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France's Disillusionment at Indochina  
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France's Disillusionment

at

Indochina

1900 - 1930

### **Abstract**

The structure of this paper will be divided into three main parts: Introduction, Body with two main topics Urbanism and Architecture and Conclusion. The whole writing will circulate around the architecture and the influence of French construction at Indochina in the interval between 1900 and 1930. The writing will first provide an overall historical context of French Colonial Empire at Indochina in order to reveal the intention of the colonisers. Then before going into the main part of the discourse, reasons and circumstances that motivate French urbanists and architects will be discussed in the Urbanism section. Subsequently, the main focus of this paper will study and compare the two most significant figures, which efficiently represent the culture and architectural style of France at the time and the influence of French architecture on Indochina. At the end, a personal comment will sum up the matters and arguments of this architectural discourse about French Colonialism in Indochina.

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## I. Introduction

There is currently large number of researches that interested in francophone culture and colonial attitudes during the post-colonial period. French Colonialism process in Africa in the 1900s seems to be the center of academic debating as well as receiving more scholarly attention while Indochina appears to be eclipsed and occasionally being the foci of academic studies. In fact, when going outside of Africa, other researches tend to focus majorly on the Franco-Chinese war from 1945 to 1954 to elucidate how the colony fall and the end of the colonial empire. So many of colonial discourses and dialogues about Indochina seemed to draw the researchers into a world of fictional and fabricated utopia as Bernard Hue wrote: *"que serait dans la littérature, l'image de l'Indochine, si elle n'était d'abord, et peut-être essentiellement, mensonge, c'est-à-dire fable, représentation mythique..."*<sup>1</sup> – the image of Indochina would be in literature. Even though, *Indochine François* was tangible and real to the ones who inhabited and also to the ones who suppressed Indochina. Hence, this study will focus on the particular period of French Colonization from 1900 to 1945 and their action in Indochina. On the other hand, the purpose will be

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<sup>1</sup> Hué, B. (ed.), *Indochine: reflets littéraires* (Rennes: PUR, 1992), p. 21.

revealing the division between history on one side and fiction on the other.

### **1. The Second French colonial empire (1830 – 1945) and Indochina**

Indochina is an undesignated region in-between India and China in which consisted of three lands (Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos). The name itself Indo-China shows the interminglement of two major Asian cultures at the time in 1900s. With shape of a kidney, Vietnam, the biggest slice in this territory, is divided into three main areas: Tonkin (delta of the Red River) in the north, Annam (narrow strip of plain between the sea and the mountains) in central south and Cochinchina (Mekong Delta region) in the south. The remaining land is covered with sodden and rich soil which indicates rice cultivation. Up north in Red River Delta and down south in Mekong Delta are the two places where majorly the population occupied. Despite the fact that the three territories in Indo-china region are connected with two great rivers and geographically adjacent to each other, they have no close relation. Opening up the brilliant façade, the interior is separated and split up by mountains and rivers<sup>2</sup>. There is nothing can be identified as one Indochinese race because they are not united and each one has grown and developed individually.

The French colonial conquest in Far East started during the era of Napoleon the Third. They took over Tourane (Đà Nẵng) in 1858, Sài Gòn and close by territories of Cochinchina in 1862 and then formed their protectorate in Cambodia in 1863. Towards 1868, China tried stand against French occupation

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<sup>2</sup> Georges Bois, "French Indo-China", *International Review of Mission* 20, no.2 (April 1931): 274

at Tonkin and fought under black flags. They defeated one French force but then lost in 1884. France then negotiated with China to define borders between areas and by June 1885, Chinese accepted the treaty of French sovereignty over Tonkin. This then lead to the formation of Union of Indochina in 1887. Under French colonization, the hyphenated name Indo-Chine disappeared and replaced with an established French designation: *l'Indochine française*, as to declare the development of a new society and identity<sup>3</sup>. The Gallic affix in the new terms marked the mixture of Franco-Asian character of the new population<sup>4</sup>. In fact, the expression of *French Indochina* were officially adopted by the decree in October 1887, as well as establishing political boundaries for the region by the French government.

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<sup>3</sup> Nicola Cooper, *France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters* (Berg, Oxford International Publishers Ltd., 2001), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



Map of Indochina 1908 - 1954

Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*. Page 123



## 2. Mise En Valeur

*Mise en valeur* (development) is an expression for economic developing strategy that has been testified by other capitalist nations, and as well the moral and cultural renovations that benefit the colonies. The terms can be put forward and stand as a rigid pillar of the colonial ideology, and used to display and measure the beneficial value of French colonization oversea. It is considered as a multi-functional notion that not only supports French belief in the international value of its civilization but also was referred to as a touchstone in the defense of French colonialism. During the turning of the century in 1900s and post World War I period, colonial texts increasingly emphasized the terms *mise en valeur* as an image of thriving and moral French colonialism. When the colonialism being the central gaze on the international stage, its developmental aspects of the colonial policy played a vital role in defending and promoting its colonial action. That was when *mise en valeur* came in useful by pulling France away from its bloody legacy of conquest and pacification and directed it towards the more ethically based colonial empire. As Albert Sarraut, a French *doctrine coloniale*, a former governor of Indochina and Minister for Colonies, retrospectively described France's role in Indochina and promoted for the ethical emphasis of colonialism in his writing in 1931:

*Elle sait, en effet, cette élite, que c'est la souveraineté française, basée sur le droit du bienfait et du progrès, qui a vraiment fait l'Indochine, fondé la France d'Asie, créé cette union puissante de pays hétérogènes et de peuples divers dans laquelle, comme dans une mutualité fraternelle. l'effort de chaque profite à tous et l'effort de tous à chacun. De ces pays différents, séparés, sans lien, trop faibles avec leurs seuls moyens, plus vulnérables*

*dans leur isolement, condamnés chacun par leur solitude à ne devenir, dans le grand tourbillon de la vie moderne, que les satellites obscurs et serviles d'autres Etats.*<sup>5</sup>

Sarraut justified French presence in Indochina and implied that the 'construction' of Indochina was not yet thoroughly accomplished. He also asserted that colonizers were not conquerors but envoys of improvement and constructive deed and in fact, enlightening the indigenous population as well as "westernizing" them should be considered as an ultimate gift from France.

Considerately applying *mise en valeur* policy, France intended to transform the politics, economics, culture and urban of Indochina and turn it into a new Franco-Asian era.

