

## Mỹ So'n in Green:

# ภาพจิตรกรรมปราสาท หมี่ เซิน แบบจามปา ของศิลปิน ต่าง นัง เถอะ

ริเอะ นากามูระ

ผู้บรรยายรับเชิญอาวุโส

มหาวิทยาลัยอุตรดิตถ์ ประเทศมาเลเซีย

### บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มุ่งศึกษาภาพจิตรกรรมปราสาท หมี่ เซิน ในยุคประวัติศาสตร์ของอาณาจักรจามปา ซึ่งวาดโดยศิลปินชนชาติจามชื่อ ต่าง นัง เถอะ เข้าใจกันว่าชนเผ่าจามคงจะสืบเชื้อสายมาจากอาณาจักรจามปา ซึ่งในปัจจุบันนับเป็นชาติพันธุ์ย่อยชาติพันธุ์หนึ่งใน 54 ชาติพันธุ์ที่ได้รับการรับรองอย่างเป็นทางการจากรัฐบาลเวียดนาม จากความขัดแย้งในประวัติศาสตร์กับชาวเวียดนาม และการเคลื่อนไหวทางการเมืองการปกครองในยุคทศวรรษที่ 1960 ประเด็นต่างๆ ที่เกี่ยวข้องกับชาวจามจึงเป็นประเด็นที่ “อ่อนไหว” เสมอมา วิหาร หมี่ เซิน เป็นศาสนสถานอันโดดเด่นแห่งราชวงศ์จามปา สร้างขึ้นระหว่างคริสต์ศตวรรษที่ 4 ถึง

คริสต์ศตวรรษที่ 13 และยังได้รับการพิจารณาว่าเป็นศาสนสถานสำคัญที่สุดในยุคที่อาณาจักรจามปารุ่งเรืองสูงสุด ในปี ค.ศ. 1999 วิหาร หมี เซิน ได้รับการขึ้นทะเบียนเป็นมรดกโลก (World Heritage Site) โดยองค์การยูเนสโก และกลายเป็นมรดกทางวัฒนธรรมที่สำคัญที่สุดแห่งหนึ่งของประเทศเวียดนาม ศิลปินชาวเวียดนามหลายรายใช้วิหารแห่งนี้เป็นเนื้อหาหลักในการสร้างสรรค์ผลงานศิลปะของตน บทความฉบับนี้คือความพยายามถอดรหัสข้อความที่ศิลปิน ต่าง หน้ เถอะ ส่งสารผ่านภาพจิตรกรรมในวิหาร หมี เซิน มีการอภิปรายโต้แย้งว่าศิลปินผู้นี้ได้แทรกแนวคิดที่ว่าวิหารแห่งนี้เป็นที่พำนักทางจิตวิญญาณของชาวจาม และมีความเป็นไปได้ที่ศิลปินจะใช้งานศิลปะเป็นกลยุทธ์เพื่อให้ชนกลุ่มน้อยกลุ่มนี้สามารถอ้างสิทธิ์ของตนในมรดกทางวัฒนธรรมแห่งนี้ได้

**คำสำคัญ :** ชชาติพันธุ์, ศิลปะของชนกลุ่มน้อย, การแสดงออกทางศิลปะ, หน่วยงานด้านวัฒนธรรม, เชื้อชาติจาม

# Mỹ So'n in Green: A painting of the Champa Sanctuary of Mỹ So'n by Đàng Năng Thọ'

Rie Nakamura

Visiting Senior lecturer

Universiti Utara, Malaysia.

## ABSTRACT

This article examines a painting of the Mỹ So'n sanctuary of the historical kingdom of Champa by a Cham ethnic minority artist, Đàng Năng Thọ'. The Cham people are thought to be the descendants of the Champa kingdom and are one of 54 state-recognized ethnic groups in Vietnam. Due to their historical conflicts with the Vietnamese and their participation in ethno-nationalistic movements in the 1960s, Cham-related issues are considered to be "sensitive". Mỹ So'n is a Hindu sanctuary of the Cham royalty constructed between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Mỹ So'n

is considered the most significant religious site of Champa at its height. In 1999 Mỹ Sơn was listed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Mỹ Sơn has become one of the Vietnam's most significant cultural heritages, and Vietnamese artists take Mỹ Sơn as their theme for artistic creation. This article is an endeavor to decipher the message that a painting of Mỹ Sơn sanctuary by Đặng Năng Thọ' conveys. His assertion of Mỹ Sơn as the Cham people's spiritual homeland and the possibility of art as a strategy for the ethnic minority people to claim ownership of their cultural heritage are argued.

