

Ceramic jars as ‘prestige goods’ in Katu culture: Considering the upland-lowland product exchange network throughout history in Quang Nam Province, Vietnam | Cái ché như một ‘phẩm vật uy tín’ trong văn hóa Katu: Suy nghĩ về mạng lưới trao đổi miền ngược-miền xuôi trong lịch sử ở tỉnh Quảng Nam, Việt Nam

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Abstract

In this paper the author discusses the social roles of ceramic jars in Katu ethnic culture; how they contributed to the building of the economic background of the ancient Champa kingdom(s); and how they participated in the ceramic trade network in Mainland Southeast Asia.

Trong bài này tác giả thảo luận về vai trò xã hội của cái ché trong văn hóa Katu; nó đã góp phần như thế nào vào sự xây dựng nền kinh tế của vương quốc cổ Champa; và tham gia vào mạng lưới buôn bán gốm sứ ở Đông Nam Á lục địa.

Keywords: Katu ethnic group, Champa kingdom(s), Central Vietnam, ceramic jar, 'upland-lowland product exchange network' | Nhóm sắc tộc Katu, vương quốc Champa, miền Trung Việt Nam, cái ché, 'mạng lưới trao đổi hàng hóa miền ngược-miền xuôi'

Ceramic Jars in Katu cognition

We went to Đông Giang district in June 2014 for an anthropological survey on goods exchange between the upland and the lowlands in Quảng Nam province; our first impression on entering the gate of the district party committee's office was the statue of three yellow brown big jars made by cement leaning on each other in the front yard (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. The statue of three jars installed in the courtyard of the Communist Party district office in Đông Giang district, Quảng Nam Province, 2014. (Source: Trần Kỳ Phương)

During the dinner with Mr. Nguyễn Bằng, the party committee secretary of Đông Giang district, who is Katu, I asked him about the significance of the three jars put up in the courtyard. He said that he himself had the idea of putting them there, because the jars symbolize prosperity, unity, internal and external communication, and the rituals of Katu people's traditional culture. Three jars symbolize the three mountainous districts of Quảng Nam province where the majority of Katu people dwell: Đông Giang, Tây Giang, and Nam Giang. Thus, by choosing the figure of three jars to construct them in the front yard of the district party committee's office, he implies that the Katu people in those three mountainous districts will unite to build and develop their economy as well as preserve their traditional culture. It shows that jars still have strong vitality in Katu life and an intimate attachment to the feelings of the Katu.

Jars and other products such as flat-gongs (*ching*), bronze cooking pots (*gok bung*), agate (*h'choon*)¹, brocade fabrics/textiles (*azuông*), and buffaloes (*t'ri*) are valuable assets of the Katu. Entering a traditional house of a Katu family, we often see rows of jars of different shapes, designs, colors, and patterns displayed along a high shelf at the rear; to the Katu people, jars are considered 'property objects' (*zôn kavan/do ti*), confirming a family's wealth and status in their society (Cort and Lefferts 2013: 239-240). Rich families possess dozens of jars, while poor families possess at least several. A jar appears in most of the major activities in Katu society, from birth to marriages and funerals (Luu Hùng 2007: 195). Hence it is often celebrated in Katu songs:

I have twenty buffaloes and my spears killed hundreds of people,
My house is large and full of jars,
I am the best hunter in the country,
And my swidden fields are the most beautiful ones...
(Le Pichon 1938: 383)

The Katu people conceive of the jar (*jô/chô*) as a sacred object (*jô ring*), so they have many rituals to worship jars (*bhuôil jô*). When getting a new jar, they hold a small ceremony to worship the jar (*bhuôil kâl jô*); the offerings include a chicken and a small jar of rice beer to feast the neighbours. If they buy a precious jar, the offerings can be a pig and some jars of rice beer to feast the whole village; when selling it, they also hold a farewell ceremony for the jar (*bhuôil tr'xâl jô*).

According to ethnographer Kaj Arhem, in Katu culture the jars (*jô*) are objects containing 'life', while the coffin (*p'rang*) is the object containing 'death'; both objects are stored in or under the same house (*doong*). When a Katu reaches old age, his/her relatives prepare a wooden coffin for himself/herself. Arhem interprets that jars symbolize the wealth of the family (*druop*), so they are stored/displayed in rows on a shelf fixed halfway up the rear wall facing the entrance (*parah*), which is the most formal location in a house. Meanwhile, the coffin symbolizes the death, so it is placed on the ground behind the rear wall, under and far from the row of jars (Arhem 2010: 227-236). Jars symbolize 'life', so they are kept 'inside the house'; meanwhile, coffins symbolize 'death', so they must be placed 'outside the house'. This arrangement reflects the cognition of a dualistic cosmology: the world of the living/the inside \Leftrightarrow the world of the dead/the outside. This is a widespread perception in the cultures of the highlanders in Vietnam and in the whole of Southeast Asia². Thus, the 'jar' has various meanings in Katu culture and is the link with the ancestors and between the living and their dead.

¹ Agate are rocks of a dark yellow or brown color, in diamond or round shapes, approx. 01-03cm long. They are found in India and were imported into Southeast Asia from the prehistoric time during the 3rd century BCE onwards.

² The cosmological dualistic cult is clearly reflected in the Cham cultural landscape, represented by the geographical location and function of the two royal sanctuaries of Champa kingdom(s): Mỹ Sơn/Srisana-Bhadresvara and Po Nagar Nha Trang. Mỹ Sơn belongs to the elements of Male/Father/Mountain/Areca-nut, while Po Nagar Nha Trang belongs to the elements of Female/Mother/Sea/Coconut (Trần Kỳ Phương and Rie Nakamura 2012: 267-280). This belief also

In Katu marriage, the jar is an important wedding offering; it is a mandatory gift in engagements and weddings. When the groom's family wants to 'catch a bride' for their son, they must have some jars as betrothal gifts. The more wealthy the groom's family, the more jars they offer the bride's family. This accords with the customs of demands for betrothal gifts (*panooih*) for the bride's family (Phan Thị Xuân Bốn 2002: 57).

