

## MANIFESTATION OF “INDOCHINESE STYLE” IN HANOI’S ARCHITECTURE IN 1920–1950s

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### Abstract

In parallel to the avant-garde development of Western architecture in the 1920s, the architecture in Vietnam developed into the “Indochinese style”, and it became eclectic at its genesis and synthesized specific forms of the architecture of the West and Southeast Asia. In Vietnam, this style combined elements and principles of the national and, to a great extent, the French architecture. The purpose of this article is to identify development patterns, the essence and manifestation of this style in the area of Hanoi from the 1920s till the 1950s. The goal is to be achieved through examining the architecture of specific public, residential and cult and sacred objects.

**Keywords:** “Indochinese style”, architecture of Hanoi, public buildings, residential buildings, cult and sacred buildings, Ernest Hebrard, Arthur Kruze.

### Introduction

In the 1920s, Neoclassicism brought to Vietnam by French colonizers began to give way to eclectic trends. One of the reasons of mass spread of such trend was inconsistency between neoclassical buildings and hot and humid climatic conditions, and that was proven by construction practice. The other reason was a wave of search of new architectural styles, which had already gripped the whole Europe at that time and reached Vietnam. Moreover, the interests of the colonial economy at the certain stage of its development began to require more organic coexistence of cultural and social forms intrinsic to the metropolis and to national consciousness of the aboriginal population. In these conditions, the task was to elaborate a new architectural style, which would combine eclectically the features of the French architecture with elements and principles of composition of the Vietnamese architecture. Finally, the “Indochinese style” became the outcome of these targeted creative endeav-

ors, spreading all over the French colonies in the Indochinese Peninsula.

The pioneer of the new style was Ernest Hebrard. He was then followed by Arthur Kruze, R. Gaston, C. Batteur, Louis Georger, Leo Craste (Ho Hai Nam, 2007) and other Vietnamese architects. Partial changes started to take place in the national architecture under the influence of new trends. Thus, for example, the facades of rowhouse residential buildings (in Vietnam, they were called “tubular houses”) started to adopt some elements of the European architecture. Changes were introduced into the layouts of buildings in the French quarters. Some cult and sacred buildings were built from new construction materials incorporating new methods of construction, etc.

The central city of Vietnam, Hanoi, could not remain on the sidelines of new trends in architecture, and, thus, beginning from the mid-1920s, the “Indochinese style” started to express itself actively in the look of residential

and public buildings constructed in Hanoi, as well as in the look of cult and sacred buildings.

**Materials and methods**

The materials used for this article consist of relevant literature sources (see References), archival sources, cartographic materials, proprietary photos and photos from the Internet, as well as materials representing on-site surveys of the Hanoi development.

The basic methods for solving the key problem are related to the typology group of comparative analysis and summary of outputs.

**Results and discussion**

**Public buildings**

The majority of the “Indochinese” style public buildings featured strictly symmetrical and classical layouts and were built two- or three-storey with the basement that was designed to protect them from moisture and prevented the upper floors from getting wet to remain dry in conditions of high humidity in Hanoi (Tran Quoc Bao, 2011). Horizontal decomposition of facades were formed by a row of windows with stripe cornices over them. The central axis of facades was usually accented with vertical co-articulations and a large decorated roof, which out-topped the

side flanks covered with similar roofs of smaller size. The uniqueness of public buildings was emphasized with two- or three-tier Chong Diem roofs (one tier overlaps another) that were common in Southeast Asia. In structures like that, light embrasures and air vents were located between the upper and the lower roofs. Moldings were placed on roof corners and ridges using so-called “printed letter” technique, which also corresponded to the principles of the architecture of Southeast Asia.

Except for the “stripe” cornice that joined rows of windows, each window was equipped with the straight step-shaped console sandric that served not only as a decorative element, but also as a structural element which supported the gutter and the roof. The composition of windows also included air vents located above or below the window frame, as well as wooden shutters protecting rooms from the sun heat.

Specific examples of “Indochinese” style manifestation in the look of public buildings in Hanoi is presented below.