**Keywords** : Ethnicity, Minority Art, Representation, Cultural Agency, Cham.

## Introduction

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A new exhibition, “A collection of precious Champa antiques”, was opened on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November 2013 at the Da Nang Museum of Cham Sculpture in Vietnam. This exhibition was organized as a part of the celebration of Vietnam Cultural Heritage Day. Along with the collection of Cham antiques and ceramics, the exhibition included 35 works of paintings and terracotta sculptures of Cham artist *Đàng Năng Thọ*. *Đàng Năng Thọ* is ethnic Cham and one of the most distinguished contemporary ethnic minority artists in Vietnam.

The Cham are one of 54 state-recognized ethnic groups in Vietnam and they are said to be the descendants of the Kingdom of Champa. Champa is considered a successor of Sa Huỳnh culture of Southeast Asia which has very strong maritime characteristics. Champa was established around the second century and was one of the earliest Hinduized kingdoms in Southeast Asia. Though it is called a kingdom, Champa was never unified politically. It was “a kind of confederation of principalities” (Po Dharma 1994, 55). Champa was divided into five different geographical areas by branches of the Tru’o’ng So’n mountain range. These were called from north to south; Indrapura (current Quảng Bình, Quảng Trị, Thừa Thiên Huế provinces), Amaravati (current Quảng Nam, Đà Nẵng and Quảng Ngãi provinces), Vijaya (current Bình Định province), Kauthara (current Khánh Hòa province), and Panduranga (current Ninh Thuận and Bình Thuận provinces).

Each of these five regions had their own political, economic, and religious centers and they existed more or less independently. Champa's political system is often referred to as a mandala (Po Dharma, 55; Quach-Langlet 1994, 21-32; Momoki 1999, 37-40; Shige-eda 1999, 154-158; Hardy 2009, 108). The word mandala or circles of kings was adapted by O.W. Wolters to describe characteristics of socio-political systems which are commonly found in ancient Southeast Asia. In each mandala, there was one mandala overlord who claimed "hegemony over other rulers in his mandala who in theory were his obedient allies and vassals" (Wolters 1999, 27). A Mandala was not a territory based polity. It depended on the personal influence of mandala overlords who identified themselves with divine authority. Successful mandala overlords retained loyalty of their vassal kings through their spiritual superiority. Adoption of Hinduism as a foreign originated superior culture enabled "a heightened perception of the overlord's superior prowess" (Wolters, 22).

Champa enjoyed considerable prosperity from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries by involvement in the maritime trade in the South China Sea. But it was absorbed by a neighboring Vietnamese country, Đại Việt, and eventually disappeared from the political map of the Indochina peninsula by the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The descendants of the people of Champa, the Cham, live as an ethnic minority and approximately 132,000 (1999 National Census) are in Vietnam. They are usually grouped into two subgroups based on their locality and historical background. One group is mainly found in Ninh Thuận and Bình Thuận provinces, which used

to be the former territory of Champacalled Panduranga. They practice their traditional religion which is divided into two groups. One is an adherent of indigenized Hinduism called Balamon or Ahier. The other are adherents of indigenized Islam called Bani or Awal. The other subgroup is the Cham people living in An Gian province of the Mekong Delta and Tây Ninh province. Both provinces have a border with Cambodia where approximately more than 250,000 Muslim Cham are living<sup>1</sup>. The Cham people in An Giang and Tây Ninh provinces follow Sunni Islam<sup>2</sup>.

In the late 1980s, the government of Vietnam adopted *đổi mới*, new economic policies. The market economy hurled Vietnam toward the globalization process. The *đổi mới* policies brought significant changes to the Vietnamese art society. The Vietnamese artists have gained a certain level of freedom to express their own feelings and thoughts, while artwork have been transformed into commodities which are circulated and consumed in the market where clients are predominantly foreigners (Taylor 1999, 247; Kraevskaia 2005, 22).

