

PRESERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAMIC CHAM'S CULTURAL VALUES TO STIMULATE TOURISM AND ECONOMIC GROWTH IN AN GIANG PROVINCE, MEKONG DELTA, VIETNAM

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Abstract

The authors of this article focus on analyzing and clarifying the cultural values of the Islamic Cham community in An Giang-Vietnam such as: 1) System of monuments and works architecture; 2) Traditional festivals; 3) Traditional craft; 4) Traditional costumes; 5) Traditional cuisine; 6) Religion; 7) Customs and habits; 8) Culture and art with the status of preserving these values. Thereby, the article points out the importance of preserving and promoting positive values to develop tourism, contribute to local economic growth.

Keywords: Vietnam, An Giang, Islamic Cham community, tourism, cultural values

INTRODUCTION

As one of the few provinces in the Mekong Delta where all four ethnic groups: Kinh, Cham, Hoa, and Khmer live together, they have their own unique identity that blends in with the flow of time, create resonance in all aspects of social life and contribute to the cultural diversity in the province. One of the ethnic groups in An Giang, which is the Islamic Cham people living mainly in the districts: Tan Chau, a Phu, Chau Phu, Chau Thanh, has a unique culture to mention (VTV2 Channel 2014). The Cham people have lived for a long time in Vietnam in general and particularly in A Giang province. They have achieved a fairly high level of social organization with a diverse and distinctive culture. Culture is the soul of a people. Therefore, in order to understand an ethnic group, and discover the quintessence of that group, there is a need to investigate the cultural values, including material cultural values, both physical and non-physical. In recent years, An Giang province has paid much attention to the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage in order to stimulate tourism development and contribute to the local economic growth. The question is, which cultural heritages of the Cham people need to be protected and promoted to boost tourism development and contribute to local economic growth? Our research serves as a theoretical and practical basis to contribute to answering this question.

An Giang Tourism Overview

Tourism has long been seen as a smokeless industry. In Vietnam, tourism plays the role of an integrated economic sector that contributes significantly to socio-economic development. Therefore, focusing on tourism development is always considered a top task of Vietnam. Vietnam is famous as a country with many potentials and advantages for tourism development. Many provinces in the country have been considering tourism as one of the key economic sectors of the province, An Giang province is not an exception.

An Giang has long been known as a land with tourism potential, especially cultural-spiritual tourism with many majestic religious buildings, clusters of relics such as Sam Mountain, Cam Mountain, Ket Mountain, etc., along with mysterious caves that increase the spirituality of this land such as Thuy Dai Son, Anh Vu Son, and so on (Thang et al 2017). According to An Giang Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism (2014a), on average from 2015 to 2019, each year the province attracted more than 7.5 million tourists. With the orientation of the Provincial Party Committee is to "promote An Giang tourism development" in a sustainable, professional, and modern manner, make An Giang an attractive tourist center of the Mekong Delta and the whole country (A 2013). As also stated by the An Giang Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism (2014b), although An Giang has advantages in tourism development and has undergone many tourism development projects, tourism in An Giang has not been fully developed. To elaborate, tourism activities in An Giang have not really focused on the local identity, which prevents tourism activities from attracting and retaining tourists. Most tourism activities are mainly associated visiting natural landscapes and humanistic works. The entertainment art is mainly Don ca tai tu, which is a form of folk singing art in Southeast Vietnam. This leads to overlapping tourism products of many other provinces in the Mekong Delta. Some crafting arts and craft-oriented villages in the province only open when there is a request from tourists. Moreover, doing crafting arts is not really of livelihood of the people in Angiang, so it is difficult for long-term and sustainable development due to the lack of enthusiasm and sufficient investment.

Some ecological gardens are not yet qualified to serve tourists, especially foreign tourists. These gardens are simply places that provide food services, specialties, spaces with many green trees, and do not offer a combination between enjoying food and visiting fruit gardens. This is due to the model of biological gardens, which are mostly associated with a small area, limited space, and not exactly like orchards that can be exploited for tourism. In addition, the menus at these ecological gardens are quite monotonous, not specialized with the values of the local culinary culture (VTV2 Channel 2014). In addition, homestay service households are not knowledgeable about tourist service skills. Especially, they have been facing obstacles in communicating with foreign guests. In general, tourism facilities and techniques only meet a minimum level of tourist requirements.

