ACCOMMODATING TRADITIONS OF HOSPITALITY IN A TOURIST REGION: THE MEKONG DELTA, VIETNAM

by

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ABSTRACT

Hospitality plays a central role in the development of tourism but brings with it its own traditions and is rooted in local heritage and culture. While there has been a significant focus on the ways in which hospitality has been commodified, commercialised and standardised in many parts of the world, less attention has been given to the ways in which existing local traditions of hospitality have and are adapting to the pressures of tourism development. The Mekong Delta region of Vietnam has long been noted (certainly in Vietnam) for its heritage of hospitality. This region, as in many parts of Vietnam, has witnessed the rapid development of tourism over recent years but in the face of limited tangible heritage sites and attractions, it is the more intangible traditions of local hospitality that are now part of the tourist offer. Today, many people in this region are engaged in the tourism sector and the delivery of an 'expected' hospitality.

This thesis examines the ways in which local traditions of hospitality are changing in the face of pressures to develop domestic and international tourism. Through an empirically grounded investigation this thesis gives insight at the micro-level as to how the practices and performances of local hospitality are changing. By focusing on particular contact zones and in particular the spaces and practices of 'homestays', this thesis shows how local traditions of hospitality are being adapted and re-made and that new forms of hospitality are being accommodated by local communities in the face of tourism development and an increasing desire on the part of visitors to gain ever-more intimate and apparently authentic experiences. I examine the inter-linked practices and material culture of local hospitality and how local tourism providers are investing in making the traditions of hospitality manifest in terms of space, physical settings and artefacts. This creates 'new' traditions which themselves are being institutionalised and standardised in response to a wider need for local economic development

through tourism. Far from being shaped wholly from the outside the local population are very much engaged in changing the traditions they themselves live within.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This thesis focuses on the study of the tradition of hospitality in a tourist region of Vietnam, the Mekong Delta. The Mekong Delta is mostly known as agricultural land, the 'rice bowl' of the country. In recent years, with the increase of the number of tourists visiting this region, tourism based on the interactions with local people's daily lives has become popular and well established. For the tourists, the Mekong Delta has long been characterised by its hospitality, considered a tradition of this region. As with other traditions, the manifestation of hospitality is subject to transformation. My thesis focuses on the ways in which hospitality is offered and presented to tourists. In particular, this research examines how the local people are involved with the packaging of hospitality and how traditions of hospitality are packaged and delivered to tourists.

While hospitality is a central theme of host and guest relationships and much attention has been given to its commercial provision in the tourism sector, more limited attention has been given to 'traditions' of hospitality and the ways in which these manifest themselves, change, adapt and are re-invented. In particular, there is limited research at the micro-scale as to how tourism development (as a function of wider economic change, diversification and development) can stimulate changes in the ways that local hospitality is practiced.

This research is founded upon a contemporary literature review of local peoples' perceptions, attitudes and behaviour towards tourism. In research on tourism, residents' attitudes toward tourism development have been an important subject since the 1970s (AbbasiDorcheh & Mohamed, 2013). This research, however, starts from the understanding that earlier studies on

locals' perceptions towards the development of tourism mainly focused on the economic and socio-cultural impact of tourism in the host communities (Brunt & Courtney, 1999; Sharpley, 2014; Tosun, 2002). For instance, the perceptions of costs and benefits from tourism affect the locals' desire to either withdraw or support the business (Sharpley, 2014; Smith, 1977). These studies also revealed that, to some extent, the local people adjust their traditional way of life, and support the development of tourism in their homeland (Cheer et al., 2013; Doron, 2005). However, we still lack understanding of how and why local people adjust their traditions and adapt to the changes in their daily lives alongside with the development of tourism, and the presence of tourists.

Additionally, with the emergence of the tourist industry, the engagement between the hosts and their guests has diversified in many ways, with the hosts becoming more and more active and creative (Maoz, 2006; Sirakaya-Turk et al., 2014). However, it should be highlighted that tourism is merely one of the various factors affecting the host communities. At the present time, the interactions between tourists and local people are changing under the impact of political, technical, socio-cultural and economic development. Within this context, it is argued that the host-guest framework is no longer suitable to explain such a dynamic relationship (McNaughton, 2006).

In earlier research, according to Wearing et al. (2010), locals' perceptions were argued to depend on past images and previous experiences of tourists. This project also found that the perceptions of the locals lead to a number of stereotypes and prejudice towards tourists. However, I believe that locals' perception may now be changing due to their increasing opportunities to contact the outsiders. Their views of tourists may alter over time, and they tend to find different ways to adapt to the changes in their traditional ways of living.

Furthermore, contemporary research has focused much on the tourists' perspective. For example, tourists' satisfaction (Nawijn et al., 2013), tourists' attitudes and behaviour (Anastasopoulos, 1992; Nyaupane et al., 2008), and tourists' perception of environmental impact (Hillery et al., 2001). There has been little research on how the host/local people think critically about their interaction with the guests. It is also argued that long-term contact with tourists will increase the skills and experience of the local people (Doron, 2005). There are a number of reasons that make the local people agree to change their way of life and participate in tourism, but in the majority of cases it is for the economic benefits (Cheer et al., 2013). It should be noted that applying strategies for managing their benefits might be just one of the ways the locals adapt to change. However, how the locals adjust their traditions, and to what extent they adapt to the changes has received little attention in previous studies.

Tourism is predominantly defined by the nature of the interaction between tourists and the local people in a destination (Moufakkir & Reisinger, 2013). According to MacCannell (2011) and Urry (2002) tourists expect to experience 'real' and 'authentic' 'traditions'. The tourist destinations are designed to be close to the 'real' experience to attract tourists (Daugstad & Kirchengast, 2013). Goeldner and Ritchie (2009) state that to successfully develop a tourism destination, along with creating better infrastructure for tourism access, maintaining traditional ways of life is also crucial. Given the importance of preserving traditional culture, and the expectations of the tourists, perceptions of residents about traditions and their attitudes to change is crucial to the success of tourism.

As a consequence of these research gaps explained above, my research aims to fill some of the shortfalls in understanding the dynamic concept of hospitality and its practice in one tourist region, the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. The project focuses on local people's perceptions of their

cultural traditions and the accommodation of the tradition of hospitality towards tourism development.

This study sets out to investigate local homestays and host and guest encounters in homestays in the Mekong Delta. The study aimed to contribute to exploring how local people are accommodating the tradition and cultures of hospitality in a tourist region. The contribution of this study is to understand the concept of hospitality, especially in the context of homestay as a commercial home, which helps mitigate the lack of research on homestay as a form of tourist accommodation. This study also contributes to the understandings of the host's views on tradition and their adaptation towards the development of the region.

1.2 Research questions and objectives

As the focal point of my thesis, I have taken the accommodating process of hospitality that emerges between tourists and the local people in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. The two main questions that guided my research are as follows:

1) How do local people understand their traditions/local heritages of hospitality?
2) How do local people participate in tourism and accommodate their traditions, in particular the tradition of hospitality?

To answer these two questions, the research will examine the ways in which local people represent, perform and deliver their hospitality to tourists in the Mekong Delta region. The objectives of this research are:

- To examine the ways in which local people in the Mekong Delta participate in tourism;
- To understand host-guest interactions in local spaces and places and how hospitality is practised;

- To examine how traditions of hospitality are made manifest through spaces, settings and artefacts and thus communicated to tourists;

- To investigate how traditions of hospitality are received by both domestic and international tourists to the Mekong Delta region;

- To assess the extent to which traditions are changing and what are the drivers of such changes.

1.3   The Case Study Region of the Mekong Delta, Vietnam

Focusing on the negotiation of hospitality, this study makes a significant contribution to understanding one of the fundamental elements of host-guest relationships in a tourism context: how the local people in a tourist destination adapt their tradition of hospitality along with encounters with tourists.

To research hospitality and host-guest relationships, the Mekong Delta is a suitable case for several reasons. First, as Sharpley (2014) has noted, many studies regarding the interface between tourism and hospitality have been based in the developed world such as North America, Australia and the UK. As tourism is now a mainstay of many developing countries' economies it is important to examine how different cultures of hospitality operate. While there have been some studies of tourism issues pertaining to Vietnam, few of these have addressed the issue of local traditions of hospitality. Secondly, within the context of Vietnam, the Mekong Delta region is a more marginal tourist area and very much at the early stages of development. Without a critical mass of heritage attractions as well as its physical marginality it provides a different perspective on the development of tourism at its relatively early stages. Third, and following on from this, its intangible heritage and its local traditions are more central to its functioning as a tourist centre. Certainly within the domestic tourist market, but increasingly

within an international context, the region is celebrated for its traditional hospitality – an openness, friendliness and generosity. This tradition has become somewhat institutionalised and is worthy of deeper interrogation.

My choice of case study was shaped by my personal knowledge and involvement with the Mekong Delta Region. I had conducted a number of tourism related projects here since 2012 and had already conducted several conversations with the local authorities and local people who participate in tourism businesses. The government's policy has placed more emphasis on tourism as a strategic industry, but after decades of development and although the number of tourists increases gradually each year, there is still a need to examine the quality of the tourist experience. At the same time the local authorities express their concern with the preservation of local cultures and traditions. This sets up a possible tension between tourism development, the protection of local cultures and the wants and needs of local people who want to improve their living standard by participating in tourism business. This is a traditional farming area and the move to tourism has not always been easy. There are signs that traditional forms of social relations have broken down between local inhabitants and that the appearance of the rural areas is changing under the greater influence of tourism operators and developers. Thus, my research objectives were not only a matter of concern for myself, but for the research participants as well. The contribution of the research may point to some implications for policy-making regarding marketing, and training and appropriate interventions concerning tourists' expectations and host perceptions of tourism may also help develop more sustainable businesses, increasing the number of tourists coming to the region and providing higher quality services.

This research takes place in the Mekong Delta region, which is located in the Southwestern region of Vietnam. This region constitutes a central municipality named Can Tho and 12 provinces. The Mekong Delta region of Vietnam displays a variety of physical landscapes, ranging from mountains and highlands to the north and west to broad, flat floodplains in the south. However, as denoted by its name, the Mekong Delta is often mentioned as a delta region and its image shaped in the tourists' mind is of a flat region with networks of canals, rivers and rice fields. This research selects three provinces including Tien Giang, Ben Tre and Vinh Long for study. These provinces are located in the same topographical area, characterised by the term "miệt vườn" (garden strips). This region is an identified character of the Mekong Delta and popular places for tourists.

In these three provinces, homestays are selected as the location to observe the host-guest interaction and the performance of local hospitality. There is little research that chooses homestays as a subject for study. Most of the research on the tourist and host interactions has taken place outside of the local people's homes such as outdoor festivals, rituals, markets and other public places. I stayed in different homestays ranging from the well-established homestays in Vinh Long province to newly set up homestays in Ben Tre province. The representation of homestays in both tangible and intangible aspects are examined.

1.4   Structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 reviews the academic literature on the concept of the host-guest relationship, hospitality and tradition, which is presented in four separate sections. As hospitality refers to the relationship between a host and a guest, host-guest relationship literature is reviewed. The first section is a discussion and critique of the host-guest relationships. Starting from the host-guest framework proposed by Smith (1977), traditional host and guest relationships are shaped

in imbalanced engagements between tourists from developed countries with the host communities in developing countries. I also show that few empirical studies have focused on the encounters between the host population and domestic tourists. In a review of host and guest relationship studies, there are not many studies which consider hospitality as a central point of the research. The concept of hospitality, which is a central issue in the host-guest relationship, is also not fully explained. The concept of hospitality is often limited in research pertinent to commercial provision and hotel management. In addition, I also review host communities' perceptions and attitudes towards the development of tourism. The findings of other research are mainly based on quantitative data which do not clearly explain the residents' perspectives towards the presence of tourism and tourists. The literature reviews on the concept of tradition enables me to illustrate further my theoretical stance.

Chapter 3 discusses the case study and its context. The overall information about tourism in Vietnam is reviewed then the Mekong Delta region is discussed as a peripheral area of the country. This chapter then provides the history of the Mekong Delta and the current cultural and economic situation of the region. The development of tourism industry in the Mekong Delta is also discussed. Here, homestay tourism has emerged and been developed as a new type of tourism.

Chapter 4 starts by reviewing the ontological and epistemological approach on which the thesis is based. Thus, I show how a constructivist perspective on hospitality is suitable for this methodological approach and a qualitative method is suitable to address my research questions. I then move on to locate my fieldwork regarding time and space and describe my research participants and my access to these research participants. Research techniques employed during the fieldwork will be presented in detail, and limitations of the methodology will be addressed.

Chapter 5 addresses the transition of tradition in local homestays in the Mekong Delta. Hospitality is also presented in physical settings of the accommodation where the guests are staying. The notion of hospitality is examined through the materiality of the hospitality. The physicality and materiality of the hospitality as presented to tourists in local homestays in the Mekong Delta are analysed.

Chapter 6 focuses on the representation and packaging of local traditions of hospitality and how this is being practised, performed and received as a kind of intangible heritage. In this respect, I show how hospitality has been chosen as a tourist product to be promoted, advertised and offered by the local people. Starting from the awareness of the local government that the strengths of the region in terms of tourism resources are not tangible heritages, hospitality was represented as an intangible culture. The hospitality has been well packaged in different host and guest 'contact zones'. From here, I narrowed down the package of hospitality in homestay accommodation and through the practice of hospitality, hosts and guests' perceptions and attitudes toward each other were analysed.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis, reviewing and elaborating further on its main contributions to our understanding of hosts' perceptions of traditions and hospitality and how they present their hospitality in particular ways. The main findings of the research will be summarized in this chapter. Recommendations for further research will also be discussed.

1.5 Conclusion

Chapter 1 has outlined an overview of the research. The following chapter will provide a review of the research literature. Covering the background theories relevant to the study, the chapter will describe and synthesise the major issues of hospitality studies and host-guest relationships. It will begin with the review of host and guest relationships which reflect the framework of

host and guest encounters which has been employed in earlier studies on tourism. Then the literature review will review the hospitality research theme. Next, the local community's perception and involvement in tourism is reviewed including the stakeholder collaboration in tourism development. Last but not least, following a review of the concept of tradition, issues related to the transmission of tradition and local people as tradition negotiators will be examined.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Tourism research has exploded globally, from which early interest in research into the hospitality industry has emerged. This research is based on the gap opened for empirical research on the hospitality field of study. Although hospitality has been becoming a more serious endeavour and discipline from the 1970s, the body of knowledge is still eclectic (Lashley & Morrison, 2013; Olsen, 2001). This thesis also stems from the realisation that academic research on hospitality is still limited to studies on service quality (Hemmington, 2007; Pijls et al., 2017). As the hospitality discipline is broad and ranging over different fields of knowledge from food science to human behaviour, this chapter focuses on the review of literature that relates to the hosts' perspective which starts from the host and guest relationships, the hosts' perceptions on tourism and the concept of hospitality.

The first section reviews the academic literature in the social sciences, primarily in anthropology, that have examined the themes embedded in the host and guest relationships. The literature reveals that the interactions between hosts and guests have been much examined. However, many of the findings are generalised and the studies of tourists' perspectives far exceed those of the hosts. It could be seen that there is room for further study, for example, opinions from the perspective of local hosts. Empirical evidence should be enriched to help us understand more about how local communities are involved in tourism and are engaged in the changes in their cultures and traditions.

The following section reviews the earlier research on the hosts' perspectives, which mainly are the perceptions and attitudes of the local community towards tourism. Research on

stakeholders' collaboration is also revealed to highlight the role of the local people in tourism development. The next section reviews the hospitality concept which features in debates within tourism studies. Though hospitality is a central issue in the host-guest relationship, this topic has not been well studied along within host-guest interactions. There are questions involving who is able to perform the role of 'welcoming host' and how they define their identity is still in question (Gibson & Molz, 2012). Hospitality is a tradition which has been transmitted through generations and it has arguably changed its form when applied to a tourism context. Crick (1989) also argues that hospitality is a duty of the hosts of the past and it is no longer applicable in mass tourism.

The last section of this literature review will examine the traditional concept itself, and its application in the tourism context. The implication of how and why tradition is transmitted could help us to learn more about the dynamics of host-guest interactions.

2.2 Traditional guest-host relationships

2.2.1 The nature of encounters

Research on host and guest encounters in tourism have been a concern for anthropologists since the 1970s (Smith, 1977; Stronza, 2001). The encounters between hosts and guests have mainly been described in the context of the visit of Westerners[1] to their former colonies (Wearing et al., 2010). These interactions between hosts and guests are described as a process of invasion and exploitation by the colonisers who have more power than the cultures of invaded countries. Such encounters are "essentially transitory, non-repetitive and asymmetrical" (Cohen, 1984, p. 379). Host-guest encounters in tourism are often described as an asymmetrical position

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[1] E. Said, Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient. London: Penguin, 1978. The concept of the West includes Europe and North America in the 19th century and expands to the former European colonies.

determined by the tourists' demands and needs, rather than the hosts' interests (Doron, 2005; Saarinen & Manwa, 2008; Yang et al., 2016). It could be explained that in an era of mass tourism since the end of World War Two, the world has witnessed an influx of tourists with high demands for services and facilities (Wearing et al., 2010). Mass tourism is not only represented by the numbers of travellers, but also by its impact on local ways of life in many aspects such as language, dress and behaviour (Smith, 1977). On the other hand, in the time of global capitalism, there is a significant dependency by developing countries on more powerful countries. Cohen and Cohen (2015) also argues that contemporary studies of tourism in the developing nations have often focused on the uneven power balance embedded in tourism. The uneven balances between the "donor" and the "recipient" are widely examined in the literature. For example, the asymmetry of knowledge (Cohen, 1984), linguistic acculturation in the locals' language (Smith, 1977), and the mutual gaze (Maoz, 2006). Tourists are seen as less likely to borrow from their hosts, while the hosts are more likely to adapt to tourists. Maoz (2006) also argues the hosts might gain influence and power over the tourists. Though, the ways in which the hosts adjust themselves and their cultures have not been well discussed.

There are models developed to explain the social and intercultural relations, however they fail to adequately take into consideration changes over time (Smith & Brent, 2001). The asymmetrical power relations seemed to fit well in the era of mass tourism when the locals did not have a loud enough voice in tourism development. The local people are far from passive, and directly engage with tactics and strategies to attract tourists as well as satisfying their desires (Bendix, 1989; Simpson, 1993). Moufakkir and Reisinger (2013) also argues that the issue of why people and host communities engage in tourism in particular ways is not well documented in recent tourism studies. McNaughton (2006) also argues that the host-guest

framework where the guests have more power over the hosts is inadequate for building up a deeper understanding of interactions between tourists and locals.

It is argued that the number of tourists, types of tourists and their consumption patterns affect the nature of socio-cultural impacts in the host communities (Urry, 2002). The local lives are impacted by two issues: the relative cultural distances between the host and the guest cultures, and the types and number of tourists (Saarinen & Manwa, 2008). Impacts will be greater when the hosts' and the guests' cultures are far apart. Hence, the relationship between tourists from developed countries and local people in developing countries, or between international tourists and the locals, are mainly investigated in the literature (Smith & Brent, 2001). The relationship between the local people and domestic tourists has been the subject of much less concern.

In the meantime, the development of technology has transformed every aspect of social life; the local people who live in remote rural areas can get information from the mass media. It might broaden their knowledge about the world and people from other cultural backgrounds. Thus, the host-guest interactions might not keep the same asymmetrical position as was considered in the earlier studies. It may not be applicable when many tourists are now non-Westerners, and developed countries are also the main tourist attractions. Nunez (1989, p. 267) argues that "in the history of acculturation phenomena, rarely has a community, a country, or a culture been a willing host but rather has had another people and aspects of another way of life foisted or forced upon them".

We lack an understanding of the host-guest interaction "because of the inconsistency of the impact and the lack of universals… the difficulty of filtering specific host-guest effects from other socialising influences… the adaptation and evolutionary processes of destination communities" (Fagence, 2003, p. 58). There is considerable value in isolating the impacts on

destination communities, and especially in unravelling the influences on social change and the conservation of local cultural resources.

To sum up, tourism producing an asymmetrical power relationship between guests and hosts seems less applicable today (Blapp & Mitas, 2018). Erb (2000) states that the residents in a community often attempt to control and fit the tourists/strangers into their place. Butler (2015) states that one may also look at the distribution of tourist service in a tourist destination without knowing much of the tourism development, wonder why such facilities exist where they do or why they are in such forms.

As the locals are more active in hosting tourists, various strategies are used to attract tourists including the way the local people prepare for hosting, attract guests with selective destination information, and design itineraries (Choi & Fu, 2018). Yang et al. (2016) argues that host guest interaction might change from gaze to dialogue. If tourists change their behaviour and attitudes from gaze to seek mutual dialogue, the relationship with the host will also change (Yang et al., 2016). Though, it may require a good length of time for tourists to immerse in a destination while most tourists have short of time. By discussing how the hosts are changing and becoming more active, this research contributes to the understanding of aspects of the host-guest relationships that has not been well examined in previous studies (Doron, 2005; Huebner, 2012; McNaughton, 2006; Stronza, 2001).

2.2.2 The language of encounters

As tourism has become a global phenomenon, and as people travel to more and more countries, they know proportionately fewer and fewer languages of the countries that they visit (Cronin, 2000). Cronin's (2000) study provides insight into the asymmetry between the perception tourists and locals have of each other regarding the language barrier. He also states that

travellers who travel within the same area of language would have an incomparable advantage over other travellers who do not have the language of the country as their native tongue. When travelling in different language areas, the tourists normally depend on interpreters or tour guides, but not on the locals. The country might only accurately be portrayed in its own language. Hence, the interpretation through the guides may bring another story. In some cases, the tour guides do not know much about the local cultures, although they know the language of the tourists. It is much more difficult for the tourists to explore the local cultures by communicating with the locals. The difficulty for travellers is in trying to establish purposeful and meaningful contacts with local people as human beings, but their limited knowledge of the language may mean that the only communication possible is "a maddening simplification of their personality and ideas" (Cronin, 2000, p. 44).

In addition, it is easier for the tourists to understand the locals than vice versa (Cronin, 2000). Tourists appear to have an advantage compared to the locals when the two groups want to know more about each other. Tourists demand to understand more about the exotic (MacCannell, 2011). Language has been used to connect tourists with the local people. Without the help of guides, tourists could enter into conversation with children or villagers by using some basic local words. On the other hand, some young villagers may approach tourists deliberately in order to practise their English (Cole, 2007). Tourists and locals split the responsibility of adapting to communication with people from another culture, they learn the language of each other (Heuman, 2005). However, the locals might not have the same desire to know more about the tourists as they do not necessarily have the same 'quest for the exotic'.

A common language may help tourists access the contact zones more quickly, but language alone is not enough. It is important to note that there are many other ways to communicate,

although the language is a key means. Channels of communication are limited due to the short contact between the hosts and the tourists. Without a mutual understanding of language, how tourists and local people communicate with each other is not clear. There is also a close relationship between tourists' expectations and the level of language comprehension of the local people. It may increase the trust and friendship when the tourists know that the hosts can speak their language. It should be noted that tourists travelling in groups on package tours may feel safer because they have a tour guide acting as a translator. Though nothing ensures that the translation they hear is a quality one for comprehending the cultures they encounter. Even in the case that tourists are not really interested in exploring exotic cultures, language knowledge may still be needed in order to solve problems or conflicts which may arise. In some cases, local people complain that tourists are not friendly and fail to respond to their hospitality (Cole, 2007). It could be the case that because of not understanding the language, tourists do not know how to respond even though they may wish to reply. In special cases, conflict may result from language incomprehension which can trigger fear and hostility.

2.2.3 Contact zones

The place where tourists and hosts meet and 'gaze upon' each other has been defined in different terms such as: borderzone (Bruner, 2005a), spaces of consumption (Saarinen & Manwa, 2008), contact zone or combat zones (Pratt, 1992). Pratt (1991, p. 34) uses the term contact zones "to refer to social spaces where cultures meet; clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today". Pratt's concept suggests unequal power relations between "multiple discourse communities" amongst a contact zone (Wolff, 2002, p. x). Engagement between tourists and hosts was defined by AlSayyad as the process through which the gaze transforms the material reality of the built environment into

cultural imagery. The engagement takes place in three general contexts: "places and situations where tourists are purchasing goods and services from the host, places and situations they are using or occupying at the same time, and places and situations in which they meet and share knowledge and ideas" (Saarinen & Manwa, 2008, p. 45). What happens during such engagements is a topic that has been much examined by anthropologists. Goffman (1959) mentioned the concepts of 'frontstage' and 'backstage' in his study about social interactions, in which people present themselves as actors in the frontstage, contrasting with their real behaviour backstage. These two terms were later adopted by Weaver and Lawton (2006) describing the places that local people are performing under the gaze of tourists. Backstage is depicted as the home of local people, where they live and do their routine activities. Tourists can mostly access and watch the activities performed by locals in the frontstage. Bruner (2005a, p. 192) also describes the concept of borderzone as "an empty stage waiting for performance time". In this sense, borderzone could be interpreted to be similar to 'frontstage'. In other words, the borderzone acts as a 'portable wall' and appears when tourists and locals meet each other. With the locals, some could stay behind the wall, staying tradition-oriented and conservative; while others could be easy-going and open to conversations with their visitors. Moreover, the perceptions of tourists and locals are not the same; "what for the tourists is a zone of leisure, for the natives is a site of work and cash income" (Bruner, 2005a, p. 192).

A contact zone is also a place where the images of the destination and the local people are represented. Likely tradition-orientation and conservation will be staged for tourism as objects of experience or consumption. Breaking away from traditions may need to be relegated to the backstage so that the destination still appears authentic to tourists. The tourists have some imagination about the place before the trips and experience the real image during the trip in variable contact zones. The places that the tourists actually visit may display a greater variety

than that found in the tourist brochures. Olsen (2006, p. 38) argues that "the images people encounter pre-trip are not necessarily reproduced in on-trip encounters, even if being inside of common frames of a global discourse". For this research, studying the concept of 'contact zones' will help to better understand, from the perspectives of local residents how particular characteristics have been selected to build the images of the destination.

2.2.4   The concept of host

The 'host' or 'host community' are terminologies widely used in tourism literature which mainly represent earlier research on the impacts of tourism. These studies focus on how the communities cope with external forces over which they have little control (Pi-Sunyer, 1989). The relationship between local people and the tourists in these situations are framed in the terms 'insiders' and 'outsiders'.

It should be noted that the concept of a host is quite broad, including people who are involved in tourism development: local residents, people of the country visited or those employed in the tourism industry. Researchers use various terms to indicate the host such as 'grassroots' (the local people) or 'big-men' (local authorities) (Cheer et al., 2013), and 'middle-men' or 'culture brokers' (Doron, 2005). As emphasised by Nunez (1989, p. 214), the so-called ''host'' and ''guest'' communities are not necessarily homogenous, as the terms might imply, but can be ''multi-ethnic'' or ''culturally pluralistic''. According to Cheong and Miller (2000), Crick (1985) and Urry (1991), the field of actors has also been expanded significantly in recent decades and today researchers examine various perspectives not only of hosts and guests, but of observers, brokers, and mediators. In another study, McNaughton (2006) compares the two-sided image of migrants who are the 'hosts' under the tourists' gaze, and 'uninvited guests' under the locals' gaze.

The argument to make here is that the barriers between insiders and outsiders are vague at this present time as the local people are getting used to the presence of tourists. The younger generations are growing up with the existence of tourists as a normal part of life. The clarification of the concept of the host will guide the research on choosing the appropriate informants for examining the research question. It is obvious that the literature has focused much on the unequal position between guests and hosts. However, how the hosts change and reshape their attitude and behaviour toward tourists is not well documented.

2.2.5 The concept of guest

There are a number of research publications which study guests/tourists to investigate their motivation to travel. It is frequently claimed that tourists are travellers who are in a quest for authenticity (Urry, 2002). Kolaz & Zabkar (2009) state that seeking authenticity becomes a key trend in tourism. Yeoman, Brass and McMahon-Beattie (2007) also state that there is a growing demand to absorb experiences and products that are original. Moreover, tourists are gullible and innocent and have to contend with inauthentic experiences (Lew et al., 2008). However, according to Berger (2004) and Bruner (2005a) authenticity is not of any great concern for tourists. Further exploration of what happens in the contact zone will bring a better understanding of whether authenticity is relevant or not. It is argued that the authenticity concept may have limited applicability to non-Western tourists (Cohen & Cohen, 2012). Moreover, in one study about the response of tourists to Balinese dance performance, Bruner (2005a, p. 209) argues that tourists are not primarily concerned with authenticity and researchers should rather "pursue the metaphors of theater and of borderzones than to study touristic verisimilitude". MacCannell also claims that authenticity seems not to be a topic that haunts tourism as before and everything now is the backstage (MacCannell, 2011). It could be said that the motivations of tourists, at the present time, are the combinations of many interests,

such as: leisure, visiting friends and relatives, business and other special purposes (Weaver & Lawton, 2006).

There are also a number of studies which categorise the tourists based on different criteria, such as: tourist personalities (Plog, 2001); tourist's exposure to the host environment (Cohen, 1984); numbers of tourists and adaptations to local norms (Smith, 1989). Besides, statisticians usually classify tourists based on their nationalities, travel purposes, length of stay, and distance of travel. However, within engagements with tourists, particularly tourists travelling in groups, the locals are not much concerned about the types of tourists. Moreover, the tourist categories are not unchangeable, "rather they are influenced by changes in tourism and by major societal transformations" (Pi-Sunyer, 1989, p. 189). Depending on each circumstance, tourists are treated as complete strangers, guests, or friends.

In earlier tourism studies, tourists are mainly described as wealthy and powerful visitors who travel to explore the other less developed countries (Wearing et al., 2010). Massey and Jess (2000) also state that Western European and North American visitors had depicted the region that they called the Orient which then influenced travellers' experiences. The trips of tourists from Western countries during the colonial era are partly shaping the thinking of local people about the tourists (Erb, 2000). Pi-Sunyer (1989) also argues that the attitudes the local people held towards tourists are not only based on direct experience but also from images and stereotypes concerning different types of visitors. However, it could be said that increasing encounters with tourists might gradually change the perceptions of local people about tourists. The local people "reassess their former ideas and attitudes" about how to interact with the tourists (Erb, 2000, p. 711). This may lead to different understandings of who tourists are in the views of the locals. Nyaupane et al. (2008) also argue that prejudice against the tourists

may be reduced by equal status contact between hosts and tourists. Tourism and the appearance of tourists are often criticised as the catalyst of the commodification of indigenous culture. However, the tourists also, in varying degrees are under the control of the locals (Pratt, 1992). Similarly, Maoz (2006) argues that the hosts might gain influence and power over the tourists. Erb (2000) also states that the local residents in a community often attempt to control and fit the tourists/strangers into their own place. Graburn (2001) argues that regular contacts with tourists can increase the perceptions of the locals about their own identities. On the contrary, Forsyth (2012) argues that the presence of tourists has not changed the behaviour or activities of the local people in any significant way. Doron (2005, p. 157) also describes tourists as the "purveyors of change", however, he claims that the presence of tourists may not bring about the passivity of the local people.

2.3 The local community's perception and involvement in tourism development and planning

2.3.1 Review of the local community's perception of tourism development

Host perception has become 'one of the most systematic and well-studied areas of tourism' (McGehee & Andereck, 2004, p. 132). The understanding of resident perceptions and responses is believed to be crucial to the successful and sustainable development of tourism (Sharpley, 2014). Crick (1989, p. 330) also states that "we need to know how people in other cultures perceive and understand tourists as a species of foreigner… and how they distinguish types of tourists". We should further explore "the actual ways in which individuals and groups relate to each other at the local level" instead of just moving around the ramifications of tourism on host communities (Doron, 2005, p. 158).

In addition, studies on the perceptions of the hosts mainly focus on locals' awareness of the impact of tourism on their society which are economic, social and environmental impacts in general (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004; Johnson et al., 1994; Tatoglu et al., 2002). Research mostly applies quantitative methods which are implemented by surveying more participants and selected variables being tested. The main findings are the relationship between variables that influence residents' perceptions of tourism (Sharpley, 2014). It tends to reveal what locals perceive but does not explain why. Moreover, much of the research on residents' perceptions is studied in the developed countries and is dominated by cases in North America, Australia, New Zealand and the UK (Sharpley, 2014). Research on local people's perceptions of tourism in developing countries has been largely overlooked. This study aims to contribute to the knowledge of locals' perceptions of their traditions, and the utilisation of tradition in tourism experiences.

Besides studies on hosts' perceptions of the impact of tourism, there has been other research on host perceptions of tourists. According to Reisinger and Turner (2012) perception is a process of gaining knowledge about other objects, people and events without the need for direct contact with them. When tourists and hosts meet each other, mutual perceptions are developed. There are models developed to formulate the relationship between tourism development and residents' perceptions of the impacts, for instance Doxey's (1975) irridex model, Butlers's (1980) destination life-cycle model, and Smith's (1977) typology of tourists. They all claim that local people respond negatively to the increasing number of tourists as the influence of tourism increases. Monterrubio (2018) also states that negative tourist stereotypes increase negative local attitudes. However, these models are quite simplistic and not applicable in contemporary contexts. As already noted, the perceptions of locals can be formed when they have little knowledge and experience of tourists. Their attitudes may change positively as they

have close contacts with the tourists (Beech & Chadwick, 2006). Conversely, Maoz (2006) compares the different view of the locals to mass tourists and backpackers. Here, mass tourists are rather more respected while backpackers are viewed as "over-liberal and uneducated" or even "shallow, foolish and unsophisticated" (Maoz, 2006, p. 229). Chambers (2000) also argues that local residents prefer mass tourists to individual tourists as they travel in larger groups and buy a lot of local products.

The research points out the differing relationships in the locals' attitude towards tourist development. Positive perceptions of tourism are correlated to the levels of education, the degree of participation, the impact of tourism business, and the distance from residential accommodation to tourist attractions (Andriotis & Vaughan, 2003; Lawson et al., 1998). Theoretical frameworks are employed to explain locals' perceptions of tourism, for instance social exchange theory and social representations theory. Social exchange theory suggests that tourists and hosts 'undergo a process of negotiation or exchange, the ultimate aim of which for each party is to optimise the benefit accruing from the encounter' (Sharpley, 2014, p. 45). The social representation theory proposes that social interaction or tourist-host interaction is fundamental to understanding local resident perceptions of tourism (Ward & Berno, 2011). However, Sharpley (2014) argues that these frameworks do not explain how and why the locals often hold these perceptions.

Contemporary studies present lists of variables influencing residents' perception of tourism. It could be said that while understanding which impacts concern the locals most is important, it does not provide insight as to why they perceive them in a particular way (Deery et al., 2012). Moreover, the perceptions of individuals are dependent on their particular personal values and their social contexts. Additionally, the participants of the research are relatively homogenous

groups which may give biased results (Sharpley, 2014). It is also noted that many researchers used 'attitude', 'opinion' or 'reaction' terms instead of the concept of 'perception'. There is a debate on the application of these terms in literature, in which the concept of perception is arguably more appropriate in the analysis of host-guest relationship (Reisinger & Turner, 2003).

Compared to research on hosts' perceptions, there are fewer studies about hosts' responses to tourism impacts (Sharpley, 2014). Dogan (1989) states that the reaction of the hosts ranges from active resistance to complete adoption of Western culture. Research on local communities' perception of tourism development has focused on one key stakeholder, mainly the local resident of a tourism destination. There has been little discussion on local communities as a network of stakeholders who are directly and indirectly involved in tourism development.

2.3.2 The role of stakeholder collaboration in tourism development and planning

According to Jamal and Getz (1995), stakeholders are the people with an interest in a common issue and include all individuals, groups, or organisations directly influenced by the actions of others. Freeman (1984, p. 46) defines that stakeholders are "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives". In many early studies, the roles of stakeholders were mentioned in the context of corporate management, in which stakeholders are people who ensure the long-term success for the organisation (Neville et al., 2005) or, "without whose support the organisation would cease to exit" (Freeman & Reed, 1983, p. 89). According to Freeman and Reed (1983), the conceptualization of stakeholders originally included shareowners, employees, customers, suppliers, lenders and society. This list was derived from the perspective of a firm's business. However, in the field of tourism, stakeholders are normally examined in a broader context, which involves not only enterprises

but non-profit organisations, government, special interest groups and individuals (Waligo et al., 2013). It is a fact that the tourism industry is highly fragmented (Jamal & Getz, 1995), and stakeholders are no longer examined in an internal organisation context, but diverse groups of stakeholders exist that are involved in management or planning issues (Waligo et al., 2013). Key stakeholders that often have been assessed in a tourism context are visitors, tourism operators, governments and local communities (Fallon & Kriwoken, 2003). Perić et al. (2014) list a range of stakeholders that are important for planning and implementation of tourism projects, including residents, tourists, employees, government, local businesses, competitors, activist groups, and educational institutions. Waligo et al. (2013, p. 343) state that stakeholders "are groups and individuals who are associated with tourism development initiatives and can affect or are affected by the decisions and activities concerning those initiatives".

Among the early studies on stakeholder theory in tourism, the impact of tourism in community development and the importance of inclusion of stakeholders in the tourism development planning process were the key issues discussed (Perić et al., 2014). Though there is a number of studies that have called for stakeholders involvement in sustainable tourism (Currie et al., 2009; Dabphet, 2013; Jamal & Stronza, 2009; Simpson, 2001; Waligo et al., 2013) and heritage conservation (Aas et al., 2005; Nguyen, 2004), there is not much research on stakeholder collaboration in tourism and its effect on the changes in a destination regarding traditions and local cultural heritage. Studies of local people's attitudes towards tourism indicate that people who benefit from tourism perceive greater economic but lesser social or environmental impact from tourism than those who do not benefit economically (Jamal & Getz, 1995). Though tourism has been characterised as a key economic booster in some developing or under-developed regions, there is no research which analyses to what extent tourism changes the

quality of the local people's lives. Moreover, the contribution that local communities can make to support regional tourism has been overlooked (Fallon & Kriwoken, 2003).

There is a great quantity of research on the role of stakeholders within which it is demonstrated that the stakeholder participation has an effect on the awareness of tourism and on gaining competitive advantage in tourism destinations (Aas et al., 2005; Anuar et al., 2012; Cooper et al., 2009; Dabphet, 2013; Perić et al., 2014; Simpson, 2001; Waligo et al., 2013). Stakeholder collaboration has also been a widely accepted approach used in tourism planning as a means to solve conflicts and promote shared common goals between multiple stakeholders (Aas et al., 2005; Waligo et al., 2013). Freeman and Reed (1983) also claim that any social problems can be solved by the redesign of fundamental institutions with the support and interaction of stakeholders in the system.

From the stakeholder theory perspective, a critical part of the stakeholder approach is the aim towards the well-being of stakeholders (Perić et al., 2014). The important thing is, though stakeholders are involved in joint decision making which is based on consensus and shared rules, they retain autonomous and independent decision making power (Jamal & Getz, 1995). Several studies have shown that community involvement is critical to the overall sustainability of tourism in the destination, however, the contribution that local communities can make to support tourism has often been overlooked (Fallon & Kriwoken, 2003). Jamal and Getz (1995) suggest that as community perceptions of economic, social and environmental issues change, the community participation should be active and dynamic, in order to enable tourism planning and development to be adjusted.

According to Singh et al. (2003), traditional, indigenous and less developed countries often have less empowerment of communicating than has the developed world. However, Hall

(1999) claims that approaches towards tourism planning should neither be top-down nor bottom-up, but a collaborative approach which requires participation and interaction between the responsible stakeholders. It would be more effective to focus on how tourism provides better facilities for local people, provides incentives to protect their environment and how the planning authorities take the views of local residents seriously (Williams & Lawson, 2001). Besides, tourism planning and development is a political process and different political institutions would influence the structure of stakeholders' networks and how they collaborate. Fallon and Kriwoken (2003) also argue that for those representing the community, the interests of individuals or groups may be evolving and changeable. While there were some of the previous studies which focused on the role of local residents in the development of regional tourism, there has been little discussion on the role of an individual stakeholder in the community consultation process.

2.4 Cultures of hospitality

2.4.1 Hospitality concept

Hospitality has frequently been perceived as a term relating to hotel and catering activities (Lashley & Morrison, 2013). According to Asad (2006) and Pohl (2002) understanding of hospitality has been reduced to ideas of entertaining family and friends, and to the services of the hotel and restaurant industry. Hospitality as economic activity has been defined as "a contemporaneous exchange designed to enhance mutuality for the parties involved through the provision of food and/or drink, and/or accommodation" (Lashley et al 2007, p.2 citing Brotherton, 1999, p. 168). Morrison and O'Gorman (2006) viewed hospitality as a multi-faceted definition:

It represents a host's cordial reception, welcome and entertainment of guests or strangers of diverse social backgrounds and cultures charitably, socially or commercially with kind and generous liberality, into one's space to dine and/or lodge temporarily. Dependent on circumstance and context the degree to which the hospitality offering is conditional or unconditional may vary.

(Lashley et.al 2007, p.2 citing Morrison and O'Gorman 2006)

In this sense, the understanding of hospitality as part of a social context is omitted. Since the publication of "In Search of Hospitality: Theoretical Perspectives and Debates", studies focusing on hospitality in social science perspectives have been increasing (Lashley et al., 2007a). The understanding of the concept of hospitality has been expanded and debated through time in the wider social, and anthropological contexts. Hospitality as a concept is rarely defined or explained in a clear or an acceptable manner (Morrison, 2002) and has been applied in "cavalier and unsystematic ways" (Brotherton & Wood, 2000).

Lashley (2000) made a valuable contribution in the conceptualisation of hospitality activities and the inter-relationships between the social and cultural, private or domestic, and commercial aspects of hospitality. Each domain represents a certain type of provision of hospitality. At a social and cultural level, hospitality is considered as a set of behaviours which originate within society and is practised differently between societies. Hospitality primarily involves sharing exchange, mutuality and reciprocity. On the private or domestic level, hospitality considers issues pertaining to the home settings as well as considering the impact of host and guest relationships. The commercial domain involves the provision of hospitality as an economic activity and includes both private and public sector (Lashley, 2000, p.5).

The basic function of hospitality is to establish a relationship or promote an already established relationship (Lashley & Morrison, 2013). The original motives of hospitality were to turn "strangers into familiars, enemies into friends, friends into better friends, outsiders into insiders, non-kin into kin" (Selwyn, 2000, p. 19). However, Cole (2007) argues that hospitality fails to turn tourists into friends; tourists fail to accept the moral authority of their hosts, as might have been expected, and fail to honour their obligations as guests. In the past, the virtues of hospitality were highly regarded, whereas in contemporary societies the importance accorded to hospitality has waned considerably, except in the commercial sphere (Lashley & Morrison, 2013). Berger argues that hospitality is in many cases a marketing tool used by travel agencies and guides (Berger, 2004). In reality, tourists may easily get into 'traps' as hosts offer hospitality for their business purposes.

Heuman (2005) categorises hospitality into two forms: traditional hospitality and commercial hospitality. The former contains some features of host-guest relationship such as protection, reciprocity and a batch of duties as defined by Aramberri (2001). The latter refers to the contact between tourist and local in a financial exchange. Heuman (2005) also concludes that the three main features of host-guest relationships do not appear in commercial hospitality.

Another perspective that researchers have often studied on hospitality is the motive. Derrida and Dufourmantelle (2000, p. 77) define hospitality as two binary concepts, "the law of hospitality" and "the laws of hospitality", which can be interpreted as unconditional and conditional hospitality. Many researchers claim that in mass tourism, unconditional hospitality no longer occurs (Aramberri, 2001). According to Lashley et al. (2007c, p. 176), "motives are never completely altruistic and unconditional, but tend to be ulterior and impure". In commercial hospitality, ulterior motives might "reduce the genuine quality of hospitableness"

(Lashley et al., 2007a, p. 8). Aramberri (2001) also argues that non-material reciprocity, mutual rights and duties which people might frequently experience in the old convention, is not applicable in tourist exchanges. The social exchange between hosts and guests which is based on the principles of gift exchange, are largely replaced by economic exchange and profit motive (Krajnovic & Usomovic, 2006).

Early studies on hospitality were carried out in an uncommercial context, in which hospitality towards strangers was regarded as an official duty (Byatt, 1988; Lashley, 2000; Pohl, 1999). Recent studies of hospitality have questioned the nature of hospitality, as it changes in a commercial context and particularly in tourism. Crick (1989) claims that hospitality was a duty of the hosts of the past and that it is therefore no longer applicable to mass tourism. Berger (2004) also argues that hospitality is in many cases a marketing tool used by travel agencies and guides.

Though hospitality is claimed to be a central theme of host and guest relationships, it has not been adequately explained (Lashley & Morrison, 2013; Lynch, 2003). Hospitality research has been limited to the domain of commercial hospitality provision (Brotherton & Wood, 2000). According to Lashley (2000), hospitality is dominated by economic transactions. Commercial hospitality is mainly studied in the context of hotels and large-scale establishments (Lashley & Morrison, 2013). The following section reviews research on hospitality in a tourist destination that provide a more thorough understanding of the hospitality topic.

2.4.2   Hospitality studies in a tourist destination

As the academic hospitality field has matured, from the 1970s, academics have been focusing on work to look more carefully into the multi-disciplinary field of hospitality with the aims to theorise the concept of hospitality (Olsen, 2001). This facilitates the analysis of hospitality as

a cultural phenomenon, and allows for research on the social aspects, alongside those of an economic nature. (Lashley et al, 2007). Hospitality was thus put into the mainstream of the social science debates.

Heuman (2005) examined how hospitality is practised by the local people to students in Dominica. The research participants were students who spent holidays to work in Dominica. He investigated whether elements of traditional hospitality such as protection, reciprocity, obedience, and performance are presented in working holidays. He suggested that some, but not all, elements in traditional hospitality were practised, however, he claims that non-monetary reciprocities still occur in mass tourism.

McMillan et al. (2011) conducted research relating to gender and equality. Their study examined how commercial hospitality has catalysed sustainable social change in the central region of Nepal through empowering women. They conclude that by participating in the tourism industry, women's living is improved.

McNaughton (2006) studied the concept of hospitality embedded in the relationship between the handicraft traders in a tourism centre in India who are seen as hosts by international tourists and the local landlords who see the traders as uninvited outsiders. He claims that the host-guest framework is inadequate for developing a better understanding of such relationships, and social relations should be studied further rather than focusing on fixed categories.

Causevic and Lynch (2009) focus on host and guest relationship in the post-conflict setting of Bosnia and Herzegovina with the aims of exploring hospitality in order to understand society. Their study draws upon the host-guest relationship in a context of forced migrants visiting their previous homes, arguing that hospitality is not just about an encounter with a guest and providing a service but a social phenomenon.

