Identity and Religion among the Contemporary Cham Ahiér in Vietnam


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**ABSTRACT**

**Identity and Religion among the Contemporary Cham Ahiér in Vietnam**

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This thesis examines contemporary Cham Ahiér identity and religion by asking two major questions: How has religion shaped (and how does it continue to shape) Cham identity; and how can the identity and religion of the Cham be understood through an analysis of rituals? To answer these questions, the author explores the ways in which Cham Ahiér identity was conceptualized by Western scholars and local Cham intellectuals and compares it with the identity construed through ritual activities conducted by ordinary Cham villagers. French colonial scholars of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were the first to suggest that Cham Ahiér are "Brahmanistes" or "Hindouistes" and thus categorized Cham identity on the basis of the assumption that the contemporaneous Cham villagers continued to practice the religion represented in medieval architectural and sculptural artifacts of the kingdom of Champa. This identification produced in the colonial period was used as the groundwork which numerous later researchers built upon. The Vietnamese term "Chăm Bàlamôn," adapted from the French term "Cham Brahmanistes," became a fixed category and now serves as the official state-sanctioned term for identification of this particular group of Cham. Contemporary overseas Cham scholars define this group of Cham as "adherents to an indigenized form of Hinduism" or "syncretic Hindu Cham." In turn, prominent native Cham scholars and intellectuals residing in Vietnam challenged the use of the term "Chăm Bàlamôn" and claimed that it is a foreign term applied by outsiders. They suggested instead the term "Cham Ahiér," a religious identity designation which is understood as being paired with the term "Cham Awal" through the

dualistic cosmological concept of "Ahiér-Awal," with communities of both "Cham Ahiér" and "Cham Awal" having been "Islamized" through their Malay neighbours. Stepping aside from all these propositions, this thesis takes a fresh look at the contemporary Cham Ahiér community by examining rituals conducted by ordinary villagers as the key to understanding Cham Ahiér identity, and most importantly, Cham Ahiér religion. The author argues that various contexts and discourses constitute different levels of the Cham Ahiér religious identity, and that it is necessary to investigate how it was constructed and perceived by both Cham intellectuals and ordinary Cham villagers. By exploring Cham Ahiér rituals, this thesis shows the extent to which both Hindu and Islamic elements have been adopted, and the means by which this adoption was accomplished. The objective of this thesis is not to categorize, label, or impose upon this group of Cham any specific term of identification that may relate to any other world religion, but to consider the ways that disparate elements cohere in the religion as currently practiced. In other words, this thesis describes how the Cham religion works on a practical ritual level. The author concludes that Cham Ahiér religion is neither systematic nor centralized, and that its rituals represent a mixture, patchwork, and juxtaposition coming from different sources of traditions accumulated over time.

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## Note on Spelling, Names and Translation

In this thesis, I use the name "Champa" to refer to the kingdom that lasted until the 19th century and was populated by the ethnic group known as "Cham." The Cham are nowadays one of the fifty-four ethnic groups officially recognized by Vietnamese government. I use the transcriptions "Champa" and "Cham" as they are likely to be familiar to a wider audience. However, according to old Cham script, "Campā" and "Cam" would be more accurate transcription of these terms.

All the Cham terms that I refer to in this thesis are transliterated according to their reading in modern Cham language written in Akhar Thrah script. I use the transliteration in Latin script designed by the École Française d'Extrême Orient instead of the local transliteration.

I opted to write all Vietnamese words including place names with their full diacritical markings. However, when I cite the works whose titles were written without diacritical markings, I keep them as they were written in the original works.

I provided the names of all Vietnamese authors in the standard Vietnamese order, with surnames followed by first names not separated by commas. The same is applied to Cham authors who have Vietnamese names.

As for Chinese characters, I use the modern Mandarin to spell them, even though the readings of the same characters in the first millennium CE may have differed considerably in different parts of China. The Chinese characters throughout this thesis are provided in their traditional versions and not in the simplified forms currently adopted in Mainland China.

For Sanskrit terms, I use the standard transliteration of *devanāgarī* script.

Lastly, to avoid confusion, I most often refer to the ethnic Vietnamese as "Viet" instead of "Kinh." "Kinh" is a recently adopted term that is used for the majority ethnic group (Vietnamese) to differentiate them from the other fifty-three ethnic groups in Vietnam.

Technically, all the fifty-four ethnic groups who are living in Vietnam are "Vietnamese" but since the Cham prefer to identify themselves as "Cham" to outsiders, in this thesis I use the term "Viet" to speak about the "Kinh." I do this for two reasons: (1) it is more familiar to a larger audience who may not be concerned with the politics of ethnic classification, and (2) it is more appropriate to use the term "Viet" to discuss the entire history of Vietnam and Champa.

Finally, all translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

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All photographs in this thesis are taken by the author unless otherwise mentioned.

## Introduction: Identity and Religion among the Cham Ahiér

## Introduction

This thesis presents a study of how contemporary religious practices are central to the identities of the Cham Ahiér in Bình Thuận and Ninh Thuận provinces of South-Central Vietnam. The Cham Ahiér are a subgroup of the Cham people, one of the fifty-four officially recognized (or, better to say, designated) ethnic groups which constitute the population of Vietnam. The central issues explored here are related to problematic labels like "Hindu" and "Muslim" which are challenged and complicated through the study of Cham rituals. Colonial French scholars of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were the first to suggest that this group of Cham are "Brahmanistes" or "Hindouistes." Such classification or identification produced in the colonial period was used as the groundwork which numerous later researchers built upon. For instance, adapted from the French term "Cham Brahmanistes," the Vietnamese term "Chăm Bàlamôn" became a fixed category and now serves as the official state-sanctioned term for identification of this particular group of Cham since the late 20th century, while its first occurrences can be found in the mid-1930s.[1] Contemporary overseas scholars define this group of Cham as "adherents to an indigenized form of Hinduism" or "syncretic Hindu Cham."[2] In opposition to the Vietnamese term "Chăm Bàlamôn," native Cham scholars and intellectuals residing in Vietnam insisted upon the use of the term "Ahiér" instead, as they argued that this is how the Cham of this particular group identify themselves.[3] Stepping aside from all these terminological discussions, this thesis takes a fresh look at contemporary Cham Ahiér identity and religion not in relation to the ancient Cham context, of which medieval religious

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[1] See Huỳnh Thị Bảo Hoà (1936: 14-15).
[2] Nakamura (1999, 2020), Abdul Hamid (2013).
[3] Thành Phần (2010: 2); Sakaya (2002: 40; idem, 2008: 133-134; idem, 2014: 97). Po Dharma, Văn hoá Chăm không có triết ý Âm Dương của dân tộc Việt, at
http://champaka.info/index.php/quandiem/quandiemvanhoa/1267-van.

iconography played an influential role in colonial French scholarship, but instead examines rituals as the key to understand Cham Ahiér identity, and most importantly, Cham Ahiér religion. Here, I adopt Catherine Bell's approach to focus on the actual "doing" of religion for which she states (1998: 205) that "ceremonial actions characterized by a self-conscious formality and traditionalism are a primary aspect of religion and an important focus in any project to understand religion."

Starting from this same supposition, I investigated Cham Ahiér religion through field research in which I interviewed Cham villagers and observed their ceremonial actions. By doing this, I also learned about Cham Ahiér identity more broadly. Indeed, aside from surveying secondary literature, the main part of this thesis is based on the fieldwork that I conducted for this project between 2015 and 2018 with the total amount of time spent in Cham villages of about seven months. This thesis focuses exclusively on the Cham Ahiér community for an in-depth investigation of the topic of religion and identity and addresses the question of the extent to which contemporary "Cham Brahmanistes" are a product of "Indianization" as suggested by French colonial scholars. In this regard, it is not my intention here to determine whether this group of Cham is "really" Hindu or not but to consider the ways in which disparate elements cohere in the religion as practiced. In other words, the objective of this thesis is not to categorize, label, or impose upon this group of Cham any specific term of identification that may relate to any other world religion but rather to examine what the Cham themselves say and act in relation to their religion. In other words, the goal of this thesis is to describe how their religion functions on a practical ritual level as religious rituals provide important contexts in which individuals are able to interpret their experiences or otherwise to try to make the invisible visible within the circumstances of everyday life.

Through my field research, I found that there are various contexts and discourses that constitute Cham Ahiér identity and religion at different levels. While examining Cham Ahiér

rituals, I noticed the heuristic distinction between ritual "practices" and "performances" in a sense that is very similar to what Sara Shneiderman (2015) has proposed in her analysis of ritual and identity among the Thangmi of Nepal. "Practice" to her refers to embodied, ritualized actions carried out by individuals within an indigenous epistemological framework for a range of non-humans and celebrated at family, lineage, or village level, while "performances" are ritualized actions carried out within a broader discursive context created by political, economic, or other kinds of external agendas or non-local and external audiences. While observing the Cham Ahiér's Katé ritual at Po Sah Inâ temple in Bình Thuận province, I saw how "practices" and "performances" took place. While the priests performed rituals in the main chamber of the temple to ask the deities for blessing, protection and prosperity upon all the Cham Ahiér, thus illuminating the "practice" aspect of this ritual, Cham intellectuals in collaboration with the government organized various religious and cultural activities to promote Cham heritage, representing the "performance" aspect. A question one might ask here is if both the "practice" and "performance" aspects can represent Cham Ahiér religion and identity. This thesis suggests that it is necessary to explore both ritual "practice" and "performance" because they are equally important in representing contemporary Cham Ahiér through different voices, contexts, discourses, levels, agendas, and purposes.

Furthermore, I suggest that a "practice" can be observed in the ritual realm of the ordinary Cham villagers who know, for instance, what food to prepare and how to pray to the deities; this knowledge combines aspects of a natural environment and of a practical, lived religion. I found that it is in fact through this practical aspect of ritual that ordinary Cham villagers identify themselves as "Cham *cuh*" – meaning "Cham who practice cremation funerals;"[4] this identification is thus different from the way in which Cham intellectuals and

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[4] They identify themselves in contrast to the other neighbouring group of Cham who practice conventional burial, i.e., the Cham Awal.

native Cham scholars prefer to identify themselves, namely, as "Cham Ahiér." In contrast, the "performances" belong to the realm of knowledge and discourse of the elites, including the priests, native Cham scholars and intellectuals who engage in identity politics (including the identification and categorization of the gods, the priests, the people and the rituals in terms of heritage); the term "performance" refers to the state-sponsored activities and discourses surrounding Cham rituals (such as in the Katé ritual at Po Sah Inâ temple mentioned above). An example of the "performance" aspect can thus be seen in the ways in which Cham elites promote the term "Cham Ahiér" as a replacement for the term "Chăm Bàlamôn" or in the ways in which they emphasize the Ahiér-Awal cosmological dualistic concept as a means to represent the identity of two Cham communities, Ahiér and Awal, perceived as indivisible social unity.[5] To justify this unity they put special stress on the *homkar* symbol, that represents, according to them, the Ahiér-Awal cosmological dualism. What I found is that while such concepts were constantly used by the native Cham scholars and intellectuals whom I had conversations with, and were featured in their publications, ordinary Cham villagers that I spoke to were mostly not aware of, or familiar with these concepts. This arguably reflects Cham elites' agendas and discourses, which can be said to exist at a somewhat different level and with different recipients and goals than those of ordinary villagers.

In short, Cham Ahiér identity should be understood through two different perspectives, namely, those of the elites and those of ordinary villagers. I believe that we cannot fully understand Cham Ahiér identity if we do not understand their religion because identity and religion are closely intertwined. From the ordinary villagers' perspective, this intertwining of religion and identity can be observed through ritual practices. For the elites, this intertwining can as well be seen through ritual performances, through conversations with them and through

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[5] A shorter or alternative term I used to refer to both the Cham Ahiér and Awal communities is "South-Central Cham." In other words, when I write "South-Central Cham," it refers to both communities.

reading their works. Native Cham scholars such as Po Dharma (2000), Sakaya (2002, 2008, 2014, 2016), and Thành Phần (2010) maintain that Cham Ahiér were those who adopted Islam after the Cham Awal and that both of these two groups of Cham have converted to a "Malayanized" form of Islam.[6] Here they identified the South-Central Cham in terms of religion. What was and, more importantly, what is Cham Ahiér religion? Based on my field research which focuses on rituals, this thesis argues that it is unnecessary and inaccurate to categorize the contemporary Cham Ahiér religion under any label such as "Brahmanism" or "Hinduism" as suggested by French colonial scholars or "Malay Islam" as suggested by native Cham scholars. The thesis concludes that Cham Ahiér religion is neither systematic nor centralized, and that its rituals represent a mixture, patchwork, and juxtaposition of elements taken from different sources of traditions and accumulated over time.

## Rationale for the Thesis

Originally, the Cham were one of the main populations of the multi-ethnic kingdom of Champa.[7] In this thesis, I use the term "Champa" to refer to (1) the territory inhabited by the Cham ethnic group, and (2) the social networks of the ancient civilization of the Cham people. Thus this term refers to both the temporal and spatial concepts used to describe what once flourished within an area stretching roughly from what is now south of the Ngang Pass from present-day Quảng Bình province to Bình Thuận province and encompassing the coastal plains and the interior highlands of Southern and Central Vietnam.[8] Throughout the history of Cham studies, from the French colonial period to the present time, the subjects of history, politics, arts, and religions of "Indianized" Champa, as based on inscriptions, religious iconography and

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[6] Meaning that Champa adopted elements of Islam from the Malay world and not directly from the Arab world.
[7] In this thesis, I use the transcriptions 'Cham' and 'Champa' as they are likely to be familiar to a wider audience. They are also used by contemporary Cham communities in Bình Thuận and Ninh Thuận provinces. However, according to old Cham script, 'Cam' and 'Campā' would be more accurate transcription of these terms.
[8] See figs. 1 and 2 for maps of Champa.

temple architecture, continues to be investigated by increasing numbers of scholars. It is only since the last two decades that we have seen a growing interest in doing field research on the Cham Muslim communities in the Mekong Delta by foreign scholars, the most prominent of whom include Rie Nakamura, Philip Taylor, Mohamed Effendy Bin Abdul Hamid, and Nicolas Weber. However, the religious practices of the contemporary Cham Ahiér community in South-Central Vietnam (Bình Thuận and Ninh Thuận provinces) have received little attention and remain largely unstudied. The first scholarly work in English that briefly mentions the Cham Ahiér community and their religion is Nakamura's PhD dissertation (1999), who treated them in the context of a study devoted to problems of ethnicity. The second work was the PhD dissertation (2013) of Abdul Hamid. In this thesis he focuses on the important role that Cham religious elites play in Cham society in securing the social and cultural continuity of Cham traditional ways of life to the present day. Thirdly, there are three articles published by William Noseworthy in 2013, 2015, and 2020, although each of these short journal articles has its own focus on a specific topic.

Why was the religion of the contemporary Cham Ahiér neglected by present-day academic researchers, especially those who conducted fieldwork in Southeast Asia? There are several reasons for this. First, Cham scholars continued to assume that contemporary Cham Ahiér were "Brahmanistes" or "Hindouistes," as suggested by colonial French scholars, and, therefore, they did not concern themselves with the task of re-examining that notion. Second, the contemporary Cham Ahiér are overshadowed by the extant "Indianized" artifacts of their medieval kings and are seen as the descendants of the ancient Champa kingdom. In practical terms, it is also much easier to study the artifacts preserved in museums and private collections than to engage in research on the present-day Cham. The Vietnamese government welcomes foreign researchers and tourists to come to Vietnam to study Cham temples and archaeological sites since these sites presumably belong to the "dead culture" of the past. In contrast, foreign

researchers encounter more difficulties when studying the contemporary Cham because they belong to a "live culture."[9] In other words, to conduct research on the present-day Cham it is necessary for researchers to acquire a certain set of social skills including dealing with different kinds of people, making personal connections, gaining trust of their informants, participating in local events, enduring the harsh weather and uncomfortable living conditions, speaking the local language, not violating local taboos, and respecting the community's rules and traditions. Also, the Communist government continues to monitor closely every foreign researcher who visits Cham villages for their research. I was also subjected to this but since I am an ethnical Vietnamese, I had flexibility in moving around and conversing comfortably to Cham in Vietnamese, the language that most of them use nowadays. Usually, foreign researchers have to obtain sponsorship from a local university or research institution that will take care of necessary paperwork for them to come to work in the areas populated by the Cham and to provide guides to accompany them in their fieldwork. Intriguingly, it would be easier for foreign researchers to do fieldwork on Cham Muslim communities in the Mekong Delta than on the Cham Ahiér communities of South-Central Vietnam because that group of Cham Muslim migrated to the Mekong Delta long ago; they identify themselves as Muslims and are connected to the Islamic world outside of Vietnam while the Cham Ahiér remain rooted in their ancestor's soil as the descendants of the ancient Champa kingdom. It should be noted here that it was only in the 19th century that the ethnic Vietnamese annexed this last region of the Cham kingdom, and this historical fact, namely, their self-identification as victorious conquerors, continues to influence the way in which the government deals with the Cham, and vice versa -- the way in which the Cham see the ethnic Vietnamese. Because of this sensitive issue, the Vietnamese government still closely monitors those researchers who enter Cham villages, and

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[9] In her dissertation, Nakamura (1999; esp. see 67-79) has a whole section titled "Going to the field; Lost in bureaucracy" in which she explained the complexity of all the regulations and paperwork she had to go through to conduct her research in Cham villages.

thus it is not only rather difficult to study the "live culture" of the Cham, but it is also particularly challenging to interact with the Cham Ahiér communities.

Furthermore, it is apparent that the government has not forgotten that the South-Central Cham were part of the FULRO (Front Unifié de Lutte des Races Opprimées) not long ago.[10] FULRO was established in 1964 as a mass movement of Cham, Khmer, and highland minority peoples whose *Manifesto* declared the organization's intention to (re)claim the territories under domination of ethnic Vietnamese. FULRO remained active as a political and military organization until early 1992, when they were disbanded by UNTAC (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia). FULRO's ambitions made the Cham appear to be a potential threat to national unity, a hidden "enemy" waiting for the right time to fight back. Thus, according to some of the Cham intellectuals whom I talked to, and according to my own experience and understanding, state functionaries discourage foreigners from doing fieldwork in Cham villages of Bình Thuận and Ninh Thuận because they do not want the Cham to have any close connections with outsiders who later might support them to rise up again to reclaim their land.[11] In short, the government's perception of Cham potential resistance, even in the present time, leads to rather drastic measures; for instance, all Cham must be educated through Vietnam's national education system, which makes them fluent in Vietnamese but illiterate in their own language and hence unable to read their ancestor's books. This erasure of Cham culture is reinforced by that of Champa history, as there is no mention of Champa in the history of Vietnam as taught in schools.[12] As a result of such direct and indirect restrictions imposed

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[10] Both the Cham Ahiér and Cham Awal communities in Bình Thuận and Ninh Thuận were part of this group. The majority of the Cham Muslims living along the Mekong delta did not join this organization. Perhaps, this was so because the Cham Muslims identify themselves with Islam and prefer to trace their origin back to the Malay world and not Champa kingdom, and thus create no threat to the government. For further research on the Cham Muslims of the Mekong see Nakamura (1999) and Taylor (2007).

[11] Throughout the history, since the time when the Cham lost their territories Ô and Lý to Đại Việt in 1306, there were many failed Cham attempts to recover their territories. That is, the fight of the Cham for restoration of their state started well before the 20th century and certainly before the creation of FULRO.

[12] This is similar to what the French colonial government did to Vietnam by forcing the Vietnamese to use "Quốc Ngữ" (literally, "National language," that is, a transliteration system using the Latin alphabet for the Hán-Nôm script which was a form of writing based on modified Chinese characters) and thus abolishing or discrediting the

by the government, the number of foreigners who have undertaken fieldwork in the South-Central Cham regions, especially on Cham Ahiér communities, remains very small so far. That in turn contributes to the absence of detailed Western scholarly work on the contemporary Cham Ahiér community, particularly on the topic of religion, since religion is always a sensitive topic in Vietnam. Therefore, the subject of my study on Cham Ahiér identity and religion aims at filling this gap in contemporary scholarship. This thesis is the first scholarly work in any language that focuses explicitly on the Cham Ahiér community and explores their ritual practices and performances in order to understand their identity and religion.

## Author's Background

My field studies took place between 2015 and 2018 in both Bình Thuận and Ninh Thuận provinces, though many of the rituals that I had the chance to observe happened to be in Bình Thuận province. This was so, first, because the majority of publications on the South-Central Cham communities are concentrated on Ninh Thuận province and that made me feel the need to explore Bình Thuận more to fill that gap. The second reason was more personal: back in 2012 when I first told my father that I wanted to explore Champa as a potential topic for my PhD thesis, he took me on a trip to visit most of the Cham medieval temples starting from Huế (the city in which I was born and which used to belong to Champa's Northern region of Indrapura) all the way to Bình Thuận and Ninh Thuận provinces, in what was the Southernmost region of Champa, Pāṇḍuraṅga. In Bình Thuận, my father, a historian, brought me to the Cham Cultural Exhibition Center and introduced me to Mr. Lâm Tấn Bình who was the director of the Center and a Cham himself. It was only then that I learned the story that after the unification

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traditional Vietnamese culture based upon the massive corpus of documents related to religion, philosophy, politics, sciences, medicine, arts, etc. written in Hán-Nôm language; it was done in order not only to turn Vietnamese population to a "new" and "advanced" culture, as it was officially stated, but also to forget its own history.

of Vietnam in 1975, my father was sent from the cultural ministry in Hà Nội to this Southern region to teach the local administration about museology and heritage preservation. Since then, he established contacts and friendship with the local intellectuals who included a number of ethnic Cham. Thanks to him, I was able to connect with Lâm Tấn Bình who was a Cham intellectual and was loved and respected by native Cham scholars, Cham priests, intellectuals, and villagers. He was a Cham who strongly and enthusiastically advocated that Cham culture, language, tradition, and religion should continue to prosper and be brought to the world stage. Since he knew my father, he was willing to teach me Cham language, culture and religion whenever I could come back to Bình Thuận for my field studies. In fact, knowing him brought me a unique opportunity, as he, in particular, introduced me to his "inner circle," namely, he took me to Hồ Chí Minh City to meet several well-known native Cham scholars such as Sakaya and Thành Phần. It was when I had lunch at Sakaya's house that Sakaya told me that he had met my father in several conferences years ago and thus he was so kind to let me photocopy all the books that I needed from his personal library. In Bình Thuận, Lâm Tấn Bình drove me to many houses of Cham priests where I was able to interview them and talk to them freely. Some priests were kind and open enough to show me their ritual manuscripts and let me take photos of them page by page while explaining to me the main ideas and meanings. Since Lâm had a good reputation and strong connection with priests, whenever there was a ritual in town, the priests would send a message to him to let me know about it, so that I could come to observe the ritual. Moreover, he also sent his trusted people to bring me to Ninh Thuận province to observe rituals and arrange necessary connections and lodging for me at a local Cham house. Thanks to Mr. Lâm, within a short time, I was known, welcomed, and trusted by those within the Cham communities.

Having good social connections is an important factor for successful field research. Being trusted by the community is essential for learning the true nature of the stories and what

is behind the words, whether spoken or unspoken. Many of the Cham whom I talked to continue to regard the ethnic Vietnamese (Kinh) as conquerors who took all their land and feel rather humiliated by their reduction to the category of an ethnic minority. In general, they do not like to have Vietnamese researchers come to their villages. However, even though I am an ethnic Vietnamese, they said that I was different from other Vietnamese researchers that they had met. First it was to my credit that I was introduced by Mr. Lâm Tấn Bình to the Cham intellectuals and priests as the daughter of a respected historian from Huế city. Often, when Cham villagers heard that I was born in Huế, they said that the city was a part of Champa territory and that I could be a descendant of the Cham. Second, since I live in Canada, that made me very different from other Vietnamese researchers who lived and worked in the country under the Communist regime. Many of those whom I met seemed to speak freely to me without thinking twice before speaking, and without concern as to whether they might be reported to state officials.

Indeed, my double identity of being Vietnamese and Canadian gave me considerable advantages in doing fieldwork in Cham communities. By being an ethnic Vietnamese who was born and raised in Vietnam until the age of 18 years old, I have the advantage of being able to communicate with the Cham comfortably in Vietnamese, a language that all of them speak and learn in school.[13] Moreover, by having the background of Vietnamese culture, I feel closer to them culturally in a natural way and that made me act accordingly in a proper and respectful way with regard to various situations. By being Vietnamese, I did not stand out as a total stranger as often Westerners do just because of their appearance. And the fact that I live in Canada interested them because that made me different from both the Vietnamese and the Westerners whom they had met before. They often asked me about Canada with an expression of curiosity and admiration on their faces. The fact that I could communicate with them and

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[13] Some Cham intellectuals and priests of the old generation can still read, write, and speak Cham but the majority the younger generations mainly use Vietnamese on a daily basis and cannot read or write Cham.

tell them about the outside world in a language and vocabulary they understand made them see me as somebody special. Thus, on the one hand, my identity, my position and my connections enhanced my accessibility and trust among the Cham communities, and hence I was invited to join them in many public and private rituals and was able to conduct structured and unstructured interviews with Cham priests and villagers. And on the other hand, since I am Vietnamese, I did not have any issues with the government regarding paperwork to visit and live in Cham villages, unlike Western researchers or tourists. Mr. Lâm Tấn Bình only needed to inform the authorities of the province about my presence in the communities and that I worked with and through his Center.

Certainly, I must admit that there are particular privileges I received regarding my interactions with the Cham. My identity and background allowed me to have close connections with Cham intellectuals, and thus one might contend that there is a great potential for me to be "steered" through my research to one particular outcome. This maybe especially the case if one thinks that there are different and competing factions within Cham society.[14] However, because of my close interaction with many Cham intellectuals, I was able to see how enthusiastic they were in explaining and promoting concepts such as, for instance, that of Ahiér-Awal dualism, and when I observed rituals on the ground and talked to ordinary villagers, I was able to notice differences and contrasts. I found that there are two different discourses that take place at the same time, both are related to the representation of Cham Ahiér identity and religion. In this thesis, I refer to Cham intellectuals as those who can read and write both Cham and Vietnamese, are active in preserving, exhibiting, and promoting Cham culture and tradition, and voice their concerns and opinions about particular Cham ideas and concepts, whether

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[14] I recognize and am aware of the potential for manipulation that Cham intellectuals may have on outsiders (academics and scholars) in their informal roles as "gatekeepers" of Cham tradition and culture. And there is always the potential for the existence of differential power relations within and between the various communities and segments of Cham society, as well as between different groups of the respondents I encountered.

verbally or in publications. Local scholars of the Cham who are themselves ethnic Cham (and who can also be called "native Cham scholars") may also be seen as "Cham intellectuals." Cham priests belong to the elite class but also to this group, though they may not be active in writing and publishing. In contrast, ordinary Cham villagers are those who neither publish anything about their culture and traditions, nor publicly express their concerns about certain Cham concepts or ideas; however, they participate in ritual practices which are a necessary part of their life. At the outset of my fieldwork, I was interacting mostly with Cham intellectuals and exploring their works which resulted in the production of my Chapter 2. However, my observation of Cham rituals in temples, funeral grounds and individual houses allowed me to interact with ordinary villagers; the results of these interactions constitute the basis for Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6.

Finally, I must confess that there were some advantages as well as certain inconveniences related to my being a woman doing fieldwork, since gender issues do influence interactions with locals and hence may shape the outcome of research. Most of the time when I visited Cham homes and temples and participated in religious and social events, I had (a) Cham national(s) to accompany me and to introduce me to the people. At those times, people would always welcome me with hospitality and answer any questions I had. There were times that I wandered alone around Cham villagers and met new Cham, but they were not afraid of talking to me and often invited me into their homes. I think that even though I was a stranger, the fact that I was a woman might have made them feel more sincere or less suspicious when interacting with me. I did strongly sense that because I am a woman, people accepted me more quickly and easily into their communities. In addition, there were not many female researchers who came to their villages to do fieldwork, and therefore, when people first saw me, many of them were curious to know about me and treated me with special attention. For example, they would take pictures together with me, offer to drive me around their villages, and to bring me

to coffee shops. However, this does not mean that being a woman, travelling alone in public buses in Vietnam from one city to another to get to Cham villages, as well as wandering alone in Cham villages, was always easy and safe. Another point that I should mention here is that it was not easy for me, as a woman, to do fieldwork in a society where alcohol consumption is the norm, as researchers might need to participate in drinking in order to benefit more from conversations which occur around tables where people are more relaxed and speak more frankly. Commonly, once a ritual is finished, people typically gather around to consume the blessed food that was formally offered to the gods at the ceremonies. At such times, they drank and talked about everything that happened in their villages and they were always kind enough to invite me in.

Here, I should also mention that in general there are three different settings for three groups of people which determine where they sit and eat. All the priests usually sit together as one group while all the male members sit together as the second group. Women and children remain together as the third group, and they usually stay in the kitchen to prepare the food and to serve the other groups before consuming the food among themselves. Since I was a guest researcher, I was invited to join the male group but because I did not drink and felt rather lonely by being the only woman there, I would often move to the women's group in the kitchen. It was there that I was able to chat with women and children while consuming the blessed food together with them and thus familiarize myself with more general daily life conversations. There, I found myself feeling rather comfortable: among them, I felt as if I were a member of the Cham Ahiér community.

## Literature Review[15]

The last part of Cham territory was colonized by Vietnam in 1832; however, in 1887 Vietnam was entirely colonized by the French so that the pioneer scholars in the study of the history and religion of Champa were French colonial explorers, archaeologists, and epigraphists who worked mainly with two kinds of medieval sources: objects of Cham religious art (monuments, temple architecture, and sculptures) and Cham inscriptions. Étienne-François Aymonier (1844-1929) and Abel Bergaigne (1838-1888) were among the first to decipher Cham inscriptions and to lay the foundations for a preliminary history of Champa based on its epigraphy.[16] Between 1910 and 1913, Georges Maspero (1872-1942) published a series of articles that he later revised and transformed into the first comprehensive history of Champa entitled *Le Royaume du Champa* (1928).[17] He suggested that Champa was a "Hinduized" kingdom that existed from the 2rd century CE (which therefore corresponded with the development of the Linyi/Lâm Ấp 林邑 kingdom, 192-629 CE) until 1471, when Champa's capital Vijaya was conquered by the Vietnamese. Nonetheless, this book was criticized by Rolf Stein (1911-1999) as early as 1947 on several issues that included the origin of Champa in relation to Linyi, the unexplained geographical shift of the capitals, and the ethnicity of the Champa people. Another early work that also contributed significantly to the study of Champa history was the *Histoire ancienne des États hindouisés d'Extrême-Orient* published in 1944 by George Coedès (1886-1969). In this work, Coedès relies considerably on inscriptions and emphasizes the arrival of superior Indian culture in Southeast Asia as the beginning of Cham history. On the subject of ancient Cham monuments and religions, Louis Finot (1864-1935)

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[15] All works mentioned in this literature review are listed in the bibliography of this thesis.

[16] Aymonier (1891), Bergaigne (1888, 1893).

[17] The book was translated from French to English by Walter E. J. Tips under the title *The Champa Kingdom: The History of an Extinct Vietnamese Culture* (Maspero 2002). The fact that it was published in 2002 in English shows its continued popularity. It was the most authoritative book on Champa history, and it served as the working tool for Cham studies for most of the 20th century. It remains the only one of its kind until now, perhaps it is so because what remains of Champa is so fragmentary that it has prevented contemporary scholars of Champa from writing a new history book.

published in 1901 his article titled *La religion des Chams d'après les monuments* that provided an overview of religious statuary of ancient Champa in which he laid a special stress on its "Indianized" aspects in terms of Indian influences discernable in Cham art. Continuing the work done by his precursors, Paul Mus (1902-1969) published in 1934 the article *L'Inde vu de l'Est: Cultes indiens et indigènes au Champa.*[18] He put an emphasis on the role of local people in the process of "Indianization" and maintained that not all regions were completely influenced by Indian culture. By examining the earth cult in Champa, he claimed that there existed a common substratum of belief and culture in both Indian and Southeast Asian societies *before* the arrival of the Indian culture in the region. He believed that this common foundation opened the door for India's influence, thus accelerating the adoption of Indian culture by the local population.

This survey of the earliest and most significant studies of Champa history and religion produced in the late 19th to the 20th century is very brief, but it shows how deeply numerous French scholars were impressed by the extant Cham artifacts because of their "Indianized" aspects; accordingly, they tried to (re)construct Cham history, culture, and religion through the prism of Indic culture. In other words, the approach that they took to study Champa, as Bruce Lockhart (2011) pointed out in his chapter, can be considered as "India-centric," focusing mainly on the Cham aspects that were presumably influenced by India.

According to French colonial historians, the "Golden Age" of Cham civilization - essentially Hindu by their estimation - began in the early first millennium CE and lasted until 1471 when Đại Việt (Việt Nam) conquered the Champa capital of Vijaya. From the 15th century onward, Champa started to decline in the sense that the Cham neither built more

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[18] On life and work of Paul Mus see Vincent Lemieux (1976), available online at http://classiques.uqac.ca/contemporains/lemieux_vincent/homme_et_oeuvre_paul_mus/homme_oeuvre_paul_mus.pdf, and Christopher E. Goscha and David Chandler (eds.) (2006), *L'espace d'un regard : L'Asie de Paul Mus (1902-1969).*

elaborate temples nor made more sculptures of their gods. Thus, the history and religion of Champa since the 15th century received less attention from French scholars. However, some French administrators whose posts were located in Southern Vietnam and who were living among the Cham communities did record some religious practices and beliefs of the contemporaneous Cham. Their work and especially the anthropological data that they obtained remain foundational milestones for the study of the contemporary South-Central Cham. Aymonier, in particular, published several works between 1885 and 1891 with a telling ethnographic account of the existence of two main South-Central Cham groups who belonged to different religious traditions. He called the first group "Cham Brahmanistes" meaning "Cham [who worship] Brahman," and who still preserved some ancient forms of Cham religion (Hinduism), while he called the second group "Cham Bani" or "gens de la religion musulmane" ("people of Muslim religion"), that is, those who followed Islam. His work remains, arguably, the most valuable source on the Cham community in the South-Central region in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Aside from Aymonier, Antoine Cabaton (1863-1942) also provided a plethora of ethnographic information on the Cham in which he asserted that the direct descendants of the kingdom of Champa were "Cham Brahmanistes." He mentioned that they were referred to as *akaphiér* ("infidèles"), that is, they were the "descendants des anciens Chams qui n'ont pas voulu accepter la religion de Mahomet."[19] In short, these scholars claimed that there were two groups of Cham in South-Central Vietnam, the "Cham Brahmanistes" who were "Hindu" and the "Cham Bani" who were Muslims.

Aside from using the terms "Cham Brahmanistes" and "Cham Bani" to refer to the two groups of South-Central Cham, French scholars also employed the terms Cham Ahiér and Cham Awal. In his article *Les Chams Bani*, French ethnographer E.M. Durand (1903a: 58) employed the terms Awal in the context of a Katan ceremony, a Cham Bani circumcision ritual

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[19] Cabaton (1901: 7).

wherein the person adopts the name Ali or Mohammad as "leur nom 'd'initié' (*āwal*), par opposition à leur nom cham 'de profane' (*āhyör* [Ahiér])." Here, *āhyör* refers to a Cham "profane" name and *āwal* to a Cham religious (Islamic) initiation name. In short, Durand applies the terms Cham Awal and *āhyör*/Ahiér to describe two groups of Cham: those who adopted Ali or Muhammad as their religious name and those who did not. Another important element in Durand's work is his mention of the Ahiér-Awal dualistic concept; this is ultimately important because it is one of the earliest accounts that mentioned this concept; I will discuss this topic in greater detail in Chapter 2.

The above-mentioned works by French colonial scholars contributed enormously to the study of Champa. However, they carried an undeniable amount of "French Orientalist" bias. A popular view among the French scholars at that time can be seen, for instance, in Jeanne Leuba's *Le Chams d'autrefois et d'aujourd'hui* published in Hanoi in 1915[20] where she maintained that it is better to learn about Champa religion by looking at their inscriptions rather than studying the "superstitious practices" of the contemporary Cham. The view of the contemporary Cham's religious practices as superstitious can also be seen in the book by Commandant Henri Baudesson (1867-1932) published in 1932 under the telling title *Au pays des superstitions et des rites: Chez les Moïs et les Chams.*[21] In short, many French scholars were interested in medieval Champa because of the undeniable Indian influences attested to in extant artifacts. They saw the contemporary Cham's religious practices as mere "superstitions" because they thought that the Cham no longer practiced the "original" Indian religion that their kings adopted long ago. As a result, the number of French scholarly studies that focused on Cham history and religion based on extant medieval artifacts outnumbered those that focused on religious practices of the contemporaneous Cham.

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[20] In his review of this book Louis Finot (1916: 22-23) praised the author for the best description of the sacrifices and magical ceremonies of the Cham available in Western publications.

[21] This book was published in English under the title *Indo-China and its Primitive People*; pp. 225-324 of the English edition are devoted to Cham "Rites and Superstitions."

In 1954, French colonial rule came to an end and the field studies of the Cham were interrupted. The most significant Western publications during the period between 1954 and 1975 were authored by Bernard-Philippe Groslier (1926-1986) and Jean Boisselier (1912-1996) who relied on earlier works and published monographs on Cham art and archaeology in 1961 and 1963, respectively. From 1954, two Vietnamese states emerged from the French colonial Indochina: Southern Vietnam, also known as the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) and Northern Vietnam, also known as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). In the North, the Cham were cited only briefly in a few works, e.g., in the book titled *Lịch Sử Chế Độ Phong Kiến Việt Nam* (History of the feudal system in Vietnam), published in 1960 by the historians Trần Quốc Vượng and Hà Văn Tấn. In this study, the Cham were mentioned mainly because they were featured as a minority group who was part of the "great national family" of Vietnam. It is useful to note here that the geographical locations of the Cham settlements were in the South and therefore, at least technically, the Cham were under the control of RVN administration. Thus, by including the Cham within the "greater Vietnamese family," those historians, on the one hand, took the liberty of imagining inclusiveness of the Cham to the Northern side,[22] but on the other hand, implicitly encouraged the Cham to be loyal to the DRV for their own political agendas.

In contrast to the rare publication on Champa and its people in the DRV, there were numerous books and articles written by both Vietnamese and the Cham themselves and published in the RVN. The most significant works include the publications of Nguyễn Khắc Ngữ (1958; 1959; 1967), Dorohiêm and Dohamide (1965), Phan Khoang (1970), Nghiêm Thẩm (1962), Nguyễn Văn Luận (1968; 1971; 1973), Nguyễn Bạt Tuỵ (1967), Tạ Chí Đại

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[22] Perhaps what they had in mind was the inherited image of a unified Vietnam that was established by the Nguyễn Dynasty before the arrival of the French, but they avoided to accept that Vietnam was unified and expanded its territory to that extent for the first time in its history due to the Nguyễn rulers. Ironically, for decades, publications of the Northern authors constantly criticized the Nguyễn feudal system for exploiting the population and letting the French colonize the country.

Cường (1970), Vũ Lang (1958), Bố Thuận (1959), and Thái Văn Kiểm (1960). In their publications, one can find two main themes. First, these authors were very much influenced by French colonial scholarship and thus maintained that Champa was a unified "Indianized" kingdom which ended in the 15th century under the control of the aggressive, expansionist Vietnamese. Second, the works published by the Cham authors were mainly short articles and covered topics such as Cham culture, legends, and rituals with the aim of attracting a large and general Vietnamese audience.

Since the reunification of Vietnam in 1975, the view of a "greater Vietnamese family" as a multi-ethnic nation became a standard theme in historical writing espoused by many Vietnamese scholars; a detail discussion of this topic can be seen in Lockhart (2011: 16-22). Briefly, the newly established Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) initiated policies for the integration of minority populations through assimilation. In her journal article *Bà La Môn Giáo ở Người Chàm Thuận Hải Xưa và Nay* (Brahmanism in Chàm people of Thuận Hải Then and Now) published in 1979, Lý Kim Hoa urged the Cham to eliminate their backwardness derived from beliefs and religions and encouraged them to adopt modern ideological education and political enlightenment. As mentioned above, the idea of the contemporary Cham practicing a form of superstitious and backward religious beliefs was introduced by the French colonial administrators and has been perpetuated by Vietnamese officials for decades, arguably until the present time.

From 1975 to 1986, Western scholars were not welcomed to Vietnam to do fieldwork because the country was rebuilding itself under the communist regime. This resulted in a considerably reduced number of ethnographic publications about the Cham in Western languages. Interestingly, from the 1980s, some scholars in France, in particular a native Cham scholar working in École Française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) in 1982-2016 named Po Dharma

(1948-2019) whose birth name was Quảng Văn Đủ[23] and Pierre-Bernard Lafont (1926-2008),[24] adopted a revisionist stance when dealing with the conventional history of Champa produced by the pioneer French scholars. Using Cham archival manuscripts, they suggested that there was no single, monolithic "state of Champa" but rather autonomous, separate and independently-ruled Cham political entities.[25] According to this version of Champa history, Champa was not a unified kingdom but a confederation of five principalities or relatively independent states, Indrapura, Amarāvatī, Vijaya, Kauthara, and Pāṇḍuraṅga (listed from North to South). Even though Vijaya, the capital of one of them, fell in 1471, the last fully independent Cham state, Pāṇḍuraṅga, survived until 1832 when the Vietnamese Emperor Minh Mạng decided to annex its territory into Đại Nam (Vietnam).

In the post-reunification period, particularly since 1986 when the Vietnamese Communist government's economic reform policy Đổi Mới was implemented, there was a new wave of publications on Champa by Vietnamese scholars, overseas scholars, and Cham scholars themselves. As far as the topic of the Cham medieval temple architecture and religious art are concerned, Trần Kỳ Phương is perhaps the most active of leading Vietnamese Cham art historians, as he has been publishing regularly in both English and Vietnamese from the late 1980s to the present. His extensive first-hand knowledge of the Cham religious sites allowed him to publish numerous original works on Cham archaeology, temple architecture and sculpture.[26] Besides, his good English language skills made him approachable by Western scholars, thus permitting him to have collaborative projects with numerous Western scholars currently working on Champa. For instance, Trần Kỳ Phương authored a chapter titled "The integral relationship between Hindu temple sculpture and architecture" published in the book

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[23] For his short biography see the obituary authored by Andrew Hardy et Daniel Perret at https://www.efeo.fr/base.php?code=963.
[24] For his obituary authored by Gérard Fussman see https://www.efeo.fr/base.php?code=933.
[25] See Po Dharma (1981, 1987) and Lafont (1988).
[26] See Trần Kỳ Phương (1980, 1984, 1987, 1988, 1990, 1997, 2002, 2006, 2008, etc.)

*The Cham of Vietnam - History, Society and Art* (2011) which he co-edited with Bruce Lockhart. This book is a collection of essays by leading scholars in the field of Cham studies written from the perspectives of history, archaeology, anthropology, art history, and linguistics.[27] On the one hand, this book provides an overview of the works published by scholars during the French colonial period, while, on the other hand, it introduces a new understanding of what constitued "Champa" and its people, as well as the religious practices of the contemporary Cham. Trần Kỳ Phương also co-authored a chapter in the monograph *Champa: Territories and Networks of a Southeast Asian Kingdom* which was published in 2019 and edited by Arlo Griffiths, Andrew Hardy and Geoff Wade.[28] This monograph provides a new understanding of Champa political geography and territory. Arguing against the revisionist stance maintained by Po Dharma and Lafont who claimed that Champa existed as a confederation of five principalities, the editors of this book suggest that the model of Champa as the spatial organization of five territories is obsolete and provide instead a new interpretation that emphasizes the centrality of river valleys in Champa's political geography (2019: 14). They claim that Champa was an agglomeration of several regions which had their own political and economic centers and depended heavily on the coastal-based trade exchange network system, thus employing Bronson's model of the "riverine exchange network." Another new and important point found in this book is Griffiths' refutation of the revisionist claim that Champa was never a unified kingdom throughout its history; he suggests instead that Champa in the 15th century was a land of significant territorial extent ruled by a powerful king (2019: 193). In short, aside from mentioning past and recent theories that contributed to the study of Champa and formed the background for my research, what I also would like to mention here is the ongoing collaboration between Western scholars and Vietnamese scholars as well as

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[27] These essays were presented for the first time at the Symposium on New Scholarship on Champa held at the National University of Singapore in 2004.

[28] Most of this book's chapters were first presented at the conference "New Research in Historical Campā Studies" (Paris, 2012).

between Western and Vietnamese research institutions that is possible since Vietnam became more open and welcomes international scholars to come and conduct their field studies.[29] This collaboration benefits both parties as they can exchange knowledge, research skills, research methodologies, and archaeological data. Also, it provides the opportunity for Vietnamese researchers to travel outside for conferences and seminars while international scholars can come to conduct joint projects with Vietnamese museums, universities, research institution, and other organizations dealing with the preservation of Cham heritage.

Regarding research on the social and cultural life of the contemporary Cham of the South-Central Cham, one of the most significant ethnographic accounts is the PhD dissertation titled *Cham in Vietnam: Dynamics of Ethnicity*, defended in 1999 by Rie Nakamura. Her dissertation was published in 2020 as a monograph under the title *A Journey of Ethnicity: In search of the Cham of Vietnam*, keeping mostly the same structure, content, and ethnographic/anthropological data. Her work focuses on the subject of ethnicity; the author poses the following questions: What does it mean to be Cham within the context of the nation-state of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam? How the Cham adapt to the mainstream discourse on ethnic minority groups? Based on her fieldwork in Hồ Chí Minh City, the South-Central coastal area, and in the Mekong Delta region, Nakamura covers numerous topics on all the Cham, including "Cham Balamon," "Cham Bani" and "Muslim Cham." Her discussion on the Cham of the South-Central coastal area found in Chapter 3 of the book is highly relevant to my work. There are two main groups of Cham in this area, namely, Chăm Bàlamôn (Cham Ahiér) and Cham Bani (Cham Awal); Nakamura (2020: 72-74) considers the Chăm Bàlamôn as adhering "to an indigenized form of Hinduism" and informs the reader that "[t]hey worship the god Po Yang and their deified kings, and hold their ceremonies in the old Champa temples called *bimong*, which were built between the 14th and 16th centuries." She studied and

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[29] With the limits I described above regarding South-Central Cham villages.

described this group of Cham while comparing them with the other group, the Cham Bani, who, she states, are adherents of "an indigenized form of Islam. They worship Po Alwah (Allah) at their village *masjid* called *thang muki*." Furthermore, she maintains that "[c]ertain legends explain the origin of the Cham people's division into two groups; in these legends, Balamon and Bani are consistently identified as *Ahiér* and *Awal*." One may question her definition of the Cham Ahiér and their religion as related to her vision of the "indigenized form of Hinduism," since her approach may imply that there is some way to measure the "level of indigenization." Furthermore, regarding the religious practices of the South-Central Cham, Nakamura stresses the importance of the cosmological dualistic notion of Ahiér-Awal and the ways in which this notion connects and binds the Cham Ahiér and the Cham Awal together. Although she gives a wonderful explanation of this notion, I would like to add that in my field studies I found this concept to be heavily stressed and promoted by the Cham intellectuals whom I had conversations with as well as in publications produced by native Cham scholars; however, I also found that this concept is almost completely unknown to ordinary Cham villagers.

Inspired by Nakamura's PhD dissertation, Philip Taylor published in 2007 a monograph in which he focused exclusively on the Cham Muslims of the Mekong Delta. Presenting them as essentially a transnational community, Taylor carefully explored their place and mobility in the cosmopolitan periphery. Regarding the question of Cham identity, Taylor points out that Islam is the main unifying factor for the Mekong Delta Cham and discusses how their belief in Islam accounts for Mekong Delta Cham identity. As far as the topic of Cham identity is concerned, Mohamed Effendy Bin Abdul Hamid in his Master thesis (2007) suggests that the Cham in Vietnam and Cambodia use their Cham ethnicity as an "ethnic passport" that allows them to enter and successfully participate in the cultural and social dynamics of other societies in Southeast Asia. I believe that this might be the case mostly for the Cham of Mekong

Delta where Islam is the main factor that connects the Cham Muslims with the other Islamic communities in Southeast Asia. In contradistinction to these scholars, I conducted my fieldwork in the South-Central region of Vietnam and worked with the Cham Ahiér and Cham Awal who live there and are not able to travel outside of Vietnam easily. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, they are not Muslims and thus cannot use Islam as the channel to create connections with the Islamic communities in Southeast Asia. Secondly, they often do not have sufficient financial resources to travel on their own for pleasure. Thirdly, the government still monitors them and some Cham whom I know and who have traveled outside of the country have had to report to the government officials regularly.

In his PhD dissertation (2013), Abdul Hamid maintains that despite the Vietnamese annexation of Pāṇḍuraṅga, the last Cham independent state, in 1832, the ethnic Vietnamese were not interested in assimilating the Cham because they were occupied by internal and external problems. He asserts that when the French colonized Vietnam, they were more concerned with Champa history and archaeology. Thus, Cham priests and the elites were able to preserve and uphold Cham culture, history, and tradition from the past to the present. According to him (2013: 1), "The Cham were able to continue their traditional way of life with the Cham religious elite taking center stage in Cham society." As far as this statement is concerned, I would like to point out that what we know about Champa and its past is mostly based on the extant artifacts (stone inscriptions, temple architecture, religious iconography) dated between the 7th to the 15th centuries that were crafted on the behalf of Cham elite class (in particular, Cham kings) and thus reflected the religious practices and culture of the elites and not of the entire Cham population. These artifacts therefore cannot be assumed to represent the traditional way of life of the entire Cham population. In my opinion, we do not have enough information concerning "Cham traditional ways of life." We do have some Cham royal documents (dated from the 17th to 19th centuries) and some religious manuscripts (dated from

the 18th to the 20th centuries) but they were the products of royals, elites, and the priestly class. It is hard to know what were the traditional ways of life of the Cham villagers; the only sources of information in this respect are the ethnographical accounts produced by the French colonial researchers in the late 19th to early 20th centuries. What we know is mainly related to the religious life of the members of Cham royal clan and elites, although this information does not come to us over the centuries in an uninterrupted, chronological straight line. Based on my fieldwork, I can confirm that Cham priests are very important in Cham society because they are the only ones who may perform the rituals and possess religious manuscripts that were inherited from their parents and precursors. But, unfortunately, not all of them can read those Cham manuscripts. Also, the majority of the priests do not publish scholarly works on their culture, tradition, and religion. It can be argued that the Cham intellectuals are more enthusiastic in persevering and promoting their culture and tradition than the priests. Some of them even criticized the priests for not trying harder to learn the Cham language in order to be able to read the religious manuscripts or to explain the meanings of the rituals. In short, I think it is necessary to recognize the differences between Cham priests and Cham intellectuals, as well as Cham elites and Cham ordinary villagers because each of these groups has its own way of describing and interpreting Cham Ahiér religion and identity.

Another point that I would like to mention in relation to Abdul Hamid's dissertation is his claim that Cham Ahiér are syncretic Hindu and Cham Awal are syncretic Muslims (2013: 9). First, the claim that the Cham Awal are Muslims or syncretic Muslims was criticized by Yoshimoto (2012) who convincingly argued that the Cham Bani do not consider themselves Muslims or members of the Islamic community. She suggested instead that Cham Bani identify themselves as *tín đồ Hồi Giáo* (Hồi Giáo [= Islam] followers) but this does not mean that they define themselves as "Muslims." Rather, they subscribe themselves to the Vietnamese religious category "Cham Bani" understood as one branch of the "Cham religion." Secondly, I would

argue that the Cham Ahiér whom I met *do not* identify themselves as "Hindu" or "syncretic Hindu." The value of the concept of syncretism is questionable here; I return to a discussion of this concept in the conclusion of the thesis. Both definitions offered by Abdul Hamid and Nakamura for the Cham Ahiér made me think of the ways in which French colonial categories of "Brahmanistes" or "Hindouistes" Cham continue to influence contemporary scholars. Through my fieldwork, I found that the contemporary Cham Ahiér do not worship any of the Hindu supreme gods such as Śiva, Viṣṇu and Brahma, and that the deities of their pantheon are quite different from those of Hinduism. Moreover, they also pray to Allah and other "Islamic gods" in funeral rituals and in Rija rituals. Thus, I believe that it is incorrect and inaccurate to categorize the Cham Ahiér as "Hindu Cham" or "syncretic Hindu" or to describe them as adhering to "an indigenized form of Hinduism." In fact, I do not think it is useful to box or label the religion and identity of the Cham Ahiér with a name of a specific religious tradition, and especially Hinduism.

The most recent ethnographic work on the contemporary Cham is represented with several articles published by William Noseworthy. In his *Reviving traditions and creating futures* (2013), Noseworthy examines the Katé festival and explains that observers are often mistaken in thinking of Katé as the "Cham New Year" and that it is celebrated only by the "Brahmanist" Cham (Cham Ahiér). He points out that other Cham communities have adapted the Katé festival into Katé-Ramâwan and Katé Cần Giờ which are newly created ceremonies and festivals. To him this "represents a shift toward a transnational frame to redefine communal and cultural identity." In the *Mother goddess of Champa: Po Inâ Nagâr* (2015), Noseworthy argues that this goddess is not "simply a local adaptation of Uma" or "the wife of Śiva" as most researchers often suggested; rather, she is a Cham "mother goddess" who has become known by many names. Lastly, in the most recent article *Shared resonance: Cham Bani conceptions of divinities in contemporary Vietnam* (2020), that Noseworthy co-authored with Phạm Thị

Thanh Huyền, the authors examined the question "How have Cham Bani conceived of divinity - the state or quality of being divine?" and suggested that scholars in the field of religious studies should use the concept of *shared resonances* to understand Cham Bani conceptions of divinity. This concept allows for the sharing of similarities in religious practices between Cham Bani and other Cham communities (Cham Jat and Cham Ahiér) while still leaving space for varying conceptions of divinity to be articulated by individual practitioners.

The above-mentioned publications are the most recent works published by overseas scholars that relate to various aspects of the Cham in Vietnam. Their works differ from French colonial works, in particular, because they focused more on the "live culture" and on the religious practices of the contemporary Cham. However, they were not the only ones interested in the contemporary Cham. Since 1986, Vietnamese researchers as well as Cham intellectuals themselves started publishing more actively on Cham culture, tradition and religious belief, and especially on Cham rituals, festivals, customary laws, myths and legends. Ngô Văn Doanh is perhaps one of the earliest and most active Vietnamese researchers who has published extensively on the contemporary Cham of the South-Central regions and of the Mekong Delta. His works provide a good introduction to Cham culture, tradition, religion, and rituals to a general and large Vietnamese audience. Unlike Ngô Văn Doanh, in his PhD dissertation (2003) Vương Hoàng Trù focuses on the contemporary South-Central Cham, in both Cham Ahiér and Awal communities of Ninh Thuận province and investigates their folk beliefs (Viet.: *tín ngưỡng dân gian*). His study of such topics as taboos and customs, totemism, shamanism, funeral rituals, agricultural rituals, and talisman practices leads him to the conclusion that the folk beliefs of the Cham have direct connection to their agricultural practices. However, his criteria for defining the term "folk beliefs" and his description of the ways in which such beliefs are differentiated from other beliefs remain unclear. The results of my field work allow me to suggest that ordinary Cham villagers do not classify or categorize their beliefs and rituals as

belonging to "folk" or "non-folk" categories. In general, they do not use this term, although Cham intellectuals do it in specific contexts which I will discuss in the following chapters.