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1 It is quite difficult to find out the exact number of the Cham people in Cambodia. According to 2008 National census of Cambodia, 1.92 % of entire population of 13,395,682 is classified as Muslim. Cambodia's Muslim people are predominantly Cham ethnic group. (General population Census of Cambodia 2008: National Report on Final Census Results. Available at [http://camnut.weebly.com/uploads/2/0/3/8/20389289/2009\\_census\\_2008.pdf](http://camnut.weebly.com/uploads/2/0/3/8/20389289/2009_census_2008.pdf)).

2 Sunni Islam has practiced among the Cham in the Mekong Delta was introduced amongst the Bani people in Ninh Thuận province since the 1950s. Some Bani have converted to Sunni Islam. There are four masjits where Sunni Islam converts congregate in the province.

While Vietnamese modern art and artists have become popular research subjects, most of the work concentrate on the artistic activities in the North<sup>3</sup>, with little mention about art produced by ethnic minority peoples.

The ethnic minority people and their culture are popular themes of paintings by the majority Kinh (Vietnamese) artists in Vietnam. They often paint the images of the ethnic minority and their culture as primitive, nature friendly, mysterious, exotic and sensual. The ethnic minority painters tend to adapt such popular images of them. They depict themselves through the majority people's eyes. Ethnic minority are often studied, explained, exhibited, and guided by the authority. However I found a different approach in the works by *Đàng Năng Thọ*'.

*Đàng Năng Thọ*' is one of the most well-known contemporary Cham artists who was born in a Balamon village in Ninh Thuận province. His artistic works bear the direct voice of the ethnic minority people. They show a depiction of ethnic minority people through their own eyes. His works expressthe thoughts and feelings of ethnic minority people with their own cultural vocabularies. In this article, I will examine his painting on Mỹ Sơn Hindu sanctuary at the exhibition, "A Collection of Precious Champa Antiques". I interpret that the painting of Mỹ Sơn by *Đàng Năng Thọ*' asserts their ownership of Mỹ Sơn as the Cham people's spiritual homeland. I also explore the possibility of art as a strategy for the ethnic minority people to claim ownership of their cultural heritage.

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3 Boi Tran Huynh (2005) wrote her Ph.D. dissertation on South Vietnam's art movement. Art critique Huỳnh Hữ'u Ủy published several studies on pre-1975 arts in South Vietnam (1990, 1993).



## Đàng Năng Thọ'

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Đàng Năng Thọ' was born in a Bàu Trú village in Ninh Thuận province which is famous for its pottery production. His father had some carpentry skills and his mother made potteries and was also one of the ritual dancers of her lineage. He liked to observe funeral ceremonies when he was child, often staying overnight at the ceremonial houses temporarily made for the funeral. There, he listened to the stories of kings, princes, and princesses of Champa told by village elders at night. He studied at Po Klong high school for Cham ethnic minority people and become known for his paintings of Po Klong Garai temple. He painted many of them at fellow students' request. His paintings of Po Klong Garai temple opened up a new life in arts for him.

Immediately after the liberation of South Vietnam in 1975, the Ministry of Culture in Hanoi dispatched a group of scholars to the south in order to eliminate any publication that bore thoughts of the old Saigon regime. An ethnologist, Phan Đăng Nhật, was one of the scholars on this mission. He was looking for an opportunity to visit the Cham community in the south. He wrote a thesis on the Ede epic of the ethnic minority in Vietnam called Dam San which describes the adventures of a hero Dam San who established the most powerful chieftain. Since it was during war time, he could not travel to the south to gather information for himself, so he wrote his thesis based on French materials. There was an argument that the Ede epic Dam San

originated in a Cham epic. Phan Đăng Nhật did not support this argument but wanted to find out if his opinion was right. He took advantage of his assignment in the south and managed to visit some Cham communities. He noticed that many Cham households he visited had a painting of Po Klong Garai temple hanging on their walls. Through people's explanations he found out that a young Cham man named Đàng Năng Thọ' painted them. He visited Thọ' at his home and learned that he wanted to study art.

