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### Preservation of Architectural and Ritual Heritage of Minh Su Dao in the Context of Urbanization: A Case Study of Quang Nam Buddhist Temple in Ho Chi Minh City

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#### Abstract

This article examines the preservation of the architectural and ritual heritage of Minh Su Dao in the context of urbanization through a case study of Quang Nam Buddhist Temple in Ho Chi Minh City. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach that integrates religious studies and cultural studies, the research draws on document analysis, field observation, and in-depth interviews. It focuses on analyzing the current state of preservation of sacred space, ritual systems, and religious knowledge within the Minh Su Dao community.

The findings indicate that Quang Nam Buddhist Temple continues to sustain key elements of traditional architecture, ritual practices, and the transmission of religious teachings. These elements contribute significantly to maintaining religious identity and supporting the spiritual life of its followers. However, the preservation process is increasingly

shaped by urbanization, shifts in community structure, generational differences, and the gradual decline of religious knowledge.

In this context, the preservation of Minh Su Dao heritage should be understood as a dynamic process involving both continuity and adaptation rather than as a fixed or static condition. The study proposes several implications, including the documentation and digitization of religious texts, the renewal of knowledge transmission methods, the integration of sacred space preservation with urban planning, and the strengthening of collaboration among religious communities, clergy, and local authorities. These approaches are essential for ensuring the long term sustainability of Minh Su Dao heritage in contemporary society.

**Keywords:** Minh Su Dao, Religious Heritage, Architectural Heritage, Ritual Heritage, Urbanization, Quang Nam Buddhist Temple

#### 1. Introduction

In the study of religion and cultural heritage, examining the current state of preservation plays a crucial role in identifying the extent to which belief systems are maintained, transformed, and adapted within contemporary society. For traditional religious communities, these values are expressed not only through doctrinal systems and beliefs but also through sacred spaces, ritual practices, religious knowledge, and forms of communal life. According to the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, intangible heritage encompasses practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills that communities recognize as part of their cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation and continuously recreated in response to changing social contexts (UNESCO, 2003) [16]. This perspective suggests that the preservation of religious heritage should be understood as a process of sustaining living cultural practices, in which tangible and intangible elements are closely interconnected.

In the contemporary Vietnamese context, numerous studies have indicated that the preservation of religious values is significantly influenced by factors such as urbanization, social transformation, and changes in the structure of religious communities. According to Nguyễn Hồng Dương (2017) [8], religions in Vietnam are evolving in a direction that simultaneously maintains tradition while adapting to modern social conditions, leading to adjustments in forms of religious practice. Similarly, Lê Văn Hào (2015) emphasizes that the survival of indigenous religions largely depends on the ability to sustain sacred spaces and ritual systems, as these elements play a central role in reinforcing belief and social cohesion. These

perspectives highlight that the preservation of religion cannot be separated from the maintenance and reproduction of knowledge and cultural practices within community life. Minh Su Dao is a syncretic religious system rooted in the tradition of the unity of the three teachings and has been strongly localized within the cultural environment of Southern Vietnam. The values of this religion are manifested through various dimensions, including temple architecture, ritual systems, communal activities, and traditions of spiritual cultivation. Buddhist temples function not only as places of worship but also as important socio-cultural spaces for the community of followers (Nguyễn Hồng Dương, 2017) [8]. However, in the context of rapid urbanization, the religious institutions of Minh Su Dao are facing significant changes in spatial organization, community structure, and modes of religious practice. Changes in lifestyle and the spiritual needs of younger generations also pose challenges to the maintenance of rituals and the transmission of religious knowledge.

Although several studies have examined Minh Su Dao and religious life in Southern Vietnam, most have focused primarily on historical development or the characteristics of belief systems. There remains a lack of in-depth research addressing the preservation of this religious heritage in the context of urbanization. In particular, there is a notable absence of case studies at the level of specific religious institutions that would clarify patterns of transformation and adaptation in practice.

Based on these research gaps, this article analyzes the preservation of architectural and ritual heritage of Minh Su Dao in the context of urbanization through a case study of Quang Nam Buddhist Temple in Ho Chi Minh City. The study aims to clarify the current state of preservation, identify patterns of change, and propose orientations for enhancing the value of religious heritage in contemporary social conditions.

This study contributes to the literature by providing an empirical case of religious heritage preservation in an urbanizing context in Vietnam.

