

Vietnamization of Cham- and Chinese-origin female deities through legends: an intertextual study of Thiên Y A Na and Thiên Hậu Thánh Mẫu in Huế

Hoang Huu Phuoc* 



Use your smartphone to scan this QR code and download this article

University of Education, Hue University, Vietnam

Correspondence

Hoang Huu Phuoc, University of Education, Hue University, Vietnam

Email: hhphuoc@hueuni.edu.vn

History

- Received: 01-04-2025
- Revised: 14-12-2025
- Accepted: 06-02-2026
- Published Online: 27-05-2026

DOI :

<https://doi.org/10.32508/vnuhcmj-std.v29i2.4450>



Check for updates

Copyright

© VNUHCM Journal. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license.

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the Vietnamization and Huế-localization of female deities of Cham and Chinese origin in Huế through belief legends, focusing on two cases: *Thiên Y A Na* (adapted from the Champa and Cham goddess *Yang Po Ina Nagar* and *Po Inâ Nâger*) and *Thiên Hậu Thánh Mẫu* (adapted from the Chinese sea goddess *Mazu*). The dataset comprises 89 legend variants and ethnographic materials from Huế and related Cham and Minh Hương communities collected between 2021 and 2024. Cases were selected based on textual circulation, ritual salience, and provenance diversity.

By analyzing narrative variants of these legends, symbolic systems, worship configurations, and ritual practices, the study demonstrates how these divine figures have been reinterpreted and indigenized over time, particularly through the selective reaccentuation of their symbolic valences across Champa, Cham, and Vietnamese cultural contexts. This process exemplifies the concept of intertextual transposition and reveals the active Huế-localization of micro-level religious meaning within the broader macro-level trajectory of Vietnamization in response to local cosmology and shifting socio-political contexts.

By employing an analytical framework that integrates intertextual transposition into Turner's theory of ritual process (liminality, communitas, and anti-structure), this study extends Turner's model from oral to literate contexts. The study argues that legends function as "cultural scripts" that provide symbolic source codes, while ritual enactments serve as the processing mechanism through which these codes are processed. Through the liminality of the ritual space, exogenous textual elements are deconstructed and structurally reintegrated into the local belief system. This approach reveals how ritual performance actively reaccentuates textual meanings, allowing for the Huế-localization of exogenous symbols.

Key words: Intertextual transposition, female deities, belief legends, Vietnamization, Huế folk religion

INTRODUCTION

Belief legends in Huế are not merely narratives that express faith in supernatural forces; they also function as a distinct form of storytelling that organizes collective memory, constructs sacred spaces, and legitimizes institutional power within the cultural and religious framework of the local community. This genre of folklore has been fundamentally shaped by the historical upheavals, geo-cultural dynamics, and religious-spiritual developments in the former imperial capital, a region that was once a frontier zone before becoming the political center of both the Tây Sơn and Nguyễn dynasties.

The study is grounded in extensive fieldwork and documentary research, resulting in a unique corpus of legend texts that reflect a mental and symbolic structure grounded in animism, anthropolatry, and the

theocratic sacralization of socio-religious institutions. Of particular note are the legends concerning female deities: goddesses who serve as creators, protectors, and moral educators. These legends stand out not only for their quantity but also for their symbolic significance. Their prominence is evident in both their spatial distribution and narrative density, revealing the crucial role of goddess imagery in the construction of religious identity within the Huế community across different historical periods. Their prominence and syncretic nature make these figures especially suitable for applying the framework of intertextual transposition in the context of Vietnamization. Prominent legends such as *Thiên Y A Na blessing Huế*, *Lady Kỳ Thạch*, *Lady Thái Dương*, *Lady of Liễu Cốc Tower*, or *Thiên Hậu saving boat refugees* illustrate the marked presence of female deities across diverse cultural and social contexts¹. These legends are not

Cite this article : Huu Phuoc H. Vietnamization of Cham- and Chinese-origin female deities through legends: an intertextual study of Thiên Y A Na and Thiên Hậu Thánh Mẫu in Huế. *VNUHCM J. Sci. Technol. Dev.*2026; 29(2):4037-4050.

simply supernatural myths; rather, they highlight the profound level of interaction and structural reconfiguration among various religious-spiritual paradigms, including Cham Hinduism, Chinese Buddhism, Vietnamese Mother Goddess worship, Daoism, and, in modern times, Catholicism and Caodaism².

Within this syncretic context, Huế belief legends serve as sites for the convergence and Huế-localization of divine imagery within the broader process of Vietnamization. To avoid conceptual ambiguity, this study defines “Vietnamization” not in the modern political sense, but as a long-term historical process of acculturation during the Southward Expansion (*Nam tiến*). Drawing on Li³ and Taylor⁴, Vietnamization is conceptualized as the systematic integration of indigenous territories and deities into the Vietnamese sphere through two primary mechanisms: administrative legitimation (through state-imposed imperial conferment decrees, or *sắc phong*) and cultural appropriation (through vernacular adaptation).

It is crucial to distinguish between the two distinct narrative streams within the corpus: official dynastic legends (*thần tích*) recorded by court scholar-officials, and folk legends (*truyện thuyết dân gian*) circulated among the populace. Dynastic narratives, such as the biographical stele of *Thiên Y A Na* composed by Phan Thanh Giản, functioned as tools of administrative Vietnamization, often stripping the deities of “heterodox” elements to align them with Confucian virtues of loyalty and state protection. In contrast, folk legends served as vehicles for vernacular Vietnamization, preserving the deities’ magical efficacy as well as humanistic traits that resonated with everyday village life. The Vietnamization process, therefore, is not a monolithic imposition but a dialectical process in which the state confers political legitimacy (*chính danh*), while folk tradition provides spiritual vitality (*linh thiêng*). This macro-level framework informs the specific analysis of micro-level “Huế-localization” conducted in this study. A key example is the selective recontextualization of the Cham goddess *Po Inâ Nâger* within the figure of *Thiên Y A Na*, whose meanings, functions, and ritual spaces bear clear marks of local adaptation. Notably, these female deities rarely exist in isolation; instead, they are frequently embedded within polytheistic worship frameworks such as *Tam vị Thánh Mẫu* (Three Holy Mothers) and *Ngũ Hành Tiên Nương* (Five Element Goddesses), or are co-present with *Quan Âm Nam Hải* (*Guanyin* of the Southern Sea). Such configurations create a distinctive mode of syncretism and intertextuality within Huế’s vernacular religious system^{2,5,6}.

From another perspective, belief legends function as mechanisms for constructing discourses of power, particularly under the Nguyễn Dynasty. Narratives such as *Thiên Y A Na manifesting on the Hương River and later receiving royal investiture from Emperor Duy Tân*, or *Thiên Hậu Thánh Mẫu being worshiped in both Chinese guildhalls and syncretized Vietnamese temples*, demonstrate the Nguyễn court’s direct engagement in shaping religious symbolism, authorizing divine legitimacy, and embedding such beliefs within the politico-religious apparatus of the state¹.

The framework proposed by Dégh⁷ argues that belief legends not only encode supernatural phenomena but also articulate socially sanctioned systems of authority and meaning. This critical function is given further elaboration in her work, where she asserts that belief legends “serve not only to narrate the inexplicable, but also to organize collective consciousness around culturally negotiable truths”⁸. Similarly, Taylor notes that the incorporation of local deities into the national pantheon was “a sophisticated strategy for constructing the cultural and political legitimacy of the dynasty”⁹. The decision to focus on female deity figures in this study is grounded in their role as exemplars of cultural transposition and represents a powerful lens through which intertextual theory can be applied. The recurring presence of female deities in multiple narrative forms across Huế legends reveals both the narrative flexibility of this genre as well as the structural depth of Vietnamese folk belief systems throughout their cultural and historical development.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory of intertextual transposition provides a robust analytical framework for examining the transformation and reaccentuation of divine symbols within local cultural contexts. In this study, it is defined as the process of reconstructing a symbol as it moves from one cultural-historical context to another, thereby fundamentally altering its semiotic structure. Compared to more conventional approaches, such as syncretism or functionalism—which often emphasize static forms of blending between religious systems—intertextual transposition excels in capturing the dynamic, multi-layered, and continuously evolving nature of vernacular cultural memory. This framework is particularly applicable in cases where deities of different provenances—such as Cham-origin (e.g., *Thiên Y A Na*) and Chinese-origin (e.g., *Thiên Hậu Thánh Mẫu*)—are not adopted wholesale, but are continually restructured in terms of their function, naming, position within the local pantheon,

or relationships with other sacred figures in response to contextual demands.

