Theory of Social Change and its Application in Studying the Traditional Culture of the K’Ho People in Lam Dong Province, Vietnam

Nhu Thuy Nguyen Thi¹ and Quyet Nguyen Thi²

Abstract
This article delves into the repercussions of cultural interference and acculturation by focusing on the traditional culture of Vietnam’s K’Ho ethnic group. Drawing from both quantitative and qualitative data collected in Lac Duong town and Ta Nung commune (in Dalat city), Lam Dong province, the authors apply the social change theory to analyze pivotal K’Ho festivals. The investigation reveals a diminishing presence of festivals such as the New Rice celebration, buffalo stabbing, and gong festivals. This decline is linked to transformations in the agricultural economy and heightened awareness within the K’Ho community. Consequently, these shifts contributed to the development of cultural models within the K’Ho community, aligning with contemporary social development practices. This study sheds light on the intricate interplay between cultural preservation, economic shifts, and evolving societal consciousness among the K’Ho people.

Keywords: K’Ho People, Social Change Theory, Traditional Culture, Vietnam

INTRODUCTION

Sociological approaches to social change are often approached cyclically because society has a life cycle. Societies are born, moved, developed, and disappeared as an inevitable rule. There is also a conflict perspective and a modernization perspective, and it seems that the modernization perspective is quite suitable for today’s trend of social change. Sociologists today argue that the complex interaction between many internal and external factors creates a transformation. However, in specific social and historical circumstances, certain factors may sometimes be more influential than others. Modern theorists are interested in the following factors when considering social change: physical environment, technology river, population pressure, cultural exchange, social conflict, global perspective, modernization theory, world systems theory, and dependency theory. Within the scope of the authors’ research, social change is approached cyclically and from the perspective of modernization within the limits of cultural change, expressed through the traditional cultural activities of the K’Ho people in Lam Dong Province, Vietnam.

Applying social change theory to research the traditional culture of the K’Ho people shows that people’s participation in traditional cultural activities tends to decrease, specifically, the new rice celebration (from 77.8% to 5.9%), buffalo stabbing festival (from 62.7% to 31.9%), and gong festival (from 77.8% to 66.5%) (T. N. T. Nguyen, 2022, p. 8). Social changes can explain the results of this research; festivals such as buffalo stabbing, new rice celebrations, and new years have gradually disappeared due to the transformation of the agricultural economic structure and the increased awareness of the K’Ho people, leading to the shaping and building of cultural models in their community under social development practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on existing premises about the ethnic groups living in Lam Dong Province, the Lam Dong Department of Culture and Information (2005) released the book “Some cultural features of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands in Lam Dong Province”, which collects several social science and humanities research works in Lam Dong province in recent years. It is an overview of the indigenous ethnic groups in Lam Dong, as well as some areas of material and spiritual culture of the K’Ho, Ma, and Churu ethnic groups. According to the statistics mentioned by the author of the book, there are three indigenous ethnic groups in Lam Dong, of which K’Ho

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is the largest. About 112,926 K’Ho people live in Lam Dong (according to census data in April 1999, K’Ho residents nationwide are 129,729 people); the rest are distributed in neighboring provinces such as Dong Nai, Binh Thuan, and Ninh Thuan (Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs, 2015).

In the work *K’Ho People in Lam Dong Province*, author Phan Ngoc Chien (2005) researched the K’Ho ethnic group in depth in two main parts. Part one presents academic and theoretical issues in anthropology related to ethnic composition, national identity, and culture. The relationship between culture and national identity is a diverse issue for which anthropology has made essential contributions to its own theories and research methods. Part two included articles on prominent economic, social, and cultural aspects of the K’Ho and Chil people in Lam Dong and an analysis of bibliographic and fieldwork documents on their identity and ethnic composition. The results of the two aforementioned studies provide a more detailed understanding of ethnic minorities in Lam Dong (including the K’Ho people) based on their customs and beliefs. They provided initial ideas for the authors to collect actual information in the research area and agreed on how to write the name of the K’Ho ethnic group.

In addition, there are other studies and articles about the 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam in general, and the K’Ho people in particular (Baulch et al., 2007; Bui & Vu, 2002; Dang, 2009; Institute of Ethnology, 2008; Le & Tran, 2006; K. T. T. Nguyen et al., 2023; Tran, 2013). These studies have provided readers with a comprehensive picture of the issues of nation, ethnicity, and ethnic origin in Vietnam. Therefore, the portraits of the 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam are presented quite meticulously while demonstrating the continuation of the tradition of solidarity between ethnic groups and patriotism over thousands of years of building and maintaining the country (Do & Ngo, 2023; Quyet et al., 2023). With quite astute arguments, the above research works have provided a comprehensive picture of Vietnamese people’s economic, cultural, and social conditions. In every aspect, geographical conditions, production conditions, residence, language, culture, and customs of the 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam. With these different conditions, the unique features of life and culture (customs, habits, etc.) of each ethnic group have been formed. In addition, it also provides the concept of an ethnic group, the concept of an ethnic group, the process of forming national states and ethnic groups in the industrial period, and the characteristics of the Vietnamese ethnic community, specifically the K’Ho ethnic group, from its origin to the characteristics of productive labor, cultural life, costumes, rituals, beliefs, marriage, and anthropological characteristics in social development. From an ethnographic perspective, using specialized research methods based on the analysis of data from reality and secondary documents, the authors mentioned above made a relatively complete sketch of the economic, social, and traditional cultural life of the K’Ho ethnic group with aspects such as religious beliefs, arts, childbirth, and wedding ceremonies. These are valuable documents analyzed and presented under the arguments of ethnographic researchers and scientists. From the perspective of sociology, the traditional culture of the K’Ho people in Lam Dong will be reviewed, researched, and explained later by the authors of this article, using the method of analyzing secondary documents through different schools and trends.