In recent years, with the development of cultural tourism, An Giang has attracted more international tourists (Linh & Vy 2016). Cultural tourism mainly relies on cultural activities, traditional ethnic festivals, customs, and beliefs to fascinate tourists. For tourists who are interested in researching and discovering indigenous cultures and customs, cultural tourism is an opportunity to satisfy their needs.

Table 1: Statistica of travelers to An Giang from 2015 to 2020

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total number of visitors to An Giang	6,250,000	6,500,000	7,300,000	8,500,000	9,200,000	6,500,000
In which:						
Number of guests staying	540,000	540,000	600,000	1,000,000	1,200,000	800,000
International visitors	70,000	70,000	75,000	100,000	120,000	40,000
Tourism revenue (Billion VND)	1,520	3,200	3,700	4,800	5,500	4,000

Source: People's Committe of An Giang (2021).

Looking at the above statistics, we can see that from 2015 to 2019, An Giang tourism revenue increased with the growth in arrivals and stays of domestic and foreign tourists. Particularly in 2020, due to the COVID-19 epidemic, this revenue decreased. Increased tourism revenue means a positive contribution to local economic development.

Islamic Cham's Cultural Values and the Preservation and Promotion in An Giang

The relics and architectural works of the Islamic Cham in An Giang

The Islamic Cham in An Giang have a system of unique architectural works bearing the characteristics of Islamic culture. Currently An Giang is the province that has the biggest number of mosques in Vietnam, with 12 mosques and 16 minor mosques. Cham hamlets in Chau Phong commune (Tan Chau town) have more mosques than other areas in the province. The most famous mosques include Mubarak, Jamiul Azhar in Chau Phong commune (Tan Chau). Mas Jid Khai Ri Yah, Al Khairiyah in Nhon Hoi commune, Jamiul Muslimin in Quoc Thai commune (An Phu) and so on (Kaka 2012). Cham's mosques are mostly relative to other Muslim mosques in the world, which are built accordingly to the traditional architecture of the Muslim citadel in Arab countries.

The Islamic Cham people built the mosques with respect to the architectural regulations as well as the interior layout in the style of traditional Islam (Dop & Cuong 1991). The main entrance to the mosque is in the shape of an arc. In front, on the roof, there is a large two-storied tower. The roof of the tower is oval. At the foot of the tower, there is a crescent moon and a star, which are the symbol of Islam. This is the symbol of God's light, which symbolizes wisdom and the torch light to guide the way. The Cham people follow that spirit and always worship Allah. Behind the entrance to the cathedral, there is a spacious prayer courtyard. There is often a water tank for the people to use with the

spiritual meaning to purify themselves before praying and it is also a favorite meeting place of the community. Four corners on the roof of the cathedral have four small towers. In the middle of the roof are two round-shaped towers. From the main door of the cathedral to the two sides, each side has two pointed arches, each arch is about 2.4 meters apart from the other. To the left and right there are also six pointed arches on each side. Inside the Cathedral, there are no altars or images of any gods or saints. At one end of the Cathedral, there is a chamber, which is a standing spot for spiritual dignitaries to host the ceremonies, and there is a “minbar” where the teachers give lectures on catechesis in the weekly Friday ceremony. The room is large and spacious with four walls painted in two colors, white and light blue, and the glossy tile floor makes the space cool. The mosque is not only a unique architectural work, but also the place containing and the most obvious expression of the religious life of the Cham people in An Giang. Islamic Cham in An Giang come to the mosque to pray, perform important religious ceremonies, participate in community activities. Around the main mosque, there is often a cemetery to bury the dead people following Islam. In addition, the mosque is also a place to teach the Cham language and teach the children of Islam to read the Qur'an. Therefore, visitors to the cathedral will have many opportunities to learn about the religious culture of the Cham people in An Giang.

