

## ACCULTURATION THE CHAMS - ISLAM IN VIETNAM THROUGH THE KAREH RITUAL OF THE CHAMS AWAL - A VIEW OF THE STRUCTURALISM

**Abstract:** *In the historical process, Cham people absorbed major religions such as Brahma, Buddhism, Islam along with the culture where these religions originated. However, Cham people only selected the elements which were appropriate for their traditional religion. Consequently, Cham people currently have a diversity of religion and culture with the endogenous and foreign elements. Chams' religions (including Brahma, which was localized) combined with Islam to become the unique religion that was Bani religion or the Chams Awal. From the perspective of the structuralism, this article shows the differences and similarities of acculturation between the Champa and Islam cultures through the Kareh ritual of the Chams Awal.*

**Keywords:** *Awal, acculturation, Chams, Islam, Kareh, structure.*

### 1. Structuralism as a research method

“Cultural exchanges and acculturation” are concepts of Cultural studies to indicate the exchanges of different cultures' groups (communities, nations) with each other that make cultural changes of one or both groups. The combination of the “endogenous” and “exogenous” cultural factors causes the diverse culture development. This process always demands to handle well the dialectical relationship between “endogenous” and “exogenous” factors of each nation. It can be said that structuralism is a good methodology that helps researchers observe and analyse the correlative phenomena, compare the exchanges between two different cultural groups.

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Structuralism was derived from the linguistic work of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson. Claude Lévi-Strauss put it into social and cultural anthropology, and Edmund Leach and Victor Turner applied it in studying rituals and festivals<sup>1</sup>. George Peter Murdock (*Social Structure*, 1949), the concept of “social structure” was used to indicate the cohesion of social institutions, such as rules of the residential area (the mother or the father...), transmission of assets, lineage (matriarchy or patriarchy), etc. Structural theories considered social institutions are not arbitrary or random sets, on the contrary, they are a “structure”. Thus, researchers’ task is how to recognize the cohesion and to explain the interdependence of social institutions. Identifying the matriarchal elements of the Chams culture through the *Kareh* ritual of the Chams Awal must be placed in relation with respect to male in the *Haircut*, *naming* (*Cắt tóc đặt tên*) and *Khotan* ceremonies of Islam.

In the case of rituals, festivals, Structuralism focuses on explaining them through the sense of space, time, behavior (including dress, speech, gesture) in rituals and festivals. According to the thought of the structuralism school, the significance of phenomena or cultural symbols must be put in opposition to phenomena or other symbols in the system (Lương Văn Hy và Trương Huyền Chi, 2012). For example, teenagers wear a skirt, wrap in a blanket, they are subservient and secretive in receiving Holy Day (*Kareh*), according to structural theory, it can be interpreted when put it in the opposed relationship to the daily lives of the children. Or as a spatial contrast between the girls (in the ceremony) and boys (outside the ceremony), under the structural perspective, it may be explained the role and position of two sexes in Chams society. Thus, the significance of the spatial arrangement or behavior in the *Kareh* ceremony can be fully understood when placed it in the opposed relationship with the other behavior and activity (*Kareh* ceremony of girls - *Katat* ceremony of boys, proselytes ceremony of the Chams Awal-hair-cutting, naming and circumcision of Islam ceremony, decorate the ceremony house Chams - Islam, matriarchy, patriarchy).

In my opinion, the structural theory as an approach method the object of research. It means that researchers must always put things,

phenomena in the dual aspect, examine the relationship among them in order to have a comprehensive view, to interpret properly the nature of the phenomenon.

Basically, structuralism can be considered as a development of the ancient dualistic dialectics on the universe of many races in the world such as *Yin-Yang's theory* of Chinese, *Linga-Yoni's* philosophy of Indian, or *Tanaow-Binai's* dual pair (male-female) in the Chams culture... The dialectical materialism of Marx's philosophy also has a similar perspective.

## **2. The formation of the three religious communities of the Chams at present and the relationship among them**

In Vietnam, Cham people currently have had three main religious communities such as *the Chams Ahier*, *the Chams Awal*, and *the Chams Islam* (researchers usually call them with corresponding names as the Chams Brahmanism, the Chams Bani (ancient Islam) and the Chams orthodox Islam. Three religious communities extremely have interactive, complementary relationships and share many cultural elements. To understand this relationship, it firstly needs to examine the ethnic progress of the Chams and the emergence of the three religious communities at present.

