

THE INDIGENIZATION OF THE CHAMS' RELIGIOUS TRADITION IN THE CENTRE VIETNAM

***Abstract:** The article reviews some of the views on the indigenization and indigenous factors of the Chams' religion in the Central Vietnam. The author learns about the religious characteristics of the Chams people from the period of Indo-culture, indigenization to present, in which the author emphasizes the religious distinctiveness of the aristocracy and of the peasantry, and distinguishes between the indigenization of a foreign religion and the reception of certain elements of the religion, but still practice traditional religions. The most importantly, the author would like to show that the indigenous tradition of the Chams has taken a leading role since the 15th century, when the Indian religion were out of place, from which elements of Indian religion is completely transformed and changed into a traditional religion that creates a period of indigenization in the process of religious development of the Chams.*

***Keywords:** The Cham; religion; indigenous; indigenization; Hinduism; Islam.*

Introduction

Beliefs and religions¹ of the Chams in the Central Vietnam are divided into four main groups² as follows: the Cham Jat³ means the Chams who maintain their indigenous beliefs and are not affected by any kind of exogenous religion; the Cham Ahiér⁴-is often called the Chams Brahmanism- means the Chams who are influenced by Hinduism; Cham Awal⁵- is often called the Chams Bani- means the Chams who are influenced by Islamism; the Cham Muslim means the

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Chams believe in Sunni Islam. according to historical records, it can be said that the Cham people do not maintain the elements of indigenous beliefs, which have existed for a long time, but they also constantly receive and adjust the exogenous religions such as Hinduism (from India) and Islam (formed in the Middle East), that created various nuances in the ethnic classification.

The diversity and uniqueness of the religious belief systems, the Chams' religions have attracted the attention of many scholars, researchers when this specialized research initially opened⁶. Among the themes of study on the Cham's religion and belief, indigenization or indigenous factors occupy a considerable amount. However, in the earliest studies of the Cham's beliefs and religions, French scholars focused on exogenous factors, mentioned little the indigenous characteristics of the spiritual life⁷. After the colonial period, the indigenous beliefs and religions of Cham people were emphasized. It is firstly mentioned the view of Nghiêm Thảm: "Hinduism of the Chams was not purely Hinduism, it was mixed with local beliefs"⁸.

Since then, the indigenization and indigenous factors in the belief and religion of the Chams have been continuously mentioned in books, articles and researches on Cham people⁹. However, if French scholars attached great importance to exogenous elements when studying the Cham's religions and beliefs, the later researchers stressed too much on the indigenous elements of the Cham's Hinduism and Islam when they were introduced into the Chams community. Thus, these scholars have not clearly defined between the Chams' acceptance and conversion of these religions from the beginning, or merely absorbing some of the elements of these religions, while retaining the indigenous beliefs. This article will examine and analyze the introduction and influence of these religions in the past and at present. It simultaneously delineates *the indigenization of a religion and reception some elements of a religion* in the case of the Chams in the Central Vietnam.

1. The Cham's religions and beliefs during the period of Indianization

The Chams people were subjects of the Champa kingdom before being an ethnic community of Vietnam, the kingdom existed in the Central Vietnam¹⁰. Throughout its existence, the Champa experienced three major periods: National establishment (from 2nd to 4th century), indianization (from 4th to 15th century) and Indigenization (after the 15th century)¹¹. During the Indianization period, the Chams received religious elements derived from India such as Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism (commonly known as the Mahayana). The author would like to indicate Hinduism in the period of Indianization.

First of all, it is necessary to distinguish between Brahmanism and Hinduism, two terms that people often mistakenly lead to the identity of each other, while the two terms have two distinct connotations. Brahmanism was the early Indian polytheistic religion based on the foundation of the Vedas, Hinduism appeared later, based on the philosophy of the Upanishads. Brahmanism worships a god; the three deities: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva joined together to become Trimuti (same as the Trinity form of Christianity) or become a God of Christianity or Islam¹². However, Hinduism is mainly divided into two denominations; one worships Shiva and one worships Vishnu¹³.

