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Research note

Tensions in Local-Global Production of Tourist Spaces in Vietnam: Heritage, Global Flows, and Local Identities

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Summary
This research note examines the relations between mobility, urban heritage, and locality in Vietnam. The main research question is: Can heritage preservation function as a decolonization project, or does it re-establish structures of internal coloniality? We analyze data on Hội An and Tam Đảo regarding narratives, appropriation, and consumption practices and link our findings to larger processes of decolonization. The paper argues that urban heritage preservation can function as a decolonization project, promoting emancipation for parts of Vietnamese society. While heritage is perceived as inherently local, its production often leads to a transfer of ownership from local communities to the national and international levels. However, due to globalized flows of knowledge, aspirations, and power in the tourist sector, it simultaneously re-establishes structures of internal coloniality in Vietnamese society. The emerging interface between global flows and local aspiration creates a landscape of spatial consumption, undermining local ownership of urban heritage space and alienating locals.

Keywords: heritage, coloniality, kitschification, tourism

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Introduction

Background and research question

In 2012, Western media reported on the opening of a replica of a small Austrian village in the southern Chinese province of Guangdong (Bell 2012). Since then, imitation landscapes based on either Western spatial forms or massive monuments have been constructed all over East- and Southeast Asia. These seemingly artificial landscapes provide sought-after travel destinations for domestic tourists, while Western tourists view them with ambivalence, citing a supposed lack of authenticity.

Tourism is rooted in mobility, creating the physical and virtual spatial movements of ideas, goods, and people in global flows. Flows of tourists searching for authenticity encounter historically rooted landscapes that make up the emerging tourist interface. They produce new touristic landscapes for consumption, embedded in the historical context of colonization and power imbalance (Michaud and Turner 2006). These flows of tourists and global narratives on authenticity and entertainment are embedded in processes of coloniality (Mignolo 2016; Quijano 2007). Coloniality describes the durable and intertwined structures of power and control first established during the colonial era.

The two case studies in this work, Hội An and Tam Đảo, are the results of past engagement with mobile actors and ideas. Hội An, located on the coast of Central Vietnam, was founded as an important regional trading port. In the 1990s, Hội An re-emerged as a national heritage site and one of Vietnam's most important tourist spots, being named a UNESCO heritage site in 1999. The French established Tam Đảo in the early 20th century as a hill station around 80 km from Hanoi, Vietnam's capital city. The area has been rediscovered in recent years by a growing urban middle class seeking recreation.

We argue that the original creation of these two places and their recent transformation into heritage sites embed these spaces into global mobility flows. The resulting appropriation and commodification combine historical material structures with emerging artificial tourist landscapes oriented towards consumption. Flows of traders, colonialists, state authorities, investors, and tourists, who bring their aspirations and knowledge, have continuously shaped both towns. Trying to integrate these outside ideals into their existing landscapes, both Hội An and Tam Đảo are today considered heritage sites by actors not native to these places. These mobile global actors continue to transform Hội An and Tam Đảo, raising the main research question of this paper: Can heritage preservation function as a decolonization project, or does it re-establish structures of internal coloniality?

Data collection and methodology

We engage with this question based on (1) a review of literature on mobility and heritage production, (2) an evaluation of visual qualitative data from participatory

fieldwork in 2015 and 2020, and (3) an analysis of image representations and reviews on online travel sites. We analyze the collected data regarding narratives, appropriation, and consumption practices and link our findings to larger processes of decolonization in the framework of global commodification and mobility.

The first section of this paper explains how the mobility of ideas and people continuously shapes urban spaces and local communities. We argue that urbanization, colonization, and tourism are inherently intertwined. Using the example of heritage space in Hội An and Tam Đảo, we look at the production, appropriation, and commodification of heritage sites. We argue that new global mobilities of ideas, money, and people connected to tourism transform local practices and identities. We conclude that the production of heritage in Vietnam constitutes emancipation from former colonial structures while also enforcing the emergence of new power hierarchies, which often alienate local communities.

For this paper, the local, as spatially bound patterns of interaction, is defined by integration processes that structure space to create a spatial organization in which specific knowledge rooted in this spatial unit has meaning. As the local has a spatial connotation, the global "denotes an abstraction from space in terms of flows, ideas, virtual realities, and images, while local in contrast refers to real spaces" (Korff 2003, 2). Simultaneously, local and global are intertwined as they encompass and constitute each other to produce localities in the framework of globalization.

