

COSMIC OUTLOOK IN SOME WORSHIP RITUALS OF THE EDE PEOPLE IN BUON MA THUOT

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Abstract. For the Ede people, the universe is a combination of three horizons, including the upper sky, middle ground and lower ground. On those three horizons, gods reside and dominate almost activities in the daily life of the Ede people. The concepts of the Ede's cosmology are imbued with idealistic thought, it personalizes all phenomena and things surrounding human life. Therefore, Ede people always think that humans were male and female. Besides, in the universe of Ede, seven is always a sacred and wonderful number because it is believed to give people warmth and peace. All these things are expressed almost comprehensively and completely in the worshipping ritual of the Ede people, hence the study of the cosmic outlook in the Ede people's worship ritual is meaningful regarding theory and reality in preserving and promoting values in the cultural identity of the Ede people in Buon Ma Thuot in the current context, when the increasingly strong globalization in Vietnam has influenced the cultural identity of this ethnic group to change under the trend of gradual fading.

Keywords: universe, cosmic outlook, the Ede people, ritual, worship.

1. Introduction

Regarding the sedentary ethnic groups in Buon Ma Thuot, the Ede people must be mentioned first because this is one of the ethnic groups with the largest population of the sedentary ethnic groups living here. Because of the inherent concept of "all things with the existence of Gods", this ethnic group has a diverse and abundant worshipping ritual system. The Ede people's ritual culture has long been the subject of research by many scientists from many different fields of research and has produced many valuable research works. Some of the typical scientific works can be listed as follows:

In the article *Faith and religious life of ethnic groups in the Central Highlands at present, some issues set out*, author Do Lan Hien said that the subject for worship of ethnic groups in the Central Highlands, including the Ede people, is the type of polytheistic beliefs [1; 75]. So they have a very diverse system of worshipping rituals. But

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these rituals have been currently changing and patched-up. Author Do Hong Ky in the article *Conservation and promotion of traditional Central Highlands cultural values in sustainable development* said that in the current situation, the faith religion and religious life of Central Highlands ethnic groups, including the Ede people, were sometimes put under crisis [2; 67]. Author Pham Quynh Phuong with the article *Identification of the changing trends in religious life in the Central Highlands today* researched five changing trends in religious life of ethnic groups in the Central Highlands, particularly the Ede people in the Central, in the current period, most notably the trend of strongly shifting from polytheism to monotheism [3; 3]. And there are many other research articles, such as *Gender equality in families of the Ede people in Dak Lak* by author Nguyen Minh Tuan [4]; *Preservation and promotion of the traditional culture of the ethnic groups in the Central Highlands* by author Ngo Duc Thinh [5] *Communication culture of the Ede people* by author Doan Thi Tam [6], and so forth. All research articles mentioned above are important achievements that contribute to preserving and promoting the values in ritual culture of the Ede people. However, no research article mentions the main subject of research as cosmic outlook in the worship rituals of the Ede people in Buon Ma Thuot. So this was a “scientific void” for me to have a chance to study after that. This study will partly explain the basis of formation and existence of worship rituals to contribute a small part in preserving and promoting the values in the Ede people's cultural identity in Buon Ma Thuot in the context of increasingly strong changes today.

2. Content

2.1. Some related concepts

2.1.1. Concept of cosmic outlook

According to the Sino-Vietnamese simplified dictionary of Dao Duy Anh (2013), “Cosmic outlook is a concept on the universe” [7: 782]. And *Dictionary and philosophical noun* of author Tran Van Hien Minh (1966) said that “the cosmic outlook is the spiritual view on the universe, the concept on the origin and meaning of the universe” [8; 326]. The cosmic outlook in most cases is understood with a similar meaning as the world outlook. The philosophy dictionary coedited by M. Ridentan and P. Iadin (1976), argued that: “the world outlook is a system of viewpoints, definitions and concepts on the whole surrounding world. In a general sense, it is the whole viewpoints on the world, on natural and social phenomena: viewpoints of philosophy, society, politics, logic, aesthetics, science, etc. Philosophical viewpoints constitute the core nucleus of any world outlook, literally understood of that noun” [9; 906].

