

## DEVELOPING SOUVENIRS FROM CRAFT VILLAGES IN HOI AN CITY

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### Abstract

Hoi An is a well-known tourist destination for both Vietnamese and foreign visitors, not only because it has a cultural heritage recognized by UNESCO but also because of its other cultural resources, including craft villages. Serving as both attractions and experiences for tourists, craft villages give them the opportunity to create unique mementos of their vacation while also boosting household income and elevating the status of craft villages. How is Hoi An's tourism industry exploiting this resource in tourism? The article conducts a scientific investigation of the role and current state of crafts in the production of souvenirs for tourism in general, particularly in Hoi An's craft villages such as Thanh Ha pottery and Kim Bong carpentry village, using research on souvenirs, observation techniques, and field excursions. The findings demonstrate that handicraft souvenirs are few, have fewer appealing designs, and must compete hard with souvenirs from other localities. These results will facilitate the collaborative efforts of Hoi An's tourism stakeholders to identify strategies that guarantee the advantages that tourism brings to craft villages and vice versa.

**Keywords:** authenticity, handicraft, Hoi An, souvenir, tourism

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### 1. Introduction

Scholars have been studying the links between tourists, souvenirs, and tourism for several decades (Swanson, 2014). Studies on souvenirs are not isolated but are embedded in studies of shopping, consumption, gift-giving habits, material culture, authenticity and handicrafts (Swanson & Timothy, 2012). Souvenir played an important role in travel. As part of their journey, tourists may seek opportunities to move from the common life or superficial aspects of their trip to experiencing the “authentic life” of the community or region they are visiting. These tourists look for manifestations of “real life” as it is or as it was in the places they visit. Taking note of these needs or wishes, countries are launching marketing strategies in which we can easily find promises about the authenticity of tourist destinations. This is what “Visit Malaysia, truly Asia”, “Incredible India” or “100% pure New Zealand” do. Tourists going to Iowa (USA) are promised that “visiting Iowa is visiting the REAL America” will satisfy them. Also, as part of their trip, tourists buy handicrafts and other souvenirs which are like tangible proofs possessing the authenticity of the places they visited, and which remind them of activities not part of static life “tourists at home”. Souvenirs acquired during the special conditions of travel become the most valuable goods owned by tourists (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988).

In their article *Tourism and Craft marketing: “producers, retailers and consumers”* presented at the annual conference of the United States Travel and Tourism Research Association, Littrell et al. (1993), defined that craft concerns objects that are made hand outside the factories. Handicraft items are made with particular attention to materials; from design to manufacturing, and these items could be used and decorated.

Historically, handicrafts were produced to meet the functional and ritual needs of the community. Today, improved transportation systems allow mass-produced products to reach remote villages and take the place of too many local artisanal products (Popelka & Littrell, 1991). Due to this change in business practices in the indigenous market, indigenous artisans lost income. Economic necessity therefore forces craft producers to seek new markets or seek other sources of income.

However, major problems are associated with modifying traditional products or developing new products for non-traditional markets. Producers have in-depth knowledge of local product aesthetics and preferences, but these standards are not applied towards consumers from other cultures (Graburn, 1982).

As a destination with a long history of development, honored as a world cultural heritage by UNESCO in 1999, Hoi An is attracting more and more tourists. Not only Hoi An ancient town, but Hoi An city also has many traditional handicrafts that are of great interest to tourists. Can Hoi An take advantage of this resource in tourism development and especially create souvenirs to serve tourists?

## 2. Research methods

The article mainly approaches problem solving using qualitative methods to collect and analyse secondary and primary data. To determine the significance and types of souvenirs, as well as how to transform handicrafts into souvenirs that attract tourists, the article uses the secondary data by working on souvenir research in relation to crafts, authenticity, and tourism. In addition, to highlight the limitations and responsiveness of these souvenir items to tourists, the article uses observation and field research methods in Hoi An ancient town and craft villages, with special focus on Thanh Ha pottery village and Kim Bong carpentry village. The field trip process helps collect data about tourist reception activities, souvenir products offered to visitors, and the challenges of craft villages, as well as souvenir items imported from other localities sold everywhere in the old town.

