

# **STUDY ON TRADITIONAL VILLAGE CENTER**

A case study of Tu Liem Suburban District, Hanoi, VIETNAM.

**LE Quynh Chi** Master Candidate

**Yukio NISHIMURA** PhD, Professor

Urban Design Laboratory, Department of Urban Engineering, Graduate School of Engineering,

The University of Tokyo 7-3-1 Hongo, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo Japan 113-8656

Fax: 81-3-5841-6265 chi@ud.t.u-tokyo.ac.jp, lequynhchi2003@yahoo.com

---

Vietnam traditional village center is cultural heritage needed to be conserved. Nowadays, there has been a conflict between retaining traditions of physical form with inevitable social, economic, and technological changes. However, still there is limited knowledge on this matter in Vietnam. Therefore, the paper's main objectives are to understand the mechanism of transformation of traditional village center through time and to propose guidelines for conservation work.

The paper includes 3 main parts (1) Background, providing general information on Vietnam traditional village, traditional village center, current status of traditional village center, and legislation system (2) Analysis on transformation process (3) Conclusion.

## **I. Background**

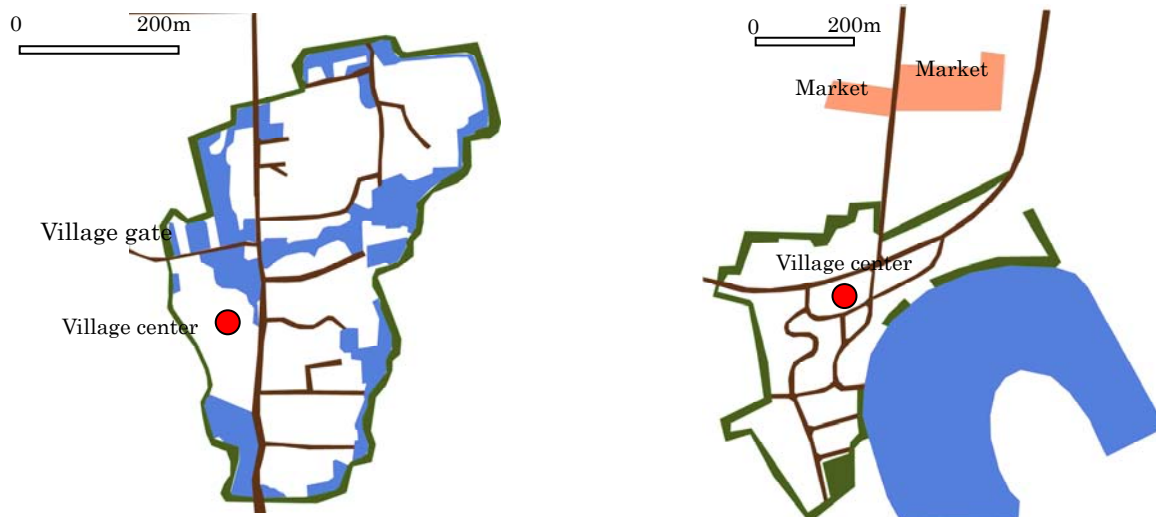
### **1.1. Vietnam traditional village**

Vietnam traditional village is a rural residential unit including many households with or without blood relationship, living in a defined geographic area, most people working in agriculture field; an economic, faith, and culture community; directly under the administrative management of commune (Ngo.Q.H, 2002).

The average area, including farm land, of authentic village was more or less 200ha. The small one occupied only 50ha while big one up to 500ha. The average population was around 1,000. In some cases, it reached up to 5,000 or even 10,000 (Pham.H.C, 2001).

In term of physical, authentic village had closeness structure demonstrating a character of self-support economic system. Village is used to be surrounded by bamboo fence and controlled by gate at main access. Inside village contained houses, religious buildings, and market. The outside was farmland and cemetery. (Figure1)

In term of social structure, it had highly-tightened knit community with overlapped relationships of neighborhood, blood, religious, career, and aging one.



**Fig.1:** Village map before 1945 - Left: Dan Loan Village. Right: Phu Luu village  
(Source: Nguyen.Q.H, 2002)

Bamboo fence     
  Road     
  Lake, pond, river

## 1.2.Traditional village center

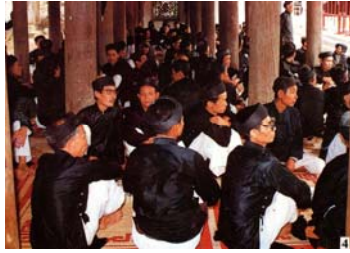
Traditional village center (TVC) had been the only center of authentic village. It is an architecture complex called *đình* (亭) in Vietnamese language. Originally, three functions had been activated in TVC, including administration, religion, and culture.

