

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

The affection of the Western world from the past together with the impact of the powerful urbanization of today has influenced to Vietnam country in general and to Hue city in particular, the geographical center and the former capital city of Vietnam. This leads to changes in contemporary societies of Vietnam country as well as of Hue city, especially the alterations in the architectural image of Hue city. Typically, during the 60 years-French domination (1885 – 1945) in Hue city, the manifestation of Hue architecture was considerably altered by the addition of Western architectural styles with new building forms and construction techniques in which the French introduced the outstanding French-influenced characteristics blended harmoniously with Hue traditional architecture. This study is an effort to conserve one historical and valuable type of Vietnamese-French architecture, and contribute partially to the long-term strategy of conserving traditional houses of Hue city and Vietnam.

### 1.1 Back ground of Vietnam

#### 1.1.1 History of Vietnam

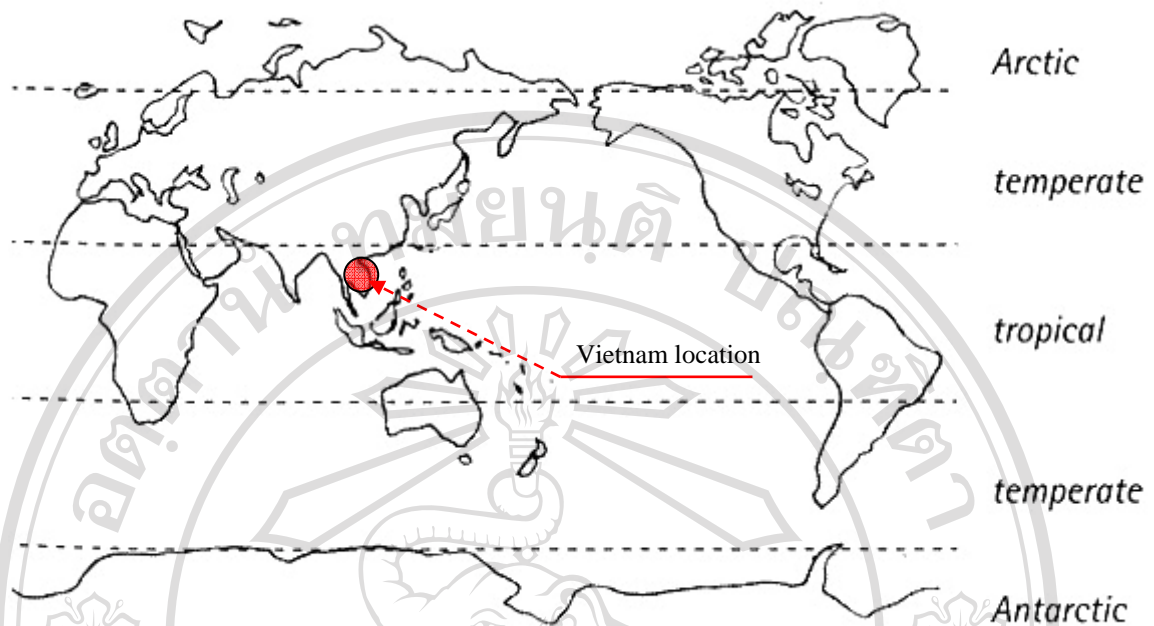
Vietnam country is located in the South-East Asia (Fig.1.1) and bounded on the west by Cambodia and Laos, and on the north by China (Fig.1.3). The country stretches from north to south, tracing the shape of letter S, closely to the East Sea with more than 2254 km of its coastline, and taking up an area of 332.800 km<sup>2</sup>. Through its geographical shape, Vietnam has evolved into three distinctive regions: North Vietnam with Hanoi City on Red River, Central Vietnam with Hue City on Huong

River, and South Vietnam with Ho Chi Minh City on Mekong River. The location of Vietnam beside the sea has made this country as a convenient place of transit in international trading sea-routes.



*Fig.1.1* The world map shows the location of Vietnam in the South-East Asia.

Vietnam is belonged to the tropical climate-zone (Fig.1.2) which has a tropical monsoon climate. It follows an equatorial monsoon rainfall pattern of one wet and one dry season. The north and central Vietnam are stroke by storms earlier and more violently than the south, especially in the coastal areas of central Vietnam like Hue city, tropical storms usually come from August to December from East-Sea direction. Weather patterns along the central Vietnam also include violent summer winds blowing eastward from Laos. The rainy season lasts from May to November.



*Fig.1.2* The climate zone world map addresses Vietnam in the tropical zone, where the French-influenced architecture in Hue city corresponds well with this climate.

The history of Vietnam dates back more than 4,000 years. Epic tales from a timeless past reveal that the genesis of the Vietnamese people began with a fantastic union between the powerful sea god, named Lac Long Quan, and the lovely mountain goddess, named Au Co. Their 100 sons, half followed their father to his sea domain and the other 50 sons joined their mother in the mountains. These mountains were home to the legendary Hung kings who descended from the mountain goddess, Au Co, and reigned over the Van Lang Kingdom (the present Hanoi city). To the southwest of Hanoi lies the Ma River valley, an ancient site where man appeared as early as the Paleolithic Age (300,000-500,000 BC). By the third millennium BC, people in this valley, called Lac Viets, had developed a complex and sophisticated society (the Dong Son culture), evidently, the casting of a single Dong Son bronze drum (excavated in many archeological sites in Vietnam, mostly in northern part) with motifs and decorations of folk-images made by Lac Viet artisans (Fig.1.4). Nowadays,

Vietnamese people recognize the ancient Lac Viets in Dong Son culture as their direct ancestors and the Dong Son bronze drum as the symbol of Vietnamese culture.



*Fig1.3* The Vietnam contacting the sea becomes the place of transit for international trading sea routes.

