

ARTICLE

Heritage and Language Values Hidden in Khmer Palm Leaf Manuscripts in An Giang Province, Vietnam

Tran Cao Nguyen¹ , Nguyen Van Sang¹ , Dinh The Dinh¹ , Nguyen Ho Thanh^{2*} 

¹Faculty of Political Education, Vinh University, Vinh 43000-44000, Nghean An, Vietnam

²Department of National Defense Education, An Giang University, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City 90000, An Giang, Vietnam

ABSTRACT

The manuscripts on Khmer palm leaves in An Giang province are a distinctive element of the cultural and linguistic heritage of the Khmer community in southern Vietnam. These manuscripts, made from processed palm leaves, serve as a repository of Buddhist scriptures, sacred texts, and traditional knowledge, reflecting the spiritual and cultural values of the Khmer people within the Theravada Buddhist tradition. This study examines the origins, the techniques of manuscript creation, and their cultural significance, highlighting their role in preserving the Khmer language and traditional teachings. The study also addresses the challenges posed by environmental degradation and the decline of traditional craftsmanship, which threaten the preservation of these manuscripts. The research employs methods such as ethnographic observation, document analysis, and interviews to clarify how data is collected and how this information will be used in the study. Along with providing criteria for selecting research subjects and locations, including pagodas in Tri Tôn and Tịnh Biên districts, the study is more systematic and verifiable, enhancing the scientific rigor and reliability of the results. The study proposes solutions such as raising community awareness, applying digital preservation methods, and encouraging community participation in preservation efforts. Through this, the research emphasizes the importance of Khmer palm leaf manuscripts as a cultural treasure and their relevance in preserving Khmer heritage and identity in the modern era.

Keywords: Palm-Leaf Manuscripts; Satra, Khmer; On-Material Cultural Heritage; An Giang Province; Vietnam

*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Nguyen Ho Thanh, Department of National Defense Education, An Giang University, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City 90000, An Giang, Vietnam; Email: nhothanh@agu.edu.vn

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 1 December 2024 | Revised: 13 January 2025 | Accepted: 15 January 2025 | Published Online: 22 January 2025
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i2.8352>

CITATION

Nguyen, T.C., Van Sang, N., The Dinh, D., et al., 2025. Heritage and Language Values Hidden in Khmer Palm Leaf Manuscripts in An Giang Province, Vietnam. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*. 7(2): 296–313. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i2.8352>

COPYRIGHT

Copyright © 2025 by the author(s). Published by Bilingual Publishing Group. This is an open access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

The Khmer community in Southern Vietnam has a long history of settlement and cultural development. Provinces with significant Khmer populations include Tra Vinh, Soc Trang, Kien Giang, An Giang, Bac Lieu, and Ca Mau^[1]. Throughout their history, the Khmer people have simultaneously worked to adapt and enhance their natural environment for survival while preserving and transmitting their cultural values. These efforts have firmly rooted their spiritual and cultural traditions in the Southern region, ensuring their continuity and integration with the local living environment. Today, the Khmer community comprises approximately 1.3 million people, primarily residing in provinces and cities in the South, such as Soc Trang, Tra Vinh, Vinh Long, Bac Lieu, Ca Mau, Hau Giang, Kien Giang, An Giang, and Can Tho. Their traditional residential spaces, known as “Phum” and “Soc,” are closely connected to a communal lifestyle centered around ancient and grand Buddhist temples.

The Khmer people possess a rich and unique cultural heritage, deeply intertwined with religious practices and vibrant folk traditions. The integration and blending of cultural influences within Khmer society have shaped a distinctive artistic and cultural identity over the past two centuries. As the largest ethnic group in the Mon-Khmer subgroup of the Austroasiatic language family in Vietnam, the Khmer have their own language and script, along with a profound belief system rooted in Buddhist philosophy. Their religious life is enriched by deeply ingrained folk concepts and teachings derived from Buddhist scriptures and customary laws.

One of the most significant aspects of Khmer Theravada Buddhism is the Sutra scriptures, inscribed on carefully prepared palm leaves and organized into sets of sutras. These scriptures are rare and valuable documents that embody the Khmer people’s spiritual and cultural heritage. They illustrate the history of the development of unique artistic and architectural forms within Buddhist traditions, as well as the ethical teachings and virtues deeply embedded in Buddhist philosophy. These manuscripts are a testament to the Khmer community’s enduring commitment to preserving their spiritual and cultural identity.

The study of Khmer Palm-leaf manuscripts has also attracted the attention of many researchers and scholars, who have approached the problem differently. The content of palm-leaf manuscripts represents Buddhism, reflects the

teachings of the Buddha, and contains Buddhist philosophy and outlook on life^[2]. Palm-leaf manuscripts are ancient records of the heritage of ancient civilizations from South Asia and Southeast Asia, mainly reflecting Buddhist teachings and practices^[3]. Before the widespread use of paper, Palm-leaf manuscripts were a popular literary medium in South and Southeast Asia, carrying rich cultural significance. These manuscripts recorded knowledge in many fields, such as history, literature, philosophy, art, and science, and also held an important position in Buddhist culture and religious teachings^[4]. The scientific evaluation of these manuscripts provides essential references for historical research on local Buddhist religion and culture and is crucial for restoring and protecting manuscripts studies. The challenge for our generation is to design a method to capture the content, recreate the lost part, and find a way to organize the manuscripts properly. Besides, using modern technology for storage and retrieval emphasizes the relevance to the requirements outlined in the search query^[5].

An Giang Province currently holds the largest collection of Khmer palm leaf manuscripts. However, improper preservation methods have made these manuscripts vulnerable to damage caused by environmental factors such as weather and termites. Additionally, the diminishing number of artisans skilled in crafting palm leaf manuscripts has led to a significant decline in their production, further jeopardizing their survival. To safeguard the cultural and linguistic values embedded in these manuscripts and to preserve the unique craftsmanship involved in their creation, it is essential to undertake comprehensive research. Such efforts will help ensure the continued appreciation, understanding, and protection of this irreplaceable heritage for future generations.

This study puts forward recommendations and solutions for the preservation and development of Khmer palm-leaf manuscripts in An Giang. Through these efforts, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the cultural and linguistic values embedded in these manuscripts and the distinctive craftsmanship involved in their creation. Additionally, the study highlights the significance of palm-leaf manuscripts in the spiritual and cultural life of Khmer Theravada Buddhists. Recognizing their importance underscores the need for dedicated efforts to safeguard and promote these manuscripts as a vital part of the Khmer community’s heritage.

2. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural, linguistic, and heritage values of Khmer palm-leaf manuscripts in An Giang Province. The research methodology includes the following components:

2.1. Fieldwork and Observation

Site Selection: Buddhist temples and Khmer communities in An Giang Province, particularly those in Tri Ton and Tinh Bien districts, are chosen due to their active involvement in the preservation of palm-leaf manuscripts. These sites are selected based on their historical significance, the extent of manuscript preservation, and their connection to the religious and cultural activities of the Khmer community.

Direct Observation: Observations will be conducted to document the environmental conditions, storage practices, and the physical state of the manuscripts. The goal is to identify potential threats and conservation challenges, from which effective preservation measures can be proposed.

2.2. Interviews and Oral Histories

Key Informant Interviews: Interviews will be conducted with artisans, monks, and cultural historians to clarify traditional crafting techniques and the cultural significance of the manuscripts. This will help provide a deeper understanding of the creative process and the religious and cultural values embedded in these manuscripts.

Community Oral Histories: Stories, legends, and experiences from the older generations within the Khmer community will be collected to gain a better understanding of the role of palm-leaf manuscripts in education, religion, and daily life.

2.3. Document Analysis

Historical and Cultural Records: The study will analyze historical documents, academic studies, and articles related to Khmer culture and Theravada Buddhism to provide context for the origin and development of palm-leaf manuscripts.

