

# Iconography in Khmer Theravāda Buddhist Temples in Vietnam: An Anthropology of Art Perspective

Dinh Thi Yen<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Thu Dau Mot University

Email: [yendt@tdmu.edu.vn](mailto:yendt@tdmu.edu.vn)

## Abstract

The Khmer population in Vietnam constitutes a cohesive religious community, with 91.39% (1,206,059 individuals) adhering to Theravāda Buddhism. For the Khmer community, temples are places of worship and cultural exchange. This study, grounded in an anthropological of art perspective and informed by ethnographic fieldwork at various representative temples, attempts to identify and analyse the distinctive symbols present in the architecture and artwork of Khmer Theravāda temples. The findings indicate that symbols include Shakyamuni Buddha, Naga, Kinnari, Krud (Garuda), Brahma/Kabil Maha Brum, Yeak, and a lion that constitute an interconnected symbolic system that embodies the worldview and cosmology of the Khmer people. The emblem of Siddhartha Gautama Buddha holds a pivotal holy role, representing enlightenment, compassion, and doctrinal authority, while the accompanying figures function as protectors, mediators, markers, and cosmological symbols. All these symbols hold aesthetic significance, embody the beliefs of the Khmer people in Vietnam, and aid in preserving cultural identity and moral education within the society.

**Keywords:** Anthropological of Art, Khmer Community, Symbolic System, Theravāda Buddhist Temples, Vietnam

Received: March 6, 2026

Revised: June 3, 2026

Accepted: June 5, 2026

---

## Introduction

The Khmer population in Vietnam is 1,319,652, representing 1.37% of the national total and placing 5th among the 53 ethnic minorities in the country. Their highest concentration is in the Mekong Delta, with a population of 1,141,241 individuals in provinces including Tra Vinh, Soc Trang, an Giang, and Kien Giang (General Statistics Office, 2020). The Khmer have inhabited the southern region of Vietnam since roughly the 14th to 15th centuries (Liêm, 2016). Their culture is a cohesive amalgamation of traditional culture, Indian culture (particularly Brahmanism), and Theravāda Buddhist culture. The Khmer people embraced Buddhism, which arrived later than Brahmanism, with great reverence and significant flourishing; they define their faith as Theravāda Buddhism Khmer (Lam & Pham, 2025; Prak et al., 2024).

The Theravāda Buddhist temple of the Khmer minority in Vietnam serves as both a religious institution and a hub for cultural activity (Yen, 2025; Hue, 2026). Buddhist culture permeates all facets of Khmer society and serves as the uniting religion for 1,206,059 individuals, or 91.39% of the Khmer population. Temples serve as both sites of religious engagement and dynamic museums, safeguarding, practicing, and transmitting cultural attributes; they function as educational institutions of locales where the Khmer people "to live is temporary, to die is

coming back". Consequently, Khmer temples are constructed wonderfully, majestically, and serenely, featuring distinctive architecture and artistic styles. The architectural complexes, statues, reliefs, and patterns symbolize religious beliefs, historical change, and cultural identity. Symbols like the Naga (serpent deity), Krud/Garuda (avian deity), Kinnari, the Dharmachakra (wheel of Dharma), Kala, and Angkorian floral motifs serve not merely as aesthetic components but also contribute to religious instruction, safeguard sacred areas, and foster community connections through festivals and rituals.

### **Literature Review**

The imagery of Theravāda Buddhist temples has garnered the interest of several scholars globally, encompassing both broad overviews and detailed symbolic analyses. In a comprehensive examination of Buddhist art and architecture, Robson (2014) scrutinised the evolution of Buddhist imagery, stupas, materials, and the dissemination of Buddhist art throughout Asia, highlighting the possibilities for localisation and the influence of merit in the development of Buddhist art. Nevertheless, the analysis predominantly remained at a superficial level, neglecting to explore specific social practices or thoroughly examine the network of social actors associated with a symbol: who commissioned it, who designed it, who determined its form, who altered it, who interpreted it, and so forth.