When Brahmanism and Islam were introduced into the Chams communities and they were absorbed by the indigenous people, these religions were not intact. With the traditional religion and strong indigenous culture, Cham people only received religious and cultural factors that were appropriate. They worshipped the new god without leaving the native gods. The animism coexisted with monotheism, Allah (the God) was worshipped in the same level with Shiva, Vishnu, Brahma and the gods of Cham people's such as the river god, the mountain god, the land God... the traditional festival along with religious ceremonies, matriarchy overwhelmed patriarchy (of Islam), etc. Brahmanism of Cham people was unlike Brahmanism of Indian, the indigenous Islam (also called ancient Islam Bani) was unlike the Arab or Malaysian Islam. The Chams religions have preserved the traditional elements as well as added the elements of foreign religions that formed indigenous religions.

The origin of three contemporary religious communities of Cham people, it must be examined since the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, when Brahmanism was just introduced into Cham people. Chams' residents peacefully accepted Brahmanism because this religion contains many similar factors with their religions such as polytheists, traditional beliefs (the linga and yoni - genitals of the male and female - are symbols represent the traditional beliefs of the ancient Cham people to wish things proliferate affluence), worship nature,... Initially, the ruling class used Brahmanism as a tool of strengthening power, demarcation class, administrative organization and deification of kings, so generally only the upper class, nobility, the rich people converted to this new religion, and most of the civilians still followed the old religion. Until the 8<sup>th</sup> century, Brahmanism was shaped which began widely affect to population (Boisselier, 1902) and it's great influence that made many people only realize the Indian elements in the Chams' culture .

Until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Islam was strongly introduced from Malaysia into the Chams (Manguin, 1979, Lafont, 2011), although there has been evidence of Arab traders to propagate Islam in this Kingdom since the 10<sup>th</sup> century (Aymonier, 1890, Boisselier, 1902, Ravaisse, 1922, Maspero, 1928). Islam was spread early, but perhaps due to the great influence of the Brahmanism at that time so there were not many people followed. In 1471, after the collapse of the Vijaya capital, more than 30 thousand Champa troops were captured; 30 thousand were killed; the king of Champa (Trà Toàn) was arrested and brought to Đại Việt; the capital completely destroyed; the faith in Brahmanism of the Chams declined, and a part of the Chams population converted to Islam (Quảng Văn Sơn, 2013). However, the powerful influence of Brahmanism and indigenous religions led to conflicts between old and new religions. Because many people did not accept the abandonment of ancestors, forget the traditional cultural identity of Muslim. This conflict gradually grew that lead to ethnic divisions. The Chams society severely separated. Until 1627, the accession of Po Rome king, he had the right and effective policies in using “dualistic thinking” of the Chams' culture which helped to

reconcile two communities as the Chams Brahmans and the Chams Muslims (Quảng Đại Tuyên and Nguyễn Ngọc Ánh, 2015).

Two nouns “Chams Ahier” and “Chams Awal” have appeared since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, during the dynasty of the king Po Romé (1627 - 1651). Previously, there were no “Chams Ahier” and “Chams Awal”; it only had the Chams believers of the indigenous religion combined with Brahmanism and Chams Muslims. Po Rome’s policy created a tolerant religion. According to his policy, the Chams Muslims, besides their teachings, had to retain their traditional religions. For the Chams Brahmans, the king also required to worship the god of the new religion (Islam); Cham people called *Yang Baruw* (New Gods). Since Cham people have called Muslims before the reign of King Po Rome (1627 - 1651) as Chams Awal (originated from the Arab language means “primary, first”). And, the Brahmans who accepted worship Allah (*Po Sipajieng* - The Creator) after King Po Rome called Chams Ahier (Arab origin, means “last, final”)². The dualistic thinking made Awal - Ahier become a pair of inseparable category as a couple³. Islam and Brahmanism of the Chams became the unique indigenous religion, totally isolated with its the orthodoxy in the world.

