

THE EFFECTS OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY ON TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN MYANMAR'S DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION

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Abstract

Public diplomacy tries to attract by drawing attention and understanding of foreign publics for its nation's values, culture, and policies through broadcasting, subsidizing cultural exports, arranging exchanges, etc. Tourism development contributes to transfer the economic mechanism, bringing the source of revenue for the state budget, attracting foreign investment and exporting products, affecting positively to the development of the related economic business. In order to develop tourism sector as a non-smoking industry, it is necessary for Myanmar to utilize the country's public diplomacy in the fourth industrial revolution age. Based on this background, this paper is an attempt to study the effects of public diplomacy on tourism development for the economic growth of Myanmar. Among the ASEAN countries, Vietnam tourism development will be examined to take the lessons learnt for Myanmar tourism development. The research question focuses on why public diplomacy plays an effective tool to develop tourism sector and how public diplomacy and tourism development link for the economic growth of Myanmar.

Keywords: Public Diplomacy, Branding, Tourism Development, Political Transition, Economic Development

Introduction

Myanmar with its long history, culture, and religious has numerous pagodas, temples, monuments, beauty spots, archaeological sites, snow-peaked mountains, deep forests with abundant flora and fauna, long rivers and natural and beautiful lakes, unspoilt beaches and archipelagos. Moreover, the 135 national races and their way of life, traditional arts and crafts make up Myanmar as one of the places of interest to tourist destinations in Southeast Asia countries.

Tourism industry is strongly recognized as the number one industry in many countries and the fastest-growing economic sector in terms of foreign exchange earnings and job creation. As for tourism development, the national branding is very important in the public diplomacy. In order to brand the state and persuade foreign people for a good image of the country, public diplomacy plays an important tool in the context of Myanmar's democratic transition.

In the global context, public diplomacy is considered as one of the most effective ways to reach international publics. In other words, public diplomacy is useful tool for acquiring positive perceptions among foreign people in another country. Moreover, public diplomacy has become an essential commodity in international affairs. In the globalization process, public diplomacy and tourism development are intertwined and related to each other in terms of politic and economic perspective. It can be said that public diplomacy effects tourism development. The paper aims to study the linkages between public diplomacy and tourism development in order to explore the effects of public diplomacy on tourism development during Myanmar's democratic transition. This paper focused on the concept of the public diplomacy; the significant of tourism as a tool for development; the public diplomacy and its effects on tourism development in Myanmar; and the lessons learnt from Vietnam in enhancing tourism sector as a tool for economy development.

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Concept of the Public Diplomacy

In the post-cold war, diplomacy not only performed by the state but also non-state actors such as the multinational corporations, international organizations and individuals. Media communication becomes an important role for the government in connection each other in terms of diplomacy, causing the emerging concept of public diplomacy (PD). The concept of PD has usually linked to the promotion of the image of a foreign country. The PD is an instrument that governments use to mobilize the resources to communicate with and attract the publics of other countries.

PD described as a process of communication to the targeted people in foreign countries. Thus, most of the governments aim to offer the understanding of their nation's ideas, goals, its institutions, culture, and model of society, attitudes, national interests, and policies that are engaged by the country. PD is a means to create positive image and positive perceptions; understanding the needs, culture, and society; justify misperceptions that exist in the international community; look for the area where the government can find the common ground; alliance to encourage tourism and inward investment.

There are various kinds of diplomacy such as economic diplomacy, shuttle diplomacy, preventive diplomacy, cultural diplomacy. Among these, the rise of public diplomacy has been an important new dimension of the domestic environment. The term public diplomacy was coined in 1965 by Edmund Gullion with the following definition:

“Public diplomacy... deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. It encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is communication, as diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the process of intercultural communications.”

Jan Mellisen who is the Director of Research at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael and a Professor of Diplomacy in the Department of Political Sciences at Antwerp University noted that “public diplomacy has already become the bread and butter of many diplomats' work”. The importance of public diplomacy has been increasingly acknowledged. Moreover, Jan Mellisen explained public diplomacy as an effort to affect other peoples or organizations outside the country in positive way to changing the people's perspective to a country. Therefore, it can be assumed that PD is used to promote national interests through persuading public outside the country.

