TEACHING GONG ART OF COR ETHNIC GROUP IN THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT IN TRA THUY COMMUNE, TRA BONG DISTRICT, QUANG NGAI PROVINCE

Hoang Thi Mai Sa
Le Thi Phuong Nga

*University of Education, Danang University; Email: hoangsa82@gmail.com
Hanoi University of Culture; Email: phuongnga117611@gmail.com
Received: 13/5/2024; Reviewed: 21/5/2024; Revised: 25/5/2024; Accepted: 28/5/2024; Released: 211/6/2024
DOI: https://doi.org/10.54163/ncdt/310

Tra Thuy commune, Tra Bong district, Quang Ngai province is where many Cor ethnic group lives. They are known for their unique cultural traditions such as playing gongs and hand-weaving. In recent years, local authorities, leaders of the district education department, secondary schools in the district have actively promoted and preserved Cor ethnic culture to students, especially Cor ethnic student. This article studies the current situation and solutions for teaching the art of gong fighting of the Cor ethnic group in an educational environment to preserve ethnic cultural values in Tra Thuy commune, Tra Bong district, Quang Ngai province today.

*Keywords:* Gong art; Cor ethnic group; Educational environment; Tra Bong district; Quang Ngai province.

1. Introduction

Contemporary society has witnessed the revival and development of clubs that teach cultural and artistic heritage to the younger generation, including Cor ethnic gong art. Intangible cultural heritage, especially folk art forms... only exist and develop when generations inherit and practice regularly. Without generations to inherit and maintain heritage practices, these cultural heritages will be lost and forgotten in the community, especially intangible cultural heritages of ethnic minority communities. Therefore, one of the important tasks of preserving and promoting intangible cultural heritage is to form clubs, open teaching classes in the community, along with the agreement and participation of leadership level in the educational environment in Tra Thuy commune, Tra Bong district, Quang Ngai province.

2. Research overview

Traditional performing arts or folk performing arts are an important cultural element for communities. However, nowadays, traditional performing arts have changed drastically, even being lost. The restoration of performing arts of ethnic minority communities is an issue of concern to many people. That is also an important content in policies to preserve and promote the value of traditional cultural heritage of ethnic minorities in Vietnam today.

Most ethnic groups in the Truong Son - Central Highlands region have gongs, no ethnic group has ever had gong fighting and this is a unique cultural activity of the Cor ethnic group. Gong fighting is a prominent cultural element in festivals in particular and Cor ethnic culture in general. Talking about the art of gong fighting of the Cor ethnic group, a number of articles have mentioned this content such as: Gong fighting - the art of gong fighting activities of the Cor ethnic group in Quang Ngai province (Dat, 2010), the article introduces the art of gong fighting of the Cor ethnic group in Quang Ngai province, it is a form of responding to musical motifs and music sentence together, the performer must have rich, intense and exciting improvisations of gong music and phrases,... Besides, there are some related articles such as: Gongs in the cultural life of Tra Bong Cor ethnic group (Tung, 2002), Cor ethnic traditional culture, overall and specific values (Chu, 2016), Ethnographic commentary on the Moi people in Quang Ngai (H. Haguet, 1905), Folk songs and folk music of the Cor ethnic group in Tra Bong - Quang Ngai (Truyen, 1998), Gong music of the Cor ethnic group in Tra Bong - Quang Ngai (Truyen, 1999), Quang Ngai: Preserving Cor ethnic culture and history through extracurricular activities for students (Dong, 2023), Preserving and transmitting Cor ethnic culture in Que land (Dao, 2023),... However, preserving folk performing arts is not a simple task because today’s young generation does not have many people who take the time to learn traditional cultural values. Performance forms are passed down from generation to other generation through word of mouth and direct instruction, with few specific written records, making it difficult to teach.

