



Young Khmer Women’s Expectation on Their Future Spouse

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Published Online: 22 June 2022</p> <p>Corresponding author: Nguyen Thi Hue</p>	<p>Society is constantly moving and changing. Criteria for choosing a life partner is very important for each person and so are Khmer girls in Vietnam. To find out the criteria for choosing a life partner of Khmer women today, the author uses the survey questionnaires and in-depth interviews with 20 Khmer female second-year students in School of Vietnam Southern Khmer Language, Culture, and Arts, Tra Vinh University. The results show that 80% of interviewees think that marriage is important in life, 65% set up their criteria for choosing a life partner with a stable career. 75% share the same opinion that those who have been monastics are knowledgeable, virtuous, have an altruistic, tolerant heart, have mature thoughts, and have a deep understanding of Khmer morality and customs.</p>
<p>KEYWORDS: Marriage Spouse; Right Man; Khmer Tradition; Khmer Young Women</p>	

1. INTRODUCTION

Vietnamese society moves from traditional to modern, from less developed to more developed. This results in obvious social changes such as production techniques, migration, urbanization, rural de-agriculturalization... The Law on Marriage and Family affirms the individual free willing in marriage and divorce, meanwhile the Law on Gender Equality, the Law on Prevention of Family Violence... demonstrate an international commitment to gender equality, eliminating discrimination against women. These things have direct impacts on family relationships, including making decision in marriage and life partner choice. The criteria for choosing a life partner with the desired characteristics, qualifications of Vietnamese youth in general and Khmer youth in particular have changed remarkably.

Marriage is a socio-cultural phenomenon that reflects ethnic cultural characteristics and is closely related to the entire social system. Research on marriage and criteria for choosing a life partner of Khmer women today is essentially a study of the traditional socio-cultural values of the Khmer people and the changes arising in the process of cultural contact with ethnic other groups.

Young Khmer people, especially girls, when entering the age of love and marriage, do not always have a clear and rigid "standard" for their choice of life partners. A lot of random factors along with psychological characteristics govern their choice. But not so that the predestined is due to fate and purely coincidental. In the Khmer concept, the full maturity

of a person is marked by marriage. Except for monks, a man without a wife, a woman without a husband easily arises the gossip of society. For the Khmer, family is a constituent element of their community, so marriage is not only important but also greatly significant to the kinship structure among the living groups. When choosing a bride or groom, Khmer people attach great importance to what family or lineage that person comes from. Therefore, although influenced by Buddhist thought, having an enormous sympathy in the relationship between parents and children, Khmer tradition values that the marriage of children is largely determined by parents. However, today with the material and spiritual progress of the nation and the world, the majority of young Khmer people, especially girls, are less dependent on the arrangement of the family. Instead, they come to their spouse with their own witness, point of view, and standards.

Khmer female girls are so vulnerable with different effects of the social progress. Also, they are with a high percentage of the population in the community and unavoidably influenced by both traditional and modern perceptions, psychology and behavior.

So, the questions arise: "What are young Khmer women's views on marriage?". The Khmer here I mean ethnic people in Vietnam. "What are the criteria for choosing a life partner for young Khmer women today?" What do they think when they have a partner who used to be a monk?" According to Khmer customs, becoming a monk is a respectable manner to men when they grow up. The time in pagodas will bring them

valuable lesson on life, on morals, and knowledge. This explains the reason why monks are considered as sacred, kind and benevolent. In the past, getting married with a man who used to be a monk made the girl’s parents proud. However, today’s social trends change, girls can also go to school, work, and socialize widely, not confined to the family framework as in the past. Therefore, finding out the evaluation of their choice for a life partner who used to be a monk is to identify and predict some changes that will inevitably take place in Khmer customs and culture. Another thing worth noting is that Khmer culture is a culture imbued with religious rites and rituals, once the monks are no longer appreciated by the community, it gradually leads to the restriction of people entering the temple to practice. Instead, Khmer youth will go to school and work. The absence of monks in the temple signaled a decline in the importance of traditional culture.

This research is conducted with questionnaires among 20 Khmer female students in Tra Vinh University. They are sophomores in the Degree of Khmer Language course.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Khmer population in Vietnam now are about 1.319.652 people (Tổng cục Thống kê Việt Nam, 2019), concentrated in the South, most of them live by farming. Khmer people worship Arak (Protector god), Neakta (Guard god), Pro back (soul); and especially, over 90% of Khmer people follow Theravada Buddhism. Therefore, the rituals of the Khmer people, especially those related to the life cycle, are governed by the views of the Theravada Buddhism (Trần Văn Bôn, 2002). There are systematize traditional marriage concepts, rules and rituals, and point out current changes in Khmer marriage (Đặng Thị Kim Oanh, 2008), (Thạch Xuyên Ba, 2015).

Discussing more about marriage in Khmer families in the Mekong Delta, as well as some analysis and descriptions of traditional marriage and changes in family structure, marriage concept has been mentioned by Nguyen Hung Khu (Nguyễn Hùng Khu, 2012).

