

Spatial Characteristics of the Backpacker Area in Ho Chi Minh City

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I. Introduction

In a pioneering study, backpackers, as a counter-concept to mass tourism, were defined as people who, as they travel, gather information from guidebooks as the counterculture and word-of-mouth information from experienced travellers. Backpackers were also characterized by lengthy stays while economizing on accommodation costs, an enjoyment in meeting locals and other travellers, a preference for independent travel rather than package tours, and an active interest in everyday life wherever they are staying (Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995).

Following this study, more systematic research was conducted by Richards and Wilson (2004a) and by Hannam and Diekmann (2010a). In the former collection of essays, Richards and Wilson understand backpackers as “global nomads,” a concept indicative of a distinguishing feature of a person who “crosses physical and cultural barriers with apparent ease in the search for difference and differentiation.” More specifically, once backpackers have consumed the experiences offered by one place they immediately move on to find new ones, constantly moving from place to place, and it is pointed out that their nomadic character contributes to the formation and maintenance of cyclical routes that emerge between “enclaves” (Richards and Wilson 2004b).

In contrast, in the latter collection of essays Hannam and Diekmann present a perspective that understands qualitative changes in backpackers in terms of the emergence of flashpackers. “Flashpackers” refers to travellers who are predominantly in their late twenties and thirties and thus tend to be older than traditional backpackers. Further, while they mingle with backpackers in a narrow sense of the term, they have expensive backpacks or roller-wheeled suitcases, netbooks or laptops, USB flash drives, smart phones, and so on and stay at various types of accommodation (Hannam and Diekmann 2010b). Research such as that outlined

above has shed light on the backpacker as a tourist and on the process of change in his or her mode of travel.

Southeast Asia, including Vietnam, is one of the destinations sought out by such backpackers (Pryer 1997). Generally, places where mainly travellers carrying rucksacks gather are often called “backpacker enclaves.” In research on backpackers and backpacker enclaves in Southeast Asia, the role of backpackers in opening up new tourist sites has been discussed by examining the routes travelled by backpackers (Pryer 1997), and the touristic behaviour of backpackers seeking local and diverse experiences and interactions has been clarified (Muzaini 2006).

Further, in analyses of the economic effects of backpackers, Scheyvens (2002) points out the potential for backpacker travel to contribute to the economic growth of developing countries, especially at a local level, a subject that has been neglected in the past. As examples of more micro studies, mention may be made of case studies of Indonesia (Hampton 1998), Thailand (Cohen 2006), and Laos (Yokoyama 2009). These studies not only point out the positive economic effects of backpacker tourism, but also note that people in local communities are not necessarily the beneficiaries of such tourism (Cohen 2006) and raise the question of economic disparity brought about by tourism development (Yokoyama 2009).

In research on backpackers in Vietnam, it has been shown that cafés have played an important role in the travel industry, serving as spaces for the exchange of word-of-mouth information in the formation of backpacker enclaves, and that these cafés and local government form mutual relationships at a micro level (Lloyd 2003, 2006).

However, in these studies there is evidence of a tendency to treat as *a priori* entities the backpacker enclaves themselves, which have been formed through the practice of alternative tourism. In contrast, Wilson and Richards pay attention to the spatial dynamism of backpacker areas and point out that, contrary to theoretical assumptions, backpacker enclaves are not isolated places and that there is exchange with locals, inner and outer permeability, and interaction between enclaves (Wilson and Richards 2008).

It has also been pointed out that the characteristics of those who practise backpacking are not necessarily consistent with the concept of alternative tourism (Spreitzhofer 1998). Further, in the case of the backpacker enclave of Pai in Thailand, it has been noted that as its development as a tourist destination has progressed there has been no antagonism between

backpackers and other individual foreign travellers and that the dividing line between the two is becoming blurred (Cohen 2006).

Accordingly, in the present study we understand the spaces where backpackers gather as places for dynamic interaction and essay a depiction of one such space as a historical structure in the urban space of Ho Chi Minh City (former Saigon).¹⁾ In point of fact, the backpacker area in Ho Chi Minh City is situated about 1 kilometre southwest of the city's tourist centre (fig. 1), and formerly a railway station stood to its north. In other words, historically speaking, the present-day backpacker area was at least partially encompassed by the urban space of former Saigon. Further, in recent years the semi-popularized type of backpacker known as flashpackers, mentioned above, has also been seen to visit and stay in this area. Taking the above points into account, this article aims to clarify the spatial characteristics of the backpacker area that has evolved in Ho Chi Minh City in southern Vietnam.²⁾

As leads for examining the historical background of the area in question, we have made use of old maps produced during the period of French colonial rule and the time of the Republic of Vietnam. Further, in order to gain a grasp of the formation and transformation of this area as a backpacker area, we have referred to the descriptions in the Japanese guidebook *Chikyū no arukikata* 地球の歩き方 (Globe Trotter Travel Guidebook) and analyzed its descriptions of the area over time. In addition, by also conducting fieldwork focusing on the business composition of the area, we ascertained the current state of the use of space and endeavoured to examine the process of change down to the present day.

On a previous occasion we showed that the area centred on former Saigon Station (present-day September 23 Park)³⁾ formerly fulfilled a central function in the distribution of goods and that the location of the railway station has been partly embedded into the present-day urban landscape (Matsumura and Ōtsuka 2012). We have also pointed out that in the walled area of the former Citadel of Saigon (Thành Gia Định, a.k.a. Citadel of Gia Định) urban functions possess continuity, characteristic of which is the concentration of facilities possessing administrative functions (Ōtsuka et al. 2014). In particular, we suggested that the area's gateway-like character, with its starting point in former Saigon Station, may be related to the formation of Ho Chi Minh City's backpacker area (Matsumura and Ōtsuka 2012). The present article is a continuation of these earlier studies.

II. The Backpacker Area in Old Maps

1. An Old Map of the French Colonial Period

Here we wish to examine the historical background of the area in question with reference to old maps. Fig. 2 shows the vicinity of the present-day backpacker area, taken from a 1:10,000 map (Plan de Saigon) produced during the French colonial period. When compared with fig. 1, it is evident that the backpacker area in Ho Chi Minh City is located to the southwest of Bến Thành Market, which also existed during the colonial period when it was the central market, and constitutes one apex of a triangle formed by Hàm Nghi Street, Lê Lợi Street, and Nguyễn Huệ Street. In concrete terms, Hàm Nghi Street heads east from Bến Thành Market towards Saigon Port, Lê Lợi Street heads northeast from Bến Thành Market towards the Municipal Theatre, and Nguyễn Huệ Street links Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee with Saigon Port.

