

## The Architecture of Bat Trang, a Pottery Village in Hanoi

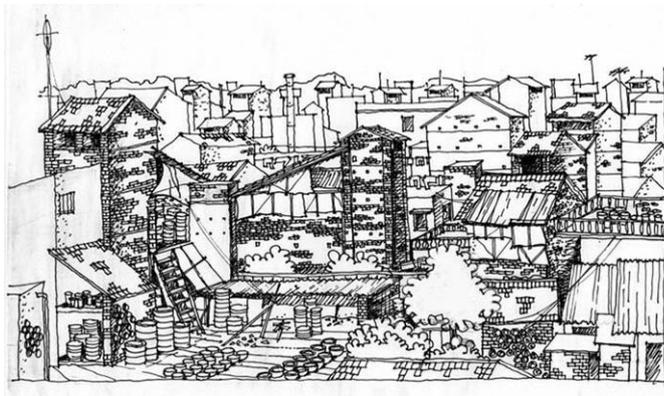
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### I. INTRODUCTION

The capital of Vietnam, Hanoi is undergoing the process of rapid urbanization. While this has led to positive changes in the small village communities nearby the city, it has also threatened the character of the villages themselves. The spread of urbanization and modern technology seem to ignore the existence of the village's identity, which has been shaped and strengthened over generations. As a result, many beautiful structures have been swallowed up by the city's expansion.

What should be done to maintain the village's identity? I believe it is important to know what should be maintained and what should be changed. Therefore, it is crucial to identify the patterns of village life, which includes identifying craft production and significant structures such as the communal house, the village gate, and village pagodas to begin to find the solution to sustaining the villages' character.

Bat Trang, a pottery village, is a good example, since it is in danger of losing its identity as a distinct village due to the urban growth of the capital city, Hanoi. This is resulting in a transformation of village life in Bat Trang including changes to pottery production and architectural form. The opening up of Vietnam has led to external influences that mean an increase in tourism and the demand for Vietnamese goods including Bat Trang pottery, which in turn results in increased wealth for the residents of Bat Trang. Therefore, change is inevitable in the pottery village and also in other villages elsewhere in Vietnam. This paper will '(re)identify' some patterns of village life in Bat Trang, which represent the essential fabric of village life and define what village life is all about, and it will examine how they have changed. This may lead to a clearer understanding of how village identity might be maintained. Is it possible to maintain these patterns, which touch upon rituals and ceremonies as well as architectural form, while everything else changes? Is it possible to come up with an alternative to either planning Bat Trang with centralized pottery production or turning Bat Trang into a quaint historical town for tourists? I shall refer to the work of the American architectural theorist, Christopher Alexander, as a starting point for devising strategies to cope with the changes. Another approach is to look at some Australian cases, such as the preservation of Bendigo Pottery and the development of historic towns like Walhalla in Victoria. Some guidelines may be proposed by attempting to adapt Alexander's patterns, as well as Australian practices, to the situation in Vietnam.



Roof scape of box kilns (Dinh Quoc Phuong 2001)



Drying pottery in the house yard (Dinh Quoc Phuong 2001)

## II. CHRISTOPHER ALEXANDER: *A PATTERN LANGUAGE*

This paper is part of my research on traditional village architecture in Hanoi, which was influenced by the book, *A Pattern Language* (1977) by Christopher Alexander and his colleagues. In an attempt to find 'a philosophy for the built environment', Alexander and his team set down their ideas, which provide inspiration and a methodology for studies of the built environment, especially in traditional societies. The text presents 253 'patterns' of architecture, town planning and building, which can be found many times and in many places. The patterns were formatted in the same way, and each consists of a statement of problems followed by a supporting explanation and discussion on related aspects such as physiology, structure, culture, science, or statistics. The authors finish the pattern by giving some guidelines in order to link the pattern to practical design that aims at dealing with the crisis of modernization. This section will discuss why and how Alexander's concept will be referred in the study of the traditional villages.

The theory has been well-known as a phenomenon in the architectural profession not only because of its widely applicable approach but also because of its provocative and controversial ideas that attracted much attention from architectural theorists and practitioners.

