

Conservation and promotion of the cultural heritage value of Binh Thuy communal house in the development of cultural tourism in Can Tho City

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Abstract: This paper investigates the cultural heritage values of Binh Thuy Communal House - a representative spiritual-architectural monument in Can Tho - and proposes strategies for its preservation in conjunction with sustainable cultural tourism development. The study aims to clarify the role of Binh Thuy Communal House in shaping local cultural identity and leveraging its tourism potential amid urbanization and digital transformation. An interdisciplinary approach was employed, combining fieldwork, sociological surveys, and historical document analysis. Findings reveal that Binh Thuy Communal House possesses significant architectural and spiritual value and serves as a highly attractive destination for both domestic and international tourists. The study recommends solutions such as digitizing heritage information, developing experiential tourism products, and enhancing digital communication. It concludes that Binh Thuy Communal House holds a pivotal position in Can Tho's cultural tourism development strategy. The practical significance lies in providing a scientific basis and policy suggestions for heritage conservation linked to local socio-economic development.

Keywords: *Binh Thuy communal house, Can Tho, Cultural heritage, Cultural tourism, Preservation.*

1. Introduction

Binh Thuy Communal House (also known as Long Tuyen Ancient Temple or Long Tuyen Communal House) is located in Binh Thuy Ward, Binh Thuy District, Can Tho City, Vietnam. The house is situated near the northern residential area, about 200 meters from the Hau River, to the east of Binh Thuy Creek, and to the south adjacent to the main traffic route (Le Hong Phong Street). This is a unique structure that represents the vibrant life of the southern rural communities, embodying the spirit of ancestor worship, reverence for those who have contributed to the country, and reflecting the ingenuity and craftsmanship of the local people [1].

Binh Thuy Communal House is one of the most prominent historical and cultural landmarks in Can Tho City, reflecting the rich folk culture of the Mekong Delta and the religious life of the local community. With a history spanning nearly 200 years, the communal house serves not only as a place for religious activities but also as a distinctive cultural symbol that preserves traditional values in architecture, art, and worship practices.

The promotion of Binh Thuy Communal House's value in the development of cultural tourism in Can Tho is becoming a key component of the city's sustainable tourism development strategy. The house attracts visitors not only due to its unique architectural beauty but also because of the historical and cultural narratives tied to its rituals and traditional customs. It is an ideal destination for exploring cultural heritage while experiencing the tranquil and peaceful atmosphere of an ancient communal house.

In the context of rapid tourism development in Can Tho, leveraging the heritage value of Binh Thuy Communal House in tourism not only helps preserve and promote traditional cultural values but

also contributes to the local economy. Visitors to the site have the opportunity to learn about the history and culture of Can Tho, as well as participate in cultural activities that honor the legacy of their ancestors.

However, developing tourism based on cultural heritage like Binh Thuy Communal House also presents challenges in preserving and maintaining the authenticity of the monument during its development. Therefore, the integration of heritage preservation with sustainable tourism development is crucial to ensure that Binh Thuy Communal House remains an attractive cultural destination while safeguarding the precious historical and cultural values of Can Tho.

2. Literature Review

Historical and cultural monuments are a significant part of cultural heritage and play a crucial role in the historical development of society. Both theory and practice have affirmed that a nation cannot achieve sustainable development without an indigenous cultural foundation, and that cultural heritage will not thrive unless it is properly preserved, maintained, and promoted. Cultural heritage, including historical and cultural monuments, serves as a repository for the material and spiritual values of a nation. It plays a vital role in educating successive generations about national traditions, enriching cultural and tourism products, and contributing to the economic and social development of local communities. Therefore, cultural heritage, and specifically historical and cultural monuments, are key concerns for international and national organizations, as well as scholars worldwide, including in Vietnam.

Internationally, in 1972, the UNESCO General Conference (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) adopted the World Heritage Convention. This is the abbreviated name for the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. According to this Convention, cultural heritage is defined as: (i) Monuments: architectural, sculptural, or painted works, archaeological elements or structures, manuscripts, caves, and groups of elements with exceptional international value in terms of history, art, or science; (ii) Complexes: groups of individual buildings or grouped constructions with exceptional international value in terms of history, art, or science, due to their architecture, their unity, or their integration into the surrounding landscape; (iii) Sites: human-made or combined human and natural structures, as well as areas, including archaeological sites, with exceptional international value in terms of history, aesthetics, ethnology, or anthropology [2].

The World Heritage Convention is an international agreement through which member countries collectively protect the enduring heritage of the world. To date, over 170 countries have signed the Convention, making it one of the most influential tools for heritage protection worldwide. In 2003, recognizing the importance of intangible cultural heritage as a driving force behind cultural diversity and as a guarantee for sustainable development, the UNESCO General Conference adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage [3].

Regarding cultural heritage research, notable works include those by Pedersen [4]; Hoffman [5]; Morris and Sanders [6]; Probst [7] and Sandis [8] among others. These studies address both theoretical and practical issues related to heritage conservation, including laws, cultural heritage policies, and heritage practices in fields such as archaeology, ethnology, history, law, conservation, and management, all aimed at the sustainable development of world heritage.

The exploitation of heritage for tourism has led to the emergence of “Heritage Tourism”. This form of tourism has also attracted attention from scholars such as Serizawa [9]; Gelbman and Ron [10]; Timothy and Nyaupane [11]; Bur and Zeitlin [12] and Khamung [13] among others. These studies examine topics such as: an overview of heritage tourism; an analysis of visitor spending and the economic impact of heritage tourism at heritage sites; and the current and future assessment of heritage tourism.

In Vietnam, the study of cultural heritage in Vietnam has been of significant interest for quite some time. Notably, the work *Vietnamese Cultural History* by scholar Dao Duy Anh presents the viewpoint: “To

become a prosperous nation both materially and spiritually, we must preserve our old culture (heritage) as the 'foundation' (root) and adopt new culture as the 'application,' meaning we must skillfully harmonize the essence of Eastern culture with the scientific achievements of Western culture" [14]. Notably, on November 23, 1945, just two months after the country gained independence, President Ho Chi Minh signed Decree No. 65/SL concerning the preservation of ancient relics throughout Vietnam. This decree emphasized that the preservation of historical relics was crucial for the reconstruction of Vietnam [15].