Manuscript Content Analysis: The content of the manuscripts will be analyzed in terms of linguistics, philoso-

phy, and culture to explore the teachings, language structures, and cultural messages they convey.

2.4. Ethnographic Methods

Participant Observation: The research will engage directly in the process of crafting palm-leaf manuscripts with local artisans to document the tools, materials, and techniques used. This method will help gather detailed information about the crafting and preservation processes.

Cultural Immersion: Participating in Khmer community rituals and events will provide a deeper understanding of the connection between palm-leaf manuscripts and religious and cultural practices in the community.

2.5. Preservation and Conservation Assessment

Environmental Analysis: The impact of environmental factors such as humidity, temperature, and pests on the longevity of palm-leaf manuscripts will be evaluated.

Preservation Techniques: The study will assess traditional preservation methods and modern technologies to propose long-term solutions for safeguarding the manuscripts, including the use of digital preservation techniques.

2.6. Data Analysis and Methodological Steps

Qualitative Data Analysis: Data from interviews and observations will be analyzed using thematic coding to identify key themes and relationships between cultural, linguistic, and preservation factors. This analytical approach will help classify information and uncover patterns and trends in the data.

Data Coding and Synthesis: Data from interviews and documents will be coded to identify major themes and cultural meanings embedded in the palm-leaf manuscripts. These themes will guide the development of preservation solutions and heritage promotion strategies.

2.7. Recommendations and Proposals

Educational Workshops: It is proposed to organize educational workshops for the community to raise awareness of the cultural and linguistic significance of Khmer palm-leaf manuscripts and to encourage their preservation.

Policy Development: Specific policies and guidelines will be proposed for cultural management agencies and local governments to support sustainable preservation efforts and promote the development of these manuscripts as cultural heritage.

2.8. Participant Selection

Experts: Participants in the study will be selected based on their knowledge and experience in the creation and preservation of Khmer palm-leaf manuscripts. The participants include: **Artisans:** Those who work directly with palm-leaf manuscripts, using traditional tools and techniques to create these manuscripts. **Monks and Clergy:** Individuals with deep knowledge of Khmer religion and culture, helping to clarify the connection between palm-leaf manuscripts and Buddhist teachings, as well as their role in religious ceremonies. **Cultural Historians:** Experts who study Khmer culture and Theravada Buddhism history, providing insights into the development of palm-leaf manuscripts in historical context. **Khmer Community:** Especially the older generations, who can share stories, traditions, and cultural values related to palm-leaf manuscripts in everyday life.

2.9. Site Selection

The research sites will be chosen based on their historical and cultural significance in the preservation of Khmer palm-leaf manuscripts. Specifically: **Temples and Khmer Communities:** The temples and Khmer villages in An Giang Province, particularly those in Tri Ton and Tinh Bien districts, are selected due to their long-standing tradition of preserving and using palm-leaf manuscripts. **Conservation and Museum Locations:** If available, conservation centers or museums related to Khmer cultural heritage will be included in the study to examine current preservation methods and their effectiveness. **Community Spaces:** Community events and rituals where palm-leaf manuscripts are used may provide insights into how these documents are protected and passed down in Khmer culture.

By integrating these methods, this study aims to provide a nuanced analysis of the hidden heritage and linguistic values within Khmer palm-leaf manuscripts. It also seeks to propose practical solutions to ensure their conservation and foster an appreciation of their role in the cultural and

spiritual life of the Khmer community in An Giang Province.

3. Results

3.1. Origin of the Palm-Leaf Manuscripts

The language and writing of each nation result from the process of generalizing and abstracting things and phenomena in real life. They are a means for people in the country to interact, exchange, and pass on experiences from generation to generation. From the development of language and writing, each nation chooses a method of recording, transcribing, and reflecting the reality of social life to suit its nation's conditions and living circumstances.

According to researcher Le Phung Hoang in the book *History of World Civilization*, he commented: "The ancient Khmer script first appeared on the Angkor Borei inscription in 611, gradually developing and perfecting until the 15th century completely occupies a dominant position in the Khmer text system."^[6] In the book *Cambodian Vietnamese*, researcher Le Huong pointed out the origin of Khmer writing. He said the Khmer people created the Khmer word in Sanskrit (Sanskrit)^[7]. Initially, Khmer kings adopted Brahman as the state religion, so Indian monks used Sanskrit to record scriptures and the king's deeds. Later, archaeologists found those words engraved on stone steles, pagoda pillars, and tower doors. Since the 6th century, the Khmer people have used this script to build a grammatical system in their official language and create their writing. From here, the Khmer people officially had writing. Also, according to this work, when Buddhism was widely spread and deeply ingrained in the spiritual life of Khmer society through Pali (Southern Sanskrit), Khmer intellectuals at that time borrowed many more nouns to supplement the knowledge and increase the diversity and richness of the Khmer languages and systems to this day.

The concepts of "leaf sutra" and "palm-leaf manuscripts" are still debated by domestic and foreign scholars. The phrase "palm-leaf manuscripts" is used by foreign scholars to refer to sutras written on palm leaves in general. Most research has also shown that there exists a type of Buddhist scripture written on the leaves of the palm tree, called the "palm-leaf tree"^[8]. Therefore, whether or not the leaf tree is used in leaf sutras in other countries such as Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Myanmar requires

more in-depth research. Thus, the Palm-leaf manuscripts of the Khmer in Vietnam, and An Giang in particular, can be considered a part of the Palm-leaf manuscripts of Southeast Asia.

Regarding its origin, along with the introduction and influence of Theravada Buddhist culture from South Asian countries, typically India, the Palm-leaf manuscripts were transmitted to Southeast Asian countries, including Vietnam. South Asian cultures have long used dried palm leaves as “paper” for their religious materials; Palm-leaf manuscripts in Tamil, Telugu, and Hindi (Indian) appeared as early as the 5th century BC. Due to the influence of South Asian civilization, Southeast Asian cultures, including the Java, Indonesian, Khmer, Thai, and Cham, similarly used palm leaves^[9].

According to Narenthiran^[8], before the appearance of paper, palm leaves were a vital writing material in most South Asian and Southeast Asian countries^[8]. Thus, before the appearance of scriptures, palm leaves were commonly used as material for writing Buddhist scriptures in South Asia and Southeast Asia.

In the initial stages of formation and development, Buddhism was only transmitted orally and spread through sermons and sermons. At that time, no written method was used to transmit the Buddha’s sermons. Therefore, the core content is easily distorted when transmitted through many intermediaries. The problem is to gather together to unify all the teachings up to now. That is why gatherings (sanitize) are held. Most sources of information about gathering meetings often need to clearly state how Buddhist scriptures were specifically transmitted^[10]. However, these sources agree that Buddhist scriptures were only recorded by memory and oral transmission during the first two compilations. Some historical sources say that the leaf sutra appeared from the fourth compilation, but some say that the sutra was engraved on a piece of copper at this compilation. Although the exact time of the birth of the Palm-leaf manuscripts has not been determined, from the above evidence, we can consider that the Leaf Sutra appeared between the third and fourth gathering, around 20 BC.

In Vietnam, Palm-leaf manuscripts can be transmitted from many different paths. Based on the history of the introduction of Khmer Theravada Buddhism into Vietnam and through the accounts of monks at some pagodas during our

survey and in-depth interviews, it can be hypothesized that the Palm-leaf manuscripts were transmitted through Vietnam by two main routes: from India to Vietnam and from India to Cambodia and then into Vietnam.

Firstly, India introduced the Palm-leaf manuscripts and the Khmer Theravada Buddhist teaching system to Vietnam. Since the time of the Funan kingdom, the introduction of Indian culture and religion has strongly impacted this country^[11]. Accordingly, Buddhism was introduced from India to the Funan kingdom through Indian missionaries and merchants. The palm-leaf manuscripts followed these fleets, were imported to Funan, and were then developed to serve evangelism. Here, missionaries preached in many places throughout the Funan kingdom. Buddhism flourished during the history of Funan, which later became the southern territory of Vietnam, today’s Southern region^[12].

