

Religion and Beliefs of the Coastal Residents of Bac Lieu: Cultural Exchange and Change

Trương Thu Trang^{1*} and Nayan Deep Singh Kanwal^{2*}

¹Department of Vietnamese Studies, Bac Lieu University, 178 Vo Thi Sau Street, Ward 8, Bac Lieu City, Bac Lieu Province, Vietnam

²International Research Institute, Mont Kiara, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia 50480.

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*Corresponding Author

Trương Thu Trang

E-mail: tttrangblu1@gmail.com

Co-Author (s)

Author 2: nayan.kanwal@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Studying the process of cultural exchange between ethnic groups will help point out the origin of cultural phenomena, see the changes in cultures, and at the same time understand the feelings of each ethnic group when receiving or not receiving, fully or in part or transforming cultural phenomena of each other. The results of such a study will also help to point out the characteristics and values of the different cultures of different ethnic groups. Applying research theory on cultural exchange and acculturation, along with ethnographic fieldwork research methods and some interdisciplinary research methods, we learn about the cultural absorption and interaction between the three ethnic groups of Kinh – Khmer – Chinese living in the coastal area of Bac Lieu, Vietnam through their religions and beliefs. Specifically, we study their religious practices to explore their origins and characteristics. And when they communicate and convert each other's belief practices, is it passively accepting or they have a choice; at the same time, when they adopt the cultures of other ethnic groups, do they lose the cultural identity of their own people, thereby helping to point out the characteristics and values of religious beliefs in the culture of the three Kinh – Khmer – Chinese ethnic groups in this land?

Keywords: Bac Liêu, Belief, Coastal residents, Religion, Vietnam.

Introduction

According to Barker (2011), the term “cultural acculturation” is widely used in the West, in many social sciences such as anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, etc. This term is translated in Vietnamese as “mixed culture”, “intercultural culture”, and “cultural absorption”. The translation used by many people is “acculturation” (absorbing and changing culture). Cultural exchange is essentially meeting, dialogue, penetration, and learning between cultures. In the process of cultural exchange, cultures complement, receive, and enrich each other, leading to cultural change at different levels.

Studying the process of cultural exchange between ethnic groups will help point out the origin of cultural

phenomena; see changes in cultures; at the same time understand the feelings of each ethnic group when receiving or not receiving, fully or partially absorbing each other's cultural phenomena. The results of this study will also help to point out the characteristics and values of different cultures of different ethnic groups.

In the coastal area of Bac Lieu, residents of the three ethnic groups, Kinh – Khmer - Chinese have had a long process of community settlement, since the time of land reclamation. At the time of the settlement of the community, cultural exchange and acculturation took place. Therefore, we will apply the theory of cultural exchange and acculturation to find out how the cultural reception and cultural interference between the three ethnic groups have happened here. Specifically, we study their religious practices to explore their origins and characteristics. And when they communicate and convert each

♦Kanwal, N.D.S is currently an Independent Researcher, Texas, USA.

other's practices, whether they passively accept or do they have a choice? At the same time, when receiving them, do they lose the cultural identity of their people or not?

According to research on specific issues of religious and belief life in Vietnam, many authors find that Vietnam integrates many forms of religions and beliefs (Toan Anh, 1992; Léopold Cadière, 1997; Dang Nghiem Van, 2001; Ngo Duc Thinh, 2001). Nguyen Thua Hy (2012) specially emphasized the pluralistic community in Vietnamese spiritual beliefs, while Léopold Cadière (1997) has recognized and analyzed thoroughly the religion and beliefs of the Annamese in the old way. The author has pointed out that the religious practices and beliefs of the people here have the integration and reception of many forms of religions and beliefs in the world. The beauty of Vietnamese beliefs lies in the spirit of cultural tolerance.

As for the religion and beliefs in coastal areas, this is a field of research in which many researchers (Le Quang Nghiem, 1970; Nguyen Xuan Huong, 2009; Duong Hoang Loc, 2009; Nguyen Thanh Loi, 2002; Phan An, 2004; Phan Thi Yen Tuyet, 2010; Pham Thanh Tinh, 2012; Pham Tan Thien, 2012) have shown interest. Through describing, analyzing and comparing these works about folk cultural phenomena of coastal residents, the authors outlined the appearance and pointed out the typical values of a number of folk cultural phenomena in each region. When it comes to folk beliefs, the authors agree that, because seafaring life is very uncertain and has many unpredictable risks, therefore coastal communities often conduct many worshiping activities for the purpose of praying for peace.

To understand more about the characteristics and cultural interference between the three ethnic groups of the South in general, and Bac Lieu in particular, through religion and beliefs, we also refer to the research works on southern culture, typically southern culture in Southeast Asian social space (Center for Vietnamese-Southeast Asian Studies, 2000). In order to learn, preserve and promote the national cultural identity, this work has shown the richness of different types of cultures of the people of the South including customs, festivals, and religion. The process of formation, development, characteristics, and the effects of the aforementioned types of cultures on the lives of residents here have been the focus of many clarifying articles. The work thus provides multidimensional knowledge about the culture of the South in view of the correlation with the cultural regions of Southeast Asian countries.

Tales of Ma Chau, Buddha's land strip, The Tales of Mr. Cu's Temple, Ong Ta Temple, The Legend of Ong Fish, The

Legend of Ong Fish Nam Hai, The Tale of Ong Bon Temple (Chu Xuan Dien, 2005) contributed to explain some phenomena of religion, beliefs, folk festivals, or customs of Bac Lieu people in general, and Bac Lieu coastal people in particular.

In Bac Lieu, the cultural intersection between the three ethnic groups in the coastal area, Kinh – Khmer – Chinese is manifested by their acceptance of each other's forms of religion and belief, it is also an expression of cultural tolerance. However, regarding the cause of the interference, contact and exchange of religions and beliefs between the three ethnic groups mentioned above in the coastal area of Bac Lieu, there is still much more to be discussed. For example, the process of reclaiming land and starting a community is also a factor affecting cultural exchange. During the research we will also pay attention to these issues.

Method

Applying the theory of cultural exchange and acculturation, from the perspective of cultural chemistry, we put the research object into the overall picture of the relationships between humans and nature and between humans and humans to explore research objects from many different dimensions, to understand how people in the Bac Lieu coastal area use religion and religious practices to adapt and adjust to their living environment, and how they balance their lives. Along with this, this paper aims to put those religious practices and beliefs in the general context of society, relying on interdisciplinary knowledge to study the origin, characteristics, role, etc., of those cultural forms, in a comparative correlation between the three ethnic groups Kinh – Khmer - Chinese.

To do this we use a number of specialized and interdisciplinary research methods as follows:

The first is the ethnographic fieldwork method, returning to the coastal area where residents of the three ethnic groups Kinh – Khmer - Chinese in Bac Lieu have been living, observing their religious practices, as well as interviewing them to understand their moods and other issues when they adopt and practice each other's beliefs.

Secondly, interdisciplinary methods such as history, ethnography, psychology, etc., allow us to find out about the journeys and origins of ethnic groups, understand how the community process takes place, the psychological element of wanting to live in harmony in the new land

has no impact on the cultural interference and acculturation between them through religious beliefs, thereby seeing the value of the reception of beliefs among peoples to forming new cultural elements.

The third is operations such as analysis, synthesis, comparison, system, helping us to systematize problems, analyze, compare and see important problems after synthesizing the results of the survey.

Cultural exchange manifestations through religion and beliefs in the Bac Lieu coastal area

Result and discussion

Expressed through ritual practice

One of the clear manifestations of cultural exchange in religions and beliefs in the coastal area of Bac Lieu is seen in the ritual practices of all three Kinh – Khmer - Chinese ethnic groups in this area.

Surveying worship facilities in both festivals and on weekdays, we found that most people have similar religious behaviors and ritual practices.

For example, on weekdays, when coming to Quan Am Phat Dai, most people come to burn incense and bow at the statue of Nam Hai Bodhisattva (the statue is 11m high facing the sea); then they step on the base of the statue, go to the lotus station where the Bodhisattva statue is placed, water the lotus, and then use their hands to catch the water flowing down from the lotus, while applying it to their hair, face, body, and praying silently to receive the best. Even the Khmer, who worship only Buddha Shakyamuni, come here and perform this ritual.

People also come to Lang Ong Ganh Hao (Ganh Hao Town, Dong Hai District, Bac Lieu Province) to touch the head and body of Ong fish, then stroke his head and body and pray. Here, the fish model restored from real leather is placed outside, and not in a glass cage.

Besides, in the coastal area of Vinh Thinh commune, Hoa Binh district, during the Nghinh Ong ritual, fishermen's boats often follow the boat carrying Long Dinh (that is, the main boat carrying the altar of Ong fish worship and the team performing the ceremony). During this time, fishermen in boats following the main boat perform the ritual of taking water from the sea behind the main boat to distribute it on their boats for good luck.

Going to a 300-year-old mango tree, people also touch the tree trunk or hug and press against the tree trunk and pray for the good.

When asked about the reason for this ritual, the people said that doing so they will be assisted by Grandparents, Grandmothers..., granted with supernatural divine power, being infused with aura to fight disease and fight against all the disasters of life.

Besides, there is a very simple reason that people "imitate" each other in ritual practice. Many people around the area and especially people from faraway said that they saw many other people practicing the ritual as mentioned above, so they followed suit. They all think that if they do not perform such rituals, they will feel extremely insecure inside, and so the ceremony spread strongly.

All the above rituals are performed voluntarily by people, in the style of "customary admission", without "cultural coercion", not intended to be directed by anyone. When people in the North and the Central come here and visit these worship facilities, they also follow the ritual of the local people to pray for good luck. They also said that if they come from far away but do not follow the local rituals, they are afraid of being punished by the "superior". This shows that even though society is modern today, the spiritual life still has a dense hold. In deep ambiguity, people are still afraid of the supernatural, the unknown. The process of cultural reception through the above rituals is done voluntarily for spiritual reasons. Together they practice the ritual in search of "spiritual security", as Oscar Salemink said. They practice rituals to seek peace, avoid punishment, in the style of "If you know how to worship, you will meet the god who bestows good luck, and if you know the taboo, you will be safe".

Performing the above-mentioned rituals, different ethnic groups do not seriously think about preserving their national identity or about the ceremonial origin of any ethnic group, nor about the object of the belief source. They only think it is the god of the country, the god of this sea, protecting them in the wind and waves, so they worship and voluntarily perform the same rituals.

In addition, according to Oscar Salemink (2005), most people find it safe to become part of a group – a family, a community, an organization, an ethnic group or race. Together they practice a ritual to find connection with the community, find themselves in the community, become a close bonded member of the marine community. Going to the Sea is one of the very dangerous career activities, calamities lurking all over the place, so those who are

in this profession need assistance. Therefore, the same activities also show solidarity and attachment between people.

Particularly for the Nam Hai Bodhisattva festival, the festival program is designed with the intention of cultural exchange between the three ethnic groups in a very bold way, pray for the peace of the country and people during the three days of the festival. The first day is peace ceremony of the Kinh people; the second day is the peace ceremony of the Chinese and the third day is the peace ceremony of the Khmer.

Thus, the Organizing Committee of Nam Hai Bodhisattva Festival is aware that this is a common festival of the three ethnic groups, showing solidarity. The ritual of praying for peace of each ethnic group still ensures the survival of its own characteristics, according to its own rites, meaning that in this case they are aware of the exchange but do not lose their cultural identity.

Besides, in the prayer ceremony it is also necessary to chant 500 times the title of Bodhisattva. Normally, this ritual is not followed by Khmer people, but at Linh Ung Pagoda, in Dong Hai district, this ritual involves all three ethnic groups. Especially at this temple, besides the abbot of the temple, no one is a monk anymore, only the people around assist the temple in all activities, including taking part in a the prayer ceremony of chanting 500 times the title of Bodhisattva once a year at this temple.

Regarding preserving identity in cultural exchange, in the coastal area of Bac Lieu, we find that the Khmer have a deeper awareness of preserving national identity. For example, they only worship Sakyamuni Buddha. When there was a Khmer pagoda worshiping Bodhisattva, they met opposition from Khmer monks and relatives around the area; or the sea god to them is still the natural god, they absolutely do not believe and do not worship Grandparents. During the Nghinh Ong festival, very few Khmer people attend the ceremony.

As for the Vietnamese and Chinese, we found the exchange of cultural practices in them stronger, especially the Vietnamese. Because of their nature they like to communicate openly, and easily accept new things. Especially when returning to a new land, Bac Lieu people are more open-minded, so they are ready to accept the culture and accept the beliefs of each other, regardless of which nation's deities they are, whenever they learn about them they will worship; Chinese people have a need to deeply integrate with the Vietnamese, many people express their desire to become authentic Vietnamese,

to be integrated, to be officially a part of Vietnam, as the people of Vietnam.

Expressed through the form of self-coordination

Self-coordination in worship facilities has become very popular. Particularly in the Mekong Delta, the coordination in the communal house, pagoda, and temple is more concentrated. The coastal area of Bac Lieu is no exception. One will easily see different Gods and Buddhas worshiped in the same temple.