## 2. Research Methodology

This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach that integrates religious studies and cultural studies to examine the preservation of architectural and ritual heritage of Minh Su Dao in the context of urbanization. It combines theoretical analysis with empirical investigation and draws on both secondary data and fieldwork to ensure the comprehensiveness and reliability of the research findings.

First, the document analysis method is used to systematize existing studies related to religion, cultural heritage, and Minh Su Dao. The sources include academic books, journal articles, and previous research on religion in Southern Vietnam. The synthesis and analysis of these materials provide a theoretical foundation for approaching religious heritage as a system encompassing both tangible and intangible elements, emphasizing the role of the community in maintaining and reproducing cultural practices (UNESCO, 2003) [16].

In addition, the case study method is applied with Quang Nam Buddhist Temple in Ho Chi Minh City as the primary research site. The selection of this case is based on its representativeness within the Minh Su Dao system in Southern Vietnam, particularly in terms of historical development, architectural value, and its role in the religious

life of the community. This approach enables an in-depth analysis of the relationship between religious heritage preservation and urbanization within a specific context.

Field observation is conducted to directly document the current condition of architectural structures, the organization of sacred space, and ritual activities at Quang Nam Buddhist Temple. The observation focuses on spatial arrangements, the use of symbolic elements, and forms of ritual practice in an urban setting. This method allows for the identification of changes in religious life under the impact of urbanization and broader social transformations.

Furthermore, in-depth interviews are carried out with religious functionaries and followers participating in activities at the temple. The interviews focus on community perceptions of religious heritage values, changes in ritual practices, and challenges in preservation efforts. Through this approach, the study clarifies the role of cultural actors in maintaining and promoting religious values in the current social context.

Finally, the comparative method is employed to situate the case of Quang Nam Buddhist Temple within the broader context of Minh Su Dao in Southern Vietnam. This approach helps identify both distinctive characteristics and general trends in the preservation of religious heritage. The combination of these research methods provides a systematic framework for analyzing the relationship between the preservation of architectural and ritual heritage and the process of urbanization in contemporary society.

Fieldwork was conducted from August 2025 to March 2026 at Quang Nam Buddhist Temple in Ho Chi Minh City. The study involved a purposive sample of religious participants to collect data on ritual practices and heritage preservation activities.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Overview of Minh Su Dao and Quang Nam Buddhist Temple

#### 3.1.1 Overview of Minh Su Dao

Minh Su Dao is a syncretic belief system formed on the foundation of the unity of the three teachings, integrating elements of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. The emergence of such syncretic religious systems in Southern Vietnam is closely associated with processes of cultural exchange and acculturation among different communities, particularly between Vietnamese and Chinese populations during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Trần Hồng Liên, 2014) [14].

In terms of origin, Minh Su Dao derives from religious traditions in China, with connections to Tiên Thiên Dao, and was introduced into Vietnam through Chinese religious masters. The process of transmission occurred from approximately the second half of the nineteenth century, in conjunction with waves of migration and the formation of Chinese communities in Southern Vietnam. The first temples were established in commercial centers such as Chợ Lớn and Hà Tiên, before expanding to other areas across the region (Nguyễn Thanh Phong, 2018; Nguyễn Thị Quý Hương & Phạm Quang Tùng, 2021) [9, 10]. By the early twentieth century, Minh Su Dao had developed significantly, with a relatively stable system of religious institutions and a growing community of followers.

From a doctrinal perspective, Minh Su Dao emphasizes moral cultivation, ethical conduct, and the pursuit of spiritual tranquility through integrated forms of religious

practice. Buddhist influence is reflected in concepts such as karma and liberation, while Taoist elements shape ritual practices and modes of cultivation, and Confucianism provides a framework for moral norms and social order. This synthesis results in a belief system that combines philosophical depth with strong connections to everyday community life.

Within the context of Southern Vietnam, Minh Su Dao functions not only as a belief system but also as a socio-cultural institution. Religious activities contribute to the maintenance of moral values, the strengthening of social cohesion, and the creation of shared communal spaces for followers. According to Nguyễn Hồng Dương (2017) [8], religions in Vietnam are closely embedded in social life and play a role in sustaining traditional cultural values. This is evident in the case of Minh Su Dao, where religious practices are consistently integrated into local community life.

### 3.1.2 The Role of Buddhist Temples in Religious Life

Within the organizational structure of Minh Su Dao, Buddhist temples occupy a central position in maintaining and developing the religious life of the community. These spaces function not only as venues for ritual activities but also as sites for preserving religious knowledge, transmitting teachings, and organizing communal activities. Religious institutions in Vietnam serve to connect doctrine, ritual practice, and social activities, thereby contributing to the maintenance of cultural values and the strengthening of community cohesion (Nguyễn Hồng Dương, 2017) [8].