3. Research method
The article uses qualitative research methods with operations such as: synthesis, analysis of secondary sources and field documents on the national intangible cultural heritage “Cor ethnic gong art, Tra Bong district, Quang Ngai province”, articles reported on the teaching of Cor ethnic gong art. In addition, the author also used the method of participant observation in some practice sessions of the performance team of the Cor Ethnic Cultural Conservation Club in Tra Thuy commune, Tra Bong district, Quang Ngai province. The author interviewed and conducted in-depth interviews with a number of artisans, members of the above club, and educational administrators in the commune and district. Inheriting the results of previous researches, the article focuses on identifying the current situation and solutions to improve the effectiveness of the work of teaching Cor ethnic gong art from the perspective of insiders.

4. Research result

4.1. Overview of Cor ethnic gong art, Tra Bong district, Quang Ngai province

Gongs are important and very sacred musical instruments in the spiritual and cultural life of ethnic minorities living in the Truong Son - Central Highlands region, especially the Cor ethnic group in Quang Ngai province. The art of gongs here is limited to the performance of gongs according to gong songs combined with ca dao dancing during seasonal festivals, especially the gong competition between two teams. Cor ethnic gongs originated from the long history of Cor ethnic community development. In the document “Ethnographic note on a people of the Quang Ngai region” (H. Haguet, 1905, p.38), the author wrote that the Upper Da Vach people and the Upper Tra Bong people of the Ma La race came to settle in Quang Ngai province in ancient times before the Champa people or Vietnamese people occupied the delta.

As for author Pham Trung Viet (1971), in his research “The Land of Quang”, he said that the Upper Quang Ngai people belong to the Cham people, divided into two main tribes: the Ca Dong or Cua people in Tra Bong and Bac Son Ha, Da Vach people in Ba To, Minh Long, Nam Son Ha districts. This source shows that the ancestors of the Cor people settled in the Tra Bong mountains thousands of years ago. This source shows that the ancestors of the Cor ethnic group settled in the Tra Bong mountains thousands of years ago. They make a living by shifting cultivation and believe in the supernatural world that dominates the crops, so they conduct rituals related to agricultural beliefs such as straw-falling ceremonies and offering new rice. In the ritual of worshipping the gods, which has the original nature of the straw ceremony, in addition to offerings and prayers, gongs were originally used by the Cor ethnic group as a means of communication between humans and the supernatural world.

Musical instruments used in festivals of the Cor ethnic group is usually two gongs and one drum (Chu, 2016). Among them, the large Cor gong is called Po (male gong); the smaller gong falls inside the larger one, called Pi (female gong) and the drum is called Agor. The Cor ethnic group has two ways of playing gongs. One way is to play with a stick, and the other way is to play with a stick combined with hand beads. The gong sticks used by the Cor ethnic group in gong performances are soft sticks, made of bamboo, similar to bamboo but softer and more flexible, with the tip of the stick split into small pieces. Experienced Cor ethnic gong makers say that using this soft stick, although the gong’s timbre is not as resonant as a hard stick, the basic sound is heard very clearly. Playing with a stick means when hitting a gong, the Cor people use a stick to hit the inside of the gong’s center to create a round, resonant sound. According to the people’s artisan of Bac village, Tra Son commune, Tra Bong district, “Playing with a stick in combination with hand beads is to flexibly use your left bicep to lean against the outside of the gong, then use your right hand to hold the stick to hit the inside of the center of the gong, the sound bounces out and is held back by your forearm to create a warm gong sound. This way of playing is often used by the Cor ethnic group in gong competitions”.

The gong art of the Cor ethnic group in Tra Bong district, Quang Ngai province is shown in the buffalo eating festival and the straw festival, so the process of practicing the art of gongs is the process of practicing the gong songs that are played in the worshipping ritual combined with ca dao dance in the festival and gong songs are performed in the gong competition at the festival. The unique feature of gong art of the Cor ethnic group is that they use gongs even in wedding customs, making friends and cultural exchanges. Besides the sacred element, there is also the secular element, which is entertaining, everyday and close. Through the words of the village elders: it is unknown when the elders used the three gong songs “welcoming guests”, “seeing guests off”, “gong fighting” (gong competition) in the buffalo eating ceremony and harvest festival to perform in the festival wedding customs, or cultural exchange festivals. Therefore, when there was a movement to stage folk art performances, gong fighting of the Cor ethnic group was performed at many festivals, competitions, mass art shows, ethnic cultural festivals in Central region - Central Highlands, national gong culture festival without facing conflicting opinions. In 2018, the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Quang Ngai province coordinated with the People’s Committee of Minh Long district to organize the Festival of gongs, musical instruments and folk songs of ethnic minorities, with the participation of nearly 150 artisans, ethnic minority actors. The
festival aims to create an environment, cultural space for artisans and actors from ethnic minorities in Quang Ngai province to exchange and learn from experience; motivate and encourage creativity, exploration, preservation and promotion of unique cultural and artistic values. In general, the local ethnic minority community in the cinnamon land and mountainous region of Quang Ngai province views gong playing and gong fighting as a ritual and living custom that is close and attached to local people. The community wants the next generation to continue to create, explore, preserve and promote Cor ethnic cultural identity.