In his studies, ethnographer Lư Hùng mentions the very interesting case of the transfer of a jar during twenty years of marriages that is now owned by Mr. Alăng Pêéc's family, in Pr'ning village, Lăng commune, Tây Giang district, Quảng Nam province:

- Brú Trung in Aró village, Lăng commune, remembers only that this jar was bought from Laos. He inherited it from previous generations. In the mid-twentieth century, it was equal in value to a buffalo.
- About 1957–58, Mr. Trung married Mr. Pêéc's sister and the jar was used as a wedding gift. Thereafter, it belonged to Mr. Pêéc's family.
- In 1978 Mr. Pêéc's son married Clâu Nâm's daughter in the same village, and the jar moved from Mr. Pêéc's family to Mr. Nâm's family.
- In 1979 Mr. Nâm's younger brother married Coor Nhir's daughter in the same village, and the jar went from Mr. Nâm's house to Mr. Nhir's house.
- In 1980 Mr. Nhir married Brú Póh's sister, and the jar was moved from Mr. Nhir's house to Mr Póh's house.
- In 1981 when Mr. Póh married Alăng Pêéc's older sister, the jar returned to Mr. Pêéc's house after twenty years of traveling through three other families. (Lư Hùng 2008:11)

The jar of Mr. Alăng Pêéc became an extremely precious jar (*k'rlóoc*) because it returned to his home after belonging to several different owners; this means that the jar brings great good luck back to his family (Lư Hùng 2007: 160). During a brief field trip in May 2015, I had the opportunity to meet with Mr. Alăng Pêéc in Pr'ning commune, Lăng village, Tây Giang district. Mr. Alăng Pêéc said that he gave the jar to his first son, Mr. Alăng Vót, born 1953, as a wedding gift for his son's wife in 1978. I saw the jar; it is a small jar without neck rings, 46 cm high, 11.5 cm mouth diameter, light yellow (eel skin color). The Katu call this kind of a jar *h'loom*. Beside this precious jar, I found that Mr. Vót had a new collection of blue and white jars with several different patterns (Fig. 2).

appears in the Jarai culture of the Central Highlands, where the phenomenon of worshipping the King of Fire (Patau Pui) and King of Water (Patau Ya) is an example (Hardy 2014: 83-92).



Fig. 2. The precious jar of Mr. Alăng Pêéc and his son, Mr. Alăng Vốt, 2015. (Source: Trần Kỳ Phương)

In funerals, jars are buried with the deceased according to the Katu custom of 'sharing property to the deceased' (*xi noor*); in this case, the jar must be perforated at the bottom, called 'killing the jars' (*pacêt jớ*), to bury them around the grave (*ping*).

Jars are intimately related to the custom of alcohol drinking such as rice or cassava beer³; as with other ethnic groups in the uplands, the Katu people drink alcoholic beverages not only to relax, but also to associate with each other, or to discuss issues related to community or individuals; alcohol drinking connects people together in social activities and people with gods in ceremonies. Alcoholic beverages are drunk in all Katu social activities, such as festivals, sacrifices, friendship rituals, engagements, and weddings, communications, funerals, and so on. Therefore, it can be said that rituals of alcohol drinking of the Katu (*um buah*) and other ethnic minorities in the Central Highland of Vietnam will certainly not be flawless without the jar.

In addition to the practical functions of the jars, the Katu people consider them as works of art. Choosing jars for a collection requires the art of enjoyment; only connoisseurs can distinguish between old jars and new ones or enjoy the beauty of various jars. The Katu divide jars into different categories: antique jars (*jớ tí*), new jars (*jớ nguớp*), golden brown jars (*jớ jaroong*), small golden brown jars (*jớ tr'loi*),

³ Katu people have several kinds of alcoholic beverages, which are made mainly from rice or cassava such as rice beer and cassava beer. These beers used to be fermented in jars.

brown jars dotted with beads (*jó a'jrai*), jars with dragon image (*jó k'roong*), and so on. Brown jars dotted with beads (*jó a'jrai*) are the most valuable. Georges Condominas (1972: 338) considered the accumulation of precious jars by the ethnic minorities as a cultural manifestation which is similar to art collecting in the West.

In sculpture, entering the Katu communal house or *guol*, we often see the image of a jar formally decorated on the main pillar (*j'răng măng*) of the '*guol*' (Fig. 3). Jars are also carved on the columns for buffalo sacrifices (*xanur*) and popularly decorated on grave houses (*ping*).



Fig. 3. Main pillar of a *guol* house carved with a jar, 2014. (Source: Trần Kỳ Phương)

In attendance at a buffalo sacrifice festival for the new rice ceremony (*caharo tame*) held at the Tây Giang district center in March 2014, I saw Katu youngsters proudly carrying blue and white large jars on their shoulders dancing to the boisterous sound of drums and gongs, while others held swords and shouted and cheered (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Katu young people shoulder a ceramic jar dancing in a buffalo sacrificed festival, 2014. (Source: Trần Kỳ Phương)

Jars are also used for storing valuable objects such as agates (*h'choon*), beads (*arak*), and brocade fabrics/textiles (*azuông*); these precious objects are kept in jars to prevent insects, rats, or other animals from damaging them. During the Vietnam War, the Katu people buried these precious jars when they moved into the mountains to avoid bombing. When the war ended, the people returned to their homes and dug out those jars.

Mr. A Tùng Vễ, a village elder from Gừng village, Prao townlet, Đông Giang district, said that his family possessed a precious jar as an heirloom. During the war, around 1960, local troops of Communist guerrillas borrowed it to store salt and hid it in a cave to avoid bombing. After the war, in the early 1980s, he and his elder brother went up the mountain to find the jar and bring it home; now his family keeps the jar as an heirloom as it has been handed down through many generations. When bringing the jar home, Mr. A Tùng Vễ made an offering to the jar to give thanks (*abhui*) for keeping it intact. We've seen that precious jar, which is an old, large, brown jar with thick and heavy stoneware clay body (Fig. 5)⁴.

