

HO CHI MINH NATIONAL ACADEMY OF POLITICS

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AGARWOOD CULTURE OF VIETNAM

SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL THESIS

SECTOR: CULTURAL STUDIES

Code: 9229040

HANOI - 2024

**The thesis was completed at
Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics**

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**The thesis will be defended before the Thesis Judging Committee
at Academy level meeting in Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics**

At 14:00 on April 3, 2024

**The thesis can be found at the National Library of Vietnam
and Library of Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics**

INTRODUCTION

1. Reasons for choosing the topic

Agarwood is a valuable natural resource found in Vietnam. Vietnamese agarwood is known for its high quality and quantity, making it the most economically valuable type of agarwood in the world. Historical records and modern statistics prove that Vietnamese agarwood is highly sought after worldwide, making up a significant portion of the global agarwood trade. It is important to protect the brand, recognize its value, and affirm the identity of Vietnamese agarwood products in the context of international integration and national development. In the era of globalisation, it is crucial to highlight cultural values that are uniquely Vietnamese and able to compete globally.

Vietnamese agarwood products hold not only great material value but also encompass a diverse intangible cultural space that includes aspects such as culture, history, religion, music, art, literature, aromatherapy, medicinal herbs, cuisine, handicrafts, diplomacy, and economics. Agarwood holds unique tangible and intangible cultural values and is a noble, pure Vietnamese product, representing Vietnamese cultural identity in the new era.

Vietnamese people have known and used agarwood for thousands of years, and it is present in many aspects of Vietnamese social life. However, Vietnamese people's understanding of agarwood culture is still scattered and unsystematic. Over time, the art of enjoying agarwood in Vietnam has somewhat faded due to the impacts of history. Therefore, it is the responsibility of cultural workers to affirm cultural depth and preserve and restore Vietnamese agarwood cultural heritage, while showing the scientific value of agarwood cultural research in Vietnam.

In the last 30 years, the Vietnamese agarwood industry and Vietnamese agarwood culture have been restored and have made significant developments. Agarwood is now associated with culture and is gradually becoming a symbol of Vietnamese culture.

For the above reasons, the PhD candidate has chosen Vietnamese Agarwood Culture as the primary research object for their thesis. The agarwood culture is based on theories, arguments, and perspectives of cultural science, and it has been chosen due to its topicality, urgency, and scientificity. The thesis emphasizes the "ownership" of this agarwood culture, not just its meaning "in" Vietnam.

2. Research purposes and tasks

2.1. Research purposes

The thesis researches the formation of agarwood culture and identifies, and affirms that agarwood culture has been accompanying and associated with the Vietnamese people for thousands of years.

2.2. Research mission

- Clarifying theoretical issues about Vietnamese agarwood culture and identifying issues that need further research and clarification.

- Identifying the basis of the formation of Vietnamese agarwood culture to clarify the natural and basic historical and social conditions that have created Vietnamese agarwood culture from the past to the present.

- Identifying Vietnamese agarwood culture to clarify knowledge about agarwood, and the close relationship between agarwood and Vietnamese culture and people.

- Discussing the role of Vietnamese agarwood culture in the future.

3. Subject and scope of research

3.1. Research subjects

The thesis focuses on the agarwood culture of Vietnam, encompassing the culture of Vietnamese people within Vietnamese territory.

3.2. Research scope

- About space

The research covers the entire country of Vietnam, with a particular focus on the Central region, including Khanh Hoa and Quang Nam. Additionally, the thesis compares and contrasts the relationship between agarwood and people in other countries.

- About time

The research topic systematically explores the Vietnamese agarwood culture in both historical and contemporary contexts, with a starting point determined by the collected documents and an end date of 2022.

- About the subject

The subject of Vietnamese agarwood culture is Vietnamese people in general, but the thesis also references agarwood in other cultures for comparison and contrast..

- About content

The basis of Vietnamese agarwood culture includes natural factors, socio-

historical factors, space, time, and the culture's subject. The thesis identifies the Vietnamese agarwood culture through traditional craft activities, types of art, crafting techniques, religious beliefs, and practices. Finally, the thesis proposes solutions for the development of Vietnamese agarwood culture.

4. Research methodology and methods

4.1. Methodology

The thesis is based on the methodology of Marxism-Leninism and materialist dialectics;

Additionally, the thesis also utilizes methodologies related to cultural research, such as "cultural coordinate system", "cultural characteristics", and "cultural knowledge", to carry out research tasks.

4.2. Research approach and methods

4.2.1. Approach

To implement the research tasks, the PhD student applies an interdisciplinary approach of cultural studies, combined with a specialized approach. The interdisciplinary approach helps PhD students to have a multi-dimensional, comprehensive view of Vietnamese agarwood culture by integrating knowledge and methods from various fields, including cultural studies, cultural sociology, history, political theoretical science, international relations, economics, and more.

The PhD student has been conceiving the topic of the thesis for almost ten years. With the aim of researching more deeply, accurately, and honestly, the student directly participated in all stages of mining, farming, manufacturing, trading, import-export, and other activities related to incense in many localities throughout the country. During this process, the student acquired practical experiences with agarwood, and some of the contents of the thesis come from the student's practical experience.

4.2.2. Research Methods

Research methods used in the thesis include:

- Cultural methods
- Textual methods:
- Interdisciplinary approach to cultural studies:
- Logical - historical method:
- Ethnographic fieldwork method
- Methods of synthesizing and analyzing documents

- In-depth interview method:
- Specific research operations: document collection, statistics, comparison, analysis - synthesis, expert consultation, participant observation,...

5. Theoretical and practical significance

5.1. About theory

- Contributing to affirm the presence and value of Vietnamese agarwood culture.
- Clarifying and deepening cultural theories, especially in studying a specific case of Vietnam.
- Contributing to the search for unique cultural features imbued with Vietnam's national identity, highly appreciated by the international community.

