

SOME CULTURAL VALUES IN HIGHLANDS EPIC

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Epic itself, along with its forming means and methods is considered as cultural faces. However, Epic, as well as other kinds of folks, is other form of word arts, uses language as means of expression; therefore, besides the role as factor of culture, it plays a storage and hiding role of the National ancient cultural deposit Indian says ‘If something is not mentioned in *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* then it does not exist anywhere in India’. For Tây Nguyên Epic, we can say that it is “Encyclopedic”, the knowledge about life of highland people. In other word, Highland's epic preserves cultural marks and evidences. Those cultural values are not easy for readers to discover through surface words because they are sometimes covered by “Dust layer of the time.”

Through the conveys of some epic works of Êđê, Bana, M'ông, such as *Dam Săn, Giông, Gió orphaned since childhood, Giông poverty with eights wives, Tre Vất envies Giông, Giông saves RangHu, Buffalo in Tiăng runs to Krong, Long – baby of Jiăng...* we realized a lively panorama of material

and spiritual culture. That is the picturesque world of animals, flora, scenery, objects... which are close to life. That is the senses of spirit, religion, community life of Highlands's people.

1. Preserves material culture

In Highlands's epic, landscape of mountain and forest, village, a range of long house, communal house together with tools, outfit, cloth, jeweler of man and woman is described lively and truthfully.

In epic of highland, the world of animal, flora is abundant. Main food is rice (with many kinds such as bake, djiang, prit...) and many other kinds such as corn, sweet potato, cassava. Crops such as gourd, pumpkin, loopah, melon. There are many kinds of tree in the forest such as bamboo, Neohouzeaua, chiffon, rattan, Bambusa procera. Birds such as vil, rling, animal such as elephant, buffalo, tiger, donkey and seafood is abundant in kinds: Shrimp, fish with its different form and color. Different kinds of trees, grasses, flowers,

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leaves mentioned many times in Epic connects to the space, forest, village of Highlands people. The mountains and forests are thick and interminable with full of strong vitality, love, community attachment of people in mountain village. Here, “girls hurriedly take water, banana, sugar cane, sweet potato, (3, pg.24) “Parents are digging forest sweet potato, dug later we cook for meal..., potato’s tree is large as wrist, climb up to the top..., sweet potato is big as thigh” (3, pg.337).

The picture of trees, fruits of forest or the products of burnt-over land often appears in comparison with strong and nice people. One Strong man is described as “A crepe turban covers his head, ties green belt, biceps are big as Bambusa procera, and biceps are firm. Calf of legs is big as banana, firm as core of Cocklebur. Head is big like a pumpkin...” (1, pg.169). While the young and beautiful girls are described as “The family has two daughters, they are beautiful like full moon. The two like two dewdrops on the leaf, like flowers in spring. Their skin is white like gourd’s flower, their faces are like peach blossom...” (1, pg.153). Name of each tree, fruit, and flower attached with a level of sentiment, a viewpoint. To describe the movement in love, the artiste sings “Her heart falls as xuh fruit, drops as squash...” (2, pg.31). To describe the angry “Their heart like chili with salt, their eyes are hot, their mouths are bitter” (2, pg.41)...

Here we see that the traditional culture in Highland mainly formed by

agriculture, milpa, relies on nature and closes to forest and mountain.

By animals appear in Epic, we see picture of people living closely to mountain and forest. They are near to the headwater, birds are excitedly singing in the top of the trees, monkeys, rabbits and other kinds of animals are glad to chase, enjoy the return of Giông, Gió” (3, pg.66). However, elephants and buffalos are closer to highland people; those animals play an important role in the life of people here. These two kinds of animal become the symbol of power, wealth, influences of villages.

Elephant is considered as the value to assess the power and courage of man when he grows mature. The elephant becomes the symbol of power, wealth of highland people, we usually see the picture of buffalo, elephant when mentions the strength of young fellows: “the young Dăm Di’s strength as a buffalo”; “His voice cots a buffalo, his smile cost an” (6, pg.420). We will be surprised and interested while seeing that the element appears as symbol of the beauty. The beauty of Hobia Polao described as: “She walks lightly like an elephant waving his heliotrope, she walks silently like a fish swimming in water” “Her breast curved like elephant’s” (6, pg.378). Elephant becomes the most sacred value. Similarly, the commune is close to the buffalo. As in legend, the buffalo shows the way to productive land. Then it becomes the sacred animal in sacrifice ceremonies. In Highland Epic, heroes

are compared to a buffalo: “The young Dăm Di’s strength is like a buffalo; “Xing Mun is strong as 6 buffaloes”; “The young men are strong than a male buffalo”; “Xing Mun and Prông Mura are wrestling like two buffaloes in jealous” “Xing Mờ Nga: We will compensate by seven buffaloes”. Buffalo is an assessment. One’s voice compared to a buffalo, strength compared to a buffalo...those are valuable. In conclusion, by Epic, we partly understand the life of Highland people...

