

Exploring Classical Vietnamese Gardens Under the Nguyen Dynasty: A Comparative Study With Chinese Counterparts

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GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT



HIGHLIGHTS

- Classical Vietnamese gardens were influenced by Chinese culture and philosophies
- Classical Vietnamese garden’s layouts, architecture, rockeries, and plants are the aspects showing the influences of Chinese culture, but have distinctive characteristics that set them apart
- Gaining insights into classical Vietnamese gardens could contribute to the development of modern landscape design in Vietnam

KEYWORDS

Classical Vietnamese Gardens;
Imperial Gardens;
Imperial Mausoleum Gardens;
Nguyen Dynasty;
Classical Chinese Gardens;
Taoism; Confucianism; Nature

This paper explores the typologies and characteristics of classical Vietnamese gardens built in the Nguyen Dynasty (1802–1945) by examining historical records, paintings, and existing gardens. The findings highlight the presence of two distinct types of classical gardens in Vietnam: imperial gardens and imperial mausoleum gardens. Numerous examples from Chinese gardens constructed during the Ming and Qing Dynasties are employed for comparison with Vietnamese gardens. Influenced by Chinese culture, Vietnamese gardens exhibit numerous shared characteristics and elements with their Chinese counterparts. Layouts, architectural styles of pavilions, garden elements such as rockeries, ponds, and bridges, as well as plant materials were inspired by Chinese gardens, yet they were adapted to align with local conditions,

such as climate and garden owners' preferences. For example, the arrangement and design of some elements, like waterscapes and bridges, species of plants and stone materials were different. Understanding the cultural significance and uniqueness of Vietnamese classical gardens contributes to their preservation and restoration. By recognizing and comparing the philosophical approaches to garden design in China and Vietnam, this research sheds light on the diverse expressions and adaptations of garden design in East Asia.

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1 Introduction

Chinese civilization existed for over 5,000 years and is characterized by rich philosophy, distinctive political structure (the Chinese feudal system lasted more than 2,000 years), diverse cultural traditions, and influential arts, architecture and literature^[1]. Chinese culture has profoundly influenced various neighbouring Asian countries, including Japan, the Republic of Korea, and other Southeast Asian nations like Vietnam. Classical Chinese gardens, dating back thousands of years, reflect a connection between culture, philosophy, and nature. These carefully designed spaces are a statement to the Chinese attitude toward harmony and balance with nature. Chinese gardens were influenced by traditional philosophies of Confucianism, Taoism (or Daoism), and Buddhism, which taught how man “could best fit into the great universe in which he lived”^[2]. Gardens were built during the rules of all dynasties and were based on a proscribed set of design principles. Chinese gardens had the most significant influence on landscape design in Southeast Asian countries. By the 18th century, Chinese garden motifs were introduced to Europe together with Chinese artifacts^[3]. However, the interpretation and manifestation of original Chinese philosophies in the art of garden and landscape design differ in each country, reflecting unique attitudes toward nature. The geographical and environmental diversity of China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Vietnam exerted a profound influence

on the evolution of classical garden design in each country. For example, the vast and diverse landscapes in China cover a wide range of climatic zones, ranging from mountains to plains, rivers, and lakes, providing abundant inspiration for garden designers. This led to the creation of gardens that aimed to replicate and harmonize with the natural surroundings^[4]. In Japan, being an island nation with limited land resources, the natural landscape of mountains with active volcanos, rivers, and the coast affected by typhoons heavily influenced garden design. Japanese gardens especially in Zen-Buddhism monasteries is mainly about “tranquility, simplicity, and harmony”^[5]. Similarly, located in a temperate zone with four distinct seasons (temperate zone of deciduous forests) and a geography of mountains and hills, Korean garden design often “realize an ideal and respect the natural surroundings”^[6]. These differences have resulted in the development of distinct and captivating styles of garden design across Asia. For example, when comparing the scenic aspects, the Korean garden style tends to be “more extroverted,” embracing open views and expansive landscapes. On the other hand, the Japanese garden style is “more introverted,” creating enclosed spaces and intimate settings for contemplation. The Chinese garden style often incorporates elements of both extroversion and introversion, striking a balance between expansive vistas and secluded corners^{[7][8]}. These distinctions reflect the unique approaches to nature and spatial design found in each culture.

Like Japan and the Republic of Korea, Vietnam was also affected by different Chinese dynasties who ruled here for nearly 1,000 years (111 BCE–939 CE). Many aspects of Vietnamese culture experienced Chinese influence, including religious beliefs, customs and habits, politics, and arts^[9]. The introduction of Chinese garden principles to Vietnam relates to historical processes and reflects political, economic, and cultural exchanges between the two countries. This cultural diffusion was also facilitated by the geographical proximity of Vietnam to China, fostering a unique blend of Vietnam’s diverse landscape and sub-tropical climate, encompassing plains, coastlines, and mountain ranges.

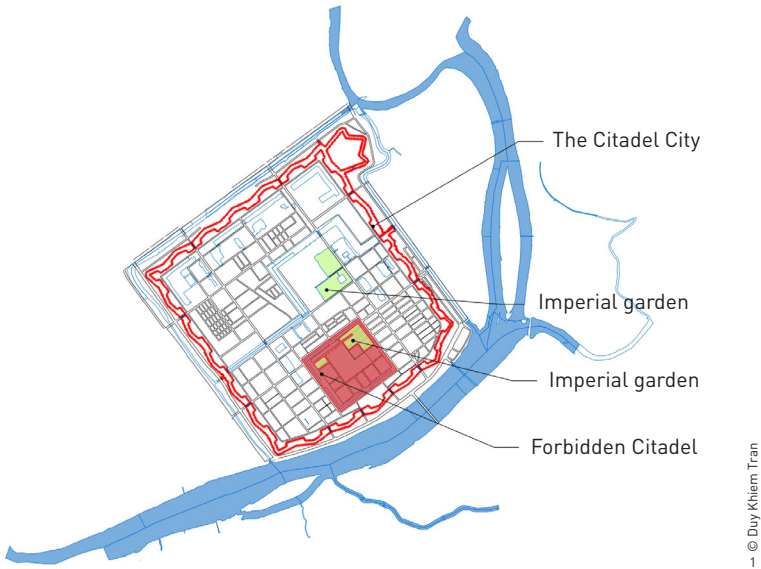
Although historic documents suggest that garden art design in Vietnam first appeared during the Ly Dynasty (1009–1225) and continued to be adopted and developed by subsequent dynasties such as Tran (1226–1428) and Le (1428–1802). However, the art of gardening reached its “golden age” under the rule of the Nguyen Dynasty (1802–1945)^[10]. Many architecture, royal gardens, and mausoleums complexes were constructed in these periods based on the philosophies from China such as Confucianism, Feng-Shui, and Yin-Yang^[11]. Like the previous dynasties, Nguyen emperors ordered to build numerous royal gardens. All were constructed only in Hue City and could not be found elsewhere in Vietnam. Based on purposes, functions, and artistic styles, this paper divides classical Vietnamese gardens into two broader types: imperial gardens and imperial mausoleum gardens. In contrast, their Chinese counterparts exhibit greater diversity, encompassing imperial gardens, imperial mausoleum gardens, temple gardens, residence gardens, scenic spot gardens, and literati gardens^[3]. However, there is a scarcity of evidence concerning privately designed gardens during Vietnam’s feudal era. It is presumed that constructing an entire aesthetic garden demanded significant resources, rendering it economically unattainable for peasant families and even for local officials. It is conceivable that the merchant class and high-ranking officials may have some private gardens. However, there is an absence of concrete pieces of evidence and references to support this hypothesis. The scarcity of documents and physical remains of Vietnamese gardens that can shed light on garden typology could be explained by numerous destructions during wars throughout Vietnamese history. Although certain classical Vietnamese homes incorporate elements of nature, such as rockeries, trees, and water features in their courtyards, these elements appear to serve a decorative function in the house rather than constituting a fully developed garden design. Thus, this paper only focuses on the imperial gardens and imperial mausoleum gardens built during the Nguyen Dynasty.

