

# Traditional weaving of the Cham people in Vietnam

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## I. An outline of historical origin and population distribution

### 1. Population – inhabitants

The Cham is indigenous people who settle long ago in the Central of Vietnam. At present, there are approximately 132,873 Cham people living in Vietnam (about 65.941 males and 66.932 females)<sup>1</sup>. Racially, they are of Indonesian descent (Nguyen Dinh Khoa 1983:56-60) and their languages are classified into the Austronesian language family, the language group of Malayo – Polynesian (J.Collins 1991: 108 – 121). Their language is very near to the ethnic groups: Raglai, Churu, Jarai, and Ede (Graham Thurgood 1999: 35 – 36).

### 2. Historical origin

Formerly, the Cham people had established a single country in a region of South East Asia, officially named Champa<sup>2</sup>. During its existence, the Champa kingdom established trade relationships and exchanged culture with neighboring developed countries, including India, Arabia, China, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Therefore, it experienced the influence of many different civilizations and cultures.

After the decline of the Champa kingdom, most of the Cham communities left their homeland for Cambodia, Thailand, Hai Nam, and Malaysia. Only minority of Cham people concentrated in a few of

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<sup>1</sup> According to the April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1999 reporter by the Bureau of Statistics of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

<sup>2</sup> The Champa kingdom was founded at the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> century – (AF 192). Its original name was Lam Ap (AD 192-758), but was later changed to Hoan Vuong (758-866), and finally became known Champa (866 to). In 1832, the Champa kingdom was entirely erased from the map. The Champa kingdom's territory spread from the Ngang pass (latitude 110) in Quang Binh to the basin of Dong Nai river (latitude 180) including coastal deltas, high lands and mountain areas. Due to early influence of Indian civilization and culture, the Champa kingdom organized its government administration under federal policy, which comprised of many smaller kingdoms including Indrapura, Amarvati, Vijaya, Kauthara, and Panduranga...

provinces of Vietnam such as Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, Ninh thuan, and Binh Thuan. A few of them moved to provinces in the South of Vietnam such as Chau Doc, Tay Ninh, Long Khanh, Binh Phuoc and Ho Chi Minh city. Consequently, these communities have come to be numbered among the ethnic minority people of Vietnam (Thanh Phan 2006: 4).



Fig.1 Map of Southeast Asian in XVII century (Po Dharma 1991: 5)

### 3. Current local communities of the Cham

The Cham is indigenous people who have been settled in what is now know as contemporary Vietnam for ages. Due to it's the many changes in its historical background and its wide spread settlement areas with distinctly different social environments, the historical and the cultural characteristics of the Cham community as a whole are not homogenous, but rather, diverse and distinct in each local area. Hence, at present, the Cham community consist of many local groups such as: Cam Awal, Cam Ahier, Cam Birau, Cam Jawa, Cam Hroi, Cam youn, and Youn Cam (Thanh Phan, 1996: 166).



Fig. 2 Cham vestiges in Vietnam (Nguyen Van Ku 2007: 1)

#### 4. Organizational structure in matrilineal society of the Cham

In the traditional matrilineal social activities of the Cham people, the organizations of religion, belief, customs, family, society, and government often existed parallel to one another. Each organization had its own structure, function, status, domain, and sphere of activity. These organizations collaborated to operate and solve regional, religious, and customary matters, as well as all other activities in the villages and hamlets. The leaders of these organizations had decisive roles in their respective societies, according to their realm of activity, and were often respected by their villagers.

## **II. Traditional Cham Weaving in Vietnam**

### **1. Cham people and Traditional Textile**

In the history, Cham people bequeathed many unique, rich, and diversified cultural assets to our age, which can be seen in different fields such as architecture, sculpture, music, dance, festivals, and the traditional patterned textile. Up until now, their unique tradition and culture keep alive among Cham people in spite of the long time elapsed and the influences of different cultures. Especially, the Cham traditional textile is still widely used in daily life as will be mentioned in the next section in the case of My Nghiep village (Ninh Phuoc district, Ninh Thuan province) and Binh Thang village (Bac Binh district, Binh Thuan province).