In former times these three streets formed a centre for the distribution of goods, linking Saigon Port and Bến Thành Market. In particular, Nguyễn Huệ Street and Lê Lợi Street were formerly tributaries of the Saigon River, and when Saigon Port was opened in the late nineteenth century, they were converted into streets with a waterway flowing down the middle of the street. This structure was utilized for the distribution of goods by water, and large numbers of shops stood along these two streets (Ōta 2003). In other words, the triangular area bounded by these three streets functioned as a hub for the distribution of goods in Saigon during the era of French Indo-China.

If we return to fig. 2, we find that what looks like station buildings stands to the southwest of the rotary in front of Bến Thành Market. Today September 23 Park is located here, but this was formerly the site of the railway station. It was at the time called Saigon Station and was opened during the French colonial period as the terminal for the Saigon-Mỹ Tho line linking Saigon with Mỹ Tho, the main city in the Mekong Delta. Later Saigon Station also became the terminal for railway lines linking northern and southern French Indo-China.

Further, some structures covering a relatively large ground area can be seen between Nguyễn Thái Học Street and Đề Thám Street (fig. 2). It is to be surmised that these were facilities related to the railway station, although this is no more than speculation since there is no key for this section of the map. Similarly, several structures covering a large ground

area can be seen dotted over the area to the south of present-day Phạm Ngũ Lão Street. But it can be confirmed that the land use of the current backpacker area as a whole was non-intensive when compared with the surrounding area. For example, the street corresponding to present-day Bùi Viện Street is marked by a thin solid line, and there is no evidence of any buildings along this street. It is to be surmised, therefore, that especially the southwest of the area exhibited extensive land use.

In light of the above, it can be confirmed that during the French colonial period the current backpacker area corresponded to the apex of a triangle connecting Saigon Port with Bến Thành Market and lay to the south of Saigon Station, a former centre for the distribution of goods throughout Vietnam; that while there were some structures covering a considerable ground area, overall land use was non-intensive; and that the area in the southwest of the backpacker area showed a more extensive use of land.

2. An Old Map from the Time of the Republic of Vietnam

Fig. 3 is a map of the same area as that shown in fig. 2, but it has been taken from an old 1:10,000 map from the time of the Republic of Vietnam (Indochina City Plans: Saigon) which was issued in 1958 and reissued in 1961. When compared with fig. 2, the first point that can be confirmed is that improvements have been made along the street corresponding to present-day Bùi Viện Street, and it can be seen that in conjunction with these improvements buildings have begun to be erected along both sides of the street. Next, it may be noted that buildings can be seen along the west side of Phạm Ngũ Lão Street as far as the area intersecting with Đỗ Quang Đầu Street.

Next, an interesting point is that the buildings to be seen in fig. 2 dotting the area to the west of Đề Thám Street can no longer be found in fig. 3. Further, in the area surrounded by Phạm Ngũ Lão Street, Đề Thám Street, Bùi Viện Street, and Đỗ Quang Đầu Street a different colour tone has been used, not found in fig. 2. Judging from other areas in the map where the same tone is used, there is a strong possibility that this area was low-lying wetland or at least exhibited non-urban land use.

Today the area enclosed by the above four streets has many alleys and is a disorderly area with dense land use. This would suggest that this area may have passed from a stage of non-intensive land use, including unused land, to a stage in which residential dwellings and other build-

ings were illegally erected. As is discussed below, the differences in the streetscape to be seen on the east and west sides of Đê Thám Street may be considered to reflect this historical background.

The year 1958 also coincided with the time when the Saigon–Mỹ Tho railway line was discontinued (Matsumura and Ōtsuka 2012). There is a possibility that with the abolition of the railway line to the Mekong Delta distribution routes in Ho Chi Minh City changed and this area underwent a transformation. Subsequent conditions in this area are described in reportage from the 1970s by Kondō Kōichi, but details are unclear.⁴⁾ But since Saigon Station continued to exist at least until the end of the Vietnam War as a terminal station for the railway network to the north, it is to be surmised that facilities and businesses related to the railway station continued to concentrate in this area.

On the basis of the above, it can be ascertained that in the second half of the 1950s urbanization slowly advanced in this area, starting from the railway station and moving on the one hand to Bùi Viện Street in the south and on the other hand to Đỗ Quang Đầu Street in the west.

III. Descriptions in Travel Guidebooks

1. Guidebooks as a Subject of Analysis

Travel guidebooks provided the impetus for the emergence in Southeast Asia of backpackers, considered to have originated in the hippy culture of the United States. The forerunner of these guidebooks was *Across Asia on the Cheap*, published by Lonely Planet in 1973 (Pryer 1997). This was an account of the travels of Tony Wheeler and his wife, the founders of Lonely Planet, and it was reprinted in 1975. Thus this guidebook could itself be regarded as a product of non-packaged travel, that is, backpacker tourism. In 1975 *Southeast Asia on a Shoestring* was published in Australia by the same company,⁵⁾ and the possibility of travelling to Southeast Asia independently, rather than in package tours, was opened up (Spreitzhofer 1998).

In Japan, *Chikyū no arukikata*, published by Diamond-Big Co., Ltd., may be regarded as the precursor of travel guidebooks. According to Yamaguchi and Yamaguchi (2009), the prototype of *Chikyū no arukikata* was a free perquisite provided to participants in “Jiyū Ryokō” (independent travel) organized by the originators of this book. At a time when package tours were the norm in Japanese society, this “independent travel” offered

trips that were semi-non-packaged and whose main aim was studying a foreign language in the country where it was spoken, and accommodation, movement within the country, and so on were left to the individual's discretion. Accounts of experiences of this "independent travel" were then put together and distributed as reference material at the briefing for the next such trip, and this became the starting point of *Chikyū no arukikata* (Yamaguchi and Yamaguchi 2009).