With regard to administrative function, TVC was the place to meet and discuss all village affairs, to judge lawsuit, to impose fines, etc, in accordance with village norms. Concerning religious function, TVC was the place to worship village tutelary deity, usually one but in some cases many deities. As for cultural function, TVC was the place to perform all kinds of theater and song, to observe ritual, festival, games, etc.

In another word, TVC used to be the multi-purpose hall for local administration, worship and cultural events. (Ha.V.T et al, 1998)



**Fig.2:** Traditional Village Center – Left: Tay Dang Village ; Right: Chu Quyen Village  
(Source: Ha.V.T et al, 1998)



**Fig.3:** Activities in Traditional Village Center - Left: Village meeting in Yen So Village.

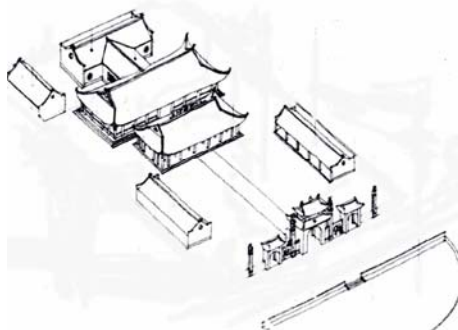
Right: Village Festival in Le Mat Village (*Source: Ha.V.T et al, 1998*)

### **1.3.Characteristics of authentic traditional village center.**

The characteristics of authentic TVC will be depicted in three aspects, including activity, form, and image, in 2 scales, whole village and TVC itself.

With regard to activity, TVC was the node of activities in authentic village. As the only center, TVC had been the main place for holding traditional events, keeping community activities lively and diversity. As presented above, it fulfilled multi-function of administrative meeting, religious customs, and culture activities.

In concern with form, TVC placed in prominent position in village, i.e. locating in start or center in village, accessing by main road (Figure 1). Moreover, TVC itself has singularity form with typical setting and unique architecture style. Firstly, TVC was built base on Feng Shui regulation (Figure 4). The Feng Shui regulated that behind or on the two sides of TVC should have elevated terrain in order to serve as ``throne arm`, and in front of TVC there must be water. The water element here is terrain for ``accumulating water``, meaning in ``accumulating divine favors``, ``accumulating happiness``, and accumulating all kinds of good fortune (Ha.V.T et al, 1998). Secondly, the main building has special exterior demonstrating in roof, including ``đạo mái``, the curved ending (Figure 5), and size. In term of size, the roof is very big, so that the height is high (nearly 6.0m), but the veranda roof is low enough to protect the building from raining and sunning (approximately 1.8m). (Figure 2) (Architecture Research Institute, 1998)



**Fig.4:** Typical setting of traditional village center (*Draw by author, 2006*)



**Fig.5:** The curve ending of roof (*Source: Ha.V.T et al, 1998*)

To the image, TVC presents various symbolic signs. First of all, it was the village center in local people's mind. Secondly, it is the office of Village God. Village Tutelary God is symbol of history, custom, morals, law, as well as the desires of whole village. He has superhuman power, an invisible connection which makes village a systematic organization (Dao.D.A, 1961). What is more, `` spiritual world is the holy one, in which only has loft and beautiful things; the whole community adore it and is tightened by it`` (Vu.T.L et al, 1991). Last but not least, there was a belief that TVC's position and direction has decisive power on village destiny. If it was chosen incorrectly, the villagers were believed to be suffering.

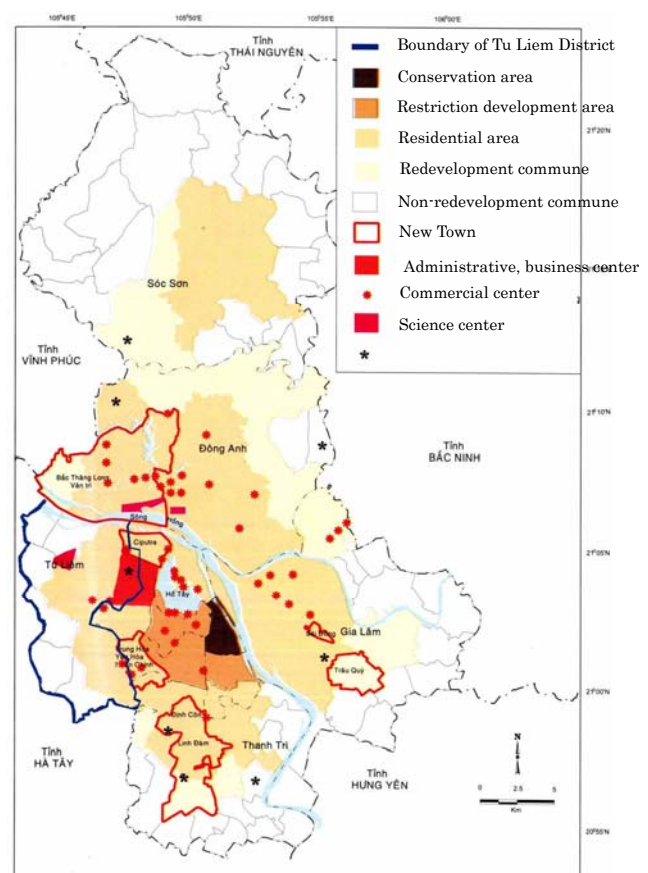
Rheumy eyes are due to the orientation of the *đình*  
The whole village will have rheumy eyes, not just me  
*(Traditional six-eight foot distich)*