Until now, the first and only work that focuses solely on the Cham Ahiér community is the PhD dissertation (2004) of Phan Quốc Anh which he edited and published as a book in 2006. Different from Vietnamese scholarship on the Cham published prior to 2004, Phan Quốc Anh emphasizes the use of the term "Cham Ahiér" instead of the Vietnamese term "Chăm Bàlamôn" to discuss this particular community. Since he lived in Ninh Thuận province, where settlements of ethnic Cham are located, and held several high positions in the government that required him to work directly with Cham intellectuals, his work reflects the close connections he had with them. In his work, Phan strongly suggests replacing the term "Chăm Bàlamôn" with the term "Cham Ahiér," and then explores the life-cycle rituals of the Cham Ahiér, that is, the rituals that start from the moment when a person is born to the moment of his or her death. His discussion of the funeral rituals is closely related to my work; in particular, it allowed me to compare his description of the funeral that he witnessed in Ninh Thuận province to the funeral that I observed in Bình Thuận province.

Over the past two decades, native Cham themselves have become active in publishing works on their culture and traditions. For example, Trương Văn Món (b. 1967), a professor of anthropology at Vietnam National University in Hồ Chí Minh city, and an ethnic Cham Ahiér himself who usually publishes under his Cham name Sakaya, made a considerable contribution to the study of contemporary South-Central Cham culture and religion. Some of his works that are most closely related to my research are the monographs *Lễ hội của Người Chăm* (Festivals of Cham people*)* (2003, reprinted in 2014), *Mối Quan Hệ Giữa Văn Hoá Chăm và Văn Hoá Mã Lai Thông Qua Lễ Raja Praong và Mak Yong* (The relation between Cham culture and Malay culture through Raja Praong and Mak Yong ritual) (2012), *Palm Leaf Manuscripts of the Cham People in Vietnam* (2016), and *Văn Hoá Champa* (Approaching Champa culture)

(2013). The latter book is a collection of short articles on topics such as archaeological sites in Ninh Thuận province, religious beliefs of the Cham, Cham language, Cham's musical instruments and dances, Cham traditional craftsmanship, and Cham cultural imprints in the Central Highlands. When reading Sakaya's works, I had an impression that he might be influenced by the writing of the "revisionist" Po Dharma who is also an ethnic Cham. For instance, in the "L'Insulinde malaise et le Campa" published by Po Dharma in 2000, the author maintains that despite Champa's "Indianization" and its visibly "Sanskritic" culture that existed until 1471, as early as the second century Champa maintained close political, commercial and religious contacts with the Malay Peninsula. Po Dharma claims that from the 17th century onwards, elements of Islamic culture were brought to Champa by Malaysian travelers. Thus, he argues that this was an act of "Malayanization" and not "Islamization" (meaning that Champa adopted elements of Islam from the Malay world and not from the Arab world). The idea that the Cham received or adopted a form of "Malay Islam" is strongly emphasized in Sakaya's works (2008: 152, 157; 2016: 87, 97) in relation to the question of religious identity of the South-Central Cham; I will discuss this matter in detail in Chapter 2.

One of Sakaya's PhD supervisors was Thành Phần, also an ethnic Cham himself and a prominent scholar in the field of Cham language and manuscripts. He also shared the same views as Po Dharma and Sakaya on a number of subjects including the question of religious beliefs of the South-Central Cham as being "Malayanized" and of the importance of the concept of Ahiér-Awal dualism in shaping the religious identity of the South-Central Cham as a whole.[30] Sakaya's father-in-law is Sử Văn Ngọc, a well-known Cham Ahiér intellectual who is the author of several books including *Các Bài Kinh Về Tục Tang Ma Người Chăm Ahiér* (Funeral mourning songs of the Cham Ahiér) (2012), *Văn Hoá Làng Chăm Ninh Thuận* (Cham traditional villages in Ninh Thuận) (2010), and *Luật Tục trong xã hội Chăm* (Cham Customary

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[30] See for instance. Thành Phần (2002; 2007; 2010; 2011; 2012).

Law) (2012). From this short description it is apparent that many prominent native Cham scholars and intellectuals are closely connected, and they often share similar viewpoints and agendas. One of Sakaya's close friends, Lâm Tấn Bình, is a respected Cham Ahiér intellectual who is the founder and director of the Center for Cham Culture Display in Bình Thuận; he is perhaps one of the most respected individuals among the Cham communities of Bình Thuận province. When I was doing my fieldwork in Bình Thuận and studied Cham language with Lâm, I saw how passionate he was about preservation and promotion of Cham culture, tradition and language. The way in which he operates is to encourage Cham individuals to donate Cham antique objects and old manuscripts to the Cham Cultural Center where they can be properly preserved and exhibited to a larger audience. According to the Cham tradition, the Cham manuscripts are supposed to be owned by the priests who usually do not share them with villagers or other individuals (e.g., native or foreign researchers). Since Lâm Tấn Bình was trusted and became influential among the community, Sakaya and Thành Phần requested Lâm to convince the local Cham priests to share the old Cham manuscripts with them.[31] Even though both Sakaya and Thành Phần were native Cham who were born in Ninh Thuận province but later moved to Hồ Chí Minh City, they required someone local to introduce them to the priests when they needed to do fieldwork in Bình Thuận province. Before Lâm retired from the Cham Cultural Exhibition Center in 2016, he published a book written in Vietnamese titled *Di Tích và Lễ Hội của người Chăm Bình Thuận* (Monuments and Ritual festivals of the Cham people in Bình Thuận). The book introduces the important Cham religious sites in Bình Thuận with a short description of the history of each site and of the rituals that are performed at those sites.

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[31] One day, when Lâm brought me to the house of a priest, I learned from the priest that earlier Lâm also brought a team of Cham to his house to scan and photograph some Cham manuscripts for Thành Phần who was working for the project titled "Preserving the endangered manuscripts of Cham" supported by British Library; see the project site at https://eap.bl.uk/project/EAP531. Also, in 2015 when Lâm brought Sakaya to visit several mosques in Bình Thuận to help him get acquainted with the local believers, I was lucky enough to tag along and this brought me the opportunity to understand how personal connections may be important in doing fieldwork.

It is one of the very few works written about the Cham community in Bình Thuận, since most researchers, either Western, Vietnamese, or Cham choose to focus on Ninh Thuận Province instead. I think one of the main reasons that made most Western scholars choose Ninh Thuận is because "The Research Center of Cham Culture" is located in this province and invites overseas scholars to come and collaborate. This center was created before 1975 but since in 1992 Thuận Hải province was divided into two provinces, Ninh Thuận and Bình Thuận, this center was re-established in 1993. This center therefore has much deeper roots than the "Cham Cultural Exhibition Center of Bình Thuận" which was established only in 2010. Also, the majority of prominent Cham intellectuals and native Cham scholars originated from Ninh Thuận province, and they are the people whom overseas scholars usually contact first for establishing research collaboration.

Another Cham intellectual who dedicated his entire life to collecting and preserving Cham manuscripts was Quảng Văn Đại. He believed that it was the duty of his generation to save Cham culture and traditions through preservation of old manuscripts for later generations. He decided to collect and then translate the most valuable Cham manuscripts into Vietnamese for a larger audience, and especially for the young Cham to understand their cultural heritage because most of them could only read Vietnamese and not Cham. In 2016, he published his first book *Cẩm Nang Nghi Lễ Truyền Thống Chăm Ninh Thuận* (A guide to Cham traditional rituals in Ninh Thuận province) in which he provided detailed description of some of the most important Cham rituals in his province. When I read his book, I felt as if I was reading a ritual manual. Another Cham intellectual who is famous among the Cham community in Ninh Thuận is Inrasara who is more focused on Cham literature - in particular, poems and proverbs. Inrasara published extensively since 1994; he also created the website https://inrasara.com/ under the title "*Không ai có thể hát thay chúng ta*" [Nobody can sing for us] where he welcomes all the Cham and others to share their thoughts on any topics related to Cham life.

The last Cham scholar I want to mention here is Quảng Đại Tuyên who received his PhD degree in 2020 from the University of Queensland (Australia) for his dissertation titled "Living Heritage has a Heart: Sacred space, site conservation, and indigenous participation at Cham sacred sites in Vietnam." Even though his research focuses on the topic of conservation of heritage sites in connection to the tourist industry, he is particularly interested in both tangible and intangible aspects of Cham culture represented in the Cham Po Klaong Girai[32] temple in Ninh Thuận province; his studies clarified certain elements related to my work on Cham rituals at this temple. I first met him at a conference on Champa in Đà Nẵng in 2012 and we kept in touch since then. He was very kind to welcome me to his house and to let me speak with his relatives as well as showing me his village in Ninh Thuận province. With his profound knowledge of Cham culture and his good English language skills that he obtained while studying in a Master program in the United States and in a Doctoral program in Australia, he represents new, young generation of Cham whose ambition is to protect and preserve Cham culture and showcase it to the world.

In short, over the past two decades, there has been a rising wave of publications authored by native Cham scholars and other Cham intellectuals. Their works focus mostly on Cham manuscripts, literature, rituals, tradition, culture, and customary laws. Shared among their works is an interest to showcase Cham culture and tradition to the world and, at the same time, to preserve them from deterioration. There is a strong emphasis on the importance of Cham manuscripts as one of the main sources for understanding Cham culture and tradition. For instance, Quảng Văn Đại constantly stressed the utmost importance of the manuscripts in his publications; Sakaya, an ethnic Cham and a professor of anthropology, states (2008: 134): "Cham manuscripts contain a lot of useful information, they are the scientific documents on

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[32] Also transliterated as Po Klong Garai.

Cham beliefs and religions, it is better to rely on them than on narrators' opinions and interviewees' lacking coherence. Moreover, narrators often carry subjective opinions and, when translating from Cham, are far from the original meaning of the manuscripts." This demonstrates the Cham perception of their manuscripts as the proper representation of their culture and tradition. Some Cham scholars even criticize researchers who do not know Cham scripts and hence are not able to use Cham manuscripts as main sources and rather prefer to depend on narratives and opinions of their interviewers. Ironically, almost all of their publications are written in Vietnamese and not in Cham. This is because the main audience who reads their works consists of ethnic Vietnamese (Kinh) and of the younger generations of Cham who are unable to read traditional Cham script.

To conclude this section, I would like to reiterate that for many decades it was the trajectory of French colonial studies of the late 19th and most part of the 20th century that conditioned the way in which Cham society and religion were considered by both outsiders and insiders. But in contradistinction from this established tradition derived from French colonial and even post-colonial works, I will not use Cham medieval artifacts as the source for understanding contemporary Cham Ahiér religion; rather, my intent here is to challenge the vision that this approach imposed on the contemporary Cham Ahiér when defining them as "Cham Brahmanistes" or "Hindu Cham." In addition, I will not employ the definitions of the system of beliefs of Cham Ahiér proposed by Nakamura (1999, 2020) and Abdul Hamid (2013) as a religion which "adheres to an indigenized form of Hinduism" or "syncretic Hindu Cham," respectively. Furthermore, I do not fully agree with native Cham scholars such as Po Dharma (2000), Sakaya (2002, 2008, 2014, 2016), and Thành Phần (2010) who described and categorized the Cham Ahiér as those who followed Islam (some time later than the Cham Awal) and who stated that all the South-Central Cham have converted to a Malayanized form of Islam. I believe that it is unnecessary and inaccurate to try to categorize or to label the contemporary

Cham Ahiér with a specific term or identify them with reference to an established "world religion." Regarding the concept of Ahiér-Awal cosmological dualism, Nakamura was perhaps the first scholar who thoroughly explained this concept as an important factor for understanding the South-Central Cham. However, in this thesis I emphasize that this concept has been heavily promoted by native Cham scholars and intellectuals while ordinary Cham villagers are not necessarily familiar with this concept. Furthermore, while I agree with Cham scholars that Cham manuscripts are a good source for the study Cham religion, to me, nonetheless, this particular source reflects mainly the literary culture of the Cham elites. My approach to the study of Cham Ahiér religion was rather different: I studied their religion *in situ*, through observations, interviews, and analysis of ritual practices and performances. The goal of this study, is therefore to describe how the religion of the present-day Cham is manifested on a practical ritual level, understand what Cham themselves think and say about this religion and how they act in relating to it. This thesis is thus the first one that explores Cham Ahiér religion and identity in this way.

## Structure of the Thesis and Chapters Summaries

This thesis consists of seven chapters, the contents of them are as follows:

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the history and religion of Champa from the medieval to the colonial period, with a focus on the history of religion in Champa through a discussion of the worship of Śiva and Viṣṇu, as well as the practice of Buddhism as seen in the extant artifacts dated mainly from the 7th century to the 15th century. The adoption of Islam in Champa is also included into consideration; it is mainly done in connection with the discussion of Champa's relations to neighbouring countries since the 15th century. An important part of this chapter is devoted to the ways in which the (re)construction of Cham heritage conducted by French colonial scholars was rooted in their perception of medieval

civilization of Champa as a part of "Indian world"; here I will discuss the ways in which medieval Cham artifacts directly influenced French colonial categorization and labeling of the Cham Ahiér's identity as Brahmanists/Hindu Cham. In this chapter, I will also identify the sites where dead and living Cham temples are located and introduce the sites where contemporary Cham Ahiér temple rituals take place; I will discuss these in more detail in chapter 4. This first chapter is needed not only to provide a background understanding of Champa history and religion but mainly to explain how French colonial studies and the (re)construction of Champa's past still influence the perception of Cham identity by both the current Vietnamese government and Cham intellectuals.

Chapter 2 continues the discussions of the Vietnamese Communist government's and native Cham scholars and intellectuals' perception of the South-Central Cham identity, particularly that of the Cham Ahiér. This chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part introduces the Vietnamese Communist Party's imposition of an "ethnic identity" (ethnicity-based identity) on the Cham, a process whereby officials categorized the Cham since 1979 as one of "fifty-four national ethnic groups" in a harmonious, unified, multiethnic Vietnam. The second part delves into the origin, history, and meanings of the terms "Cham Ahiér" and "Cham Awal" in which contemporary native Cham scholars have sought to replace the present-day official state-sanctioned terms inherited from the French colonial terms "Chăm Bàlamôn" (or "Hindu Cham") and Chăm Bàni ("Muslim Cham") inhabiting the South-Central Coast. They explain that the term "Ahiér" referred to those Cham who accepted Po Awluah (Allah) *after* Po Romé's reign (r. 1627-1651), whereas Cham Awal (Cham Bani) are those who followed Islam *before* Po Romé's reign; and the result of these events was that all the South-Central Cham converted to Islam. While this topic is discussed by native Cham scholars in their publications, Cham intellectuals who I spoke with did not concern themselves with the meaning of those terms but just used them as given. What is indeed shared among native Cham scholars

and intellectuals is the emphasis on the cosmological dualistic concept of Ahiér-Awal and the way in which it represents the "religious identity" of the Cham of Southern and Central Vietnam as a whole. Interestingly, I found that ordinary Cham villagers do not use the terms Ahiér and Awal, nor are they familiar with the Ahiér-Awal dualism. Thus, if outsiders, namely the Vietnamese Communist government authorities, imposed and, in effect, *manufactured* Cham ethnic identity, native Cham scholars and intellectuals have employed the terms Ahiér and Awal and promoted the concept of Ahiér-Awal dualism as the "religious identity" of the South-Central Cham with their own agenda. This chapter sets the stage for the following chapters in which I explore Cham Ahiér rituals to understand their religion and the ways in which ordinary Cham villagers identify themselves through the rituals that they practice, that they are Cham *cuh* or Cham who practice cremation funerals.

Chapter 3 focuses on the subject of Cham Ahiér population, including human population and "non-human" population, that is, spirits and deities. When describing the human population, I introduce key components of Cham Ahiér society with a particular focus on Cham Ahiér priests in order to understand who they are, what their responsibilities include, what makes them recognizable to the external observers, how they become priests, why are they entrusted with certain tasks, what different types of priests exist and how they relate to, or are regarded by, the rest of Cham society. In this respect, I found that while native Cham scholars and intellectuals refer to one group of Cham priests as "folk masters," ordinary villagers neither use this term nor do they know which priests belong to this group. In the non-human population, I introduce the Cham Ahiér concept of divinity, their pantheon of gods (*yang*), deified kings (*yang patao*), together with their views concerning ancestors (*muk kei*), ghosts (*bhut*), and demons (*jin, abileh*). While exploring this subject, I also found that Cham elites use various categories to describe their gods such as "old deities" (*yang klak*)/ "temple deities" (*yang bimong*) and "new deities" (*yang barau*), but, once again, ordinary villagers do

not use these terms, nor do they understand which deities belong to which categories. Thus, what I propose in the conclusion of this chapter is to acknowledge at least two different discourses that are occurring simultaneously and how both of them represent Cham voices.

Chapter 4 explores four Cham Ahiér annual temple rituals (Peh Bi-Mbeng Yang, Yuer Yang, Katé, and Cambur) to understand which gods Cham Ahiér worship at temples, and how, when and why they worship them. But before delving into the rituals, the chapter explores Cham Ahiér perceptions of sacred sites such as temples and the ways in which they think of the concepts of "sacred" and "pure." Then it describes how Cham ancient sacred temples were recently recognized by the government as national heritage properties; this recognition let the government claim that it is in charge of their preservation and conservation, as well as of promoting them to be tourist sites. This chapter also explores temple activities and the "invention" of Cham traditions which, I suggest, is the joint effort of both the local Cham Ahiér community and the government. While the government tries to promote Cham culture and tradition through temple activities to attract tourists, the Cham also do so but with the intention to showcase their heritage and identity. This chapter suggests that Cham religion and identity can be understood through ritual practice and performance, along the lines of Shneiderman's perspective in which practice is understood as ritualized actions carried out by the Cham priests to their gods in the main chamber of the temple while performance refers to ritualized actions carried out not only by the Cham priests and not only for their gods but with external agendas and for political or economic reasons. Last but not least, this chapter also examines the role of the priests in temple rituals to show how the term or category of "folk masters" created and used by native Cham scholars and intellectuals carries no meaning when it comes to ritual practices in which all the priests work together, with each of them having a particular task within the same ritual in order to make the ritual be completed successfully.

Chapter 5 focuses on two interconnected subjects within Cham Ahiér religious culture and practices; the first is the funeral practices including funeral regulations, the concepts of "good death" and "bad death" as well as the cremation ritual, while the second one is the *kut* (cemetery) entry ceremony. Through exploring these topics, one can gain an understanding of the Cham concepts of afterlife, religion, and identity. The Cham Ahiér believe that death is only the end of one's current lifetime on Earth as one will be reborn into another life where she or he will join ancestors. However, in order to be reborn in that world, the deceased needs to have a proper funeral ceremony in which the priests perform the rituals to create a new body for the deceased to be transformed from being a dead person to be born again in her of his next life and a *kut* entry ceremony is performed to bury the forehead bones of the deceased in the cemetery of the ancestors of clan-based matrilineal descent and thus to let the deceased join the world of the ancestors permanently. Exploring these rituals, I found that ordinary Cham villagers do not identify themselves as Cham Ahiér, that is, they do not apply to themselves this term extensively used by native Cham scholars and intellectuals; instead, they identify themselves as "Cham *cuh*", that is, "Cham who practice cremation." In fact, the Cham Ahiér are very proud that their funeral practices differentiate them from the Cham Awal who practice burial funerals instead. Thus, the cremation ritual lets the Cham Ahiér distinguish themselves from other groups of Cham, and participation in this ritual helps them strengthen the identity of the Cham Ahiér community. While in the temple rituals (mentioned in the previous chapter) all the deities that were called upon are considered "old deities," a term I have borrowed from native Cham scholars, in the funeral rituals "new deities" or "Islamic deities" were also called upon together with "old deities" to help the deceased person to reach the world of ancestors. This chapter thus suggests that the Cham Ahiér death rituals contain a mixture of various religious practices and beliefs that are derived from diverse sources and traditions.

Chapter 6 examines two sets of fundamental rituals of the Cham Ahiér. The first is the Puis and Payak rituals and the second is a group of four Rija rituals. Puis and Payak rituals are clan rituals performed privately at home for the benefit of all clan members. The purpose of Puis and Payak rituals is to repay ancestors and the gods for blessings and protection of the clan in past years. The deities worshipped in these rituals are mainly "old deities" or "temple deities." The second set of rituals are the "Rija rituals" which include Rija Nagar (New Year dancing ritual), Rija Harei (day dancing ritual), Rija Dayep (night dancing ritual), and Rija Praong (great dancing ritual). The purpose of these rituals is to ask the gods for protection and blessings, for good health, good fortune, and good weather. The deities worshipped in the Rija are both "old deities" and "new deities." It is only in the Rija Dayep and Rija Praong each clan, aside from worshiping other deities, also follows and worships "new deities" who either belong to the "mountain lineage" or to the "ocean lineage." Thus, through these rituals the concept and practices related to "clan identity" can be identified. Despite native Cham scholars and intellectuals using the term "folk priests" to refer to the priests who perform the Rija rituals (which are also referred to as "folk rituals"), ordinary Cham villagers whom I talked to did not refer to them as such nor did they use the terms "new deities" and "old deities." In addition, my closer study of these rituals reinforces the idea that it is inappropriate and inaccurate to categorize the religion of this Cham community using specific terms identifying their beliefs with world religions, since they do not practice Hinduism or Islam, nor do they see themselves as Hindu or Muslim.

Chapter 7 delivers a conclusion to this thesis and offers a summary of my finding. This thesis explores the complex connections between identity and religion that can be identified through an analysis of Cham Ahiér ritual practices and performances. As stated in the opening part, the goal of this thesis is to describe how the religion works on a ritual level and how rituals help understanding Cham Ahiér identity and religion. By looking into a number of the most

important rituals of the Cham Ahiér such as those performed at temples*, funeral rituals, *kut* entry ritual, Puis and Payak rituals as well as the Rija rituals, I demonstrate in this thesis that the religion of the contemporary Cham Ahiér contains a mixture, patchwork and juxtaposition of various religious beliefs and traditions accumulated over a long period of time. In addition, by examining Cham Ahiér rituals along the lines of practice and performance, this thesis recognizes the involvement of different parties in maintaining and creating Cham Ahiér identity and religion; these parties include native Cham scholars and intellectuals, and ordinary Cham villagers. Lastly, this thesis suggests that religion of the Cham Ahiér is not static, but it continues and will continue to evolve through time, and that the rituals they practice and perform arguably play major role in this evolution.

# Chapter 1: Medieval Champa and French Colonial Construction of Cham Religion and of Cham Identity

## 1.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on two main topics. The first is Champa's history in connection to religion. The second is the French colonial reconstruction of Champa history, religion, and Cham identity. As far as Champa's history is concerned, I examined secondary sources and shall summarize below the theories and hypotheses proposed by various prominent Cham scholars. I did not attempt to organize these theories in chronological order because I recognize the challenges of writing the history of Champa on the sole basis of fragmented pieces of various kinds of evidence. In fact, the remains of Champa are so fragmentary that they require interpretations and analysis based on interdisciplinary approach that would include contributions of historians, linguists, historians of religion, and art historians. Writing this part, I adopted the only methodology available to me, the one that can be referred to as "multidisciplinary patchwork," and which consists of bringing together different pieces of information originating from the political history of Champa, the history of its religion and religious art. The goal of this survey is to reconstruct the history of adoption and development of various religions in Champa. The methodology necessarily varies when adapted to the research questions; for instance, when discussing Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism, and Buddhism in medieval Champa, aside from using secondary sources, I also examine and study primary sources including extant medieval Cham temples, religious sculptures, and inscriptions. Even though this thesis focuses mainly on the contemporary Cham Ahiér, I believe that it is necessary for this study to have solid background in the political history and history of religions of the Champa kingdom because they provide not only the reasons for particular theories developed by certain modern scholars but, even more importantly, as my thesis tries to show,

this multidisciplinary approach may explain how and why the present-day Cham Ahiér practice their own kind of religion which differs from what we know about Cham religions of the past on the basis of the extant medieval texts and artifacts. While discussing medieval Cham religion based on the inscriptions, sculptures, and temples, I also include a section explaining how the contemporary Cham consider their ancient temples and identify them as "dead" temples (*bimong baraw*) or as "living" temples (*bimong hadiep*). In addition, I demonstrate that those temples are now regarded as the houses of their deified kings and not of the Hindu gods that the temples were originally built for. The annual rituals that contemporary Cham Ahiér perform in these "living temples" will be discussed in the Chapter 4.

In the second part of this chapter, I explore first how French colonial authorities tried to control the population of the country, Vietnam, which they conquered and how they created, for this purpose, the concept of "minorités ethniques" and applied it to the Cham as well; this paradigm shift resulted in the creation of a new, modern Cham identity. I then examine how the French colonial scholars took part in the construction of Cham history, religion, and identity based on the extant medieval artifacts. In fact, the approaches that French colonial scholars took were largely "Orientalist", if we use the term made famous by Edward Said,[33] and included an India-centric perspective. While the French scholars were apparently amazed by the extant medieval temples, sculptures, inscriptions, as well as other artifacts, and thus emphasized how powerful this kingdom was and how advanced were its civilization and culture, they perceived the religion of the contemporary Cham as superstitious because the Cham no longer practiced the Indian religions whose deities were amply represented in their medieval temples and inscriptions. Nonetheless, the French held highly sympathetic attitudes towards the contemporary Cham whom they viewed as oppressed by the ethnic Vietnamese

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[33] In *Orientalism* published in 1978, Said refers to the work of Agnes Murphy (1968) *The Ideology of French imperialism, 1871-1881* who discussed the French colonial expansion in Vietnam on pp. 46-70 of the reprint of her monograph. Another work discussing French colonial ideology and published slightly later than Murphy's monograph is Raymond F. Betts (1961), *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914*.

(Kinh) and positioned themselves as saviors rather than conquerors, thus legitimizing their presence in Vietnam and, later, their political domination. In addition, they interpreted the ethnic Cham in an India-centric perspective while paying full attention to the "Indian" aspects of Cham medieval artifacts; this led them to identify one group of contemporary Cham as "Cham Brahmanist" or "Cham Hindu." Thus, the second part of this chapter is necessary because the identification of the "non-Muslim Cham" as "Cham Brahmanist" or "Cham Hindu" created by the French continued to influence the scholarship on the Cham and, ultimately, the ways in which the post-colonial Vietnamese government treated Cham identity and religion.

## 1.2 A Brief Overview of the History and Religion of Champa

The first comprehensive work written on the history of Champa was published in 1910-1912 by Georges Maspero (1872-1942) under the title *Le Royaume de Champa*,[34] and remains the only one of its kind until now. It was the most authoritative book on Champa history, and it served as the working tool for Cham studies for most of the 20th century. Nonetheless, this book was criticized by Rolf Stein (1911-1999) in 1947 on several issues, particularly on Maspero's theory of the origin of Champa in relation to Linyi. More recently, Maspero's work was also questioned by Taylor 1992, Southworth 2004, and Vickery 2005, 2011 who disagreed with Maspero's vision of Champa as a unified kingdom. Moreover, Po Dharma 1981; 2001, and Lafont 1988, suggested that Champa was not a single entity, but a multi-polity "network state" organized as a federation or a confederation comprised of five principalities; this federation included, from North to South, Indrapura (located in the territory stretching from

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[34] This work was published as a series of chapters in the scholarly journal *T'oung Pao*, vol. 11 (1910), pp. 125-136, 165-220, 319-350, 489-526, 547-566; vol. 12 (1911), pp. 53-87, 236-258, 291-315, 451-482, 589-626; vol 13 (1912), pp. 153-187, 189-201. It was published in book form in 1928 (Paris & Bruxelles: Les Editions G.van Oest), reprinted by EFEO (Paris) in 1988 and translated from French to English by Walter E. J. Tips under the title *The Champa Kingdom: The History of an Extinct Vietnamese Culture* (Maspero 2002). For a review of this work (including a comparison of the original publication as a series of articles and its publication in book form) see the review of Louis Finot (1928).

present-day Quảng Bình to Thừa Thiên Huế), Amarāvatī (Quảng Nam to Quảng Ngãi), Vijaya (Bình Định), Kauṭhāra (Phú Yên to Khánh Hoà) and Pāṇḍuraṅga (Bình Thuận and Ninh Thuận) (fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Map of Champa (Po Dharma 2001: 15).

Nevertheless, Hardy et al. (2019: 14) argued that this model of Champa organized as a cluster of five territories is also obsolete and provided instead a new interpretation that emphasizes the centrality of river valleys in Champa's political geography (fig. 2). However, according to both interpretations Champa consisted of several regions which had their own political and economic centers and depended heavily on the coastal-based trade exchange network system, a model which is known as Bronson's 'riverine exchange network' (Bronson

1977; Hall 1985; Trần Kỳ Phương 2006, 2009). It is noteworthy that when examining Cham royal inscriptions of the 15th century from Quảng Nam to Đồng Nai, Griffiths (2019: 193) refutes the claims that throughout its history Champa was never a unified kingdom. Based on epigraphical data and evidence from stele inscriptions dated from 1401/2 to 1443/4 and associated with the name of Śrī Viṣṇujāti Vīrabhadravarmadeva who reigned through the first four decades of the 15th century, he suggested that Champa at that time was a land of significant territorial extent ruled by powerful kings. Furthermore, Hardy (2019: 221) insists that Champa was a set of independent principalities and at the same time a unified kingdom in the sense that at different times these principalities were linked into a kingdom that its inhabitants called "Champa."



Fig. 2. The Territories of Champa (Hardy et al. 2019: 20).

While early scholarship asserted that Champa's territories covered mainly the coastal areas, recent scholarship suggests that Champa's political geography was not restricted to coastal areas but also included the highlands.[35] Since large parts of Champa territory were located along the coast and their inhabitants actively participated in the prosperous network of maritime trade routes (often referred to as the "Maritime Silk Road" or "Maritime Silk Route") that connected India to the shores of present-day Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, Vietnam, and further to the Northeast, into China and Japan),[36] this geographical location facilitated the adoption of Indian religious and cultural traditions and allowed medieval Champa to maintain stable contacts with subcontinental India and other "Indianized" states of Southeast Asia, such as the Sri Vijaya Empire, the Kingdom of Java, and the neighbouring Khmer Empire.[37]

Current scholarship suggests that Champa ethnic composition was diverse and that a large number of its inhabitants were speakers of Hrê (a Mon-Khmer language) (Hardy and Nguyễn 2019: 121). Nonetheless the native speakers of the Cham language, belonging to the Austronesian ethno-linguistic group in Southeast Asia,[38] were the predominant inhabitants of multi-ethnic Champa. It remains difficult to reconstruct the process of the emergence of Champa on the basis of linguistic evidence. Several scholars suggest that the Cham maintained an Austronesian language spoken from the 4th century CE (Po Dharma 1997: 41; Thurgood 1999: 3-4), while Brunelle (2005: 9-10) maintains that there is not much evidence to identify the beginning of settlement of Chamic speakers in the region as well as the area where the first Chamic speakers came from, although current speculation is that they originated in Borneo.

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[35] See for instance the works by Trần Kỳ Phương (2009, 2013); Southworth and Trần Kỳ Phương (2019).
[36] On the "Maritime Silk Route" see, for example, Michel Jacq-Hergoualc'h (2002).
[37] According to Hall (2011), coastal polities could be trading *entrepots* for the maritime trade networks, hence the adoption of Indian religions and cultures as attested to in ancient states of Southeast Asia. Perhaps, diverse religious backgrounds may have helped these early states improve their relations with one another and reinforce both economic ties and political cohesion. This group of small neighbouring polities was referred to as "Maritime Asia" by Acri (2016) to describe the circulation and transmission of Esoteric Buddhism in an interconnected network of sea routes across Asia.
[38] See Brunelle's PhD thesis of 2005 for a study of the Chamic language family.

What Brunelle believes is that by the beginning of the Common Era, the coast of central Vietnam was populated by Austronesian speakers.

The main sources of information on Champa civilization are derived from 23 extant brick temple complexes, 233 stone inscriptions,[39] a handful of religious stone sculptures dispersed in museums in Vietnam and around the world,[40] and a few historical texts from neighbouring countries such as the account found in the Chinese *Sui shu* 隋書 (Records of the Sui [Dynasty]), *Song huiyao jigao* 宋會要積搞 (Drafts of the Collected Statues of the Song [Dynasty]), and the *Da Ming shilu* 大明實錄 (Veritable Records of the Great Ming [Dynasty]).[41] Thus, as mentioned earlier, the materials that we can use to sketch a history of Champa remain highly fragmentary with various bits here and there. The very name "Campapura" first appeared in a local Cham inscription (C. 96) in the Mỹ Sơn Stele Inscription of Prakāśadharma, which is dated to 658 CE (Schweyer 2010).[42] A few years later, the name "Campeśvara" also appeared in the Khmer Kdei Ang inscription (K.53), (Cœdès and Parmentier 1923: 46; Sanderson 2003; Schweyer 2010). Champa was mentioned under several different names throughout history: it was found in Chinese sources under such names as Linyi 林邑 (Viet. Lâm Ấp[43]) from 192 to 758, Huanwangguo 環王國 (Viet. Hoàn Vương quốc) from

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[39] According to Griffiths et al. (2012), the total number of inscriptions that had been found prior to 2010 is 233. They were written in Sanskrit and Old Cham and dated mainly from the 7th to 15th centuries. See the majority of Cham inscriptions in Majumdar (1927, reprinted 1985), Schweyer (1999), Golzio (2004), and Griffiths et al. (2012).

[40] See Cham sculptures at the Museum of Champa Sculpture in Đà Nẵng, Vietnam National Museum of History (Hà Nội), Vietnam History Museum (Hồ Chí Minh City), Bình Định General Museum (Bình Định), Huế Museum of Royal Antiquities (Huế), Musée national des arts asiatiques (also known as Musée Guimet, Paris), the Asian Art Museum (San Francisco), The Met (Metropolitan) Museum (New York), etc.

[41] For a thorough study of these three Chinese accounts and their mention of Champa, see Wade (2003), (2005); Shiro (2011); and Aspell (2013).

[42] Here and below, I refer to numbers of the École Française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) inventory of Champa inscriptions. The C. in the notation refers to Cham and the K. refers to Khmer. For inscriptions of Champa, see Majumdar (1985), Golzio (2004), and https://isaw.nyu.edu/publications/inscriptions/campa/inscriptions/index.html.

[43] The Vietnamese pronunciation of the Chinese characters of Linyi is "Lâm Ấp." It was Ngô Sĩ Liên 吳士連 (ca. 1400-?) who first recorded the name of the polity of Lâm Ấp in his *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư* 大越史記全書 [The Complete Historical Records of the Great Viet] published in 1479. It is the first extant Vietnamese historical record mentioning the Cham and Champa.

758 to 886 and Zhancheng 占城 (Viet. Chiêm Thành[44]) from 886-1471 (Vickery 2005, 2011; Trần Kỳ Phương 2006).

To come up with an historical narrative of Champa and its date of origin, French scholars (Finot 1902, Maspero 1928, Coedes 1944) had to rely on Chinese sources; they identified Champa with the Linyi kingdom whose rise is dated to 192 CE.[45] However, recently Zakharov (2019) argued that Champa and Linyi were two different kingdoms and the Chinese sources mentioning Linyi are not concerned with Champa history. Also, it is quite difficult to identify the kings of Linyi as those of Champa. Thus, the principal source of data on early Champa is its royal epigraphy. The earliest Cham inscription that has been found so far is the Võ Cạnh inscription (C. 40). The inscription's first editor, Abel Bergaigne (1838-1888) dated it to the 3rd century CE (Bergaigne 1893). However, recently Zakharov (2010) dated it to the second half of the 4th century or to the 5th century CE. This inscription was composed in Sanskrit with Indian poetic metres and shows many features of Indian cultural traits, including terms of political vocabulary such as *rajan* 'king', *bhrtya* 'royal servant or minister', *sadas* 'assembly', thus indicating the complexity of processes of cultural interaction between Southeast and South Asia (Zakharov 2010: 18-19). The inscription records the donation made by a king belonging to the royal family of Śrī Māra. The importance of this early Cham Sanskrit inscription is that it is an historical document which attests to the presence of Indian culture in this land from the late 4th century CE.[46]

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[44] The term Chiêm Thành 占城 (lit. "Cham Citadel" of "Cham Citadels," probably referring to "Cham Towers") is also first recorded in the aforementioned *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư* of Ngô Sĩ Liên. But the term 占城 (Zhancheng in modern Mandarin) first appears Chinese history of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) in the record of 1369 narrating how the first Ming emperor Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328 – 1398, r. 1368-1398) ordered to send envoys abroad to announce the establishment of his new dynasty (Wade 2019: 257).

[45] For a recent study of archaeological issues related to the cultural and historical processes in Central Vietnam (from Sa Huỳnh to Linyi and Champa), see Lâm Thị Mỹ Dung (2017).

[46] According to Smith (1999), prior to the 4th century CE, the contacts between regions of the Eastern Indian Ocean were rather sporadic and limited to economic interactions. She believes that only after the 4th century, concurrent with a number of political and cultural changes in the subcontinent such as the growth of the Gupta

### 1.2.1 The worship of Śiva in Champa

Modern reconstructions of the early history of Champa religion rely mostly upon royal inscriptions, archaeological monuments, and religious sculptures. Inscriptions are in fact one of the main sources that provide an opening into Cham political, social, economic, linguistic, and religious systems. A survey of extant Cham inscriptions points to the primacy of Śiva worship at the royal courts of medieval Champa. In fact, the majority of Cham inscriptions mention the worship of Śiva or pay homage to Śiva prior to mentioning other Hindu and Buddhist deities who also appear in the same inscriptions.[47]

The earliest Cham indication of Śiva worship can be seen in several 5th century CE inscriptions such as the Mỹ Sơn stele inscription of Bhadravarman I (C.72) in Quảng Nam province and the Chợ Đinh rock inscription (C. 41) which also contains the name of the king Bhadravarman who may have had certain connections with Phú Yên province as well.[48] The Mỹ Sơn stele inscription of king Bhadravarman I (C.72) records that the king erected a temple dedicated to the benevolent Śiva (Bhadreśvara) and documented land endowments which were to be used for the long-term purpose of maintaining the temple. The Chợ Đinh rock inscription (C. 41) refers to a sacrifice offered to Śiva, who is called Bhadreśvarasvāmin.[49] According to Chemburkar and Kapoor (2018: 47), Bhadreśvara was the state god of the Cham at Mỹ Sơn

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polity, did Southeast Asian political entities adopt Sanskrit for administration and for religious establishments. In other words, she suggests that with the development of coherent political and social systems (to a certain extent mirrored, one can add, in the religious iconography), the Gupta dynasty became a prominent political and social model for the states of Southeast Asia.

[47] Since Śiva is mentioned in the majority of extant Cham inscriptions, I will not point out the name of each inscription. However, I will do so with inscriptions related to Vaiṣṇavism and Buddhism because their total numbers are only about a dozen for each.

[48] For full translations of these inscriptions, see Majumdar (1985) and Golzio (2004). A king named Bhadravarman is mentioned in both of these inscriptions, one from Quảng Nam province and another from Phú Yên province. It remains unclear if it was the same king or they were two different kings with the same name. Schweyer (2010: 9), however, states that the C. 41 is the last inscription of Bhadravarman. It should be noted that Quảng Nam is far from Phú Yên and the current scholarship emphasizes that there was no political unity or a monolithic kingdom of Champa; however, recently on the basis of his analysis of epigraphical texts and sculptural steles Griffiths (2019) argued that Champa was perhaps a political unity during the 15th century. This argument shows the complexity of Champa political history and history of religion of Champa.

[49] For detail, see Zakharov (2019).

sanctuary (4th-14th centuries) of Quảng Nam province. In fact, the Mỹ Sơn complex was a major Cham temple site which included numerous temples, and it was one of the earliest ritual sites of Champa (figs. 3 and 4).



Fig. 3. Mỹ Sơn sanctuary, Quảng Nam province.



Fig. 4. Bhadreśvara Liṅga at Mỹ Sơn B1, Quảng Nam province
(Photo courtesy of Trần Kỳ Phương).

The other major Cham ritual site that prominent Cham scholars (e.g., Schweyer 2004, Trần and Nakamura 2008) suggest having existed in parallel to Mỹ Sơn is the Po Nagar sanctuary at Nha Trang (Khánh Hoà province) (figs. 5 and 6). They maintain that while the cult of the male deity Bhadreśvara was central at Mỹ Sơn, the female deity Yā Pu Nagara was the main figure at Po Nagar sanctuary (8th-14th centuries). According to Schweyer (2004), the history of Po Nagar sanctuary is mentioned in a number of royal inscriptions found at the site dated from the 8th to 14th centuries. These inscriptions allow us to understand the organization of the sanctuary, they mention the various deities that were worshipped at this site and the political discourse that turned the main goddess into a symbol of the earth of Champa, and also inform us that the main goddess was a consort of the god Bhadreśvara worshipped at Mỹ Sơn. Trần and Nakamura (2008), moreover, suggest that the god and goddess worshipped at the two sanctuaries represented the cosmological dualism of Mỹ Sơn and Po Nagar. They argue that since the Cham inscription C. 38 found at Po Nagar sanctuary mentions that the statue of the goddess Bhagavatī was erected in 784, this Bhagavatī goddess is Parvati, the female counterpart of Bhadreśvara at Mỹ Sơn. One can however ask whether the mere mention of the goddess Bhagavatī in an inscription implies that she was the consort of Śiva? And why was it important for Cham scholars to insist that she was Śiva's consort? According to Noseworthy (2015: 130-131), "Bhagavatī" was a respecful and honorific title that simply meant "the goddess" and could be applied to various female deities, and its presence did not necessarily mean that this particular "Bhagavatī" was Śiva's consort. He maintains that in India one can find mentions of numerous other Bhagavatīs including Bhagavatī Saraswati, Bhagavatī Kali, and Bhagavatī Lakshmi. In his discussion of the worship of the Cham goddess, Noseworthy (2015:107) states: "In the past, Po Inâ Nâgar has too often been portrayed as simply a "'local adaptation' of Uma, the wife of Śiva, who was abandoned by the Cham (and) adapted by the

Vietnamese in conjunction with their conquest of Champa."[50] He argues instead that, as a "close reading" of the Cham manuscript *Damnây Po Inâ Nâgar* suggests, Po Inâ Nâgar is, rather, a local Cham mother goddess who was known by many names.[51]



Fig. 5. Po Nagar sanctuary, Khánh Hoà province.



Fig. 6. The main shrine of goddess worship at Po Nagar sanctuary, Khánh Hoà province.

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[50] For the topic of the Vietnamization of the Cham deity Pô Nagar, see Nguyễn Thế Anh (1995).
[51] Yā Pu Nagara/Yapu-Nagara/Yang Pu Nagar/Po Nagar/ Po Inâ Nâgar/Po Inư Nưgar.

In Cham religious iconography, depictions of Śiva, both in anthropomorphic form and aniconic symbolic form (*śivaliṅga*), appear more frequently than those of other deities. In Mỹ Sơn sanctuary, aside from the *liṅga* Bhadreśvara, other representations were found, including a sandstone standing statue of the anthropomorphic Śiva (fig. 7) and tympana with dancing Śiva (figs. 8 and 9).



Fig. 7: Standing Śiva, Mỹ Sơn C1, Quảng Nam province.

Fig. 8. Dancing Śiva, Mỹ Sơn C1, Quảng Nam province.



Fig. 9. Dancing Śiva, Mỹ Sơn H1, Quảng Nam province
(Photo courtesy of Trần Kỳ Phương).

Aside from the Mỹ Sơn sanctuary, Śiva worship can also be seen in later periods and

other regions, for instance in the Po Klaun Garai inscription of Jayasimhavarman III (C.11)

dated to the 13th century and found in the temple of Po Klaong Girai located in present-day Ninh Thuận province, the southernmost territory of medieval Champa (the Cham called this region Pāṇḍuraṅga). Interestingly enough, there is an extant tympanum of dancing Śiva mounted facing east above the main door of the main shrine of Po Klaong Girai temple complex. Also, in this temple, there is a *Śivaliṅga*, which remains *in situ* in the *sanctum sanctorum*, a narrow square room with a pyramid-shaped roof (figs. 10, 11 and 12). Such evidence suggests that this temple was dedicated to Śiva and therefore Śaivism was still in practice in this region as late as the 13th century.[52] The temples, statues and *liṅgas* not only reveal that Śaivism received royal and elite patronage but that it was also a mature, well-established religion in different regions of Champa and existed from as early as the 5th century CE until at least the 13th century.[53]



Figs. 10 and 11. Po Klaong Girai temple and dancing Śiva, Ninh Thuận province.

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[52] The majority of the original icons and sculptures of deities in extant Cham temples were removed and thus in general it is not always easy to know what the main deity of a given temple was. Still, there are numerous *liṅga-yoni* sculptures that remain intact in the main shrines of many temples, suggesting a dominance of Śaivism practice in ancient Champa, and in this case, pointing to Po Klaong Girai temple as an originally Śaiva temple.

[53] There are variants in artistic style of Śiva iconographical depictions in different regions and different periods. This suggests that there might have been more than one form of Śaivism practiced in Champa during the whole course of its history.

Fig. 12. The main shrine of Po Klaong Girai temple, Ninh Thuận province.

## 1.2.2 Cham ancient temples: "dead" temples and "living" temples

While Cham scholars look at all the ancient Cham temples as valuable archaeological sites, as a proof of a great civilization, as an embodiment of history, as heritage sites, and as evidence of the past, contemporary Cham intellectuals regard their temples in terms of "dead" temples (*bimong baraw*) and "living" temples (*bimong hadiep*). "Dead temples" are those medieval temples where the present-day Cham no longer go to perform rituals.[54] This is either because of government restrictions, or due to the isolation and poor condition of the structures. "Living temples" are those that are still active and where the contemporary Cham Ahiér of Ninh Thuận and Bình Thuận provinces go to perform annual rituals to commemorate their gods and deified kings; these temples are not numerous. There are about twenty-three Cham extant brick temple complexes.[55] From North to South, they are:

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[54] Quảng Đại Tuyên (2020: 28) called them "deserted sites" that he contrasted with the "living temples" identified by him as the "living heritage sites."

[55] In this dissertation, I use the term "temple" to refer to the large-scale brick structures that were built before the 17th century. Recently built small-scale sacred sites are referred to as "shrines."

| Provinces | Temples |
|---|---|
| Quảng Trị Province | • Hà Trung temple (10th century) |
| Thừa Thiên-Huế Province | • Liễu Cốc temple (11th-12th centuries)<br>• Mỹ Khánh temple (8th century) |
| Quảng Nam Province | • Mỹ Sơn temple complex (7th-13th centuries)<br>• Đồng Dương temple complex (9th-10th centuries)<br>• Khương Mỹ temple group (10th century)<br>• Chiên Đàn temple group (11th-12th centuries)<br>• Bằng An temple (10th-12th centuries) |
| Bình Định Province | • Tháp Bạc/ Bánh Ít temple group (11th-12th centuries)<br>• Bình Lâm temple (11th century)<br>• Dương Long temple group (12th-13th centuries)<br>• Hưng Thạnh/Tháp Đôi temple group (12th-13th centuries)<br>• Cánh Tiên Temple (13th-14th centuries)<br>• Thốc Lốc temple (13th-14th centuries)<br>• Thủ Thiện temple (13th-14th centuries) |
| Phú Yên Province | • Tháp Nhạn Temple (11th-12th centuries) |
| Khánh Hòa Province | • Po Nagar Nha Trang temple complex (8th-13th centuries) |
| Ninh Thuận Province | • Hòa Lai temple group (9th century)<br>• Po Klaong Girai temple group (13th-14th centuries)<br>• Po Romé Temple (16th-17th centuries) |
| Bình Thuận Province | • Po Đam temple group (8th-9th centuries)<br>• Po Sah Inâ temple group (8th-9th centuries)[56] |
| Dak Lak Province | • Yang Prong Temple (12th-14th centuries) |

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[56] Also called Po Sah Inư, Phú Hài, Phố Hài.

Most of these temples were built before the 14th century. Only Po Romé Temple was built considerably later, in the 16th-17th centuries. Among these twenty-three temples, there are five temples that the contemporary Cham, mainly the Cham Ahiér, still visit to perform their annual rituals; and these temples are thus seen as "living temples." They are: Po Dam (8th-9th century) and Po Sah Inâ (8th-9th century) in Bình Thuận province; Po Klaong Girai (13th-14th century) and Po Romé (16th-17th century) in Ninh Thuận province, and Po Nagar (8th-13th centuries) in Khánh Hoà province. They are the places where temple rituals that I discuss in chapter 4 of this thesis take place. Within these five "living temples," Po Nagar temple is located a slightly far from the Cham villages and thus it is less visited by the Cham. Also, since this temple is dedicated to the goddess Po Nagar, the Cham do not perform there the annual Kate ritual, and that also contributes to the declining frequency of its use by the Cham. Intriguingly, this Cham temple could be one of the most visited by Vietnamese (Kinh) according to my observations during fieldwork over a four-year period. It was always very crowded, full of Vietnamese childless women who came to the site to pray for children, especially for having a son because this temple is famous for its spiritual power and it is said that the residing goddess can grant wishes of this kind. According to my observations, Cham women do not approach the goddess with such requests.

Aside from the Po Nagar temple, which throughout its history always was the house of the goddess, all the other four "living temples" are seen by the contemporary Cham as houses of their deified kings. However, I think that this is a recent phenomenon because when examining those "living temples," it is very common to see the presence of *liṅgas-yoni* and the bull Nandin that thus suggests that those temples very likely were originally built with certain associations with Śiva worship or somehow related to Śaivism. For instance, according to Aymonier (1891), Po Klaong Girai temple was constructed at the end of the 13th century on the behalf of King Jaya Singhavarman III to dedicate the temple to Śiva under the name

Singhavarmalingesvara. The contemporary Cham, however, do not worship the *liṅga-yoni* in this temple as an aniconic representation of Śiva and Shakti in this temple but worship instead the icon of their deified king. In this temple, the icon of the face of deified king Po Klaong Girai in fact is made of *papier maché* that covers the top of the *liṅga-yoni* located in the main chamber (see figs. 12, 13 and 14). The original name of this temple remains unknown; the same can be said about many other Cham temples.[57] To the contemporary Cham Ahiér, the temple is the house of Po Kloang Girai king, the main god and the "owner" of this temple. However, Cham scholars still cannot decide if he was a historical or legendary king. Po Dharma (1999) followed by Lafont (2014) suggested that king Po Klaong Girai is a symbol of Jaya Simhavarman III, a historical king who ordered the building of the temple dedicated to Śiva that nowadays is named Po Klaong Girai temple and it was only later that the *liṅga-yoni* inside the main chamber was transformed into a statue of Po Klaong Girai. What is evident at the moment is that the contemporary Cham Ahiér do not worship any Hindu gods such as Śiva, Viṣṇu, or Brahmā as the main deities of ancient temples but instead worship their kings and royals whom they believe to be historical figures. They worship them as deities, ancestors and owners of those temples. In so doing, the present-day Cham reconnect themselves to their common (but arguably imaginary) historical past, and temple rituals enact and validate the relationship between the contemporary Cham and their deified kings, thus connecting the present-day communities to medieval Champa in terms of historical lineage or historical identity, reaffirming that they are the descendants of Champa kingdom.

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[57] Through Cham inscriptions we can find some original names or the original deities that the temples were dedicated to, but not all of them.

Figs. 13 and 14. The icon of Po Klaong Girai king at Po Klaong Girai temple, Ninh Thuận province.

Indeed, present-day Cham Ahiér believe that those "living" temples were built by the Cham to honour their kings or royals, the temples were their houses, and they were named after these kings and royals. They believe, for example, that Po Dam temple is the "house" of the deified King Po Dam, Po Romé is the "house" of King Po Romé, Po Klaong Girai temple is the "house" of King Po Klaong Girai, and Po Sah Inâ temple is the "house" of Po Sah Inâ. Regarding the very recent history of Po Sah Inâ temple, it is worthy to note that this temple used to be called "Phú Hài" (by French colonial scholars who were the first to study Cham temples and religious art) because it is located in Phú Hài district. It was the responsibility of the Cham Ahiér priests who lived in the village Pajai (Palei Pajai) near the temple to take care of the temple rituals. However, since the Cham inhabitants in the village were relocated by the government and forced to move close to the mountains, the temple was left unattended. Only in 1994 was the temple recognized by the government as an item of "national heritage" and thus the government gave the villagers of the Cham village Hàm Thuận Bắc the right to restore ritual worship at this temple. It is during this period that the temple name was changed from "Phú Hài" to "Po Sah Inâ". While art historians dated Phú Hài to the 8th-9th centuries, this

temple is now regarded by many contemporary Cham Ahiér intellectuals as the house of the Po Sah Inâ, a princess of the 15th century. According to Sakaya (2014: 155), citing Po Dharma (1983), in the Cham historical annals Po Sah Inâ was a *sister* of king Po Kabrah in the 15th century. However, Sakaya also mentions that, according to a legend, Po Sah Inâ was a *general* of King Po Romé in the 17th century. The identity of Po Sah Inâ thus remains obscure and among the Cham there is no consensus concerning this figure. However, the opinion shared by all the Cham is that they worship Po Sah Inâ as a royal figure whose iconic representation is the *liṅga-yoni* located in the main chamber of the temple, which is dressed in regalia when the temple rituals take place (see figs. 48, 49).

## 1.2.3 The worship of Viṣṇu in Champa

Based on the extant artifacts, one can suggest that not only Śaivism was adopted by the royals in the medieval Cham religious landscape, but that Vaiṣṇavism was also present. Viṣṇu, one of the supreme gods of the Hindu pantheon, was worshipped by Cham royals as is revealed in dozens of inscriptions and sculptures. Among 130 Cham inscriptions categorized and translated by Majumdar (1927, reprinted 1985) there were three inscriptions specifically devoted to Viṣṇu, namely, the Dưỡng Mông pedestal inscription of Prakaśadharma (C.136, dated to the 7th century), the Glai Klong Anoh stelae inscription of Harivarman (C.19, dated to the 9th century CE), and the Biên Hòa Viṣṇu image inscription of Jayasiṃhavarman IV (C. 1, dated to 1421/22). However, there are some other inscriptions mentioning Viṣṇu's incarnations, attributes and references to the gods associated with him.[58] Moreover, the king of Champa, Jaya Rudravarman, considered himself an incarnation of Viṣṇu in the Batau

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[58] Such as Nārāyaṇa in the Glai Lamov stelae Inscriptions of Indravarman I (C. 24, dated to 801 CE), Hari and Vikrama in the Yang Tikuh stelae inscription of Indravarman I (C.25, dated to 799/800 CE), Govinda in the Hòa Quế stelae inscription of Bhadravarman (C. 142, dated to 909/10 CE), Madhava in the Mỹ Sơn stelae inscription (C. 90, dated to 1081 CE). See these inscriptions in Majumdar (1985) and Golzio (2004).

