

THE ROLE OF THE IMAGES OF JAPAN AND ITS PREFECTURES IN THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF JAPAN AS A TOURIST DESTINATION

ABSTRACT. The article deals with the analysis of the tourist destination images of Japan and its prefectures and contains the results of the research carried out both based on examination of official Japanese statistics and tourist literature in Japanese, English and Russian and social polls in Russia and field studies in Japan. In this paper we present the results of the research conducted by the specially created for this work original method of tourist literature review that allowed us to select prefectures most rich in different tourist images and to develop a typology of Japanese prefectures. To present day the research of such kind is a unique one not only about Japan but on the whole as well.

KEY WORDS: images of Japan, tourist destination image, place image, attractiveness as a tourist destination, tourism industry, typology of Japanese prefectures

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INTRODUCTION

In the postindustrial economy the role of tourist destination images (TDI) in the development of the territories has been increasing greatly. According to Lawson and Baud-Bovy (1977) tourist destination image is the expression of all objective knowledge, impressions, prejudice, imaginations and emotional thoughts an individual or group might have of a particular place. It encompasses both the personal images and the stereotyped images shared by groups. "To some extent images as a territory resource have become as important as natural resources and industrial capacities. Tourism is quickly turning into a driver of Japanese

economy. In terms of the contribution to the GDP (which rose from 2% at the beginning of 2000-s to 4,9 % in 2014) (Economic Impact of Travel on Japan, 2014) it is competing with automobile industry and is higher than that of electronics industry (Cool Japan Strategy 2012). Though for the most part it is due to domestic tourism gains, in recent years foreign inbound tourism has been developing successfully. The amount of spending by foreign tourists has jumped greatly, especially due to the nearly doubled number of the prosperous Chinese visitors, who spend much more than travelers from other countries.

Still, despite the fact that Japan can boast by a lot of things that could not be seen anywhere else it is not such a popular destination among people travelling to foreign countries. In 2014 it was 22nd in the world and 7th in Asia though in 2015 in Asia it moved to the 5th place and in the world to the 16th (White Paper on Tourism 2016). There are 3-5 times more foreign visitors in Turkey, Italy, China, Spain, USA and France than in Japan. And in comparison with Great Britain, Germany and France Japan's gains from tourism are 3-5 times lower (Japan Today 2015)

Meanwhile, Japan has a high touristic potential and many people throughout the world perceive Japan as a very attractive country for travelling. Yet for a whole host of reasons consider such a trip to be unrealistic. In our research we aimed at analyzing the stereotypes of the perception of Japan, the problems that hinder more intensive inward tourism and measures aiming at overcoming them and improving the appeal of the country (Tihotskaya and Stegnienko 2015).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The main object of this research paper is analysis of the destination images and stereotypes that exist about Japan and its prefectures and their role in attractiveness of Japan for foreign tourists. In the course of our research the sociological poll was carried out by Alexandra Stegnienko in Moscow (from December 2014 to March 2015) to find out the images that transform into negative

factors determining negative perception of Japan as a tourist destination. Methods we used include statistical method, social polls and interviews, as well as specially developed for this research original system of analyzing tourist literature. More than 12 top guidebooks and websites were analyzed: «Lonely Planet», «Dorling Kindersley», «Tomas Cook», «National Geographic Traveler», «Vokrug Sveta», Japanese editions introducing Japan to foreigners (Sato 2008; Takayuki 2009). We have also analyzed the articles about all prefectures in Wikipedia and Wikitravel in English, Japanese and Russian languages. Also we have conducted field studies in Japan and composed mind maps.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main summarized results concerning obstacles for travel to Japan we presented in the table consisting of two parts: according to potential and according to actual tourists (Table 1). We have interviewed 100 tourists who had visited Japan and compared their answers with destination images of 900 Russian citizens who had never been in Japan (both by questioning, mainly students, personally or by asking to fill in a survey and through the Internet where all people despite age, sex, etc. could answer). People wishing to visit Japan but considering it unlikely fear high traffic costs and general burden most of all. One third of all respondents consider visa acquisition quite difficult and fear the language barrier (Visa regime for Russian citizens was softened only

