

RECONSTRUCTION OF TRADITIONAL COMMUNITY HOUSE IN A KA HAMLET, NAM DONG DISTRICT, THUA THIEN HUE PROVINCE - PROCESS AND EXPERIENCED LESSONS

NGUYEN NGOC TUNG*, TRUONG HOANG PHUONG*, HIROHIDE KOBAYASHI**, MIKI YOSHIZUMI***, LE ANH TUAN****, TRAN DUC SANG****

* Faculty of Architecture, University of Sciences, Hue University, VIETNAM

** Graduate School of Global Environmental Studies, Kyoto University, JAPAN

*** College of Gastronomy Management, Ritsumeikan University, JAPAN

**** National Institute of Cultural and Art Studies, Sub-institute in Hue, VIETNAM

Abstract

The project for reconstruction of traditional community house in A Ka hamlet, Thuong Quang commune, Nam Dong district, Thua Thien Hue province was implemented more than two years (3/2016 - 8/2018) based on community effort, support of local government and consult of expert group. The construction of the community house was implemented within three months (20/5/2018-22/8/2018) and was followed nine steps. Five experienced lessons are found. The lessons are the rationale for learning, expanding to the future related construction projects.

Keywords: *Traditional community house; Reconstruction of community house; Guol house; Katu ethnic group.*

1. Background

Katu ethnic (population is around 86.617 in 2017, according to [1:9]) mainly contribute in the mountainous areas of Quang Nam province, Thua Thien Hue province and part of Da Nang city, Vietnam. Original village of the Katu (called as Vel or Vil) consists of several tens of dwellings houses, surrounding a traditional community house named Guol. Guol house is normally located in the center position of the village. It plays the role as administrative, social, cultural center of the village. It has oval, horse-shoes, or polygonal layout ([5:119], [9: 98]). However, it has been changing, similar to the deterioration of many Guol houses.

In 2007, a traditional community house in Hong Ha commune, A Luoi district was reconstructed under a project of JICA. The community house was designed and constructed by mostly traditional method based on many surveys, interviews, discussions among patriarchs, old local people and experts. The reconstruction was implemented in five months and completed on September 2007. Besides, the local people used 17 body modules for design and measurement during the construction. It can be said that the constructed house is the result of using three local resources: natural resources (building materials); human resources (unified community); and intellectual resources (knowledge and technique).

However, the feature of traditional community house in Hong Ha commune is recognized as different cultural identify of some ethnic minorities such as Ta Oi, Bru Van Kieu and Katu [5: 133]. Therefore, a project for reconstruction of traditional community house (Guol house)

of Katu ethnic group is proposed to exploit traditional process from preparation, design, to construction.

Rrodetour project (Program of Ecotourism Development) in Thua Thien Hue province supported to reconstruct a Guol house at Ta Rinh hamlet, Thuong Nhat commune, Nam Dong district in 2011-2013 [8:71-73]. The purpose of the project is to maintain and popularize traditional community house and develop ecotourism. However, the house has been demolished and collapsed on May 2018. The main reasons are that the location for construction is far from the village. There were few local people, who participated in the construction (actually, Kinh builders and carpenter were rent to construct the house). So, the local people rarely take care the house. For establishing reconstruction of Guol, it should be concerned about location for the reconstruction and participation of local people.

In 2014, a series of field surveys were implemented in different Katu villages in Thua Thien Hue province (A Luoi, Nam DONG), Quang Nam province (Dong Giang, Tay Giang) and Da Nang city. The purpose of the surveys is to find potential site for reconstruction of Guol house. Finally, A Ka hamlet, Thuong Quang commune, Nam Dong district, Thua Thien Hue province was selected for the reconstruction project because A Ka villagers are motivated and they have knowledge for traditional construction (figure 1). Besides, A Ka hamlet did not have Guol house.

