

Youth cognition of mother goddess worship (Case of students at Thang Long University)

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Abstract:

This study aims to examine the levels of awareness, attitudes, and behaviors of students at Thang Long University regarding Mother Goddess Worship - a form of Vietnamese folk belief and an important component of the country's intangible cultural heritage. The research employs a combination of document analysis and quantitative survey methods using a five-point Likert scale questionnaire. A total of 120 students were selected through convenience sampling, ensuring diversity in gender, academic disciplines, and year of study. The findings indicate that students generally possess a positive perception of the cultural and spiritual value of Mother Goddess Worship. However, actual participation remains limited due to a lack of experiential opportunities and insufficient support from educational and social environments. The study emphasizes the crucial role of youth in preserving and promoting this heritage in the context of modernization. Accordingly, the study proposes several practical measures: integrating content on Mother Goddess Worship into university curricula through interdisciplinary modules or seminars; organizing field trips and experiential learning activities at prominent Worship sites such as Phủ Tây Hồ and Phủ Dầy; and developing creative digital media campaigns (e.g., videos, infographics, social media content) tailored to students' communication habits. These strategies aim to narrow the gap between cultural awareness and behavioral engagement among young people.

Keywords: Mother Goddess Worship, awareness, attitude, behaviors, students

1. Introduction

Mother Goddess Worship is an important component of Vietnam's folk belief system, reflecting spiritual beliefs and emphasizing the role of women in society. Over centuries, this belief system has contributed to the preservation of cultural identity and community cohesion. However, in the context of modernization - with the rise of technology, media, and globalization - Mother Goddess Worship faces the risk of decline and distortion. In some places, it has even been exploited for personal gain through ritual practices and the promotion of superstitious behaviors.

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Vietnamese youth, who play a decisive role in the continuation and promotion of cultural heritage, have diverse approaches to this belief. While many young people show interest in and appreciation for the practice, others approach it superficially or with limited understanding. Although there has been a considerable amount of research on Mother Goddess Worship, studies that focus on youth perception remain limited, especially in the rapidly changing spiritual and cultural landscape. Therefore, this study was conducted to examine students' levels of understanding, attitudes, and behaviors toward Mother Goddess Worship, aiming to propose solutions to enhance awareness and contribute to the preservation and promotion of this form of intangible cultural heritage in contemporary life.

Literature Review

In international research on youth perception of intangible cultural heritage, the study *Engaging the Youth in the Safeguarding and Promotion of Korean Intangible Cultural Heritage* by Nguyễn Thị Thanh Hoa (2019) briefly examines youth participation in Korea's intangible cultural heritage system through the lens of critical theory on youth engagement. By reviewing programs designed for and implemented by young people, the author seeks to identify the driving forces behind youth involvement in safeguarding and promoting Korean intangible cultural heritage. In addition, several other international studies reveal similar trends in how youth engage with intangible heritage. For example, the study by Ahn & McKercher (2015) highlights how a lack of emotional connection discourages students from participating in heritage-related activities, while the work of Verena Röhl & Christiane Meyer (2020) indicates that although European youth possess a strong awareness of cultural value, their conservation behavior tends to be passive. These findings serve as a comparative foundation and reinforce the conclusions of the present study in the context of Vietnam.

In Vietnam, one of the most comprehensive works on Mother Goddess Worship is the two-volume *Đạo Mẫu Việt Nam* by Ngô Đức Thịnh (2009). The first volume analyzes the system of Tam Phủ - Tứ Phủ Worship and various forms of Mother Goddess Worship across Vietnam's three regions, clarifying the development from goddess Worship to an organized pantheon with a structured ritual system. The second volume delves into textual materials and spirit possession rituals (hầu đồng), considered the central practice of Đạo Mẫu, to highlight their cultural, spiritual, and social roles. Ngô Bạch (2010), in *Rituals of Mother Goddess Worship and Cultural Customs*, provides a comprehensive study of Đạo Mẫu, covering aspects such as its essence, origin, festivals, spirit possession rituals, and ritual spaces. Vũ Hồng Vận (2020), in his ethnographic study *Mother Goddess Worship of the Vietnamese People*, approaches Đạo Mẫu from an anthropological perspective, emphasizing its historical connection to matriarchal traditions in Vietnamese culture. Furthermore, a scientific research project conducted by students Lương Phạm Mai Trang, Nguyễn Thị Ngọc Huyền, Nguyễn Thị Oanh, Nguyễn Hoài Thu, and Nguyễn Thị Hoài Thu (academic year 2021 - 2022) explores Mother Goddess Worship among spiritual tourists in Hanoi, proposing ways to harness the value of this belief system for tourism development in the city.