ลิขสิทธิ์มหาวิทยาลัยเชียงใหม่  
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*Fig.1.4* The Dong Son bronze drum (representing the Dong Son culture in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC) is found in many areas of Vietnam (*right picture*) and become one of cultural symbols of today Vietnam.

Afterward, the history of Vietnam proceeded with 14 Dynasties which included the Chinese domination for over 1000 years (111 BC – 938 AD), the self-control period (939 – 1857), the French colonization (1858 – 1954) before reaching an independent country of today. Vietnamese people have a tradition of strong ties to the family and community. Politeness, sensitivity, modesty, and humility are the traits of Vietnamese. Confucian love in Vietnamese mind reveals itself the affection of Chinese culture and becomes the principal ethic-foundation of society in former times beside other religious loves such as Buddhism, Christian, Animism, Hinduism, and Catholicism.

In the pre-colonial period before 1858, the society of Vietnam still kept the local setting with respect to their customs and traditions. When the French came in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, Vietnamese society started to be affected and changed in the wake of westernization. The first French occupation in Vietnam took place in Da Nang City in 1858 (about 100 km from Hue city southerly), Ho Chi Minh City was then colonized by the Treaty of 1862, Hanoi City fell in 1882, and Hue City in 1885. The colonization process of Hue city occurred later than Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh even though it is closer to Da Nang (the first place of French occupation) because of the government of a series of Vietnamese kings there, the Nguyen kings, at the same time. They directed Hue city with feudal laws but compulsorily with high respect to the French administration until the official-dominated time in 1885.

Vietnamese colonial society was affected by the French concept of the “*Civilizing Mission*”, arising from the western Christian belief in delivering enlightenment to Asia. The initial stage of the colonization process (mid 19<sup>th</sup> century – 1900s) was characterized by little understanding of the local setting and armed-force was the preferred way to ‘assimilate’ or convince local people. Later on, the French adopted a new strategy known as, ‘*Franco-Vietnamese collaboration and harmony*’ in which they recognized that collaboration with the locals was necessary to achieve colonial goals and to increase profits from local products, mainly rice and rubber.<sup>1</sup>

French colonists started to see Vietnamese culture through a western lens and attempted to change what did not suit their culture. According to Professor Nguyen

Van Trung of Ho Chi Minh University, the *Civilizing Mission* and *Franco-Vietnamese collaboration and harmony* were ‘myths of colonialism’ devised to obscure the

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<sup>1</sup> Boi Tran Huynh. *Vietnamese Aesthetics from 1925 onwards*. 2005

imperialist interests of the French. They used ‘assimilation and association’ as two aspects of their civilizing, built infrastructures and facilities such as roads, railways, hospitals, banks, institutions to reinforce their myths they desired Vietnamese to believe. In 1939, for examples, about 2.997 km of railway system was finished to connect northern and southern Vietnam, going through Hue city, and 23.987 km of asphalted-roads throughout Vietnam was accessible in the same year.<sup>2</sup> It improved greatly the transportation system of Vietnam at that time, mostly by rivers or land-roads.

#### 1.1.2 The overview of Vietnamese architecture in the period of the last feudalism (1802-1945) and the French-domination (1858 – 1954)

Vietnamese people mostly lived together in a village cluster which was surrounded by a thick hedge of protective bamboo. This character helps to define a community in preserving of customs and beliefs and be known as the basic unit of Vietnam society. Vietnamese traditional houses were built of local materials, mainly bamboo, wood, straw, and, more recently, bricks or baked clay taken from surrounding fields. It can be recognized through several traditional housing styles of ethnic groups in Vietnam, such as the Kinh people’s house with the bamboo or timber structures and gable roofs, the Muong people’s stilt house with 4 bays and high sloping roofs, the Thai people’s stilt house constructed by bamboo or timber with only one principle of facing the ever-green mountain or river, E-De people’s house with the length up to 30 – 40 meters, Meo people’s house with timber structures tied by bamboo strings. Only in the capital city as Hue city, the complexity and perfection of the Citadel architecture affected the formation of traditional architecture of local