Literature review

Politics of mobility and flows of people and ideas

All cities are representations of their locality and history. Cities are also the result of the flow of mobile ideas concerning their material forms and acceptable behavior for people moving through them (Söderström 2013). Because urban spaces are organized around encounters and communication (Arendt 1958; Schmid 2012; Sennett 2010), they facilitate the flow of goods, ideas, and aspirations. Consequently, urban spaces are always locally rooted but with a global outlook.

As mobility transforms the materiality of cities, it offers access to modernity for local people while appropriating their lived space for economic and political interests (Schmid 2012). Therefore, mobility is embedded in structures of power which Tim Cresswell (2010) calls the politics of mobility. Depending on underlying power relations, the capacity to be mobile enables:

- participation in the construction of the local heritage space,
- coping with processes of appropriation, and
- realization of individual aspirations in the context of commodification.

Furthermore, spatial mobility allows new aspirations and reimagination of the material space as those traveling are confronted with differences in meaning, form,

and behavior. As mobility transforms historical urban spaces, these historical spaces are (re-)discovered for travel and tourist activities. Urban space becomes a heritage space that combines materiality with the practices and traditions rooted in it. However, because heritage needs to be locally rooted to maintain its authenticity, the focus of urban development shifts from modernization to preservation to keep its attraction for tourists. Here, authenticity is understood as practices, people, and materiality conceived in encounters as genuine and true to the imagined past. Authenticity is a perceived representation of the past and the contemporary spatial and social landscape in which practices and people are embedded.

Relation between colonialism, tourism, and urbanism in Vietnam

Tourism in Vietnam is intrinsically connected to colonialism. French colonists brought the practice of tourism to Vietnam and created tourist infrastructure in the second half of the 19th century (Peyvel and Võ 2016). They invested in infrastructure for seaside resorts and hill stations as a reprieve from tropical heat in the cities (Demay 2014). Hill stations combined lush nature and rural peacefulness with modern amenities and leisure activities. To Westerners, these hill stations were located outside of time and space, isolated from the colonial state. They created an island of metropolitan culture that evoked the motherland. Colonial travel destinations thereby connected colonies with the space of the home country. This connection allowed European colonialists to envision themselves as modern and cosmopolitan, which was reinforced when returning to the metropolitan center with pictures and artifacts to present to an audience (McDonald 2017; Linehan, Clark, and Xie 2020). Hence travel mobility was intertwined with the idea of modernity. The consumption of books and visuals also made colonial spaces accessible for people in the metropolitan center. This representation of foreign space for those at home is still part of travel practices today.

Tourism contributed to infrastructure development in the periphery of Indochina, like transport, electricity, and leisure facilities. These developments altered the spiritual and livelihood functions attached to the transformed physical landscapes (Peyvel and Võ 2016, 38). The transformed spaces, influenced by outside ideas, were integrated into the concept of a Vietnamese community and the narrative of historical continuity.

Modern-day consumption of historical urban spaces by tourists continues the process of spatial transformation and the reproduction of colonial tourism practices. Tourism affects urban materialities like architecture and the functional role of the city (Peyvel and Võ 2016, 39). Former recreational sites serve as tourist destinations and generate revenue (Peyvel and Võ 2016, 38; Michaud and Turner 2006). Coastline privatization (Peyvel and Võ 2016, 38) and ecological destruction due to increasing tourism have entered public discourse (Hitchcock, King, and Parnwell 2010; Bourdeau, Gravari-Barbas, and Robinson 2015).

Heritage production and objectification

The production of historical heritage is based on two consecutive transformation processes influenced by flows of ideas and people: (1) the historical creation of urban space based on global ideas on urbanity (Söderström 2013), and (2) its transformation into heritage. The previous taskscape, oriented towards everyday use, changes into a heritagescape and finally a leisurescape, a landscape of escapism, consumption, and leisure activities, based on a process of slow commodification (Mitchell 1998, 276). Ingold (1993) defines a taskscape as a socially constructed space of human activities embedded in spatial materiality. In this sense, heritagescape is the landscape of the material and social past reconstructed in the framework of modern practices of development, tourism, and socio-economic practices.