- *Main building of the Indochinese University* (1927, architect Ernest Hebrard). The building was the first example of the “Indochinese” style. It is characteristic that the initial project was consistent with stylistics of Neoclassicism. However, during the construction, Ernest Hebrard resolutely changed the facades using numerous elements



Figure 1. Public buildings: (a) main building of the Indochinese University; (b) building of Louis Finot Museum; (c) building of the Department of Finance

of the architectural style of Southeast Asia (Ngo Huy Quynh, 2008).

The facade's key accent is its two-tier hipped roof located along the central axis. Between the tiers, there are rectangular windows intermixed with concrete “Chinese” consoles, which imitate wooden structures. The facades are decorated with moldings following the Vietnamese traditions. Above the main entrance, there is an “open book” type cartouche, an octagon from the “Book of Changes” and the iron grid in the shape of coins, symbolizing wealth and prosperity. Above the yard entrance, there is a large balcony of the second floor. The balcony’s balustrade is formed with molded elements replicating the motive of elements on the roof. The entrance is flanked by two false “lamp post” type columns corresponding to the Vietnamese traditions, which are often found in Tam Quan (triple-arch gate) (Figure 1a).

The main hall is decorated with a large Vietnamese fresco made by V. Tardieu. It depicts the life of the Hanoi society in the beginning of the 20th century. In the background one can see a traditional Tam Kuan.

- *Building of Louis Finot Museum* (1926–1931, architects: Ernest Hebrard and C. Bateur). The cross-shaped layout of the building is naturally organized around the central display area (Tran Quoc Bao, 2011). An essential supplement is the large octagon-shaped lobby with a corresponding dome-shaped roof. This “European” composition features shapes that typical to traditional architecture of Southeast Asia. Thus, the octagonal dome of the lobby overtops the structure of three-tier roofs, whereas the up-

per roof is supported by Chinese consoles. In general, the shape of the roof resembles the bell tower of Keo pagoda in Thai Binh Province.

The roofs of the display area resemble roofs of Khmer pagoda in South Vietnam. However, roofs of Khmer pagoda have no air vents or light embrasures, as opposed to the Vietnamese Chong Diem style. The lower roof has a wide extension in order to cover large windows from the sun and the rain. The canopy is supported by paired columns with consoles, styled on elements of the traditional wooden frame. Together with contours of the balustrades, they create an image of the traditional architecture of Southeast Asia. The end facades are enriched with decorative chong giuong frame made from wooden bars. Only absence of stucco wall decor (because of the wall colonnade) distinguishes the facades of the museum building from other buildings.

Natural lighting and air ventilation are provided through traditional combination of window frames, where smaller frames overtop the larger ones. Together with air ventilation embrasures located on the roofs, they allow for horizontal and vertical air circulation inside the building (Figure 1b).

- *Building of the Department of Finance* (1925–1928, architect Ernest Hebrard) (Ngo Huy Quynh, 2008). The building, having the shape of the “gong” letter (工), consists of four-storey and three-storey buildings joined together by the covered way.

The facade of the main building is classically symmetrical and structured with three projections, the one in the