Table 1. Obstacles for travel to Japan according to potential tourists, %

Difficulty level	Orientation difficulty	Not enough guide signs in English	High prices	Language barrier	Inhospitable people
No problem	29	38	22	20	71
Could be some inconveniences	29	23	17	25	13
Casual difficulty	11	13	26	17	1
Could be a problem	13	8	16	16	
A serious problem	3	4	5	7	

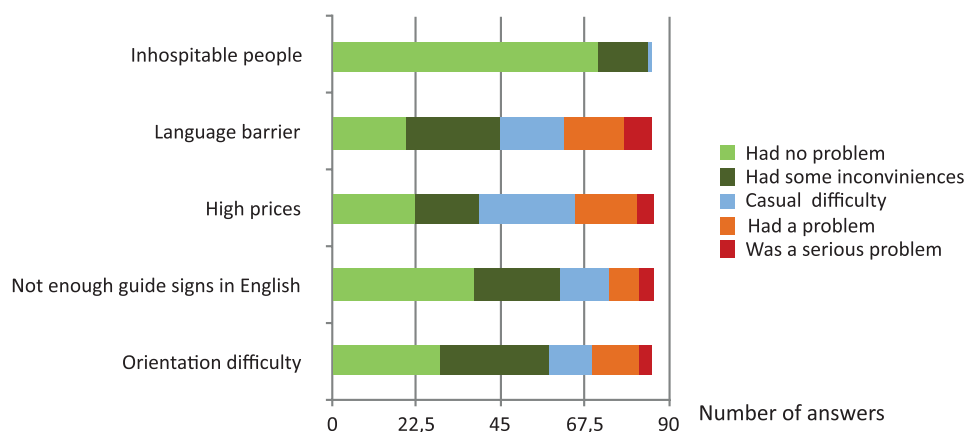


Fig. 1. Obstacles for travel to Japan according to actual tourists

in 2017. The applicants, who pay for their trips themselves, will not have to provide any statement from a guarantor, and more people will be entitled to multiple-entry business visas under the reworked criteria). At the same time tourists that visited Japan noticed that they had no difficulties despite some language problems and considered the prices rather high.

The Japanese tourist industry is rather well developed and suitable for various kinds of trip (Tikhotskaya 2016). Still, unlike domestic tourists feeling comfortable being taken good care of, foreign visitors not understanding the Japanese language experience panic from mere looking at Japanese characters (Tikhotskaya 2018). Our analysis of the main tourist campaigns and measures to create comfortable environment for foreign travelers undertaken in Japan shows that carrying out the active tourist policy favored the rapid recovery of foreign tourist arrivals that decreased greatly after the 2011 Great Tohoku earthquake. According to Japan Tourism Agency data in 2013 Japan achieved the goal which was set at the beginning of 2000-s for the year 2010 – the number of foreign tourist arrivals for the first time exceeded 10 million. Number of foreign tourists in 2015 increased to 20 million (doubled since 2011), spending increased to 3.5 trillion yen; nearly as much as the role of automobile parts export. The government has set a new set of targets for the tourist industry: the number of international visitors to Japan should increase to 40 million by year 2020

and to 60 million by 2030 (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism 2016).

The most effective step was the simplification of the visa system for a number of the countries of South-East Asian countries that led to the increasing stream of tourists. The programs aimed at environment improvement for foreign travelers also brought in good results. It included widening tourist information network, free Wi-Fi destinations extension, introduction of foreign languages signs, credit card acceptance widening, broadening of tax free shops, promotion of volunteer movement.

Every prefecture, every community aspires to position itself as an attractive tourist destination using the images that exist about Japan on the whole and supplementing them with something unique. As a result of the activation of local efforts the attractiveness of Japan's image as a popular tourist destination is growing. What is even more important, it is taking shape owing to the Japanese people considerable culture as well. According to the U.S.travel magazine Conder Nast Traveler, in 2016 Tokyo and Kyoto were picked as the world's best cities outside United States, while in 2015 they ranked 15-th and 9-th (in 2017 Tokyo was the first and Kyoto – the third).