According to Joseph Nye, public diplomacy is an instrument that government uses to mobilize resources of soft power to attract the public of other countries, rather than merely their governments. While old public diplomacy relied on the concept of advocacy and propaganda, the new public diplomacy aims at branding and network. Nation branding concerns applying of branding strategies and tools to promote a nation's image. Every country has a negative and positive reputation which has an impact on a country's political, economic and social position in the world. A country's reputation plays an important role that impacts on coming foreign direct investment and tourism sector.

Moreover, the new public diplomacy has concentrated on building soft power and nation brand instead of merely prestige and international image. The concept of new public diplomacy has involved additional actors of both state and non-state actors. Thanks to technological advancements particularly mobile phones and the internet, the new public diplomacy has also benefited significantly from a modern technological environment. There is major difference

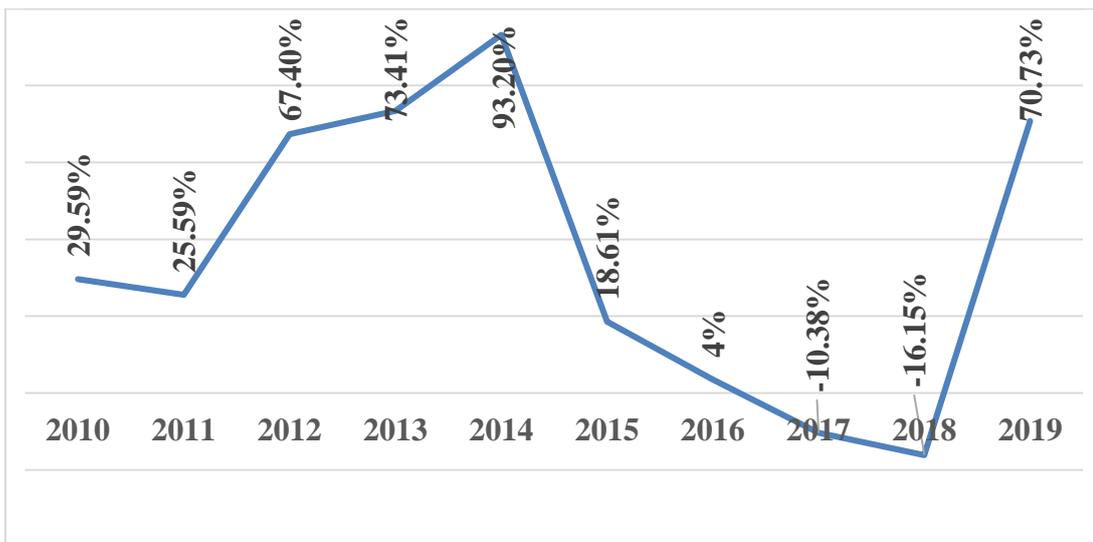
between old diplomacy and new public diplomacy. Old diplomacy deals with the relationships between the representatives of states, particularly government to government relationships. The new public diplomacy comprises both government to people relationships and people to people relationships.

Tourism as a Tool for Development

Tourism development is an important economic development activity in most countries around the world including Myanmar. It has played a major role in driving forward Myanmar’s economic development after undertaking its democratic reforms in 2011. There are number of ways tourism can be defined, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2008) describes that tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes. The UNWTO recognized that it is the fastest growing economic sector, and the sector is bringing in a lot of foreign exchange earnings.

In terms of foreign exchange earnings and job creation, it is firmly established as the number one industry in many countries and the fastest-growing economic sector. In this situation, it has become one of the largest service industries in the world. The tourism industry’s biggest advantage is that it can generate maximum employment opportunity. Tourism sector as a non-smoking industry has provided jobs for lots of labors, having strong relationships with other industries by creating the multiplier effect to other sectors’ advancement, improving social-economic situation and raising community’s standard of living. In addition, it is an invisible export industry which means that there is no tangible product to deliver. Therefore, it has been identified as a priority sector in the government’s export industry in many countries including Myanmar. Myanmar’s tourism revenue growth from 2010 to 2019 can be seen in Chart 1.

