TRANSFORMATION OF URBAN VILLAGES IN THE CITY OF HANOI, VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT
In Vietnam, urban village is a unique phenomenon that highlights the process when farming villages were transformed into urban environment under the influence of rapid urbanization. In Hanoi, Vietnam, urban villages were formed when cities sprawled and surrounded the adjacent villages within the urbanized landscape. To take advantage of the urban surrounding, residents in those villages transformed their dwellings into rented accommodation for those who could not afford expensive renting cost elsewhere in cities.

Urban villages provided alternative urban spaces to suit the special needs of various groups, such as immigrants. However, due to the self-built natures of buildings in urban villages, there were concerns about health issues in those built environments such as poor qualities of ventilation, lighting, or fire escape routes, together with the lack of appropriate public space or provision of basic facilities. This paper studies urban villages in Hanoi, examining the historical and social background of villages, and exploring issues such as the health equality and neighborhood support and wellbeing. Some comparison will also be drawn between the urban villages in Vietnam and those in China, which developed in similar rapid urbanization processes.

The study aims to provide more information on how fundamental economic and social changes might bring new healthy problems and the possible solutions to those issues. Case studies, direct observation, interviews and archive study are key research methods for this project. The project aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge about the interconnection and potential solutions to the problems associated with health and the built environment.

Key word: Urban village, informal settlement, self-built housing, Hanoi and urbanization.

INTRODUCTION
In the literature, the meaning of urban village is sophisticated. The Western countries consider urban village as the planning ideology that create new urban areas having all characteristics of
Principles of urban village included a strong sense of place, a pedestrian and friendly environment, and a high degree of involvement of community in design and management processes. Thus, the Western notions of urban village have been widely accepted as planned areas that encourage social interaction and balanced community. By contrast, in the developing countries in Asia, a definition of urban villages refers to rural settlements, and they become parts of the urban structure under the rapid urbanization. Therefore, the name urban village also can be expressed as “villages in the city” to describe the urban transitional phenomenon².

In Vietnam, the economic reforms that began in 1986 have generated a significant and steady growth in investment, consumption and standards of living. Cities have continued to attract laborers due to the growth in the industrial and service sectors. As a result, rural to urban migration has created the largest labor flow and unprecedented trend in the nation’s history³. For the rural migrants, squatting is not a viable option to obtain shelter because peripheral urban land is inaccessible to migrants and authorities are intolerant of informal settlements. The massive and increasing housing demand of housing to satisfied migrants needs is often located in existing settlements⁴. During the process of urbanization, various rural villages have been spatially encompassed by the expanding of cities⁵. The land use in the villages often remains unchanged as the formal urban development simply leapfrogs the villages’ settlement.

The urban village phenomenon has aroused academic attention. Though literature reviews, urban village has been studies using multi disciplines regarding sociology, history, psychology and economy. Within those works, the urban villages were not built or constructed by developers. In many situations, villagers lose their farmland because of land requisition by the government for new developed projects⁶; therefore, farmers develop their houses for rent and small business to generate income⁷. Moreover, the migrant spread to cities to seek the job and buy the house to become the urban residents. Without planning and weak controlling, villagers and migrants always build their house as big and high as possible with poor application of regulations⁸. By contrast, the urban villages have some positive effects such as pedestrian accessibility, self-containment, mix-land use and neighborhood interaction. Urban villages are the idealist place for migrants who are seeking shelter in the cities⁹. In addition, urban village is an important area during the process of urbanization for villagers to adopt with new conditions in urban areas¹⁰.

