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SUSTAINABLE CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM IN HUE CITY, VIETNAM: FOCUSING ON NGUYEN DYNASTY CEREMONIES

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Abstract: Hue, the singular former capital of Vietnam, remarkably preserves its royal architectural integrity and a wealth of unique, culturally rich traditional ceremonies. In the specific context of Thừa Thiên Huế Province in Vietnam, the UNESCO recognition of its cultural heritages has the potential to transform the region into a global heritage city. For several decades in the 20th and 21st centuries, Hue has consistently emerged as a pivotal center of tourism in Vietnam. This study delves into the realm of cultural heritage preservation and interpretation, with a keen focus on identifying Hue's intrinsic cultural elements. The objective is to foster sustainable and systematic development of cultural heritage tourism in this UNESCO-acclaimed eight heritages city. Employing a globally recognized value-based approach to heritage conservation and enhancement, the paper methodically employs qualitative research methodologies. These include a comprehensive literature review, analysis of diverse documentary sources (both official and private), semi-participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and field studies. The findings illuminate the profound influence of religious and spiritual values in shaping Hue's cultural identity and directly impacting the urban planning, architectural design, and functional aspects of the city's edifices. The research thereby lays a scientific groundwork for developing strategies in cultural heritage tourism; it is anchored in a comprehensive narrative centered on the ceremonial practices of the Nguyen Dynasty, with a particular emphasis on the Nam Giao Sacrifice. This exploration not only reinforces the cultural significance of Hue but also charts a course for its future as a beacon of cultural heritage tourism.

Keywords: cultural heritage tourism, heritage preservation, Nguyen dynasty rites, Nam Giao Sacrifice, Hue city

Introduction

Hue, the capital of the Nguyen Dynasty (the last imperial dynasty of Vietnam), is the sole ancient capital in Vietnam that has been preserved to a significant extent. The architectural ensemble of the royal palaces, including the fortress system, palaces, tombs, and the distinctive and culturally rich traditional ceremonies, has remained intact throughout the vicissitudes of history. The values of religion and spirituality form a distinctive identity for the people of Hue, influencing urban planning, architectural design, and the functionality of structures in the city. Consequently, the distinctive cultural heritage tourism activities in Hue explore these values, either directly or indirectly. For several decades in the 20th and 21st centuries, Hue has been one of Vietnam's most prominent tourist destinations. In this historic region, which has been recognized by UNESCO and is regarded as "one destination, eight

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heritages" in tourism communications, the core values of Hue's culture are closely linked to the Nguyen Dynasty's ceremonial heritage. Notwithstanding the aforementioned exceptional values, Hue remains devoid of published research, both at the international and domestic levels, on its heritage tourism sector, which is based on Nguyen Dynasty Rites with a particular emphasis on the Nam Giao Sacrifice. However, the city of Hue, despite its rich heritage, faces the complex challenge of harnessing its cultural and historical assets for sustainable tourism development. Further rigorous research is required to investigate the nexus between heritage preservation, interpretation, and tourism, with a particular focus on the process of transforming historical assets into tourism commodities. This gap represents the central focus of our research.

In this paper, we seek to explore and analyze the dynamics of cultural heritage preservation in Hue, specifically through the lens of the Nam Giao Sacrifice, a significant cultural and spiritual ceremony. Our research is guided by the overarching question: How can Hue's cultural heritage, particularly its traditional ceremonies and architectural wonders, be leveraged for sustainable tourism development while ensuring the preservation of its cultural integrity and identity? To address this, our study delves into the current state and utilization of Hue's cultural heritage in the realm of tourism. A key focus is placed on developing a value-based approach to heritage preservation, attempting to align with global best practices while also tailored to Hue's unique cultural landscape. Our objective is to propose strategic and sustainable solutions for the development of cultural heritage tourism in Hue by emphasizing the intersection between heritage preservation and tourism. Its focus on the Nam Giao Sacrifice and other ceremonial practices of the Nguyen Dynasty provides a distinctive framework for leveraging Hue's religious and architectural heritage. These solutions aim to respect and preserve Hue's historical and cultural integrity while promoting its viability as a tourist destination. By conducting this study, we aspire to contribute meaningful insights to the field of cultural heritage tourism, offering a nuanced understanding of how cultural heritage can be sustainably promoted and preserved in the context of a city like Hue, which is rich in history and tradition.

Literature Review

A review of international and domestic scientific data sources reveals a notable scarcity of published research on Hue's heritage tourism sector, which is based on Nguyen Dynasty Rites with a particular emphasis on the Nam Giao Sacrifice. In order to respond to the aforementioned research question, it is necessary to construct an effective theoretical framework which allows for clarification of the application to sustainable cultural heritage tourism in this historic city. In the context of Hue's unique heritage, it is essential to undertake research on the interrelationship between cultural heritage preservation, heritage interpretation, the partnership between culture and tourism, and cultural heritage tourism.

Cultural Heritage Preservation

The exploration of cultural heritage preservation has expanded significantly over the years, moving beyond just the conservation of physical assets to include an intricate tapestry of intangible elements that reflect the depth and diversity of human civilization. Cultural heritage has mutated by three inseparable elements: from monuments to people, from objects to functions, and from preservation in itself to targeted preservation, which is explained as sustainable use and development (Loulanski, 2006).

Intangible cultural heritage has been instrumental in broadening this perspective, emphasizing that cultural heritage is not only about preserving physical monuments, landscapes, and artifacts but also about safeguarding beliefs, rituals, festivals, and folk culture (Kurin, 2004; UNESCO, 2020). This comprehensive view of cultural heritage underlines its critical role in offering insights into the human experience across different cultures and historical periods. In the modern tourism landscape, heritage is still one of the most significant components of tourism (Timothy and Boyd, 2006; Timothy, 2011).