In light of the above, it is evident that early travel guidebooks were in the first place individual accounts of the travels of the authors themselves and served only secondarily as guides for future travellers. In other words, travel guidebooks may be assumed to have been products that reflected, even if only partly, how travellers understood and interpreted local society.

A volume of the *Chikyū no arukikata* series on Vietnam, that is, a volume that mentioned "Vietnam" in its title, was first published in 1989. The guidebook for Vietnam was first called *Chikyū no arukikata furontia* 地球の歩き方フロンティア, but in 1994 the word *furontia* (frontier) was removed, and the first edition of *Chikyū no arukikata: Betonamu* 地球の歩き方 ベトナム was published.⁶⁾

2. The Backpacker Area as Seen in *Chikyū no arukikata*

Table 1 shows changes in descriptions of the present backpacker area in *Chikyū no arukikata*. The columns give, from the left, year of publication, total number of pages, number of pages dealing with the backpacker area in the description of Ho Chi Minh City, heading, number of maps, and keywords. In the case of keywords, words that may be considered symbolic when describing the backpacker area have been selected. According to this table, the backpacker area was first mentioned in the 1995 edition of *Chikyū no arukikata*,⁷⁾ and since then it has continued to be taken up in subsequent editions, including the latest edition, even though there have been changes in the content of the descriptions of this area.

If we focus first on changes in the heading, they can be divided into three stages:⁸⁾ "For budget travel, head for Phạm Ngũ Lão Street!" (1995–2000); "For budget travel, head for Đề Thám Street!" (2001–2007); and "Vietnam's largest backpacker area: Bùi Viện Street and Đề Thám Street" (2008–2014). Changes in the guidebook's heading more or less coincide with changes in the content of the backpacker area's description. Therefore, it is possible to identify characteristics of the manner in which the

backpacker area has been described in each period.

1) 1st Period (1995–2000)

First, in the description of the backpacker area in the 1st period cheapness is brought to the fore. If we examine the actual descriptions, the following logic is presented: if one wishes to travel cheaply, one needs to travel as an individual, and consequently one will be able to come in contact with aspects of the daily lives of ordinary people, something that cannot be experienced in package tours.

Worthy of special mention are the following three points. First, the running of tours by cafés can already be seen in this period. In the 1995 edition it is stated that “these cafés also host all kinds of minibus tours.” When one takes into account a social situation in which regulations concerning the movement of people had been relaxed since the Doi Moi (Đổi Mới, “Renovation”) policies of 1986 and foreign tourists were gradually being accepted, it may be inferred that cafés catering for foreigners were opened from an early stage and had become quite diversified.

Next, up until the 1997 edition the backpacker area is referred to as “the Khaosan Road of Saigon,” an allusion to Khaosan Road in Bangkok, renowned for its cheap accommodation. It may be supposed, in other words, that at this time likening the backpacker area to Khaosan Road made it easier for readers to imagine what the area was like.

The last point to be noted is the description of Bùi Viện Street. In the 1995 edition we read, “Let’s go back along Bùi Viện Street. Here there are few cafés for travellers such as those in Phạm Ngũ Lão Street, and it is lined with tailors, barbershops, general stores, and so on.” The 1996 edition, on the other hand, has: “Let’s go back along Bùi Viện Street. It is lined on both sides with small guest houses in which the upper floors of private homes and shops have been refurbished.” From this it can be surmised that Bùi Viện Street, which had not necessarily been an area catering for (foreign) travellers, was being gradually incorporated into the travel industry.

2) 2nd Period (2001–2007)

As can be inferred from the change in heading, in descriptions of the 2nd period it is evident that the centre of the backpacker area was shifting to Đề Thám Street, and in fact a map of Đề Thám Street has been added. When compared with the 1st period, there is no longer such an emphasis on cheapness. Although the backpacker area is described as an area for

cheap accommodation for individual travellers in editions of the 2nd period, there is no mention of cheap prices or cheap tours.

Worth noting is firstly the appearance of the word “backpacker” for the first time in the 2001 edition.⁹⁾ The backpacker area is referred to as “the start of cheap accommodation areas where backpackers from around the world gather.” A background factor in the emergence of this term was the broadcasting of a travel programme in Japan by the comedy team Saruganseki 猿岩石 in 1996, which introduced backpackers as penniless travellers and sparked a boom (Yamaguchi and Yamaguchi 2009). As a result, the word “backpacker” passed into general parlance, and the use of this term made it easier to gain a more concrete image of the backpacker area.

Secondly, mention may be made of the description of the backpacker area as a place where travellers’ necessities could be acquired. In other words, it had come to be described not just simply as a place where one could travel cheaply, but as a place that could offer amenities above a certain standard that were needed when travelling. Further, in the 2004 edition we read, “Recently Euro-American backpackers have begun congregating in Đõ Quang Đầu Street. It is still quiet, but mini hotels and restaurants have opened. Even narrow alleys are closely lined with guest houses.” It can be inferred that the backpacker area had gradually expanded westwards.

3) 3rd Period (2008–2014)

In the 3rd period the method of presentation has been completely changed. First, when compared with the 1st and 2nd periods, the coverage of the backpacker area has been reduced from 5 pages to 2 pages in spite of an increase in the total number of the guidebook’s pages, and the number of maps of the area has also been reduced by one. The most distinctive feature is that the area has come to be described as a place where backpacker tourism can be experienced. Although the word “backpacker” is used in the heading, references to “individual travellers” have been removed. Instead, convenience, typified by convenience stores, is emphasized, and it is described as a stylish area and a place where cheap tours can be experienced. This would suggest that it had come to be positioned as a place visited by all kinds of tourists.

In fact, in the 2008 edition there appears the phrase “although it is in a location somewhat removed from the centre of Ho Chi Minh City....” Prior to the 3rd period, the backpacker area had been regarded as an area

for cheap accommodation that contrasted with the city centre where up-market hotels were located, but from the 2008 edition a sense of distance from the city centre comes to the fore in the description of the backpacker area. Viewed from a different perspective, it could be considered that it had come to be posited as an area that might be visited by the sort of people who stayed in upmarket hotels. Furthermore, the expression “another touristic place” would suggest that the backpacker area had come to be positioned as a tourist spot.