One of the distinctive features of recent tourist policy in Japan is diversification of the tourist flows. As it can be seen in the Table 2 most tourists visit 3 regions: Tokyo, Hokkaido and the heart of the Kansai region

that is Kyoto and Osaka. These destinations are equally popular among Japanese and foreign travelers. But while the fifth place in domestic travels occupies situated rather close to Tokyo Shizuoka prefecture, with its spectacular natural landscapes, foreign tourists visit it more rarely and prefer more close to Tokyo Chiba prefecture (Table 2).

Based on statistical data it is difficult to trace one-day tourist trips, such as to Tokyo Disneyland, Kamakura or Hakone and Fujiyama from Tokyo and inaccuracy of statistics inspired us to develop original method of analyzing.

A. Stegnienko has analyzed guide-books in English and Russian languages as well as most popular internet travel sites (Wikipedia and Wikitravel) in English, Russian and Japanese. In the total 12 sources were analyzed. From them for all prefectures were taken various characteristics: toponyms, definitions, names of temples, handicrafts as well as personalias and so on. Depending on the degree of every characteristic disclosure

the prefectures received value from one to three points and the appropriate category – historical, cultural, natural, et cetera. If there is a whole section in a guidebook TDI received 3 points, if a short description – 2 points and if only short mentioning – 1 point. For example, in the case of Hokkaido a lot is said about ainu, so this image is given 3 points while about Shiretoko there are only 2 paragraphs (2 points) and about ice diving only one sentence (1 point). All the points received by every image in every guidebook were summarized and it allowed us to create the rating of most significant images and the rating of prefectures most detailed described in the tourist literature.

Then the total value was summarized and the most important characteristics and prefectures with most detailed information were identified; their tourist specialization was discovered (Stegnienko 2013). After that we calculated the share of each prefecture in all tourist destination images (Fig. 2). On the map in deep brown are shown prefectures with high value and in beige – with low

Table 2. Number of tourists by prefecture and prefectures rating, 2015
(White Paper on Tourism 2016)

Prefecture	Rating among all tourists	Total number of tourists	Rating among foreign tourists	Number of foreign tourists
Tokyo	1	51480	1	9980
Hokkaido	2	30390	3	3050
Osaka	3	24090	2	4310
Kyoto	4	20690	4	2990
Shizuoka	5	20300	10	540
Kanagawa	6	14620	8	920
Chiba	7	19790	5	1990
Okinawa	8	18520	6	1360
Nagano	9	16850	11	530
Aichi	10	14620	7	1060
Fukuoka	11	14560	9	560
Hyogo	12	13080	12	490
Miyagi	13	10170	29	100
Yamanashi	23	6910	13	480

value. If the prefectures TDI found in tourist literature are considered we receive more reliable rating of each tourist destination. In this case the second place occupies Kyoto prefecture, the cultural capital of Japan, where 16% of all cultural heritage objects of the country are concentrated. Not coincidentally Kyoto is called the city of thousand temples. In addition to important sacral objects there are lots of historical and cultural sites (to begin with shogun's castle Nijo and emperor palace), temples as well

as national parks. Besides, Kyoto prefecture hosts the largest manga museum which is also a center of modern culture. Tourism plays a key role in the prefecture's economy. For example, in 2010 while there were less than 3 million residents it was visited by 76 million domestic and 1 million foreign tourists.

If we take into account TDI, Okinawa prefecture, often called Japanese Hawaii, comes the third. Then also appears Nagasaki prefecture. Despite not belonging to top

