

The Architecture of Imperial Mausoleums: Case Studies from the Early Nguyen Dynasty (1802-1848), Vietnam

Hung Ngoc Vo*

Faculty of Architecture, Silpakorn University, Bangkok, 10200, Thailand
vongochung1978@gmail.com

An Vinh Le

Faculty of Civil Engineering, Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City, Ho Chi Minh City, 71408, Vietnam
levinhan@iuh.edu.vn

Chotima Chaturawong

Faculty of Architecture, Silpakorn University, Bangkok, 10200, Thailand
chaturawong_c@silpakorn.edu

*Correspondence: vongochung1978@gmail.com

Received 09 - 12 - 2024
Revised 15 - 04 - 2025
Accepted 13 - 06 - 2025

Abstract

This research examines the layout and architecture of the imperial mausoleums of the early Nguyen dynasty (1802-1848) in Hue City. The research focuses on three imperial mausoleums: those of Emperor Gia Long, Emperor Minh Mang, and Emperor Thieu Tri. These mausoleums were constructed between 1814 and 1820, 1840 and 1843, and in 1848, respectively. Previous studies have examined the historical and socio-cultural contexts, as well as traditional spiritual practices. However, comprehensive knowledge of the site layout and architectural composition remains limited, leaving gaps in the research. This research employs a methodology consisting of historical document investigation, site surveying, architectural inventory, clarification of terminologies related to mausoleum conceptions, and site plan analysis. The findings



An overview photograph of
Hieu Lang, the Mausoleum
of Emperor Minh Mang

indicate that the Nguyen Dynasty's mausoleums were typically built in the southwestern mountainous area of the Hue Citadel. The imperial mausoleums of Emperors Gia Long, Minh Mang, and Thieu Tri follow three, one, and two axial layouts, respectively. The mausoleums comprise three fundamental architectural components: the Tomb area (A), the Worship Temples area (B), and the Stele Hall area (C). These elements coexist and represent kingship, theocracy, and civil rights, respectively. The Tomb area (A), where the emperors' remains are interred, is considered the most significant section and is consistently linked with the Stele Hall area (C). The Worship Temples area (B) serves as an intermediary entity and includes key architectural structures, such as the main temple, sub-temples, sub-houses, pavilions, and the main gate. The main temple, located at the center of the worship area, houses the votive tablets of the emperor and queen, where their souls are venerated. This study highlights how the emperors' mausoleums convey messages from the past, clarifying the connotations of body, soul, and memory as expressed through the architectural entities A, B, and C. The study analyzes architectural terminologies and conceptions, mausoleum layouts and architecture, and architectural types and structures, which were not primarily addressed in previous studies.

Keywords: imperial mausoleums, architectural layout, cultural symbolism, Nguyen Dynasty, complex of Hue monuments, Vietnam

1. Introduction

Hue is located in central Vietnam and was the capital city of the Nguyen dynasty, dating between 1802 and 1945 (Fig. 1). The dynasty consisted of thirteen emperors (Table 1) and could be divided into two main periods. The first period (1802–1858) marked Vietnam's independence era,¹ while the second period (1858–1945) corresponded with French colonial rule. The complex of Hue monuments, Vietnam's first World Cultural Heritage site, also includes the Nguyen royal mausoleums in its southwest mountain area.²

Influenced by the long-standing belief that life is temporary and death is a return to eternity, the kings of Vietnam's feudal dynasties consistently strategized to construct their mausoleums immediately upon ascending the throne. Notable examples include the Mausoleum of the Ngo Dynasty (939-965),³ Tran Dynasty (1225-1413),⁴ Le Dynasty (1428-1527),⁵ and Nguyen Dynasty (1802-1945). By the time of the Nguyen Lords (1558-1775), plans to build mausoleums for the lords and royal family



Fig 1

Fig 1
Location of
Hue, Capital City
of the Nguyen Dynasty
(1802-1945)

Table 1

No	Successive Emperors		Reign Periods	Birth and Death Dates	Names of Royal Family (Vietnamese)	Names of Royal Family (English)
	Names	Chinese Names				
1	Gia Long	嘉隆	1802 - 1820	1762 - 1820	Nguyễn Phúc Ánh	Anh Phuc Nguyen
2	Minh Mang	明命	1820 - 1840	1791 - 1840	Nguyễn Phúc Đản	Dam Phuc Nguyen
3	Thieu Tri	紹治	1841 - 1847	1807 - 1847	Nguyễn Phúc Miên Tông	Tong Phuc Mien Nguyen
4	Tu Duc	嗣德	1847 - 1883	1829 - 1883	Nguyễn Phúc Hồng Nhậm	Nham Phuc Hong Nguyen
5	Duc Duc	育德	1883	1853 - 1883	Nguyễn Phúc Ưng Chân	Chan Phuc Ung Nguyen
6	Hiep Hoa	協和	1883	1847 - 1883	Nguyễn Phúc Hướng Dật	Dat Phuc Huong Nguyen
7	Kien Phuc	建福	1884	1869 - 1884	Nguyễn Phúc Ưng Đăng	Dang Phuc Ung Nguyen
8	Ham Nghi	咸宜	1884 - 1885	1871 - 1943	Nguyễn Phúc Ưng Lịch	Lich Phuc Ung Nguyen
9	Dong Khanh	同慶	1885 - 1889	1864 - 1889	Nguyễn Phúc Chánh Mông	Mong Phuc Chanh Nguyen
10	Thanh Thai	成泰	1889 - 1907	1879 - 1954	Nguyễn Phúc Bửu Lân	Lan Phuc Buu Nguyen
11	Duy Tan	維新	1907 - 1916	1900 - 1945	Nguyễn Phúc Vĩnh San	San Phuc Vinh Nguyen
12	Khai Dinh	啓定	1916 - 1925	1885 - 1925	Nguyễn Phúc Bửu Đảo	Dao Phuc Buu Nguyen
13	Bao Dai	保大	1925 - 1945	1913 - 1997	Nguyễn Phúc Vĩnh Thụy	Thuy Phuc Vinh Nguyen

members primarily focused on the southwest banks of the Huong Giang River in the Hue area. This layout was later restructured during the Gia Long period of the Nguyen dynasty (1802-1945). The mausoleums of the succeeding Nguyen Emperors were continuously planned and built in the same southwest mountainous area of Hue City, upstream of the Huong Giang River. Although the Nguyen Dynasty was the last feudal dynasty of Vietnam, the mausoleums were still used traditionally to bury their emperors. The Nguyen dynasty had thirteen emperors, but only seven mausoleums were built due to the historical circumstances of Vietnam.⁶ The planning and construction of the mausoleums established a distinctive architectural style, embodying unique artistic values.

The mausoleum is considered the second palace of the succeeding emperors of the Nguyen dynasty,⁷ where spiritual activities and national rituals take place, representing the power of the emperors and the Nguyen dynasty.

Table 1

Chronological list of the Nguyen Dynasty's Emperors

2. Materials, Methods, and Study Aims

2.1 Materials

Previous studies based on Vietnamese sources are for example Thai Van Kiem, *Cố Đô Huế-Di Tích-Lịch Sử-Thắng Cảnh* [Hue Ancient Capital-Monuments-History-Beauty Spot] (1960)⁸; Mai Khac Ung, *Lăng Cửa Hoàng Đế Minh Mạng* [The Mausoleum of Emperor Minh Mang] (1993)⁹ ; and Phan Thanh Hai, *Lăng tẩm Hoàng đế Triều Nguyễn ở Huế* [Royal Tombs of the Nguyen Dynasty in Hue] (2010).¹⁰ They primarily focused on the investigation of historical documents and qualitative assessment of the cultural and artistic values of the imperial mausoleums. An in-depth study of fundamental architectural issues, such as site planning characteristics, building types, architectural features, and landscape design principles, has not yet been undertaken.

Foreign research on the imperial mausoleums of the Nguyen dynasty has covered architectural history and techniques, primarily conducted by Japanese researchers and graduate students from 1994 to 2005 through Japan-Vietnam research cooperation programs.¹¹ These studies are beneficial for identifying features of the imperial mausoleums constructed during the first half of the nineteenth century.

However, these studies have not yet analyzed the fundamental compositional principles of a typical imperial mausoleum in Hue. They also lack a comprehensive classification and inventory of the existing architectural structures and their positional arrangements within these mausoleums. Additionally, there is an absence of explanations regarding the locations of the mausoleums and their geographical distances from the urban center, the Hue Citadel.

2.2 Methods

The research methodology involves collecting and analyzing historical documents, conducting site measurement surveys, capturing photographs, observing the site, and performing comparative studies of site plans.

The statistics, classification, and analysis of the mausoleums' heritage buildings and site plans were based on the measurement data collected by Waseda University in cooperation with the Hue Monuments Conservation Center from 1994 to 2020. Accordingly, the combination of historical and cultural records with on-site surveys of the imperial mausoleums allows for precise identification of the names, locations, and specific functions of each building and architectural cluster as well as clarification of their functional roles. Furthermore, the number of compartments, measured horizontally, in individual architectural units has been documented, providing a crucial basis for analyzing relationships among buildings, areas, and the overall layout.

2.3 Study Aims

This study aims to examine the imperial mausoleums of the Nguyen dynasty dating from the early stages of the Nguyen dynasty (1802-1848), with particular attention paid to the early three mausoleums of the Nguyen emperors, namely those of Emperor Gia Long, Emperor Minh Mang, and Emperor Thieu Tri.

3. Study Results

The Nguyen dynasty, which lasted 143 years (1802-1945), saw the reign of 13 emperors. However, due to various political, economic, and social factors during the Nguyen dynasty, only seven mausoleums remain, each with a different scale and architectural style. These seven mausoleums belonged to the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, ninth, and twelfth Nguyen emperors (Table 2 and Fig. 2).

Table 2

No	Name of Mausoleums		Emperors	Years of Construction	Locations	Distance from the Citadel
	Names	Chinese Names				
1	Thien Tho Lang	天授陵	Gia Long, the first	1814-1820	Dinh Mon village, Thua Thien Hue province	16 km
2	Hieu Lang	孝陵	Minh Mang, the second	1840-1843	An Bang village, Thua Thien Hue province	12 km
3	Xuong Lang	昌陵	Thieu Tri, the third	1848	Cu Chanh village, Thua Thien Hue province	8 km
4	Khiem Lang	謙陵	Tu Duc, the fourth	1864-1873	Duong Xuan Thuong village, Thua Thien Hue province	7 km
5	An Lang	安陵	Duc Duc, the fifth	1899-1906	Tay Nhat village, Thua Thien Hue province	3 km
6	Tu Lang	思陵	Dong Khanh, the ninth	1907-1917	Duong Xuan Thuong village, Thua Thien Hue province	7 km
7	Ung Lang	應陵	Khai Dinh, the twelfth	1920-1931	Chau Chu Mountain, Thua Thien Hue province	10 km

Table 2

List of the remaining Emperor Mausoleums

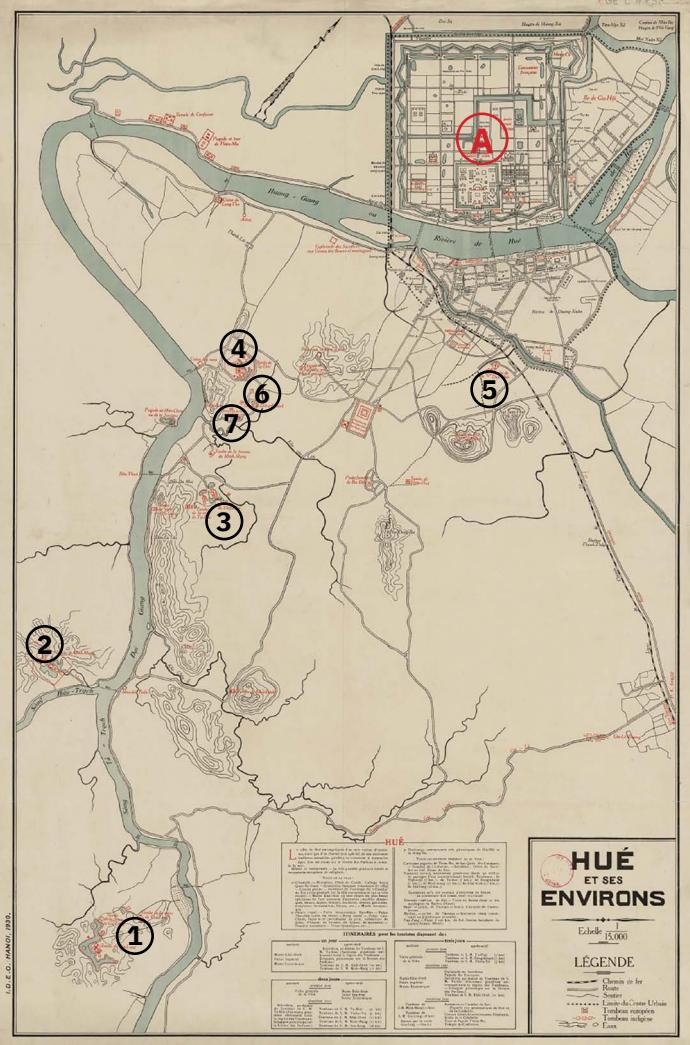


Fig 2

The first three imperial mausoleums were built during Vietnam's independence (1802-1848), reflecting traditional Vietnamese architectural identity. The fourth mausoleum, Khiem Lang, was constructed while Emperor Tu Duc was still alive¹² and is located on the right bank of the Huong Giang River.¹³ Since 1885, Vietnam had been under French control; however, the Nguyen dynasty courtiers continually constructed mausoleums for succeeding emperors. During this period, the architecture blended Western influences and traditional Vietnamese design, including the three royal mausoleums of Emperor Duc Duc, Emperor Dong Khanh, and Emperor Khai Dinh, the fifth, ninth, and twelfth emperors, respectively. The first is located south of Hue City,¹⁴ the second near the mausoleum