There were cases that villager had to turn the orientation of the TVC or even move it to another place when villagers thought that it had bad influence on livelihood. (Ha.V.T, 1998)

The transformation of these characteristics will be discussed in part II.

#### 1.4.Current situation

To get understand on current status of TVC, a survey was done in 17 villages in Tu Liem Suburban District located in West side of Hanoi city. On the one hand, this district is land of tradition, containing 83 TVCs (Tu Liem District People's Committee, 2006). On the other hand, this district has been under strong development. According to Hanoi Master Plan issued in 1998, more than half of this district will be inside urban area in 2020 (4016.75 ha out of 7515.25 ha). As a result of this, the construction work blossoms, i.e. the construction area reach 15%. Moreover, there is a trend of job transformation, moving from agriculture to industry and small business. To be specific, only 50% of its population nowadays does the farm work (Hanoi GIS Atlas, 2002). Therefore, it presents a complicate situation.

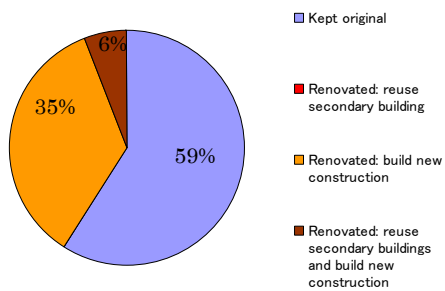


**Fig.6: Hanoi Master Plan**  
(Source: Hanoi GIS Atlas, 2002)

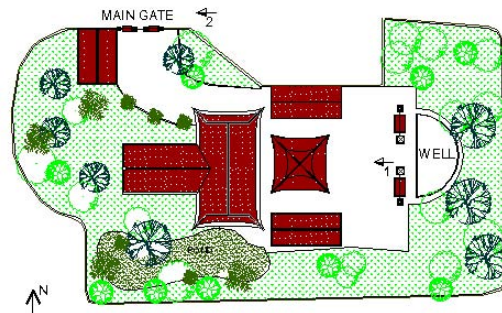


The survey points out 2 main results as following:

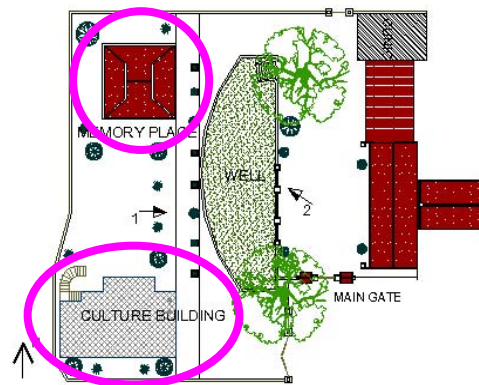
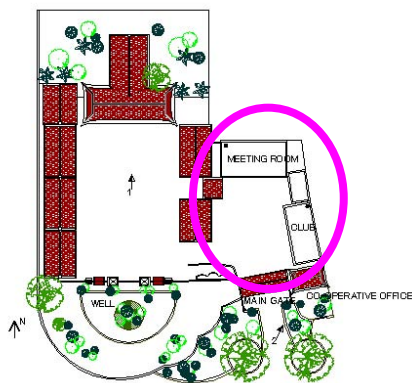
To the TVC itself, the statistical work shows that nearly half of number of surveyed TVC has been renovated. It is interesting enough to mention most renovation work is done by inserting new construction, while the secondary buildings left vacant. Main buildings have been preserved well.