Regarding the manifestation of hospitality in material heritage, Lynch (2003) did PhD research on the homestay sector, examining hospitality as being related to space or the use of space. He studied the conceptual relationships between hospitality and space in the homestay sector. This research also shows that hospitality manifestation could be further understood by combining these perspectives with the theory of spatial settings, and cultural displays. He developed a conceptual framework identifying the main components of the hospitality experience. He found that home setting and artefacts contribute to the creation of impressions. He also suggested that the social control of the space contributes towards the hospitality experience. After this study, there has been little research on the tangible aspect of hospitality.

2.4.3   Hospitality and host-guest relationship

According to Lashley and Morrison (2013) wider understanding of hospitality suggests that hospitality is principally a relationship based on host and guest. Before there was a hospitality industry, people around the world had experienced the custom of welcoming strangers (Moore, 2007; Pitt-Rivers, 2012).

Aramberri (2001) suggests three main features embedded in host-guest relationships: protection, reciprocity and a batch of duties for both sides. He claims that the terminology of host and guest can be only applicable outside mass tourism. However there is a stronger argument that hospitality or any of the moral norms can apply to hosts and guests in tourism perspectives (Crick, 1989). Although it seems not to have so much meaning when talking about the host-guest relationship for mass tourism, it may be worth to examine the nature of host-guest relations in small-scale, community-based tourism (Heuman, 2005).

Among discourses on hospitality as a central theme of host-guest relationship, there are two schools of thought. One sees hospitality as "a social phenomenon" while others believe the

host-guest relationship is entirely built on "the commercial transaction between them" (Causevic & Lynch, 2009, p. 122). Global consumers today seek 'difference' and 'hospitality' as economic goods, and it helps to clarify the role of those producers or suppliers, who make their living catering to this demand (AlSayyad, 2001). Hospitality is practised in a way that replicates certain aspects of host-guest relationships that have been found to exist across many cultures. The hospitality presented in host-guest relationships is the "obligation to give, the obligation to receive, and an obligation to reciprocate" (Neill, 2005, p. 3). This is contrary to the idea of the imbalance in the host-guest relationship which states that the hosts are in a lower position compared to the guests. In studies of hospitality, it seems that the hosts are actually in a position of more control in each interaction with the guests (Heuman, 2005). Therefore, such a relationship is one of power and control, as being a host means having an element of power over the guest. Hosting and rituals are ways to domesticate and control the unknown 'other'. Cole (2007) suggests the hosts have control and put guests into a relationship of dependency and debt. It challenges the notions of unbalanced positions of host-guest relationship framework in anthropology studies in which the hosts are passive and of lower status.

Erb (2000) suggests that residents treat tourists as unpredictable and unknown because of their cultural ignorance. In a popular model by Doxey (1975), the more tourists come to a destination, the less welcomed they are by the hosts. In old traditions, kindness to strangers was a sacred duty. However today, although tourists are outsiders/strangers, the presence of tourists is becoming an accepted feature of daily life; because of this it could be seen that the duties of the hosts might be changing. In light of hospitality studies, it is argued that host and guest terminologies should be applied only in small-scale, community-based tourism (Heuman, 2005). It could be said that hospitality is still applicable in tourism contexts especially between

host and guest encounters in private domains. The nature of a good host may not vanish, though it has changed relatively in modern times.

The locals' behaviour is also explained through the lens of hospitality. There are a number of reasons to elucidate why tourists are welcomed by the hosts. Strangers could bring good fortune and wealth (Cole, 2007), or according to traditional beliefs they could be a deity in disguise (Neill, 2005), if they were not treated well, they could bring calamity to the hosts (Pitt-Rivers, 2012). The tourists are also greeted as guests in the hope that they will support, aid and protect the host in the future due to reciprocal relations (Heuman, 2005). In the hosts' perspectives, motives for being hospitable are mostly ulterior, the desire to supply just that amount of hospitality that will ensure guest satisfaction, limit complaint and hopefully generate a return visit, whilst turning in a profit (Lashley & Morrison, 2013). However, as Cole (2007) suggests in her study, the locals appear to be giving without receiving, because visitors bring them status, especially guests from afar. Though, in other cases, the distances do not have much meaning. Villagers do not know exactly where the tourists come from, they are simply considered as outsiders, or 'white people' (O'Rourke, 1988). Tourists recognise the engagement with local residents as the experience of being a guest (Heuman, 2005). It is less clear whether locals view the relationship in this way or not. They might not feel any mutual obligation because the tourists are mainly temporary visitors to an area. Whether tourists come and change the locals' motives or not is not clearly investigated in the literature. Careful examination of hospitality is essential to understanding the interaction and behaviour of tourists and locals. For this research, the way the locals offer their hospitality and how it changes will be studied, to better understand how the locals view their traditional ways of greeting guests.

The idea that tourism reproduces an asymmetrical power relationship between guests and hosts seems less applicable as a default perspective today. Instead, host communities hold a more active position and are inventive to adapt to changes. Hospitality is a tradition which has been transmitted through generations, and it has changed its form when applied to a tourism context.

2.5 Application of 'tradition' as a concept in tourism

2.5.1 The concept of tradition

Tradition remains a very complex concept that has been used in a variety of ways. Originally from Latin, the word tradition means "to transmit, or give something to another for safekeeping" (Giddens, 2003, p. 39). In the literature on tradition, the concept of tradition is mentioned in two ways. Firstly, tradition can refer to material objects such as buildings, arts, crafts or beliefs about all sorts of things, images of persons and events, practices, rules and customs (Shils, 1981). Shils (1981, p. 13) also states that tradition is something which "was created, was performed or believed in the past, or which is believed to have existed or to have been performed or believed in the past". However, AlSayyad (2004) argues that the material products themselves are not tradition, it is the practices of transmission that constitute what tradition is. Secondly, he holds that tradition is the action of transmitting things. Kroeze and Keulen (2013) state that the function of tradition is providing communication, organising collective memory and creating coherence. Though intangible traditions are not easy to codify and package to offer to the consumers, there is not much differentiation in early studies between tangible and intangible traditions.

Tradition as a concept is also normally compared and contrasted with modernity and innovation (Graburn, 2001; Upton, 2001). Tradition might be conceived as a hindrance to the development of society by policy makers. Traditional aspects of people's daily life might be superseded by

the conveniences of modernisation. Tradition then is considered to be destroyed or removed. The opposite is also often the case; in the face of fast social change, people attempt to retain their traditions to create a sense of stability and identity. According to Upton (2001, p. 299), tradition "serves as a mirror of anxieties… that arises from the fear that modern life is, by its nature, inauthentic– even counterfeit or spurious".

Eisenstadt (1973) emphasises the changing nature of tradition, which though tradition persists and continues through time, it focuses on dynamics and change. Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983, p. 1) argue that phenomena characterized as traditions which "appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented". Similarly, Graburn (2001) asserts that traditions are continually being created even during modernity. He also argues that tradition is not necessarily old or belongs to the past and remains unchanged, it might be "old, modified or new" (Graburn, 2001, p. 10). In Bruner's (2005a) study, Balinese dance is an example of transformed tradition changing in various shapes before being performed to tourists today. In the same way, AlSayyad (2001, p. 19) states that tradition is the "product of a lifetime of experiences by individuals and, having changed much over time, it is bound to change even more as it is passed along to the next generation".

Linnekin (1991, p. 447) emphasises that traditions are "not inauthentic" and "all traditions – western and indigenous – are invented, in that they are symbolically constructed in the present and reflect contemporary concerns and purposes rather than a passive legacy". This led to the now shared conclusion that "all traditions are constructed or invented at some stage in history and this quality does not necessarily make them less genuine" (Kroeze & Keulen, 2013, p. 1271). Kroeze and Keulen (2013, p. 1271) also state that "people who are part of a tradition are already often aware of its constructed nature as they use it as linguistic techniques of

memory". Traditions have a mobilising function, as "traditions are always oriented on the one hand towards the past: as repetition, habit, routine, and recollection" (Kroeze & Keulen, 2013, p. 1272).

2.5.2 How and why are traditions transmitted?

Though there is debate over how tradition changes, it is not clear how and why traditions are transmitted and to what extent they are considered as unchanged (Cheer et al., 2013; Graburn, 2001; Shils, 1981; Simpson, 1993).

Previous studies point out the reasons for transmitted traditions. It could be said that primarily, traditions are transmitted and preserved because their owners want to keep them for the next generation (Shils, 1981). Shils also claims that "traditions are not independently self-reproductive or self-elaborating" (Shils, 1981, p. 14). Tradition was reformed through the desire to create something truer and better or more convenient for those who acquire and possess it. Traditions can deteriorate in the sense of losing their adherents because their possessors cease to present them, or because those who once received and re-enacted and extended them now prefer other lines of communication (Shils, 1981). In that sense, new generations may find other traditions more acceptable, according to the standards which they feel more comfortable with.

Graburn (2001) observes that the Native Americas call any customs 'traditions' if they want to continue practising them. He argues that the transmission is so natural that people may not realise the 'passing on' (Graburn, 2001). Shils (1981, p. 14) also argues "tradition might undergo very great changes but its recipients might regard it as significantly unchanged". However, in a tourism context, it seems that we have not experienced any particular case in which the people who possess traditions do not realise the significant change in their tradition.

Previous cases show that people have deliberately re-invented their traditions as a product to offer to tourists. For instance, Bruner (2005a) observes that the traditional Balinese dance has been created and performed to meet the demand of the tourists.

Moreover, previous studies reveal that the locals keep their traditional ways of presenting cultural practices as they can get more benefit from them (Bruner, 2005a; Cheer et al., 2013). As more and more tourists are interested in cultural tourism and seek to explore the cultural heritage, traditions "become subject to inspection and commoditization" (Graburn, 2001, p. 8). However, Greenwood (1989) states that not all cultures have adapted for money exchange. According to Robinson:

> The tourism industry largely conceives of culture(s) in two ways: either as value free, and thus largely as an inconsequential aspect of development; and/or as just another product to be packaged. As a result, culture(s) as embodiments of living traditions are reduced to superficial subjugates of consumerism and lose their active social aspect, political function, and authenticity (Robinson, 2001, p. 18).

Simpson (1993) studies the transmission of ritual knowledge in Sri Lanka in which rituals of healing and exorcism are transformed into commodities appropriate for consumption by tourists. Anthropologists argue that through time, cultural practices, rituals or events are transformed into commodities appropriate for consumptions by tourists (Simpson, 1993). This argument opens an issue embedded in the concept of appropriation. What could be considered 'appropriately transformed', or in other words, how far do the locals want to invent their traditions? In this particular topic, the previous research has emphasised the suitability for tourists as a key consideration (Simpson, 1993; Smith, 1977). However, it could be said that the locals' demands should be considered in the transformation process. It is clear that we are

lacking an understanding of how traditions are modified by the negotiation of the locals who are arguably the main actors in the process.

2.5.3   Consuming tradition in a tourism context

Contemporary tourists' nostalgia and curiosity of the past make tradition an important theme of tourism, which also contributes to the preservation and renewal of traditional cultures. As cultural tourism appeared as a sort of alternative tourism, tourists become consumers of tradition (Upton, 2001). The consumption of tradition was often located in the process of commercialisation of cultural heritage (AlSayyad, 2001). Embedded in the argument is the idea that people in host destinations will lose their cultural identity as a result of tourism (Stronza, 2001). Tourism may cause hosts to forget their past or lose their culture as they adopt the new lifestyles and new ways of being, which they learn from outsiders (Smith, 1977). AlSayyad also argues that the manufacturing of tradition has been viewed negatively as it served the markets' demand "without the application of intellect" (AlSayyad, 2001, p. 2).

However, there is a strong belief that tourism strengthens the existence of cultural tradition. Cohen (1988) argues that the emergence of a tourist market frequently facilitates the preservation of a cultural tradition which would otherwise perish. In another study about the Songkran festival in Thailand, Porananond and Robinson (2008, p. 320) observe that "the tradition of the festival is secure precisely as it has continually been re-invented in the light of tourist audiences". Moreover, it is universally agreed that promoting tourism is an important strategy for community and regional development (Saarinen & Manwa, 2008).

There is a debate on the impact of tourism and local empowerment around whether tourism empowers customary owners of traditional culture or not (Cheer et al., 2013). Tourism increases tensions as traditional culture is utilised in tourism (Forsyth, 2012). A transformation

through conservation and restoration of traditional cultural practices for the entertainment of consumers has been raised as a concern in the postmodern era.

2.5.4 Local people as tradition negotiators

Besides the research on the two extremes: the hosts and guests, other studies focus on the intermediate groups; for instance, governments, travel agencies, tour guides, travel writers and people involved in the transportation industry (Chambers, 2000). However, research on the local people as 'a mediator' has not been well considered. Doron (2005) argues that the local people normally do not have full power in the process of negotiating their culture. She also states that the locals can develop many tactics and strategies to satisfy their needs and desires to their own advantage. However, her study is merely concentrated on the relationship between the boatmen and foreign tourists. The local people may not willingly apply the same tactics for domestic tourists as they do for foreign tourists.

Pratt (1992, p. 7) claims that locals cannot control what comes into their cultural arena but can control what they absorb into their own culture. Moreover, academic research reveals that the local inhabitants are active and creative in constructing attractive traditional products that meet the tourists' desires (Bruner, 2005a; Cheer et al., 2013).

AlSayyad (2004) argues that tradition should be viewed as a negotiation between the dominance of national or local culture, and the exercise of choice by some members or groups of that society. Kuwahara (2001) argues that it is a challenge for the local people to be self-sufficient economically while at the same time preserving and transmitting their traditions. He studies tourism in Yap, an island in the Caroline Islands, formerly known as New Philippines of the western Pacific Ocean, which has contributed to the restoration, revitalisation and

preservation of traditional culture, though it is not replacing the traditional trade which played a big role in providing external power for politico-economic autonomy.

The locals are far from passive in inventing their traditions, they utilise them as a strategic means to attract tourists (Bendix, 1989; Simpson, 1993). It could be said that tourism is no longer a domination of wealthy tourists over poor hosts but that the presence of tourists contributes to the process of re-enforcing the locals' self-image. Cheer et al. (2013) argue that the locals may not feel comfortable about living in 'traditional ways' as suggested by tourism agencies. However, they just do their jobs to get money (Simpson, 1993). Locals are encouraged to 'dress-up' in traditional costumes and display themselves for tourist entertainment, and sometimes for basic subsistence (Mugerauer, 2001). Forsyth (2012) observes that there are ongoing concerns from the authorities on misappropriation of traditional knowledge under the influence of modern factors. However, we still do not know to what extent the local people think that they are losing their traditions when they invent or create them as tourism products. The local people who take part in traditional festivals are not only beneficiaries but cultural inventors and preservers as well which strengthen the distinctive cultural identity of each local community (Abram, 1997).

2.6   Conclusion

There is a proliferation of research on hospitality, however, they have been focusing on hotel and management. There is lack of literature specifically directed towards hospitality as a cultural heritage and tourism product. Hence, my literature review covers across different disciplines, for instance, host and guest relationships, local perceptions on tourism, and the concept of tradition to give a theoretical base for the research. This chapter reviews the academic literature in the social sciences, primarily in anthropology studies, that have

examined the host and guest relationship in the tourism context. The literature reveals that the interactions between hosts and guests are described most frequently as unbalanced power relationships.

In studies on hospitality, Lashley et al. (2007b, p. 123) reaffirm the "inherent inequalities" in the relationship between host and guest. However, McNaughton (2006) argues that the contemporary host-guest framework is inadequate for building up a deeper understanding of interactions between tourists and locals. Moreover, the point of view that the hosts are passive seems less applicable today. Rather, the local communities more directly engage with tactics and strategies to attract tourists as well as satisfy their own desires (Bendix, 1989; Simpson, 1993). The nature and dynamics of the tourist-local relationship has three main aspects: people's interaction, perceptions and attitudes (Cohen, 1984). Locals' view of tourists should be further examined for better understanding the complex and double side of the whole picture (Aramberri, 2001; Maoz, 2006).

The research presented here reviews the previous literature on guest-host relationships and how understandings of hospitality are inherent in these relationships. The first section reviewed the nature of encounters between tourists and hosts and their mutual view of each other. It is argued that the contemporary host-guest framework is not enough to explain such a dynamic relationship. Tourism contact is much more complicated than contact between different people with different backgrounds, where simple contacts between tourists and hosts would not improve prejudice (Sirakaya-Turk et al., 2014). Contemporary studies of tourism in developing countries often concentrate on the relationship between international tourists and the locals who are dependent on the tourist business; there are not many studies about the complex relationships between domestic tourists and the foreign tourists at the same time. The locals' viewpoint influences how they behave to tourists and how they decide to transmit their

traditions. Because they have to use tactics to tourists, however, some tactics just work for foreigners - or at least for tourists who have not been there before, or have only a little knowledge about the destinations. Smith (1977) has made a significant contribution to the theory of host-guest relations which is the groundwork for the majority of research on the host and guest relationships in tourism. The host-guest framework in this and subsequent research suggests an unbalanced relationship usually based on the opposition between visitors from Western countries and local people in developing countries (Moufakkir & Reisinger, 2013). Cohen and Cohen (2015) have proposed a "mobilities" paradigm which suggests alternative way to think about the hosts and guests encounters at a tourist destination. Especially, the study of tourism from the emerging regions, where the forms of domestic and regional corporeal mobility have received a relative lack of attention in the literature (King, 2015). The hosts and guests relationships has been becoming more focus on recent studies in which this relationships are elaborated in more angles which are not simply understood as an asymmetrical relationships. Rather, the hosts and guests paradigm is both hierarchal in nature and centred on the role and interests of the host (Chen, 2018).

Additionally, the chapter reviews dominant themes in hospitality disciplines which reveals that hospitality studies have been preoccupied with commercial provision (Lashley, 2000). Not only hospitality studies in tourism context are still in the early stages of development (Lashley & Morrison, 2013), but the research on the local people's perceptions and attitudes is also far from inductive observation (Olsen, 2001). Missing in the previous studies is a consideration of the perceptions and response of local people towards outsiders. The literature has largely ignored the subject of how locals perceive outsiders (Stronza, 2001). It could be seen that there is room for further study, particularly the response or adjustment of the hosts towards the dynamic changes of tourism development. Models or analytical frameworks should be

developed to help us predict the condition under which locals experience tourism. Locals' view of tourists should be further examined for better understanding the complexion and double-sidedness of the whole picture (Aramberri, 2001; Maoz, 2006).

The literature review on the host-guest relationship and local people's attitudes towards tourism showed that most of the social and cultural theories of tourism had been developed from the experiences of Western tourists, and consequently some may not be directly applicable to non-Western tourists. Moreover, most of the theories of tourism encounters focus on the interplay between the culture of the host in a developing country and that of the guest from a developed country (Moufakkir & Reisinger, 2013).

The literature chapter also reviewed the concept of tradition, as the research questions aim to understand how local people perceive their cultures and their attitudes and behaviour to the presentation of traditions of hospitality. Reviews of the concept of tradition guided me into the methodology of the research, which was to examine both tangible and intangible aspects of hospitality. This will be discussed further in the following chapters, where I analyse hospitality in tangible aspects (chapter 5) and intangible aspects (chapter 6).

CHAPTER 3: TOURISM IN THE MEKONG DELTA, VIETNAM: CONTEXT AND ISSUES

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to describe the current tourism context of the Mekong Delta, Vietnam, in the context of the issues of the locals' engagement with tourism. To Vietnam, the Mekong Delta region plays an important role as it is the most productive region in agriculture and fishery. Recently, tourism has come to be considered to be one of the industries that have the potential to benefit the local community in the region. However, there are a number of issues that tourism in the Mekong Delta is facing. For example, the number of tourists compared to other regions in the country is low (about 8% of total international tourists and 6% of total domestic tourist) (Hong, 2014). Local government authorities in the Mekong Delta have been struggling to find an effective way to attract more tourists. Moreover, according to local authorities, the perceived tourism image of the region is weak as there are currently no unique tourism services on offer for each province.

The chapter will start by presenting background information on tourism in Vietnam in general, and will also address the current situation in the Mekong Delta. Secondly, the overview of the Mekong Delta region which is considered as a peripheral area in Vietnam will be presented. Then, the tourism resources of the Mekong Delta and the types of tourism will be addressed.

Lastly, I will present the key stakeholders in the development of Mekong Delta tourism. The development of tourism is important in helping local people with a low standard of living, particularly in the Mekong Delta area, to increase their earnings. To some extent, with the presence of tourism and tourists, the local culture has also been transformed. In the Mekong Delta region, the issues of how local people adjust their traditions along with the development

of tourism and the presence of tourists are still not investigated. This will also underline the suitability of choosing the Mekong Delta as a study area for my research.

3.2 Overview of Vietnam and tourism development

3.2.1 Understanding Vietnam

Vietnam is located in Southeast Asia and is bordered by China to the North, Laos and Cambodia to the West, and the South China Sea to the East (Figure 3-1). With an area of 330,000 square km, Vietnam is considered to be one of the more densely populated countries in the region. Vietnam had an estimated population of 96.49 million in the year 2018, ranks as the world's 14th most populous country and the third most populous Southeast Asia country after Indonesia and the Philippines (World Population Prospects, 2018).

Figure 3-1 Map of Vietnam

(Source: http://www.vietnam-travel-guide.net/vietnam-map/)

Vietnam is also a multi-ethnic country with 54 ethnic groups, in which the majority is Kinh, who account for 86.2% of the population. The official language is Vietnamese. Minority ethnic groups can speak the Vietnamese language with the Kinh and use their own languages in their localities.

Vietnamese is the official language of Vietnam, and it is spoken throughout the country. Dialectic differences are marked between the north, central and southern regions. There are also many different languages spoken by the various ethnic minorities, particularly in the Central Highlands and the far north of the country. Khmer, the Cambodian language, is spoken in parts of the Mekong Delta. The Vietnamese people's knowledge of foreign language reflects the country's relationship with foreign powers in recent history. Much of Vietnam's older generation can speak French, while many middle-aged Vietnamese speak Russian and other Eastern European languages as they spent time in countries like Russia, Bulgaria and the former East Germany during the Cold War. After the reunification, the teaching of Russian was encouraged all over the country. With the collapse of the USSR in 1991, all interest in studying Russian has grounded to a screeching halt. Most Vietnamese who bothered to learn the language have either forgotten it or are in the process of forgetting it now.

Today, Vietnam's youth has fully embraced the English language. A significant number of young people also study Chinese, Japanese, French and other Western European languages. People in their 60s and older (who grew up during the colonial period) are much more likely to understand some French and the later generation, for whom English is indispensable for professional and commercial contacts with the Americans. The large number of tourists and investors from China, Taiwan and Hongkong provides the chief motivation for studying

Chinese. In addition, cross-border trade with mainland China has been increasing rapidly and those who can speak Chinese are well positioned to profit from it.

Vietnam's territorial history is a transformation of living space of Vietnamese people. It included different states: in some periods Vietnam lost its territory to other countries, in other periods Vietnam conquered new territory. Before the French colonization, the culture of Vietnam was heavily influenced by Chinese culture in terms of politics, government, Confucian social[2] and moral ethics, and art. That period started from 111 BC and lasted for 1000 years, a time which Vietnamese people often call "Bắc thuộc" (belonging to the North). That is the reason why in most of the pagodas and temples in Vietnam, tourists can see Chinese language inscribed on the gates, columns and steles. The culture of traditional families in Vietnam has many similar characteristics with the Chinese. For instance, the influence of ideology and religion, in which Confucianism became an essential ideological viewpoint on the establishment of a centralized monarchy as well as the basic principles of ruling; influences on painting, architecture, sculpture; and the influence on writing and art literature. During the Chinese domination of North Vietnam, several civilizations flourished in what is today central and south Vietnam, particularly the Funanese (Cambodian) and Cham (Indian). After centuries of resistance, the Vietnamese people overthrew their Chinese rulers, and became independent (Ladenburg, 1974). The next millennium was advanced by the accomplishments of successive dynasties, before the French came.

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[2] Confucianism is an ethical and philosophical system, also described as a religion, developed from the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius (551–479 BCE).

Vietnam as a French colony (1867-1945)

French colonialism in Vietnam lasted for nearly 80 years from 1867 to 1945. France controlled Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, which was called French Indochina. At that time, Indochina was one of the most lucrative colonial possessions. According to Cooper (2001) French influence in Asia including Vietnam was very strong with an aim to introduce modern political ideas, social reforms, industrial methods and new technologies. To minimize local resistance, the French employed a 'divide and rule' strategy, undermining Vietnamese unity by playing local officials, communities and religious groups against each other (Shipway, 1996). Colonial officials and French companies transformed Vietnam's thriving subsistence economy into a primitive capitalist system, based on land ownership, increased production, exports and low wages.

In 1887, after completing the invasion of Vietnam, the French created a quite new ruling system from the central to the local level. During the French colonial period, Vietnamese culture absorbed various influences from the Europeans, including the spread of Catholicism and the adoption of the Latin alphabet. French was also the official language of Vietnam from the beginning of French colonial rule in the mid-19th century until independence under the Geneva Accords of 1954. Today, French is spoken by over 5% of the population and it is sometimes used in international relations and education. Much of the present infrastructure of Vietnam was built by the French, such as the railway from the North to the South, along with bridges and buildings. However, tourist interests, such as French colonial architecture, are primarily located in the big cities such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city. There is a considerable number of classical French constructions that are conserved at present in Hanoi and most of them have retained the original appearances with initial features and materials. They have all become

either culture symbols of Hanoi or are used by Vietnamese authorities as offices of important departments such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State Banks of Vietnam, and The Palace of Presidents (Vietnam Online, 2015). At the present time, Vietnamese people still use the railway which was built by the French for travelling and cargo transport. It could be said that the infrastructure the French built in Vietnam for their exploitation purposes has become the supporting infrastructure for tourism development, making the major areas of tourist interest in Vietnam accessible.

Vietnam from 1945 to 1986

On September 2, 1945, Ho Chi Minh, leader of the Viet Minh organization, declared Vietnam's independence under the new name of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.[3] From this time, the country was divided into two zones: the free zone and the occupied zone. In the latter, French colonists still maintained their economic policy as before, but it was more focused on serving the war. After the withdrawal of the French in 1954, Vietnam became involved in another war, which is known as the Vietnam war (or American war) which lasted for a decade from 1964 to 1975. Much of the physical infrastructure of the colonial facilities was destroyed in the war. At that time, Vietnam was split into two regions, the North and the South, where the South was under the control of the pro-American Vietnamese government. Ho Chi Minh city, called Saigon before 1975, was known as the "Pearl of the Orient" and was a developed and busy city in the eastern region at that time.

The emergence of mass tourism in the 1960s bypassed Vietnam because of war, political and economic constraints (Jansen-Verbeke & Go, 1995). In 1964, Americans represented the

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[3] A Vietnamese, communist-led organization whose forces fought against the Japanese and especially against the French in Indochina: officially in existence 1941–51 (Moïse, 1998)

largest group of visitors followed by France, Taiwan, Japan and the UK (Laderman & Rosenberg, 2008). American veterans or international tourists who were involved in the war were among the first tourists to Vietnam. They were interested in visiting museums, cultural heritage, historical, monumental sites, and engaging in cultural activities (Butler & Suntikul, 2013). At the present time, in general, Americans are welcomed in Vietnam and the tourists find it a safe place to visit. In 1975, the American war ended and the North and the South of Vietnam were unified as one country. From that moment, the government of Vietnam started to focus on nation building and improvements to the infrastructure.

In 1995, about 10 years after renovation, Vietnam created a tourism master plan for the following 15 years with the assistance from the UNWTO and UNDP (Suntikul et al., 2008b). The political and economic changes have increased Vietnam's accessibility in the international tourism market. Vietnam has made efforts to boost tourism as a spearhead industry (Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, 2013).

Vietnam after "renovation": transformation from a war zone to a potential tourism destination.

Since 1986, Vietnam has experienced an economic reform, which is known as "đổi mới" (renovation). Through this, the Vietnamese economy has changed from a stagnant, centrally planned economy to a more dynamic market-oriented economy. Before this open door policy, the Vietnamese government had monopolized the tourism sector. The new economic policy of openness actively facilitated tourism development (Jansen-Verbeke & Go, 1995). In 1987, one year after "renovation", Vietnam issued a law on foreign investment, which encouraged direct foreign investment in Vietnam, especially in the tourism industry. Reforms were enacted to promote the private sector as an economic driver, and to permit state and privately-owned

industries to trade directly in foreign and international markets (Suntikul et al., 2008a). Consequently, private enterprises also increased in number and started to serve the independent tourist backpackers market. In 1990, with the hope to encourage tourism in the country, the Vietnam government declared a programme called "Visit Vietnam Year". However, this programme is considered to have failed as Vietnam has lacked suitable infrastructure, accommodation facilities, appropriate tourism organization and skilled staff (Jansen-Verbeke & Go, 1995). The quantity and quality of Vietnam's tourism infrastructure was not sufficient to meet the expectations of the international tourism market. Vietnam's entry into ASEAN in 1995 as well as Vietnam's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2007 are milestones that indicate Vietnam's integration into international markets. This also helped in boosting the Vietnamese tourism industry. Many Viet kieu (Vietnamese people who are living abroad) return to visit friends and introduce their country of origin to their children (Chon & Berger, 2012).

In 1991, the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) published a Vietnam tourism development master plan along with the United Nations development plan (Jansen-Verbeke & Go, 1995) which identified Vietnam as having four regions with market potential for tourism development. One of the four regions is Ho Chi Minh and its surroundings (the Mekong Delta) which offer possibilities for river cruises.

In the past, war was a main barrier to Vietnamese travel (Laderman & Rosenberg, 2008). In 1994, the United States lifted the 20-year-old trade embargo, and this was also a boost to Vietnam's economy and the tourism industry (Jansen-Verbeke & Go, 1995). With this repeal, there was the potential for returning veterans to visit Vietnam as a battlefield nostalgia trip (Blaine et al., 1995; Weaver, 2011). Though trips to Vietnam were constrained by government

regulations, the demand of Americans to visit Vietnam still existed (Blaine et al., 1995). The number of international tourists to Vietnam also started to increase from 1995 onwards (Vietnam National Administration, 2003).

3.2.2 Vietnam as a tourist destination in the Southeast Asia region

About half a century ago, South East Asian countries have witnessed substantial growth in inbound international tourism (Henderson, 2010). One of the reasons was the political stability which helped boost tourism development (Weaver & Lawton, 2006). Both international and domestic tourism in the South East Asia region has expanded rapidly. However, the study of tourism in South East Asia has not provided us with a comprehensive view of the dynamic changes in social, economic and environmental and cultural issues involved in tourism (Hitcock et al., 1993). There is some research about Asian tourism, mostly concentrated on tourism in particular destinations, such as Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia (Bruner, 2005a; Causey, 2003; Ness, 2003). Much of the debate on tourism in developing countries, including those in South East Asia, has focused on whether its impact is negative or positive and whether people support or disapprove of the presence of tourism and tourists (Hitcock et al., 1993). However, various relationships between tourism and culture have tended to be overlooked. In general, tourism has often been conceived in terms of positive and negative effects on traditional culture (Erb, 2000; Wood, 1980). Hitcock et al. (1993) also argue that when culture is perceived as a static object, lacking the dynamics of change, the values of local participants are ignored. Whether or not tourism has a positive or negative effect on traditional cultures is arguably not as important as how that affects local lives and how the locals perceive these changes.

Southeast Asia is becoming a popular destination with the number of international tourist arrivals increasing by four times from 20 million tourists in 1991 to 80 million tourists in 2011. According to Mok and Lam (1998) foreign arrivals reached 985,000 in 1994, growing from 440,000 in 1992, representing an upsurge of 124% during the period. Government information on the number of visitors is patchy and inconsistent, but some government statistics reveal that Vietnam welcomed 650,000 visitors in 1993 (HKTDC, 1994), and 1,400,000 visitors in 1994 (Wong and Bloomberg, 1995). From 2006 onwards, tourists from ASEAN rose sharply, especially tourists from the neighboring countries such as Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. However, growth of the number of international tourists to Vietnam is unstable and has varied considerably due to external impacts such as financial crises, and epidemics. The number of domestic tourists has also increased significantly since 1995. The number of domestic tourists is 28 million in 2010 which is four times larger than those in the 1995 statistics (VNAT, 2014b).

In 2013, there were approximately 93 million international tourist arrivals to the Southeast Asia region. Vietnam ranks fifth in Southeast Asia with 7.5 million, after Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia (World Economic Forum, 2013). Factors shaping the Vietnamese tourism industry are: the environment, politics, and government involvement, all of which are closely linked and crucial to the successful development of tourism in the country. Vietnam has many natural endowments and resources that are major attractions for tourists (Chon, 2013).

Vietnam tourism resources

Vietnam has a long coastline (more than 3,400 km) which stretches from the north to the south in the S shape of the country along with over 2,800 islands which make sea, sun, and sand one

of the most popular attractions to tourists (Stewart, 2014). Vietnam also has almost 3,000 national heritage sites and eight World Heritage sites recognized by UNESCO, including two natural heritage sites, five cultural heritage sites and one mixed heritage site. All of these sites are in the North and the Central region of Vietnam. There are no World Heritage sites in the South of Vietnam where the Mekong Delta is located.

In terms of market share for the first tourists come to Vietnam, Taiwan was ranked top, with the largest influx of visitors into Vietnam in 1994, while the U.S. and France, at second and third, also dominated the market. At that time, approximately 2 million Vietnamese tourists or Viet Kieu, located in some 80 countries, dominated the market when they returned to their homeland for a visit (Mok & Lam, 1998). As Vietnam borders on China in the north, the number of Chinese visitors to Vietnam is the highest in the past few years. The number of Korean tourists has also increased. Korean contemporary culture and cultural products, referred to as 'The Korean wave' has expanded throughout East Asia including Vietnam since the mid-1990s (Suh et al., 2005). Besides that, in 2014, Vietnam has relaxed the visa policy for seven countries, Denmark, Finland, Japan, Norway, Russia, South Korea, and Sweden. Since July 2015, Vietnam has also increased the number of nationalities permitted to enter the country without a visa (if stay less than 15 days), including French, German, Italian, Spanish, and British. International visitors travel to Vietnam mainly by air. Vietnam has a long sea coast but does not have many tourism sea ports. According to Vietnam National Administration Tourism (VNAT) (2015a), the average length of international tourists' stay is approximately 9 days and the average spending of tourists per day has not been increased (approximately 100 US dollars/per day for international tourists and 50 US dollars/per day for domestic tourists) (VNAT, 2013).

After some changes in governmental tourism policy since 1995, Vietnam now has seven tourism regions.

(1). Northern Midland and mountainous region features eco-cultural tourism associated with exploration of cultural identities of ethnic minorities;

(2). Red River Delta and Northeast coast region is characterized by sea trips, and cultural tourism associated with values of the wet rice civilization and local traditional activities, and urban tourism.

(3). North Central region is characterized by tours to explore cultural and natural World Heritage sites, marine tourism, eco-tourism, historic-cultural exploration.

(4). South Central Coast region is known for marine and resort tourism associated with the exploration of heritage, marine culture and cuisine.

(5). Central Highlands region has eco-tourism and cultural tourism exploiting the unique cultural values of indigenous ethnic groups.

(6). Eastern South region features urban tourism, culture and history exploration, marine ecological and resort tourism.

(7). Mekong Delta region features eco-tourism, river life culture, marine ecological and resort tourism.

With regard to tourism human resources, the tourism industry has created many jobs. However, to meet the needs of integration and competition, tourism staff lack professional skills, foreign language communication and instructors are weak and inadequate. Staff in tourism who are qualified are mostly concentrated in large cities, whereas it is in the remote areas that tourism human resources are in short supply.

Since 2001, Vietnam has focused on developing a tourism infrastructure, in which the budget has been distributed proportionally to provinces and cities across the country. However, this financial support from the state only guarantees 20% of the capital needs of the provinces. In addition to the state's contribution, investment by the private sector has also increased rapidly. However, these private investments are voluntary, scattered, and fragmented. In some destinations, investment without careful planning has ruined the environment which impacts negatively on the tourism.

3.3   Overview of Mekong Delta

3.3.1   Mekong Delta as a peripheral area

The Mekong Delta lies downstream of the Mekong River, also known as Cửu Long Delta ("Nine dragons") as the river splits into nine tributaries before joining the sea. The delta has a crisscrossed network of canals which deliver freshwater to most parts of the region (Figure 3-2). It is located in the Southwest of Vietnam and is one of the largest rice-producing regions in the world. The coastline has a length of around 600 km, mostly with relatively low sea dykes and mangroves which are the destinations for eco-tourists.

The Mekong Delta encompasses a large portion of southwestern Vietnam of 39,000 square kilometres (Hackney, 2013). The delta has a population of approximately 18 million people (i.e. roughly 20% of the national population). It is predominantly an agricultural area with 80 percent of the inhabitants living in rural areas and 76 percent of its population engaged in agriculture. The Mekong Delta is the most important agriculture region in Vietnam, though covering only 12% of the total land area. This region provides half of the national rice output and 90% of the rice exports of Vietnam (Berg, 2002). The Mekong Delta region constitutes 12 provinces and a city named Can Tho, and its administration is directed by the State. Can Tho

city also acts as a receiving tourist centre from where the tourists head to different tourist attractions in the region. The Mekong Delta is rural in character with limited local investment capital.

Figure 3-2 The Mekong Delta region

Source: http://www.mdpi.com/2072-4292/5/2/687

The Mekong delta bears many of the features of a peripheral area, which is characterized by relatively low levels of economic activity, sparser population and greater reliance on agriculture and allied rural industries (Brown et al., 2000). The delta has been traditionally regarded as one of the most economically disadvantaged parts of Vietnam. The residents in the delta do not have as good a standard of living and vibrant lifestyle as in the urban area. There

is often a long tradition of out-migration to more favoured areas. Infrastructure and social amenities tend to also be poorer.

The delta is quite a vast area and some provinces in the far south are a long distance from Ho Chi Minh city. Before the Can Tho bridge was built in 2010, traveling from Ho Chi Minh city to Can Tho city, the centre of the region, was time-consuming and inconvenient as the only way to cross the river was by ferry. The Mekong Delta region is not characterized by magnificent scenery but by a rich culture and a unique traditional way of living. The local community in the Mekong Delta essentially has a water-based lifestyle built on their strong dependency on the river for food and transportation. Floating markets are a special feature of the delta, offering visitors the chance to see dozens of boats selling agricultural products and flowers. However, only a few of the markets have retained their unique characteristics due to the development of road transport so decreasing the number of trade boats. Mekong Delta cities and provinces are calling for large-scale investments to restore a number of floating markets such as Cai Be in Tien Giang province, Cai Rang in Can Tho city, Nga Bay in Hau Giang province, and Nga Nam in Soc Trang province (Vietnamnet, 2015).

The Mekong Delta is considered the 'rice bowl' of the country. The number of people working as farmers accounts for over 80% of the population in the region (Pham, 2010). However, there are over 2 million poor people who live with a daily income of 0.3 USD/day, out of a total of 20 million people (Bui, 2010). Poverty reduction is set as a prioritised target along with the building of new-style rural areas and environmental protection (Vietnamnews, 2014). In this context, tourism is considered a key factor which can help boost the economy of the region and improve the living standards for local people.

The commute of the people in the Mekong Delta is characterised by the river. Traditional vehicles are boats and sampan, a small wooden boat. Wealthy families have canoes to carry goods and materials. The type of boat and sampan used depends on the characteristics of the terrain and rivers.

As a result of the economic transition strategy of the whole country, the Mekong Delta is shifting its economic structure from traditional agriculture to industry and service. In comparison with trade and service development in the whole country, this sector in the Mekong Delta is being slowly developed. Service sectors in the Mekong Delta include key sectors such as import-export, water transport and tourism. Tourism is becoming an important sector for the region. However, compared to other regions of Vietnam, the Mekong Delta's tourism sector has only just started to develop in recent years.

The Mekong Delta is also rich in culture. This area is the home of many ethnic groups, primarily Viet, Chinese, Muslim Cham, and Khmers (The, 2014). The Mekong Delta is struggling to alleviate issues related to the infrastructure, poverty, and illiteracy in its territory. According to the General Statistic Office, in 2014, the proportion of households living under poor conditions is about 6%. This number is even exceeded in some specific provinces, for instance Tra Vinh, Hau Giang, and Soc Trang (Ministry of Labour, 2012). There are about 53% of 1.3 million Khmer people falling under the poverty line (Truong, 2012).

Although the Mekong Delta has advantages in agriculture, fruits and fisheries; the gap between rich and poor is still widening. The poverty rate in the Mekong Delta region accounts for 17% of the country's poor households (Vietnam General Statistics Office, 2010), and there is significant and increasing land scarcity in the delta which was found to be more of a contribution to poverty. In addition to the three ethnic minority groups in the Mekong Delta,

the Khmer were the largest group with more than 1.2 million people, one of the most populous ethnic groups in Vietnam. They are also the most economically and socially disadvantaged due to their lack of land, their over-dependence on agriculture and with low skills and a language barrier because they use their own Khmer language (Eldis, 2004). Over half of the poor in some provinces in the Mekong Delta are working for hire in agriculture as their main source of income. Employment of this nature is seasonal and does not generate sufficient income. With the presence of tourism, the local people can find jobs when they are not busy in agricultural work. However, the paradox is that the poor people can only find low paid jobs such as boat sailing, and cooking. On the other hand, land owners can earn a living in selling fruits and using their land and gardens to generate extra income from hosting tourists.

3.3.2 Tourism resources in the Mekong Delta

Natural resources

The Mekong Delta is not a spectacular destination with astonishing views or outstanding beauty spots. However, the Mekong Delta has a dense network of canals crisscrossing the area which give it a unique characteristic. The Mekong Delta also has great biodiversity. There is a wide variety of ecological systems of fauna and flora, from mountain to swampy river basin and coastal areas. The Mekong Delta has been identified as a 'biological treasure trove' with preservation strategies at national level (Fantz, 2008).

Typical natural tourism resources of the Mekong Delta are the ecological areas including wetlands ecosystems, national parks and marine ecosystems. Moreover, most of the popular bird sanctuaries in Vietnam are located in the Mekong Delta including Bac Lieu bird sanctuary (Bac Lieu), Tram Chim (Dong Thap), Vam Ho bird sanctuary (Ben Tre), and Tra Su mangrove forest (An Giang). All of these sanctuaries are popular for eco-tourism.

The Mekong Delta also has a sea coast of 700 kilometers with more than 145 islands and beautiful beaches. In particular, the most famous island is Phu Quoc island in Kien Giang province which attracted many tourists.

Cultural resources

Compared to natural resources, cultural resources in the Mekong Delta are equally diversified. The tangible cultural tourism resources in the region include historic sites, pagodas, temples, and craft villages. The Mekong Delta region is also a land of diversity, and richness of religion. Many pagodas and temples in the regions attract domestic tourists coming for worship. The most featured is Ba Chua Xu festivals in An Giang province. In 2014, An Giang attracted the highest number of religion-based visitors with 6 million people.

Besides tangible cultural tourism resources mentioned above, the Mekong Delta also has the intangible cultural tourism resource. These are festivals, craft villages, gastronomy, and sports events. One of the distinctions of the Mekong Delta is the presence of a large number of Khmer people whose traditions and culture practices are still maintained at present. Popular festivals of the Khmer people include Chol Chnam Thmay (New Year festival), Sene Dolta (annual celebration to honour ancestors) and Ok Om Bok (Moon worship festival). Especially Ok Om Bok festival, which is a named national intangible heritage, is popular with tourists.

The Mekong Delta regions also maintain their traditional craft activities. In the region, there are more than 200 traditional handicraft villages including pottery, traditional silk, mats, wooden furniture, rattan and bamboo products, flowers, rice pancakes, weaving. The craft activities create about 200,000 jobs for the local people (Nguyen, 2014). The small traditional handicraft enterprises are drawing the participation of at least 30% of all households and making at least 50% of the total income of the village (World Bank, 2012).

Food tourism is also an emerging type of tourism in the region. Tourists may have a better chance of discovering how the living conditions have influenced the way local people eat. Embedded in a cultural lifestyle on water, the main dishes of the Mekong Delta people include rice, soup, vegetables and fish. The people here are also very flexible in using various types of vegetables in their meals in the sense that any type of vegetable growing in the water can be used.

There are intangible culture resources in the region such as festivals, and traditional culture practices such as music and dance performance. Stemming from the demand of entertainment, cultural activities and worship, each ethnic group has their typical kind of cultural performance. For example, the Viet ethnic group have "đờn ca tài tử", the type of traditional folk music which is recognised by UNESCO as intangible cultural heritage. Most of the tours in Mekong Delta include a "đờn ca tài tử" performance in which the artists are playing traditional musical instruments and singing. However, folk dancing or traditional music in this region is difficult to preserve or hand down to future generations. Here, the community's role is crucial. The most important protection for intangible heritage is people's awareness of its value, their desire to retain it and how they will work to achieve this goal (Le, 2011). The attachment to this kind of music and/or dance performances which are offered on tours is considered a way for people to maintain their traditions (Abram, 1997). However, we do not know to what extent the implicit local knowledge in these events could facilitate tourists to learn more about local culture.

The lifestyle of the people is also considered as an intangible tourism resource. One of the most striking features of the Mekong Delta lifestyle is the inhabitants' bonding with the river. All transport, trading and daily activities are carried out on the river or attached to the river. In addition, the typical characteristics of the Mekong Delta people are hospitality, sincerity,

openness and generosity. This is considered to be one of the factors that motivate tourists to visit this area. For the people in the Mekong Delta, hospitality is a tradition, and for those travelling to the Mekong Delta, hospitality is the expectation of an experience. In the following section, I will give more detail about the narratives relating to the formation of the hospitality trait of the people in the Mekong Delta.

3.3.3   Hospitality as a cultural heritage

The Vietnamese people's character is mostly referred to as hospitable (Jansen-Verbeke & Go, 1995). The Mekong Delta is also known as a destination with hospitable and friendly people which is one of the factors that attract tourists. Tran (2006) also claims that hospitality is one of the typical characteristics of the people in the Mekong Delta. When tourists come to a locals' house, they are basically greeted well and warmly. They can be offered some drinks and food. The tourists also might expect this region to be a safe region, as the Mekong Delta is depicted as "a crime-free zone where traditional morals have been reserved" (Taylor, 2007, p. x). The wealth of this land produced generous and hospitable people who have always welcomed guests with their all sincere heart. Cited as evidence is that houses in the Mekong Delta are often higher, wider and more open to the outside world as compared to ones in the North and the Central region (Travel Mekong, 2016).