Tablah inscription (C.17, dated 1160/61) as did the king Harivarman "who is of divine birth" and "an incarnation of Viṣṇu," as declared in a broken boulder in Chiên Đàn (C.64, dated 11th CE).[59]

Regarding Cham sculptures of Viṣṇu, it is possible to identify this deity due to the iconography with standardized depictions of Viṣṇu usually having four arms and holding a *sankha* (conch), *cakra* (wheel), *gada* (mace) and *padma* (lotus). In Champa, he is depicted in three forms: standing, seating, or reclining (see figs. 15, 16, 17). Standing Viṣṇu sculptures were found in one of the northernmost sites of ancient Champa, located in Đa Nghi-Quảng Trị province and dated to the 8th century, while seated sculptures of Viṣṇu (on a pedestal, on the Garuḍa, and on the serpent (Śeṣa) are found mainly in the central region of Champa, mainly located in Quảng Nam province, and dating from the 7th to the 11th century.[60] There are two sculptures of reclining Viṣṇu found in Quảng Nam province, both of them depicting Brahma emerging from the lotus stemming from the navel of Viṣṇu. Interestingly, in the Glai Lamov stelae inscription (C. 24) from Phan Rang, Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa is mentioned as giving birth to Brahma; however, no sculpture of this kind was found in that region. In any case, the fact that images of reclining Viṣṇu were sculpted in stone and mentioned in inscriptions shows that the myth was known in Champa, in the central region (Quảng Nam) but also in the southernmost region (Phan Rang). Interestingly enough, in Champa one can see sculptures of Viṣṇu's consort Lakṣmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, and his *vāhana* (vehicle) Garuḍa, as well as his *avatāra* Kṛṣṇa; however, no images of other *avatāras* have been found.

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[59] See these two inscriptions in Golzio (2004: 161-162) and Griffiths et al. (2012: 221-223)
[60] See for instance, Viṣṇu seated on Garuḍa dated to the 9th-10th centuries found in Quảng Nam and Bình Định provinces, currently in Guimet Museum (Paris), Viṣṇu seated on pedestal and on serpent dated to the 7th-8th centuries CE found at Phong Lệ, Quảng Nam province, currently at Museum of Champa Sculpture in Đà Nẵng, as well as two sculptures of reclining Viṣṇu also preserved in the same museum.

Fig. 15. Standing Viṣṇu (Zephir 2006: 124).



Fig. 16. Seated Viṣṇu, Đà Nẵng Museum of Cham Sculpture, Quảng Nam province.

Fig. 17. Reclining Viṣṇu, Đà Nẵng Museum of Cham Sculpture, Quảng Nam province.

The sculptures under scrutiny are identifiable; however, since they are currently preserved in museums or private collections, that is, removed from their original locations, it is difficult to know how far and to what extent the Cham royals dedicated themselves to the worship of Viṣṇu. It is also problematic to know whether a given Cham temple is dedicated to Viṣṇu since there are not many sculptural images of deities remaining inside of near the temples. Thus, information that we can gather on the worship of Viṣṇu in Champa is mainly coming from inscriptions and sculptures which are dated between the 8th and 13th centuries. After that, we do not have much information on the worship of Viṣṇu.

### 1.2.4 Buddhism in Champa

Buddhism is another Indian religion which was also adopted by the medieval Cham royals. In 1896, when Étienne Aymonier delivered an oral report on the Buddhist sanctuary Đồng Dương for the French Société Asiatique[61] it provoked a strong interest in Cham Buddhism, and Đồng Dương was systematically excavated in 1902 by Henri Parmentier and

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[61] See Aymonier (1896) for a summary of this report.

Charles Carpeaux[62] (fig. 18). Two years later, in 1904, Louis Finot also explored the sanctuary of Đồng Dương and translated two long texts engraved on two stelae found there.[63] On the basis of his analysis of these two inscriptions, he suggested that the sanctuary of Đồng Dương was a Buddhist monastery devoted to Lakṣmīndra Lokeśvara, a Buddhist deity. Furthermore, he argued that this name was a combination of two names referring to the king Indravarman II (who founded the monastery) and to Avalokiteśvara.[64] Since then, many scholars including Majumdar (1927), Boisselier (1963), Nguyễn Trian (2005), Schweyer (2009), and Guy (2011) made conjectures concerning the identity of the main deity central to the sanctuary; however, there is still no unanimous conclusion. Even regarding the date of the sanctuary, it is uncertain if it was first consecrated by King Jaya Indravarman in 875 CE, or if he only extended an already existing sanctuary and dedicated it to Lakṣmīndra-Lokeśvara in that year.[65] But what is undeniable is that Buddhism achieved a rather high status during the reign of king Indravarman II, as demonstrated by the size of the Đồng Dương temple complex and the number of sculptures found at the site.

[62] See Parmentier (1903) and Carpeaux (1908). Their detailed descriptions of the archaeology and architecture of Đồng Dương sanctuary are extremely important because Đồng Dương was almost completely destroyed during the French war (1946-54) and the Vietnamese war (1955-75).
[63] Finot (1904: 85-110). The inscriptions are referred to in his work as follows: Đồng Dương stelae Inscription of Indravarman II (C.66), dated to 875 CE and Đồng Dương stelae Inscription of Jayasimhavarman I (C. 67), dated to the end of the 9th century CE.
[64] Finot (1904: 97-98).
[65] For a detailed discussion of this topic, see Schweyer (2009), nos. 33 and 42 at http://moussons.revues.org/810?lang=en

Fig. 18. Đồng Dương temple, Quảng Nam province (Guillon 2001: 36).

For decades, the study of Cham Buddhism almost always focused on this particular site. This interest in the Đồng Dương temple complex as representative of Buddhism in Champa might be justified by the fact that the number of the extant Buddhist sculptures and inscriptions found at the site is larger than what has been found at other sites. They provide valuable information concerning the ways in which Buddhism was practiced and patronized by Cham royals. Also, Đồng Dương temple complex happened to be the last group of Buddhist temples extant by the late 19th century when the colonial studies of Cham religion began in earnest. Thus, the site received extensive attention from scholars interested in Cham Buddhism. However, Đồng Dương was not the only Buddhist center in Champa.

Despite the majority of Cham inscriptions mentioning Śiva and other Hindu deities, there are 14 inscriptions (dated between the 8th to the 13th centuries) explicitly mentioning Buddha, Buddhist doctrine, donations to Buddhist monks, and construction of Buddhist

temples.[66] The construction of temples for Buddha and Avalokiteśvara were mentioned in various inscriptions found in the regions from North to South of Champa, namely, in Quảng Bình, Quảng Trị, Quảng Nam, Bình Định, Khánh Hoà, Kom Tum, and Ninh Thuận provinces. When examining those Buddhist inscriptions, I found that only the Bakul inscription (C. 23, dated 829 CE) from Ninh Thuận mentions the construction of monasteries to Jina (i.e., Buddha); the rest of the inscriptions mentioned some forms of Lokeśvara/Avalokiteśvara. It seems that the Cham particularly favoured the bodhisattva Lokeśvara/Avalokiteśvara more than other Buddhist deities. Lokeśvara was regarded as the deity who embodied kindness and patience and was always ready to save all sentient beings. No matter in what situation one was, if she or he was constantly and reverently thinking of Lokeśvara, it would be possible to reach the highest salvation, as mentioned in the Đồng Dương Stela Inscription of Indravarman II dated 875 CE (C. 66) and An-Thái Stela Inscription dated 902 CE (C. 138).[67] The emphasis on these qualities and aspects of Lokeśvara/Avalokiteśvara is a prominent concept in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Indeed, John Guy (2011: 302, 309) argues that according to archaeological data, Champa in the 9th century was a vibrant centre of Mahāyāna Buddhism and the popularity of the bodhisattva Lokeśvara cult in Champa did not appear suddenly in this region but occurred in "a climate of pan-Asian internationalism, encouraged by a rising wave of trade wealth" and that close maritime connections with Java and other Southeast Asia states facilitated the thriving of Mahayanist activity. Interestingly, among all the stone sculptures and bronze statues depicting Avalokiteśvara in Champa, the deity is always in the male and not female form (figs. 19 and 20). Does this mean that Champa received its Buddhism solely from India and was not influenced by Chinese Buddhism? This question can be posed since Avalokiteśvara was always represented in male form throughout its history in India while in China the deity was

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[66] They are inscriptions under the code numbers C. 23, C. 66, C. 138, C. 149, C. 167, C. 38E, C. 171, C. 89, C. 100, C. 92, C. 55, C. 134, c. 150, C. 52. See Golzio 2004 for the details of these inscriptions.
[67] See the inscriptions in Glozio (2004: 60-73, 89-92).

transformed into the body of a female deity starting from around the 8th century CE.[68] The topic of the sources of transmission of Buddhism to Champa remains a contested one as scholars are still trying to understand the history and development of Buddhism in Champa as well as its relationship to the neighbouring countries.



Figs. 19 and 20. Bronze statues of Avalokiteśvara found in Champa,
The History Museum of Hồ Chí Minh City.

By examining Cham inscriptions, we can learn about the names given to the temples, the names of the deities residing in those temples, and the names of the kings and donors who constructed and patronized the sites. For instance, the Buddhist An Thái stela inscription dated 902 CE (C. 138) contains a record of the erection of a statue of Lokanātha by Sthavira Nāgapuṣpa, the abbot of the monastery Pramudita-Lokeśvara founded by king Bhadravarman II. Intriguingly, in the inscriptions that reveal Buddhist aspects, we see the mention of Hindu deities as well. And there is the mention of the construction of Śiva temples found in the same

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[68] See Chun Fang Yu (2000) and Nandana Chutiwongs (2002) for a thorough study of Avalokiteśvara in Asia.

inscriptions, such as in the Bakul stelae inscription (C.23) and in the Nham Biểu stelae inscription (C.149), that mention the building of Buddhist temples and monasteries. This shows that the royals did not worship only Buddhist deities or patronize Buddhism solely or that Buddhism achieved the highest position in the religious sphere of the royal court. In fact, the interplay between Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism, and Buddhism in Champa was quite complex and we still do not have enough knowledge about how they were practiced in medieval Champa.[69] What we do know is that Buddhism gained its position in the court culture of the elite and most likely existed within the whole of the Indian religious traditions practiced by the Cham elites. The decline of Buddhism can perhaps be mutually related to the decline of "Indianized" Cham court culture that began in the 15th century.[70] After this period, we see only a relatively small number of newly constructed Hindu-Buddhist stone sculptures and temples; neither do we see new inscriptions.[71] The only exception is the Po Romé temple built in the 16th-17th centuries (fig. 21) dedicated to the historical Po Romé king (r. 1627-1651) who is worshipped by the contemporary Cham Ahiér as a deified king. Different from all the other Cham temples, this is the only temple that houses the seemingly original statue of a king, presumably Po Romé, fashioned to look like a deity with eight arms holding objects that are traditionally associated with Śiva. According to Nora Taylor (1998: 263), this kind of depiction of the king as a god shows not only how the Cham wanted to immortalize their king and prolong their history but also "illustrates the 'localization' of Indian religious concepts in Cham culture whereby Śiva-like qualities are attributed to local figures." Intriguingly, in some of the rituals, the South-Central Cham worship Po Romé under the name Po Gahlau meaning "sovereign aloeswood".

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[69] From the 10th to 15th centuries in Eastern Java and Bali, several kings were deified in either the Śaiva or Buddhist way, and sometimes in both. For instance, King Viṣṇuvardhana was deified as Śiva in Tjandi Mleri and as the bodhisattva Amoghapasha at Tjandi Djago. King Krtanagara was deified at Tjandi Djawi as "Śiva-Buddha" (Holt 1967). For a recent detailed study of the cult of "Śiva-Buddha" in Java and Bali, see Acri (2015).

[70] The 15th century was also the period when the Vietnamese captured the Cham's citadel and capital Vijaya.

[71] Those objects that were produced after this period received less attention or mostly dismissed by French colonial scholars and art historians because they regarded them as artistically inferior to the older ones and thus reflected "Champa's decline."

Citing Inrasara and Sakaya, Noseworthy (2013: 164) states that this is a Muslim name that he received after his journeys to Kelantan positioned in the North-East of the Malay Peninsula to study *kabar rup*, that is, "Malay magic." He maintains that "as a result of such connections, the Malaya-Muslim cultural influence in the Cham kingdom of Pāṇḍuraṅga increased during this time." (ibid.)

Let us return briefly to the history of Champa around the period of the 15th century and position it in relation to its neighbouring countries to understand why the Cham reached out to the Malay world and adopted Islam. In order to discuss this issue, we cannot ignore Champa's relations with the neighbouring country Đại Việt 大越 (Vietnam) which was in constant conflict with Champa and thus influenced Champa history directly.



Fig. 21. Po Romé temple, Ninh Thuận province.

### 1.2.5 Champa and its relations with neighbouring countries from the 15th century

Traditional and historical narratives maintain that Chinese domination of Vietnamese territory centered in the Red River Delta existed for a thousand years and it was only from the 10th century onward that the Viet managed to free themselves from Chinese rule.[72] Champa was portrayed in official Vietnamese records as a large and powerful country and the Cham army continued to harass the still-fragile new Vietnamese nation and sacked the city of Thăng Long (present-day Hà Nội), the capital of Đại Việt (Vietnam) on at least three occasions (in 1371, 1383, and 1387) (Wong Tze Ken 2011: 239). However, Vietnam was also gradually rising and becoming a regional power competing with the Cham. Champa suffered several major military defeats from their Vietnamese rivals; the most decisive of them was that of the military campaign of the Vietnamese emperor Lê Thánh Tông (r. 1460-1497) in 1471 when the Vietnamese captured Chà Bàn citadel of the Cham located near the present-day town Qui Nhơn and then the Champa capital Vijaya (in modern Bình Định province). This resulted in a large-scale annexation of Cham territory into Đại Việt.[73] Citing Cabaton 1960, Nakamura (2000: 57) states that the fact that Vijaya fell to the Viet in 1471 made the Cham flee to Cambodia, where they were converted by Malays, and thus Islam became widespread among

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[72] The "Viet" here refer to the whole population of "Vietnam" during this period but in this thesis, I also refer to the "Viet" as the majority ethnic group of Vietnam that accounts for more than 80% of the entire contemporary population of Vietnam. In the government censuses conducted since 1975, the term "Kinh" was used to refer to this majority group and to differentiate it from the fifty-three other ethnic minority groups.

[73] Po Dharma (2001: 18-19). Many scholars argued that the destruction of Champa was due to the *Nam tiến*, i,e., "Southward movement" of the ethnic Vietnamese. They frequently use the term *Nam tiến* to indicate that there was a constant aggression directed from the North (that is, from Vietnam) to the South (that is, Champa). Yet there are other opinions. For example, Vickery (2011: 376-377) claims that if we consider Linyi as a part of early Champa then Chinese records mention Linyi's constant aggression against Vietnamese. But if we do not consider Linyi as a precursor of Champa, then there is also evidence confirming that starting from the 10th century, when Vietnam received its independence from China, the numbers of conflicts provoked by the two countries were approximately equal. In 1360-1390, Champa almost completely conquered Vietnam. Thus, Vickery suggests that the term *Nam tiến* should be used to describe the history of Cham-Viet relations only from the 15th century onwards. Furthermore, joining the revision of the classical narrative, Griffith (2019) suggests that Champa in the early 15th century was a sucessful and unified kingdom, while Whitmore (2019: 179, 191 ) conjectures that a possible climatic reason for Cham's "decadence and decline" and its failure must be understood at the level of inter-state competition in which Champa did not make any advances in political organization as well as in military technology, resource production and control similar to those achieved by Đại Việt (Vietnam) during the Lê dynasty.

the Cham refugees in Cambodia from the 15th century. The number of the Cham who fled to Cambodia during this period and the reasons that made them leave the country remain unknown. Wong Tze Ken (2011), however, maintains that very few changes took place in Viet-Cham relations because the Vietnamese were embroiled in internal power struggles (between the Lê and the Mạc clans from 1533 to 1592 and between the Trịnh and Nguyễn Lords from 1627 to 1672), thus leaving Pāṇḍuraṅga, the Southernmost part of Cham territory with the new capital of Champa, on its own.[74] Sharing the same view, Weber (2012: 162) maintains that the wars between Champa and Vietnam during this period resulted in seizures of territory by the Vietnamese rulers who, however, were not intent to conquer and annex Champa, to monopolize its territories and resources, or to control its population. Also, according to Hardy (2019), the annexation of Champa proceeded segment by segment and Champa's absorption into Vietnam therefore did not take place as a single act. It was not easy for the Vietnamese rulers to pacify and control the newly occupied territory, and to do so the Vietnamese Emperor Lê Thánh Tông appointed three Cham men as rulers of three separate Southern territories (from modern Phú Yên southwards), and offered two mandarin positions to two Cham men working together with two Vietnamese officers who supervised them in the Northern territories (Quảng Nam and Quảng Ngãi); he also established a collaboration with local chieftains in the heartland of the Vijaya kingdom's capital, Bình Định (Hardy 2019: 250). In short, Hardy (2019) suggests that Lê Thánh Tông's rule in Champa was more theoretical than actual, and that a Vietnamese administrative framework was established on paper but on the ground the adopted method was to co-opt local chieftains, so the actual governing continued to be done by Cham chieftains. All this suggests that even though Champa as an independent kingdom collapsed, it did not disappear. Champa's principalities continued to exist, as did the kingdom's name, its

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[74] In the 17th and 18th centuries, Vietnam was officially ruled by the Lê dynasty, but the real power actually belonged to the families of Trịnh Lords of the North who controlled the imperial court in Thăng Long (Đằng Ngoài) and the Nguyễn Lords in the South who had their capital in Huế (Đằng Trong).

administration and traditions.[75] This also can be seen in the way the Cham connected with the outside world.

Despite its size reduced by 1594, Cham rulers continued to honour their alliances with the Malay world by sending military forces to assist the Sultan of Melaka-Johor in his battle against the Portuguese. In addition, in the early 17th century, the Cham continued to be actively engaged in overseas trade with people from the Malay Archipelago, the English East India Company, the Portuguese, and the Dutch at Melaka.[76] (Wong Tze Ken 2011: 243-244). This suggests a strong level of autonomy of the Cham who were able to maintain certain levels of political and economic control of their own affairs. More importantly, this connection with the Malay world also facilitated the adoption of Islam as a new religion in Champa.[77]

### 1.2.6 The adoption of Islam in Champa

According to Nakamura (2000: 58), Champa experienced contacts with Muslims of two kinds at different times. The first contacts might have occurred as early as the 9th century when the Cham had numerous contacts with Persian, Arab, Indian and Chinese Muslims. The second wave of contacts between Islam and Champa occurred in the 16th and 17th centuries; at that

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[75] Although in 1653 Cham king Po Nraup led an army to attack Vietnamese, the Cham lost and Po Nraup was obliged to send tribute to the court of Nguyễn Lords who ruled Vietnam in 1558-1776, thus changing Champa's status to that of a vassal state of Đàng Trong (i.e., Vietnam). Since the Cham shared their territory border with the Nguyễn, they paid tribute only to the Nguyễn. But the fact that the Nguyễn were too busy dealing with the Trịnh in the North gave the Cham rulers time to continue doing things in their own way. However, in 1692, the Cham ruler of Pāṇḍuraṅga Po Saut (r. 1660-1692) challenged the Nguyễn leaders again and, as the result, Pāṇḍuraṅga soon became subjugated. Interestingly, after Po Saut's death, the title of "Barbarian King" (*phiên vương* 藩王) was given by the Vietnamese to Cham ruler Po Saktiraydaputih in 1694. This shows that, on the one hand, Nguyễn looked at Champa as part of their territory but, on the other hand, they recognized Champa as a semi-independent political entity having, however, a certain level of integration into the Nguyễn domain (Wong Tze Ken 2011: 250).
[76] There is evidence for connections between the Cham and Malay world as early as 840 CE. Malay epigraphy (the Kuti and Kaladi inscriptions) show that the Cham envoys resided at the Srivijaya court in 840. Despite a few Cham inscriptions that mention maritime raids by people from Java, it seems that Malays had extensive contacts with Champa. Vietnamese documents mention that Champa king Chế Năng (1312-1318) took refuge in Java after the failed attempt to recover the territories of Ô and Lý lost to Đại Việt in 1306. Also, after the fall of Vijaya in 1471, many Cham dignitaries came to settle in the Malay world (Melaka, Aceh, Pahang, Peninsular Malaysia); see Weber (2016: 165).
[77] The Malay world included present-day Malaysia and Indonesia.

time the contacts were established mainly with Malay Muslims. Nakamura maintains that by the 11th century the Muslim community had established a significant presence in the Southern part of Champa; this claim is mainly based on two Arabic inscriptions which were found in Champa. Interestingly, Haw (2017:1) recently suggested that these two Islamic inscriptions that formed an essential basis of the early history of Islam in Champa in fact did not originate from Southeast Asia but from Tunisia. He maintains that there is no good evidence of any Islamic presence in Champa until the 16th century.[78] Moreover, Reid (1993: 163-164) suggests that the period 1550-1650 is the critical phase of Islamization and Christianization in Southeast Asia when the arrival of Portuguese Christians in the 16th century stimulated Muslims in Southeast Asia to group together to counterattack the Portuguese.[79]

Writing on the introduction of Islam to Champa, Manguin 1985 supports an idea similar to Cabaton's hypothetical view of the Malays as the people who propagated Islam amongst the Cham; this hypothesis is related to the active role of the Cham in the maritime trade network of Southeast Asia.[80] Based on their suggestions, Nakamura (2000: 61) maintains that by the 17th century a considerable portion of the Cham population had converted to Islam; to support her claim she presents the story of King Po Romé (r. 1627-1651) as an example of the conversion to Islam of the Cham court and Cham population. The complex history of the interaction of Islam and Indic religions is mirrored in the story about the Cham King Po Romé who was a historical figure and is still worshipped as a deified king among the contemporary

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[78] He believes that evidence of Islam in Champa before this period is sometimes derived from essentially circular arguments.

[79] See also Chambert-Loir (1994: 96), Nakamura (2000: 59-60), and Bruckmayr (2017) on the process of "Islamization" of the Cham.

[80] Further evidence attests to the close relationships between the Malay and the Cham that can be seen through the Rija ceremony which celebrates the coming of Malay royalty (symbolic names of three Malay princes Putra Jinyang, Putra Jawa, and Lasama) to Champa shores in wooden boats (see chapter 6 for a detailed discussion of the Rija ceremony). In addition, the 16th century Cham-Malay lexicons are tangible proof of religious and cultural exchanges between the Malay and Cham (Weber 2016: 174-175).

South-Central Cham. [81] He is often credited by the Cham for solving and unifying the Islamic influence of the Cham Awal/Cham Bani with the Indic-influenced Cham Ahiér populations, thus stabilizing his kingdom.[82]

Here, it should be noted that nowadays the Cham of Southern and Central Vietnam concentrated in present-day Bình Thuận and Ninh Thuận provinces (formerly the Cham principality Pāṇḍuraṅga) include two Cham communities: Cham Awal (Cham Bani) and Cham Ahiér. It is generally assumed in the scholarship that the Cham Bani constitute one of two Muslim groups in Vietnam, the other being the Cham Muslims of the Mekong Delta. According to Taylor (2007: 1), the Cham of the Mekong regularly go to mosques for prayers and study the Koran and Arabic language in mosque-based schools; they follow the Shāfiʿī school of Sunni Islam adhered to much of Southeast Asia. As for the Cham Bani, Yoshimoto (2012:487-488) mentions that they have often been described as an unorthodox Muslim group because their religious practices are strongly imbedded in local and traditional customs in the sense that aside from worshipping Allah, Mohammad, Ali, and Fatima as "gods", they also worship Hindu gods and maintain ancestor worship.[83]

According to Nakamura (2000) and Yoshimoto (2012), the fact that different groups of Muslims exist in Champa can be explained by the history of the process of Islamization in Champa that occurred through different channels: the new religion entered Champa with Arab

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[81] See more detailed discussions of Po Romé in Inrasara (2006), Sakaya (2008), Taylor (1998), Yoshimoto (2011), Noseworthy (2013).
[82] See further discussion of this subject in Chapter 2.
[83] Thus, the main point in Yoshimoto's argument (2012) is whether we should equate the Cham Bani with "Muslims who practice Islam;" this question is related to the problem of the definitions of "Islam" and "Muslim." Nakamura 2000 maintains that the form of Islam practiced by Cham Bani shows a few similarities or connections with other Muslim practitioners in Southeast Asia or with mainstream Islamic practice. Based on my field research, I can confirm that ordinary Cham villagers of this community self-identify themselves simply as "Cham" or "Cham who practice burial funeral" (in contrast to the Cham Ahiér who practice cremation funeral). It can be also observed that the issues of categorization, terming, or labeling are among the main the concerns of Cham scholars and Cham intellectuals, while it remains unclear to what extent the resulting categorizations can help understand the actual history and religion of Cham community.

and Persian merchants from the 9th to the 11th centuries and came with the Malays from the 16th to the 17th century. These authors suggest that the Cham residing in the Mekong area adopted Islam when the religious contacts with the Malays were intensified while the Cham Bani are those who remaining in the South-Central Vietnam after their country was deprived of maritime trade with Islam and thus were cut off from the rest of the Muslim world in Southeast Asia. Following the logic of Nakamura and Yoshimoto, one can conjecture that both groups received Islam from the Malays starting from the 16th century onward.

As I mentioned earlier, even though the Champa capital Vijaya was captured by the Viet in 1471, Champa continued to exist as a semi-independent political entity with a certain level of autonomy in terms of political and economic control. This lasted through the Nguyễn period until the 17th century. When the Nguyễn regime collapsed in 1776 and that of the Trịnh in 1786 because of the Tây Sơn uprising (1771-1801), the whole region of both Champa and Vietnam was in chaos. Only in 1802 did Nguyễn Ánh defeat the Tây Sơn rebels and unify Vietnam to establish the new imperial Nguyễn dynasty.[84] Under the title of Emperor (r. 1802-1820) Gia Long maintained the same manner of ruling the Cham in their domain as had the Nguyễn Lords before him. He did not suppress the Cham administration and traditional nobility but respected the Cham traditional customs (Weber 2012: 164). However, the situation of Pāṇḍuraṅga started changing dramatically in 1832 when Emperor Minh Mang (r. 1820-1841) decided to annex the last remaining independent Cham state and totally replaced its political and administrative officials with ethnic Vietnamese (Kinh).[85] This event marked the end of the

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[84] The history of Vietnam as a unified country in its present national form started only from the time of foundation of the Nguyễn dynasty (Goscha 2016).
[85] According to the 19th century Cham *ariya* (narrative poems composed and written in the modern Cham language), the decisive incorporation of Pāṇḍuraṅga by Minh Mạng into the Viet state was an ordeal for the local population; it was done with the imposition of a foreign order and various economic, religious and cultural restrictions. While the Vietnamese official accounts describe it simply as the administrative reorganization of a province, the Cham *ariya* offer a radically different view of the event and of the changes that happened in Pāṇḍuraṅga as well as of the numerous reforms carried out by the Huế court to assimilate the Cham. Despite that, Weber (2012: 158-159, 180) maintains that Cham traditions did not disappear because it seems that cultural policies implemented by Minh Mạng were not enforced by his successors.

Champa kingdom. Thus, returning to Nakamura's discussion on why the Cham Bani "Muslims" are different if compared to the Cham of Mekong and other Muslims, I found that Weber's work (2011) can shed some light on this matter.

Prior to the 18th century, a number of Cham who were mostly converted to Islam left Champa for Cambodia. However, in 1738 they fled Cambodia to seek asylum to the area around the Mekong Delta (Tây Ninh and Châu Đốc; and this was the first time when the region fell under Viet control during the reign of Nguyễn Phúc Khoát, r. 1738-1765), and also in 1812-1813 when Cambodia was invaded by Siamese. The Nguyễn lords (or, since 1802, of the imperial Nguyễn dynasty) treated them as settlers for military colonies. They were used by the Vietnamese authorities to defend the frontier and administrative centers of the areas populated by the Khmer and other ethnic groups. Those Cham brought their form of Islam with them to the new settlement areas; thus, this could perhaps be one of the explanations for the differences in religious practices between the Cham of the Mekong area and the Cham Bani. With that historical and geographical background, Weber (2011: 742) asserts that linking the roots of the Cham of Tây Ninh and Châu Đốc with the kingdom of Champa is fruitless. This in fact is confirmed by recent studies showing that many of the Cham of the Mekong area do not share the conviction that their ancestral origins lay in the ancient kingdom of Champa but rather recognize Islam as a key marker of their identity (Taylor 2007: 6-8). In short, when the Cham and Viet populated the Mekong Delta, the Nguyễn rulers pushed their frontier further into Cambodian territory and extended their own influence. However, the year 1858 marked the beginnings of French colonial conquest in this region.

## 1.3 French Colonial Rule and the Creation of "Minorités Ethniques"

The French colonial intervention into the region began in 1858 with a joint Franco-Spanish mission to save European Catholic missionaries from persecution by the Nguyễn

Dynasty Emperor Tự Đức 嗣德 (r. 1848-1883).[86]  By 1887, the French officially established

the Union Indochinoise, which comprised the administrative units of Cochinchina (a colony

located in Southern Vietnam), Annam (a protectorate located in the Central Region), and

Tonkin (a protectorate in the North),[87] together with French protectorates of Cambodia and

Laos. Only in the protectorate of Annam (also known as Đàng Trong) was the pre-existing

Nguyễn imperial government left intact, albeit in a severely reduced form. The Central

Highlands became a part of the Annamese domain, yet the new French colonial rulers regarded

the mountainous areas as strategically crucial for political control.[88] Võ Nguyên Giáp (1911-

2013), general of the Vietnam People's Army, once said that whoever controls the Central

Highlands, controls all of Indochina.[89] The French sought to incorporate highland territories

and peoples into its Indochinese Union to achieve this same goal of control.[90] In 1895, the

highlands officially came under French colonial authority, with administrators claiming that

they had a moral responsibility and a "civilizing mission" (*mission civilisatrice*) to rescue the

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[86] Actually, the first Western missionaries (Portuguese Franciscan missionaries, Spanish Dominicans, and mainly Portuguese Jesuits) came to this region as early as the 16th century. Only a few members of the early Jesuit mission in Vietnam were French; the most famous of them was arguably Alexandre de Rhodes (1591-1660) who is until now famous in Vietnam as the inventor of the phonetic transcription system known as "Quốc Ngữ" ("National language"). The majority of French (Catholic) missionaries came to Indochina as members of the Société des Missions étrangères de Paris, or "Paris Foreign Mission Society," established in ca. 1660.

[87] French colonial authorities divided Vietnam into three parts, adapting the geographical division established by previous Vietnamese local rulers, whereby Đàng Ngoài was called Tonkin and Đàng Trong was divided into Annam (Central Vietnam) and Cochinchia (South Vietnam). The Nguyễn toponyms were "Bắc Thành" for the region the French named "Tonkin," and "Gia Định" for the region the French named "Cochinchina."

[88] Interestingly, the Cham were the first to explore the Highlands and to establish ties with their inhabitants. Several extant Cham ruins, statues, and other vestiges bear witness to the deep connections between the Cham and the "Montagnards", literally "mountain dwellers"; this term for the various indigenous peoples of the Central Highlands of Vietnam was widely used by the French colonial administration. Some Cham sites in the Central Hinglands can be seen at Kon Klor and Bomong Yang near Kontum, Yang Mum in Gialai province and Yang Prong in Dak Lak. Moreover, Cham king Po Romé (r. 1627-1651) in fact belonged to the ethnic group of highland Churu people. See Noseworthy 2013 for a study on the Cham's first highland sovereign Po Romé.

[89] Salemink (1995: 263).

[90] Three principal motivations underpinned their efforts: 1) border-security, notably concerns about (British-backed) Siamese expansion; 2) political motivations, particularly strong when the boy emperor, Hàm Nghi, was smuggled out of the Huế court in 1885 by the influential regent Tôn Thất Thuyết to the nearby central highlands, where he appealed to the people to revolt against the protectorate; and 3) the protection of, and intelligence obtained from, Catholic missionaries. The French colonial administration safeguarded Catholic missionaries and facilitated their work in the highlands. In return, military officers and administrators received information on the peoples with whom the missionaries made contact, and the resulting information helped the colonial administration extend greater control over these far-flung regions. Early French perceptions of the mountain peoples were thus influenced heavily by the representations imposed by the early missionaries.

highlands from "greedy Viet intruders" and to "bring peace" there.[91] This action was reflective of the larger French effort to generate divisions among their subjects, to turn non-Viet people against their former overlords and align them with the colonial administration (this apparently was a manifestation of the famous strategy of "divide and conquer"). The French claimed that it was done to protect highlanders and their culture from Vietnamese threats and in return, they had to swear loyalty to the French.[92]

Once the French set up administrative control of the region in 1895, they grouped highlanders into tribes based on "ethno-linguistic" links which tied peoples to land and language. In so doing, the French "ethnicized" the highlanders, and "ethnic minorities" emerged through the process of ethnicization in relation to a nation-state. The French thus constructed ethnic identity in contrast to Viet identity,[93] and the concept of "minorités ethniques" became a term of convenience, a catch-all, for the French ethnographers and administrators to use for different groups of people, including the Cham. One of the early pieces describing the contemporary Cham as "*minorités ethniques*" was the 1925 article titled *Une minorité ethnique du Sud Annam. Les Chams: peuple en agonie.*[94] This article is important because it is one of the few documents written on the contemporary Cham, and it shows that

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[91] Nakamura (1999: 30-32).

[92] Goscha (2016: 463-464), Salemink (1995: 287-288). See also Salemink (2003: 85) for a discussion of Léopold Sabatier (1877-1936), a French administrator of Darlac from 1913 to 1926, who positioned himself as the protector of the Rhadé culture from the Viet. Sabatier maintained that the Viet is the foreigner who robbed, exploited subdued, despised, and oppressed them; thus, he argues that if the Montagnards obey him, then and only then will he protect them. Interestingly, Sabatier conducted his own studies of minorities, in particular, the Rhadé; see his *La Chanson de Damsan* (1928) and *Palabre du serment au Darlac (1930)*. On Sabatier see Gerald Hickey, *Sons of the Mountains: Ethnohistory of the Vietnamese Central Highlands to 1954* (1982), esp. see pp. 297, 308.

[93] Salemink (1995: 263). Salemink (2011: 28) argues that precolonial ethnic identities were weak while local identities were strong in fluid situations and that from the colonial and postcolonial eras, "hard" ethnic boundaries were created as products of the classification of ethnic groups.

[94] This document is a property of Jean Cousso and is now kept in the Fonds Albert Sallet at Archives privées d'outre-mer (ANOM), see http://anom.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/ark:/61561/ql463lghr.form=complexe; I assume that its author is Sallet. This document was kindly photographed and sent to me by Dr. Matthew Galway in November 2018. Another publication that mentions the term *minorités ethniques* is the booklet (23 pages long) titled *La pénétration scolaire dans les minorités ethniques*, prepared by the Direction générale de l'instruction publique and published in 1931 in Hanoi by Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient. In his dissertation Salemink 1999, p. 265 adds the words "Indochine Française. Section des services d'intérêt social" to the title.

by this time, the French had already established the solid ethnic boundaries for the concept "*minorités ethniques*" to describe the Cham. In this article, the author mentions that the Viet see the Cham as "paresseux, défiants, pleins de vices et méprisables en tout," but to him "le Cham est simple et s'ingénie à manifester sa reconnaissance. Il ne sait comment se donner et il le fait en toute naïveté ;" he also sees the Cham as "la race [qui] en est à sa fin."[95] The author's description of the Cham is interesting because he differentiates his perspective from that of the Viet. He had sympathy for the Cham, whom he saw as miserable, oppressed and exploited by the conquering Viet to the point that, in his words "leur passivité convaincue peut se traduire avec le maximum d'horreur par le cri d'une de leurs vieilles lamentations 'Comment faire pour ne pas naitre.'"[96] This description of the Cham indicates how the French saw the Cham, as a people who needed French "protection" from the Viet.

Étienne Aymonier (1844-1929), a resident in Bình Thuận in 1886, produced telling ethnographic accounts that remain, arguably, the most valuable source on Cham community in Bình Thuận in the late 19th to early 20th centuries. He describes the living conditions of the Cham under the administrative control of the Annamese officials as being "courbés sous la domination de ce mandarinat."[97] He compared the Cham in Bình Thuận with their brethren in Cambodia and felt rather sympathetic toward what he viewed as the Cham's miserable conditions imposed by the officials. Another French administrator who also held sympathies for the Cham was Charles Lemire (1839-1912), a French provincial representative in Bình Định in 1890 who saw the Cham as "so oppressed and so worthy of interest" and vowed that the present of colonial intervention is a "guarantee of effective protection under the [French] flag."[98] Thus, what we see in French publications authored by ethnographers and administrators

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[95] Sallet (1925: 2, 9,14).
[96] Sallet (1925: 13).
[97] Aymonier (1885: 253).
[98] Lockhart (2011: 3). See also Charles Lemire (1869).

during this time is that there is a clear distinction between the Viet and the non-Viet, an emphasis on how montagnards and Cham were oppressed by the Viet, and the suggestion that the non-Viet needed to be protected by the French.

In short, to consolidate colonial rule and bring disparate cultural groups under a single colonial aegis, the French had to create a vocabulary of classification; this is how the concept of "minorités ethniques" came to life. Moreover, ethnic identity was created in a dynamic process, motivated by the colonial desire for political power, and especially by the intention to legitimate French control over the territory and people.[99]

### 1.3.1 French construction of Cham history and identity: Orientalism and an India-centric perspective

Two French scholarly approaches to reconstructing Cham history that stand out are Orientalism and an India-centric perspective. First, it may be said that French descriptions of the Cham were "Orientalist", to use Edward Said's definition of the term. Said believes that there was a "high-handed executive attitude of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century European colonialism" in which "anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient [….] is an Orientalist and what he or she does is Orientalism."[100] He further explains that "Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident,' and adds that "Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient - dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."[101] Prominent colonial French scholars such as Étienne

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[99] For a further study of the "invention" of minorities in colonial Vietnam see Thomas (2004).
[100] Said (1978: 2).
[101] Said (1978: 2-3).

Aymonier, Henri Parmentier, Philippe Stern, and Jean Leuba were amazed by the ruined temples, religious sculptures, and stone inscriptions of Champa kingdom. On one hand, they tried to (re)construct Champa history, emphasizing how powerful this kingdom was, with its advanced civilization and culture. On the other hand, they held a highly sympathetic attitude towards the contemporary Cham, whom they viewed as oppressed by the Viet. They perceived Cham culture as a "decadent" one whose decline was the consequence of Viet expansionism and assimilationism. In the mean time, some other scholars, for instance, Jeanne Leuba (1882–1979) saw the contemporary Cham as retrograde, ignorant, and superstitious.[102] French military commander Henri Baudesson (1867-1932) even titled his book published in 1932 *Au pays des superstitions et des rites: Chez les Mois et les Chams*.[103] One can conclude that these authors remained true to their attitude as French Orientalists by denigrating the "Orient" or the contemporary Cham religious practices as mere "superstitions." To many French scholars, the Cham were superstitious simply because they no longer practiced the "old" Indian religions that their medieval kings adopted.

The second approach French colonial scholars took to (re)construct the history of Champa and its culture carried an India-centric perspective.[104] They paid full attention to the "Indian" aspects of medieval ruined temples, religious sculptures, and stone inscriptions of the Champa kingdom. The French thus incorporated Champa into their own perspective which focused on Champa's "Indianized" aspects and then concluded that the contemporary Cham had descended from this background, ignoring the contemporary local culture and ritual practices. The "uncovering" of Champa's history was a scholarly recuperation, and the French

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[102] For example, she said: "It was necessary, without expecting any help from the ignorant superstitious natives (Cham), to investigate the inscriptions…" Nakamura (1999: 111). See also her book *Un Royaume Disparu. Les Chams et Leur Art* (1923).

[103] "Moi" is a Vietnamese term used by French and Vietnamese to refer to the ethnic minorities; it implies the meaning of "savage." Baudesson's book was published in 1919 in English under the title *Indo-China and its primitive people: Everyday life, rites and superstitions of the Moïs and the Chams of Vietnam*. See also Baudesson (1906).

[104] This idea was first discussed by Lockhart (2011: 4-6).

colonial scholars were successful in implanting this knowledge of "Indianized" aspects into the minds of contemporary Cham as their historic memory. Thus, through the (re)construction of Champa history, French colonial scholars actually *created* Cham historical identity.[105] Contemporary Cham whom I have met during my fieldwork in Bình Thuận and Ninh Thuận still thank the French for "discovering" and "saving" their historical medieval temples and their heritage and "bringing back" their history. This reminds us of a similar case of Khmer temples that were "saved" from Thai control and "reincorporated" into Cambodia through the exercise of European power. As Barnett states:

> "The French were able to appropriate Angkor and use it to reprimand the inhabitants they conquered. 'Look how you have fallen', the Europeans said, the implication being that only the French were able to save Cambodia."[106]

For the French, the defining characteristic of the Champa kingdom was that it was once a great and powerful "Indianized" civilization, but by the time of colonial rule the Cham people became a "fallen nation" and were slaves of the Viet. By promoting "the cult of Champa," that is, by featuring its high civilization represented in the medieval "Indianized" temples and sculptures, French colonials linked the religious life of contemporary Cham to the Indian religions their medieval kings adopted, despite the ruptures that occurred over centuries of wars of succession, territorial expansion, and decline. Moreover, they did not consider that the Cham temple architecture, religious sculptures, and Sanskrit inscriptions were the products of the medieval royal and elite classes and that there was no evidence confirming that the entire Cham population in general shared the same culture and religious practices as the elites.

Regarding contemporary South-Central Cham identity, between 1885 and 1891, Étienne Aymonier published several works that described one of the two main groups of Cham

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[105] One can ask whether the French colonial authorities and scholars were inspired by the "reconstruction" of the Indian past conducted by their British counterparts starting from the 18th century. On "(re-)construction" of the Indian past see, for example, Chatterjee (1998), and Dodson (2007).
[106] Barnett (1990:105-106).

as "Brahmanistes"[107] or *Cham chéat.*[108] As for the latter term, he explains that "Cham" or "chams de race," are those "qui ont conservé un reste de leur ancien culte sivaïte,"[109] that is, preserved the remains of their ancient Śaivism, implying that they still practice some ancient forms of "original" Cham religion and culture. However, Aymonier (1891: 20-24) also refers to "Brahmanistes" as *akaphiér* or *kafir*, a term that the Cham borrowed from Arabic, meaning "non-believer [in Islam]" or "non-Muslim." In contrast to a "non-believers," the second group of Cham was called the *Cham Bani* or "gens de la religion musulmane," that is, "people of Muslim religion." [110] "Bani" or "Bini" is a Cham term which has its origin in Arabic word meaning "child/children of, son(s) of, descendant(s) of."[111] Aymonier therefore uses the terms "Cham Brahmanistes" and "Cham Bani" to describe two different groups of Cham in Southern and Central Vietnam, each having its own religious identity.

Antoine Cabaton, in his *Nouvelles Recherches sur les Chams* (1901:4), also supported the idea that the direct descendants of Champa kingdom are "Cham Brahmanistes," and that they are *akaphiér* ("infidèles"), that is the "descendants des anciens Chams qui n'ont pas voulu accepter la religion de Mahomet." Although both Cabaton and Aymonier said that "Brahmanistes" were called "non-believers" and "infidèles," it seems to me that the term

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[107] It remains unknown why Aymonier used the term "Brahmaniste" instead of "Hindou." The term "Hindu" and "Hinduism" were introduced first into the English language in India in the 18th century, and French authors used the term "Brahmanisme" even in the late 19th century; see, for example, the book of François-Jean-Marie Laouënan (1822-1892) titled *Du brahmanisme et de ses rapports avec le judaïsme et le christianisme* (1884) in which the author explicitly equates Brahmanism and Hidnuism: "le Brahmanisme moderne, l'Hindouisme, comme quelques-uns le nomment, ne diffère pas essentiellement du Brahmanisme védique ni du Brahmanisme philosophique ou légal ; les principes constitutifs sont restés les mêmes; seulement, la scène et les personnages ont changé." (vol. 2, p. 2). Some other authors also used the terms "Hinduism" and "Brahmanism" as interchangeable or considered Brahmanism a part of Hinduism; some others thought that "Hinduism" simply referred to the "relatively new religion of Hindu" while "Brahmanism" was referring to "the most ancient Indian religion" (which did not exist anymore) in which the key role was played by the representatives of the caste of Brahmans. In the case of Champa, when French scholars referred to "Brahmanism" they most probably meant the "old Indian religion" that the Cham presumably adopted and practiced.

[108] Another term used instead of *Cham Chéat* is *Cham Chuh/Cuh* which means "the Cham [who practice] cremation".

[109] Aymonier (1885: 4-5).

[110] Idem, p. 4.

[111] Also, according to Durand (1903), the term "Bani" comes from the Arabic word *beni* that means "sons [of the Prophet]."

*akaphiér* was not a self-identification term but probably was used by those Cham who adopted "Islam" to refer to the *other* group of Cham, the "Brahmanistes," who did not adopt it.   What this shows us is how French colonial scholars, motivated by the Indian aspects which appeared in medieval Cham artifacts, defined contemporary Cham identity and religion through that lens.

## 1.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided a brief history of Champa kingdom in connection to various religious traditions such as Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism, and Buddhism that were adopted by the Cham elites as shown in existing medieval temples, sculptures and inscriptions. Islam was also adopted in Champa and is in evidence from the 17th century onward. While French colonial works contributed significantly and in fact provided the foundation to the study of Champa history and religion, it is important and necessary to recognize that there was a certain bias or oversimplification in these works, particularly, in the ways in which their authors defined or categorized contemporary Cham identity and religion based on medieval religious artifacts that were produced on behalf of political elites in medieval times. However, the French colonial historiography remained so influential that many Cham scholars continued using their definition and categories about the contemporary Cham and built upon them further. For instance, inherited from the French category "Cham Brahmanistes," the Vietnamese term "Chăm Bàlamôn" ("Bàlamôn" presumably being a phonetic transcription of "Brahman") became a fixed category to refer to the contemporary South-Central "Hindu Cham," and "Chăm Bàlamôn" was an official state-sanctioned term in government statistical collections and in Cham identity cards. The term "Chăm Bàlamôn" was used as early as 1936 and is still used in scholarly publications authored by both Cham and Viet scholars.  Overseas scholars such as Nakamura (1999, 2020) and Abdul Hamid (2013) refer to Cham Ahiér as adhering to "an indigenized form of Hinduism" and "syncretic Hindu," respectively.  In this thesis, I propose a different approach, beyond such labels, based on contemporary Cham rituals. But before we

delve into the rituals themselves, I will discuss in the next chapter how the Vietnamese government defined Cham identity and how native Cham scholars and intellectuals stressed the cosmological concept of Ahiér-Awal dualism (represented by the symbol *homkar*) as representing the identity of the whole South-Central Cham, thus promoting the unity and solidarity of the two different religious Cham communities.

# Chapter 2: Definitions of Cham Identity

## 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explore Cham identity by situating it, first of all, within the historical and political context of Vietnam, and by exploring the French colonial administration and, later, Vietnamese state imposition of an "ethnic identity" on the Cham. Officially categorized as one of the fifty-four national ethnic minority groups in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the contemporary Cham present us with an intriguing avenue toward both problematizing and contextualizing identity. Since the 1976 reunification, the Vietnamese government regarded the Cham monolithically as a category of an ethnic group, an "ethnic minority," referred to as "Cham Nationality." The ruling Vietnamese Communist Party's categorization of ethnic groups was based on three criteria: those of culture, language, and ethnic identity (Yoshimoto 2001: 324). But during the process of classification, the government failed to identify consistently the Sunni Muslim Cham inhabiting Mekong Delta who speak different dialects and practice their specific cultural rites differently from those Cham who lived in Bình Thuận and Ninh Thuận provinces of Southern and Central Vietnam. By grouping all the Cham together as a single ethnic minority, the Vietnamese government neglected the ethno-geographic diversity of the Cham who inhabited different regions and also ignored the greater diaspora living in neighbouring countries, particularly in Cambodia. Thus, the government imposition of an "ethnic identity" on the Cham was conducted with its own political agenda and purpose, designed to visibly fit in with Vietnamese Communist Party's image of a harmonious, unified, and multiethnic Socialist Republic of Vietnam. In terms of identity based on religion, the government used the term "Chăm Bàlamôn" to refer to one of the two main groups of Cham in the South-Central Vietnam. Interestingly, by examining secondary sources,

I found that both the official state-sanctioned ethnicity-based identity and the identification of "Chăm Bàlamôn" were actually inherited from French colonial predecessors.[112]

In the second part of this chapter, I explore the origin, history, and meanings of the terms "Cham Ahiér" and "Cham Awal" which Cham intellectuals and native Cham scholars have used in an effort to replace the state-sanctioned terms "Chăm Bàlamôn" ("Cham Brahmanistes", that is, "Hindu Cham") and Chăm Bàni ("Muslim Cham"). In addition, they promoted the concept of Ahiér-Awal cosmological dualism represented by the symbol *homkar* as a symbol of South-Central Cham identity, binding the two communities of Cham together. While this dualistic concept is well discussed in Nakamura's PhD dissertation (1999), what I want to emphasize in the present thesis is how it is heavily stressed and promoted by Cham elites but absent in the minds and conversations of ordinary Cham villagers. I have not only examined secondary sources produced by Cham intellectuals and native Cham scholars but also relied on my interviews and conversations with them. I argue that Cham elites have their own agenda while promoting their identity and state politics does make impact on the way the Cham intellectuals choose to identify themselves. This chapter is necessary because it provides us a chance to see how the views of the elites differ from those of ordinary Cham villagers who showcase their identity and religion through their rituals. Rituals are the key to their identity, and rituals reveal the subtleties of Cham Ahiér religion, as I will show in the following chapters.

## 2.2 State Projects and Ethnic Minorities: the Imposition of Ethnic Identity

1976 ushered in the era of reunification of the North (the Democratic Republic of Vietnam) and South (the Republic of Vietnam), wherein the unified Vietnam became the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. As part of the preparations for the decennial census in 1979, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam issued Decision 121 on the "nomenclature of Vietnamese

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[112] See the third part of chapter 1 for French colonial creation of the concept "minorités ethniques" to legitimate their control over the new population and territory.

ethnic groups" which enumerated the ethnic groups that are still officially recognized today.[113] The Cham collectively became one of the fifty-four official national ethnic minority groups, and Kinh was the official name given to the majority ethnic group of Vietnam. These were ethnic identities imposed by the governement, a part of the overall project of legibility and simplification of social processes for political and/or administrative purposes.

Regarding the Vietnamese government's design for Cham categorization, James Scott (1998: 2) allows us to understand more fully why Vietnamese officials lumped all Cham together under one category, regardless of cultural, religious or linguistic difference. He argues that the use of "the standardization of weights and measures," "cadastral surveys and population registers," "standardization of language and legal discourse" and so forth, were methods to bring disparate groups under one ruling yoke. Since societies are complex in their entirety, a state like Socialist Vietnam had to simplify the concepts by which it governed these particular groups. The governement thus created a standard grid used for recording and monitoring. Thus, one might ask what kind of political benefit the government obtained by recognizing, enumerating, and imposing the labels of national ethnic minority groups in the very beginning of state-building as an independent Socialist Republic of Vietnam. It is quite difficult to understand the imposed ethnic identity of the Cham without at least a very short discussion of the history of modern Vietnam. Thus, I will start this section with some historical background to help explain how the government constructed the country's history and the role of Cham communities in it.

### 2.2.1 Understanding Cham ethnic identity within a unified Vietnam

Official Vietnamese history textbooks all promote a vision of a unitary Vietnam, an "eternal" country that always existed as pictured in its present "S-like form" on geographical

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[113] Pelley (2002:103).

maps of South-East Asia beginning with the Hồng Bàng dynasty that came to power in 2879 BCE and continued its advancement on a straight chronologically line for more than four millennia of uninterrupted development. This historical narrative portrays the country as having a clear-cut boundary and as populated by a united populace through which it presents the various indigenous groups as if they were all ethnic Vietnamese from the remote past to the present. In addition, Vietnamese historians constructed the official history of Vietnam with the image of Vietnam as a unified nation, all its inhabitants of which shared the same history and culture. This portrayal of the history of Vietnam is highly problematic for several reasons. First, there were neither clear-cut boundaries, nor the very concept of "boundary" before the nineteenth century. Second, as Keith Weller Taylor (1998) claims, 20th century representations of Vietnamese history and culture mostly assumed unity and continuity throughout history. But since wars occurred rather often within the territory that we call Vietnam today, the existence of a single, unified Vietnam as portrayed by conventional historiography is highly problematic. Moreover, Christopher Goscha (2016) reminds us that the unified country of Vietnam in its present national form has only an eighty-three-year history from 1802 (the year when the Nguyễn dynasty came to power) to 1858 (the year of the French advent), six months in 1945 (time between the end of French rule and the beginning of Japanese occupation), and from 1975 (the end of the Vietnam War) to the present. Thus, one can ask where and how the ethnic Cham stand in this history of a unitary Vietnam?

### 2.2.2 From multi-ethnic history to Vietnamization and assimilation

Vietnam was officially colonized by the French from 1887 to 1954. After the 1954 Geneva Treaty, two Vietnamese states emerged from French colonial Indochina: North Vietnam, also known as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), with Hồ Chí Minh as

president; and South Vietnam, also known as the Republic of Vietnam (RVN), with Ngô Đình Diệm as Prime Minister.

As early as the 1960s, the very idea of ethnic minority groups as integral parts of the nation was promoted in the three-volume *History of the Feudal System of Vietnam (Lịch Sử Chế Độ Phong Kiến Việt Nam)* compiled by prominent DRV Hanoi scholars. The authors promoted the idea that the Cham are a constituent part of the "great national family" (*đại gia đình dân tộc*).[114] Moreover, Champa and Cham culture(s) were described in the *History of Vietnam* published in 1971, as naturally and gracefully flowing into, and being a part of, the "greater Vietnamese family".[115] The view of a "greater Vietnamese family" or multi-ethnic nation became a standard theme in historical writing espoused by many other Vietnamese scholars from the North, for instance, Lê Văn Hảo (1979) and Lê Văn Chưởng (1981). According to Bruce Lockhart (2011:17), this history tried to show that the Cham were increasingly integrated with the people of Đàng Trong[116] and peacefully became part of the Vietnamese nation sharing the same history and culture with other ethnic groups.[117] The victorious Vietnamese Communist Party has made it part of its agenda to continue this construction of a "multi-ethnic" national history integrating other minorities with the ethnic

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[114] Phan Huy Lê et all (1960, vol.3: 103).

[115] Published by Social Science Committee (Uỷ ban Khoa học Xã hội) in 1971.

[116] Đàng Trong (lit. "Inner Circuit" is the area to the South of what is now the Gianh River in Quảng Bình province. It is a term for a geographical division term commonly used to contrast with Đàng Ngoài (lit. "Outer Land"). From the 16th to the 18th centuries, Vietnam was officially ruled by the Lê dynasty with the Lê Dynasty emperor residing in the northern part of the present-day Vietnam known as Đàng Ngoài with the capital at Thăng Long (present-day Hà Nội). Đàng Trong (with the capital Huế) was the stronghold of the feudal administrative structure ruled by the Nguyễn Lords from the 16th century. But before the Nguyễn Lords were sent by the Lê Dynasty emperor to govern this southernmost region of his empire, this region was under the control of the northern principalities of Champa.

