



SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE OF PEOPLE IN THE BORDER AREA OF AN GIANG PROVINCE, VIETNAM

Tieu Minh Duongⁱ

Department of Literature,
An Giang University,
An Giang, Vietnam
Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City,
Vietnam

Abstract:

An Giang is a border province located at the headwaters of the Mekong River in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. For a long time, the An Giang border has been a significant trade center of the region. Although it is a delta province, the terrain has fields, mountains, and hills, called the Bay Nui region. The people living here have four ethnic communities: Kinh, Chinese, Cham, and Khmer. The main ways of life are farming, animal husbandry, and cross-border trade. Due to the natural and social conditions, the culture and lifestyle of the people in the border area of An Giang both lie in the exact source of Vietnamese culture and the culture of the Southwest region - Mekong Delta - and have unique characteristics, properties, and appearance. The article will focus on explaining the factors that create some specific expressions of the culture and lifestyle of the community in the border area of An Giang.

Keywords: lifestyle culture, An Giang people in the border area, cultural space, cultural adaptability

1. Introduction

Lifestyle culture is an essential content of cultural studies. The content of lifestyle culture not only considers human survival characteristics but also establishes the customs and practices of the human community in historical development. Research on lifestyle culture can be reduced to two basic directions or viewed as a unified, inseparable combination - lifestyle culture, like "*lifestyle culture of people in the Southwest*", "*lifestyle culture of rural people*", "*lifestyle culture of teenagers*", ... or view "*lifestyle culture*" as two separate categories: cultural category and lifestyle category. However, whether the approach is combinatorial or based on two separate categories, the research must still focus on the central issue, lifestyle.

According to cultural researcher Pham Hong Tung, "*Culture can be defined as the entire behavior, lifestyle, arts, beliefs, and institutions of the population that are transmitted from one generation*

ⁱ Correspondence: email tmduong@agu.edu.vn

to the next. Culture is also known as the way of life of an entire society. It includes codes of manners, dress, language, religion and ritual, codes of conduct such as law and morality, and systems of belief, including fine arts and cuisine". From there, the researcher determined: "It can be affirmed with certainty that "lifestyle" is closely related to "culture"; "lifestyle" can be considered an integral part of "culture", or a mode of existence of "cultural" expression."

From the researcher's perspective, we explain the cultural and lifestyle content of the border community in An province, considering it a cultural space - lifestyle, with appearance and characteristics separate points. This unique characteristic and appearance has a basis for formation and development in social history. To say it more fully, the cultural expression of the lifestyle of the community of people in the An Giang border area in the cultural space and only what belongs to the existence of that space itself creates its characteristics and appearance private. Here, cultural space is not simply a name but an entity, a structure consisting of many system elements and relationships.

2. Literature Review

An Giang is a western province of Vietnam, located upstream of the Mekong River flowing into Vietnam, formed during the historical process of the southwestern region. Referring to An Giang, usually in people's perception, is a fertile land, fertile fields known as the "rice granary" of the Mekong Delta. However, regarding topography, An Giang has fertile fields and is a province with many mountains and hills, also known as the Bay Nui region.

According to Wikipedia, "An Giang is one of the first six provinces in Cochinchina [Việt Nam – Nam kỳ lục tỉnh], during the independent Nguyen Dynasty, established in 1832 under the reign of King Minh Mang, with an area of 3536, 7 square kilometers, the East borders Dong Thap province, the North and Northwest border Kandal and Takeo provinces of Cambodia with a border nearly 104 km long, the Southwest borders Kien Giang province, the South borders the City Can Tho. The main transportation system is a waterway and road, which is very convenient; it is part of an important national and international inter-regional transportation network, with international border gates of Tinh Bien, Vinh Xuong - Tan Chau and Long Binh - An Phu. That is the advantage of opening, developing, and integrating An Giang's economy with other provinces in the region and abroad, especially Southeast Asia."

From current practice, An Giang has self-zoned and established "boundaries", not only geographically but also containing its cultural features and lifestyle. Therefore, "territorial culture or regional culture is a form of culture in which, in a defined geographical space, human communities live together in a certain natural environment, under certain conditions. Similar social development conditions, and especially lively cultural exchange relationships, have formed common cultural characteristics throughout a long history".