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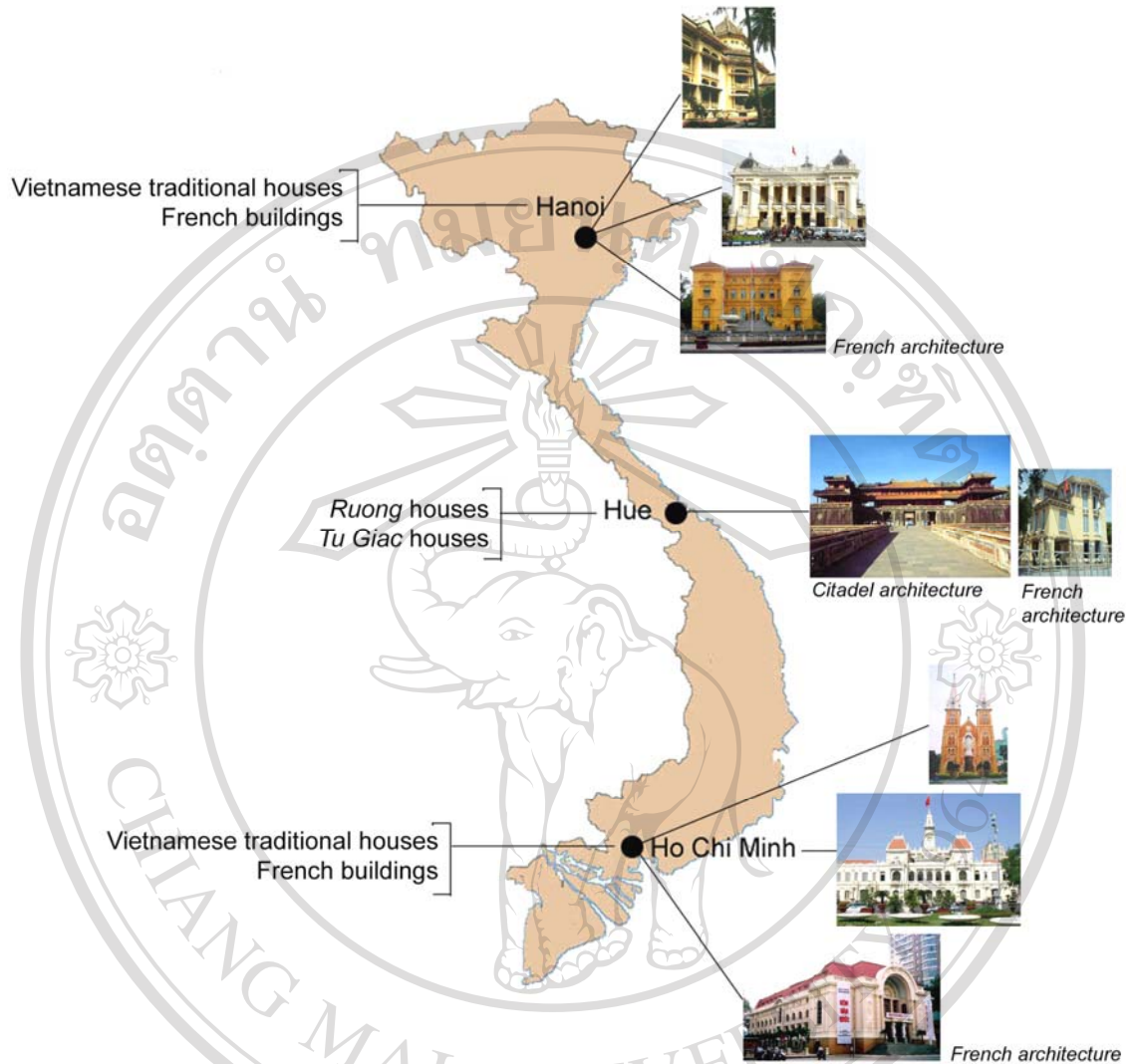
<sup>2</sup>

Boi Tran Huynh. *Vietnamese Aesthetics from 1925 onwards*. 2005

houses there in spatial-organization, in using materials, and building structures for examples.

During this period, Vietnamese architecture, on one hand, developed traditional architecture with the reveals of Citadel architecture and Vietnamese traditional houses, and on other hand, absorbed the new changes from the contribution of Western architecture throughout the country. Hanoi City with its relatively temperate climate attracted the French and made them choose this place as the headquarters of their colonial administration. The French intended to turn Hanoi into a ‘little Paris’ by the construction of Municipal Theatre in 1911 as a smaller version of the Opera House in Paris, the French Governor General Palace in 1907, the Louis Finot Museum in 1932 (fig.1.5), and other French buildings. Ho Chi Minh City is not exception since the French construction of Notre-Dame Cathedral in 1875 to show their Christianity belief in a remote nation from France was known as the first French architecture in this city. Later, many buildings in French styles were built here, such as, Saigon Town Hall in 1908, and Municipal Theatre in 1900 (fig.1.5). In Hue city, the special place with the available existing of the Citadel of the contemporary Nguyen dynasty (1802-1945) on the north-bank of Huong River, the French respected the Citadel architecture and built the French buildings on the south-bank of Huong River. The architecture of the Citadel and those French buildings played the key-role to define the characteristics of Hue local architecture in this period, particularly, *Ruong* houses followed the Citadel architecture and *Tu Giac* houses reflected the mixing of the Citadel, *Ruong* houses with the French architecture (Fig.1.5).





*Fig.1.5* The distribution of Vietnamese and French architecture in three main cities of Vietnam: Hanoi in northern part, Hue in central part, and Ho Chi Minh in southern part.

## 1.2 Background of the Hue City

### 1.2.1 History of the Hue City

Hue is located in the geographical center of Vietnam (Fig.1.6). The convenience of closing to the sea (12km from the sea by river-transportation) made this place become a good destination of foreign traders (i.e. Chinese, Japanese, French, or Portuguese) to come, trade, and exchange their products and commodities. Thus trading river-routes were strongly developed in Hue city previously.

As a former capital and cultural centre, Hue has a history going back over 2000 years. In ancient times, Hue was part of the Vietnamese kingdom of Van Lang.

Around 111 B.C., the kingdom was occupied by Chinese and remained occupied for more than a thousand years; however, Hue city took its liberation as early as 192 A.D and became a frontier-post of the independent Champa kingdom. In 1306, as the gift of Champa kingdom for the wedding of the Champa king Jaya Sihnavarman III with the Vietnamese princess Huyen Tran, Hue once more belonged to Vietnam and part of Thuan Hoa district. Phonetic distortion of the word Hoa (in Thuan Hoa) gave Hue its common name as today.

From the mid 16<sup>th</sup> to the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century, Thuan Hoa represented a further southward step for Dai Viet (the former name of Viet Nam) and a take-off point for southerly territorial expansion. In 1771, the three Tay Son brothers led a big peasant revolt to overthrow the Nguyen lords in the south and then the Trinh lords and the King Le in the north, and thus achieved the reunification of the country. Phu Xuan (Hue today) became the capital city of Tay Son dynasty and of a reunited Vietnam. In 1801, assisted by the French, Nguyen Anh, a prince of the previous Nguyen lords-line, undertook the re-conquest and occupied Hue, proclaiming himself king there in 1802, under the name Gia Long, and start to set up the administrative capital of the last feudalism of Vietnam, the Nguyen dynasty 1802-1945, in Hue city.

Environmentally, the Hue climate follows the tropical monsoon climate of Vietnam with the emergence of hot and humid. It is considered as one of the most severe regions in Vietnam with the fluctuation of mean temperatures from 20° C (January) to 30° C (June-August), the high humidity more than 80%, the highest

rainfall up to 3,000 millimeters per year, and the rainy season occurring from September to January with the heaviest precipitations in November.