For example, in the scope of the survey, at Van Ban Ngu Hanh Temple, we encountered many Gods, Buddhas, Bodhisattvas worshiped in the same shrine, such as: Buddha Shakyamuni, Seven Ladies, Bodhisattva Quan The Am, Ngoc Hoang, Earth Mother, Ca Ong, Ong Ho, God of Fortune – Earth Land or at Ong Fish Mausoleum in Ganh Hao town, which was formerly a shrine to worship Mother Thien Hau; since the fish Ong died, fishermen brought Ong fish to worship with Thien Hau in this shrine.

In VinhThinh commune, Hoa Binh district, according to people, over a hundred years ago, there was a small shrine dedicated to Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva. Until recently, in 2010, a fisherman who went fishing at sea met Ong dead fish who was drifting into this sea area, so he brought Ong fish to be worshiped together with the Bodhisattva. After that, they built Ong Fish Mausoleum next to the Temple of Bodhisattva. However, since Ong fish was worshiped here, the Bodhisattva's custodian moved the Bodhisattva picture to the right side, and at the same time, on the left side Thuy Long God was worshiped, giving up the central position to Ong fish. To explain this, people think that when placing Ong fish next to Bodhisattva, the fish must put it in the middle, because men are bigger than women. According to the traditions of ancestor worship, the people believe the Ong fish to be the father and the Bodhisattva to be the Mother.

In addition, on the right side, next to the image of Bodhisattva, is a picture of Quan Cong. Regarding this, the guardians of the Mausoleum could not explain why Quan Cong was worshiped here. However, according to Mr. Nguyen Thanh Loi, in Quang Hoi village (Van Thang commune, Van Ninh district, Khanh Hoa) there are legends related to Quan Cong and Ca Ong Nam Hai. Legend has it that a phoenix lays two eggs, one falling into the East Sea, turning into the Nam Hai (whale) and the other falling on the mainland and being hatched into a common rose by a monk. For hundreds of days into Quan Cong, this person was suppressed outside the ringing of

the bell. So is it because of this legend that the people here worship Quan Cong? This is also very likely, because the people around here are people from the North and Central areas, so perhaps they know about this legend and worship Quan Cong here.

Besides, a number of other worshipping institutions combine to worship Than Da (Thach Than); although it is a coastal area, there are no mountains that match the same message as the highlands. This is due to the influence of Khmer Stone worshipping custom.

Vietnamese worship facilities often exhibit cultural chaos through a combination of Gods and Buddhas of different ethnic groups. In an original Chinese temple which only worships Lady Thien Hau, after being taken over by the Vietnamese, gradually there will be more Gods and Buddhas. Vietnamese people often do not care about the origin of the object being worshiped; they are only interested in how to have an idol or a Buddha for them to worship, to satisfy their spiritual needs. At the same time, if the Free Church is under the supervision of the Vietnamese, they will tend to observe whether there are Khmer or Chinese people living around, if so they will invite Khmer followers. The purpose is to satisfy the spiritual needs of all three peoples. Moreover, for Vietnamese people, whenever they hear which deities or Buddhas are sacred, they are willing to worship without having to trace their origins.

Another case where there are signs of worshipping many gods at the same temple is at Quan Am Phat Dai, the largest temple on the coast of Bac Lieu. The Bodhisattva being worshiped today is Quan Am Nam Hai. However, the Nam Hai Quan Yin Festival is held during the three days of March 22, 23 and 24, the three days of the birth of Ms. Thien Hau, a goddess originating in China. Thus, it is likely that before, the main object of worship at this temple, there was Ms. Thien Hau, a goddess specializing in saving people in distress.

In addition, except for the Khmer worship establishment, all other worshipping institutions along the coast of Bac Lieu are dedicated to worshipping Than Tai – Tho Dia at the foot of the main shrines. The implication of worshipping Than Tai – Tho Dia here has not been clearly explained by the person in charge of the worshipping committee.

Expressed through tales of the history of the Gods

One of the manifestations of cultural exchange in the coastal area of Bac Lieu is the reception of the Gods of the

worshiped object. When there are three ethnic groups Kinh – Khmer - Chinese, it is necessary to explain the origin of the Gods and Buddha. They pass down all the folktales, then, depending on each ethnic group, some details of the stories are told to suit the mind of the people, and at the same time to show that this deity, Buddha, has the origin of his people. The process of changing story details is the process of “nationalizing” the Gods and the Buddha that are being worshiped.