However, the spirit of national solidarity has made the Vietnamese ethnic community constantly grow solid and steadfast on the path of building and maintaining the country (Q. T. Nguyen et al., 2023; Quyet et al., 2023; Thuy Trang, 2022; Rashid et al., 2023). This work has a robust ethnographic character, but it is still an issue that needs to be considered from a sociological perspective. Especially for ethnic minorities in areas with harsh socio-economic conditions, contributing to improving the quality, efficiency, and sustainability of the development of ethnic minorities in new contexts; “The Yao people in Vietnam” by the Institute of Ethnology (Vietnam) has sketched a comprehensive picture of the Yao (Dao) people - an ethnic minority community living in Vietnamese territory with many different names such as Kem Mien, Kim Mun, Diu Mien (in the past they were called Man, Dong, Xa) and then came to a consensus on the name of an ethnic group. The Institute of Ethnology has highlighted the cultural characteristics of the Dao people through their language, costumes, wedding ceremonies, village institutions, and community activities. These cultural elements not only perform the function of ethnic cohesion but also distinguish the Dao people from other ethnic groups. These cultural elements enrich the cultural treasure of the great families of Vietnamese people (Institute of Ethnology, 2006, pp. 6,14). This is an important document, a basis for authors to learn and research other ethnic minority groups,
specifically the current state of cultural life of the K’Ho people in Lam Dong Province from a sociological perspective.

In addition, two other studies used ethnographic fieldwork as the primary approach (Institute of Ethnology, 2004; Khong & Tran, 2007). These authors fully presented the issues of the natural environment, population, historical origins, economic life, social organization, material culture, and spiritual culture of the Lo Lo and K’Ho people. Contribute to overcoming the limitations of previous research from the perspective of ethnography (Jam et al., 2012). The authors wish to inherit the results of the research from the perspective of the traditional culture of the above study, from which to delve deeper into the study of the K’Ho ethnic group in Lam Dong from the perspective of the researcher, and contribute to creating a complete and diverse picture of ethnic minorities in Vietnam.

From a cultural studies perspective, Nguyen Van Quyet (2013) presented the cultural change of agricultural and rural communities in developing industrial parks in his doctoral thesis. Using an interdisciplinary method, he sketched out a panorama of changes in the cultural life of the residential community of the industrial park, such as people’s participation in community rituals and culture in daily life and building and developing cultural models. From an ethnographic perspective, in the thesis “Marriage and Family of the Chu Ru People in Lam Dong Province,” Vo Tan Tu (2010) analyzed the economic, cultural, social, and religious characteristics and changes in marriage and family of the Chu Ru people in Lam Dong province. He introduced the characteristics, traditional rituals, and general changes in the rituals of the K’Ho Sre.

To deeply investigate the components and structure of spiritual life, the authors reviewed many studies on marriage customs on some aspects of rituals, customs changes, marriage age patterns, and research methods on several ethnic minorities in Vietnam, including the K’Ho ethnic group (Dinh, 2021; Nguyen, 2001; Nguyen, 2007; Tung, 2018). The K’Ho is an ethnic minority with a large population in Lam Dong province, alongside other ethnic groups such as Sre, Chil, Lach, Nop, Ca Don, and To La (Bui & Vu, 2002, pp. 22-23; Hasan et al., 2017; Tuannoi, & Rugwongwan, 2020). As of April 1, 2019, there were 43 ethnic groups residing in Lam Dong Province, with a population of 1,296,906 people, of which the Kinh ethnic group had 963,290 people, and the K’Ho ethnic group had the largest population among the remaining 42 ethnic minorities with 175,531 people (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2020, p. 151), accounting for 13.53% of the total population of the province. In the past and present, the K’Ho people have preserved many unique traditional cultural identities, contributing to the diverse and rich cultural appearances of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands of Vietnam (Waheed et al., 2010; Kaewdok et al., 2018). Under the impact of innovation and integration, K’Ho traditional culture has been changing drastically, posing opportunities and challenges that need to be analyzed and explained to develop a culture in particular and socio-economic development in general for this ethnic group (Nguyen & Phung, 2021).

Thus, the traditional culture of different ethnic communities from the perspective of different scientific disciplines is reflected in the studies mentioned above. This is a valuable theoretical basis for content and methods in research fields, especially from the sociological perspective of the traditional culture of the K’Ho ethnic group. The theory of social change and its application in the study of the traditional culture of the K’Ho people in Lam Dong, Vietnam, will now be analyzed more deeply by the authors of this article in the research results.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Our study adopts a sociological framework, employing a blend of methods for comprehensive insight:

**Primary Data Collection:** Data was primarily collected through surveys designed to explore life-cycle rituals. This involved deploying detailed questionnaires to gather firsthand information from participants, emphasizing the direct engagement with subjects for authentic data collection.