An important feature of Hinduism in Champa is the construction of temples by bricks dedicated to the three supreme gods of Indian origin: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, or worship these three gods in the Trinity form¹⁴. Through the number of inscriptions and artifacts associated with the Hinduism's temples, it can be said that Shiva was the most important god of the Cham; Shiva was often worshiped as a statue, but more commonly Linga represented by three main types: Linga, Mukhalinga (Linga with face or head of god) and Linga with three parts (the top representing Shiva, the middle with eight faces representing Vishnu and the bottom with four faces representing Brahma. However, Linga was often worshiped in Cham temples and combined with a rectangular base at the bottom called Yoni¹⁵.

In addition to Shiva, the Chams also worshiped Shiva's wife (Sakti), the goddess originally worshiped under the name Bhagavati, however, since the 11th century, the goddess has been worshiped under the name Yapu - Nagara or Yang Pu Nagara. The main worship place is Po Ina Nagar Tower in Nha Trang, Khanh Hoa at present¹⁶. The worship of Shiva's wife, according to Nguyen The Anh, is a combination of indigenous beliefs (worshiping Yang Pu Nagara) and Hinduism (worshiping Bhagavati)¹⁷. And Lafont explained the worship of the goddess parallel with Shiva is a sign of strengthening the north-south unity of the Champa kingdom¹⁸. Trần Kỳ Phương và Rie Nakamura even showed a hypothesis that worshiping Shiva in My Son (north) and worshiping Shiva's wife at Po Ina Nagar Tower (south) reflects the dualistic structure of the Chams world view¹⁹.

In addition, during this period, the Chams people worshiped gods closely related to Shiva such as Ganesa (elephant head, human body, son of Shiva), Skanda (god of war, son of Shiva) and cow god Nandi (Shiva's riding animal), these statues were only worshiped beside Shiva²⁰. In addition, some temples, relics related to the gods such as Brahma, Vishnu, Laksmi (Vishnu's wife) show the Chams worship these gods, though less common²¹. Thus, the worship of Shiva and the deities related to Shiva is the Saivism played an important role in Hinduism in Champa.

However, it should be noted that during the influence of Hinduism (and even Buddhism) in Champa in particular as well as in Southeast Asia in general, the deities and other elements of these religions such as scriptures, rituals, worship in temples and shrines were practiced by the royal family's member and the nobles²². Meanwhile, the majority of the population still followed the indigenous beliefs, worshiped the natural gods such as heaven, earth, mountain, river, sea, stone, rice soul, animal, tree; human gods such as heroes, indigenous characters, ancestors²³. However, over two thousand years of existence in Champa, some elements of Indian religions, especially Hinduism, could not affect the commoners such as the abstinence of beef, cremation.

It should not unite the influence of a religion's elements with the acceptance and practice of this religion, the Chams commoners just accepted a few elements of Hinduism, the indigenous beliefs played the important role in the spiritual life of Cham people. In contrast, the king, the lord, the aristocrat acquired Hinduism through the worship of the gods and performance the rituals of this religion. Thus, in this period, the Chams religions divided into two distinct parts: religion of the royal family, aristocracy originated from India; Indigenous beliefs influenced by some Hinduism's elements of the commoners.

2. The decline of Indian religions and the popularization of indigenous beliefs during the indigenization period

The indigenization period was marked by the collapse of Vijaya in 1471²⁴, since religions received by the upper class completely collapsed, the indigenous beliefs with some Hinduism's elements replaced them and developed. In fact, these religions overwhelmed, even covered Hinduism, so the author uses the term "universalization" to discuss this phenomenon.

