

FORMATION PROCESS OF “WESTERN” STREET ARCHITECTURE DURING FRENCH COLONIAL PERIOD IN HUE

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Abstract - This paper examines the architectural formation of the Le Loi “Western” street in Hue city by collecting secondary data through articles, magazines, images, books, maps, etc. and by conducting field surveys (mainly observation and taking photos). The built time of architectural buildings along Le Loi street can be divided into 3 periods: 1876-1902; 1093-1920; and 1921-1954. The architectural characteristic of the buildings constructed in early period was classical (neo-classicism) style, French local style. The later constructed buildings began to incorporate traditional local architecture, forming the Indochine architectural style. The constructions built after 1930 were in the Art Deco architectural style.

Key words - French colonial architecture; “Western” street; Indochine architecture

1. Background

Urban structure and architecture of French heritages have been remained and existed in many places of Vietnam. In the history of Vietnam, the French started to attack Da Nang port in 1858 but they failed because of a resistance of the Nguyen dynasty soldiers. The French, after that, turned their attack to Gia Dinh citadel in the South. In 1862, the Nguyen Dynasty was forced to cede the three provinces of Nam Ky and Con Dao island according to the Nham Tuat Treaty. In 1874, the Nguyen Dynasty was forced to sign the Giap Tuat Treaty and continuously cede the six provinces of Nam Ky to the French. After the fall of the capital in 1885, the French basically imposed their domination over the entire territory of Vietnam and began the process of exploiting and establishing a colonial regime in different fields, such as administration, culture, society, education, religion, architecture, urban planning, etc. The influence of the French in these areas remains evident and undeniable in Vietnamese cultural history. In terms of urban planning, the French planned and built many different types of architecture in big cities such as Hanoi, Hai Phong, Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang, Da Lat, etc. Based on the local conditions, the French oriented building suitable urban cities. They could build a Europeanized urban city where the local neighborhoods disappeared or they could build a separate European urban city next to the local urban area [1, p. 26]. Hue belonged to the second case when the French only occupied Mang Ca military area in the Citadel and kept the original environment of the area in the North of Huong river. Meanwhile, the French began to build a series of architectural works along Huong river and neighboring areas in the South of the river. Later on, the area on the southern bank of Huong river became bustling

with many architectural works and a modern traffic infrastructure system, especially Le Loi St. (named Jules Ferry before 1945), known as the “Western” quarter in Hue during the French colonial period.

Architectural works in Vietnam during the French colonial period can be divided into five styles, which are: Pre-colonial architecture (or Barracks architecture); Neo-classicism (or Western classical Architecture); French local architecture (or French folk architecture); Indochina architecture; and Art Deco and Art Nouveau ([2], [3], [4] and [5]). The Pre-colonial Architecture style appeared in the early colonial period. The Neoclassical Architecture style appeared in the early 20th century (however, some villas built before 1900 also had this style) [5, p. 30]. After 1900, the French local architecture (1900-1920), Indochina architecture (1920-1930), and Art Deco (1930-1945) appeared gradually [6]. However, the above classification of architectural styles is tentative because the architectural styles somewhere also express the mixing consciousness between modern forms and traditional patterns that adapts the local context [8, p. 11]. The scope of this article focuses on the formation of the “Western” quarter architecture in Hue city.

2. Methodologies

Secondary data method is used to collect articles, books, magazines, images, and maps related to Hue city in general and the “Western” quarter (Le Loi St.) in particular during the French colonial period. These data can provide an overview of the historical and architectural context on Le Loi St. The authors also tried to find out information regarding origins, transformation of the newly constructed buildings during the French colonial period.

Field survey methods by observation, taking photos, interviews with experts were conducted to collect information of existing buildings and current feature of facade elements, which provide architectural characteristics of surveyed buildings.

This article focuses on the architectural works on both sides of the street, from Hue station (located at the beginning of Le Loi St., on Bui Thi Xuan St.) to Hue University of Education.

3. Formation process of “Western” quarter in Hue

Based on Article 20 of the Giap Tuat Treaty, the French President appointed a Resident Minister to Hue to negotiate

with the Nguyen Dynasty court. The first French representative sent to Hue after this treaty was Rheinard des Essarts. Rheinard arrived in Hue in 1875, and his first task was to find a location to build the Resident Superior building¹. After many negotiations with the Nguyen Dynasty court, the Resident Superior building was constructed in 1876 and it was the first French building on the southern bank of Huong River, at the current location of Hue University of Education (Figure 1).