**Ethical Considerations in Human Subject Research.** In aligning with the highest standards of ethical integrity, our research methodology incorporated several key measures to ensure the respectful and ethical treatment of human subjects. Notably, we obtained formal ethical approval from relevant local authorities prior to initiating
our study. This permission encompassed the entirety of our research activities, including conducting interviews on life-cycle rituals. Our commitment to participant comfort and trust was demonstrated through our diligent acquisition of all necessary authorizations, thereby fostering a conducive environment for participation.

The interviews were thoughtfully arranged to take place within the secure and private settings of the respondents’ homes, offering the option to include family members in the process to enhance comfort levels. Each session was meticulously planned to last between 45 to 60 minutes, ensuring thorough engagement without imposing undue time burdens on participants.

A cornerstone of our approach was the transparent and meticulous process for obtaining informed consent, spearheaded by the lead researcher. This process was carefully designed to uphold participants’ autonomy, clearly communicating their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Additionally, we guaranteed the confidentiality of all collected data, which was safeguarded in secure, password-protected storage systems.

It is important to clarify that, in accordance with our institutional guidelines, ethical approval from our institutions was not deemed necessary for the type of survey research conducted. However, we ensured that all participants, including local residents and government officials, were fully informed about the study’s objectives and the measures in place to protect their personal information confidentially.

Regarding the specifics of the consent process, we can confirm that verbal consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study. This consent was documented through a recording pen, ensuring a reliable and ethical record of participant agreement. In compliance with the journal’s requests, we are prepared to submit the interview questions form and recorded interview audio to supplement our submission, further demonstrating our commitment to ethical research practices.

Field Research. The study was executed in Lam Dong Province, utilizing in-depth interviews with 26 individuals and analyzing 477 household surveys collected from December 2016 to February 2017. The dual-questionnaire approach covered general personal information and specific cultural festivals, incorporating a mix of open and closed questions.

Study Participants and Demographics. The research focused on the Chil and Lach local groups within the K’Ho ethnic community. Of the 477 surveyed households, distribution included 253 from Lac Duong town and 224 from Ta Nung commune, with a gender representation of 43% male and 57% female. Within the K’Ho ethnic breakdown, Chil, Lach, and Sre groups were represented at 56.8%, 38.4%, and 4.8% respectively. In terms of religious affiliation, 41.3% were Catholics and 58.7% Protestants.

Research Locations. The study areas were Ta Nung commune (Da Lat city) and Lac Duong town (Lac Duong district), chosen for their significant cultural traditions and demographic composition predominantly of the K’Ho ethnic group. Both locations offer unique insights into the cultural and socio-economic dynamics within Lam Dong province.

Data Analysis. Quantitative analysis of survey data was complemented with secondary document analysis, including literature, digital sources, and local economic-cultural reports. This dual approach aimed at a holistic understanding of the impact of urbanization on the life-cycle rituals among the K’Ho people.

Secondary Document Analysis: We extensively reviewed academic and grey literature, including books, news articles, online content, and official reports, to contextualize our primary findings within broader discussions on urbanization and its effects on traditional practices among ethnic minorities in Lam Dong province.

This methodological approach ensured a thorough examination of the research topic, grounded in ethical rigor and a deep respect for the subjects and their cultural contexts.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Social change is an ongoing process, a change in behavioral patterns, relationships, social designs, and stratification systems over time (Pham & Le, 2008, pp. 179-182). Although it appears stable on the outside,
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society is constantly moving within itself. Every society, regardless of how conservative and traditional, undergoes transformation. This change has become more precise and rapid in the modern society.

There are many perspectives on social change, but the broadest understanding is to view it as a change from the previous social situation or lifestyle (Pham & Le, 2008). Many anthropology, history, cultural studies, and sociology scientists have studied social change research. From a sociological perspective, scientists such as Auguste Comte, Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, G. J. Lenski, H. Spencer, and T. Parsons have offered different perspectives on and analyses of social change.

First, the perspective of conflict theory. From the vantage point of conflict theory, the unfolding of history and societal evolution transcends mere rational endeavors of individuals, deeply rooted in the strife and competition among diverse groups. This perspective underlines that societal transformations and advancements are significantly shaped by the intricate dynamics of social contradictions and conflicts. Karl Marx, a pivotal figure in this theory, underscored the critical influence of social contradictions in driving societal transformation and progress. His insights emphasize that conflicts, rather than mere individual actions, are central to understanding the mechanisms of social change and development (Turner, 1975). Furthermore, the concept of ‘social contradiction’ as a unique form of group conflict elaborates on the profound impact that conflicting collective attitudes, derived from individual perspectives, have on the social fabric, thereby offering a nuanced understanding of societal conflicts (Porello et al., 2015).