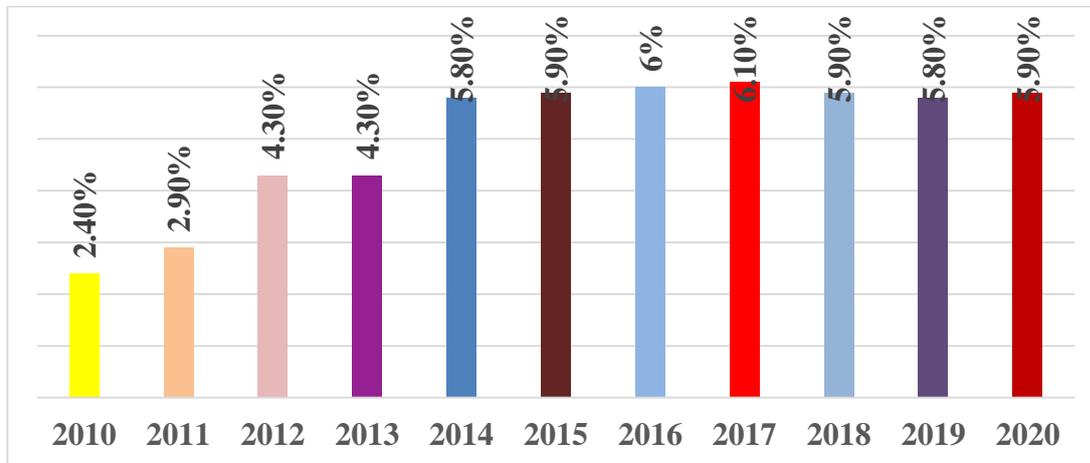
Chart1. Myanmar’s Tourism Revenue Growth (2010-2019)



Source: Myanmar Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, 2020

Undoubtedly, to both the industrialized and less developed countries of the world, tourism industry has become an important and integral element of their development strategies. It is frequently considered as an economic development path. Furthermore, it contributes to transfer the economic mechanism, bringing the source of revenue for the state budget, attracting foreign investment and exporting products, affecting positively to the development of the related economic business, including to fine arts and handicraft.

The goals of tourism development are income generation, employment, increase in foreign exchange and tax earnings, reduction of rural-urban migration and balancing trade account. According to figure 1, contribution of travel and tourism to employment for Myanmar was 2.4 percent in 2010. Although Myanmar contribution of tourism industry to employment fluctuated, it tended to increase from 2010 to 2020 period. When tourism sector is developed, it will attract many visitors and help that country develop services such as aviation service, restaurants, hotels, etc. In this way, there is relationships between tourism as a tool for development and the economic growth of Myanmar.



Source: <https://knoema.com/atlas/Myanmar>, 2020

Figure1 Myanmar Tourism Industry's Contribution to Employment (2010-2020)

Public Diplomacy and Its Effects on Tourism Development in Myanmar

The relationships between public diplomacy and tourism development have the cause and effect one. In the globalization process, public diplomacy and tourism development are important ideologies and they are interrelated to each other for the potential and prosperous economy. For effective promotion of tourism, public diplomacy can help to promote nation's branding on the global context. In fact, the term of public diplomacy describes as engaging people with one's country in getting to understand our values and encouraging people to see us as an attractive destination for tourism. Under these circumstances, the public diplomacy and its effects on tourism development will be analyzed for the economic growth of Myanmar.

Every country has lovely things. Countries' lovely things can influence on the hearts of the foreign public. Myanmar, known to most travelers as the Golden land, possesses outstanding historic, natural and vibrant cultural heritage. Great natural attractions combine with wonderful temple architecture which are contributed for branding of country's image. Myanmar has a lot of natural resources which are of potential attractions to both existing and potential tourists. Joseph Nye expressed that public diplomacy tries to attract by drawing attention and understanding of foreign publics for its nation's values, culture, and policies through broadcasting, subsidizing cultural exports, arranging exchanges, etc. In this context, it can be assumed that tourism industry can be developed by utilizing public diplomacy.

Through public diplomacy, Myanmar can expect to attract foreign people for good images of Myanmar as a tourism destination because public diplomacy can be called people-to-people diplomacy or people's diplomacy in some countries. The effectiveness of public diplomacy in another country can be reflected in perceptions or views of the local people about that Myanmar.

Regarding positive perceptions of the foreign people about Myanmar, technological aspect especially websites and social media sites can largely effect the branding of the country. Additionally, technological aspect can mostly affect the development of travel and tourism because international tourists and tour companies exposure internationally through websites and social media sites. In this situation, reliable media sites play an important role in drawing the hearts and souls of the foreign people. The writers, journalists and bloggers are leading the main role for the success of public diplomacy by telling and writing good stories of Myanmar. In the public diplomacy, the individual and non-state actors play an important role in order to brand the state and attract foreign people for a good image of the country. Every citizen can be a diplomat for the success of public diplomacy. Besides, the government of Myanmar should focus on creating a globally recognized national brand for Myanmar that is synonymous with emerging democracy, enhancing Myanmar's regional role.

