

Transformation of built cultural heritage in old Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City), Vietnam

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Abstract. Saigon was founded by the army commander Nguyen Huu Canh in the seventeenth century. It became the capital of the French colony of Cochinchina in 1883, part of French Indochina until 1945, and the capital of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) until 1975. It has diverse cultural characteristics and a unique urban form. It was described as 'the pearl of the Far East' during the 19th and 20th centuries. After the unification of North and South Vietnam in 1975, Saigon was renamed Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC). The economic reform process, *Doi Moi*, which started in the late 1980s, transformed Vietnam from a highly centralized planned economy to a socialist-oriented market economy, and its cities, HCMC included, underwent significant new development. This paper aims to re-understand the nature of old Saigon's establishment and identity to authentically consolidate new findings of the spatial development axis; re-assess the cultural significance of remaining places, which are needed to support the coming Master plan period 2040-2060 of HCMC towards sustainable conservation in a globalization context.

Keywords: Saigon transition, spiritual axis, twin-cities

1. Introduction

The rapid transformation of HCMC's economy in the last two decades is one of the success stories of Asia. The transformation of this economic center brought about tangible and intangible cultural changes in central places. Consequently, old urban artifacts and fabric, which represented the distinctive cultural and architectural identities of the Vietnamese, Khmer, Cham, Chinese, French, and Indians, are being replaced with more gigantic modern glass skyscrapers.

A local Vietnamese scholar, Le Quang Ninh [1], has provided clear evidence that one consequence of the phenomenon of rapid modernization in the central districts has been that HCMC has lost about 30% of its total 108 registered architectural heritage items since 1993 and 18 significant heritages of Saigon as well [2]. For instance, over hundred-year-old factories along Tau Hu canal and Tran Van Kieu street and at the old Binh Dong quay while ancient shop-houses in Ben Thanh area were demolished in 2014 for redevelopment projects. Three conservation plans have been drawn up in the past, such as central HCMC's architecture (1995) and Cholon town (2012); adjusted master plan (zone ZV-7) of

