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**Where to wear? An investigation into the  
tourist motivation and tourist experience  
of traditional fashion tourism  
in Huế City, Vietnam**

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## ABSTRACT

Traveling to a destination while engaging in clothing-related practices is referred to as fashion tourism. Over the past few years, there has been a growing interest in studying this niche of tourism. Several scholars have proved a variety of positive influences of fashion tourism on the development of localities. However, the majority of studies on fashion tourism mainly take an approach to Western perspectives with a focus on trendy contemporary clothing. Hence, there exists little understanding of fashion tourism in Asian countries that are renowned for traditional clothes. This thesis aims to address this gap in knowledge by exploring the motivations, experiences, and reflections of domestic tourists participating in traditional fashion tourism in *Huế* city, Vietnam.

As a bygone capital of Vietnam in the 19th and 20th centuries, *Huế* city possesses a myriad of well-preserved heritage sites and other cultural products. The long-standing history and aesthetic landscapes of *Huế* city have motivated many Vietnamese people to travel and wear traditional clothing during their trips. In order to unfold the reasons why this place is appealing to domestic tourists, the qualitative approach, namely in-depth, semi-structured interview, has been adopted. In total, eleven people of diverse socio-cultural backgrounds participated in this thesis. They are Vietnamese tourists who have been to heritage sites in *Huế* city at least once over the last five years and dressed in traditional clothing on their journeys.

The results of this research show that the participants' perspectives on and affinity for traditional clothes are divided into three layers of significance: a tourism product, a social tool, and a cultural heritage representing national identity. In parallel with the multiple layers of significance, the motivations and experiences of domestic tourists follow a three-stage process, indicating that traditional fashion tourism is a form of escapism, a means of social interactions, and most importantly, a reflection of belongingness.

**KEYWORDS:** *fashion tourism, cultural tourism, traditional clothing, Huế city, tourist motivation, tourist experience*

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Among all Vietnam-based metropolises, *Huế* is one of the few that has successfully maintained its lure of a placid city. The beauty and attractiveness of *Huế* are considered a marked contrast to the images of the hustle and bustle with modern high-rise towers of other cities. Being the former imperial capital of Vietnam from 1802 to 1945 CE, *Huế* city is home to rich cultural resources and a variety of historical landmarks with architectural artistry, most of which have been well-preserved for ages (Bui, 2009). Hence, without a doubt, this city has become a fascinating destination for aspiring cultural tourists to explore. For many years, domestic tourists of Vietnam have often dressed in *Áo Dài*, a renowned type of traditional clothes, during their visit to *Huế* city. More recently, this place has witnessed a significant growth of youngsters putting on many other types of ancient Vietnamese attire while strolling around heritage sites in response to the trend of nostalgia and an increasing interest in Vietnam's traditional fashion among the young generation ("Vietnam's ancient costumes", 2020). In other words, it is relevant to say that domestic cultural tourism with an emphasis on traditional clothing is getting more and more ubiquitous in *Huế* city.

Strictly speaking, the fact that tourists are attracted to places associated with fashion is not a new phenomenon. In the context of the global market's competitiveness, it is necessary for destinations to remain and stimulate economic growth of the tourism sector by defining their distinctive and appealing features, including fashion (Siaga, 2018). Every year, there is a large number of tourists flocking to the cities that are well-known for fashion, for example, Paris, Milan, or New York (Jedras, 2011; Siaga, 2018). These destinations enable the visitors to have an immersive experience of fashion through different activities, for instance, catwalk shows, fashion weeks, exhibitions, shopping, and so forth. As a consequence, fashion has been serving as a tool to enhance destinations' images in a highly competitive tourist market, which attracts more tourists to the site and subsequently, offers a considerable contribution to the local economy.

To put it another way, fashion should be considered one of the critical aspects that has an impact on the development of tourism. Thus, fashion-based tourism, or fashion tourism, has been recognized as one of the most important and growing niches of tourism by several scholars (Farsani & Jamshidi, 2020; Bada, 2013; Lewis, Kerr, & Burgess, 2013). Notwithstanding the significance of fashion tourism and its growth in academic research, there exist a number of

critical gaps in knowledge. To be specific, the focus of most existing studies has so far been limited to two main thematic concerns: the influence of fashion tourism on the images of destinations (e.g., Siaga, 2018; Chilesse & Russo, 2008, Lazzeretti, Capone & Casadei, 2017) and tourists' shopping practices (e.g., Boulhosa & Casais, 2019; Choi, Heo, & Law, 2015a, 2015b). As such, there still remains little knowledge about the role of fashion in shaping the tourists' motivations and experiences, which are essential and fascinating topics of research in the field of tourism since they provide explanations for the tourists' behaviors and demands (Sharpley, 2018). That is the first blind spot that this research paper aims to address.

In addition, the majority of previous empirical studies commonly take an approach to contemporary fashion, especially *haute couture* clothing, in the Western contexts and share their exclusive focus on international tourists (Lewis, Kerr, & Burgess, 2013). It leads to another gap in knowledge that this research wishes to fulfill, namely a lack of attention to the practices of fashion tourism in Asian backgrounds. As fashion tourism is a multifaceted phenomenon that continues to develop, it is necessary for scholars to take wider perspectives to contribute to a holistic understanding of this field. However, it should be noted that instead of high fashion, Asian countries are well-known for traditional dresses such as the *Kimono* of Japan, *Hanbok* of South Korea, or *Áo Dài* of Vietnam. Additionally, since traditional clothing is seen as a symbol of identity and cultural heritage of a nation (Montazer & Bidoki, 2017; Disele, Tyler, & Power, 2011), it largely engages the locals rather than foreign nationals. In other words, domestic tourists have greater accessibility to and socio-cultural awareness of traditional clothing. In this way, it can be argued that the fashion tourism in Asian contexts is closely associated with traditional clothes and popular among domestic visitors.

As a matter of fact, the motivations and experiences of domestic tourists participating in (traditional) fashion tourism cannot be fully grasped through the same lens as international visitors. In order to address the blind spots of our knowledge in this field, this master thesis investigates the motivations, experiences, and reflections of domestic tourists engaging in traditional fashion tourism in Vietnam, with *Huế* city as a case study. The findings of this research contribute to clarifying why Vietnamese tourists engage with heritage sites and traditional clothing, and to what extent traditional fashion might have an impact on their travel motivations and experiences. Furthermore, Vietnam has rich cultural resources, both tangible and intangible, hence the potential for the development of cultural tourism. Yet, the dominant focus of Vietnamese researchers is on dark tourism in which tourists visit the remnants in

relation to Vietnam's recent wars against France and the United States, ignoring other promising cultural tourism products like ancient attires. Thus, the practical relevance of this research is reflected in the fact that it sheds light on the inextricable relationship between traditional clothes and tourism growth in Vietnam, serving as a framework for the local government and tourism practitioners to adopt relevant policy adjustment and strategic supplementation regarding the fashion tourism as a niche of cultural tourism in *Huế* city in particular, and in Vietnam in general. With the defined objectives, a research question is formulated as follows:

*How and in what ways does traditional Vietnamese fashion relate to domestic tourists' motivations to visit Vietnam's heritage sites as in the case of Huế City, and what meanings do they give to their experiences?*

To seek an answer to the above research question, this study adopts a qualitative approach to the motivational forces and experiences of domestic visitors to *Huế* city and how they interpret and attribute meanings to their experiences. The data was gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with eleven Vietnamese tourists of different social backgrounds who have traveled to *Huế* city in the last five years and dressed in traditional clothing during their visit. After being transcribed verbatim, the obtained data was analyzed with the thematic analysis (Bryman, 2012) method to provide and present the results in a systematic way.

This master thesis consists of five major chapters: **Introduction**, **Literature review**, **Methodology**, **Findings and Discussion**, and **Conclusion**. The first chapter, named **Introduction**, has presented an overview of the research, pointing out the background and rationales for conducting traditional fashion tourism in Vietnam with an emphasis on domestic tourists. It also provides the research objectives, research question, and the methodology that the paper would utilize to give the results. Chapter two, **Literature review**, examines previous studies on the socio-historical context of Vietnam's tourism, the emergence of fashion tourism, the motivations and experiences of tourists engaging in traditional fashion tourism, and the introduction of *Huế* city as the case study. Chapter three, **Methodology**, demonstrates and substantiates the chosen method for this research paper. Chapter four, **Analysis and Findings**, reports the results emerging from obtained data, reflecting domestic tourists' affinity with traditional Vietnamese clothing and how much it can affect their motivations and experiences

of traveling to *Huế* city. The last chapter, **Conclusion**, summarizes the main points of this thesis, acknowledges its limitations, and offers recommendations for future research and the improvements in the practices of traditional fashion tourism in Vietnam.



## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The second chapter reviews the literature on fashion tourism and the fashion tourists' motivations and experiences with a focus on traditional clothing in Vietnam. By discussing the key contexts and concepts that lead to the research topic, the chapter aims to provide a deeper understanding of (traditional) fashion tourism throughout the world in general, and in Vietnam in particular. Chapter 2 is structured as follows. First, this chapter contextualizes the socio-historical forces upon which Vietnam's tourism was developed. Next, to give more insights into fashion tourism as a niche of cultural tourism, the literature review discusses the role of (traditional) fashion and how it contributes to the development of tourism. After that, the next section looks at the motivations and experiences of tourists engaging in fashion tourism, followed by the introduction of traditional fashion tourism in Vietnam with *Huế* city as a case study.

### 2.1. Tourism in Vietnam: The socio-historical context

#### 2.1.1. Cultural tourism in the context of globalization

The development of tourism has an inextricable link to the globalization process. Thus, studies on tourism should be placed within the globalizing context to unfold more complicated elements underlying its development (Hannam, 2002). Without any doubt, globalization has become a wide-ranging topic in the contemporary world. This phenomenon takes place in all spheres of life. Nevertheless, there is no consensus on the definition of 'globalization' because of the numerous ideas underpinning this concept. For example, Giddens (1990) defines globalization as the accumulation of social relations over the world, wherein multiple places are connected to each other in such a way that things occurring in a locality can be shaped by an event of a different region, and vice versa. Waters (2001) postulates a more multifaceted conceptualization, as globalization is described as a social process in which geographic restrictions on economic, cultural, social and political aspects gradually diminish, followed by a shift in the way people act. For Amin (2002), globalization refers to the connection of both spaces and places with global-level forces such as international ideologies, worldwide structures of authority, transnational organizations, and others. Irrespective of the disagreement on the definition of the term globalization, it is evident that in the present context of globalization, geographical borders are blurred and social relations and transactions worldwide are linked with one another, resulting in transnational activity operations.

The globalization process has triggered a long-standing debate on its impact on national cultures and local cultural patterns. Despite being an inevitable process that occurs in the worldwide development, globalization is claimed to result in homogenization (Mak, 2012). By proposing the theory of “McDonaldization”, Ritzer (1995) argues that globalization through standardization induces the removal of (cultural) distinctness between communities. Thus, it is a threat to local cultural identities and unique cultural patterns of every society, which can lead to the deprivation of cultural diversity throughout the world (Letchner & Boli, 2005). By the end of the 20th century, standardization of tourism products and depletion of local norms were depicted as major drawbacks of globalization (Reisinger, 2009).