Vietnamese imperial gardens were privately owned by emperors and royal families for leisure and relaxation (Fig. 1). During the Nguyen Dynasty, there were more than 30 imperial gardens, with notable examples including the Doanh Chau, Ngu Vien, Truong Ninh, Thieu Phuong Garden, Tinh Tam Lake, Thuong Mau Garden, Thu Quang Garden, and Co Ha Garden^[10]. These royal gardens were typically constructed within confined spaces and were often enclosed by walls and adjacent buildings.

Imperial mausoleum gardens were the gardens attached to the emperor’s tombs. They were used not only as places for mourning or worship but also as second palaces where emperors resided before their passing away. After the emperor’s death, his concubines moved to the mausoleum to live and took care of the tomb^[12]. Before any imperial mausoleum was built, the designers had to carefully choose a favorable geographical location. After that, the surrounding landscape would be designed to harmonize the site’s natural features with a mausoleum’s architecture. The task was to create a serene and majestic final resting place for the emperor^[13]. Vietnamese royal mausoleum landscapes showcase a fusion of natural elements, intricate designs, and symbolic features that reflect the Vietnamese belief in honouring and remembering the deceased.

Although Vietnam’s traditional garden design art may not have bold imprints like China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea, they still have unique characteristics reflecting the ancient Vietnamese attitudes toward nature and it is worth studying. However, the

1. The locations of imperial gardens in the Hue City in the Nguyen Dynasty



understanding of historic garden design in Vietnam remains limited due to sporadic studies that are primarily available in the Vietnamese language. As a result, the characteristics, principles, elements, and features of Vietnamese gardens have not been adequately comprehended. Therefore, the objective of this study is to fill this knowledge gap and shed light on the unique aspects of classical Vietnamese garden design. Understanding the essence of traditional gardens, which reflect local attitudes towards nature, could play an important role in developing principles of sustainable urban landscapes in modern cities.

2 Methodology

This study focuses on Vietnamese royal gardens built during the Nguyen Dynasty (1802–1883) to highlight their characteristics and features as data related to garden designs from earlier dynasties is insufficient for comprehensive research. To elucidate the characteristics and principles of classical Vietnamese gardens, the research team analysed philosophies, layouts, architecture, rockeries, and plant materials, using historical texts, photos, archival images, and paintings of classical Vietnamese gardens. These valuable resources comprise glass paintings and artwork of the mid-19th century from Hue City museums. The paintings help conduct a visual comparative analysis of historical documents and existing garden sites, as well as elaborating the layouts of destroyed royal gardens. This research also used the graphical analysis method by interpreting existing Chinese and Vietnamese garden plans and preparing the drawings that helped visualize and analyze garden layouts and different elements.

The characteristics, aesthetics, and philosophies of earlier Chinese gardens built during the Ming and Qing Dynasties are also included for the comparison where it was applicable. It is noticed that classical gardens constructed during the Ming and Qing are very diverse, but this research only emphasizes the common elements such as overall layouts and architectural and garden features. According to Qingxi Lou, the classical Chinese garden is “an all-encompassing piece of artwork made up of architecture, hills and streams, as well as lush vegetation and flowers, combining the beauty of natural scenery, of architectural forms, and of landscape paintings”^[14]. Thus, this research follows this definition of classical Chinese garden while discussing its influence on Vietnamese garden art. Similarly, this paper acknowledges the existence of different schools of Feng-Shui and Yin-Yang concepts but interpret these concepts in a broader sense. This comparative analysis not only highlights the unique features of classical Vietnamese gardens, but

also underscores the cultural exchanges and influences between these two rich traditions in garden design.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Philosophies and Concepts Influencing Vietnamese Garden Art

Classical Vietnamese gardens exhibit a unique philosophy of design that harmoniously blends Taoism, Confucianism, Feng-Shui, and Yin-Yang concepts with a deep respect for nature. Those philosophies and concepts are adopted from the Chinese culture through the interaction between the two countries.

Taoism is an ancient Chinese philosophy and religion that guides living in harmony with the universe. It is often associated with the sage Laozi, who authored the foundational Taoist text, the *Tao Te Ching*, around 500 BCE. This tradition offers wisdom on how to align one’s life with the natural order of the cosmos^{[15][16]}. A central tenet in Taoism is the balance of opposite forces—Yin-Yang. The concept of Yin-Yang underscores the interconnectedness of all seemingly opposite things in the universe, such as light and dark, hard and soft, dynamic and stable, which collaborate harmoniously to form a universal whole^[15]. Taoism has exerted a significant influence on Vietnamese beliefs, emphasizing the notion that humans should live in harmony with their environment^{[17][18]}. The Taoist ideas of harmony and balance are demonstrated in the traditional Vietnamese gardens through the utilization of opposite pairs such as water and rockeries, and open and enclosed spaces.

Confucian philosophy was the mainstream of traditional Chinese culture. Confucianism was introduced into Vietnam via merchants and priests^[19] and gradually co-existed with Buddhism to become a crucial ideology of the feudal monarchy^{[9][20]}. Confucianism was reinforced by society through the filial piety and absolute obedience of children to their family, or mandarins to their emperor^[21]. In both Chinese and Vietnamese garden art, the influence of Confucianism is reflected in the layouts of architecture and even the use of plants. For example, Confucianism places great significance on bamboo, considering it a symbol of beauty and noble character^[22]. Consequently, bamboo was frequently incorporated into classical garden designs, reflecting the profound influence of Confucian values on garden aesthetics. Confucian belief also emphasizes the importance of a well-ordered society, where individuals and institutions coexist in harmony^[23]. Classical Vietnamese gardens reflected this philosophy via architectural structures in garden spaces. Structures are symmetrical and geometric in shape and reflect Confucians, while garden elements (rocks, water bodies,

plants, etc.) exhibiting more natural forms and shapes reflect Taoist beliefs.

Feng-Shui is the traditional Chinese doctrine of “geomancy.” One of the aims of this theory is to find a special site that would bring health, wealth, fortune, and prosperity to the occupants, based on its geographical and morphological features^{[24]~[26]}. In Vietnam, Feng-Shui has deeply influenced architectural and landscape design for centuries. The principles of Feng-Shui are applied to various aspects of life, including the layout and orientation of homes, temples, gardens, and even the entire cities^[27]. A site or land that is favorable to Feng-Shui will enhance “Qi” (气), the positive energy running on the Earth, which is preferred for building cities, imperial tombs, and other important buildings^[28].