Figure 1. The Office of the French Resident Superior in Annam in 1900 (source: Ministère Colonies (1902), *Exposition de Hanoi en 1902. Catalogue Officiel Métropolitain. Publié par L'Office Colonial, P. 53*)

The 1885 map of Hue city showed that the early buildings along Huong river were the naval camps of Nguyen Dynasty (Figure 2). Later on, there were numerous buildings that were constructed along the bank of the river. In 1886, the resident building (*Tòa công sứ* as spoken in Vietnamese, currently is Ho Chi Minh museum) was constructed according to the French President's decree dated February 3, 1886 (Figure 3). The palace of the resident (*Đình Công sứ* as spoken in Vietnamese) was located opposite and slightly to the east. (Figure 4) [9].



Figure 2. The 1885 map of Hue citadel (source: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b530231259.r=hu%3c%a9langEN#>)

In 1889, the administrative centre of Thua Thien Provincial Government was moved to 16 Le Loi St. (People's Committee of Thua Thien Hue Province as present) [10]. In 1894, the hospital was built but it was a temporary architectural form and was located close to the bank of Huong river [11, p. 286]. In 1896, Quoc Hoc school was established with the name as École Primaire Supérieure (Figure 5). At the beginning, the school consisted of a 3-chamber– 2-side building. Until 1898, 2 more classrooms were built with a front 30-chamber building and a back 16-chamber building. In addition, 4 more square houses were built in the rear part. The school also had a covering fence with 2-story gate (built in 1897) [12].



Figure 3. Resident building (source: Ho Chi Minh museum)



Figure 4. Palace of the Resident building before 1997 (source: archived by Hue Children's house, taken from FB: <https://www.facebook.com/hoangnguyenchantu>)

In 1897, Thanh Thai Bridge (Truong Tien bridge at present) was designed by the Schneider et Cie et Letellier company and completely constructed in 1900 [13]. On the street, a branch of Indochina bank (Institute of Digital transformation and Educational resources at present) was also constructed during this period [9]. Additionally, there were several villas and colonial houses of French officers located on Le Loi street as a described by Paul Doumer regarding the right bank of Huong River during the period of 1897-1902 as follows: "... the French headquarters used to be on the left bank of Huong river. On the right bank, the old Resident's palace has currently become university dormitories and infantry barracks. There are 5 or 6 houses for officials, a small hotel managed by Mr. Bogaert. That's all the French had in Hue; the city only had

¹ At this stage, the representative of France was called a Legation (légation) rather than a Resident (résident).

these...” [14, p. 318]. This suggests that several buildings such as the former headquarters of the Union of Literature and Arts Associations (currently located at 26 Le Loi St.) and the building at 4 Hoang Hoa Tham St. may have been constructed before 1903 [15, p. 113] (figures 6 and 7)².



Figure 5. *Quoc Hoc school at early time*

(source: *Ban liên lạc cựu học sinh Quốc Học tại Sài Gòn, “Quốc Học - Huế lịch sử 120 năm”, Tuyển tập kỷ niệm 120 năm Quốc Học Huế 1896-2016, NXB Thanh Niên, tr. 10-22, 2016*)



Figure 6. *Building at 26 Le Loi St. (source: the authors)*



Figure 7. *Building at 4 Hoang Hoa Tham St. (source: the authors)*

In the early stage after 1900, several other buildings were continuously constructed on the street. Saigon Morin hotel located at 30 Le Loi St. is the first hotel in the Central

Vietnam, which was constructed in 1901 (Figure 8). The hotel was firstly a 2-story building with a simple Western architectural style. This is a miniature representation of the architectural and functional style commonly found in the South of France [10]. In 1905, Hue railway station was constructed and officially began operations in 1906³. Pellerin School was also founded by Brother Aglibert of the Lasan Order and served as the principal in 1905 (Hue Academy of Music at present) [16, p. 321]. The Central Hospital of Hue was also relocated and constructed at its current location (at 8 Le Loi St.) in 1905, and by around 1910, it was estimated to have approximately 25 French-style buildings [11, p. 286]. By 1910, the Annam Public Works Office was built at 27 Le Loi St. (Diem Phung Thi museum at present) ([10], [17], and [18]).

Regarding architectural form, the buildings built in this period have a classical style but simple in element design, with simple ornamentation, featuring column styles and wall moldings to create highlights. The villas have a French local architectural style with symmetrical facades.



