

Urbanization and its Impact on the Cultural Values in the Life Cycle Rituals of the K'Ho Ethnic Group in Lam Dong Province, Vietnam

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Abstract

Urbanization significantly affects the cultural values embedded in the life cycle rituals of ethnic communities. This paper explores the transformation of cultural values within the life cycle rituals of the K'Ho ethnic group in Lam Dong Province, Vietnam, focusing on weddings and funerals. Utilizing urbanization as a phenomenon, it examines how these rituals evolve in response to the pressures and opportunities of urban life, highlighting the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity in a rapidly urbanizing context.

The research employs a sociological framework, combining primary data collection through detailed surveys and in-depth interviews with 26 individuals, and secondary document analysis. The survey included 477 household questionnaires, focusing on K'Ho households in Ta Nung commune and Lac Duong town. Document analysis involved examining books, scientific reports, statistical data, and other relevant sources to provide comprehensive insights into the effects of urbanization on K'Ho life cycle rituals.

The study concludes that urbanization significantly impacts the cultural values and practices of the K'Ho ethnic group, leading to the professionalization and simplification of traditional rituals. Traditional practices are increasingly infused with modern elements, reflecting broader socio-economic transformations and the integration of new cultural norms. These findings underscore the importance of detailed, context-specific analyses to understand the unique cultural heritage and socio-economic conditions of ethnic communities in the face of urbanization.

Keywords: Urbanization, Life cycle rituals, K'Ho ethnic group, Lam Dong province, Vietnam.

Introduction

This paper explores the traditional life cycle rituals, focusing on weddings and funerals, which are pivotal events in an individual's life. These rituals encompass a range of practices from birth to first hair-cutting and sometimes even first nail-cutting ceremonies. Weddings, in particular, signify a critical transition in personal and social relationships. As Vo (2016) emphasizes, marriage is not only an essential phase in a couple's life but also intertwines economic and emotional aspects, playing a vital role in social reproduction and the preservation of lineage. Conversely, funerals mark the end of life, symbolizing a return to the ancestors, God, and the natural world and signify the closure of one's ability to contribute to their lineage.

The cycle of "Birth - Old Age - Illness - Death" is an immutable law of human existence; a universal experience that every individual must inevitably confront. Ethnological and anthropological studies have traditionally provided insights into the fundamental characteristics of wedding and funeral customs from their unique perspectives. However, this study adopts a sociological lens to examine these rituals within the context of urbanization. It analyzes the changes in the cultural values and life cycle rituals of the K'Ho ethnic group in Lam Dong Province, Vietnam, in the context of urbanization. This approach offers a fresh perspective on how these rituals have evolved and adapted in the face of rapid urbanization, reflecting the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity in the contemporary Vietnamese society.

In this context, this study aims to investigate the impact of urbanization on the cultural values of life cycle rituals among the K'Ho ethnic group. Its objectives are:

- To analyze the transformation of traditional wedding and funeral customs under the influence of urbanization.
- To examine the expansion of urban culture and lifestyle within the K'Ho community.
- To assess the population expansion and transition from village to city culture and its effects on life cycle rituals.
- To explore the relationship between urbanization and changes in cultural values within life-cycle rituals like weddings and funerals.

Urbanization: The Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is rooted in urbanization theory, which provides a lens through which the transformation of cultural values within life cycle rituals can be scrutinized. Urbanization theory posits that as societies transition from rural to urban, significant shifts occur in social structures, cultural practices, and individual behaviors (Castells, 1977). These changes are often characterized by increased professionalization, simplification of traditional customs and the adoption of practices influenced by the market economy and contemporary socio-economic dynamics.

Urbanization and Cultural Change

Urbanization is a multifaceted process that encompasses demographic shifts, economic transformations and alterations in social and cultural life. It is marked by the movement of people from rural areas to urban centers, resulting in the growth of cities and changes in the way they live and interact (Gugler, 1996). This process affects cultural values and practices, including life cycle rituals, by introducing new norms and expectations that often differ significantly from traditional customs.

The K'Ho ethnic group, like many other indigenous communities, experiences urbanization as a force that both challenges and reshapes its cultural identity. Urbanization theory suggests that traditional rituals, such as weddings and funerals are not static; they evolve in response to the pressures and opportunities presented by urban life. For instance, the professionalization of these rituals often means that tasks traditionally performed by family members are outsourced to service providers, reflecting a shift towards more efficient and less labor-intensive practices (Harvey, 1989).

Dynamics of Tradition and Modernity

The interplay between tradition and modernity is a central theme in understanding the impact of urbanization on cultural practices. Tradition represents the inherited customs and beliefs passed down through generations, while modernity embodies the contemporary values and practices influenced by current socio-economic conditions. Urbanization theory provides a framework for analyzing how these two forces interact and shape cultural evolution (Lefebvre, 2003).

In the context of the K'Ho ethnic group, urbanization introduces new cultural elements that coexist with, and sometimes replace, traditional practices. This coexistence can be seen in the simplification of wedding and funeral rituals, where traditional elements are retained but are increasingly infused with modern practices. For example, traditional wedding ceremonies, which once spanned several days and involved elaborate rituals, may now be condensed into shorter, more standardized events that align with urban lifestyles (Smith, 2001).

Socio-Economic Transformations and Cultural Practices

The socio-economic transformations brought about by urbanization also play a critical role in shaping cultural practices. As communities become more integrated into the market economy, the cultural values embedded in life cycle rituals adapt to reflect the new economic realities. This adaptation often leads to a commodification of cultural practices, where rituals become services that can be bought and sold (Zukin, 1995).

