

**THE CHANGES OF PLACE ATTACHMENT BEFORE AND
AFTER 1975 IN HO CHI MINH CITY**

CHAN WAI LAI

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

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HO CHI MINH CITY

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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this study is to understand how conflicts and the recovery processes have impacted on the people's social values as well as place attachment in a post-conflict city. Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam is used as the case study. Sense of place, place attachment and disruption in place theories has been used as theoretical framework to understand the human impacts and to analyze the experiences of Saigoneses. Data was collected through three methods: secondary data, field observations and one-on-one personal interviews with eight residents as well as semi-structured interviews with forty residents which were conducted in Ho Chi Minh City. Qualitative data was analyzed in-depth through the analytic bracketing approach. The study indicated that the conflicts had caused a strong disruption on Vietnam resulted millions of Vietnamese had fled. During the recovery process, changes took place as the ideology of the country change from republic to socialist and from a command economy to a socialist-oriented market economy. As Ho Chi Minh City grows rapidly, people from outskirts started to immigrate to the city for different purposes. As revealed from the interviews with respondents, they were still able to cope with the changes in replacing or restoring the place attachments throughout these 35 years. Ho Chi Minh City is still their native city which holds an important role. The major finding showed that Saigoneses were attached to the setting of the place and to the people. Nevertheless, the place belongingness has been transformed from home, street and village which are small in scale and where intimate relationships are developed to open space and park and even coffee shop where the flow of people is huge with changes in people happen daily.

(Keywords: Post-Conflict, Ho Chi Minh City, Place attachment, Disruption in place attachment)

ABSTRAK

Objektif utama kajian ini adalah untuk memahami kesan-kesan konflik dan proses pemulihan di atas nilai-nilai sosial masyarakat serta *place attachment* di dalam sebuah bandar yang mengalami konflik. Bandar Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam digunakan sebagai kajian kes. *Sense of place*, *place attachment* dan teori gangguan di suatu tempat telah digunakan sebagai rangka teori untuk memahami kesan-kesan terhadap manusia dan untuk menganalisis pengalaman yang dilalui oleh Saigonesese. Data dikumpulkan melalui tiga kaedah: Data sekunder, observasi semasa berada di Bandar Ho Chi Minh dan wawancara peribadi bersama dengan tujuh penduduk serta wawancara semi-berstruktur dengan empat puluh warga yang menduduki Bandar Ho Chi Minh. Data kualitatif dianalisis secara mendalam melalui pendekatan *bracketing* (mengurung) analitik. Kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa konflik telah menyebabkan gangguan yang kuat di Vietnam yang menyebabkan berjuta-juta penduduk Vietnam melarikan diri. Semasa proses pemulihan, ideologi telah diubahkan dari Negara Republik kepada Negara Sosialis serta dari ekonomi komando kepada ekonomu pasaran sosialis. Apabila Bandar Ho Chi Minh bertumbuh dengan cepat, penduduk luar Bandar mula bermigrasi ke bandar untuk tujuan yang berbeza. Seperti yang disebutkan di dalam wawancara dengan penduduk, mereka masih mampu mengatasi perubahan yang berlaku di dalam bandar mereka dalam tempo 35 tahun ini. Bandar Ho Chi Minh City masih merupakan bandar asal mereka yang memegang peranan penting. Penemuan utama kajian menunjukkan bahawa Saigonesese dipengaruhi oleh tempat dan orang-orang. Walaubagimapun, tempat yang mereka berasa dipilih mereka telah berubah dari rumah, jalan dan desa yang berskala kecil dan dimana hubungan dibangunkan kepada ruang terbuka, taman dan kedai kopi di mana aliran orang sangat besar dan perubahan pada orang berlaku setiap hari.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This research seeks to understand how conflicts and the recovery processes have impacted on the people's social values as well as place attachment in a post-conflict city before 1975 and after 1975. *H Chí Minh* City in Vietnam was used as the case study. Sense of place, place attachment and disruption in place theories has been used as theoretical framework to understand the human impacts and to analyze the experiences of Saigoneses. Data was collected through three methods: secondary data, field observations and one-on-one personal interviews with 8 residents as well as semi-structured interviews with 40 residents which were conducted in *H Chí Minh* City. In essence, this research is sociological study of what happens to people when places are changed.