Public diplomacy is the conduct of international relations by governments through public communications media and through dealings with a wide range of nongovernmental entities for the purpose of influencing the politics and actions of other governments. The political aspect has an enormous impact on the tourism industry. Because, political stability can be seen as opportunities for the development of tourism industry. Myanmar's tourism industry in the past, present and future cannot be separated from domestic and international political circumstances. Although Myanmar has many traditional tourism attractions and famous historic landscapes, its domestic politics (failure of public diplomacy) caused tourism development to lag behind compared to other ASEAN countries.

Since the inauguration of a civilian government of President U Thein Sein in 2011, Myanmar initiated political, economic and social reforms to direct the country towards liberal democracy, a mixed economy, and reconciliation. After undertaking its democratic reform, Myanmar expects to be a turning point with bright potential for Myanmar tourism industry when the US and EU suspended or removed most of their investment and trade sanctions on Myanmar. This is a critical time to be practicing public diplomacy so as to brand the state. In this context, it is necessary for Myanmar to utilize public diplomacy as one of the most effective ways to develop tourism industry.

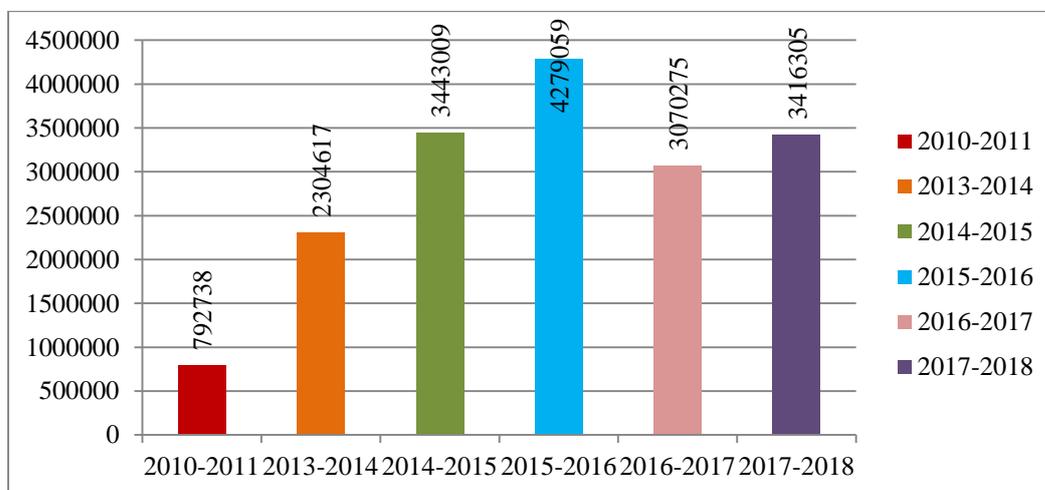
After its democratic transition in 2011, Myanmar prioritized tourism in the government's Framework for Economic and Social Reforms (FESR) 2012-2015 as "potentially one of Myanmar's most important sectors, with enormous possible to contribute to greater business opportunities and balance social and economic development if properly managed and developed". Myanmar has formulated a number of tourism sector-specific policies that set out an overarching framework for the development of the tourism sector. These included the Responsible Tourism Policy 2012, the Policy on Community Involvement in Tourism 2013 and the Myanmar Tourism Master Plan 2013-2020 (MTMP: 2013-2020).

As for tourism development in Myanmar, the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism (MOHT) has embarked on its initial reform strategies for the tourism sector which included smooth entry of foreign tourists to Myanmar, improvement towards quality service in hospitality, enhancement of standards in service providers and promotion of all year-round tourism destinations. Moreover, in terms of policies and regulations, Myanmar is building a conducive environment for responsible tourism development. In 2013, Myanmar announced a much longer list of areas that tourists could visit without, or in some cases with, prior permission. In 2014, Myanmar introduced an e-visa system through which tourists can apply electronically for visas. Myanmar has waived visa requirements for visit lasting up to 14 days for the ASEAN countries: Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, the Philippines, Vietnam, Singapore, Brunei and Thailand.