The manifestations of these above philosophies and concepts in garden design vary significantly across each country. For example, in Japan, garden design was mainly influenced by Zen-Buddhism^[29], with a sense of “melancholic beauty” reflected through the absence of real vegetation and flowing water in the dry landscape-style gardens. The renowned rock gardens, known as “karesansui,” represent a minimalist approach with carefully arranged rocks, gravel, or sand, as symbolic elements^[30]. These gardens aim to evoke a meditative atmosphere, reflecting Japanese’s deep connection and respect for powerful and dynamic nature and the pursuit of inner peace through Zen-Buddhism principles^{[5][31]}. While in China, the Republic of Korea, and Vietnam, the influence of Confucianism and Taoism on garden designs is more prominent. The combination of these philosophies reflects a unified character that embraces personal excellence and spiritual predominance. Private Chinese gardens were designed for the intellectual elites and “embody a

pleasure-seeking spirit”^[29], while Vietnamese gardens, particularly in the imperial garden context, featured central architectural elements and also aimed to demonstrate imperial power and wealth through a particular location of gardens in the city and interpretation of garden features^[13].

3.2 Characteristics of Classical Vietnamese Gardens

3.2.1 Layouts of Gardens

(1) Similarities in the layouts of classical Chinese and Vietnamese gardens

Experiencing centuries of cultural exchange with China, the design of classical Vietnamese gardens shares many common characteristics with their Chinese counterparts. These similarities in layout underscore the deep-rooted connections between the two cultures while also showcasing distinct Vietnamese adaptations. Both classical Chinese and Vietnamese gardens incorporate elements of stillness (static) and movement (dynamic) or contrast and harmony to create a harmonious experience for visitors. This technique is easily found in most Chinese gardens such as Yuyuan Garden, Humble Administrator’s Garden, and Lion Grove Garden in China, and Thieu Phuong Garden and Co Ha Garden in Vietnam (Fig. 2).

Static elements like pavilions, bridges, and rocks offer stability and aesthetics, providing spaces for reflection and relaxation. These static components provide a sense of stability and permanence within the garden. Pavilions and bridges, for instance, offer places for contemplation and rest, while carefully positioned rocks and plants contribute to the garden’s overall aesthetics^{[3][32]}. In contrast, dynamic elements such as streams, ponds, plants, and waterfalls

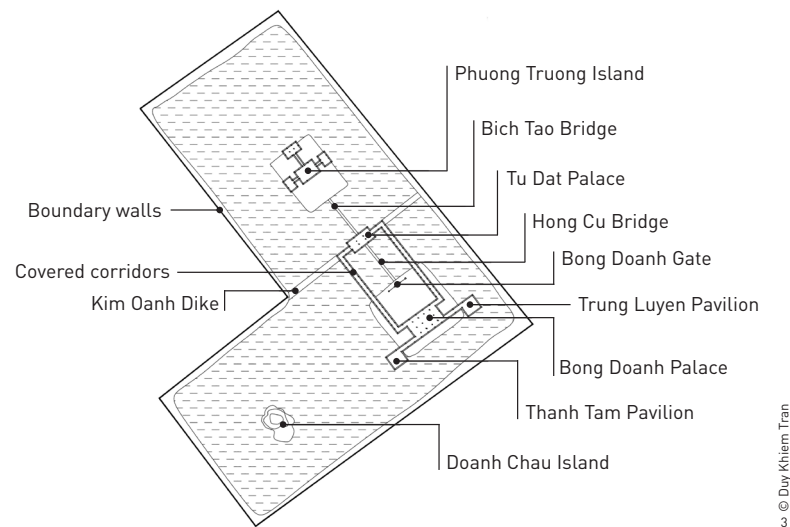


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2. Static and dynamic elements in Humble Administrator’s Garden in Suzhou, China (Fig. 2-1) and Co Ha Imperial Garden in Hue, Vietnam (Fig. 2-2).



3. A drawing of the layout of Tinh Tam Lake



4. The glass painting of Tinh Tam Lake (source: Hue Royal Antiquities Museum)

bring movement and a sense of constant change to the garden. This dynamic quality not only adds visual interest but also generates soothing sounds, contributing to the garden's overall sensory experience. The presence of fish and lotus in the water features adds a dynamic, living element to the garden^[3].

Another indispensable technique in classical Chinese garden designs is the use of contrast and harmony design principles. The contrast technique focuses on two very different geological elements to develop the main concept, typically involving mountains and natural water bodies, where one represents height or elevation while the other symbolizes the depth of a landscape^[3]. This technique is also used in classical Vietnamese gardens, as evidenced by the deliberate contrast and harmony found in elements such as hilly terrain and tranquil ponds. When using this technique, garden designers need to evaluate the surrounding area thoroughly, focusing mostly on making the most of the current landscape. The natural environment is only changed when it is necessary^[3]. Examples of this approach can be found in Chenge Mountain Resort and Summer Palace in Beijing, China, and Imperial mausoleum gardens of Gia Long, Minh Mang, and Tu Duc Emperors in Vietnam. Smaller classical gardens like Lion Grove Garden and Lingering Garden (China) and Thieu Phuong Garden and Truong Ninh Garden (Vietnam) also demonstrate contrastive elements such as architecture and living landscapes.

The harmony approach in both Chinese and Vietnamese gardens concentrates on fostering a special relationship among buildings/pavilions, natural landscapes, and plants. In this context, building

complexes (e.g., houses, palaces, pavilions) are typically arranged in an asymmetrical manner that aligns with the contours of the natural terrain. This layout seeks to achieve a sense of unity and synchrony between human-made elements and the encompassing natural landscapes^{[3][33]}.

An illustrative example of Chinese cultural influence on classical Vietnamese garden art is the concept of "Three Celestial Islands in One Pond," rooted in celestial myths. This concept initially emerged during the Zhou Dynasty (1046–256 BCE) and gained prominence during the Qin and Han Dynasties (221 BCE–220 CE), leaving a distinct mark on garden art^{[10][34]}. This concept is illustrated in the design of the Summer Palace in Beijing, where the lake has three small islands. These islands stand for three celestial islands, namely, Penglai, Fangzhang, and Yingzhou Islands. In the case of Vietnam, the Nguyen Dynasty also ordered to creation of the Tinh Tam Lake based on this concept. The lake was built from 1822 to 1838 during the reign of several emperors. The Kim Oanh causeway divided the garden into two parts. Compared with the smaller royal gardens in Hue City, Tinh Tam Garden has a large area of water bodies combined with islands. This concept is also found in other classical gardens in Vietnam, such as the enchanting Co Ha Garden, showcasing the profound influence of Chinese culture on Vietnamese garden design (Figs. 3, 4).

(2) Differences in the layouts between classical Chinese gardens and Vietnamese gardens

While classical Vietnamese gardens have deeply embraced many Chinese garden design techniques, they also showcase significant

