(RESEARCH ARTICLE)

Tourism development and cultural commodification in Bali, Thailand, and Vietnam

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Abstract

This qualitative study employs a comparative ethnographic approach across three rapidly developing Southeast Asian tourism destinations in Bali, Thailand and Vietnam to examine complex impacts on intangible cultural heritage and everyday cultural realities as international visitor flows accelerate. The project encompassed 18 months of immersive multi-sited fieldwork engaging 96 participants through in-depth semi-structured interviews and 15 focus group discussions. Over 500 hours of systematic participant observations occurred across both mundane public spaces and ritual ceremonial events. Discourse analysis examined policy and media materials regarding cultural tourism and heritage planning. Triangulation compared emergent themes across varied data types to discern multifaceted dynamics intermixing ongoing tradition, adaptation and change. Descriptive statistical analysis of tourism growth indicators from 2000-2020 supplemented qualitative interpretations. Multiple regression analysis identified significant sociocultural, economic and political predictors of perceived commodification pressures across settings. Similarities and differences in change dynamics and planning regimes emerged between religiously and politically diverse sites through systematic comparative analysis. Key dimensions investigated encompass shifts in meanings, practices, productions, sense of identity, community relations, ritual performances, representation disputes and intergenerational negotiations amidst tourism expansion and globalized mobility. Findings reveal uneven blends of risks and opportunities around intangible cultural heritage persisting, adapting or transforming as locales balance enduring local life-worlds with heightening transnational interconnectivity.

Keywords: Cultural Tourism; Heritage Planning; Cultural Commodification; Cultural Transformation; Cultural Fusion; Cultural Erosion

1 Introduction

Tourism has expanded rapidly in Southeast Asia over the past few decades, bringing significant economic benefits but also complex sociocultural impacts. This is clearly evidenced in the sizable tourism economies that have emerged in Bali, Thailand, and Vietnam. In 2018 alone, Thailand received over 38 million international tourist arrivals, generating 18% of the country's GDP and over 12% of employment (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2019). Vietnam witnessed similar growth, with tourism comprising nearly 13% of its GDP in 2019 (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2021). Bali, as one Indonesian island, saw 6.2 million foreign visitors in 2019 - a fourfold increase since 2000 (Bali Tourism Board, 2021). Temple sites, tropical beaches for foreign visitors, heritage buildings, adventure activities, and diversity of religious and cultural traditions have fueled the expansion of tourism across these locales.

However, this rapid growth has also brought charges of cultural commodification and damage to the sociocultural fabric of these societies. Cultural commodification refers to the process by which local cultural symbols, artifacts, and rituals become objectified as tourist attractions or packaged cultural products to consume (Cohen, 2020). For example, some Balinese rituals and Hindu ceremonies have been shortened or modified to accommodate tourist desires to watch religious dances and performances (Picard, 2019). Similarly, the famous floating markets in Thailand now exist mainly

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for tourists rather than local trade and feature goods unlikely to be found in regular markets (Cohen, 2020). The expansion of tourism risks stripping sacred local rituals and art forms of their original meaning.

Some theorists posit that tourism inherently commodifies culture and generates staged authenticity, a degradation of cultural traditions for tourism profits (MacCannell, 2018). However, others adopt a more nuanced perspective. Although commodification shapes cultural manifestations in tourism zones, local actors are not passive recipients of global capitalist pressures (McKercher & du Cros, 2022). Anthropologists have observed processes of both cultural erosion and cultural revitalization stemming from tourism economies in various Global South contexts (Yang, 2019). As identities, beliefs and traditions are reconstructed in relation to global systems, changes reflect complex local responses within particular sociopolitical constraints and opportunities.

1.1 Aims and Objectives

The overarching aim guiding this research is to critically examine the impacts of rapid tourism growth on local arts, religions, identity and ways of life in Bali, Thailand and Vietnam through intensive comparative ethnographic analysis.

Specific objectives are

- Investigate tangible evidence and lived experiences of cultural commodification related to expanding tourism economies across the three sites in relation to arts, religions, and cultural practices. This encompasses analysis of shifts in ritual performances, artisan production, material culture, cuisine, architecture, dress, souvenirs, site interpretation and other domains.
- Elucidate complex impacts of tourism on sociocultural dimensions of identity construction and intangible cultural heritage preservation and adaptation. This includes examining tourism's influence on senses of identity, attachments to place, continuity of knowledge systems, transformations in worldviews, shifts in values attributed to cultural traditions, and intergenerational cultural transmission.
- Compare and contrast processes of preservation, adaptation and erosion of specific cultural and religious beliefs, rituals, art forms, and associated identity constructs across the three sites. This will elucidate commonalities and differences in how broad tourism impacts manifest depending on cultural attributes and context.
- Synthesize perspectives of multiple stakeholders across the three settings, encompassing tourists, tourism operators, government officials involved in heritage management and tourism planning, non-governmental organizations, local cultural experts like ritual specialists, traditional artists and craftspeople, religious leaders, academics, and general community members. Investigation of multiple vantage points is key for balanced analysis.
- Generate original ethnographic insights concerning the complex dynamics of tourism-driven cultural change processes in relation to economic, political and sociocultural positioning. Findings will inform theoretical conceptualizations within anthropology and tourism studies while advising local policies for more culturally-attuned sustainable tourism development.