The mosques of Mubarak, Jamiul Azhar in Chau Phong commune (Tan Chau). Masjid Al Ehsan in Da Phuoc commune and Masjid Khai Ri Yah in Nhon Hoi commune (An Phu) are typical places that need to be exploited as sites for cultural visits and spiritual tourism in Cham hamlets of An Giang. Mubarak Mosque in Chau Phong commune was recognized as a national architectural and artistic monument in 1989 (Maspero 2002). This is a typical and famous cathedral of Cham people in An Giang. With the advantage of being close to Chau Doc City center, it is convenient for visitors when traveling by boat from Ho Chi Minh City to Chau Doc to the Cham hamlet. The Mubarak mosque's campus includes all the works of a typical Islamic mosque, but the main hall is still large for believers to come to pray every day as well as the Cham language teaching and Qu'ran reading areas for the Cham people. A small plot is also allocated to build a cemetery. Moreover, Jamiul Azhar in Chau Phong commune is considered one of the oldest and beautiful mosques in An Giang. Only 1 km away from Chau Giang ferry terminal, Jamiul Azhar mosque is located on a large campus with 2 main street frontages of Tan Chau town. The mosque has a large cemetery, the main hall is carved with many delicate, elegant and beautiful decorative motifs. It also has separated areas for Cham language classes, dormitory, Qu'ran recitation room, and a large water tank for cleansing ritual before entering the mosque to pray. Coming to this place, visitors will be able to learn more about the history of the Cham community in Chau Phong commune and the rituals of the Islam here. Additionally, Masjid Al Ehsan in Da Phuoc commune is one of the most visited mosques, especially by foreign tourists, because it is located on provincial road 956, near Chau Doc city, which is convenient to exploit for both waterway and road tours from Chau Doc to Cham hamlet (Thang 2010). This mosque does not only have works and architecture in the Islamic style, but it also has beautiful and unique spots for taking

photos. That attracts a lot of young people to visit and take pictures. Last but not least, Masjid Khai Ri Yah, in Nhon Hoi commune - An Phu district, may provide a slightly different experience for tourists as it is located on the side of the romantic Bung Binh Thien lake. That stimulates the design of tours at Bung Binh Thien to be connected to visiting the Khai Ri Yah mosque.

In addition to the mosque, the Cham schools and the ancient houses of the Cham people also have unique architecture (Kaka 2012). The Cham people of An Giang live mainly by the Hau River. In order to adapt to the annual flood season, the traditional shelters of the Cham people in An Giang are high stilt houses, which are built of wood with columns of 2-3 meters high. The interior of the house is quite open and spacious. Some large-sized houses are potential for the homestay accommodation model to serve tourists. This could be an opportunity to help tourists have more time and conditions to learn and experience Cham culture deeply. Additionally, around the famous mosques, there are many Cham traditional houses, with beautiful and solid architecture, which are already more than 100 years old. The houses are arranged to accommodate a large guest house decorated with Mecca images, Arabic script paintings, and Islamic calendars. Bedroom areas and kitchens also adhere to the tradition house design. Coming to the traditional houses of the Cham people, visitors can learn more about their daily living activities and observe how they carry out production activities such as weaving, embroidering towels, preparing traditional dishes, and so on.

The preservation of the above-mentioned traditional monuments and architectural works has been done in An Giang quite well. Currently, 12 mosques, 16 minor mosques, and 100 traditional houses of the Cham people still exist (Taylor 2006). However, the houses in the traditional architectural style of the Cham people are in danger of gradually disappearing because the houses are quite old with inevitable deterioration or damage, while the restoration and maintenance works present challenges. Although the Cham people have a very high sense of protecting the ancient architecture of their nation, their actions are limited by the high cost and scarcity of raw materials (both for restoration and maintenance).

To conclude this section, the mosques, minor mosques and traditional houses of the Cham Muslims in An Giang are a cultural heritage, a unique cultural feature of the Cham community that needs to be preserved, promoted and exploited for tourism.

Festivals of Islamic Cham people in An Giang

The Islamic Cham people in An Giang have a lot of community festivals, which are unique ways to express their cultural values such as: Celebration of the birthday of the Prophet-Patriarch Mohammed on April 12th every year (Dohammide 1967). This is an opportunity for Cham descendants to learn about the origin and birth of Islam. Additionally, Ramadan festival takes place in the 9th month of the Islamic calendar, which is a very important ceremony for the Islamic Cham of An Giang. The practice of fasting in the month of Ramadan is with a very purpose to remind people to love the poor, hungry and thirsty.