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<sup>5</sup> Sarraut, A., *Grandeur et servitudes coloniales* (Paris: Sagittaire, 1931), p. 266

## II. Making Indochina French?

### 1. Introduction

The pre-colonial Indochinese history is complicated as North Vietnam have been dominated and ruled under Chinese occupation for over nine centuries until A.D. 939. They remained their control over Tonkin until late 19<sup>th</sup> century when the French came. After such a long period under China's governance, Chinese profoundly influenced Vietnamese culture. It still existed particularly in the political and social system such as Confucianism, Mahayana Buddhism and ideograms. In spite of the fact that there was still the confrontation between North Vietnam, which supported by communist allies, and South Vietnam, which supported by America and anti-communist countries, the two regions were still equally linked. The north demanded for the rice from Mekong Delta while the south benefited from the mineral development in Tonkin. The conquest of Indochina had opened up an opportunity for French colonialism to build up a new image itself that would be commendable. By homogenizing the regions geographically and politically, France then could render a visible French at Indochina. As a feature of the *mise en valeur* policy, transforming Indochina culturally and politically in the sphere of *la plus grande France* <sup>6</sup> was an objective that could be accomplished not only through construction and urban design but also through intellectual development of the native population, particularly was the indigenous comprehension of French language. Besides, it was also through isolating the influences of neighboring countries as well as the pre-colonial culture.

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<sup>6</sup> Refer to book for further details: Fafart, Alph. *Vers La Plus Grande France D'Asie: Au Tonkin*. Ninh Bình: Impr. Thiện Ban, 1921.

## 2. Architecturally<sup>7</sup>

For this part of the study, the term Indochina is mainly referred to Vietnam as France's administration majorly focuses on this part of the region, and the particularities of Cambodia and Laos tend to be subsumed under the umbrella terms *Indochine Française*<sup>8</sup>. Besides, staying away from the periphrasis of the term Indochina, it will be signified as a colony.

In order to generate a new identity, construction – an important feature of *mise en valeur* policy, clearly contributed enormously to the process of making Indochina French as to visualize its presence in buildings and the urbanscape of the colony. Native construction was destroyed and replaced with French structures that embraced and acted as a distinctive feature of French colonialism. All of the French structures can be classified into several categories regarding the major influential styles in different timelines of the colonization. For the first period of time, before 1900, buildings were militarily designed basing on simple functionalism with detail decorations influenced by neoclassical-order. In the next interval between 1900 and 1920, Beaux-Arts with classical order and massiveness were the dominant characters of construction style. Then during the following 10-year period, it was all about the amalgamation of Western elements and construction principles that adapted to local climatic conditions and features. Thereafter, other new and

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<sup>7</sup> For this part of the writing, book: Nicola Cooper, *France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters*, Oxford, New York, 2001, chapter 3 will be used as a major source of information.

<sup>8</sup> See the Introduction in Nicola Cooper, *France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters*, for an extended discussion of 'Terminologies'.

modern architectural styles originated from Western countries started to appear<sup>9</sup>.

#### **a. Urbanism**

The plans and accomplishments of Indochina in early 20<sup>th</sup> century typified a discreet form of modern urbanism in which showed an approach that more responsive to local history and culture than the solution of the European architectural avant-garde. In fact, the two versions of city planning were not contradicting one another due to some cities of the colony still represented the crucial principles that had been adopted by the avant-garde modernists including: standardize construction, modernize organization of public services and industry, efficient city circulation, and concentrate more on the hygienic characteristic of design, in particular fresh air and sunlight. The colony, during these years (1900s), was the central attention of the French-speaking world and seen as *champ d'expérience*<sup>10</sup> (field of experiment) – a laboratory. The notion of colonial cities being used as laboratories is significant in many ways. A large amount of professional talent such as architects, scientists and administrators were brought together and got involved in experimenting social and urban theories on the colony in order to find a better solution for re-urbanizing cities at home. The individual works of these professors gave an in depth understanding that benefited the development of contemporaneous

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<sup>9</sup> Nguyen Quang and H.Detlf Kammeir, *Case study: Conservation Program for the French colonial Quarter in Hanoi*, The Economics of Heritage: UNESCO Conference on Adaptive Re-use of Historic Properties in Asia and the Pacific, Topic 1: The economic and political rationale for local government investment in heritage conservation and adaptive re-use: a consideration of laws and incentives, Case Study: Hanoi (Viet Nam), p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Books that mention this subject including: Vaillat; Joseph Chailley-Bert, *La France et la plus Grande France* (Paris, 1902); J. B. Piolet and *La France hors de France* (Paris, 1910).

colonialism and also provided later generation a more avant-garde and original source of cultural-relativist approach.

At the turning of the century, a new colonial policy known as “association” emerged under the influence of the social and aesthetic conception that originated from social scientists and urbanists – two recently published professions at that time<sup>11</sup>. This opposed to the previous policy in the early nineteenth century called “assimilation” in which French culture dominated its colony in language, government system and architecture and also used potent military force to gain sovereignty and suppress local rebellion. The associate spirit of the new policy focused on respecting and preserving local cultures such as historic monuments and tribal councils and simultaneously provided social services including state schools and hospitals. By doing so, countering resistance was far more advantageous than using army force both in efficiency and moral aspect. The basis of “association” related closely to urban planning and cultural sensibility and concentrated on matters that expanding from architectural heritage conservation to public services distribution. It gave urban planning and architectural design a significant role in defining political problems as well as fortifying the political power of French colonisers. All of the political problems in the colony, in particular commercial and residential design, administrative centralization, industrial development and standardized labor force, were not alien to that in France. Hence, this links clearly to the term “laboratory” that has been mentioned before in which the colony being used as part of French experiment. In fact, there was no

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11 More information on the term “laboratory” and the influence of social scientist and urbanists on French colonialism can be traced in Gwendolyn Wright, *Tradition in the Service of Modernity: Architecture and Urbanism in French Colonial Policy, 1900-1930*, *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol.59, No.2 (Jun., 1987), the University of Chicago Press, p. 298

noteworthy result from French action at the colony that could assist the redevelopment plan in France.

## **b. Case study of typical architectures**

### **i. First period (before 1900)**

In late nineteenth century, French attitude towards the indigenous population could be perceived patently when they formed an authoritarian regime to overpower local resistance. Franco army's leverage was expanded not only through military buildings, but also through urban design of the cities that had been captured by France. First urban redevelopment plan of Saigon was drawn by Coffyn, a military engineer, in the 1880s. Coffyn's plan focused on two aspects: public surveillance and emphasizing French greatness to attract European investors<sup>12</sup>. First of all, large open streets were designed to allow clear observation and at the same time, lessen large open spaces to prevent vast unauthorized local gathering from occurring. Secondly, by constructing some ostentatious buildings, Coffyn tried to embed the French feel into the borough that would encourage the feasibility of Indochina dream as well as make it investable.

With the conquering spirit of eliminating any vestiges of local organization, Saigon was massively devastated and rebuilt by the colonizers. The reconstruction process of this city hence involved the dominance of classical

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<sup>12</sup> See Brebion, J., 'La Naissance et les premieres annees de Saigon, ville francaise', *Bulletin de la Societe des Etudes indochinoises*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1927, p. 63-138

and baroque architecture as it paraded the universality of Western vision of beauty and order. Saigon no doubt became the *Paris de l'Extrême-Orient*<sup>13</sup>, a proud prestige and cultural hegemony of France during the colonial period.