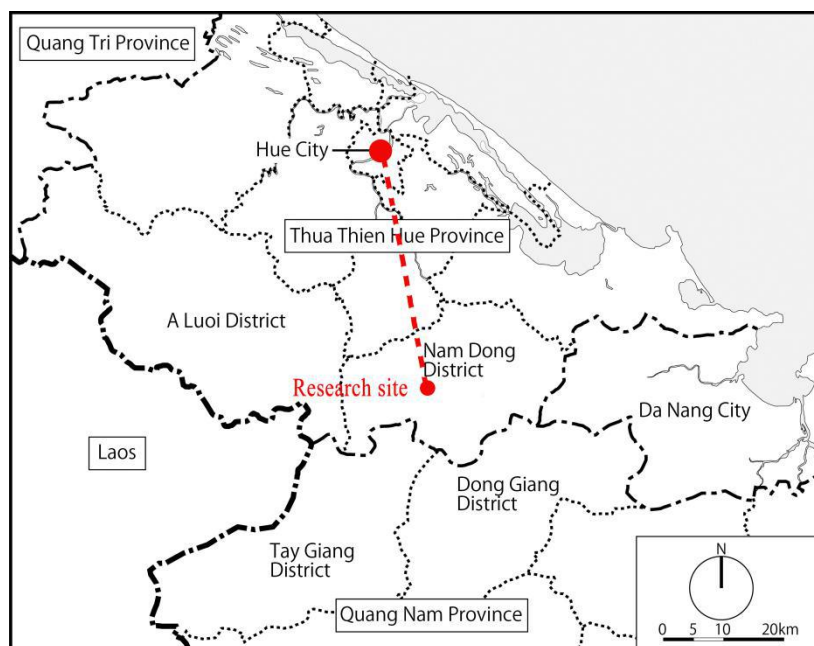


Figure 1: Research site of the project

2. Preparedness for the reconstruction project in A Ka hamlet

A Ka hamlet, one of seven hamlets of Thuong Quang commune, has 107 households, 328 inhabitants and all of them are Katu (according to the statistical data in 2018). The hamlet is on the west, 12 km far from the center of Nam Dong district¹.

¹ Nam Dong, a mountainous district in Thua Thien Hue province, is located on the Southwest of Hue city. According to the statistical data in 2017, it's area is 64,777.9 sq.km and Katu inhabitants are 11,945, which occupies 70% *Katu* ethnic minority in Thua Thien Hue province.

In past, A Ka hamlet had a traditional community house, which was built in 2004. However, the house was leaky on the roof in 2010 (figure 2). Until 2012, the house was mostly decayed and completely collapsed in 2013. Therefore, the villagers really need to reconstruct a new traditional community house. Besides, the patriarch and some old villagers still know about traditional method for construction of Guol².

The goal of the project is to reconstruct Guol of Katu ethnic group based on traditional method. Thus, the unique architectural characteristics of Guol house can be conserved. In addition, the process for reconstruction can be preserved that can contribute to conserve cultural values of Katu ethnic group. The condition of A Ka hamlet mentioned above can reach the goal of the project. This is the reason why A Ka hamlet is selected for the reconstruction.



Figure 2: Deterioration process of Guol house in A Ka hamlet

After many field surveys, meetings and discussions with local villagers, local government (district, commune and hamlet levels), a plan for implementing the project was unified (figure 3, 4). A statement was signed to implement the project on March 2016 with the following contents:

- Implemented period: March 2016 - October 2017 (actually the project was finished on August 2018).
- Budget: Labors of villagers and Kyoto University, Japan use part of research fund to support part of labors as 95 millions VND (calculated budget is 245 millions VND).
- Responsibilities of each stakeholders: A Ka hamlet has responsibility to exploit materials (wood, leave,...), do outwork for Guol, construct Guol, organize necessary ceremonies, and preserve the house after finishing the reconstruction. Local government has responsibility to support administrative documents, check and speed up the process. Consultative researchers have responsibility to support part of budget, consult constructed techniques, traditional ceremonies, etc. Besides, the researchers have to record and preserve process of the reconstruction, interview and organize meetings, seminars to share knowledge for construction and preservation after completion.