5.2. About practice

- Via in-depth research on agarwood products, this thesis will contribute to adding a unique piece to the Vietnamese national cultural history.
- In the context that the agarwood industry is making new progress in both quality and quantity, research on the history and culture of agarwood will contribute to preserving Vietnamese traditional culture. On the other hand, this research helps to spread the cultural value of Vietnamese agarwood globally.
- Contribute to promoting the development of cultural industry and economic sectors relating to agarwood.

6. Structure of the thesis

Besides the introduction (9 pages), conclusion (2 pages), list of author's published works related to the thesis, list of references (12 pages) and appendices (50 pages), this thesis includes 4 chapters as follows:

- *Chapter 1.* Overview of research situation and theoretical basis (24 pages)
- *Chapter 2.* Foundation for the formation of Vietnamese agarwood culture (41 pages)
- *Chapter 3.* Identifying Vietnamese agarwood culture (58 pages)
- *Chapter 4.* Discussion about Vietnamese agarwood culture (29 pages)

Chapter 1

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH SITUATION AND THEORETICAL BASIS

1.1. Overview of research situation

1.1.1. Research projects related to Vietnamese agarwood culture

It is important to conduct theoretical research on cultural studies and Vietnamese culture to understand the cultural values of Vietnamese Agarwood.

The book "Foundations of Vietnamese Culture" (1998), edited by Tran Quoc Vuong, provides an overview of Vietnamese culture and its basic features, including beliefs, religions, customs, festivals, crafts, food, clothing, housing, art, architecture, and sculpture.

Another book called "Foundations of Vietnamese Culture" (1998) by Tran Ngoc Them explains the formation and development of Vietnamese culture by using a "cultural coordinate system" that includes aspects such as space, time, subject, and theory of cultural characteristics.

The above studies help identify Vietnamese agarwood culture in the history of national culture, determine the methodology to recognize the agarwood culture and propose scientific bases and plans to develop it as an essential part of Vietnamese culture.

Additionally, research works on the history of world culture and civilization, such as "A Brief History of the World" by E.H. Gombrich and "A Brief History of Humanity" by Yuval Noah Harari highlight the importance of culture and civilization in the development of humanity from the past to the present. They demonstrate that the cultural identity of each country and nation plays a crucial role in its development and building, both in the past, present, and future. Thus, developing Vietnamese national culture is not only about preserving old values but also promoting the quintessence of Vietnamese culture to spread it globally in a culturally diverse world.

1.1.2. Research projects on agarwood in Vietnam and in the world

Research on agarwood from a historical and cultural perspective has been conducted in Vietnam for a long time, but the information is mainly scattered across studies on history, literature, Vietnamese culture, regional culture, or other documents. The data on geography, diplomatic relations, medicine, agriculture, forestry, taxes, etc. can be summarized to include studies

on agarwood from a historical, economic, trade, and diplomatic perspective, as well as from a cultural perspective. However, this division is only relative because all sciences have a dialectical relationship and are related to each other.

1.1.2.1. Research on agarwood from a historical perspective

One of the most important works that mention agarwood is "Phu Bien Tap Luc" written by Le Quy Don in the 18th century. In this work, Le Quy Don recorded critical information about the economy and society of Dang Trong, including meticulous information about agarwood. This is also one of the first famous works mentioning the preciousness of Vietnamese agarwood products.

Agarwood was recorded many times in ancient diplomatic events such as tribute, levy books, and between Dai Viet and Ai Lao, Bon Man, and other dynasties in the original document "Dai Viet Complete History". These records show that agarwood is a vital product for Dai Viet's diplomacy.

Apart from the ancient bibliographies mentioned above, many other documents mention agarwood, such as "An Nam chi comb" by Le Tac, "Lich dynasty huong chuan loai chi" by Phan Huy Chu, and the book Frankincense and Myrrh: A Study of the Arabian Incense Trade by Nigel Groom (1981). The article "History of Use and Trade of Agarwood" also provides valuable insights into the history and significance of agarwood.

1.1.2.2. Research on Agarwood from a cultural perspective

Agarwood holds great importance in major religions of the world, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Christianity, Islam, and more. It has a significant spiritual symbolism in the world. Some notable projects that highlight the significance of agarwood are "On Stone and Scroll" by De Gruyter (2011) and the book "Proceedings of the 10th International Congress on the Archeology of the Ancient Near East."

In terms of researching the religion and spirituality of Vietnamese people, several works such as "Vietnamese Customs" by Phan Ke Binh, "Material Civilization of Vietnamese People" and "Human Life Customs" by Phan Cam Thuong, "Vietnamese Tet Festival," "Vietnamese Civilization" by Nguyen Van Huyen, and "Dialogue with the Ancient Civilization of Champa" by Le Dinh Phung mention agarwood and its significance in ancestor worship, worship of Heaven and Earth, and other beliefs of Vietnamese people.

The book "Land of Vietnam, Heaven of the South" (1960) by Thai Van Kiem is a comprehensive historical and cultural work that covers products,

customs, geography, academic traditions, fine customs, and traditions in Vietnamese history. The author dedicates many pages to agarwood and its rarity and uniqueness in both material and spiritual value.

1.1.2.3. Agarwood from the Perspective of economics, trade, diplomacy, agriculture and forestry

Research projects have been conducted to study the best quality Agarwood found in Khanh Hoa, Phu Yen, Quang Nam, and Binh Dinh provinces, which lies within the natural distribution area of Agarwood trees stretching from Nghe An to Phu Quoc. The geological aspects of these areas have also been studied.

Additionally, there are resources available in the form of articles, press releases, and documentaries on Agarwood. Vietnam has an Agarwood Museum in Khanh Hoa that has been built on a large scale to preserve and promote the cultural value of Vietnam's Agarwood heritage.

