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# Sustainable Values from Traditional Chinese Living Spaces in Cho Lon, Ho Chi Minh city

MA. MA HOA THIEN

MA. TRUONG NGOC CHAU

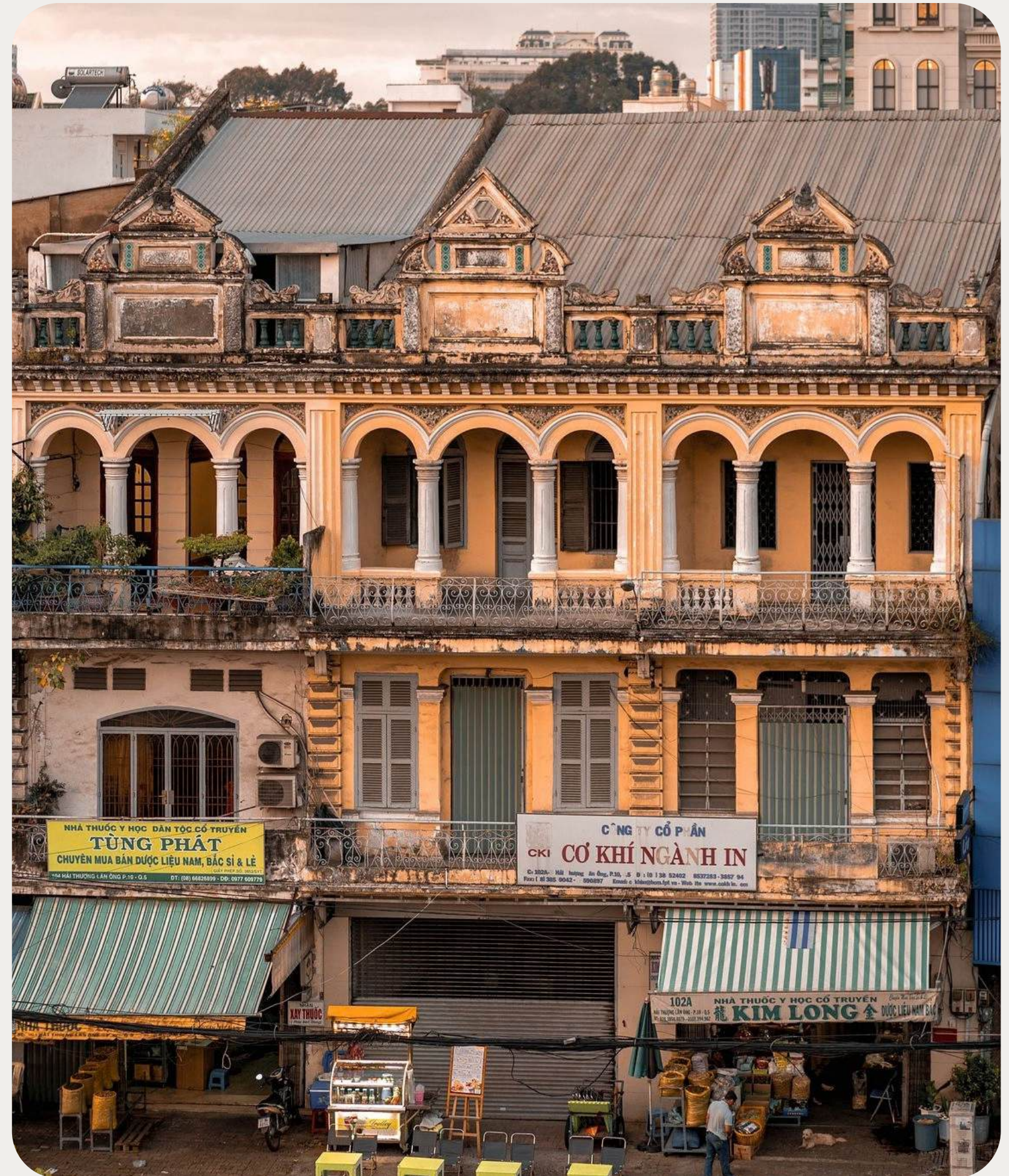
ASSOC.PROF. DR. VO THI THU THUY

VAN LANG UNIVERSITY

# Research Context

Traditional houses are not only architectural heritage. They also show how people adapted to the environment and urban life.

- Climate change, increasing population density, and the loss of local cultural identity are major challenges for sustainable urban development.
- Traditional Chinese houses in Cho Lon have developed through more than three centuries of migration, settlement, and adaptation to Southern Vietnam.
- These houses combine living and business spaces, natural ventilation, skylights, and flexible functions.
- This study examines their sustainable values and how traditional spatial principles can be applied to contemporary architecture and living-space design.