Existing studies on Mother Goddess Worship in Vietnam - such as the works of Ngô Đức Thịnh (2009), Ngô Bạch (2010), and Vũ Hồng Vận (2020) - mainly focus on clarifying the pantheon, rituals, and cultural origins of Đạo Mẫu. However, they are limited in their analysis of how this belief system has transformed in modern society, especially regarding the role of youth in receiving and recreating traditional cultural values. Applied studies such as the student research (2021 - 2022) have taken initial steps to explore the belief system from a tourism perspective but still lack theoretical depth and a comprehensive assessment of socio-cultural impacts. Recognizing this research gap, the current study titled *Youth Perception of Mother Goddess Worship (Case of Students at Thang Long University)* seeks to investigate students' levels of knowledge, attitudes, and approaches - representative of the younger

generation - toward this traditional belief. The study not only aims to evaluate current awareness but also proposes practical measures to enhance youth engagement with the tradition, contributing to the preservation and promotion of national cultural values in the era of integration and development.

2. Research Objective and Methodology

The objective of this study is to examine the levels of awareness, attitudes, and approaches among young people - specifically, students at Thang Long University - toward Mother Goddess Worship, thereby reflecting the current state of its reception in modern society. The study sets out three primary research tasks:

1. What is Mother Goddess Worship? What are its origins and developmental history?
2. How do young people (students at Thang Long University) perceive Mother Goddess Worship?
3. What is their attitude toward Mother Goddess Worship in the context of contemporary society?

To accomplish these research tasks, we employed two main methods: literature review and synthesis, and questionnaire-based survey and analysis. The literature review method was used to analyze and synthesize existing studies on the historical development of the subject, clarifying the origins, characteristics, and values of Mother Goddess Worship. This provided the theoretical foundation for assessing youth awareness and attitudes. The survey method was applied to collect empirical data on students' levels of understanding and their attitudes toward the belief.

To collect data for the research objectives, we conducted a survey using an online questionnaire created on Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of three main sections:

1. Basic personal information - Questions aimed at gathering data on the respondent's gender, academic year, field of study, and religion.
2. Awareness and knowledge - Questions using a 5-point Likert scale (from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree") to explore respondents' awareness and understanding of Mother Goddess Worship.
3. Attitudes and behaviors - Questions designed to assess personal attitudes, levels of agreement, and willingness to participate in activities related to the belief..

A total of 120 valid responses were collected from Thang Long University students using convenience sampling, due to time and resource constraints. The official survey was conducted over four days, from May 13 to May 16, 2025.

In addition, to gain deeper insights into the factors influencing students' awareness of Mother Goddess Worship, we conducted follow-up semi-structured interviews with 10 selected students. The interviewees were chosen to ensure diversity in gender, field of study, and level of interest in the topic. Interview questions focused on personal experiences, perspectives on the spiritual and cultural values of the belief, and barriers to accessing and

participating in related activities. However, due to limitations in time and personnel, this interview phase served as a preliminary exploration and did not reach the level of in-depth qualitative analysis. This is acknowledged as a limitation of the study and a basis for suggesting future research directions. The interviews were conducted online via Zoom over a five-day period, from July 8 to July 12, 2025.

Specific demographic information of the survey respondents is presented below:

Table 1: Basic demographic information of survey participants

Criterion	Number (Students)	Percentage
Gender	Male: 24	20%
	Female: 96	80%
Academic year	Year 1: 25	20.8%
	Year 2: 16	13.3%
	Year 3: 14	11.7%
	Year 4: 54	45%
	Other: 11	9.2%
Field study of	Korean Studies: 49	40.8%
	Finance & Banking: 14	11.7%
	Multimedia Communication: 11	9.2%
	English Studies: 12	10%
	Others: 34	28.3%

Religion	None: 110	91.7%
	Yes: 10 (Catholic: 3, Buddhist: 3, Other: 4)	8.3%

Data Analysis Method: The collected data was analyzed using percentage-based frequency distribution to determine correlations between variables. Survey questions were designed using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from “Strongly Disagree” (1 point) to “Strongly Agree” (5 points). Average scores were calculated by dividing the total score by the number of respondents (120 students). Based on this, the level of awareness and attitude of the respondents toward Mother Goddess Worship could be evaluated as follows:

The female-to-male ratio was significantly imbalanced, with 80% female and 20% male. By academic year, the majority of participants were fourth-year students (45%), followed by first-year students (20.8%), indicating high participation from students at both entry and final stages of their studies. In terms of majors, respondents came from various disciplines, with Korean Studies accounting for the highest percentage (40.8%), suggesting strong interest in the topic among this group.