Phan Đăng Nhật believes that the DNA of a group of people will pass down through generations and that is the way the cultural characteristics of an ethnic group will be continued. He argues that Champa achieved highly sophisticated arts and the Champa people's artistic DNA should be inherited among the contemporary Cham people. Upon his return to Hanoi, he met his friend working at the Ministry of Culture and also a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam. He made arrangements for Thọ' to be admitted to the University of Fine Arts in Hanoi. However, Thọ' had financial and family problems couldn't go to Hanoi and so Phan Đăng Nhật rearranged that Thọ' would go to study art in Ho Chi Minh City.

Since he did not have enough education to enter the university, Đàng Năng Thọ' first studied at the Art College (Cao Đẳng Mỹ Thuật) in Ho Chi Minh City between 1975 and 1979. The post 1975 government had policies to promote ethnic minority people and to integrate them

into the newly unified nation of Vietnam and there was a movement to include an element of the ethnic minority into art (Tính dân tộc trong nghệ thuật). Such a political environment worked favorably for *Đàng Năng Thọ*' to pursue his art. He recalled how well he was treated at the College. Almost all of his fellow students were former soldiers at the front. He was the first and only student of ethnic minority background at the school.

Upon his graduation from the Art College, he could have entered the University of Fine Arts, but he went back to his home town and worked for the Office of Culture and Information in *Thuận Hải* province (former *Ninh Thuận* and *Binh Thuận* provinces). During his work at the Office of Culture, he had opportunities to visit various Cham villages in the region. After working there for several years, he enrolled at the University of Fine Arts in *Hồ Chí Minh City* in 1987 without taking an entrance examination. While he was in *Hồ Chí Minh City*, he frequented the National Library in the city to salvage any documents on Cham and Champa.

The story told by *Đàng Năng Thọ*' about himself, how a poor boy growing up in an ethnic minority village, became a well known artist has some analogies to the Cham legends. He considered his meeting with *Phan Đăng Nhật* as his fate. He could achieve life-time accomplishment because of his help. He could study art at the University; he could hold his first exhibition in *Hanoi* in 1995; he could go to *India* to participate in an art conference which adopted one of his teracota sculptures to put on the cover page of the conference pamphlet;

he could have his sculpture purchased by the Museum of Hanoi. In some Cham legends, people who were born with unusual talent or supernatural ability would become a ruler or an important person in the society with the help of others who had the ability to understand extraordinary characters hidden by the protagonists. The contrast between his lack of social skill and unsophisticated and naive manner versus his hidden, extraordinary artistic talent gives legend-like charm to his story. In his story, his artistic talent and esthetic value were expressed as a gift. It was not learned but was given at his birth.

Thọ' explains producing paintings or sculptures as a religious experience. According to him, he is usually in a trance-like state while creating his works. He cannot hear anything but his inner voice. He argues that his artistic activities are to let his soul express itself, and his ethnic background is quite significant for his artistic activities.

Đàng Năng Thọ' creates art works by using ethnic symbolism or ethnic vocabularies. For example, one of his well known works titled pray for rain (Lễ cầu mưa), based on his graduation work at the University of Fine Arts, conveys the most significant cosmological symbolism of the Cham people. In this painting a lady visited a ritual musician who is sitting in front of a brick temple. The female statue in the background tells viewers that she is Queen Bia Thanh Chi and the temple is enshrining her husband King Po Rame<sup>4</sup>. The background color of orange and red indicate fire, especially cremation fire of the Balamon religion of Cham

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4 Po Rame temple was established between the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

people. The color also implies the sun. Ninh Thuận province is one of the driest places in Vietnam. The Cham villages where irrigation canals have not yet reached harvest rice only once in a year while other areas can harvest two or three times a year. Rain is an important source of the Cham people's livelihood. A Cham woman who is considered to be the source of life visited the temple to pray for rain (picture 1). The painting has two hidden notions of fire / sun / male and water / rain / female which lead to the symbolism of Cham people, Ahier (male) and Awal (female) dualism. The Ahier – Awal dichotomy is the base of religion, cosmology and the world view of the Cham people living in the south central coast of Vietnam (Nakamura 2009).

