
A Comparative Study of Full Ordination (Upasampadā) Patterns between Mahāyāna and Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam

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Abstract

This research offers a qualitative and comparative analysis of Full Ordination (Upasampadā) ceremonies found within Mahāyāna and Theravāda Buddhism in contemporary Vietnam. Set against the backdrop of Vietnam's diverse Buddhist landscape, this study aims to achieve three primary objectives: (1) to meticulously document the structural elements and historical development of the Mahāyāna Upasampadā ritual, (2) to clarify the corresponding ordination ceremony within the Theravāda tradition, and (3) to undertake a comprehensive comparison of their respective liturgical structures, institutional configurations, and cultural expressions. Empirical data were gathered through a thorough documentary analysis of canonical Vinaya texts (specifically the Dharmaguptaka and Pāli versions), monastic regulations issued by the Vietnam Buddhist Saṅgha (VBS), and a critical appraisal of existing scholarly literature on Buddhist ordination practices in Southeast Asia. Primary sources included Vinaya commentaries, official VBS ordinances, and documented liturgical manuals, while secondary sources encompassed peer-reviewed scholarly articles and ethnographic narratives on ordination ceremonies.

The findings indicate that the Mahāyāna Upasampadā, fundamentally rooted in the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya, manifests as a multi-stage procedure. It begins with candidate evaluation (termed the “Seven Examinations”), followed by intricate ritual performances orchestrated by a council of Ten Masters. This ceremony is distinguished by its Sino-Vietnamese liturgical practices, elaborate vestments, hierarchical seating arrangements, and symbolic offerings inspired by indigenous court rituals. In contrast, the Theravāda Upasampadā, anchored in the Pāli Vinaya, adheres to a more streamlined sequence. It is presided over by a Saṅgha council (comprising the Upajjhāya, two Ācariyas, and a minimum assembly of ten monks), prioritizing precision in the Motion and Three Proclamations (ñatti–catuttha–kamma), minimalist aesthetic principles, and direct recitation in Pāli.

Despite these procedural differences, both traditions converge on fundamental Vinaya tenets, notably the essential nature of formal proclamation rites and adherence to the Four Fulfilling Conditions. Additionally, VBS initiatives aimed at standardising ordination protocols have fostered mutual recognition and occasional collaborative

platforms, indicating a growing inter-sectarian harmony. This investigation makes a significant contribution to the anthropology of Vietnamese Buddhism. It provides practical recommendations for Vinaya education and monastic training, and establishes a foundational framework for future research focusing on ordination lineages, the revival of Bhikkhunī, and inter-tradition dialogues.

Keywords: Full Ordination Ceremony (Upasampadā); Theravāda Buddhism; Mahāyāna Buddhism; Vietnam Buddhist Saṅgha

Introduction

The Full Ordination Ceremony (Upasampadā) is a pivotal rite marking a sāmaṇera's (novice's) transition into full membership of the Bhikkhu Saṅgha. As prescribed in the Mahāvagga of the Vinaya Piṭaka, this ceremony hinges on three essential elements: a consecrated boundary (sīma), a qualified preceptor (upajjhāya), and a quorum of ordained monks. In its most common contemporary form, ordination proceeds via "A Motion and Three Proclamations" (Pāli: ñatti-catuttha-kammavācā), where the assembled Saṅgha formally solicits consent thrice before admitting the candidate (Mahāvagga I.74.3; Horner, 1971).

Buddhism arrived in Vietnam by at least the second or third century CE, with Mahāyāna quickly becoming the dominant school (Lê Mạnh Thát, 2006). Traditionally, Mahāyāna ordination involved three sequential transmissions—novice (sāmaṇera/sāmaṇerī), bhikkhu/bhikkhunī, and Bodhisattva precepts—collectively known as the Three Ordination Platforms. Over time, these merged into the Great Precept Transmission Ceremony, which historically lacked uniform protocols and was confined to individual temple communities. Following national reunification and the establishment of the Vietnam Buddhist Saṅgha (VBS) in 1981, Mahāyāna ordination procedures underwent standardization, leading to nationwide guidelines that balance liturgical fidelity with local cultural expressions (Thích Đồng Bồn, 2019).

Though less widespread, Theravāda Buddhism has also established a strong presence in Vietnam, initially among the Khmer minority in the south and later through Vietnamese Kinh monks trained in Cambodia. From the 1940s, institutions like Bửu Quang Temple in Ho Chi Minh City emerged as vital centres for Theravāda training and ordination (Thiên Hậu, 2017). The Theravāda Upasampadā in Vietnam remains primarily an in-group affair, focusing on bhikkhu ordination under Pāli Vinaya regulations, characterised by procedural simplicity and strict adherence to canonical language.

Today, the VBS officially recognizes both Mahāyāna and Theravāda ordinations. Interestingly, Theravādin candidates often participate in Mahāyāna-administered ceremonies to secure formal endorsement. In several provinces (e.g., Ho Chi Minh City, Huế, Bà Rịa–Vũng Tàu), joint ordination events now feature parallel sect-specific rites within a shared framework, fostering inter-tradition harmony while preserving doctrinal particularities (Thích Tâm Hải, 2015). Despite this institutional rapprochement, existing scholarship remains largely sect-specific, often focusing on Vinaya exegesis or ritual description. There is a clear need for an integrated, comparative study examining how Mahāyāna and Theravāda ordination models have evolved, interacted, and been harmonised under the VBS in Vietnam's pluralistic environment.