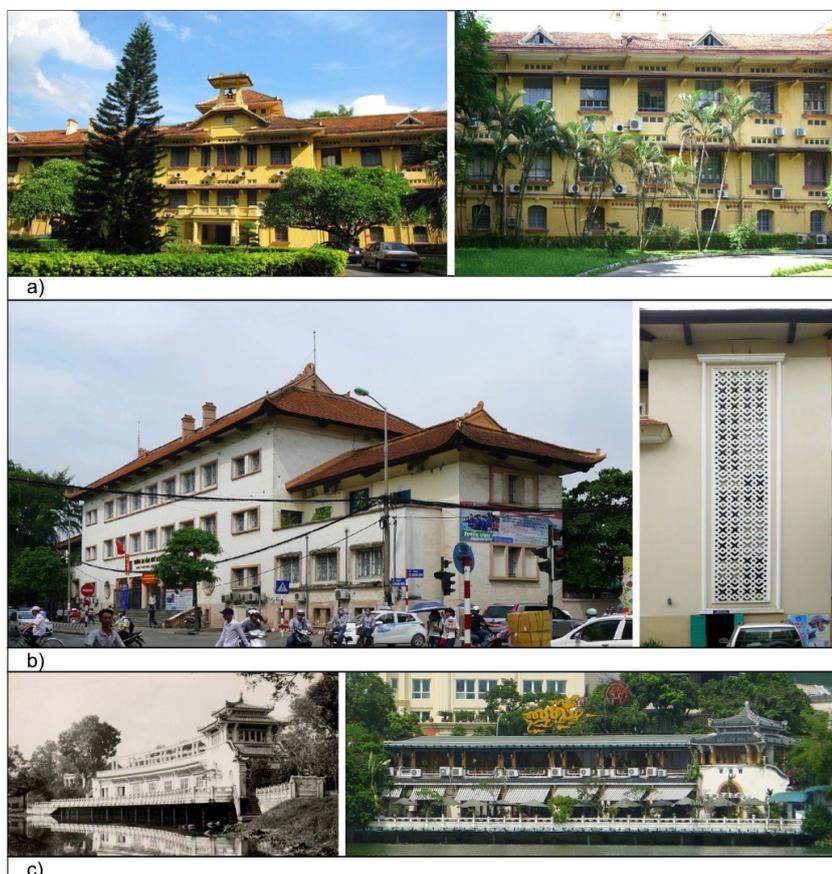


Figure 2. Public buildings: (a) building of the Institut Pasteur; (b) building of Indochina Guest House; (c) building of Thuy-Ta Restaurant

center and two from the sides. Above the central projection, there is a tower, the roof of which with wide extension is supported by columns. The stripe of windows of the third floor is accented with cornices located above and below the window frames. Two watch towers are topped by eightfold sloping roof. Other features of the Indochinese style are represented by the “open book” cartouche on the fronton, the roof with plain Vietnamese Vai Ka or Mui Hai tile, two single Chinese consoles supporting the balcony and consoles of upper buildings, as well as stucco on the fence in the shape of lotus buds which might be often found in pagodas (Figure 1c).

- *Building of the Institut Pasteur* (1928, architect R. Gaston) (Ngo Huy Quynh, 2008). The central axis of the three-storey building with the gallery along the south facade is featured by a small bell tower topped by the roof in Asian style. Below it, there is a complex roof with various slopes. Deep inside the building, a two-tier Chong Diem roof can be seen. On the wall between the roofs, there is an ornament made of glazed bricks in the shape of a lemon flower (Figure 2a).

In front of the main facade, there is a large garden with trees planted to protect the building from the sun.

- *Building of the Indochinese Guest House* (1938–1942) consists of the three-storey central building and two two-storey side blocks. The corresponding roofing

system is associated with the ancient Vietnamese Tam Quan system. All roofs feature traditional Vietnamese curved (using Dau Dao elements) corners and ridges decorated in line with the Vietnamese traditional decor pattern, but only in simplified version. The main roof is covered with ridge tile. In contrast to others, the building of the guest house has no common stripe canopies and over-the-window sandrics on its facades. The main entrance is similar to the portico of Louis Finot Museum (Figure 2b).

- *Building of Thuy-Ta Restaurant* (1937, architect Vo Duc Dien) (Hoi KTS, 2008) was built using reinforced concrete structures. Its curved shape repeats the bend of the shore of Hoan Kiem Lake and creates an image of a ship with a tower topped by two-tier eightfold sloping Chong Diem roof. The tower looks similar to Tran Ba Dinh tower of Ngoc Son Temple located across the lake on the island. Big “European” windows with simple patterns are coupled with “Chinese” stripe canopy and the oriental landscape art (Figure 2c).

