



Volume 1	Issue 2	June (2021)	DOI: 10.47540/ijias.v1i2.192	Page: 82 – 88
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## Preserve and Promote the Values Cultural Belief of the Khmer People in An Giang Province, Vietnam

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### ARTICLE INFO

*Keywords:* An Giang Province, Cultural Beliefs, Spiritual Life, the Khmer People.

*Received* : 14 March 2021

*Revised* : 11 May 2021

*Accepted* : 04 June 2021

### ABSTRACT

Cultural belief is a unique feature that has an important value in the spiritual life of the Khmer people in An Giang province. It is a bold combination of indigenous and religious colors, most of the Khmer in An Giang believe in Buddhism, taking it as one of their ways of life, as solid spiritual support to adjust behavior, and handling interpersonal, interpersonal, and social relationships. Cultural beliefs have created for the Khmer in An Giang to have a rich, unique spiritual life, bringing their own identity, contributing to diversity in the culture of the country. The article aims to highlight the manifestations of cultural belief and point out the values of cultural belief in the spiritual life of Khmer people in An Giang province, offering some solutions to contribute to preserving, preserving the cultural belief of the Khmer people. Thereby, to preserve and promote cultural beliefs in the spiritual life of the Khmer people in An Giang province in the trend of international integration.

### INTRODUCTION

Cultural belief has long been a problem that many scientists are interested in both theory and practice, it is the spiritual need of a part of the people, and it is related to all fields of social life, affects morality, economy, society, and other human activities. Cultural belief is closely linked to the daily life of each person, each ethnic group.

The Khmer people in Vietnam have many cultural traditions, in which cultural beliefs have a very important place in their spiritual life, bearing indigenous and religious colors (Hanh, 2013). The Khmer people in An Giang province always preserve their cultural characteristics, beliefs, and customs. During the development of the community of ethnic groups in An Giang, Khmer culture has exchanged and linked with other cultures, contributing to forming an enriching and diversifying culture of the nation.

International integration and socio-economic development in Vietnam have brought many great opportunities. On the other hand, it can erase the cultural identity of each ethnic group, fade the

traditional cultural values, the national solidarity declines. Therefore, to preserve the cultural identity of the Khmer people, we need to have an overview of the current situation, and appropriate solutions for the inheritance and effective promotion of cultural values their traditions.

### METHODS

To have a research basis to clarify the problem posed, we have collected verification information from many sources. Secondary data we have collected from official legal authorities such as the People's Committee of An Giang province, Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of An Giang province, Department of Ethnic Affairs of An Giang province. Primary data we have collected data from the survey, get opinions from experts. The paper is done based on analytical, synthesized, and logical methods. We have consulted many valuable documents. We used interviews and surveys in localities where there are a large number of Khmer people.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Cultural Beliefs**

Cultural beliefs contain sacred values for human spiritual life. Belief is a system of human beliefs about the sacred, natural or social phenomena related to their lives to ask for the protection and help of whom from super objects pictures that people worship. Culture is what people create to form social values and standards in the process of working, practical activities, with specific characteristics of each ethnic group (Thin, 2016). These standard values influence and regulate the psychological, behavioral, ethical life and activities in all areas where human presence is present.

In Vietnam, cultural beliefs have been interested and researched by scientists. In fact, cultural beliefs have been formed based on beliefs and people have used different means to denote that belief. Cultural beliefs are the connection from a certain form of belief, and it integrates other cultural values including monuments, festivals, legends, performing arts (Thin, 2016). Cultural beliefs are a set of values of human directions and ways of dealing with the supernatural or social world related to their life. These directions and ways of conduct reflect the physical and spiritual conditions corresponding to the natural and social environmental conditions of a residential community.

Cultural beliefs are approached from tangible cultural values, intangible culture through worship facilities, worship rituals, folk anecdotes, places, rituals, festivals. It is related to all forms of human beliefs including natural cult beliefs, the cult of man; the divine cult, which exists not only in abstract form but also exists in practical ways and behaviors (Hai, 2020).

### **Expression of Cultural Belief in the Spiritual Life of Khmer people**

#### **1. Cultural belief in typical festivals and customs**

The PiThi Chol Chnam Thmay is called the Khmer New Year celebration. It is the biggest celebration of their year, taking place in mid-April of the calendar, the Khmer are influenced by Brahmanism, so the Khmer celebrate the New Year differently the Kinh ethnic and Chinese. On the occasion of the ceremony, families prepare a tray, light incense, and light candles to bring the old fairy

back to heaven, and welcome the new fairy to earth. After that, the Khmer will shower and wash, bring the tray to the pagoda, and celebrate the New Year procession. Families will offer rice to the monks. They will do a sand-mountain ceremony to pray for good weather and good crops. The Khmer prepares fragrant water (including rainwater and fresh flowers), they bring it to the temple to bathe the Buddha. After the Buddha bathing ceremony, the Khmer also hold a bathing ceremony for the elderly monks in the pagoda (Thang, 2015).