In 1986, author Lam [16] published the *Handbook on Monument Preservation*, which made a significant contribution to the preservation of historical and cultural monuments in Vietnam. In 1997, researcher Vinh [17] published the work *Some Issues on the Preservation and Development of National Cultural Heritage*, in which he proposed a theoretical framework for applying heritage preservation research, particularly for historical and cultural monuments in Vietnam.

In 2001, the Law on Cultural Heritage was enacted, providing an important legal foundation to raise awareness and strengthen the preservation and promotion of national cultural heritage. In 2009, the Law on Cultural Heritage was amended and supplemented. This law stipulates that cultural heritage includes both intangible and tangible cultural heritage; tangible cultural heritage refers to physical products with historical, cultural, or scientific value, including historical and cultural monuments, scenic spots, artifacts, antiques, and national treasures. Historical and cultural monuments are structures, sites, and artifacts, antiques, or national treasures associated with these sites that have historical, cultural, or scientific value [18].

Theoretical and practical studies on the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage and historical and cultural monuments have been addressed by many scholars from various perspectives, including [19-26]. Among others.

In 2005, the Tourism Law was enacted, providing the legal foundation for tourism activities in Vietnam. In 2017, this law was amended and supplemented. The Tourism Law specifies that cultural tourism resources include historical and cultural monuments, revolutionary sites, archaeological sites, architecture, traditional cultural values, festivals, folk art, and other cultural values [27].

In 2017, the Political Bureau and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam issued Resolution No. 08-NQ/TW on developing tourism into a key economic sector. The resolution includes the policy: Develop sustainable tourism; preserve and promote cultural heritage and the valuable traditional values of the nation [28].

In recent years, numerous studies have been conducted on the management and exploitation of cultural heritage and historical-cultural monuments to develop tourism. Notably, the textbook *Cultural Heritage Management with Tourism Development* by authors Le, et al. [29] is the first theoretical work on this issue. Studies on the preservation and promotion of heritage values in tourism development are also discussed in works by Nguyen [30]; Nguyen [31]; Nguyen [32] and Nguyen [33] among others. According to Nguyen [30]: The relationship between monument preservation and tourism development is a two-way interaction: from an economic perspective, tourism is a specific economic sector that includes many cultural elements; from a cultural perspective, tourism is a cultural activity with high economic effectiveness and increasingly plays an important role in the country's economic development [30].

The exploitation of historical and cultural monuments and cultural heritage for tourism in localities has also been the focus of many scholars, such as Nguyen and Pham [34]; Dao and Huynh [35]; Hoang [36]; Phan and Le [37]; Dang [38]; Huynh [39]; Nguyen [40]; Tran [41] and Nguyen [42] and others. These studies highlight that historical and cultural monuments and cultural heritage in various regions are rich and have great potential for tourism development. Therefore, localities with heritage sites have invested in creating tourism products to attract visitors. However, there are still many issues

that need attention, such as security, environmental hygiene, food safety, and the quality of tourism services.

In Can Tho city, in 2004, the People's Committee of Can Tho issued Decision No. 254/2004/QĐ-UB, which established the regulations for the management, preservation, and promotion of historical and cultural monuments and scenic spots in the city. In 2016, the Can Tho Party Committee issued Resolution No. 03-NQ/TU on promoting tourism development with the goal of: “Making tourism in Can Tho a key economic sector, affirming its brand, ensuring sustainable development, and making a significant contribution to the service sector structure and the city's growth; developing tourism in a professional, modern, focused direction, befitting a central city in the Mekong Delta”. At the same time, the resolution also emphasized the policy: “Linking tourism development with environmental protection, preserving, and promoting the historical and cultural values of the nation” [43].

To implement Resolution No. 03-NQ/TU of the City Party Committee, the People's Committee of Can Tho issued Plan No. 111/KH-UBND on September 19, 2016, regarding the implementation of Resolution No. 03-NQ/TU; the Department of Culture, Sports, and Tourism issued Action Plan No. 4454/KH-SVHTTDL on October 25, 2016, regarding the implementation of Plan 111/KH-UBND of the People's Committee of the city on promoting tourism development. Specifically, Can Tho city has implemented numerous projects for the construction, restoration, and preservation of historical and cultural monuments, such as: the inauguration of the National Monument Site of the establishment of the An Nam Communist Party Branch in Co Do; the groundbreaking of the National Historical Site of Lo Vong Cung; the restoration and repair of some deteriorated components of the National Monument of the Phan Van Tri Poets' Tomb; and the implementation of the anti-deterioration project to restore the National Monument of Nam Nha Pagoda...[44].

Based on the implementation of the contents of Resolution No. 08-NQ/TW dated January 16, 2017, from the Politburo on the development of tourism as a key economic sector; Resolution No. 59-NQ/TW dated August 5, 2020, of the Politburo on building and developing Can Tho city to 2030, with a vision to 2045; and the Resolution of the 14th Congress of the Can Tho Party Committee for the 2020-2025 term, the Can Tho Party Committee issued Resolution No. 10-NQ/TU on December 29, 2021, on “accelerating tourism development in the new context, aiming to position tourism as a key economic sector of the city” [45].

