



CHAPTER 3

Awar–Ahier: Two Keys to Understanding the Cosmology and Ethnicity of the Cham People (Ninh Thuận Province, Vietnam)

Rie Nakamura

Introduction

In Vietnam today, the many vestiges of ancient Champa — including Mỹ Sơn — are better known than the living Cham people. The vestiges are pictured on posters and calendars, often accompanied by beautiful Vietnamese women in *áo dài* (Vietnamese traditional dress), which can create the impression that Cham people no longer exist in Vietnam, that Champa left nothing more than some beautiful examples of architecture to contemporary society. In actual fact, around 130,000 Cham people live in Vietnam today, and their population is growing. Cham are also found in various parts of Southeast Asia, the most numerous community being in Cambodia, where the population is estimated at several hundred thousands of people. After the reunification of Vietnam in 1975, a number of Cham people left Vietnam for Australia, Canada, France, USA and other parts of the world.

There are two distinct groups of Cham people in Vietnam, if we consider their place of residence, their historical background and their religion. One group lives in the south central region of Vietnam, particularly Ninh Thuận and Bình Thuận provinces. These two provinces used to form one large province, called Thuận Hải, which covered a similar area to the part of the kingdom of Champa known as Pāṇḍuraṅga. This is where the largest concentration of Cham people in Vietnam may be found. About 86,000 Cham people live here. In addition, approximately 20,000 Cham live in Phú Yên and Bình Định provinces, north of Ninh Thuận and Bình Thuận.¹ This group is called Cham Hroi, which is classified as a sub-group of the Cham ethnic group. It is believed that the Cham Hroi were members of the population of the kingdom of Champa who, left alone without contact with other Cham communities, developed different cultural traditions from the Cham living in Ninh Thuận and Bình Thuận.²

The second group lives in the Mekong Delta, most of them around Châu Đốc city in An Giang province, near the border with Cambodia. About 12,000 Cham people live in this region,³ and almost all are Sunni Muslims. Mekong Delta Cham also live in Ho Chi Minh City and surrounding provinces such as Đồng Nai and Tây Ninh.

There are differences in ethnic self-identification between these two groups of Cham. In general, the Cham of south central Vietnam understand being Cham as being descendants of Champa, while the Cham of the Mekong Delta see being Cham as being Muslim. The Cham of the south central area do not hesitate to recognise the Cham of the Mekong Delta as members of the same ethnic group. However, the Mekong Delta Cham often have reservations about recognising a common group identity with the Cham of the south central area. For them, Champa is an unfamiliar entity. In recent years, a tendency among the Cham people to identify themselves as “one Cham”, seems largely the result of familiarising ethnic classification by the Vietnamese government.

This chapter is a short introduction to the Cham living in south central Vietnam, particularly in Ninh Thuận province where I conducted research in 1995–96. The focus of the chapter is the Cham people’s religious system, and particularly a dual structural principle in Cham cosmology called *Awar* and *Ahier*, which I believe holds keys to understanding the way their ethnicity is constructed and reveals an interesting aspect of their world view. Before turning to this discussion, however, I would like to make some general comments about the Cham in this part of Vietnam.

The Cham People of Ninh Thuận Province

In the past, the Cham were known as skilful seamen in the Southeast Asian maritime trade. Today, a group of Cham living in Ninh Thuận pay annual visits to their ancestors' graves, in cemeteries the oldest of which are located right on the sea shore. This indicates that they used to live close to the ocean, as their cemeteries are always built right outside their villages. Nowadays, however, their villages seem to be locked inland. In Ninh Thuận, Cham people live in villages far from the coast and no longer build boats or sail out to the ocean.

In the twenty-first century, the Ninh Thuận Cham engage in the cultivation of wet rice and the growing of grapes. Some raise animals such as cattle, pigs, chickens and ducks. A few villages are known for their handicrafts, such as the textiles and pottery which are mainly produced by Cham women. With increase of domestic and international tourism in Vietnam, Cham textiles are particularly widely marketed. Their education level is relatively high. There are many Cham school teachers, and one Cham village is home to so many teachers that some have to go to work in villages of the Kinh (or Việt, Vietnam's majority ethnic group). Numbers of Cham doctors, nurses and pharmacists work in the provincial hospital. There are Cham lawyers and scholars working in Ho Chi Minh City.

Cham society is known for its matrilineal and matrilocal system. When a couple marry, the husband goes to his wife's house to live with her family. When the sister of a married woman is preparing to get married, the married couple move out of the wife's parents' house and build a new house nearby. When the husband dies, his body is sent back to the village of his birth, where he is buried in the village graveyard. There are a few exceptions to these customs, but generally speaking husband and wife are never buried side by side. The children of the Cham belong to their mothers' lineage and their property is passed down through the female line.⁴ Usually the youngest daughter gets a rather larger portion of the parents' property, since she and her husband are the ones who take care of the aging parents.

The Sunni Muslim Cham of the Mekong Delta tend to be seen as having lost this matrilineal and matrilocal principle, because of the influence of Islam. In actual fact, their living arrangements are ambilocal than strictly matrilocal. A couple's living arrangements often depend on their economic situation and access to the job market or education.

But the basic rule remains matrilocal, as the forms of traditional wedding ceremonial indicate. The three-day-long Cham Muslim wedding culminates on the third day when the groom enters the house of his bride. A folk song is supposed to be sung on the day he leaves his family. The song teaches him how to behave toward his wife and his wife's parents in their house. When he enters their house, he takes off all the clothes given to him by his family, and changes into new clothes prepared by the bride's family. This symbolises the cutting of ties with his natal family, as he becomes a new member of the bride's household.

The Cham of south central Vietnam still maintain their traditional writing system, which is called *akhar thrah* (*akhar sarak*). This script evolved from Sanskrit. All religious texts, legends and poems were written in *akhar thrah*. Traditionally, only a limited number of people could read *akhar thrah*. In the past, if someone wanted to learn *akhar thrah*, he/she had to visit a *Guru* (teacher) until the *Guru* was convinced to teach him/her.⁵ Nowadays, with provincial government support, a Cham Language Center (*Ban Biên soạn Sách chữ Chăm*) has been established in Phan Rang, the capital city of Ninh Thuận province. Run by Cham people, the centre is responsible for publishing the textbooks used in the Cham writing classes and for training teachers of *akhar thrah*.

The written script has the greatest authority over the Cham people's cultural knowledge. Doris Blood noted that they value literature more highly than oral tradition.⁶ Many Cham from south central Vietnam think that if one lacks knowledge of *akhar thrah*, one cannot understand *ilmu*, culture. During my field research, I had to modify my original plan to visit different Cham villages to collect information, and instead spent a few hours every day studying *akhar thrah* at the Cham Language Center. This reflected a difference, between my Cham teacher and myself, in our understanding of Cham culture: I understood culture as something observable, while my teacher understood it as something found in texts. It became clear to me that Cham intellectuals place ultimate authority in texts. In answer to my questions, elderly Cham people often read and translated their books for me. Such things happened so often that I came to suspect that Cham intellectuals believe that the Cham culture *only* exists in written form. Culture is not something acted out, not something that one can observe.

