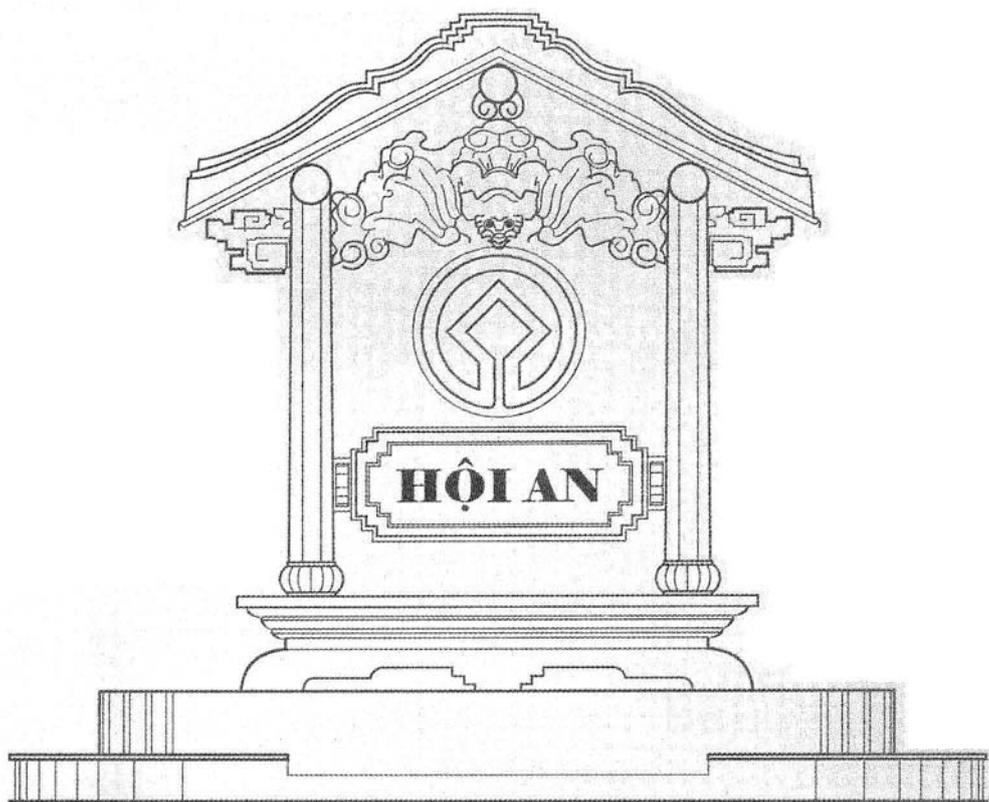


ACHR Asian Heritage Project



Hoi An, Vietnam Mission Report

**by André Alexander
with Maurice Leonhardt and Nguyen Huong**

ACHR Asian Heritage Project Visit to Hoi An, Vietnam

Hoi An mission report by André Alexander with input from Maurice Leonhardt
Time: November 23.11.-28.11

Mission participants: Maurice Leonhardt (ACHR), Nguyen Thi Thu Huong (Hanoi-based architect and ACHR contact), André Alexander (heritage coordinator).

I General Description

Hoi An is a former trading port in Quang Nam province, about 30 km South-East of city and airport of Danang, the provincial capital.

The bay area where the city is located has been inhabited since ancient times. The present town Hoi An was founded at the end of the 16th century as a settlement of Vietnamese, Japanese and Chinese traders, in line with a policy of keeping foreign traders away from administrative centers. European traders also frequented the area since that time. The town prospered in the 17th and 18th centuries, but declined in the 19th century when trade patterns changed.

During the French War the city was bombarded and suffered some damage. During the American War the city fortuitously escaped damage and destruction.

Hoi An was recognized as national heritage already in 1985, and in 1986 a management office for the conservation of the old town was established.

Present-day Hoi An, with a population of 31,200, is not large, but spread out. The historic center consists of little more than three long thoroughfares running parallel to the Thu Bon river (ca. 30ha).

In 1999 Hoi An was added to the World Heritage List.

The UNESCO's evaluation committee justifies the inscription as follows:

Hoi An Ancient Town is an exceptionally well-preserved example of a South-East Asian trading port dating from the 15th to the 19th century. Its buildings and its street plan reflect the influences, both indigenous and foreign, that have combined to produce this unique heritage site.

Criterion (ii): Hoi An is an outstanding material manifestation of the fusion of cultures over time in an international commercial port.