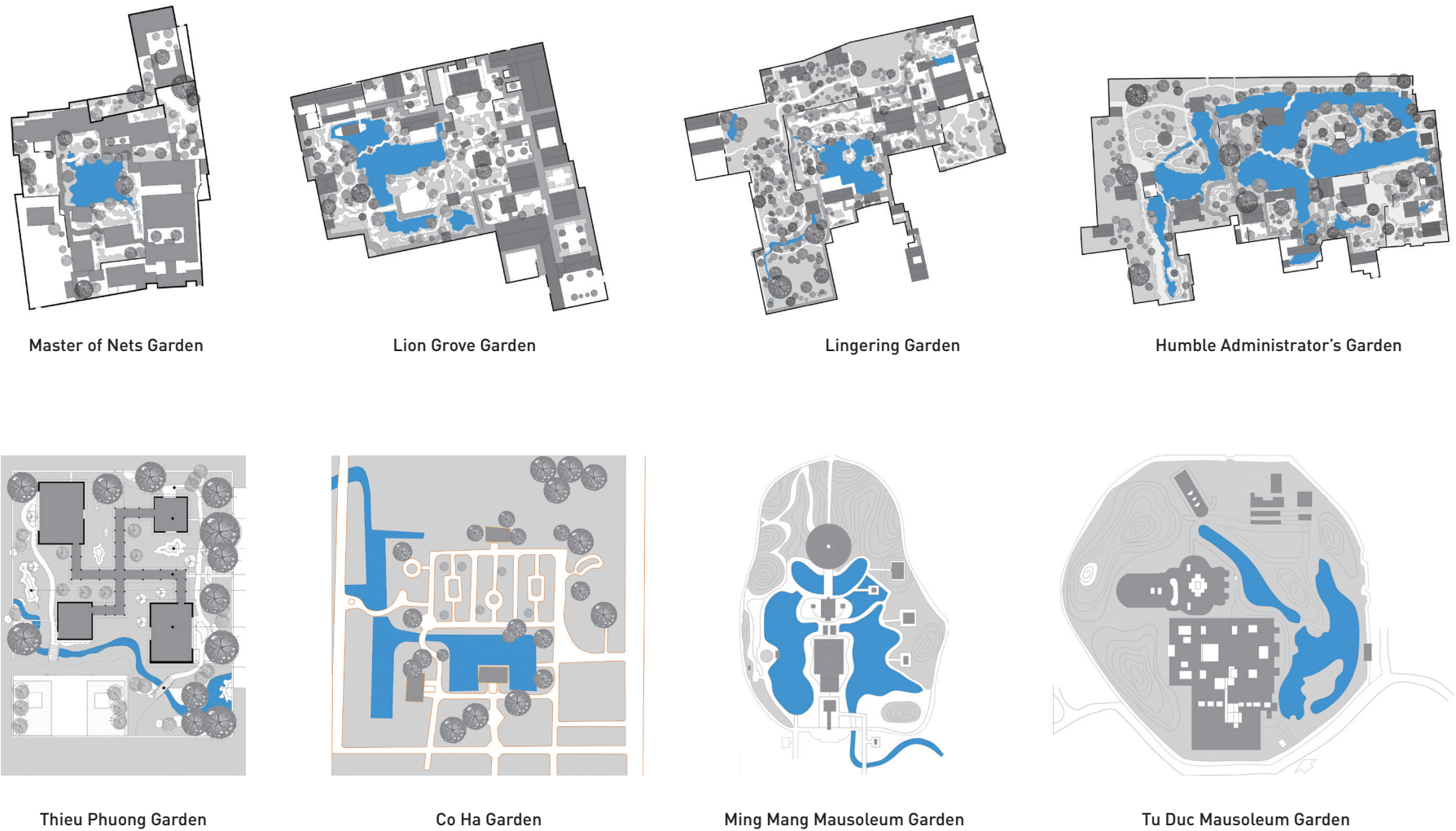
differences in their layouts. These distinctions reflect both cultural variations and the unique environmental conditions of Vietnam (such as the sub-tropical climate and different native plants), setting them apart from their Chinese counterparts. One notable difference lies in the use of water elements. In private Chinese gardens, water elements like ponds, streams, and waterfalls are used to introduce a special sense of movement and create a soundscape. This is particularly pronounced in the private gardens of southern China, where an extensive network of rivers and lakes, coupled with existing abundant water resources, facilitates the harmonious incorporation of water into the garden design. As expressed in the book of Jie Hu, “a garden without water is not a genuine garden”^[3]. Thus, the waterscape in classical Chinese gardens is given priority and is located in an outstanding place and also occupies a large area in the gardens (Fig. 5).

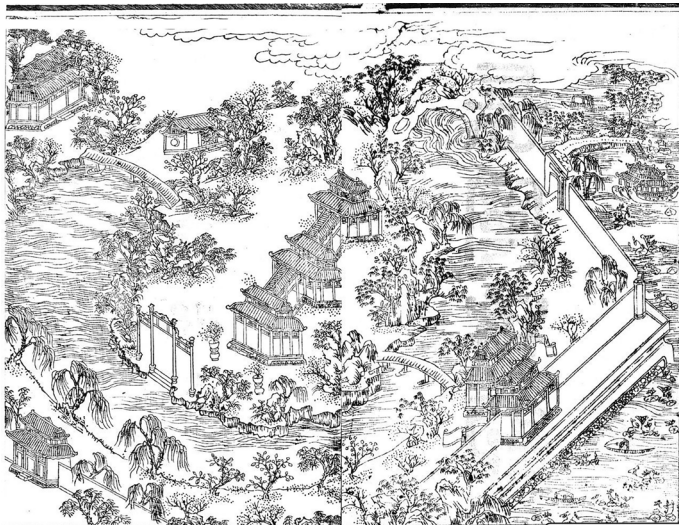
In contrast, the arrangement of water elements in classical Vietnamese gardens follow a different approach. While still integral to the garden’s design, they are not as extensively and prominently

featured as in Chinese gardens. Instead of occupying central positions, waterscapes in classical Vietnamese gardens are often positioned to surround or lie in front of architectural structures. In imperial gardens like Thieu Phuong, the water elements are small inlet streams that meander through the garden. Here, the focus shifts toward the architectural features and the interplay between corridors and the surrounding waterscape (Fig. 6).

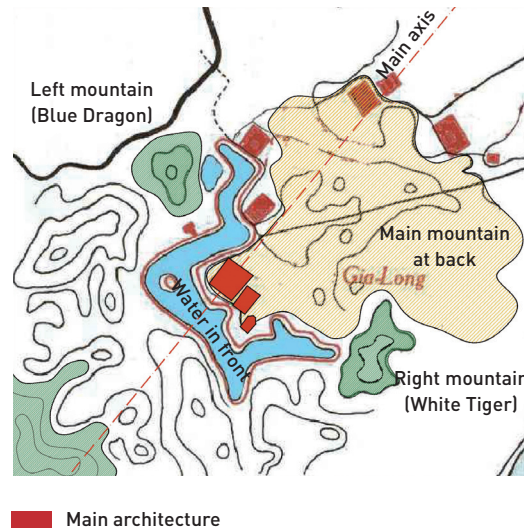
Another example is the Truong Ninh Imperial Garden located in the Forbidden Citadel of Hue City. Analyzing the painting of Truong Ninh (Fig. 7) reveals that the garden comprised three buildings laid out on an island in the shape of the Chinese character “Wang” (王, meaning “emperor”)^[35]. The front building was named “Ngu-Dai-Dong-Duong” (five generations living under the same roof), the middle building was named “Tho Khang” (longevity), and the last

5. Water elements in Chinese gardens
6. Water elements in Vietnamese gardens

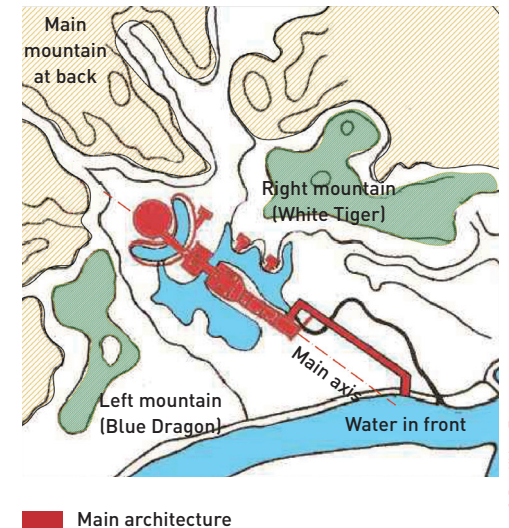




7. The painting of Truong Ninh Garden (source: Hue Royal Antiquities Museum)



8-1 Main architecture



8-2 Main architecture

8. Feng-Shui principles in imperial mausoleum gardens: Gia Long (Fig. 8-1) and Minh Mang (Fig. 8-2)

one was named “Van Phuc” (prosperity). All three buildings were connected by a central covered corridor. The island was located in Lake Kim Thuy (golden water) and could be accessed via three curved bridges.