⁴ According to Louise Cort, Curator Emerita of ceramics at the Sackler Gallery of Arts, Washington, D.C., this jar was made in the Móng Cái kilns in Quảng Ninh province, Vietnam, during the early 20th century (Personal communication 17 August 2014). I would like to thank Ms Cort for her information.



Fig. 5. Mr. A Tùng Vê and the precious jar of his family, 2014. (Source: Trần Kỳ Phương)

According to Mr. A Tùng Vê, a precious jar (*jó ti*) is not necessarily an antique, but it should be well-known in the community as a sacred jar (*jó ring*). Especially, jars which have been handed down through many generations are priceless, so his family is very proud of keeping this precious jar. In most cases, the price of precious jars depends on the deal negotiated between the owner and the buyer; there is no fixed price on such objects. Condominas (1972: 202-219), observing the price negotiation on an ancient jar among M'ngong Gar, wrote, "Once I saw an elephant included in the process of evaluation. In this case, a very old and beautiful jar, which I saw in the

mountain village of Daak Bok, was the pride of its owner, who estimated its worth as that of an elephant with tusks as long as arms. The jar, moreover, was believed to have a dragon soul (*hêeng rmeh*)”.

To get satisfactory beautiful jars, Katu have to travel to the markets in the lowlands to exchange with Vietnamese traders they know well (*pr'đi noh*). Previously, Katu in Quảng Nam province often carried their products down to such large markets as Hà Tân, Ai Nghĩa, Túy Loan, etc., to exchange them for jars or gongs. Conversely, Vietnamese traders/'dealers' carried those high-grade goods to remote villages to sell or barter.

Normally, beautiful jars are introduced to Katu by intermediaries or middlemen (*ador lưót dol*), or between the Katu if the need arises. When deciding on a satisfactory jar, Katu will discuss the price, barter forest products for it, or make cash payments. Previously, buffaloes were used as a unit of account in trading. Sometimes Katu purchase jars on credit and pay by installments.

Recently, we saw Vietnamese traders riding motorbikes to Pr'ning hamlet, Lãng village, Tây Giang district to exchange pottery, including jars, bowls, and plates for forest products such as honey, malva nuts, valuable mushrooms, and bamboo shoots. Nowadays, due to convenient roads, the exchange of goods between the uplands and the lowlands is quicker and more favorable than ever before; thus, the Katu continue to keep their noble hobby of collecting jars as an aspect of conserving their traditional culture.

Jar trading in the 'upland-lowland exchange network' in Quảng Nam region

Central Vietnam is sometimes described by Vietnamese scholars as a vigorous body with its 'chest' to the sea and its 'back' to the mountains. Communication between the two parts is based on 'a network of riverine product exchange'. This is reflected in a Vietnamese proverb, “Ai về nhẩn với nậu nguồn/Mãng le gỏi xuống cá chuồn gỏi lên” [“Whoever goes to see the uplanders please remind them, (if) forest products are brought down, sea products are carried up”] (Trần Kỳ Phương 2010: 210). The Kinh people (Vietnamese) in coastal Central Vietnam call upland-lowland trade *buôn thương*, upland trading.

Two major rivers, the Thu Bồn and the Vu Gia, connect the mountainous areas and the plains in Quảng Nam province. These two rivers and their tributaries created a very convenient transportation system from the upland to the lowland for the whole province.

Relying on these two rivers, a market network was set up centuries ago and exists today. Historical accounts and local people call the mountainous areas the 'Thu Bồn forest source' and 'Vu Gia forest source' (or '*nguồn Thu Bồn*' and '*nguồn Vu Gia*' in Vietnamese⁵). The midland markets, situated conveniently between the lowlands and

⁵ The book, *Phủ Biên Tạp Lục* [Miscellaneous Accounts from the Frontier], originally published in Chinese in 1776, records that, "... every year, the two main forest product sources of Quảng Nam

uplands, became centers of direct goods exchange between upland and lowland. This market system collected upland products and provided lowland products for traders/dealers (*k'lai*) who directly managed trading networks between the Katu (uplanders) and the Kinh/Vietnamese speakers (lowlanders) and with the Cham in ancient times (Le Pichon 1938: 364). Two main centers of exchange were located at the headwaters of the Vu Gia River, i.e. Bến Giằng wharf (today's Nam Giang district) and Bến Hiên wharf/Pic Aruong (today's Đông Giang district).

Currently, about 50,000 Katu are settled in the three mountainous districts of Đông Giang, Tây Giang, and Nam Giang, in the west of Quảng Nam province (Fig. 6) (Luu Hùng 2007: 18); and about 25,000 inhabitants in Sekong province in Laos (Sulavan, Kingsada, Costello 1996: iii). Formerly, based on the geographical location of each village (*viel*), the Katu divided themselves into two zones, the lower Katu (*phương ếp*) and the upper Katu (*zai*)⁶. The Katu in lower areas, especially in the villages contiguous to the plain, often traded directly with Kinh traders. They also took on the role of intermediary in transferring goods to upper Katu villages. The exchange system based on low-to-high terrain created a dynamic and frequent network of trade between the uplands and the lowlands.