Criterion (v): Hoi An is an exceptionally well preserved example of a traditional Asian trading port.

Physical description

The old town consists of three different quarters, the Japanese, Chinese and French quarter. The streets are lined by tile-roofed single and two-storey shop houses built in a blend of various Asian and European architectural styles.

The Japanese architectural influence is less visible today, as Chinese traders took over most of the trade following Japan's policy of restricting contacts with the outside world under the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1635 and the gradual decline of the Japanese quarter in Hoi An. Even though the Dutch, Portuguese and other Europeans traded here since early times, the French Quarter came into existence only in the 19th century, developing in parallel to France's political colonization of the country.

The old town is organized into three wards, each with 6 neighbourhood committees of around a 1000 people. There is also a so-called "street leader" for every 40-50 households.

Relevant management regulations and upgrading mechanism

A management office for the old town was established in 1986 for the conservation of the old town when Hoi An became national heritage. The management office received technical assistance from UNESCO and financial assistance from Japan when Hoi An became world heritage in 1999.

Funded partly by donor money and partly from funds locally raised (tourist tickets, taxes), the management office currently engages in infrastructure upgrading and has a policy for subsidizing house repair. Initially, with Japanese donor funds, the government offered 80% of the costs for repair of historic buildings in the old town. At that time, the work was undertaken by government-affiliated builders. A conservation fund organized as revolving fund was established in order to help people who couldn't pay their contribution to housing repair. The scheme has now changed, depending on the historic value of a building (as graded by the management office's experts) the subsidy from the government is between 20 and 55% only. Residents can carry out some of the repairs themselves. However, if the house is subsequently sold, the subsidy has to be paid back to the government from the proceeds of the sale. The government has recently restricted the opening of more shops and tourist services in the old town, due to the well-known phenomenon that shops selling all the same kind of souvenirs profligate. Cars are not allowed into the old town, and even the use of motorcycles is restricted several times per week.

Observations

There is a bustling local market in the center of town, where both souvenirs and local products such as fish and vegetables are sold. Many ordinary people live in Hoi An, seemingly unaffected by the busloads of foreign tourists.

II Our assessment according to the project criteria

1 People's participation in the heritage project

a) Have the residents (poor and other) participated early in the planning phase?

NO, the good state of preservation is due to the decline of the trading economy. The World Heritage application was launched by the government, as is the norm in such cases. However, since then there seems to have been a form of local consultation for planning the upgrading and restoration activities.

b) Who are the main actors? Who initiated the conservation project and why? Who is the main driving force of the process – government, private sector, external agencies, universities or community groups?

THE local city government has a great deal of authority unknown in other Vietnamese cities, and is the main driving force for the conservation project.

The academic establishment, and especially the Vietnam architectural association played a big role in pushing the national and international recognition of Hoi An.

c) Participation in the implementation?

THE local form of participation consists of public meetings in the neighbourhood offices. For example, The survey of individual houses was carried out by an expert team. Based on that survey the government's plan for subsidizing house repair was formulated, the plan was also discussed during these neighbourhood meetings.

According to some of our interview sources, people do speak about their interests during these meetings, and this qualifies as a kind of consultative process, which we

have been unable to qualify further as special permission would be necessary for us to participate in such meetings.

d) Participation in maintenance? YES according to the new mechanism people can get financial assistance but can carry out some of the works themselves. This is unlike in Lijiang where government experts would select which building would be repaired and also selected what the repairs would be.

e) Participation in overall management of project / district government? YES but limited through Neighbourhood Office meetings, which appear here to be more inclusive and participatory than in China. People told us that during those meeting people often make their points and express their interests.

f) Existence of community-based organisation? NO.

g) Existence of savings groups? YES, the traditional savings groups that have existed in Vietnam for a long time. A small interview with a member of such group with monthly saving was conducted. Group consist of 10-15 women in the same neighbourhood with the same amount of monthly saving (100.000 - 300.000 VND). They take turns in receiving loans from the saved money without interest. Most of the people could access the loans of the government program for the poor that has low interest rates (6% per year), provided they have a Hoi An resident permit.

Rating: 4 out of 5

2 How are the urban poor / low-income residents affected?

a) To what extent do they depend on the historic area for cheap housing?