Second, the Palm-leaf manuscripts could be transmitted from Cambodia to Vietnam during formation and development. According to monks at several Khmer pagodas in the Tri Ton district and Tinh Bien district, through the stories of their predecessors, the Palm-leaf manuscripts were only transmitted to Vietnam around the mid-nineteenth century, mainly from Cambodia. This statement also has no convincing basis. However, there are very few written sources about the origin and time of the Palm-leaf manuscripts’ introduction in Vietnam. It can also be understood that the Palm-leaf manuscripts were transmitted during a previous period. However, later sources of the Palm-leaf manuscripts from Cambodia continued to be imported into Vietnam due to the interaction between the Khmer community and Khmer Vietnamese Theravada Buddhists in South and Cambodia. According to the story of the eldest monk Chau Ty, when he grew up, he saw that the Palm-leaf manuscripts had been in the temple for a long time.

3.2. Crafting Techniques and Distribution of Palm-Leaf Manuscripts in An Giang Province

Techniques for Making Palm-Leaf Manuscripts in An Giang Province

Crafting Materials

To create a Palm-leaf manuscript book, one must use raw materials, including pre-processed loose leaves, ink, and engraving tools (engraving pen, wooden stick). The palm

tree is also known as the palm leaf. This type of leaf resembles dong nem leaves or palm leaves. (See **Figure 1**).



Figure 1. Palm trees grown in Tri Ton and Tinh Bien districts, An Giang province.

Source: Nguyen and Do^[13].

The tree usually lives in highlands and mountainous areas. To create “paper” from loose leaves is a long and detailed process. Only some leaves on every tree can be chosen as a leaf to write sutras on because when left to age naturally, the leaves are often brown-green, which is inconvenient for recording and aesthetics. Therefore, the leaves chosen are young leaves that have just emerged. First, people will choose good, young leaf buds. Young leaves are ivory white, have straight stems, and feel smooth. Then, people use pieces of string to wrap around the tree buds to prevent the leaves from blooming. When the leaves start to get old, people cut them down. Then, use a board to squeeze each leaf tightly, dry it in the sun, wait until it withers, and remove the leaf veins. After cutting each piece, each leaf will usually be cut into three to four pieces. Each leaf blade is sixty centimeters long, about five centimeters wide, and can have four to five lines of writing. Then, the leaves are lined up to engrave sutras. People use a sharp object to make cuts directly on the leaf in straight rows parallel to the length of the leaf. Usually, each leaf blade has only about five rows. However, with today’s technology, people often use pens or pencils to draw directly on the leaves.

The ink used to brush onto leaves after engraving is usually dark ink, made from many different materials, from ink grass crushed to get water, sawdust burned to reveal charcoal then mixed with water, coal mixed with honey, young areca fruit^[14].

Engraving Technique

This is a rather complicated and elaborate step, requiring the engraver not only to have profound knowledge of Buddhist ethics and the writing on the sutras but also to be meticulous in engraving the words. The tool used for carving is a round wooden pillar nearly three centimeters in

diameter and about one thousand seven hundred and twenty centimeters long. The pen’s tip is sharpened, and a sharp nail engraves words on leaves. People also use a wooden stick with a length of about thirty to thirty-five centimeters, a width of five centimeters, and a thickness of about one centimeter, polished smooth to use as a stand to carve sutras. (See **Figures 2 and 3**).



Figure 2. Tools used to engrave words on Palm-leaf manuscript.

Source: Nguyen and Nguyen^[15].



Figure 3. The bracket used to fix the leaves to engrave words on the Palm-leaf manuscript.

Source: Nguyen and Nguyen^[15].

Monks carve sutras by sitting in a meditation position, holding a wooden brace in their left hand and a pen in their right hand to carve (See **Figures 4 and 5**). Each leaf blade can usually only engrave about four to five lines of text, each line from twenty to thirty words, depending on the size of the text. However, the most challenging thing is still to move the letters evenly; the size of the letters must be even, and the depth must also be equal to ensure that when scanning ink, the letters have the same thickness and lightness.

Then, people use pre-mixed ink to sweep the entire surface of the engraved leaf. Please wait a few minutes for the ink to penetrate the grooves, and then the engraver will wipe it clean with a cloth. The ink stains in the grooves will

not be wiped away so that they will color the text. Next, a thin layer of kerosene is applied to both sides of the leaf to make the leaf surface shinier and avoid termite damage.



Figure 4. Monks in An Giang learn to write Palm-leaf manuscript.

Source: Nguyen and Do^[13].



Figure 5. Elder Venerable Chau Ty is attentively instructing monks to write Palm-leaf manuscript.

Source: Nguyen and Do^[13].

Close the File and Save It

When the engraving of sutras is completed, people bind each volume one by one. Sutras with the same theme as Tripitaka and Khmer folk tales are grouped according to different themes called sutras (See **Figures 6 and 7**).



Figure 6. The Palm-leaf manuscript sutras displayed at Sa Lon Pagoda, Tri Ton district, An Giang province.

Source: Nguyen^[16].

The content used to engrave the sutra is available from previous Palm-leaf manuscript books. Each sutra is a small

topic following the content of the earlier sutras. The number of leaf manuscript blades used in the palm-leaf manuscript depends on the length and short content of the sutra. On average, each sutra contains about forty leaf blades. Each set of sutras usually does not specify the number of volumes. Depending on the content of the types of sutras, the number of sutra volumes is higher or lower.



Figure 7. The delicate, straight handwriting on the Palm-leaf manuscript.

Source: Nguyen^[16].

Keeping the Palm-leaf manuscript is not complicated. In the past, some temples often used wooden cabinets to store sutras. The Palm-leaf manuscript lets prayer be placed together with other types of scriptures. However, the invasion of insects such as cockroaches and rats has partially damaged the leaf prayer books and the scriptures over time. That's why, most of the time in Khmer pagodas today, they often use glass cabinets to store scriptures. Usually, scriptures are placed on the bottom shelves. The sutras are placed solemnly in the top drawer and arranged neatly and orderly (see **Figures 8 and 9**).



Figure 8. One set Palm-leaf manuscript prayer at Praynven Pagoda, Tri Ton district, An Giang province.

Source: Nguyen and Nguyen^[15].



Figure 9. Retention Palm-leaf manuscript prayer at Praynven Pagoda, Tri Ton district, An Giang province.

Source: Nguyen and Nguyen^[15].

3.3. Distribution Situation of Palm-Leaf Manuscript in An Giang Province

In An Giang province, the leaf sutra is widely distributed mainly in Khmer Theravada Buddhist temples. The distributed quantity is primarily concentrated in several pagodas in the Tri Ton and Tinh Bien districts; a few are stored in the Chau Thanh district. However, many temples still have not had access to this type of classic.

According to a report on the survey of precious and rare documents in Tri Ton and Tinh Bien districts of the An Giang Department of Home Affairs in December 2023^[17] (see **Table 1**), in these two districts, the number of Palm-leaf manuscripts stored in pagodas is about one hundred and eight sets with several about seven hundred and thirty-six volumes. Some pagodas have many palm-leaf manuscripts, such as Praynven Pagoda (Tri Ton district), with nearly three hundred volumes. The palm-leaf manuscripts are mainly concentrated in O Lam commune, Tri Ton town, Nui To commune, Luong Phi commune of Tri Ton district and An Cu commune, Van Giao commune, Tinh Trung commune, Tinh Bien town, Nui Voi commune of Tinh Bien district, is associated with great artisans, such as Chau Ty, Chau Kak, Chau Sn Hy, Chau Poly, Chau Soc Khon.