1.1.2.4. Research on cultures similar to Agarwood

It is evident that Agarwood is a topic of interest in various scientific fields. However, no research on Agarwood Culture has been published so far. To provide a foundation for the thesis research, the PhD student has consulted cultural research projects that deal with similar subjects, such as tea, coffee, and ceramics. These include books like "Chinese Wine" by Ly Tranh Binh (2011) and "History of Tea" by Laura C. Martin (2020), which examine the history and culture of tea from a global perspective, among others.

1.1.3. General evaluation and research problems for the thesis

The books and research works mentioned above are valuable sources of material for graduate students to carry out their thesis. Although these sources are not too rare, there is still a lack of systematic research on Agarwood from a cultural perspective. There are very few separate research works on Agarwood in fields such as history, culture, and economics, and Agarwood is mainly only mentioned in a part or a paragraph of the studies mentioned above. These studies, while scattered and unsystematic, hold great value and are an important source of data to carry out a thesis. When combined into a whole, they offer a panorama of Vietnamese agarwood culture. However, there are still no works in the cultural sector that take Agarwood as the main research object.

The thesis will continue to research the following issues:

- Interpretation of instrumental concepts such as culture, cultural values, local knowledge, folk knowledge, material culture, intangible culture, and more.

- Build a research theory when choosing a cultural research object.

- Research the basis of formation of Vietnamese Agarwood Culture to clarify the natural conditions and basic historical and social conditions that have created Vietnamese Agarwood Culture from past to present.

- Identify Vietnamese Agarwood Culture to clarify knowledge about Agarwood, the close relationship between Agarwood and Vietnamese culture and people.

- Discuss the issues raised for the development of Vietnamese Agarwood Culture at present and in the future in order to prove that Vietnamese Agarwood Culture is an important element affirming Vietnamese cultural identity during the new phase and contributes to enhancing the position of Vietnamese culture in the world.

1.2. Theoretical basis of the thesis

1.2.1. The basic concepts

The thesis focuses on several key concepts, including culture, cultural value, local knowledge, tangible and intangible culture, and Vietnamese agarwood culture.

1.2.2. Research perspectives

The researcher approaches culture from a three-dimensional perspective, which includes cultural subjects (people), cultural space, and cultural time.

From the perspectives on the structure of culture of previous researchers such as Tran Ngoc Them, Tran Quoc Vuong, Chu Xuan Dien,... were inherited in establishing the structure of Vietnamese agarwood culture.

1.2.3. Structure of Vietnamese Agarwood Culture

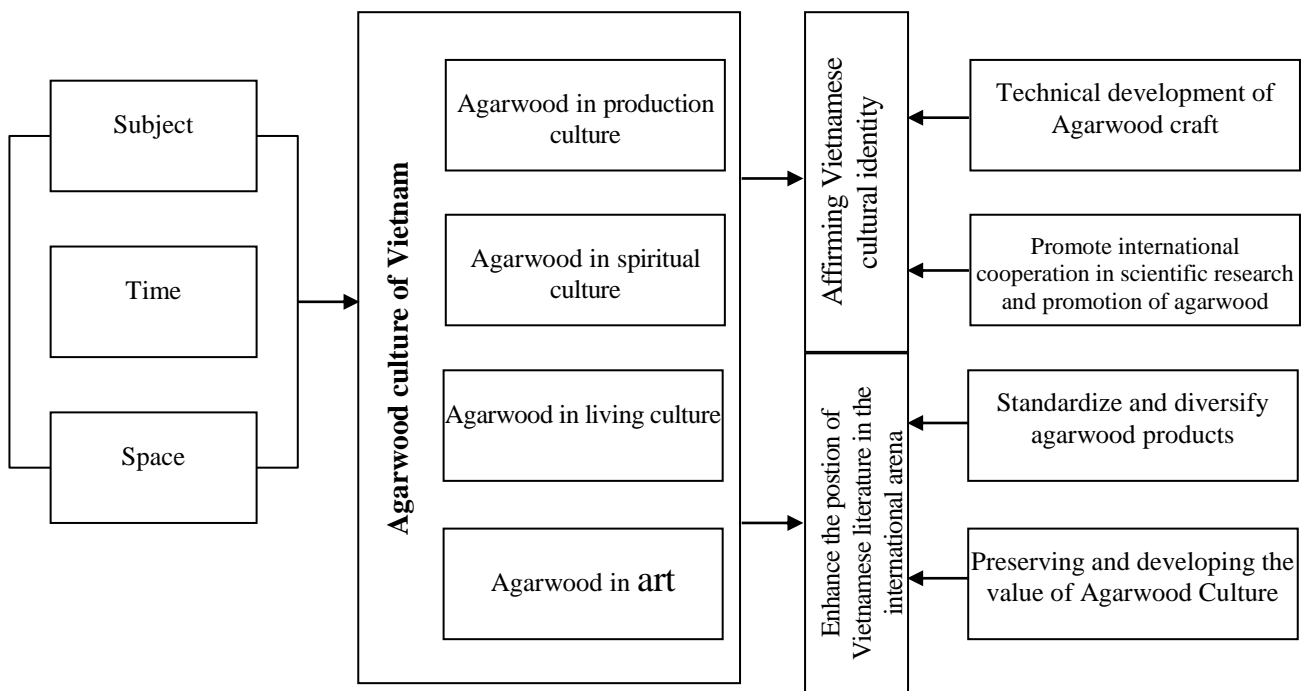
- Production culture/economic culture: knowledge, skills, and arts related to Agarwood exploitation, farming, manufacturing, manipulation, business, and trade.

- Living culture: using Agarwood in costumes, cuisine, medicine, cosmetics, gifts, and diplomacy.

- Spiritual culture: using Agarwood in rituals, worshiping gods, life cycle rituals, sacrifices, Holy Mother and Agarwood Holy Land,...

- Art and culture: Agarwood in poetry, prose, folk songs, folk songs, proverbs, fine arts,...

1.2.4. Analytical framework of the thesis



Summary of chapter 1

There is currently a significant amount of research on culture, covering both theory and practice. Theoretical works provide the foundation for learning about research methods, theories, and the scientific basis for research.

