



## RAGLAI ETHNIC GROUP'S LIFESTYLE IN KHANH HOA PROVINCE, VIETNAM

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### **Abstract:**

Lifestyle is seen as a human product; however, it plays a huge role in helping human define their goals, create motivations, form personality and establish ethical behavior patterns in harmony with ethics, customs and trends of the times, all of which are to ensure a stable and developing community. Raglai ethnic group is one of 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam, which has been distributed mainly in several provinces, mostly in Khanh Hoa province. The goal of the article is to clarify some issues such as views on lifestyle; a profile of the Raglai ethnic group in Khanh Hoa province, and a study about the Raglai people's lifestyles. In order to accomplish our goals, we use several research methods namely analysis, synthesis; logic and history, field trip and interview.

**Keywords:** lifestyle, ethnic group, Raglai

### **1. Introduction**

When mentioning lifestyle, it refers to the culture, civilization or tradition of the nation associated with each certain historical period. It is the most common and relatively stable set of living activities characterized by each ethnic group, nation or region of social group. Lifestyle is loads of activities of cognitive subjects in order to meet the needs of life, which are manifested in such aspects as eating, dressing, accommodation, traveling, giving birth, entertainment, communicating and satisfying some intellectual and aesthetic demands etc... Human lifestyle is regulated by the means of social production. However, lifestyle also has a strong impact on production methods because people are not only a product of their circumstances, but also a creator of their own living situation.

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## 2. Content

### 2.1. General theory of lifestyle

The term "lifestyle" was first used by an Austrian, Alfred Adler (1870-1937). Personal lifestyle is influenced by the surrounding environment such as family, place of residence, education, culture and especially communication.

According to a brief political dictionary, lifestyle is "*the basic and typical features in living activities of socialist members, which are manifested in the field of labor, living, resting in the family and in all areas of the social life of Soviet people*". A. M. Rumiantxep said that "*The inherent forms of human activity of socialism are determined by their living conditions within the early stage of communism*". Gedge filth affirmed that: "*Lifestyle is a whole system of essential characteristics that express the activities of peoples, classes, social groups, individuals in the conditions of a certain socio-economic form*".

K. Marx used to specify the relationship between people and living conditions through some concepts namely mode of production, mode of lifestyle. K. Marx writes as "*This mode of production should not be studied merely in the sense that it is the reproduction of the physical life of individuals. More importantly, it is a certain mode of activity of those individuals, a limited form of their living activity as well as the mode of their life*".

Through the above views, we realize that lifestyle is shown in many different aspects such as: lifestyle contributes to the selection of needs, identifying benefits and formation of human activity goals. In terms of material production activities and the struggle to improve society, lifestyle plays a direct and most significant role. Due to increasing human needs, in order to meet material needs, people seek to produce material possessions to satisfy their own demands. Satisfying the needs is to resolve the relationship of benefits; the greater the benefit require, the more the production process must be promoted; lifestyle contributes to creating the right motivation for people to work for. In daily life, people's needs are increasingly diverse, in order to have the right action, it is essential to determine the purposes and benefits of the action. Whether the benefits were consistent with the lifestyle at that time or not. If the action is in accordance with the general positive lifestyle of the community, it is a useful one; if it goes against the positive lifestyle of society, this is the downside of lifestyle.

### 2.2. An overview of the Raglai people in Khanh Hoa, Vietnam

Raglai is one of 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam, distributed mainly in several provinces such as Ninh Thuan (58,911 people), Khanh Hoa (55,844 people), Binh Thuan (15,440 people) and Lam Dong (up to 1,517 people). In Khanh Hoa, the Raglai people live mainly in Khanh Son district. Up to now, the Raglai have still maintained a matriarchal system. When women reach adulthood, they choose a suitable man and take them to be husband. All children are born with their mother's surname; the right to inherit property in the family belongs to the daughter and usually the youngest daughter. As for men, after being kidnapped to become a husband, they have two basic rights, the first is the right to work and develop the wealth of the wife's family; the next is the right to make love with their wife for breeding. However, if the man makes a serious mistake, he must come back

his mother's house without bringing property or children since property and children belong to their wife's right. Raglai people live in stilt houses – which are also called long houses. The house is solidly built, usually the main pillars are more than three handbreadths in diameter and 4 meters high.