This reliance on texts is peculiarly similar to the nineteenth-century Orientalists' attitude to their studies, described by Said. The knowledge the Orientalists possessed about the Orient came from books. The "classical

Orient” — found only in texts — was considered to be the real Orient while the modern Orient was seen in terms of problems to be solved.⁷ In the Cham case, their intellectuals’ textual orientation can be understood as a denial of Cham modern cultural practices. Vietnamese government minority policies have resulted in the loss of many Cham religious ceremonies and the modification of their rituals. They probably see their contemporary cultural practices as impure, by comparison with the culture formerly practised in the kingdom of Champa, which they deem genuine and truly original. For them, real original Cham culture may thus be found only in the texts: if one is seeking “correct” cultural information about the Cham, one should learn to read the Cham scripts.

A small number of Cham in An Giang province who were able to read old Cham scripts feature in Ner’s 1940s account of the Muslims of southern Vietnam.⁸ When I visited An Giang province in the mid 1990s, I did not see a single book written in *akhar thrah*. An old man informed me that he owned several books written in *akhar thrah* which he had buried to save them from the confusion of war. After the war was over, he dug them out and found that the texts were no longer legible. The loss of *akhar thrah* among the Sunni Muslim Cham of the Mekong Delta is often seen — by the Cham of south central Vietnam — as a loss of culture, *ilmu*: the Mekong Delta Cham are thus deemed to have lost their Cham authenticity. For the Cham of south central Vietnam, their ability to access and possess “authentic” knowledge of their past — of the kingdom of Champa — make them more authentic Cham.

Cham Balamon and Bani

The Cham people of south central Vietnam have abundant ritual traditions: approximately 150 different religious ceremonies are known. There are two distinct groups of Cham in this region, if we consider their religious beliefs. One group — called Balamon — adheres to an indigenised form of Hinduism. They worship the god *Po Yang* and their deified kings, and hold their ceremonies in the ancient Champa temples called *bimong*, which were built between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. They are supposed to observe a taboo on eating beef. They are normally cremated when they die.⁹ They are led by a body of priests, *Halau Tamunay Ahier*. The other group — called Bani — adheres to an indigenised form of Islam. They worship *Po Alwah* (Allah) at their village mosque called *thang muki*. They are supposed to observe food taboo on

eating pork. When they die, they are buried without cremation. They are led by a body of priests, *Halau Tamunay Awar*.

The term Balamon, however, is rarely heard in Cham villages. The Balamon Cham are simply known as “Cham”, by the same name as for the ethnic group. The term Balamon¹⁰ is used only by scholars and researchers, and never by the Cham themselves in their daily conversation. In order to avoid confusion in terms — between Cham as Balamon and Cham as the entire ethnic group — I use the term “Cham Balamon” when referring the Balamon people.

According to the Cham, all Cham are born as Cham Balamon. But a particular group of Cham is scheduled to become Bani after their birth. The people of this group obtain their full membership through a ceremony of conversion to the Bani religion. Thus, being Cham Balamon indicates an elementary form of existence in the world. Bani are not born as Bani, but become Bani from Balamon. This, however, appears to me to be no more than a discursive distinction. In reality, the terms Cham Balamon and Bani bear meanings that extend further than mere religious differences explainable by conversion. Membership in the respective group is determined right from the time of an individual’s birth. Since the matrilineal principle governs kinship, this person becomes Cham Balamon because he/she was born of a Cham Balamon mother, while that person becomes Bani because he/she was born of a Bani mother. It is possible to convert to other religions than Balamon and Bani — such as Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, etc. — but the convert will still maintain a certain identity as Cham Balamon or Bani. This identity not only indicates a difference of religion, but also of the community into which the individual was born.

The Cham Balamon and the Bani do not live in the same villages. There are 22 Cham villages in Ninh Thuận province.¹¹ Of these, seven are inhabited by Bani people.¹² As Cham Balamon and Bani do not share a common daily life in the same village, they know little about each other’s customs and traditions. For example, my Cham language teacher was a Bani, and his wife often invited me for lunch when I was working in her village. She was very curious about my impressions of the Cham Balamon and often wanted to know what they fed me in their villages. She asked if I could eat their food. I told her that although I was not familiar with some dishes, I had no problem eating their food, including ceremonial dishes. She expressed her surprise in the following terms:

We (Bani) eat first and then conduct our ceremony, so our food is fresh and clean; meanwhile the Cham Balamon do the ceremony first, then eat afterwards. That is why their food is not fresh and clean. Even though I am Cham, I don't dare eat Cham Balamon food. You are not Cham, you're a foreigner, but you can eat their food. You are better than me. But you need to be careful about the food in Cham Balamon villages. It's not clean as ours.

Some members of her family were medical specialists — her sister was a doctor who worked at a well-known hospital in Ho Chi Minh City — so I initially thought that this concern about food and hygiene had something to do with her family background. Only later I discovered that Bani and Cham Balamon have differing senses of hygiene. For the few months I was concentrating on observing Cham Balamon funerals, I attended funerals in different villages, about one every two weeks. I also held discussions with a Bani anthropologist on the sequence and variety of Cham Balamon funerals.¹³ We had a few disagreements over details of ceremony, such as the number of pieces of bones to be removed from the cremation pile, and the names of the invited deities. Though he claimed that his information was accurate and mine was not — since he is the Cham — I thought that his knowledge was more or less based on beliefs popularly held by the Bani people about Cham Balamon funerals. I suspected that he had not spent enough time observing actual ceremonies, probably because he did not feel comfortable attending their funerals. In fact, I have never been to observe a Cham Balamon funeral with him.

I once met a Bani man at a Cham Balamon funeral. He was married to a Cham Balamon woman; the deceased was his wife's relative. He did not enter the funeral house to join in the ceremony, but sat instead in his relatives' house, drinking tea, smoking and chatting. Occasionally I saw other Bani people attending Cham Balamon funerals: they never entered the funeral house. Perhaps they were afraid to approach the corpse, but their comments on the Cham Balamon ceremony always related to hygiene: “dirty”, “unclean”, “unsanitary” and so on. This differing sense of hygiene seems to separate the two groups, and also provides a perspective on their relative degrees of “progress”.

The Cham Balamon, meanwhile, often agree with Bani criticisms of their religious practices. They admit that the Bani are more progressive, that their ceremonies are simpler. However, they also argue that they are unable to simplify their ceremonies as the Bani do, because the Cham

Balamon people must maintain the authentic cultural traditions inherited from Champa without alteration or simplification.

One of Vietnam's cultural policies aims to preserve minority customs, traditions and languages, while erasing obstructions to progress such as superstition, non-scientific practices and out-dated customs. The state thus urges the people to simplify and modify some of their more lavish religious ceremonies and customs. In the unitary "evolutionist scheme" of socialist thinking, in which the Kinh ethnic group is depicted as the most advanced and evolved of the 54 officially recognised ethnic groups, progress connotes assimilation to Vietnamese (Kinh) culture.

The Cham Balamon reinterpret this unitary evolutionist scheme in terms of purity of culture and tradition. One of the poorest and most isolated Cham Balamon villages in Ninh Thuận is called Bình Nghĩa: here, certain ceremonies and traditions differ from those in other Cham Balamon villages. The reason for this was explained to me in the following way. Bình Nghĩa village is located far from the Kinh communities, and it is backward and very poor as a result: of all the Cham villages, however, this minimal influence from Kinh culture has enabled them to maintain Cham customs and traditions in the purest form.