3.4. Contents of the Palm-Leaf Manuscripts

The palm-leaf manuscript is the common name of the document engraved on the leaf. In the Khmer language, it is called Satra Slat Rit, “Satra” means scriptures and books or documents together, “Slat” means leaf, and “Rit” means to press tightly. Khmer people often call the Palm-leaf

manuscripts briefly “Satra.”

Table 1. Situation of the distribution of Palm-leaf manuscripts in Tri Ton and Tinh Bien districts, An Giang province. Source: Author.

Place of Distribution	Manage	Sutras	Sutra Book
TRI TON DISTRICT			
Praynven Pagoda	Monk Chau Chol	50	300
Svayton Pagoda	Monk Chau Pho Ly	03	26
Soai So Pagoda	Monk Chau Ty	12	64
Sa Lon Pagoda	Monk Chau Son	01	07
Som Say Pagoda	Monk Chau Dao	0	0
Snay Don Kum Pagoda	Monk Chau Kon	02	20
Bung Pagoda	Monk Chau Huy	04	40
Pra Thiet Pagoda	Monk Chau Khal	02	16
Thuot Chrom Pagoda	Monk Chau Rinh	01	05
TINH BIEN DISTRICT			
Moi Pagoda	Monk Chau Chan Đa	01	05
Ro Pagoda	Monk Chau Soc Khonl	01	03
Son ke Mias Pagoda	Monk Chau But	03	15
Wat Co Pagoda	Monk Chau Dinh	0	0
Ba Xoai Pagoda	Monk Chau Vut Tha	*	07
Co Don Pagoda	Monk Chau Soc Ra	05	45
Thot Not Pagoda	Monk Chau Kim Son	01	08
Soc Re Pagoda	Monk Chau Som Bath	0	0
Thiet Pagoda	Monk Chau Chom	02	10
Van Rau Pagoda	Monk Chau Ninh	01	30
Wat Tot Pagoda	Monk Chau Chol	02	14
Thom Mit Pagoda	Monk Chau Rop	03	23
Sa Rat Pagoda	Monk Chau Sóc Khên	02	14
Sa Pel Lot Pagoda	Monk Chau Ninh	03	14
My A Pagoda	Monk Chau Kak	05	28
Crang Chay Pagoda	Monk Chau Chol Chi	*	08
Svay Ta Som Pagoda	Monk Chau Bronh	02	20
Kop On Del Pagoda	Monk Chau Ban	02	14
Total		108	736

Based on the content in the sutra, researchers often divide the Palm-leaf manuscripts into four main groups, including Satra Ruong (Satra of stories), Satra Lo-beng (Satra of entertainment), Satra Cho-bung (Satra of teachings) and Satra Tê (Satra scriptures, verses). In particular, depending on each sutra, its meaning and role will be clearly shown, specifically as follows:

Satra Chest (folk tales) is a series of stories written by Satra, which can also be called a set of folk literature (Oc-so-sac-po-ro-lom-luoc) that records samples of old stories to borrow stories from ancient times to teach people today. In Satra Ruong, it is divided into different forms, such as Ruong-bo-ran (ancient stories), Ruong-ni-tien (stories), or Ruong-bo-dom (ancient stories). However, to distinguish between distinct story genres, such as myths, legends, fables, etc., Khmer people use terms to name them. For example, Ruong-a-sti-tai are true mythological stories to distinguish them from Ruong-predict (mythical ghost stories) or Ruong-tê-vok-tha (fairy tales), Ruong-pa-pac-mum

(religious dialogue), Ruong-sac-sana (false storytelling the biographies of bodhisattvas) and Ruong-pơ-rông (magical folk tale). In addition, regarding the genre of jokes or fables, Khmer people also classify into many different types such as Ruong-sat-bac-say (animal stories), Ruong-kom-pulling (satire), or Ruong-rao-xa-fly (humorous story).

From such diversity and richness in the genre, it can be seen that Satra Chest is not simply a Satra set used to tell stories. Still, it is also used to create and transform into literary and artistic works that are unique and highly applicable. In particular, along with the function of oral transmission, Southern Khmer people also use Satra Ruong to create stage scripts in the typical singing and dancing art of Khmer culture, such as Rô băm, Dì kê or Dù kê. Moreover, Khmer also used Satra Ruong to improvise and build many works for reciting poetic stories such as Chum-rieng-cha-pay, À day repartee singing, À day Ruong (À day story). In addition, Satra Ruong has been researched by Khmer artisans to create unique works in painting, sculpture, and decorative arts in pagodas with many diverse and rich themes, with sources available originating from folk tales. Satra Ruong is a crucial element not only in the form of folk literature but is also a key factor contributing to making Khmer literary and artistic treasures both mysterious and meaningful aesthetics through promoting and honoring beauty. Furthermore, the most significant meaning that can be seen from Satra Ruong is to change the perception of the entire Khmer social community in the concept of sound - evil, good - bad, of justice - evil so that there can be new things profound changes in thinking and life attitudes when carrying out the long process of migration and settlement in the Southern region.

Lo-beng Satra (Entertainment Satra) is a Satra set that mainly records entertainment activities, folk games, traditional sports, and physical activities in Khmer society. Most of the content in Satra Lo-beng is clearly shown in two aspects. On the one hand, Satra Lo-beng reflects the simple agricultural lifestyle of Khmer residents through folk games that are fun and entertaining in production work, as well as social activities such as fighting, wrestling, cockfighting, bridge playing, kite flying, etc. On the other hand, Satra Lo-beng also exudes a spirit of freedom, a liberal, leisurely, and free-spirited demeanor in social activities, which, through festivals, has brought to life this demonstrates the personality and simple, rustic lifestyle of the Khmer working popula-

tion. In addition, the beauty of the intersectionality in Satra Lo-beng is clearly shown in the fact that it both integrates fun and entertaining folk tales while also being associated with the views of karma and morality in teaching people according to Buddhist philosophy. Therefore, it can be seen that in Satra Lo-beng, the contradiction between “promoting good and discouraging evil is explained dogmatically, focusing more on illustrating doctrine than reflecting social relationships.” This is what makes Satra Lo-beng identify with Satra Ruong.

Satra Cho-bung (Satra of the Law of Teaching) is considered the classic Satra, the most prominent in the entire content of the palm-leaf scriptures. The Khmer call Satra Cho-bung a solemn teaching song because of its nature and role in the way of living in the community. To acquire knowledge from Satra Cho-bung, the Khmer people divide them into two different groups of subjects. One is the type used for monks; this type mainly talks about the practice and precepts, as well as learning Buddhism and cultivating virtue for monks. The other is the type used for ordinary people, which mainly mentions the teachings and advice on the ancients’ virtues in educating children.

According to the complete statistics, in Satra Cho-bung, there are up to 11 teaching songs recorded, including:

1. *Cho-bung Pơ-rôs*: The law of teaching sons.
2. *Cho-bung S-ray*: The law of teaching daughters.
3. *Cho-bung He-ma-hachan*: The law of teaching the people.
4. *Cho-bung Bon-dambi-dia*: The law of teaching fathers.
5. *Cho-bung Koon-chau-lo-boc*: The law of teaching children.
6. *Cho-bung Toul-mien-khơ-luong*: The law of self-cultivation.
7. *Cho-bung Vi-thua-banh-dit*: The law of intellectuals.
8. *Cho-bung Piek-chas*: The law of teaching the ancients.
9. *Cho-bung Rick-net-ties*, also called *Chơ-bấp Pơ-rac-Hích-sam-phia*: The law of the king to teach the people.
10. *Cho-bung Kê-kal*: The law of inheritance, also known as *Cho-bung Sề-thay*: The law of the rich man teaching his children.
11. *Cho-bung Pơ-kôn-châu*: The law of teaching children and grandchildren^[18].