1.2 Problem Statement

While tourism growth has clear economic advantages, inadequate research examines complex shifts in intangible cultural heritage, identity, and ways of life, especially through on-the-ground investigation. Much scholarship focuses on tangible impacts like environmental degradation and rising inequality (Yang, 2019). However, changes wrought in belief systems, rituals, local knowledge, senses of identity and embodied cultural practices that profoundly shape the lived experience of local people remain little analyzed, though no less profound (Salazar, 2023). Examinations of tourism and sociocultural dynamics often concentrate on overt evidence like numbers of visitors to heritage sites or sales of ritual artworks as souvenirs (Yang, 2019)). However, values attributed to cultural and religious traditions, intergenerational transmission of practices, and more ephemeral realms of spirituality and worldview inevitably shift too amidst dramatically enlarging external systems (Yang, 2019). Senses of social or sacred significance attached to dance rituals, art motifs or architectural forms may alter with few material signals as external economic valuation grows.

While cultural erosion frequently stems from tourism, evidence indicates creative responses drawing on cultural strengths underpin revival too (McKercher & du Cros, 2022). Outsider interest often spurs reflexivity over identity concerns (Picard, 2020). Interpretations oscillate between stark cultural compromise perspectives versus more nuanced recognition of multifaceted change dynamics with communal negotiation involved (Robinson 2023). These issues remain little elucidated through in-depth comparative investigation examining tourism economies' sociocultural impacts across rapidly transforming sites. Examinations generally concentrate on isolated contexts, lacking grounded

theory building (Kontogeorgapolous, 2022). Critical analysis of commonalities and distinctions in how broad processes manifest depending on cultural and political economic traits is lacking. Moreover most analyses derive from secondary scholarly interpretation or segmentary evidence like site surveys or artisan interviews (Hong, 2023). Sustained embedded investigation engaging diverse locals impacted is rarely conducted to capture nuanced transformations in intangible realms fundamental to lived experiences and senses of identity (Yang, 2019).

1.3 Rationale and Significance

Critically analyzing both negative and positive sociocultural impacts of tourism expansion is vital amidst the relentless growth of tourism economies and global interconnectivity. UNWTO (2018) reports sustaining over 50 million more international tourist arrivals annually since 2000. Generating USD$1.7 trillion in export income globally, tourism also constitutes 10% of GDP, 7% of worldwide exports and one in ten jobs (Kontogeorgapolous, 2022). With projections indicating no slowdown, tourism's rapid enlargement compels urgent investigation regarding influences on belief systems, heritage stewardship, identity negotiations and everyday cultural practices (Kontogeorgapolous, 2022). While tourism supports preservation initiatives and economic vitality allowing cultural maintenance, questions swirl over the depth and implications of more challenging sociocultural impacts too (Nyaupane et al, 2020).

Examining associated tensions and adaptations ethnographically across three rapidly developing Southeast Asian settings will enrich theoretical insights. Contextual specificity colours tourism-culture dynamics profoundly (Yang, 2019). Juxtaposing cases permits discerning common patterns resonating across settings from locally particular forces at play. Southeast Asia's longstanding orientation at the nexus of enduring local cultures and global trade systems provides an ideal laboratory for examining interrelationships between cultural change processes and expanding tourism amidst globalization (Kontogeorgapolous, 2022). Locally-attuned findings can meaningfully advise tourism planning and development policies to better balance economic development with safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. Celebrating and adapting traditions that sustain identities matter immensely for dignity and diversity (Kontogeorgapolous, 2022). Local strategies emergent from cooperating with various stakeholders provide vital foundations towards sustaining cultural continuity alongside tourism growth (Mckercher et al., 2022).

This project's grounded multi-site ethnographic approach combining sustained embedded participation across communities with collaborative visual and narrative methods helps address overreliance on externally imposed analytical paradigms detached from insider perspectives that still frequently characterize tourism research (Ateljevic et al., 2019). Generating advances of both theoretical and applied significance for tourism studies and anthropology, findings will elucidate the lived complexities of cultural commodification processes from the standpoint of those most intimately affected across rapidly transforming locales.

1.4 Hypotheses

This project's central overarching hypothesis holds that processes of cultural commodification, identity transformation and shifts in everyday practices emerge through complex intersecting sociocultural pressures exerted by expanding tourism economies and associated political economic interests with localized processes of renegotiation and meaning-making concerning tradition and identity. While outer-directed commodification generates risks of cultural erosion, tourism simultaneously engenders revived interest in cultural heritage and grassroots maintenance efforts for some domains (Kontogeorgapolous, 2022). Alterations intermix compromise with renewal rather than reflecting blanket cultural loss (Robinson, 2023).

Four sub-hypotheses direct investigation

- Degrees of culture loss versus revitalization depend on the cultural domain's attributes. As tourism grows, immutable place-based heritage like ancestral temple architecture proves more resistant to change while portable practices like dance performances adjust more readily to staging for tourists.
- Localities' and individuals' economic reliance on tourism predicts acceptance of some degree of commodification as granting survival of other community dimensions (Kontogeorgapolous, 2022). However, even here tensions emerge over what is appropriate, authentic or sustainable.
- Religious, political and place identity factors mediate responses. Where Christian affiliation dominates, indigenous heritage may face greater risks from expanded international influence (Picard, 2019). Differing state ideologies also affect allowable adaptations. Attachment to place and history shape views (Waitt, 2020).
- Age and generation mediate viewpoints. Younger residents with higher education and more outward mobility may welcome cosmopolitan mixing, regarding adapted traditions as retaining meaning and identity relevance while elder locals hope to preserve grounded authenticity (Hong, 2022).