Similarly, when discussion turns to the question of what the Cham people are like, oppositional rhetoric is used to contrast them with the Kinh: the Cham are thus poor and primitive but honest and loyal, while the Kinh are rich and progressive but cunning and disloyal. To prove these points, people often repeat certain historical stories. For example, there is the legend of a tower-building competition between a Champa king and a Vietnamese emperor (about a dispute over territory). Instead of fighting, both sides agreed to hold a tower-building competition. The side which could build the higher tower in a single night would be entitled to occupy the disputed territory. The king of Champa had the tower made by piling up bricks, while the Vietnamese king ordered it built of bamboo and then coloured to make it look like brickwork. The next morning the king of Champa saw the taller tower built by the Vietnamese and, in shame, immediately called his troops to retreat and abandon the territory.

Ahier and Awar – Male and Female

Certain legends explain the origin of the Cham people's division into two groups, and in these legends Cham Balamon and Bani are consistently

identified as *Ahier* and *Awar*. Both words are from the Arabic, with *Ahier* meaning “back, behind, or after” and *Awar* meaning “front or before”. In the legends, *Ahier* denotes Cham Balamon and *Awar* denotes Bani. In daily life, the Cham use these terms to differentiate between certain types of ceremony, or between people of the Cham Balamon group and those of the Bani. They also use this dual principle in their cosmological explanations.

In the Cham lunar calendar, a month consists of 30 days. But the days are not counted from 1 to 30; instead, the days 1 to 15 are counted twice. The first 15 days are called *bingun*; the second 15 days are called *klam*. The first *bingun* half of the month is denoted *Ahier* while the second *klam* half of the month is denoted *Awar*. Both Cham Balamon and Bani hold their wedding ceremonies on the Wednesday of the *klam* half of the month. Why Wednesday? Wednesday is seen as a day of balance, and is thus considered to be the best day for weddings. This notion of balance relies on the principles of *Ahier* and *Awar*. The Cham week consists of seven days, as in the solar calendar. The first three days — Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday — are considered to be *Ahier*: fire and heat are attributed to these days. The last three days — Thursday, Friday, and Saturday — are considered to be *Awar*: water and cold are attributed to them. Wednesday, on the other hand, falls between *Ahier* and *Awar*. Furthermore, the soil — representing growth and fertility — is attributed to this day, which adds to Wednesday’s suitability for weddings.

These principles also govern other cosmological beliefs. For instance, the upper part of the human body, from head to navel, is called *akhar* and considered *Ahier*, while the lower part, from navel to feet, is called *tanuh riya* and considered *Awar*. The Cham imagine the sky as the body of a human being, hunched over with the hands and feet on the ground: they thus see the part of the day from dawn until noon (the sky’s upper body, hands to navel) as *Ahier*. The period from noon until sunset (the sky’s lower body, navel to feet) is *Awar*.

Legends about *Ahier* and *Awar* suggest that this two-realm division is meant to bring peace upon Cham society. One version of a legend I collected reads as follows:

A long time ago, the prophet *Po Nubi Mohamat* was an *Ahier*. At that time, the *Awar* became very strong and *Po Nubi Mohamat* was very impressed with them. So he tried to change all the *Ahier* people to become *Awar*. However the *Ahier* people opposed *Po Nubi Mohamat*,

arguing that “in the world there should be men and women. If we have only women, how can we maintain the world?” Thus a war between the *Ahier* people and *Po Nubi Mohamat* broke out. They fought for seven days and seven nights. Then *Po Nubi Ichbrahim* came between them as a mediator. He asked *Po Nubi Mohamat*, “Can you live with only one eye, only one hand, and only one leg?” *Po Nubi Mohamat* did not know how to answer this question and agreed that the rest of *Ahier* should remain *Ahier* but he himself became *Awar* on this occasion. After seven days and seven nights of battle, *Po Nubi Mohamat* felt thirsty; he brought out water by magic and shared it with all the *Ahier* people, so peace between them was restored. (This legend was related to me by a Cham Balamon shaman, *Ong Guru Urang*.)

The dualistic tendency in Cham cosmology was pointed out by Blood, who lived among the Cham people for several years before 1975. Of the two realms in the system she described, one belonged to the father, the other to the mother.¹⁴ In the legend above, *Ahier* is male and *Awar* female. Many Cham people express a similar idea of *Ahier* representing men and *Awar* women and further explain that, to function properly, society must have *Ahier* and *Awar*. Thus *Ahier* exists for *Awar*, and *Awar* exists for *Ahier*. The mutual dependence of the two realms holds the world of the Cham people together.

The male and female attributes of *Ahier* and *Awar* have many manifestations, which include the two groups’ respective bodies of priests. For example, a local scholar of the Cham Balamon told me the following story about the birth of his first child. After their marriage, he and his wife were childless for some time. His mother-in-law became concerned and sent him to a nearby Bani village to ask the Bani priests for help. He brought offerings of special candles and soup to the priests. They read the Qur’an for him. He made several trips to the Bani village, and he and his wife were then blessed by a son, followed by three other boys and four girls. He explained to me why his mother-in-law asked him to see the Bani priests, and not Cham Balamon priests (the leaders of his own religion). Cham Balamon priests symbolise men and men cannot give birth: only Bani priests, who symbolise women, could help the couple have children.

The gendered attributes of Cham Balamon and Bani priests are also manifested in their behavior and clothing. When Cham Balamon priests conduct ceremonies, they always sit with crossed legs in the way Cham men sit. Bani priests sit with their feet under them and



Fig. 1. Bani women wearing their *khan djaram*, An Nhon village (Photograph Rie Nakamura 1995).

to the side, in the way Cham women sit. Priests of both groups wear white turbans with red tassels at both ends, but on top of the turban Bani priests add a cloth called *khan djaram*. The *khan djaram* is an item of clothing used by Bani women: the priests wear it in the same way as the women wear it (Fig. 1). Bani priests shave their heads when they enter the priesthood, while Cham Balamon priests wear long hair tied in a bun at the top of their head. When they are conducting ceremonies, the bun is covered by a white turban without red tassels tied in a special way. The turban is tied into the shape of a *liinga* (Fig. 2).

Ahier-Awar complementarity is also expressed in number cosmology. The Cham community identifies itself through a symbol called *Hon kan*, composed of two numbers and two figures. The symbol's centre is a circle representing the sun, under which there a crescent. The number 6 is set above the sun, and the number 3 below the crescent. The sun and the number 3 are considered *Ahier*, while the crescent and the number 6 are *Awar* (Fig. 3). For the Cham, the number 9 is the largest number



Fig. 2. Cham Balamon priests with their distinctive *linga*-shaped turbans (Photograph Rie Nakamura 1995).