[117] This is reminiscent of Lon Nol's notion of a greater Khmer-Mon nation described in his 1972 pamphlet *Le Neo-Khmerisme*. His view and that of one of a greater Vietnamese family are both indicative of a growing trend among "nationalist historians": that of an *imaginaire* of past history informing contemporary ideas of national greatness. Interestingly, Lon Nol was anti-Vietnamese and attempted to use ethnic Cham dreams of regaining Champa as a way to build support against Vietnamese communists. He wanted to unite the Mon people in Burma and Thailand, the Khmer in Cambodia and Kampuchea Krom, the Cham of Cambodia and Vietnam, and the highlanders (Eng Kok - Thay 2013: 133).

Vietnamese into a single narrative of peaceful coexistence for the unified Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV).

Writing on China's ethnic classification of 1954 (Chin. *minzu shibie*), Thomas Mullaney (2010: 325-327) suggests that it was the social scientists, especially the ethnologists and linguists, who played a prominent role in the classification efforts that determined which of hundreds of minority communities would be officially recognized by the state as national minority groups; he also suggests that the Chinese Communists in this period did not have much experience with the concept of a "unified multinational country" (Chin. *tongyi de duo minzu guojia*). He states: "Social scientists served as the eyes of the modern Chinese nation-state, and in doing so, taught the state how to see ethnicity *categorically*" (Mullaney 2010: 327). At this point one can ask, why did SRV ethnographers and social scientists need to create such a "multi-ethnic history"? What was the purpose for its creation? According to Alexander Woodside (1976: 5), the beginning of the 20th century was the time when Viet (Kinh) nationalists, revolutionaries, and intellectuals took leading roles in the anticolonial struggle to overcome the fragmentation of the colonial period. It was the beginning of the persistent search for "organized communities" in Vietnam. And as Kim Ngọc Bảo Ninh (2002) states, the Communists were the most organized of all anticolonial forces in Vietnam, but internally they were divided by disputes over national identity.

A "multi-ethnic" history was created strategically as one of the tools for the Vietnamese Communists to gain support during the two Indochina Wars (1945-1954, 1955-1975). Thus, the concept of a "multi-ethnic" history was used less for the sake of recognizing various ethnic groups on the land than for bundling together various ethnic groups to demonstrate solidarity with "the great multi-ethnic family of Vietnam" for political purposes.[118] As such, Cham

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[118] Communist leaders of Vietnam arguably followed the models of multi-national states implemented in Soviet Union (since 1922) and in Mainland China (since 1949); literature on the cases of these two multinational states is abundant and will not be cited here.

identity as an ethnic minority was constructed in relation to the Viet (Kinh) and others in a "greater family" structure, and positioned as a people who have struggled together with the Viet either against foreign invaders or against Vietnam's own "feudal" rulers."[119]

While the DRV focused on promoting solidarity wherein all ethnic minorities came together to live happily as one big family, the RVN took a starkly contrasting approach to ethnic minorities. According to Oscar Salemink, South Vietnam's ethnic minority policy was influenced by two factors: first, the need to isolate minorities from Communist propaganda and influence them to prevent them from supporting the Communists; second, to pacify a series of ethnonational movements in the hope of gaining support from the minority population. Thus, minority policy was created primarily to defeat the enemy - the Northern Communists - rather than to address the needs of the communities themselves.

Furthermore, the RVN had an assimilationist policy of Vietnamization toward both lowland and highland minorities."[120] Under president Ngô Đình Diệm (1901-1963), the Southern Vietnamese regime took a strong assimilatist policy toward ethnic minorities by planting Vietnamese culture within their communities. Minorities groups were thus forced to take Vietnamese names, use the Vietnamese language, and wear Vietnamese clothes.[121]

Since the (re)unification of Vietnam in 1976, the newly established Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) also initiated policies for the integration of minority populations through assimilation. One of the approaches the Vietnamese Communist Party took was to resettle the Viet (Kinh) in the highlands and various other regions to live together with different ethnic minority groups so that "development" would be brought to "less civilized people."[122] Article

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[119] Lockhart (2011: 33).
[120] Nakamura (1999: 34-35), Hickey (1982:47-60), Mạc Đường (1978).
[121] Nakamura (1999: 35-37). This assimilation policy of Ngô Đình Diệm regime provoked strong reaction and various ethnic movements emerged; such a movement of the Cham people in the South-Central coast and Mekong Delta was represented by the "Front for the Liberation of Cham."
[122] This has a historical precedent in Vietnamese history which goes all the way back to Chey Chetta II and his relationship with Nguyễn Lords teaming up against the Siamese. This event resulted in the expansion of Vietnamese territory to the Mekong Delta and modern-day Hồ Chí Minh city. In other words, Vietnamese migration to the South leading to the assimilation of the Khmer and Cham already happened in the past and that

30 of the new SRV Constitution stated "The State undertakes the overall administration of cultural activities. The propagation of all reactionary and depraved thought and culture is forbidden. Superstitions and harmful customs are to be eliminated."[123] As Lý Kim Hoa states in *Cham Balamon of Thuận Hải Then and Now* (1979):

> "The more important thing is to give the Cham an ideological education and political enlightenment. It is necessary to make the Cham understand that Vietnam belongs to all the minority groups, including the Cham. Together with the Viet and other ethnic brothers and sisters, the Cham are also the owners of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. It is necessary to be in solidarity with other ethnic groups in Vietnam's multi-ethnic community, and eliminating poverty and backwardness, especially those caused by beliefs and religions, is the current most serious problem of Cham Balamon of South Vietnam."[124]

One can wonder how the Cham reacted to this kind of statement and the subsequent imposition of an ethnic identity on them. In 1964, FULRO (Front Unifié de Lutte des Races Opprimées) was founded as a mass movement of Cham, Khmer, and highland minority peoples whose *Manifesto* declared the organization's intention to (re)claim lost territories now under Vietnamese control.[125] In a document written by Y Bham Enoul, head of FULRO, their ideology was expressed as follows:

> "Since 1955, all the countries of Indochina achieved independence. But the Cham nation and people are still suffering and have become what is called a minority in their own land. To use that term is a humiliation for a group that is really lord of the land because this word means small people. They had no more right to control their own country and nation. Thus, their national identity disappeared, and they must live as slaves to the nations which stronger and smarter people, for instance, the Youn [a derogatory term for the Viet]. Because the danger in the future is so great for the Cham, thus they must awaken, struggle and fight to serve their own nation."[126]

Even though FULRO was disbanded in 1992, Cham identity remained linked to the Viet perception of them as a perpetual threat to national harmony. The South-Central Cham

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was not a result of communist revisionism, but a continuing process representing an important feature of Vietnamese statecraft.

[123] See Nakamura (1999: 48, 53).

[124] My translation.

[125] FULRO remained an acting political and military organization until the early 1992 when it was disbanded by UNTAC (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia). For the history of FULRO see, for instance, Hickey (1993).

[126] Eng Kok-Thay (2013: 134-135).

however, do not see themselves similar to other ethnic minority groups in Vietnam because they are the descendants of the once powerful Champa kingdom.[127]

Thus, to summarize, it can be said that in the middle of the 20th century the DRV created the concept of the "multi-ethnicity" of national identity to show the solidarity of "the great multi-ethnic family of Vietnam" for political purposes, with one of the results of this creation being a Cham identity constructed as an "ethnic minority" in relation to the Viet and others in a "greater family of ethnic groups." The RVN, however, created minority policies to encourage the Cham and others to join their side in the confrontation with the DRV. Since reunification, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam has attempted to build the image of a unified Vietnam populated by a diversity of different ethnic groups.

### 2.2.3 Chăm Bàlamôn as state-sanctioned religious-based identity

Going through numerous Vietnamese publications, I found that the first Vietnamese to employ the term "Chàm Bàlamôn," written in Quốc Ngữ (the "national written language," that is, Vietnamese transliterated into the Latin alphabet) was Huỳnh Thị Bảo Hoà (1896-1982); in her publication (1936: 14-15) she used this term to describe the Cham who followed "đạo Bàlamôn" or "Bàlamôn giáo" (Brahmanism) (1936: 14-15). Evidently, French scholars were responsible for the usage of the term "Brahmaniste", and Huỳnh Thị Bảo Hoà most likely read French works and followed their usage. I was not able to find any other works written in Quốc Ngữ prior to 1936 that would use the term "Chàm Bàlamôn," but from 1936 onward this term was used in works published in Vietnam by both Cham and Viet intellectuals and researchers. During my field research in Cham villages in Bình Thuận and Ninh Thuận provinces, I found

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[127] Contemporary Cham identity is marked and colored by the French who reminded the Cham that they were the direct descendants of the Champa kingdom. This encouraged a sentiment of inclination to the past, a sense of inexplicable loss, of being colonized by the Viet and hence what remained were the powerful elements of nationalist feelings which are still prevailing today.

that this term is commonly and daily used by both Cham intellectuals and ordinary villagers. In addition, I noticed that Cham priests and intellectuals continue to use the term "Chăm Bàlamôn" in titles of religious councils, official documents for the government, as well as writings in local Cham journals (fig. 22). Moreover, this term is also used on official citizenship identification cards to indicate the religious identity of Cham. All this shows how much this term is ingrained into the life of the Cham nowadays.

There is another Vietnamese term, *Hời,* (Han-Nom: 回, lit. "Muslim") used to refer to the Cham. It was mentioned in several publications as early as 1889 by the missionary of the Missions étrangères de Paris Louis Vuillaume[128] and by Cham scholar Inrasara to refer to the Cham as late as 2009. Nonetheless, the Vietnamese term "Chăm Bàlamôn" became a standard reference to "Hindu Cham," while "Chăm Bàni" referred to "Muslim Cham" in Southern and Central Vietnam, originating from French scholarship as well.

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[128] In 1889 Vuillaume published the letter that he sent to his parents from Ba-Ria (that is, Bà Rịa, a town in Bà Rịa–Vũng Tàu province in the Southeast region of Vietnam) on December 8, 1885, under the title "Un souvenir de la persécution dans la mission de Cochinchine orientale". In this letter he mentioned that the Cham helped some Viet Catholic convert to escape from capital punishment by Vietnamese government (pp. 55, 58).
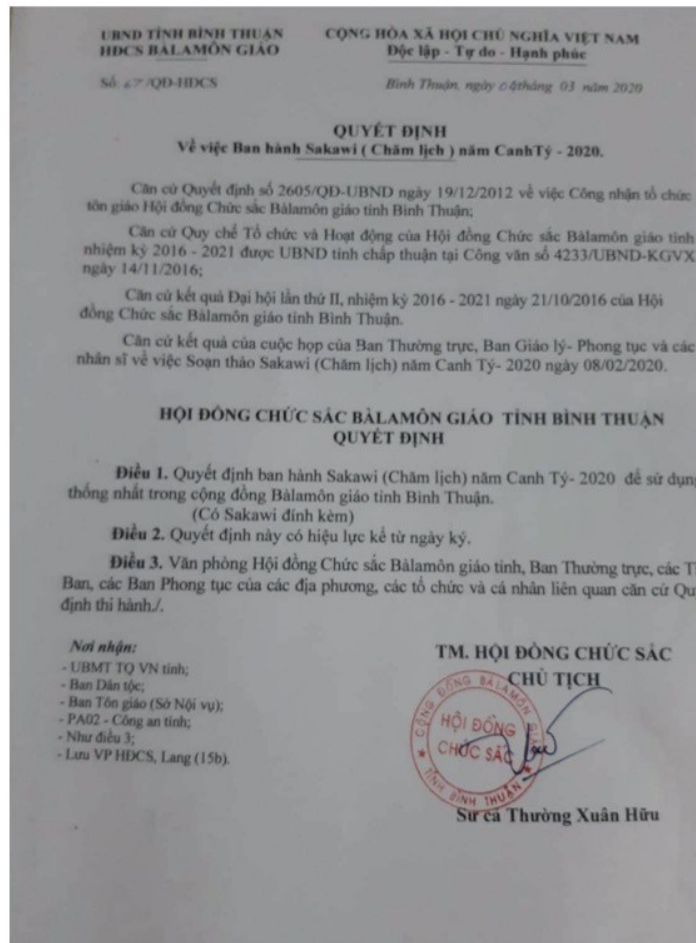
Fig. 22. Official document for issuing new calendar of 2020-2021 by The Council of Dignitaries of Cham Bàlamôn in Bình Thuận province (Hội Đồng Chức Sắc Bàlamôn Giáo Tỉnh Bình Thuận)

## 2.3 Cham Intellectuals and Religious Identity of the South-Central Cham

As I examined secondary sources published by native Cham scholars, I noticed that over the past two decades there were some semantic debates on the use of the Vietnamese terms "Chăm Bàlamôn" and "Chăm Bàni" used to refer to the Cham of the Southern and Central Vietnam. Prominent Cham scholars such as Po Dharma, Sakaya, and Thành Phần have challenged the use of the terms "Chăm Bàlamôn" and "Chăm Bàni" in Vietnamese publications and claimed that they are foreign terms applied by outsiders. However, the term "Chăm Bàlamôn" was not invented by Vietnamese researchers; it is a Vietnamese term that followed

the French description of the "Cham Brahmanistes" whom the French believed to be the direct descendants of ancient Champa. Interestingly, on the one hand, the Cham researchers mentioned above criticized the usage of the Vietnamese term "Chăm Bàlamôn" but not the French term "Cham Brahmanistes" nor did they contest the idea suggested by the French that the contemporary "Cham Brahmanistes" are the direct descendants of the ancient "Indianized" Champa. In fact, the identification term, "Cham Brahmanistes" that the French designed for the Cham was most probably established on the basis of visual similarities between the extant medieval Cham temples and statues with Indian ones. Numerous medieval Cham Sanskrit inscriptions, temple ruins, and religious sculptures certainly testify to a particular link between medieval Champa and India. However, the use of the term "Brahmanistes" to describe one group of contemporary Cham originated from the colonial nomenclature and was not necessarily relied to solid scholarly historical studies. The following chapters of my thesis will focus on the religious beliefs and ritual practices of the contemporary "Cham Brahmanistes" to see whether this French's creation of religious identity was accurate enough. For the moment, let us continue with the discussion of the term "Chăm Bàlamôn" which, as such modern Cham scholars as Po Dharma, Sakaya, and Thành Phần suggest, should be replaced by the terms "Ahiér" and "*akaphiér*" because, those scholars argue, they are the original terms that the South-Central Cham used to identify *themselves*. This is rather confusing because these terms in fact have their origins in the Arabic language and we do not know when these terms were for the first time adopted and used by the Cham.[129]

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[129] According to Sakaya (2008:135), the terms "Cham Ahiér" and "Cham Awal" are used in several Cham manuscripts; unfortunately, he did not mention the dates of these manuscripts. On the basis of collecting Cham manuscript for Bristish library preservation purposes, Phan Nhiên Hạo (2015:109-110) suggests that Cham palm-leaf manuscripts were produced from the 17th century to the late 19th century, while traditional paper manuscripts were most likely produced from the 19th century through the early 20th century, and industrial paper manuscripts were produced from the early 20th century onward. While studying Cham manuscripts, Nosewwothy and Phạm (2020) maintain that the oldest known extant Cham manuscript is dated to the 18th century while most of them were originally produced in the late 19th to early 20th centuries. Thus, the earliest appearance of the term "Cham Ahiér" attested in manuscripts could be from the 17th to 18th centuries.

Reading French colonial works, I found that in a 1903 work titled *Les Chams Bani*, French ethnographer Eugène-Marie Durand[130] (1864-1932) employed the terms "Cham Ahiér" and "Cham Awal" to refer to the Cham in Bình Thuận and Ninh Thuận provinces. Durand (1903: 58) used the term "Awal" in the context of a Katan ceremony, a Cham Bani circumcision ritual wherein the persons adopted the names "Ali" or "Mohammad" as "leur nom 'd'initié' (*awal*), par opposition à leur nom cham 'de profane' (*ahyor*)," that is, *ahyor* referred to a Cham "profane name" and *awal* to a Cham religious "initiation name."[131] This work shows that the terms "Cham Awal" and "Cham Ahyor/Ahiér" were mentioned in 1903 as describing two groups of Cham, one that adopted Ali or Mohammad as their religious name in contrast to the other who did not.

Accordingly, at the center of this analysis is a problematization of the very terms "Ahiér" and "Awal." Nakamura (1999: 128) suggests that "Ahiér" means "back," "behind," or "after" whereas "Awal" means "front" or "before." In addition, Yoshimoto (2011: 325) suggests that "Ahiér" derives from the Arabic word meaning "last," implying that "Cham Ahiér" was a term that emerged in diametrical opposition to the "Cham Awal" standing for "first, front, or before". But neither Nakamura nor Yoshimoto provided an explanation as to why the Cham Ahiér are represented as "last, back, behind, after," and why the Cham Awal are labelled as "first, front or before." Meanwhile, Po Dharma contends that "Awal" refers to the Cham who followed Islam "before" Po Romé's (r. 1627-1651) reign and they are the Cham Bani of today, whereas "Ahiér" are the Cham who accepted "Po Awluah" (that is, Allah) "after" Po Romé's reign and are called Chăm Bàlamôn today.[132] Po Romé was a Churu

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[130] Eugène Eustache Louis Marie Durand stayed in Qui Nhon from 1888 to 1923. For his biography and list of publications concerning Cham see https://irfa.paris/en/missionnaire/1774-durand-eugene/.

[131] Another explaination that continues to be mentioned by the contemporary South-Central Cham is that every Cham, when born, is referred to as "Cham," and and only at the age of 15 this person will go through a ceremony to be officially initiated into the Awal religious tradition and thus will become "Cham Bani."

[132] The exact words of Po Dharma are "Awal là từ Á Rập có nghĩa "trước, khởi đầu". Chăm Awal ám chỉ cho những người Chăm đã theo Hồi Giáo "trước" triều đại Po Romé, tức là Chăm Bani hôm nay. Ahiér cũng là từ Ả Rập, có nghĩa là "sau, cuối cùng". Chăm Ahiér ám chỉ cho những người Chăm chấp nhận Po Uluah là đấng

highlander who ascended to the head of Cham royalty and became the king of the last Cham state Panduranga.[133] Po Romé was also the last historical Cham king who is venerated and worshiped in his own Po Romé temple as a deified king.  Sharing the same idea with Po Dharma, Sakaya (2008; 2016) suggests that Cham Ahiér are those who embraced, practiced and converted to Islam "later" (lit. "*after*") and Cham Awal are those who, in turn, did so "earlier" (lit. "*before*"). What I find especially puzzling in this explanation, however, is the question of *who* would identify themselves as "non-believers" or "infidèles," (*kafir*) or would make the claim that they (or their group) had accepted Allah after Po Romé's reign or after the Cham Awal did. Such terminology sounds very much as if it was introduced by outsiders, and it is not very likely that it was used by insiders. My assumption, therefore, is that only gradually did these terms lose their original Arabic meaning and became commonly used by the Cham Ahiér intellectuals to identify themselves.

Meanwhile, Po Dharma, Sakaya, and Thành Phần state that scholars of Cham studies should use the terms "Cham Ahiér" and "Cham Awal" because these terms only emphasize Brahmanical or Islamic *influence* rather than strict adherence to any religious orthodoxy.[134] However, Sakaya (2008: 164, footnote 7) also states that the Cham Ahiér are those who have not yet converted to Islam or who had converted to Islam only *after* the Cham Awal. He used the term "cải đạo" (conversion) to imply the idea of a total change of faith or religion. Likewise, Sakaya (2016; 2014: 90-91, 97) asserts that both Cham Ahiér and Cham Awal were

thượng đế "sau" triều đại Po Romé, tức là Chăm Balamon hôm nay." See
http://champaka.info/index.php/quandiem/quandiemvanhoa/1267-van.

[133] Pāṇḍuraṅga, the southernmost Cham polity, was annexed by Đại Việt (Vietnam) in 1651/3 and became a "vassal" of the Vietnamese Lê Dynasty and had to pay tribute to it and, later, to Đàng Trong of the Nguyễn family. Until 1832, the Cham in Pāṇḍuraṅga were ruled under the *Thuận Thành* system: they were subjects of the Pāṇḍuraṅga Cham royal family and not of the Vietnamese court. However, in 1832, under the rule of the Emperor Minh Mạng, Pāṇḍuraṅga was incorporated into Vietnamese Empire.

[134] Thành Phần (2010: 2), Sakaya (2002: 40; 2014: 97; 2008:133-134), for Po Dharma's text see http://champaka.info/index.php/quandiem/quandiemvanhoa/1267-van. These and earlier publications of these two Cham scholars had some influence on Vietnamese and Japanese researchers as one can see in the usage of the terms "Ahiér" and "Awal" in Nakamura (1999), Vương Hoàng Trù (2001), Phan Đăng Nhật (2003), Phan Quốc Anh (2004), Nguyễn Văn Tỷ (2009), Bá Minh Truyền (2010), Bá Văn Quyển (2011), Yoshimoto (2011).

"Islamized" by Malays who brought to them a specifically "Malayanized form of Islam."
However, what I have found through my field research is that while the Cham Ahiér have
adopted some "Malayanized Islamic deities" and worship them in some rituals such as *Rija*
rituals, they do this together with a large pantheon of other deities. Thus, the main questions
that I ask in this thesis are: What is the Cham Ahiér religion after all? To what degree are the
Cham Ahiér influenced by Malayanized Islamic practices? How do Cham Ahiér villagers
practice their rituals, who do they worship, and when and where do they perform their rituals?
For the moment, I will not focus on these questions; instead, I will continue to focus on Cham
religious identity as promoted by native Cham scholars and intellectuals so as to better
contextualize this line of inquiry. Then in the next chapters, I will explore Cham rituals to show
how ordinary Cham villagers perceive Cham identity and religion.

### 2.3.1 The concept of Ahiér-Awal cosmological dualism and the *homkar* symbol

Most researchers who focus their studies on the contemporary Cham take for granted
the terms "Ahiér" and "Awal" as given without much concern for their meaning, history of
their adoption and of their usage. Instead, they put an emphasis on explaining the symbolic
cosmological dualism inherent in the notion of Ahiér-Awal. This is understandable because
during my fieldwork, I encountered many Cham intellectuals who stressed the importance of
the concept of Ahiér-Awal cosmological dualism: according to them, it binds the two different
religious communities together. Based on this dualist concept, Sakaya (2014: 97) stresses that
Cham Ahiér and Cham Awal are the same Cham who are linked inextricably, and these links
can be seen in the religious doctrines, festivals, outfits of priests, and common rituals which
unify all religious activities for the benefit of the whole Cham community.

One might wonder as to what exactly the Ahiér-Awal cosmological dualism refers to.
The earliest mention of this dualist concept can be seen in 1903 work of Durand where he

quotes a Cham saying "Po car awal kamei, po basaih ahyor lakei," which Durand translated as "Les acar sont awal et filles; les basaih sont ahyor et garçons".[135] This quote reveals two important aspects: first, Po car belongs to Cham Awal and Po basaih to Cham Ahiér (Ahyor, in Durand's transcription) and, secondly, Po car symbolically represents the feminine, whereas Po basaih symbolically represents the masculine. Generally speaking, Po car refers to the group priests of Cham Awal and Po basaih refers to the group of priests of Cham Ahiér. [136] The cosmological dualist concept was constructed to represent two opposite but mutually interdependent forces, one related to Cham Ahiér, another related to Cham Awal. Contemporary Cham intellectuals and native Cham scholars tend to describe this in terms of an opposite binary relationship conceptually representing the relationship between Cham Ahiér and Cham Awal communities, using such concepts as *liṅga-yoni*, father-mother, husband-wife, east-west, right-left, day-night, sun-moon, temple-mosque, *yang-yin*,[137] and upper body-lower body, respectively.[138] The relationship between Ahiér and Awal is said to be a binary opposition, an opposition in which each entity needs the other one in order to exist.

Discussing the origins of the symbolic dualism of Ahiér-Awal, Cham scholars Po Dharma, Sakaya, and Inrasara maintain that it was a 17th century creation, that took place during the reign of King Po Romé (r. 1627 to 1651). These Cham scholars explain that there

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[135] Durand (1903: 56).

[136] The official Cham term for the system of Cham Ahiér priests is "Halau Janâng Ahiér" and for Cham Awal priests is "Halau Janâng Awal." *Po basaih* is actually the name of the lowest rank of priests.

[137] The famous Chinese *taiji* 太極 symbol representing the interrelated and interacting Chinese cosmic forces Yin 陰 and Yang 陽 can be seen on many religious objects of both Cham Ahiér and Awal communities. Also, this symbolic dualism notion is explained as being the *yin-yang* concept in an examination of Cham kites by Quảng Đại Tuyên, see:
https://inrasara.com/2011/11/04/quảng-đại-tuyen-bước-dầu-tim-hiểu-về-triết-li-am-dương-thong-qua-hinh-ảnh-canh-diều-cham/.

[138] See Sakaya (1996; 2000; 2004; 2014), and Thành Phần (2010). Interestingly, the elements representing the Cham Ahiér such as *liṅga*, father, husband, East and eastern (right) side, day, sun, internal part of a temple, and upper body in Indian philosophical culture have higher status than the elements representing Cham Awal, namely, *yoni*, mother, wife, West and western (left) side, night, moon, area surrounding a temple, lower body. Po Dharma suggests that the symbolic dualism notion of Ahiér-Awal (in Cham: *tanaow-binay/lakei-kamei*) is based on the Indian *liṅga-yoni* concept and *not* on the Chinese *yin-yang* concept, see:
http://champaka.info/index.php/quandiem/quandiemvanhoa/1267-van.

were constant religious conflicts[139] between Cham Ahiér and Cham Awal and that King Po Romé had to create the concept Ahiér-Awal complementary dualism to solve the dispute between the two Cham groups.[140] Moreover, conflicts between *Cham Ahiér* and *Cham Awal* are reflected in many Cham legends, among them two Cham *ariyas* (lyric poetical compositions in the modern Cham language), the *ariya Cam-Bini* and the *ariya Bini-Cam*.[141] These *ariyas* narrate tragic love stories between Cham boys and girls from two different religious communities and the ways in which their parents violently destroy their unions. Here, we see once more the inner tensions of the Cham communities related to their religious allegiances. We do not know exactly when these *ariyas* first emerged, but according to Inrasara's (2011) linguistic analysis, *Cam-Bini* emerged in the 18th century. As for *Bini-Cam*, Inrasara (1994) collected specimens of poetry from a hand-written document completed in 1903.[142] Thus, following the claim made by Cham intellectuals about the origin of the dualist concept Ahiér-Awal, we can conjecture that this concept was perhaps established and developed around the 17th century or even later for the specific purpose of reconciling the two different Cham religious groups. What I found through my field research is that while contemporary Cham intellectuals often talk about it enthusiastically, this does not mean that

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[139] They did not specify if it was a Hindu-Muslim conflict, although it was implied to be so.

[140] There is a tendency among the Cham to give credits to the King Po Romé for different creations, including the dualist concept. Some Cham intellectuals suggest that this concept can be seen in Po Romé temple, however when I visited the temple, I could not find any sign of it. In study of the architecture of Po Romé temple complex, Bá Văn Quyển (2011: 171-181), who mostly repeats what Cham intellectuals say, mentions that it was constructed on the king's behalf and that the temple shows the dualist elements of Ahiér-Awal because there is the *kut* graveyard of the Ahiér (containing *klaong* box with forehead bones in it) and the Ghur graveyard of Awal at the temple complex. However, he did not mention the dating of the *kut*. In an article published by archaeologists Bùi Chí Hoàng and Đặng Ngọc Kính who excavated the Po Romé complex in 2010, the authors maintain that the main temple was built in the 17th century and suggest that the Bani *kut* and the *klaong* box are from a later period or that they were later added to the temple complex.

[141] See Inrasara (1994) for a discussion of these two *ariyas* in Vietnamese. Both *ariyas* were translated by William Noseworthy, see http://inrasara.com/2010/12/03/ariya-cam-bini-by-english/
http://inrasara.com/2010/12/15/ariya-bini-cam-by-english/, http://inrasara.com/2010/12/05/moving-separately-as-boats-on-the-water-relating-ariya-cam-bini-and-ariya-bini-cam-to-17th-century-campa/. Moreover, see Nakamura (1999: 126-130) for some Cham legends that talk about the conflicts between Ahiér and Awal, and also *Danak Ahiér-Awal* (tale of *Ahiér-Awal)*, the tale was translated from Cham into Vietnamese by Đàng Thanh Quốc Thuận, upon on my request.

[142] Inrasara titled this *ariya* as "Bini-Cam" but most of the Cham, including Po Dharma called it "Nai Mai Mang Makah" (that is, "The princess that came from Malaysia").

ordinary Cham villagers understand this concept or know much about it. Nor are Cham Ahiér and Cham Awal communities actually binding together and cannot exist without one another. They in fact exist independently with their own structures of villages and space around them, their own priest lineages, and ritual systems. Here, I want to emphasize that this dualistic concept is rather a theoretical concept heavily promoted relatively recently by the Cham elites; it does not reflect a fundamental and common religious belief and practice shared by all members of the two communities.[143]

In short, the discussion of the Ahiér-Awal dualistic concept and the employment of terms "Ahiér" and "Awal" represent a discourse produced by Cham elites which circulates among themselves and is known now to researchers working on Cham, as well to the government. The intention behind it, one can conjecture, is to show the Cham identity as having a unique binary religious character, which differentiates themselves from other ethnic minorities, and, at the same time, shows the solidarity and unity of both Ahiér and Awal as one community. Ordinary Cham villagers are certainly not the primary intended recipients of this discourse because many of those whom I talked to simply did neither knew the terms Ahiér and Awal nor the dualistic concept. They have their own way of exhibiting their identity and it is a completely different level of discourse, one that we will examine in the next chapters.

Regarding the Ahiér-Awal dualist concept, Sakaya as well as many other Cham intellectuals whom I met suggest that this concept is manifested in the symbol *homkar* because this symbol indicates a dialectical unification of two opposed entities. Many Cham explained to me that the *homkar* symbol includes the sun and the number "three" to represent Ahiér whereas Awal is symbolized by the moon and the number "six" (fig. 23). Explaining the

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[143] While discussing the highlanders' Jarai Constitution, Andrew Hardy (2015: 53) suggests that the complementary dualist concept of Cham Ahiér and Cham Awal (that he read in Nakamura's work) might bear comparison with the Patao; he asks: "should we regard the cosmology of complementary dualism as something broader, something shared by humanity as a whole." To me, it is hard to answer this question because it seems that the concept of Ahiér-Awal dualism was created to serve a specific purpose. It does not represent a religious belief or philosophical concept that is daily practiced and commonly understood by all the Cham.

meaning of *homkar*, Nakamura states (1999: 132-133) that "The Ahiér number three plus the Awar [= Awal] number six becomes the number nine which is the most complete number. Thus, the symbol of *homkar* which is composed of the symbols of Ahiér and Awar indicates the most complete form of existence; unity, balance, stability, and peace." Here, Nakamura not only explains this symbol in terms of the Ahiér-Awal binary relationship whereby one needs the other to exist, but also implies that only when the Ahiér and Awal unite, harmony and peace come into the community of Cham Ahiér and Cham Awal as a whole.[144]
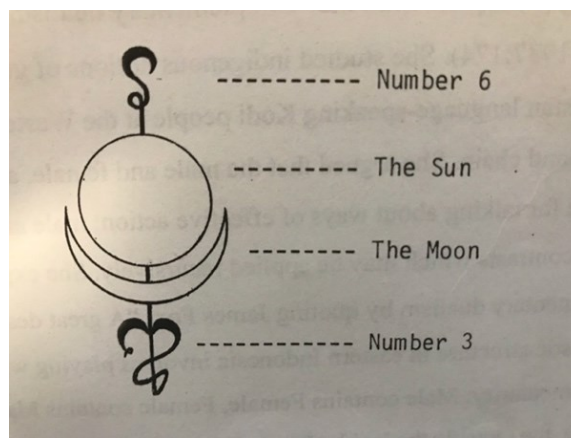


Fig. 23. The symbol *homkar* (Nakamura 1999: 132).

One can certainly wonder as to when the symbol *homkar* first came into existence: Was it, in particular, during the same period when king Po Romé is supposed to have created the cosmological symbolic dualism of Ahiér-Awal to reconcile the two groups of Cham? And also, did the *homkar* symbol carry the same meaning from its origin to the present time? Looking into the history and meaning of *homkar*, there are explanations of two kinds. The first one is offered by Cham intellectuals who follow the conjecture of Cham scholar Thiên Sanh Cảnh, who proposed in the 1960s that the *homkar* is a symbol that represents Ahiér-Awal dualism and binary opposition. To them, the circle on the top of the *homkar* represents the Sun marked with number 9, while the crescent at the bottom represents the Moon marked with number three. Six plus three equals to nine and that number represents "humans." As such, the *homkar*

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[144] Nakamura (1999: 132). For more on *homkar*, see also Thành Phần (2010: 5-7).

represents the universe and the humans. Cham Awal intellectuals, however, propose a slightly different schema in which the number six represents Po Awluah (Allah) and the Awal community, while number three represents the Cham Ahiér. Thus, both contemporary Cham Ahiér and Cham Awal intellectuals share a common understanding that emphasizes the binary cosmological dualism reflected in the structure of their own society.

The second explanation is proposed by Po Dharma (2013) who suggests that *homkar* originates from *omkara* or *Om/AUM* in Sanskrit and has the same meaning as the sacred syllable of Hinduism *Om* (or *Aum*) (fig. 24). Following Po Dharma, Sakaya (2013) claims that the earliest extant *homkar* with the syllable Om in Cham texts appeared in the Võ Cạnh inscription (C. 40) of the 2nd century.[145] He asserts that one can see this symbol in numerous ancient Cham inscriptions, manuscripts and talismans, as well as on the temples of Po Romé and Po Klaong Girai, though he acknowledged that there are no extant Cham texts that could explain the meaning of the *homkar*.[146] As for me, I have seen the symbol *homkar* on Cham manuscripts and talismans (earliest date could be around the 19th century) but not on Cham medieval inscriptions nor ancient brick temples. Interestingly, while working on an article on Cham medieval Buddhist votive tablets, I found a Thai Buddhist votive tablet with an engraving on the back showing a symbol that looked almost the same as the Cham *homkar*.[147] Having suggested that *homkar* originates from *Om*, Po Dharma and Sakaya reaffirm not only its sacredness but also its connection to ancient "Indianized" Champa; however, they did not explain how it came to symbolize the Ahiér-Awal dualism. When I interviewed Cham Ahiér

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[145] There is an on-going debate over the date of this earliest Cham Sanskrit inscription. Some Cham intellectuals tend to push its date to the 2nd century CE and suggest that it coincides with the beginning of Champa history, However, the first scholar who published this inscription, Abel Bergaigne (1893) dated it to the 3rd century CE while Zakharov (2010) dated it to the late 4th - early 5th century CE.

[146] http://tagalau.com/homkar-cham-tu-nguon-goc-den-thuc-tai-sakaya/

[147] https://www.goldentriangleantiques.com/thai-terracotta-buddhist-votive-tablet/. Thai Buddhist votive tablets are usually seen as amulets for protection from evil that Buddhists typically wear as necklaces. Interestingly, the Cham *homkar* symbol is also used as amulet, more specifically, as the *most* powerful and popular of all Cham amulets. One can wonder if the modern Cham *homkar* has any connection with this Thai Buddhist symbol. But it is certain that among the Thai there is no such concept as Ahiér-Awal dualism as presumably represented by the *homkar*.

priests and asked them about the meaning of the *homkar,* most of them answered that it is a very powerful symbol without providing any further explanations. Perhaps the ambiguity of this symbol enhances its perceived power. What I want to suggest at this point is that the *homkar* most probably is not a medieval symbol developed from the Indian syllable *Aum/Om.* If we consider what Cham intellectuals suggest, i.e., that the Ahiér-Awal dualism was created during the reign of King Po Romé in the 17th century, then perhaps it is possible that the *homkar* could have been adopted and interpreted as the symbol of this dualism around this time period or slightly later.
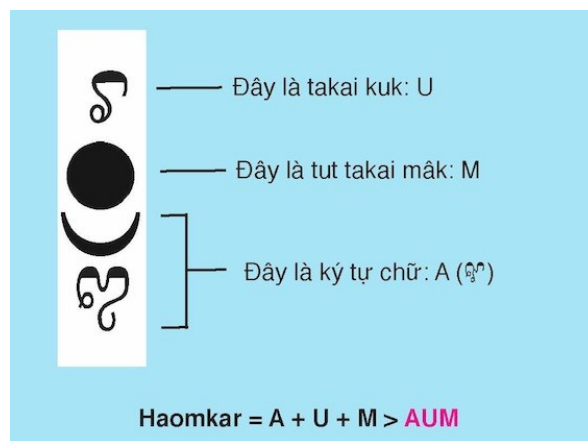


Fig. 24. The symbol *homkar* (with explanations of Po Dharma[148]).

Nowadays when visiting villages of both Cham communities in Bình Thuận and Ninh Thuận provinces, one can see the symbol of *homkar* everywhere: it is placed on top of the gates and doors of recently built mosques, local shrines, *kut* cemeteries, communal houses, on covers of recently published books, calendars, and even as the logo for a Cham website;[149] however, it cannot be found on any old temples, even on the Po Romé temple  (of the 16th-17th centuries) where the Cham worship the deified king Po Romé credited with creation of the Ahiér-Awal concept (figs. 25, 26, 27 and 28). But the symbol continues to be placed on new religious sites

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[148]http://champaka.info/index.php/quandiem/quandiemtinnguong/967-chinhs
[149] See for instance, the symbol *homkar* is employed prominently on the logo of one of the most important websites on Cham studies: https://chamstudies.net/.

and is used freely for different reasons and purposes because it works well to represent the group to others and to its members.

Despite the way in which Cham intellectuals promote the dualist notion of Ahiér-Awal and point to the symbol *homkar* as proof of the unification and the implied religious identity of the South-Central Cham as a whole,[150] Cham villagers do not refer to themselves as "Cham Ahiér," instead, they would say they are "Cham *Cuh*", that is, Cham who practice funeral cremation, to identify themselves in contrast to Cham who practice funeral burial, the Cham Awal.[151] In fact, while conducting my field studies, I found numerous differences between the Cham Ahiér and Cham Awal.

Cham Ahiér and Cham Awal have lived separately for centuries, in their own villages with different societal organization; this was so because of differences in religious practices and taboos with regard to such issues as religious rituals and ceremonies, the pantheon of deities, and dietary restrictions. In fact, since the Ahiér and Awal do not live in the same villages but are isolated one from another, they do not really know much about each other's customs and traditions. This is especially so for old people and women who do not travel or communicate as much as young people who have more opportunities to interact in schools or universities. In addition, those Cham Awal who know about the Ahiér's religious practices often criticize Ahiér rituals as being too complicated; in particular, the funeral rituals are seen as unsanitary and dirty.[152] Cham Awal see themselves as more advanced and progressive in terms of having relatively simple religious practices and ritual ceremonies.

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[150] Cham intellectual Inrasara even goes further and suggests the term "Ahiér-Awal religion" when talking about the religious activities of the two Cham communities; he does so because he believes that they are manifested in the concept of Ahiér-Awal cosmological dualism. He also suggests that this dualist concept contributes to the survival of his community. To him, it is necessary for the two Cham communities to be together to consolidate the Cham population as they are already small in number. See http://inrasara.com/2021/04/04/cau-chuyen-cham-15-ton-giao-Ahiér-awal-cac-yeu-to-quyet-dinh-song-con/.

[151] See chapter 4 of the present work for a further discussion of the term "Cham *Cuh*" and detail discussion of their funeral cremation.

[152] Cham Ahiér priests feel rather intimidated by the way in which Cham Awal talk about their cremation funerals; they asked me whether I share the same view when I was observing their cremation funeral. They were quite surprised to see that I did not mind at all to eat blessed food on the cremation ground with them.

Furthermore, intermarriage between Ahiér and Awal was strongly discouraged and seen as taboo. It is only recently that this has become more flexible though it remains rare.[153] Following customary law, the Cham Ahiér are advised to marry among themselves and if somebody marries a Cham Awal, the spouse will neither receive a regular funeral nor be able to join the world of ancestors (see chapter 4 for a discussion of "good death" and "bad death"). The Cham Ahiér perform their own set of rituals at temples while the Cham Awal perform their devotional practices in mosques. Each community has their own set of religious leaders and priests and has a different place of worship.



Fig. 25. Cham Ahiér community house, Bình Thuận province.

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[153] Inrasara mentions that until 2011 the intermarriage rate between the two groups was very low, and there were only three intermarried couples in Mỹ Nghiệp village (where Cham Ahiér live) and Văn Lâm village (where Cham Awal live), while these two villages are only 3 km far from one another. Phan Quốc Anh (2006: 360-361) mentions that most of the intermarriages are condemned by the Cham society. Many couples had to leave the villages to stay together, and some even committed suicide in the hope of being together in the afterlife.

Fig. 26. Po Inâ Nâgar shrine in Hữu Đức village, Ninh Thuận province.



Fig. 27. Cham Awal mosque Bình Thắng, Bình Thuận province.

Fig. 28. *Kut* cemetary, Bình Thuận province.

## 2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I examined the complexity of Cham identity through the lenses of two interrelated components of Cham identity: ethnic identity and religious identity. I approached this by situating the development of each of these forms of identity within its own history and development. One version of Cham ethnic identity was imposed by the Vietnamese government, although Cham identity as a concept (as a term in the "vocabulary of ethnicity") originally arose from studies by French colonial scholars. Since the reunification, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam has been developing an image of a unified Vietnam populated by a united populace of different ethnic groups, living in harmony with one another. Furthermore, in terms of Cham religious identity, the government follows the French categorization of "Cham Brahmanistes" and used the term "Chăm Bàlamôn" for one of the two main groups of the Cham in South-Central Vietnam. However, over the last two decades, native Cham scholars and intellectuals have challenged the use of the term "Chăm Bàlamôn" in Vietnamese publications, claiming that they were foreign terms applied by outsiders, and suggesting they be replaced by

the terms "Ahiér" and "*akaphiér*" They argue that these were the original terms that South Central Cham had used to identify *themselves* and ignore the fact that these terms had actually originated from Arabic and not the Cham language. Thus, it is interesting to see how a term such as "*akaphiér*" ("non-believer") in Arabic was re-appropriated by native Cham scholars and intellectuals. In addition, they are the leading force in promoting the Ahiér-Awal dualism; one can suggest that it was part of an effort to harmonize the relationship between the two Cham groups. The Ahiér-Awal symbolic cosmological dualism is nowadays used by the Cham intellectuals as the symbol of religious identity of South-Central Cham as a whole. They claim that Ahiér and Awal coexisted on the grounds of the symbolic dualism of Ahiér-Awal and thus possessed a singular religious identity embedded in this dualism. In fact, they mobilized this dualism enthusiastically and exhibited this "unique" (their word) Ahiér-Awal symbolic dualism of "South-Central Chamness" as representing their singular religious identity, the one that draws its strength from the concept of unity of complementary forces and is based on numerological symbolism. They laid special stress upon the Ahiér-Awal dualism to show that Cham religious beliefs are original, authentic, and traditional. They point to the symbol *homkar* as the manifestation and proof of the Ahiér-Awal dualist concept.

The Ahiér-Awal symbolic dualism might have its origin in the Po Romé period of the 17th century, and, as Cham intellectuals suggest, it may have been a tool designed to solve religious disputes between Cham Ahiér and Cham Awal communities. Several French colonial scholars employed the terms "Ahiér" and "Awal" and acquired some general ideas about the Ahiér-Awal symbolic dualism in the late 19th to early 20th centuries when they visited Cham villages. My examination of secondary sources shows that scholarship in all languages from the 1940s to the 1980s largely ignored this dualist concept, and it started emerging into Cham scholarly use and drawing scholarly attention only since the 1990s.

I conjecture that Cham intellectuals did realize that the symbolic dualism is useful in promoting the solidarity of the two Cham groups, and that by having a common religious ideology and group identity they could continue to resist cultural and religious assimilation of Vietnamese state. Moreover, their attempt to promote the uniqueness of "South-Central Chamness" through Ahiér-Awal dualism was ultimately a response to the government's softening of its restrictions over people's cultural and religious activities. It was perhaps a response as well to the government's implementation of the policy of preservation of ethnic minorities' cultures and identities ("*giữ gìn văn hoá bản sắc dân tộc thiểu số*") that followed the government's policy of economic reforms (Đổi Mới) of 1986. It is thus important to approach this Ahiér-Awal symbolic dualism as a recent phenomenon with its own purpose and agenda.

Consequently, while this chapter focuses primarily on the discussion of Cham identity fostered by different political actors and Cham intellectuals, it also provides information about the background and the nature of contemporary Cham Ahiér religion and rituals as a key to Cham identity. By examining the rituals of the Cham Ahiér in the following chapters, I will demonstrate how Cham Ahiér villagers display their identity through the rituals that they practice and perform, and how the vocabulary they use for describing this differs from that of Cham intellectuals.

## Chapter 3: Cham Ahiér population: Humans, Gods, Ancestors, Ghosts, and Demons

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the Cham Ahiér community, particularly its "extended population." By "extended population" I mean the theological, cosmological and even ontological constructs including both the human population of the community as well as its non-human, supernatural part. I will also explain the key components of Cham Ahiér society with particular focus on Cham Ahiér priests as well as their concept of divinity, their pantheon of gods together with their views on ancestors, ghosts, and demons. This chapter is written to provide the necessary background for the next three chapters on Cham Ahiér rituals. In this chapter, I pay special attention to the structure of the priesthood and to the people who conduct the rituals and serve as intermediaries between humans and divinities. The purpose of exploring the Cham Ahiér priesthood is to understand who they are, what their responsibilities are, what makes them recognizable to external observers, how they become priests, why they are entrusted with certain tasks, what different types of priests exist and how they relate to, or are regarded by, the rest of Cham society. In short, the focus of the first part of this chapter is to introduce to the reader all the categories of Cham priests so that in the next three chapters I can focus directly on a variety of rituals that those priests perform. In the second part of this chapter, I explore Cham Ahiér's concept of divinity and discuss the Cham pantheon of gods and goddesses, such as the mother goddess Po Inâ Nâgar, deified kings (*yang patao*), "new deities" (*yang barau*) and "old deities" (*yang klak*), "temple deities" (*yang bimong*), ancestors (*muk kei*), as well as ghosts (*bhut*) and demons (*jin, abileh*).

This chapter is mainly based on information I gathered through structured interviews and unstructured conversations with Cham intellectuals, priests, and ordinary villagers. In addition, I also consulted secondary sources published in Vietnamese by Vietnamese

researchers, native Cham scholars and intellectuals. Through my research on the Cham Ahiér priest system, I found that while Cham elites were using such terms as "folk priests" to categorize or to group together certain priests, ordinary villagers I talked to were neither aware of these categories nor concerned with the questions about the groups to which specific priests belonged. The same can be said about such terms as "new deities" or "old deities;" these are the categories used by Cham intellectuals and the priests to discuss various Cham Ahiér gods, but ordinary Cham villagers are neither familiar with those terms nor do they know which gods belong to which categories. Many villagers do not even remember or know the names of gods of their large pantheon. Thus, I argue that the business of categorization is and, most likely always was, the concern of the Cham intellectuals and it is important to recognize that among the Cham there are different perspectives and means of understanding their own religious tradition. It is as if there are two levels of discourse or two different discourses at play portraying the Cham pantheon differently and reflecting the social structure of Cham Ahiér community.

## 3.2 Cham Ahiér Population and Societal Organization

According to statistical data collected by the state in 2019 (the state takes a census every ten years), the total Cham population in Vietnam was about 178,948 people, concentrated mostly in Ninh Thuận (67,517 people) and in Bình Thuận (39,557 people).[154] The total Cham Ahiér population living in Ninh Thuận province was about 38,000; they lived mostly in fifteen villages: Hậu Sanh, Hiếu Thiện, Vụ Bổn, Mỹ Nghiệp, Chung Mỹ, Hữu Đức, Như Bình, Bầu Trúc, Hiếu Lễ, Chắt Thường, Hoài Trung, Phước Đồng, Thành Ý, and Bĩnh Nghĩa (Phan Quốc Anh 2006: 60-65). In Bình Thuận province, there were about 18,000 Cham Ahiér who lived mainly in the twenty villages of Lạc Trị, Cao Hậu, Phú Điền, Tuy Tịnh, Bình Tiến, Bình Đức,

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[154] Statistical Yearbook of Vietnam 2019: https://www.gso.gov.vn/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Ket-qua-toan-bo-Tong-dieu-tra-dan-so-va-nha-o-2019.pdf

Bình Hiểu, Tịnh Mỹ, Trí Thái, Mai Lãnh, An Lạc, Ma Lâm 3, Lâm Thuận, Hiệp Nghĩa, and Hiệp Hoà (Lâm 2013: 76). According to the native Cham scholar Thành Phần (2010), each village (*palei*) is self-governed, that is, each village usually has six administrative units: the administration properly speaking, the council of Cham elders, the council of clans, the council of Cham Ahiér *basaih* priests (*halau janâng* Ahiér), the council of Rija priests (*hahlau janâng* Rija), and, lastly, the council of Gru Urang priests (*halau janâng* Gru Urang). This kind of village organization was also explained to me by Cham intellectuals, but they emphasized that this six-fold structure is mainly found in relatively big villages with large population.

In the administration unit, there is a "village chief" who is elected to this position by the villagers. The village chief's role is to serve as an intermediary between the government and the villagers; one of his major functions is to transmit news to his fellow villagers regarding government policies. He also has to inform the villagers about religious activities in the village such as the dates for certain rituals, and he mobilizes villagers to contribute financially to carry out public rituals. Each village also has an accountant who takes care of the financial transactions related to activities going on in the village, such as ritual expenses. The accountant of the village can be a woman, but the village chief is always male.

Each Cham village has a council of the elders that is run by knowledgeable people who are mostly men. They are Cham intellectuals who are supposed to know the culture and traditions well and their overall role is to preserve Cham customs and language. Young people can consult these people for advice when they do not know how perform certain activities in accordance with tradition. However, if a community member commits an offense and disregards the traditions and customs, the elders of the council can apply a certain kind of punishment to the guilty person, following the Cham customary law.[155] In some cases, when the elders cannot solve a problem, they will report to the local government to request an advice

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[155] See Sử Văn Ngọc and Sử Thị Gia Trang (2012) for details of Cham customary law.

concerning the right measure to be applied. In general, the Cham highly respect their elders and usually see them as experts in Cham culture who are therefore responsible for preserving and protecting it. Another important duty they are responsible for is to write official invitation letters to the government and villagers when particular events or rituals are supposed to take place in their village. They usually discuss the events with the priests and village chief regarding the dates and the scale and then assist them to carry out rituals in the appropriate manner.

In each village there are numerous clans (*gep patina*), their numbers range from 6 to 22 depending on the size of the village. Each clan is headed by a male clan chief (*akaok gep*) who takes care of the clan's well-being. Several Cham mentioned to me that in the past, the role of the clan chief used to be held by women but nowadays the clan chefs are always men; my informants did not remember when this role was transferred to men.[156] It is the responsibility of the clan chief to suggest to the members of his clan the dates when certain rituals (such as Puis, Payak, Rija Harei, Rija Dayep, Rija Praong, and Rija Nagar) should be conducted for the benefit of the whole clan. Some of those rituals are not performed regularly unless there are unfortunate events such as sickness or death happening to numerous clan members. In that case, the clan chief needs to take appropriate measures. Despite having a male clan chief and a male village chief, as well as the council of the elders in which the majority of members are male, all the Cham whom I spoke with maintained that Cham society is matrilineal because its members trace their kinship through their mothers' lineages. Each clan includes people from the same matrilineal lineage, and they worship the same clan lineage ancestors through *ciét atau*. *Ciét atau* is a bamboo basket containing symbolic costumes of ancestors; it is always

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[156] I think this might have something to do with being influenced by Vietnamese patriarchal society. This makes me think of my discussion of this subject when my Cham informants explained to me that they did not have the tradition of giving family names to their children; they stated that it was only starting from Minh Mạng reign period (more specifically, from the 1830s) that the Vietnamese king requested the Cham to have family names. Nowadays, I noticed that Cham are giving fathers' (and not mothers') family names to all of their children, despite their own claim that Cham society is matrilineal.

kept by Muk Rija, a female ritualist and representative of the clan. Also, each clan has their own matrilineal lineage cemetery (*kut*) for their members and that is how they remember their ancestors and relatives and trace their genealogies. However, they do not create written or oral genealogies with the full names of members of the clan recorded for generations as the Vietnamese do. Usually, daughters stay with their parents while sons move to their wife's house once they get married. Thus, Cham society is also matrilocal. In Cham Ahiér society, daughters are preferable because they continue the family lineage, and it is the youngest daughter who inherits the family fortune.

Another important village organization is the council of Cham Ahiér priests (Hahlau Janâng Ahiér) who are also called *basaih* priests.[157] They are responsible for performing rituals at temples and rituals for the dead. The *basaih* priests are strictly male; each priest must have a wife before he can study to join the *basaih* system. There is a hierarchy within the community of the *basaih* priests and the highest rank *basaih* priest is called Po Adhia. However, not all villages can have a Po Adhia, so a single priest of this kind may serve several villages. Po Adhia is the one who makes decisions concerning the dates for temple rituals and funeral rituals. In Ninh Thuận province, there are only three Po Adhia priests in total to supervise the religious activities at temples (*bimong*) as well as in all the villages; in Bình Thuận province there are also only three Po Adhia priests.

The fifth organization in village is the council of Rija priests (Hahlau Janâng Rija). The Hahlau Janâng Rija includes both male and female priests such as Ong Maduen, Ong Ka-ing, Muk Rija, Ong Kadhar, and Muk Pajau. While the first three priests are responsible for Rija rituals, the last two are in charge of temple rituals, the clan rituals Puis and Payak as well as *kut* cemetery entry rituals. To Vietnamese speakers, the term "Ong" sounds similar to the

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[157] The *basaih* priests are sometimes called *paséh*. *Basaih* is the École Française d'Extrême-Orient form of transliteration while *paséh* is a form of local transliteration of the same term.

Vietnamese term "*Ông*" meaning "mister" and the Cham term indicates that the person called "Ong" is a male ritualist. The term "Muk" for female ritualist sounds very similar to the Vietnamese term *Mụ* often used in central Vietnam indicating a female person. I wonder if this is a mere coincidence or the Cham indeed adopted the Vietnamese terms for convenience since in daily conversation the Cham use many Vietnamese terms when speaking among themselves. While the position of the *basaih* priests is often passed down from father to son, in the Hahlau Janâng Rija system, these positions are often passed down not only from father to son but also from mother to daughter.

The last organization in village is the council of Gru Urang priests (Halau Janâng Gru Urang) who are male specialists for rituals performed in individual homes for health protection, or for treating illness that is believed to be caused by ghosts or demons. Some Cham still believe that these priests can perform magic to ward off evil spirits and cleanse the sick body. However, because the majority of Cham tend to go to local governmental hospitals the demand for this kind of rituals is decreasing. When conducting my fieldwork in Bình Thuận province I met one pregnant lady who requested the service of such a specialist to take care of her during her pregnancy and she refused to go to the hospital to have regular check-ups. Unfortunately, she ended up losing her child at a very late stage during her pregnancy and was criticized by many of her Cham friends for believing in such "outdated" and "unscientific" service (these were the very terms used by her community members). This example shows how changed are the views of the present-day Cham concerning such kinds of "magical" treatment. In this thesis, I briefly introduce Gru Urang councils to show that they still exist in Cham communities, but I will not focus on them because most of the rituals that I am going to discuss in the next few chapters are not related to them.

