

# Tourism and Urban Heritage in Hanoi

Dr. Wantanee Suntikul\*

## Abstract

In 1986, Vietnam introduced an economic program called *doi moi* (Renovation). *Doi moi* has succeeded remarkably in moving the country from a sluggish centrally-planned economy to a mixed market-oriented economy. In the same period, tourists have been flocking to Vietnam in unprecedented numbers.

Vietnam possesses a unique mixture of different types of “heritage” sites, especially in its urban areas, including sites representing traditional Sino-Vietnamese culture and relics of French colonialism. This paper investigates the issues of urban heritage tourism in Hanoi, the capital city of Vietnam.

The urban environment in Hanoi’s Ancient Quarter is identified as one of the great heritage townscapes in Asia (Logan, 1995). With the increased tourist traffic to Hanoi in parallel with Vietnam’s increasing accessibility to foreign travellers, tourism is becoming an important economic, political and social force that is playing a determining role in the re-development of the Ancient Quarter and the centre of Hanoi.

A growth in profit-driven, tourism-related enterprises is one consequence of the shift to a more market-oriented economy. The pressure of market forces is also being felt in the property market of the Ancient Quarter. Call for the preservation and restoration of the constructed urban heritage of the Ancient Quarter in the face of market forces are being raised by both international and domestic interest groups. Each group has its own ideology as how the Ancient Quarter should be preserved.

Using the examples of the Ancient Quarter and two other prominent urban heritage attractions, this paper investigates the ways in which the interplay of different ideologies and priorities has shaped the discourse and practice in the conservation and use of these historic sites. It examines the policies and problems surrounding the development of heritage tourism in present-day Vietnam and uses the example of Hanoi to raise issues of the interrelation between tourism, economics and the preservation and presentation of urban heritage that has implications for other cities in Asia and beyond.