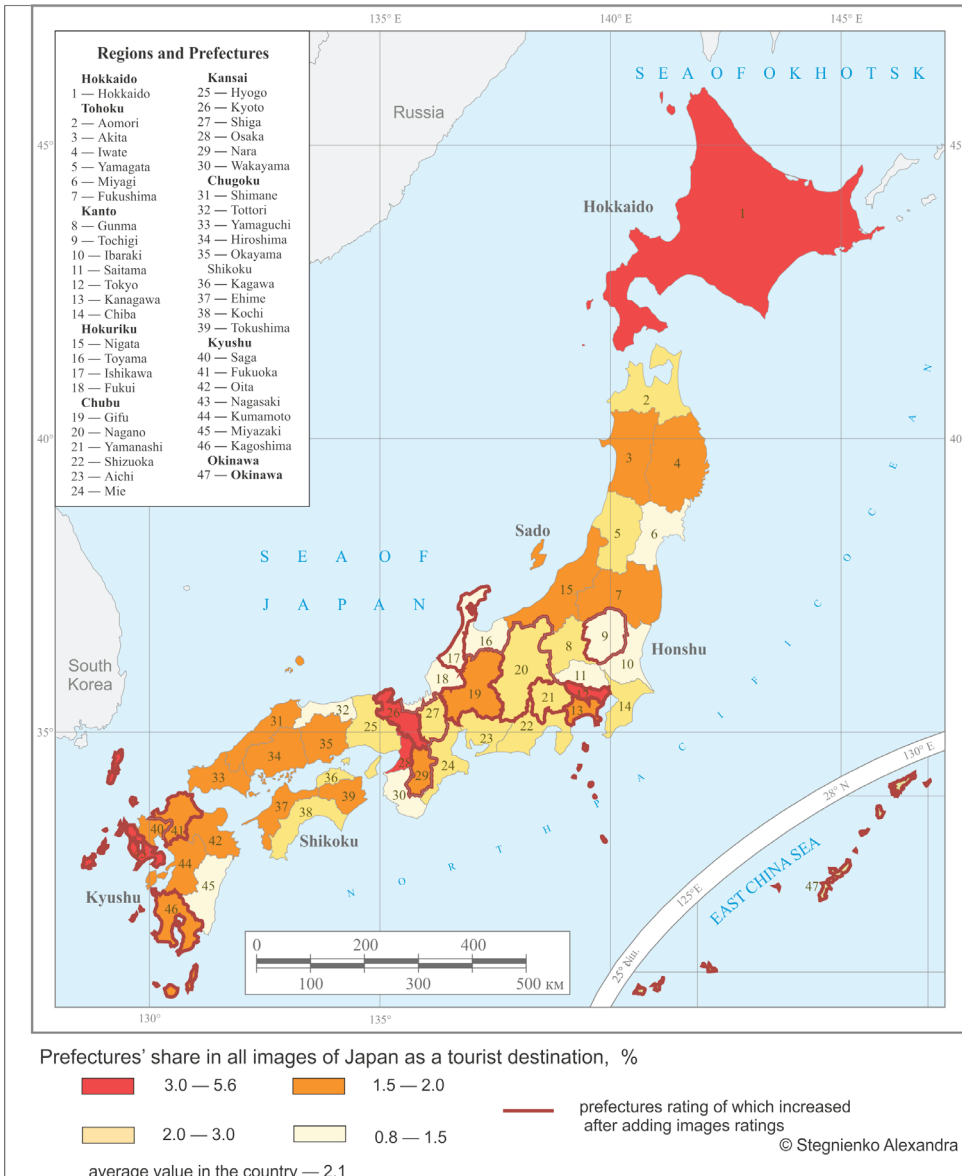


Fig. 2. Prefectures share in all images of Japan as a tourist destination

10 by the number of tourists, it is famous around the world no less than Kyoto and Tokyo due to nuclear bombing during WWII as well as Hiroshima. In the case of considering images Nara prefecture also hits the top 10, because it is very popular as one-day travel destination from Kyoto. Among foreign tourists it gained success not only as the first capital of Japan, where the Todaiji and Horyuji temples and other famous historical sites are situated but also because of the possibility of close contact with deer strolling with ease through the city parks, shrines and temples.

Outlined are prefectures value of which increased after adding TDI rating. (This is a composite score received by prefectures due to every image depending on the details of its description). It means that these prefectures have some significant TDI and are popular destinations among domestic travelers. They are not once mentioned before Tokyo, Kyoto, Nara, Kanagawa and Osaka prefectures. Yamanashi prefecture, with the symbol of the country, Fuji-san (Fujiyama is situated in both Yamanashi and Shizuoka prefectures and the two are debating about its location), and Tochigi prefecture with Nikko about which there is a popular saying "who has not seen Nikko does not know what a beauty does mean".