Towards a heritagescape: Construction and appropriation

Hitchcock, King, and Parnwell (2010, 2) cite Melanie Smith (2003), who defines "heritage" as an interpretation process rather than a static collection of material things. Heritage production begins with the construction of heritage, first by colonial powers, then—after independence—by the elites of the new nation-state. Ian C. Glover (2003) cites Benedict Anderson (1983) to explain the recontextualization and depreciation of archaeological sites by colonial rulers as a tool of legitimization. After independence, as part of nation-building efforts, heritage was recontextualized in narratives of pre-colonial era accomplishments, traditions, and national identity (Hitchcock, King, and Parnwell 2010, 264). Today, state actors still use the decolonization of national heritage as a political tool to increase state legitimacy, creating spaces of contestation. Enduring structures of coloniality (Mignolo 2016; Quijano 2007) force previously colonized countries to confront the contextualization of their heritage. Jan Ifversen and Laura Pozzi (2020) describe four approaches to heritage production:

- removal of material traces,
- repression of memories and histories of colonialism,
- reframing of memories and material space with narratives of modernization and independence,
- the re-emergence of alternative narratives.

This process creates sanitized historic spaces (Linehan, Clark, and Xie 2020). Colonial roots of violence and dispossession are ignored and their memory is removed to produce enjoyable tourist landscapes. Instead of confronting the colonial past, it is disguised and transformed into an aspirational item for consumers Linehan, Clark, and Xie 2020).

Unintentionally, this creates spaces of symbolic annihilation, which silences local memories and reproduces spaces of colonial violence. As decolonization becomes

an elite project, localized forms of knowledge, meaning, and materiality are decontextualized to support nation-building projects (Ifversen and Pozzi 2020; Linehan, Clark, and Xie 2020).

Following heritage construction, historically rooted spaces are appropriated by international actors, such as global investors and UNESCO, with their understanding of heritage. UNESCO, for example, focuses on the originality of material structures to maintain authenticity. Hence UNESCO sets rules for conserving heritage sites, emphasizing preservation (Bui and Le 2017, 292; Avieli 2015, 39–40). These rules partially shift control over these spaces from local authorities and people to the global level.

However, the ownership of tourist infrastructure (Linehan, Clark, and Xie 2020), the imaginations used in marketing, and the production of touristified landscapes also constitute practices of appropriation. With the increasing value of land in tourist hotspots, investors and state actors enter markets and push residents out of competition, resulting in corruption and land rights conflicts. As landscapes of staged encounters emerge, the appropriation of land, traditions, and culture and the enclosure of local spaces like beaches become commonplace (Linehan, Clark, and Xie 2020). This appropriation of localities transforms structures of colonialism into practices of coloniality.

Commodification: Kitschification, nostalgia, and aspirations in the emerging leisurescape

Heritage space is not only produced by global actors and ideas but also by its consumption. The commodification of space, practices, people, and meanings is expressed in the "tourist gaze" (Urry 1993), which reduces encounters to their visual consumption. Travel agencies reimagine previous colonial spaces based on caricature identities and circulate them globally (Linehan, Clark, and Xie 2020) to promote a process of carefully selected representations in touristic encounters (Johnson 2010, 173). The colonial gaze becomes a tourist gaze that manufactures colonial imaginaries (Linehan, Clark, and Xie 2020).

To this effect, processes of "kitschification" transform landscapes in Asia to increase their attractiveness to tourists (Bachimon, Gauché, and Lê 2020). Kitsch represents a simple, charming, albeit artificial view of reality and the illusion of authenticity (Bachimon, Gauché, and Lê 2020). "Kitschification" allows for a cheaper tourist experience, particularly for the middle class in Vietnam. The blending of different styles, including architecture from other epochs and world regions, combined with distorted proportions, evokes uniqueness and extravagance. However, "kitschification" also provides a sense of safety and familiarity because it facilitates orientation and mobility in tourist landscapes (Bachimon, Gauché, and Lê 2020).

Like the colonial powers, who previously built replicas of their countries for recreational purposes, today's developers produce new levels of kitsch. They use colonial memory to design tourist landscapes based on historical nostalgia (Linehan,

Clark, and Xie 2020; Ifverson and Pozzi 2020 for Shanghai). Nostalgia is rooted in positive emotions around an idealized past based on memories embedded with imagination (Yuanyuan Shi et al. 2021). This nostalgia links kitsch to aspirations (Appadurai 2004), using the past as a frame of reference (Appadurai 2004). The countryside becomes a counter-model to the chaos of modern cities, representing a rural, authentic past (Gillen 2016). Thus nostalgia serves tourists who hope to escape from the demands of modern everyday life (Shi et al. 2021; Mitchell 1998, 274–275).

