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REINHABITING COLONIAL HERITAGE: THE HANOI OPERA HOUSE AS A POSTHUMANIST CULTURAL ASSEMBLAGE

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ABSTRACT

In postcolonial cities, colonial-era architecture increasingly serves as a dynamic site where memory, cultural identity, and market logics intersect. Yet existing studies often privilege either conservationist or commodified framings, neglecting how such heritage is actively reconfigured through embodied, affective, and institutional processes. This study addresses this gap by analyzing the Hanoi Opera House as a posthumanist cultural assemblage within Vietnam's evolving creative economy. Drawing on participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and policy analysis, the research traces how colonial architectural heritage is transformed through interactions between material agency, technological mediation, and institutional repositioning. Findings reveal that the Opera House operates as an atmospheric infrastructure where acoustic dynamics, spatial affordances, and sensory ecologies co-produce heritage experience. Moreover, its integration into Hanoi's cultural industry strategy foregrounds new tensions between historical memory, creative innovation, and market imperatives. By introducing the concept of posthumanist heritage assemblage, the study advances a situated theoretical model that reconceptualizes colonial urban heritage beyond binaries of preservation and commodification. It contributes to global debates on heritage governance and cultural economy, while offering critical insights into the relational politics of postcolonial urban futures.

KEYWORDS: Hanoi Opera House, Colonial Heritage, Post-humanist Assemblage, Atmospheric Infrastructure, Cultural Industries, Vietnam.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, scholars in heritage studies have increasingly challenged the linear narratives of preservation that reduce colonial-era structures to aesthetic or architectural artefacts. Instead, emphasis has shifted toward understanding heritage as an entangled field of memory, power, urban transformation, and affective encounter (Smith, 2006; González Martínez, 2021). Nowhere is this complexity more visible than in formerly colonized cities, where architectural legacies of empire continue to shape collective memory and urban identity in contested ways (Logan & Reeves, 2009). While dominant discourses of conservation have often privileged material authenticity, more recent scholarship particularly within post-humanist and more-than-human approaches has foregrounded the agency of non-human elements such as buildings, materials, technologies, and atmospheres in producing heritage value (Sterling, 2020; Waterton, 2020). This ontological shift not only decentralizes human subjectivity, but also opens up new ways of engaging with heritage as a spatial, sensorial, and political assemblage (DeSilvey, 2017; Svensson, 2021). As Svensson (2021) notes in her study of embodied encounters in Beijing's historic neighbourhoods, heritage should be seen not merely as a static object but as something lived and co-produced through human-material-temporal entanglements. At the same time, the intensification of cultural and creative industries has introduced new pressures and possibilities for heritage in urban contexts. As Ocón (2021) demonstrates in the Southeast Asian context, digitalization, tourism, and creative economy agendas have redefined heritage as both symbolic capital and a cultural asset to be activated, repackaged, and monetized. However, these transformations raise important questions about memory politics, gentrification, and the shifting roles of cultural institutions especially in postcolonial cities. In Vietnam, while the development of cultural industries has been established as a strategic national priority, academic discourse on colonial architectural heritage largely remains grounded in conservationist and historical frameworks (Logan, 2000). Few studies have critically examined how heritage sites are being restructured symbolically, technologically, and institutionally in response to evolving urban imaginaries, market logics, and more-than-human ecologies. This article addresses this gap by examining the case of the Hanoi Opera House, a French-built monument inaugurated in 1911 and modelled on the Palais Garnier in Paris. While

previous studies have acknowledged its architectural and historical importance, limited attention has been given to its contemporary transformation as a dynamic heritage assemblage. Rather than treating the Opera House as a fixed monument of colonial legacy, this study interrogates how it has been repositioned within Hanoi's urban and cultural economy as an affective space, a memory structure, and an intermediary institution in the music industry. By adopting a post-humanist framework and engaging with debates on cultural industries, this research contributes to the growing body of literature that seeks to reconceptualise heritage as a socially and materially co-produced field. It goes beyond the application of existing theories by localizing post humanist discourse through a Southeast Asian epistemological lens, situating theoretical innovation within the socio-cultural specificities of postcolonial Vietnam. It offers both theoretical insights into the lived complexities of colonial heritage in postcolonial Southeast Asia and a grounded case study of institutional restructuring within Vietnam's evolving cultural landscape.