Many scientific research projects, such as those in the fields of culture, history, religion, commerce, and agriculture, mention agarwood. However, agarwood is not usually the main research focus, resulting in limited and unsystematic coverage. Nevertheless, the fact that agarwood is mentioned in many scientific works contributes to multidimensional knowledge about agarwood in different scientific fields.

To date, no research project in cultural studies or related fields, such as cultural management, history, sociology, or Vietnamese studies, have taken agarwood culture as a research focus. This thesis is the first work in cultural studies to investigate agarwood culture.

The thesis uses appropriate cultural research theories to develop research content. The cultural coordinate system theory and cultural characteristics theory play an essential role in solving the research task of the thesis based on the theoretical framework, which aims to establish and identify Vietnamese agarwood culture.

Chapter 2

BASIS FOR FORMATION OF VIETNAM AGARWOOD CULTURE

2.1. Vietnam agarwood cultural space

2.1.1. Natural space of Vietnamese Agarwood

There are several countries in the world that have a long history of trading, producing and processing Agarwood. These countries include Vietnam, India, Bangladesh, and some other Southeast Asian countries. In Vietnam, Agarwood trees are naturally found from Nghe An in the south to Phu Quoc, mainly along the Truong Son range.

In Northern Vietnam, most experts have previously stated that there is no Agarwood tree. Instead, a tree species similar to the popular Chinese species *Aquilaria sinensis* gilg, also known as white wood incense, tree incense, and female incense, is found. However, new research shows that Vietnam's Agarwood trees are mainly distributed naturally along the Truong Son range from the upper Ca River to the Southeast region. The provinces famous for exploitation, production, processing and Agarwood trade in Vietnam are Khanh Hoa, Quang Nam, Nghe An, Ha Tinh, Quang Binh, Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, Dak Lak, and others. These provinces are associated with the majestic Truong Son range, which was previously the land of the ancient kingdom of Champa. The natural conditions of Central Vietnam are the prerequisites for the formation of Vietnamese Agarwood Culture. They are also part of the space of Vietnamese Agarwood Culture on the cultural coordinate system.

2.1.2. Social space of Vietnamese Agarwood Culture

It is evident that Agarwood naturally grows in Vietnam along the Truong Son range from Ha Tinh to the South Central region. This area was once part of the ancient kingdom of Champa, now a part of unified Vietnam. To study Agarwood and its culture, it is essential to mention the history of the ancient kingdom of Champa and the Cham Vietnamese people. The ancient kingdom of Champa went through various historical stages, including the following:

2.1.2.1. Brief history of the ancient kingdom of Champa - the former center of agarwood and Vietnamese agarwood culture

The Sa Huynh culture, which existed before Champa, laid the foundation for the Champa kingdom. This culture appeared around the 5th century BC and

was widespread in the coastal areas of Vietnam, even expanding to the highlands.

The formation of the early Champa state was associated with the struggle for independence of the Champa people, who rebelled against the rule of the Han Dynasty in China. The Tuong Lam people achieved victory in 190-192 when China was in chaos, gained autonomy, and established a country. This ancient country was heavily influenced by Indian culture.

The ancient kingdom of Champa had a brief history during the early kingdom period, which was divided into five periods. These periods include the Sinhapura period (2nd to 7th century), Virapura period (750 - 850), Indrapura period (around 850 - 962), Champa Vijaya period (late 10th century - 1471), and the late period of the Champa kingdom (1471 - late 17th century).

Champa was once the center of Vietnamese agarwood culture, which was renowned worldwide before the kingdom completely dissolved within the territory of today's Vietnam. Many evidences suggest that the inhabitants who built the ancient kingdom of Champa migrated from island Southeast Asia to the central region of today's Vietnam.

The ancient kingdom of Champa faced destruction for many reasons, but mainly due to its aggressive foreign policy and difficult economic development path. Dai Viet dynasties often attacked Champa to retaliate against Champa attacks and then retreated. However, after the attack of Le Thanh Tong (1471 - 1472), this dynasty could no longer stand up. After historical changes, today the ancient kingdom of Champa lies entirely within the territory of Vietnam.

2.1.2.2. The present space of Vietnamese Agarwood Culture

The process of national integration between the Vietnamese and Cham people, resulting in the formation of the Vietnamese people as we see today, occurred over an extended period of time. The strongest period of integration took place between 1471 and 1832..

Initially, studies suggest that the center of Vietnamese Agarwood Culture was closely linked with the ancient Champa kingdom, in the central region of present-day Vietnam. As a result of the integration between the Vietnamese and Cham people, this culture has had more opportunities to flourish. Today, it is evident that the Vietnamese Agarwood Culture has expanded throughout Vietnam and has even spread to other countries around the world. The entire territory of Vietnam, from North to South, is now considered the space of

Vietnamese Agarwood Culture. The Central region, which was once the area of the ancient Champa kingdom and presently the Khanh Hoa region, is the most significant area for this culture..

2.2. Time of Vietnam agarwood culture

The Vietnamese people have been using Agarwood for thousands of years. Historians consider the ancient kingdom of Champa, located in central Vietnam, to be one of the first Indian-influenced countries in Southeast Asia. It can be inferred that the Cham people knew how to exploit, trade, and use Agarwood around the first centuries of the Common Era.

The Vietnamese people also have a history of using Agarwood dating back to the second century BC. Evidence of this can be found in historical records, such as the legend of Chu Dong Tu, the legend of Buddha Mother Man, and the records about Si Nhiep (137-226).

2.3. The subject of Vietnam agarwood culture

The ancient kingdom of Champa was once at the center of the world's agarwood production, which today is completely taken over by Vietnam. The Cham people and later the Vietnamese people have continued to preserve and promote the agarwood profession. Over a long period of time, the Vietnamese (Kinh) and Cham people went through a process of cultural and ethnic integration, and now they are all citizens of Vietnam.