**Fig.7:**Chart on current status of TVC(Constructed by author, 2006)



**Fig.8:**Example of TVC with no new element-Tu Hoang Village (Personal survey, 2006)



**Fig.9:** Example of renovated TVC-Left side: Hoe thi Village. Right side: Me tri Thuong Village (Personal Survey, 2006)

To the proximity of TVC, the physical appearance is under great influence of urbanization. The landscape of surrounding of TVC in non-urbanized villages still keeps rural character. At the same time, in villages which is planned to be inside urban area in 2020, rising in construction density and height of individual house has negative affect on the appearance of TVC.



**Fig.10:** Physical appearance on TVC's surrounding (*Photos by author, 2006*)

To get a comprehensive knowledge on transformation process, 4 representative villages, namely Hoe Thi, Thi Cam, Phung Khoang, and Me tri Thuong, were chosen because they have different status on TVC itself, original or renovated one, and village, urbanized or non-urbanized one.

### 1.5.Legislation system

The legislation documents related to conservation work of TVC is reviewed through The Law on Cultural Heritage, the Law on Land, the Law on Building and District Plan.

Conservation was paid attention in Vietnam right after national liberation by Decree No.65/sl (1945). However, not until 2001 the first Law was approved by Vietnam National Assembly. The Law on Cultural Heritage, supplemented by the Decree on implement, regulates that protection area of cultural heritage includes:

- Protection area I: the area inside original boundary of heritage has to be preserved status quo
- Protection area II: in the area surrounding Protection area I, it is allowed to build buildings that help to improve the site's value, without harmful effect to architecture, natural landscape, and ecological environment of the site.

Specifically, for relic located in residential area or next to immovable buildings, it is conserved by Protection Area I only.

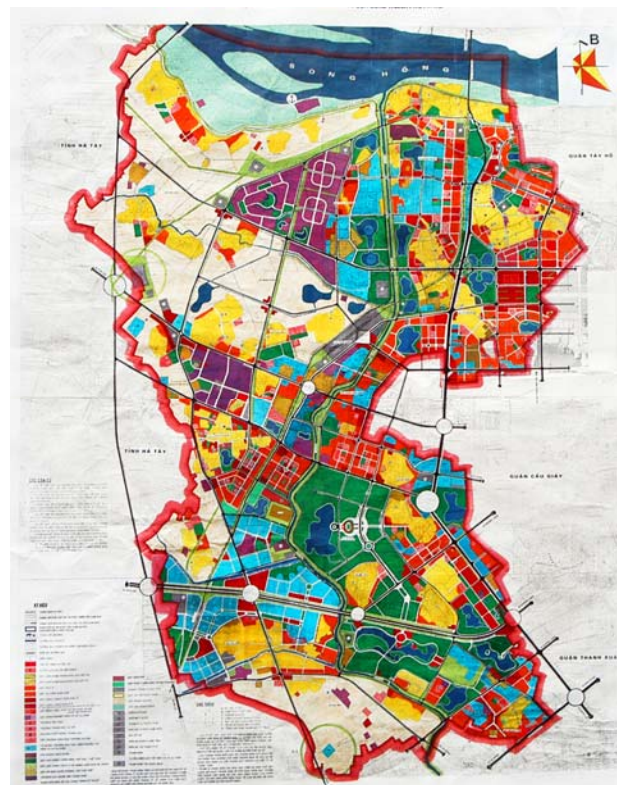
According to the latest Law on Land passed on 2003, the TVC's land right certificate is grant to local community. The responsibility of management of TVC is in charge of Manager chosen by local people. Local Government interferes just in case of trespass or illegal use.

According to the Law on Building passed on 2003, the development control on construction work bases on (1) Planning certificate (2) Building permission. These two documents will be issued base on detail plan (scale 1/2,000 or 1/500). However, for Tu Liem District, only District Plan (scale 1/5,000) was approved by Hanoi People's Committee in 2000. The District Plan just gives general guidelines on village redevelopment work. It classifies villages into 2 categories: inside and outside urbanized area. Both will be remained and upgraded by improving infrastructure system. The average height is regulated 2 and 1.5, the building coverage 30% and 40-45%, the FAR 0.6 and 0.6-0.7, for village inside and outside urbanized area accordingly. (Figure 11)

In short, it is worth to mention that conservation work of TVC nowadays is in charge of local people. However, detail regulation or guideline to conduct this work is in lack. For TVC itself, except TVC recognized as national heritage which is conserved status quo, no preventive measure has been given to protect the rest account for more than 1/2 of total (46 out of 83). For the TVC's surrounding, because of lacking detail plan, spontaneous construction work of individual threatens to have bad influence on TVC.