One can see this dualism as the base of Đàng Năng Thọ's paintings. Finding the cultural codes hidden in his paintings creates intimacy between the viewers and the painter; "I could read your message, I understand



**Picture 1** *Pray for rain*  
(*Lễ cầu mưa*) by Đàng Năng Thọ'  
(courtesy of Đàng Năng Thọ')



**Picture 2** *A temple in Mỹ Sơn and*  
*The sacred Mountain of MahaParvata*  
(The picture taken by Rie Nakamura)

your symbolic language and what you are expressing in your paintings”. His paintings include people who can read his hidden codes and exclude people who cannot. Sharing the symbolic codes with the painter produces a sense of “in-group” identity. Both the painter and the viewers belong to the same community. In the following section I try to read his messages in his paintings on the theme of Mỹ Sơn Hindu sanctuary shown at the exhibition, “A collection of precious Champa antiques” at the Da Nang Museum of Cham Sculpture in Vietnam.

## **Mỹ Sơn sanctuary**

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Before examining paintings of Mỹ Sơn by Đặng Năng Thọ, let us see the characteristics of Mỹ Sơn Hindu sanctuary. It is located about 70 km southwest from the city of Đà Nẵng in central Vietnam. Comparing to the other Hindu/Buddhist temples like Angkor and Borobudur in Southeast Asia, temples in Mỹ Sơn are much smaller in scale, yet a variety of architectural styles and intricate decorative design reflect highly developed Champa esthetics (Tran Ky Phuong 2011, 236). Though no temple keeps original structures and many of the temples are damaged and destroyed under the harsh weather and during Vietnam’s prolonged wars, there are about 70 brick temples that still remain in Mỹ Sơn (Shige-eda 1994, 10; Shige-eda & Tran Ky Phuong 1997, 70-73) (picture 2).

The sanctuary is surrounded by mountains and the sacred mountain of Maha Parvata is located to the south of the sanctuary. Champa kings

constructed temples dedicated to the god Shiva between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. In 1985 archaeologists discovered a possible reburial tomb of a king of the 10th century. It indicates that M̃y So'n is not only a place to worship but also a place of burial of the Champa kings (Tran Ky Phuong 2011, 240). M̃y So'n is considered the most significant religious site of Champa of its kind.

M̃y So'n sanctuary also reflects Champa's cosmological significance. Approximately 450 km south of M̃y So'n, there is another Champa royal sanctuary called Po Nagar established between the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Po Nagar sanctuary is dedicated to the Goddess Bhagavati (Shakti of Siva). Examining these two prominent royal sanctuaries we can find ahier-awal or male-female dichotomy which is the quintessence of the Cham people's world view and cosmology. M̃y So'n sanctuary dedicated to the God Shiva represents ahier, the male/father's realm, while Po Nagar sanctuary dedicated to the Goddess Bhagavati represents awal, the female/mother's realm. According to the inscriptions, several kings offered temples and icons to both royal sanctuaries during the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Champa depended on maritime trade. The northern state of Champa, Amaravati where M̃y So'n royal sanctuary is located had a significant port to China while southern state, Kauthara where Po Nagar royal sanctuary is located, produced quality aloe wood highly demanded in the international market. By making tributes to both royal sanctuaries, the kings of Champa unified two states symbolically and to gain prosperity (Tran Ky Phuong & Nakamura 2012, 274-280).

Mỹ Sơn has been abandoned for quite some time. Initially it was rediscovered by the French scholars at École Française d'Extrême-Orient who carried out research and restoration works. However the Vietnam War ruined Mỹ Sơn and made it inaccessible. Mỹ Sơn was used as a base by the South Liberation Front and as a result, Mỹ Sơn was severely bombed and large numbers of land mines were buried. The chief curator of the Guimet Museum at that time wrote a letter to President Nixon to protest the bombing of Mỹ Sơn sanctuary (Tran Ky Phuong 2011, 244–245). The destruction of Mỹ Sơn A1, one of the largest temples at the sanctuary was the greatest loss since it was considered one of the master works of Champa architecture.