Although there are many different definitions of the cosmic outlook, it is realized that *the cosmic outlook is the whole human concepts on the universe, is the consideration and thinking about heaven and earth, living beings and changes of heaven, earth and living beings. In other words, the cosmic outlook is our concept on the laws of evolution of the universe and living beings.*

2.1.2. Concept of worship ritual

Under the *Vietnamese dictionary* of the Institute of Linguistics edited by Hoang Phe (2012), “ritual has a similar meaning to rite and the rite is defined as rituals of a

ceremony (in general) and sequence of proceeding” [10; 872]. The anthropologist named EBTylor in his *Primitive Culture* work (2013) argued that “ritual is the means of communication with soul entities” [11; 946] and “it is best to believe in spiritual entities as a minimum definition of religion” [4; 947]. And A.A Radugin (2002) in his *Encyclopedia of Cultural Studies* asserted that “Rituals appear in mythology to show the effective relationship between daily life and the supernatural. The rituals are passed on not only in religion but also in daily life” [12; 326].

I realize that ritual is an important identity to understand the culture of an ethnic group. Ritual is the panorama of conduct, psychological identity and ethical norms of an ethnic group. Under the demands of the spiritual life, it was human psychology of both fear and wishing for favors granted by the supernatural world that forms the ritual.

According to the *Vietnamese dictionary* of the Institute of Linguistics edited by Hoang Phe (2012), “Worship is to show respect for a god, a sacred object or the soul of the dead in forms of a ritual, a worship based on the custom or beliefs, also by raising offerings to the gods or the dead’s souls, under traditional beliefs or customs” [10; 1222]. And the *Vietnamese dictionary* coedited by Nguyen Ton Nhan & Phu Van Han (2013) said that “Worship is the one by rituals and praying” [13; 1049].

Worship is a social phenomenon that has existed since time immemorial in almost all ethnic groups around the world. From the time of primitive society, people mainly relied on hunting and gathering to survive. Therefore, human life is almost entirely dependent on nature, stemming from anxiety in response to the life that inherently had many potential risks, uncertainties, and dangerous diseases. People had a need for help and protection from the supernatural forces, thereby human generated the ideology of worshiping the supernatural forces in nature. This is one of the most important bases for the formation and existence of worship phenomenon. From the aforementioned analyses, it comes to my realization that worship rituals are the etiquettes and sequences of steps for ritual practice towards predecessors, grandparents and ancestors, sages and saints who had merits to the country, and so on. Other supernatural forces that are the ones that human is always afraid of, respects, and prays for them to witness the inner feelings and aspirations of human.

2.2. Overview of the Ede people and worshipping rituals of the Ede people in Buon Ma Thuot

Buon Ma Thuot is the name for “a mountainous village” of the Ede ethnic group. At the end of the nineteenth century, there was only one village with about 50 long houses governed by chieftain Ama Thuot. In the early years of the twentieth century, Buon Ma Thuot was no longer a single village, but gathered and developed to dozens of other villages. However, Buon Ma Thuot was still a big village of the whole region and it was also governed by chieftain Ama Thuot. Currently, Buon Ma Thuot has about 40 ethnic groups, among the indigenous ethnic groups, the Ede people is the most populous [14; 1328]. Ede ethnic group was derived from the Malay language speaking ethnic group in the Pacific Islands. In daily life, the Ede people follow matriarchy, so children bring their mother's family name. The wife will marry her husband and the man after marriage will live in his wife's family. The Ede people's livelihood in Buon Ma Thuot is mainly agricultural farming on upland fields.

