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## Challenged and opportunities in protection of river culture in Mekong delta

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### Abstract

The Mekong Delta is the delta of the Mekong River's end with many large tributaries flowing into the sea and a system of intertwined canals, diverse flora and fauna, rich and diverse, warm and mild climate. These are favorable conditions for the development of river culture. River culture includes many factors such as agriculture, history, transport and tourism that affect every aspect of the region's socio-economic life. The development of river culture is always affected by many opportunities and challenges. Appropriate change is needed to adapt to climate change, which is a global threat. Next is the shift in growth model, adjustment of development orientation, new approaches to economic growth, natural resource management and environmental protection. This article is qualitative one in order to analyze the opportunities and challenges for the sustainable development of the river culture of the Mekong Delta, along with solutions to preserve and promote.

**Keywords:** challenge, chance, Mekong delta, river culture

### 1. Introduction

At present and in the coming time, the river culture in the Mekong Delta must face at least two global challenges, one regional challenge and one from delta exploitation itself. Global, it is climate change, rising sea levels, and globalization of economy, international integration. These challenges do not work individually, but together and continually impact, multiplying the consequences of harms, which are the combined challenges to the sustainable development of the Mekong Delta.

The Mekong Delta is a young delta, sensitive to external and internal impacts. The Mekong Delta is suffering double impacts from climate change, sea level rise and from the use of water sources from upstream.

After 1975, Vietnam embarked on the Mekong Delta exploitation plan. The issues that need to be clearly understood and solved are alum, sour and salty. The challenge then for the plains, especially in the three sub-regions, was that in the rainy season, there was excess water, immense floods, but in the dry season, there was a serious shortage of water, cracked soil from soil layers. Again in the dry season, sea water is intruding deeply into the delta. At the beginning of the rainy season, alum is washed and flowing into canals, pulling the pH down. People must wait for alum soil less new rice cultivation.

Non-stop in two crops, many provinces starting from An Giang, Dong Thap, flooded embankments to make third-crop rice from the 1990s. The increase in income was exchanged by the disturbed hydrological regime on the outside the dike. Inside, soil fertility decreases and the environment degrades.

The challenge in the area, apart from the loss of mangroves and melaleuca forests, is the exploitation of sand on the Tien and Hau rivers, exacerbating the deficit of the sediment balance; is the overexploitation of groundwater causes the subsidence of the ground, leading to faster sea level rise, and agricultural development is still more in width than in depth, more in quantity than in quality, leading to waste of resources, especially land and water resources.

The cost is also loss of mangroves to square shrimp farming. Lack of fresh water to keep the pond salinity suitable for shrimp farming, groundwater has been pumped up. In some parts of the region where freshwater is available, people exploit saline groundwater to ensure square salinity for shrimp to grow.

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Through these challenges, there are opportunities to promote and preserve the river culture in the Mekong Delta. In Vietnam, there is no "Great Wall of China" but the Mekong Delta has "Great Wall Street". This is an opportunity to develop river culture in general as well as tourism in particular.

The Mekong Delta is a cultural and cultural region. River culture needs to be understood in the widest possible sense, including agriculture, aquaculture, maintaining the unique cultural characteristics of the people and the identity of ethnic minorities, and protecting and conservation of nature, traditions of the same region, river economy, business and sustainable development of various types of tourism services to attract tourists and honor the beauty of this land and country. We must understand the opportunities and challenges affecting the river's culture in this land. To achieve that goal, the authors have conducted a research entitled "The opportunities and challenges of protecting river culture of the Mekong Delta".

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1. River culture

Culture is one of the many issues people care about from past to present. Depending on the approach, researchers give cultural definitions, each of which reflects different perspectives and assessments. Although culture has many definitions and many ways of expressing words, cultural definitions have quite similar points through the following main points:

Firstly, culture is the material and spiritual values created by man to serve the needs of human life. Culture is the product of man, by man and for man. The culture of re-influencing people (creative subjects) makes people more and more perfect according to the standards set by the subjects themselves in the process of affecting the living environment. These standards are accepted by the community and are considered as the requirements for each individual in the community to be voluntarily implemented.