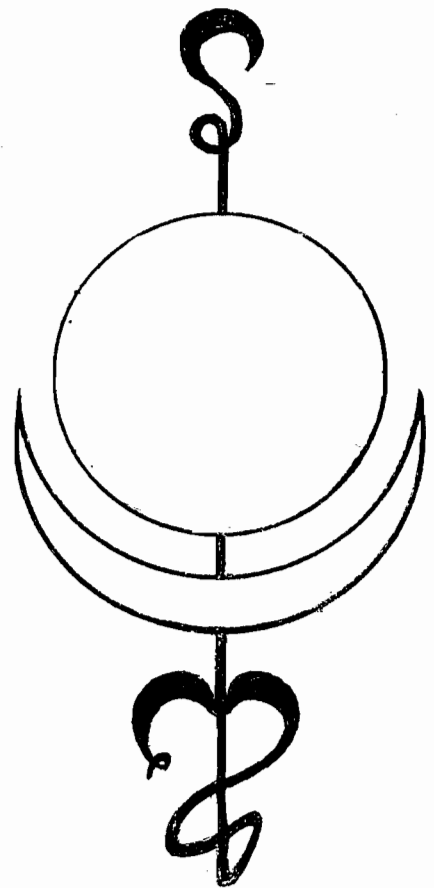


Fig. 3. The *Hon kan* symbol — composed of *Ahier* and *Awar* elements — represents the most complete form of existence: unity, balance, stability and peace (Photograph Rie Nakamura 1995).



Fig. 4. Cham Balamon priests carrying their yellow rectangle bags on the day of receiving the costume of the Goddess from Raglai people, during the Kate Festival, Hữu Đức village (Photograph Rie Nakamura 2006).

in script. The *Ahier* number 3 plus the *Awar* number 6 join to form the number 9 which is the most complete number. Thus the *Hon kan* symbol — composed of *Ahier* and *Awar* elements — represents the most complete form of existence: unity, balance, stability and peace. In other words, when *Ahier* and *Awar* co-exist, the world of the Cham finds unity.

We may also pursue the idea of complementarity in the symbolism of priesthood. As we have seen, Cham Balamon priests symbolise men and Bani priests symbolise women. But they also bear attributes representing something from the opposite sex. The Cham Balamon priest carries a yellow rectangle bag on his shoulder (Fig. 4), while the Bani priest has three bags, which hang from his neck down onto his back. One of three bags is slightly larger than the others, and the two smaller bags are tied by the same cord (Fig. 5). The Cham Balamon priest's bag symbolises the uterus; the Bani priest's bags symbolise the penis and testicles.

These bags symbolise the acceptance, within *Ahier* and *Awar*, of their counterparts. Janet Hoskins, who studied indigenous notions of



Fig. 5. A Bani priest carrying his small three bags, An Nhon village (Photograph Rie Nakamura 1995).

gender and agency among the Austronesian-speaking Kodi people of the Western tip of Sumba in the Lesser Sunda island chain, argued that gender is the most consistently evoked structuring principle within this “complementary dualism” (Hoskins 1987: 174). She argues that male and female, as abstract categories, provide a language for talking about ways of effective action; “male and female are simply used to express contrasts which may be applied recursively: Male contains Female, Female contains Male: Inside contains the Outside, the Outside the Inside; Black, White, White, Black.”¹⁵

Hoskin’s notion of complementary dualism may be observed in Cham ceremonies. One peculiar thing is that one can often find more *Awar* elements in *Ahier* ceremonies than *Ahier* elements in *Awar* ceremonies. For instance, during *Ahier* funeral rituals, Cham Balamon priests make a triangle by placing their hands above their forehead to pray to *Po Nubi*, *Po Nubi Eta*, *Po Nubi Atam* and *Po Nubi Mota*, all of whom are *Awar* deities. According to a Cham Balamon priest, they have to pray to invite *Awar* deities to their funerals, weddings and other ceremonies, as well as the celebrations held on the construction of new houses. On these

occasions, the Cham Balamon prepare two different sets of areca nut and betel leaf, which are essential offerings in every religious ceremony. One is called *hala kapu*, which is the *Ahier* set; the *Awar* set is called *hala tam tara*. While Cham Balamon (*Ahier*) people often present both *Ahier* and *Awar* sets at their ceremonies, Bani (*Awar*) people rarely present *Ahier* sets. The only time I observed the Bani people using the *Ahier* set was on the occasion of a funeral.

According to Po Dharma, the strong Islamic influence in Balamon religion was a result of the political situation of Champa during the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. Comparison of old documents kept among the Cham in Ninh Thuận province with oral traditions led him to the discovery that *Awar* deities were placed higher than *Ahier* deities in the religious pantheon of Champa. He then came across documents on the origin of a ceremony called *Rija Prong* explaining why the *Awar* god *Po Alwah* took the place of the *Ahier* goddess *Po Inu Nugar*. During that period, Champa tried to ally with military powers on the Malay Peninsula to fight against the Vietnamese, who increasingly threatened Champa. In order to maintain these alliances, in the context of ongoing Islamisation of the Malay world, it was crucial for the court of Champa to show an interest in Islam. The replacement of *Ahier* deities with *Awar* deities in the state religious pantheon was made to meet political needs.¹⁶

Po Dharma's argument is a convincing explanation of the existence of more *Awar* elements in the *Ahier* rituals. However, I would like to look more closely at the nature of the ceremonies, in order to understand how *Awar* elements work in *Ahier* ceremonies. I found that those *Ahier* ceremonies which contain *Awar* elements often bear meanings relating to "life" or "birth". For example, *Ahier* cremations contain the meaning of rebirth in the other world. All participants in the ceremony implicitly play the different roles involved in childbirth — including the newborn's parents, other relatives, godparents, midwife and so on. The funeral continues for four days, including a day off on the third day. On the first day, a bowl of rice and a boiled egg are prepared for the deceased, and this meal symbolises the meal for a pregnant woman. Thus the deceased impregnates a new life in his/her body.¹⁷ When the deceased's skull is saved from the cremation flames and the nine pieces of bones are removed from the forehead, the deceased gives birth to his/her new life in the other world. Immediately after this ceremony — whereby the nine pieces of bones are placed into the container *klong* — a ceremony called *patrip* is performed: *patrip* symbolises the new-born person's first meal in the other world.

Until a cremation has taken place, the body is kept in a funeral house (*Kajan*), to the northeast of which a shed is constructed, called *Rap*. The *Rap* is usually occupied by musicians, and by the craftsmen who make the ornaments for the cremation carriages. Cham Balamon priests may not step into this *Rap*, and some argue that this is because the *Rap* is *Awar* territory. The *Rap* is built for the *Awar* deity, *Po Nubi Mohamat*. Assisted by another *Awar* deity (*Ja Tin*) who holds a torch to light up the inside of the funeral house, *Po Nubi Mohamat* observes the sequence of the ceremony from the *Rap*. The prophet's assistant *Ja Tin* is symbolised by a torch-like object inside the funeral house. The *Awar* deity, *Po Nubi Mohamat*, is present at the *Ahier* funeral because the *Ahier* funeral contains the meaning of the rebirth. *Awar* here takes on a female role, giving birth and symbolising fertility. With both elements *Awar* and *Ahier*, the life cycle — of which a death is a part — is complete.

Awar, Ahier and Akafier

Until now, I have discussed *Ahier* and *Awar* as religious distinctions between the respective groups of Cham people of the south central region. However, within the Bani community itself, *Ahier* and *Awar* also mark differences in religious status (see Table 2). For the Bani, *Awar* refers to the body of Bani priests, while *Ahier* refers to the Bani lay people who do not enter the priesthood. Thus the *Awar–Ahier* opposition, as it is used within the Bani community, distinguish between the sacred and secular in Bani religion.