Today, the subject matter of Vietnamese agarwood culture is very clear. The Cham and Vietnamese people are all citizens of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, have Vietnamese nationality, and live and work according to the law, constitution, and laws of the state of Vietnam. Therefore, no matter what angle one evaluates from, the subject of Vietnamese agarwood culture today is the Vietnamese people in general.

Summary of chapter 2

In chapter 2, the basis of Vietnamese agarwood culture is thoroughly analyzed and evaluated considering natural, historical and social conditions. The natural basis of this culture is attributed to the favorable climatic conditions, soil quality, geological structure, and biology that support the natural growth of the *Aquilaria Crassna* Pierre ex Lecomte tree. This tree grows naturally along the Truong Son mountain range in Vietnam, producing the highest quality agarwood in the world, which is considered a precious treasure

across five continents. The region has special natural conditions that are unique, producing Vietnamese agarwood that cannot be found elsewhere in the world.

The social basis of Vietnamese agarwood culture is deeply connected to Vietnamese history, particularly the process of Vietnamese advancement to the South, which is closely linked to the history of the ancient kingdom of Champa. The primary growing area of Agarwood in Vietnam was once the land of the ancient kingdom of Champa and the Cham people. After thousands of years of historical changes, the ancient kingdom of Champa was conquered by Dai Viet, becoming a part of today's Vietnamese territory. The Vietnamese people, Cham people, and other ethnic groups that make up the Vietnamese ethnic community are all Vietnamese.

Through research and analysis, the thesis has established a coordinate system about Vietnamese agarwood culture consisting of three fundamental elements, which have a dialectical relationship with each other: space, time, and the subject of culture.

Chapter 3

IDENTIFICATION OF VIETNAMESE AGARWOOD CULTURE

3.1. Agarwood in the production life of Vietnamese people

3.1.1. Aquilaria tree - agarwood and cultural knowledge about the natural process of producing agarwood of Vietnamese people

When discussing agarwood trees in Vietnam, the *Aquilaria Crassna* Pierre ex Lecomte species is commonly referenced due to its ability to produce agarwood.

Agarwood is generated on agarwood trees through various means such as termites, ants, physical impacts, intentional or unintentional, and in rare cases, lightning. Agarwood formation through the natural selection process is challenging and the tree can easily perish before it can produce agarwood. It takes approximately 30 to 50 years from the time when the tree is injured to when agarwood is present on the tree. The quality of the wood, the density of the essence, and the fragrance vary based on the age of the agarwood.

The most unique and exceptional form of agarwood production is through the tree being struck by lightning, which can result in the production of the most excellent type of agarwood. When an agarwood tree is injured, the tree secretes resin to cover the wound, and over time, chemical reactions alter the wood

molecules. As a result, agarwood must undergo a challenging natural selection process in nature to produce its most valuable and precious product.

3.1.2. Vietnamese people's way of exploiting natural agarwood

There are still groups that go to the forest to search for agarwood, but it has become increasingly challenging to find blocks of agarwood in primary forests. The process of finding agarwood is associated with folk knowledge such as rituals, taboos, and charms, and it is very strenuous and arduous. Tourists also face many difficulties and challenges to find and exploit agarwood in nature.

3.1.3. Vietnamese people's way of raising agarwood and creating agarwood

In contrast to natural exploitation, Vietnamese people have been cultivating agarwood from a very early age. Tay Son is considered to be the dynasty with the first strategic vision of the value of agarwood farming in Vietnam. After the country was unified and carried out Doi Moi, interest in agarwood began to progress when agarwood trees were grown in many places and freely traded on the international market.

Today, the number of agarwood, especially agarwood in nature, is estimated to be very small. To supply the market and develop Vietnamese agarwood culture, cultivating agarwood is the only viable solution. Vietnamese people have been cultivating agarwood in many places, with the support of science and technology.

The exploitation of agarwood has existed since people realized the value of this tree. In the past, Vietnamese people exploited agarwood in a natural, self-sufficient, and self-sustaining way. Today, agarwood in Vietnamese territory has been cultivated, bred, and produced with the application of science and technology. This shows the humanity of Vietnamese agarwood culture even more clearly.

3.1.4. How to classify agarwood and Ky Nam

There are four types of agarwood in ancient documents relating to the southern period. They are divided into Nhat Bach, Nhi Thanh, Tam Huynh, and Tu Hac, with Ky Nam being only found in Vietnam's Khanh Hoa region. The Ky Nam is also classified into four types ranging from low to high, namely black, fluorescent, clear, and white, based on its age, colour, and degree of fossilization.

Agarwood, which is softer than Ky nam, has many essential oils and shows the properties of wood. There are several types of agarwood, and their classification is more diverse than in Ky nam. These types include sunken agarwood, floating agarwood, yellow agarwood, agarwood, yellow agarwood, agarwood, agarwood, natural agarwood, and artificial agarwood.

Artisans who are experts in classifying Agarwood and Ky nam can determine their origin and quality by smelling and tasting. These artisans can even tell whether the Agarwood is natural or artificial, in which country or region it originated, and how old it is when burned.

3.1.5. Crafting and trading agarwood

Traditional incense making is a special craft that has existed for a long time in Vietnamese culture. To make incense, astringent powder is taken from herbs, and the best flavoring agent is agarwood. Apart from its spiritual value, burning agarwood also purifies the air and creates a magical enlightenment.

In the past, Vietnamese people used both the bark and leaves of Agarwood trees to make paper, called honey paper, which was used as an offering to the King of the Jin Dynasty in China.

Since ancient times, many handicraft products have been made from agarwood, such as delicately carved agarwood blocks, statues of Buddha and deities, and costume jewelry. Agarwood is also used to make valuable storage items such as chests and trunks.

Agarwood trees are not only exploited and processed but also provide livelihoods for people involved in bringing agarwood to the market. Approximately 8,000 people are involved in agarwood farming, 5,000 people in agarwood processing, and up to 5,000 people in agarwood business, with more than 1,000 registered companies selling this product.