However, being global does not indicate being similar or the same, since the globalization context varies between different places. In contrast to the ideas of homogenization impact, many scholars posit that globalization can help to reinforce cultural identities. To illustrate, globalization contributes to an increased awareness of cultural differences between multiple communities, which can provoke the revitalization of nationalism and fundamentalism in many cases (Sharpley, 2018). In this regard, Appadurai (1996) suggests that globalization can spark homogenization to some extent, but at the same time, it can also develop heterogeneity. Hence, globalization is viewed as a complicated process involving a mix of homogenization and heterogenization. Similarly, Scott (2000) further postulates that globalization provides many opportunities for the preservation of local cultural traditions and the growth of cultural innovations. Global forces, on that account, should be seen as the acknowledgment of cultural differences, cultural domestication, or cultural innovation (Reisinger, 2013), rather than threats to cultural tourism.

### **2.1.2. The evolution of (cultural) tourism in Vietnam**

Even though tourism is a phenomenon that took place very early in history (Sharpley, 2018), this sector is relatively young in Vietnam due to historical and political reasons (Bui, 2009). In fact, there is evidence that traveling practices in Vietnam had existed from the feudal era to French colonization. However, it was not until 1986 that the country saw significant growth in the field of tourism. Prior to 1986, Vietnam had suffered greatly due to the severe wars of independence against France and the United States in the 19th and 20th centuries, followed by the economic embargoes imposed by the United States government. Infrastructure and landscapes were severely damaged during wartime. Thus, domestic tourism of the country

was nearly non-existent, whereas inbound tourism was politically sensitive and merely developed for political reasons, with foreign tourists serving as political delegates (Bui, 2009; Truong & Le, 2017).

With the launch of the *Đổi Mới* (Renovation) economic reforms by the government in 1986, tourism in Vietnam began to flourish and subsequently became one of the most crucial driving forces of the national economy (Truong, Hall, & Gary, 2014). The open-door policies imply Vietnam's integration into the global economy in the era of globalization. The change in government's policies has resulted in the fall of communism and the transition to a free-market economy, encouraging foreign investment and ownership into several sectors in Vietnam, including tourism (Suntikul, Butler, & Airey, 2008). Furthermore, Vietnam claimed membership in several regional and international associations; for example, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1995, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in 1998, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2007. That has offered the countries opportunities to participate in the global economy and regional integration initiatives, including tourism (Bui & Jolliffe, 2011).

It is noteworthy that making the country a key tourism destination in Asia-Pacific, especially in Southeast Asia, is a critical strategy of Vietnam (Pham, 2012). Located in the eastern part of Southeast Asia region, Vietnam shares borders with China and Laos in the north, and Cambodia in the west, and possesses 3260 kilometers of coastline with a myriad of beaches and archipelagoes. That has provided many opportunities for regional tourism development in Vietnam. Notably, Chinese tourists are a significant group of Vietnam's inbound tourism, as the number of tourists coming from mainland China often ranks the highest among international travelers (Le & Ridderstaat, 2021). It manifests the significance of developing border tourism in Vietnam.

In addition to being a low-cost destination for foreign visitors, Vietnam has also seen a growth in domestic tourism, considering it is one of the most populous countries in the world, with a population of over 98.5 million people in 2021 (General Statistic Office of Vietnam, 2021). In fact, even though inbound tourism receives more scholarly attention, domestic arrivals are seen as the primary market of Vietnam's tourism industry for now and in the future as well (Bui & Jolliffe, 2011). To be specific, the number of domestic tourists always remains high, for example, over 85 million people in 2019 (Vietnam National Administration of

Tourism, 2019). Explaining Vietnamese tourists' motivations for traveling, Johnson (2010) indicates that they are likely to travel to get away from the current constraints of ideological struggles about the recent history of anti-colonialism and nationalist disputes. As Sharpley (2018) states, nostalgia can develop as a response to frustration with the present and apprehension about the future. In the case of Vietnam, the nostalgic interests seem to go back further into the country's ancient history, into which traditional clothing serves as an intriguing window.

At the same time, as previously stated, the process of globalization fosters conditions for local cultures to be preserved and promoted and gives people opportunities to appreciate them (Sharpley, 2018). In the context of applying *Đổi Mới* reforms as a response to the expansion of globalization around the world, Vietnam's cultural distinctiveness is getting more and more attention from the Vietnamese nationals, which gradually fosters different niches of cultural tourism. It is of significance to note that cultural tourism is a potential sector in Vietnam, as 4000 years of history have brought the country rich cultural resources and traditions, including textiles (Bui, 2009). Within the scope of this thesis, domestic cultural tourism in Vietnam with an approach to traditional fashion tourism will be studied.

## **2.2. The inextricable connection between fashion and tourism**

### **2.2.1. The role of (traditional) fashion**

Fashion is a pervasive concept that underpins multiple facets of life, for example, culture, entertainment, business, politics, and so forth. Thus, fashion plays a crucial role in several aspects, though its importance is constantly underestimated (Godart, 2012). The meaning of fashion is indeed about more than just clothing people wear to cover their bodies. As emphasized by Bada (2013), fashion is one of the greatest and most influential aspects of civilization. It is the outcome of a unique kind of endeavor undertaken by humanity. From early in history, humans have recognized the importance of fashion. For instance, as early as the 15th century, fashion was deemed so significant and powerful that Charles VII was asked to create a separate ministry of fashion in France (Svendsen, 2006). In the past, fashion was solely the domain of the royalty, the wealthy, and celebrities. Following the development of society, fashion has been gradually democratized and thus, approached by people of lower social statuses (Godart, 2012).

Although fashion is frequently associated with clothes, its application and meanings are diverse. According to Vagasi-Kovacs (2013), fashion, as a product, possesses creative and cultural values and has an impact on a variety of industries. In a similar sense, Kiều (2018) indicates that every costume has cultural values which are shaped by the needs of human life, and it changes over time as communities and nations develop. Indeed, fashion is important because it not only meets human's basic needs, but is also closely connected with identity (Bada, 2013; Maneva, 2017; Mūrniece, 2015; Godart, 2012). Everyone is involved in fashion, as everyone needs to wear clothes. However, different people will have different reasons behind their choices of clothing. Fashion, therefore, allows us to gain an understanding of personal and collective identities, cultural backgrounds, beliefs, social values, social statuses, or environments. It is noteworthy that clothes do not just simply reflect the cultural aspects and social belonging of the wearers. Instead, they can also be active agents in shaping a user's identity related to one's gender and broader sociality (Iuga, n.d.). Discussing the relevance of fashion in society, Yang (2004) argues that clothing "is a "material" product, but it is also significant in terms of the cultural progression of humanity" (p. 3).

It should be noted that due to the values and advantages it holds, fashion has received much attention in the academic world in recent decades (e.g., Godart, 2012; Davis, 1992). Nevertheless, most of the existing studies on fashion focus primarily on the Western perspectives, since scholars often show little interest in Asian clothing (Godart, 2012). As such, there is still little understanding of the role of fashion in the Asian context. However, it is evident that while the clothing of Western countries is often referred to contemporary (high) fashion, Asian nations are more popular with the traditional attires, such as *Hanbok* of South Korea, *Kimono* of Japan, or *Áo Dài* of Vietnam.

In fact, the symbolic values of fashion manifest themselves more transparently in traditional dresses. According to Disele, Tyler, and Power (2011), traditional clothing refers to an ensemble and design that represents a community as a whole, or has an association with specific cultural behavior and values. Traditional clothing is passed down through generations, and has some necessary changes in its shapes and significance due to a shift in taste and values over time (Iuga, n.d.). What makes traditional clothes differ from contemporary ones is that long history and rich culture are embedded in the clothing itself. They depict the creativity, traditions, quintessence, cultures, social life, and many others, of our ancestors. They are products of the past, having witnessed many ups and downs in the history of a community or a

nation. As such, traditional clothing is not merely a physical product, but rather a tangible cultural heritage of a community as a whole (Montazer & Bidoki, 2017; Disele, Tyler, & Power, 2011).

### **2.2.2. Fashion tourism**

Fashion has a significant impact on the growth of the tourism sector. In recent years, fashion has become one of the major unique selling points of a place over others (Lazzeretti, Capone & Casadei, 2017; Chilese & Russo, 2008). It is considered an effective tool to strengthen a destination's branding and stimulate local competitive advantage (Capone & Lazzeretti, 2016). For instance, Barcelona (Richards, 2011), Paris, Milan, and New York (Montazer & Bidoki, 2017) are the cities that are well-known for high fashion, which is one of the most attractive elements of the destinations to many tourists. By conducting clothing-related projects such as fashion shows, these cities attract a huge flux of tourists every year. To put it another way, fashion can be utilized to create or reinforce a destination's image, making a positive impact on the beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a tourist has of a particular place (Biondo, 2021). As emphasized by Ratnasari (2020), the promotion of fashion can boost the economic growth of not only the fashion industry but also the tourism sector. In addition, clothing-related tourism can stimulate personal values in tourists, such as self-improvement, self-direction, universalism, assurance, and benevolence (Choi, Heo, & Law, 2015a). As a result, fashion is believed to be an influential part behind the tourists' travel decisions and their preference for a destination (Lewis, Kerr, & Burgess, 2013).

The influence of fashion on tourists' behaviors has developed to such an extent that a new type of tourism has emerged, which is known as fashion-based tourism, or fashion tourism. Fashion tourism has multifaceted nature as it is inextricably connected to other forms of tourism. Thus, the concept of fashion tourism is sophisticated and so far, there has been no consensual definition for this topic (Craik, 2013). Nevertheless, according to Siaga (2018), fashion tourism can be generally understood as a niche market in which tourists travel to a location to shop, explore, discuss, and consume fashion-related elements. In a similar sense, Biondo (2021) that even though fashion tourism is traditionally associated with shopping tourism, the concept is now used to demonstrate the trend of tourists flocking to fashion destinations in order to partake in fashion experiences regardless of the nature of commerce.

Fashion tourism is an approach that can be placed under the umbrella paradigm of creative tourism, shopping tourism, and cultural tourism (Siaga, 2018; Montazer & Bidoki, 2017; Farsani & Jamshidi, 2020). To illustrate, the highlight of creative tourism is the tourists' engagement in creative practices, for example, participating in crafting workshops during their trip (Richards & Raymond, 2000). On the other hand, shopping tourism is described as a form of travel in which shopping is the primary tourists' motivation, or one of the major reasons for their travel (Choi, Heo, & Law, 2015b). In terms of cultural tourism, the tourists travel to cultural attractions to have experiences that meet their cultural demands (Ashworth & Dietvorst, 1995). As mentioned earlier, the study of clothing in this paper focuses on traditional fashion as a cultural heritage of a nation; therefore, it ties to the domestic nature of tourism. Thus, within the scope of this thesis, fashion tourism is approached as a form of domestic cultural tourism.

Despite its significance, the number of extensive studies on the relationship between fashion and tourism remains limited (Lewis, Kerr, & Burgess, 2013). Strictly speaking, that tourists are attracted by clothing-related places is not a new topic of research (e.g., Lazzeretti, Capone & Casadei, 2017; Montazer & Bidoki, 2017). However, the majority of existing studies mainly highlight fashion tourism as a niche of creative tourism and shopping tourism, pointing out how clothing can affect the artistic and shopping practices of tourists to result in a significant economic growth. Moreover, it should be noted that these studies predominantly focus on international tourists from the perspective of inbound tourism. Thus, little attention has been given to fashion in tourism as a cultural product of a community, and how it is perceived by domestic tourists. That is a blind spot that this paper aims to address by studying traditional fashion tourism with an approach to domestic tourists in Vietnam.

## **2.3. Fashion tourists: Motivations and experiences**

### **2.3.1. The tourist motivation and tourist experience**

Tourism, at its elementary level, is a product that is acquired and consumed by the tourists. Thus, every tourist goes through the demand tourism process (Sharpley, 2018). As Sharpley (2018) posits, the demand for tourism consists of complex and multifaceted aspects. As a result, it is critical to study every important element of the process, including the tourists' motivations, experiences, and how they give meanings to their visit in order to gain a holistic

understanding of how and why tourists behave in a particular way. That will subsequently assist tourism makers in enhancing their practices for the development of the tourism industry.