Nostalgia is not rooted in the history of heritage but visions of an aspired modernity represented by the space (Bachimon, Gauché, and Lê 2020). Rural environments are transformed from productive to decorative landscapes that only simulate a rural lifestyle. This tourist experience encourages consumerism, offers mass-produced souvenirs, provides the backdrop for photos shared on social media, and firmly integrates these spaces into global imagination (Bachimon, Gauché, and Lê 2020). As aspirations are contextualized in global narratives of modernization, consumption, and development, they cause a deep intrusion into existing landscapes due to the creation of kitschified landscapes.

In the emerging societies of Southeast Asia, aspirations often center around self-perception as a modern citizen. Consequently, tourist sites have to combine past and future, tradition and modernity, authenticity and comfort to fulfill these aspirations.

Process of heritage production and commodification in Hội An and Tam Đảo

Hội An

Production of heritagescape in Hội An

In literature (Bui and Le 2017: 293; UNESCO 2021; Avieli 2015), Hội An is represented as an important port city during the golden age of maritime trade in the region from the 15th century onward. Due to changes in trade routes, the closing of China's borders, and the siltation of the river connection, the main port moved to Da Nang in the early 19th century. In 1884, Hội An became part of the French protectorate of Annam. During this period, colonial architecture influenced the houses built in the old town of Hội An. Due to its small size, limited political importance, and peripheral location, most historical architecture survived the 20th century. In 1999, UNESCO declared Hội An a World Heritage site. Today, French colonial architecture, old Chinese family houses, and assembly halls dominate the ancient town center. Old infrastructure like the famous Japanese bridge is restored and repurposed to serve as museums.

Fig. 1: Restored courtyard in the old town center of Hội An

Photo: Franziska Nicolaisen 2020. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Hội An is the result of historical mobility and was once a symbol of early globalization. However, the architectural landscape became frozen in time with its UNESCO heritage status. Nir Avieli (2015, 47) speaks of "empty shell syndrome." While the materiality of the space is preserved, its functionality has radically changed. Tourist infrastructure, including hotels, resorts, shops, and restaurants, has replaced everyday urban life (Bui and Le 2017, 295).

While Hội An re-emerged as a recreational consumption space, local authorities aim to promote Hội An as a "cultural city," including cultural events and a city pass that allows entrance to most historical buildings and museums (Bui and Le 2017; Tran 2014). The focus is on the illusion of historical authenticity. The historical context is simplified and Hội An's history between 1884 and the modern-day is absent from the tourist experience.

For most of the second half of the 20th century, Hội An's identity was rooted in rural livelihood (Bui and Le 2017). After Vietnam re-entered the international community in the 1990s, this identity changed. Hội An's rapid tourist development attracted investors, entrepreneurs, and backpackers, which accelerated processes of

appropriation by "foreigners." The development of tourism infrastructure leads to local people losing access to public spaces like Cửa Đại Beach.

Fig. 2: Hội An's old city center between recreational consumption and cultural restoration

Photo: Mirjam Le 2014. CC BY-SA 4.0.

The Vietnamese state perceives the use of public space for private activities as uncivilized. Therefore, authorities regulate behavior and activities such as renovation, shop operation, and motorbike use, to maintain the city's image for tourists (Avieli 2015; Bui and Le 2017). The regulation and control of the old city center in Hội An sanitize urban heritage space from the reality of Vietnamese urban life.

The growing tourist infrastructure has spread into the rural hinterland, integrating the rural landscape and the handicraft villages into the production of Hội An as a tourist site. These rural villages have become part of the leisure industry with guided tours, restaurants, and cooking classes. The rural hinterland is heavily entangled with the global flows of tourists and money, enabling local-global encounters and the expansion of heritage space beyond the historical framework of the old city. While the ancient town center functions as a tourist hub, the city recently redeveloped the Thu Bon River islands, referencing the ancient town's architectural design to increase the urban area. (Bui and Le 2017).

Fig. 3: Redevelopment on Thu Bon River Island with old architectural styles

Photo: Mirjam Le 2014. CC BY-SA 4.0.

On the positive side, Hội An's status as a UNESCO heritage site has provided capital for local people to renovate and maintain their old houses (Avieli 2015; Bui and Le 2015). The emerging hospitality sector has created new labor opportunities. State authorities invest in education for the hospitality sector, for example training tourist guides. However, this sector depends on tourism demand. Moreover, jobs in management are often given to metropolitan elites or expats. At the same time, many locals work long hours in low-paying jobs, for example, in tailors' shops (James 2010). These processes thereby reproduce structures of coloniality where the local community is subordinated to the needs of the tourism sector.