Figure 8. *Saigon Morin hotel in 1903 (source: <https://www.aavh.org/?p=1852>)*

After 1910, some buildings along the street were renovated or newly constructed. Most of the buildings in Quoc Hoc school were rebuilt after 1915. In 1917, Dong Khanh school (Hai Ba Trung high school at present) was constructed and completed after two years. By 1920, the War Memorial was built near by the bank of Huong river and directly opposite to the entrance gate of Quoc Hoc school [19]. In the late 1920s, the Annam Public Works Office was constructed with two floors (the building located at 23 Le Loi St. at present) [11]. However, according to an aerial photo in 1920, the three-story building of the Annam Public Works Office already existed (Figure 9). This aerial photo shows that the buildings located at 15 Le Loi St. and 28 Le Loi St. were appearing (gradually Le Ba Dang Art center and former Department of Health at present).

During this period, the construction density along Le Loi Street was relatively dense, stretching along Huong river from Truong Tien bridge to Hue railway station (Figure 10)⁴. Figure 10 shows the formation of several

² The building located at 4 Hoang Hoa Tham St., although its main facade faces Hoang Hoa Tham St., is located on the property at 28 Le Loi St..

³ Hue station and the hotel were completed on December 15, 1906 (construction began in 1902). The contractor is Thai Thi Tu (the wife of Minister Nguyen Truong) [20, p. 45].

⁴ Figure 10 is labeled as a map of Hue around 1910. However, the map includes Dong Khanh School (currently Hai Ba Trung School), which was established in 1917. Therefore, this map must have been produced after 1917 [21].

main streets, such as those running along Huong river (Le Loi St.) and the An Cuu river (Phan Dinh Phung St.), as well as Ly Thuong Kiet St., Hung Vuong St., Ha Noi St., and Ngo Quyen St.,... The buildings constructed during this period were concentrated densely in the area bounded by Le Loi and Ngo Quyen Streets along Huong river.

In terms of architectural characteristics, the buildings constructed during the early phase of this period were influenced by the Western classical style, as seen through classical column styles, wall decorations, window sills, a system of double-layered doors with glass on the inside and shutters on the outside, and single or double wooden cantilevers. However, some of the later constructions began to show influences of traditional Vietnamese architecture. For example, the War Memorial bears resemblance to traditional Hue masonry screen (*bình phong*). The fence of Quoc Hoc school features stylized lotus bud decorations, and the cantilevers of some buildings at Hai Ba Trung school and Quoc Hoc school evoke images and characteristics of Hue traditional architecture.



Figure 9. Aerial photo of Le Loi St. in 1920 (source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/13476480@N07/50365727697>)⁵

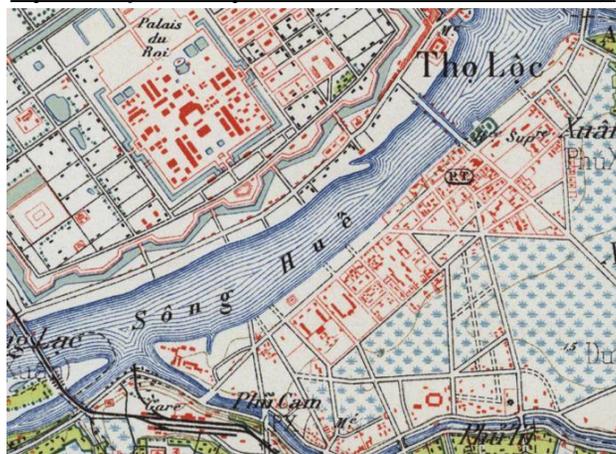


Figure 10. Map of "Western" Quarter of Hue city after 1917 (source: nla.gov.au/nla.map-vn1634720 Service Géographique de l'Indochine. Edited by the authors)

During the period from 1921 to 1945, the transportation system did not change much. Most architectural works were located within the boundaries between Le Loi St. and Ngo Quyen St. (Figure 11). Along Le Loi Street, several new buildings were constructed during this time, including the Annam House of Representatives (currently is Hue University headquarters located at 3 Le Loi St.)⁶, the Governor's Residence (constructed in 1930, now the Azerai Hotel located at 5 Le Loi St.)⁷, and the Sports Club (constructed around 1940, currently known as Le Cercle located at 11 Le Loi St.). For architectural features, the new buildings from this period were influenced by Art Deco style, characterized by simple lines and the use of large, elongated glass wall sections. Decorative elements and classical motifs were simplified or removed.