Worship of Mr. Ta (Néak Ta), is a long-standing folk belief of the Khmer. This belief is held by the Vietnamese and has been deeply embedded in the culture of the nation. In the coastal area of Bac Lieu, not only the Khmer, the Vietnamese, but also the Chinese absorbed the Ta Than belief and the Chinese also have a sense of nationalizing this God. From the story of the Ta Than of the Khmer, the Chinese received and transformed a little bit and told that:

“At the beginning of the hamlet establishment, people often suffered from dangerous diseases and insecure lives. Therefore, the first group of residents who came here with the knowledge about fengshui chose the land in the middle of the dragon’s belly as a suitable place to build a shrine to worship Mr. Ta. They always believe that Mr. Ta will keep the sacred dragon and bring a peaceful life for everyone. Later, thanks to the monks who worshiped in the fields, people knew that the God of worship in the temple was Mr. Truong Minh Chuong from China. This God has blessed the Tieu people to live peacefully and do well. The Khmer also built a Ta temple next to the Chinese one. Every year, people in the area often organize to light incense to worship Mr. Ta to give thanks and thanksgiving”(Emily & Lavenda, 1995).

In addition, there are many tales about Ong fish. Each ethnic group worshipping Ong fish has transformed the story into a story of its own.

The Cham people believe that the whale is the incarnation of a god named Father Ail Va. Because he was anxious to return to his hometown after a period of study, Father Ail Va disobeyed his teacher, turned himself into a whale, went out to the big river and then was punished. Father Ail Va changed his name and called himself Po Riyah (tsunami of the Sea) and at one point transformed into a swan, becoming the benefactor of those who were shipwrecked (Danh Thanh Hien, 2013).

The Vietnamese people have a legend about Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva going and returning to the South Sea. She was heartbroken when she saw many

fishermen die at sea because they could not find a grain of rice to survive. Therefore, she took a torn robe and threw it into the sea and turned into a herd of whales specializing in rescuing victims (Nguyen Xuan Kinh, 2009).

In Bac Lieu, the belief of Nam Hai Bodhisattva was deeply rooted in the mind of the people of the sea. Vietnamese fishermen often tell the legend of Nam Hai Ong fish according to the Buddha's tale similar to the story mentioned above, but there are some changes:

"Previously, fishermen used to go to the sea often to encounter big waves and big storms that overturn the boat. To help people in distress, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva took one of the five thousand pieces of cloth off his robes and threw it into the sea. The cloth turned into Ong fish and saved fishermen in tribulation. Next to the fish he always has his assistants, which are two Sauries. Ong fish has saved many people out of danger in the sea. Fishermen love and worship fish. He should call it "Nam Hai Tuong Quan", "Ngoc Loan Ton Than".

Besides, there is the story about Ong fish saving people which led her to have a miscarriage outside the Ong Doc estuary. The story goes, one day, there was a big storm, at that time there were boats still floating on the sea, unable to reach the shore, Ong fish saw that but came back to save the people. In spite of the big waves and wind, she saved several people, as a result of which she was exhausted and had a miscarriage.

In respect of Ong fish, every year, fishermen hold "Nghinh Ong" ceremony to commemorate the merits of Ong fish" (Thich Minh Lanh, 2012).

This story is both to explain the origin of Ong fish, and also to show the intention of worshiping Guanyin Nam Hai, a Bodhisattva who has staunch believers in this land.

The Bac Lieu people often talked about the Ong fish, saving fishermen, and in doing so, miscarriage and dying. This is probably derived from the story of a fish that miscarried, drifted into the village and was worshiped by people (Tran Hong Lien, 2004). Perhaps that is why there are opinions discussing the gender of the fish. This is also an interesting issue; when possible, we will continue to study in a separate treatise.

It can be seen that cultural exchange has become a need of the peoples living next to each other. However, in the process of exchanging and receiving each other's beliefs, each ethnic group often uses many different ways, including converting story details to convert their beliefs to

the closest – most suitable for their people. At the same time, it also allows other ethnic groups to see the importance of their own people in the community settlement process. However, this is one of the reasons that cause the phenomenon of overlapping cultural layers. This will make it difficult for the next generation to separate cultural classes to study the indigenous culture of an ethnic group, or to study and trace the origin of a folk custom or belief that has existed for a long time in folk.

Changes in religion and beliefs in the Bac Lieu coastal area in contemporary life

Expressed through the spread of religious beliefs

In Bac Lieu, coastal residents live mainly by fishing and aquaculture, forming regional cultural features different from the city or the countryside. One of those characteristics is religious beliefs, expressed through the beliefs of Nam Hai Bodhisattva, Ba Thien Hau, Ong fish.