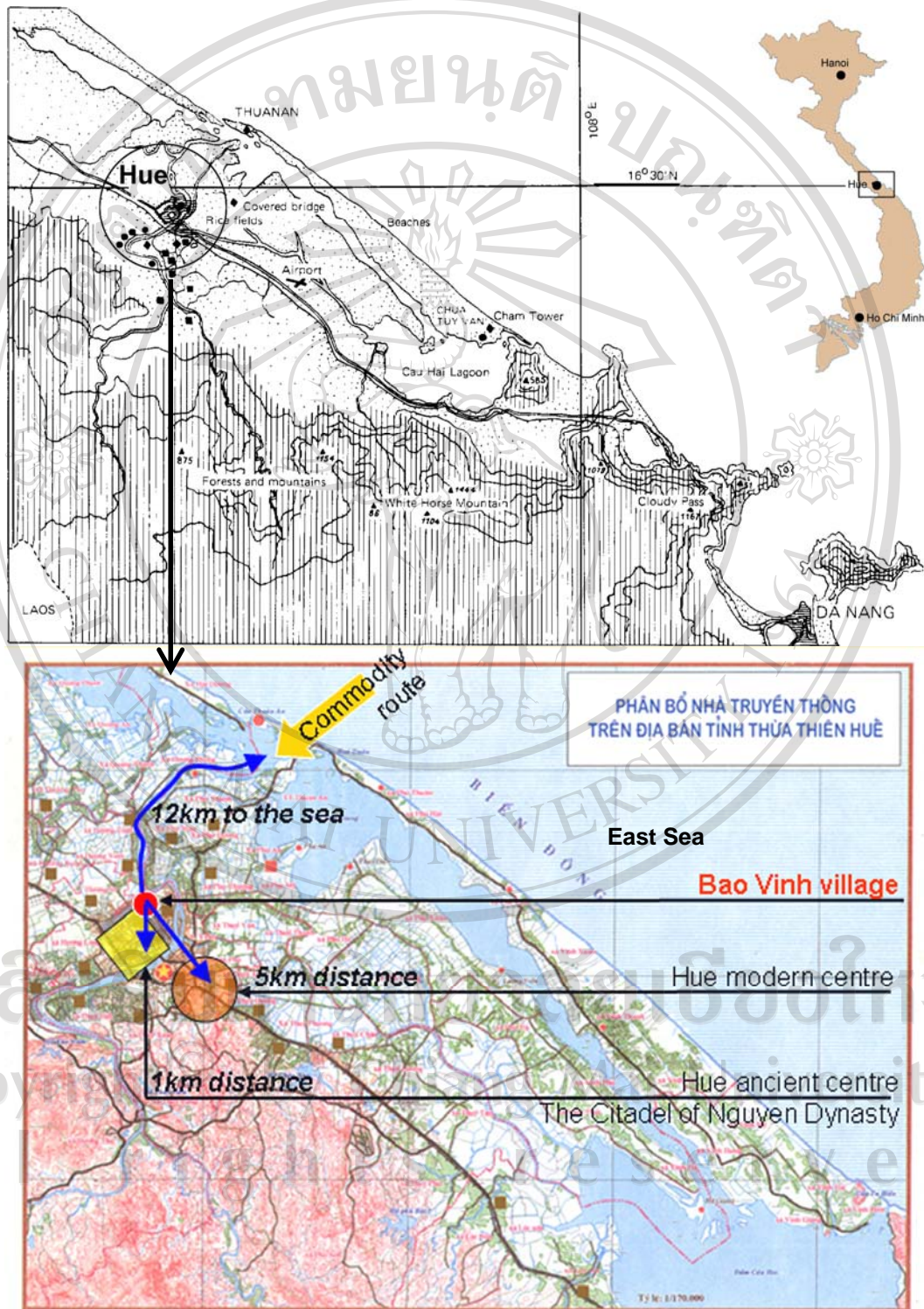
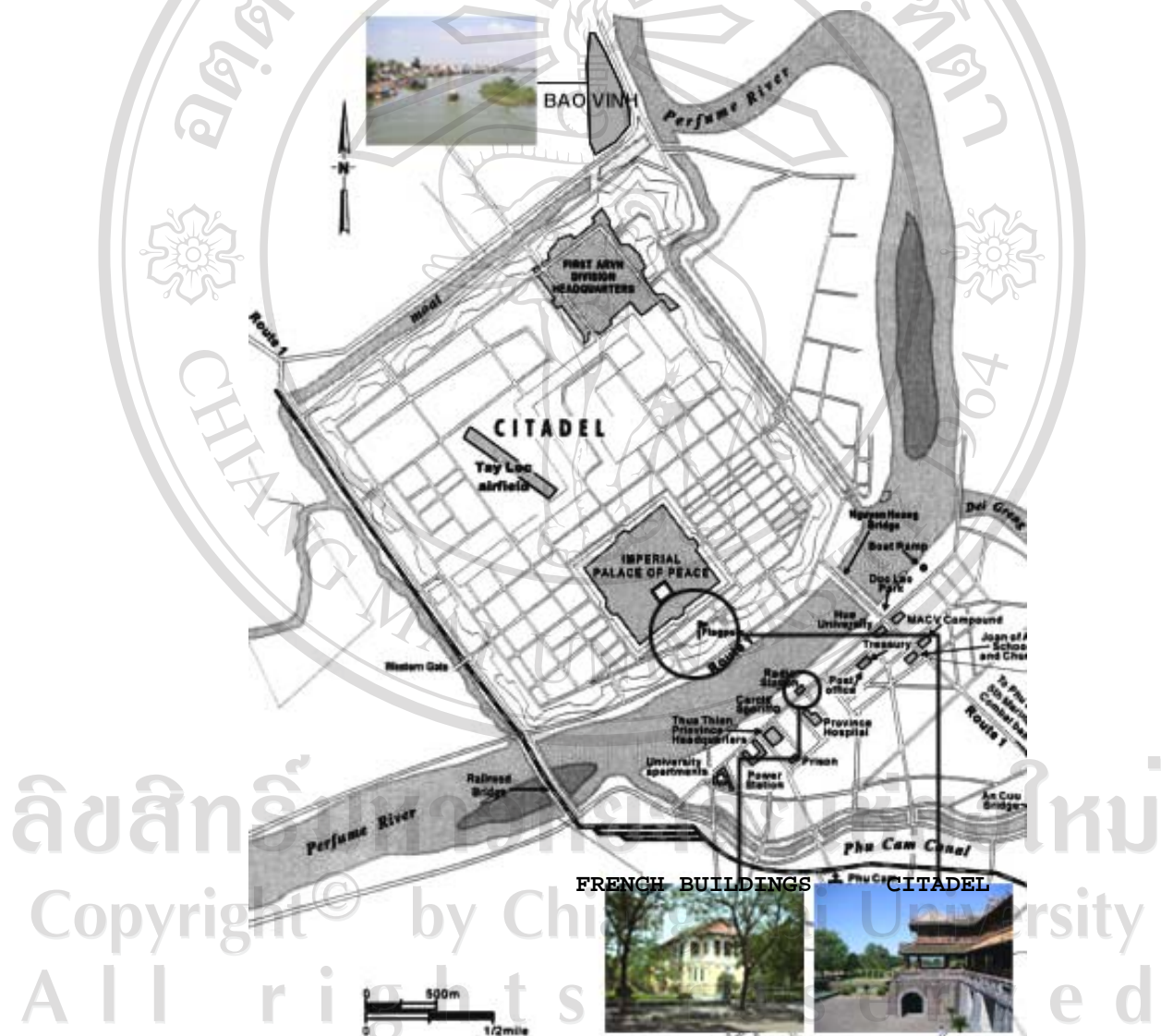