Notes:

- Ⓐ Hue Citadel
- ① Thien Tho Lang Mausoleum (Gia Long Emperor)
- ② Hieu Lang Mausoleum (Minh Mang Emperor)
- ③ Xuong Lang Mausoleum (Thieu Tri Emperor)
- ④ Khiem Lang Mausoleum (Tu Duc Emperor)
- ⑤ An Lang Mausoleum (Duc Duc Emperor)
- ⑥ Tu Lang Mausoleum (Dong Khanh Emperor)
- ⑦ Ung Lang Mausoleum (Khai Dinh Emperor)

Fig 2

Locations of the Nguyen Dynasty's Mausoleums associated with the Citadel

of the fourth emperor,¹⁵ and the third to the southwest of Hue City. Emperor Duc Duc's descendants: Emperor Thanh Thai and Emperor Duy Tan—the tenth and eleventh rulers—were also buried and worshipped at the An Lang Mausoleum of Emperor Duc Duc.

3.1 Terminologies and the Conceptions

Based on historical documents from the Nguyen dynasty, there are 32 terms related to the architectural features of the mausoleums (Table 3). Among these, two common nouns directly refer to the concept of a mausoleum, three pertain to the ideas of a spiritual axis and underground spatial arrangement, and twenty-six describe the visible elements that comprise the mausoleums and their associated buildings. Consequently, the analysis of the constituent elements of the mausoleums primarily focuses on three main concepts: the Tomb area, the Worship Temple area, and the Stele Hall area.

From the early times of the Nguyen Dynasty, the imperial family established a unique system of ancestral temples and burial customs within the Hue Imperial City, drawing on the rich tradition of Vietnamese ancestor worship and the influence of Chinese Confucian practices. These practices were also extended to the temples at the Nguyen Dynasty's mausoleums, tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of this royal lineage.¹⁶

Initially, the Nguyen emperors designated the “Nguyen Mieu” (Fig. 3) as the principal shrine in their ancestral homeland of Gia Mieu village, Thanh Hoa province. They made dedicated efforts to establish a comprehensive shrine system within the precincts of the Hue Imperial City and at the various imperial mausoleums.¹⁷ These shrines, including the Trieu Mieu, Thai Mieu, The Mieu, and Hung Mieu, were dedicated to ancestor worship. They were strategically positioned on both sides of the central axis, in front of the Forbidden City and the Thai Hoa Dien main palace, which served as the central hub for dynasty-wide celebrations.¹⁸

Table 3

No	Terminology			Conceptions and Functions
	Vietnamese	Chinese	English	
1	Lăng Tẩm	陵寢	Mausoleum	The burial and worship place for emperors and queens consists of three main elements: the Tomb area (where the coffin is buried), the Worship Temple area (which keeps the votive tablet and worships the soul), and the Stele Hall area (which records the merit and message of the emperor).
2	Sơn Lăng	山陵	Tomb at mountain area	Tombs of the emperors and royal family are located in the mountainous area.
3	Thần Đạo	神道	Spiritual-central axis	The spiritual axis at the center of the emperor's mausoleum is also the axis for planning and construction according to the principle of absolute symmetry.
4	Toại Đạo	隧道	Underground tunnel	The underground tunnel was used to move the emperor's coffin into the grave and was covered after the burial was completed.
5	Huyền Cung	玄宮	Grave	The underground part of the Tomb was where the emperor's coffin was housed.
6	Bửu Thành	寶城	Tomb area	The tomb area, where the emperor's body was buried, includes the grave, the underground tunnel, and the enclosing wall.
7	Tẩm Điện	寢殿	Worship Temple area	The worship temple area is where ritual worship activities to commemorate the deaths of the emperor and queen are held includes the main temple, sub-temples, auxiliary houses, and the main gate (entrance to the worship area).
8	Bí Đinh	碑亭	Stele Hall area	The Stele Hall area is where the square stele hall is located, which contains a large stone stele used for recording the emperor's merits and messages.
9	Chính Tẩm	正寢	Main Temple	Holding votive tablets, worshipping the souls of the emperor and queen, and conserving and displaying worship items.
10	Bái Đinh	拜庭	Courtyard	Located in front of each worship temple area and tomb area of the mausoleum and used for military officials during royal ceremonies.
11	Trụ Biểu	柱表	Landmark Tower	Arranged symmetrically on the front side or both sides of the stele hall area and serving the function of marking the terrain and reminding people of the sanctity of the mausoleums.

Table 3

List of the terminologies according to the historical documents of the Nguyen Dynasty

Table 3 (Continued)

No	Terminology			Conceptions and Functions
	Vietnamese	Chinese	English	
12	Môn	門	Gate	Featuring three passages, known as Tam Quan (with doors), arranged along the central front wall of the worship temple area. The gate includes one path (with doors) that typically serves as the main entrance to the tomb area or the side entrance to the worship temple area.
13	Phường Môn	坊門	Symbol Gate	The gate features three passages (without doors), typically made of bronze or marble, adorned with beautiful elaborate decorations. It serves as a welcoming or symbolic gate.
14	Phối Điện	配殿	Sub-Temple	The sub-temples are symmetrically positioned in front of the main temple, on the left and right sides. They are simple and small, used for worshiping the emperor's courtiers during his reign.
15	Phối Viện	配院	Sub-House	The sub-houses are symmetrically located on the left and right sides at the back of the main temple and share the same scale and architectural features as the sub-temples. They serve as storage for clothes and furniture, as well as a place to display offerings for worship ceremonies.
16	Lâu	樓	Pavilion	The building features a square floor plan on a two-level foundation. It has two stories and eight yellow-glazed tube-tiled roofs, positioned along the central axis behind the worship temple area or the stele hall area.
17	Các	閣	Pavilion	The building features a rectangular floor plan on a one or two-level foundation. It has two stories with eight tiled roofs and is located on the right or left side relative to the central axis.
18	Đình	亭	Open House	The small building features an octagonal plan, lacks doors, and is roofed with flat or glazed tube tiles. It serves as a space for sightseeing and relaxation.
19	Quán	觀	Observing Port	The small building features a quadrangular plan and a tiled roof without doors. It serves as a place to enjoy the scenery and breeze.
20	Tạ	榭	Floating House	The small building is situated partly on land and partly floating on the water, located near the edge of the lakes in the mausoleum. It serves as a place to admire the scenery, read, and relax during hot weather.

Table 3

List of the terminologies
according to
the historical documents
of the Nguyen Dynasty

Table 3 (Continued)

No	Terminology			Conceptions and Functions
	Vietnamese	Chinese	English	
21	Phòng	房	Chamber	The small rectangular sub-house has a simple structure and accommodates military officers guarding the mausoleum and servants providing support and living arrangements.
22	Trai	齋	Study House	The small rectangular sub-house, with its simple structure, was used by the emperor during his period of vegetarianism, as well as for reading and studying.
23	Sở	所	Office	The public building, with a scale and architectural features similar to the sub-houses, is used for military officers and soldiers.
24	Hiên	軒	Part House	The small building serves as a resting place during walks or as a shelter from the rain and sun.
25	Khô	庫	Store	The warehouse stores furniture for worship and daily activities.
26	Trù	廚	Kitchen	The kitchen prepares offerings and serves daily meals to the military officials and those serving in the mausoleums.
27	Kiều	橋	Bridge	The brick and stone bridge provides a passage across the lake within the mausoleum grounds.
28	Hồ	湖	Lake	The lakes (natural or artificial) are an indispensable water element, providing water for daily use and irrigation in the mausoleums.
29	Trì	池	Pond	The ponds (natural or artificial), smaller than lakes, serve as essential water elements in the mausoleums, just like lakes.
30	Sơn	山	Mountain	The natural mountains far outside the mausoleum serve as spatial orientation factors. The artificial mountains or/and hills are often created by filling soil during the process of digging lakes to form high mounds on which buildings are constructed.
31	Đảo	嶼	Peninsula	The artificial peninsula is situated near the lake's edge, with a raised section extending toward the water's surface, on which a floating pavilion is built.
32	La Thành	羅城	Outermost-surrounding walls	The longest outermost surrounding wall of the mausoleums serves as a defensive barrier, protecting and separating the interior from the exterior of the mausoleums.

Table 3

List of the terminologies
according to
the historical documents
of the Nguyen Dynasty



Fig 3

The Nguyen Dynasty believed that thoughtful ancestor worship significantly contributed to the spiritual strength of the Dynasty. This religious practice has profoundly influenced the design of the mausoleums of the Nguyen Dynasty's emperors, imparting to them an exceptionally unique and memorable style.

A secretive principle known as Feng shui (風水) was applied in urban planning and in the construction of imperial mausoleums. This principle was likely continuously implemented up until the Nguyen Dynasty in Vietnam. The essence of Feng shui remains complex and has yet to be fully deciphered. However, in the case of the imperial mausoleums of the Nguyen Dynasty in Vietnam, Feng shui is understood as the interaction between two fundamental elements—Wind (風) and Water (水)—which contribute to the prosperity and harmony of the capital city and ensure the longevity of the Dynasty.

Fig 3

The “Nguyen Mieu” Shrine in Gia Mieu village, Thanh Hoa province

Therefore, all Nguyen Dynasty mausoleums were built in the southwestern mountainous area of the Hue Citadel, characterized by numerous hills, mountains, rivers, and streams. The mountains are the first to receive water from the sky, channeling it into the rivers. The difference in elevation between the mountains and rivers creates air pressure variations, generating wind, which helps purify the air in the land and around the mausoleums. Indeed, each mausoleum corresponds to a prominent mountain and a major river (Fig. 4). Additionally, large water reservoirs were often placed in front of the imperial mausoleums to store natural water and capture cooling breezes, maintaining a serene and refreshing atmosphere for the worship spaces.

Specifically, Thien Tho Son was chosen as the main mountain for Gia Long's mausoleum, Hieu Son for Minh Mang's mausoleum, Thuan Dao Son for Thieu Tri's mausoleum, Giang Khiem Son for Tu Duc's mausoleum, Thien Thai Son for Dong Khanh's mausoleum, and Chau Chu Son for Khai Dinh's mausoleum. All these imperial mausoleums share a common water source, the Huong Giang River (Perfume River), which runs in front of or surrounds the mausoleums and supplies water to the large reservoirs within each mausoleum complex. Even though the orientation of the mausoleums varies depending on the designer's choice and the emperor's will, this is likely the most fundamental indigenous Feng shui principle shared among Asian countries, serving as a common foundation that each nation adheres to. However, each country adapts this foundation according to the unique terrain and geography of its land. For this reason, since the Nguyen imperial mausoleums were built in mountainous areas, the burial site of the emperor is referred to as "Son Phan" (Mountain Grave), and the mausoleums themselves are called "Son Lang" (Mountain Mausoleums), both reflecting this fundamental principle.¹⁹



Fig 4

3.2 Mausoleum Layouts and Architecture

Emperor Gia Long established his Thien Tho Lang Mausoleum at the farthest southwest point of the Hue Citadel²⁰ after reconstructing the imperial tomb complex for Lord Nguyen and the royal family.²¹ The Hieu Lang Mausoleum of Emperor Minh Mang was completed by his son, Emperor Thieu Tri, who followed his father's original plan (Table 4). The mausoleum area stretches from the slopes of Kim Phung Mountain, the highest peak in the region, to the Bang Lang Junction, where the Huu Trach and Ta Trach Streams merge to form the Huong Giang River (the Perfume River), which flows toward the heart of Hue City. Emperor Tu Duc constructed the Xuong Lang Mausoleum for his father, Emperor Thieu Tri.

