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# Feeding a tourism boom: changing food practices and systems of provision in Hoi An, Vietnam

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## ABSTRACT

While food studies have increasingly gone beyond the “Western” experience in food globalization processes, research on food and tourism has often prioritized the (Western) tourist’s gaze. In the literature on food and tourism in Asia, little attention has been given to the experiences of host populations. Responding to this lacuna in the literature, this paper analyses how a tourism boom is fed and how tourism-driven “foodway encounters” shape food practices and systems of provision. Focusing on the major tourism transformations seen in the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Hoi An, Vietnam, over the past decades, we study how hosts approach tourists’ demand for both comfort food from home and new food experiences that are simultaneously “authentic” and safe. We analyze how both Vietnamese and foreign hosts seek to understand, influence and adapt to the culinary preferences of visitors, and how they develop the necessary skills to do so. Furthermore, since feeding tourists often requires a wide range of food traditionally unavailable or uncommon in Hoi An, we analyze how hosts acquire the ingredients necessary for changing food practices and how systems of provision both shape and take shape through the process of catering to the particularities of touristy foodways.

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## Introduction

Food is at the core of cultural and economic globalization, and the ways in which food travels and how the meanings, contents and tastes of food change in cultural encounters, have long attracted academic and popular attention (e.g., Timothy and Ron 2013). Although the idea of a strong Westernization of food cultures across the world retains a significant position in popular imaginations and in different macro-oriented academic fields, it has been well established that food globalization involves complex processes of hybridization (e.g., Wilk 2006). As put by Matejowsky (2016, 20) based on his studies of fast food in the Philippines, “the interpenetrative forces of globalization and localization interact and influence each other in new and unexpected ways”. Thus, as argued by Montefrio et al. (2021: 119), the messy and erratic

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nature of food globalization calls for approaches that acknowledge the “multidimensional, multivalent, and multiplicitous” in these dynamics. Food studies have increasingly gone beyond the “Western” experience in such interaction (e.g., Wilk 2006, Matejowsky, 2016; Kong and Sinha 2016; Montefrio and Wilk 2020, Laurent, 2022; Montefrio et al. 2020; Machin and Chen 2023), in the process “decenter[ing] the dominance of Euro-American and Anglo-centric food scholarship” (Montefrio and Wilk 2020, 103). Calls for a similar move are seen in the growing literature on food tourism (see Ellis et al. 2018). In the literature on food and tourism in Asia, the non-Asian viewpoint has clearly dominated (Park, