

APPLICATION OF ORIENTAL PHILOSOPHY IN RESORT ARCHITECTURE: THE CASE OF FITO MUSEUM

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the integration of traditional Eastern medicine philosophy into contemporary healing architecture through the design of a therapeutic resort inspired by the FITO Museum in Vietnam. Drawing upon principles of spatial balance, yin–yang harmony, five-element theory, and sensory alignment, a design-based research (DBR) approach was employed to reinterpret architectural strategies embedded in materials, spatial layout, natural ventilation, and cultural symbolism of FITO. A preliminary user survey with 102 participants was conducted to assess perception based on conceptual renderings and floor plans. Results indicated strong positive responses, with over 80% associating the design with feelings of relaxation, cultural identity, and nature connection. These findings demonstrate that Eastern medicine—rooted in inner healing—can be effectively translated into architectural expression to promote emotional well-being. The study concludes with implications for healing-oriented design in the Southeast Asian context and advocates for the integration of quantitative assessment tools in early-stage architectural development.

Keywords: healing architecture, traditional Vietnamese medicine, cultural identity, interior design, therapeutic resort, tropical design

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research Context

In recent decades, architectural design has undergone a significant shift—from a purely functional and formal approach to a more human-centered model that emphasizes the relationship between the built environment and holistic well-being. Particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, global attention to mental health and the quality of living environments has increased markedly. According to the World Health Organization ((WHO, 2022), the pandemic has had serious psychological impacts worldwide, creating an urgent need for living spaces that support emotional recovery and foster stronger connections between people and nature.

The idea that architectural space can have a healing effect is supported by numerous studies. Even passive exposure to nature—such as viewing greenery through a window—can accelerate post-surgery recovery, a finding that has significantly influenced the design of healthcare environments (Ulrich, 1984). Environmental neuroscience also supports this relationship: environmental design can influence stress responses and emotional well-being, highlighting the importance of spatial elements in the healing process (Sternberg, 2009). This connection between space and psychological health is a cornerstone of healing architecture. These insights have paved the way for a new wave of design that highlights natural elements, including daylight, ventilation, eco-friendly materials, and greenery in both residential and therapeutic spaces. Meanwhile, in the East—particularly in Vietnam—traditional philosophies such as yin-yang, the five elements (Ngũ Hành), herbal medicine, and holistic wellness not only reflect healing principles but also embody a worldview that sees harmony between humans, nature, and the cosmos. The body of knowledge within Vietnamese traditional medicine, which blends treatment with long-term nourishment through herbs, nutrition, and qigong, presents rich potential for the development of sustainable healing architectural spaces. However, the spatial expression of Vietnamese Eastern medicine philosophy remains relatively limited in modern architecture—especially in resorts and wellness environments. A rare but exemplary case that successfully embodies this spirit is the FITO Museum of Traditional Vietnamese Medicine in Ho Chi Minh City. The building is composed of reconstructed traditional Northern Vietnamese wooden houses (nhà rường), using local timber materials, multilayered spatial layouts, and sensory transitions that foster both visual and tactile engagement.

Its interior details form a comprehensive healing experience. The museum not only preserves thousands of Han-Nom medical artifacts and documents but also faithfully recreates traditional medical practice settings from rural to royal contexts with cultural depth and finesse. FITO has become an iconic model of a culturally rooted healing space, where architecture transcends the physical to become an emotionally resonant, spiritual, and community-connected living entity.

In the context of Vietnam—with its tropical monsoon climate and Eastern culture deeply embedded in wellness philosophy—the integration of healing architecture with indigenous knowledge is not only a contemporary trend but also an opportunity to develop resort and therapeutic models that reconnect with nature, enhance personal experience, and sustainably restore both physical and mental health.

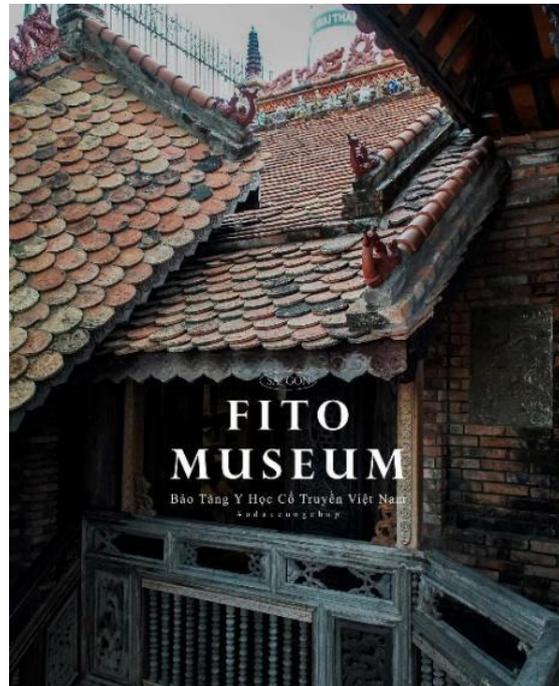


Figure 1: FITO Museum

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/>

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This study is developed from the philosophical and spatial inspiration of the FITO Museum, aiming to explore the potential of designing a contemporary healing-oriented resort rooted in the cultural foundations of Vietnamese traditional medicine. By reinterpreting the values and spatial logic of Eastern medicine within the context of wellness architecture, the study aspires to contribute a culturally distinctive healing architectural model that aligns with Vietnam's tropical climate and the growing trend of health and wellness tourism.

1.2. Research Questions and Objectives

This study aims to explore how the philosophical and spatial principles of Vietnamese traditional medicine—as exemplified by the FITO Museum—can be reinterpreted and applied to the design of a contemporary healing-oriented resort. To guide the research process, the study focuses on the following core questions:

Research Questions

1. What spatial and material elements in the FITO Museum express the healing values and cultural identity of Vietnamese traditional medicine?
2. How can these principles be transformed into the design of a contemporary resort that supports both physical and mental well-being?
3. What architectural design strategies can create healing experiences that reflect Vietnamese cultural identity?

Research Objectives

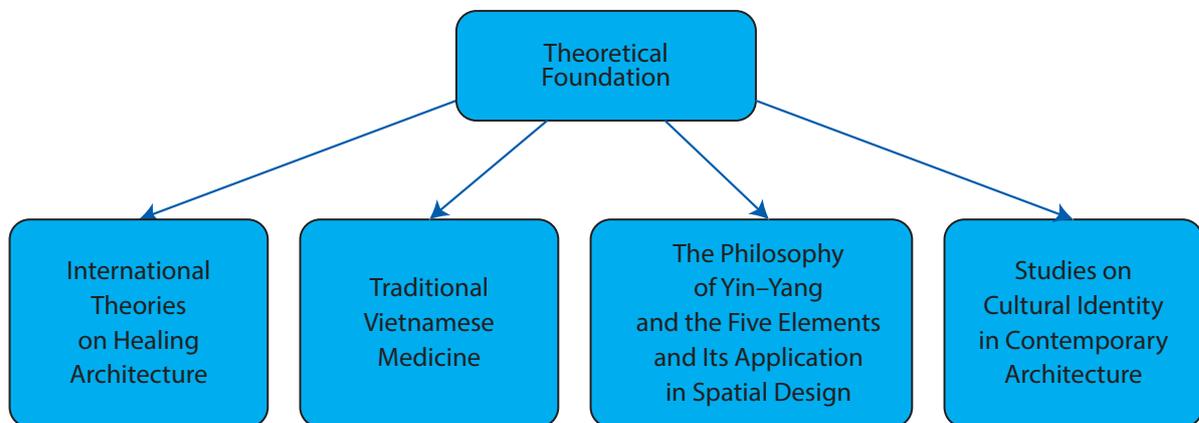
The research objectives of this paper are:

1. To explore the impact of healing space design on the physical and mental health of its users.
2. To evaluate the potential application of Traditional Chinese Medicine philosophy and healing architecture in the FITO Museum space, with the goal of creating an environment for recovery and health care.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

2.1. Literature Overview:

The theoretical foundation for this study is built upon a review of the following key groups of literature:



The theoretical foundation of this study is built upon four main groups of literature:

- (1) international theories on healing architecture;
- (2) indigenous knowledge systems of Vietnamese traditional medicine;
- (3) the yin–yang and five-element philosophy and its application in spatial design;
- (4) research on cultural identity in contemporary architecture.

Firstly, international theories on healing architecture provide an essential basis for understanding how designed space affects both physical and mental health. Aripin (2007) explains that healing architecture centers around restorative experiences through elements such as natural light, eco-friendly materials, flexible layouts, and tranquil environments. These factors reduce stress, enhance comfort, and support biological functions. Expanding on this, Singh, Sabahat, and Qamruddin (2021) emphasize the “ripple effect” of architectural environments—the ability to foster peace, serenity, and emotional connection beyond physical boundaries. Such research confirms that intentionally designed spaces

can activate positive physiological and psychological responses, demonstrating the applicability of healing architecture in hospitals, traditional medicine museums, and wellness resorts.

Secondly, the indigenous knowledge system of Vietnamese traditional medicine offers a profound philosophical foundation with strong potential for spatial translation into healing environments. According to Đỗ Tất Lợi (2001), Vietnamese traditional medicine is not only a therapeutic system but also a method of health preservation, aimed at achieving balance in both physical and mental well-being. One of Đỗ Tất Lợi's major contributions is his research on medicinal plants and herbs in Vietnam, which highlights the importance of using natural medicinal resources in treating illnesses. He argues that natural remedies not only help cure diseases but also maintain balance within the body, reflecting the philosophy of Eastern medicine regarding the harmony between humans and nature. According to Kieu Xuan Dung (2010), Eastern medicine is not only a therapeutic system but also a preventive care method that seeks yin–yang balance between humans and their environment. Trung (2005) elaborates on the roles of herbal remedies, acupuncture, massage, meditation, and medicinal plants as regulators of internal energy (qi), which can be spatially interpreted—particularly suitable for wellness and mental health-focused architecture. Phuong (n.d.) emphasizes stillness, connection with nature, and energy cultivation as essential humanistic values in healing space design. This aligns with the perspective of the World Health Organization (2022), which advocates for the integration of traditional medicine into sustainable health care policies.

Thirdly, the philosophy of yin–yang and the five elements serves as a core conceptual framework in Eastern medicine and informs spatial organization in Asian architecture. Yin and yang represent complementary opposites: passive–active, dark–light, enclosed–open; while the five elements—Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water—reflect natural substances and cyclical transformations. These are manifested architecturally through spatial duality, light and ventilation control, and the symbolic use of materials and colors. For instance, wood represents vitality (Wood), sunlight and fire evoke stimulation (Fire), earthen bricks and stone provide grounding (Earth), metals symbolize purification (Metal), and water calms emotions (Water). According to Đỗ Tất Lợi, the use of medicinal plants corresponding to the elements in the Five Elements theory, such as trees (Wood), herbs (Fire), or cooling herbs (Water), is a way to integrate medical principles with

spatial design. According to He & Luo (2011), Lin (2019), and Zhang (2020), applying the five-element theory in design is not merely symbolic—it fosters an energetic equilibrium where people are reconnected with both nature and their inner selves, in accordance with deep Eastern healing principles.

Lastly, studies on cultural identity in contemporary architecture and resort spaces offer vital references for proposing a healing resort model. Graham and Howard (2008) assert that cultural identity not only reflects the past but also reconstructs collective memory, tradition, and community consciousness within modern living environments. Similarly, Nguyen (2022) highlights the importance of symbols, materials, and indigenous architectural language in creating spaces that are both culturally symbolic and suited to contemporary lifestyles. In this context, integrating cultural identity into architecture is not merely an aesthetic gesture, but a human-centered strategy aligned with sustainable development trends.

Based on these theoretical sources, the FITO Museum was selected as the case study, as it is one of the few contemporary architectural examples in Vietnam that clearly expresses the intersection of traditional medicine and spatial design. Covering an area of approximately 600 square meters, with six floors and 18 exhibition rooms housing over 3,000 artifacts spanning from the Stone Age to the present, FITO offers a refined, culturally rich, and distinctly Vietnamese space. The museum primarily uses wood, Northern Vietnamese traditional wooden structures, and handcrafted decorative details. Field surveys, architectural drawings, and photographic documentation were collected from multiple sources to analyze spatial morphology, materials, and symbolism. As such, FITO not only preserves the legacy of traditional Vietnamese medicine but also serves as a model for integrating healing philosophy into contemporary architectural practice.



Figure 2: A space featuring traditional Northern Vietnamese architecture at the FITO Museum.

Source: <https://vietnambeauty.com.vn/bao-tang-y-hoc-co-truyen-viet-nam-fito-dep-co-kinh-qua-goc-may-cua-travel-blogger-nguyen-ky-anh-a16497.html>

2.2. Research Methodology

This study uses an applied design method combined with qualitative analysis to connect theory and architectural practice. The research steps include:

1. Document Analysis:

The study begins with collecting and analyzing materials related to healing architecture, the philosophy of Vietnamese traditional medicine (Yin-Yang – Five Elements), and the design of cultural identity in wellness spaces. The materials include monographs, scientific papers, international organization reports, and documents on the FITO Museum.