This research addresses that gap by analysing procedural divergences and convergences, assessing their implications for Buddhist education, community cohesion, and the institutional development of the Vietnamese Saṅgha. In so doing, it sheds new light on how ordination ceremonies continue to shape the transmission of the Buddha's teachings in contemporary Vietnam.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the Structure and Evolution of Mahāyāna Full Ordination Ceremony (Upasampadā) in contemporary Vietnam.
2. To examine the Structure and Evolution of Theravāda Full Ordination Ceremony (Upasampadā) in contemporary Vietnam.
3. To compare the Pattern of Full Ordination (Upasampadā) Ceremonies between Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism within the context of Vietnam.

Literature Review

The following review synthesises key Vinaya studies on Full Ordination (Upasampadā) within Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism, highlighting their contributions and identifying a gap in comparative, socio-cultural analysis in Vietnam.

Early canonical scholarship has been foundational for understanding ordination procedures. Horner's (1971) authoritative English translation of the Mahāvagga, the Greater Division of the Vinaya Piṭaka—provides critical detail on the Buddha's establishment of the Saṅgha, the rules governing ordination, the various Upasampadā formats, and the formal prerequisites for ceremony. By presenting the Pāṭimokkha recitation and guidelines for communal assemblies,

this work remains indispensable for reconstructing the structural skeleton of early Full Ordination rites.

Within the Theravāda tradition, concise manuals have made Vinaya practice more accessible. Bodhisīla Bhikkhu's (2003) *Vinaya Sankhepa* offers a systematic overview of monastic rituals—confession (*pārājika*), the rains-retreat (*Vassa*), and notably the *Upasampadā* sequence—drawing directly from the *Mahāvagga* and *Cūlavagga*. Earlier, Vāṇsarakkhita Bhikkhu (1993) produced *Pabbajita Vinaya Sankhepa*, which details novice and higher-ordination protocols, clarifying the roles of *Upajjhāya* (Preceptor) and *Ācariya* (Teacher) in candidate preparation. Somdet Phra Mahā Samaṇa Chao Krom Phrayā Vajirañāṇavarorasa's (1973) *Dhammayuttika Nikāya Ordination Procedure* text further standardises Theravāda ordination liturgy under Thai monastic authority, enriching understanding of ceremony formality and council structure.

Mahāyāna ordination has similarly benefited from Vietnamese translations and commentaries. Thích Thiện Hòa's (2008) *Giới Đàn Tăng* translates and explicates ancient Chinese ritual texts, detailing both minor precept-transmission and major *Upasampadā* ceremonies in the Vietnamese Mahāyāna context. Thích Đồng Minh (1999) complements this with *Nghi Truyền Giới*, which presents Bhikkhu, Bhikkhunī, novice, and Bodhisattva ordinations in a clear, Vinaya-aligned format. More recently, the Huệ Nghiêm Vinaya Temple committee (2020) compiled *Truyền Giới Chánh Phạm*, an authoritative field manual for Vietnamese Mahāyāna ordinations, covering *Sāmaṇera*, *Śikṣamāṇā*, and Bodhisattva platforms, and is widely used in major ceremonies nationwide. Thích Phước Sơn's (2006) *Luật Học Tinh Yếu*, a university-level textbook at Vietnam Buddhist University, systematically addresses the Bhikkhu *Pāṭimokkha* (*Dharmaguptaka Vinaya*), *Saṅgha-kamma* rules, offenses, and Bodhisattva precepts, bridging academic and practical Vinaya training. Finally, Trí Tánh's (2023) *Giới Đàn Theo Tinh Thần Luật Tạng* focuses on the Great Ordination platform, its council roles, procedural conditions, and contemporary logistical challenges, offering a model for optimising ordination architecture.

Collectively, these works provide detailed expositions of ordination texts, ritual mechanics, and pedagogical frameworks in both traditions. However, they predominantly treat Mahāyāna and Theravāda ordinations in isolation or focus on doctrinal exposition rather than examining how ceremonies have co-evolved or converged within Vietnam's pluralistic religious milieu. This study addresses that gap by comparatively analyzing the structural adaptations, procedural

developments, and inter-traditional harmonisation of Upasampadā rituals under the Vietnam Buddhist Saṅgha's regulatory umbrella, thereby contributing an original socio-cultural dimension to Vinaya scholarship.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in this research is structured based on the process, research methodology and output. It can be illustrated as follows:

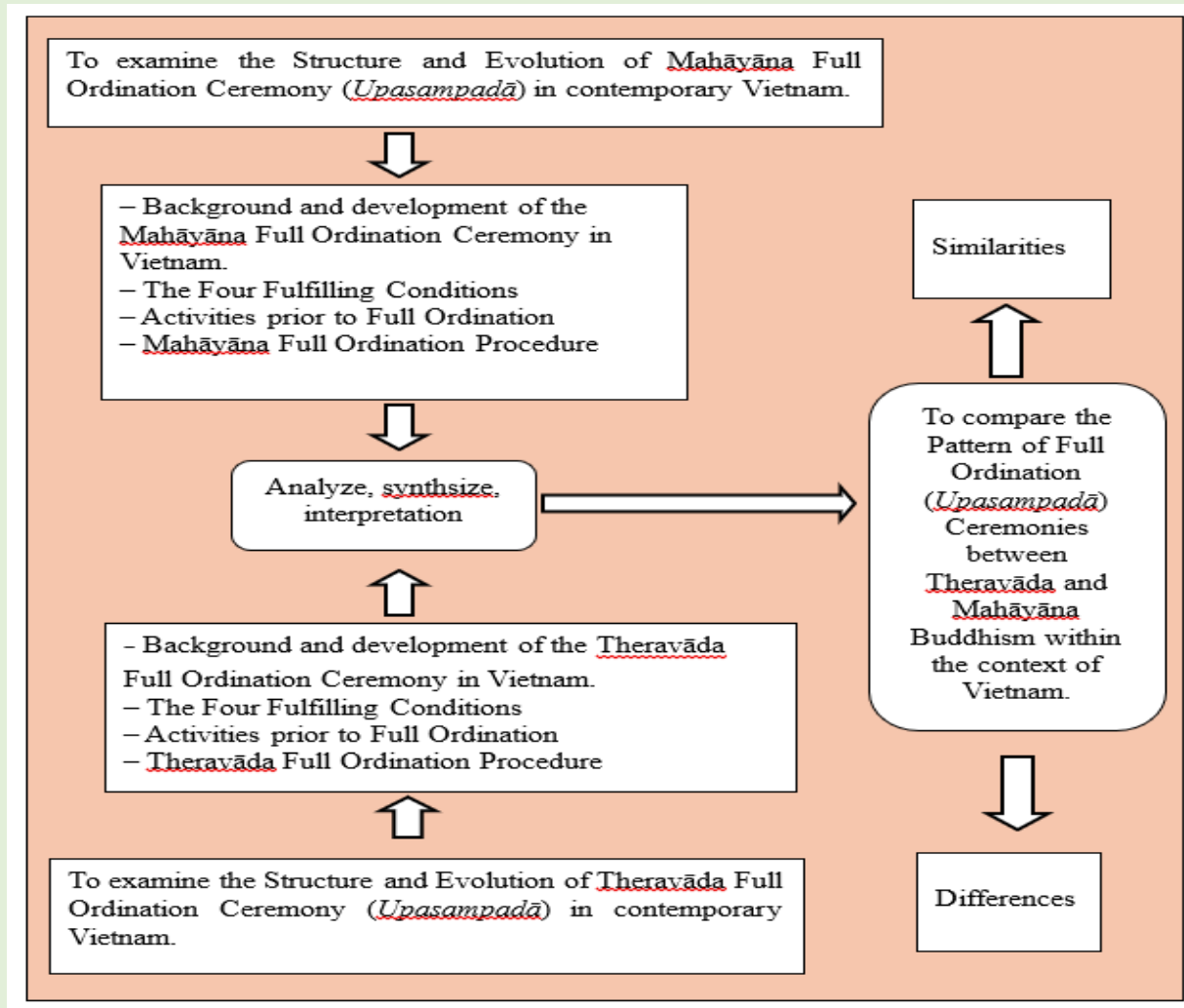


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This study employs a documentary research methodology, primarily utilizing documentary analysis, description, and comparative analysis. Primary textual materials will be examined through analytical and comparative lenses. The research will be conducted through the following steps:

Data Collection

Collecting data from Primary sources, including both the Mahāyāna and Theravāda Tipiṭaka, the Commentaries and Sub-commentaries of both traditions, Buddhist historical texts, the Vietnam Buddhist Saṅgha Charter, and Regulations of the Vietnamese Saṅgha Affairs Department. On the other hand, the data also from the secondary source of several yearbook on ordination ceremonies from various Vietnam Provincial Saṅgha Council, textbooks, research works, Buddhist congregations, newspapers, Buddhist journals, and other Buddhist books and scripture.

Analysis and Synthesis

Analyzing and synthesizing the raw data, as well as systematizing the collected data, to provide a clear understanding of Mahāyāna and Theravāda Full Ordination (Upasampadā) Ceremony Pattern in Vietnam.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Concluding the differences and similarities in the Full Ordination (Upasampadā) Ceremony patterns between Theravāda and Mahāyāna in Contemporary Vietnam. Formulating conclusions, identifying significant research findings, and suggesting valuable insights for further research.

Research Results

Objective 1: The study found that the structure and evolution of the Mahāyāna Full Ordination Ceremony (Upasampadā) in contemporary Vietnam has undergone significant development while remaining rooted in the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya (Buddhayaśas, tr.). Traditionally practiced under the format of the Three Ordination Platforms Ceremony (Tam Đàn Đại Giới), the full ordination process has become notably standardized under the unified structure of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (Most Venerable Thích Thiện Hòa, 2008; Trí Tánh, 2023).