Studies on the preservation and promotion of historical and cultural heritage sites in Can Tho City, such as those conducted by Do, et al. [46]; Lam [47]; Nguyen [48]; Le [49] and Can Tho Monument Management Board [50] and the Can Tho Monument Management Board [50] have highlighted that, alongside achievements in heritage conservation, numerous issues still need to be addressed. Notably, a concern raised at the national historical site of the Bui Huu Nghia Memorial is the discovery of 32 “unusual” ornamental objects that do not align with the traditional customs and aesthetics of Vietnam. Regarding the exploitation of historical and cultural heritage sites for tourism development, several studies have been conducted by scholars such as Ngo [51]; Nguyen, et al. [52]; Dao and Ong [53]; Huynh [54]; An [55]; Nguyen [56] and Dao [57]. These studies have identified factors influencing the appeal of tourism resources at heritage sites, while also proposing solutions for effectively leveraging cultural heritage in sustainable tourism development in Can Tho. Issues such as preservation and restoration of heritage sites, ensuring their alignment with conservation standards, and balancing heritage protection with tourism demands remain significant challenges in the process of developing cultural tourism in the region.

These studies offer valuable perspectives not only on preserving historical and cultural heritage but also on how to responsibly harness and promote the cultural heritage assets in the context of sustainable tourism development in Can Tho City.

Specific studies on Binh Thuy Temple can be mentioned, including: Nguyen [58]; Can Tho Museum [59]; Vu [60]; Huynh [61]; Dang [62]; Thanh [63] and Huong [64].

Nguyen [58] “Stories from Long Tuyen Ancient Village”; Thanh [63] “Binh Thuy Temple – The most beautiful temple in the Western region”; Huong [64] “Binh Thuy Temple - an architectural structure with a striking, majestic, and splendid artistic style”; and the group of authors Nguyen, et al. [65] “Current status and solutions for preserving and developing the Ky Yen Festival at Binh Thuy Temple in the context of sustainable tourism development in Can Tho City”...

Overall, these studies confirm that the historical and cultural monuments in Can Tho City, including Binh Thuy Temple, have great potential for tourism development. However, these potentials have yet to be fully realized. Tourism activities at these heritage sites are still fragmented, and there is no coherent tourism route. The tourism products are still underdeveloped and lack appeal.

From the findings of both domestic and international research mentioned above, it is evident that cultural heritage in general, and historical-cultural monuments in particular, are valuable resources for tourism development. At the same time, tourism development is an important solution for preserving and enhancing the value of heritage sites. Exploiting historical and cultural monuments for tourism not only generates revenue that contributes to the preservation and promotion of the site’s value but also brings benefits to local communities and businesses. Thus, the issue of preservation linked with the exploitation of historical and cultural monuments for tourism development is a pressing matter for countries, regions, and localities, including Can Tho City, the tourism hub of the Mekong Delta (Mekong Delta Region).

The literature review shows that the study of Binh Thuy Temple and the enhancement of heritage values in the cultural tourism development of Can Tho City should not only focus on historical and architectural factors but also consider the opportunities and challenges in sustainable tourism development. The existing research provides a solid foundation for developing appropriate conservation and tourism development solutions, while preserving the distinctive cultural values of Binh Thuy Temple in the future.

3. Research Methodology

To study and clarify the heritage values of Binh Thuy Temple and how to promote these values in cultural tourism development in Can Tho, this study employs appropriate scientific research methods to collect, analyze, and evaluate data comprehensively. Specifically, the research methods will be applied as follows.

3.1. Theoretical Research Method

This method aims to establish the theoretical foundation and framework for the research topic. Documents, books, scientific articles, theses, reports from specialized organizations, and previous studies related to cultural heritage, monument conservation, and cultural tourism development will be synthesized and analyzed. Through this, the author will clarify concepts and theoretical issues related to cultural heritage, criteria for evaluating heritage values, and the role of tourism in preserving and promoting heritage.

3.2. Practical Research Method

To gain a specific and detailed understanding of Binh Thuy Temple and the promotion of heritage values in cultural tourism, the study will conduct surveys and interviews with relevant subjects, including.

Survey: Conduct a field survey at Binh Thuy Temple to assess the current state of the monument, its cultural, historical, and architectural factors, as well as the tourism services currently being implemented there. The data collected from the survey will provide insights into the conservation status and tourism development in the area.

In-depth Interviews: Interview 20 experts in the field of heritage conservation, tourism development, and local management officials in Can Tho, along with 100 local people, to gather information about

their perceptions, views, and the solutions being implemented to promote heritage values and cultural tourism at Binh Thuy Temple.

3.3. Data Analysis Method

The data collected from the survey and interviews will be analyzed in two ways:

Qualitative Analysis: Process information from in-depth interviews, field notes, and observations to clarify the cultural, historical factors and the tourism potential at Binh Thuy Temple. This method helps to understand subjective aspects, such as the community's, tourists', and managers' perceptions of the heritage values and the role of cultural tourism.

Quantitative Analysis: Data from surveys and questionnaires will be analyzed quantitatively to assess tourist satisfaction, the effectiveness of tourism and conservation activities at Binh Thuy Temple, as well as the community's interest in preserving and promoting heritage values.

3.4. Proposed Solutions Method

Based on the analysis results, the study will propose specific solutions and recommendations to enhance the heritage values of Binh Thuy Temple in cultural tourism. These solutions will include conservation methods, tourism product development, heritage promotion, and local government policies to support these efforts. The aim is to ensure the sustainable preservation of cultural heritage, improve tourism effectiveness, and enhance the quality of life for the local community.

The research methodology applied in this study aims to provide a comprehensive view of Binh Thuy Temple and the promotion of heritage values in cultural tourism in Can Tho, helping to propose sustainable tourism development solutions and effective heritage conservation strategies.

4. Research Results

The research results of the study reflect important information and data collected from field surveys, interviews with relevant stakeholders, document analysis, and theoretical studies. These results are analyzed and presented in the following key areas:

4.1. Evaluation of the Heritage Values of Binh Thuy Temple

Binh Thuy Temple is not only an important historical monument of Can Tho city but also a cultural symbol for the local community. The research results clarify the cultural, historical, and architectural values of Binh Thuy Temple.