Fig 4

The prominent mountains and major rivers in southwest areas

Table 4

Criteria	Thien Tho Lang of Emperor Gia Long	Hieu Lang of Emperor Minh Mang	Xuong Lang of Emperor Thieu Tri
Water to the front	Man-made pond	Huu Trach River	Man-made pond
Area and boundary wall	2,875 hectares, without outer boundary walls (including the mausoleum of Emperor Gia Long and the mausoleums of his family members)	500 hectares with outer boundary walls	6 hectares, without outer boundary walls
Facing direction	Southwest	Southeast	Northwest
Axis/Axes	3 axes, each for the Tomb area (A) at the center, Worship Temple area (B) to its right, and Stele Hall area (C) to its left	1 axis for A (Tomb area), B (Worship Temple area), and C (Stele Hall area) aligned from inner to outer	2 axes, one for A (Tomb area) and C (Stele Hall area), and the other for B (Worship Temple area)

The three mausoleums of Emperor Gia Long, Minh Mang, and Thieu Tri have similarities and differences in locations, directions, sizes, numbers of axes, and architectural arrangement.

Table 4

Comparison of the three mausoleums

1) Location, Facing Directions, and Area

The locations of the three mausoleums are similar, with water at the front and mountains at their rear. The mausoleum of Emperor Gia Long is surrounded by 36 hills and mountains, among which Thien Tho Son Mountain is the largest and serves as a landmark for the mausoleum.

Meanwhile, the mausoleum of Emperor Minh Mang has Hieu Son Mountain, the highest peak in the area, at its rear. The mausoleum faces southeast towards the Huu Trach River.

Similarly, the mausoleum of Emperor Thieu Tri is backed by the region's highest peak, Thuan Dao Mountain. Like the mausoleum of Emperor Gia Long, it lacks outer walls, as it is believed to be naturally protected by the surrounding hills and mountains.

2) Axis/Axes

The three main areas—the Tomb area (A), the Worship Temple area (B), and the Stele Hall (C)—are arranged in distinct configurations in these three case studies. In Emperor Gia Long's Mausoleum, these elements are positioned along three parallel axes, while in Emperor Minh Mang's Mausoleum, they are aligned along a single axis. In contrast, Emperor Thieu Tri's Mausoleum features these areas arranged along two parallel axes. Thus, the mausoleum of Emperor Thieu Tri can be described as a balanced blend between those of Emperors Gia Long and Minh Mang.²²

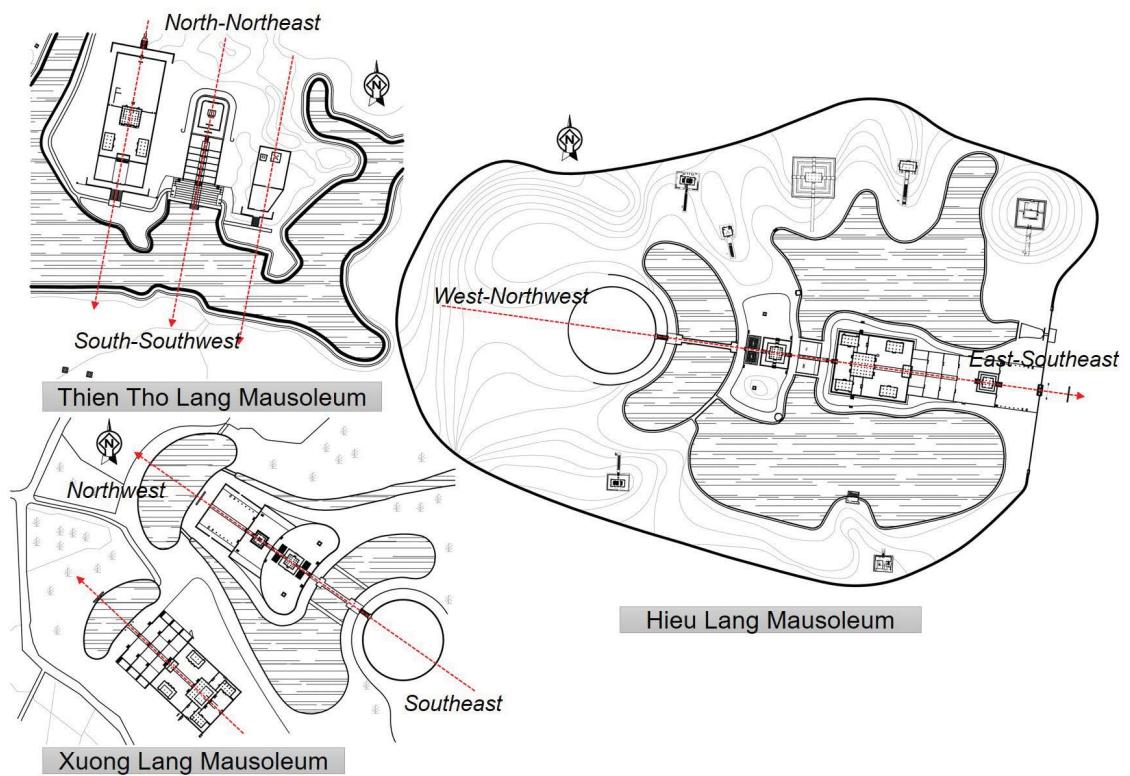


Fig 5

Fig 5

Comparison of
the directions and axes
of the three mausoleums

3) Architectural Arrangement

The architectural characteristics of the three elements (A, B, and C) at Emperor Minh Mang's and Emperor Thieu Tri's mausoleums share similarities and differ from those at Emperor Gia Long's Mausoleum. (Table 5-8)

The mausoleum of Emperor Gia Long is divided into three main constituent areas set along three parallel axes for the Tomb area (A), the Worship Temple area (B), and the Stele Hall area (C) (Figs. 6, 7.1, and 7.2). In contrast, the mausoleum of Emperor Minh Mang only has the Than Dao spiritual axis at the center, divided into three main sections facing southeast. From inner to outer, these sections are the Tomb area (A), the Worship Temple area (B), and the Stele Hall area (C) (Opening figure on page 38 and Fig. 8). Meanwhile, the mausoleum of Emperor Thieu Tri (Xuong Lang) is organized along two parallel centripetal axes, from interior to exterior. These main areas include the Tomb area (A) and the Stele Hall area (C) on the right spiritual axis, and the Worship Temple area (B) on the left spiritual axis (Fig. 9). In scale and architecture, Emperor Thieu Tri's structures closely resemble those of Emperor Minh Mang's Mausoleum, though they are slightly smaller and less complex (Figs. 8 and 9).

Tomb Area

Table 5

Mausoleum of Emperor Gia Long (Thien Tho Lang) (Fig. 6)	Mausoleum of Emperor Minh Mang (Hieu Lang) (Fig. 8)	Mausoleum of Emperor Thieu Tri (Xuong Lang) (Fig. 9)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Architecture is the simplest. - Tomb area, rectangular, on the middle spiritual-central axis and enclosed by inner and outer brick walls. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tomb area at the end of the spiritual axis featuring a circular shape enclosed by a brick wall. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tomb area, a circular shape, at the end of the right spiritual axis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tombs built in two stone sarcophagi surrounded by the inner walls. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Buu Thanh Tomb designed after the traditional underground pathway at the end of the spiritual axis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Buu Thanh, a circular tomb
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A stepped courtyard with two rows of stone statues in front, depicting mandarins, elephants, and horses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Buu Thanh Mon Gate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Buu Thanh Mon Gate
-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tan Nguyet Tri, a semicircular pond 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ngung Thuy Tri, a semicircular pond
-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thong Minh Chinh Truc Kieu Bridge at the center. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chanh Trung Kieu, Dong Hoa Kieu, and Tay Dinh Kieu, brick and stone bridges
-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Phuong Mon, two bronze gates, at the beginning and end of the bridge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Phuong Mon, two bronze symbolic gates at both ends of the central bridge.
-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yen Nguyet Kieu Bridge on the right side of the pond. 	-
-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minh Lau Pavilion built with wood in multiple stories on Tam Tai Son Mountain at the center and front of the tomb area. 	-
-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tru Bieu landmark tower, each on Thanh Son and Binh Son mountains flanking Minh Lau Pavilion. 	-
-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trung Minh Ho Lake. 	-
-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trung Dao Kieu, Ta Phu Kieu, and Huu Bat Kieu, three stone and brick bridges. 	-
-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dieu Ngu Dinh, an octagonal hall, and Nghinh Luong Quan, a pavilion, for viewing the landscape. 	-

Table 5

Tomb Area comparison of the three mausoleums

Worship Temple Area

Table 6

Mausoleum of Emperor Gia Long (Thien Tho Lang) (Fig. 6)	Mausoleum of Emperor Minh Mang (Hieu Lang) (Fig. 8)	Mausoleum of Emperor Thieu Tri (Xuong Lang) (Fig. 9)
- The Worship Temple area, rectangular and surrounded by walls, located on the right-hand axis, parallel to the axis of the Tomb area.	- The area is along the spiritual-central axis, enclosed by brick walls, and in front of the Minh Lau pavilion.	- The axis of the Worship Temple area to the left of the Tomb area's axis. - The Worship Temple area, rectangular and enclosed by brick walls, featuring sub-gates at the center of each four sides.
- Minh Thanh Dien, the main temple in a twin-ridge beam style placed at the center and facing southwest. The altars of the Emperor and Queen located in the main temple's central compartment.	- Sung An Dien Main Temple for worshipping the Emperor and Queen, featuring a twin-ridge beam design and built at the center of the Phung Than Son Mountain.	- Binh Phong, a brick front screen
- Nghi Mon Main Gate at the center of the front wall.	- Dong Phoi Dien and Tay Phoi Dien, two sub-temples, to the front left and right of the main temple.	- Ban Nguyet Ho, a semicircular lake
- Ta Tong Tu and Huu Tong Tu, two sub-temples to the front left and right of the main temple.	- Dong Phoi Vien and Tay Phoi Vien, sub-houses to the rear left and right.	- Phuong Mon, a symbol gate
- Ta Tong Vien and Huu Tong Vien, two sub-buildings, storing clothes and worship items for the Emperor and Queen, at the back left and right of the main temple.	- Hien Duc Mon, the main gate of the worship area.	- Bai Dinh, a three-level courtyard with a central aisle paved in granite.
- Sub-gate at the center of the back wall.	- Hoang Trach Mon, back sub-gate flanked by two smaller gates on either side.	- Hong Trach Mon, the main entrance resembling the Hien Duc Mon main gate of Emperor Minh Mang's mausoleum.
- In front of the Worship Temple area is a tiled courtyard, its central aisle paved with granite.	- Bai Dinh, an elevated courtyard with three levels.	- Bieu Duc Dien, the main temple at the center of the area. Its architecture features twin ridge beams, similar to the Sung An Dien main temple of Emperor Minh Mang's Mausoleum.
-	-	- Ta Vu and Huu Vu, two sub-temples flanking the main temple to the left and right.
-	-	- Ta Tung Vien and Huu Tung Vien, two sub-houses on the left and right.