A Vietnamese art historian, Tran Ky Phuong is one of a few scholars who dared to cross the landmine field to see the monuments after the war. He recalled that he had to walk beside a single rope which guided him on a safe path to the temples. Unfortunately, six people were killed and a number of people were wounded during the restoration operation of Mỹ Sơn in 1978. During the 1980s, a Polish scholar Kazimierz Kwiatkowski worked in Mỹ Sơn and a team of Polish experts conducted research and restoration work on the Champa monuments in Central Vietnam (Tran Ky Phuong 2011, 246). In 1997 the conservation project of Mỹ Sơn which was a multi-year scientific research project entitled “Investigation Zoning and Management of Mỹ Sơn Monument and Archaeological Site” was initiated with major financial contribution from Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The results of the project were published in 2009 (Hardy et al, 2009)



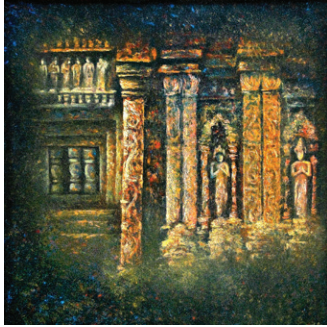
After Vietnam's adoption of a market economy and the opening up of the country, Mỹ Sơn has been considered a national historical and cultural site and in 1999 it was listed as a World Heritage by UNESCO. Since then it has attracted many visitors from inside and outside of the country. Approximately 150,000 people visit Mỹ Sơn every year (Tran Ky Phuong 2011, 249). Mỹ Sơn has become one of the significant historical heritage sites for the development of tourism in Central Vietnam.

## Paintings of Mỹ Sơn by Đặng Năng Thọ'

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While Mỹ Sơn has become Vietnam's significant cultural heritage, Vietnamese artists take Mỹ Sơn as their theme for artistic creation. The Vietnamese Artists Association divided up Vietnam into several different regions and each region annually organizes an exhibition to introduce new works by their artists. I have seen the exhibition of the central highlands region and the central part of Vietnam in the past few years and found a few paintings of Mỹ Sơn by the Kinh/Viet artists. These paintings depicted Mỹ Sơn as a historical site or a ruin where one could imagine the lost kingdom of Champa. It is a corpse of a once prosperous country which no longer exists. The colors of red, orange or brown are usually used to paint brick temples in Mỹ Sơn (picture 3 and 4).

The painting of Mỹ Sơn done by Đặng Năng Thọ' is quite different from those by Kinh/Viet artists. Thọ' had two paintings of Mỹ Sơn at the



**Picture 3** *The word of the earth (Lời của đất) by Lê Ngọc Thanh (The picture taken by Tran Ky Phuong)*



**Picture 4** *The night of joyful singing (Đêm hoan ca) by Nguyễn Thu'ong Hỷ (The picture taken by Rie Nakamura)*

exhibition. One is titled Memory of Mỹ Sơn (Ký ức Mỹ Sơn) and was painted after he visited Mỹ Sơn for the first time in 1995. Đằng Năng Thọ' did not produce abstract paintings prior to his trip to India in 1998. Thus Memory of Mỹ Sơn may have been produced a few years after his first visit to the sanctuary.

Thọ' recalls that during his first visit to Mỹ Sơn he could not stop staring at one of the temples for more than an hour. Something captured his mind and he could not move. This experience is depicted by the painting of Memory of Mỹ Sơn. The strong primary colors used for this painting indicate the artist's fascination and exultation to see Mỹ Sơn in his own eyes for the first time. In this painting we can see the face of a man, probably Đằng Năng Thọ' himself, on the right hand side with a large eye facing a tower-like object. The sacred Mountain of Maha Parvata

above his face indicates that he is in Mỹ Sơn. His face becomes a part of the environment transferring his hair to the sky, his cheek to the walls of the temple. The artist becomes a part of Mỹ Sơn and its scenery. The painting reveals his strong attachment to Mỹ Sơn (picture 5).



