

## Chapter 3

### **Hué: The Influences of Feng Shui on Landscape and Architecture**

This chapter is an overview of Feng Shui applications including the elements and principles which were applied to Hué and its landscape architecture. It explores how Feng Shui applications can be manifested through spatial arrangements of various building types, and illustrates how Feng Shui can be adapted for large and small scale applications.

#### **3.1 Hué – Preamble**

Hué, a city in central Viet Nam and capital of Thua Thien Province, lies on the Huong River, known as Perfume River, about 15 kilometers or 9 miles from the west of the Gulf of Tonkin and about 650 kilometres or 400 miles from the south of Ha Noi. Hué was an important repository of Viet Nam's ancient past, dominated by majestic temples, ancient tombs, and the imperial Citadel.

Recent archeological findings show traces of dwelling in Hué for thousands of years. Relics, such as stone axes and pottery ware, dating back 4000 years, show human occupation in the area. Stone axes found at regional places such as Hong Bac, Hong Van, Hong Ha, Hong Thuy, Bac Son (A Luoi), and Phong Thu (Phong Dien) prove the existence of life in this area, which could be in excess of 5000 years ago (Glover, 1999). In 1987, a Cong Rang relic indicates that the inhabitants of La Chu, Huong Chu, and Huong Tra had highly spiritual and material lives for some 2,500 years. Similar finding were found in Cua Thieng in 1988 (Glover, 1999).

Many historical buildings are located in Hué, largely a legacy from its time as the capital of the Nguyen dynasty (1802-1945) (Phan, 1998). The city was instrumental in the political movement against Viet Nam's emperor. During the 1945 August Revolution, a popular uprising for independence, a coalition of communist and nationalist forces seized Hué and forced the last Nguyen emperor to abdicate.

After Viet Nam was partitioned in 1954, Hué became part of South Viet Nam. Since the city lies near North Viet Nam, it was central in much of the fighting during the American War in Viet Nam. During the Tet Offensive in early 1968 North Vietnamese and National Liberation Front (NLF) forces held the city for 25 days. During the retaking of the city by the U.S. and South Vietnamese forces, the Forbidden Purple City - part of the royal complex - was heavily damaged. NLF troops finally recaptured the city on March 25, 1975. The rich history of Hué has been recognised by the United Nations, and the designation of the 410<sup>th</sup> World Heritage Council site.

### **3.2 Feng Shui – Introduction to Viet Nam**

The invasion by the Chinese in Viet Nam in 111BC signaled the commencement of Chinese rule which only ended in 938 AD (Phan, 1998). It is not surprising that Feng Shui applications were imported to Hué. Initially, Feng Shui consultants walked the land, test the soil, studied the signs made by wind and water, and sought the *Five Geographical Elements* regarded as the signs of prosperity (Rossabach, 1983; Yu, 1998).

### **3.3 Feng Shui – Application in Hué**

In this chapter the larger system can be explored in terms of the “natural poetic landscape”; referring to natural formations (Adamson, 1999). In opposition to the larger system, are artificial systems; understood as smaller systems which can be identified by the manipulation of landscape and architectural elements. In this research, both of these elements can be called “man-made”.

There are acute differences between the larger regional Feng Shui system and that of the smaller systems within. These differences exist despite the fact that natural elements are shared by multiple systems.

### 3.3.1 The Landscape of Hué as a Whole System

When the Feng Shui consultants of the first Nguyen emperor searched for a suitable site for the capital Hué was selected because it is at the centre of the country (Figure 3-1). The location is comprised of various desirable geographic features, such as background mountains of the Truong Son range, embracing forests, vast plains, the Perfume River and, most importantly, the Gulf of Tonkin (Adamson, 1999). These geographic features can be described as the *Five Geographical Elements* of Hué.