The emerging art scene in Hội An illustrates this complicated interweaving of ownership and appropriation. Hội An's authorities focus on intangible heritage, particularly artisan craftwork, to market the ancient city center (Tran 2014). Private art galleries in the ancient center provide showcases for local, contemporary artists and traditional handicrafts. However, expats own many of these galleries and sell their artwork and narratives of Vietnam. The company Hay Hay illustrates this challenging balance between support for local art and appropriation. Founded as a new art collective by two foreigners trying to support local artists and artisans, it was perceived as a bright spot in the cheap consumption landscape in Hội An. However, over time, Hay Hay became a global design studio located in New Zealand and decorating hotels in Asia with Asian imagery and art (Hay Hay Hotel Art Supplier,

n.d.), reproducing colonial processes whereby foreigners appropriate Vietnamese spaces for consumption purposes.

Leisurescape Hội An

Over the last two decades, Hội An has morphed into a modern consumption space. Domestic tourism and backpackers are slowly being pushed to the margins as the tourist space of the city focuses more on guided tours for affluent Western tourists. (Bui and Le 2017). Commerce is once again the city's driving force, as most buildings in the old town contain high-end tailors or shops for souvenirs, representing kitsch. Hội An has become famous for its tailoring services, even though it is not part of any local tradition or custom. The line between artisan artifacts, art, and kitsch in Hội An's souvenir shops is blurred by a combination of local symbols, like the conical hat, with global symbols, like Christmas decorations. These symbols create exotic visuals not rooted in local identities but in global flows.

Fig. 4: Localized kitsch in a high-end souvenir shop in Hội An

Photo: Mirjam Le 2014. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Beyond the commodification of tourist experiences with kitsch souvenirs, there is also a low-key "kitschification" of the urban landscape, staging the city as picture-perfect. Clean, decorated streets without motorized traffic project an image of Vietnam not found anywhere else. However, this image caters to historical and exotic nostalgia, evoking an alien world known in the West from adventure novels,

portraying a peaceful, better past where everything was colorful and joyful. The use of Cyclos, Vietnam's rickshaw, for tourist entertainment demonstrates this.

Fig. 5: Re-emerging practices: Cyclos as means of transport for tourists

Photo: Mirjam Le 2014. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Authorities have invented several festivals and have reintroduced old games to maintain the illusion of authenticity and provide tourists with entertaining experiences. One example is the moon lantern festival, where tourists put lanterns into the river on the day of the full moon (James 2010; Bui and Le 2017). However, these forms of entertainment, including historical costumes and music, are not part of locals' daily routines.

Referring back to the idea of the empty shell syndrome (Anieli 2015), the city becomes a museum where the experience of Vietnam is "Disneyfied," curated, and manufactured to create a safe travel space. While the staging of the tourist space is prominent, the residual historical material space reduces the need for a "kitschification" of the landscape. Kitsch is relegated to souvenir shops and maintains the impression of artisan handicrafts. However, the everyday activities of the residents are pushed outside of the ancient town and looking for the "real Vietnam" becomes increasingly difficult.

Thus, to fulfill aspirations of rural nostalgia, tourists book tours to surrounding areas where they can pick produce and take cooking classes (Things To Do 2021). In the context of heritage production, this expands the UNESCO heritage concept by

incorporating local practices and landscapes, and offering new sites for encounters. At the same time, the inclusion in these tours of "traditional" games and performances, like those offered by Kybimo garden (Kybimo Garden 2020), appropriate local culture for imitation and "kitschification." Due to a lack of communication, the blurred lines between Vietnamese rural life and the invented traditions limit opportunities for learning and understanding. Local identities become props for entertainment.

Fig. 6: Souvenir shop in Hội An as emerging leisurescape

Photo: Mirjam Le 2014. CC BY-SA 4.0.

In contrast to the invented or revived traditions staged for tourists, it is possible to find glimpses of lived Vietnamese tradition in Hội An. One example is the annual celebration of the Vietnamese New Year (Tết). Hội An has a good number of spots that offer tourists the opportunity to experience Tet celebrations. Homestays, for example, offer a festive dinner to their guests. It is also possible to observe celebrations in public spaces, for example, dragon dances in the streets and the burning of offerings. Local decorations, particularly yellow flowers, are commonplace and point to locally rooted traditions. However, it is difficult for tourists to appreciate these examples of modern lived traditions due to a lack of context.