In examining the evolution of cultural heritage preservation principles, it's evident that the initial efforts, largely spearheaded within Western countries in the early 19th century, were primarily focused on protecting the authenticity of tangible heritage elements. The impact of the humanity, directly or indirectly, creates a discontinuity between the remains, considered as belonging to the past, and the evolution of mankind up to the present day. Key contributions from scholars like Lowenthal (1995), Jones (2006), Nilson et al (2018) have highlighted this era's conservation ethics, which revolved around preserving the physical remnants of the past. According to this perspective, the discontinuity between the present and the past has engendered the major principles of conservation. These principes include the focus on the past and physical (tangible) monuments, the originality of heritage cannot be reproduced and the focus of attention on future generations in heritage conservation (Poulios, 2010).

Heritage Interpretation

In the realm of heritage interpretation, the concept has significantly evolved.Their perspectives redefine heritage as a dynamic entity, constantly reinterpreted and reshaped by contemporary society, as delineated by Merriman (1991), Ashworth et al (1999) and Loulanski, 2006. Freeman Tilden's seminal work "Interpretation Our Heritage" (1957) underscores the importance of education in heritage interpretation, blending it with entertainment to enhance visitor experiences. The primary goal of heritage interpretation is not only to impart knowledge but also to evoke emotions and inspire visitors and tourists to continue exploring, conserving and enhancing our heritage. This perspective is further expanded by Timothy (2011), who emphasizes the multifaceted role of heritage interpretation in balancing conservation while making heritage accessible to contemporary audiences.

The Partnership between Culture and Tourism

The relationship between culture and tourism has also undergone a considerable transformation. Initially, as Liang et al (2022) point out, culture’s integration into the tourism industry was driven by the need to create distinct identities for tourist destinations in a globally competitive market. This evolution from independent to interdependent entities highlights the crucial role of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage in defining the appeal and uniqueness of tourist destinations. Building on this, Richards (1996), Richard & Wilson (2006), Lee et al (2016) have illustrated the expansion of this partnership to include a variety of cultural expressions, thus enhancing the tourism experience and opening new avenues for economic and cultural exchange. This perspective highlights the necessity of a balanced approach that respects and preserves the integrity of cultural heritage while enhancing the tourism experience.

Cultural Heritage Tourism

The emergence of cultural heritage tourism as a transformative form of tourism, as defined by Lee (2016), has been a significant development in this field. The comprehensive study by Zang et al. (2023) using bibliometric analysis, highlights the growing interest and research in cultural heritage tourism since the early 2000s (Russo, 2002). This form of tourism, characterized by its dual functions of preserving heritage and fostering tourism growth (Aas et al., 2005; Ballesteros et al., 2007), is rapidly evolving into a significant segment of modern tourism. The critical roles of local residents in heritage areas and informed tourist behavior in fostering sustainable development in this field are underscored by Lan et al. (2021) and Gannon (2021). The approach to developing cultural heritage tourism as described above is consistent with the principles of heritage conservation (UNESCO, 1972) and the fundamental principles of heritage interpretation (Tilden, 1957).

Research Methods

In order to identify Hue's core cultural values and their influence on urban planning and architecture, it is necessary to explore the significance of the Nam Giao Sacrifice and Nguyen dynasty ceremonial practices in heritage tourism. Furthermore, it is essential to propose sustainable strategies for cultural heritage tourism that balance preservation with economic growth. In order to achieve these goals, our research adopts a value-based approach to the preservation and enhancement of cultural heritage. This approach is consistent with globally recognized methodologies as outlined by experts such as Mason (2002), De la Torre et al. (2005), and Poulios (2010). It places stakeholders, including government agencies, associations, local residents, and tourists, at the center of heritage conservation efforts, particularly in the context of tourism development.

Our research was initially informed by the Franco-Vietnamese project (PRODETOUR Huế, 2017), which was funded by the former Poitou-Charentes region and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Europe of France. The project focused on cultural mediation in tourism. Furthermore, a doctoral thesis at La Rochelle University in France (Nguyen, 2019) provided valuable insights into recent trends and developments in the field of cultural tourism development in Hue.

The qualitative research methodology was deemed appropriate for exploring the multifaceted and contextual phenomena of cultural heritage and tourism in Hue. The selected methods, including a literature review, archival research, semi-participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and field studies, facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the cultural heritage of Hue, with a particular focus on the ceremonial practices of the Nguyen Dynasty and their implications for sustainable tourism development.

In order to determine the core cultural values of Hue and the influence of Hue culture on tangible heritage (Hue urban planning, especially the architectural works of the Hue Ancient Capital relic complex, etc.) and intangible heritage (worship customs under the Nguyen dynasty, including the Nam Giao Sacrifice), we employ a method of document analysis. To gain a deeper understanding, we undertook a comprehensive and meticulous comparison of archival materials from both France and Vietnam. These included the Overseas Territories Archives of France in Aix-en-Provence (CAOM), the National Library of France in Paris, and the French School of the Far East in Paris; in addition to

Vietnam's National Archives Center N01 in Hanoi (VNAC1), and N04 in Dalat (VNAC4). From this data source, we synthesize and analyze information pertaining to the relationship between culture, heritage, and tourism. Our research in the national archives of Vietnam and France focused on the collections of the General Government of Indochina (GGI, as code) and those of the Residence Superior of Annam (RSA) and the Superior Residence of Tonkin (RST). Series L is concerned with the interdisciplinary subject of "Commerce - Industry - Tourism." A comprehensive analysis of the archives' holdings and related folders reveals the interconnection between Hue's cultural heritage, encompassing both cultural integrity and identity, and the phenomenon of cultural heritage tourism. Moreover, the National Library of France in Paris and the French School of the Far East in Paris have facilitated access to additional periodicals, namely the Bulletin des Amis du Vieux Hué and Extrême-Asie. The sources that have been processed according to the aforementioned topic are the result of doctoral thesis research on tourism development in Annam (Nguyen, 2019). This comparative study proved indispensable in providing a historical, cultural, heritage, and tourism perspective, which was essential for this research project.