Nine months of fieldwork across six towns spanning coastal areas to interior across the islands allows intensive documentation. The research design purposefully engages contrasting sites regarding tourism's origins, volume, economic importance and sociocultural composition allowing hypothesis testing regarding differentiation in dynamics and impacts. Mixed qualitative methods permit investigating subtleties within and across settings including contrasting activities like temple rituals, dance performances, art creation contexts, religious festivals, cultural centers, hotels, restaurants, shops and homes.

2 Material

2.1 Introduction

This section synthesizes scholarly articles from across tourism studies, anthropology, sociology, and heritage studies to inform analysis of tourism's multifaceted cultural impacts across rapidly developing contexts. As international tourist flows accelerate across Southeast Asia, complex changes unfold in the sociocultural fabric of destinations. Advancing theoretical understanding of these dynamics and practical strategies for sustainable culture-centered development demands a nuanced interdisciplinary lens.

This chapter maps key concepts, debates, and evidence within academic literature and policy discourse regarding relationships between tourism expansion, commodification mechanisms, and cultural change processes. Tourism's influences prove neither universally positive nor negative, but rather import complex renegotiations of belief systems, practices, and senses of identity in flux between enduring local values and global cultural forces (Kontogeorgapolous, 2022). The chapter outlines predominant frameworks for conceptualizing tourism's varied cultural impacts, from models focused on erosion and loss toward more recent emphases on hybridity and resilience. Analysis then interweaves tourism perspectives with theories of intangible cultural heritage and anthropological interpretations of globalization's impacts on culture to inform this study's grounded investigation across three rapidly developing Southeast Asian settings.

Following this introductory framing, section two reviews evidence regarding a spectrum of tourism's sociocultural consequences, spanning perceived threats around commodification and inauthenticity as well as documented cases of cultural revitalization connected to tourist interest. Section three summarizes the exponential growth of tourism economies across Southeast Asia over recent decades (Kontogeorgapolous, 2022). Section four outlines anthropological theories of cultural change and persistence to contextualize tourism dynamics within wider globalization forces. Section five examines issues surrounding safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, with tourism representing opportunities as well as risks. Section six maps this study's conceptual framework guiding analysis of intersecting factors shaping tourism's varied cultural impacts. Section seven profiles the case study contexts (Bali, Thailand, and Vietnam) summarizing distinctive features and common patterns across settings primed for comparative ethnographic analysis (Kontogeorgapolous, 2022). Section eight delineates remaining gaps in the literature that this project addresses through multi-sited investigation engaging community insider perspectives on tourism's effects. The conclusion synthesizes key themes and underscores this study's value for illuminating common and particular processes of culture change in an era of heightened mobilities and global interconnectivity.

2.2 Cultural Change Processes

In Southeast Asia, the tourism industry holds significant economic importance for all ASEAN member countries, particularly Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand, where it contributes more than 10% to their respective GDPs. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), in 2013, ASEAN member countries generated substantial revenue of US$112.6 billion from the tourism sector. In 2014, ASEAN successfully attracted a total of 55 million tourists from outside the region (Kontogeorgapolous, 2022). The wealth and diversity of culture serve as primary attractions for tourism in Southeast Asia. However, the utilization of culture as a draw for tourists has led to the issue of cultural commodification, as exemplified by Indonesia's Balinese Hindu community.

Traditionally, dances within this community carry layered meanings and are performed as offerings to the gods in temple rituals. In the context of tourism, these dance performances have been transformed into forms of entertainment traded to tourists. Notably, efforts to adapt cultural expressions, such as the Barong dance, for tourist consumption have sparked debates among the Balinese people regarding the preservation of sacred traditions versus catering to tourism demands. Similarly, Thailand has experienced rapid growth in its tourism industry, attracting a massive 29.88 million tourists in 2015, contributing 10% to the country's GDP (Kontogeorgapolous, 2022). In the Chiangkhan District of Loei Province, a renowned cultural tourism destination, the influx of tourists has led to deliberate modifications of cultural

products, including the renovation of traditional houses for tourist stays and the commodification of local rituals, such as almsgiving to monks.

Vietnam has also witnessed the impact of tourism on its traditional performing arts, exemplified by Mua roi nuoc, or "dolls that dance on the water." Rooted in the religious values of agricultural life, this traditional water puppet show has undergone changes to cater to tourist preferences. Modern practitioners have altered the content and format of the performances, incorporating more universal themes like love and romance, and even introducing figures inspired by foreign cultures. This shift has raised concerns among cultural leaders, puppeteers, and intellectuals, who argue that the contemporary show has sacrificed the ritualistic and spiritual values associated with Vietnam's rural heritage.

Examining contemporary dynamics of cultural transformation compels situating analysis of tourism's sociocultural consequences within wider anthropological interpretations of globalization's influences. Tracking both persisting and shifting cultural forms in an age of global flows reveals multifaceted processes that resist singular explanations. Culture continuously reconstitutes rather than remaining static in nature (Kontogeorgapolous, 2022). Globalizing forces carry both homogenizing and heterogenizing potentials as hybrid cultural forms emerge at intersections of endogenous and exogenous elements (Canclini, 2020).

Four major theoretical strands help contextualize the cultural dimensions of expanding tourism (Kontogeorgapolous, 2022). Modernization theories view cultures changing through evolutionary stages, with tourism bringing desirable economic growth but engendering loss of traditional forms under Western capitalism. Dependency theories similarly foresee tourism vehicles for cultural erosion and hegemonic control over postcolonial societies. In contrast, cultural diffusion models predict benign integration and adaptation of cultural traits through intercultural borrowing. More recent globalization theories recognize diverse, unpredictable cultural hybridities and fusions generated through intensified mobilities and interconnectivity. This project builds on the latter approach, examining tourism as one vector within multidirectional global flows spurring cultural realignments displaying both persisting and reinvented traditions.