For the K'Ho people, the transition from a village to a city culture entails a shift from community-based, resource-sharing practices to individualistic, market-oriented behaviors. This shift influences the way life cycle rituals are conducted, as economic considerations become more prominent in decision-making processes. The professionalization of wedding and funeral services is a manifestation of this trend, highlighting the economic underpinnings of cultural change (Bourdieu, 1984).

The theoretical framework of this study, grounded in urbanization theory, provides a comprehensive understanding of the transformation of cultural values within the life cycle rituals of the K'Ho ethnic group. By examining the interplay between tradition and modernity, as well as the socio-economic dynamics driving these changes, this framework elucidates the complex processes through which urbanization reshapes cultural practices. The insights gained from this analysis contribute to a broader understanding of how ethnic communities navigate the challenges and opportunities of urbanization, balancing the preservation of cultural identity with the demands of contemporary life.

Literature Review

Urbanization has a profound impact on the cultural values and practices of ethnic communities. Castells (1977) posits that urbanization induces significant shifts in social structures, cultural practices, and individual behaviors. This theory is essential for analyzing the transformations within the K'Ho ethnic group's life cycle rituals in Lam Dong Province, Vietnam. According to Gugler (1996), urbanization involves demographic shifts and economic transformations that influence cultural values and practices. These shifts are evident in the simplification and professionalization of traditional K'Ho weddings and funerals, reflecting broader socio-economic dynamics.

Harvey (1989) highlights that urbanization leads to the professionalization of rituals, indicating a shift towards more efficient, less labor-intensive practices. This professionalization aligns with the findings of this study, which observes a transition from elaborate, community-driven ceremonies to more streamlined, market-influenced events. This transformation is indicative of the broader trend where traditional customs are increasingly influenced by urban lifestyles and economic considerations.

Tradition and Modernity

The interplay between tradition and modernity is a central theme in understanding cultural transformations due to urbanization. Lefebvre (2003) argues that urbanization leads to a dynamic coexistence of traditional and modern practices. This coexistence is evident in the K'Ho community, where

traditional wedding and funeral rituals retain elements of cultural heritage while incorporating modern practices. Smith (2001) supports this view, noting that urbanization often results in the simplification of traditional ceremonies to accommodate contemporary urban lifestyles.

Nguyen et al. (2022) emphasize the profound influence of globalization and international integration on cultural practices. They argue that these forces introduce new cultural elements that coexist with, and sometimes replace, traditional practices. This observation is pertinent to the K'Ho community, where traditional rituals are increasingly infused with modern elements, reflecting the broader socio-economic transformations associated with urbanization.

Socio-Economic Transformations

The socio-economic transformations brought about by urbanization play a critical role in shaping cultural practices. Bourdieu (1984) highlights that as communities become more integrated into the market economy, cultural practices adapt to reflect new economic realities. This adaptation often leads to the commodification of cultural practices, where rituals become services that can be bought and sold. This phenomenon is observed in the K'Ho community, where the professionalization of wedding and funeral services underscores the economic underpinnings of cultural change.

Pham et al. (2023) contribute to this discourse by examining the intersections between cultural practices and economic shifts. They argue that economic transformations necessitate adaptations in cultural practices to align with contemporary socio-economic conditions. This perspective is echoed in the current study, which identifies the professionalization and simplification of K'Ho life cycle rituals as responses to the pressures and opportunities presented by urban life.

Cultural Preservation and Change

Nguyen and Nguyen (2024) explore the impact of cultural interference and acculturation on the traditional culture of the K'Ho ethnic group. They find that urbanization leads to a diminishing presence of traditional festivals and rituals, reflecting broader socio-economic shifts. This finding is consistent with this study, which observes a decline in traditional K'Ho rituals such as the New Rice celebration and gong festivals. The decline is attributed to transformations in the agricultural economy and increased awareness within the K'Ho community, highlighting the complex interplay between cultural preservation and change.

Phung et al. (2024) extend this analysis by investigating the impacts of rural urbanization on the peasantry in Vietnam. They argue that rural urbanization leads to significant transformations within the peasant class, including shifts in economic life, cultural practices, and ideologies. This analysis is relevant to the K'Ho community, where urbanization has introduced challenges such as land dispossession and a growing rural-urban divide. These challenges necessitate nuanced policy interventions to support the evolving role of the peasantry and ensure equitable distribution of development benefits.

Educational and Ideological Shifts

Quyet et al. (2023) discuss the changing role of education and training in the context of Vietnam's industrialization and modernization. They argue that the Vietnamese government's focus on education policy improvement is essential for national development. This perspective is pertinent to the K'Ho community, where educational and ideological shifts are influenced by urbanization. The professionalization of life cycle rituals can be seen as part of a broader trend towards modernization and adaptation to contemporary socio-economic conditions.

Thuy and Quyet (2021) emphasize the impact of international economic integration on students' perceptions and revolutionary ideals. They argue that education plays a critical role in promoting positive cultural values and mitigating the negative effects of globalization. This view aligns with the current study's findings, which highlight the need for educational initiatives to preserve cultural heritage while adapting to modern influences. The professionalization and simplification of K'Ho rituals can be seen as part of this broader trend of balancing cultural preservation with contemporary socio-economic realities.

Local Context and Specific Studies

Specific studies on urbanization in Lam Dong province provide crucial insights into the regional impacts of urbanization. The Hanoi National University of Social Sciences and Humanities (2014) conference proceedings titled “Urbanization and Management in Sustainable Development in the Central Highlands” has introduced various approaches and research on urbanization and its effects on economic, cultural and social developments in the Lam Dong province. This conference sketched out a comprehensive landscape of urbanization and urbanization management in sustainable development in the Central Highlands.

