

ENHANCING HUMAN RESOURCES FOR THE CONSERVATION AND PROMOTION OF THE CULTURAL VALUES OF KHMER FOLK MUSIC IN SOUTHERN VIETNAM

Pham Tiet Khanh [Phạm Tiết Khánh]¹

Abstract

Khmer folk music in Southern Vietnam is diverse in its forms and mainly serves religious rites and traditional ceremonies. However, with the trend of increasing integration and exchange, and under the strong and constant influence of the wave of Western civilization, the development and popularity of modern audiovisual media, new and attractive music shows on television and social sites, the folk music of the Khmer in the South is coping with a great deal number of difficulties and challenges. Although changing trends are inevitable, we need solutions to continue promoting the values of Khmer folk music in the South in new conditions and contexts without losing its identity, including training core human resources for this objective. The article focuses on two research objectives: the first is to understand the policies of the government of Vietnam and the results of practical training of human resources to preserve and promote the cultural values of Khmer folk music heritage in the South of Vietnam and the second is to propose solutions in developing and training human resources to preserve and promote the values of Khmer folk music and culture in the South of Vietnam.

Keywords

Folk music, Khmer people in Southern Vietnam, Cultural values, Conservation and promotion, Human resource

INTRODUCTION

In the South of Vietnam, the population of Khmer ethnic group accounts for the largest number among the ethnic minorities. According to the survey of the General Statistics Office of Vietnam in 2019, of the six ethnic minorities in Vietnam with a population of over 1 million, the Khmer reached the population of 1,319,652 million (Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs – General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2020: 54). Experiencing a long and stable coexistence with ethnic groups in the South, the Khmer have built a unique and diverse culture and folk art with many different forms and genres, which show profound humanistic ideological content and play an important role in their social life. In particular, the folk music with many different genres of the Southern Khmer contains unique values in terms of ideological content and art forms; it is closely associated with the rhythm of daily life, the community cultural activities, and traditional festivals of the Khmer people in the South: The Five-tone Orchestra, Mo-ho-ri Orchestra, Wedding Orchestra, Sko-Thum Orchestra, A-Rak Orchestra, Chhay-Yam Drum Dance, A-Day Singing, Chom-Rieng-Cha-Pay, Dong-Dao, Lullaby, and others (Pham Tiet Khanh et al., 2019: 9–10).

From the author's survey, in the years 2018 and 2019, on the reality of the conservation and promotion the cultural value of Southern Khmer folk music in 10 provinces and cities in Southern Vietnam with the residence of Khmer people (Pham Tiet Khanh, 2021), the results indicated the problems in preserving and promoting Southern Khmer folk music heritage in recent years.

First, there are only three of seven genres of folk songs existing in the daily life of Khmer people in Southern provinces and cities: ritual singing, Chom-Rieng-Cha-Pay, and lullaby (Bom pe). Genres:

¹ Pham Tiet Khanh is Assoc. Prof. at Tra Vinh University, Vietnam, His email contact is ptkhanhtv2000@gmail.com.

working songs, Dong-Dao (Bot Chom separates Komara Komarai), educational songs (Chbăp), and love songs that have been and are in danger of disappearing.

Second, there are 3 of 12 instrumental orchestras existing: Five-tone music, called Pin Peat, Kh'se music, and Chhay dam music. Orchestras have gradually disappeared in the cultural life of the Khmer community in Southern Vietnam such as the Koong Sko, Cha pai Doong Veng, Arak, Mo-hori, Ro hash, Du ke, all of them are art forms often performed at Khmer pagodas, Di ke, Sko Thum, and Khlon Khech (Pham Tiet Khanh et al., 2019).

In the current context of integration and globalization, the traditional music of Southern Khmer in Vietnam is facing many difficulties and challenges. Son Ngoc Hoang, the former head of the Khmer Art troupe in Kien Giang Province – Vietnam, claimed that “the massive penetration of foreign cultural and musical products; the domination of Western music genres in music life and on the mass media system” ((Pham Tiet Khanh et al., 2019: 16) as well as the appearance of new and attractive music programs on social networking sites contributed to reducing the role of folk music in the community activities of the Khmer in the South of Vietnam. Besides, the process of urbanization and the emergence of industrial zones in Southern localities have somewhat impacted on the Southern Khmer folk music heritage. The folk music of the Khmer people in the South was born from *phum* and *sroc* associated with the pagoda of Theravada Buddhist – including all the tangible and intangible cultural values of the Khmer. However, an important force in inheriting and transmitting folk music, the Khmer youth in the South, has gradually left their villages moved toward urban areas and industrial zones to solve livelihood problems. This phenomenon has caused the lack of young people who are expected to inherit and transmit the music of the nation. In particular, many artisans and artists who directly practice the traditional music have to give up their passion for their livings, as the satisfaction of material needs in the artisan's family is more urgent than other needs. Moreover, a number of artisans and artists who master in Southern Khmer folk music are getting old and in poor health or have passed away, while the successor team has not been properly trained. Therefore, the activities of preserving and promoting the value of folk music in the Southern Khmer cultural life have gradually declined, and the risk of losing the good musical instrument players and the ancient songs is very high.