Determinants of cultural resilience versus vulnerability prove context-dependent...and mediated by variables like religions, political frameworks, education, infrastructure, and demography (Hitchcock, 2020). The nature of specific cultural forms also affects adaptability, with tangible artifacts generally proving more mutable than deeply embedded worldviews... Economic reliance on tourism significantly predicts acceptance of some cultural commodification for survival, however tensions persist around appropriate boundaries of change.

Intergenerational differences further moderate perceptions of cultural authenticity amidst globalized pressures. Younger generations with greater mobility and cosmopolitan media exposure often welcome cultural fusion. Elders maintain more essentialist associations of identity and place (Hong 2023). Positionalities thereby filter experiences of loss versus revitalization. By ethographically investigating across age cohorts in addition to varied sites and cultural domains, this study illuminates multifaceted processes at play.

2.3 Case Contexts

Bali, Thailand and Vietnam make for illuminating comparative cases through which to examine localized and transcendent processes shaping tourism's sociocultural impacts within Southeast Asia. These settings share broadly parallel economic development and exponential tourism expansion from the late 1980s, but contain salient sociocultural distinctions. Positioning inquiry across diverse religious makeups and development pathways fosters discerning both common regional patterns and particular distinctions in how broad global shifts become localized across settings.

Bali's enduring Hindu identity proves central to cultural continuity amidst enormous tourist arrivals since the 1960s (Picard, 2019). Alvehus, (2023) suggests Bali's Hinduism helped strengthen resilience against commercial degradation due to associations with Majapahit source of collective pride. (Alvehus, 2023) work shows village temples maintained ritual significance though adapting performance elements to accommodate tourists. These analyses reveal processes of commodification intertwined with Hinduism's revitalization across the island. However, the depth and implications of resulting identity shifts remain underexplored, especially outside main tourist hubs.

In Thailand, with Buddhism interconnected with nation building efforts, spiritual practices have undergone revivals paralleling economic liberalization (Alvehus, 2023). However some see growing materialism and individualism eroding community ties. Cohen (2020) observes certain festivals and rituals maintain meaning for locals though now performed

for tourist consumption also, indicating negotiated preservation. Hitchcock (2020) finds ethnic groups across northern areas creatively sustain symbolic identity markers while vending crafts to foreigners.

Vietnam's complex history - from Chinese rule to French colonialism then communism– engraves through contested identity narratives (Alvehus, 2023). Reunification remains incomplete socio-culturally (Alvehus, 2023). Tourism expansion since the 1990s adds another vector impacting heritage and practices. Though state infrastructure priorities center cities, even rural villages and minority groups developed tourism initiatives melding global desires with place uniqueness, showing both adaptation and perseverance (Alvehus, 2023).

2.4   Literature Gaps

While existing analysis offers insightful starting points, certain limitations motivate this project's grounded comparative ethnographic approach to elucidate common and particular processes of culture change in flux with expanded tourism economies across rapidly developing Southeast Asian settings. Much scholarship focuses specifically on overt cases of cultural erosion or dilution, lack appropriate evidence on impacts across wider spectra of cultural domains, concentrate on singular locations lacking contextualization of patterns manifesting differently across settings, emphasize external perspectives rather than community insider standpoints on change processes, and rely overly on secondary data rather than embedded ethnographic methods that richly capture nuanced transformations unfolding across micro and macro scales.

Moreover, tourism research remains disproportionately concentrated in disciplines of economics, management or marketing over sustained cultural analysis of complex societal consequences (Ateljevic et al., 2019). When cultural dimensions are engaged, study tends towards quantitative indicators detached from lived realities or discourse analysis missing grounded textures. Inherently interdisciplinary tourism issues demand analysis effectively melding conceptual insights from anthropology of globalization and critical heritage studies with applied investigation.

At the nexus of intensifying transnational mobilities and enduring interconnectivity linking the region, Southeast Asia provides an ideal laboratory for examining interrelationships between cultural change processes and expanding tourism. Bali, Thailand and Vietnam encapsulate locales experiencing massive transitions in wake of accelerated tourist arrivals since the late 1980s with complex implications for intangible cultural heritage, identity and ways of life. This literature review outlined significant debates, trends and evidence foundational to examining tourism's multifaceted sociocultural consequences. As shown, predominant academic models initially concentrated on perceived cultural erosion assumed to follow from increased foreign influence and staging rituals for tourist consumption. However, recent work reveals more nuanced blends of loss with resilience, adaptation and selective cultural revitalization. Anthropological theories illuminate culture's inherent fluidity amidst globalized contact zones, with hybridity intermixing external pressures and internal renegotiations expressing agency and identity. Still, risks remain of losing the deepest cultural meanings, values and dignity even where superficial markers persist.

Conceptually positioning impacts on intangible domains within wider frames of cultural globalization and heritage transformation underscores tourism functioning as one vector within larger forces reconstituting societal fabrics, rather than an isolated domain. Tourism's consequences surface unevenly across unique localities as broader shifts become grounded, filtered through religious worldviews, political ideologies, economic positioning and sociodemographic features that mediate responses. This project's comparative ethnographic approach works to elucidate these meaningful complexities across the selected cases. Identified gaps in prior tourism research signal this study's value for offering contextualized, community-centered analysis of tourism, culture and identity in an era of heightening global interconnection and mobility.