Our methodology was informed by a series of in-depth interviews conducted with a diverse range of stakeholders. By engaging with a diverse range of stakeholders, including scholars, historians specializing in the Nguyen Dynasty, local government representatives (such as those from the Department of Culture and Sports, the Department of Tourism, and the Hue Monuments Conservation Center), and tourists, it is possible to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with cultural heritage tourism. Furthermore, we randomly selected and conducted interviews with both domestic and international tourists at prominent tourist reception points in Hue. This approach enabled us to gain direct insights into visitor experiences and interactions with Hue's cultural heritage. The sample size for the in-depth interviews was seven respondents in Hue City, particularly in the Hue Monument Complex. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. This corroborates the counsel proffered by Veal (2011), with respect to the duration of interviews, which typically range from 20 minutes to slightly over an hour. The interviews were conducted in a multitude of locations, including the Imperial Palace, Nam Giao Esplanade, Tu Duc and Minh Mang King Tombs, and Hue Citadel.

Where	**Name**	**Number of leaders**	**Number of researchers**	**Number of residents**	**Number of tourists**
Hue Citadel	Department of Culture and Sports	1			
	Department of Tourism	1			
Imperial Palace	Hue Monuments Conservation Center	1			
Nam Giao Esplanade			1		
Tu Duc and Minh Mang King Toms			1		
Imperial City of Hue	International tourists				1
	Domestic tourists				1
Total				**07**	

Source: The Authors, 2024

The sample of seven respondents was selected with great care and intention to fully explore the aims of the study. In regard to the criteria for experts surveyed, the author selected respondents based on the following criteria: (i) Demonstrated comprehension of the cultural, heritage, and cultural tourism landscape within the Hue city region; (iii) Documented experience in the research, preservation, and management of cultural heritage; and (iv) A history of research, exploitation, and management of cultural heritage tourism in Thua Thien Hue province. Two of the seven interview subjects were researchers on Nguyen dynasty heritage and, concurrently, former directors of the Hue Monuments Conservation Center, the Department of Tourism, and the Department of Culture and Sports. All of the researchers are residents of the Citadel of Hue.

The interviews were conducted using three questions designed to address the three main objectives of this research project. These objectives were identified as follows: (1) to identify Hue's core cultural values and their influence on urban planning and architecture; (2) to explore the significance of the Nam Giao Sacrifice and Nguyen dynasty ceremonial practices in heritage tourism; and (3) to propose sustainable strategies for cultural heritage tourism that balance preservation with economic growth. This research employs a value-based methodology for the preservation and enhancement of cultural heritage. In conducting and analyzing the interviews, the researchers employed a four-step process, as outlined below: designing interview questions based on theory framework and the core cultural value of Hue (result of documentation phase as researching tool); (2) contacting interviewers in Hue; (3) data collection; (4) and data analysis by using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis included description, interpretive, and overarching coding. The interview data was analyzed as follows. The researcher read all transcripts and highlighted data on sustainable cultural heritage tourism in Hue City, Vietnam, focusing on Nguyen dynasty ceremonies. Used researcher comments to define descriptive codes. Secondly, Hue's core cultural values, their influence on urban planning and architecture, the significance of the Nam Giao Sacrifice and Nguyen dynasty ceremonial practices in heritage tourism, and sustainable strategies for cultural heritage tourism were identified. Finally, a number of overarching themes were built and explored upon the interpretative codes. Concerning research ethic, the researchers were aware that this research collected data from participants in Hue City, thus they had to protect their individual details. In order to address this responsibility, the researchers followed the ethics process. The participants had not experienced any harm and be informed of purposes of the research and maintain the right to withdraw at any stage of the research (Jennings, 2010). The names of respondents were protected and not showed in this research.

The fieldwork and semi-participatory observations (that is, observations structured in a particular way) constituted a crucial element of our research. These observations were conducted in Hue, specifically at the Hue Monuments Complex and during the Nam Giao Sacrifice. They facilitated a profound immersion into the local cultural practices. This is of paramount importance for comprehending the living heritage of the city, which is pivotal to the research objectives. The PRODETOUR Huế 2, a Franco-Vietnamese project, provided unique access to otherwise restricted areas and specific events (such as the upper floors of the Pavillon of the Splendor and the Nam Giao Sacrifice) for the research team. These field studies were crucial in providing firsthand observations and data, which enriched the research findings.