Table 6

Worship Temple Area
comparison of
the three mausoleums

Stele Area

Table 7

Mausoleum of Emperor Gia Long (Thien Tho Lang) (Fig. 6)	Mausoleum of Emperor Minh Mang (Hieu Lang) (Fig. 8)	Mausoleum of Emperor Thieu Tri (Xuong Lang) (Fig. 9)
- The Stele Hall area situated on the left-hand side of the central axis of the Tomb area.	- The Stele Hall area positioned at the front of the spiritual axis.	- The Stele Hall area located in front of the Tomb area.
- Bi Dinh, the stele hall featuring a square building with two roof layers enclosed by brick walls. At the center of the square stele hall stands a stone stele with a Chinese character inscription written by Emperor Minh Mang, praising his father. All the inscriptions on the heart of the stele are covered with gold plating, and the stone stele is built on a pedestal.	- Bi Dinh, the square stele hall, standing on a two-tiered foundation. Inside, a stone stele, 3 meters tall with a pedestal, named Thanh Duc Than Cong, recording the emperor's merits.	- Duc Hin Lau, a pavilion resembling the Minh Lau Pavilion at Emperor Minh Mang's mausoleum.
- A small stone stele altar, 1.2 m high, for worshipping the earth genie.	- Bai Dinh, a tiled lower courtyard. Two rows of stone statues depicting mandarins, elephants, horses, and a pair of bronze unicorns housed in bronze shelters lined the courtyard's left and right sides.	- Tru Bieu, two landmark brick towers flanking the pavilion.
-	- Dai Hong Mon, the main entrance to the mausoleum with a three-way brick gate	- Bi Dinh the square stele hall placing a stone stele, Thanh Duc Than Cong, recording the merits of Emperor Thieu Tri.
-	- La Thanh, outermost surrounding walls.	- Bai Dinh, a tiled courtyard lined at both ends with rows of stone statues depicting mandarins, elephants, and horses.
-	- Binh Phong, a brick front screen, flanked by two stone lion statues serving as guardians.	- Binh Phong, a front screen.
-	- Ta Hong Mon and Huu Hong Mon, two smaller gates to the left and right of the main entrance	- Nhuan Trach Ho, a semicircular lake to the front of the screen.

Table 7

Stele Area comparison of the three mausoleums

Others

Table 8

Mausoleum of Emperor Gia Long (Thien Tho Lang) (Fig. 6)	Mausoleum of Emperor Minh Mang (Hieu Lang) (Fig. 8)	Mausoleum of Emperor Thieu Tri (Xuong Lang) (Fig. 9)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tru Bieu, two landmark towers at the forefront of the three main areas, are visible from all directions. - Mausoleum D, tombs of the emperor's family members. One particular case is the Thien Tho Huu Lang Mausoleum of the second-ranking Queen Thuan Thien Cao Hoang Hau, the second wife of Emperor Gia Long, built by Emperor Minh Mang to honor his biological mother. This tomb area is located to the north and set apart from the main tomb area. Because it was not a part of Emperor Gia Long's original construction plan, it is not considered an original constituent element of this mausoleum. - A stepped courtyard with two rows of stone statues in front, depicting mandarins, elephants, and horses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The central spatial area of Emperor Minh Mang's Mausoleum is surrounded by seven small mountains (hills), each of which once supported a building constructed sequentially. - Truy Tu Trai Hall on the Phuc Am Son Mountain in the northern area - Quan Lan So Office on the Dao Thong Son Mountain - Linh Phuong Cac Pavilion on the Khai Thach Son Mountain - Thuan Loc Hien Part House on the Duc Hoa Son Mountain - Ta Tung Phong Chamber on the Tinh Son Mountain - Huu Tung Phong Chamber on the Y Son Mountain in the southern area - Hu Hoai Ta Floating Pavilion on the Tran Thuy Dao Peninsula - These seven buildings were positioned similarly on artificial hills surrounding Trung Minh Ho Lake and oriented toward the central spatial area; however, they varied in scale and architectural design based on their classifications and functions. - All buildings have collapsed, leaving only their foundations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Historically, to the right of the grave and slightly to the rear was a pavilion named Hien Quang Cac, accompanied by a storage area called Than Kho, located to the right of the pavilion. - A house was situated on the back-left side outside the Worship Temple area, along with a duty room for soldiers near the storage area.²³ - Unfortunately, all of these structures have since collapsed and become indistinguishable.

Table 8

Other Structure
comparison of
the three mausoleums

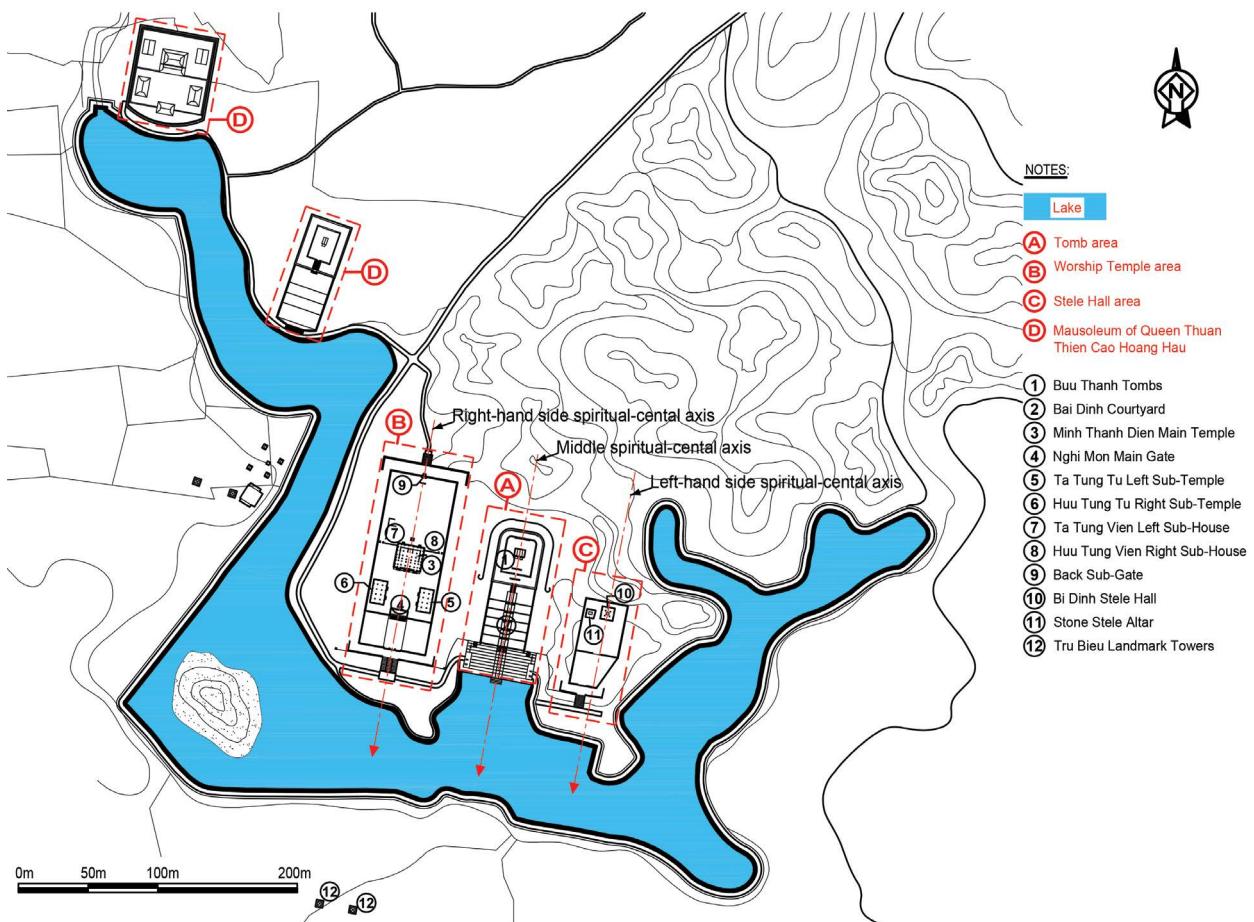


Fig 6

Fig 6

Site plan of Emperor
Gia Long's Mausoleum



Fig 7.1

Fig 7.1

Aerial photograph of
Emperor Gia Long's
Mausoleum



Fig 7.2

Fig 7.2

Tombs of Emperor
Gia Long (right) and
Queen Thua Thien Cao
Hoang Hau (left)