It is, therefore, of great necessity to understand the current status of preserving and promoting the values of Southern Khmer folk music and also the need to train human resources for researching and outreach Khmer folk music in the South of Vietnam. This would contribute to the goal of preserving, promoting, and honoring the value of national heritage and meeting the aspirations of the ethnic minorities, localities, and the guidelines of the Party and State.

BACKGROUND

The assessment of the current situation, proposing solutions to preserve and promote the cultural values of Southern Khmer folk music, has been mentioned by many researchers to different degrees in Vietnam. In “The national and international research on the Southern Khmer folk music,” Pham Tiet Khanh (2019) presented in detail the research materials at home and abroad relevant to Southern Khmer folk music. In particular, the national studies on the Southern Khmer folk music were divided into four major groups, including studies on the traditional music of Vietnam referring to the Southern Khmer folk music, studies on the Southern Khmer culture and art referring to issues of the Southern Khmer folk music, studies on the Southern Khmer folk music, and studies on achievements, reality, and potential solutions for preserving and promoting the values of the Southern Khmer folk music. This article also reviews some studies that have been done in Cambodia, which mainly introduce the traditional art forms of the Khmer people in Cambodia including music, dance, and theater. The research conducted by Pham Tiet Khanh et al. (2019) published in the ‘Scientific Journal of Tra Vinh University’ has determined the current practice of

preserving and promoting the values of folk music of the Southern Khmer in terms of policies of the Party and State, methods, and contents of preserving and promoting the values of folk music of the Southern Khmer. The article also identified achievements, limitations, and causes of those achievements and limitations in preserving and promoting the Southern Khmer folk music in recent years. Particularly, the field of training human resources to preserve and promote the folk music heritage of the Khmer people in the South of Vietnam has not received the attention of many researchers. Nguyen Dang Hai and Pham Thi To Thy (2014) analyzed the reality of human resource training in the industry of the Southern Khmer traditional instrument performance in Vietnam. According to the authors, the training of human resources in arts performing in Vietnam has encountered a number of shortcomings in terms of the structure of training professions and training quality. Le Tien Tho (2014) assumed that the limit in human resources, especially the qualifications of the composing and performing team, was the biggest challenge in preserving and promoting the Du ke art of the Southern Khmer in Vietnam.

For works on preserving and promoting the value of Khmer folk music heritage in the South of Vietnam that have been published outside Vietnam, “Bompe Kon der Khmer in Hau Giang and Kien Giang” by Jähnichen (1993), which published on *Studies in Ethnomusicology*, is known as one of the early works that introduce Khmer folk music in Southern Vietnam. In this article, Khmer folk lullabies in some localities of Hau Giang and Kien Giang provinces in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam, have been introduced and transcribed to Western readers. In the article of “What is known about some music features and song lyrics of the Khmer living in the South of Vietnam?”, Nguyen The Truyen (2021) introduced the themes and contents of Southern Khmer folk songs as well as identified the similarities in melody between the Southern Khmer folk songs and other ethnic minorities in Vietnam. Pham Tiet Khanh (2021) learned about the practice and transmission of traditional music in the Southern Khmer community in Vietnam and proposed recommendations for conservation and promotion of traditional musical heritage of the Southern Khmer in Vietnam in the context of current globalization.