EVEN before the economic reform policy of Doi Moi, the Hoi An old town was locally considered a more expensive neighbourhood. The low-income communities traditionally live around the old town in nearby quarters and villages, but come to the center for their livelihoods.

b) Have there been resettlements and relocations? NO only families formerly living on boats without homes have first moved into the city in the mid-1990s but already a few years later (between 2 to 5 for our informants) they were given new houses on the other side of the river, 5 minutes away from the old town by bicycle, and still with river access.

c) Population figures of low-income residents 10 years ago / before any heritage initiative started, and today? NO figures were available, but according to information obtained locally, there has been no shift in residential patterns during this time.

d) Changes in economic patterns for the poor – has their traditional livelihood been affected adversely (closing of markets, workshops etc), unintentionally positively (fringe benefits) or intentionally positive (new jobs, new markets for local products)? Had the project design promised these things?

ACCORDING to our sources, prices of staple foods are not affected by tourism. Everybody interviewed was of the uniform opinion that his or her life had improved considerably over the past ten years. Many attributed this to the tourists "who brought in money", with new demand for labour and products. Some people, like the sellers of fish and vegetables, said that they did not really benefit much from tourism, but saw no harm either.

e) *Have living conditions improved (infrastructure – access to safe drinking water, better waste management, better drainage etc.)?* THEY have improved considerably, and are still improving. During our time we saw street paving in progress, and also heard about efforts to move the power grid lines to underground. The streets were kept very clean, and there are good public toilets. However, we did not find information about the existence of a sewage treatment system, and how the toilet system worked.

Rating: 4 out of 5

3 The impact of tourism

a) *Which impacts can be observed?*

THERE has been a big impact, easily observable in the number of souvenir shops and tourist restaurants in the old towns. One effect we noticed was that some people, including children and even old people, would routinely ask foreigners for money. Others, such as the sellers in the local market, seem to take little notice of foreigners. Compared to other tourist districts, such as Kathmandu's Thamel or Bangkok's Khao San road, the atmosphere in Hoi An's old town is very laid back, with few hussles. The overall impact so far has been much less than in many other tourist destination cities, thanks in part to government efforts to restrict the opening of too many shops selling the same things, and banning the sex industry (no massage parlours allowed).

b) *What gains / interests for the tourist industry have negative / neutral / positive impacts on communities? Which interests of the tourist industry might result in conflicts with community interests?*

THE house owners have benefited considerably, as they can get co-financing from the government for house repair. The first phase of the project saw subsidies of up to 80% of total costs, this has now decreased. A large group of people in the old town earns their living from tourist-related activities.

Rating: 3 out 5 – the impact is more positive than negative,

4 Physical Aspects of Heritage Conservation

a) *Were the results of heritage work carried out positive (good quality work, authenticity of place preserved)?*

Overall there is a strong feeling of authenticity because original materials, scale and grain are dominant, and streets are still cobble-stone paved and there are no cars. Advertising is restricted.

Rating: 4 out of 5

5 Finances

How much money for historic conservation work came from tourism? How much from external sources? How much from the private sector (or from public-private partnerships), how much from government, how much from the communities?

THE management office said that the conservation management was funded by money from the national, provincial and local government levels, as well as from money raised for the purpose (such as the selling of entrance tickets to the old town, this money apparently goes directly into the project). The UNESCO gave only technical

assistance, but other donor money has helped to launch the upgrading subsidy process.

How much in relation to the overall was spent on low-income communities?

Under the former subsidy system, poor people could easily claim assistance for housing upgrading, since they needed to contribute only 10% (another 10% could be waived). Under the current system, apparently poor residents can also claim a larger part of government subsidy as part of the design of the upgrading project. Houses that are located in back alleys, with little economic potential for the owners, are also receiving more assistance.

Rating: 5 out of 5

6 The Image of the city

Has it changed / improved as a result of heritage conservation work? Is the heritage district a main factor for the image of the city or a lesser factor?

The Heritage status is the single most important recognition factor for Hoi An.

7 Who were the conservationists and where had they received their training?

Conservation

The names of the schools and conservation courses that are available in the city / country and their nature and orientation.

There are no conservation courses available in Hoi An (which is a very small city), the current experts of the management office were trained in Danang, Hue, Hanoi, Ho-Chi-Minh City, including the director Mr. Nguyen who was trained in Hue.

Conservation and relocation laws, zoning regulations and procedures in the city/country, building by-laws and zoning regulations and the manner in which they impinge on conservation-related development.

We obtained a copy of the management office's publication containing the regulations. The publication (in Vietnamese) is of high quality and also describes the step-by-step procedure for applying for government assistance.