Secondly, culture is the product of people and culture is created and developed in the mutual relations between people and society. Therefore, the physical and spiritual values that are close and accepted by the community are valid in reality and passed down through generations.

Thirdly, culture is considered a historical phenomenon of human society, but it is a phenomenal phenomenon, the indispensability of man and culture existing in parallel with the existence of human society in general and each community in particular. Therefore, culture is both popular and unique. Popularity is evident in the ability of every community to create material and spiritual values that serve its own community life. The peculiarity is the difference in nuance and specific expressions of each community, depending on historical conditions and circumstances; on the origin, characteristics, qualifications and thinking development of each human community; about living space (including stability and change of human living space); about exchanges and acculturation with other cultural forms of the community.

Fourthly, culture is transmitted from generation to generation through the process of socialization. Culture is recreated and developed in the course of human action and social interaction.

According to UNESCO Director-General, "For some people, culture includes masterpieces in the areas of thinking and creativity; For others, culture encompasses everything that makes one nation to another, from the most sophisticated product to the beliefs, customs, customs, lifestyle and labor" Each culture is the property of a certain community of people - a cultural subject. Each individual or community lives in connection with the natural environment and the surrounding society. People in the Mekong Delta depend on the water environment taking water as raw materials to serve their lives and making the river become an important element in their cultural life.

So far, when referring to the Mekong Delta is a vast river, fertile plains, immense rice fields, fruit-laden gardens, many species of fish, bowls and a granary of the whole Water, etc. Over hundreds of years living on hundreds of thousands of rivers, canals and ditches, people of the Mekong Delta have formed a unique culture, which is the river culture.

To better understand this river culture, we need to consider the correlation in the general relationship of the Mekong Delta. When speaking of culture, it refers to the relationship between nature (land - water) and people. In this relationship, nature (earth - water) is what precedes man, is a prerequisite for human life. But without human hands, brains, and perseverance, the earth - the water is the soil - the water of nature. The Mekong Delta has experienced thousands of years of wilderness, rivers, swamps, forests and wild animals. When the exile group came to explore and spent hundreds of years transformed this desolate land into a rich land, abundant fish, shrimp, rice, fruit trees; densely populated, forming villages, towns, towns, cities - the product of human creative endeavors. It is these values that have created a river culture of the Mekong Delta.

### 2.2. Protecting river culture

River culture is associated with all aspects of people's lives such as culture that will affect residents of the Mekong Delta, affect gardens, aquaculture, river culture and the travel of residents. River Delta culture is a big topic with many aspects such as: history, literature, art, religious beliefs, residence, river tourism. Under the impact of the Industrial Revolution 4.0, the process International integration as well as climate change is taking place on a global scale, the conservation and promotion of river cultural values in the Mekong Delta region has become more urgent than ever.

We also need to realize that nature in general and the Mekong Delta in particular are the premise of human creativity. Without nature, people cannot create material and spiritual values that serve their needs and interests (including the birth, existence and development of people). From the elements of nature (light, atmosphere, weather, climate, country, resources), people create values that serve themselves. Therefore, we need to recognize nature as culture. When acknowledging nature as a culture, we must have a cultural attitude towards nature. We must attach exploitation to the conservation of natural resources. Conserving natural resources is also preserving people's own lives. Preserving river cultural values creates a strong spiritual foundation, orienting, nurturing and developing the life of people in the Mekong Delta. Moreover, preserving cultural values of the river also contributes to promoting

tourism development, increasing incomes and improving the material and spiritual life of the people in the region. River culture will increasingly develop following the trends of the times but will also face many challenges. Thus, the protection of river culture will face many opportunities as well as challenges that strongly impact this culture.

### 3. Research methodology

This report focuses on studying the opportunities and challenges of river culture in the Mekong Delta to develop a strategy for promotion and conservation. This paper stems from the fact that the challenges and opportunities have a significant impact on the water culture of the Mekong Delta. The results of this report may not be common to the whole country as conditions in other regions of Vietnam may not be the same as those in the Mekong Delta. The report has applied many different research methods. Here are several research tools that are being used in the report:

+ Research secondary documents: to prepare for the report, the author has conducted a secondary research on the opportunities and challenges that have been happening and are imminent for the river culture in the Mekong Delta. This study aims to provide the most up to date information and knowledge.

