Influence of the Tourism Business on the Facades of Townhouses in the Case of Hanoi's Ancient Quarter

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Abstract

The Hanoi ancient quarter is a district with 1,000 years of history, which has grown rapidly in recent years as an international tourism destination with its historical townscape as a tourism resource. Consequently, the business types have shifted toward tourism and with that town houses are being rebuilt and renovated, thereby changing the townscape. Surveys of changes to the townscape were conducted from 2003 through 2015 to grasp the actual conditions and causes of the changes, and to clarify the impact on the townscape. Among those, this paper analyzes data from 2003 and 2006 as the initial change, and reaches the following findings.

1) Not only is the tourism industry spreading, but also tourism shops are expanding to upper floors.
2) Rebuilding, renovation, and other changes with an impact on the townscape are taking place along with the shift of business type to the tourism industry.
3) Many of the rebuilding projects are for conversions into hotels.

Keywords: Vietnam; historic district; tourist business; change

1. Introduction

The Hanoi ancient quarter traces back to 1010, when the capital was established. To produce tributes for the Emperor, artisans were assembled from neighboring villages and were accommodated in the quarter adjoining east of the imperial court in clusters of houses grouped by profession (Fig.1.). Over a history of more than a thousand years since that time, the quarter developed into a district with its own distinct culture, while undergoing Chinese and French influences. Thereafter, up to 1986 when the Doi Moi reform program was adopted, the quarter was left behind by economic development, so that the urban structure remained along with many historical buildings, even if their number declined. Steps to preserve the appearance of the quarter were undertaken starting in the 1990s. Then as Vietnam looked ahead to celebrating the Millennial Anniversary of Hanoi in 2010, the government in 2004 designated the ancient quarter as an important cultural asset. Efforts were stepped up for preserving and restoring the town houses and for beautification.

Today, however, in addition to becoming the center of the economy and culture as the capital of Vietnam, the ancient quarter has turned into an international tourism area.

The number of foreign tourists visiting Hanoi is greatly increasing, growing from around just 500,000 in 2002 to about 3.27 million in 2015 and to about 4.02 million in 2016.1 There has thus been an active shift away from other businesses toward tourism, one result being that town houses have been renovated or rebuilt, progressively altering the townscape.

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In this paper authors first of all examine the reality of the shift toward tourism in Hanoi's ancient quarter. In addition, authors also offer a systematic analysis of trends regarding changes to townhouse facades due to the tourism business.

2. Prior Research

There is the following prior research on the Hanoi ancient quarter. First, as research regarding the living environment, there is the research by Hoang Huu Phe and Nishimura (1989). In this work, a survey was carried out centered on three blocks of town houses and analyses were conducted on the residence format and the residents' evaluation of the residences, hinting at the effectiveness of district improvement plans at the smallest administrative level. Next, there is the research by To Kien (2008) regarding the preservation of historical town houses which addresses the oldest type of town houses in the ancient quarter and examines their preservation and the means of restoration when there are no historical reference materials. Also, Yee Sing The (2016) carried out research on rehabilitation methods and revitalization strategies for old towns in four Asian cities, including the Hanoi ancient quarter.

So while the above research has been conducted on the Hanoi ancient quarter, there is little that focuses, like this paper, on its rapid change into a tourism destination and which clarifies the impact of that shift on the townscape. Consequently, this paper is unprecedented among the research on the Hanoi ancient quarter, and is considered significant.

3. Government Initiatives

In the midst of the rapid economic growth and shift to tourism, the People's Committee of Hanoi devised an ordinance aimed at preserving the quarter. The ordinance (45/1999/QD-UB; hereinafter the "preservation ordinance") on the preservation of this quarter, which went into effect in June 1999, defined the scope of the district, the streets to be preserved, the buildings to be preserved, and the principles of preservation and development. It also specified such items as building-to-land ratio, height, building materials, and colors. Regarding signs, which impact townscape, there was already an ordinance (10/2001/QD-UB) on the use of signs and banners for advertising purposes; but the above preservation ordinance defined specific items including sign materials and shape, languages used, and colors. The items on shape and color, however, are limited to abstract expressions such as "readily visible," "understandable," "beautiful," "subdued," and not using colors that are too gaudy. For administrative duties, the Hanoi ancient quarter management board was established. Board members, who are specialists in architecture, handle design management of rebuilding and renovations in the quarter. The size of the area, however, covering a square kilometer, and the many buildings in it are among the reasons they are unable to manage it fully at present.

Support for restoring, preserving, and making use of the town houses in the quarter is being received also from foreign countries. Starting in 1999, with financial and technical cooperation from Toulouse, France, restoration of three town houses and one assembly hall was completed. Of the three restored houses, the first became the Hanoi ancient quarter management board office and the second was used as a town house tours facility. The third house, after being restored, became an actual local residence, as a demonstration case for proposals to eliminate the problem of crowding in the district and improve the living environment.