Although there is various study of urban village, there is lack of research on the transformation of urban village and its adoption of informality within Vietnamese urban context. Due to difficulty in accessing data, the study of urban villages in Vietnam is scares. Many important questions have not been answered such as how did urban villages emerge and develop in the process of city development? How did urban village influenced on living quality? And how to improve quality of life in urban village? The answers to these questions matter because these provide us knowledge regarding relations between city development and the creation of urban village. In addition, at the planning level, it becomes possible to recognize and analyze the urban village’s pattern with respect to overall structure of city development. Finally, it will possible to gain clues that how to deal with these urban villages in general and with specific one.
To start answering such questions, this article explored the development of urban villages in an extremely fast-growing city of Hanoi. The data were collected during several fieldwork periods in 2015, 2016, and 2017. During the fieldwork, two urban villages were visited to observe interesting features of their development. Therefore, this paper shall introduce the urban villages in Vietnam through the lens of socio-cultural factors and historical development of Hanoi. Two case examples of Vietnamese urban villages were selected to reveal the transformation of urban village.

**FORM TRADITIONAL VILLAGE TO URBAN VILLAGE**

Hanoi, the capital city of Vietnam for nearly 1000 years, located in the South of Red River. The development of the city started when Ly King chosen this area for the royal citadel. Since then, the city has been developed overtime and become the political, economic, social, and cultural center in Vietnam. However, the development of current urban structure of Hanoi could not be separated from the development of the traditional villages. Within the urbanization process, traditional villages have been transformed into parts of urban metropolis. The original villages that was identified by and natural landscape have been surrounding by modern buildings and infrastructure. Thus, the urban villages represent as special feature of urban pattern due to its historical, physical, economic, and social factors.

Village is the basic social and self-sufficient unit in Vietnam for centuries. Originally, each village was built surrounding dominated clan or particular surname lineage. In addition, each village has its own rules and customs. Following to the Vietnamese proverb: “The customs of the village have precedence over the laws of the king” (In Vietnamese: “Phép vua thua lệ làng”), it means that a village can be considered as independent area without the control of state or political regularities. In another Vietnamese proverb that “each village strikes its own drum and worships its own deities” (In Vietnamese: “trộng làng nào làng ấy đánh, thánh làng nào làng ấy thờ”), the Vietnamese village was a unique complex system that only support its community. Villagers had litter connection with other people outside their community.

In the term of physical pattern, village’s settlement was located depending on natural landscape and agricultural and fishing activities. The location of villages was normally situated in the high ground area that helps to protect village from flooding and external aggressions. One village could have several clusters. All clusters were located around the communal house, temple, pagodas and village’s well while the village gates situated outside near the main road. Furthermore, the traditional village was surrounding by a row of bamboo trees for protection. The village’s houses were generally connected with each other though the fish bone system or particular pathway made by house owners based on their agreements.

In terms of belief systems, there is a combination of several religious practices including Buddhism, Taoism and indigenous folk religions. The religion practices are necessary activities for each villager. In festival days, villagers always go to their temples, pagodas and communal house for worship. Every year, villagers have to donate money or time for self-help activities to maintain those public buildings.
The city slowly expanded during the central economic planning period (1954-1986). During this time, Vietnamese government applied the central economic plan. The planning focused on collective quarter and industrial zones around the outskirt of city. In addition, during this period, the state applied Ho Khau system to control migration from rural to urban areas. Movement from rural to urban areas had to be approved by the authority. As a result of strictly controlling, the rate of urbanization was very low, except several rural villages were merged into new urban structure. Village’s structure was basically remained unchanged.

In the late 1980s, Vietnam suffered the political changes from central command economy to socialist oriented market. Within the political and economic transition, Hanoi has become a dream place for migrant. The Ho Khau system, which has been using to control the rural to urban migration, has lost its function. Rural migrants could register as temporary residents in urban areas. In addition, international investment and private enterprises increased significantly; new jobs in industrial sectors and services that do not require Ho Khau emerged. Consequently, the reforms opened a new page of rapid rural-urban transition. In 1954, the urban population accounted for only 12 percent of total population. After three decades of central economic planning which restricted urbanization, the urban population reached 20 percent in 1985. On the contrary, after twenty years since the reforms, the urban population has quickly increased to 34 percent, and that number is predicted to reach 55 percent by 2050. Typically, in Hanoi, rural-urban migration contributed approximately 40 percent of urban population.