The MTMP: 2013-2020 was sought to build Myanmar into a leading tourist destination in Southeast Asia and to supply to the increasing number of tourists arriving in Myanmar. It has set a high target of 3.01 million international visitors in 2015 and 7.48 million in 2020. The MTMP: 2013-2020 was served as an important vehicle for moving the country forward. The government of Myanmar promises the world to make Myanmar “better place to live, better place to visit” by adopting the “Responsible Tourism Approach” as a core of sustainable tourism development principle. In this way, Myanmar is showing the world as safe tourist destination.

Due to its democratic reform, tourism started booming in 2012 and 2013. It has increased both domestic and international tourists as well as total tourism receipts in Myanmar. Relating to international tourism, international tourism is a relative absence of tariff barriers as compared to manufactured goods and other forms of exports. Consequently, international tourism is the world's largest export earner and an important factor in the balance of payments of most nations including Myanmar.

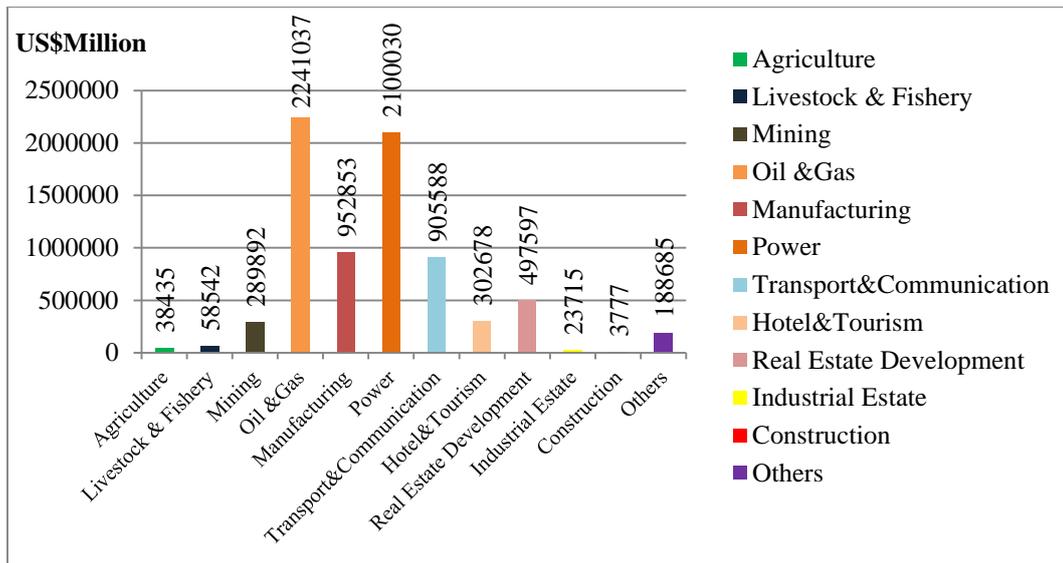
According to the official statistics of the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism (2019), the growth rate of international tourist arrivals in 2017-2018 increased 341, 6305 compared with 792,738 visitors in 2010-2011 (figure 2). According to the figure 2, it can be found that the number of international tourist arrivals has continued to increase because Myanmar showed significant progress on the way to democratic reform to the foreign public (in term of the successful of public diplomacy). Therefore, international tourist arrivals cannot ignore the political context in Myanmar.



Source: Ministry of Hotel and Tourism, 2019

Figure 2 International Tourist Arrivals (2010-2018)