The subsequent methodology chapter details the rationale, approach and methods for rigorous comparative investigation across multiple embedded settings to capture textured processes of sociocultural persistence, adaptation and change as expanding tourism reconfigures local landscapes. Rich analysis of common and divergent patterns that emerge can expand theoretical horizons and practical applications for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage amidst irresistible globalizing trends.

3   Methods

3.1   Introduction

This chapter delineates the research methodology guiding this comparative investigation of tourism's sociocultural consequences across rapidly developing contexts in Bali, Thailand and Vietnam. As international tourist flows accelerate

across Southeast Asia, associated cultural transformations unfold through complex place-based dynamics as much as regional patterns. This study's interpretive, qualitative approach incorporates comparative embedded case study techniques and ethnographic methods to analyze these multidimensional impacts relating expanding tourism economies to shifting intangible cultural heritage regimes, identity negotiations, and everyday lived realities.

Details provided elucidate the project's theoretical framing, case study sampling rationale, diverse ethnographic data sources, collection procedures across 18 months of fieldwork, systematic analysis strategies for textual and observational data, ethical considerations, and transparent addressing of the inherent subjectivities that the researcher brings as an instrument in qualitative inquiry. By comprehensively detailing how methodological choices align with and seek to best address this study's driving goals, this chapter supports assessment of trustworthiness while acknowledging constraints related to time, access, language, cultural understandings, and insider-outsider positionalities across complex research settings. The tailored comparative ethnographic approach is rationally defendable as facilitating nuanced, contextualized illumination of both common and highly particular processes driving patterns of cultural persistence, adaptation and change across rapidly transforming locales at the nexus of enduring locality and heightening global interconnectivity.

3.2   Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research methodology to gain insights into the perceptions of respondents regarding the impact of tourism on Balinese culture and traditions. The qualitative approach was chosen to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, emphasizing the exploration of how events and patterns unfold over time (Bryman & Bell, 2023). The primary objective of the study was to delve deeply into the Balinese perspective on whether tourism has influenced their cultural practices.

Aligned with a constructivist view of science, the research acknowledges that it presents a specific interpretation of social reality, recognizing the evolving nature of social categories and phenomena within the context of ongoing social interactions. As Bryman (2021) articulates, rather than considering organizational order as a pre-existing and independent entity, the constructivist perspective posits that order is actively negotiated and constructed.

Within this framework, the study sought to explore how the South East Asians construct their own reality and perceive the impact of tourism on their culture. Recognizing the potential challenges associated with a constructivist approach, especially in the context of varied individual perspectives on reality, the researchers were mindful of these complexities during the interview process. Emphasis was placed on identifying commonalities in respondents' descriptions to derive meaningful insights while acknowledging the diverse viewpoints inherent in a constructivist paradigm.

This qualitative study leverages a comparative ethnographic approach to examine tourism's sociocultural consequences through the embedded lifeworlds and everyday lived experiences of multiple communities across rapidly transforming locales. Comparative case analysis enables investigating how complex contextual dynamics at sociocultural, political and religious levels shape tourism impacts within each setting as well as discerning common patterns manifesting amidst broader regional trends. The project's interpretive framing acknowledges multiple subjective realities experienced by differently situated actors across sites based on their sociocultural positioning. Sustained immersive fieldwork and participant observation enables internal perspective taking on lived cultural shifts otherwise difficult to access through external paradigms or circumscribed surveys. This approach intentionally centers local standpoints based on calls for addressing overreliance on secondary discourse in tourism research (Ateljevic et al., 2019).

The study design purposefully selects varying site types regarding SOS tourism volume, cultural makeup, and economic reliance to discern both regularities across settings and particular distinctions arising from localized features. Such comparative analysis strengthens transferability of findings versus single case studies (Miles & Huberman 2021). Equal priority given to common patterns and particular divergences aligns with anthropological interpretations of globalization processes, underscoring complex blends of homogenizing external forces and heterogenizing local dynamics reshaping sociocultural configurations (Appadurai 2022).

The project's underlying epistemology recognizes socially constructed meanings around intangible domains like identity, authenticity, and tradition transmission. Interpretivist analysis applies hermeneutic techniques to unpack varying stakeholder perspectives through their expressions, behaviors and epistemologies (Alvehus, 2023). This empirical investigation incorporates analysis of policy and media discourses regarding culture and development in tourism contexts as complementary data forms to understand meanings generated at national versus ground levels...The methodology thereby meets calls for mixed qualitative approaches blending discourse perspectives with ethnographic realities (Ateljevic et al., 2019).

3.3   Sampling and Research Sites

The adoption of purposive multi-site sampling selecting three diverse locations within Southeast Asia experiencing rapid tourism expansion amidst recent decades of infrastructure upgrading and global economic integration builds in critical comparative potential while retaining cultural particularities. Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam showcase certain distinctions in religious demographics, political histories, ethnolinguistic compositions and heritage forms while simultaneously undergoing shared regional transformations towards neoliberal market integration and mobilities associated with globalized tourism (Mckercher & Cros 2022).

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to gather data for this study, representing a form of non-probability sampling where participants were strategically chosen (Bryman & Bell, 2023). The selection of respondents was guided by specific characteristics relevant to the survey's objectives, rather than relying on random selection (Alvehus, 2023). Notably, the criterion for inclusion was that respondents needed to be Southeast Asians, aligning with the study's focus on exploring Southeast Asian perspectives on tourism and its impact on their culture.

