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The Cham People

The Malayo-Polynesian speaking peoples of Vietnam and Cambodia speak languages belonging to the Malayic group of Sundic languages. Sundic speaking peoples lived on the island of Borneo prior to their spreading to adjacent regions. From Borneo they sailed north to Vietnam, west to peninsular Malaysia and Sumatra, and south to Java and Bali. While Sundic speaking groups appear to have migrated to parts of Indonesia as early as 1500 BC, they do not seem to have arrived along the coast of Vietnam until some time around 600 BC. It is during the period 600 BC to 300 BC that Malayic groups, including the ancestors of the Malayo-Polynesian speaking peoples of Vietnam and Cambodia, migrated to eastern Sumatra, Peninsular Malaysia, and Vietnam. This migration took place at a time when the Tai Dong Son culture influenced the coastal areas of Borneo. The two events may well be related.

Malayic languages can be divided into three main groups (in addition to the Moken and Moklen who do not weave): Malayic-Dayak, Malayan, and Acehnese-Cham. Of these three groups, only those peoples speaking Chamic languages living in Vietnam and Cambodia are of interest here. Chamic speaking peoples are believed to have arrived on the coast of Vietnam from Borneo between 600 BC and 300 BC and are associated with the early Sa Huynh culture. Chamic speaking peoples came to occupy most of the coastal areas of central and southern Vietnam (see Howard 2004: 183-87; Howard 2005). The ancient Cham also settled further inland along the Mekong River as far as what is now southern Lao. Thus, a Cham king named Devanika is credited with founding a town near the Mekong River in Champasak during the second half of the AD 400s. The early Cham in southern Lao and Cambodia were later absorbed into the Khmer Empire, while the center of Cham habitation and political power was concentrated along the coast of central and southern Vietnam. Warfare within the Chamic population and the gradual Kinh (Vietnamese) conquest of the coastal regions resulted in the lowland Cham population being divided into three distinct groups and some Chamic groups moving into the adjacent highlands. The Cham groups include the Western Cham of Cambodia and the adjacent border region of southern Vietnam, the Eastern Cham live in the vicinity of Phan Rang, the Cham Haroi of Phu Yen and Binh Dinh provinces in central Vietnam. Western Cham people are descendants of Cham who moved into territory under Khmer rule in 1693 to escape the Kinh conquest. Some of these Cham subsequently returned to Vietnamese territory in the 19th century and settled in the vicinity of Chau Doc. The Cham Haroi moved into the highlands in the 1600s as the Kinh conquered the adjacent coastal territory. The Chamic speaking Jarai and Rade moved into the highlands after warfare with other Chamic groups some time between AD 1000 and 1300.

Chamic peoples may have made bark-cloth and not woven cloth when they first arrived on the mainland. Evidence of this might be seen in regard to the Chamic speaking Roglai and Chru. The Roglai have traditions of making bark-cloth and plaited bast fiber cloth, but not of

weaving (Howard and Howard 2002: 17-18). The Roglai presently live inland from the Cham in the highland areas of Ninh Thuan and Khanh Hoa provinces, but in the past they lived in the coastal plain to the northeast of their present territory. The Chru live to the west of the Roglai in Binh Thuan and Lam Dong provinces and mainly obtain cloth through trade with other peoples who do weave. The absence of weaving among these relatively isolated Chamic groups might indicate that the first Chamic speaking peoples to settle along the coasts of Vietnam did not weave.

Whether they brought the knowledge of weaving with them or began to weave once they settled on the mainland, it is likely that the knowledge of weaving was a result of contact with the Tai-speaking people associated with Dong Son culture. Dong Son influence is associated with weaving by peoples of coastal Borneo and as well as among the peoples of central Vietnam. The Heger I bronze drums that have been found in numerous sites in central and southern Vietnam attests to the extent of contact with the Dong Son Tai. There is archaeological evidence of weaving among the Chamic peoples associated with Sa Huynh culture. Sa Huynh culture dates from the earliest period of Chamic settlement in Vietnam and sites associated with it are found mainly along the coast of central Vietnam. Textiles and evidence of textiles have been found in some Sa Huynh burial sites. Thus, Solheim (1959: 102) refers to "Cloth impressions [that] were noted on several artifacts" and comments that Parmentier (who undertook excavations of the area and examined artifacts from the sites in the early 1920s) "mentioned two pieces showing traces of linen [possibly hemp or another bast fiber], one of coarse weave and the other fine" and Colani (who visited the sites in 1934) "noted impressions on both iron and pottery. One 'fossilized' cloth of a simple overunder weave, was made of thread about 0.5 mm thick."

