

Echoes of the Past:
Vietnamese Architecture
Through the Lens of French
Colonialism

Corinthian columns, triangular pediments, and elaborately sculpted adornments—Neoclassical aesthetics in Southeast Asia serve as a canary in the mine for a period when the French exercised colonial power over Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. In particular, we aim to document Neoclassical architecture in the Southern region of Vietnam, specifically in the former capital of French colonial rule on the Indochinese Peninsula, Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon). Our goal is to highlight the cultural details that make each structure uniquely Vietnamese while also exploring how traditional Vietnamese design has been preserved, modified, or integrated into these colonial buildings.

Our study will focus on identifying architectural features present in Vietnamese design prior to French colonization, and how these features were applied, altered, or integrated into Neoclassical buildings. By comparing traditional religious, political, and residential structures with their French colonial counterparts, we aim to uncover the synthesis of two distinct architectural traditions. This research will provide insight into how this cultural fusion shaped the urban landscape of Southern Vietnam.

Our research will concentrate on three key regions: Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City), Cholon (the historic Chinatown of Saigon), and Dalat, each offering unique insights into the intersection of French colonial and traditional Vietnamese architectural styles. These areas were central to French colonial rule and continue to shape the cultural and architectural landscape of Southern Vietnam.

Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City)

As the former capital of French Indochina, Saigon is a focal point for the study of French Neoclassical architecture. The city is home to numerous buildings that reflect French colonial power while adapting to the local environment. Key sites include: *The Saigon Central Post Office (1908)*, *The Ho Chi Minh City Opera House (1883)*, *The Notre-Dame Cathedral Basilica of Saigon (1880)*, *The Former French Colonial Buildings Along Dong Khoi Street*

Cholon (Chinatown of Saigon)

Cholon, the historic Chinatown of Saigon, provides a unique opportunity to explore the intersection of French, Chinese, and Vietnamese architectural styles. In this area, we aim to document how French colonialism influenced local Chinese-Vietnamese designs. Notable sites include: Binh Tay Market, the Cholon Pagodas

Dalat

Unlike the urban centers of Saigon and Cholon, Dalat offers a unique case study in French colonial architecture. Developed as a highland resort town, Dalat was designed to provide respite from the tropical heat, which led to a distinct architectural style. This city's cooler climate and function as a colonial retreat required different architectural considerations, making it an essential area for our research. Key sites in Dalat include: *The Dalat Railway Station (1930s)*, *The Domaine de Marie Church*, *The Dalat Palace Hotel (1922)*

By studying Neoclassical architecture in Southern Vietnam, we aim to document an essential aspect of the country's colonial history and architecture. Our research will foster a greater appreciation for how architectural design evolves over time and space, influenced by both colonial power and local traditions. This project will contribute to a deeper understanding of architectural identity, and the dynamic relationship between indigenous and colonial architectural styles in Southeast Asia

1858
September 1, 1858
French Invasion

1862
Saigon becomes
the capital of
Cochinchina

1880
The Notre-Dame
Cathedral Basilica
of Saigon is built

1883
Ho Chi Minh City
Opera House is
built

1902
Hanoi becomes
the capital of
French Indochina

1908
Saigon Central
post office built

1945
Vietnamese
Independence
from France

1976
July 2, 1976
Hanoi Capital of
unified Vietnam



Budget	
Airfare-----	\$3000
Hotels-----	\$1000
Tour Guide-----	\$1000
Site Visits-----	\$500
Meals-----	\$300
Emergency-----	\$600