This study is guided by the following research question: How is colonial urban heritage restructured through the interplay of material agency, institutional repositioning, and affective experience in postcolonial Southeast Asia?

Using the Hanoi Opera House as a case study, the research seeks to advance a more-than-human understanding of heritage as an assemblage shaped by layered historical memory, cultural industry dynamics, and spatial technological entanglements. In doing so, the article aims to contribute to ongoing debates on postcolonial urban heritage, creative reuse, and the affective politics of conservation. This article did not merely apply post-humanist theory to a new setting. Rather, it contributed to heritage theory by introducing the concept of atmospheric infrastructure and by proposing a hybrid governance model specific to Southeast Asian postcolonial contexts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the past two decades, heritage studies have increasingly problematized static notions of preservation, especially in relation to colonial urban sites. Building on foundational work by Smith (2006) and Logan and Reeves (2009), scholars have emphasized that heritage is not simply a material remnant of the past, but a contested and negotiated terrain of memory, power, and identity often shaped by broader geopolitical and urban dynamics. In postcolonial contexts, colonial heritage is not merely

a reminder of foreign domination but a site where competing narratives of pride, shame, erasure, and reinvention intersect and collide (Logan, 2000; González Martínez, 2021). A growing strand within this field has turned toward post-humanist and more-than-human perspectives, questioning the anthropocentric lens that has long dominated heritage discourse (Waterton, 2020; Sterling, 2020). Scholars such as DeSilvey (2017) and Harrison (2015) argue that heritage should not be understood solely as a human-centred construct but as an assemblage of human and non-human agencies involving material decay, atmospheric presence, microbial activity, and emotional affect. Svensson (2021), in her study of Beijing's historic neighbourhoods, shows how heritage is not experienced through visual or symbolic interpretation alone, but also through bodily movement, sensory engagement, and the atmospheric qualities of space. This "embodied encounter" with heritage opens up new theoretical avenues for understanding affective, spatial, and temporal dimensions of preservation and transformation. At the same time, scholars have increasingly examined the political economy and digital transformation of heritage, especially in rapidly urbanizing cities of the Global South. Ocón (2021), for instance, explores how digitalisation and creative industry strategies in Southeast Asian cities have repositioned endangered heritage as both content and commodity subject to reframing through platforms, tourism, and branding logics. In parallel, González Martínez (2021) demonstrates how curated museum spaces in Shanghai selectively frame gentrification as heritage, producing sanitized versions of memory that support urban redevelopment and displacement. These studies underscore how heritage today is not simply preserved but also strategically activated, aestheticized, or instrumentalized in service of broader urban, economic, and ideological agendas. Despite this dynamic shift in global scholarship, studies on colonial architectural heritage in Vietnam have remained largely anchored in conservationist narratives, focusing on architectural integrity, stylistic hybridity, or historical documentation (Logan, 2000; Delplace, 2005). While these contributions have laid a necessary foundation, they often overlook the entangled role of affect, technology, memory politics, and institutional repositioning in shaping the evolving life of heritage sites.