Nowadays, the belief of coastal residents of Bac Liêu is spreading strongly across all people in the province and some other provinces.

In this regard, F. Rats, one of the first founders of the theory of "Cultural diffusion" in Western Europe, argues that "the exposure and dissemination (propagation) of cultural achievements are attributes. L. Frobenius also thinks that cultural exchange and fusion in cultural development and transfer among ethnic groups and regions around the world consider it as the basic law of cultural development (Huynh Minh, 2002).

As mentioned above, at present, at Quan Am Phat Dai, not only during Tet holidays but on weekdays, people inside and outside the province often come to burn incense to pray for peace. Visitors of all classes, all different professions come to the temple to pray for everything that happens in their lives.

So the Bodhisattva, as a sacred support for coastal residents, gradually changed his position, becoming the Bodhisattva of everyone. Quan Am Phat Dai is located on the coast, surrounded by tourist areas and tourist services, so it is also very convenient for visitors to light incense to pray to Buddha and perform entertainment activities.

The belief of Nam Hai Bodhisattva in Bac Lieu is followed by pilgrims, travelers, traders and has spread throughout the Mekong Delta and surrounding areas. The cultural

exchange and fusion here happen naturally, without any intention, only by spiritual beliefs that this belief has a very strong pervasive power. Currently, during the holidays, Quan Am Phat Dai area has no room to crowd visitors; they have to park their cars about 5km from Quan Am Phat Dai, and then walk to the stage. Each year more and more visitors come to worship.

Mausoleum of Ong Ganh Hao or Lang Ong Vinh Think is no exception, although the number of visitors coming here is not compared with Quan Am Phat Dai but is equally diverse. Ong fish not only supports fishermen but also serves as a spiritual support for many people inside and outside the province.

Through observation, chatting with tourists, with people, with some experts, we have summarized a few more causes and explanations for this phenomenon.

In a conversation with the attendees of the Nghinh Ong Ganh Hao festival, a native of Nam Can district, Ca Mau province said, he had heard about the festival for a long time, but only in recent years (2014) had he been able to visit with the construction of a road to area. So for the first time he had the opportunity to attend a noisy festival like this. Some officials from the district cultural office also said that due to convenient transportation, the number of visitors attending the festival was twice or three times higher than before. In addition, due to the increasing human life expectancy, improved physical conditions, the demand for traveling, visiting different regions of the country as a form of special tourism has emerged. This is especially selected by the people as spiritual tourism. People, especially the elderly, love to participate in tours that combine visiting famous worship facilities.

This means that cultural exchanges and changes are also influenced by socioeconomic conditions. When people have better economic conditions, more developed society will promote commercial activities, tourism, etc., thereby enabling the spread of culture, cultural development to the community in many different ways.

Expression through the pilgrim's mindset

One of the changes of religion and beliefs in the Bac Lieu coastal area is the tendency to form entertainment functions of religion and beliefs here. It is expressed through the pilgrim mentality. Despite being called pilgrims many visitors come to coastal worshiping facilities without any interest in lighting incense and bowing to the Buddha. Instead, their main activities are sightseeing, photography, and shopping.

In addition, to meet the needs of visitors, some worshiping facilities have expanded the pagoda scene for tourism. For example, Quan Am Phat Dai built Mount Guan Yin, 32 incarnations of Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, and a number of other works; Mausoleum of Ong Ganh Hao built Bat Nha boat with Nam Hai Bodhisattva standing above, facing the sea; and the Siamese Pagoda plans to apply to build a Sala for tourists to rest.

Along with the objective of worship, going to pagodas, churches, and shrines is also coming to a different world, experiencing many things one does not know. This is also a form of relief from the chaos of life. The function of religious beliefs at this time tends to serve tourism. It is an *"adaptive or adaptive function, to maintain more or less harmonious relations between the natural environment and the cultural community – the ethnic group"* (Tocarev, 1994).