The process of urbanization increased quickly result in dramatic changes of urban landscape affecting every aspect of rural villages. Vietnamese cities have not only become the country with fast rate of urban population growth, but they have also facilitated urbanization by absorbing massive number of rural villages. For example, the urban land increased from 2,200 square kilometer in 2000 to 2,900 square kilometer in 2010. To accommodate investment and development, the government relies on urban development to convert sub-urban rural for urban use. In this process, the government tends to requisition farmland rather than settlements of rural villages to avoid costly and time-consuming programmer requiring the compensation and relocation of villagers. As a result, the settlement components of villages remain while their surrounding environment dramatically changes. New urban areas spatially surrounded villages leading to the formation of urban villages.
Figure 1: The formation of Me Tri urban village in Hanoi under the process of urbanisation (Based on satellite images).

For example, the urban block in the south of Dong Da district (figure 2) is a combination of several parts of traditional villages namely Xa Dan, My Duc, Trung Tu and Trung Phung. In the part, there were several small lakes and rice fields that separated villages. Over the process of development, some state projects have filled most of lakes and rice fields. Old roads were improved and built around the village, circulation inside the urban village is based on traditional alley system. Most alleys are very small for cars and public transports.
Due to low income, most migrants came to Hanoi living in the urban village to avoid expensive living costs. For the villagers, they soon realized the benefits of upgrade building for rent. The migrants are great tenants because they do not complain much about the living conditions of the urban villages. Therefore, villagers always redevelop their houses as big and high as possible result in the transformation of dwellings in urban villages. When the migrants have better income, they would buy houses in the city. However, property prices in new housing projects are very expensive. On the other hand, villagers who lost their agricultural land due to land requisition need money to support their new life in urban areas. Thus, villagers in pre-urban areas always sold parts of their land in villages with cheaper price than one in new developed areas. Consequently, plots in villages were divided into smaller plots for selling. Today, urban villages have become the chaotic areas with many different social groups including traditional villagers, new residences, and rent’s group such as workers and students.

Since the reform in 1986, the government tried to control housing development. The land allocation standards were adjusted including limited for the height of private houses and limit areas and side of land. Those policies did not slow down housing development in urban areas. Most households in urban villages were able to rebuild their houses. New houses were constructed with modern materials such as concrete and brick. In addition, most building in urban villages exploited the regulations to maximize built-up area and living spaces. Thus, building density in urban villages become very high.
The process of village transformation into urban village is significant affected to livelihood of villagers. Finding a new job is a challenge for villagers. Villagers start to join the informal sector jobs with low-wave in the cities such as street vending or selling food in the street. In addition, if the house is located in main alley or streets, villagers generally set up shops on their own houses. There are various types of shop including grocery shops, café, small restaurants, hairdressing shop or clothing shops. The shop sells only basic products, necessities and food. The product and services target poor income groups. Their prices are cheaper than those in well-established store or supermarket. Shops and restaurants normally run by house owners. Most restaurants’ space in urban villages is only enough for eight to ten chairs and several tables. In less busy alleys, the ground floors are generally used for workshops, stores or online shops. Most urban villages maintain at least one street market, where local residents could find fresh vegetable, meat, poultry and fish. When the new urban areas were fully established surrounding the urban village, restaurants and shops have been upgraded. More expensive shops and restaurants can be found along the main busy streets.
In term of planning, urban village is considered as traditional residential land in planning, and there is no macro project to develop those areas. Since the urban village become part of urban structure, the administrative community is transferred from township to ward and district levels, which provide social welfare such as schools, clinics and activities centers for the villagers. Although the local administrative levels have responsibility for providing, management and upgrading infrastructure, due to land price in the urban village grows overtime, the cost of redevelopment and compensation becomes higher and higher. The most popular projects are to develop basic facilities and amenities such as water and sewage system, electricity, and basic social facilities. Despite that, the streets in urban villages are narrower and dark inside, the electronic wire is speared above the head; the buildings striped the skylight. The main public spaces are traditional communal buildings such as temples, pagodas and communal houses.
Figure 5: Alleys in urban villages in Hanoi (Image by Ngo Kien Thinh)