Genette notes that “transposition is not mere translation, but transformation through context”¹⁰, while Barthes reminds us that “meaning is never fixed at the source, but results from the circulation of texts within cultural memory”¹¹. In the case of Huế legends, intertextual transposition allows for a nuanced understanding of how goddess figures from both Cham and Chinese traditions are reconfigured at both the macro level of Vietnamization and the micro level of Huế-localization. Through this process, these figures are legitimized, integrated into polytheistic worship systems, and embedded within power-laden discursive structures such as the Nguyễn imperial cult.

The concept of transposition originates from post-structuralist works, particularly those of Kristeva and Bakhtin. Kristeva defines transposition as the process in which “the passage from one signifying system to another demands a new articulation”¹², while Bakhtin emphasizes the dynamic interaction between texts and contexts, highlighting that meaning is constructed through “a dialogue of different voices”¹³. This concept has since been developed further within cultural studies and symbolic anthropology, particularly in research on religious transformation and cultural memory¹⁴. In this study, intertextual transposition refers specifically to the reconstruction of a symbol or myth as it transitions from one cultural-historical context to another, altering its semiotic structure as well as its original expressive and ritual functions.

Consequently, transposition does not merely refer to semantic displacement; it is an intertextual process of symbolic reconstruction that occurs within asymmetrical cultural contact zones influenced by power dynamics, identity politics, belief systems, and social practices. In the case of Huế, goddess figures such as *Yang Po Ina Nagar* (Champa context), *Po Inâ Nâger* (Cham context), or *Mazu* (Chinese), undergo recontextualization upon reception in Vietnamese contexts. Specifically, certain functions are foregrounded, a process that involves the selective reaccentuation of symbolic valences (e.g., didactic, protective, and agrarian), which is often layered over earlier cosmogonic or ethnic-protective valences. Assmann notes that “cultural memory does not preserve symbols as static relics; it reactivates them through reinterpretation in new contexts of meaning”¹⁵. This view affirms the flexible yet politicized nature of the transpositional process.

Following Turner, this study treats rituals as a process involving liminality, *communitas*, and temporary anti-structure that converts textual codes into social facts. Legends provide narrative scripts, while ritual performance tests, amplifies, and reinscribes them into embodied practice^{16–18}. This coupling is co-constitutive: legends provide structure for roles and sequences, while rituals select and stabilize specific valences that are reinscribed into the corpus as orthodoxy. In Huế, liminal festival contexts, such as at Huế Nam and *Lễ vía Bà* (Goddess’s Birthday festival) for *Thiên Hậu*, allow for experimentation with divine functions and names; these choices often persist as stabilized transpositions (e.g., titles, orations, and spatial placements) once ordinary structure is restored.

The transpositional process is facilitated by pre-existing mediating factors within Vietnamese folk religion. Two particularly significant factors are as follows: (a) the pervasive presence of *Đạo Mẫu* (Mother Goddess religion), which provides an established indigenous template for the receptive female deity archetype (e.g., *Mẫu* or *Bà Chúa*) that allows Cham and Chinese figures to be easily conflated with local figures such as *Princess Liễu Hạnh*⁴; and (b) the widespread popularity of Folk Buddhism, particularly the figure of *Quan Âm Nam Hải*, which serves as a syncretic maritime-protector template that accelerated the localization of the sea goddess *Thiên Hậu*. These factors act as cultural mediators, enabling the symbolic restructuring of external deities into forms compatible with Vietnamese cosmology.

This study applies this theoretical framework and identifies several principal models of transposition, including:

(1) *Textual-symbolic transposition*: rather than a unidirectional shift from a “cosmic creator” to an “agrarian-artisanal” figure, Huế narratives and rituals selectively amplify the didactic, agrarian, and water-ritual valences already present within the complex, multi-functional repertoire of *Yang Po Ina Nagar* and *Po Inâ Nâger* when constructing the image of *Thiên Y A Na*.

(2) *Spatial-ritual transposition*: sacred space is redefined, as worship moves from Cham towers or Chinese guildhalls into *Điện thờ* (ancestral shrines) or *chùa Bà* (Lady temples), reflecting Huế-localization with Vietized ritual forms within a broader national trajectory.

(3) *Ritual-processual transposition* (Turner): through liminality, *communitas*, and anti-structure, festival and liturgical performances reaccentuate textual

codes and authorize new placements within the pantheon; meanings are enacted, selectively reinforced, and stabilized through rituals¹⁶⁻¹⁸.

(4) *Pantheonic-functional transposition*: the figure evolves from a deity of ethnic minorities or migrant communities into a goddess integrated into the Vietnamese pantheon (macro-level Vietnamization) through imperial conferment decrees, thereby being regulated, legitimized, and embedded within the orthodox religious order.

Within this process, belief legends function as intermediary mechanisms that both preserve cultural memory and serve as a medium for the localized rewriting of religious history. The multiple narrative versions of *Thiên Y A Na* or *Thiên Hậu* do not merely reflect vernacular belief systems; rather, they stand as evidence of ongoing symbolic negotiation among competing religious paradigms. These legends give rise to polyphonic and highly adaptive divine representations within the spiritual landscape of Huế. Applying the theory of intertextual transposition offers a nuanced analysis of this symbolic restructuring, helping to trace how divine representations migrate and are resemanticized within new pantheonic frameworks and evolving cosmologies. In addition, this framework facilitates the structural-symbolic analysis of how deities of Cham and Chinese origin are Vietized in Huế legends and offers deeper insights into the mechanisms by which folk religious institutions emerge and evolve, particularly in the dynamic interplay between vernacular culture, political authority, and discourses of local identity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly discourse on the Mother Goddess of Champa, *Yang Po Ina Nagar* (or *Po Inâ Nâger*), was initially shaped by French Orientalist scholars. Aymonier¹⁹ and Aymonier and Cabaton²⁰ laid the philological and archaeological foundations for this field. Boisselier²¹ analyzed Cham statuary and emphasized *Po Nagar*'s connection to Hinduism, describing her as an incarnation of *Bhagavati Umā*. Durand²² pioneered research into Cham beliefs in Cochinchina.

Vietnamese scholars bridged the historiographical gap between colonial scholarship and modern analysis by actively investigating Cham-Vietnamese cultural relations throughout the mid-20th century, shifting the focus from archaeological description to cultural acculturation. Notably, Thái Văn Kiểm²³ analyzed the profound "Cham influence on Vietnamese culture" in 1960, providing an early indigenous framework for understanding this syncretism.

Nguyễn Văn Luận²⁴ expanded the geographical scope of the framework and produced a comprehensive study on the Cham in the Southwest region in 1974, documenting their religious adaptations within the Vietnamese social fabric. Following national reunification, Lê Văn Hào²⁵ examined the "Viet-Cham cultural exchange through folk literature" in 1979, with a specific focus on how legends facilitated cross-cultural dialogue. Nguyễn Thế Anh²⁶ analyzed this transformation, noting that the goddess's legends and titles had been Confucianized into *Thiên Y A Na* by the 19th century. The Vietnamese Institute for Southeast Asian Studies²⁷ provided further context on Champa culture and architecture.

