

THE VALUE OF DIGGING STICK IN THE CULTURAL LIFE OF THE KHO-MU PEOPLE IN THE NORTHWEST AREA

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The Kho-mu people are one of the ethnic minorities residing in the Northwest region of our country. During the production process, the Kho-mu people have accumulated quite rich cultural capital. Cultural characteristics of the Kho-mu people are always show a close relationship with the mountainous forest nature, the practice of shifting cultivation and the daily life of the community. The image of a digging stick for planting seeds is one of the manifestations of the relationship between the habits, conditions, farming environment and daily life of the Kho-mu people. Digging stick for planting seeds is a labor tool associated with the traditional production method of “poking holes for seeds” in the fields of the Kho-mu people; it is an object associated with religious activities as well as a unique folk musical instrument of the ethnic group. Through the research of this tool type, the article analyzes the role and position of the digging stick in the cultural life of the Kho-mu people in the Northwest region in the past, present and in the current local tourism development.

Keywords: *Kho-mu people; Northwest region; Digging stick; Labor tool; Musical instrument.*

1. Introduction

The Northwest is a region located in the west of the Northern region of our country, including some provinces as: Son La, Lai Chau, Dien Bien, Lao Cai, Yen Bai, Hoa Binh, Phu Tho, Tuyen Quang, Ha Giang and the Western districts of Thanh Hoa Province, West of Nghe An Province. The Northwest region has a relatively high terrain with many massifs and mountainous ranges running in the Northwest - Southeast direction. This area is the residence of ethnic minorities such as Thai, Mong, Dao, Khang, La Hu, La Ha, Kho-mu... with rich cultural capital, many cultural features have been recognized to be the national intangible cultural heritage. Decision no. 1877/QĐ-BVHTTDL dated June 8th, 2015 of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism has recognized the Northwest as having 7 national intangible cultural heritages including: Xoe Thai art and Hat Cha festival of Thai people, in Dong Sang commune, Moc Chau district of Son La province; Kin pang then festival of the white Thai people (Muong Lay town); Nao Pe Chau New Year of the Black Mong people (Muong Dang commune, Muong Ang district); Hoang Cong Chat temple festival (Noong Het commune, Dien Bien district) of Dien Bien province; Xoe Thai art (Lai Chau province); Xoe Thai art (Muong Lo, Nghia Lo town) of Yen Bai province.

The Kho-mu is one of the ethnic groups belonging to the Mon - Khmer language group, the South Asian language family, they are also known by other names such as Xa Cau, Kha Klau, Mang Cau, Tenh, concentrated in the Northwest region. The Kho-mu culture is quite rich, showing the characteristics of the inhabitants of shifting cultivation. Because the area lives mainly in the middle and high mountains, so the traditional livelihood of the people is based on shifting cultivation. During the cultivation process, the Kho-mu people have accumulated many important knowledge such as the agro-calendar system adapted to shifting cultivation, predicting the changes of the weather; production techniques as well as how to choose farming tools suitable for mountainous terrain,...

The primitive religious forms have a strong influence on the spiritual life of the Kho-mu people, in which, the highlight is the animism and totemism of the religion. Therefore, in the Kho-mu people's concept, there are many ghost types (Hroi), including: heaven ghost, earth ghost, forest ghost, village ghost, ancestor ghost, ghosts of animals and plants,... This is the basis for the development of forms of worship in religious activities of the ethnic group, which include agricultural production rituals, such as seed planting ceremony, rice spirit

worshipping ceremony, rain prayer ceremony and procession ceremony "Taro, gourd", ceremony "The bamboo shoots growing season",... The rituals not only express the thoughts, spiritual notions and wishes in the life of the Kho-mu people but also reflect the unique values of folk art. Folk art through dance, lyrics, ethnic musical instruments is one of the highlights of the Kho-mu culture, which includes the type of musical instrument, the digging stick for planting the seed. However, up to now, folk art capital has not been fully exploited the potential values which inherent in ethnic social life. Therefore, within the scope of this article, we study the value of a production tool type as well as a traditional folk musical instrument with the desire through which to suggest the direction to exploit the values of the digging stick for planting the seed in the socio-economic development of the local ethnic community.

2. Research overview

The Kho-mu ethnic groups, including the Kho-mu ethnic group has always been a topic of interest to scientists to study with prominent works such as: "The Kho-mu ethnic group in the Northwest" (Khong Dien), "Kho-mu people" (Chu Thai Son and Vi Van An), "Culture of ethnic minorities in the North of Vietnam (Institute of Ethnology),... The research works introduced the area, origin of ethnic group, study the material and spiritual culture of the Kho-mu people in the Northwest region.