Nguyen (2012a) examines the interplay of economic, social, and cultural factors in the Central Highlands during the reform period, particularly following the implementation of the Resolution No. 22 of the Politburo. This research is crucial in understanding the changes in the Central Highlands, including Lam Dong, and provides a foundation for analyzing the impacts of urbanization on the K’Ho community. In this context, Nguyen (2012c; 2012b; 2014) can be considered the first sociological research on the change in cultural values of the K’Ho people in Lam Dong province. Her work specifically reflects on the economic, cultural, and social development situation of the Central Highlands and Lam Dong, explicitly analyzing several issues in the marriage of the K’Ho people in depth.

Broader Studies on Urbanization and Culture

Research on cultural value changes during the urbanization process in the Central Highlands raises many issues of concern. Trinh (2016) and Baulch et al. (2007) discuss the integration of traditional customs with new elements such as cultural innovation and modern values. They highlight that ethnic communities in the Central Highlands retain traditional customs while incorporating new activities such as sports and tourism (Huong & Dérioz, 2020; Thái, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2023). Pham (2013) underscores the role of culture in stability and sustainability, noting that culture is constantly changing and integrating.

Nguyen (2008) emphasizes that both material and spiritual culture are human products, and culture expresses human nature. In the context of industrialization and globalization, preserving traditional cultural values becomes essential. Mai and Mai (2003) reflect concerns that globalization can erode cultural traditions and create a global culture, seen through the emergence of similar behavioral patterns and homogeneous consumer products worldwide.

On the contrary, Ton and Nguyen (2014) shed light on the theoretical and practical issues of the urbanization process across Vietnam. They reflect in detail the theoretical and practical issues of urbanization in various localities, providing valuable insights into the broader impacts of urbanization.

Despite the extensive research on urbanization and cultural change, gaps remain in understanding the specific impacts on the K’Ho ethnic group. This study addresses these gaps by focusing on the unique cultural and socio-economic context of the K’Ho community in Lam Dong Province. While previous research has explored the general impacts of urbanization on cultural practices, there is a need for more detailed, context-specific analyses that consider the unique cultural heritage and socio-economic conditions of ethnic communities. Nguyen and Nguyen (2024) highlight the importance of investigating the specific cultural practices of the K’Ho community, noting that broader studies often overlook the nuances of local contexts. The current study contributes to this gap by providing a detailed analysis of the transformations in K’Ho life cycle rituals, focusing on the interplay between tradition and modernity. This approach offers a more nuanced understanding of how urbanization impacts cultural practices in specific ethnic communities.

This literature review reveals that urbanization significantly affects cultural values and practices, including life cycle rituals. The professionalization and simplification of K’Ho weddings and funerals reflect broader socio-economic transformations associated with urbanization. However, gaps remain in understanding the specific impacts on the K’Ho ethnic group, highlighting the need for more detailed, context-specific analyses. This study addresses these gaps by providing a comprehensive analysis of the transformations in K’Ho life cycle rituals, offering valuable insights into the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity in the contemporary Vietnamese society.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a sociological framework and uses the following methodologies:

1. Primary: data collection and
2. Secondary: document analysis.

Data Collection.

This research gathered information using a survey focused on life-cycle rituals. This involved detailed questionnaires to collect data directly from the subjects.

Ethics

Ethical considerations were paramount in this research, including obtaining local authority permissions for conducting life-cycle ritual interviews. Participant convenience was prioritized ensuring that all the necessary authorizations were in place to foster trust. Interviews, averaging 45 -60 minutes, were held at the respondents' homes, with the option for family members to participate. The lead researcher clarified the process of written informed consent, emphasizing the right to withdraw at any time and ensuring data confidentiality on a secure, password-protected computer system.

Sampling Methodology

The sample was chosen based on the overall demographics of K'Ho households with individuals aged 18 or older in two Lam Dong province areas (Ta Nung commune and Lac Duong town). Non-probability random sampling technique was employed. The study, conducted from December 2016 to February 2017, involved in-depth interviews with 26 individuals and collecting quantitative data through 477 household surveys.

Research Demographics

The primary focus was on the Chil and Lach local groups of the K'Ho ethnic community. The survey distribution included 253 questionnaires in Lac Duong town and 224 in Ta Nung commune, with male respondents constituting 43% and females 57%. In terms of ethnic breakdown, Chil, Lach, and Sre people they comprised 56.8%, 38.4%, and 4.8%, respectively. For religious demographics, 41.3% were Catholics, and 58.7% were Protestants.

Study Areas

The research was conducted in Ta Nung commune (Dalat city) and Lac Duong town (Lac Duong district). Ta Nung, part of Dalat city, consists of 1,037 households (4,725 individuals), with ethnic minorities making up 50% of the populace, predominantly K'Ho (People's Committee of Ta Nung commune, 2014). Despite being part of Dalat city, Ta Nung commune remains relatively isolated, with limited trade opportunities due to its location. Lac Duong town, established in February 2004, spans 7,061 hectares, with significant forestry and agricultural land. It houses 2,268 households (9,755 individuals), 55% from the K'Ho ethnic group, mainly the Chil and Lach local groups (People's Committee of Lac Duong town, 2015). Known for its unique culture and tourist attractions, Lac Duong town has shown significant economic growth, with a notable increase in both income and living standards (Lam Dong Provincial Statistics Department, 2016)

Methodological Approach

Utilizing the collected field survey data, the results were quantitatively analyzed, supplemented by a secondary document review. This involved performing various tests, calculating statistical parameters, and assessing impact factors, thus ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the research subject.

Secondary Document Analysis.