Thompson (2022) concentrated on the symbolism, imagery, and significance of Buddhist statues, highlighting that within the Theravāda setting, these monuments were perceived not only as depictions of a historical character but also as tangible conduits of a transcendent presence. The colossal seated Buddha statue at Sukhothai, northern Thailand, is orientated from above, gazing down at the devotees below, producing an artistic impression that appears to teach and impart a religious significance. The paintings in Theravāda temples seek to illustrate the history of the Buddha's life and his teachings (Ferguson & Johannsen, 1976; Poolsuwan, 2022).

Zhang (2018) examines Theravāda Buddhist architecture in Xishuangbanna predominantly through an aesthetic lens, emphasising the temple's architectural space. The author contends that temple architecture is a visual spatial entity whose significance arises from the congruence between human aesthetic perception and the inherent characteristics of the architectural form (Senseney, 2007; Pearson & Richards, 2003). Zhang further characterises Theravāda temples as a manifestation of regional "ecological architecture" influenced by the local environment, ecological adaptation, and cultural history.

Research in Vietnam suggests that the architecture of Khmer Theravāda Buddhist temples constitutes a cultural space with three primary components: environmental landscape, temple architectural complex, and sculptural art. The entrance gate, the fence, and the encompassing forest are located outside. The gate and walls are splendid with their reliefs, embossed floral motifs, and embellishments. Beyond the gate lies an architectural complex featuring numerous structures systematically grouped and intricately designed (Lorenzon, 2021; Kornberger & Clegg, 2003). The principal and most significant area is the main hall.

The main hall is centrally situated on elevated terrain, orientated along an east-west axis that overshadows all other edifices. In the Buddhist perspective, the main hall is orientated towards

the east, symbolising enlightenment, the illumination of wisdom, and new beginnings. The main hall represents Mount Meru, the abode of the Buddha; beyond the main hall lies the realm of deities and spirits safeguarding the Buddha and the Dharma. Cambodian and Thai designs predominantly influence traditional Theravāda temple architecture in Vietnam (Srinivasan, 2019).

Nguyen examines the impact of Brahmanism on some pictures in Khmer temples, asserting that figures such as the god Maha Prum, the goddess Kinnari, the bird Krud, and Naga are derived from Brahmanism, shaping their worldview and philosophical outlook. In a cultural analysis of the Kinnari symbol within Theravāda temples, author Ngo posits that the Kinnari-Cây No image, derived from Indian mythology and adorned in Theravāda Buddhist temples, epitomises the sanctity and nobility of Buddhist women while also signifying devoted love in matrimony. This revered animal symbolises the repulsion of malevolent spirits and the safeguarding of the Dharma. In relation to the Chan (yak) image Nguyen posits that it derives from Balamon culture, symbolising a guardian role that protects individuals and wards off malevolent spirits from entering the temple, predominantly depicted in grandstanding or seated poses within Khmer temple precincts.

Consequently, amidst the myriad images and symbols of the Khmer people, scholars have elucidated the significance of certain images, employing various methodologies for categorisation. However, the anthropological approach to art which examines aesthetics, symbolic significance, and the role of art within Khmer society has not received substantial attention. This essay aims to address this gap by systematically categorising and conducting a comprehensive examination of the origins, aesthetics, significance, and social roles of images found in Khmer temples in Vietnam.

## Methods

This article applies an interdisciplinary methodology within the social sciences, integrating the anthropology of art and symbolism. The symbolic method clarifies the structure and design of Khmer temples, as well as the cultural importance and use of symbols in the lives of the Khmer people and the cultural characteristics of this ethnic group. This study utilises an anthropology of art approach to examine various components, including composition (symmetry the divine axis and eastward orientation), proportion, rhythm, stylisation, carving techniques, relief work, wall painting, architectural colours, and the classification of imagery in Khmer visual arts. The investigation highlights that the visual arts included in temples are an essential component of Khmer social life, with symbols consistently linked to authority, beliefs, and ethnic identity. The information for this article was gathered through a synthesis of documentary analysis and ethnographic fieldwork. Sources comprise temples, scholarly research, reports, and visual representations of Khmer temple architecture. The examined imagery and its associated themes provide a comprehensive analysis of Khmer temple imagery in Vietnam. The ethnographic fieldwork research was undertaken on multiple occasions from 2021 to 2025 at the following temples: Cadaransi in Ho Chi Minh City, Thom Ma Cho in Soc Trang province, Ang in Tra Vinh province, Rajamahajetavanaram, Sirivansa, and Serey Odom in Binh Phuoc province, among others. Throughout the fieldwork, the author documented and captured images of the statues, reliefs, patterns, and spatial arrangement of the temples. Concurrently, the author

performed comprehensive interviews with monks and Buddhist adherents to elucidate the genesis and significance of the images. Documented observations and interviews established a scientific foundation for this investigation. This methodology and approach afforded the author significant insights into the iconography present in Theravāda Buddhist temples of the Khmer population in Vietnam.

