

# Ethnic Minority People and Tourism in Vietnam: The Traditional Textile in Binh Thuan Province

ベトナムにおける少数民族と観光政策  
— ビントゥアン省の伝統織物の事例 —

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## Abstract

In Vietnam, tourism development is a part of poverty alleviation policy for ethnic minority people. This paper is based on our field survey on textile and tourism of ethnic minority people in Binh Thuan Province.

Textile of ethnic minority people is an important resource for tourism. At the same time, the traditional backstrap loom is considered as “behind the times,” and “modern and efficient” floor loom is now being introduced.

However, the latter is not appropriate to weave the traditional textile so beautifully as the traditional one, and the textile woven is not sold well in the market. The efficiency-oriented policy causes a lot of trouble to ethnic minority people.

## 要 約

ベトナムでは少数民族の貧困対策の一環として観光開発が進められている。本稿は、ビントゥアン省における少数民族の織物と観光に関して行った現地調査に基づいている。少数民族の織物は重要な「観光資源」である。同時に、伝統的な背帯機 (Backstrap loom) は「後れたもの」と見なされ、「近代的」で「効率的」な高機 (Floor loom) が導入されようとしている。しかし、それはこの地域の伝統的な織物を織るには適当ではなく、伝統的な機で織ったような美しさはなく、売れない状況が続いている。効率重視の政策が、混乱を生じさせている。

**Key words** : Ethnic Minority, Cham, Vietnam, traditional textile

**キーワード** : エスニック・マイノリティ、チャム人、ヴェトナム、伝統織物

## I. Introduction

When an economy develops, people lose many things such as beautiful scenery, cultural heritage, leisure time and so on. Tourists are the people who move looking for what they lost. Their destination is usually remote areas, where ethnic minority people live and economy is not “developed.” In this way, tourism and “poverty” is related. Poverty Alleviation policy for ethnic minority people has been one of the main national objectives of the Vietnamese government and tourism has been one of the means for this objective. Both well-preserved natural environment and rich cultural heritage attract tourists. If they have already lost them, they may be restored and sometimes even created by the name of restoration. Thus tourism and ethnic minority people are closely related to each other.

However, natural environment and cultural heritage does not necessarily bring about income directly to ethnic minority people. They may be excluded from “national park” where environment and cultural heritage are preserved exclusively for tourists. Important thing is the way how they are involved in tourism industry. If they are exploited by the industry, it may just result that they may lose something important for their life, culture and tradition while only tourism capitalists are making a profit. Tourism should result in improving the life of ethnic minority people not only economically but also culturally. We need to be careful enough in this respect when we examine the impact of tourism on ethnic minority people.

Textile has been one of the main items for tourism development, in which ethnic minority people are directly involved. Traditional textile and its products can be sold to tourists as a souvenir, and weaving villages may be promoted as a

tourist destination. Thus weaving can bring about income directly to ethnic minority people who usually lack job opportunity. This is a way how tourism is usually considered to contribute to poverty alleviation for ethnic minority people.

However, in many ways tourism can deteriorate their life. Economically they must sell their products. They are selling a part of their culture, which may have some impact on the meaning of textile. For example, if they have been weaving for sacred purpose such as ceremony, the sacredness may be lost by commercializing it. In some cases the culture itself may be deformed or even created to make the products more attractive for tourists. This is to make culture, and even ethnic minority people, subordinate to tourism industry. They are the means for the industry but they should be the ends of the policy. The objective should be to improve their life, in which culture is taking an important part. This is the reason why we must carefully avoid the income approach which evaluates everything in terms of income. This approach cannot appropriately evaluate deterioration of cultural life. We need more holistic approach and we adopt in this paper the perspective of the capability approach of Amartya Sen, which evaluate people's well-being in terms of what they can do and can be.

The paper is based on our field research that we conducted in Binh Thuan province mainly in February and December 2007 as a part of Prof. Eguchi's research project. This province is located in the coastal area, 200 km north of Ho Chi Minh City. We visited several weaving villages of ethnic minority people, mainly Cham<sup>1)</sup> and K'ho<sup>2)</sup>, which are now becoming involved in tourism. They still keep weaving with traditional methods called "backstrap loom." Their cloths are mostly used in traditional ways such as for ceremonies and daily use. They may be exchanged within the village or between villages of the same ethnic group and very rarely sold to visitors or tourists due to the limited access to the villages. Thus at present it is mainly for self-consumption but this shows that it

has a promising potential to be promoted for tourism and to become an important source of income for the weavers.

On the other hand, the provincial government in cooperation with an NGO is trying to promote weaving by introducing a new type of loom called “floor loom,” which they say more efficient than the traditional one. This is true only if the weaver can handle it efficiently, but this loom is very difficult to handle. What is worse, the floor loom is alien to the local ethnic minority people and inappropriate for weaving their traditional textile, which means the quality of the textile is deteriorating. An expert is making his effort to adapt it to their local condition but does not succeed yet. Weavers, mostly women, keep using it without pay because the quality is too low to be sold. They seem to be exhausted. In this case, not only the culture but also the female weavers became a means for tourism.

This paper is organized as follows. Section II overviews the situation of Binh Thuan Province. Section III shows the case of La Da Commune, which is located in remote mountainous area and where traditional weaving is preserved well. Section IV shows the case of Ma Lam Town which is more urbanized and where the traditional weaving was extinguished several years ago. Section V is the case of Phan Hoa Commune where many women still keep weaving in the traditional method. But the new loom was introduced into this commune, which makes trouble to villagers such as women’s group leader, weavers, and the expert. Section VI is the case of Phan Thanh Commune where the new loom was introduced at a large scale which also has a lot of problems. The last section is the conclusion.