### 4.2. Current situation of teaching gong art of the Cor ethnic group in the educational environment in Tra Thuy commune, Tra Bong district, Quang Ngai province

Tra Bong district, Quang Ngai province is very interested in preserving Cor. Currently, the district has nearly 1,000 people who know how to play gongs. This is a very proud achievement not only for Cor ethnic artisans, but also a recognition of the efforts of culture and sports area of Tra Bong district. Currently, Tra Bong has gathered 12 artisans to work as pillars in the development of Cor ethnic culture, of which three have been recognized as elite artisans by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. Hopefully, with this “human capital”, the cultural beauty of the Cor ethnic group will not be lost and will be honed in the field of culture and art (Head of Culture and Information Department of Tra Bong district).

On August 19th, 2022, in village 2, Tra Thuy commune, Tra Bong district (Quang Ngai province), the first Congress of Cor ethnic cultural preservation club in the period of 2022-2027 was launched and held. According to Vice Chairman of Tra Thuy Commune People’s Committee, a club member said: “We established the Club in 2022. But before that, in Village 2, Tra Thuy commune, we gathered a performance team specializing in performing gong fighting and ca dao dancing of the Cor ethnic group. The biggest advantage in the performance team is that the members of the team are all children and grandchildren of the family, so it is easy for the club leader to manage. Over the years, we have spread our passion for gong fighting to many people. Up to now, the club has taught many classes, for many subjects, including students, teachers and youth groups in the commune to learn how to play gongs and dance ca dao. At the same time, club members are also invited to teach gong fighting classes in communes and districts to establish Cor cultural preservation clubs. Our club also participates in many competitions, performances, cultural activities inside and outside the province, achieving many high collective and individual achievements”.

According to an artist - cultural officer of Tra Thuy commune, Tra Bong district, the generation of grandparents, uncles and brothers from the past learned and knew how to play gongs from a young age, around 7 years old, it was taught directly from his father and older brother. “Since childhood, he has lived in a cultural space imbued with national identity with village offerings and festivals such as buffalo stabbing festival, Tet Nga ra, new rice celebration, worshiping gods,... Therefore, love and passion for national culture have been nurtured in you over the years”.

According to many people in Bac village, Tra Son commune, Tra Bong district, Quang Ngai province, they do not remember when they learned to play gongs, they only remember that “seeing the elders play gongs, I really liked it and often listened to them”, pay attention to the way the elders play the gongs and drums, distinguish each gong rhythm and drum sound, then practice playing it carefully and become familiar with it”. Through interviews, many people mentioned that observing the practice of gong playing and gong fighting from their predecessors from year to year has aroused their curiosity, interest, desire to play the gongs themselves, learning to play gongs voluntarily by young people. Learning to play gongs taking place as an inevitable event, without the need for propaganda or promotion. The eldest sons in the family must follow in the footsteps of their fathers and grandfathers, must also know how to play gongs. Ethnic group rarely have the opportunity to observe the elderly and middle-aged people playing gongs and fighting gongs.