Since the publication, many criticisms have been made of the theory both positively and negatively. While Protzen (1978) argued that *A Pattern Language* is an invalid approach to environmental design, and readers should 'refute the whole' because 'it enforces an unenlightened conformism' and 'leads to a deterioration of intellectual capabilities', Grabow (1983) demonstrated and confirmed the phenomenological aspects of the theory by looking at and grasping the process of Alexander's thoughts and ideas that built up as 'a new paradigm in architecture', and pointing out that what made Alexander's pattern theory distinct from those of his predecessors such as Martin Heidegger, D. T. Suzuki and Plato is his practical solution to deal with the negative aspect of modern life. Additionally, Dovey (1990) examined the nature and prospect of the new paradigm as well as the strength of its opposing forces or 'enemies', according to the author. This resulted in a conclusion that Alexander's theory is of merit and should be widely applied, and the emergence of the 'enemies' was also important since it indicated the process of implementation and evolution of the theory. Furthermore, Salingaros (2000) raised the importance of implementing the pattern theory in architecture and town planning by demonstrating its validation and how it will evolve and develop.

Most recently, Saunders (2002) was concerned about the debates on Alexander's pattern theory. He neither totally supported nor opposed the theory suggesting that architects and especially academics have a duty to study the theory as a 'phenomena' and a 'classic'.

In fact, Alexander's ideas have provided tools for environmental design therefore they do have a strong impact on design theory (Zeise 1984; Dovey 1999). Wang and Groat (2002) also demonstrated the usefulness of Alexander's theory to frame an architectural research.

The continuous discussion, criticisms and application of *A Pattern Language* since its publication in 1977 to most recently, 2002 indicate the currency of Alexander's pattern theory in architectural profession. Since there have been many theoretical debates about Alexander's pattern theory, this paper rather tries to understand the theory by using it as a tool to test and support the 'patterns' of village life in Hanoi and vice versa.

Alexander's philosophy is initiated and developed more by do-it-yourselfers and owner builders than by architects (Saunders 2002). Thus his theory directly links the users to the process of design, which permits design without requiring comprehensive and professional knowledge, or, according to King (1996), Alexander's theory offers 'a world where ordinary people could take command of the production of their environment'.

Similarly, traditional village architecture in Hanoi evolves slowly as ordinary people build what they need and repeat what has worked in the past. The process of traditional and vernacular building can tell about people's behaviour and relationships and how they relate to people's living and working. As a result, reading the books by Alexander pushes me to think about the places where I live and visit, and this gives inspiration for grasping the

'pattern' of the village life I am studying. Alexander's pattern theory even though it is often considered as either pre-modern or high-modern (King 1996), in my opinion aims at dealing with the disadvantages of modernization. This is also what the traditional villages in Hanoi are facing. Therefore I believe that this approach is well suited to the studies of those communities Vietnam.

### III. PATTERNS AND THEIR CHANGES: BAT TRANG VILLAGE<sup>1</sup>

Many studies on traditional Vietnam, particularly those on the North, often describe the village as a place where people and their traditional ways of life have been metaphorically protected by 'a bamboo hedge'. Therefore its traditional patterns of architecture, such as village gate, banyan, pagoda and house seem to be unchanged.

However from my observations and subsequent discussion about Bat Trang, it appears that the existences of those patterns are not obvious. The traditional villages are undergoing significant changes, which have led to the transformation of the old ways of life, as well as to the emergence of new ones, which create new patterns of architecture. Discussing those patterns results in another way of looking at the built environment of the traditional village.

The traditional idea that *The Village Area* is defined by a prominent mass of greenery filled with trees and demarcated to the outside world by a bamboo hedge (Gourou 1945; Nguyen Van Huyen 1995) may not be sufficient for a full perception of the present villages. In fact, many villages, such as Bat Trang, are not masses of greenery. The traditional craft production, such as pottery making under the process of *doi moi* (renovation), appears to be a key factor that creates and changes the village area. Moreover natural factors, such as floods and erosion, and regional re-division must be taken into account in discussions on the village area and its topographical landscape.



**Left Aerial view of Bat Trang: mass of the tiled roofs of the houses and production areas (National Archival Centre).**

**Right The village area as a mass of greenery (Gourou 1936).**

The shift of the economic base from semi-agriculture to non-agriculture in Bat Trang particularly and in other villages generally (Hanoi People's Committee 2001), has led to enormous changes in the village area and land utilization. Thus there will be more land allocated for increasingly expanded pottery production. This raises the need for an appropriate re-division of land uses. Therefore the mass production of pottery should be centralized in new sites. Alexander (1977), in general term suggests that small-scale production, which requires skilled hands, should not be separated from living place so remains in the ancient area. This re-allocation will lessen the 'burden' caused by the increasing production and pollution for the village area, and sustain the tradition of family-based craft production.