Regarding religion, most students identified as non-religious (91.7%), with only a small number affiliated with Catholicism, Buddhism, or other religions. This result reflects the respondents’ self-identification based on formal criteria for religious affiliation. In the Vietnamese context, becoming an official adherent of a religion such as Buddhism or Catholicism typically requires undergoing specific initiation rituals, such as Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels (*Quy y Tam Bảo*) or Baptism. Therefore, individuals who have not participated in these formal rites may still consider themselves non-religious, even if they are culturally influenced by certain religious traditions. It is also important to distinguish between not having the official status of a religious adherent and completely lacking spiritual belief or religious-cultural influence. Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism have deeply permeated Vietnamese traditional values and moral norms, but their influence is largely socio-cultural rather than institutional or dogmatic (Vuong Hoàng Quân, 2018, p.1). In this study, we focus on students’ perceptions of Mother Goddess worship - a form of indigenous folk belief that is generally not classified within institutionalized religions. The classification of students as religious or non-religious in our survey is based on their participation in formal initiation rites, such as *Quy y Tam Bảo* in Buddhism or Baptism in Catholicism.

3. Concepts, Origins, and Development of Mother Goddess Worship

3.1. The Concepts of “Belief” and “Mother Goddess Worship”

3.1.1. The Concept of “Belief”

According to the Vietnamese Dictionary, belief (tín ngưỡng) is defined as “belief in a particular religion; respect for religious freedom” (Hoàng Phê, 2003, p. 994). The Sino -

Vietnamese Dictionary defines it as “admiration or superstitious devotion to a religion or ideology” (Đào Duy Anh, 1996, p. 283). The 2016 Law on Belief and Religion in Vietnam defines belief as “a form of faith expressed through rituals associated with traditional customs that bring about spiritual peace.” In his work *Mother Goddess Worship - From a Cultural Perspective*, Phạm Việt Long (2024, p. 12) analyzes the term by stating that **“tín”* means to believe, and **“ngưỡng”* means reverence - combined, they refer to belief and Worship of supernatural forces.” Moreover, scholar Đặng Nghiêm Vạn emphasizes that belief “is a type of religious faith, closely linked with religion but not identical to it” (2005, p. 88). In summary, belief can be understood as a form of faith and reverence intertwined with rituals and traditional customs, reflecting the relationship between humans and the supernatural world. It is both a cultural - social phenomenon and a significant component of religion, contributing to the preservation of identity and community cohesion.

3.1.2. The Concept of “Mother Goddess Worship”

First, the term *Mẫu* (Mother) originates from Sino-Vietnamese, while the native Vietnamese equivalents include *Mẹ* and *Mụ* (a dialectal term from Central Vietnam). Initially, both *Mẫu* and *Mẹ* refer to a woman who has given birth to someone - a maternal title used by children. Beyond this basic meaning, these terms also carry honorific connotations, such as in the titles *Mẹ Âu Cơ*, *Mẫu Liễu Hạnh*, or *Mẫu Nghi Thiên Hạ* (Ngô Đức Thịnh, 2009, p. 29). According to Nguyễn Hữu Thọ (2022), Mother Goddess Worship can be defined as “a form of folk belief composed of multiple layers: goddess Worship, divine mother Worship, and the Three and Four Palaces (*Tam Phủ - Tứ Phủ*), centered on the sacred belief in the power of the Mother as the creator and protector of nature, society, and humanity.” This belief system is also characterized by its syncretic and polytheistic nature, and it is viewed by practitioners as a way to cultivate moral values and preserve cultural traditions.

Phạm Việt Long (2024, p. 12) asserts that “Mother Goddess Worship, or *Đạo Mẫu*, is the veneration of goddesses, female deities, and royal ladies in Vietnamese folk culture. It reflects gratitude for maternal nurturing and protection and has contributed to the development of virtuous lifestyles and customs in Vietnamese society.” Additionally, Vũ Hồng Vân (2020, p. 22) defines Mother Goddess Worship as “a form of belief originating from goddess Worship (though not all goddesses are Mothers), representing a segment of social consciousness that emerged from matrilineal clan systems to honor women who contributed to the nation and community. These women exemplify historical, cultural, and moral virtues and are revered as Holy Mothers or Queen Mothers.”

In summary, Mother Goddess Worship is a belief system rooted in Vietnamese folk culture that honors female deities as symbols of creative power and protection of life. It combines various layers of belief - from goddess Worship to *Tam Phủ - Tứ Phủ* - and reflects polytheism. Beyond spiritual protection and prosperity, it preserves values such as gratitude, patriotism, and respect for women’s roles. As such, it constitutes a significant expression of cultural spirituality that strengthens community bonds and promotes national festivals.

3.2. Origins of Mother Goddess Worship

According to Phạm Việt Long (2024), Mother Goddess Worship dates back to prehistoric times, reflecting the desire for fertility and growth among early Vietnamese agricultural communities. This belief system is a long-standing indigenous tradition rooted in the matriarchal social structure - where women played a central role in both family and community life. During the 16th and 17th centuries, the practice flourished, expanding

beyond peasant communities to include merchants and the upper classes, in the context of growing trade and cultural exchange.