It is necessary to mention that the structure and functions of six administrative units in Cham village described in this part were explained to me by Cham intellectuals. In writing this

part, I also consulted the publication authored by native Cham scholar Thành Phần (2010). This ideal village model containing all the six administrative units can be seen in some populated villages but not all villages have enough of various types of priests and thus it is normal, for instance, to see one Po Adhia priest working for several villages. In addition, ordinary villagers do not necessarily see the layout or structure of a village in such an organized way, with different units and various categories. To many villagers all the priests are the same in that they are seen as just members of a single group, and the villagers are unaware that each priest has a different role to play when performing rituals. The villagers do not necessarily know who belongs to which category, but what they know from their experience is which individual performs which rituals so that they can ask the appropriate priests for the services they need. In short, while Cham intellectuals provide their perspective regarding the constitution of a village with a clear-cut grouping and categorization of village organization, ordinary villagers are mostly unaware of or do not care much about the categorization of the priests and rituals, even though they may feel that it is important to live their lives following the practices and habits inherited from their parents, grandparents, and relatives.

### 3.3 Cham Ahiér Social Classes

There are three social classes in Cham Ahiér society: priests (*hahlau janâng* or *aw kaok*), royals (*gep patao*), and villagers (*gihéh* or *aw juk*). The priests are in charge of performing all types of private and public rituals on the behalf of Cham villagers. Cham villagers do not perform rituals by themselves no matter if the rituals are small or big; it is the role of the priests whose livelihood is based upon providing such services to villagers. In turn, villagers have to contribute some money to the priests, to pay for their labour to perform the rituals because that is the main source of income for the priests. Even though Cham villagers respect the priests, this does not mean that they necessarily see the priests as having a higher

position, authority and knowledge compared to Cham intellectuals. In fact, many of the Cham intellectuals whom I spoke with criticized Cham priests for not being willing to learn the Cham language and thus not being able to read old Cham religious texts but instead only memorizing hymns just for the purpose of performing rituals.

Regarding Cham royals, according to the Cham intellectuals whom I met in Bình Thuận province, the lineage of Cham royalty continues until today and their descendants live mainly in Bắc Bình of Bình Thuận province. They trace their lineage to king Pô Klong Mơhnai and queen Pô Pia Som of the 17th century. In 2015, Mr. Lâm Tấn Bình, the director of Cham's Cultural Exhibition Center in Bình Thuận brought me to visit the house of the princess Nguyễn Thị Thềm who donated for the permanent exhibition some objects that belonged to the Cham royal family, such as the crown, coats, and swords. It was there that I met her adopted daughter Nguyễn Thị Đào and her husband Lư Thái Thuổi (fig. 29). They inherited the house when Nguyễn Thị Thềm passed away and took responsibility for the treasures left by the royal family to safeguard them. They have nine children and most of the children live in the same village except for one of the sons who moved to Cambodia. Aside from the youngest son of Nguyễn Thị Đào who currently works at Bình Thuận Cham's Cultural Exhibition Center as an administrative officer, the other children have rather diversified jobs not related to Cham history: among them there are a pesticide salesman, a rice paper saleswoman, a daycare educator, and a gas station attendant. They do not receive any special treatment from the government and from their own community and live in rather modest conditions. When I asked Cham villagers in Ninh Thuận province if they knew anything about the Cham royal family in Bình Thuận, many of them responded that they did not know that there is still a Cham royal lineage and did not show any kind of curiosity to know more.

Fig. 29. Nguyễn Thị Đào and her husband Lư Thái Thuổi with the author of this thesis at their residance in Bình Thuận province (Photo courtesy of Lâm Tấn Bình).

As for Cham villagers, they can be subdivided into two main categories: (1) Cham peasants/ordinary villagers and (2) Cham intellectuals or native Cham scholars. In this thesis, I identify as "Cham intellectuals" those among the Cham who can read, write, and speak Cham and have concerns about preserving and promoting Cham culture and religion. The majority of them are male; a certain number of them have published works about their culture and traditions (written in Vietnamese). Within this group of intellectuals there are some male Cham who obtained Master and Ph.D. degrees and became professors and researchers in various universities and research institutions in Vietnam; I refer to them as "native Cham scholars."

They are the ones who publish most often about Cham culture and traditions and their work often provides not only descriptions but also analysis of the data presented.

One can wonder whether the contemporary society of the Cham Ahiér has any traces of the Indian-style caste system since medieval Champa was supposedly "Indianized," as discussed in Chapter 1. During my fieldwork in Bình Thuận and Ninh Thuận provinces, I did not see any element of the caste system existing in the present-day Cham society. However, Phan Quốc Anh (2006: 31) suggested that traces of the caste system exist in Cham Ahiér society; this claim was based on his study of the way in which their funeral rituals are performed. He argues, for instance, that a family's status is directly related to the number of *basaih* priests performing funeral rituals for the family. According to him, families of a higher caste may be identified by the presence of four *basaih* priests at the funeral, whereas families of a lower caste may be identified by the presence of only one priest. To me this example is not sufficient to claim that the caste system exists in Cham Ahiér society, if indeed it ever did; the most basic counterargument is that all the Cham that I talked to maintain that people are born equal and everyone has the same opportunity to study or to work in any place that he or she wants. Interestingly, when I ask about the caste system, some Cham intellectuals simply responded that it still exists, and they suggested that I read Phan (2006) as if it was a fully reliable source of information. The reaction was similar when I asked some Cham intellectuals to name for me some of their gods; instead of giving me the names of gods by themselves, they suggested that I should read Sakaya's book in which the author provided a long and presumably full list of names. This made me think about the ways in which knowledge of their past and their traditions circulates and is transmitted and appropriated by the Cham intellectuals while the majority of ordinary villagers do not know about those sources. In any case, to further support his argument about the caste system, Phan (2006) points to the Cham inscription of 1088 attributed to King Jaya Indravarman found in Mỹ Sơn sanctuary; it mentions the Indian

caste system of Brahmins, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, and Śudras. Phan uses this inscription as the proof of his claim that contemporary Cham has continued to maintain the caste system. However, I believe that taking information from a medieval inscription and applying it to the contemporary society is not convincing enough; in fact, it remains unknown whether the system mentioned in the inscription was ever actually implemented in medieval Champa, let alone continued until the present time. According to my observation of contemporary Cham society and its religious practices, there is no such thing as an "Indian-style" caste system in Cham society but there are three social classes in Cham Ahiér society and people do generally respect the priests; however, I found that people pay even higher respect and admiration to the intellectuals. I noticed that those Cham who work for the government and have high positions as well as those who work for universities as professors and hold Master or PhD degrees have the highest respect of Cham villagers.

## 3.4 Cham Ahiér Priests

The language that I used to communicate with the Cham was Vietnamese and since most of the publications in recent decades authored by Cham intellectuals are also written in Vietnamese, it is thus necessary to introduce at least some of the Vietnamese terms that they use to describe and categorize their priests. In his works, the native Cham scholar Sakaya (2008, 2014) uses the Vietnamese term *tu sĩ* to describe the *basaih* priests (*halau janâng* Ahiér). However, he did not explain the meaning of this or the reason why he uses this term *tu sĩ*. Some Cham intellectuals who I talked to also use this term. *Tu sĩ* in Vietnamese (修士 in Han-Nom, literally "male individual performing self-perfection" or "a cultured scholar") means "monk," pointing to the idea that the *basaih* priests belong to a religious system or a school with hierarchy and ordination. And indeed, there is a hierarchy within the community of *basaih* priests, and they have to go through ordination rituals to become *basaih*. Another Vietnamese

term that I heard the Cham use more often when referring to the *basaih* priests is *chức sắc* (dignitary); this term is also used by the native Cham scholar Thành Phần in his publication (2014). As for the other group of Cham Ahiér priests, namely, the Rija priests (*hahlau janâng* Rija), Sakaya (2008, 2014) and Cham intellectuals use the Vietnamese term *thầy cúng dân gian* ("folk master," "folk ritualist") and *chức sắc dân gian* ("folk dignitary") to refer to the priests in this group. Since they use the Vietnamese term *dân gian* (folk)*,* my initial understanding was that this group of priests must oversee folk rituals. Also, since they use the Cham term *hahlau janâng* Rija to refer to the priests who are in charge of Rija rituals, I thus conjectured that they equate Rija rituals with folk rituals.

In this thesis, I will use the term "priest" for both groups of priests, rather than "monk" (*tu sĩ*) or master (*thầy cúng*). In my opinion, the term "monk" might be confusing as it is often used to refer to Buddhist and Christian monks, while the term "master" seems to underline the role that these "folk" priests play in Cham ritual. I argue that the Vietnamese term *dân gian* ("folk") that Cham intellectuals use to categorize their priests is misleading because, according to my fieldwork observations, "folk" priests perform a variety of rituals, from family and clan rituals to villages and temple rituals. "Folk" priests perform rituals alongside and in close collaboration with *basaih* priests in all the temple rituals, as we will see in the next chapter when examining Cham Ahiér temple rituals. No temple ritual can take place without the participation of both groups of priests. Furthermore, the term "folk" priests might misleadingly suggest that these priests can only perform "folk" rituals. To me, it is very hard to determine what Cham "folk" rituals are and how they differ from "non-folk" rituals, especially given that the "folk" priests perform their rituals alongside the *basaih* priests in all the temple rituals.

Interestingly, I found that while Cham intellectuals focus on grouping, categorizing, and labeling different priests, ordinary Cham villagers regard all the priests to be the same under the Cham term *halau janâng* (dignitaries). To them, there are neither "folk" masters nor

"folk" rituals; instead, each priest has a role to play and a particular expertise to exercise in order to perform the rituals correctly and successfully. Contrary to some Cham intellectuals' efforts in categorizing the priests into two different groups of *halau janâng* Ahiér (*tu sĩ* Ahiér) and *hahlau janâng* Rija (*thầy cúng dân gian* Rija), both belong to the same official organization called "Council of Cham Brahmanist Dignitaries" (Viet: Hội Đồng Chức Sắc Chăm Bàlamôn). This Council has been recognized by the government since its establishment in 2012. This means that all Cham Ahiér priests are under the same category of "Cham Brahmanist dignitaries" (even though native Cham scholars suggested to replace the term "Cham Brahmanist" or "Chăm Bàlamôn" with "Cham Ahiér"). This chapter will not focus on the structures and policies of this Council; this information is provided only to point out the complexity of categorization, the difficulties related to the use of Vietnamese language for the classification of the priests, and the different perspectives maintained by Cham intellectuals and ordinary Cham villagers on this issue.

Regarding the priests, a broad and generally accepted definition one might use is that they are the principal servants of the deities and that they therefore have the primary responsibility for performing acts of both public and private worship. They act as the intermediaries between the human world and the other worlds. However, there are no Cham temple priests who reside in the temple complexes permanently to serve the deities on a daily basis as it is often the case in Hindu temples in India or in Vietnamese Buddhist temples. In fact, there is no concept of "temple priests" in contemporary Cham religious practices. There is a priest called Ong Camânei, who is a temple guard responsible for protecting the temple and its sacred objects, as well as for keeping the costumes of the deities. He does not perform rituals for the resident deities but only assists the *basaih* priests and other non-*basaih* priests such as Ong Kadhar and Muk Pajau during specific annual rituals at the temples, such as Katé and Chabur.

Since Cham priests neither stay at the temples nor serve the deities regularly, their main work is performing rituals for villagers at the village level, which is also the main source of their income. Many priests told me that they do not wish their children to pursue the priesthood path because such a profession cannot support the family financially and they would like their children to get a good job with good position in society. Indeed, many young Cham that I had conversations with prefer to study in a university and after that to get an office job in a big city rather than staying in their villages to become priests. What would bring greater respect to the family of a priest in the Cham community would be to obtain such a job rather than following in the footsteps of the child's father or mother to become a priest or a priestess. The lack of interest in following this profession in the current young generation causes concern among the older priests that there might not be enough priests to perform rituals on a regular basis in the future. What makes this situation even more complicated is that in Cham culture the priests transmit their knowledge of ritual performance techniques and religious texts only to their own sons and daughters. Cham Ahiér religious manuscripts (*agal bac*) that contain songs/hymns to the gods (*dam nây yang)* are the priest's property, they are considered sacred, and the priests do not share them with other villagers. *Agal bac* refers to palm-leaf manuscripts written in Akhar Thrah script and used by *basaih* priests. The Vietnamese term that Cham intellectuals use to refer to *agal bac* is *kinh luật Bàlamôn giáo* (literally meaning "Brahmanist *sutras*"). The fact that the term *sutra* is used reveals an emphasis on the importance of *agal bac*. Some of the main themes mentioned in the *agal bac* are the creation of the Universe and the formation of the Earth and humans, and religious beliefs that the Cham are supposed to know, as well as taboos and social rules that the Cham should follow, as well as different amulets that can be used by *basaih* priests to help people. The *basaih* priests chant verses from the *agal bac* on such occasions as ordination ritual ceremonies (*patruh kanal tapah*, *patruh kanal liah puah*) for *basaih* priests, village rituals to neutralize bad omens (*kamruai pakap*), purification rituals

of the land (*balih*), purification rituals for the *basaih* priest (*tuh aia buh salih ka basaih*), rituals for opening god's eyes (*pakak mâta yang*), and *kut* entry ceremonies. Another kind of sacred texts are called *dam nây yang* (Viet: *thánh ca*), which are songs or hymns praising the merits of various deified kings and deities. Those that are sung by Ong Kadhar at temple rituals such as Yuer Yang, Katé, Cambur and at clan rituals such as Puis and Payak for deified kings and "old deities" are chanted in the Cham language while the ones sung by Ong Maduen for "new deities" at Rija rituals are in Malay language. The priest of all categories must use the manuscripts and/or sacred songs that correspond to the type of ritual performed.

### 3.4.1 Cham Ahiér *basaih* priests

Cham Ahiér *basaih* priests perform only rituals for their own communities and not any others. With respect to the *basaih* priest lineage, traditionally only those who are born into priests' families can become priests. *Basaih* priests are strictly male. In most cases, a son of a priest receives training from his father, and thus the priesthood is passed down hereditarily only in the male line. Recently, the path toward priesthood has become more flexible as the number of people who wanted to follow in their fathers' footsteps has decreased. Although people who do not belong to the priestly lineage normally cannot become priests, there are special cases in which people who, possessed by certain divinities known to have extraordinary qualities, virtues, wisdom, and skills, might have been allowed to join the *basaih* priesthood. Of course, they are required to go through a period of training with specifically assigned teachers.

There are several conditions, requirements, and strict rules that people have to follow in order to join the priesthood. The first requirement for a man to become an Ahiér *basaih* priest is to have a wife. Then he must go through ordination ceremonies as well as other purification rituals for the body and the mind. Another absolute requirement is that all of them

need to be physically fit, and not handicapped. Also, they need to study the Cham script and memorize ritual manuscripts. Once they reached the status of *basaih* priest, they have to observe strict dietary rules which exclude meat of mammals (in particular, beef, deer, rabbit meat), certain fish (eel, catfish), frogs, squashes, seeded bananas, and figs. They cannot take showers nor sleep with their wife on certain days. Some Cham villagers also mentioned that *basaih* priests are neither allowed to participate in wedding ceremonies, clan rituals (Puis, Payak, Rija) nor visit peoples' houses informally because they can carry certain "impurities" caused by their performance of funeral rites, considered to be a source of inauspiciousness.

*Basaih* priests have to follow a dress code. An initial indicator that helps one to recognize *basaih* priests is their all-white traditional clothing with a white turban as covering for the head. Red tassels are sewn onto their turbans and at the lower edge of their robes to indicate their ranking.[158] The five ranks of *basaih* priests, from lowest to highest are: Basaih Ndung Akaok, Basaih Laih, Basaih Pahuak, Po Bac, and Po Adhia. These terms are used in Ninh Thuận province, but in Bình Thuận province Po Bac is called Basaih Tapah and Po Adhia is called Gru Harei. Based on many conversations with Cham Ahiér priests and intelectualls, I can sumamarize the religious background and the duties of the priests as follows:

- Basaih Ndung Akaok is a beginner who has only gone through the first ordination. His level is that of an apprentice. In the period of apprenticeship, he must learn Cham script, religious teachings and rules, and also to let his hair grow long. It is important to mention that because a *basaih* needs to be a married man, his training does not start from a young age but only when he reaches adulthood.

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[158] In contrast with, but somehow parallel to, the dress-code of *basaih* priests of Cham Ahiér community is the dress-code of the Po Acar priests (Halau Janâng Awal*)* of the Cham Awal community. The uniform of Po Acar priests of the Cham Awal community is also white but slightly different. For instance, if *basaih* tie the front part of the dress on their right side, Po Acar's uniform is buttoned at the center of the body. Also, if *basaih*'s turbans have red tassels at both ends, Po Acar's turbans have a cloth called *khan djram* tied on top of the turban.

- Basaih Laih is a person who has completed his apprenticeship and is officially ordained as a priest. However, both Basaih Ndung Akaok and Basaih Laih are still at the student's level and their study of ritual manuscripts and practices must always be conducted under the guidance of teachers (of the rank of Po Bac or Po Adhia*)*. The priests of this level are allowed to participate in rituals as assistants for training.

- Basaih Pahuak is a priest who is fully qualified to participate in official services. He is no longer at a student level but can perform certain rituals by himself. In fact, he is the one responsible for the ritual of "feeding the dead" in a funeral ceremony.

- Po Bac (or Basaih Tapah) is a high-ranking priest who performs rituals without any supervisor and can teach and guide the priests of the three lower ranks. A Tapah cannot get the highest rank as long as the Po Adhia of their community is still alive. In other words, a Po Bac can move up to the highest rank to become a Po Adhia only when the previous Po Adhia dies.

- Po Adhia is the highest priest who has the sole discretion on the appropriate dates and times to perform temple rituals, funeral rituals, and other religious activities in the villages of which he is in charge. In Ninh Thuận province, there are three Po Adhia priests who are officially in charge of all the religious activities in Po Nagar shrine in Hữu Đức and temples Po Klong Girai and Po Romé. They also supervise the daily religious activities of the Cham communities located around those three sites. In Bình Thuận province, there are also three Po Adhia priests who are responsible for performing rituals for the Cham population concentrated in three districts of Bắc Bình, Hàm Thuận Bắc, and Tuy Phong and at the two temples Po Dam and Po Sah Inu. The Po Ahdia priests in Bình Thuận province are not officially assigned total authority and responsibility as clearly as in Ninh Thuận. All religious activities such as temple rituals, funeral rituals and *kut* entry rituals that take place

in the Cham Ahiér communities are directed by Po Adhia priests who then assign other lower level *basaih* priests to help them carry out the rituals.

### 3.4.2 Cham Ahiér non-*basaih* priests

In this thesis, I refer to all the priests who are not *basaih* priests as "non-*basaih* priests" and I do not use the Vietnamese terms *thầy cúng dân gian* ("folk master," "folk ritualist") and *chức sắc dân gian* ("folk dignitary") that native Cham scholars and intellectuals use. I believe the use of these Vietnamese terms is misleading because when I observed temple rituals, I saw Ong Kathar and Muk Pajau, who the Cham intellectuals include in the "folk" category, actually performing rituals alongside the *basaih* priests; I also observed that they play quite important roles in rituals performed at ancient temples. No Cham would consider the temple rituals to be "folk" rituals, thus, it does not make sense to me to label some of the priests who perform temple rituals as "folk" priests. I admit that the term "non-*basaih* priests" that I use in this thesis probably is not the best term, but it is the only term that I can think of for these priests with respect to the idea that they are not sharing the same lineage as the *basaih* priest.

Non-*basaih* priests, including both males and females, receive their training from their fathers and mothers; they therefore can be identified as hereditary descendants in the respective priestly lineages. Male priests learn from their fathers and female priests learn from their mothers. To become a Muk Pajau priestess, a woman must have reached menopause as her body is a vessel for the divine entity to enter and communicate with the Cham. This stipulation seems to be related to the common perception of menstruation as impure. In addition, to get to this position of Muk Pajau, she needs to be selected and nominated by her village on the basis of her virtue, in addition to inheriting the role from her mother. Even though all the priests learn from their parents, they have to go through ordination rituals to be recognized as official priests. There is no hierarchy among the different kinds of non-*basaih* priests; however, there

are hierarchies within the groups of Ong Kadhar priests and Ong Maduen priests, as they have to go through different stages of learning and practicing. These non-*basaih* priests include:

- Ong Kadhar is a male priest who sings/chants sacred songs/hymns (*dam nây yang*) praising the merits of various deified kings and "old deities" in temple rituals and clan rituals (Puis, Payak). While singing, he also plays a string instrument called *kanyi* and in some rituals at village level, he dances to communicate with ancestors as in trance. There are three rankings for this lineage of priests, from lowest to highest, they are as follows: Kadhar Ndung Akaok, Kadhar Kakuak Ndaw, and Kadhar Gru.[159] Kadhar Gru is the one who selects the auspicious day and time to perform a ritual, but he does not necessarily perform the ritual itself. Instead, usually it is a lower rank priests who will perform the ritual.

- Ong Maduen is the priest who plays the *baranâng* drum and sings sacred hymns (*dam nây yang*) praising the merits of both "new deities" and "old deities" whom he invites to the Rija rituals.[160] There are three rankings in the Ong Maduen priest system; from the lowest to the highest they are as follows: Maduen Ndung Akaok, Maduen Kakuak Ndaw, and Maduen Gru.

- Muk Pajau is a priestess whose responsibilities include preparing and arranging food offerings for temple rituals and village rituals, serving food and drinks to the deified kings and gods, and dancing to communicate with ancestors as in trance and to celebrate the success of the ritual.

- Ong Camânei is a temple guard who is responsible for protecting the temple and its sacred objects as well as keeping the costumes of the deities. He assists the *basaih* priest Po Adhia in any rituals performed at the temples. For the Cham, this is a religious position that carries

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[159] The term *gru* seems to derive from the Sanskrit term *guru* meaning "teacher" or "spiritual master."
[160] Some Cham intellectuals told me that Ong Maduen priests sing songs for "new deities" in Malay language, but they learn to memorize the hymns by heart and cannot read or write Malay nor they can explain in detail the meaning of the hymns they sing.

a sense of duty; this position is passed down from father to son to continue protecting the ancestors' work. However, since the Cham temples are now under the management of the goverment this role is also understood to be that of a security guard working under the supervision of the government.

- Muk Rija (also known as Muk Raja) is a priestess who safeguards her clan's sacred object *ciét atau*. *Ciét atau* is a bamboo basket containing symbolic items obtained from ancestors. It is a religious symbol representing a clan. There are some clan rituals or family rituals that require the presence of the *ciét atau* and it is her duty to bring it to the event and to perform all the rituals that are related to the *ciét atau* and ancestors of her clan. In the temple rituals such as the Katé, she assists her clan members by bringing food offerings to temple rituals, but she does not perform in these rituals.

- Ong Ka-ing is another prominent priest of the Rija rituals who is responsible for dancing to entertain the deities as well as offering food to the deities.

Among these non-*basaih* priests, I noticed that while Ong Kadhar and Muk Pajau oversea temple rituals (together with the *basaih* priests) and direct the clan rituals of Puis and Payak, the three other priests Ong Ka-ing, Ong Maduen, and to some extent, Muk Rija are the main actors of Rija rituals organized in villages. Thus, I see here a division of labour performed by different priests[161] into at least three types of roles corresponding to the various types of rituals that these priests are responsible for, rather than in terms of two categories of "folk masters" and "monks" as suggested by native Cham scholars and intellectuals.

What I find interesting regarding the Cham Ahiér non-*basaih* priests is that they are also employed by the members of the Cham Awal community who organize the Puis and Payak

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[161] The rituals are performed by the priests of at least three different groups: (1) *Basaih* priests, Ong Kadhar and Muk Pajau perform temple rituals; (2) Ong Kadhar and Muk Pajau perform Puis and Payak clan rituals; and (3) Ong Ka-ing, Ong Maduen and Muk Rija perform Rija rituals.

rituals as well as the Rija rituals in their villages, but not the temple rituals. We will learn more about the roles of these priests in the next chapters when exploring the rituals that they perform. Now I am going to turn to a study of the concept of divinity in the Cham Ahiér tradition and the pantheon of gods, goddesses, and deified kings, as well as views about ancestors, ghosts, and demons among the Cham Ahiér.

## 3.5 Cham Ahiér's "Divine Population"

The Cham Ahiér worship numerous gods and goddesses, up to some 160 deities.[162] Indeed, the Cham Ahiér have such a large pantheon of deities that they have the humorous expression *Buel karang, yang pambluak* (Viet: *Dân thì thưa, thần thì thừa*), meaning "sparse population [but] too many deities."

### 3.5.1 Cham Ahiér's mother goddess Po Inâ Nâgar and other gods

Po Inâ Nâgar is the Cham's mother goddess (Vietnamese: *thần mẹ xứ sở*), or, more precisely, the mother goddess of the Cham land. The Cham Ahiér whom I met worship her as the creator of the Universe and of all species including humans. They praise her for having taught agriculture and weaving to their ancestors and see her as one of the most powerful and important deities of the Cham pantheon. I think she is one of the most popular deities among the Cham, because when I asked my Cham Ahiér informants to name some of their deities for me, the majority of them mentioned her name first. But ordinary Cham villagers did not have much else to share with me about her.

By examining secondary sources, I found several mentions of legends that perhaps circulated among Cham elites; according to these legends, Po Inâ Nâgar was born from the

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[162] For a full list of all the Cham deities, see Phan Quốc Anh (2006: 297) and Sakaya (2014: 555-566).

clouds and had 97 husbands with whom she had 39 daughters, all of them goddesses.[163] Nowadays, the mother goddess Po Inâ Nâgar is worshipped in no fewer than thirteen local shrines (*danaok*) dedicated to her in Phú Yên, Khánh Hoà, Ninh Thuận and Bình Thuận provinces. Among them, the ones most visited by the Cham are the shrines at Hữu Đức village[164] and at Bĩnh Nghĩa village, in Ninh Thuận province, and the shrine at Bắc Bình in Bình Thuận province. These shrines were constructed recently, in the beginning of the 21st century.[165]

Aside from worshipping the mother goddess Po Inâ Nâgar, the Cham Ahiér also worship a large pantheon of other deities such as Po Yang Amâ (Father God), Po Yang Inâ (Mother Goddess), Po Yang Ahitiak (the sun deity), Po Lingik (the sky deity), Po Yang Tasik (the ocean deity), Po Yang Cek (the mountain deity), Po Patao Aia (the water deity), Po Yang Angin (the wind deity), Po Yang Hajan (the rain deity), Po Yang Apuei (the fire deity), Po Yang Dhan Adih (the deity of four cardinal points), and Po Bhum (the earth/soil deity), among others. Again, the names of these gods were given to me by Cham intellectuals and ordinary villagers do not necessary remember names of their various gods. Instead, they would refer to their gods in general, as "Po Yang," and whenever they need a blessing or favor instantaneously, they would call upon Po Yang for help. There was one time I mentioned to a few Cham friends how difficult it was for me to finish my PhD and they immediately said that they would ask Po Yang to help me overcome all the obstacles. Po Yang here simply means "god," not any specific god but just any divinity. Interestingly, the term *Yang* is also used by

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[163] Cabaton (1901), Phan Quốc Anh (2006), Sakaya (2013).
[164] See fig. 26.
[165] For a map of prominent shrines dedicated to her, see Noseworthy (2015). In his article, Noseworthy argues that, according to a "close reading" of the Cham manuscript *Damnây Po Inâ Nâgar*, Po Inâ Nâgar is a local Cham mother goddess who was known by many names.

many other ethnic minorities in Vietnam to refer to god. As for the term *Po*, the Cham use it as an honorific prefix before the names of deities, kings, and high-ranked *basaih* priests.[166]

### 3.5.2 Cham Ahiér's deified humans

Cham intellectuals use the Cham term *yang patao* (God-king) for their deified kings. The Vietnamese terms that they use are *vua thần* ("deified kings") and *nhân thần* ("deified humans"). The pantheon of deified humans was not limited only to kings but also extended to queens and great generals who were either historical or legendary figures, for instance, Po Klaong Girai, Po Romé, Po Sah Inâ, and Po Dam, Bia Than Can, Bia Than Cih, Cei Dalim, and Cei Tathun. They are worshipped as gods and the Cham Ahiér praise them for their impressive contribution to Champa's territorial expansion, agricultural development and dams construction. One can find the life stories of the deified humans such as Po Klaong Girai, Po Romé, Po Sah Inâ, and Po Dam in contemporary Cham myths, legends and sacred songs (*Ariya* and *Dam nây yang*); in these sources those figures are linked to historical Champa and are praised for their contributions to the kingdom.[167]

### 3.5.3 Cham Ahiér's "new deities"

An important group of deities that Cham Ahiér venerate, among others, are the so-called "new deities" (*yang barau).* The term *yang barau* is used mainly by Cham intellectuals and ordinary Cham villagers do not really use this term or necessarily know about its existence.

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[166] Haw (2017) spells Po as "Pō," Noseworthy and Phạm (2020) spell it as "Ppo." I follow Cham authors who spell it "Po." I do not know when the term "Po" first appeared in use in Cham writing but for an idea of how often Po was prefixed to the names of Cham divinities see Cabaton 1901. In Cham medieval inscriptions, the term Śrī is primarily used as an honorific title used for heavenly and earthly figures such as the gods and the kings.

[167] See Sakaya (2014: 513-554) for some of the sacred songs that are usually sung in temples and narrate life stories of the deified humans. It remains unknown if these figures were deified in medieval times and thus have some actual continuity with the present, or legends, myths, and sacred songs were developed around these figures long ago, and only later did the Cham added to these figures the status of divinity and the "new" myths.

For Cham intellectuals, *yang barau* include (1) Islamic deities, such as Po Awluah (Allah), Nabi Mohamat (Muhammad), Phua Timah (Fatimah), Po Nabi Ibrahim, and Po Ali; (2) deified Malays such as Po Bar Gana, Patri Bang So, and Patra Tho Le La; and (3) deified Cham figures who converted to Malay Islam or were associated with it; they include Po Romé, Po Sah Inâ, and Po Sah Bingu. The second group -- "deified Malays" -- are those Malay people who came to Champa and died in Champa and thus the Cham worship them as deities. I heard about the various kinds of *yang barau* at different times from different Cham intellectuals; in other words, they did not mention all of these deities and deified humans at once in an orderly way. It was only when they explained to me the Rija rituals that I understood that the category *yang barau* includes not only Islamic deities such as Po Awluah (Allah), Nabi Mohamat (Muhammad), and Phua Timah (Fatimah) but also deified Malays and certain deified Cham royals.

There are two types of deified Malays: deities of "mountain lineage" (*atau cek*) and deities of "ocean lineage" (*atau tasik*), and each clan follows and worships deities of either the mountain or ocean lineage. This tradition is passed down from previous generations; the individuals who are supposed to remember all the names of deities belonging to both lineages are the priests who perform the Rija rituals while ordinary Cham villagers usually do not remember these names.[168]

Regarding the "new deities" of mountain lineage (*atau cek*) and the deities of ocean lineage (*atau tasik*), some Cham intellectuals explained to me that there are several Cham legends (*dammây am pam*) which mention the Malays who came to Champa during the Po Romé period (r. 1627-1651). Those legends reveal the origin of the mountain lineage deities

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[168] The list of names of different deities for each lineage can be found in Sakaya (2014: 151, 174). He provides the list of names of the "new deities" of the mountain lineage (*atau cek*) that includes Po Ban Mata, Patra Po, Patra Gik Gai, Po Than Mâta, Po Rat Ina, Patri Mânuen, Patri Ban So, and Po Patri Can Ni. The "new deities" of the ocean lineage (*atau tasik*) include Patra Ritan, Po Mal Tituk, Po Bana Jawet, Po Bana Jamâsiér, Po Bana Jamâtai, Po Bana Jali, Po Mansi, Po Jalimit, Po Jalikem, and Jawa Than Mâta.

and the ocean lineage deities. An overarching idea found in all these legends is that there were people from Malaya who came to help Champa to fight against Đại Việt (Vietnam) during the king Po Romé period (17th century); they came via both the land route and the maritime route. However, the Cham did not recognize them and accidentally killed most of them. The Cham felt guilty and regretful once they recognized who those people were and since then the Cham worshiped them as deities. More specifically those who came by land were worshipped as "mountain deities," and those who came by boat, as "ocean deities."[169] Many of the ordinary Cham villagers whom I talked to do not know about these legends; they remain mainly known to some Cham intellectuals. Regarding the people from Malaya, I want to note that the Cham tend to use the term "Malaya/Malayu" rather loosely to refer to those of Malay ethnicity or descent in the maritime regions of what today constitutes parts of Malaysia and Indonesia.[170]

### 3.5.4 Cham Ahiér's "old deities"

Some Cham intellectuals, however, explained that *yang barau* are new deities who are recently discovered and worshipped but their identity and origin remain unknown or are ambiguous in contrast to *yang klak* (old deities), that is, those gods that the Cham worshipped for a long time and knew their names and origins. The deified kings Klaong Girai and Po Romé belong to the latter category. Nowadays *yang klak* is a term used by intellectuals to talk about all the Cham Ahiér's "original" deities while excluding those deities who were recently adopted or influenced by "Islamic" elements.

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[169] These legends are mentioned in Sakaya (2014:155-159). Interestingly enough, Sakaya (2008: 141) suggests that the division between *atau cek* and *atau tasik* is a vestige of an old Totemic practice, thus suggesting that there exists a connection between the contemporary ritual practices and legends, on the one hand, and some kind of presumably old, original and indigenous practices, on the other. In his PhD dissertation, Vương Hoàng Trù (2003: 86-87) also suggests that the Cham worship of *atau cek* and *atau tasik* is a remnant of a totemic practice.
[170] Beyond this use of the term, the meaning of Malay (or Malayu) takes on other connotations within the modern nations of Malaysia and Indonesia. In addition to such potentially contentious uses of this name, further confusion may arise from its use in ethnolinguistic studies where it refers to a wide-spread grouping of languages across the South Pacific and Indian Oceans.

The category of "old deities" includes deified humans and "deities of the temple" (*yang bimong*). "Deities of the temple" are those who are invited "to visit" during particular ceremonies and are worshiped at temples; this category includes Po Ginuer Matri (Śiva, whom the Cham consider a temple door guardian), the mother goddess Po Inâ Nâgar, deified kings, queens, and other royals and generals. The terms *yang klak* and *yang bimong* are thus interchangeable. Interestingly, the deified Cham kings and royals who the Cham believe were influenced by Malay Islam (this group includes Po Romé, Po Sah Inâ, and Po Sah Bingu) belong to *both categories* of "new deities" and "old deities;" they are worshipped at Rija festivals as "new deities" but are also worshipped at temples as "deities of the temples" or "old deities." One can say that they have a kind of "double identity." But those "new deities" such as Po Awluah (Allah), Nabi Mohamat (Muhammad), Phua Timah (Fatimah), Po Nabi (Muslim Prophet Ibrahim known as Prophet Abraham in the Hebrew Bible), and Po Ali are strictly not invited to be worshipped at temples. Again, this is the knowledge discussed and circulated among Cham intellectuals while the ordinary villagers are not concerned with all these categories of their gods.

## 3.6 Ancestor Worship

The terms that Cham Ahiér use for ancestors are *muk kei*, *po muk* (male ancestor deity), and *po kei* (female ancestor deity). The Cham Ahiér form a matrilineal society in which people trace their kinship through their mother's lineage, thus the ancestors whom they worship are the deceased members of the mother's blood line. Ancestors of each clan are represented by a *ciét atau*, which is a religious symbol of the clan that is worshipped as a sacred object[171] (fig. 30). It is through this *ciét atau* that the living can "connect" with the realm of *muk kei*. The

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[171] The notion of 'object' here is limited as it is an agent both defining a lineage and connecting it with its ancestors; however, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss this matter further. See, for example, Holbraad and Pedersen (2017) for a discussion of this topic.

*ciét atau* is simply a square bamboo basket containing several sacred items remaining from ancestors, such as costumes, handkerchiefs, paper fans, swords, and even handwritten notebooks. This *ciét atau* is usually kept by Muk Rija, a senior female member of the clan who takes the role as the sacred objects' caretaker. Some Cham intellectuals explained to me that Muk Rija is the clan's female shaman who worships the *ciét atau* on her clan's behalf. The *ciét atau* is always hanging under the ceiling of Muk Rija's house. Whenever there are family rituals or clan rituals which invoke ancestors, this *ciét atau* needs to be taken down; this can be done only by Muk Rija through a ritual conducted to ask permission from the ancestors to bring it down. When performing rituals for her clan members, Muk Rija wears the costumes that are kept inside the *ciét atau* to connect with her ancestors. Aside from the *ciét atau,* there is another sacred object that is also regarded as a symbol of ancestors, it is *ciét praok. Ciét praok* is a basket that contains symbolic costumes of those who had a sacred death. These deceased individuals are considered ancestors of special kind, namely, those who have high abilities to protect and bless their living relatives. [172]



Fig. 30. Muk Rija and *ciét atau* basket; the picture is taken during a ritual conducted to introduce a new member of the family to ancestors (*éw praok*). Bắc Bình district, Bình Thuận province.

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[172] Concerning the origin of the Cham practice of *ciét atau* and *ciét praok,* Sakaya (2014: 393) suggested that it should have appeared around the 17th century when Champa had close connections with Malaya and was influenced by the Malay's ancestor worship. However, in his earlier article, Sakaya (2008: 157) claimed that the Cham started the practice of *ciét atau* together with the Rija Praong ritual in the 18th century; to support this claim he cited the Cham manuscript VMST.1 and the works of Po Dharma (1990: 19-27; 1999).

Some Cham told me that prior to the Vietnamese Emperor Minh Mang's reign (r. 1820-1841), the Cham did not have the tradition of having family names nor the practice of preserving the names of their family members in genealogical records.[173] They recognized instead their relatives on their mother's side (*pupah/gơw gan*) by worshipping the same *ciét atau* and the same *kut* (clan graveyard belonging to the mother's lineage). Even though now all Cham Ahiér have family names, they continue the practice of worshipping the clan's *ciét atau*. People in the same clan who worship the same *ciét atau* cannot marry each other. There are many family rituals and clan rituals that require the presence of this *ciét atau*, thus people from the same clan tend to live in the same village because there is usually only one *ciét atau* for each clan.[174]

### 3.6.1 Curtain up and mat down: sacralized home space and ancestor worship

Being Vietnamese, growing up with a permanent altar for ancestor worship in my house was natural and familiar to me. Each Viet house usually has an altar for ancestor worship where pictures of the deceased and offering such as flowers, fruits and incense are placed. The altar is often placed in the living room, at the center of the house, and thus it is easy to have a glance at the altar when one enters the house. Cham Ahiér uphold ancestor worship, but traditionally they do not establish a fixed place of worship such as an altar or a shrine at home. Only on a few rare occasions I saw that some Cham families had small altars with incense and pictures

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[173] According to Nguyễn Khắc Ngữ (1967: 125), it was only from 1837 onwards, that is, during the Emperor Minh Mang reign period, that about 30 Viet family names were assigned to Cham, including Quảng, Hán, Đàng, Châu, Bá, Phú, Trượng, Thành, Lâm, Kiều, and Thập. These family names were given to the Cham for the first time in 1837, together with an order stipulating that the Cham had to dress themselves like the Viet. Shine Toshihiko (2013: 48-50) suggests that this probably was done to reinforce the policy of household registration and land use rights made effective during Minh Mang's time. Since they were given family names, daughters usually took their mothers' family names while sons took those of their fathers. However, based on my fieldwork, I noticed that nowadays Cham are giving fathers' family names to all their children. I think this is most likely influenced by the Viet's patriarchal practice of using the father's family name. However, these family names remain primarily used for the government's administrative purposes and not for recognizing one's relatives.

[174] However, in case when the clan is very large in size there might be two *ciét atau*.

of recently deceased members of their families. Discussing Cham heritage and authenticity, Quảng Đại Tuyên (2020), a native Cham Ahiér himself, maintains that the use of joss stick incense is a taboo and is contrary to Cham tradition. He sees this as a recent influence of the ethnic Vietnamese. I think that adopting a fixed altar at home is also a recent practice, and one in which the Cham Ahiér were probably influenced by Vietnamese practices as well.

While the Vietnamese maintain the practice of having a memorial date for each recently deceased ancestor, and the family performs a specific ritual for that ancestor when the memorial date comes, the Cham Ahiér do not have such a practice. Once all the deceased are sent off to the clan's *kut* cemetery, the family does not have any more responsibility to perform any rituals for the deceased or for ancestors. However, if they still want to, they can perform a ritual for ancestors during the Katé festival in the 7th month of Cham Ahiér calendar at the *kut* or at home; as some Cham intellectuals told me, this is a recent practice.

The majority of Cham houses that I visited do not establish any permanent altar to worship ancestors or gods at home. Whenever Cham Ahiér need to perform a ritual to inform ancestors about the family's coming events and ask for their blessings, they would hang up a curtain on a wall in the living room or on the outer wall of the house's main entrance, and thus establish the boundary for a temporary altar. Some Cham explained to me that traditionally, the curtain that is used should be a piece of white fabric embroidered with heavenly life imagery where humans and animals live in harmony. However, nowadays, people use fabric with any kind of pattern because it is costly to buy an already embroidered piece (figs. 31, 32, 33, and 34). Aside from the curtain, the host family also needs to clear the ground to place some floor mats called *ciéw bang*. *Ciéw bang* are straw mats that are used only for ritual

purposes.[175] Once a *ciéw bang* is placed in front of a curtain, it creates a place of private worship at home and the place to communicate with ancestors.




Fig. 31 and 32. Cham Ahiér ancestor worship at home, Bình Thuận province.




Figs. 33 and 34. Cham Ahiér ancestor worship at home, Bình Thuận province.

The curtain and the *ciéw bang* create the house's temporary altar where all kinds of foods are placed as offerings to the ancestors. If the Vietnamese use incense as the medium to connect with the world of the divine, the Cham Ahiér use candles and fire in the form of burning agarwood or aloe wood to communicate with ancestors. A large part of ritual worship is related

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[175] They are similar to the regular straw mats for daily use except they are smaller in size and have red fabric covering all the edges.

to food offerings as they believe that the more food they offer, the greater is the chance that their wishes will be granted. Once the ritual is finished, the family members will eat this food together with the priests. Interestingly, in rituals of any kind, big or small, the Cham would invite the appropriate priests, who are non-*basaih* priests (since *basaih* priests work only for temple rituals, funerals and *kut* entry rituals) to come to perform the ritual on the family's behalf. The newly set up altar which is placed on the ground is the place where the priest performs rituals and communicate with ancestors. In short, with a curtain, *ciéw bang,* offering food, and the priests, any part of the house and even the space outside of the house can become a place of worship.[176]

## 3.7 Everywhere Here, There, and In Between: Ghosts, Demons and the Use of Amulets

Will everyone be considered an ancestor after death? And do ancestors always do only good things for their descendants? The Cham Ahiér whom I met all responded "no" to both these questions. They further elaborated that people who lived "fiercely" in the world will become "fierce ghosts" once they die and will harm their relatives. So those people do not become ancestors or are not considered ancestors by their descendants. The second explanation was that those people who had a "bad death" or an "unnatural death," "incomplete death" may become ghosts. These categories of death include, for instance, a death that happens when the person is alone and outside of his or her home, so that nobody can see it (*matai bhao*), or a violent accident (*matai jhak)* when the whole body or its parts are missing. The third type of explanation was that certain individuals become ghosts because their living relatives do not perform the appropriate funeral rituals and *kut* cemetery entry ritual to release their souls. My informants explained that in the latter case, since the souls are trapped in the terrestrial world due to not having the appropriate rituals conducted by the priests to let their souls move to the

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[176] All the rituals that I observed were performed on the ground. This is very different from the rituals of the ethnic Vietnamese where the objects related to the ritual are usually placed on high tables.

next life, to go to heaven and rejoin with ancestors, they thus become ghosts to disturb the living relatives (and not strangers). Their souls wander from place to place and can be found anywhere. They might, for instance, find a big stone, a river, or a big old tree to make their home. But if the dead received appropriate rituals for the funeral and *kut* entry, then the *kut* is where her or his soul will reside on earth.

The Cham Ahiér not only believe in the existence of *bhut* (ghost) but also of *jin* (demon). Interestingly, all of the Cham whom I had conversations with can describe or give their opinions about ghosts but not many can explain in detail who the *jin* are, except asserting that they firmly believe that *jin* exist. Most of the people say that the *jin* are worse than ghosts as they are more dangerous and harmful. Some added that the *jin* persist longer than ghosts. Others said that ghosts are dead relatives while demons are dead who are unrelated. And some even said that when humans die, they become ghosts and if ghosts do not have living relatives to take care of them then they become demons. Lastly, a few Cham intellectuals explained that demons are virgin girls who died unjustly and could not be reincarnated and thus became demons. They added that demons can haunt anyone and not only blood relatives, and because of that demons are scarier and more evil than ghosts. In short, all the dead have the potential to some degree to threaten the living community.

To please the ghosts and demons, Cham villagers have to perform rituals for them from time to time to offer food and drinks. However, it is not always easy to please the wandering ghosts and demons. There can be many reasons for them to be dissatisfied, such as not being offered enough food or not being invited to rituals. Their unhappiness with humans can be seen in the signs when there is death at a young age or continuous bad fortune and disease in the village. Wandering ghosts and demons are understood to be like humans in that they also need to be fed, flattered, and entertained. If people do not venerate them regularly, they can become upset and harm people. Thus, Cham Ahiér worship and offer food to them but they do not just

passively or patiently wait for their understanding and blessing; instead, they are also active in taming, preventing, protecting, and defending themselves by using amulets.

Amulet practice is used by the Cham Ahiér for many purposes such as to ward off evil forces from entering one's own house or religious sites, to purify the land and temples from pollution, and to treat diseases of humans and animals that are believed to be created by ghosts or demons. It is common among the Cham Ahiér to wear amulets as a form of protection and defense against the evil forces, and to ward off negative energy and illness. For instance, in the ritual of introducing to the ancestors a new member of the family, a one-month-old baby, the priests Muk Rija and Gru Urang have to draw various symbols, including such symbols as the *homkar, lang kadak,* moon, sun, and certain numbers on a piece of paper which is then rolled up and tied to the child's bracelet. The priests then sacralize the bracelet amulet to become a guardian bracelet to prevent ghosts and demons from harming the child (Phan Quốc Anh 2006: 162). The origins of amulet practice remain unclear and there is so far no systematic study of Cham amulet practice except a few short introductory articles published by Sakaya.[177] All Cham Ahiér *basaih* priests and non-*basaih* priests use amulets for different rituals and religious purposes. In Cham Ahiér funerals, amulets are often used to ward off ghosts and demons from coming to disturb the funeral rituals; we will see more discussion of this in Chapter 5. Amulet practice among the Cham is a fascinating topic that certainly requires an in-depth study in the future.

### 3.8 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce the different characters of Cham Ahiér communities, from human to gods, ancestors, ghosts, and demons.  While the first part of this

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[177] For a brief discussion of different types and purposes of amulets, see Sakaya (2016, p. 89; 2008, pp. 141-144) where he mentions that there are three types of amulets (*baoh sarak adamah*) used by the Cham: (1) amulets with signs and symbols (*baoh sara*), (2) amulets with drawing (*adamah*)*,* and (3) amulets with written words (*akhar sarak*).

chapter focused on the societal structure of the Cham Ahiér with a particular focus on their system of priests, *basaih* and non-*basaih* priests, the second part of the chapter focused on the concept of divinity, the pantheon of gods and goddesses, deified humans, "old deities" and "new deities" as well as ancestors, ghosts, and demons. Based on the information I gathered from my fieldwork and from the secondary sources, I found that the division between different groups of priests in term of categories such as the council of Cham Ahiér *basaih* priests (*halau janâng* Ahiér), the council of Rija priests (*hahlau janâng* Rija), and the council of Gru Urang priests (*halau janâng* Gru Urang) are mainly known, used, and circulated among Cham elites. Ordinary Cham villagers for the most part do not know or are not concerned with those categories or groupings. Furthermore, since Vietnamese is the official language that the contemporary Cham daily use (their education from kindergarten to university is all in Vietnamese), the majority of publications by native Cham scholars and intellectuals were written in Vietnamese (to reach larger audiences, including both Vietnamese and Cham). They use the Vietnamese terms *tu sĩ* (monk) and *chức sắc* (dignitary) to describe the group of *basaih* priests and the terms *thầy cúng dân gian* ("folk master," "folk ritualist") and *chức sắc dân gian* ("folk dignitary") for the group that I call non-*basaih* priests. I believe that the Vietnamese term *dân gian* (lit. "folk") that native Cham scholars and intellectuals used is misleading because, for instance, the priest Ong Kadhar and priestess Muk Pajau, whom they categorize as "folk masters," actually do perform rituals at ancient temples for which they are responsible. This will be seen in the next chapter when we examine Cham Ahiér temple rituals. Interestingly enough, despite having different categories for their priests, all the Cham Ahiér priests belong to the same official organization recognized by the government called "Council of Cham Brahman Dignitaries" (Viet. Hội Đồng Chức Sắc Chăm Bàlamôn) for Bình Thuận province and "The Council of Interim Dignitaries of Cham Brahmanism" (Viet. Hội đồng Chức sắc Lâm thời Chăm Bàlamôn) for Ninh Thuận province. Not only does it show that all the priests

officially belong to the same group, but also the very fact that the council was officially named as related to "Cham Brahmanism/ Chăm Bàlamôn," shows the popularity of this term and how deep it is rooted in contemporary Cham society in contrast to the term "Cham Ahiér" that the native Cham scholars and intellectuals were advocating for. Despite all these complications with the categories and the use of inaccurate or inappropriate Vietnamese terms in categorizations adopted by Cham elites, ordinary Cham villagers simply use the term *halau janâng* for all of their priests.

In the same vein, I found that while Cham intellectuals categorized Cham deities into "new deities" (*yang barau*), "old deities" (*yang klak*) and "deified kings" (*yang patao*), ordinary Cham villagers do not really know or use these terms, nor do they remember the names of different deities; instead, they generally refer to all their gods as *yang* or *po*. In addition, once the remains of a deceased (which consists of nine pieces of forehead bones) is sent to his or her mother's *kut* cemetery, he or she will also be regarded as *yang*. However, if deceased individuals had a "bad death" (*matai jhak*/*matai bhao*) and did not have funeral and *kut* entry rituals, they will become ghosts (*bhut*) or demons (*jin, abileh*), and it is generally believed that these non-human entities remain among the Cham villagers. In short, what this chapter demonstrated is the variety of interpretations within the Cham Ahiér community, those of priests, native Cham scholars, intellectuals, and ordinary Cham villagers. It is important to point that out because it is inaccurate and insufficient to describe the beliefs of Cham Ahiér on the basis of accounts offered by only one part of their community while ignoring other parts. This aspect will be further explored and analyzed in the next chapter when we look in detail at Cham Ahiér temple rituals.

# Chapter 4: Cham Ahiér Temple Rituals - Practice and Performance

## 4.1 Introduction

In a chapter titled "Performance," Catherine Bell (1998: 205) states:

> Scholars use many terms to talk about religious activity, most basically, liturgy, worship, ritual, and recently performance. Although these terms reflect different perspectives and assumptions, they share the supposition that ceremonial actions characterized by a self-conscious formality and traditionalism are a primary aspect of religion and an important focus in any project to understand religion.

In my work I share the same supposition, thus this and the next two chapters explore the actual "doing" or ceremonial actions to understand Cham Ahiér religion. While this chapter centers on temple rituals or rituals that are performed at temples, the next chapter will investigate funeral rituals and *kut* cemetery entry ceremony, and the last chapter will explore Puis, Payak and Rija rituals. These rituals are the most fundamental for and most practiced by the Cham Ahiér and thus they may be said to characterize and represent Cham Ahiér religion in its present form. For the Cham Ahiér community, religion is manifested in ritual activities, and it is ritual that binds and unites the community. The ritual activities that I refer to here are either ritual "practices" or ritual "performances;" for defining and differences between the two, I follow Shneiderman (2015: 37-38) who states:

> "Practice" refers to embodied, ritualized actions carried out by […] individuals within a group-internal epistemological framework that mediates between the human and divine world: to stop malevolent deities from plaguing one's mind, for instance, or to guide a loved one's soul to the realms of the ancestors. Practices are addressed to the synthetic pantheon […] deities that inhabit the […] divine world, and take place within the clearly delimited private domains of the household, or communal but exclusively […], spaces. Practices then are the actions encapsulated in what Goffman calls social "primary frameworks." "Performances," […] are framed "keyings," or "transformations," in Goffman's terms (1974), of the practices found within primary frameworks. Performances are ritualized actions carried out within a broader discursive context created by political, economic, or other kinds of external agendas." She maintains that "practice and performance […] are both essential aspects of contemporary cultural production and as such as mutually constitutive. Neither can be substituted or subsumed by the other. Both are necessary for groups and individuals to maintain the pragmatic and emotional well-being that derives from a sense of belonging to a shared identity that is recognized by others within the political context of individual nation-states.

Adopting Shneiderman's perspective, this chapter examines Cham Ahiér temple activities along the lines of ritual practice and ritual performance to show the characteristic features of Cham Ahiér religion as well as the Cham Ahiér identity. There are two main parts in this chapter. In the first part I will introduce contemporary Cham Ahiér perceptions of the ancient temples or sacred sites and their ideas about the concepts of "sacred" and "pure." Then I will discuss how both "living temples" and "dead temples" of the Cham were recognized as "National Heritage Sites" and were thus placed under the authority of the government in terms of preservation and conservation, as well as of promotion of tourism in ancient sites. While in the past only Cham Ahiér priests were supposed to visit the temples for ritual practices, nowadays all Cham villagers visit temples during annual public temple rituals. Also, the government encourages Cham villagers to perform various cultural activities during the temple ritual Katé for purposes of the development of tourism, thus, on one hand transforming the Katé from ritual to festival, and, on the other hand, taking part in inventing Cham tradition. The cultural activities of ritual performances at temples can be seen as part of the invention of Cham tradition and this is a result produced by the joint efforts of the local Cham Ahiér community (by both Cham intellectuals and villagers) and the Vietnamese goverment. In this chapter I argue that both ritual practices performed by the priests in the main chambers of the temples for their gods and the ritual performances performed by Cham villagers for large audiences, including tourists, showcase Cham Ahiér identity and religion.

## 4.2 Cham Ahiér Perception of Sacred Sites

From the 7th to the 15th centuries, numerous Hindu and Buddhist temples were constructed on behalf of the kings and other members of the royal families. These temples were mainly brick structures scattered from the northernmost part of Champa in Quảng Trị province all the way

to the southernmost extent in Bình Thuận province. The studies of these temples in terms of architectural art and iconography as well as their titular deities arguably were among the most popular topics of Champa studies since the colonial period. My focus here is not laid on those aspects of Cham temples but rather on the ways the contemporary Cham Ahiér community view those temples, and especially how they are used today as "living temples."[178]

### 4.2.1 Religious landscapes: concepts of "sacred" and "pure"

According to Trần and Shigeeda (2002: 75-88), many Cham temples were built near main rivers of the respective regions, on top of mountains, facing East, and were far from the large population centres located in the delta areas of rivers. Thinking about temple locations and village settlements in terms of geography, I noticed that temples were always located far from villages, or, the other way around, villages were established far from the temples. Naturally, this made me think about how difficult it was for Cham worshippers to go to temples: it is still rather difficult in the present day, but it must have been especially hard in earlier times when transportation was not as convenient as it is now. I also wondered how often Cham villagers visit their temples or whether the distance between temples and Cham villages by any chance discourages or prevents villagers from visiting temples more often. It took me some time to realize that it is not only the distance that prevents Cham villagers from going to temple frequently. Rather, there is an understanding among the Cham that the houses of the divine should be separated from the human world so that they always remain pure and not polluted by human daily activities.[179] This idea naturally leads to a discussion of the concepts of purity

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[178] Among the extant ancient temple complexes, there are five that the contemporary Cham Ahiér still go to in order to perform their annual rituals; they are thus considered "living temples" while the others are considered "dead temples." The five "living temples" are Po Dam (8th-9th century) and Po Sah Inâ (8th-9th century) in Bình Thuận province; Po Klaong Girai (13th-14th century) and Po Romé (16th-17th century) in Ninh Thuận province, and Po Nagar (8th-13th centuries) in Khánh Hoà province.