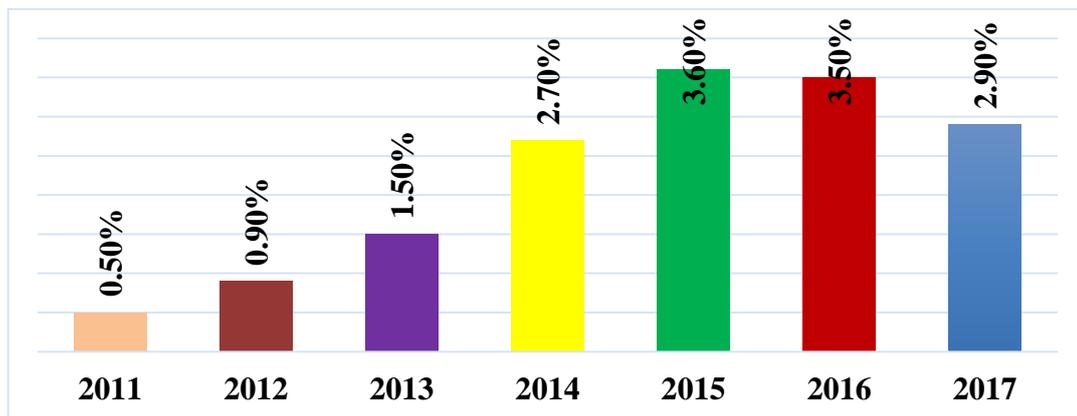
Furthermore, tourism development is basically dependent on foreign investment. Figure 3 below showed foreign investment by sector in Myanmar. According to figure 3, most foreign direct investment (FDI) was concentrated in oil and gas. Hotel and tourism was a small recipient of FDI, but had been identified as a sector promoted for investment in the 2017 FDI law. Like other sectors, tourism sector was positioned as one of the top priorities foreign investment sectors in Myanmar.



Source: Directorate of Investment and Company Administration, 2018

Figure 3 Foreign Investment by Sector (Cumulative Total as of March 31, 2018)

With regard to foreign direct investment, political aspect had caused Myanmar to lag behind in the volume of FDI flows relative to other ASEAN countries such as Cambodia and Vietnam. For instance, tourism development of Vietnam is basically dependent on foreign investment. After undertaking its democratic reform, the government of Myanmar demonstrates its strong investment climate by creating a globally recognized national brand for Myanmar that is synonymous with emerging democracy, enhancing Myanmar’s regional role. As for Myanmar, it is unreasonable to ignore public diplomacy so as to persuade foreign investors. It can be understood that successful of public diplomacy can help increasing the flow of FDI.



Source: Myanmar Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, 2018

Figure 4 Myanmar Tourism Industry’s Contribution to GDP (2010-2020)

Likewise, the tourism industry has contributed significantly into country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Myanmar tourism industry’s contribution to GDP (2010-2020) can be seen in figure 4. According to the figure 4, the growth rate of tourism industry’s contribution to GDP increased 2.9% in 2017 compared with 0.5% in 2011 because of encouraging growth in FDI in hotels and other tour related facilities.

As for tourism development in Myanmar, the government of Myanmar prioritized tourism sector as one of Myanmar's most important sectors with tremendous potential to contribute to greater economic opportunities. In SEA countries, Vietnam showed that tourism plays an important role in economic and political life by utilizing successful of public diplomacy for Vietnam's rapid economic growth. Therefore, the following part will be focused on the tourism development of Vietnam so as to take the lessons learnt for Myanmar tourism development.

Lessons from Vietnam

Recognizing the significant role of tourism sector, Vietnam has been supporting tourism as a development tool for economic growth and poverty alleviation. Myanmar also designated tourism as a national priority sector for its socio-economic development. However, Myanmar's tourism development lags behind compared to Vietnam where the tourism industry is a major employer and engine of economic growth. Therefore, Vietnam tourism development will be examined to take the lessons learnt for the contribution of Myanmar tourism development. Vietnam is a different country with Myanmar, in term of political, but their economic goals, i.e., to provide employment opportunity to her people and attract foreign investors, are similar. For that reason, Vietnam is chosen as an example.

Despite the return of peace after the Vietnam War ended in 1975, for over a decade the country experienced little economic growth because of conservative leadership policies and growing international isolation. For the sake of the country's survival, Vietnam's leaders were forced to adopt economic and political reforms or "Doi Moi" (renovation) policy in 1986. Due to the economic and political reforms, Vietnam transformed the country from one of the world's poorest nations into a middle-income country. In addition, the economy of Vietnam has transformed from an agrarian to a service economy.

With these political and economic reforms, Vietnam applied some campaigns to gain public image globally through its PD so as to build its own image on the global scale. One of those campaign was through launching Vietnam's Tourism Year campaign in 1990. It can be said that by launching 1990 Vietnam's Tourism Year campaign, Vietnam aimed to attract safe destination to the international tourists; to draw the foreign public attention to eye for travelling and to gain more recognition from other countries in the world.