One of the reasons for the change in the form of getting tattoos is also to serve this target. Tattooing has become a cultural and spiritual activity for folk from north to south. The tattoo kit includes a tattoo card set and two glue sticks. The person applying for tattoos needs to light incense to pray and then shake the box containing the tattoo cards so that a card is dropped. Next, you have to apply for a KEO, if you apply for one face down card, one card face up is a successful tattoo application, otherwise if both the KEO cards are both face up, you must pray and do it again. After applying for a tattoo, the person applying for a tattoo will bring the tattoo card to the temple and ask the temple to explain. However, nowadays, because the number of visitors is too crowded, customers are crowded to apply for tattoos, so the form of applying for tattoos has changed. Some places also keep both tattoo cards and two hexagrams and then they make photocopies of the solutions for customers to take home to read. There are places where the hexagram is completely removed, only the box containing the tattoo cards is left, applicants just need to shake the card to drop a card. Or some places give up tattooing kits completely, but only use the form of "drawing tattoo cards". In this way, the tattoo cards are printed numerically on each folded word, and put in the box. The person applying for a tattoo needs to just pick up one sheet for himself and see the solution after that.

Thus, the more modern the socio-economic conditions are, the more forms of religious beliefs will change to suit the times. And partly for this reason, many festivals, including those in the Bac Lieu coastal area, appear to be commercialized. Regarding this, the author Le Hong Ly (2008) has discussed at length in the project, the impact of the market economy on the religious festival". Many

people come to the festival for the purpose of having fun and shopping in a large-scale “fair”. Therefore, the Organizing Committee organizes the Trade Fair around the festival area to meet the needs of the people. The attitude of some pilgrims to Bac Lieu coastal worshipping facilities reminds us of the clash between tradition and modernity.

The phenomenon of tourists coming to communal houses, temples, pagodas, etc., but not lighting incense, not kneeling, not celebrating and only taking photos, filming, shopping, etc., is creating a big change in style of customs and beliefs.

Expressed through festival organization activities, through rituals

Currently, the festival organization in Bac Lieu coastal area is changing towards “synchronizing” festival activities. That is, festivals often have scripts available, or they hire a festival scriptwriter. In addition, the Festival Organizing Committee often goes to the festival-like places in their locality to learn from experiences, learn how to organize the festival, and learn the rituals and activities taking place during the festival. For example, when coming to Nghinh Ong festival in Ganh Hao, we will see the same as Nghinh Ong in Vinh Thinh, similar to Nghinh Ong in Song Doc – Ca Mau.

Coming to Nghinh Ong festival in Ganh Hao, exchanging with Ceremony Organizing Committee, a senior member of the organizing committee said that they often facilitate surveying other places, learning to enrich the festival’s activities. When other places have good activities, Ceremony Organizing Committee brings it back to apply in the festival in their locality. The cultural office also said that now, if you want to attract people to the festival, thereby promoting trade, and socio-economic development, the festival must be organized. There should be a large-scale organization with many new activities attracting visitors.

Therefore, it can be said that learning from each other during festivals has become a habit. Although this enriches the festival activities and attracts tourists, it can also diminish each festival’s unique characteristics.

As for the Nghinh Ong festival in Vinh Thinh, although basically similar to the Nghinh Ong festival in Ganh Hao (the two localities are only about 30 km apart), a few points have been changed differently by the Organizing Committee. The Nghinh Ong festival in Vinh Thinh has only been held for the fifth time, while in Ganh Hao it has

been held for the twelfth time. The organizers of Nghinh Ong in Vinh Thinh consulted the way of Nghinh Ong in Ganh Hao, and later organized it a little differently.

The first point is the solemn arrangement of the Uncle Ho altar in the middle of the boat carrying Long Dinh to Nghinh Ong. In Vinh Thinh, the arrangement of the Uncle Ho’s altar is always very careful.

The second point- at Ganh Hao, the boat carrying Long Dinh Nghinh Ong is often tied to two other boats on both sides, implying one-hearted solidarity, at the same time letting the boat firmly do the ceremony without being disturbed by the waves. Only when asked for the hexagram did the three boats split apart and return. In Vinh Thinh, there is no ceremony of poles, boats carrying Long Dinh run first, in the middle, other large ones and small boats follow behind.

The third point – at Ganh Hao, all offerings on Nghinh Ong boat after worshipping are brought back. In Vinh Thinh, the rituals after asking for the hexagram are dumped into the sea, including things such as: grandfather’s shirt, soldier’s shirt, gold and silver banknotes, pig’s head, boiled chicken, sticky rice, salted rice, and fruit. Other boats also bring silver and gold banknotes to scatter them into the sea.

The fourth point – Nghinh Ong in Vinh Thinh has a bigger “procession of the Nam Hai country”. Soldiers hold the flag “Procession of the Nam Hai country”. Coming to the sea gate, when the ceremony master asks for hexagrams, he immediately allows the person to take sea water to take back to the boat. This seawater, after being brought back, is poured into nine urns at Lang Ong, implying that it has brought him to the Mausoleum.