The decline and collapse of Hinduism's civilization in general and Hinduism in Champa in particular in the 15th century has been demonstrated by scholars, however, the universalization of indigenous beliefs is still less illustrated. It does not mean that it is unrealistic or just an unfounded inference. In fact, the Hinduism elements indigenized by local beliefs are practiced by Cham people at present. It allows us to assert that the beliefs of the commoners overwhelmed elements of Hinduism beliefs of the royal family's members and nobles. The author will dedicate this part to prove this hypothesis by reference to the religious life of Cham people at present.

Firstly, the overwhelming of the indigenous beliefs with Hinduism is manifested through the transformations of the gods worshiped in the Hinduism temples. For example, according to ancient inscriptions, the Hinduism temple in Nha Trang, Khanh Hoa was the worshiping place of the Shiva's wife in the period of Indianization²⁵, however, according to the legend of the Chams, the goddess was born of clouds and sponges who was creator of the universe, all things, taught to

Cham people plowing fields, transplanting rice, weaving cloth²⁶. From this myth, Cham people worship Po Ina Nagar as the god of creation without mentioning the Hinduism's elements of the goddess; the Chams later moved the goddess to worship at the place where Cham people live. The most famous place is the Po Ina Nagar Temple in Huu Duc, Ninh Phuoc, Ninh Thuan²⁷.

This phenomenon also occurred in many temples of Cham people in Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan. The Po Klaong Girai Temple in Phan Rang - Thap Cham, Ninh Thuan is a typical example. This temple is now worshipping Po Klaong Girai King - a king with many merits for the Chams, the king-god is worshiped under the image of a Mukhalinga (along with a Yoni) in the main temple of the tower²⁸. However, as mentioned above, Linga is a symbol derived from Hinduism; it symbolizes Shiva; the inscription on the door of the main tower also confirms it. The temple was built by Jaya Sinhavarman III King (1285-1307) to worship Jaya Sinhavarmalingesvara (in which Sinhavarman is the name of the king and Lingesvara is a name of Shiva worshiped under the symbol of Linga)²⁹. Thus, this temple was built (about the 13th - 14th centuries) to worship Shiva, under the name Jaya Sinhavarmalingesvara, because Shiva was often worshiped under various names, such as Shiva is Bhadesvara in My Son³⁰.

The other evidence of the indigenization of Hinduism is expressed in the worship of Linga Po Nai on Cha Bang mountain. At present, on the top of Cha Bang mountain, there is a Linga consisting of three sections (the square base, the octagonal middle part and the round top) which is identical with Po Nai, a native goddess of Cham people. The sacrifice for Po Nai is usually held there every year³¹. However, it is originally a special type of Linga, derived from Hinduism, which usually consists of three parts representing Samsara (Principle: Birth-Existence - Death, rotation of the universe and all things): the square below represents the god Brahma, the octagonal middle part represents the god Vishnu and the round top represents the god of destruction Shiva³². Thus, the Linga symbol on Cha Bang Mountain

may have been indigenized the Trimuti symbol of Hinduism as the symbol of Po Nai - a native goddess.

However, although the elements of indigenous beliefs have replaced the elements of Hinduism as well as the dominant of the Cham's religious life (since the 15th century), some traces of this religion have found in the Chams spiritual culture. It is necessary to mention that the texts of worship and purification the temple refer to the name Shiva in the opening paragraph³³; the sutras recited in the ordained ceremony of the Basaih monks (derived from the Hindism's clergy) were mixed Cham characters and Sanskrit; ritual prayers had syllables *Om* or *Omkara* (derived from the Aum symbol in Hinduism) at the beginning³⁴; the Homkar symbol (derived from the Indian syllable *Aum*) is usually drawn in eight directions in the purification temple ceremony, painted on the offerings of the fire deity worship in the temple, painted on the funeral stretcher in the Chams Ahiér's funeral or on the charms, texts, ancient books of the Cham³⁵; as well as the custom of fasting beef and cremation of the Chams Ahiér similar to the Hindu in India.