2. Case Study Analysis:

The FITO Museum is chosen as a case study to explore spatial elements, materials, lighting, and cultural symbols. Data is collected through field surveys, images, drawings, and interviews with users.

3. Creative Design Thinking:

Based on the theory and case study analysis, the study develops a design solution for a healing resort, reimagining Eastern medicine through functional zoning, architectural forms, materials, and therapeutic elements such as scent and natural sounds.

4. Visualization and Presentation of Design:

The design solution is presented through architectural drawings, 3D renderings, analysis diagrams, and comparison charts, demonstrating the process of transforming cultural heritage into contemporary architectural practice.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Overall Design Concept

Based on the philosophical spirit of traditional medicine and the distinctive spatial language of the FITO Museum, the resort is designed with a healing architecture approach rooted in Vietnamese Eastern medicine culture. The overall layout of the resort follows the model of “from the external world to the inner self”—where each spatial transition guides users toward a state of balance, relaxation, and restoration.

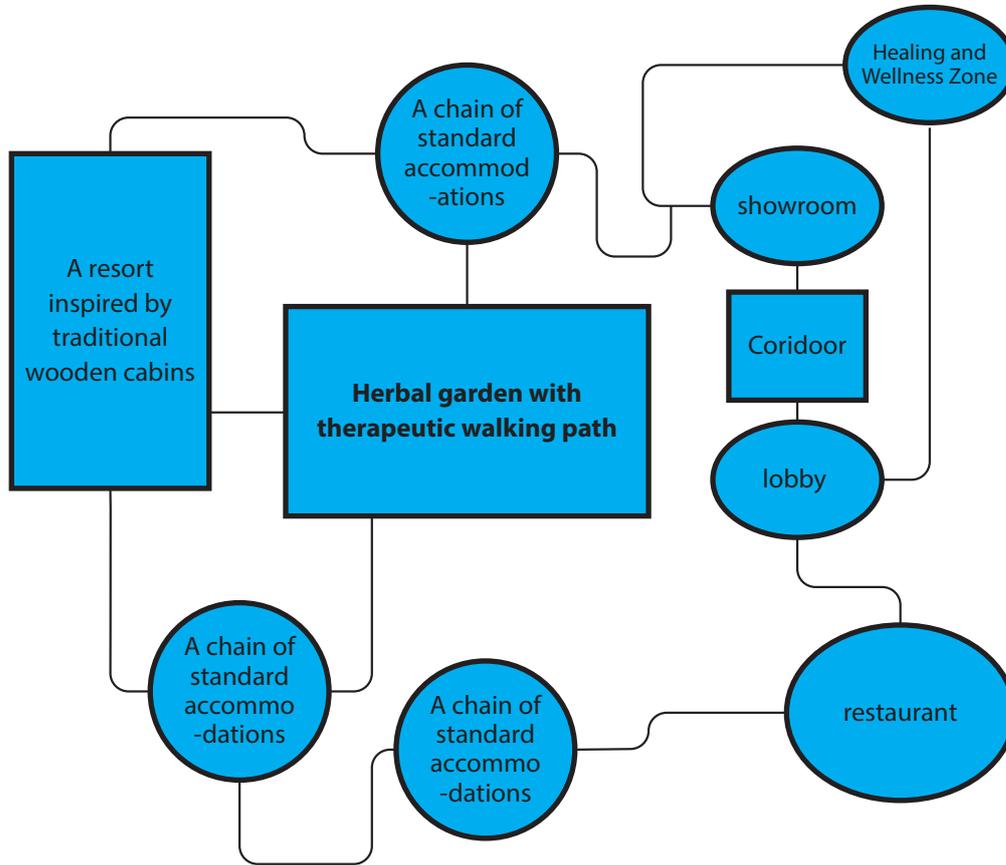
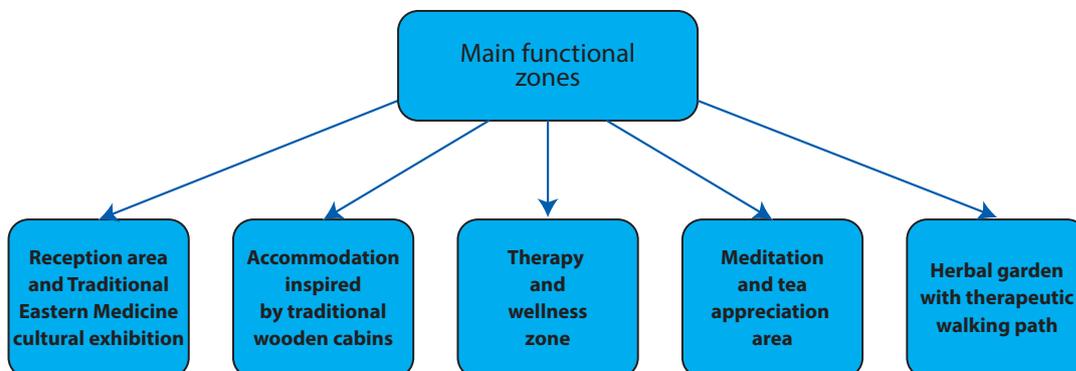


Figure 3: Functional zoning diagram of the resort.

Source: Nguyen Minh Tien

The resort consists of five main functional zones:



3.2. Inheriting Spatial Elements from the FITO Museum

No	Element	FITO – Current Condition Analysis	Resort – Design Application	Analysis
1	Materials of the FITO Museum	<p>FITO primarily uses wood, bamboo, and unbaked bricks—creating a warm, intimate atmosphere with a handcrafted quality that evokes memories of traditional Northern Vietnamese architecture.</p>  <p>The space of the Fito Museum features extensive use of wooden materials.</p> <p>source : https://vietnambeauty.com.vn/uploads/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/22-1.jpg</p>	<p>Based on the spirit of “Wood – Earth,” the resort selects materials such as wood, laterite stone, and terracotta tiles—not only environmentally friendly but also maintaining a warm and sustainable atmosphere suited to the tropical climate.</p>  <p>Entrance Lobby Area.</p> <p>source: Nguyen Minh Tien</p>	<p>Similar to how the FITO Museum extensively uses wood and unbaked bricks, the resort inherits this rustic spirit by employing unfinished-style wood and laterite bricks (210x45x100 mm) as primary building materials. These bricks, with their natural reddish-brown hue, create a warm and inviting atmosphere, aligning with the “Wood – Earth” philosophy in traditional medicine. Wood is used for flooring and veranda-style corridors, offering a sense of relaxation while helping to reduce heat transmission.</p>
2	Spatial Organization	<p>Multiple layers, transitions, and an interplay between interior and exterior spaces—all convey a sense of warmth and intimacy while effectively communicating the heritage of Vietnamese Eastern medicine. The interior elements are integrated into the user experience rather than merely being on display.</p>  <p>Nature-accessible space at FITO Museum.</p> <p>source : https://storage.googleapis.com/vietnam-travel-guide/2023/03/Museum-of-Traditional-Vietnamese-Medicine-FITO-Museum-35.jpg</p>	<p>The building volumes are gently tiered at varying heights, with corridors connecting functional spaces that open out to the medicinal garden. The open areas feature columns inspired by traditional Northern Vietnamese architecture. The floors are paved with wood-look tiles, representing the Wood element (Mộc).</p>  <p>Connecting corridor between functional spaces.</p> <p>Source: Nguyen Minh Tien</p>	<p>The corridor design features gentle transitions and soft lighting to soothe the mind and regulate emotions. In addition, resting spaces are interspersed with live herbal landscapes, creating sensory interactions through aroma and visual elements.</p>

No	Element	FITO – Current Condition Analysis	Resort – Design Application	Analysis
3	<p>“Lighting and ventilation”</p>	<p>Skylight, wooden staircase, indirect natural lighting.</p>  <p><i>The staircase leading to the outdoor space at FITO Museum.</i> source : https://authentiktravel.com/media/ckeditor/fito-museum-what-to-do-in-saigon-7.jpg</p>	<p>Corridors and open spaces lead to garden areas featuring various herbs, which are also medicinal plants. Here, the lotus garden serves not only as a source of medicine and a beautiful flower but also as a healing aromatic stimulant. The space embodies the Water–Wood elements.</p>  <p><i>The connecting corridor between functional spaces passes through the lotus garden.</i> Source: Nguyen Minh Tien</p>	<p>The floor plan and elevation drawings reveal that the building blocks are arranged in a rhythm of varying heights ($\pm 0.000 \rightarrow +0.400 \rightarrow +1.800$), connected by wooden-covered corridors with eaves. This creates a gentle spatial flow that subtly guides movement. This organizational approach reflects the concept of soft transitions—a prominent feature in the FITO Museum—allowing users to pass through layers of space naturally, evoking the sensation of journeying into inner depth.</p>
4	<p>Oriental Medicine Symbolism:</p>	<p>Displays of traditional medical tools, woodblock prints, medicinal herbs, and numerous other cultural heritage artifacts.</p>  <p><i>Exhibition space of traditional medical instruments.</i> source : https://cdn.getyourguide.com/img/tour/7cf525e0fb56703669ac407d852885aecd2bd1d37b2c5e80230b1e3d135fe1f.png/145.jpg</p>	<p>Interior decoration incorporates motifs of traditional Oriental medicine, with design elements on walls, ceilings, and furnishings often reflecting its symbolic details.</p>  <p><i>Frangipani flowers, recognized for their medicinal properties, are incorporated into the design of headboard wall decorations.</i> Source: Nguyen Minh Tien</p>  <p><i>Transitional corridor between functional zones.</i> Source: Nguyen Minh Tien</p>	<p>Narrative Detail: The reception area and the main corridor are organized as open spaces, featuring wooden verandas and traditional-style eaves that evoke the image of timber corridors in ancient medical houses. These elements are not merely structural components, but serve as narrative devices—settings for “healing through experience” activities such as herbal foot soaks, meditative music sessions, or conversations with traditional physicians.</p>

The resort design presented in this study is developed based on a selective inheritance of the morphological elements and symbolic features of traditional Eastern medicine architecture. This inheritance does not aim to replicate forms, but rather focuses on interpreting the spirit—through the organization of spatial experiences and the creation of an emotional flow for users. According to Tuan (1977), space only becomes place when it is associated with emotions and cultural memory; therefore, contemporary design must recreate the emotional depth of tradition through new forms. This aligns with Niebisch's (2009) perspective, which holds that "virtual memory space" is an essential part of organizing experience and evoking cultural symbolism through human movement and interaction in space. Elements such as materials, light, spatial organization, and symbolic imagery are approached as mediums of cultural transmission and healing. The use of rustic materials rooted in the Wood–Earth elements—such as wood, bamboo, terracotta, and natural stone—is considered a means of stabilizing emotions and regenerating inner energy. This is consistent with the concept of the Five Elements and the principle of mutual generation and restriction in traditional medicine (Truong & Nguyen, 2023). According to Đỗ Tất Lợi (2001), the medicinal herbs in Vietnamese traditional medicine not only have therapeutic effects but also help regulate the flow of energy (qi) and maintain balance within the body, reflecting the philosophy of Eastern medicine about the harmony between humans and nature. These materials are not only biologically compatible but also possess tactile, olfactory, and visual qualities that help activate a meditative state. Ghazaly. (2022) also emphasize the role of natural light, passive ventilation, and natural materials in promoting mental and physical recovery within architectural spaces (Ghazaly, Badokhon, Alyamani, & Alnumani, 2022).

In addition, the design reimagines narrative-rich spaces such as the herbal dispensary room, with imagery of medicine cabinets, scales, and the act of preparing medicine—not merely as cultural imitations but as a symbolic memory system, where users are guided through a healing experiential journey (Niebisch, 2009). This experience is organized through spatial rhythms: from static – open – transitional zones to emotional interaction points like filtered light, directed breezes, and herbal scents—all aligning with the traditional Eastern medical organization of Qi (energy) and Shen (spirit). Traditional elements no longer appear as direct physical forms but are sedimented into sensations—transformed into non-verbal spatial memory, allowing users to perceive cultural identity and depth without explicitly

seeing historical images. This fusion of traditional memory and modern emotion is what constitutes "soft healing" in architecture, which Ulrich (1991) defines as the ability of the environment to stimulate psychological and physiological recovery (Ghazaly et al., 2022).

Therefore, contemporary interior design in this case study is not merely a physical arrangement but a nuanced dialogue between past and present, between local values and modern living needs. From that, it forms a healing space that is both humanistic and sustainable—aligned with the goals of Healing Architecture in its strategy of ecological and cultural architectural design (Ghazaly , 2022; Truong & Nguyen, 2023).