Buddhist temples in Minh Su Dao also illustrate the close relationship between tangible and intangible heritage. From a tangible perspective, they are architectural structures with historical and aesthetic value, reflecting the formation and development of the religious community. From an intangible perspective, they serve as spaces for rituals, spiritual practices, and the transmission of religious knowledge. According to UNESCO (2003) [16], intangible cultural heritage is inherently linked to the communities that practice it and to specific cultural spaces, indicating that the preservation of temples must be closely associated with the continuation of religious activities within these spaces.

In the context of urbanization, the role of temples becomes increasingly significant as traditional community relationships undergo transformation. Temples not only sustain religious activities but also function as spaces that connect community members, preserve cultural identity, and provide a shared environment for religious and social interaction in urban settings.

### 3.1.3 The Case of Quang Nam Buddhist Temple in Ho Chi Minh City

Southern Vietnam is characterized by a high degree of cultural and social openness, creating favorable conditions for the introduction and development of various religions. According to Trần Hữu Hợp (2016), this region represents a zone of cultural interaction where both indigenous and foreign religions coexist and evolve. Within this context, Minh Su Dao has been able to develop and integrate into the religious life of local communities.

Within the scope of this study, Quang Nam Buddhist Temple in Ho Chi Minh City is selected as the case study to analyze the preservation of architectural and ritual heritage of Minh Su Dao in the context of urbanization. The selection is based on criteria such as historical development,

architectural value, and its role in the religious life of the community.

Quang Nam Buddhist Temple is a long established religious site closely associated with the development of the Minh Su Dao community in an urban setting. In the contemporary urban environment, the temple not only maintains traditional ritual practices but also adapts to changes in the social context. This makes it a suitable site for observing the interaction between preservation and transformation in religious life. The temple location and identity are indicated at the entrance (see Fig 1).



Source: Authors' fieldwork, 2025.

**Fig 1:** Quang Nam Buddhist Temple in Ho Chi Minh City: (left) entrance signage indicating the temple's location and institutional identity; (right) central altar space reflecting architectural organization and ritual symbolism

From an architectural perspective, the temple reflects a combination of traditional elements and adaptations to urban conditions. The spatial layout is organized along a central axis, with the main hall serving as the focal point for religious symbols and key rituals. Decorative elements such as horizontal lacquered boards, parallel sentences, and ritual objects reflect the worldview and ideological system of Minh Su Dao. According to Lê Văn Hào (2015), religious institutions in Southern Vietnam often demonstrate processes of localization through adjustments in architectural design and spatial organization to suit local social conditions.

Beyond its religious functions, the temple also plays an important role in social life. Studies indicate that such institutions serve not only as places of spiritual practice but also as communal spaces, and historically they have functioned as sites associated with patriotic movements during the colonial period (Nguyễn Thanh Phong, 2018) [9]. This reflects the close relationship between religion and social life in Southern Vietnam.

At the same time, Quang Nam Buddhist Temple illustrates the transformations occurring in the preservation of religious heritage under the influence of urbanization. Changes in spatial organization, patterns of community participation, and the evolving needs of followers have created new challenges for maintaining architectural and ritual values. The examination of this case provides an important empirical basis for analyzing the relationship between preservation and adaptation of Minh Su Dao in contemporary society.

## 3.2 Preservation of Architectural Heritage and Sacred Space

### 3.2.1 Architectural Characteristics and Organization of Sacred Space

In studies of religious heritage preservation, architecture and the organization of sacred space are considered essential elements that reflect the characteristics of a belief system. Religious institutions are not merely physical structures but

also cultural spaces where religious practices take place and where the spiritual life of the community is maintained. According to UNESCO, the preservation of religious heritage should be approached in relation to both tangible elements and the socio-cultural environment in which religious practices are continuously sustained (UNESCO, 2003) [16].

Buddhist temples of Minh Su Dao represent a distinctive type of religious institution that combines architectural features with spiritual philosophy. According to Trần Tiến Thành (2009), these temples function not only as places of worship but also as spaces for meditation and the transmission of religious teachings, clearly reflecting the syncretic nature of this tradition. Their architectural design is closely associated with religious symbols and spatial arrangements that support inner spiritual practice.