However, the appearance of Shivayang at the beginning of the suttas does not show that Cham people worship Shiva at present (or any Hinduism's deity as some researchers often infer³⁶). It just shows that Cham people have received and transformed the Hinduism's scriptures in their current religious life. And recitation the name Shiva is just a procedural opening of the passage, in contrast, Shiva is not named in the deity system of the Chams. Some researchers also believe that Po Ginuer Mantri which Cham people still pray is Shiva of Hinduism³⁷, however, Po Ginuer Mantri is just the name of the god who is identical with the god image on the reliefs in the temples, towers of the Chams. There is no evidence that this is Shiva, because the image of Shiva was just fastened on the relief plate in front of the main tower of the Po Klaong Girai, Po Ginuer Mantri temples, while Po Ginuer Mantri had no connection with Shiva in the other Cham temples and towers. Thus, Po Ginuer

Mantri can not be completely identical with Shiva, a god who is not worshiped by Cham people at present.

On the other hand, although there are some Sanskrit terms in Basaih's ordained texts, most of these suttas is still the Cham's language. That is the remnant of the use of Indian texts. The term *Om* or the symbol *Homkar* used by the Chams was originated from India but it has been modified much according to the Cham's conception. The custom of cremation of the Chams Ahiér originated from India, but the Chams did not completely cremate as the Hindu in India; they retained nine pieces of the forehead bone and buried them in Kut (a cemetery of mother's clan) to the soul stays forever with ancestors in the afterlife³⁸. Therefore, it should consider these factors as remnants of the Indianization period in which Hinduism influenced the beliefs of the Chams commoners. These remnants have existed from the localization period to the present.

In short, since the 15th century, Hinduism of the aristocracy has fallen into recession; the elements of indigenous beliefs have mixed with several Hinduism's elements; they have transformed the symbols, foundations and ways worship of Hinduism. Until nowadays, the indigenous beliefs of the Chams have become the dominant elements of the spiritual culture; the elements of imported religions originated from Indian are remnants, traces. Having abandoned Hinduism and following the religion of the masses, the Chams did not even know Shiva, Vishnu or Brahman, instead they worshiped the indigenous deities such as Po Ina Nagar, Po Klaong Girai, Po Romé, etc. In other words, the beliefs of local residents have changed, overwhelmed and embraced the religion from India that received by the elite for two centuries. It can be said that the Indian religion has been indigenized by the beliefs of the commoners.

3. The reception and indigenization of Islam

Although the mark of foreign Muslim groups has appeared in Champa since the 10th century, however, the sign of the emergence of an indigenous Muslim community was very blurred. Until the

sixteenth century, Islam, through its relationship with the Southeast Asia Islands' countries, began to take its place in these kingdoms, thereby a Cham Muslim community was formed. It is the Chams Awal/Bàni community today³⁹. Since receiving Islam, Cham people have been transforming this religion into an indigenous religion; it is completely different from the practice of the orthodox Islamic community. The referenced research the Chams community's the practice of religions-beliefs will show us a mixture of the indigenous beliefs' characteristics with the Islam's elements introduced from outside world.

Firstly, this research mentions the elements of local beliefs maintained in the spiritual life of Cham Awal. The indigenous beliefs of Cham people in particular and Southeast Asian people in general consist of polytheism including heavenly genius, natural gods and human gods such as kings, queens, heroes, ancestors, etc. The Chams Awal, as well as the Chams Ahiér, maintain their belief in all things, so they always hold rituals of worshiping rice fields, purification of land and houses and many other agricultural rituals. They also worship various human gods through rituals such as Rija Nagar, Rija Praong, etc. Every year, they go to temples and shrines to offer sacrifices to the gods beside the Chams Ahiér⁴⁰.