Regarding the cultural and lifestyle characteristics of the An Giang people in the border area, it is possible to establish a relatively geographical limit: Tan Chau, An Phu, Chau Doc, Tinh Bien, and Tri Ton. Of course, geographical and cultural space do not overlap, but there is always a difference, and to some extent, cultural space has a more or less widespread spread. As researcher Ngo Duc Think said above, it is due to "...live cultural exchange relationships, so in the long historical process, common cultural characteristics have formed".

3. Material and Methods

Methods used in research include document collection, data analysis and synthesis. The comparative method is also used to compare the cultural change and development of the community living along the border area of An Giang province. The documents are collected from sources such as research documents of domestic authors on Southern culture; Data on population and socio-economic characteristics from the Statistics Department of An Giang province; electronic reports, data from scientific research works, and domestic and foreign specialized magazines related to research issues.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Some explanations about the culture and lifestyle of people in the An Giang border area

So far, many cultural researchers, from experts to non-specialists, have explained the culture and lifestyle of the people in the An Giang border area.

First, it can be seen that researcher Nguyen Van Hau, based on the nature of the borderland, explains the culture and lifestyle of the community here. That is, because it is a border area, from real life, people always have to live in a state of caution, dealing with the problems of laundry and robbery that quickly occur, and from there, forming a type of lifestyle.

Alternatively, journalist Le Huong believes this place has the interwoven culture and lifestyle of four ethnic communities, Kinh, Chinese, Khmer and Cham, and "*cultural symbiosis*", creating a different cultural and lifestyle characteristic compared to other areas. That is a lifestyle focusing more on quality, content over form, a lifestyle with more social ease, and a more straightforward aesthetic taste.

Writer Son Nam believes that, due to the characteristics of the geographical environment, the land has both mountains and fields, thereby creating a cultural lifestyle called "*garden civilization*".

With the explanations just mentioned, these opinions only address cultural properties rather than origin, expression, and characteristics. They have yet to approach the truth of objective reason to some extent.

The author inherits the insights of our predecessors and starts from the scientific content "*material conditions to solve*" and determines that it is the factor that shapes the characteristics and appearance of lifestyle and cultural life of the community of people in the An Giang border area. That is, to quote Karl Marx, "*humanity always only poses problems that it can solve*". Because "*the problem itself only arises when the material conditions to solve it already exist or are at least in the process of being formed*". Therefore, when considering the culture and lifestyle of the people of An Giang in the border area, it is necessary to establish the relationships between the way of life and precisely the economic basis that makes up the decisive content to create its characteristics and appearance: the "border trade" lifestyle.

Researcher Nguyen Van Hau has also confirmed that the An Giang border area is "*a place where the four main regions live*" and "*people from all over the world gather here to trade and sell*". In addition to Chau Doc, there are Tinh Bien and Tan Chau. "*Although these two places are only small*

districts, they are also near the border." Thus, the "*place where the four principalities live*" and "*the four directions gather*" have existed for a long time in the history of the people here.

Alternatively, for a long time, this place has formed a way of trade and commerce between this side of the border and the other side, between this locality and other localities in the region. Vietnamese and Cambodian people gathered together to buy and sell like a small market scene. This is the place of frontier trade. Large and small smuggling and illegal exchanges often happen in this place. Rural residents near the border disregarded procedures because of their daily needs. Although professional smugglers have complete personal records, transporting goods is another matter. They want to make much profit and have to "*parachute*" (a form of smuggling today - TMD) those goods. Thus, the "*illegal*" and "*regardless of procedures*" trade behavior of "*frontier trade*" forces people to "*cover up*" and "*disguise*" to bypass censorship and avoid control of the government is obvious. It is the lifestyle of "*creating a false form*" in a trade that "*gradually molds*" over time to create a lifestyle: less emphasis on form, simplifying form. It comes from the reality of "*frontier trade*" life, which, over time, creates a "collective unconscious domain" of the subject of border cultural space.