Further, in the 2008 edition the subheading “Proliferating Indian restaurants” is used, and in the 2010 edition this has changed to “Ethnic gourmets congregate.” From this it can be inferred that from this period the multinationalization of restaurants was advancing in response to the diverse needs of different tourists. However, the diversification and multinationalization of restaurants was probably also related to the increasing global movement of people. It is, for example, also quite conceivable that the increase in South Asian restaurants was due to an influx of South Asians who did not necessarily come for the purpose of tourism.

As we have seen in the above, the street names that appear in the heading for the backpacker area give an idea of the process of its geographical expansion. That is to say, first Phạm Ngũ Lão Street attracted attention as an area where backpackers gathered, whereafter the area expanded first to Đề Thám Street and then to Bùi Viện Street. A reason that interest initially focused on Phạm Ngũ Lão Street is presumably that because this street adjoined the former railway station, businesses catering for railway passengers had concentrated here, and these facilities were subsequently converted for use by present-day travel-related industries.

IV. Spatial Characteristics of the Backpacker Area

1. Spatial Composition of the Overall Area

In this section we wish to examine the spatial characteristics of the present-day backpacker area on the basis of fieldwork. Fig. 4 shows the composition of types of businesses by category in buildings facing Phạm Ngũ Lão Street, Đề Thám Street, Bùi Viện Street, and Đỗ Quang Đầu Street. In the case of Phạm Ngũ Lão Street, only the data for the south side of the street is given since the north side bounds September 23 Park. As a rule, the business type in a building's first floor was ascertained. Buildings with different functions on the upper floors are discussed below.

First, among the total number of 427 buildings in the area, eating and drinking establishments, travel agencies, and hotels (including all lodging facilities such as mini hotels and guest houses) account for more than half of the buildings (approx. 55%). This indicates that this is an area specializing in tourism. The ratio of eating and drinking establishments and of travel agencies and hotels is roughly the same, at about 27% each.

The category with the next highest ratio is retail shops, accounting for about 17%. In addition to souvenir shops, this category includes various kinds of shopping stores. Next, service businesses are the fourth highest, at about 12%. This category includes primarily galleries, tattoo parlours, motorcycle rental shops, and so on. This is followed by general stores for everyday items, and this category includes convenience stores, stalls, and pharmacies. Although they cannot be clearly identified as such, many of these could be said to be shops catering for travellers. In this fashion, the characteristics of this area as a tourist space are quite apparent.

2. Characteristics of the Arrangement of Buildings in Each Street

Table 2 shows the business composition ratios by street, on which basis it is possible to gain a grasp of the spatial characteristics of each street.¹⁰⁾ First, there is a high ratio of travel agencies and hotels in Phạm Ngũ Lão Street, and they account for about 53% of the shops along this street (fig. 5). When eating and drinking establishments are added, the percentage rises to about 73%. When we look at the breakdown between travel agencies and hotels, 24 travel agencies are located along this street, and their percentage (approx. 30%) is greater than in other streets. Another characteristic of this street is that among the 8 hotels there are 2 large hotels (belonging to the same corporate group), the only large hotels in the backpacker area. As well, there are 11 buildings shared by a travel agency and a hotel, and in such cases the reception areas for the travel agency and the hotel are often both found on the first floor, although there are also exceptions in which the reception area for the hotel is located on the second floor.

It may thus be surmised that in Phạm Ngũ Lão Street, which, as was noted above, was the first part of the backpacker area to become built-up, there first existed cafés such as might be used by foreigner tourists, which then became places providing word-of-mouth information for individual travellers who were not participating in package tours (Lloyd 2006), and that while some of these traveller cafés turned into specialist travel agen-

cies and added lodging facilities, there also emerged people who specialized in the hotel industry in the hope of attracting the travellers who gathered in this area.¹¹⁾ Another characteristic of Phạm Ngũ Lão Street is that there is a concentration of financial institutions requiring a large ground area, centred on banks and office buildings.

Next, a distinctive feature of Đê Thám Street is that its business composition ratio is similar to that of the entire area. Specifically, eating and drinking establishments account for about 28% of the shops and travel agencies and hotels for about 27% (fig. 6). The travel agencies and hotels are made up of 12 travel agencies, 6 hotels, and 5 buildings housing both a travel agency and a hotel. When compared with the business composition of the entire area, the number of tailors (7) and souvenir shops (9) is slightly higher than the average.

Fig. 7 shows the distribution of businesses along Đê Thám Street, where the percentage of some types of businesses is roughly identical with that of the entire area. Đê Thám Street is about 210 metres in length, and although no striking characteristics such as the adjacency of specific business types were observed, in the area close to Phạm Ngũ Lão Street there tend to be a relatively large number of travel agencies, hotels, and eating and drinking establishments and also souvenir shops catering for travellers. Further, a comparison of the east and west sides of the street reveals that many souvenir shops, tailors, and service businesses are located along the west side. In addition, it can be pointed out from the distribution pattern of shops that the building frontages are narrow. This is a characteristic to be seen in Vietnamese cities, and the shops stand on rectangular plots that are long from front to back. The frontage of the buildings along Đê Thám Street is on average from 3 to 5 metres in width.

An interesting point to be noted here is that a difference can be observed in the streetscape along the east and west sides of Đê Thám Street. Along the east side of the street 37 buildings stand at more or less regular intervals with frontages of roughly the same width, and they are systematically numbered. In contrast, the frontages of the 48 buildings along the west side are not uniform. In addition, there are also many alleys joining the street, and some street numbers that ought to be there are missing or else the buildings have not been numbered systematically.¹²⁾

These differences in the streetscape can be partly explained on the basis of our reading of the old maps described above. It can be pointed out, namely, that whereas the east side of Đê Thám Street began to be developed from a comparatively early stage and the existence of build-

ings can be ascertained already in the period of French colonial rule, the west side remained virtually undeveloped until the time of the Republic of Vietnam. In addition, in the alleys spread out to the west of Đề Thám Street there are concentrated intricately intermeshed small land lots occupied by residential dwellings, hotels, and other miscellaneous businesses. It is to be surmised, therefore, that after the Vietnam War the land to the west of Đề Thám Street was put to use in ways that were not properly planned, starting with housing lots.