Second, the perspective of global social change. In the context of global social change, people must move beyond a linear perspective and view changes in the direction of syncretism. Regarding the multifaceted perspective of global social change, it’s essential to transcend the simplistic linear viewpoint and embrace a synthesis of diverse influences. The concept of creative syncretism highlights that institutions and societal changes are inherently complex, often driven by the innovative combinations of cultural and institutional resources by individuals (Berk & Galvan, 2009). Furthermore, the dynamic nature of globalization prompts a reassessment of class structures and political affiliations, underscoring the inadequacy of traditional models in capturing the essence of contemporary class inequalities and their global implications (Goldthorpe, 2002). Additionally, the stability of an international society amidst cultural diversification suggests that syncretism, through its facilitation of cross-cultural exchange, may play a pivotal role in maintaining equilibrium in a world where Western dominance is waning (Buzan, 2010). These considerations point towards a transformative framework where politics, global economics, and culture collectively contribute to a syncretic direction of change, challenging traditional paradigms and fostering a more integrated understanding of global social dynamics.

Third, the perspective of evolutionary theory on social change. The theory of evolution originated in Charles Darwin (1809-1882), was proposed in biology as a theory of natural development, and was applied to the social field by Auguste Comte (1798-1857). Comte saw society as a progressive process from low to high, from simple to complex. Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) also supported this view, arguing that society progressed from simple to complex. Comte and Durkheim’s works are examples of unilinear evolutionary theory.

Fourth, the perspective on cultural acculturation perspective. Acculturation first appeared in the late 19th century and is widely used in anthropology and society. It focuses on the process of adopting the beliefs and behaviors of another cultural group. Acculturation can proceed in the direction of the minority group or in both directions depending on the specific situation. Some scales such as the Cultural Beliefs and Behaviors Adaption Profile (CBBAP), The Benet – Martinez Acculturation Scale (BMAS), and the General Ethnicity Questionnaire – abridged (GEQ-a) are used to measure the level of acculturation in ethnic minority communities.

In summary, different arguments about social change and acculturation theory help us to better understand cultural changes in today’s society. For the K’Ho people, these studies can be applied to analyze their transformation through traditional rituals (Brūm, 2020) and festivals.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

New Rice Celebration (K’Ho New Year) And Buffalo Stabbing Festivals
According to research by Linh Nga NiêkDam and other ethnographic and anthropological researchers, before the K’Ho people harvest rice and corn, there is a rice-worshipping ceremony that includes a pot of wine and a chicken offering at each lot (sowing many types of rice on a large field). To prepare for this ceremony, the whole village (bon) must join hands to clean up the house, outside of the village, and the water wharf and repair the rice-cutting tools to make them sharp to welcome the rice. The kach ceremony is held after all rice is exhausted and stored in the warehouse (đăm) upstairs in the kitchen. Only rice seeds should be kept in the basket below and not put together in the warehouse. People also put a few baskets to eat daily. However, before pouring new rice into a pot, people must take all old rice and corn out to make wine. The kach ceremony is held when the wine is drinkable, the kach ceremony will be held. In November and December, when preparing for the “drinking straw” ceremony to open the newly grown rice (eating new rice) or nhô rhe, the whole village will go together to fish and into the forest to hunt animals to make the meal more abundant. This is also the community’s New Year celebration (Figure 1). If harvest is abundant, buffaloes are sacrificed to thank the gods. This ceremony, also known as nhô lêr bông, hoặc Nhô Lir Bông (A. D. Nguyen, 2022).

![Figure 1: New Rice Celebration Festival (Nhô Lir Bông) of Di Linh district, Lam Dong province](image)

Author: Vu Mung, 2022

However, as agricultural production plays a leading role, the K’Ho people in Lam Dong province choose wet rice production, coffee growing, livestock raising, and poultry depending on geographical characteristics. For example, the K’Ho Sre people’s primary farming method is to grow rice on wet fields in the valleys (Sre means water fields), while other K’Ho groups reside in high mountains and clear the forests for farming (mir) to grow corn, upland rice, and cassava. In addition to agricultural production, the K’Ho people have other occupations such as hunting wild animals, fishing, and gathering forest products, which are still very popular. The most common handicrafts are weaving and blacksmithing, especially the K’Ho Chil people, who also weave. In addition, some places have pottery (made without wheels). Traditional production tools include axes, yoas (or woot- used to chop trees, is a piece of old bamboo bent at one end to insert the iron blade), and sticks to poke holes in for seeds (chrmul). As for the Chil local group, in addition to the stick for poking holes in seeds, there is also p’hal (used for both poking holes and inserting seeds, with a wooden handle and iron blade about 28 cm long and 3–4 cm wide). Sre people’s wet rice farming tools include hoes and plows (ngat) that are made of wood. Previously, the blade was made of wood, but recently it was replaced with iron. Harrow (sokam) with wooden teeth and kor (used to level the land). Plowing, harrowing, and leveling the land are all pulled by two buffaloes.
but are no longer common. The K’Ho community switched from wet rice production to coffee and cash crop production. The trend of developing a market economy to replace self-sufficient production has contributed to changes in several cultural models in the community.

