



THE ARCHITECTURE OF VIETNAMESE TEMPLES – A STUDY FROM AN ARTISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

The pagoda in Vietnam is an architectural work with many artistic values. The pagoda is a sacred space, and it gathers the cultural and artistic values of the Vietnamese people. In addition, it has satisfied the living needs of life, meeting the aesthetic needs of the people. The temple is the most complete collection of visual elements, closely combining and supporting each other in a unified whole. From an artistic perspective, the temple is the most typical architectural art of the Vietnamese people. The beauty of the temple is reflected in its sanctity. The art of architecture and decoration of the temple expresses the thoughts and feelings of the Vietnamese people. Besides, it shows the creativity and aesthetic aptitude of the Vietnamese people. The pagoda is a typical example, a uniqueness that creates the unique beauty of the Vietnamese people.

Keywords: architecture, culture, art, temples, Vietnam

1. Introduction

Buddhism occupies an important place in the history of Asia in general and Vietnam in particular. Associated with Buddhism are the temples, with unique architecture and close to most classes of people. Most of the temples, especially those of the Ly and Tran dynasties, were built in places with beautiful natural scenery. All temples were built in areas with mountains and pure water. The architecture of the temple integrates with nature into a significant unity. Attached to that temple is the tower expressing people's desire for Buddha.

In Vietnam, the pagoda is a relic in almost all historical periods of the past 2000 years; it is the first object of the study of ancient art. The remaining vestiges of ancient temples show us the ups and downs of history, contributing to a more accurate recognition of many issues of the nation's cultural history.

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The temple is the base for the operation and propagation of Buddhism. However, Vietnamese pagodas, in addition to worshipping Buddha, also worship gods, including "Thay" and "Lang" pagodas in Hanoi that worship "Tu Dao Hanh" and "Ly Than Tong". The temple worships the three religions "Buddha - Lao - Confucius". The word "Chien" in Vietnamese also refers to a Buddhist temple. Some have suggested that the word "Chien" may be derived from the Pali word "Cetiya" or the Sanskrit "Caitya". Both are used to refer to the main hall of worshipping Buddha. According to the Vietnamese proverb "King land, village pagoda", most temples belong to the village community. Building a pagoda is a big deal for a village in Vietnam. Choosing a place to build a temple is governed by the concept of feng shui. People believe building a temple must choose a good place, day, and time. A good position is where the left side is empty or surrounded by rivers and lakes [1]. Tiger Mountain means that on the right, it must be tall and thick, the layers turn back, or there is a lotus flower, or there is a dragon worshipping.

Vietnamese pagodas are built with familiar materials, including bamboo, wood, bricks, and tiles. The best materials are given to the temple. Materials and money used to construct the temple are often donated among all population classes, called "merit". They are believed to be blessed when they donate materials or money for the temple's construction. Some pagodas engrave the names of contributors on ironwood poles that are not termite-affected. In addition, these names are also recorded on stone altars or pottery and porcelain, such as incense bowls, vases, and lampstands in a long list.

Buddhism has contributed to the nation's rich and unique cultural treasures, including valuable material and spiritual, cultural and architectural heritages and sculptures. The temples have special architectural and artistic characteristics and are associated with the cultural and religious life of the local people.

2. Literature Review

The start of the construction of the pagoda and the inauguration of the pagoda are significant moments in the life of Vietnamese villagers. There are usually special ceremonies on these days. Vietnamese pagodas are often not a construction but an architectural complex consisting of houses arranged next to each other or connected. Depending on the layout of these houses, people are divided into different types of pagodas. The names of traditional pagodas are named after Chinese characters that are close to the architectural plan of the temple.

The layout of the pagoda is in the form of the word "Cong" inside, while a frame like the word "Khau" or the word "Quoc" surrounds the outside. These are the layout forms of the leading architectural works. The "Cong" type pagoda is the most popular. However, there are some exceptions, typically the One Pillar Pagoda in Hanoi in the shape of a lotus blooming on the water, or newly built pagodas such as Vinh Nghiem Pagoda with two floors in Ho Chi Minh City. In both the Buddhist traditions and the achievements of architecture, such exceptions are few.