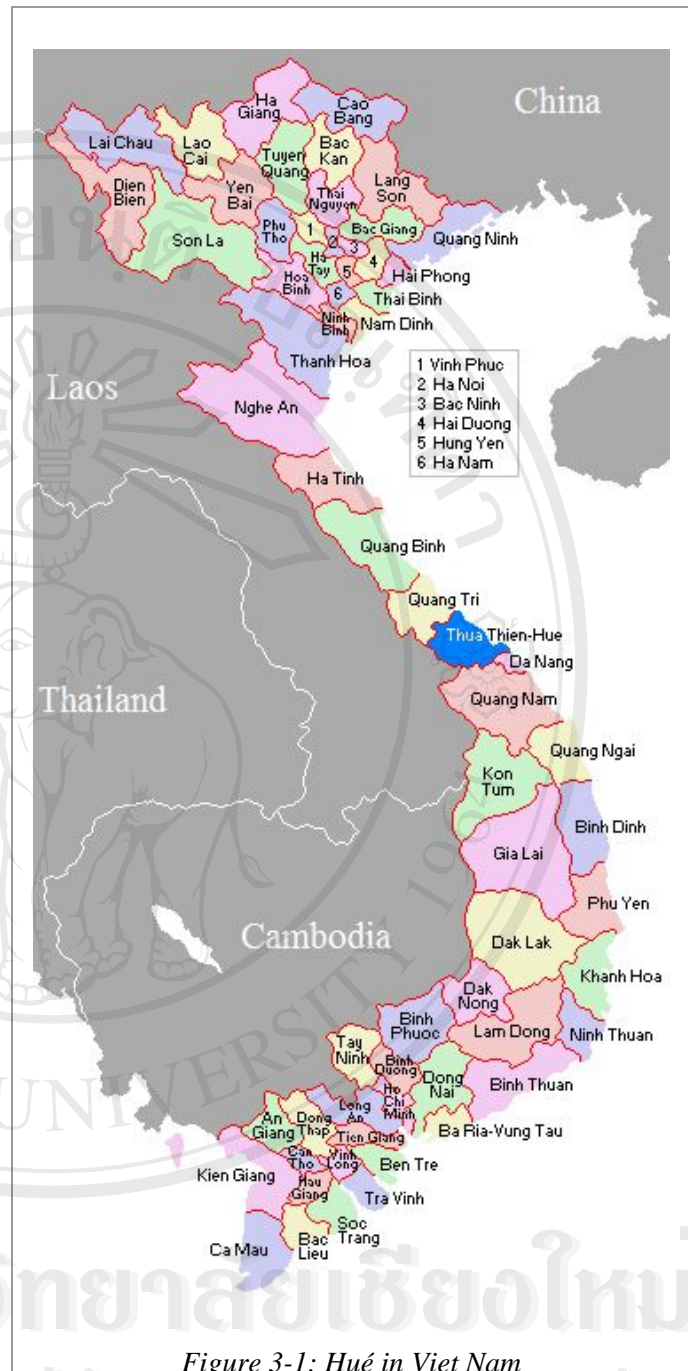


Figure 3-1: Hué in Viet Nam

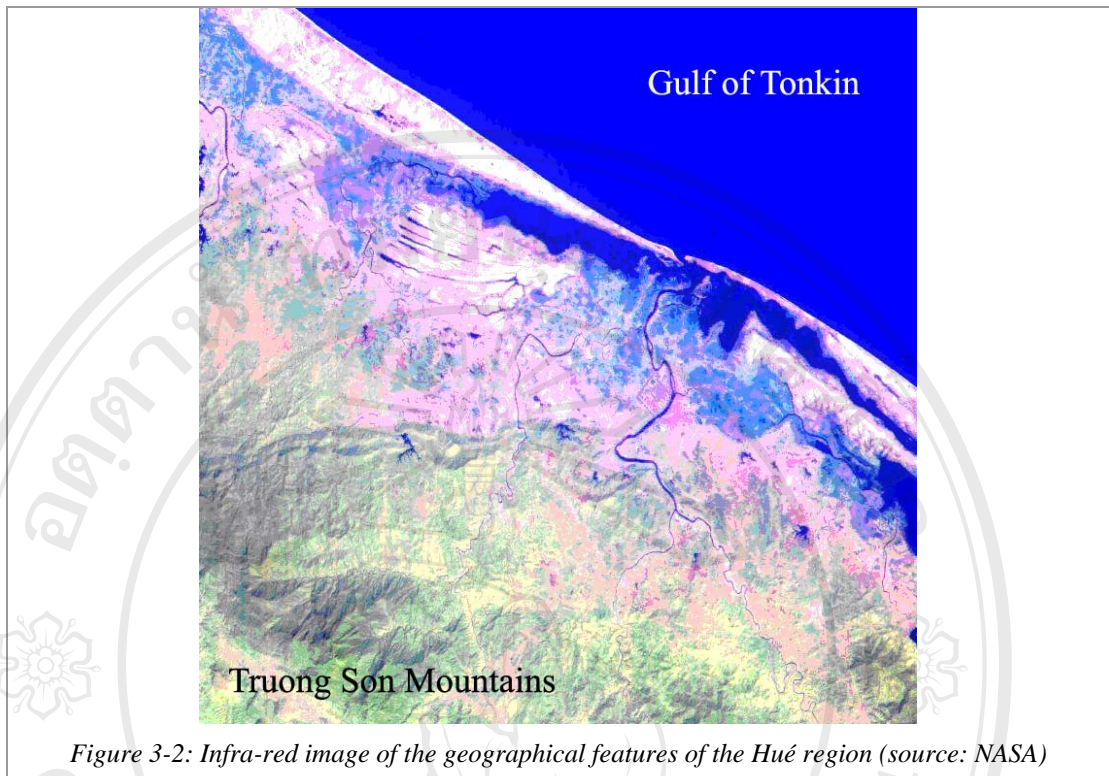


Figure 3-2: Infra-red image of the geographical features of the Hué region (source: NASA)

In the large scale application, mountains and watercourses, Dragon Vein and Water element respectively, were the first two important considerations when selecting Hué. Imbued with *Living Qi*, it is believed that Hué is protected by the Truong Son Mountains and blessed with incoming opportunities from the Gulf of Tonkin and the Perfume River (Figure 3-2).

