Champa Culture in Today’s Vietnam

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Abstract

This research paper investigates Champa Culture in South Asia region and in Vietnam in modern World. The main objectives are especially to provide comprehensive overview of Cham Culture in South Asia and Vietnam in modern World, to provide with examples of Cham Structures – especially buildings and such as, and to act as an entry point for scholars and people interested in Cham Culture or South Asia Culture.

Keywords: Champa, South Asia, Modern World, Vietnam.

1. Introduction

The main purpose of this article is to create an overview of Chams Culture and their heritage in Vietnam in 21st Century, focusing especially on its location. The objectives of the research paper are:

a) To provide comprehensive overview of Cham Culture in South Asia and Vietnam in modern World,
b) To provide with examples of Cham Structures – especially buildings and such as,
c) To act as an entry point for scholars and people interested in Cham Culture or South Asia Culture.

The overview research paper is done with methodology of literature review, sources compilation and synthesis.
2. Champa Culture and Empire

The Cham ethnic group initially arose during the Cham Pa kingdom's rule over the central coastal region of Vietnam between the fourth and twelfth centuries (VNA, 2020).

They built numerous prominent structures around their dominion at the time. Some of the towers that are still standing today are Po Nagar tower in Khanh Hoa province, Po Klong Garai and Po Rome towers in Ninh Thuan province, Nhan tower in Phu Yen province, and notably the UNESCO-recognized My Son sanctuary, where there are now 21 towers left standing (VNA, 2020).

Researchers give the architecture of the Cham ethnic group, which may be seen in the relics and may be comparable to other such ancient construction projects (VNA, 2020).

The Chams were a nautical society as a result of their location along the coast. The commerce in spices and silk between China, India, Indonesia, and Persia was governed by the Champa Kingdom during its height (Vietnam Travel, 2022).

As Vietnam Travel (2022) includes, this very cosmopolitan culture was greatly impacted by Hindu doctrines brought over from India. Many of their temples are dedicated to Shiva, who is frequently represented by a linga, and their sculptures feature a variety of Hindu deities.

Hindu theories were mixed with indigenous beliefs, such their notion that they were derived from Po Nagar, a goddess formed from heavenly clouds and sea foam. She created the soil, trees, and rice. She is also referred to as the Mother of the World. She also showed humanity how to live off the land (Vietnam Travel, 2022).

2.1 Spread of Cham Culture in South Asia – Example of Champa Empire

As states Britannica (2022), from roughly the 18th parallel in the north to Point Ke Ga (Cape Varella) in the south, the Champa, Chinese Lin-yi, ancient Indochinese monarchy spanned the middle and southern coastal region of Vietnam from the 2nd to the 17th century AD. Champa was formerly inhabited by the Cham, a Malayo-
Polynesian race with an Indianized culture. The Cham culture had a significant impact on the Vietnamese, who eventually absorbed Champa (Britannica, 2022).

In maritime Southeast Asia, the Cham people had built up enormous and intricate webs of connections that included activity in the political, religious, cultural, and commercial sectors (Abdul Hamid, 2006).

The following figure shows the spread of Champa Empire in South East Asia as presented by Siebenhutter (2019).

Champa Empire and Cham Culture Spread in South Asia

![Champa Empire and Cham Culture Spread in South Asia](source: Siebenhutter, 2019)

As can be seen, the core of Champa Empire used to be located mainly in Vietnam and Cambodia, partially also in Lao PR.

2.1.1. Champa Empire in Vietnam – short history

Britannica (2022) says that Champa Empire was under pressure from the Vietnamese kingdom of Dai Viet in the tenth century, and as a result, it ceded Amaravati in 1000 and Vijaya in 1069. Further Vietnamese and Cambodian raids were repelled by Harivarman IV, who established the ninth Cham dynasty in 1074, but in 1145 the Khmers attacked and destroyed Champa under the forceful leadership of Suryavarman II. Two years later, Jaya Harivarman I, a new Cham ruler, ascended to
power and overthrew the Khmer Empire. In 1177, Jaya Harivarman I's successor stormed the Cambodian capital of Angkor. The Chams were once more subject to Cambodian rule between 1190 and 1220, and later in the 13th century they came under siege from the Tran monarchs of Vietnam as well as the Mongols in 1284 (Britannica, 2022).

Following figure shows Champa Kingdom between Khymer Empire and Dai Viet Empire as it faced pressure from both sides (Watt, 2022).