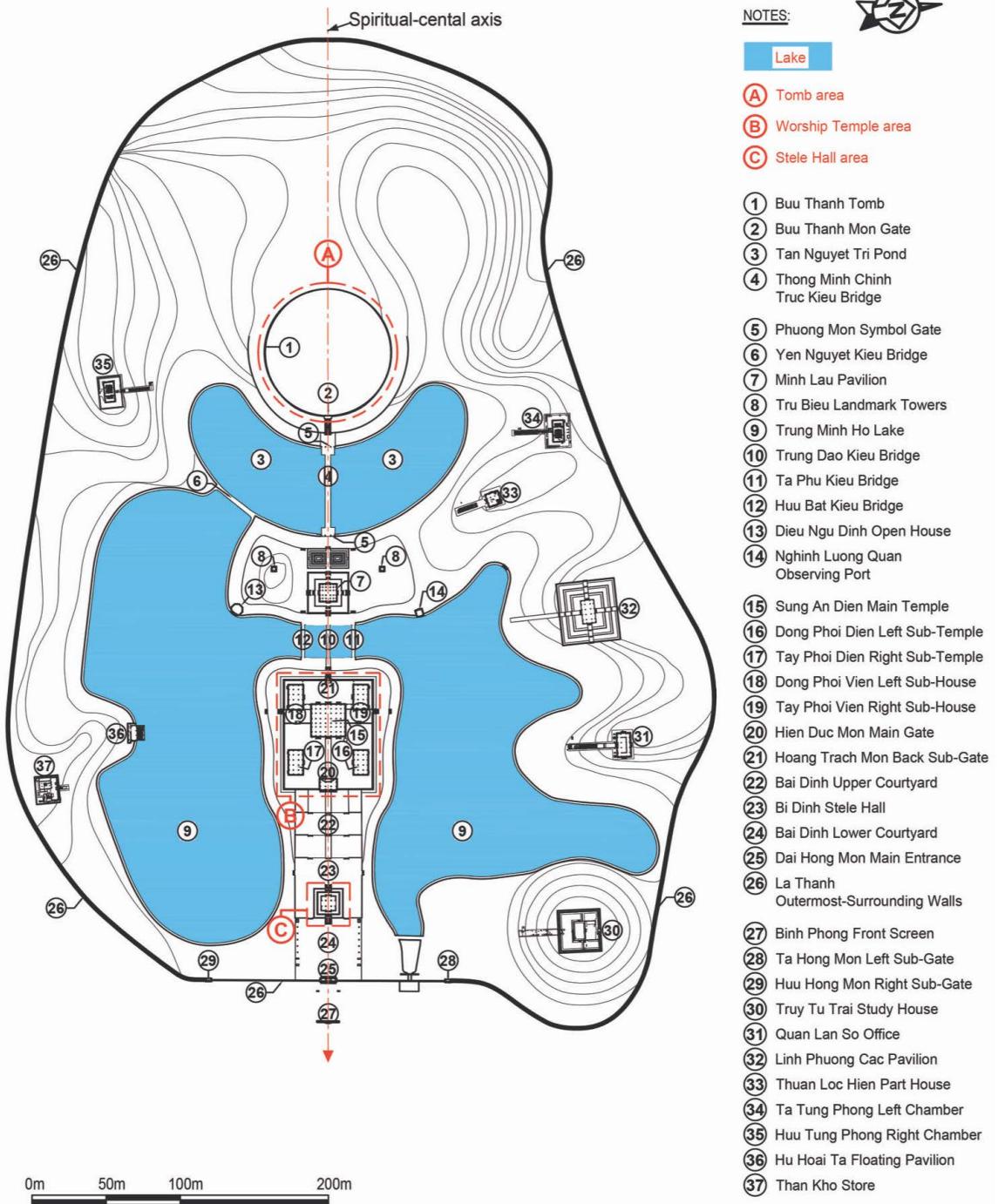


Fig 8

Fig 8

Site plan of the Emperor
Minh Mang's Mausoleum

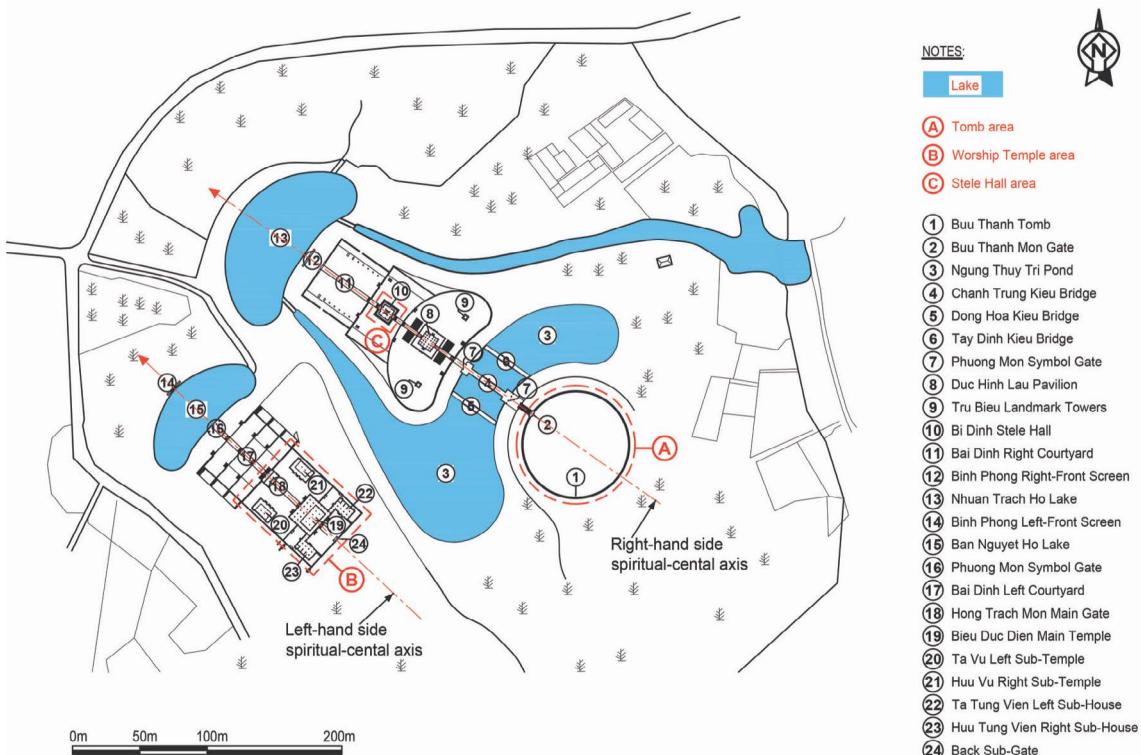


Fig 9



Fig 10

Fig 9

Site plan of the Emperor Thieu Tri's Mausoleum

Fig 10

Aerial photograph of Emperor Thieu Tri's Mausoleum

3.3 Architectural Types and Structures

Among the seven surviving emperors' mausoleums, the Mausoleum of Emperor Minh Mang best preserves these defining elements, making it an ideal case study (Figs. 11.1-12.5). Additionally, one building from Emperor Tu Duc's mausoleum (Fig. 12.6) and two structures from Emperor Gia Long's mausoleum were selected to illustrate this study (Figs. 13.1 and 13.2). All buildings listed in Table 9 are aligned along the mausoleums' spiritual-central axes and roofed with yellow glazed tiles, with pairs of symmetrically arranged buildings roofed with green glazed tiles. While some buildings collapsed and survived only in historical photos (Figs. 12.1 and 12.5, Fig. 8 Nos. 13 and 30-37), others were restored between 2000 and 2022.

The most common architectural features of the buildings in the early Nguyen Dynasty emperors' mausoleums include wooden frame structures, tiled roofs, and foundations made of brick or stone. These features embody Hue's distinct architectural language and exhibit a consistent style. The mausoleums are typically designed with horizontal layouts rather than vertical, and the site plans follow the principle of axial symmetry, with one, two, or three axes. Progressing along the central axis, the ground level rises gradually. The three main components—A, B, and C—are located on hills, with symbolic buildings set atop high, two- or three-tiered podiums, open on all four sides. These structures are placed within a striking natural landscape, harmoniously integrating water, greenery, and architectural elements, balancing nature and human craftsmanship, stillness and movement, reality and illusion, and material and spiritual realms. This approach results in a unique architectural style distinct from the imperial mausoleums of other Asian countries.

The principal architecture of a mausoleum includes a main temple, sub-temple, sub-house, stele hall, pavilion, and main gate. These elements are exemplified by case studies from the Mausoleum of Emperor Minh Mang.

1) Main Temple

The main temple, known as Chinh Tam (正寢), is situated at the center of the worship area. It serves as a sacred space for worship, provides a residence for the soul, and hosts essential ritual ceremonies dedicated to the emperor and the queen. (No. 3 in Fig.6, No. 15 in Fig. 8, and No. 19 in Fig. 9).

2) Sub-Temples and Sub-Houses

The Sub-Temples (Nos. 5 and 6 in Fig. 6, Nos. 16 and 17 in Fig. 8, and Nos. 20 and 21 in Fig. 9) and the Sub-Houses (Nos. 7 and 8 in Fig. 6, Nos. 18 and 19 in Fig. 8, and Nos. 22 and 23 in Fig. 9) differ only in name, function, and location; they share nearly identical architectural features, scale, and wooden structures. This style represents the most fundamental form of Nguyen imperial architecture. As affiliated structures, the sub-temples and sub-houses are always situated close to the main temple while maintaining relative independence.

3) Stele Hall

In the early Nguyen dynasty, these buildings were constructed from wood and brick and roofed with tiles; however, later constructions used concrete, altering some architectural features (No. 10 in Fig. 6, No. 23 in Fig. 8, and No. 10 in Fig. 9).

4) Pavilions

The building type known as Lau has a square floor plan and two stories covered with tube or flat tiles. Lau is a prominent architectural highlight, providing a scenic viewpoint or a place for relaxation. In contrast, the building type known as Cac has a rectangular floor plan with two stories and is positioned off the main axis. This structure is oriented for a more intimate setting and functions as a rest, reading, or study space. The mausoleum of Emperor Gia Long does not feature these building types, while the mausoleums of Emperor Minh Mang and Emperor Thieu Tri include both Lau and Cac structures (Nos. 7 and 32 in Fig. 8 and No. 8 in Fig. 9).

5) Main Gates

The main gate is the principal entrance to the worship temple area (No. 4 in Fig. 6, No. 20 in Fig. 8, and No. 18 in Fig. 9).

6) Other Structures

In addition to the primary structures, the mausoleums include various auxiliary buildings (Figs. 6, 8, and 9), such as main entrance brick gates, symbolic bronze gates, bridges, open houses, floating pavilions, landmark towers, stone statues, and so on. Although some auxiliary structures may occasionally be omitted or added, the fundamental functions and architectural concepts remain intact across the three case studies examined in this study.

Table 9

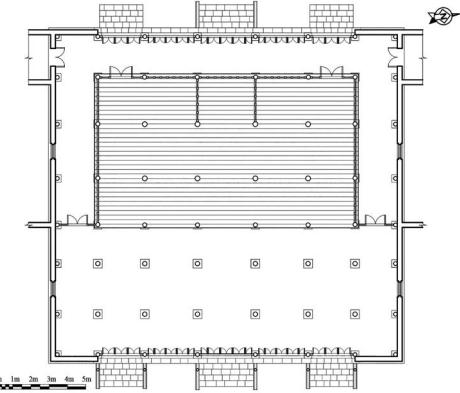
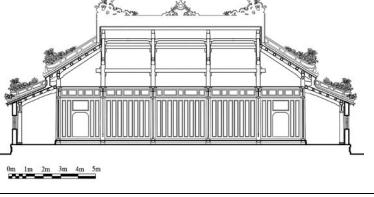
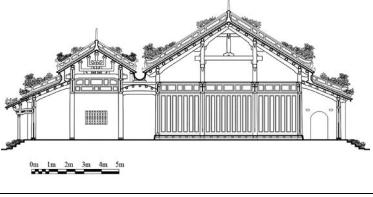
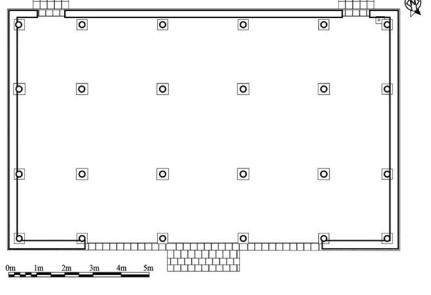
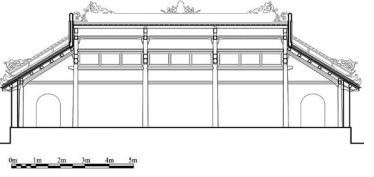
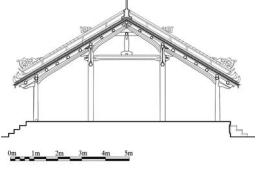
Building Types	
1. Main Temple, (Sung An Dien Main Temple)	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 45%;"> Floor Plan  </div> <div style="width: 45%;"> Longitudinal Section  </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 45%;"> Cross-Section  </div> <div style="width: 45%;"></div> </div>
2. Sub-Temple (Dong Phoi Dien Left Sub-Temple)	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 45%;"> Floor Plan  </div> <div style="width: 45%;"> Longitudinal Section  </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 45%;"> Cross-Section  </div> <div style="width: 45%;"></div> </div>

Table 9

Building types and structures
 (case of the Emperor
 Minh Mang's Mausoleum)

Table 9 (Continued)

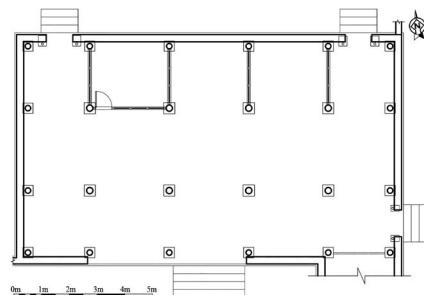
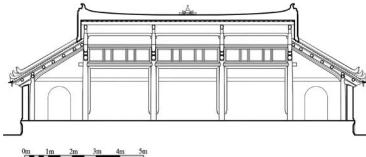
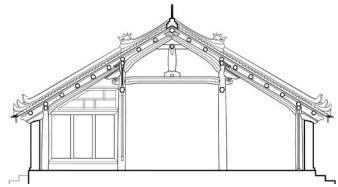
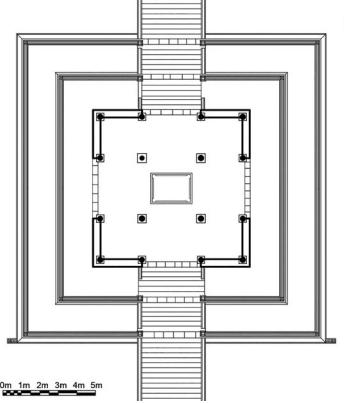
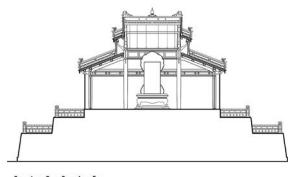
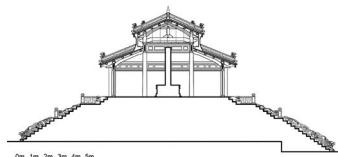
Building Types			
3. Sub House (Dong Phoi Vien Left Sub- House)	 - Located on the main temple's back, left, and right sides. - Serving as storage for worship items, ceremonial clothing, and preparation for rituals held at the main temple.		
	 		
4. Stele Hall (Bi Dinh Stele Hall)	 - A square plan, featuring a two-tier roof with yellow tube-glazed and flat tiles. - Constructed on a two- or three-level foundation and open to four sides for ventilation, without doors. - Enshrining a large stone stele commemorating the emperor's achievements. - Located along the central axis of the mausoleum, either in front of the tomb area or near the entrance. - In front of the stele hall, located a tiled courtyard often including two rows of stone statues representing mandarins, elephants, and horses.		
	 		