*C'est vrai. On ne peut songer sans admiration au petit nombre d'années qu'il à fallu à la France pour faire d'une ville malsaine, au canaux marécageux, une cité élégante, aux riches édifices, aux rues larges, aérées, bien ombragées.*<sup>14</sup>

Despite the fact that Saigon had been praising with its new Franco-Asia identity: a modern city (population of about 120,000 at that time, including more than 10,000 French) with municipal theater that abled to hold 800 people, pavement cafés, modern urban design and even racetrack, it was rather a largely superficial nature that the architects failed to renovate the old water supply system and to address the appropriate construction for the tropical climate in Indochina. In particular, Notre-Dame cathedral, designed by Jules Bourard, completed in 1880 with red bricks and Western ventilation system could not solve the problems of heat and humidity of the climate near equator. The premature decision of promptly turning Indochina into the Paris of the Far East resulted in inappropriate construction solution for the colony.

One type of social buildings that this paper focuses on is theater – a public figure that represents the technological superiority of France through its architecture and portrays French culture by hosting art performances. This particular part of the study will discuss about the only three theaters that

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13 Translate to English: "Paris of the far east"

14 Translate to English: "It's true. We can not think without admiration the few years he has taken in France to an unhealthy city, the marshy channels, an elegant city, rich buildings, wide streets, airy, well shaded". Josset, E., A Travers nos colonies: livre de lectures sur l'histoire, la géographie, les sciences et la morale (Cours moyen et supérieur), (Paris: Armand Colin, 1901), p. 262.



France has built in Vietnam during the early time of twentieth century. The first one was Saigon Opera House in Cochinchina, constructed from 1897 to 1900 then followed the construction of Hanoi Opera House in Tonkin, 1901 - 1911 and later, a similar version of that at Haiphong between 1904 and 1912 (an adjacent city to Hanoi). Out of three, Hanoi Opera House is the main focus as it has been built mimicking the architecture of the most famous theater in Paris: Nouvel Opera de Paris, designed by Charles Garnier and built between 1861 and 18752

## **ii. Infrastructure development (1900-1920)**

By carefully applying *mise en valeur* policy in the development of Indochina, France changed their colony into an era of progress in which the economy was modernized and evolved. On the other hands, industry was integrated into both urban and agriculture so that lead to 50 per cent growth of production output<sup>15</sup>. Indochina, as a result, turned into an era of industrialization with a wide range of traditional and new industries were renovated and upgraded including mines, rice, rubber plantations, tobacco, sugar, electricity power stations, industrial services and so on. The colonial government hence anticipated a need of transport provision, a modern infrastructure throughout the Union of Indochina. A number of transportation developments had been proposed in which two important achievements should be addressed: *Trans-Indochinois*, a new railway network that was constructed in sections from 1905

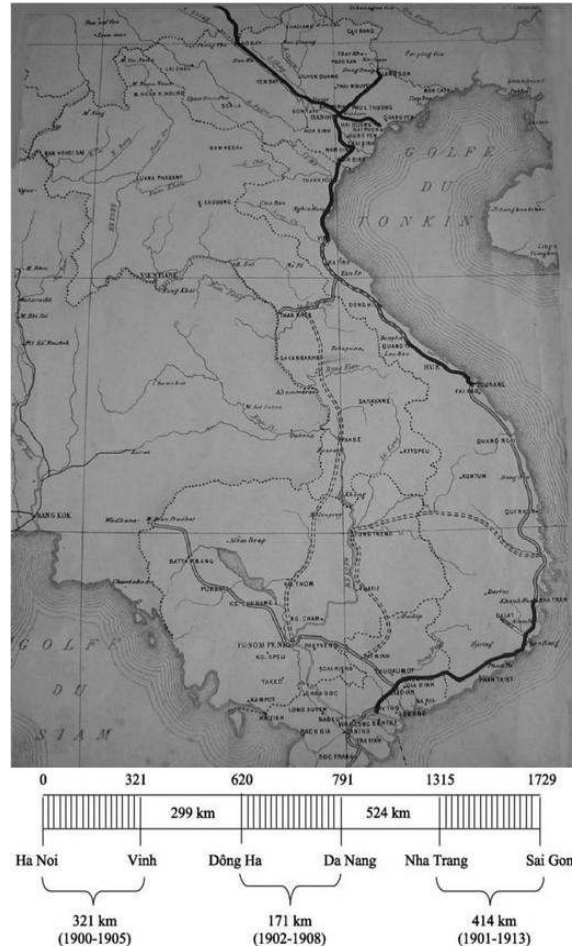
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15 Nicola Cooper, *France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters* (Berg, Oxford International Publishers Ltd., 2001), p. 30

and finished in 1936, and the development of Route Coloniale No. 1 (RC 1), also known as the Mandarin Road started by the Chinese about 2,000 years ago, extended to the south by the Vietnamese and then redeveloped by the colonizers.



Route Coloniale No. 1



Transindochinois

\*Both images are taken from <http://www.talkingproud.us/Military/Ban%20Laboy/Ban%20Laboy/BanLaboyHistory.html> (retrieved on 20th November 2012)

Accompanying with transportation development, ports and harbors were also the key elements in growing the economy. The two ports of HaiPhong (north of Vietnam) and Saigon (south of Vietnam) were redeveloped to meet the standards and needs of the expanding import and export businesses.



Haiphong cement works and port

*Nicola Cooper, France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters, 2001, p. 30*

Being a harbor city, Haiphong, adjacent to Hanoi, was a swamp village stuck in between thousands of development projects and noises and only existed as a port simply for anchorage<sup>16</sup>. The city dwellers and French troops were unable to deal with the anarchy and the disorder of home government. When the colonisers came, the city had a potential of becoming a central port in the Far East and that would generate a lot of benefits for the colony and also itself, a city with population of about 16,000 at that time (including few thousands French people and troops). Hence, in order to transform this place in to an asset of France, the French government decided to build a large-scale theater and other administration buildings near by as to establish a local governing system and implant a French social life style into the region.

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<sup>16</sup> Louis Lyautey, *Lettres du Tonkin et de Madagascar, 1894 – 1899* (Paris, 1902), p. 59 and “Propositions faites par le general en chef au gouverneur general pour la campagne d’hiver 1895-1896,” in *Revue des deux mondes*, March 1, 1900, p. 241-49.

### iii. Theaters study<sup>17</sup>

One type of social buildings that this paper focuses on is theater – a public figure that represents the technological superiority of France through its architecture and portrays French culture by hosting art performances. This particular part of the study will discuss about the only three theaters that France has built in Vietnam during the early time of twentieth century. The first one was Saigon Opera House in Cochinchina, constructed from 1897 to 1900 then followed the construction of Hanoi Opera House in Tonkin, 1901 – 1911 and later, a similar version of that at Haiphong between 1904 and 1912 (an adjacent city to Hanoi). Out of three, Hanoi Opera House is the main focus as it has been built mimicking the architecture of the most famous theater in Paris: Nouvel Opera de Paris, designed by Charles Garnier and built between 1861 and 1875.