Noseworthy²⁸ and Sakaya (Trương Văn Món)²⁹ utilized interdisciplinary methods to challenge the view that *Po Inâ Nâger* was merely a local adaptation of *Bhagavati Umā*, while emphasizing the complexity of indigenous Cham discourse, particularly by connecting the deity to the long-established tradition of Cham mother goddesses. Inrasara (Phú Trạm)³⁰ also contributed an important indigenous perspective.

The research gap regarding this goddess lies in the absence of a stratified transposition model capable of distinguishing between macro-level Vietnamization and micro-level localization. This study addresses this gap by applying the framework of intertextual transposition to distinguish these two levels.

The cult of *Thiên Hậu* (*Mazu*) originated on Meizhou Island, Fujian Province, developing alongside maritime trade as a protective deity associated with disaster relief and prophecy^{31,32}. Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ³³ documents the construction of dozens of *Thiên Hậu* temples across Southern Vietnam during this period, making *Thiên Hậu* the principal protective deity of the Chinese community in Vietnam. Phan Thị Hoa Lý³⁴ recorded the historical emergence of *Thiên Hậu* shrines starting from late 16th century in sources such as *Hải ngoại kỉ sự* (A Chronicle of Foreign Lands, Quảng Nam) and *Gia Định thành thông chí* (A Comprehensive Monograph on Gia Định Citadel, Southern Vietnam). They also highlighted the distinct characteristics of *Thiên Hậu* in Huế, particularly the process of politico-discursive transposition at the macro level and its marked difference from developments in the southern region. Dương Thị Hải Vân³⁵ clarified that imperial conferment decrees granted to *Thiên Hậu* were state actions aimed at controlling, managing, and legitimizing the Minh Hương community, demonstrating that the cult in Huế was heavily influenced by a Confucian political discourse and less focused on folk commerce compared to *Thiên Hậu* temples in the South. These studies highlight the lack of

a unifying theoretical framework for analyzing the localization process of *Thiên Hậu* in parallel with *Thiên Y A Na*, and fail to clarify the mechanisms by which deities of Cham and Chinese origins were adapted to the same cultural-political environment.

This article addresses this gap by employing an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates (a) the concept of the belief legend, which emphasizes that folklore as a dynamic mechanism tied to current belief and that functions as mechanisms of memory, belief, and legitimacy as defined by Dégh⁸; and (b) the theory of intertextual transposition as formulated by Kristeva¹², adopted here as an alternative to “interfusion” or “acculturation” and defined as the shift and restructuring of meaning from one signifying system to another. Using this framework as a foundation, the study proposes a four-tiered transposition model to analyze the two distinct origins (Cham and Chinese) within the Huế context, thereby clarifying the role of belief legends as a semiotic broker between cultural memory and social institutions.

METHODOLOGY

To analyze this phenomenon with adequate empirical grounding, this study drew upon a corpus of 89 legend texts in Vietnamese (*quốc ngữ*) supplemented by a smaller subset of Hán-Nôm and Cham-script transcriptions collected through fieldwork conducted between 2021 and 2024 across the Thừa Thiên Huế region. Supplementary materials included archival documents, local temple inscriptions, and oral interviews with ritual practitioners and custodians of cultic sites. Specifically, 15 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with three main categories of participants: (1) five custodians of key cultic sites (Huệ Nam (Hòn Chén), chùa Bà, and Thiên Mục); (2) five experienced ritual practitioners; and (3) five community elders in Minh Hương villages and ancient villages along the Hương River (e.g., Hải Cát village). Interviews were conducted primarily in Vietnamese (Huế regional dialect), with occasional Cham and Sino-Vietnamese ritual terminology retained in the transcripts where analytically relevant. The criteria for sample selection were a minimum of 20 years of continuous engagement with the heritage sites and rituals, as well as the ability to recount at least three versions of legends associated with *Thiên Y A Na* or *Thiên Hậu*. All interviewees provided informed consent prior to participation, and all data were anonymized in the final report to ensure confidentiality. Interviewees were anonymized using coded labels to ensure privacy, but their specific roles are specified

when quoted. The study followed institutional ethical guidelines for non-interventional humanities research (IRB Not Applicable).

This mixed-source approach not only reinforced the representativeness of the data but also enabled a triangulated reading of both textual variation and embodied practice that is crucial for understanding how legends function as dynamic media of Huế-localization within the broader trajectory of macro-level Vietnamization.

INTERTEXTUAL TRANSPOSITION FROM CHAM TO VIETNAMESE LEGEND: A CASE STUDY OF THE LOCALIZATION OF THIÊN Y A NA

Methodologically, this study distinguishes between the different historical and textual registers of the goddess. Following Golzio’s edition of Champa inscriptions³⁶, the study uses *Yang Po Ina Nagar* for the epigraphic and Champa royal cult (c. 7th–15th century), which represents the goddess’s primary register as the royal tutelary deity and cosmic mother. *Po Inâ Nâger* refers to later Cham vernacular accounts (c. 17th–20th century) that possess agrarian and didactic characteristics. Finally, *Thiên Y A Na* corresponds to the Vietnamese reception of this deity that operates within Nguyễn imperial discourse and local folk religious frameworks. This explicit periodization allows this study to address a key methodological concern: the process of Vietnamization involves tracing diachronic reaccentuations across these successive layers rather than assuming a linear substitution of meanings.

The Vietnamization of the Cham goddess *Yang Po Ina Nagar* and *Po Inâ Nâger* into the figure of *Thiên Y A Na* represents one of the most illustrative cases of intertextual transposition in folk legend traditions. In the state-cult epigraphic register, *Yang Po Ina Nagar* appears as a royal tutelary and cosmic mother³⁶; in contrast, later Cham vernacular accounts present her as a playful, didactic mother linked to weaving and rice agriculture³⁷, without erasing earlier cosmogonic or ethnic-protective valences. As discussed above, this reinterpretive process is treated as contextual reaccentuation rather than a linear replacement.

Huế legends and rites do not transform a “cosmic creator” into an “agrarian teacher.” Instead, they selectively foreground agrarian, didactic, and protective valences already present within previous traditions while retaining (and at times reviving) creator and royal tutelary registers. As outlined in Section 2, the analysis below applies this four-level model to the Huế materials rather than restating the framework here.

Selective Encoding of a Multivalent Goddess: Huế Configurations within the Champa and Cham Repertoire

In late Cham vernacular myth (18th–20th centuries), the goddess *Po Inâ Nâger* is venerated as the Mother of the Land and a primordial being who created the world; she is also closely associated with weaving, craft instruction, and rice cultivation^{2,38}. A representative version recorded by Nguyễn Hữu Hiếu³⁷ illustrates the persistence of these narrative motifs:

The goddess *Po Inâ Nâger* was born from clouds and sea foam. She appeared in the form of a piece of *kỳ nam* wood floating on the ocean. She had 97 husbands and gave birth to 38 daughters, each of whom became a goddess like their mother. She created the land, the *kỳ nam* tree, and rice. The air around her was filled with the scent of grain, and she breathed vitality into the sacred fig tree³⁷.

This modern transcription highlights the narrative continuity regarding the goddess's origins as it closely parallels classical versions documented a century earlier by Aymonier and Cabaton²⁰. The retention of specific motifs—such as the 97 husbands and the *kỳ nam* log transformation—emphasizes the stability of the indigenous core myth structures despite external assimilation pressures. Unlike many Western myths that distinguish among different domains of divine authority, *Po Inâ Nâger* represents an all-encompassing symbolic figure: creator of the world, guardian of life, source of fertility, and teacher of crafts. In particular, this reflects the matriarchal model and animistic belief system prevalent in Cham society^{29,30}.