**Residential buildings**

- *Hau Lau Palace* (1821) was intended as a residential place for imperial concubines. In 1883, French colonizers renovated this three-storey rectangular building. Its central part and two side parts are crowned with three-

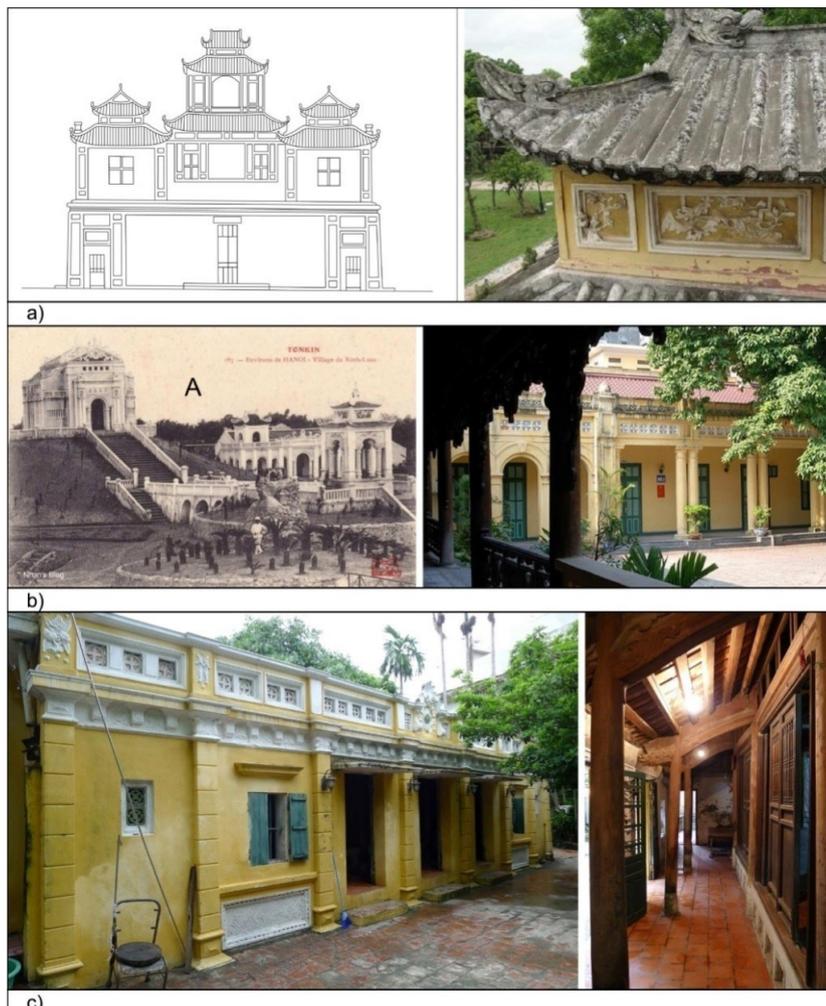


Figure 3. Residential buildings: (a) Hau Lau Palace; (b) Thai Ha Ensemble; (c) traditional residential house in neoclassical style