Haiphong municipal theater at present (personal photo)

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<sup>17</sup> For this part of study, Book Christopher Curtis Mead, *Charles Garnier's Paris Opera* will be used a major source of information.

Being built during the turning of century, the dominant style of this construction was still Baroque architecture. In fact, the design of this theater was replicated from the *Palais Garnier* opera house designed by Charles Garnier in Paris. All of the construction materials for this smaller version of Paris opera house were delivered from France and it took eight years from 1904 – 1912 to finish the building. It was situated at the heart of the city where all three cultures met: Vietnamese, Chinese and French.

Hanoi Opera House, also known as the Municipal Theater or the Great Theater, is designed by two architects Broyer and V. Harlay with a numerous influence from Charles Garnier's *Nouvel Opéra de Paris*. It has been playing a vital role in both representing and promoting the image of the capital city of Vietnam. There are few in depth researches on the architecture of this Opera House that have been published to the public. Access to its records is either restricted due to important documents are stored in France, or limited to few people or organization with expertise and responsibility to the theater, in particular the Department of National Archives and Records of Vietnam and two Vietnamese architects Hoàng Đạo Kính and Hồ Thiệu Trị who have been responsible for the major renovations of Hanoi Opera House between 1995 and 1997. Therefore, in this part of writing, the architecture as well as the influence on local history of this masterpiece will be interpreted through studying and comparing with its close "brother" in France: the *Opéra de Paris* by Charles Garnier.

Garnier's Paris Opéra is considered to be the largest, the most expensive and the most flamboyant architectural project that has been carried out by the Second Empire of Napoleon III. It took fourteen years from 1861 to 1875 to construct this monument with the cost of thirty-three million francs and an enormous amount of work contributed by ninety painters and sculptors. That combining with the luxury interior of ornamental decorations, mirrors, sparkling chandeliers, gilding, bronzes and marbles generated an image reflecting the wealth of France's economy and the heyday of French architecture and technology at that time. As it was praised in the *Paris Journal* by Ernest Chesneau in 1875: "Au Paris agrandi, aéré, assaini, transformé avec la plus clair prévoyance des besoins sociaux et en même temps avec magnificence par le gouvernement impérial .... il fallait une salle d'opéra digne de la grandeur, du luxe et des arts du Paris nouveau."<sup>18</sup> And as it was described by Christopher C. Mead in his book *Charles Garnier's Paris Opéra*: "The Paris Opéra represents the Second Empire with the same comfortable excess, the same fleshy amplitude as the tufted upholstery of a *confident*, the crinolines of a Worth gown, or a nude painted by Bouguereau."<sup>19</sup>

As significant as Paris Opera in France, Hanoi Opera stood for the culture, economy and technology – an image of power and intelligent of the colonisers in Indochina. Although, the scale and cost of the one in Hanoi was nothing compare to its 'brother' at home, Hanoi *Théâtre municipal* still acted as a spiritual symbol that mentally invigorated and inspired the French government as well as their army.

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18 Ernest Chesneau, "Pourquoi, par qui et comment le nouvel Opéra?" *Paris Journal*, 14 Jan. 1875: "For the enlarged, ventilated, purified Paris, transformed with the clearest foresight of the social needs and at the same time with magnificence by the imperial government . . . one needed an opera house that was worthy of the grandeur, the luxury and the arts of the new Paris."

19 Christopher C. Mead, *Charles Garnier's Paris Opéra: Architectural Empathy and the Renaissance of French Classicism*, p. 4

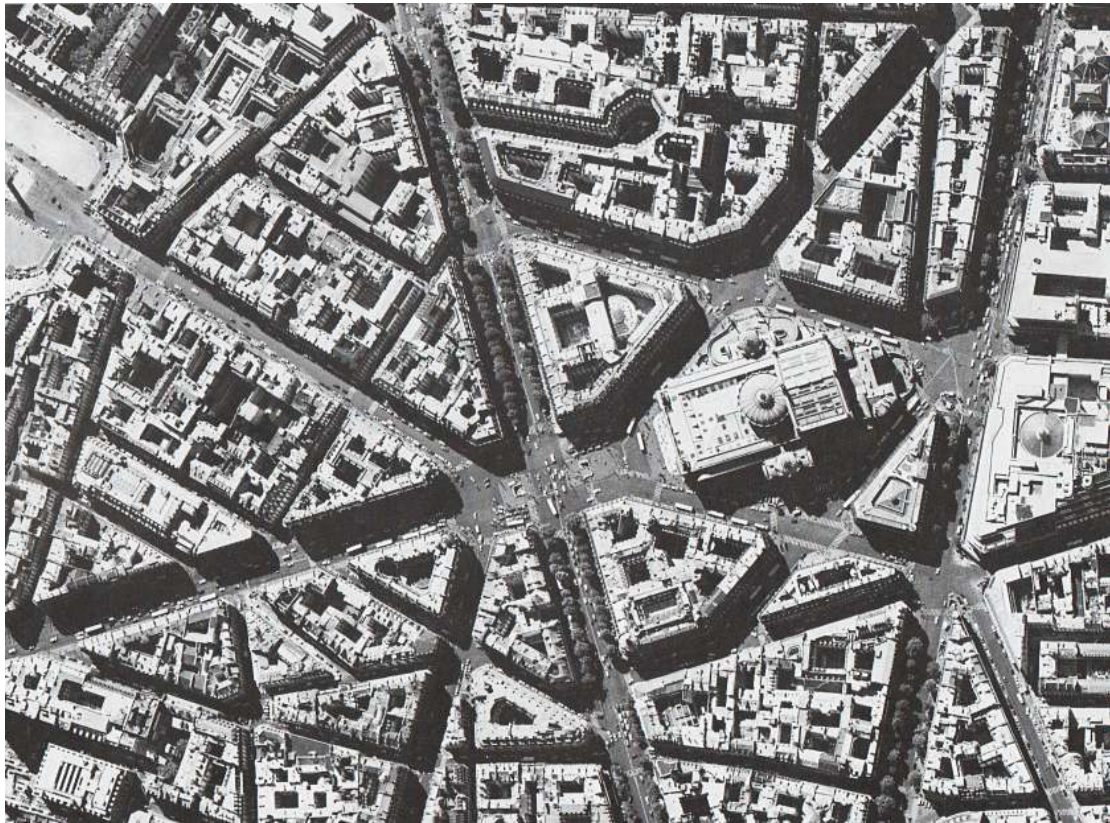
Paris Opera House	Hanoi <i>Théâtre municipal</i>
1,979 seats	870 seats
Cost of 36 milion francs	Cost of 2 million francs
Total area = 11000 m <sup>2</sup>	Total area = 2600 m <sup>2</sup>
Height = 56m (ground to tallest point)	Height = 34m (ground to tallest point)