Scholar Vũ Hồng Vận (2020) argues that Mother Goddess Worship can be interpreted from three main perspectives: ethnological, cultural, and ideological. From the ethnological perspective, it is a native product stemming from matrilineal systems - an era when women held the primary role in family and social structures - as seen in the Bắc Sơn cultural tradition and the legendary tale Con Rồng cháu Tiên (Children of the Dragon and Fairy). Although matrilineal systems declined after the Northern domination period, the image of the mother continued to be revered and deified in the spiritual life of the Vietnamese people. Culturally, Mother Goddess Worship is rooted in the close relationship between agricultural communities and nature - especially the elements of earth and water, which are likened to nurturing mothers, foundational to the wet-rice civilization. Ideologically, this belief reflects the dualistic thinking and yin - yang philosophy characteristic of Vietnamese culture, emphasizing the generative and protective roles of Mother Goddesses through symbolic pairings such as heaven - earth, father - mother, day - night, and others.

3.3. Formation and Development of Mother Goddess Worship

Mother Goddess Worship is a prominent form of folk belief with indigenous roots that plays a vital role in the spiritual and cultural life of the Vietnamese people. While many major religions in Vietnam - such as Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam - have foreign origins, Mother Goddess Worship is endogenous, formed and developed within the fabric of traditional Vietnamese society. It reflects the popular desire to honor feminine reproductive power, protection, and the harmonization of natural forces.

3.3.1. From Goddess Worship to the Structure of Đạo Mẫu

According to Ngô Đức Thịnh (2009), forms of goddess Worship have existed in Vietnamese folk culture since ancient times, as evidenced in myths and legends such as Mother Âu Cơ, the Sun Goddess, Moon Goddess, and the archetypal “Mother” figures worshipped by ethnic minority groups. These goddesses not only serve as creators but also symbolize supernatural power, craft mastery, and national heroes - thereby affirming the role of women in Vietnamese history and culture.

Building upon these traditions, Mother Goddess Worship gradually evolved into a structured system centered around divine female figures known as Mẫu (Mothers), with prominent examples including Mẫu Liễu Hạnh, Mẫu Thượng Thiên, Mẫu Thượng Ngàn, and Mẫu Thoải. Several historical and legendary women - such as an empress of the Song Dynasty, a princess from the Hùng Kings era, or Lady Diệp (Lady Diệp is venerated as the Holy Mother of the Nation, Thánh Ân, and worshipped at the temple bearing her name in Trấn Yên District, Yên Bái Province (Đạo Mẫu Việt Nam, Volume 1, p. 30))- were posthumously honored by the people as National Mothers (Quốc Mẫu) or Queen Mothers (Vương Mẫu) (Ngô Đức Thịnh, 2009). This demonstrates a transformation from general goddess Worship to a more systematized veneration of specific Mother Goddesses, aligned with social structures and communal spiritual needs.

3.3.2. The Formation of the Three Palaces - Four Palaces System

A turning point in the development of Mother Goddess Worship was the establishment of the Tam Phủ - Tứ Phủ (Three Palaces - Four Palaces) system. This marked the codification

of content and ritual practices, categorizing the Mother Goddesses into four sacred realms: Heaven (Thượng Thiên), Earth (Thượng Ngàn), Water (Thoải Phủ), and the Palace of Music (Nhạc Phủ, in the Four Palaces). This system incorporated concepts of cosmic harmony from Daoism but was indigenized by replacing male deities (e.g., Tam Quan) with female ones, reflecting the Vietnamese tradition of revering motherhood (Ngô Đức Thịnh, 2022, pp. 30 - 36).

3.3.3. Regional Distribution and Diversification

Mother Goddess Worship is practiced throughout Vietnam, with regional variations that reflect each area's unique cultural, historical, and social characteristics. In the North - particularly the Red River Delta and the coastal North Central region - the Three and Four Palaces system is especially prominent. A clear distinction is made between goddess Worship (e.g., Rice Mother, Sugarcane Mother) and Mother Goddess Worship (e.g., Quốc Mẫu, Vương Mẫu). This form not only inherits indigenous beliefs but also exerts a reverse influence, "Three-Palace-izing" or "Four-Palace-izing" traditional goddess Worship practices (Ngô Đức Thịnh, 2022, pp. 30 - 36).

In Central Vietnam, the belief system is divided into two main layers: goddess Worship (Tứ vị nương nương, Bà Ngũ Hành) and Mother Goddess Worship (e.g., Thiên Y A Na, Pô Inur Nugar). Practices in this region emphasize ritual more than festivity, reflecting a deep reverence for nature and a syncretic mix of folk and royal traditions, as well as indigenous and foreign elements (Ngô Đức Thịnh, 2022, pp. 40 - 43).