In addition, in the temple, there are houses, including the ancestral home, which is the place to worship the monks who used to be the abbot at the temple, or the monk house, the residence of the monks and some other structures such as the bell tower and the three gates. Vietnamese pagoda architecture was built and developed quite diversely through different historical periods and spaces and is also dominated by local architectural styles. "Tam" typeface pagodas are more common in the South than in the North. Muong people make simple bamboo pagodas, Cambodian and Thai temples influence Khmer pagodas, and Chinese pagodas also have their architectural nuances. Tam Quan is an indispensable part of Vietnamese pagodas, the gate to the pagoda. Some pagodas have two Tam Quan, one Tam Quan inside and one Tam Quan outside. The upper floor of Tam Quan can be used as a bell tower. We go past the "Three Quan" to the temple yard. The temple yard is set up with ornamental pots and rockeries to increase the natural scenery of the temple [2].

The area of the temple yard depends on each pagoda's specific conditions and characteristics. Towers like Dau Pagoda and Thien Mu Pagoda are sometimes built in the temple yard. The temple yard has the temple's first architectural layer, the "Bai Duong" house (also known as the front street). To get here, we have to go up some stairs. At the "Bai Duong" house, there is a place-to-place statues and stone steles recording the temple's history; you can set a bell when outside the gate of Tam Quan does not build a bell tower. In the middle of Bai Duong is the top of incense, the place to burn incense. Usually, people come to the temple to burn incense here. The number of Bai Duong pavilions depends on the pagoda's size; the smallest is three pavilions, usually five.

Passing the house, "Bai Duong" is the main hall. Between "Bai Duong" and the main hall, there is a space for natural light to shine. The main entrance is the most essential part of the temple, where the Buddha statues of the Buddha shrine are displayed. Parallel to the main hall, connecting the main hall with the back hall, are two corridors, forming a three-room house. Through the main entrance, in the direction of the corridor, you will reach the Tang house (also known as the rear house), the ancestral house. The back home in some pagodas in the South is adjacent to the main hall, right behind the altar.

The layout and structure of the pagoda have many different variations. In some pagodas, there is also a temple to worship Buddha behind; it is the type of pagoda in front to worship Buddha and behind to worship God; it is popular in the North. Some temples have a steeple in the front or pagodas with a steeple at the back. The pagoda has a bell tower right on the Tam Quan gate and a bell tower above the ancestral house. Some pagodas have large stupas in front, such as Dau pagoda in Bac Ninh, Pho Minh pagoda in Nam Dinh province. Some pagodas follow the style of placing bell towers on both sides or have their tower gardens, such as Tran Quoc Pagoda in Hanoi, But Thap Pagoda in Bac Ninh, and Bo Da Pagoda in Bac Giang [3].

3. Methodology

Documentary research methods and theoretical systematization were used. This method selects and classifies documents according to research needs, including books, newspapers and magazines related to pagoda architecture and art in Vietnam. From there, build a theoretical framework suitable for research purposes and requirements.

Synthetic methods were used in the study. This method is used to systematize the theory and available studies; it helps the author judge the current architectural status of temples in Vietnam.

4. Results

4.1. The architectural beauty of Vietnamese pagodas

The temple is a spiritual space that many people come to, including Buddhists and non-Buddhists. On Tet holiday, many people come to the temple to burn incense to pray for peace and pay respect. When coming to the temple, not only look at the pure beauty of that place but also find a sense of peace, friendliness, a moment to calm down, and feel right and wrong, good and bad. The pagoda is not only a spiritual space but also an indispensable cultural space for most Asians in general and Vietnamese in particular [4]. The temple has been associated with beliefs in the cultural life of Vietnamese people. Stretching over the territory of Vietnam, there are pagodas with unique architectural and artistic characteristics related to the cultural and religious life of the local people. Since its introduction to Vietnam, Buddhism has accompanied the Vietnamese people through the ups and downs of history.

Temple architecture in Vietnam is diverse. Generally, pagodas in Vietnam are built in a beautiful and solemn position; the front of the temple faces south, called the direction of "Bát nhã" (implying wisdom). The layout of the temples takes symmetry as the primary method. The complex of pagoda architecture includes rows of houses with high artistic value, such as towers, bells and bell towers, stele halls, and stele houses. The beauty of the temple in Vietnam is in harmony with the landscape and surrounding environment; the pagoda brings a hidden beauty deposited deep in each person's soul towards good [5].