At each Bani village mosque, there are usually ten to twenty Bani priests. Eligibility for the priesthood is restricted to married Bani men who have accomplished the circumcision ceremony called *Katan* and know how to read the Arabic script. In general, there is at least one priest from each of the village's lineages in attendance at the mosque. On accession to the priesthood, the priest has to shave off his hair; from then on, he will always wear a special long white coat, which indicates his status as a Bani priest. He cannot drink alcohol nor eat pork; his food must be prepared according to the Bani religion, like *halal* foods in Islam. Every Friday, the priests participate in prayers to *Po Alwah* at the mosque, mostly attended by elderly women, one from each household. For the entire sacred month of *Ramuwan* (Ramadan in Islam¹⁸), Bani priests have to live in the mosque, away from their families; they fast from dawn to sunset for the first five days of *Ramuwan* and pray five times a day throughout the month.

The terms *Awar* and *Ahier*, as used by the Bani people, also bear male and female attributes. But an attempt to unravel which realm bears which gender attribute can lead to considerable confusion. Once, in discussion with the Bani, I repeated what I had learned in a Cham Balamon village about the male and female realms indicated by the directions right and left in a Bani village. I had understood that a person's right hand belongs to the domain of *Ahier*, indicating the male attribute, while a person's left hand belongs to the female domain of *Awar*. This caused a big debate among the elderly men. Finally the heated exchange ended with a bland sentence pronounced by a Bani priest: "*Awar* is male." For the Bani religious community, *Awar* (normally regarded as female) when used to refer to Bani priests belong to the male realm; *Ahier* used in the context of Bani lay people belongs to the female realm.

Being of the male realm, the Bani priests (*Awar*) need assistance from the female realm (women and unmarried men cannot enter the priesthood). Within the priesthood, there are six different ranks, and according to a principle of seniority, the Bani priest gradually climbs up the hierarchical ladder.¹⁹ The highest rank is *Ong Guru*, of which there is one at each mosque. During the period of my field study, the *Ong Guru* of one Bani village had long since passed away, but the Bani priest in line to take the position of *Ong Guru* had not been promoted: the village had had no *Ong Guru* for quite some time. Without an *Ong Guru*, the village was unable to organise several important ceremonies, including funerals, led by the priests of their own village. The reason for this situation was both simple and, to me, unexpected. The wife of the candidate for the position of *Ong Guru* was very sick, lying in hospital: Bani priests can be promoted only if their wives are healthy and have good moral conduct.

The priests' promotion ceremony is performed on the last day of the month of *Ramuwan*. On this occasion, the wife of the promoted priest wears a cloth similar to the one she wore at the *Karah* ceremony, by which one enters the Bani religion. She wears as much gold jewellery as possible, and sits in a guest house attached to the mosque to observe the ceremony. If she is sick or in her menstrual period, she cannot attend. But if she does not attend, the priest cannot be promoted. The Bani priest, as male, needs the assistance of the female.

The ceremonies conducted by the Bani priests require the presence of a woman called *Muk Poh*. In each Bani village there are one or two *Muk Poh*. Most of the Bani rituals involve an offering of rice to the

priests. When each household prepares the offering, an unmarried young girl is chosen from the household to do the preparations: then, during the rituals, it is the *Muk Poh* who offers the rice to the priests. Bani priests cannot conduct rituals without the *Muk Poh*'s assistance. During Friday prayers, the first lay people to pray are *Muk Poh* and a wife of *Ong Guru*. Their prayer acts as a signal to the other lay people to begin their prayers.

Within the Bani community, the gender attributes of *Awar* and *Ahier* — with *Awar* as male and *Ahier* as female — are consistent and possess their own internal logic. The reversal of the normal *Ahier* and *Awar* gender attributes within the Bani community can be explained by the contextuality of *Awar–Ahier* principles.

The Cham Balamon are excluded from the *Ahier* and *Awar* categories used within the Bani community. They are classified instead as *Akafir*. This term is equivalent to the Arabic term *Kafir*, denoting non-Muslims. The terms *Awar*, *Ahier* and *Akafir* are, however, used only for people belonging to the Cham ethnic group. Initially, as a Buddhist Japanese, I thought I would be categorised as *Akafir*: later on, I was told that I was neither *Ahier* nor *Akafir* but Japanese. While Muslims generally use the term *Kafir* without regard to a person's nationality or ethnic background, the Cham use these terms only within their own ethnic boundaries.

Let me attempt to summarise the discussion so far. Firstly, when these symbols are used in the context of Cham religion as a whole, *Ahier* (Cham Balamon) is male and *Awar* (Bani) is female. Secondly, within the specific religion of the Bani people, the gender attributes of *Ahier* and *Awar* are reversed, *Ahier* (lay people) is the female principle while *Awar* (priests) is male (see Table 1). Thirdly, when the terms *Awar* and *Ahier* are used in conjunction with the term *Akafir* as a set of three, the terms *Awar* and *Ahier* lose their male and female symbolism. Instead, they indicate the degree to which one embraces Bani religion

Table 1. *Ahier* and *Awar*

<i>Cham Religion</i>	
Cham Balamon (Balamon)	Bani
<i>Ahier</i>	<i>Awar</i>
Male	Female
Right	Left

Table 2. *Awar, Ahier and Akafir*

<i>Cham Balamon Religion</i>	<i>Bani Religion</i>	
	Bani lay people	Bani priests
<i>Akafir</i>	<i>Ahier</i>	<i>Awar</i>
	Female	Male
	Left	Right

(see Table 2). To the Bani, the relationship of *Awar*, *Ahier* and *Akafir* indicates relative distance from *Po Alwah*. The Bani priests (*Awar*) enjoy the greatest proximity to *Po Alwah*, the Bani lay people (*Ahier*) are the next closest, and the Cham Balamon (*Akafir*) exist at the greatest distance. Thus the distinction between *Ahier* and *Awar* reflects the different levels of multiple religious relationships. But in any case, when the two terms are used as a pair, they maintain the attributes of the male and female realms.

***Ahier* and *Awar* – The Great Tradition and the Little Tradition**

Within Bani religion, besides their symbolism of the male and female principles, and their representation of the degree of adherence to Bani religion, the terms *Ahier* and *Awar* are sometimes used to refer to types of ceremony. Ceremonies conducted by Bani priests are called *Awar*. However, some ceremonies cannot be performed by priests. These are called *Ahier* and are conducted by *Guru Urang*, Bani lay persons. The religious authority of Bani priests is limited to ceremonies relating to *Po Alwah* and *Po Nubi*. Ceremonies relating to the ancestral spirit called *muk kay*, and other spirits, are all in the hands of the *Guru Urang*. Thus *Ahier* and *Awar* sometimes indicate a distinction between the great tradition (religion) and the little tradition (spirit rituals).