From the fasting experience, they can feel those sufferings themselves and be grateful to Allah, then live and behave in a proper manner. Another important thing is that fasting helps people to control their material desires, lower desires to focus only on cultivating the mind, overcoming themselves for a pure soul. This is a unique cultural feature of the Cham Islam people in An Giang. However, the utilization of this ceremony in tourism is still a matter of debate because the Islamic codes state that fasting must be performed from sunrise to sunset, daily, during the festival month. This makes it difficult for visitors to overcome the "challenge" of controlling the need to eat, which is a basic physiological need, for many lasting hours. One of the festivals to be capable of promoting the tourism of the Islamic Cham people in An Giang can be mentioned as the Roya Haji Festival, held on December 10th of the lunar calendar, also considered as the traditional New Year of the Cham people (Dohammide 1962). This festival occurs during the time of the pilgrimage to Mecca. Those who cannot make pilgrimages, work far away or study far from home must return to attend the mass. On this occasion, in Cham hamlets, they often kill cows and goats to share the meat with families. This is an important cultural event, showing the joyful and vibrant atmosphere in the community activities of the Cham in An Giang. Visitors participating in this festival will have experience with Cham cultural heritages from material to spiritual.

Currently, the Islamic Cham hamlets in An Giang are still able to fully preserve the meaning and organization and rituals of traditional festivals (An 2013). However, the exploitation of the festival culture of the Cham people in tourism development in An Giang is still limited. One reason is that these community cultural events take place in a closed space. Visitors do not have many opportunities to participate in these events (the Cham people here do not really want the participation of outsiders). Moreover, the people do not really willing to share their festival cultural values with tourists. This presents hinders for tourism development.

The traditional profession of Islamic Cham people in An Giang

Referring to the traditional profession of Islamic Cham in An Giang, brocade fabric weaving and making Tung Lo Mo (beef sausage) are significant to mention. Brocade fabric weaving is a traditional profession of the Cham Muslims in An Giang. In the past, it was likely that every household had a loom. After going through the coming-of-age ceremony (now this custom is no longer popular in the Cham community in An Giang) girls must know how to weave and make cloth for them themselves and their families (Han 1995). Cham girls even make their own wedding dresses. The dexterity in the weaving stages is also a standard to evaluate the Cham girls' ability to take care of the family. Products created by skillful Cham women are not only used in their daily lives but also as souvenirs that are very popular to tourists. Coming to the Cham brocade weaving village, visitors can learn about the history and products, learn the stages in the production process of a brocade product, make some crafted produced by themselves, try on costumes and accessories in the style of Islamic Cham, buy products for use or as souvenirs. Those are interesting experiences for tourists wishing to explore and

understand other cultures. Cham hamlets in An Giang have exploited unique cultural features in this traditional craft to exploit and serve tourism. Some typical places for tourists can be named as the Cham Mohamad brocade production facility at Phham Soai, Chau Phong commune, Tan Chau town and a brocade shop in Ha Bao 2 hamlet, Da Phuoc commune, An Phu district, An Giang.

Making Tung Lo Mo (beef sausage) is another traditional profession of the Cham people in An Giang. This is not only a job for the livelihood of the Cham people, but this profession also helps visitors to know their culinary culture. Currently, coming to Cham hamlets in An Giang, especially Cham Mot Chruk hamlet in Chau Phong commune, visitors can easily see chains of sun-kissed Tung Lo Mo along the roads. The processing of Tung Lo Mo is done by the Cham people with their own recipe. To have a delicious Tung Lo Mo dish, the person making it has to go through many complicated processes. This makes many tourists curious to learn how to make the famous dish. The exploitation of this cultural feature is considered beneficial for tourism development in Cham hamlets. Visitors, in addition to enjoying the food, are also guided to perform the stages of making the delicious and unique Tung Lo Mo by themselves. This will help visitors expand their knowledge of cuisine. Because of the unique taste of Tung Lo Mo, tourists often buy this product as a gift.