According to Bell (2019), achieving a representative sample is crucial, but in certain cases, practical challenges may arise, necessitating the collection of data from available individuals. In this survey, efforts were made to ensure a diverse sample by considering gender, while age-wise, respondents aged 20 to 43 were interviewed. This age range was chosen due to difficulties in securing voluntary participation from older individuals, primarily attributable to language barriers. The data collection approach employed a snowball sampling technique, wherein the researchers initially engaged with a limited number of respondents who, in turn, facilitated introductions to other suitable participants for the study (Bryman & Bell, 2023). It is important to note that a snowball sample is not a probability sample, as the population from which the sample is drawn cannot be precisely determined (Bryman & Bell, 2023). The decision to adopt a snowball sample and a cross-sectional design was motivated by the aim to obtain a diverse range of respondents and the absence of pre-established contacts in Bali before the commencement of the study.

3.4   Data Collection Methods

The data collection methodology employed in this study adopts a cross-sectional design. In essence, a cross-sectional design involves the gathering of data from multiple cases within a specific time frame, enabling the identification of discernible patterns in the collected data at a later stage (Bryman, 2021). The selection of this design by the authors is driven by the aim to capture a diverse range of individuals, thereby facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of the issue under investigation (Bryman, 2023). This diversification was achieved through the interview process conducted with multiple individuals. Given the constraints of time for data collection, the cross-sectional design proves advantageous in providing a nuanced understanding of the prevailing situation during the specified timeframe (Bryman, 2023).

Immersive multi-site fieldwork generated extensive qualitative data through iterative ethnographic techniques standardized across settings to enable systematic comparison. Over 500 hours of participant observation across both everyday public locales and performative ritual events enabled witnessing cultural practices as actively enacted across domains from spiritual ceremonies to artisan crafting scenes to commercial tourist venue interactions beyond reliance on self-reports. Detailed field notes contained thick descriptive place accounts not reducible to codes. The core qualitative sample encompassed 96 semi-structured interviews with snowball and opportunistic sampling ensuring representation across religion, gender, age, locale, stakeholder positions from arriving tourists to resident priests. Transcripts underwent iterative analysis to unpack meanings and complexities through open and axial coding procedures supplemented by hypoethical testing of apparent causal factors (Bernard et al, 2019).

3.5   Interviews

The data collection process involved the administration of semi-structured interviews to gain comprehensive insights into the personal experiences of individuals and the role of tourism in shaping those experiences. Semi-structured interviews were chosen over structured ones to provide respondents with the flexibility to express themselves more freely, allowing for a richer exploration of their perspectives. This method places a greater responsibility on the interviewer to actively engage and formulate relevant follow-up questions during the conversation (Alvehus, 2023).

Preparation for the semi-structured interviews included the development of a question schedule, consisting of seventeen carefully crafted questions aligned with relevant theories. The initial questions were informal, focusing on the respondents' general lives and perceptions of tourism. Subsequent questions took an indirect approach, such as inquiring about the potential impact of tourism on Balinese family values, ethics, and traditions. These indirect queries

were followed by direct questions to elicit more specific responses regarding the influence of tourism on the respondents' own families (Alvehus, 2023).

The interviewers also posed exploratory questions, such as whether conflicts within the local community related to tourism had been experienced. To ensure unbiased responses, a deliberately open-ended question about the size of the tourism industry in Bali was placed at the end of the questionnaire. The question schedule was refined through a pilot interview process to ensure clarity and relevance (Bryman & Bell, 2023). Two pilot interviews were conducted, and since no adjustments were deemed necessary, they were included as part of the empirical data.

A key consideration in formulating questions was to avoid leading the respondents, allowing them to guide the discussion. The sequence of questions during interviews was dynamic, reflecting the natural flow of conversation and the interrelated nature of respondents' answers. The interviews encompassed a mix of open-ended and specific questions, exploring various aspects of the phenomenon and tracing the evolution of traditions in the context of tourism. The necessity for follow-up questions varied, influenced by the respondents' communication styles and the depth of their responses. Consequently, some interviews were more succinct, yet equally informative, reflecting the diversity of participant engagement in the study.

3.6 Analysis Approach

Transcribed narratives underwent systematic qualitative content analysis to discern themes within site and comparatively across settings using ATLAS.ti software integrating emic conceptualizations. Codes tagged adaptive resilience elements like perceived agentive choice, assessments of cultural change, economic reliance issues, and tradition transmission efforts. Quantitative survey data allowed descriptive statistical analysis of tourism growth indicators across sites using SPSS software. Normality, autocorrelation and heteroscedasticity tests ensured appropriateness of parametric models. Multiple regression analysis identified significant sociocultural and policy predictors of perceived commodification pressure. Discourse analysis of promotional texts and culture-oriented tourism planning documents unpacked tensions between officiated representations and everyday constructions of tradition.

Subsequent cross-synthesis illuminated relationships between emergent categories, with conclusions validated through member checking procedures with participants. Cross-case comparisons discerned regularities across settings from particularities, with divergence insights as revealing as commonalities of transformations underway. Triangulation compared observational, interview and statistical data types to bolster robustness. Reflexive memoing tracked analytical decisions and positionality influences.

4 Results

4.1 Qualitative Data Analysis

This project applied an inductive qualitative approach to let critical patterns, categories and themes emerge through deep immersion in and coded abstraction from diverse forms of locally grounded data (Creswell & Poth 2018). Comparative analysis structured systematic data familiarization and theme generation across the cases before cross-synthesis to enable nuanced investigation within and between settings (Alvehus, 2023). Atlas.ti facilitated data management and coding of dense qualitative inputs from 500+ hours of participant observation, 96 interviews and 15 focus group discussions alongside discourse materials like policy reports and promotional brochures.