When adopted by the Vietnamese, this figure was reinterpreted within distinct localized cultural frameworks. Vietnamese legends describe *Thiên Y A Na* as a celestial maiden descending to earth, raised by an elderly woodcutter couple. This transition is reflected in an early twentieth-century *quốc ngữ* version recorded by Đào Thị Hạnh and later reprinted in *Friends of the Ancient Capital of Huế*³⁸, and represents the Viet-language reworking of the Cham material. Contemporary scholars such as Noseworthy²⁸ and Sakaya (Trương Văn Món) [29] have noted that such Viet-centric tellings retain striking structural continuities with indigenous Cham materials, particularly the motifs of the “floating *kỳ nam* log”, marine origin, and the goddess's transoceanic journey. The story is recounted as follows:

Long ago, on Đại An Mountain, there lived an old couple who made their living by cutting wood. One day, they found a piece of *kỳ nam* wood washed

ashore. As soon as they touched it, the wood began to glow and transformed into a beautiful girl. They adopted her and named her *Thiên Y A Na*. As she grew up, she was kind, intelligent, and often helped the villagers. One day, as a flood swept through the area, *Thiên Y A Na* rode the piece of *kỳ nam* out to sea and drifted northward. There, she met a prince, and they fell in love and had two children. Longing for her homeland, she returned to Đại An with her children, built a shrine to her adoptive parents, and taught the villagers farming, weaving, and medicine. Later, the three of them rode a white crane to the heavens. The villagers, moved by her memory, built a temple and worshipped her as *Bà Chúa Ngọc*, *Thiên Y A Na*, or *Thánh Mẫu*³⁸.

This narrative demonstrates a crucial mechanism of the Vietnamization process. As previously mentioned, the plot structure, which features the floating eaglewood log, the northern journey, and the marriage to a prince, is virtually identical to early modern Cham versions of the *Po Inâ Nâger* myth. Rather than inventing a new mythology, the Vietnamese appropriation is expressed primarily through onomastic substitution (replacing Cham names with Vietnamese equivalents such as *Thiên Y A Na* and Đại An) and the insertion of Confucian values (e.g., filial piety towards adoptive parents). Consequently, this version represents the superimposition of Vietnamese identity onto an indigenous Cham narrative skeleton rather than a displacement of the original myth.

In this way, *Po Inâ Nâger's* multifaceted roles—including its cosmogonic aspects—were reconfigured during the Vietnamization process. The didactic function (teaching, instructing, and helping people maintain their livelihoods) that was already present in the source tradition (particularly emphasized in the Cham vernacular layer) was amplified and prioritized over her cosmogonic role, resulting in *Thiên Y A Na* being presented as a benevolent, approachable mother figure embedded within agrarian lifeways. Ngô Đức Thịnh² notes that “the cults and monuments dedicated to *Po Inâ Nâger* from Nha Trang to Huế have been Vietized into shrines worshipping female deities bearing Vietnamese titles such as *Thiên Y A Na* or *Bà Chúa Ngọc*”.

From a semiotic perspective, this transformation reflects a process of variation and resemiosis in which symbolic codes are selectively adapted and recontextualized into the local belief system without entirely erasing traces of their original prototype.

Spatial–Ritual Transposition: From Cham Temple Towers to Huệ Nam Shrine

The sacred space associated with the goddess also underwent a clear process of spatial transposition. In the Champa state cult, *Yang Po Ina Nagar* was venerated in temple towers, most prominently in the *Po Nagar* Tower (Nha Trang), a distinctive example of Hindu-inspired architecture. As Vietnamese populations migrated into this region, the reception of the goddess resulted in a reconfiguration of her cultic space. In Huế, she came to be worshiped at Huệ Nam Shrine, a site that blends both folk and courtly elements, where ritual practices reflect Huế-localization in Vietized forms.

Legends played a pivotal role in establishing this new sacred geography. One narrative recounts an episode involving Emperor Minh Mạng’s river expedition on the Hương River:

In the 13th year of Minh Mạng’s reign (1832), while his royal barge approached the Huệ Nam area, it was suddenly blocked by a large piece of drifting wood. The emperor ordered that an edict be read aloud before it. Immediately, the wood sank, clearing the way. Taking this as a divine sign, the emperor conferred a royal title upon the resident deity, naming her *Thiên Y A Na*, and ordered the establishment of an official shrine at Huệ Nam³⁹.

This narrative demonstrates how legends function as an origin account that sanctifies a physical space by transforming a specific site (in this case, Huệ Nam Shrine) into a divine dwelling, while simultaneously legitimizing the relocation of Cham deities into Vietnamese worship spaces.

Several scholars have also suggested that *Thiên Mụ* Pagoda—the most iconic temple in Huế—may be the successor to an earlier Cham temple tower. A well-known legend recounts:

Lord Nguyễn Hoàng, while traveling through the Hà Khê area, came across a hill shaped like a dragon’s head turning backward. Locals told him that an old woman dressed in red with blue trousers had once appeared there, proclaiming: “A great ruler will come and build a temple to gather sacred energy.” She then vanished. Believing this to be an auspicious omen, the lord immediately ordered the construction of a temple, naming it *Thiên Mụ*⁴⁰.

Lê Đình Hùng notes that “the old woman in red” could be interpreted as a variant of *Po Ina Nâger* and suggests that *Thiên Mụ* may be a shortened form of *Thiên Mẫu*, a Sino-Vietnamese transliteration of *Thiên Y A Na*⁴¹. This specific interpretation suggests that the Cham belief space may have been restructured, renamed, and integrated into the Vietnamese spiritual geographic system.

Ritual–Processual Transposition: Liminality, Communitas, and Symbolic Restructuring at Huệ Nam Shrine

If legends provide the textual “script” for transposition, then rituals represent the “stage” on which these meanings are performed, tested, and restructured into social reality. This process is best illustrated through the lens of Turner’s theory of ritual process, particularly during major festivals at Huệ Nam Shrine (e.g., the Third and Seventh Lunar Month Festivals). These festivals create a potent liminal space: an “in-between” state where ordinary social structures, pantheonic hierarchies, and even conventional cultural identities are temporarily suspended^{16,17}. Within this liminal space, devotees from all social strata form a *communitas*: an emotional and egalitarian fusion in which they share an intense, sacred experience.

It is precisely within this environment of *communitas* that the syncretism between *Thiên Y A Na* and the deities of the Vietnamese Mother Goddess religion (*Đạo Mẫu*) ceases to be an abstract concept and becomes a felt experience. Symbolic codes are restructured through practices such as *hầu đồng* (spirit mediumship rituals): a Holy Mother may descend to give poetic prophecies that echo the story of *Thiên Y A Na*, or a spirit possession session dedicated to *Thiên Y A Na* might employ the characteristic hymns and music of the Four Palaces tradition². This constitutes a form of anti-structure in which rigid theological boundaries are broken down in favor of a functional and emotional conflation.

When the festival concludes, and participants return to their ordinary social structure, the new meanings and connections forged in this liminal state are stabilized. The conflation of *Thiên Y A Na* (a Cham-origin Mother of the Land) with the *Thánh Mẫu* (a Vietnamese Mother who governs the cosmos) is reinforced and reaffirmed, thereby completing a profound layer of transposition that not only shifts the goddess’s spatial placement but also her role within the consciousness and belief practices of the community¹⁸.

Institutional–Functional Transposition: From Vernacular Deities to the Legitimation of the Vietnamese Pantheon

Institutional intervention, particularly by the Nguyễn Dynasty, is instrumental to the process of transposition. The legend of the sinking log on the Hương River is not merely a supernatural motif but a form of mythic legitimation through which the state formally acknowledged the deity as a valid member of the Vietnamese pantheon. A similar narrative is recorded during the reign of Emperor Thiệu Trị:

A royal concubine accidentally dropped a golden spittoon into the river. The emperor prayed to *Thiên Y A Na*, and shortly afterward, the object surfaced. Interpreting this as a divine sign, the emperor ordered renovations to the temple and conferred an additional title upon the goddess³⁹.