**Fig.11:** Tu Liem District Plan  
(Source: *National Institute for Urban and Rural Planning, 2005*)

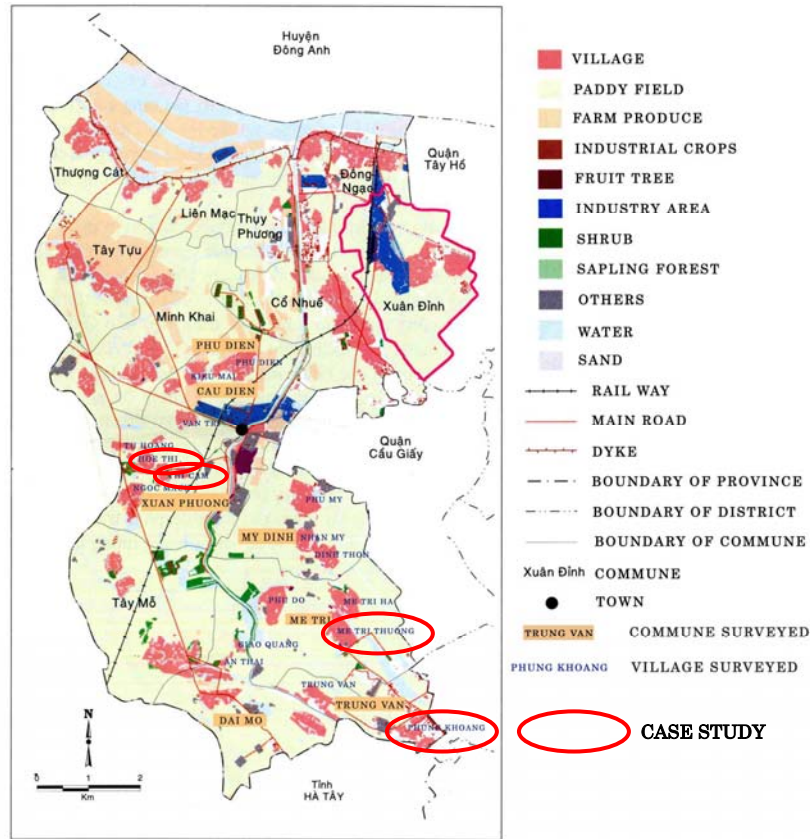
 Village





## II. Analysis transformation process

Four villages and its TVC are chosen as case studies namely Thi Cam, Hoe Thi, Me tri Thuong, and Phung Khoang.



**Fig.12:** The position of case studies – Tu Liem District Map  
(Source: Hanoi GIS Atlas, 2002)

The main characteristics of 4 case studies are summarized as following table:

	Traditional village center		Village	
	Original	Renovated	Urbanized	Non-urbanized
Thi Cam	O			O
Hoe Thi		O		O
Me tri Thuong		O	O	
Phung Khoang	O		O	

**Table 1:** The characteristics of 4 case studies

The area of Hoe Thi Village and Me tri Thuong Village is 38ha approximately, the population is more or less 4500. Thi Cam Village and Phung Khoang Village are much smaller, i.e. 18ha and 17.1ha correspondingly. However, the number of population in 2 latter villages is so different from each other. While the number of resident in Thi Cam Village is about 4000, this figure in Phung Khoang Village reaches 7000 in which 3000 is the number of people renting house here.

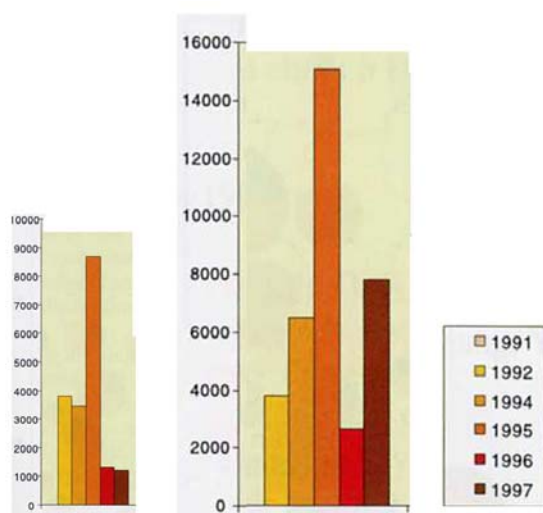


Phung Khoang Village and Me tri Thuong Village now are under strong pressure of urbanization because of being surrounded by new developments such as National Sport Center, National Conference Center (Me Tri Thuong case), New Towns (Phung Khoang case).

The transformation mechanism will be analyzed by comparative study on land use maps of villages and plans of TVCs in 3 times, including 1960, 1994-1998, and 2003-2005. 1960s was the time of subsidized economic system and agriculture co-operative movement. Thanks to Doi Moi (Renovation) policy issued in 1986, 1990s saw the strong development in economic, improving villager's life. With the introduction of Hanoi Master Plan in 1998, encouraging by Law on Land 1993, Tu Liem suburban district has witnessed the profound change in construction work.