In the society of Highland people, the main job of men is knit, casting, tree chopping, participating in combat when war happened. Actually, these characters such as Giông, Dam Săn, Dăm Di are extraordinary men in the struggle against enemy to protect the peace of highland people, Moreover, they are excellent in manufacturing activities such as chopping tree, breaking rocks, going into forest to hunt, farming, building communal house, tomb house ...While the women split fire wood, grind rice, cook..., they do everything” (3, pg.86). Through Epic, we see the men “working all day without a rest, if he does not go to milpa, he leads people and dogs go hunting for mice, birds, stags, deer for meal with forest bulbs” (2, pg.46). And the image of a woman fishing “One day, felling sad because of staying at home, she wants to go fishing. She calls her sister to go together... “The two old women put their dossier onto their backs and wade to the lake for fishing. Although the way is difficult, they go

easily, for a while, their dossier is full of fishes, only fishes and fishes” (3, pg.96). In M’ông Epic, there a romantic scene: she is fishing while he is hunting:

“I’m shoveling shrimps in the stream

You’re taking arbalest to hunt on the bank

You’re also picking vegetable and bamboo sprout” (5, pg.247).

We can see the image of matriarchal clan society through the labor distribution of the powerful women in the family. We also know custom in ancient highland ethnic family, women get up early to grind rice, cook, and men do nothing ‘Cock coos for the first time, she gets up to cook, until the rice are ripped men in house just get up ” (2, pg.131). When breakfast finished they begin to work: “Women wake up and grind rice, men wake up and do nothing”. Especially the farming, hunting and picking, and also drought, poor crop appeared in Epic exactly and lively from vegetable picking to bulbs digging in the forest, firewood chopping milpa visiting... to the name of weapon, production tools, trap to prevent birds from destroying crops.... All are listed here fully.

We also realize the culture of eating and drinking in Highland through familiar and delicious dishes in commune as well as activities. Rice is main food. Vegetables picked from forest or land surroundings their villages. If they go to some far place, they just bring a handful of cooked rice: “Bia Ponong prepares

rice and cooked rice for the brothers” (3, pg.54). “Reach the house, she grasps a hand of cooked rice, put salt into dossier” (3, pg.93).

The way of cooking is simple, mostly boiling and baking: “Keep dossier in tower. Then baking fish, boiling vegetable” (3, pg.98). Wine is common drink of Highland people. Because wine stored in jar, so there are many avoidance, formality while fermenting as well as taking water. Like betel and areca of Vietnamese, wine inviting represent hospitality. While an esteem visitor comes to one house, the host will invite the visitor to drink wine. The visitor taste the first, then:” the host drink first, the visitor later”: “Mr. Róh immediately takes wine, order his servant to kill the pig with canine tooth to cheer Xét” (3, pg.24). “After meal, the girls put wine jars in middle of the house to make acquaintance with the visitors” (2, pg.31). They consider wine as a drink in meeting: “Xét comes to Bia Xin’s room, Bia Xin puts an other wine jar Bia Xin and Xét are talking next to the wine jar.” (2, pg.32). On holidays and ceremonies, weddings... they drink: “for two times of moon”, drink up this jar of wine, they tale and other, eat up food, they kill more pig, cow. “Bok Tolum catches a big pig and takes some more wine jars. (3, pg.51). For Highland people, wealth evaluated by number of wine jars, rice, number of killed animals in a holiday.

By Epic, we see image houses on stilts, long-house, communal house in Highland villages: “The communal

house built by the two men heights to the sky. Look up to the house, feels dizzy to be felt.” (3, pg.69). At nights, young men guard for the sleep of all village: “Since the day building the communal house, two brothers and young men in the village sleep in the house but not their house. They just come home for meals, and then come back to the house to knit... (3, pg.69). Custom of Highland people in Epic is also lively. See how Đam Săn choose his costume to welcome visitor: “Đam Săn take off his old loin-cloth, take on a new one. Does not satisfy with this dress, he takes another one. He winds a loin-cloth dotted with flower, wind a flower turban round his head.” (3, pg.147). While Giên Yuru dresses colorful: “She changes a new beautiful skirt. The skirt is short with 7 coats but her white skin still can be seen” (3, pg.25). Their costume is not only usable but also high valuable of arts.