The activities on preserving, introducing, and resurrecting the Khmer traditional music of the Cambodian have been interested and researched by many scientists in Cambodia and other countries around the world. For works in Khmer language, the representatives of these include the early published studies of Chap Pin, Pich Tum Kravel, Hun Sa Rin, and Keo Narom. *Robhash Pro Chia Pray Khmer* (Phnom Penh, 1964) by Chap Pin mainly introduces the name, origin, and tools – props in Khmer folk dance. In presenting about Khmer dances, Khmer folk music is also mentioned as a tool for the folk dances of the Khmer in Cambodia. The remarkable work of the Research Group of Manners and Customs, published in 1970 (Phnom Penh Buddhist Publishing House), *Om Py Lôm Nom Soong Khep Nay Ph-Lênh Khmer* briefly introduce nine Khmer orchestras: Pin Piet, Khmer (ancient wedding orchestra), Arak, Khloong Chhnak, Koong Sko, Chhay Dam, Pay Keo, Koong (orchestra of the Khmer in Cambodia who live in the areas bordering Thailand), and the orchestra of the Ko La ethnic group living in Pei Lin Province (Cambodia); musical instruments of strings, wind, diaphragm, and reverberation; rituals and considerations when starting to learn music; folk stories related to Arak music; and ancient wedding music of the Khmer in Cambodia. However, with a capacity of about 80 pages, the work is only carried out in the form of generalizing the types of orchestras and some types of Khmer musical instruments, not deeply analyzing the characteristics and functions of each type of orchestra and the way performance or crafting of musical instruments. Even so, this work still has historical significance and value for reference and comparison for later studies on traditional Khmer music when it was published quite early. Pich Tum Kravel's studies published in 1997 (*Yike and Bassac Theaters*, Royal University of Fine Arts) and 2000a (*Khmer Mask Theater*, Phnom Penh) have provided basic knowledge about the traditional theater of the Khmer in Cambodia, in which the folk songs and the orchestras serving in the performance of the plays are also described in detail by the author. The work has directly mentioned the Khmer folk music as *Don Trây, Rô băm & Lakhôn Khmer* (Pich Tum Kravel, Phnom Penh, 2000b). In this study, Pich Tum Kravel spent 18 pages to describe the contents relevant to

Khmer music as follows: names of orchestras, types of musical instruments, the arrangement in each specific orchestra, the meaning of the orchestra: Arak worship orchestra, Neakta; traditional orchestra – wedding music (Pheng Ka); Pin Peat orchestra – serving in religious rites with small Pin Peat orchestra and large Pin Peat orchestra; Mohori orchestra – serving in cheerful and upbeat atmosphere; gong – drum orchestra (serving in religious rites); Chhay Dam orchestra; the orchestra of Tream Ming or Thom Mom; and the orchestra of Skô chhnas or Skoôn. With two studies published in 2011, Keo Narom conducted on the main topic of Cambodian music. In *Don Tray Nâu Protês Khmer* (Nokor Wat, Phnom Penh, 2011a), Keo Narom presented the role, meaning, ancestral worship rituals, ways of harmonizing, mixing, and changes of the orchestra from the past to the present; the lyrics are used in conjunction with the orchestras: the Arak orchestra – the traditional wedding orchestra; Pin Peat orchestra; Mohori orchestra; A Day orchestra; Du Ke theater orchestra; and Muon Krum orchestra. In the work of *Don Tray Nung Chivit Khmer* (Chho Pon Rang Say, Phnom Penh, 2011b), Keo Narom introduced the role of Khmer traditional orchestras associated with life-cycle rituals, religious ceremonies, festivals, Khmer community activities, and performances associated with each ritual. The two Keo Narom's works have provided detailed insight into Khmer traditional orchestras and the role of traditional music in the cultural activities of the Khmer in Cambodia; these are valuable information for reference, contributing in identifying the basic similarities and differences in the role of music in the lives of the Khmer in the South of Vietnam and the Khmer in Cambodia.

English works of scholars studying traditional Cambodian music printed in monographs on Khmer Cambodian music, which published in Cambodia or in prestigious international journals on musicology and culture studies, have provided quite useful information about the relationship between traditional music and cultural preservation and about the transmission of traditional music between generations; in general, the training of human resources in practicing and spreading traditional arts of the Khmer in Cambodia, and their folk music in particular. It is possible to list articles such as: *Khmer Music: The Foundation of Cultural Resources and Conservation* (Kathy M. McKinley, 1999), *The spirit's entrance: free metric solo introductions as a complex memory tool in traditional Khmer wedding music* (Jähnichen, 2012), and *Indigenous Music Mediation with Urban Khmer: Tampuan Adaptation and Survival* (Saurman, 2014). Through the case study of Cambodian Living Arts (CLA), a remarkable study of Cambodian traditional music was conducted by Francesca Billeri and published in 2017 as *The process of re-construction and revival of musical heritage in contemporary Cambodia*. The study examines the incentives of the process of preservation and revival of these art forms, aiming to promote and reconstruct the traditional music; at the same time, this leads to the commercialization, Westernization, “patronization,” and de-contextualization of traditional music’ (Francesca Billeri, 2017, tr. 92). Through the study, Francesca Billeri has provided specific evidences on the practice of preserving and promoting the traditional music in the current context of Cambodia.