The Truong Son Mountain Range protects Hué and nearby farm lands from harsh winds which arise in the springtime, the monsoon, and during April and May. The many Gulf of Tonkin commercial ports including Thuan An, Lang Co and Canh Duong meant prosperity for the capital. The Perfume River provided water to nourish the crops (Phan, 2001). It is believed that these geographical features form wholeness within and harmony between humanity, nature and heaven (Phan, 1998).

Despite suffering substantial damage in the American War in Viet Nam much of Hué's ancient architecture survived; including the royal Citadel, religious pagodas and common garden houses. This ancient architecture is built within the larger system of the "natural poetic landscape" (Adamson, 1999) and based on Feng Shui rules in terms of spatial arrangements (Phan, 1998). The unification of ancient architecture



and the “natural poetic landscape” at Hué can be described as “landscape architecture” (Phan, 1998). Phan (1998) holds that the landscape architecture of the ancient capital of Hué contains Feng Shui because the site embodies all Five Geographical Elements.

### 3.3.2 The Citadel Construct

The location of the Citadel was chosen to be the foundation of the Nguyen Dynasty. The Citadel, in which the royal family lived, forms the heart of Hué (Adamson, 1999). The ‘whole system’ concept of landscape design of the city of Hué, including the spatial arrangement of the Citadel is balanced between natural landscape and artificial architectures.

With respect to the natural landscape, the selection of a harmonious place to build the Citadel contained important geographical elements such as expanding river, screen-mountain, fertile and verdant greenery (Phan, 1998). The Citadel was designed to induce the flows of *Qi* and to enrich the prosperity of the immortal royal family (Phan, 1998).

#### ❖ Natural landscape

The *Dragon Vein* element of the Citadel is shared with the one of the city (Truong Son Mountains) at a longer distance in a larger scale.

The *Sand* element of the Citadel can be identified by the *Four Emblem Animals*. *Green Dragon* and *White Tiger* elements represented by Hen and Da Vien Islands respectively in the Perfume River became two guardians of the Citadel (Figure 3-3). The *Red Phoenix* element represented by Ngu Binh Mountain functions as a screen to protect the Citadel from *Dead Qi* and a beacon of fortune (Phan, 1998) (Figures 3-3 and 3-4). However, it lacks the *Black Tortoise* at the rear of the Citadel.

The *Water* element is represented by the widening river section, *Water Mouth*, in front of the Citadel. A famous physical attribute of the Perfume River is the leisurely flow of fragrant water. When passing in front of the

Citadel the river widens signifying abundance for the Nguyen Dynasty, the Emperors, and their descendants (Figure 3-5).

The *Cave* element is defined by the *Outer Bright Court*, symbolized by the large square in front of the Citadel. The square is of military importance because it prevents enemies from lurking or attacking unexpectedly

The *Direction* of the smaller Feng Shui application determines the orientation of the Citadel complex - but does so whilst maintaining the balance of the two islands. The Citadel's orientation is southeast, embracing a bright future and becomes the guideline for all essential buildings of the Citadel. The major buildings such as High Noon Gate, Thai Hoa Palace, Can Chanh Palace are along the main axis, separated by large courtyards including *Inner Bright Court*. Buildings of lesser importance are on either side of the main axis in symmetrical balance.