However, the current young generation of Cor ethnic group rarely have the opportunity to observe the elderly and middle-aged people playing gongs and fighting gongs. Because the gong performance ritual is associated with the buffalo eating festival and the straw festival, but they are no longer held regularly. Village elders said: before 2000, the whole village sometimes had 7-8 families holding a buffalo eating festival in a year to pray for health and peace. Villagers in the village observe gong playing and ca da dancing rituals regularly. However, after 2000, villagers rarely held buffalo eating ceremonies. The Fall Festival (harvest festival) is held more often in November according to the Cor ethnic group’s calendar, but this festival has also been simplified a lot, only worshiping gods, eating and drinking and no longer gong fighting in some villages above in Tra Bong district and other districts. That is why authorities at all levels need to pay attention to teaching the art of gong fighting to the younger generation so that Cor ethnic culture does not disappear.

The Cor ethnic cultural subject - a people’s artisan who has passed the age of 70, realized that while he was still alive, he still devoted himself to serving the Cor ethnic Cultural Preservation Club. He said his generation did not live as long as the
village elders, his father himself was a people’s artisan who was honored by the State in 2015, he passed away in 2017, when he was over 100 years old. Over the years, he has persevered and actively encouraged his descendants and villagers to preserve gong culture. Because, it is the “soul” of the village and the treasure left by our ancestors. He gathered a number of young people in the village and commune to teach them how to play the gongs properly and with the correct rhythm. Thanks to the enthusiastic guidance of the village elders, the distant sound of gongs attracted a large number of young people in the commune. Although everyone in the gong team is busy with field work, but a few times a month, the team members gather to practice playing the gongs together. From his teachings, many young people in the commune were able to play all the gong songs of their ethnic group. To date, many communes in Tra Bong district have established gong teams of 20 or more members, regularly participating in gong performances in cultural events organized by the commune. This is a great source of encouragement, encouraging young people to believe in love, stick with gongs and be excited about learning gongs as well as performing the traditional art form of the Cor ethnic group. The older Cor people teach how to play gongs to the younger generation. The previous class teaches the next class and for many generations, the Cor people have preserved their gong culture quite well.

During a field trip on Sunday, March 2024, in village 2 and village 5 of Tra Thuy commune, Tra Bong district, the author had the opportunity to witness a practice session of the gong fighting performance team. The practice session took place in front of a people’s artisan’s yard. The resounding sound of the gong urged the children in the village to come and watch, everyone was excited, for the day of the national solidarity congress, with cultural participation from Tra Thuy Commune gong fighting team will take place on Monday morning. Little girls wearing traditional dresses of the Cor ethnic group ingeniously joined the ca dao dance team. The boys also swayed, moved their feet and memorized the gong-playing movements of their uncles and aunts. The practice session lasted from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m, everyone left with excited discussions about tomorrow’s conference. In addition to storing rare gong sets, to contribute to preserving and promoting this value, gong artisans in Tra Bong district have constantly made efforts to teach the younger generation how to play gongs of correct rhyme and preservation of traditional gong songs.

In the gong teams of communes and towns, there are many young people participating, showing that gong culture in Tra Bong district has been strongly inherited and promoted in the lives of ethnic minorities. Teaching gongs to the younger generation not only contributes to preserving cultural values recognized as intangible cultural heritage of humanity, but also contributes to enriching the spiritual life of the indigenous people of Tra Bong district; thereby creating a source of motivation for each person to overcome difficulties, rising up in socio-economic development, reducing poverty and building new rural areas.

4.3. Solutions for teaching gong art in an educational environment to preserve and promote Cor ethnic cultural values in Tra Thuy commune, Tra Bong district, Quang Ngai province

Through interviews with insiders, the author synthesizes a number of proposals and solutions corresponding to three educational environments to preserve and promote Cor ethnic cultural identity in Tra Bong district as follows:

Firstly, in the family educational environment: This is the first environment in which grandparents and parents guide Cor ethnic children to pay attention to gongs, traditional festivals of the Cor ethnic group. Every parent needs to remind their children to participate in ethnic festivals and observe folk art, thereby thinking about their responsibilities and how to preserve the intangible cultural values of the Cor ethnic community. Localities must consider teaching activities as a mandatory task in building the family’s cultural life, a criterion for evaluating cultural families in order to implement the Party and State’s policy of preserving and developing the ethnic minority cultural identity. Cor Ethnic Cultural Conservation Club in Tra Thuy commune shared: “The club currently has 20 members, of which 12 are female and 8 are male. Among these 20 members, there is a family of artisans, 6 people are participating, who are his biological son, daughter-in-law and son-in-law”. This is a model family for spreading the awareness of preserving and promoting the value of Cor ethnic cultural heritage to many generations and many members of the extended family. This artisan family is proud to receive the cultural family certificate of merit from the commune and district when his children and grandchildren all strive to study and have job positions at state agencies. Even though they worked hard as farmers and lived off acacia and cinnamon trees in the forest, but the couple always saved money to feed their children. They have 7 children (5 sons and 2 daughters). His children always supported their father’s wish to spread people’s understanding of Cor ethnic culture, including gong performances and ca dao dancing. In Tra Son commune, Tra Bong district, there are also families of artisans Ho Van Bien and Ho Van Thai who hold and transmit gong culture and art to their descendants. These are exemplary examples, showing that the family educational environment is the closest and most effective way to guide young people to pay attention and learn to play gongs.

Secondly, in the school educational environment:
The school has a learning environment, scientific teaching methods, experienced artisans and teachers so students can learn more effectively. Primary School for Ethnic Minorities Boarding School and Tra Thuy Secondary School are the first school in the district to establish a Cor ethnic cultural club among students. In 2023, the club has 30 members including students with interest and passion for ethnic culture and a number of school teachers who have been trained by artisan Ho Ngoc An to play gongs and ca dao dance. Ms. Duong Thi Thu Ha, Principal of Tra Thuy Primary and Secondary Ethnic Boarding School said that for many years, the school has been very interested in preserving and promoting ethnic cultural values. In teaching activities, the school has guided teachers to integrate ethnic cultural content in lessons in related subjects, experienced lessons and the school has also organized many activities of preserving culture for students such as organizing haverst Tet with traditional dishes such as wrapping typical cakes of the people, organizing gong playing, ca dao dancing, inviting artisans to teach gongs, ca dao dancing for students,… This is considered the foundation for schools to replicate and do a good job of preserving culture in schools (Dong, 2023).

There are many schools in the district, but only Tra Thuy Ethnic Boarding Primary and Secondary School has many Cor ethnic students, so it is convenient to promote and teach. Tra Bong district encourages the remaining schools in the district to also contribute their efforts in preserving and promoting Cor ethnic cultural heritage.

Thirdly, in the community and social environment: Tra Bong District Party Committee, Quang Ngai province is very interested in promoting ethnic minority culture. Implementing Resolution No. 02/NQ-HU of Tra Bong District Party Committee on preserving and promoting ethnic minority cultural values in the period of 2021-2030, district builds 1-2 cultural villages and restores traditional houses and festivals of the Cor ethnic group and strengthening traditional performance teams in communes and towns. All levels and branches of Tra Bong district have made efforts to organize many activities related to preserving ethnic culture, such as organizing cultural thematic activities, contributing to helping people understand and proud of our ethnic culture, from there, we have a sense of learning and preserving it. Village heads and commune chairmen need to invest more time and effort in establishing clubs and groups to teach and practice cultural heritage, at the same time, examine, evaluate and reward successful individuals with outstanding achievements in promoting gong performances. Regularly organize performances between clubs and communes to learn, exchange and share learning experiences. To do that, there needs to be the attention and support of the State, the provincial Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the People’s Committees of communes and districts, especially the awareness of preserving and promoting the values of the Cor ethnic culture in Tra Bong district, Quang Ngai province.