² For choosing constructed site, the authors conducted field surveys of Katu villages in Da Nang city, Thua Thien Hue and Quang Nam provinces. According to the surveys, there are many Katu villages, Katu people, especially young generation do not know traditional method for constructing Guol.



Figure 3: Discussion with local villagers on September 2015



Figure 4: Discussion with local government on March 2016

Table 1 shows the preparedness of the project. Firstly, management board for reconstruction is established. It is divided into four groups carrying out four main works. Then, the hamlet organized a ceremony to choose land for constructing Guol house, workshop for disinfection and others according to traditional custom of the Katu. The next works are gradually wood exploitation, wood transport, doing outwork and making components of Guol house. Because of several reasons (weather, there were some villagers, who passed away, policy of central government for closing forest, etc.) the preparedness is extended to May 2018.

Table 1: Preparedness work before the reconstruction of Guol house

No.	Time	Content
1	March 2016	Statement agreement
2	March 2016 - August 2016	Discussion, work division: Group 1-exploitation of materials; Group 2-doing outwork; Group 3-construction technique; Group 4-ceremony organization
3	13 June 2016	Decision no 1279/QĐ-UBND of the chairman of Thua Thien Hue province for promulgating reconstruction project for Guol house at A Ka hamlet
4	02-14 August 2016	Ceremony for choosing land Ceremony for disinfection Ceremony for wood exploitation
5	17 August 2016	Field survey in forest and mark selected trees
6	August 2016 - March 2017	Exploitation of some main components for Guol house
7	April 2017	Transport
8	March 2018 - May 2018	Doing outwork

The most difficult work is to exploit wood for Guol house. The policy for closing forest promulgated by the Prime Ministry of Vietnam in 2016 caused delayed exploitation. The

villagers only cut tree from community forest but the quality of wood is another problem. Group 1 was divided into small sub-groups (each sub-group has 4-8 persons) and went to forest to check, evaluate wood quality, mark trees for cutting (figure 5). According to local knowledge, time for cutting tree should be at the end of month (there is no moon at the end of month and termite will not eat wood) and in dry season for more convenient to transport.

Group 2 has duty to design, carve and paint images on the components of the house such as center pillar, cross beam, motif carving on the roof, etc. (figure 6). These images express lifestyle of Katu ethnic group and their religious belief.

Techniques for Guol construction is managed by group 3. Group 3 designs, makes components, reconstruct Guol house followed traditional method. Katu ethnic group has used body-based units for measurement, design of their Guol house ([4], [7]). According to the surveys, the Katu uses 18 body-based units for measurement, design and construction³. In case for A Ka hamlet, the villagers use 15 body-based units for design and construction of Guol (figure 7). For more convenient in doing outwork and speeding up the process, the local villagers also use several modern tools such as saw, hammer, etc.

The leader of group 4 is the patriarch. He has responsibility to organize and implement traditional ceremonies and worships during the project (figure 8). Some important ceremonies are ceremony for setting up Guol house (20 May 2018), ceremony for putting ridge beam (22 May 2018) and inauguration ceremony (22 August 2018).



Figure 5: Wood transport



Figure 6: Drawing image

³ According to previous surveys, Katu ethnic group has 17 body-based units ([7]). However, based on the interview with 25 patriarchs in Nam Dong district in 2018, Katu ethnic group has one more unit for measurement, design and construction.

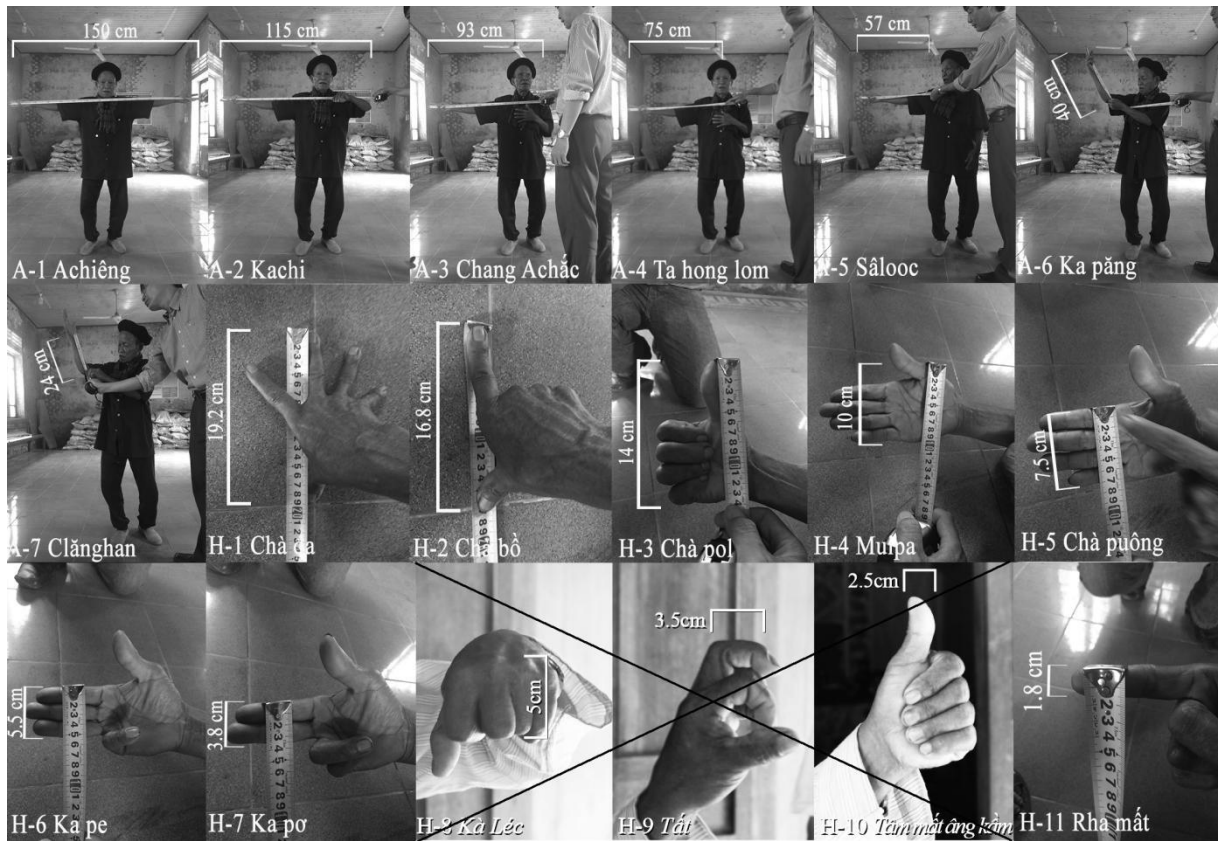


Figure 7: 18 body-based units of Katu ethnic group



Figure 8: Ceremony for setting up Guol house on May 2018

3. Reconstruction process

Before the reconstruction, the hamlet selected the land of old Guol house for setting up new Guol house. The new house faces the Northeast (same as orientation of the former Guol house) because this is a good orientation as the Katu's conception. Reconstruction process of

Guol house in A Ka hamlet was basically followed nine steps (figure 9) and it was completed in four months (20 May 2018 - 22 August 2018).