Unfortunately, historical accounts of Cham weaving are very limited and there are relatively few examples of older Cham textiles. Maspero (2002/1928: 1) cites early Chinese sources indicating that the Cham wove both cotton and silk cloth. These Chinese sources also discuss weaving techniques and patterns of cloth. One refers to cloth that is dyed "with five colors," to "speckled cloth," and reports that Cham weavers "knew how to mix gold thread into the weft and weave, wrong or right side out, a different pattern on each side" and they "embroidered complicated motifs made more dazzlingly luxurious with gold, silver, pearls, and gemstones" (Maspero 2002/1928: 20). Thus, there is no specific mention of supplementary warp or warp float weaves even though it is apparent that these are old Cham weaving traditions.

The textiles of the lowland Cham and the highland Chamic-speaking Haroi, Ede, and Jarai are different in many respects, but I believe that a case can easily be made for their forming part of a common tradition. For example, all of these groups weave on what Vietnamese scholars usually refer to as an Indonesian style backstrap loom to distinguish it from the foot-braced backstrap loom that is still used by some of the neighboring highland Mon-Khmer speaking groups. In addition to the Indonesian style of backstrap loom the lowland Cham have added a type of frame loom that is used for weaving supplementary warp and weft patterned cloth. This loom will be discussed in more detail below, but the important point

here is that it represents a later addition to Cham looms while the Indonesian style backstrap loom represents an older tradition shared by all Chamic-speaking groups. There is also linguistic evidence of a common heritage. This is not so evident today since several Vietnamese words have entered the Cham vocabulary in reference to clothing (e.g., *ao* and *khan*). Prior to such Vietnamese influence during the latter half of the 20th century, the Cham and their highland relatives shared some basic terms for cloth and clothing. Thus, Aymonier and Cabaton (1906: 16, 90), an early Cham dictionary, cite both the words *aban* and *khan* for clothing, cloth in general, sarong, or woman's skirt. In Ede (Rhade) the word *aban* refers to a blanket (see Tharp and Buon-Ya 1980: 1). In Vietnamese the word *khan* refers to a shawl or turban and *khan ao* means clothing in general. This is probably the origin of *khan* in Cham, but *khan* is also reminiscent of the Indonesian word *kain* (cloth). It is interesting to note that the word *aban* does not appear at all in Moussay (1971: 157), where we find only *khan*. There are also similar terms used in Cham and Ede for loom parts, such as *khong* in Cham and *khung* in Ede for the warp beam, and for weaving (*muñim* in Cham and *mñam* in Ede).

The Lowland Cham and Their Textiles

As was noted above, the lowland Cham are divided into the Eastern Cham and the Western Cham. The Eastern Cham live mainly in Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan provinces, located between Saigon and Nha Trang and occupying an area that was part of the old Champa kingdom. The national census of 1999 reported 57,137 Cham living in Ninh Thuan and 29,35 Cham living in Binh Thuan. A small number of Eastern Cham also live further north in Binh Dinh and Phu Yen provinces and in recent decades Eastern Cham have also settled in Lam Dong Province and in Saigon. The Western Cham are divided between those living in Cambodia and those living near the Cambodian border in Vietnam. The Western Cham in Vietnam live mainly in An Giang and Tay Ninh provinces. The 1999 census reports 12,435 Cham living in An Giang Province and 2,663 Cham living in Tay Ninh Province. There are also some Western Cham people living in neighboring provinces and in Saigon. The total Cham population living in Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) according to the 1999 census is 5,192. Western Cham people in Cambodia live primarily along the Mekong River in Kompong Cham Province and along the Tonle Sap River in Kompong Chhnang Province. Officially in 1992 there were around 220,000 Cham in Cambodia, but unofficial estimates placed the population at closer to 300,000. There are also about 4,000 Western Cham living in Thailand (mainly in Bangkok) and about 10,000 in Malaysia.

