

A Study on the Construction Model of Ancient Vietnamese Capital Cities

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Abstract

China's urban planning theories originated from the 'harmonious relationship between humans and nature' perspective of ancient environmental culture, which was disseminated through the process of 'Mutual Understanding of Civilisations'. Vietnam is geographically adjacent to China, and has the closest relationship with China in the Southeast Asian region. Numerous cultural artefacts and symbolic elements dating back to the Stone Age have demonstrated the cultural origins of the two countries. The northern region of Vietnam has been under the control of the Chinese Feudal Dynasties from the third century B.C.E. until the early tenth century. After gaining independence, Vietnam continued to have a suzerain- vassal connection with China for about nine centuries. Vietnam is a significant research subject in the "Han Cultural Circle" because of the aforementioned variables that have contributed to a high degree of cultural resemblance between China and Vietnam. In order to determine the genetic relationship between the original mode and localised innovation from the perspective of urban planning history, this study will compare and contrast the construction models of ancient Vietnamese and Chinese capital cities. Additionally, it will show how Chinese urban planning theories have influenced Southeast Asian urban construction activities, either directly or indirectly.

Keywords

Ancient Vietnamese Capital Cities; Chinese Urban Planning Theories Context; Construction Model; Comparative Study; History of Urbanization and Planning

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INTRODUCTION

As the ancient cultural origins of East-Asia, the Chinese Civilisation had successively played the role of 'Water Pump' and produced profound impacts on the development of neighboring countries' culture, before pre-modern times. From present academic consensus, the Indochina Peninsula, Korean Peninsula and Japanese Archipelago were the most significant regions that be influenced with Chinese Civilisation in political institutions, feudal ethics, customs, literature, and etc¹. Analysis of cultural phenomenon, the process of influence was divided into 'active learning' and 'forced acceptance', and the subsequent integration with their own cultural system. However, due to the different historical-cultural context and motivations, these countries were formed their specific Hua-Yi Concept out of their perceptions of 'self' and 'other'². Especially, system of prefectures-counties and suzerain- vassal relations had contributed to a high degree of cultural resemblance, but with the advancement of powerful clans and the separatist regimes gave rise to a sense of local self-reliance, which made the Vietnam gradually forming political subjectivity, cultural subjectivity, and auto-ethnocentrism.

Capital City as sanctity and legitimacy of a unified national political power, which as followed China's cultural view of the environment and harmonious relationship between natural and artificial environment³. At present, most research is based on map analysis and decoding methods to analyse the constituent elements, spatial evolution process, development mechanism and planning principles of the capital cities. The number of typology-based studies on the dissemination of planning theories and comparisons between Chinese and international capita-cities is relatively fewer. Based on the excavation of extensive historical literature and maps, this research aims to adopt the comparative study on the characteristics of the built environment of ancient Vietnamese and Chinese capital cities; and to parse composited urban spatial features under the combination of geographic environment and historical context, from the planning and morphology perspective. Moreover, the research attempts to further find the prototype of chosen cases cities based on the comparative and historical analysis, which would help to understand how Chinese urban planning theories have directly or indirectly influenced the construction of Southeast Asian cities in different historical periods.

METHODOLOGY

In the perspective of material choosing, the research will select the literature records from the ancients' codes and official history records from China and Vietnam, by combining the historical perspectives of both parties to make the historical discourse more objective and comprehensive. Apart from research results of historical literature, archaeological and anthropological research, the study will mainly rely on the historical maps decoding. As an important research medium, the maps' drawing process expressed a cognitive intentions or concepts in geographical and spatial aspects for the ancients. As a kind of intuitive material that record the urban morphology and spatial pattern and function by visual graphics, which are primarily illustrated the 'relationship' between the built environment and natural

