

Heritage preservation and tourism development in the ancient villages of Vietnam

December 2015 – January 2016

Place of fieldwork: Vietnam

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Key words: Ancient villages in Vietnam, heritage preservation, ancient houses, heritage tourism development, Japanese assistance

● Research background

My research is related to heritage preservation and tourism development in the ancient villages of Vietnam and Japan. In Japan, heritage preservation of the old villages in Kiso Valley, such as Tsumago and Magome, began at the end of the 1960s, initiated by the local village residents. In Vietnam, heritage preservation of the ancient villages has begun only recently, during the 2000s, following wide assistance from Japanese experts on heritage preservation, especially for the conservation of traditional houses, villages' communal houses, and temples.

● Research purpose and aim

In my Ph.D. thesis, I aim to compare local residents' motivation in Japan's and Vietnam's ancient villages to take part in tourism development in the village and their efforts to preserve communal and private historical heritage, i.e., their traditional folk houses and the ancient landscape of the village.

● Results and achievements of the fieldwork

In my current fieldwork in Vietnam, I have conducted surveys in three ancient villages: two villages officially recognized as National Heritage sites—Duong Lam and Phuoc Tich—and a third village that is not officially recognized as an ancient village—Dong Hoa Hiep in the Mekong Delta region. For the surveys, I conducted interviews and used a Vietnamese language questionnaire to ask about local residents' perceptions of heritage preservation, tourism development, Japanese assistance, and living conditions in recent years. The results of the survey showed that local residents' perceptions of heritage preservation and tourism development in their villages vary from village to village. In Duong Lam, many residents expressed discontent about living in a National Heritage site and being disturbed by the growing number of tourists. In Phuoc Tich village, all the interviewed residents expressed pride in their historical heritage and their hope to see more tourists, since the number of visitors recently dropped significantly. In Dong Hoa Hiep village in the Mekong Delta, all the owners of the ancient houses are interested in preserving their ancestors' heritage; however, some of the families feel disappointed because they have not succeeded in becoming effectively involved in tourism development in the village.

● Implications and impacts on future research

The results of the fieldwork shed more light on the local residents' perceptions of heritage preservation and tourism development in Vietnam's ancient villages. For comparative research, I will conduct a similar survey in Tsumago or Miyama traditional villages in Japan.



Tourism activities in Duong Lam village, Northern Vietnam. University students from Hanoi enjoying traditional games in Duong Lam village's Communal House. December 2015.



Interview with one of the residents in Duong Lam village, living in a traditional wooden house that is 200 years old. December 2015.



One of the traditional ancient houses built in the typical architecture of Phuoc Tich village, central Vietnam.. January 2016.



Interviewing an elderly resident in one of the ancient houses of Phuoc Tich village, with my research assistant Bach from Hue city.



Ancient house of Mr. Xuat in Dong Hoa Hiep village, Cai Be, Mekong Delta, South Vietnam. January 2016.

A family of three people living in this house of influential and rich ancestors. The original house was built in the 19th century in the Vietnamese traditional style, wooden architecture. In 1936, a French façade was added, following the impact of French architecture among wealthy Vietnamese families. The family that currently lives in the house has an income of only 30 USD per month, earned by selling fruits from their garden. Family members welcome numerous tourists to visit their house. Even though about 500 tourists visit their house every month during the dry season, the family reported not receiving any economic benefit from the visitors.



Owner of Mr. Kiet's ancient house in Dong Hoa Hiep village in the Mekong Delta region. The family has received significant financial help for the house restoration from JICA, a Japanese NPO. Every day during the high season, several tourist groups visit Mr. Kiet's house for sightseeing. Many tourists stay overnight in the homestay provided, for about 70 USD per night, including meals.