The procedure follows a highly organized ritual structure with clear sequential stages. It begins with pre-ordination activities, including candidate examination, confession rituals, and training in basic etiquette and monastic rituals (Most Venerable Thích Phước Sơn, 2006). Once qualified, the candidate enters the formal Upasampadā ceremony, which includes the following core steps:

- Requesting the Ten Venerable Masters Council: This council consists of the Preceptor, the Kamma-Ācariya, the Teaching–

Ācariya, and the Seven Witnessing Masters (Huệ Nghiêm Vinaya Temple, 2020).

- Performing the Saṅgha–Kamma: This refers to the formal act by the assembly.
- Candidate Examination: Eligibility is rigorously checked based on the Thirteen Major and Ten Minor obstructing circumstances (Most Venerable Thích Đồng Minh, 1999).
- A Motion and Three Proclamations (Skt. jñapti–caturtha–karman): These are made to obtain the consensus of the Saṅgha.
- Admonishment to the New Bhikkhu: The newly ordained monk is instructed on basic monastic precepts and lifestyle.
- Ritual of Receiving Robes and Alms Bowl: This symbolizes full entry into the monastic community (Most Venerable Thích Phước Sơn, 2006).

Table 1 The Mahāyāna Full Ordination Ceremony (Upasampadā) structure

Phases	Main Components	Vinaya Basis / Notes
1. Pre-Ordination Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidate Examination • Confession • Instruction in basic etiquette (monastic rules, robe handling) • Vinaya precepts and doctrinal training 	Dharmaguptaka Vinaya guidelines on pre-ordination eligibility and moral conduct. Based on Mahāyāna Vinaya tradition; emphasizes monastic discipline and ethical conduct
2. Formal Upasampadā Ceremony	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requesting the Ten Venerable Masters Council • Performing the Saṅgha–Kamma • Examination of the Candidate • A Motion and Three Proclamations (jñapti–caturtha–karman) 	
3. Post-Ordination Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admonishment to the new Bhikkhu • Ritual of receiving the Essential Bhikkhu Belongings 	

Core elements such as the Four Fulfilling Conditions, the Perfection of the Candidate's Personal Qualities, the Assembly, the Boundary, and the Announcement of the Act remain integral to its structure (Most Venerable Thích Thiện Hòa, 2008; Trí Tánh, 2023).

Throughout the ceremony, the use of Sino-Vietnamese or Vietnamese chanting, elaborate ritual choreography, and strict hierarchical roles reflects the profound influence of Mahāyāna monasticism, Vinaya values, and Vietnamese feudal aesthetics (Most Venerable Thích Đồng Minh, 1999). These features collectively define the ceremonial solemnity and cultural richness of the Vietnamese Mahāyāna ordination system.

Objective 2: The research into the Theravāda Full Ordination Ceremony (Upasampadā) in Vietnam revealed a distinct yet equally disciplined framework rooted firmly in the Pāli Vinaya (Mahāvagga) (Horner, 1971; Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, 2013). Traditionally practised among Khmer ethnic communities and more recently adopted by Vietnamese Kinh monks, Theravāda ordination emphasises a simpler and more scripturally conservative approach (Vaṇsarakkhita Bhikkhu, 1993; Phra Huynh Minh Thuan, 2017).

The structure of the full ordination typically includes steps such as requesting dependence (Nissaya), scrutiny of the bowl and robes, examination of the candidate, and the central act of “A Motion and Three Proclamations” (Pāli: ñatti-catuttha-kammavācā) conducted entirely in Pāli to finalise the ordination (Somdet Vajirañāṇavarorasa, 1973; Horner, 1971). This is followed by the admonition to the new Bhikkhu, which guides precepts, daily conduct, and community responsibilities (Bodhisila Bhikkhu, 2003).

The Four Fulfilling Conditions—the perfection of the candidate's qualities, the assembly, the boundary (sīmā), and the announcement of the act—are likewise foundational to validate the ceremony (Vaṇsarakkhita Bhikkhu, 1993). The Saṅgha council typically includes a Preceptor (Upajjhāya), two Ācariyas (Kammavācācariya and Anusāvanācariya), and witness monks, adhering to traditional Vinaya stipulations (Bodhisila Bhikkhu, 2003).

The entire ritual is conducted in Pāli, preserving the canonical language of the Theravāda school and affirming the ritual's authenticity (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, 2013). While simpler in ritual aesthetics compared to the Mahāyāna model, Theravāda ordination in Vietnam maintains strict adherence to Vinaya

regulations and ethical discipline (Phra Huynh Minh Thuan, 2017). Despite variations in regional implementation, particularly between Khmer and Kinh practitioners, the core structure remains consistent with Theravādin monastic heritage, emphasising scriptural purity and spiritual integrity. The use of Pāli chanting, emphasis on Vinaya adherence, and minimal ritual embellishments collectively reflect the Theravāda ideal of monastic simplicity and doctrinal purity (Somdet Vajirañāṇavarorasa, 1973; Vaṇsarakkhita Bhikkhu, 1993).

