

Impacts of the Policy "Khu Tru Mat" on Residential Space of Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu (1960 – 1963)



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ABSTRACT: Khu Tru Mat is one of the important rural policies issued by the Government of the Republic of Vietnam (1955 - 1963). Through this policy, Khu Tru Mat was established in many strategically located areas in the Mekong Delta. Accordingly, the Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu area was both an important intersection in the transport connection system and a strategic political-military position of the Government of the Republic of Vietnam in the Mekong Delta. Therefore, the implementation of the Khu Tru Mat policy in the Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu area was not only the goal of building a strategic political and military area of the Government of the Republic of Vietnam but also had a great impact on the rural face here. The purpose of this study is to analyze the impacts of the Khu Tru Mat policy on the spatial change of residential areas in the rural areas of Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu by exploiting the values from the data source at Vietnam's National Archives in Ho Chi Minh city. The research results not only provide important references but also orient some historical experiences for contributing to the strategic planning of socio-economic development in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam today.

KEYWORDS: Khu Tru Mat policy, Vi Thanh – Hoa Luu region, economic face, Republic of Vietnam, historical research, Mekong Delta region of Vietnam

1. INTRODUCTION

Khu Tru Mat was one of the important rural policies of the Government of the Republic of Vietnam, promulgated by President Ngo Dinh Diem (1955 - 1963). Through this policy, Khu Tru Mat was established in many strategic areas in the Mekong Delta. That not only had a great impact on the rural appearance but also made an important contribution to the political and military strategy of the Government of the Republic of Vietnam in rural management and control of farmers in the area. On this topic, in international studies, there are the following approaches:

According to research by Zasloff (1962), the term Khu Tru Mat was understood as “protected villages” or “agrovilles”. This study analyzed Khu Tru Mat, a plan issued in 1959 with the content of establishing large-scale resettlement sites for farmers in rural South Vietnam. Through these resettlement areas, the Government of the Republic of Vietnam made a large investment in finance and construction of facilities to promote economic and social development.

According to published results from The Pentagon Papers (1971), the term "Agrovilles" was used to describe the "House of Secrets". Accordingly, Khu Tru Mat was explained as the Rural Community Development Center established in 1959 by the Government of the Republic of Vietnam proposed and implemented the plan. In these centers, farmer families were planned to live in residential clusters of 300 to 500 households, and they were offered social benefits from the Khu Tru Mat program such as schools and social security services. In these areas, the living and productive activities of the families were protected and controlled by the national army to prevent attacks from the Viet Cong.

Researched by Spector (1983), the Khu Tru Mat policy was started in 1959 and it was built into networks throughout the delta, bordering Saigon. Both the Government of the United States and the Republic of Vietnam made efforts to build these places into permanent agricultural lands, in which the peasants were resettled and organized into paramilitary armies to prevent infiltration by the Viet Cong. However, this policy had difficulties from the outset.

According to Coker (1989), while researching in detail about the Khu Tru Mat program of the Republic of Vietnam implemented in the South of Vietnam, the author mentioned Tru Mat Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu, which was built with the largest scale and model for other areas in the South of Vietnam. The author also described Khu Tru Mat Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu designed by famous Vietnamese architect Ngo Viet Thu. According to the design, this Khu Tru Mat had 4 separate and adjacent areas, of which 3 areas to the south of Xa No River had an area of about 200 hectares and the remaining one to the north had an area of about 400 hectares.

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The central area to the south of the Khu Tru Mat was nearing completion, while the area north of the Xa No River was progressing very slowly.

A study of Colby's (2007) reflected the goal of the Khu Tru Mat program was to change the face of rural areas in the Mekong Delta. However, many mistakes in the implementation process led to serious consequences such as the area of the zones was too large to be controlled, the local government lacked capacity, the working method was not flexible, etc. Not only did this cause discontent among the people about Khu Tru Mat but it also caused conflicts with the Government.

For Vietnam, researchers often approach the Khu Tru Mat politically and militarily with very different analyses.

In the study of Giau (1964), these Khu Tru Mat represented the tension between the government of the Republic of Vietnam and the Viet Cong in the competition for the trust of the people of South Vietnam through rural policy.

According to research by Cuong (1973), Khu Tru Mat was one of the rural construction and development programs of the government of the Republic of Vietnam. This study mentioned the statistics on the number of Khu Tru Mat built in 1960 as 17 zones. In 1962, 22 more zones were established in the whole South and about 6954 households settled with an area of about 601 acres.

According to Huyen (2014), the overall study of the Khu Tru Mat policy was about describing the structure, assessing the adverse effects of this policy on the revolutionary process of the Viet Cong from 1959 to 1960. In addition, this study also stated that this was a dangerous policy that disrupts the rights of the people, causing a deep conflict between the people and the Government of the Republic of Vietnam.