In the South, the line between goddess Worship and Mother Goddess Worship is less distinct. Figures like Bà Chúa Xứ, Bà Đen, Thiên Hậu, Bà Hỏa, and Bà Thủy Long are all revered as female deities who offer protection, reflecting a rich cultural synthesis involving Vietnamese, Chinese, and local indigenous beliefs. In addition to the Three and Four Palaces system with spirit possession rituals (hầu bóng), the South also features the unique performative form known as Bóng rỗi singing (Ngô Đức Thịnh, 2022, pp. 43 - 49). While regional variations are diverse, they all share the same core belief: faith in the supernatural power of the Mother figure.

3.3.4. Revival and Integration in the Contemporary Context

After a period of decline, especially during the latter half of the 20th century, Mother Goddess Worship has experienced a marked revival since the early 1990s. This resurgence has been driven largely by the voluntary efforts of spirit mediums (con nhang đệ tử) and devotees committed to preserving traditional rituals and cultural heritage. Activities such as festivals, temple restoration, and spirit possession ceremonies (hầu đồng) have brought this belief system back into community life.

In 2012, the Châu văn ritual in Nam Định province was recognized as a national intangible cultural heritage. In 2016, "The Practices Related to the Beliefs in the Mother Goddesses of the Three Realms of the Vietnamese" was inscribed by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. According to VTV Online (December 3, 2016), key reasons for this recognition included the heritage's continuity across generations, its widespread appeal among ethnic groups, and its ability to foster community cohesion. Ngô Đức Thịnh (2009) emphasized: "Vietnamese Đạo Mẫu has constructed an archetype of the Vietnamese mother and woman. The primary representation is the mother - the one who gave birth to us. The Mother is also nature, the surrounding environment: Mother Heaven, Mother

Earth, Mother Water, and Mother Forests, encompassing all aspects of life, offering protection and the conditions necessary for human survival.” This perspective highlights the profound symbolic and cultural - social value of Mother Goddess Worship beyond its religious aspects.

4. Survey Analysis

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

4.1.1. Students' Level of Knowledge about Mother Goddess Worship

The statistical results show that students generally recognize the visible characteristics of Mother Goddess Worship, such as "a Vietnamese folk belief" and "featuring the *hầu đồng* ritual" (both scoring 3.08), as well as "includes *chầu văn* singing" (3.04) - elements that are frequently depicted in media and festivals. In contrast, more specialized statements scored lower, such as: "Developed in the 16th century with the Holy Mother Liễu Hạnh" (2.51), "Influenced by Taoism and Buddhism" (2.54), and "Associated with Phủ Dầy" (2.63), indicating a lack of foundational knowledge among many students.

Table 2. Level of Understanding about the Mother Goddess Worship Belief

Content	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score
It is a Vietnamese folk belief.	2 (2.2%)	0 (0%)	9 (10.1%)	49 (55.1%)	29 (32.6%)	3.08
It involves the Worship of female deities (Mother Goddesses).	2 (2.2%)	4 (4.5%)	12 (13.5%)	51 (57.3%)	20 (22.5%)	2.92
It includes the <i>hầu đồng</i> ritual (spirit possession ceremony).	1 (1.1%)	2 (2.2%)	10 (11.2%)	45 (50.6%)	31 (34.8%)	3.08
It features <i>chầu văn</i> singing (ritual music to invoke spirits).	1 (1.1%)	1 (1.1%)	16 (18%)	41 (46.1%)	30 (33.7%)	3.04

It is associated with Phủ Dầy (a major Worship site).	5 (5.6%)	12 (13.5%)	21 (23.6%)	31 (34.8%)	20 (22.5%)	2.63
Knowledge about the Holy Mother Liễu Hạnh .	5 (5.6%)	9 (10.1%)	22 (24.7%)	32 (36%)	21 (23.6%)	2.68
It is a folk belief Worshipping female deities representing nature and fertility.	1 (1.1%)	6 (6.7%)	24 (27%)	38 (42.7%)	20 (22.5%)	2.79
Originated in the 16th century with the Mother Goddess Liễu Hạnh .	2 (2.2%)	3 (3.4%)	26 (29.2%)	35 (39.3%)	23 (25.8%)	2.84
Rooted in agricultural culture and matriarchal thought.	3 (3.4%)	14 (15.7%)	29 (32.6%)	32 (36%)	11 (12.4%)	2.51
Knowledge of the hầu đồng ritual: mediums incarnate Mother Goddesses	2 (2.2%)	6 (6.7%)	23 (25.8%)	36 (40.4%)	22 (24.7%)	2.81
Knowledge of chầu văn songs telling legends of the deities.	2 (2.2%)	9 (10.1%)	22 (24.7%)	38 (42.7%)	18 (20.2%)	2.73
Recognized by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2016.	4 (4.5%)	9 (10.1%)	12 (13.5%)	33 (37.1%)	31 (34.8%)	2.88
Honors the role of women in Vietnamese culture	1 (1.1%)	9 (10.1%)	13 (14.6%)	39 (43.8%)	27 (30.3%)	2.91

Knowledge of the Tam Tòa Thánh Mẫu (Three Palaces of the Mother Goddesses).	1 (1.1%)	13 (14.6%)	18 (20.2%)	36 (40.4%)	21 (23.6%)	2.75
Influenced by Taoism, Buddhism, and ethnic spiritual practices.	2 (2.2%)	15 (16.9%)	27 (30.3%)	33 (37.1%)	12 (13.5%)	2.54

These findings suggest that while students are relatively familiar with the external aspects of Mother Goddess Worship, their understanding of its historical context and theological structure remains limited. Therefore, there is a need to promote a more comprehensive and systematic education on Vietnamese folk culture within universities.