4. Outline of the Survey

4.1 Survey Design

From March 2003, a comprehensive survey of the preservation status of the ancient quarter was carried out with the cooperation of the People's Committee of Hanoi and the Hanoi ancient quarter management board. It included measurement surveys of the traditional town houses, a survey of the living style, and surveys of changes in the townscape. Of these, the present study makes use of the photos of facades taken over time to show changes in the townscape on surveys of changes in the townscape.

The surveys of changes in the townscape were conducted seven times over the twelve-year period from March 2003 to August 2015. Among these, this paper uses data from the surveys conducted in March 2003 and in August 2006, when the number of foreign tourists surpassed 1.0 million. Authors position the March 2003 survey as the first survey and the August 2006 survey as the second survey, and analyze these to grasp the initial changes. Data from a third survey carried out in August 2015 are also used, providing long-term analyses spanning more than a decade from the first survey.

The surveys of changes to the townscape, in addition to photographing of facades, also included notation and observation of professions and of handled products and the like.

4.2 Survey Scope

While the surveys of changes in the townscape in principle covered the structures facing the 76 streets designated in the preservation ordinance for the ancient quarter, in this paper the analysis applies to the following three streets (Fig.2.).

(1) Hang Bac Street: Hang Bac Street is located in the southeastern part of the Hanoi ancient quarter, and runs about 280 meters east-west. It was built in the 13th century at the latest, and was initially a street where silver was handled. For that reason, there are still many precious metal shops remaining. Hang Bac Street is a representative street of the ancient quarter with a lot of traffic, and it is designated by the People's Committee of Hanoi as a street to be given priority in preservation efforts.2

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(2) Ma May Street: Ma May Street runs about 270 meters north-south, and intersects with Hang Bac Street at its southern end. It has been given the same preservation priority as Hang Bac Street, and has a lot of tourist traffic.

(3) Hang Be Street: Hang Be Street extends about 170 meters north-south, and intersects with Hang Bac Street at its northern end. Its southern end marks the edge of the ancient quarter, so Hang Be Street is one of the entrances to this district. It has been designated as grade 2 in the preservation efforts.

5. The Basic Facade Design

Traditional town houses in this area are wooden, with side walls made of bricks (Fig.3.). The roof is gabled, with tile-roofing. The facade is symmetrical in design and features a frontage of three spans. Houses consist of one or two stories. The center features an entrance and the left and right spans are open. Town houses of the French colonial type also exist; these are also wooden, consisting of three spans and two stories. At present, due to remodeling and rebuilding, the facades show a diverse range of designs. However, most of them were originally derived from the same basic facade design.

6. Changes on Each of the Surveyed Streets

6.1 Hang Bac Street

Hang Bac Street has long been a major street with a history of buildings going far back in time. At the time of the first survey, it was already filled with shops catering to tourists. The tourism businesses on this street are therefore not diffuse but have become highly concentrated.

6.2 Ma May Street

Ma May Street has a town house tours facility completed in November 1999 with assistance from Toulouse, France, and consequently has the largest number of tourists among the three streets analyzed in this paper. Also, whereas shops for local residents outnumbered those for tourists in the first survey, by the time of the second survey this situation had been reversed. As for business types, on Ma May Street all types of businesses for tourists as well as those serving both tourists and locals have increased in number. Compared to other streets, the increase in service industry businesses aimed at tourists is notable, but growth in souvenir shops has slowed and their proportion to other businesses is lower.

In the third survey, Ma May Street was still experiencing a rapid rise in businesses aimed at tourists. In particular, hotels, travel agents, and other services for tourists were concentrated in this street more than in other streets.

6.3 Hang Be Street

As of the first survey, the shift from other businesses toward those catering to tourists had progressed more on this street than on the others covered in this study. Hang Be Street already had a large number of shops aimed at tourists as of the first survey. Accordingly,
while the number of such shops has since increased, the pace of their growth has slowed, and the street is instead seeing a trend toward replacement between tourist industry businesses. This street has a higher proportion of souvenir shops than the other streets. Also, unlike the other streets where all types of businesses catering to tourists have increased, on this street the goods sales and service industry businesses aimed at tourists have started to decline.

In the third survey, as with Ma May Street, the number of shops for residents had decreased, and the number of shops for tourists had increased. Unlike Ma May Street, however, the number of souvenir shops and restaurants had increased. Souvenir shops were the most numerous here of the three streets surveyed.

In shops for tourist services, authors observed renovation and rebuilding, as well as renovations in restaurants and souvenir shops aimed at the tourist trade. Changes to the openings and changes to the spans and exteriors were also seen in shops for tourists.

In the second survey, eight buildings were rebuilt. Of these, one housed a souvenir shop, two became travel agencies, and five were turned into hotels. In the third survey, 14 out of 18 buildings that were rebuilt became shops for tourists (two souvenir shops, one restaurant, seven hotels, one travel agency, and three complexes including a hotel).
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Fig. 5. Examples of Facade Changes by Tourism Businesses
Two of the eight buildings in which rebuilding had taken place in the second survey, and four of 18 buildings that had been rebuilt in the third survey, were designated for preservation in the preservation ordinance. Five of the six rebuilt buildings were shops for tourists.

