

Doctoral Dissertation

**Sense of Place in Culturally Vulnerable Areas:
Case Studies of Asian Towns**

(Summary)

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1. BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATIONS

Roughly more than 65% of the world's population will live in urban areas by 2050. Therefore, the study of mental health, psychology, and urban design attracts many scholars. However, when a city centre, especially in developing countries, receives a big pressure of physical infrastructure development, there is an opportunity to lose the unique quality of place or significance of the place, the phenomenon we define as culturally vulnerable areas. Therefore, exploring shared values, experiences, and feelings can be conducted by listening to people's opinions or stories and implementing them into urban policy is challenging.

Maintaining people's shared values, perceptions, and feelings are important, especially when the government wants to increase the number of residents or visitors. For example, when the towns or cities satisfy residents' psychological needs, they would intend to stay in the towns or cities. When the visitors are satisfied with the towns or cities, they will intend to revisit or stay longer. Conversely, when the shared value among people is demolished, it affects residents' experiences and behaviours. Up to this point, previous studies have yet to explore empirically how these psychological dimension has been measured in the context of culturally vulnerable areas.

The globalization of towns and cities worldwide has urged planners, designers, and governments to protect the local value, pay attention to the physical elements which provide uniqueness, and use them to support people's mental health or psychological well-being. For the reasons mentioned above, an urgent study on the exploration of SOP in culturally vulnerable areas, such as disadvantaged places, is important, especially in exploring the applicable methodology to collect people's experiences, examining the relationship between SOP and other variables such as satisfaction, and analysing the shared physical elements among people.

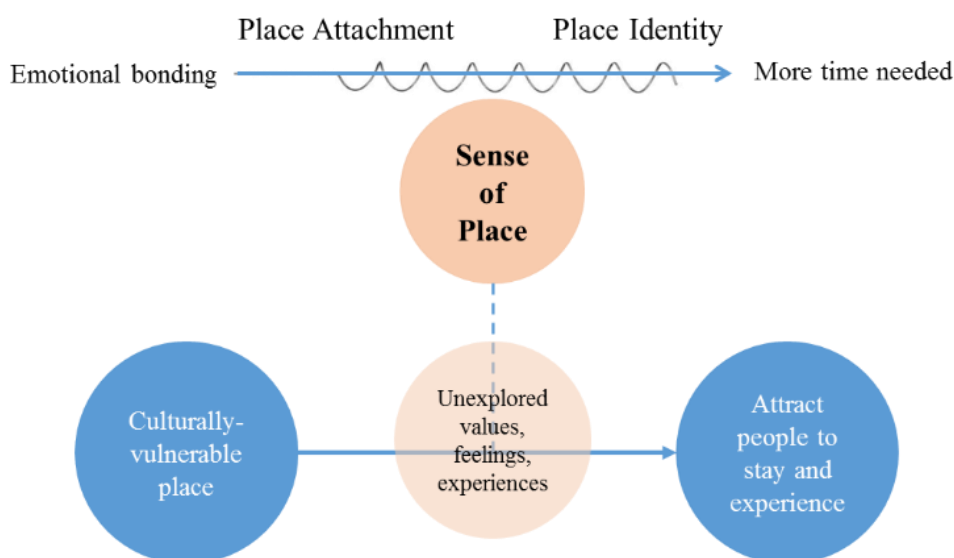


Figure 1.1. Research Framework

Research questions and objectives:

This study's main objective is to comprehensively explore the sense of place in different case studies of culturally vulnerable areas. While the detailed objectives are as follows: first, to explore and collect people's experiences through walking experiences; second, to explore a sense of place to develop attractiveness and to influence people's intention to stay; third, to reveal people's perceptions about the image of the place. In this study, the research questions are as follows:

- 1.1. How can urban design qualities and individual reactions describe the sense of place through real-time walking experience?
- 1.2. How do participants' responses contribute to urban design policy?
 - 2.1. In border towns, what attributes reflect residents' sense of place?
 - 2.2. What should be considered to improve residents' sense of place in border towns?
- 3.1. In border towns, what attributes reflect residents' sense of place?
- 3.2. How are SWOT and SOP influencing residents' intentions through Place satisfaction?
- 4.1. What objects which had a strong impression for the residents that can reflect the place identity? (For Taoyaka Onsite Team Project)

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs qualitative and quantitative approaches and comprehensively tries to understand a sense of place in culturally vulnerable areas. The type of data collection includes walking sessions, in-depth interviews, workshops, and face-to-face questionnaires. The study area is selected based on the characteristics of culturally vulnerable areas, where cultural significance might vanish due to the pressure of rapid infrastructure development. The study area covers different locations from Surabaya (Indonesia) to Greater Mekong subregion border towns which consisted of four countries (China, Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam) and Mitarai (Japan).

3. MAIN FINDINGS

First, the findings show that urban design qualities and individual reactions clearly explain the character of the place, which help urban designers, architect, and other decision-makers to create a walkable neighbourhood. The study notes that the visitors (non-residents) notice favourable and unfavourable elements influencing the sense of place.

Second, the psychological, social, and environmental relationship between residents and the border towns has revealed significant findings. It is found that a sense of place significantly influences residents' intention to stay longer through place satisfaction. In addition, sense of

place and SWOT have significant correlations. The findings show cultural and natural attributes have strong emotional bonding for residents. Cultural attributes include religious buildings, old buildings, and historic districts, while natural attributes involve rivers, parks, trees, etc. However, negative feelings about border towns also occurred. Casinos are perceived as disturbing objects because residents think that Casinos can lead to other criminal activities. The negative feelings are found to encompass geographical distance significantly. As the border towns develop as transportation hubs, residents are concerned about the historical and cultural significance, which might be influenced by rapid physical infrastructure development. Residents also worry about the traffic flows, which might influence the sense of safety living in the border town. The unique finding from the border towns study is that the Opportunity of place is not the main factor affecting residents' long-term residential intentions. It means that even though the border towns have promising economic activity in the future, it does not influence people's intentions.

Third, the study revealed hidden stories of residents in Japanese rural towns. It is necessary to collect the current image of the place because the past image of the place might bring a sensitiveness to the residents. The shared attributes by residents can be used to create a new image without ignoring the history of the place.

4. CONTRIBUTIONS

Theoretical contribution. This study formulates a research framework for a sense of place in culturally vulnerable areas to increase the intention to revisit and stay longer. The theoretical contribution is mainly in chapters 5 and 6, which discuss the border towns in developing countries. First, it is found that visibility and interaction influence the development of a sense of familiarity. Second, people's negative and positive feelings are associated with geographical distances.

Methodological contribution. A combination and application of the quantitative and qualitative approaches to draw broad conclusions regarding the role of a sense of place in affecting people's intentions. In addition, the contribution related to the appropriateness of utilising theoretical concepts from different contexts may help future studies on a sense of place.

Practical contribution. The study highlights the importance of understanding people's feelings, experiences, and values in creating a liveable neighbourhood or town. These findings can potentially be used by designers, planners, and government officials. The study also provides strategies, suggestions, and recommendations to improve the neighbourhood or town from culturally vulnerable areas, which different stakeholders can implement.