# Research Gap and Objectives



## Research gap

Previous studies mainly focused on Chinese migration history, community culture, architectural types, and housing characteristics.

However, fewer studies have examined the sustainable values of these living spaces in terms of environmental adaptation, social life, cultural identity, and their ability to respond to modern urban changes.

## Research objectives

1. Identify the main characteristics of traditional Chinese living spaces in Cho Lon.
2. Analyze their sustainable values through spatial organization, climate adaptation, and community activities.
3. Suggest ways to apply traditional spatial principles to contemporary design and urban heritage conservation.

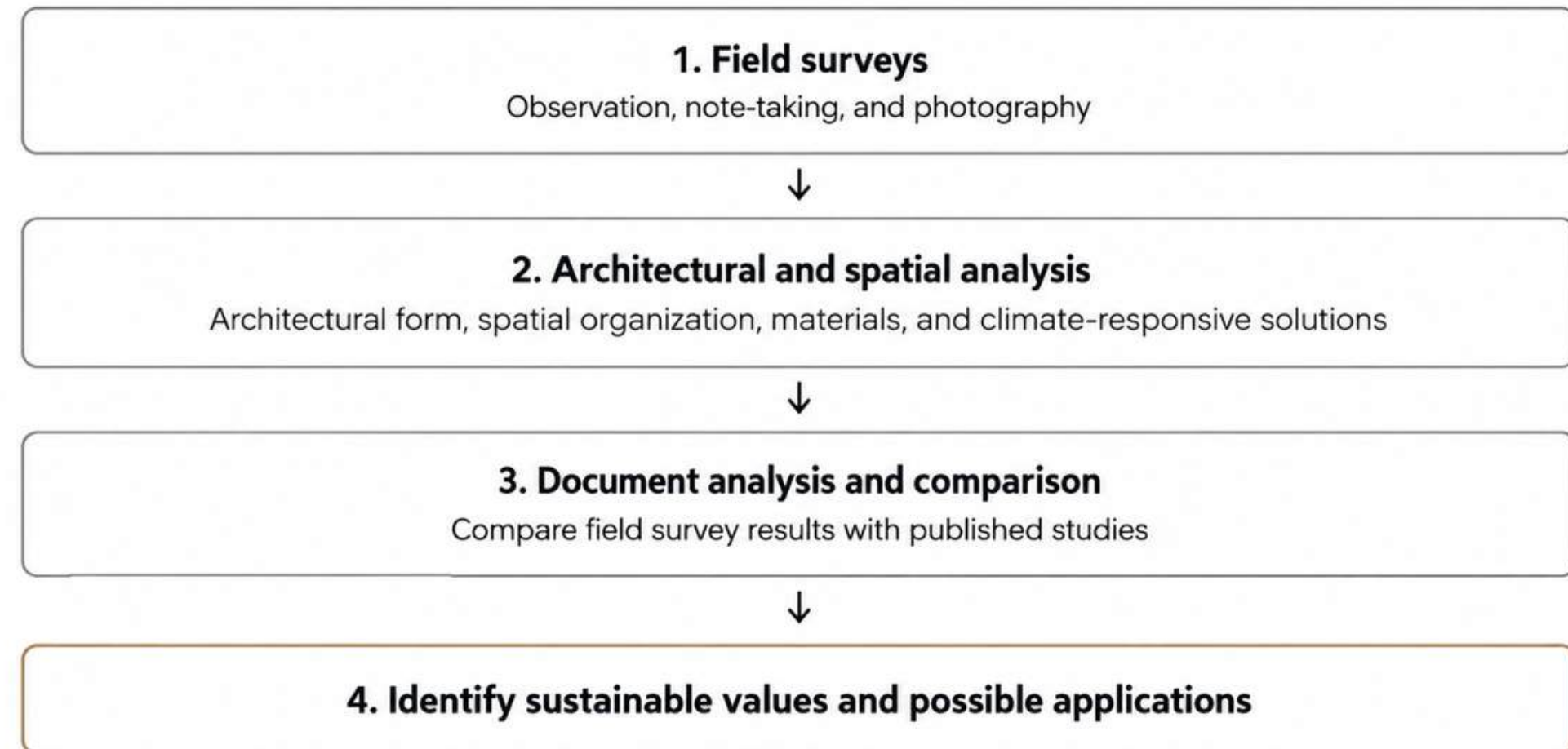
# Research Scope and Methods

## **Research area**

*Traditional Chinese houses in Cho Lon, mainly in former District 5 and part of former District 6, Ho Chi Minh City.*