From the content of the teachings, the main foundation in Satra Cho-bung mainly refers to and revolves around the philosophy of living towards goodness, along with the advice of virtues of the ancients in educating people's morality. Moreover, along with the philosophy of educating people's morality, Satra Cho-bung also points out the existence and limitations and mentions the factors that affect building and developing Khmer society. That is to criticize and condemn bad habits, social evils that have a particular impact on the good customs in national culture, such as theft, deceit, laziness, and gambling, to advise people to stay away from, not to get caught up in evil, foreign cultures.

Satra Tê (Satra Sutra, verse) is a type of Satra that records all the Buddhist teachings or scriptures in the most basic way. In the Khmer language, Satra Tê is considered a type of literature with a Buddhist spirit in the Khmer literary and artistic treasure. To form Satra Tê, there are the following volumes:

One is The *Chiec-dok* volume, which records most of the stories about the previous lives of Buddha Shakyamuni.

The *To-chiec* volume mainly records the Buddha's virtues, such as charity, morality, and diligence.

Third is The *Mo-ha* volume, which deals with the great Kalpa of Buddha, and this is also considered a large, voluminous book about the life of Buddha (consisting of 14 volumes).

Fourth is the *Trai-pê-dot* volume (Tripitaka) or *Tham-ma-pa-da* (Dhammapada), translated from the Pali canon into the Khmer language. These are considered popular scriptures used by Khmer monks for teaching and preaching at significant ceremonies and to educate and transmit the light and spirit of Buddhism to Khmer.

In general, the palm-leaf scriptures synthesize many separate scriptures and scriptures. The palm-leaf scriptures are an intellectual product with much knowledge and a great heritage containing profound educational philosophy. From the foundation of the Satras, the Khmer of the South have summarized and built progressive views on life in the concept of people, morality, and humanity to have a harmonious combination between religion and life, between the spirit of Buddhism and folk beliefs in the way of organizing and living social life.

3.5. The Moral Education Philosophy of the Palm-Leaf Scriptures

Palm-leaf scriptures are a great treasure in the art and cultural treasure of the Khmer community. This art form has tangible and intangible cultural values when it contains and brings spiritual stability to the community with a philosophy of life associated with the ethical foundation of ethnic culture.

Looking at the overview, it is easy to see that most of the texts written on palm leaf are products of folk literature, Buddhist knowledge, and philosophy, recorded by the Khmer and transformed into stories, excellent and profound stories closely associated with community life. It reflects life experiences and folk concepts to be passed down and carried out in parallel with teaching human virtues. For that reason, education is considered a critical factor in the foundation of organizing and building the social life of the Khmer people. This is reflected in the content of the palm-leaf sutra through the following points:

First, the palm-leaf sutra teaches people to do good and live a good life. It can be seen that, in the teachings of Khmer Theravada Buddhism, in addition to the basic precepts that are mandatory for practitioners, such as "do not kill, do not steal, do not commit adultery, do not lie, do not drink alcohol and drugs" (the five precepts), there are still many other precepts that practitioners and followers of Khmer Theravada Buddhism must comply with and keep to have appropriate attitudes and behaviors depending on the circumstances and conditions. This has been demonstrated in the concepts of good and evil, good and bad, right and wrong, and what should or should not be done in speech and relationships. For example, in Khmer customary law it is taught that:

*"Kùm đôy pút pel kùm som kùm sếp
Kùm sóp kùm sral, k ùm o kùm al T'rêk đôy ngey"*
(Rough translation: Don't follow bad things
Don't be naive and follow bad things)^[19].

There is also a passage that teaches:

*"Th-êk muôi chia kho-êc-đóp;
Chacht chia tê-vô-tót, mocht chia te-vo-da"*
(Rough translation: One crow becomes ten crows
A snake's heart, a Buddha's mouth)^[18].

Khmer Theravada Buddhists are taught how to practice good deeds on significant holidays. On these occasions, in addition to chanting prayers for the souls of the deceased,

Khmer monks also use excellent and meaningful stories about karma and reincarnation to teach people. For example, the story of the young man who showed filial piety to his mother, Socpenh Kokma (The character's name (son) is mentioned in the legend about the filial piety custom of children in Khmer folklore) the legend of the custom of building sand mountains (The worshiping ritual is popular during the traditional Chol Chnam Thmay festival of the Khmer community in the South. This ritual is closely associated with the religious life of the Khmer culture. In addition, the sand mountain ritual also refers to the "reincarnation theory" in Khmer folklore. The Khmer believe that each grain of sand built will free a sinner. Therefore, the sand mountain ritual has been deeply ingrained in the community's consciousness as a good moral act to sow good karma in the world for the Khmer), or the story of the hunter of wild animals in Khmer (The story deals with the profession of hunting and killing wild animals. This genre of story aims to talk about the "law of cause and effect" and valuable lessons about good and evil. If you sow evil seeds (killing wild animals) in this life, you will inevitably receive bad results in the next life (the souls of all animals will cause trouble) folklore teach people and demonstrate the concept that "living a good life will be rewarded with good things, being kind will surely be rewarded with good things".

Second, the Palm-leaf scriptures remind people to strive to cultivate their minds and character. When referring to human character, Buddhism always believes that everything and everything originates from the mind and comes from the mind. From this perspective, we can understand that human life's origin of all suffering, joy, and sadness is ultimately born from the mind. It is the core, the root of all desires in the world. Therefore, Buddhism always advocates eliminating ignorance and darkness in the human mind by keeping precepts and practicing the paths of liberation from the correct perception of character. Understanding that the mind creates the cause of suffering, most Khmer Theravada Buddhists always pay attention. They are cautious in their thoughts and actions to harmonize religion and life best. In most religious activities or significant festivals of the year, Khmer Theravada Buddhists are advised to do good deeds and live a good life and to seriously reflect on what has happened in the past to make efforts to adjust and cultivate their minds so that their minds are always peaceful, less troubled, avoid

dark thoughts and sow the seeds of good life. In Cho-bap Piêk-Chas (the advice of the ancients), it is taught that: "Uôc tus kum ôl la an" with the implication that "When pulling a boat, you must pull it gently so that the river water does not become muddy"^[19]. This is meant to remind and advise people to cultivate a sound mind, to be persistent and patient in any situation, and at the same time, to know how to control their emotions to avoid conflicts, discord, and bad things caused by an impure mind. The Khmer are very sophisticated in teaching human virtues. They borrow specific images from things and phenomena in real life to compare, contrast, and cite evidence to advise and educate people in a close, easy-to-understand way so that each person can adjust and correct themselves.

From this perspective, it has been shown that the Palm-leaf scriptures always provide solid spiritual support for people's spiritual life in Khmer society. The light reflects and illuminates the human mind to always be in the calmest state, thereby helping people's perception and behavior to be correct and gentle to avoid causing bad things and bad things in communication and relationships between people.

Third, the Palm-leaf scriptures contribute to consolidating and building social-ethical relationships. It can be seen that, along with social and legal institutions, ethics can be seen as an essential tool to regulate and orient social relationships, first of all, relationships between families, clans, villages, and communities. This has been demonstrated in the central role of the palm-leaf sutras when it advises and orients the establishment of those relationships in a stable manner in Khmer society. This has been demonstrated as follows:

In family relationships, the palm-leaf sutra advises people to strive to cultivate and preserve virtues such as "filial piety," "loyalty," and "tolerance." in relationships, filial piety plays a core, central role in the filial piety and gratitude of children and grandchildren towards their grandparents and parents; loyalty plays a vital role in the task of establishing and maintaining family happiness, and tolerance is the premise for maintaining order, discipline and family etiquette with the viewpoint of "warm inside, peaceful outside." For that reason, in Cho-bap Kôn-chau, it is taught that: "Disrespecting one's mother goes against the Buddha's teachings; No matter how lowly a person is, he or she will not abandon the love of his or her parents; a person's words are longer

than a path; rice left for many years will spoil”^[20].