Table 9
 Building types and structures
 (case of the Emperor Minh Mang's Mausoleum)

Table 9 (Continued)

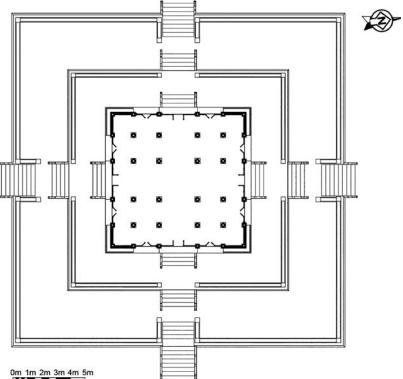
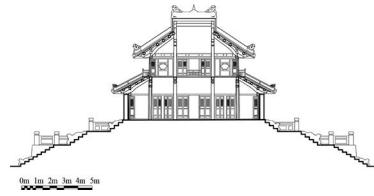
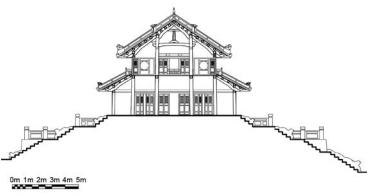
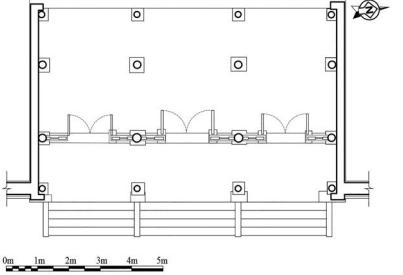
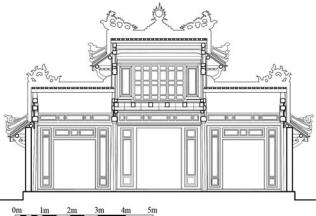
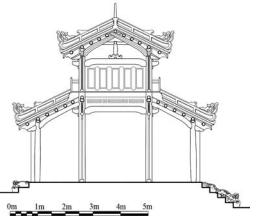
Building Types			
5. Pavilion (Minh Lau Pavilion)			Floor Plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Having a square or rectangular floor plan. - Built on a three-level foundation on the main axis of the mausoleum. 			
			Longitudinal Section
			
6. Main Gate (Hien Duc Mon Main Gate)			Floor Plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A rectangular floor plan with three entrances, called Tam Quan. - The central compartment featuring two stories with stairs. - Serving as an entrance and a spiritual symbol. - A prominent style in Hue Imperial City during the early Nguyen dynasty, prior to Western cultural influences in Vietnam 			
			Longitudinal Section
			

Table 9
Building types and structures
(case of the Emperor Minh Mang's Mausoleum)



Fig 11.1



Fig 11.2



Fig 11.3



Fig 11.4



Fig 11.5

Fig 11.1

Sung An Dien Main Temple
at Emperor Minh Mang's
Mausoleum

Fig 11.2

Dong Phoi Dien Left
Sub-Temple, Emperor
Minh Mang's Mausoleum

Fig 11.3

Dong Phoi Dien Left
Sub-House, Emperor
Minh Mang's Mausoleum

Fig 11.4

Bi Dinh Stele Hall,
Emperor Minh Mang's
Mausoleum

Fig 11.5

Minh Lau Pavilion,
Emperor Minh Mang's
Mausoleum



Fig 12.1

Fig 12.1

Linh Phuong Cac Pavilion,
Emperor Minh Mang's
Mausoleum



Fig 12.2

Fig 12.2

Hien Duc Mon Main Gate,
Emperor Minh Mang's
Mausoleum



Fig 12.3

Fig 12.3

Hong Trach Mon
Front-Main Entrance,
Emperor Minh Mang's
Mausoleum



Fig 12.4

Fig 12.4

Phuong Mon Symbol Gate
and Thong Minh Chinh
Truc Kieu Bridge, Emperor
Minh Mang's Mausoleum



Fig 12.5

Fig 12.5

Dieu Ngu Dinh Open House
(collapsed building),
Emperor Minh Mang's
Mausoleum



Fig 12.6

Fig 12.6

Xung Khiem Ta Floating
Pavilion of Emperor
Tu Duc's Mausoleum



Fig 13.1

Stone Statues in
the Bai Dinh Courtyard,
Emperor Gia Long's
Mausoleum

Fig 13.1



Fig 13.2

Fig 13.2

Tru Bieu Landmark Towers,
Emperor Gia Long's
Mausoleum

4. Discussions

Previous studies have primarily approached the topic from the perspective of historical document research and qualitative assessments of cultural and artistic value rather than through detailed architectural or scientific analysis. These gaps highlight the need for further research and discussion, as addressed in the sections below.

4.1 Mausoleums' Location

Historical records have no specific regulations regarding the mausoleums' location or positional relationships. These mausoleums were all planned for construction in the southwestern mountainous area of the Hue Citadel. Historical information mentions the term “*Son Lang*” (山陵), which may implicitly refer to their location in the mountainous region. Generally, the ideal location for building an emperor's mausoleum must satisfy Feng shui and geographical conditions based on Eastern concepts and Vietnamese traditions. An ideal site is surrounded by high mountains, creating a valley containing a large lake.

This ideal type of land, known as *Son Hoi Thuy Tu* [mountains surrounding and water gathering in the center], was traditionally favored by ancient Chinese emperors when selecting sites for their mausoleums. The illustrative maps of the first two imperial mausoleums of the Nguyen dynasty are still preserved and allow us to understand the construction planning ideas of the Nguyen Dynasty (Figs. 14.1 and 14.2).

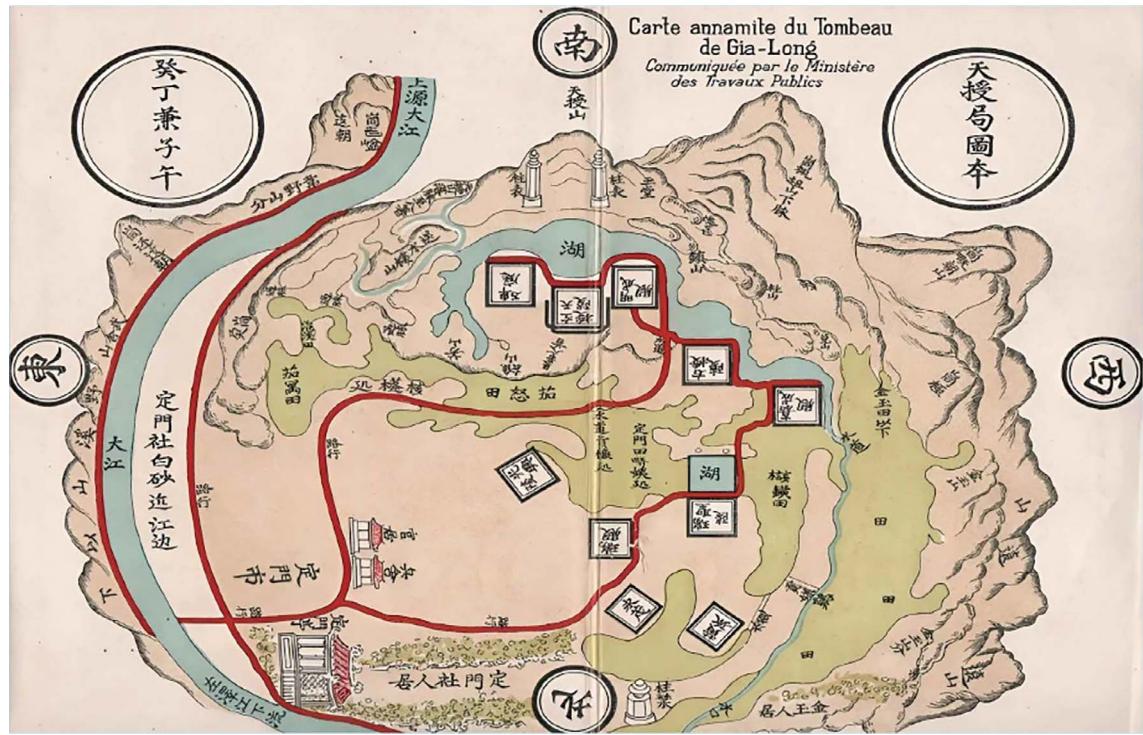


Fig 14.1

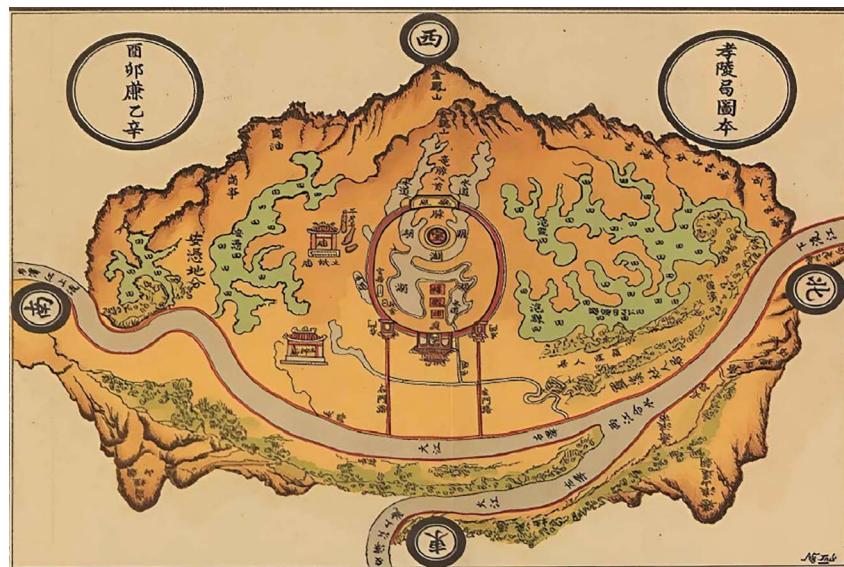


Fig 14.2

Fig 14.1

Illustrative map of the site plan of Emperor Gia Long's Mausoleum

Fig 14.2

Illustrative map of the site plan of Emperor Minh Mang's Mausoleum

A recognizable characteristic of these maps is that the mausoleums are surrounded by hills, mountains, and rivers or lakes. The mountain ranges serve as natural defensive walls protecting the mausoleums, while the mountains, as the highest points, collect rainwater to supply the rivers, which then flow into the lakes within the mausoleums. These rivers, in turn, provide essential water resources for daily life and worship ceremonies and act as convenient waterways that allow direct access to the inner areas of the mausoleums. These drawings also support the author's perspective on the Feng shui characteristics of the Nguyen imperial mausoleums, which historical sources refer to as "Son Lang" (Mountain Mausoleum), as discussed earlier.

One remarkable feature discovered in these two images is the presence of rice fields (highlighted in green) and access roads (highlighted in dark red) situated in the open spaces between the hills and the tombs—features not recorded in historical documents. The presence of rice fields around the imperial mausoleums indicates that agricultural activities took place historically and have persisted until today. This phenomenon is unique to the Nguyen Dynasty's imperial mausoleums in Vietnam and contrasts with imperial mausoleum layouts in other East Asian countries sharing similar cultural traditions, such as China, Japan, and Korea.

Agricultural cultivation played a crucial role in providing a consistent food supply for the local population, as well as offerings for important ceremonial occasions held at the mausoleums. The distance from the urban center to these mausoleums was considerable (up to 16 km in the farthest cases), making transportation by horse-drawn carriage or rowing boat time-consuming. Therefore, on-site agricultural production was necessary to mitigate logistical challenges posed by the mausoleums' remote locations. Additionally, from a security perspective, open spaces around mausoleums served essential

observation and defensive functions. Such land acted as a buffer zone, allowing monitoring and protection against grave robbers, enemy attacks, or damage caused by livestock such as buffaloes and cattle. Thus, the site selection had to be advantageous and accessible via waterways and roads.

Regarding the distance from the mausoleums to the Hue Citadel, as indicated in Table 2, Emperor Gia Long's mausoleum is located the farthest away (16 km), followed by Emperor Minh Mang's mausoleum (12 km away), and Emperor Thieu Tri's mausoleum (8 km). The distances of the remaining mausoleums from the Citadel tend to be shorter. This arrangement reflects the concept that mountains are elevated places that first receive clean water from heaven; rivers and lakes subsequently collect and store that precious water. The land elevation is higher farther southwest from the Citadel, featuring more mountains to capture clean water, first utilized in mausoleum worship services, then distributed along rivers to lower areas, near the Imperial City. The elevated mountainous terrain ensures that the land remains clean, uncontaminated, and thus more suitable for spiritual and ceremonial activities.

According to the traditional hierarchical order of feudal dynasties, the founder of a dynasty is considered the most significant and revered person, followed by succeeding descendants. Although these descendants were all proclaimed emperors after ascending to the throne, they remained subordinate in rank to the founder according to the family lineage. Therefore, mausoleums for these emperors were generally constructed on land of lower elevation compared to that of the founding emperor.



Fig 15.1

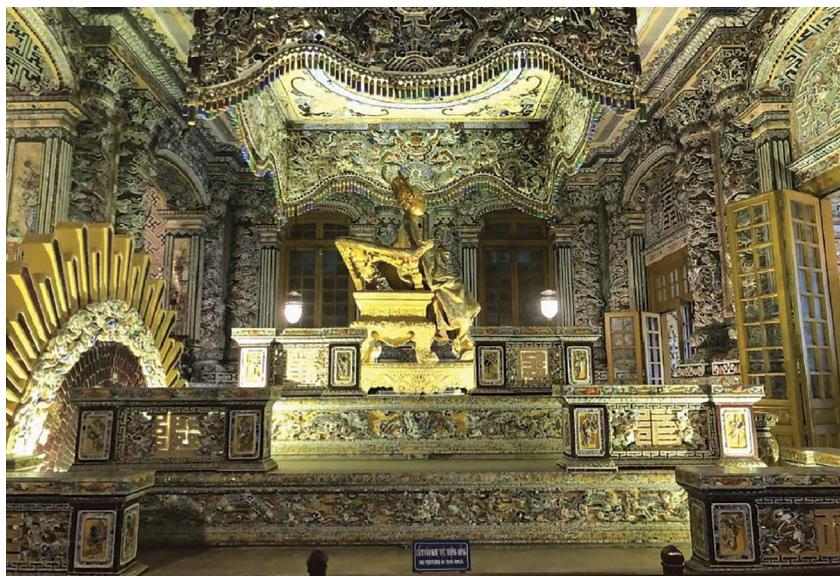


Fig 15.2

Fig 15.1
Aerial photograph of
Emperor Khai Dinh's
Mausoleum

Fig 15.2
A life-sized statue of
Emperor Khai Dinh placed
on a podium with his grave
directly beneath it.