Within Balamon religion, by contrast, *Awar* and *Ahier* are not used to indicate any distinction between religion and spirit rituals. But despite the lack of terminology, a distinction between these two different types of religious practice is expressed by practitioners and through the materials used in ceremonies. For instance, in Cham ceremonies a grass mat called *chieu pang* is used by the priests and other religious practitioners. Usually the *chieu pang* is kept rolled up. When the Cham Balamon and Bani priests

make their prayers, they sit on the inside face of the rolled *chieu pang*. This position of the *chieu pang* is called *padang*. When other religious practitioners, including the *Guru Urang*, conduct *Ahier* ceremonies they use the outside face of the rolled *chieu pang*. No religious cooperation ever takes place between the *Guru Urang* and the priests, either Cham Balamon or Bani.

Cham Traditional Religion

As will be clear from the above, the terms *Ahier* and *Awar* are fluid: they change according to the group and its characteristics; their meaning depends on the context in which they are used. This fluidity differentiates them from very fixed terms like Cham Balamon and Bani, and illustrates the interdependency of the two religions of the Cham people living in the south central region. At a glance, Cham Balamon and Bani seem like two completely different religions, of Hindu and Islamic origin, but they are in fact two different outcomes of acculturation grown in the same ground. Cham Balamon religious attributes make sense only when in opposition to Bani religious attributes, and vice-versa. For the Cham people of south central Vietnam, this binary principle is the dynamic that constructs their world.

Young Cham Balamon and Bani students have opportunities to meet at high schools or universities, but the old people, and especially women, have few chances to communicate with each other. Clear boundaries and differing cultural forms might seem to mark these two groups as two different ethnic groups. However, when I questioned them about their ethnic identity, none of the Bani people answered that they belonged to the Bani ethnic group: they simply said they were Cham. Neither group seems keen to articulate their differences for outsiders. The group division only matters within the ethnic group.

Relations between the two groups also take literary forms. Within the tradition of Cham lyric poetry, there are three significant poems: one of them is called Cham-Bani, and it is a story of unfulfilled love between a young Cham Balamon woman and a young Bani man. According to Inrasara, it was written around the end of the nineteenth century, and became the most popular lyric poem among the Cham of Ninh Thuận and Binh Thuận provinces. It relates the story of how a Cham Balamon and Bani fell in love, against the taboo of inter-religious relationship. Facing strong disapproval from her parents, the Cham Balamon woman

escaped from their house in the village and secretly went to live with the Bani man. Later, however, she was caught by the Cham Balamon, brought back to her village and punished with death. During her funeral, her Bani lover jumped into the cremation fire: they were reunited in the other world.²⁰

Several folk songs among Cham in Ninh Thuận province broach the relationship between the Cham Balamon and the Bani. One of my Cham teachers taught me the following song, which he often used when teaching Cham scripts to the Cham school teachers:

Cham Balamon and Bani are not separated far
 Actually, since long ago, we share the same blood
 Which gods created us?
 You are just a grain of rice and I am just a rice-husk.

The song suggests that the two share the same origin, that they are different parts of the same thing. Another song describes the pumpkin and the gourd, their vines ever tangled on the same trellis. The pumpkin and the gourd, of course, symbolise the Cham Balamon and Bani.

According to an ancient Cham text kept by a shaman, the Cham gods appear in different guises. They transform themselves from one form to another, crossing the boundaries between the two religions. For instance, one of the earliest and most supreme gods of the Balamon religion, called *Po Ku*, transformed himself into the goddess *Po Inu Nugar* (Pô Nagar). *Po Inu Nugar* means the universe: she is the mother goddess of Champa: she created human beings and the kingdom of Champa. She also taught the Cham people agriculture, sericulture and weaving. *Po Inu Nugar* transformed herself into *Po Alwah*, the supreme god of the Bani religion. In another example, a Balamon god called *Po Alwah Hu* transformed himself into the Bani *Po Nubi Mohamat*. But *Po Alwah Hu* is the name given to the god when he is in the sky while *Po Nubi Mohamat* is the name given to him when he is on earth. In this way, the Cham Balamon and the Bani deities are the same (see Table 3).

Table 3. Transformation of Cham Balamon Deities

<i>Cham Balamon</i>	<i>Bani</i>
<i>Po Ku</i> → <i>Po Inu Nugar</i> (female) →	<i>Po Alwah</i> (female)
<i>Po Alwah Hu</i> (male) →	<i>Po Nubi Mohamat</i> (male)

Despite their differences, the Cham Balamon and Bani share the same system of beliefs — “the Cham religion” — and believe in the same gods. It might appear that they believe in separate gods. But in actual fact, their gods are the same gods known by different names and worshipped in different ways by two different groups of Cham people. The Cham Balamon and Bani may not know each others’ customs and traditions well. They do know that they belong to the same ethnic group.

No distinction is made between them in the way they are depicted in Vietnam today: in this context too, they are the same ethnic group. They are, however, more often represented — in the choices made by people involved in assembling museum collections, books on minorities and other media — by the Cham Balamon. Bani people see no problem in being identified as Cham Balamon in the public sphere. Their religious differences do not create differences of ethnic identity. Sharing a belief system, a sense of belonging to the old kingdom of Champa and a common ancestry, both Bani and Cham Balamon assert a common ethnicity to outsiders.

Within the ethnic group, however, a clear boundary surfaces, which temporarily disappears when they relate to outsiders. Members of the Cham ethnic group know the difference between Cham Balamon and Bani. Knowledge of this dual organisation is a recognised token of membership in their society. This goes some way towards explaining why the Cham in south central Vietnam often omit the Mekong Delta Cham when they talk about the Cham in Vietnam. The Mekong Delta Cham do not share this specific knowledge, so the south central region Cham do not recognise them.

Ethnicity among the Sunni Muslim Cham of Ninh Thuận province

Sunni Islam — known as *Jawa* by the Bani — was first introduced into Ninh Thuận province in the 1960s. The Sunni Islam converts in Ninh Thuận province claim that they belong to the realm of *Awar*. Neither Bani nor Cham Balamon agree. The Sunni Islam converts are thus excluded from the *Ahier* and *Awar* dichotomy which — as we have seen — is a defining concept for the ethnicity of the Cham in south central Vietnam. The Sunni Islam converts have, as a result, become rather marginalised among the Cham communities of Ninh Thuận.

At present, there are four Sunni Islam mosques in the Bani villages of Ninh Thuận province. During my field research, 70 Sunni Muslim families lived in Phúc Nhơn village, amounting to about 10 per cent of the population of this Bani community. In this village, I was told that Sunni Islam had been introduced by a college student from the village. This student was studying in Cần Thơ city, in the Mekong Delta, when he heard about the Cham living in a neighbouring province, An Giang. Out of curiosity, the student visited the Cham in An Giang and found that the Islam they were practicing was different from the Bani Islam he knew. He returned to Phúc Nhơn village and told Bani priests about the Islam practiced by the Mekong Delta Cham. None of the Bani Priests knew about the Sunni Islam, but — predictably perhaps — they did not approve of the way the Mekong Delta Cham practised Islam.