environment, even with the inaccurate scale, position, and object's shape, these characters made the necessary to digital translate on the basis of modern maps. The decoding process is divided into information extraction and information reorganization, with the error correction by whole course⁴. The information extraction is the interpretation of historic information, associating with the annotation text, the relationship between the city and natural base in regional scale, and the facilities and buildings in urban scale. Information reorganization could be recognized as translation of historic information in modern map base, firstly, following the Classification of Information Theory, the data would be classified as basic spatial information, conceptual spatial information and comprehensive spatial information that is collected by historical map^{5,6}, and the original abstract graphics would be further concreted during the process. Subsequently, the information reorganization is regarded as an analysis process by principles of synchronicity and diachronicity, and the overlying with modern map to qualify the spatial features. The process often accompanies by the understanding of explanatory notes, which will ensure the accuracy of translation work and highlight the most historically valuable element. In urban studied perspective, the map-based derivative research is basic research, comparative research and data research⁴. Currently, from the comparative research, the mostly research focus on the endwise dimension of urban development, which has completely displayed the trajectory of urban space in different historic period, and further explain their evolutionary patterns. However, the amount of cross-section dimension results is relatively fewer and not yet systematic, since the dimension will involve multiple sites in cross-regional perspective.

This research will conduct comparative research on the base of historical maps decoding. In pre-step, researcher will collect the map of Vietnamese and Chinese capital cities in the same period, built by same ethnic group or remarkable cultural connections. The decoding process would be targeting landscape pattern, urban spatial layout, street system and the facility-type structures. The comparative research will adopt the cross-section dimension as the main perspective, which aim to excavate the cultural genes based on the analysis of construction's context and urban spatial characteristics. Moreover, the research process would not ignore the endwise dimension and the phenomenon on the integration effect about Eastern-Western planning theories. From the endwise dimension, with the following of integration effect about Eastern-Western planning practices, the historical value of Vietnam's historical capital cities would be further clarified, and further understanding particularity of this cultural phenomenon.

CAPITAL CITY IN ANCIENT PERIOD

POLITICAL-CULTURAL RELATIONSHIP IN EARLY ANCIENT PERIOD

From the official Vietnamese chronological materials, the southward migration activities for various Chinese ethnic groups had founded the ethnic and cultural basis of Vietnam. Especially in Vietnamese historical materials, the construction of historic image with blood-tie with China was the description of Lạc Long Quân as the earliest monarch in Vietnamese mythical lends, who is the descendant of Chinese Ancestor-Flame Emperor, and also possessed dragon-style

totem⁷. This kind of consciousness originated from the profound historical ties between China and Vietnam, which also represented the political and cultural relations between the Chinese Central Regimes and Yue ethnic groups in the south. From the literally interpretation, Yue is mainly referred to the ethnic groups of Vietnam in the present context, but from afford-mentioned migration and mixed-race effect, the distribution range of this ethnic group had covered from Jiangnan region in China to central Vietnam. The viewpoint was be proved by the Ancient Chinese Documents; the records was taken the 'BaiYue' to describe the nations who mainly active in the south to the lower reach of the Yangtze River in China^{9 9 10}. From the perspective of ethnic composition, the branch of the BaiYue ethnic groups that located in the present-day Guangdong, Guangxi and northern Vietnam regions, which be named as Nan-Yue, Luo-Yue and Ou-Yue in Ancient Period. In the Vietnamese official records, above branch of Yue ethnic group had established Văn Lang Kingdom and Ou Luo Kingdom successively. Although the social nature still remained clan tribal alliance, the appearance of the capital city caused the historians believed the political system of Vietnam was already a regime state^{11,12,13}.

CITADEL CAPITAL

The first capital city was appeared in the dynastic transition stage, when the An Dương Vương defeated the Hùng Duệ Vương to establish the Ou Luo Kingdom. According to the official recordings, the An Dương Vương was originally the king of the Ancient Shu Kingdom, and southward migrated to the area after being defeated by the Qin Kingdom^{14 15}. Thus, the related urban construction activities could be classified as the 'Construction based on the ethnic culture integration'. The capital city was found in Cổ Loa in 257.BCE, which locating in the northern upper plain of Hồng River Valley, and where under the jurisdiction of Đông Anh District, Hanoi. For the geographic perspective, the valley has formed by the impact of the Hồng River and the Sulich River, is an important industrial and agricultural centre in Vietnam and even in Southeast Asia, and its geographical location determines the attributes of human settlements. Archaeological data shows that, before the construction of capital city, the site was also unearthed artefacts Phùng Nguyên Culture to Đông Sơn Culture for Bronze Age¹⁶.