Raglai people do not have script, so their ancient documents are nearly found. The domestic and foreign research documents on Raglai culture are few and investigative, which there is no depth in cultural research. Currently, scientific researchers have yet to agree on the ethnic origins of the Malayo-Polinesien language group in Vietnam (including Cham, Raglai, Churu, Ede, Giarai). There are two noteworthy theories. The first theory is that these ethnic groups are from the Southeast Asian island. Also, Russian scientists believe that the peoples of the South Island migrated from the islands in the South China Sea to Southeast Asia. The second theory is that all ethnic groups migrated by land from southern China to Vietnam, Laos, and then migrated to some islands. In this case, Raglai culture is expressed through folk medicine knowledge, ancient stories, epics, folk music, some traditional musical instruments, and a system of festivals, customs and beliefs. In terms of festival culture, on occasions of organization namely weddings, engagements, rites of grave-removal, worshiping gods as well as in daily life and festivals, stem liquor is irreplaceable in the Raglai culture. Raglai's stem liquor is carefully fermented, so the liquor looks golden yellow like honey; when drinking it, we feel ecstatic and lightheaded as if we were flying in the middle of the forested mountains. Therefore, in the physical cultural heritages according to the concepts of the Raglai, the cup of stem liquor can be the second most valuable asset after the Mala (a very precious musical instrument of the Raglai people). The culture of stem liquor is a traditional activity of Raglai people that needs to be preserved. Village culture is established on the basis of those who share the same interests in the forest land public ownership regime in each village. Palay (village) of family structure is the traditional social institutions of the Raglai people. Raglai people have their own language. They do not follow any religion, only the polytheistic religion which means "*all living beings have their own soul*". *Raglai people take the names of mountains, rocks, forest trees, animals to name their surnames and consider them as guardian gods; for instance, some large families such as family Chamaléa (blood cord), Pa tau a xá (grinding stone), Pi năng (areca tree), people here have absolute faith in the supreme force called "Giang"*. (Yang).

In the years 1961-1965, Raglai script was built on the basis of the Latin alphabets. Since then, the Raglai literacy movement was supported by the people. Cultural, information and medical activities were developed, gradually eliminating backward customs and raising awareness of disease prevention. Many beautiful cultural traditions are paid attention to be preserved, exploited and protected, for examples stone musical instrument, epic, system of folk tales, folk songs, folk dance ... all of which have been combined with the culture of many different regions bring out a rich and unique culture for this place. Today, the Raglai community has entered the work of building a new society. In that society, the Raglai people are a part of the ethnic group with "equality, solidarity, cooperation and mutual development" in the community of ethnic groups in Vietnam.

### **2.3. Raglai ethnic group's lifestyle**

As can be seen that lifestyle is formed and existing in a dialectical unity between subjective and objective factors of human life. With a certain space and time in which human lifestyle has been gradually formed, moved and changed to create separate characteristics. Related to that, lifestyle is shown mainly through labor and production activities, socio-political activities, cultural-spiritual activities, daily activities and communication activities.

#### **2.3.1 Raglai ethnic group's lifestyle in terms of material production activities**

Material production activities are the first material basis for human to survive, they not only provide human with necessary material needs but also contribute to the creation of human themselves. In production activities, Raglai people use very rudimentary tools, productivity is mainly based on human power, crop productivity completely depends on weather. In terms of extreme climatic conditions, rain is pouring into floods, the sun swirls with strong wind and extremely hot, all of which create long-term dry months, so the production activities of Raglai people faces to many difficulties. Since August 1945 onward, the socio-economic life of Raglai people has changed. The trade with the surrounding areas is somewhat favorable, a variety of officers move to live here and offer new kinds of craft-job which gradually appear such as weaving, cotton processing, paper processing ... all of which somewhat help improve the lives of Raglai people. In addition, the traditional mode of hunting and gathering has gradually decreased, the form of sedentary farming styles according to the slash-and-burn cultivation are alternated instead.