## II. Overview of Binh Thuan Province

Binh Thuan Province is located in the southern coastal region of Vietnam, about 200 Km north of Ho Chi Minh City (Figure 1). The total land area is 7,992 square kilometer, of which agricultural land is 1,141 square kilometer, or 14 % of the total. Its capital city is Phan Thiet, which is known as a fishing port and famous for “nuoc mam” (Vietnamese fish source). Its population is 1,090,000, which is composed of Kinh and 26 ethnic minority people. Kinh people (872,000 persons) account for 80 % of the total, and Cham people (29,532 persons) account for 2.7%. Cham people historically took an important role in this region. Champa Kingdom, which was flourishing from 2nd to 14th centuries in this region, was a kingdom of Cham people. Its remains such as Po Sah Ina Tower, which was influenced by Hinduism, are preserved as cultural heritage (Picture 1). Such a historical background makes Cham people to take an important role in the region economically and socially. Villages of Cham people are scattered in the region, in some of which traditional textile is kept weaving. We visited some of them during our field survey.

One of the tourist destinations in this region is *Muine*, a beautiful beach resort, which is located only 20 Km north of Phan Thiet City. Because of the arid climate, a desert spreads out along the coast, which is often seen in picture books and calendar of Vietnam.

In the past several years, cultivation of dragon fruit has been spread in this region. Many shops along the national road No.1 sell dragon fruits as well as fish source. Buying these products is another purpose of tourists.

So far tourism development has been taken place along the coastal area. The less-developed mountainous area of the province where many ethnic minority

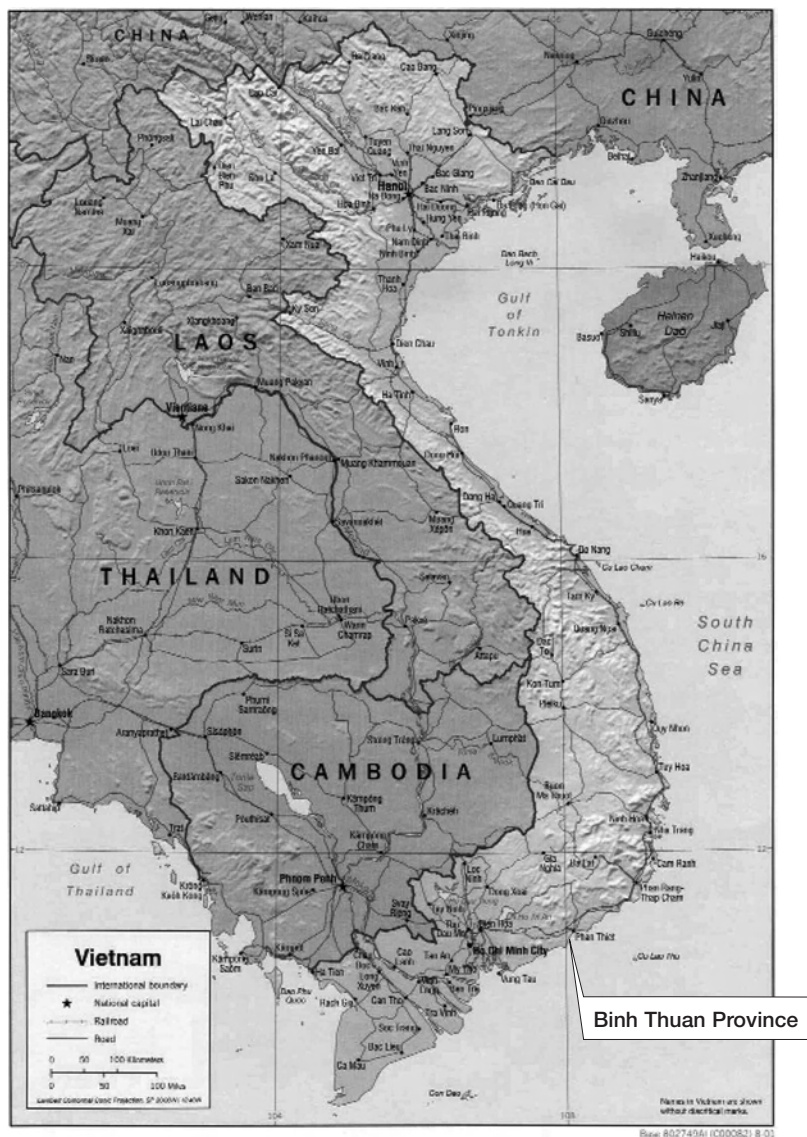
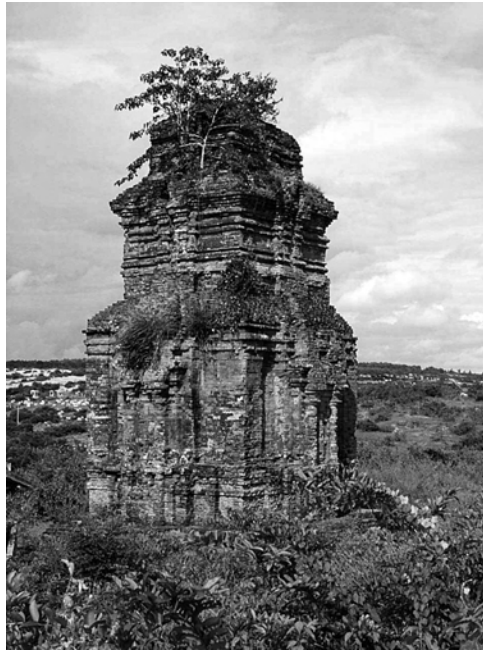