Finally, the Khmer performs the ritual of bathing Buddha at home. All children and grandchildren in a family spread flower mats, invite grandparents, parents to sit down. They want to be forgiven by their parents for the shortcomings and mistakes that have occurred during the past year, they promise to correct them. After reciting the prayers, everyone will wish for the new year the whole family will always have much luck, joy, peace, and happiness. After that, children and sons will use water to bathe their grandparents and parents to express their gratitude for the merit of being born and nurtured.

The Okombok Festival (Moon Worshipping Ceremony) is held in October according to the lunar calendar every year (in December of the solar calendar), exactly on the night of the 15th October of the lunar month, before the moon reaches the top of its head, the Khmer gather at temple grounds or house-to-house, or many houses gather in a place to the ceremony together. The Khmers see the Moon as a god that regulates the crops of the year. Therefore, they use agricultural products including sticky rice to make Rice Flakes, coconut, banana, sweet potato, taro, and cakes to the moon god. Everyone sat with their hands folded, facing the Moon for the ceremony. When the moon was high, people started burning incense and lamps and invited the elderly, the most prestigious person in the village to conduct the ceremony (Hung, 2019).

The host prayed and he expressed the Khmer's gratitude to the Moon-god, they prayed to the Moon-god to accept the gift and give everyone health, and the harvest would be healthy. After the ceremony, the children were invited to eat Rice Flakes, the host asked the children to come close to him and clasped his hands towards the Moon, then he took the Rice Flakes and some other offerings for the children to eat. He patted the back and asked

the children what they wanted. The Khmer believe that the children's answers will be the beliefs and motivations of the adults next year.

The PiThi Sene Don Ta (ancestor ceremony), is one of the three biggest traditional festivals of the year of the Khmer in An Giang, the ceremony has the same meaning as the Vu Lan ceremony of the Vietnamese. It is a ceremony held to commemorate the merits of grandparents, parents, and relatives, give thanks to the deceased and bless the survivors, while creating bonds between friends, relatives, and the whole community together. According to the custom and tradition of the Khmer, there is no annual death anniversary date for the dead. The Khmer thought that ancestor worship was not important, because they thought that there was no connection between the living and the dead, the ancestor's soul could not give them anything they wanted. The ordination is only aimed at thanks to the blessing of the spirit of the deceased.

The PiThi Sene Don Ta ceremony is a folk traditional ritual with the unique and unique beauty of the Khmer. These special features are reflected in the social and moral values of the Khmer. Stemming from the mindset of living standards between people and the right social ethics. The Khmer festival has become an invisible cord connecting the human community, creating great social values. These values are expressed as the relationship of blood, lineages, village, regions and ethnic communities, religious communities, and relationships within the national community (Thang, 2015).

The PiThi Sene Don Ta ceremony, the traditional cultural identity of the Khmer is clearly formed, that is, the qualities including customs - festivals - pagodas - monks are an inseparable cultural and spiritual symbol of the Khmer community, it creates cultural beauty in cultural and

rituals because it is oriented towards the roots. Moral values in the PiThi Sene Don Ta Feast of the Khmer always show human behavior towards people and people to the world around them.

## **2. Cultural beliefs in community activities of Khmer people**

The Khmer in An Giang, the form of community living is a popular and traditional form of upland residents. The Khmer live concentrated on the foothills of the mountain, the edge of the forest. They have a sense of solidarity, protection, and mutual assistance in the Khmer community. The relationship between members of the villages is one of equality and mutual support. Everyone in the village is obliged to abide by the rules and regulations of the village to protect security and order and contribute to the service of the pagoda (Hai, 2020).

It can be understood that, in the forms of community activities, Buddhist activities play an important role, it is the factor that holds the community together firmly. Therefore, the Khmer pagoda was built not only to meet the needs of religious and belief activities but also the needs of education and socio-cultural activities of residents.

### **The value of cultural belief in the spiritual life of the Khmer people**

Cultural beliefs always play an important role in the spiritual life of the Khmer people. The Khmer appeared early in the An Giang land, many pagodas of the Khmer people on this land, proved for that. The Khmer have created for themselves an identity, a separate religious culture. Research about the cultural beliefs of the Khmer An Giang often refers to Buddhist beliefs, folk beliefs. However, determine the value of these forms of belief as necessary, to continue to research, preserve and promote.