In terms of labor, apart from slash-and-burn cultivation, Raglai people also know how to exploit forest products. They also know how to cut wood to build houses and make tools for production, relying on raw materials from forests to develop handicraft manufacture such as knitting. In breeding and fishing, Raglai people know how to catch fish, birds, animals ... to have better daily meals as well as tame wild animals to become domestic pets to help stabilize their lives.

Nowadays, with the reform policies of Vietnamese Party and State, they have helped these ethnic groups abolish slash-and-burn cultivation and carry out the work of sedentary farming to gradually stabilize their lives. Raglai people know to focus on expanding their cultivated area, using buffaloes and cows to replace human power. Also, they grasp at composting manure for crops, contributing to an increased productivity. Raising cattle and poultry has been developed, especially large-scale models of raising cows, goats and sheep have been formed; Forestry activities such as afforestation, reforestation, collection and preliminary processing of forest products have been paid attention. However, all of which Raglai people have are backward farming lifestyles with individual production forces, self-sufficiency, isolation of small production and an agricultural production associated with the exploitation of hills and forests in particular. The changes in their lifestyle through production activities have been still slow, in which traditional factors in their lifestyles still impact on.

### 2.3.2 Raglai ethnic lifestyle in the field of cultural and spiritual issues

Those are to satisfy human needs for spiritual value which is an indispensable basic need of human and society. Spiritual-cultural activities have a dialectic relationship with material activities; the development of labor forces has been gradually increased, leading to an increasingly diverse and rich cultural and spiritual life. Spiritual-cultural activities take place in the interaction between stages namely demand, production, exchange and consumption of spiritual values and cover all fields of spiritual life such as thought, literature, art, science, education, belief and religion. These activities in these fields are placed in mutual interaction, promoting each other and contributing to forming a lifestyle.

For Raglai people, the first spiritual activity associated the process of production, hunting and gathering food. Raglai people's life depends on the forest. All their food and drink are bestowed by forests. However, forests sometimes bring danger to themselves, which can be some natural disasters or the attack of wild animals. Therefore, the Raglai people really love forests, worshipping forests and mountains and considering everything existing in the forest to be the Gods, such as river god, mountain god, tree god ... Paying homage to the Gods and worshipping the Gods are their spiritual life; sometimes when they believe in an unobvious strength which cannot be explained clearly, they think it is the will of "Yàng" (God).

Raglai people live with the custom of settling down on slash-and-burn cultivation in order to live together and exploit forests effectively, they set the convention for people in their community, which is called "Customary Law". According to the Raglai customary law, they define that their fields belong to the family lineages and community ownership. Although old fields have been uncultivated for a long time, no one can violate these land since everyone understands the provisions of the Customary Law, everyone is aware of the use of land and slash-and-burn fields which are possessed by other owners - especially Pochurq (mountain owner) is trusted by the whole community.

In the realm of literature, Raglai people have left a huge treasure of folk literature, including folk tunes, ancient tales, epics, proverbs, idioms, folk riddles. Especially the epic set with quite large content has been collected, compiled and translated. Raglai folklore genres are expressed in rhymes. Raglai rhyme is both rhymed according to "hard-rhyme" and soft-rhyme" schemes like the Cham's literature rhyme.

Spiritual-cultural life of Raglai people is associated with folk cultural activities. Ancient fairy tales are a form of oral telling; Telling songs, poems, fables, all of which are forms of oral culture. Related to this, ancient stories through the form of telling which is a genre of telling by words without singing, such as Chay Bboloh (Gao guy), Chay kra (monkey boy), Patio kiäk (frog god), Chay Taleäk (flute player)...etc. These old tales are spoken by the elders in the village and told by families for their descendants on festivals. Nowadays, the number of people who know how to tell these ancient stories is very few and the habit of telling stories is gradually being forgotten.