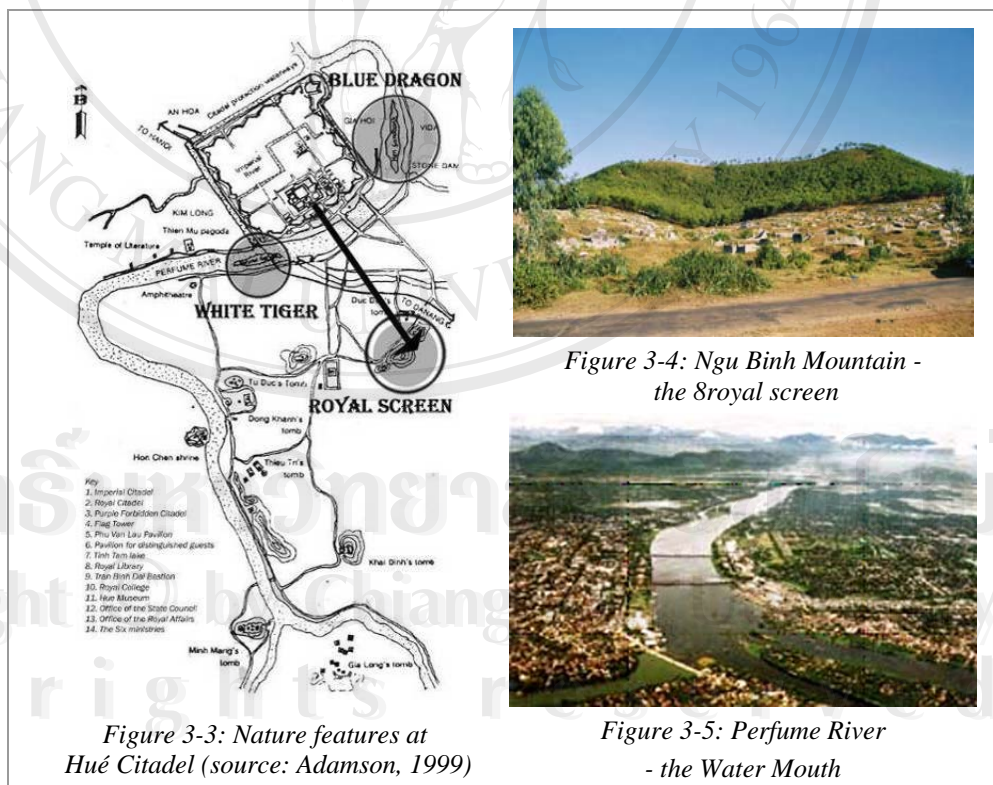


Figure 3-3: Nature features at Hué Citadel (source: Adamson, 1999)

Figure 3-4: Ngu Binh Mountain - the 8royal screen

Figure 3-5: Perfume River - the Water Mouth

### ❖ Man-made architecture

Whilst using *Five Geographical Elements* to achieve the *Living Qi* throughout the landscape of the Citadel, the Nguyen emperors and their Feng Shui consultants also practiced Feng Shui applications on the architecture. In particular, the principles of spatial arrangement such as *Yin-Yang* and the uses of the Feng Shui motifs were practiced.

To understand how both *Yin-Yang* principles and Feng Shui *motifs* were used in the architecture of Hué Citadel, it is important to refer to the ancient cosmology of the Hué Emperors. Believed as Divine Sons of *Heaven* living on *Earth*, their Citadel could only be represented by the *Earth* model.

In Feng Shui practice the *Heaven* model is identified by a round shape whilst the *Earth* model is identified by a square shape. The Citadel is comprised of a series of enclosures (Figure 3-6) around the throne, which is the heart of the Empire (Figure 3-7). The architecture of the Hué Citadel is designed to reflect the *Earth* model by the reduction of the scale of the larger unit.

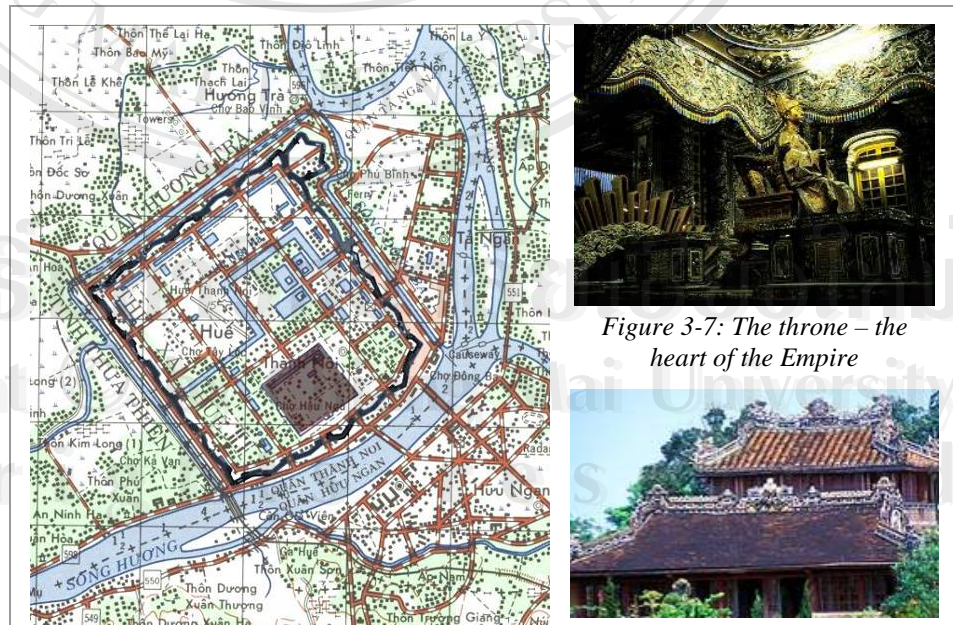


Figure 3-7: The throne – the heart of the Empire



The Hué Citadel complex (Figure 3-6) encompasses the Capital Citadel (“Kinh thành”: the biggest rampart), the Royal Citadel (“Hoàng thành”: the middle rampart) and the Forbidden Citadel (“Tử cấm thành”: the smallest rampart) (Phan, 1998).