Motivation is one of the most fundamental topics, and at the same time, among the most complicated areas when it comes to tourism studies. The tourist motivation can be understood as the driving force behind human behaviors (Crompton, 1979). Therefore, Mill and Morrison (1992) indicate that the tourist motivation should be the initial factor to consider when researching tourists' behaviors and the tourism process as a whole. Within the tourism field, motivations can be divided into push and pull factors. To illustrate, push factors manifest the intrinsic driving forces that lead to people's decision to travel, for instance, getting away from reality, exploration, or relaxation. On the other hand, pull factors concern the characteristics of destinations that appeal to the tourists, such as stunning landscapes, recreational facilities, or events (Crompton, 1979; Sharpley, 2018). It should be noted that in practice, the differentiation between push and pull factors is not clear-cut as there exist a variety of other contextual factors (Sharpley, 2018). Nonetheless, an understanding of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational forces would effectively assist scholars in exploring the reasons underlying tourists' destination choice and their travel behaviors.

Along with the tourist motivation, tourist experience is also a fundamental research issue. The tourist experience can be defined as emotional, physical, spiritual, and intellectual interactions between visitors and a particular place (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). That is a sophisticated process of psychology which differs from everyday experiences (Cohen, 2004). A good experience is likely to have an impact on the tourists' destination loyalty or intention to recommend the site to other people (Hsu et al., 2008; Zhang & Walsh, 2020). In other words, an understanding of the tourist experience would allow tourism practitioners to improve their operations to attract more visitors to the destinations. Emphasizing the significance of the tourist experience, Zhang and Walsh (2020) indicate that tourism scholars need to take into consideration both on-site experiences and post-visit experiences to gain a holistic insight into the tourists' behaviors. As such, by uncovering not only Vietnamese tourists' experiences during their trips but also the meanings they attribute to their experiences, this thesis would provide a deeper understanding of the tourist experience of traditional fashion tourism.



### 2.3.2. The impact of (social) media on fashion tourists

Similar to any other types of tourist, fashion tourists have their own motivations for engaging in fashion-based travel. So far, no research that explicitly investigates the motivations and experiences of fashion tourists has been implemented. What is more, studies on fashion-related tourism often put an emphasis on shopping practices (Bada, 2013; Boulhosa & Casais, 2019) instead of the cultural heritage experiences. However, based on existing studies, it is likely that social media can be one of the significant motivational forces for tourists to visit fashion-related destinations. Indeed, as Lundberg and Ziakas (2018) indicate, media plays an integral role in contemporary society, and has infiltrated a variety of industries, including tourism.

As remarked upon previously, many of existing studies on the field of fashion tourism take an approach to international tourists and marketing strategies of the destinations. To be specific, the promotion of major fashion-related events and festivals on national and international media platforms has resulted in a massive influx of tourists to cities that are renowned for high fashion, for example, Paris and Milan (Montazer & Bidoki, 2017; Jedras, 2011). Thus, the “tourist gaze” (Urry, 1990) of these Western cities is closely related to *haute couture* fashion.

Unlike Western countries, the typical features of fashion in Asian countries are often associated with traditional costumes. As such, it can be argued that fashion tourism in Asia should be studied from the perspective of traditional clothing. With regard to traditional fashion tourism, the considerable interest in the *Hanbok* of South Korea is a perfect example of how the media plays a role in tourists’ travel decisions and choices of destination. To illustrate, many people in Korea as well as around the world are obsessed with the aesthetic cultural images of South Korea, including the *Hanbok* as the country’s traditional costume, that is shown in movies, dramas, music videos, and other forms of media as a result of the growth of *Hallyu* (or the Korean Wave). Motivated by this place of imagination (Reijnders, 2011), these people may travel to specific locations seen on screens and dress up in Hanbok to actively seek out the material references to (re)affirm their perceptions of reality and imagination (Jin, 2017). It should be noted that the fact that international tourists dress up in traditional costumes of a country can be considered a significant cultural symbolic compliment. More critically, this phenomenon refers to cultural appropriation in tourism, in which the tourists adopt different

spheres of a culture, such as traditional fashion, that belong to another community (George, 2010).

### **2.3.3. Authenticity**

Since fashion tourism can be linked to *lieux d'imagination*, or places of the imagination (Reijnders, 2011), it becomes relevant to discuss the notion of authenticity in tourists' motivations and experiences. According to Sharpley (2018), authenticity is an ambiguous term that is commonly used in academic literature to demonstrate tourism motivation, tourism experience, or tourism attractions and events. In fact, the concept of authenticity is often touched upon in cultural tourism and its sub types, such as fashion tourism, because the representation of the past or the 'Other' is embedded in these tourism niches (Wang, 1999; Sharpley, 2018). MacCannell (1973) points out that the tourism world is replete with the manifestation of the significant role of authenticity when it comes to tourists and their experiences.

Due to the complex nature of authenticity, scholars have proposed different definitions and interpretations for this concept. As indicated by Taylor (2001), "there are at least as many definitions of authenticity as there are those who write about it" (p. 8). For example, Boorstin (1962) claims that authenticity results from pseudo-events, whereas MacCannell (1973) postulates that it refers to what the tourists find true to place. It should be noted that within the tourism context, authenticity is not fixed (Sharpley, 2018). Instead, the degree of authenticity of a sight or attraction is determined by the tourists' connection with that sight or attraction. Based upon the notions of back region and front region introduced by Goffman (1959), MacCannell (1973) has proposed the concept of staged authenticity. The staged authenticity concerns the fact that products are staged, hence, they are perceived as authentic by tourists. Nevertheless, to the locals, these products have lost their original meaning and can no longer be seen as the representation of local culture.

Wang (1999) divides authenticity in the field of tourism into three main types, including objective authenticity, constructive authenticity, and existential authenticity. To be specific, objective authenticity refers to the genuineness of originals, such as buildings, artifacts, or other objects. This form of authenticity can be applied to resources of traditional fashion tourism when it comes to the fashion items originating from the past or being made by local craftsmen.

On the other hand, constructive authenticity deals with objects symbolically. This notion is used to describe the authenticity that tourists or tourism producers expect from toured objects regarding their beliefs, preferences, prospects, and others. Constructive authenticity is socially constructed and influenced by the tourists' perception; therefore, it is changeable, contextual, relative and evolutive (Salamone, 1997). In other words, what is considered authentic by some tourists can be seen as inauthentic by others. Indeed, it reflects the significant role of tourism marketing, since the destination's images created and promoted will be perceived as authentic by the visitors, whereas the aspects that are not promoted are often assumed to be inauthentic (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). In traditional fashion tourism, constructive authenticity exists when a clothing-related experience matches the tourists' imagination. This imagination can be shaped through different ways, for example, social media and marketing.

Both objective authenticity and constructive authenticity focus on the objects, but according to Wang (1999), these two concepts cannot comprehensively interpret the tourists' experiences. Hence, it is crucial to take into consideration the idea of existential authenticity, which is activity-related. Existential authenticity is shaped by personal perceptions. This type of authenticity does not result from the genuineness of objects, but emerges from the fact that tourists engage in non-ordinary activities, escaping the constraints of everyday life. Regarding traditional fashion tourism, non-ordinary practices can be trying new types of ancient costumes or taking photos at heritage sites while wearing traditional clothing, allowing the tourists to actualize parts of their selves and gradually experience a sense of belonging.

Overall, in the context of traditional fashion tourism, different interpretations of authenticity can coexist, depending on tourists' perceptions of authenticity and what they seek for in tourism practices related to traditional clothing. Experiences that are perceived as authentic by some can be not authentic to others. To put it another way, authenticity is in the eye of the beholder.

#### **2.3.4. A sense of belonging**

This research paper studies domestic fashion tourism with an emphasis on traditional clothes as cultural heritage. Being the cultural heritage of a nation, traditional fashion reflects the national identity and authenticity, allowing domestic tourists to have a "sense of belonging" (Morley, 2001). From the psychological perspective, a sense of belonging is described as "the

experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment” (Hagerty et al., 1992, p. 173). Generally, the sense of belonging can be understood as a sentimental connection in which individuals can have a feeling of being part of something larger. Since belongingness is one of the essential psychological needs of humans, this notion has been widely discussed and investigated in a variety of fields, including tourism.

Within the field of tourism, a sense of belonging can be defined as the feeling of identification or psychological attachment that the tourists have when visiting a particular destination (Chi & Han, 2020). In other words, its emergence involves both the visitors and destinations. A sense of belonging is believed to have the function of stimulating a complicated relationship between tourists and a place, creating a personal sentiment (Tsai, 2016). That affective attachment is referred to as “topophilia” by Tuan (1974). When a visitor has a great sense of belonging to the place, he or she is more likely to form an emotional connection with the location and become attached to it (Han et al., 2019). As a result, promoting a strong sense of belonging in the tourist experience is an effective strategy for the tourism development of any destination. As pointed out by Han and Hyun (2018), tourists who acquire a sense of belonging would have higher satisfaction, and subsequently, loyalty intentions towards the attractions.

By wearing traditional costumes while visiting heritage sites, domestic tourists tend to feel connected to the locations, the history, and the wider national community, fostering their pride in the country’s cultural quintessence. In other words, it is relevant to say that through traditional clothing, the tourists are able to have a more immersive experience, allowing them to strengthen their national identities. In this thesis, the motivations and experiences of domestic tourists engaging in traditional fashion tourism will be analyzed empirically through the case of *Huế* city in Vietnam.

## **2.4. Traditional fashion tourism in Vietnam**

### **2.4.1. The affinity with traditional attires**

As discussed above, in the context of globalization and digitization, the trend of nostalgia has widely developed, encouraging people to (re)discover local and national cultural heritage as a way to promote a sense of national/local identity (Sharpley, 2018). This

phenomenon has also taken place in Vietnam. Over the past few years, following the advancements in technology and information, there has been a growing interest in national history, traditions and cultures among Vietnamese people (Đâu, 2019). Notably, ancient clothing has received much attention from the Vietnamese and attracted the interest of many young people ("Vietnam's ancient costumes", 2020). In the past, most of the Vietnamese often thought of *Áo Dài* when it comes to traditional clothing. However, the contemporary form of *Áo Dài* that people nowadays are familiar with only dates back to the early of the 20th century (Trần, 2013; Đoàn, 2006). As a matter of fact, the cultural heritage of traditional costumes of Vietnam is not limited to *Áo Dài*, since the country has undergone 4000 years of history, hence rich, unique and long-standing national cultural heritage and traditions (Đoàn, 2006).

With the aim to revive the quintessence of traditional Vietnamese clothing, multiple projects have been implemented to restore and reconstruct traditional costumes of Vietnam, for instance, the book "*Ngàn năm áo mũ*" (*A thousand Years of Caps and Robes*) by scholar Trần Quang Đức (2013) or the publication "*Weaving a Realm*" by the cultural organization Vietnam Centre (2020). Indeed, these works are important, because the traces of traditional Vietnamese costumes were profoundly influenced when the Western culture introduced by the French during wartime was thoroughly imposed on Vietnamese society (Trần, 2013). Thanks to such projects, the Vietnamese have gradually gained an understanding of different types of traditional attires of wider national history, such as *Giao Lĩnh* (cross-collar) dress, *Nhật Bình* dress, *Ngũ Thân* (five-panel) dress, and others (see Appendix A).

Recently, it can also be easily seen that traditional Vietnamese clothing has been indirectly promoted through different media platforms. To be specific, several Vietnamese singers have decided to wear traditional dresses in their music videos, for example, Hoà Minzy's music video named "*Không thể cùng nhau suốt kiếp*". In addition, on social media such as Facebook or Instagram, many young Vietnamese people have posted photos in which they were wearing ancient attires at historical landmarks. These actions have contributed to the spread of traditional clothes among the Vietnamese. Additionally, they illustrate that domestic tourists are becoming more open to new experiences in relation to traditional dresses.

#### **2.4.2. Case study: *Huế* City, Vietnam**

People who wear traditional dresses tend to seek out aesthetic backdrops which are often historical sites with traditional architecture complementing the nature of the clothes, or

actual local heritage from which a specific type of traditional costume originated. *Huế* city in Vietnam is one of these places. The city is located at the center of *Thừa Thiên Huế* province on the North Central Coast of Vietnam. Regardless of its small size and population, *Huế* is designated as a primary economic zone for Vietnam's central region (Bui, 2009). *Huế* city, according to Nguyen and Cheung (2014), is one of the most popular and favorite tourist destinations in Vietnam due to its rich cultural heritage and serenity. Located at a strategic position in Vietnam, *Huế* city was the imperial capital of the *Nguyễn* dynasty, the last royal dynasty of Vietnam, from 1802 to 1945 CE. In addition to its role as the political center, the city was also considered as a cultural and religious center during 143 years of reign of the *Nguyễn* dynasty (Suntikul et al., 2016).

The illustrious history and cultural quintessence of *Huế* city are still preserved and manifested through pristine landmarks, relics and monuments originating from the city's prime as the royal capital of Vietnam. To be specific, *Huế* city is renowned for a myriad of heritage sites such as *Hoàng Thành* (Imperial City), *Tử Cấm Thành* (Forbidden Purple City), Mausoleum of Emperor *Khải Định*, Mausoleum of Emperor *Minh Mạng*, Mausoleum of Emperor *Tự Đức*, and many other related royal palaces. Most of these sites used to be places of living and working of emperors, empresses and other nobles. It is noteworthy that through the elites, some types of clothing have been made popular, such as the *Nhật Bình* dress, a costume for the empresses during the *Nguyễn* dynasty.

Although several heritage sites were partly damaged by the wars, the whole landscape has been sufficiently well-preserved. Given its significant cultural and historical values, the complex of *Huế* monuments was inscribed as World Cultural Heritage by UNESCO in 1993. With the potential for tourism development, *Huế* city has been promoted by the Vietnamese government as a must-go destination of the new millennium for not only domestic tourists but also foreign visitors (Bui, 2009).

As the strength of *Huế* city is its possession of cultural resources, the local government has put much focus on the development of cultural tourism (Bui, 2009). Noticeably, in recent years, tourism makers of the city have paid attention to the promotion of the charms of ancient costumes in response to the growing interest in traditional fashion among the Vietnamese. For example, visitors wearing traditional Vietnamese attire were offered free entrance to relics in *Huế* city for three days from March 6th to 8th 2021 as a celebration of International Women's

Day (Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, 2021). Such a project, undoubtedly, would encourage Vietnamese people to preserve and promote the traditional clothing as the nation's glorious and precious cultural heritage. At the same time, it can attract more tourists to the city, hence the development of the tourism sector. For many years, domestic visitors to *Huế* have often worn the *Áo Dài* since it is the most common type of traditional clothing of Vietnam. But in recent years, the tourists, especially young people, have also dressed in other traditional attires in response to the increasing affinity to the nation's cultural heritage. That phenomenon has opened up the connection between the tourism sector and traditional dresses. Thus, it is of importance to study the traditional fashion tourism in *Huế* city to unravel the impact of clothing on Vietnamese tourists' decision-making and experiences.

## CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 demonstrates and justifies the chosen method to explore the motivations, experiences, and reflections of domestic tourists involved in traditional fashion tourism in *Huế* City, Vietnam. It includes: research philosophy and design, data collection procedure, data analysis strategy, and ethical issues.

### 3.1. Research philosophy and design

That social phenomena are perceived as the consequences of interplay and reflection of different actors, rather than an individual existence, implies a constructivist approach (Matthews & Ross, 2010). To be specific, the perspective of a social constructionist on reality is non-essentialist, indicating that reality cannot be recognized objectively. Instead, reality is generated by the interactions between humans themselves or between humans and objects/spaces. To put it another way, our world is constantly and actively shaped through people's meaning-making practices (Couldry & Hepp, 2016). This ontological perspective is believed to be the most pertinent for this thesis, as the operations of traditional fashion tourism necessitate the participation, interactions, and interpretations of various social actors, including the tourists.

Since meanings of reality are actively constructed, it is relevant to adopt an interpretivism strategy to make sense of the reality. This epistemological approach, according to Matthews and Ross (2010), places a premium on individuals' subjective understandings and explanations of social phenomena, as well as their actions. In terms of traditional fashion tourism, the thoughts and experiences of domestic tourists are undoubtedly constructed subjectively. As such, the most appropriate way to enrich our knowledge about this field is through interactions and conversations.

The directions discussed above entail qualitative research. Thus, this thesis utilized a qualitative approach by implementing semi-structured, in-depth interviews (Bryman, 2012). Qualitative methods are distinguished from quantitative ones in such a way that they do not yield quantifiable results, use measurements, and test hypotheses (Hoepfl, 1997; Goodson & Phillimore, 2004). According to Bryman (2012), a qualitative study would assist researchers in investigating people's inner world, for example, feelings, thoughts, or behaviors. In addition, a micro-level approach that deals with a small number of participants instead of large surveys



would provide a more holistic understanding of personal opinions related to specific contexts. Overall, qualitative research allows the researcher to better engage with the specific conditions surrounding a destination.

The research question of this thesis is as follows: *How and in what ways does traditional Vietnamese fashion relate to domestic tourists' motivations to visit Vietnam's heritage sites as in the case of Hué City, and what meanings do they give to their experiences?* In other words, this paper attempts to explore tourists' motivations, experiences and reflections of domestic tourists involved in traditional fashion tourism in *Hué* city, which are highly subjective, personal, and contextual. As a result, interviewing as a qualitative method is the most suitable and reasonable choice. The interviews were semi-structured since there would be more flexibility in communication, and in-depth and follow-up questions could be asked when touching upon an interesting topic.

### **3.2. Data collection**

There were eleven interviews in total. All interviewees (two males and nine females) in this study ranged in age from 23 to 35, had traveled to *Hué* city at least once in the last five years and had worn traditional Vietnamese clothing during that trip. The participants can be either people wearing a type of traditional dress besides *Áo Dài* for the first time or the ones who used to wear it prior to the trip. Most of the participants are living in different regions of Vietnam, and only two of them have recently relocated to foreign countries for educational purposes. Their occupations are relatively diverse; for example, PhD candidate, lawyer, cultural consultant, architect, freelancer, and others. It shows that the interviewees are highly educated; therefore, the information given by them is detailed and multidisciplinary. Also, it seems relevant to argue that people engaging in tourism with cultural motivation tend to have higher education than those only partaking in mass tourism. The demographic details of respondents taking part in this research are highlighted in Appendix B.

At this point, it is noteworthy that the pre-existing knowledge of the researcher also plays an important role in the study, since it provides a plethora of ideas on which aspects need to be emphasized and allow the researcher to comprehend the interviewees' accounts more easily. The author of this thesis is also a Vietnamese national, offering the respondents comfort so they can freely express their thoughts. Also, with some experience of working on several

projects related to traditional clothing, the researcher was able to elaborate on the participants' ideas and foster effective communication.

Participants were approached through snowball sampling (Bryman, 2012), or to put it another way, via personal acquaintances and the Internet. Given the fact that Facebook is the widely-used social media platform in Vietnam, and there are several groups on Facebook related to tourism in Vietnam and traditional Vietnamese clothing, the researcher posted an interview invitation in these groups for those who met the sampling criteria of this thesis. It is of significance that a detailed introduction about the researcher, research objectives, and issues relating to this study was provided to generate a friendly environment between the interviewer and interviewees. To be specific, in this thesis, seven interviewees were recruited from Facebook groups related to tourism and traditional fashion, while the others were introduced by friends and acquaintances of the researcher, and also by the previous interviewees.

Due to the geographical distance between the researcher and participants, all interviews were implemented through an online platform, namely, Zoom. That offered the possibility of recording the interviews visually and orally so that the researcher could listen again to transcribe them afterward. Online interviews also enabled participants to feel more secure and relaxed when compared to the chaotic and noisy environment surrounding a location. Thus, participants were open and enthusiastic to share their thoughts and feelings about engaging in traditional fashion tourism in *Huế* city. A drawback of online interviews was that sometimes the internet connection and signal transmission were not stable, resulting in bad audio quality. That subsequently led to the inconvenience in the process of transcribing the interviews to a certain extent. Nonetheless, online interviewing is still considered a reliable and practical option in the context of travel restrictions imposed by COVID-19 pandemic.

The interviews were carried out during the period from March 13th to May 8th of 2022. The language used in the interviews was Vietnamese, which is the native language of the researcher and all respondents. Each interview lasted from 45 to 60 minutes. An interview guide (see Appendix C) with a set of specific questions and themes was carefully prepared in advance to ensure the consistency and sufficiency of topics for all interviews. Nonetheless, as semi-structured, these interviews did not follow in any particular order of questions to enable the flexible flow of speech. The participants could freely express and elaborate on their points

of view, and introduce their own subjects as long as they were related to the central topic (Galletta, 2013).

The interviewees were asked questions that are closely linked to the relevant concepts of this paper. Firstly, domestic tourists were asked about their perspectives on and affinity for traditional Vietnamese clothing (e.g., Why do you like wearing traditional Vietnamese clothing?; How would you assess the importance of preserving traditional clothing?). Secondly, to fulfill the objectives of this thesis, questions were constructed based on three topics, including tourists' motivations (e.g., What made you decide to travel to *Huế* city?; Did you plan to wear traditional clothing during your trip?), on-site experiences (e.g., How did you feel and what were you thinking when wearing traditional attires during your trip?; What factors made your trip interesting?); and post-visit reflections (e.g., How would you describe the connection between traditional clothing and heritage sites in *Huế* city?; How did the trip change your attitudes or viewpoints on traditional Vietnamese clothing?).

### **3.3. Data analysis**

Once collected, the data needs to be analyzed to get the answers to the research question. Indeed, when conducting a study, the method of analysis should be selected carefully to fit the research question. For this paper, all data was examined through thematic analysis (Bryman, 2012; Braun & Clarke, 2006). As conducted in Vietnamese, each interview was given a brief synopsis of about 200 to 300 words in English.

To obtain raw data, all interviews were transcribed word for word without the help of any software. The transcripts were then read several times before being attached to codes using the program named Atlas.ti so that the researcher could familiarize with the data. In the following step, the codes were analyzed and categorized into themes. Later, the themes were corrected, linked, and formulated into overarching ones that address domestic tourists' motivations to travel to *Huế* city and wear traditional attires there, as well as how they attribute meanings to their experiences. According to Drisko and Maschi (2015), the objective of developing codes, and then themes, is to highlight the most meaningful and relevant information provided by research participants. Following this stage, all themes that have the relevance to the main topic were examined with regard to their interrelationships, allowing the researcher to eventually formulate coherent findings on the motivations and experiences of traditional fashion tourists.