There have been a number of studies on Vietnamese culture in the South, with explanations from different angles on the character of the Southwestern people. The hospitality of the local people in the Mekong Delta was studied by a number of historical and cultural researchers (SonNam, 1973; Tran, 2012; Tran, 2006, 2014). Vietnamese people came to the southern region from more than three centuries ago. They were originally from the North and the Central. Most of them were farmers, artisans, and poor people looking for a place to live and

make a living. Arriving in the South, the Vietnamese immigrants gathered into groups, communities, embarking on the task of clearing the land and setting up new villages. In this situation, the community spirit was formed. One of the fundamental characteristics of the inhabitants was chivalrousness. This characteristic is explained as the outcome of the living environment in the past when people must depend on each other due to lack or uncertainty of local resources. When people came to a new land, the settlers faced many difficulties, so they cared for, helped and supported each other and even sacrificed themselves to help each other. Thereby, the living conditions in the past period of reclaiming a new land had formed a sense of community. The traditional community spirit of Vietnam that formed in the North was a close co-operation within the boundaries of the village. The local people only cooperate with whom they knew or had relationships. However, in the South, this character was weakening and transforming into a more social community spirit. The social community spirit can be understood as a sense of cooperation with people regardless of whether they know each other or not, for the benefit of the whole society (Tran, 2014).

Another characteristic of the people in the Mekong Delta is their generosity. The generosity manifests from everyday life in relationships with friends and neighbours. There are many stories and myths about this particular trait. For example, if someone has to go away from his house, the neighbour will come to look after the house, take care of the garden, and the cattle and poultry. When receiving guests, if the host has no food available, he can go to the house adjacent to pick some vegetables, or to catch some fish in the neighbour's pond for cooking. When the family had a big party such as wedding or death anniversary, the host family did not need to ask for help, the nearby residents will voluntarily gather and help cooking and cleaning. The neighbours also lend the hosts bowls, plates or any other kitchen utensils if needed for the party.

Due to the large expanse of the Mekong Delta and the sparsely populated areas, with its privileged natural conditions, the people here are considered more generous than those in other regions. They rarely store up things and the home equipment was basic. They could spend all their savings to help others. In many localities in the Mekong Delta, many families with houses close to the road often put a big water jar in front of their houses so that people crossing can stop to take some water then go.

The community spirit and generosity facilitated the residents to be sociable and hospitable to others.

> The book "Đại Nam nhất thống chí" (Dai Nam Comprehensive Encyclopaedia) described about the characteristics of the Southerners as "privilege to the guests regardless of the cost". According to the records of Trinh Hoai Duc, when guests come to the house, the homeowner will offer betel leaves, food and drinks, the offer was for all the guests, no matter where they came from and who they were. Thus, people travel away from home to this region do not have to bring money and food.
>
> (Tran, 2014, p. 697) (translated by the author)

The hospitality of the Southwestern people was said to be different from other regions featured by their natural hospitability, which is a basic instinct or human need. As described, they were held to be very friendly, consider guests as family members, and did not require the guests to reciprocate.

For strangers, acquaintances, or any people who were not be able to continue their journey, the local people could give them a temporary stay. When receiving guests to sleep overnight, the sleeping area for guests is the most convenient place which was normally the trestle bed located

in the front room of the house. About dishes for guests, the host family often invited their guests to drink rice wine. When the guests came, even if there was only one hen left for raising, the host still cooked it to treat the guests. If the woods used for burning fuel was run out of in the middle of the cooking, the landlord would not hesitate to remove some thatched leaves on the house wall for burning.

Nguyen (1989) expressed his grateful to the local inhabitants who greeted him in the midst of the night when he had to stop in the middle of his business trip in the delta. He wrote in his memoir "Seven days in Dong Thap Muoi":

> One night in Dong Thap, and rain shelter in front of a thatched house. It was over 2 am. An old lady inside called out. I replied. Then immediately there was a rustling sound, then a beam of light gushed through the leaf wall, and an old lady opened the door, invited me in. The house was quite small, just about 6 square meters. There was only one cheap wooden bed. A lady about 17, 18 years old folded her blanket in a hurry, greeted me and stood on one side. I regretted of breaking their sleep, but the old lady insisted me to stay indoors because it was cold and windy outside. Then the old woman and the lady stayed up for more than an hour, talked and waited with me until the rain was getting smaller.

> (translated by the author)

The memoir above was written down 30 years ago, when the Mekong Delta was still a peripheral area, in poor condition, especially in transportation. It was not uncommon for a stranger to stop in the middle of the journey as they could not move in the dark. The public means of transport were not available at that moment of time. The local hospitality impressed

many strangers and travellers and it was arguably the greatest characters of the local inhabitants.

The Mekong Delta today has changed significantly compared to the previous century. Different from the period when the Vietnamese people came here to settle, the delta is no longer a deserted region and scarce of people. The land has been exploited and utilised. This region is undergoing a period of industrialisation and modernisation with an increase of industrial zones and urban areas. The people's living space has also changed, and the local culture has also transformed in various ways. There has been little discussion on how the local people accommodate their cultural tradition at the present time to adapt to the changes.

3.4 Tourism in the Mekong Delta

3.4.1 Overview of the Mekong Delta tourism and current issues

Tourism in the Mekong Delta has been developed since 1995 with the first tourists to the Mekong Delta who were Russian or French visiting the Mekong Delta on their business trip.[4] At this moment, tourism industry in the Mekong Delta is still considered not as developed as in other regions of the country (VNAT, 2016). The number of tourists to the Mekong Delta increased at a rate of 12.5% per year, whilst income from tourism was only about 3% of national tourism revenue, which is lower than that of the national average. There was a great difference between the provinces in the Mekong Delta. Whilst Tien Giang, Ben Tre receives 50% of the total international visitors in the region, An Giang accounts for one third of the total domestic visitors. Kien Giang and Can Tho provinces though only welcome 17% of domestic visitors and 23% of international visitors in the region, but tourism revenues of these two

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[4] Information obtained from interviews with Mr Luu Hoang Minh, Director of Tourism Information Centre, Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism. He was former Director of Cuu Long Tourism Company, the first state tourism company in Vinh Long province.

provinces accounted for nearly 50% of total revenues. The Mekong Delta local government is planning for tourism development and has gradually invested in infrastructure for the travel industry; creating specific tourist products of the delta, raising the quality of services, and creating tours through provinces (Mekong Delta planning report, 2014). According to the strategy and master plan for Vietnam Tourism Development to 2020 with a vision to 2030, the Mekong Delta is identified as one of the key areas for tourism development of the country.

The Mekong Delta's climate is characterized by a relatively constant temperature, a rainy season from May to October and dry season from November to April (Jansen-Verbeke & Go, 1995). The typical climate of the region influences the tourism season as well. It is important to check the information before visiting the Mekong Delta as normally people do not travel much in the rainy season. Moreover, in some natural activities such as boat trips in mangrove forests, tourists can only observe the most beautiful natural scenery when the water level rises in the flooding season. The tourist season in the delta lasts from September to February. Some tourists buy package tours in which the tour operator decides what will be done and what will be visited according to their prior conceptions (Cipolla, 2004). The rest are mainly backpackers who explore the destinations by themselves, and the interaction with the hosts is not arranged but spontaneous. Trips to the Mekong Delta from Ho Chi Minh city are quite cheap compared to visits further to the north of the country. And when the tourists pay less, they might not expect the corresponding high quality of the destination (Tseng et al., 2011). Most of the international tourists to the Mekong Delta are individuals who mainly buy package tours from Ho Chi Minh city and travel down to the Mekong Delta in groups. Usually they join together and spend a day trip in the region. The level of communication between tourists and local residents is not intensive. In addition, there are backpackers, students, and researchers who

spend several days in the area in more rich culture destinations such as Khmer villages and Cham villages.

Due to the dependence on the rivers and canals, the daily activities of the local people are bound to the water. Everything here is attached with the prefix "floating" such as: floating markets, floating houses, floating restaurants, floating bars, floating fuel stations, and many other floating shops. The Mekong Delta has popular floating markets which attract tourists such as Cai Rang market (Can Tho city), Cai Be market (Tien Giang), and Phung Hiep market (Hau Giang). The region's most densely occupied places are located on elevated land call *miệt vườn* (garden strips) (Biggs, 2012) where tourists can come to visit the orchards, pick fruits and have a meal there.

The Mekong Delta is divided into 4 touristic areas (Mekong Delta development plan, 2010):

- Cluster centre: includes the city of Can Tho, An Giang, Kien Giang and Hau Giang provinces is suitable for river sightseeing tours, business travel, festival tourism, and sea and beach sightseeing.
- Ca Mau peninsula: comprises the provinces of Ca Mau, Bac Lieu and Soc Trang and offers tours to the southern pole of the country, ecotourism in the mangroves, culture tourism, Khmer festival tourism.
- The east coast area: comprises the provinces of Tien Giang, Ben Tre, Tra Vinh, Vinh Long and offers tours along the canals, orchards, home-stay, visiting craft villages, historic heritage.
- Dong Thap Muoi area: includes Dong Thap and Long An province which is popular for eco-tourism in the inland wetlands Plain of Reeds.

The population in the Mekong Delta is approximately 20 million people, of which 75% are involved in agricultural work (Mekong Delta plan, 2013). For the last few years, the local residents who engaged in traditional farming have started to take part in tourism business. In general, the local residents in the Mekong Delta do not have the proper skills to serve tourists and they do not have a financial budget for investment in tourism facilities. The Mekong Delta also has four ethnic groups of local residents, of which two ethnic groups are Khmer and Cham. Most of the Khmer people (1.2 million people) have been living in poor conditions and depend totally on farming (Ngo, 2013). Some of them engage in tourism business such as selling traditional brocade, traditional cakes of the Khmer people and performing folk dance and music. Some of the Cham families are involved in the tourism business by introducing their traditional weaving activities to tourists and selling textile handmade products (Trong & Trung, 2014).

Tourism development in the Mekong Delta at its early stage was spontaneous with no systematic plan. The Rough Guide in the UK selected the Mekong Delta as one out of 10 best value destinations for the year 2015.[5] It said that with just a small amount of money, tourists can sightsee in the vast area of the Mekong Delta and enjoy the vivid and colourful life of the local people. Motorbikes and boats could be used to explore every corner and there are only a few foreign tourists visiting the area. The Rough Guide also mentioned Phu Quoc island as a beauty spot where tourists should stay. However, in terms of numbers of tourist arrivals (Ryan & Aicken, 2010), the Mekong Delta is still considered to have a poor image as a destination.

As stated, the Mekong Delta is considered as a peripheral area. However, many features of the periphery, which are not suitable for economic development can be positive attractions for

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[5] http://www.roughguides.com/best-places/2015/best-value-destinations/, accessed: 5 April 2016.

tourists (Brown et al., 2000). In particular, despite the inconvenience of reaching peripheral areas, tourists may see them as worth visiting because they are relatively unchanged and unspoilt (Chaperon & Bramwell, 2013). Tourism development involves exploitation of the periphery by the core. With the location close to Ho Chi Minh city, Tien Giang tourism destination has been most exploited. Tien Giang is located at the gateway to the Mekong Delta. Of all the 13 provinces of the Mekong Delta region, Tien Giang attracts the most foreign tourists (Tuoitrenews, 2014).

Mekong Delta tourism has been facing many challenges. The Mekong Delta has a variety of tourism resources, though local government claims that these resources have not been utilised to their full potential. According to reports on the current situation of the Mekong Delta, the revenue from tourism is low due to the lack of activities to entertain tourists and the lack of diversified tourist products and services offer. The quality of tourism products is low, with a lack of uniqueness of experiences on offer. Services on offer via tour packages are similar in each province. In any tour to the Mekong Delta, tourists are offered travelling along the river and canals by boats or sampans, visiting local factories and listening to traditional music. Moreover, there is lack of human resources with sufficient knowledge and quality for the tourism business. In general, the labour force is in shortage and has low skills due to the fact that most of worker in tourism industry are original farmers. Two-thirds of the labourers in the Mekong Delta are unskilled. Therefore, transition of the labour force from agriculture to industry and services is very limited.

In addition, infrastructure for tourism is weak and has not been invested in properly or consistently. Many tourist destinations are attractive, but the infrastructure and services are poor and simple. The Mekong Delta could be accessed by air, by land, and water. However,

these transportation means are currently unable to satisfy the transport demand (Phan, 2010a). Vietnam authorities and transport services are under strain from a growing population and industrial development, especially in the Mekong Delta. There are only two primary roads that connect the Mekong Delta and Ho Chi Minh city and have to serve 18 million local people and the tourists. These two major routes are becoming increasingly congested. Many rural roads and local waterways are in dire need of upgrading.

Regarding accommodation, the Mekong Delta has put much effort into improving the facilities. However, funds invested in Mekong Delta tourism are not adequate. Due to insufficient levels of investment in equipment and facilities, along with poor additional service systems, tourism business in the region has not met the needs of tourists with high income and international tourists. In addition, the travel companies in the Mekong Delta region are small in scale and often act as intermediate agents for larger tourism companies in Ho Chi Minh, Hanoi and other major tourist centers. Tourism promotion in the Mekong Delta has not received proper concern. There is a lack of cooperation in tourism management between the provinces in the region and other provinces in the country and social awareness of tourism is limited.

3.4.2   Homestay tourism

As a generic term, 'homestay' is used to refer to types of accommodation where visitors or guests pay directly or indirectly to stay in private homes (Tucker & Lynch, 2005). Homestay tourism has developed in Vietnam for more than a decade. Homestay has been emerging as a new trend in rural areas as international visitors have strong demand for exploring daily indigenous life and culture in Vietnam. Homestay services mainly concentrate in mountainous area in the Northwestern region of Vietnam where there is a high concentration of minority ethnic groups. For the Mekong Delta, alongside the increase in the number of tourists visiting

the area, homestay has become a popular form of accommodation for tourists. Homestay is also one of the preferred styles for the tourists. Instead of staying at typical hotels, tourists prefer to stay with a local family.

As a way of engaging with the local communities, international tourists often find a homestay is a good way for them to understand the local culture. In 2015, homestay in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam has been named 1st in the top eight best Christmas trips for solo travellers by Wanderlust, a prestigious magazine from the UK (VNAT, 2015b). Also in this year, The Rough Guides, a UK travel guidebook, ranked the Mekong Delta 6th out of the 10 best value destination in terms of authenticity of experience and easy contact with local culture and daily lives of the community. International tourists may wish to discover the local culture much more than domestic tourists. However, there are still restrictions in the local policy on offering lodging for foreign visitors in this region. In reality, the tourists do not stay in the region for a long time. The tourists usually spend 1-2 days in the region. Moreover, travelling in package tours does not give visitors much opportunity to closely interact with local people.

Before participating in the tourism business, the residents earn their living mainly on agriculture, farming and fishing. So most homestay owners are originally from farming. Some local people wanted to change their traditional family business to tourism business by opening homestay. Households engaged in providing tourism services are often associated with travel companies through contractual commitments. Besides working on signed contracts, a homestay family can negotiate with travel agents through a verbal profit-sharing agreement. There are a number of local people who spontaneously open their business and manage to do business on their own. This has created differences in the quality of services provided between the groups. On the relationships among the stakeholders such as local government, travel companies and

the homeowners, the local government provides policy advice and support security issues. Travel companies look for partners to accommodation providers who are local inhabitants and the residents choose to enter into business with the hope to earn more income.

In particular, the local authorities contribute to the development of homestay in different ways, for example, promoting local tourism images, organising professional training courses for participating households, providing tourist services and upgrading infrastructure for tourists, and issuing policies relating to loan support, and handicraft training.

3.5 Stakeholders and their collaboration in the Mekong Delta tourism

In the Mekong Delta tourism context, key stakeholders include those involved in the development of the tourism industry such as government organisations, tourism companies, NGOs, transport suppliers, accommodation providers, tourists and local residents. Though each group of stakeholders plays an important role in the development of tourism, some stakeholders are more important than others for ensuring the success of activities (Dabphet, 2013). The role of local residents and their participation in tourism has been recently more emphasised.

The tourism system in Vietnam acts by a top-down management approach. On the national level, the lead organisation is the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. It is the government ministry in Vietnam responsible for state administration of issues relating to culture, family, sports and tourism nationwide; in addition to the management of public services in those fields. The Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) belongs to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. It is the government agency of Vietnam which manages tourist operations and activities throughout the country. It has full control in terms of business development, planning, public relations, personnel training, conducting research, and instructing and inspecting the implementation of policies and other regulations in the tourism sector.

On the provincial level the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism has the function to control the culture, sports, tourism, and marketing in a province. On the municipal level, the Cultural and Information Division has advisory functions in the field of management of culture, tourism and other social issues in the locality.

At this present time, the collaboration among provincial authorities in the Mekong Delta tourism are in four main areas: tourism management policy making and local tourism development; tourism product development; tourism promotion and communication; and tourism human resource development. Regarding the connection with the local residents, the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism also has its own training division which provides training courses on tourism to improve the skills of local people who serve in the tourism industry. Local authorities also organize conferences, and workshops on tourism, in order to gather ideas from tourism companies and educational institutions on tourism related issues.

There is also a collaboration with NGOs to implement tourism projects in the region. The Mekong Delta Tourism Association is an NGO established in 2008 with the aim of boosting the coordination between tourism business companies and local government agents, business companies and their clients and among the business group itself. [6] Recommendations will be proposed to governmental organisations to issue more efficient policies in the tourism sector.

In the Mekong Delta, over 60% of the investment budget for tourism is on tourism infrastructure, facilities and products (Vietnam tourism master plan, 2013). Unresolved land issues make investment in tourism relatively risky, which may explain why most of the investment in the regions are from local people.

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[6] Introduction of Mekong Delta Tourism Association, http://mdta.com.vn/about/, accessed: 15 June 2015.

Besides that, there are some international NGOs involved in the development of the tourism industry in the region such as Agriterra, a Netherlands NGO which has financed the agritourism development project in An Giang province since 2007-2014 (Vietnamnews, 2012). The project is conducted by the provincial government, with support from Agriterra, an agricultural organization from Netherlands. The aims of the project is to transform the existing agro-tourist office of the provincial union into a rural farmers' tourist centre. As a result, a viable Farmers' Rural Tourism Centre at provincial level was established, which mobilizes the potential of farm households to host tourists and to generate income by agro-tourist services and job opportunities.

In addition, there are a number of projects which were supported from NGOs working on infrastructure, agriculture and environment. ESRT (Environmentally and Socially Responsible Tourism Capacity Development Programme) support technical aspects on responsible tourism development projects in three Mekong Delta provinces (An Giang, Kien Giang and Can Tho). The common aim of these projects is helping local farmers develop their household economy and escape poverty. Under the project, selected farmers in the province will be provided with professional skills through courses on tourism services. They will thus learn to develop tourism products that meet the demands of both domestic and foreign tourists.

Travel agents in the Mekong Delta are mainly 'intermediary companies' who act as mediators on a link of tours booked in travel agencies in big cities outside the region. More than 95% of the international tourists coming to the Mekong Delta have been sent from travel companies in Ho Chi Minh city, Hanoi and other cities (Xuan, 2016). The capacity of the region to directly attract inbound tourists is low. The tourism business activities in the Delta mainly focus on domestic tourism and outbound tourism (Vu, 2008). Hotels and private accommodation renters

cooperate with the travel agents, and private bus companies and others to sell tickets, promoting tours among their guests. However, at the present time, the collaboration between travel agents in the region has not been working well. It is a fact that the stakeholder values and perspectives on tourism development may vary widely. As the number of tourists that come to the Mekong Delta is low and just increases inconsiderably for the past few years, the hesitation in investment from private sectors still exists. There are diverse viewpoints among business groups on whether to invest first to attract tourists or to put the money in after the number of tourists increase. For the small enterprises it is risky to invest in tourism projects as they are concerned that the large enterprises will be the main beneficiary.

3.6 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter is to provide background information of Vietnam in general and the Mekong Delta in particular. This chapter starts from introducing Vietnam as a tourist destination in South East Asia. Vietnam tourism has a long period of development beginning in 1986, the renovation period. The Mekong Delta region which is traditionally a productive region for agriculture and fishery has recently been focusing on tourism development. Though the delta has many tourism resources, tourism in this region has not strongly developed yet compared to the other regions. The only real advantage of the region is its close proximity to Ho Chi Minh city which is the biggest of the country and a popular tourism destination. Tourists choose to visit the Mekong Delta in short trips as it is close to the city and the scenery in the delta is different from the urban area. However, the Mekong Delta is facing difficulties in creating its own tourism image in order to attract more tourists.

According to research and writings on the characteristics of the Mekong Delta people, in general, the local inhabitants are hospitable, generous and sociable. The local people here had a long history of accepting cultural exchanges and acculturation with other residents.

The hospitality of the Mekong Delta people is profuse. It is explained that the favourableness of natural conditions and climate make people's lives in the Mekong Delta easier than in other regions. The mutual support and reliance amongst the first settlers at the beginning of the new land exploration made them more open and friendly.

As tourism develops in the region, they also welcome guests with a very sincere and hospitable manner. Families in the tourism business are willing to learn and take part in training courses with an aim to serve the tourists better. They also are not afraid to change their living space, refurbish their houses and gardens to welcome guests. Regarding preservation of tradition, the local people here are not adverse to keeping what belongs to the past, but they do adapt to the evolution of an ever-changing society, especially with the more frequent presence of tourists.

The earliest history of people inhabiting the Mekong Delta region is with the occupation of the Cham people, and Khmer people from the 11th century to 17th century. The territorial expansion by King Nguyen led to the first movement of the Viet people from the North and Central regions of Vietnam to the Mekong Delta. They experienced a period of settling their new lives in this region and helping each other in constructing the first houses. The Mekong Delta also was under the colonisation by the French for 80 years from 1860 and was then governed by the Americans for 20 years until 1975. After the war ended, the people started to put the distress of the war behind them and to welcome foreigners, including the American and French people. Though welcoming foreigners was not easy in the start, it has changed significantly in the last two decades. With the increase in the number of foreigners to the regions, and the demand to

stay overnight, local people host international guests. The establishment of homestays is an example of the hospitality extended to foreigners.

Moreover, the people in the Mekong Delta are people originally from the North who came to a 'new land' for reclamation and inhabited it side by side with other settlers. Recently, they have also lived alongside increasing numbers of visitors. It could be argued that, their self-identification as a "delta people" or "water life style" people as well as the way they perceive others as outsiders, residents, and tourists has changed many times. I believe that what has occurred in the Mekong Delta, in particular the presence of tourism offers an exemplar of how local people learn to adapt to changes in the social and economic conditions.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the research methods and methodology used to fulfil the aims and objectives of this study. I outline the research paradigm, research design and the methods of data collection, and the research limitations of this study. The overall strategy adopted was using a qualitative methodological approach to investigate in-depth data. This research was based principally on in-depth interviews conducted with the local people and tourists in three provinces Tien Giang, Ben Tre and Vinh Long in the Mekong Delta. Simultaneous to qualitative interviewing methods, participant observation was employed to focus on the interactions between hosts and guests in homestays services. With this method, behaviour, conversation and experience can be recorded in situ.

The first section addresses the research questions and objectives including the research paradigm and philosophical assumptions that guided this research investigation. These assumptions concern ontology, which defines epistemology and methodology, then leads to the specific research methods. The review of the literature on hospitality and host-guest relationships has already indicated my preference for a constructivist methodological approach.

The second section explains the research process, and the reasons for choosing the Mekong Delta as a qualitative case study. By introducing the main study locations within the Mekong Delta, I explain why these locations were suitable for my research on tourism, tradition, and hospitality. Then, I address my access to research informants, and the methods I applied to get the information from the participants, the challenges and opportunities it generated. As my research focuses on the ways in which hospitality is produced and performed in the Mekong

Delta, I employed phenomenological methods to investigate the "hospitality phenomenon" presented by the local people.

I subsequently give an overview of the various sources of the data on which the research is based, emphasising how I gathered a variety of perspectives on tradition, tourism, hospitality and local perceptions.

Finally, I present how I positioned myself in the relationships with research participants. I explain how I shifted positioning to achieve meaningful relationships with the informants. I also address the opportunities and challenges encountered when I established a relationship with each group of participants. Before concluding, the limitations of the methodology are defined.

4.2 Research approach

4.2.1 Research questions and objectives

Based on the literature review in the previous chapter, host communities are not well examined in comparison to research on guests' perspectives. Host gaze studies are mainly focused on residents' attitudes, where locals' perceptions are quantified, and simplistically examined. There is a need for further research on how and why the hosts perform their culture to tourists rather than what factors affect the host communities' culture as addressed in most of the previous studies on the residents. Among issues relating to host and guest relationships, hospitality is claimed to be a central theme of host and guest relationships. However, the concept of hospitality has not been adequately theorised (Lashley & Morrison, 2013; Lynch, 2003). Hospitality is mainly studied in the field of hospitality management education (Lashley et al., 2007a). Hospitality is rarely investigated in host and guest relationships in a tourist destination where the role of hosts are more dynamic and active.

The overall purpose of my research is to explore the underlying issues of the performance of hospitality in a tourist destination. The research aims to discover the local people's perception of their tradition of hospitality and how they practice their hospitality to tourists. Thus, the two broad questions that guided my research are how local people see their hospitality and how local people participate in tourism and accommodate their tradition of hospitality. Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 will address those questions by investigating hospitality in two key themes which are the tangible and intangible manifestations of hospitality.

4.2.2   Research paradigm: social constructivism approach

With the research questions addressed above, I reviewed common research paradigms to find the most suitable theoretical perspective to fulfil the aim of the research. A research paradigm is the set of common beliefs and agreements shared between scientists about how problems should be understood and addressed (Kuhn, 1962). A research paradigm is "a basic set of beliefs that guide action" and direct how the researcher can obtain the required knowledge (Guba, 1990, p. 17).

According to Guba (1990), there are many paradigms that we use in guiding our actions. Research paradigms can be characterised through their ontology (the nature of the knowable, the nature of reality), epistemology (the nature of the relationship between the inquirer and the knowable) and methodology (how should the inquirer go about finding out knowledge?). Scientific paradigms are determined by ontological positions. The ontology and epistemology create a holistic idea of how knowledge is viewed and how researchers can see themselves in relation to this knowledge, and the methodological strategies used to uncover it. Ontology can be defined as the study of reality or things that comprise reality. Ontology positions establish the process of knowing which lead to the epistemology, which is a theory of knowledge

concerned with the scope of knowledge. Consequently, epistemological assumptions lead to the methodology, which is how one investigates the knowledge. Accordingly, each methodology establishes methods which are a set of tools, procedures, techniques or strategies to be used in a scientific inquiry (Slevitch, 2011).

There are different research paradigms such as positivism, constructivism, realism, pragmatism, and postmodernism, each embodying diverse ideas about reality and how we can gain knowledge of it (Maxwell, 2013). Specifically, paradigms that are relevant to qualitative research include interpretivism, critical theory, feminism, queer theory, and phenomenology (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2013). Borrowing the term from the French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, Maxwell (2013, p. 42) highlighted "bricolage" as a critical approach to qualitative research. Here the researcher creatively employs tools and materials which are suitable and available for them to complete a task. Bricolage emphasises "the relationship between a researcher's ways of seeing and the social location of his or her personal history" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 168). It focuses on the clarification of the researcher's position in the web of reality and the social locations of other researchers and the ways they shape the production and interpretation of knowledge. I borrowed this idea to clarify my methodological approach, which is an application of constructivism in my research. Similar to the approach of Maxwell (2013), my approach to this research is constructivism. The perspective is epistemological constructivism which states that our understanding of this world is our construction, rather than a purely objective perception of reality, and no such construction can claim absolute truth. In other words, what people perceive and believe is shaped by their assumptions and prior experiences as well as by the reality with which they interact. I have found this perspective particularly useful for my study, as the review from literature reveals that host-guest encounters as well as host's perceptions depend on specific contexts. As a result

what happened in my research field may not conform to the contemporary models or theories. Thus, I believe that it is necessary to hold ontological constructionism perspectives to investigate this topic. This perspective is perfectly matched in the sense that the tourists will to some extent act with the hosts or gaze on the local destination based on their previous experiences (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006). Conversely, the hosts might do the same, and they might change the way to interact with the tourists along with the development of tourism, though there is not much research which discusses this issue from hosts' perspectives.

Based on the formulated research questions and research paradigm, I planned my research as a qualitative research design which is based on a social constructivism perspective.

Creswell (2007, pp. 20-21) explains about social constructivism:

> Social constructivism often combined with interpretivism is a worldview. In this worldview, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences.... These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views... Often these subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. In other words, they are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others (hence social constructivism) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives.

The following table summarises four common paradigms:

Table 4-1 Basis beliefs of alternative research paradigms

Paradigm	Ontology	Epistemology	Methodology	Method
Positivism	Reality is real and apprehensible	Findings true – researcher is objective by viewing reality through a one-way mirror	Experimental, mostly concerned with testing of theory, verification of hypotheses.	Mainly quantitative methods such as survey, experiments
Constructivism Interpretivist	Multiple local and specific constructed realities	Created findings – researcher is a passionate participant within the world being investigated	Ethnography Grounded theory Phenomenological research Discourse analysis Feminist theory	Usually qualitative methods such as observation, in-depth interviews, participant observation, narrative
Critical	Virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic	Value mediated findings – researcher is a transformative	Dialectical- Critical discourse analysis	Open-ended interviews, focus groups, open-ended

			Critical ethnography	questionnaires, open-ended observations and journals
	and gender values, crystallised over time	intellectual who changes the social world within which participants live		
Pragmatic/Realism	Reality is real but only imperfectly and probabilistically apprehensible	Findings probably true – research is value-aware and needs to triangulate any perceptions he or she is collecting	Design-based research Action research	Mixed methods, combination of quantitative and qualitative methods

Source: extracted from (Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994, 2005; Sobh & Perry, 2006)

Regarding paradigm positions in social research, the table (Table 4.1) shows that constructivism adopts relativism as it takes the concept of the truth to be socially constructed or socially relative, a subjectivist epistemology as it is more dependent on the researcher's role, and a hermeneutic dialectical methodology. By defining this approach, I comprehended that the knowledge which would be discovered exists inside of the social contexts that create it, and it varies in nature and is time and context bound.

In ontological terms, there is no single reality and the realities that the researchers want to find out are locally and specifically constructed. Constructivists believe that there is no single reality or truth, and therefore reality needs to be interpreted, and thus they are more likely to use qualitative methods to get at those multiple realities. This theoretical perspective guides

the understanding of a local community and their daily practices, perceptions and behaviour, the researchers have to be aware of their experience and culture and recognise that they might see the context differently and experience it differently too. In epistemological terms, reality needs to be interpreted and the researchers need to be a "passionate participant" to discover the underlying meaning of activities (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 196).

> Constructivism is a term often used interchangeably with interpretivism. Interpretive research, which is where qualitative research is most often located, assumes that reality is socially constructed, and that, there is no single, observable reality. Rather, there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event. Researchers do not "find" knowledge, they construct it.

> (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 9)

According to Slevitch (2011), the qualitative approach has been increasingly used in hospitality and tourism research as an alternative to the more traditional quantitative approach. According to Xiao and Smith (2006), the tourism field of study is still dominated by the scientific-positivistic paradigm while there is an emerging contribution of the interpretive paradigm in some established subject areas.

The purpose of this research is to bring depth to perceptual explorations that have resulted from resident attitude surveys. Host gaze studies have been confused with residents' attitudes surveys, where locals' perceptions are quantified, and simplistically examined. That is not to say that such analyses of resident opinions have no merit, but by analogy to Foucaults' gaze, perception studies tend to reduce the reality of the gaze to what is visible, yet we know that what is visible is not the whole truth (Moufakkir & Reisinger, 2013). "Instead of seeing culture as an external reality that acts on and constrains people, it can be taken to be an emergent reality

in a continuous state of construction and reconstruction" (Bryman, 2016, p. 30). Culture has a reality that persists and predates the participation of particular people and shapes their perspectives. Constructionism also suggests that the categories that people employ in helping them to understand the world around them are in fact social products. The categories do not have built-in essences, instead, their meaning is constructed both in and through interaction.

4.3   Research design

This study employed qualitative methods for data collection. Primary data collection such as in-depth interviews with key stakeholders and field observation were adopted. The fieldwork was conducted in three periods from between July to September in 2015, from April to June in 2016 and from March to April in 2017. The data collected was on host and guest encounters in public places such as markets and popular visiting points such as craft villages, and local factories. Further data was obtained on the hosting activities of homestay owners towards their guests in local homestays in the Mekong Delta. In-depth interviews were conducted with five main types of stakeholders of the tourism sector including local authorities, tour guides, and travel agents, local hosts and guests in Ben Tre, Tien Giang and Vinh Long provinces. The interviews were mostly conducted at the interviewees' homes where they felt comfortable to cooperate with the researcher. The main purpose of these interviews was to obtain information on how and why the homestay was set up, the daily operation of the homestay, the offered activities and products, and the involvement of travel agents and local authorities in the homestay business. Participant observations were also used in 10 homestays in Ben Tre and Vinh Long provinces in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam.

4.3.1 Rationale for selecting the study area

When I first became interested in in-depth qualitative research, I had some opportunities to travel to the Mekong Delta for holiday and research in various areas in the Mekong Delta. These included Ben Tre, Tien Giang, Dong Thap, Can Tho, An Giang and Kien Giang provinces. Some of my earlier research was conducted in the Mekong Delta, such as studies on homestay tourism in Vinh Long, agricultural tourism in Ben Tre, and research on rural tourism development in the Mekong Delta. I also attended a course called "management knowledge training for state officers and managers in homestay tourism" which evoked my interest in studying this field further. In addition, when reviewing previous studies on tourism, I found that there were few studies on tourism here compared to other fields such as agricultural, economic or cultural studies. As my research questions focus on how the local people change their traditions, especially the tradition of hospitality in a tourism context, my decision on fieldwork locations focused on the Mekong Delta region, which is known as a land of hospitable people compared to other regions in Vietnam (Mcfarlane, 2015; Pham, 1996; Tran, 2014). Hospitality becomes one of the motivations for tourists to travel to this region. Studies on hospitality in the Mekong Delta in tourism were not apparent in the previous research on tourism in the Mekong Delta.

Through discussions with tourism managers in the Mekong Delta, I also realised that the study of hospitality was an appropriate research topic that could be examined extensively in the Mekong Delta. Existing managers in tourism often come from other industries such as sports and culture, and the region faces challenges regarding economic, social and educational development. In particular, the economy in the area is under developed compared to the general level of the country. Some managers wanted to invest in fast-paced industrial development, rather than tourism. On the contrary, some other managers put much effort into the

development of the tourism industry, but still find it difficult to find the right direction for the local industry. The local government and tourism officers opened tourism conferences, and called for researchers to add more theoretical research to the tourism industry. For the reasons mentioned above, I chose the Mekong Delta as a case for study.

As I have been involved in a number of research projects in the Mekong Delta with my college, I chose the sample for my study partly based on my experience in this area. I selected three provinces from the total of 13 provinces in the Mekong Delta which are seen as examples likely to produce the most valuable data (Denscombe, 1998). The specific study sites I selected in the Mekong Delta are three provinces Vinh Long, Tien Giang and Ben Tre (See Figure 3-2).

The tourism activities in these three provinces have been increasing, and attract a large number of tourists. Geographically, these three areas are close to Ho Chi Minh City. This was convenient for me regarding research funding as well as the time that I could arrange in the study area. Another aspect is that these three provinces are located in a zone called "miệt vườn" (garden strips). Garden strips are a term used to refer to highlands, with many orchards, where most of the urban areas are located within the freshwater alluvial zone (Biggs, 2012, p. 14).

Fruit orchards, fields, canals and islets are the representative features of the Mekong Delta, despite the fact that the area has other attractions such as the sea (Phu Quoc beach tourism in Kien Giang province), mountains (tourism annually attracts the largest number of domestic tourists in the region, main pilgrims to Chùa Bà Pagoda in Sam mountain), and mangrove forests (ecotourism at mangroves, national parks). However, the Mekong Delta, as its name implies, is mainly a plain land with alluvium, rivers and canals. Therefore, the popular tour programmes are boat tours along canals and visits to the floating markets.

The three provinces I selected are places where activities for domestic and international tourists are busy. For international tourists, when they arrive in Vietnam, they will go to Tan Son Nhat International Airport in Ho Chi Minh City. They can visit the city and then look for tours to neighbouring areas. Because of this, the Mekong Delta is often chosen for short-term trips. Moreover, the areas near Ho Chi Minh City such as these three provinces are where tour operators sell short tours to tourists.

The following section addresses how I gained access to the field. According to Delamont (2002, p. 17), some researchers easily choose a remote field site when seeing culture as 'backwards', 'primitive' or 'underdeveloped'. My fieldwork sites were in remote places, away from the big city and by some means involved discomfort. I felt that it would be an interesting experience as I used to live in big cities. However, my selection was not based solely on the remote location of the Mekong Delta but where I could find the most suitable information for the conceptual understanding of the research questions. Furthermore, it had to be a place that I could stay for long enough (regarding the availability of accommodation, the permission of house owners and money).

As hospitality is my primary topic, the observation of engagements between tourists and hosts took place in three general contexts: public places such as bus stations, ferry stations, and markets where tourists are purchasing goods and services from the hosts; and homestays which tourists and locals are using or occupying at the same time. The reason that I chose homestay as an object of investigation is that here the interactions between hosts and guests are more intense. Basically, homestay is a place where the participation of guests in host families occurred, for instance, sharing meals and attending family events. That is a place where the hospitality phenomenon can be observed from different angles. Regarding homestay, Tien

Giang and Vinh Long are among the most popular destinations (Nguyen, 2013). Vinh Long was the first province to develop homestay services in the Mekong Delta (Minh, 2015). The second reason for my selection of field sites was the destinations of tourist interests. The higher the number of tourists, the more chances to observe the encounters of local people with tourists. Based on statistics, Tien Giang province attracts the largest number of international tourists (Tuoitrenews, 2014), while An Giang attracts the largest numbers of domestic tourists in the Mekong Delta (Travers et al., 2015). Both of them include natural landscapes with rivers and canals and are quite famous for water scenery. In Tien Giang, the floating market Cai Be is a popular place of interest. The following are the specific destinations where I went to meet contacts in the tourism industry.

Table 4-2 Lists of participants involved in the research

Vinh Long	Ben Tre	Tien Giang
Department of Cultures, Sports and Tourism - Travel companies - Homestays: Ba Linh, Phuong Thao, Ut Trinh, Bay Thoi, Ngoc Sang	Department of Cultures, Sports and Tourism - Travel companies - Homestays: Nhon Thanh, Duyen Que, Jardin du Mekong, Hong Thai, Chalet Suisse guest house	Department of Cultures, Sports and Tourism (My Tho city) - Travel companies - Cai Be floating market - Homestays

From Ho Chi Minh (HCM) city, Tien Giang, Ben Tre and Vinh Long can be reached by road. Tien Giang is quite close to HCM city, approximately 40 miles. Tourists pass Tien Giang to Ben Tre, which is about 54 miles from HCM city. Vinh Long province is 80 miles from HCM city. Due to the appointments I set up with the local authorities, I travelled to Vinh Long first, then Ben Tre and Tien Giang. As it was not difficult to buy coach tickets from HCM city to the Mekong Delta, I chose to use this form of travel. There are several private travel companies to choose from and the departure times are frequent, every half hour. By travelling to the delta by coach, from HCM city I was able to join other tourists, which enabled me to experience the services of the tour operators and make it easy to talk with other tourists.

4.3.2   Phenomenological approach: Mekong Delta case study

My research aims and objectives were to understand local people's perceptions of their hospitality, their thoughts, their attitudes and behaviour relating to the tradition of hospitality and how they present hospitality to tourists. This study falls into the category of phenomenological studies. In this thesis, hospitality was examined as a "phenomenon" that we can observe, touch, feel and taste. Phenomenological research is one of the essentially qualitative approaches including ethnography, hermeneutics and symbolic interactionism. A phenomenological research study is a study that attempts to understand people's perceptions, perspectives and understandings of a particular situation. The purpose of the qualitative phenomenological research is to describe a lived experience of a phenomenon (Waters, 2017, p. 1). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), for qualitative research or a qualitative inquiry, researchers ask questions about people's lives, the social and cultural contexts in which they live, and the ways in which they understand their worlds. Then, the researcher observes "what was going on, interviewed people in the settings, and collected and analysed artefacts and personal and public documents relevant to understanding what they were

studying" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 6). In my research, the Mekong Delta was selected for a qualitative case study including observation and examination of some specific cases. As this is a qualitative analysis of narrative data, the data sources include stories, journals, field notes, conversations, interviews, family stories, photos, other artefacts, and life experiences. Phenomenological approaches can be applied to single cases or serendipitous or deliberately selected samples.

Drawing from the philosophies of constructionism, phenomenology, and symbolic interactionism, qualitative researchers are interested in how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, what meaning they attribute to their experiences. The overall purposes of qualitative research are to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process rather than the outcome or product of meaning-making, and describe how people interpret what they experience.

According to O'Gorman (2007) the emergent paradigm of hospitality studies does not have a coherent philosophical foundation. In this research, I did not make any hypothesis to assume what happens as the research questions would not be simply explained by a hypothesis. Rather, I used the inductive approach by "exploring the phenomenon and used the contemporary theories to reflect upon it", which means the research starts with "the observations searching for a pattern from observation and the development of explanations" (Bernard, 2011, p. 7). As Silverman (2010) mentions, qualitative researchers build toward a theory from observations and intuitive understandings, collected from being in the field. Data from interviews, observations, or documents were combined and ordered into larger themes as the researcher worked from the particular to the general. The data from the participant observation and interviews is analysed in the following chapters by drawing out the key themes and variables

relating to the host-guest relationships. The themes that emerged included: the meanings surrounding the concepts of 'host', 'guest' and 'hospitality' among tourists and hosts, comparisons between the expectations and experiences of domestic tourists and international tourists and how the local people shape their hospitality in commercial perspective.

4.3.3 Data collection methods

To collect data I used mixed methods which are: semi-structured interviews, participant observation, taking notes and exploring written documents.

Observation of local hosts and tourists

I began by making broad descriptive observations and then after recording and analysing my initial data, I started to make focused observations. During the tours with other tourists, I just blended in as one of them. I observed the other tourists' interaction with local people, how they were served and how they consumed tourism products. I also liked the idea of using the "tourists' gaze". Through this lens, I could "interview myself", and my perspectives would be incorporated into more data to be compared and analysed. This would avoid researcher bias as the information perceived by myself will be interwoven into the analysis as another perspective (Breckenridge et al., 2012). Besides spending time meeting and engaging with local people and tourists in homestay families, I also visit Cai Be floating market in Tien Giang and other public places such as ferry stations and traditional markets where informal interactions between locals and tourists took place.

Participant observations

A destination which I selected to stay at was An Binh island. This island is located in Long Ho commune, Vinh Long province. Some of the activities offered are picking fruit, catching fish, listening to local artists' songs, getting acquainted with the life of the Southern people, and visiting the fish rafts on the edge of the islet all along the Hau River. Regarding the opportunities that I had to access the field, as the fieldwork location is in my country, I had no language barriers in contacting local people or domestic tourists. However, in communication with international tourists, it was a challenge as I could only interview tourists who spoke English.

Of all the activities observed, the interactions between the hosts and tourists are the main focus. Applying the participant observation method I chose to stay in the local people's houses, observing and describing their social actions, interacting with them and participating in their everyday practices. In the Mekong Delta, homestays represent an emergent sector of the tourism industry, providing tourists with additional accommodation choices (Travers et al., 2015). Homestays in this region range from very basic to more modern lodges, guest houses, or B&Bs. Homestays offer breakfast and dinner, usually in a shared dining area, usually accompanying the hosts at the dining table.

Along with other tourists I participated in tourist activities offered by homestay owners such as cycling tours and boat tours. Participant observation provides more complete data about how tourists feel about the hospitality offered by the hosts beyond services in homestays. In addition, it enabled me to check and confirm my observations and inferences. According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2010) and Marshall and Rossman (2014) repeated observations help rule out spurious associations and premature theories. They also allow a much greater

opportunity to develop alternative hypotheses during the research. Beside the time staying in the homes of local families, I also booked a tour to Cai Be floating market. At the floating markets, I observed how the local people approach the tourists and how they deal with a boat tour. I also observed how the locals entertained and responded to their passengers if requested.

In-depth interviews

The in-depth semi-structured interview method was used in particular to investigate the perceptions of government officials, local people, tourists, tour guides and tour operators. I used the in-depth interview as a form of qualitative research in which I asked homestay owners about their perceptions, opinions, and attitudes towards the homestay product service concerning their private business and the overall operation of homestay business in the region. Open-ended questions were prepared for each group of research participants. Such questions facilitate the data richness, provide context and determine research participants' attitudes, perceptions and opinions.

Having identified the relevant research participants, before stepping into the field, I sketched a plan of the homestays that I chose to stay at. I did not have much prior information about the homestays. In prior research and on other holiday trips, I often stayed in hotels as a normal option for domestic tourists. A snowball technique was applied to facilitate the access of the homestays. Snowball sampling is where research participants recruit other participants for a test or study (Bernard, 2012). It was partly because I was not familiar with the local area, hence, by asking the local host, it made easier for me to find the location of other homestays. However, the difficulty in finding the other homestays was not the entire reason. By asking about the information for homestay accommodation, I gathered some data on how the local homestays

see each other in their own view. Before checking out a homestay, I asked the homestay owner to recommend another homestay in the local area.

I used in-depth interviews with the expectation of getting more detailed and rich data. According to Kvale (2008), interviewing does not only concern a complex form of social interaction with interviewees but the interview data is also co-produced in these interactions. In addition, face to face interviews offers an immediate means of validating the data (Denscombe, 1998). The interview is a suitable method to gain insights into people's opinions, feelings, emotions and experiences (Denscombe, 1998).

Relating to interviews, I used a voice recorder to ensure everything said was preserved for analysis. After each interview was finished, I also looked for ways to improve my questioning technique if necessary. With a feeling that the local people in the Mekong Delta are not comfortable with the formal interviews, I tried to make the interview as informal as possible. The conversations were carried out at any time the informant felt the most comfortable, for instance, while preparing dinner, while gardening, or picking fruit.

As I intended to explore and describe in detail the opinions of local people towards servicing tourists, new interviews were conducted until a point of saturation, where further interviews yield little new knowledge (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Besides formal interviews, I also gathered data through observation as I could notice things that have become routine to the participants that may lead to understanding the context. Merriam (2009) also states that observation makes it possible to record specific incidents, and behaviour that can be used as reference points for interviews. Moreover, observation can also be used when participants may not feel free or willing to discuss the topic under study.