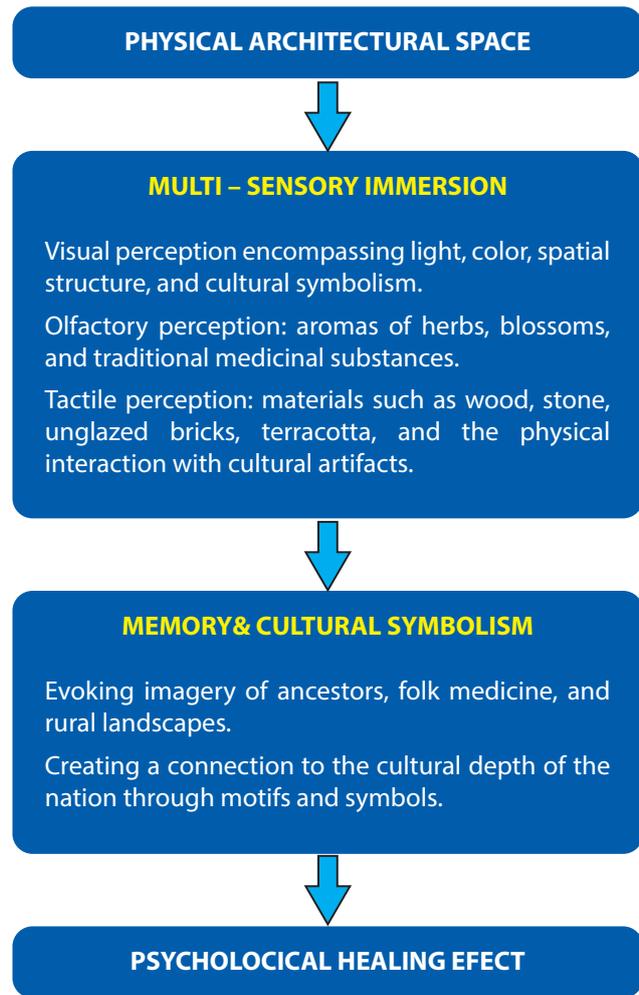
3.3. Healing Through Architecture – An Emotional Experience:

Healing spaces in architecture go beyond aesthetics; they aim to profoundly influence human emotions, behaviors, and physiological states through multisensory experiences. The therapeutic resort design, inspired by Eastern medicine philosophy and the FITO Museum, is structured around four primary senses—sight, smell, hearing, and touch—to create a continuous, natural, and purposefully guided mental healing process.

- **Sight:** The space utilizes a warm, earthy color palette—such as terracotta red, wooden brown, and deep green—combined with raw natural materials like wood, bamboo, laterite stone, and soft-filtered daylight through wooden louvers. Together, these elements create a gentle visual ambiance that reduces sensory pressure and evokes feelings of safety and relaxation. According to Küller (1986), indirect lighting and warm color tones not only provide visual comfort but also help regulate emotions and reduce neural stress in enclosed interior environments—where people are often exposed to artificial lighting and passive sensory stimulation.
- **Smell:** The fragrance of herbs—such as agarwood, lemongrass, ginger, and mint—is subtly diffused throughout spa areas, tea rooms, and medicinal gardens. Studies have shown that natural scents can trigger positive memories and regulate the nervous system, contributing to a sense of purification and lightness. Specifically, essential oils like lavender, bergamot, yuzu, and rosewood (*Aniba rosaeodora*) have been proven to modulate the autonomic nervous system, lower cortisol levels, and enhance overall mood by acting directly on the brain's limbic system (Chikazawa , 2023).

- **Hearing:** Sounds of flowing water, birdsong, or low-frequency meditation music are integrated into the space to calm the sympathetic nervous system, reduce blood cortisol levels, and support restful sleep. Research indicates that exposure to natural sounds—such as streams and birdcalls—following stress stimuli leads to significantly faster physiological recovery of the sympathetic nervous system than exposure to urban noise. This is evidenced by skin conductance level (SCL) measurements, which demonstrate that nature sounds effectively soothe the nervous system without creating cognitive load (Alvarsson, Wiens, & Nilsson, 2010).
- **Touch:** Direct contact with textured surfaces such as rough wood, cool stone, and rammed earth provides an authentic and intimate tactile experience. According to Koga and Iwasaki (2013), natural materials like wood, bamboo, and earthen finishes can induce feelings of relaxation, comfort, and safety through tactile interaction, thereby enhancing users' emotional bond with the space. These positive affective responses contribute to creating a healing environment—particularly crucial in spaces designed for rest and recovery.
- **The integration of all four senses** contributes to the creation of an implicitly therapeutic mental space—where users do not need to consciously try to relax but are gently guided into a serene and harmonious state. Additionally, the presence of Eastern medicine symbols and local cultural identity in the design functions as a form of emotional cultural memory, helping individuals reconnect with themselves and their traditional roots through an immaterial healing experience. In combining these layers of perception, the museum transcends its role as a display space to become a spiritual healing structure—where sensory experiences lead people back to their collective memory and cultural heritage.

The Spatial–Cultural–Emotional Healing Model in Museum Interior Design



3.4. Architectural Identity and Replicability

The design results demonstrate that the healing resort model holds significant potential for deeply integrating elements of Eastern medicine culture into contemporary architecture. These elements include the philosophy of Yin–Yang and the Five Elements, herbal symbolism, imagery evoking traditional diagnostic and prescription practices, representations of renowned physicians who founded the medical tradition, and tranquil spaces characteristic of the healing journey in traditional medicine.

Based on the use of natural materials, a spatial organization with a contrasting rhythm of openness and enclosure, and systems of natural lighting and ventilation, the model successfully creates a resort environment that embodies strong cultural identity and provides a distinct therapeutic effect on the mind and spirit. The space not only fulfills the basic function of relaxation but also serves as a medium for transmitting traditional medical heritage, promoting emotional education, and fostering inner balance—

especially relevant amid rapid urbanization and rising mental health challenges.

To assess initial user perceptions of this design concept, the research team developed an online survey. The questionnaire focused on four main criteria: the level of relaxation, connection to nature, sense of cultural familiarity, and overall satisfaction—based on visual renderings and descriptive materials.

The survey was conducted with 102 participants, including architecture students, office workers, and potential clients of therapeutic resort experiences. The survey was carried out with three groups of participants: (1) Architecture students, (2) Office workers, and (3) Potential clients for health and wellness experiences. Architecture students were classified as experts due to their knowledge and ability to assess spatial design. The office worker and potential client groups were classified as customers because they evaluate the space from a practical and experiential perspective.