“Actually, buffalo stabbing and new rice celebrations are rarely organized because they require a large budget. In the past, there were many buffaloes and cows. Each family collects a little to buy a very fat buffalo. Only the family that buys a large buffalo will be famous. This also shows the family’s role in society. Now it rarely happens, only big festivals, because our area no longer grows rice. The rice here has no longer been grown for about seven years; now, in the surrounding area, the K’Ho Lach people have lived in the center of Da Lat city. Life has changed, society has changed.” (Male, 46 years old, Gong Maker, Lac Duong town).

These changes can be confirmed again in the explanation of an elderly K’Ho person when interviewed by the authors: “Now we no longer grow rice; for over ten years, people have lived in this Lac Duong town still doing rice. In the past, rice was grown here, while some of the Chil people worked in upland rice, while the Lach people worked in wet rice. Over the past ten years, people have abandoned wet rice and switched to cultivating vegetables and berries. Compared to wet rice farming, the income is higher, they can change from one crop to two or three crops, so the festival to celebrate new rice is no longer there” (male, 64 years old, Lac Duong Town). For that reason, the new rice celebration and the buffalo stabbing festival almost no longer exist in the K’Ho community, and gong culture tends to decrease gradually; the results are reflected as follows (see Table 1).

### Table 1: Level of participation in traditional cultural festivals of the K’Ho people

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Lac Duong town</th>
<th>Ta Nung commune</th>
<th>General</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>frequency</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buffalo stabbing festival</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New rice celebration (New Year)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>92.9</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Survey data, February 2017)

To explain the changes in the mentioned cultural festivals, the authors interviewed people in the research area; the results showed that “in this area, ethnic minorities are all Lach ethnic people. In the past, it was different from now because of the economy. In the past, people used to cultivate in the form of nomadic wet rice farming. They could only produce one crop a year, with low productivity. They grew corn and flowers to supplement their food. Through the exchange of production techniques, they slowly improved their farming techniques and economic productivity has improved. Regarding cultural life, in the past, when they worked on wet rice, they only got one harvest a year, and then they harvested in November-December. Furthermore, when they had material wealth, they held a New Rice celebration ceremony. This ceremony was often held at the end of the year, close to Christmas. Wet rice has only recently changed, nearly ten years ago, there was a celebration of new rice. When we abandon new rice to grow crops, new rice is no longer celebrated. The festival of buffalo stabbing and celebrating new rice is gradually fading away because of today’s lifestyle. They followed a self-sufficient lifestyle in the past, but now they follow the service lifestyle. Everyone aims to develop a market economy, so there are no more plowing buffaloes” (male, 35 years old, Cultural Officer of Lac Duong town).

The factors influencing changes in traditional cultural festivals of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands in general and the K’Ho people in Lam Dong in particular have been previously studied by some scholars. In the book “Traditional cultural values of the Central Highlands with sustainable development”, authors of that book affirm that ongoing innovation and global integration are transforming ethnic cultures, as evidenced by the Buffalo Stabbing Festival of Central Highlands Minorities. Migration, industrialization, and technology have contributed to cultural erosion. In particular, tangible and intangible heritage in the Central Highlands and nearby mountainous regions face alarming threats (Oriental Development Research Institute, 2016, p. 278).

Thus, the correct policies and guidelines of the Vietnamese State and the authorities at all levels (province, district, and commune) are focused on converting intensive farming, increasing crops, and converting production models to the natural conditions of each country. Local and family economic conditions have
contributed to changes in the spiritual lives of the K’Ho community. Besides, the role of the process of opening up and integrating with outside cultures through the process of industrialization, modernization of rural agriculture, the trend of expanding urban lifestyle, and the influence of the market economy is also one of the factors contributing to changing the perception of K’Ho spiritual life.

The above results show that the organization of cultural festivals in the community is more or less maintained, in addition to the gradual reduction of some festivals such as buffalo stabbing and new rice celebrations due to the process of model economic transformation, intensive growth channels, and the influence of natural conditions. There has been an increasing trend in many other festivals such as Christmas, Tet holidays, art competitions, movie screenings, and sports, and the K’Ho ethnic group responded with a degree of enthusiasm. To a certain extent, these changes are consistent with times and religious beliefs.

**Gong Cultural Festival**

Mr. Bon Yo Soan, Deputy Head of the Ethnic Committee of Lam Dong province, said “As a province inhabited by many ethnic groups, Lam Dong province’s culture is formed from the long-standing cultural identity of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands. Origin and culture of residents from regions throughout the country who come to work, live and settle. That blending together has created Lam Dong a unique, rich, diverse and unique folk cultural treasure”. However, urbanization and integration have caused many changes to the Central Highlands cultural treasure in general, and gong culture in particular. According to Trinh Quang Phu, the Central Highlands Gong Festival is fading and no longer attractive, usually appearing only in festivals and state organizations (Oriental Development Research Institute, 2016, p. 38).