How about the Chams Islam who are present? Since the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, wars were constant; people suffered from disturbance; the Kingdom of Champa had a risk of collapsing. Under the pressure of South expansion (Nam Tiến) of Đại Việt, Cham people scattered. In particular, a large proportion of refugees fled to Cambodia. As a result of frequent exchanges with Islam in the world, especially with Malaysian, Indonesian, they have gradually lost the traditional characters, most of them followed orthodox Islam. Until the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a part of Cham people in Cambodia returned to settle in An Giang, and then expanded into the Southeastern Vietnam provinces. The presence of Cham people in Saigon was mentioned by Trịnh Hoài Đức (1765 - 1825) in the work “Gia Định Thành thông chí”. In 1964 a number of the Chams intellectuals worked in Saigon, represented by Mr. Từ Công Xuân who contacted with orthodox Islam, then they came to Ninh Thuận to propagate their faith to the Chams Awal’s followers and a part of the

Chams Awal's followers re-converted to Chams Islam. As a result, Cham people in the Southern Centre (Nam Trung Bộ) formed three religious communities.

Currently, the Chams Muslims in Vietnam have tended to interact with the orthodox Muslims in Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, etc. and they have had a close relationship with Muslim communities in the world. While the Chams Awal's believers partially preserved indigenous religion such as worship the gods, ancestor, and ritual practices when receiving Islam, the Chams Muslims absorbed Islam and gave up their indigenous religion, ancestors worship, and rituals which did not belong to Islam. They "only worship Allah and Mohammed, read the Qur'an and comply with five religious practices of Islam such as *mengucap* (credible words), *sambahyang* (pray), *puasa* (fast), *zakat* (almsgiving) and *Haji/umrah* (visit Mecca) (Dohamide, 1965, Phú Văn Hân, 2001).

### **3. Kareh Ritual of the Chams Awal and acculturation factors between the Chams and Islam**

*Kareh* is one of life cycle rituals of the Chams Awal; it was simultaneously formed with the establishment of the Chams Awal. Despite being called as *Kareh*, but in fact, it takes place two ceremonies. The *Kareh* is for girls. The *Katat* is for boys. It can be confirmed that the *Kareh* ritual of the Chams Awal derived from the combination of the two Muslim rites, which is the *haircut and the naming* ceremony for newly born babies and *Khotan* ceremony for adolescents. I will present an overview of the two ceremonies to understand this connection.

The *haircut and naming* ceremony is called *Akikah*<sup>4</sup> in Islam. When a Muslim child was born for 7 days (or 14 days, or 21 days), their parents organise the *Akikah* ceremony. During the ceremony, homeowner invites relatives to attend. An elderly person in the family or the child's father holds a small knife (or scissors) to cut the hair of the baby, and then smears a little honey in the baby's mouth. They believe that it helps the child will speak fluently<sup>5</sup>. Whereas people gather around the child and read the Qur'an, pray for the God to bless the child. Then they chose a Holy name given to it. According to Mr.

Hakaim<sup>6</sup> Châu Văn Kên, there are hundreds of Holy name<sup>7</sup>. Boys are given names like Mohamed, Ali, Abu Bakr...; Girls are given names such as Phuatimah, Aminah, Khodijah... It is the reason why Muslims have the same name. Thus, the child was accepted by Allah and became a Muslim. In addition, if a family has a good condition in the economy, they can kill a goat, sheep to celebrate, according to the rules as a male: 2 animals, a female: 1 animal<sup>8</sup>.

For Khotan ceremony, the Chams Muslim community regulates that boys and girls at the age of 15 are considered to reach maturity, they have to suffer from minor surgery *Khotan* in the genitals (usually from 10 to 15 years old). The responsible person can be man or woman, depending on the sex (male or female) of an object who suffer from the minor surgery. A sharp sterilized knife is used to cut slightly the genitals. For the girl, it needs to make a light incision, while for the boy, it cuts off a piece of a foreskin. While the ceremony is carried out, the participants pray the God bless. If someone has reached maturity without Khotan she/he is considered not clean to share the religious activities. This ceremony is usually understood as a mature ceremony of the Chams Muslim (Phú Văn Hãn, 2013). In fact, it is a “purifying” ceremony, according to the view of Muslim. In Islamic countries where the medicine has developed, this rite is carried out when a child was born. In addition, someone who desires to enter religion, or get married a Muslim, he/she has to pass this ritual to be recognized as “clean” to participate in religious activities. However, perhaps due to the influence of the Chams Awal’s view of *Kareh* and *Katat* so the Chams Muslim also generally understand *Khotan* as a mature ceremony. The influence of the Chams Awal’s view on the orthodox Islam can be seen since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Originating from the two rites, Chams Awal people created a ritual system *Kareh* and *Katat* with their own matriarchal characteristics. The *Kareh* ritual is for girls, the *Katat* is for boys, but it can not have *Katat* if there is no *Kareh*. At the *Kareh* ceremony, the girls have a haircut and named the Holy name by the clergy (*Po Gru*), they officially enter the religion. However, things are not simple like the