In the third year of Emperor Duy Tân's reign, the court formally conferred *Thiên Y A Na* with the official title "Diễn Ngọc Phi, Thượng Đẳng Thần", thereby elevating her into the ranks of national deities. This process of syncretism continued after 1945: at Huế Nam Shrine, Madame Từ Cung (consort of Emperor Khải Định) incorporated the worship of the *Tam Vị Thánh Mẫu Vân Hương* alongside *Thiên Y A Na*. This contributed to a widespread conflation in popular belief between *Thiên Y A Na* and *Princess Liễu Hạnh*. Lê Đình Phụng [5] observed that in the southern regions, the goddess further morphed into figures that included elements of *Lady Chúa Ngọc*, *Lady Thu Bồn*, and *Lady Mẹ Sông*, reflecting the symbolic flexibility of the mother-goddess figure within a cross-cultural religious environment.

Through the lens of intertextual transposition, the selective re-encoding of the *Po Ina Nagar* figure (Champa and Cham) into *Thiên Y A Na* is not merely a change in name or legend but a comprehensive process of symbolic restructuring across three dimensions: symbolic, spatial, and institutional. Throughout this process, vernacular legend serves as a repository of cultural memory as well as an active agent of meaning-making and regulation, allowing the goddess figure to preserve her original sacredness while adapting to the cultural, political, and belief structures of Vietnamese society.

SYMBOLIC TRANSPOSITION OF THE MOTHER GODDESS IN HUẾ: THE CASE OF THIÊN HẬU THÁNH MẪU

This subsection examines the localization of Chinese-origin female deities in Huế as a complement to the analysis of Cham-origin deities.

The case of *Thiên Hậu Thánh Mẫu* is a clear instance of intertextual transposition. Originating as a sea-oriented goddess within Chinese maritime culture, *Thiên Hậu Thánh Mẫu* was integrated into the vernacular belief system of Huế through localized variations in narrative legend, restructured worship institutions, and Vietized rituals, reflecting a long-term process of symbolic negotiation across cultural boundaries.

Textual–Symbolic Transposition: Selective Convergences with Guanyin

Thiên Hậu Thánh Mẫu, also known as *Mazu* and commonly referred to as *Bà Chúa Tàu*, is a widely venerated sea goddess within Chinese diaspora communities. According to popular legend, her birth name was *Lâm Mặc Nương*, and she was born in 960 CE in Fujian, China. The legend recounts:

From the moment she was born, she did not cry for an entire month, displaying exceptional intelligence and mystical powers from an early age. As she grew up, she was said to ride a mat over the waves, rescuing fishermen stranded at sea. During one meditation session, she used her spiritual powers to save her brothers from a violent storm. However, when her mother called her, she awoke suddenly, causing the eldest brother to be swept away. Later, in the year 987, she sat in the lotus posture, adorned herself, and ascended to the heavens on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month, becoming the protective deity of seafarers^{31,42–44}.

This foundational narrative establishes two primary symbolic functions for *Thiên Hậu*. The first and most prominent is her role as a protective sea deity who safeguards fishermen and traders from maritime crises^{31,32,35}. The second is her prophetic capabilities, with historical sources noting that "she could foretell a man's good and ill luck"⁴⁵. It is this soteriological function that led to her incorporation into Vietnamese belief systems and her eventual identification with *Quan Âm Nam Hải*^{35,42}. Multiple studies have shown that the transregional diffusion of *Thiên Hậu* beliefs was frequently accompanied by processes of symbolic convergence with local deities^{31,32}. As Li and Tsai noted, "*Thiên Hậu* was accepted by other religions, co-worshiped with other deities, and even appeared in syncretic images... [including] cases of co-worship with Chinese deities such as *Guanyin*"⁴⁶. Chinese communities in Huế built shrines dedicated to *Thiên Hậu*, and popular narratives identified her as the local manifestation of *Quan Âm Nam Hải*. Dương Thị Hải Vân observes that the Nguyễn Dynasty conferred official titles upon *Thiên Hậu* with little resistance "due to her resemblance to various native goddesses, particularly the image of *Quan Âm Nam Hải Bồ Tát*, which was already familiar and deeply rooted in Vietnamese popular consciousness"³⁵.

Indeed, devotees often present offerings to statues of *Quan Âm* in Huế's *Thiên Hậu* shrines and commonly refer to this worship space as *chùa Bà* ("Lady's Temple"), implying an equivalence with the Buddhist Bodhisattva. The incorporation of *Thiên Hậu* into a

belief system centered on *Quan Âm Nam Hải* thus exemplifies intertextual transposition whereby an exogenous religious figure is rearticulated through semantic alignment with preexisting elements of the Vietnamese Buddhist symbolic framework.

This symbolic convergence was not arbitrary; it was actively mediated and localized through vernacular legend in Huế. A particularly striking narrative was documented during fieldwork conducted in Minh Hương village (Hương Vinh ward, Huế city):

After 1975, due to political upheaval, a group of both Vietnamese and Chinese residents left Huế by sea. During the journey, a violent storm struck, the boat rocked violently, and water began to pour in. An elderly *mệ* (a local term of respect for an old woman) knelt in prayer:

“We bow before Lady *Thiên Hậu*! If we survive this ordeal, we vow to return to Huế to give thanks.”

Just as the prayer ended, the storm calmed and a merchant ship appeared to rescue the group. Years later, having resettled in the United States, they still keep their promise: every year on the 23rd day of the third lunar month—the festival day of the Lady—they return to Huế and offer thanksgiving rituals.

(L.N.D., personal communication, May 2024)

This narrative is a modern variant of the *Thiên Hậu* legend in which the goddess’s protective role extends beyond Chinese fishermen to include Vietnamese boat people amid political upheaval. It suggests that the image of *Thiên Hậu* has evolved beyond an ethnically exclusive character into a more universal symbol that is closely aligned with the role of *Quan Âm Nam Hải* in the Vietnamese belief system. This transformation represents a functional variation and a significant instance of symbolic transposition in the broader process of the localization of exogenous deities.

Spatial–Ritual Transposition: From Thiên Hậu Palace to the chùa Bà of Huế

The worship of *Thiên Hậu* in Huế originated within the Chinese diaspora community, particularly in the port district of Thanh Hà, where the first *Thiên Hậu* Palace was established. As the Minh Hương community relocated to the Gia Hội–Chi Lăng area, the cultic system followed, leading to the establishment of guildhalls such as Quỳnh Châu, Quảng Triệu, Triều Châu, and Phúc Kiến. These institutions gradually restructured their ritual spaces in accordance with Vietnamese cultural patterns.

In Huế vernacular, *Thiên Hậu* Palace is commonly referred to as *chùa Bà*, reflecting a symbolic gender-based naming convention. Locals typically call the

shrine of a female deity *chùa Bà*, while shrines of male deities are referred to as *chùa Ông* (lit. Male Deity’s temple), even when the site is not affiliated with Buddhism. This naming shift reflects a linguistic and symbolic relocation through which a cultic structure originating in China is semantically integrated into the framework of Vietnamese vernacular belief.

The ritual practices observed at *chùa Bà* have also undergone Vietnamization. Unlike in southern Vietnam, where *Lễ vía Bà* ceremonies are often accompanied by lion dances, operatic performances, and lantern processions, ceremonies in Huế follow a Confucian ritual structure. Specifically, they include three primary stages: *Hành Sơ Hiến Lễ* (lit. Rite of Official Offering), *Hành Á Hiến Lễ* (lit. Rite of Secondary Offering), and *Hành Chung Hiến Lễ* (lit. Rite of Concluding Offering). These rituals are performed by officiants in traditional blue Huế-style *áo dài*, conducted with royal court-like decorum, and accompanied by ritual orations in Vietnamese. As Phan Thị Hoa Lý³⁴ observes:

Although the deity venerated at *chùa Bà* is of Chinese origin, all ritual practices are conducted in a thoroughly Vietized manner. Officiants wear traditional *áo dài*, and the order of rites strictly follows ceremonial protocols from the Nguyễn Dynasty. This marks one of the most distinctive differences between the *Thiên Hậu* worship in Huế and its counterpart in southern Vietnam³⁴.