Fig. 7: Lived traditions in local spaces: Tet decorations for the Year of the Goat in Hội An following Central Vietnamese customs

Photo: Mirjam Le 2015. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Beyond the rural and historical nostalgia, which is heavily commodified, lie the economic aspirations of the residents, global investors, and state authorities. Participation in modernity, enabled by financial means and investment, is the main aim. Maintaining Hội An as a heritage site is less focused on local identity and tradition and more on improving economic livelihoods. Thus, while the "kitschification" and use of local identities for tourist entertainment might be problematic with regard to decolonization, it can provide local empowerment where it opens economic opportunities and the realization of local aspirations of modernity.

Tam Đảo

The production of a heritagescape

Tam Đảo was founded in 1907 by French colonists as an exclusive summer retreat for French elites, around 80 km from Hanoi in Vinh Phuc Province, 900 meters above sea level. During colonial times, Tam Đảo was known as "The Đà Lạt of the North," named after the most famous hill station constructed by the French in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. The name Tam Đảo translates as "Three Islands," referring to the three mountains in the region. Today Tam Đảo is still known for its nature and temperate climate, with a yearly average temperature of 22.9°C.

Fig. 8: Lived traditions in local spaces: Tet decorations for the Year of the Goat in Hội An following Central Vietnamese customs

Photo: Mirjam Le 2015. CC BY-SA 4.0.

At first, development was slow. In 1912 there were only a few buildings, mainly for military personnel. The first fully equipped hotel opened in 1913. In 1914, private villas were built (Cungphuot 2021). Photographs taken in the 1920s and 1930s show the steep and winding road that led up to the resort and the town's relatively small size. It consisted of large French-style villas, a public swimming pool, parks, a playground, and walkways surrounded by trees. Other infrastructure shown includes electric cables leading up the hill and bridges built across streams (Saigoneer 2017).

As tourism during colonial times contributed to infrastructure development in the periphery, it initiated profound spatial changes. Historical accounts from as early as 1905, written by French colonists, describe the difficulties in developing Tam Đảo as a hill station. During the early years, streets were blocked by flooding and a local man died during the construction of a bridge. In later years, the use of the station as a sanatorium was emphasized (Entreprises Coloniales 2014).

However, unlike Hội An, this historical landscape did not survive the last century. Only one French Catholic church remains as proof of Tam Đảo's historical roots as a hill station. Other colonial traces are ignored or have even been removed. The reclaiming of the space by the Vietnamese government constitutes an act of emancipation, but local people are marginalized in the pursuit of modernization. The lack of historical contextualization also erases negative memories about colonial

power structures, former spiritual meanings, and identity. While this study focuses on the former hill station, which is now the town of Tam Đảo, it is part of Tam Đảo national park, which covers an area of 34,995 ha in three provinces, namely Vĩnh Phúc Province, Tuyên Quang Province, and Thái Nguyên Province.

Fig. 9: Emerging domestic tourist space: Central square in Tam Đảo

Photo: Ronald Hermann 2020. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Tam Đảo is rich in biodiversity. The Vietnamese government designated it as a conservation area in 1977 (Le et al. 2016). The area was then recognized as a national park in March 1996 and is one of the largest national parks in Vietnam. Unlike other areas around Hanoi, Tam Đảo national park has not been transformed into agricultural land. While conserving local biodiversity and species helps preserve a part of Vietnam's natural heritage and identity, it also transfers ownership of the region to the national level.

Tam Đảo district, which comprises not only Tam Đảo town but also communities at the foot of the mountains, is home to a large number of ethnic minorities, predominantly the San Diu minority. With a population of about 10,000, they are one of the smaller ethnic groups in Vietnam. Nevertheless, their folk songs became national intangible cultural heritage in 2019 (Vietnamplus 2014). Continuous interest among tourists in the area offers the opportunity to share and preserve this

culture. However, continued investment, the influx of ethnic Kinh, and employment opportunities in the tourism sector for ethnic youths threaten the preservation of their language and customs.