purpose of the ritual. During this ceremony, family members and relatives give many gifts, money, and gold, etc. as a dowry in the matriarchal family for the young girl's marriage. Accordingly, if a girl of the Awal community reaches the mature age, the *Kareh* ritual is not done yet, the girl would have not been recognized as a believer of Bani nor permitted to perform weddings by the dignitaries of the religion. Being a believer of religion is extremely important because it affects other ceremonies throughout the life of the Chams Awal people. Since they will be allowed to participate in official ceremonies and activities of Bani religion. Besides, *Kareh* ceremony for girls is probably the most important ceremony, it leaves a deep impression for the Chams girls because this is the transitional period into adulthood, young girls enter the age of marriage, they were recognized maturity by the village community and religion. Previously, when the age of marriage early, after this ceremony, they were allowed to find a mate and get married.

The young girls of the Chams Awal community at the age from 12 to 15, they must be passed the *Kareh*, especially, before reaching the age of puberty (first menses). Bani religion, as well as, Islam, has the concept that thing offer to the God *Awluah*<sup>9</sup> must be the cleanest and purest. People believe that when a girl has menses they are “not clean”, “not pure” to participate in the religious rituals. An indispensable character in the *Kareh* ritual that is *Muk Buh* (a woman who offers offerings). *Muk Buh* is responsible for offering gifts to *Po Awluah* in each *palei* (village) of the Chams Awal. *Muk Buh* stays in the ritual house with the girls who will pass *Kareh* (*anak Kareh*), who is responsible for looking after and to teach the girls the ritual procedures and practices. The next important character is 3 clergies Awal (*Po Acar*) who operate the ritual.

The ceremony takes place during two days. The first day is called *Harei Mbeng Awluah* (date of notification to Allah). The girls are led to have a bath by *Muk Buh* in the morning. This ritual is conducted outdoors. They make a line led by *Muk Buh*, next *Po dhi kamei* - the daughter of the family who are organizers of the ceremony), the other girls follow her. The girls cover the body by a long quilt and water



from their heads. While watering, *Muk Buh* prays the God for the girls. After having a bath, they come back as the previous order. Next, they perform *Mbeng Awluah* ritual which is directly led by a clergy (*Po Gru*). This ritual takes place simply and quickly. The offerings are placed on high trays (*salao glaong*), arranged in order such as a bunch of bananas, two bowls of sugar water (or sugar), sticky rice, cake (*tapei paoh*) and a bowl of salt that is indispensable in the *Po Acar*<sup>10</sup> ceremony. A clergy master prays to invite Awluah (Allah) and the girls' ancestors come witness. The end of the first day, the girls return to retreat until the next day.

There are lots of sweet, especially, two bowls of sugar on the offering trays. I asked the clergy master why there are two bowls of sugar, he just replied that it is a custom of ancestors without giving any further explanation. To solve this question, from the structural theory, I must study the original ritual of Islam. As mentioned above, there is a ritual of putting honey on baby's mouth with hope that the child would say sweet words, beloved by everyone during the hair-cutting and named ceremony for newborn baby. Therefore, it can be seen sweet food on offerings trays offered *Po Awluah* of the Chams Awal with the meaning that young girls will say mellow words and have sweet beauty.

The Chams have an idioms: "Sep ndom yuw jalikaow" (honeyed words).

Or in *Gia huấn ca* of Ms. Thruh palei "Kamei ndom puec gheh ghang, Gep gan urang oh ndom balei" (Girls speak gently, their neighbours cannot belittle) (Sử Văn Ngọc, 2012).