4.1.1. Historical Value

The village temple marks the formation of a stable community in a particular area, reflecting the population history of the region [66]. The establishment of a village temple indicates the formation of a densely populated and stable community. The Mekong Delta is a new land, and the early settlers who cultivated and developed the land, once they established a stable agricultural community, built village temples. Thus, the time of the temple's construction can be used to determine when the area became a settled village. In the past, Can Tho, known as Tran Giang, had early-established villages such as Binh Thuy, Thoi Binh, Tan An, Thuong Thanh, Thoi An, Tan Loc Dong, Thanh Hoa, Trung Nhut, which are detailed in the Nguyen [67]. Can Tho, once called Tran Giang, had the villages of Tan An and Thoi Binh formed very early. The name Binh Thuy, derived from the peaceful and calm waters of the area, reflects the early settlement and development of the region, which eventually became the birthplace of the Can Tho people. Over time, human construction has enhanced the landscape, making it more charming and cultural, leading later generations to name the area Binh Thuy and Long Tuyen.

According to Hoang [36] and historical records regarding the construction and development of monuments in Can Tho, the architectural art of Binh Thuy Temple reflects various historical periods.

4.1.1.1. *Foundation (1844)*

According to the oral accounts of the village elders, when floods repeatedly devastated the village of Long Tuyen, destroying houses and crops, the people were suffering. They built a wooden temple with thatched roofs at Binh Hung Junction in the year Gelbman and Ron [10], initially to worship the local guardian spirit and ensure peaceful and prosperous activities.

4.1.1.2. *First Renovation (1853)*

In the fifth year of the reign of Dao [14] the imperial commissioner Huynh Man Dat, during his tour along the Hau River, encountered a sudden storm and took refuge on an island at the confluence of a canal and Hau River at Binh Hung Creek (now Con Linh at Binh Thuy Creek). Thanks to this, his boat was safe. He went ashore to observe the local people and decided to rename the creek and the area as “Binh Thuy”. Upon his return, he submitted a petition to Emperor Tu Duc, requesting the royal decree to recognize the “Bổn Cảnh Thành Hoàng” (Local Guardian Spirit) for the Binh Thuy temple on November 29, 1852. From then on, the village was named Binh Thuy, and the temple was called Binh Thuy Temple. After receiving the royal decree, the local people renovated the temple in 1853, adding tile roofs and building a small theater (used for performing arts, with a small wooden stage for local performances). Over time, individuals who contributed to the nation, such as Dinh Cong Trang, Nguyen Trung Truc, Bui Huu Nghia, and Vo Huy Tap, were also honored and worshiped at the temple.

4.1.1.3. *Second Renovation (1909)*

In 1904, the district governor Nguyen Duc Nhuan noticed the temple was deteriorating, so it was completely rebuilt at the intersection on a 2.9-hectare plot of land. Unfortunately, after the district governor's death, the project was delayed. In 1909, Mr. Nguyen Doan Cung and his family decided to proceed with the reconstruction of the temple at the same site (Binh Thuy Creek) with a budget of 5,823 Indochinese dollars. The construction began on July 12, 1909, and was completed in 1910, under the design of Mr. Huynh Trung Trinh.

The commemorative stele for Binh Thuy Temple (formerly known as Long Tuyen Ancient Temple) states: “Long Tuyen Ancient Temple, now known as Binh Thuy Temple, was granted the royal title 'Bổn Cảnh Thành Hoàng' by Emperor Tu Duc on November 29, 1852. The current temple was rebuilt in 1909. It is one of the oldest temples in the Southern region, and it remains largely intact in Can Tho province”.

Binh Thuy Temple is a valuable architectural work of the Vietnamese people, serving as a spiritual gathering place for the local community during traditional festivals [66].

4.1.1.4. *Third Renovation (2001)*

In 2001, the Ministry of Culture and Information invested in the comprehensive restoration and enhancement of Binh Thuy Temple. Since then, the local people and government have continuously worked to preserve and promote Binh Thuy Temple – a cultural heritage of great significance in the spiritual life of the people in the Mekong Delta and Vietnam in general.

4.1.2. *Cultural Value*

Binh Thuy Temple is the site of religious rituals and serves as the cultural center of the community. The customs, practices, and festivals held at the temple are an integral part of the cultural life of General Department of Tourism [68]. Annually, the local people organize two grand festivals: the “Thượng Điền” festival at Binh Thuy Temple is considered the largest festival in the Mekong Delta region. The festival dedicated to the “Bổn Cảnh Thành Hoàng” (also known as the village's guardian spirit, the god of the land) reflects the rice civilization, seeking peace for the country, well-being for the people, and favorable weather conditions (rain and wind). This festival takes place over three days, the 12th, 13th, and 14th of the lunar month of April, ensuring family health and prosperity. During these days, visitors, the villagers from the six former hamlets of Binh Thuy (Binh Nhut, Binh Lac, Binh

Thuong, Binh Duong, Binh Pho, and Binh Yen), and local people gather in large numbers to participate in the vibrant temple ceremonies, filled with flags and colorful decorations.

In the past, when the road systems were not yet expanded, the ritual procession of the sacred scrolls took place on the river, using dragon boats and floating rafts. Today, these have been replaced by “Long xa” (a traditional cart) and other land transport vehicles. On the first day (12th of April in the lunar calendar), from 2 a.m., a crowd dressed in formal attire follows the “Long xa” to carry the sacred scrolls on a journey from the temple to the Be junction and then returns to the temple for the ritual. Afterward, the temple area becomes lively with various folk games, such as duck racing, tug-of-war, opera performances, singing, and women’s domestic arts. At night, the temple is filled with the sounds of horns, drums, and gongs during the rituals. Traditional performances of ancient plays are staged continuously during the three days and nights of the festival. The “Hạ Điền” festival is held only on the 14th of December in the lunar calendar. The ceremony is similar to the first day of the “Thượng Điền” festival: it includes rituals, offering the sacred scroll, and folk performances.

4.1.3. Architectural Value

The architecture of Binh Thuy Temple bears a strong imprint of Southern folk art, with decorative elements, column systems, roofs, and typical artistic motifs. These values reflect the blend of traditional design and local cultural characteristics in the temple's construction.