To go inside the village one traditionally needs to pass through *The Village Gate*. The gateways in general and the village gates in particular are usually familiar, unforgettable image (Gourou 1936; Tran Ngoc Them 1997). The function of a village gate is far more than just a security entrance. Its symbols and spirit add meaning and character to the village. Urbanization and modernization, however, often suppress the presence of the village gate and its roles. In Bat Trang, the village gates do not exist, thus their physical existence in present is almost forgotten. However the gates are still spiritually important since they are

remembered in folk poems (Do Thi Hao 1993). Therefore the village gates should be re-considered to be an important pattern of village modern life. The old gate should be preserved. New gates should be built with contemporary design. These will not only re-create the pattern of the village gate that marks the village entryway but also intensify the village's sense of community.

**Left A village gate, banyan tree and tea stall: an ideal pattern (National Archival Centre).**

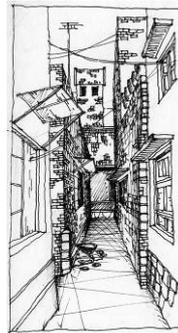


**Right A village gate and boom of buildings in Hanoi (Dinh Quoc Phuong 2002).**



The village gate usually goes with *The Village Trees*, such as the banyan and the bamboo hedge, two other important features of traditional villages. The bamboo hedge, which was regarded as the most dominant character defining the village boundary, the village gate and the old banyan represent the village's pride and dignity (Phan Huy Le, et. al. 1993). The banyan tree and the buildings under its shadow, such as the gate and a little tea-stall, form a pattern of life that accommodates local beliefs and social activities to the surroundings. Similar to the village gate, the physical presence of such tree places is blurred or forgotten in many urbanized villages, such as Bat Trang. Therefore it is important that the pattern, 'Tree Place', suggested by Alexander in general, including the banyan and the gate should be recreated in Bat Trang, where the new tree places will not only serve as marking points for the ancient area and commercial zone but also provide valuable social places for human activities, such as pottery making and trading.

Going to the village, one needs to walk on *The Village Road*, which is no longer surrounded by ponds and wet-rice fields as usually understood. The road not only provides links between spots but also exists as a pattern setting for the village's everyday activities. The philosophy and policies of *doi moi*, with its market orientation, allows villagers to change the pattern of road life: turning the road that has a better location into a local shopping strip, where the only type of goods it serves will be craft products. In Bat Trang, the road-scape is characterised by pottery making: showing pottery and drying coal cakes on the walls along the road. Recent road renovations resulted in changes to the layouts of the shop-houses that transform the pattern of the road life. The local conflict and misunderstanding caused by the road renovations (Trinh Phu Son 2002) raises the importance of clearly grasping the village life at the grass-root levels. In the near future, the road life can be adapted to be the pattern of a promenade that connects the village's attractions. This will not only maintain the traditional structures of the village such as the communal house, the pagoda and the old houses, but also facilitate the life along the road, which will bring more visitors and benefit to the village.



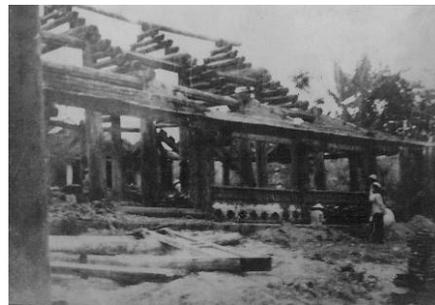
**Left** A village road and shop-houses in Bat Trang (Dinh Quoc Phuong 2002).

**Right** A village lane in ancient Bat Trang (Dinh Quoc Phuong 2001).

Entering the village and walking on the village road leads to *The Village Lanes* that narrow as they go deeper inside. The pattern of the village lanes is created and changed by local characteristic, such as housing density, geography and hydrographical conditions. In Bat Trang, the lane system bears some unique features: they are very narrow, creating a zigzag layout partly for reducing the power of the seasonal floods. The system of lanes also helped to deal with wrongdoers, such as thieves and robbers. High walls, box kilns, and using the upper level of laneways of drying pottery intensify these special characteristics. However the lanes are too hidden. Transporting on the lanes during the peak season is another issue. Therefore, a possible change to improve this is creating buffer zones at the house entrances along the lanes for better circulation. The lane system should be exposed more to visitors by setting a certain route linking some ancient houses in the village.