+ Methods of analysis: after collecting secondary data, because the author did not have enough economic conditions as well as time conditions, he decided to use the method of analysis, synthesis and comparison of secondary data collected from various online and offline sources (books, newspapers, scientific journals).

### 4. Research results

After studying and analyzing the author data, the following results were obtained:

- **Opportunities for the protection of river culture in the Mekong Delta:**

Date 27/3/2018 in Can Tho City, City People's Committee. Can Tho, Novaland Group, The Boston Consulting Group, Military Commercial Joint Stock Bank (MB Bank) signed a cooperation agreement on strategic consultancy and implementation of the project "Tourism Development in the Mekong Delta Long adapts to climate change" with the witness of Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc and representatives of participating ministries, agencies and sectors.

On November 17, 2017, the Government issued Resolution No. 120 / NQ-CP on sustainable development of the Mekong Delta to adapt to climate change. This Resolution is the basis for implementing many Government's programs and activities to promote sustainable development in the Mekong Delta.

The Prime Minister signed Decision 417 / QD-TTg on April 13, 2019, promulgating the Overall Action Program to implement the Government's Resolution No. 120 / NQ-CP on sustainable development of the Mekong Delta adapting to the variable climate change. The overall action plan sets out six main task groups and specific solutions, including: (1) Reviewing, completing and supplementing the system of mechanisms and policies; (2) Update and systematize interdisciplinary data and data, strengthen basic surveys; (3) Planning and organizing territorial space; (4) Building reasonable economic structure to adapt to climate change;

(5) Infrastructure investment and development; (6) Development and mobilization of resources.

The above shows that the state and the government have created many opportunities to influence the protection of the river culture of the Mekong Delta.

- **Challenges to protecting river culture in Mekong Delta:** Analysis of satellite images shows that nearly 90% of the 600 km long coastline of the Mekong Delta has erosion. On average, each day this area loses an area equivalent to 1.5 football fields due to the ongoing erosion and sand mining activities.

In 13 provinces in the Mekong Delta, there are about 126 organizations and enterprises licensed to exploit in sand mines along the Mekong River. According to scientists, with the current speed of sand exploitation, it is forecast that all sand reserves on Tien and Hau rivers will be over after 30 years.

According to the leader of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, the development of hydroelectric dams in the upper Mekong is affecting the natural environment in the Mekong Delta, resulting in a rapid and complex impact. If enough terraced hydropower plants are developed in the upper Mekong basin, up to 90% of sediment and sediment will be retained. Hydroelectricity on the mainstream will cause many significant adverse impacts, including depletion of dry season flows causing saline intrusion, depletion of aquatic resources, biodiversity and adverse effects on road traffic. aqua. The amount of alluvium and sediment is reduced by 65% only because of hydroelectric systems in Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. If including China, the amount of red alluvium in the Mekong Delta is only 15 million tons, less than 10% of the natural condition.

Efforts to promote rice production makes the area of melaleuca forests disappear quickly in Dong Thap Muoi, in the Long Xuyen Quadrangle and in the U Minh forest (Upper and Lower). Moreover, low-lying areas are drained to increase crops. Forest loss is dehydration. Drainage of water contains the risk that the water level in the area will be low when the Mekong River water to the delta is not as abundant as before.

According to the Director of Department of Water Resources Management, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, land subsidence in the Mekong Delta is complicated. The measurement of subsidence of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment shows that from 2005 to 2017 in the whole Mekong Delta region, only 6% of the area did not subside while 29% of the subsidence area was less than 5cm, 20% of the subsidence area was from 5 -10cm and 8% subsidence area above 10cm. Notably, the subsidence area over 10cm is distributed in 9 provinces and cities, including concentrated in Bac Lieu and Ca Mau. Particularly in An Lac area, Binh Tan district, Ho Chi Minh City subsided to 81.4cm in 12 years, ward 1, Bac Lieu town subsided to 62.6cm and Vinh Hai commune, Vinh Chau town, Soc Trang province subsided to 53.1cm.

The results show that the challenges affecting the protection of river culture in Natural Resources - environment stem from climate change as well as over-exploitation by humans.