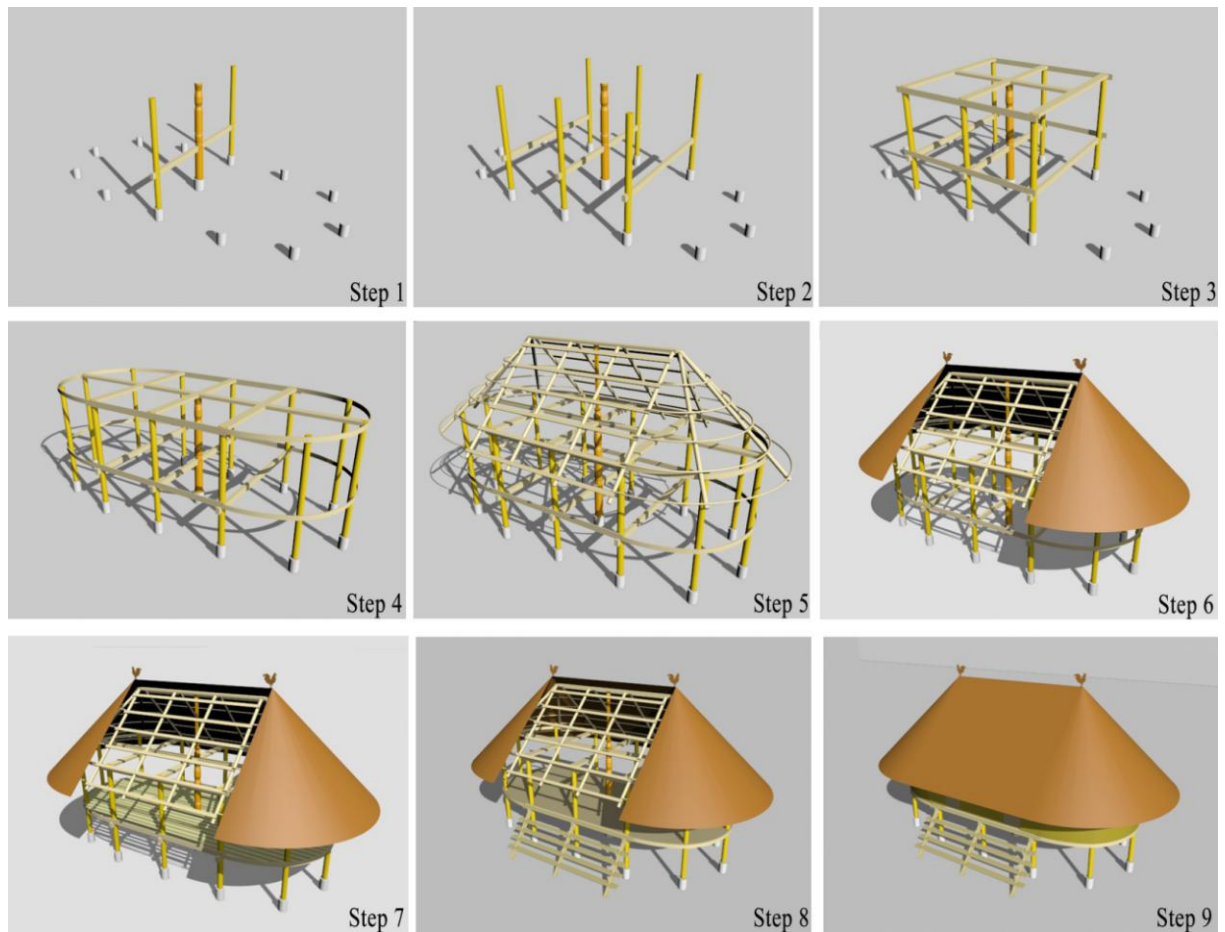


Figure 9: Steps for constructing Guol house

- Step 1: Traditionally, all pillars should bury directly in the soil. In this case, all pillars were put on concrete platform for protecting from insects. Firstly, the center pillar and 2 main pillars in front and behind were set up.

- Step 2: The other four main pillars were put in parallel pairs, creating two parallel lines of main pillars running up to the sixth pillar. Thus, the center pillar is in the middle center position.

- Step 3: Cross and eaves beams were assembled for making a firm solid connection.

- Step 4: Six round pillars were set up, while round beams were assembled. Then, the villagers put the upper part of center pillar and a cross beam via the center pillar

- Step 5: Each pair of roof beams were assembled facing to the above cross beam. Each side of the house roof has 4 roof beams. Each pair of cross beam make an “X” shape in the top and is closely tied on the ridge pole that securities it firmly.