Table 2 The Theravāda Full Ordination Ceremony (Upasampadā) structure

Phases	Main Components	Vinaya Basis / Notes
1. Pre-Ordination Activities	Before entering the Full Ordination ceremony in Theravāda traditional, the candidate must pass an essay exam, an oral exam on the Dhamma and precepts, and recite the Pali chants by heart in the ordination ceremony.	Pāli Vinaya (Mahāvagga I.75; Horner, 1971) Strictly follows Theravāda Vinaya code (ñatti–catuttha–kamma)
2. Formal Upasampadā Ceremony	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requesting the Dependence (Nissaya) • Scrutiny of Bowl and Robes • The Examination of the Candidate • A Motion and Three Proclamations 	
3. Post-Ordination Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Admonishment for New Bhikkhu 	

Objective 3: The comparative analysis of Mahāyāna and Theravāda Full Ordination ceremonies in Vietnam reveals both convergences and divergences that reflect broader doctrinal and cultural dynamics. Both traditions share foundational elements, particularly their reliance on the Vinaya, the requirement of the Four Fulfilling Conditions, and the central ritual of “A Motion and Three Proclamations” (Horner, 1971; Thích Phước Sơn, 2006; Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, 2013). These shared elements affirm the continuity of core Buddhist values across traditions, despite historical and geographical differences.

However, significant differences emerge in several key dimensions. In terms of ceremonial sequence and ritual complexity, Mahāyāna ordinations, as

outlined in sources such as *Giới Đàn Tăng* by Thích Thiện Hòa (2008), *Nghi Truyền Giới* by Thích Đồng Minh (1999), and *Việt Nam Truyền Giới Chánh Phạm* (2020), are notably more institutionalised, ornate, and incorporate extended components including Bodhisattva precepts and memorial rituals for benefactors. The ritual roles are meticulously divided among the Ten Venerable Masters Council, which comprises a Preceptor, Kamma-ācariya, Teaching-ācariya, and seven Witnessing Masters (Thích Phước Sơn, 2006; Trí Tánh, 2023).

In contrast, Theravāda ordinations—especially those practised among the Khmer and Kinh Vietnamese Theravāda Saṅgha—follow a simplified sequence with a strong focus on Vinaya fidelity and scriptural clarity. They strictly adhere to Pāli chanting and monastic roles as outlined in *The Ordination Procedure* by Somdet Vajirañāṇavarorasa (1973) and *Luật Xuất Gia Tóm Tắt* by Vaṇsarakkhita Bhikkhu (1993). The Saṅgha council typically consists of a Preceptor (Upajjhāya), two Ācariyas, and witness monks, functioning according to Pāli Vinaya traditions (Bodhisila Bhikkhu, 2003; Phra Huynh Minh Thuan, 2017).

The study also highlights differences in lay involvement. Mahāyāna ceremonies often include active lay participation in offering, witnessing, and even receiving Bodhisattva precepts, whereas Theravāda practice remains largely monastic-centric with limited lay ritual engagement (Matt Orsborn, 2021; Huệ Nghiêm Vinaya Temple, 2020). Additionally, regional adaptations in ritual performance, such as the combination of administrative and traditional segments in large-scale joint ordination ceremonies, illustrate the flexible integration of tradition and modern governance (Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, 2023).

Importantly, the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (VBS) has played a pivotal role in promoting harmonisation across traditions. Through initiatives like shared ordination platforms, cross-sectarian recognition, and educational exchanges, the VBS fosters inter-tradition respect while affirming the legitimacy of each system (Bhikkhu Thích Đồng Bồn, 2019; Trí Tánh, 2023). This comparative framework offers valuable insights into how traditional monastic institutions can adapt to contemporary educational, administrative, and cultural contexts while maintaining fidelity to the core teachings of the Buddha.

Table 3: Overview about Comparative Analysis of Mahāyāna and Theravāda Full Ordination Ceremonies

Phases	Aspect		<i>Mahāyāna</i>	<i>Theravāda</i>
Ceremonial Activities Prior to Full Ordination	Similarities	Knowledge Assessment Before Ordination	Both traditions require candidates to pass an examination on Dhamma, <i>Vinaya</i> and monastic precepts.	
		Training in Monastic Etiquette	Candidates in both traditions receive training on proper deportment, robe-wearing, and alms bowl handling.	
		Memorisation Requirements	Candidates must memorise important monastic texts to understand monastic discipline.	
	Differences	Knowledge Assessment Specifics	Candidates must memorise four essential <i>Vinaya</i> texts required for monastic life in the Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese but are not required to memorize the formal recitation for the Full Ordination ritual.	Candidates must memorise key <i>Pāli</i> scriptures; memorise and accurately recite the entire formal recitation for the Full Ordination ritual in <i>Pāli</i>
		Confession & Purification	Requires formal confession (<i>Pratideśanā</i>) before the Buddha statue and the <i>Vinaya</i> Masters, where candidates admit past violations of the ten novice precepts, if any.	No formal confession ritual is required before ordination.
		Pre-Ordination Training Focus	Includes detailed guidance on monastic etiquette and ritual performance in the Full Ordination ceremony.	Focus on monastery discipline, with minimal additional ritual training.
	Similarities	General structure	Structured and sequential, including seeking approval, examination, declaration, ordination, and instructing the candidates on observing the precepts. Conducted with strict procedures to ensure the candidate's eligibility to become a <i>Bhikkhu</i> .	
		Overall sequence	Includes performing the <i>Saṅgha-Kamma</i>	Does not include performing the