Post conflict is defined as “locales that are socially, economically, and physically impacted by war, ethnic or religious conflict, or endemic criminal violence” (Davis, 2008). The term is interchangeable with post-war. Post conflict has been widely discussed in the urban planning field regarding to the reconstruction of policy, economic, security and others.

Space often becomes known and defined by people through their personal experiences, space acquires meaning and thus it transformed into a place (Riley, 1992). Places vary in scale and significance. When people become attached to places, they developed an affective bonds with the places and the place gives them a sense of belonging, especially their homeland (Tuan, 1977) Thus, place attachment was defined as individuals’ commitment to their neighborhood and their neighbors as well (Riley, 1992).

This chapter presents the overall structure of the study. The second section explains about the background of study. Research Hypothesis was explored in the third section. This is followed by the Research purpose and objectives. Research questions were in the fifth section. The sixth section highlights the scope of research and is followed by the research gap. The eighth section focus on the research methodology and on the last section, the organization of the study was explained.

1.2 Background of Study

Throughout the history of Vietnam, Vietnamese have been in war before AD 938 (hochiminhcity.gov.vn). Vietnam has gone through ruling under China for thousand years and the French colonization for few decades. The impact of French Colonization has left the country with a civil war; separating the country politically into two sides, which normally called North Vietnam and South Vietnam.

Saigon, which is called as *H Chí Minh City* now was referring the current District 1. It was an important city long before its name was changed. As such, Saigon is still the common name to refer to *H Chí Minh City*. People still prefer to be called Saigonese. *H Chí Minh City* was founded 300 years ago by the French Colonization and it is a very young city compare to Hanoi and Hue.

April 30, 1975, it was a significant date recording the fall of Saigon. This important event has unified the North Vietnam and South Vietnam under the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. It stated a new phase for Vietnam in their history. Saigon was then renamed as *H Chí Minh City*.

When Vietnam was under the stage of post-disruption, it consistently was in war with its neighboring countries. Thus, the redevelopment of the country was rather slow compare to other Asian Countries which gained independence about the same time with Vietnam. Besides that, the change of new authorities and the new ideology has caused a great number of Vietnamese flee to other neighboring countries, but most of their final destination was in United State.

The country started to develop as the country has gone through a economic renovation (*Đổi Mới*) as way to tackle the slow recovery. *Đổi Mới* is the term given to the economic reforms initiated in 1986, changing the country from a command economy to a “socialist-oriented market economy” (Hoang, 2007). As a result, there is an improvement in the country economy.

After the renovation, *H Chí Minh City* is growing rapidly and has become the Vietnam first mega-region in the making. The city is estimated to reach 10 million people in 2020 compared to current 7 million. Yet, the city is paying a price for the development through suffering from environmental problems and pressure while coping with the fast growth and migration in the city (Waibel, 2009).

1.3 Hypothesis

Vietnam War is a disruption for the whole Vietnam and it should have left a great impact on socio-physical of *H Chí Minh City*, influencing its environmental and redevelopment.

1.4 Research Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the study is to understand the socio and cultural impact caused by the Vietnam War in *H Chí Minh City* through experiences and

understandings of a group of respondents living there. The objectives of this study are:

- a. To understand how people in *H Chí Minh* City develop their sense of place and experience the place they live in at the pre-disruption phase.
- b. To find out how they think about the changes that are currently happening in their environment and their community; and
- c. To determine how these changes are impacting their lives and how they cope with it.