This article seeks to bridge that gap by drawing on post-humanist theory and critical cultural economy frameworks to analyse how the Hanoi Opera House

has been materially, symbolically, and institutionally restructured in the postcolonial present. In doing so, it builds upon but also moves beyond existing work by foregrounding the nonlinear, more-than-human, and economically entangled nature of colonial heritage transformation in Vietnam. Furthermore, this study proposed the concept of heritage as atmospheric infrastructure, which reimagined colonial-era buildings not merely as physical relics or symbolic stages, but as affective infrastructures that mediated emotional resonance, per-formative experimentation, and relational aesthetics. Unlike conventional frameworks that emphasized architectural integrity or curated memory, this approach viewed heritage sites as dynamic affective systems continuously recharged through sensory flow, institutional modulation, and embodied collectivity. In the context of Southeast Asia, where heritage often inhabited spaces of unfinished transition and ritualized ambiguity, such a model enabled a more situated and resonant theorization of urban colonial legacies.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach grounded in post-humanist theory and critical cultural economy. Rather than treating heritage as a fixed object or discrete site, the research viewed it as an assemblage of relationships among human and non-human agents—architecture, technologies, atmospheres, institutional discourses, and affective publics. Such an orientation aligned with a broader ontological turn in heritage studies, which recognizes heritage as a relational and performative field (DeSilvey, 2017; Waterton, 2020), and enabled an analytical framework attuned to the entanglements of memory, materiality, and symbolic transformation. Post-humanist theory provided not only a conceptual stance but a methodological orientation. It replaced the subject-object dichotomy that underlies conventional heritage analysis with a relational ontology, where human and non-human agents are entangled in networks of co-constitution. Rather than asking what heritage means to people, this perspective invites inquiry into how heritage emerges through affective atmospheres, material affordances, and socio-technical processes. This approach resonates with Braidotti's (2013) posthuman ethics, where agency is not fixed in the human subject but circulates through relational flows between bodies, technologies, and environments. Similarly, Haraway (1991) reminds us that boundaries between nature, machine, and human are

historically constructed and always porous an insight crucial for approaching heritage not as a bounded artifact, but as a techno cultural assemblage in flux. Assemblage thinking (DeLanda, 2006; Bennett, 2010) further supports this view by treating the Opera House not as a bounded entity but as a spatial and temporal configuration of architectural forms, bodily practices, sound ecologies, state agendas, and digital infrastructures. This theoretical grounding directed not just the thematic framing of the research, but also its methodological execution from field observation that recorded sensory dynamics, to coding practices that prioritized process, relation, and emergence over categorical description. The research was also informed by cultural industries frameworks (Hesmondhalgh, 2018; UNESCO, 2018), which offered insight into how heritage becomes entangled in market logics, branding strategies, and creative economy policies. The intersection of these perspectives enabled the analysis to trace how colonial heritage is not merely preserved, but actively reconfigured through a complex layering of economic, institutional, and symbolic processes. Fieldwork was carried out in Hanoi between early 2022 and early 2024, with the Hanoi Opera House serving as the central research site. Data collection consisted of three interlinked components. First, participant observation was conducted during five major cultural events, including classical concerts, cross-genre performances, and public art installations, both inside the Opera House and in its adjacent urban spaces namely, August Revolution Square and Cố Tân Park. These observations were recorded through detailed field notes focused on spatial configuration, audience behaviour, technological mediation, and ambient sensory conditions. Second, ten semi-structured interviews were carried out with performing artists, cultural officials, stage designers, urban planners, and event organizers. The interviews explored themes such as artistic interaction with space, memory and symbolism, institutional roles, and perceived tensions between preservation and innovation. Third, relevant policy documents, development plans, media coverage, and promotional materials were analysed to trace the institutional and discursive framing of the Opera House as a heritage site. Data were analysed thematically using a grounded coding strategy. Interview transcripts and fieldnotes were organized and coded manually, supplemented by NVivo software to trace co-occurring themes across data types.