The culmination of this comprehensive methodological approach is a robust and nuanced understanding of the religious and spiritual values that form the core of Hue's unique identity. These values exert a considerable influence on urban planning, architectural design, and the functionality of the city's structures. They provide value-based heritage conservation models that serve as a robust scientific basis for proposing sustainable and contextually relevant solutions for the development of cultural heritage tourism in Hue. These solutions are designed to align with the overarching theme of Nguyen Dynasty ceremonies, particularly focusing on the Nam Giao Sacrifice, thereby offering a comprehensive and culturally attuned framework for the enhancement of cultural heritage tourism in Hue.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

The distinctive cultural identity of Hue, characterized by its profound and unique charm, endows the city with a deeply appealing and attractive ambiance that captivates tourists. Hue's exceptional cultural values have been recognized multiple times by UNESCO in the category of World Cultural Heritage. Amadou - Mahtar M'bow, the former Director-General of UNESCO, once remarked, "Hue is not only a paragon of architecture but also a pinnacle of spirituality and a vibrant cultural center - where Buddhism and Confucianism have deeply permeated and blended into local traditions, nurturing a highly unique religious, philosophical, and moral ideology." In the specific context of Hue city in Vietnam, the recognition by UNESCO of its cultural heritages has the potential to transform the region into a global heritage city.

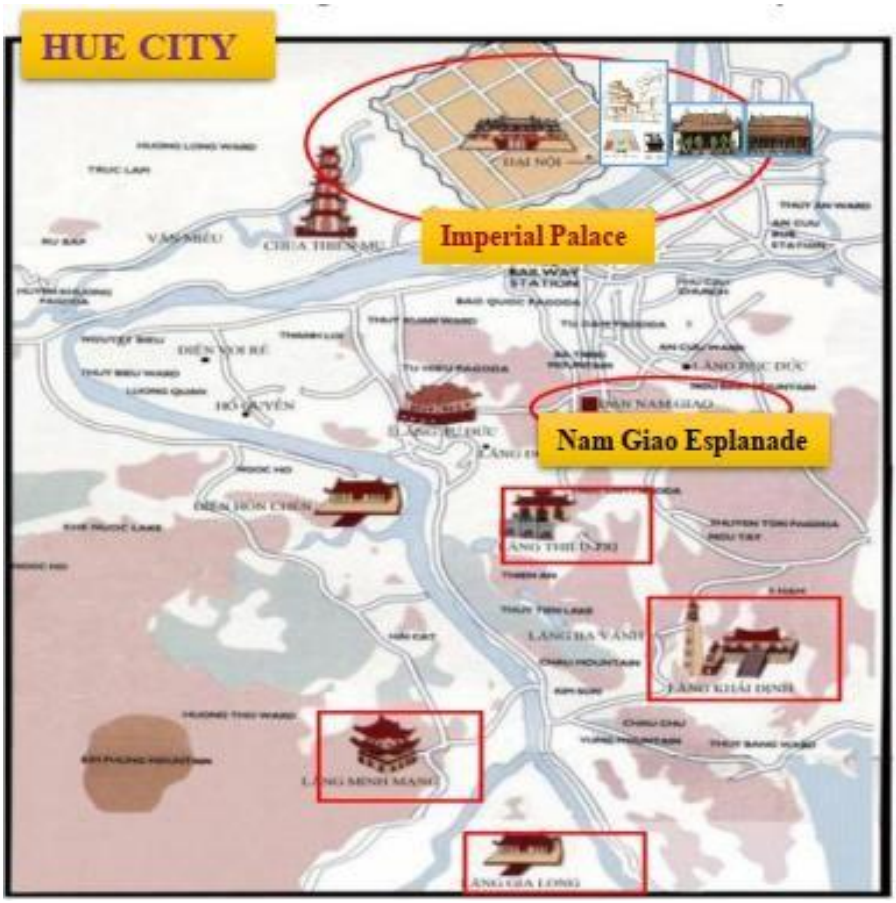
The religious and spiritual values of Hue form the unique identity of its people and significantly influence the urban planning, architecture, and functionality of the city's structures. These factors are crucial in dynamically preserving cultural heritage (Aas et al., 2005) through sustainable tourism development, which also embodies the two main functions of cultural heritage tourism.

The Ceremonial Rites of the Nguyen Dynasty

Religion, as a spiritual phenomenon of society, is a form of social consciousness, reflecting societal existence in specific historical periods. Animism, a philosophical, religious, or spiritual belief, posits that souls or sacredness exist in all objects, natural phenomena, and other entities in the natural environment. Religions manifest animism through various folk beliefs.

All monarchic dynasties in Vietnamese history have conducted ceremonies to worship heaven, earth, and ancestors. The king, being the son of Heaven and Earth, was regarded as the Celestial Son, ruling by the mandate of heaven. Through these ceremonial rites, the king always played a central role, bridging the connection between the spiritual world and the folk world. In these ceremonies, the king represented the people in offering sacrifices to Heaven, Earth, and various deities. The ceremonial rites of the Nguyen Dynasty were categorized into three levels: Đại Tự (Major Rites), Trung tự (Medium Rites) and Quần tự (Small Rites).

Figure 2. Hue and the main sites concerning the ritual sites of the Nguyen dynasty



Source: Hue Monuments Conservation Centre

The architectural design and functionality of the structures, as well as the organization of the ceremonial rites, were in strict accordance with the ritual norms established by the Nguyen Dynasty. Architectural structures in the Hue Monuments Complex were built to serve the Đại Tự (Major Rites), including: (1) Nam Giao Sacrifice (Heaven Worship Platform); (2) Đàn Xã Tắc (Earth Worship Platform); (3) Triệu tổ Miếu, Thái Tổ Miếu, Hưng Tổ Miếu, Thế Tổ Miếu, Hiển Lâm Các, Điện Phụng Tiên, among others. Significant structures like Nam Giao Sacrifice, Đàn Xã Tắc, and Hiển Lâm Các were architecturally designed in a three-tier system, reflecting the Tam Tài theory (three basic elements of the universe: Heaven, Earth, Humanity), and oriented towards a holistic cosmological approach. These architectural works were meticulously planned and constructed both inside and outside the Imperial City of Hue, adhering to strict Feng Shui principles to ensure the prosperity and development of the Nguyen Dynasty and the nation.