Field notes

Besides observations and interviews, I would also pay attention to keeping records and memos each day on the field. I noted everything I saw and heard in as much detail as I could manage. In addition, I was aware that it is impossible to separate the research methods. It was a mixture of observation, participation, interviewing and note-takings. For example, tourists often spent the daytime outside the homestay, they normally gathered with the host families for dinner. This was the time I could chat with the tourists and observed how they were fed and treated. I also asked for an interview (voice recorded) with tourists if they had free time in the evening, I also observed and took notes, or sometimes did all of these at the same time.

Photograph

I took photos of the different homestays settings including the outside settings of gardens and exterior, kitchen and the interior designs of reception rooms, bedrooms. Most of the photos were analysed in chapter 5 as I elaborated the objectification of hospitality. Photos were also taken at different tourist visiting points such as floating markets, local factories and craft villages. This helped me create a permanent record and visualise the direct observations after I left the field.

4.4   Research participants

Inductive methods are based on qualitative information regarding a construct obtained from opinions gathered from the target population. Five main groups of target participants were chosen for this research including governmental authorities, travel agents, tour guides, local farmers and tourists. The information from governmental authorities, travel operators and tour guides helped me to understand the background of tourism activities and resources in the region, how the tourism network works and the involvements of stakeholders in the tourism

system. The information from tourists and hosts clarifies the significance of the tradition of hospitality, and how the tradition of hospitality transforms the relationships between them.

Local government officers

I gained access to local authorities with the support of my colleagues in HCM Open University. HCM Open University had been conducting research in the Mekong Delta for years, so we have contacts in local authorities. Through these contact lists and references, I contacted prospective informants in advance to arrange an appointment. Before the actual interview, all the governmental officers would be aware of the purpose of as well as the questions for the interview. This was to ensure the success of the interview, as reasonable preparation is needed from interviewees to answer some specific questions such as the facts and figures of tourism sectors, which was not available in the local authorities' office desk.

The governmental authorities are people who work in the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism in each province (See Table 4-3). The interviews took place in different places including in the office (Tien Giang), workshop on homestay tourism (Ben Tre) and in a restaurant (Vinh Long). I found that interviews taking place in the office or workshop were more formal, and lasted for 90 minutes. The interview with Mr Minh in Vinh Long was less formal and it seemed that the interviewee felt more comfortable to share knowledge in informal conversation. The local officers were also asked to nominate other stakeholders that either they were in regular contact with or they felt were important and powerful stakeholders for tourism planning and development. For instance, people who work at the community level were taken account of as they are directly responsible for the tourism activities in their locality. These people also have a close relationship with the local farmers, through which I could easily get the information involved in the business of the households in the village.

Table 4-3 Lists of interviewee: Local authorities

Interviewee	Position	Province
Mr Luu Hoang Minh	Director of Tourism Information and Promotion centre-Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism	Vinh Long
Mr Tran Duy Phuong	Deputy Director of Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism	Ben Tre
Mr Nguyen Tan Phong	Deputy Director of Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism	Tien Giang

Regarding the questions for local authorities, I asked general questions on their point of view on tourism development of the Mekong Delta and the province where they are in charge. I also asked questions on culture, and heritage preservation in the tourism sector. For the aim of the research, I needed data relating to the ordinary people who participate in the tourism business. Thus I asked questions on the collaboration of the local authorities with the residents in tourism development (See Appendix 4-1).

Travel agents

In the Mekong Delta, the number of travel agents is not great, with about seven to eight travel companies or agents in each province on average. The travel agents that I chose to interview

were partly based on referrals from my university colleges. Besides, I also took a chance to interview some travel operators that I met at the homestays (Table 4-4).

Table 4-4 Lists of interviewees: Travel agents

Interviewee	Position	Company name	Location
Mrs Duyen	Tour operator	Thoi Son Mekong river tourism company	Tien Giang province
Mr Tam	Director	Nam Bo tourism company	Ben Tre province
Mr Hoa	Tour operator	Cuu Long tourist corporation	Vinh Long province
Mr Thai	Director of Sales & Marketing	PG International travel company	Ho Chi Minh city
Ms Yen	Tour operator	Passage to Asia company	Ho Chi Minh city

Regarding questions for travel agents, I asked questions relating to background information of the travel agency and tour programmes in the Mekong Delta. Questions on the collaboration between the travel agents with local authorities and the local people were also asked (See Appendix 4-2).

Regarding the access to the local farmers and tourists, I wanted to explore further how the local people host their guests and how the tourists experienced it when they are hosted. I focused on their interactions in the homestays area, and some other places that tourists had engagements with the locals such as floating markets, traditional markets, restaurants and shops. The tourists selected for interview were convenience samples (Bernard & Ryan, 2010) (Table 4-5). Convenience sampling (also known as availability sampling) is a type of method which collects data from population members who are conveniently available to participate in the study. The tourists that I chose to interview were tourists who stayed in the homestays at the same time as me or who participated in the same tours with me. Tour guides that I interviewed were people I met at the homestays or who guided me in local boat tours or cycling tours.

Tourists

For the tourists, I chose the convenience sampling methods. Convenience sampling is technique where research participants are selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Of the tourists I met on boat tours and in homestays, I asked their consent for interviews. Questions asked related to their preferences of tourist destinations and activities. I also asked tourists what sort of reception they received from the local people in the Mekong Delta (See Appendix 4-3).

Table 4-5 Lists of interviewees: Tourists

Interviewees	Nationality	Place of interview	Note
Tourist 1	French	Ba Linh homestay	A family of four people (husband, wife and two children)
Tourist 2	Canadian	Ba Linh homestay	One couple
Tourist 3	French	Ba Linh homestay	One couple
Tourist 4	French	Phuong Thao homestay	Husband and wife (retired)
Tourist 5	German	Phuong Thao homestay	One couple
Tourist 6	Australia	Ut Trinh homestay	A big group of Australian came to the Mekong Delta on a cycling tour
Tourist 7	America	Ut Trinh homestay	One couple
Tourist 8	Italian	Ut Trinh homestay	Husband and wife

Tourist 9	French	Bay Thoi homestay	Husband and wife
Tourist 10	Italian	Ngoc Sang homestay	Solo traveller
Tourist 11	British	Nhon Thanh homestay	The family included three people visiting the Mekong Delta who bought a tour from a local travel agent
Tourist 12	American	Cycling and boat tour	Four tourists travelled by coach from Ho Chi Minh City to the Mekong Delta
Tourist 13	Finnish	Floating market	A husband and wife who are Vietnamese-Finnish came to the Mekong Delta for a holiday

Tour guides

Similarly to tourists, tour guides who participated in the interview were chosen for convenience. Most of the tour guides that I interviewed were people whom I met in homestays. I booked Mekong Delta tours and the tour guides in my trip were also interviewed (Table 4-6). I asked questions relating to the tourists' popular visiting points and activities as local guides had close relations with the tourists (See Appendix 4-4).

Table 4-6 Lists of interviewees: Tour guides

Interviewee	Place of interview	Note
Tour guide 1	Phuong Thao homestay	Tour guide for an Australian couple coming to the Mekong Delta on a honeymoon
Tour guide 2	Ut Trinh homestay	Tour guide for an Italian couple
Tour guide 3	Ut Trinh homestay	Tour guide for Australian tourists in cycling tour
Tour guide 4	Nhon Thanh homestay	Tour guide for British family
Tour guide 5	Cycling tour	Tour guide for an Italian couple and me to explore the area in Ut Trinh homestay
Tour guide 6	Boat tour	Tour to islands, visiting factories in Ben Tre
Tour guide 7	Cycling and boat tour	Group tours with other American tourists from Ho Chi Minh city to visit local factories in Ben Tre

Local people

Local people that I interviewed included five homestay families in Ben Tre, and five homestay families in Vinh Long (Table 4-7). I also had conversations with shopkeepers in local factories, and local people in Cai Be floating market. Some of the homestay families I booked online or over the phone in advance. Others were referred by the homestay owners themselves or by tour guides. Questions asked were the background information of the homestays to investigate how homestay owners participate in tourism business. I also asked questions on their viewpoints of tradition, engagement with tourists and the ways they hosted their guests (See Appendix 4-5).

Table 4-7 Lists of interviewees: Homestay owners

No	Interviewee	Homestay	Location
1	Mr Trong	Ba Linh	Vinh Long
2	Mr Phu	Phuong Thao	
3	Mrs Trinh	Ut Trinh	
4	Mrs Bay	Bay Thoi	
5	Mr Nam	Ngoc Sang	
6	Mrs Linh	Duyen Que	Ben Tre

7	Mr Muoi	Nhon Thanh	
8	Mr Phi	Chalet Suisse House	
9	Mr Thai	Hong Thai	
10	Mr Vinh	Jardin du Mekong	

4.5 Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis is the range of processes and procedures whereby the researchers move from the qualitative data that have been collected, into some form of explanation, understanding or interpretation of the people and situations they are investigating (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative data analysis is usually based on an interpretative philosophy. The idea is to examine the meaningful and symbolic content of qualitative data.

This section explains how the primary data was analysed which was from preparing and organising data to reducing data into themes ready for presenting it in the narrative form in the following chapters. It is an interpretive process including coding, finding patterns and grouping categories. Patterns identified within the responses from participants are used for critically analysing themes in chapter 5 and chapter 6.

Step 1. Open coding

As some of the interviews were audiotaped, the data analysis began with transcribing the interview. The types of qualitative data that I collected included written text (writings on travel websites, brochures, itineraries, field notes), audible and visual data (interviews, photos and videos). In addition, I had field notes taken at ten specific homestays and other field notes which were organised into separate sections identified by date and by context. The field notes include all activities that I participated in and observed during the days that I spent inside and outside homestays. The data analysis started by going through the transcripts line by line to get an overall feel for the content. As I was familiar with the data, I started the coding process by finding interesting or salient features within the text. Coding can be explained as the categorisation of data or labelling sections or passages of text (Saldaña, 2009). This initial organisation of raw data is often called open coding. Open coding was done by attaching labels to lines of text, going through the entire data set and assigning meaningful titles to codes. These titles are based on the knowledge that guided my research questions and reviewed theory relating to the research questions and objectives.

Step 2. Conceptual categorisation and selective coding for core categories

From the open coding process, I produced a long list of codes. The second step was about re-focusing by sorting initial codes into some order or groups. This step involved looking for the patterns across those codes found in step 1. This process is subject to a higher level of categorisation forming core categories. The criteria employed for selecting a core category depends on whether or not the category was central. This relates to as many other categories and their properties as possible so that it can account for a large portion of the variation in a pattern of behaviour. The frequency of occurrence of the category in the data was also

considered. The frequent re-occurrence generates a stable pattern and informs what concept I should emphasise in my analysis and discussion.

Initial data analysis guided further and more focused data collection, leading to further conceptualisation of the data and refinement of the coding schemes. Similarities and differences between the compiled codes were clustered together to create categories. Conceptual saturation was reached when no new categories were generated. Conceptually similar codes were combined and thus a series of categories was generated. This combination was based on the common ground between encoded parts or elements. Then the groups were named based on the relationships between the groups. Finally, the sorting process was used to create themes.

Step 3. Development of patterns and themes

The final step is a process that compares the core categories and the lower level conceptual categories subsumed under the core ones across all interview transcripts and other sets of data. The aim is to organise the core categories in a way that generates a compelling story and encompasses the phenomena described in the interviews, field notes, and other materials.

4.6 Ethical considerations

As my research involves human subjects, strict ethical codes were considered when I carried out the research. Prior to conducting the fieldwork, this study was reviewed and received ethical approval in March 2016 through the Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee at the University of Birmingham. Before I conducted the fieldwork, I gained the informed consent of the research participants. The local government officers and travel agent operators were informed by letter to get their consent for interview. The local people were

approached in their homes or working areas. The local people were informed about the purposes of the interview just before it was implemented.

For government officers and tour operators, the consent forms were presented to them before the start of interviews. The form states the objectives of the research, the usages of their interview recordings and the rights to withdraw from the research. The contents of the consent forms were explained when the research participants had any queries. After they agreed with the contents, the interviews were conducted.

For tourists, tour guides and local people I did not use the consent forms as there were time constraints and it was also too formal for a short interview. However, I asked their approvals at the site. I talked with them about the objectives of my research projects and what their data would be used for. The interviews were carried out on site after receiving their approvals. The research participants would be able to access the research result if they needed to understand how they were presented, quoted and interpreted.

Some informants did not remain anonymous, for instance, local authorities and homestay owners, however, they were informed before the interviews. Consent forms were sent to these participants who stated whether or not they were willing to reveal their names in the research. The informants were explained that personal data would be processed fairly and lawfully. Additionally, the informants could refuse to talk about any issues that made them feel uncomfortable.

4.7 Researcher role on site

I understood that the role of the researcher played an important part in my thesis. Just as previous researchers have presented themselves to research participants, the researchers could

be anywhere in between pure researcher, tourist-researcher, researcher-guide or tourists (Bruner, 2005a; Lynch, 2003). In conducting fieldwork, the researchers can negotiate access by introducing themselves as researchers before they can collect information. While contacting the local people, I positioned myself as a domestic tourist. I rather wanted to be a "friend" and more than a "purely researcher". I wanted to establish close friendships with the informants so they could share their knowledge and opinions comfortably. This was due to the knowledge that I got from the Mekong Delta people; the locals prefer an informal and friendly environment, and it would be easier for them to share their thoughts than in a formal conversation.

The advantage of conducting interviews with local hosts was that we spoke the same language so it was easier for me to build rapport with the interviewees in order to obtain honest and open responses. This brought me some advantages. I found that as I spoke the same language and chose their homes to visit, some homestay owners were very welcoming. They cooked meals for me when I arrived though lunch was not included in the homestay price. They did not add money for that to my bill when I checked out. However, the downside of creating bonding contacts with the locals was when the local people considered me as an "insider", they were not taking care of me as with other "outsider" guests. For example in homestays, the guests often attended a cooking class before having dinner, and the hosts showed the guests how to cook a dish and how to eat it. The host gave samples for the guests to try but they did not give any to me. This was because they assumed that I was familiar with the process and it was not necessary to "perform" for me.

While in the Mekong Delta, it is popular amongst international tourists to travel solo, but it is rare for domestic travellers to travel alone. Thus, the local people did not recognise or accept

me as a tourist. When I joined with other international tourists in group tours, the local people always perceived me as a tour guide. Thanks to that I evolved into the position of a tour guide in the tourism supply chain. No need to be informed in advance or be introduced to the local factory shop owners, a tour guide is immediately offered a discounted price on whatever they buy in a local factory shop. This is because the guide creates the economic benefits for the sellers through bringing the tourists to the factories to visit. On the contrary, tour guides are not welcomed by the homestay hosts. The guides do not play the role of creating bonding between tourists and landlords, rather they make the intimacy between the owners and the guests reduced.

The location of the fieldwork inspired me, as the tradition and cultures of the Mekong Delta are different from those of the North where I was born and grew up. I did not have the feeling of completely doing research in "my own culture". It is a type of project where the familiarity and strangeness are crosscutting (Burgess, 1992).

As I had been living in HCM city since 2010, I had time to adapt myself to the Southern dialects. I was certain that I would not have any problems of understanding the local people in the Mekong Delta. In addition, it would be easy to ask for an explanation of any words which I did not comprehend. However, I speak with a Northern accent, and this difference created challenges for me when I was in the field. Speaking a similar accent would have enabled me to harmonise myself into local daily lives. As the topic of my project relates to the lives of the southern people, it would be easier to share the story with people who have a similar accent. A Northern accent created distance between me and the locals. For instance, I would be easily recognised as a tourist or outsider to the local community. Thus, I might put myself at risk of 'hard bargaining' on everything, such as taking "honda om" (a typical way to travel around the

city by sitting behind the motorbike driver), food and drink, and lodging. However, I always bore in mind that this was also part of the tourist experience and it was also useful data.

In the summer of 2015, after spending some time in the delta, I returned to HCM city and decided to do an "experiment". I asked one of my friends to go along with me for a week to the field. She had been living and working in HCM city. She was born there and speaks with the Southern accent. We returned to the same places that I went to before. I let her do the "deal" and it turned out that she got a better price compared to me going to the delta by myself (hotel price, street food and tour around the Ong Ho isle by motorbike).

The difficulty of the different accents also happened when I visited the Cham village to see how the Cham people raise the fish in floating rafts. I took several pictures of the fish rafts and also filmed the fish eating food. Then, I asked the tour guide to video me when I talked with a young man who is the owner. To my surprise, he refused to be filmed and the reason was he thought I am a journalist and trying to inspect his business. It was due to the fact that I speak the Northern accent - the accent of VTV journalists and I was assumed to be as a journalist (VTV- Vietnam television is the national television broadcaster which is centered in Hanoi, the capital city in the North of Vietnam). The local people ascribe an assumed position to a stranger visitor based on how they experience him or her.

The other challenge was on booking homestay accommodation (though not for all homestays), as homestay services are open for people who want to experience the exotic culture and to understand the daily lives of local people. In the initial months of searching for the field site, I had experienced a difficulty when I booked a homestay lodging in Vinh Long province. When I phoned the homeowner, the man who heard my voice kept asking me why I needed to stay in his house. When I gave the reason that I wanted to experience the lives in the delta, he still

hesitated to offer me a stay. He thought that it was not reasonable for Vietnamese people to stay in homestay as we are countrymen and I should know the culture (even though I am from another region of the country). It might be that when he heard my voice, he did not feel safe as I could be anyone, not necessarily a tourist, may be a journalist as in the previous case.

The final issue that I thought would affect the value of the data was my identity as a female researcher. It was easier for me to book a homestay as a single tourist. According to Duyen Que homestay in Ben Tre, they were reluctant to let domestic tourists stay in the homes due to a bad experience with earlier guests. However, talking with Ms Linh, the homestay owner, she confessed that when talking to me on the phone and knowing that I travelled by myself she decided to take my reservation.

4.8 Limitations of the research

The limitations of the research came from the nature of the theoretical approach that the data gathered during the fieldwork generated: a large and varied quantity of field notes, tape recordings, interview notes, jottings, photos and videos. It was difficult to put the data into systematic and separate categories as there were many ways of linking up parts of discussions and observations. One single piece of data or variable represents more than two themes. Hence, it affected how I divided the data into different chapters, sections and headings. For example, one single piece of data extracted from interviews with homestay owners could be categorised under different themes, such as the competitiveness among homestays and/or the involvement of local authorities and/or the investment of the homestay owners on hospitality. Once I coded a theme for a single piece of data, it was not replicated under the other themes. It was researcher bias on organising the data in the ways that made them easier to address. However, the

theoretical assumptions employed in this research would under all circumstances gain no single truth, rather a "relative" and "constructed" one.

Among the three study areas, Ben Tre and Tien Giang were the most popular visiting places for me prior to my fieldwork, while I had never visited Vinh Long before. As it is more difficult to contact local authorities than other research participants I had to depend on their timetable to book an appointment. As I got the consent for interviews with Vinh Long provincial officers first, for convenience, I decided to spend the time accessing other research participants in Vinh Long province, before I moved to the next study area. Hence, the first homestays that I stayed at are in An Binh island, Vinh Long province.

Moreover, the time requirements for fieldwork in Vietnam for students sponsored by the Vietnam government fund is limited, which is a maximum of two months. So I had to divide my fieldwork into three different stages over three years rather than staying in the field continuously for five months. Travel costs from and to the UK and Vietnam were increased. Moreover, due to the time constraints for my research, I did not have enough time to conduct repeated observations of the same research participants such as homestay owners. After finishing interviews with all homestays owners, I noticed that some of the friendly and open-minded homeowners were the first homeowners such as Ba Linh, Ut Trinh, and Ngoc Suong. The interviews were mainly based on prepared questions. At the end of the fieldwork, I realised there were some issues I wanted to clarify but I did not have enough time to get back. Although I was in contact with the hosts, not every host uses the means of exchanging information via email. However, the data collected through email after I returned to UK facilitated the assessment of the changes compared to previous information obtained from earlier interviews, and clarified further issues that were not clear in the previous interviews.

On the subject of research, right from the start I limited research informants to the local people involved in tourism activities and serving guests. Therefore, I did not interview people who are not involved in the tourism business. However, this is also a group that can provide good information on the topic in terms of learning more about the hospitality of the ordinary people with the tourists.

Another limitation is that the data collected from research participants who are travel operators did not provide rich data to contribute to answering my research questions. The reason is that these travel operators do not directly interact with tourists as well as the hosts at the visiting points. Questions relating to the relationship between residents and tourists or with visitor interactions were not adequately answered due to their lack of experience with tourism practices.

4.9   Conclusion

My research aims to examine how the local people in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam, see their traditions, and their responses to the changes in their tradition of hospitality in a tourism context. Therefore, the research explores the underlying reasons for how local people perform their hospitality in tourism contexts. The local people who took part in the interviews were government officials, travel agents, tour guides, tourists and ordinary people who are involved in the tourism sector. Direct interviews were carried out on-site in Tien Giang, Ben Tre and Vinh Long provinces. Information obtained from three culturally distinct areas in the Mekong Delta allows me to gauge more accurately the extent to which the issues raised are shared throughout the regions. These case studies are also used to explore in more detail the notion of "community", "stakeholder", "contact zones", "host" and "guest" which were addressed in the

literature review chapter. The homestay case studies are also used to explore in more detail the notion of "community", and "contact zones".

The research questions and the review of the literature on local people's perceptions of tourism and tradition in the previous chapter indicated that the constructivist approach and ethnographic methods are suitable to my thesis. Constructivism in psychology refers to approaches to the study of perception and cognition which explains how people might acquire and construct knowledge and meaning through their experiences and interactions (O'Shaughnessy & Chicago, 2006; Raskin, 2002; Wang, 1999). In this sense, I have examined the field through the interactions with the local people and of the local people with their visitors, and between themselves. This chapter aims to clarify how ethnographic methods were applied to fulfil the objectives of this research and how the empirical data was obtained. In order to achieve the best possible results, the most appropriate method of research to use would be qualitative research methods (Jupp, 2006; Kvale, 2008; Silverman, 2010). Rather than testing theory, the study made a case for building theory from inductively analysing the social phenomenon (Kvale, 2008). This research uses various methods including participant observation and in-depth interviews. Simultaneously with qualitative interviewing methods, participant observation was employed to focus on the interactions between hosts and guests in homestays services. Participant observation was realised to be the most appropriate method to obtain significant data on interactions and relationships between hosts and guests (Tucker & Lynch, 2005). With this method, behaviour, conversation and experience can be recorded 'in situ'.

The data from the participant observation and interviews were analysed by drawing out the key themes and variables relating to the host-guest relationship. The themes that emerged included: the meanings surrounding the concepts of 'host', 'guest' and 'hospitality' among tourist visitors

and hosts; comparisons between the expectations and experiences of domestic tourists and international tourists; the extension of hospitality in the form of guiding and interpretation of the local area. The findings were mirrored in the interviews with the guests. The level to which guests can enter into 'real life' is dictated largely by the hosts, and depends on the extent to which the hosts are prepared to interact with their guests.

CHAPTER 5. THE TRANSITION OF TRADITION IN LOCAL HOMESTAYS IN THE MEKONG DELTA

5.1 Introduction

As discussed in the literature review chapter, hospitality is a dynamic concept which is rarely defined or explained (Morrison, 2002). Hospitality is the custom of welcoming strangers (Moore, 2007; Pitt-Rivers, 2012). Hospitality also concerns core values in societies which affects the behaviour of individuals in different societies (Pohl, 1999). Hospitality in a tourism context is also merely an economic activity where the providers of hospitality have the obligation to treat their customers well (Lashley, 2000). Moreover, the quality of hospitality has changed over time and intertwined in different contexts. As presented in chapter 3, the distinguishing features of the Mekong Delta are not the tangible heritage such as physical artifacts, building architecture but more the intangible heritage and tradition of hospitality amongst its people. Hospitality is presented through the provision of the food, drink and accommodation in the home and is the central issue of host guest relationships (Lashley & Morrison, 2013). Hospitality is mainly the intangible element which is performed by the hosts to their guests. However, hospitality is also presented through physical settings of the spaces where the guests are staying. The complexity inherent to local tourism spaces in developing countries has not been sufficiently investigated, theorised or conceptualised in tourism research (Moufakkir & Reisinger, 2013). Tourists' experience and representations of local communities have been discussed in various studies, mainly regarding staged authenticity (Cohen, 1988; McIntosh & C. Prentice, 1999; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). The presences of tourists and commodified cultures have been claimed to be factors that make the hosts unable to be authentic because they must pander to tourist expectation (Boorstin, 2012). Hence, to consider

the hospitality concept in context, it is worthwhile considering the materiality of the hospitality. In this chapter, I examine the physicality and materiality of the hospitality as presented to tourists. I focus on local homestays in the Mekong Delta where tourists stay with the home owners and experience the local lifestyles.

The first section describes vernacular local home architecture and the changes that occur over time in terms of building materials, design and construction. This section also describes the main types of local traditional houses in the Mekong Delta, including houses on land, stilts houses, and ancient houses. The second section examines the ways in which homestay owners construct their home for tourist accommodation. Touristic spaces and 'contact zones' where hosts and guests meet and interact with each other in homestays are also discussed. This section shows that places are not only the result of a long history but are constructed out of particular interactions, perceptions, experiences and understandings. In the third section, I discuss the ways in which the nature of hospitality is evident through the food and drink served to tourists in homestays. Host and guest interactions are further examined through the description of meals offered in homestays. The final section examines the ways in which various stakeholders operate to produce these spaces of traditional hospitality. This shows how homestay interplays with other dimensions of home and how external stakeholders affect the home, the domestic environment and its tradition.

5.2   Vernacular local home architecture

In this section, I discuss the building materials that local people in the Mekong Delta used in the past and the reasons that they chose those materials for house construction. There have been normal adaptations by the locals to improve their quality of life. The construction of the houses has been changed with the replacement of new materials and the architecture of the house. In

the region, some local people use their home for tourist rental. However, as homestays were perceived as places where tourists could absorb the local traditional lifestyles, houses for homestays are not those houses that have been necessarily modernized. However, traditional houses are not very appealing to tourists, as a homestay for tourist accommodation.

5.2.1 Traditional houses: Building materials

As the weather in the Mekong Delta is characterized by a hot and humid climate all year round, local builders often maintain a unique system of construction which takes into account both the natural weather conditions of a hot humid climate and the risks from various natural disasters such as rising water levels and flood. They also demonstrate a profound understanding of locally available construction materials. Popular building materials in the Mekong Delta are wood and leaves, which are available on site, low cost and very consistent with environmental conditions and economic conditions of the local farmers. Traditionally, households do not have access to air-conditioning or fans, and must rely on the wind and the household design to provide comfort. Hence, local people have developed a house construction design for this hot climate in order to release heat and keep the household cool. Regarding materials for roof thatching and the construction of house walls, Nipa palm (locally called water coconut) has been traditionally used in the rural areas (Hong & San, 1993). This type of material is relatively durable under the changing weather and climatic characteristics of the Mekong Delta. In the dry season, water coconut leaves are used for the roof as effective heat protection layers, especially at midday when the outdoor temperature is high, and the indoor space will stay cool.

However, the Mekong Delta has been a relatively slow economic growth region which has made a huge impact on how to build a house and how to choose materials available to the local people here (World Bank, 2012). Moreover, depending on the economic situation of the

households, different materials have been exploited in house construction. Traders built houses with valuable materials such as brick, tile roof, tiles, wood, cement columns, and wooden floors while fishermen built houses with tiles or thatched roof, bamboo or eucalyptus columns, wood or bamboo floors (Anh et al., 2003). Generally, a traditional southern Vietnamese house has walls of woven bamboo, brick, wood; earthen or concrete floors; and a roof of palm leaves or thatch. The roofs of both stilt houses and floating houses used to be of thatch. Thatched roofs were the norm in the delta. These days, corrugated metal sheets are preferred. They give better weather protection and last much longer. However, these types of houses are not used for homestays as they do not attract tourists.

In the meantime, the industrialization and modernization in the rural areas which has been encouraged in Vietnam has led to the transformation of local life (Do, 2011). Rapid development of housing construction has also occurred in the rural areas of the Mekong Delta. Many durable houses are built. With the introduction of new building materials, almost all temporary houses that were made from bamboo and palm leaves have been replaced by tiled and concrete houses. Corrugated iron or metal sheets have been used to make roofs.

5.2.2   Traditional house as presented to tourists

Though the Mekong Delta is not recognized for a spectacular landscape or magnificent architecture or buildings, the vernacular architecture of the houses in the Mekong Delta is a typical example of tradition of this region. The picture of the Mekong Delta is of a network of canals and rivers and an expanse of rice paddies and riverside houses, as illustrated in different tourist brochures, tourism websites, and tourist blogs.

Regarding local houses, stilt houses are ubiquitous in the Mekong Delta. Stilt houses are normally built along the banks of the canals or rivers (Figure 5-1). However, tourists cannot

find stilt houses as homestays because stilt houses usually comprise one or two spacious rooms which open out onto the deck. Some stilt houses have a road in the front and river at the back. The rear of the house is used for the kitchen, bathroom and toilet. They are normally designed for daily use by the family. In this type of building, there is not enough space for hosting tourists. Moreover, the living conditions of these houses is perceived as not adequate for tourist accommodation.

Figure 5-1 House on stilts along the Mekong river

Source: http://news.zing.vn/nhung-ngoi-nha-dac-trung-vung-song-nuoc-mien-tay-post678618.html

However, tourists still can observe the houses from outside as they travel by boat tours along the canals and rivers. Tourists enjoy observing river lifestyles or taking pictures/videos of the local people washing and bathing in the river by their houses.

Besides stilt houses, floating houses are another local vernacular type of houses, mostly located in the areas that Cham people inhabit. While stilt houses line the steep banks, floating houses, by contrast, occupy the river completely independent of land (Sterling et al., 2007). Residents live their entire lives on the water, rarely setting foot on land. However, recently, some of them have participated in tourism. The activities that they offer for tourists are visiting fish rafts and Cham handicraft villages located in An Giang province. They also set up an area in the house for selling souvenirs. Similar to stilt houses, floating houses are not used for accommodating tourists.

Due to a long history of land reclamation, the Mekong Delta is also called a "new land". It was gradually formed as it is today after the Vietnamese people from the North and the Central part of Vietnam migrated to the South to expand their territory. Apart from choosing to locate along the river, to escape the dampness or flooding, local people often chose elevated ground to build their houses. Those houses are typically one story comprising different rooms. This structure literally derived from that of the people in the North and the Central part of Vietnam. During the expansion of the territory to the south (between the 17^h century to 18th century), the first settlers brought along their vernacular structure (SonNam, 1973). The number of rooms and choice of materials to make the house depend on the economic situation of each family, or natural environmental conditions of the local area. The most popular is three rooms and two side-wings. Systems of columns are used to support the house frame. The Vietnamese house is structured symmetrically, and the space in the middle is always intended as a place of worship and living. The interior of a traditional Vietnamese house reflects the cultural value that men are historically respected more than the women; the sleeping place for the males is in the central room, whereas that for the females is in the side room (Figure 5-2).
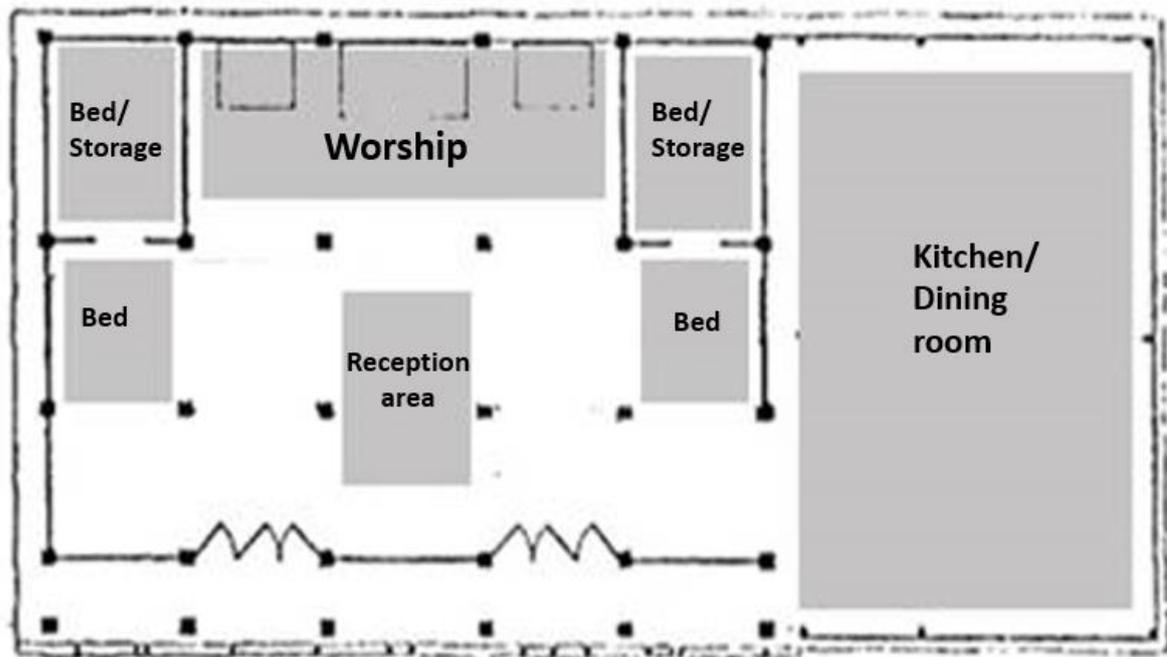
Figure 5-2 Layout of a three compartment and two side wings of a traditional house

Source: http://dalatarchi-tranconghoakts.blogspot.co.uk/2012/12/ac-trung-kien-truc-nha-vuon-

truyen.html

When local people decided to hosts tourists in their houses, at the beginning, they shared their bedroom with the tourists. However, when the number of tourists increased, they started to construct extra buildings around their houses. While traditional houses of the majority local people are quite compact within a limited surrounding area, houses for tourist rental are located over a fairly large area, approximately from one to two hectares. As the number of tourists grows, there is a lot of potential to reconfigure or extend their houses for accommodation. For all homestays that I visited, the original house arrangement was retained as a residence for the homeowner and his/her family. The dining area was built outside the main house in an open space without walls. It is similar to a big tent with a thatched roof furnished with a number of chairs and tables. As the number of tourists increased, the bedrooms in the main house were not enough. The homeowners built a range of bedrooms outside and shared bathroom and

toilets outside. Some homestays upgraded their bedroom by building a toilet inside the bedroom to make tourists more comfortable.
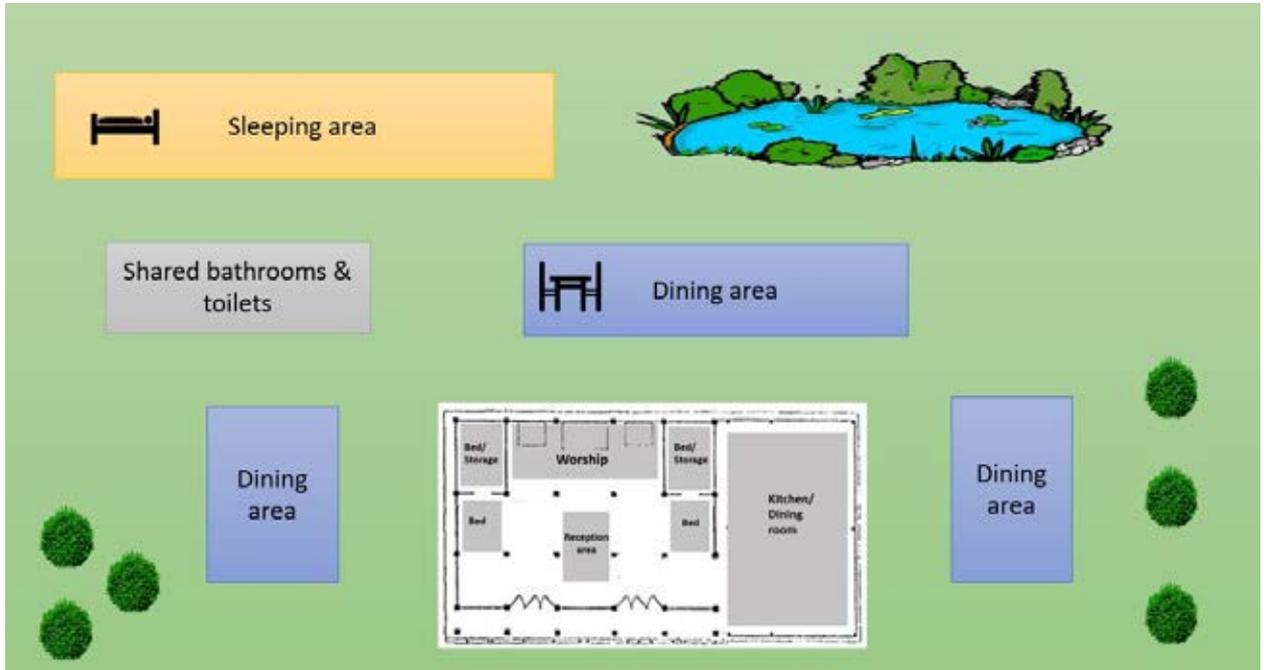
Figure 5-3 A generic example of a physical space of a homestay

Figure 5-3 illustrates the physical space of a homestay. Homestay owners often are people who own a lot of land or have a strong financial budget. They usually utilize their land to build more bedrooms for tourist lodging. Some homestays could have more than one dining area as sometimes they do not only host tourists staying overnight but large groups of tourists that merely drop in for lunch.

Recently, another type of houses that the local people call "nhà cổ" (ancient house) has also been exploited as homestays. Those houses had been built in the 19th century during the French colonization. The common features of these ancient houses are the harmonious combination of two architectural styles: Vietnamese and French (Figure 5-4). Looked at from outside, the ancient house is in French style architecture. However, the internal structure is typically Eastern

style (Figure 5-5). These houses are not representative for the majority of local people who have had a poor living standard for many years, however, this misleads the tourists as it is a living style by local people in the past. Existing ancient houses mostly reflect architectural styles of the affluent social class in the past. Though tourists expect to experience the tradition of the Mekong Delta, what they could observe in a local homestay is not an impoverished but an impressive, classy living space. Ancient houses are chosen to be homestays because of their colonial history.

Figure 5-4 The façade of Cai Cuong ancient house in Vinh Long province

Source: http://vietnam.vnanet.vn/vietnamese/nha-co-cai-cuong/51743.html

Figure 5-5 Tourists listening to traditional music ("đờn ca tài tử ") inside Cai Cuong ancient houses

Source:https://www.tnktravel.com/blogs/vietnam-blogs/a-visit-to-ancient-houses-in-mekong-delta-vietnam/

Those houses have the internal design with the mixture of French and Oriental architecture. The local people believe that this architecture is attractive to the tourists, especially

international tourists. Among international tourists, French people are the visitors who are most interested in exploring the vestiges of French influences from the colonial past.

5.3 Local houses and the modification into a commercial house

This section introduces the emergence of homestay business in the Mekong Delta. Then I explain the physical settings in local homestays and how the local people change their houses to meet emerging tourists' demand. The homestays that I describe in this part are located in An Binh island, Vinh Long province, where homestay businesses are more well established (Figure 5-6).
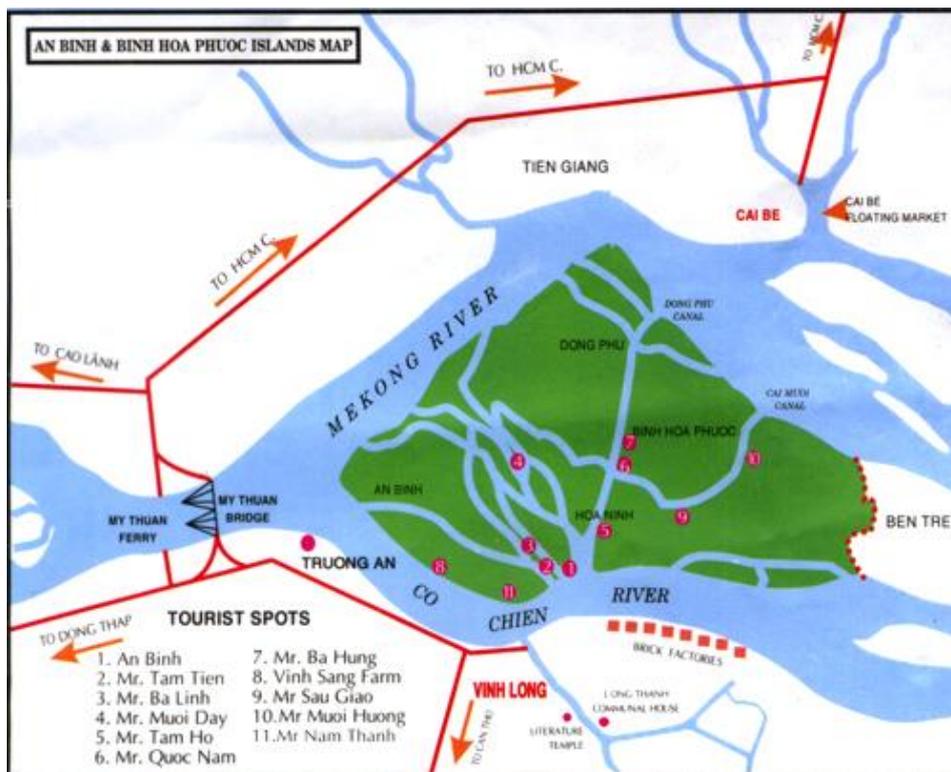
Figure 5-6 Map of An Binh island

(Source: http://www.lahistoriaconmapas.com/atlas/country-map15/vietnam-map-vinh-long.htm)

5.3.1 The transmission of homestay patterns in the Mekong Delta

Regarding the historical development of tourism industry and homestays business in the Mekong Delta, a tourism local government officer explained in an interview: "After the United States lifted the embargo in Vietnam in 1994, French people were the first people come to Vietnam to visit. They wanted to return to former colonies in southern Vietnam. They came to Sai Gon (now Ho Chi Minh city) and Vung Tau beach, and then go further to nearby destinations such as My Tho (Tien Giang province) and Vinh Long. At that moment, [the] transportation network was very poor, there was not enough time to get back to Sai Gon in one day, so they chose to stay in Vinh Long. Moreover, they were offered to stay in local houses. Staying in local people's home started from that time".

In the Mekong Delta, the first homestay business emerged in the Vinh Long province, and has concentrated mainly in An Binh island since 2001. Though homestays are located in several provinces in the Mekong Delta, I use homestays in An Binh island as an exemplar regarding the establishment of homestay business. An Binh island is located opposite the city of Vinh Long, accessed by a ferry.

The islet's area is 60 square km and it has a lot of orchards, including mango, durian, rambutan, and longan. Here, Sau Giao homestay was the first homestay on the island. It is run by an old man who spent most of his life in gardening. He won a bonsai competition held in Ho Chi Minh city in 1981. He also had a collection of symmetrical shaped bonsai in his garden. In the beginning, there were tourists who passed by and visited his garden. Sau Giao saw a limited number of tourists visiting the area. Since the year 2001, with the introduction of Cuu Long travel company (Vinh Long province), Sau Giao became much more of an established tourist

destination. Regarding the originating of homestay business in Vinh Long, the manager of Cuu Long tourism company comments:

> Initially, due to the needs of tourists, Mr Sau Giao agreed to host travelers who wanted to visit his bonsai garden. Tourists came there and enjoyed the fruits in the garden as well. The price at that time was 5,000 VND per guest. Later, activities to welcome tourists visiting landscaped gardens, and orchards spread across different households in An Binh island. Over time, the services involved doing gardening with local people, listening to traditional music and staying overnight in the garden.

However, Sau Giao homestay business had closed after the death of Mr Sau Giao. His garden was almost abandoned as his children did not continue their father's business. Besides termination of Sau Giao homestay, there were a few homestays that have closed down, such as Muoi Day, Ba Hung, Tam Tien. At the present time, according to a local tourism government officer, there are 10 households who are running homestay business in An Binh island. Here, there are three landlords that possess two homestays at the same time in different names. Phuong Thao and Nam Thanh homestays are under the same owner, as are Ngoc Sang and Ngoc Phuong, Ba Linh and Bay Trung. In general, the local farmers have gradually capitalized their lands and become small business owners.

5.3.2 Representational modes in spatial arrangements for homestays

For the homestays that I visited in An Binh island, the common features of the houses is the simulation of traditional houses that were built by use of natural resources. They are mainly wooden wall houses with thatched roofs. The colour of the house depends on the colour of the construction materials; wooden components have a brown natural colour. In terms of colours, traditional architecture uses indigenous paints to protect the wooden parts against humidity and

termites; yellow and red are the dominant colours with red as the background, which helps to bring out the gilded decorations. Some homestays extend their buildings with new materials like cement or bricks. Homestay owners often pay attention to building and decorating the space around the main house to create a relaxed area.

One of the common features that you can see in most of the homestays are the gardens surrounding the houses, planted with some tropical fruits such as grapefruit, longan, jackfruit, rambotan. The purpose of growing big trees in the garden is to create a green and cool area for the house. Moreover, the tourists can observe how local people do gardening and take care of local fruits. Depending on each homestay, tourists can also pick the fruits from the trees and enjoy them for free. Some other homestays sell the fruits in the garden for their guests.

The second typical feature is the presence of hammocks everywhere inside the house, on the verandas around the house and in the garden (Figure 5-7). Some local people called them "American hammocks". It is said that the hammocks were issued by the U.S Army during the Vietnam War. It is the jungle hammock, dark green colour, originally fabricated from scavenged U.S parachute cloth, which gave protection against crawling insects. They were also used by Vietnamese soldiers during the war. The hammocks kept down the incidence of disease and illness as they kept soldiers off the ground and protected them from mosquitos (Kearny, 1999). In the local homestays' gardens, hammocks can be hung and tied between two trees, or tied to the columns of the house along the veranda. Guests can take a nap in the hammock if they feel hot and suffocating inside their rooms. Some homestays have a small thatched roof house (or summer house) in the garden equipped with hammocks for tourists to rest. I observed that tourists found the hammocks quite relaxing and use them frequently. While the hosts rarely use the hammocks for themselves to rest. It seems that home facilities are designed for the use

of the guests hence, they have priority to use them. However, in a few of homestays where the host have not hosted many tourists, the host still use the hammocks as usual, while his guests sit at a table nearby and chat to the host. It creates the feeling of sharing the living space with the hosts.

Figure 5-7 Guests relaxing in hammocks hanging along a veranda in Ngoc Phuong homestay in Vinh Long province

(photo taken by the author)

The third feature that was observed in homestays is the big water jars which were organised in the garden, along the path or near the dining area (Figure 5-8). Collecting rain water for domestic use is a tradition in the Mekong Delta. Storage of rain water in terra-cotta jars and

cement-brick tanks or in large concrete containers is very common in rural, and sub-urban areas and islands. The advantages of rain water in the Mekong Delta are: it is almost clean, easy to collect and very low cost. In rural areas, villagers buy alum in solid form and stir it into river water in the storage jars. Alum is a chemical compound that has been used for centuries for purification of drinking water. After a few minutes stirring, the dust particles settle at the bottom of the jar and the water is ready to use. However, nowadays, all the homestays are equipped with tap water. Those water jars in the homestay are just ornamentation and create the feeling of tradition for the visitors.