## Result and Discussion

### Buddhist Symbols and Symbols Associated with Theravāda Teachings

#### *The Shakyamuni Buddha Statue*

The configuration of Buddha statues in all Khmer Theravāda Buddhist temples in Vietnam is uniform. The Shakyamuni Buddha sculptures in the main hall are positioned in various proportions and postures dhyana, dharmachakra, parinirvana, among others forming a multi-layered symbolic environment where sculpture, architecture, light, and colour evoke a religious ambiance. The shrine's layout is structured based on the principle of center-symmetry-stratification, featuring the Buddha statue in the highest and central position, which acts as the sacred axis of the worship space. This configuration not only produces a visual impression of equilibrium and gravity but also embodies a Buddhist perspective wherein the Buddha is situated as the focal point of ethical order. From that point, worshippers engage with the statue, immersing themselves in a physical and emotional experience of devotion, humility, and contemplation.



Figure 1. Shrine in Thom Ma Cho temple (Soc Trang province)  
*Source: Dinh Thi Yen (2023)*

The central Buddha statue is a seated Buddha meditating on a lotus throne beneath a Bodhi tree, which symbolises wisdom. Numerous smaller statues in various stances depict the Buddha's practice, dissemination of the Dharma, and achievement of Nirvana, serving as a

reminder of life's transience. The principal Buddha statue is substantial, accentuated by a luminous halo, gilded hue, and a conspicuous placement relative to the other statues. These ingredients establish a religious ambiance, wherein light signifies enlightened understanding, and gold concurrently embodies merit, purity, and transcendental attributes. This space's beauty eschews minimalism, instead embracing the principle of sacred richness: intricate patterns, curved arches, botanical reliefs, and ornamental details envelop the surfaces, transmuting the architecture from a mere physical structure into a sensory experience of the sacred domain. The art serves not just a decorative purpose but also fulfils ritualistic and epistemic roles, aiding participants in distinguishing between ordinary space and sacred space.

Additionally, the existence of auxiliary statues, murals, and reliefs in the main hall and sala illustrates the life of the Buddha, encompassing his previous incarnations, birth, spiritual practice, enlightenment, dissemination of Buddhism, and attainment of Nirvana. The paintings evoke a profound beauty, articulating the Buddhist philosophy of existence and perspective, while safeguarding and propagating the teachings and nurturing the devotion of adherents to the Buddha and Khmer Theravāda Buddhism. The adornments of fresh flowers, coloured lights, and offerings indicate that the shrine is a dynamic aesthetic entity, always reconstituted via daily religious rituals. This indicates that temple art should not be perceived as the work of a solitary artist but rather as a communal accomplishment of the religious community, whereby symbolic significance is generated, preserved, and revitalised via acts of offering, stewardship, and reverence. This image unequivocally illustrates that, under Theravāda Buddhism, art serves as both a medium for conveying religion and a cultural technology for emotion, memory, and sacred order

### ***Dharmachakra (Wheel of Dharma)***

The Dharmachakra is represented at the principal entrance, roof reliefs, religious objects, and temple boundaries of Khmer Theravāda Buddhist temples. Monks and artisans dictate the dimensions, hue, and positioning of the Dharmachakra, embodying the desires of the Buddhist adherents. The Dharmachakra is one of the oldest symbols. It comes from the Buddha's first and most important teaching. The Dharma wheel represents the Buddha's teachings, with its eight spokes representing the Noble Eightfold Path, the axle representing the precepts, and the rim representing awareness and meditative concentration. In the Theravāda tradition of the Khmer community in Vietnam, the turning of the Dharma wheel symbolises the propagation of the Buddha's teachings, guiding sentient beings from ignorance to enlightenment. The Dharma wheel is a powerful symbol of peace and compassion that encourages love for others, helping each other, and giving to others.