Because of this, it is always easy to see manifestations of the lifestyle culture that the people here show, such as the lack of symmetry and harmony between the external expression and the internal quality of life and the expression between form and content quality. This lifestyle culture manifests itself in many aspects, from clothing to housing, communication to activities.

For example, in communication, we often see them exuberant and flirtatious, and they often socially use words that are somewhat flirtatious, humorous, witty, and look like something funny. For example, in front a somewhat unfortunate situation, people living in other places will show sympathy and share comforting words, such as: "*replace people*" and "*it is over...*" *the people in the border area here also share but use words like: "if only..."*,. Therefore, from those external manifestations, thinking that they are easy-going, easy-going people but that is a huge mistake. Alternatively, in terms of clothing, we see something strange in their outfit style, the type that does not match, like "*this guy's beard sticks to that woman's chin*", the clothes contradict each other,... Or in terms of colour. What they often use the most are dark, soft, and somewhat monotonous colours. Moreover, if, from that monotonous, somewhat disproportionate appearance, it is confirmed that their struggling life is lacking. With a simple, even rough appearance, behind that appearance is a life that is not at all miserable, even somewhat wealthy, and people in the surrounding areas cannot compare.

Therefore, it is impossible to understand the culture and life of the An Giang border area through external expressions. To be more precise, the people of the An Giang border do not focus their lives on external manifestations but on the inside, on quality. Therefore, their quality of life is often very high and complete, but at first glance, it looks monotonous. They are intelligent, sharp, and insightful, but their expression seems playful and easy-going.

4.2. The ability to quickly adapt to a new life in the culture and lifestyle of the people in the An Giang border area

Another manifestation in the lifestyle culture of the people in the An Giang border area is the ability to quickly adapt to a new life, whether familiar or unfamiliar. If the lifestyle of people in other areas of the Mekong Delta region is "*easy to change places of residence, if the locality is not good then leave, even living mobility*", ... then the lifestyle of the people in the region An Giang border, in addition to the typical characteristics of the region's culture, also has its typical features of the border area. If there is a lifestyle of the so-called "*if you do not do well, then leave*", then this characteristic is only manifested to the extent of people with a low-income life, a life of "*bread and butter*" rather than the characteristic culture. One thing that can be seen is that trade is a dominant economic form for the people of the An Giang border area. If it is a "*departure*", then "*leaving*" is also very different from other people in purely agricultural production areas in the region. Their cultural space is "*trade and commerce*", so they have a flexible personality and even have tricks, so when changing their life environment, they are very adaptable and easy to get along with import. Alternatively, once there is a change in life conditions, people in the An Giang border area can easily cross the boundaries of cultural space to integrate into a new cultural space, a new life, and adapt quickly to new environments.

The historical process brings about this content. That is, from the very beginning, they were immigrants from many different lands, and when they "*came here, they stayed here*" (Southern folk songs), coexisting in real life to form the characteristic of "*swerving people*", forming characteristics of their thinking and perception of life. Therefore, for them, integrating into a new life and environment is not a challenge but an opportunity, a foundation for building the future.

Besides, the commercial nature of life in border areas also plays a vital role in creating their bravery and ability to adapt to cultural space. Therefore, the acuity and flexibility will become even sharper and more magical. Moreover, their thinking is more spatial than temporal thinking.

4.3. The ability to integrate thoughts the ability to integrate concepts in real-life

Another characteristic of the culture and lifestyle of people in the An Giang border area is the ability to integrate ideas and concepts into real life. In fact, "*the main transportation system is the waterway and road of the inter-regional transportation network*," which is a favourable condition for meetings, exchanges, and interactive relationships between people. Therefore, even though it is a border area, for their real life, "*border*" is not a barrier. Their steps are not limited by space. Knowing that life is a series of interactions, meetings, exchanges, and exchanges, thinking, perception, and ideas about human life also become multi-dimensional and diverse. Of course, life cannot contain every synthesis in its entirety, but once, achievements in one aspect will sometimes be a weakness in the other. From there, the ideology of human life helps to diversify perspectives and integrate ideas, not just as a foundation for aesthetic and artistic activities. In other words, cultural and artistic activities are not the primary goal of the owner's culture, lifestyle, and trade. Life is focused on the economic aspect, which is more practical than the aspect of "*reciting poetic poetry*". Therefore, if there is "*song chanting*", it is only an expression of

personal inspiration, not the "*Tao Dan Chieu Anh Cac*" movement in Ha Tien. Due to awareness of the role of economic life, the cultural and lifestyle spirit of people in the An Giang border area has gradually "*spread*" to neighbouring areas. Lifestyle culture in areas such as Phu Tan, Cho Moi, Chau Phu, and Chau Thanh in An Giang province has manifested more or less. Because the economy is the decisive material foundation - "*the spiritual is not something else but the material that is transformed into the human mind and transformed there.*"