However, Emperor Khai Dinh's mausoleum, located only 10 km from the Citadel, deviates from this arrangement. Despite being the 12th emperor and having his mausoleum built last, its proximity to the Citadel ranks third, shorter only than the mausoleum distances of the Dynasty's first two emperors. This deviation can be explained by the declining adherence to traditional, unwritten regulations and practices regarding mausoleum construction during the later stages of the Nguyen Dynasty, influenced by Western culture. This shift is evident in Emperor Khai Dinh's mausoleum's architectural features, spatial layout, worship practices, and construction materials, which show partial Western influence (Figs. 15.1 and 15.2).

4.2 Mausoleum's Axes and Direction

There are no specific rules for determining the number of axes used in each mausoleum. Groups A, B, and C can be organized along one axis (as in the mausoleums of Emperor Minh Mang and Emperor Khai Dinh), two axes (as in those of Emperor Thieu Tri, Emperor Tu Duc, Emperor Duc Duc, and Emperor Dong Khanh), or three axes (found only at Emperor Gia Long's mausoleum). Similarly, the primary orientation of the mausoleum may be toward the southwest, southeast, northwest, or northeast, but never directly east, west, south, or north. This orientation likely serves to minimize the direct impact of natural elements (sun, rain, wind) on the buildings' front facades (Table 10).

Regarding the selection of the mausoleum's orientation, some perspectives suggest that the primary direction of the mausoleum is determined based on emperor's astrology, ascertained from his birth date, and adjusted by rotating the central axis according to the compass directions of Feng shui, based on the selected time for the groundbreaking ceremony.

Table 10

No.	Emperors	Mausoleums	Main Directions	Axes	Positional Relation of A, B, C	Geo-coordinates
1	Gia Long	Thien Tho Lang	Southwest	Three axes	A central axis, B on right-parallel axis, C on left-parallel axis	16°21'42"N 107°35'48"E
2	Minh Mang	Hieu Lang	Southeast	One axis	A (back), B (central), C (front) of the axis	16°21'42"N 107°35'48"E
3	Thieu Tri	Xuong Lang	Northwest	Two axes	A (back) and C (front) on right axis; B on left-parallel axis	16°25'04"N 107°34'21"E
4	Tu Duc	Khiem Lang	Northeast	Two axes	A (back) and C (front) on left axis; B on slightly right-parallel axis	16°25'58"N 107°33'59"E
5	Duc Duc	An Lang	Northwest	Two axes	A (back) and C (front) on left axis; B on right-parallel axis	16°27'04"N 107°35'35"E
6	Dong Khanh	Tu Lang	Southeast	Two axes	A (back) and C (front) on right axis; B on left-radial axis	16°25'47"N 107°34'11"E
7	Khai Dinh	Ung Lang	Southwest	One axis	A (back), B (central), C front of the axis	16°23'56"N 107°35'25"E

Table 10

The Mausoleums' axes and directions

In reality, each mausoleum can have more than one central axis, which creates confusion in analyzing direction and identifying a definitive pattern. Multiple variables and parameters must be considered when determining the orientation if the Feng shui compass is applied in relation to the “Bagua” (八卦). The “Bagua” originates from the *I Ching* (Book of Changes), comprising a system of eight trigrams used in Taoist cosmology to represent fundamental principles of nature and the universe. It is commonly applied in Feng shui traditional medicine, martial arts, and architecture. Each trigram consists of three lines (solid for Yang and broken for Yin), forming eight possible combinations, each associated with special meanings, as explained in Table 11 below.

Table 11

Trigram	Name (Vietnamese)	Name (Chinese)	Meaning	Element	Direction
☰	Càn	Qián (乾)	Heaven, strength, masculinity	Metal	Northwest
☷	Khôn	Kūn (坤)	Earth, receptivity, femininity	Earth	Southwest
☵	Khăm	Kǎn (坎)	Water, danger, wisdom	Water	North
☲	Ly	Lí (離)	Fire, clarity, civilization	Fire	South
☳	Chấn	Zhèn (震)	Thunder, movement, initiation	Wood	East
☶	Cấn	Gèn (艮)	Mountain, stillness, stability	Earth	Northeast
☴	Tốn	Xùn (巽)	Wind, penetration, adaptability	Wood	Southeast
☱	Đoài	Duì (兌)	Lake, joy, communication	Metal	West

Accordingly, the main direction of the mausoleums, as indicated by the central axis of the tomb area, facing southwest, corresponds to trigram *Kūn* (☷); facing southeast, corresponding trigram *Xùn* (☴); facing northwest, corresponding trigram *Qián* (☰); and facing northeast, corresponding trigram *Gèn* (☶).

However, upon verifying the emperor's astrology based on their birth dates and analyzing actual survey measurements, it becomes evident that these perspectives do not apply in this case. Thus, the selection of the mausoleum's direction based on the emperor's astrology was not practiced (Table 12).

The direction of the mausoleums appears to have been selected based on directions associated with positive meanings corresponding to the above-mentioned trigrams: *Kūn*, *Qián*, *Gèn*, and *Xùn*. Alternatively, it is also possible that the mausoleums' directions were determined by a special principle yet to be deciphered.

Table 11

Eight trigrams of the “Bagua”

Table 12

No	Directions					Mausoleums		
	Name of Date	Date of Birth (Lunar year)	Astrology					
			Trigram	Element	Directions	Direction	Element	Trigram
1	Gia Long	15/01/1762	Xùn (䷳)	Wood	South, East, North, Southeast	Southwest	Earth	Kūn (䷁)
2	Minh Mang	13/04/1791	Kūn (䷁)	Metal	West, Northwest, Northeast, Southwest	Southeast	Wood	Xùn (䷳)
3	Thieu Tri	11/05/1807	Xùn (䷳)	Fire	North, East, South, Southeast	Northwest	Metal	Qiān (䷎)
4	Tu Duc	25/08/1829	Lí (䷒)	Fire	East, North, Southeast, South	Northeast	Earth	Gèn (䷄)
5	Duc Duc	04/01/1853	Zhèn (䷴)	Wood	South, Southeast, North, East	Northwest	Metal	Qiān (䷎)
6	Dong Khanh	12/01/1864	Kǎn (䷈)	Metal	Southeast, South, East, North	Southeast	Wood	Xùn (䷳)
7	Khai Dinh	01/09/1885	Duì (䷤)	Water	Northwest, Northeast, Southwest, West	Southwest	Earth	Kūn (䷁)

Table 12

Astrology of the Emperors
and the directions of their
Mausoleums

An observed convention is that Area A (Tomb area) is always mentioned first in historical documents describing these mausoleums, followed by Area B (Worship Temple area), and then Area C (Stele Hall area). This suggests that Area A is the most important, as it contains the emperor's coffin and is unique to the mausoleum, whereas Area B and C can be found in multiple locations within the Hue Imperial City or in the residences of royal family members. For mausoleums with two axes, Area A and C are consistently linked and arranged on the same axis, while Area B may occupy a separate axis.

The principles governing the arrangement of these three areas (A, B, and C) along one or multiple axes and determining the main direction of the mausoleum are complex and difficult to interpret. Kingship and theocracy are axes of political ideology that are inseparable in a feudal society, where the emperor is referred to as the Thien Tu (天子), meaning Son of the Gods, and a God. The axis of Area A represents kingship, whereas the axis of Area B symbolizes theocracy. This relationship reflects the organic connection between invisible and visible elements within a socio-political entity or kingship entity, with the emperor as its representative. The axis of Area C, perhaps, represents civil rights—the right to know, the right to observe, and the right to evaluate—and can be aligned with Area A or with the components of both Area A and B.

Although the site plan arrangement of each mausoleum may differ, these three essential constituent elements consistently appear and have been restored and preserved through generations of emperors.

4.3 Concepts of the Three-Elemental Constitutions

1) The Tomb Area

The Tomb area (Area A) is the most important place in the mausoleum, as it is the exclusive location where the bodies of the emperors are buried. Therefore, it is meticulously safeguarded, with a single entrance secured by durable bronze doors that remain closed. The Tomb area typically occupies a disproportionately large space relative to its practical needs. Its ground plan can either be circular or square, encompassing the underground tunnel and the grave itself, which is buried deep underground after construction. Typically, it is impossible to determine the exact location of the coffin. A notable exception is Emperor Khai Dinh's mausoleum, where the coffin's location was precisely identified directly beneath the life-size statue, and photographed to mark this position (Fig. 15.2).

According to Eastern spiritual beliefs, death represents the conclusion of one life cycle and the beginning of a new one. Therefore, when the emperor was buried, he was always accompanied by numerous burial items and royal treasures for use in the afterlife. The practice of bodily preservation after death was common in ancient Egypt and throughout Asia. This practice symbolically allowed the soul to return and re-enter its body. Scientifically, physical burial preserves bones containing human DNA, thus symbolically maintaining a connection with descendants. The construction of a mausoleum from durable materials such as stone, designed for long-term sustainability, arises from this cultural and spiritual conception.

2) The Worship Temple Area

The Worship Temple area (Area B), with the main temple building placed at its center, houses the votive tablets and serves as the location for worshipping the souls of the emperor and queen. According to the Vietnamese emperor's burial ceremony,²⁴ the emperor's soul, called Than Minh (神明), was symbolically transferred from the corpse into a ceremonial dummy known as Than Bach (神帛). His votive tablet, recording the emperor's name and date of birth, is called Than Chu (神主).²⁵ If the Tomb area preserves the physical body, then the Worship Temple area serves to venerate the soul and preserve the emperor's personal resume.

3) The Stele Hall Area

The Stele Hall area (Area C) contains the stone stele, which records and commemorates the emperor's merits. It may also include messages intended by the emperor as a testament for future generations, providing insights for descendants and the country. Creating a stone stele shares the same purpose as constructing a mausoleum from stone: durability and permanence. The stele functions as a concise historical record of each emperor's reign, intended to ensure remembrance and so gratitude among future generations. Moreover, it reflects the community and nationality of each dynasty.

When the Stele Hall area is positioned independently on its own axis, this arrangement may represent the axis of civil rights being elevated to equal prominence alongside those representing kingship and theocracy. Such an arrangement occurred uniquely in Emperor Gia Long's mausoleum, established at the beginning of the Nguyen dynasty, when the country had recently emerged from civil war and achieved reunification. In contrast, in subsequent emperors' mausoleums, regardless of whether organized along

one axis or two, the Stele Hall area was always situated in front of the Tomb area. This placement may express that national consciousness and civil rights consistently held a central place in the political philosophy of the Nguyen dynasty, an idea explicitly embodied within the architecture of the emperor's mausoleums.

5. Conclusion

This research has examined three case studies of the emperor's mausoleums from the early stage of the Nguyen dynasty: those of Emperor Gia Long, Emperor Minh Mang, and Emperor Thieu Tri. The mausoleums are structured around three elemental constituents: the Tomb area (Area A), the Worship Temples area (Area B), and the Stele House area (Area C). Each of these elements symbolizes kingship, theocracy, and civil rights. Although the rules for arranging these components along a unified or separate central axis are not explicitly defined, a consistent pattern emerges where Area A and C are interconnected, while Area B frequently serves as an intermediary element.

The repeated appearance of these three fundamental components (A, B, and C) across all mausoleums articulates a delicate balance between tangible and intangible realms, human view, and spiritual beliefs concerning the cyclical nature of life and the universe. This architectural structure allows a deeper understanding of the coexistence between visible and invisible entities, generating an abstract concept of time and space that transcends purely material interpretations.

The architectural legacy embodied in the Nguyen dynasty's mausoleums offers valuable insights into the interconnected concepts of the Body – Soul – Memory, as represented through these three areas. These mausoleums thus stand as a profound testament to intellectual and spiritual evolution, providing enduring philosophical insights that should be continually examined and interpreted. Preserving and understanding

this legacy can significantly contribute to future sustainable human development, enriching Vietnamese traditional culture and the world community's memory.