Table 1. Average Population by Locality, Khmer in An Giang Province

Numerical order	Administrative units	The average population in 2018	The Khmer people	
			Amount of people	Percentage
1	Long Xuyen city	280.426	556	0,2
2	Chau Doc city	112.024	112	0,1
3	Tan Chau An Phu district	172.359	135	0,1
4	Phu Tan district	209.806	134	0,1
5	Chau Phu district	246.112	669	0,3
6	Tinh Bien district	121.308	35.657	29,4
7	Tri Ton district	132.803	45.180	34
8	Chau Thanh district	170.817	3.602	2,1
9	Cho Moi district	346.854	159	0,1
10	Thoai Son district	181.194	4.689	2,6
11	An Phu district	180.013	158	0,1
<b>Total</b>		2.153.716	91.051	4,2

The cultural beliefs of the An Giang Khmer in the process of formation and development have contributed to the creation of traditional Khmer values including belief, love for people, filial piety, community, diligence, hard work. These are very valuable values that need to be inherited and promoted. Therefore, the research on the values cultural beliefs of the Khmer to promote the positives.

The pagoda is a place to connect Khmer people. They complement each other in the process of existence and development. Buddhist philosophy has become the main idea in the ideology of the Khmer, they put all their faith in Buddhism, the convergence point is the pagoda and monks.

The Khmer have a concept that if they go to the temple and do good deeds, they will enjoy merit. Most of the Khmer people, voluntarily thought they were followers of Buddhism. They voluntarily associate their life with the temple from birth to death. In fact, most of the Khmer, since their birth, have followed their family towards Buddhism (Thanh, 2019). When boys grow up, they often go to the temple to study and they are educated in the Buddhist spirit. The Khmer often think that they only go to the temple to study to have knowledge and virtue.

Buddhism plays an important role in educating and forming the personality and people of the Khmer people. The humane philosophy and the concept of cause and effect of Buddhism have profoundly influenced the perception of all members of the Khmer family, and in the Khmer

ethnic community, making everyone good direction, good work (Hung, 2019). Good deeds have made the soul of the Khmer people untouched by the temptation of money and material. It can be affirmed that the pagoda is the living center of Buddhism. All activities of Buddhist beliefs are carried out in the pagoda. Therefore, Buddhists are very attached to the pagoda, and the pagoda has a special role in the cultural and religious life of the Khmer people.

In addition to holidays, when there are fun things or something difficult, the Khmer people always turn to the pagoda. In the Khmer family, relatives have conflicts, they ask the pagoda for help and settlement. Therefore, the pagoda is considered a place to mediate disputes in each Khmer community. Everything complicated and troublesome is discussed at the pagoda. The pagoda also plays a role as a center for preserving and promoting the language, customs, and traditional morals of the Khmer people. The Khmer An Giang has learned the ethnic script first comes from the pagoda.

Khmer pagoda plays an important role and position in the life of the Khmer, it is associated with all cultural, spiritual activities, beliefs, religions, and festivals of the nation. The Khmer said that Buddhism and the nation coexisted, so Theravada Buddhism and the Khmer people in An Giang had a bond. The Khmer's religious beliefs are deep and steadfast. When the Khmer died, their sons and children brought the dead's remains to the temple. Because the last wish of the Khmer people

is to “rest under the shade of the bodhi tree” when they die. Wealthy Khmer families often ask the temple to allow them to build a tower in traditional

architecture so that they can keep the remains of theirs (Hung, 2019).

Table 2. Number of Pagodas, Monks Comparison Between An Giang and Mekong Delta

Numerical order	Administrative units	Number of Khmer people	Number of pagodas	Number of monks
1	An Giang province	91.051	65	580
2	Cuu Long River Delta	1.183.458	446	7.433

In addition, the values of cultural beliefs are also reflected in the position of a monk. The chairperson of a pagoda is the solidarity center of the whole village, with the absolute respect of the people. Buddhist monks are not only those who carry out the mission of Buddhism, guide religious activities but also guide and organize cultural and educational activities for the community (Quang, 2011). Or to put it another way, Theravada Buddhism has a very high educational function. Therefore, the cultural, religious beliefs, national traditions with rich festivals have merged with each other. These values can be clearly seen in some content.

Theravada Buddhism dominated the entire spiritual life of the Khmer in An Giang. Most of the Khmer people believe and act according to the Buddhist teachings, it helps people to do good deeds, accumulate merit, towards the roots, to show humanity, it is a fine tradition passed down for many generations. Pagoda for the Khmer was a sacred place and associated with their daily life, it was not only a place for religious activities but also a place of community activities, a place of learning, playing, and entertainment.

In addition, the pagoda is also a place to share joys, sorrows, difficulties in life, it is a place to preserve and promote moral values, it preserves the traditional cultural values of the ethnic. All young people in the Khmer families, who are 12 years or older, must enter the temple to practice religion (no time limit). All men must be literate of their people, it shows their feelings and responsibilities to the nation so that they pay homage to the Buddha, and at the same time to accumulate merit and accumulate knowledge for themselves (Hanh, 2013). The Khmer do not distinguish between religious festivals or folk festivals. All festivals are held at

the pagoda and the monk is the most important person for the Khmer. This special feature has made a cultural heritage, the values cultural beliefs preserved and passed down through many generations.