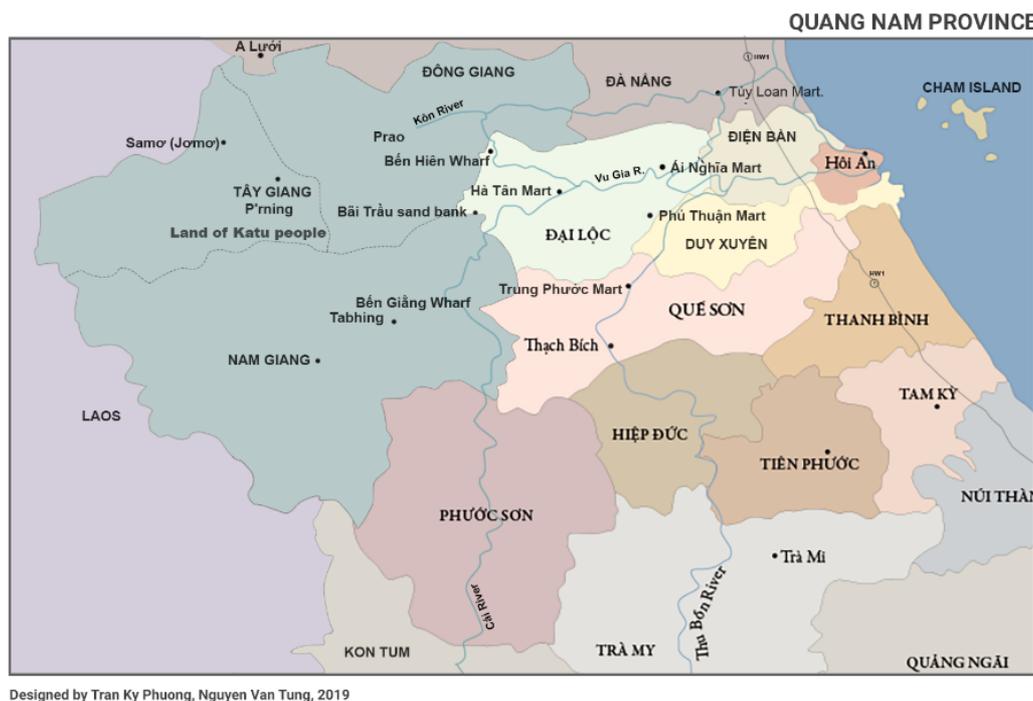


Fig. 6. Map of sites and locations discussed in this article. Three mountainous districts of Katu people -- Đông Giang, Tây Giang and Nam Giang -- are in grey-green color. (Source: Trần Kỳ Phương and Nguyễn Văn Tùng, 2019)

Katu villages located in the lower regions, especially in the area near Bến Hiên and Bến Giằng wharves, have more favorable conditions to barter with Kinh traders in the

region are the Ô Đa (Vu Gia) source and the Thu Bồn source (which) paid a variety of taxes, including betel, rattan, resin, gold, and many other forest products.” (Lê Quý Đôn 2007: 268-269)

⁶ Most Katu villages are currently located in the upper area along the Vietnam-Lao or Sekong province boundary.

lowlands. Sometimes, conflicts of interest have arisen between the Katu in the lower and the upper areas, mainly over issues of unfair pricing. To take revenge on each other, they took advantage of the 'blood hunting' custom, a human blood ritual to pray for good harvests⁷; in this ritual, the Katu in the upper areas would hunt to kill the Katu in the lower areas if they had a grudge against them (Luu Hùng 2007: 194).

This revenge could also be aimed at Kinh traders, according to Mr. Quách Xuân, a senior Communist cadre who lived with Katu during the wars in Vietnam from 1946 to 1975. A story of killing a Kinh trader for revenge had been handed down among Katu villages located in the lower area near Bến Hiên. This incident occurred around the early 1920s when Katu villagers in this area sent 'blood hunters' to Hà Nha to kill a rich trader named 'she-devil Tâm' to avenge her demand for certain prices in the exchange of goods (Quách Xuân 2001: 79-80).

Regarding the exchange of goods between the uplands and the lowlands after the end of Vietnam War in 1975, Mr. A Tùng Vẽ, said that, in the 1980s, he often bartered in Hà Tân market, Đại Lộc district. He usually traveled on foot in groups of two or three people along streams or caught a boat; it took two or three days to travel from Gùng village (his native village at the time) in Prao townlet to Hà Tân market following the Kôn River. Mr. Abing Lắm and his wife, Mrs. Hối Thị Aru, in Pr'ning village, Lăng commune, Tây Giang district (formerly Hiên district [before 2003], contiguous to Vietnam-Laos border) told us that, in the early 1980s, the couple and fellow villagers often carried local forest products to Hà Tân market to barter for jars, gongs, salt, salted fish, and essential items. It took them two weeks to get there and return home because there were no roads and they had to travel along the streams and through different Katu villages down to the plain (*klung*).

In terms of the exchange of goods between Katu in the lower areas (*phuong ép*) and the upper areas (*zal*), Mrs. Hối Thị Aru, Mr. Abing Lắm's wife, said that, in the 1980s, the Katu in Laos often went down to Pr'ning village to barter; meanwhile Katu in the lower areas did not go up to the upper areas. Products brought from Laos were mainly woven fabrics or brocades called *azuong*, since the Katu people in Laos (*zal*, i.e. Katu in upper areas) were very good at weaving. Because *azuong* is also considered an asset, it can be exchanged for jars, gongs, and other premium goods that Katu in the lower areas buy from the lowlands, i.e. Kinh traders⁸. Mr. Ka Phú

⁷ According to ethnographers, 'blood hunting' is a vestige of 'head hunting', a popular custom of the ethnic minorities living in Southeast Asia in the old days (Luu Hùng 2007: 197). When Le Pichon wrote his article on the Katu in Quảng Nam, around 1938, he saw a buffalo-sacrifice pillar with a human skull attached near Bến Hiên (Le Pichon 1938: 393).

⁸ In June 2009, I conducted a fieldwork in Ban Thong T'ruk, Kalum district (Muong Kalum), Sekong province, Laos. This is a small Katu village (*ban*) with 68 people, 12 households, and 6 stilt houses. The village was formerly located near the Laos-Vietnam border and moved to the Sekong River near Kalum district in 1977. Mr. Sai Kham, aged 26, in Thong T'ruk, said that he often brought brocade (*azuông*) and dried fish to A Vrong commune, Tây Giang district (formerly Hiên district, which Katu people in Laos still called Muong Hiên) in exchange for salt and seasoning; it took him four days on foot from Muong Kalum to A Vrong commune through several different villages, each night staying in a different village. Meanwhile Katu people in Kalum district usually brought dried fish to exchange with Katu people in Tây Giang district, because the rivers and streams in this area had been polluted by cyanide used for gold exploration. He also said that 5-6 brocades *azuông* brought from Muong Kalum to Muong Hien could be exchanged for a good flat-gong. When I was in Ban Thong T'ruk, I saw Katu

Thương, aged 82, a retired cadre Katu living in Bà Dzôn village, Cà Dzy commune, Nam Giang district (near Bến Giằng wharf), said that Katu in the upper areas often travelled down to the lower areas to exchange goods, while Katu in the lower areas rarely went upriver to barter; meanwhile, Kinh traders did not dare to go into Katu villages for fear of 'blood hunting'. Accordingly, Bến Giằng and Bến Hiên were the two major exchange places for Katu and Kinh people in the area (Fig. 7)⁹.