3.1.6. Vietnam is a major Agarwood trading center in the world

During the ancient and medieval periods, goods were transported from the East to the West through both maritime and land Silk Roads. Vietnam was also a participant in these trade routes, with Agarwood being one of its most sought-after products. The ancient kingdoms of Funan and Champa, which are now part of Vietnam, were known for producing high-quality Agarwood. This product was highly valued in the international market and was mentioned in historical records by travelers such as Khordadzbeh, Marco Polo, Battuta, Tome Pires, and Odoric de Pordenone.

Even today, scientific research conducted by scholars from both Eastern and Western countries confirms that Agarwood from Vietnam, especially from Khanh Hoa Province, is of the highest quality and value in the world. Vietnam remains a major center of Agarwood production, and foreigners continue to appreciate the Vietnamese Agarwood culture.

3.2. Agarwood in the spiritual life of Vietnamese people

Agarwood has been used for centuries in spiritual and religious cultures. When burned, the white smoke and scent of Agarwood is associated with human concepts like fire, the soul, and life after death. This scent is considered sacred and noble, a pure fragrance not mixed with any other scent.

Religion and belief systems often explore complex issues like heaven and hell, life after death, karma, and good versus evil. As science has yet to fully explain these concepts, many people believe in supernatural forces that dictate human destiny and the fate of humanity. People often worship and make sacrifices to these forces in the hopes of protection from the supernatural world. Agarwood is used in all major religions, including Buddhism and Christianity. The pure fragrance and white smoke of agarwood is seen as a connection between the earthly world and the world above, making it a common denominator in spiritual and religious rituals across all cultures.

In Vietnam, a country with many different religions and beliefs, ancestor worship is the most important belief. Agarwood has been a part of Vietnamese national culture for thousands of years and is used in all major life-cycle rituals, including the first-month ceremony, the coming-of-age ceremony, the marriage ceremony, and the funeral ceremony. Incense sticks are offered to ancestors and gods during these ceremonies, and incense burners are present in temples, pagodas, shrines, churches, and other religious sites. During holidays, tens of millions of people visit spiritual facilities in Vietnam.

3.2.1. Agarwood in important religious rituals of Vietnamese people

Agarwood has a significant role in the traditional Vietnamese belief system that involves worshipping Heaven and Earth. Throughout the thousands of years of feudalism in Vietnam, the Nam Giao and Tich Dien ceremonies were considered the most important and grand ceremonies on a national level, especially for a culture associated with agriculture like Vietnam.

The Tich Dien Ceremony is an important land worship ceremony in Vietnam that takes place once a year. At the beginning of the year, an

auspicious day and month are chosen, and in the past, the king himself had to conduct the Tich Dien ceremony. The Tich Dien festival holds immense importance for the agricultural society as it is a prayer for a bountiful harvest.

3.2.2. Agarwood is used in rituals to worship gods and life cycle rituals of Vietnamese people

Vietnamese people have a diverse range of beliefs and religions, including the worship of Heaven, Earth, ancestors, national heroes, and tutelary gods, as well as Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Islam, and Christianity. Incense is an integral part of all these ceremonies, and Agarwood incense is the preferred choice. Agarwood has been associated with Vietnamese religious life and beliefs for thousands of years.

3.2.3. The art of rewarding agarwood in offerings and incense burners

When researching Agarwood culture, it is impossible to overlook incense burners, which are an important part of the cultural ecosystem. They are used during ceremonies to burn Agarwood and offer prayers.

3.2.4. Holy Mother of Agarwood and Agarwood Sanctuary in Vietnam - Holy Mother Agarwood

In Vietnam, agarwood has become an increasingly important aspect of local festivals. The Thap Ba Festival in Nha Trang, Khanh Hoa, for instance, is now considered a celebration of agarwood. Legend has it that Po Nagar - Thien Y Ana Holy Mother, also known as the Mother of the Land, gave birth to all things, including agarwood. As a result, those working in the agarwood industry worship the goddess Po Nagar as the founder of their profession.

- Agarwood Sanctuary

Po Nagar Ba Tower relic in Nha Trang is considered the "holy land" of agarwood, as it is the birthplace of the most valuable agarwood. Due to this, Khanh Hoa is known as the Land of Agarwood and considered the holy land of agarwood in Vietnam.

3.3. Agarwood in the daily life of Vietnamese people

3.3.1. The art of enjoying Vietnamese agarwood in traditional and modern costumes and cosmetics

Agarwood has numerous uses in the daily life of Vietnamese people, such as in eating, dressing, and living. The aroma of agarwood is used to make incense, jewellery, body scent, and clothes. Agarwood is also used in the

production of handicraft products like worship statues, jewellery, etc. Due to their rarity, large wooden household items such as tables, chairs, and beds are not usually made from agarwood. Instead, small-sized objects like caskets, chests, trunks, paper sleeves, fans, and combs are made from agarwood. In feudal times, the costumes and clothing of Kings, Lords, nobles, and mandarins used agarwood as belts and were steamed with agarwood for fragrance.

Agarwood is a precious fragrance used in cosmetics. Agarwood essence appears in high-end cosmetic products such as facial cleansers, lotion, shampoo, shower gel, and perfumes that use agarwood as a base. Nowadays, perfumes that use agarwood as a base are often more expensive than normal perfumes and are identified as a separate product line, known as the Oriental scent group.

3.3.2. The art of enjoying agarwood in traditional and modern medicine

Agarwood is a valuable source of medicinal herbs that has been used in traditional medicine for centuries. Tue Tinh and Hai Thuong Lan Ong, two famous physicians in Vietnamese history, have written about dozens of remedies made from agarwood. In traditional medicine, agarwood has many uses.