Quang Nam Buddhist Temple is a representative religious site of Minh Su Dao in Ho Chi Minh City, constructed in the early twentieth century during a period of significant development of this religion in Southern Vietnam. The structure reflects traditional architectural features, including a layout composed of a main hall, courtyard, entrance gate, and auxiliary facilities serving religious activities. The main hall serves as the central space, where religious symbols are placed and major rituals are conducted.

Minh Su Dao temples preserve a wide range of tangible heritage values, including architecture, sculpture, horizontal lacquered boards, parallel sentences, and inscriptions. These elements reflect the integration of religious and cultural characteristics, as well as the process of localization of an originally foreign religion within the Southern Vietnamese context (Nguyễn Thanh Phong, 2018) [9]. Decorative features such as horizontal boards, parallel sentences, and ritual objects are arranged within the interior space to express doctrinal meanings and symbolic systems. The architecture of these temples clearly demonstrates processes of localization through the integration of traditional elements with the cultural and environmental conditions of Southern Vietnam (Trần Hồng Liên, 2014) [14]. As a result, sacred space embodies not only architectural value but also serves as a repository of cultural memory and religious practice.

### 3.2.2 Current State of Architectural Preservation

With a history of more than one century, Quang Nam Buddhist Temple has undergone multiple restorations and renovations aimed at maintaining structural stability and meeting the religious needs of the community. Restoration activities have primarily focused on reinforcing structural components, repairing roofs and walls, and improving auxiliary facilities.

These efforts reflect the commitment of the religious community and organizational structures in preserving the temple. In many cases, financial resources for restoration rely largely on contributions from followers, highlighting the central role of the community in religious heritage preservation. This represents a common characteristic of religious site preservation in Vietnam, where the community acts as the primary agent in maintaining sacred spaces.

In addition to the built structure, the surrounding landscape of the temple is also carefully maintained. The courtyard, greenery, and symbolic elements contribute to the creation of a sacred environment and provide spiritual stability for followers. These features play an important role in

preserving cultural identity and strengthening community cohesion (Trần Hồng Liên, 2014) [14].

However, architectural preservation also faces several challenges. Pressures from urbanization, changes in spatial planning, and practical usage demands may lead to adjustments in the structure of the building. This situation requires a balance between maintaining traditional values and adapting to contemporary conditions (UNESCO, 2003) [16].

### 3.2.3 Transformation of Sacred Space in the Context of Urbanization

In an urban context, the sacred space of Quang Nam Buddhist Temple has undergone certain transformations. Urban development, including increased population density and changes in infrastructure, has directly influenced the organization and use of religious space.

One notable manifestation is the adjustment of spatial scale and structure. Under conditions of limited land availability, areas within the temple have been reorganized to accommodate the needs of the community. Sacred space is no longer used exclusively for ritual purposes but also serves broader communal functions, reflecting an expansion of the social role of the religious institution. Furthermore, changes in urban lifestyles have influenced the ways in which space is utilized. Religious activities are organized more flexibly in terms of time and form to align with the living conditions of followers. According to Nguyễn Hồng Dương (2017) [8], religious institutions in Vietnam are increasingly adapting their structures and functions to suit contemporary social contexts. Ongoing construction activities in the surrounding area clearly demonstrate the pressure of urban development on the temple's spatial environment and sacred landscape (see Fig 2).



Source: Authors' fieldwork, 2025.

Fig 2: Urban construction surrounding Quang Nam Buddhist Temple in Ho Chi Minh City

This process demonstrates that sacred space is dynamic and continuously shaped by its interaction with the surrounding social environment. Such adaptability contributes to the continued existence of the temple under conditions of urbanization, while also reflecting the flexibility of religious traditions.

### 3.2.4 General Assessment of Sacred Space Preservation

From the above analysis, it can be observed that the preservation of architecture and sacred space at Quang Nam Buddhist Temple follows a combined approach of continuity and adaptation. Core traditional architectural elements are largely maintained, while certain modifications are introduced to meet the demands of urban life.

The role of the religious community is a key factor in this preservation process. Restoration, maintenance, and the continuation of religious activities are largely supported by community participation, reflecting the agency of the community in safeguarding religious heritage. However, urbanization also presents significant challenges, including spatial constraints, the risk of architectural alteration, and changes in patterns of space usage. These factors necessitate appropriate preservation strategies to ensure the sustainability of heritage in a modern social context.

More broadly, the preservation of sacred space in Minh Su Dao is not merely the maintenance of a physical structure but the preservation of a living cultural environment in which religious values are continuously practiced and reproduced within community life. Within the wider context of Vietnamese religious life, the existence of Minh Su Dao reflects the diversity and syncretism of the religious system. According to Trần Hồng Liên (2004) [13], religions in Vietnam have developed through processes of cultural interaction and adaptation, in which external elements are adjusted to fit local social contexts. This helps explain the flexibility observed in the architecture and sacred spaces of Minh Su Dao today.