Figure 11. Map of the "Western" Quarter of Hue city in 1930 (source: http://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/world_cities/txu-oclc-21740104-hue-1968.jpg. Edited by the authors)

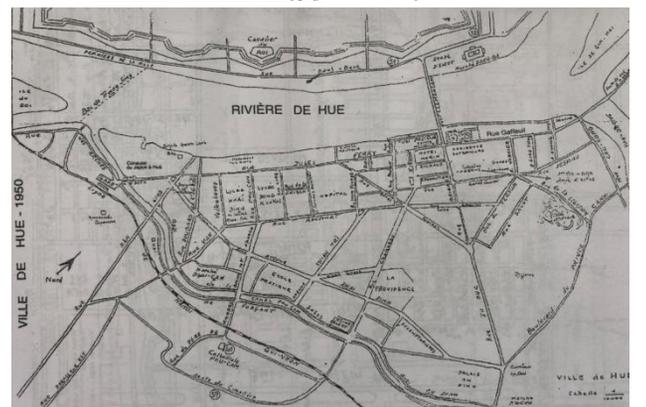


Figure 12. Map of the "Western" Quarter of Hue city in 1950 (source: D. P. Thu, Hue - Street name: past & present. Hue: Thuan Hoa publishers, 2004. Edited by authors)

From 1946 to 1954, the planning of Le Loi St. experienced minimal changes. The planning and transportation systems primarily developed by expanding southward along Huong river (Figure 12). During this period, Tran Quang Khai St. was established, while Tran

⁵ There is a note marked in the photo showed that it was taken in 1920. However, another source informed that the photo was taken in 1930 (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/13476480@N07/50380996716/in/album-72157715327026232>).

⁶ Previously, this place was the Central Advisory Room, established in 1920 [18]. In 1926, the Central Representative Institute was founded under the decree of the Indochinese Governor-General Alexandre Varenne.

⁷ According to the author Le Minh Son, the Governor's Residence was built in 1930 [22]. However, the author Nguyen Dinh Toan asserted that the building was constructed around 1935' [17], while the author Tim Doling mentioned that the structure was built in the 1930s [11, p. 289].

Cao Van St. was extended westward, intersecting with Hai Ba Trung St.. After 1954, the French withdrew from Vietnam as a whole, including Hue. Many of the buildings constructed by the French may have suffered significant damage or destruction for various reasons. Along Le Loi St., several colonial buildings were destroyed and replaced by new buildings with different architectural styles. Meanwhile, some other buildings have undergone renovations, expansions, or functional changes to meet current needs.

4. Research results and discussion

Based on the field survey, the built time of the colonial-era buildings along Le Loi St. can be divided into three main periods, as shown in Figure 13. Most of the buildings along this street were constructed from 1902 and earlier, marking the early stage of the colonial period⁸. Notably, the majority of the buildings constructed during this period are located on the opposite side of Le Loi St., facing Huong river. This indicates that the French had a vision for landscape planning, respecting the beauty of Huong river and creating setbacks when constructing buildings. The second period, from 1903 to 1920, saw the construction of buildings serving transportation, public administration, and educational institutions. Period 3, after 1920, involved the construction of three buildings located on the banks of Huong river.

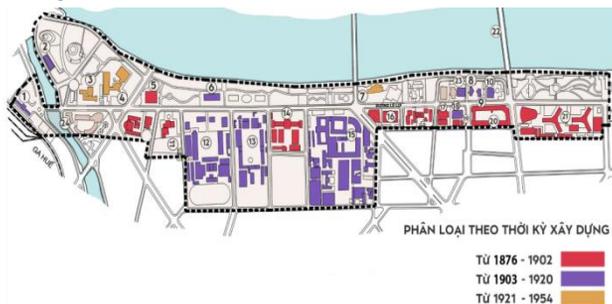


Figure 13. Distribution of the surveyed buildings on Le Loi street (source: the authors)

Currently, along Le Loi Street extending to Hue railway station, there are 16 remaining colonial-era buildings (Table 1). The planning of this street has essentially remained unchanged, preserving the surrounding architectural landscape. Table 1 shows that most of these buildings exhibit a classical (Neo-classical) architectural style, focusing on public and civil works. The villa-type and colonial residential buildings reflect the French local architectural style. Additionally, the two hotels, Azerai and Le Cercle, were constructed in the later periods and featured an Art Deco style⁹.