Also we tried to identify the factors that are forming the TDI of Japan and prefectures most rich in them (Fig. 3). In the course of analyzing the formation factors of prefectures images we divided them into key and secondary ones and developed the classification of prefectures' images by their formation factors. We found out that cultural factor is the dominant one – 31% of all images were formed this way. Japan is primarily famous for its cultural heritage though this factor includes very diverse groups of images. They are literal and cultural masterpieces, mentality features, traditional festivals and rites, gardens, crafts, modern architecture, thematic parks.

While the beaches of Japan don't account even for 1% of images the second place is occupied by the natural factor and climatic factor (22%). It is particularly important

for Japan taking into consideration on the one hand unpredictability of its nature and common natural disasters and on the other hand sacral perception of nature inherent to Shinto religion and uncommon environment friendliness, the cult of nature beauty. Not in many countries in the world one can find the tradition of mass group enjoying of sakura blossom, full moon or autumn leaves.

The third place by the input into the formation of Japan's images occupies economic factor that is 16%. This group contains any images that are characterizing agriculture, industry and service sector. Thus, Nagoya city with Toyota headquarters, together with surrounding cities, is famous as Japanese capital of automobile industry. Anyone can go to a special excursion at the Toyota demonstrative hall though an advance order is necessary.

At last, typology of prefectures was made – we chose main, major and significant tourist destination images centers as well as image semi-periphery, periphery and deep periphery (Fig. 4). The main tourist destination image centers are those the total rating of which is more than 800 images and they are mentioned in all analyzed information sources. This type includes 3 prefectures: Tokyo, Kyoto, Hokkaido. Not less important for understanding of the image of Japan are 5 major image centers: Kanagawa, Osaka, Hiroshima, Fukuoka, Nagasaki prefectures. (Other type's criteria are explained in the map legend).

And finally mind maps for all kinds of tourist destination images types for most prefectures were composed. Mind map allows representing visually the place image. We shall explain it on the example of Hokkaido (Fig. 5). On the mind map of this prefecture are clearly seen the two key groups of this prefecture image formation, that is North and Nature. All other images are related to them. The Northern geographical position determined the otherness of this prefecture from the center of Japan. Northern landscapes and large open spaces remind more of Russia (One nickname of Hokkaido prefecture is "Japanese Siberia"). Vegetables,

not common for Japan, are cultivated here. Northern position and remoteness explain later developing and cultural differences. While there are no famous ancient temples the national minority ainu villages culture of whom is now added to Japan's heritage objects are preserved. The Northern position is also related to sport development that

is Olympic Games, ski resorts as well as to popular snow festival that takes place in Sapporo.

The periphery prefectures image is often less diverse (Fig. 6). These prefectures are tourist "backwoods" of the country that are rarely mentioned in the guidebooks. However