Stemming from polytheistic beliefs, therefore, since time is immemorial in the cultural life of the Ede people, an abundant and diverse ritual worship system was formed. This is the most typical manifestation of Ede cultural life in the early period of traditional agricultural civilization. The occasions when the Ede people organize worshipping rituals are the opportunities for this ethnic group to show their creativity in various types of folk arts and culture, such as performance of gongs, dancing, singing, creation of tomb house statues, and so on. Besides, worshipping rituals are also an opportunity for the Ede people to exchange cultures and learn experiences in real life, thereby creating cohesion in their community and sharing with each other good values in daily life. The worshipping rituals of the Ede people clearly reflect the cosmic outlook of this ethnic group in real life. Due to the high cohesion of the community in the daily life of the Ede people, many ceremonies in the worshipping rituals of the Ede people are imbued with festival characteristics. Therefore, in addition to the Ede people's typical worshipping rituals such as *ceremony for praying for pregnant women, naming ritual, ritual of blowing air on baby's ears, adulthood ritual, wedding ceremony, funeral ceremony, ceremony of praying for good health, ceremony of praying for upland fields, ceremony of praying for rain, ceremony of worshipping God of Wind, ceremony of plucking off the rice, ceremony of processing the God of Rice to warehouse, ceremony of processing K'pan chair, ceremony of worshipping for entering new house, etc.*, the Ede people also have many other worshipping rituals that are of bold festival characteristic, typically *ceremony of celebrating the rain of early season, ceremony of eating new rice, ceremony of worshipping river wharf, ceremony of eating buffalo for celebrating a bumper crop*, and so forth. Each ceremony in the worshipping rituals of the Ede people hides messages inside about the human life philosophy and cosmic outlook of this ethnic group. Spirit prayers are the most important part to represent the most human life philosophies and cosmic outlooks in the worshipping rituals of the Ede people. The Ede people have a large system of worship rituals, but within the scope of this article, I will mention only some of the most typical worship rituals to clarify the cosmic outlook of this ethnic group through worship rituals.

2.3. Basic content about cosmic outlook in the worshipping rituals of the Ede people in Buon Ma Thuot

2.3.1. The universe has three horizons

The Ede people believe that the whole universe is a combination of three horizons, including upper sky, the sky has a shape of a dome covering the ground, when the sunset occurs, the sun set below deep caves while the dawn comes, the sun rises from the cave, so does the moon; middle ground with a square shape and lower ground. On those three horizons, there are gods residing [14; 769]. For the Ede people, the upper sky always have *Ae Die* god reigning, this is their ultimate god, *Ae Die* is a god who created human and all beings, *Ae Die* is also a god who gives all plant varieties for human. In addition, the upper sky also has *Ae Du* god, this is a god who guides human how to practice worship rituals. For the Ede people, these are two ultimate gods, hence in almost spirit prayers of the worshipping rituals of the Ede people, the names of these two gods are prayed, typically in the ceremony of praying for good health. The spirit prayer script often has the following paragraph:

You are god of fate
You are god who bestowed the destiny
Bestowed on the spouse
Ae Du bestowed
Ae Die determined [15;213].

Also in the ceremony of praying for good health, the spirit prayer script also has the following paragraph:

You are god of fate
You are god of destiny
Bestow the harmony on the spouse
Ae Du yielded
Aê Diê bestowed [15;219].

And in *seed sowing worship ritual*, the spirit prayer script also often has a paragraph mentioning these two gods:

Du God coming to drinking wine remembers to bring with millet variety
Die God coming to drinking wine remembers to bring with rice variety [15;75].

And there are many other spirit prayers in the worshipping rituals of the Ede people that mention the names of these two gods.

In addition, there are many other gods in the upper sky horizon reigning, typically two gods of *Mtao Kla* and *Hbia Klu* who are a spouse, they often bless human in the works on the upland fields, take care of the land, create mountains, create ponds, lakes, rivers, streams, etc., hope the trees on the upland fields always grow well. On the ground horizon, there are always god of land (*Yang lan*), god of rice (*Yang mdiê*) reigning, in addition, other gods such as *Mtao Thuã* and *Kbuã Lan* bring human with favorable weather conditions, protect the trees, animals, rivers and streams, and so on. As for the lower ground horizon, the Ede people believe that this horizon is under the control of two gods named *Bang Bung* and *Bang Dai*, who are a spouse who looks after the souls of the dead. When the souls of the dead have gone through the grave leaving ceremony, they will return to dwell in the lower ground that is considered the hell [14; 1372]. For them, the world of the living has mountainous village with daily livelihood activities, the world of the dead also has a similar setting. The village of the living world is governed by the village patriarch and the head of the village while the village of the dead is governed by two gods named *Bang Bung* and *Bang Dai* with similar functions.