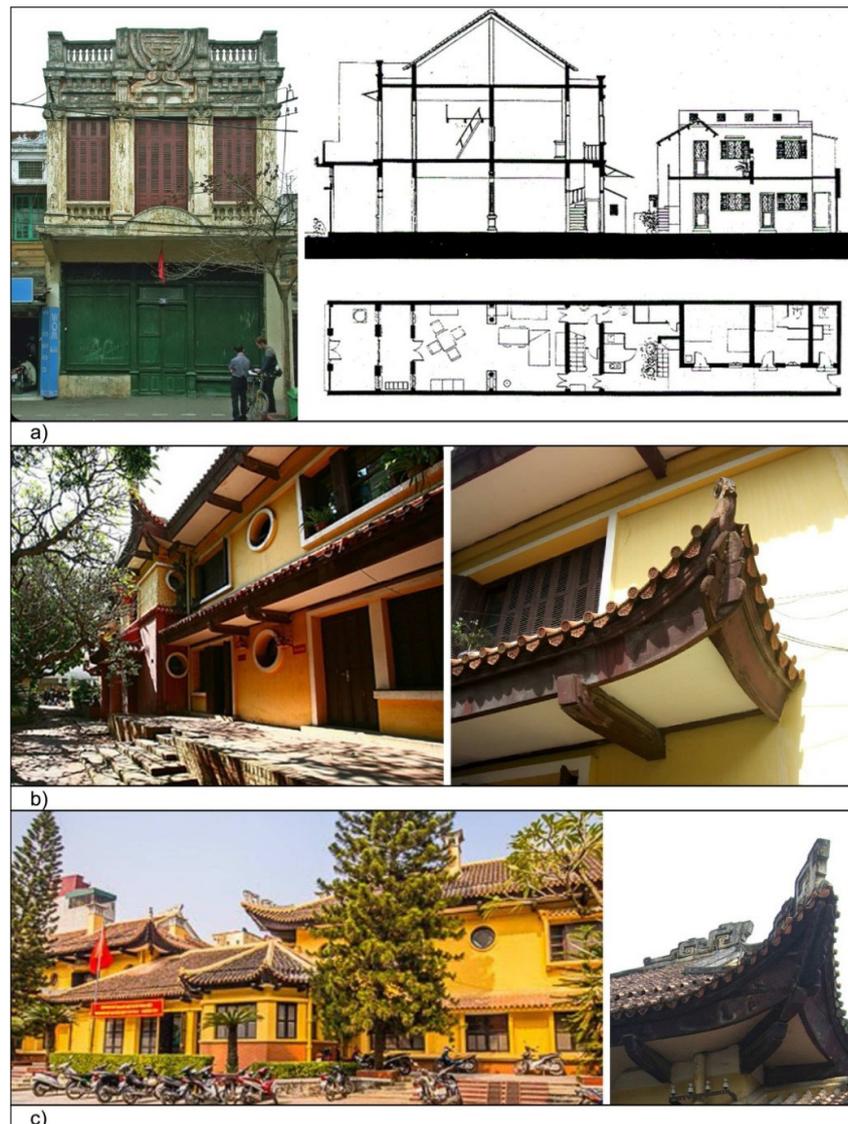


Figure 4. Residential buildings: (a) “tubular” house; (b), (c) French Officers Villa and Naval Club Villa

and two-tier roofs. These outwardly traditional roofs were nevertheless made of reinforced concrete, including “tile”. Traditional but simplified reliefs are made of stucco (Cong thong tin dien tu Chinh phu, 2010) (Fig 3a).

This restored building is the first example of non-conceptual “Indochinese style”.

- *Thai Ha Ensemble* was built at the end of the 19th century to the south of Hanoi and consisted of residences, mausoleums, pagodas, temples, etc. The large plot had a rectangular layout (the owner was a nobleman under Nguyen dynasty). All structures of the ensemble were made of new construction materials using new technique featuring the Asian and European eclectic style. The combination of classical and Vietnamese forms and techniques paved the way to a brand new architectural style of that time. For example, the big crowning fronton on the facade is complemented with two “lamp post” type Vietnamese columns that framed the arch. The family temple was topped by two traditional towers built of concrete and brick. The temple was divided into seven sections. Three central sections had classical

columns supporting the large eaves on the terrace, and on the sides there were symmetrically standing arches with “lamp post” style columns. The pavement of the terrace depicted red dragons (Tap chi dien tu Van Hien Viet Nam, 2014) (Figure 3b).

Terraced residential houses (so-called “tubular” houses), which essentially are the traditional Chong Diem dwellings transformed under influence of the French architecture, represent a large group of “Indochinese style” architecture. Their “adjoint” facade (usually only one) overtops the roof and is designed in line with neoclassical style. However, the gable roof and the interior space of the house remained traditional (Figure 3c).

The facades of “tubular” houses in French quarters strictly followed Western architectural style, but their layout was influenced by traditional style houses of old quarters. Some Indochinese architectural features often appeared in the course of construction (“open book”, “lotus buds” cartouches, “lamp post” columns, etc.) (Figure 4a). This type of houses was popular in the 1920s through the 1940s (Dang Thai Hoang, 1999).