**Solutions to Preserve and Promote Cultural Beliefs of Khmer People**

**1. Socio-economic development, improvement of material life for Khmer people**

Preserving and promoting traditional cultural values of the Khmer people is a difficult and long-term content, it cannot be a subjective and willful product, but it depends on the level of economic development, into specific local situations and conditions. To effectively develop socio-economic areas of the Khmer people, it is necessary to well implement the contents of the planning, arrange suitable concentrated residential areas, ensure that the Khmer people develop production in accordance with the special characteristics ethnic scores, regions (Thuy, 2012).

The State should step up the work of hunger eradication and poverty reduction, address pressing housing issues, productive land, domestic water, and infrastructure for Khmer people. Local authorities focus on building essential infrastructure, promoting the efficiency of works, effectively exploiting the potentials and strengths of the region. Places of worship, pagodas, community activities, or structures damaged or degraded must be repaired promptly (Hop, 2019).

Improving material life for the Khmer is an important job. If there is a standard of living that meets the essential needs of material life, then Khmer ethnic people can raise their awareness, self-consciously preserve and promote their traditional cultural identity, and they will respect, pride, and cherish the traditional cultural values (Minh, 2018).

Table 3. Number of Poor Households in An Giang Province

An Giang province	Years		
	Early 2016	End of 2016	End of 2017
Poor households the Khmer	6.949	6.268	5.432
Percentage	32,29%	27,76%	24,85%

**Raising Awareness of Preserving and Promoting Cultural Beliefs of Khmer People**

Only when Khmer people understand their position and role in preserving and promoting values in cultural beliefs will they actively self-implement effectively. If they themselves do not have a sense of preserving, inheriting, promoting, it will fade or lose cultural values is inevitable. We need to carry out a campaign to preserve and promote the cultural identities of the Khmer ethnic groups in An Giang, if there is an impact from many directions, it will be an advantage for higher efficiency. Develop a sense of community, from ethnic consciousness to national consciousness through traditional culture. Since then, the effectiveness of the work of preservation and inheritance has been enhanced and has practical significance in social life.

Education to raise awareness for Khmer people about the meaning of preserving good cultural values of the Khmer people, we need to promote well the role of the elderly and reputable people in the village. They are the ones who retain the most traditional cultural values, have the experience and reputation to organize cultural beliefs activities, are the pillars of cultural activities, high-value voices, and are respected in the community (Quang, 2011). They are a group of people with an irreplaceable role in propagating and educating, preserving traditional cultural identity.

The main way to preserve and promote the traditional culture of the Khmer people in An Giang is through propaganda, advocacy, education, and persuasion. Therefore, the State management agency on culture and information to the Khmer ethnic minority areas living focus on continuously opening propaganda waves in all forms to raise awareness of the whole society about the preservation, inheritance, and promotion of their traditional cultural values.

Local authorities should pay attention to the young generation, who is the most sensitive to all changes. In many ways, young generations of the Khmer can explore and contact traditional cultural

heritages in many ways. Thereby, forming pride, eliminating inferiority complex, considering preserving, inheriting, and promoting the traditional cultural values of our people is a sacred and honorable task of their generation.

**CONCLUSION**

Cultural belief is a social phenomenon with inheritance and sustainability, it always exists in the flow of the movement and development of history - society. Each ethnic group, with its conditions and history, has a traditional culture with its own characteristics, long-standing and stable, that is the national cultural identity. The Khmer people in An Giang, are people with a rich, long-standing, and very unique culture, the preservation, and inheritance of their cultural values have become necessary under the conditions current.

The Khmer ethnic community in An Giang province together with their religious, beliefs has contributed to the richness of cultural and religious life in Vietnam. As an ethnic minority, living alternately with other ethnic groups in the region, the Khmer people always show their spirit of solidarity and harmony with each other, and they still maintain their characteristics in cultural beliefs of their people, creating distinctive features bearing traditional cultural colors of the Khmer people in An Giang province.

Due to the low living standards of the Khmer people in An Giang province. So a part of the Khmer have not thought about and are not interested in preserving and promoting the cultural values of the nation, they have not been aware of the values culture and they are also not aware of the important role of religious culture in life. The trend of globalization is also one of the reasons leading to the change of values that gradually erode the cultural identity of the Khmer ethnic people.

If we do well the content to preserve and promote the values in the cultural beliefs, we can not only preserve the distinct and proud cultural features of the Khmer people but also promote

strength contributes to building a bold, advanced Vietnamese culture.

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