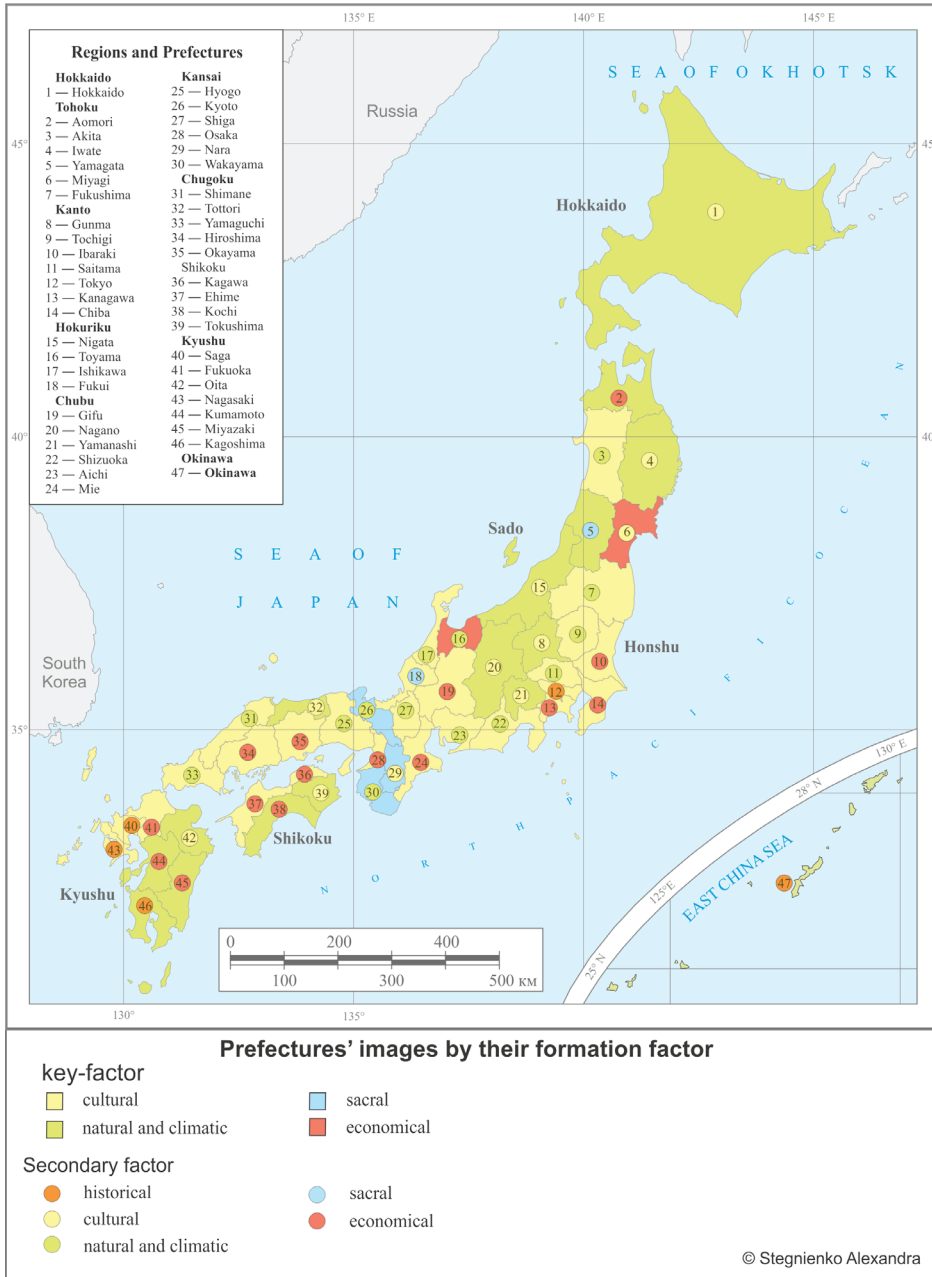


Fig. 3. Prefectures' images by the formation factor

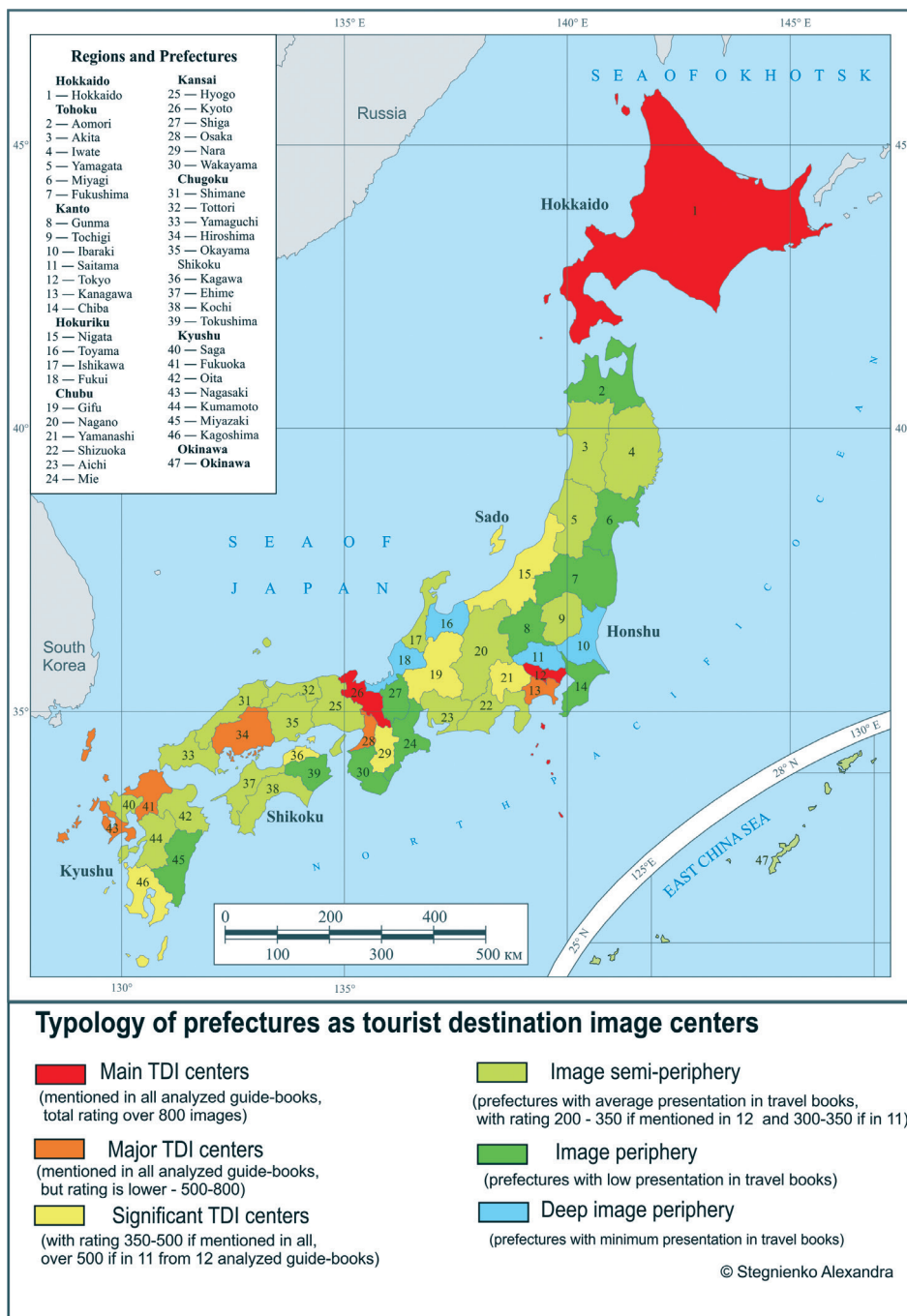


Fig. 4. Typology of prefectures as tourist destination centers

it does not mean that these prefectures have nothing to boast of. Thus, in Toyama prefecture there is one of the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List sites, Gokayama village, where traditional village architecture

is preserved. Besides, Toyama prefecture has lots of routes through the picturesque mountains and river valleys.