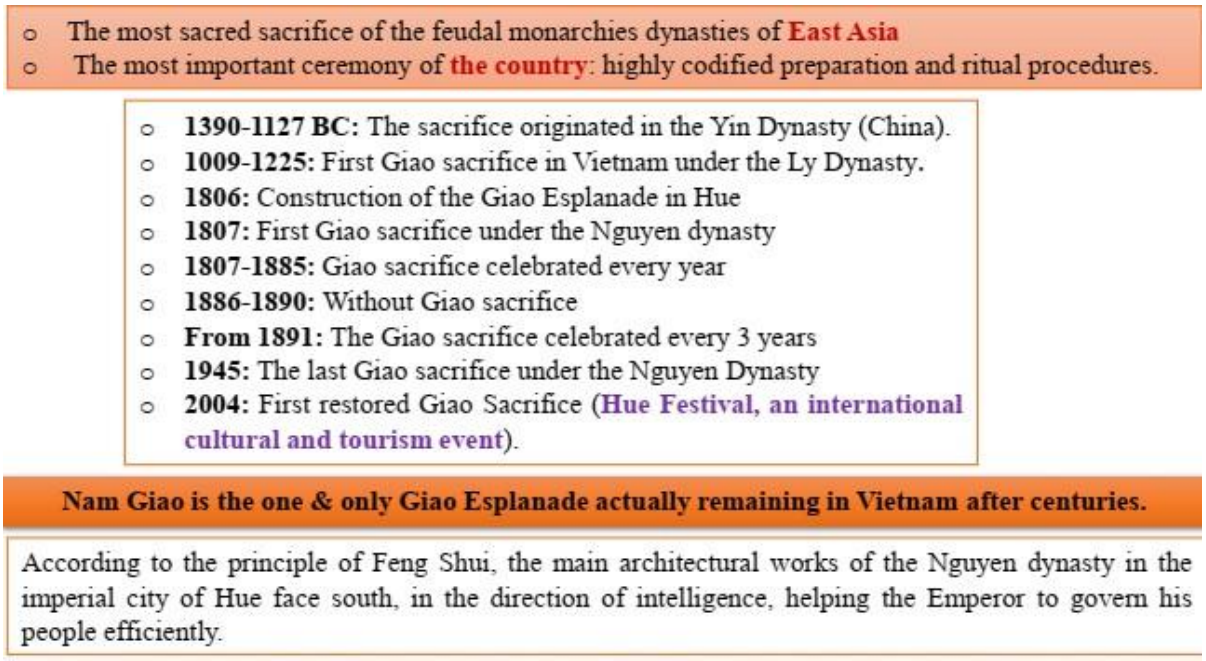
Nam Giao Sacrifice: The Essence of Ceremonial Rites in the Nguyen Dynasty's Court

The Nam Giao Sacrifice, the most eminent ceremony within the Đại Tự (Major Rites), embodies the quintessential elements and symbolic significance of the Nguyen Dynasty's ritualistic heritage. This ceremony, considered the most crucial national ritual, exemplifies the human aspiration to harmonize with the spiritual world, the cosmos, and nature. It also affirms the king's legitimacy as the Heavenly Son, embodying the divine mandate. Through this ritual, the king consistently played a central role in

connecting with the spiritual and folk worlds. The written character for Emperor comprises three horizontal lines symbolizing Heaven, Earth, Humanity, and a vertical line connecting these elements. The emperor was perceived as the sole mediator between Heaven and Earth and the link between the spiritual and mortal realms. The Nam Giao Sacrifice is the most sacred ceremony among the monarchic dynasties of East Asia. Traditionally, the Emperor himself would lead this significant event, reaffirming his divine power as the Celestial Son through communion with Heaven and Earth. "It is one of the most beautiful spectacles that one can witness in Hue, due to the nobility and solemnity of the ceremony, the dignity of the rituals, the number of participants, the richness and antiquity of the costumes, the beauty of the setting, and the impressive timing of the ceremony" (Collection du Vieux Hué, 1921, p.89).

Originating from the Zhou Dynasty in China, the Nam Giao Sacrifice evolved from a fusion of folk beliefs and ceremonial practices established by Duke of Zhou (Zhou li). The first Nam Giao Sacrifice in Vietnam was performed during the Lý Dynasty (1009 - 1225). The Nguyen Dynasty conducted its first Nam Giao Sacrifice in 1807, and it became an annual event thereafter. Between 1886 and 1890, the Hue court ceased the Nam Giao Sacrifice. From 1891, it was held once every three years, with the last ceremony under the Nguyen Dynasty occurring on March 23, 1945. The Nam Giao Sacrifice was first revived in 2004 as part of the Hue Festival, a cultural and tourism event of international significance.

Figure 3. Nam Giao Sacrifice: historic and signification



Source: Authors from different data sources, 2024

The Nam Giao Sacrifice, the most important religious structure of the Nguyen Dynasty, was constructed south of the Imperial City of Hue in 1806. It is a complex of architectural works including the Giao đàn (sacrificial area), Trai cung (area for the king's purification before the ceremony), Thần trù (kitchen for preparing offerings), and Thần khố (storage for ceremonial items). The centerpiece of Nam Giao

Sacrifice is the Giao đàn, consisting of three tiered platforms, each built upon the other, facing south, the direction of enlightenment.