Figure 1 Map of Vietnam

出所) [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle\\_east\\_and\\_asia/vietnam\\_rel01.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/vietnam_rel01.jpg)



**Picture 1 Po Sah Ina Tower (Binh Thuan Province)**

people live is now planned to be developed as a tourist destination by the provincial government. La Da Commune is located in the planned area.

### **III. La Da Commune**

#### **III-1. Poverty and Tourism Development Plan**

La Da Commune is located in the northwest end of Ham Thuan Bac District, which is also located in the northwest border of Binh Thuan Province, adjacent to Lam Dong Province. Ham Thuan Bac District spreads from low land rice field to mountainous forest area. Of its total area of 128,247 ha, 41,900 ha (32.6%) is

agricultural land and 69,000 ha (53.8%) is forest area. La Da Commune is located in the mountainous area.

The population of Ham Thuan Bac Province is about 159,700, which is composed of Kinh and 23 ethnic minority people. The total population of ethnic minority people is 11,293 persons or 7.0 % of the total. The major groups of the latter is Cham (4,239 persons), K'ho (4,299 persons), Rai (1,028 persons), and Raglai (364 persons). La Da Commune is mostly populated by K'ho people, while other communes that we visited are mainly populated by Cham.

Usually mountainous area is populated by ethnic minority people, and due to their less commercialized economy, their cash income is lower and therefore its poverty incidence is statistically higher than other areas according to the official criteria of poverty<sup>3)</sup>. This commune is classified “poor” by the province and received various kinds of subsidies and assistances from the provincial government. For example, 150 ha of land were planted with rubber trees with the assistance. K'ho people, as well as Raglai, Churu, and Rai people, receive preferential treatment. For example, from pupils of kindergarten to junior high school students receive 5-10 Kg of rice per month, stationery, uniform, etc. free of charge.

La Da Commune is located in remote mountainous area, and it takes about one hour by car from the main road (Road No. 1) due to the bad road condition which is now under renovation. This renovation is a part of the tourism development plan. This road will connect Phan Thiet City with Da Lat City in Lam Dong Province, another major tourist spot in southern Vietnam, which was constructed as a French style “summer resort” on the top of mountain during the French colonial period. In the tourism development plan, some villages of ethnic minority people were selected to develop as a tourist spot and as a provider of traditional textile, one of which is La Da Commune. This is expected



to serve as a poverty alleviation policy as well as a project for “Preservation of traditional trade villages” of the Office of Information and Culture of the Province. In spite of the enthusiastic attitude at the provincial level, many villagers as well as village leaders do not seem to be so enthusiastic about the plan.

### **III-2. Traditional Weaving in La Da Commune**

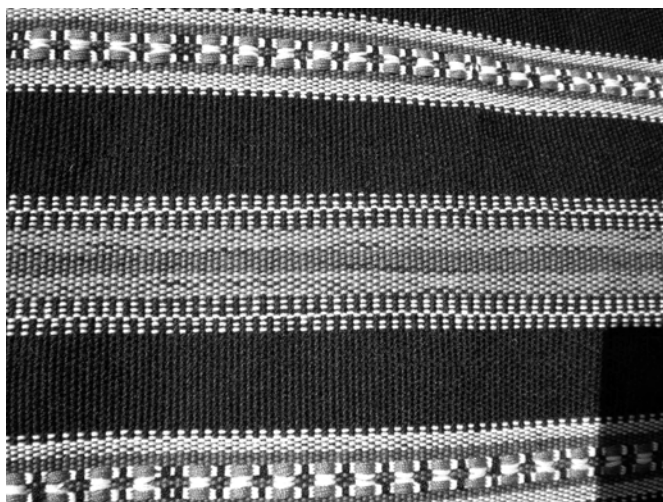
La Da Commune was established in 1975 at the time of unification of Vietnam by integrating several K’ho villages (or *Buon* in K’ho language) in this area. Reflecting this historical background, this commune is composed of four hamlets. Its population is now 2,388 persons (475 households), and population of K’ho is 2,168 (427 households), accounting for 90 percent of the total population. The other ethnic groups are Cham (15 persons, 3 households) and Kinh, Tay, and Chinese (the total of these three groups is 205 persons, 45 households). These people are mainly live in the fourth hamlet, while K’ho dominates other three.

Since this commune is located in mountainous area, its economy depends on upland crops, fruit trees and forest products. Its main agricultural products are dry rice, corn, rubber, cotton<sup>4)</sup>, cashew nut, mango, jackfruit, cacao, etc. During rainy season from June to November, both men and women go out to work in the field. There is no weaving in this season. But during dry season from December to May in the next year, women stay in the village and weave the traditional cloth. On the other hand, men go out to the field to prepare for the next cultivation by slashing and burning the field.