Figure 5. Residential buildings: (a), (b), (c) residential buildings and villas with Southeast Asian decor

The interior of “tubular” houses of that time was peculiar. The space between rooms was provisionally divided by two Corinthian columns instead of traditional wooden columns that divided the internal space of the house into three sections. Sometimes two Corinthian columns were linked with a round arch.

Traditional construction materials were gradually replaced by new ones; brick, steel and even reinforced concrete were used instead of wood.

At the end of the 1930s, villas featuring eclectic facades started to appear. The pioneer was architect Arthur Kruze. The most significant pieces of art created by him in this architectural style were the French Officers Villa and the Naval Club Villa.

- *French Officers Villa* (1939) features a rectangular layout and volumetric solution using traditional motives (Hoi KTS, 2015). Thus, the terrace in front of the entrance is topped by the “Vietnamese” roof supported by two red columns. The wall above the roof is actively decorated using “printed letter” technique. The whole building is covered with a set of curved roofs. Except for the main roof, there is a canopy stripe above the front terrace and canopies above windows of the rear facade. All roofs have large eaves supported by wooden consoles. The decorated roof elements are made in the same way as in previous

buildings. Roof corners feature curves using Dau Dao. Bedrooms are located symmetrically to the main axis of the building. All windows are framed with volumetric cover plates (Figure 4b).

- *Naval Club Villa* (1939–1940) (Hoi KTS, 2015) consists of the central public and two side bedroom blocks. There is a large terrace in front of the building. Decorative elements on the balustrade, windows and console surface feature the architectural style of Southeast Asia. The system of roofs with varying elevation on the main facade is divided into three uniform parts. Two bedroom blocks are topped by jerkin-head roof, and the main section of the common block is covered with eightfold sloping roof (Figure 4c).

The architect of these two buildings Arthur Kruze found an unusual solution by locating the gutter at the intersection of the walls and the roof. The area of roof projections is small, therefore, the volume of rain water is not significant and it freely streams down to the yard.

Vietnamese architects also made their contribution to the development of “Indochinese style”. Residential houses and villas built by them were mainly located near Thien Quang Lake, where Vietnamese intellectuals were settling, who, as a rule, took interest in modern interpretations of traditional architectural forms. Small two-storey

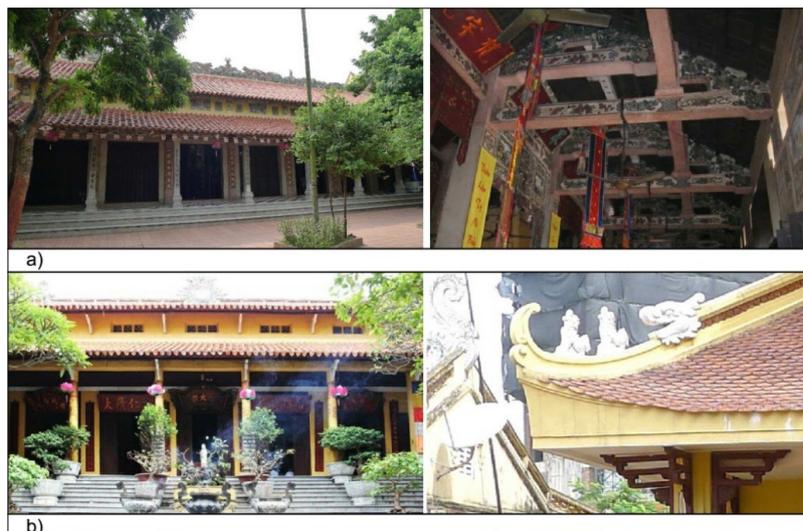


Figure 6. Cult and sacred buildings: (a) Hung Ky Pagoda; (b) Quan Su Pagoda

villas that were built for them, with bedrooms on the second floor were mainly built from brick and reinforced concrete. Only doors were made of wood featuring traditional decor. Even so, the system of roofs remained traditional. Hipped roofs were still embellished with bas-reliefs typical for Southeast Asia (Figure 5 a, b, c).