Therefore, the cultural space of the people in the An Giang border area is due to the process of survival and the way of trade and life, stretching over time, forming a type of lifestyle culture has its appearance and characteristics compared to other cultural and lifestyle regions of the Mekong Delta region.

5. Recommendations

This study is from the perspective of introduction and literature review. This result is a premise for further research on the culture of An Giang province, Vietnam.

6. Conclusion

Approaching and explaining the lifestyle culture of the people in the An Giang border area, of course, is only the first step, and we have also determined that lifestyle culture is not formed overnight but, in essence, is a new process that creates its appearance and characteristics. From there, it can be concluded that the culture and lifestyle of the people in the border area of An Giang, due to the nature of trade and stretching over time, forms a foundation of the subconscious, even unconscious, in life. Lifestyle culture is not created by anyone but by the realities of life. Of course, lifestyle culture is a large, multi-dimensional category, so for the content to be more apparent, it is necessary to have a multi-dimensional view, approached from many angles, to fully understand it. Therefore, we will continue to study the cultural and lifestyle content of the people in the An Giang border area in the following research.

Acknowledgements

The article is based on the author's research results. The author does not receive financial support and has no conflict of interest with anyone.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author

Dr. Tieu Minh Duong works at the Department of Literature, An Giang University, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

References

- A. A. Belik, (Do Lai Thuy, translated by Dr. Hoang Vinh), (2000). Cultural anthropological theories. (Reference book - Internal circulation). Hanoi: *Journal of Arts and Culture*.
- Richard Appignanesi – Chris Gattat (Translated by Tran Tien Cao Dang), (2006). *Introduction to Postmodernism*. Ho Chi Minh City: Tre Publishing House.
- Translated by Nguyen Van Dan, (2005). Unesco World Declaration on Cultural Diversity. *Journal of Social Sciences Information, vol. 10*.
- Nguyen Van Hau, (2006). *Half a month in That Son region*. Ho Chi Minh City: Tre Publishing House. (Republish)
- Le Huong, (1970). *Flea market on the border of Vietnam and Cambodia*. Saigon: Quynh Lam Publishing House.
- Nguyen Van Huyen, (2003). Vietnamese people's lifestyle under the impact of current globalization. *Journal of Philosophy, No. 12*.
- Son Nam, (2017). *Mekong Delta - Ancient lifestyle and garden civilization*. Ho Chi Minh City: Tre Publishing House. (Republish).
- Ngo Duc Thinh, (2015). *Regional differentiation and cultural zoning of Vietnam*. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.
- Pham Hong Tung, (2007). Lifestyle research: Some conceptual issues and approaches. *Hanoi National University Science Magazine, No. 23*.
- Ho Ba Tham, (2003). *Southern cultural issues and development*. Ho Chi Minh City: Culture - Information Publishing House.
- Tran Ngoc Them, (2000). *Vietnamese cultural establishment*. Ho Chi Minh City: Education Publishing House.
- N. V. Sicova, (translated by Prof. Dr. Hoang Vinh), (2005). Culture and civilization. *Folklore Magazine, No. 5*.
- Itamar Even-Zohar, (Tran Hai Yen, translated by Nguyen Dao Nguyen), (2014). *Multi-system theory in cultural and literary studies*. Hanoi: The Gioi Publishing House.

Tieu Minh Duong
SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE OF
PEOPLE IN THE BORDER AREA OF AN GIANG PROVINCE, VIETNAM

Creative Commons licensing terms

Author(s) will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). and European Journal of Literature, Language and Linguistics Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflicts of interest, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated into the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).