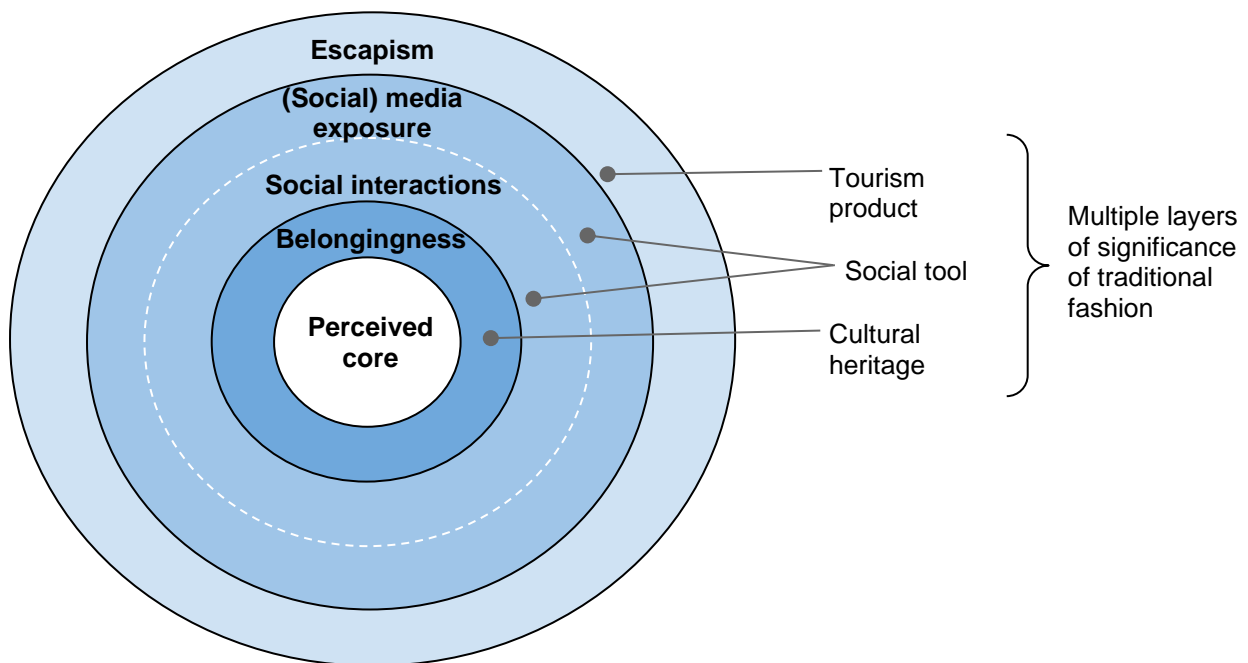
Through the analysis of the interviews, it became apparent that the Vietnamese tourists' affinity for and perspective on traditional fashion can be classified into multiple layers of significance. On the basis of these layers, the domestic tourists experience traditional fashion tourism through a three-stage process to gradually approach the perceived true identity of the locations related to traditional costumes. In the next chapter, the findings will be presented in detail.

### **3.4. Ethical considerations**

The interview respondents were given assurances that their completely voluntary participation in this research would not harm them or their businesses. They were informed that they had the right to halt the interviews at any time, withdraw any information, or refuse to answer any questions that might offend their sensibilities. All collected data will be solely used for academic work. Despite the fact that participants were offered anonymity, they all agreed to have their real names and other socio-demographic information used when being referred to in this master thesis. At the end of the interviews, each participant was asked to sign a consent form, allowing the researcher to use the information obtained from the interviews when writing the research findings.

## CHAPTER 4. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The fourth chapter demonstrates a critical analysis of the empirical research on the motivations, experiences, and reflections of domestic tourists engaging in traditional fashion tourism in *Huế* city of Vietnam. It should be noted that the motivations and experiences of tourists on fashion-related journeys involve diverse elements. The differences in these underlying factors can be due to the visitors' cultural background and their varying degrees of affinity for traditional Vietnamese clothing and heritage sites in *Huế* city.



**Figure 1.** Visual depiction of engagement in traditional fashion tourism based on the multiple layers of significance of traditional clothes. Design by the author (2022).

The data gained from interviews has revealed three layers of significance of traditional Vietnamese clothing perceived by domestic tourists, which are a tourism product, a means of social interactions, and a cultural heritage of the nation. On the basis of these layers, three themes in relation to the tourists' motivations for traveling to *Huế* city and the meanings that they ascribe to their experiences have emerged. The themes follow a three-stage concentric model (see Figure 1) which illustrates the process of experiencing traditional fashion tourism in *Huế* city by means of gradually approaching the perceived core value of the location related to traditional clothing. As such, this chapter is divided into three main sections according to the layers of the onion-metaphor. First, it addresses traditional fashion tourism as a form of escapism, in which domestic tourists aspire to relaxation and new experiences related to the

tourism products offered by the location. Next, the chapter shows that the motivations and experiences of domestic tourists are much in line with the need for social interactions, in which (social) media serves as the bridge between individual and collective aspects. The last section deals with traditional clothing as a cultural heritage and symbol of national identity; thus, the Vietnamese tourists can acquire a sense of belonging to the destination and the community by engaging in traditional fashion tourism. All the quotes made by the participants in this chapter are originally in Vietnamese, but have been translated into English.

#### 4.1. Escapism

To Vietnamese domestic tourists, their imagination of *Huế* city is often constructed through books, the Internet, and recommendations from other people. As mentioned earlier, *Huế* is renowned for its placidity despite being one of the metropolises of Vietnam, hence the unique image when compared to other big cities in Vietnam such as *Hà Nội* or *Hồ Chí Minh* city. In this regard, *Huế* is widely perceived by domestic tourists as a perfect destination for a getaway.

I must say that it [visiting *Huế* city] was excellent. It was extremely peaceful [...] and the locals were very hospitable and kind. Everything in *Huế* city can't be criticized. The food was especially cheap. It was so pleasing to hear the gentle voice of *Huế*'s locals [...] So I had a lot of great and memorable experiences in *Huế* city when compared to other destinations ~ Huy (27, male, content creator, *Hà Nội*, Vietnam)

The aforementioned quote from Huy demonstrates his experience as a tourist to *Huế* city. In the context of rapid urbanization and industrialization, people wish to gain rest and recovery by traveling (Wickens, 2002; Sharpley, 2018). Thus, the interviews have revealed that the majority of domestic tourists travel to *Huế* city, a place away from their regular environments, to satisfy their real or perceived need to escape from the constraints and boredom of everyday life. That is in line with the “diversionary mode” of the tourist experience postulated by Cohen (1979), in which traveling is seen as an expression of escapism. For example, when it comes to her motivations and experiences of traveling, Thanh (27, female, cooking teacher, *Hà Nội*, Vietnam) explains that even though she has visited *Huế* city several times for business purposes, her strong affection for this place is still retained due to the serenity it offers:

The characteristic of city life is hubbub. So I really like *Huế* city because it's very peaceful. I like it [the city] very much. I always try to spend one or two days visiting around *Huế* to enjoy the peaceful atmosphere every time I have a business trip to the city [...] The pace of life [when being in *Huế* city] seems to slow down.

However, escaping from daily routines reflects not only the tourists' desire to leave behind the daily pressure, but the need to experience something different as well (Wickens, 2002). In other words, the tourists are fascinated by the pull motivational factors which are the typical features of a destination. They have a strong will to feel, try, and engage in new activities in that place. This phenomenon is referred to as experience-seeking by Diehm and Armatas (2004). In the case of *Huế* city, the yearning for experience-seeking is manifested in the fact that Vietnamese tourists are attracted by the characteristics and tourism products offered in the destination, such as heritage sites, food, and traditional clothes. When talking about this aspect, Vân (34, female, lawyer, *Hà Nội*, Vietnam) indicates: "I think the common thought between tourists is that people always want to have new experiences when visiting a destination. That can be tasting the local food or wearing traditional costumes".

Similar points of view are found in other interviews, as some respondents give examples of their inclination to dress in the *Hanbok* when being in South Korea or the *Kimono* when traveling to Japan. In this sense, the interviewees imply that traditional fashion tourism is popular among not only domestic visitors but also international tourists as well. In other words, the travelers consider traditional clothing as one of the many differentiating elements of every destination. For this type of tourist, traditional fashion is, therefore, a secondary motivation for the realization of a journey to *Huế* city.

Traditional fashion, as a matter of fact, can also be the primary motive for domestic tourists to visit heritage sites in *Huế* city. Being the products of meticulous craftsmanship, traditional Vietnamese attire holds immense visual charms, which have triggered many people's interest in trying on this type of clothing. The attractiveness of traditional clothing is shown in the following remarks:

... It [traditional dress] looks beautiful. Actually, at first, when I hadn't tried it on, I thought that it wouldn't be suitable for me. But when I put it on, it looked amazing. That's why I decided to rent one [traditional dress] immediately. ~ Vi (27, female, retailer, *Tiền Giang*, Vietnam).

The aesthetic value of traditional fashion is also manifested in the quotes made by Huy (27, male, content creator, *Hà Nội*, Vietnam); however, it is more in the sense that traditional costumes are different from everyday life and can be served as a way to increase self-confidence:

Honestly, I think these [traditional] clothes are absolutely stunning [...] They are different from the normal clothes we wear every day. The colors [of the traditional clothing] are so attractive to me. Wearing traditional clothes makes us feel more confident [...because...] they can cover our body flaws.

At this point, it needs to be noted that not everyone has the opportunity to wear traditional Vietnamese clothing in their regular surroundings. Since producing a traditional Vietnamese dress is a highly-skilled and time-consuming craft, the price of each dress is often so high that many people cannot afford it. In addition, as some respondents point out, there is a lack of shops that offer high-quality traditional clothing for hire around their neighborhoods. It also should be noted that the trend of traditional clothing is still relatively new in Vietnam, and as a result, many people are not used to wearing it in daily life and may feel some embarrassment of being different from others. For example, Phuong (27, female, administrative specialist, *Hà Nội*, Vietnam) states: “I had never worn it [traditional clothing] before, so I felt kind of embarrassed. I’m a bit scared of people looking at me”. To fulfill their demand for wearing ancient attire, these people need to search for a so-called appropriate place or special occasion in which they will not be judged by people wearing normal clothes.

In such a case, visiting heritage sites in *Huế* city is considered an ideal decision. As mentioned previously, *Huế* city is indeed one of the few places in Vietnam that implement projects on encouraging tourists to dress in traditional clothes during their trips. As Bảo (25, male, cultural consultant, *Hồ Chí Minh* city, Vietnam) says in this regard: “It [being in *Huế* city] enables tourists to wear traditional dresses without being criticized. That [wearing traditional clothes] is being normalized in *Huế*”. This is further highlighted by Vân (34, female, lawyer, *Hà Nội*, Vietnam) when she implies that traditional fashion is a significant cultural heritage of Vietnam, and one of the best ways to preserve and develop it is to “apply it [traditional clothing] into our contemporary life”. In this sense, Kim (30, female, PhD candidate, Lisbon, Portugal) expresses her fondness for using traditional clothes in daily life:



“Sometimes my friends and I wear traditional dresses when we dance at the jazz clubs [...] I also wore a *Ngũ Thân* dress at my birthday party”.

For domestic tourists who evince an avid interest in photography, traditional fashion seems to be an indispensable factor in their satisfaction of the trip to *Huế* city. Referring to her experience as unforgettable, Ngân (23, female, freelancer, *Hà Nội*, Vietnam) says the following:

Traditional clothing and heritage sites in *Huế* city have a mutual relationship [...] The sites will beautify the outfits and vice versa [...] Wearing a traditional dress was a new experience for me. The photos I took are so great. That was an experience I will never forget.