Finding out the reason for this, we came to know that the elders and the host committee in this locality belong to the people from the North and the Central areas, so some rituals are mixed between two cultural flows. Practicing Nghinh Ong is mixed with the custom of receiving water from outside.

F.Rats once pointed out the method of cultural transmission: 1. Spreading the whole culture from community to community, also known as acculturation and 2. Spreading or moving each cultural element individually in different forms from population point from one residence to another (Ha Van Tan, 1981).

The case of the Nghinh Ong Festival in Vinh Thinh and Ganh Hao is the spread of individual cultural elements among cultural regions, creating new cultural nuances.

In addition, the Nam Hai Bodhisattva festival over time also changed some rituals. For example, the ritual of praying for peace in this festival aims to unite the three ethnic groups Kinh – Khmer - Chinese. During the three days of the festival, the first day is the Vietnamese people's peace ceremony, the second day is the Chinese people's peace ceremony, the third day is the Khmer people's peace ceremony. The daily rituals correspond to the ritual characteristics of each (Kinh, Chinese or Khmer) ethnic group.

Thus, the Nam Hai Bodhisattva festival has no longer meant the typical festival of the coastal people, but has become a festival of three ethnic groups, meaning community unity, a festival organized gradually towards both security and tourism.

Conclusion

Through surveys and studies of the current situation, we found that the reception of religions and beliefs of coastal residents of Bac Lieu took place strongly, especially for the Kinh. The Kinh are highly correlated with the religious forms and beliefs of other ethnic groups. Particularly for the Khmer and Chinese, some want to retain the typical cultural characteristics of the nation, while some want to integrate and exchange. With religious beliefs, too, the Chinese and the Khmer also accept the religion and beliefs of the Kinh and cultural exchanges with each other.

It is the cultural exchange that has created a change in religion and belief in the coastal area of Bac Lieu. This change significantly changed the appearance of a number of religions and beliefs in coastal areas. It both helps to form new features, while being able to erase some of the traditional values.

The results of this research help the next generation to understand clearly the religious and belief origins of their own people, thereby respectfully preserving that cultural capital. At the same time, I understand why there are strong cultural interference and transformation phenomena of the three ethnic groups in the Bac Lieu coastal area, forming new cultural elements that are both beneficial to the community and harmony process. Among ethnic groups, it is necessary to respectfully preserve, otherwise it will lead to the loss of ethnic roots, erase the culture, and will not be beneficial to preserving the national cultural identity.

Therefore, in order for the religion and belief of the Bac Liêu coastal area to develop in a sustainable direction, it

is necessary to have follow-up studies, from which there are integrated solutions to preserve and promote the cultural values of the region Bac Lieu beach, including the religion and beliefs of the inhabitants here.

Competing Interests Statement

The author(s) declare that they have no significant competing financial, professional, or personal interests that might have influenced the performance or presentation of the work described in this manuscript.

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Biographical Statement of Author(s)

Trương Thu Trang was born in Vietnam in 1981. She received her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees from Can Tho University, Vietnam in 2004 and 2010; respectively. She then received her Ph.D. from the Academy of Social Sciences of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences in 2017.



She has been teaching at the Faculty of Education, Bac Lieu University since 2007. Currently she is the Head of the Department of Vietnamese Studies at the Faculty of Education.

Her research interests are religion, folklore beliefs, folklore, and tourism culture.

Dr. Trương Thu Trang

Faculty of Education
Bac Lieu University
178 Vo Thi Sau Street, Ward 8
Bac Lieu City, Vietnam

E-mail: tttrangblu1@gmail.com

Nayan Deep S. Kanwal was born in 1958. He received the BAG, and M.Sc., degrees from UPNG in 1982 and 1984, respectively, and received a French government scholarship in 2005 to undertake his Ph.D. from France.



He joined Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia, in 1996. Since then, he has been with UPM where he served as a Lecturer. In addition, he functioned as the Chief Executive Editor with several prestigious academic journals. Subsequently in 2018, he was offered to work as a visiting Professor at BINUS University, Indonesia.

His main areas of research interest are environmental issues, and English language studies.

Professor Kanwal is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (FRSA), United Kingdom, a Life Member of the British Institute of Management (BIM), United Kingdom, an Associate Member of the Marketing Institute of Singapore (AMIS) and an Associate Member of the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science and Technology (AIAST).

Professor Dr. Nayan Deep S. Kanwal

Independent Researcher
Texas, USA

E-mail: nayan.kanwal@gmail.com