4.1.2. Attitudes and Perspectives toward Mother Goddess Worship

In terms of attitude, most students express positive views about Mother Goddess Worship, especially in recognizing its cultural value and the importance of preserving heritage. Statements such as "Should be preserved" (3.06), "Helps to understand folk beliefs" (3.05), and "An important part of cultural identity" (3.01) all scored above 3.0, reflecting a relatively high level of agreement. However, the statement "Has spiritual value for today's youth" received the lowest score in this category (2.62), indicating some skepticism or disconnect between the belief system and the spiritual life of modern youth.

Table 3. Students' Attitudes toward the Mother Goddess Worship Belief

Content	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score
Be proud to be a part of Vietnamese culture	1 (1.1%)	1 (1.1%)	18 (20.2%)	42 (47.2%)	27 (30.3%)	2.98
Help to understand folk beliefs	1 (1.1%)	1 (1.1%)	12 (13.5%)	47 (52.8%)	28 (31.5%)	3.05
Be an important part of cultural identity	1 (1.1%)	0 (0%)	20 (22.5%)	37 (41.6%)	31 (34.8%)	3.01

Have spiritual value for today's youth	2 (2.2%)	4 (4.5%)	41 (46.1%)	31 (34.8%)	11 (12.4%)	2.62
Reflect the respect for the role of women	1 (1.1%)	1 (1.1%)	23 (25.8%)	40 (44.9%)	24 (27%)	2.98
Should be preserved	1 (1.1%)	0 (0%)	17 (19.1%)	38 (42.7%)	33 (37.1%)	3.06

This suggests that students tend to perceive the belief as a traditional ritual system but do not fully grasp its practical relevance in contemporary society. This presents a challenge for heritage education and communication, which requires new approaches to transform heritage from a “memory to be preserved” into a “living value” aligned with the identity and spiritual needs of younger generations.

4.1.3. Actual Behavior toward Mother Goddess Worship

In contrast to their positive awareness and attitudes, students’ actual engagement with Mother Goddess Worship remains limited. Statements such as “Have participated in activities” (2.29), “Have shared information” (2.26), and “Have searched for information” (2.45) all scored below 2.5, revealing that most students have not taken concrete actions related to the belief. The gap between awareness - attitude and behavior suggests a lack of practical connection, possibly due to insufficient exposure, experience, or the perception that the belief is not compatible with modern life. Among behavioral items, the statement “Plan to visit Worship sites such as Phủ Tây Hồ or Phủ Dầy” scored highest (2.70), indicating greater potential for future participation, especially when linked with cultural tourism and experiential learning.

Table 4. Students’ Behaviors Related to the Mother Goddess Worship Belief

Content	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score
Participate in relevant activities	8 (9%)	21 (23.6%)	27 (30.3%)	20 (22.5%)	13 (14.6%)	2.29
Plan to participate in the future	7 (7.9%)	9 (10.1%)	35 (39.3%)	25 (28.1%)	13 (14.6%)	2.57

Actively seek information	6 (6.7%)	11 (12.4%)	38 (42.7%)	24 (27%)	10 (11.2%)	2.45
Plan to seek information in the future	5 (5.6%)	14 (15.7%)	30 (33.7%)	27 (30.3%)	13 (14.6%)	2.55
Share information on social media	9 (10.1%)	26 (29.2%)	23 (25.8%)	20 (22.5%)	11 (12.4%)	2.26
Plan to share information on social media	10 (11.2%)	18 (20.2%)	23 (25.8%)	28 (31.5%)	10 (11.2%)	2.42
Visit places of worship like Phủ Tây Hồ, Phủ Dầy	11 (12.4%)	21 (23.6%)	15 (16.9%)	22 (24.7%)	20 (22.5%)	2.48
Plan to visit places of worship like Phủ Tây Hồ, Phủ Dầy	5 (5.6%)	17 (19.1%)	14 (15.7%)	35 (39.3%)	18 (20.2%)	2.70

Directly visiting Worship spaces can help students better understand the architecture, rituals, and social roles associated with Mother Goddess Worship. Therefore, integrating field trips, extracurricular activities, or cultural modules in university curricula is an effective solution to enhance student access and participation in this intangible heritage.