This research also employed document analysis, which involved examining a variety of sources including books, newspapers, internet resources, magazines, scientific reports, statistical data, and economic-cultural reports on Lam Dong province's urbanization and ethnic minorities. The documents were chosen based on their relevance and credibility in providing comprehensive insights into the effects of urbanization on the life cycle rituals of the K'Ho people in Lam Dong province, Vietnam. The selection criteria included:

- Books and book chapters: Key academic texts and ethnographies detailing the cultural practices and urbanization impacts on ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands. Notable sources included works by Smith (2001), Lefebvre (2003), Castells (1977), Gugler (1996), Zukin (1995), Thái (2018), Trinh (2016), Vo (2016), and Mai and Mai (2003), etc.
- Journal articles and Theses: Articles and features from reputable Vietnamese and international publications reporting on recent developments in urbanization, cultural changes, and socio-economic conditions in Lam Dong by Dang and Nguyen (2023), Nguyen et al. (2023), Nguyen (2014), Baulch et al. (2007), and Nguyen(2012c; 2012b; 2014), etc.
- Internet Resources: Online databases and academic websites providing up-to-date information and reports on urbanization trends and their impact on indigenous communities in Vietnam.
- Scientific Reports: Research reports and conference proceedings such as those from the Vietnam Scientific and Technical Committee (1986), Hanoi National University of Social Sciences and Humanities (2014) and Oriental Development Research Institute (2016), World Bank (2022) which provide in-depth analyses of urbanization and management in sustainable development in the Central Highlands.
- Statistical Data: Official statistics from government sources, such as the General Statistics Office of Vietnam (2020), Lam Dong Provincial Statistics Department (2016), and official reports from People's Committee of Ta Nung commune (2014), People's Committee of Lac Duong town (2015) offering quantitative data on demographics, economic conditions, and cultural practices.

These sources were systematically analyzed to understand the comprehensive effects of urbanization on the traditional life cycle rituals of the K'Ho people, ensuring a robust and detailed understanding of the socio-cultural transformations occurring in Lam Dong province.

Findings

Cultural Value Changes in Wedding Rituals of The K'Ho People in Lam Dong Province, Vietnam

In this overview, marriage among the K'Ho ethnic group and its customs are examined. A wedding represents the formal union of a couple, symbolizing their love and desire to cohabit and have children (Nguyen et al., 2005). Historically, weddings have been an integral cultural aspect across communities, irrespective of ethnicity, religion, or nationality. Each community exhibits unique marriage practices reflecting its identity. For the K'Ho, marriages are based on mutual love and family consent. Interaction in daily life, community events, or cultural activities often leads to relationships and marriages. Vo (2016) notes that the Chil subgroup of K'Ho people's partner selection criteria are similar to other ethnic groups, valuing hard work, good morals and health. Virginity is not heavily emphasized. Additionally, the Chil practice '*tam kop*,' a pre-arranged family agreement for marriage when children are young. Breaking this arrangement incurs penalties. Such practices are remnants of the ancient marital systems, reflecting a dual-organizational society. Other traditional customs, like marrying cousins are now less prevalent due to societal changes and evolving perceptions in Lam Dong's K'Ho community.

Age of Marriage

The age of marriage is critical for a stable marital relationship, serving as a marker of maturity and decision-making capability. Over the last decade in Vietnam, significant research, including that of Nguyen

(2000) has focused on this aspect, especially in the Red River Delta region. These studies align with Goode's hypothesis, indicating a trend towards later marriages among the educated and urbanized people. Vo (2016) further highlights that traditional marriage ages among the K'Ho-Chil people have evolved, with a noted increase in the average age at marriage for both genders in recent years. In fact, Vo (2016) has shown that the age of marriage for Chil boys and girls was usually between 16 and 17 years old for girls and 18 to 20 years old for boys. Although the initiative in marriage usually belongs to girls (Le et al., 2020), if a girl cannot choose a husband at that age, she will have difficulty getting married and may even have to live alone. In choosing a life partner, the age gap between a boy and a girl is usually two to three years, which is the most popular among Chil people. This shows a pretty significant change: the current marriage age of K'Ho men and women tends to increase significantly, with a rate of 73.4%, the marriage age of men is now higher than ten years ago and 69.4% believe that the marriage age of women is higher than ten years ago (Table 1).

Table 1: Marriage age of K'Ho men and women today compared to ten years ago

Source: Author

| Measures | | Lac Duong town | | Ta Nung commune | | General | |
|---|------------|----------------|------|-----------------|------|-----------|------|
| | | frequency | % | frequency | % | frequency | % |
| Current marriage age compared to 10 years ago for men | Older than | 196 | 77.5 | 154 | 68.8 | 350 | 73.4 |
| | Remains | 43 | 17.0 | 42 | 18.8 | 85 | 17.8 |
| | Younger | 14 | 5.5 | 28 | 12.5 | 42 | 8.8 |
| Current marriage age compared to 10 years ago for women | Older than | 183 | 72.3 | 148 | 66.1 | 331 | 69.4 |
| | Remains | 51 | 20.2 | 47 | 21.0 | 98 | 20.5 |
| | Younger | 19 | 7.5 | 29 | 12.9 | 48 | 10.1 |

Most men typically marry between the ages of 18 and 20, which represents about 52.2%, while those between 21 and 25 make up 40.9%. For women, the prevalent age range for marriage is between 18 and 20 years, accounting for 78% of marriages (Table 2).