The second day is called *Harei Taok Kareh*, the major day. From early morning, people build 2 houses' ceremony, a big one, a small one, facing each other: The big one faces the West, towards the Mecca of Islam, symbolizes sanctum (*Sang Magik*), where *Po Acar* practice the ritual. The small one (*Sang Euk* - the house for making up), opposite, where the young girls are on their abstinence (cầm mình), Ms. *Muk Buh* (who raises offerings) and Ms. *Muk Kacak mbuk* (who puts the girls' hair in a bun - Bà cột tóc) guard them. At the houses'

ceremony, everything is decorated, located in its own order which closely represents male - female, yin - yang (*tanaow - binai*).

The second day morning, *Muk Buh* leads the girls to have a bath like the first day. Then, they are led to the *Sang Euk* house for making up such as getting dressed yellow brocade dresses, wearing silver and golden jewelry and putting their hair in a bun (*búi tóc tó*). Wearing hair in a bun needs a lot of time, so there is a woman who is charged with that work (*Bà cột tóc*). When everything is well prepared, the clergy master (Master of Ceremonies) calls young girls go to the sanctum for the ceremony. *Muk Buh* will lead the girls in line come in the main ritual house for having a haircut and naming. At that time, a small boy (toddler) also is convened on. Each *Kareh* ceremony must have a small boy who holds the status of *Po dhi lakei*, plays the role of a witness the hair cutting and naming the Holy names ritual, christened for the young women. *Po dhi lakei* is selected as *Po dhi kamei*. The criteria for selection are mentioned as follows:

First, the Master of the ceremony lets the small boy bite a grain of salt, and next he uses a small knife and a pair of scissors to cut the hair of the child at three positions, the first one in the middle of the forehead, the second and the third one on two sides, then he calls the Holy name of the child. Finally, he turns to the young girls, he continues the ritual according to this order from *Po dhi kamei* to the other girls. Cham people consider hair as human origin. The meaning of the haircut is to express their gratitude to the parents, and reverence, devotion their soul and body to God Awluah.

When the hair cutting and naming ceremony finishes, the young girls are led by *Muk Buh* to come back *Sang Euk* house. At that time, the food has been prepared to offer to the clergies in the *receiving offerings ritual* (*nhận lễ vật*) meanwhile the girls take off yellow clothes, then get dress the traditional white robes in preparation for the final rituals, *Bowing* (*Kakuh - Lễ lạy*). After raising offerings, the young girls are called back for *Bowing ritual*. They offer trays of betel (*thor hala*) to the masters of ceremony. The young girls bow three dignitaries, first *Po Gru*, next to the right one, then the left one for three times. While the young girls bow, the clergies pray to invite *Po*

*Awluah* and their ancestors come to witness. The first time of bowing dedicates to the God *Awluah*; the second one to dignitaries, ancestors, parents, and relatives with belief that people recognized them as adults and they are recognized by religion. During this process, the boy (*Po dhi lakei*) witnesses that the young girls have a hair cut and convert to Bani religion.

Then, the girls receive best wishes and gifts such as money, gold, fabric, even buffalo, cow, goat, sheep, land, etc., from their family members, relatives. These gifts are placed in a jar and the Master of ceremony blesses, then they are given to the girls. And they are also regarded as initial asset, dowry so their parents and other family members cannot use them. The ceremony finishes, the girls have status in religion, they are adults and have the right to marry. Girls' families feast their relatives and friends.

Beside the *Kareh* ceremony for girls, there is a ceremony that *Katat* is taken place for the boys from 12 to 15 years old. In a small tent at the corner, the boys bring there a jar which contains some rice, 5 pieces of betel with dry arecas, an egg and a knife to use in the ritual of "cutting foreskin". However, the "cutting ritual" is just symbolic. And there is an interesting thing. While Islam has the greatest respect for male, the opposite is expressed in the Chams' ritual. It firstly is shown through the common name of two ceremonies: *Kareh*. While the *Kareh* of girls takes place in two major houses which symbolize the sanctum, the *Katat* of the boys is carried out in the hidden places such as behind the house. And while the *Khotan* of Islam is a true "cutting foreskin" ritual for small boys, this rite of the Chams Awal is performed symbolically. Meanwhile *Kareh* for girls takes place with many rituals and procedures. It shows the unlimited power of the Chams' matriarchy when Islam was introduced.

A noticeable thing is the young girls wear lots of gold and silver. On that day, the girls' parents take charge of buying golden and silver jewelry, or they have to borrow them from relatives, neighbours as much as possible for their children being glowing in the ceremony. Costumes of the girls are also completely yellow, even headscarves, made of expensive precious fabrics. It expresses the parents' desire

that their daughter will be rich, marry a good husband such as social status (title), prosperity, etc.