The architecture of the Nam Giao Sacrifice under the Nguyen Dynasty strictly adheres to the Tam Tài theory (Heaven, Earth, Humanity) and the concept of "round heaven, square earth." This is represented in the spatial organization, of the which combines both a relative separation and an absolute unity. The top tier, circular and painted blue (Viên đàn), symbolizes Heaven. During ceremonies, a blue fabric structure (Thanh Ốc) is erected here for worshipping Heaven, Earth, and the Ancestral Spirits. The middle tier, square and painted yellow (Phương đàn), is dedicated to Earth worship. During the Nam Giao Sacrifice, a yellow fabric structure (Hoàng Ốc) is erected for worshipping the Sun, Moon, Stars, Clouds, Rain, Wind, Thunder, Years, Months, Mountains, Seas, Rivers, Marshes, mountain spirits of the Nguyen Dynasty's royal tombs, guardians of tombs and mausoleums, and all territorial deities of Vietnam. The bottom tier, also square and painted red, symbolizes Humanity. During ceremonies, altars, offering tables, and incense burners are placed on the two upper tiers of the platform. Reception areas are set up for high officials and special guests. Hue Monuments Complex, including Nam Giao Esplanade, was recognized by UNESCO as world cultural heritage in 1993.

The Giao procession is a major and unique event, encapsulating the cultural essence of Hue. Giao Cortege is grandiose spectacle for the imperial court, for "his people" and for tourists The activities of the Giao procession extend beyond the confines of Nam Giao Sacrifice, covering the expansive space from the Imperial City of Hue to Nam Giao Sacrifice. The procession begins in front of the Ngọ Môn gate of the Imperial City and proceeds to Nam Giao Sacrifice. Thousands of people gather along the route, creating a vibrant and festive atmosphere. Decorative gates, flags, altars, and other elements are erected along the route, adding to the ceremonial splendor.

Discussions

Our theoretical framework (heritage preservation, heritage interpretation, cultural heritage tourism) and the identification of Hue's core cultural values (ceremonial rites of the Nguyen Dynasty, with the Nam Giao Sacrifice as the pinnacle) contribute to finding the intersection between Hue's cultural heritage and its visitors - the tradition of ancestor worship. This tradition, shared by Vietnamese people nationwide and by East Asians with similar folk beliefs, forms a connection point in tourists' exploration of Hue's cultural heritage. This approach aligns with Tilden's (1957) first criterion for heritage interpretation: "Interpretation must connect the attraction to the visitor, or else the visitor's experience becomes meaningless." This connection point provides a scientific basis for proposing sustainable, integrated, and well-coordinated development strategies for cultural heritage tourism in Hue, centered around the Nguyen Dynasty's ceremonial rites, particularly the Nam Giao Sacrifice.

In the context of Vietnam's tourism industry as a whole, the tourism products in Hue remain relatively uniform and constrained by traditional models. The lack of systematic integration and connectivity, both within the city of Hue and across provincial, interprovincial, and regional boundaries, represents a significant challenge for the city's tourism sector. In particular, the number and quality of tourism products based on the cultural resources of the Nguyen Dynasty's monuments and ceremonial rituals in Hue and its surrounding areas are limited, with little change since the early 20th century. This is a principal factor contributing to the sluggish growth in tourist stays in Hue, particularly for extended

periods. To date, there has been no comprehensive strategy for planning cultural heritage tourism products in Hue. The majority of tourism programs in Hue continue to utilize routes that were established in approximately 1910 (Nguyen, 2019) and have undergone only slight modifications over time until the present.

Adopting a value-based approach to conservation and enhancement of heritage, this paper focuses on identifying the intersection between Hue's cultural heritage and tourists, centered on the tradition of ancestor worship, with the pinnacle being the Nam Giao Sacrifice, the most important and symbolic ritual of the Nguyen Dynasty's ceremonial rites. The research findings demonstrate that the core cultural values of Hue are intricately linked to religious and spiritual values. The Nguyen Dynasty's ceremonial norms significantly influenced the urban planning and architecture of the Imperial City of Hue. Ceremonial activities at architectural structures serving rituals according to the Nguyen Dynasty's ceremonial rites (Nam Giao and Xã Tắc Esplanades, temples, royal mausoleums in Hue, etc.), and rituals reconstructed for major international events (re-enactment of Nam Giao Sacrifice, Xã Tắc Ceremony, etc.) form a vibrant living heritage complex. This provides a scientific basis for proposing development solutions for cultural heritage tourism in Hue, built on an overall theme around the Nguyen Dynasty's ceremonial rites, with the essence being the Nam Giao Sacrifice, covering the geographical area of the Imperial City of Hue and its surrounding areas.

Implications and Recommendations

"The master plan on tourism development to 2020, vision to 2030 and Vietnam tourism development strategy to 2030" outlines a strategic approach focusing on various forms of tourism, including cultural tourism, beach and island tourism, and eco-tourism. Within the broader context of local development in Vietnam, building upon the foundation of preserving and promoting the heritage of the ancient capital and the unique cultural identity of Hue, with its distinctive cultural, heritage, ecological, landscape, eco-friendly, and smart features, Thừa Thiên Huế province is set to become a centrally governed city by 2025. Regionally, by 2030, it aims to be a major, distinctive cultural, tourism, and specialized healthcare center in Southeast Asia (Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, 2019), and by 2045, a prominent cultural and tourism hub and a city of festivals in Asia (Thừa Thiên Huế Provincial Party Committee, 2021). "The Conservation and Value Enhancement Plan for the Hue Monuments Complex up to 2030, with a Vision to 2045" is being developed to fully identify the value of both tangible and intangible heritage, providing legal basis and direction to exploit and enhance cultural heritage resources, positioning Hue as the nucleus of heritage cities of the future.