The harmony of the cosmos can be understood as the combination of the opposite and complementary energies *Yin-Yang*.

- *Yin* shows shade of mountain, cold rainy weather, right-hand, circle, signifying all that is feminine and passive.
- *Yang* shows the sunny side, heat, left-hand, square, signifying all that is masculine and active.

The architecture is made to harmonize the Citadel with the *Yin-Yang* rhythm of nature. For example, the idea of “*Heaven* is round, *Earth* is square” is a manifestation of *Yin-Yang* principle, this led to the square configuration of the Citadel. *Yin-Yang* principle is applied in the spatial arrangement with the left room/house for man and the right room/house for woman. *Yin-Yang* roofing tiles are used on all of buildings (Figure 3-8). *Yin-Yang* can be also understood as the harmonious combination of nature (*Yin*) and architectural constructs (*Yang*), which is the reason why every building in the Citadel has its own garden (Figure 3-9).



Figure 3-9: A rockery in a royal garden



Figure 3-10: A model of cosmos in the Co Ha royal garden

Gardens within the Citadel are designed to reflect the *Yin-Yang* principle. Each garden is a reproduction of the cosmos; rocks, verdant trees and small ponds mimic the image of the greater world with its mountains,



forests and limitless oceans (Figure 3-10). Within each garden, *Yin* and *Yang* are represented by the smooth water (*Yin*) under the sharp rockery (*Yang*), or the still of the rockery (*Yin*) and the flow of water (*Yang*) (Figures 3-9, 3-10). Each element contains both *Yin* and *Yang* which allows it to balance itself with the surroundings.

Feng Shui motifs which include statues, pictures, stylized Chinese characters and embossments were deployed in various locations throughout the architectural detail of the Citadel. It is believed that statues of a *Tiger* or *Phoenix* could totally substitute for natural features (Phan, 1998), especially at locations where natural features are absent.

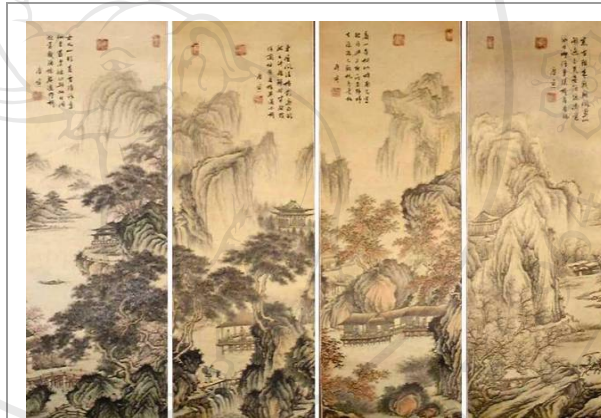


Figure 3-11: Motif of the Four Seasons

Feng Shui motifs include the *Four Seasons*: for *Spring* - the Apricot; for *Summer* - the Lotus; for *Autumn* - the Daisy; for *Winter* - the Willow (Figure 3-11); the *Four Emblem Animals*: the *Dragon*, *Tiger*, *Tortoise*, *Phoenix* (Figure 3-12, 3-13); stylized Chinese characters (Figure 3-14); and the *Two Dragons* fighting for a pearl (Phan, 1998).



Figure 3-12: The Tiger motif



Figure 3-13: The Phoenix motif

These motifs can be regarded as visual tales expressing human desires. For example, the *Four Seasons* signifies the need to live in harmony with nature; the *Four Emblem Animals* illustrates the idea of protecting humans from natural calamities; and the *Two Dragons* fighting to get the pearl expresses the desire of Nguyen Emperors to possess eternal life (Figure 3-15).



Figure 3-14: Stylized "Double Happiness" motif



Figure 3-15: Two Dragons motif

As discussed earlier, Feng Shui symbols can be deployed where naturally occurring features are absent. The decorative *motifs* have a function - forming elements of *Living Qi*. *Tiger* or *Dragon* statues (Figure 3-12) are symbolic guardians, usually placed in front of buildings. The *Phoenix* motif (Figure 3-13) placed in a wall substitutes for the natural feature of a small hill, and is symbolic in signifying good fortune for the buildings residents. Double-rowed groupings of civil and military Mandarin statues symbolize a wealthy and prosperous dynasty (Phan, 2001).