1.5 Research Questions

This study focuses on these questions:

- a. How did the people develop their sense of place and what does their place mean to them?
- b. What transformations in people, place, and processes are they experiencing after the war?
- c. How are these transformations changing the way the people understand and experience their place?

1.6 Scope of Research

The study is limited to the three parameters. The focuses are mainly on place belongingness, social integration and emotional feeling. Place belongingness looked at the places that the residents attached to. It can be vary from landmark to road; while social integration focused on the social activities that happened around the city in order to understand the interaction between the residents of *H Chí Minh* City. The emotional feeling is used to explain the value and their custom to understand how each had experienced with certain places (table 1.1).

Parameters	Place belongingness	Social Integration	Emotional Feeling
Variables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landmark/ • City elements • Road + people movement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration (harmony) • Interaction (Social Activities) • Locale –space-square 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value • Custom • Utilitarian

Table 1.1: Variables for each parameter

These three parameters are adopted to compare *H Chí Minh* City before and after 1975. The concern is only in a studied context in *H Chí Minh* City, focusing on the disruption and post-disruption phases as it was hard to date back the pre-disruption phase. As such, the pre-disruption is discussed in the study to understand the initial place belongingness, social integration and emotional feeling of the people in *H Chí Minh* City.

1.7 Research Gap

A lot of excellent researches have been conducted to look into the redevelopment policies in order to produce a set of correct policies to rebuild a city through security, humanitarian, governance, reforms, and infrastructure. All of these researches have covered a lot of procedure in redeveloping a place after the conflicts (Table 1.2) (Volkan, Julius and Montville, 1991).

Policies	Consensus (or Near-Consensus) and Implications for Policy and Practice	The Role of Context in the Prioritization and Sequencing of Policies	Prerequisites and Other Factors that must be taken into Consideration
Implementing large-scale and long-term Infrastructure development Projects	Planning should be a major focus from the very beginning because the lead-time for a large-scale project may take 2-5 years.	Whether large-scale reconstruction should be a top priority depends upon the stage of country's development and etc.	Without improvement in security, governance and democratization, largescale reconstruction is not likely to succeed.

Table 1.2: scopes being look into in a research on a post-conflict city, District 1 *H Chí Minh* City

There are yet to have any research that looks into the detail of place attachment for a post-conflict city to understand how the place attachment gets evolved through the three different phases- post disruption, disruption and post-disruption. This study helped urban planners and designers to look into the individual and community basic needs and it gave a new insight on the recovery process of a post-disrupted city.

Volkan, Julius and Montville (1991) mentioned that more thoughts on basic human needs and vulnerabilities are necessary to understand the challenge to peacemakers in hot ethnic conflicts. These include the individual requirement throughout life for strong sense of self, in the absence of which is the potential for depression and reactive violence. There is a need for collective mourning before a serious, violent ethnic conflict can be reduced and ultimately resolved.

As stated here as an example, mourning is a kind of individual needs after a disruption occurs. Furthermore, Volkan, Julius and Montville (1991) suggests that “mourning is the human reaction to loss, change and the threat of loss or change; it is the key concept in large-group interaction. Obviously, war brings mourning; the fallen and lost territories are mourned, and any new land gained cannot be ‘owned’ until a reaction like mourning takes place...because if a group cannot mourn, it cannot accept real change.”

This study seeks to understand how the disruptions have caused impacts on the people and their place attachments, and thus understand the recovery process toward place as well as how the people reestablish their place attachments after the conflicts.

In such, this research is trying to view from a individual and community perspectives, a bottom up research which is much toward a small scale yet personal approach rather a research that looking from top to bottom which its scope are much broader but wider.

1.8 Research Methodology

The research is designed to understand the insights of the *H Chí Minh* City residents with the disruptions happened before and after 1975. A qualitative and quantitative approach was used to gather their personal life experiences. This part provides the descriptions of the research design, data collection methods, data analysis strategies, and the documentation that guided this research.