4.2. Comparative Analysis by Demographic Variables

The data analysis reveals certain differences in students' awareness and attitudes toward Mother Goddess Worship across demographic groups, particularly in terms of gender, academic year, and religion.

Firstly, by gender, female students tend to show a higher level of agreement than male students when evaluating Mother Goddess Worship as an essential part of national cultural identity and a source of spiritual value. The agreement rate among female students reached approximately 80%, compared to only 20% among male students. This discrepancy may be explained by gender-based empathy: the image of the Holy Mothers likely creates a stronger psychological and emotional resonance among female respondents. Mother Goddess Worship appears to foster a sense of empathy and self-identification among female students. This view is supported by Nguyễn Thị Thanh Mai (2021), who emphasized that in a society still influenced by patriarchal norms, Mother Goddess Worship serves as a spiritual space for women to assert their value. Many female students shared that they had accompanied their mothers or grandmothers to temples and regarded these visits as a way to connect with family traditions while experiencing a sense of peace and intimacy. One student remarked: "When I

was younger, I didn't understand much, but as I've grown older, visiting Phủ Tây Hồ is not just about praying for luck - it's also an opportunity to learn about culture and the role of women in Vietnamese spiritual life." Such experiences help deepen students' awareness of the belief system as a spiritually empowering space for women.

By academic year, fourth-year students (44.6%) demonstrate a higher level of knowledge and a more positive attitude toward Mother Goddess Worship compared to first-year students (20.7%). This difference reflects the accumulation of academic knowledge, cultural experience, and exposure to heritage-related coursework and extracurricular activities throughout their university studies. A more developed foundation in critical thinking also enables final-year students to better recognize the indigenous roots, symbolic meaning, and social relevance of the belief. In other words, students are more likely to appreciate and incorporate this tradition into their own cultural identity as they mature academically. Some final-year students shared that participating in cultural heritage courses and specialized seminars had helped them understand Mother Goddess Worship from a symbolic and cultural perspective. One student noted: "I'm not religious, but after studying intangible heritage, I see Mother Goddess Worship as a way to honor motherhood and preserve Vietnamese identity in modern society." These responses suggest that academic learning, when combined with personal experience, plays a critical role in shaping positive attitudes toward traditional beliefs.

Regarding religion, most surveyed students reported no religious affiliation (91.7%), while only 10 identified as religious (Catholic: 3, Buddhist: 3, Other: 4). Non-religious students tended to view Mother Goddess Worship as a cultural folk practice rather than as a religious system in opposition to institutionalized faiths. Among the religious group, 3 had never heard of Mother Goddess Worship, while the remaining 7 expressed moderate agreement (3.43 - 4.00 points), with the statement "Has spiritual value for today's youth" receiving the lowest score (3.43). The non-religious group rated this statement slightly higher (3.51), suggesting that both groups maintained a somewhat neutral stance on spiritual value, while still acknowledging the cultural and identity-related significance of the belief. Several non-religious students stated that they found it easy to approach Mother Goddess Worship as part of national heritage, without any conflict with personal beliefs. One student commented: "To me, Worshiping the Mother is a beautiful symbol - you don't need to fully believe in it, but you can still respect it because it's part of our culture." This perspective reflects cultural openness and tolerance - a hallmark of today's younger generation.

In general, an awareness of cultural diversity and flexibility in engaging with belief practices enables students - particularly those without a formal religion - to develop more positive attitudes toward Mother Goddess Worship. They tend to value its humanistic and symbolic aspects, viewing it as part of national identity rather than a competing religious belief. In summary, expanding cultural experiences and fostering a non-dogmatic mindset contribute significantly to the acceptance and preservation of Mother Goddess Worship among today's youth.

4.3. The Relationship between Awareness - Attitude - Behavior

Survey results indicate that although most students demonstrate positive awareness and respectful attitudes toward Mother Goddess Worship, their actual participation remains low - clearly highlighting a gap between awareness and behavior. This phenomenon is not uncommon in cultural and social research, particularly in the context of how youth engage with folk heritage under the influence of globalization and digital technology.

To explain this relationship, the study applies the Knowledge - Attitude - Behavior (KAB) model - an established framework in social psychology. According to this model, knowledge (awareness) serves as the foundation influencing an individual's attitude (beliefs, emotions, evaluations), which in turn leads to concrete behavior (Ajzen, 1991, pp. 179 - 211). The model assumes a logical sequence: correct awareness → positive attitude → appropriate behavior. In this study, students with high awareness scores (above 3.0) on features of Mother Goddess Worship - such as festivals, *hầu đồng* rituals, and *chầu văn* singing - also tend to express positive attitudes, recognizing the belief as a core part of national identity that deserves preservation. However, actual behaviors (e.g., attending festivals, sharing information, seeking further understanding) remain inconsistent. For example, despite having adequate knowledge and favorable views, only about 30% of students have visited Worship sites like *Phủ Tây Hồ* or *Phủ Dày*, and around 25% have shared related content on social media. This demonstrates a clear awareness - behavior gap, which is a common occurrence in studies on youth engagement with cultural heritage.