Coincidentally, around this time a group of Cham people from An Giang, including Mufty Omal Aly and an Indian Muslim named Ismael Maulawi, visited Phúc Nhơn to proselytise Islam. The student asked them the same questions he had put to the Bani priests: clear answers were given. Some of the Bani were impressed by their profound and extensive knowledge of Islam. In 1962, 15 Sunni Islam converts asked the Bani priests to open the mosque on a daily basis, so they could pray every day. The request was rejected, so they decided to build their own mosque. The mosque was completed in 1963 with financial support from the local government, the Muslim community in Vietnam, Ismael Maulawi, and the *Hiệp hội Chăm Hội giáo Việt Nam*, an Association of Muslim Cham people established in Saigon as a part of South Vietnam government's ethnic minority policy.

As Islam gained ground among the Bani, the antagonism between the converted Bani and the remaining Bani increased. Some sympathised with the Muslim converts. Most of these were relatives of Sunni Islam converts, and they argued that religion should be chosen through individual will. These sympathisers were called *walai*: the villagers — including the priests — divided between the *walai* and anti-*walai*. Antagonism within Phúc Nhơn village reached its peak in 1969 to 1971. There were a few violent incidents. Sunni Islam converts had to put up with various kinds of bullying from the Bani. One elderly Sunni Muslim person recounted that, during that time of enmity, Sunni Islam converts could rely only on Allah and the local government.

The relationship between the Bani and the Sunni Islam converts softened after Vietnam's reunification, when any kind of religious prose-

lytising was prohibited. Although Sunni Islam proselytisation among the Bani people of Ninh Thuận has reemerged since the onset of the *Dổi Mới* reforms (1986), and the number of converts is slowly increasing, the violent incidents of the past have not been repeated.

The Bani tend to see Sunni Islam converts as people who have abandoned their original religion and the Cham tradition: they are deemed to be committing a sin by neglecting *muk kay*, the ancestral spirits. According to them, denying *muk kay* means denying oneself, as without the ancestors one would not exist. They also criticise the converts for abandoning Bani religion to gain development and humanitarian aid from foreigners. The Sunni Muslims in Ninh Thuận are connected to Muslim communities around the world and have received donations from foreign Muslim visitors, and financial aid from foreign Muslim organisations. Because of such foreign connections, they teach English in addition to regular Qur'anic study. I was often surprised to meet Cham students in their mosques who spoke to me in English. The converts' foreign connections and access to foreign aid provoke envy among the Bani people.

The converts often become upset when they hear about such criticism from Bani people, and argue that they converted to the Sunni Islam in order to "follow the right path", and not for monetary gain. One of the members of this group told me that conversion to Sunni Islam and belief in Sunni Islam is a "Revolution among the Cham". They believe that the Bani religion is a degraded form of Islam and that its practice is not right. It is steeped in superstition; it is unscientific and backward; Sunni Islam is scientific and more advanced. The converts often consider themselves more educated, more scientific, and more developed than Bani people, because they understand the theology of their faith and practice Islam "correctly".

Furthermore, although the Cham in An Giang province have adhered to Sunni Islam for much longer than the Cham in Ninh Thuận province, the newly-converted in Ninh Thuận claim that they are religiously superior. They admit that the Mekong Delta Cham can read the Qur'an more skilfully, that they are more familiar with the religious practice of Islam. But they also argue that the Muslim Cham of the Mekong Delta are narrow-minded and obsessed with religious practice, caring little about education: few of their families send their children to school. According to these converts, the Mekong Delta Cham only know how to read the Qur'an, but they do so without understanding the meaning of it, and suffer from various superstitions caused by their lack of scientific knowledge.

Responding to the Bani people's criticism that they have renounced their Cham heritage, they argue that they have no intention of abandoning Cham tradition and culture: by maintaining *akhar thrah* literacy and by participating in traditional ceremonies — such as visiting their ancestors' graves before the holy month of *Ramadan* — they preserve their cultural and historical traditions, unlike the Muslim Cham in the Mekong Delta. They especially emphasise their efforts to preserve knowledge of the Cham script. They showed me signs in their mosques written in both the Arabic and Cham scripts. Someone from a mosque came to my Cham language teacher's office to discuss how to eradicate Cham script illiteracy amongst the Sunni Muslim. They are critical of the Mekong Delta Cham, who cannot read *akhar thrah* and know nothing of the history of Champa. Thus the sense of superiority among Sunni Islam converts in Ninh Thuận towards the Mekong Delta Cham takes more than just a religious form. They also feel also superior for respecting the original Cham forms of tradition and culture.

Unlike the Cham in the Mekong Delta, whose ethnicity is constructed around the Islamic religion, the Muslim Cham in south central Vietnam cannot use Islam alone to construct their ethnic identity. They need to include elements of tradition connecting them to the ancient kingdom of Champa: *akhar thrah* and the Cham language hold a significant place in their construction of ethnicity.

Conclusion

An ethnic classification often gives a homogenous and monolithic image to “a group”, while in reality people's ethnic identity is complex and quite dynamic. Being Cham in Vietnam has various meanings: from being descendants of the kingdom of Champa, to being Muslim; from being honest to being backward: all depends on with whom one is interacting with and in what kind of social context. The ethnic boundaries which determine the ethnic content always need to be articulated and readjusted according to the various relationships to other groups, and the social context. Ethnicity is fluid and malleable. It is an “ambiguous aspect of social life”.²¹

The ethnicity of the Cham in south central Vietnam has been constructed around a connection to the past, the kingdom of Champa. Beyond their communities, they assert their ethnicity by claiming this heritage, by making links with the ancient kingdom which once established a

civilisation quite different from Vietnamese civilisation and at least as prosperous as Vietnamese civilisation. They assert their respect for and preservation of cultural traditions expressed through continued ritual practices, maintenance of cultural knowledge including the writing system, constant searching for the origins of the Cham culture, and a reluctance to marry non-Cham outsiders. Meanwhile, internally, their ethnicity is demonstrated by an intricate and fluid dualism, the concept of *Ahier* and *Awar*, the male and female realm.²² The fluidity of these terms illustrates the inter-dependency of the two religious groups, Cham Balamon and Bani, and their construction of an ethnic identity as Cham.

Various local Cham scholars have identified *Ahier* and *Awar* as the *liṅga* and *yoni*, the sacred symbols of Hinduism, the religion of Champa. Paul Mus argued that Hinduism was probably accepted by the population of Champa without resistance, as a result of a certain cultural predisposition. He explained this as follows. The area from the Bay of Bengal of India through Indochina, Southern China, Indonesia and other Pacific islands used to belong to a single cultural area called Monsoon Culture. In Monsoon Culture, people believed in animism. Among the spirits, the spirit of the earth was one of the most important. To worship the earth spirit — an abstract being — people erected stones at sacred places. The erected stones were sometimes personified by heads of communities who played a significant role as links between the earth spirit and the community. In such a religious environment, the people of Monsoon Culture did not perceive the newly introduced Hindu religion as a totally foreign practice, but rather as something familiar. Mus argued that this local religious background led to the localization or indigenization of Hinduism, or in other words Cham Balamon religion.²³

Thus, according to Trần Kỳ Phương, a specialist in the history of Champa art, the dual principle of the Cham people can be observed in the structure of the sanctuary at Mỹ Sơn.²⁴ He further argued that the location of the two sanctuaries — Mỹ Sơn in Quảng Nam province and Pô Nagar in Nha Trang, Khánh Hoà province — reflects certain characteristics of the cosmological dualism. Thus, Mỹ Sơn, the sanctuary for the god Śiva symbolises the father/male realm, while Po Nagar, the sanctuary for the goddess of Po Inu Nugar symbolises the mother/female realm.²⁵ My anthropological research shows that this dual structure also lies at the heart of the dynamic which constructs the world of the Cham people in Central Vietnam.