Explaining the reciprocal relationship between traditional fashion and historical landmarks, Minh (30, female, architect, Melbourne, Australia), from the perspective of an architect, indicates that “there is a correlation in terms of time between the forms [of the traditional clothing] and the space”. To put it another way, things that originated from the past should go together. Thus, heritage sites in *Huế* city are believed to be fitting backdrops where the Vietnamese can dress in traditional clothing. However, in this regard, Thanh (27, female, cooking teacher, *Hà Nội*, Vietnam) further points out that taking photos while wearing traditional clothing gives her considerable pleasure, but at the same time, it can “reduce the attention to the landscapes” to a certain extent. Similarly, Nga (30, female, office worker, *Hồ Chí Minh* city, Vietnam) mentions:

I was too focused on taking photos, so I didn’t spend much time on sightseeing and looking at the monuments [...] It [taking photos] has both advantages and disadvantages. It helps me keep the great memories. But at the moment when I was at the sites, it made me slightly distracted.

Despite having more efforts in stimulating the use of traditional clothes in everyday life and tourism when compared to other places, *Huế* city is believed to have several shortcomings in fashion tourism practices. In the first place, most of traditional clothing rental stores are located some distance away from the heritage sites, as illustrated in the comments below:

It [the store] is situated in the new expansion area of the city [...] about four kilometers away. ~ Nga (30, female, office worker, *Hồ Chí Minh* city, Vietnam)

I think that around heritage sites, there are only a few eye-catching stores [where traditional clothing can be hired]. When I needed to hire a traditional dress, I had to travel a bit far from the heritage sites. It took me 10 to 15 minutes to drive [...] It [the store] was also difficult for me to find. I think that if there are more eye-catching stores located near the sites, people can explore and hire traditional clothing more easily. That will be better. ~ Vi (27, female, retailer, *Tiền Giang*, Vietnam).

Undoubtedly, that can result in several inconveniences such as time-consuming and strenuous mobility for the tourists, not to mention the fact that most of the traditional dresses are relatively heavy. Another deficiency in fashion tourism management in *Huế* city is that those traditional clothing rental stores are privately owned instead of being administered by the local government. Commenting on this issue, Bảo (25, male, cultural consultant, *Hồ Chí Minh* city, Vietnam) points out:

Actually, these stores belong to private owners, hence a lack of a professional system [of offering clothing rental services] like in South Korea and Japan. Moreover, as far as I know, many of them [the stores] don't have staff who are knowledgeable about traditional clothing to give customers advice [...] That may lead to the inaccuracy of the way the traditional clothes should be worn.

Overall, in the first layer of the onion-metaphor, the motivations and experiences of domestic visitors concern their personal needs for escapism. In other words, traditional fashion tourism in *Huế* city manifests the Vietnamese tourists' desires to escape from their regular environments and have new experiences with traditional costumes. Though there exist certain weak points in the tourism management, the tourists still believe that *Huế* city is an appropriate place where people can have a getaway and dress in traditional Vietnamese dresses without being judged.

#### **4.2. Media exposure and social interactions**

Moving from the outside-in, the second layer concerns the fact that traditional fashion tourists' motivations and experiences reflect the involvement of interpersonal connections

between the visitors themselves, and between visitors and non-visitors as well. Situated between the first and the second layers is the (social) media. It serves as a link in which the motivations and experiences of domestic tourists are shifted from the individual level to the collective one. The media includes newspapers, webpages, leaflets, TV programs, and most importantly, social media applications such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok. In fact, for most of the participants, social media is the decisive factor that allows them to gain more knowledge and information about traditional clothing, and share their experiences of engaging with these types of costumes as well. As previously mentioned, the understanding of traditional Vietnamese costumes was negatively affected as a result of the introduction of the Western cultures during wartime. Nonetheless, thanks to social media, there has been a growing affinity to the (re)discovery of national traditions and cultures, preponderantly traditional fashion. The relevance of social media in promoting traditional clothing is described as follows:

Accidentally, I saw a group on Facebook about the traditional clothing of Vietnamese males [...] then I thought oh, there are such beautiful traditional clothes for men. Then I started to find out more information about it. I think that our culture is really great [...] I had known nothing about the Ngũ Thân dress until some years ago. ~ Minh (30, female, architect, Melbourne, Australia)

Similarly, Phương (27, female, administrative specialist, Hà Nội, Vietnam) mentions that she had only known the *Áo Dài* before seeing other types of traditional Vietnamese clothing on social media:

I have known about the *Nhật Bình* dress or *Ngũ Thân* dress for just one or two years [...] Before that I had no idea about it. I didn't know that Vietnam has types of clothing like the *Nhật Bình* dress. Only when I watched some videos on social media recently did I know that Vietnam has so many beautiful costumes [...] Before that I only knew the *Áo Dài*, the one that we often wear. I didn't know there were other traditional dresses.

From the interviews with the Vietnamese tourists, it is apparent that social media plays a significant role in constructing the tourists' motivations and experiences, especially for first-time visitors to *Huế* city. To be specific, some of the respondents point out that the photos posted by previous domestic fashion tourists on social media platforms, predominantly

Facebook, exclusively or partially affected their decisions to travel to *Huế* city while dressing in traditional clothes. That is shown in the following statements:

It [social media] influenced me for sure. I have seen a lot of beautiful photos [of fashion tourists in *Huế* city] on Facebook. I have also watched some music videos in which the artists wore traditional costumes on social media. At that time, I thought it was so beautiful [...] So that was my motivation for visiting *Huế* city to take a photo shoot with traditional clothes. ~ Ngân (23, female, freelancer, *Hà Nội*, Vietnam)

The described motivation of Ngân is illustrative of domestic tourists' desire to realize the tourism imagination embedded in their minds (Reijnders, 2011). Due to the media, the tourists become familiar and fascinated with the destination and the act of wearing traditional clothing there. Triggered by this imagination, they decide to visit heritage sites and put traditional clothing on, with an aim to seek a more authentic experience of *Huế* city. The authenticity of this experience should be viewed as “constructive authenticity” (Wang, 1999), in which visitors carry out the trip just as the characters known from the media. Thus, traveling to heritage sites in *Huế* city not only enables tourists to look over the reality and imagination of a place, but also brings them a more immersive experience. In this context, it can be argued that the “tourist gaze” (Urry, 1990) towards *Huế* city can be shaped and contextualized by narrative mediatization, validating the relevance of (social) media in traditional fashion tourists' decision-making processes.

Being satisfied since their tourism imagination has matched the reality, the domestic tourists subsequently share their experiences with their acquaintances or a specific group in multiple ways, preponderantly through the photos or videos uploaded on social media platforms. To put it another way, these people continue to generate motivations for traveling for future visitors, recommending them to have the same exhilarating experience of wearing traditional clothing while visiting heritage sites in *Huế* city. As such, the media has become a way for the tourists to promote traditional fashion tourism in *Huế* city in particular, and in Vietnam in general:

I uploaded [the photos] on my Facebook account [...] My friends seem to like them a lot. After seeing my photos, a friend of mine had visited *Huế* city on the Lunar New Year holiday, hired a traditional dress and taken photos there. ~ Vi (27, female, retailer, *Tiền Giang*, Vietnam).

We can promote it [traditional fashion tourism] in many different ways. For example, wearing those types of clothes and taking beautiful photos is definitely a very effective way of attracting young people [...] I took many photos and I uploaded them on the Internet to show them to my friends. It's [social media] a kind of promotion of the destination's images. Then more and more people will know about it. ~ Thanh (27, female, cooking teacher, *Hà Nội*, Vietnam)

According to Chandralal and Valenzuela (2015), sharing travel experiences with others may provide tourists greater pleasure than keeping them alone. To be specific, sharing experiences will lead to social dynamics among not only the travel groups, but also other (prospective) travelers. In this regard, Huy (27, male, content creator, *Hà Nội*, Vietnam) emphasizes his feeling of delight in sharing his travel experiences on social media, which subsequently results in the significant social interactions among tourists and those who have not engaged in traditional fashion tourism in *Huế* city before:

I posted a video [of the trip] on my TikTok. It has over 120.000 views. There are a lot of comments and questions for me. A lot of people feel interested in wearing traditional costumes in *Huế* city [...] Many of them have tagged their friends on that post. I feel very happy [...] Due to my post, people have had the intention to wear traditional clothing when visiting *Huế* city. I just feel so happy with that.

In addition to being a motivational force, social media, in fact, is also used as a tool for domestic visitors to search for the stores where they can hire traditional clothes, as is shown in the following remarks:

[I searched for the information] on Facebook. Then I found several stores where I could hire traditional clothing [...] I could compare the fees of these stores. Then I chose the cheapest one. ~ Ngân (23, female, freelancer, *Hà Nội*, Vietnam)

I searched for the stores [on Facebook] in advance. Then I also looked for the types of traditional Vietnamese clothing. ~ Vi (27, female, retailer, *Tiền Giang*, Vietnam).

This finding, indeed, is in line with several existing studies on tourism which indicate that social media platforms have an impact on the way tourists schedule their journeys (e.g., Cox, Burgess, Sellitto, & Bultjens, 2009; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Leung, Law, van Hoof, &

Buhalis, 2013). Since the majority of tourists want to plan their trips in advance to save time and avoid any potential issues, social media has become a powerful means of searching for information thanks to its easy accessibility. As a result, it is relevant to say that social media plays a vital role in not only the actual experiences but also the pre-visit stage of the traditional fashion tourists' tourism demand process.

In the second layer, traditional Vietnamese fashion is not merely a tourism product anymore as it is perceived symbolically by the domestic tourists. To illustrate, it is not just the aesthetic value of the traditional dresses that is appealing to the fashion tourists, but also its power to facilitate social bonding between people who share the same passion for this type of clothing. In this respect, the physical characteristics of traditional clothing become secondary, and the emphasis of the tourists' motivations and experiences is on the social aspect of dressing in traditional clothing together. This finding is consistent with the research on the social turn in tourism studies conducted by Larsen, Urry and Axhausen (2007). These researchers assert that the center of tourism is no longer about places, but about the social relations that are reinforced at a distant location. As the interviews have shown, many of the respondents consider traditional fashion in their trips as a means to maintain, strengthen, and expand interpersonal relationships within the traveling companions. The traveling companions here can be family members, partners, co-workers, or friends:

My friend suggested wearing traditional clothing. And I thought that it sounds really cool [...] We wore traditional dresses while visiting the Imperial City [...] It was fascinating. ~ Anh (32, female, event organizer, *Hà Nội*, Vietnam)

Interestingly, the traditional fashion tourism also allows domestic tourists to meet new people having the same interests and passions on Vietnamese culture, or in other words, expanding their social network:

People coming from the north, the central, and the south [of Vietnam] were able to connect with each other [...] That was my most memorable trip to *Huế* city [...] I think that the *Ngũ Thân* has made it easier for me to connect with other people, and I feel very grateful for that. I mean, it [traditional clothing] is like a ticket for me to connect with people more easily. Thanks to the trip, I've got to know new friends [...] sharing the same passion. ~ Minh (30, female, architect, Melbourne, Australia)

The aforementioned quotes from Minh are illustrative of her social experience of engaging in traditional fashion tourism in *Huế* city. She and her husband traveled to this city to participate in a marathon competition and also to enjoy a short holiday. Launched by the local authorities, that marathon has encouraged the competitors to wear traditional clothing while running to promote Vietnamese culture. Metaphorically referring to traditional clothing as a “ticket”, Minh’s account demonstrates the notion that through the traditional Vietnamese fashion, the feasibility of social ties and physical togetherness can be opened up. Similar observation can be found in the following narratives:

On that trip [to *Huế* city], I was able to talk to some people. I also met the author of the book *Ngàn Năm Áo Mũ*. We had a drinks party [...] It was nice to listen to the stories he shared on the *Ngũ Thân* dress, the meaning of each button [...] It was really great. ~ Kim (30, female, PhD candidate, Lisbon, Portugal)

These examples indeed suggest that from the theoretical perspective, traditional fashion tourism in *Huế* city offers the possibility of bonding, and at the same time, bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000). By definition, social capital refers to the aggregate of assets or resources derived from and accessible through all networks of relationships (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). As Putnam (2000) explains, bonding social capital is inwardly focused on strengthening exclusive identities and enhancing homogeneity. On the other hand, bridging social capital is outwardly focused, enabling the connections between different individuals. These notions are embedded in the context of traditional fashion tourism in *Huế* city, as the Vietnamese tourists are able to not only reinforce the existing bonds between families, friends, and others, but also bridge the gaps between previously separated or unknown people.