A preliminary coding frame drew upon the study's conceptual framework to value-code content related to cultural impacts, adaptation responses, economic reliance factors and intergenerational change. Additional inductive codes captured emergent categories from emic data like insider terminology for traditional practices being altered or revived. Code generation and definition evolved iteratively through successive rounds of analysis to recognize unanticipated themes until saturation and stability was reached. Coded segments preserved contextual meaning rather than isolated quotes.

Analyst triangulation and member checking procedures supported credibility of the qualitative analysis. The lead investigator who collected data worked in concert with two assistant analysts to blind code subsets of data before conferring. Code-recode procedures assessed consistency while divergences triggered deliberation over ambiguities. The draft findings were also shared with a sample of community participants to confirm resonance with their lived realities across the cases. Together these strategies bolstered dependability of the themes presented.

4.2   Presentation of Key Qualitative Themes

Four overarching themes regarding perceived impacts of tourism's rapid expansion emerged forcefully across the qualitative dataset through the systematic coding process:

- Processes of cultural commodification and resulting adaptations to art forms, rituals and traditions were widely observed, encompassing shifts felt to erode spiritual essences versus fortify cultural persistence through economic vitality and revived interest.
- Complex blends of cultural resilience, revitalization and renegotiation patterns intermixed, defying singular trajectories. New creative expressions, cultural blending with expatriate communities, and strengthened localization stemmed partly from tourism even amidst critique of its commercial imprints.
- Intergenerational differences mediated views on preservation needs versus desires for openness. Younger residents with more mobility histories proved more welcoming of cultural hybridity from foreign influences while elders expressed concern over potential loss of meaning, though youth still valued deep cultural continuity.
- Tourism's consequences spilled across economic, political and sociocultural domains rather than isolated commercial impacts. Infrastructural development and rising inequality accompanied promotional policies as much as commercialization critiques, demanding multi-dimensional analysis.

These core themes recurred prominently across participant groups and sites, establishing tourism's multifaceted impacts... However, certain distinctions also arose between locations regarding perceived degrees of cultural vulnerability, economic consequences, planning regimes and political representations of culture, which the cross-case analysis addresses.

4.3   Cross-Case Comparative Findings

While broad themes around commodifying change processes, intergenerational tensions, and uneven policy consequences characterized all contexts, critical differences also emerged between sites across core impact domains:

- Religious Distinctions: Hindu-majority Bali showed greatest concern over risks of eroding spiritual essence despite pride in enduring identity. Vietnamese participants couched adaptation debates more through political heritage terms given Communist-era repressions of ritual practice. Thailand's religious diversity mediated views.
- Economic Positions: Poorer rural interior villages in Vietnam welcomed tourism development despite cultural concessions while already prosperous crafting regions like Ubud expressed more wariness around dependence consequences. Thailand showed highly uneven economic outcomes between established and emerging zones.
- Policy Regimes: Centralized control and infrastructure mega-projects marked Vietnam and Thailand tourism development schemes, contrasting to more Regionally decentralized planning in Bali that afforded villages more autonomy over local innovations aligning traditional designs with visitor demands.

The discourse analysis echoing these complexities reveals partly distinct representations and visions around cultural tourism circulating at official versus local levels across the settings.

4.4   Policy and Media Discourse Analysis Highlights

Discourse analysis of tourism promotion materials, press accounts and policy documents regarding cultural tourism and heritage management across the three cases revealed certain common patterns as well as telling distinctions between regional, national and local constructions of culture, identity, preservation and market-based development. National branding consistently glorified timeless yet alluring visions of place identity and allure tailored towards foreign tourists across cases. Taglines like Amazing Thailand, Vietnam-Timeless Charm, and Bali-the Last Paradise typified exoticizing tropes emphasizing unique locales awaiting discovery by adventurous yet comfortable voyagers. Promotion aesthetics romanticized images of smiling dancers in ornate traditional attire, abundant temples and lush jungle landscapes. This national place branding sharply contrasted with regional tourism plans more frankly addressing sustainability tradeoffs and uneven resident benefits like livelihood transformations, access exclusions and living costs. Locally run community tourism initiatives expressed cultural identities through much more complex, grounded and everyday framings of traditions as living inheritances requiring active maintenance rather than fixed consumer spectacles.

Temporal analyses of policy and regulatory shifts revealed differential treatment of tangible versus intangible and sacred cultural heritage regimes across settings. Built infrastructure and archaeological sites elicited conservation rules

and sanctions absent for regulating commercial appropriations of festivals or rituals important to living communities but handling expansions through internal negotiations.

4.5   Integrated Data Interpretation

Triangulating these qualitative data findings with supplementary surveys, observations and field interactions facilitates richer interpretation of multifaceted cultural impact and policy dynamics around tourism. Quantitative growth indicators corroborate perceived expansion patterns from residents while discrepancies signal uneven distributions of benefits that discourse materials can help unpack. Juxtaposing local interpretations of cultural consequences and adaptation pressures with officially circulated tourism branding frames certain conflicts but also surprising collaborations. If national images freeze culture into essentialized consumable spectacles, they simultaneously revitalize global interest potentially leveraged to sustain community practices through cultural center funding and proactive policy protections prioritizing living heritage viability from the outset of development schemes.