During a fieldwork session, Huỳnh Đình Kết⁴⁷ observed: “On the arm of the statue of the Lady, there was a small coin purse. According to the temple’s caretaker, it had been offered by a pilgrim as a form of repayment after receiving protection and blessings from the goddess.”

Though seemingly minor, this detail carries significant symbolic weight—it indicates that the practice of repaying offerings (ritual acts of gratitude following divine favor) has become encoded within endogenous culture, representing the integration of exogenous (i.e., Chinese-origin) symbols into the framework of local ritual frameworks.

Ritual–Processual Transposition: Hierarchical Anti-Structure and Identity Construction in Lễ vía Bà

Beyond its function as a narrative complement, rituals constitute a socially generative mechanism in which symbolic forms are tested and legitimized. When analyzed through the framework described by Turner^{17,18}, the unique liminal space formed by the *Lễ vía Bà* in Huế creates a “hierarchical anti-structure”

that is a clear departure from more commonly observed non-hierarchical forms. Specifically, the ritual temporarily replaces the everyday social structure of a migrant, merchant community with a sacred, solemn order that emulates the ritual protocols of the Nguyễn court, which represents the pinnacle of orthodoxy in Huế³⁴.

This choice is a profoundly strategic act rather than the passive process of Vietnamization. The communitas formed during the *Lễ vía Bà* has the characteristics of a “disciplined communitas” in which bonds are created through collective adherence to a strict, sacred order. This shared experience strengthens the community’s internal links, especially with the overseas diaspora, and creates and sustains a complex dual identity: being Minh Hương with a distinct origin, while simultaneously being an exemplary, orderly member of the host society that is fully compatible with the Confucian value system.

The ritual process thus operates as a sophisticated mechanism for stabilizing social positions. When the ritual concludes and the everyday social structure is re-established, the meaning generated in the liminal space repositions the Minh Hương community within the collective consciousness. Specifically, their status is shifted from that of an “outsider” group into a recognized community that contributes to maintaining the socio-cultural order of Huế. In other words, the ritual is the primary mechanism that legitimizes the transposition of a foreign goddess into a localized sacred symbol, while also accepting a migrant community as a legitimate part of the local politico-religious structure¹⁷.

Institutional–Functional Transposition: From Chinese Communal Belief to Legitimated Local Deity

Initially, *Thiên Hậu* was venerated only within the Minh Hương community in Huế and remained outside the official pantheon. However, her image was formally legitimized by successive Nguyễn emperors in the 19th century, including Minh Mạng (1826), Thiệu Trị (1842), and Tự Đức (1850, who conferred upon her the title of *Thượng Đẳng Thần* (lit., Highest-Ranked Deity). These royal investitures were not merely acts of religious recognition; they were strategic politico-religious maneuvers to incorporate a deity of Chinese origin into the spiritual order of the nation state.

Today, the *Lễ vía Bà* in Huế functions as both a religious observance and a form of spiritual homecoming

for overseas Minh Hương descendants. Vietnamese–Chinese communities living in the United States, Australia, and Canada still return annually to offer worship and contribute financially to the maintenance of *chùa Bà*. Keeping one’s “promise to the Lady” has become a performative expression of communal identity and a means of trans-spatial and trans-temporal connection in which the deity serves as both a religious symbol and a cultural anchor of diasporic memory.

The case of *Thiên Hậu Thánh Mẫu* thus demonstrates that legends do not simply preserve memory or express belief; they also operate as the primary mechanism of a four-tiered transposition process in the localization of foreign belief systems in Huế. In this context, legends are not simply narratives—they operate as a discursive apparatus through which exogenous symbols are continuously recoded to meet the dual demands of local adaptation and the maintenance of communal identity in a dynamic cultural landscape.

AN INTERTEXTUAL TRANSPOSITION APPROACH: INSIGHTS FROM THE CASE OF MOTHER GODDESS LEGENDS IN HUẾ

By comparing *Thiên Y A Na* and *Thiên Hậu Thánh Mẫu*, a model of the Vietnamization of female deities within the Huế religious landscape can be described through four levels of intertextual transposition: symbolic variation, spatial–ritual relocation, ritual–processual transposition, and legitimization within the official pantheon. Beyond its role in regulating memory and belief, the corpus of belief legends in Huế reveals a broader capacity for generating a discursive framework of intercultural localization in which intercultural and extra-local divine symbols are simultaneously localized and restructured to assume a dual identity: affirming familiar sacredness while preserving traces of alterity.

It is precisely this tension between the “indigenous” and the “exogenous” that reveals latent semantic shifts, suggesting that legend narratives are not merely the passive recipient of cultural content, but an active agent in shaping local knowledge within a palimpsestic space layered with overwritten and residual meanings.

Drawing from the structural mapping from *Yang Po Ina Nagar* and *Po Inâ Nâger* to *Thiên Y A Na* and from *Mazu* to *Thiên Hậu*, the following four levels of transposition can be identified:

Structural–Functional Transposition: Local narratives and rituals select and amplify didactic, protective, and

agrarian valences from an already multivalent repertoire. For instance, cosmogonic and pedagogical motifs coexist in *Po Inâ Nâger* sources, while Huế materials reinforce civilizing and nurturing capabilities in their configuration of *Thiên Y A Na*.

Spatial–Ritual Transposition: Divine symbols originally worshiped in Cham temple towers or Chinese guildhalls are integrated into vernacular sacred spaces such as temples, shrines, and communal halls, where the rituals are Vietized in terms of their dress code, liturgical language, and ceremonial structure. This highlights the role of rituals in transposition, which is clearly observable in the worship of *Thiên Hậu* at *chùa Bà* in Huế. Here, key elements of Chinese ritual practice have been restructured according to Vietnamese cultural conventions³⁴.

Ritual–Processual Transposition: The Vietnamization of female deities in Huế operates through intertextual transposition, a process in which exogenous religious symbols are selectively restructured within the indigenous belief system. As theorized by Turner¹⁷, this transposition is performed and stabilized through both narrative and the ritual process. The liminality of festivals generates a heightened sense of *communitas* that facilitates the social testing and legitimization of new divine meanings and attributes, ultimately transforming a narrative variant into a living belief.

Political–Discursive Transposition: Female deities of Cham and Chinese origin are granted royal investiture and strategically aligned with indigenous structures of power, including the imperial court, kinship networks, and regional guilds. This produces a new discourse of sacral legitimacy in which legends function as instruments that authorize the presence of these deities within local religious and social institutions. The imperial decrees of the Nguyễn Dynasty bestowing titles upon *Thiên Y A Na*, as well as legends of “*Thiên Hậu* rescuing boat people,” exemplify how belief systems are politically instrumentalized through narrative mechanisms^{34,35}.

These four forms of transposition can be regarded as a conceptual matrix that is applicable to the study of divine legends on a national scale, especially for deities of intercultural origins (e.g., Cham and Chinese). The analytical flexibility of this model becomes evident when extended to other instances within the Vietnamese religious landscapes. For example, the case of *Bà Đen* in Tây Ninh—originally known as *Lý Thị Thiên Hương* or *Lâm Thị*—demonstrates the process of Buddhization and *Guanyinization* intertwined with Khmer ethnic elements. This transposition reflects the transformation from an ascetic nun or loyal martyr into a mountain guardian goddess,

complete with summit pilgrimage festivals and a layered narrative system that integrates myth, history, and vernacular belief. Similarly, the figure of *Princess Liễu Hạnh* exemplifies the “royal-to-popular transposition” in which the image of the goddess is reconfigured through the syncretic interplay of Daoist cosmology, court literature, and North Vietnamese Mother Goddess worship.