The building materials of Vietnamese pagodas are mainly wood; this material limits the rise of architecture. With wooden structures, the way of construction has many systems. In terms of architecture, the pagoda's design is quite similar to temples and shrines. However, the tower is a unique Buddhist architecture. Materials such as bricks and concrete were mainly used to construct the pagoda from the late 19th century to the early 20th century.

4.2. Some typical temples in Vietnam

4.2.1. Keo Pagoda (Than Quang Tu) is located in Vu Thu district, Thai Binh province

Keo Pagoda was completed in 1632. This is a temple built in the 17th century that has remained intact to this day. Keo Pagoda is an ancient temple with the most significant area remaining today. The entire area is 28 hectares, and the land for the pagoda construction occupies 58,000 square meters. Keo Pagoda consists of many structural buildings in the style of the two characters "Cong" (according to Chinese characters). Corridors running along both sides of Keo pagoda form the word "Quoc" (according to Chinese characters). The pagoda has two Tam Quan; Tam Quan still retains a set of 2m high, 2.6m wide wooden doors carved with delicate mother dragons and baby dragons worshipping the moon.

The entire architecture is silhouetted against the three sides of the lake. Keo Pagoda is different from other pagodas; the steeple of Keo Pagoda is located at the back of the upper hall, which is the highlight of the entire architecture. The steeple consists of three roofs; this type of roof gets light and wind to create a calm inside. The three floors of the steeple have 12 curved blades that create lightness and serenity for the entire architecture.

Keo Pagoda is a large-scale Buddhist architecture of the 17th century that retains the architecture almost intact from Tam Quan to the Tam Bao worshipping Buddha. The beauty of temple architecture is greatly enhanced by the surrounding landscape, a harmonious combination of artificial architecture and nature's beauty, creating precious and traditional ancient work traditional and imbued with national identity.

Keo Pagoda is the temple with the complete Buddha hall, currently storing 197 relics and antiquities associated with the temple's formation and development history. With the architectural beauty and the relic's unique cultural, historical and scientific values, the Prime Minister ranked Keo Pagoda as a special national relic in 2012.

4.2.2. Thien Mu Pagoda (Hue)

Thien Mu Pagoda was rebuilt in the reign of Lord Nguyen Hoang (1601) on Ha Khe Hill in Huong Long commune, Hue City. The pagoda the highlight is Phuoc Duyen Tower, located in front of the pagoda, reflecting the romantic Perfume River. The beautiful image of the temple has entered the works of painting and photography.

Phuoc Duyen Tower, the famous architectural work of the temple, was built in octagonal shape, seven floors high (21.27m), more minor to the top; each floor worships a Tathagata, and the highest floor is to worship the Lord. Ton. There is also Dai Hung Palace, the temple's main temple, with beautiful and grand architecture; the temple shows the characteristics of Hue Pagoda. In addition to the bronze Buddha statue in the main hall, many bronze statues and altars were cast in 1677, a wooden royal concubine with gilded paint donated by Lord Nguyen Phuc Chu in 1714. Besides the temple, there is an altar of Buddha Di Lac and the shrine of Buddha Quang Am. Behind the pagoda is a large pine garden with beautiful and poetic scenery.

Thien Mu Pagoda was recognized as a national relic (Architecture and Art) on August 27, 1996, by the Ministry of Culture and Information under Decision No. 1964-QDVH/TT.

4.2.3. Vinh Nghiem Pagoda (Ho Chi Minh City)

The Nguyen lords gradually expanded their territory to the South; the temple is also an image left in this region. Many temples were built throughout the provinces and cities in the area. The centre of the South is Ho Chi Minh City, with a large-scale pagoda known to many visitors worldwide as Vinh Nghiem Pagoda.

To propagate Buddhism, two monks built the pagoda from the North to the South, Thich Tam Giac and Thich Thanh Kiem. The two monks took the prototype of the wooden pagoda of the same name in Bac Giang province built during the reign of King Ly Thai To. The designer for the project is architect Nguyen Ba Lang and his associates.