In addition, there are research articles, theses that delve into in-depth research on a specific field of the Kho-mu people in many different aspects. Among them, the thesis "Marriage and family of the Kho-mu people in Mai Son district, Son La province" (Thuan, 2016), gave an overview and identified the characteristics of marriage and family of the Kho-mu people in Mai Son district. Research article by author Nguyen Thi Thu Hoai "Building a unique cultural village - thinking from the preservation and promotion of the Kho-mu ethnic culture" to clarify the unique appearance of the Kho-mu's unique spiritual and material culture, which refers to traditional livelihoods and ethnic folk art forms.

It can be seen that the research works on the Kho-mu people are quite rich and the authors are interested in many different aspects such as history, economy, society, culture, art... The research works mentioned above have provided rich material sources to clarify the research problem of the article. However, up to now, there has not been any research that systematically investigates the value of the digging stick in the life of the Kho-mu people, thereby assessing the potential of the digging sick role in exploiting socio-economic development of

the Kho-mu people today.

3. Research method

To clarify the research matter, the article uses some basic methods, such as the method of collecting secondary documents and the method of synthesis, analysis, evaluation to indicate the characteristics, functions and the role of the digging stick in the life of the Kho-mu people, thereby pointing out the direction of exploiting the values of the hole-poke stick in the economic development of the local Kho-mu people.

4. Research result

4.1. *The digging stick for planting seed reflects the adaptation to the natural environment in the traditional production of the Kho-mu people*

The residence characteristics of the Kho-mu people are distributed along steep mountainous slopes, the form of shifting cultivation with the method of digging holes to plant seeds, which has existed for a long time in the traditional livelihood of the Kho-mu people before. Cultivation according to the way of poking holes, it is necessary to have tools to poke holes, which the Kho-mu people call *Che le* (digging stick).

The digging stick originated from the stick that was formerly used for gathering and when used in agricultural production, it also went through development stages (Dang Nghiem Van and associates, p.53). In the Kho-mu people, the digging stick also represents the development of production tools. The Kho-mu's digging stick consists of three types: The first type is simply designed to be used in one crop, to be a piece of wood made from a log or an old bamboo, 3-4cm in diameter, 1.5 - 1.8m long, one end is whittled and sharpened. The second type is used for a long time, had a iron-covered pointed tip (Khong Dien and associates p.80). The third type is a digging stick with a musical instrument. Thus, at first, it was just a simple, rudimentary stick that could only be used in one season and in the next season, they had to create a new one. Then, in order to make it easier to use, without having to waste time searching for materials and remaking after each seed crop, the Kho-mu people chose good trees and bamboo to make a long-lasting stick "in many places where appeared a stick made of a tree that only grows on rocky mountains – called *may cu* in Thai, or by ironwood, *apitong*,..." (Dang Nghiem Van and associates p.80, p.53). The characteristic of this stick is that people choose good materials and carefully cut it, seal it with iron at the tip and become a tool to use through the growing seasons, until it is damaged, it will be discarded. The second type of digging stick partly reflects the specialization of tools in production in

the former Kho-mu people. The Kho-mu people use this stick to poke holes, usually men go ahead in a line depending on the number of people with an appropriate distance, using sticks to poke holes in the ground to create holes about 2-3cm deep, enough for the seeds to germinate and take root in the soil, the women follow to plant the seeds and fill them with soil.

According to cultural relativism, in shifting production in conditions of sloping terrain, rudimentary labor tools, the use of a digging stick associated with the method of poking holes and planting seeds, reflecting the adaptation to the natural environment and social development conditions at that time. Because, this cultivated method contributes to limiting the process of leaching and soil erosion due to floods. Later when the hoe appeared, besides using the hoe to prepare the land for planting seeds, the Kho-mu people as well as some ethnic minorities cultivating on relatively steep slopes still maintained the way of using the digging stick for planting seeds. According to the evaluation of researchers Hoang Cam and Nguyen Truong Giang, "the digging stick is a unique creation of the residents working in the fields, to be a cultural product drawn from the people's hundreds of experience years to adapt and effectively, sustainably exploit the surrounding natural environment" (Hoang Cam, Nguyen Truong Giang, p.30).