The poetic parables are sung to condemn and criticize those people who are lazy and cruel as well as to defend the honest, poor and weak people. The philosophy of those stories is often seen that " *if you run after two hares, you will catch neither; evil people must die*

*while gentle and intelligent people are children of the Heaven and the kindness will prevail in the end*". A majority of Raglai people follow pantheism belief, which they believe that all things and phenomena such as a stone, a knife, an ax ... have their own soul, fate and connection with human because man is an entity of nature.

Thus, the ancient Raglai's treasure trove aims at both reminding the next generation to remember the history of their ancestors and villages and head towards a high value of Truth - Kindness – Beauty which is highly educational.

In the domain of Raglai art, it is mainly expressed through folk music which is outstanding is Ma La musical instrument. Ma La is considered one of the sacred instruments, kept in a place of respect like Silt House and if anyone would like to take it out, they must perform a ritual to ask for permission. Ma La musical instrument is indispensable in the festivals, especially the festival of "new rice", and Grave-removal festival because this is the spiritual culture of Raglai people. Each kind of Ma La musical instrument has a name, which reflects the matriarchy. The set of Ma La has many items which are symbols of each family member and must be headed by the Ma La "mother". In general, Ma La melody is simple, short, repeated many times, but containing profound content. Ma La is played not only to communicate with Gods in agricultural rituals, life-death rituals and other rituals but also to be an indispensable close friend in community activities.

In addition to Ma La musical instruments, Raglai people also have many other musical instruments for their spiritual life. The Percussion set includes Mã La, Drum, flat Gong, soil drum, La-a Gong, lithophone; Wind set includes Bàu khene, Horn khene and Flute; String set includes Chapis, one - two string zippers, the Lip lutes.

Besides, Raglai people also have folk games and a variety forms of entertainment to reduce fatigue after a hard-working time. For instance, a game of chasing crows which a hen fights against hawks to save her chicks; or many games such as Pee-ka-boo, a tiger catches goats, flying kites, stick-pushing competition, rope pulling, U-playing, rice-pounding competition, crossbow-shooting competition. In addition to their indigenous games, there are also some games that thanks to the cultural exchanges with other regions, the cultural and spiritual life here is enriched.

In terms of religion, Raglai people carry a full range of pantheism beliefs of the South Islanders in Vietnam in particular and the Southeast Asian agricultural population in general. The Raglai religious beliefs have a primitive form of religion that dominates their spiritual life, which means everything has their own soul, expressed in festivals and Shuman rituals. For instance, Agriculture rites (including rice worshipping ceremony, grain-picking up ceremony, new-rice ceremony, riped-rice offering ceremony, "eating new rice" festival), life-cycle rituals (including ceremony of giving birth, midwifery, bracelet-offering ceremony, naming ceremony, rite of passage, confession ceremony, wedding ceremony and especially the grave-removal ceremony.) Currently, Raglai people live in Khanh Hoa province with their "Ritual of grave-removal" which has just been recognized by the State as a National Intangible Cultural Heritage. This shows that the religious life has become a regular spiritual lifestyle in Raglai life in Khanh Hoa in particular and nationwide Raglai people in general.

Regardless of education, compared to the common background between regions and ethnic minorities in the vicinity, the cultural and educational situation of the Raglai people has not yet developed dramatically. Before 1975, the education issue for the ethnic minorities was not really paid attention to. Those educated Raglai officers were mainly people going to work in the North. That makes the educational life here very poor. After 1975, thanks to the Party and State policies towards the ethnic minorities, education and training of Raglai people has been much more taken care of. At a low starting point, although the educational development has not been very dramatic, it can be seen that the proportion of school-age pupils has been increasing. However, compared with other ethnic minorities in the region, it is still slow; the intellectual level of Raglai people has not met the requirements of the current society.

