

PRESS RELEASE

By the people, for the people

Restorers from Germany in cooperation with a Vietnamese architect are proving that restoration must by no means be restricted to the palaces and tombs of mighty rulers. Pests, rain and the passing years have taken their toll on the 700-year old village hall in Tran Dang near Hanoi, a particularly splendid testament to Vietnamese cultural history. Local people have repaired their 'Dinh' over the centuries as best their means allow yet they were unable to tackle its present state alone. The German–Vietnamese team is now not only restoring the village hall but also assessing the condition of the entire historic village core and making recommendations on how best to preserve it.

From 2009–2010, the roof and the entire ironwood (in Vietnamese, 'lim') structure of the 'Dinh' will be restored, along with the extension housing an altar. On the building's ridge and gables, colourful carvings depicting ornamental, mythological and folkloric figures, and rare black ceramic mosaic-embellished sculptures attest to aesthetic, historical values that demand to be saved. The plain modern altar is to be replaced by a reconstruction of its historical predecessor. Tran Dang's 'Dinh' is embedded in an architectural ensemble comprised of a pagoda, a bell tower, a spring fed well, footbridges and gates – the hub of community life since time immemorial – where village assemblies, markets, and ceremonies in honour of guardian spirits all take place. The 'Dinh' is surrounded by small ponds in the shape of a turtle – one of four creatures that the Vietnamese hold sacred.

Vietnam's Ministry of Culture, Sport & Tourism declared the village hall of Tran Dang a monument of national importance in 1988. The current project is funded in the framework of the Cultural Preservation Programme maintained by the Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany, and directed by the 'German–Vietnamese Society' (DVG). Restoration work is carried out under the aegis of the German Conservation Restoration and Education Projects (GCREP) team, led by Chief Restorer and Project Manager, Ms. Andrea Teufel while Mr. Ly Truc Dung of Buffalo Architects is responsible for construction planning, management and monitoring. The people of Tran Dang are contributing to the project by clearing and cleaning up the historic core area. The decay of important historical monuments is thus being halted, the people are working to renew their ancient 'Dinh', and the historic village core as a whole is beginning to look more its old self – and to look to the future.

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