Valuable studies on the reality of resources for teaching Khmer traditional music and studies on policies and solutions have been implemented in Cambodia to maintain and revive the Khmer traditional music such as: ‘Transmission of Khmer Traditional Performing Arts: Its Genuineness, Challenge, and Impact on Society’ (Sam-Ang Sam, 2007), ‘Perspectives of Culture-Bearers on the Vitality, Viability and Value of Traditional Khmer Music Genres in Contemporary Cambodia’ (Catherine F Grant, 2014), and ‘Learning and Teaching Traditional Music in Cambodia: Challenges and Incentives’ (Catherine F Grant, 2015). Sam-Ang Sam (2007) assumed that, in the new context of globalization and advanced technology, “the transmission of Khmer traditional knowledge is, in general, dwindling, a new generation—youth of the present—shuns tradition completely and practices activities that are totally nontraditional. On the basis of assessing the transmission of Khmer performing arts by examining the effects and challenges on the process as well as its outcome, Sam-Ang Sam proposed ways of transmitting knowledge adapted to new context and challenges basing on the political, social, and cultural realities of Cambodia. In two articles published in 2014 and 2015, based on the results of data analyzed from interviews with the

participation of a group of master-musicians, teachers, and performers (Catherine F Grant, 2014) and observational data from fieldwork in 2013 and 2014 (Catherine F Grant, 2015), Catherine has recognized the existing of positive signals about the revival of Khmer traditional music genres among Cambodians and pointed out the challenges as well as the incentives for encouraging the learning and teaching of traditional Cambodian music. In this article, Catherine (2015) also detailed some solutions to overcome challenges and energize young people to learn traditional Cambodian music.

The studies on Khmer Cambodian folk music, in general, have obtained many achievements, providing a multifaceted view of the conservation and promotion activities of the Khmer Cambodian toward this heritage. Although the folk music of the Southern Khmer, Vietnam, has not been mentioned, these studies have provided valuable information for reference and comparison when we learn about the activities on conserving, promoting, and resources training for the folk music of the Southern Khmer in Vietnam.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHOD OF RESEARCH

FOLK MUSIC

Folk music refers to a type of music that is orally transmitted and anonymous. Folk music, reflected through melodies and rhythms, is created, performed, and transmitted in the folk style. In the study *Vietnamese music – traditional and modern*, To Vu argued that "folk" works are always "anonymous," unnamed authors, without original scores (literature and notation). The music is transmitted by "word of mouth" (singing), fiddling, without systematic training, procedures, and school-style rules. It is always "variant." This feature may be partly a consequence of the abovementioned transmission method, which can be interpreted as "a tale never loses in the telling," but it may also be due to the "arbitrary" processing and adjustment of the composers (also anonymous) in later generations, in different localities (To Vu, 2001: 26). Southern Khmer folk music is special artistic compositions, born associated with specific production activities and social activities of workers, in which the thoughts, feelings, and aspirations of the people are reflected through specific rhythms, sounds, and lyrics. Southern Khmer folk music is full of basic features of folk music in particular and folklore in general.

CULTURAL VALUES

Cultural values are often placed in relation to types of values: social values, moral values, economic values, and legal values. In case, it is understood that "Culture is an organic system of material and spiritual values created and accumulated by people through practical activities" (Tran Ngoc Them, 1996: 27), then the whole culture is in the category of values, or contains solely values. Culture is a man-made value system, in which cultural values include all traditional values and a part of current values.

CONSERVATION AND PROMOTION

Conservation "is keeping and preventing from being lost" (Hoang Phe, 2003: 39), while promotion means to "creating conditions for the good to thrive" (Hoang Phe: 76). Cultural conservation is understood as efforts to protect and preserve the existence of heritage in its original form. Promotion means actions to put cultural values into practice, create positive spillovers in society, consider them as potential internal resources contributing to social development, and bringing about material and spiritual benefits to people. Therefore, conservation and promotion of the values of Southern Khmer folk music is preserving, collecting, and making the good and beauty in the Southern Khmer folk music to flourish.

ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELD-VISIT METHOD

To collect and learn about Khmer folk music in the South of Vietnam, it is necessary to learn about the characteristics of the culture where those musical works are born. Therefore, the ethnographic field-visit method helps to penetrate deeply into the cultural environment of the birthplace and nurture the folk music of the Southern Khmer. At the same time, the field-visit method also helps researchers penetrate deeply into different community groups and individuals in society. This study utilized the Ethnographic field-visit method at 10 southern provinces/cities of Vietnam in which there are many Khmer people living. In addition, the study was carried out in some other places in Cambodia where there are activities related to preserving and promoting outstanding culture and arts such as Cultural Village (Siem Reap), the model of preserving and promoting folk music at Cambodian Living Arts (Siem Reap), the model of preserving folk music at Angkor Wat complex (Siem Reap), the production of Khmer traditional musical instruments (Phnom Penh), and the model of preserving folk culture and art at the National Museum of Cambodia (Phnom Penh). The Ethnographic field-visit was conducted in 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021 on the targeted participants of people, artisans, artists, researchers, and managers.