Ritual Structure and Sequence	Differences	and structure	to announce the start of the ordination formally.	<i>Saṅgha–Kamma</i> to announce the start of the ordination formally. However, in <i>Theravāda</i> , this stage is replaced by the Scrutiny of Bowl and Robes to ensure proper preparation of robes and alms bowl.
			Includes Ritual of Receiving the Essential <i>Bhikkhu</i> Belongings as a detailed ceremony for receiving robes and items.	Does not include an elaborate ritual for receiving <i>Bhikkhu</i> belongings.
		Presentation style	Conducted in the Vietnamese and Sino–Vietnamese, incorporating cultural and ritual elements for added significance.	Entirely conducted in <i>Pāli</i> , concise, and adheres strictly to <i>Vinaya Pitaka</i> .

Discussions

This study examines Mahāyāna and Theravāda Upasampadā structures and compares their patterns in Vietnam, collectively illuminating how shared Vinaya foundations adapt to distinct ritual and cultural environments. Consistent with the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya framework (Buddhayaśas, CBETA T22 No. 1428), contemporary Vietnamese Mahāyāna ordination ceremonies adhere to the "Motion and Three Proclamations" protocol (Mahāvagga I.74.3; Horner, 1971) while layering additional aesthetic and institutional elements. Candidates progress through a “Three-Platform” model: novice, Bhikkhu/Bhikkhunī, and Bodhisattva precepts, within the Tam Đàn Đại Giới (Great Precept Transmission Ceremony), employing Sino-Vietnamese liturgy and ornate vestments (Thích Thiện Hòa, 2008; Thích Đồng Minh, 1999). These embellishments reflect

centuries of cultural integration, as noted by Nguyen Lang (2000) and Le Manh That (2006), whereby Vietnamese feudal and indigenous ritual sensibilities infuse the standard Vinaya protocol.

Vietnamese Theravāda ordinations align closely with Pāli Vinaya codifications, as outlined in Vinaya Sankhepa (Bodhisīla Bhikkhu, 2003), Pabbajita Vinaya Sankhepa (Vaṇsarakkhita Bhikkhu, 1993), and The Buddhist Monastic Code II (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, 2013). Field observations confirm a streamlined sequence led by an Upajjhāya, two Ācariyas, and a minimum of seven bhikkhus, emphasizing Pāli recitation and minimal ceremonial paraphernalia. Historical Khmer influences in southern Vietnam have also shaped Theravāda platforms, resulting in localized adaptations that maintain procedural simplicity while accommodating resource constraints (Thien Hau, 2017).

Despite sharing the Four Fulfilling Conditions (perfect candidate, assembly, boundary, announcement) and the Motion and Three Proclamations rite, Mahāyāna and Theravāda ceremonies diverge significantly in ritual complexity, language use, and communal involvement. The Vietnam Buddhist Sangha's 2023 ordination regulations introduce a "dual-track" framework, allowing each tradition to perform its distinct liturgy within a unified administrative structure (Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, 2023). Recent joint Great Precept Transmission events in Hồ Chí Minh City and Huế demonstrate emerging inter-tradition solidarity while preserving sectarian specificity (Thích Tâm Hải, 2015).

The findings underscore the necessity of integrated Vinaya education. Texts such as Luật Học Tinh Yếu (Thích Phước Sơn, 2006) and Truyền Giới Chánh Phạm (Huệ Nghiêm Vinaya Temple, 2020) provide models for curricula that balance Mahāyāna's ceremonial sophistication with Theravāda's procedural rigour. Strengthening such programs can enhance monastic competency, support Bhikkhunī initiatives, and reinforce communal cohesion.

Building on this comparative analysis, future research should adopt longitudinal designs to track ordination outcomes, survey regional ritual variants, and evaluate the long-term impact of VBS-led harmonisation on sectarian relations. Promoting collaborative ordination workshops and educational exchanges between Mahāyāna and Theravāda communities will further bridge doctrinal divides, ensuring that Upasampadā remains a vibrant conduit for the Buddha's teachings in Vietnam's pluralistic context.

Knowledge from Research

This research has generated substantial knowledge from studying the theory and practice of the Full Ordination Ceremony (Upasampadā) in contemporary Vietnamese Buddhism. Through detailed examination of both Mahāyāna and Theravāda traditions, three key dimensions of understanding have emerged: historical, structural, and comparative knowledge.

First, the study significantly contributes to historical knowledge regarding the transmission and evolution of ordination practices in Vietnam. The insights gained from this research reveal that Mahāyāna ordination, based on the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya, has been established in Vietnam for centuries, evolving alongside Vietnamese dynastic, cultural, and monastic institutions. In contrast, Theravāda ordination, following the Pāli Vinaya, was initially preserved within the Khmer ethnic community and only later adopted by Vietnamese Kinh monks in the 20th century. This historical progression enriches our understanding of how ordination practices serve not only religious but also cultural and political functions within a national context.