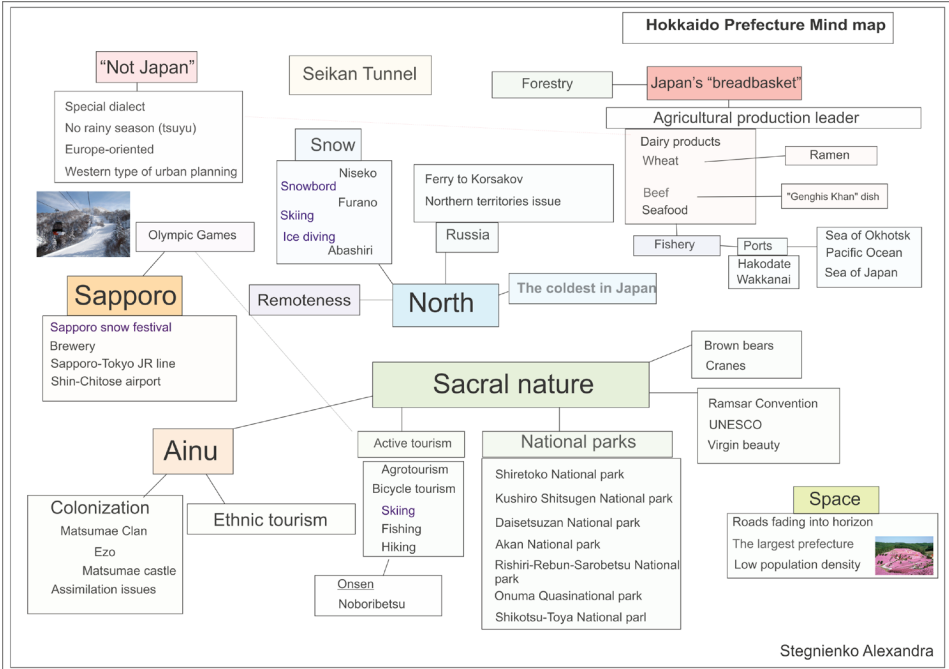


Fig. 5. The mind map of Hokkaido prefecture

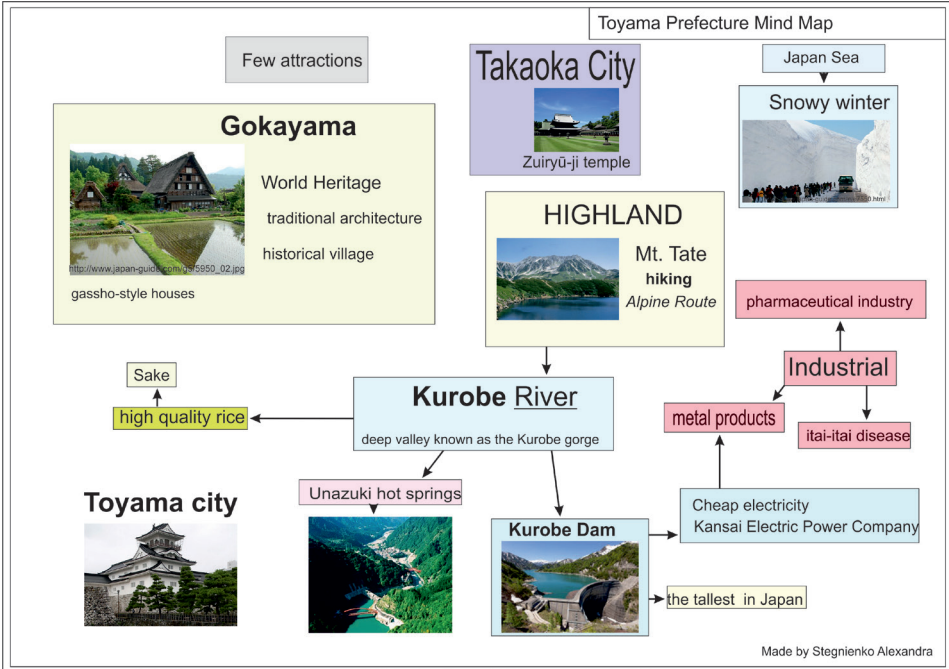


Fig. 6. The mind map of Toyama prefecture

CONCLUSION

The carried out research allowed us to make the following conclusions.

1. We defined highs and lows of Japan as a tourist destination. Among highs there are cultural heritage, service, infrastructure and among lows mainly high level of prices and visa and language problems.

2. Our method of research is more demonstrative than the analysis of the statistics of tourist flows because while studying statistical data it is difficult: to monitor one-day trips (e.g., to Disneyland, Kamakura, Fuji-san), to separate usual tourists from business tourists among domestic tourists in particular.

3. Images influence on tourism can't be underestimated. Well-known images of Japan make it an attractive destination for both Asian and Western tourists though image of expensive and difficult for independent travelers country hinders the development of tourism.

4. Images affect the distribution of tourist flows. Mostly foreign visitors go to 4 destinations which are dominant in travel

literature and no less interesting but less famous prefectures remain on the margins of the international tourism.

5. The measures to create comfortable environment for foreign travelers give results and it makes sense to continue this policy.

6. The policy of domestic tourist flows diversification is becoming successful but it is still only the first step in relation to foreign travelers.

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