Comparison table of two structures<sup>20</sup>

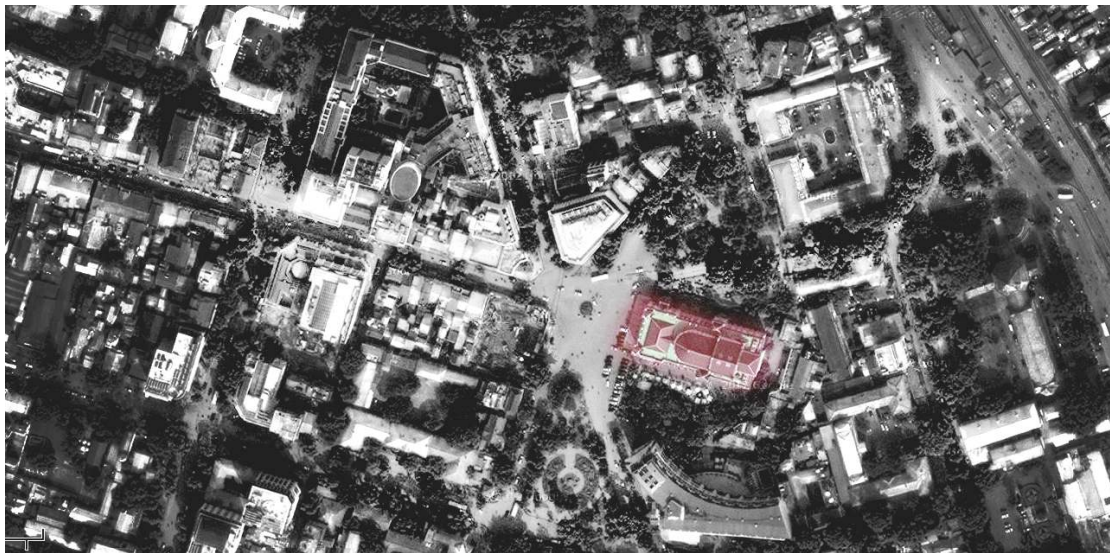
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<sup>20</sup> Information taken from Wikipedia [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palais\\_Garnier](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palais_Garnier) and [http://vi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nhà\\_hát\\_Lớn\\_Hà\\_Nội](http://vi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nhà_hát_Lớn_Hà_Nội)





*Urban plan of Garnier's Opera House (photo taken from <http://maps.google.com>)*



*Urban plan of Hanoi Opera House (photo taken from <http://maps.google.com> with photoshop modification)*

There are a lot of similarities between the two urban plans of Paris Opera House and Hanoi Opera House. The selection of both sites was not by accident similar to each other but they followed certain rules which had been declared by Jacques Francois Blondel in mid-eighteenth century about basic



requirements for designing contemporary French theaters. There are three essential aspects of theater design that need to be focused on: Site/location, auditorium and function on the exterior<sup>21</sup>. Basing on the new direction for French theater design, a series of solutions were proposed by French architects for the competition of designing the Paris Opera during the period between 1763 and 1860. The question of designing an appropriate auditorium was answered by Victor Louis in 1780 and later in 1860, Hector Horeau solved the rest of the issues finding the right location and the suitable exterior form. Horeau brought forward his criteria of picking a proper site for the Paris Opera:

1. De laisser l'Opéra au milieu de son public . . .
2. De mettre l'Opéra dans de bonnes conditions de prospérité, en le plaçant sur le boulevard qui est la voie naturelle de théâtres
3. D'élever un édifice public dans un quartier qui en est privé, particulièrement sur la ligne des boulevards où l'on ne voit de maisons que depuis la Magdeliene [ sic ] jusqu'à la porte St.Denis.
4. D'isoler complètement l'édifice et d'offrir de arrivages faciles.<sup>22</sup>

This compare to the urban map of Hanoi Opera House: it is situated within its public, isolated completely and it does offer easy access to the building. The facade of the theater is facing Tràng Tiền street, one of the most crowded and busy streets of Hanoi, so this fulfills the second requirement as to place the building on a busy thoroughfare. Hence, that gives an explanation for the site selection of Hanoi Municipal Theater.

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21 Christopher Curtis Mead, *Charles Garnier's Paris Opera*, p.45

22 Horeau, "Etude d'un projet d'Opera definitif" : "(1) To leave the Opera in the milieu of its public . . . (2) To provide for the Opera's prosperity by placing it on the boulevard which is the natural thoroughfare of theaters. (3) To elevate a public building in a private quarter, particularly on the line of boulevards where one sees nothing but houses from La Madeleine to the Porte St.Denis. (4) To isolate the building completely and to offer easy access."



Charles Garnier. Opera. View from the avenue de l'Opéra

*Image taken from Christopher Curtis Mead, Charles Garnier's  
Paris Opera, p. 107*



Hanoi Opera House. View from Trang Tien

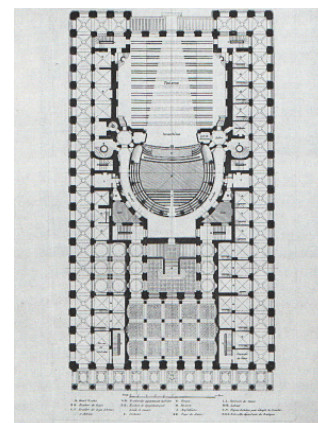
About the shape and design of French theater's interior, auditorium reform was initiated by Jacque Germain Soufflot with his Grand Theatre in Lyons in 1756. The elliptical shape that existed in modern theaters had been inspired by the ancient Greek theaters and the design of Teatro Olimpico of Palladio in Vicenza. It was not until the significant breakthrough in Victor Louis's Grand Theater in Bordeaux in 1780 that French theater auditoriums were built in a similar way later at that time. This new type of auditorium with features of open balcony boxes and horseshoe plan was used and brought into many other theater designs years after it was developed.