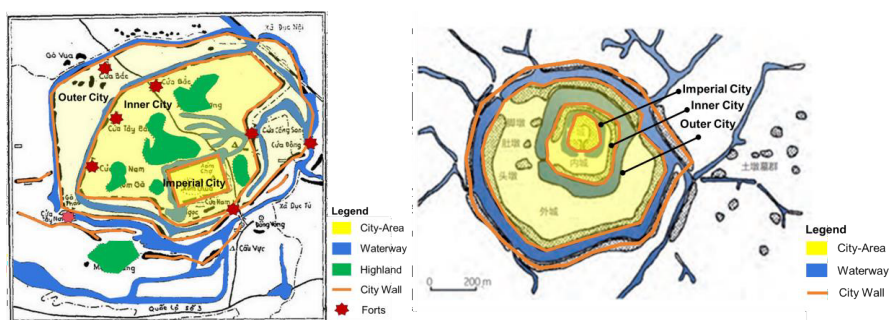


Fig. 1. Urban Structure of Cổ Loa Citadel (Left) and the Yancheng Ancient City (Right)

Compared with named as a 'city', the urban structure is closer to the 'citadel' in ancient period, due to the construction context should consider the defence as the essential factor. River and topography as the important natural advantages, which has been adequately utilized by the layout of Cổ Loa Citadel. From the positional relationships, the Cổ Loa Citadel is located on the northern highland about 6 kilometers from the main stream of the Hồng River, and the linked by branch channel. The citadel surrounded by water was taken the water environment as the first line in the defence system. Analyzing the entire structure of Cổ Loa Citadel, the three-story city wall structure caused the urban spatial structure similar appearance with snail, with a total of nine stories city-wall staggered with moat from west to east inside and outside the city, that is the reason why it also be named as 'Spiral City' in Chinese characters. Moreover, fortification was systematically consisted of moats, internal trench, numerous defence engineering, three-story soil wall with a total length of about 16 kilometers, and earthen mounds and towers on the outer city¹⁷. In the urban zoning, as the left picture in Figure 1, the urban area was divided by city-walls system into outer city, middle city and inner city, the spatial layout and functional zoning is similar as the Yancheng Ancient City in the Eastern-Zhou Dynasty of China (right picture in Figure 1). Yancheng Ancient City was constructed by 'Juwu', as the earliest branch of BaiYue, over than ten cities were established by the ethnic group in the lower reaches of Yangtze River, and these cities mostly located on the area that adjacent to rivers or lakes¹⁸. Although the archaeological data show a gap of nearly three hundred years between the construction of the two cities, similarity in urban form and function zoning is extremely obvious. As the central area of the whole city, inner city located the highest position, where including the imperial palace and royal residential areas¹⁹. Moreover, the middle city and outer city respectively distributed residential area of the officials and troops, and the two layers of urban space gradually decrease in elevation. The urban form reflected the hierarchical classification system and political control in early tribal settlements, with urban defence pattern, the urban construction model showcases the idea of 'adapting the environment resources' in Chinese traditional planning theories. More importantly, though the comparative analysis, the spatial layout could be summarized to a special model with tradition wisdom between the built environment and water. In the geography perspective, the waterfront cities are a common phenomenon in alluvial fan plains, and the clan-based social context and the military threat from the north still important external driver for the production of this type of urban form.

OPPOSITION TO CHINESE FEUDAL DYNASTY IN LATE ANCIENT PERIOD

In the 221.BCE, Emperor Qin Shi Huang had unified the vassal states in Eastern Zhou Dynasty and effectively formalized and administrated the territory as empire. To further stabilize the political power, began military campaigns to the south and north in succession, and the southern expedition was carried out five times and lasted for seven years. With the implementation of System of Prefectures and Counties, the places where the BaiYue ethnic group previously lived was under the jurisdiction of Nanhai Prefecture, Guilin Prefecture and Xiang Prefecture respectively, and Zhao Tuo was appointed as the governor of Nanhai Prefecture to administer the territory for the three prefectures^{20,21,22}. However, the stable political situation only lasted

ten years and was broken by massive peasant uprisings. Zhao Tuo was established the Nanyue Kingdom in 204.BCE that independence from the central dynasty. Although the Nanyue Kingdom as an independent regime and opposite to Western-Han Dynasty, and Nanyue became a vassal state of the central dynasty in 196.BCE with the tied political and economic relations. Thus, this episode was taken the Nanyue Kingdom be regarded as the 'Pre-phase for Chinese Rule', and which was the official threshold of Vietnamese History Documents in Dynastic Period, and was described as Triệu Dynasty^{23,24}.