The paper researches and proposes development directions for cultural heritage tourism openly and holistically, with the core cultural element (the ceremonial rites of the Nguyen Dynasty, among which the Nam Giao Sacrifice is the pinnacle) as the central theme throughout the overall script. We suggest building a platform of products that can cater to various tourist groups (domestic tourists, international tourists, and locals exploring Hue). This product system can be deployed across multiple heritage sites, landmarks, and can be applicable at different times (according to the calendar of ceremonial rituals) offering tourists the opportunity to experience products in the most authentic spaces possible. The program aims to create thematic links and connectivity within the city, province, and region and can be combined with various types of tourism. It allows tourists to use only basic services or to enhance their experience with additional services and products. Based on the basic tour routes exploited since around

1910 in the Imperial City of Hue, the tour routes and explanatory content are adjusted and rebuilt based on the main axis of worship. Overall, the basic route of the Imperial City is processed thematically by emphasizing the division of the temple system and important structures serving ceremonial rituals into two blocks. This approach demonstrates the interconnectedness of the two spatial planning blocks serving ceremonial rituals (architecture, significance, functionality...) through the symbolic structure of Hiển Lâm Các.

Based on Hue's core cultural values, heritage conservation principles, and the characteristics of cultural heritage tourism, our development direction constructs cultural-tourism events rooted in the past (real events closely linked to livelihood and activities in the economic, cultural, and social life of the people of Hue) and preserved over time to the present - Time focus: Past and Present. The range of cultural fields of interest to tourists is also expanded - Cultural focus: High and popular culture.

This expansion of the cultural scope, linked to classified as past and contemporary events, means that the market for cultural heritage tourism widens. The main consumption behavior of cultural heritage tourists is not just to be satisfied with individual tourism products but also to use them in their process (in real environments and recreated heritage spaces) - Experience - Form of consumption: products and processes (OECD, 2008). Respecting the principles of heritage conservation (UNESCO, 1972, 2003, and 2010) and the core principles of heritage interpretation (Tilden, 1957), we propose an orientation that allows cultural heritage tourism activities to be personalized for tourists through the form of heritage experiences (in real environments and recreated heritage spaces).

Tourism Program 1 (Core Program): Exploring the Nguyen Dynasty's Ceremonial Rites & Folk Experiences (Basic Program + Experience 1)

This program is conducted on full moon days and at the end of the lunar month. Building on the basic tourism program, the script delves deeper into the mid- and end-of-month worship ceremonies. Tourists gain hands-on experience participating in spiritual activities that have become a part of daily life in Hue, right within the Imperial City, after digital technology explorations at the Interpretation Center

- Expansion Option 1 for Tourism Program 1 (Optional): Basic Program + Experience 1 + Vegetarian Culinary Experience.

- Expansion Option 2 for Tourism Program 1 (Optional): Basic Program + Experience 1 + Interaction with Hue Researchers.

- Expansion Option 3 for Tourism Program 1 (Optional): Basic Program + Experience 1 + Interaction with Hue Researchers + Vegetarian Culinary Experience.

- Expansion Option 4 for Tourism Program 1 (Optional): For tourists using Homestay in the Citadel of Hue: Basic Program + Experience 1 + Participation in preparing and conducting full moon and end-of-month worship rituals with locals.

Tourism Program 2: Exploring the Nguyen Dynasty's Ceremonial Rites & Folk Experiences (Core Program + Experience 2)

This program is also conducted on full moon days and at the end of the lunar month. On top of the basic tourism program, the script focuses on the ancestral worship rituals of the royal family. The king, before being the son of Heaven and Earth, is a human being with biological parents like everyone else. This highlights that Đại Tự (Major Rites) represents the highest form of Vietnamese ancestral worship. The Đại Tự ceremony represents the ancestral worship of the Vietnamese people, following the Nguyen Dynasty's worship norms. Tourism planners and state management agencies, along with travel companies, must understand this core value to develop and connect tourism products with potential customers and use this core message in promotional activities, destination marketing, and product promotion. Tourists gain hands-on experience participating in spiritual activities conducted by descendants of the Nguyen Dynasty emperors at places like Thế Tổ Miếu within the Imperial City of Hue, enhanced by digital technology explorations. During the tour, guides use films and digital exhibitions to reconstruct the rituals for illustration.

- Expansion Option 1 for Tourism Program 2 (Optional): Basic Program + Experience 2 + Interaction with Hue Researchers, Witnesses, and Descendants of the Nguyen Dynasty Emperors.

- Expansion Option 2 for Tourism Program 2 (Optional): Basic Program + Experience 2 + Participation in preparing and conducting ancestral worship rituals organized by descendants of the Nguyen Dynasty Emperors at private residences (e.g., Tùng Thiện Vương Mansion) and cultural exchange experiences.

It is crucial for tour operators to exercise professionalism and discretion when selecting customers for this particular product. Establishing a connection between tourists and the Nguyen Dynasty's royal family before offering the product is essential and requires careful consideration.