Historically Cham people grew not only cotton trees but also mulberry to raise silkworm, and produced cotton and silk products by themselves. Many documents described Cham textile industry and their weaving skills, and their precise, plentiful, and multiform products. According to G. Maspéso (1928), Cham people grew mulberry to raise silkworms, and also grew cotton for weaving fabric. According to Le Quy Don (1972), the fact that Cham people grew cotton trees to get cotton fiber for weaving fabric was also mentioned in Van Dai Ngoai Ngu (1972), which mentioned that Cham people grew a kind of cotton tree called Cac Boi tree, and that when the cotton flowers ripened, they looked like feather of goose, spinning cotton to make fibers for weaving. Furthermore, an old Chinese literature also mentioned that Cham people knew how to grow cotton trees and how to raise silkworms in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century, every year they had eight broods. It is also mentioned that they could dye cloths so nicely. In the 8<sup>th</sup> Century, Myanmar people were visiting the Champa to buy the Cham cottons for weaving fabric (Thanh Phan and Ikemoto Yukio, 2008: 80 - 81).

### **2. Feature of Cham tradition textile**

#### **a. Traditional cotton production**

Previously, the Cham sowed cotton for fibers. There are two varieties of cotton: *Lapah Cham* and *Lapah Laow*. Two varieties of cotton is suitable for dry climate areas under climate Savanna. Seeds of Lapah Laow often have big flowers that can get more fibers, but not durable. Cham Lapah seeds often have small flowers that provide small and less fiber, but white and very durable.

Time to start planting cotton is in July or August and harvest in about March or April next year. Each tree can provide cotton from two to three years.

After 1980, traditional cotton fibers no longer to continue use as common. Instead, they buy threads in the market. In the view of them, the cost of threads in the market cheaper than traditional cotton fibers. Therefore, the Cham not continue to grow cotton fibers as before anymore. This affects the quality and value of the products of traditional fabrics.

### **b. Fibers dyeing colors**

Cham people weave two kinds of material: one type to be dye for use in making clothing. Another type is woven. In making the fabric for clothing Cham people use natural white cotton. For textile state on brocade, before weaving, Cham people dye the fibers.