Tam Đảo town today consists of two key tourist areas, Tam Đảo 1 Tourist Area and Tam Đảo 2 Tourist area, and is foremost a tourist site for the urban middle class in Hanoi and its expat community. While it is still called "The Đà Lạt of the North," the name now reminds visitors only of the cool climate, fresh air, and breathtaking views that characterize Tam Đảo today. The main attraction of Tam Đảo remains and draws in visitors escaping both heat and the hectic lifestyle of the modern city, thus reviving the colonial practice of traveling to the mountains during summer. Today, Tam Đảo's image combines nature, recreation, and authenticity. Almost all the historic buildings are gone, destroyed in the 1950s. Instead, new hotels and restaurants have been built in their place. While the long road climbing up the hill still exists, it has been improved to serve modern traffic. Nevertheless, the road is very narrow. Thus vehicles driving in opposite directions have to navigate carefully to pass safely.

Fig. 10: European style architecture dominates the newly constructed urban landscape in Tam Đảo

Photo: Ronald Hermann 2020. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Beyond this focus on serenity, Tam Đảo also represents modern entertainment. The natural scenery and new buildings offer visitors an ideal backdrop for group pictures and selfies. The French Catholic Church is a favorite for wedding pictures, which are extremely popular among Vietnamese. The couples do not necessarily have any connection to the Christian faith or French culture. The Church is reduced to a historical artifact, chosen for its beauty and uniqueness, without actual historical contextualization. Colonial history is only mentioned in tour guides and is not represented anywhere in the material space in Tam Đảo via signs or visible information. In photographs taken in 2008, the old letters denoting the former colonial swimming pool can still be seen, but it is unclear whether those still exist in 2021 (Manhhai, n.d.). Old staircases and fragments of old buildings are still scattered around Tam Đảo, but no conservation effort nor map indicates where these places are.

The emerging leisurescape

Since its founding in 1907, Tam Đảo has undergone several transformations from war destruction to touristic rediscovery. It developed from an exclusive resort and sanatorium for French elites, to a site in the war against the French, to a place of modern-day entertainment and consumption. While the town's rebuilding started in 1959, it only developed as a tourist destination after 2010. Since then, new hotels, guest houses, shops, and restaurants have been built at a rapid pace. They accommodate the growing number of foreign and domestic tourists and generate new income streams.

Fig. 11: Appropriating nature: Tam Đảo as rediscovered hill station

Photo: Franziska Nicolaisen 2020. CC BY-SA 4.0.

The large number of hotels compared to the local population and the omnipresence of souvenir shops in the town center demonstrate the focus on consumption. There is a strong focus on colorful architecture, referencing European villages combined with different architectural styles, embellishments, and bright colors.

While hill stations, small replicas of the colonial motherland, constituted a form of reverse "exoticism," recent developments in Tam Đảo demonstrate the modern process of "kitschification." The most prominent example of this process is "Tam Đảo Castle," built between 2015 and 2018, mixing neo-Gothic and Renaissance architectural styles (Luxurydesign, n.d.). The architects took inspiration from European castles, most notably Neuschwanstein Castle in Germany, the blueprint for Disney's Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty Castles (Ghelburi, n.d.). It was designed as a symbol of Tam Đảo (Luxurydesign, n.d.) and is the first visible building when driving up the hill towards the town center.

Fig. 12: Tam Đảo town coming into view from the main road leading up the hill, with Tam Đảo Castle at the forefront

Photo: Franziska Nicolaisen 2020. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Reviews of Tam Đảo Castle are predominantly positive, emphasizing its beauty with adjectives such as "majestic" and "impressive," and it serves as a popular backdrop for photographs. Even though it is set on a hilltop, visitors can easily reach the castle

on foot. Close to the castle, there is a restaurant with an outdoor terrace. Because the castle is still under renovation, the terrace is popular for taking pictures and enjoying the view.

The production of such a new "European space" with fairytale architecture is not embedded into a historical discourse of colonialism but a fantasy. Marketing on Vietnamese travel sites and blogs only refers to the colonial past as a footnote. However, tourism in Tam Đảo reproduces the aspirations and practices of earlier colonial French tourists. The marketing, directed at a growing Vietnamese middle class, is similar to historical photos depicting the space: golf, nature, and a swimming pool represent continuity from the colonial past.

Fig. 13: Commodification of heritage: Fairy tale architecture as leisurescape not embedded in historical context

Photo: Ronald Hermann 2020. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Finally, in the case of Tam Đảo, the idea of nature and nostalgia for rural life is prevalent. Travel sites point toward easy access to experiencing nature. The town is located in a national park, so there is some information regarding the biodiversity surrounding Tam Đảo. However, generally, there is a lack of rural context. Nature is an important marketing tool, but at the same time, the development and modernization of space also destroys the existing nature. Nature becomes

domesticated for tourists, staged as a safe space. However, access is limited, so it cannot be freely discovered. Instead, routes exist which are described online for tourists to follow. In a positive sense, this protects nature by limiting access. However, it also produces a level of simulation of the experience of a wild Vietnam.