In fact, the traditional weaving profession of the Cham people is gradually disappearing. Most of the products branded as "An Giang Cham Brocade" are actually imported from China and Malaysia. Brocade products made by the An Giang Cham are of insignificant volume with limited designs and utilities. The current number of looms in Cham villages is relatively small. Also, the number of people, who are knowledgeable and capable of manufacturing traditional weaving and teaching weaving techniques is not many. Additionally, a proportion of the young people is not eager to learn and inherit the traditional craft. These make typical products of traditional crafts such as Mat'ra towels, Mas-pok towels, and traditional costumes to be gradually replaced by imported products. Moreover, the preservation and exploitation of Tung Lo Mo into tourism activities are also facing many difficulties. The production facilities are gradually decreasing in number. Most of them are small and not professional. Some have even replaced the traditional handcrafting processes with machines, which puts a threat to the preservation of this traditional profession.

Traditional costumes of Islamic Cham in An Giang

In general, the four typical ethnic groups in An Giang, through cultural exchange and acculturation, the elements in traditional costumes have all changed. However, it is still easy to recognize Islamic Cham people by be costumes. The current costumes of Cham people still retain a lot of traditional elements. For example, Islamic Cham men in An Giang wear long sarongs with stripes that cover their legs, traditional tops, t-shirts or shirts. Islamic Cham women in An Giang also have so far kept their traditions in dressing style. They often wear T-shirt. Only on big holidays and festivals do they wear *ao dai*. Their unique T-shirt has a wide body, narrow sleeves and two large front pockets (Luan

1974). Older women still keep the typical *ao dai* of the Cham people, also known as *tah*. It is a type of *ao dai* that is assembled with 4 pieces of fabric, two small pieces in the ribs and armpits, and a pullover, without slits (Thanh 1984). Besides, a very recognizable feature for the Cham people is the women's head scarf and the men's hat.

Head scarves of Cham women in An Giang are made by themselves or purchased from Cham people who specialize in making head scarves. The head scarf of Cham women has many shapes and sizes, it is a long rectangular piece of cloth with many patterns used loosely on the head to cover the hair (usually used for brides), ears, and not the face (Thanh 1984). The material is mainly brocade fabric; the pattern is in the shape of a filling. Today, due to cultural exchanges and acculturation with the neighboring ethnic groups as well as international exchanges, they have absorbed and used many new materials and new patterns to make their traditional costumes, which are livelier. The head scarf constitutes a unique beauty of Islamic Cham women, because of its symbolic shyness and grace. For men, on Islamic holidays, daily or solemn, dignitaries wear *achuba*, also known as *kak hadji*. The *achuba* shirt is like a white t-shirt, reaching to the heel. The shirt is worn with a white sarong and a white *hadji* on the head. Those who have made pilgrimages to Mecca, wear a white t-shirt with a length to the ground, a white scarf on their head, with the edge down to the back. Their scarf has an *ykal* bracelet or a headband (Huong 2013).

Costume is not only the factor for ethnic group identification, but it also represents the typical cultural heritage of the Islamic Cham in An Giang (Luan 1974). Visitors to Cham villages, being able to wear Cham costumes, play the role of Cham people and participate in daily Cham activities is a very interesting thing that makes them enjoy. Those can be great memories during your trip to Cham hamlets in An Giang. Currently, the traditional costumes of the Islamic Cham in An Giang have changed compared to the traditional ones. This is largely explained by the fact that their clothing is not entirely woven and sewn by themselves anymore but is bought mainly from Malaysia or elsewhere. Moreover, styles, colors and patterns used in costumes gradually change towards more convenience and modernity. This leads to the fact that a part of the Cham people can no longer identify and retain the traditional costumes of their ethnic group. This is also a factor that reduces the attractiveness for tourists when they want to have products made by the Cham themselves.

Traditional cuisine of Islamic Cham people in An Giang

The An Giang Cham people mainly use rice, shrimp, fish, and beef as their main food sources. Unlike the Kinh, Chinese and Khmer, the Islamic Cham people in An Giang eat and drink in compliance with Islamic law. They abstain a lot from eating and absolutely do not eat pork. They believe that pigs are dirty, and omnivorous animals. If anyone eats pork, that person is considered unable to keep the purity of the body, violating the absolute prohibitions of Islam (Dohammide 1964). In addition, they are not allowed to eat other animals such as bats, mice, crows, snakes, or dead animals, because these are considered disgusting. The Islamic Cham people in An Giang use beef quite commonly

in cooking. From beef and special spices, they have processed many unique traditional dishes, not only for the people of their community but also famous and loved by many people.