The lowland Cham are also divided according to religion. It is common to recognize a three-fold division into Hindus, called Cham Kaphia or Cham Chuh; Old Moslems, called Bani; and New Moslems. Cham Hinduism is syncretic in which Siva is the dominant deity, with Indra, Vishnu, and Buddha playing roles in worship, along with a variety of ancestral spirits, including those of the mythical and ancient kings of Champa. The king of Champa converted to Islam around 1607, but he did not force his subjects to convert. The descendants of those who did convert and who remained in Vietnam are the Bani. All of the Cham who fled to Cambodia in 1693 converted to Islam, adopting a less liberal version of the religion that was promoted by the Malays with whom they came into contact. Thus, while all Western Cham people are New Moslems, Eastern Cham people are divided mainly between Hindu and Old

Moslem as well as a small number of New Moslems. Writing in the early 20th century Baudesson (1997/1919: 231) estimated that two-thirds of the Eastern Cham population was Hindu. Religion has influenced Cham weaving and dress in a number of ways. As one well-known Cham weaver commented in regard to religion, those who are Hindu have been more concerned with maintaining and reviving old Cham traditions in terms of weaving and dress. This is most noticeable in recent efforts to revive old Cham motifs such as one depicting the god Siva.

Maspero (2002/1928: 2-3) provides a description of ancient Cham dress based on Chinese accounts. He says that their clothing “consists of a piece of cotton, the *kama*, which they wind round their body from right to left and cover it from the waist to the feet.” His use of the term *kama* is a bit strange, since it means page or leaf in Cham, but his general description appears to be accurate. He also notes that in winter they add “a thick robe.” He describes the robes of the king (2002/1928: 16) as including an outer robe made of “damask with golden flowers on a black and green background” and an under-robe “made of very fine white cotton, sometimes embroidered with gold fringe.” Finally, he mentions (2002/1928: 18) that on their wedding day women wear “a cotton robe made of strips of cloth assembled in the manner of a well grid.” We can also learn something of the patterning of ancient Cham clothing from sculptures of human figures. Guillon (2001: 148) notes that three motifs “are clearly distinguishable: geometric, four-petal flowers and star shapes of various kinds.”

The dress of modern Cham has changed in several ways. Western Cham males and females generally have adopted Malay style Moslem attire. Baudesson (1997/1919: 229-30) gives an account of Eastern Cham dress in the early 20th century: “The costume of the men consists of a skirt and a very long white robe. The women wear a large piece of cloth wrapped round to form a rude skirt. Gay colours are somewhat restricted, white and white striped with red and green being most popular. For bodice they have a clinging dark green tunic open at the throat... The men wear as headdress wither a large turban or sometimes merely a kerchief. Pockets are unknown, but two purses hung from a long girdle provide an excellent substitute.” Today Eastern Cham often wear generic clothing on an everyday basis, but they continue to wear ethnically distinct attire on special occasions. Such descriptions are of a fairly general nature and tell us little of how the cloth is decorated.

Research indicates that in the past as today, men’s clothing tended to be fairly plain with most noticeable decorative feature being narrow bands of colored cloth sometimes added along the edges of their otherwise plain white sarong. These days such a sarong is called a *khan bal cih* or *khan bar jih*. The term *jih* refers to narrow decorative strips of cloth that are added to the side and top of the cloth and *bar* means color or die. The strips of cloth on the sides and top of the cloth are narrow and often feature zigzag patterning. A wider strip of cloth with more elaborate patterning is attached to the hem. This patterning is normally woven using a supplementary weft technique. Men’s head-cloths may also have a decorative strip of cloth and fringe at each end. The patterning in the decorative strip at the end also appears normally to be woven using the supplementary weft technique. The man’s tunic usually lacks such decorative strips of cloth.