Three analytical axes were developed

inductively: the symbolic layering of the Opera House across historical periods; the interaction between human performance and non-human elements such as acoustic dynamics, light, spatial constraints, and technological augmentation; and the institutional embedding of the Opera House within Hanoi's cultural industry strategy. While every effort was made to triangulate sources and capture a multidimensional view of the site, certain limitations are acknowledged. The interview sample, though professionally diverse, reflected primarily voices from within the formal cultural sector and may not fully represent grassroots or critical perspectives. Furthermore, the researcher's positionality as an academic affiliated with a Hanoi-based university shaped the design of interview questions and interpretive lens. These factors were mitigated through iterative analysis, peer review of coding frames, and conscious engagement with the reflexive demands of post-humanist epistemologies, which do not assume objectivity but value situated knowledge and interpretive resonance. Ultimately, this methodological design was not aimed at measuring heritage as a quantifiable entity, but at tracing how the Hanoi Opera House has become a site of layered interaction where historical memory, creative practice, material agency, and institutional logic intersect and reshape one another over time.

4. RESULTS

The findings of this study unfold along three closely interwoven threads that emerged through field engagement and iterative analysis. First, the Hanoi Opera House revealed itself as a layered symbolic site, where collective memory, ambivalence, and official narratives intersect. Second, performances within and around the building activated complex interactions between human actors, spatial dynamics, technological affordances, and atmospheric conditions. Third, the site's evolving institutional logic shaped by state policy, cultural industries discourse, and artist-driven experimentation reflected a broader reconfiguration of heritage in the context of Vietnam's urban cultural economy.

4.1. *Symbolic Layering and Ambivalent Memory*

Interviewees across artistic and managerial domains described the Hanoi Opera House not simply as an architectural remnant of colonial rule, but as a structure saturated with layered meanings some celebrated, others unresolved. For senior performers, the building evoked a lineage of cultural

prestige: "It's a stage of discipline and dignity," one classical musician remarked, "but also a place where we inherit burdens we didn't choose." Others spoke of the building's "elegance built on contradiction," where republican and imperial aesthetics coexisted in uneasy harmony. These reflections revealed that the Opera House functioned less as a static monument than as a memory structure continually reinterpreted through generational, political, and artistic lenses. Archival documents and planning reports likewise revealed deliberate shifts in the symbolic positioning of the site. In official narratives from the 1990s, the Opera House was framed as a "reminder of Hanoi's cosmopolitan legacy." By the 2010s, however, policy documents began referring to it as a "creative nucleus" within the city's cultural innovation corridor. This evolution signaled not a break with the past, but a gradual reframing of colonial heritage through the language of creativity and urban ambition.

4.2. Entangled Performances: Human-Material-Technological Relations

Participant observation during five live events highlighted how performances at the Opera House activated a dense web of interactions between human expression, built environment, and technological mediation. In one multimedia performance, for example, the overlay of LED mapping on the building's façade generated an uncanny fusion of colonial architecture and contemporary visual art. Audience reactions captured in fieldnotes ranged from fascination to discomfort; some described the effect as "hauntingly beautiful," others as "a strange collision of times." Inside the auditorium, acoustics often determined how artists engaged with the space. Dancers and musicians adapted choreography and timing in response to spatial constraints and reverberation. A **lighting designer commented:** "You don't just light the performance; you light the memory of the building." This statement captured how spatial affordances, historical residue, and technical devices converged to shape both artistic intention and audience perception. For instance, during the 2023 cross-genre performance Echoes of Light, traditional Vietnamese *dàn tranh* melodies were layered with ambient electronic beats and were projected across the building's colonial façade through kinetic light mapping. Elderly attendees described the experience as "ghostly yet intimate," while younger audience members called it "a portal between epochs." Such moments did not merely illustrate innovation but also embodied the building's material agency as a participant in time-

bending encounters between historical residue and contemporary imagination. Non-human agencies also surfaced in more mundane moments. On humid days, condensation affected sound quality and required last-minute adjustments. Equipment failures due to architectural wiring limitations forced stage crews to improvise. These instances revealed that the building itself not only as structure but as atmospheric and material presence participated in the crafting of each performance, exerting subtle but consequential force.