Weaving is a work for women<sup>5)</sup>. They say that it is expected for all young women to learn how to weave before their marriage but at present, only 60 women in the commune can weave. And only some of them actually keep

weaving, while others stop weaving. They say that weaving itself is not so difficult to learn. The pattern on the cloth is not so complicated to learn. The meaning of the pattern is well-known to the villagers. The fact that many women stop weaving even though it is not difficult to weave indicates that weaving is neither profitable nor desirable for some women. For others, weaving is a pleasure as well as a source of income. They may keep weaving not only because they do not have other sources of income but also because they like weaving. Thus weaving is an activity in which aptitude matters. We should not simply assume that every woman has aptitude for weaving. The strategy to promote weaving for development often neglects this fact, which will deteriorate the QOL (quality of life) of the women who are unwillingly involved in a weaving project<sup>6)</sup>.

The cloths woven in the village is generally consumed by the weaver or exchanged within the village, and seldom sold to outsiders. It is usually used for skirt for women, towel, bedcover, headscarf, and so on. It is mostly used by old



Picture 2 K'Ho pattern woven by the traditional loom

people but not popular among young people. Traditional cloths are used as a gift in marriage ceremony. A bride is expected to present 20 to 30 pieces of cloths to her bridegroom's mother. For this purpose, the bride's mother may weave for her daughter, or obtain them in exchange or buy them at the market.

In this remote commune, the new type of loom is introduced. This new loom was introduced by the provincial government in order for rural development, poverty alleviation, and ethnic tourism. The reason for introducing this type of loom is that it is more "efficient" than the traditional one in the sense that it can produce longer and wider cloths per day. Its width is 135 cm wide, which is usually 90cm wide. However, this loom is very difficult for women to handle and the quality of the product is inevitably low, which will cause serious problems as discussed below. Thus efficiency is considered only in terms of quantity, and cultural and economic values are neglected.

Now 78 persons are involved in this project, of which 68 persons are attending



Picture 3 Newly introduced floor loom in La Da Commune

training course to learn how to use this loom and the remaining 10 persons are learning how to use sewing machine. Most of them are women but we saw two young men are learning among many young women. Another man involved in this project is the teacher (indicated by Mr. X hereafter). This indicates that the traditional gender division of labor may not be applied to a newly-introduced “modern” technology. In their tradition, the role of men relating to weaving is to make the back strap loom, which is mostly made of bamboo and much simpler than the new one. Now the person who makes the floor loom is the teacher himself who is a carpenter and tries to adapt it to the local condition.

Another difference from the tradition is that women attending the training course are very young. This may be partly explained by the fact that they are more interested in and easily used to the new technique and partly by the fact that they can receive some amount of money as stipend. They may be taught during this training course that this new loom is “better” in their sense of efficiency than the traditional one, which may make them misunderstood that it is “superior” in any sense than the traditional one. If they misunderstood that the traditional one is “inferior,” it is against the preservation of traditional weaving.

### **III-3. The Case of Ms. A**

Ms. A was born in 1959. She has 6 children (3 boys and 3 daughters) and her husband is 10 years older than she. She is one of the women who still keep weaving in the commune. She usually weaves for two month from February to March, until the harvest season of beans. She grew cotton to make yarn until 10 years ago but now she buys yarn at the market. The cloths that she weaves will be used for her daughters’ marriage ceremony. She said she would weave 20 to 30 pieces of cloths to give her daughter and her daughter will present them to

her bridegroom's mother as a part of the ceremony<sup>7)</sup>. After the marriage ceremony, bridegroom will stay with his bride's family for a while and work for the family. And when they have a baby, they will move out of the house. It may be interpreted that the cloths is given in exchange for bridegroom's labor. So long as the bride and bridegroom are living in the same village, the cloths are circulating in the village forever if they are not consumed. However, since cloth is a necessary good and must be consumed, someone in the village should keep weaving to make it circulating until they completely depend on the market. Thus cloths have a role in their social life.

She is so skillful that she can weave a cloth of 135 cm wide with the traditional backstrap loom. This width is unusually wide in comparison with the usual width of 60 cm. It seems as if she is challenging to the new loom that is designed to weave 135cm width cloth with the traditional loom. In her house, the new floor loom is set, which may be given by the provincial government, but she said she does not use it at all. In fact she can use it because she attended a training course and learned how to use it. She does not want to use it because she prefers the traditional one. She said that it is impossible to weave cloths with the new loom as beautiful as with the traditional one. But the only one point, in which the new loom is superior to the traditional one, is that it can weave a wider cloths. She seems to prove the potential of the traditional loom to weave such a wide cloth. However, she said it is very tiresome for her to weave such a wide cloth, taking one week to weave a piece of cloth.

She likes to weave with the traditional backstrap loom and has a lot of pride to weave with it. Our QOL survey showed that her self-confidence is very high, perhaps due to her ability to weave, for which many outsiders including foreigners visit her. Unfortunately health aspect of her QOL is not good, perhaps because of her old age. We know that weaving is not just for income. It has much

more important meanings to her life.

## IV. Ma Lam Town

Ma Lam Town is located more urbanized area than La Da Commune, near the railway and National Road No. 1 and more affected by economic development. Another village that we visited in Ham Thuan Bac District is Hamlet No. 3 of Ma Lam Town. This is a Cham village, called *Palei Pajai* in their language. Its population is 1,894 persons, of which 1,273 are Cham, or two thirds of the total population. The remaining one third is Kinh. In the past, many women in this village wove their traditional textile but only five years ago they stop weaving. Only four houses still keep traditional backstrap looms. Five years ago, the new floor loom was introduced into this village, too. A training course was held and some women mastered it. Now a group of women is preparing to use it for their business. The coincidence of the disappearance of the traditional loom and the introduction of the new loom may not be by chance. The new loom might expel the traditional one.