4.2. *The hole poke stick is associated with the characteristics of ethnic beliefs*

The image of a digging stick - the basic tool in the traditional shifting cultivation method of the Kho-mu people is both a production tool and a sacred object in the ethnic minority's religious activities. On the role basis of the digging stick in shifting production methods of "poking holes to plant seeds", the concept of everything having a soul is deeply rooted in the Kho-mu people's thoughts, so they also have taboo for this tool type. The Kho-mu people abstain from burning, throwing the digging stick after planting seeds, but have to wait until the rice and corn grow before they can be discarded. Because they are afraid that if they do so, it will affect the efficiency of crops and crop yields such as: rice and crops will die, the crop will fail. Heretofore, for the long-term use of a digging stick, when the crop was completed, the stick was left on the fields to worship the goddess in some places (Dang Nghiem Van and associates, p.56).

Digging sticks and shifting cultivation methods for planting seed are associated with religious activities related to the Kho-mu people' agriculture. After clearing the fields, preparing for the sowing

stage, the Kho-mu people hold a seed planting ceremony. The purpose of the ritual is to pray to the gods and ancestors to bless the rain and wind, drive away animals and insects that destroy crops, sprout green seeds and keep the villagers happy. In order to perform the seeding ceremony, the family must first prepare a symbolic piece of land, called *mat reec*. On that piece of land, people tied a piece of sharp bamboo pipe symbolizing the blade of a spear to exorcise evil spirits; in the middle of the bamboo pipe, there are three sharp bamboo sticks, the bottom is tied with a piece of wood representing male fertility, then plant a few stumps of taro and lemongrass. Then, they set up a ceremony tray consisting of a boiled rooster, betel nut, two rolls of white rustic cloth. The shaman or the householder conducts an offering to the gods and ghosts for good crops. After that, the householder uses a digging stick to carry out the ritual of poking holes in the symbolic field, then sprinkles water and chants mantras around the field (Khong Dien and associates, p.283).

4.3. The hole poke digging stick is a folk musical instrument of the Kho-mu ethnic group, contributing to the serving exploitation of local tourism activities

Currently, the development of various tourism types in the ethnic community in our country is being promoted, in which the exploitation of cultural values plays an important role, creating its own characteristics and attracting tourists.

The digging stick is not only a labor tool associated with the main traditional economic method of the Kho-mu people, but also a kind of folk musical instrument of the ethnic group. During the production process, the Kho-mu people created additional parts in the stick structure by attaching a music box on top of the handle. Initially, they used a bamboo pipe with a few pebbles inside as a music box, then it was replaced with a metal box and inside were marbles. When conducting to poke hole, the rhythm of the hole poking movement combined with the bass, high and fun sound of the pebbles hitting the bamboo tube,... creates the rhythm of a musical instrument. Once upon a time, in the productive labor of the Kho-mu people, there was also the custom of changing works, so each time doing farming, planting seeds, it was not only family members who performed it, but also had the participation of other households in the same village. Thanks to the musical instrument's features, the forerunner both worked and created a rhythm that encouraged the behind ones to follow. The vibration of the stick sound creates a pleasant orchestra, bringing relaxation and reducing fatigue

during labor process. The digging stick becomes an accompaniment to the tra seed planting dance - a dance that simulates the unique agricultural production of the Kho-mu people. This is an indispensable dance in major national holidays, such as the festival of praying for crops, praying for rain and New Year. Therefore, the digging stick is not only one of the products that reflects the results of the creative process from the labors of the ethnic group, but the attractiveness of this folk musical instrument type with folk dances, related rituals and beliefs have created a unique cultural value to exploit this tool type to become an attractive tourism product, especially in the model of building community tourism. Because, through the digging stick, visitors can experience the traditional productive life of the ethnic group, hear about the sacred element of the stick, participate in related religious rites, thereby creating the impression and attractiveness of the destination for tourists. Bringing the folk art form "dance for planting seeds" into the organization of events of community tourism in order to attract tourists to participate in, to increase the excitement and appreciation of the folk art of the ethnic community. Currently, the Kho-mu people in the Northwest have brought unique cultural values of the ethnic group, including the image of a stick that pokes holes to perform at the Vietnam National Village for Ethnic Culture and Tourism at the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology with the program "Music of the Kho-mu people in Nghe An and Dien Bien provinces",...

Promoting cultural values associated with the image of a digging stick in tourism development is one of the solutions contributing to preserving and promoting the cultural values of the Kho-mu people today. However, the promotion of musical instruments, folk dances and rituals associated with this instrument type is still limited, especially in the direction of comprehensively exploiting the values associated with the image of a digging stick for planting seeds as well as the dance for planting seeds to increase the attractiveness of a tourism destination or event. Therefore, it is necessary to have effective solutions to use this unique cultural value in tourism development in the locality.