However, according to the structural views, in another dimension, the *Kareh* ritual partly represents a different aspect of the Chams society. For example, it is not all girls have the opportunity to receive *Po dhi kamei*, nor family can host the *Kareh* ceremony. Their “background” must be considered if their family was converted to Bani religion for three generations or not (grandparents, parents are pure Awal or not, the Chams language called *Harat* means *pure blood*). The young girls of families who cannot organize the ritual are sent to the ceremony to ask help. They are called *pagem* which means “transplantation”. They are usually poor, insufficient finance, or maybe not enough “pure” to organize ceremonies. The girls queue, the girl is *Po dhi kamei*, who is always the head of the line. In some cases, the girls’ mothers jostle with other girls for the front position of their daughter. It raises a question why they have to do that thing; the answer is found after asking the clergies; they affirmed that standing in any position follow *Po dhi kamei* is not important. It can be said that it is a conception. It can be surmised that the strong unconscious belief urges mothers sending their wishes into rituals with the hope that their child is not inferior to anyone in the religious or social position. Through the ritual observation, the girls who stand on the end of the row get much less attention of lookers-on. In addition, the *Kareh* ritual represents “social stratification” of Chams people. There has been the rich and the poor, hierarchy, the distinction between a pure blood and an exotic one, between men and women based on the matriarchal thought, etc. When I asked about the role of the boy who acted as a witness of the ritual, the clergies did not explain satisfyingly; they invoked the customary law of religion so they must be complied with. Fortunately, a clergy said that the small children do not yet speak; they are truly pure and honest (they do not yet say a bad, insincere words), so they can become the representatives of Po Awluah<sup>11</sup>. According to the structural views, in comparing with the *Akikah* ritual of Islam, the children who receive the hair-cutting and naming ceremony are newborn 7 days, or 14, 21 days. Therefore, it is

conjectured that when Cham people combine the two Islamic ceremonies *Akikah* and *Khotan* for the age of hair cutting and naming, but the ceremony of young girls is larger in comparing with the regulation of Islam. Thus, they have a solution to permit a boy under 2 years old who firstly receives hair cutting and naming, then the young girls. The child is not merely a “witness” but he is also the representative of the young girls in front of the Almighty *Awluah*. However, why the child is a boy, is not a girl. According to the structural perspective, the Chams culture always expresses the philosophy of *tanaow - binai* (male - female). In the *Kareh* ritual, there is a girl leader - *Po dhi kamei* so it must also have a boy leader - *Po dhi lakei*. The balance between male and female has seriously been practiced in the Chams culture. In addition, the *Kareh* and *Katat* ceremonies are not separately held but they must be jointly organized. There is the *Kareh* for girls; there must be *Katat* for boys. It's a “dualistic religion” of Chams people. Thanks to this thinking, the conflicts between the indigenous Chams and Islam are dissolved by the Chams *Awal*. It can be generalized that the *Kareh* ritual symbolizes the matriarchy that is a principle bringing a continuation for the Chams' society. In terms of religion, the *Kareh* is a ceremony for proselyte of Bani religion, but what happens during the ceremony is not simple. It totally opposes to the patriarchal features of Islam; the matriarchal characteristics are expressed thoroughly into the *Kareh* ritual of the Chams *Awal*. They manifest the Chams's conception of life and of world view; the Islam's acculturation which has become an indigenous religion. At present, the Chams as well as the ethnic groups such as Churu, Rade, Jarai and Raglai who still preserve matriarchy. Generally, the matriarchal form of the Chams has characteristics as follows: The continuity generation in the family and society is women rather than men; residence after marriage, the customary law (*adat*) clearly rules that men come to live in the house of their wives; women have an important role in organizing the family and society; besides the responsibility for taking care families, children, the Chams women also are responsible for performing rituals related to family, ancestors; women have responsibility and effective role in preserving and protecting the traditional culture; properties of

the family, of ancestors are inherited by the youngest daughter (Sử Văn Ngọc, 2012).