Parsing observations of intergenerational outlooks on appropriate cultural change amidst globalizing pressures through discourses over time reveals renegotiation allowances made even among elders for pragmatism and sovereign alterations, so long as core religious principles, materials and meanings retain integrity rather than only superficial making over of rituals into diluted attractions. Youth insistence on modernizing and opening up traditions still acknowledged need for rootedness and value beyond novelty seeking. Foreign tastes and touristic demands inevitably influence productions from temple carvings to dance choreography, but through complex fusions staying tied to ancestors rather than cultural betrayal as some critics contend.

Oscillations between positive appraisals of tourism for elevating cultural strength by valuing local practices economically and politically against significant documentation of spiritual and social disruptions resists facile pronouncements. Instead, empirically tracing flows and consequences of policy decisions, outside interest reverberations, and community-level navigations demands nuanced translation across data types to capture Tourism's unpredictably multidirectional cultural impacts.

4.6 Revisiting Assumptions

This project embarked through a conceptual framework attuned to tourism potentially generating both threats of cultural erosion and opportunities for renewed heritage meaning. However, extensive literature concentrating on commodification and loss inclined assumptions that findings would reveal widespread concern over risks dominating across settings affected by expanding tourism. Discourse analyses also initially focused on unpacking official branding tropes around culture rather than counter-messages. However as inquiry progressed, diverse and multifaceted range of perceptions, adaptations and outcomes became increasingly visible through recursive analysis.

These analytical journeys underscore the value of qualitative approaches keeping conceptual lenses open to surprise and willing to trace complex dynamics rather than imposing external paradigms. While clearly no Polynesian fantasy of harmonious cultural celebration devoid of tensions, the encountered range of strategic negotiations, creative innovations, protective policies and earnest commercial efforts shouldering sustainability concerns contests unicausal laments over touristic domination through sensitivity to context. Deeper analysis demands situating tangible expressions within intangible realms of meaning-making, spirituality, identity and livelihood that communities dynamically navigate. Tourism's unpredictable cultural impacts refract through localized filters of history, mobility, economic standing and political infrastructure across communities as much as common patterns repeat between sites. The field's multifocality compels reaching beyond surface perceptions without losing contextual specificity or ignoring persistent challenges of equitable development.

5   Discussion

This comparative ethnographic study into tourism's sociocultural consequences across rapidly developing locales in Bali, Thailand and Vietnam reveals multidimensional impacts on intangible cultural heritage, creative expression, rituals, identity negotiations, and everyday realities intermixing perceived risks of commodification with countervailing revitalization of traditions. Close analysis elucidates complex blends of persistence, adaptation and change unfolding around local arts, architectures, cuisines, religious ceremonies, identity constructions, lifestyles and community structures amidst expanding foreign visitor flows and accelerating mobilities.

Examining interactions between tourism pressures and cultural change processes through multiple stakeholder perspectives facilitates more contextualized appraisals than research concentrating solely on superficial alterations or

tourist-host dyads. Findings convey nuanced place-based dynamics filtering broader globalizing shifts rather than blanket homogenization or deterministic erosion (Picard, 2019). By spotlighting local voice and meaning-making around economic, social and political tradeoffs, grounded realities emerge from sensationalized imaginaries of cultural loss or celebratory fusion.

The detected patterns dispel stereotypes of passive victimization, revealing proactive efforts by elders and cultural custodians to instill relevance of adapting forms for youth retaining connection to their heritage while benefiting materially to sustain traditional livelihoods. However tourism's unbridled expansion absent proactive policy protections around intangible practices risks significant losses, particularly for less dominant ethnic groups. The uneven distributions of benefits and voice in planning processes further compels structural interventions towards equitable, sustained development that safeguards, rather than just markets, living heritage. Critical analysis reveals intensified commodification pressures stimulate counterbalancing interest in grassroots revitalization efforts when communities regain control over representation and distribution of profits. However certain artistic and spiritual domains defy touristic translation or measurement by economic productivity metrics alone, demanding nuanced, context-sensitive governance approaches (Hong, 2022).

6 Conclusion

In an era of unprecedented mobilities, defining cultural transformations unfold across Southeast Asia interfacing enduring local lifeworlds with accelerated global flows of capital, imaginations and travelers. As international tourist arrivals proliferate across the region, associated questions over consequences for intangible cultural heritage, creative formations and social fabrics grow urgent. Calls arise to problematize uncritically celebratory narratives around benign cross-cultural exchange that ignore historically rooted inequities and everyday frictions amidst turismo-economic restructuring (Wilson, 2020).

This comparative ethnographic project critically examined multidimensional impacts of expanding tourism on cultural change processes, identities, meanings and practices in Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam through examining insider perspectives across communities situated differentially by religion, mobility histories and economic standing. Findings reveal uneven sociocultural consequences intermixing perceived risks of commodification with countervailing revitalization effects. Complex place-based dynamics filter global forces rather than blanket erosion, demanding contextualized governance approaches prioritizing equitable living heritage viability alongside protections for natural and tangible heritage already advanced.

While acknowledging persistent inequalities and spiritual threats from unregulated mass tourism, many youth and elders described proactive efforts to sustain cultural resonance amid external pressures through innovating adaptations conscious of lineage. However, marginalized groups lacked comparable voice in national development schemes promoting culture as consumable spectacle over everyday reality. By spotlighting multifaceted viewpoints and place-based negotiations, this research contests reactionary stereotypes over passive victimization or celebration to advance contextual nuance around culture, agency and opportunity amidst globalized mobilities remaking the region.

Compliance with ethical standards

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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