Sharing the same opinion, Nguyen Thi Kim Van believes that those interested in the culture and music of the Central Highlands can easily see the risk of extinction through the rapid decline in the number of gongs in the Central Highlands. In 1980, Gia Lai and Kon Tum provinces had tens of thousands of gong sets, the number of gongs in each village was dozens of sets, and many wealthy families kept more than ten sets of gongs in their homes. Nevertheless, by 2004, the number of gongs in Gia Lai province was only 5,117, and Lam Dong province had only 3,113 sets. This also occurred in the neighboring province, Dak Lak, from 1982 to 1992; 5,325 sets of gongs were lost, and in the following ten years (1993-2003), this province continued to lose 850 sets of gongs (Oriental Development Research Institute, 2016, p. 38). During those decades, “bleeding from gongs” became popular when people discussed gongs in the Central Highlands. The decline in the number of gongs also means that the community and family activities associated with gongs are gradually becoming less frequent (Oriental Development Research Institute, 2016, p. 310). For the K’Ho ethnic group in Lam Dong Province, Gong culture is also in this flow. The gradual loss of the unique cultural features of the Central Highlands in the spiritual lives of ethnic minority communities is clearly expressed. “During the subsidy period and economic difficulties, gongs were lost a lot; Because of difficult conditions, people catch buffaloes and cows to sell, gongs are also sold, gongs are boiled to separate the copper; In the past, when I was on a business trip, I even saw people using gongs to make pig troughs. When the economy is difficult, no one is qualified to sell gongs, and the value of gongs almost loses its true meaning: people only buy them to get copper. Therefore, gongs are gradually disappearing, and their numbers are decreasing. However, a few households also earnestly love the value of gongs, so even in difficult and poor conditions, they still keep them. The quantity is still minimal, so sometimes people who want to have a pair of gongs to play have to buy them elsewhere, but this ratio is not much, if not to say there is no more” (Male, 55 years old, resident in Lac Duong Governor). Some authors even go further by stating that the gradual loss of gong cultural space is due to “the inevitable impact of the integration process and also the negative side of the market economy” (Oriental Development Research Institute, 2016, p. 323).

Maintaining and contributing to preserving cultural values in spiritual life, organizing cultural festivals, and Gong culture is an urgent and vital job for each ethnic minority community and locality. Lam Dong is a province with many ethnic minority groups, of which a large proportion are the K’Ho ethnic group. After 1975, immigration flows came to Lam Dong province in the context of developing new economic zones, contributing to the diversification of the lifestyle and culture of indigenous residents. However, the core cultural values, expressing the unique identity of the Central Highlands in general and Lam Dong in particular, are still maintained and promoted in economic, cultural, and social development, which must mention the lasting value of Gong culture. Some scholars have identified that “the gong cultural space of the Central Highlands is one
of the famous cultural heritages that UNESCO has recognized as a representative intangible cultural heritage of humanity” (Oriental Development Research Institute 2016, 5). According to Trinh Quang Phu, one of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity, the gong festival in the Central Highlands is fading and no longer attractive, appearing only in festivals. State agencies mainly organize festivals.

Maintaining and contributing to preserving cultural values in spiritual life, organizing cultural festivals, and Gong culture is an urgent and essential job for each ethnic minority community group as well as for each locality. Lam Dong is a province with many ethnic minority groups, of which a large proportion are the K’Ho ethnic group. After 1975, immigration flows came to Lam Dong province in the context of developing new economic zones, contributing to the diversification of the lifestyle and culture of indigenous residents. However, the core cultural values expressing the unique identity of the Central Highlands in general and Lam Dong in particular are still maintained and promoted in the context of economic, cultural, and social development, which must mention the lasting value of gong culture. Some scholars have identified that “the gong cultural space of the Central Highlands is one of the famous cultural heritages that UNESCO has recognized as a representative intangible cultural heritage of humanity” (Oriental Development Research Institute, 2016, p. 5). According to Trinh Quang Phu, one of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity, the gong festival in the Central Highlands is fading and no longer attractive, appearing only in festivals. Festivals are mainly organized by state agencies (Trinh, 2016).

The authors’ research results also show that Gong culture is decreasing, as previous research has shown. More than ten years ago, up to 77.8% of respondents responded that the gong culture festival still existed, but today, this percentage has decreased to only 66.5%. The level of participation in this festival was relatively low and there were significant differences between the two study areas (see Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Lac Duong town</th>
<th>Ta Nong commune</th>
<th>General</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>frequency</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Survey data, February 2017)

Recording that some people believe that gong cultural festivals still exist in Lam Dong shows that gongs are used quite diversely in people’s spiritual lives. Since early times, gongs have been used quite diversely in the spiritual lives of the K’Ho people. Because “the longevity celebration has become a way of life of the K’Ho people, organized with buffaloes and cows, some households make pigs and organize gong beatings. In the past, there were about 10 or 11 gong groups in the area, but now there are only 9 to 10 active groups. The purpose of gong groups is to exchange cultural activities. Gong playing also occurs within the family, often on occasions such as dancing, funerals, and engagements. There are a number of tourists who come to research and learn about gong culture, so the exchange of gong culture is no longer limited to the family but also expands the exchange with tourists in tourist, sightseeing, and serving domestic and foreign tourists. These business activities have contributed to increasing household economic income’ (male, 34 years old, cultural officer of Lac Duong town).