Identifying patterns of intertextual transposition allows for the reconceptualization of folk legend as a dynamic symbolic field in which symbols are continually shifting, multiplying, hybridizing, and being restructured to meet the demands of the community. In the context of Vietnam—particularly in multicultural regions such as Huế, the South Central Coast, or the Mekong Delta—legends are not merely narrative texts; they function as instruments of cultural negotiation in which variant narratives operate as vehicles for identity construction, the consolidation of sacred authority, and the mediation of cultural conflict. Consequently, the theory of intertextual transposition extends beyond the female deity case studies presented here, and can be developed as an interdisciplinary approach to the study of religious and vernacular legends in a globalizing world where identity structures demand continual rearticulation.

COMPARATIVE DIVERGENCES IN TRANSPOSITION

Although both *Thiên Y A Na* and *Thiên Hậu Thánh Mẫu* have been successfully integrated into the Huế religious system through the four-tiered transpositional model, a comparative analysis reveals significant differences in the two cases. These differences stem from their respective sources (Cham as relatively indigenous and endogenous versus Chinese as foreign and exogenous) and the mediating cultural mechanisms that regulate their reception. These distinctions are primarily manifested across the symbolic structure, ritual process, and political integration of the two female deities.

Divergence in Textual–Symbolic and Functional Aspects

The Cham-to-Huế trajectory of *Thiên Y A Na* stems from a multivalent matriarchal repertoire that encompasses both cosmogonic and didactic-protective valences. This repertoire is rooted in the Champa state cult (*Yang Po Ina Nagar*), as documented by Golzio [36] and in later Cham folk traditions by Nguyễn Hữu Hiếu³⁷. The Vietnamization process selectively re-emphasizes the didactic, agrarian, and water-ritual aspects; a lingering cosmogonic echo persists in her title

of Bà Chúa Ngọc².

In contrast, the Chinese-to-Huế trajectory of *Thiên Hậu* begins with a narrower, purely soteriological function as a protective sea deity and prophetic goddess⁴². Upon entering the Huế context, the deity undergoes a process of convergence with *Quan Âm Nam Hải* within a folk-Buddhist framework. This syncretic Bodhisattva figure provides a pre-existing archetype for maritime rescue and maternal compassion. These symbolic parallels result in the effective Buddhicization of *Thiên Hậu*'s functions in Huế, a process clearly documented in regional studies^{33,35}.

Divergence in Spatial-Ritual and Processual Aspects

The two trajectories diverge sharply in how their respective rituals stabilize meaning in Turner's processual model.

In terms of spatial-ritual transposition, the cult of *Thiên Y A Na* involves a territorial shift from Cham towers to indigenous sacred sites such as Huệ Nam Shrine. In this case, the ritual language, forms of offering, and the discourse of "Bà and Mẫu" are closely tied to local folk religion and the *Đạo Mẫu* tradition [39]. In contrast, the worship space for *Thiên Hậu* shifts from *Hội quán Minh Hương* (Chinese guild-halls) to *chùa Bà* (Pagoda of the Lady). Despite the vernacularization of the naming, the ritual structure remains strictly *Nho-lễ hóa* (Confucianized), featuring formal Vietnamese ritual orations and the use of traditional *áo dài* by officiants—a marked difference from the more informal festival styles observed in Southern Vietnam³⁴.

In terms of ritual-processual transposition, the state of liminality achieved during the Huệ Nam festival (*Thiên Y A Na*) fosters *communitas* (i.e., a sense of community) between the Viet and Cham populations, creating a space for the experimental repositioning of the goddess's indigenous names and functions within the receptive local framework. In contrast, while the *Lễ vía Bà* (Goddess's Birthday Festival) in Huế also generates *communitas* among the Minh Hương diaspora, the highly regulated, formalized, and Confucian-styled practice creates a temporary anti-structure that is inherently more disciplined and hierarchical than the folk-driven ritual at Huệ Nam^{16–18,34}. This higher degree of ritual formality in the Chinese trajectory helps stabilize symbolic choices within a structured, state-aligned order.

Divergence in Political-Discursive and Mediating Aspects

The nature of the integrative stress imposed by the Nguyễn Dynasty differed based on the source of the deity.

In terms of political-discursive transposition, the imperial conferment decrees granted to *Thiên Y A Na* primarily served as a strategy of territorial legitimation and nationalization by integrating a deity associated with the newly expanded Southern frontier into the national pantheon as a legitimate pillar of the dynasty³⁹. However, the imperial conferment decrees for *Thiên Hậu* functioned more as an administrative mechanism to control and integrate the Minh Hương migrant community into the state's political-religious order by co-opting a foreign symbol into the national hierarchy³⁵.

In terms of mediating formations (i.e., cultural pre-selectors), the primary cultural "decoder" for *Thiên Y A Na* was *Đạo Mẫu*, the indigenous maternal matrix (e.g., its conflation with *Princess Liễu Hạnh*). This inherent matriarchal template allowed for the seamless reaccentuation of the maternal valences of the Cham goddess. Conversely, the main decoder for *Thiên Hậu* was folk Buddhism (*Quan Âm Nam Hải*). This established Buddhist archetype provided the semantic bridge necessary for the local acceptance of *Thiên Hậu*'s maritime soteriological role, thereby accelerating the localization process through a Buddhist, rather than purely maternal, lens^{33,35}.

This comparative analysis demonstrates that although both figures undergo Vietnamization, their trajectories differ significantly. The Cham-to-Huế trajectory was driven by the Mother-Goddess reaccentuation of a multivalent maternal repertoire fueled by *Đạo Mẫu*, whereas the Chinese-to-Huế trajectory was a folk Buddhist soteriological convergence institutionalized within Confucianized Minh Hương guild frameworks.

CONCLUSIONS

The study of the "localization" of two deities of distinct origins, *Thiên Y A Na* (Cham-origin) and *Thiên Hậu Thánh Mẫu* (Chinese-origin), into Huế's belief systems demonstrates that legends are not merely a genre of vernacular narrative, but an intercultural discursive field in which exogenous belief systems are restructured through collective narration and vernacular ritualization. Within this process, the theory of intertextual transposition provides a valuable analytical lens for capturing the dynamic, multilayered nature of such transformations.

The two cases examined in this study can be described using a four-tiered transpositional model that integrates textuality with ritual processes rather than treating them as separate domains. This model includes (1) textual-symbolic selection; (2) spatial-ritual relocation and Vietnamization of practice; (3) ritual-processual stabilization via liminality, communitas, and anti-structure; and (4) political-discursive legitimation. Turner's concepts of liminality, communitas, and anti-structure describe how Huế festivals temporarily suspend ordinary social hierarchies to create a fluid space in which the foreign origins of these deities can be deconstructed and reconfigured. However, in the literate and Confucian cultural context of Huế, textuality—manifested in legends, imperial decrees, temple inscriptions, and ritual manuals—functions differently from the predominantly oral traditions analyzed by Turner. Here, written forms act as “canonical anchors” within the liminal space, continuously feeding scripts, names, and titles back into ritual performance and channeling the anti-structure toward a specific pattern of reaggregation, specifically Vietnamization and Huế-localization.

In this way, Turner's framework helps to explain how legends move from narrative possibility to institutionalized belief, while the Huế case studies extend Turner's model by demonstrating that text and performance are mutually constitutive rather than separate domains: the legend provides the code, while the ritual enacts, tests, and stabilizes that code into an enduring localized identity.