Read Highland Epic, we relive a period in Highland history. Their material life is poor, but they are full of affection, sentiment and nature. People live and assert themselves among the forest. Up to now, deposit remained in life of highland people.

2. Preserve spiritual culture

Besides material culture, it is spiritual culture that lightens in Epic. That is “a field” of actual and illusory, close and far...

Became custom and habit, before going to somewhere or doing some important things, Highland people worship their gods to win a support. The same in Epic.

To have a good crop, milpa, the work of choosing forest to do farming is significant, Giông (Epic *TreVăt envies Giông*) considered as foreshadow of gods: “At night, in dream Giông sees soul of Bok Koidoi said: Hey Dăm Giông, tomorrow, do not lead people to that milpa to do farm! Or a worst thing happens” (2, pg.78). Before going to the front or going far away, characters also pray for gods’ bless. Details of the ceremony also described. Giông prayed before going to the front against Jrai, Lao: “I wish for your attention. Today, I offer Gods livers of an old buffalo, old cow, old pig, goat-the type equal to small jaw, and liver of cock, sitting hen...I pray for Gods support me to win. Deity of mountain, water, tree, please supports me, answer me” (4, pg.316).

Credence of highland people in life is something likes charm and bait and it appears specifically in Epic. Charm and bait has ability to change and a versatile strength. People believe that some persons have ability to expel amulet and spell and bring the good to villagers. In Epic *Giông, Gió orphaned since childhood*, Bia Ponong, daughter of forester Bok Tolum, has a miraculous medicine, a miraculous string that helps Giông win Bok Tolum and revives Gió. While Xem Yang and Rang Hu have ability to revive Xét and Bia Xin, although they died for a period of time. If they want to achieve something or when getting difficulty in life, people often beg Yang for support: “She does not know how to make Xét come back to her, suddenly she think about Yang,

asks Yang to help” (2, pg.35). For Highland people, Gods is hallowed but also closed, and “human” “Bia Xin begs Yang for help, Yang says: Oho, I will help you, it is easy, and Xét will love you again. I promise to help you, then how do you express your thanks to me?” (2, pg.36). And Bia Xin promises to pay Yang a golden chicken. A time later, her begging becomes true, but the golden chicken has not appeared. Yang appeared in front of Bia Xin: “Hey Bia Xin, I helped you...What about my chicken v” (2, pg.52). Bia Xin can not find the chicken and then Yang punish Xét village. Gods in Epic is the reflection of credence of Highland people.

By Epic, we know that, if there is a person or an animal giving birth in an M’ông family. They do not let person out of the family come to the house for a period of time.

“The goat bears her babies in three nights

The pig bears her babies in four nights
Human bears her baby in four nights” (5, pg.391).

In Bana Epic, the man takes the initiative to find his lover: “One noon, Xét calls young men in his village for going out to find whether Bia Xin is beautiful or not (2, pg.30). While in Êđê Epic, we see resistant behavior to the depraved custom called “connect the tie”. In general, Highland people consider love between men and women must base on voluntary and they are not so different in age. . “Image that, if you are young and beautiful, but you have to

marry an old man, will you agree??” (3, pg.101). The devoted love of Giông, Gió with Xem Yang and Rang Hu explained simply: “The two young men cannot resist to the charm and” (3, pg.93). Actually, reading any piece of Highland, we find devoted loves like that.

Boys and girls love and if they agree to marry, they will exchange their bracelet; “After talking, Bia Xin suggest exchanging bracelet” (2, pg.33). However, after knowing Hlarkông, Xét does not like Bia Xin, he and Hlarkông exchanged their bracelet and they are going to marry” (2, pg.34). The wedding will be held later on “village, men, women, young girls and boys. They kill hundreds of buffalo, thousand of cow. Pigs and chickens also killed in hundreds, thousands” (2, pg.43). Custom in the wedding also listed in details: Then, if they give birth to a daughter, they “worship by rake”, if they give birth to a son, they “worship by axe.”

Epic also mentions different custom of Highland people, such as swearing father and son ceremony between Bok Tolum and Giông (Epic: *Giông, Gió orphaned since childhood*) described specifically:

“Bok Tolum listens to Giông’s answer and says:

- Dear, if you want to be son and father with me, I would be glad!