[179] From my observation, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, Cham Ahiér do not establish a permanent altar or reserve a specific place of worship at home for their gods and ancestors. Whenever there is a need for a ritual

and pollution in Cham Ahiér tradition. There is a shared understanding among the Cham Ahiér whom I talked to about how humans in their daily activities contract all kinds of pollution, while the divine always need to remain in an environment of purity; this creates a clear-cut boundary between the human world and the divine world.[180] Many Cham villagers said that they would not under any circumstances go to a temple alone and disturb the deities because they would not know if they are interrupting the deities at the wrong time, for instance, while the deities are resting. They mentioned that people should not displease the deities by "invading" arbitrarily and by making their territory impure; otherwise, there could be consequences such as the decline of agricultural production, unfavorable weather conditions or even, in the worst-case scenario, "capturing" people's souls. Thus, in simple terms, according to the Cham tradition humans are regarded as impure and gods as pure.

Many Cham told me that traditionally only Cham Ahiér priests have the authority to open the door and enter a temple to perform annual temple rituals; when they finish their work, they lock the door of the temple immediately. This applies to local village shrines (*danaok*) as well. Each village has at least one village shrine which is usually located in a vacant place far from residential areas. Most local village shrines were constructed only in the last hundred years and they are mainly dedicated to the worship of deified Cham royals and the mother goddess Po Inâ Nâgar. These shrines are regarded as sacred just as temples are, they are closed all the time and opened only for ritual activities. Cham villagers do not visit or wander around the shrines on a regular basis. It is only when the village elders and priests organize annual large-scale public rituals for the benefit of the whole community that villagers would come to the shrines and participate in the rituals. The same thing can be said about the *kut* cemetery that

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that related to ancestors, they will set up a temporary one. The only permanent place of worship for ancestors is the *kut* (cemetery) and it is located far from the village as well.

[180] One can wonder how to understand possession by divinities in this context. My informants told me that only the priestess Muk Pajau who must have reached menopause and the priest Ong Kadhar are qualified for ritual possession.

is closed all the time; and villagers or family members do not visit their ancestors in the *kut* when there is no priest in attendance to perform certain rituals.

There are no Cham temple priests who reside permanently at temple complexes to serve the deities on a daily basis. Once the priests finish a ritual at a temple, they return home to their family. Since the "living temples" must be always closed and can be opened only on certain days and at certain times for a specific ritual, they are not so much "living" once the ritual is finished. After that, such a temple remains a "dead" temple gathering dust; no one goes there to clean the temple on a regular basic. In every ritual, the priests always perform a purification ritual of the site before inviting the gods to the actual ritual. This brings us to the next point of our discussion, namely, to the way in which the Cham Ahiér regard and treat an icon or image of a deity. A stone, a sculpture, or an icon can be considered a manifestation or a representative of a god or goddess only after the deity is invoked through a ritual performed by a priest. Before and after the ritual, the gods live in heaven and not in those images. Some Cham even joked that the gods and ancestors who wander around in the human realm are the dangerous ones and that people need to watch out for them. However, many Cham informants told me that their gods and ancestors "live in heaven."

In Cham Ahiér tradition, as in many other societies, the concepts of "purity" and "pollution" go hand in hand with taboos.[181] For instance, it is taboo for a menstruating woman to enter a temple because the Cham believe that she carries with her impurity that can defile the temple even inadvertently. A *basaih* priest should never attend a wedding or visit someone's house because his profession includes performing rituals for the dead and therefore his contact with corpses is considered to carry impurity and pollution. Before performing any ritual, *basaih* priests have to perform a purification ritual first to wash themselves and to remove all the "uncleanness" or pollution they carry. Interestingly, while the *basaih* priests are

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[181] See Douglas (2002) for a thorough analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo.

not welcome to attend wedding ceremonies or newborn celebrations because their impurity is presumed to be inauspicious, they are the main actors in temple rituals, the closest servants of the god(s) and the only ones who can open the door of "the most sacred place on Earth," a local expression regarding their temples.

### 4.2.2 From sacred temples to heritage sites

Technically, the rightful owners of ancient Cham temples are the Cham; however, since the Champa territory is a part of Vietnam now, all their temples are officially under the protection, regulation, and restrictions of the Vietnamese state. Since the 1990s, both Cham "dead temples" and "living temples" are recognized as "national heritage sites" and are thus under the authority of the government. Contemporary Cham Ahiér have four main annual temple rituals and the dates for those rituals vary each year depending on the Cham calendar. Once they set the dates, the Cham Ahiér community in Ninh Thuận province must inform the provincial Relic Management Board in advance for permission to perform the rituals. As for the Cham Ahiér in Bình Thuận, they need to work with Bình Thuận Museum whenever any activities in Cham temples are concerned. In Bình Thuận province, there is no Relic Management Board but it is the Bình Thuận Museum that is in charge of management of all the activities at heritage sites in the province. Both of these agencies then need to report back to the Department of Culture and Sports of each province. From the government's point of view, ancient Cham temples are an integral part of Vietnam's national heritage and thus the government has the right to approach the temples regarding issues of conservation, preservation, management, and promotion of these ancient sites as tourism destinations. According to Quảng Đại Tuyên (2020, p. 13), tourism is the primary factor for economic development in these areas and Cham cultural heritage plays a vital role in the tourism development projects of Ninh Thuận Province. He argues that the local authorities preserve

and promote Cham cultural heritage as the top tourist attractions of the province for their own economic benefits without inviting the indigenous population to participate in the protection and management of their ancestral heritage sites. The term "indigenous" that Quảng uses here refers to the Cham community to which he also belongs. He maintains that the government has neither consideration nor respect for the religious and traditional functions of the "living" heritage sites, that is, the Cham ancient temples. For instance, according to the Cham tradition, "living Cham temples" always have to be closed; only the Cham Ahiér priests had the authority to open the temple door. The priests came to temples and opened the door for the sole purpose of performing annual rituals and giving offerings to the deities on behalf of the Cham population. Once the priests finished the rituals, they closed the temple doors completely until the next ritual. That said, now the Cham temples belong to the government, and hence many of them are nowadays opened by the government on a regular basis for tourists; this goes against the traditional religious practices and beliefs of the Cham. Furthermore, the Cham believe that women should not enter the sacred sites while menstruating because that will inflict ritual impurity upon the temple and thereby will be punished by Yang (deity). However, most female visitors are not aware of this Cham taboo and thus they may unknowingly disrespect Cham tradition.

### 4.2.3 Temple activities and "invented tradition"

According to the native Cham scholars Sakaya (2014: 240-243) and Quảng Đại Tuyên (2020: 36), prior to 1967, Cham villagers did not participate in temple worship, and they did not go to temples; only the priests went there to offer worship to the gods, kings, and ancestors. It was the priests' duty to perform rituals on behalf of the whole community. One can wonder if it was always like that in the past. There is no evidence to determine how the villagers of pre-modern Champa may have practiced their religion. In other words, it remains unknown if

Cham villagers ever practiced rituals in those temples in medieval times or if their religious practices were centered around temple worship performed by the priests. There are no stone inscriptions, or manuscripts that discuss how the Cham population approached temple worship in the medieval period. However, if we think about temple architecture, the foundations of Cham temples usually occupied a very small area while their height was rather considerable; that made them look like towers from far away (hence the term "Cham towers").[182] The main chamber of a Cham temple is usually very small, and it would be impossible for many devotees to enter there. Thus, it is reasonable to suggest that perhaps in the past only priests were allowed to enter the temples and to perform rituals inside of them. However, nowadays, villagers are encouraged to participate in temple rituals which are regarded more as public worship or community worship.[183]

1967 marked the beginning of the transformation of Cham temple ritual worship. During that time, the Government of Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) issued an order to restore a portion of the ancient Cham temples in Ninh Thuận Province. The inauguration of the restoration work took place on the date of Katé ritual at Po Klaong Girai temple. To celebrate this event, Cham students from a local school were encouraged to present some musical and cultural performances to the representatives of the South Vietnamese administration. Since that time, adventurous young Cham students started to worry less about entering the sacred spaces and gradually came to clean up some areas around the Po Klaong Girai temple in order to camp there; this chain of events initiated a slow movement among the villagers who started coming to Katé and other temple rituals.[184]

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[182] In Western publications the term "Cham towers" appears as early as the 19th century in publications of French colonial scholars; see, for example, Aymonier (1891).

[183] Here I am discussing Cham temples within the religious landscapes of Bình Thuận and Ninh Thuận provinces only. I am not including other "living" Cham temples such as the Po Nagar in Nha Trang because this temple is very particular in a way that it is very "Vietnamized." For a detailed discussion of the "Vietnamization" of the Cham deity Po Nagar, see Nguyễn Thế Anh (1995).

[184] Sakaya Văn Món (2014: 240-243), Quảng Đại Tuyên (2020: 36-37).

In the present-day Cham Ahiér religious setting, temple worship is mainly a public activity, a "community worship" while private worship is mainly performed at home. In general, temple rituals are destined for the wider membership of the communities while the rituals taking place in the village are performed for clans and families. During public temple rituals such as Katé, Cham villagers (mostly women responsible for household religious practice) dress up nicely in their traditional clothes and bring lots of offerings to the temple for their ritual worship (figs. 35-36). According to Quảng Đại Tuyên (2020: 36-38), traditionally, it was not compulsory to bring offerings for gods, but this became part of an "invented tradition." In addition, he asserts that the participation of all villagers representing different generations is also a recent practice but affirms that the original spiritual elements continue to be preserved. Here, I feel that there is a concern and a genuine emphasis among Cham intellectuals on the "authenticity" and "uniqueness" of Cham temple rituals. On the one hand, they acknowledge that the temples were originally built to worship Indian gods such as Śiva and Viṣṇu, but, on the other hand, they believe that the contemporary worship of their deified kings in those temples is a legitimate part of their historical legacy. In speaking about the originality and authenticity of the Katé ritual, Quảng Đại Tuyên (2020: 37), for instance, states that it is "the product of cultural traditions that have existed since at least the 17th century," and it is "a custom associated with indigenous beliefs, localised, and attached to a language that dates from the 16th and 17th centuries."

Fig. 35. Cham villagers prepare food offerings at Po Romé temple compound.



Fig: 36. Waiting to pass food offering to the priests at the main chamber of Po Romé temple.

When I visited Cham "living temples" during the Katé festival, they were very crowded with many people, and numerous activities took place there. The festive atmosphere at Cham

temples resembles the celebration of the New Year (Tết) by ethnic Vietnamese. In fact, many Vietnamese, even researchers, have mistaken the Katé festival for the Cham New Year celebration and refer to Katé as Tết.[185] This is so also because there are many festive activities that were recently incorporated into the Katé ritual. As a matter of fact, in 2017, the Katé at Po Romé temple in Ninh Thuận province was recognized by the government as a part of Vietnam's "national intangible cultural heritage" (fig. 37) and thus it should not only be protected but also promoted in order to attract a wider audience for development of tourism industry. Interestingly, this recognition only applied to the Katé in Ninh Thuận province and not in Bình Thuận province. It was only five years later, in April 2022, that the Katé in Bình Thuận was recognized as being part of Vietnam's "national intangible cultural heritage" (fig. 38).[186] Some of the activities were recently added to the Katé at Po Sah Inâ temple in Bình Thuận province, they included competitions for Cham traditional dancing (fig. 39) and for the preparation of traditional trays of food offerings (figs. 40-41), an official ceremony to start the Katé (figs. 42, 43), and a procession for the Katé ceremony (figs. 44-45). The people who participated in these activities were ethnic Cham, but the activities were always conducted under the supervision and surveillance of the government. In addition, the government also mobilized Vietnamese "local pupils" for an official parade (figs. 46) to mark the starting of the Katé festival at Po Sah Inâ temple.[187] This "invention" of Cham tradition resulted from the joint efforts of the local

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[185] In the beginning of my fieldwork in Cham villages, many Cham villagers told me that Katé is Tết. I also read many Vietnamese articles that described Katé as Tết. However, it was only after numerous and long conversations with different Cham that I gradually figured out that Katé is *not* Tết. When I confronted some Cham to ask why they did not correct this misunderstanding, they said that they used the Vietnamese term "Tết" for convenience as the simplest and fastest way to explain the Katé to ethnic Vietnamese. It is only when they became close enough to me and saw how serious I am in trying to understand their culture that they said that Cham do not celebrate the Vietnamese New Year and that Katé is *not* Tết.

[186] I believe that one of the main reasons for the government not to recognize Katé in both regions as "national intangible cultural heritage" on the same date is because they want to avoid having a large Cham social gathering that might become hard for the government to keep under control.

[187] This, I believe, can be seen as a part of the government's effort in assimilation and multi-ethnic blending, manifested via inserting native Vietnamese (Kinh) people and their present-day culture into Cham temple activities.

Cham Ahiér community (including both Cham intellectuals and villagers) and of the Vietnamese government.

However, not all recently added activities practiced and performed at temples are supported by Cham intellectuals. For instance, while Quảng Đại Tuyên (2020: 36-38) points out that Cham villagers coming to a temple to worship and bringing food offerings to the gods are part of an "invented tradition," he completely opposes the recent practice of Vietnamese tourists lighting joss-stick incense at Cham temples. He asserts that this is a violation of Cham customary practices and indigenous culture and is therefore inappropriate and inauthentic from the Cham perspective. And to him, "'living heritage' is characterized as authentic, because it presents real-life activities of Cham locals as a continuity of maintained cultural practices."[188] Thus, it seems to him, authenticity is defined by what the indigenous Cham themselves have been practicing and performing even if those activities are recently created. Here, on the one hand, he criticizes the government's involvement in using Cham temples for tourism purposes and allowing tourists to burn joss-stick incense, but on the other hand, he ignores the fact that Cham intellectuals are also the people who work with and for the government, and are responsible for organizing cultural performances at temples as part of an "invented tradition."[189] The concept of invention of tradition was popularized by Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger in their 1983 edited work, *The Invention of Tradition*. Hobsbawn (1983: 1) explains that "'Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seeks to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past." And inventions of tradition occur "more often frequently when a rapid social

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[188] Quảng Đại Tuyên and Nosewworthy (2023: 283-284).

[189] From what I have seen, the government does not promote the practice of tourists burning joss-stick incense at Cham temples nor they have any rules or policies against such practices. Rather, I think it is more because of cultural, social, and religious practices embedded in their own traditions that leads Vietnamese to think of ancient temples as sacred and thus it is their habitual practice to burn joss-stick incense when asking for blessings. But not all Vietnamese tourists come to Cham temples with joss-stick incense.

transformation of society weakens or destroyed the social patterns of which 'old' traditions had been designed."[190] Thus, to Hobsbawn, there seems to be a distinction between "old" or ancient traditions and "new" or "invented traditions." Thinking about Cham Ahiér religion on the one hand, Cham intellectuals assert that their ritual activities are a continuation of age-old practices; however, on the other hand, they also acknowledge certain practices as recently invented. Despite all that, they strongly believe that their ritual practices are authentic and have no break with tradition or the past. Also, it is impossible to distinguish, trace, and measure accurately the real and old from fabricated and invented ritual practices in Cham Ahiér religion. For that reason, I think Hobsbawn's idea cannot be used as an explanatory theory for Cham Ahiér religion. In contrast to Hobsbawm's definition of invented tradition, the constructivist theory of tradition, developed by Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin in their 1984 article, "Tradition, Genuine or Spurious," suggest that traditions are contemporaneous symbolic constructions and that they continue to evolve and be re-created. However, as Plant (2008: 184) points out: "By depicting all traditions as symbolic constructions containing similar basic structural and functional qualities, the constructivist theory of invented tradition tends to obscure the varying meanings or importance that traditions may have to different societies." He thus suggests that:

> "extant theories of invented tradition have tended to discount the extent to which traditions can simultanouesly innovate as well as serve as powerful normative forces for cultural continuity…., I suggest that scholars, rather than treat them as genuine or invented, reassess traditions as operationalized symbols constitutive of specific cultural and historical meanings."[191]

This is the spirit that my thesis carries on as I believe that it is normal for the Cham Ahiér religion to evolve, develop, and transform as part of contemporareous practices embedded in specific historical periods and societies.

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[190] Hobsbawm (1983: 4)
[191] Plant (2008: 176).

Fig. 37. The government's certificate of recognition of Katé in Ninh Thuận as a "national intangible cultural heritage."[192]

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[192] This certificate was issued at the time of the Katé festival and placed next to Po Romé temple in 2017. Interestingly, as shown in the photo, Cham Ahiér priests (in white dress) were waiting for the government's security guard (in blue shirt) to open the temple and to let the Cham priests enter it to perform the Katé ritual.

BỘ VĂN HÓA, THỂ THAO VÀ DU LỊCH    CỘNG HÒA XÃ HỘI CHỦ NGHĨA VIỆT NAM
Số:   776  /QĐ-BVHTTDL                              Độc lập - Tự do - Hạnh phúc

*Hà Nội, ngày 04  tháng 04 năm 2022*

**QUYẾT ĐỊNH**
**Về việc công bố Danh mục di sản văn hóa phi vật thể quốc gia**

**BỘ TRƯỞNG BỘ VĂN HÓA, THỂ THAO VÀ DU LỊCH**

*Căn cứ Luật Di sản văn hóa và Luật sửa đổi, bổ sung một số điều của Luật Di sản văn hóa;*

*Căn cứ Nghị định số 98/2010/NĐ-CP ngày 21 tháng 9 năm 2010 của Chính phủ quy định chi tiết thi hành một số điều của Luật Di sản văn hóa và Luật sửa đổi, bổ sung một số điều của Luật Di sản văn hóa;*

*Căn cứ Nghị định số 79/2017/NĐ-CP ngày 17 tháng 7 năm 2017 của Chính phủ quy định chức năng, nhiệm vụ, quyền hạn và cơ cấu tổ chức của Bộ Văn hóa, Thể thao và Du lịch;*

*Theo đề nghị của Chủ tịch Ủy ban nhân dân tỉnh Bình Thuận và đề nghị của Cục trưởng Cục Di sản văn hóa.*

**QUYẾT ĐỊNH:**

**Điều 1.** Đưa vào Danh mục di sản văn hóa phi vật thể quốc gia:
**Lễ hội truyền thống**
**LỄ HỘI KATÊ CỦA NGƯỜI CHĂM**
**Tỉnh Bình Thuận**

**Điều 2.** Chủ tịch Ủy ban nhân dân các cấp nơi có di sản văn hóa phi vật thể được đưa vào Danh mục tại Điều 1 Quyết định này, trong phạm vi nhiệm vụ và quyền hạn của mình, thực hiện việc quản lý nhà nước theo quy định của pháp luật về di sản văn hóa.

**Điều 3.** Quyết định này có hiệu lực thi hành kể từ ngày ký.

**Điều 4.** Chánh Văn phòng Bộ, Cục trưởng Cục Di sản văn hóa, Chủ tịch Ủy ban nhân dân tỉnh Bình Thuận, Giám đốc Sở Văn hóa, Thể thao và Du lịch tỉnh Bình Thuận, thủ trưởng các cơ quan, đơn vị và cá nhân có liên quan tới di sản văn hóa phi vật thể được đưa vào Danh mục chịu trách nhiệm thi hành Quyết định này./.

**BỘ TRƯỞNG**

*Nơi nhận:*
- Như Điều 4;
- Bộ trưởng;
- Các Thứ trưởng;
- Lưu: VT, DSVH, HTP.20.

**Nguyễn Văn Hùng**

Fig. 38. The government's certificate of recognition of Katé in Bình Thuận as a national intangible cultural heritage issued by the government.

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Fig. 39. Cham traditional dance competition at Po Sah Inâ temple during the Katé 2017.



Fig. 40. A Cham participant in flower arrangement competition preparing an offering tray at Po Sah Inâ temple during the Katé Festival of 2017.

Fig. 41. Male Cham participants in flower arrangement competition preparing an offering tray at Po Sah Inâ temple during the Katé Festival of 2017.



Fig. 42. Government official ceremony to start the Katé 2017 at Po Sah Inâ temple.

Fig. 43. Procession for Katé ceremony at Po Sah Inâ temple.



Fig. 44. Procession for Katé ceremony at Po Sah Inâ temple.

Fig. 45. Procession for Katé ceremony at Po Sah Inâ temple.



Fig. 46. Vietnamese pupils organized by the government to parade at Po Sah Inâ temple to start the Katé 2017.

While the government currently intends to promote Cham culture and tradition through temple activities, especially through ritual practices and performances to attract tourists, the Cham also want to promote their culture and religion to showcase their heritage and identity.

The "invention" of tradition here can be understood in what Shneiderman (2015: 37-38) calls "performances" which are "ritualized actions carried out within a broader discursive context created by political, economic, or other kinds of external agendas." The activities (figs. 39-45) such as dance performances, the preparation of trays of ritual food offerings, holding an official ceremony to start the Katé, and celebrating the procession ceremony for the Katé are certainly ritualized actions performed by the Cham themselves, yet it is also certain that these activities were first created for political and economic reasons under the government's patronage. Since these ritualized actions were only recently added to Cham temple rituals, one can ask if those events can be said to represent Cham identity? My answer is affirmative because those activities were organized and performed by the Cham Ahiér, and they can be understood as essential aspects of contemporary Cham cultural production. According to Shneiderman (2015: 37-38), both ritual practices and performances are "necessary for groups and individuals to maintain the pragmatic and emotional well-being that derives from a sense of belonging to a shared identity that is recognized by others within the political context of individual nation-states." Observing the Katé, I saw in the faces of the Cham who participated in the performances of those "new activities" a sense of both responsibility and pride while representing their culture and tradition, a sense of belonging to a shared identity, the feeling that they are Cham and that they are distinct from the Vietnamese. In a way, those performances helped the Cham to display their identity in contrast to the Vietnamese.

According to the young Cham that I met at several temples, one of the main reasons for them to be there during public rituals was to make connections with other young Cham. Public rituals are not just about the priests' practicing rituals in the main chamber for the deities anymore; there are many new activities and performances that they can participate in or watch with other Cham. Thus, for the young generation, this is certainly the time to meet and have some fun; but it is also the time when they can exhibit their cultural identity and religious

identity and can be proud of themselves as the descendants of the mighty Champa kingdom. Many of them told me how proud they are of their kings' ancient brick temples since no one in the world today can yet understand the technique they used for gluing the bricks. Coming to the temples helped them to connect to the past, to their roots, to the historical Champa. This is reaffirmed in Quảng Đại Tuyên's PhD thesis (2020: 110) in which he states, "The temple awakens a sense of cultural pride and historical awareness."[193] This, I believe, is a recently developed sentiment resulting from, or responding to, the question of identity among the young generation of the Cham. This is also the message that French colonial scholars conveyed to the Cham of more than a century ago (even though their intentions may be questioned), namely, that they were the descendants of the kings who built these magnificent temples. Historical identity is what the younger generations of Cham Ahiér proudly exhibit nowadays while attending public temple rituals.

In short, what we see here is the complex process of how Cham Ahiér identity is displayed through ritual performances organized by Cham intellectuals and the government and performed by young Cham villagers in temples during the Katé. Since Cham intellectuals have more chances to attend higher education and many of them are now working for the government, they become the mediators between the Cham community and the Vietnamese government. They are highly respected by Cham priests and villagers, and they are the main force in shaping the ritual performances. Both Cham ritual practices and performances represent two facets of Cham Ahiér identity and religion. We will see more of their ritual practices below.

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[193] Quảng Đại Tuyên also mentions that many Cham intellectuals have been promoting the Katé festival to raise consciousness about preserving Cham culture in younger generation because they fear of losing their culture.

## 4.3 Temple Rituals

The set of temple rituals that I examine in this chapter are those that the Cham Ahiér conduct annually and include four main temple rituals: Peh Bi-Mbeng Yang, Yuer Yang, Katé, and Cambur. These rituals are performed at the five "living temples" and newly established local shrines. The rituals follow a specific sequence according to the Cham Ahiér Sakawi calendar: the Peh Bi-Mbeng Yang ritual (temple door opening) is performed in the first month, the Yuer Yang (praying for rain) in the fourth month, the Katé (worshiping deified kings, deified members of royal families and ancestors) in the seventh month, and the Cambur (worshipping the Mother goddess Po Inâ Nâgar and ancestors) in the ninth month.[194] In theory, as the names of the rituals suggest, each of these rituals has its own specific purpose; in practice, however, all these rituals are meant to commemorate the kings, royals, gods, the goddess Po Inâ Nâgar and ancestors and to pray for favorable weather, abundant crops, and the growth of life and prosperity. Also, while each of these rituals is performed in a specific temple and for a specific deity of the temple, a large pantheon of deities is usually invited to every ritual feast, including deified kings, generals, queens, the mother goddess Po Inâ Nâgar, and the temple door guardian Po Ginuer Matri, but not the "new deities."[195] When I asked why "new deities" are not invited to temple worship, several Cham intellectuals simply said that temple rituals are only for *yang bimong* (temple gods).

Below I provide brief descriptions and discussions of the key elements of each ritual in order to understand the rituals themselves, the gods that are worshipped in these temple rituals, the roles of Cham Ahiér priests in temple worship, and, ultimately, Cham Ahiér religion. Since many temple rituals share the same ritual procedures and priests' tasks, I have chosen some

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[194] The oldest temple for the goddess is the Po Inâ Nâgar temple at Nha Trang (Khánh Hoà province), however since the location of this temple is a bit far from the South-Central Cham community, its members usually go to the local shrines in Ninh Phước (Ninh Thuận province) and in Bắc Bình (Bình Thuận province).
[195] See chapter 3 for a description of "new deities." They are basically, deities that are related to Islamic influence.

essential parts and elements to elaborate on some of them in greater detail than on the others in order to reduce repetition. For instance, any ritual performed at a temple needs to start by asking the titular god for permission to open the door of the temple. Since I mention this in the description of Peh Bi-Mbeng Yang ritual, I will not bring it up again in the description of the other three rituals.

### 4.3.1 Peh Bi-Mbang Yang ritual

This ritual is performed in the first month of the Cham Ahiér calendar and is the first ritual of the new year. The purpose of this ritual is to propitiate the deified kings and the temple gods, to ask for blessing for a prosperous New Year, for favorable weather for agriculture and for good health for everyone. In Ninh Thuận Province, this ritual is usually performed at the Po Inâ Nâgar shrine in Hữu Đức, the Po Klaong Girai temple and the Po Romé temple while in Bình Thuận Province it takes place at local shrines. There are four smaller rituals within the Peh Bi-Mbang Yang. The first one is a ritual performed by the priests to ask the deities for permission to open and enter the temple. The second ritual is to bathe the icon of the main deity (*manei yang*) of the temple. When the ritual takes place in the Po Romé temple, the image to be bathed is that of the deified king Po Romé who is regarded by the Cham as the main deity of the temple. The third ritual is dressing the icon of the main deity (*anguei khan aw*) in many layers of beautiful garments. While the bathing and dressing rituals are performed solely for the main deity of the temple, the last ritual is called the "grand ritual" (*maliéng yang*) and is intended for all the *yang bimong* (temple deities), including all deified kings, queens, generals, the goddess Po Inâ Nâgar and the ancestral deities Po Yang. Each deity is invited to the ritual by Po Adhia and honoured by Ong Kadhar who sings specific hymns praising the merits of each of the deities while playing the *kanyi* musical instrument. In fact, there are several dozen deities who are invited to this part of the ritual: they are not represented with any images;

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instead, they are simply invoked by Po Adhia and Ong Kadhar through chanting their names. At the time when Ong Kadhar sings hymns to each deity, Muk Pajau offers food to that particular deity accordingly. Food is the most important part in any Cham ritual because the Cham Ahiér believe that the deities need to eat just like humans and if the priests do not offer food to the deities, the deities might get angry and will not bless the the priests and the community that they represent. The offering materials in this *maliéng yang* ritual include a boiled goat, three boiled chickens, five trays of rice with non-vegetarian dishes, and one tray of rice with salt and sesame, as well as cakes, bananas, mangos, coconuts, flowers, wine, boiled eggs, betel and areca nuts. The food that was used outside of the temple for the ritual asking permission to open the door cannot be brought inside to be offered again but will be shared among the priests once all the rituals are done. Interestingly, I noticed that Cham Ahiér pay special attention to food offerings in the sense that the priests often speak out loud to let the deities know about what they are offering and about the quality of each item. In the book titled *A guide of Cham traditional rituals in Ninh Thuận province,* Quảng Văn Đại (2016) describes in great detail all the materials that are needed to be prepared for each ritual, from the number of eggs to the number of betel leaves, candles, bananas, chickens, and the number of priests, etc.[196] I found it interesting that the book appears to be a sort of ritual manual written by a Cham intellectual to be used by the priests. In any case, this indicates the important role of food offerings in Cham Ahiér ritual practices. Once the food offering is finished, Muk Pajau performs a ritualistic dance to connect with Po Yang (the ancestral deities) to ask if they are happy with the ritual offerings and if they will in return bless the Cham. The ritual is finished when she hands out some hardboiled eggs to the villagers as a symbol of good luck. After that, the clothes that adorned the icon of the main deity will be removed and kept safely for the next ritual. The food offerings will be brought to the ground in front of the temple and shared among

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[196] See also Sakaya (2014: 196) for the amount of food required for this ritual.

the priests to be consumed right there. Since Peh Bi-Mbeng Yang is a small ritual and contains no "festive" activities, the number of Cham villagers who come to the ritual is very small and they participate mainly as helpers. This ritual remains the concern and the responsibility of the priests, and the goal of it is to please the gods for the welfare of the whole Cham community.

### 4.3.2 Yuer Yang ritual[197]

This ritual takes place in the fourth month of the Cham Ahiér Sakawi calendar, a time of extremely hot weather and often drought in the South-Central region. The purpose of the ritual is to pray for rain to yield good crops, and for humans and livestock to be in good health. Some villagers explained to me that this ritual is named "praying for rain" because often the rains came after they performed this ritual. The priests who are in charge of this ritual include Po Adhia and other *basaih* priests who come to assist him and take this opportunity to learn from him. Moreover, this ritual cannot take place without non-*basaih* priests such as Ong Kadhar and Muk Pajau because they are the main ritual actors who give praise and offer music and food to the deities.

This ritual usually lasts for two days and one night and there are actually many smaller rituals within Yuer Yang. The first is to purify the temple (*talih tanah*) and all its surroundings. The ritual procession starts from the East of the temple, going around it in a clockwise direction and ending in the Northeast. At each of the eight cardinal directions, the priests utter some sayings and blow conches to invoke the deities to be present, then the priests place the offerings (rice buns) on banana leaves at eight directions, thereby relating symbolism to spatial concepts. The second ritual within the Yuer Yang consists of chanting sacred texts (*bac gal praong*) in

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[197] I did not observe this ritual but I asked several priests and many Cham villagers to describe the ritual for me, as well as watching videos recorded of the ritual. I also consulted the publications of Sakaya (2014) who described the ritual that took place at Po Klaong Girai temple in Ninh Thuận province and Lâm Tấn Bình (2016) for the ritual that took place at Po Sah Inâ and Po Dam temples in Bình Thuận province. Some Cham Ahiér villagers in Bình Thuận told me that this ritual is more often performed at villages.

which several *basaih* priests take turns chanting four sets of texts until the morning. The content of these texts narrates the biographies and merits of various deities including the Fire deity (Yang Apuei), the Sun deity (Yang Aditiak), and the Earth deity (Yang Tanah) who gave life to all species. Reciting these texts also serves to wake the gods up and to invite them to come and witness the ritual. The next ritual is the fire ritual (Cuh Yang Apuei) which takes place in the morning after the chanting is completed. In order to perform this ritual, the priests need to have offerings including a boiled goat, wine, boiled eggs, betel and areca, candles and agarwood, eight rice buns, a bundle of firewood, a wooden Nandin, a Homkar symbol, a bunch of straw, a camphor lamp and some human and animal figurines/effigies (*salih*) made of rice powder. These food offerings are usually prepared by villagers in advance in the village. Basically, there is no ritual without food. Even if the priests are there but they do not have ritual food, they cannot invite the deities to come down.

The Cuh Yang Apuei ritual starts when Po Adhia stands facing the East and invites Fire deity, Sun deity and Earth deity, as well as other temple deities to the ritual. He lights up a piece of wood at the main place of worship and then holds a bunch of figurines, waving them in front of the fire while praying to the gods. Then Ong Kadhar praises the deified Po Klong Girai, Po Romé and others for the creation of fire, water, agriculture, rice, and irrigation. To end this ritual, the priests bring the figurines to a nearby river and let them float away. The last ritual of Yuer Yang is called "dam building ritual" (*talaih jamang tam*) performed the next morning at a dam near a big river. This ritual is directed by a Banâk (dam guard) but a prerequisite for the ritual *talaih jamang tam* requires Ong Kadhar and Muk Pajau to perform a ritual to the deified king Po Klaong Girai whom the Cham believe to be the deity of irrigation. After that Banâk and Ong Kadhar can perform the *talaih jamang tam* ritual at a dam with various food offerings to the deities including Po Inâ Nâgar, Po Klaong Girai, Po Romé and other *yang bimong* to ask for good irrigation in the fields. The well-being of the crops depends

not only on rain, that is, water coming from the sky, but on irrigation and the management of the water coming from rivers. This ritual shows the Cham Ahiér's perception of life in a practical way regarding how society functions in connection to history and religion. The Cham Ahiér worship their deified kings as builders and creators of different means by which the inhabitants can survive. The Cham are grateful to their king Po Klaong Girai for the creation of dam irrigation and through worshipping the king as such, they make a very real and human connection to this figure.[198]

The Yuer Yang ritual is also called Cuh Yang Apuei or the "ritual for the Fire deity" by some Cham Ahiér in Bình Thuận province; in this name the emphasis is placed on the ritual part related to fire. When this ritual is performed at Po Dam temple, the rituals Rija Harei (day dancing ritual), Rija Dayep (night dancing ritual), and Ngap Yang Tikuh (ritual for the Mouse deity) are also incorporated as parts of the Cuh Yang Apuei temple ritual.[199]

### 4.3.3 Katé ritual

The Katé ritual performed at Cham ancient temples is fundamentally an ancestral memorial worship, centering on the commemoration of Cham deified kings and royals such as Po Klaong Girai and Po Romé. Before 1967, Katé was a temple ritual performed by Cham Ahiér priests while Cham villagers were not supposed to participate in this event. However, since 1975, Katé is an event that welcomes not only Cham villagers, but also interested Vietnamese and members of the government to visit and learn about Cham culture and religion. Musical performances then became a part of the event and are now seen as necessary to

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[198] It reminds me of the idea proposed by Nora Taylor (1998: 264) who argued that the main statues of, for instance, Po Romé or Po Klaong Girai kings are not mere representations of deified kings but symbols of the transformation in popular mythology of historical figures after their death. She suggested that there is an association between the stone statue that is meant to embody a ruler's features and the power that is believed to be naturally contained within the stone. Thus, the statue is both a god and a royal, and an embodiment of both divine and emblematic aspects of an earthly ruler's power.

[199] See a detailed discussion of the Rija Harei and Rija Dayep rituals in chapter 6.

welcome all the guests and visitors to the Katé festival.[200] In 2017, Katé was recognized by the government as "national intangible cultural heritage." This means that since then both the government and the Cham are supposed to protect the Katé ritual from disappearing. Nowadays, Katé is celebrated not just as a one-day temple ritual but it became a time of festivities and ceremonial activities which take place at many different locations on various days over the course of a whole month. It is not limited to the members of the Cham Ahiér community, but also welcomes the members of the Cham Awal community. In the past Katé was a Cham Ahiér temple ritual performed at ancient temples but now it has expanded to the village level and the family level as well. This means that the various practices of Katé are performed not only at the temple but also at village shrines and in individual homes, though on different days than the temple rituals, usually after the Katé at temples is finished. In addition, there are also its new adaptations, the Katé-Ramâwan and Katé Cần Giờ. According to Noseworthy (2013: 13), Katé-Ramâwan is a Cham student-led activity that is held in Hồ Chí Minh City one or two weeks after the official Katé. It is a musical performance that blends dances, songs, and traditional music with explanations of Katé ceremonies and the Cham celebration of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. As for Katé Cần Giờ, it is a recently started tradition of gatherings that emphasizes cultural dialogue amongst Cham populations from Cambodia and Vietnam. It is meant to bring both Islamic and non-Islamic elements together and promote inter-faith dialogues. Noseworthy (2013: 12) believes that this "represents a shift toward a transnational frame to redefine communal and cultural identity." In this chapter, I provide a description of Katé ritual performed at temples only.

The ritual practices of the Katé at temples have several parts. The first ritual is performed to receive the garments from the Raglai people for the main deity of the temple (*raok khan aw*). Historically, the Raglai were neighbors of the Cham. In their shared history,

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[200] Sakaya (2014: 240-243), Quảng Đại Tuyên (2020: 36).

the Raglai were close to the Cham and were entrusted to keep Cham royal treasure and religious objects when Champa was invaded by the Viet. Nowadays, they do not keep any more of the Cham royal treasure, but they still keep the garments of the main deities of the Cham "living temples" in Ninh Thuận. Thus, when Katé comes, they bring the garments of the deities to the Cham priests who use them to perform the ritual of dressing the main temple deity. Once Katé is finished, the garments are returned to the Raglai so that they can continue to keep them for the Cham until the next year when the ritual is performed again.[201]

The second ritual of the Katé is the "opening of the temple door" (*peh bi-mbang yang*) when Po Adhia has to ask Po Ginuer Matri, the door guardian of the temple for permission to open the temple's door. The third ritual is to bathe the main deity icon (*manei yang*) represented in the form of a *liṅga yoni*, *mukha liṅga*, or a stone sculpture (figs. 47-48). This ritual is performed by Ong Camanei and Muk Pajau and the substance that is used to wash the deity's "body" is pure water taken from a clean source. The fourth ritual is to dress and decorate the icon (*anguei aw khan/cuk khan aw po yang*) with the clothes received from the Raglai people (fig. 49). The fifth ritual, which is the main ritual (*maliéng yang/paliéng yang*) starts once the deity is dressed up nicely in colorful clothes and is ready to have his meal. At this point, Ong Kadhar plays the *kanyi* instrument and sings hymns praising each deity that he invites to the feast while Muk Pajau offers food to each of the deities according to the hymns. Some Cham told me that in the past it was only Ong Kadhar who played the *kanyi* instrument for this ritual. However, nowadays other musicians who play *ginang*, *baranâng*, and *saranai* instruments also participate in this ritual to offer music to the deities.[202] There are many *yang bimong* invited to the Katé ritual but no images of those deities are used, except for the main deity's symbolic

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[201] I observed several Katé rituals in Ninh Thuận province where the Raglai people brought the garments to the Cham. However, in Bình Thuận province, since 2008, this practice no longer exists. For instance, in Po Dam temple, the local Cham made copies of the main deity's garments and keep them in the village for easier access.
[202] Sakaya Văn Món (2014: 303) suggests that this is a recent practice that emerged due to the influence of Katé festivities.

icon in the form of a *liṅga* on a *yoni* located in the main chamber of the temple. For instance, the main deity of Po Klaong Girai temple is the deified king Po Klaong Girai represented in the form of a *liṅga-yoni*. The main deity of Po Sah Inâ Temple is Po Sah Inâ who is also represented in the form of a *liṅga-yoni*.



Fig. 47. Bathing the main icon of Po Romé temple.

Fig. 48. Bathing the main icon of Po Sah Inâ temple.



Fig. 49. Dressing the main icon of Po Sah Inâ temple.

Some of the food offerings that are essential for the Katé ritual include goat meat, chicken meat, fish, rice, cakes, fruits, betel and areca nuts, boiled eggs, sticky rice, sweets, flowers, and wine. With such offerings, the priests ask for the gods' blessings for favorable weather and health. Once the deities finish eating, Muk Pajau dances to entertain the deities and sometimes she goes into a trance to connect with Po Yang or the divine essence of the ancestral deities. Her body can be understood as a "vessel" that the ancestral deities may enter and thus communicate with the participants of the ritual, in particular, to inform them whether they were happy with the offerings and if the ritual was successful. After this, the ritual assistants will take all the food offerings outside of the main chamber and invite the priests to eat the blessed food before they go home.

### 4.3.4 Cambur ritual

The ritual of Cambur is performed to honour the Cham mother goddess Po Inâ Nâgar; however, the ritual is not only performed at local shrines dedicated to the goddess but is also held at other temples dedicated to deified kings such as Po Klaong Girai, Po Romé, and Po Sah Inâ. The Cambur ritual usually takes place in the ninth month of the Cham Ahiér calendar. The purpose of this ritual is to propitiate the deities and ask them to bless the Cham with favorable weather and abundant crops, as well as with numerous descendants. There are several smaller rituals within Cambur, and the ritual procedures are the same as in the Katé ritual. The first one is a ritual performed to receive the goddess' garments (*raok khan aw*) from the Raglai people. The second ritual is to open the door of the temple (*peh bi-mbang yang*) and ask for permission from the temple guardian deity Po Ginuer Matri. After that is the ritual to bathe the temple goddess or the temple main icon (*manei yang*). Following the bathing ritual is the dressing ritual in which Ong Camanei and Muk Pajau dress the goddess (*anguei aw khan*) or the main temple deity with the garments they received from the Raglai people. Once the deity is dressed

up properly with beautiful clothes and adorned with ornaments, the main ritual (*maliéng yang*) is started with Ong Kadhar playing the *kanyi* instrument and singing hymns praising each deity that he invited to the feast including first the goddess Po Inâ Nâgar, then deified kings, and *yang bimong*.

The praising hymns that Ong Kadhar sings to the deities generally convey the qualities and contributions made by the deities to the Champa kingdom and its people. They can be seen as stories and legends; for instance, the goddess Po Inâ Nâgar is praised for her contribution in teaching the Cham the art of weaving and the technology of lowland rice agriculture, Po Klaong Can is said to have taught the Cham people pottery, Po Klaong Girai is praised for the creation of dam irrigation, and Po Romé for the creation of the calendar and the Ahiér -Awal cosmological dualism concept.[203] To each deity that Ong Kadhar praises and invokes, Muk Pajau offers food in a symbolic form. There are no images or icons of all the deities that are invited to the temple ritual except for the main deity of the temple.  Some of the food offerings required for this ritual include boiled goat meat, three trays of food and rice, three trays of cakes and fruits, betel and areca nuts, boiled eggs, sticky rice, sweets, flowers, and wine. Cham Ahiér believe that the divinities need to eat food just like humans and only after they consumed the food, they would bless the Cham. There is a notion of an exchange between humans and deities in which humans offer food to deities and in return deities grant the humans' wishes. Cambur ritual ends when Muk Pajau exhibits her dancing skills and in so doing connects with Po Yang to ask if they are happy with the ritual offerings and whether they would bless the Cham with health and prosperity.

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[203] These Cham hymns are composed in the modern Cham language and written down in Akhar Thrah script. The majority of young Cham generation cannot read and write Cham but can only speak Cham. The Cham do not have their own schooling system, they go to the same schools as the ethnic Vietnamese and use Vietnamese language and study Vietnamese history. They do not get a chance to learn about the history of Champa since Vietnamese history textbooks do not mention Champa history in the school curriculum. Cham villagers mosly learn about their kings and "history" of Champa kingdom through the praising hymns that Ong Kadhar sings in these temple rituals. This "history" is what allows the contemporary young Cham to have a sense of their own heritage.

## 4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I explored contemporary Cham Ahiér perceptions of temples as sacred sites, explained how contemporary Cham villagers join their priests to visit those temples to perform ritual worship, and demonstrated that this participation by villagers is a recent phenomenon. I also discussed how ancient Cham brick temples were recognized by the government as items of "national heritage" and discussed the Katé temple ritual that became a part of the "national intangible cultural heritage;" the temples and rituals are now promoted as sites and events used by the government to attract tourists. In the past, only Cham Ahiér priests had the authority to open the doors of the temples to perform rituals and then to close the temples until the next temple ritual; however, nowadays the government controls the opening hours of the temples since they are considered national heritage sites and are thus transformed from sacred places to tourist attractions. Moreover, the government encourages Cham villagers to perform various musical activities and ritual performances during the Katé Festival to "showcase Cham culture" and to attract tourists. By encouraging Cham villagers to perform various cultural activities at temples and by opening the temples every day, the government ultimately takes part in "inventing" Cham culture and tradition. As for the Cham, by visiting the temples and performing various cultural and religious activities, they also invent their own tradition. The roles of both Cham intellectuals and ordinary villagers in participation in the temple activities, particularly in ritual practices and performances in temples, contribute to the consolidation of the invented contemporary Cham identity. Attending to the temple rituals became a religious activity that started only since the last few decadesl while participating in these rituals, Cham villagers reenact their relationship with historical Champa kingdom and proudly showcase their historical identity. They connect themselves to the people who built those great temples and to the resident deified kings and royals whom they currently worship in those temples as gods and ancestors. In short, temple activities enact and validate the

relationship between the Cham and their deified kings, thus connecting the present-day communities to medieval Champa in terms of historical lineage or historical identity as the descendants of Champa kingdom.

In the second part of this chapter, I examined Cham Ahiér temple rituals that showcase Cham Ahiér religious identity and religion. The rituals of opening the temple door, bathing and dressing the main icons of the temples are indicative of Hindu influences. However, the meaning of the ritual itself, the gods worshipped, and the priests who direct the rituals are very different from those of Hindu rituals performed in Indian temples. In Cham Ahiér temple rituals, the devotees pay the highest homage first to the deified kings whom they worship as gods and as ancestors. During the ritual worships, they praise them for their contribution to the practical developments that helped Cham society survive, such as the creation of dam irrigation, pottery, and weaving. The temple rituals thus give the contemporary Cham a chance to experience certain connections with their deified kings and royals in a direct and personal manner. Furthermore, if in India it is only the Brahmin male priests who are in charge of all the temple ritual activities including worshiping, bathing and dressing the main deity, with no women allowed to do that, in Cham temples it is the priestess Muk Pajau who is responsible for the preparation of food offerings, bathing and dressing the main deity of the temple, and who then goes into a trance to connect with the divinities to know whether the ritual is successful.

All the Cham temple rituals are accomplished due to collaboration of both *basaih* priest and non-*basaih* priest. They work together hand in hand to make the ritual happen successfully. Each priest has a specific role or task to do when the ritual starts, and no one is more important or less important than others. Seeing how they worked together in temple rituals made me think that the category of "folk masters" that the Cham intellectuals use to identify the non-*basaih* priests is inappropriate and misleading because all the priests were equally important.

Intriguingly, many Cham told me that temple rituals will not start if the non-*basaih* priests were not there but if the *basaih* priests cannot come, the non-*basaih* priests can still start the rituals. Moreover, the role of priestess Muk Pajau in Cham Ahiér temple rituals is extremely prominent because she participates in every part of them. She is responsible for food preparation and possesses the necessary skills and knowhow to arrange the right types and amounts of food for the deities. Moreover, the role of Muk Pajau is not reduced to food preparation and offering to deities; she also takes part in bathing and dressing the main deity of the temple and, as a post-menopausal woman, she goes into a trance to have direct contact with deified ancestors. One of the explanations regarding her occupation of such important roles in public life and in the religious activities of the Cham Ahiér may be based on the observation that Cham Ahiér society still follows the matrilineal system. In India, it is only the Brahmin male priest who is in charge of all the temple ritual practices including worshiping, bathing and dressing the main deity, and no woman is allowed to do that. Nonetheless, the role of Muk Pajau in temple ritual practice reinforces the idea that non-*basaih* priests are as important as *basaih* priests. Thus, the categories among the priests maintained by Cham intellectuals should not be understood in terms of power and dominant authority but rather in terms of division of labour.

Furthermore, while observing Cham temple rituals, I noticed that Cham Awal priests did not participate in those rituals. Some Cham told me that according to traditional regulations, Cham Awal priests are not allowed to go to Ahiér temples. Only recently a few progressive Cham Awal priests claimed that the deified kings who are worshipped in those temples are also their kings, and thus there should be nothing wrong about their entering Ahiér temples.[204] The appearance of Cham Awal priests in Cham temples is a recent phenomenon encouraged by an on-going movement among the Cham intellectuals who believe that to participate in temple activities is a way to showcase their historical identity as the descendants of Champa kingdom

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[204] See Quảng Đại Tuyên (2020: 112).

and to strengthen Cham community. In short, what these temple rituals reveal is only a part of Cham Ahiér religious identity and religion and do not portray the complete picture. To have a deeper understanding with a fuller image of Cham Ahiér religion and identity, we will continue to explore Cham Ahiér ritual practices in villages in the next chapters.

## Chapter 5: Ceremonies of Life's Passage: Funerary Practices and *Kut* Entry Ceremony

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on two interconnected aspects of Cham Ahiér religious practice, the first being the funeral ceremony including cremation rituals and the implications of such concepts as "good death" and "bad death," while the second is the *kut* cemetery entry ceremony (hereafter referred to as "*kut* entry ceremony"). A common belief among the Cham Ahiér is that death is only the end of one's current lifetime after which one will be reborn into another life. The Cham saying, "Life is just a short-time travel" (*dok di lôk nao kăk*) expresses the idea that the life that one currently has on the Earth is a temporary one, a short-term existence; in contrast, the next life in which the deceased joins ancestors in Heaven permanently is much more significant. However, no one gets to be reborn into the world of ancestors simply because she or he has died. A dead person needs to have two things in order to be reborn in that world: a funeral ceremony and a *kut* entry ceremony. While the purpose of the funeral is to create a new body for the deceased to inhabit in her or his next life, the *kut* entry ritual focuses on burying forehead bones of the deceased in the *kut,* so that the deceased can finally rejoin the world of ancestors (*muk kei*). The *kut* is a cemetery of clan-based matrilineal descent and the Cham Ahiér believe that the *kut* is where ancestors live on the Earth; therefore, after death the remains of one's body must return to live beside his or her mother in the *kut*.

When observing Cham Ahiér funeral rituals and speaking to the priests and villagers at funerals, I found that they are proud of their rituals pertaining to death, particularly the cremation ritual as a religious practice which differentiates themselves from the other group of Cham, the Cham Awal, who maintain burial practices for funerals rather than cremation. Thus, I believe that cremation rituals contribute to strengthen the identity of this community. In other words, sharing the same funeral ritual practices solidifies the connection between these people

and helps them form themselves into a community, thus embedding these ostensibly religious activities within the sociological make-up of the village. Funeral rituals contribute to defining the identity of the Cham Ahiér community in contrast to the Cham Awal. Furthermore, I found that many of the ordinary Cham villagers whom I met refer to themselves as "Cham *Cuh*" and are not familiar with the term "Cham Ahiér." "Cham *Cuh*" is the term that both the Cham Ahiér villagers and other groups of Cham in the Southern and Central Vietnam use to refer to the Cham Ahiér; this is an identifying term applied to the Cham who practice cremation since the word "*cuh*" means "cremation."[205] Thus, it can be argued that the term "Cham Ahiér" is used mostly by Cham intellectuals in scholarly contexts and is thus more familiar to researchers whereas the term "Cham *Cuh*" is more commonly used by villagers for self-identification. Lastly, a close examination of Cham Ahiér funeral and of *kut* entry ceremony not only reveals their concept of afterlife but also helps identify the deities that they worship including ancestors, "old deities" and "new deities."

## 5.2 Funeral Ceremony

There are several different types and forms of the Cham Ahiér funeral rituals. The choice of the form to be used depends on whether the deceased belongs to the cremation lineage or the burial lineage, and on the manner in which the person died, that is, whether the deceased had a "bad death" or a "good death". Even though Cham Ahiér identify themselves as Cham *Cuh*, that is, "the Cham who practice cremation," not all the Cham Ahiér practice cremation. There are particular details and situations regarding local practices bound by history, tradition, and religious customs that prevent a small number of Cham Ahiér from having cremation funerals. Particularly, among the Cham Ahiér there is a division between the clans who belong to the "cremation lineage" and those of the "burial lineage," with the clans who belong to the

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[205] Here we see that their terminology refers to religion as something one does. For the modalities of "doing religion," see Adam Yuet Chau (2019).

burial lineage being in the minority. When I asked the priests about the criteria used to decide who belongs to which of the two lineages, in most cases they answered that it was an established tradition inherited from earlier generations and one had to simply follow the family tradition. It therefore can be identified as a "clan-based classification."[206] There are several explanations for the reasons why a given clan belongs to the burial lineage. Many of my informants from "cremation lineage" asserted that their clans formerly worshipped a Viet queen who was the wife of the Cham king Po Nit, thus, they follow Viet burial funeral practices. The second explanation can be seen in the writings of Phan Quốc Anh (2006:192) who suggests that these clans just continue their family tradition inherited from previous generations and that their ancestors belonged to the class of serfs (Cham: *halun halak*), who were mostly peasants and by custom must have continued the tradition of the burial funeral.[207] In fact, my interviews with local Cham Ahiér in Bình Thuận province suggest that those who belong to the burial lineage are considered as having a low servile status which was often associated with socio-economic status.[208] In any case, a Cham Ahiér who belongs to the burial lineage is supposed to have a burial funeral; however, the funeral of such a person will retain procedures similar to a cremation funeral but in a condensed form, as it is usually completed within one day instead of the four days of the cremation funeral. Also, for the Cham Ahiér who belong to the burial lineage, the funeral ends when the corpse is buried. They do not need to perform the *kut* entry ceremony. It remains unclear where the ancestors of the burial lineage exist and whether the dead will join them. Some of the Cham whom I spoke with did not know how to answer this question nor were they concerned much with this topic. There were a few

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[206] In Ninh Thuận, there are only a few clans who are members of the burial lineage, and they are mostly concentrated in Ninh Phước and Ninh Hải districts. In Bình Thuận there are also only a few clans, and they live mainly in Bắc Bình district.

[207] For an in-depth study of slavery in Champa, see Guyot-Becker's PhD dissertation (2014).

[208] Some of my informants spoke about them as poor people who must accept a burial funeral because they could not afford the price of a cremation funeral (which costs around five thousand U.S dollars or more). However, I also heard that in special cases when the family of the deceased belonged to the burial lineage but could afford a cremation funeral and, moreover, the deceased had a "good death," they negotiated with their village head, village elders and *basaih* priests asking for permission to switch to a cremation funeral.

intellectuals who told me that people from this lineage are destined to be reborn as humans or as animals depending on the *karma* they accumulated while they were alive, but they will never be reborn in heaven and become deified. However, there were a few villagers who mentioned that the deceased from a burial lineage can still go to heaven if they have a proper burial funeral and if they did good deeds when they were alive. Thus, what we see here is a variety of explanations, interpretations, and understandings among the Cham. Most of the people are concerned with the idea of afterlife in the world of ancestors. However, some of the Cham also believe that doing good or bad deeds for others in this life will influence the next life in which one will be reborn as human or animal, respectively. This shows how different concurrences of philosophies and thoughts have been internalized among the Cham.