4.3. Institutional Repositioning and the Logics of Cultural Economy

Over the past decade, the Opera House has undergone an institutional transformation from a state-run performance venue into a semi-autonomous cultural operator aligned with Hanoi's creative economy agenda. Interviews with administrators indicated a shift in how the site was managed, funded, and programmed. "We now have to curate not only for quality," noted one official, "but for visibility and economic resonance." This shift involved new metrics of success: ticket sales, audience data, media exposure that redefined what counted as cultural value. Policy documents and urban masterplans echoed this repositioning, identifying the Opera House as a node in a larger network of creative spaces meant to attract both domestic tourism and international partnerships. This institutional reframing introduced new tensions. While some staff embraced the potential for innovation and visibility, others expressed concern over the dilution of artistic integrity and the soft erasure of colonial complexity in favor of a polished, exportable image. Notably, these processes of symbolic reframing, affective encounter, and institutional repositioning did not unfold sequentially or independently. Instead, they formed a mutually reinforcing mesh of historical meaning, performative presence, and cultural-economic logic. The transformation of the Hanoi Opera House cannot be reduced to a single policy, event, or design intervention; it is better understood as a relational process that cuts across materiality, narrative, and institutional action. To elucidate how these interwoven dynamics manifest in practice, Figure 1 presents a conceptual model developed from the study's thematic coding and theoretical synthesis. Rather than depicting a static system or linear pathway, the model visualizes the Hanoi Opera House as a relational assemblage shaped by recursive interactions among material, institutional, symbolic, audience, and market-driven elements.

This visualization clarifies the complex, multi-directional processes through which the Opera

House has been repositioned within contemporary cultural and economic imaginaries.

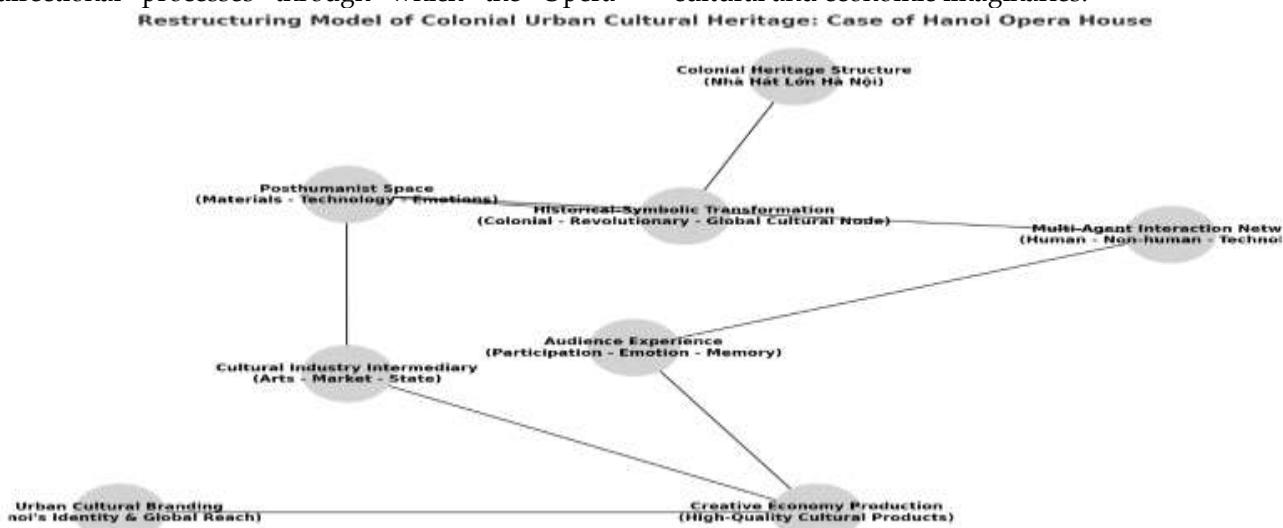


Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the Hanoi Opera House as a Relational Assemblage within Vietnam's emerging Cultural Economy. The Model highlights Five interlinked domains Material Infrastructures and Technological Mediations; Institutional actors and Governance Logics; symbolic and Narrative Framings; audience Practices and affective Engagements; and Creative industry Drivers whose Recursive interactions shape the Opera House's evolving Institutional Identity.