Fig.1.6 Geographical situation of Hue City showing the relationship of Bao Vinh outwards (12km from the sea by river-transportation) and inwards close to the Citadel (1km) and Hue modern centre (5km).

The outstanding feature of Hue city is the harmonious integration of the historic sites and natural environments set on two beautiful banks of the Huong River (Perfume River), especially, the Citadel of Nguyen dynasty (in the square form) within 2.2 km long on each side, the French buildings, and Bao Vinh village have been located closely on both sides of the Huong River (Fig.1.7).



*Fig.1.7* The location of Bao Vinh Village near the Huong River (the trading route to Hue from the sea-direction at that time) made it become the famous commercial river-port of Hue City in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### 1.2.2 The Hue historical architecture in the period of the last feudalism of Vietnam and French domination

Affected from characters of Vietnamese traditional architecture, Hue architecture in this period was also defined by local features, but more specially, in harmony with the Citadel architecture. It is the characteristics of commonly one-storey buildings, the odd numbers (1, 3, 5) of compartments in spatial organization, two sloping-roofs along the length of building, timber structures, *Liet*-tile roofs, *Vo*-brick walls, or traditional mortar which can be found in the Nguyen royal buildings (i.e. Ngo Mon Gate, Thai Hoa Palace), in Hue pagodas (i.e. Thien Mu and Tu Hieu), and in local traditional architecture of the *Ruong* houses and *Tu Giac* houses.

The arrival of the French in 1885 had offered various new architectural styles for Hue city, for examples, the pre-colonial style (before 1900) with the primitive forms of barracks and hospitals, the neo-classical style (1900-1920) with the emphasis on symmetrical facades in administrative buildings, the French-localized style with French villas, and the Indochina or modern style (1920-1945) with the strongly solid forms and functional concentration.<sup>3</sup> Outstandingly, it has been manifested by the

French buildings on the south bank of Huong River and a series of the French-influenced houses in Bao Vinh village in north-east Hue city, so-called *Tu Giac* houses.

However, from 1986 when the national open-door policy (*Doi moi* policy) of Vietnam was adopted, lots of new architectural styles from outside (i.e. post-modern styles, deconstruction style, renaissance style, India style, or Russian style) have been introduced into Hue city with various ways of perception of Hue residents. The

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<sup>3</sup>  
Dr. Nguyen Minh Duc

conflicts with traditional architecture are obvious and be well-supported by the change of new needs of living in public. One hand, it has developed the number of today buildings in comparison with the limited number of historic buildings, and on the other hand, it has emphasized the rareness of historical buildings and seriously threatens their demolition soon or later.

### **1.3 Background of the Bao Vinh Village**

Bao Vinh was a famous commercial river-port of Hue city previously. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, its former river-port, Thanh Ha, appeared as the first trading place and contributed greatly to the commercial development of Hue city (Fig.1.8). However, the natural occurrence of one islet (Con But islet) rising in the middle of river had made merchant ships or boats inconvenience to landfall as before and thus led to the collapse of Thanh Ha at the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century. Due to its geographical conveniences of closing to the sea (12 km by river) and closing to the Citadel (1 km), the Bao Vinh river-port came into being as the substitution and be known as the second commercial place of Hue city in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Goods and commodities here imported from other regions of Vietnam or from foreign countries were distributed to Hue inner markets by the Huong river- transportation. Trading activities here happened mainly on the river where goods and commodities were imported and exported from river-direction.