## 2.1. Transformation process of village physical structure and its influence on traditional village center

It is worth to mention on the change in number of population of Tu Liem Suburban District from 1960 to 2000s. This period could be divided into 3 phases: 1960-1979, 1979-1990, and after 1990. In the very first phase, although a national program to decrease the birth rate was launched, the figure on birth rate remained high. To be detail, in the early time of the phase, this figure was 3.5%, and at the end of 1970s, 2.3%. In the second phase, the number of population was relatively unchanged thanks to government effort to control birth rate and flow of migration (Hanoi GIS Atlas, 2002). After 1990, there have been 2 trends. For the village located further from Hanoi Center City, the number of population has increased slightly. To be specific, in Xuan Phuong Commune, where Thi Cam Village and



**Fig.13:** Number of people moving out and in of Tu Liem suburban district in 1990-1998

(Source: Hanoi GIS Atlas, 2002)

inner city is so limited that could not satisfy demand, so people want to buy land in the urban periphery. What is more, Hanoi Master Plan issued in 1998 push up the price here.

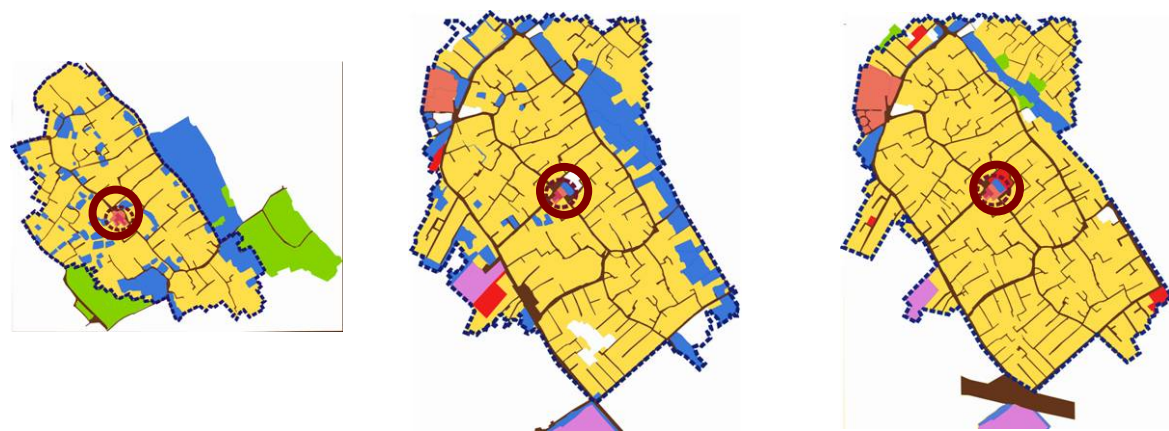
Hoe Thi Village locate, the population rose only 3.069 in 8 years from 1995 to 2003 (Xuan Phuong People's Committee, 2003). However, for the village located next to center city, the situation is in contrast. Although the index on natural increase has declined, its population rises rapidly due to urban-rural migration. Because of low-income in agriculture field, farmers leave their hometown and move to Hanoi. However, they cannot afford price in inner city, and tried to find a living place in the boundary. At the same time, the living area inside

Consequently, more and more people move in to these villages (Hanoi GIS Atlas, 2002). To be detail, in Me Tri Commune where Me tri Thuong Village locates, the increase in population accounts for 20% per year (Me Tri Commune People's Committee, 2005)

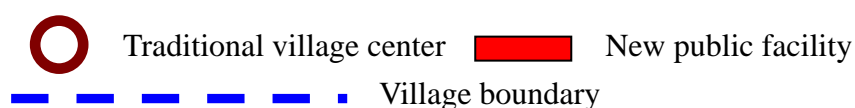
Correspondingly, there are two main phases in the transformation process of village physical structure. Before 1990, four villages chosen had witnessed the expansion in village's area. Particularly, the area of Hoe Thi Village and Me tri Thuong Village climbed nearly double, saying from around 20ha in 1960 to more or less 40 ha in 1994-1998. This trend was halted since 1993 due to the strict control of conversion form agriculture land to residential land regulated by the Law on Land. However, the rapid increase in population in urbanized village as discussed above leads to infill development. The result is rising in building coverage and FAR. It has bad influence on TVC's physical appearance, especially in the village where TVC's surrounding has been developed mainly by private sector.