The local authority in Hoi An is very powerful in setting up and enforcing of conservation regulations. However, currently they are more concerned that too much is happening at the same time, and they aim to slow down the process to improve quality. They have identified 1007 historic houses that are eligible for government assistance.

Rating: 4.5 out of 5

Overall rating: 4 out of 5.

When we asked the vegetable market sellers whether they feared that their market would be relocated in the future to make space for tourist souvenirs, they said that that would never happen, because it would be too much of a hardship for people. This is a great compliment to the local government, and sums up our judgment that the authorities seem to be genuinely concerned with the welfare of the residents.

III Recommendations:

In general, the work of the management committee seems so far to have achieved a good balance between conservation principles and community interests. Their idea not to have too many projects at the same time is quite admirable. There are several pro-poor details in the upgrading mechanism that are very laudable. One wonders whether rising tourist numbers will have a stronger impact in the future, and how well the town is prepared for that. The main concern from the heritage task force's point of view is that the community participation process, though it reportedly exists, could not be witnessed.

It would be good if one of the Hoi An Neighbourhood Community offices could organize a residents' meeting where a group of community people from Thailand or another country could participate.

Under the new regulations the government offers less contribution for housing upgrading than before, maximum around half of the costs. The government contribution depends on the heritage value of a building, and poor residents generally live in less splendid homes that qualify for less assistance. Therefore a savings mechanism might be necessary for poor residents to participate.

It should be explored whether the traditional savings groups that exist in Hoi An could become involved in helping with the housing upgrading programme offered by the management office. It should also be explored whether the ACHR savings groups already existing in other Vietnamese cities could be expanded to include Hoi An with the focus of financing housing upgrading. A particular focus of such activities should be the sellers of fish, poultry and meat at the local market, who so far seem not to benefit from the tourist boom in Hoi An.

IV Sources

Persons interviewed:

- ∞ Ms Ngyuen Thi Thu Huong, Hanoi-based architect who knows Hoi An for years
- ∞ Nguyen Chi Trung, Director, Hoi An Centre for Monuments Management & Preservation
- ∞ Ms Le Thi Thu Thuy, Administration, Hoi An Centre for Monuments Management & Preservation
- ∞ Owners/Proprietors of Kim Quyen tailor shop (residents of Hoi An for generations)
- ∞ Owners/Proprietors of Tram Anh tailor shop (residents of Hoi An for generations)
- ∞ Ms Do "Yun", tour operator (resident of Hoi An for generations)
- ∞ Uncle of Ms Do "Yun", who lives in his old ancestral home near the Japanese bridge
- ∞ Mr Tran Duong, owner of heritage house 25 Phan Boi Chau ((resident of Hoi An for generations)
- ∞ Tourist Boat operator, female, makes 90\$ net profit a month
- ∞ Resettled "boat" family #1, was first given land in 1992 near old town, resettled near water front on opposite shore in 2005
- ∞ Resettled "boat" family #2, was given land ca. 7 years ago, resettled 1-2 years ago
- ∞ Kim Dong village carpenter, says he rarely gets commissions from Hoi An but since Kim Dong village is doing well, he finds enough customers here
- ∞ Cigarette Stall seller
- ∞ Hoi An Old Museum of History & Culture main operator
- ∞ Market souvenir seller #1, makes good money since he shifted from taxi driver to shopkeeper selling souvenirs

- ∞ Vegetable market seller #1, works hard, buys vegetables and re-sells, makes just ok money, says its impossible now to get a license for selling souvenirs
- ∞ Vegetable market seller #2, works hard, buys vegetables and re-sells, makes just ok money
- ∞ Fish market seller #1, works hard, buys fish from fishermen and re-sells, doesn't make much money
- ∞ Kim Dong village vegetable market seller #1, sells vegetables to Hoi An market, says business is good but not as good as in selling tourist items
- ∞ Owner of old house under reconstruction near ferry pier

Sites visited:

Old town, Kim Dong village, "vegetable village", beach, modern districts of Hoi An, Japanese bridge, Museum of History & Culture, Historic house of Quan Thang, Historic house of Mr. Tran Duong, main Buddhist temple, Marble mountain.