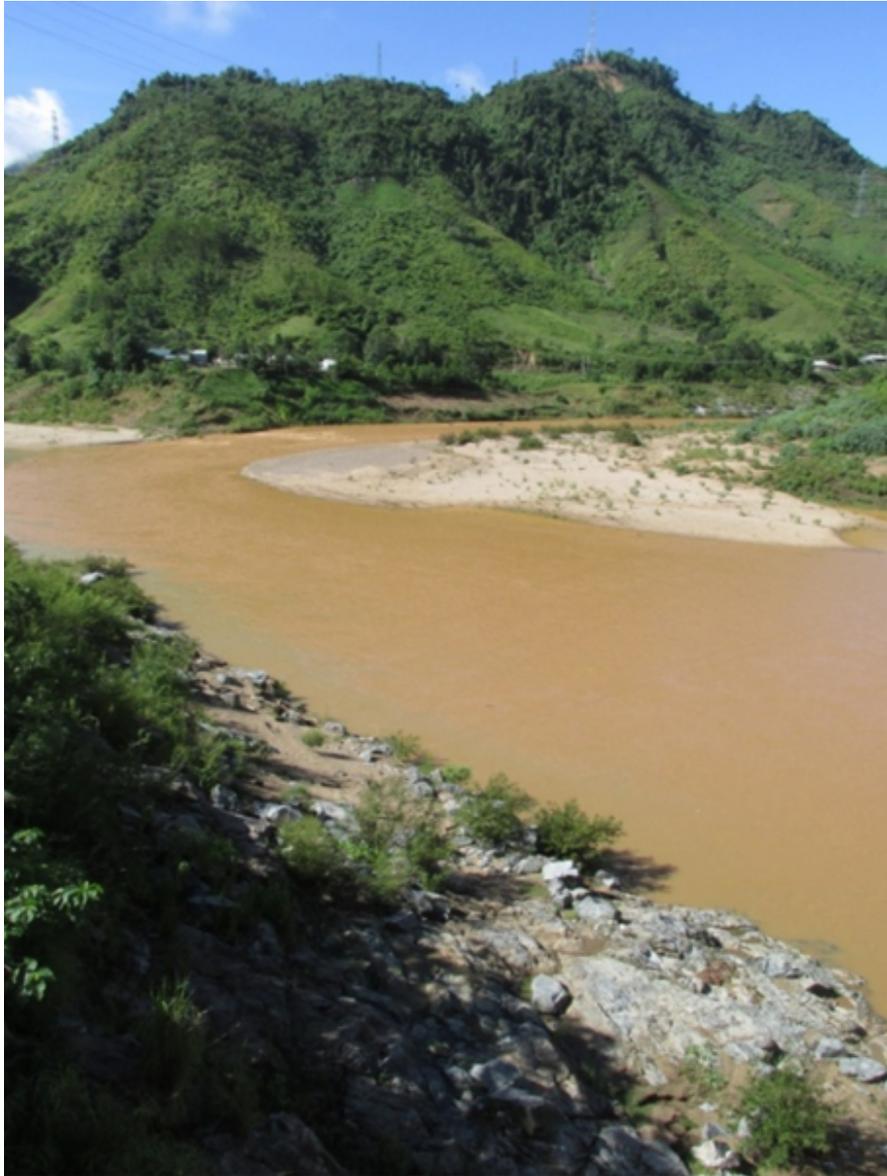


Fig. 7. Landscape of Bến Giằng, 2014. (Source: Trần Kỳ Phương)

women weaving *azuông* to bring to Muong Hiên for bartering for items such as jars, flat-gongs, salt, electronics, cloth, and footwear. (Here I would like to thank Dr Thonglith Luangkhoth for his contributions to my fieldwork in Laos in 2009-2010).

⁹ Phủ Biên Tạp Lục [*Miscellaneous Accounts from the Frontier*] states, "The forest source of Ô Da [Vu Gia] has no tax (and) produces a lot of gold, but the source is in a remote area which has many **wicked barbaric men**; traders can only exchange along the river, they do not dare exchange in the mountain" (Lê Quý Đôn 2007: 287; author's emphasis).

About 30 kilometers from Bến Giằng wharf, on the Cái river, where its current flows into the upper Vu Gia River, a large sand-bank along the river called Bãi Trầu (Betel-leaf sand bank) (N15° 49' 45.56" x E107° 55' 53.50") is opposite Hội Khách village (Fig. 6 & Fig. 8). Formerly, it was a place to barter betel and other forest products between Katu and Kinh. Today, a small floating village, 'Vạn Hữu Vinh'¹⁰, remains; this was once actively involved in the exchange of goods in the region. Mr. Trần Lãng, born in 1930, a retired cadre living there, said that, before 1945, his family lived on their boat (approx. 880cm × 300cm, called a *ghe trường*, meaning 'long boat'), transporting goods along the Vu Gia River to Hội An port. Mr. Trần Lãng told us that bartering at the Bãi Trầu was mostly in common items, such as salted fish, salt, sedge mats, cloths, etc., for betel (*trầu nguồn*, forest betel, grown by minority peoples), honey, bark of the tree *artocarpus tonkinensis* (to chew with betel), etc. Bartering occurred year-round except for short periods of heavy rain in October and November. The busiest time for bartering was from December to March. Katu in the lower area carried goods by walking down to Bến Giằng wharf and then walked to Bãi Trầu sand bank to barter; it took about a day to walk from Bến Giằng wharf to Bãi Trầu. Mr. Ka Phú Thương said, "In the rainy season, the goods were more expensive than in the dry season because exchanging goods to uplands was more difficult because Katu were scared to go into the wet forest to get products." Regarding bartering costs, Mr. Thương said that in the early 1950s at Bến Giằng wharf, the most precious jar could be exchanged for two buffaloes and a new jar could only be exchanged for roughly twenty back-baskets (*zong*) of betel (*apah*) (each back-basket weighed roughly 30kg, holding about 1500 betel leaves), or by twelve liters of honey¹¹.