There were some artificial mountains made of rocks named “Bao Son,” “Kinh Ngu,” and “Ho Ton,” which exist till today^[36]. Truong Ninh Imperial Garden was ranked seventh in Emperor Thieu Tri’s “20 Places of Scenic Beauty in the capital city,” who also wrote the poem “Truong Ninh Thuy Dieu” (Fishing at Truong Ninh) and dedicated it to the garden. In 1923, the Truong Ninh Palace was renamed “Truong Sanh” (longevity)^{[12][35]}.

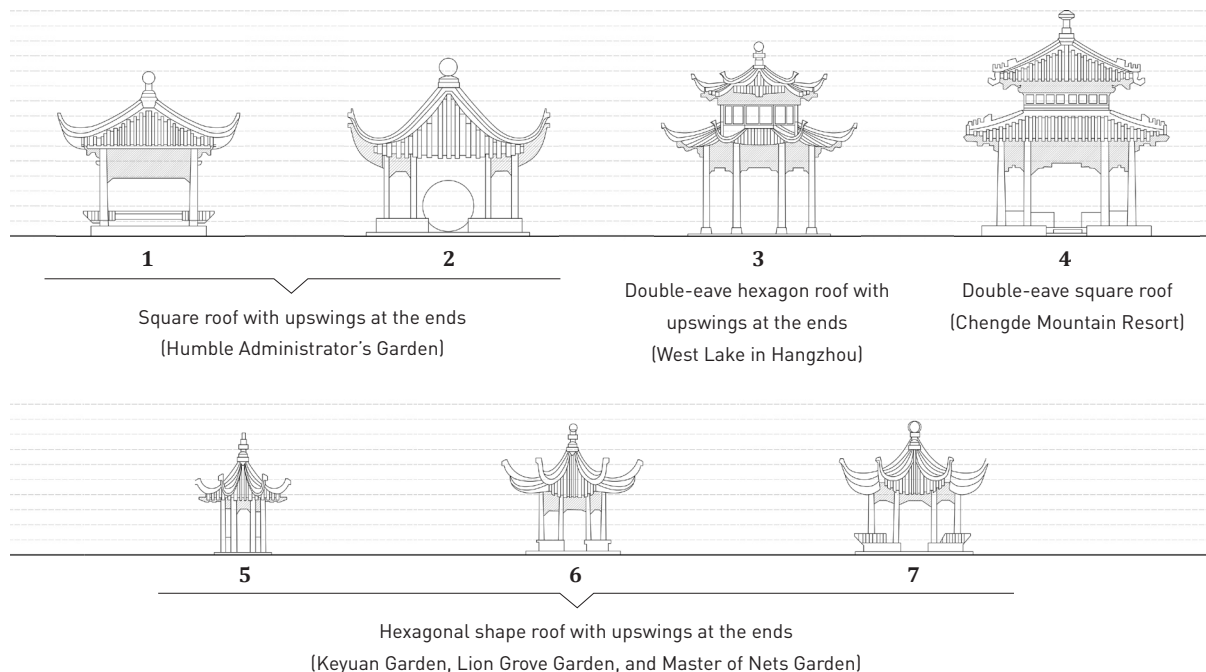
Conversely, in imperial mausoleum gardens, water surfaces often occupy larger areas and adhere to Feng-Shui principles. Feng-Shui principles dictate that a balance site should have a natural mountain at the back, water in the front, and two smaller mountains to the left and right representing for “Blue Dragon” and “White Tiger,” respectively. The diversity of shapes and contours is found in the differing topography and the perception of the foreground, middle ground, and background. Various textures in the grass, trees, and water contribute to various colours. Structures and tombs blend into the surrounding landscape, forming a cohesive and integrated environment^[37]. This alignment reflects the careful consideration of natural elements in harmony with the principles of Feng-Shui, contributing to the distinctive characteristic layout of Vietnamese imperial mausoleum gardens. Typical examples are the mausoleum gardens of Gia Long and Minh Mang (Fig. 8).

Moreover, a distinguishing feature of classical Chinese gardens

is the tendency to divide water bodies into smaller, interconnected parts using elements such as islands, causeways, piers, bridges, corridors, and stepping stones. This deliberate segmentation aims to enhance spatial depth and thus visually make the garden bigger^{[3][17][38]}.

In Vietnamese gardens, however, the approach to water is often simplified. Rather than dividing it into numerous distinct components, water is typically treated as a unified whole. It could be a pond, a lake, a creek or a stream. This design choice aligns with the natural conditions of the sites and the skills of artisans, emphasizing the balance between Yin and Yang elements rather than trying to create many spatial layers. For example, in the mausoleum complex of Minh Mang emperor, Trung Minh Lake in front of the main tomb serves as a prominent Yin element. The crescent shape of Trung Minh Lake symbolizes the moon (Yin), complementing the tomb’s circular shape, which stands for the sun (Yang), further enhancing the Yin-Yang balance and the interconnectedness of opposing forces in the mausoleum’s design.

Based on these comparisons, it can be concluded that while classical Vietnamese gardens and their Chinese counterparts employ similar techniques, there are notable differences in the arrangement of elements. The most prominent distinction lies in the presence and shape of waterscapes. In Chinese gardens, water often takes a central position and occupies extensive areas (sometimes up to two thirds of a garden) which could be observed in many classical gardens like Master of Nets Garden or Humble Administrator’s Garden. Whereas in Vietnamese gardens, architecture (houses and



9. The common types of Chinese traditional pavilions (not to scale)

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pavilions) is prioritized, and water is evenly integrated into the overall design. Additionally, water bodies in Chinese gardens can be divided into multiple sections, creating diverse layers of spaces^{[3][14]}, while in Vietnamese gardens, water often serves as an Yin element in a more unified manner. These differences underscore the unique approaches and philosophies that characterize each tradition and designer's vision.

3.2.2 Architecture

If Feng-Shui theory, Confucianism and Taoism govern the design of the overall layout, it is also worth investigating the garden elements such as architecture, rockeries, and plants. These features are common in both Chinese gardens and Vietnamese gardens; however, Vietnamese gardens incorporate some different interpretations of fine-scale design.