EXPERT INTERVIEW METHOD

It is obvious that in-depth knowledge of folk music is required to annotate places, names, languages, legends, etc., classify folk music works, identify cultural values, and propose a system of solutions in order to preserve and promote the cultural values of the Southern Khmer folk music. Therefore, it is of great necessity to consult experts in each field to ensure the science and accuracy of the research. During the implementation of the research, the author conducted in-depth interviews with experts on Khmer folk music in the South. They are researchers, artisans, artists, and managers in the field of Khmer folk music in the Southern region. In addition, the research team organized two seminars and two scientific seminars at Tra Vinh University in 2019 and 2020 to collect information from experts, artisans, artists, managers, individuals, and stakeholders who have understanding and interest in Southern Khmer folk music.

STATUS OF HUMAN RESOURCES

RELEVANT POLICIES

On the basis of the Resolution of the 5th Central Committee (Session VIII) on building and developing an advanced culture imbued with national identity, the Prime Minister has issued many documents to promote the training of intellectuals working in the field of preserving and promoting ethnic minority cultures and arts at local levels across the country. The Decision No. 1270/QĐ-TTg dated July 27, 2011, on approving the Project "Preserving and developing cultures of Vietnam's ethnic minorities until 2020"; the Decision No. 1243/QĐ-TTg dated July 25, 2011, on approving the Project "Renovating and improving the training quality of arts and culture schools for the period 2011–2020"; and most recently the Decision No. 41/2014/QĐ-TTg dated July 21, 2014, of the Prime Minister on promulgating "The preferential regimes for pupils and students studying traditional and specific arts at arts and culture schools." Accordingly, students are entitled to many incentives such as reduced tuition fees, vocational training, and learning equipment. Specifically, students studying at state arts and cultural institutions are entitled to a 70% reduction in tuition fees, receiving a scholarship equivalent to 40% of the cost of a vocational training course and equipped with school uniforms such as clothes, shoes, and socks once a year.

HUMAN RESOURCES FROM TRAINING AND TEACHING

To meet the needs of socio-cultural development in the South, contribute to training human resources for the Khmer people in the South, and preserve the values of Khmer language, cultures, and arts in the South, at the Official Letter No. 8425/VPCP-KGVX, issued in 2013, of the Office of the Government, the Prime Minister agreed on the policy of investing in building the Southern Khmer Language – Culture – Art Faculty of Tra Vinh University to implement national key tasks of training human resources in Khmer Language – Culture – Art in the South.

Those directions and policies of the Party and State have created a foundation and favorable conditions for promoting human resource training in universities, colleges, and intermediate schools in Vietnam. Traditional Instrumental Performance of the Southern Khmer has been organized by many schools, such as the Intermediate level of Traditional Instrumental Performance (the Five-tone Orchestra) at Soc Trang Intermediate School of Culture and Arts and the undergraduate program in Performing Traditional Khmer Instruments in the South, at Tra Vinh University.

To date, Tra Vinh University is the only institute in Vietnam that provides the undergraduate program in Traditional Instrument Performance (specializing in Southern Khmer's Traditional Instruments Performance). The program has commenced since the 2012–2013 school year, using both entrance exam and nomination to recruit students. The training duration is 5 years with 131 credits (50 general education credits and 81 specialized credits). In particular, the program strongly focuses on practical skills (with 90 practice credits, accounting for 68.7%) such as skills in performance, editing, and staging.

In addition, many organizations and individuals have organized refresher courses, short-term training, or learning-by-doing classes such as the training course in actors and stage musician at Tra Vinh Intermediate School of Culture and Arts or by Khmer Art Troupe in collaboration with Soc Trang Intermediate School of Culture and Arts.

The Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of An Giang Province organized a course in Cha Pai instrument for some talented and passionate Khmer youths taught by artist Chau Nung and artist Chau Hunh in Ô Lâm Commune, Tri Ton District, An Giang Province, in 2014. With the financial support from the locality, artist Danh Trung Hieu (Hai Thuol), in Ban Tan Dinh Commune, Giong Rieng District, Kien Giang Province opened courses in the Five-tone Orchestra for more than 380 learners. Hau Giang Province, also provided courses in basic performance methods of A-day singing. Outstanding artist Tran Van Xen in Hoa Thanh District, Tay Ninh Province, has opened Chhay-Yam-drum dance courses for many generations. The project of Reconstructing and Teaching Yeak Rom – Robam ballet of Southern Khmer, in 2013, implemented by the Department of Gender and Ethnicity, Tra Vinh University with the sponsorship of the Ford Foundation, 20 Khmer youths in Giong Luc hamlet, Chau Thanh District, Tra Vinh Province, were chosen to be the participants. It can be said that thanks to the strong support, encouragement, and investment of the State in many aspects, the training and teaching of human resources in the field of Khmer art in the South has significantly developed in both quality and quantity in recent years. Besides the achievements, the training and teaching work in the past time also has many difficulties and shortcomings (Table 1).

Educational levels	Number	Proportion (%)
Illiterate	32	14.4
Primary school	57	25.7
Junior high school	58	26.1
High school	34	15.3
Intermediate	21	9.5
College	3	1.4

Undergraduate	15	6.8
Graduate/master	2	0.9
Total	222	100

Figure 1: Levels of education of Khmer artists in the South (Scheme by the author, 2019).

The survey results show that artisans and artists in the field of Khmer folk music in the South have low levels of education. The total number of surveyed artisans and artists who have undergone professional training at intermediate level or higher accounts is only 18.6%, while 14.4% of artisans are illiterate. Therefore, although the Khmer people want to preserve and promote the musical values of their people, they are limited in their qualifications and skills, especially in reserving and conducting musical research.

In addition, due to limited educational qualifications, artisans and artists are mainly trained and taught by traditional methods, based on personal experience. The survey results show that the method of giving and transmitting professions based on personal experience accounted for 55.7%, organizing teaching classes with the participation of artisans and artists accounted for 23.1%, and participating in training courses at art training institutions accounted for 24.2%. Similarly, regarding the idea that "Artisans and artists are trained and fostered in professional skills, composing, performing, and teaching methods," 33.8% of the surveyed artisans and artists completely agreed, 53.2% partially agreed, 11.7% disagreed, and 1.4% completely disagreed. These results show that the majority of artisans and artists have not been professionally trained.

Currently, in some places in the Southern region, the instruments used are not according to the prescribed orchestral payroll from the past, but depending on the locality's number of musicians who know how to play ethnic instruments. The number of artists and musicians participating in traditional Khmer folk orchestras in the South are becoming rare nowadays. The main reason is that very few people study ethnic musical instruments, especially the young Khmer generation, because most of them like to follow the trend of learning Western musical instruments. In addition, although, in recent years, there have been a number of studies on Khmer folk music and Southern Khmer folk instruments by researchers who have collected and recorded methodically with proper musical notes, most of the Khmer artisans, artists, and musicians cannot read those notes as they are simple farmers who have not properly trained in formal schools, nor had knowledge of basic music theory or features of folk musical instruments. These are also limitations and weaknesses in the performing arts of Khmer folk musical instruments in the South today.

In terms of training needs of society, Khmer students in the South are not really interested in traditional arts majors. Although the demand for human resources for Khmer Southern art is very large, many professional training institutions always fail to recruit enough learners. Tra Vinh University is the only institution in the country that provides the undergraduate program in Khmer Southern Traditional Instruments performance, but the total number of students enrolled in this major is also very modest and have gradually decreased over the years. From 2012 to 2021, 10 training courses were provided. However, the total number of student intake was only 48. The number of students in 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021 are 10, 7, 3, 2, 1, 2, 2, 2, 12, and 7 students, respectively. Despite many encouragement policies such as full scholarships, free-of-charge accommodation at the University's Dormitory, monthly stipend of 450,000 VND (10 months/school year), and other preferential regimes according to current regulations, very few students enroll in this major or drop out before graduation.

In addition, Tra Vinh University has organized music restoration in folk games, lullabies, and Arak orchestra of the Khmer in the South. Since 2014, at Khmer art festivals in the province and Southern region, Cham Rieng Cha Pai art has been included in the performances to introduce and exchange art. Ethnic boarding schools in Tra Vinh Province will also introduce Cham Rieng Cha Pai art into teaching and cultural activities in schools (Figures 2 and 3).



Figure 2: Students at Tra Vinh University practice with musical instruments (Photo by the author).



Figure 3: Awarding certificates of course completion to students participating in the Cham Rieng Cha Pai art teaching class at Tra Vinh University (Photo by the author).