PREFECTURAL SEAT OR CAPITAL CITY

The boundaries of the Nanyue Kingdom were substantially inherited from the areas governed by the prefectures set up in the Lingnan region during the Qin Dynasty. Zhao Tuo possessed the dual identity with 'Magistrate' and 'King' due to the independent state-building operations after the fall of the Qin Dynasty. With the implementation of 'maintaining harmonious relations with BaiYue ethnic group', the productivity and technology had achieved rapid development in the region, while the Nanyue Kingdom also received numerous refugees from the north, and the policy also realized the assimilation between the 'Han' and 'Yue' Culture.

In terms of urban construction perspective, the Panyu City also possessed the dual identity with 'Prefectural Seat' and 'Capital City' with the changing of regional governor's identity. As a governor with Han Chinese ancestry, the site selection and the spatial form of Panyu City were reflected the utilization of traditional Chinese planning theories. From the site selection, Panyu City located in the northern land of the Pearl River, and the southern side of Yuexiu Mountain. According to the statements in Shang Shu, "basic principles and pattern of site selection for residential area, villages, and cities should be follow 'Negative yin-yang hold, and Mountain seat back surface water'²⁵. Figure 2 has illustrated the positional relationship, the site of capital city of Nanyue Kingdom was followed the principle, and the site was located at the middle position between the mountain and river. Panyu City was regarded as the starting point of Guang Zhou's construction, the site was inherited in Song and Qing Dynasty. The archaeological research has confirmed that the similarity in the city-wall, imperial buildings and garden design of the palace city of Panyu City and Chang'an City in Western Han Dynasty. With the archaeological reports that, the city-wall of Panyu City has adopted the construction techniques for foundation trenching on both inner and outer sides, since the soil with high viscosity²⁶. Additionally, the architecture and layout planning of the palace city was broadly imitated the regulations of Chang'an City, though the scale of palace buildings is relatively small.

The similarity also reflected in the imperial garden site, the most intuitive is architectural form, terrain processing and water-related landscape¹⁹. In architectural form, the unearthed cultural relics contain numerous of platform- pavilion style architectural structures. The appearance of platform-pavilion style architecture was stemmed from the worship of nature, especially from mountain and river. In specific layout, the landscape skeleton was converted to the combination of 'platform-pavilion style architect' and 'pond', which symbolized the 'Divine Kingship' and 'Divine Space'^{27,28}.

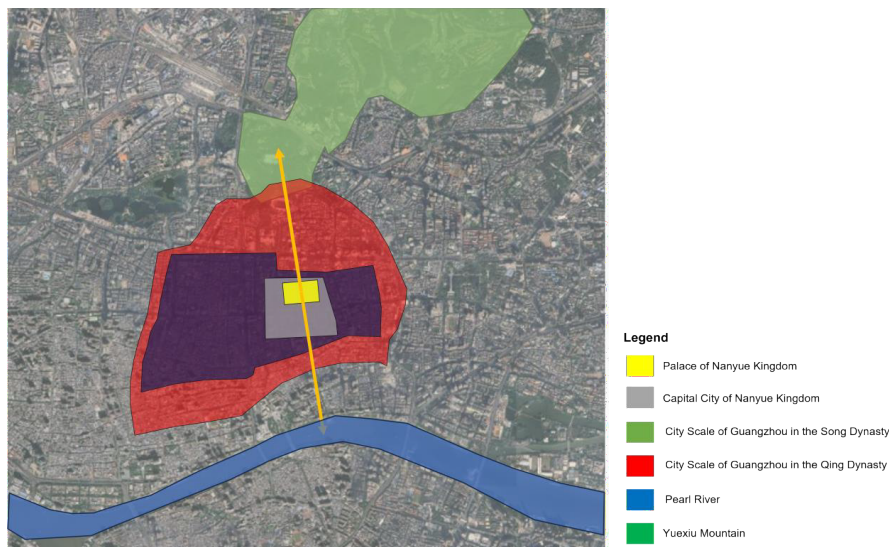


Fig. 2. The Relationship between the Natural Landscape and Location of Panyu City

CAPITAL CITY IN DYNASTIC PERIOD

THE FIRST CAPITAL CITY- THĂNG LONG

After the Nanyue Kingdom be conquered by Western-Han Dynasty in 111.BCE, current Vietnam had entered to Chinese Rule Period, and set the Jiaozhou State with three prefectures. Until the 938.CE, Vietnam has independence from China and became monarchical-feudal state, and maintained a vassal relationship with China. After nearly a century of war, Vietnam was unified by LýThái Tổ in 1,010. CE, and stepped a period of stable development. With the capital city was moved to the Đại La Citadel, and changed the name to Thăng Long²⁹.