(1) Houses and pavilions on the water surface

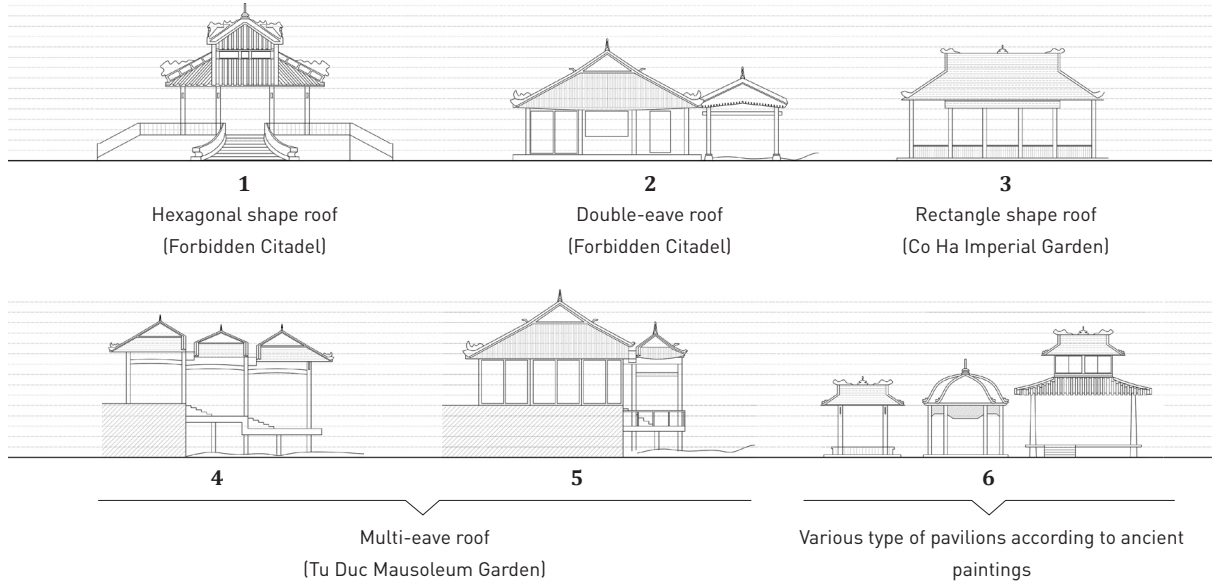
In the Vietnamese and Chinese royal gardens, pavilions are an indispensable element. Besides playing an important role in forming the beauty of garden landscapes, they were also functional and provided a place to rest and enjoy the scenery for owners and guests. In China, pavilions are assumed to first appear in the Zhou dynasty. During the Han dynasty, pavilions functioned as watchtowers and were often multi-storied without surrounding walls for easy observation. Until the Sui (581–618 BC) and Tang (618–907 BC) Dynasties, the function of pavilions gradually shifted from military buildings to aesthetically pleasing landscape

structures in the gardens of wealthy officials and literati^[39]. Both Chinese and Vietnamese pavilions often take up the best viewing spots of gardens—next to or even directly above the water surface—to afford inspiring and breathtaking views. Sometimes, a pavilion is placed where visitors could easily see the moon's reflection at night or listen to the sound of a stream^[2].

The Chinese pavilions are often partly concealed in a vast landscape. This idea suggests the humble presence of people in nature^[14]. The diversity of Chinese pavilion architecture in both shapes and sizes is exemplified in Figure 9. They come in both single-storey and two-storey configurations, adorned with colorful elements, intricate decorations, and varied structural designs. Inside, a consistent feature involves the presence of stone tables to accommodate visitors^[33].

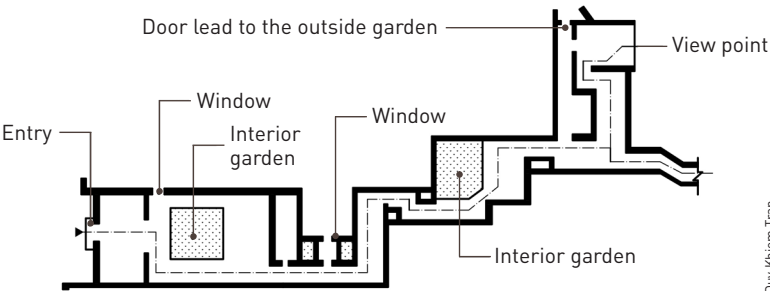
Conversely, the Vietnamese pavilions looked like a platform or a traditional house sitting on the water surface (Fig. 10). Many of them have the word “Ta” in their names, which means “a house on the water.” This structure often has two or three parts partly enclosed by wooden walls while the roofs are often multi-curved. The most famous one is Xung Khiem Ta in the Tu Duc Mausoleum. This structure is a double-space house located on the bank of Luu Khiem Lake. The main space of this architecture was designed as a traditional house with surrounding walls on three sides, while the second space is open and upon the water surface, supported by a wooden columns system. Emperor Tu Duc often used this place for enjoyment and discussion with officials.

10. The common types of Vietnamese traditional pavilions (not to scale)
11. Corridors in the Lingering Garden (not to scale): enclosed corridor (Fig. 11-1) and zigzag corridor (Fig. 11-2)



(2) Corridors

Corridors are common in classical Chinese and Vietnamese and gardens. They were not only used to connect buildings. Corridors themselves are beautiful architectural structures and an essential component in garden design. A corridor plays a crucial role in connecting various structures and provides visitors with a scenic pathway to see the most beautiful vistas and views^[40]. Chinese traditional gardens have four types of corridors: straight, zigzag, wavy, and double-paved^[3]. According to the geographical features, corridors may climb, decrease, and twist. They alter the scenery further, create subsections in areas, and increase the depth of view



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11-1



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from a functional standpoint^[3]. While long straight corridors were used extensively in imperial gardens, private gardens used zigzag or winding corridors because ancient Chinese believed straight lines were evil spirit ways^[38]. When visitors travel through the zigzag corridors, their views also change at the angles, so they can enjoy the garden at different scenes and thus have different moods (Fig. 11). Corridors are often combined with winding pathways to bring visitors new visual and sensory experiences^[41].

In Vietnamese imperial gardens, corridors are also used to connect and divide spaces. Further, they have many types with different names such as “Truong Lang” (long straight corridor), “Hoi Lang” (square corridor), “Van Tu Hoi Lang” (Swastika corridor), “Duc Lang” (open-sided corridor), and “Truc Lang” (short corridor) (Fig. 12)^[42]. Many types of corridor could appear in an imperial garden and imperial mausoleum garden. Among these, Van Tu Hoi Lang, known as the “swastika corridor,” within Thieu Phuong Garden stands out prominently. Its construction dated back to 1828 when Emperor Minh Mang initiated its creation to the east of the Forbidden Citadel of Hue City. Subsequently, in 1841, it underwent repair and enhancement^[43]. This corridor was meticulously designed in the shape of Swastika, a representation rooted in Buddhism (Fig. 13).

This research revealed that zigzag corridors and up-down corridors did not appear in classical Vietnamese gardens. It hypothesizes that Vietnamese gardeners favored balance, symmetry, and alignment due to the influence of Confucian–Buddhism concepts. With their inherent asymmetry and unpredictability, Zigzag and up-down corridors may not align with such cultural

influence (as the corridor types found in Vietnamese gardens adhere to more “static” symmetrical principles). Additionally, there could be some technical construction obstacles, but it lacks specific evidence. There were also some enclosed corridors with small windows to divide the space like a screen. Compared with Chinese corridors, Vietnamese corridors have a more central position in the gardens, surrounded by other elements rather than arranged close to the outer garden boundaries.