### 3.3.3 Pagodas of Hué

Feng Shui applications are employed in the design of pagodas. As the population of Hué can be inferred to be spiritual (Phan, 2001), many pagodas, which serve this traditional belief, have been constructed throughout the city. The landscape and architecture of pagodas are regarded as art in Viet Nam venerating the spirit world and religious ceremonies (Phan, 2001). In Hué and the neighboring vicinity, there were a large number of renowned pagodas built over the last 400 years which included Thien Mu, Bao Quoc, Tuy Van, all of which employed Form School Feng Shui (Adamson, 1999).

### ❖ Pagoda landscapes

With regard to the landscape of pagodas, *Five Geographical Elements* are the most important features in the selection of the land. Unlike the Citadel, where the natural features are sought to exploit the harmony of the land and all advantages from nature, the pagodas are not harmonized nor do they draw any advantages from nature. On a small scale, it is not easy to locate a site with a mountainous landscape (*Dragon Vein*) and a river (*Water*) in front. So the Hué ancients tended to improve the location of pagodas by using artificial environments.

The *Dragon Vein* can be referred to as the high topography on which some ancient pagodas of Hué are located, sheltered by mountains or protected by trees at the rear. Being quiet and calm, they seclude themselves from society, yet take full advantage of the *Dragon Vein* properties. Pagodas of Thien Mu, Bao Quoc, Huyen Khong 1 and 2, Tuy Van, Tu Hieu are such examples.

The *Sand* can be formed by the *Four Emblem Animals* which are created by artificial features such as a screen wall with the *Red Phoenix*. The combination of trees and stone represent the *Green Dragon* and the *White Tiger* at the left and the right of the land respectively (Figure 3-16) as viewed from the pagoda. The group of trees at the rear represents the *Black Tortoise*. All pagodas of Hué are enclosed by perennial plants, providing cool shade and protection from the harsh climate (Phan, 1998).

The *Water* can be represented by a pond located either to the front or rear of the pagoda entrance. This pond represents the element of *Water Mouth*, also symbolizing watercourses cleaning the dust of life. Some pagodas, such as Thien Mu (Figure 3-17) or Hon Chen face a river naturally, and for those lacking natural water features the artificial features such as fishponds or streams are provided (Figure 3-18).



The *Cave* can be defined by a front yard, which plays the role of *Bright Court* (Figures 3-19, 3-20). In the pagodas of Hué, *Bright Courts* can be further subdivided into a “*Inner Bright Court*” that is in front of a pagoda, and a “*Outer Bright Court*” located in front of the whole pagoda complex in the main North-South axis.

The *Direction* can be determined as the pagodas of Hué face south. There is a famous saying in Viet Nam of “Sages face south to pacify the world” (“Thánh nhân nhìn hướng nam bình thiên hạ”), and pagodas are no exception. Many pagodas like Thien Mu, Tu Hieu, Bao Quoc were oriented to face south, southwest or southeast, rather than to face a road or path.



Figure 3-16: Thien Mu Pagoda – Green Dragon

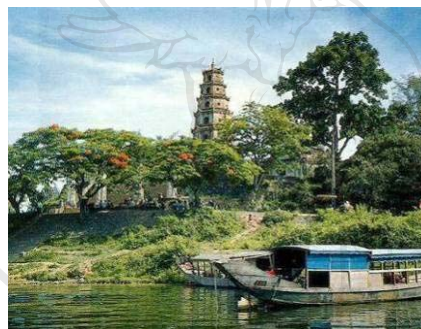


Figure 3-17: Thien Mu Pagoda – natural water



Figure 3-18: Tu Hieu Pagoda - Pond



Figure 3-19: Bao Quoc Pagoda - Bright Court & Water Mouth



Figure 3-20: Tu Hieu Pagoda - Bright Court

#### ❖ Man-made architecture

Whilst the *Five Geographical Elements* in a natural landscape are found in balance in the North-South axis, it is believed that the symmetrical structure in the man-made architectures of the pagodas are another way to

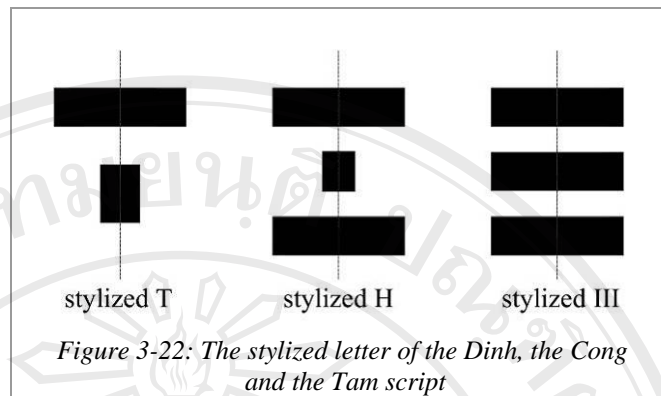
perform *Qi*. In this structure the middle axis, called the *Spirit Axis* (“trục Thần đạo”), is oriented North-South, and the buildings within the pagodas are arranged symmetrically around this axis (Figure 3-21).