5. Discussion

In the current context, the exploitation of ethnic cultural values in the socio-economic development of the community is being researched and applied. With a rich folk art capital, it not only contributes to creating a unique cultural imprint but also is one of the important potentials to exploit and develop tourism in localities where the Kho-mu ethnic group is lived. Promoting cultural values associated

with the image of a digging stick of the Kho-mu people in tourism development is also one of the solutions contributing to preserving and promoting the cultural values of the Kho-mu ethnic group now. However, the exploitation of musical instruments, folk dances and rituals associated with this instrument type is still limited. In the local festivals, the events associated with tourism are mostly purely performance, without the overall exploitation of the values associated with the digging stick for planting seeds to increase the attractiveness and leave a deep impression on the audience. Therefore, exploiting the Kho-mu people's unique cultural features: The image of a stick that pokes holes to plant seeds, associated with the seasonal dance in tourism today, it is necessary to highlight the material and spiritual values this type of instrument and musical instrument in ethnic life to increase the attractiveness of a local tourism destination.

Some recommendations for exploiting the image of a digging stick to plant seeds in local tourism development: Applying cultural factors associated with a digging stick to plant seeds: origin, use, sacredness, folk art... in the development of tourism presentations related to the Kho-mu ethnic group, to the working tools associated with the Kho-mu people, ethnic folk art (depending on each subject to build the tourism presentation accordingly). Performing folk arts, including seasonal dances in local tourism events with the participation of the Kho-mu community. The digging stick for planting seeds is a cultural product displayed at community tourism sites to contribute to highlighting ethnic cultural characteristics; creating a souvenir product at the community tourism sites of the Kho-mu people.

6. Conclusion

The image of a digging stick reflects a traditional shifting production method that has existed for a long time in the social history of the Kho-mu ethnic group in our country in general and the Northwest in particular. The method of planting in the upland fields, poking holes to plant seeds, although revealing certain limitations, but when placed in the socio-economic situation, the appearance of this type of tool and the natural environment characteristics where this ethnic group resides showing that the use of a digging stick with the method of poking holes reflects the Kho-mu people's adaptation to the natural environment in production. Therefore the digging stick plays an important role in ethnic life, to be a typical production tool as well as a sacred item associated with the harvest rituals related to agricultural production of the Kho-mu people. Moreover, in the production of a digging stick is not only a labor tool but also a folk musical instrument, when the Kho-mu people attach it, the instrument can make sounds and create rhythms when used.

It can be affirmed that the digging stick is versatile in use, both for production and as an entertainment instrument for workers. Today, the digging stick for planting seeds is used as a musical instrument for the dance to sow the seeds, becoming a type of folk music and dance of the Kho-mu people, performing for tourism activities, contributing to the preservation of ethnic culture. However, in order to exploit the value of this type of tool, local authorities and tourism planners should have specific solutions, implementation methods in building and developing tourism models associated with the local Kho-mu community.

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GIÁ TRỊ CỦA CHIẾC GẬY CHỌC LỖ TRÀ HẠT TRONG ĐỜI SỐNG VĂN HÓA CỦA NGƯỜI KHƠ-MÚ VÙNG TÂY BẮC

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Người Khơ-mú là một trong các dân tộc thiểu số cư trú tập trung ở khu vực Tây Bắc nước ta. Trong quá trình lao động sản xuất, người Khơ-mú đã tích lũy được vốn văn hóa khá phong phú. Đặc điểm văn hóa của dân tộc Khơ-mú luôn thể hiện mối quan hệ gắn bó mật thiết với thiên nhiên núi rừng, tập quán canh tác nương rẫy và đời sống sinh hoạt của cộng đồng. Hình ảnh chiếc gậy chọc lỗ tra hạt là một trong những biểu hiện của mối liên hệ về tập quán, điều kiện, môi trường canh tác và đời sống sinh hoạt của người Khơ-mú. Gậy chọc lỗ tra hạt là công cụ lao động gắn với phương thức sản xuất truyền thống “chọc lỗ tra hạt” trên nương rẫy của người Khơ-mú; là vật gắn với sinh hoạt tín ngưỡng đồng thời là một loại nhạc cụ dân gian đặc sắc của dân tộc. Thông qua việc khảo cứu về loại hình công cụ này, bài viết phân tích vai trò, vị trí của gậy chọc lỗ trong đời sống văn hóa của người Khơ-mú ở khu vực Tây Bắc trong truyền thống, hiện tại và trong phát triển du lịch tại địa phương hiện nay.

Từ khóa: Người Khơ-mú; Khu vực Tây Bắc; Gậy chọc lỗ; Công cụ lao động; Nhạc cụ.