The conceptual model outlined above synthesizes the multilayered restructuring dynamics of the Opera House. To further unpack the empirical patterns that informed this model, the following coding themes and comparative insights are presented.

Table 1: Coding Themes.

Theme	Sub-themes / Codes
Symbolic Layering of Memory	Colonial ambivalence, official narrative shifts, civic pride, unresolved contradictions
Human-Material-Technological Relations	Acoustic adaptation, spatial constraints, lighting interaction, atmospheric affordances
Audience Affective Experience	Embodied encounter, sensory engagement, emotional resonance, affective memory
Institutional Repositioning	Policy shifts, creative economy logic, funding mechanisms, cultural branding
Material Agency and Performance Constraints	Architecture as actor, humidity effects, wiring limitations, spatial influence on performance

Table 2: Comparative Analysis.

City	Mode of Colonial Heritage Activation	Key Characteristics
Hanoi	Performative activation; atmospheric assemblage	Hybrid governance; layered symbolism; relational reparation
Singapore	Neoliberal creative industry framework	Strong commodification; global branding; privatized spaces
Shanghai	Selective museification; gentrification narrative	Curated memory supporting urban redevelopment; displacement tensions
Ho Chi Minh City	Partial neglect; fragmented activation	Uneven institutional support; fragmented memory politics

These findings provide a rich empirical grounding for reflecting on broader patterns of colonial heritage restructuring in Southeast Asia, which the next section discusses in comparative and theoretical perspective.

5. DISCUSSION

Building on the thematic clusters identified through NVivo analysis (Table 1; Figure 2 in Appendix), this study advances new insights into the postcolonial restructuring of colonial urban heritage in Hanoi. The hierarchical relationships between the main themes and sub-themes, visualized in the coding tree, further elucidate how material agency, technological mediation, cultural activation, and affective engagement converge to shape contemporary heritage practices. This study has examined the Hanoi Opera House not merely as a preserved colonial landmark, but as an evolving cultural assemblage shaped by posthuman entanglements, creative industry dynamics, and affective audience experience. The findings suggest that colonial urban heritage, when viewed through a posthumanist lens, cannot be reduced to its architectural form or official narratives. Instead, it must be understood as a field of co-production where space, memory, material affordances, institutional agendas, and embodied encounters intersect and

reconfigure each other. In recent scholarship, several studies have demonstrated the relational and contested nature of urban heritage in postcolonial settings. Svensson (2021), for example, foregrounds how embodied movement through Beijing's historic districts animates heritage as a lived spatial practice. Similarly, González Martínez (2021) shows how museum curation in Shanghai reframes gentrification as nostalgic memory, obscuring displacement and power asymmetries. The present study complements these analyses but shifts the focus from heritage representation to heritage performativity attending not only to how colonial memory is curated, but to how it is enacted and contested through sensory, affective, and technological interactions within architectural space. Moreover, the study extends Ocón's (2021) insights into the digitalization and commodification of heritage in Southeast Asia by examining a site that has not been digitally reconstructed or decontextualized, but rather reactivated *in situ* through performance, programming, and institutional repositioning. In this sense, the Hanoi Opera House represents a more complex case where cultural memory is neither archived nor erased, but dynamically re-authored through practice. What distinguished the Hanoi case from parallel trajectories in Singapore or Shanghai was not merely the form of activation, but the mode of relationality. Here, the Opera House was neither fully commodified nor nostalgically preserved. Instead, it was continuously re-sensed and re-signified through a mixture of socialist cultural programming, state-mediated aesthetics, and improvisational creativity by artists operating within bureaucratic constraints. This hybrid governance of heritage neither neoliberal nor grassroots revealed a distinct Southeast Asian configuration in which power, memory, and performance interwove without collapsing into a singular logic. The notion of posthumanist heritage proved especially useful in capturing the more-than-human dynamics at play. As the findings have shown, sound, lighting, humidity, spatial constraints, and architectural resonance were not passive backdrops but active participants in shaping both artistic expression and audience response. These elements support Waterton's (2020) call for heritage studies to move beyond symbolic representation toward ecological and affective understandings of heritage experience. The Opera House, in this light, is not simply a building with historical significance; it is a material actor with aesthetic and atmospheric agency a co-performer in the ongoing redefinition of cultural value. At an