- Step 6: 24 leaf units were tiled from the top to the bottom. These leaf units were knit by nón leaves (local leaves). On the top of the roof, the villagers used a sheet metal, covering by cò leaves ((local leaves) for protecting from raining. The villagers crafted cock symbols for roof cresting because they claimed that the symbol could wake villagers up to go to work every morning.

- Step 7: 19 floor beams were assembled.

- Step 8: Floor surface were made by straightened lồ ô (local leaves). After that, kitchens and stairs were implemented.

- Step 9: The partitions were assembled. These partitions were made by lồ ô with average size of 850mm x 850mm. Finally, the pole for buffalo sacrifice was set up the middle courtyard, in front of the house.

4. Experienced lessons

The inauguration was organized on 22 August 2018 at A Ka hamlet, Thuong Quang commune, Nam Dong district. The reconstruction project was implemented more than two years from the period for situation survey, establishing project, discussion, agreement, exploiting materials, doing outwork, to the period for construction. Until now, it is more than one year after the inauguration, the Guol house has been preserved and it has been evaluated as the most beautiful Guol house in Nam Dong district. The villagers usually use the house as place for daily activities such as recreation, meetings, organized place for different events of the hamlet and commune.

In the context of modernization and urbanization, many Guol houses have been altered with modern materials and architectural forms. The A Ka Guol house can be typical case for expanding and applying for other reconstruction of traditional community houses. The following is five experienced lessons derived from the project in A Ka hamlet.

- Community based reconstruction of traditional community house: according to the surveys [7], among 43 community houses in Nam Dong district, there are two traditional community house and four traditional community house using modern materials. The others are modern. These house were constructed based on the support from outside projects and few local people directly involved. Normally, these Guol houses will be decayed quickly because local people rarely take care. The reason is that the houses are not their achievement so that, the local people will not be regretted. When local community mainly participate in the project, this is a chance for them to learn, share knowledge together. They are more close-knit and unified. According to the interview with local people in A Ka hamlet on October 2019, all local people have awareness to protect their Guol house after the reconstruction.

- Careful preparedness: the preparedness for the reconstruction project in A Ka hamlet is more than one year, while the time for the reconstruction is only four months. It implies that the preparedness is very important. The success of the project is mainly based on the preparedness, from discussion, division of responsibilities for each stakeholders, material exploitation, to make outwork and components of Guol house. Besides, some suddenly problems arising should be cared. For example, the policy for closing forest in 2016 influenced to the material exploitation. The project was also extended because several local villagers passed away. Other factors should be cared such as weather, human resources, etc.

- Role of local government: It can be said that local government plays an important role for the implementation of the project. Local government is the person, who promulgates official documents to approve the project. They also direct the material exploitation and check

project progress. The procedure for promulgating project is quite complicated and it takes a lot of time. Therefore, it should be care the time for solve official documents.

- Role of experts: The purpose of the project is to reconstruct a traditional community house and as the result, it can contribute to preserve and maintain the indigenous values of Katu ethnic group. The role of experts is to coordinate, consult local people and local government for reaching the purpose on time. The impacts of urbanization, modernization have conducted idea to use modern materials and techniques in the construction. In case of A Ka hamlet, local villagers firstly suggested to use concrete for the pillars because it is hard to find wood and more stable. Similarly, some local villagers wanted to replace sheet metal roof for leaves roof because leaves roof is quickly decayed (when tiling leaves roof, it should be replace every 5-10 years). The experts had to convince and explain the importance of traditional values to local villagers. Then, they understand and agree to implement the reconstruction based on traditional method.

- Indigenous knowledge passing from generation to generation: The reconstruction project has a significant to be a method for preserve, maintain and pass indigenous knowledge from generation to generation. According to the interview with patriarch, hamlet leader and old villagers, process of the reconstruction project is really a chance that young generation to learn constructed experiences and knowledge from old villagers. The Guol house is onw used as place for daily activities of local villagers, place for talking, meeting, sharing knowledge among villagers. Besides, the house is precious property that local villagers are proud of, introduce and popularize to travelers and other visitors.