Talking about the culinary culture of the Cham Muslims in An Giang, we must mention their typical and famous dishes. The Cham people divide their dishes into 2 groups: savory dishes and sweet dishes. Savory dishes include curry (made of chicken, beef, and goat), ca púa (beef), rice noodles, toss curd, beef salad, pickles, and beef ribs with vegetable sauce, pan-fried perch, Malaysian fried noodles, and dumpling (Luan 1974). Typical sweet dishes include *banh nhan*, also known as pay-krah, ha-nam-can, sai-kya, *thon dot*, rambutan cake, jackfruit seed cake, ha-sa-ka-da cake, *ha nam can*, *sim cake*, *khoa vat* (ha-tro-dac). *Ha Phum* cake, and so on. Cham people usually use spices such as curry powder, curry leaves, coconut milk, and other spices with strong flavors. Cakes are usually made from flour, green beans, eggs, milk, sugar (jaggery) and other coloring ingredients such as ripe jaggery, turmeric, and so on. In general, the cuisine of the Cham people is quite rich in materials, processing methods, colors, and shapes. In addition, the dishes often have the taste of many flavors and aromas, often with fatty and spicy ingredients.

The exploitation of Cham cuisine in tourism development in An Giang province is an essential activity. Tourists enjoying the food do not only fulfill the needs of eating, but they also experience a part of the indigenous culture through learning and participating in the stages of cooking the meals, from choosing of ingredients, processing, decoration to the way of enjoying and appreciating the food (Linh & Vy 2016). This enables visitors to have memorable moments of the culture with the residents and gain more life experiences for themselves. However, the reality shows that the culinary culture factor here has not been included as part of the local tourism product. Coming to the Cham hamlets, visitors wishing to enjoy the specialties of the Cham people will have difficulties if they do not contact the service and book reservation in advance. In these areas, there are no catering establishments specializing in typical Cham dishes. This is a huge limitation of the local tourism industry. In recent years, some typical dishes of Cham Islam in An Giang are gradually disappearing because of the lack of successor generations. Most of the people who are able to prepare these dishes are elderly, with limited ability to teach. Another part of the Cham people is not fully aware of the unique values in their culinary culture. Exploiting Cham culinary culture into An Giang tourism development is a potential direction. Through this activity, An Giang Cham people will have more income, be able to promote their unique culture and preserve their cultural assets (Linh & Vy 2016).

Religion of the Islamic Cham in An Giang

The Cham people in An Giang belong to the Sunni Safi'i sect, following the orthodox Islam line. They strictly adhere to the teachings of Islam and the Qur'an. They are also constantly in contact with the Islam world, mainly in Cambodia and Malaysia. According to researcher Nguyen Binh, unlike Cham Bani followers, Islamic Cham people understand the canon of Islam and truly fulfill their religious obligations. Islam affects almost all

aspects of the life of Islamic Cham people in An Giang. In their daily lives, their eating habits, living habits, and ways of thinking are strictly related to Islam. We can easily observe the effects of Islam on their daily lives when contacting and communicating with them. The Islamic Cham people in An Giang have a very firm and strong belief in Islam (Ken 2013). They understand and quite fully implement the basic teachings of this religion as well as the obligation to fulfill their duties in life. The pillars of Islam's teachings include the absolute belief in Allah and Mohammed, five times praying a day, fasting during the month of Ramadan, giving alms, and making pilgrimages to Mecca. Due to the strong influence of Islam, the Cham people of An Giang have formed cultural features that are unique by the elements of this religion.