In summary, the Raglai ethnic group, with a rather rich spiritual life through folk culture forms and festivals, partly shows the significance of spiritual culture in Raglai ethnic group's life. This is also a criterion for us to compare the differences between the Raglai culture with other ethnic minorities in other regions, contributing to the diversity of lifestyles in the Vietnamese ethnic community.

Raglai ethnic group's lifestyle in the field of family activities: daily activities are indispensable ones of human, which are apart from labor activities. These daily activities take place in each family, aiming at reproducing human labor. Specifically, they include eating, drinking, resting, entertainment, breeding, educational activities in each family and in communities.

For the Raglai ethnic group, daily activities are mainly expressed through the ethnic group culture, family culture and village culture (Pa Loi). The Pa Loi culture of Raglai people is different from the village culture of other ethnic groups in the Central Highland because Raglai people do not have Communal House and Guol House but only Silt House; Raglai people do not have a village elder but only a patriarch, in which a village elder is alternated by a prestigious female patriarch in a certain community group. However, all daily activities of Raglai people are mainly associated with family culture and their ethnicity. They consider the family as a place to store and transmit ethnic culture to the next generations, which family structure, marriage, inheritance, blood relationship fully reflects daily activities of Raglai ethnic group.

Raglai people considered family as a place to preserve customs, cultural traditions of the community as well as a site to teach ethnic culture to the next generations. With a tradition of nomadic life, Raglai families gather in Paloi (village) on high mountain slopes (500 - 600 meters above sea level) or gather along the mountainside to do slash-and-burn cultivation. However, the Raglai Paloi (villages) are built relatively stable. In each Paloi, there are several clans living. Raglai families can be divided into two types namely extended family and small family. An extended family is one of several generations living together in a long Silt House. There are no separations between rooms, which can create a cozy and comfortable living space.

In terms of production, extended families often share a common farming area, in which each small family has a separate land plot. Sometimes, each small family possess their own field, depending on the specific conditions of each upland area. In each small

family's upland areas, there are huts and small stilt houses for storing harvested products. Through surveys in some families, the concepts of common and private possessions in each small family in an extended family is not clear, mostly sharing everything; when they are out of corn, couples in an extended large family can take the corn of their older or younger couples to eat from easy.

In a Raglai family culture with matriarchy, the woman is the head of the family, their children are born according to their mother's surname; among many children in a family, the youngest daughter is the most powerful person who can inherit everything when their mother dies. In a family with many generations living together, they live in harmony. Regarding the marriage system of Raglai people, they maintain the marriage regime according to the mother's lineages, they are allowed to get married if they are from the same lineages even the lineage gaps are too much. If there is marriage incest, this is a taboo and can be punished by "Yang".

Raglai people consider sex to be sacred and under divine supervision; those who do wrong things will be punished by Gods. The old custom of sleeping was a fine cultural feature of Raglai people. It is the custom of welcoming guests to stay overnight at home. Originally, it was a good custom because it is only for unmarried men and women, they met in a village festival such as: eating rice-head ceremony, grave-removal ceremony, wedding ceremony etc ... Next to the walls of Silt Houses or around jars of Straw Liquor, they danced passionately according to Mã La rhythm. When the night was late, they invited each other to their silt house, laying together to talk about their future life and especially they did not let "sex" happen. Thanks to the custom of sleeping in Silt Houses, many couples found their partners, they got married and lived happily. Today, due to the interference of culture, beliefs and lifestyle, that custom of "Sleep" is exploited and transformed, so until now it almost no longer exists.