According to the authors’ survey results, more than ten years ago, gong cultural festivals were held on occasions such as K’Ho ethnic celebrations (52.2%), weddings (53.5%), ethnic festivals (27.5%), buffalo stabbing (26.2%), sports and tourism activities (23.1%), celebrating new rice (18.8%), and others (insignificant proportion). Recently, gong cultural festivals have often been held mainly for organizing sports/tourism activities (80.1%), and cultural festivals of ethnic groups (64.3%) tend to increase significantly. The New Year festival and celebrations of the K’Ho ethnic group both account for over 30%, as do weddings (28.9%), and other occasions such as the buffalo stabbing festival, new rice celebration, horse giving up, and funerals tend to decrease compared to 10 years ago. This result partly shows compatibility with the opinion of Nguyen Thi Kim Van, who said, “The popularity of gongs among all ethnic groups in the Central Highlands. Gongs are an indispensable part of people’s lives. It is present in most rituals of individuals, families, communities and even in festivals throughout the growing season of agricultural residents” (Oriental Development Research Institute, 2016, p. 303).
However, the authors recognize that the problem of organizing gong cultural festivals in sports/tourism activities tends to increase significantly. “It is all tourists, which means there are many cases. People come up to order rice and watch the gongs. Generally, a tray of rice has enough hill chicken, bamboo-tube rice, porridge, buffalo meat, and many other types of meat. The amount for the tray of rice is about more than one million, eating while watching gongs. Anyone who wants to play gongs can just not eat, but most of the delegations will watch the gongs after eating” (Male, Kinh ethnicity, 35 years old, police officer of Lac Duong Town).

In terms of meaning, Gong culture exists as a communication tool - a means of information for the community (45.1%), a message that ethnic people want to send to each other, or a sense of pride. Each person is proud to hear the sound of a gong. The sound of the gong depends on the nature of the problem expressed in the community life. However, the meaning of the gong festival today tends to vary and change quite a lot. “First of all, for communication, in addition to being a pure musical tool, gongs also have a voice, that is, the sound of gongs. For example, when people welcome guests, they have their rhythm of welcoming guests. When it is fun, the rhythm is faster, and the tone increases, increasing the festive atmosphere. Alternatively, at funerals, people hang gongs very low and sad. Gongs represent the voice and soul of people and ethnic groups in the Central Highlands, including the K’Ho people in Lam Dong. Of course, when people hear the sound of gongs, they feel refreshing and very close to their homeland, country, and people. Ancient gongs are gradually disappearing, so their sound is not as good as in the past. Regarding the participants in gong occasions in the old society, they were mainly older men with families. These people had experience, and their qualifications for playing gongs were also higher. However, now young people also learn, gong playing classes are opened to train and maintain gong culture, open to students, so now everyone can play, both men and women are learning and playing gongs” (male, 64 years old, retired, teaching K’Ho language, Lac Duong town).

In the past, occasions for playing gongs were quite diverse, but today, the trend of fading away has been shown quite clearly. “As far as I know, in the past, when I first came back, […] there was no orchestra. If there is no sound at a wedding, take out the gong to play, or if they receive guests, that is, guests entering their house, then also play the gong to welcome relatives. Nevertheless, now there is an orchestra, so the gongs are removed. However, in my view, it is not about religion, religion is about banning anything, but about gongs, no one can ban it, but nowadays it is not like in the past” (Male, Middle-aged, Protestant Deacon Board of Ta Nung commune).

In addition, the gong festival is considered a “communication tool between humans and gods.” Today, 45.0% of opinions think that this meaning still exists in the K’Ho community. As a typical cultural feature of the Central Highlands, gong culture is a mark expressing the unique identity of the Central Highlands ethnic groups, and 81.7% of opinions said that it means “preserving folk culture.” Furthermore, 36.3% of the respondents said that gong culture festivals also exist as entertainment, and 39.7% said that gong culture is to “educate ethnic pride for children and grandchildren.” This issue concerns people’s views.

“First, when I make gongs, I already have the blood in my body, passed down from my grandparents. Beat the gong to understand your roots. The gong itself shows you who you are and where you come from. Second, in modern society, gongs help people connect with each other. With the sound of gongs, you beat me, and I heard it. When I walked on the street, I also came to listen. Teaching others to fight is also a way to preserve and preserve. Third, playing gongs is also a form of business because not only performing in the village, on the street, in any place, if anyone needs it, they will hire a gong team to perform, thereby bringing a small source of income for the family” (male, 30 years old; gong maker, Lac Duong town) (see Table 3).

Table 3: The meaning of the gong cultural festival in the K’Ho life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Lac Duong town</th>
<th>Ta Nung commune</th>
<th>General</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>frequency</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication tools between humans and Gods</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Means of information for the K’Ho community</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preserving ethnic culture</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting of tourism and culture</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>79.3</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For entertainment and amusement</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Survey data, February 2017)

In addition to traditional and national meanings, today’s gong cultural festivals are open, oriented towards new values, and more interactive and expressive. Therefore, the significance of promoting tourism and culture
accounts for a very high proportion of the research results (72.4%). Through conversations with the K’Ho people, the authors learned that “The atmosphere and meaning of the gong cultural festival is different than in the past. In the past, people played gongs on occasions such as the new rice festival; the festival atmosphere now is associated with tourism services, and other activities are both old and new” (male, 64 years old, retired, teaching K’Ho language, Lac Duong town). Gong festivals mainly serve tourism activities (Huong & Dérioz, 2020; Quang Sang, 2021; Thài, 2018). Currently, many domestic and foreign tourists visit the Gong festival, through which they can interact with each other, and tourists can eat and enjoy the festival simultaneously.