In recent times, research has been focused on the use of agarwood in medicinal herbs to create medicines and functional foods. Modern scientific research has confirmed that agarwood contains many micronutrients that can help to cure various diseases such as headaches, insomnia and cancer

3.3.3. The art of enjoying agarwood with cuisine

Agarwood is a versatile substance that finds its use not only in perfumes and incense but also in the culinary world. One of its popular uses in cuisine is in winemaking. Another product derived from Agarwood is Agarwood cigarettes, which are being produced in large quantities under the Vietnamese brand. Agarwood tea and Agarwood coffee are also available, and hundreds of tons of Agarwood tea are consumed annually. Apart from these, there are many other innovative ways to enjoy Agarwood in various cuisines.

3.3.4. Agarwood in Vietnamese Diplomatic Culture from past to present

Agarwood and Agarwood have been valuable diplomatic gifts for Vietnamese people for thousands of years. Even today, they are still used as official diplomatic gifts by the Vietnamese Government to world leaders. The

Khanh Hoa agarwood fan is a popular choice for this purpose. The value of Agarwood in Vietnamese culture is significant, as it is often given to heads of state or used in important foreign affairs work.

3.4. Agarwood in the cultural and artistic life of Vietnamese people

Vietnamese folk literature is rich with proverbs, idioms, and folk songs that express the desire to preserve the traditional culture of the Vietnamese people. Agarwood is a common theme in these literary works, representing nobility and sacredness in various situations, such as a wife missing her husband, praising the homeland, and expressing thoughts and sincerity. Agarwood is also present in other forms of art, carrying the same meaning of preciousness and sacredness, both materially and spiritually.

In literature and poetry, it symbolizes royal palaces, fragrance, white smoke, nostalgia, monologue, loneliness, and hardship. The image of "sucking on wormwood to find agarwood" is used to express magic and the Khanh Hoa land.

3.5. Characteristics of Vietnamese agarwood culture

Vietnamese agarwood culture has a unique position on the coordinate axis of space, time, and subject. Analyzing the elements of Vietnamese agarwood culture and its presence in the life of Vietnamese people suggests that it has several characteristics. Vietnamese agarwood culture has a long history, extensive reach, and strong vitality. The Vietnamese art of enjoying agarwood is very rich, unique, and possesses several unique features on a global scale.

Summary of chapter 3

Agarwood culture is a purely Vietnamese element that has existed and developed within extensive economic and cultural exchanges with the world. Vietnamese agarwood culture is symbolic and exists alongside the common cultural flow of the nation. Although Vietnamese people have known and used agarwood for a long time, they have not approached agarwood comprehensively as a separate culture carrying a "pure Vietnamese" cultural identity. Therefore, we must use the word "identify" to describe the culture as it is both "familiar" and "strange."

The thesis has analyzed the knowledge about agarwood and how it is classified as cultural knowledge. The analysis includes the imprints of

agarwood in elements of Vietnamese and world culture such as agarwood craft, livelihoods from agarwood craft, exploiting agarwood in nature, growing and creating agarwood today, and more.

To study and approach agarwood systematically and "identify" Vietnamese agarwood culture, chapter 3 has linked agarwood with the main cultural elements of production life, living life activities, spiritual life, and artistic life of Vietnamese people. This is expressed through the presence of agarwood in various aspects of Vietnamese culture such as production, business, religion, beliefs, handicrafts, literature and arts, medicine and pharmacy, diplomacy, cuisine, festivals, architecture, sculpture, and more. This is not only found in Vietnam but also in many great civilizations around the world.

Vietnamese agarwood culture has its unique characteristics in terms of cultural subject, space, and history that do not overlap with any other culture in the world. This is an important factor in finding distinct cultural features with deep Vietnamese cultural identity. The issue of identifying Vietnamese agarwood culture is clarified on a scientific and practical basis.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION ABOUT VIETNAMESE AGARWOOD CULTURE

4.1. Current problems of Vietnamese agarwood culture

4.1.1. Sustainable development of agarwood craft and Vietnamese agarwood culture

In order to sustainably develop Vietnam's Agarwood industry, it is crucial to change the way people think about agarwood and agarwood culture. Expanding crop area and production is not enough. The state and society need to invest more intelligence and money into this traditional but very new agarwood culture. Vietnam's Agarwood Culture, particularly Khanh Hoa, will soon be promoted to become a National Cultural Heritage and a World Heritage Site recognized by UNESCO.

We must create conditions for culture to create material wealth for society, and develop cultural industries associated with agarwood. This will

allow the industry to contribute more to the country's economy, like Ginseng, Korean Ganoderma Mushroom, and Japanese Kobe Beef. To meet the world's demand in both quality and quantity, it is necessary to expand the area where agarwood trees are grown.

Product diversification is also essential for the agarwood industry. Processing and manipulation can create agarwood products with a surplus value many times higher than exporting raw products. To optimize the cost of production and processing, it is necessary to apply science and technology.

To strengthen the national brand of Vietnamese Agarwood, promotion and communication are indispensable, both domestically and globally. This will help to affirm and declare the origin of Agarwood Culture to the world. Cultural space for Vietnamese Agarwood is also necessary for its development.

4.1.2. Take advantage of international cooperation in scientific research on Agarwood and promote Vietnamese Agarwood

In order to promote and develop Vietnamese agarwood culture on a global scale, it is crucial to establish scientific cooperation through international forums and publish research on Vietnamese agarwood in reputable scientific journals and international news outlets. This is necessary to solidify Vietnam's position as the center of agarwood and the primary source of agarwood in the world.

4.1.3. Diversify Agarwood products to meet the needs and standards of the world market

To expand the Vietnamese agarwood industry, it is important to diversify products, innovate with high intelligence, and add more value in the future. This can be achieved through the development of agarwood-based pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, and other products

4.1.4. Preserving and promoting the value of Vietnamese agarwood culture

Educating people about the positive values of Vietnamese agarwood culture is also essential. Agarwood has already been recognized as a precious product of Vietnam in history textbooks.

The Khanh Hoa Agarwood Museum is a leading location for preserving and promoting the art of enjoying Vietnamese agarwood. The museum has also combined many new cultural activities centered around agarwood, including

precious documentary films about the process of finding, cultivating, and producing agarwood. At the museum, artisans also demonstrate the techniques of agarwood digging and sculpting..