### IV-1. Cham People and Traditional Textile

According to Vietnamese Statistical Office, the Cham population in Vietnam was 132,837 in 1999, which live mainly in southern provinces of Vietnam, in which Binh Thuan Province is included. In the history, Cham people bequeathed many unique, rich, and diversified cultural assets to our age, which can be seen in different fields such as architecture, sculpture, music, dance, festivals, and the traditional patterned textile. Up until now, their unique tradition and culture keep alive among Cham people in spite of the long time elapsed and the influences of different cultures. Especially, the Cham traditional textile is still

widely used in daily life as will be mentioned in the next section in the case of Phan Hoa Commune.

Historically Cham people grew not only cotton trees but also mulberry to raise silkworm, and produced cotton and silk products by themselves. Many documents described Cham textile industry and their weaving skills, and their precise, plentiful, and multiform products. According to G. Maspéro (1928), Cham people grew mulberry to raise silkworms, and also grew cotton for weaving fabric. According to Le Qui Don (1972), the fact that Cham people grew cotton trees to get cotton fibre for weaving fabric was also mentioned in *Vân Đài Ngoai Ngu* (1972), which mentioned that Cham people grew a kind of cotton tree called *Cac Bôi* tree, and that when the cotton flowers ripened, they looked like feather of goose, spinning cotton to make threads for weaving. Furthermore, an old Chinese literature also mentioned that Cham people knew how to grow cotton trees and how to raise silkworms in the 6th Century, every year they had eight broods. It is also mentioned that they could dye cloths so nicely. In the 8th century, Myanmar people were visiting the Champa to buy the Cham cottons for weaving fabric.

#### **IV-2. The Traditional Backstrap Loom**

We interviewed an old woman (age 62, indicated by Ms. B hereafter) who kept her traditional backstrap loom in her storage. She took it out and washed it for us (Picture 4). She said she inherited it from her grandmother when she died about 20 years ago. The loom was made by Ms. B's grandmother's husband. Until 1975, people grew cotton for weaving but they had stopped growing it since then according to the government policy. She used the inherited loom for weaving traditional cloths until 5 years ago. She could sell a piece of cloth (1.2 m x 2.0 m) at about 40,000 VND<sup>8)</sup>, which were used for funeral ceremony. After they



**Picture 4 Traditional Backstrap Loom in Ma Lam**

stopped weaving, villagers have to buy hand-woven cloths from other villages or factory-made cloths from market.

Now only four people have the traditional looms. Three of them keep it in storage and one of them lent it out for exhibition. Another woman (age 58, indicated by Ms.C hereafter) has one but she does not know how to weave. Her mother could and when she was alive, Ms. C could weave cloths with her mother but now she said she cannot weave alone without her mother's help. Even if she could, she said she would not weave because she does not have enough time to weave. For her, weaving is just a very time-consuming, unpleasant and unprofitable activity. This suggests that many women will not turn to weaving unless it becomes profitable enough. Ms. C said she had no traditional cloths, suggesting that the traditional cloths are used only for special occasions nowadays.

A training course for new floor loom was held in this village, too. Three



months course was started at the end of 2006. About 15 floor looms were brought into this village and set in the community house. 30 women participated. The participants were members of “no third children” group, which means that following the national policy, they support the idea that the number of children should be at most 2. At the beginning, they requested the provincial government for the training course to be held in their village. The same person as in the case of La Da Commune, namely Mr. X, came to this village to teach.

Ms. D is in her mid-forties and taking an important role in the project of the new loom. A part of her house was remade as a workshop for the project, for which she spent about 8,000,000 VND (500 US\$). She attended not only the training course to use the new loom but also the training course to use sewing machine. She owns a pedal-operated sewing machine. Now she can make various kinds of bags and actually she has made many bags with the cloths that she wove by herself. Unfortunately she does not have a market channel for her products and sometimes her teacher (Mr. X) comes to buy them.

She has a small irrigated farmland and grows rice three times a year with her husband. The harvest months are April, September, and December. She said she will weave during the farmers’ slack season. It seems that she does not have enough spare time due to the triple cropping but she is so keen to weave and use sewing machine. She seems to like weaving and sewing, not just for income. She also goes to Lam Gian Hamlet in Ham Tri Commune, Ham Thuan Bac District, which is about 30 minutes away by motorbike, to teach how to use the new loom at a training course for the villagers. After the training course in her own village ended, the looms were brought to other villages and the training course is held there. Ham Tri Commune is one of them. She seemed to enjoy teaching. These activities make her QOL very high, especially confidence on her ability is very high.



Picture 5 Cham patterns woven by the new loom

However, she has some problems. The most serious one is that she cannot sell her products. Unfortunately, the quality of her products is not high enough to be marketable. The fundamental problem is that the new loom is not appropriate for weaving Cham textile. They try to imitate the Cham patterns such as *Bingu Birau* (new flower) and *Bingu Tamun* (flower of melon) but they are not so beautiful as those woven by the traditional loom. They cannot return to the traditional backstrap loom because it was already lost. The younger generation who are in their forties like Ms. D said that traditional backstrap loom is difficult to use. Actually it may not be difficult but they do not have a chance to learn. The government does not seem to be interested in the “inefficient” loom. Villagers are now losing the knowledge of the tradition. People may begin to believe the tradition is “inferior.” To believe “new” and “modern” technology is “superior” implied that the tradition is “inferior,” which may be the reason why villagers are reluctant to conserve the traditional loom.