The continued presence of Minh Su Dao temples in urban environments can also be understood within the broader framework of Buddhism in Southern Vietnam. According to Thích Nhật Từ (2021) [12], Buddhism in this region is characterized by syncretism, social engagement, and a high capacity for adaptation to social change, thereby maintaining an important role in the cultural and spiritual life of local communities. These characteristics also contribute to explaining the persistence and transformation of Minh Su Dao religious institutions in the contemporary context.

### 3.3 Preservation of Ritual Systems

#### 3.3.1 Ritual System and Its Religious and Social Significance

Within religious communities, ritual systems play a central role in maintaining belief and reinforcing social cohesion. Rituals are not only expressions of sacred belief but also serve as means for transmitting doctrine and reaffirming the moral values of the community. According to Durkheim (1912/1995), religious rituals function to strengthen collective consciousness and create social cohesion through the reenactment of sacred symbols.

The religious practices of Minh Su Dao are clearly reflected in its ritual system and communal activities. According to Nguyễn Thị Quế Hương and Phạm Quang Tùng (2021) [10], these practices include both purely religious rituals and activities oriented toward social life, thereby reflecting the beliefs and communal attachment of followers.

The ritual system of Minh Su Dao is influenced by multiple traditions, particularly Buddhism and Chinese folk beliefs. This formation is associated with the transmission of Tiên Thiên Đạo, which integrates elements of spiritual cultivation and ritual practice, resulting in the syncretic character of religious practice within the community (Nguyễn Thanh Phong, 2018) [9].

At Quang Nam Buddhist Temple, traditional rituals of Minh Su Dao continue to be maintained as a central component of religious life. Typical rituals include ancestral worship ceremonies, prayers for peace, requiem rituals, and ordination ceremonies. Ancestral worship rituals express

gratitude toward founding masters and preserve the historical memory of the community (Nguyễn Hồng Dương, 2017) [8]. Prayers for peace and requiem rituals reflect the spiritual needs of followers for well being and the liberation of the deceased, while also demonstrating the integration of Buddhist elements with folk beliefs (Lê Văn Hào, 2015). Ordination ceremonies play an important role in maintaining the organizational structure of the religion and transmitting its spiritual values.

Overall, ritual systems carry not only religious significance but also clear social functions. According to Geertz (1973) [5], ritual is a form of cultural expression through which individuals construct meaning within social life. In the case of Minh Su Dao, rituals contribute to preserving religious identity and strengthening community cohesion.

#### 3.3.2 Degree of Maintenance and Practice of Rituals at Quang Nam Buddhist Temple

The maintenance and practice of rituals at Quang Nam Buddhist Temple depend largely on the participation of the community and the organizational role of the religious institution. In practice, traditional rituals continue to be performed relatively regularly, particularly during major annual occasions, attracting a significant number of followers.

These rituals typically involve activities such as chanting, offering incense, and performing traditional ceremonial procedures. Through these practices, rituals become a form of collective religious activity that contributes to reinforcing religious identity and maintaining community cohesion (Geertz, 1973) [5].

However, levels of participation vary among different groups of followers. Middle aged and elderly participants tend to be more actively involved, while younger generations participate less frequently due to the influence of urban lifestyles. This reflects broader transformations in religious life under the impact of contemporary social conditions.

#### 3.3.3 Transformation of Rituals and the Role of Religious Functionaries in the Context of Urbanization

Under conditions of urban transformation, the ritual system of Minh Su Dao at Quang Nam Buddhist Temple has undergone certain adjustments to adapt to changing social conditions. According to Turner (1969) [15], rituals evolve alongside social structures and tend to transform in response to new environments.

One notable change is the reduction in duration and simplification of certain ceremonial procedures. While rituals continue to be maintained, they are organized in more flexible forms to accommodate the living conditions of followers. In addition, the integration of rituals with community activities contributes to increasing participation.

Religious functionaries play a crucial role in maintaining ritual practices. They are responsible not only for conducting ceremonies but also for transmitting doctrine and guiding followers in religious practice. According to Weber (1978) [17], individuals who hold religious authority play an essential role in maintaining order and stability within belief communities. However, this group is currently facing challenges related to generational continuity, as the number of younger participants remains limited (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985) [11].