Figure 6: Historical buildings highlights the evidence of original villages (Images by Ngo Kien Thinh)
LESSON FROM CHINA DEVELOPMENT

China applied similar political ideologies with Vietnam for urban development. Since the economic reform in 1978, new developed projects are constructed by large developers. However, in early 2000s, when agriculture land became scare and might result in national food shortage, the government started to strictly control spatial extension of cities. Therefore, developers turn their focus on residential land in urban villages. In addition, different views with respect to urban villages as an inefficient and irregular use of valuable land resources has emerged. Although urban villages are not considered as slum, urban villages are generally being criticized for various negative social aspects including crimes, fire hazards, public health and conflicts. To develop environment and social issues in urban villages, the official policies often aim at demolition and redevelopment of urban villages into large-scale modern living and service facilities. By that, urban villages can be absorbed within the formal administration system and government can gain control over the new neighborhoods.

Despite that, the redevelopment projects may raise several social issues such as gentrification and changing of villager’s livelihood. Therefore, it is difficult to redevelop urban village due to conflict between three groups: land owners, developers and government. Local authority wants to develop the modern neighborhoods while the developers want to maximize their profits and reduce the cost of redevelopment. On the other hand, villagers see their urban villages as their homes and work place to generate income; thus, they tend to resist any large-scale development plans.

According to planning to 2030 and vision to 2050, urban area in Hanoi city will be increased to 45.300 ha and that number is expected to 55.200 ha in 2030. Thus, large number of villages in the outskirt of city will be merged into urban structure. Therefore, a clear strategies and vision to develop urban village should be classified during initial stages of planning. Otherwise, urban villages will be turned into unhealthy living areas, and it will become much difficult for redeveloping urban villages.

CONCLUSION

Regarding to social perspective, urban village is an important stage of urbanization. Traditional village in Hanoi area are changing from agricultural communities into urban neighborhood under the process of city expansion. They serve as a special stage to provide space and time for rural people to adapt to new way of life in urban conditions. Villagers have to learn new skills in order to make a living without crop production. However, due basic skills and lack of training, most villagers can only do simple jobs in the city. Thus, villagers tend to invest into their houses for their own business. For migration, urban villages are ideal place for living areas in the city. Thus, the built environment in urban villages is diversity and suitable for different social groups.

In term of planning, the self-organized constructions let to poor quality of living environment. The physical structure of urban villages is identified with narrow lanes and alleys, face to face high building that strip the sky and mixed land use. The buildings are often lacking of fire preventing system, natural lighting and ventilation. The height of building is ranged from two to six floors. There is lacking of public spaces inside urban villages. Except for few traditional buildings such as
temples, pagodas and communal house, generally there is no public and green space. Besides that, the infrastructure and facilities in urban villages are poor. Pipelines and drainage system are poorly constructed. The alley is often very small. Most of alleys could only be accessed by motorbike and walking. All of those factors result in an unhealthy living environment and lacking of efficient management.

The lesson to redevelop urban villages in China shows the conflicts of interest of different groups. Therefore, during early stage of urbanization, urban villages should have clear its vision in different scales for future developments. In master planning, urban village should be considered as part of urban system. The vision should have specific roles regarding function and mixed development in urban areas. For the district scale, the strategies should make strengthen the interrelationship between different types of urban villages and its surrounding urbanized landscapes. The strategies should involve in urban road, housing distribution, publics spaces, commercial activities and other social factors.

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