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The interpenetration of migration and tourism: the case of Russian-speaking tourism in Nha Trang, Vietnam

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Abstract. The purpose of this paper is to explore the interrelationship between tourism and migration by the case study on Russian-speaking tourism phenomena observed in Nha Trang, Vietnam. The case challenges us to reexamine our static interpretations of tourism/migration concepts and to focus on the interpenetration of them. This paper tries to educe the multiple intermediate forms of human mobility that go beyond the simple framework of binominal confrontation between tourism and migration.

Keywords: tourism; migration; Russian-speaking tourism; Nha Trang; Vietnam

Introduction

The movements of people have become much more diverse phenomena than ever before in contemporary globalized world. The innovations in transport technology dramatically increased the intensity and speed of global flows of people. Now people move more frequently, multi-directionally, easily, inexpensively and casually on the globe. This trend of global mobility of people is exposed clearly and symbolically in an increase of international tourist arrivals. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), international tourist arrivals grew to 1,326 million in 2017 and UNWTO forecasts international tourist arrivals to reach 1.8 billion by 2030 (UNWTO 2018). The volume and impacts of mobility shown by these figures are not negligible. Today, tourism has become one of the important aspects to discuss on the global movements of people. Along with that, static interpretations of the concepts of “tourism” and “migration” traditionally applied are also urged to reexamine for more flexible and dynamic understandings on the phenomena.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the interrelationship between tourism and migration and to examine the interpenetration of tourism and migration in contemporary context based upon the realities found in the case study on Russian-speaking tourism phenomena in Nha Trang, Vietnam. The complex social and political contexts that have been generated historically from the relationships between Vietnam and Russia or the former USSR produced Russian-speaking tourism economy and tourist enclave in Nha Trang, and Nha Trang has become a node of mobility for Russian-speakers who have various different forms of mobility that go beyond the static conceptual frameworks of “tourism” and “migration”. This paper tries to examine the linkage between tourism and migration and educe the multiple intermediate forms of human mobility.

This study is based upon the qualitative data collected from the field observations and interviews, along with the investigations of secondary data and information obtained mainly from government offices, travel companies and news reports. The field observations were conducted in Nha Trang intermittently between December 2015 and March 2018 for about two months in total. Additionally, the interview with a travel company in Russia was made in Moscow in June 2017, and the interviews with several Russian tourists at home were made in Vladivostok in August 2017.

The increase of Russian tourists in Nha Trang

Nha Trang, the capital city of Khanh Hoa province located in southern Vietnam, has been seen as one of the best beach resorts in Vietnam since its first development as a resort for colonial officials during the French colonial period. After the Vietnam War, Nha Trang also served as a resort for high-level officials of the socialist government. Since the introduction of economic reforms known as “Doi Moi” in 1986, tourism development has been accelerated in Nha Trang. Nha Trang is now a major tourism destination in Khanh Hoa province, and the province received more than 4.5 million tourists, both domestic and international, in 2016.

Since around 2010, the number of tourist arrivals from Russia to Nha Trang gradually started to increase, and the sharp increase has been observed especially after 2012. According to the statistical data prepared by the Department of Tourism, Khanh Hoa Province People’s Committee, the number of tourist arrivals from Russia to the province reached 273.809 in 2016, and this number accounts for more than 60% of the total number of tourist arrivals from Russia to Vietnam in the same year (433.987). The number of tourist arrivals from Russia to the province in 2016 remarkably increased more than 9 times of the number counted in 2010 when the increase of tourists from Russia started (Table).

Table

Tourist arrivals from Russia

Year	Khanh Hoa Province*	Vietnam**	Year	Khanh Hoa Province*	Vietnam**
2009	19 958		2013	148 932	298 334
2010	29 663		2014	238 334	364 873
2011	34 317		2015	229 210	338 843
2012	82 992	174 287	2016	273 809	433 987

Source: * Department of Tourism, Khanh Hoa Province People’s Committee.

** Vietnam National Administration of Tourism.

The factors for rapid increase of Russian tourists in Nha Trang

The primary and direct factor of this rapid increase of Russian tourists in Nha Trang is new business policies adopted by major travel companies in Russia in the early 2010s. Since the mid-2000s, one of the major travel companies in Russia established their business base in Thailand and they started some studies to develop their market in the region (Mishukova, 2018). However, more direct factor for Russian travel companies to adopt new business policies to send their clients to Nha Trang was related to international political situations. Between 2010 and 2012, a series of antigovernment protests, uprisings

and armed rebellions spread across North Africa and the Middle East. This so-called the “Arab Spring” made difficult for Russian travel companies to send their clients to the popular holiday destinations among the Russians such as Tunisia and Egypt. Those companies discovered Nha Trang as an alternative destination with good beaches, which is one of the most important attractions for Russian holidaymakers, and started to send their clients by direct charter flights from several Russian cities to Nha Trang. The rapid increase of Russian tourists in Nha Trang has been mainly brought by this mass tourism system. Additionally, decline of the Russian rubles, low performance of Russian economy, travel restrictions to Turkey and Egypt in 2015 also helped to increase the numbers of Russian tourists to Nha Trang.

There exist some other factors to develop Russian tourism in Nha Trang. Since the first establishment of diplomatic relationship in the time of the Soviet Union, Vietnam and Russia have maintained a close and strong diplomatic relationship. This special relationship has created some unique conditions and environments that support the recent development of Russian tourism in Nha Trang. One of the conditions that helped the development of Russian tourism in Nha Trang well in very practical level is the Vietnam government’s immigration policy to exempt Russian tourists from visa requirement for a short-term stay within 15 days. After the introduction of this policy in 2009, the number of Russian tourist arrivals to Vietnam clearly increased. Additionally, as a historical environment underlying the familiarity or interests of Nha Trang among the Russians, it is worth for us to remember that the naval port of Cam Ranh near Nha Trang was leased and used by the Pacific Fleet of the Soviet and the Russian Navy between 1979 and 2002 as the largest naval base outside of the country, and many Soviet and Russian naval personnel frequented to and stationed in Cam Ranh. This helped for the Russians to be familiar with the name of Cam Ranh or Nha Trang and created their interests for travel to Nha Trang to some extent.

Russian tourist enclave in Nha Trang

The rapid and massive increase of Russian tourists in Nha Trang brought the accumulation of businesses and services for Russian tourists in the central part of Nha Trang city, and this forms a tourist enclave for the Russians.

In the central part of Nha Trang city, at the small area of about 0.12 square kilometers, surrounded by Tran Phu Street, the city’s main street facing to the beach, Hung Vuong Street and Nguyen Thien That Street, we can observe the accumulation of many hotels, guest houses, restaurants, cafes, tour agents, souvenir shops and other service facilities. Most of them are doing their business mainly for Russian tourists. Within this area, the special environment that makes possible to stay mostly only speaking in Russian is available. Many shops display signs in Russian and many restaurants prepare their menus in Russian. There are many store staffs, waiters and waitresses who speak Russian working in this enclave.

Some of the shops, restaurants, cafes and tour agents in the enclave are owned and managed by the Russians or other Russian-speaking people from the former USSR republics. The rapid and massive growth of Russian tourism in Nha Trang has prepared many business chances for both locals and Russian-speakers.

Various forms of mobility among Russian-speakers in Nha Trang

The backgrounds of the store and restaurant staffs that speak Russian are diverse. There are some local Vietnamese who try to learn and use Russian language to do business with Russian tourists, but there are also many people who came to Nha Trang to do business for Russian tourists from the countries that constituted the former USSR such as Ukraine, Belarus, Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyz and Tajikistan. What they have in common is their abilities to speak Russian language. The rapid increase of Russian mass tourists in Nha Trang has generated the demand for communication amenity in Russian language, and this demand has created the opportunities of migration for employment and inauguration of business for Russian-speakers.

It is also very important to point out that there exists another type of people who are doing business and providing services to Russian tourists by speaking Russian language. They are the returnees who migrated from Vietnam to the former USSR and Russia as contract workers. In the 1980s, more than 100 000 Vietnamese workers in total were sent to the then USSR because of the labor shortage in the USSR, the surplus of labor in Vietnam after the war and Vietnam's trade deficit accumulation with the USSR (Lukyanetz et al., 2014: 14). Some of those workers continued to stay and work in Russia and other former USSR republics after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and they have been playing important roles in the social and economic link between Vietnam and Russia since then. Some of these Vietnamese returnees from Russia are also active in the Russian tourist enclave in Nha Trang by mobilizing their Russian language skills as cultural capital. For example, a middle aged Vietnamese woman from Hai Phong used to manage 3 shops at the bazaar in a city of western Siberia came back from Russia to Vietnam by her brother's request to be the manager of the restaurant opened by him in the enclave. She utilizes her Russian language and business communication skill developed in her business in Russia to manage her restaurant.

As mentioned above, the vast majority of Russian tourists to Nha Trang are so-called mass tourists who purchase packaged tours organized by major travel companies. They spend their holidays in Nha Trang as long as the period of visa exemptions allows, but the length of their stay is relatively short and they are basically temporary visitors. However, there exist other types of Russians who repeat the trips to Nha Trang many times, or change short trips to long-term stay. The prime attraction of Nha Trang for the majority of Russian tourists is inexpensive winter resort. There are some Russians who stay for long-term in Nha Trang during whole winter season to escape from the severe cold of Russia and return to Russia for summer season. In such cases, it is difficult for us to distinguish tourism from migration clearly as practice and we have to identify very mobile and contiguous form of travel and sojourn. Additionally, among the Russian speakers who work for the tourism sector to support the Russian tourism in Nha Trang, there are some people who take Nha Trang as just a waypoint of their journeys of career development, and wander many different resorts for the Russians all over the world. Nha Trang is a node of mobility for such Russian-speakers who have mobile and contiguous forms of travel and sojourn.

Conclusion: linkage of tourism and migration in Nha Trang

The linkage of tourism and migration elicited from various forms of mobility observed in the case of Russian-speaking tourism phenomena in Nha Trang might be tentatively classified into the following five patterns, namely, a) mass tourists, b) frequent travelers, c) long-term sojourners, d) tourism labour migrants, e) tourism business migrants. However, it is extremely difficult for us to classify them into the fixed patterns based upon certain criteria such as purpose, length of stay, legal status and so on. A movement of people in a pattern easily transforms into another pattern, and patterns are interconnected. For example, there are a lot of Russian-speaking migrant workers in tourism sector of Nha Trang who firstly came to Nha Trang as tourists or visitors for pleasure, and some of them are readily quit their jobs and move to other places. Tourism and migration are interpenetrated in a series of movements or process as actual practice in this context. In this sense, those classified patterns themselves are actually fluid and mobile in nature.

When people move more frequently, multi-directionally, easily, inexpensively and casually on the globe, this fluidity must increase and the interpenetration of tourism and migration proceeds further and escalate. Especially, in the case of Russian-speaking tourism in Nha Trang, the fluidity of Russian political and economic situations and the fluidity of tourism business affect the fluidity of people and accelerate the mobility of people. The inquiries on the linkage of tourism and migration will open up a new approach to our understanding on the movements of people in contemporary world.

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Взаимопроникновение миграции и туризма на примере русскоязычного туризма в Нячанге, Вьетнам

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Целью работы является исследование взаимосвязи между туризмом и миграцией путем изучения русскоязычных туристических перемещений, наблюдаемых в Нячанге, Вьетнам. Данное явление заставляет иначе интерпретировать статические данные туризма и миграции и сосредоточиться на их взаимопроникновении. В статье предпринята попытка выявить многочисленные промежуточные формы мобильности населения, которые выходят за рамки простого биномиального противостояния между туризмом и миграцией.

Ключевые слова: туризм; миграция; русскоязычный туризм; Нячанг; Вьетнам

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