The scientific findings of this research offer valuable guidance for the restoration and conservation of the imperial mausoleum complex of the Nguyen Dynasty in Hue. They present significant opportunities for the comprehensive rehabilitation of mausoleum areas damaged by natural disasters and wars, ensuring historical accuracy in the preservation of architectural heritage. These efforts not only enrich the cultural heritage resources but also contribute to the economic growth and tourism development of Hue city in particular, and Vietnam as a whole. Moreover, the research holds considerable academic value by providing a comprehensive understanding of the planning and construction principles behind the Nguyen Dynasty's imperial mausoleums. It makes a meaningful contribution to the fields of architectural history and the study of spiritual and cultural traditions, both within Vietnam and across Southeast Asia.

Acknowledgment

This article is part of a PhD dissertation entitled “Architectural Study of Imperial Mausoleums in Early Nguyen Dynasty, Hue City, Vietnam (1820-1841),” for the History of Architecture Program at Faculty of Architecture, Silpakorn University, Thailand.

Notes

- 1 Tran Trong Kim, **Việt Nam Sử Lược [Brief History of Vietnam]** (Da Nang: Da Nang Publishing House, 2003), 401-564.
- 2 Phan Thuan An, **Quần Thể Di Tích Cố Đô Huế [The Complex of Hue Monuments]** (Ho Chi Minh City: Tre Publishing House, 2005), 27.
- 3 It includes the temple and mausoleum of King Ngo Quyen in Duong Lam Village, Son Tay District, Hanoi City.
- 4 Mausoleums were built in several places, including Thai Duong (Hung Nhan-Thai Binh), Tham Dong (Duyen Ha-Thai Binh), and An Son (Dong Trieu-Quang Ninh). Most of the mausoleums of the Kings of the Tran Dynasty suffered severe damage and underwent alterations during the restoration process.
- 5 Tomb of the Le Dynasty is located in Lam Kinh (Thanh Hoa Province), forming a complex with the Thai Mieu as the central temple. The tomb only covers the grave, excluding a separate temple area. Worship is gathered at the Thai Mieu Temple.
- 6 Phan Thuan An, **Quần Thể Di Tích Cố Đô Huế**, 37.
- 7 Phan Thuan An, **Royal Mausoleums in Hue-A Wonder** (Da Nang: Da Nang Publishing house, 2014), 11.
- 8 Thai Van Kiem, **Cố Đô Huế-Di Tích-Lịch Sử-Thắng Cảnh [Hue Ancient Capital-Monuments-History-Beauty Spot]** (Sai Gon City: Ministry of National Education, Cultural Institute Publishing House, 1960), 54-62.
- 9 Mai Khac Ung, **Lăng Cùa Hoàng Đế Minh Mạng [The Mausoleum of Emperor Minh Mang]** (Hue City: The Vietnam's National Association of History, Publishing House of Thua Thien Hue's Branch, 1993), 85-89.
- 10 Phan Thanh Hai, **Lăng tẩm Hoàng đế Triều Nguyễn ở Huế [Royal Tombs of the Nguyen Dynasty in Hue]** (Hue City: Thuan Hoa Publishing House, 2010), 45-47.
- 11 For instance; Yutaka Shigeda, **Restoration Report of the Huu Phoi Dien Monument-Hieu Lang Mausoleum** (Tokyo: Nihon University, 1997); Motoi Takemura, “The Site Plan Design Method of Thien Tho Lang, Hieu Lang, and Xuong Lang,” (Master’s Thesis, Waseda University, 2001); Yuki Kojima, “The Master Plan of Khiem Lang,” (Master’s Thesis, Waseda University, 2005).
- 12 National Association of History of the Nguyen Dynasty, **Đại Nam Thực Lục Chính Biên, Quyển 7 [The Official Veritable Records of Dai Nam, Volume 7]** (Ha Noi: Giao Duc Publishing House, 2007), 1073-1074.
- 13 Cabinet of Nguyen Dynasty, **Đại Nam Nhất Thống Chí: Kinh Sư, Quyển 6 [The Unified Gazetteer of Đại Nam: Capital Section, Volume 6]** (Sai Gon City: Ministry of National Education Publishing House, 1960), 58-60.
- 14 Ibid., 60.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 National Association of History of the Nguyen Dynasty, **Đại Nam Thực Lục Chính Biên, Quyển 7**, 680.
- 17 National Association of History of the Nguyen Dynasty, **Đại Nam Thực Lục Chính Biên, Quyển 6 [The Official Veritable Records of Dai Nam, Volume 6]** (Ha Noi: Giao Duc Publishing House, 2007), 190-191.
- 18 Cabinet of Nguyen Dynasty, **Đại Nam Nhất Thống Chí: Kinh Sư, Quyển 6**, 56-57.
- 19 Cabinet of Nguyen Dynasty, **Đại Nam Nhất Thống Chí: Capital Section, Volume 1** (Sai Gon City: Ministry of National Education Publishing House, 1960), 15.
- 20 Cabinet of Nguyen Dynasty, **Đại Nam Nhất Thống Chí: Kinh Sư, Quyển 6**, 56.
- 21 National Association of History of the Nguyen Dynasty, **Đại Nam Thực Lục Chính Biên, Quyển 6**, 466.
- 22 Ibid., 71.
- 23 Cabinet of Nguyen Dynasty, **Đại Nam Nhất Thống Chí: Kinh Sư, Quyển 6**, 57-58.
- 24 Do Bang Doan and Do Trong Hue, **Những Đại Lễ và Vũ Khúc của Vua Chúa Việt Nam [The Great Ceremonies and Dances of Vietnamese Kings and Lords]** (Hanoi: Hoa Publishing House, 1968), 343.
- 25 Ibid., 349.

Bibliography

Bang Doan, Do and Do Trong Hue. **Những Đại Lễ và Vũ Khúc của Vua Chúa Việt Nam [The Great Ceremonies and Dances of Vietnamese Kings and Lords]**. Hanoi: Hoa Publishing House, 1968.

Cabinet of Nguyen Dynasty. **Đại Nam Nhất Thống Chí: Kinh Sư, Quyển 1 [The Unified Gazetteer of Đại Nam: Capital Section, Volume 1]**. Sai Gon City: Ministry of National Education Publishing House, 1960.

_____ . **Đại Nam Nhất Thống Chí: Kinh Sư, Quyển 6 [The Unified Gazetteer of Đại Nam: Capital Section, Volume 6]**. Sai Gon City: Ministry of National Education Publishing House, 1960.

Khac Ung, Mai. **Lăng Cùa Hoàng Đế Minh Mạng [The Mausoleum of Emperor Minh Mang]**. Hue City: The Vietnam's National Association of History, Publishing House of Thua Thien Hue's Branch, 1993.

Kojima, Yuki. "The Master Plan of Khiem Lang." Master's Thesis, Waseda University, 2005.

National Association of History of the Nguyen Dynasty. **Đại Nam Thực Lục Chính Biên, Quyển 6 [The Official Veritable Records of Dai Nam, Volume 6]**. Ha Noi: Giao Duc Publishing House, 2007.

_____ . **Đại Nam Thực Lục Chính Biên, Quyển 7 [The Official Veritable Records of Dai Nam, Volume 7]**. Ha Noi: Giao Duc Publishing House, 2007.

Shigeda, Yutaka. **Restoration Report of the Huu Phoi Dien Monument-Hieu Lang Mausoleum**. Tokyo: Nihon University, 1997.

Takemura, Motoi. "The Site Plan Design Method of Thien Tho Lang, Hieu Lang, and Xuong Lang." Master's Thesis, Waseda University, 2001.

Thanh Hai, Phan. **Lăng tẩm Hoàng đế Triều Nguyễn ở Huế [Royal Tombs of the Nguyen Dynasty in Hue]**. Hue City: Thuan Hoa Publishing House, 2010.

Thuan An, Phan. **Quần Thể Di Tích Cố Đô Huế [The Complex of Hue Monuments]**. Ho Chi Minh City: Tre Publishing House, 2005.

_____ . **Royal Mausoleums in Hue-A Wonder**. Da Nang: Da Nang Publishing house, 2014.

Trong Kim, Tran. **Việt Nam Sử Lược [Brief History of Vietnam]**. Da Nang: Da Nang Publishing House, 2003.

Van Kiem, Thai. **Cố Đô Huế-Di Tích-Lịch Sử-Thắng Cảnh [Hue Ancient Capital-Monuments-History-Beauty Spot]**. Sai Gon City: Ministry of National Education, Cultural Institute Publishing House, 1960.

Illustration Sources

All illustrations by the authors unless otherwise specified.

Opening figure Trieu Chien, 2018.

Fig. 1 Modified from Vietnam.vn, **Looking Back at the Mergers of Provinces and Cities in Vietnam**, Accessed May 29, 2025, Available from <https://www.vietnam.vn/en/nhin-lai-nhung-lansap-nhap-tinh-thanh-pho-cua-viet-nam>.

Fig. 2 Modified from National Library of France, Maps and Plans Department, **Hué et Ses Environs [Hue and its Surroundings]**, Accessed May 29, 2025, Available from <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b530647505.r=Hu%C3%AA?rk=321890;0>.

Fig. 3 Phuc Tuan, **Lo khai thác đá ảnh hưởng đến quần thể di tích [Concerns about Stone Exploitation Affecting the Monuments]**, Accessed May 29, 2025, Available from <https://vanvn.vn/thanh-hoa-lo-khai-thac-da-anh-huong-quan-the-di-tich/>.

Fig. 4 Tourism Information Center of Vietnam's Ministry of Culture-Sport-Tourism, **Sông Hương-Vẻ đẹp nên thơ của xứ Huế [Huong River-the Poetic Beauty of Hue]**, Accessed May 29, 2025, Available from <https://vietnamtourism.gov.vn/post/35032>.

Fig. 5 Modified from the site plan drawings of Emperor Gia Long's Mausoleum, Emperor Minh Mang's Mausoleum, and Emperor Thieu Tri's Mausoleum, Hue Monuments Conservation Center.

Fig. 6 Modified from the site plan drawing of Emperor Gia Long's Mausoleum, Institute of Waseda Heritage, Waseda University.

Fig. 7.1 Pham Quang Tan, **Các đời chúa Nguyễn [The Successive Nguyen Lords]**, Accessed June 1, 2025, Available from <https://pqt.edu.vn/cac-doi-chua-nguyen.html>.

Fig. 7.2 Trung Nguyen, **Lăng Gia Long (Thiên Thọ Lăng)-ngôi lăng của vị vua đầu tiên của Triều Nguyễn [The Mausoleum of Emperor Gia Long (Thien Tho Lang)-the Mausoleum of the First Emperor of the Nguyen Dynasty]**, Accessed June 1, 2025, Available from <https://phuot3mien.com/lang-gia-long.html>.

Fig. 8 Modified from the site plan drawing of Emperor Minh Mang's Mausoleum, Institute of Waseda Heritage, Waseda University.

Fig. 9 Modified from the site plan drawing of Emperor Thieu Tri's Mausoleum, Institute of Waseda Heritage, Waseda University.

Fig. 10 Dan Viet, **Vì sao lăng mộ của ông vua thứ 3 của vương triều nhà Nguyễn ở một làng của TP Huế lại “một mình một hướng”?** [Why Does the Tomb of the Third Emperor of the Nguyen Dynasty, Located in a Village in Hue, Uniquely Face a Different Direction from the Others?], Accessed June 1, 2025, Available from <https://danviet.vn/sao-lang-mo-vua-thieu-tri-vua-thu-3-nha-nguyen-o-tt-hue-lai-quay-mot-huong-chuong-ai-20240822172009265-d1179962.html>.

Fig. 12.1 The Institute of Heritage Waseda, 2006.

Fig. 12.5 Ibid.

Fig. 14.1 L. Cadière, “Chapitre III: La Stèle de Gia-Long, Le Tombeau de Gia-Long [Chapter III: The Stele of Gia Long, The Tomb of Gia Long],” **Bulletin des Amis du Vieux Hue** 4 (1923).

Fig. 14.2 Ch. Lichtenfelder, “Notice sur le tombeau de Minh-Mang (1) [Note on the Tomb of Minh Mang (1)],” **Bulletin des Amis du Vieux Hue** 4 (1937).

Fig. 15.1 Hue Monuments Conservation Center