3.2.3 Rockery

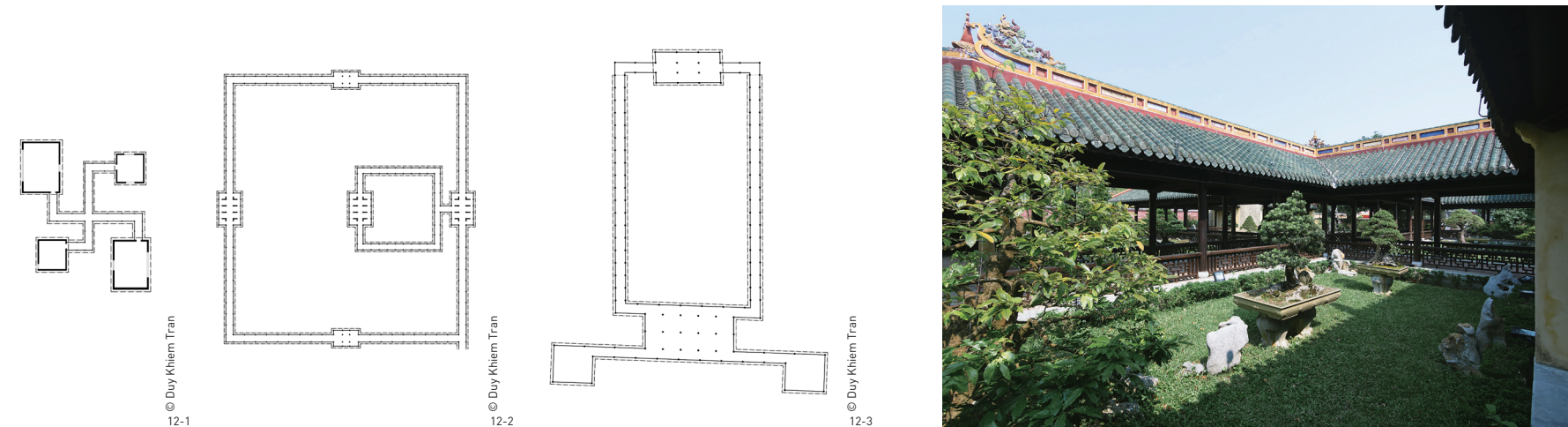
Rockery was appreciated by both the Vietnamese and the Chinese designers. It stemmed from ancient religious attitudes towards nature, which believed that mountains are connections between heaven and earth^[38]. In Taoism, rocks are believed to have positive natural energy and classified as Yang while plants and water as Yin^[44]. Several crucial aspects require consideration when crafting rockeries, including their position, shape, size, and height. The size of a rockery should harmonize with the available space, and its shape typically adheres to the principle of being “lower in front and higher at the back”^[3]. These rockeries are often situated next to architectural features like pavilions or corridors. Besides, Kai Gu^[45] emphasized the significance of rockeries in shaping three fundamental aspects – form, space, and time in a classical Chinese garden. The interplay between rock and water generates the garden’s form, the juxtaposition of stillness and motion defines its spaces, and the enduring vitality of rocks and water contributes to the garden’s temporal dimension.

The Chinese are interested in rocks that are rugged and have unusual shapes and cavities since they are configured to concentrate “Qi” energies according to Chinese beliefs^[46]. The rockery is often

categorized into three types—earth hill, stone rockery, and earth-stone rockery^[3]. Each of them has different characteristics and advantages but all try to recreate an image of real mountains, cliffs, hill ridges, and caves. These created structures are abundant and inspired by China’s natural topography. (Figs. 14, 15).

In contrast, while rockeries are a common and essential element in classical Vietnamese gardens, they are not as diverse in types and styles as their Chinese counterparts. Vietnamese rockery is often referred to the artificially rocky mountains with relatively simpler density, sizes, and shapes compared with the intricate variety found in Chinese gardens. They are smaller, softer, and less rugged, and there were not many holes in the rock’s body (Fig. 16)^[36]. In the gardens, rockeries became focal points for a larger view, so they were often placed in an outstanding place such as the middle of a lake. An example is the rocky mountain named “Divine Mountain on the Sea,” located in the lake of Thai Binh Lau Garden (Fig. 17). This artificial mountain was built based on the Chinese legend of the fairy mountains floating in the middle of the East Sea^[36]. Different from China, Vietnamese gardeners did not try to replicate nature as closely as possible when creating a rocky mountain; instead, they focus on the theme, symbol, and meanings of the artificial mountains. Several rockeries still exist in the imperial garden of the Nguyen dynasty. Each was built with different themes of “three sacred islands” in Truong Du palace, or “the nine dragons” in the Tu

12. Corridors in the Vietnamese imperial gardens (not to scale): swastika corridor (Fig. 12-1), square corridor (Fig. 12-2), and mix of long straight corridor, open-sided corridor and short corridor (Fig. 12-3)
13. Thieu Phuong Gardens and the Swastika Corridor





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14. Rockery in Lion Grove Garden
15. Rockery in Lingering Garden

Duc mausoleum garden.

The differences in rockery styles between classical Chinese and Vietnamese gardens can be attributed to variations in natural conditions, economic resources, and artistic and cultural traditions. China's diverse landscape and historical wealth allowed to use of varied stones, while Vietnam may have had limitations in geological resources and economy. Additionally, different artistic skills and cultural preferences for using rocks contributed to the distinct rockery designs.

3.2.4 Plants

Plants are considered one of five essential Feng-Shui elements, including metal, wood, water, fire, and earth. Plants (or green), related to the wood element, represent life energy, longevity, and the power of growth^[47]. Plants, with their various attributes like form, texture, color, odour, shading, and meaning, play an integral role in shaping the distinctive landscapes within classical gardens.

There was a range of plant species, including trees, shrubs, herbaceous perennials, and aquatic vegetation. Plants that have colorful flowers, leaves or fruits had a special meaning and were favoured^[41], for example, orchid (*Orchidaceae* spp.), banana (*Musa* spp.), bamboo (*Bambusa* spp.), plum tree (*Prunus* spp.), willow (*Salix* spp.), water-lily (*Nymphaeaceae* spp.), and duckweed (*Lemnoideae* spp.).

In classical gardens of China and Vietnam, plants can be found next to the pavilions, on hills and rockeries, and on water surfaces. These two cultures share several common principles in the selection and arrangement of vegetation to enhance the beauty and meaning of gardens. For example, fewer trees, shrubs, and flowering perennials are arranged intentionally around the group of stones. Such arrangement should accentuate the ruggedness and mineral nature of the rock formations^[3]. This principle can be found in Lion Grove Garden, Lingering Garden, Thieu Phuong Garden, and Co Ha Garden. Besides, maintaining a proper distance



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16. Rockery in Thieu Phuong Garden
17. Rockery in Thai Binh Lau Garden

between each pair of trees along the lakeside is important to ensure they do not obstruct the view of the waterscape and provide (and frame) the most important vistas to other garden elements (Figs. 18, 19).

In traditional Chinese gardens, aquatic plants enhance the beauty of the water surface, adding an extra layer of charm. However, they are carefully managed to avoid dominating the water, ensuring clear reflections and a harmonious overall look^[3]. This technique could be applied in the water features of classical Vietnamese gardens, although it's not as commonly seen as in Chinese gardens.

However, in general, plant arrangement in classical Vietnam gardens is not as strict as the Chinese counterparts. Small ornamental plants such as low shrubs, flowers, and bonsai can be planted in moveable boxes or tanks. The outer spaces of Vietnamese gardens have fruit and evergreen trees to provide shade and food, thus combining the practical and ornamental purposes.

Orchids and lotuses are very common in Vietnamese gardens since they are meaningful and can grow well in spring and summer. They represent the purity of Buddha's body and mind^[47]. Plus, orchids are locally available in Vietnam, Yellow Mai flower (*Ochna integerrima*) is also popular for its aesthetic values in spring and the ability to form many different shapes because of its life form. Gardeners often combine plants with rockeries to enhance the garden's beauty. Compared with Chinese royal gardens, Vietnamese imperial gardens did not have many pines (*Pinus* spp.), bamboo or blossoming plum trees, due to climate conditions and the owner's tastes.