Interestingly enough, a comparative study on land use maps in different period shows that the main structure of village has relatively unchanged from 1960. Therefore, in term of physical, the TVC's prominence position, locating in the start or center of village and accessing by main road, has been kept.

In term of function, the authentic role as concentration point of activities inside village of TVC has been declined due to rising in number of new public facilities.



**Fig.14:** The transformation process of village physical structure – From left to right: Me tri Thuong land use map in 1960, 1994, 2003 (*MetriThuong People's Committee, 2006*)



## 2.2.The transformation process of traditional village center itself

The transformation process of TVC itself will be studied in 2 aspects, physical and functional one.

In term of physical, the plans of four case studies in 1960, 1994-1998, 2003-2005 show that while the main building has been maintained well, the rest of TVC has changed. Its

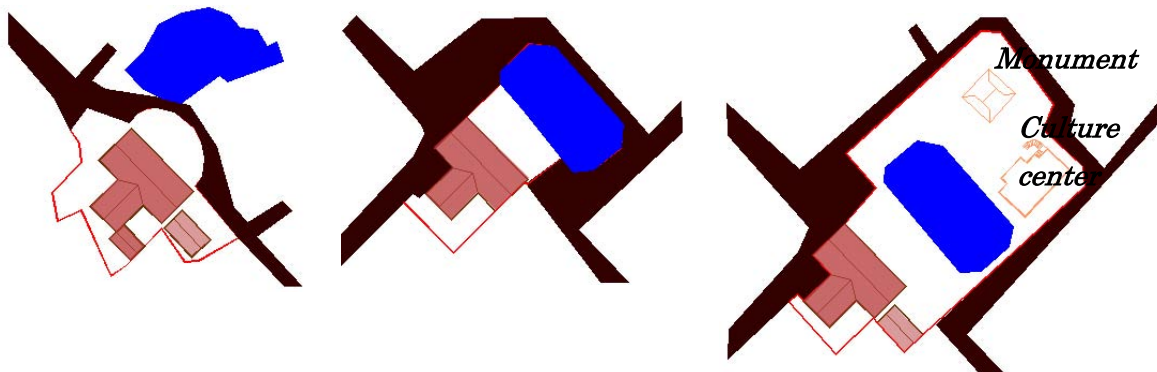
transformation process is depicted through 2 stages, 1960 to 1990s and 1990s to 2000s.

The time 1960-1990s witnessed the destruction in physical setting. There was a sad fact of losing nature element, i.e. garden and pond, destroying secondary building, and starting to insert new structure inside the original boundary with inappropriate architecture style. The main reason is that protection cultural heritage did not draw proper attention because this period was the time right after war, government effort mainly put on economic development..

The time 1990s-2000s has seen positive trend thanks to The Decree on Culture Heritage issued in 1991, and then The Law on Cultural Heritage 2001. TVC has been restored as sacred space. What is more, in an effort to making TVC and surrounding as center for culture activities, new buildings serving for this purpose has been attached. However, without guidelines, these buildings have bad influence on TVC because of blocking view toward TVC and unfit architecture style.



**Fig.15:** New construction attached to TVC-Left to right: New building in Hoe Thi built in 1990s; Culture Center in Me tri Thuong built in 2000s; Monument in Me Tri Thuong built in 2000s (*Photos by author, 2006*)



**Fig.16:** Transformation process traditional village center –Plan of Me tri Thuong traditional village center in 1960, 1994, 2003 (*MetriThuong People`s Committee, 2006*)

In order to get knowledge on the transformation of activities in TVC, an interview with local people was conducted in Phung Khoang Village. The result is summarized in table 2. The change in activities of TVC is demonstrated in 3 periods, including before 1930, from 1930 to 1991, and after 1991. 1930 is the time of starting war. 1991 is the time of recognizing Phung Khoang TVC as national heritage and establishing local organization (Festival Board) to protect village's culture property.

	<i>Activities</i>	<i>Before 1930</i>	<i>1930-1991</i>	<i>After 1991</i>
1	Five-village Festival	O	X	O
2	Village Festival	O	X	O
3	Agriculture Festival	O	X	X
4	Raining Festival	O	X	X
5	Summer start festival	O	X	X
6	Summer end festival	O	X	X
7	Village God Birthday	O	X	O
8	The starting day for Village God's holiday	O	X	O
9	January 1 <sup>st</sup> in moon calendar	O	X	O
10	15 <sup>th</sup> of every month (moon calendar)	O	X	O
11	1 <sup>st</sup> of every month (moon calendar)	O	X	O
12	Wedding	O	X	X
13	Meeting	O	O	X
<i>Note:</i> O: being held X: not being held				

**Table 2: The transformation of activities of Phung Khoang traditional village center** (Source: Personal survey, 2006)

As can be seen, the time 1930-1991 had seen the frozen in activities of TVC. Nowadays, thanks to effort of local organization, many traditional events have been recovered. However, its number drops in compare with the time before 1930, accounts for nearly 50%.