### ***Bodhi Tree***

The Bodhi tree is intimately linked to the life and enlightenment of the Buddha. Buddhist mythology states that Prince Gautama Siddhartha meditated for 49 days and nights beneath the Bodhi tree, attaining enlightenment. The Bodhi tree signifies enlightenment, embodying wisdom, tranquillity, and attention; it also serves as an object of reverence, representing the Buddha in his absence. The Khmer people cultivate several Bodhi trees within Buddhist temple grounds, serving as sacred symbols that commemorate the site of the Buddha's enlightenment, embody the solemnity of the monastic environment, and offer shade for the temple area. The

Bodhi tree symbolises not merely a tree but also an emblem of individual capacity for self-enlightenment, signifying the resilience required to transcend suffering and attain tranquility.

### **Iconography of Deities and Mascot Symbol**

#### ***Kabil Maha Brum (Brahma)***

Brahma, the four-faced deity, is one of the three principal divinities of Brahmanism. In Khmer temple construction, effigies of this deity are frequently positioned atop temple gateways, stupas, salas, pillars, and various other edifices within the architectural complex. Brahma is sculpted in cement with four faces orientated towards the cardinal directions: east, west, south, and north, symbolising omniscience, universal knowledge, and omnipresence beyond space. Buddhism thrived, although veneration for Brahmanism persisted in Khmer society. Consequently, the depiction of the four-faced Brahma god is consistently incorporated into Theravāda Buddhist temple architecture.

The depiction of Brahma in the ornamental art of Khmer Buddhist temples signifies the Buddha's preeminent standing among all deities of the cardinal directions, reflecting the localisation of symbolism within Khmer religious practices. Brahma is now redefined inside the Brahman system of Khmer people as a guardian deity rather than solely a creator god, possessing four faces that serve the dual purpose of observation and safeguarding the society. The depiction of Kabil Maha Brum is associated with the mythology of the Khmer New Year (Maha Sangkran), wherein the deity embodies cyclical time, morality, and communal blessings, illustrating the intrinsic connection between temple art and the memories of festivals and folk rituals. In Khmer temples, the four-faced deity serves as both a guardian and a manifestation of Khmer artistic attributes: the capacity to assimilate Indian symbolism and subsequently reconfigure it into an indigenous aesthetic-religious lexicon, wherein art functions as both a manifestation of devotion and a method of structuring the community's symbolic order.

#### ***Naga***

Research on Buddhist iconography in Southeast Asia indicates that the Naga is linked to the Mucalinda motif, which safeguards the Buddha, and symbolises the protection of the Dharma, supernatural authority, and the validity of the religious institution (Gaston-Aubert, 2010). The Naga (Neak) is a phrase denoting an entity with a head akin to that of a cobra, composed of cosmic dust particles, representing universal power and strength, immortality, and a deity that bestows happiness onto humanity. In Khmer temples, Naga functions as a symbolic entity linking the art, rituals, collective memory, and natural surroundings of the Khmer populace. Naga is frequently represented in relief within the temple space, characterised by a long, slender body adorned in yellow and turquoise, exhibiting symmetrical form. Nagas are depicted at the temple gate, atop the main hall, on the pillars of the main hall, on sala roofs, on flagpoles, on stupas, and on fences, among other locations. Functioning as a hallowed boundary, it safeguards Buddhist space and signifies the shift from the secular realm to the sacred domain. For the Khmer people, the significance of the Naga transcends classical Buddhism; it simultaneously embodies elements of indigenous beliefs regarding water, fertility, and communal safeguarding, mirroring the perspective of a rice-farming agricultural society where

water is both essential for survival and a revered entity. The quantity of Naga heads is invariably odd, as the Khmer hold that odd numbers symbolise the eternity of the universe. Naga figures in Khmer temples are typically represented with five heads, symbolising the five enlightened Buddhas in the cycle of creation and destruction, or with seven heads, representing enlightenment, awakening, and supreme wisdom.