In addition, the Ede people also worship countless other gods such as *Yang Hrue* (god of sun), *Yang Mlau* (god of moon), *Yang Cu* (god of mountain), *Yang Ee* (god of water), *Yang Argin* (god of wind), *Yang Tlua* (god of rain), *Yang Kbua* (god of fertility), *H'Bia Klu* (god of fairy), *Yang grrab* (god of thunder), *Yang Hma* (God of upland fields),... and many other gods governing most of the daily activities of the Ede people.

For the Ede people, there are two kinds of gods in the universe, god of the good and god of the evil. So besides the aforementioned gods of the good, gods of the evil are always ready to bring bad effects to human, typically *Yang Brieng* (God of falling star).

This god has the same figure as a monkey and often orders tigers, leopards, poisonous snakes, etc., to harm human. When the Ede people see the falling star on the sky, they believe that there will be someone who dies suddenly without any reason. In addition, *Yang Lie* is also a god of the evil who often causes disasters in agricultural activities of human, such as poor crop, drought, natural disasters [14; 770], etc. The Ede people always think that worship rituals are a means for human to communicate with the gods in the universe.

2.3.2. Human is classified into male and female genders, so do the things

Staircases always have male and female types: The Ede people make a living by cultivation and husbandry at pre-industrial level, so their concept of the universe until now is the concept of primary dichotomous cosmology, in which traditional fertility belief is a typical manifestation of the dichotomous structure, starting from the concept of combination of male and female, is the root of any development in the universe. The Ede people's long house is a practice space of many important worship rituals of this ethnic group and the staircases are not simply a part to lead the way to the long house, but they are also "sacred". The Ede people's long house always has two separate staircases, male staircase and female staircase. The female staircase is always placed in the left for women and girls in the family while the male staircase is placed in the right for men and boys in the family and guests of the family. Each staircase is often carved into images representing milky breasts and crescent moon to express women's right symbol in matriarchal families. This is also the way for the Ede people reminds people always remember the breadwinner of the woman in the family. Before putting the staircases into use, the Ede people must perform a spirit worship ritual to pray for receiving the protection of all family members and guests of the family who daily go up the staircase.

Gongs also have male and female: The gong is considered a means for the Ede people to communicate with the gods. The sound of gongs is the inner feelings and aspirations of the Ede people, its sound is indispensable in the worship rituals of this ethnic group, the sound of gongs is always echoed in important moments of the Ede people's life. Since birth, the Ede people have heard the sound of gongs in the *ceremony of praying for mothers and babies*, and when growing up, this sound is also echoed in the adulthood ritual when the Ede men and women wish to live together for the rest of their life, the sound of gongs is also echoed at weddings. When someone dies, the sound of gongs is also heard as a farewell in *funerals* and *grave leaving ceremony*. Because there is always the concept of dichotomy, gongs of the Ede people always have gongs that represent male and gongs representing female. The Ede people call a set of gongs to be *Čing K'nah* usually consisting of ten ones. Among them, there are three gongs with a knob, the one with the largest knob is called *Ana čing*, and the remaining two gongs with smaller knobs are called *Moong čing* and *Mduh čing*. Seven remaining gongs have no knobs, in ascending order: *Čhar*, *K'nah Dy*, *Khők*, *H'liang*, *H'Lue Khők*, *H'Lue Khők Diêt*, *H'Lue H'liang* with a meaning to represent each member of an Ede matriarchal family, including mother (*Ana*), father (*Mduh*) and children. In a set of gongs, the pair of gongs considered the most valuable, including *Ana čing* (*the gong that represents the mother*) and *Mduh čing* (*the gong that represents the father*). For the Ede people,