In the business composition ratio along Bùi Viện Street, eating and drinking establishments account for about 29% of the buildings, while travel agencies and hotels account for only about 21%. As regards the breakdown of travel agencies and hotels, when compared with Phạm Ngũ Lão Street and Đề Thám Street, there is a greater proportion of hotels than travel agencies. Another distinctive feature of Bùi Viện Street is that there is a high ratio of shops running service businesses (approx. 15%), and 30 of the 49 such businesses in the entire area are located along Bùi Viện Street. They include 14 galleries, 10 beauty salons, and 4 dry cleaners (fig. 8).

Lastly, in the business composition ratio along Đỗ Quang Đầu Street there is a high ratio of eating and drinking establishments, which account for about 32% of the shops. A distinctive feature that can be noted here is that whereas in other streets a large proportion of such establishments are restaurants and so on serving meals, in Đỗ Quang Đầu Street there are many cafés and bars. Specifically, there are 6 cafés and 6 bars. A distinctive feature of the cafés operating along Đỗ Quang Đầu Street is that while taking the form of cafés, many of them are café-bars that serve alcoholic beverages already during the day (fig. 9). There are also many shops dealing in everyday miscellaneous goods, and these account for about 18% of the shops and include 6 stalls and liquor stores and 3 convenience stores.

On the basis of the above, it is evident that the backpacker area that has been the subject of our investigations is an area specializing in tourism, with eating and drinking establishments, travel agencies, and hotels accounting for more than half of the businesses, and that each street has its own spatial characteristics. Travel agencies and hotels are concentrated along Phạm Ngũ Lão Street, and travel agencies in particular predominate, with 24 travel agencies, approximately half of the 50 travel agencies in the entire area, being located here.

A distinctive feature of Đề Thám Street is that eating and drinking establishments and travel agencies and hotels account for about 28% and

27% respectively, which coincide with the average values for the entire area. It was also confirmed that the frontages of the buildings along the west side of the street are not uniform in width and that various kinds of businesses, starting with small shops such as souvenir shops and tailors, are distributed along the street.

Although eating and drinking establishments, travel agencies, and hotels are concentrated along Bùi Viện Street, the ratio of travel agencies and hotels is low when compared with the average ratio for the entire area, and instead there is a high ratio of service businesses. In addition, it is not necessarily the case that only facilities catering for travellers (especially foreign travellers) are located along Bùi Viện Street. For example, if we look at the makeup of eating and drinking establishments, when compared with Phạm Ngũ Lão Street and Đề Thám Street there are many inexpensive eating places, and even among the beauty salons included in service businesses there are establishments of the type utilized by locals.

Eating and drinking establishments are concentrated along Đỗ Quang Đầu Street. These include 6 cafés and 6 bars, and it was confirmed that the eating and drinking establishments along this street are centred on these cafés and bars. A distinctive feature of these is that at many of the cafés not only coffee, soft drinks, and so on but also alcoholic beverages are served to foreign travellers. In addition, there is a high ratio of shops selling everyday miscellaneous goods along this street, and there are more stalls of a local type than there are convenience stores.

V. Concluding Remarks

In this article we have focused on the backpacker area in Ho Chi Minh City with the aim of clarifying its spatial characteristics. As a result, the following points can be made. First, the present backpacker area is located in an area adjacent to the former railway lines of Saigon Station. Former Saigon Station was located in what is now September 23 Park, and it functioned as a terminal station linking present-day Bến Thành Market with the Mekong Delta and northern Vietnam. The backpacker area lies to the southwest of this former railway station. It may therefore be supposed that at least some businesses connected with the railway station were located here. But as can be confirmed when checking this area on old maps, up until the French colonial period no intensive land use was to be seen here except in some streets such as Phạm Ngũ Lão Street and the east side of Đề Thám Street.

Secondly, when we examine the composition of the types of businesses in the four streets forming the core of the backpacker area, it is found that each has its own distinctive pattern. In Phạm Ngũ Lão Street, which faces former Saigon Station and was gradually being built up from the French colonial period, there are concentrated travel agencies providing travel information necessary for travellers. There is a strong possibility that some of these travel agencies were originally cafés. In fact, Sinhcafe (now Sinh Tourist), a long-established café that switched to the travel business, is currently based in Đề Thám Street, but so far as can be ascertained from travel guidebooks, until the late 1990s it was located in Phạm Ngũ Lão Street.

Similarly, in Đề Thám Street, which was developed from a relatively early stage, there are concentrated travel agencies, hotels, and eating and drinking establishments, and the percentage of these types of businesses along this street is roughly identical to that of the entire area. In contrast, in Bùi Viện Street not only do eating and drinking establishments predominate, but the percentage of travel agencies is lower than the average for the area, and instead there is a concentration of service businesses. In Đỗ Quang Đầu Street there are many bars among the eating and drinking establishments, and there is also a high percentage of general stores dealing in everyday goods.

Thirdly, it is to be surmised that these characteristics of each street reflect the process of expansion of the backpacker area. Judging from the descriptions found in guidebooks, it is to be supposed that the backpacker area started from Phạm Ngũ Lão Street and first expanded to Đề Thám Street and Bùi Viện Street and then as far as Đỗ Quang Đầu Street. The characteristics of the types of businesses in each street as of 2015 can be understood to indicate that the area underwent a process of extensive expansion, starting with travel agencies, followed by a concentration of small hotels and then an increase in restaurants and souvenir shops necessary for travellers, and lastly bars.¹³⁾

In light of the above, the backpacker area in Ho Chi Minh City is not to be understood as an enclave in which alternative tourism has evolved—that is, as a monolithic homogeneous space—but may be regarded as an urban landscape that strongly reflects a process in which locals have strategically selected certain types of businesses in the course of their urban lives while making the most of the historical background of each street. At the same time, it can also be viewed as a space that continues to change in response to the emergence of flashpackers, as can be seen in the develop-

ment of convenience stores and the multinationalization of restaurants.

Lastly, we would like to mention the following two points for future consideration. The first, related to the process of the formation of the backpacker area, is gaining a concrete grasp of buildings that house both a travel agency and a hotel. As a hypothesis, it may be supposed that as cafés turned into travel agencies, the hotel industry also developed more or less simultaneously. But there is a need to conduct individual fact-finding surveys about the establishment of such composite modes of business and the actual operation of travel agencies and hotels.