Figure 5-8 Water jars in the front yards of the Ut Trinh homestay

(photo taken by the author)

Finally, ponds are also dug alongside the houses to raise fish for food. For example, Ba Linh homestay includes 10 rooms, comprising two blocks, each block has five rooms, two double

rooms and three twin rooms, located among orchard gardens with the excavated pond along the back of the house. In the pond, there are several types of fresh-water fish. The homestays owner said:

> The purpose of this artificial pond is for the guests to relax. They can rest in the hammock under the shade of the dining house while watching the fish swimming nearby. We also catch the fish from the pond to cook the meal for the guests straight away. It will bring more fresh taste.

Homestay design and layout

As mentioned in the previous section, ventilation is essential for local people in the Mekong Delta. There are a few stairs to get into the house. Raised floors contribute to the flow of air around the building. Open sides let cooling winds circulate within the house. Wide verandas are also constructed in homestays to promote air movement, as does the open plan of the interior. Walls and floors are thin to keep the houses as cool as possible. Inside the house is the column system, supporting wooden columns forming the basic structure of the building. Vietnamese ancient houses mainly use "open architecture" to match the hot and humid environmental condition. Its characteristics are tall, airy and close to nature, using outer space, windows and trees. The main house usually has an odd number of compartments (one, three or five) with one or two private rooms on two sides. In Vietnamese beliefs, the odd numbers symbolize luck and eternity.

As mentioned in the previous section, local houses are typically one story and on average contain only two rooms (living and bedroom) with the kitchen, bathroom and toilet facilities often located outside. It is common for each home to be occupied by four to five people. The people within the area have a very communal culture and a household typically consists of

grandparents, parents and children. The sleeping areas are shared by all members of the household.

The house is supported by two main rows of columns running along the sides and columns are used to extend the indoor space. Local homestays use new building designs that can cope with the environmental changes and bring sustainability to the region, whilst still retaining a traditional feel to the design.

Material culture: investing in hospitality

One attempt to participate in the tourism industry, one of the few available ways to improve living standards for locals, is for many people to invest a great deal of money in renovating their houses into homestay guesthouses. The local people keep the exterior of the houses with a traditional look by setting tangible objects such as water jars or hammocks around the garden. Interior settings have also been developed in a more fragmented pattern due to the tastes of the tourists.

In Vinh Long, many tourists whom I met during the fieldwork believed that the homestays represented the "ancient," "authentic," or "unique" living Mekong Delta culture. Amongst information gained from the guests, the respondents claimed that seeking an "authentic" local cultural experience was their primary reason for choosing a homestay in the Mekong Delta.
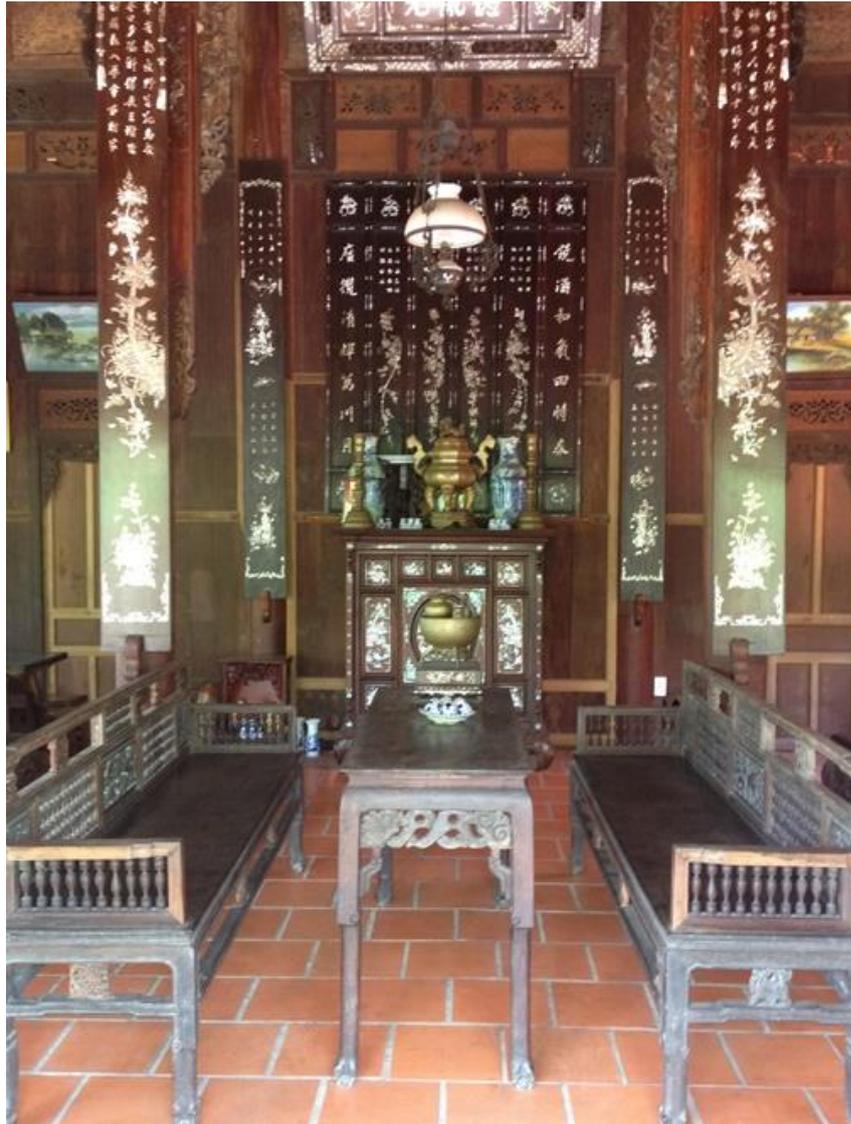
Figure 5-9 Ut Trinh homestays reception area smothered in ornaments with lacquered boards hanging vertically along the house pillars.

(photo taken by the author)

One owner's comments illustrated the local hosts' most common concern about their culture at home:

Tourists always say that they are looking for "authenticity" when they choose a homestay. Actually, they do not know anything about Vietnamese culture, except for seeking those external characteristics such as the house architecture and my house is a

"homestay" now, so I have to try to meet their demands, and modify my home as they want.

In traditional architecture, decorations are usually focused on the space below the roof, and particularly the main compartment located in the central part of the house. Traditional architecture has rich decorative motifs. The decoration of the house usually is a carved pattern on wood with the stylized lotus daisy motifs or the animals: dragon, phoenix, turtle and unicorn. While the ancient houses that are used for homestays keep the original ornamentation, new built homestays reproduced the interior design in their own ways (Figure 5-9). The appearance of the reception areas in a homestay is an example that tradition, by definition, is a matter of continuity or the passage of time, but it is also a matter of perception.

5.3.3 The creation of new spaces

There are different ways of modifying a home to provide a homestay. Starting with their original houses, homeowners add extra rooms or extend separate houses in their premises. As the number of tourists increases, the hosts expand their houses or build extra rooms nearby to derive more income from tourists. Some households manage to utilise all the land they possess for the house construction. This innovation significantly alters both the character of the property and the interactions of the hosts with guests. Recently, locals have tended to modernise their homestays more than before. Chapman and Hockey (1999) state that the transformation in design of houses may have less to do with technological factors than with changing social relationships. These transformations come about in response to changed patterns of urban life, employment, expectations of leisure, privacy, respectability, community, security and the projection of social status. Conversations with homestay owners in Vinh Long province reveal that new homestays are being built according to the preferences of new groups

of tourists. For instance, Ut Trinh homestay's owner comments on the need to build new rooms with air-conditioning and including modern bathrooms:

> Each year, we host a certain group of Singapore tourists. They normally arrive as big groups of students in low season in May, June and October. They cannot suffer from the heat and cannot stand the fan in the rooms. Thus, we have built about ten more rooms with air-conditioning. The house was built in yellow brick, equipped with mosquito nets. It still has a traditional look with that style.

Regarding creating new homestays as preference of tourists, Ba Linh homestay's owner states:

> We have another homestay run by my sister which is a few meters away from here. That homestay has been built separately in a more tranquil area for French tourists as they prefer silence more than other guests.

As Meethan (2006) argues, the spaces of tourism are constructed to fulfil or attempt to fulfill tourists' expectation. The innovation of the homestays in the Mekong Delta indicates that local people are adapting their tradition due to the needs of the tourists who expect to consume a product that fit their wishes.

In addition, the modifications in the local homes are significant as homeowners want to expand their business. In order to meet their guests' demands, many hosts installed flush toilets, air-conditioning, even breaking from traditional houses where dining areas were inside or in the kitchen where the family gathered together during the meal. The dining areas in homestays are often located outside the main house. Some homestays build wide dining areas with about ten dining tables to host several groups of guests at the same time.

There are also differences between the original houses and the extended spaces. While original houses remain traditional, the extensions are modernized. The old elements of the houses have been untouched as "home heritage" or for sight-seeing. The extensions for tourism rentals are upgraded to match the demands of contemporary tourists.

Reception area

Depending on each homestay owner, the design of the reception area can be different. As it is expensive to build a new, modernized vernacular house like its traditional predecessors, some local homestays kept their reception room in its original state. Other homestays who are stronger financially tend to make the reception room more impressive and well-organized. They create places with an identity resembling the houses of wealthy people in the past that are full of nostalgia. Thus, the house often has systems of pillars made from the most expensive, highest quality wood. In the reception area, on these pillars hang beautifully carved wooden boards depicting the merit or talent of the homeowners' ancestors (Tran, 2012). Regardless of the styles, most reception areas have common facilities such as a table and chairs in the middle, and wooden sofas or trestle beds on both sides. The reception room is always the worship room, located in the front of the main house. However, one thing should be noted here, the function of the reception area in local homestays is changing. Though the reception area is the space that is used to greet the guests and to provide a waiting area for them, homestay owners rarely use it as a greeting place. Regularly, the guests are led to the dining area situated in a more open space. The reception area is normally located with the main house where local families live so there are not many regular interactions there. It is considered 'back-stage' as mentioned by Goffman (1959) and Bruner (2005a). For reception areas that are built consciously or

deliberately, objects or symbols of the past are constructed which make it rather more a museum than a hosting place.

Sleeping areas

In the Mekong Delta a typical three room house has a living room and two bedrooms, one for parents and the other for the children (Menzel & Mann, 1994). The sleeping area is open plan and has hammocks and wooden beds with mosquito nets hanging overhead. As the number of tourists increased, the landlords then build more rooms near their main house. Traditionally, before the home is extended, the hosts arranged folding canvas beds in the living room or along the veranda outside the house for their guests to sleep. However, as the homestay owners wanted to expand their business, they made use of the available land to build more rooms for tourist accommodation. Moreover, the number of tourists has increased with higher demand of comfort; after a few years, sleeping in canvas beds in homestays was no longer possible. Hence, sleeping areas were built separately from the central building, where the family sleeps (Figure 5-10).

Further, in response to the needs and expectations of tourists as well as the advice of tourism professionals, the privacy of the homestay has been increased as bedrooms are separated with doors and locks. Regarding the design for sleeping areas, Phuong Thao homestay's owner comments:

> Traditionally, local people never use locks for the rooms inside the house. It is not the custom in a rural house. However, we have to follow the regulations so that all rooms have locks and we also number the rooms. That's why homestay looks much more a guesthouse or hotel rather than local homes.

Figure 5-10 Range of rooms constructed in Ba Linh homestay which is located separately
with the main house with shared bathrooms and toilets outside

(photo taken by the author)

Bathroom

The incorporation of modern facilities into the vernacular house meant totally changing the construction of the house by adding a bathroom and toilet. Traditionally, the local people built their toilet outside the house. It is often located at the back of the garden, or typically on the bank of the river. However, at this moment, all homestays are equipped with flush toilets and bathrooms which are built outside of the main houses. Nhon Thanh homestay owner said "the first thing I have to think about before I officially open the business is the construction of a new toilet". Over time, some homestays attached bathrooms in guest's bedroom, for instance, Bay Thoi, and Ut Trinh homestay, whereas others still need to share bathroom and toilet.

Kitchen and dining area: a contact zone of hosts and guests

As mentioned above, most households started homestay tourism business from 2001 onwards. Homestays developed simply from people's pre-existing homes, for instance, ancient house (Cai Cuong homestay), or traditional earth floor house (Ba Linh homestay), and/or large garden with tropical fruit trees. To attract tourists, homestay families have exploited the features of their homes which elevate them from other homestays in the local area. Cai Cuong homestay is attractive due to its ancient house which was built in 1885 with the western style exterior and deep eastern style inside decorations. Ba Linh homestay intrigues visitors as the house with the earth floor is formed with rough dragon scales. Ba Linh homestay's owner comments on the distinct character of his house:

> My house was upgraded and renovated to meet the needs of tourists. However, the kitchen floor was retained as the original: The bumpy floor, according to folklore called dragon scales floor. It represents good fortune to the family. This is also a typical characteristic of the traditional house in the South West region of Vietnam.

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The kitchen is extended and often equipped with a long wooden table, where the guests can gather around and observe how the family prepares the food. Traditionally, the local people use wood as fuel. However, wood is not a cheap material to use for cooking nowadays. Ut Trinh homeowners said:

> It is more expensive to use wood as fuel. It also produces a lot of smoke. That's why the kitchens are always open. Open walls carry the smoke from wooden cooking up toward the roof.

Hence, the homestays keep the wooden stove for the guests to observe and practice cooking. However, electricity and/or gas stoves are also equipped for modern cooking. I observed in Ba Linh homestay that the more modern kitchens were built fairly hidden behind the wall that separates the kitchen into two compartments (Figure 5-11). This wall was built separating the kitchen space into two areas: the outside open for tourists, the inside was not banned to tourists but was not introduced by the hosts. The activities happened inside the wall are normal cooking but the more "modern" kitchen equipment was used. The kitchen space has been restructured for a performance to the tourists and practical uses of the family. Not all the foods served to tourists were cooked on the wooden stove outside, as it took longer to cook compared to the gas, as explained by the hosts. The locals are adapting to the new life with the presence of the tourists in their house. Along with the engagement with tourism, the local people are also packaging their lives in a new way.

Figure 5-11 A woman is frying spring rolls on a coal stove in the kitchen (left) while other family members are cooking beef inside by gas (right) in Ba Linh homestay.

(photos taken by the author)

One of the issues to note here is the contact between the host and the guests. The contact between 'hosts' and 'guests' has long been the subject matter of tourism research, and raises a number of issues relating to control over the process of cultural creation and maintenance (Meethan et al., 2006). One of the reasons for the guests to choose to stay in a homestay is the sense of being at home and sharing the meals with the family. In homestays, tourists share meals with their homestay operators and are treated to some extent as members of the family (Gu & Wong, 2006; Kayat, 2010; Richardson, 2004). The interactions between hosts and guests in local homestays occur intensively in kitchen and dining area.

What I observed from most of the homestays in An Binh island is the very large dining areas. One homestay can have more than one dining area located outside the main house nearby. There are no opportunities for the tourists and the hosts sharing the meal together. The hosts are always busy inside the kitchen, preparing the food and making it ready to serve the guests while guests are sitting outside to be served.

Below is a comment from an Australian tourist about the location of tourists in dining areas in Ba Linh homestay:

> While there was another family there, we were set up at a separate table in a pagoda on the other side of the house. I don't know if it was set up like that by the request of our guide or the other family but we thought it might have been nice to eat with the others, instead of totally alone, but maybe you can request that.

A tourist comments about his dinner in a homestay: "After reading so many good reviews about this place, we were expecting something more authentic for the dinner. Even though there were two more guests we found ourselves at our own table, just us, white table clothes and a restaurant-feel. We were hoping to get to eat with the family but they were only our humble waitresses". I had quite a few interviews with the hosts in local areas and they confessed that "I do not always show up at dinner time. If there are a lot of guests coming in, I will come with other helpers and stay there, chatting and talking with them. If there are not many guests, I let my staff (hosts' relatives or neighbours) do the cooking and serve the food".

Though there is no sharing of meals with the locals, the homeowners have some engagement with their guests. They stand beside the guests and instruct them how to eat the food. They also offer the guests one small cup of local rice wine during the meal. After dinner, the hosts linger in the dining area and have a chat with the guests. Though I observed in some homestays, the

guests relaxed by themselves and talking to each other instead of the hosts. It is a fact that when there are different groups of guests present in the house, it is difficult for the hosts to have a proper chat with each of them.

5.4   The modification of traditional food in Mekong Delta homestays

This section investigates the difference between the ways local people eat at home and how they serve their guests in homestays. The food chosen for the daily meal in the Mekong Delta and table settings at home are discussed first, then the food preparation and serving are examined.

5.4.1   Traditional local food

Dating back to the 19th century, the first immigrants in the Mekong Delta learnt how to utilize the resources available for survival. Agricultural land was opened up by new settlers who also brought wet rice techniques from their homeland to the Mekong Delta. Hence, like other regions of Vietnam, the main source of food for the Mekong Delta inhabitants is rice. Today, the typical feature that embodies delta cuisine are blends of fish and water vegetables, such as grilled snakehead fish wrapped in lotus leaf, grilled snakehead fish covered in mud, and catfish with sesban flowers. At present, the local people still often use food that is available in their living environment. In addition, they grow vegetables or raise chickens or fish for home consumption.

Food in homestays is provided in two meals including dinner and breakfast which is included in the original price. For dinner in homestays, rice is often served as the main dish. Fish is also served and two typical dishes are fried elephant ear fish and steamed "diêu hồng" fish (red fish).

Furthermore in order to cope with the hot weather, Mekong Delta people often prefer liquid food. One of the popular foods is "hủ tiếu" which is a kind of noodle dish traditionally from Chaozhou and Fujian in China. This is a rice noodle cooked with bean sprouts, chives, pork, and shrimp. Hủ tiếu is a favourite breakfast for local people. However, it is not served as breakfast in homestays. According to the explanation of homestays owners, though traditional breakfast is offered, tourists do not like it. The suggestion from travel agents for breakfast in homestays is "continental breakfast" which comprises bread and fried eggs.

Another type of liquid food is "lẩu" (hot pot) which also originated from China. In the Mekong Delta, hot pots are cooked with local fish and various local vegetables which are often wild plants that grow naturally and are readily available. Hot pot is also a favourite dish for main meals such as lunch or dinner. However, hot pot is ordered mostly by domestic tourists and can often be found in restaurants more than in homestays. Lunch or dinner in homestays is normally the same set menu. Tourists normally have breakfast and dinner in homestays. Lunch is excluded from the price. Tourists can order lunch at extra cost. Tourists who buy boat tours often have lunch during the journey in other local areas.

In addition, as aquatic food sources are abundant, the fish caught is not usually used up. Due to hot weather all year round, stockpiling food by drying is very convenient. It can be dried at an earlier stage on the boat, then brought to the mainland to continue to dry completely in order to preserve it. Dried food is used as a reserve in case of crop failure, or poor fishing conditions due to bad weather, or for commercial use. There are many types of dried food, the most popular of which are dried shrimp and dried fish ("mắm"). This type of food originated from the Khmer (Cambodian) people who transferred their tastes to the Vietnamese during the eighteenth century when they joined large numbers of North Vietnamese people who settled in

the South (Lien, 2016). The fish are processed then salted, dried and stored in jars for up to four months. Raw fish, after being fermented, can be directly eaten with rice. This dish is very popular in the Mekong Delta. Nowadays, people who live in urban areas tend to use fresh meat in their daily meals. Gradually, dried food has become a specialty of the rural areas. They are packaged as tourism products which are sold to urban tourists to take home for use or as presents for their friends and family.

Unlike Western meals which are divided into separate courses like appetizer, main entrée and dessert, Vietnamese meals are typically served all at once and shared. Each family member has his or her own rice bowl and utensils (normally a pair of chopsticks for adults or a spoon for children). For stir-fried dishes and rice, they would use chopsticks, for soup dishes, there will be a soup spoon put in the soup bowl for shared use. All dishes except individual bowls of rice are communal and are shared in the middle of the table. The typical style of having meals is sharing every dish, even the dipping sauce. The dipping sauce which is a popular fish sauce, is placed in a small bowl and put in the middle of the table so that every family member can use it. The rice pot is put at the end of the table. It is also customary for the younger diners to wait for the elders to eat first and the women sit right next to the rice pot to serve rice for other people.

When eating, Vietnamese people sit on the floor on mats or around a table with chairs. Dishes are often set out on a table and people help themselves. Food is placed on rice in a bowl. Soup is often eaten last to wash down the meal. Many people use a toothpick to clean their teeth when they finish eating. Vietnamese people also pick up food for each other as an action of care and hospitality. Tea (strong, green tea) is the most common drink in Vietnam. Tea is normally served after every meal. While tea is the drink of choice for most Vietnamese people,

some prefer coffee (pure black coffee or mixed with condensed milk). It can be served hot or cold, depending on preference. For most Vietnamese people, the family meal is important as family members gather together. Dinner is seen as the most important meal of the day. It is the time that the family members share what they have done during the day.

5.4.2   The homestay meals

In terms of expressing hospitality, food is an important factor and a marker of hospitality. The way food was selected, prepared and served reflects the hospitality of the hosts towards their guests. Food and drinks offered in the Mekong Delta homestays are typical examples of how the local people are modifying their traditional food and show their paying attention to the details of the food offering to tourists. In the past, the hospitableness of the hosts was praised when they treat a guest with food rather than any judgements about the food. Now food is not simply served as an ethical treatment of strangers, in some circumstances, the food preparation reflects the aesthetic of the hosts in making food more attractive and tasty towards their guests.

In this section, I briefly describe what occurs in a homestay and how the food is prepared and served. In the morning, the breakfast is normally served at around 6.30 am. However, it can be changed to suit a guest's timetable. Breakfast in homestays are more Western in style and normally include bread (baguette) with fried egg or omelette, strawberry jam, soft cheese, and one type of local fruits. This breakfast is absolutely not traditionally Vietnamese as dairy products have never previously been part of the Vietnamese breakfast. Lien (2016) states that Vietnamese cuisine is a mixture of French and Vietnamese dishes. An abundance of French products such as milk, butter, cheese, coffee, and chocolate were imported to Vietnam during the French colonial occupation which left an impression on the Vietnamese who had not been exposed to such alien delights before. The baguette is considered as the most cherished legacy

of the French in Vietnamese cuisine (Peters, 2011). However, in homestays this breakfast has been introduced for tourists instead of a local one. The drinks in homestays are not included in the price, drinks are sold separately depending on how much the guests use. In homestays, there is a red Coca-Cola fridge usually put in the dining area or in the kitchen. The guests can choose what they want to drink. There are some types of beers, soft drinks and water. Tourists write their names and what they drank on a sheet of paper put on a table next to the fridge or hanging on the wall. The price will be calculated and paid for when the guests check out.

The Mekong Delta homestays set a continental breakfast for their guests as this was recommended by travel companies who organized a standard menu for most foreign tourists. The hosts just follow the requests of the tourism agents. Some other hosts explained to me that traditional food used for breakfast by local people such as rice noodles did not always satisfy the foreign tourists' appetite.

Traditionally, dinner is always the most important meal and contains more food than the others. In homestays, dinner is often served at about seven pm. Before dinner time, tourists can attend some cooking activities with the hosts if they want. For instance, the hosts show their guests how to make spring rolls, Vietnamese pancake and salad. Homestays call it "cooking class". The tourists gather with the hosts around a table in the kitchen, watch the hosts do some samples and they copy. The guests can also fry the rolls that they have just made. Then they move outside to the dining area, ready to be served. The homeowners and their family members prepare the food in the kitchen and serve the food in order. Normally the soup is served first. In this sense, the order of eating food is altered. As mentioned earlier, traditionally, local people start the meal with rice and meat or fish. Then they have soup at the end of the meal. However,

soup is served at the beginning of the meal in homestays as the homeowner explained to me that it better matches the eating habits of international tourists.

In addition, local hosts are transforming traditional foods into different dishes. For instance, spring rolls are seen as an indispensable dish on the menu for tourists in homestays. However, staying in some homestays, I experienced differences in this special traditional dish. It varied from the cover of the rolls to the ingredients inside. Rice paper is traditionally used as the cover. However, I could see homestay owners using different types of cover which then makes the appearance different. In addition, the traditional ingredients were also replaced by various components. Traditionally, the main ingredient of fried spring roll is minced pork. However, in Mekong Delta homestays, there was a substantial change from the original version. The minced pork disappeared and taro (a starchy vegetable) was being used as a substitution which drastically affected the taste. One explanation for this is that taro is cheaper than meat and can be kept fresh for a longer time in hot weather. It should be noted here that it is not a habit of local people to store meat in the freezer. Refrigeration is a relatively new concept in the Mekong, so even though most homestays have fridges and freezers the locals still get their food fresh from the market rather than using the fridge/freezer as storage. The freezers are mostly used for ice. Speaking with French tourists, I learned that the majority of them only wanted to eat vegetables and fish as they did not consider the meat to be fresh.

However, sometimes this does not satisfy tourists as one tourist who tried the roll in a local restaurant commented: "The rolls were terrible. They were filled with the local equivalent of a potato puree". It would be different if the original food had been kept and cooked in the same way. I have added this dish to my study as spring rolls are considered a popular and a special dish of Vietnamese people for international tourists. However, in reality, spring rolls are not a

traditional food of the Mekong Delta people though it is made in every local homestays in this region. The traditional Vietnamese spring roll is a dish from the North.

Figure 5-12 A sailing man carved from papaya on a cucumber boat decorated in

a spring roll dish

(photo taken by the author)

One more thing that should be noted here is the decoration of the food (Figure 5-12). Traditionally, the food of the Mekong Delta people is very basic without paying attention to the aesthetic of the food. However, when basic homestays change to a more commercial homestay, there is competitiveness between local businesses. Homeowners wanted to make their service different and noticeable to other local homestays. Talking about food ornamentation, a Ba Linh homestay owner said: "I am the first person to create these decorations. If you see a picture of the food with those decorations somewhere, you would recognize that they belong to our homestay".

Taking elephant-ear fish as an example, in the Mekong Delta, this is a typical dish. The popular way of decorating this dish is the fish is put bolt upright on a bed of greens with flourishes of carrots shaped as water flowers. Many tourists find this impressive and it is easy to find the picture of elephant-ear fish in many tourists' blogs. The thing is that is actually not the local traditional way of cooking and decorating. Talking about how local people adjust traditional styles of cooking and presenting food, one former manager of a Cuu Long tourism company in Vinh Long province claimed "We sent tourists to stay in a local house and the homeowner said he did not have any experience of hosting. You know, initially the farmers at that time had no idea about cooking and serving. They did not know how to fry a fish properly. We sent the cook from our company there to help them prepare the food. Gradually, we taught them how to cook by themselves. We also organised training courses for homestay homeowners. They learnt how to serve the food to tourists". The local authorities perceive that the Mekong Delta people are exceptionally hospitable, though they are not skillful. Hence, they needed training on hospitality. As Lashley (2000) states, being hospitable does not necessary mean being a good host if people judge a host by his skills.

As mentioned in chapter 3 about the hospitality of the local people, a distinctive feature of Mekong Delta people is the drinking culture. It is common and can be called a custom that people are sociable, chatting, sharing and expressing their intimacy through drinking. The food that they eat for drinks is very basic, maybe just some fruits in the garden. The local people can sit with their guests and chat from early morning to night. Some homestays owners simulate this reception by inviting guest to drink wine, for example, longan wine in Ba Linh homestay, and cinnamon wine in Ut Trinh homestay. During the dinner at the Ba Linh homestay, Mr Trong, the homestay owner explained that the tradition of southwestern is welcoming guests with tea, and offer the guests some wine during the meal. He said that the host should drink

with the guests but no one in his house can drink alcohol. He held a glass of wine and went to the table to invite tourists. I noticed that homestay owners avoid to drink or use water instead, hence the wine offering by host family during dinner was just an imitation of a custom. The hosts explained that though they are serving tourists at home, it was also a job, hence they could not get drunk during work. All tourists at the table try the strong local wine, but the host did not drink. So the intimacy from having a drink between hosts and guests does not exist in homestays.

It could be said that changes in the way of hosting tourists in the Mekong Delta homestays, to some extent, involve a contribution from local authorities. The interrelationship of local authorities and travel agencies along with local people's businesses is discussed in the next section.

5.5 Stakeholders collaboration in homestay business settings

This section examines the roles of stakeholders that shape homestay business in the Mekong Delta. The establishment of homestay business in the Mekong Delta is discussed first, then the involvement of key stakeholders such as local authorities, and travel agencies is examined.

5.5.1 Stakeholders' involvement in the establishment of homestay business in the Mekong Delta

In the Mekong Delta, there are three main factors that drastically affect the development of the homestay business. This includes the home owners, local authorities, and travel agencies. Home owners were desperate to capitalize on the tourists' need for accommodation. The local authorities wanted to boost tourism and the local economy. While travel agencies wanted to offer authentic style accommodation as part of their packages.

In the beginning, homestays stemmed from the needs of backpackers, who wanted to stay in people's homes to experience the local people's lives rather than in hotels with full amenities. Some homestays in the Mekong Delta were established with financial assistance from international tourists. For instance, during my stay I was told by Mr Thai, the owner of Hong Thai homestay that in 2012, that they received financial aid from a Swiss couple to build more rooms for tourist rental.

> The Swiss tourists gave me 2,000 USD for the construction. When they came back for another visit, I returned the money to them but they refused to take it back. To show them my thanks, I offered them a free stay and took them for tours around the Mekong Delta. I treated them like family members and told them that they can come to Vietnam at any time and my house is their second home.

Another homestay was set up due to an accidental interaction with foreign tourists. Mr Muoi No, the Nhon Thanh homestay owner told how after assisting two cycling tourists who had crashed down in the canal near his house, he had taken them home so they could clean up and have a rest. The tourists gave him some money but he refused as he just wanted to offer his hospitality. Before leaving, the tourists took some photos with him, and showed their gratitude by saying that they would put the images taken with him to social networks and tell their friends about his house and its location. After this encounter, Mr Muoi No was interested in opening his door to international tourists.

Apart from reasons such as an increased income for families, and increased knowledge and understanding gained from meeting people from different cultural backgrounds, many households in the Mekong Delta participate in the homestay business because of the local government launching programs (Nguyen, 2013). In particular, the local government has a

considerable influence in mobilizing people to participate in the tourism business by improving local infrastructure. In reality, many families are unable to participate due to lack of facilities to cater for tourists, a lack of finance and human resources as well as necessary professional skills.

Though the establishment of the first homestays was not triggered by the government policy, the development of homestay tourism was considered later a part of community-based tourist development in Vietnam. The Vietnamese government is committed to developing the tourism industry and sustaining it far into the future. Since 2010, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations, the Vietnamese government has started tourism projects to enhance the benefits for local communities. A major project with the support of JICA (Japan International Corporation Agency) was launched in 2010 to last until 2020 in three regions of Vietnam in order to bring benefits to the community, to improve the lives of rural people and of minority ethnic groups in remote areas. As part of the strategy for Vietnam's future tourist development, the Vietnamese government "aims to foster the cultural values associated with the conservation of cultural value, develop cultural tourism products and to attract tourists, especially foreign tourists, creating a mechanism for local people to participate in tourism".[7]

However, in reality, the implementation of the government policy in local communities has faced many difficulties. As the government aimed to develop the tourism industry into a leading economic sector, provincial authorities started to propose specific tourism development strategies. As a result, the local authorities went from door to door to households in their district to mobilise people to participate in tourism. One homestay owner said:

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[7] Vietnam Government Portal, 2011, Strategy on Viet Nam's tourism development until 2020, vision to 2030, http://www.chinhphu.vn/portal/page/portal/English/strategies/strategiesdetails?categoryId=30&articleId=10051 267, accessed: 10 January 2016 .

Municipal authorities came to my house and talked about the tourism business. Before participating in tourism, I was a gardener and I had no idea about business. However, the authorities said that they would support the infrastructure, building roads and renovating the boat dock to make it convenient for tourist boats to anchor. We also invest some money to alter my current house to welcome guests.

In addition, the travel companies also actively looked for destinations for tourists. They also came to households, which already participated in tourism or had not been in this business before, to negotiate about a business relationship with the home owners. If a deal is reached, a contract is signed between the home owners and the travel agents who undertake to send guests to these homestays. By means of this collaboration, the companies have reliable places where they can send their clients and the homestays can earn money from having a guaranteed source of income. Such negotiations as these have been taking place in many locations in the Mekong Delta. The travel agents also gave advice on homestay construction. From a discussion with Bay Thoi homestay, I found out that though the reception house has a traditional look, it had been built later alongside the main house as suggested by the travel agency. The owner said that:

We opened the business in 2005, at the same time as Ut Trinh homestay (another homestay in An Binh island). When Ut Trinh opened her own travel agency, she had bookings from tourists and she suggested to me that I build this house (the reception area) to host the guests.

There is an interrelationship among the three key stakeholders: homestay owners, local authorities and travel agencies. Among homestays, there is a competitiveness but also a cooperation in sharing tourist bookings. Homestays and travel agencies enjoy a close

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relationship in the sense that homestays are responsible for hosting and the travel agencies promote the tours, receive the bookings and send the tourists to homestays. The local authorities have some influences in terms of regulations and guidance on the homestay operation.

5.5.2 Stakeholders' point of views on homestay regulations

There is consensus among scholars and practitioners that planning and marketing of community-structured destinations requires a cooperative approach among the three main different parties including homestay owners, travel agencies and local government. However, in each region, there are different ways of collaborating. In the Mekong Delta, although homestay owners are independent, the travel agencies and local authorities have a large involvement in decisions relating to the homestay business settings including the setting up of new homestay businesses, homestays design, menus offered to tourists, and ways of hosting and catering.

Most homestays are built with the owners' funding. The owners also design the house and decorate the interior space depending on their available financial resources. However, homestay construction is restricted by the regulations set out in Vietnam Tourism Law. Accordingly, homestay homeowners must comply with the standards issued by Hotel Department, Vietnam National Administration of Tourism. These standards are consistent with the common standards for ASEAN countries, including nine criteria, namely the host, lodging, activities, management, location, hygiene and cleanliness, safety and security, marketing and sustainable development principles (VNAT, 2014a).

Regarding regulations, I could see that the homestay owners have radically different views to those of local authorities. The homestays owners state that the local authorities always come

and check their homestays business once a year. They could be fined if they are not following the homestay regulations. There is a difficulty in retaining the houses in a traditional manner and keeping them within the law. They feel that the rooms which correspond to the homestay regulations become more like hotel rooms rather than a room in a local home. For instance, the standards for the bedroom define the size and facilities, and a maximum of four of the total number of bedrooms which are not being used by any member of the homestay providers must be allocated to homestay guests. Additionally all the bedrooms must be separate and have locks installed. This conflicts with the traditional way of living as the sleeping areas are normally shared and open. In addition, it is usual for the sleeping areas to be unconnected with the main house which means that the layout of the interior space of the house is changed by homestay regulations.

There is also disagreement regarding the use of "traditional" identity as a tourist attraction and the hygiene and cleanliness criteria of the homestays. The Ba Linh homestay owner claims that:

> I deliberately kept the kitchen floor as it originally was because it is a dragon scale earth floor which is a typical of Mekong Delta house and traditionally means it is a sign of good luck for the family. However, the environmentalist came for annual check and said it should be removed to be more hygienic. I still keep it as it is, a unique characteristic of our homestay (nowadays local people are not keeping the earth floors but replace them with tiled floors). It is also the suggestion from the travel agency to keep it for tourists to see.

Regarding the correlation of travel agency and the homestay business, as mentioned earlier, the homestays are becoming a frequent destination chosen by the travel agents. In this way, the

travel agents send out the requirement and information about tourists to the hosts. Following that, the menus are set in advance for the tourists by the agencies and sent to the homestays before the arrival of the guests. Then, the family prepares the food as it is instructed by the travel agency. As a result, tourists do not have the opportunity to change the menu when they stay in homestays. The food is prepared in advance by the hosts in the correct amount, and the markets are not always available and convenient. It is impossible for the hosts to change the menu if the guests ask. For the guests who book to stay more than one night, the hosts change the dinner menu for the second night, while breakfast is always the same regardless of the guests' length of stay. In this way, the tourist holiday experiences, to some extent, are controlled by a programme of leisure experiences.

To control the homestay business, besides the regulations set out for homestay households, the local government also organises training classes for the hosts. While the local authorities are trying to make efforts to control the tourism business, there is not much agreement between the government and the local homestay owners. Abdullah et al. (2014) also state that in some countries characterized by centralized and top-down bureaucratic political structures, it is difficult for the community to participate.

During my stay in field work, I obtained divergent information from the local authorities and the homestay owners. The local authorities said that it is their responsibility to help local people who have little knowledge about tourism business to run better businesses. In addition, the local government aims to encourage the pride of the local ethnic background and care for the survival of the vernacular tradition. The training courses are designed with the aims of changing local attitudes and behaviour and to pass on knowledge to those in the tourism industry. These courses concentrate on interpersonal communication techniques and customer service skills.

The training program aims to enhance the level of service and hospitality provided to the visitor and increase the awareness of the importance of tourism to the province and the role the local people in making tourism work at the local level. Besides training courses, the Department of Tourism also arranges workshops on homestay business. The participants include homestay owners, hoteliers, guesthouse operators, restaurant managers, travel agents, tour operators, and tour guides. However, conversations with homestay owners gave me negative feedback regarding the support from the local authorities. Regarding the training courses provided by the local authorities, one homestay owner commented that:

> We are the first household who opened homestay business in the year 2001. We attended some courses however the people who trained us do not understand about homestays. They did not provide any guidance or training skills. While I asked them about how to run a homestay, they did not give us a proper answer and they even asked us what a homestay is. Thus, we have to learn how to do it. The trainers also use the standards of a hotel to apply to homestay business and when they come to check our homestay, they follow those standards. While, in my opinion, the tourists prefer the traditional ways of living as long as it is tidy and clean. However, it is an obligation to follow the homestay rules.

Moreover, some homestay owners refused to attend the workshops, or join in the tourism business associations as they did not see the benefit of being a member. It is more often the case that the homeowners believe the government hinders rather than helps with their business.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter presents the Mekong Delta homestays as an example of the transition of traditions in the contemporary context. There has been significant conversion of traditional homes of the local people to the homestays as tourist accommodation. Along with the urbanisation and modernisation trends, the presence of tourism and tourists have had an effect on how the local people structure their lives. As the numbers of tourists increase and homestay owners expand to satisfy demand, the reality of the homestay is no longer tourists staying in the home of a local family but rather more like a small backpacking hostel or guest house. In addition, there has been a loss of distinctiveness between places, so that the homestays begin to resemble each other in terms of the settings of a homestay and what they offer. According to Meethan et al. (2006), it is possible to view such an outcome as the 'encoding' of dominant value systems or the production of the 'tourist gaze'. Growing homestays in the Mekong Delta constitutes an example of the manufactured or "invented" cultural traditions. Though local people tend to retain the traditional architecture of their homes, it cannot be denied that the layout of the houses has significantly altered. The important point here is not only about the physical patterns or spatial development of particular local homestays, but the ways in which these spatial patterns interrelate with socio-cultural values and perceptions. In the case of the Mekong Delta, it is the homestay owners and travel agencies dictating homestay environment that is based mostly on their own perception of what the tourists want to experience, rather than demands from the tourists themselves. I would argue that the creation of more living space along with the production of spatial representations in the Mekong Delta homestays are creating new patterns of visitors' experience. This chapter also highlights the collaboration between stakeholders who participate in the tourist industry including home owners, travel agencies and local authorities. In response to the local regulations as well as the suggestions of tourism

professionals, the homestays are modernized to meet the common standards. Tourism is no longer a matter of "personal choice characteristics of Western individualism" (Williams, 2004, p. 93). It is also a matter of personal choice of the local hosts which shapes the tourist experiences. These choices again are restricted by the control of other stakeholders and by the regulations on the homestay business and the bond with travel agents, as they control the tourist reservations.

The representation and performance of hospitality in the homestays in the Mekong Delta are not easily explained by the contemporary stakeholder relationship framework (Aas et al., 2005; Simpson, 2001; Waligo et al., 2013). The characteristics of a transition economy in which the role of the state largely influences the activities of organisations and individual making tourism activities in Vietnam in general and the Mekong Delta, in particular, is a complex phenomenon. In the Mekong Delta, hospitality is chosen to be promoted by the policy-makers and it is the premise of the commercialisation of hospitality in the tourism context. Investigations of local communities' perception of tourism development in previous studies has mainly focused on one key stakeholder: the residents of a tourist destination. There has been little discussion of local communities as a network of stakeholders who are directly and indirectly involved in tourism development. Interviews with local authorities and travel agents in the Mekong Delta provided a broader picture of the perception and negotiation of local communities on tourism development. The local people show their resistance towards legislative documents applied for homestays however, the conformity with the law was an assurance for their standard of hospitality.

CHAPTER 6: THE REPRESENTATION AND COMMODIFICATION OF HOSPITALITY IN THE MEKONG DELTA TOURISM CONTEXT

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter 5, I have analysed how hospitality is becoming a tangible heritage. It is expressed through physical settings and services offered in local homestays. In this chapter, I focus on the representation and commodification of local traditions of hospitality and how this is being practised, performed and received as a kind of intangible heritage. I have highlighted in the previous chapter that traditional homes have been transformed to a more welcoming home to tourists. Local homestays are an example of creating and inventing tradition in which the hosts have created a sense of hospitality through physical settings as well as the food offered. However, as I mentioned in the introduction of Chapter 5, the concept of hospitality is also embedded in intangible elements, which are more complicated to define and elaborate. The aim of this chapter is to study the intangible aspects of Mekong Delta hospitality practices in the tourism context. The chapter starts from the ways in which Mekong Delta hospitality is selected to be promoted as a tourist product. This is a result of an authorised heritage discourse on defining attractive and unique tourism products for the region. Hospitality is represented in tourism websites and brochures. Travel agents also package hospitality in their tour programs through various itineraries. In the second section, I examine different contact zones to elaborate the dynamic of changing hosts and guest interactions. The competition amongst homestay businesses under the pressure of tourism development is also discussed. The performance of hospitality in homestays is further clarified in the last section. Through the presentation of

hospitality, hosts and guests' perceptions and attitudes toward each other are analysed. In addition, I also discuss the influence of tour guides as a mediator in hospitality offerings.

6.2   Representations of hospitality

This section analyses how hospitality in the Mekong Delta is represented in tourism documents. Hospitality is represented in tourism websites though symbols of smiles, images and narratives of the friendly, honest and hospitable local people. Hospitality is also packaged through the introduction of homestays as a type of tourism. Following on from the analysis of these representations, the consumption of hospitality is also discussed.

6.2.1   The affirmation of hospitality as a 'tourism product'

To the perceptions of the local people, tradition is also a 'hardly defined' concept. When asked if they could define their tradition, the Mekong Delta people often associate it with natural landscapes, some of them refer to craft villages and local festivals. Other assume that practices of minority ethnic groups such as Khmer and Cham are more traditional than those of majority ethnic groups such as Kinh or Viet people. Recently, the government has also promoted daily lifestyles and hospitable characteristics of local people as a traditional heritage. As highlighted in Chapter 3, compared to other regions in Vietnam, the number of tourists and the income from tourism is lower in the Mekong Delta region. Efforts have been made by the local government in order to boost tourism revenues and attract more tourists. The general policy of promoting tourism in Vietnam was launched by the government in 2001 (Vietnam Tourism master plan, 2001). In this, due to the natural conditions, the first type of tourism to be prioritized for development in the Mekong Delta is ecotourism. Recently, the tourism strategy has been updated for the period from 2010 to 2020 and more long term into 2030, in which the tourism industry is intended to be a key sector which can attract more tourists as well as

enhance revenue. In the updated strategy, the promotion of tourism has also been given more attention than before. The promotion of tourism in various media aims to raise the awareness of those who participate in the supply chain of tourism services and the community; to create professional tourism providers and hospitable communities.

For the Mekong Delta, in 2010, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism approved the project to develop the tourism industry in the region up to the year 2020. Also, in the year 2014, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism launched the task of developing the project "Master Plan for Tourism Development in the Mekong Delta to 2030" (IDTR, 2016). In those projects, Mekong Delta tourism is considered to have a potential for development. Examining the region's potential and advantages, the local government gave priority to developing specific tourist products of the Mekong Delta, such as experiencing life on the river, ecological tourism, and tours to cultural heritage sites. Here, the engagements between tourists and local people are highlighted. The tradition of hospitality has been more focused. Based on the long-term tourism development plan, the government also developed long-term communication plans for the tourism industry. The Mekong Delta is stated to be able to attract tourists by its differentiation. The difference is the local community who are generous, sincere, honest and hospitable (Tri, 2011).

In highlighting the hospitability of the local delta people, information gathered from the official tourism website also defines hospitality as a tourism product. For example, in the website of Vietnam National Tourism Association, the 'affable, hospitable, helpful and generous' characteristics of the Southern people were mentioned as an attractive tourism product (Phan, 2010b). According to Mr Nguyen Cong Hoan, Vice general director of Hanoi Redtours Tourism Company, tourism advertisements in the media aims to promote tourism products, drive consumption and regulate the behaviour of stakeholders. The message of the Mekong

Delta tradition of hospitality in various means of communication, also directs the tourism motivation of domestic travellers from the other regions. In addition, international travelers, who are considered to be more likely to be exposed to novelties and differences would become potential buyers of this intangible tourism product.

Mr Hoan also commented on the purposes of tourism marketing:

> The media should focus on the promotion of the attraction of the destination, raising the awareness of tourism service suppliers and the local people in tourism destinations in order to create professional tourism personnel and a friendly and hospitable community that satisfy tourists.

This comment reveals that according to the local authorities, a "hospitable community" is formed through increasing the awareness of the local people of their roles in tourism development. Moreover, Mr Hoan's opinion shows that the local government differentiated local tradition of hospitality from the hospitality that could be employed in tourism industry. In other words, the policy of the government is to adjust the tradition of hospitality into a saleable product which satisfies the growing and rapidly changing demands of tourists. This is the premise for the commodification of the tradition of hospitality.

To assist with place promotion, local authorities adopt marketing strategies that promote the local area as unique places and advertise the image of the Mekong Delta at international exhibitions as part of tourism development projects.

There are difficulties in implementing government policies in each location and business household. Mr. Luu Hoang Minh, director of Vinh Long Tourism Information and Promotion center, shared the difficulty of calling for the participation of local homestays in the area:

> We called the homestays to join in a promotional project and exhibition but they did not want to participate. We organised overseas exhibitions to find new customers and

other business partners. Some homestays already have traditional customers and they did not want to participate. However, if they do not change their products/service, they will lose their clients.

Homestay households advertise their products on their own websites. Whereas local governments want to engage in tourism businesses in order to achieve the ultimate goal of the number of tourists and the revenue as targeted. Therefore, local authorities organised training courses for those who work in restaurants and hotels. Furthermore, they have directed training to homestay owners. However, as stated in Chapter 5, homestay owners found that they are bound by the laws set forth for homestay business, while they want to take the initiative in doing business in their own way. At present, some homestays cooperate with the government and participate in training courses, others argue that participation brings no benefit for them. That is why the process of welcoming guests, and the way of serving visitors in local homestays are varied depending on the approach and knowledge of each owner and what they may have learned from the training that they attended.

Tourism professionals and local authorities play influential roles in producing and authorizing particular images of the Mekong Delta. According to Mr Luu Hoang Minh, director of Vinh Long tourism information and promotion center, compared to other regions in Vietnam, the natural landscapes of Mekong Delta are not appealing for sightseeing. Hence, the Mekong Delta authorities attempted to capitalise on the intangible heritage, the ways people live and the hospitality among its people. His comment was the result of the professional discourses directing the selection process of the uniqueness of the Mekong Delta.

Travel brochures are a tool for travel agents in shaping the image of a destination. Images presented on travel brochures provide a "mental grid" for tourists to filter their pre-departure perceptions (Adams, 1984, p. 469). Travel agents might select any image to be a representative

image of the destination, in the case of the Mekong Delta, hospitality as an intangible heritage was chosen to be advertised.

6.2.2 Text, image and narratives

The previous section represents a discourse on tourism that is external to the potential tourists and may be seen to represent the social and cultural ideological embedding of tourism as a phenomenon within contemporary marketing practices. In this part, I examine in more detail how hospitality is codified. In general, the Mekong Delta is advertised as the place where tourists can meet hospitable and friendly people.

According to Tresidder (2010) marketing texts initiate a communication relationship with the reader, a set of touristic signs and images that form consensus constructs that signpost the tourism experience. "Smiles" are also mentioned as a sign of hospitality. In the Mekong Delta travel websites, the smile is privileged to advertise the destination and be mentioned as a presence of hospitality. It could be a farmer smiling and showing a bunch of local fruits (Figure 6.1) or a local merchant offering some local products in a local market with a smile, or the photos of the children giving tourists a big smile. It creates the idea that tourists could meet happy and friendly people in every corner of the delta. It also creates the feeling of safety and friendliness.

The hospitality of the local people was emphasised as the reason why people are inspired to come and are impressed when they visit the area (Mcfarlane, 2015). Lonely Planet, the world's largest travel guide book publisher highlights the "true taste of rural hospitality" that the tourists could experience when visiting the Mekong Delta.[8] In a Mekong Travel Company

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[8] Lonely planet, http://www.lonelyplanet.com/vietnam/mekong-delta, accessed: 2 September 2016.

brochure, An Binh island is described as an island with an abundance of local fruits where tourists will be welcomed by friendly smiles from local farmers.[9]

Figure 6-1 Picture of a local farmer raising a bunch of rambutan in his garden posted in Tien Giang tourism website

Source: http://meodulich.info/mien-tay/du-lich-tien-giang/tho-giang-tay-chao-don-ban-voi-nhung-dieu-sieu-bat-ngo

Figure 6-1 exemplifies a typical touristic presentation. Ordinary local residents are no longer wearing traditional costume as shown in the picture. In boat tours, local guides wear traditional costumes to give a feeling of the traditional culture to the tourists.

For instance, Vietnamese visitor Tieu Duy posted the following on Ivivu, a travel guide blog about the Mekong Delta and his impressions of the friendliness of the local people:

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[9] On a boat tour offered by Ut Trinh homestay (the homestay owner work in the Mekong Travel company), the boatman gave me a small brochure (6 pages) which includes brief information about the Mekong Delta, Vinh Long province, with a number of photos of rice fields, fruit gardens, floating markets and homestays.

No matter where you are from, how good or bad you are, you are always welcomed as relatives. I went with my friends to the mangrove forest, on the way we stopped at a local bridge and took some pictures. Then I met a lady who is on the way home from the market. When she saw us, she asked if we are on vacation and invited us to her home and offered us a dinner. On another occasion, I got lost when I tried to find my friend's home, I stopped at a house where some men were having drinks, I asked the way and they said: "Come on in, have a drink, then we will show you the way" (Tieu Duy, 2017).

Similar narratives are posted in tourism forums which trigger the wish to experience the same things when visiting the Mekong Delta.

The friendliness of the local people is also highlighted in Vietfun Travel, a tourism company:

The locals will treat visitors as their relatives living far away coming back home. Tourists might also experience the kindness and friendliness of the local people when asking for directions. And tourists always receive the smiles of the local vendors whether you buy or not (Viet Fun travel, 2014).

Further explanation is addressed here to clarify why the advertisement emphasises the smiles of the local merchants towards their customers. In Vietnam, the first buyer plays a very important role. People use the phrase 'mở hàng' ('opening the shop') to refer to the first buyer. If he/she spends a good amount of money, is happy to buy, and does not bargain too much, the salesman will have good luck all day and is likely to sell a lot of goods. If the first buyers ask for a price, and touch and examine the product but do not buy it, the seller is likely to be very unhappy and might perhaps be rude. This is usually more serious in the North than in the South and causes an anxiety when 'opening the shop'. Hence, domestic tourists are reassured that

traveling in the Southern region that they can ask for the price, and check the goods thoroughly without any problem.

The ways in which the Mekong Delta is promoted shape different ideas and expectations of the Mekong Delta for foreigners and domestic visitors. In particular, for domestic tourists, the hospitality of the Mekong Delta is perceived as inherent. This is one of the motivations for domestic tourists to visit the Mekong Delta. The development of the internet and information technology makes it easier for tourists to find information on different tourist destinations. Tourists may have found guide books unreliable or out of date, hence, they would rather talk to other tourists or find reviews from previous travellers. A story that I often heard from my relatives and friends about the Mekong Delta was that tourists visiting orchards may pick fruits and eat as much as they want. For tourists coming from other regions, this was a sign of the generosity of the delta people that they found interesting. However, with the increase in the number of tourists, orchards are now visited by more tourists, so the fruits picked are no longer free of charge. Tourists can find advertisements such as, 'enjoying fruits until you feel full only with 20,000 Vietnam dongs'(Huynh, 2016).

On a bike tour with Binh, a local guide, I also experienced how economic factors affect the locals' reception of tourists. While cycling through the village, I saw gardens growing rambutan on both sides of the road. However, the gardens were not open for tourists. Binh explained that if tourists came right in the rambutan season, which is normally in June, the fee for visiting and enjoying the fruits is only 30 to 40 thousand Vietnam dongs (one to two US dollars). However, in April the price is high. Hence, the locals prefer to sell to traders to make more profit. They do not welcome tourists. Towards the end of the season, the price of a

rambutan is significantly reduced to only 5,000 Vietnam dongs. Then the local people are more welcoming to visitors.

6.2.3 Tour programs

As mentioned in the previous section, the hospitality in the Mekong Delta is promoted as a tourist attraction in various media and websites. In this section, I examine several Mekong Delta tour programmes to further clarify how hospitality is packaged in tourism products. Tour programmes offered by three tourism companies are analysed, including Viet Fun travel, Viet media travel, and the Mekong Travel company. They are selected as those companies are popular travel agents and the tour programs are easily accessed via internet. As stated in Chapter 3, the popular Mekong Delta tours are mainly one day tours. In addition, a number of tour programs are designed to cover different provinces in several days. In those tour programs, the usual attractions are floating markets, fruit gardens, craft villages, temples, pagodas and other historical and cultural relics. The common features of tour programmes to the Mekong Delta are primarily one day itineraries with several continuous activities. In general, the travel companies often merge the elements of hospitality into their tour programmes. For example, when visiting the fruit gardens, visitors will be warmly welcomed by friendly garden owners, observing the way local people are trading, buying and selling on the river, and discovering the daily lives of people living on the island.

However, for short tours the activities for tourists are consecutive and intense. At present, homestay owners also sell boat tours to their guests. The duration of the boat tours is approximately three hours. The popular visiting points are local factories, craft villages, and floating markets. In general, there are quite a few visiting points which are used by several travel companies. Interactions between tourists and local people are fleeting. In their comments about the tour programmes offered, tourists often said that they were not satisfied as there was

not enough time to explore and understand much about the Mekong Delta. They also suggested that if one wants to study the local area thoroughly, the popular tours being sold by travel companies are not suitable. It is better for individual tourists to discover the area than to travel in package tour groups.

Hospitality is further packaged through the introduction of homestay tourism. Here tourists can also eat and chat with the hosts. The Lonely Planet advertised homestays in the Mekong Delta as a 'home away from home' where tourists could have a unique insight into the day-to-day lives of the local people (Florence & Jealous, 2003). Viet Fun Travel Company also states that tourists stay at a home of local people to become truly indigenous people.[10] After dinner some families exchange stories and songs over bottles of rice wine long into the night. Long chatting and drinking is the custom of local people, however, the following sections will discuss how this tradition has been altered by tourism.

6.3 Host and guest interactions in different contact zones

As mentioned in the literature review chapter, 'contact zone' is a complex concept by which one can elaborate on the dynamic host-guest relationship framework. This section examines three contact zones, including transport hubs such as bus stops, and attractions such as local factories, and homestays. The interaction between hosts and guests in different contact zones shows how hospitality is practiced and received. The bus stop and coach stations are places to witness the hospitality of the homestay proprietors and the commercial hospitality from local drivers. Local factories are regular visiting points in tourism itineraries. The hospitality practices here are purely commercial where local people show their hospitality in order to sell

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[10] Viet Fun travel , Mekong Delta homestay tour program, http://www.vietfuntravel.com.vn/tour-du-lich-homestay-mien-tay.html, accessed: 20 August 2017.

local products. In homestays, the hosts performed their hospitality by providing food, drink, accommodation and entertainments.

6.3.1 Bus stations and rest stops

In this part, I mention rest stops and bus stations where tourists drop in during their journey to the Mekong Delta and have a first interaction with the local people. I use a review article published in the most popular online newspaper of Vietnam <vnexpress.net>. The name of the article is "The Mekong Delta has rip-off restaurants" (Diem, 2013).[11] The article summarises opinions from a number of readers on the case of the rip-off restaurants in Tien Giang province. The authors also gave a few more examples of other tourists being "ripped-off" when they paid the bill after ordering some food and drinks at some rest stops. The author poses a lot of questions, for instance, how could a friendly and honest Western region act like this? Has the Mekong Delta region been infected with the rip-off? The point here is not the content of the article but the reactions of the readers to the article.

There was a debate among domestic tourists on the hospitality of the Mekong Delta people. The article wrote that a tourist from the Northern region exclaimed that he likes Western region people so much that when he read this he was shocked. Another tourist stated that: "In the past, when travelling to the Mekong Delta, if you eat or drink anything you do not have to ask the price in advance as in the North. Today everything has been changed". Conversely, there were also opposite opinions which said there was no evidence to conclude that while it was a restaurant in Tien Giang the owners came from Tien Giang province:

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[11] The title of the article and all comments followed were translated by the author

The Mekong Delta people are never like that, the owners of those restaurants are definitely people from other regions coming to settle here.

(Comment from a reader nicknamed tominhchanh)

This phenomenon only happened in Tien Giang province, which spoilt the image of the entire Mekong Delta.

(Comment from a reader nicknamed chauphan299)

The Mekong Delta could not behave like that and I suggest that if tourists want to get to know the people of the Western region, to try going on a provincial road and try a restaurant or a cafe. If tourists stop in a rest stop along the highway, there are other settlers from other regions who come here to settle for their living.

(Comment from a reader named Ho Nam Nhan)

It is business and people would think of profit, but if tourists come in contact with the ordinary, original Mekong Delta farmers, they will know that they are honest.

(Comment from a reader nickname ligologi)

All of these comments show that hospitality, and honesty are perceived as inherent and a typical characteristic of the Mekong Delta people. Still though, it is difficult for the domestic tourists to accept it, rip-off had happened in the area. However, it does not only stem from the presence of tourism, but also the consequence of the transportation development. As stated in the context chapter, the Mekong Delta used to be a peripheral area until the development of the local economy and transportation system. Instead of commuting to different provinces in the region

by ferries, people now can commute by roads. Rest stops have been established after the construction of highways in the regions.

Another transport-related contact zone is bus and coach stations or ferry stations where the tourists can meet local people for the first time. Tourists who travel to the Mekong Delta from Ho Chi Minh city commonly buy tickets at a travel company. The journey will be from Ho Chi Minh city to different stops in the delta. As the bus follows one main road throughout different provinces, when it arrives at a certain destination, tourists might be dropped off by the side of the road where there is not a formal bus station. The ensuing interactions are often seen as unpleasant, as tourists are often surrounded by a lot of motorbike men who offer them a lift. The state of scrambling for passengers or arguing over the price makes bus stops appear as an unreliable place to many tourists. As soon as the bus approaches the station, motorbike and taxi drivers immediately gather at the door and ask the passengers to use their services. If tourists say the name of the destination, the drivers will offer a price. Here, the engagement between locals and tourists might turn into hard bargaining. In other cases, the driver just simply offers a lift without saying the price. It is sometimes tricky for unfamiliar tourists as they might be ripped off at the end of the journey. To make it more convenient to tourists, some homestays offer a pick-up service. For unfamiliar tourists, the presence of motorbike men who can help them to find a suitable lodging is however, also a rescue. There are several positive comments from TripAdvisor about how they were picked up and driven safely to a homestay by local people without any sign of cheating. A tourist also commented about the availability of the hospitality at Ba Linh homestay:

> We were picked up by motorbike and safely delivered to the homestay with only two hours' notice. Mr. Truong and his family/staff met us with open arms and despite the late hour, treated us to a hearty home-cooked meal of local specialties.[12]

Offering a pick-up service is a way that homestay owners think they can show their caring and hospitality. In certain circumstances, tourists do not have many choices and opt to select one of these drivers. However, it varies in different situations. Sometimes when some of the locals have established a degree of trust, they will manage to sell the tourists other services, such as a boat tour for the following day. The locals might not cheat tourists at the first encounter. However, when tourists already trust them, it would be possible for them to be exploited in the subsequent transactions.

Examining several cases of tourists who did not book homestays in advance and put their trust in the stranger-hosts at ferry stations, it showed that it was not always as bad as some individual guests experienced who were also not familiar with the area, and they benefitted from this informal contact. However some other tourists are sceptical of this and think that the locals try to cheat them.

6.3.2   Local factories, craft villages

Reviews from tourists' inquiries in tourism forums show that several tourists choose to visit the Mekong Delta with limited time available. Packaged tours are preferred as the tourists do not have to spend so much time arranging the trip by themselves. Time limitations mean that they follow a tight itinerary adhering to a commonly prescribed route which often consists of a boat tour and a range of rest stops. These stops are local factories of coconut candies, rice

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[12] TripAdvisor (2014a), review from tourist with TripAdvisor account Evan S, *Extraordinary homestay visit*, https://www.TripAdvisor.co.uk/ShowUserReviews-g469421-d2244761-r245038400-Ba_Linh_Homestay-Vinh_Long_Vinh_Long_Province_Mekong_Delta.html, accessed: 12 June 2017.

paper, bricks, and handicrafts. Observations at those tourist attractions show the poor communication between local providers and tourists due to the brief contact between the two. When arriving at these local factories, tourists are often seated at different tables where they can taste honey tea and local fruits. Tourists who spend their day out in boat tours realize that they are fed a lot of fruits and honey tea during their trip at different visiting points. However, the reason that tourists are sent here is not only to consume free fruits and honey tea, but because the local people wish to sell souvenirs and other local products, such as honey, pollen, and jelly. There are A4 papers containing detailed information about the pollen or jelly products printed in English and Vietnamese put on each table. When tourists are settled at the tables, the local people then bring honey jelly boxes and pollen bags and put them on the table in front of the tourists. Some of the local people introduce these products and give the product information to tourists to read. They also directly offer the products to tourists. For international tourists, they just put the honey products on the table and leave without saying anything. While domestic tourists sometimes bought the honey products, I observed that international tourists were more willing to buy coconut candy, bamboo products, and handmade handicrafts. The hospitality norms are included in the ways local people practiced here, however, their hospitality is not extended to all types of tourists.

A common strategy in entertaining tourists is also to provide some deliberately staged dance or performance as a means of getting to know the host culture. Tourism spaces are created as well as various kinds of activities are offered based on which tourists can "construct a narrative of their wish fulfillment" (Meethan, 2006, p.5). Additionally, Erb (2000, p. 710) claims that "tourism is part of the process of modernization, and globalization, but local actors are agents in this process, and not just the recipients of modernization processes". It was absolutely true when I observed the performance of "đờn ca tài tử" (traditional music) in the Mekong Delta

(Figure 6-2). The performance of traditional music has been completely distorted by the locals. As Bruner (2005a, p. 192) observes, "the natives have to break out of their normal routines to meet the tourists to dance for them, to sell them souvenirs, or to display themselves and their culture for the tourists' gaze and for sale". Samantha, a tourist blogger observed the same when she wrote on her blog[13] that it is not 'traditional' when the singers began singing an English song:

> Next we went to Turtle Island where we sat around some fresh fruit (oh, fruit, how I've missed you), listened to some traditional music (and not so traditional when the singers cutely began singing "If You are Happy and You Know It)."

Samantha was not the only person who experienced that. On a boat trip in Ben Tre, when we got off at a rest stop in Cồn Quy (Turtle Island), I witnessed a very odd performance of "đờn ca tài tử". When I arrived, there were a couple of English tourists sitting at another table behind me, after that a big group of Chinese tourists had arrived. The local performers seemed to be quite sensitive in identifying their customers and providing the products that they considered to be suitable for different travellers. After the local performers sang some Vietnamese songs they started to sing an English song. I saw that the couple of English tourists laughed when they saw that performance, and I myself was very embarrassed as I did not expect that. Then, the local performers continued to sing a Chinese song. The Chinese visitors listened with more accepting attitudes, and after the song ended, they left to continue their tour.

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[13] Samantha, *Inside…A Mekong Delta day trip,* [n.d], https://www.thereshegoesagain.org/mekong-delta-day-trip/, accessed: 30 July 2017.

Figure 6-2 Locals performing "đờn ca tài tử" in Turtle Island, Ben Tre province

(photo taken by the author)

Though tourists can enjoy the performances for free, the performers expect them to pay some money. They asked for tips by placing fake flowers on each table and leave them there while other artists are singing. However, they do not explain why they put the flowers on the table. Tourists can tip the singers by inserting some cash in the middle of the flower. Then, the tourists can leave them at the table, or give the flower back to the singer. Tourists often gave the tips after an explanation by tour guides or fellow tourists who have experienced it before.

As I observed, domestic tourists often requested the singer to sing more. It could be any songs that they wanted to hear and the performers never refused. While, for foreign tourists, they often listen until the singers finish then they left or started exploring the area. It is understandable that the foreigners do not understand the language so they do not ask for anything more. However, the local performers had come up with ways to pamper the

international guests by singing foreign songs. With regard to the service offered to domestic tourists, the local hosts assumed that singing foreign songs will make foreign guests enjoy the performance more. This music performance indicates that the local people are attempting to enrich tourists' experience by adding what they perceived that tourists want to see. A contact zone will be a location where tourist can have something to eat, to see, to listen and to buy.

6.3.3 Tipping: the appreciation of hosts' hospitality or an obligation?

According to Andrews (2000), due to the introduction of financial transactions within the hospitality nexus, it can no longer embody the principles of obligation and reciprocity. Obligation and reciprocity might happen in the cases where no financial transaction takes place. Often when visiting a local's home in the countryside, the hosts pack something for guests to bring home. The parcel often contains the specialty of their hometown, which are typically fruits or some dried food. At homestays, the hosts did not give the guests anything like that. Homestay owners also said that homestay guests do not often choose to give money as a tip. Nevertheless, the reciprocity still exists in certain cases. Tourists gave gifts to the owner in some cases, for example, a French tourist gave the home owner a T-shirt with designs by himself, or a German guest drew a painting of the homeowner as a gift. Vice versa, homeowners will often assist their guests in making contact with the next destination, take them to the train station or bus station, or call the hotel for a reservation. Tourists are often very appreciative of these gestures and they judge it as a very clear expression of the hospitality of the host.

Tipping as reciprocity often occurs in boat tours between tourists and boatmen. Though cultures of tipping are different in different countries, tipping is a means by which customers show gratitude. Alternatively, tipping is perceived as just a kind of obligation. I would like to

take an example of a boat tour that I took in 2013. It was a training course on state management of homestay tourism organized by Centre of professional training (Ministry of Culture Sport and tourism). The course included a sightseeing tour to Tien Giang province, in which we took a boat tour to 'ancient houses' and a tour along the river. The members of the tour included lecturers from universities, officials, and specialists of state management agencies who were in charge of the provincial tourism sector. When we finished the boat tour, the team leader stood up and called on everybody to contribute a small to tip the boatman. He stated that the reason was to support the boatman who had to work hard. The team leader impressed on other passengers the responsibility to share with the poor. For that reason, no one wanted to identify themselves as unsympathetic.

At the present time, stories relating to tipping have changed. Whist I travelled on boat tours, I often heard stories from the boatmen/women. They described the way they received tips from tourists and suggested that if I wish to give them a tip, I should give it before the end of the trip, so that the boat owners could not see it and ask them to share. Conversations with boatmen/women show that they are in a disadvantaged position as they only receive a very small amount of money for each tour from the boat owners (about one US dollar for taking tourists along the canal for one hour). The stories told by boatmen are the same as in my trips in 2013, and throughout the years, the money they receive for sailing a boat tour has not changed. The local people expect that if the tourists heard about their stories, they would give a tip. On another boat tour that I took with a local guide, I saw him pay a tip to the boatman. It was strange to me so that I asked him why he had to give the tip. And he answered that, as he is a free-lance local guide, he gave the tip so the boatmen will show a good attitude to his clients.

6.3.4 Homestays: competition in hospitality offerings

As highlighted in the literature review on the concept of hospitality, the critical part of hospitality is entertaining guests. According to Pohl (2002) understandings of hospitality have been changed from a moral practice of hosting strangers and anyone in need to entertaining family and friends and to the services of hotels and restaurants industry. Lashley (2000) states that the value placed on being hospitable to strangers varies through time and between societies. In contemporary pre-industrial societies, and earlier historical periods in developed Western societies, "the duty to entertain both neighbours and strangers represents more of a moral imperative" (Lashley, 2000, p. 5). Telfer (1996, p. 86) also defines a hospitable person as "someone who entertains often, attentively and out of motives appropriate to hospitality".

As there is a trend of tourists using homestay as an alternative choice instead of typical hotels, local people who used to work as tour guides or boatmen have opened homestay businesses. This generates a highly competitive environment, where the locals attempt to develop strategies by which encounters with tourists can be beneficial to them (Erb, 2000). They hire their neighbours or arrange some relatives to meet visitors in the ferry station. Those people will greet the tourists (frequently backpackers) and accompany them to their homestays.

In addition to competing by offering services to attract tourists from the first meeting point such as at a bus stop or ferry stations, the homestays can compete with each other by offering additional activities to entertain tourists. For example, in order to entertain tourists during the night, Ut Trinh homestay hired a group of local people wearing traditional costumes and performing traditional music. The performance was composed as a short play. They had a man who explained the content of the play in English before the performance. Ut Trinh homestay owner showed her pride by stating that the musical performance offered in her homestays is tailored to have more appeal to tourists than in other destinations. It could be said that

hospitality is a confirmation of host identity. In a study about home-hosted accommodation in New Zealand and Scotland, Tucker and Lynch (2005) claim that the politics of identity of both the host and the guest were identified as highly significant in constructing the homestay product. In the Mekong Delta, different activities are performed not only for the tourists but also as a confirmation of the host. For example, the performance of 'đờn ca tài tử' (local traditional music) performed in Ut Trinh homestay was intended as an added value to her homestay. The owner told me that she invited a group of local performers to her house to perform the music to her guests. The music was composed differently with a story line and the performers made it like a play. Before it was presented to tourists, a man introduced the content of the performance briefly in English so the audience could understand the meaning. This made her homestay service different and unique. The ordinary 'đờn ca tài tử' were presented in tourist destinations are just performed by some local performers wearing 'áo dài' (a traditional Vietnamese national costume which also does not represent this typical type of music) while standing and singing individual songs (Figure 6.2).

The other example of competitive hospitality that I noticed is that there is a tendency for homestay owners to explore and invent new tour routes for the tourists. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the problem of Mekong Delta tourism is the overlap of tourist products and services offered in different provinces. It has been already claimed that there is no need to travel through the Delta to understand the region as the tour programmes offered by different travel agents are similar. Instead of depending on tour programmes designed by travel agents, homestay hosts offered tours which are claimed as unique and more interesting journeys for their guests. Hence, tourists have more chance to engage with local people in less touristic areas. It could be said that locals' awareness of the need for inventing new experiences for tourists has been established.

It is interesting to note that as the result of this awareness, supplementary homestay products were created by the homestay owners. In other words, homestay owners are aiming to design "a more real" homestay. At interviews with Ut Trinh homestay, I was told that her homestay is going to host a student group who would not stay at her homestay. Instead, they would stay at local homes located elsewhere in the village. The students would stay and help to build houses for the poor. In order to do this, Trinh had to prepare a proposal and submit it to the municipal authorities. If the commune approved, they would select a few reliable households that can host about 10 guests. Trinh told me that the local people there do not participate in tourism business and rarely see foreign guests:

> They are really hospitable, for example here if you wanted a coconut you have to pay. But there, they bring a bunch of coconuts for you to drink. Or they can cook a big bunch of sweet potato and tell you to take a rest, and eat before continuing to work. If you want to see the real hospitality, you have to go further inside the villages. Here, homestays are business, and the hospitality is diminished.

Homestay owners are well aware of the depreciation of traditional hospitality in the homestay business. The provision of a type of tourism under the form of pro-poor activities like this would trigger a new trend in homestay tourism.

The development of tourism does not only create tensions between homestay owners but also affects the relationships between them and other local people who do not participate in tourism business. An interview with Ba Linh homestay shows that the relationship among local people has been distorted with the development of tourism. The villagers often help each other on occasions such as house building, wedding parties, and death anniversaries. However, when Ba Linh used his house for tourist rentals, the neighbours were not coming so often. He

explained that the locals felt uncomfortable and did not want to disturb tourists staying inside the house.

Acknowledged in the interviews with local homestays, homestay owners were willing to support each other in the period of business start-up. For instance, an interview with Bay Thoi homestay family shows that this homestay was renewed and rebuilt at the suggestion of Ut Trinh homestay, which is a homestay in the locality. Ut Trinh homestay helped in providing tourists for Bay Thoi homestay. It is a fact that a small scale homestay business is unable to host all tourists at certain times which encouraged them to have connections with others. As Savage et al. (2010) explain, collaboration is carried out to protect the stakeholders' interest. The homestays do not refuse to accept the contract of hosting big groups of customers, in order to get benefits as well as maintaining customer relationships. Over time, the homestays were expanded to overcome the limitation of space in the high season. The expansion of homestays also helps the owners to have more revenue. Along with the expansion of individual homestays, the connection between homestays decreases.

Although homestay is expanding, the number of visitors is unstable and unpredictable. According to Ba Linh homestay owner, his house does not always have guests. There are only a few guests coming in a week, particularly at low season such as June, or in the rainy months (normally from May to October), and unstable weather. For example, salinity due to seawater intrusion and drought in 2015 in the Mekong Delta caused some homestays to be temporarily closed due to polluted water sources, which made it impossible to provide clean water for tourists. In addition, each homestay extends its spaces which results in high competition. Consequently, not only the cooperation between homestays decreases, but also "unfair" competition occurs. Interviews with Nhon Thanh homestay's owner shows that there is "unfair" competition. He told me a story of what happened between his homestay and another

homestay in the local area. A couple of travelers got lost as they arrived at the other homestay and discovered that it was unlike the one they found on their website when they booked. Although the homestay knew Nhon Thanh homestay they did not tell the guests. Moreover, they tried to invite the guests to stay, and offered them food and drink. However, the guests refused to stay and resolutely found the way to his homestay. Finally, with the help of the local police they arrived at his homestay safely. It could be seen that the tourism business altered the local community relationship and how they show their hospitality to each other.

Another issue is that there are similarities in the process of hosting tourists: the activities offered and the procedure of hosting. Before participating in the tourism business, the local people mainly lived on agriculture, such as rice cultivation, fruit growing, and fishing. So mostly homestay owners were originally farmers. Some homestay owners wanted to change the traditional occupation of the family to find more profitable jobs. Through conversation with different homestay owners, I found that the homestay business has operated spontaneously. Homestay owners learn from each other to maintain and improve their services. Ba Linh homestays told me that he participated in homestay training courses organized by local authorities. However, he complained that the course did not work out for him, hence he managed to learn by himself. Some homestay owners say they receive advice and support from travel companies. Other homestay business are developed by learning from other homestays. Mr Trong, Ba Linh homestay's owner said that he had been to Can Tho to supervise the homestay business model there. Although Ba Linh homestay was one of the first homestays in the region, and had experiences of hosting tourists for years, he still wanted to examine homestays in other areas beyond his hometown. His aim was to learn the models of other homestay businesses which he hoped would be useful for his business. Linh, Duyen Que homestay's owner, knowing that I was at Ba Tri homestay and that I have a relationship with

the homestay owners, asked me for a contact and said that she had a plan to examine other homestays in the local area.

6.4 Performance of hospitality in homestays

This section further studies the host and guest interactions in local homestays. As homestays are my main fieldwork locations, I discuss issues relating to homestays in a separate section rather than include them in the previous section of hosts and guests interactions in different contact zones. This section first discusses how language impacts upon hospitality encounters in homestays. The hospitality performance of the hosts and the tourists' expectation and reaction to that performance are examined in the following parts.

6.4.1 Language impact on hospitality encounters

Homestays tend to be short stay destinations. For most tourists, a homestay is just a rest-stop for a longer journey and is seen as a place to sleep. It is rare for tourists to stay more than two nights in a homestay. However, people who stay more than one night will often buy a boat tour to explore the delta the next day. During the time I stayed in different local homestays, I noted that tourists normally arrived at around four to five in the afternoon. Regarding the time that the guests arrived, one homestays owner said that:

> Tourists normally arrive late in the afternoon as they often depart in the morning from Ho Chi Minh city. They might take some tours somewhere else in the Mekong Delta before they come to the homestay. They will have dinner here and sleep here, having breakfast in the next morning, then go.

The price for a one night stay varies among homestays ranging from 16 USD to 22 USD per person. The difference depends on the facilities (with or without air conditioning). During the

time that the guests are staying in homestays, they can borrow bikes from their host for cycling around to explore the surroundings. Most homestay owners have a good store of bikes especially for the tourists to use. Tourists can also attend a cooking class with the homeowners. The bikes and cooking class are all included in the original price.

When the guests arrive at homestays, one family member will be there to welcome them. Normally, the hosts will have been contacted before and know that they will have guests coming to stay. It is rarely the case that the guests just walk in without contacting homestays first. But if it happens, and the homestays have available rooms, the guests are always welcomed. On arrival, the hosts welcome the guests and direct them to their rooms, show them the location of bathroom and toilets (if they are located outside of the house) and normally remind the guests about the free Wi-Fi. Sometimes, the hosts might just let the guests explore the house by themselves. However, there is always an introduction to the facilities of their home, and some activities that the guests may take, for instance, cycling, and cooking class and the dinner time. In some circumstances, the hosts direct the guests to the dining area and offer them a tea or drinks and have a quick chat. This is the time that the guests and hosts start to learn about each other. However, it is not always the case that the hosts are present at the time the guests arrive. There are family members who do this task. They might be the hosts' immediate family members who live in the homestay or relatives that come over to help. In some homestays, the hosts have set up their own small travel agency. As they are now running a business they cannot always be present for the day to day running of their homestay. In these cases, the hosting jobs are delegated to other family members.

I observed that the difference in conversation between hosts and guest can vary greatly between homestays. The language and cultural barriers can make it difficult for hosts and tourists to

communicate well. During my time staying in homestays, I had the chance to speak with many tourists and discovered that there was a definite problem with communication. Some tourists find it hard to seek out homestay family members for help with certain things as they feel they are invading on private family time. It is not like a guest house or hotel where there are staff at all times to help with inquiries. Some tourists felt that they wanted more information from their homestay hosts about local customs, history and activities. I found most hosts were more than willing to provide all the information necessary, however they do not volunteer this unless asked by the tourists.

There are also differences in the ways of greeting guests amongst the local people. In some homestays, the hosts invite guests to their dining table, offer them of some tea and fruits, while in other homestays, hosts are not present at the meeting point. Some of them just appear to say hello and then show the guest to their room. The guests are informed of the time of serving dinner and they discover the area by themselves. While Westerners often have greetings such as "Welcome" or "Make yourself at home", I did not see the landlords saying it to their guests. That does not mean they are not welcome, it is just a difference in the ways of performing hospitality. However, the lack of expressive hospitality through words is still considered by some visitors to signal a lack of hospitality. There is also an issue of language barriers between hosts and guests. While a tourist from Australia commented that he had a true experience when staying with a family who do not speak English, other tourists find that the hosts' capacity for communication by foreign languages (mainly English or French) is an important thing.

As mentioned in chapter 5, I observed the modest communication between the hosts and tourists in homestays. The owners of the homestays are normally middle-aged people who did not study English in school as the younger generations nowadays do. Some of them speak French as their only foreign language, which makes it difficult for international tourists who

cannot speak French. The hosts have often learned just enough English for basic communication. This is also the reason why the hosts and the guests cannot learn about each other very well. Communication between hosts and guests is just simple conversation. For instance, the questions frequently were "Did you sleep well?", "Is the food ok?" and the answers are typically "yes". As the result, the hosts assumed that there nothing to improve as their service meets the tourists' demands. It is clear that lack of language skills limited the communication and affected how tourists think about the hospitality of the local people. Host-guest encounters in tourism are often described as an unsymmetrical position determined by the tourists' demands and needs, rather than the hosts' interests (Doron, 2005; Saarinen & Manwa, 2008). The problem is that while the hosts think that their service is acceptable through asking direct questions to the tourists, they tend to have disapproving response to tourists' negative comments after the stays. Reviewing tourists' comments in TripAdvisor and booking websites, I found that local people tend to disagree with tourists' negative comments. Regarding the topic discussed with guests, it was rarely that the hosts talked to guests about the local life or history. In the Mekong Delta where the communication is limited due to language barriers, the power of tourists is weakened. The dependence on tour guides is significant.

The ability to use foreign language in communicating with international tourists was important in homestays. Different from the tour guides who trained to be a professional, it is difficult for a local working as a guide. I found that the hosts were enthusiastic, and wanted to arrange more activities to entertain tourists. For example, the niece of Ba Linh homestay asked two French tourists and I if we wanted to go to the temple to see a ritual. We cycled to the temple and then she took us to another pagoda of the village, however, she could not explain anything so we just saw and explored by ourselves.

Being asked whether tourists find that the hosts are hospitable or not, interviews with tourists in different homestays show that the hosts are considered hospitable when they can use foreign languages to explain about the local area. Reviewing comments of different tourists in homestays, they often relate the friendliness and hospitality of the hosts in helping with travel arrangements:

> The owners have recommended things to do and help us with careful attention to book the next step of our trip (bus to Rach Gia, boat to Phu Quoc).[14]

> or

> The owners' daughter is very friendly and hospitable. She speaks fluent English and any directions, recommendations, advice, she was able to give us, such as organise bus tickets and transfers.[15]

According to tourists, hospitable hosts are people who helped them with transportation information and arrangement to their following destinations. This is very important to international tourists as there is not detailed information available that can help tourists arrange their trips before they come to the delta.

6.4.2 Hosts' view towards tourists

The identity of the guest has an impact on how the hosts show their enthusiasm about hosting their guests. I refer to my gaining access to local homestays in the Mekong Delta as an example.

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[14] TripAdvisor (2015a), reviews from a tourist with account name Ernestrenan on his comment title "A nice surprise",https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/ShowUserReviews-g303942-d2162577-r338459958-Chambres_D_hotes_MEKONG_LOGIS-Can_Tho_Mekong_Delta.html, accessed: 9 January 2017.
[15] TripAdvisor (2014b), Reviews from Anna P, Australian tourist on her comment title "a Home away from home",https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/ShowUserReviews-g303942-d2162577-r209026076-Chambres_D_hotes_MEKONG_LOGIS-Can_Tho_Mekong_Delta.html, accessed: 9 January 2017.

In the initial months of searching for the field site, I started by searching for homestay lodging in Vinh Long province and called them for a reservation. When I phoned Nam Thanh homestay, the owner heard my voice and indicated that he was not willing to let me book. He kept asking me why I needed to stay in his house. When I gave the reason that I was a tourist and just wanted to experience the lives in the delta, he still did not want to offer me a stay. After failing to book a homestay by phone, I called Ba Linh homestay and stated that I am a researcher who wanted to study about homestay tourism and I was accepted without any hesitation. When I arrived, the homestay owners also stated the reason that he let me stay was because I was a research student. After staying in Ba Linh homestay, I tried to call Nam Thanh homestay again, stating clearly who I was and the owner was happy to let me stay.

According to Nyaupane et al. (2008), prejudice towards the tourists may be reduced by equal status contact between hosts and tourists. I found that the homestay owners after knowing me, often spent more time greeting me compared to other international tourists, and lingered at the tea table for a long time to share their story and discuss their business. They also stayed awake later on the night to gossip about the plans for their homestay business in the years to come. The most important thing was to be invited to have meals with their family members. That made me feel more intimate and more like a "guest" than just a "tourist". We also exchanged facebook, email addresses and telephone numbers for future contacts. After I finished my fieldwork, the hosts still updated me about their status and sent me some pictures of the new buildings in their homes. Hence, there is not enough evidence to state that the hospitable obligations has reduced in commercial tourism contexts. Though, there is little doubt that the hosts hold different attitudes towards their guests based on distinctions between particular types of tourists, such as gender, nationality and occupation. In my case, the host families expect that knowing me as a researcher would be useful for them. Ut Trinh homestay owner said, she

hoped that I would write a good review for her homestays, Nhon Thanh homestay owner expects that I would give him some good advice for his plan of extension to his homestay.

Another issue that I mentioned in chapter 5 is that the hosts are not often sharing meals with tourists. In addition, the hosts also limit the chance of sharing meals between tourists. While the hosts always tended to separate different groups of tourists in the dining area, tourists often found that sitting and sharing meals together is an occasion to socialize when the hosts failed to do so. At Ba Linh homestay, I had a chance to speak with several tourists and had meals with them. On the first day of the stay, there was a family from France, a husband and wife and their two children. We started to talk to each other when we were invited into the kitchen to prepare for the meals with the hosts. As usual, the hosts set two separated tables for me and the French family. Seeing that I travelled alone, the French family asked if I wanted to sit at the same table with them. Before rearranging the table, the hosts came to ask me if I agreed. He also explained the reason why he set two separated tables for us, it was because he was afraid that I would not feel comfortable with having meals with the children. Families with children are often seated at separate tables as he once got a complaint from a guest about the children's table manners. In order to prevent possible disagreements between tourists, the homeowner thought it best to separate them.

He also explained why he set different tables for different groups of guests:

> Sometimes when I brought out the fish, the guests compared the size of the fish in their dish with other guests. They do not focus on their own table but look at the other table.

While tourists want to sit together, hosts tend to separate them to avoid the tensions emerging between them and tourists.

Doing interviews with hosts on how they found the difference between tourists from different countries, I found that the hosts change and reshape their attitude and behaviour toward tourists depending on guests' nationalities. Ba Linh homestay owner gave his judgement on his guests:

Israeli and Italian tourists are the most annoying. The Jewish people always think that they are better than others, the Italians only half smile and show offence. As far as I know, the Italians are divided into two regions, Northern Italy is pleasant but the South Italy is full of mafia, so they scorn other people".

The owner of Ut Trinh homestay also had views upon her guests that Australians are the most pleasant tourists, French are very fussy. They always bargain over price.

As Erb (2000, p. 711) argues, local people "reassess their former ideas and attitudes" about how to interact with the tourists. Since homestay owners gain experience of hosting through engagements with guests day after day, they would restrict contacts or talk with visitors from those countries that they perceive are not willing to interact.

In some cases the hosts keep a distance from their guests. When I asked if the hosts spend time to talk with their guests after dinner, Ba Linh homestay owner showed me his hesitation. He found that the Western tourists prefer privacy and are not willing to talk:

I want to be hospitable, but it also depends on the visitors, if I talk to them and they do not respond, I will not start the conversation with them. Russian guests are even more horrible, I greeted them but they did not even say anything. Even if they are VIP guests, they do not answer the tour guide. Because Russian guests are mainly tycoons.

Sometimes it is better to not provide more hospitality than guests want. As tourists' demands are different, they have different opinions on the interactions with the hosts. Some appreciate it if they have more privacy and are not intruded upon much. A tourist from London wrote a comment about Ba Linh homestay:

The family members were never too intrusive and we always felt that we could have space and time for us every time we wanted to sit on the tables, hammocks, or wander around the grounds and the garden.

Hospitality is also delivered differently to each type of tourists: international and domestic tourists. The local people expect tourists to adapt to their particular settings. In some homestays, foreigners are more welcomed than domestic tourists. Contrary to what I assumed, most of the homestay owners did not fancy to accept domestic tourists, as they claimed that domestic tourists do not follow the culture of the homeowners. According to Ba Linh, Phuong Thao and Duyen Que homestays, domestic tourists are more demanding and do not respect the time of the hosts. They normally lengthen their meals until late at night and ask for food and service that the hosts could not provide. Duyen Que homestay also said they experienced cancelation of booking from domestic tourists without being informed in advance.

There is also difference in the ways hospitality is delivered for backpackers and mass tourists. Taking a cooking class is an example. A cooking class is often included in homestays when tourists gather with the host family in the kitchen to observe and participate in cooking local food. In Phuong Thao homestays, there was no 'cooking class' on the day I stayed. The owner's nephew explained to me that normally tourists travel in big groups and have a fixed itinerary, and the cooking class is often stated in the tour programme. As on that day, there were only backpackers and individual travelers who did not know about the cooking class or hesitated to ask for it, the homestays did not offer this activity, though he told me those tourists would not be interested in the cooking.

I also observed similar differences in hosting between big groups of guests and individuals or backpackers. In the Mekong Delta, homestay owners preferred tourists travelling in a big group more than individual groups as it is more convenient for them to control their reception.

However, homestay hosts found backpackers are more open and more sociable. While homeowners often spend more time with the guests when there are more guests in their house, they often disappear when there are not so many guests. Instead, their family members or neighbours will help them with hosting.

Based on previous experiences with different types of tourists, the hosts "learn to anticipate and seek to satisfy the tourists' expectations and stage themselves in accordance with them" (Cohen, 2003, p. 4). According to Cohen (2002), among Western mass tourists, the less experienced young backpackers, eager to explore the exotic cultures, may be more easily misled by their hosts' staging. However, comments from local homestays in the Mekong Delta show that backpackers are perceived as more sociable and inquisitive, which in turn means that their hosts are more willing to interact. Ba Linh homestay owner's niece, who was in charge of greeting tourists and talking with them after dinner, commented:

> I found it easier to interact with backpackers, individual or small groups of tourists as most of them can speak English. They are very sociable. A big group of tourists often does not know each other. They even do not want to talk with each other, let alone local people.

I found that it is hard to judge whether hospitality is unconditional or not in the contemporary tourism, however, it is contingent depending on the context and types of guests. Another example of contingent hospitality is the providing of entertainment activities for tourists, for instance Ut Trinh homestay is the only homestay in Vinh Long to provide traditional music for tourists. The service is free of charge. However, I found that the performance was not every night. The owners just do it when they host big groups of tourists. As tourists did not know in advance how many fellow travellers would stay with them at a homestay, they might confront

contingent hospitality. In some circumstances, tourists are welcomed by the 'real' owner and offered a traditional performance. In other cases, the guests did not see the hosts during their stay at all but some staff who could not speak any foreign language. The paradox is that though the hosts state that individual tourists are more sociable and likable guests, they prefer to host tourists who are travelling in big groups more than several individual tourists. Hosting big groups of tourist brings them more benefits and saves time and human resources. Economic factors to some extent overwhelm the desire of the hosts to communicate with guests.

6.4.3 Tourists' view towards local performance of hospitality

As mentioned in the first section, hospitality is often represented through the symbol of smiles. The Mekong Delta capitalises on this universal welcome to express the hospitableness and friendliness of the local community. It is not difficult for tourists to interact with the friendly and hospitable people in the Mekong Delta. Paul, a member of Vietnam Travel Specialists team, who travelled extensively across 17 countries, wrote on his blog about the Mekong Delta:

> Everywhere we turned, we were greeted by the friendliest of smiles and a chorus of 'Hello!' from every man, woman, and especially children who were in our path. For these people, the sight of Westerners right outside their front door was "exhilarating" (Paul, 2016).

Tourists often found children easier to approach and they enjoyed sharing time with them. I was also guided by Khang, an eight-year old boy, the son of Duyen Que homestay owners. When I moved to Nhon Thanh homestay, he cycled to visit me. When he arrived, he also played with other foreigners and they were having fun by drawing together. Homestay hosts who have not worked in the tourism industry before opening a homestay, normally do not speak English, but their children or other relatives can often speak a little. Hence tourists are sometimes only able to talk with the children, which fails the expectations of the tourists, who would like to

obtain more knowledge of the local area. In the evening, after the main meal, is when the children gather with the tourists. Children of the homestay operators are also getting used to seeing groups of tourists in their village. It is observed that they enjoy chatting with the tourists, guiding them for cycling tours around the village and that they are very hospitable to the tourists.

However, it is evident from interviews with tourists in some local homestays, that a smile is perceived as not enough to convey hospitality, especially in the tourism settings. I spent time with two Austrian tourists in Phuong Thao homestay after dinner. We chatted about the experience in homestay and they commented:

> It should be more than just a smile. We expected that the host family welcome us by saying something, for example 'welcome to our family', but the young man who collected us from the ferry and brought us here did not say anything to us.

They also expect more engagements and conversations with the hosts. According to them, there is a lack of explanation from the hosts about the local area, history and culture. It shows that the smiles from the hosts are not as important as how they could bring a smile to their guests. The guests would quickly notice when hosts are not giving them full attention.