## **Theoretical approach**

*The study uses Amos Rapoport's House Form and Culture (1969) to examine the relationship between housing form, spatial organization, culture, lifestyle, and community activities.*



# Theoretical Background and Previous Studies

| Research direction                                             | Main authors                                                                                                                   | Research focus                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| History and culture of Chinese communities in Southern Vietnam | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Chau Hai (1992), Nguyen Cam Thuy (2000), Phan An (2005), Tran Hong Lien (2005)</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Migration, settlement, community organization, and cultural adaptation</li></ul>          |
| Traditional housing and architecture                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Rapoport (1969), Knapp (2005), Oliver (2006)</li></ul>                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Relationships between housing, culture, lifestyle, and environmental conditions</li></ul> |
| Heritage and sustainable development                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>UNESCO, ICOMOS, UN-Habitat</li></ul>                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Heritage conservation, urban development, and environmental adaptation</li></ul>          |

## Research direction

This study looks at traditional Chinese Vietnamese housing as a living-space model that includes environmental, economic, social, and cultural values

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## Historical Development and Architectural Characteristics

### Historical Development

- Since the late 17th century, Chinese communities settled in Southern Vietnam.
- Early settlements developed along waterways, supporting trade and handicrafts.
- Saigon–Cho Lon's urban growth led to the development of commercial shophouses.

### Architectural Characteristics

- A mix of Chinese traditions and French colonial influences.
- Semicircular arches, balconies, pilasters, and iron railings.
- Wooden shutters and louvered doors adapted to the tropical climate.



# RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## Spatial Organization and Residents

### Spatial Organization

- Typical frontage: 4–12 m; depth: 15–25 m.
- Ground floor: business, storage, and small-scale production.
- Upper floors: family living, resting, and worship.
- Skylights provide natural light and ventilation.

### Spatial Flexibility

- Street-front houses: living combined with business.
- Alley houses: mainly family living.
- Flexible spaces for different generations and daily needs.

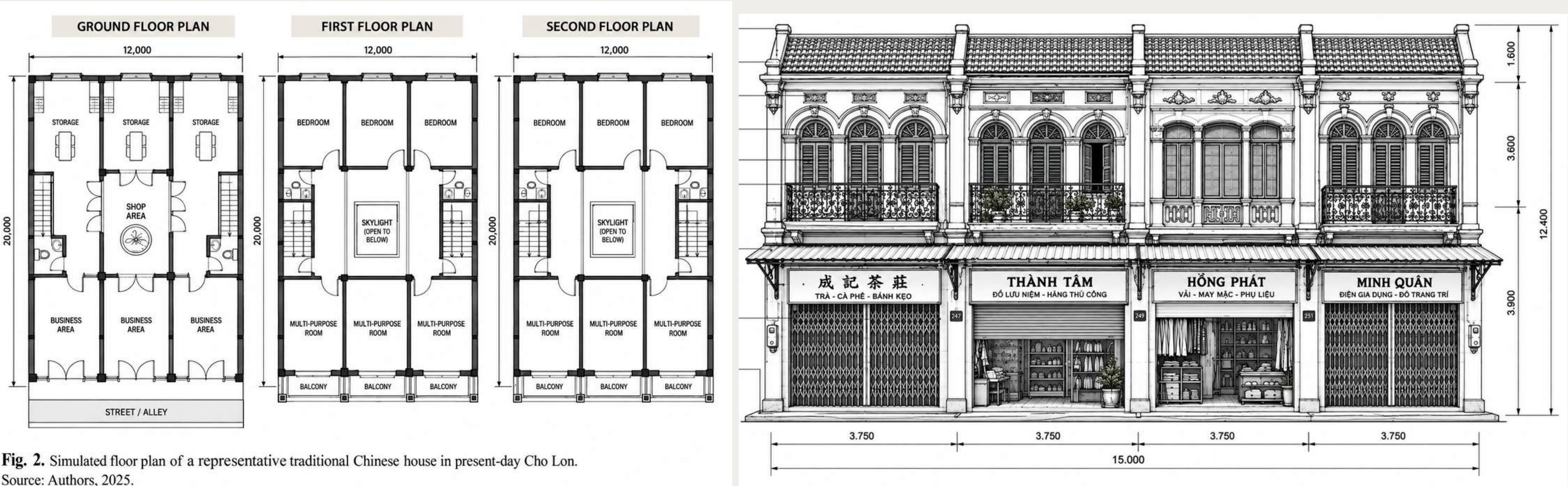


**Fig. 2.** Simulated floor plan of a representative traditional Chinese house in present-day Cho Lon.  
Source: Authors, 2025.