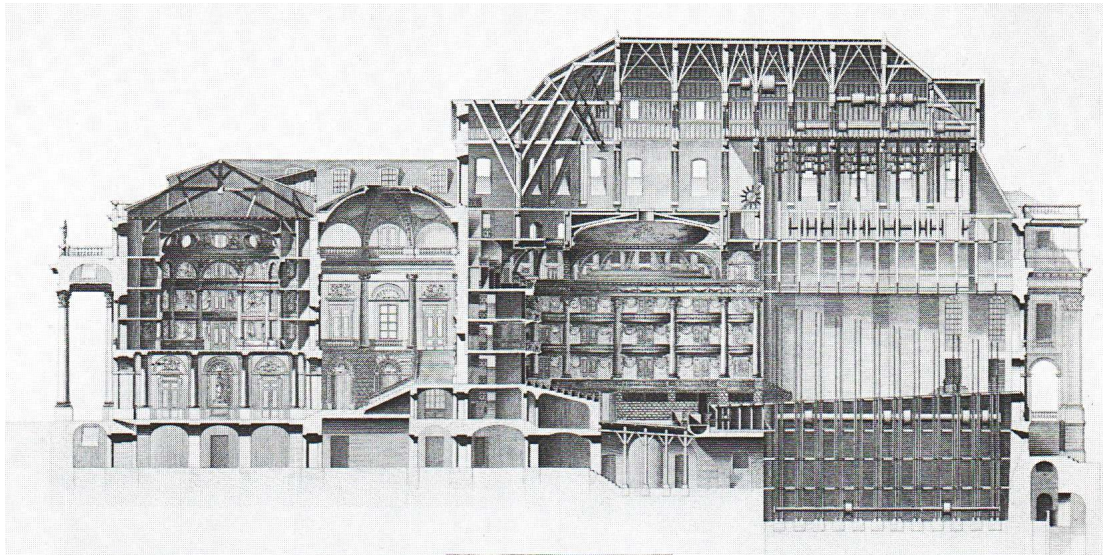
Victor Louis. Grand Theatre, Bordeaux, 1773-80.

Perspective

*(images taken from Louis, Salle de spectacle de Bordeaux, pl. 19;B0)*

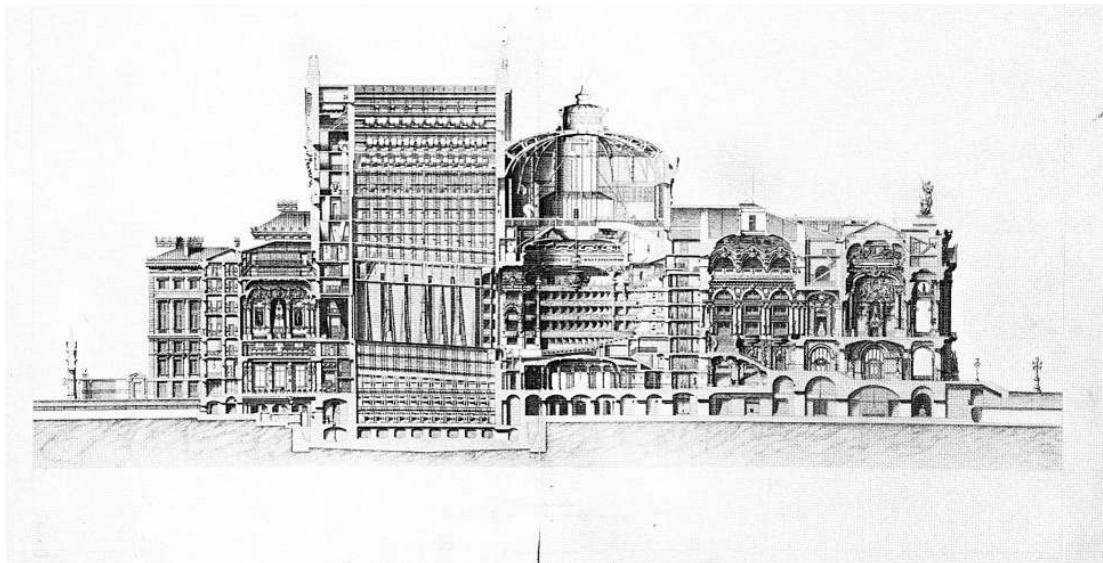


Victor Louis, Grand  
Theatre, Bordeaux  
1773-80. Plan



Victor Louis. Grand Theatre, Bordeaux, 1773-80. Section

(images taken from Louis, *Salle de spectacle de Bordeaux*, pl. 19;B0)



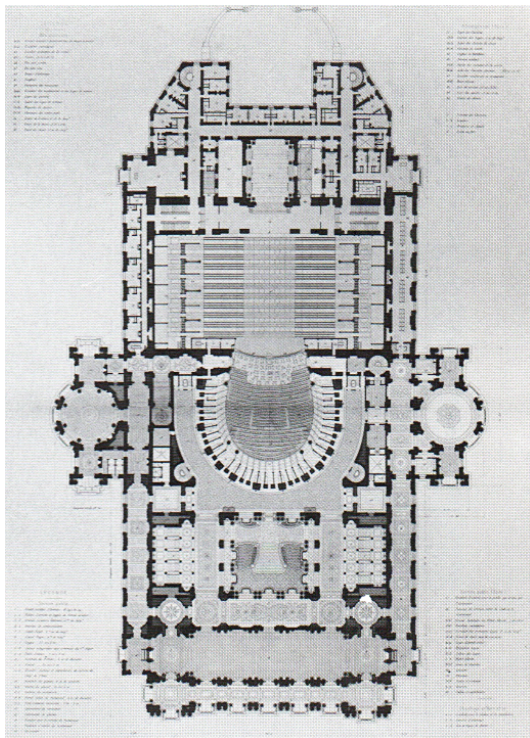
Charles Garnier. Paris Opera House. Longitudinal Section

(engraving by Riquois and Hibon, Garnier, *Le Nouvel Opera*, fol. 1, p 17-18)

Compare the early version of modern French theater in 1780 to the much more sophisticated work of Charles Garnier in 1875: the overall composition is still the same with a front facade welcoming theatergoers into the *foyer*, the visual experience on approach is then extended to the great central staircase where it leads people to the theatrical realm of the central auditorium and at the end, beyond the stage scenery is where the backstage located. Garnier's Opera House was designed using method that structured in the Prix de Rome project of Charles Percier in 1876. The proposal was started with intersecting

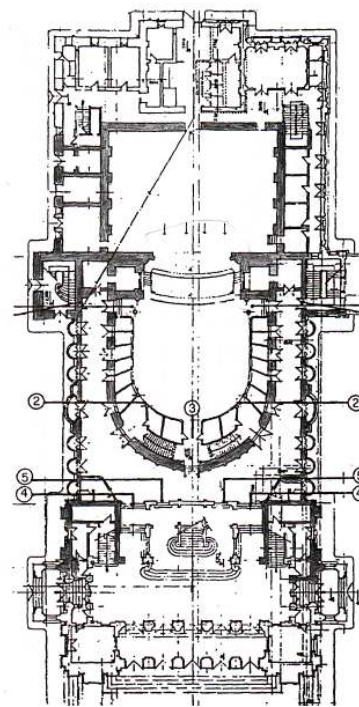


rectangles programmatically on its plan. This then divided the theater into two parts: public spaces including entrance hall, foyer, grand stair and auditorium, and theater spaces including stage, backstage and administration units. The circulation inside is splitted into many directions and fused together at the central vestibule and salons. The layout of Hanoi Opera House is almost exactly the same as Garnier's theater apart from it does not have the two lateral galleries.