Similar as the Panyu City, the site location of Thăng Long also presented the relationship with the natural elements, located in the southwestern side of Hồng River and against the Tản Viên Mountain. It embodied a spatial vision that oriented by 'Feng-shui' and 'Kingship'. As the of "capital city within the city, unifying the four directions", and the intersection of rivers was be regarded as 'dragon's belly' where gathered the 'National Essence'³⁰. The Capital relocation Action has caused a spatial location relationship with 'the capital is in the middle area'. The thought was originated from the Jifu System in *Shangshu and Zhou Li*, as a requirement of capital's location, which produced 'Central-Edge' Ring Layer Structure with geographic and political nature. Thus, the Capital Relocation Proposal was the governor implemented the 'Construct the Capital in the Centre' in the geographical space concept^{31 32}. Meanwhile, the site selection also be interpretation as the realistic thinking, since China is more threatening from the north compared with Champa in the south, the Hồng River could be regarded as natural defence.

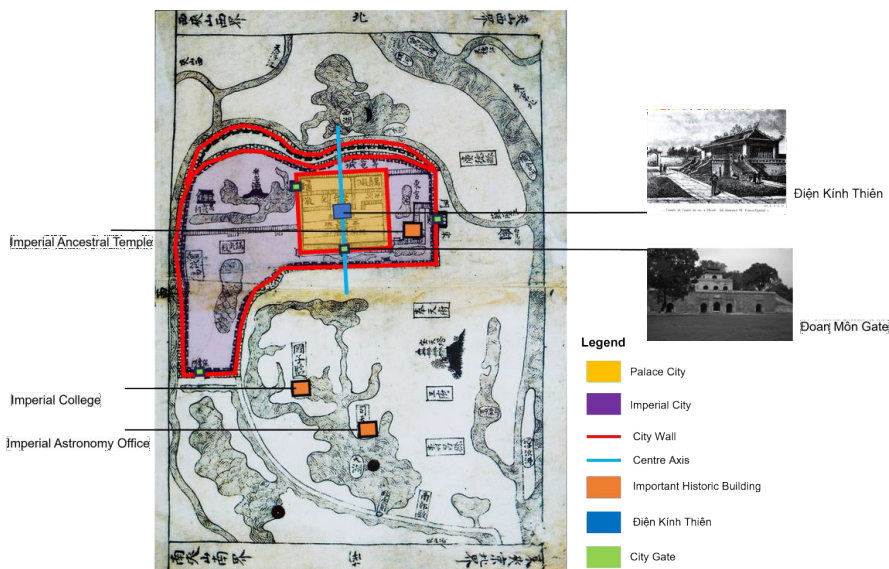


Fig. 3. Urban structure and Buildings' Layout of Thăng Long

Influenced by Confucian culture, the urban spatial structure of Hoàng thành Thăng Long and Chang'an City had illustrated strong similarity. Firstly, the capital's programme had emphasized the etiquette and hierarchy, and formed the Outer City-Inner City-Palace City, and corresponded to the Civilian residential areas, Officials' Residence-Office Area and Royal Residence respectively³³. In the perspective of palace buildings' construction, consistent with the Chang'an City, the palace city located in the north part of the capital city, centred around the Điện Kinh Thiên, formed a north-south axis with Đoan Môn Gate, and Bac Mon Gate, the Imperial College and the Imperial Ancestral Temple are located on the south-east and south-west sides of the palace respectively³⁴ (Figure 3). In addition, the south gate's form of Hoàng thành Thăng Long also followed the 'one gate, five roads', accompanied by strong political and etiquette functions which also reinforced the symbols of kingship^{35,36,37}. In the civilian residential areas, the linkage with market has emerged at the junction of the east side of the imperial city and the Hồng River, with the ceremony ideology. Similar as Chang'an City in Tang Dynasty, the market was concentrated in specific blocks^{38,39}. In the following period, with the concentration trend of lane and street, the opening neighborhood with commercial and handicraft industries has formed around the market, which named as '36 Guild Streets' by the number of streets.