institutional level, the repositioning of the Opera House within Hanoi's creative economy reflects a broader shift in how heritage is governed and monetized. As cultural infrastructure is increasingly evaluated through metrics of visibility, flexibility, and market resonance, heritage sites risk being instrumentalized as economic assets rather than sites of contested memory. Yet, as this study suggests, such transformations are not unidirectional. Artists and cultural workers can mobilize heritage spaces to stage subtle negotiations reclaiming aesthetic sovereignty, reinterpreting colonial traces, and proposing alternative futures. In this sense, the study offers a more ambivalent and agentic view of heritage restructuring: one that neither celebrates creative economy uncritically nor romanticizes resistance, but attends to the frictional zones where institutional logics, material ecologies, and human intentions collide. By focusing on the Hanoi Opera House, this research contributes to a growing body of scholarship that reconceptualizes heritage as a dynamic, processual, and more-than-human phenomenon. While building on established posthumanist theories, the study advances a localized perspective by embedding Southeast Asian cultural, political, and spatial logics into the posthuman assemblage model. It advances theoretical conversations on posthuman heritage while grounding them in a non-Western, postcolonial, and artistically active context something still underrepresented in current IJHS discourse. The model proposed here is not intended as a universal framework, but as a situated interpretation of how colonial architectural heritage can be restructured through performative, institutional, and atmospheric means in a rapidly transforming Southeast Asian city. While grounded in a specific case, the analytical insights drawn from the Hanoi Opera House invite broader reflection on how postcolonial heritage sites are reworked not only through policy or preservation, but through performances of meaning, affect, and use. As such, the case does not merely illustrate existing theory; it challenges us to refine how heritage studies conceptualize transformation especially in regions where colonial legacies remain materially present but are discursively unstable. Beyond its empirical specificity, this research also opened a broader methodological horizon for posthumanist heritage studies. Rather than relying solely on visual documentation or narrative interviews, the study employed sensory attuned ethnography and what might have been termed "relational coding" a mode of analysis that tracked how space, sensation,

material behavior, and policy discourse entangled over time. Future research might have extended these tools to sites where heritage was emergent rather than established, or where material actors humidity, sound echoes, architectural residue participated more directly in the shaping of memory politics. In doing so, the field could have moved toward an epistemology of atmospheric entanglement, capturing how heritage was lived, felt, and negotiated within postcolonial affective infrastructures. Importantly, this study has situated posthumanist heritage theory within Southeast Asian epistemologies of relationality, embodied space, and aesthetic ambiguity. In many Southeast Asian contexts, including Hanoi, heritage is not governed solely through rigid conservation regimes or neoliberal commodification. Instead, it inhabits fluid cultural spaces where layered temporalities, performative rituals, and embodied community practices coexist and reshape meaning (Winter, 2014; Byrne, 2014). Such relational understandings resonate with regional cosmologies that emphasize interdependence, affective atmospheres, and spatial ambiguity offering critical alternatives to Western-centric models of heritage governance. The Hanoi Opera House exemplifies this dynamic terrain, where colonial legacies are neither passively preserved nor aggressively commodified, but creatively reinhabited through embodied performance, atmospheric experience, and evolving institutional practice.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the Hanoi Opera House not as a static architectural artefact but as a dynamic posthumanist assemblage—where material agency, atmospheric infrastructure, embodied performance, and institutional logics intersect to produce shifting forms of heritage value in postcolonial Hanoi. Moving beyond binary frameworks of preservation versus commodification, the research has