## 3. Findings and Discussion

### 3.1. Crafts – a souvenir

The first evidence of the presence of crafts with “souvenir” value appeared towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the time when tourist practices were asserting themselves (Perles, 2007). Since World War II, the demand for souvenir arts and crafts has grown in step with tourist visits and growing numbers of collectors; mainly in previously isolated areas of the world (Graburn, 1982). Tourists want to bring home a few things to mark, both in their own memories and in the minds of their relationships, the places they have been. Not keen on traditional arts, they only want things that remind them of the superficial aspects of their experience and can only afford to buy small, easily transportable objects. The quantitative progression of mass tourism intensifies these trends for commercial fine arts and introduces new factors.

With the birth, the extension if not the explosion of the holiday practice from the 1950s, many rural artisans, formerly specialized in the production of utilitarian objects, deliberately, and sometimes exclusively, oriented themselves towards niche of remembrance. In some cases, tourist demand for souvenirs requires only slight modification of traditional items such as miniaturization of pottery or wood carvings. Artisans are also seeing other major changes such as the simplification of the product or the use of new materials. For example, modern sculptures of the Makonde people of East Africa no longer have indigenous functions and are no longer made, as tradition would have it, of kapok wood (light wood of the region) but of any wood (local or import). Furthermore, they practically no longer bear any aesthetic and formal relationships with traditional Makonde art (Graburn, 1982).

Thus, souvenir arts have little or no importance in terms of the culture that produces them, except that they can only be sold for the benefit of the community. Almost all the old aesthetic rules can be broken, while the social organization of production can change. New products have been generated

to meet the needs of the market, museums, and tourist collectors at all levels. Similar tourism developments have successfully spread all over the world.

Artistic works that are generally recognized as such are handmade, expensive, and unique (or in very few copies), whereas souvenirs are usually mass-produced, inexpensive, and often present (Thompson et al., 2012). While this may be the case, it may be contested in the postmodern context, as the distinction between artistic works and memories may become blurred. And the collection of tourist souvenirs stimulates the manufacture of replicas of traditional objects and the mass production of souvenirs which are based on traditional canons of taste, form, and modes of production.

### **3.2. Memory and authenticity in tourism**

The verb souvenir, which means “to remember”, comes from French origins. It denotes an object - a place, time, event, or even a person that aids in memory when translated as an English noun (Swanson & Timothy, 2012). According to dougoud (2000) and decrop & Masset (2014), souvenirs are presents or goods made locally that have a connection to the important culture and history of the places they are visiting.

gordon (1986) developed a widely referenced typology of five types of souvenirs: (1) “pictorial images” such as postcards (but also photographs, posters and books), souvenirs of (2) “pieces of the rock” which are literally extracted from the environment of the destination (like a beach pebble), (3) “symbolic shorthand” which are items that evoke thoughts about the place where they were purchased (like replica monuments), (4) “markers” inscribed with words or logos that mark a destination and/or time (such as an inscribed mug or other utilitarian object), (5) “local product” souvenirs that are indicative of local goods such as clothing from the regional crafts.

Timothy (2005) adds yet a sixth type of memory to this list which calls the “memory of the situation”. “Situational memorabilia” which refers to memories of wars, disasters, commemorations can suddenly become a valuable tourist commodity after a devastating event and subsequently become highly collectible, memorable, and useful as an item of capital cultural for the demanding tourist. The event itself becomes a commodity and passes into history.

Following the research of Thompson et al. (2012), before mass tourism, at the time of the “Grand Tour” in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, souvenirs consisted of prints, jewelry and other works of art. Little by little, they were revised downwards to make them more financially affordable. At the end of the 18th century, painters produced specific views of sites, responding to the enthusiasm of the public of tourists on the Grand Tour (Evans, 1999). It is interesting to note that even in the early days of mass production of this type of souvenir, their development was based on copying and dimensional reduction of recognized artistic works. In this respect, the memory at the beginning is rarely a “unique” or “authentic” object, but a representation, which often has evolved through several iterations and is still a key element today.