Fig. 8. Bãi Trầu (Betel-leaf sand bank) is located alongside the riverbank under the foot of mountain, 2014. (Source: Trần Kỳ Phương)

¹⁰ Vạn means floating village built on a river bank or river-mouth whose inhabitants make a living by trading, transporting commodities and passengers, or fishing in the river.

¹¹ Interviewed by the author at Ca Dzy commune, Nam Giang district on 28 August 2014.

Jars are costly goods, so it is necessary to trade through intermediaries who can communicate in either the Katuic or Kinh (Vietnamese) languages. The Katu call these intermediaries '*ador lưót dal*', salesmen. Intermediaries can be Kinh or Katu. When someone needs to purchase a jar, the intermediary will take him to sellers to see the jar and bargain over it; the intermediary will receive a commission (*daang zeenh*) from both the seller and the buyer. Katu in the upper area often travel to Katu villages in the lower area to purchase jars; meanwhile, Katu in the lower area, especially in villages contiguous to the lowlands, go straight to such big markets in the midlands such as Hà Tân, Hà Nha, Ái Nghĩa, Túy Loan, etc., to buy jars (Fig. 6 & Fig. 9). Every Katu family desires to collect jars; they have their own dealers who are considered close friends/brothers (*di nor/pr'di nor*) with whom they frequently exchange that kind of product. During the mid-1950s some Kinh (Vietnamese) merchants had good contacts with Katu in the region, such as Mr. Lạc and Mr. Bồn at Ái Nghĩa market; Mr. Suong, Mr Lru, and Mr. Tuong at Hà Tân and Hà Nha markets; Mr. Đê at Túy Loan market; etc. These are still remembered with respect by elder Katu nowadays.



Fig. 9. A floating village (*vạn* in Vietnamese) in Hà Tân market, 2014. (Source: Trần Kỳ Phương)

The Katu story of Bác Đê (Uncle Đê, his real name is Mai Đê) is illustrative. He continued to trade with minority people throughout the Vietnam War and after the end of the war in 1975. Bác Đê (b.1913-d.1988) who lived in Túy Loan market, he was a police officer assigned to a mountainous region during the time of the South Vietnamese Government (1954-1975). He became acquainted with Katu and began to exchange commodities with them. After 1975, as a former South Vietnamese official, the Communist government sent him to a re-education camp. A number of Katu who had supported the Communist party during the war demanded his release, arguing that

without his help they could not have obtained lowland products such as foods and medicines to supply Communist guerrillas in the region during the war. Bác ĐỀ was released 20 days after his arrest and continued to trade with Katu until he died in 1988¹². This example indicates that *buôn thặng* was the significant economic system in the central region. Another interesting aspect of Bác ĐỀ's episode is that it was not so much the market that highland minority people needed for exchange as the availability of trustworthy individuals. The implication of this example is that trade partners rather than markets played the significant role in upland-lowland exchange.

The product exchange network in Quang Nam area during Champa times

The exchange network in this region has been building since the time of the Sa Huỳnh prehistoric culture, between the 3rd century BCE and the 1st century CE. This continued through the Cham historical periods from the 2nd to the 15th century CE and then during the 16th to 18th centuries through Hội An port-city when the Nguyễn dynasty reached its heyday (Cort 2017: 286; Trần Kỳ Phương 2010: 206-215). According to anthropologists, exchanges such as these between the Katu and the Kinh could become economic backbones of Southeast Asian societies. Godelier noted, as quoted by Condominas (1972: 216, note 6) "Exchange does not constitute a marginal activity, an occasional appendix to the functioning of the society . . . but a strategic element of its structure. At the limit we can say that this society cannot subsist without exchanges."

Historically, the exchange network between upland and lowland made Central Vietnam prosperous for centuries. This included the ancient realms along the coast from the Cham kingdom(s) to the 'Xứ Đàng Trong', 'Interior Region', of the Nguyễn dynasty (Wheeler 2006: 163-193). Ceramic jars were the main item among 'prestige goods' for the Katu, thus, the demand for these jars built a large and permanent consumer market; thanks to its high value this provided great benefits to the indigenous people. Historical accounts note that, during the 17th and 18th centuries, ceramics were the main item imported from South China into Quảng Nam markets through Hội An port-city¹³. As a result, the residents in Central Vietnam, both lowlanders and uplanders, have run a large-scale product exchange network that played an important role in the international maritime trade route in the South (China) Sea (Nanhai). Anthropologists have argued, "...In truth, peripheral peoples had always been firmly linked economically to the lowlands and to world trade. In some cases, they appear to have provided most of the products valued in international commerce" (Scott 2009: 4).

Many prehistoric archaeological sites of the Sa Huỳnh culture (300 BCE-100 CE) have been discovered and excavated along the banks of Thu Bồn and Vu Gia rivers from lowland to upland (Yamagata 2006: 168-184). Artifacts found in these

¹² According to Mr. Mai Ngọc, eldest son of Mr. Mai ĐỀ, in Đông Lâm hamlet, Hòa Phú village, Hòa Vang district, Danang City, in an interview with the author, 16 June 2014.

¹³ *Phủ Biên Tạp Lục* [Miscellaneous Accounts from the Frontier] records, "Commodities imported from China ... sell very well, lots of interest, without any slump. These goods include various kinds of textiles, brocades, cloths ... copper items, several sorts of porcelains, ceramics ... to be exchanged together, everyone gets satisfied with their own requirements ..." (Lê Quý Đôn 2007: 296-297).

excavations include bronze mirrors, bronze cooking pots, and bronze coins from the Chinese Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE). Additionally, agates, carnelians, beads, precious stones, gold earrings, and gold from India reveal the formation of networks of product exchange between upland and lowland based on these two large rivers since prehistoric time (Trần Kỳ Phương 2010: 206-215).