THE LAST CAPITAL CITY- IMPERIAL CITY OF HU

During the Western Han Dynasty, Hué City was under the jurisdiction of Rinan Prefecture, Ji-aozhou State, and was subsequently occupied by Champa nearly 9 centuries. The political significance of the city was shown on the last feudal unified Dynasty of Vietnam, Nguyễn Dynasty.

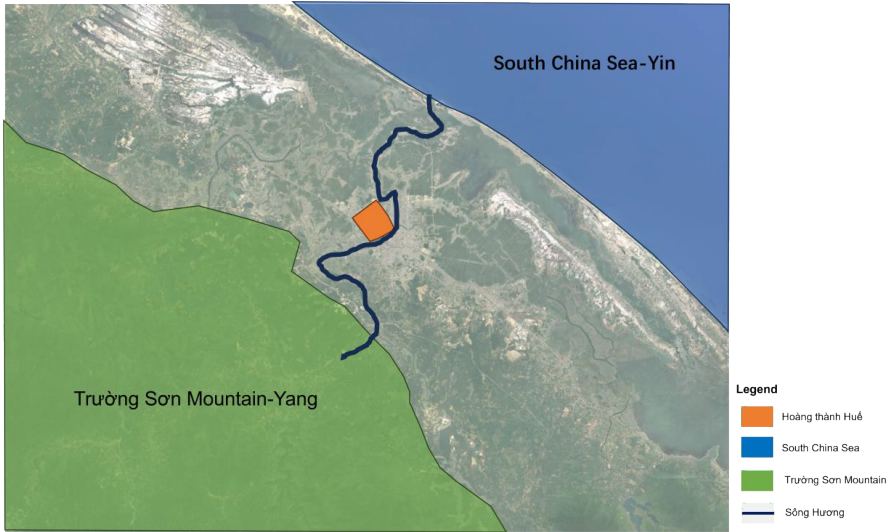


Fig. 4. Geographical conditions of Imperial City of Huế

Although the Huế City was formally founded as the capital city in 1,802. CE, the city has been as the capital for the Nguyễn Regime in the south since 1,635. CE and the name were Phú-Xuân⁴⁰. After being officially proclaimed emperor, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh had ultimately located the capital city on the north side of Sông Hương, and with the old site of Phú Xuân. From a practical perspective, experiencing the operation nearly two centuries, generous social and economic foundation would the stability of political regime. As a regime that has just experienced war, rebuilding on the original site is the most cost-effective approach⁴¹. In geographic perspective, the location is on the middle area of the country, where was easy to control the border. Moreover, from the relationship with natural landscape, the site is located on the waterfront area between the Trường Sơn Mountain-Yang and South China

Sea-Yin, by the connectivity of Sông Hương, the position had reached equilibrium between two substances (Figure 4)⁴².

In addition to influence of suzerain-vassal relationship with Qing Dynasty, the urban layout was completely modelled on Beijing City, Qing Dynasty (Figure 5)⁴³. In the shape, different with the Thăng Long, Imperial City of Huế was presented as a triple courtyard-style square with strong symmetrical characteristic, which symbolled the characteristics of etiquette have been further strengthened. The primary palaces were built in the south part of the capital city and near the Sông Hương, the zone was formed the Imperial city and Forbidden City from outside to inside, and the remaining part belongs to the capital city. In the period, the centre-axis had throughout the three- story urban areas, the layout of other ceremonial buildings followed the regulation with 'Ancestor Hall in the left, Alter of Land and Grain in the right', Điện Thái Hòa located in the centre, and 'outer palace and inner court', even the names of the palaces were consistent with those of Beijing City^{44,45}.

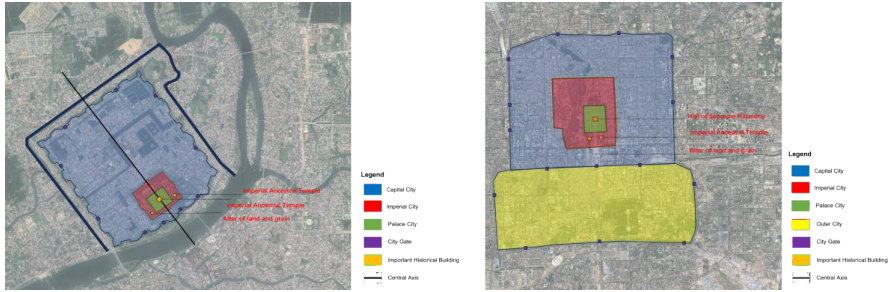


Fig. 5. Comparison of Urban Structures of 'Imperial City of Huế' and 'Beijing City in Qing Dynasty'.