8. Changes in the Facade of Townhouses by Tourism Businesses

In the case of souvenir shops, the changes observed most often in the second survey involved repainting or changes made to architectural fittings. In the third survey, however, in addition to expansion of house openings, authors also observed shops whose facades had been altered by the placing of boards over the outer facades and other measures. In restaurants aimed at tourists, authors already observed at the time of the second survey examples of businesses that had repainted their facades in eye-catching colors. These were more common than in other business types. But during the third survey authors also observed houses whose openings had been restructured and where changes had been made to the external appearance of the facades. In the case of travel agencies, there were relatively few cases of renovations involving actual physical changes to the building itself, but converting a building to use as a travel agency involves larger billboards than other types of business, and such boards were numerous. In the case of hotels, major changes including renovations and extensions were observed in all three surveys. But authors observed examples of larger-scale changes during the third survey, including cases in which two buildings had been knocked together to form a single hotel.

In at least one case, only the first floor of a building was given over to business use at the time of the first survey. At the time of the second survey, two separate businesses occupied the first and second floors. By the time of the third survey, the business on the second floor had expanded to occupy the third floor. (Fig. 4., bottom row.)

9. Conclusion

9.1 Diffusion and Concentration of Tourism Businesses

At the time of the first survey, the extent of the shift to tourism businesses was most pronounced on Hang Be Street, followed in order by Hang Bac Street and Ma May Street. Thereafter, the trend stabilized somewhat on Hang Be Street and Hang Bac Street but became more noticeable on Ma May Street. The likely reason is that, due to the location of the ancient quarter in the north part of Hanoi, tourists came to it initially from the south, so that the southern area by the entrance way was initially built up as a tourist area. Later, drawn by the town house tours facility on Ma May Street, the tourist area spread to the north. In this kind of process, a selection and switching of tourism business types occurs in areas where the shift to tourism is already advanced, and the diversification of tourism business types is likely to proceed in areas where the shift is not advanced.

There are also cases in which a shop was located only on the ground floor in the first survey but by the second survey a different shop had been opened on the second floor. In addition, there were cases where shops were expanded on the upper floors. The normal situation is for shops to be located only on the ground floor facing the street, and up to now having shops only on the ground floor was the case in most of the examples. In prime locations, however, the types of tourism businesses are likely to become more concentrated, with cases like this in which shops are located also on upper floors. When shops occupy upper floors, the changes to the facade become more complicated, and concerns arise about the impact on appearance.

9.2 Facade Changes with the Shift to Tourism

In many cases the renovations accompanying the shift to tourism businesses resulted in the loss of traditional design motifs and adoption of modern designs. At the same time, there are cases of facades that at first glance appear traditional but are in fact thoroughly inauthentic designs. Such modifications end up causing the district to lose its authenticity.

Both citizens and officials need to recognize anew that the traditional town houses are a tourism resource, that inauthentic town houses lower the value of the area, and that a reduction in traditional buildings will make the area less attractive to tourists.

9.3 Impact of the Increase in Service Industry Businesses on Townscape

Many of the rebuilding cases have been for switching from other types of businesses to hotels. Even among existing hotel buildings, many are illegal, and they are a cause of disruption to the townscape. The number of travel agencies has also grown rapidly, many of which have erected large signs or many signs, obscuring the buildings that are a tourism resource. The impression of facades has also been altered greatly, complicating the townscape.

Given the overall trend in tourism businesses away from sale of souvenirs and other goods toward service businesses such as hotels and travel agencies, it would seem wise to devise effective proposals for dealing with the accompanying issues.

Notes

1 REPORT, Visitors to Hanoi in 2016, Tourism Department, PEOPLE’S COMMITTEE OF HANOI CITY, 31st December, 2016.
2 The preservation ordinance designates 76 streets in the Hanoi ancient quarter, with 17 listed as grade 1 and 59 as grade 2, in accordance with their importance. Additionally, nine of the grade 1 streets are designated as having a special priority for preservation.
3 Because there are buildings with multiple shops, the number of buildings and the number of shops are not the same.
Business types were judged by the part facing the street. Business targets were judged by goods, price and languages that are written on the signboard etc. Specific classification is as follows. Goods for life for inhabitants: daily goods, clothes, shoes, food & drinks etc., services for inhabitants: barber, bike repair, copy service, ceremonial equipment rental etc., goods for life for tourists: film, batteries for cameras etc., services for tourists: hotel, travel agency, rental bikes, laundry service etc., goods for life for both: CD & DVD sales etc., services for both: cyber cafe, bank, ATM etc., other business: office, tutoring school, theater, etc., others: vacant house, under construction, temple, police station, school, etc.

References