The second point is the interrelationship between the business types of tailors, galleries, and dry cleaners concentrated along Đê Thám Street and Bùi Viện Street and the process of the formation of the backpacker area. That is, are these types of businesses that emerged with the expansion of the backpacker area or can they be regarded as types of businesses that had developed around former Saigon Station through connections with the railway station? The elucidation of these points is a necessary task also for tracing more empirically the above-mentioned process of extensive expansion of the backpacker area and will also be indispensable for gaining a grasp of changes in urban space in this area from the end of the Vietnam War down to the present day.

Postscript

The main points of this article were presented in a paper delivered at the 8th annual meeting of the Japan Association on Geographical Space in 2015, held at Tsukuba University. We had made some modifications of this article which was originally published in *Chirikūkan* 地理空間 [*Geographical Space*], 9(1):45-62, entitled “Hōchimin-shi ni okeru bakkupakkā eria no kūkanteki tokuchō” ホーチミン市におけるバックパッカーエリアの空間的特徴 [*Spatial Characteristics of Backpacker Area in Hochiminh City*]. The primary data used in this study were gathered mainly in field-work conducted over a total of three weeks in March and August–September 2014.

Notes

- 1) An example of another study from a perspective similar to that of the present study is Mori and Hirayama 2004, which analyzes Khaosan Road in Bangkok, Thailand.
- 2) In the following, the term “tourist” refers mainly to mass tourists who use

package tours, while “backpacker” signifies people who travel individually for relatively long periods on a budget. The word “traveller” is used when these two are not or cannot be clearly differentiated. This is the case, for example, when referring to individual travellers in the 1970s, before the term “backpacker” had taken root, or when including people such as flashpackers.

- 3) To simplify matters, in this article present-day place-names and street names have been uniformly used. When using historical place-names, they have been added in parentheses after the present-day name.
- 4) One example of a book by Kondō Kōichi 近藤紘一 is *Saigon no ichiban nagai hi* サイゴンのいちばん長い日 [Saigon’s longest day], Bunshun bunko 文春文庫 (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū 文藝春秋, 1985; originally published in 1975 by Sankei Shinbunsha Shuppanyoku サンケイ新聞社出版局).
- 5) As of 2015, the 17th edition had been published.
- 6) As of March 2015, the 20th revised edition had been published.
- 7) Ever since the first edition of the Vietnam volume in 1994, they have included a subtitle along the lines of “’94-’95 edition,” but for simplicity’s sake in the following the year of publication has been used.
- 8) Yamaguchi and Yamaguchi 2009 provides a detailed analysis of changes in *Chikyū no arukikata* itself, based on interviews with the people who planned and coordinated the trips. It is essential to examine what sort of interrelationship there might be between historical changes in the travel guidebooks themselves and changes in their content, and we wish to address this topic in the future.
- 9) However, in the 1994 edition the backpacker area is not mentioned as such, but on a page providing a guide to hotels it is noted that “around Phạm Ngũ Lão Street there are cheap hotels and guest houses, the friends of backpackers” (p. 77). Four hotels are listed, two in Phạm Ngũ Lão Street, one in Đê Thám Street, and one in Bùi Viện Street. The expression “backpackers” remained on this page until the next year’s edition, but was no longer used thereafter.
- 10) As regards the distinction between restaurants, eating places, cafés, and bars, we first checked their signboards and other external features and then identified the type of business on the basis of the use of internal space. Specifically, “restaurant” refers to an establishment that has a menu in English or other foreign languages and offers multinational dishes, whereas an “eating place” has as a rule no menu and caters primarily for local residents. “Cafés” serve mainly coffee and soft drinks, whereas “bars” open in the early evening and serve exclusively alcoholic beverages.
- 11) According to Lloyd 2006, in the late 1980s and early 1990s there were only two hotels in Phạm Ngũ Lão Street where foreigners could stay.
- 12) In Vietnam, street numbers are generally divided down the left and right sides of a street, with one side starting from an odd number and the other from an even number.
- 13) It will, however, be also necessary to corroborate details of the spatial development of the backpacker area on the basis of textual sources and fact-

finding surveys, and we wish to take this up on another occasion.

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Table 1. Changes in descriptions of the backpacker area as seen in travel guidebooks (1989–2014)

Period	Year of Publication	Total Number of Pages	Number of Pages on Backpacker Area ²⁾	Heading	Number of Maps (Titles) ³⁾	Keywords ¹⁾												
						cheap accommodation	lives of ordinary people	individual traveller	Khaosan Road	cheap prices	cheap tours	backpacker	travellers' necessities ⁴⁾	convenience/style				
1	1989	158	0															
	1992	155	0															
	1994	232	0															
	1995	248	2	For budget travel, head for Pham Ngủ Lào Street!	1 (Pham)													
2	1996	264	3		1 (Pham)													
	1997	296	4		1 (Pham)													
	1998	322	4		1 (Pham)													
	2000	341	4		1 (Pham)													
	2001	355	4		2 (Pham/Dê)													
	2002	354	4		2 (Pham/Dê)													
	2003	387	5	For budget travel, head for Dê Thâm Street!	2 (Pham/Dê)													
	2004	403	5		2 (Pham/Dê)													
3	2005	403	5		2 (Pham/Dê)													
	2006	409	5		2 (Pham/Dê)													
	2007	409	5		2 (Pham/Dê)													
	2008	453	2		1 (Bùi/Dê)													
	2009	453	2	Vietnam's largest backpacker area: Bùi Viên Street and Dê Thâm Street	1 (Bùi/Dê)													
4	2010	453	2		1 (Bùi/Dê)													
	2011	453	2		1 (Bùi/Dê)													
	2012	453	2		1 (Bùi/Dê)													
	2013	453	2		1 (Bùi/Dê)													
2014	453	2		1 (Bùi/Dê)														

1) Keywords mentioned in the description of Ho Chi Minh City in the corresponding edition of the guidebook are marked by a circle (○).
 2) The number of pages on the backpacker area includes not only the main text but also pages with maps and photographs.
 3) In the map titles, (Pham) refers to Pham Ngủ Lào Street, (Dê) to Dê Thâm Street, and (Bùi) to Bùi Viên Street. (Pham/Dê) indicates that the map covers both Pham Ngủ Lào Street and Dê Thâm Street.
 4) "Travellers' necessities" here includes international telephone calls, travel agents, e-mail reception service (internet café), money changers, souvenir shops, etc.
 (Compiled on the basis of annual editions of *Chikyū no arukikata*)