#### 3.3.4 General Assessment of Ritual Preservation

From the above analysis, it can be observed that the ritual system of Minh Su Dao at Quang Nam Buddhist Temple

remains relatively stable, although certain adjustments have been made to adapt to the context of urbanization. Core ritual values continue to be preserved, while forms of practice demonstrate flexibility in response to contemporary social conditions.

Rituals not only sustain religious life but also contribute to strengthening community cohesion and transmitting cultural values across generations. However, changes in lifestyle and participation levels, particularly among younger generations, pose challenges for long-term preservation.

Overall, the preservation of ritual systems in Minh Su Dao should be understood as a process that involves both maintaining tradition and adapting to social change. The combination of community participation, the role of religious functionaries, and flexible organizational approaches constitutes a key factor in ensuring the sustainability of ritual practices in contemporary society. Ritual practices are closely associated with the arrangement of altars and sacred objects (see Fig 3).



Source: Authors' fieldwork, 2025.

**Fig 3:** Ancestral altar and ritual objects at Quang Nam Buddhist Temple, illustrating ritual practice and symbolic structure

### 3.4 Preservation of Religious Knowledge and Spiritual Traditions

#### 3.4.1 Preservation of Religious Texts and Scriptural Materials

In religious traditions, sacred texts and scriptural materials play a foundational role in preserving doctrine, ritual norms, and spiritual knowledge within the community. In the case of Minh Su Dao, this body of texts serves not only ritual purposes but also functions as a medium for transmitting moral and philosophical values across generations. According to Assmann (2011) [1], religious texts can be understood as a form of cultural memory that enables communities to maintain the continuity of spiritual values over time.

At Quang Nam Buddhist Temple, religious texts and documents are still preserved and used in daily religious activities. These materials primarily exist in printed and handwritten forms, including ritual texts, doctrinal explanations, and manuals for spiritual practice. Some documents, due to their age, also hold historical value, reflecting the formation and development of the religious community.

However, the preservation of these materials remains limited in several respects. Storage conditions at the temple are not always adequate for safeguarding older documents, particularly handwritten manuscripts. In addition, efforts to systematize and conduct scholarly research on Minh Su Dao texts remain insufficient, which may lead to the gradual loss of religious knowledge over time. According to UNESCO (2003) [16], documentation, digitization, and research are essential measures for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage associated with traditional knowledge.

Historically, the preservation and transmission of religious texts in Vietnam have faced numerous challenges due to war and social upheaval. Nguyễn Hiền Đức (1993) notes that many Buddhist materials were lost or destroyed during periods of conflict and colonization. This context partly explains the current limitations in the systematization of religious knowledge within indigenous traditions such as Minh Su Dao.

#### 3.4.2 Transmission of Doctrine and Religious Knowledge

In addition to the preservation of texts, the transmission of doctrine plays a crucial role in maintaining and developing the religious knowledge system of Minh Su Dao. Religious knowledge exists not only in written form but is also conveyed through ritual practice, oral instruction, and direct guidance within the community. According to Berger (1967) [2], religious knowledge is sustained through processes of social reproduction in which beliefs and values are continuously transmitted across generations.

The development of Minh Su Dao is also closely associated with the influence of Zen traditions and systems of religious transmission originating from China. According to Trần Tiến Thành (2009), Minh Su Dao temples are influenced by Zen lineages and their transmission processes, which have contributed to the formation of distinctive doctrinal systems and modes of spiritual practice.

At Quang Nam Buddhist Temple, doctrinal transmission primarily takes place through chanting sessions, religious instruction, and guidance in ritual practice. Religious functionaries and experienced practitioners play a central role in conveying knowledge, helping followers understand the meanings of scriptures and moral teachings. In addition, thematic activities are occasionally organized to enhance the religious awareness of the community.

However, current modes of transmission still rely heavily on oral traditions and individual experience. According to Goody (1987) [6], knowledge systems that depend largely on oral transmission may face risks of transformation or disruption if they are not systematically documented. At the same time, changes in urban lifestyles have reduced participation among certain groups of followers, particularly younger generations, thereby affecting the long-term continuity of knowledge transmission.

#### 3.4.3 The Role of the Religious Community in Sustaining Spiritual Knowledge

In the preservation of religious knowledge, the community of followers plays a central role, as knowledge is not confined to texts but is also maintained through everyday practice. In the case of Minh Su Dao, the community at Quang Nam Buddhist Temple serves as the primary agent in maintaining rituals, practicing spiritual cultivation, and transmitting religious experience.