Different with Chinese traditional fortified tower, the city-wall's form of Imperial City of Huế has illustrated the similarity with French Vauban-Style Fortification. Most historians interpreted that originated from the French assistance in Trìn̄h-Nguȳn̄ Civil War, and the bastion of Vauban-Style would increase thickness of walls to resist artillery-type weaponry, which enhanced practicality in 19th Century warfare⁴⁶. However, traditional Chinese defence elements have not been completely discarded, the artificial moat and trenches were distributed around city wall, and formed an integrated defence system. The construction of Imperial City of Huế could be seen as a successful attempt that compromised and integrated of Chinese and Western urban construction culture, and the fusion phenomenon also appeared on the Th̄ng Long in the late 19th century (Figure 6). More importantly, the two different cultures had achieved balance and harmony in a same built environment. On the one hand, the Vauban-Style Fortification would present a concentric zone form in the Europe, the city wall's form in Imperial City of Huế has demonstrated a spatial imagery of the compromise of defence structures to administrative space. On the other hand, the city gate of Imperial City of Huế has broken the taboo on the even-numbered gates in traditional Chinese culture, which aim to maximise the defensive nature of the Vauban-Style Fortification⁴⁷.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the planning evolution process of ancient Vietnamese capital cities under the influence of Chinese urban planning theories, the historical stages of capital cities construction could be preliminarily divided as 'Construction based on the ethnic culture integration' and 'Overall imitation and referencing'. In the first stage, the urban defence system as the most prominent feature has showcased the adaptation and utilization of nature resources. With the extended research for the capital cities of the Yue ethnic group, the capital cities' location has widely distributed in the estuarine area and the water-related built environment had reflected the maritime character. Cồ Loa Citadel and the Panyu City could be regarded as the beginning and the end of this phase, respectively, and the process could be summarized as a process from 'independent construction' to 'participation of Han ethnic group in construction and management'. In the spatial perspective, the shape of palace cities was represented a square, and the shape of inner

city and outer city has experienced the transformation from 'integrating with the natural environment' to 'compliance with the ideology of ritual system', by the course of the national amalgamation. Entering to the 'Overall imitation and referencing' phase, the urban construction was based on the adoption of Confucianism by Emperor. In addition to complied with the requirements for urban site selection for 'Centre' in Fengshui Theory, in specific spatial structure, the increasing symmetry and the division of urban areas due to ritual systems was the most direct manifestation of the following of Chinese urban planning theories. However, this process also contained the 'innovation stage' by the reference to Western Urban Defence Culture, which achieved a 'harmony' in spatial arrangement and create a special local characteristic.