In the research of Tho (2017), the author argued that the establishment of the Khu Tru Mat Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu was a huge concentration camp, a military base to prevent the development of revolutionary forces in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam.

According to Trong (2020), the Khu Tru Mat program was weak compared to the previous Dinh Dien area of the government of the Republic of Vietnam and the consequences of the Khu Tru Mat area caused a great disturbance in the population organization in the countryside.

In general, not only did these studies describe and analyze the Khu Tru Mat of the government of the Republic of Vietnam (1959 - 1963) with many different points of view but also created scientific values in research on Vietnam history. Through these materials and the actual survey of the Khu Tru Mat, it oriented research on the impact of the Khu Tru Mat in the changes in population space of Vi Thanh – Hoa Luu region. Moreover, it also oriented the research on the process of establishing the Khu Tru Mat and analyzed the change in the economic spatial structure for this rural community.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE PLAN OF KHU TRU MAT VI THANH - HOA LUU

President Ngo Dinh Diem implemented the Khu Tru Mat program throughout the South of Vietnam, typically the Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu in the Mekong Delta. Accordingly, the construction plan of Khu Tru Mat Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu included three steps:

Step 1. Construction site survey

The survey site and selection of Khu Tru Mat had to have security, economic and traffic criteria. According to RVN (1959), Khu Tru Mat was built in strategic locations to control the security situation inside and outside this zone. In addition, this area had to be a place with fertile land and convenient waterway routes in order to ensure the development of commercial, industrial and agricultural activities. According to Nghiem (1970), the location of Vi Thanh village was suitable for the plan to establish Khu Tru Mat, because this place had a strategic location in terms of waterway and road traffic, connecting Phong Dinh and Rach Gia provinces. It was also a large, rural area, the land was vast but not yet agriculturally cultivated.

Step 2. Building the project of Khu Tru Mat

The Cadastral Agency took measurements and drafted drawings, and the General Directorate of Central Construction would build the Khu Tru Mat project. The design project of 1/10000 scale, Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu has been divided into 4 sub-zones: Bac Xa No, Vi Thanh, Trung and Hoa Luu sub-zones with a total length of about 7 km, taking Xa No river as the main area, the center of the Tru Mi area. Each side was 2 km wide, with a total area of about 28 km², controlling the entire Vi Thanh - Rach Gia waterway route.

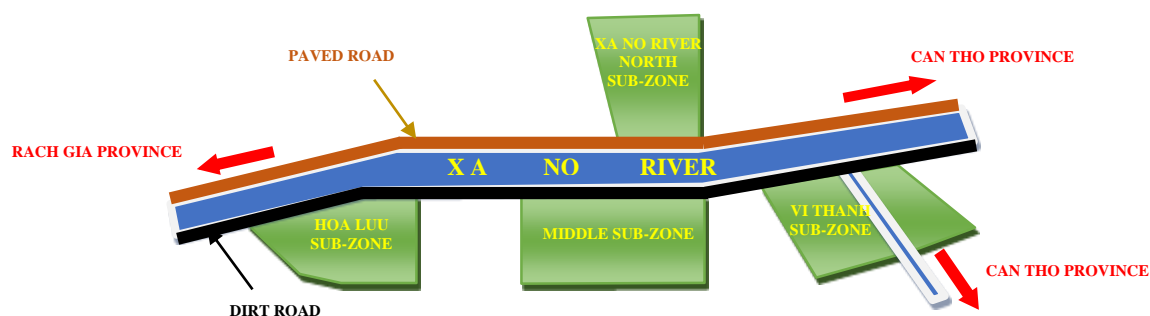


Figure 1. Simulation diagram of the structure of 4 sub-zones in the design of the Khu Tru Mat Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu in 1959 (Source: Compiled by the author)

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According to RVN (1959), the design project of Khu Tru Mat Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu area included 4 sub-zones, in each sub-zone was arranged different operating areas.

The commercial area was arranged in a convenient location along the Xa No river and the road. The location of the market and the commercial area was designed to facilitate trade and transport of goods both by water and by road. Around the commercial area, there were also designed locations for train stations to transport passengers and goods intercity. In addition, this area also had a hotel, a restaurant, etc., to serve the needs of passengers for eating and resting.

The administrative area was the central position of each sub-zone. According to the design of the project, this area had included administrative and administrative buildings and headquarters of specialized agencies in charge of social security such as infirmary, birth care house, children's hospital, agricultural association, information house, stadiums, and especially schools were built away from markets and clinics. In addition, each sub-zone also had a power plant to ensure lighting for people living in the area.