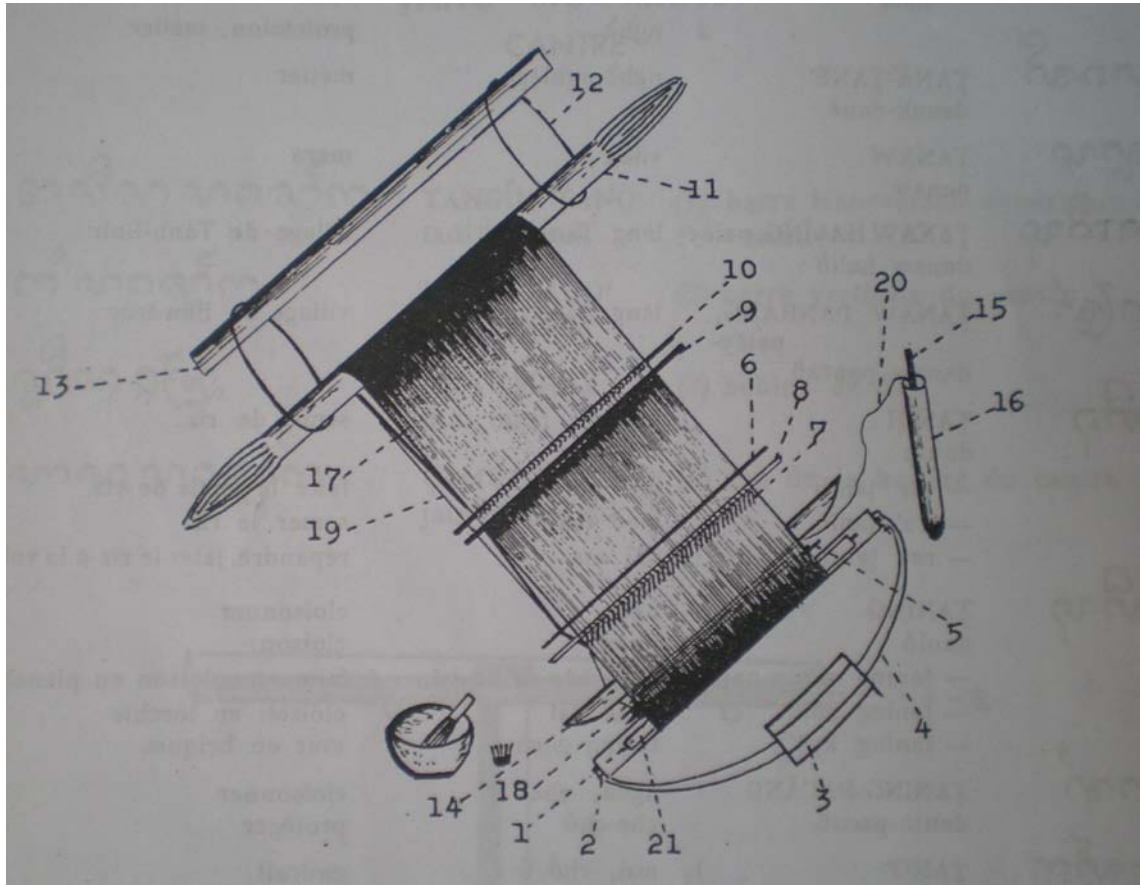
The types of fabric traditional Cham people often use basic color as white, red, yellow, blue and purple. The primary source of dye has been nature, with the dyes being extracted from leaves, rind, stem and root of the tree in the forest.

<b>Materials</b>	<b>Colors</b>
Rind of lanung patak tree	Red (dark red)
Rind of kayuan tree	Red (scarlet)
Rind of root nyau tree	Red (claret)
Rind of hapang	Yellow (saffron)
Rind of hala khun	Yellow (gold)
Fruit of baoh hadang tree	Black
Leaves and stem of maow tree	Blue
Leaves and stem of hala malar tree	Grey

Nowadays, Cham people often buy threads colors in the market to replace the type of traditional fibers. Because of the process of dyeing fibers take much time.

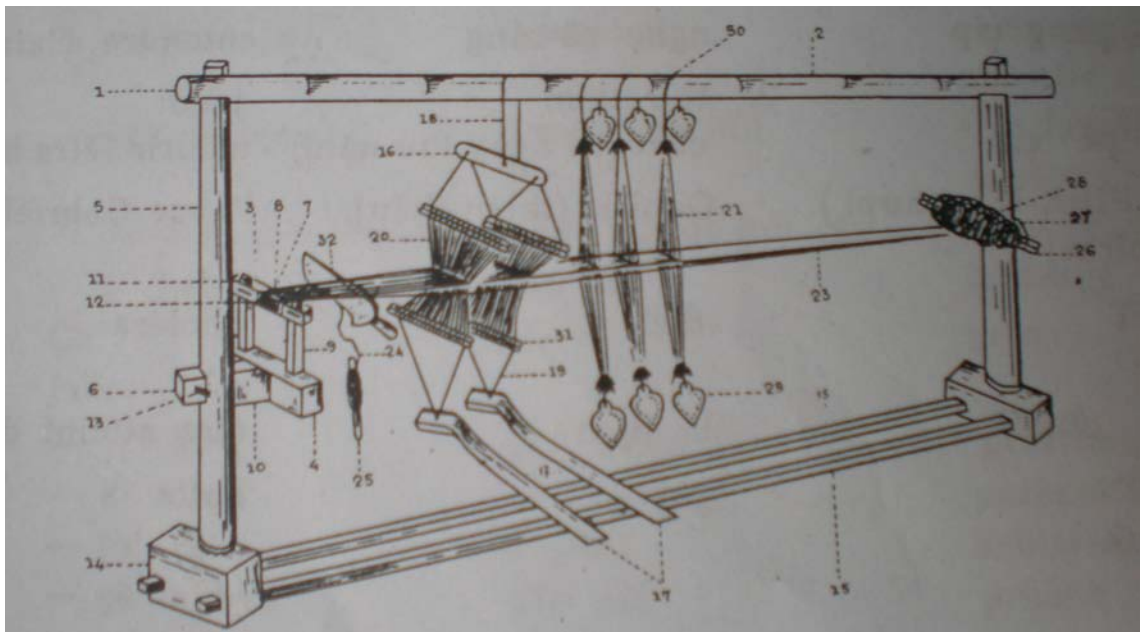
### c. The traditional weaving loom of Cham people