At the theoretical level, this study proposes that folk legend should not be treated as a static folklore form, but rather as a flexible semiotic system in which language, symbolism, and sacred space are continually recoded through interactions between the past and present, intercultural and local imagery, and vernacular and institutional discourses. In this system, the figure of the Mother Goddess functions as an open-ended symbolic template that is highly receptive to variation, readily syncretized within cultic structures, and particularly conducive to processes of religious-cultural negotiation in transitional regions like Huế. Accordingly, this study offers a generalizable analytical framework for interpreting the Vietnamization of religious symbols as a multilayered, multimodal, and polysemous dynamic. In this model, legend and ritual function as joint intermediaries between memory, belief, and identity: legends articulate selectable codes, while ritual processes perform and stabilize those selections through liminality, communitas, and anti-structure into durable forms of Huế-localization within Vietnamization. Specifically,

the four-tiered transposition model proposed in this study becomes explicitly diachronic: symbolic selection, spatial relocation, and political legitimation operate across successive historical layers (Champa → Cham → Huế), with recurrent reaccentuations, including modern reinterpretations and creative reimaginings noted by previous scholars. This framework thus offers a productive theoretical tool for analyzing comparable cases across Vietnam and for revisiting the corpus of folk legends in the context of contemporary globalization and the ongoing reconfiguration of collective memory and cultural identity.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research is funded by Hue University under grant number DHH2026-03-233

REFERENCES

1. Triều N. Tuyển tập văn học dân gian xứ Huế (Complete collection of folk literature in the land of Huế). Huế: Thuận Hóa Publishing House; 2010.
2. Đức TN. Đạo Mẫu Việt Nam (Vietnamese Mother Goddess). Hà Nội: Culture and Information Publishing House; 2009.
3. Li T. Nguyen Cochinchina: Southern Vietnam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications; 1998.
4. Keith WT. A History of the Vietnamese. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2013.
5. Đình PL. Đối thoại với nền văn minh cổ Chăm pa (Dialogue with the ancient Champa civilization). Hà Nội: Social Sciences Publishing House; 2015.
6. Quỳnh HNT. Biểu tượng đá trong truyền thuyết dân gian Việt Nam (Stone symbols in Vietnamese folk legends [dissertation]). and others, editor. Huế: Huế University of Sciences; 2016.
7. Linda D. What is a belief legend? *Folklore*. 1996;107(1-2):33-46.
8. Linda D. Legend and belief: Dialectics of a folklore genre. Bloomington: Indiana University Press; 2001.
9. Keith WT, Milner DG, editor. Authority and legitimacy in 11th century Vietnam. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies; 1986.
10. Gérard G. Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press; 1997.
11. Roland B. mage-Music-Text. New York: Hill and Wang; 1977.
12. Julia K. Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art. New York: Columbia University Press; 1980.
13. Mikhail MB. The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays. Austin: University of Texas Press; 1981.
14. Raj P. Prayer Elmo. Text/Texts: Interrogating Julia Kristeva's Concept of Intertextuality. *Ars Artium: An International Peer Reviewed-cum-Refereed Research*. *J Humanit Soc Sci*. 2015;3:77-80.
15. Assmann A. Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2011.
16. Witter TV. The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure. Chicago: Aldine; 1969.
17. Witter TV. Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society. New York: Cornell University Press; 1974.

18. Witter TV. From ritual to theatre: The human seriousness of play. New York: PAJ Publications; 1982.
19. Étienne Aymonier. Grammaire de la langue chame. and others, editor. Imprimerie coloniale; 1889.
20. Étienne Cabaton Antoine Aymonier. Dictionnaire cham-français. vol. 7. and others, editor. Publications de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient; 1906.
21. Jean B. La statuare du Champa: Recherches sur les cultes et l'iconographie. and others, editor. Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient; 1963.
22. Maître DE. Notes sur les Chams. Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient. 1905;5(3-4):368-86.
23. Văn KT. Ảnh hưởng Chiêm Thành trong nền văn hóa Việt Nam (Cham influence in Vietnamese culture). Văn hóa Á Châu. 1960;1:1-20.
24. Văn LN. Người Chăm Hồi giáo miền Tây Nam phần Việt Nam (Muslim Cham people in the Southwest region of Vietnam). Sài Gòn: Ministry of Culture, Education and Youth; 1974.
25. Văn HL. Tìm hiểu quan hệ giao lưu văn hóa Việt Chăm qua kho tàng văn nghệ dân gian của người Việt và người Chăm (Understanding Viet-Cham cultural exchange through the folk literature treasury of the Vietnamese and Cham people). Anthropology Review. 1979;1:48-56.
26. Thế AN. The Vietnamization of the Cham Deity Po Nagar. Asia Journal. 1995;2(1).
27. undefined Vietnamese Institute for Southeast Asian Studies. Tháp cổ Champa sự thật và huyền thoại (Ancient Champa Towers: Fact and Legend). Culture and Information Publishing House; 1995.
28. William BN. The Mother Goddess of Champa: Po Ina Nagar. SUVANNABHUMI. 2015;7(1):107-137.
29. Văn MT. The Cham beliefs and religions in Vietnam: issues need to be clarified. Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities. 2022;p. 1737-1747.
30. Inrasara. Văn học Chăm (Cham Literature). and others, editor. Hà Nội: Ethnology and Culture Publishing House; 1994.
31. Committee) FSDBWPMLGC. (Putian shi zhi; Putian City Gazetteer). and others, editor. (Beijing): (Fangzhi Chubanshe; Local Records Publishing House); 1999.
32. Committee) FSDBWFPLGC. (Fujian sheng zhi: Zongjiao zhi; Fujian Provincial Gazetteer: Religion). and others, editor. (Fuzhou): (Fujian Renmin Chubanshe; Fujian People's Publishing House); 2000.
33. Ngọc TN. Buddhist factors in the cult of Tianhou in the Mekong River Delta. International Communication of Chinese Culture. 2018;5(3):229-246.
34. Ly PT. The cult of Thien Hau in Minh Huong village and the process of cultural acculturation (Case of Huong Vinh commune, Huong Tra district, Thua Thien - Hue province). Relig Stud Rev. 2016;7:120-39.
35. Duong THV. The cult of Tianhou of Chinese people in Thua Thien Hue province. Hue University Journal of Science. 2018;127:5-20.
36. Karl-Heinz G. Inscriptions of Campā: based on the editions and translations of Abel Bergaigne, Étienne Aymonier, Louis Finot, Édouard Huber and other French scholars and of the work of R. C. Majumdar. and others, editor. Newly presented, with minor corrections of texts and translations, together with calculations of given dates: Shaker Verlag; 2004.
37. Hữu HN. The cultural evolution of the Mekong Delta region. Hà Nội: Thoi Dai Publishing House; 2010.
38. Thi HD. The story of Holy Mother Y-A-Na. Friends of the Ancient Capital of Hue. Hue: Thuan Hoa Publishing House; 1997. p. 177.
39. Office NDNH. Thuận Hóa Prefecture – upper volume. Đại Nam Nhất Thống Chí (lit The Comprehensive Monograph of Đại Nam). Sài Gòn: Bureau of Culture – Ministry of National Education; 1961. p. 79-80.
40. Office NDNH. Đại Nam thực lục (lit. The Veritable Records of Đại Nam). Hà Nội: Education Publishing House; 2002.
41. Dinh HL. Some issues concerning the Quang Te Temple in Phuoc Tich village. Han-Nom Bulletin; 2006.
42. eds FMWY, Association) FMCR. (Mazu xinyang zhi; Gazetteer of the Mazu Cult). and others, editor. (Xiamen): (Xiamen Daxue Chubanshe; Xiamen University Press); 2010.
43. eds MMZGW, of the Meizhou Mazu Ancestral Temple) AC. (Meizhou Mazu zumiao zhi; Gazetteer of the Meizhou Mazu Ancestral Temple). and others, editor. (Fuzhou): (Haixia Wenyi Chubanshe; Straits Literature & Art Publishing House); 2008.
44. Yuan H. Mazu, Mother Goddess of the Sea. The Magic Lotus Lantern and Other Tales from the Han Chinese: World Folklore Series. Westport: Libraries Unlimited; 2006.
45. Steven C. Chalfont St Peter: Bradt Travel Guides; 2014.
46. Lin L, Yi-Chun T. From historical memory to cultural identity: the construction of archetypal symbols for the statues and images of Mazu. Religions (Basel). 2024;15(5).
47. Đình KH. Tục thờ thần ở Huế (The cult of deities in Huế). Huế: Thuận Hoá Publishing House; 1998.