The Palm-leaf scriptures always advise and remind people to practice and cultivate virtue, especially each individual, because each good individual creates a good community and family, and only exemplary models can build a civilized society.

Regarding social community relations, when talking about the Khmer community or Khmer society, we are talking about a community of people with a lifestyle of solidarity, mutual love in a spirit of empathy and close symbiosis. This has been reflected throughout the long-term settlement and living in the Southern region. During that process, the Khmer community not only took the spirit of equality and democracy as the top principle in establishing social order but also promoted the spirit of “Solidarity, mutual love” in building and developing society. This is considered an outstanding value and a good tradition in the lifestyle of the Khmer community because it is the main element that determines the existence and development of a community of people with a typical lifestyle in cultural isolation. Khmer proverb says: “Sound tells us the language, character tells us the family; Voice represents ethnicity, character represents race”^[20] to express the pride and national pride of the Khmer community during the process of settling in the new land. Therefore, thanks to maximizing the spirit of solidarity and mutual love in labor production, the construction and stabilization of society become more favorable. Khmer proverbs often teach: “Do not eat your fill alone, without considering others; when people are hungry and suffering, let them eat their fill”^[20]. Sophia-sat also always reminds us:

“Nhiêch cho - ngay min sơ - mơ bon pho - ôl chích”

(Rough translation: Distant relatives are not as good as close neighbors)

“Kim bếch chất đon eng min bay”

(Rough translation: A person cannot live in isolation without relying on anyone)^[18].

With the intention of teaching and reminding about the spirit of solidarity, living for each other and not separating in any circumstances, because that is the truth, the life experience that the ancients have summarized about the value of life, of the spirit of mutual love, the value that has shaped a sustainable Khmer society to this day.

Fourth, the Palm-leaf scriptures advise people to live sincerely, slowly, and humbly. Based on the reality of life,

it has been shown that the essential condition to ensure a connected, happy, and healthy life is the value of humility and sincerity. Without humility and modesty, there certainly cannot be genuine sincerity, and of course, it is impossible to maintain any relationship in communication and behavior. Likewise, in Khmer society, the ancients talked a lot. They paid much attention to a sincere, slow, and humble lifestyle to teach people to live moderately and gently and to form good moral character for each individual. The most evident proof of this is the simple lifestyle, not competing, not being afraid of conflict or extravagance, waste of the Khmer people’s social life. Accordingly, all the wealth created by the Khmer people is obtained through honest and hard work, and most of that wealth is used for charity, temple worship, and temple building.

Moreover, the Khmer people are cautious in their relationships and pay great attention to their words. They start and talk gently and slowly, avoiding gossip, bad things, and things that can affect themselves, their families, their clans, and especially the image of the village. Because the Khmer always understands that deception is a sin and a violation of the village’s ethical rules, it affects the image of the whole community. Therefore, the Khmer avoid gossip and scandal; they live honestly, slowly, and humbly, considering it a tool, a guideline for building a good lifestyle. There is a saying: “Tho-êk muôi chia kho-êc-đóp” (One crow becomes ten crows - criticizing the habit of making up stories and bragging) or “Châcht chia tê-vô-tôt, mocht chia te-vo-da” (Tevotot’s stomach, Tevoda’s mouth or Buddha’s snake-like heart and mouth - Criticizing the habit of lying, using sweet words to deceive)^[18].

In addition, to remind and advise people to live sincerely and modestly, in Satra Cho-bap Kon-Chau, it is taught that:

“Nis kir chơ-bấp krom

Pro Sơ uddom Dòng mean neak phoong

Preur oun lum tuorm

Kom bey mean chho-koan

Prach nha bom phon.”

(Roughly translated: This is the law under

The noble content used to advise people

It would help if you were humble

Do not be a thug)

Wisdom is still better^[19].

These are considered valuable teachings with the implication of advising children always to be gentle and polite, not to lie or deceive anyone, even in the most diminutive relationship, and to maintain good harmony with everyone. Therefore, in the law of teaching children (Satra Chơ-bấp Kôn-chau), the ancients paid great attention and were careful in the way of communication and always advised people to cherish and preserve relationships by living humbly, gently, and sincerely with those around them to create beautiful values in life. This is a typical moral value, representing the character and behavioral culture of the Khmer community. This has contributed to shaping a community of people with an honest and peaceful lifestyle throughout building and developing society over the past centuries.

Fifth, the Palm-leaf scriptures remind people to protect the ecological environment. With the tradition of being wet rice farmers, the ecological environment is a solid spiritual support and a significant influence on the typical production method of community life. From the early days of the presence and implementation of the lifestyle in the South until now, the Khmer community has consistently shown that they are a community with a close and harmonious lifestyle in compatibility and symbiosis with the natural environment. This is considered a prominent feature in the cultural life of the Khmer community.

To have a positive attitude in adapting quickly to the natural environment, it is clear that the foundation of Buddhist teachings greatly influences the thinking and lifestyle of the Khmer community in the concept of ecological ethics. Accordingly, from rituals and Buddhist stories describing the universe and humans, the Khmer people in the South have concretized this by using forms of worship associated with elements of the natural environment that are directly related to human life and agricultural production activities to teach people. In which all elements belonging to nature, such as trees, land, and water sources, are governed and regulated by the gods. From the legends and stories in Khmer folklore that mention the natural world, such as the origin of the universe and all species, the story of rain and wind, the sun - the moon, the story of Nieng, Me Khata, the tale of Ria-hu to the great traditional festivals such as Chol Chnam Thmay or Ok Om Bok or the stories associated with rivers, ponds, swamps and mountains and forests have demonstrated the sacredness of the natural world in the lifestyle and thinking of the Khmer

community. The Khmer believe that: “The natural world always has souls because the gods reside there.” For that reason, Southern Buddhism strictly prohibits the killing of living creatures in the living world, as well as limiting and avoiding damage to natural resources. This is considered a primary convention of Buddhist teachings in ecological ethics education to advise and remind believers to protect the natural environment and ensure that the resources used are always rich and abundant. This has strongly influenced the thinking and lifestyle of the Khmer community in the process of conquering and transforming nature in the Southern region. During that process, the Khmer always showed a reserved, respectful, and moderate attitude in exploiting products from the natural environment to help organize and implement life smoothly and in a harmonious connection with the ecological environment.

Imbued with the view that ecological ethics have great significance for human life, up to now, on major festivals of the year, such as Chol Chnam Thmay, Ok Om Bok, or agricultural festivals (such as going to the fields, harvesting agricultural products), the Khmer community always conducts rituals of praying and giving thanks to express their respect to heaven and earth and the gods who have blessed and bestowed good things for a whole life. Khmer folk songs say:

God Prac In, please bless us.

God Maha Brum, please come down to help;

Please let rain fall and flood the fields.

Breathe! Breathe!

Wealth and longevity come to us.

Buddhism has permeated everyone

The fields of heaven and earth, The efforts of people.

Breathe! Breathe!

A downpour: Happiness will take us to Nirvana.

(Song of praying for rain)^[18].

In general, the entire content of the Palm-leaf scriptures reflects a profound philosophy of life. It is a set of scriptures focusing mainly on educating human morality and helping people build good moral relationships. In particular, what can be seen in the entire content of the Satra is the profound but close moral advice, which is genuinely linked to human life so that it is deeply ingrained in the consciousness of the whole community as a set of standard rules of conduct in Khmer society. Moreover, originating from the viewpoints

and principles in educating human morality, the Palm-leaf Sutra has contributed to forming a positive and progressive concept of life in building and developing society. This has contributed to creating a typical lifestyle in the cultural isolation of the Khmer people in the South throughout the long process of living together until today.