Raglai people get married very early age (from 14 to 15 years old), especially women and they have children at this age. Their desire is to have many children. When having many, they have much labor force; however, due to lack of knowledge about childbirth planning and childcare, the death rate of infants is very high. During pregnancy period, women do not eat food with a lot of resin such as jackfruit. In particular, in their opinion, the period of giving birth is "fetid", so they are not allowed to give birth at home. In order to have a place to give birth, they have to build a temporary hut in the forest. A few days after the birth of their baby, the baby is taken to take a bath in a stream, all the utensils used for the period of breeding are burned to purify themselves. When an infant was born three days after the birth, the family holds a ceremony called "Mid-wife worshiping ceremony"; up to 30 days after being born, a midwife and ancestors giving- ceremony are celebrated for new-born baby. For children who are always fussy, Raglai people hold an extra ceremony to put bracelets or bangles on these children's legs or wrists. After the "Ancestors ceremony" is done, a "Naming ceremony" will be held; and a "Rite of Passage" will be held until the child becomes an adult. In addition, the Raglai ethnic group also has some ceremonies such as engagement ceremony, wedding ceremony, grave-removal ceremonies ..., all of which are cultural practices associated with daily activities of Raglai people.



### **2.3.3 Raglai ethnic group's lifestyle in terms of communication activities**

Communication activities are a basic form of human activity, which indicate the mutual interaction, meeting each other, human-to-human relationships, behavioral activities, relationships with other people and community, with oneself and nature. In communication activities, compared to Cham people, Raglai people still retain many elements of ancient language and culture. This is the origin of a powerful clan from many centuries ago; the Pi Nang-Cau clan linked the La-u-Dua clan in the North to establish Champa Kingdom at the end of the second century AD. That is the reason why until today the Cham and Raglai ethnic groups consider each other like brothers, Cham is older brother and Raglai is younger brother.

In the matter of religious culture, Raglai people maintain the form of polytheistic beliefs and "all living things have their own soul" in order to communicate with Gods. Polytheism belief is the concept of rebirth - reincarnation, related to all activities in human life. Grave-removal ceremony is a form of connection between the dead and the living. At the same time, this is also a humanistic beauty in the Raglai lifestyle.

Raglai people also have a variety of different festivals, gathering a myriad of participants. The new-rice ceremony and the new-year welcoming custom of Raglai people are highly communal activities. When a festival is held, it is an opportunity for people to meet, exchange, and confide to each other about everything in production as well as in life. The new rice-eating festival is also a season-changing ceremony, sending off the dry season, praying for favorable rain and water for next good crop. The ceremony also marks a production cycle of the year with the joyfulness and gratitude to the ancestors as well as to "Yang" who bestowed a bumper crop last year.

In regard to festivals, Raglai's new rice-eating festival includes many diversified activities. When the priest finished the respecting ceremony, a Mã La musical team begin to dance in a circle and beat drums, gongs, and Mã La instrument. They dance and play hundreds of Mã La dances. Everyone drinks straw liquor together happily, many young people bring their musical instruments such as lip trumpet, khene, Chapis; they confide to each other through musical instrument sounds and some unique loving melodies such as manhi, hari, suri, mayeng, kathông, ...

In addition to the festival forms, Raglai people also have many communicative activities through the forms of ancient epic tales, singing and telling stories (singing and telling ancient stories, poetic stories, fables and epic) or through folk songs, idioms, puzzles, proverbs ...etc. in order to convey spiritual values to their descendants, which it is vital to preserve the folklore treasure which has been gathered over thousands of years by their ancestors.

It can be said that the forms of communication activities of Raglai ethnic group mainly take place in the production process, in festivals and folklore forms, through which Raglai people can communicate, exchange ideas, express feelings for each other, which enrich their spiritual life, contributing to forming their unique lifestyle.

### 3. Conclusion

Raglai people's lifestyle in Khanh Hoa is a traditional way of life, challenged through thousands of years of changes, ups and downs along with the history of Vietnamese nation. Related to this, their lifestyle has long-lasting and sustainable basic values; however, some there are non-fundamental values, which only existed at a temporary period and then have been eroded, degraded, or even lost afterwards. Nevertheless, a lifestyle is an endless stream that is constantly being supplemented and developed; the basic characteristics of the traditional lifestyle of Raglai ethnic group have become sustainable and incorruptible.

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