Second, the research enhances structural knowledge about the ritual components and procedural frameworks of the Full Ordination Ceremony. The study provides detailed documentation and analysis of key ritual elements, such as the Four Fulfilling Conditions, the Motion and Three Proclamations, the role of the Preceptor and Witnessing Masters, and the preparatory steps before ordination, in both traditions. This documentation serves as a scholarly reference for the standardised format of ordination across traditions, and it clarifies how each tradition organises its respective rituals following its Vinaya lineage.

Third, this research develops comparative knowledge by identifying both similarities and differences between Mahāyāna and Theravāda ordination ceremonies. While both traditions uphold Vinaya principles and emphasize ethical and spiritual readiness, Mahāyāna ceremonies tend to be more elaborate, involving a Council of Ten Venerable Masters, additional liturgical roles, and aesthetic features influenced by Vietnamese court rituals. Theravāda ordinations, in contrast, remain simpler and more canonical in form. The comparative findings from this research also explore how regional adaptations, cultural integration, and lay involvement shape the unique identity of each tradition's ordination ceremony in Vietnam.

Knowledge from Research

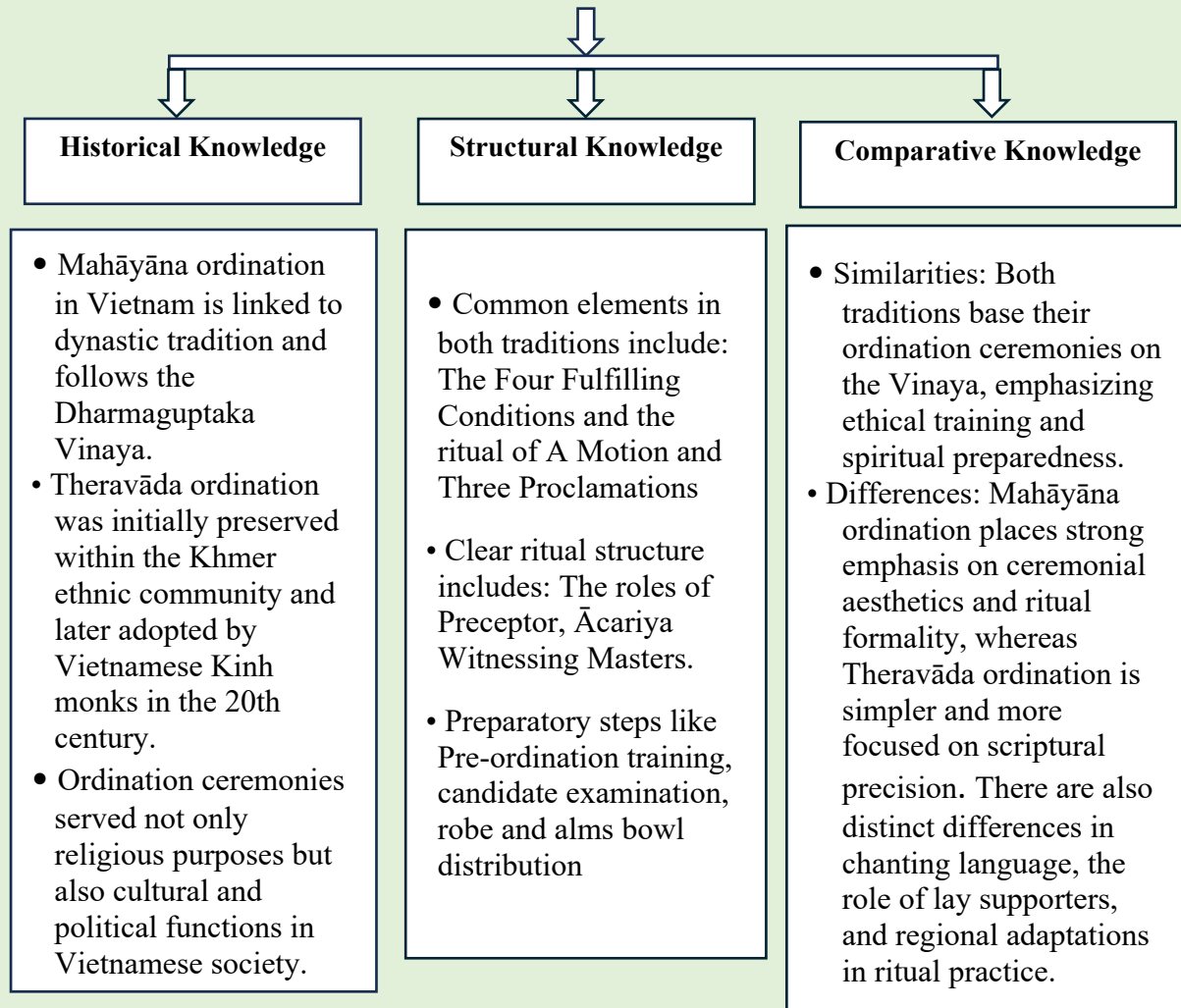


Figure 2: Knowledge from Research

Furthermore, this study contributes practical insights derived from this knowledge base into the modern efforts of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha to harmonize these traditions without diminishing their unique identities. The knowledge gained from this research provides a foundation for policymaking in Buddhist education, ordination governance, and future Vinaya training across traditions. This body of knowledge supports a clearer, more systematic approach to organizing ordination ceremonies, maintaining doctrinal integrity, and fostering mutual respect between different Buddhist schools.