One of the leading natural sites of Tam Đảo town is the "Silver waterfall" (*Thác Bạc).* However, in online reviews of the site, Vietnamese visitors criticize the smell of the water. Contrary to the expectation of pristine nature, when visitors come down the steep stairway that descends to the waterfall, they are reminded of the toll tourism development has taken on the natural surroundings of Tam Đảo.

Rural mountain landscapes, primary vegetation, and agriculture in high-altitude resorts have symbolized a form of authenticity since the origin of tourism. Tourist aspirations entangle participation in modernity as expressed by consumption and the search for authenticity and nostalgia for a rural and historical past. This entanglement is represented by the staging of the tourist landscape, as seen on tourist websites and Facebook review groups. The created landscape offers two backgrounds for selfies: (1) the lush mountainous landscape, including mysterious clouds and dream-like light, and (2) the recreated European castle and town square. All of this creates an imaginary fairyland, removed from time and space. It combines rural nostalgia, nostalgia for a childlike innocence represented in Disney fairytales, and the drive for modernity to be shown on social media.

One example of the commodification of historical spaces by creating the illusion of authenticity and appealing to nostalgia for an idealized colonial past is a collection of fragrances named after and inspired by Tam Đảo. Marketed as "A memory from the holy forests of Indochina" (Diptyqueoaris 2021) by one of the brand's founders who spent his childhood in the former French colony, it is produced in France and marketed to an affluent Western middle class.

Discussion: Global flows, the ownership of urban heritage, and coloniality

In this paper, we have discussed two historical urban spaces in Vietnam—the colonial-era hill station Tam Đảo and the pre-colonial trading port, Hội An—and their transformation through mobility, heritage production, and tourism. Both tourist sites are historically located at the interface of global flows of ideas, people, and goods, including trading networks and colonial travel practices. They were thus never merely local but permanently embedded in global narratives. Nowadays, in staging their respective tourist landscapes, both spaces not only present their historical and natural landscapes but integrate them once again into global flows of narratives and identities. We argue that these places move beyond the local narrative on Vietnamese identity as they represent an image of Vietnam to the outside world. As travel agencies market these spaces to a global, mobile audience, they are embedded into processes of alienation from local communities. Leisurescapes with

a strong focus on consumption emerge, partly erasing local realities in favor of exotic fantasies, rural nostalgia, and fictitious historical realities.

Thus, while flows are imagined as mobile and open, in reality, these global flows reshape the existing landscape and erect new boundaries. They limit access, ownership, and local agency for local people in the name of a homogeneous global vision of modernity, tourism, and consumption which washed up in these spaces on the backwash of the flow of tourists, experts, and investors. Consequently, in both locations underlying structures of coloniality have re-emerged. These structures are based on Vietnamese and global inequalities between the center, represented by metropolitan elites, and the periphery, with its local population. While creating new opportunities, tourist consumption excludes those that cannot participate and exploits the local labor force, like in the case of the tailors' in Hội An. This alienation leads to the re-establishment of metropolitan power structures.

However, integration in global flows of ideas, money, goods, and people also opens new opportunities for emancipation for the middle class. With access to the global community, new aspirations can emerge and be realized, for example, for artists in Hội An. For the Vietnamese middle class, domestic tourism allows them to appropriate global leisure practices at home and become part of a globalized, mobile community, shifting frames of reference of a younger generation beyond the local or national framework. The example of Tam Đảo shows that the "Disneyfication" of European architecture into a fairyland can be understood as an appropriation of European culture in a kind of reverse exoticism, similar to the European appropriation of Asian culture. Thus, future research should look at the changing power balance wherein Europe is perceived as a recreational and exotic "other" which provides adventure and excitement. In this sense, the reappropriation of a European space offers an opportunity to realize the aspirations of the urban middle class. However, this emancipation can be understood as a privilege of a mobile middle class that can use their social status to enforce their agency. Lower socio-economic groups cannot participate in these practices of emancipation. Instead, they face internal coloniality due to economic development and modernization. An intertwined and contested relationship exists between decolonization and the reinforcement of previous power structures.

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