Following the main road to the village centre, there are a number of public buildings constructed by villagers. The most important building is *The Communal House* (the *dinh*), an open structure for public uses. What makes the *dinh* important is not only its impressive structure, but also its essential social and cultural values to the community. The main functions of the *dinh* are administrative, cultural and religious demonstrating some patterns of life including a 'Local Town Hall', an 'Activity Pocket' and a 'Small Public Square' in Alexander's *A Pattern Language* (1977).

**Left** Old *dinh* in Bat Trang: timber structure (Nguyen Van Sao, Personal Collection).



**Right** Current *dinh* in Bat Trang: concrete structure (Dinh Quoc Phuong 2001).



In Bat Trang, the *dinh* has changed a lot because it has been rebuilt and renovated several times caused by the village's natural and geographical transformation. Despite many physical changes, the *dinh* is always the place for keeping and developing the village's spiritual values. The communal house, even though nowadays it has to share its functions with some contemporary buildings such as The People's Committee Office and The House of Culture, still shows its crucial role in the village's everyday life. The urbanization and commercial pressure, however, mean that the *dinh* must be adapted to accommodate new patterns of life to the village. Its original structure should be preserved and reconstructed following the desire of the villagers.<sup>2</sup> New patterns of life can be added to the *dinh*. The central location of the *dinh* provides an opportunity to accommodate various ceremonial utilities such as a welcoming place for visitors, a water gateway or arriving port in the case of Bat Trang. By doing this, the newly adapted *dinh* will really benefit villagers both spiritually and functionally.

Along with the *dinh*, the *chua lang*, *The Village Pagoda*, has been an important building that enhances the village built form as well as the village's social life (Nguyen Quan and

Phan Cam Thuong 1991). Each village often has a pagoda because villagers regard as a holy ground that provides them with spiritual support during the course of daily life. The *chua lang* has experienced many changes caused by natural reasons, such as geographical changes, and social influences, such as disregarding the traditional role of the pagoda during the Vietnam war. The economic reform that started in 1986 has improved the villagers' living standard. This also resulted in the need for a better cultural and spiritual life, which encourages people to renovate and recover the *chua lang* and its social position in the village. In Bat Trang, the renovations of the village pagoda and its new contribution to the village life have re-affirmed its presence despite of many changes.



**Left Renovated *chua lang* in Bat Trang (Dinh Quoc Phuong 2003).**

**Right The main incense burner and the contributor in Bat Trang pagoda (Dinh Quoc Phuong 2003).**

The experiences drawn from Bat Trang confirm that the *chua lang* is important and a valuable structure that should be preserved and maintained. New *chua lang* should be built in the new villages, where there are no pagodas. The locals should be involved in these works since they are the ones who understand most about their built environment. For the rebuilding of the pagodas, exploiting and reusing all that remains from the original structure is crucial to provide a meaning of tradition, remembrance as well as authenticity.

From the village centre, the village roads and lanes lead to the village *Houses*, which are erected by practising common *Building Customs*, and characterised and changed by craft production that reveals the sense of *Home and Work*. The village houses share similar features created by building styles and techniques, rites and folk beliefs, and were classified by the owners' economic condition, social ranking and the feudal government rules (Dao Duy Anh 1938). The house construction and the related customs are crucial for guaranteeing the inhabitants' spiritual comfort, which sometimes is more considered than physical conveniences. Despite many common characteristics, the village dwellings are varied if they are examined as places for home-based working. Craft production has impact on the use of space in the village house. The force of the market economy and tourism increases the demand for craft products that transforms the spatial arrangement in the house compound. The changes of production technique also lead to spatial transformation inside the house. Previous studies on the Vietnamese village house seem to disregard the sense of home-based working and its influences on the dwelling place. Because of modernization, contemporary house-constructors seem to underestimate the building customs and ceremonies that were practiced for generations.