The architecture of Vinh Nghiem Pagoda has a blend of classical and modern. The architecture of ancient pagodas in the North, combined with modern construction techniques and materials, is one of the typical works of Vietnamese Buddhist architecture in the 20th century. The pagoda was built in 1964 and completed the essential items in 1971 on a campus of about 6000m². The central building is solid and extensive, consisting of a ground floor and two floors. The main shrine of Buddha is built in the style of "Cong" (Chinese characters). At the four corners of the roof of the pagoda, there is a phoenix head, and in the middle of the top is a wheel of Dharma. On the outside, the temple creates a delicate and elegant appearance according to ancient Vietnamese architecture, but the internal structure is cast in reinforced concrete.

Next to the central building are towers, including the Quan The Am tower located to the left of the Buddha hall from the entrance gate, including seven floors, nearly 40m high, square, and 4m on each side. The top of the tower has nine wheels and circles called Long Xa and Quy Chau. This is the most massive tower in the buildings of Vietnamese Buddhism. Vinh Nghiem stone tower is located on the right of the entrance gate, 14m high; the tower was built in 2013 to commemorate the two monks who created the pagoda. This is also the most prominent stone tower in Vietnam. The Relic Tower was built behind, to the left of, the Buddha hall (from the entrance gate), with four floors, 25m high, built in 1982 and completed in 1984. The tower was built in a unique style. Stairs from the courtyard lead up to the tower. The tower was built to house the remains of Buddhists.

4.3. The image of the temple goes into the work of painting - applied art

The temple is associated with the beliefs and spirituality of the Vietnamese people; the temple also brings a beauty of architecture with bold national character. Pagodas are often built in places with beautiful land; most ancient pagodas are built in areas with charming mountains. The beauty of artificial architecture blends with the natural scenery, forming a masterpiece picture that has gone into many paintings and graphic products.

The painting "Ancient Teacher's Pagoda Festival" by artist and people's artist Chu Manh Chan has restored the ancient beauty that has been lost or has gone into oblivion.

The painting has recreated the biggest festival in the old Doai region with a busy flow of people and folk games. In particular, the temple has gentle architecture in the spacious space of the charming mountainous area, bearing the characteristic golden lacquer colour of lacquer.



Figure 1: Painting "Thay Pagoda Festival" (Chu Manh Chan, 1964), lacquer, 4m x 2.5m

The painting "Landscape of Thay Pagoda", one of the oldest Buddhist temples in Vietnam, with classical art. Painter Hoang Tich Chu also left us a lacquer painting depicting the temple hidden in the poetic and quiet mountain scenery. The work is currently kept at the Vietnam Fine Arts Museum.



Figure 2: Painting "The scenery of Thay Pagoda" (Hoang Tich Chu, 1944), lacquer, 97cm x 196cm

With a meticulous and careful painting style, even the smallest detail, artist Tran Duy (1920-2014) produced many lyrical paintings of pagodas with soft silk. The writing style is rich in emotion, giving viewers another sense of the beauty of the Vietnamese temple.



Figure 3: Painting “Nhat Cau Hoi An Pagoda” (Tran Duy, 1993), silk, 60cm x 80cm



Figure 4: Painting “Phu Minh Pagoda” (Tran Duy, 1993), silk, 46cm x 68cm

The beauty of the pagodas is not only included in the paintings but also stamps by the designers, through which the beautiful images of Vietnamese temples are known to more people.

5. Conclusion

The type of architecture and sculpture of Vietnamese pagodas is an art form that appeared early in the history of Buddhist culture in particular and Vietnamese culture in general. From the V-VI centuries, Buddhism has developed quite strongly; Giau Chau has up to twenty guardian temples. The architecture of the pagodas is quite different from the Buddhist architecture in China. This shows a separate path in the architectural style of Vietnamese Buddhism. Architecture has identified the uniqueness of the components and the art of carving and engraving associated with the architecture into a unified whole with bold national character.

The architecture of ancient temples to today's temples has a seamless development and inheritance, no matter what materials it is built; in general, the temple still gives us a feeling of lightness and softness by the rooftops with curved blades, symbolizing the flexibility of Buddhism. The carvings on wood and stone in the temples of the Ly and Tran dynasties that have survived until now are a valuable source of material for assessing the importance of Buddhist architecture, sculpture and fine arts. These are vivid proofs of the value of the contribution of Buddhist art, especially architecture, to the country's culture.

Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the conception and writing of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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