According to Phan Quốc Anh (2006:142), the Cham Ahiér universe contains three parts: Heaven (*ptichih yang atachah*), Earth (*lulah*), and Hell (*nưrăk*). There are five layers in the realm of Heaven with the highest three reserved for priests and for those who belong to the cremation lineage and had a "good death" (*mưtai sian*), that is, those who died of old age, and therefore had a "natural death." The last two lower layers of the realm of Heaven are for those who had a "bad death" (*mưtai bhaw*), that is, those who died prematurely, and/or died in an accident, but also belonged to the cremation lineage. There are two layers in the realm of Hell: the higher one is for those people who had a "good death" but belonged to the burial lineage (*Cham baung-Cham dar*), or those who died prematurely (under 15 years old) but belonged to the cremation lineage (*Cham Cuh*). The lower layer of hell is for those Cham people who had a "bad death" and belonged to the "burial lineage." Thus, from this description, it seems that Hell is not necessarily an unpleasant place. One can wonder if Hell is the place where the dead of the burial lineage meet their ancestors since this lineage does not have the *kut* entry ritual to help the deceased to join the world of ancestors in Heaven and become deified.

Aside from the emphasis on the lineage of the deceased (that is, whether the lineage is a "cremation" or "burial" one), the second element that determines the type and form of the funeral ceremony is the manner in which the person died, that is, whether the deceased had a "bad death" or a "good death". In other words, her or his type of funeral is related to the "death types," which can be identified by the priests on the basis of the age of the person, the circumstances of the death, e.g., whether the person died inside of the house or outside, whether her or his body parts were all intact, and so forth. Thus, the type of death also influences the type of funeral that the deceased will receive and determines the place where the deceased will be reborn in the next life. There are many rules and factors related to the classification of "good death" or "bad death", and also to the choice between "cremation" or "burial". Below I will discuss some of the most important requirements and regulations.

The majority of Cham Ahiér belong to the cremation lineage, and, therefore, most of them will have a "cremation funeral." Only people who were cremated can be deified and become *yang* (deities). People who had a burial funeral cannot be deified. Those who die under fifteen years of age can only have a "burial funeral," no matter what lineage that person belonged to. The main priests in charge of funeral ceremony for both lineages are *basaih* priests. For a "burial funeral" there can only be one *basaih* priest performing the ritual while for a "cremation funeral" there can be two *basaih* priests or even more. Cham Ahiér do not have a permanent altar or place of worship of ancestors at home; instead, the *kut* (cemetery) is located where ancestors reside on Earth and thus is the permanent place of ancestor worship (though they do not have the practice of visiting the *kut* regularly, as most attend only once a year during the Katé period). Those who belong to the burial lineage do not have a *kut* cemetery and thus they worship their ancestors through the *ciét atau*, the clan's "sacred basket," an object representing ancestors, since all the Cham Ahiér, no matter what lineages they belong to, have a *ciét atau* for each clan.

### 5.2.1 "Good death" and "bad death"

Such terms as "good death" (*mưtai siam*) or "complete death", "normal death", "natural death" refer to those who died at home, with their whole body remaining intact, and who were not disabled before they passed away. There are some even more specific features distinguishing the "good death", they are as follows. The head of the dying person is lifted up by a relative before her or his last breath. While a dying person is taking her or his last breaths, family members must stroke her or his body from feet to head to help the soul to be released from the head. Once the person has stopped breathing, he or she must be laid directly on the ground and touch the soil because the Cham believe that people are born from the "Mother Earth" and must return to the earth when they die.

The terms "bad death" (*mưtai bhaw*), "incomplete death," or "abnormal death" refer to the following situations. The death is "bad" when the person dies on a day without the moon, on the first day of the (lunar) month, or on a Thursday. People who died outside of their home and village during a war, or because of an accident, drowning, or suicide, or with some parts of their body missing are considered as having a "bad death." This category also includes those who were blinded, crippled, or disabled at the time of their death, and people who died before they reached the age of 15 (puberty age), or who died of old age but were never married. The relative of those who had a "bad death" but belonged to a cremation lineage must ask a priest to perform a ritual of exorcising ghosts and are not allowed to have the cremation funeral right away; instead they must conduct a "temporary burial" of the deceased for a specific period of time and only then have the corpse exhumed for a cremation funeral.[209] Also, in the case when

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[209] It is common for the Cham Ahiér cremation lineage in Bình Thuận province to perform the cremation funeral for the deceased as soon as there are auspicious days. However, for the Cham Ahiér cremation lineage in Ninh Thuận, the tradition is to bury the corpse for a few years and then have it dug out to perform the cremation ritual. The funeral ritual that I observed and discussed in this chapter took place in Bắc Bình district of Bình Thuận province. When working on this chapter, besides my field notes and interviews, I also consulted publications of Phan Quốc Anh (2006) and Sử Văn Ngọc (2012; 2015) who studied the Cham Ahiér funeral rituals that took place in Ninh Thuận province to see the similarities and differences between the two provinces. When the differences are prominent or noticeable, I mention them in my analysis.

a person had a "bad death" with the whole body disappeared (for example, as result of drowning) or destroyed, the priest will need to perform a ritual to call the soul of the dead back and another ritual for creating/reinstating body parts for the dead. If the "bad death" happened at home, the corpse must be taken out of the village for a ritual to ward off evil spirits. The Cham Ahiér believe that without this ritual the soul of the dead will not be released from the body to go to another world but will keep wandering among the living as a ghost or demon and dragging other members of the family to die as well.

People who died at home and who stopped breathing on bad hours or bad days are still considered as having a "bad death" even if they were properly attended to by relatives; for this reason, their bones will not be merged into the core of the family line in the *kut* cemetery. Such people can never join the world of the ancestors in Heaven. To avoid this situation, when a dying person is old and unable to continue living any longer, the family members will invite the priests to come to perform the *kak dhaung* ritual to take away the soul of the dying person *before* his or her actual death. Once the *kak dhaung* ritual is completed, it is believed that the soul does not reside inside the body any longer, thus the person can die on any day, in bed, and with no need to be placed on the ground nor having a family member holding her or him while dying. In such a case, the person is regarded as having a "good death". In short, a "good death" is of utmost importance because it directly influences the afterlife of the deceased. Here, it is not the *karma* or actions that one performed during her or his lifetime that affects one's next life; instead, the determining factors are how the person died and what was the lineage to which she or he belonged.

### 5.2.2 Cremation funeral

The cremation funeral that I observed was in Bắc Bình district of Bình Thuận province. The deceased was a man about 50 years old. He died at home due to sickness and he was with his children and wife at the moment of passing away. This is an important element to consider, among others, in determining whether he had a "good death" or a "bad death". His funeral was organized as the one for ordinary people of the cremation lineage who had undergone a "good death." While *basaih* priests played the central role at funeral ritual practices, they were not the only ones at the scene. There were some other funeral specialists and assistants for specific tasks; they included Ong Daoh (funeral singer), Ong Heng (bamboo palanquin builder), Muk Buh (food preparation lady), Ong Hala Char (corpse carriers), Ragei (carpenters), Gru Khik Sang (a house guard to prevent ghosts, demons and evil spirits from coming in), a drum player and several other musicians.

A Cham Ahiér cremation funeral always takes four days, and it is the highest *basaih* priest Po Adhia who selects the auspicious date to start the funeral. The selected days follow the order of the week, either running from Sunday to Wednesday, or from Wednesday to Saturday. Following the order of these four days, the first day is devoted to the ritual performed to "feed the deceased" (*harei pahwak*). The second day (Monday or Thursday) of the funeral has no ritual but only musical performances. The third day is focused on a "tree cutting" ritual (*tak kayau*) performed to collect wood necessary for the cremation. On the last day, the cremation ritual itself is carried out. According to the Cham traditional calendar, the day to cremate the corpse has to fall on a Wednesday or a Saturday. As for the months, a funeral ritual can only be performed in the third, the sixth, the eighth, the tenth, and the eleventh month of the Cham Ahiér calendar.[210]

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[210] For good and bad hours, days and months of the Cham calendar, see Sakaya (2016).

The funeral that I observed took place in a temporary shack called *kajang* built at the place reserved for funeral purposes outside of the residence areas of the village. It was located on the other side of a canal which separates the residential area from agricultural fields. (see figs. 50 and 51). The *kajang* where the funeral rituals took place was located on the field side of the canal and this place was used only for funeral rituals. The cremation itself was carried out further into the fields and away from residential areas. People believe that death is inauspicious and that a dead body is polluting; thus, they do not perform funerals at home. This is in contrast to the practices of the Vietnamese whose funerals take place at home and people carry the corpse to the graveyard for burial only at the very end of the funeral ceremony. Even though a dead body is associated with pollution, the funeral ritual can be seen as one of the most important rituals of the Cham Ahiér because it is not simply an occasion to say farewell to the deceased; rather, the ritual represents a complex process for the creation of a new body, a rebirth into the next life. The role of the *basaih* priests is to guide the dead at every step of the way (through four days of rituals) so that the dead can be reborn.



Fig. 50. Village *kajang* for funeral.

Fig. 51. Funeral *kajang.*

The timetable of the ceremony is as follows:

<u>Day 1:</u>

There are many rituals on the first day of the funeral but before starting any ritual activities, the *basaih* priests must undergo a purification ritual to clean themselves. The notions of purity and impurity are apparently crucial to address for any ritual practice to come about. Basically, the *basaih* priests need to go to a quiet place, usually under a tree where a bottle of water is prepared. They sit in a squatting position facing East, recite some appropriate mantras and use their ritual bamboo stick to draw talismanic figures on the ground. People at the *kajang* explained to me that the *basaih* priests were reporting to the gods and ancestors about the funeral that was taking place and informed them about the name and age of the deceased. They also asked the gods to witness their sincerity and to help them purify themselves so that they could perform the funeral ritual effectively. The purity of the priests is understood as directly

related to the success of the entire ritual. To end this part of the ritual, the priests rinse their mouths, wash their hands and feet, and symbolically pretend to wash their hair and entire body.

The next ritual, the *basaih* priests have to pray to the Termite God (Po Yang Katuec) for permission to start the funeral ritual. The Cham Ahiér believe that a termite mound is the dwelling place of numerous deities, and the priests need those deities to prevent malevolent ghosts and demons from coming to disturb the funeral. While offering wine, eggs, betel and areca nuts at a termite mound, *basaih* priests inform the Termite God that they would perform the funeral ritual for a particular person with a certain name and age and would ask the Termite God to bless and protect them to perform the funeral successfully. When the *basaih* priests finished the ritual at the termite mound, they would go to the *kajang* where the funeral takes place, but halfway through they need to stop at an intersection of three roads to sit and to draw a talisman and to ask numerous deities, including Po Nabi Ew and Po Nabi Hanuk, who are the guardian deities, to take away the old name of the deceased and give him or her a new name. They then pick up a handful of soil to use later in the feeding ritual.

After arriving at the funeral *kajang*, the *basaih* priests had to perform the *Mưlieng Yang* ritual to invite the Mother Goddess Po Inâ Nâgar, Po Yang and other "old deities" to come and witness the funeral, give blessings, and enjoy the food offerings. The offerings include betel and areca nuts, wine, water, salt, chicken, fish, taro soup, bananas, raw bean sprouts, cakes and sweets. The ritual ends with the *basaih* priests asking those deities to protect them from being harmed by malevolent ghosts and demons whom the Cham believe to be surrounding the funeral site. Since *basaih* priests are the ones who stop the ghosts and demons from coming and disturbing the funeral, these entities might attack the priests, and therefore the priests themselves also need the protection given to them by the deities.

One of the most important rituals on the first day of the funeral is "feeding of the deceased" *(harei pahwak)*. The Cham Ahiér believe that the entire funeral represents the

process of the dead being reborn, and therefore they imagine that by the first day of the funeral the dead is a fetus only a few months old living inside her or his mother's womb, and thus this fetus needs nutrition. The feeding of the imagined five-month-old fetus requires basic materials such as water, rice, salt, and the soil that the *basaih* priests collected earlier on the way from the termite mound. This soil is sprayed on the corpse while water is sprinkled on the head of the deceased. The priests also feed the deceased some rice. Family members also take part in feeding the dead, with the women going before the men.

In the ritual that I observed, the wife and children of the deceased and other close relatives all wore white dresses, thus it was easy to recognize them. They seemed to be very busy with all the tasks at hand in the funeral ritual and had no private time or space yet to mourn the deceased in a sentimental or emotional way. They cried from time to time but in a controlled way that made me feel as if they had accepted the inevitability of a death in their family. About one hundred villagers came to pay respects to the deceased during the course of the first day and each of them stayed for an hour or two. There was a small table set up on the edge of the left side of the *kajang* with a photograph of the deceased, a plate for donated money, and a ceramic vase for anyone who wished to light up an incense stick for the deceased. This vase was similar to the Viet altar; however, the fact that it was not placed at the centre of the *kajang* as the ethnic Vietnamese would do indicated that the influence from the ethnic Vietnamese had not yet been established as a conventional practice. There was an incense vase, but I did not see that many Cham lighting incense for the deceased; this was so perhaps because traditionally the Cham do not have the practice of using it. It is only recently that some Cham Ahiér more influenced by Vietnamese religious practices than the others also started lighting up incense for the deceased and ancestors. Interestingly, when my turn to pay respect to the deceased came, the family expected me to light up incense for the deceased as they saw that I was not from their own community. Some of the villagers at the funeral told me that the

deceased had many ethnic Vietnamese friends and the family set up that table mainly for his Vietnamese friends. However, the fact that some of the contemporary Cham Ahiér "insert" some Vietnamese religious practices into their rituals reveals their flexibility in adopting or incorporating new elements into their existing traditions.

The person who was responsible for preparing the funeral food was the female "specialist" Muk Buh. In the evening of the first day of the funeral, she had to prepare five trays of food, symbolizing the five-month-old fetus. Among these five trays, four were for the *basaih* priests and one for the deceased. The *basaih* priests performed a ritual to offer dinner to the deceased (or, according to another explanation, to the fetus) with a bowl of rice and boiled egg. Once this ritual was completed, the *basaih* priests performed a purification ritual for themselves and then they ate the food that was given to them. People who came to the funeral and stayed for the whole day were invited to have dinner at the *kajang* together with the priests. I was also invited to have dinner with all of them and this gave me an opportunity to ask the priests to elaborate on some issues. They were not able to provide the answers to some of my questions and thus sometimes they would consult the elders at the *kajang* for answers. To my surprise, several priests asked me if I think that Cham Ahiér are less civilized and less hygienic compared to Cham Awal regarding funeral ritual practices. They were surprised that I did not mind eating at the funeral ground with them and to sit not far from the corpse. They told me that many of the Cham Awal often criticize them as being "uncivilized" and impure because of their cremation funeral practices. This let me understand how the funeral ritual is crucial for the community's identity since it binds the Cham Ahiér together as a community in contrast to the members of Awal community who practice burial funeral ceremonies.

The last ritual to end the first day of the funeral was a ritual to prevent the spirit of the deceased from following their relatives (*nau glai*).[211] The Cham Ahiér believe that at this point, the spirit of the deceased is wandering around and following the living members of the community, especially those who were born in the same zodiac year as the deceased. Thus, the purpose of this ritual is to help cut this connection off. This ritual is directed by one *basaih* priest and the requisite materials to perform it are wine, wax candles, betel and areca nuts, and a stick twig with leaves. This ritual, which must be performed at night, occurs on vacant ground about forty meters away from the funeral *kajang*. In the funeral that I observed, about twenty of the closest relatives of the deceased had to come to this ritual in order to avoid being followed by the spirit of the deceased.

At the vacant ground, a hole about thirty cm wide was prepared in advance. This hole is called *halow* meaning "beginning" or "source". Arriving at the hole, the priest performed a ritual asking the spirit of the deceased to go far away. While praying, he poured wine and put betel and areca nuts in the hole. After that, the priest asked the relatives to sit all around as close to the hole as possible so that he could pour some water on their heads (fig. 52). Following that, the priest walked around behind the people reciting mantras and at the end of each sentence, he shouted: *peng pheng đoik* (meaning "run away" or "disappear"), and everyone shouted after him. After that the priest asked everyone to tear off some leaves and throw them into the hole. The ritual ended with the relatives walking away from the hole without looking back. Everyone returned to the *kajang* to have some sweets and that was the end of the first day of the funeral.

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[211] According to Sử Văn Ngọc (2012: 48), the purpose of this ritual is to capture malevolent ghosts and it is performed at the crossroads.

Fig. 52. A priest pouring sacred water on the heads of relatives of the deceased.

Day 2:

There was no ritual performance on the second day of the funeral except that the funeral band played and sang songs the whole day. The band included several funeral musicians who had to perform from morning until evening singing a large number of songs of mourning and celebration of life. The content of these songs pertained mainly to the life cycle of a person from birth to death and then to rebirth. Interestingly, a large number of the mourning songs or hymns, and mantras recited in the Cham Ahiér funeral performance mentioned such Malayanized Islamic deities as Thu Pô Kuk Ni Yat ("three Nabi deities"), Mưla Khah (angel created by Allah), Abileh, Abilis, Jin, Satan (demons created by Allah), Allah himself, Mahammat (the Prophet Muhammad), and so forth.[212] While the band was playing music and

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[212] For the lyrics of the funeral mourning hymns and mantras, see Sử Văn Ngọc (2012).

singing, members of the family cooked and offered food only to the deceased. No one was allowed to eat at the funeral *kajang* on the second day except the deceased.

Day 3:

On the third day of the funeral, the "ritual of cutting down trees" (*tak kayau*) is the most important one and is assisted by two carpenters (*ragei*). This does not refer to the actual action of cutting down trees but only to a symbolic action. This ritual symbolizes the household stage of life of the dead being reborn and now living as a new person, and hence, needing to cut trees in preparation for building a house (an imagined one to live in Heaven and not on Earth because the dead will not be reborn on Earth). Also, in this ritual, the *basaih* priests must read some mantras to chase away evil spirits that reside in the trees. The Cham Ahiér believe that trees often house malevolent ghosts. Once this ritual is done, the *basaih* priests go to the intersection of three roads where they dig a small hole, draw a talisman in the hole, and then put three bamboo sticks in a triangular form and cover the hole with soil. During this time, Ong Heng performs a ritual to ask various deities for permission to build a bamboo palanquin (*sang thwơr*: lit. "house in heaven") to use on the next day to carry the corpse to the cremation ground and to be cremated together with it[213] (figs. 53 and 54). Interestingly, the roof of the *sang thwơr* is decorated with a bird called Heng, on the front is attached a talisman image of a *homkar*, and on the back there is a talisman with the image of the sacred cow, Kapila.[214] My informants explained to me that Heng is the bird that brings the soul of the dead to Heaven while the sacred cow Kapila carries the body of the dead through seven rivers and seven mountains to reach the

[213] The palanquin thus plays the role of a coffin.
[214] Phan Quốc Anh (2006: 211) mentions that it is the bird Hăng (in dragon form) that can be seen as decoration of the roof of the *sang thwơr*. However, my Cham informants said that the bird Hăng is reserved for royal families only, while for villagers, it is another bird, Heng. Following the Cham manuscript (*agal bac*) with the code number VMST.11, Sakaya (2008: 150) asserts that the cow Kapila carries the soul of the dead to heaven. Such differences regarding details show how different are concepts of the members of this community who apparently have various sources of knowledge and understanding.

Ganges. It is only then that the dead can be reborn into the next life. This is an interesting indication of a Hindu background of the ritual. Several Cham intellectuals and priests explained to me that the cow Kapila is Śiva's *vahana* Nandin. However, "Kapila" (a cow) is not the same as Śiva's Nandin (a bull); the name "Kapila" (Sanskr. "the red one") probably refers to *Kamadhenu*, the celestial wish-fulfilling cow.[215] It is believed that by the third day of the funeral the fetus carrying the soul of the deceased is seven months old; apparently we are dealing here with the concept of different temporal scales that exist in different worlds.[216] Thus, for dinner, Muk Buk prepares seven trays of food; the first tray is for the dead, the next four trays are for the priests, and the last two trays are for the carpenters who helped out in the ritual of cutting down trees.



Fig. 53. *Sang thwơr* and the *homkar* symbol.

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[215] See Monier-Williams ([1899] 2008: 1232), *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, and Madeleine Biardeau (1993), "Kamadhenu: The Religious Cow, Symbol of Prosperity."
[216] For example, 1 day and 1 night in the world of *pitris* (lit. "the fathers", the spirits of the departed ancestors in Hindu culture) correspond to one solar month; see Frederick Eden Pargiter (2018: 46-48).

Fig. 54. *Sang thwơr* and the Kapila cow symbol.

Day 4:

On the fourth day of the funeral, the priests start the first ritual at 6 a.m by asking the gods to allow them to make a temporary cooking place with nine kitchen stones (*patau ging*) in order to build three stoves in the open air (fig. 55). A big pot is placed on each of the stoves for Muk Buk to prepare nine trays of food offerings. The nine kitchen stones and the nine trays of food symbolize that the fetus is now nine months old, having reached the moment of birth. These trays are divided as follows: one tray for the dead, four trays for the priests, two trays for the carpenters, and two trays for the corpse carriers (Ong Hala Char). This is the last meal for the dead before the corpse is carried to the cremation ground, and all the priests, funeral specialists and helpers also need to eat before going to the cremation ground. During this time, the musical band continues to play, and the relatives of the deceased pay farewell to the dead before the corpse is carried to the cremation ground. The prayers of the relatives are mostly about wishing the deceased to be reborn in the realm of heaven and to meet ancestors there, and in return they request the deceased to bless them with health and prosperity. The way the

Cham Ahiér pay respect to the deceased (or the gods) is with their whole bodies completely prone on the ground; women are supposed to have one leg crossing the other. This posture is practiced not only in funeral rituals to revere the deceased but also in temples when the Cham Ahiér worship their gods. It is interesting to see this prostration because neither ethnic Vietnamese (Kinh) nor other ethnic minorities in Vietnam employ this posture to show their reverence to the deceased or gods. It remains unknown where and how the Cham started to practice this kind of posture looking somewhat similar to the full prostration practiced in Tibetan Buddhism. The only explanation I got from the Cham Ahiér is that this was used to show a complete devotion to Po Yang (deity).



Fig. 55. Nine funeral kitchen stones (*patau ging*).

Meanwhile, in the house of the dead, Ong Khik Sang is responsible for guarding the house; he sets up a temporary altar with wine, betel and areca nut, agarwood, wax candles, fruits, cakes and sweets; he also sets a fire in the middle of the front yard in order to perform a ritual to safeguard the house from the entrance of evil spirits. During this time, four men (Ong

Hala Char) whose job is to carry the corpse, come to visit Ong Khik Sang in the house to ask for four pieces of betel leaves as amulets to prevent them from being followed by evil spirits when they carry the corpse to the cremation ground.

Around 10 a.m, after the *basaih* priests had purified themselves, they all pointed their religious bamboo wands (*gai mông*) at the roof of the corpse's palanquin while reciting prayers before beginning their circumambulation around the palanquin.[217] After that the *basaih* priests ordered the funeral *kajang* to be demolished. The *kajang* was disassembled before the cremation to let the dead be reborn (or the new fetus to be born) (fig. 56). After that, everyone followed the priests and escorted the corpse to the cremation ground. The band musicians continued to play mournful music while walking among the people. On the way to the cremation ground, the group stopped at a small pile of straw in the middle of the road. They burned the pile of straw, thus symbolizing that the mother is "going through labour" to give birth. During the walk, the members of the mourning family who all wore white clothes from time to time prayed to the deceased by completely laying their bodies on the road. (figs. 57 and 58).

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[217] The content of the prayer is as follows: "The soul of the deceased, we point you in the direction of the realm of your ancestors by three paths: Hell, Earth, and Heaven; go to the realm where you see your ancestors." Ancestors can be found on Earth in the *kut* cemetery, or in other words, the cemetery is the house of ancestors on Earth.

Fig. 56. Demolishing the funeral *kajang*.



Fig. 57. Carrying the corpse to the cremation ground.

Fig. 58. Relatives praying to the deceased on the way to the cremation ground.

Halfway to the cremation ground, the *basaih* priests stopped and pointed their *gai mông* to the sky to guide the soul of the dead to the direction of heaven. After this, the four men who carried the corpse had to turn the carrier, so the feet of the deceased indicated by the image of the sacred cow called Kapila would go first and the head with the image of *homkar* would follow. I asked a number of Cham for the explanations of this action and in general they offered two kinds of reasons. Cham intellectuals and priests explained that turning the corpse around, from feet-first to head-first, implied that the fetus had turned its head downward in the womb to be born. Other Cham villagers however think that by turning the palanquin around like that, the dead will forget the way to go back home and will not be able to disturb her or his relatives.[218]

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[218] To me, this also helps explain why the Cham do not establish a permanent altar at home for their ancestors. They do not want the dead to come back home, and they do not want to be close to the dead. Thus, one can understand why the Cham Ahiér do not visit (or wander around) temples, shrines, and *kut*.

As soon as everyone arrived at the cremation ground, the priests performed the last ritual offering to the deceased including rice, fruits, a cake, betel, water, a mirror, and a comb. After that they continued with a ritual to ask deities of the land for permission to set the pyre there (figs 59 and 60). Once the ritual was completed, people carried the corpse to the pyre, together with clothes, sandals and other personal materials to be burned with the corpse (fig. 61) because it is believed that those objects (transfigured with the fire) were necessary for the deceased in the ancestors' world.[219] While the pyre was catching fire, the *basaih* priests stood facing the East, raised their hands to their heads, joining their index fingers and their thumbs together to form triangles. The priests later explained that this figure was the symbol of opening the "door" for the fetus to be born, or for the death to be rebirth in the ancestor world.



Fig. 59. Ritual preparing the land to set the pyre.

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[219] Some Cham intellectuals explained to me that if the deceased belonged to the priestly class or to the royal family, they are entitled to carry with them to the other world nine shirts, nine pairs of pants, and eleven blankets with fringes at both ends. People from lower classes who died at the age of fifty years old or more are entitled to five shirts, five pairs of pants, and nine blankets with fringes at both ends. People who do not fall into any of these two categories are allowed to have only three shirts, three pairs of pants, and five blankets without fringes on either end.

Fig. 60. Ritual preparing the land to set the pyre.



Fig. 61. Carrying the corpse in the *sang thwor* to the pyre.

When the cremation was nearly complete, people dug out the skull of the dead and took nine pieces of the forehead bone to put in a box called *klaong* (a container made of silver, or cooper, or ceramic). (figs. 62 and 63) After that, they threw the skull back into the fire. Once the fire stopped, the *basaih* priests threw some rice on the ground where the fire was set; other priests and relatives also did the same. The cremation ritual ended when the *basaih* priests performed a ritual with boiled chicken and rice cakes to wish the dead-turned-infant a healthy new life.[220] On the way back home, the *basaih* priests gathered the relatives to perform a ritual to promise the deceased that they would perform other rituals for the deceased: the *Patrip bak klou* after three days, the *Patrip bak bilan* one month later, the *Patrip bak thun* one year later, and then the *Patrip klou thun* three years later, followed by the *kut* entry ritual.



Figs. 62 and 63. Forehead bones.

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[220] Some Cham told me that the new life is in heaven, and it is where ancestors live. However, they also explained that it is only through the "*kut* entry ceremony" that the deceased can definitely rejoin their ancestors. Most often, it was not specified by my informants where the deceased would be during the time period starting at the cremation period and ending at the moment of entering the *kut*.

What I found intriguing through my observation of the Cham Ahiér funeral ceremony is that the whole funeral ritual itself represents a symbolic process of helping the deceased to be reborn into the next life, and this new life is not supposed to be on the Earth, but in Heaven, in the realm of ancestors. However, in the funeral hymns recited by the priests throughout the four days of the ritual that I observed, Islamic "deities" (also referred to as "new deities") were invited to come down to protect and help the deceased to reach the new world where she or he was supposed to be born. Some of those deities were Allah, Pô Dêbita (God), Nabi Mahammat (lit. "Saint Mohammad"), Mun Nhi Run (Angel), Mưla Khah (Angel created by Allah), Nabi (the one chosen by Allah to impart faith to mankind), Pô Lihik and Pô Lihi (Gods supervising human souls), and Nabi Liéh Hak (God governing human souls). "Old deities" were also invited to the funeral; among them were Patao Lôk Ala (King of the underworld), Raginư (God of protection/patronage), Linkhan Mao Thuk (God of death), Yang Aditiak (Sun God), Yang Can Nâk (Moon God), Po Tanâh Riya (God of the land), Po Inâ Nâgar (the Mother Goddess), the deified king Po Romé, and the deified king Po Klaong Girai. Thus, in the Cham Ahiér funeral ritual we see a mixture of various religious practices and adaptations with deities that were called upon to guide the dead to the heaven include both Islamic "new deities" and "old deities" of the Cham.

### 5.3 *Kut* Cemetery Entry Ceremony

The earliest time when the *kut* entry ceremony (*ba talang tama kut*) can take place is three years after the corpse was cremated: it must be conducted either in the third, the sixth, the eighth, the tenth, or the eleventh month of the Cham Ahiér calendar. The purpose of the *kut* entry ceremony is to bury the nine pieces of the forehead bones that were taken out during the cremation in the deceased's mother's lineage cemetery. It is only then that the deceased finally

can join her or his ancestors forever. If the *kut* entry ceremony does not take place, the soul of the deceased continues to wander on the Earth and is not able to rejoin ancestors. Traditionally, the *kut* entry ceremony is the last ritual for the deceased and when it is completed the family is not obligated to perform any more rituals. However, as Thành Phần explains (2011: 338), many Cham nowadays believe that their ancestors are able to return to the human world once a year during the Katé ritual in the seventh month of the Cham Ahiér calendar. Thus, recently people have started visiting *kut* during this period to offer food and drink to ancestors.

As far as the definition of the *kut* is concerned, in simple terms, it is a burial place for the Cham Ahiér who belong to the "cremation lineage;" it is based strictly on matrilineal descent. The Cham Ahiér believe that it is only natural that members of the mother's lineage must return after death to rest beside his or her mother. In fact, the *kut* is a physical place on Earth where ancestors reside and thus it is vital to be buried close to one's own ancestors on the mother's side. It is also believed that it is only through the *kut* entry ceremony that the soul of the dead can finally rejoin the world of ancestors (*nưgar muk akei*) and become a deified ancestor (this, however, is true only for those who had a "good death"). Thus, the "*kut* entry ceremony" can be seen as a ritual performed to "divinize" ancestors.

It is very costly to organize a *kut* entry ceremony individually, thus relatives of the deceased often wait to perform the *kut* entry together with other relatives belonging to the same clan. It is common to wait for about ten years when the clan has about ten boxes (*klaong*) of bones of ten deceased members of the clan to perform the *kut* entry for them together. Each *klaong* contains nine pieces of forehead bones and each *kut* entry ceremony is usually performed for two to twenty boxes of *klaongs*. These *klaongs* are from different families but they belong the same matrilineal kin group. Aside from an obligation to prepare large amounts of food offerings, the families also must invite several *basaih* and non-*basaih* priests to perform the ceremony. The three main priests who basically perform and direct all the rituals in the *kut*

entry ceremony are *basaih* Po Adhia, Ong Kadhar, and Muk Pajau. Each of these priests has different roles, for instance, the *basaih* priests deal directly with the bones to wash, purify, and deposit them at the *kut*, while Ong Kadhar plays the *kanyi* musical instrument and sings hymns to invite various deities and ancestors to come to the ceremony. Meanwhile, the priestess Muk Pajau oversees offering alcohol and food to each deity and ancestor, but, more importantly, she also acts as an intermediary or medium to connect the living with their ancestors.

The *kut* is usually located outside the residential area or outside of the village. Since it is a sacred place that possesses certain power, the Cham Ahiér do not want to live close to it because ancestors can protect and bless people but also can harm them. The ideal site for establishing a *kut* should have a mountain to the South and a river to the North. Interestingly, the person who performs the ritual to establish *kut* for a lineage is the priestess Muk Rija who is in charge of keeping the sacred object *ciét atau* representing ancestors of the clan. The facts that the *kut* is based on the matrilineal kin group, and that it is Muk Rija who has the authority and skill to perform the ritual to establish the *kut*, thus reflect the important position of women in Cham matrilineal society. Each *kut* has stone pieces called *patau kut* arranged along an East-West axis. The shapes and forms of the *patau kut* can be slightly different.[221] In general, old *kuts* (mostly from royal families) usually have well-polished stones and are sculpted with motifs while relatively new village *kuts* include simple pieces of round, un-sculpted stones. These stones are erected in an upright position and their heights vary from about forty to fifty cm (figs. 64 and 65).

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[221] According to Thành Phần (2011: 344) there are five main types of *patau kut*; this classification is based on various shapes and forms of the stones.

Fig. 64. *Kut* of villagers.



Fig. 65. *Kut* of King Po Nit (r. 1603-1613).

Each *kut* can have three, five, six, seven, or nine stones and these stones can be seen as simple markers indicating places of burial where the bones and ashes were placed. However,

these stones are sacred and are also seen as an embodiment of the divine. A common feature among all the *kuts* is that the biggest stone is located in the middle and is usually seen as a representation of the mother goddess Po Inư Nưgar. The stone pillar to the East is the place where the bones of men who had a "good death" are buried. In contrast, the stone pillar to the West is the place where the bones of women who had a "good death" are buried. This is so for the *kut* with three stones; as for the *kut* with five stones, two extra stones are added for the men and women who had a "bad death." For the *kut* with six stones, the last stone, located in the East, is solely for *basaih* priests. The *basaih* also follow the matrilineal kinship system. In a *kut* with seven stones, the last stone is for people who held high position in the old government or in the current Vietnamese government. As for the *kut* with nine stones, the last stone is for sons-in-law who were orphans.

I did not have a chance to observe the *kut* entry ceremony, so I relied upon videos that my Cham informants shared with me as well as their descriptions of the event. Those videos were filmed within the past 10 years in Bình Thuận province. Many Cham told me that the *kut* entry ceremony usually began on a Saturday night when the *klaongs* that contain the bones of the dead (from different families but the same clan) were taken out from where they were hidden and placed on temporary altars for food offerings.[222] Since these *klaongs* contain the bones of the dead, they were worshipped in the same way as the gods, with food and drink being offered to them by the priests. The food and drinks include wine, betel and areca nut, boiled chicken, fish, duck, cakes, fruits, agarwood, and flowers. On Monday morning, all the bones were taken out of the *klaongs* to be cleaned and purified by *basaih* priests who had to categorize them into bones of those who had a "good death" or a "bad death" and of male or

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[222] Within the first month after the cremation ritual, the *klaong* is kept inside a basket (*kathok*) and hung from the ceiling of the deceased's house. During this month, it is believed that the "baby" (as the funeral represents the construction process of a new body for the next world) is too young and weak to be independent. After one month, the *klaong* is removed from the house to be hidden somewhere in a safe place until certain rituals or *kut* entry ceremony is performed and it can be brought out and placed onto the altar for the further rituals.

female. Then on Tuesday morning, they were enthroned on palanquins and carried to the cemetery. Arriving at the *kut*, the *klaongs* were transferred to high-legged trays arranged along an East-West axis and then were covered by Cham traditional cloths. The priests normally sat down in front of the *patau kut*, facing South, and the closest relatives of the deceased sat on the other side of the *patau kut*, facing the priests. While the priests performed purification rituals for all the bones, the relatives paid respect to the stone pillars by laying their bodies completely on the ground. After that, the priests performed a ritual to ask deities such as Po Inâ Nâgar (the Mother Goddess), Po Ginuer Matri (temple guardian), deified kings Po Klaong Girai, Po Romé, Po Dam, Po Gihlau (the latter is also known as "Deity of the Cinnamon Forest"), Po Riyak ("Wave Deity"), and Po Tang ("Deity of the Agarwood Forest") to help the souls of these people to join the world of ancestors. In the meantime, the bones of the deceased were buried in front of particular stones according to whether they had a "good death" or a "bad death." Some Cham intellectuals explained to me that this ritual happened on Tuesday midnight because it was the only moment when *basaih* Po Adhia can be transformed into Śiva to lead the souls of the deceased to the eternal world of the ancestors. But most of the ordinary Cham villagers told me that they do not know the reason for the choice of this day and time or the meaning of this procedure, but just followed the tradition.

Once the forehead bones were buried under the right *patau kut*, the priests continued to perform the eye-opening ritual, bathing, and dressing the *patau kut*. In this part, Ong Kadhar sang hymns inviting the God of stone to come to divinize the recently deceased and thus, from that moment on, the deceased became a new deified ancestor. In the meantime, a *basaih* priest drew eyes on the *patau kut* and sprayed some water on those stones, symbolizing bathing the stones. When the *basaih* priests finished these operations, the relatives of the deceased immediately washed the stones carefully and dressed them up in a very similar way to the main deities (in the form of *liṅga* and *yoni*) who reside in Cham temples (fig. 66). It should be noted

that even though only the priests can attend to the deities in the temples, during the *kut* entry ceremony the relatives of the deceased also can attend to bathing and dressing the stones since the stones represent their own ancestors.



Fig. 66. The *patau kut* are dressed. (Photo courtesy of Quảng Đại Tuyên).

As in any other Cham ritual, food offering is an important part in the *kut* entry ritual. Relatives of the deceased prepare a lot of food to offer to all the ancestors, the "old deities" and the "new deities" who are invited to the ritual. In this ritual, while the deities consumed the food, Ong Maduen played the *Baranâng* drum, Ong Kadhar played the *kanyi* and Ong Yuk played the *saranai*. An important component of this event was a mediumistic *séance*; Muk Pajau danced and went into a trance to communicate with the ancestors, asking whether the souls of the dead are now in the world of the ancestors and if the ancestors are happy with all the food offerings. After that, she performed another dance to confirm that the dead have now joined the world of the ancestors. To celebrate the event, relatives of the deceased, both men and women, also happily participated in the dancing accompanied by the music played by the

priests. After that, everyone enjoyed the food and drinks that were offered to the ancestors and deities. The next morning, the *basaih* priests performed a purification of the stones for the last time, accompanied by large amounts of food offerings which brought an end to the *kut* entry ceremony.

## 5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I examined rituals for dead, particularly funeral rituals and the *kut* entry ceremony. These rituals are important for the Cham Ahiér because they provide the means to help the deceased to join the world of ancestors in Heaven. It is the duty of the relatives of the deceased to organize those rituals so that the dead can join the world of ancestors and live permanently in Heaven. Once the *kut* entry ceremony took place, the deceased is regarded as a deified ancestor and worshipped as a deity (*yang*). The period between the funeral rituals and the *kut* entry ceremony can take up a rather long time period, from three to fifteen years, and I found that the Cham are not really concerned with where the soul of the deceased wanders or where the dead reside during the period in between. Instead, what they put emphasis on is the importance of organizing the funeral and *kut* entry rituals so that the deceased can go to Heaven. The Cham believe that if they do not organize those rituals the dead will become wandering ghosts on Earth and will harm the living. In short, what these rituals reveal is the Cham Ahiér concept of afterlife, namely, that people are thought to be born and die, and after they die, they should join the world of ancestors in Heaven. All of the Cham with whom I had conversations shared this understanding and practice. However, there were a few times when some Cham intellectuals mentioned the belief in reincarnation, i.e., the idea that people can be reborn as human beings or animals on the Earth in the next life depending on their karma accumulated while they were alive. In other words, they maintained that doing good deeds and good actions in this life would eventually influence the outcome of the next life in which one will be reborn

as human or animal. This discussion came up when I asked about where the deceased from the burial lineage go after death if they cannot go to Heaven. Another time this concept came up when the *basaih* priests advised that close relatives of the deceased must abstain from eating mammals for the whole first month of the funeral period because the deceased could be reborn as a human or as an animal. Besides this food taboo, there was no other mention of the idea of being reborn in this life on Earth again. All these remarks of my informants pointed to the idea that there is neither systematic, institutionalized, unified doctrine behind Cham Ahiér religious practices and beliefs nor any monolithic understanding of their own religious practices shared by all the Cham Ahiér. This perhaps is the outcome of the absorption of various religious traditions by Cham Ahiér that was caused by their living for long time very close to the Vietnamese Buddhist community; their contacts with Buddhists might have influence their thought and vocabulary.

The historical origin of the practice of the "*kut* entry ceremony" remains obscure. A large number of my informants (ordinary villagers) said that it is an old tradition and that they do not know the origin of it. Cham Ahiér priests and intellectuals however often gave credit to king Po Romé of the 17th century. Interestingly, Sakaya (2014: 390) suggests that the origin of the *kut* practice could be traced back to the Po Klaong Girai period of the 13th century. He maintains that before this period people threw the ashes of the cremated relatives into rivers and ocean and it was only from the 13th century onward that *kut* cemeteries became popular. Furthermore, in another publication, Sakaya (2016: 96) asserts that, according to his own observation, the Cham Ahiér *patau kut* are similar to Islamic tombstones in Malaysia, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia.[223] His argument is as follows: Cham Ahiér believe that the soul of the dead must return to reside in the *kut*; however, the Cham *kut* is designed in Islamic style;

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[223] In fact, one can find gravestones in shapes similar to Indonesian ones in Mongolia; they belong to Nestorian tradition and are dated back to as early as the 2nd century CE; see Halberstma (2008). The use of tombstones such as these is certainly not unique to Indonesian Muslims.

therefore, he suggests, it means that the souls of the dead ultimately must return to the sacred land of the Malay Muslims in La Macca (Indonesia).[224] In the same article, Sakaya also argues that Cham Ahiér manuscripts (*agal bac*) indicate that the religion of the Cham Ahiér was Islamized. Indeed, I have learned that the hymns that are sung in funerals and the "*kut* entry ceremony" are recorded in Cham manuscripts in which the names of Islamic "deities" such as Allah, Mohammad, Thu Pô Kuk Ni Yat (three Nabi deities), Mula Khah (an angel created by Allah), Abileh, Abilis, Jin, Satan (demons created by Allah), etc. are mentioned. [225] However, it is necessary to point out that in funeral rituals, both "old deities" and "new deities" were called upon and worshipped in the same manner.

In contrast to Sakaya, regarding the *kut* practice, Nora Taylor (1998) supports the idea of a transition from *liṅga* as an incarnation of Śiva to *patau kut* as a representation of divine power, and maintains that they serve similar purposes in that both are representations of gods or deified Cham kings. However, *patau kut* for Cham villagers are the representations of one's ancestors and have nothing to do with Śiva. More importantly, my observation and research suggest that Cham Ahiér rituals for the dead demonstrate a phenomenon of adopting and enthroning the "new deities" to the same level as other local deities or sometimes even higher, while the rituals themselves are not necessarily "Islamized" or "Hinduized." This phenomenon was first noticed by Po Dharma (1990) when he examined Cham manuscripts and oral traditions and found that deities of Cham Awal ("new deities") were placed higher than the deities of Cham Ahiér ("old deities") in the religious pantheon. He explained that fact by suggesting that from the 17th to the 19th centuries Champa tried to ally with military powers in the Malay peninsula to fight against the Vietnamese. Thus, the Cham adopted Islamic "deities" to their religious pantheon to show their interest in Islam for the political purposes of

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[224] According to Sakaya (2016), for Malay Muslims in Southeast Asia, La Macca is regarded as Mecca.
[225] See Sử Văn Ngọc (2012) for the lyrics of the songs and hymns used in Cham Ahiér funeral rituals.

gaining powerful allies.[226] This, I believe, can explain why we see "new deities" being called upon in these rituals while the ritual actions themselves do not represent any Islamic characters. Intriguingly, Cham Ahiér rituals for the dead show certain resemblances to ancient Hindu practices such as the belief in joining the world of ancestors in the afterlife and the creation of a new body for the next life in funeral ritual. However, this does not mean that Cham Ahiér's funeral ritual can be categorized as "Hinduized" or as having origins in Hindu practices. As such, the materials presented in this chapter show an interesting mixture and adoption of different beliefs and practices from various religious traditions materialized throughout a long period of time that contributed to what we call contemporary Cham Ahiér religion. Thus, I believe that it is inaccurate to define the Cham Ahiér along the line what French colonial scholars suggested when identified the Cham as "Brahmanistes" or "Hindouistes," nor it is correct to follow Nakamura's description of them as adhering "to an indigenized form of Hinduism" or Abdul Hamid's interpretation of them as "syncretic Hindu."

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[226] Nakamura (1999: 138-139).

# Chapter 6: Cham Ahiér's "folk" rituals: Puis, Payak and Rija

## 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I examine two sets of fundamental rituals of the Cham Ahiér. The first includes the Puis and Payak rituals while the second is a group of four Rija rituals. Puis and Payak rituals are clan rituals performed privately at home for the benefit of all clan members. The purpose of Puis and Payak rituals is to repay ancestors and the gods for blessings and protection of the clan in the past years. Food offerings and hymns of praise are used as the means to thank ancestors and the gods. The deities that are worshipped in these rituals are ancestors and "old deities" or "temple deities." The second set of rituals is the "Rija rituals" which include Rija Nagar (New Year dancing ritual), Rija Harei (daytime dancing ritual), Rija Dayep (nighttime dancing ritual), and Rija Praong (great dancing ritual). The main purpose of these rituals is to ask the gods and ancestors for protection and blessings that will lead to good weather, good health and prosperity. The deities that are worshipped in the Rija rituals are both "old deities" and "new deities." Remarkably, in the Rija Dayep and Rija Praong, a new set of "new deities" of mountain lineage and ocean lineage are introduced and worshipped. These "new deities" are indicative of the clan identity as each clan follows either mountain or ocean lineage deities but not both.

Interestingly enough, when I discussed these rituals with Cham intellectuals, one of the first things they mentioned was not the content or the purposes of those rituals but how different these rituals were from other Cham rituals mentioned in the previous chapters: they used the Vietnamese term "*dân gian*" and English term "folk" to refer to these rituals. They categorized them as "folk" rituals and explained that only the "folk" masters can perform these rituals, while the *basaih* priests of the Cham Ahiér are not supposed to be involved in any part of these rituals. When conducting my fieldwork, I noticed that the term "*dân gian*" or "folk" is used

only by Cham intellectuals and not by villagers. To the ordinary villagers, these rituals are similar to any other rituals since they need to organize them once in a while to make the ancestors and gods happy and to ask for protection and blessing in return. Thus, the term "*dân gian*" or "folk" that Cham intellectuals use to describe and categorize these rituals should be understood as a convenient term used to differentiate between temple rituals and village rituals as well to differentiate between the types of priests in term of labour division. I believe that the term "folk" here is misleading and therefore, throughout this thesis, I use the term "non-*basaih* priests" to refer to those priests who do not belong to the *basaih* lineages.

My analysis of these two sets of rituals leads me to argue that despite the dominance of "new deities" who are worshipped in these rituals, particularly in the Rija rituals, "old deities" also remain important and continue to be worshipped. In other words, the worshipping of those "new deities" in the Rija does not mean that Cham Ahiér converted to Islam or that their religion is Islamized. Rather, Cham Ahiér have incorporated the "new deities" into an existing religious system (indigenous religious tradition) and worshipped the "new deities" in their own terms and in their own ways. Below I provide my analysis of the first set of clan rituals, the Puis and Payak rituals, followed by the second set of rituals, the Rija rituals.

## 6.2 Clan Rituals: Puis and Payak

Puis and Payak are Cham Ahiér clan rituals performed for the purpose of repaying the gods for bestowing protection, blessings, wishes, and prosperity to the clan over recent years. The way the Cham Ahiér return the favors to the gods is through offering praise, food, drink, and dances.[227] Ideally, Puis and Payak should be performed once a year. However, since these rituals (as well as many other Cham Ahiér rituals) require large amounts of food offerings, it

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[227] The same logic applies on an individual scale (or at a personal level): for instance, if a child was sick and the mother prayed to a particular deity to ask for help, once the child recovered the mother should go to the temple or shrine of that deity to return the favor to that deity. Puis and Payak carry the same idea but are organized to return the favor of the whole clan.

is difficult for members of the clan to have the financial resources to perform this ritual annually, thus they typically perform the ritual once every three or seven years. Nevertheless, it is important for the clan to perform one of these two rituals once in a while for the prosperity and solidarity of the whole clan. If after seven years they have not performed either of the two rituals, unfortunate things may happen to the clan.[228] Each clan is supposed to perform either the Puis or the Payak ritual but not both of them.

How do Cham Ahiér know if their clan should perform the Puis or Payak ritual? In Ninh Thuận province, each Cham clan is associated with a hometown and this hometown is assigned to carry out some religious responsibilities with regard to the temple closest to that hometown.[229] The Cham Ahiér who live in villages around Po Romé temples usually must take care of those temples and thus commonly perform Puis ritual which is dedicated to the deified king Po Romé.[230] Cham villagers to whom I spoke did not know when this tradition was established, but maintained that for an unidentified time period every new generation of villagers followed the ritual activities of the previous one. Cham who live in the villages close to Po Klaong Girai temple would normally perform the Payak ritual dedicated to the deified king Po Klaong Girai.[231] This arrangement was set by the Cham community in Ninh Thuận long ago; however, it does not apply to Bình Thuận province because there are neither Po Romé nor Po Klaong Girai temples there. The Cham Ahiér in Bình Thuận province do perform Puis and Payak but they follow a different system, that is, if the clan chooses to worship deified kings as more important that the nature deities then this clan will perform Payak; in turn, those who pay the highest homage to nature deities will perform Puis.[232] Some Cham told me that

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[228] The clans that belong to the "burial" category of Cham Ahiér do not perform these rituals because of financial reasons.

[229] Relatives and members of the same clan usually live together in the same village and worship the same *ciét atau*.

[230] This applies to the clans that live in villages such as Hậu Sanh, Mỹ Nghiệp, Vĩnh Thuận, Vụ Bổn, Hiếu Thiện.

[231] These villages are Phước Đồng, Chất Thường, Hiếu Lễ, and Hoài Trung of Ninh Phước district.

[232] The Cham Ahiér are polytheistic, with each clan choosing to worship, or to be dedicated to, certain deities more often than others, but the clan members do not believe in the idea of a single supreme god. When I asked them, which god is the highest and most powerful in their pantheon, people often did not understand my question

those who do not know if their clan should perform Puis or Payak can search in the clan's sacred basket *ciét atau* for a piece of paper that contains the list of the deities that the clan venerates.[233]

Puis and Payak rituals can be performed at a clan ancestral house if the clan has one. Otherwise, they can be performed at the residence of one of the members of the clan who is willing to do so. Both these rituals carry similar meanings and purposes. Also, they have comparable ritual procedures in terms of choosing an auspicious time to perform the ritual, offering materials, and the types of priests, namely Muk Pajau and Ong Kadhar. The most apparent difference between Puis and Payak is that each ritual is dedicated to a different main deity (or group of deities) depending on the clan as mentioned above. Saying this, however, I should stress that there is a nuance: Cham Ahiér generally believe that all deities are equally powerful and each of them is important for certain purposes and in certain situations. It is common that in every single ritual, people would invite to come to the feast a large pantheon of deities and not just one or a few deities. This can be seen in the temple rituals and funeral rituals which I discussed in chapters 4 and 5. Thus, technically, in Ninh Thuận province, Puis is the ritual to repay the favour to the deified king Po Romé, and Payak is the ritual for the deified king Po Klaong Girai. However, in practice, the priests would invite ancestors (*muk kei*), deified kings, and other deities to these rituals. Interestingly, in the ritual description provided by Sakaya (2014: 119), he states that "the clan ritual Puis is performed to repay the god (*jiâ muk kei*) – particularly Po Romé." Sakaya did not explain what the words *jiâ muk kei* mean but I discussed them with several Cham informants who confirmed that they mean "[*paying*] *tax to ancestors*." In this case, these words convey the idea that the Puis ritual for the living members of the community is necessary to "pay taxes" to ancestors for their protection

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because to them all of the deities are important and powerful. To them, ancestors are *yang* (gods), deified kings are also *yang*, and nature deities are *yang* as well.

[233] Also, that paper usually mentions the types and amounts of offerings the clan should prepare for each ritual and each deity.

and blessings. Here King Po Romé is regarded as an ancestor and worshipped together with other ancestors (*muk kei*) of the clan. The same principle applies to the king Po Klaong Girai who is worshipped by the contemporary Cham Ahiér as a deified king but also as an ancestor.

The Puis and Payak rituals normally start with the head of the clan (*akaok gep*) informing all the members of the intention to organize such a ritual and asking them to contribute money in preparation for the ritual.[234] Once he gets the consent from most of the people in his clan, he brings wine, betel and areca nut to the house of the priest Ong Kadhar Gru to determine an auspicious day to perform the ritual for his clan. Puis and Payak rituals can be performed in any month except the eleventh month and the twelfth month of the Cham Ahiér calendar because in olden times those two months were reserved for royal activities. As for the date, it should be on an even day and not on an odd day. On the auspicious day that the Ong Kadhar Gru selects the clan members must construct a temporary shack called *kajang* in the front yard of the clan ancestral house or a clan member's house. While male members construct the *kajang*, female members gather and prepare all kinds of foods and sweets as offerings for the ritual. The altars in the *kajang* have to be filled with objects for offering, such as betel and areca nuts, wine, rice, dried fish, chickens, water, tea, cakes, sweets, fruits, flowers, candles and agarwood for fire.[235] Once the preparation is finished, the head of the clan will bring wine, betel and areca nuts to the houses of the Ong Kadhar, Muk Pajau, and Muk Rija for the procession rituals of Ong Kadhar's *kanyi* musical instrument,[236] Muk Pajau's sacred rice paddy (*brah krang*), and Muk Rija's sacred basket (*ciét atau*). Muk Pajau and Ong Kadhar

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[234] Nowadays the head of the clan is usually a man; however, some Cham explained to me that in the past it was mostly women who held that position in keeping with Cham traditions as a matrilineal society. Perhaps the changing practice for clan leadership from women to men is a result of living closely to the Vietnamese who practice patrilineality.

[235] Agarwood (Viet. *trầm hương*) is expensive and hard to find nowadays; thus, very often the Cham priests would replace it with different types of wood that they will still call *trầm hương* (i.e., "agarwood") for the sake of convenience.

[236] The *kanyi* is also called a *rabap*.

are the main priests in these rituals; but since Muk Rija is the guardian of the clan's *ciét atau* that represents ancestors, she is also invited to the ritual.

The Puis ritual which I observed was conducted at a house in Bắc Bình district of Bình Thuận province (figs. 67 and 68).[237] When the agarwood starts burning and a candle is lit up in the *kajang*, it means that the ritual has started. There are three main parts in the *Puis* and Payak rituals. The first part starts with Muk Pajau inviting the clan ancestors to come to the ritual to hear praises and enjoy food and drinks. Once the offerings to the ancestors are finished, the priests continue to invite other deities such as Po Romé for Puis ritual and Po Klaong Girai for Payak ritual. Other deities are also invited to the feast; they include Śiva (whom the Cham call Po Ginuer Matri), Yang di sang (Deity of the house), Po Inâ Nagâr (Mother Goddess), Po Par (a deified mandarin known for his literary talent), Po Thun Garai (a deified Cham king), Cei Thuen (another name of deified Cham king Po Klaong Girai), Po Garai Bhaok (deified mandarin, deity of mountains), Po Tang (deity of agarwood forest), Po Rayak (waves deity), and Po Gahlau (deity of cinnamon forest).[238] For each of these deities, Ong Kadhar plays the *kanyi* musical instrument and sings songs praising them while Muk Pajau offers food and pours wine to each deity. The songs of praise that Ong Kadhar sings are mainly legends (*damnây, am pam*) that inform the listeners about the lives and contributions of deified kings of Champa and praise the deities for their protection and blessing of the Cham people. After all the deities have been offered food and drink, the second part of the ritual begins with Muk Pajau performing her dance offering, dedicated mainly to deities such as Po Ginuer Matri (Śiva), Po Inâ Nâgar, Po Romé, and Po Klaong Girai. While dancing, she also offers wine (*aia tapay*) and

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[237] In the present study I also compare my observations with the description of *Puis* and *Payak* rituals that took place in Ninh Thuận province provided by Sakaya (2014).