The discussion above has substantiated the positive results in relation to social aspects of the Vietnamese domestic tourists’ motivations and experiences. As Chandralal and Valenzuela (2015) point out, encouraging tourists to socialize, and more saliently, sustaining the delightful interactions with one another while on their journeys are among the most fundamental factors of unforgettable travel experiences. For that reason, it can be said that the traditional fashion tourism in *Huế* city has the potential for growth.

### 4.3. Belongingness

Moving closer to the presumed core identity lies the third layer, in which traditional Vietnamese clothing is considered an integral cultural heritage of the country and a representation of national identity. The majority of participants believe that traditional fashion is an indispensable part of the national history and identity, for example:

Traditional clothing is very important because it plays a crucial role in shaping the culture and identity of a community. It's also a yardstick by which to compare with other countries in what we call respecting our own culture. ~ Bảo (25, male, cultural consultant, *Hồ Chí Minh* city, Vietnam)

First of all, it [traditional clothing] to every individual is the identity. Like other countries, South Korea has the Hanbok, and Japan has the Kimono... We all know them very well. They show their identities. ~ Nga (30, female, office worker, *Hồ Chí Minh* city, Vietnam)

This finding, indeed, constitutes the most profound discrepancy between fashion tourism in Vietnam and the Western countries. To be specific, the perspective of domestic fashion tourists on fashion tourism in Vietnam revolves around traditional dresses and their cultural values. On the other hand, as seen in several previous studies (e.g., Jedras, 2011; Bada, 2013), the approach to fashion in Western nations is often related to trendy clothes such as *haute couture*. In terms of this difference, Minh (30, female, architect, Melbourne, Australia) comments:

To me, traditional Vietnamese clothing... it already includes the word "Vietnamese" in it, that is, the clothing of Vietnamese people. It [traditional Vietnamese fashion] has national characteristics. The fashion of France or Italy is more about international features. It [Western fashion] is famous because it is sold internationally, the world knows it, and then it becomes the trend that people follow. It is fashionable. It can change a lot over time. And it holds fashion brand values. But the traditional Vietnamese fashion is for the Vietnamese nationals [...] It differs from modernity.

As Minh has pointed out, traditional clothing is a type of cultural heritage, which means something originating in the past that we choose to keep in the present for the sake of the future



(Harrison, 2013). In contrast to contemporary fashion, it possesses the historical and cultural values, reflecting the beliefs and norms of our ancestors. Thus, once domestic tourists approach the last layer, they are able to grasp the core value of the destinations in association with traditional fashion, which subsequently allows them to experience a “sense of belonging” (Morley, 2001). In other words, individuals can have a feeling of being a part of the destinations, as well as the wider national community. Several interview respondents have demonstrated that their experiences of visiting heritage sites in *Huế* city seem to be much related to nostalgia, in which they have an imagination of living in the past. Such imagined nostalgia is shown in the following statements:

I think... how to say, the atmosphere surrounding the place gave me a feeling of nostalgia. It made me feel like I was returning to the past, looking at the places where our ancestors had lived before. ~ Vân (34, female, lawyer, *Hà Nội*, Vietnam)

When visiting these palaces and mausoleums, I could feel a kind of connection even though I wasn't born in this city [...] But when I was there, everything seemed to be very familiar to me. ~ Bảo (25, male, cultural consultant, *Hồ Chí Minh* city, Vietnam)

The feeling of nostalgia described above can be explained by the fact that heritage sites in *Huế* city have been well-preserved throughout many years, hence the archaic landscape surrounding the area. According to Park (2010), visiting heritage settings allows nationals to obtain the link between them and the national past in their imagination. To the Vietnamese domestic tourists, the sites in *Huế* city reflect the proud long-standing history and culture of the nation. They are able to gain more knowledge through the facts and information presented at the heritage sites, which consequently evokes their connection to the places and nationalism, for instance, Anh (32, female, event organizer, *Hà Nội*, Vietnam) articulates: “I am very proud of our national history [...] There are many splendid palaces and mausoleums [...] not inferior to other countries at all”. As such, the tourists feel intimately connected to the monuments and the national history. In this regard, Vân (34, female, lawyer, *Hà Nội*, Vietnam) further underscores that tour guides as on-site storytellers can also play an important role in triggering more immersive experiences and sentimental attachments for the tourists: “Stories that are told by the tour guides will help us understand more about the history of the places. It will make our visit become more meaningful”.

The sense of belonging seems to be greater when domestic tourists put on traditional Vietnamese dresses. Traditional clothing, indeed, makes a deep impression on visitors to *Huế* city since it helps them to unequivocally identify themselves as Vietnamese nationals. From an ethnographic standpoint, national identities are the defining characteristics of traditions, cultures, and ethnic backgrounds of a country (Park, 2010). Notwithstanding the socio-historical changes and the impact of globalization on culture and society in Vietnam, there exist strong ties to what constitutes ‘the Vietnamese’. This finding is consistent with a plethora of existing studies in which globalization is believed to result in the reinforcement of nationalism and growing passion for (re)discovering cultural values of the country (e.g., Sharpley, 2018; Scott, 2000). The following narratives potently exemplify the significance of cultural elements such as traditional clothing in expressing national belonging in the context of globalization:

When we are normal people [...] more accurately, we are modern people, we always follow new trends. It is likely that we will follow new trends. And as Vietnamese society is constantly growing, there will be a lot of new things for people to pursue. But at the same time, it’s quite likely that we will gradually lose the old things [...] If there hadn't been a special event in my life [wedding ceremony] that urged me to find traditional clothing, I wouldn't have realized that our cultural quintessence was fading [...] The *Nhật Bình* dress that I wore on my wedding day is a way I pass on the Vietnamese culture to the next generations [...] It will be handed down to my children in the future.  
~ Minh (30, female, architect, Melbourne, Australia)

It is interesting to see that Minh’s account also indicates the application of traditional dresses in big life events such as wedding ceremonies, highlighting the wider importance of traditional fashion beyond tourism. In this sense, the Vietnamese consider traditional clothing as one of the most formal types of fashion that should be used on meaningful and major occasions.

Through traditional Vietnamese dresses, the national identity can be displayed both extrinsically and intrinsically. To illustrate, wearing traditional clothing helps domestic tourists to *Huế* city visually identify themselves as the Vietnamese. This finding is clearly shown in the case of Vi (27, female, retailer, *Tiền Giang*, Vietnam) when she visited the Imperial City for her wedding photoshoot:

There's a yellow wall where I took my wedding photos [...] At that place, when I wore traditional Vietnamese clothing, the photos had Vietnamese characteristics [...] But when I put on the modern wedding dress, I don't know why the photos appeared to have the Korean style. All people in my team had the same opinion.

The aforementioned quotes from Vi reflect the observable expression of national identity through traditional clothing, a distinct feature when compared to the modern dresses. In other words, national identification can be rationally acquired or retained once domestic tourists dress in traditional Vietnamese attire. However, it can also be constructed emotionally on the basis of tourists' subliminal feelings and attitudes towards their country. The sentimental connection between them and the wider national community is described as "spirituality" by Bảo (25, male, cultural consultant, *Hồ Chí Minh* city, Vietnam). Working in the culture sector, Bảo frequently wears traditional clothes in his daily life or at cultural events. Nonetheless, being at historical landmarks in this type of clothing always brings him a more sacred feeling, as he states:

It's [wearing traditional Vietnamese clothing at heritage sites] very different. It is related to spirituality. When I wore ancient clothes at these heritage sites, I felt that I had a very strong spiritual connection with the ancestors. I feel like when we put on the traditional clothes we can understand more about those places than when we wear normal clothing. I think it has to do with my emotions, my feelings when I visit a relic and wear the exact type of clothing of people who used to live and work at that relic.

Bảo's account points out the possibility of having a spiritual connection to the ancestors through traditional clothing. That experience, in fact, signifies the wider cultural context of Vietnam. To illustrate, Vietnam in particular and many other Asian societies in general are characterized by a dominant belief in folk religions and a custom of worshiping their ancestors (Horstmann, 2011), resulting from the strong influences of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. In this regard, the association with spirituality manifests the new shade of traditional fashion tourism, partly overlapping the characteristics of spiritual tourism.

Putting themselves into the social past, the domestic tourists go through some transformations in their attitudes and behaviors. Several participants indicate that wearing traditional clothing while visiting heritage sites have made them behave more gently to be true, or at least close enough, to the nature of the place and the type of clothing they are wearing.

That can be explained by the fact that under feudal dynasties in Vietnam, these clothes were worn by the upper class who had to follow certain rules of behavior, such as proper ways of walking, talking or eating. As the tourists acquire a connection with the place and its past, they feel a need to adapt themselves to the surroundings by behaving and acting like their ancestors. Indeed, that reflects not only the deep engagement in traditional fashion tourism, but also the domestic tourists' appreciation for their ancestors who built up such magnificent and proud works:

Actually, I think from the moment I put on the *Nhật Bình* dress, my feelings had changed. I felt like I needed to walk differently. Or it seemed inappropriate for me to laugh as loudly as usual. And the fact that going to such places [the heritage sites] makes me feel very proud and happy ~ Nga (30, female, office worker, *Hồ Chí Minh* city, Vietnam)

When I wore such a type of clothing to a relic, I appreciated every moment, every site that I visited... And I felt kind of something, like I need to act more gently, walking more gently, even though I wasn't the only one there to dress like that [...] So I think we need to act properly and politely whenever we wear traditional dresses while visiting heritage sites. ~ Vân (34, female, lawyer, *Hà Nội*, Vietnam)

Being connected to the sites and the national community, the majority of interviewees admit that their experiences of engaging in traditional fashion tourism were far beyond their initial expectations. Specifically, for the domestic tourists who had never worn any type of traditional clothes besides the *Áo Dài* before visiting heritage sites in *Huế* city, their trips have made their affinity to traditional clothing and national history, culture, and traditions become stronger:

It did [make me feel more interested in traditional clothing]. In the future, if I have more time, I will stay in *Huế* city longer to have more experiences. If I have a boyfriend I also want him to experience it with me. ~ Phương (27, female, administrative specialist, *Hà Nội*, Vietnam)

Thus, it motivates these tourists to gain more knowledge and information about traditional Vietnamese clothing, as Ngân (23, female, freelancer, *Hà Nội*, Vietnam) indicates: "I'm willing to join the groups [on Facebook] to learn more about it [traditional fashion]".

Overall, all domestic tourists have been so satisfied with their trips that they wish to engage in traditional fashion tourism again in the future.

The quotes outlined above manifest domestic tourists' desire to have a connection to the heritage sites in *Huế* city, history and national community through traditional fashion. Illustrating their experiences with "topophilia" (Tuan, 1974), the respondents of this thesis point out the fact that traditional clothing can provide a "space of belonging" (Morley, 2001) where domestic travelers can have a feeling of being attached to a collectively imagined past.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The last chapter summarizes the main findings, followed by the theoretical and practical contributions derived from the research. In addition, it outlines several research limitations and suggestions for future studies on traditional fashion tourism.