5. Conclusion

Reconstruction project for traditional community house of Katu ethnic group in A Ka hamlet was started on March 2016 and finished on August 2018 (time for reconstruction is from 20 May 2018 to 22 August 2018). the implementation of the project is based on traditional method, from material exploitation, transport, doing outwork, construction, to organizing traditional ceremonies. There are nine steps for the constructing the house, from setting up pillars, assembling beams, rafters, roof, floor, to setting up partitioned wall. Besides, there are five experienced lessons that can be found. The project is typical case to expand into other cases. It can increase awareness of local villagers to preserve and maintain traditional, cultural values as well as transforming knowledge from generation to generation.

6. References

- [1] Bh'Riu Liéc (2018). *P'rá Cotu Tiếng Cotu*. Hội Nhà Văn publishers. (in Vietnamese)
- [2] Luu Hùng (2007). *A contribution to Katu ethnography*, Thế Giới publishers, Hanoi.
- [3] Hirohide Kobayashi, Akiko Iizuka (2010). Indigenous Construction Technology of Cotu Minorities in Central Vietnam - Case study of the traditional community house in Hong Ha commune, Thua Thien Hue province, *Architectural Institute of Japan*, No.653, 1679 - 1686.
- [4] Hirohide Kobayashi & Nguyen Ngoc Tung (2013). Body-based units of measurement for building

Katu community houses in Central Vietnam, Vernacular heritage and earthen architecture: contributions for sustainable development. *Proceedings of International Conference on Vernacular Architecture CIAV2013 | 7^oATP | VerSus - 16-20 of October 2013 Vila Nova Cerveira, Portugal*, pp. 359-364.

[5] Hirohide Kobayashi và cs (2008). *Participatory Construction of Traditional Community House in Mountainous Village of Central Vietnam*, NXB Chính trị quốc gia, Hà Nội.

[6] Akiko Iizuka (2012), Traditional community house of the Co-tu ethnic group in central Vietnam, *Sansai: an environmental journal for the global community*, No. 6, pp. 97-114, Kyoto University.

[7] Truong Hoang Phuong, Hirohide Kobayashi, Nguyen Ngoc Tung (2013). Typological research on traditional community house of the Katu ethnic minority in Vietnam. Vernacular Heritage and Earthen Architecture: Contribution for Sustainable Development. *Proceedings of International Conference on Vernacular Architecture CIAV2013 | 7^oATP | VerSus - 16-20 of October 2013 Vila Nova Cerveira, Portugal*, pp. 343-349.

[8] Truong Hoang Phuong (2015). *Conserving Traditional Community House of the Katu Ethnic Minority - A Case Study in Nam Dong District, Thua Thien Hue Province, Central Vietnam*. Dissertation, Kyoto University, Japan.

[9] Nguyễn Hữu Thông và cs (2004). *Katu kẻ sống đầu ngọn nước (Katu - the people living at the water-head)*, Thuận Hóa publishers. (in Vietnamese).

[10] Nguyễn Ngọc Tùng, Hirohide Kobayashi, Võ Ngọc Đức (2014), Kiến trúc nhà Guol và phương pháp xây dựng bằng kích thước cơ thể của người Cơ tu (Architecture of Guol house and construction method of body modules of Co tu ethnic group), *Tạp chí Khoa học và Công nghệ (Journal of Science and Technology)*, No. 1, Vol. 2, pp. 203-212. Hue University of Sciences. (in Vietnamese)

[11] Lê Anh Tuấn (2002), *Về ngôi nhà Guol của người Katu ở bắc Trường Sơn Việt Nam (Guol Communal House of Co-tu Minority in North Truong Son of Vietnam)*, scientific information, Research Sub-Institute of Culture and Arts in Hue. (in Vietnamese)

[12] Đặng Nghiêm Vạn, Chu Thái Sơn & Lưu Hùng (1993). *Ethnic minorities in Vietnam*, Thế Giới publishers, Pp. 72-75.

[13] Trần Tấn Vĩnh (2009). *The Cotu in Vietnam*. Vietnam News Agency Publishing House.