In fact, the cultural exchanges between the Chams and Islam are very complex through many dimensions and periods. Before the penetration of Islam, the Chams believed in polytheism (they worshipped the deity of Land, of Heaven, of Mountain, of River, etc.), in ancestor worship (*Muk Kei*) and in the deities of Hinduism like Siva, Brahma, Vishnu. Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, under the powerful impact of Islam and the localization of the indigenous religions that has formed the Awal-Ahier religious system. It consisted the indigenous identity and new religious element. Until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the orthodox Islam came back to propagate in the Chams community in the Southern Centre, a part of the Chams Awal reconverted to Islam. In this re-introduction, the acculturation rarely happened. For example, many Muslims (base on the *Katat* ritual of the Chams Awal community) believe that the *Khotan* ritual (circumcision) as the maturity ceremony of their religion, but it actually is the rite of disinfection, sanitization the body. Beside the hair cutting and naming ritual, although they believe in the orthodox Islam, the Chams Islam community still preserved some rituals as a remnant of indigenous religion, such as visiting their ancestors' graves in the first days of Ramadan; the dead body is buried with the head towards the north; they believe in amulets, demons, perform healing ceremonies at home (Phú Văn Hãn, 2004). The Chams Muslims still love singing, artistically performing along with the Chams Awal on the occasion of the Ramadan, festivals and New Year festival although it is limited according to Islam's canon. In particular, this Chams Muslim community maintains the matriarchy, enhances the role of women in society.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In summary, there have been exchanges with Islam from the Middle East since the 10<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, however, since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and the 17<sup>th</sup> century in particular, the Chams have had contact and strong relations with Malaysia, then Islam officially introduced into the Chams community which led to the birth of a Chams

community affected by Islam, the Chams Awal or Chams Bàni. In the process of exchange and absorption Islam, the Chams Awal community did not identically copy Islam; they have always taken the indigenous religion as the foundation, modified Islam, maintained ancestor worship, matriarchal tradition that has been obviously expressed through the Kareh ritual.

The most unique thing is shown in the *Kareh* ritual of the Chams Awal that is the creative combination of two cultures and religions in a ritual; a reversal of gender position in opposing to conceptions of each party on the importance of the matriarchy or patriarchy, and expression the duality philosophy *tanaow - binai* (male - female) of the Chams culture in ritual, as well as acculturation of religion. Things which were found out in research of the Kareh ritual show the correctness of the application of structuralism in researching rituals and festivals, especially prove the effectiveness in studying cultural exchanges and acculturation.

It can be said that the contact between the two cultures (Chams and Islam) is an exotic one, rarely seen in the world. Initially, Islam penetrated into the Chams community and it left many cultural heritage, including religious couple Awal - Ahier. Until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Islam came back to the Centre, but the Kingdom of Champa was gone. There was just the Chams community with the indigenous dualistic religion Awal - Ahier which affected to the orthodox Islam and Islam was partly brought the Chams' identity once again. The Chams Awal/Bàni is a unique religion in Vietnam and is a part of the Chams' cultural identity; on the other hand, the Chams' cultural identity has softened the rigidity of Islam./.

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**Notes:**

- 1 Victor Turner (1967), *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, Ithaca: Cornell; Edmund Leach (1976), *Culture and Communication: The Logic by which Symbols are Connected*, Cambridge University Press.
- 2 Po Dharma, E.F.E.O.
- 3 Sakaya (2012), Quảng Đại Tuyên và Nguyễn Ngọc Ánh (2015).

- 4 Chams called *Cakak mbuk brei angan*, or *Kareh* (The interview with Mr. Hakaim Tài Ngọc Thịn, Văn Lâm Village, Phước Nam Commune, Thuận Nam, Ninh Thuận, 30th Oct. 2015).
- 5 The interview with Mr. Tài Ngọc Thịn.
- 6 Each sanctum of Islam has a Board *Hakaim* which manages the rite and believers.
- 7 According to Bá Trung Phụ, there are 25 deities (Bá Trung Phụ, 2001).
- 8 The interview with Hakaim Châu Văn Kên, Văn Lâm Village, Phước Nam Commune, Thuận Nam, Ninh Thuận, 1<sup>st</sup> Nov. 2015.
- 9 Cham people call Allah as Po Awluah.
- 10 According to customary law, *Po Acar* has to bite a grain of salt before using offerings.
- 11 The interview with Imam Hùng, an Awal clergy, Văn Lâm Village, Phước Nam Commune, Thuận Nam, Ninh Thuận, 28<sup>th</sup> Oct. 2015.

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