**Left Building custom: putting a stone dog on the ground to expel evil (Gourou 1936)**

**Right Sense of home and work: a living room as a workshop for pottery making in Bat Trang (Dinh Quoc Phuong 2003).**

Therefore studies to preserve and develop the characters of the village houses should look at the building customs and the meaning of home and work since according to Groves (1991, 1998), building customs and home workshop 'make a place special, which in turn helps to foster a bond between person and place; they permit people to actively participate in the building process; they are the re-actualisation of a primordial event or a sacred history; they are the progenitor of myths and legends; often they constitute the collective memory of the people involved in building process; and they are powerful design tools.' It is important for builders to integrate those factors with modern amenities in their designs. This will create a pattern of house that will be both physically and spiritually connivent.

In the Vietnamese village, each house has its own sense of home and work due to the differences of family context including the house location, the family history and social and economic conditions. The patterns of house and the nature of their changes, therefore, are also varied. Lining the village road are the *Shop-houses for Tourists*. While the houses usually reveal the sense of home and work, the shop-houses for tourists bear a meaning of trade, tourism and home. The new market economy results in major shift in the house layout, attracting tourists seems to be the key driving force that transforms the shop-house's compositions and façades. Besides, the uses of new architectural elements such as the front yards in Bat Trang, as well as the imitation of so-called French-style architecture indicate people's perception of architectural changes. Tourist tastes and commercial activities also bring more abstract styles of house design, and result in the exploitation of the traditional features in new shop-house designs. All of these reveal new patterns of architecture, which indicate the 'evolution', and adaptation of villagers' attitude to modernization and tourism.

**Left A desert gateway to a house for ancestor worship in ancient Bat Trang (Dinh Quoc Phuong 2001)**



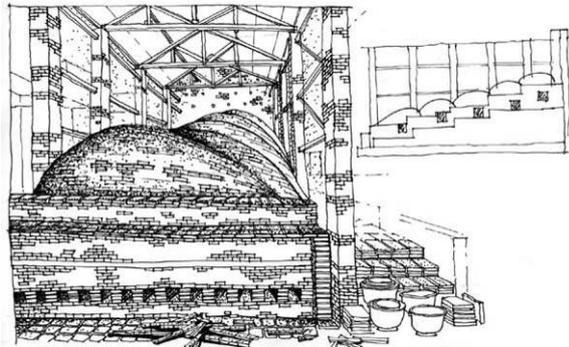
**Right A new shop-house in Bat Trang: exploiting tradition for tourist purpose (Dinh Quoc Phuong 2003).**



Hiding deeply inside the village lanes are the *Houses for Ancestor Worship*, which serve as living places and family ancestor altars. It appears that the ancestor altar for family worship is the major force that can keep the old houses remaining while other houses that only serve as living places have disappeared. The houses for ancestor worship have similar layouts: a living area and a separate building for the family altar. Because of the changes, the houses' characteristics are more intricate than just reflecting the traditional style. Generally, looking at a house can tell a lot about its owner (Groves 2003). While the living areas change enormously the buildings for the family altar remain untouched. The original layouts and decoration of the houses of ancestor worship reflect the social order and family hierarchy in the village. The transformation of the living areas reflect the impact of social and economic shift and people's thoughts on those changes. In Bat Trang, keeping unused workshops and kilns for tourist consumption is a good adaptation to change but lessens the intimate meaning of family-based working. On the other hand, resistance to change of the buildings for the ancestor altar may waste its tourist potential. Therefore, the houses for ancestor worship should be exposed more to visitors by sensitively turning them into tourist places that will 'show up' the lane life hides inside the village.

Creating an important part of the village built form are the workshops for craft production. The home-workshops and their changes reveal a lot about the villagers and their dwellings. In Bat Trang, the kilns, the main component of the workshops, demonstrate the patterns of village life. The uses of *lo ech*, *Frog Kilns* and *lo rong*, *Dragon Kilns* created patterns of life in

the past, and raise a question of how those patterns can be adapted to the present. The *lo ech* known as the first style of kiln has almost lost its physical traces in the village and even in the villagers' minds. Therefore, it is important to retrace and rebuild the *lo ech* so their historic image and values will be recalled to contribute to present life of the village.