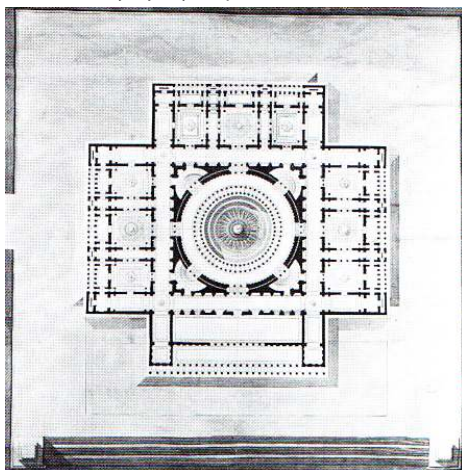
Charles Garnier. Opera. First floor plan

(engraving by Rebout and Maurage;  
Garnier, *Le Nouvel Opera*, fol. 1, p. 10-11)



Hanoi Opera House. First floor plan

Hoang Dao Cung, *Kien truc nha hat*, Hanoi, 2008, p.244



Rome. Plan (EBA)

Charles Percier. Un Edifice a rassembler les Academies, 1786 Grand Prix de





1 Dome ceiling decoration at Hanoi Opera House (author)



2. Central decoration above stage at Hanoi Opera House (author)



3. Side decoration at Hanoi Opera House (author)



4. Francois Jouffroy. L'Harmonie, Plaster model for Opera facade Group, ca. 1865 (Cliche de Musees Nationaux)



5. Aime Millet. L'Apollon couronnant la Danse et la Poesie, plaster model for Opera flytower apex group. ca. 1865 (Cliche des Musees Nationaux)

The ornamental decoration inside Hanoi Opera House is a mixture of East and West cultures. Major of wall decorations are influenced by French arts with the presence of eagle's wings (4) and the lyre (5). The central decoration detail right above the stage (2) has a face of a man represents for the father of Vietnamese people with a crown similar to the one of the Statue of Liberty. The side details (3) are also adorned with two rice stems which represent Vietnamese agriculture.

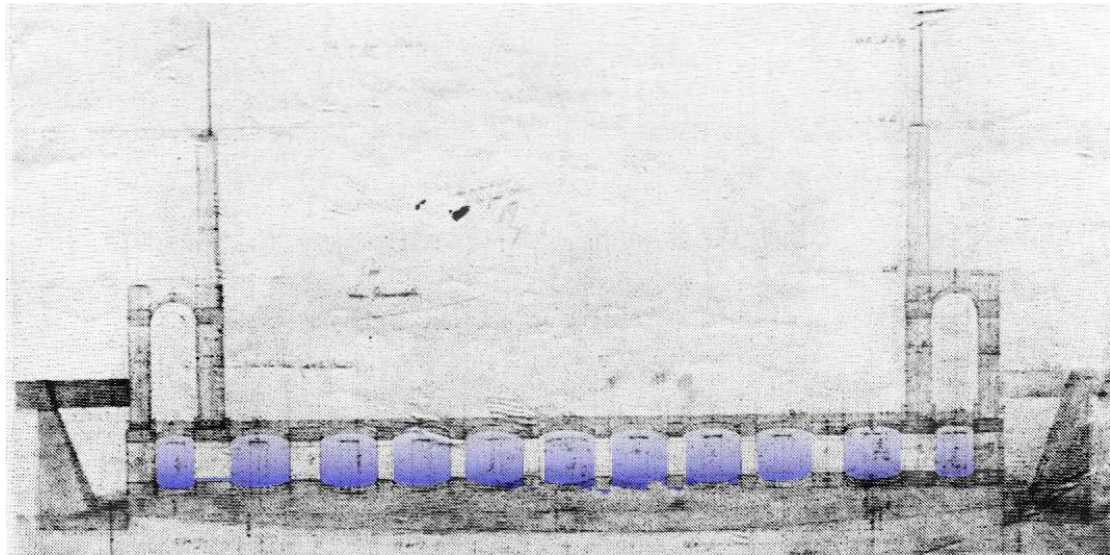
### c. Construction

Both sites of the operas were waterlogged and they were treated in different ways. French engineers with advanced technology of using reinforced concrete, a double foundation was specially designed for the *cuve* – the substage part of the structure lying twelve meters below the ground level<sup>23</sup>. This double foundation system has gaps in between which allows water from a tributary of the River Seine to flow naturally and keep moisture away from the structure above. The solution of consolidating the ground of Hanoi Opera house was rather a traditional and economical method in which 35,000 bamboo stakes were driven into the ground and a 0.9 meter layer of concrete was casted on top<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Christopher Curtis Mead, Charles Garnier's Paris Opera, p.147

<sup>24</sup> Nguyễn Thị Kha, *Nhà hát Lớn Hà Nội - vẻ đẹp tròn trĩnh kỳ diệu*, Nhà xuất bản Hội Nhà văn, 2011



Opera Agency, Opera, cuve. Transverse section, 20 June 1862 (B0).

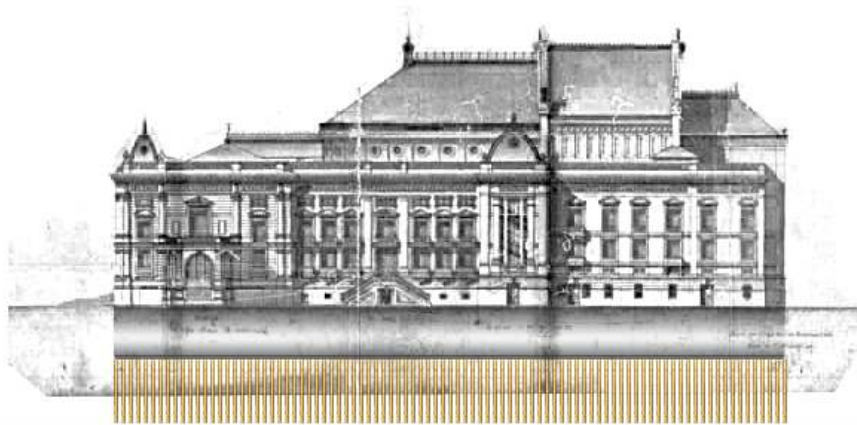


Image taken from Nguyễn Thùy Kha, Nhà hát Lớn Hà Nội - vẻ đẹp tròn trĩnh kỹ, Nhà xuất bản Hội Nhà văn, 2011, p.398