everything always has two opposite sides and the objects always have male and female. In that spirit, gongs always have male gongs (*Mduh čing*) and female gongs (*Ana čing*), these pairs of male and female always are opposites in a unified whole. Because the Ede people have a matriarchal tradition, in all opposites, the female often occupies the decisive position, typically the position of the female gong (*Ana čing*) is always placed right in front of the entrance in the guest compartment that is the most important compartment in a long house on stilts, which represents the position of the owner of a matriarchal family, while the male gong (*Mduh čing*) is always placed at the end of the gongs. When performing in the worshiping rituals, because of being always hung in an elevated position, the female gong always produces the most echoing sound that covers the entire performance space while the male gong is placed at a lower position, therefore its sound is not as far-fetched as that of the female gong.

Drum also has male and female: Along with gongs, the *h'gor* drum (*buffalo leather female drum*) is also one of the cultural heritages deeply expressing the cosmic outlook of the Ede people, the *h'ogr* drum is an indispensable component in the gong set of the Ede people. The name *h'gor* with the letter h at the beginning represents the female gender. The *h'gor* drum is also considered to be a “sacred” musical instrument of the Ede people that is associated with many important Ede people’s worship rituals. Co-performing with the gong set in worshiping rituals, but the *h'gor* drum always plays the leading role to regulate the rhythm of the whole gong set. This shows the feminism in the matriarchy of the Ede people. The process of making a *h'gor* drum is also very careful and rigorous. When preparing to produce drum, the Ede people hold a *h'gor* drum making ceremony with a sacrificial offering of a buffalo. After that, a group of people go to the forest to practice *the ceremony of praying for obtaining trees to make drum*, when the satisfied forestry trees are chosen, the Ede people practice *the ceremony of asking for permission from gods*. In this ceremony, there are the following main rituals: a young Ede man stands from far way and launches an axe so that the axe is embedded to the trunk, then the group of people comes home. Early in the morning, the group returns to the forest, if the axe is still attached to the trunk, it means that the gods allows people to cut down the tree to make the *h'gor* drum, but in case the axe falls into the ground, it means that the gods do not allow to do so. If so, the Ede people have to perform a ceremony of asking the gods to cut down another forestry tree. The process of making drum is carried out by Ede people right in the forest. When the drum is brought back to the village, they have to conduct a *spirit worshipping ceremony*. The *h'gor* drum always has a male surface and a female surface, the male drum surface is made from male buffalo skin, the female drum surface is always made from female buffalo skin and is always larger than the male drum surface. When the creation of the *h'gor* drum is completed, the Ede people organize a *ceremony of blowing soul for drum*, eventually they bring the drum to a long house and fix it on *k'pan* chair. The Ede people often choose the name of the oldest, most prestigious and deceased woman in the family line to name the *h'gor* drum. *H'gor* drum performance is absolutely not casual, all must avoid following the taboos as specified in their unwritten laws. When planning to move a drum out of the long house for any reason, the Ede people must perform a *ceremony of asking for permission from the gods*.

2.3.3. Number 7 is the sacred and magical number

Number 7 exists throughout the cosmic outlook of the Ede people, they use this number as a milestone for the time in the universe, they calculate the time based on the moonlit cycles and number 7 is the number to end a moonlit cycle of the week. The Ede people often base on the moonlit cycle to organize worship rituals. For this ethnic group, number 7 is a symbol, representing the completeness and entirety, so the number of offerings for the Ede people to worship the gods is usually corresponding to number 7. Typically in worshiping ritual practice, there are usually 7 copper cups of blood, 7 jars of *rượu cần* (wine drunk out of a jar through pipes), 7 dishes of meat, etc. Because, for Ede people, the quantity must be 7 to show the fullness, completeness, affluence and only when they do so, the gods will witness to their sincerity, understand the inner feelings and aspirations that they want to convey to the gods. In addition, the Ede people always consider number 7 as a sacred number, a miraculous number that brings peace, prosperity and good things. Therefore, the gong set of the Ede people often has 7 pieces; staircase of long houses usually have 7 steps up and down; when human dies, their soul must undergo 7 transformations to return to the human world by reincarnating into a newborn during the *naming ceremony*; for a child born after 7 days, it is required to conduct a *naming ritual* and *ritual of blowing air on baby's ears*; the life of an Ede person often undergo 7 main *ceremonies of praying for good health*; 7 days after burial of the dead, the family must perform the ceremony of seeing off the dead's soul, and so on. Because based on the Ede people's cosmic outlook, the above rituals must be performed corresponding to number 7 to achieve fullness, full peace, completeness.