Tittrell et al. (1993) stated five criteria for the authenticity of souvenirs used by tourists, as follows: uniqueness, workmanship, aesthetics and use, cultural and historical integrity, and genuineness. Then, the subject of authenticity is also often linked to that of memory in tourism research (Halewood & Hannam, 2001). Indeed, it has often been argued that the inauthenticity of much tourism comes from the process of commodification which gives the phenomenon an alienating and explicit exchange value (Watson & Kopachevsky, 1994). According to this view, aspects of tourism can also lead to a standardization of culture and the translation of local phenomena into global culture particularly through the production of souvenirs.

On the other hand, certain aspects of heritage tourism can also lead to a reevaluation of local culture and the local population redevelops the community despite the production of souvenirs (Thompson et al., 2012). In search of authenticity, some tourists focus on the product based on its specificity and originality, its manufacturing, its cultural and historical integrity, its aesthetics, and (or) its functions and use.

Interestingly, academic expertise can also be used to confer authenticity. Even a sense of place can confer a sense of authenticity because something sold in an “authenticated” place gives added authenticity (Shenhav-Keller, 1993). Purchasing from places where goods are actually made can even become a verification of the authenticity process (authenticity is conferred when people see the item being made) (Littrell et al., 1993). Labels are also often put on goods to make them appear more authentic and to add a guarantee of quality assurance. Such “marking” helps to make explicit the exchange value of the product. But, clearly, the production of souvenir goods can be a “double-edged sword”, because while it can be lucrative for a host community, it can also lead to a craft item that is mass produced and becomes inauthentic and dissociated from its original meaning.

However, regardless of the category, the memory has a particular function or purpose: It makes what would otherwise be an ethereal state tangible, just like a physical item does. Because of its physical presence, an ephemeral, fleeting experience can be located, defined, and frozen in time, and something commonplace can be elevated to the status of an amazing experience. Individuals have the urge to bring items from remarkable and sacred time and space home with them, where they become part of the regular, everyday time and space after they get there. Because of the transient and intangible nature of things, they are unable to hold the extraordinary experience, but they can hold it on a tangible object that originates from the location they visited (Gordon, 1986).

The process by which we leave the ordinary state (home) for the extraordinary or heightened state (far, elsewhere) and become a tourist is generally conceived as temporary. But we can return to normal by taking a piece of the extraordinary in terms of memory. The actual tourism experience cannot be recreated, but the object may contain something of the original existential tourism experience (Wang, 1999). Paradoxically, these “extraordinaries” are often mass-produced, low-quality items, but they can still contain value in terms of association with a real experience or place. Their real value and their assigned value are very different. If a mass production of souvenirs is examined objectively, especially in the context of a souvenir shop, it seems contradictory that a souvenir can bring much presence to the home. But upon its return, the memory can function as an object through which the memory can be reexamined (Thompson et al., 2012).

### ***3.3. Craft villages in Hoi An***

There are many traditional trades in Hoi An and also, in the suburbs, villages of traditional trades such as carpentry, pottery, lanterns, rattan basketry, hat making, mat weaving, textile weaving, embroidery, clothing, lacquer manufacturing, etc. Due to the limitations of the research, we will only discuss here the three traditional craft villages in the city developed for tourism: namely Kim Bồng carpentry village, Thanh Hà pottery village.

#### ***3.3.1. Thanh Hà pottery***

The most famous traditional pottery village in Quảng Nam is Thanh Hà. According to legend, around the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the ancestors of ten family lines were the first creators of the village of Thanh Hà but they first lived in the hamlet of Chiêm Thành. The most flourishing period of Thanh Hà pottery village extended from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the founding and development of Hoi An and the commercial center of Đàng Trong. The village produced bricks and tiles for the construction of houses in Hoi An. Aside from essential products that serve the daily needs of residents and the surrounding area, sugar jars became essential products for traders in Đàng Trong. The reputation of the pottery village of Thanh Hà increased considerably with the pottery exported to Japan in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Cochi or Cauchi pottery (Giao Chi) was very popular with the Japanese (Phạm, 2002).

In the village, there were around twenty turntables and to operate each turntable, three workers were needed. Two workers were responsible for kneading the clay and one worker oversaw turning the pottery. The number of workers in the village was therefore more than a hundred because, in addition, Thanh Hà had many kilns. There were also village traders who owned large boats to transport pottery products throughout the neighboring provinces.