At the moment, other women who took the training courses are not active in weaving. They say that they like weaving and sewing but they have neither the new loom nor a sewing machine. And they almost forgot how to make a bag. They seem to be waiting for weaving to be more profitable.

## V. Phan Hoa Commune

### V-1. The Traditional Backstrap Loom

The area where the traditional weaving is still well preserved in Binh Thuan Province is Phan Hoa Commune in Bac Binh District, which is located in the eastern part of the province and in less urbanized area. Its population is 8,755 persons (1,809 households) as of January 2007 according to People's Committee of Phan Hoa Commune, all of which are Cham people. This is an agricultural area and they grow rice, vegetables, fruits such as banana, mango. After *Ca Giay*



Picture 6 The Cham Monks



Picture 7 Traditional Loom in Phan Hoa Commune

Dam was constructed, this area is provided with irrigated water and farmers began to grow rice twice a year.

Perhaps due to its less urbanized location and the fact that all of the population is Cham, this village preserves the Cham tradition very well. Monks wear traditional costume and people respect them. Many women keep weaving with traditional backstrap loom. The number of those who can weave is 68 persons in total (32 in Bing Tan Hamlet, 32 in Bing Ming Hamlet, and 4 in Bing Hoa Hamlet). These figures seem to indicate that the distribution of weaver is not uniformly distributed but clustered in some hamlets in the commune. They weave only during farmers' slack season, namely from March to June. The weavers are generally old women and tend to be poor. They use the traditional loom because it is easy for them to handle. It is said that 80 % of women can weave with the traditional loom if the pattern is simple. Even if it is complicated, 40 to 50 % of women can weave.

## V-2. The Case of Ms. E

Ms. E was born in 1942 (now 65 years old) and still keep weaving with the traditional backstrap loom. She has 10 children (2 sons and 8 daughters) and her husband is one year younger than she. She has a small farmland of 0.4 ha and grows rice with her husband. Before irrigated water became available due to the construction of *Ca Giay* Dam, she grows rice once a year but now twice a year.

She began to learn how to weave from her grandmother when she was 12 years old. Actually her grandmother did not teach her. Her grandmother rather scolded her not to disturb her weaving. However, Ms. E liked weaving and kept watching her grandmother weaving. In this way she learned how to weave the Cham traditional textile. Now she is still weaving from time to time, not everyday. Since she likes to weave, she always weaves whenever she has time. If she has enough time, she weaves for about eight hours a day. She can weave a piece of cloth of simple pattern within three days. But it takes 20 days for her to weave very complicated patterned cloths. Her products are not only used within her family but also sold to people both in her and other villages. Sometimes it may be sold to foreigners, though the chance is very small because the area is not for tourists. By selling the cloths, she can earn a modest income from time to time. On average, it may reach 35,000 VND per day, which is not bad in comparison with the wage that a man can earn. As she becomes older and her skill is improved, now her products can be sold at higher prices.

As she learned by watching her mother, she herself did not teach all of her daughters how to weave. It was up to the daughters whether they learn it or not. Among her ten children, only three daughters can weave the Cham traditional textile. They are the first daughter (age 44), the second daughter (age 42), and the seventh daughter (age 32). The first and the seventh daughters are staying in the village and sometimes help their mother. The second daughter is the best

weaver, and can weave much faster and more beautifully, skillfully and creative than her mother, so three years ago she was recruited by the director of a tourist resort in *Muine* to work there to demonstrate tourists how to weave. At the same time, her products are sold at the resort at very high prices. This seems to be a successful case of income generation, tourism development and conservation of culture.

### V-3. The New Floor Loom Project

In spite of the rich cultural tradition, an NGO tried to introduce the new floor loom to this village. The NGO selected this village as a pilot case of their project. Their purpose was officially to alleviate “poverty” by introducing the “modern” and more “efficient” floor loom. They might have expected that villagers can weave the same traditional textile with the new loom. For them the backstrap loom seemed to be “primitive” and less “efficient,” which should be replaced by the “modern” one. This project came down to this village through the provincial and then district offices. The local government might introduce this village to the NGO because many women in this village were still weaving. The project started in 1997. The counterpart in the village was the women’s group whose membership amounts to more than 1,200 persons. The leader was sent to Ho Chi Minh City to learn how to use the floor loom, though she had no experience of weaving. She was sent not because she knew weaving but because she was just the leader of the women’s group. She was expected to learn it and teach it to her group members. But since she lacked the knowledge and experience of weaving, it was not easy for her to perform what she was expected to do. 15 women attended the training course. Their incentive was not the learning but the stipend that they would receive. After the training course ended, the women kept using the floor loom for three years, during which the NGO bought the products

at a high price. Some of the looms were set at the members' house. But when the project ended and the NGO left the village, there was nobody who wanted to buy their products. Their products were so expensive and so poor in quality that they were not sold at the market. When they brought their products to an agent in Ho Chi Minh City, she said the quality was so low that she paid only 60 % of the price, most of which she retained for repaying their debt to the NGO. They received only a small amount of money just enough to buy bus tickets to come back home. They had no money to eat. They might have felt misery and indignity. If this story is true, what the NGO did was not for the villagers.