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## Materials, Colors, and Natural Conditions

### Materials and Colors

Brick, wood, roof tiles, iron, and =reinforced concrete.  
Common colors: cream, yellow, green, blue, pink, and brown.  
Materials and colors create Cho Lon's architectural identity.

### Natural Conditions

Louvered doors support ventilation.  
Deep eaves and balconies provide shade and rain protection.  
Skylights bring daylight and fresh air indoors.



# RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## Sustainable Values: Adaptation to Natural Conditions, Social and Community Values

### Passive Design Solutions

- Louvered doors: Airflow, shade, and privacy.
- Balconies and deep eaves: Sun and rain protection.
- Skylights: Natural lighting and ventilation.
- Internal courtyards: Air circulation and daily activities.

### Social and Community Values

- Live-work spaces support business and family life.
- Multi-generation living strengthens family relationships.
- Commercial activities maintain community networks.

### Cultural and Identity Values

- Worship spaces preserve traditional beliefs.
- Feng shui influences spatial organization.
- Architectural details reflect cultural exchange.
- Traditional houses maintain customs and community identity.



# Sustainable Values: Economic Value and Adaptive Capacity

## EXTRACTED ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS FROM EXISTING BUILDING IN CHO LON



**Pediment and ornament**  
Chinese decorative motifs  
adapted to local architecture



**Arches and columns**  
Semicircular arches and  
classical columns with  
colonial influence



**Iron railing**  
Decorative ironwork  
with floral patterns



**Wooden shutters**  
Louvered doors and windows  
for natural ventilation



**Awning and signage**  
Shaded frontage for climate  
protection and commercial use



## EXTRACTED LAYOUT CHARACTERISTICS



Symmetrical composition



Rhythm of arches and openings



Horizontal layers



Mix of Chinese and colonial styles



## SPATIAL ORGANIZATION (LIVE-WORK MODEL)



**Upper floor**  
Family living,  
bedrooms,  
worship



**Middle floor**  
Living space,  
receiving guests



**Ground floor**  
Business, trading,  
production,  
services

## SUSTAINABLE VALUES FROM TRADITIONAL ELEMENTS

### 1 Multi-functional Spaces

Combine business, production, and family living to optimize land use.



Business



Family living



Production / Storage

### 2 Flexible Functions

Houses can become shops, offices, or services while retaining architectural features.



Traditional shop



Café / Office / Service

### 3 Longer Building Life

Renovation and adaptive reuse save resources and reduce construction waste.



Original use



Renovation



Adaptive reuse

# Conclusion and Recommendations

## Key Findings

- Traditional Chinese houses show environmental, social, cultural, and economic values.
- Flexible live-work spaces support family life and local businesses.
- Passive design helps adapt to the tropical climate.
- Architectural features reflect cultural identity and local adaptation.

## Recommendations

- Apply traditional spatial principles in contemporary design.
- Preserve architectural identity and historic streetscapes.
- Encourage adaptive reuse of traditional houses.
- Connect heritage conservation with community life.

## Main Conclusion

Traditional Chinese houses in Cho Lon offer valuable lessons for sustainable architecture and urban development.



### DESIGN INSPIRATION

Extracted elements from traditional houses in Cho Lon



#### Pediment & ornament

Simplified into clean, modern lines



#### Arches & columns

Reinterpreted with lighter proportions



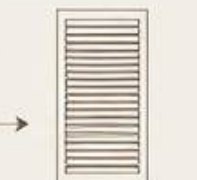
#### Iron railing pattern

Abstracted into perforated screen and metalwork



#### Wooden shutters

Reinterpreted as sun shading and ventilation screen



### SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS

Applying local and durable materials in a contemporary way



#### Lime plaster / Mineral paint

Breathable, heat reduction



#### Terrazzo

Durable, low maintenance



#### Wood

Warm tone, locally available, renewable



#### Ceramic tile

Traditional feel, local identity

### FLOOR PLANS

(5,000 x 15,000 mm)



ROOFTOP  
Rooftop terrace  
+ Utility



3RD FLOOR  
Bedroom  
+ Working space



2ND FLOOR  
Living space  
+ Family area



1ST FLOOR  
Dining & Kitchen  
+ Flexible space



GROUND FLOOR  
Shop / Business  
+ Entrance

# Cultural Characteristics of the Chinese Community's Way of Life



THANKS  
FOR  
LISTENING