Figure 3-21: Thien Mu Pagoda - The complex is oriented around the main North-South axis, facing North

Besides, the ancient Vietnamese *Chu Nom* scripts, which carry both good meanings and the balanced structure of the letters, are used popularly in the architectures of the pagodas. The most frequent scripts used are *Dinh* (signifying strength), *Cong* (signifying positive attack) and *Tam* (signifying the *Three Abundances* of *Heaven*, *Human* and *Earth*). The main buildings oriented around the *Spirit Axis*, in symmetrically balance, is a stylization of *Chu Nom* scripts.

*Chu Han* and *Chu Nom*, both using Han ideographs, were the national scripts of Viet Nam. *Chu Han* was used from the 1<sup>st</sup> century to 10<sup>th</sup> century, from whence *Chu Nom* was developed to better represent spoken Vietnamese. *Quoc ngu* is a Latin-based script, with additional tone marks, developed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and adopted as the national script in the 1920's.



According to Phan (1998), the simplest form of architectural layout in the pagodas follows the letter *Dinh* (stylized T), consisting of the main sanctuary perpendicular to the praying hall in the front. Another layout is the letter *Cong* (stylized H) where the main sanctuary and the praying hall are parallel and linked by a hall called the incense-burning hall. Another layout is the letter *Tam* (stylized III) which includes three parallel buildings, the lower, the middle and the upper building (Figure 3-22). Around the main buildings there are secondary buildings such as house of the Head, residence for monks, bell-tower and the three-door entrance as the entry gate of the temple. Regardless of scripts, buildings in the Hué pagodas are arranged along the *Spirit Axis* and are symmetric.

### 3.3.4 Hué Garden Houses

Hué preserves a special type of common architecture, which is not seen in other regions in Viet Nam, but appeared hundreds years ago in Hué – the garden house (Phan, 1998). Whilst the royal family lived in the Citadel, many other distant royal relatives and rich people lived in garden houses in villages such as Nguyet Bieu, Vy Da and Kim Long. Like the uses of Feng Shui applications in the Citadel and the pagodas, distant royal relatives and rich people used Feng Shui applications for the choice of their home site, directions, and home layouts (Adamson, 1999).



### ❖ Garden Houses landscape

The *Dragon Vein* can be represented by the high topography helping to elevate the buildings from flooding. Whilst the Citadel and pagodas are located in a mountainous landscape, Garden Houses cannot utilize such real natural feature. Instead, they use an even and flat terrain with trees at the back to symbolize mountains.

Perennial trees such as jackfruit, plum, or tamarind

are selected to protect the house from harsh wind whilst enjoying some economic values from harvesting.

The *Sand* is provided by the *Four Emblem Animals* and the surrounding trees (Figure 3-23). Similarly with *Sand* of the pagodas, the two trees in the front yard can be seen as the *Green Dragon* and *White Tiger* (Figure 3-24), the brick screen can be seen as *Red Phoenix* (Figure 3-25), banana trees with large foliage at the rear can be seen as *Black Tortoise*, corresponds to the ancient saying “arecas in front, bananas on back” (“trước cau sau chuối”). It is important to note that the *Black Tortoise* coincides with the perennial trees which symbolized a stable mountain of *Dragon Vein*.

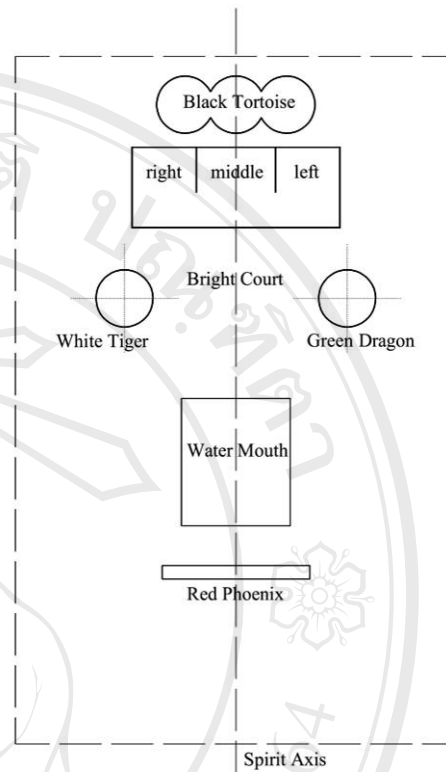


Figure 3-23: Garden house schematic



Figure 3-24: The front two trees –  
Green Dragon and White Tiger



Figure 3-25: The screen –  
Red Phoenix

According to Phan (1998), behind the front entrances is to be found the screen of Garden Houses which symbolizes the *Red Phoenix*. Usually they are constructed of brick and contain art or a legends or the story of the building construction. The screen depicted in Figure 3-25 contains art in the form of *Two Dragons* fighting for a pearl motif. Figure 3-26 shows a *Red Phoenix* screen decorated with *Double Happiness* motif.