HUMAN RESOURCES FOR RESEARCHING KHMER FOLK MUSIC IN THE SOUTH OF VIETNAM

The work of collecting and researching Khmer folk music and musical instruments in the South over the past time has cultivated many important achievements. The most remarkable outcome is a series of book collections, introducing Khmer Southern folk songs by authors Lu Nhat Vu, Le Giang, and Nguyen Van Hoa. These works were carried out from the 1970s to the 1990s of the 20th

century. Along with the collection of folk songs of the Vietnamese and Chinese ethnic groups, Khmer Southern folk songs were also collected and introduced in the works: *Southern folk songs* (1978) by Lu Nhat Vu, Le Giang, and Nguyen Van Hoa; *Kien Giang folk songs* (1985a) by Lu Nhat Vu, Nguyen Van Hoa, and Le Giang; *Song Be folk songs* (1985b) by Lu Nhat Vu, Nguyen Van Hoa, Le Giang, and Tu Nguyen Thach; *Hau Giang folk songs* (1986a) by Lu Nhat Vu, Le Giang, Nguyen Van Hoa, and Minh Luan; *Cuu Long folk songs* (1986b) by Lu Nhat Vu, Nguyen Van Hoa, Le Giang, and Thach Han; and *Tra Vinh folk songs* (2004) by Nguyen Truc Phong, Lu Nhat Vu, Nguyen Van Hoa, and Le Giang.

In early years of the 20th century, many works on collection, selection, and introduction of folklore of ethnic groups in the South were carried out, in which Southern Khmer folk songs were more or less gathered in some typical works such as *Bac Lieu Folklore* (2011) by Chu Xuan Dien (editor) and, most recently, a collection of 100 Khmer folk songs (2004) by Nguyen Van Hoa.

To visualize the appearance of Khmer folk songs in the South, we statistically summarize the number of Khmer folk songs in the South from Hau Giang folk songs, Cuu Long folk songs, Kien Giang folk songs, Song Be folk songs, and Tra Vinh folk songs. As a result, the total number of 328 Khmer folk songs are collected and published, with 50 songs in the Southeast region and 278 songs in the Southwest region. The collected Khmer Southern folk songs fall in the main genres, such as lullaby (Bom pe), singing in rituals and customs, Du-ke singing, Di-ke singing, Dong-dao singing (Bot-chom-rieng-Komara-Komaray), educational singing (Chbap), courtship singing, etc. Many Southern Khmer folk songs have been documented by the authors with musical notes, translated into Vietnamese. However, the collected folk songs do not fully cover the full picture of the Khmer Southern folk music. In particular, the authors have not mentioned the field of Khmer musical instruments in the South.

According to statistics conducted from February to August 1999 by the Institute of Music, the Khmer, Cham, and Hoa ethnic groups have 919 folk songs and 667 folk tunes; the Kinh people have 8,977 folk songs and 2,055 folk tunes; ethnic minorities in Truong Son – Central Highlands have 1,529 folk songs and 1,374 folk tunes; and ethnic minorities in the North and North Central regions have 5,466 folk songs (Phuong Thao, 2010). This shows that the collection and research of folk songs and folk tunes of the Khmer are still limited compared to other ethnic groups in Vietnam.

Research on Khmer music in the South also cultivated many important achievements, especially research by Pham Duy (1972), Le Ngoc Canh (2004), Nguyen Thi My Liem (2014), Dao Huy Quyen et al. (2005, 2007), and Hoang Tuc (2011), two worthnoting works being *Ethnic Khmer Southern Music* (2005) and *Soc Trang Ethnic Musical Instruments* (2007). These works have been classified and described in detail each type of musical instrument of the Khmer in the South.

Through the collection, research, and introduction of Khmer folk music in the South, it can be seen that:

First, the collection of Khmer folk songs and folk tunes was carried out systematically, mainly in the 80s of the 20th century, more than 30 years ago. The existing collections of Khmer Southern folk music mainly focus on folk songs. However, many genres have not yet been collected, some new genres have only been collected in a very limited amount compared to what are being orally circulated such as Chom-rieng-cha-pay and A-rak orchestra. Though Khmer people have their own script, folk songs and folk tunes have not been collected and preserved in writing and books, but exist mainly through oral transmission, or only exploited by a few artisans or artists in a very traditional way.

Second, the statistics, classification, and identification of Khmer folk music genres in the South have not been systematically done on the basis of scientific theory and practice. The identification of genres, genre structure, characteristics, and values of Khmer folk music in the South has not been systematically implemented. Many genres of Khmer folk music in the South have not been unified in classification and identification, such as singing, talking, short rhymes...