According to Luckmann (1967) [7], religion is sustained not only within formal institutions but also through everyday

practices and lived experiences. In practice, followers participate not only in temple rituals but also in the application of moral principles and spiritual practices in their daily lives. Through activities such as chanting, preparing ritual offerings, and organizing ceremonies, religious knowledge is transmitted naturally within the community.

In addition, the community plays an important role in transmitting knowledge to younger generations. In many families following Minh Su Dao, guiding younger members to participate in rituals and learn doctrinal principles is considered an integral part of traditional education. According to Bourdieu (1977) [3], the transmission of cultural values and practices within the family represents a form of cultural reproduction that helps sustain systems of knowledge and belief across generations.

#### **3.4.4 Challenges and General Assessment of Religious Knowledge Preservation**

Although religious knowledge in Minh Su Dao continues to be maintained through texts, rituals, and community activities, the preservation process currently faces several challenges. One major issue is the risk of deterioration or loss of religious materials due to inadequate preservation conditions. Many documents still exist in traditional formats that are vulnerable to damage or loss over time.

In addition, the transmission of knowledge remains heavily dependent on the experience of religious functionaries, while the number of successors with in-depth doctrinal knowledge is limited. Changes in social structure and levels of participation, particularly among younger generations, also affect the continuity of knowledge transmission. According to Berger (1967) [2], in modern societies, the diversification of cultural choices may reduce the influence of religious institutions if they fail to adapt appropriately.

However, these challenges also open up new directions for preservation. The integration of traditional transmission methods with modern approaches such as digitization, database development, and increased academic research can contribute to sustaining religious knowledge. At the same time, encouraging community participation, particularly among younger generations, will be a key factor in maintaining the vitality of Minh Su Dao traditions in the context of urbanization.

Overall, the preservation of religious knowledge in Minh Su Dao at Quang Nam Buddhist Temple is not limited to the safeguarding of texts but involves the maintenance of a living cultural system in which knowledge is continuously reproduced and transmitted through community life.

### **4. Discussion and Implications for Heritage Preservation**

#### **4.1 The Role of Stakeholders in the Preservation of Minh Su Dao Heritage**

In the contemporary context, the transformation of Minh Su Dao should be understood within the broader trends of religious development in Southern Vietnam. According to Trần Hữu Hợp (2016), religions in this region are evolving toward adaptation to modern society, while also increasing their participation in social activities and complying with legal regulations. This indicates that the preservation of religious heritage cannot be separated from processes of social adaptation. The case of Quang Nam Buddhist Temple illustrates a typical model of interaction between heritage preservation and urbanization in Southern Vietnam.

The findings show that the preservation of architectural and ritual heritage of Minh Su Dao does not depend on a single actor but rather on the interaction among the community of followers, religious functionaries, and local authorities. Among these, the community plays a central role as the direct agent in practicing and maintaining religious life.

At Quang Nam Buddhist Temple, the community actively participates in organizing rituals, maintaining sacred space, and contributing material resources to the religious institution. Through these activities, religious values and ritual practices are continuously sustained within community life. From the perspective of Bourdieu (1977) [3], processes of cultural reproduction within the community serve as an important mechanism for maintaining systems of values and knowledge across generations.

Religious functionaries play a guiding and organizational role in religious activities. They preside over rituals, transmit doctrine, and ensure the normative character of religious practices. According to Weber (1978) [17], religious authority plays a crucial role in maintaining order and continuity within religious traditions.

Local authorities act as supporting and regulatory agents through the implementation of legal frameworks and by facilitating stable religious activities. Coordination between the state and religious communities is considered an essential factor in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2003) [16]. However, the level of support varies depending on local conditions, resulting in differences in preservation outcomes.

Overall, the effectiveness of preservation depends on the harmonious coordination among these stakeholders. When the community serves as the central actor, religious functionaries provide direction, and local authorities offer support, the preservation process is more likely to achieve long-term sustainability.

#### **4.2 Challenges in the Preservation of Minh Su Dao Heritage**

One of the major challenges facing Minh Su Dao today is the decline in the number of followers and the aging structure of the community. Recent estimates indicate that the number of adherents ranges from approximately 10,000 to 13,000 individuals, distributed across around fifty religious institutions nationwide. The relatively small size of the community limits its capacity to sustain religious activities (field data, 2025–2026).

In addition, generational gaps have become increasingly pronounced. While older generations maintain strong attachment to traditional rituals, younger individuals tend to participate less frequently due to the influence of modern lifestyles. This directly affects the transmission of religious knowledge and ritual practices.