At the end of the 4th century CE, Cham inscriptions refer to the Thu Bồn River as a sacred river or Mahanadi (Mother River) next to the sacred mountain or Mahaparvata (Father Mountain) where the Cham royal sanctuary of Srisana-Bhadresvara was erected (Majumdar 1985: 6-8). Southeast Asian historians have acknowledged that the port-cities/port-polities of the Champa kingdom(s) were entrepôts for luxury forest product sources linked to the 'Maritime Silk Road' of the South China Sea, Nanhai. Important port-cities such as Đại Chiêm Hải Khẩu (the port of Great Champa) of the Amaravati State (in the Hội An area of Quảng Nam Province) and Thị Nại (Sri Boney) of the Vijaya State (today's Bình Định Province) are often mentioned in Chinese and Arab historical records throughout the centuries (Wade 2009: 242-244). Many recently discovered shipwrecks on the central coast of Vietnam provide insights on ceramic trade in the South China Sea; this sea was called the 'Champa Sea' by Arab travelers and merchants during the 8th to 12th centuries (Ferrand 1913: 144-145)¹⁴. Newly found shipwrecks date from the 9th to the 16th centuries; most of the objects discovered are Chinese, Đại Việt, Khmer, Cham and Thai ceramics (Cort 2017: 267-296; Brown 2009: 33-75; Miksic 2010: 384-408).

The large quantities of ceramics found at archaeological sites and at shipwrecks in the former Cham territory of Central Vietnam can be compared with ceramics held by ethnic groups living in the uplands, we can thus figure out a huge market for this product. Accordingly, residents of the uplands were the most frequent customers, who built a lively, attractive, and sustainable ceramic market for the Southeast Asian ceramic maritime trading network (Aoyagi 1999: 97; Bùi Chí Hoàng 2000: 53-64).

Historically, upland-lowland product exchange has been evidenced by relics of Cham occupation, including the remains of brick towers and inscriptions found in the land of the Katu or in the midland adjacent to the land of the Kinh. This Cham occupation illustrates the vivid existence of the product exchange network in the early Quảng Nam region. In order to learn more about Cham riverine exchange network, we can refer to Cham sites on the Thu Bồn and Vu Gia riverbanks. For example, on the Thu Bồn River, there is a rock inscription known as the Thạch Bích inscription, now in Thạch Bích village, Quế Lâm commune, Nông Sơn district (Fig. 10). The inscription, was carved by King Prakasadharmā in the 7th century in the Thu Bồn riverbed. This inscription emphasizes the land conquered by the king and his merits achieved by setting up a temple of Shiva (Amareśa): "The illustrious conqueror, king of Campā, of

¹⁴ On passe de là à la mer du Campa, où se trouve l'arbre d'aloès; on ne connaît personne qui y habite. L'origine de cette mer est voisine du Nord ténébreux... Après la mer du Campa, dont nous avons parlé, vient la mer de Chine, mer mauvaise et froide, plus froide qu'aucune autre." ["We pass from there to the sea of Campa, where one can find the aloes-wood tree; we do not personally know any people who lives there. The origin of this sea is close by the dark North... After the sea of Campa that we have talked about, we came to the sea of China which is a bad and cold sea, colder than any other."] (Ferrand 1913: 144-145)

great wisdom, called Śrī Prakāśadharman, has established Amareśa, the great... " (Corpus of the Inscriptions of Campa, C135).

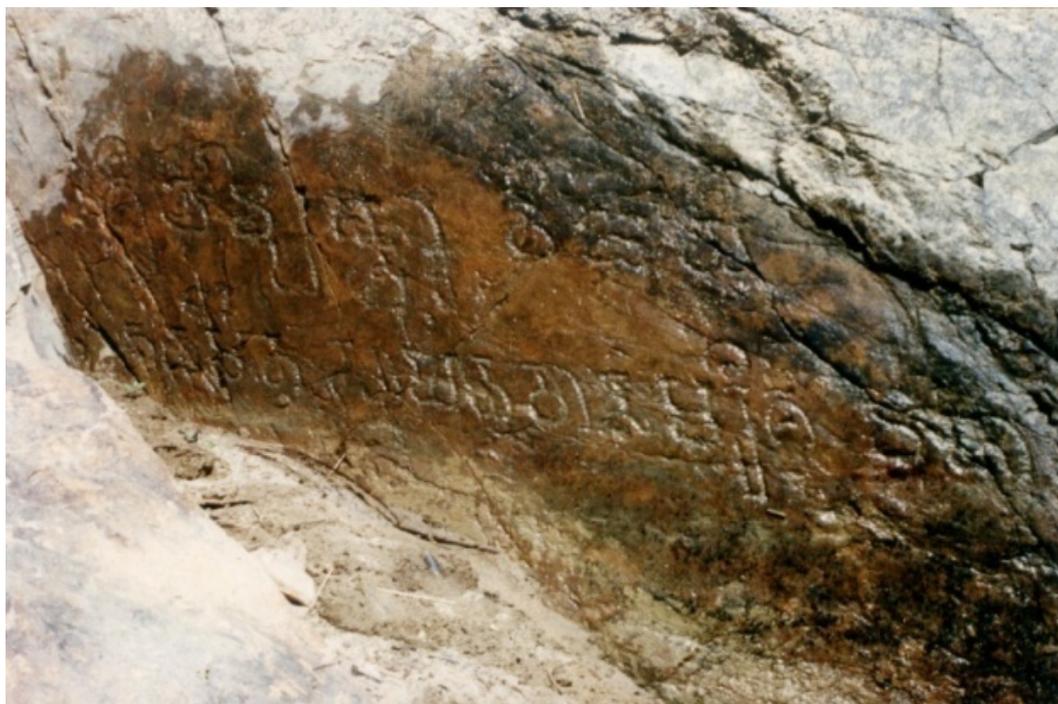


Fig. 10. Thạch Bích inscription on the Thu Bồn riverbed, 2003. (Source: Trần Kỳ Phương)

At the Phú Gia market, Dzùì Chiêng village, Quế Sơn district, on the Thu Bồn river, about 10 km east of Thạch Bích, people discovered a sandstone relief, 88cm high, in which the image of god Vishnu Narayana (Vishnu standing on surf) is carved (Trần Kỳ Phương 1982: 195-196) (Fig. 11). Art historians have analyzed the details shown on this relief in terms of style and dated it to the 7th-8th centuries. This is the only appearance of Vishnu standing on surf in Cham sculpture; it reflects the local cult associated with the activities of former Cham inhabitants (*urang Campà*) on the Thu Bồn River.