Binh Thuy Temple is a significant architectural and artistic structure [1]. Although it was rebuilt in the early 20th century, the architecture still retains many traditional elements of the Vietnamese architectural style. The temple is categorized as a religious monument and an architectural artwork of unique significance. It is built on a plot of land of more than 4,000 m², following the shape of the “chữ Nhất” (a traditional Vietnamese character for “one”), located on the southern bank of the Hau River in Binh Thuy Ward. This design contrasts greatly with the architecture found in northern Vietnam. The temple is built on a high foundation with depth, with six rows of columns in both the front and rear structures. The layout includes five main halls for worship and two internal corridors on either side.

The “tiền điện” (front hall) is dedicated to the heroes who contributed to the prosperity of the homeland, such as Tran Hung Dao, Phan Boi Chau, Bui Huu Nghia, Nguyen Trung Truc, and Dinh Cong Chanh. It also includes altars for the “Ngũ Vị Nương Nương” (Five Ladies) and other ritual altars. To the right of the “tiền điện” is the space for receiving guests and the meeting area for the temple's dignitaries. The “chính điện” (main hall) is where the “Bổn Cảnh Thành Hoàng” (the village's guardian spirit) is worshiped, with a central portrait of the benevolent deity, whose contemplative expression suggests deep thought about the affairs of human life and the world. Behind the deity is Dinh Cong Chanh, who contributed significantly to the local community and is revered as a “Hậu Thần” (Late God).

Along both sides of the main hall, the left side is dedicated to the altars of “Hương Chức Tiên Giác” (the ancestors who helped the land) and “Hậu Hiền” (the late sages). On the right side, facing them, are the altars of “Chức Sắc Tiên Giác” and “Tiền Hiền” (The early sages). The rear hall houses the altar for the “Hậu Thần” (Late God) in the center, with two altars for “Hữu Ban” and “Tả Ban” on either side. Outside the temple, there are two large shrines dedicated to the deities of Agriculture and Tigers, and near the temple's gate, two shrines honor the deities of the Forest and Canal Excavation (Water Channeling God). Alongside other cultural activities, Binh Thuy Temple has created a unique identity for itself as a village temple in a newly settled land.

4.2. Assessment of the Preservation and Promotion of the Cultural Heritage of Binh Thuy Communal House

Tangible cultural heritage is considered an invaluable asset of cultural heritage. It holds significant historical, cultural, and educational value. The UNESCO Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted in 1972, defines tangible cultural heritage as including large-scale architectural works, sculptures, and paintings, archaeological elements or structures,

inscriptions, caves used as shelters, and groups of architectural works. Article 4 of the 2001 Cultural Heritage Law defines tangible cultural heritage as physical products that possess historical, cultural, and scientific value, including historical-cultural relics, scenic landscapes, cultural artifacts, antiques, and national treasures.

The preservation of tangible cultural heritage is of immense importance to each nation, ethnicity, and humanity as a whole [69]. Tangible cultural heritage serves as evidence of history, culture, and the identity of a people, helping to connect the past with the present, thereby ensuring continuity in the cultural and historical flow. According to Luu [23] “Cultural heritage is an indispensable part of national identity; it acts as a bridge between generations and is a crucial resource for the sustainable development of a country”.

Through surveys, the current state of preservation and promotion of the cultural heritage at Binh Thuy Communal House is as follows.

4.2.1. State of Preservation

As early as Decree No. 65/SL, the first decree by our State on the preservation of cultural heritage, signed by President Ho Chi Minh on November 23, 1945 (this date has since been designated by the Phan and Le [37] it was affirmed that: “Preserving ancient relics is a very important and necessary task in the nation-building process of Vietnam”. This decree has also served as a guiding principle for the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage in Can Tho City, creating endogenous resources for development.

Can Tho City currently boasts many significant tangible cultural heritage sites, including “a total of 38 historical-cultural relics, of which 14 are national-level relics and 24 are city-level relics” [44]. Among these, some of the prominent heritage sites include Binh Thuy Communal House, Nam Nha Pagoda, and the Can Tho Great Prison. Additionally, Can Tho is home to numerous other historical and architecturally unique monuments. These sites not only embody historical and cultural value but also symbolize the cultural fusion of the ethnic communities residing in Can Tho City.

According to Dang [69] in recent years, Can Tho City has made considerable efforts in preserving and promoting the value of its tangible cultural heritage. Particularly since the issuance of Resolution No. 33-NQ/TW on June 9, 2014, by the XIth Central Party Committee, “On the development of Vietnamese culture and people to meet the requirements for sustainable national development”, the city has made significant investments in the restoration and enhancement of heritage sites.

According to the Department of Culture, Sports, and Tourism of Can Tho City, in the five years from 2019 to 2023, the total budget for the restoration and enhancement of historical-cultural relics in the area amounted to more than 200 billion VND.

Table 1.

Restoration and Enhancement Budget for Historical-Cultural Relics in Can Tho City (2019–2023).

Unit: Billion VND

Year	National-Level Relics	City-Level Relics	State Budget	Socialized Funds	Total Budget
2019	175.36	17.2	190.5	2.06	192.56
2020	0.8	1.49	1	1.29	2.29
2021	0.8	0.85	0.85	0.8	1.65
2022	12	0	0	12	12
2023	4.9	0.43	0	5.33	5.33

Source: Department of Culture, Sports, and Tourism of Can Tho City (2019–2023) [45, 74–77].

Binh Thuy Communal House is a unique architectural, artistic, and cultural heritage. Through surveys and research, several sections of the communal house have been damaged or lost, and there has yet to be funding allocated for restoration. The mobilization of socialized funds for the restoration and enhancement of the communal house faces more difficulties compared to other historical-cultural relics.

This is because the ritual activities at the communal house are less frequent compared to those at temples, especially with the lack of funds to cover utilities such as electricity and water, as well as expenses for organizing the Ky Yen Festival and other activities at the communal house.

Table 2.

Statistics on Damages at Binh Thuy Communal House Relic - Can Tho.