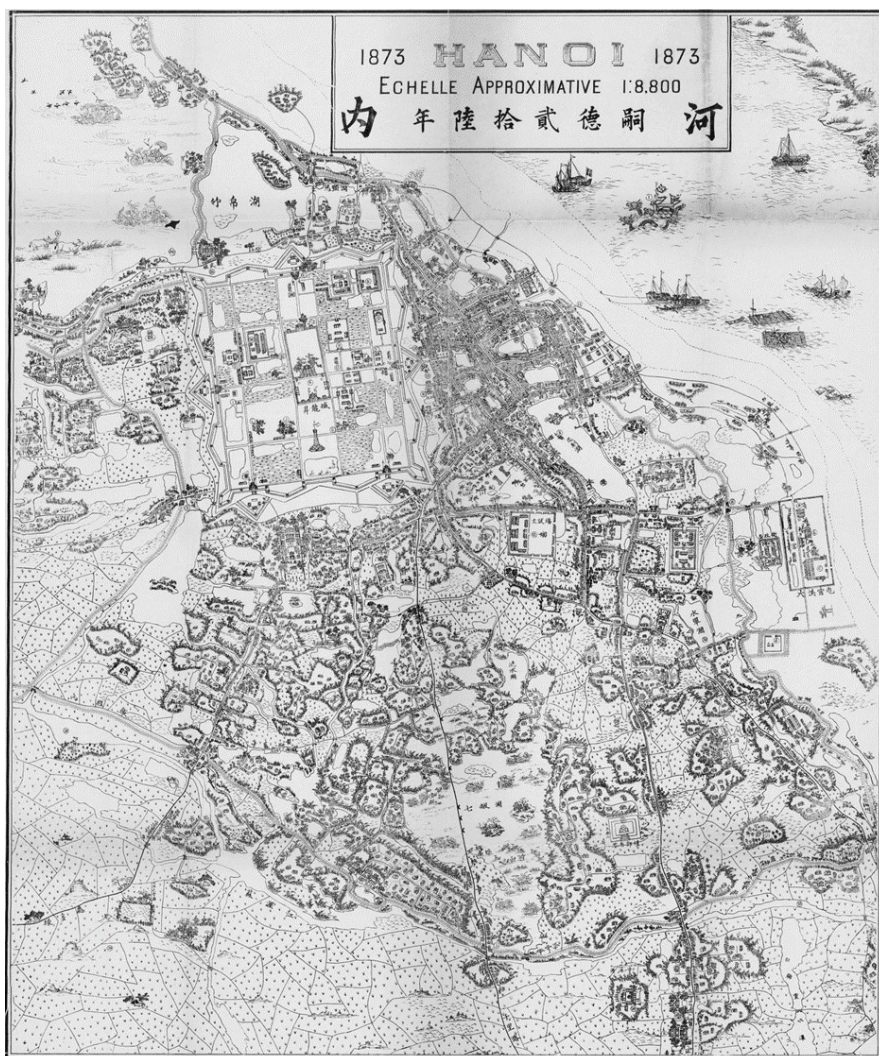


Fig. 6. Hanoi in 1873.

The thesis regards the ‘ancient Vietnamese capital city’ as an entirety, to discuss the relevance with Chinese Urban Planning Theories from the spatial structure and functional layout, based on historical map. In the perspective of cultural transmission, the construction of ancient Vietnamese capital cities could be seen as direct evidence of the dissemination of Chinese urban planning theories to Southeast Asia, especially during the Dynastic Period of Vietnam. Due to the suzerain-vassal relations between China and Vietnam, the consciousness of ‘Southern China’ caused the Vietnam expected the equality between its regime and China, and the urban space became an intuitive medium for this idea. ‘Kingship-Supremacist’ and ‘Harmony between mankind and nature’ was directly determined the site selection and construction mode. Meanwhile, with the development of history, Southeast Asia as a venue for witnessing the integration of the world’s diverse cultures, the Vietnamese capital cities which be constructed or experienced reconstruction since the 19th century could further refine its heritage value from the perspective of integrating Chinese and Western urban planning theories, and accelerating the conservation works for this cultural heritage type.

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DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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IMAGE SOURCES:

Figure 1 Vietnam National Museum of History—Bài 2: Cổ Loa - công trình phòng thủ sớm nhất. Website: <https://baotanglichsu.vn/vi/Articles/3096/10191/bai-2-co-loa-cong-trinh-phong-thu-som-nhat.html>

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Figure 2 Search: Museum of Nanyue Kingdom Palace. Website: <https://www.google.com/maps> (Decoding by: Schematic Diagram of the Capital city of Panyu in Nanyue Kingdom. In: Hu Jian. *Aesthetic Characteristics of Architecture in Capital Panyu of Nanyue Kingdom*[J]. *Huazhong Architecture*. 2006(11): 66-70.

Figure 3 Based map: Emperor LêThánh Tông. Map of Đông Kinh (Hanoi) in 1490- Hồng Đức bản đồ sách

Figure 4 Search: Thành phố Huế. Website: <https://www.google.com/maps>

Figure 5 Search: 'Kinh thành Huế' and 'Beijing City'. Website: <https://www.google.com/maps>
Decoding by 'National Library of Vietnam, The citadel's plan in the Đại Nam nhất thống chí' and 'Peking, 1914, Cartographic Department of the Royal Prussian National Survey'

Figure 6 Phạm Đình Bách, Map of Hanoi in 1873 drawn in 1902. Website: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/13476480@N07/11387030115>

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