Fig. 11. Sandstone relief of god Vishnu Narayana (Vishnu standing on surf), 88cm high, discovered at Phú Gia market on Thu Bồn river. Housed at the Cultural Office of Quế Sơn district. (Source: Nguyễn Thượng Hỷ)

Regarding the area of the Vu Gia River, in 1985 a small brick temple next to the Sa Huỳnh culture sites was excavated in Pa Xua village, Tabhing commune, Giàng district (now Nam Giang district) about 12 km to the west of Bến Giàng wharf (Trịnh Căn 1991: 105-109). This is a small brick temple built in the early period of Cham art before the 10th century (Trần Kỳ Phương 2010: 208, note 2). This brick temple is convincing evidence of the presence of the Cham culture within what is now Katu territory. It can be said that this place was once an important settlement, including religious and commercial centers. Therefore, it can be argued that an inter-village system existed in society of that period in this area. This temple is evidence of the power of a local leader in the upland who associated with the Cham kingdom(s) in the lowland of the Thu Bồn River basin. Possibly this temple was established in order to supervise a product exchange network on the overland routes that connected the

central coast of what is now Vietnam but at that time was controlled by Cham with routes in the uplands/hinterlands possibly stretching to the Bolaven Plateau (Sekong province) in Southern Laos.

In the Katu village of Samo (Jomo) in Tây Giang district on the Vietnam-Laos border, three large stone inscriptions in Sanskrit are mixed with ancient Cham and Katuic Mon-Khmer writing (Fig. 12). The primary content of these 7th century inscriptions refers to the buffalo sacrifice ritual of the local residents. Although the content of these inscriptions has not been thoroughly interpreted, they are good evidence of the presence of Cham culture in this remote mountainous area as Wittayarat argues (2004/5: 14-17). However in this context we may suggest a hybrid Katuic-Cham culture appeared in this area rather than only the Cham.



Fig. 12. Samo (Jomo) inscription in Tây Giang district, carved in old Cham, the 7th century CE. (Source: Nguyễn Thượng Hỷ)

In addition, in such large markets as Phú Thuận, Thu Bồn, Ái Nghĩa, and Túy Loan, Cham sculptural works in art periods dating from the 8th-13th centuries have been found. Among them, the most remarkable is the golden head of the god Shiva (Shiva-kosa), 24 cm high, 0.58 kg, dated to the 9th-10th century. This was found in 1997 in Phú Long village (near Phú Thuận market), Đại Thắng commune, Đại Lộc district. This is a rare work of Cham art used to cover a linga during royal rituals (*lingapuja*) in a major temple of a Cham dynasty. It is now displayed at the Quảng Nam Provincial Museum (Hồ Xuân Tịnh 2011: 279-307; 1998: 10).

The Cham ruins that remain along the two main rivers of this region are evidence of the religious and economic foundations for learning about the 'riverine product exchange network' between the upland and lowland throughout the centuries. One of the main items of the forest luxury products that Katu have exchanged with

lowlanders (i.e. Cham) is eaglewood; Katu people call it *galau*, the same word as *kahlow* in Cham (Moussay 1971: 162). This Cham eaglewood was called *canfi* by Arab merchants during the 8th to 12th centuries (Ferrand 1913: 30). According to old Katu, this high value item could be exchanged for precious jars.

Conclusion

From the above tangible and intangible cultural evidence, we may infer that some Cham were professional traders who established a trading relationship with early Katuic people of that time (Le Pichon 1938: 364). One of the main items imported by the Cham was ceramics, as evidenced by the large number of ceramic artifacts found in shipwrecks off the coast of Central Vietnam (Fig. 13). These ceramics include pieces from South East, South West, and East Asia alongside the outstanding Cham kilns built in Vijaya during the 14th -16th centuries (Đình Bá Hòa 2008: 217-236; Aoyagi 1999: 91-97; Aoyagi 2005: 678-688; Diem 2011: 204-237). Some of these ceramic items could have been supplied to for the consumption of indigenous ethnic groups in what is now Central Vietnam and Highland Laos and Cambodia, including Katuic groups (Cort and Lefferts 2013: 233-241).



Fig. 13. Jars found in shipwrecks off of Cham Island (Hội An). Displayed at the Museum of Ceramic Trade, Hội An, 2006. (Source: Trần Kỳ Phương)

However, many studies of Southeast Asian ceramics do not mention the role of the large and vivid ceramic market of indigenous highland peoples. Hopefully this essay will encourage further research into this dynamic ceramic market as Louise Cort and Leedom Lefferts have previously remarked on. Together with ceramics, premium

items such as flat-gongs (*pr'noh*), copper pots (*gốc pung*), and copper trays (*a-pó-sri*) were formerly some of the products in the exchange network between the uplands and lowlands of the region. Cham merchants and, later, during and after the 15th century Kinh (Vietnamese) merchants considered all of these as major imports; among all of these items, ceramic jars played a key role in building the rich economic background of the ancient kingdom(s) of Champa (Wade 2009: 242-244; Aoyagi 2005: 678-688).

Further in-depth study of the socio-economic relationships between Katuic speakers of the uplands and lowlanders, including Cham (*urang Campà*) and Kinh in the northern parts of Central Vietnam, will make a practical contribution to understanding the economic structure of the ancient Cham kingdom(s). These kingdoms' economic relationships with the people of the highland is essential in understanding those who actively participated in the ceramic trade routes of Southeast Asia.

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