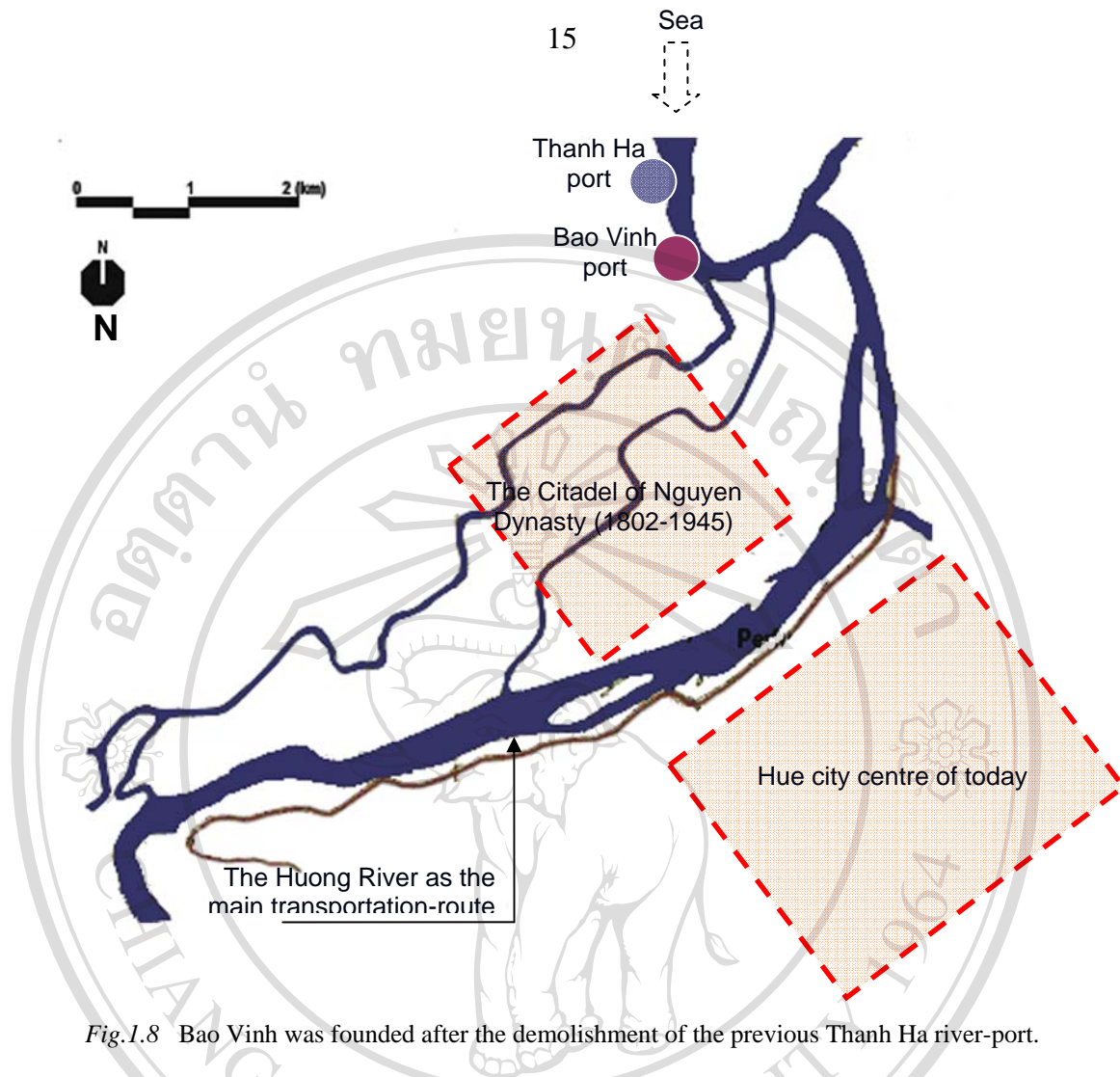


Fig.1.8 Bao Vinh was founded after the demolishment of the previous Thanh Ha river-port.

Initially, a series of thatch cottages were built on the riverside of Bao Vinh village to store and exchange commodities imported from the river-direction.<sup>4</sup> Fires supported by winds had burned them down several times in the past, which led to the construction of new cottages with stone-walls for fire-prevention.<sup>5</sup> As early as the 20<sup>th</sup> century, due to serious landslides of the riverside caused by annual floods of the Huong River, the French who occupied Hue since 1885 decided to clear these stone cottages away to consolidate the riverside and rebuild them. They constructed a

<sup>4</sup> Nguyen Thien Binh. Bao Vinh commercial town – The foundation process & cultural economic activities under the Nguyen dynasty (1802-1945). BA thesis. Hue University, 1998, p. 47.

<sup>5</sup> Based on the descriptions of the captain Dutreuil de Rhins on his arrival at Hue in 1877. *B.A.V.H 1916*. Thuan Hoa publisher.,1997.

concrete embankment along the river to strengthen the riverside on which they built a series of *Tu Giac* houses (Fig.1.9) with empty-lands in-between for boat-docks<sup>6</sup> to maintain trading activities of Bao Vinh river-port.

The pattern of trading activities in Bao Vinh where merchandises were imported and exported from the river-direction defined the particular architecture on the riverside. The suggestion of the French for the riverside-architecture, specifically the *Tu Giac* architecture, in relation to Hue traditional architecture has made this place become more special and be known as one of the best illustrations for the Vietnamese-French architecture in Hue city.

In short, as early as the French domination period, this village was still respected to develop trading of Hue city, evidently through the French suggestion for the construction of *Tu Giac* houses on the riverside to maintain trading activities of Hue city in general and of Bao Vinh in particular. However, once the colonialism developed higher and deeper, it required better conditions of infrastructure and facility, and of course, the river-transportation system was not sufficient for huge movements of soldiers, weapons, supplies, or goods. The construction of railway system and asphalted-roads by the French was obvious, and therefore affected and reduced the commercial roles of Bao Vinh river-port gradually. It resulted in the transformation of all *Tu Giac* houses from commercial shop-storages into dwelling units as seen today.

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Nguyen Thien Binh. *Bao Vinh commercial town – The foundation process & cultural economic activities under the Nguyen dynasty (1802-1945)*. BA thesis. Hue University, 1998, p. 48.