Monument	Damages Repaired	Damages Not Repaired
Binh Thuy Communal House	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The main architectural part of the communal house is still quite intact. However, in the roof section, some round dragon motifs and figures of saints and immortals have been damaged or lost. - The wooden architecture inside the communal house is still in relatively good condition, with only a few parts damaged, such as the pair of dragons in the main hall, the statues of Mr. Chieu and Mr. Muc, which have recently been repaired. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Roof: The ceramic figures of the Japanese and Moon couple have undergone slight changes (the Immortal figure has lost its left arm). The Management Board of the communal house stated that the cause was due to the passage of time. - The rear gable section of the roof: The dragon-shaped fish motif is missing two-thirds of its design, due to a theft that occurred on June 6, 2018.

Source: Statistics and survey by the author in 2025.

The conservation and promotion of cultural values, linked with tourism development, is a direction identified by the Party and State in many major policies and strategies. Investment in resources for this work will lead to the development of infrastructure, products, services, and increase market flows, contributing to the overall development of the locality.

By addressing the mutual relationship between heritage conservation, traditional education, and tourism development, Can Tho aims to become an ecological, civilized, modern city with a strong river culture identity. It will also be a regional center in the Mekong Delta for services, commerce, and tourism, as outlined in the Mekong Delta Region Planning for the 2021-2030 period, with a vision towards 2050, approved by the government.

4.2.2. Heritage Valorization Activities

Research clarifying existing tourism programs and activities at Binh Thuy Communal House, such as.

Tour routes:

- Ninh Kieu River – Binh Thuy River Tour.
- Cai Rang Floating Market – Son Island – Binh Thuy Communal House Tour.
- Ninh Kieu Wharf – Bui Huu Nghia Memorial – Binh Thuy Communal House – Binh Thuy Ancient House – Hung Temple Tour.
- Hoi Linh Pagoda – Nam Nha Pagoda – Bui Huu Nghia Memorial – Binh Thuy Communal House – Son Island Tour.
- Cai Rang Floating Market – Hu Tieu Pizza – Binh Thuy Communal House – Binh Thuy Ancient House – Son Island Tour.
- Cai Rang Floating Market – Hu Tieu Craft Village – Nam Nha Pagoda – Binh Thuy Communal House – Tan Loc Isle Tour.
- Ninh Kieu Wharf – Cai Rang Floating Market – Ba Cong Fruit Garden – Binh Thuy Ancient House – Binh Thuy Communal House Tour.
- Binh Thuy Communal House – Binh Thuy Ancient House – Tan Loc Isle – Bang Lang Bird Garden Tour.
- Binh Thuy Communal House – Binh Thuy Ancient House – Son Island Tour.
- Bui Huu Nghia Memorial – Binh Thuy Communal House – Binh Thuy Ancient House – Truc Lam Phuong Nam Zen Monastery Tour.

4.2.2.1. Cultural Events

Ky Yen Festival (Upper and Lower Rice Fields), Vietnamese Poetry Day (Nguyen Tieu Poetry Night), Don Ca Tai Tu Festival, Book exhibitions, Calligraphy art exhibitions, Lion dance, Martial arts performances, Bamboo boat races, Traditional boat races...

4.3. Analysis of the Potential for Developing Cultural Tourism at Binh Thuy Communal House

4.3.1. Potential to Attract Tourists:

Binh Thuy Communal House is considered an attractive destination for both domestic and international visitors, thanks to its unique cultural value and the tranquil scenery of the structure. The historical, cultural, and architectural features of the communal house will play a crucial role in drawing tourists.

Cultural and Historical Significance: Binh Thuy Communal House holds a deep cultural and historical legacy, making it an essential site for tourists interested in Vietnam's heritage. Visitors can experience traditional architecture and the religious practices that have been preserved through generations, offering a glimpse into the region's unique identity.

Architecture and Scenic Beauty: The architectural style of the communal house is a notable example of traditional design, blending cultural and aesthetic features that appeal to tourists with an interest in history and architecture. Its serene location also offers a peaceful environment that attracts visitors seeking to enjoy the natural beauty of the region.

Despite the general increase in the number of tourists to Can Tho in recent years, the city has yet to reach the peak tourist numbers seen in 2019 (before the COVID-19 pandemic). This suggests that there is significant potential for tourism growth, particularly in cultural tourism, as the city recovers and seeks to attract more visitors. By leveraging the historical and cultural assets like Binh Thuy Communal House, Can Tho can further enhance its appeal as a cultural tourism hub in the Mekong Delta region.

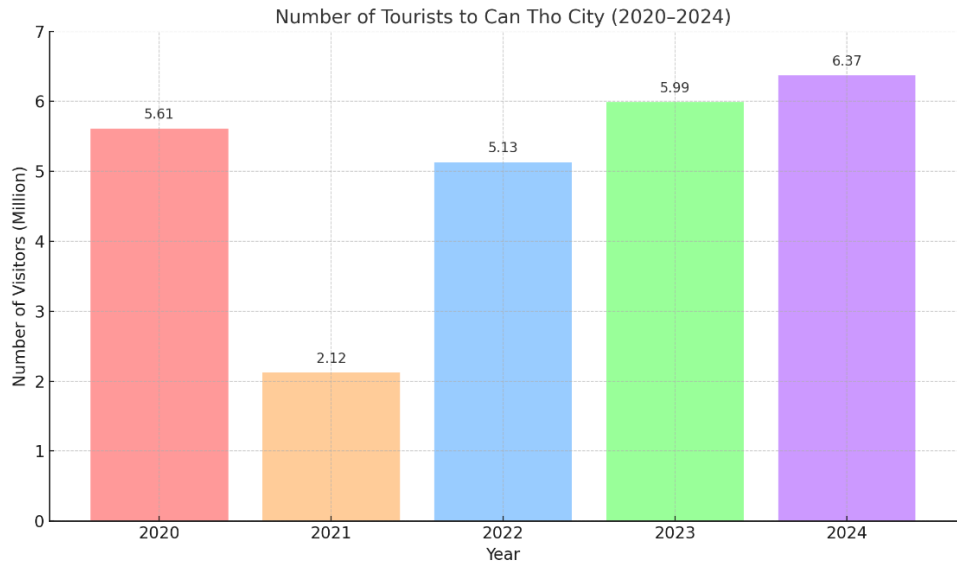


Figure 1.
Number of tourists to Can Tho City (2020-2024).
Source: Department of Culture, Sports, and Tourism of Can Tho City (2020-2024) Can Tho Department of Culture [70].