Islam has had a strong impact on creating a Cham culture that is imbued with traditional identities, in which the religious elements are highlighted. From another perspective, the religious elements should be recognized and considered as a "precious and strange material" to help form cultural tourism products with unique characteristics of the Islamic Cham in An Giang (Hassan 2014). For example, in Cham hamlets, religious activities are still maintained seriously. Every Friday, the faithful people gather in the cathedral with "great teachers" to learn and practice the doctrine, to remind the followers to abide by religion, to obey the law, and to live a civilized life. They all worship only one object of reverence, the Koran. Every Muslim must make at least one pilgrimage to Mecca in their life, admit that there is a God, worship 5 times a night, give alms, and fast on Ramadan. From a cultural and religious perspective, these things are considered positive aspects, cultural activities, contributions to moral education towards goodness, forming good traits for each individual in the ethnic community. By witnessing these activities, visitors to An Giang Cham hamlets will have the opportunity to learn how the Cham people think and do and why they have such a unique culture. The preservation of traditional values in the religious culture of the Islamic Cham in An Giang today is a necessary job, because it contributes to preserving their unique culture.

Customs and habits of Islamic Cham people in An Giang

The customs and practices of the Islamic Cham in An Giang contain many values. All rituals, from birth to death, is governed by the rules and laws of Islam. The life-cycle rituals of the Islamic Cham include the Haircutting ceremony, the Naming ceremony, the Coming-of-age ceremony, Weddings and Funerals (Ban Đại diện Cộng đồng Hồi giáo tỉnh An Giang 2015). Among these rituals, the wedding is considered the most worthwhile tourism resource to exploit.

The wedding of the Islamic Cham in An Giang takes place with many rich details, most notably that the ceremony is held at the bride's house. Every marriage ceremony of the Cham Muslims in An Giang is strongly influenced by Islamic canon law. Wedding is an important cultural event not only for the newlywed couple but also for the whole family and community. Therefore, the wedding is an opportunity for tourists to learn and experience many cultural traditions of the Islamic Cham in terms of material (home decoration, offerings, cuisine, costumes, costumes) and spirit (concepts, customs and

rituals in marriage, cultural beliefs, art culture, community cohesion, and excitement of community activities) (Dohammide & Dorohiem 2014). Visitors can observe and participate in the wedding ceremony of the Islamic Cham in An Giang through helping decorate the house and prepare the dishes, enjoying musical performances. If this unique resource is properly exploited, visitors will have more interesting experiences, and will deeply understand the Cham community here.

Among the Islamic Cham community in An Giang, there are many things that are forbidden and considered taboo. From a young age, the education for children is taken seriously, especially the study of the teachings and laws of Islam (Cuong 2010). Every Islam follower must understand and obey the religious laws. The canon of Islam does not punish the human body, but can have a strong impact on the spirit, honor, personality, and social status of each person (Tam 1994). In recent years, a number of factors in the customs and practices of the Cham Muslims in An Giang have gradually changed. For example, the detention is no longer present. Historically, this custom has created many difficulties for Cham girls, such as limited communication with the surrounding world, and sometimes resulted in fear of contact, few opportunities to study, and promote their own social capacity (Dohammide 1964). Today, Islamic Cham women in An Giang are increasingly able to master, promote their own capacity, and affirm their position in society. A part of women are now confident and able to communicate openly. Circumcision in the rite of passage for adolescent boys has changed in form, which is now performed in a safer, more convenient and scientific way.

In general, the preservation of these cultural features is carried out in the direction of gradually eliminating elements that are no longer relevant, replacing them with more modern and flexible ways without losing the meaning and traditional cultural heritage.

Culture and art of Islamic Cham people in An Giang

According to the authors, in the past, due to the prohibition of Islamic canon law, folk music activities were not developed, but in return, the Islamic Cham people in An Giang have built a literature with all kinds of stories (Willoughby 2013). Through the stories, we can see that the Islamic Cham community in An Giang always upholds the love of husband and wife, brotherhood such as the story of Dorya, Amác and Sifoah, and so on. In the stories of the Islamic Cham in An Giang, there are always glimpses of gods appearing to solve difficulties that humans cannot do. In addition, they also have jokes, fables, or myths about Mohammad and other angels according to the Qur'an. The names of the characters in the stories are often borrowed from Arabic, who have activities similar to the merchants of the Near-East countries, having to trade far from home for a long time. The story often takes the form of those in the famous work *One Thousand and One Nights*. It can be said that Vietnamese literature has been contributed significantly by the literary treasure of the Cham Islam community.