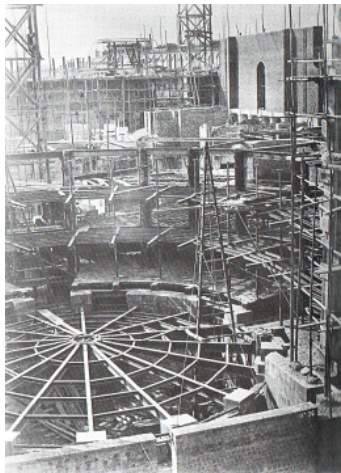
The genesis of Paris Opera House was a harmonious blend of masonry construction and cutting-edge technologies. The skillful crafting of stone blocks interweaving with massive iron structures, vaults and roofs expressed the interests of Garnier in every technical aspects of architectural design, even though he was more a romantic dreamer than acting from rational motives. The use of iron was necessary at the Opera where fires were a constant thread and also because of its practical advantages; Garnier argued:

*“...c'est d'abord les combles, dont les fermes peuvent avoir une portée bien plus grande que les fermes en bois . . . [ et qui ] sont à l'abri des incendies*



*Après les combles, les planchers en fers sont également très-recommandables, ils sont de même à l'abri des incendies, ils affaiblissent moins les murs qui les protent, et étant moins épais que les planchers en bois, permettent de donner aux étages une plus grande hauteur."*<sup>25</sup>

In comparison, Hanoi Opera House, was constructed with much lighter and cheaper materials: brick and steel. In fact, France provided all of the construction and manufacturing technology related to steel and it was mainly used for large span structure such as the circular dome on top of the auditorium similar to the iron construction of the one in Paris.



Delmaet and Durandelle.

Photograph of the Opera auditorium 10 May 1865 (BN)



Delmaet and Durandelle.

Photograph of the Opera, Vestibule des Abonnés  
25 March 1864 (BO)

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<sup>25</sup> Charles Garnier, "L'Architecture en fer," *Le Musée des Sciences*, I, 1857, p. 322: "...let us cite first of all roofs, whose beams can have a much greater load-bearing span than wooden beams . . . [and which] are fire proof. / After roofs, floors are equally very recommendable; they are also fireproof, they weaken less the walls supporting them, and being less thick than wooden floors, permit a greater height to each floor."



The act of building a small version of Paris Opera House at Hanoi can be linked directly to the marginal story of the smaller version (1/16 size) of the Statue of Liberty in late 19th century<sup>26</sup>. This smaller size of the Statue of Liberty was made by Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi as a sample of the giant statue before it was presented to America as a gift to express France's respect. The intention of France bringing that iconic figure to Hanoi in 1887 was to exhibit the fame of the war winner and their technical excellence in the eyes of the oppressed people. (similar to the act of flying one's flag to declare a particular territory). That was clearly demonstrated by naming the statue as *Tượng Công Lý*<sup>27</sup> and placing her on top of *Tháp Rùa* (*Tour de l'île de la Tortue* - turtle tower) at the middle of Hoàn Kiếm Lake, which were the two images connected closely to the history of Vietnamese people expelling the invaders.

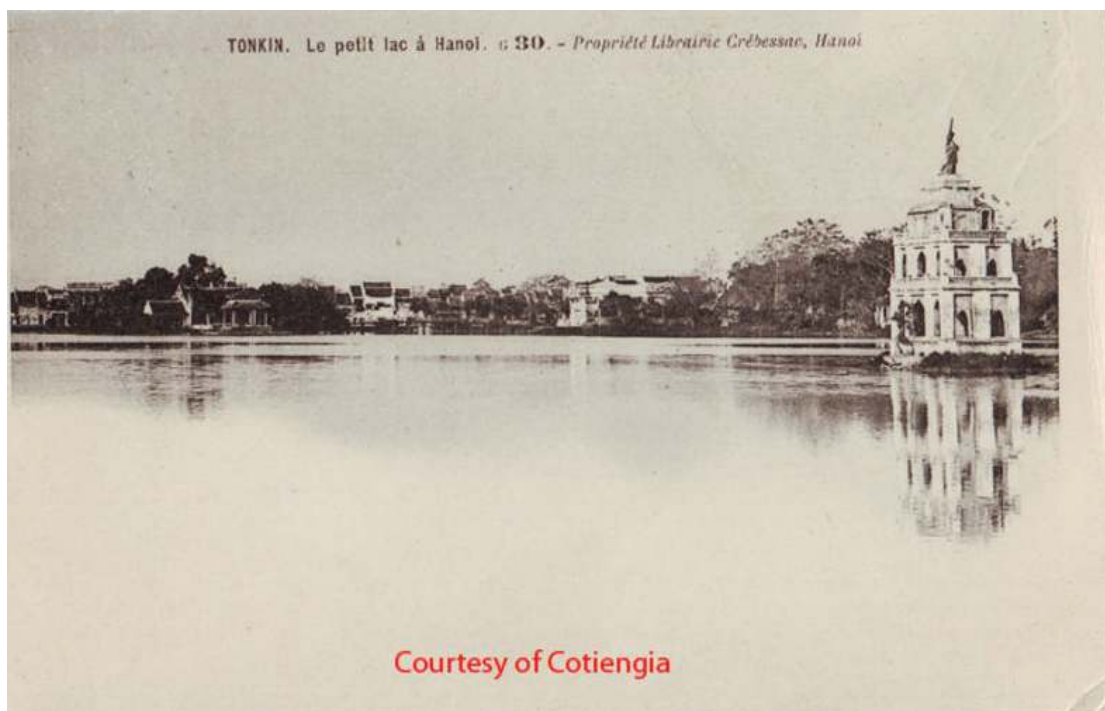


Photo taken from official website of Hoan Kiem Lake <http://www.hohoankiem.org/>

<sup>26</sup> More information about the smaller version of the Statue of Liberty can be traced in: Claude Bourrin, *Le vieux Tonkin: De 1884 à 1889*, IDEO, Hà Nội, 1941.

<sup>27</sup> The statue was named as Monument de la Justice (the Monument of Justice)

In spite of all immoral deeds that related to this Statue of Liberty, according to the most famous historian of Vietnam: Dương Trung Quốc, the statue was donated to Ngũ Xã bronze casting industry as material source for the project of moulding the biggest Adida Buddha bronze statue in Vietnam at Ngũ Xã pagoda. The transformation of the Statue of Liberty into Adida Buddha – a religious figure of Vietnamese people's beliefs, somehow became an amalgamation between East and West cultures that laid a foundation for the future society of Vietnam.



Adida Buddha, image taken from website <http://www.vov.vn>

### **III. Conclusion**

This chapter of French colonial history has shown different aspects of the colonisers' dream of expanding their territories to the Far East. The colonial government sought more subtle ways as their culture tactics were changing during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in order to maintain their power and to earn more support from the government and people at home. Indochina, as a 'laboratory', demonstrated a significant stage of modernism that involved urban and architectural design and the debate between people who believe in the principles of universalization and the ones who respect local cultures during the process of westernizing a region. The act of colonizing Indochina of France allowed both sides to experience the vision of such city and to understand an approach to urban design that could be combined with politics and artistic ability in order to achieve further political ambition.

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