This disconnection may be attributed to several socio-cultural mediating factors. First, a lack of real-life experience is a significant barrier. Many students have never directly participated in rituals or visited sites like *Phủ Dày* or *Phủ Tây Hồ*, which limits their emotional connection and reduces belief engagement to a theoretical level. Second, the social environment - including family, school, and media - still lacks sufficient influence in creating a bridge between students and traditional beliefs. Additionally, generational differences and cultural shifts play a role. While young people today are shaped by modern and globalized thinking, Mother Goddess Worship is sometimes perceived as “old-fashioned,” “superstitious,” or “outdated.” As a result, even rationally positive attitudes are often accompanied by emotional indifference or neutrality in practice. Finally, the commercialization of rituals and the lack of credible information on social media also distort perceptions. Misrepresentations - sometimes promoting superstition - have led some students, even those with accurate knowledge, to hesitate in taking action due to fear of being stigmatized by society.

From the KAB perspective, fostering accurate knowledge is a necessary but insufficient condition for behavior change. Positive attitudes must be reinforced through personal experience, emotional connection, and cultural pride - areas that the current education and communication systems have yet to effectively address. Moreover, the two-way interaction between attitude and behavior should also be acknowledged: once individuals participate in a cultural experience (e.g., temple visits, festivals), their attitudes may strengthen, leading to further engagement - creating a recurring behavioral cycle.

Therefore, equipping students with a strong knowledge base, combined with emotional-cultural education and expanded opportunities for real-life experience, represents three key pillars for transforming awareness into behavior. When guided appropriately, young people can move beyond passive heritage reception to become active agents in the preservation, innovation, and promotion of cultural values in a way that resonates with the times.

5. Conclusion

Based on the analysis and cross-referencing with scholarly literature, the study draws several key conclusions. First, contemporary students demonstrate a relatively comprehensive understanding of Mother Goddess Worship, particularly regarding the roles of the Mother deities, the *hầu đồng* ritual, and the spiritual value of the belief. This knowledge stems from both formal education and informal sources such as social media, mass media, and family

traditions. Second, positive awareness contributes to the formation of respectful attitudes and support for the belief as a symbol of national identity. However, the intensity of such attitudes varies depending on factors such as gender, region, academic discipline, and religious affiliation. Third, there exists a discernible gap between awareness - attitude and actual behavior. Although many students possess adequate knowledge and express agreement with the belief system, only a small portion actively participate in related cultural practices. Fourth, the study clarifies the causal relationship among these three components in the context of modernization, commercialization of heritage, and evolving cultural consumption habits. Factors such as media influence, educational exposure, urbanization, and lack of firsthand experience all affect students' behavior toward Mother Goddess Worship.

Notably, even among students with positive awareness, indifferent or emotionally detached attitudes remain common. This is partly due to the perception of the belief system as a traditional ritual disconnected from modern spiritual life, compounded by the lack of experiential opportunities and guidance from families or educational institutions. To bridge this gap, the study proposes several concrete policy recommendations: (1) Integrate cultural heritage modules into university curricula, particularly those focused on intangible heritage; (2) Organize field trips or experiential learning activities to prominent Worship sites such as Phủ Tây Hồ and Phủ Dầy; (3) Develop digital communication campaigns that combine academic content with creative formats (e.g., infographics, videos, mini-games) to improve outreach to students via social media platforms. These measures aim to transform heritage into a living and relatable subject, aligned with students' lives and interests. In addition, based on the study's findings, the following further policy implications are suggested: (4) Incorporate Mother Goddess Worship content into both general and higher education curricula through interdisciplinary approaches (e.g., cultural studies, communication, sociology); (5) Encourage universities to organize extracurricular and experiential activities at related heritage sites such as Phủ Dầy and Phủ Tây Hồ; (6) Support student-led communication initiatives (e.g., videos, podcasts, social media projects) to promote a positive image of the belief system; (7) Strengthen cooperation between schools, families, and communities in heritage education, particularly through cultural festivals and local partnership projects; (8) Expand large-scale mixed-method research to build policy frameworks based on empirical data.

In conclusion, Mother Goddess Worship is not merely a cultural memory but also a spiritual space through which young people can define personal values in the age of globalization (Nguyễn Thị Thanh Mai, 2021). Accurate perception enables youth to understand the relationship between belief and cultural identity - an essential condition for the proactive preservation of heritage (Ngô Đức Thịnh, 2009). UNESCO (2016) also emphasizes that the vitality of intangible cultural heritage depends on intergenerational transmission and especially the participation of the youth. Thus, when equipped with proper knowledge, students can overcome prejudice or skepticism and become active agents in creatively spreading Mother Goddess Worship - harmonizing tradition with modernity.

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