Table 2: Marriage age of the K'Ho people today

Source: Author

| Measures | | Lac Duong town | | Ta Nung commune | | General | |
|-----------------------------------|----------|----------------|------|-----------------|------|-----------|------|
| | | frequency | % | frequency | % | frequency | % |
| Popular age of marriage for men | Under 15 | 1 | 0.4 | 2 | 0.9 | 3 | 0.6 |
| | 15-17 | 8 | 3.2 | 12 | 5.4 | 20 | 4.2 |
| | 18-20 | 141 | 55.7 | 108 | 48.2 | 249 | 52.2 |
| | 21-25 | 97 | 38.3 | 98 | 43.8 | 195 | 40.9 |
| | Over 25 | 6 | 2.4 | 4 | 1.8 | 10 | 2.1 |
| Popular age of marriage for women | Under 15 | 1 | 0.4 | 1 | 0.4 | 2 | 0.4 |
| | 15-17 | 27 | 10.7 | 32 | 14.3 | 59 | 12.4 |
| | 18-20 | 198 | 78.3 | 174 | 77.7 | 372 | 78.0 |
| | 21-25 | 26 | 10.3 | 15 | 6.7 | 41 | 8.6 |
| | Over 25 | 1 | 0.4 | 2 | 0.9 | 3 | 0.6 |

The issue of "child marriage" or early marriage in ethnic minority communities, frequently reported in media and studies from 2000 onwards (Dutta, 2022), is now less prevalent. Current trends indicate a shift towards later marriages, "There are now few child marriages, now (K'Ho youth) want to have fun and socialize" (male, 34 years old, cultural officer of Lac Duong Center). In the K'Ho ethnic group of Lam Dong, the rate of men marrying under 17 years old is just 4.6%, and for women under 17, it is 12.8%. These figures suggest a growing awareness and consideration in forming marriages and families among the K'Ho people.

Matchmakers, Engagement Ceremonies and Husband-Capturing Customs

Men and women of marriageable age can freely get to know each other or through a matchmaker. According to ethnographic research by Vo (2016), among the Chil people, the above ritual must go through many steps, and the initiative and implementation of these steps belong to the bride's family.

First of all, there is a ring exchange ceremony - the ceremony of asking the groom's family about the young couple's marriage. The person who represents the bride's family to perform this ceremony is the matchmaker (*cau loh gwong*)—a reputable and well-spoken person. The matchmaker will bring a copper bracelet and many beads to the groom's house. If the groom's family approves, the matchmaker will put a bracelet on the groom's arm and give the beaded necklace to the groom's mother. When the groom's family approves, the bride's family will continue to bring the bride price and meet the groom's large family, including uncles, brothers and sisters, etc. The bride price includes gongs, jars, beads, and pigs (70-80kg), which are considered to be given specifically to the boy's mother to thank the person who gave birth to him and raised him and will be slaughtered to feast on the boy's relatives. On this occasion, the bride's family also requires the groom's family to kill a dog to treat the bride's family, as the Chil proverb says "A pig knows the mother-in-law, a dog knows the husband".

Ethnographic research reveals that in K'Ho culture, the bride's family, led by a matchmaker, presents gifts to the groom's household during engagements. Although similar to the Chu Ru, these offerings differ from the Chil's traditions. In Chil customs, significant items like a bowl and a beaded string are given to the groom's mother, each with a substantial value. Customarily, the groom's family returns a portion of these gifts to the couple, aiding them in starting their life together. The K'Ho, however, have distinct practices, including specific gifts like scarves and rings, highlighting the importance of these traditional exchanges in their matrimonial customs.

Following the engagement, the K'Ho ethnic group practices the traditional "husband-capturing" custom, reflecting their matrilineal system. This practice, where women's families play a significant role in marriage arrangements, is common among various ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands. They possess the right to make decisions for all significant occasions, such as engagements, marriages, funerals, and other events (Le et al., 2020). Although still prevalent (accounting for 81.3%), its frequency is decreasing in modern times, especially in more urbanized areas. The continuation of this custom highlights the blend of tradition and evolving cultural norms within these communities. However, the husband-capturing custom in Lac Duong town - which is considered an urban and civilized area, accounts for a higher rate than in Ta Nung commune (Table 3)

Table 3: Husband-capturing custom of the K'Ho people

Source: Author

| Husband-capturing custom | | Lac Duong town | | Ta Nung commune | | General | |
|--------------------------|-----|----------------|------|-----------------|------|-----------|------|
| | | frequency | % | frequency | % | frequency | % |
| Present | Yes | 214 | 84.6 | 174 | 77.7 | 388 | 81.3 |
| | No | 39 | 15.4 | 50 | 22.3 | 89 | 18.7 |
| Ten years ago | Yes | 244 | 96.4 | 212 | 94.6 | 456 | 95.6 |
| | No | 9 | 3.6 | 12 | 5.4 | 21 | 4.4 |

The custom of husband-capturing of the K'Ho people takes place before the wedding when the couple has feelings or has the approval of both families. The bride's family will "capture" the boy to come to their house to live and work until the wedding ceremony. Although nowadays there is a tendency to gradually shift to "not capturing husbands", this custom is still more or less maintained by the K'Ho people as a feature of their culture. "*The custom of capturing the husband still exists, having to stay with the son-in-law, the daughter goes to capture the boy*" (male, 34 years old, cultural officer of Lac Duong Town). Moreover, after that, the "girl" stayed to be the "bride" in the "husband's family". The length of time to become a bride depends on the agreement between the two families. Usually, the ideal time to become a bride is three to six months because the bride's family wants their daughter to give birth to her first child at her parents' house (Phan, 2005).

Wedding Challenge

Reality shows that the K'Ho people follow a matrilineal system; the bride's family is always considered the primary breadwinner, the one who masters the economy and has the right to make decisions. Therefore, in a marriage, it is understandable that the bride's family comes to ask for her hand in marriage. Since then, the groom's family has always been the party to challenge the wedding (Long, 2021). In the current period, the wedding invitation is still maintained as a traditional custom. K'Ho people believe that the wedding gift represents the value of a man. Therefore, the wedding invitation is an indispensable ritual in organizing a wedding. In this study, the most common wedding favors of the K'Ho people are money (92.5%), gold (62.1%), wedding favors made of cloth/towels/beads also account for a large relatively high proportion (49.1%), the proportion of wedding favors being buffalo/cow, or other objects is relatively low (below 11.7%) (Survey data, December 2016 - February 2017).