As entertaining activities are not available in rural areas, some hosts find other ways to entertain guests, such as taking them along the village path to the river bank to see fireflies or staying at the dining area after dinner for chatting or singing. In some homestays, as they were working for a whole day, the hosts went to their room early, then their guests were left to drink and chat the night away. As leisure activities are not available for tourists during the nights, they tended to make friends with other tourists to have somebody to talk with. According to tourists' comments on TripAdvisor about their stays in homestays, some of them enjoyed the evenings

much better as they have other tourists to sit with during dinner or at least have some other guests hanging around to have a chat.

Reviews with tourists' comments on homestays and the hosts show that homestay owners sometimes failed to provide the desired welcome and care for guests. Moreover, comments from some tourists show that they perceive homestay as a business enterprise rather than a real local homestay, as evidenced for instance when the family members were mentioned as "staff" and "team":

> There were so many people walking around the "home" that I never got an idea of who was family and who was hired to help. There was one man (the owner I assume) who spoke English, but he was not very helpful and a bit rude. I was shown to the room and got no explanation about anything, like when we would eat, where I could get some cold water. When I asked questions he would yell for 'the staff' and they would show me.[16]

However, when tourists receive too much hospitality, they might find it strange. Among other tourists who were impressed with the smiles of the local people, a Hungarian tourist commented on TripAdvisor:

> On the way to Vietnam we stopped by an island, totally untouched, we might have almost been the first white tourists, kids everywhere, smile and smile and smile from each of the locals. How people can be so nice to strangers? [17]

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[16] TripAdvisor (2015b), review from a TripAdvisor account Morgenfryd, *Not recommendable*, https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/ShowUserReviews-g303942-d1237769-r268103398-Minh_Viet_Homestay-Can_Tho_Mekong_Delta.html, accessed: 25 May 2017.

[17] TripAdvisor (2009), review from a TripAdvisor account Tibor4500, *CFM cruising on the Mekong - Angkor/Saigon*, https://www.TripAdvisor.co.uk/ShowUserReviews-g293927-r67638060-Mekong_Delta.html, accessed: 30 May 2017.

The Hungarian tourist was surprised at the attitudes of local people to tourists. He might be skeptical of those "smiles", or the ulterior motive of the local people. I found that tourists are sometimes uncomfortable with the ways the hosts greeting them. I met an Italian tourist when I stayed in Ngoc Phuong homestay. He asked me to show him the direction to the bus station as he wanted to check the price to Can Tho province on the following day. I decided to walk with him to the station. When we arrived at the station, some women ran to us and offered tickets to Can Tho. The Italian tourist asked me why the local people kept approaching him and whether they wanted to take his money. The reason why he worried was that he was cheated by a taxi driver in Saigon on the way from the airport to his hotel. He questioned everything that the local people gave him. I also found that the local people are aware that tourists are skeptical of their hospitality and it affects their attitudes towards tourists. Taking my experience in Duyen Que homestays as an example. While I asked Linh, the homestay owner to borrow a bike to cycle around the village, she suggested that I drop in a shop owned by her aunt. The shop is a visiting point which was located by the river. Mrs Tu, the owner of the shop stays there for the whole day, hosting tourists from boat tours. She sells coconuts and all the products made from coconuts and local fruits. Tourists can observe the process of peeling the cover of the coconut and try the coconut flesh and juice. When Mrs Tu invited me to eat some handmade cakes and candies she said "all my products are safe, no chemicals, don't worry". The way she said this reminded me of another story that I experienced the day before when I cycled with Khang (the son of Duyen Que homestay). He took me around the village and asked me to drop in on his grandma's house as we cycled back to the homestay. I was offered some handmade fruit jam and drinks. When I got inside the house, she gave me a glass of Coca-Cola. I showed my politeness by finishing all the drink. Then she made me a glass of lime juice. Again, I did not want to leave it so I drank all. Then she continued to offer me another drink, a glass of

rainwater. I did not want to refuse her offer but I felt full so I had to drink it gradually. She told me "Finish then you can go. I did not put poison in the drink so don't be afraid". The way the local people offered me food and drink, I notice the implications behind their words, local people think tourists hesitate to accept their hospitality and often are skeptical about local products. In the following section, I want to reflect on tour guides as mediators between host-guest relationships. As mentioned before, due to language barriers, the dependence of tourists on the tour guides are significant, hence the tour guide might help boosting or weakening the connection between hosts and guests.

6.4.4   The role of tour guide in mediation of hospitality

As discussed in the literature chapter, there is a great amount of research on the role of tour guides who mediate in the encounters between hosts and guests (Smith, 1977; Weiler & Walker, 2014). A tour guide is a mediator "conveying information, offering explanations and developing narratives" (Dahles, 2002, p. 783). The general argument is that the socio-cultural gap between hosts and tourists is significantly mitigated by such mediators (Cohen, 2003). In the Mekong Delta, tour guides go along with tourists from the departure point, on boat tours around the delta, and escort them to the homestay. They are often allocated a room in a homestay and have meals on their own with a specific menu. However, host-guest relationships are also fragmented by the activities of the third party – the tour guide. An example of the obstructive mediation of a tour guide was when a couple of French tourists who stayed in Ba Linh homestay wanted to join in lunch with the locals in a ritual party in a local temple. The tour guide prevented them from taking part as she was afraid that the food was unsafe for tourists.

In order to judge whether a host is hospitable or not, one can look at the way he welcomes a tour guide. The hosts consider tour guides as 'uninvited' guests. The hosts often fulfill their tasks to tour guides, for instance, by arranging a room and a separate meal for them. I observed that the hosts provided the hospitality for tour guides at a basic standard. They often are not happy when the tour guides are more demanding. The hosts also do not want tour guides to interfere in their reception process. For example, Ut Trinh showed her dissatisfaction when a Thailand tour guide participated in a cooking lesson. When the tour guide put more wood in the oven, Ut Trinh raised her voice and told her to stop in an unpleasant manner. I asked Ut Trinh why she showed a negative attitude with the guide in front of other guests. Then Ut Trinh told me that "It does not matter. I do not like the guide as she is too hasty. She is involved in everything when she stays here and always wants to show off".

The owner of Duyen Que homestay was annoyed and said that the tour guide showed excessive guest care at the homestays while it was their job. Ba Linh homestay owner's niece also said that big groups of tourists are frequently escorted strictly by one to two tour guides which makes it difficult for the host to develop activities to entertain their guests.

Duyen Que homestay owner also complained about the behaviour of tour guides:

> We prefer to host individual tourists or tourists who have bookings online as they are more friendly. They are also eager to explore culture and are more sociable. On the contrary, tourists sent by travel agents often have a tour guide. I found that the tour guide can be affected, ostentatious and demanding. And generally, they flatter tourists.

Interestingly, a local tour guide commented on the way tourists do not prepare well before their journey to the Mekong Delta:

> Typically, 90% of the tourists do not know where to go. They have the itinerary but most of them do not read it, then they do not know where to go or what to do for the next days. Tourists only know the number of destinations, when they come to Vietnam, they only know Hanoi or Saigon [Ho Chi Minh city]. If the tour guide explains more, tourists would learn more.

From these comments, it is interesting to see that the difficulties of the host-tourist encounter are particularly severe with the presence of tour guides. As tourist guides have to take responsibility for their clients, they may thus not only mediate, but also partly obstruct the host-guest encounters.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have considered the representation of hospitality in the Mekong Delta and considered a wide range of situations in which local people performed their hospitality to their guests. Local authorities and policy makers play a significant role in directing the tourism products to be offered. Hospitality is perceived as inherent in the culture of the region but it is not a static legacy. Hospitality is shaping and changing its form along with the development of tourism over the past two decades. The findings are a confirmation of Cohen's argument that hospitality has been transforming from 'traditional' hospitality rules to professional, commercialised hospitality as the number of tourists increases and the locals realise the lack of reciprocation (Cohen, 2003).

Hospitality is performed in several ways and in shifting spaces. It has been presented differently depending on the nature of encounters between hosts and guests. Hospitality is practised in different forms with the aim of satisfying tourists as well as bringing more benefits to the locals. Differing from tangible heritage which has parameters for maintenance and preservation, the intangible heritage has changed much over time. As AlSayyad (2001, p. 19) claims on Graburn's work about the concept of tradition "it is bound to change even more as it is passed along to the next generation". The findings show that the local people are practising their hospitality in various forms depending on their knowledge or suggestions from travel agents. It should be noted that traditional forms of hospitality are changing, multilayered and contingent and have been associated with learning processes. The local people are creating more activities so that tourists can engage as guests. However, the addition of more activities is done not only to meet the tourists' demand but also to enhance the competitive capability of the host. There is a tendency for local people to utilise more tactics to deliver their hospitality. Hence, the relationship between hosts and guests is also prone to exploitation and mistrust (Gmelch, 2012).

Along with the tourism development, the Mekong Delta people have defined tourism and tourists, and share with the tourists a limited nature of hospitality. The hosts' perceptions of tourists' gender, status, occupation, and nationality affect how they perform their hospitality. Economic factors impact and overwhelm the desire of the hosts to socialize with guests. Hosts prefer to host group tours rather than individual guests as it brings them more benefits. The practice of hospitality has been changing with the development of tourism and the presence of tourists. Furthermore, hospitality among the local communities is also being distorted along with the development of tourism.

From the viewpoint of tourists, the hospitality of the local people is judged by how well they communicate with the tourists and how the hosts can offer their assistance, such as, arranging a tour to explore the local area or a journey to their next destination. Moreover, tourism development is an agent of change, in which the number of tourists, types of tourists and their consumption patterns affect the nature of socio-cultural impacts in the host communities (Urry, 2002). The local people are inventing ways in which to try to ensure that the experience of commercial hospitality in homestay accommodation is mutually satisfactory to both hosts and guests. There are a variety of added value activities created by the locals. There is also a tendency towards creating tourist products with the purpose that tourists can experience what is locally perceived as more real hospitality. The local people are creating more activities so that tourists can engage as guests. Furthermore, host and guest engagement is mediated by the presence of tour guides, especially for international tourists. The experience of tourists largely depends on tour guides and the engagement between hosts and guests is restricted by tour guides.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

For tourists to and inhabitants of Vietnam, the Mekong Delta has long been known for its tradition of hospitality. In the absence of a critical mass of tangible heritage attractions, these intangible traditions of the local people's hospitality have increasingly become the central reason to visit. Tourism based on the temporary engagement with the everyday life of 'the other' is well established and in the Mekong Delta region this is bound up with the experience of local hospitality; presented as a regional tradition. But as with any tradition it is subject to change and re-invention and this marked the entry point for my research having noticed both a general increase in tourist activity in the region and an increase in the ways in which traditions of hospitality are packaged and offered to the tourists. My study thus focused on the ways in which hospitality is produced and performed for both domestic and international tourists to the Delta region. Against the backdrop of tourism becoming an increasingly important mode of economic development for what remains as a marginal region of agricultural production, I was interested in how local communities are involved with the commodification of hospitality, how they practice this, where they practice this and the extent to which they are reflexively engaged in changing the traditions of which they see themselves as being a part of. In the absence of previous studies on the hospitality of the Mekong Delta my work aimed to understand the ways in which the 'hosts' of the Mekong Delta region are accommodating traditions of hospitality in their participation in the tourist economy.

The two fundamental research questions posed are: how do local people understand their traditions/local heritages of hospitality and how do local people participate in tourism and accommodate their traditions, in particular the tradition of hospitality. In answering these

questions, the study focuses on the way the local people encounter, welcome and host tourists, underlining the differences in the perceptions and representation of hospitality. Research on hospitality has questioned the nature of hospitality, as it changes in a commercial context and particularly in tourism (Berger, 2004; Crick, 1989). My research does not question whether hospitality is a genuine motive in the contemporary world or not, as it is difficult to clarify the purposes in commercial contexts. Instead I have focused on how the hosts are offering their tradition of hospitality to different types of guests. The following sections will conclude my answers to the above research questions and explain how the hospitality becomes what it is today in the Mekong Delta tourism context.

7.2   The packaging of hospitality in the Mekong Delta

This section shows how hospitality is represented and established, and regulated in a network of suppliers. There are always agreements from the top to the bottom level of government of how things to be regulated and tourism industry is not an exceptional case. The central government decides to institutionalise the hospitality and its decision will be mirrored in the way tourism industry is controlled.

The government's orientation in using hospitality has been a factor in attracting visitors since the year 2011 when the tourism industry was given its logo and slogan for the first time. The message that the Vietnamese tourism board wants to convey to tourists is that Vietnam is a place of new experiences, diverse landscapes, optimistic faces and smiles. An idea shaped by the policymakers, and shown through the logo of the tourism industry which is a smile, showing friendliness and hospitality. In promotional brochures of the Mekong Delta, the smile and friendliness are also included as an identifying feature of the region.

As mentioned in the context chapter, the Mekong Delta was originally an agricultural area. People's livelihoods have largely been based on agriculture, fishing and handicrafts. However, in the last two decades, with the development of infrastructure systems, the Mekong Delta has gradually diminished its status as a peripheral area. The development of tourism industry has been reflected in the boost of number of tourists per annum. However, due to a lack of tangible tourism resources, water scenery and rice fields were thus exploited as a representative image of the area. In addition, the hospitality of the people, which is supposed to be a typical identity of local people, is utilised as an attractive element for tourists. Travel agents have actively used the "hospitality" feature in their marketing programmes. The local government also emphasised hospitality as a "tourism product" on the official announcement. Under this statement, hospitality became an important feature of tour programmes. On tourism websites, brochures, "local smile", "welcoming", and "friendliness" were frequently mentioned to highlight this "tradition".

Hospitality is presented in various products being offered to tourists. All of these products are regulated and controlled by the government under system of licenses and regulation. Typical tours in the Mekong Delta are boat tours and visits to orchards, craft villages and local factories. Through these tours, tourists will have a chance to appreciate the typical and unique characteristics of the region. These include the distinct landscape of the rivers surrounding orchards and residential areas, the daily lives of the local people and their hospitality. On the other hand, tourists are also eager to "gaze upon or view a set of different scenes, of landscapes or townscapes that are out of the ordinary" (Urry, 1991, p. 1). However, the hospitality services offered to tourists are all copied from the other provinces in the region which made difficult for tourists to realise the difference and distinctiveness of each destination.

In order to create a supply network of hospitality, local people decide locations to visit for tourists. These locations are popular for example, floating markets which present tourists with a traditional way of doing business or product exchange of local people. Another option is to visit factories which produce local products for instance coconut candy and oil. The purpose of these factories in the past is to satisfy the local consumption in such products. However, recently the area witnesses an increasing number of these factories and many of them are built for pure tourist interests, not for local consumption. This is a quite clear evidence of how local people change the way of thinking, their perception on hospitality with the presence of tourists. This is also an implication of how they adapt their culture and traditions to satisfy not only what they need for daily life but also to please the tourists.

The adaption of local hospitality is also presented at the first "meeting points". This is like a door to door service of which local people offer pick-up at a designated areas and deliver tourists to the places of interest. This type of arrangement should not be confused with public transportation in place for local people. Instead, it is designed by the hosts in particular to bring more convenience to tourists only.

Homestay business is also an evidence of how hospitality and culture identity transform. Instead of staying at home waiting for the guests, the hosts also try to impress tourists by a door to door service. They employ more staffs or send their family members to welcome guests at designated pick-up points for instance coach station. They also use this opportunity to market their service to whomever they think are potential clients at the pick-up points. That local people become more dynamic and active in seeking for clients proves hospitality and cultural identity are recently commercialised in the Mekong Delta.

7.3 Homestay settings: tangible aspects of hospitality

7.3.1 The creation of space

Normally, the premise used for homestay is expanded from an ordinary house to accommodate both the hosts and the guests. In general, the typical homestays' exterior is a vernacular architecture which is made from natural building materials such as bamboo, wood or bricks. The interior varies between homestays. Some homestays have greatly invested in artefacts or ornamental objects, while other houses are equipped with more basic facilities. The common things among homestays are they are all modernised and upgraded to a standard more acceptable to tourists and as required by regulations. In the Mekong Delta, traditional values have changed and been replaced by modern elements that make a destination become a more 'tourist-friendly' place. Local houses which are functional yet not appealing to tourists are not selected by travel agents as homestay accommodation. To attract more tourists, local people are constructing a homestay model considered to be "appealing to the guests", which is produced through knowledge sharing by homestay proprietors within the Mekong Delta society. The local people are presenting their hospitality through the alteration of their living spaces for tourists' consumption.

Homestay settings are the creation of spaces for hospitality: dining area, bedrooms, and bathrooms. The dimensions of each specific areas are proportional and their positions are somehow related. However, the homestay settings are changing to satisfy the increasing number of tourists. The expansion of the homestay to accommodate more tourists results in the alteration of space setting. Homestays has been innovated gradually by adding adjacent bedrooms, sharing bathrooms, or more modern rooms with private bathrooms. In addition, that new and designated areas for tourists are built is not uncommon. The change of home settings

are also significantly determined by the government sets of regulation. As consequence, the homestay owners no longer share the living space with their guests as before.

How homestay owners renovate their home to accommodate tourists in the Mekong Delta challenges the concept home. Actually, whether the tourists can experience the life and culture of ordinary people in Mekong Delta is questionable. A house is not only a mirror of self as described by Marcus (2006) but also of other selves in the Mekong Delta. However, to please tourist, some settings of the houses are not related to the homeowners' design ideas or family background. I observed that in most of the Mekong Delta homestays the setting is an imitation of a traditional lifestyle of the upper class not the ordinary people in the society. Thus, it might be misleading if one wish to visit homestays to have a broad picture of the how the ordinary people in Mekong Delta people conduct their lives. As Urry (2002) suggests, the number of tourists, types of tourists and their consumption patterns affect the nature of socio-cultural behaviours in the host communities. With the presence of tourists, the way local people in the Mekong Delta adapt to the development of tourism is not by the maintenance and preservation of origin but expansion. Although they have a shared understanding of the term "homestay" with the implication to preserve the traditions, they still deliberately renovate and expand their home to fulfill to please the tourists. These homestays are not representative of the living conditions of the majority ordinary people. These homestays are actually designed with profit-driven mind rather than to provide the authetic hospitality and culture experience.

Homestay is a practice that unties the notion of the borderline between frontstage and backstage. Tourists are expected to break through the border and immerse into the backstage. As results, the local people are creating more spaces for tourists to access and increase more chances for them to get closer to the daily lives of the local communities. There is a deliberate

attempt to provide a higher degree of hosts and guests engagement within the property. The most common thing that has been applied in every homestay is the home settings have been altered to increase the access to the common dining area. In addition, the kitchen was set up with more spaces for tourists to join in the cooking. In some homestays, cooking short courses are provided in-house to encourage the guests' participation in the kitchen and understand the local cuisine. However, the more integration between the hosts and the guests, the less time spent between family members in the backstage. The presence of tourists in backstage, to some extent, distracts the hosts' daily routine.

7.3.2 Artefacts: representation of vernacular traditions

In discussing the relevance of the home to hospitality, according to Lashley and Morrison (2013), previous studies have focused the debate on the context of the class definition of the home, or a physical or service description of the home. However as Lynch and MacWhannell (2000, p. 103) argue, rather, it is the symbolic significance of the house which is essential, "what the home represents which is drawn upon as much as the external coverings".

My analysis of homestay settings highlights the importance of the fact that artefacts and physical objects are frequently referred to as traditional in the Mekong Delta. In this region, artefacts play a highly significant part in the construction of the homestay product. Moreover, physical artefacts are more capitalised on in homestay settings, as local people perceive it as a representation of the local tradition that tourists expect to see.

The artefacts are studied in previous studies as a display of the past (Savage et al., 2010), a sense of identity (Lynch, 2003) or a lifestyle of the host (Lynch et al., 2007). The home settings in Lynch's study was designed by the home owners based on their culture and personal character. However, it is not applicable in the cases of Mekong Delta homestays where artefacts

and settings are a deliberate attempt by the hosts to increase the sense of a "traditional", "rural" and "exotic" feeling for their visitors. In my study, the home setting was created or produced as a result of what local people perceived that it was the tourists' wish to see. The settings do not relate to the homeowners' cultural background nor reflect their characters. The sense of homeliness is replaced by the sense of commercial hospitality or constructed tradition. In counter-point to Lynch's (2003) comments about the homestay product framework, I observed that artefacts are not simply pertinent to the householders' identity. In the Mekong Delta, the home setting was identified as having a perceptional effect contributing to the common understanding of the product on offer. Artefacts are constructed depending on the ways local people understand the term "homestay". The local people see a traditional home by the presence of compulsory objects such as wooden tables and chairs and traditional style trestle beds. As the homestay business developed, the local people invested in their houses more than before. If a new reception area were built, the homeowners would furnish these objects.

Regarding the changing nature of tradition, Eisenstadt (1973) states that though tradition persists and continues through time, it focuses on dynamics and changes. This is also reflected in the ways in which Mekong Delta homestays have been developed. Tradition is destroyed or removed if it is not appropriate for the present owners' purposes, including tourism. Linnekin (1991) also claims that the transmission of tradition reflects contemporary concerns and purposes rather than a passive legacy. The interior design in the Mekong Delta homestays reminds one of the vernacular architecture, although in the past these motifs were designed intentionally and were meaningfully associated with the history of the community, while the current motifs have no meaning. It is just an embellishment. The use of displays is firmly based on the knowledge of the current presenters. Moreover, not all of the homeowners originally

came from the area. Hence, no artefact or subject is too vernacular. There is a tendency that newly built homestays reproduce traditions in their own ways.

To express the hospitality of the guests, local people do not hesitate to invest in tangible and visible objects. Big investments in artefacts, physical objects, decorations in private homestays are indicative of a purposeful investment in hospitality. At the present time, in the context of language barriers which limited the conversations between hosts and guests, the artefacts display works as a non-verbal means of communication.

7.3.3 Food offerings

Not only the appearance of the homestays are a blend of tradition and modern, but the food offering in homestays is also a mixture of Oriental and Western styles. The notable features of the hospitality of the Mekong Delta people are that they are considered to be simple, straightforward and sincere in hosting. They welcome guests with enthusiasm, but not too formally, as with a sumptuous feast. The guests were traditionally invited to sit on the floor having the meal with the hosts using any food available. In some cases, if the hosts did not have food available, they would borrow from their neighbours. There are many folk songs and verses, or proverbs, mentioning this unconditional hospitality. However, at present the hospitality has been standardised and upgraded, ranging from physical settings to food and styles of serving. Western-style breakfasts are offered in all homestays, table settings with knives and forks, the order of food serving and the alteration of food ingredients are examples of the changes in hospitality in practice.

7.4 Entertaining guests: the duty of hospitality

The diversification of leisure services for tourists has been increasing in the Mekong Delta. As defined by Lashley (2000) hospitality is not only a provision of food, drinks and accommodation but to delight the guests. My findings showed that the local people's perception about hospitality has changed as entertaining guests is not only a duty but a way of diversifying the services offered to attract more tourists. Thus, they have been finding various ways to entertain tourists. For example, the performance of folk songs normally performed at tourist rest stops where they can buy local souvenirs. Nowadays, homestay owners hire performers to present for their guests in the homestay in the evening. For the homestay hosts in the Mekong Delta, they are aware of the duty of the host, and perform it as a hosting procedure: welcoming, showing guests to their rooms, and informing them of meal times. The locals believe that the length of visits is limited by the unavailability of the entertaining activities. Homestay hosts were therefore trying to fulfil the duty of entertaining guests in different ways. In some homestays, the hosts offer additional services such as cycling or boat tours with local guides, or traditional music performances. In other homestays, the hosts spend more time after dinner chatting with tourists, and taking them to see fireflies at night. It could be said that the intimacy of host-guest encounters depends on the additional provision of entertainment to tourists. The level to which guests can enter into a 'real life' is primarily dictated by the hosts and depends on the extent to which the hosts are prepared to interact with their guests (Tucker & Lynch, 2005). Though in a commercial context, the duty of hosts are tasks or actions that they are required to perform as part of their job. The hospitality duty delivered in the Mekong Delta is multi-faceted, depending on each circumstance. Tourists may be treated as complete strangers, guests, or friends. It depends on the trust of tourists, and the trust is created or diminished by tourists' behaviour toward the hosts and surroundings.

Prejudice towards the tourists is reduced by intimate contacts between hosts and tourists. According to interviews with tourism officers about the development of homestay tourism, increasing encounters with tourists gradually change the ways local people present their hospitality to tourists. The local people recognise that engagement with tourists is the experience of being a host. Their experience of hosting as well as their skills of service is gradually improving. The changes come from the understanding of the tourists' demands, just as they learn from other homestays.

It could be said that the development of homestay businesses has shown the change in the way local people contact their guests. Homestay owners frequently receive guests through online booking, telephone booking or tourists sent by travel agents. At present, local homestay owners are more active in approaching their potential guests, as they employ more strategies in offering and selling their homestay product.

On the contrary to Heuman's (2005) and Aramberri's (2001) conclusion that the three main elements of the host-guest relationship, including protection, reciprocity and a batch of duties do not feature in commercial hospitality, I found that the homestay hosts were aware of the duty that they needed to do in a homestay such as organising activities to entertain guests, and having a conversation with guests after dinner time. I also observed that the tourists gave presents to guests before they left to reciprocate what the hosts gave them. Additionally, the hosts were always willing to help tourists in booking for accommodation or buying a ticket for travel to other destinations, though these were not required by the guests or an inclusive service in the homestay package. These findings indicate that the features that are embedded in traditional hospitality, to some extent, occur in commercial hospitality.

7.5   Hosts and guests: mutual gaze and expectations

7.5.1   Hosts' view of tourists

Amongst theories on the host-guest relationship, tourists view were identified as the more important aspect (Maoz, 2006). In the context that there has been little research on the host view, my discussion of the local homestay owners' attitudes towards domestic as well as international tourists provides more insight into these relationships.

Like the tourist gaze, the host's view is constructed, dynamic and "varies by society, by social group and by historical period" (Urry, 2002, p. 351). The view has been subjected to and transformed by social, cultural, economic and environmental phenomena (Urry, 2002). In the Mekong Delta, the hosts' perception of their guests influences the effectiveness of hospitality. The hosts often build guests' images in advance, before the direct encounter. Based on the information that the hosts have received about the guests, gained from bookings online in advance, provided by local travel agents, or communications by telephone between the hosts and guests, the hosts prepare how to host their guests in ways that can reduce tensions for both sides. The homestay hosts' gaze on international and domestic tourists are different. Many homestays owners see domestic tourists as impolite, messy and bossy, while they found that international tourists are more respectful and not over-demanding. However, the homestay hosts held different perceptions on foreign tourists coming from different nationalities and regions. These attitudes could also result in suspicion, dislike and avoidance. Such feelings, in turn, reinforce the fixed images and obstruct close relations based on real encounters.

The presentation of hospitality depends on hosts' attitudes towards guests. The homestay owners prefer to host international tourists rather than domestic tourists. Hosts hesitate in accepting domestic guests to stay in their homestays. For example, there was a situation when

some Vietnamese tourists were unable to reserve a room in homestays, while homestay owners are willing to host international tourists who just show up at their houses without being informed in advance. The reasons that homestay hosts refuse to receive domestic guests come from the previous experience of hosting. It was suggested by Sharpley (2014) the local people hold positive attitudes towards tourist development as they perceive and receive the benefits from tourism and local people hold negative views toward tourists as the number of tourists increases.

In the Mekong Delta, the hospitality of the homestay owner is hindered by resistance or hesitation in hosting domestic tourists in homestays. The negative attitudes toward domestic tourists are not simply explained by the influence of economic factors, as the price applied is the same for international and domestic tourists. The hosts' attitude was not driven by the number of tourists, as homestays hosts are aiming to host more tourists to make use of the labour working in the homestay. Instead, the limitation of hospitality is derived from bad experiences with early domestic guests who are often friends/relatives of the tour guides or travel operators. Those visitors perceive homestays as commercial services similar to restaurants, which means they allow themselves to have meals late at night. It is very usual in Vietnam cultural norms for a guest to invite themselves around. Although the visits to friends without informing in advance is reduced in big cities, this situation is still common in the rural area. It is not uncommon that the homestay hosts treat visitors as their regular guests. Instead of saying "No", they manage to serve even in inconvenient conditions, for instance, by accepting guests walking in without informing them in advance. However, when hosting international tourists and domestic tourists, the homestay hosts started to compare and prefer the behaviour of foreign tourists and restrict their reception of domestic tourists.

In receiving guests, the hosts build a bond of trust and they have some threshold of accepting or not accepting strangers into their homes. However, the host's trust in tourists is facilitated and improved by tourists' behaviour during their stay. The increasing personal conversations cement the relationship between hosts and guest. The perceptions held towards particular types of guests serve to reinforce the lack of host and guest conversations as there was an absence of stimulus to discourse. In the Mekong Delta, subjects for discourse were about the setting, artefacts, food, heat and temperature, noises, activities offered during the stays and information on other tourist destinations. The discourse also gave the hosts ideas to adjust their homestay product on offer. The existence of host-guest discourses reinforces the length and purpose of tourists' stay in homestays.

Besides, Pi-Sunyer (1989) also argues that the attitudes that the local people hold towards tourists are not only based on direct experience but also come from images and stereotypes concerning different types of visitors. The Mekong Delta homestay hosts can also display different behaviour, enthusiastic or apathetic, due to their past experiences with tourists from diverse backgrounds. There are differences in hosting tourists due to their nationality or occupation. Moreover, the engagements are experience-oriented, the local people described tourists from easy to more demanding based on their nationalities. Also, the hosts spend more time with tourists if they know their status and when they have a high status they find more trust to share their thoughts. The images hosts hold of their guests are modified after their stay. This research suggests that attitudes and behaviour of the local hosts change after regular contacts with particular types of tourists. Hosts and tourists relationships, in consequence, are significantly changed along with the continuous adjustment of views of each other.

In three detailed case studies originating in the American Southwest, the Tyrolean Alps, Austria, and Belize, Central America, Chambers (2000) argues that local inhabitants prefer mass tourists to individual tourists as they travel in larger groups and buy a lot of local products. In the Mekong Delta, homestay owners preferred tourists who travel in a big group more than individual groups as it is more convenient for them to manage their stay. Though, homestay hosts found backpackers are more open and more sociable.

Graburn (2001) argues that regular contacts with tourists can increase the perceptions of the locals about their own identities. On the contrary, through case studies in two countries in the Pacific islands, Forsyth (2012) argues that the presence of tourists has not changed the behaviour or activities of the people in any significant way. Doron (2005, p. 157) also claims that previous studies tend to show tourists as "the purveyors of change while the creative practices of the hosts are rendered invisible". I agree that it is not possible to separate the impact of tourism on local communities without taking into account other factors such as the economic and social development of the area, and the knowledge and perception of the local people, especially the people who have power in decision making.

Tucker and Lynch (2005) identify a range of host 'personality' types, for instance, people-people, relaxed, perfect host, house proud, businessman hosts. Each particular type of host was using a variety of ways of hosting, and their reception strongly impacts on the guests' experience. In this thesis, I found that different types of hosts affect the ways they host their guests and arrange their home settings. According to Lynch et al. (2005), the size of a commercial home unit has a negative relationship with the involvement of the host. That means it is expected that guests have closer interactions or at least can see the presence of the hosts more frequently in a small scale commercial home such as a private homestay. However, my

research found that even in private homestay, the involvement of the hosts depends on who the hosts are. The hosts can be classified as people with local roots, migrants, homestay owners who run a business by themselves, homestay owners who mostly depend on travel agents, and homestay owners who are travel agents. Lynch et al. (2005) have also stated that the entrepreneurial orientation of the host is increasing as the size of the commercial home increases. However, the types of hosts also affect the entrepreneurial orientation of a homestay. My findings also reveal that local hosts who own the business or depend more on travel agents tend to be investing more on the material sides of hospitality but are involved less in host-guest encounters. More empirical study is needed to suggest the influence of different types of hosts in the ways they offer their hospitality.

The commodification of culture has been mentioned in academic discourses on the effect of tourism on local cultures (Brunt & Courtney, 1999; Dogan, 1989; Sharpley, 2014). The central idea is that local communities are passive actors and tourists are considered as a purveyor of change (Doron, 2005). However, I found that, for the case of the Mekong Delta, the outcome of touristic encounters and pseudo-events are not only based on what tourists choose to see, but on what locals think tourists expect to see. Hence, host communities are not a static entity that is affected by the choices of tourists; instead the local people are tailoring themselves according to the ways that they wish to satisfy tourists' needs.

7.5.2 Tourists' expectation

Hospitality can be sensed and experienced when a meaningful interaction between tourists and locals is improved. Situations when tourists appreciate the locals' hospitality are, for example, travellers who got lost, tourists who need information on travel issues, or need assistance with

reservations for the next destination. When communication and discourse with hosts are superficial, hospitality is not recognised, and a smile is not enough.

Through interviews with tourists, I found that tourist expectation is more than what they have been experiencing in the Mekong Delta. As there has been an increase in the efficiency of transport infrastructure in the Mekong Delta, the residents improve their houses and use better materials in housing construction. Substantial cemented houses have replaced more temporary structures. However, while those houses are functional for family members, they are not spacious enough for hosting more guests and are not attractive to tourists who expect to stay in a homestay with vernacular and traditional style.

As shown in interviews with guests in a homestay, they expect intimacy, frequent communication and shared meals with the hosts, which is not well-practised in homestays. This research confirmed that language and communication are critical factors that affect the quality of hospitality. Poor communication between hosts and guests was mainly due to language barriers. In some cases, it could be seen that the interactions of hosts and guests in the Mekong Delta homestay are less intimate than the interactions among the guests themselves. Moreover, due to the hosts' perception of tourists' preference for privacy, they assume that tourists are not always willing to be sociable. Then, the hosts are not active in conversation with international tourists.

My findings on the uses of vernacular architecture and physical settings in homestays support those put forward by Graburn (2001) and Upton (2001) who claim that traditional aspects of people's daily life might be superseded by the conveniences of modernisation. The Mekong Delta homestay hosts a high number of travellers from big cities who get used to convenient and modern facilities. According to Thomas (2005) living with the poor is to feel oneself in

contact with greater continuity of tradition. However, homestay guests tend to admire the aesthetic features and comfort rather than to enjoy living with a lack of facilities. According to current guests in homestays, it does not matter if the homestay is traditional or not, but it is better if it is comfortable. The findings from tourists' expectation imply that the current performance of hospitality in the Mekong Delta has an impact on tourists' satisfaction and judgement about the quality of the service.

7.6   Regimented hospitality and institutionalisation of hospitality

This section shows that the ways in which the local people in the Mekong Delta are accommodating their tradition of hospitality. The involvement of various stakeholders such as local authorities, travel agents, tourists and homestay owners is an example of the regimented hospitality and the implications that hospitality is in the process of institutionalisation.

The ways the local people participate in tourism in the Mekong Delta, in particular homestay business showed that hospitality is strictly managed and controlled. Previous research on residents' motivation to participate in tourism mainly explains this by the job opportunities, and household income (Nguyen, 2013). However, this study showed that the participation of local farmers in the tourism business is intertwined with the involvement of the local government and travel agents. The establishment and operation of a homestay business was a process which started from the persuasion of the local authorities or the offer from travel agents to the adoption of a controllable system. There are varied reasons for a local farmer to open a homestay business. I found that most of the current homestays are intervened by the local governments and travel agents. The ways local people are establishing and running their homestay businesses could be called a "door to door" negotiation process. It was as local government officers and travel operators come to each house to encourage the local people to adopt tourism.

The selection of homestays is not only based on voluntary participation but also on a selection process. According to the local authorities, homestay products have a powerful impact on the overall image of a destination. There are criteria for homestay host selection, for instance, being knowledgeable on tourism, good personal qualities, long-term thinking and caring for the community.

Policymakers aim to standardise hospitality in local homestays by employing the homestay regulations. The homestay experience is no longer the business between the hosts and the guests. In fact, this interaction now is controlled and regulated by the legal system. The study reveals that there were disagreements between homestay owners and local authorities on how homestay is operated. The regulations on how a homestay should be built and designed, for instance, the area of the room, the standard of bed, mattress, facilities in the room, and security locks are not fully accepted by the homestay owners. In addition, these requirements by accident draw the line between the hosts and the guests as there are virtually no requirements applicable for resident houses. The wish to experience the authentic hospitality and culture of tourists is now limited and controlled as there are designated areas for the guests.

The uniformity of tourism products is the purpose of management policies. While the requirement of the law is a constraint for homestay owners, in the perceptions of the policy-makers, tradition might be a hindrance to the development of tourism. For those homestay owners who appreciate the traditional authenticity, there is reinforcement for instance periodical inspections to make sure the legal conformity.

Among the variety of tourism products, homestay is one of the businesses which is significantly controlled by the government. Unfortunately, not all policies and regulations are selected to promote homestay business in a way that sustains the local hospitality and cultural identity.

Without understanding the purpose of homestay, the government contradicts itself to the manifesto of homestay "hosts and guests eat, stay, and share activities together". What the government trying to do is not to maintain the cultural authenticity as it is for generations, not to promote the hospitality as a local identity but try to oversee the traditions as the way the government wants it to be

In addition, homestay businesses are dependent on and significantly influenced by travel agents. For example, the Western-style breakfast offered in all local homestays is the menu set by the travel agents. A popular activity that the homestays have recently offered is a cooking class. The presence of a cooking class comes from the suggestions of travel agents as an additional activity to enhance the connection between the overnight tourists and the hosts. Additional home-based activities such as bike tours and boat tours proposed by travel agents are also further attached to homestay product.

How the local people build and renovate their homestays is also influenced by local authorities and travel agents. Although homestay is primarily built and decorated based on traditional concept, there are always disagreements between the homestay owners and local authorities on what traditions should be kept, what are a hindrance, and not suitable for modern tourism. The disagreement of homestay owners with the environmentalists in replacing the "dragon scale" earth floor in Ba Linh homestay is an example. While the environmentalists encouraged the homestay to remove the earth floor to be more hygienic, the owner wanted to keep it as it represents a traditional and unique style of a local people's house. To the contrary, when the Nhon Thanh homestay owner intended to replace his original wooden house with a brick house, travel agents suggested he keep it as it would attract tourists more than a new looking house. Based on interviews with local authorities and homestay owners, the local authorities pay

attention to the appearance and cleanliness of the homestays, while travel agents and homestay owners who are directly involved in the business prefer to define their own ways to make their houses more attractive to tourists. This lack of consensus exposed an ambiguity in how the Mekong Delta people think about their cultures and what could be considered tradition in the view of tourists. The conflict probably is valid and present in any traditional display and shows the complexity of a hospitality manifestation. This can only be fully understood if researchers take further steps on tradition and its implication in commercial context into account.

The Mekong Delta people are perceived to be more hospitable than people in other regions. The Southwestern society is known to be less formal, though the hosting process is more institutionalised. My findings of contemporary homestay settings in the Mekong Delta showed that the emergence of homestay business in the Mekong Delta is an example of the transition from informal and social hospitality to more formal and commercial hospitality. Homestays are under annual inspection by local authorities. At the same time, the regional tourism departments cooperate with the tourism promotion centre to open training courses for homestay business households. Homestay owners were expected by the local governments to attend various training programs including tourism and homestay, hygiene and environment care in homestays, safety and security, marketing skills, customer service, housekeeping service, food and beverage service, and cookery.

7.7 Limitations and recommendations for future research

The first limitation of the research is the lack of prior research studies on the topic of hospitality as perceived and presented by the local residents. In research on host populations, the ordinary local residents are mainly included through primarily quantitative methods. In addition, previous research frequently considers the host population as a homogenous society.

The second limitation was access to homestays. I did not have access to some homestays in Ben Tre because at the time I was conducting fieldwork in 2016 the Mekong Delta had experienced a severe drought and salinity intrusion. When I contacted some homestays, the host said that the homestay was temporarily closed due to salty water, not enough fresh water to cater for tourists.

The third limitation is the time constraint, it would have added to the depth of the data if I could have spent more time with the residents. The length of study would facilitate more insights in the changes in the way the local people offer hospitality to different types of guests, the difference of hosting in the low season compared to the high season, the difference between welcoming groups visiting homestay in the course of the day for lunch, and those who stayed at the homestay. Moreover, the findings of the research revealed that there was disagreement on the operation of homestays amongst stakeholders, especially between homestay owners and local authorities. However, I did not have enough time and resources to investigate further the resistance of homestay owners to the regulations and the innate disagreement amongst stakeholders.

Finally, a limitation is the variety of research participants. While suggesting that there are differences when comparing commercial hospitality and social hospitality that is presented by ordinary people in the Mekong Delta who do not participate in the tourism business, this research has not focused on local people who do not engage in tourism.

The result of the study underlines the need to carry out further investigation into a number of areas.

Firstly, this study employed qualitative methods and included travel agents, tour guides and local authorities as participants. The methodology has facilitated insights into the ways local

people accommodate their tradition of hospitality. However, a group of participants were interviewed separately. It would be more meaningful when we treat the host population in a broader context, considering the social relations that affect their perceptions and behaviour. Independent research in the same social settings should be carried out for each type of stakeholders, such as local travel agents, local guides, homestays, ordinary locals, and local authorities. The mutual dependence among these stakeholders is manipulated by different social relations while being overall controlled by top-down management. I suggest future research to employ a mixed group of participants. As suggested by Morgan (1993), focus groups are particularly useful when there are power differences between the participants and decision-makers or professionals, when the everyday use of language and culture of particular groups is of interest, and when one wants to explore the degree of consensus on a given topic (Gibbs, 1997). The group interviewed different stakeholders might help to access further the influence of local authority's policies to the negotiation process of hospitality in homestay businesses.

Secondly, studies on the contact between tourists and locals through regular encounters beyond commercial settings may provide more insight into the understanding of the nature of hospitality. Moreover, the study on hospitality in a wider context would enrich and enhance the study of commercial applications of hospitality activities (Lashley & Morrison, 2013). More focus on the production side of the homestay sector will allow tourism marketers, travel agents and policy-makers to recognise the tradition of hospitality ascribed to homestay tourism activities as perceived by the guests. The information can be useful for marketing decision makers such as travel agents and local authorities as they strive to seek the traditional and unique values that can be delivered to tourists. This research has shown the difference between the locals' attitudes and behaviour towards domestic tourists compared to that of international

tourists. However, the attitude towards domestic guests changes after a successful and meaningful relationship between host and guest. A deeper understanding of the relationship between quality of contact and hosts' perception on domestic tourists has the potential to improve the relationship. Such research would assist in contributing to the field of hospitality, by adding knowledge to the understanding of hosts' views and expectation on tourists' behaviour.

Thirdly, in developed and market-driven economies, hospitality is constructed based on studies of customer research on demands and needs. The reception of local people is not only based on a hospitality code or standard, but also on the natural instinct of hosts on hosting a stranger. The local people set their own rules of reception, suggesting that the level of hospitability offered by local people does not only depend on the "willingness to serve" but also on the competitiveness with other homestay businesses. The study also mentioned the competition between homestays which motivated homestays to improve their service. It could be said that unfair competition is another feature of the transition economy. In a more positive approach, the competition motivates hospitality suppliers to innovate to make themselves different and attractive to tourists. This finding implies that hospitality is not merely derived from the tradition, culture, or religion but also from the pressure of competition. Hence, future research might question further the influence of competitive environment to the hospitality performance.

Much previous research on the resident attitudes concludes that the role of local communities has a significant impact on the changes of attitude towards tourist development and conservation (Mbaiwa & Stronza, 2011). However, the host community is frequently put in a context in which their relationships and behaviour are properly regulated by laws, regulations, and behaviour norms. This research studied tourist activities in the context of Vietnam which

is in a transition process to a market economy. Here the most significant characteristic is the dominance of the state, which affects the behaviour of individuals in that community. Tourism is not an exceptional case. The tourism industry is dominated by government, provincial and communal policies. Tourism law and regulations, in particular homestay regulations are inadequate, which enables conflicts in the way hospitality is presented to tourists. With the regulations currently applied for homestays, there is a risk of destroying a homely context because there is uniformity in terms of furnishings. In discussion with homestay owners, training courses and the applicable law, are considered inappropriate for homestays because they are more suitable for the hotel industry rather than for private homes. A question suggested for further research is reconciling state regulation and local improvisation and the creation of homeliness in homestays. Spatial and social control strategies employed might usefully be reviewed (Lynch, 2003).

Finally, homestays in this region are increasingly altered to the preference of the tourists though whether or not it affects the emotional link of the hosts with their home is not understood. The concept of hospitality still needs to be further explained, in particular regarding the tangible facet of hospitality. Hospitality is often examined as an intangible cultural heritage. In the Mekong Delta, hospitality is referred to as personal characteristics such as being friendly, honest, open and generous. However, in this research, I found that the local people materialise their hospitality and package it in various forms. For instance, local hospitality was embedded in physical objects such as a homestay's physical settings, artefacts, furniture, and food. For this, I would like to draw attention to hospitality as it is manifested in the material culture of a tourist region.

As claimed by Urry (2002), the backstage is sometimes merely a staged back region which is similar to the opening of the kitchen area for tourists in Mekong Delta homestays. I argue that instead of claiming a backstage as 'not authentic', we could focus more on the way the presence of backstage changes the meaning of certain social arrangements of the hosts. It might give more insights into the changes of the hosts' daily lives in modern society. The study also showed that the establishment of homestays is a social process by which the homestay operation transforms into the profession of a higher standard and competence. While tourists expect a homely feeling in homestays, the homestays create an institutional feel. The standardization of physical settings combining with poor connections between hosts and guests lowers the quality of the hospitality. The current regulations on homestay business encourage a certain uniformity in respect of local design and materials, furniture and interior decoration. As Lynch (2003) suggests the individual expression in keeping with the concept of the home should be encouraged as in keeping with the nature of the homestay product. It would be of more value if more detailed research could be conducted on the professionalism of the homestay tourism sector in the Mekong Delta. The Mekong Delta community comprises of "multiple discourse communities" which are presented as different stakeholders such as local authorities, travel agents and local people. As suggested by Pratt (1991) and Wolff (2002), multiple discourse communities are always present in a contact zone and they are in relations of unequal power. The relations between local authorities and the local people working in tourism businesses are present in relations of unequal power. It is a relationship tied to legislative issues between policy-makers and policy-adopters. Researchers can draw on contact zone theory to have a deeper understanding of the cooperation of stakeholders towards the improvement of the hospitality performance.