Third, with regard to many works on collecting Khmer Southern folk songs by Lu Nhat Vu et al., the translation and notation of some folk songs and folk tunes also have some confusion. This is probably because the authors are not knowledgeable about Khmer language. Therefore, we need to organize the collection and recording of Khmer Southern folk songs and musical instruments in a more systematic way. It is extremely important to build a separate tune scale system for recording Khmer folk songs and musical instruments in the South in order to spread and preserve them.

Despite the limitations, these works are valuable and necessary reference sources for the research, teaching, and training of Khmer Southern folk music.

Solutions to develop and train human resources to preserve and promote the values of Khmer folk music and culture in the South of Vietnam are discussed herein.

In this article, some measures are proposed to develop and implement policies and train human resource contributing to preserving and promoting the role of cultural and musical values in sustainable development in the Southwest region.

First, maintain traditional forms of music education, while creating opportunities for people to access new forms of education. The urgent issue now is that the localities in the Southern region need to focus on investing more heavily in education and training in order to improve the people's intellectual levels and to train and foster human resources, especially disadvantaged groups. In addition, researching and promoting the effectiveness of forms and activities of training and transmitting traditional Khmer folk music should be focused. It is also necessary to strengthen formal training forms suitable for modern education and promote the role of monks, artisans, and reputable people in the community so that they can perceive and take the key role in self-preservation and promotion of their own culture through fostering activities, training, supporting the teaching, and promotion of traditional cultural and artistic values of the community. Thus, the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, Committees for Ethnic Minority Affairs, and the Buddhist Associations of the provinces should research and propose measures to preserve and promote the values of Khmer folk music and theater. Furthermore, Khmer ethnic high schools, universities, and colleges and Khmer Theravada temples shall increase their activities of teaching these rare art forms.

Second, build a team of successors and the public to enjoy folk arts. The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism; Ministry of Education and Training; Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism; universities; colleges; etc. in the southwestern provinces should promote their management role and function for Khmer culture and music, advise and organize folk music activities in general, and disseminate Khmer folk music. Specifically:

- Organize events to introduce and exchange talented artists in playing instruments, singing, and making musical instruments of folk music with students, trainees, graduate students of related disciplines, and high school students.
 - Launch a Creative Competition (with valuable prizes for each genre) on making new musical instruments or upgrading the old ones; composing meaningful songs about moral education in the new society; composing new songs based on the specific nature of music; and organizing demonstrations and exhibitions of the results of the contest and select them for use in school training and home teaching.
 - Integrate the creative competition content into the annual Folk Music Festival held in provinces and regions where Khmer people reside. Encourage and award prizes for young people to partake in creativity and performance. Compositions with high artistic quality would be disseminated, staged, and performed in local or regional cultural programs; printed, distributed, and disseminated widely on mass media channels to honor talents and promote creative movements.
 - Third, manage and organize folk music activities from the perspective of the State.



Figure 4: The only Khmer chapey-player of the town Tra Vinh in 2014. (Courtesy of Vietnam-Net Global).



Figure 5: Young musicians are trained in playing a traditional Khmer musical instrument in An Giang, 2015. (Photo courtesy of baoangiang.com.vn).

The Party and State continue to complete mechanisms and policies, focusing on building specific mechanisms and policies for preserving and improving the cultural life of Khmer people. The State invests funds for programs and projects on collection, as well as funding to support artisans so that they can regularly provide teaching courses for young people. In terms of cultural heritage management such as folk music, the implementation of cultural policies for heritage types and heritage subjects is very important and urgent in the current social context. Particularly, it is necessary for artisans – those who have made musical instruments, musical melodies, and songs and used them for performance and teaching – to enjoy some incentives such as rewarding and provision of special health care service.

CONCLUSION

Each type of cultural heritage in general and folk music of the Khmer in the South in particular is created, preserved, propagated, and developed by humans. In other words, the people are the force who plays a “most important” role in preserving the cultural values of various types of heritage. Therefore, the viewpoints or policies of the Party and the State need to be built on the basis of the needs and consensus of the community for the conservation to be really effective.

At present, it is urgent to implement groups of scientific solutions to preserve and promote the cultural values of Khmer folk music in the South; first of all, to meet the needs of cultural enjoyment of the Khmer communities in the modern life. More importantly, preserving and promoting the values of Khmer folk music in the South is one of the tasks to contribute to preserving the national identity of the Khmer ethnic community in the South. This task is not only an effort to prevent the quintessential values from being diminished but also contributes to the promotion of cultural values in terms of morality, lifestyle, aesthetic conception, and education in the community.

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