

Vietnam

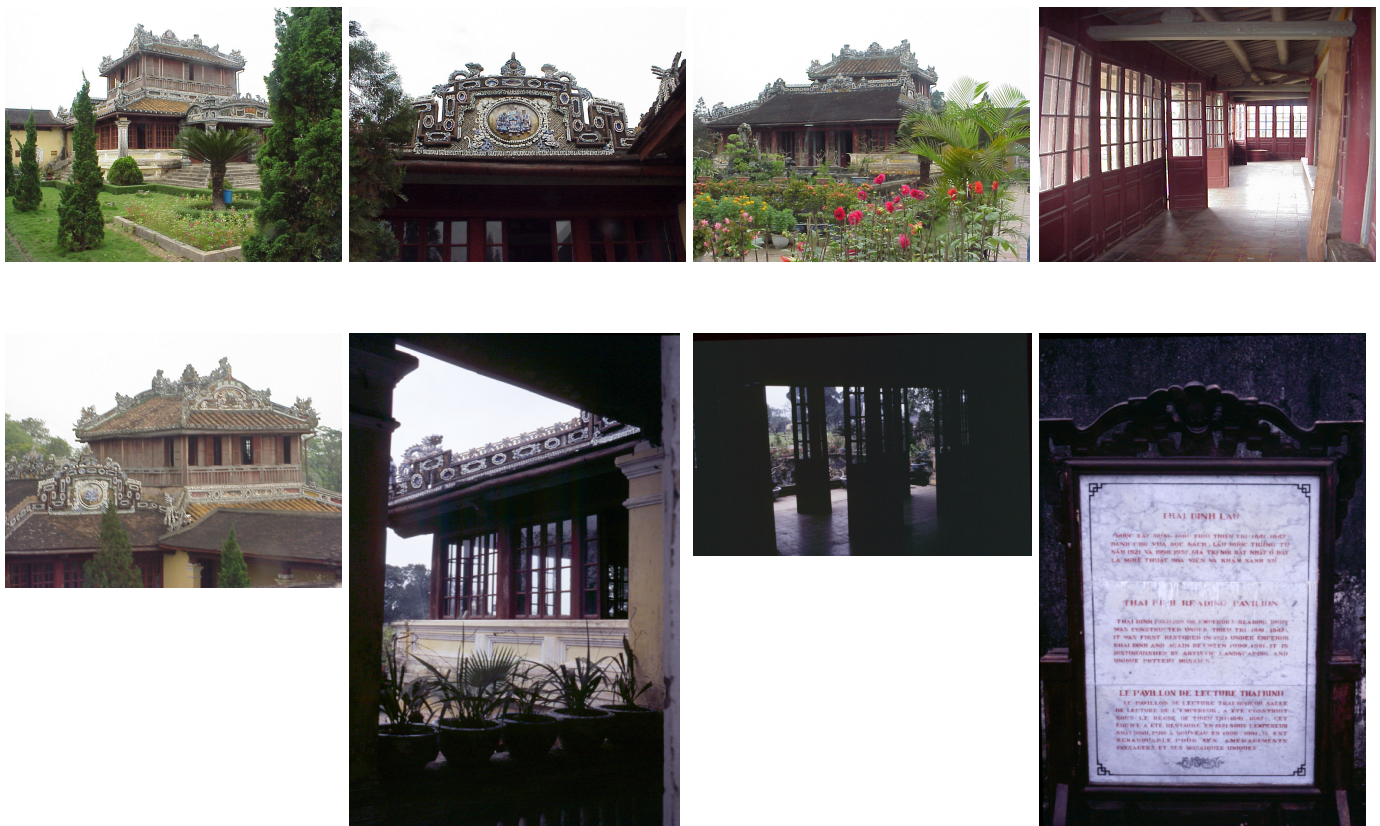
The Emperor's library and reading pavilion in Hué - surviving the Tet offensive 1968

Pierre Evald

The Chinese invasion in 1407 reimposed two decades of Chinese rule where the Vietnamese administration was run by senior officials brought in from China. Vietnamese text were during these decades until 1427 either destroyed or taken back to China and mostly lost - one of the major setbacks for later collecting of Vietnamese classical literature. For the next four and a half century, until the French conquest, Vietnam remained free of foreign control and pursuit of cultural relics. But until the arrival of the French, the universe of Vietnamese intellectuals revolved around China, and Chinese scholars provided the Vietnamese frame of reference for its philosophy and political and social thinking. The library facilities in the imperial citadel cum palace in Hué were until the demise of empire among the key institutions in the conservation and elaboration of this delicate cultural mix.

Thai Binh Lau.

The emperor's reading pavilion within the palace area in Hué. Built under Thieu Tri (1841-47). Restored 1921 under the emperor Khai Dinh. And restored again in 1990-91, following its only minor damages during the Tet offensive in 1968 from where this construction miraculously were among the very few to stand behind when the battle was over after Vietnam's short taking over the imperial citadel with its national symbol: The flag bastion. The reading pavilion is distinguished by artistic landscaping and unique pottery mosaics. At present it's being used for various exhibitions and the interior contains only few traces of it's former imperial use.



Tang Tho Lau. The storage building for the imperial library cum archive with books, scrolls and imperial records. Located in citadel area, Dinh Tien Hoang street, one kilometer north of the palace area in Hué. It's a two-storeyed massive greyish building now being used as living quarters for government employees and military officers. At present (2000) plans are being worked out for the restauration of the complex. From here books were taken to the reading pavilion within the palace area, following an Eastern tradition for separating the storage of books

from the reading itself.



The preservation of books in Hué has throughout the years been threatened by frequent **flooding of The Perfume River**. Latest major flooding was in November 1999 when the level of the water was 1.70 -2.00 meter above normal level. At this occasion several scholars' book collections, including 2-400 old books, were destroyed. Some books were secured to the upper floor of the houses in the low areas where the flooding took place. Mr. Nguy ễn Xuân Hoa, at Thạch Hãn 3, and Mr. Phou Thuân, at Nguyễn Chi Thank 29, were among the scholars whose collections were partly damaged during this recent flooding, with water rising more than one meter above floor level inside their houses.



The National Library of Vietnam is located in Hanoi, established by a decree when independence was proclaimed in 1945, and building on the former Pierre Pasquier Library. It is computerized and in a new building, heading Vietnam's public libraries system as well as managing the union catalogue project for the country.

In Ho Chi Minh city the former National Library was in 1974 changed to **The General Library of Sciences**. It can be considered the second national library of Vietnam. The library is joining the public library system and plays a central role in the region, processing materials for 48 libraries in the city and its surroundings. During the war with U.S.A. many collections from the biggest libraries in Saigon were evacuated into security zones in the jungles and The Central Highlands to avoid raids and bombing. In caves at the evacuation sites books were exposed to extremely high humidity, but also used by scientists and students in temporary reading rooms.

References:

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