3.6. The Current Situation of Preserving and Developing the Palm-Leaf Scriptures in An Giang in Recent Times

About the Crafting Technique

After a long time, the crafting technique of the Palm-leaf scriptures has been almost forgotten in the Khmer Buddhist community in An Giang due to many factors:

First, the source of raw materials is scarce. As is known, the primary material for crafting the Palm-leaf scriptures is the palm-leaf. Creating “paper” from the palm leaf must go through many stages. At the same time, in recent times, the exploitation of mountains for farming and road construction for tourism has affected the number of palm trees. Combined with the limited palm trees and the difficulty in processing Buong leaves, the “paper” made from palm trees has become scarce. Monks who want to engrave scriptures must buy palm leaves from Cambodia;

Second, only a few know how to engrave palm-leaf scriptures. Before 2023, in An Giang, only the head monk Chau Ty (Soai So pagoda, Tri Ton) knew how to carve palm-leaf sutras. Training people to carve sutras has recently been given attention, but the number still needs to grow. Carving sutras requires people to know Buddhist sutras, especially sutras written in Pali and ancient Khmer. In addition, carving sutras requires patience and hard work to create sutras that are both aesthetically valuable and culturally and religiously meaningful.

Regarding the form of use and teaching

Currently, very few people know how to carve Palm-leaf scriptures in An Giang. Most monks in pagodas in the Tri Ton and Tinh Bien districts need to learn how to carve sutras on palm leaves. Not to mention, the carving technique requires a long time of learning and practicing, and the issue of understanding the content of this type of sutra is also critical. Most Palm-leaf scriptures are carved in Pali; some still use ancient Khmer script, but many use both in the same book. This causes much difficulty for Buddhists who want

to learn Buddhist sutras from Palm-leaf scriptures.

Regarding statistics and storage

According to the survey, most pagodas still need help grasping how the number of palm-leaf scriptures they store has changed over time (the previous and current numbers). Only when the competent authority conducts an inventory will the number of Palm-leaf scriptures be announced. At the same time, the storage of Palm-leaf scriptures currently still has many shortcomings:

First, Palm-leaf scriptures are easily damaged by termites and insects. Palm leaves are more flexible and less susceptible to termites than other types of leaves that can be used to carve Buddhist sutras, such as Thốt Nốt leaves and cau leaves. However, at some pagodas such as Mỹ Á Pagoda (Tinh Bien district), Sa Lon Pagoda (Tri Ton district), and Bung Pagoda (Tri Ton district), due to poor preservation and lack of storage methods to avoid termites and insect infestation, several sutras have been damaged;

Second, palm-leaf scriptures were lost during the storage process. Regarding storage, pagodas store Palm-leaf scriptures and other sutras, causing confusion and needing more quantity control. In addition, moving sutras from one place to another without management is also one of the causes of loss.

Regarding conservation and development activities

Along with the planning of organizing classes on carving letters on palm leaves, the Department of Home Affairs of An Giang province has requested the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism to accept the preparation of a dossier to nominate the palm-leaf scriptures into the List of documents under the “Memory of the World Program” of UNESCO. Accordingly, in 2014, the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of An Giang province prepared a dossier to nominate the palm-leaf scriptures to the List of documents under the “Memory of the World Program” of UNESCO. However, the nomination dossier encountered some difficulties in the nomination criteria, leading to the nomination of the palm-leaf scriptures into the List of documents under the above program that needs to be implemented. By 2017, the palm-leaf scriptures were officially recognized as a National Intangible Cultural Heritage. The Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of An Giang province has established a provincial management board to preserve and maintain them long-term. The Department has also proactively coordinated

with the Museum of Cultures of Vietnam's Ethnic Groups and the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences to implement conservation measures.

3.7. Solutions and Recommendations for Preserving and Developing the Palm-Leaf Scriptures in An Giang in the Coming Time

In reality, if we consider and recognize the Palm-leaf scriptures as a rare type of document and consider them as cultural heritage values, the conservation work of this type needs to be built scientifically and by actual conditions.

First, inventory, survey, and research work

Inventory of Palm-leaf scriptures is the first step and fundamental research activity to grasp the total quantity or a representative part of the quantity in An Giang province. From there, we can proceed with the next steps of classification and evaluation based on the initial accurate results. Identifying and determining the value of Palm-leaf scriptures is a necessary research activity to accurately determine the name (including the official and local names), type of heritage, cultural subject, cultural space, characteristics, and historical and cultural values of Palm-leaf scriptures. In addition, there should be scientific tasks related to the study of palm-leaf scriptures, their origin, meaning, and position in the palm-leaf scripture system of Southeast Asia.

Second, continue to expand palm-leaf scripture carving classes.

Pagodas need to focus on opening palm-leaf scripture carving classes for Khmer Buddhists. In particular, classes should be organized to teach and practice regularly, focusing on the quality of students when completing the course. It is possible to study the scientific teaching program framework that is suitable for current conditions if necessary. In addition, local authorities need to focus on supporting teaching conditions for artisans teaching scripture carving. Thus, it is essential to equip suitable teaching facilities, support teaching costs, and purchase materials. At the same time, management agencies must conduct statistics on the number of incoming students and check the quality of outgoing students.

Third, organizing storage

Pagodas need to focus on storage work. It is necessary to classify the Palm-leaf scripture for easy monitoring. At the same time, regular inspection of the quantity and form of

all Palm-leaf scripture should be paid attention to. Note the inspection report; if there is any loss or damage, clearly state the cause and report it to the competent authority for timely resolution. People's Committees of communes and districts need to propose support for storage cabinets for pagodas. At the same time, it is necessary to coordinate with insect prevention units to spray to protect the assets of the Palm-leaf scripture. The most urgent thing is to issue regulations on conservation work, stipulating that the Palm-leaf scripture is a source of documents and heritage owned by the state.

Fourth, disseminating the value of the Palm-leaf scripture.

It is necessary to organize propaganda and raise awareness about the importance of Palm-leaf scripture. From there, individuals and organizations, especially Khmer Buddhists, understand that this is a precious and rare source of Khmer Southern Buddhism that our ancestors have painstakingly created and preserved until today. Pagodas must continue to promote the total value of the Palm-leaf scripture by bringing it into the community and participating in religious activities. In particular, continue to include it in sermons at ceremonies, festivals, and teaching to Buddhists. In addition to some of the above solutions, authorities need to pay special attention to preserving and promoting the value of the Palm-leaf scripture. At the same time, the most practical methods of maintaining palm varieties must be applied to ensure the source of raw materials for carving sutras. Accordingly, surveying and introducing palm varieties to areas with suitable living conditions is necessary. Provide financial support for pagodas to purchase palm varieties or pre-processed palm leaves.

4. Discussion

The Khmer palm-leaf manuscripts represent an invaluable cultural asset, embodying spiritual, historical, literary, and artistic significance for the Khmer people in the South, especially in An Giang province. These manuscripts are considered the soul of Khmer culture, reflecting the community's memory and Buddhist philosophy.

Historical Value

The palm-leaf manuscripts serve as a key historical source for understanding Southern Buddhism and the Khmer people's development. They originated as a medium for com-

piling Buddhist teachings, transitioning from oral to written tradition during the fourth Buddhist compilation. The texts document Buddha Shakyamuni's sermons, the Tripitaka, and teachings advocating morality and human values. These scriptures also preserve Khmer folklore and societal insights, providing rich material for studying Khmer history and Southern Buddhism's influence in An Giang.

Literary Value

Khmer literature, recorded in palm-leaf manuscripts, bridges folk and scholarly traditions. The texts encompass fables, folk tales, and philosophical poetry, integrating Buddhist ethics with Khmer cultural narratives. Idioms, proverbs, and family songs in the manuscripts convey moral teachings and life philosophies, reinforcing community values and passing on ancestral wisdom.

Cultural Value

These manuscripts are vital for studying ancient Khmer and Pali scripts. They use Pali for Buddhist teachings and Khmer for stylistic elements, offering insights into linguistic history. The meticulous carvings on the palm leaves, including sutra titles, dates, and content, illustrate the Khmer community's artistic and spiritual dedication. In a globalized context, they attract international interest in Khmer culture and heritage.