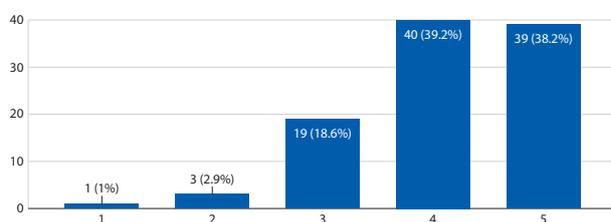
The survey results show that the architecture student group placed greater value on the aesthetic and functional aspects of the space, while the office workers and potential clients focused more on elements related to relaxation and connection with nature. Specifically, the potential client group highly appreciated the use of natural materials like wood and bamboo, with 87% indicating that they felt a connection to nature through the use of these materials.

The goal of grouping participants was to analyze how each group evaluates the designed space from different perspectives. Architecture students were considered the expert group due to their knowledge and experience in evaluating the aesthetic and functional qualities of the space. Meanwhile, office workers and potential clients were categorized as the customer group because they assess the space from a practical and personal experience perspective.

Preliminary results indicated:

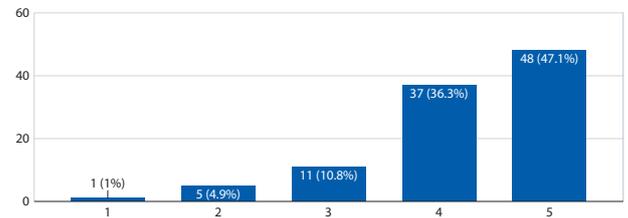
79% expressed a positive emotional connection to the space.

4. Bạn có cảm tình với không gian này không?
102 responses



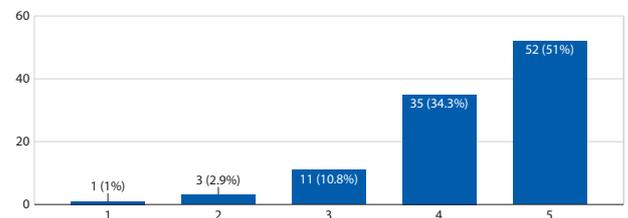
85% felt that the renderings created a connection with nature through open spaces, natural lighting, or fragrant herbs such as lotus.

5. Tôi cảm nhận rõ sự kết nối với thiên nhiên thông qua không gian mở, vườn thuốc, ánh sáng tự nhiên, các loại thảo mộc có hương thơm như sen...
102 responses



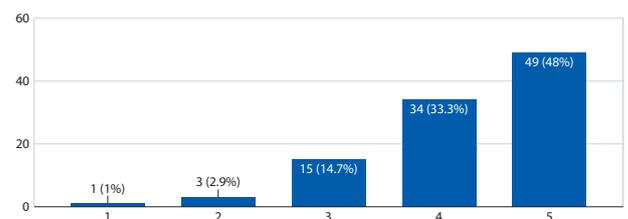
87% appreciated the use of materials such as raw wood and bamboo for evoking a sense of friendliness and rustic simplicity.

6. Việc sử dụng vật liệu gỗ mộc, đá xanh, tre, tạo cảm giác mộc mạc và thân thiện
102 responses



83% recognized elements of Eastern medicine culture through distinctive symbols such as medicine cabinets, tea ceremony spaces, open layouts, and materials that evoke a rustic atmosphere.

7. Tôi nhận thấy rõ các yếu tố văn hóa Đông y trong thiết kế (các dấu hiệu đặc thù như hộp thuốc, không gian trà đạo, không gian mở, vật liệu mộc mạc)
102 responses



The positive feedback from this survey indicates a high level of user receptiveness to the proposed design model, reinforcing the hypothesis that cultural identity and nature-based design play a vital role in healing architecture. However, some participants suggested limiting the use of wood due to its high construction cost.

The survey also measured other senses such as smell, sound, and tactile sensations. The survey question about scent asked participants to evaluate their level of relaxation when exposed to the scents of herbs like lotus, ginger, and mint. 82% of participants reported feeling relaxed when smelling the lotus scent in the space.

Sound was also surveyed through questions about the sound of flowing water and birdsong in the space. 78% of participants stated that the sound of flowing water and birdsong helped them feel relaxed and reduced stress. This supports the research of Alvarsson (2010), which shows that natural sounds help lower stress levels and promote faster recovery compared to urban noise.

Questions about tactile sensations from interacting with natural materials such as wood and stone were also included in the survey. 79% of participants indicated that they felt comfortable when touching wood and stone surfaces in the space, suggesting a connection between physical sensations and mental relaxation.

The discussion on the impact of space on feelings and health was enhanced by focusing on real data from the survey conducted at the FITO Museum. The results showed that the design of the space, including natural light, and natural materials such as wood and stone, created a relaxing environment, reduced stress, and enhanced the feeling of tranquility for visitors. The use of materials like wood, terracotta, and water helped activate a sense of relaxation and integration with nature, aligning with the traditional medicine philosophy of “Nam dược trị Nam nhân.”

Specifically, the survey revealed that 78% of visitors felt relaxed and comfortable when exposed to spaces that used many natural materials like wood and stone. 85% of participants felt a deep connection with nature when they saw plants and flowing water in the museum space. These elements created a healing experience, while also reducing visitors’ stress and fatigue. These results support Đỗ Tất Lợi’s view on the role of natural medicinal materials in creating balance and healing for the body and mind.

3.5. Presentation of Design Form and Spatial Language

The following renderings illustrate how the research team has translated the healing philosophy into design—from overall layout to details in material, lighting, and climate responsiveness. The design language reflects a harmonious integration of the Yin–Yang philosophy, Eastern medicine symbolism, and the architectural identity of Vietnam.

The reception area is designed with strong influences from Eastern medicine, featuring a striking decorative wall made up of traditional apothecary drawers, paired with miniature landscapes displaying rare medicinal herbs.

The space utilizes raw wooden furnishings, evoking a rustic, intimate, and relaxing atmosphere. A refined highlight lies in the stylized frangipani flower-inspired lamps, crafted from paper, which gently evoke a spirit of healing. Wall patterns also mimic the forms of medicinal plants, simultaneously showcasing the rich heritage of traditional medicine and reinforcing the overall message of the space.



Figure 4: Corridor connecting different functional spaces.

Source: Nguyen Minh Tien.



Figure 5: Various medicinal herbs displayed as wall decorations.