**The old *lo rong* (Dragon kiln) in Bat Trang (Dinh Quoc Phuong 2001)**

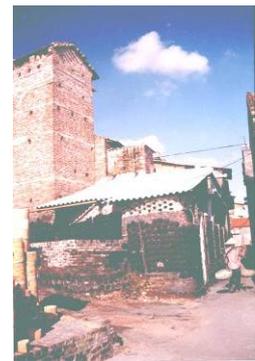
The appearance of *lo rong* marked a significant change in the pattern of village life: shifting from house-based working with *lo ech* to corporative production with *lo rong*. This resulted in changes in the economic conditions of the villagers and the subsequent political transformation in the village. The current abandonment of a *lo rong* in Bat Trang raises the need to appropriately use the old structure for new purpose. The *lo rong* and its related pattern of activities should be revitalized to partly strengthen the village sense of history and tradition, which is very important for sustaining the village identity as well as benefiting the village's modern life through tourist activities.

Filling up the village houses are the *lo hop*, *Box Kiln*, that dramatically changed the village landscape in recent decades. The initial use of the box kiln is a solution for the potter to make pottery for extra income during the time of 'closing door' of Vietnam. The new economic policies of *doi moi* encouraged handicraft production, which stressed the significant role of the box kilns in shaping the village's built form as well as its social life. Being cheap to build and run and, especially having the right to do private business have led to the mushrooming of the *lo hop*. This creates the village's architectural identity, and highlighten the period of renovation that adds the sense of time and event to the built environment in Hanoi.

**Left A gas kiln: new technology in Bat Trang (Dinh Quoc Phuong 2002)**



**Right A box kiln in ancient Bat Trang (Dinh Quoc Phuong 2003).**



While the box kiln, a local invention, is popular and dominates the village built environment the appearance of the *lo ga*, *Gas Kilns* which is less polluting and more convenient to use, is a real challenge to the existing architectural identity of the village. Changing to gas kilns, which are a consequence of globalization and modernization, is necessary from an environmental point of view but it may result in the disappearance of the box kilns, a beautiful pattern of village architecture. Therefore, utilizing both the gas kilns and the box kilns may be a good strategy for maintaining the physical beauty of the old structures while applying the advantages of the new pattern.

The *Bat Trang Bricks* and the *Coal Cakes*, which are the smallest but most important elements and needed to shape and characterize the village's built form. The village houses and kilns are made from Bat Trang bricks, which are not only historically significant but also a means of expressing human contact and marking the sense of time and place in ancient area. Bat Trang bricks are special since they were initially produced and used as tools for making pottery then happened to be a popular building material in Vietnam. Using new techniques of pottery production, which did not use Bat Trang bricks and new building materials means that there are less Bat Trang bricks made. While the use of 'fake' Bat Trang bricks, which are made by imitating the real ones, are increasingly popular, it is beneficial for potters to produce and reclaim their product, the 'real' Bat Trang bricks.



**Left Using Bat Trang bricks for house decoration in Bat Trang (Dinh Quoc Phuong 2003)**

**Right Coal cakes in Bat Trang (Dinh Quoc Phuong 2001).**

Drying on the village walls are 'Coal cakes' for fuelling the box kilns, another unique characteristic that should be taken into consideration when planning for change in Bat Trang. The use of gas kilns instead of the box kilns means no coal cakes are needed to dry on the village walls. This will be environmentally better for the village however it weakens a pattern of life, the *Coal Cakes* that often go with the box kilns to mark the time of significant development in the Bat Trang.

#### **IV. LEARNING FROM THE 'PATTERNS'**

Despite many criticisms since its publication in 1977, discussed previously, Alexander's *A Pattern Language* appears to be a useful theoretical framework for studies on traditional architecture, especially where the built environment of small communities are under pressure from dramatic changes. However the previous section, which focuses on identifying Alexander-like patterns of village architecture in Hanoi, reveals that it is possible to enrich the Alexander's pattern theory by adding to them the element of 'change', which Alexander did not mention in *A Pattern Language*.

The particular links between Christopher Alexander's patterns and the patterns of village life demonstrate the possibility of using the theory for the studying the architecture of one village in Hanoi, Bat Trang and therefore provides another example that strengthens the importance of the theory in research on traditional architecture generally. Additionally, the differences between Alexander's general patterns and the patterns I (re)identified in Bat Trang show the flexibility of the pattern theory to the effect that different cultures reveal and accept different patterns of architecture. (Alexander 1979)

Discussion on Bat Trang reveals that *A Pattern Language* presents the patterns of village architecture that shape the identities of villages in different cultures. Particularly, this helps to recall, raise and identify the significant presence of those architectural patterns in Vietnamese villages, such as Bat Trang. Firstly, Alexander's patterns correspond with some patterns of village architecture that characterise Hanoi villages generally, but were physically missing and forgotten in Bat Trang. For example, looking at the patterns relating to 'Gateways' and 'Tree Places' in the Alexander's book, recalls the images of *Village Gates* and *Banyan Trees* in village life around Hanoi. Moreover, referring to *A Pattern Language* strengthens the focus on social meanings of the physical characteristics in the village. For instance, the sense of home and work in village houses is partially reflected in the patterns 'Scattered Work' and 'Home Workshop' by Christopher Alexander.