When it became apparent that their products were unsalable, members stopped weaving and returned the loom to the leader's house. After the end of the project, only the unused looms, material such as expensive, high quality, Switzerland-made yarn, unsalable products, and debt to the NGO were left.

In spite of this failure, another project started in this village, which still used the floor loom. Training course was held in 2004 and 2006, and 10 women attended each time. They received 10,000 VND as a stipend. In 2006, some of the looms were brought to Hamlet No. 3 of Ma Lam Town as mentioned above. Now Phan Hoa Commune is preparing to hold another training course to use the floor loom at the end of year 2007.

#### **V-4. The Expert of the New Floor Loom**

In the technological aspect, the key person is Mr. X who lives in Phan Hoa Commune. He is now 53 years old. After he retired from the provincial agricultural office at age 50 in 2004, he was invited by the Center for Encouragement to Industrial Development to teach villagers how to use the floor loom. He is the person who taught at Hamlet No.3 of Ma Lam Town and now is teaching at La Da Commune and Ham Tri Commune in Ham Thuan Bac District

as mentioned above. In Ham Tri Commune, he is teaching for 28 persons, dividing them into two classes. It is said that if there are 20 weavers, the village will be acknowledged as “Weavers Village.”

He was an expert on agriculture but he has been studying textiles of ethnic minority people such as Tay and Cham people. Another reason why he was invited to teach might be that his wife was the leader of women’s group in Phan Hoa Commune. He not only teaches how to weave but also makes the floor loom by himself. The loom is not so complicated that he could make it by imitating the existing one that was brought from outside by the NGO. It costs about 3,300,000 VND to make one floor loom. There are two types of loom; one can weave cloth of 135 cm wide and the other can weave cloth of 90 cm wide. He usually makes the former, which is unusually wide and very difficult to handle. He insists that the new loom can weave textile of any pattern of every ethnic minority people. Theoretically it may be possible, but actually the loom is not well-designed to do so.

He thinks the current design of the loom has serious problems that make it very difficult to handle, which makes the productivity very low. The reason why this loom was introduced was its assumed high productivity but it is not so high as expected because of the technical problems. He is improving the deficiencies but it does not work so well as he expected so far.

In spite of his efforts, this project seems to have made wrong choice of technology. The low quality and low productivity was caused by the inappropriate floor loom. The loom is not technologically established and it is very difficult to use. And it is not appropriate to weave the Cham textile. As a result, only few people want to buy the textile woven by the floor loom.



## VI. Phan Thanh Commune

Phan Thanh Commune is also dominated by Cham people. In 2007, its population is 7,145 persons (1,365 households), of which 83% is Cham (5,928 persons, 1,095 households). This commune is more urbanized in Bac Binh District than Phan Hoa Commune. It is adjacent to the National Road No. 1 and close to the District office. Most of the population is still partly based on agriculture but they have many non-agricultural sources of income. Therefore weaving, especially the traditional one, is not popular among women. It seems that many of people in this commune already abandoned the traditional backstrap loom. Rather than weaving by themselves, they prefer to buy the traditional Cham cloths for funeral and other ceremonies from other villages. This implies that they have more profitable income opportunity other than



Picture 8 Phan Thanh Cooperative

weaving and that people do not have an incentive to weave as a purely economic activity. However, the case of the new floor loom is a different story. It is introduced to this commune recently. It looks like a factory in urban area. In the compound, there are several buildings, and two of them are workshops, in each of which about 30 floor looms are set. This factory is also supported by the provincial government as a part of tourism development plan.

This factory was established as Phan Thanh Cooperative in April, 2006 at Canh Vien in Phan Thanh Commune with the area of 1,500 square meters. It is a part of the “Trade Village Restoration Plan” of the Province. Its membership is 60 persons, all of whom are women and live in Canjing Hamlet. These women took training course of Mr. X at the beginning. The buildings were constructed with the financial support of the provincial government. Other equipments such as 60 floor looms, 5 industrial sewing-machines, raw materials, are provided by the provincial government. Besides the 60 looms that were provided by the provincial government in 2006 when the Cooperative was established, 5 looms were provided in 2001 by an NGO with cooperation of the provincial government. The 60 looms were made by Mr. X by imitating the first 5 looms. He says that the 60 looms are much stronger and better than the first 5 looms.

Its purpose was originally to provide villagers with a supplementary source of income for poverty alleviation at a small scale, but later it was integrated into a larger tourism development plan. Its purpose changed to mass production of traditional Cham textile to sell to tourists. The provincial government drew up a plan which characterizes this area by Cham culture to make this area attractive for tourists. A planned Cham Museum is considered as the central tourist attraction.

In spite of the provincial government’s support, this cooperative has many serious problems. Out of 65 looms that they have, only 24 looms are now used

because their products are not sold well on the market. As mentioned above, the newly-introduced floor loom is not suitable to weave Cham textile and difficult to handle. As a result, the products do not seem to be beautiful or well-finished. Though it is not theoretically impossible to weave with the new loom as beautifully as the traditional one, it needs much more efforts to adapt the loom to the Cham textile. Another problem is its high cost. Even though the raw materials are provided by the provincial government without charge, wage cost is too high due to workers' low productivity. The low productivity is brought about by their inexperience and the difficulty to use the loom. Another reason of high cost is that the opportunity cost of labor is high. When people have another job opportunity with high wage, they are not willing to work at weaving factory with low wage. This area seems to be too much urbanized to employ cheap labor.