Religious area: the church was built close to the freshwater reservoir, while the temples and pagodas were located far from the administrative area. The planning of the religious area was to ensure the religious and belief life of the people in the Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu area.

The technology area was the place where production factories such as rice mills, bakeries, ice factories, wine-making, sugar-making, flour-making, knitting, weaving, and carpentry camps were concentrated. The location was convenient for the transportation of materials and products.

The residential area and farm garden was the key area of Khu Tru Mat Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu. Because farmers' families were settled and cultivated according to the allocated land with an area of 1000 - 5000 m², each household was also separated by a canal that was 4 - 6m wide. This was to determine the limit of the land area of each family as well as ensure the water source for daily life and agricultural production of the people.

According to RVN (1959), Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu area was granted a budget of 1,100,000 VN\$ by the Government of the Republic of Vietnam for project design, medicine, community work organization and construction of civil works. In addition, they were also allowed to borrow 400,000 VN\$ from the government budget to build infrastructure.

Step 3. Executing the Khu Tru Mat Project

After the project design was approved by the government, a project management board for this area was established to run the project and manage the project budget. Khu Tru Mat Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu was built in the form of Government and people working together: the government supported the construction budget, local people contributed labor. According to Nghiem (1970), in about 3 months of project implementation, tens of thousands of local farmers joined forces with the government to change the small Vi Thanh village into a new town.

3. THE ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF THE KHU TRU MAT POLICY ON THE VI THANH - HOA LUU AREA

The Khu Tru Mat was established to have a great impact on the settlement space and economic activities of the Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu region at that time

The process of establishing Khu Tru Mat was also the process of rural urbanization, which greatly affected the settlement and cultivation space of residents in Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu area. Before the establishment of Khu Tru Mat, the population was sparse, scattered along the Xa No river. After the establishment of Khu Tru Mat, resettlement areas were established surrounded by large and small waterways, taking the Xa No River as the center. According to Liem (1995), the location of the Khu Tru Mat was selected appropriately and had sufficient conditions for economic development such as agriculture and commerce.

These settlements were set up in sub-zones surrounded by large and small rivers. Each sub-zone also established an administrative center to manage all socio-economic activities. The settlement space of families was built to adapt to the population density. This ensured farming space for residents and provided a connection between the rural area and the central urban area of the region as well. This created a breakthrough change in the economic activity space of Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu before and after the establishment of Khu Tru Mat.

In addition, commercial space was concentrated along the banks of Xa No River, especially for industrial production, while a technology center was set up outside the residential area. This arrangement contributed to solving the employment needs of residents and rebuilding the goods circulation routes. This was the bridge between stages such as production, transportation and the consumption of products inside and outside the region through the waterway - road transport routes, the lifeline of Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu.

The Khu Tru Mat policy created Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu infrastructure

Before 1959, Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu was a small village that had been discovered since the end of the 18th century. Agricultural farming was the main activity of small rural areas with run-down houses which were built scattered along the large rivers such as Xa No, Nang Mau. According to RVN (1959), the situation of a large number of farmers living in the wilderness and

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remote regions led to a great disadvantage for their lives as it caused many obstacles to the government's policy to support rural welfare effectively.

Since 1960, Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu area has been planned and built in terms of waterway traffic, electricity supply system covering everywhere, centralized water supply system... Basically, The Government of the Republic of Vietnam created a revolution in the infrastructure of Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu, it helped to transform this region from a small farming area to a spacious town and contributed to promoting the economic development of this rural area. Many road traffic connecting Vi Thanh - Can Tho, Vi Thanh - Rach Gia, rural roads inside and outside the sub-areas were built quickly. The renovation of traditional waterways such as Xa No and Nang Mau rivers brought great advantages in transporting passengers and goods. Moreover, it also supported irrigation activities in agricultural production. According to Liem (1995), Khu Tru Mat could develop agriculture, and the area of cultivated land can be further expanded by reclaiming more fertile land, which created conditions for younger generations to become landowners in the future. Moreover, Khu Tru Mat could develop commerce and other service sectors, and jointly develop handicrafts connected with the local agricultural industry.

In addition, the Government also invested in building markets, train stations, schools, hospitals, and kindergartens for the people. Thereby, the geographical distance and travel time between regions were shortened and the prejudices about the difference between rural and urban areas were eliminated. According to Nghiem (1970), the old shabby houses were replaced by spacious houses, the transport system was built; Vi Thanh village nowadays has a hospital, school, power plant, etc. Vi Thanh became a prosperous town of the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam.