Vietnam believed that 1990 Vietnam's Tourism Year campaign became an instrument of Vietnam's PD in increasing their nation branding and promoting the country's image to the world in order to accelerate economic growth. So, Vietnam selected tourism as one of the vehicles for its national development. Vietnam laid more focus in building long term strategy for promotion tourism of Vietnam in period 2010-2030. Vietnam also made efforts in building a positive image as the national branding of Vietnam to become one of the international tourist destinations in Southeast Asia.

Vietnam expressed country's image to attract incoming tourist by showing stable political context and stable government through its public diplomacy. As for Vietnam, tourism industry helps agriculture and other industries directly and indirectly. Tourism sector has been supporting as a key industry in contributing to Vietnam's economic growth. Moreover, the globalization and open economy helped Vietnam's tourism to emerge as one of the biggest foreign exchange earners for Vietnam.

According to the website of the Vietnamese National Administration of Tourism (VNAT), over 4.2 million international tourists arrived in Vietnam in 2007 compared to 1.3 million in 1995: an increase of over 200% in twelve years. In 2019, Vietnam received 18 million international tourist arrivals. The 2019 North Korea-United States Hanoi Summit meeting was part of a public diplomacy strategy to promote the international image of Vietnam. This summit meeting was a

good example of the successful public diplomacy. At this summit meeting, Vietnam showed its cooperation and safe destination to the international tourists and drew the foreign public attention to eye for travelling.

Because of the diversity of resources both natural and cultural resources, Vietnam is gaining higher position of the tourism image in the world. According to the 2017 World Economic Forum's Tourism Competitiveness Index, Vietnam ranked 32nd globally (out of 120 countries) and 3rd within Southeast Asia in terms of the volume and attractiveness of natural and cultural resources. It is found that Vietnam has proven to be one of the fastest growing tourist destinations in Southeast Asia region.

Regarding Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the tourism industry particularly as well as the service industry in general has contributed significantly into GDP in Vietnam. According to the 2017 General Statistics Office of Vietnam, the direct contribution of tourism industry into GDP was Vietnamese Dong-VND 279,287 billion (approximately to 6.6% GDP). Therefore, tourism industry was considered as the key business for developing Vietnam's economics. According to the 2019 General Statistics Office of Vietnam, Hotels & Tourism was the 4th top contributor to the country's GDP.

After 34 years of Renovation process (Doi Moi Reform) since 1986, Vietnam has had significant changes in many sectors such as agricultural production, industry and tourism field as well. Doi Moi has been extremely successful in transforming Vietnam from a stagnant, unstable, centrally planned economy to a dynamic and quickly growing market-oriented economy. According to World Bank's 2019 July data, it described Vietnam's economy as "Vibrant economic growth, albeit moderating". It is evidently seen that tourism industry is a major engine for economy growth of Vietnam.

In studying of Vietnam, Myanmar can learn the lessons from Vietnam so as to develop tourism industry. These lessons are as follows: the need for political and economic reforms, particularly on the openness of economy to foreign investors, utilizing public diplomacy as a tool for national branding and, guaranteeing the safe destinations to the international tourists.

Conclusion

In order to enhance tourism sector, Myanmar needs the effective utilization of public diplomacy for building national branding. Public diplomacy can directly or indirectly reduce negative perceptions or views of the foreign people about Myanmar. Tourism sector can be development by applying public diplomacy through persuading public outside the country. Accordingly, public diplomacy can effect on the development of tourism sector. In this way, public diplomacy in general and tourism industry as a development tool in particular can contribute for the potential and prosperous economy of Myanmar.

Although Myanmar has many traditional tourist attractions and famous historic landscapes, its failure of public diplomacy caused tourism sector to lag behind compared to other ASEAN countries. By studying Vietnam's tourism industry, it is obvious that the successful development of Vietnam's tourism not only lies on the possession of physical attributes such as beautiful beaches, attractive landmarks and cheap prices but also bases on its effective utilization on public diplomacy for its national branding.

It is necessary for Myanmar to pay attention on the public diplomacy in the fourth industrial revolution age. In this context, reliable media sites play an important role in branding of the country and drawing positive perceptions of the foreign people about Myanmar. As for Myanmar, it is unreasonable to ignore public diplomacy in order to attract the country's brand to the world as a tourism destination. It can be said that if Myanmar utilizes public diplomacy as one of the most

effective ways to attract the international public, Myanmar can become an emerging and one of the fastest-growing tourist destinations in Southeast Asia region.

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