Table 2. Composition of types of businesses in each street (2015)

Category	Type of Business	Street				Entire Area
		Phạm Ngũ Lão n = 81	Đê Thám n = 85	Bùi Viện n = 205	Đỗ Quang Đâu n = 56	
Eating & Drinking Establishments	Restaurant	8	13	33	4	58
	Café	6	8	7	6	27
	Bar	1	2	12	6	21
	Eating place	1	1	7	2	11
	Subtotal ¹⁾	16 (19.8)	24 (28.2)	59 (28.8)	18 (32.1)	117 (27.4)
Travel Agencies & Hotels	Travel agency	24	12	12	2	50
	Hotel	8	6	22	1	37
	Combined travel agency and hotel	11	5	8	5	29
	Subtotal	43 (53.1)	23 (27.1)	42 (20.5)	8 (14.3)	116 (27.2)
Retail Shops	Shopping store	3	5	20	0	28
	Souvenir shop	2	9	15	1	27
	Tailor	0	7	8	4	19
	Subtotal	5 (6.2)	21 (24.7)	43 (21.0)	5 (8.9)	74 (17.3)
Service Businesses	Gallery	0	3	14	0	17
	Beauty salon	1	1	10	5	17
	Tattoo parlour	1	2	2	0	5
	Motorcycle rental & repair shop	1	1	0	3	5
	Dry cleaner	0	0	4	1	5
	Subtotal	3 (3.7)	7 (8.2)	30 (14.6)	9 (16.1)	49 (11.5)
General Stores	Convenience store	4	3	7	3	17
	Stall, liquor store	3	1	6	6	16
	Pharmacy	0	1	4	1	6
	Subtotal	7 (8.6)	5 (5.9)	17 (8.3)	10 (17.9)	39 (9.1)
Other	Bank, etc.	6	2	4	1	13
	Residential dwelling	0	1	7	5	13
	Education	1	0	2	0	3
	Administration	0	2	1	0	3
	Subtotal	7 (8.6)	5 (5.9)	14 (6.8)	6 (10.7)	32 (7.5)

1) The subtotals for each category indicate the percentage (%) for each street. In the case of the entire area, they show the average percentage (%).

(Source: based on fieldwork)

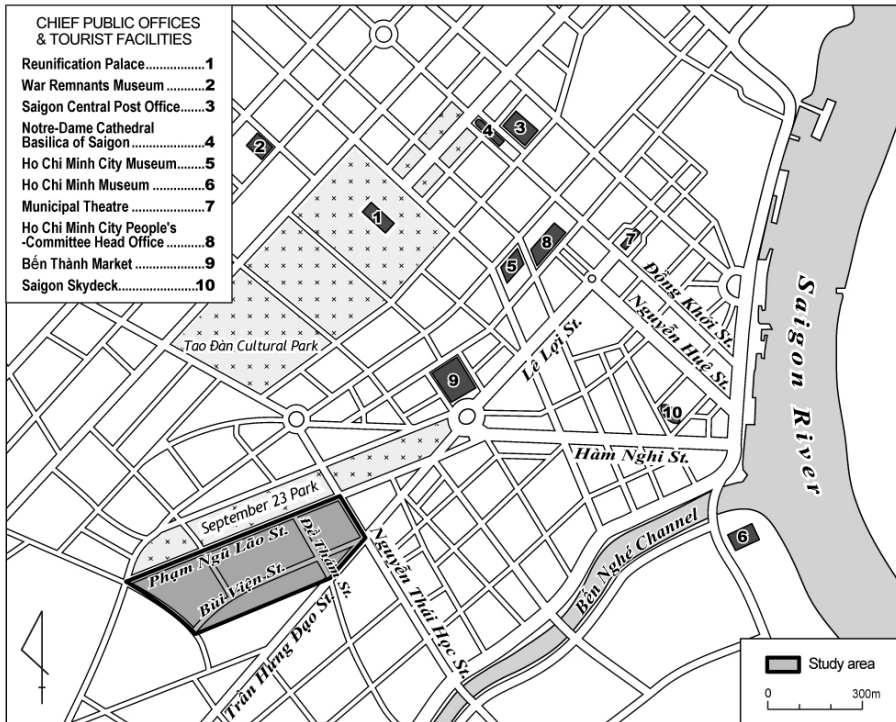


Fig. 1. Centre of Ho Chi Minh City and area taken up in this study

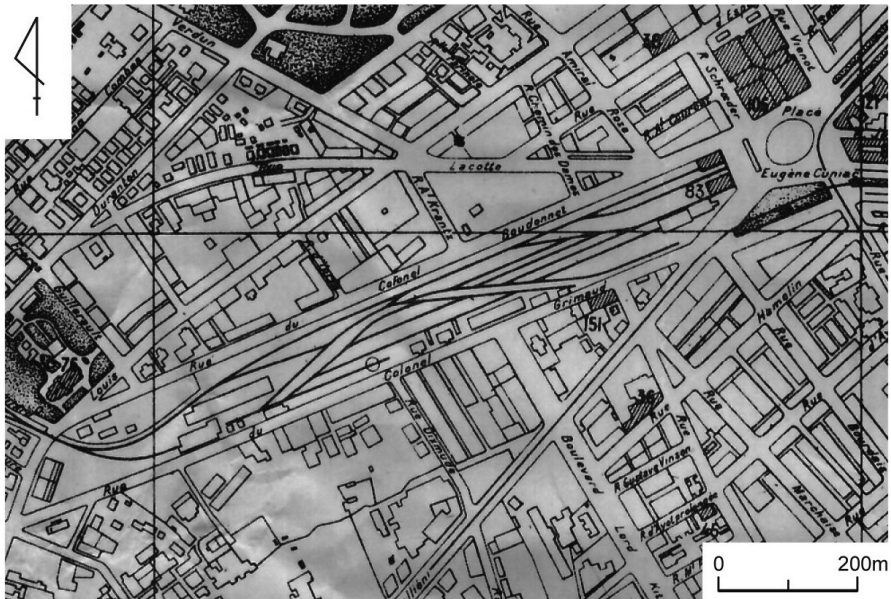


Fig. 2. Backpacker area and environs during French colonial period

(Source: part of map [1:10,000] held by Rikkyo University Centre for Asian Area Studies, with some modifications)