Figure 3-26: The brick screen



Figure 3-27: The plant screen

Alternatively, a group of medium-sized trees (Figure 3-27) can be used in place of a screen, reducing both strong winds and curiosity seekers' stares. This screen also creates openness for the garden and reduces the separation between the house and its surroundings (Phan, 1998).

The *Cave* which means the house location can be defined by the *Bright Court* in front. In garden houses, the front yard plays the role of the *Bright Court* (Figures 3-24 and 3-25). There is only an *Inner Bright Court* located between the house and the *Water*.

The *Water* in garden houses is represented by a water pond with rockery or a small aquarium with lotus flowers, goldfish and carp (Figure 3-28), located behind the screen. There are also two rows of short trees such as hibiscus, roses, or laurels surrounding the pond. The pond improves the microclimate by evaporation and creates a calm atmosphere (Phan, 1998).



Figure 3-28: Pond cools the environment

The *Direction* in garden houses is met by orienting them to the south, which is reiterated in a Vietnamese saying "Get married to a woman, build south-facing house" ("Lấy vợ đàn bà, làm nhà hướng nam"). Houses with south facing aspects can avoid cold wind from the northeast in winter and enjoy fresh wind from the south in summer. *Living Qi* which comes with the fresh wind can enter the houses easily. Some houses turn away from the road for two reasons; (1) to have good direction, to face south, and (2) to have an escape from the noise and hot atmosphere of outside life (Phan, 1998).

❖ **Man-made architecture**

*Yin-Yang* principle, in particular the notion of *Yin* represented by feminine and passive and *Yang* represented by masculine and active, can be seen clearly in the spatial arrangement of garden houses. Normally, garden houses are divided into three spaces: the *Yang* space on the left for men



(“nam tả”), the *Yin* space on the right for women (“nữ hữ”), and the middle space to worship the Buddha or ancestors (Figure 3-23). The *Yang* space could be connected with expanded room for first-born son (*Yang*) whilst the *Yin* space on the right connected with the kitchen for woman and daughters (*Yin*).

Garden houses are made of wooden construction, with carefully executed carvings and decorations. They are located in the middle of large gardens with beautiful bonsai and trees providing year round shade and flowers. The Feng Shui elements in a garden houses are usually comprised of a main entrance, minor entrances, a screen at the front yard, rockery, and a small aquarium. Together, with the main building in the centre of garden, there are several secondary buildings and a water well, for daily use. Like the Citadel and the pagodas, garden houses have a main axis through the main components. This main axis is regarded as the *Spirit Axis* for the house, following the principle of the *Five Geographical Elements*.

In summary, this chapter has explored the important applications of Feng Shui practice used in the context of Hué. There are various Feng Shui manifestations to be found in various architectural forms in Hué such as the Citadel, the pagodas and garden houses, as discussed above. These architectural styles reflect both Vietnamese aesthetic and foreign influences in particular China (Phan, 1998). Feng Shui influences on the landscape architectures of Hué, Viet Nam can be highlighted as follows:

Firstly, Feng Shui utilizes natural features as a necessary addition to architecture. For example, the Citadel has uses the two islands on the Perfume River and the Ngu Binh Mountain. Natural features are often used because people tend to believe that architecture is controlled by natural elements such as the *Five Geographical Elements*.

Secondly, Feng Shui harmonizes nature with the human environment through the use of gardens. In some architectural styles such as the Citadel, the pagodas and

garden houses, garden plays an important role in harmonizing buildings and the surrounding landscapes. This is to create a smooth transition from larger scale to small scale and from the surrounding natural landscape to the artificial architectures. Hué maintains the fresh green environment with a large number of gardens plants on the streets, and the park systems on both sides of the Perfume River. Hué has been considered a city of gardens because of its garden houses, garden pagodas, and Citadel gardens (Adamson, 1999).

Thirdly, Feng Shui creates a synergy between nature and artificial architectures. Hué architecture tends to remain in harmony with the surrounding landscape. The buildings themselves do not overwhelm the landscape, but rather are made grander by the surrounding rivers, mountains, and meadows.

Finally, Feng Shui helps ease the lack of natural features in artificial architectural environments. Where natural features of the *Five Geographical Elements* are absent, they can be created or replaced by adding features such as planted trees, rockeries, statues, sculptures, or decorative *motifs*.