Figure 2. Kabil Maha Brum in Ang temple (Tra Vinh province)  
*Source: Dinh Thi Yen (2023)*



Figure 3. Naga in Srey Odom temple (Binh Phuoc province)  
*Source: Dinh Thi Yen (2025)*

A prominent serpent head is centrally positioned, surrounded by two smaller heads. The serpent heads are consistently elevated and orientated forward with their ears extended. The Naga in

Khmer temples serves as a complex symbol; it is a revered creature, endowed with significant power and divine capabilities, safeguarding individuals and Buddhism and symbolising belief in immortality. This revered animal influences aesthetic sensibilities, majesty, and power, steadfastly safeguarding the temple and Buddhist doctrines while nurturing the community and revitalising Khmer cultural identity through visual arts and rituals.

### ***Kinnari (Cay No)***

Kannari originates from Indian mythology and represents one of the three emblems of endless life, joy, and immortality. This is a hybrid deity, embodying both human and avian characteristics, often represented in pairs: the female is referred to as Kinnari, while the male is known as Kinnara. The Khmer population in Southern Vietnam embraced Kinnari and integrated it into their temple design. In Khmer temples, the Kinnari figure is perceived as a symbolic intermediate linking religious art, cosmology, and collective aesthetic sense, rather than simply a decorative element. Kinnari, possessing a human body and avian wings, embodies a sacred hybridity that obscures the distinctions between humans, nature, and the celestial, thus illustrating a vision of a harmonious and orderly universe.

In Khmer temple construction, the figure of Cày No is crafted from plaster or cement, with a serene visage, extended wings, upright legs, a protruding chest, and elevated arms that support the columns and rafters in architectural edifices such as the main hall, sala, stupas, and schools. The statues are adorned with a spectrum of hues, imparting a feminine, soft, elegant, graceful, and fluid semblance of a goddess. The Cày No symbol adorns the intersection of column capitals and rafters in architectural structures, serving as an essential emblem that enhances fluidity, mitigates the grandeur of sacred architecture, and simultaneously infuses the Buddhist space with connotations of grace, purity, and artistic value. These characteristics enhance the unique aesthetic of Khmer temple art in Vietnam.

Kinnari exemplifies the localisation of Indian symbols within the Khmer context, where religious art imparts doctrines while also integrating indigenous cultural memory, particularly the notions of sacred nature and the interplay between beauty and righteousness. Khmer individuals perceive Kinnari as a protective being against malevolent spirits, safeguarding the temple and the Dharma while embodying purity, devoted love, and ideal beauty. Moreover, the Kinnari picture represents a reverence for nature and a celebration of life within the temple premises—where avian and terrestrial creatures coexist and the sanctity of all beings is honoured in accordance with Buddhist principles.

### ***Krud***

In Brahmanism, the legendary bird Krud, referred to as Garuda, serves as the steed of the guardian deity Vishnu. In Khmer culture, this revered being possesses unmatched power, epitomising virtue, consistently aligning with righteousness to combat malevolence, and perpetually assisting those in distress. Consequently, the representation of the mythological bird Krud is carved and adorned on edifices within Khmer temples in Vietnam. At transitional locations in architecture such as gable ends, corners, pedestals, or entrances—the Krud functions as a threshold guardian, structuring the visual experience of the devotee and delineating the shift from secular to sacred space. The Krud, which is about the Naga,

represents not only a legendary battle but also the difference between the sky and the water, heavenly power and local power, and the order of the heavens and the land's fertile energy. In Khmer temples, the Krud serves as an intermediary symbol of sacred sovereignty, reflecting Brahmanical Indian heritage while being reinterpreted within Khmer aesthetic and religious sensibility as a protective figure for the community, bolstering architecture and reinforcing cultural identity.