Fig.1.9 Bao Vinh village site map shows the 9 *Tu Giac* houses, the outstanding French-influenced architecture of Hue city, on the riverside to develop trading here previously.

#### 1.4 Problem Statements

In comparison with about 1.000 historical royal buildings of Nguyen dynasty<sup>7</sup> adopted as the world heritage in 1999 and over 1.000 traditional *Ruong* houses<sup>8</sup> of Hue city, all 9 *Tu Giac* houses are rather rare and more concerned of losing identity. They are still addressing a genuine local architecture combined with the influences of French architecture, particularly the applying of local materials and traditional architectural elements into the new structure introduced by western architecture.<sup>9</sup> They have become one of the most unique types of housing in Hue region worth for the preservation and conservation efforts.

The focuses of officially national and provincial authorities on them have escalated the importance of *Tu Giac* houses. The Decision No. 166/1999/QĐ-TTg on August 10<sup>th</sup>, 1999 adopted by the Prime Minister of Vietnamese Government for ratifying the amendment of the overall planning of Hue city valid till 2020 has considered Bao Vinh as the Sector II of the Conservation Zone. The Decision No. 3032/QĐ-UB in 2003 approved by Thua Thien Hue People Committee for ratifying the Conservation Planning and Development of Bao Vinh old quarter, has addressed all 9 *Tu Giac* houses for the strategy of conservation.

However, there is no action for conservation of *Tu Giac* houses in reality up to now except that they are briefly referred to or being introduced in some studies but not yet being studied in details. For examples, Mieke Belmans and Ruth Oberthaler in 1998 classified *Tu Giac* houses as the French-influenced architecture without any

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<sup>7</sup> Phan Thuan An, 2005

<sup>8</sup> Tran Ba Tinh, 2004

<sup>9</sup> Mieke Belmans, 1998 & Nguyen Quang Tri, 2002

conservation recommendations, Nguyen Quang Tri in 2002 just listed *Tu Giac* house as one type of historic houses that needed to be protected but again, providing no solution for conservation. Similarly, Tran Ba Tinh in 2005 considered *Tu Giac* houses as one part of Hue traditional houses required to be conserved but still no detailed solutions.

More importantly at the present time, the source of historic Vietnamese- French architecture has been not given the due respect yet, especially in Vietnamese-French housing architecture. In Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, except for the previously French administrative buildings which are being now used for housing Vietnamese administration, the historical Vietnamese-French houses which also contain the harmonious blending of Vietnamese and French architecture have been almost out of control and protection. Even in Hue city, the heritage city with many valuable Vietnamese traditional buildings (mostly Nguyen royal buildings in 1802 -1945 and *Ruong* houses 1802-1975) already recognized, the attentions have the tendency to Vietnamese traditional architecture more than Vietnamese-French architecture.

Therefore, the study on *Tu Giac* houses, a genuine Vietnamese-French architecture, can be the supplement to fulfill the Decision No. 166/1999/QD-TTg and Decision No 3032/2003/QD-UB of Vietnam government and Hue city, to fill the gap of conserving the source of Vietnamese-French housing architecture, and to contribute to the integrity of researching of Hue traditional houses. Especially after September of 2007, the total number of 9 *Tu Giac* houses is reduced down to 8 houses because of the destruction of one house (No.5) for constructing a new concrete building. It has made the conservation on *Tu Giac* houses much more significant and serious to prevent the demolition and disappearance of the rest 8 houses.

### 1.5 Objectives of the Thesis

The first objective of this study is to provide knowledge of traditional architectural characteristics and values of *Tu Giac* housing in Bao Vinh village of Hue City reflecting the French-influenced architecture in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. By conserving the *Tu Giac* housing type, all their architectural parts are protected and preserved; the architectural characteristics exposed on them are then retained and become an available useful source of knowledge about the traditional architecture as well as the French influences on traditional architecture for generations to perceive, to understand, to learn from them, and to review in their later works.

The second objective is to offer a *Tu Giac* Housing Conservation Prototype in Bao Vinh village that can provide fundamental conservation techniques for all 8 *Tu Giac* houses, and can be adapted to conserve other similar 2-storey houses in the same area. The study aims to build up a Prototype representative of all *Tu Giac* houses in Bao Vinh with the adequate techniques of conservation for all its architectural parts. Those conservation techniques are given based on the existing conditions of all *Tu Giac* houses in accordance with the Regulations and Principles of conservation (see chapter 2), and can be used to conserve each *Tu Giac* house. This prototype could be applied to conserve similar 2-storey houses in Hue region, especially the French-influenced buildings along the Huong River and nearby. It may be used to conserve similar houses in South East Asia, especially the application on the Wat-Ked historic houses in Chiang Mai-Thailand as an example.

## 1.6 Significances of *Tu Giac* houses

The characters of Bao Vinh river-port are revealed in the type of *Tu Giac* dwelling, a good example of Vietnamese-French historical architecture. The study on *Tu Giac* house will preserve the architectural identity of Bao Vinh and prevent the distinction of one unique type of housing in the source of Hue traditional houses. With the conservation of historic *Tu Giac* houses, young generations can come to see, to comprehend, and to review the knowledge from their architectural values.

The study will improve the strength and stability of all *Tu Giac* houses at the present and in the future time since the environmental and human impacts on *Tu Giac* houses have been threatening the collapse of the houses. With the provision of conservation methods and techniques for decayed and damaged parts as in the study, the conditions of all *Tu Giac* houses will get better and bring back the safety for residents living in.