7.8 Conclusion

Hospitality is a part of cultural tradition of the Mekong Delta and it is changing under the pressure of tourism development. The changes are demonstrated in the process in which local people in Mekong Delta adjust themselves and their traditions in order to attract tourists. In the context of tourism, homestays have been established as a mean of attracting tourists by offering local hospitality and cultural experiences. The establishment and operation of homestays reflect top-down and bottom-up operating systems and involves the participation of the whole society. The state government set up the master plan to develop tourism in the regions while provincial officers come to each household to encourage the participation of local residents. Local residents participate in the program by renovating their properties to accommodate tourists. Travel agents also suggest the use of homestays as an alternative for accommodation for tourists who wish to experience the real local life and culture. These activities driven by commercial interests result in the transform of hospitality or departure of culture from authenticity.

With the current legislations, the homestay experience is no longer the pure interaction between the hosts and the guests. In fact, this interaction now is controlled and regulated by the legal system. Training is offered by the government and every service offered by the hosts even the way to welcome guests is standardized. All the homestays must satisfy the threshold in facilities for instance, space, ventilation, lighting and food hygiene. These requirements by accident draw the line between the hosts and the guests. The wish to experience the authentic hospitality and culture of tourists is now limited and controlled as the guests must stay in their designated areas. Some local food disappears on the menu due to hygienic dissatisfaction. For those homestay owners who appreciate the traditional authenticity, there is reinforcement for instance periodical inspections to make sure the legal conformity. Without understanding the

purpose of homestay, the government contradicts itself to the manifesto of homestay "hosts and guests eat, stay, and share activities together". What the government trying to do is not to maintain the cultural authenticity as it is for generations, not to promote the hospitality as a local identity but try to oversee the tradition as the way the government wants it to be.

Local people adapt to the tourism development and their hospitality gradually changes. These changes unfortunately are not in a way to preserve the cultural identity but to satisfy the needs and demand of tourists. This is clearly illustrated by the scale expansion of homestay services. Homestay is renovated and expanded not to keep its authenticity but to accommodate more tourists as possible. The culture transform is also demonstrated in the homestay settings, the decoration for instance artefacts. The expansion and decorations of homestays are also influenced and encouraged by travel agents who are obsessed by the sale targets. In fact, the homestay owners have capitalised on what tourists want to see. Ironically, tourists are using homestay because they feel they are experiencing true Vietnamese culture, while actually the local Vietnamese people are changing their traditional home styles and behaviour to accommodate the tourists.

Another important finding of the research is how hospitality is perceived, manifested and performed to serve tourists who wish to experience the homestay in the Mekong Delta region. This study indicates the services that homestays in Mekong Delta offer are different from the authentic hospitality of local people. Where tourists come from, their countries of origin really affect the way the hosts offer their hospitality. That the host gaze upon international tourists differs from the gaze on domestic tourists is not uncommon. Domestic tourists are normally not welcome in local homestays in practice. This favouritism is purely driven by commercial

interest. Paying the same price, domestic guests tend to be more demanding and normally more works and resources are in need of their satisfaction.

The local traditions and hospitality are normally offered by the host and experienced by the guests. However in Mekong Delta, this mechanism is not one way but a dynamic process. The guests do not only passively receive but also have influences on what the hosts can offer. In addition, this process is significantly influenced by the other stakeholders for instance, travel agents or both local and central governments. As consequence, local traditions and hospitality are changing and subject to re-invention to adapt to legal requirements, tourists demands, and social context.

APPENDICES

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Appendix 4-1 Interview questions for local authorities

Questions about point of view on tourism development

1. What is the significance of tourism in the local community?

2. Why does the region/province want to boost the development of tourism?

3. What are the strategies to attract more tourists?

4. Is there any policy or guidance from the central government about tourism development in the region? Do you receive any support from the government?

5. How do tourism companies work in the region? Is there any cooperation between the local authorities and business groups?

Questions about culture and heritage preservation

1. What are popular destinations in the region/province? Why are they chosen to be tourist attractions?

2. How does the region/province use the traditional elements (both tangible and intangible heritage) in tourism development?

3. Do you think the tourism industry can help preserve the cultural heritage and traditions in the region? How?

4. What do you do to balance the tourism business and heritage preservation?

Questions about local people

1. How do you think tourism will bring benefit to the local people?

2. How many percents of local people participate in tourism business? How are they involved?

3. What are the roles of local people in tourism development plans?

4. Do you discuss tourism development with local people? How?

5. What are the responses of local people to tourism development plans?

6. What has been done by the local authorities to provide support (financial, training courses on professional skills, business knowledge) for local people in tourism destinations?

7. How do local people perceive tourists/ interact with tourists?

Appendix 4-2 Interview questions for travel agents

Questions about background information of the travel agents

1. Which kind of tours are you offering to tourists within/to the Mekong Delta?

2. Which destinations do tourists prefer? Do you know why?

3. What is the role of traditions/ cultural heritage among tourism attractions for tourists in the Mekong Delta? Why?

4. What did you include in the itinerary? Why?

5. What do you think of the way that local people interact with the tourists?

Questions about cooperation with local authorities and other business groups

1. How long has your company worked in tourism business?

2. Is there any competitiveness in doing tourism business in the region?

3. Do you receive any support from the local government? Do you have to follow any guidance? Are there any constraints?

4. What is the role of your company in the Mekong Delta Tourism Association? Do you receive any support from them?

5. How do you cooperate with other companies?

Questions about the cooperation of travel agents with local residents

1. Does your company have any relationships with the farmers who are doing tourism or plan to take part in tourism business?

2. What is the benefit-sharing scheme with the local people/farmers? How do you decide that?

3. Do you face any troubles to cooperate or discuss with the local people?

Appendix 4-3 Interview questions for tourists

1. Why do you travel to the Mekong Delta?

2. Which tourist attractions and activities do you like the best? Why?

3. What do you think about the engagement with local people? Would you like to talk with them and how can you approach them?

4. What are the most important characteristics that you would like to know about the local cultures? How do the local people respond if you ask questions about their lives/cultures?

5. When you first arrived, how were you hosted? (discuss the images of hospitality they encountered every day, how have these images shaped the understanding of hospitality).

6. Could you give me your comments about this homestay? What satisfies you and what does not?

Appendix 4-4 Interview questions for tour guides

1. As a tour guide in the Mekong Delta, which tourist attractions and activities do you see tourists prefer? Do you know why?

2. What is the difference between international tourists and domestic tourists to the Mekong Delta?

3. How do local people respond to tourists?

4. What are the relationships between local people and tourists? Where do they interact with each other and how?

Appendix 4-5 Interview questions for local people

Questions about background information

1. How long have you been involved in tourism?

2. Why did you decide to do tourism business and how?

3. How is your life changing after the presence of tourism and tourists?

4. Do you think that tourism brings more benefit to your family than just doing farming?

5. Do you receive any support from the local authorities?

6. How do you think about your role as one of the stakeholders in the tourism sector?

Questions about perception of traditions

1. What do you think attracts tourists to the area?

2. What is the best representative image of your local destination that it can offer as a tourist attraction?

3. What are the traditions in the Mekong Delta?

4. Are these traditions tourist attractions?

5. Do you think that the local traditions have changed under the impact of tourism?

6. If yes: How do you adapt to these changes?

Questions about engagement with tourists

1. What do you think of the tourists? (Foreign tourists and domestic tourists)

2. How do you host tourists? Are there any differences between domestic tourists and foreigners?

3. How many days on average do the tourists stay at your house?

4. How do you express your hospitality to your guests?

5. Is there any requirement from the travel agents and the regulations of the local authorities towards the hosting activities?

6. Have you ever experienced difficulty to offer hospitality? What are some of your fears or uncertainties about welcoming strangers?

7. What is the difference between hosting friends and strangers before you opened the business, and at this moment hosting tourists?

8. What do you think are the benefits of offering hospitality?

9. Are you concerned about the social status of your guests?

10. Do you reduce your caring for some tourists as you think that the travel agent would take care of them?

INTERVIEW SUMMARY

This pertinent information was obtained from interviews with research participants including local authorities, travel agents, tourists, tour guides and homestay owners in the Mekong Delta.

Local authorities

Mr Luu Hoang Minh - Director of Tourism Information and Promotion centre-Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism – Vinh Long

Date: 20 April 2016

An interview with Mr Luu Hoang Minh was conducted over a dinner at a restaurant in Vinh Long City. The informal conversation lasted for some hours and Mr Luu talked about the history of the tourism industry in Vinh Long. The early visitors to Vinh Long were French and the practice of staying at local people's homes has developed from their preferences. In the beginning, local people did not know about the business because they were traditionally farmers, whose work was mainly associated with gardening and fruit trading. Travel companies have since coordinated and assisted local people in the tourism business showing them how to host and prepare food for tourists. The strategy of the tourism industry is to take advantage of available natural resources which make the Mekong Delta different to other regions including river systems, canals and orchards along the rivers. Local authories also recognize that the Mekong Delta does not have the advantage of natural heritage but more cultural heritage, such as cultural tourism to discover the life of its people and their traditional hospitality. However, in the process of tourism development, there are different views on the normalization of the tourism sector, including the homestays to develop tourism business in a more professional way.

Mr Tran Duy Phuong - Deputy Director of Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism – Ben Tre

Date: 15 May 2016

An interview with Mr Tran Duy Phuong took place at a seminar delivered by Dr. Vo Sang Xuan Lan on farm tourism, conducted in Ba Tri District, Ben Tre City. Mr Phuong gave me a brief overview of Ben Tre tourism industry, in which homestay began to emerge in the year 2012. Homestay setup here is based on the coordination and cooperation with tourism companies as the travel agents send tourists to homestays. Local governments support the construction of public transport routes in the area, while homestay owners invest in therepair and expansion of their houses to welcome guests. Mr. Phuong also said that homestay business should examine tourists' demands because homestays need to make the comfort and convenience of the tourists their first priority. However, the local people felt they should bring tourists back to the traditional life of the delta people and did not want to modernize their home too much risking the loss of tradition.

Mr Nguyen Tan Phong- Deputy Director of Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism – Tien Giang

Date: 6 August 2015

An interview with Nguyen Tan Phong took place at his office at the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism in Tien Giang province. Mr Phong talked about the tourism development in Tien Giang, where Thoi Son is a major tourist attraction, especially for weekend travel. Tourists mainly buy tours from Ho Chi Minh City as Tien Giang has the advantage of

geographic proximity. Plans for Tien Giang include the use of agricultural land for industrial zones with the aim of restructuring the economy and focusing on the development of industry and services. Homestays in Tien Giang exploit the advantages of ancient houses built in the 19th century and still in use. Mr. Ba Duc, Mr. Vo and Mr. Kiet are three operators who are doing this. Visitors come to see the architecture which is a mixture of French and Oriental. Tourists are also served food there.

Travel agents

Mrs Duyen - Tour operator - Thoi Son Mekong river tourism company Tien Giang province

A friend introduced Duyen to me and an interview took place during a visit to Thoi Son Island where we had lunch. The most popular tours here include experiences such as going to the port in a horse-drawn carriage, sailing along the canals by boat, visiting souvenir shops, bee keeping locations, tasting honey products, and listening traditional music. Tourists can travel both individuallyand in large groups and the guide is a local often wearing traditional costume to create a sense of tradition. However, Thoi Son island has become more commercialized and is now a very touristy place.

Mr Tam - Director - Nam Bo tourism company - Ben Tre province

This interview with Mr Tam took place at Nhon Thanh homestay and through this conversation I learned that homestay and travel companies have a cooperative relationship. Travel companies seek out potential properties and offer advice on how to transform them for tourist rental. The tourism company also advised on how to renovate and expand the house using natural materials to simulate the traditional style of housing. Homestay sites are chosen

primarily where there are many pristine rural features convenient to the tourist route. In these locations, people are generally considered to be kinder and friendlier. A partnership between a tourism company and household is deemed successful when the host agrees to cooperate enthusiastically. Mr. Tam said that in some places such as Cho Lach in Ben Tre province the local people earn their income from fruit trading, and they want to live a peaceful life, hence they do not want to be involved in contact with many people and do not want to serve others. In this process of co-operation, the travel company has a significant impact on how a homestay will work, such as naming the homestay, building a guest room, and setting of prices.

Mr Hao - Tour operator - Cuu Long tourist corporation - Vinh Long province

The interview with Mr Hao was introduced by Mr Luu Hoang Minh and Mr Hao talked about the development of homestay operations in Vinh Long province. In some circumstances, homestays developed spontaneously as the owners used to be a boatmen and started the business as their own wish. These businesses often do not have business names and the operators contact tourists directly in Ho Chi Minh City at popular places for foreign tourists such as Bui Vien, and Pham Ngu Lao. The homestay owners visit Ho Chi Minh City and offer tourists accommodation in Vinh Long directly in person. Others go to the ferry to offer tourists stays in their houses offering a fixed price including two meals which is cheaper than a hotel. As those homestays work on their own, they do not have a proper tour program as offered by travel agents. They did, however, offer tourists some additional activities such as catching fish, seeing fireflies at night or visiting local markets.

Mr Thai - Director of Sales & Marketing - PG International travel company - Ho Chi Minh city

An interview with Mr Thai focused on tours that the travel company offer within the Mekong Delta and the destinations that were most popular with tourists. There are two main routes offered to tourists to the Mekong Delta the first of which is from Ho Chi Minh city to Cai Be in Tien Giang province. This includes vists to floating markets, the islands and sailboat trips along the canals. This route is mainly for tourists travelling for just one day from Ho Chi Minh city. The second route is Cai Be to Can Tho city, staying overnight in the boat. The can be from Cai Be to Can Tho or vice versa. This route is therefore aimed at tourists travelling in the Mekong for two days. There are two main reasons that these tours are suggested to tourists, the first being the attraction for tourists who do not have much time to spend in the Mekong Delta. The second is the fact that the sites to visit are chosen in these tour programs as they are not overcrowded and tourists can see the features of the Mekong Delta but without meeting too many other tourists at their destination.

Ms Yen - Tour operator - Passage to Asia company - Ho Chi Minh city

This interview with Mrs Yen was carried out in a café in Ho Chi Minh city. What I gleaned from the interview was the viewpoint of a tour operator about the relationship between local people in the Mekong Delta and tourists. This is a bilateral relationship between service providers and service consumers. The local people show their kindness and respect to their customers, the tourists whilst the tourists visiting the Mekong Delta feel the friendliness and enthusiasm of the local people. Although thought to be a little mean giving too few tips, the locals were generally complementary about foreign tourists thinking them clean, tidy and funny.

Tourists

Tourist 1 A French man of about 45 years old traveling with his wife and two children

The interview took place in Ba Linh homestay. The man chose to go to the Mekong Delta because at that time, children were having a term break in France, and the trip to a different country was felt to be an educational experience for the children. The Mekong Delta is promoted in travel brochures as a "paradise" which made him and his family more curious about the region. As with other French tourists, the family wanted to see the French architecture that still exists in the Mekong Delta and chose tour programs to the ancient houses built in the 19th century under the French colonial period in the area.

Tourist 2. A Canadian couple around 40 years old.

The interviews took place in Ba Linh homestay after dinner when all the other tourists had gone back to their rooms. I talked to a Canadian couple I met who were accompanied by an elderly guide. They were travelling for six months, starting from Japan. They had been skiing for 2 weeks, then they sent the skiing equipment back to Canada and came to Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and finally were to travel to Europe. Outside of the sleeping areas are the tables and chairs for tourists to sit and rest. My room was next to the Canadian couple's room and I had a discussion with the woman. She started to tell me about the way the local people treated them mentioning a trip to the North of Vietnam. While staying with the local people they were served a pancake for breakfast but they wanted to eat the local food not western food. The woman said that the food offered in the homestay was too generous and felt the host wanted to impress the guests but it was not necessary for them to do that.

Tourist 3. A French couple

I met a French couple in the Ba Linh homestay where Phuong, the niece of the owner took us to explore the village by bicycle. During a stop in a pagoda, I conducted the interview with the couple. They explained that they were travelling to several provinces in the Mekong Delta and were just staying in the Ba Linh homestay for one night. They said that this was their first time in Vietnam, and in fact their first time in Asia. I asked why they chose Vietnam rather than Thailand and they informed me that they thought Thailand is slightly touristic. The couple had chosen Vietnam as they thought that it was still relatively *untouched*.

Tourist 4. A retired French couple.

I met an elderly retired couple at the Phuong Thao homestay whilst seated at the same table during dinner. They explained they had sold their property in France, banked the proceeds and decided to travel to various Asian countries including Vietnam. They chose to travel to the Mekong Delta and stayed in the homestay as they wanted to go to untouched places, not too touristy. They told me that in the Mekong Delta, they could explore the area on their motorbike and joining a large tour or boat with many other tourists was not appealing to them.

What I learned from them was that sometimes, tourists do not have any plans and the decision to stay longer in one place or another depends largely on the hosts. They asked me how they should travel from here to Can Tho city and whether they could travel from Vinh Long to Cambodia by boat. Another item of interest is the food offered in homestays, they explained that they had not tried meat or fish as they thought that they would not be fresh assuming the local people in the rural area do not have adequate fridges to store food. After I had bought fish for them to try and explained about the food the couple said that they would order the fish tomorrow. They also did not like the way the local people approach foreingers in the big cities

such as Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh city, but were much happier that in the Mekong Delta as they felt less bothered by the locals.

Tourist 5. A German couple

This interview took place after dinner at the Phuong Thao homestay at around 8.30pm when the tourists had gathered in groups in the dining area. A group of Australians were having drinks and chatting but I approached a couple from Germany when I noticed that they sat separately from other tourists, the man was reading on his laptop and the woman was just relaxing on the hammock. I struck up a converstation with the woman who said that she had booked this homestay through a website and was staying for two nights.

She explained that they were visiting the Mekong Delta after being told about it by her friend. They had travelled to other places in Vietnam before visiting the Delta and she was anxious to compare the food between those places and here in the Mekong Delta. The food she said was ok but she had no idea about the hosts as there was poor communication between the hosts and guests. She told me they had been picked up and brought to homestay by the owner's nephew and she did not know whether the nephew could speak English as during the drive home, he did not say anything. According to her, hospitality should not only be expressed through smiles but needed the conversations between the hosts and guests. She thought that if the hosts are hospitable, they would welcome guests by offering for example drinks or fruits. She felt it would be better if the host and family members welcomed their guests with greetings such as "welcome to our homestay". As for the homestay, if the interactions between the host family and guests were improved, the status of the homestay would improve and it could become one of the top accommodations for tourists. The hosts could give more explanation about the local

foods, and describe the location of the house, the history of the region and what activities that tourists can be involved with.

They had also cylced around the area she added, at about 4pm for about 30 minutes but the weather was too hot for them to explore by bicycle. "We wanted to come here because we want somewhere less touristy, so we picked homestay rather than a big hotel. We just need somewhere clean, but if we pay less than $10 the room is not going to be clean so we accept we have to accept a slightly higher price".

Tourist 6. A female Australian

The interview was conducted with an Australian tourist from a large group of Australian cyclists who came to the Mekong Delta on a cycling tour.

She suggested that the tourists appreciated the appearance and the layout of the house and that the architecture of the house was very impressive. The accommodation is set in a traditionally wooden house with small courtyards, bonsai and a veranda outside to relax on while watching the river traffic go by. The house also has so many amazing details and is a relaxing place. However, she said her group felt that for them a homestay should have more comfort to ensure a good sleep. She had enjoyed getting a chance to be part of the meal preparation. They also enjoyed being brought into the local home, given refreshments and treated to an outstanding performance of traditional music and singing that told folk tales of the Mekong.

Tourist 7. An American at Ut Trinh homestay

The interview took place before dinner when all the tourists had gathered together in the kitchen to watch the hosts cooking and and helping in preparing the meals. Unlike other tourist accommodation, in homestays, travellers do not have to book in advance but just walk in as the

hosts still manage to find rooms and prepare meals for them. The homestay is far from "small and simple" as they had expected in the Mekong Delta, actually the room is very spacious, and the buildings are quite stunning in design. It is not so much a Homestay but more a B&B with several guestrooms. Nevertheless the service, tranquillity and possibility of helping in the kitchen give this place a homly feel.

Tourist 8 - An Italian couple

I interviewed an elderly Italian couple at Ut Trinh homestay in the evening whilst we were having dinner together with Mrs Lan, the tour guide. As I had joined in a bicycle tour with the couple earlier, at dinner they asked me to join them. They were careful trying local food as they do not eat sour soup or steamed fish and the wife does not eat snails although they both liked spring rolls and fried noodles. They had tried a small piece of the unfamiliar local jackfruit. Homestays, they felt, needed additional activities to increase interaction between guests and local people. They explained they are keen on places where they feel comfortable and are convenient.

Tourist 9 – A French couple

I carried out this interview with a French couple in Bay Thoi homestay. They told me they had spent some days in a homestay in the northwest of Vietnam in a wooden house on stilts. They said the houses there are different and the people raise chicken and pigs around the property. The weather, they said was too hot for them in here.

What I got from this interview was the boundary of the concept of hospitality. Sometimes, hospitality is unfairly influenced by previous bad experiences. On the way to the Mekong Delta, the couple had taken a taxi and they thought that they had been charged double the fare.

They said they thought the taxi driver knew how to speak English but at that moment he lost his English and it was really hard to talk to him. They just paid after the trip and learned a lesson. The tourists are sceptical on every trip after this.

Tourist 10 – A male Italian Ngoc Sang homestay

I met an Italian tourist at Ngoc Sang homestay who was travelling alone and was quite inquisitive. The thing I learned from him was that when tourists travel by themselves without the help of tour guides or companions, they are often sceptical about what local people offer. At places like bus stations, the pier, or on the street local people see tourists as being proactive when approaching to offer services but this makes him apprehensive about being cheated or ripped off.

Tourist 11 – A British party consisting of a mother, daughter and daughter's partner

This interview took place in Nhon Thanh homestay. Before dinner we had an afternoon free so we gathered at a table in the front yard and talked together. The mother told me that she thought the tour program was not clear enough as it stated that this homestay was located on an island. Actually when they got off the boat, they had to take a motorbike and travel a very long distance which she had not enjoyed. The party did not expect the homestay to be in such a far remote area and did not have river view. The requirement to show their passport when checking in the homestay was not explained in advance and so they left all their passports in their hotel in Ben Tre. This is a security regulation required by the police of homestays but was viewed however as an inconvenience by tourists as well as homestay owners during reception.

Tourist 12. American lady from a cycling and boat tour. Four tourists

I had an interview with a lady, one of a group of four American tourists travelling by coach from Ho Chi Minh City to the Mekong Delta. They were visiting the Mekong Delta as they wanted to explore the Delta which is a rural area and very different to the big cities. We met in the port and took the same boat to travel across the river to another island. We then cycled around the island and visited different local factories. When we had a rest in the traditional local house who made traditional cakes, I talked with one lady of the group about their journey to the Mekong Delta. What I learned from this interview was about the language communication between the local people and tourists. They had a tour guide with them but sometimes they had to be separated in small groups to travel in different sampans. Although it took half an hour across the canal the boatman did not say anything as he couldn't speak English. It was one of the limitation of their tour as they would like to be informed about the area where they were.

Tourist 13 - A Finnish couple

I had an interview with a retired Finnish couple on a boat to a floating market. They were of Vietnamese-Finnish origin and came to the Mekong Delta for a holiday. By chance we travelled in the same boat. The couple talked about the reason they were visiting the floating market. The floating Market is a popular tourist destination and they expected to see traditional trading activities on the river with the local people in the Mekong Delta. However, the floating market is not as busy as it was but each year returning to Vietnam they wanted to make a nostalgic visit the floating market and the scenery along the river. The boatmen and women in the floating market also express their friendliness and hospitality. Such a tour creates a comfortable feeling for the traveler as it is not confined within the framework of a default tour program. Instead, tourists may visit some of their favourite places or stay longer in a place they found

interesting. If the tourists wanted to buy local products, the boatman would manage to find for them.

Tour guides

Tour guide 1.

Full interview with Hung, a tour guide for an Australian couple at Phuong Thao homestay.

In the morning, when all the guests were still in their rooms I met Hung in the front yard of the house. I had seen him in the kitchen the day before but had no chance to talk with him. I decided to ask if he is a tour guide and whether I could interview him. Hung agreed to participate and we talked comfortably in the dining area over breakfast.

Me: I saw you arrive yesterday with two tourists?

Hung: Yes, they are Australian

Me: How is your journey? Is everything ok?

Hung: Well, the weather is too hot here. My clients were travelling from the North, the South is too hot, here is the hottest over 40 degrees celcius. When they were in Hanoi, the weather was cooler, then they flew to Da Nang, it was too hot, more than 40 degrees they have sunburn and heat shock so they are tired.

Me: Oh, I see. Yesterday I saw them sat separately at a table and did not want to talk with other guests in the homestay.

Hung: Yeah, they were not happy partly due to the hot weather, partly because the service was not as they expected, not the same as in the advertisement. I saw them all sweaty and I found it very uncomfortable. If I asked they definitely stay they are ok. They are polite, not too delicate, but they are not satisfied. I did text them to ask if every thing was alright or if they need anyt hing, and they still say they are ok. Tourists do not want to be interfered with too much.

Me: Do you find that tourists prefer to stay in homestays other than in hotels?

Hung: Actually, homestays in this area are not truly one but rather like a guest house. When the guests come to stay in these homestays, it is a misleading. In the Mekong Delta, homestays were set up quite similar and homestay was not well defined. This homestay is much more like a farmstay.

Me: Do you explain to the tourists before they participate in tour program?

Hung: Yes, I did, they understood, to some extent, but when they came here, it might be different than their expectation. For example, for this couple, they just married and they want something romantic. Everytime I asked, they always said they are ok, I asked if they need anything or wanted to bike around I can go with them but they still said if they need anything they will tell me.

Me: Yes, the weather here is more humid and sticky so it is not very pleasant.

Hung: In a tour program from the North to the South, the weather changed too much and tourists did not expect that hot. Normally 90% of the tourists do not know where they will go. Even tourists have the itinerary, they still did not read, and have no idea of what is going on the next day. Tourists just know that there are some specific visiting spots, or if they visit

Vietnam, they only know Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city. If the tour guide explain more, tourists would know more but they still do not know very clearly in details.

Me: What is the different between the North and the South? Some tourists told me that they found they are not being cheated in the South.

Hung: Anyway, there are always good and bad people. You still meet nice people in Hanoi, being treated unfair in Ho Chi Minh city. In Vinh Long and My Tho, the local people are quite friendly but not a hundred percent.

Me: What is the difference between international tourists and domestic tourists to the Mekong Delta?

Hung: For instance, these two Australian tourists mainly find somewhere to relax, find somewhere romantic, they thought that in homestay there will be different, and they do not mind to learn about the culture, everything is ok, they do not focus or particular interested in anything. Older tourists are keen on exploring local culture and would like to interact with local people. Asian tourists will complain if you take them here. Asian tourists are mainly Chinese, they like somewhere noisy and more exciting. In here, there are not so many things to do. The light are all off at 7,8 pm. For European senior tourists like this region as this area is quite peaceful. They like to stay away from the city, the homestays are good choice.

Me: This is my second homestay. The first homestay that I stayed was Ba Linh.

Hung: You can try Ut Trinh homestay. I found that engagements between hosts and guests are more intense than in this homestay. In this homestay, I did not see the hosts show up so often. Homestays are not so many different in the regions as they have the same styles, such as they ensure there are minimum level of interaction between hosts and guests such as preparing food

with the hosts. Today, there are not so many guests staying here then the hosts did not pay attention in hosting. In Vietnam, there are not so many places that have "truly" homestay.

The hosts brought breakfast meals for us then the interview were interrupted a bit.

Hung: You said that you stayed in Ba Linh?

Me: Yes, I found Ba Linh from "Tripadvisor".

Hung: To be honest, in "Tripadvisor" the comments or reviews are very subjective. I think just 30-40% of the reviews is true. And actually the tourists are not too focus on any details. When there are many guests at homestays, the hosts will taking care of their hosts better then the guests give more positive comments. Negative comments are more reliable, as for those tourists they care more about the place where they stay. When tourists focus on more details their opinions are more accurate.

Me: Do you often take tourists to homestays?

Hung: Not so much. For all the tours that I participated in, four out of ten tourist groups stay in homestays other than hotels. It is because they thought that homestay are more intimate and they can have chance to have close contact with the local people lives. However, when they arrive, they might find that it is not so many different.

Me: If you take tourists to the Mekong Delta, which homestays are the most often selected?

Hung: It depends on the travel agents. I found that Ut Trinh homestay is the most popular. Ut Trinh invested more in her homestay than others. Have you ever listened to don ca tai tu (traditional music of the Mekong Delta)?

Me: Yes, I have been to My Tho and Ben Tre.

Hung: I never suggest tourists to go to My Tho because the way they do tourism is too commercial, the performers just sing two to three songs then finish their performance. Then they bring the flowers to each table for the tourists to put tips in. It is so ridiculous. In here, for example, in Ut Trinh homestay, the host are more focus on the traditional music performance to the guests and they made their songs like a play so the tourists can, to some extent, understand the idea of the song. In Cai Be (Tien Giang), you can visit ancient houses and there are also musical performance.

Me: Will you stay here for long?

Hung: No, I will leave this morning. The tourists will be back to Ho Chi Minh city then spend one day in Cu Chi. This season, it is very hot to stay in this kind of house, did you find difficult to get to sleep?

Me: I am ok. The only problem is the mosquito. I got some bites.

Hung: I always bring along with me some anti-mosquito insense.

Me: I will go to Ut Trinh homestay after today as your suggestions

Hung: Homestays here are the same, not really a homestay but there are some households also try to create the homely feel, and pay more attention to their guests. Old tourists prefer homestay to younger tourists. On the other day, I took a group of young Italian tourists to an orchards, the landlord said that if they want to try to some starfruit, they can pick some. But then they climb up the tree and break all the branches and the branches with flowers to take pictures. Then I had to remind them to leave some money for the landlord. Tour guides always

say that European tourists are polite, civilized, but not all of them, some are even worse. Vietnamese people now are well behaved than before.

The Mekong Delta, the natural scene is not spectacular, but the culture and the service are better, the locals are more open and show their enthusiasm in serving the guests. But it is also depend on the tourists. Some tourists ask tour guide to create more chances for them to participate with local people. Last time, I guide a group of Middle East tourists, they brought some ingredients from the market and cook their meal in homestays. While the hosts cook their local food and then they join the meal together.

Me: Right. Sometimes, tourists found that they are guests then they feel hesitate to request or demand something from the hosts.

Hung: Even with the suggestions from tour guide, some tourists still feel shy. Umm, how do you get here?

Me: I came here from Vinh Long by An Binh ferry which took about 5 minutes. Then I caught the honda om (motorbike) to get to homestay. Do you find the hospitality of the local people is changing?

Hung: If tourists go into the remote areas, contact with the local people, they are still very friendly and enthusiastic. If you accidently passed by a wedding, the family might invite you join in and have some food. I remember seven years ago,When I visited my friends' relatives in the Mekong Delta, they took me out for fishing, they chose the fish that I like and then roast it. You don't have to pay money. They even got upset if you pay them.

Me: What are the most popular tours in the Mekong Delta?

Hung: In this area, mainly tours are boat tours. The first tour is from Ho Chi Minh city to My Tho and Ben Tre, Cai Be – Vinh Long and Cai Rang – Can Tho floating market. However, floating market is not so busy at the moment. Now the roads are developed so the local people do not use river to transport goods. In My Tho and Ben Tre, there are only few boats, the floating market in Can Tho is busier. In Cai Rang floating market, I even did not dare to buy anything, even Vietnamese people are rip-off and the price is higher than buying in land. Even the Vietnamese people treat each other unfair. It is hard for tourists. I wanted to introduce to the foreign tourists the culture of having food in boat but it is difficult to do so.

Me: Is it time for you to prepare to leave?

Hung: It's ok. No problem. I saw you yesterday but I thought you are Japanese tourist so I did not say hello. As you know, Japanese people do not like to talk to strangers. When you spoke Vietnamese to me. I was so surprise.

Me: It is interesting to have a talk with you today Thank you for your time. Hope to see you around.

Tour guide 2 - Mrs Lan

I met Mrs Lan who is the tour guide for an elderly Italian couple at the Ut Trinh homestay. We were having dinner at the same table. Mrs Lan is a freelance tour guide and also a lecturer at a language college. She is often a guide for French and Italian tourists. There is a difference between the choices of accommodation by tourists. According to Mrs Lan tourists normally do not like staying in homestays with air conditioning. The air conditioning equipment at Ut Trinh homestay was installed at the request of Singaporean tourists who come to the homestay once per year in the summer. Now homestays are subject to many dislikes with guests wanting to

communicate with the hosts but also wanting privacy. Guests also expect higher levels of comfort than normal living of the local people. In particular Italian tourists do not like to live in uncomfortable accommodation prefering comfortable to traditional.

Tour guide 3 - Mr Lam Tour guide for Australian tourists on a cycling tour

My talk with Mr Lam took place during dinner at Ut Trinh homestay. Lam was the tour guide for a large group of touring cyclists. The tourists were taking cycling tour through several Asian countries and in Vietnam Mr Lam was responsible for travelling with them through some provinces of the Mekong Delta. The main task of group tour guides is to take care of the guests' safety, arrange their meals and sleeping accommodation appropriately. Each type of tourist seems to have different feelings about the hospitality of the local people. For Lam tourists travelling from North to South Vietnam as his group were do not feel the difference in the level of hospitality between different regions. This is because they do not stay long in one place and all their activities are arranged by the tour guide in quite a strict itinerary and depend on the guide more than the local hosts.

Tour guide 4 - Ms Van, tour guide for a British family in Nhon Thanh homestay

As Van works for a tourism company, she was invited to attend a workshop organized by the Department of Culture, Sport and Tourism in Ben Tre province. She explained one of the activities conducted by the local authorites was a trip to the North of Vietnam during which Homestay households could join and learn the experiences of other local people who participate in homestay business in the North. The Department also organises training courses to introduce homestay models from other countries for the reference of local homestay owners. She told me that travel companies and policy makers tend to standardize homestay as the resort style by

suggesting breakfast buffet for the guests for example but the homestay owners do not support this approach.

Tour guide 5. Mr Binh, a tour guide for a cycling tour.

Mr Binh acted as a tour guide for an Italian couple and myself to explore the area around Ut Trinh homestay. According to Binh the season of the fruits has an effect on the hospitality of the local people, for example, in April or May, tourists can visit rambutan gardens and enjoy the fruits for a very reasonable price (one pound), as this time is the season of the rambutan. However, in other seasons, tourists are not so welcome as the price of the rambutan is higher and the local people prefer to sell the fruits to merchants and earn more money than hosting the tourists.

Tour guide 6 – Mr Huong A Retired English teacher

When I stayed in the Hong Thai homestay, the owner suggested a tour to explore the local area and Mr Huong was to be my tour guide. The tour included cycling around the village, visiting the local factory shop and boating along the canal. As we finished the tour on the way back to the homestay Mr Huong invited me to visit his house where the interview took place as we sat drinking tea and eating dried banana, a local product, made by his wife. He told me his reason for becoming a tour guide was when he, by chance, met two foreign guests who had lost their way in the village, he helped them return to their group. In addition, from the interview, I also comprehended the collaboration of tour guides, boatmen, tourists and owners of visting locations. The tours were carried out everyday at anytime that tourists wanted without prior planning. For example, homestay guests may decide to make a tour immediately and if they want to take a tour by bike or boat, the homestay owner will contact the local guide. The guide will then make contact with the visiting points and boatmen to arrange the tour. I also

discovered a thing about tipping, usually, tips are given by tourists to those who have served them, but here local guides also offer tips to the boatmen in the hope that the boatmen will serve their clients (tourists) better.

Tour guide 7 - Cycling and boat tour. Group tours with 5 American tourists from Ho Chi Minh city to visit local factories in Ben Tre.

In the Mekong Delta, tour progams must be scheduled according to the natural conditions of the area. As the water level changes during the day the boat tours are arranged to suit the level of the water allowing safe passage along the river. Homestays are linked to local restaurants to suit the itinerary of a tour. The majority of tourists come to the Mekong Delta to explore the countryside culture, especially French tourists who love to study Vietnamese culture. The local guides of some boat tours often wear traditional costumes to create a traditional look. Another thing that I learned from the interview was about the role of tour guides. New guides usually follow the tour schedule whilst experienced guides sometimes modify the tour schedule. They do not always go in the order of the tour program and may cut out some sites reducing the time staying at one visiting point.

Homestay owners

Vinh Long province

Mr Trong – Ba Linh homestay owner

When I arrived at Ba Linh homestay Mr Trong offered me some tea and we sat in the dining area. The interview started naturally as he knew in advance that I was doing fieldwork and that I was conducting research about homestay businesses. Mr Trong started his homestay business in 2001 making it one of the first homestays in the Mekong Delta. Mr Trong's sister opened

another homestay named Bay Trung within walking distance, which includes four rooms which are mainly for French tourists who prefer privacy. I also understand that in homestays guest reception is conducted in a process which starts by directing the guests to the room, explaining about the facilities of the house, offering the guests some drinks, informing guests about meal times and introducing some additional activities though these are dependent on each homestays.

What I learned from his story is that homestay owners understand about their business and they also plan to improve their homestay by learning and copying from others. Mr Trong has explored many places such as Can Tho with homestays built like bungalows, however he discovered that there are not so many homestays in this area, hence less competition.

Mr Phu – Phuong Thao homestay owner

The type of guests staying in homestays are generally tourists travelling in large groups or individual tourists. Homestay hosts did not normally accept walk-in domestic tourists as they are said to be not conform to the hosts' expectation. Domestic tourists have a culture of talking loudly during meals and lengthen the meal till late at night. This affects other international tourists when they share the common dining area. Hence, homestay owners prefer to choose hosting international tourists over domestic tourists. In some exceptional circumstances, domestic tourists from package tours offered by travel agents or from state companies are accepted by the hosts. International tourists in Phuong Thao homestay are mainly from European countries, there is not a great difference between the behaviour and attitude. Though French tourists found it more difficult to communicate with local people as the homeowners mostly just speak English. Sometimes tourists' demands could not be satisfied due to poor communication between hosts and guests.

International tourists would like to stay in an ordinary local house, however the capacity of those houses is small and can host only two to four guests at a time. Thus, it is not practical for the family to start homestay business. The second thing is the restriction of homestay regulations that homestays need to meet certain standards to be active.

Mrs Trinh – Ut Trinh homestay owner

In the Ut Trinh homestay the bedrooms were built in accordance with tourists' preference. For example, bedrooms equipped with air conditioning for Singaporean tourists, bedrooms equipped with fans and open wall for English tourists. Bedrooms built without open walls at the top are more prefered by French tourists. Ut Trinh used to be a tour guide and worked for a tourism company. At the moment, she has her own company and the tour programs that she offers to tourists include staying in her house. She understands that homestays are expected to be more traditional in style in which air conditioning is not very suitable. Then she called her house "Ut Trinh Countryhouse" to avoid using the word "homestay". Though she has her own house in the city but she sometimes stays at her homestay to host guests if there are large groups of tourists staying. In other cases, her relatives help her to host the guests and she hired her neighbour to help cook the food. Ut Trinh also said the real hospitality is fading in homestay as the homestay business is more commercialised. The guests normally have to pay for what they were offered. However, in some areas where local people do not participate in tourism business, they might offer the tourists food, drink or local fruits for free.

Ut Trinh also has her own opinion about different types of tourists. She believes Australain tourists are the friendliest whilst French tourists are more difficult and often bargain. Israeli tourists do not stay in homestay overnight, but they have meals there and English tourists are mainly elite tourists who expect a higher level of service and quality.

Homestay owners also improve their service by adding more activities such as cooking classes, boat tours to the floating market, visiting orchards, gardening and catching fish. Ut Trinh also organises new activities for tourists to make it different to other homestays. For instance, she hires some local performers to sing traditional songs for guests in the evening or boat tours and cycling tours to less commonly visited places.

Mrs Bay – Bay Thoi homestay owner

An interview with Mrs Bay at Bay Thoi homestay took place after breakfast at the homestay. This interview helped me understand more about the different ways of establishing a homestay. Bay Thoi homestay was set up as suggested by the Ut Trinh homestay when there were too many visitors at a time and Ut Trinh homestay could not serve them all. Mrs Trinh suggested to Mrs Bay tothat she should renovate the house and build extra rooms to welcome guests. The homestay's façade is decorated in traditional style as suggested by the travel company, while other bedrooms are built in more modern style, with brick walls and cement. Guest reception at the homestay follows a process, but the interactions between the owners and tourists are limited because the host can't speak English, all transactions depend on the grandchildren of the landlord. The Homestay has a lot of bycicles free for tourists to borrow. If tourists would like a boat tour, they have to ask the landlord and then the landlord will help arranging the tour.

Mr Nam – Ngoc Sang homestay owner

An Interview with Mr Nam took place late in the evening at Ngoc Sang homestay which was formed in a different way to the remaining homestays. Mr Nam used to be a boatman and before participating in tourism business their living was mainly dependent on gardening. He worked as a boatman for five or six years before he found that tourists really wanted to communicate with him but he could not speak English at that time. This motivated him to learn

English and he started to welcome tourirsts to stay in his house. As he started from a very basic position without any big investment, some tourists after staying in his house gave him advice on how to renovate his house for tourist rental. He also plans to buy more land to build bungalows for tourist accommodation.

Ben Tre province

Mrs Linh – Duyen Que homestay owner

For two days I stayed in the Duyen Que homestay which is the home of a family of four people, Phong, Linh and their two sons. I also had chance to explore the village accompanied by their youngest, Khang an eight year old boy. What I learned from the interview with Linh is sometimes it is not easy to book a homestay in advance as the homestay owners would not rely on the guests if they were Vietnamese, or a single man as they were afraid of cheating or stealing. I was accepted to stay as I am a woman and travelling alone. However, sometimes individual guests can not book because homestay owners prefer to serve big groups of tourists, so they save time and earn more money. The homestay owners refuse to accept guests due to bad experiences with some guests before. For instance, some guests booked but then did not turn up. Domestic tourists are not welcomed in homestay as they often drink till late at night, they are said noiser and messier than foreign tourists.

The idea of opening a homestay may not derive wholly from the home owners but by others ideas. In the case of Duyen Que homestay, the method of operating and the interior design were suggested by Linh's uncle. The uncle is a doctor working in Ho Chi Minh city and was given the idea by a friend who also a homestay owner. The homestay family mainly use their living space for tourist rental but they also plan to innovate and expand for tourist accommodation.

The food offered in homestay is also modified to tourists' tastes (mainly international tourists). As I am Vietnamese, I joined the dinner with the family and we ate some local food which was not served to homestay guests.

Mr Muoi – Nhon Thanh homestay owner

Mr Muoi do not care whether he hosts domestic or international tourists. He likes Vietnamese tourists as it is easier to understand each other as he can not speak English. However, foreign guests are more likely to conform to the homestay's routine whilst domestic tourists often lengthen their dinner till late, are more demanding such as asking the locals to climb the coconut tree or drink wine then they give them tips. Some domestic tourists seem more generous in tipping but the local people do not always like this.

I also learn from the interview that there are interferences from travel agents in homestay business. For instance, in some cases Mr Muoi wanted to discount for individual tourist but the travel agent (who often send the tourists to homestay) does not agree with that as he is afraid that the tourists will compare the price that they have to pay. In addition, there is also involvement of local authorities in homestays, such as the business licence to open a homestay business which was checked by the department of Culture, Sports and Tourism. Police officers also check if the homestay have enough security for tourists (the room should have locks).

Mr Phi – Chalet Suisse House owner

Mr. Phi said he used to work for a travel company before helping his sister who was the owner of the homestay but she now lives in Switzerland. The name of the homestay (Chalet Suisse-Swiss Wooden house) is also a memory of the country that now she lives in. He said the business is for fun rather than benefits, there is a low season when they were not busy but they

also have tourists stay in high season which is a trade-off. A service that the homestay owner offers to the tourists is to try to help the tourists to save money by arranging trip to next destination. He showed me his hospitability by saying: "I cancelled the room and he called directly to Mr. Thai to let me direct contact will be lower price".

When I arrived at the homestay, I wandered around and took some pictures. Mr Phi told his sister to set another plate for me to having lunch with them. Then we had a converstation afterwards. I found out that the number of tourists staying overnight are still low. His homestay welcomes mainly backpackers who do not book in advance. Tourists often arrive in the afternoon, and have to find other places for food. "When the number of guests are two or three, we can cook for them however, the food does not always suit their taste". The backpackers want to stay just one night to enjoy the rural atmosphere, different from Ho Chi Minh city and then continue to Vinh Long, Can Tho, Chau Doc and to Cambodia. The other thing that I found out in this homestay is that the business is influenced by politics. When I asked him why it was so quiet in his homestay (I am the only guest on that night) he answered that as the country is in preparation for an election on the 22 May the communal local authorities sent a request to homestays to restrict the hosting of guests.

Mr Thai – Hong Thai homestay owner

I first met Mr Thai in the Chalet Suisse House when he came to pick me up by Honda. As I visited his home in the morning we had plenty of time to talk before dinner. Mr Thai talked about his homestay business and his intention to expand to create more jobs for the local people living in his area and the wish to train the next generation to do tourism. At that moment, he has a supporting team including five speaking English tour guides and two French speaking

tour guides who are expert in long distance motor tours, such as from Vinh Long to Tra Vinh or Cambodia.

I asked whether he knew there were negative comments about Hong Thai homestay on "Tripadvisor" and he explained to me why. He did not reply on the website but preferred to let the tourists comment or respond. He said it is an experience for him and helped to avoid the problem arised in the future. Differently to other homestays who have collaboration with travel agents, Hong Thai homestay owner started his business by himself. He said that there was no support or guidance from the authorities here. He did not join any tourism association or cooperate with any travel company because he did not want to be involved with mediators. The tourism companies compete with each other and reduce the tour price. This leads to poor service quality, which affects the homestay though the homestay is only one stage in the chain of activities.

Mr Vinh – Jardin du Mekong homestay owner

The interview with Mr Vinh, Jardin du Mekong homestay owner took place during dinner at the homestay. The homestays included a few lodges which were set in green with ponds, old traditional cooking equipment and fruit trees. Jardin du Mekong's self contained units are spacious, private, cool and well appointed. They're set among the large, shady and lushly beautiful garden. What I learned from the interview with Vinh was that the homestay owners copy from each other the ways of operating a homestay whilst keeping themselves a little different to the others. Vinh understands what he is doing for his homestay and is trying to make the cooking class different from the other homestays. As he explained the food preparing process from the beginning of how to make the ingredients instead of cooking them. Tourists were taught how to prepare traditional banh xeo (Vietnamese pancake). The price also include

foot massage and lemon grass foot bath which I found different from the other homestays. Vinh also took his guests for a bike ride through the village to the market and sometimes stopped off at a cafe. He also arranged boat trips where the driver took tourists to his home and the pagoda. All activities that are offered by the homestay aim to invite the tourists into a real authentic non touristy experience.

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