Fig. 3. Backpacker area and environs at time of Republic of Vietnam

(Source: part of map [1:10,000] held by University of Texas Libraries, University of Texas at Austin [<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/Vietnam.html>], with some modifications)

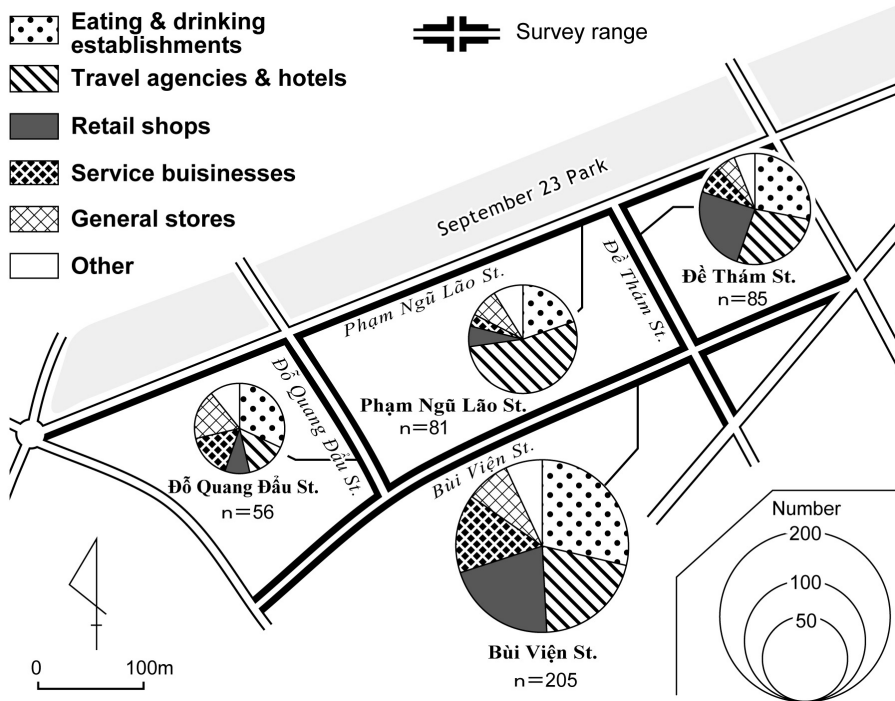


Fig. 4. Business composition by street in backpacker area (2015)

(Source: based on fieldwork)



Fig. 5. Street scene along Phạm Ngũ Lão Street

Travel agencies stand side by side facing former Saigon Station (September 23 Park). These agencies run day trips to the Mekong Delta and Cù Chi tunnels and arrange hotel bookings, airline tickets, etc. (Source: photograph by authors, December 2014)



Fig. 6. Street scene along Đề Thám Street (east side)

Development began along the east side from an early stage, and today the street is lined with multi-storied hotels and travel agencies. CAFE KIM Tourist on the left is an example of a travel agency that started out as a café. (Source: photograph by authors, March 2014)

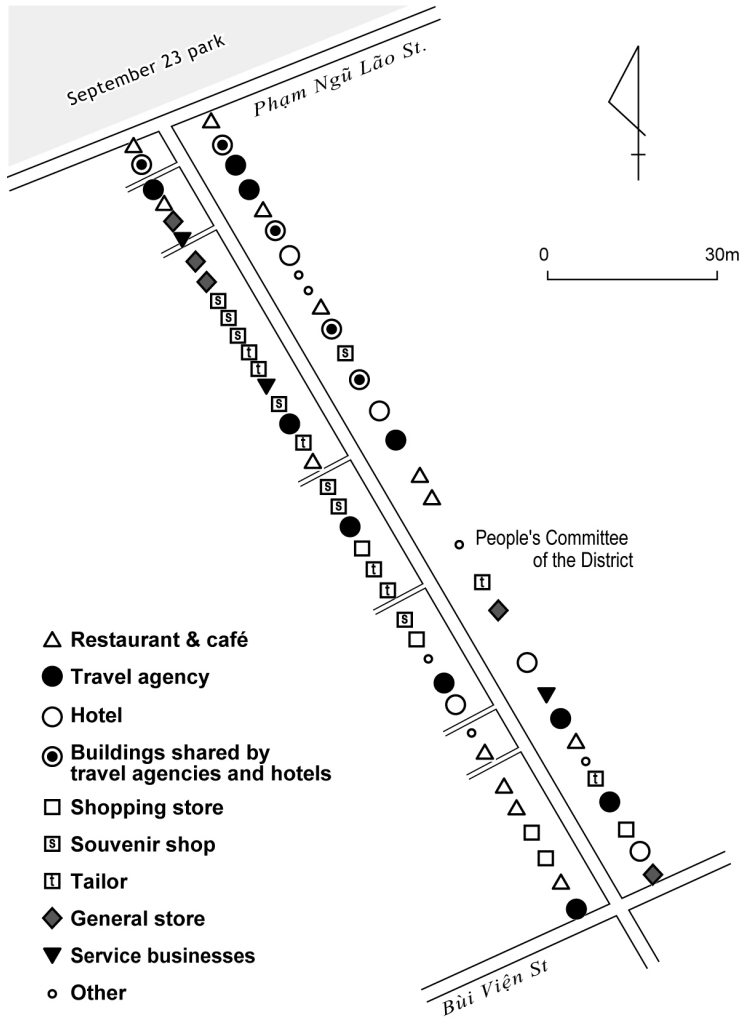


Fig. 7. Distribution of business types along Đê Thám Street (2015)

The stretch of street as far as the intersection with Bùi Viện Street is shown here.

(Source: based on fieldwork)



Fig. 8. Street scene along Bùi Viện Street

In addition to souvenir shops, restaurants, and eating places, beauty salons and other service businesses are concentrated along this street. A wide range of amenities meeting the needs of travellers are offered here. (Source: photograph by authors, September 2014)



Fig. 9. Café on Đỗ Quang Đầu Street

Cafés along this street are thronged not only with foreign travellers but also with local residents who come by motorcycle. As well as coffee and soft drinks such as fruit shakes (*sinh tố*), alcoholic beverages are also served. (Source: photograph by authors, September 2014)