## 5. Discussion

As for the opportunities mentioned above, it has a strong impact on the protection of the river culture in the Mekong Delta, specifically as follows:

With the government spending a huge amount of money to develop Natural Resources - the environment will remove the bottlenecks on transportation infrastructure, help adapt to climate change and help promote a special of regional river culture.

The signing of cooperation between the City People's Committee of Can Tho, Novaland, BCG and MB Bank will connect and gather more international organizations to finance climate change adaptation such as World Bank, IFC, ADB, DEG, etc. The project of investment in the area of natural resources and environment aims to plan and implement tourism connectivity and development strategies for 13 provinces and cities in the Mekong Delta region, of which Can Tho City plays a central role.

The Government's promulgation of Resolution No. 120 / NQ-CP on sustainable development of the Mekong Delta to adapt to climate change with 6 specific tasks will help this area: be able to adapt to climate change, real present in the immediate period and the period after 2020; building reasonable economic structure and overall planning for sustainable development of Mekong Delta adapting to climate change; develop urban systems and rural residential areas suitable to the characteristics of natural ecosystems, specific conditions of the region and each ecological sub-region; shifting from pure agricultural production thinking to developing agricultural economy and tourism under new and diversified models, meeting market requirements in the context of climate change.

Regarding the challenges mentioned above, it has a very bad impact on the protection of the river culture in the Mekong Delta, specifically as follows:

The exploitation of resources in the upper delta, especially the construction of hydroelectric dams, has changed the flow, resulting in a reduction of sediment load, reduction of fishery resources, deep saline intrusion into the inland areas, impacts negatively the socio-economic sustainable development of the whole Mekong Delta.

This over-exploitation of minerals and sediments has created many creeks and deep pits in the river bed, many places up to 15m deep, deeper than the bottom elevation of natural river tributaries in Cambodia, especially in Vietnam. There is the deepest creek up to 45m, causing rapid subsidence that threatens to destroy the river's culture in the Mekong Delta.

The downside of high-intensity economic development has become more and more severe, causing many consequences, such as environmental pollution, serious ecological imbalance, land subsidence, groundwater decline, and invasion. In fact, the coast has caused many areas of natural forests, especially mangroves, melaleuca forests, and protection forests, to be cut down for other purposes, causing severe degradation.

## 6. Conclusion and recommendation

### 6.1. Conclusion

The Mekong Delta is one of the areas with advantages and great potential for development in the current trend of globalization. However, the extraordinary developments of

climate change and rising sea levels are happening faster and more unpredictably with extreme weather forecasts that are a huge challenge for this area. During the research and analysis, the group found that there are many opportunities and challenges affecting the river culture here. The study also found that there are clear relationships between opportunities and challenges. The report shows that challenges are increasing and have profound implications for river culture. However, the authorities in Vietnam have actively promoted activities to promote and preserve the river culture of the Mekong Delta. The government and local authorities have intervened in specific situations such as river bank erosion, storms, and frequent landslides. The government and local authorities have implemented these activities very early, thus helping the river culture to be preserved and promoted.

### 6.2 Recommendations

It is time for six countries in the basin to develop a mechanism to use water resources, in which the rights and interests of each country must go hand in hand with responsibilities and obligations for the whole basin, with a spirit of cooperation to develop together. The ministries, the Mekong National Committee, and the scientists need to detect, monitor and evaluate the impacts of upstream water exploitation projects since they are just beginning to show timely the harmful impacts to the government having a basis for negotiation for the sake of the delta and for the good of the basin.

More than ever, in the new context, the overall socio-economic development master plan and branch and local development plans must be reviewed in the direction of saving fresh water, living with drought and salinity, and deploying Saltwater waterfall is a resource as many countries have been successful, ensuring fresh water for people's lives. The model of socio-economic development in this delta needs to gradually shift from width to depth.

Ministries, departments, branches and localities must work closely together to face challenges. The issue of institutional innovation and identification of coordination mechanisms is important. More than ever, the chain linkage, regional linkage and regional economic development have been extremely urgent. In order to develop sustainably, it is necessary to address the current situation where the Mekong Delta is currently a low educational region on a national scale. Moreover, the government needs to invest more in social infrastructure and road connectivity here.

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