Secondly, like the Chams Ahiér, the Chams Awal also have faith in the soul of the deceased, so they often use charms, organize ritual of exorcising the evil spirits when they are disturbed; they also worship the dead because they believe that the deceased still exist in another life. In funeral, the Chams Awal often hold the ceremony of bringing the wealth, food to the deceased in the other world. The Chams Awal also perform ritual for grandparents, ancestors and the deceased on many occasions of community such as visiting ancestors' graves and worshiping ancestors before the beginning of Ramawan. They also often dedicate offerings for relatives who died when they ask for security and thanks to grandparents, ancestors⁴¹.

In opposition to indigenous beliefs, the Chams Awal received some elements of Islam, and they practice them completely different to the

orthodox Islamic community in the world. Firstly, the Chams Awal consider Po Awlaoh (Allah) as their supreme god, in addition to worshiping the gods of Islam such as Mohamad, Ali, Fatimah, etc. However, it is different from the way of worship Allah, as the unique God, the Chams Awal viewed Po Awlaoh as a leading god in their divine system; they worship many other gods⁴². Secondly, the Chams Awal also accepted the Qur'an, but dignitaries do not often consider this book as a true doctrine book that teaches and directs followers; they just consider it as a worshipping text to recite in the rituals of community or human life-cycle rites, even the clergies can not explain the meaning of the words they recite⁴³. Lastly, like the Muslims, the Chams Awal are also abstained from pork, also built the church. They also build mosque but it is completely different from the Muslim mosque. They do not come there to pray. The mosque just opens certain times of the year and mainly in the Ramawan festival⁴⁴. The Chams Awal also organize the annual Ramawan festival, however, the practice is performed by clergies; the other inhabitants do normal activities. The Chams Awal often performs ceremonies such as Kareh (for women) and Katat (for men) when they reach maturity. However, the form of organizing, performing these rituals are different from the one of the purely Islamic community; they bring many indigenous imprint⁴⁵.

On the one hand, the Chams Awal have accepted some elements of Islam, but these elements are not strictly practiced in accordance with the doctrine and canons of Islam, so the Chams Awal is known as the heterodox Islamic community. On the other hand, this community has maintained and practiced the indigenous beliefs such as polytheism, ancestor worship. Therefore, they are also considered as an Islamic community but they are indigenized. In short, despite there has been a Cham community influenced by Islam, the practices of Islam's elements are no longer orthodoxy and blended with many indigenous elements, constituted the religious life of the Chams Awal community.

Conclusion

This article summarizes the research on indigenization of the Cham's beliefs and religions in the Central Vietnam. The author determined that the Chams did not completely believe in the religions of India during the Indianization period. In fact, these religions were just dedicated to royalty and nobility. In contrast, a majority of the commoners believed in indigenous beliefs and were just influenced by a few elements of Indian religion. The indigenous beliefs have been existed though they were overshadowed by the Indian religions of the upper classes. And these religions have played an important role in the spiritual life of the Chams since they abandoned the exogenous religions. Thus, the author makes a clear distinction between acceptance an exogenous religion from influence certain elements of that religion in the Cham's religious life.

By the 15th century, the Chams were no longer worship the deities, use the scriptures and practice dogma of Hinduism. Since the traditional indigenous beliefs have become their most important beliefs. The elements of Hinduism have been modified. The Hinduism's temples, towers, statues, scriptures has been transformed and perceived by the view of commoners. In other words, Hinduism of the aristocracy was completely transformed and covered by the indigenous beliefs. Islam was simultaneously introduced into the Cham's society, but it was also inevitable of being blended with the indigenous elements and it lost the orthodoxy of a monolithic religion. Since the Chams community has been divided into two groups: a group believed in the indigenous beliefs mixed with some elements of Islam and remnants of Hinduism known as the Chams Awal/Bàni; the other Cham community still believed in the indigenous beliefs influenced by Hinduism's elements known as the Chams Ahiér/ Brahmanism. /.

NOTES:

- 1 In this article, the author approaches "belief" and "religion" as two terms referring to two different connotations. Belief includes polytheism, natural gods (anamism) and indigenous deities, ancestor worship. Religion consists of

elements introduced from imported religions such as some elements of Hinduism and Islam.