1.8.1 Data Collection

Data collection comprised of three parts: secondary data, field observations, and personal interviews with seven residents as well as semi-structured interviews with 40 residents in *H Chí Minh* City.

1.8.2 Secondary Data

The secondary data were collected throughout the study was sources from websites, government documents, historical records and previous research done in humanitarian, economic, post war development, urbanization, planning, infrastructure, transportation and others in *H Chí Minh* City and Vietnam. The secondary data were gathered to provide a general background of Vietnam War and on the physical aspects of the *H Chí Minh* City as well as the historical, cultural and political context for the study.

1.8.3 On Site Survey

The fieldwork part of data collection was done during Jan 6, 2010 until Jan 12, 2010. During the survey, the researcher went to two universities- *H Chí Minh* City University of Architecture and Vietnam Australia International School to collect information and to conduct interviews. Besides that, several historical buildings were visited while casual interviews were conducted with seniors, elders, adults and children during the visit.

1.8.4 Interviews

The individual and semi-structured interviews with the respondents took place during the fieldwork in the respective city. The interview guide (Appendix A and B) used during the interviews was designed according to the research questions:

- a. How did the young adults develop their sense of place and what does their place mean to them? (Pre-disruption phase)
- b. What transformations in people, place and processes are they experiencing? (Disruption phase)
- c. How are these transformations changing the way the people understand and experience their place? (Post-disruption phase)

The interview questions were open-ended and were constructed to illicit detailed personal responses. Wording of each question was taken care so that respondents are able to answer in any way and express their feeling and understanding of their everyday life and experiences. While the semi-structured questionnaire comprised of a section to allow the respondents to express their thinking toward the city.

1.8.5 Interview Process

The purpose of the study was first explained and respondents are given a general summary of the interview questions. Selected respondents were then interviewed on the spot, either in the work places, coffee shops or university.

All respondents were interviewed in English although some of them needed translation from time to time during the interview session. All interviews were recorded with a MP3 player.

For the semi-structured interview, respondents were selected randomly. Some of them do not understand English, thus some of the survey questions were done with body languages between researcher and respondents. The respondents selected were able to understand as the questionnaires were in bilingual- English and Vietnamese.

1.8.6 Pilot and Interview Procedure

The first interview was conducted as pilot to determine if the questions were suitable. Only minor adjustments to the questions were needed and therefore the pilot interview is included in the study. Each interview took approximately one to one and half hour to complete. Respondents were asked in a conversational style.

For example, the interviews began with simple introduction, leading to simple questions asking about the particulars of the respondents and their opinions toward *H Chí Minh* City. From there, they were asked about the changes the city is facing. Sometimes, questions were not needed as the respondents were enthusiastic to share and began the conversation once the introduction was done.

1.8.7 Data Analysis

The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and reviewed using the analytic bracketing for qualitative data recorded in the *Analyzing Interpretive Practice* by Gubrium and Holstein (1997). Each interview was replayed for a total of four times during the transcribing process and analysis the interviews case by case to look into the similarities and differences in the interviews. The transcribed text was then coded to identify the major and minor themes and to highlight the related opinions from the respondents. Finally, all the interview responses were grouped into a table to summarize the significant findings through it (Appendix C).

In order to protect the identity of the respondents who were interviewed, names were removed and each respondent was assigned a number and quotes using the capital letter “R” and an assigned number for each of them. Furthermore, the quotations used in this study include the original spoken text without correction of grammar as changing the quotes might alter the meaning that the respondents were expressing.

1.9 Organization of the study

The study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter gives reader a general overview and background of the study as well as the objectives and the significance of this study. The second chapter explains about the theoretical framework of sense of place, place attachment and disruption in place attachment which served as a priori component and posteriori components informed through qualitative study. The third chapter provides the historical context on *H Chí Minh* City and Vietnam. The fourth chapter includes the analysis and synthesis of the findings. The fifth chapter is the final chapter on summarizing the study and discusses the significant findings with recommendations for further research and closing remarks.

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