Figure 4. Kannari in Rajamahajetavanaram temple (Binh Phuoc province)  
*Source: Dinh Thi Yen (2026)*



Figure 5. Krud in Wath Sro Loun temple (Soc Trang province)  
*Source: Vietnam News Agency (2024)*

The depiction of the mythological bird Krud is crafted from plaster or cement, exhibiting a uniform design prevalent in all Khmer temples. The Krud is an avian figure possessing a human torso, a bird's head, a hooked beak, two erect legs, expansive wings for stability, and two arms elevated over its head. The Krud is a combination of symbols that stand for supernatural strength, the ability to cross the line between heaven and earth, and the protection of Buddhism, monks, and society. The Krud, manifesting at pivotal architectural junctures like roof gables, corners, and the intersections of columns and rafters, embodies both aesthetic elegance and structural integrity. It serves as a threshold guardian, orchestrating the visual experience of the faithful and delineating the shift from secular to sacred space. The Khmer people regard the Krud as a symbolic intermediary of sacred sovereignty, embodying elements of Brahmanical-

Indian heritage while being reinterpreted through Khmer aesthetic and religious sensibilities as a protective emblem for the community, bolstering architecture and reinforcing cultural identity.

### ***Yeak (Chan)***

Yeak is represented through statues and reliefs. Round statues are typically positioned at the temple entrance, sala entrance, stupa entrance, and surrounding the main hall. Reliefs illustrating Yeak are shown on the temple walls, the windows of the main hall, the eaves, and the door frames to safeguard the temple and Buddhism. Yeak is typically depicted as a tall figure clad in armour, wielding a broom or sword lying on the ground, characterised by a furious visage, broad eyes, an expansive mouth, sharp fangs, and a multi-layered headdress that symbolises power. Chan, a mythical creature, is adorned with diverse colours based on the artist's imagination. The predominant colours are red, blue, yellow, and warm hues, illustrating the ferocity of the Chăn figure. These characteristics have a compelling visual impact and establish a body language of authority, causing individuals entering the temple to instantly perceive the demarcation between the ordinary and the sacred place.

In the Khmer culture of Southern Vietnam, the Chan is a protective deity with specific social and ritual roles: safeguarding, repelling malevolent spirits, and balancing emotions of fear and veneration among adherents. The Chan's ferocity is not aimed at creating disorder but is instead employed to safeguard sacred order. Consequently, the Chăn in Khmer temples epitomise a paradoxical yet quintessential representation of Khmer religious art: the ferocious is transmuted into a form of protection, and the fearsome evolves into a guardian of the community. Yeak imparts moral lessons, emphasising the intrinsic goodness and humanity of individuals and steering them toward a virtuous existence.

### **Lions**

Lions are a prevalent motif at the entrances of Theravāda Buddhist temples among the Khmer populace. Lions are frequently positioned near gates, steps, or pillars or in front of the main hall locations of significant transitional importance to delineate the boundary between secular and sacred settings. In Khmer temples, the lion serves not only as a decorative motif with a magnificent presence but also as a sacred emblem within aesthetic, religious, and social frameworks.

This cement sculpture represents a lion in a standing position on its front legs, with its hind legs bent in a kneeling stance, showcasing its powerful physique, facing forward, with eyes fixed ahead and mouth agape. This produces a visual impression of strength and cultivates a language of authority, instilling a sense of reverence and discipline for pilgrims. The lion statue, positioned at the temple gate, serves not merely as a visual representation but as a symbolic entity that imparts to devotees the sensation of entering a distinct realm, a safeguarded region where both body and mind must be attuned to the divine. The artisans crafted lions at significant edifices within the temple, embodying the architectural and sculptural lexicon and communal belief in their capacity to safeguard the sacred site, protect the Buddha, repel malevolent spirits, and foster tranquillity for both the temple and its worshippers.



Figure 6. Yeak in Ang temple (Tra Vinh province)  
Source: Dinh Thi Yen (2023)



Figure 7. Kannari in Rajamahajetavanaram temple (Binh Phuoc province)  
Source: Dinh Thi Yen (2026)

Besides the mentioned symbols, the architectural designs of Khmer temples are adorned with many characters and mythical beings, including the deities Hanuman and Reahu, as well as dragons, unicorns, swans, and lotus flowers. Every symbol embodies aesthetic significance, meaning, and a function within Khmer society.