**Picture 5** *Memory of Mỹ Sơn*  
(*Ký ức Mỹ Sơn*) by Đặng Năng Thọ' (courtesy of Đặng Năng Thọ')

The other painting of Mỹ Sơn at the exhibition which is the focus of this paper was produced in August 2013, two months after his visit to Mỹ Sơn in June 2013. Interestingly he put the date of the production on the painting which he seldom does. Despite the fact that the title of the painting is Mỹ Sơn, the main figure of this painting is a young woman wearing a dark navy blue colored dress positioning herself slightly diagonally. Tran Ky Phuong, who was at the exhibition, pointed out that her posture is called tribhanga, triple flexion. It is a body position of noble people which originated in Champa art tradition influenced by Hindu art. According to Đặng Năng Thọ' this young woman is a ritual

dancer, having a peacock position by putting her two hands with fans on her back. In her background, there are temples of Mỹ Sơn and the sacred Mountain of Maha Parvata, roughly drawn by a black line and all are painted in deep green (picture 6)



**Picture 7** *Alone (Một mình)* by Đàng Năng Thọ' (courtesy of Đàng Năng Thọ')

**Picture 6** *Mỹ Sơn* by Đàng Năng Thọ' (courtesy of Đàng Năng Thọ')

The young woman's face and her long supple neck are outlined by the black line but Thọ' did not use his bold black line to shape her figure; instead he used the contrast of the colors to silhouette her in dark navy blue against the dark green background. Without cutting out the main figure on the canvas by his typical strong black line (picture 7), the painting suggests some connections or unity between the young woman and her background, Mỹ Sơn Sanctuary. She can be seen as a spirit or a deity living in Mỹ Sơn or as a further embodiment of Mỹ Sơn itself.

Personified images are useful to create a special attachment and belonging to a specific territory. It is often applied as a part of nation-state building technologies to transform bordered territory to homeland recognized by the citizens. It creates a fictive kinship relationship between the people and the personified territory and people come to believe that their blood is rooted in the particular geographical landscape. Similarly Tho' might have painted the young woman as Mĩ So'n and it expresses a very personal and special connection between the painter and Mĩ So'n sanctuary.

Once I had an opportunity to watch a video taken by a group of overseas Cham from California visiting Mĩ So'n. They were in a temple where a stone basin was. The stone basin was filled with rain water. One of the ladies in the group scooped the water up by her hand and splashed the water on the ground while praying. This is one of the acts conducted during the Balamon ritual. I was surprised to see her action and realized that Mĩ So'n is still a "working" religious site for the Cham people. For the Cham people Mĩ So'n is not a world heritage, but a secret sanctuary and their spiritual root. It is not a relic of an old kingdom or archaeological vestige but a holy religious center which is still "alive". Tho' painted Mĩ So'n in green to assert its life and its continuous spiritual significance amongst the Cham people. His painting of Mĩ So'n contrasts with the Mĩ So'n painted by the Kinh/Viet painters who tend to depict Mĩ So'n as "dead" ruins or remnants of the past.

## Conclusion

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After adaptation of the *đổi mới* policies, foreigners visiting Vietnam have been increasing and tourism grows as a significant industry. The ethnic minority peoples' culture and tradition have become important cultural assets for Vietnam's tourist industry and are recognized as a part of unique Vietnamese national cultural heritage. The Cham culture and tradition have been mainstreamed as a part of national heritage, however, the more Cham ethnic culture is mainstreamed as a part of national culture, the less Cham people can assert ownership of their culture.

Cham dance and music were performed at the opening ceremony of the exhibition "A collection of precious Champa antiques" at the Da Nang Museum of Cham Sculpture. The Cham people are known historically for their rich music and dance tradition. The first performance for the opening ceremony was the dance of Apsara, female celestial dancers, the most well-known Cham people's dance performance in Vietnam. This dance used to be called Siva dance and in general it is introduced as a classical dance form of the Cham people. However this dance was a creation of a Vietnamese choreographer in the late 1980s, based on postures of Champa sculptures and Cham people's ritual dance (Đặng Hùng 1998). Though the Apsara dance was criticized among the Cham local scholars as a distortion of Cham tradition, it became popular among the Cham as a repertory of their cultural performance. Since the late 1990s, Apsara dance is performed predominantly by Kinh/Viet dancers

for tourists. In fact at Mỹ Sơn sanctuary, there are daily performances of Apsara dance by Kinh/Viet dancers to entertain visitors. The Apsara dance was performed at the exhibition's opening ceremony. Ironically, Thọ, who was also a director of the Center for Cham Cultural Studies in Ninh Thuận province, watched the Cham cultural performance created and performed by the Kinh/Viet people.