Then, he pour pig’s blood into a bowl, says:

- Hey Giông, before we drink wine to swear as father and son, I have to give

suck to you. Come here and sleep in my arm”

Giông lied down in Bok Tolum’s arm, Bok Tolum pours the pig’s blood bowl on to his breasts, bows to Giông and tells him to suck. Giông sucks. At the same time, make careful recommendation “Dear, since then we are father and son”...” (3, pg.52).

There are many sections in Epic that describes Buffalo thrusting holiday. Here, we catch many details coincide with Buffalo thrusting in life of Highland people. Firstly, they ask for advice of village patriarch to donate and choose buffalo: “While donating, it just sees the cage. See the biggest buffalo. There are puddles on his back. Now we have to kill that buffalo. You have to catch that buffalo immediately.” (5, pg.572). Also chopping down the tree to tie the buffalo, movement to thrust the buffalo, takes its blood and pours into the wine-cup, split its meat and share to all houses in the village. ... All are described as in the actual life. Watching Lênh thrust the buffalo strongly; we image that Highland young man in Buffalo thrusting: “Lênh takes a javelin to thrust the buffalo, steps silently. Lênh walks like a squirrel. Lênh raise the javelin, and then thrust into to leg of the buffalo. Its leg was cut. Lênh uses javelin thrust into its hipg. The buffalo falls down” (5, pg.574). Up to now, Highland people still save this tradition. And the thrusting holiday mentioned in M’ông Epic as a proud cultural activities: “Tiăng eats buffalo without missing a year. Eats buffalo without

missing a year. Raise the pole without a missing month...Fame of Tiăng, Yang well known everywhere” (5, pg.612).

Besides folklore in language is *music*. Name, function and use of many kinds of musical instruments described truthfully in Epic. Gongs a musical instrument satisfy entertaining requirement and also connect human and Gods. It can be considered as a unique culture, attached to life of. It appears in life of each person from the cradle to adult, marriage, when he is happy or sad and to the grave and at Pothi ceremony. At home, Đam Săn “lies on the hammock, his hair set free to a copper gong”. When HơNhi prepares to propose marriage to Đam Săn, Gongs played thrill: “Play the most resounding, the most thunderous sound. Play to be earth-shaking, to the entire region, to the ground. Play through the roof to the sky. Play to the monkey fall down the tree. Play to the wraith stop harming human. Play to squirrel and mouse forget digging. To the snake creeps out the hole. To the stag and deer stand motionless to listen. To rabbit not to eat grass.” (1, pg.158). This is the most beautiful section describes gongs, and mentioned many times in Đam Săn Epic such as: When HơÂng welcomes HơNhi family, when HơNhi and HơBhi because Đam Săn chopped down deity tree -Smuk, gongs are played to share the sadness, when Đam Săn wins M'tao Mxây, when people congratulate Đam Săn... Gongs show the wealthy, pride of materials, prestige of personal and the village... Đam Săn says: “If I marry

HơNhi I will become the rich chieftain with many gongs in all types” (1, pg.154). We can see that, gongs appear in Epic with high frequency, deeply reflect all aspects in culture, life of Highland people. Those quotes are evidence of role of Gongs in Highland ethnic group consciousness. Therefore, Gongs deserve the significant role in this regional culture.

Otherwise, through Epic, we find out their *conception about human origin, universe, soul, body*. That mentioned in mythology. We find many proverbs mention experience in producing, especially counsel human. Now, while drinking wine, old Highland men and women sing Epic to advise people do the good things. Many worship sentences in Epic used to donate Gods. Therefore, it reflects more about actual life.

In conclusion, through specific and lively descriptions, Epic honors cultural and spiritual values of Highland people. Their spiritual life reflects belief in life. That is the hope, dream of human: a better life, a better place at ease, wealthy, peace after days and months work hard among the farm, milpa.

Study Epic helps me to discover cultural characteristic of Highland people. Through surveying the material and spirit world in socio-cultural life of Highland people in Epic, we come to a conclusion: Cultural life of Highland people is very abundant, it connected to the forest, mountain and village commune. Remarkably, event, thing mentioned in Epic is normal, familiar, present social activities, thought, state of

mind and people's conceptions. The artisan blows era spirit to things, event, make it lively. An ominous fact is that their cultural values are being lost in oblivion together with the development of modern life. How to maintain and develop Highland cultural values is a stinging problem for pro-Highland people.

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