Even though Christopher Alexander's book is not about change, its ideas can be used to suggest possible ways to adapt village patterns of architecture in the face of change. In other words, in an indirect way, it helps to highlight the hidden potential of the village and turn this into new patterns that suit the life of the present day better. A good instance is Alexander's pattern 'Paths and Goals' that helped to identify two patterns in Bat Trang, the *Village Lanes* and the *Houses for Ancestors Worship*, suggest that they could attract tourists. Also, referring to *A Pattern Language* clarifies and strengthens the roles of the emerging patterns to the contemporary life in the village. For example, the patterns 'Opening to the Street' and 'Open Stairs' by Alexander suggest the importance of the *Shop-houses for Tourists* and the *Village Roads* and how they serve the modern life in the village in the face of change.

Even though Alexander's *A Pattern Language* is a valuable source of theory for environmental design, especially which related to traditional architecture, it also has certain limitations. One is the general nature of the study, which was generated and synthesized from the observations of the authors in many places. Another is that it ignores economic conditions. A study like mine, which looks at a particular village and its own situation, highlights these shortcomings. For example, *Shop-houses for Tourists* is a direct consequence of *doi moi* that enhances the economic condition of the village.

*A Pattern Language* is about the links between physical convenience, the social contacts between people, and the elements of the built environment, while some patterns of village life in my study of Bat Trang rely more on the spiritual aspects of life. For example, Alexander's pattern theory supports the social values of the patterns of village architecture, such as *House: Home and Work*, but does not support *House: Building Customs* involving local folk beliefs and ceremonies. Administrative changes and government policies and their subsequent effects are also not included in Alexander's discussion. For instance, the pattern *Village Area* has been changed by a lot of government policies such as provincial re-division plans and the open door policy of Vietnam to the world. *A Pattern Language* does help to point out strategies to identify the patterns of village architecture however it does not suggest how to deal with particular problems caused by the local situation. One instance is the conflict between locals in Bat Trang involving the renovation of the *Village Roads*.

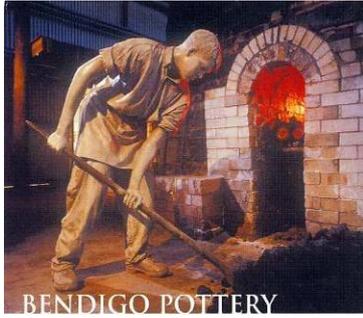
This research takes Alexander's theory as a research framework as a means of understanding village architecture in Hanoi. And, this, in final thoughts, provides experiences for further studies on the traditional built environment. There appears to be a common thread connecting *A Pattern Language* to my case study village, which reveals that a clear perception of the traditional village architecture can be achieved when it is observed, described and analysed as certain patterns and their roles in the village life.

My study of Bat Trang illustrates that Alexander's theory is not perfect in all situations. Thus in studying village architecture in Hanoi, while *A Pattern Language* is a good starting point as a theoretical framework, I believe that other sources are also worth looking at. Therefore I have looked at some real projects in Victoria, Australia, which appear to be good models for Bat Trang and which may help to fill some gaps in Alexander's *pattern* theory.

## V. AUSTRALIAN PRACTICES

While Alexander's pattern language provides a useful tool for theorizing the patterns of village architecture in Hanoi, experiences drawn out from real projects in Victoria, Australia, appear to be good models that may help to partly fill some gaps in the *pattern* theory.

Adapting to change is important for sustaining the village's identity. Indeed, the practical projects conducted in Victoria, such as the Preservation of Bendigo Pottery, the development of the township of Walhalla and the homestead of Buda, Historic Home and Garden in Castlemaine suggest strategies to maintain the village architecture in Hanoi generally and in Bat Trang particularly. These projects demonstrate the advantages of adaptive changes for old buildings to sustain their historic values. Particularly, Bendigo Pottery illustrates how the old structures, in this case the kilns, may be combined with the new buildings and modern technology to create an impressive place for visitors. This can save the old buildings and at the same time bring more benefit to the area.