Cham women's clothing is of most relevance to our study of supplementary warp weaving. Wrap-around skirts (*khan pilang*) and decorative sashes (*taley kaing* or *talei kaing*) are of particular interest since these are the only items that usually feature supplementary warp patterning. The material for wrap around skirts is usually woven on a backstrap loom and is often decorated with stripes or bands with patterning that is woven using either the supplementary weft, supplementary warp, or warp float techniques. In discussing supplementary warp motifs with the well-known Cham weaver Mrs. Phu Thi Mo she noted that only two supplementary warp motifs appear on skirt-cloth woven on the backstrap loom and that in the past such cloth with these motifs was only worn by women of the noble class. These are the *tu muk* and *tu pik* motifs. The *tu muk* motif includes zigzag lines and I have two interpretations of what it represents: either a type of forest vine or a termite (the common meaning of the word *muk*). The appearance of the word *muk* again in reference to supplementary warp weaving is interesting even though the Cham and Tai words have different meanings. The *tu pik* motif is a rhomb shape with wings or hooks and a center that is of a different color than the outer part of the motif (*pik* in Cham refers to a wing). It is now rare to weave these motifs on a backstrap loom using the supplementary warp technique. Instead, skirt-cloth woven on a backstrap loom usually features the alternating warp float technique. The alternating warp float technique is also used to weave a variety of other motifs on skirt cloth.



Figure 1. Detail of a strip of cloth featuring the *tu muk* motif. Woven in 2007. [MH]

Decorative sashes and other narrow strips of cloth are woven on a long and narrow type of frame loom that will be described in detail below. This loom appears to be designed to weave a variety of supplementary warp and supplementary weft motifs on relatively narrow bands of cloth. These bands can be used for decorative sashes, added to the edges or wider pieces of cloth for decoration, or stitched together to form wider pieces of cloth that are covered with decorations. In addition to a range of geometric patterns, there are also more realistic motifs. Complex motifs depicting Siva on top of a peacock and another of a dragon (see Howard 2005: 129, fig. 14) are woven only using the supplementary weft technique. A somewhat less graceful motif depicting a human figure is woven using the supplementary warp technique. Geometric figures are woven using both the supplementary weft and the supplementary warp motif. The *gal vak* is an especially popular geometric motif woven using

the supplementary warp technique. This is a rhomboid with hooks extending from it. The word *gal* refers to a stock or stump and *vak* means intertwined as well as destiny.



Figure 2. Detail of a blanket woven by Mrs. Mo around 2000 featuring the gal vak motif. [MH]

While supplementary warp weaving has virtually ceased in the case of skirt-cloth woven on a backstrap loom, it is thriving in regard to these narrow strips of cloth being woven on the special Cham frame loom. This type of cloth remains in great demand by the Cham for decorative sashes, still commonly worn on special occasions as well as for use in making a wide variety of consumer items ranging from small change purses to DVD/CD holders.

The Cham refer to supplementary warp weaving as *bi ngu qua tan*, to make a pattern with two layers. As was noted above, Eastern Cham weavers use three types of loom. Moussay (1971: 436, 438) refers to the Cham backstrap loom as a *tanung munim pan khan*. The name indicates that this is a loom (*tanung munim*) for weaving broad pieces of cloth (*pan khan*). Very narrow strips of cloth are woven on a simple small frame loom called a *tano pa cako* (Moussay 1971: 287). The term *cako* refers to the heddle rods and other parts of a loom that are used to make patterns and this type of loom has two of these: the *cako hala* (the main heddle rods) and the *cako pingu* and *ban cako* (the bar and strings used to produce patterns). A more advanced type of frame loom that is called a *tanung munim jih talah* (*jih* is spelled *cih* by Moussay (1971: 66). As was mentioned above, *jih* refers to narrow strips of cloth that are added to larger pieces of cloth. *Talah* refers to a wider strip of cloth than can also be used as trim or as a sash/belt. The distinctive characteristics of this loom include the use of weights (*poh karang*) that are attached to the *cako pingu*. It is this assemblage that is used to produce supplementary warp and supplementary weft patterns. In discussing the complexity of a particular pattern, Cham weavers refer to the number of *cako* that are employed. Thus, a very simple pattern would require only five *cako*, many patterns need a dozen or so, while the most complex motif (the Siva and peacock) entails the use of 130 *cako*.