### 5.1. Conclusion and implications

On the basis of the interviews with eleven respondents engaging in traditional fashion tourism in *Huế* city, Vietnam, the findings of this thesis have shed light on the relationship between traditional Vietnamese clothing and domestic tourists' motivations for and experiences of traveling. Traditional clothing is indeed connected with touristic experiences in many ways, as domestic tourists consider it as an important part of before, during, and after their trips. Through traditional fashion tourism, the visitors' affinity for ancient costumes and the affective connection to heritage sites are intertwined, affecting and stimulating each other. The participants' accounts have indicated the revival of traditional fashion in Vietnam over the last few years, reflecting multiple layers of significance of traditional Vietnamese clothing. In relation to these layers, the travel motivations and experiences of domestic tourists go through a three-stage process, which allows travelers to gradually approach the perceived true identity of the heritage sites.

In the first stage of this process, traditional fashion tourism is considered a form of escapism, in which traditional clothing is a kind of tourism product that provides domestic tourists with new experiences. Both positive and negative aspects of escapism have been pinpointed in the findings. The positive facet of escapism concerns a search for knowledge, whereas the negative one relates to a desire for pleasure, fun, and avoidance of stress and responsibilities (Fodness, 1994). To be specific, given its long-standing history and rich cultural heritage, *Huế* city allows Vietnamese tourists to gain more understanding about the national/local history and cultural products such as traditional clothing. In addition, the fact that this city has peaceful landscapes and atmosphere undoubtedly appeals to tourists who want to leave behind the constraints of a mundane perceived existence and to experience something different from their regular environments, especially in the context of urbanization and globalization. For people who have an interest in dressing in traditional Vietnamese clothing, *Huế* city provides an appropriate backdrop of historical monuments and comfort fostered by different cultural projects.

The second stage involves the exploration of the social values of traditional fashion. It is in this stage that the domestic tourists' motivations and experiences change from individual expression to interpersonal one through media exposure. In this study, it is evident that the majority of interviewees acknowledge that the ways they deal with traditional Vietnamese clothing are greatly affected by media representation and consumption. To put it another way, the media plays a crucial role in constructing the "tourist gaze" (Urry, 1990) towards *Huế* city and tourism practices in relation to traditional dresses. Subsequently, domestic tourists are motivated to visit *Huế* city, where they can dress in traditional clothing along with others as a method for provoking social interactions, strengthening social bonds, and expanding social networks. In this regard, the visitors value physical togetherness in association with traditional fashion.

The final stage depicts a desire to acquire a "sense of belonging" (Morley, 2001) to the heritage landmarks in *Huế* city and the national community. In this stage, traditional clothing is seen as a strong marker of national identity to domestic travelers. Expressing domestic tourists' imagined nostalgia and the ability to show their identity, the interviews have suggested that the Vietnamese visitors to *Huế* city have made an approach, or at least got close enough, to the core value of traditional clothing. That allows the tourists to have "topophilic sentiments" (Tuan, 1974), or in other words, the emotional attachment to the places and the wider national community.

The results mentioned above suggest that traditional fashion tourism offers domestic tourists a sensory, social, and spiritual window into a place's history, culture, traditions, and identity. It fulfills the tourists' need for escapism, social interactions, nostalgia, authenticity and belonging. As such, the experience of traditional fashion *in situ* become a valuable memory to domestic tourists, stimulating their ancient clothing-related imagination of the destination and interest in the national culture and traditions. In general, it can be argued that the practices of traditional fashion tourism offer immersive and unique experiences to the Vietnamese tourists, enhancing their destination loyalty and bolstering their affinity to traditional clothing and other cultural heritage. In line with several existing studies on the role of contemporary fashion in tourism (e.g., Lazzaretti, Capone & Casadei, 2017; Chilese & Russo, 2008), traditional fashion can potentially serve as a unique selling point of a destination over others. That justifies the relevance of traditional clothing in tourism practices and the potential to develop traditional fashion tourism in *Huế* city and throughout Vietnam.

It should be noted that the study manifests a considerable difference between traditional fashion tourism and the type of tourism focusing on contemporary clothing. To illustrate, a multitude of existing academic studies on fashion tourism point out the tourists' motivation for shopping (Bada, 2013; Boulhosa & Casais, 2019). Regarding fashion tourism in Western countries, a huge flux of (international) tourists travel to locations in association with trendy fashion such as Paris and Milan every year to purchase clothing or participate in fashion events. According to O'Cass and McEwen (2004), the focus of this type of tourists is on the social value of high fashion, reflecting their desire to gain prestige and define social status. However, in the context of traditional fashion tourism in Vietnam, and possibly in other Asian countries, domestic tourists seem to have no or little intention of buying traditional clothes, but only experiencing them. This can be explained by the fact that traditional clothing is not used daily, and not everyone can afford it as the price of a high-quality traditional dress is often high. Rather than acquiring social status, domestic tourists engaging in traditional fashion tourism express a desire for national identification, allowing them to have a connection to the national community and the imagined collective past in their present-day experiences. As such, the emotional connection of traditional fashion tourists appears to be greater than that of tourists involved in contemporary fashion tourism.

The results derived from this research paper also highlight some practical implications for the development of tourism practices in relation to traditional fashion in *Huế* city. Even though *Huế* city is perceived by domestic tourists as a destination that has stronger association with traditional costumes than other places in Vietnam, there are aspects that can be improved to provide tourists more satisfying experiences. Firstly, a crucial consideration that tourism practitioners should take is to provide more attractive stores located close to heritage sites where tourists can hire traditional clothing. More attention to the improvement of customer services will stimulate the tourists' satisfaction, which may subsequently keep them staying longer and make them feel willing to spend more money on the services (Wang, Zhang, Gu & Zhen, 2009). Secondly, as suggested by some participants, there should be more experts or trained staff who are able to explain and give detailed advice to traditional fashion tourists, especially those who want to learn more about the traditional dresses. Since there are still many Vietnamese people having little knowledge about types of traditional clothing apart from the *Áo Dài*, introduction or presentations from trained professionals can raise the tourists' awareness of the diversity of traditional fashion, contributing to the preservation and promotion of ancient costumes.



## **5.2. Limitations and recommendations for future research**

Even though this research has some contributions, there exist several limitations. To begin with, the number of interviewees in this study is limited, with only domestic tourists being focused on since the nature of traditional clothing is intimately related to domestic visitors. However, several respondents have mentioned the potential of developing this niche of tourism among foreigners, as in the examples of their interests in wearing the Hanbok and Kimono when visiting South Korea and Japan, respectively. As such, it is indeed interesting to also explore the attitudes and behaviors of international visitors. It is recommended to conduct research comparing the opinions of domestic and international tourists towards tourism practices associated with traditional clothing.

Another limitation is that due to limited time, this thesis only takes an approach to the tourism demand side, hence a lack of understanding of the supply side. As stated by Sharpley (2018), the market forces for the development of tourism involve stakeholders from both demand and supply sides. Also, the findings of this thesis have suggested the role of different stakeholders such as tour guides and experts on traditional Vietnamese fashion. For these reasons, it would also be beneficial to study traditional fashion tourism from other perspectives, such as local government, tour operators, tour guides and travel agencies in order to enhance more knowledge of this field.

Thirdly, this paper solely investigates the motivations, experiences, and reflections of traditional fashion tourists. Expanding the scope of the study, for instance, studying the destination's image, tourism economics, tourism marketing, or tourist-host relationship will contribute to a bigger picture of this niche of tourism. Especially, as shown in this research, the promotion of traditional clothing via media platforms appears to have a considerable impact on the tourists' motivations and experiences. As such, it is suggested that future scholars should look into the close links between media representations, traditional fashion tourism, and the behaviors of traditional fashion tourists.

Lastly, all domestic tourists interviewed in this study are young people (below the age of 40) who are much influenced by the social media. In the future, it is expected that Vietnamese people of all ages will have the knowledge about different types of traditional clothing of the country through more projects and strategic policies. In this way, traditional fashion tourists will not be limited to young people anymore. Hence, it would also be

interesting to investigate whether there are differences in attitudes and behaviors between younger and older generations engaging in traditional fashion tourism.

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**APPENDIX A: SOME EXAMPLES OF TRADITIONAL VIETNAMESE CLOTHING**



**Figure 2.** *Giao Lĩnh* (cross-collar) dress (Ho, 2020)



**Figure 3.** *Nhật Bình* dress (Nguyen, 2021)



**Figure 4.** *Ngũ thân* (five-panel) dress (Ỡ Vân Các, 2021)

**APPENDIX B: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES**

<b>First name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Place of residence</b>
Minh	30	Female	Architect	Melbourne, Australia
Anh	32	Female	Event organizer	Hà Nội, Vietnam
Nga	30	Female	Office worker	Hồ Chí Minh city, Vietnam
Ngân	23	Female	Freelancer	Hà Nội, Vietnam
Huy	27	Male	Content creator	Hà Nội, Vietnam
Bảo	25	Male	Cultural consultant	Hồ Chí Minh city, Vietnam
Phuong	27	Female	Administrative specialist	Hà Nội, Vietnam
Kim	30	Female	PhD candidate	Lisbon, Portugal
Thanh	27	Female	Cooking teacher	Hà Nội, Vietnam
Vân	34	Female	Lawyer	Hà Nội, Vietnam
Vi	27	Female	Retailer	Tiền Giang, Vietnam

## **APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE**

*Note: Before the interview, ask the participants for permission to record, and whether they want to remain anonymous when being referred to in the research. After the interview, ask participants to sign a consent form. The interviewer does not need to strictly follow the order of the questions below.*

### **Socio-demographic information**

- What is your name?
- How old are you?
- Where are you from?
- Where are you living at the moment?
- What is your occupation?
- What is your educational background?

### **Affinity with/Perspectives on traditional clothing**

- What does traditional clothing of Vietnam mean to you? How is it different from Haute Couture clothing?
- What sources do you use to get (updated) information on traditional fashion?
- Do you think it is important to preserve traditional clothing? If yes, what can we do to preserve these attires?
- Do social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, or YouTube contribute to your awareness of the significance of traditional clothing? Are there any other factors?

- Why do you like wearing traditional Vietnamese clothing?

### **Motivations**

- When did you visit Hue city?
- What made you decide to travel to Hue city?
- What did you know about the city before traveling to?
- What did you expect before you traveled?
- Did you plan to wear traditional clothing during your trip? Why?

### **Experiences**

- Which sites did you visit during your trip to Hue city?
- How did you feel when you visited the heritage sites in Hue city?
- What did you do while visiting those heritage sites?
- What factors made your trip interesting?
- Did you bring the traditional clothes from home, or did you hire them at the sites?
- How did you feel and what were you thinking when wearing traditional attires during your trip?
- Did you take photos while wearing traditional clothing? Did social media (photos on Facebook, music videos on YouTube, etc.) affect your decision to do so?
- Are there any factors that resulted in negative feelings?

### **Reflections**

- How would you describe the connection between traditional clothing and heritage sites in Hue city?



- Do you think that heritage sites in Hue city are suitable places for wearing traditional clothing? Why? What makes these sites different from other places?
- Among all heritage sites in Hue city that you visited, which one do you think is most attractive and suitable for visitors to wear traditional clothing? Or all the sites have the same charm?
- Did the trip change your attitudes or viewpoints on traditional Vietnamese clothing?
- Do you want to go back to Hue city and wear traditional clothing there if you have a chance?
- What do you think can be improved to bring higher satisfaction to visitors to Hue city?