Champa Empire between Khymer Empire and Dai Viet

![Champa Empire between Khymer Empire and Dai Viet](source: Watt, 2022)

**2.1.2. Cham People in Vietnam in the 21st Century**

Nowadays, more over 160,000 Cham live in Vietnam, mostly in the provinces of Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan as well as portions of Phu Yen, Binh Dinh, An Giang, Tay Ninh, and Ho Chi Minh City. The south-central beaches are dotted with Cham settlements (Nga, 2013).

Nga (2013) also states that the Chams are made up of several local groups with diverse cultures, religions, and ideologies. Some people go to mosques, while others
worship in pagodas or tower temples. According to Le Duy Dai of the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology, there are four different groups of Cham in Vietnam (Nga, 2013):

1. Balamon – following Hindu,
2. Bani – following old Islam teachings,
3. Islam – following current Islam,

Nga (2013) also says that in contrast to the Cham Bani, who practice traditional Islam, the Cham Islam adhere to modern or conventional Islam. The southern delta provinces of An Giang, Tay Ninh, and Ho Chi Minh City are where the majority of the Cham Muslims reside. They formerly moved from Vietnam to Cambodia before coming back and settling in the southern delta (Nga, 2013).

Above-written means that Islam, in certain form may be present in Vietnam and may be connected to Cham culture.

3. Chams Culture in Vietnam in 21st Century

Cham (Champa) Culture is still preserved, especially in Cambodia and Vietnam. In this chapter, I will present Cham Culture in Vietnam. Nowadays, there are certain main Champa heritage that are easily-to-be accessed from major Vietnamese cities. Such an heritage sites include for instance:

- My Son – so called “Spiritual Capital of Champa” – easily accessible from Da Nang Airport,
- Hoi An, Hue and Da Nang – easily accessible from Da Nang Airport,
- Other cities and locations such as Binh Dinh (city centre) and Phan Thiet (nearby Mui Ne) – accessible by motorbike or taxi from Mui Ne and Ho Chi Minh City.
Champa Empire has been in conflicts with Dai Viet People as well as with Khmer (Cambodia). This affected especially Champa Culture in Cambodia.

As Watt (2022) adds, only subsequent battles with the Khmers, who rebelled against the empire and caused it to divide, rivaled its conflict with Champa, which resulted in the abandoning of Angkor in favor of Phnom Penh in the middle of the fourteenth century. While Hinduism and Buddhism were both a component of its culture, Buddhism's escalating dominance from the 1300s onward had a role in the fall of the kingdom (Watt, 2022).

The following figure shows example of Champa Empire sculptures which can be seen all over Vietnam.

Example of Champa Sculptures.

Source: Author.
Champa Empire also left many Tower-like structures and similar building all over Vietnam. Such a structures were used for instance for worshiping. Following figure shows example of such as structure.

**Example of Champa Tower-like structure nearby Phan Thiet (South Vietnam).**

*Source: Author.*

**Example of Champa Tower-like structure nearby Phan Thiet (South Vietnam)**

*Source: Author.*
Map of current cultural heritage of old Champa Empire in Vietnam also include following heritage sites:

- Indrapura – capital of Kingdom of Champa, nowadays in Quang Nam province in Central Vietnam,
- Vijaya – today in Qui Nhon, Binh Dinh province,
- Kauthara – today nearby Nha Trang,
- Panduranga – today in Ninh Thuan.

4. Discussion

The discussion shall be focused on how to preserve Champa Empire Heritage – both tangible and intangible – for future generation not only in Vietnam, but also in whole South Asia region. This includes following questions:

- How to preserve structures, buildings and such as?
- How to preserve intangible heritage such as Cham culture, traditions and behaviour and customs?
- Are Webinars and Culture-related meetings regarding spreading knowledge of Cham Culture and Traditions sufficient to preserve the knowledge of culture?

We cannot forget that Cham Couture is a part of Culture of many countries in the South Asia region, especially Vietnam, Cambodia and Lao PR.

5. Conclusion

Champa Empire is still present in form of structures, buildings and traditions. It is a good sign that both – tangible and intangible heritage – of Champa Culture have been preserved; however now it is a question on how to preserve Champa Culture in today’s fast-changing modern World, especially in Cambodia and Vietnam.

Nowadays, there are four kind of Chams in Vietnam, Balamons who follow Hindu, Bani who are following old Islam teachings, Cham Islam – following current Islam, and Hrois who do not follow any religion.
Important cultural heritage sites include Quang Nam province in Central Vietnam (former Indrapura), Qui Nhon in Binh Dinh province (former city of Vijaya), Nha Trang (former Kauthara) and Ninh Thuan (former Panduranga).

References