Since the products are not sold, the wages are not paid to the workers, most of whom are female. Some of them had been working for several months without wage payment. If a business does not go well, it may go bankrupt and the workers will stop working. But this cooperative keeps operating at the cost of voluntary unpaid workers. Female workers are feeling very much obliged to the provincial government for providing the buildings and equipments. This is the reason why they keep working voluntarily. If a business does not go well, the manager should take some countermeasures. But the manager of this cooperative (Ms. F, age 51) was elected not because she has a sense of business but because she is a leader of women's group. Another reason why workers keep working may be her leadership. She is also working without pay for many months. Business sense is not what she was expected to have as a leader of women's group<sup>9)</sup>. It is beyond her ability to expect her to act as if a business woman.

## VII. Conclusion

Textiles of ethnic minority people are one of important elements of tourism in Vietnam as well as in other countries. This paper showed the present situation of traditional textile in La Da Commune and Ma Lâm Town in Hàm Thuan Bac District and Phan Hoà Commune and Phan Thanh Commune in Bac Binh district. These villages have a long tradition of weaving, but nowadays they are almost falling into oblivion. People here are always aware of finding ways to maintain and preserve their traditional textile. But the changes in life and the market forces cause many obstacles to preserve and develop the traditional textile.

Through our survey of four hamlets where they have a prospect to restore “The village of traditional weaving,” we have the following findings. Currently, four villages (Hàm Trí, Ma Lâm, Phan Hoà and Phan Thanh) have the programmes to restore the traditional weaving. In these villages, the material facilities were invested, and open training course were already and are currently carried out. It shows that the Party, Government, leader of province and local government really concern about the lives of low income people in general the ethnic minority people in particular.

Through our surveys, the trade village restoration programme in Binh Thuan Province suits with the wish of ethnic minority women and satisfy the expectation of compatriot. So many people participate enthusiastically in this programme, and create the movement toward textile industry among women. After the training course ended, the textile project met difficulty because it could not make profit as the case of Phan Thanh Commune. Many women are still trying to enhance their skill to create good products to meet the market

demand. However, if the manager doesn't have enough managerial competence, the traditional textile project is hardly to develop strongly.

Other cases are found in Ma Lâm and Hàm Trí. Although some students have difficulty in transportation to attend the training course, they overcome this obstacle and join the class regularly because of their wish to study. Especially the enthusiastic and experienced instructor, Mr. X, will encourage students to take part in the textile class more zealously. If they are following the right direction of development, these villages will restore and develop textile industry strongly.

In Phan Hoa Commune, many people still maintain traditional textile industry. The case of Ms. E's family is symbolic. Our survey shows that this is one of the families that inherited and maintained the tradition. According to our survey, we need to have more concern on this kind of people and encourage them with different methods.

In general, if the local government has a specific concern to develop this area as an eco-cultural tourism spot in a proper way, this area will restore traditional weaving and will be benefited from the project successfully and unshakably.

### Notes

- 1) Cham people belong to Malayo-Polynesian language. Its population in Vietnam is estimated at 99,000 (Dang Nghiem Van and others, 2000, p.211). Following Vietnam General Statistics Department, the population of Cham people in 1999 is about 132,873 persons (Thanh Phan, 2007, p.12).
- 2) K'ho people belong to Mon-Khmer language. Its population in Vietnam is estimated over 92,000. "They have close historical relationship with other ethnic groups speaking Malayo-Polynesian Languages – the Cham, Chu-ru, Raglai and others" (Dang Nghiem Van and others, 2000, p.53). Following Vietnam General Statistics Department, the population of K'ho people in 1999 is about 128,273 persons (Phan Ngoc Chien and others, 2005, p.11).
- 3) Problems of applying official poverty line which assumes the life of Kinh people to

ethnic minority people whose life is very different from the majority are discussed in Ikemoto and Shine [2005].

- 4) In the past, they grew cotton to spin it into yarn by themselves. But now they usually buy yarn at the market.
- 5) Even if men weave traditional textile, they say that villagers would not despise the men for that reason. To the contrary, they may be praised for helping their mother. However, there is no man who weaves the traditional cloths, though there are some men who learn a new technique to weave, as mentioned below.
- 6) See Ikemoto, Shuto and Taguchi [2005].
- 7) This means that women who have many sons will receive many pieces of cloths when they marry while women who have many daughters will have to give many pieces of cloths when they marry.
- 8) 40,000 VND (Vietnamese Dong) is nearly equal to 2.5 US\$.
- 9) She talked about her own debt. She borrowed 2,000,000 VND (about 200 US\$) from an NGO unwillingly. This was also a semi-official project which imitated the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh and she had to borrow it. With the money, she bought several goatlings to raise and sell. However, she was unfortunate; some of the goatlings died due to disease on the one hand and the price of goat went down on the other. She gave up keeping the goatlings and sold them at a very low price. She recovered only 200,000 VND. She lost 1,800,000 VND in this investment. Now she is left only with debt which she must repay 85,000 VND every month for two years. If this NGO were the Grameen Bank, its staff would have monitored and advised the borrower but this NGO did nothing but just collecting the money. If she keeps repaying, this system superficially working very well, neglecting that fact that she made a loss, but that actually causes troubles for borrowers.

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