Tourism Program 3: Exploring the Nguyen Dynasty's Ceremonial Rites & Experiencing the Nam Giao Sacrifice and Giao Procession (Core Program + Experience 3)

This program is conducted on the days of the reenactment of the Nam Giao Sacrifice and Giao Procession, targeting: (1) Tourists who have previously visited the Imperial City of Hue (basic program) and are returning to Hue; (2) First-time visitors to Hue who possess substantial knowledge about Hue's culture. The program delves into the ancestral worship rituals of the royal family on the days of the Nam Giao Sacrifice and Giao Procession reenactments.

In essence, the multitude of significant worship rituals in Hue offers numerous opportunities to develop cultural heritage tourism programs. The richness of the temple system, pagodas, architectural structures for rituals, and spiritual practices of the people of Hue ensure that tourists can immerse themselves in cultural and spiritual experiences at any time of the year. For sustainable development, all tourism products must be systematically planned and connected, built upon the core values of local culture, and actively involve the local community.

Studies on Hue's culture, focusing on Nguyen Dynasty's ceremonial rites, provide the necessary conditions for us to propose a system of cultural heritage tourism products built on an overall script themed around ceremonial rites (with the essence being the Nam Giao Sacrifice). This product system

can be applied to various tourist groups (domestic tourists, international tourists, and locals exploring Hue) and can be deployed across multiple heritage sites, applicable at different times (ceremonial rituals), offering tourists opportunities to experience products in the most authentic spaces possible. The tourism program is thematic and interconnected within the city, province, region, and can be combined with various types of tourism. These proposals not only contribute to sustainable tourism development, effectively based on enhancing the value of local tangible and intangible heritage, but also help more prominently position Hue on the tourism map of Vietnam.

In order to respond to the research question, "How Hue's cultural heritage, particularly its traditional ceremonies and architectural wonders, can be harnessed for sustainable tourism development while ensuring the preservation of its cultural integrity and identity?" we construct the aforementioned theoretical framework, which allows us to undertake research on the interrelationship between cultural heritage preservation, heritage interpretation, the partnership between culture and tourism, and cultural heritage tourism. This approach is consistent with the principles of heritage conservation (UNESCO, 1972) and the fundamental principles of heritage interpretation (Tilden, 1957), rendering it an appropriate for Hue City, a destination with a rich history and global cultural heritage.

Conclusion

Utilizing a value-based approach to the conservation and enhancement of heritage, this paper has focused on developing a theoretical research framework encompassing heritage preservation, heritage interpretation, and cultural heritage tourism. This approach aids in identifying the core cultural values of Hue, contributing to finding the intersection between Hue's cultural heritage and its visitors, centered around the tradition of ancestor worship. The research results demonstrate that the religious and spiritual values form the unique identity of Hue's culture and significantly influence the planning, architecture, and functionality of the city's structures. Ceremonial activities at architectural sites that serve rituals according to the Nguyen Dynasty's ceremonial norms, as well as rituals restored for major international events (like the Nam Giao Sacrifice), and the tradition of ancestor worship (Tế Miếu) create a distinctive living heritage complex in the only ancient capital in Vietnam that has preserved fairly intact its overall architecture of fortresses, palaces, mausoleums, and temples. This forms the scientific basis for proposing development solutions for cultural heritage tourism built on an overall script themed around the Nguyen Dynasty's ceremonial rites, with the essence being the Nam Giao Sacrifice, covering the geographical area of the Imperial City of Hue and its surrounding areas. Tourism development must be based on the principle of heritage conservation, especially World Heritage (UNESCO, 1972, 2003, 2010). Nam Giao Sacrifice, part of the Hue Monuments Complex, is recognized by UNESCO as a World Cultural Heritage site.

The proposed orientations for developing this system of cultural heritage tourism products can be applied to various tourist groups (domestic tourists, international tourists, and locals exploring Hue) and can be deployed across multiple heritage sites over different times (ceremonial rituals), offering tourists the opportunity to experience products in the most authentic spaces possible. The tourism products are thematic and interconnected within the city, province, region, and can be combined with various types of tourism. They allow tourists to choose: to use only core services or to enhance their experience through additional services and products. These proposals contribute to sustainable and effective tourism development based on enhancing the value of local tangible and intangible heritage.

Furthermore, they work to make Hue a more prominently tourist destination on the map of Vietnam and the region. In line with the research theme of cultural heritage tourism in Hue, a future research direction could be to study the process of transforming historical assets into tourism commodities.

By clearly linking the research objectives and findings, this paper provides a concise summary of the study's focus on sustainable heritage tourism and the importance of heritage preservation in Hue City, Vietnam. It highlights the practical implications for Hue tourism, relevant to heritage and tourism researchers and professionals alike. Moreover, by contributing to filling the research gap, the paper helps to investigate the nexus between heritage preservation, interpretation and tourism, with a particular focus on the process of transforming historical assets, which is based on Nguyen Dynasty rites with a special emphasis on the Nam Giao sacrifice, into initial insights for tourism commodities: orientations for developing this system of cultural heritage tourism products that are thematic and interconnected within the city, province, region, and can be combined with various types of tourism in this historic city.

However, the study has some limitations such as: the reliance on qualitative data and the lack of quantitative indicators. It should be necessary for future research to complement quantitative research methods. The future research should be conducted to comprehensively approach and analyze the research topic in the relationship between tourism supply and demand, in order to concretize the process of transforming historical assets into tourism commodities in a sustainable way (such as specific and thematic heritage tourism tours, events, etc.). In addition, the research theme could be expanded into specific and actionable research axes, such as the comparative analysis of Hue's heritage tourism strategies with other UNESCO World Heritage cities; the long-term socio-economic impacts of heritage tourism on local communities in Hue; and the role of digital technologies in enhancing visitors' engagement with Hue's intangible heritage.

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