The bar chart illustrates the number of tourists visiting Can Tho City from 2020 to 2024. In 2021, there was a sharp decline in tourist arrivals, reaching only 2.12 million, mainly due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, from 2022 onwards, tourism recovered steadily. By 2024, the city recorded its highest number of tourists in five years, with over 6.37 million visitors.

Despite the overall growth in tourism, the number of visitors to historical and cultural sites in Can Tho remains relatively low and has shown a declining trend. In 2019, there were 654,907 visits to these heritage sites. By 2022, this number had dropped significantly to just over 252,186 visits, which accounted for only 4.95% of the total 5,134,605 tourist arrivals in Can Tho that year.

A specific example is the Binh Thuy Communal House, one of the city's key cultural landmarks. In 2023, it welcomed 28,779 domestic tourists and 943 international visitors. According to Ha [66] Binh Thuy Communal House ranks just behind Can Tho Market Hall (Nhà lồng chợ Cần Thơ) in terms of attracting both domestic and international tourists.

Table 3.

Historical and Cultural Sites in Can Tho with High Numbers of Domestic Visitors in 2023.

No.	Heritage Site	Percentage (%)
1	Can Tho Market Hall	58.2
2	Binh Thuy Communal House	45.4
3	Binh Thuy Ancient House	35.7
4	Kham Lon (Old Prison)	34.1
5	Ong Pagoda	33.5

Source: Ha [66].

Table 4.

Historical and Cultural Sites in Can Tho with High Numbers of International Visitors in 2023.

No.	Heritage Site	Percentage (%)
1	Can Tho Market Hall	100.0
2	Binh Thuy Communal House	72.4
3	Binh Thuy Ancient House	72.4
4	Ong Pagoda	63.8
5	Pothi Somron Pagoda	56.9
6	Nam Nha Pagoda	37.9

Source: Ha [66].

4.3.2. Distinctive Tourism Products

Tourism products associated with Binh Thuy Temple, such as visiting historical sites, participating in festivals, experiencing traditional rituals, and enjoying the local specialties of Can Tho, will be developed to create profound experiences for tourists.

4.3.2.1. Upper-Field Ky Yen Festival

Time: Held at the beginning of the harvest season (on the 12th, 13th, and 14th days of the 4th lunar month).

Purpose: To pray for a good harvest, favorable weather, and successful cultivation for farmers.

Main Activities: The festival begins with the “Long Xa Du Ngoan” ceremony at dawn on the first day of the festival; The ceremonies include the God’s ceremonial cloth change, the ritual for worshipping God Nong, the ceremony for God Son Quan, the King’s worshipping ceremony, the main ritual, and the ritual offering to the ancestors, among others; The festival also features the procession of the deity’s tablet, sacrifices, traditional opera (hát bội), cải lương performances, folk music (đờn ca tài tử), folk games, a contest for traditional cakes, a flower arrangement competition, sporting events, bicycle races, tug-of-war, boat races, and three-person boat races.

Nature: This festival marks the beginning of the farming season, symbolizing hope and renewal.

4.3.2.2. Lower-field Ky Yen Festival

Time: Held at the end of the harvest season (on the 14th day of the 12th lunar month).

Purpose: To express gratitude to the deities for a bountiful harvest, while praying for continued peace and prosperity for the village.

Main Activities: Offering rituals with the harvest produce; Villagers gather to celebrate, with folk performances and cultural exhibitions;

Nature: This festival marks the end of the harvest season, symbolizing gratitude and remembrance.

In addition, during both the Upper-field and Lower-field festivals, visitors can participate in various activities such as exhibitions, book displays, calligraphy demonstrations, the “Return to Heritage” program, tourism promotion and marketing activities, the Binh Thuy Delicious Cake Festival, and the Art Rice Cake competition. During the festival period, there will also be booths showcasing local products, traditional handicrafts, and local artisanal goods. Visitors will have the opportunity to purchase souvenirs from shops within the temple grounds and may also participate in fortune-telling ceremonies to seek peace and good luck in life.

Table 5.

Comparing the Upper-field Ky Yen Festival and the Lower-field Ky Yen Festival at Binh Thuy Temple.

Criteria	Upper-field Ky Yen Festival	Lower-field Ky Yen Festival
Time	Beginning of the harvest season (4th lunar month)	End of the harvest season (12th lunar month)
Purpose	To pray for a bountiful harvest.	To give thanks after the harvest.
Significance	Beginning and hope.	Conclusion and gratitude.

4.4. Recommendations and Solutions for Sustainable Tourism Development

4.4.1. Conservation Solutions

4.4.1.1. Develop a Comprehensive Cultural Heritage Conservation Plan

One solution is to develop a comprehensive and long-term cultural heritage conservation plan. This is essential to ensure the sustainability of heritage sites in Can Tho city. The plan should include a thorough assessment of the current status of heritage sites, identify risks posed by climate change, such as flooding, erosion, and rising sea levels, and propose specific protection measures. Additionally, heritage conservation should be integrated into the urban development and sustainable tourism strategies. It is necessary to mobilize resources from the government, international organizations, and the local community to ensure financial support for cultural heritage conservation efforts. Moreover, it is important to establish a monitoring and periodic evaluation system to adjust conservation measures according to environmental changes, ensuring the long-term preservation of heritage sites [69].