5. Discussion

Through the work of teaching Cor ethnic gong art in an educational environment, the results achieved are that the Department of Education and Training of Tra Bong district organized 3 training classes on the art of gong dancing, folk songs and Cor ethnic dance for 72 officials and teachers working at schools in highland communes where the Cor ethnic group live. Students are divided into 2 classes, each class has more than 30 people, studying for 3 days. The district Department of Education and Training invited Cor artisans from the Cor ethnic cultural preservation club in Tra Thuy commune to directly teach. Trained teachers will continue to carry out the mission of teaching Cor ethnic culture to students after this course. However, with little time to study, the artisans only teach two basic gong lessons: the gong to welcome guests and the gong to see off guests for students, teenagers, teachers and the gong to worship the gods, the gong fighting between two teams are more difficult, requires longer time to study and cultivate and there is no next team. It is necessary to expand the class and age range to participate in learning to play gongs and fight gongs to raise awareness about practicing the festival and strengthening community cohesion. Only when they are aware of the responsibilities, obligations and rights of each individual or community in preserving Cor ethnic culture and they will participate in organizing the straw festival, the buffalo eating festival and actively participate in gong fighting performances, happily and voluntarily. Maintaining gong fighting performances in a professional and methodical manner will only be truly effective in teaching gong fighting to the younger generation. The establishment of clubs and groups to learn gong fighting and teaching gong fighting at educational institutions such as elementary schools and high schools in recent years has only been seasonal, without a performance environment, learning is not coupled with practice, making the effectiveness of preserving and promoting the value of gong fighting cultural heritage to be difficult.

6. Conclusion

Teaching gong art in an educational environment is necessary and effective, bringing sustainable value to the conservation and promotion of ethnic minority cultural values in Central Vietnam. Tra Thuy is a difficult mountainous commune, located in the northwest of Tra Bong district, the commune’s current population is 3,671 people, but it is a typical commune that does a good job of teaching gong art to young people. From 2017
to 2023, Quang Ngai has organized 5 festivals of gongs, musical instruments and folk songs of ethnic minorities in the province and 6 festivals of provincial-level mass arts. This is also the occasion for the Cor ethnic cultural conservation Club in Tra Thuy commune to be chosen by the district and province as a representative unit to perform gong art. Currently, communes in Tra Bong district have established clubs and opened classes to teach gong art, increasing the number of people who know how to play gongs and passionate about ethnic minority culture and arts. However, activity clubs are facing the challenge of lack of operating funds, investment in performance costumes and training costs for performance participants are not satisfactory. There is currently no specific policy to support and promote the teaching of gong performing arts in the community, mainly due to enthusiasm, love of the profession and desire to preserve traditional cultural values left by his father to the artisans. Teaching the art of gong performance is carried out through integrated forms in schools, opening classes under programs, projects or serving to organize events, so it faces many difficulties.

References

TRUYỀN DẠY NGHỆ THUẬT CỒNG CHIÊNG NGƯỜI COR TRONG MÔI TRƯỜNG GIÁO DỤC Ở XÃ TRÀ THỦY, HUYỆN TRÀ BỒNG, TỈNH QUẢNG NGÃI*

Hoàng Thị Mai Sa a
Lê Thị Phương Nga b

*Trường Đại học Sư phạm, Đại học Đà Nẵng; Email: hoangsa82@gmail.com
bTrường Đại học Văn hóa Hà Nội; Email: phuongnga117611@gmail.com
DOI: https://doi.org/10.54163/ncdt/310

Xã Trà Thủy, huyện Trà Bồng, tỉnh Quảng Ngãi là nơi có nhiều người Cor sinh sống. Họ được biết đến với truyền thống văn hóa độc đáo như chơi cồng chiêng và dịch vụ cho khách. Trong những năm gần đây, chính quyền địa phương, lãnh đạo phòng giáo dục huyện đã chú trọng phát triển các hoạt động phổ biến hóa, hướng đến việc giáo dục các em học sinh, đặc biệt là học sinh người Cor. Bài viết này nghiên cứu thực trạng và giải pháp truyền dạy nghệ thuật đấu chiêng của người Cor trong môi trường giáo dục nhằm bao tồn giá trị văn hóa dân tộc ở xã Trà Thủy, huyện Trà Bông, tỉnh Quảng Ngãi hiện nay.

Từ khóa: Nghệ thuật cồng chiêng; Người Cor; Môi trường giáo dục; Huyện Trà Bông; Tỉnh Quảng Ngãi.

* Bài viết là sản phẩm của đề tài nghiên cứu khoa học: “Phong tục đấu chiêng của người Cor ở huyện Trà Bông, tỉnh Quảng Ngãi”. Mã số: T2023-TN-09.