[238] The last two deities are worshipped in temple rituals as "temple deities" but they are also categorized as "new deities", especially in the Rija Praong ritual. Po Rayak ("waves deity") is the deity who sent off the people from Malayu to return to their country and King Po Romé is worshipped in the Rija Praong ritual as Po Gahlau (deity of the cinnamon forest). See more below in the discussion of Rija Praong ritual.

a tray of betel and areca nut (*thong hala*) to these deities.[239] The last part of the Puis and Payak rituals is conducted to send off the deities back to Heaven; this is done by Muk Pajau who pours a final wine offering to the deities and throws rice grains and prays to each deity to continue to protect and bless the whole clan. Once Muk Pajau finishes saying farewell to all the deities, members of the clan gather and enjoy the "blessed food" and drink together.



Fig. 67. Puis ritual, Bắc Bình district, Bình Thuận province.

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[239] For more information on the dances performed during the Payak ritual, see Sakaya (2014: 119-131).

Fig. 68. Puis ritual, Bắc Bình district, Bình Thuận province (Photo courtesy of Sabay).

What I find particularly interesting about the Puis and Payak rituals is that aside from worshiping the clan's ancestors, other deities invited to these rituals are the same deities as in the temple rituals. Also, the praising songs that were sung at the rituals for those "old deities" are the same as those sung at the temples. In fact, it is the same priest Ong Kadhar who is in charge of singing songs of praise to the deities, either in a temple ritual or in Puis and Payak rituals. One of the main differences is that there is no *basaih* priests at Puis and Payak rituals while the presence of the *basaih* priests is required in temple rituals.

## 6.3 Rija Rituals

There are four types of Rija rituals; they include Rija Nagar (New Year dancing ritual), Rija Harei (day dancing ritual), Rija Dayep (night dancing ritual), and Rija Praong (great dancing ritual). Cham villagers whom I spoke with as well Cham intellectuals in their publications (e.g., Sakaya 2014 and Lâm Tấn Bình 2016), use the Vietnamese term *múa*, meaning "dancing," to refer to these rituals since a major component of each of these rituals is

based on dances. All the Rija rituals share similar ritual procedures, prayer-songs, offering objects, and musical instruments, and are dedicated for the most part to the same deities, namely, both "new deities" and "old deities." The main priests who direct and perform these rituals are non-*basaih* priests. What is particularly interesting about the Rija rituals is that some Cham Awal also perform these rituals in their own villages and employ Cham Ahiér's non-*basaih* priests to help them. In other words, the non-*basaih* priests work for both Cham communities when performing the Rija rituals. One aspect to note is that in the Rija Dayep and Rija Praong rituals, Cham Awal's priests Po Acar also participate to represent the "new deities", especially Po Awluah (Allah), who are supposed to receive praises and food offerings from the priests.[240]

There are a few differences in the execution of the Rija rituals between Ninh Thuận and Bình Thuận provinces such as the location and time where they take place. In Ninh Thuận province, they are usually performed at a temporary bamboo *kajang* set up on an empty ground in the villages. However, in Bình Thuận province, these rituals can also be performed at temples and local shrines. For instance, one can see the Rija Nagar, Rija Harei, and Rija Dayep performed at Po Dam temple, and the Rija Nagar performed at local shrines such as Po Nrop, Po Patao At, Po Klaong Kasat, Po Anit, and Po Klaong Ghur. When these rituals are performed at temples and shrines, they become part of a larger set of rituals, meaning that the Rija Nagar, Rija Harei, and Rija Dayep are performed together with other rituals under the umbrella of the Yuer Yang temple ritual. However, they are not "temple rituals," meaning that they are not performed inside the main sanctum or the main tower of the temple; instead, the ritual takes place on a temporary *kajang* set up on the vacant ground within the temple complex.

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[240] Similar to the *basaih* priests of Cham Ahiér, Cham Awal have Po Acar priests who serve Po Awluah as their supreme God in mosques, yet this does not mean that Cham Awal are Muslims or are totally converted to Islam because they also worship ancestors and "old deities" and perform Rija rituals as the Cham Ahiér. For this reason, some scholars, e.g., Nakamura (1999: 122), define Cham Awal as "adherents of an indigenized form of Islam," while Yoshimoto (2012) argued that it is inaccurate to equate Cham Awal with Muslims.

### 6.3.1 Rija Nagar

The purpose of performing the Rija Nagar (new year dancing ritual) is to chase away negative aspects including bad luck, disease, sickness, crop failure, and drought, and to welcome a new year with favorable weather, health and prosperity. It is *not* the ritual to celebrate the New Year similar to the Vietnamese or Chinese rituals celebrating New Year Eve according to the lunar calendar; instead, it is usually performed at the beginning of a new year defined according to Cham Ahiér Sakawi calendar. Since this ritual requires non-*basaih* priests to perform it, but not all the villages have enough priests, some villages need to "borrow" priests from other villages, and in that case, they perform the ritual *after* the villages that have their own priests have had the ritual, which explains why such rituals could also occur in the second month. This ritual is usually organized and performed at villages; however, in Bình Thuận province there are only a few Cham villages that celebrate the Rija Nagar at temples and shrines, and this is why the ritual is incorporated into a group of other temple rituals and does not take place on the first month of the New Year. For instance, the Rija Nagar is performed at Po Dam temple in the fourth month of the Cham Ahiér calendar. In Ninh Thuận, this ritual usually takes place on Thursday and Friday while in Bình Thuận it usually happens on Tuesday and Wednesday or Saturday and Sunday. Since the Rija Nagar is a two-day ritual, it is often called by Cham villagers "entry day and exit day ritual" (*tamâ di jip tabiak di suk*), or "'new deities day' and 'old deities day ritual'" (*tam apo barau tabiak po klak*) or "first chicken day and second goat day ritual" (*tamâ tabiak pabaiy manuk*). In these cases, the rituals are referred to with the types of the food offerings and the deities that the villagers worship when conducting them. The Rija Nagar that I observed in Bắc Bình village of Bình Thuận province included chickens for food offering on the first day but people told me that in Bình Hiếu village (Bình Thuận province) food offerings on the first day are always vegetarian.

The first day of the Rija Nagar ritual is dedicated to the "new deities" (*yang*/*po barau*) as described in chapter 3 above, referring to: (1) deities influenced by Islam, such as Po Awluah (Allah), Nabi Mohamat (Muhammad), Phua Timah (Fatimah), Po Nabi Ibrahim, Po Ali; (2) deified Malays[241] such as Po Bar Gana, Patri Bang So, Patra Tho Le La; and (3) deified Cham kings and members of royal clans such as Po Romé,[242] and Po Sah Inâ who converted to Islam. The main priests who are in charge of the Rija Nagar are two male non-*basaih* priests, Ong Maduen and Ong Ka-ing. In this ritual, Ong Maduen has to sing songs praising each deity while playing the drum *baranâng*. All the songs are sung in the Malay language and Ong Maduen has memorized them by heart.[243] In the meantime, Ong Ka-ing is responsible for offering food and dances to all the deities. Aside from the main priests, there are also other musicians who assist in the event by playing various instruments such as the drum *Ginang* and flute *Saranai*, and that makes the event even livelier. As with the other rituals, food offering is an essential part in the ritual performance and the villagers must prepare sticky rice, chickens, cakes, wine, tea, betel areca nuts, sweets and fruits to offer to the deities. The first day of the ritual concludes with Ong Ka-ing dancing and sending all the negative forces away. It is this last part of the ritual that attracts villagers to come because Ong Ka-ing dances barefoot around a bonfire and then steps on the fire while villagers clap their hands to the beat of the music, showing support to the priest to finish the dance successfully.[244] According to the villagers, this dance represents the idea of dispelling the heat of the dry season and getting rid of the

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[241] Deified Malays are Malay people who came to Champa and died in Champa, and thus the Cham worship them as deities. It is unknown if these Malay people are actual historical figures; however, it is mentioned in several Cham legends (*dammây am pam*) that these Malays came to Champa during the Po Romé period. See further discussion of those legends below.

[242] Po Romé is a deified king worshipped by the Cham Ahiér as the main deity of Po Romé temple. He belongs to the category of "temple deities"/"old deities" but since the Cham believe that he converted to Islam, he is also categorized by the Cham as one of the "new deities." In the Rija Praong, Po Romé is worshipped as a "new deity" under the names Po Cahya, Cei Sit, and Po Gahlau. Deified Cham kings, such as Po Klaong Girai, who did not convert to Islam are worshipped as "old deities."

[243] He learns them from his teacher and does not necessary understand the meaning of all the songs, nor can he speak the language.

[244] A short video of this ritual is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Jmz3DRNajA.

negative forces from the old year to welcome the cool weather and hope for favourable rain with abundant crops in the new year.

The second day of the Rija Nagar ritual is dedicated to "old deities" (*yang klak*) including the mother goddess Po Inâ Nagâr, deified Cham kings and queens, and temple guardian Po Ginuer Matri who is regarded by some Cham as being Śiva, as well as other temple deities (*yang bimong*). But the most important deity of the second day is Po Inâ Nagâr, in contrast to Po Awluah (Allah) who is the most important deity on the first day. The ritual on the second day is directed by the same priests Ong Maduen and Ong Ka-ing.[245] The ritual starts with the priests sitting down in front of the place of worship and inviting first the mother goddess Po Inâ Nagâr and then all the other deities to come down to listen to their praise. Then Ong Maduen plays music and sings hymns praising the deities while Ong Ka-ing offers food to each deity. Food offerings for the "old deities" are the same as for the "new deities" but with goat meat added. An important part of the ritual conducted on the second day is the making of figurines (*salihs*) of people and animals, specifically, figurines of one male and one female human being and of 12 zodiac animals. These *salihs* are then consecrated by the priests who infuse them with souls (*craok suan*). The Rija Nagar ritual ends when all the *salihs* are sent off by Ong Ka-ing at a confluence of a river. My informants explained that they send the figurines

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[245] Sakaya (2014: 140) states that ritual of the second day is directed by Ong Kadhar and Muk Pajau. However, as my informants explained, this is true only for one village, namely, Bĭnh Nghĩa (Palei Bal Riya) in Ninh Thuận, while all the other villages in both provinces employ Ong Maduen and Ong Ka-ing for both days of the Rija Nagar. Also, on the second day of the Rija Nagar in Bĭnh Nghĩa, there is a part focused on the dance called *tamia klai kluk* performed by Muk Pajau and a male villager. The dance starts with Ong Kadhar playing the *kanyi* and singing about mother goddess Po Inâ Nâgar. Then the male villager holds three bamboo sticks carved in the form of a penis and dances imitating the movements of sexual intercourse. After a while he passes the bamboo sticks to Muk Pajau and she continues the dance. Other Cham villages do not include this dance in their Rija Nagar. A detailed discussion of this dance can be seen in Sakaya (2014: 142-143) though he did not explain the meaning of this dance. I think it is related to fertility. Some Cham informants told me that recently there is a movement to revive this dance as an independent dance not related to this particular ritual; one can see more information at https://www.facebook.com/100004006105956/posts/2683386328471544/.

to carry away bad luck, unfavorable weather, and negative forces in the old year in hope for a better harvest, health, and prosperity in the new year.

### 6.3.2 Rija Harei

Rija Harei (day dancing ritual) is organized by a family or clan for the purpose of asking ancestors and deities for protection and blessings offered to all members of the clan in the new year. This is also an occasion to ask for permission from the gods for any upcoming plans or important tasks that the clan or family might be preparing for in the new year. For instance, if the clan plans to organize a *kut* entry ceremony or the family plans to have a wedding ceremony that year, then its members need to perform Rija Harei to ask the gods for permission to organize such events. The Rija Harei ritual is usually performed in a temporary *kajang* or individual home in the first month of the Cham Ahiér calendar once the Rija Nagar is done. However, in Bình Thuận, this ritual is also performed in temples together with the Yuer Yang ritual in the fourth month or with the Katé ritual in the seventh month of the Cham Ahiér calendar. The priests who direct this ritual are the non-*basaih* priests Ong Maduen and Ong Ka-ing using some help of Muk Rija. Since this ritual usually lasts for only two to three hours, food offerings are less elaborate if compared with those of the Rija Nagar. The ritual starts with Ong Maduen playing a drum called *baranâng* and inviting a number of deities to come to the feast; the deities include both "old deities" and "new deities" such as deified ancestors (Po Praok, Po Patra), temple deities and deified Cham kings and royals (Po Klaong Girai, Po Romé, Cei Sit, Cei Praong, Cei Dalim, Po Sah Ina), as well as Po Tang, Po Rayak (Waves Deity), Po Tang Ahaok (Boat Rowing Deity), Po Gahlau (Deity of the Cinnamon Forest), and Po Hanim Par.[246] Each invited deity will be greeted by the two priests and offered wine, food, and songs

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[246] For a legend about Po Hanim Par see the Cham document provisionally titled "The legend of Cham deities" preserved in the British Library and available online at https://eap.bl.uk/archive-file/EAP1005-32-15#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=4&xywh=-414%2C-149%2C4827%2C2963 . More documents on Cham deities

of praise. The songs are the same as those used in the Rija Nagar ritual. During this moment, the priests also inform the deities about the upcoming plans that the family or clan intend to organize and ask for their blessings. Once the food offering is finished, Ong Ka-ing performs a dance following the rhythm of the musical instruments while villagers pray.[247] This last part of the ritual is dedicated to ancestors where family and clan members pray to their ancestors asking them to continue blessing the living members of the clan.

### 6.3.3 Rija Dayep [248]

Rija Dayep (night dancing ritual) is organized by a family or a clan for the purpose of asking ancestors and deities to help their family and clan overcome difficulties and obstacles. This ritual is performed when there are many members in a family or in a clan who are abnormally ill or when the clan prepares to organize a big event such as a *kut* entry ceremony. This ritual often takes place around the second or third month of the Cham Ahiér calendar in villages. However, in Bình Thuận, this ritual is also performed in Po Dam temple right after Rija Harei ritual together with the Yuer Yang ritual in the fourth month. Rija Dayep is directed by Ong Maduen and Muk Rija with the presence of Cham Awal's priests Po Acar who represent Po Awluah to receive offerings.[249] Many Cham intellectuals explained to me that the reason Po Acar priests are present in this ritual is because of the Ahiér-Awal dualist concept. To me, it seems unlikely that the participation of the Po Acar priests is related to this dualist

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(including Po Hanim Par) are available online at the Southeast Asia Digital Library (an interuniversity project website hosted by Northern Illinois University), see
https://sea.lib.niu.edu/seadl/seadl/islandora/search/Po%20Hanim?page=2&type=edismax&cp=seadl%3Acham .

[247] Some Cham intellectuals told me that sometimes in this part of the ritual, a horse is brought in and Ong Ka-ing holds the horse by a rope and dances for a while. They explained that the presence of a horse might be linked to the worshiping of the new deity Po Hamin Par who came from Malaya and became the lover of Cham princess Po Sah Inâ.

[248] I did not observe these rituals and rely on interviews with my informants, video recordings provided by my informants, and publications of Sakaya (2014) and Lâm Tấn Bình (2016). I recognize the differences in the ritual practices from one village to another; however, my focus is on the main ritual procedures, the prayer-songs, the deities that are called upon, and the priests who perform the rituals.

[249] Po Acar priests participate in these rituals only when they take place in villages; when it is performed at temples, Po Acar priests do not participate.

idea. Instead, it is more likely that Po Acar priests are involved simply because the "new deities" are honoured in the ritual. However, this answer leads to an even more difficult question: Why are Po Acar priests not involved in a Rija Nagar ritual where "new deities" are also worshiped? Most of the Cham I talked to did not know how to answer this question and only a few explained that even though the "new deities" were invited, "old deities" are still more important in the first Cham Ahiér rituals of a new year; hence Po Acar priests do not need to be there.

Rija Dayep is usually carried out in a temporary *kajang* in the front yard of a family house. The ritual starts in the evening with Ong Maduen and Muk Rija inviting "new deities" (*yang barau*) to come down to savor all the vegetarian food including sticky rice, sweets, rice cakes, and fruits. Once the food offering to "new deities" is finished, the priests will invite "old deities" (*yang klak*) to consume non-vegetarian food. Food offerings for *yang barau* are usually vegetarian while for *yang klak* they are non-vegetarian. The fact that "new deities" are invited to eat first demonstrates the importance of their role in this ritual. Once the food offering is finished, participants will eat together the food that was offered to the deities and then prepare for the ritual dance later at night.

The nighttime dance ritual begins with Muk Rija sitting down at the main place of worship (*sanai*). In front of her there is a three-level tray of betel and areca nuts, *ciét atau*, boiled eggs, wine, and fire. While Ong Maduen plays the *baranâng* drum and invites "new deities" to enjoy the night ritual, Muk Rija offers food to each of them. The "new deities" that are invited to this ritual are either the new deities of the mountain lineage (*atau cek*) or new deities of the ocean lineage (*atau tasik*). There are several legends explaining the origin of the deities of mountain lineage and of ocean lineage. [250] The main idea shared by these legends is

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[250] For more details on these legends, see Sakaya (2014: 155-159). I do not know if the mountain and ocean lineages have any significance elsewhere apart from that represented in these Rija Dayep and Rija Praong rituals. These deities are not invited to any other rituals that I have discussed in this thesis.

that there were people from Malaya who came to help Champa fight against the Vietnamese during the king Po Romé reign period (17th century); they came *via* both the land routes and the maritime routes. However, the Cham did not recognize them as allies and mistakenly killed most of them. The Cham felt guilty and regretful once they recognized who those people were, and since then the Cham have worshiped them as deities, namely, those who came by land were worshipped as "mountain deities," and those who came by boat were worshipped as "ocean deities". In this ritual, if a clan worships "new deities" of the mountain lineage (*atau cek*), Ong Maduen will invite these deities to the ritual. But if a clan worships "new deities" of the ocean lineage (*atau tasik*), Ong Maduen has to invite deities of both lineages.  In this ritual Ong Maduen has to invite the deities and to praise them in Malay language. After offering food to each deity, Muk Rija performs dance offerings. There are many types of dances accompanied by corresponding songs, and Muk Rija dances one dance after another. Once Muk Rija finishes all her dances, members of the clan pay respects to their ancestors represented in the *ciét atau* which draws the Rija Dayep ritual to a close.


### 6.3.4 Rija Praong

Rija Praong (great dancing ritual) is the largest dance ritual of all the Rija, and it normally lasts four days and four nights. This ritual is organized by clans and does not happen often but only after several years, when the clan gathers enough money to prepare the ritual, since it requires a very large number of food offerings.[251] In the same way as other rituals, Rija Praong is organized to honour deities, to offer food, drink, music, and dances, to ask the deities for their protection and blessings, and to help those members of their clan who happen to be in severe illness and in need of miraculous cures given by the deities.[252] The main deities that are

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[251] It would cost about three thousand U.S dollars to organize this ritual.
[252] Some villagers believe that the deities would be happier with a larger amount of food offerings in this ritual and thus might be willing to cure a sick person who is seriously ill.

worshipped in this ritual are the "new deities" of the "mountain lineage" and "ocean lineage." I found it fascinating to see that the "new deities" or "Malayanized Islamic deities" are regarded as "miracle doctors" having "miracle powers" to heal sickness. This shows how a religious element can be transformed and adapted to local needs and practices. Other "old deities" are also believed to have such powers to heal, but if the sickness lingers, it is not considered inappropriate to call upon "new deities" to help as well. Apart from that, this ritual also provides an occasion to promote Muk Rija to her spiritual position to take care of the *ciét atau* for her clan. Also, this ritual can promote Ong Maduen to his spiritual position. It seems to me that since it requires so much preparation for the Rija Praong ritual to take place, people were trying to add many different objectives to this ritual.

This four-day ritual is divided into two parts, the first part (the first two days) is called "Pok Rija" or ritual to promote Muk Rija to her spiritual role as the guardian of the *ciét atau* for her clan, and the second part (the last two days) is to celebrate her new spiritual role. Thus, this arrangement shows that the ritual focuses greatly on Muk Rija as the main actor. The ritual procedure is basically the same for both "mountain lineage" and "ocean lineage," except that for the "ocean lineage" there is an extra "boat ritual" that I will discuss below. If a clan follows a "mountain lineage" deity (Rija Praong *atau cek*) then its members need to invite only mountain deities, but if the clan follows an "ocean lineage" deity (Rija Praong *atau tasik*), then its members must invite deities from both sides, as they do in the Rija Dayep ritual.

For the ritual to actually happen, the clan members should follow several requirements regarding abstinence; it is also required that there should not be any funeral or *kut* entry rituals in the clan for the whole previous year. To construct a temporary *kajang*, the priests have to perform a purification ritual for the materials that are used to set it up*,* such as wood and bamboo. In addition, for successful accomplishment of the Rija Praong, it is forbidden for menstruating women and *basaih* priests (Cham Ahiér) to enter the *kajang* (the place of

worship) because they are considered ritually unclean.[253] Once the *kajang* is built, the Cham Awal priest Po Acar performs the opening ceremony to officially start the Rija Praong by inviting the deities Po Awluah (i.e., Allah) and Mohamat (i.e., Muhammad) to come to witness the ritual and bless the clan with prosperity. Following Po Acar, Ong Maduen invites, in the Malay language, all the other "new deities" to the rituals. The use of this language in addressing the "new deities" shows the tribute to the origin of these deities and, at the same time, shows the close link between Champa and Malaya. Furthermore, one of the essential sacred objects that is needed for the Rija Praong ritual is the *ciét atau*. Thus, before the Rija Praong ritual starts, Ong Maduen and Muk Rija must perform the *ciét atau* procession to bring the *ciét atau* from Muk Rija's house to the *kajang*. The arrival of the *ciét atau* marks the beginning of the ritual worship of the "new deities" performed by Po Acar and Ong Maduen, and Po Acar priests must eat some small amount of food offerings on behalf of the "new deities" thus indicating that the "new deities" have accepted the offerings and will favour the success of the ritual. Also, in this part, Ong Maduen has to perform a purification ritual for Muk Rija so that she will be in the purest stage to serve the "new deities" and deified ancestors.

Once the purification ritual for Muk Rija is done, it will be followed by the ritual to promote her to be officially appointed the Muk Rija of her clan. There are a few differences in ritual practices if Muk Rija belongs to the "ocean lineage" deities or "mountain lineage" deities. If she belongs to the "mountain" one, then she herself, Ong Maduen and Po Acar will invite Po Awluah, Mohamat (that is, Muhammad) and the "new deities" of "mountain lineage" to come to the ritual to witness the event and to receive offerings. After that comes the ritual to celebrate her position in which Ong Maduen and Muk Rija offer food to the "new deities" and Po Acar receives the offerings on behalf of the deities. Then, Ong Maduen and Muk Rija

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[253] Since the *basaih* priests perform funeral rituals, they are treated as ritually unclean people, even though they perform rituals at the temple, the most sacred place of all.

perform several dances; the most significant part of this dance is the time when Muk Rija goes into a trance to connect with ancestors to deliver the wishes of the clan members and to receive advice from the ancestors.

The ritual to promote Muk Rija of the "ocean lineage" to her religious position is similar to that of the "mountain lineage" except that at the end of the ritual she has to swear to be forever a "child of Po Awluah." In addition, there is a ritual directed by Ong Maduen to receive and to welcome two boats of people from Malaya. This ritual reconstructs the legend that explains the origin of the "new deities" of "ocean lineage," in particular, where the two boats of people came from and for what purpose. As explained in the *Rija Dayep* about the legends of "mountain" and "ocean lineage" deities, the Cham people did not recognize the people that came from Malaya and mistakenly killed most of them. Thus, king Po Romé ordered the Cham to worship them as deities of "mountain" and "ocean" lineages. In this part of the Rija Praong, the priests reconstruct the story of the two boats of people that came from Malaya and sing songs as well as offer food to them as a way of paying tribute. People actually create two boats made of wood and have them placed in the *kajang* for this ritual. For the clan that worships the "new deities" of the ocean lineage, the Rija Praong ritual ends with Ong Maduen's songs dedicated to Po Rayak (wave deity) to send off the two boats with people and their souls to return safely to their home country, Malaya (fig. 69). In short, through the Rija Praong ritual, we see a combination of ancestor worship and the incorporation of new religious elements with the creation of a new tradition influenced by the contacts with Malaya.

Fig. 69. Rija Praong ritual with two boats, Ninh Thuận province
(Photo courtesy of Quảng Đại Tuyên).

Discussing the Rija rituals, Sakaya (2014: 184) suggests that they are a link that connected the Cham Ahiér and Cham Awal communities together in the process of creating an Islamized Champa. There are two points in his statement. First, Sakaya believes that the Rija rituals connect the two communities together. However, what I see is that while Cham Ahiér perform Rija rituals within their own families, clans, villages, shrines, and temples, the Cham Awal do not come to participate in the Cham Ahiér's Rija rituals, and vice versa. The only thing somehow corroborating his statement is that in the Rija Dayep and Rija Praong rituals, Cham Awal's Po Acar priests come to represent Po Awluah to receive offerings; however, their roles are mainly those of passive observers and food receivers on behalf of Po Awluah and "new deities." The fact that Cham Awal also perform Rija rituals, but in their own communities and on different occasions from the Cham Ahiér, indicates the independence of ritual practices of each of these two communities. Secondly, since the "new deities" are called upon and invited to these rituals, Sakaya believes that this shows that Cham religion and Cham people were

Islamized. To me, however, adopting and worshipping Islamic "new deities" does not mean that the Cham Ahiér converted to Islam or that the Cham Ahiér are Islamized; aside from calling upon the names of "Islamic deities," the rituals themselves do not contain any practices that can be said to be Islamic.

In addition, examining the Rija Praong ritual, Sakaya (2012: 2) argues that it is similar to the Mak Yong ritual of the Malays and that they both started around the 17th century when Champa had close contacts with Malaya. However, in another article, using a Cham manuscript, Sakaya (2008: 157) suggests that the Cham started the practice of *ciét atau* together with the Rija Praong ritual in the 18th century. In any case, what this tells us is that the practice of *ciét atau* together with the Rija Praong ritual could have developed relatively recently and that it most likely happened during a period of close contact with Malaya.

## 6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined two sets of rituals: the Puis and Payak rituals, and the Rija rituals. They are the rituals that are performed in villages with the participation of clan members and villagers. Puis and Payak rituals focus on worshipping ancestors of the clan as well as those deities that belong to the category of "old deities" such as deified kings and temple deities. The Rija rituals, however, focus on worshipping "new deities," and clan ancestors, but also the "old deities", though to a lesser degree. Cham intellectuals categorize these rituals as "folk" ones and they explain that the main priests who direct those rituals are "folk" ritualists. Interestingly enough, in the Rija Dayep and Rija Praong rituals, the Cham Awal Po Acar priests also participate as witnesses and representatives of Po Alwuah (that is, Allah, who belongs to the category of "new deities"). Ordinary Cham Ahiér villagers whom I spoke with basically did not know those categories of "folk" rituals and "folk" ritualists, nor did they know which deities belong in the categories of "new deities" and "old deities." To them, all rituals simply

represent the act of worshipping and offering to *yang* (gods), and all gods are divine and equally important. What they know is how it is necessary to organize those rituals as their duty for ancestors and gods, what food should be offered, and how it should be prepared.

In examining these rituals, I found that Cham Ahiér adopted "Islamic deities" or "new deities" to enlarge their pantheon; in other words, they incorporated the "new deities" into an existing religious system with ritual procedures focused on food offerings to the deities, making human and animal figurines to be send off as replacements, the priests going into trance to connect with ancestors, and sending off the two boats carrying with souls to safely return to their home country, Malaya. On the one hand, these rituals can be considered an indigenous practice, but, on the other hand, they show certain connections with the Malay religious world. Yet it would be inappropriate or inaccurate to suggest that these rituals are indicative of Islamic influence or that the Cham Ahiér practice any particular form of world religion such as Islam. The clan identity that is represented by "new deities" is an interesting phenomenon that shows how the Cham Ahiér incorporated new elements into their existing religious tradition; I believe that this was a slow and gradual process that went on for several centuries. The Cham Ahiér adopted the "new deities" and elevated them to the same position as their other numerous gods, and then worshipped "new deities" in their own terms, thus embedding these deities in the complex fabric of their own tradition which focused on the worship of ancestors and deified royals included within an even larger pantheon of other deities.

## Conclusion

The pioneers in the study of Champa and its people were French scholars who worked in Vietnam during the colonial period (1887-1945). To (re)construct Champa's past, particularly its history and religion, they worked mainly with two kinds of medieval sources: objects of Cham religious art (sculptures and temples) and Cham inscriptions. The main sources of information on the civilization of Champa were derived from 23 extant brick temple complexes, 233 stone inscriptions, and a handful of religious stone sculptures dispersed in various regions of Vietnam, from its Central to Southern part. On the basis of visual similarities between the extant medieval Cham artifacts and their Indian counterparts, the French researchers of the 19th and early 20th centuries suggested that Champa was an "Indianized" or "Hinduized" kingdom. Indeed, numerous medieval Cham Sanskrit inscriptions, temple ruins, and religious sculptures testified to a particular link between medieval Champa and India. However, the Indian influences that can be seen in medieval artifacts were produced for Cham royals and elites and therefore represented only their own religious worldviews. It remains unknown whether the mass population of medieval Champa also adopted Indian religious traditions, and if it did, to what extent. Moreover, there is insufficient data to understand what the local culture and religious beliefs were either prior to the arrival of Indian culture and religions in the Cham royal court or after Champa began to decline in the 15th century.

The earliest ethnographic accounts of the culture and religious beliefs of the South-Central Cham were authored by Étienne Aymonier in 1891. He published several studies that suggested the existence of two main South-Central Cham groups who belonged to different religious traditions. He called the first group "Cham Brahmanistes", that is, "the Cham [who worship] Brahman" and still preserve some ancient forms of Brahmanism or Hinduism; he called the second group "Cham Bani" or "gens de la religion musulmane" ("people of Muslim religion"), that is, those who followed Islam. Ten years after Aymonier, in 1901, Antoine

Cabaton also provided a plethora of ethnographic information on the Cham in which he asserted that the direct descendants of the kingdom of Champa were "Cham Brahmanistes." To refer to this group he used the Cham term *kaphir/akaphir/akaphiér* ("infidèles") derived from the Arabic term *kafir/kafer* meaning "non-believer", that is, the "descendants des anciens Chams qui n'ont pas voulu accepter la religion de Mahomet" ("descendants of ancient Chams who did not want to accept the religion of Mahomet"). In short, these colonial scholars claimed that there were two groups of Cham in South-Central Vietnam: the "Cham Brahmanistes" who were "Hindu" and the "Cham Bani" who were Muslims. One can suggest that French scholars categorized Cham religious identity on the basis of their assumption that the contemporary Cham villagers continued to practice the religions represented in the extant medieval artifacts of Champa (hence the French term "Cham Brahmanistes"), contemporary Cham were seen by the French colonial administrators through this lens, as representatives of "Indian culture"; this vision was supported by the extant medieval artifacts. Because of this approach, colonial scholars and administrators fostered the view among contemporary Cham intellectuals that their identity was linked to the legacy of the Indianized Champa kingdom.

It is important to mention that since the French scholars were the first to categorize one of the main groups of the Cham of South-Central region as "Cham Brahmanistes," this identification was consciously or unconsciously adopted by researchers who used it as the groundwork in later studies and continued building upon it. In one of the earliest accounts written in Quốc Ngữ (literally, "[Vietnamese] National Language,") its author, Huỳnh Thị Bảo Hoà (1936: 14-15) used the Vietnamese term "Chăm Bàlamôn", following the French term "Cham Brahmanistes", to talk about the contemporary Cham of the South-Central region. The term "Chăm Bàlamôn" ("Bàlamôn" being a local transliteration of "Brahman") was taken too liberally from the received French scholarly tradition. Nonetheless, the term "Chăm Bàlamôn"

became a fixed category and serves now as the official state-sanctioned term to refer to "Hindu Cham" in Vietnam.

In the last two decades, prominent native Cham scholars and intellectuals such as Po Dharma, Sakaya, Thành Phần, and Lâm Tấn Bình, among others, challenged the use of the term "Chăm Bàlamôn" in Vietnamese publications and claimed that it is a foreign term applied by outsiders. They suggested to replace it instead with the term "Ahiér" because, they claimed, that was how the Cham Ahiér identify themselves.[254] Paradoxically, the very term "Ahiér", in fact, has its origin in the Arabic language and it remains unknown when it was adopted and started being used by the Cham.[255] In any case, the Cham scholars suggested that Cham Ahiér (or Chăm Bàlamôn) are the Cham who accepted Po Awluah (Allah) *after* Po Romé's reign (r. 1627-1651), hence the term "Ahiér" meaning "after", whereas Cham Awal (Cham Bani) refers to the Cham who followed Islam *before* Po Romé's reign, hence the term "Awal" meaning "before."[256] They thus maintained that both Cham Ahiér and Cham Awal were converted to Islam by Malays or through a specifically "Malayanized form of Islam", that is, they were not converted to any version of Islam coming from Arabic countries.

When examining Cham identity, Nakamura (1999; 2020) describes Cham Ahiér as "adherents to an indigenized form of Hinduism" in contrast to Cham Awal whom she identifies as "adherents to an indigenized form of Islam." Po Dharma, Sakaya, and Thành Phần, also share the same idea, namely, they agree that Cham Ahiér are those Cham who experienced a

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[254] Thành Phần (2010: 2); Sakaya (2002: 40, 2008: 133-134, 2014: 97). See also Po Dharma's text posted at http://champaka.info/index.php/quandiem/quandiemvanhoa/1267-van.

[255] The term "Ahiér" was mentioned in several Cham manuscripts but of the time when those manuscripts were produced remains unknown. According to Noseworthy and Phạm 2020, the oldest known extant Cham manuscript is dated to the 18th century.

[256] Historically speaking, there is no clear evidence for the practice of Islam in Champa prior to Po Romé's reign. Numerous scholars, including Po Dharma, Sakaya, Thành Phần, and Nakamura believe that Champa experienced contacts with Muslims as early as the 9th century; this statement is based on two Arabic inscriptions found in Champa. However, as I mentioned in chapter 1, according to Haw (2017) these two Islamic inscriptions (taken by scholars as one of the main sources for the early history of Islam in Champa) in fact did not originate from Southeast Asia but were transported from Tunisia. Haw maintains that there is no good evidence of any Islamic presence in Champa until the time period after the 16th century and that the evidence of Muslims in Champa before this period is derived from essentially circular arguments.

certain Brahmanist *influence*.[257] Abdul Hamid (2013) however, suggests that Cham Ahiér are "syncretic Hindus," and Cham Awal are "syncretic Muslims." Thus, what we can see here is the long-lasting effect of French scholarship, more specifically, the continued influence on present-day interpretation of Cham religions inflicted by French categorization; all the aforementioned scholars agree that the term "Hinduism" continues to be useful for describing the contemporary Cham Ahiér religion. Until today, no one has challenged such definitions except Yoshimoto (2012, p. 503) who maintained that the present-day Cham Bani do not see themselves as Muslim or members of the Islamic community but rather they identify themselves as followers of "Hồi Giáo" (*tín đồ Hồi Giáo*). However, Yoshimoto suggests that this does not mean that they accept being identified with Islam or that people should equate Hồi Giáo with Islam, and its followers, with Muslims.

Regarding the contemporary Cham Ahiér, this thesis is the first to challenge previous accounts which portrayed them as "Brahmanists" or Hindu or stated that their religion should be identified with reference to either Hinduism or Islam. The contemporary Cham Ahiér do not worship any of the Hindu supreme gods such as Śiva, Viṣṇu, Brahma, and the deities of their pantheon are totally different from those of Hinduism. Their ritual activities, priests, and religious texts barely resemble Hindu practices. Even when they worship the *liṅga-yoni* in a medieval Cham temple, the central icon used in the ritual represents their deified king who is regarded as an ancestor and a culture hero for his contribution to social or technological development, such as dam irrigation; this is the case, for instance, of the king Po Klaong Girai. In addition, this thesis also challenges the definition of Cham Ahiér religion that used the terms "Islam" or "Malayanized form of Islam" because despite the fact that the Cham Ahiér call upon

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[257] This seems to contradict their explanations of the meaning of the term "Cham Ahiér" as referring to those Cham who accepted Allah and followed Islam after the Po Romé reign and are now "Islamized." See Thành Phần (2010), Sakaya (2002, 2008, 2014), and Po Dharma's text posted online at http://champaka.info/index.php/quandiem/quandiemvanhoa/1267-van.

"Islamic deities" to come to some rituals (such as Rija rituals and rituals for the dead), the ritual procedures themselves are not Islamic. Also, during the temple rituals, no "new deities" or "Islamic deities" are called upon or invited to the temples. Thus, it is inaccurate and misleading to define or categorize Cham Ahiér religion with the terms "Hinduism" or "Islam," and define Cham Ahiér identity as either "Hindu" or "Muslim." By exploring the most fundamental rituals of the Cham Ahiér, this thesis demonstrated how Cham Ahiér religion is practiced - and performed - by its followers and how their religious identity can be identified through an analysis of their ritual activities. To the best of my knowledge, this thesis is the first attempt to study contemporary Cham Ahiér religion through their ritual activities.

In recent years the publications produced by Cham intellectuals as well as scholars such as Sakaya (2008: 134) laid a special stress on the importance of Cham manuscripts as the main and most accurate sources for constructing Cham Ahiér religion. In my opinion, it is certainly important to use old Cham manuscripts to study Cham Ahiér religion, but by no means should they be considered the main authoritative sources or only sources representing the religion of the present-day Cham Ahiér. Sakaya does not mention that the Cham manuscripts were and are the property of Cham priests, they are regarded as sacred and must be kept away from Cham villager's view, and thus it is not easy for everyone to access them. It is only recently that some Cham intellectuals were able to convince some priests to share their religious manuscripts.[258] Moreover, since those manuscripts were handwritten, it is not always easy to decipher them and even a well-trained linguist will still need the help of Cham priests and Cham intellectuals who are accustomed to the religious context to assist her or him in translation. In addition, it

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[258] They did so because, as explained by some Cham intellectuals to me, they worried that if their manuscripts were not treated with the appropriate conservation techniques then they would soon deteriorate, because these manuscripts were written mostly on palm leaf and paper. According to Noseworthy and Phạm (2020), the oldest known extant Cham manuscript is dated to the 18th century, and all the older original Cham manuscripts are lost. Since the majority of Cham population now do not know Cham language and there are only a few extant Cham works, the idea of saving and protecting the Cham religious manuscripts naturally came to the minds of Cham intellectuals expressed in their interviews.

should be noted that when they were created or written down, the Cham manuscripts represented certain voices and certain visions of a certain period in the history and were produced with a certain agenda.

My purpose in this thesis is not to determine what is the "true religion" of Cham Ahiér, but rather to elucidate how contemporary Cham Ahiér villagers practice their religion. Thus, my thesis takes a different approach as it does not rely on manuscripts to study Cham Ahiér religion and identity but instead it is mainly based on an anthropological approach and focused on field studies including observations and interviews, complemented by a thorough investigation of secondary sources published by Cham intellectuals, native Cham scholars, Vietnamese researchers and overseas scholars. To explore the present-day Cham Ahiér community, I first considered them in historical context as the descendants of the Champa kingdom and discussed the religions that were adopted by medieval Cham royals as attested in the extant artifacts. Furthermore, my methodology was based on comprehensive and structured interviews in which I collected and took into consideration opinions of as many interviewees as possible, because I believed that all voices are equally important. With that in mind, I found two main viewpoints, one shared by Cham intellectuals and the other expressed by ordinary Cham villagers; they differ considerably from one another and represent different perspectives concerning one and the same religious tradition; however, I argue that both of them are equally important in portraying Cham Ahiér religion and identity.

To investigate Cham Ahiér religion, I posed the following questions: What rituals are the most important to the Cham Ahiér? How do Cham Ahiér practice their rituals? What are the main ritual processes going on and procedures conducted in each ritual? Which deities are called upon and worshipped in each ritual? And last but not least, what are the roles of the priests whom the Cham employ to perform the rituals?

In my thesis I explored several fundamental rituals of the Cham Ahiér; they belong to two categories, namely, the rituals that take place in temples and those that take place in villages (in particular, at cremation grounds, *kut*, and in individual homes). For temple rituals, as I discuss in chapter 4, I examined the most fundamental rituals, namely: the temple rituals Peh Bi-Mbang Yang, Yuer Yang, Katé, and Cambur. I found that despite the opinions of the prominent native Cham scholars including Sakaya, Thành Phần, and Po Dharma who suggested that all the South-Central Cham are influenced by a form of Malayanized Islam, I did not see any prevailing Islamic influences in the Cham temple rituals.  I discovered that "new deities" or "Islamic deities" such as Allah and Mohammad were strictly not "invited" to the temple rituals, while the invited deities included only the so-called "old deities" or "temple deities" and deified kings. Cham Ahiér pay highest homage to the deified kings and royals whom they worship as gods and as ancestors. They praise them for their contribution to the actual deeds that helped Cham society survive and prosper, such as the creation of dam irrigation, pottery, and weaving. The temple rituals thus give the contemporary Cham a chance to experience a sense of linkage to their deified kings and royals in a direct and personal manner. Also, despite Cham temples include rituals of opening the temple door, bathing and dressing the main icons of the temples as necessary steps in ritual activities which can be seen as similar to traditional Hindu temple rituals in India, the meaning (or purpose) of Cham temple rituals, the gods that they worship, and the priests who perform these rituals are very different. In India, it is only the Brahmin male priests who are in charge of temple ritual activities including worshiping, bathing and dressing the main deity while no women are allowed to perform these duties; in Cham temples, conversely, it is the priestess Muk Pajau who is responsible for the preparation of food offerings, bathing and dressing the main deity of the temple; she even goes into a trance to connect with the divinities (ancestors) to know whether the ritual was successful.

In contrast to the opinion of Cham intellectuals who group Muk Pajau and others into the category of "folk" masters/ritualists, this thesis suggests that it would be more appropriate to refer to them as non-*basaih* priests. This is because I saw that all the temple rituals were performed by both *basaih* priests and non-*basaih* priests. They worked together hand in hand to make the ritual successful. Each priest has a specific role or task to do when the ritual starts, but no one is more important or less important than the other. Since this discussion of terminology is tangential to the scope of this thesis, I will not explore it further here; I would like only to stress the role of Cham intellectuals in categorization and to assert that the ordinary Cham villagers do not share the same view of these categories; I suggest that the villagers are not even aware of the existence of the categories of "folk masters," "old deities," "new deities" and "Islamic deities," as to them all the deities are sacred, divine and powerful, and all of them are simply identified as "*yang*." It is Cham priests and intellectuals who remember the names of the various deities while the ordinary Cham villagers do not.[259] This is one of the main points that I have attempted to make in this thesis, namely, that there are at least two discourses or two main viewpoints at play, with both coming from within the Cham Ahiér community and showcasing their religion and identity, one from native Cham scholars and intellectuals, the other from ordinary Cham villagers.

While examining Cham temple rituals, I found an interesting intertwining between the Cham Ahiér and the government. It is a recent phenomenon for Cham villagers to come and participate in temple ritual activities, which can be seen as a form of "invention" of Cham traditions. Since the Cham temples are now recognized by the government as a part of its "national heritage property," the government is in charge of their conservation as well as their promotion as tourist sites. Temple rituals such as the Katé are recognized by the government

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[259] Cham villagers neither use those categories nor do they know which priests belong to which group or which deities belong to which categories. Pointing this out, this thesis does not disregard Cham intellectuals' categories because they provide a practical "road map" or tool for outsiders to make sense of how the things work; the priests themselves presumably do not need any information of this kind.

as a "national intangible cultural heritage," and it is one of those events that the government uses to promote tourism. The government encourages the Cham to perform various cultural activities during the Katé and collaborates closely with the Cham intellectuals to organize the whole Katé event. On the one hand, the government oversees the event with a particular political agenda but, on the other, the same government uses this event to promote it to tourists as something unique, as a tool to showcase Cham heritage and identity. Thus, both the local Cham Ahiér community, including Cham intellectuals and villagers, and the government contributed to the "invention" and rejuvenation of the Cham temple rituals, particularly the Katé.

Furthermore, in this thesis I suggest that Cham religion can be understood through an analysis of ritual practices and performances, along the lines proposed by Shneiderman (2015), namely, the ritual practice is to be understood as ritualized actions carried out by devotees for their gods while performance is seen as ritualized actions conducted with some *other* external agendas and political or economic purposes. While the Cham community's coming to the temples to worship their deities is a part of their ritual practice, Cham intellectuals and administrators who sponsor, organize musical, cultural, and other performances at such events (for example, at the Katé) arguably have certain additional agendas motivated by external political and economic reasons. Thus, both the ritual practices and performances of the Cham demonstrate and represent Cham Ahiér religion and religious identity and point toward an historical identity linked to the glorious Champa kingdom. Young Cham nowadays love to come to the temples during the Katé festival to proudly showcase their identity to their Vietnamese friends. The extant ancient temples are symbols of a highly developed civilization that the young Cham are very proud of. Even though they were categorized by the Vietnamese government as just one of the 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam, they do not consider themselves as

insignificant or similar to other minority ethnic groups because they had a great kingdom with a high civilization in the past.

Aside from public temple rituals, I also examined private rituals for the dead, including funeral and *kut* cemetery entry ceremonies at the village level. Cham Ahiér funeral rituals represent a process of helping the deceased to be reborn into the next life where they can join ancestors in Heaven. In the funeral, the priests perform the ritual to create a new body for the deceased to be transformed from a dead person to an entity ready for her or his next life. Interestingly enough, the deities who were called upon by the priests to help send the deceased (in the new body) to join their ancestors in Heaven are Islamic "deities." But it is important that the deceased receives the *kut* entry ceremony when her or his forehead bones (collected during the cremation) are buried in the cemetery of clan-based matrilineal descent, and only after that the deceased can join the world of ancestors permanently. In other words, only after that the deceased is believed to join his or her ancestors in Heaven and is considered a *yang* (deity). The Cham Ahiér believe that if they do not perform the *kut* entry ceremony for the deceased to join ancestors in Heaven, the dead will continue to wander on the Earth and harm the family in the form of a ghost. As discussed in Chapter 3, not all the ancestors are good to their relatives; their actions depend on how they died and whether they received a proper funeral and *kut* entry ceremony. This demonstrates how important the rituals for the dead are in the minds of the Cham Ahiér.

It is common for the Cham Ahiér to keep the bones of the deceased for a decade or more after the cremation before they are able to afford the expense of the *kut* entry ceremony. However, it remains unclear to me where and in what form the soul of the deceased stays during this span of time between the cremation and the *kut* ceremony. Most Cham villagers do not know how to answer this question or never thought of it. Interestingly enough, some of my informants mentioned that all the relatives of the deceased must abstain from eating mammals

for the whole first month of the funeral period because the deceased could be reborn as a human or as an animal. The concept of reincarnation or rebirth on the Earth came up a few times among my conversations with Cham intellectuals; however, they did not explain in detail if a dead person can be reborn on the Earth. This would contradict their idea of having the *kut* entry to send off the deceased permanently to Heaven. As an outsider and researcher trying to make sense and understand their tradition in a systematic way, I saw that contradiction although they themselves do not necessarily saw this as contradictory or at least did not pay much attention to any theorization or rationale behind it. In fact, I noticed that the interviewed people combined different worldviews "on top of each other" and manifested different interpretations and levels of understanding of their own religious activities. I found that there is no systematic and coherent understanding of the concept of afterlife as related to the funeral rituals and to the *kut* entry ceremony shared among all the Cham.

While examining rituals for the dead, I found that non-*basaih* priests would also participate alongside *basaih* priests to make the ritual a success. And while temple rituals worship only "old deities," funeral rituals and *kut* entry ceremony worship both "old deities" and "new deities." Also, while native Cham scholars and intellectuals intend to replace the Vietnamese term "Chăm Bàlamôn" by the term "Cham Ahiér," ordinary Cham villagers are not familiar with the term "Cham Ahiér." Rather, "Cham Cuh" meaning "Cham who practice cremation" is the term that both the Cham Ahiér and Cham Awal villagers use to refer to the "Cham Ahiér." Thus, it is the ritual practices, in particular funeral rituals, which contribute to defining the identity of the Cham Ahiér community in contrast to the "Cham Awal", that is, "those Cham who maintain burial practices for funerals." In short, Cham Ahiér's rituals for the dead contain a mixture of various religious practices and beliefs derived from diverse sources and traditions. Thus, I concluded that the description given by the French colonial scholars to this group of Cham as "Brahmanistes" or "Hindouistes" is not appropriate, and that

Nakamura's definition of them as adhering to "an indigenized form of Hinduism" and Abdul Hamid's definition of their religion as "syncretic Hinduism" are not accurate.

The last two sets of fundamental rituals of the Cham Ahiér that I examined in this thesis are the Puis and Payak rituals and four Rija rituals. Puis and Payak rituals are the clan rituals performed privately at home for the benefit of all clan members. The purpose of Puis and Payak rituals is to repay ancestors and the gods for blessings and protection of the respective clan in past years. The deities that are worshipped in these rituals are mainly "old deities" or "temple deities." The second set of rituals consists of the so-called "Rija rituals" including Rija Nagar, Rija Harei, Rija Dayep, and Rija Praong. The purpose of these rituals is to ask the gods for protection, and blessings of good health, good fortune, good weather for the new year and for the more distant future. The deities worshipped in all Rija rituals are both "old deities" and "new deities." It is only in the Rija Dayep and Rija Praong rituals that we see that each clan follows and worships either "new deities" of the "mountain lineage" or of the "ocean lineage." Thus, through these rituals I discovered the practice of clan identity related to "new deities." Interestingly, in the Rija rituals, Ong Maduen sang hymns praising the "new deities" in the Malay language and "new deities" in these rituals were more prominent than the "old deities." This observation points to the idea of a historical connection between the Cham and the Malay people or between the Rija rituals and the Malay religious world.

The phenomenon of adopting and promoting the "new deities" to the same level as the other local gods or placing them even higher, was explained by Po Dharma (1990). According to him, from the 17th to the 19th centuries, Champa tried to ally with military powers in the Malay Peninsula to fight against the Vietnamese. Thus, the Cham included Islamic "deities" in their religious pantheon to show their interest in Islam for political purposes, i.e., for getting powerful allies. This, I believe, can explain why we see the "new deities" being called upon in these rituals while the ritual procedures themselves do not reflect any Islamic practices. In other

words, what I see in these rituals is that the Cham Ahiér adopted "new deities" and promoted them to the same position as their other gods and that they worship the "new deities" on their own terms and in their own way. They incorporated the "new deities" into the existing religious system embedded in local practices; this modification of their religion thus allowed for flexibility in their religious practice and its further development.

This brings us back to the question of how one should define and interpret contemporary Cham Ahiér religion? As an outsider and observer of their rituals, I see that Cham Ahiér are not Hindus because they do not practice any specific tradition or form of Hinduism, nor they identify themselves Hindus. They are not Muslim either because they do not practice Islam. And they are certainly not Buddhists. As for the Cham themselves, they do not identify themselves with any of those three world religions, nor are they familiar with any religious doctrine, concepts and ritual practices from those three religions. Since it is inappropriate and inaccurate to categorize the religion of this Cham community under any specific terms connecting them with these three world religions, does it mean that their religion should be considered a "folk" religion or a local tradition?  In this thesis, I avoided using the terms "local tradition," "indigenous practice," and "folk tradition" because of the challenges that the definitions of each of these terms and the difficulties of application of these terms to Cham religious practices may imply. How can one delineate the boundaries for each of these concepts and how can each of them be understood in terms of the fluidity of processes it implies, such as the processes of localization, indigenization, adoption, adaptation and influence? Also, how can we define those concepts and identify them in cases where there are various religious elements from different traditions which are blended, mixed, borrowed, and interwoven together? The fact that Cham Ahiér intellectuals did not categorize their temple rituals and death rituals as "folk" ones means that they do not expect for them to be boxed solely within the definition of "folk" religion. The Cham Ahiér's religion includes three major

components: the religious manuscripts, the community of priests, and a set of rituals; this makes me think that their religion does not belong to the category of "folk religion."

Can the Cham Ahiér religion be studied and understood through the lens of syncretism? In this thesis, I have resisted applying this concept to the Cham Ahiér religion. Although by now there is an established body of work which examines syncretism between religious traditions as a means of analyzing the historical development of religions in a diversity of locales throughout the globe, in a practical sense the concept is nonetheless still limited by definitional constraints and by such related challenges as to how we might measure the "degree of syncretism" or otherwise determine which practices, symbols or ideas may be considered as syncretic while others are not. In short, what is our purpose for deciding whether a given tradition is syncretic? As Shaw and Stewart (1994: 6) state: "Simply identifying a ritual or tradition as 'syncretic' tells us very little and gets us practically nowhere, since all religions have composite origins and are continually reconstructed through ongoing process of synthesis and erasure."

If indeed syncretism is a factor or condition of potentially all religions, one could argue that it is therefore not very useful for distinguishing between religions or as a means of characterizing any particular religion. In this regard, then, the Cham Ahiér religion is not fundamentally different from other religions. Even a geographically extensive "world religion" might nonetheless be understood as an amalgamation of locally applicable religious practices and the social and institutional relations which they engender. One potentially useful insight that could come from this line of analysis is with regard to the position and perspective of outside observers, meaning those who have some vested interest in the labelling of (in this instance) Cham religious practices, such as French colonial scholars, Vietnamese state officials, Cham priests and so forth. In this respect, the concept of the "world religion" becomes more salient; somehow the localized, ethnically-identified religions (such as that of

the Cham Ahiér) seem to be more "official" when they are examined in reference to one or another world religion. Does Cham religion seem somehow more important when it is considered as some sort of offshoot of Hinduism or Islam? One might consider, for example, that the French colonial scholars had this sort of thing in mind as they were, in a sense, trying to give the Cham a history, thereby making Cham civilization a grander thing than what it might first appear - and in this way the "project" of trying to understand Cham religion is a subset of the much larger project of European colonialism in Vietnam, as elsewhere in the colonial world.

Therefore, I believe it is not useful to box Cham Ahiér religion into a specific, established religious tradition; in other words, their religion does not fit into the conventional categories of world religions, nor do the Cham embrace the notion of an "official" religious status. It is only when one understands the geography, history and religion of Champa in context, with all the connections of Champa to neighbouring countries throughout its existence, and the interactions between the contemporary Cham and the Vietnamese government, that one can better understand the nature of Cham Ahiér religion. The Cham have responded to all the influences they received, and their response has led to a kind of mixture that has required centuries of internalization and transformation to arrive at the current state. Finally, the religion of the Cham Ahiér is not static, but it continues and will continue to evolve through time with the rituals that they practice and perform.

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