Until now, the Cham people still continue to use two types of traditional loom for weaving. Loom for weaving cloth sheet which called *daneng aban khan* and loom for weaving long belt which called *daneng jih dalah*. The size of cloth sheet made of *daneng aban khan*: width from 0.30m to 0.90m, length from 1.50m to 2.50m. The size of **belt** made of *daneng jih dalah*: width from 0.01m to 0.25m, length from 50m to 150m.



(1) gang sia; (2) gai gan; (3) haniua sia; (4) gang ana; (5) danaok gang sia; (6) jalan talei; (7) talei sia; (8) kawik sia; (9) gilaong kawik; (10) gai payeng; (11) cakuw sia; (12) kaliéng sia; (13) kabai sia; (14) gilaong cuk thathuw; (15) tathuw kawik; (16) kawik traow.

Fig. 3 Daneng aban khan - traditional weaving loom for cloth sheet  
(Moussay G. 1971: 436)



(1) rup danang; (2) katul; (3) anghu; (4) akaok danang; (5) gang danang; (6) akaok anghu; (7) libang anghu; (8) gai pacar; (9) geng anghu; (10) takuai danang; (11) tangi anghu; (12) tathuw anghu; (13) taik danang; (14) takai danang; (15) hanyua danang; (16) ariéng asaih-ngaok; (17) asaih ala; (18) talei kak ariéng; (19) talei asaih (20) cakaow hala; (21) cakaow bingu; (22) dalah; (23) mrai hangua; (24) mrai hanrak; (25) wec; (26) gai balik dalah; (27) talei ruak danah; (28) hanuh dalah; (29) paoh karang; (30) talei baoh karang; (31) ban cakaow; (32) prak.

Fig. 4 Daneng jih dalah - traditional weaving loom for belt sheet  
(Moussay G. 1971: 66)

Product from *daneng aban khan*:

- Head scarf (long scarf and short scarf)
  - ✓ Long scarf which called *khan njam* is a white cloth (about 150 – 180 cm length and 60 – 80 cm wide) have two line patterns at the scarf edge, each line 14 cm. It is use for women and ceremony.
  - ✓ Long scarf which called *khan matham* is a white cloth (about 240 cm length and 40 cm wide) have two line patterns at the scarf edge, each line 14 cm. It is use for monks.
  - ✓ Short scarf which called *séw* is also a white cloth (about 90 cm length and 30 cm wide). It use for men.
- Skirt:
  - ✓ Men skirt, called *khan* is only a white cloth (about 190 cm length and 90 wide).
  - ✓ Women skirt, called *ban* is have pattern on (similar to men skirt).
- Tunic:
  - ✓ Men tunic, called *ao likei* is a white cloth (about 250 cm length 90 cm wide)
  - ✓ Women tunic, called *ao kumei* is made from two pieces of cloth (each pieces about 180 cm length 90 cm wide). White cloth is use for ceremony and color clothes use for everyday and festival.
- Blanket, called *khan matham ndih* made from 2 sheets of cloth to 1 large sheet used like a blanket.