foregrounded how colonial urban heritage is continuously re-authored through affective encounter, spatial performance, and policy-driven repositioning. By introducing the concept of heritage as atmospheric infrastructure, the study has contributed a localized theoretical innovation to global debates in posthumanist heritage studies. In Southeast Asian postcolonial contexts, where colonial legacies are materially present yet discursively unstable, this approach captures the complex relational entanglements that shape how heritage is experienced and governed. Methodologically, the research has demonstrated how sensory ethnography and relational coding can enrich the analysis of heritage as lived experience attending to the role of non-human actors such as spatial affordances, acoustics, and atmospheric conditions in shaping audience perception and artistic practice. The findings suggest that postcolonial heritage sites like the Hanoi Opera House cannot be understood solely through narratives of national identity or cultural commodification. Instead, they must be approached as affective ecologies in which multiple temporalities, institutional agendas, and material agencies co-produce dynamic and contested meanings. More broadly, this research calls for greater attention to Southeast Asian epistemologies of relationality and embodied space in heritage studies challenging Eurocentric assumptions about how heritage is valued, governed, and inhabited. It invites scholars and practitioners to embrace heritage as an ecology to be engaged with creatively and critically, rather than a legacy to be merely preserved or consumed. Future research could extend this framework to other postcolonial urban contexts exploring how atmospheric, performative, and institutional dynamics shape the evolving life of colonial heritage across diverse spatial and political registers. In doing so, the field may develop richer, more situated understandings of how the past remains active in the making of urban futures.

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APPENDIX

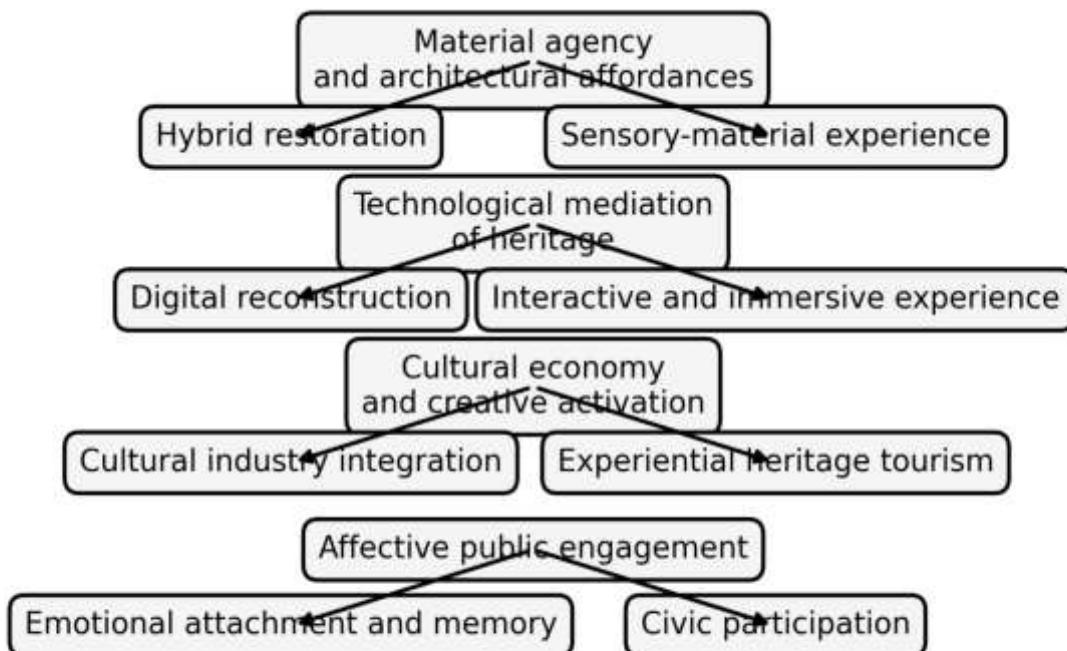


Figure 2: Visual Coding Tree of Qualitative Data (NVivo Analysis).