Negligence of Cham people as cultural agency can also be observed by the preservation and restoration of Champa's historical vestiges. The temple of Po Klong Garai has also been recognized as Vietnam's national cultural heritage and is under the care of a provincial museum which belongs to the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of the province. Traditionally, Po Klong Garai temple is only open four times a year. The rest of the time few Cham pay visits to the temples since they respect and fear the power of the god. However the temple is now open year-round for tourists. Inside the temple is decorated with illumination and the linga is decorated by the king's attire. There are flowers, incense, a donation box and other offerings. None of the practice is the Cham tradition but Kinh/Viet tradition. Yet the Cham cannot oppose such Vietnamization of their significant religious site since they do not have a control over the national cultural site.

Po Klong Garai temple has gone through several restorations. Though the restoration works are considered to be relatively successful, they upset the Cham intellectuals and the local scholars. They believe that the restoration projects did not retain the original shape and idea of

the temple. One of the worst restoration works of a Champa religious site is the restorations of the Hoà Lai temples which were constructed in the early ninth century. The Hoà Lai temples are located approximately 14 km north of Phan Rang City along the National Highway No. 1. The Hoà Lai temples originally consisted of three towers but the central tower was destroyed by bombardment during the war. The Hoà Lai temples have gone through several restorations but the restoration work done by the Institute of Constructional Technology in Hanoi and the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Ninh Thuận province during 2005 and 2007, caused outcry among the Cham intellectuals. The temples were “badly deformed by reproductions of new terracotta figures” (Tran Ky Phuong 2011, 247) which are unknown to Champa’s historical figures. They saw drastic transformation of the HoàLai temples and deplored it as a destruction of their cultural heritage. An American writer, Mike High, wrote a short article expressing his concern about poor conservation work on Hoà Lai temples in 2009 and sent it to the English newspaper in Vietnam but his article was never published.

The culture of ethnic minority people has become an important national asset to demonstrate rich cultural heritage and to attract tourists in Vietnam. Highlighting such cultural diversity can also be useful for the state to claim its’ success in integrating numerous ethnic groups and unifying the nation. Vietnamese government emphasizes its effort to conserve the ethnic minority’s culture and tradition. However it is more like museumization or salvaging of their cultural items. As long as



artifacts are stored or customs and traditions are recorded, it is considered that ethnic minority's cultural heritage is preserved and protected. The ethnic minority people are as neglected as their cultural agencies and they remain as mere recipients of state minority policies. They are always guided, protected, assisted and taught by the state authority. Thọ's painting of Mỹ Sơn, however, reclaims the ownership of the Cham people's cultural heritage. The painting reveals a special connection between the painter and Mỹ Sơn sanctuary. By painting Mỹ Sơn in green and painting a young woman as an embodiment of the sanctuary, Thọ' asserts that Mỹ Sơn is still alive as a holy sanctuary. For him and his people, Mỹ Sơn is not a world heritage site or historical vestige but a significant spiritual homeland.

Currently there is no possibility for ethnic minority people to form a grassroots organization to represent their voices (McElwee 2008, 189). Any organizations initiated by the Cham people will be seen as suspicious due to their previous involvement inseparatist movements such as United Struggle Front for the Oppressed Races (FULRO<sup>5</sup>). The works of Đàng Năng Thọ' demonstrate that art can be a powerful tool for the ethnic minority people who are muted in the public domain to express their ownership of their culture and tradition.

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5 *Front Unifié de Lutte des Races Opprimées* (United Struggle Front for the Oppressed Races) was an ethno-nationalistic movement emerged in the central highlands in the mid-1960s. The movement was organized by the highland ethnic minority people, Cham and Khmer Krom participated in the movement (Hickey 1982).

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