From the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the pottery village of Thanh Hà began its decline because the pottery market was increasingly threatened by the appearance of new materials in the manufacture of common household utensils. Consumers, no longer wanting to use terracotta products considered outdated, preferred to buy modern products made of aluminum and plastic. These utensils are more practical and economical than those made of terracotta because they are more resistant and difficult to break. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were only two potteries left in operation which not only produced only small quantities but also had great difficulty adapting to the needs of consumers more attracted by “modern” products. Needs evolved but the products were not improved in their variety, their models and manufacturing techniques stagnated. Another handicap was that the skilled workers were old and no longer passed on their know-how to young people. The latter find the job too difficult and not very remunerative given the low economic value of the products and the small size of the consumer market. Big questions arise that politicians and their socio-cultural partners must answer: what is the future of the profession and how can we pass on the traditional values and know-how of this profession from generation to generation?

To partially answer these questions, the Hoi An city is now encouraging the few remaining artisans to welcome tourists who would like to know and deepen the values of this traditional profession through practice. Now there are eleven kilns operating regularly which receive the income from the sale of entry tickets to the village. Aside from the eleven kilns, the other families in the village participate in tourism and benefit from it through the sale of souvenirs.



Traditional pottery products



New pottery products

**Fig 1.** Thanh Hà Pottery village (2016, 2022)

### 3.3.2. Kim Bông carpentry

Kim Bông carpentry village was founded in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, this profession began to develop thanks to the prosperity of the commercial port of Hoi An. Until the

18<sup>th</sup> century, this profession achieved prosperous development with three main divisions: carpentry in the construction of monuments urban architectural works, civil carpentry, and carpentry in boat construction. This carpentry village was well known because the ancient wooden houses of Hoi An had been built by the carpenters and sculptors of Kim Bồng. The village's sculptors were so renowned and highly regarded in Vietnam. Today, the imprints of this profession are clearly expressed and visible in the ancient houses, pagodas, congregation seats and houses of worship of Hoi An. All these buildings are still decorated with meticulous and aesthetic sculptures.

Nowadays, carpenters continue to make traditional products such as doors, gates, religious statues and traditional "bầu" boats, but they have also moved to the design and manufacture of modern furniture and objects in drink. With the development of tourism, some of the village's artisans now produce artistic wooden products to the great satisfaction of visitors. These new creations are wooden statues and everyday objects such as chopsticks, bowls, etc.



Souvenirs that can be found in Vietnam's tourist destinations are sold in Hoi An

**Fig 2.** Hoi An night market and Hoi An market (2016)

Tourists' demands and interests are catered to by the wide variety of souvenirs available throughout Hoi An. It is challenging for handmade souvenirs to compete with other souvenir items due to a variety of factors, such as few items and unattractive designs. For instance, the only things found in Thanh Ha pottery village are tiny ceramic vases and objects shaped like the animals of the zodiac. Meanwhile, the only traditional handicrafts found in Kim Bong carpentry village are bowls and chopsticks. It is evident that the growth of traditional handicraft mementos plays a crucial role in heritage preservation, supporting the livelihood of artisans, raising awareness of the importance of heritage, and adding interest to tourism tours. The role of all stakeholders, including the public, local government, and tourism-related businesses, must be explicitly encouraged through policies and action plans to accomplish this.



#### 4. Conclusion

One of the most significant cultural resources of a place is its craft villages. In addition to being promoted and protected, offering tourists immersive experiences helps craft village households become more economically stable. In addition to experiencing, visitors can make or purchase mementos from this location when they engage in these activities. Handicraft souvenirs are always sought after by tourists to commemorate their trips and the places they have visited. Two craft villages in Hoi An City, Thanh Hà pottery and Kim Bồng carpentry, also create products that meet the needs of tourists, ensuring criteria for the authenticity of souvenir: uniqueness, workmanship, aesthetics and use, cultural and historical integrity, and genuineness. However, the number of items and designs remains a challenge for these two crafts in meeting the needs of tourists. In order to support craft villages in producing more goods with superior designs in the future, local tourism management organizations must pay particular attention to maintaining integrity and conduct more in-depth study about the needs and preferences of tourists.

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