Product from *daneng aban khan*:

- Belt:
  - ✓ Men belt, called *talei ka\_ing likei* is 180 cm length and 10 cm wide, is woven with red fibers mixed with yellow and blue patterns.
  - ✓ Women belt, called *talei ka\_ing kumei* is 180 cm length and 1 cm wide, is woven like men belt.
- Long robe:
  - ✓ Women long robe, called *talei tabak* is 180 cm length and 10 cm wide, is woven like belt.

**d. Patterns on textiles**

The Cham people decorate lavish motifs on their textile, especially on their traditional dress. The patterns decorate a part of their dress, especially on women's skirt and dignitaries clothes was decorated cover all part.

		
<i>Khan njam</i>	<i>Khan matham</i>	<i>Séw</i>
		
<i>Khan mban jih</i>	<i>Talei ka-ing</i>	<i>Ao khan likei</i>
		

Ban	<i>Khan ban</i>	<i>Ao khan kum</i>
		
<i>Talei praong</i>	<i>Talei anak girut</i>	<i>Talei jih</i>

**e. Names of Cham people textile patterns:**

Name of patterns	Meaning
Takuai katraw	dove neck
Mata manuk	chicken eyes
Patuk hop siap	hop-siap star
Patuk parik	parik star
Cam baraw	new flower
Haraik	creeper
Mata kagaik	gangsaw
Hamek	hamek flower
Wang (wang 2 täl (2 lóp))	wang flower
Pataih	pataih flower
Taduk	button

Haraik mata manuk	creeper and chicken eyes
Bamâk	bamâk flower
Man kam	mankam flower
Tamul	flower of melon
Mata kagaik	gangsaw
Patuk hop	hop star
Tam un	tamun flower
Takai athau	dog footmark
Cakau kalang	eagle claw
Ina girai	dragon
Hiép	hiép flower
Hang	hang flower
Dadaong	dadaong flower
Tamul tek luak	melon flower
Kacak	kacak flower
Bauh rabai	beans flower
Agan wak	agan wak flower

Thuphi	thuphi flower
Coh kamang	spike
Wang 3 tăl	3 wang leaves
Thon hala	pan
Hop jih bamâk	?
Kar bung takai kanhik	?
Kar bung takai bhong	?
Barung	barung star
Găn wak	chan
Kacak hatai bhong	grey lizard
Tataih	tataih flower
Wang agan wak	wang chain
Pataih hop krâh	pataih hop flower
Taduk hluak	tender leaves of hluak tree
Hop agan wak	?
Wang hatai bhong	
Mâta manuk akauk tuak	chicken eyes, head

Kar bung kandah	kar bung kandah flower
Tathau	breast
Kapit	kapit flower
Anâk kacak	lizard

### 3. Situation of Cham weaving conservation

The area where the traditional weaving is still well preserved in Vietnam is My Nghiep village in Ninh Phuoc district (Ninh Thuan province), which is located in the eastern part of the national road 1A<sup>3</sup>. Its population is 3,205 persons (520 households) as of January 2006 according to People's Committee of Ninh Thuan province, all of which are Cham people. This is an agricultural area and they grow rice, vegetables, fruits such as banana, mango. After Tan Giang Dam was constructed this area is provided with irrigated water and farmers began to grow rice twice a year.

However, the cultivation area of the village is not a lot, the total area of the village has only about 100 ha. Income from agricultural production is not enough money to pay for things they need. So textile trade is seen as the main source of income of the household. At present, textile products are not consumed a lot, so the villagers are having difficulties in life. Young people do not want to continue weaving. Most of them left the village to find jobs in cities. In the village only the older people continue to maintain the traditional textile trade.

#### Conservation and development of traditional weaving industry of the Cham people in Vietnam

### III. Conclusion

Weaving industry of the Cham people is one of the earliest traditional industries. It used to existence and very developed in association with Champa's civilization and culture. Today, though weaving products of the Cham people have a very special and diverse identity to meet the market, but still not enough to compete with industrial textile products, thus their traditional weaving industry is gradually being fading now. If there is no solution to conserve and develop it, the weaving industry of Cham people will soon disappear in the near future.

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<sup>3</sup> Distance from National road 1A to village is about 1 km

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