Wedding Ceremony

The wedding ceremony (*vô kup bao* – Fig.1) is held sometime after the engagement ceremony, but this time is not explicitly regulated. Usually, people hold weddings about five to six months after the engagement ceremony. Nevertheless, there are also cases where the bride's family does not have the financial means or for some reason, people take the groom to the bride's family first and then hold the wedding later. Along with development and integration, the form of wedding ceremonies of the K'Ho people has also gradually changed from “self-sufficient” - the wedding ceremony is held by the bride's family (accounting for over 80%). However, now there is the appearance of organizing at restaurants and hiring services (28.8%, this rate was only 1% ten years ago).

“In the past, weddings do not have tables and chairs like now, or there are, but people borrow them, and people often spread out mats to sit on [...] Nowadays, people also have a new concept, hiring services, they only worry about receiving guests”

60 years old male, Lac Duong district.



Fig. 1: A traditional wedding ceremony of the K'Ho ethnic group
Source: Van Long, 2021

Along with changes in the form of wedding ceremonies, the costumes of the bride and groom today also tend to “choose” in accordance with the process of integration and cultural exchange.

“Traditional costumes are now very modernized; they also use brocade to sew, but sew in the current style. Boys only wear clothes; girls wear skirts. The loincloth is only used to recreate ancient times and wear it during festivals”

Male, 35 years old, Cultural Officer of Lac Duong town.

“Nowadays, they are all about beauty. They exchange cultures, so they wear suits. At weddings, they now mainly wear suits. Few families need to wear traditional costumes”

60-year-old man, Lac Duong Town

This research has noted a decrease in the trend of using traditional costumes of the K’Ho ethnic group in wedding ceremonies from 93.7% to 30%. In the future, the choice of Western European-style wedding attire from only accounting for 12.6% has now increased to 95.8%, and there is little difference between the two research areas.

From the above analysis, it is clear that the wedding customs of the K’Ho people today have changed quite a lot. According to K’Ho people’s assessment, today’s wedding ceremonies differ from the past ceremonies (69.6%). The expected design shows that today’s weddings are more significant, with receptions, orchestras, music and dancing, loudspeakers, wedding theaters, and reduced rituals. More concisely, not as long as before, today’s wedding favors are not made of cattle but are made of money and gold. The phenomenon of parents making decisions in marriage has decreased, and children’s right to self-determination has increased significantly. The reasons leading to these changes are the process of living with the Kinh ethnic group (91.8%), learning through mass media (37.3%), and integration, the “self-consciousness gradual change” of the K’Ho people is also an important indicator (67.5%). That is why men and women are aiming for marriage and are becoming more diverse, no longer limited to the K’Ho community.

Urbanization reshapes social life, bringing different ethnic groups closer and facilitating cultural exchange and assimilation. For the K’Ho ethnic group, the wedding ceremony begins a sustainable married life. This form of this ceremony has evolved significantly over the past decade, with notable differences between Lac Duong town and Ta Nung commune (Table 4). The influence of urbanization and the coexistence of various ethnic groups in the same region have led to changes in rituals and attire, with Western-style clothing becoming more common at K’Ho weddings.

Table 4: Wedding costumes of the K’Ho people

Source: Author

| Time | Type of wedding costumes | Lac Duong town | Ta Nung commune |
|---------------|---------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Present | Western-style clothing | 97.2 | 94.2 |
| | Ao Dai (of Kinh ethnic) | 0.8 | 0.9 |
| | K’Ho traditional costumes | 30.4 | 29.5 |
| Ten years ago | Western-style clothing | 12.3 | 12.9 |
| | Ao Dai (of Kinh ethnic) | 94.5 | 92.9 |
| | K’Ho traditional costumes | 1.6 | 0.4 |

Thus, urbanization process and Vietnam’s state policies for developing new economic areas have led to a diverse demographic influx in Lam Dong province. In Lac Duong town and Ta Nung commune, there is a significant migration of the Kinh ethnic group. Historically, the K’Ho ethnic group predominantly resided in the Ta Nung commune, living dispersedly. However, following the Kinh people’s migration, there has been a noticeable trend of the K’Ho community consolidating.

Changes in Cultural Values in Funeral Rituals of The K'Ho People in Lam Dong, Vietnam Concepts and Factors Affecting Death and Funeral Announcements.

The cultural values in the funeral rituals of the K'Ho people in Lam Dong, Vietnam, have also undergone significant changes. Traditionally, the K'Ho, especially the K'Ho Lach, categorized deaths into natural and unnatural causes, each with distinct rituals and beliefs. Linh Nga NiêkDam's ethnographic research highlights these traditional practices and beliefs. When someone dies, the gong is not played; only three people knock on the bamboo tube to announce the news. Only when the shroud begins does the gong sound. Bamboo jars are only beaten at midnight to send off the dead. The set of bronze bowls used to play at the funeral and then brought out to play outside the grave will be buried there. Even the drum used at this funeral must be broken and then hung outside the grave, with the notion that these objects. Now, it is the property of the dead; the living cannot use it anymore (NiêkDam, 2011). However, with societal transformation and urbanization, these views are evolving. The once rigid distinction between "good death" and "bad (sudden) death" is fading.