Source: Nguyen Minh Tien

Connecting the various spaces are corridors designed in the style of Northern Vietnam, leading through herb gardens that evoke a sense of relaxation, immersion in nature, and a complete experience of healing and serenity.



Figure 6: Corridor connecting different functional spaces.
Source: Nguyen Minh Tien.



Figure 8: Corridor connecting different functional spaces.
Source: Nguyen Minh Tien.

The bedroom space is entirely rustic, featuring stylized apricot blossom motifs made from pressed paper—once again reflecting the spirit of Eastern medicine and evoking a sense of healing.



Bedroom decorated with frangipani patterns, a medicinal flower.
Source: Nguyen Minh Tien

In summary, the reception area is designed with an aesthetic orientation rooted in Eastern medicine, selectively reinterpreting key elements of traditional medical culture within a contemporary context. The focal visual structure is formed by a wall system arranged with apothecary drawers—symbolizing traditional methods of storing and classifying medicinal herbs—combined with herbal miniature landscapes to enhance the connection between physical space and the symbolic values of indigenous medicine. According to the study by Hoàng Phương and Vũ Anh (2022), traditional visual elements, when expressed through subtle and emotionally resonant symbolism, can produce therapeutic effects that extend beyond the physical realm.

The dominant interior material is raw wood, featuring neutral tones and natural surface textures to create a sense of closeness and harmony while minimizing visual stimulation, serving the purpose of emotional regulation for users. Phenomenological research by Lee (2022) emphasizes that materiality, touch, and bodily movement play a central role in forming spatial perception, especially when material elements are emotionally evocative and harmonized with user experience.

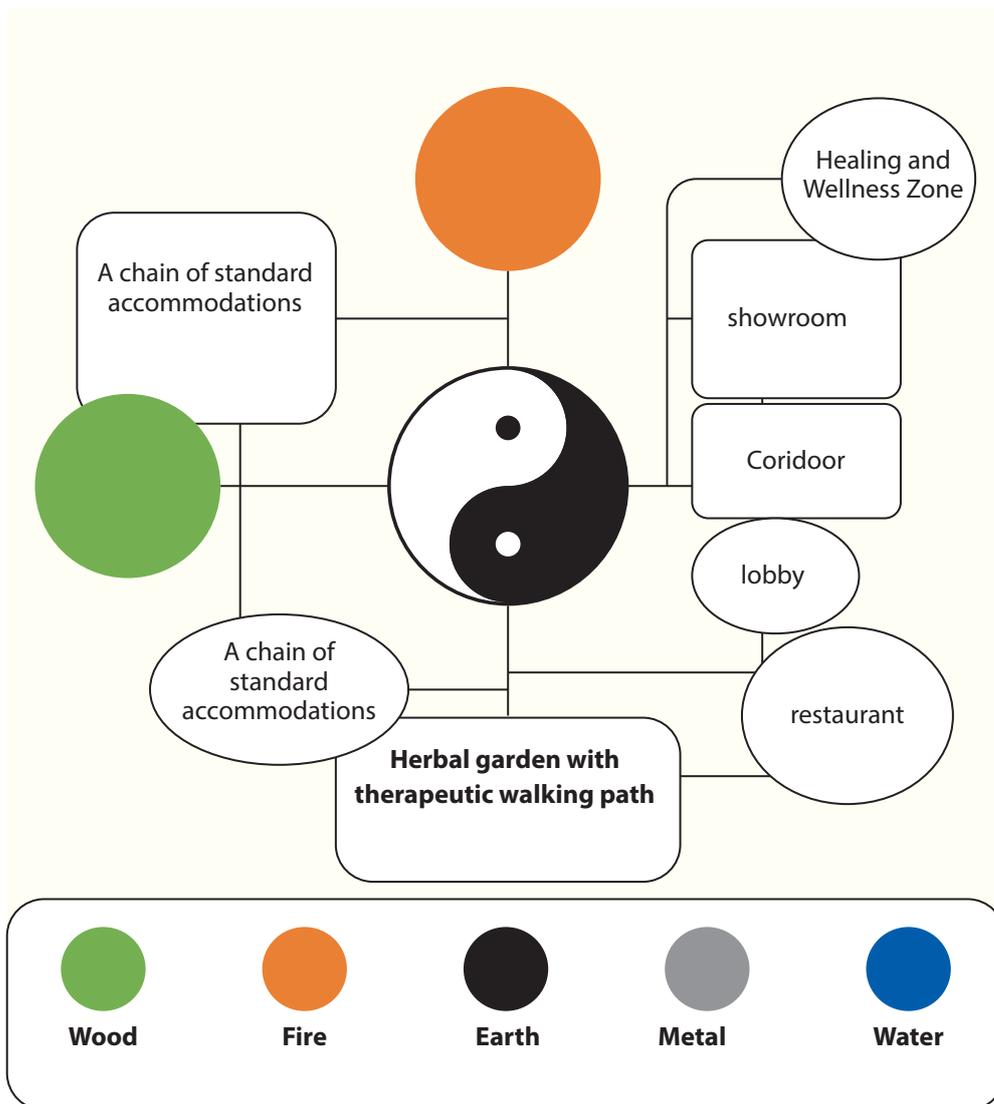
Notably, the lighting system integrates decorative clusters of stylized frangipani lamps—a flower symbolizing purity and healing in many East Asian cultures. Light and shadow are used as tools for meditation and spiritual connection, creating a multisensory experience that, according to Ghazaly (2022), can stimulate mental and physical recovery functions through warm spaces, gentle materials, and deliberate light interactions. The decorative motifs on the wall surfaces feature images of traditional medicinal herbs, serving as an educational display that subtly and systematically conveys the knowledge system of Eastern medicine. At the same time, these elements redefine the function of the reception area—not merely as a waiting space, but as a spiritually therapeutic environment where users are sensorially engaged, connected to nature, and immersed in a deeply healing experience on both physical and psychological levels. Traditional Vietnamese medicine emphasizes emotional balance and internal harmony through practices such as qigong, meditation, and alignment with natural rhythms, where space and environment contribute subtly to healing. According to Đỗ Tất Lợi (2001), the medicinal herbs in Vietnamese traditional medicine not only have therapeutic effects but also help regulate the flow of energy (qi) and maintain balance within the body, reflecting the philosophy of Eastern medicine regarding the harmony between humans and nature. According to Nguyễn Đình Hòa

(2015), the “soft healing” elements in traditional medicine are formed from the harmony between qi, spirit, and form, where space can serve as a means to regulate emotions and naturally transform inner energy.

