

The Making of Places in Sister Cities between South Korea and Vietnam

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Introduction

In the era of globalization, world cities positioned themselves at the center of discussions on inter-city networks. Notwithstanding, little attention has been paid to transnational inter-city relations among small cities. The doctoral dissertation titled 'Transnational Place-Making of the Sister City Regime: Case Studies from South Korea and Vietnam' utilizes observations and in-depth interviews to investigate the transnational place-making practices between sister cities in South Korea and Vietnam. In specific, it aims to answer three questions: (1) What types of places are constituted in the sister cities? (2) Which social processes construct these places? (3) How does place-making matter in contemporary sister city relations?

Fieldwork in Vietnam was conducted in two small cities: Quy Nhon and Vinh. Accordingly, Quy Nhon City in Binh Dinh Province established a sister city relationship with Yongsan District from Seoul in 1997. During the Vietnam War, Quy Nhon City served as the garrison of the Korean Capital Mechanized Infantry Division (also known as the Fierce Tiger Unit), which was originally established in June 1949 in Yongsan District. Meanwhile, Vinh City in Nghe An Province and Namyangju City in Gyeonggi Province officially became sister cities in 2005. Both cities are the hometowns of national revolutionaries, Jeong Yak-Yong and Ho Chi Minh.



Fig. 1 (left): Yongsan International Relation Office in Quy Nhon City.

Fig. 2 (above middle): Yongsan Street in An Phu Thinh new town, Quy Nhon.

Fig. 3 (above right): Hanok Pavilion in An Phu Thinh new town, Quy Nhon.

Fig. 4 (below): Charitable houses in Phuoc My Commune, Quy Nhon City.

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While the micro-politics of local historical contexts play a significant role in the establishment of sister city relations, which are also associated with the making of places between the sister cities. Historical elements appear in both the *unmaking of place-of-memory* as well as the *making of place-of-welfare*. Place-of-memory unmaking refers to the practice of renaming historical monuments related to distressing events, such as the Korean soldier hate monument in Quy Nhon City. Meanwhile, the making of new places that target welfare infrastructures, such as charitable houses, kindergartens, and medical service centers for the disadvantaged of the city, is also motivated to reduce the impacts of catastrophic histories. Place-(un)making between sister cities, therefore, refers to the *unmaking of memories* that constitute the *politics of forgetting*.

Transnational place-making in sister cities is further linked to the *making of commercial opportunities* between the cities. It is demonstrated in the making of places such as trade centers, tourist sites, or education programs. Here, transnational sister city place-making is embedded in the dynamic context of transnational connections between South Korea and Vietnam, as well as the macro-politics of national political and economic reforms.

The investigation of transnational sister city place-making enables us to understand how the reconfiguration of urban spaces is associated with both the micro-politics of local historical contexts and the macro-politics of national and transnational economic and political reforms. Analyzing the making of places between the sister cities, we gain insight into the role of sister cities in the transnational development nexus between South Korea and Vietnam. They serve as i) new international avenues for Korean small and medium-sized enterprises to enter small cities in Vietnam, (ii) magnifiers of local-global relations in the “everyday” place-making of individuals, and (iii) new sites of urban development.



Fig. 5 (left): Namyangju Dasan Street in Vinh City.

Fig. 6 (above right): “Cho Vinh” (“Vinh market”) where the Namyangju-Vinh Trade Center used to be located.

Fig. 7 (below right): The old location of the Namyangju-Vinh Trade Center in Vinh market.

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