The research scope of the paper only outlined the architectural formation process of the “Western” in Hue city, as well as the relevant historical information and architectural characteristics of the colonial-era buildings along this thoroughfare. The subsequent phase of the study

will concentrate on architectural characteristics, analyzing various aspects such as architectural language, spatial function, building materials, structural frameworks, and decorative motifs. This analysis will facilitate an evaluation of the significance of the aforementioned buildings, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the colonial architecture and informing the development of appropriate strategies for the preservation and promotion of the heritage of the “Western” quarter in Hue city.

Table 1. The surveyed buildings on Le Loi street (source: authors)

No	Building (address)	Built time	Architectural style	photo/ Note
1	Hue railway station (Bui Thi Xuan)	1905	Classical style	
2	Hue Academy of Music (1 Le Loi)	1905	Classical style	
3	Hue University (3 Le Loi)	1927	Classical style	
4	Azerai Hotel (5 Le Loi)	1930-1935	Art Deco	
5	Ho Chi Minh Museum (7 Le Loi)			Resident building before (Figure 3). Already new construction
6	War Memorial	1920	Indochine Style	
7	Le Cercle (11 Le Loi)	1940	Art Deco	
8	Cultural, Sports, and Tourism Center of Hue city (23 Le Loi)	1920s	Classical style	
9	Cultural, Sports, and Tourism Center of Hue city (25 Le Loi)	1920s	Classical style	
10	Diem Phung Thi museum (27 Le Loi)	1910s	Neo-classism and French local style	

⁸ Previous studies have used the milestones of 1900, 1910, and 1920 to delineate the phases of architectural styles during the colonial period [6]. However, during the period from 1897 to 1902, Paul Doumer served as the Governor-General of Indochina in Vietnam. Subsequently, Paul Doumer wrote memoirs about Vietnam in general and Hue in particular during that time [14].

⁹ For more information on the characteristics and architectural styles of colonial-era buildings in Hue, refer to references [3] and [22].

No	Building (address)	Built time	Architectural style	photo/ Note
11	Hue Children's house (10 Le Loi)			Formerly Palace of the Resident building (Figure 4). Already new construction
12	Quoc Hoc High School (12 Le Loi)	1896 (most of buildings were constructed after 1915)	Architectural style depended on specific building, mainly classical style	
13	Hai Ba Trung High School (14 Le Loi)	1917	Architectural style depended on specific building	
14	People's Committee of Thua Thien Hue (16 Le Loi)			Unkown origin. Already new construction
15	Central hospital of Hue (18 Le Loi)	1894	Architectural style depended on specific building	
16	Institute of Digital transformation and Educational resources (20 Le Loi)			Formerly Branch of Indochine bank. Already new construction
17	Former Headquarters of the Union of Literature and Arts Associations of Thua Thien Hue (26 Le Loi)	Before 1903	French local style	
18	Formal Department of Health			Unkown origin. Already new construction
19	Building at 4 Hoang Hoa Tham	Before 1903	French local style	
20	Saigon Morin hotel (30 Le Loi)	1901	Classical style	
21	Hue University of Education (32 Le Loi)			Formerly the Annam Superior Residence (Figure 1). Already new construction
22	Truong Tien bridge	1899-1900		
23	Le Ba Dang Art Center (15 Le Loi)			Unkown origin. Already new construction

5. Conclusion

After occupying the entire of Vietnam territory, the French carried out exploitation and established a colonial system in different fields, such as economy, society, administration, culture, architecture, construction, transportation... In Hue, the French respected its landscape, natural terrain of Huong river banks when they planned the “Western” street on the Southern bank of the river, along Le Loi St.. This street is connected to Hue Station, an important transportation hub linking Hue to surrounding provinces and cities, and to Truong Tien bridge, which connects both sides of Huong river.

Built time of architectural works on the street can be divided into 3 stages: before 1902; 1903-1920; and 1921-1954. Most of the buildings constructed in the early stage follow the classical style but in a simple manner, while villas and colonial houses have the style of local French. In the later stage, the combination between the classical style and traditional local architecture, known as the Indochine style, emerged. In addition, some buildings constructed after 1930 were influenced by Art Deco style.

Although some buildings were destroyed and rebuilt, the colonial-era buildings along Le Loi St. still exist with a significant number, totally 16 buildings. Conducting a comprehensive study of the “Western” quarter, its characteristics, and evaluating the value of these buildings is essential for developing appropriate strategies for their preservation and promotion in the future.

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