In summary, the knowledge acquired from this research not only deepens theoretical understanding of the Upasampadā rite but also provides applicable knowledge that can be utilized in religious education, inter-sectarian dialogue, and administrative planning within the Vietnamese Buddhist context

Conclusion

This comparative study of Mahāyāna and Theravāda Upasampadā ceremonies in contemporary Vietnam underscores the dynamic interplay between doctrinal fidelity and cultural adaptation within Buddhist ordination practices. By tracing the historical trajectories, liturgical architectures, and institutional frameworks of each tradition, this research illuminates how ordination ceremonies serve not only as spiritual thresholds but also as vehicles for preserving monastic discipline, transmitting communal values, and negotiating identity in a rapidly modernising society.

In the Mahāyāna context, the ordination ritual, steeped in the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya, manifests as a ceremonially rich, hierarchical event. Candidates undergo rigorous pre-ordination preparation, including doctrinal examinations, ritual training, and community sponsorship. The formal ceremony is distinguished by a Ten Masters Council, the use of Sino-Vietnamese liturgical texts, elaborate vestments, and performative aesthetics inherited from Vietnam's feudal court traditions. This emphasis on formality and symbolism reflects Mahāyāna's integrative approach to Buddhist praxis, where ritual artifice and communal pageantry reinforce the aspirant's transition into monastic life.

Theravāda ordination, in contrast, hews closely to the Pāli Vinaya's canonical prescriptions. Conducted by a Saṅgha council (an Upajjhāya plus two Ācariyas and a quorum of ten monks), the ceremony prioritises procedural clarity, Pāli recitation, and minimal ritual paraphernalia. The central action, the Motion and Three Proclamations, unfolds with methodical precision, underscoring Theravāda's valorisation of textual accuracy and unadorned simplicity. Traditions share foundational commitments, the inviolability of the Vinaya code, the pivotal role of formal proclamation rites, and the ethical imperative of candidate preparedness. Importantly, the Vietnam Buddhist Saṅgha's regulatory interventions have promoted inter-tradition mutual recognition, standardised ordination protocols, and occasional joint ceremonies, paving the way for greater ecclesial cohesion.

This study recommends strengthening Vinaya pedagogy through integrated curricula that draw upon both Dharmaguptaka and Pāli resources, fostering inter-sectarian workshops for monastic educators, and supporting Bhikkhunī ordination initiatives. Future research might undertake longitudinal studies of ordination outcomes, map regional variants beyond urban centres, and

explore lay perceptions of ordination as a marker of social and spiritual legitimacy. By framing Upasampadā as both tradition and innovation, this work contributes to a nuanced understanding of how Vietnamese Buddhism sustains the Saṅgha's continuity amid changing cultural landscapes.

Suggestions

From this study's findings, several key suggestions emerge to support the advancement, refinement, and harmonization of the Full Ordination Ceremony (Upasampadā) in contemporary Vietnamese Buddhism. These proposals target two main areas: practical applications for the Saṅgha community and future research directions for scholars.

For the Saṅgha, it's vital to continue strengthening Buddhist education and inter-tradition collaboration. This can be achieved by developing a unified regulatory framework for ordination under the Vietnam Buddhist Saṅgha (VBS). Such a framework should standardize eligibility criteria and training requirements while implementing a centralized digital system for monastic records. Enhancing inter-tradition educational exchange is also crucial; creating shared curricula, conducting joint Vinaya workshops, and promoting doctrinal understanding between Mahāyāna and Theravāda will foster unity. Furthermore, balancing tradition with administrative efficiency means embracing digitalization for records and post-ordination training programs. Expanding joint ordination platforms, already successful in cities like Hồ Chí Minh and Huế, will allow each tradition to maintain its unique procedures within a shared, unifying framework. Finally, strengthening lay support through structured educational programs can deepen their understanding of ordination's significance and foster long-term connections with the Saṅgha.

For future research, this study provides a foundation for exploring the implications of these findings on monastic discipline and religious identity. Scholars could delve into the historical development of ordination ceremonies under various influences, from dynastic patronage to modern state administration. Comparative studies with Buddhist countries and traditions (e.g., Thailand, Myanmar, or Chinese Mahāyāna) would offer invaluable cross-cultural insights into Vinaya implementation and training models. There's also significant potential in exploring the revival of Bhikkhunī ordination in Vietnam, examining its historical trajectory, doctrinal challenges, and institutional responses, drawing

lessons from successful revivals elsewhere. By pursuing these avenues, future research can deepen our understanding of Buddhist ordination, support tradition-based reforms, and contribute to the ongoing development and unity of the Vietnamese Buddhist Saṅgha.

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