

Review of: "Ancient Houses in Ben Tre City: A Multifaceted Approach to Preserve Artistic Architectural Heritage and Boost Local Tourism"

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The abstract explores the historical residences of Bến Tre city, which trace back to the French colonial era in the latter half of the 19th century, emphasizing their distinctive attributes within a context rich in both tangible and intangible elements. The authors aim to promote technical approaches for preserving the architectural heritage, expanding their focus to encompass sustainable building practices, and ensuring the long-term survival of historical edifices.

Section 1 introduces the notion of urban heritage, originating in the 1930s through the work of Italian architect G. Giovannoni. In Bến Tre city, the authors conducted surveys of 10 ancient houses dating back to the pre-1920 colonial French period. These houses embody a fusion of material and spiritual worth, weaving a tapestry of cultural narratives rooted in antiquity. Notably, the residence of Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao emerges as a pinnacle of artistic expression, frequently serving as a symbol for both domestic and foreign administrations. Designated as a National Historic Site in 2015, it stands as a testament to the city's rich historical tapestry (source: <https://thamhiemmekong.com/thong-tin-du-lich-mien-tay/ba%CC%89o-tang-ben-tre-noi-luu-giu-ky-uc-va-ve-dep-van-hoa-cua-xu-dua.html>). Collaborative studies conducted by Vietnamese and English teams in Bến Tre city are also acknowledged, spotlighting life narratives that underscore a collective commitment to preserving cultural identity and environmental stewardship.

The intrinsic value of these ancient houses is intricately intertwined with geological, geomorphological, and spiritual dimensions. However, the impending demolition of one of these structures (as discussed in **Section 2**) to make way for new construction projects poses a significant threat. Illustrated by the authors, one such house—a charming villa that once served as the headquarters of the Bến Tre Provincial Farmers' Association—exudes a blend of Asian and European architectural influences, boasting ornate painted ceilings, embellished windows, and intricate woodwork patterns. The history of its previous occupants reflects the villa's cultural significance during its zenith. Today, preservationists, residents, and architects alike advocate against the proposed demolition of this and other historic structures in Bến Tre city.

Section 3 delves into legislative measures concerning the preservation and promotion of invaluable historical heritage, particularly focusing on the Bến Tre Ancient Houses. Emphasizing the imperative to Connect, Conserve, and Promote the Heritage Values of these houses through tourism, it underscores the necessity of incorporating the perspectives of the residential community and other stakeholders vested in preserving cultural heritage. The discussion highlights the

relevance of the 2019 Law on Architecture, cautioning against alterations that disrupt the architectural harmony of public and private spaces.

In *subsection 3.2*, titled “From experts on public opinion: The French...,” the authors stress the significance of safeguarding Vietnamese cultural relics and advocate for collaboration between state agencies engaged in new construction projects and heritage preservation experts. Specific recommendations include integrating ancient houses into parks and surrounding areas and repurposing them for tourist services or high-quality homestays. The economic value of indigenous cultural resources is underscored, along with the unique architectural style of Indochina, which presents challenges for replication in new construction projects. Addressing concerns such as soil fragility, the authors propose solutions such as restoring drainage systems to mitigate the motivations for demolition while preserving the original aesthetic and ensuring structural safety.

Section 4, the Discussion, revisits the benefits of revitalizing the architectural and cultural significance of Bền Tre's ancient houses. Finally, in **Section 5**, the Conclusion asserts that lessons gleaned from these ancient houses can stimulate tourism and environmental revitalization for future generations. It emphasizes the importance of maintaining a continuous connection between the past and future, preserving the invaluable contributions of these buildings and the stories they encapsulate.

Recommendations for authors:

The authors could suggest actively engaging the local community and raising public awareness about the historical significance of Bền Tre's ancient houses. Encouraging community involvement in preservation efforts can foster a sense of ownership and pride, further strengthening the commitment to conservation.

I recommend exploring adaptive reuse strategies for repurposing ancient houses to meet contemporary needs while preserving their historical integrity. This approach can ensure the continued relevance and viability of these structures in the face of evolving societal demands.

These recommendations can enhance the comprehensiveness of the study and provide actionable insights for preserving Bền Tre's architectural heritage.

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