4 Conclusions

This paper discusses the realm of classical Vietnamese gardens, unravelling their philosophies, design characteristics, and historical evolution, particularly during the Nguyen Dynasty. The traditional garden designs in Vietnam share both similarities and distinct characteristics compared with their Chinese counterparts, notably in the treatment of water elements. Chinese gardens prioritize water, often covering significant areas and creating diverse spatial layers. In contrast, Vietnamese gardens prioritize architecture and integrate water more simply. The role of rockeries in classical Vietnamese gardens, while essential, differs significantly from their diverse and intricate counterparts in Chinese gardens. Vietnamese rockeries are characterized by smaller, softer, and less rugged features, with fewer holes in the rock's body. Classical Vietnamese gardens can be seen as an offshoot of classical Chinese gardens, as they draw inspiration, philosophies and concepts from Chinese culture. Classical Vietnamese gardens prominently feature many common elements and design techniques found in Chinese gardens. These shared aspects include the integration of waterscapes, architectural structures, rockeries, and plant arrangements, all harmoniously incorporated into the garden layouts.

Although classical Vietnamese gardens are less represented due to fewer existing examples and being smaller in scale, they also possess unique adaptations that reflect the specific cultural and environmental context of Vietnam, for example, climatic conditions (sub-tropical climate), local vegetation (evergreens), and the availability of local stones. Chinese culture has profoundly influenced these gardens, notably through the incorporation of the



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- 18. Plants in the Garden of Harmonious Interest, Summer Palace, China
- 19. Plants in the Thieu Phuong Garden, Vietnam

concepts of Confucianism, Taoism, Feng-Shui, and Yin-Yang into their architectural and landscape designs. Confucianism predominantly governs the architecture, resulting in symmetrical layouts, while Taoism infuses a more natural style into the gardens and the Yin-Yang concept governs the arrangement of rockery, waterscape, and even plant selection. The combined influence shapes the distinctive beauty and philosophy of classical Vietnamese gardens.

Vietnamese imperial gardens, though exhibiting similarities with Chinese private gardens, stand out in their own right. However, when it comes to the imperial mausoleum gardens of the Nguyen family, a striking resemblance emerges with the grandeur of Chinese imperial gardens like the Summer Palace in Beijing or Chengde Mountain Resort. Vietnamese mausoleum gardens echo the legacy that transcends borders and cultures. Vietnamese imperial mausoleum gardens are distinctive and multifunctional complexes that blend different elements and features. These unique landscapes are used not only as tranquil parks and gardens but also as palaces for living and sacred burial sites, setting them apart as a unique style in Asia.

Since 2010, the Hue Monuments Conservation Center has initiated restoration projects for the imperial gardens of the Nguyen Dynasty. Two of these projects, Thieu Phuong Garden and Co Ha Garden, were successfully completed in 2010 and 2012. Ongoing research and restoration efforts continue for the remaining imperial gardens. These research findings could serve as valuable resources for future research on garden history and historical garden restoration and conservation in Vietnam and other Asian regions. Subsequent future studies may delve into areas such as plant varieties, the use of hard materials and colors, as well as architectural features of historic gardens.

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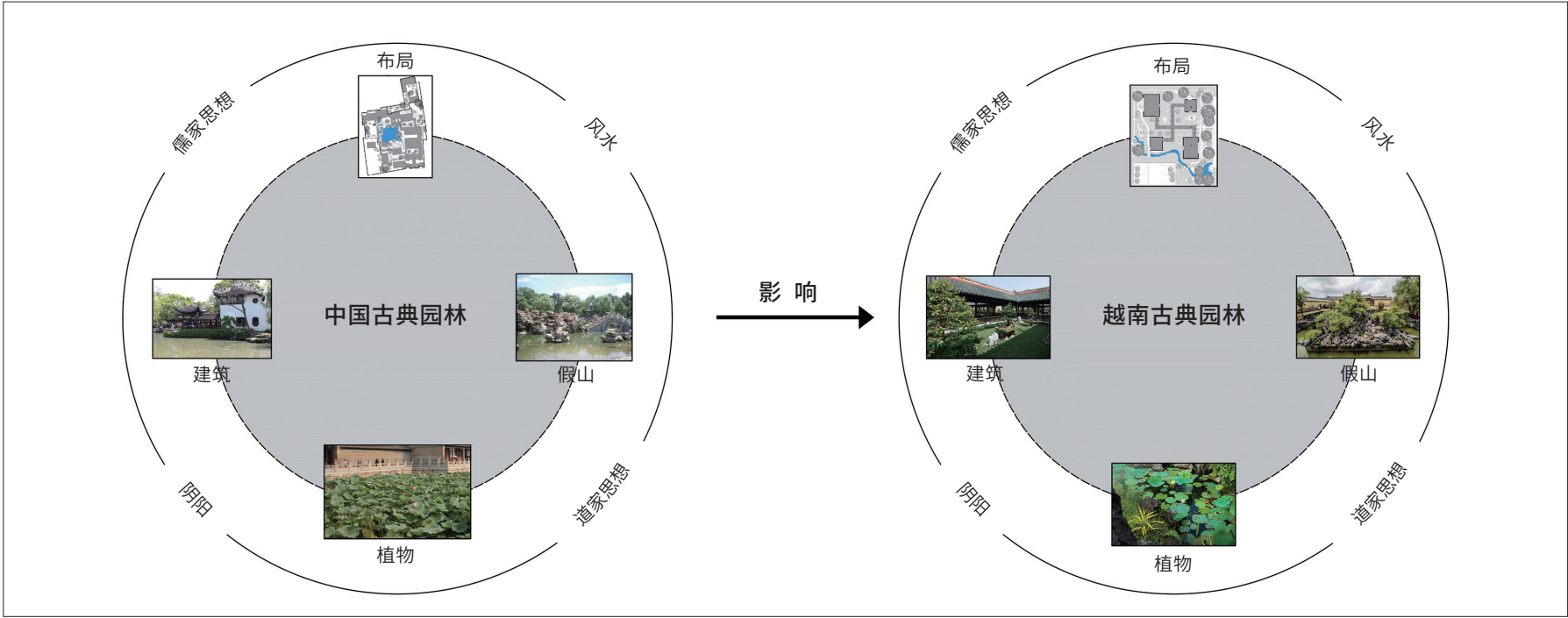
阮朝时期越南古典园林探索 ——与中国古典园林的比较研究

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图文摘要



摘要

本文通过研究历史文献、绘画和现存园林，探讨了越南阮朝时期（1802 – 1945）建造的古典园林的类型和特点。依据研究结果，作者将越南古典园林划分为两类：皇家园林和皇家陵园。研究通过大量对比明清时期的中国园林实例，认为越南园林受到中国文化的深刻影响，并展现出许多与中国园林相似的特点与元素。园林布局、亭台楼阁的建筑风格、假山、水体、桥梁等园林元素，以及植物材料的运用都受到中国文化的影响，但又根据当地的气候条件和园主的喜好进行了调整。例如，二者在水景、桥梁、植物品种、石材等元素的排布和设计上都有所不同。深入了解越南古典园林的文化意义和独特性有助于促进相关保护和修复工作。通过剖析和比较中国和越南园林的设计思想，本研究揭示了东亚园林设计多样的表现形式和适应性。

文章亮点

- 越南古典园林受到中国文化和哲学的影响
- 越南古典园林的布局、建筑、假山和植物都体现了中国文化的影响，但也具有与众不同的特点
- 深入了解越南古典园林有助于推进越南现代景观设计的发展

关键词

越南古典园林；皇家园林；皇家陵园；阮朝；中国古典园林；道家思想；儒家思想；自然

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