A study on choosing a life partner of Vietnamese students in general found that the average age of marriage is 27.3 for men and 24.3 for women. The common model of marriage decision is that parents and children decide together in the form of "children decide in consultation with parents". Regarding specific orientations related to future spouses, the research has also shown that more than half of students are not very interested in the educational level of their future spouse, however, the percentage quite a high percentage of students, when asked, expect their future spouse to have a stable job and nearly half of the students hope their future spouse's income to be higher than theirs. Regarding the character and moral qualities of the future spouse, most

students want their future spouse to have three important qualities, which are “psychological, caring, sharing”, “faithful” and “responsible to the family”. In addition, most students prefer their future spouse to have an appearance that is not too beautiful, but good-looking. In addition, the similarity in culture, lifestyle, and family situation is also a criterion that students pay attention to when choosing a future life partner (Võ Nữ Hải Yến, 2019). Therefore, more than ever, choosing a suitable life partner for young people needs to be given great attention, considering it as a core factor to build a sustainable marriage and family in the young generation. In general, most of the research works on Khmer people in the Mekong Delta have more or less mentioned Khmer customs, festivals, marriage and family structure. Particularly on the issue of criteria for choosing a life partner, so far there has been no in-depth and comprehensive research, from theory to practical surveys.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Rational

In order to evaluate the current criteria for choosing a life partner of Khmer women, the research focuses on three main concepts: (1) The role of marriage in life (2) The criteria for choosing a life partner of Khmer young girls (3) Their views when they have a partner who has been a monk.

3.2. Scope

The object of the research is the Khmer female students of the second year of class DA18NNK of the Department of Khmer Southern Language, Culture, and Literature of Tra Vinh University. This is the unique Faculty that deliver specific diploma specialties related to Khmer community in the Mekong Delta, such as Khmer language, Pedagogy Khmer Literature, Culture, Khmer Art,...

3.3. Database

The reason why choosing research subjects is Khmer female students of class DA18NNK instead of choosing other classes, because this is the class with the largest number of students, including 10 male students and 20 female students from different provinces in the Mekong Delta: Tra Vinh, Kien Giang, Soc Trang, Ca Mau, Can Tho, An Giang, Hau Giang, Bac Lieu.

Surveys by questionnaires and in-depth interviews are employed. The study conducted a survey of 20 questionnaires for female students. The survey sample is randomly selected by place of residence and all have the same educational level and religion (they are in the same class and Khmer ethnic people): 9 Tra Vinh students (45%), 5 Kien Giang students (25%), 4 Soc Trang students (20%), 1 An Giang (5%), 1 Hau Giang (5%).

4. THE RESULTS

4.1. The role of marriage in life

According to the research results, there are 16 students (80%) think that marriage is very important in life and 4 students

(20%) think that marriage is not important in life. When in-depth interviews, the participants said that marriage is important to life because marriage will reduce the burden of life for them, sharing and helping each other in work and life. And for those of you who think that marriage is not important in life because they feel that when they are married, they will not be able to control themselves, are always bound to responsibilities, and be controlled by all activities in life.

4.2. The criteria for choosing a life partner

After consulting the research papers on life selection criteria, I have come up with 4 criteria for choosing a life partner (Educated people, people who have been monks, rich people, people with stable jobs) in the survey questionnaire for them to make a choice. Research results show that 2 students (10%) choose someone with education, 5 people (25%) choose someone who has been a monk, no student (0%) chooses a rich person, up to 13 friends (65%) choose someone with a stable career. Thus, it can be seen that although each person has different criteria for choosing a life partner, the majority (65%) choose someone with a stable career to be their future life partner. And the rich are not part of their criteria for choosing a life partner.

4.3. The point of view when having a life partner who has been a monk

According to the research results: 15 students (75%) share the same opinion that having a partner who has been a monk is knowledgeable, virtuous, altruistic, tolerant, and thoughtful. The ones who used to be monks became mature and deep understanding of the morality, customs and habits of the Khmer people; there are 3 friends (15%) think that it doesn't matter if your partner is a monk, they just need someone who is compatible, sincere and loves and respects each other; There are 2 students (10%) whose opinion about people who have been monks is: “Those who have been monastics when they get married will teach their spouses moral knowledge, making them have a better life. happy, quiet, no quarrels”. Research results show that, although each person has different views about their life partner who has been a monk, most of them (75%) still value the monk’s life behavior and knowledge. This brings a positive signal because the traditional marriage view of the Khmer is still maintained by the younger generation today.

5. CONCLUSION

Love – marriage and family is a trio that are closely related to each other. True love is the foundation of marriage and family. To love and be loved is a human right. For us to come together with a happy love, it requires us to go through many difficulties, hardships, many sacrifices to get to know each other and then come together. And the same goes for Khmer girls, they also go through the process of learning, sacrificing, political opinions and standards to choose a life partner who can accompany them through the storms of life to reach the happiness. For them marriage is very important to their lives

(80%), they have their own standards and criteria to choose their life partner, but the core, the most desirable thing is to have a life partner who has a stable career to build a family with. Khmer women (75%) also wish that if they have a partner who has been a monk, they will be very proud and respectful of their partner, because they understand that those who have been monks are understanding people, knowledgeable, virtuous, altruistic, tolerant, thoughtful, and has a deep understanding of the Khmer's morality, customs and habits.

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