Artistic and Craftsmanship Value

The creation of palm-leaf manuscripts is a highly skilled process, requiring proficiency in ancient scripts, artistic precision, and immense patience. These artifacts demonstrate the creativity and technical prowess of Khmer artisans, highlighting the intricate relationship between spiritual devotion and craftsmanship.

In summary, the Khmer palm-leaf manuscripts of An Giang are a profound testament to the Khmer people's heritage, reflecting their religious, cultural, and artistic achievements. They continue to serve as a repository of knowledge, ethics, and identity, offering invaluable resources for research and cultural preservation.

5. Conclusions

The Khmer palm-leaf manuscripts in An Giang province are a remarkable testament to the cultural, spiritual, and linguistic heritage of the Khmer people. These manuscripts not only preserve Buddhist teachings, litera-

ture, and life philosophies but also reflect a critical historical shift in documenting and safeguarding knowledge before the widespread use of paper. Their content embodies the beliefs, moral values, and intellectual achievements of the Khmer community, while their form showcases the skill and craftsmanship of ancient Khmer artisans. Currently, these manuscripts are preserved in Khmer pagodas across the Tri Ton and Tinh Bien districts, continuing to serve as a vital source of knowledge, containing Buddhist scriptures, folk tales, calendars, and other valuable records of Khmer culture. Although these manuscripts hold immense cultural and linguistic value, they face numerous threats from environmental factors, the limited understanding of ancient scripts, and the intricate craftsmanship required to create them, which pose significant challenges to their preservation. Preserving these manuscripts requires coordinated efforts, including conservation techniques, education about the historical and linguistic importance of these texts, and their integration into modern Khmer cultural and religious practices.

The Khmer palm-leaf manuscripts in An Giang province, Vietnam, are an important part of the cultural and linguistic heritage of the Khmer people. These manuscripts serve as a precious treasure that preserves the traditions, spiritual beliefs, and intellectual achievements of the Khmer community, all recorded on palm leaves. To preserve the Khmer palm-leaf manuscripts in An Giang, the following specific strategies can be implemented: Develop specialized conservation programs; Invest in conservation infrastructure; Utilize digitization technology; Organize workshops and classes on Khmer cultural heritage; Encourage scientific research; Enable Khmer artisans' participation in preservation; Provide financial and legal support; Facilitate community involvement in heritage protection. By implementing these strategies, not only can the Khmer palm-leaf manuscripts be preserved, but they can also contribute to maintaining and promoting the cultural values of the Khmer community for future generations.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, T.C.N., N.H.T., N.V.S., and H.T.S.; methodology, N.H.T., N.V.S., and H.T.S.; software, N.H.T., and T.C.N.; validation, T.C.N., and N.V.S.; formal analysis, N.H.T., and H.T.S.; investigation, N.H.T., and T.C.N.; data

curation, T.C.N., and N.V.S.; writing - original draft preparation, H.T.S., and N.H.T.; writing - review and editing, T.C.N., N.H.T., N.V.S., and H.T.S.; visualization, T.C.N., and T.NH.; supervision, H.T.S.; project administration, T.C.N., N.H.T., N.V.S., and H.T.S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study may be obtained on request from the corresponding author.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank Vinh University and An Giang University (AGU), Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City (VNU-HCM) for supporting this research

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Tuan, P.V., Le, V.T.P., Ly, N.K., et al., 2023. Citizens' satisfaction with the service quality of Khmer civil servants in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*. 50(4), 1318–1329. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.50412-1130>
- [2] Ly, N.T., Nha, T.H.N., Tuan, N.V., 2022. Conservation and promotion of the palm-leaf manuscripts of the Khmer people in An Giang. *Van Lang University Science Journal*. 36, 54–62.
- [3] Yu, D., Li, X., Sun, S., et al., 2024. The effect of traditional processing craft on the hygroscopicity of palm leaf manuscripts. *Heritage Science*. 12(280), 2–12. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40494-024-01402-2>
- [4] Zhang, W., Wang, S., Guo, H., 2024. Influence of Relative Humidity on the Mechanical Properties of Palm Leaf Manuscripts: Short-Term Effects and Long-Term Aging. *Molecules*. 29(5644), 2–16. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/molecules29235644>
- [5] Raghavan, S.V., Vasanth Kumar Mehta, R., Srinivasu, G., 2021. Palm leaf manuscripts: Saaswathaiswaryam the eternal treasure of India. *CSI Transactions ICT*. 9(1), 31–36. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40012-020-00325-0>
- [6] Trang, T.H., 2014. The influence of Southern Buddhism on the language, literature, and art of the Khmer people in Southern Vietnam. *Journal of Social Sciences of Vietnam*. 79(6), 95.
- [7] Le Huong, 1969. Vietnamese of Khmer origin. General Publishing House: Saigon, Vietnam.
- [8] Narenthiran, R., Saravanan, G., Rammunujam, K., 2012. The digitization of palm leaf manuscripts. In *Proceedings of the National Conference on Innovative Library Services in Digital Era, SALIS 2012*, 19–21 January 2012; pp. 457–462. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13140/2.1.2016.6084>
- [9] Mon, T.V., 2016. Palm leaf manuscripts of the Cham people in Vietnam. *Studies on Asia Series V*. 1(1), 122–137.
- [10] Thich, V.G., 2012. An overview of the transmission history of the scriptures and the features of the Nikaya Sutras. Retrieved March 15, 2021, from Buddhism Today. Available from: <http://www.daophatngaynay.com/vn/kinh-dien/pali/12329-khai-quat-lich-su-truyen-bakinh-dien-va-nhung-dac-diem-cua-kinh-tang-nikaya.html>
- [11] Thien Minh, 2010. The history of classics and evangelization. Retrieved March 15, 2021, from Buddhism Today. Available from: <http://www.daophatngaynay.com/vn/kinh-dien/van-hoc-kd/5439-Lich-su-Ket-tap-Kinhdien-va-Truyen-giao.html>
- [12] Nguyen, M.C., 2008. Southern Khmer Buddhism (Looking back on issues). Religion Publishing House: Hanoi, Vietnam.
- [13] Nguyen, N.T., Do, T.H., 2023. Khmer Southern Buddhism in An Giang in socio-economic development and building a new culture. Available from: <https://chuaxaloi.vn/thong-tin/phet-giao-nam-tong-khmer-an-giang/3148.html> (cited 22 April 2024).
- [14] Surinta, O., Rapeeporn, C., 2008. Image segmentation of historical handwriting from palm leaf manuscripts. *International Federation Processing*. 288, 182–189.
- [15] Nguyen, V.L., Nguyen, T.T., 2021. Palm-leaf Sutra: Intangible cultural heritage of the Khmer people in An Giang. *HCMCOUJS - Social Sciences*. 16(1), 97–107.
- [16] Nguyen, V.T., 2022. Palm-leaf scriptures - a philosophy of moral education for the spiritual life of the Khmer community in the South. *Journal of Religious Studies*.

- 6(222), 3–23.
- [17] An Giang Department of Internal Affairs, 2023. Report on the survey of rare documents in Tri Ton and Tinh Bien districts, November 2023. Available from: <http://sonoivu.angiang.gov.vn/> (cited 18 February 2024).
- [18] Truong Luu, 1993. *Khmer culture in the Mekong Delta*. National Culture Publishing House: Hanoi, Vietnam. pp. 215–216.
- [19] Hoang, T., 2013. *Satra Chobáp*, customary law written on palm leaves of the Khmer people in the South. *An Giang Culture - History Journal*. 30.
- [20] Nguyen, T.K.T., 2014. Studying the content of Khmer proverbs (through comparison with Vietnamese proverbs). *Ho Chi Minh City University of Education Science Journal*. 97.