In term of participants, the result of survey points out that most participant is older than 50 years old. The young generation seldom attends traditional events except being asked. It put the challenge for the year ahead because the link between TVC and modern generation is weak.

### 2.3.Future prospect

Base on the analysis of transformation process, future prospect of tradition village center will be given in 3 aspects, including activity, form, and image, in 3 scales, whole village scale, proximity of TVC, and TVC itself. Its result is summarized as following table:

	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Form</b>	<b>Image</b>
--	-----------------	-------------	--------------



	Original	Trend	Original	Trend	Original	Trend
<b>Village scale</b>	Node	Decrease	Prominence location	Kept	Center of village	Gone
<b>Proximity</b>				The physical appearance has bad influence on TVC		
<b>Traditional village center itself</b>	Three function	Decrease, only religious function maintained	Unique architecture style	Kept	Office of Village God	Kept
			Traditional setting		Decisive power on village destiny	Gone

**Table 3:** Future prospect of traditional village center (*Constructed by author, 2006*)

Therefore, it is in need to enhance the activity in TVC and develop the control on the physical appearance in its surrounding

### III. Conclusion

Base on these findings, the most urgent needs for traditional village center is (1) controlling the construction work in surrounding (2) revitalization the activities (3) encourage the role of local people, in order to conserve the traditional environment and enhance the link between villagers and traditional center.

The local organization namely Festival Board has been established in village and achieves some success. However, this organization needs support in both administrative term and profession term. Therefore, an Advisory Board should be established including:

- Local organization (Festival Board)
- Government sector
- Academic sector

The Board should aim to implement the following objectives:

1. To revitalize historical environment
2. To nurture continued activities vitality

What is more, village code has long history in Vietnam village. In the nature, it contains the general rules of conducting voluntarily agreed upon by population communities. It is not

law but only support and complement law in the social management among the population communities and localities. It includes the rules and norms expressed in documents reflecting fine customs, practices, and cultural traditions of localities (Son.L.H, 2004). Since the Village Code had great influence on village in the past and is in process to recover now, two above mentioned objectives can be realized through Village Code that would be revised by the Board. The revising item should comprise as follows:

1. Physical Planning Item:

Since the existing development control is too board to perfectly ensure future construction that may be harmful to the landscape. Physical Planning Item is proposed to revitalize historical environment. The Physical Planning Item should concern:

- The proximity of traditional center: developing urban design guidelines: managing height, improvement programs including architecture element, colors.
- Inside the boundary of traditional center: prohibition of constructing new structure.

2. Activities Item

Due to the lack of proper activities, the link between modern generation and traditional village center is weak. The Activities Item should be:

- Regulate the duty of villager in conserving traditional center
- Revitalize traditional events
- Organize new events which adapt with modern life

The revising Village Code should be submitted by working committee to the local government (Commune People's Committee) for approval.

### **Concluding remarks**

One lesson from this study is that while conservation work is more and more drawn attention, the lack of careful planning, improper activity and weak role of local people have led undesirable transformation. In order to protect the culture property, future conservation planning of Vietnam should aware of impacts from urbanization in both physical and social aspect, role of local people and comply with recommendation.

### **REFERENCES:**

#### **Books**

Dao, D.A (1961), Vietnam History Culture, Bon Phuong Publishing House, Saigon  
Ha, Nguyen (1998), Community Hall, Ho Chi Minh Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City  
Vu, Dam (1991), Culture and Inhabitant of Red River Delta, Society Science Publishing House, Hanoi

**Report**

Architecture Research Institute (1998), Conservation on religious architecture, Hanoi

Tu Liem District People`s Committee (2006), Annual Report, Hanoi

VTGEO (CNST)-UMR CNRS-IRD ``REGARDS``, Bordeaux III University (2002), Hanoi GIS Atlas, Hanoi.

Xuan Phuong Commune People`s Committee (2003), Brief on Economical Social Development Plan in 2003-2010, Hanoi

Me Tri Commune People`s Committee (2005), Annual report, Hanoi

Phung Khoang Commune People`s Committee (2004), Annual report, Hanoi

**Thesis/Dissertation**

Ngo, Q. H (2002), Planning village in Tonkin area in industrialization and modernization trend, Ph.D. Thesis, Hanoi Architecture University, Hanoi

Pham, H.C (2001), Transformation village into urban residential unit in suburban area of Red River Delta, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Civil Engineering, Hanoi.