Figure 3 (left). Mrs. Mo weaving supplementary warp patterned cloth on a *tanung munim jih talah* type of loom (Nha Trang, 2007). [MH]

Figure 4 (right). Detail of a the *tanung munim jih talah* loom in Fig. 3 showing the *cako pingu* and *poh karang*. [MH]

The *tanung munim jih talah* type of loom appears to be unique to the Eastern Cham in Mainland Southeast Asia and even among Eastern Cham its use in the past appears to have been highly restricted to those who wove special decorative cloth for elites. During the latter years of the kingdom of Champa such weaving was largely restricted to the village of My Nghiep in Ninh Phuoc District, Ninh Thuan Province. My Nghiep remained an important weaving center for the Cham after the final conquest of Champa by the Vietnamese, providing specialized textiles for other Cham in neighboring communities. While weaving declined in other Cham communities during the 20th century, it continued in My Nghiep and in the 1990s My Nghiep emerged as an important commercial weaving center producing hand-woven textiles on frame and backstrap looms for a relatively large external market in Saigon and elsewhere. Supplementary warp textiles continue to be woven in My Nghiep using the *tanung munim jih talah* type of loom with many younger women learning to weave such cloth and keeping the Cham tradition of supplementary warp weaving alive.

Western Cham weaving has evolved very differently from that of the Eastern Cham. If the initial Cham migrants to Cambodia wove on a *tanung munim jih talah* type of loom any trace of this loom's use among the Cham in Cambodia disappeared long ago. Since the use of this loom was restricted in terms of location and the range of textiles woven it is, in fact, unlikely that those who fled to Cambodia used it. Moreover, the type of textiles produced on this loom were closely associated with the Hinduism and syncretic Bani Islam and were not textiles that had a place in the Malay-inspired Islam adopted by the Cham in Cambodia. Informants have told me that their ancestors wove on backstrap looms, but use of these looms also ceased quite some time ago and for a long time Western Cham weavers have used a Malay style of frame loom. The Western Cham use the term *kay* or *ki* is used in Western Cham for this loom. This is undoubtedly derived from the Khmer term for loom (*kei*) that in turn is derived from

the Tai word for loom (*ki*). Aymonier and Cabaton (1906: 71) refer to this term and it is possible that it was once used by the Eastern Cham to refer to such frame looms. The primarily decorative techniques employed by the Western Cham in their weaving are weft ikat and warp ikat. In the past they also used supplementary weft and *plangi* decorative techniques. The only example of cloth woven using the supplementary warp technique by Western Cham are narrow strips of cloth woven to make shoulder-bags by members of a weaving cooperative in Chau Phong village (Tan Chau District, An Giang Province, Vietnam).

Conclusion

Contemporary Cham use of the supplementary warp technique represents its most successful case of survival in Southeast Asia. In fact, this is an example not simply of the survival, but the flourishing of supplementary warp weaving. An early Cham innovation in the creation of a special type of frame loom for weaving supplementary warp patterned textiles has played an important role in this. Supplementary warp weaving on backsrap looms as declined, but it has expanded in the case of textiles woven on the special Cham frame loom. Even more than the well-known Phuan supplementary warp patterned skirt bodies from Had Sieo in Thailand, supplementary warp patterned Cham textiles woven for the commercial market have proven extremely successful. A possible threat to this success has emerged with the appearance of commercial imitations of supplementary warp patterned textiles, but to date market conditions have allowed for the expansion of both the genuine hand-woven supplementary warp patterned textiles and the commercial copies.

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