4.2. The role of Vietnamese agarwood culture

4.2.1. It is an element that contributes to affirming cultural identity

Vietnam

In the era of globalization and deep international integration, in order to assert the position of national culture, it is important to have distinct elements that possess "identity", uniqueness, and high competitiveness in the global arena. Agarwood, also known as "oud", holds both economic and cultural value, and has the potential to become a symbol of Vietnamese culture, country, and people in the 21st century..

4.2.2. Contribute to enhancing the position of Vietnamese culture in the world

Soft power can be defined as the power of culture. This cultural power contributes to the overall strength of a nation through dynamic relationships between political, economic, cultural, social, and even military fields. The Vietnamese agarwood culture is a part of the "soft power" of Vietnamese culture, which is truly attractive to humanity and embodies pure Vietnamese elements.

Summary of chapter 4

The sustainable development of Agarwood Culture in Vietnam requires discussions based on scientific bases and practical experiences. It is essential to consider the real-life practices to provide suggestions for the sustainable development of Agarwood Culture.

As of 2023, the current world order is changing with complex developments. Globalization trends are showing signs of slowing down, and there are contradictions and conflicts at the international level. During the period of strong globalization, many theories aimed at eliminating national and ethnic boundaries or disregarding national and ethnic consciousness were born and spread widely. These arguments may create favorable and easier conditions for great powers to intervene in other countries. Vietnam needs to re-evaluate its purposes to avoid such risks.

We can understand "soft power" as "cultural power" based on accurate statistics and modern criteria. Applying the theory of "soft power" properly can help statistically and quantify the cultural development in the country and evaluate the influence of the country's culture on the world. Accurate assessment and statistics can help the cultural industry contribute more to the cause of protecting and building the Fatherland.

Vietnamese Agarwood Culture has the potential to become attractive and respected worldwide, carrying within it the national identity of the Vietnamese people that cannot be found anywhere else. In order for Vietnamese Agarwood Culture to continue to develop strongly, it is necessary to implement positive measures to sustainably develop Agarwood Culture in general and the Agarwood industry in particular. These measures include changing perceptions about Agarwood Culture, increasing promotion of Vietnamese Agarwood, developing cultural industries associated with Agarwood, strengthening product research and innovation, enhancing the price education value of Agarwood to Vietnamese people, and preserving traditional values of Agarwood.

CONCLUDE

Over the years, scientific research on culture, history, geography, biology, medicine, economics, agriculture, and forestry has referred to Agarwood, both in Vietnam and around the world. However, there has been no dedicated research work on Agarwood from a cultural perspective. Therefore, it is necessary to synthesize interdisciplinary knowledge related to Agarwood to gain a better understanding of its human nature. This includes exploring the relationship between people and Agarwood, which is a crucial aspect of culture. Research on Vietnamese Agarwood Culture has significant practical and topical significance, as it contributes to the general cultural flow of the country.

Vietnamese Agarwood Culture has developed over thousands of years based on natural conditions and historical and social conditions in Vietnam. It exhibits all the characteristics of a cultural entity including humanity, value, system, and history. It can be viewed through the coordinate system of space,

time, and the subject of culture. By exploring the basis of Vietnamese Agarwood Culture, we can solve delicate research problems, such as the process of harmonizing the Vietnamese-Cham people and the process of moving south of the Vietnamese people. This will help us better understand which is the Vietnamese Agarwood Culture.

To gain more insight into Vietnamese Agarwood Culture, we need to identify the relationship between Vietnamese people, Agarwood, and other cultural elements. Agarwood plays an essential role in other cultural elements of Vietnamese people such as productive working life, daily life, spiritual life, artistic life, and is expressed in production, business, religion, belief, handicrafts, festivals, livelihood, cuisine, medicine, and cultural diplomacy. This will help us identify Agarwood Culture more easily. The research also clarified that Agarwood Culture is universal, not only in Vietnam but also around the world.

Vietnamese Agarwood Culture has a lot of potential for development in the 21st century. "Vietnamese cultural identity" is unique and has existed for many centuries, making it difficult to replace on a global scale. Vietnamese Agarwood Culture is national and has enough conditions to spread globally, contributing to building and developing "Vietnamese cultural soft power" in the new era. However, to develop Vietnam's Agarwood Culture to achieve the highest efficiency, there needs to be a specific strategy. This includes developing the Agarwood industry, building space Agarwood Culture space, and researching the uses of Agarwood. The Party and State must pay attention to these issues to ensure the successful development of Agarwood Culture.

Appendix 1: Agarwood in major religions in the world

Appendix 2: Foreigners' comments and assessments about Vietnamese agarwood

LIST OF AUTHOR'S PUBLISHED WORKS RELATED TO THE THESIS

1. Nguyen Duy Thai (2020), "Cultural characteristics of Vietnamese Agarwood", *Journal of Culture and Arts*, no. 9.
2. Dang Thi Tuyet, Nguyen Duy Thai (2022), "Building brand culture - From theory to practice", *Journal of Culture and Arts*, no. 7.
3. Nguyen Duy Thai (2022), "International cooperation on culture in Vietnam seen from the Vietnam - UNESCO cooperation relationship", *Journal of Culture and Arts*, no. 11.
4. Nguyen Duy Thai (2023), "Foundations of Vietnamese Agarwood Culture", *Journal of Culture and Arts*, No. 8.
5. Nguyen Duy Thai (2023), "Agarwood in religion and beliefs of Vietnamese people", *Journal of Culture and Arts*, no. 9.
6. Nguyen Duy Thai (2023), "Cultural characteristics of Vietnam's Agarwood", *International Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences Studies (IAHSSS) (published online)*, No. 6.
7. Nguyen Duy Thai (2023), "Cultural knowledge about Agarwood and Agarwood of Vietnamese people", *Journal of Cultural Studies*, No. 5.