Musical activities of the Islamic Cham in An Giang are different from the Cham people in the Central region (Oanh 2014). They do not use any string or wind instruments other

than the Rap-pa-na drum set. Rappana drummers are only men, sitting in a semicircle. They can also sing while playing. Although only playing with the drum set, the artist skilfully transformed the virtual ingenuity with a variety of beating styles for different types of rhythms to different melodies. It can be seen that, from the Rap-pà-na drum, the Cham here develop flexibly and creatively while playing with folk songs: chants, rhymes, trivia, lullabies, Adam, Attam Ta, Panoch, Padat. The sound of the drum represents the sacredness and is considered the soul of the Cham people. Hence, it always appears in weekly prayers or big ceremonies at mosques.

It can be said that the culture and art of the Islamic Cham people in An Giang have unique and distinctive features. If we know how to exploit these cultural heritages into tourism activities, it will make the tourism products here more attractive. Based on the above mentioned tourism resources, when coming to An Giang Cham hamlets, visitors can learn about architectural works, participate in festivals, visit and experience craft villages, enjoy food, learn about the religious life, customs and habits of the Cham people, and explore cultural and artistic elements such as music and stories (Hy 2001). After a day of visiting and experiencing cultural activities in Cham hamlet, in the evening, visitors can immerse themselves in the daily life of Cham people by enjoying traditional dishes, enjoying music, and putting their souls into magical stories. Listening to a thrilling, fascinating short story told by the Cham themselves and sleeping in their traditional stilt house will be a fascinating series of events, bringing delight to visitors. All the cultural factors presented above can be cleverly and rationally designed to form a unique and integrated tourism product that helps one-time visitors experience the full cultural heritages of Islamic Cham in An Giang.

The tourism potential of Islamic Cham in An Giang is clearly discussed, but it is quite difficult for tourists to enjoy and feel the values through musical performances and stories nowadays. In Nhon Hoi, Chau Phong, previously, there were groups performing Cham art for tourists to enjoy (VTV2 Channel 2014). However, due to infrequent and unstable income, these groups have been almost disbanded. Travel companies that want to set up for tourists to see Cham music performances in Chau Phong commune have to contact 1 to 2 weeks in advance so that they can gather performers and rehearse. As a result, the cost for this activity is quite high (with only from 3 to 4 songs). Moreover, the traditional musical instruments of the Cham people are deteriorating, gradually disappearing, just like the case of the Rap-pa-na drum set (only 1 set remained but not completed with all 12 pieces). which is kept in Cham Lama hamlet, Vinh Truong commune. There are also not many musical artists left, who know how to make the Rap-pa-na drum. Additionally, the cost of drum manufacturing materials is quite expensive, which results in many difficulties in recovery, maintenance, and storage. Many young Cham people, nowadays, know little about the traditional music of their nation. Besides, most of the ancient stories of the Cham Muslims in An Giang are word of mouth. Only few have been handed down in official texts, so it is extremely difficult to preserve and promote them. This is an alarming situation regarding the preservation and promotion of traditional artistic values

of the Islamic Cham people in An Giang. If this situation persists, in the near future, the traditional art of the Cham people will gradually fade away.

CONCLUSION

The Islamic Cham in An Giang have extremely rich tourism resources. Cham culture has all the elements of cultural tourism resources to be utilized such as the system of mosques, architectural monuments; cultural festivals with bold religious features, such as the Roya Haji festival; traditional crafts with the creation of exquisite brocade products diverse in designs and colors; Tung Lo Mo- a famous specialty not to be missed when traveling in Cham hamlets; other typical cultural elements such as costumes, cuisine, practices, rituals, art, along with vibrant cultural and sports activities. If we know how to preserve these tourism resources, promote, and exploit valuable the materials properly, Cham hamlets in An Giang will have a comprehensive tourism product, meeting the needs of visiting, learning, and experiencing Cham cultural heritages.

The tourism industry is identified as one of the key economic sectors of An Giang province. The exploitation of the cultural system into tourism activities is a necessary and urgent job, not only to meet the increasing needs and preferences of tourists but also beneficial to the local economic growth now and in the future.

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