Another challenge is the risk of the erosion of religious knowledge and rituals. The decreasing number of individuals with deep understanding of doctrine, combined with the reliance on oral transmission, increases the likelihood of loss of traditional values. According to UNESCO (2003) [16], intangible heritage can only survive through continuous transmission within communities.

Urbanization also exerts significant influence on religious space and practices. Changes in residential patterns, economic pressures, and the diversification of social activities reduce participation in religious life. At the same

time, competition from modern forms of entertainment and media alters the ways in which individuals engage with religion.

These challenges indicate that the preservation of Minh Su Dao cannot be separated from the broader transformations of contemporary society.

#### 4.3 Implications for Preservation and Value Enhancement

Based on the above analysis, several orientations can be proposed to preserve and enhance the heritage values of Minh Su Dao in the context of urbanization.

First, it is necessary to strengthen the preservation of religious knowledge through the digitization of texts, the development of databases, and the promotion of academic research. These measures can reduce the risk of loss of materials and facilitate the transmission of doctrine.

Second, methods of transmitting religious knowledge should be renewed to attract younger generations. The integration of traditional forms with modern communication tools can improve accessibility and sustain community engagement.

Third, greater attention should be paid to preserving sacred space as a key component of cultural heritage. Restoration and maintenance of architectural structures should aim to retain traditional values while adapting to urban conditions.

Fourth, coordination between the religious community and local authorities should be enhanced. Preservation policies need to be implemented in a consistent manner and tailored to the specific characteristics of each religious institution.

Finally, the preservation of Minh Su Dao heritage should be approached as a dynamic process in which traditional values are maintained alongside flexible adaptation to contemporary social changes. This perspective aligns with UNESCO's (2003) <sup>[16]</sup> approach, which views intangible cultural heritage as a living practice continuously recreated within communities.

#### 4.4 Overall Assessment

Overall, the architectural and ritual heritage of Minh Su Dao at Quang Nam Buddhist Temple has been relatively well preserved, although it is increasingly shaped by the impacts of urbanization and broader social transformations. These dynamics create both challenges and opportunities for redefining approaches to heritage preservation.

Preservation should not be confined to the maintenance of traditional forms but should prioritize the continuity of core values within evolving social contexts. The effective integration of continuity and adaptation represents a key condition for sustaining the vitality and long-term development of Minh Su Dao in contemporary society.

#### 5. Conclusion

This study examines the preservation of architectural and ritual heritage of Minh Su Dao in the context of urbanization through the case of Quang Nam Buddhist Temple in Ho Chi Minh City. The findings indicate that this preservation process is inherently complex, shaped by the interaction between tradition and ongoing social transformation. The architectural system, ritual practices, and religious knowledge of Minh Su Dao have been relatively well preserved, continuing to play a significant role in maintaining religious identity and supporting the spiritual life of the community.

However, under conditions of urbanization and modernization, the preservation process is facing considerable challenges. The decline in the number of followers, the aging structure of the community, generational gaps in religious participation, and the risk of erosion of traditional knowledge and ritual practices are among the most pressing issues. In addition, transformations in urban space, economic pressures, and shifts in modern lifestyles are reshaping patterns of religious practice and levels of community engagement.

In this context, the study emphasizes that the preservation of Minh Su Dao heritage should not be approached as a static process but rather as a dynamic one, in which traditional values are sustained alongside flexible adaptation to contemporary social conditions. Effective coordination among the religious community, religious functionaries, and local authorities is essential to ensure the continuity and long-term sustainability of this heritage.

Based on these findings, the study proposes several key orientations. These include strengthening the documentation and digitization of religious knowledge, renewing methods of knowledge transmission to better engage younger generations, preserving sacred spaces in alignment with urban planning, and enhancing collaboration among stakeholders involved in heritage preservation. These orientations not only contribute to maintaining the values of Minh Su Dao but also offer broader implications for the preservation of religious heritage in contemporary society.

Overall, the case of Quang Nam Buddhist Temple demonstrates that, despite facing significant challenges, Minh Su Dao retains the capacity to adapt and sustain its vitality within modern social life. The balanced integration of preservation and adaptation will be a decisive factor in ensuring the long-term continuity and development of this religious heritage. The persistence of Minh Su Dao in an urbanizing context should also be understood within the broader diversity of religious life in Vietnam, where belief systems tend to be syncretic and adaptive while maintaining core values through processes of transformation (Trần Hồng Liên, 2004) <sup>[13]</sup>.

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