This research shows that the concept of "good death" and "bad death" of the K'Ho people, as previously held by ethnographic and anthropological researchers, is no longer valid in the current context. Society is increasingly developing; as urbanization grows, urban lifestyle tends to prevail over rural lifestyle, and people's concept of death also becomes more straightforward and gentler. This shift reflects the broader changes in spiritual culture and religious beliefs among the K'Ho people. This can also be seen as a common challenge in preserving ethnic culture in urban spaces in the Central Highlands, Vietnam in general and the K'Ho ethnic group in particular (Dang & Nguyen, 2023).

Entombment Ceremony and Offerings for the Dead.

Funeral arrangements usually occur immediately after the death has been announced to brothers, sisters, relatives and the neighbors. Organizing a funeral starts with preparing a gown for the dead, papers, incense, coffins, setting up a tent, etc. A funeral ceremony lasts for a few days, depending on the religion.

As mentioned above, for the K'Ho Lach people, three people will knock on the bamboo tube to announce the news when someone dies. Upon receiving the news, the surviving family members and relatives prepare steps for a funeral. According to NiêkDam (2011), when someone dies, children, grandchildren, and near and far relatives, when informed, bring clothes and money. If they are relatives, they must bring wine to the dead person. There is a difference with other ethnic groups: before dying, the deceased can write down what they want to bring with them, what drum to play, and where to choose the land to bury (if you do not choose your land, bury it). When the dead person has made such a request, the living person must keep in mind that those objects belong to the dead person and the living person does not have the right to use them but must bury them or leave them next to the grave (if there is a horse, tie it right next to the grave).

After death, the property is usually divided into three large parts for the wife and children, a small part for the sister, and a small part for the person to carry. The coffin is made of a hollow tree trunk; the lid is a smaller tree trunk placed on top of the coffin. The deceased wears the most beautiful traditional clothes, such as a brocade loincloth, a brocade blanket, and a mat before being placed in the coffin, with a gong resting on his knees and personal belongings at his feet. They are often used daily as small sharp knives, copper rings, beaded rings, rattles, spoons, bowls, etc. Funerals usually last four to seven days. At the funeral, all debts owed to the deceased must be paid and stated before the coffin (Nguyen). If the deceased is married but has not had a wedding according to customs, before the funeral, a wedding must be held according to all rituals and offerings to compensate the in-laws. During the first seven days after the burial, every day, someone in the family must bring food to the grave three times a day, and at night, someone must also bring wine, chicken, and meat to drink with the dead all night. On the third day, all the belongings and hobbies of the deceased must be taken out of the grave and burned. On the seventh day, invite relatives and neighbors to make offerings to the deceased at home. This ceremony also has a social and unlucky nature. After worshiping for seven days, there is no need to bring food and wine to the dead anymore.

Funeral and Burial Time

The funeral customs and burial practices among different ethnic groups in Vietnam vary significantly. One of these K'Ho local groups, the K'Ho-Chil people, follows a distinct set of traditions for honoring the deceased. The Chil funeral procession comprises several rituals. It begins with the first day of mourning, known as “shroud” (*liệm*), followed by the second day, “commitment” (*nhập quan*) and the third day, which involves “excretion and burial” (*đưa ma và chôn cất*). Unlike the Kinh ethnic group, who have annual death anniversary ceremonies, the K'Ho-Chil perform monthly rituals at the burial site, with the final ceremony called “grave leaving ceremony” (*lễ bỏ mã*) occurring after three to five years (Oriental Development Research Institute, 2016).

The burial process is carried out after the coffin is prepared, and it involves a ceremony called “shroud”, overseen by a priest. During this ceremony, essential items for the deceased in the afterlife are placed inside the coffin, while the remaining possessions are burned. It is crucial to prevent dogs from passing near the coffin during this time. The body remains at home for two to three days to allow relatives and friends to pay their respects. The Chil people practice earth burial, ensuring the deceased is conveniently near the village for easy visitation and care. During the funeral procession, all houses along the route are tightly shut, and children are kept indoors to protect them from malevolent spirits. A bell is placed on the coffin to safeguard the soul from evil forces. The deceased is always oriented towards the southeast direction.

After the burial, participants must cleanse themselves before returning to the village. The funeral utensils are collected and cleaned at the deceased's family home, and a protective charm is applied. For seven days following the funeral, relatives frequently visit the grave, bringing food and items the deceased favored. As time passes, these visits become less frequent. The Chil people observe a one-year mourning period, during which they adhere to various taboos, such as abstaining from eating rat meat (due to the fear of rats disturbing the grave), refraining from festivities, refraining from remarrying (if the widow/widower) and avoiding personal grooming. After the mourning year concludes, the Chil people hold a “mourning ceremony” (*mãn tang*), marking the end of mourning. Following this, the family resumes normal activities (Vo, 2016).

Contrastingly, the K'Ho-Lach people do not create individual graves but share a communal tomb with a protective roof. They build a house and dig a communal grave, placing two horizontal trees across the pit and a wooden board or bamboo bed on top to accommodate the coffin. Over time, the bed deteriorates, causing the coffin to fall into the pit, ultimately merging the deceased's remains with the family and lineage's ancestral bones. In contrast, the K'Ho-Srê people place the coffin directly inside the communal grave, omitting the use of a bed or platform (NiêkDam, 2011).

Nowadays, the beliefs and practices regarding funerals have undergone noticeable changes. In this research, when a family experiences a death, instead of signaling it by blowing a conch shell or erecting bamboo or sugarcane poles in front of the house, relatives often hang a mourning announcement board to convey the news. The funeral rituals' responsibility, particularly the shrouding (*khâm liệm*) (preparation of the deceased), is now more often shouldered by the elders within the community, village leaders, or even the deceased's family.