Source materials

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"Local Case Study Team": Culture Heritage Management and Tourism: Models for Co-operation among Stakeholders, A Case Study on Hoi An Viet Nam, Bhaktapur 2000, online @ <http://www.unescobkk.org/index.php?id=474>)

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ibid.: FINAL REPORT IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION PLANS HOI AN - VIET NAM, Hoi An 2001

UNESCO Advisory Body: EVALUATION REPORT CONCERNING THE INSCRIPTION OF HOI AN ON THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST, http://whc.unesco.org/archive/advisory_body_evaluation/811.pdf

WORLD BANK Poverty and Human Resources division: Vietnam Living Standards Survey (VLSS), 1997-98, Basic Information, 2001

Hoi An Sites	Vietnam	Heritage for People Project
	23 - 28 November 2006	ACHR / THF



Hoi An center of the old town, Thu Bon river front with ferry pier and fish market



Map of the old town, showing the first- & 2nd grade protected districts (red, yellow) and buffer zone (blue)



Nguyen Thai Hoc Street is still very laid back, despite being one of the main tourist haunts



Vietnamese and Chinese style historic houses



Buildings influenced by French colonial architecture



Cafes in the old town are very popular with foreign tourists

Hoi An Sites	Vietnam	Heritage for People Project
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The Japanese bridge, linking two sections of the old town, was built by a Japanese donor in the 17th century.



The heritage house in the old town, used by the management office for housing exhibitions.



Exhibition in the heritage house.



Sign proclaiming a heritage site restored by the government with Japanese assistance.



Art imitating life.



Traffic is restricted, cars are not allowed, and motorbikes only sometimes.

Hoi An Sites

Vietnam

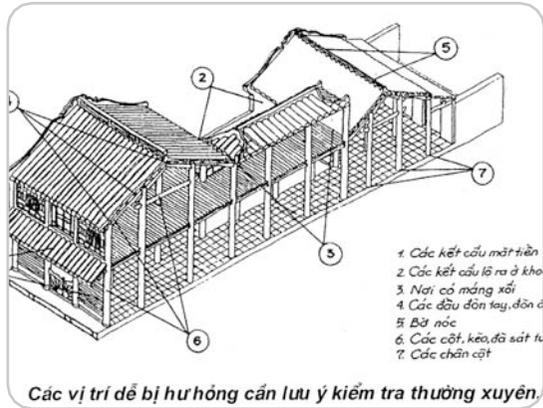
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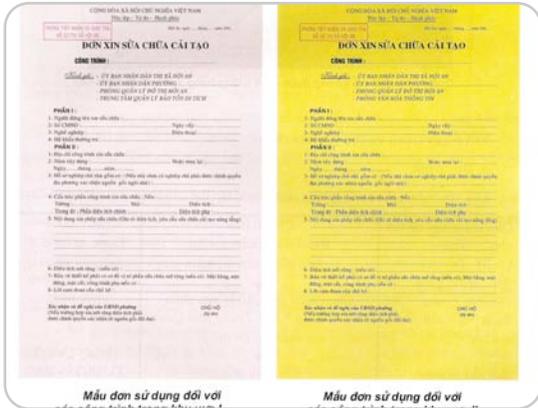
ACHR / THF



A view of 18th century Hoi An from a historic scroll painting in the possession of a local museum .



Section drawing, showing typical Vietnamese “long house” (source: management committee).



The forms for claiming assistance from government for house repairs.



Typical Vietnamese roof structure often found in Hoi An, Chinese-influenced timber frame and roof tiles.



Roof structure of a Chinese-style temple in the Museum for History and Culture.



House in the old town undergoing government-supported repairs.

Interviews - Hoi An	Vietnam	Heritage for People Project
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Ms Nguyen Thi Thu Hong
Hanoi-based architect who knows Hoi An for years.



Nguyen Chi Trung - Director, Hoi An Centre for Monuments Management & Preservation.



Ms Le Thi Thu Thuy - Administration, Hoi An Centre for Monuments Management & Preservation.



Owners/Proprietors of Kim Quyen tailor shop (residents of Hoi An for generations).



Owners/Proprietors of Tram Anh tailor shop (residents of Hoi An for generations).



Ms Do "Yun", tour operator (resident of Hoi An for generations).

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Uncle of Ms Do "Yun", who lives in his old ancestral home near the Japanese bridge.



Mr Tran Duong - owner of heritage house 25 Phan Boi Chau ((resident of Hoi An for generations).



Tourist Boat operator, female, makes 90\$ net profit a month.



Resettled "boat" family #1, was first given land in 1992 near old town, resettled near water front on opposite shore in 2005.



Resettled "boat" family #2, was given land ca. 7 years ago, resettled 1-2 years ago.



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Cigarette Stall seller.



Hoi An Old Museum of History & Culture main operator.



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