The Khu Tru Mat policy has contributed to promoting the transformation of industry structure and commercial product diversity in the Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu area

The Khu Tru Mat policy implemented in Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu redistributed production areas and community labor resources. This was the process of rural urbanization in order to develop economic sectors, create and connect economic exchanges between urban and rural areas.

Agriculture in rice cultivation, farming and animal husbandry significantly improved thanks to the support policy on seedlings, seeds and fertilizers, as well as advice by agricultural experts. According to RVN (1960), on March 24, 1960, the Government of the Republic of Vietnam sent a delegation of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to Khu Tru Mat Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu to administer injections to cattle and guide staff. local people how to prevent diseases in agriculture. Non-agricultural industries such as processing agricultural products and food include rice milling, rice drying, bread making, ice making, winemaking, sugar making, flour making, carpentry, knitting, etc. was accessible and increasingly essential in socio-economic activities in this place.

New service industries such as transporting passengers, goods by train, restaurant services, hotels, market information, etc., were formed and more bustling. In particular, commercial activities inside and outside the region became vibrant through markets with the participation of a larger number of small traders than before. Commodity products became diversified and abundant with the exchange and exchange of products from other industries. With a new economic appearance, commercial goods were not simply agricultural products but also passengers and services have become products of the economic sector, which was something new for rural areas in Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu after the Government of the Republic of Vietnam had implemented the policy of Khu Tru Mat in Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu.

Besides, taking care of cultural life and health in Khu Tru Mat Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu was increasingly focused, so it required a very large team of teachers and doctors. Therefore, professions that required high professional qualifications such as teachers, doctors, etc. were increasingly interested in raising awareness and taking care of and protecting the health of residents in the region.

The transformation of the occupation structure of residents and the commercial products of the region became more diverse to meet the needs of a new life of residents in the area and economic and commercial exchanges with neighboring areas. That contributed to creating the economic space of Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu area which was both self-sufficient, typical of small-scale agriculture, and a commercial city.

4. CONCLUSION

The Khu Tru Mat policy was deployed and implemented by the Government of the Republic of Vietnam for the Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu area, because this place was an important intersection in the inter-provincial waterway traffic axis Phong Dinh, Kien Giang, Ba Xuyen was also an important outpost for the control of the entire Ca Mau peninsula. Therefore, the establishment of Khu Tru Mat Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu would have strategic value in many economic, political and military aspects of the Government of the Republic of Vietnam for the southern region of the Mekong Delta.

From an economic point of view, Khu Tru Mat Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu was actually an innovative idea for rural planning, urban construction and promoting the commercial development of the river area. This policy really had a landmark impact on the Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu area:

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Firstly, the spatial change in rural residential areas of Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu, besides agricultural production space, people in the region also created industry areas outside the living area by the Government of the Republic of Vietnam. The settlement space was planned to adapt to the population density of the region by the Government, providing facilities for living and working for each household. In addition, the space for community activities in each sub-zone in Khu Tru Mat Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu was appropriately diversified, which contributed to building a richer cultural and spiritual life for the people than before.

Secondly, the policy of Khu Tru Mat contributed to the development of infrastructure in the community structure of Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu area. Because before that, Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu was simply a small agricultural village, scattered and isolated from the urban center, so the policy of Khu Tru Mat was implemented, creating the process of urbanization in rural areas. Accordingly, the Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu area was planned and built with increasingly complete infrastructure in terms of road traffic systems, electricity and water systems in each sub-zone, which had the effect of attracting people to the residential areas, where they live concentrated on a larger scale.

Finally, the policy of Khu Tru Mat of the Republic of Vietnam changed the economic structure and agricultural production in the rural areas of Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu. Besides the traditional rice cultivation of the region, new factors appeared in production activities here. The emergence of commodity production farm models, agro-fishery processing industries, handicrafts, and service industries were formed and created conditions for development. Cultural activities, education, sports, financial services are also being formed to meet living and production requirements in rural Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu.

It is thanks to the planning of the Khu Tru Mat that has made an important contribution to shortening the space and time gap between the two urban and rural areas, and at the same time creating a strong economic connection in the region and outside the Khu Tru Mat Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu, this is an important basis for shaping Hau Giang urban area in modern times.

In short, the Khu Tru Mat policy of the Government of the Republic of Vietnam was really an innovative idea in urban planning and rural economic development in the 1960s. However, due to the historical circumstances of the war and the implementation process affected by many different factors, the policy of Khu Tru Mat deployed in the Vi Thanh - Hoa Luu area had many subjective and objective limitations determined. Therefore, from the creative ideas of urban planning thinking and rural economic development along with its limitations, many valuable historical experiences are drawn for the making of open development policy urban expansion and construction of residential areas associated with the social security plan of Vi Thanh locality nowadays.

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