The symbol of number 7 is also shown in many Ede people's worship rituals, one of the typical examples is the ceremony of processing *K'pan* chair. For the Ede people, the *K'pan* chair is a symbol of power and wealth, this chair is always placed in a long house that is the seating place of the gong team and also the place of positioning *h'gor* drum. In the process of making *K'pan* chair of the Ede people, there are the following remarkable rituals: when the *ceremony of asking the gods to cut down trees to make chair* is finished, the family head leads 7 young men carrying 7 axes and the shaman to the place where the forestry tree has been chosen. When the forestry tree is cut down, the family head and the shaman walk on the tree 7 times with the implication of expelling evil spirits. At this time, the workmen begin to produce *K'pan* chair. When the making of *K'pan* chair is completed, everyone carries the *K'pan* chair to the front door of the long house and place one end of the *K'pan* chair on the floor of the house. At this time, the family head holds a shield with one hand and a sword with the other hand, then walks on the *K'pan* chair 7 times with the implication of expelling the evil spirits, then names the *K'pan* chair as an affirmation of ownership of the *K'pan* chair. The offerings for the ceremony of processing *K'pan* chair usually include a buffalo and 7 jars of wine tied to 7 pillars. The biggest jar of wine is tied in the outermost column, the body of the column is covered with buffalo blood in 7 sections. The shaman sitting at the head of the *K'pan* chair holds the long stick in his hand to immerse in the copper bowl of blood of the sacrificed animal mixed with alcohol and applies to the *K'pan* chair vertically with the implication of blessing for protecting the property for the landlord.

In addition, by the cosmic outlook, the Ede people also use number 7 to create a limit to the space and time that are inherently endless in the universe to express a different expectation of conquering the universe and the nature of their ethnic group. This is clearly shown in the *Dam San* epic of the Ede people, in which young man named Dam San always had a desire to occupy and conquer the space that inherently belongs to the gods through the act of seeking and conquering the Sun Goddess to take her home to become his wife. *Dam San* passed 7 mountains and 7 waterfalls by making a jump; for a moment he came home. But in the end, *Dam San* failed, he died and his soul merged into *Dam San* grandson so that *Dam San* grandson followed his footsteps to fulfill his dream. Conquering the universe is always the Ede people's desire, the predecessor generation fails to fulfill and the descendant generation has to continue to realize, but such a dream is forever only aspiration. In the worshipping rituals of the Ede people, number 7 appears almost throughout the ritual practice steps. Depending on the specific purpose of each ritual in worshipping ceremony, number 7 will have a different human life philosophy and cosmic outlook. But in general, in the Ede people's cosmic outlook, they always consider number 7 a sacred number, a magic number that always gives them peace, prosperity and good things in human life.

3. Conclusion

Because of the concept of “all things with the existence of Gods”, every living of the Ede person must undergo a lot of worship rituals. The cosmic outlook hidden within those worship rituals expresses and conveys to the gods the inner feelings and aspirations of the Ede people. The important cosmic outlook in the worship rituals of the Ede people has created a delicate sympathy between human and the gods, it personalizes all phenomena and things surrounding human life, thereby creating emotions that positively impact the cultural life of this ethnic group in the community. The study of the cosmic outlook universe in the Ede people's worship rituals has both theoretical and practical significance in preserving and promoting the cultural identity values of the Ede people in Buon Ma Thuot in the current period.

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