**Left** The old kilns and recreated activities provide the sense of history and tradition in Bendigo Pottery. (Visitor brochure 2002)

**Right** Pottery showing: Old kilns and workshop are adapted to use for tourist purpose (Dinh Quoc Phuong 2002).

The Walhalla project concerns sense of place: enclosure and remoteness for attracting visitors who are the main supporters to revitalize the historic town. The preservation of Buda Home and Garden provides a feasible strategy, which could be applied to village architecture in Hanoi. For example, the *Houses for Ancestor Worship* in Bat Trang could be exploited to use for tourist purposes rather than keep them intact. The Buda project points up the importance of adapting a 'family heritage' to a 'public asset' that not only facilitates the local life, but also ensures sufficient funds to maintain its significant heritage values.

Public involvement is another critical practice that certifies the feasibility of any plans to preserve and develop the traditional built environment generally and the village architecture in Hanoi concretely. Participating in some planning projects in Melbourne, gives me some experiences in this aspect. I was involved in two projects with different roles: (1) as a user and resident in a community meeting for a project, Warr Park Heritage Landscape Development Plan, in Brunswick, Melbourne; and (2) as an architectural research student from Melbourne University participating in a workshop for the project Urban Design Framework and Streetscape Design Plan: Victoria Street Activity Precinct, in Richmond, Melbourne.

Understanding the community at grass-roots level is crucial to work out appropriate strategies to identify the patterns of village life. In the first project, the Warr Park plan, I was invited to the community meeting by the Moreland City Council in Melbourne. The meeting called for participation of all local residents who could comment on the plan to 'identify the opportunities that could be further developed and facilities that are in urgent need of repair or replacement'. The participants also were asked to discuss the plan to clarify detailed direction for Warr Park through the next several years.

Making good use of consultants is another experience that is worth applying in Hanoi's villages. In the second project, I joined the workshop conducted by the City of Yarra (a Melbourne municipality), and Hansen Partnerships (a planning and design firm in Melbourne). The aim of the workshop was to 'engage key project partners in thinking creatively about how the Victoria Street Activity Centre and its environs might change in the next fifteen and twenty years.' The participants came from multi-discipline areas: they were consultants from the City Council, Vic Track, Vic Roads, Office of Housing, architectural practices, Melbourne University and community groups. Contributions of the participants to the workshop helped the design team to understand more about the area, and to have a broader view of their design framework. This is very important for the feasibility of the project.

The Australian projects and related public involvement are certainly not new strategies in planning and design practice. However, according to William. S. Logan, the author of *Hanoi, Biography of a City* (2000), the matter that challenges planners in Hanoi now is 'to learn to listen to all interested parties, to articulate a vision of the city that keep the best of the past alongside new development...' Therefore, if similar strategies and public activities were conducted in villages in Hanoi, such as Bat Trang, they would not only provide a better understanding of the villages' political and economic conditions, but also give a clearer insight into village life, which may in turn help to avoid problems between locals, such as the hidden conflict involved in *Village Roads* case in Bat Trang.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Hanoi is a city of villages. The future image of urban Hanoi therefore has been characterised not only by new high rises in the city centre and new housing areas, but also by the villages and their patterns and changes. The traditional village architecture and its idyllic characteristics are always considered in the description of valuable landscape. Thus in the studies of the village built environment, it is important to identify what created the ideal landscape. The 'ideal patterns' of the traditional village are not a result of careful and serious planning or design. They spontaneously take shape in the course of everyday life, naturally accommodating the beliefs, social relations, and customs as well as everyday uses. Therefore the village system is seen as being firm and sustainable.

However, traditional methods of studying village architecture in Hanoi only by looking at the ideal and unchanged patterns may be inadequate. Each village has its own character created by craft production. The traditional villages are undergoing significant changes, which are reflections of *doi moi* policy, modernization, globalization, and most importantly, the villagers' needs and aspirations. Therefore, I believe that decision makers should examine the village built form in its real context, relating to traditional production.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Alexander's patterns and the patterns of village architecture discussed in this paper are in quotation marks and italic respectively.

<sup>2</sup> I visited Bat Trang village on July 2005. The *dinh* have been rebuilt. The villagers use timber as the main building material to recall the original structure of the *dinh* in Bat Trang.

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