“Funerals today no longer involve the setting up of sugarcane or bamboo poles. In the past, when society was less developed, these poles were erected to signal a death within the family. Nowadays, people no longer use bamboo or sugarcane poles; instead, they put up mourning announcement boards in front of the house to announce the funeral. The mourning customs among the K'Ho people are now quite simple. The deceased is dressed in clean, new clothes—any attire will do as long as it is new. They are adorned with white socks and then wrapped in white cloth draped over and around them before sealing the coffin. Shrouding is conducted by respected elders, village leaders, or someone trusted by the family. Nowadays, most families handle the preparation of the deceased themselves”.

As a 61-year-old male resident of Lac Duong town shared,

Furthermore, the traditional practice of crafting coffins from tree trunks and hollowing them out has largely been replaced by purchasing pre-made coffins.,

“Coffins used to be crafted from tree trunks, and people would hollow them out and make a lid for them. However, nowadays, most people buy ready-made coffins, and the deceased is taken to a cemetery for burial”.

A 61-year-old male resident of Lac Duong

In this research result from 2012, it was found that the number of days between the time of death and the burial, as chosen by the majority, is one to two days (62%), followed by three days (37.3%), with a small percentage suggesting more than four days (0.7%). This shift in beliefs regarding the number of days before burial reflects changes in the perceptions of the K’Ho people regarding this aspect of funeral customs.

Funding for Organizing Funerals.

In terms of funding for organizing funerals, author’s previous research findings (2012) indicate that the majority of funeral arrangements fall within an acceptable range, ranging from approximately 32% to 38%. Regarding burial practices, 54.7% of opinions still adhere to traditional customs, 39.3% suggest a reduction in formalities, and 6.0% report increased procedures. The evaluation of how funerals and burials are organized varies and is influenced by individual households’ economic conditions and perspectives. One respondent, a 46-year-old male from Lac Duong town, noted,

“It depends on the economic circumstances of different families and their individual beliefs. Therefore, making a blanket assessment on this matter is not feasible”.

One respondent, a 46-year-old male from Lac Duong town

These changes can be attributed to various factors, including the impact of traditional mass media, cultural exchanges between ethnic groups, and the gradual evolution of K’Ho traditions. Concurrently, the K’Ho people have embraced a new way of life and culture, with a heightened awareness of adhering to the policies the Party and State set forth concerning funeral and burial practices. This shift is driven by a more comprehensive understanding of economics and social culture, focusing on cost reduction and hygiene, and recognizing economic developments that differ from the past. Today, people are less inclined to indulge in excessive consumption of food and drink, partly due to state regulations, as they adapt to a new lifestyle.

The analysis above suggests that the funeral customs among the K’Ho people have undergone some notable changes. Due to the scarcity of forest wood, the traditional hollowed-out coffins have become rare, replaced by six-panel coffins commonly used by the Kinh ethnic group. When all necessary preparations for the deceased are complete, the burial can occur within one to two days after death. The influence of Protestantism and Catholicism has led to the construction of solid brick graves in many areas, often featuring inscriptions with the names of the deceased’s saints.

Among various ethnic and religious groups practicing different belief systems and spiritual lifestyles, each community may choose distinct funeral customs based on their economic circumstances and religious beliefs. Under the influence of urbanization and exposure to different ethnic communities living in the same area, as well as increased awareness, knowledge, and lifestyle changes through media, the K’Ho people tend to adopt new practices. Consequently, K’Ho funeral customs have undergone positive adaptations in alignment with society’s evolving trends and development.

Conclusions

This study investigated the impact of urbanization on the cultural values of life cycle rituals among the K’Ho ethnic group in Lam Dong Province, Vietnam, focusing on weddings and funerals. The findings

reveal significant transformations driven by urbanization, socio-economic changes, and cultural interactions.

Urbanization has led to the professionalization and simplification of traditional K'Ho weddings and funerals. Tasks traditionally performed by family members are increasingly outsourced to service providers, indicating a shift towards more efficient, less labor-intensive practices. This trend reflects broader socio-economic transformations where market economy dynamics influence cultural practices, turning rituals into services that can be bought and sold.

- There is a dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity in K'Ho cultural practices. Urbanization introduces new cultural elements that coexist with, and sometimes replace, traditional practices. This coexistence is evident in the simplification of wedding and funeral rituals, where traditional elements are retained but increasingly infused with modern practices. For instance, traditional wedding ceremonies, which once spanned several days, are now condensed into shorter, more standardized events that align with urban lifestyles.
- The transition from a village to a city culture involves a shift from community-based, resource-sharing practices to individualistic, market-oriented behaviors. Economic considerations have become more prominent in decision-making processes related to life cycle rituals. The professionalization of wedding and funeral services among the K'Ho people highlights this shift, reflecting the adaptation of cultural values to new economic realities.
- There is a decline in traditional K'Ho rituals such as the New Rice celebration and gong festivals is attributed to transformations in the agricultural economy and increased awareness within the K'Ho community. This decline highlights the complex interplay between cultural preservation and change. The integration of traditional customs with new elements, such as cultural innovation and modern values, is a notable trend among the K'Ho, reflecting the broader impacts of urbanization and globalization.

The study also underscores the impact of educational and ideological shifts on cultural practices. The Vietnamese government's focus on improving education policy and the influence of international economic integration have shaped the cultural values of the K'Ho community. Educational initiatives are crucial in preserving cultural heritage while adapting to modern influences. The professionalization and simplification of K'Ho rituals are part of a broader trend towards modernization and adaptation to contemporary socio-economic conditions.

This study concludes that urbanization significantly impacts the cultural values and practices of the K'Ho ethnic group in Lam Dong Province. The professionalization and simplification of life cycle rituals reflect broader socio-economic transformations associated with urbanization. These findings highlight the need for detailed, context-specific analyses to understand the unique cultural heritage and socio-economic conditions of ethnic communities, providing valuable insights into the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity in contemporary Vietnamese society.

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