4.4.1.2. Invest in Training Local Experts on Heritage Conservation and Climate Change Adaptation

To effectively preserve cultural heritage sites in Can Tho against the impacts of climate change, training local experts is crucial. These experts need to be equipped with in-depth knowledge of conservation techniques and the ability to respond to climate change challenges. The training should cover not only the technical aspects of construction and preservation but also understanding of cultural heritage, history, and community engagement. The relevant authorities in Can Tho can collaborate with research institutes and universities within and outside the city to develop training programs to build local human resources for heritage conservation. Additionally, raising community awareness about the role of heritage conservation in the face of climate change is an important aspect of ensuring the comprehensive and long-term protection of these sites [69].

4.4.2. Tourism Development Solutions

4.4.2.1. Develop the “Long Tuyen Ancient Village” Tourism Model

The prominent feature of the historical and cultural heritage sites in Binh Thuy District is that the valuable sites are concentrated in the Long Tuyen Ancient Village. Notable heritage sites such as Binh Thuy Temple (Long Tuyen Ancient Temple), the memorial area for Scholar Bui Huu Nghia, Binh Thuy Ancient House (Duong Family Chapel), and Nam Nha Pagoda are located close to each other and are connected by both water and land transportation routes. This proximity makes it very convenient to form a network of tourist attractions linked to the ancient village setting [53].

4.4.2.2. *Support Policies*

Currently, Can Tho city has implemented various policies to support the training of personnel for providing services to tourists, including those visiting historical and cultural sites in general and Binh Thuy Temple in particular. For the development of tourism at historical and cultural sites, the key human resource is the team of tour guides and interpreters. Therefore, the city should have management policies and support systems for this team to ensure the accurate transmission of heritage values to visitors. It is essential to prioritize using local residents and tour guides from cultural centers and tourism promotion centers. There should also be policies to support volunteer tour guides, such as students from tourism programs or the temple's management committee, in line with the local financial conditions.

The city should also have mechanisms and policies to invite artists in various art forms to perform and teach the local community. This will gradually lead to the formation of clubs for various types of arts, such as traditional opera (hát bội), folk music (đờn ca tài tử), cải lương theater, calligraphy, etc. Additionally, there should be policies to support these clubs in performing regularly or periodically at Binh Thuy Temple for visitors.

5. Conclusion

The research has analyzed and clarified the cultural, historical, and architectural values of Binh Thuy Temple, while emphasizing the importance of preserving and promoting these heritage values in the development of cultural tourism in Can Tho. From this, the study provides specific recommendations and solutions to promote heritage preservation and sustainable tourism development at Binh Thuy Temple, while also contributing to raising community awareness about the importance of cultural heritage.

5.1. *The Importance of Binh Thuy Temple*

Binh Thuy Temple is a valuable historical and cultural monument of Can Tho, embodying the architectural, cultural, and spiritual values typical of the Mekong Delta region. Not only is it a place of worship, but it also serves as a profound cultural symbol for the local community, reflecting the tradition of honoring ancestors and protecting national cultural values. The preservation and promotion of Binh Thuy Temple's heritage value is not only significant historically but also contributes to maintaining and developing the cultural identity of Can Tho.

5.2. *Promoting Heritage Values in Tourism Development*

Promoting the heritage value of Binh Thuy Temple in cultural tourism development is an important strategy to generate financial resources for heritage preservation, while also enhancing tourism effectiveness and fostering local economic development. Binh Thuy Temple has the potential to become an attractive cultural tourism destination, attracting both domestic and international visitors, and providing opportunities for the local community to participate in tourism activities, generating income, and raising awareness about the importance of heritage.

5.3. *Challenges and Solutions for Sustainable Tourism Development*

Despite Binh Thuy Temple's great potential for tourism development, it still faces several challenges, such as protecting the monument from the negative impacts of mass tourism, lack of resources and infrastructure, and the absence of clear cultural tourism policies. To develop sustainable tourism at Binh Thuy Temple, investments in infrastructure, human resource training, and the development of distinctive tourism products are needed. More importantly, a proper tourism management system should be established to protect the heritage while effectively promoting tourism activities.

5.4. Recommendations for the Future

To ensure the sustainable development of Binh Thuy Temple in cultural tourism, the main recommendations include:

Enhance Heritage Preservation: A scientific preservation plan and technical solutions are needed to maintain the monument's authenticity while integrating environmental protection and minimizing tourism's negative impacts.

Develop Community-based Tourism: Involve the local community in the tourism development process to create job opportunities and increase local participation in heritage preservation and promotion.

Establish Clear Cultural Tourism Policies: The local government needs to develop policies and strategies that link tourism development with heritage preservation, and create favorable conditions for investors and tourism organizations to participate in tourism development at the temple.

Promote and Introduce Heritage Values: Strengthen the promotion of Binh Thuy Temple through media, social networks, and national and international tourism programs to attract visitors.

With its distinctive cultural values preserved, on September 5, 1989, the Ministry of Culture and Information issued Decision No. 1570-VH/QĐ recognizing Binh Thuy Temple as a National Architectural Art Monument. In 2001, the Ministry of Culture and Information invested in the restoration and preservation of the temple. Since then, the local community and authorities have consistently paid attention to preserving and promoting Binh Thuy Temple, a cultural heritage of great significance in the spiritual life of the people in the Mekong Delta.

Binh Thuy Temple is a special historical and cultural monument, not only valuable in terms of history but also an important part of Can Tho's cultural heritage system. Promoting the heritage values of Binh Thuy Temple in the development of cultural tourism will help preserve traditional values, stimulate local economic development, and raise public awareness about heritage protection. However, to achieve this goal, coordination between government agencies, communities, and tourism businesses is necessary to build a sustainable tourism development strategy that harmonizes heritage conservation and economic growth.

Institutional Review Board Statement:

This study did not require formal approval from an Institutional Review Board, as it does not involve interventional research or pose any risk to participants. Nevertheless, all ethical principles for conducting research were strictly observed. All individuals who participated in surveys or interviews were fully informed about the study's purpose, assured of the confidentiality of their personal data, and voluntarily consented to participate.

Transparency:

The author confirms that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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