- 2 There are many ways to classify the Chams. The most common is the classification of Cham people in the local group. According to Inrasara, Bùi Khánh Thế, the Chams are divided into the Cham East (the Cham in Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan); the Cham Center (the Cham in the South); the Cham West (the Cham in Cambodia).
Inrasara (1994), *The Chams' Literature*, Ethnic Culture Pub., Hanoi: 12.
Phan Xuân Biên, Phan An, Phan Văn Dốp divided the Chams into the Cham Thuận Hải (a previous province included Ninh Thuận và Bình Thuận at present) and the Cham An Giang. See: Phan Xuân Biên, Phan An, Phan Văn Dốp (1992), *The Chams' Culture*, Social Sciences Pub., Hanoi: 5 - 7.
Thành Phần divided the Cham into three groups: the Cham Hroi in Phú Yên, Bình Định..., the Cham Klak (old) in Ninh Thuan, Binh Thuan and the Cham Biruw (new) in the South of Vietnam. Thành Phần (2007), *List of the Chams' books in Vietnam (Danh mục Thư tịch Chăm ở Việt Nam)*, Young Pub., Ho Chi Minh City: 12.
However, in this article, the author uses the classification of Cham people into 4 groups based on religions - beliefs by the author Sakaya, because in my opinion, it is a reasonable division, full expression on the nature, characteristics and differences among the Cham groups. See: Sakaya (2010), *The Chams' Culture - Research and Critical Analysis (Văn hóa Chăm: Nghiên cứu và phê bình)*, Female Pub., Hanoi: 219 - 220.
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- 4 The term “Ahiér” means “after, last”. It means the Cham who do not convert to Islam, influenced by Hinduism, the Cham Hinduism. See: Rie Nakamura (2009), “Awar - Ahier: two keys to understanding the cosmology and ethnicity of the Cham people (Ninh Thuan province, Vietnam)”, in *Champa and Archaeology of Mỹ Sơn*, Hardy - Cucarzi, & Zolese (co-chief author), NUS Press, Singapore: 86; Sakaya (2010), *ibid*: 217; Thành Phần (2014), “Preserving and Bringing into play the traditional culture through Ew muk kei, Katé - Ramawan, and Rija Nagar festivals” in *The Chams' Socio-Cultural Issues*, Young Pub., Ho Chi Minh City: 7.
- 5 The term “Awal” means “first, early”. It means the Chams received some elements of Islam, a community influenced by Islam, the Cham Bani. See: Rie Nakamura (2009): 86; Sakaya (2010): 217; Thành Phần (2014): 7.
- 6 According to a recent statistics, there are about 2,282 books, newspapers, articles about Champa and Cham people, including about 80 works of beliefs and religions of the Chams, the others more or less refer to religions and beliefs of the Chams. See: *Work General researching on Champa (Tổng thư mục Champa)* by Branch of Institute of Art - Culture in the Centre Vietnam, Hue City (2002).
- 7 Studies on the Cham's religions and beliefs can be consulted: E. Aymonier (1891), *Les Tchampa et leurs religions*, Ernest Leroux, Paris; L. Finot (1901),

- “La religion des Chams d’après les monuments”, trong *BEFEO (Bullentins de l’Ecole Francaise d’Extrême-Orient/ Tập san của Viện Viễn Đông Bác Cổ)*, Paris: 12-33; A. Cabaton (1902), *Nouvelles recherches sur les Cham*, EFEO (Ecole Francaise d’Extrême-Orient), II, Paris; R.P. Durand (1903), “Les Cham Bani”, *BEFEO*, III, Paris: 54-62; Paul Mus (1933), “L’Inde vue de l’Est. Cultes indiens et indigènes au Champa”, *BEFEO*, XXXIII-1, Paris: 367-410.
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