Notes

- ¹ According to the most recent National Census, the Cham population in Vietnam was 132,873 in 1999. In terms of population, the Cham were ranked 13th of the 54 ethnic groups of Vietnam. According to the same source, the Cham population in Ninh Thuận and Bình Thuận was 86,493, and 20,687 in Phú Yên and Bình Định.
- ² According to Khổng Diễm, the Cham Hroi were classified as a separate ethnic group by the state ethnic classification of 1974, then merged into the Cham ethnic group at the time of the general census in 1979. Khổng Diễm, *Population and Ethno-Demography in Vietnam*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2002, pp. 14–5, 24–5.
- ³ According to the 1999 Census, the Cham population in An Giang and Tây Ninh provinces was 12,435.
- ⁴ Since the Cham have adopted Vietnamese names, their children take their father's family name, but they belong to their mother's lineage not their father's.
- ⁵ The female Cham were discouraged from the study of *akhar thrah* in the past. One reason for this, I was told, was that parents tended to fear that knowledge of *akhar thrah* would allow their daughters to communicate secretly with their lovers.
- ⁶ Doris Blood, "Aspects of Cham Culture", in *Notes from Indochina on Ethnic Minority Cultures*, ed. Marilyn Gregerson, and Dorothy Thomas, Dallas, Texas: Summer Institute of Linguistics Museum of Anthropology, No. 6, 1980, p. 6.
- ⁷ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1978, pp. 94, 204–7.
- ⁸ Marcel Ner, "Les Musulmans de l'Indochine française", *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* XLI, fasc. 2 (1942): 151–202.
- ⁹ However, those who die before the age of fifteen are not cremated. Two small Cham Balamon villages, called Palay Rio and Palay Bingu, located next to each other to the east of one of the largest Bani villages in Ninh Thuận province, are also a special case. There are three temples (*bimong*) in Ninh Thuận Province, where the Cham people worship deified kings; all Cham Balamon villages belong to one of these three temples. The people of Palay Rio and Palay Bingu, however, do not belong to any of them. The Cham Balamon from these two villages are not cremated when they die. The local scholars explain this saying that the people of Palay Rio and Palay Bingu cannot be cremated since they are the descendants of landless slaves. Today the people of these two villages have land. However because of a lack of good access to water resources, the villagers do not engage in wet-rice cultivation as do the Cham in other villages. According to a legend in

Palay Rio and Palay Bingu, their ancestors used to live around the northern part of Huế: later, for some reason, they sailed down south and settled in Pāṇḍuraṅga.

¹⁰ Dohamide, a Cham scholar from the Mekong Delta, told me that Balamon is a Vietnamese word drawn from the term “Brahman”.

¹¹ The Cham Balamon population in Ninh Thuận province is about 32,000, while the Bani population is 22,000. Sakaya, *Lễ hội của người Chăm* [Cham people’s festivals], Hanoi: Nxb Văn hoá Dân tộc, 2002, p. 39.

¹² One village called Phú Nhuận (or Palay Boh Dang in the Cham language) is an exception: here, the Cham Balamon and Bani live together. However their residence is not intermingled: the village is divided between the Cham Balamon and Bani residential areas by a narrow street cutting through the village.

¹³ There are several kinds of Cham Balamon funerals: *Dam Ram* — the funeral without the body of the deceased; *Dam Mutai Tha Urang Pa Seh* — the funeral without a cremation for people who died before reaching the age 15; *Dam Mutai Dua Urang Pa Seh* — the funeral for people who died age over 15, the most commonly practised funeral; *Dam Mutai Pa Urang Pa Seh* — the funeral almost identical to *Dam Mutai Dua Urang Pa She*, but conducted by four priests instead two, with several different ceremonial objects. The families belonging to particular lineages have to organise this extravagant funeral.

¹⁴ Blood, “Aspects of Cham Culture”, pp. 43, 48.

¹⁵ Janet Hoskins, “Complementarity in this World and the Next: Gender and Agency in Kodi Mortuary Ceremonies”, in *Dealing with Inequality*, ed. M. Strathern, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 197.

¹⁶ Po Dharma, “Deux princes malais au Champa: leur rôle dans la vie socio-politique et religieuse de ce pays”, in *Le monde indochinois et la péninsule malaise*, Contribution de la Délégation française au Deuxième Congrès International sur la Civilisation Malaise, Kuala Lumpur, 1990, pp. 19–28.

¹⁷ In this symbolic context, the deceased’s actual sex seems to be disregarded.

¹⁸ The dates of *Ramuwan* are exactly those of the dates of Ramadan.

¹⁹ The ranks, in ascending order, are *Po Char*, *Ong Mu Tinh*, *Ong Katip*, *Ong Imum tum*, *Ong Imam Krah* and *Ong Guru*.

²⁰ In the lyrical poem, *Ariya Cham-Bani*, the Cham Balamon is represented by a woman and the Bani by a man. The Bani man throwing himself onto the funeral pyre can be understood as a male form of suttee. This poem reverses male and female roles in the way I discuss in this chapter. And the poem also closely reflects a social reality. During my period of field study, I learned of several inter-religious marriages amongst the Cham. Most were between Cham Balamon women and Bani men. I encountered only one case of a Bani woman married to a Vietnamese man, but never came across a

single marriage involving a Bani woman and a Cham Balamon man. Reality closely matches the relationship depicted in the poem. Inrasara, *Văn học Chăm* [Cham literature], Ho Chi Minh City: Nxb Văn hoá Dân tộc Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh, 1993, pp. 175–81.

- ²¹ Thomas H. Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*, London and Boulder, Colorado: Pluto Press, 1993, p. 31.
- ²² Note, however, that the term *Awar*, as used by the Sunni Muslims in Ninh Thuận province, requires further investigation, as it is not only used within the Cham ethnic groups. I believe that this difference reflects a construction of ethnicity different from that of the Bani and Cham Balamon. Thus among the Bani, the word *Akafir* is used only within their ethnic group: it was not applied to me. However, Sunni Muslims at the mosque classified me as *Kafir*. This suggests that *Awar* is equivalent to Muslim and can be applied universally.
- ²³ Paul Mus, *India Seen from the East: Indian and Indigenous Cults in Champa*, Monash Paper on Southeast Asia No. 3, Melbourne, Monash University, 1975 [originally published as “Cultes indiens et indigènes au Champa”, *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* XXXIII (1933): 367–410].
- ²⁴ Personal conversation with Trần Kỳ Phương during a visit to Mỹ Sơn in 2005.
- ²⁵ Trần Kỳ Phương and Rie Nakamura, “Mỹ Sơn and Pô Nagar Nha Trang Sanctuaries: in regard to the cosmological dualist cult of Champa kingdom (Central Vietnam)”, in *Old Myths and New Approaches — Interpreting Ancient Religious Sites in Southeast Asia*, ed. Alexandre Haende, Monash Asia Institute, Monash University (forthcoming).