#### Cult and sacred buildings

The eclectic style of cult and sacred buildings was formed under the influence of new construction materials and technologies, as mechanical combination of Western architectural forms with traditional forms in such extremely sustainable typological group of buildings was impossible.

- *Hung Ky Pagoda* (1932) was constructed from reinforced concrete and faced with porcelain tile. Its facades were enriched with “open book” style cartouches, mosaics and reliefs made from porcelain (TT Cong nghe thong tin — BVH, TT & DL, 2010). The architectural composition and bearing construction of the building were also tradi-

tional. Reinforced concrete elements of the main block of Chinh Dien were covered with light rose-colored stucco with fine-grained chips. Together with the mosaics, they contributed to formation of the multi-colored image. On the central axis of the pagoda, there is a temple built in strictly traditional manner, and nearby there are some other buildings of colonial architecture that were built for bonzes (Figure 6a).

The combination of architectural objects of different times, constructed using various materials and embellished with rich decor is rare and is a great value for pagodas. Skillful use of concrete for the construction of cult and sacred objects is as well considered as valuable.

- *Quan Su Pagoda* was built in the 15th century. In 1942, it was reconstructed by architect Nguyen Ngoc Ngoan. This is the first pagoda countrywide that had two storeys. 30 years later two other similar pagodas would be built in Saigon. All of them were constructed from brick, using reinforced concrete structures, though using slight-



Figure 7. Cult and sacred buildings: (a) Cua Bac Catholic Cathedral; (b) two other cathedrals

ly bended traditional two-tier roofs, as Dau Dao element was renovated in order to meet the characteristics of concrete. Concrete consoles, imitating the wooden ones, did not support the roofs anymore. To create the traditional image, the ridges were embellished with mythological images and stripes of glazed brick. Walls, doors and window frames were decorated as well (Figure 6b).

- *Cua Bac Catholic Cathedral* (1930–1932, architect Ernest Hebrard) was built near the northern gates of Hanoi's citadel. The cathedral is almost the only sacred building in Hanoi, where volumetric Neo-Renaissance composition is combined with Asian style.

The temple is topped by the system of roofs in Southeast Asian style. The main roofs feature Chong Diem" type forms, others feature Khmer pagoda roofs. However, all of them are built of reinforced concrete structures. There are also small decorative roofs. Windows are always left open providing constant lighting for interior spaces (Figure 7a).

In Hanoi, there are two other sacred buildings that were built before Cua Bac Cathedral. Their common feature is in application of traditional Vietnamese roofs for the whole building, and the use of new construction materials along with wooden roof construction (Figure 7b).

### Conclusion

The formation of the "Indochinese style" in the capital of Vietnam was a logical consequence of socio-cultural and socio-economic processes that took place in the first half of the 20th century, both in Europe and in the Asian

colonies of France. Providing certain wholeness to the development of the European economy in the Asian country required blurring out the sharp distinctions in the nature of production and culture between France and Vietnam. The same was required for peaceful coexistence between local population and colonizers. As to the architecture, the task involving creation of the synthesized style was facilitated by extensive experience in eclectic architecture in Europe of the 19th century. But there was also "counter flow" of reasons for the formation of the "Indochinese style" in Vietnamese architecture, i.e. the desire of educated population of the Vietnamese society to assimilate attractive forms of the European culture.

Specific manifestations of the "Indochinese style" in buildings for various typological groups had similar optional features, the key among which were the following:

- use of elements of Western architecture in building facades and in course of volumetric construction of buildings, while maintaining the traditional principles of interior arrangement;
- application of of the Vietnamese system of natural air conditioning of rooms in western buildings, which is vital for humid and hot climate;
- embellishment of the European-style buildings with elements typical for the architecture of the countries of Southeast Asia. The most common was the use of tiered roofs with curved edges;
- masking concrete structures and elements under traditional wooden forms.

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