## Conclusion

The imagery in the sculptural art of Khmer Theravāda Buddhist temples is intricate and varied. The majority of imagery in Khmer culture derives from Indian culture or Buddhist texts. All are conserved by the Khmer people within the temple's architectural complex, with each image embodying substantial significance for Buddhism and the Khmer community. Images like Buddha Shakyamuni, sacred symbols such as the Naga, Kinnari, Krud, the four-faced deity, demons, and lions illustrate that Khmer temple art transcends mere architectural decoration; it should be regarded as a dynamic symbolic system linked to worldview, rituals, collective memory, and communal existence. Consequently, Khmer temples serve as an aesthetic, social, and religious arena where art not only mirrors beliefs but also actively contributes to the perpetuation of Khmer cultural identity. An anthropological approach to art enables us to assert that the imagery system on Khmer temples constitutes not merely a religious artistic heritage but also a cultural language through which the Khmer community interprets the world, preserves collective memory, and asserts its presence within the contemporary Vietnamese cultural landscape.

## Acknowledgments

I sincerely thank all individuals who supported this study, including the monks, the Khmer people, and the local authorities who provided resources and facilitated my field research. Their guidance and support made this research possible.

## References

- Ferguson, J. P., & Johannsen, C. B. (1976). modern Buddhist murals in northern Thailand: a study of religious symbols and meaning 1. *American Ethnologist*, 3(4), 645-669. <https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1976.3.4.02a00060>
- Hue, N. T. (2026). Natural Environment and Ethnic Cultural Practices of Khmer People in Southern Vietnam: A Case Study of Du Ke Theater and Phuoc Bien Worship. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)*, 10(3).
- Kornberger, M., & Clegg, S. (2003). The architecture of complexity. *Culture and organization*, 9(2), 75-91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14759550302804>
- Lam, H. H., & Pham, K. D. (2025). Theravada buddhism's philosophy: Ethical foundation of khmer community in the southern vietnam. *Synesis*, 17(1), 21-38.
- Liêm, V. Đ. (2016). Vietnam at the Khmer Frontier: Boundary Politics, 1802–1847. *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review*, 5(2), 534-564. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ach.2016.0018>
- Lorenzon, M. (2021). From Architectural Analysis to Architectural Theory: City Gates as Public Spaces in Syro-Anatolian Urban Centers. *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology and Heritage Studies*, 9(3), 225-246. <https://doi.org/10.5325/jeasmedarcherstu.9.3.0225>

- Pearson, M. P., & Richards, C. (2003). Architecture and order: spatial representation and archaeology. In *Architecture and Order* (pp. 47-79). Routledge.
- Poolsuwan, S. (2022). Visual narratives: Buddha life stories in the “medieval Theravāda” of Southeast Asia. In *Routledge Handbook of Theravāda Buddhism* (pp. 287-304). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351026666>
- Prak, S., Leeka, J., Keo, R., Kaewphaitoon, S., & Ketveerapong, P. (2024). Applied Khmer Philosophy. *Journal of Graduate MCU KhonKaen Campus*, 11(2), 14-22.
- Robson, J. (2014). The Buddhist Image Inside-Out: On the Placing of Objects Inside Statues in East Asia. *Buddhism Across Asia: Networks of Material, Intellectual, and Cultural Exchange*, 1, 291-307.
- Senseney, J. R. (2007). Idea and Visuality in Hellenistic Architecture: A Geometric Analysis of Temple A of the Asklepieion at Kos. *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens*, 76(3), 555-595. <https://doi.org/10.2972/hesp.76.3.555>
- Srinivasan, S. (2019). Analyzing the Impact of Indian Architecture on the Architecture of Cambodia, Thailand and Indonesia. *International Journal of Architectural and Environmental Engineering*, 13, 244-57.
- Thompson, A. (2022). Icons: Standing out from the narrative in Theravādin art. In *Routledge Handbook of Theravāda Buddhism* (pp. 305-326). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351026666-25>
- Yen, T. H. (2025). The Role of Buddhist Education in the Propagation of Buddhism in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. *Buddhism in Mekong Region Journal*, 8(2), 62-70.
- Zhang, Q. (2018). The Analysis of Aesthetic Perception of Theravāda Buddhist Architecture in Xishuangbanna. In *2018 5th International Conference on Education, Management, Arts, Economics and Social Science (ICEMAESS 2018)* (pp. 593-597). Atlantis Press. <https://doi.org/10.2991/icemaess-18.2018.121>