Thus, it is clear that the current gong cultural festival not only appears in the major festivals of the K’Ho ethnic group but also promotes local tourism. However, for festivals to attract more tourists, the locality also needs a conservation policy. Recently, 11 gong teams (groups) were established in Lac Duong town, and business activities were organized to serve tourists, contributing to the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage. While promoting the socioeconomic development of Lac Duong district in general and Lac Duong town in particular, it creates jobs and income for participants (K’Ho people). The gong group’s activities have been well observed in terms of performance time, ensuring political security, social order, and safety in the locality (People’s Committee No. 02/BC-UBND of Lac Duong town on the situation of activities of the gong groups in 2014 and management direction in 2015).

As one of the intangible cultural heritage sites recognized by UNESCO, the Gong cultural space has reached an international level and is not confined to a village cultural model; it is the pride of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands. Therefore, ways to maintain and preserve good cultural values are also focused on and deployed in community life. “In 2014, in coordination with the Heritage Management Department - Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of the province, the Department of Culture and Information of Da Lat City organized a gong teaching class and awarded certificates to 24 students, youth of six villages” (People’s Committee of Ta Nung commune, report on the implementation of the 5-year socio-economic plan 2010-2014). There are some spontaneous gong-tapping classes led by elderly artisans to participate in public music programs, but this method is still temporary. Furthermore, those “young artisans” memorized a few songs, mainly for performances. Previously, young people in the Central Highlands were proficient in playing gongs and often performed on significant holidays (Oriental Development Research Institute, 2016, p. 214).

With the country’s development, the need to explore cultural and international relations is increasing, attracting international and domestic tourists to explore the national culture. Opening teaching classes and building a museum are necessary to preserve and promote Gong culture in the Central Highlands. However, the challenge is the commercialization of gongs, loss of cultural value, and commercial fraud. Additionally, the space for gong culture is narrow, musical instruments are scarce, and conservation awareness is low. Research and education on traditional cultural values are necessary to preserve and promote the cultural heritage in the context of increasing challenges and losses (Oriental Development Research Institute, 2016, p. 38).

The above analysis clearly reflects the trend of gradually decreasing and even disappearing cultural festivals according to each occasion. Specifically, some festivals, such as the buffalo stabbing festival and the new rice celebration, are almost no longer popular in the cultural lives of the K’Ho ethnic community. There are many reasons for these changes, specifically, the influence of urbanization on the migration process, the expansion of urban lifestyles, the transformation of local economic models, the Vietnamese government’s policies, and many socio-demographic factors (religion, ethnicity).

CONCLUSIONS

Although social change theory is approached in many different ways, especially the acculturation approach, which starts from the process of socialization of individuals or social groups and occurs within a culture, it tends to focus on the processes and states of cultural absorption between cultures, thereby differing from assimilation and integration. In sociology, this study is stimulated by the transformation processes of primitive societies due to contact with industrial societies and the consequences of global migration. The degree of acculturation and the subsequent rate of cultural absorption depend on the spatial (and social) distance from the group of origin, the quality of the ability to interact with other groups (the ability to rise, differentiate
discrimination) at the time of contact, and the need for acculturation and the behavioral outlook formed from there. Therefore, this approach has been concretized when studying the changes in the traditional culture of the K’Ho people in Lam Dong Province, Vietnam.

Specifically, in terms of time, it shows that in social change, the traditional spiritual values of the K’Ho people have changed in both positive and negative directions. Although the New Rice celebration (K’Ho New Year), Buffalo Stabbing Festival, and Gong Cultural Festival have undergone many changes, they still represent the essence and national cultural identity of the Central Highlands ethnic groups in general, and the K’Ho ethnic community in Lam Dong in particular. Some festivals, such as buffalo stabbing and new rice celebrations, have gradually disappeared due to the transformation of the agricultural economic structure as well as increased people’s awareness, contributing to shaping and building new cultural models per social development practice.

Disclosure Of Interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Data Availability and Sharing Policy

The data that support the findings of this study are available upon reasonable request in accordance with the Taylor & Francis “Share upon reasonable request” policy. Requests for access to these data should be directed to Nhu Thuy Nguyen Thi, at ntnthuy@hcmute.edu.vn. The data will be available after a request is reviewed and an agreement on the use of data, including proper citation and acknowledgment, is reached.

Due to privacy concerns, recorded data cannot be made openly available. This is to protect participant privacy. Where possible, aggregated or anonymized data sets that support the findings of this study will be provided as an alternative. Please allow up to a week for a response to your request. It is our commitment to support the scientific community while ensuring the ethical and legal compliance of data sharing.

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Author Contributions

Nhu Thuy Nguyen Thi: Conceptualization, Investigation, Data Curation, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Original Draft Preparation, Review & Editing.

Quyet Nguyen Thi: Formal Analysis, Review & Editing, Supervision.

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