3.6. Diagram of Spatial Organization Principles Based on Yin–Yang and the Five Elements

Based on the foundational principles of Eastern medicine, the following conceptual diagram simulates how resort space can be organized along the axis of Yin–Yang opposition and complementarity, while also integrating the Five Elements system to generate a naturally balanced energy field. Specifically, dynamic (Yang) zones—such as the restaurant, main lobby, and exhibition areas—are arranged on the periphery, whereas tranquil (Yin) spaces—such as the accommodation area, garden, and therapy zones—are positioned at the central core and rear. The central garden—representing the Earth element (*Thổ*)—serves as the core regulator of the overall energy flow.

The diagram also illustrates the elements of Wood (*Mộc*), Fire (*Hỏa*), Earth (*Thổ*), Metal (*Kim*), and Water (*Thủy*) through materials, spatial orientation, and function, thereby reflecting the harmonious operation of all things according to Eastern philosophical cosmology.



Five Elements	Characteristics	Design Expression	Specific Application Areas	Therapeutic / Emotional Effect
Wood	Growth, development, flexibility	Native plants, natural wood materials, floral and leafy patterns	Entrance, garden, lobby, reading areas	Enhances vitality, creates a sense of warmth and connection with nature
Fire	Heat, activation, motivation	Natural sunlight, candles, earthy red walls, meditative music	Morning yoga zones, sauna, sunrise terrace	Stimulates positive energy, awareness, and inspiration
Earth	Stability, grounding, balance	Terracotta bricks, laterite, rammed earth, raw flooring	Central courtyard, meditation garden, transitional zones	Fosters safety, stability, and grounding
Metal	Clarity, purification, structure	Light metals (brushed brass, stainless steel) in handles or decorative details	Lobby walls designed with medicinal cabinet motifs	Brightens space, promotes focus and mental clarity
Water	Flow, softness, deep emotion	Small ponds, water features, sound of flowing water, herbal tea areas	Near spas, tea rooms, along pathways	Calms emotions, supports meditation, balances energy

Design Implications

The healing resort design model, based on Eastern medicine philosophy, goes beyond merely recreating cultural identity—it opens a pathway toward sustainable, human-centered, and holistic architectural design. By applying the principles of *Yin–Yang* and the *Five Elements*, space is organized into a harmonious system of dynamic and static energies, evoking a sense of relaxation and inner connection while also addressing the multifunctional needs of contemporary society.

The first implication is the potential to expand this model into other building types, such as wellness homestays, meditation and therapy centers, open museums, indigenous community spaces, or even eco-rest stops in highland areas. Thanks to its flexible structure, the model can be adapted to various geographical, climatic, and cultural contexts while preserving the core design philosophy.

The second implication lies in the integration of this approach into therapeutic tourism development policies, where architecture is not just infrastructure but an integral part of holistic healthcare (well-being). Especially in regions rich in indigenous medical resources—such as the Northwest, Central Highlands, or the Mekong Delta—developing this model also contributes to preserving folk knowledge, creating sustainable livelihoods for local communities, and shaping a unique tourism identity.

Lastly, from a professional architectural perspective, this study proposes a new design mindset—one that places immaterial elements such as energy, emotion, and life philosophy at the center, rather than focusing solely on functionality or formal aesthetics. It is a call for architects, planners, and investors to re-evaluate the value of space—not only as a place to live, but as a place to *heal*.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the philosophy of Eastern medicine is not only foundational to traditional Vietnamese healthcare but also offers profound value when translated into architectural language—particularly in the context of resort and wellness space design. Through the analysis of the FITO Museum—a representative case of the convergence between architecture, culture, and healing—the paper has clarified how materials, lighting, spatial layout, and cultural symbolism can be harnessed to create locally rooted and sustainable healing environments. The proposed healing resort design, inspired by Eastern medicine, not only extends the applicability of traditional philosophies in contemporary architecture but also contributes to the formation of culturally rich and emotionally engaging health tourism spaces. It stands as evidence of the potential for healing architecture when grounded in national identity—reconnecting people with nature, with themselves, and with their cultural heritage.

Looking ahead, deeper interdisciplinary studies exploring Eastern medicine principles—integrating fields such as healthcare, design, and tourism—will provide valuable direction for developing more humanistic living environments that meet the physical and mental health needs of modern society. This paper approached the FITO Museum of Traditional Medicine as a prominent example of healing architecture that intertwines with local cultural values. Through the analysis of three layers of sensory experience—visual, tactile, and olfactory—it is evident that physical space serves not only a functional role but also acts as a catalyst for psychological regulation and the evocation of therapeutic memory. From a theoretical perspective, FITO Museum contributes to expanding the scope of “healing architecture”—a concept traditionally confined to healthcare facilities—into the realm of cultural preservation and dissemination. This suggests a new design approach: healing heritage—the ability to heal through traditional, symbolic, and sensorial cultural spaces.

However, to more convincingly affirm the healing role of traditional architectural spaces like FITO, further in-depth studies with empirical data are necessary. Future research may explore the actual impacts of such design elements on users’ emotions, behavior, or physiological states—through quantitative surveys, biometric tracking, or behavioral analysis of spatial experience.

In today’s society, where mental well-being is increasingly prioritized, spaces like the FITO Museum have the potential to serve not only as heritage repositories but as healing sanctuaries within the urban fabric—places where individuals are gently reconnected with themselves through the guidance of space, memory, and cultural identity.

4.2. Recommendations

Based on the results, the paper proposes several directions for practical application and further research:

- **In architectural practice:** Encourage architects to deeply explore the value of local cultural spaces—particularly Eastern philosophies—as a creative foundation in the design of wellness, therapeutic, and restorative environments. Moreover, it is essential to incorporate multisensory and emotional experiences as a core part of wellness and healthcare architecture.
- **In architectural education and theory:** Integrate the concept of healing architecture and design models associated with cultural and medical heritage—such as FITO—into design curricula to enhance humanistic and identity-driven perspectives in architectural creation.
- **In future research:** Expand investigations to include more folk structures and culturally therapeutic museums (e.g., traditional herbal clinics, village communal houses, native medicinal gardens) in order to construct a design principle system suited to Vietnam’s diverse climatic and cultural regions. In addition, quantitative research—such as user satisfaction surveys or mental recovery indices—could be applied to evaluate the healing effectiveness of resort environments based on this model. Future research could apply quantitative assessment tools for mental health, such as indicators of sleep quality, stress levels, and emotions of participants before and after experiencing the designed space. These studies could help further clarify the impact of spatial design on the mental and physical health of users.

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