The conservation of *Tu Giac* houses will play an important part in preserving the landscape of riverside in Bao Vinh village. The riverside now is created by all *Tu Giac* houses mixing together the former boat-docks and the new buildings scattered along the street and river. *Tu Giac* houses therefore become one of three factors generating the landscape of riverside. However, the landscape now is distorted generally by new buildings constructed illegally in recent years with the chaos in style and size. Some of them took the plots of destroyed *Tu Giac* houses on the riverside for building the new ones and this occurrence may be continued in future. With the conservation of *Tu Giac* houses, the consistency in appearance of all *Tu Giac* houses will be achieved, the plots of them will be kept to end the unexpected quantitative

development of new buildings on the riverside, and thus contribute an important part to the better landscape of riverside in Bao Vinh village.

### **1.7 Hypothesis**

A research can be conducted to achieve a prototype model of *Tu Giac* House Conservation Method to conserve the architectural characteristics of *Tu Giac* houses to sustain all 8 *Tu Giac* valuable houses reflecting the 70-80 year old genuine Vietnamese architecture mixing with French architecture for young generations to see, learn, and appreciate into the future. The *Tu Giac* House Conservation Method can be at least partially applied to similar houses in Hue city and hopefully to other similar houses in South-East Asia.

### **1.8 Research Design & Procedure**

To achieve the first objective, field survey at the site and references to historical and architectural literatures of Hue city and Vietnam are carried out. Additionally, references to the literatures on architectural conservation, especially in the conservation work of historic buildings in Hue city, can fulfill the second objective.

(See Fig.1.10 in next 2 pages)

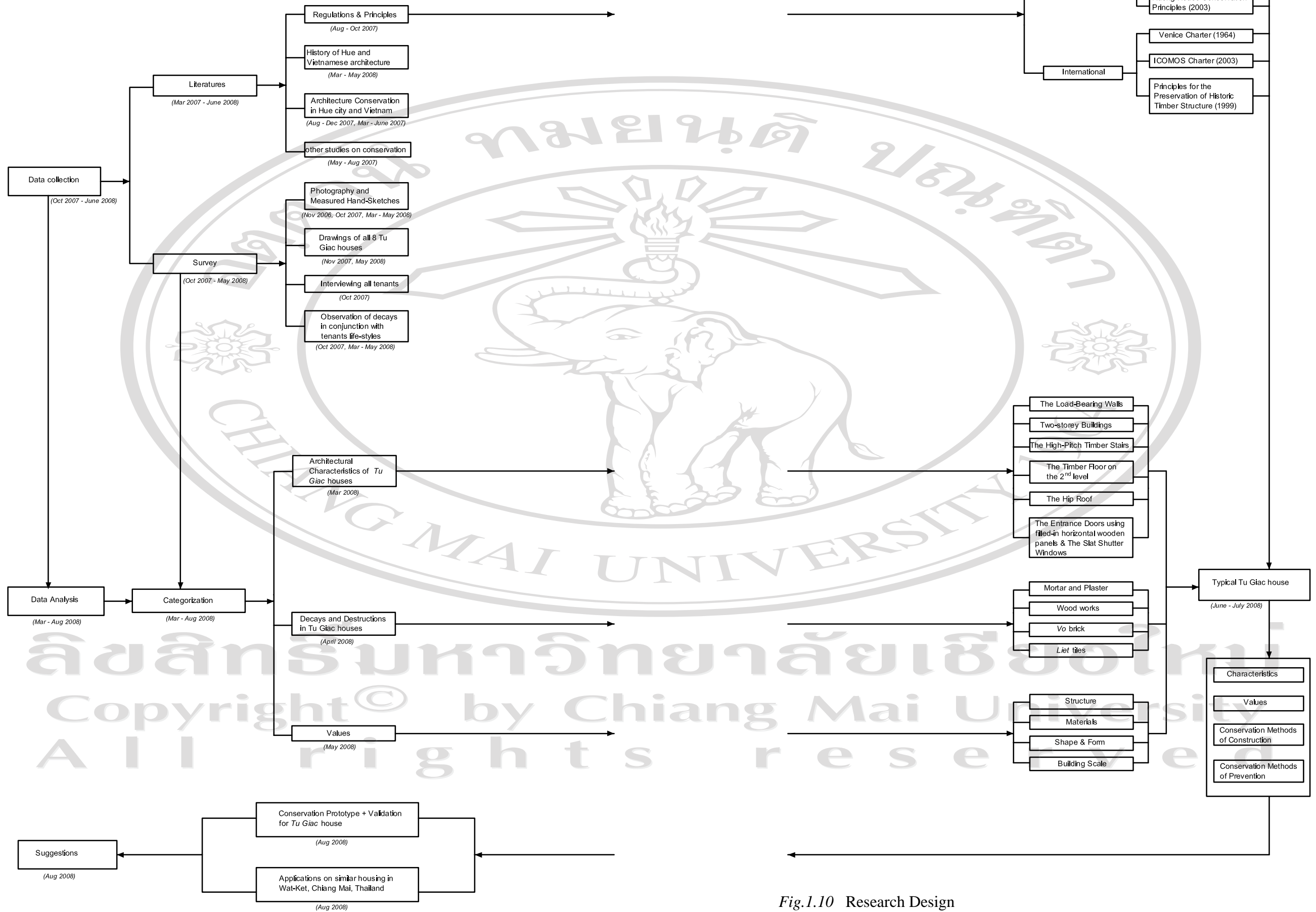


Fig.1.10 Research Design

## 1.9 Conclusions of Chapter 1

The *Tu Giac* houses have been proved to have historical values in the Hue City architecture as they had been utilized as important storage houses to store goods and commodities transferred in and out directly to and from the last Nguyen Dynasty, the Citadel Palace of the last Emperor of Vietnam (Fig.1.8). With only 8 units left to be seen on River Huong (Fig.1.9), especially the rareness of their 2-storey French-influenced architecture, it is still not too late to conserve Tu Giac houses for later generations to see. Questions arise of how Tu Giac houses can be conserved. The attempt of this research is to provide methods of conserving Tu Giac house in Chapter 3 and consolidate according to the Research Design in Fig.1.10 to achieve the prototype conservation techniques in Chapter 4.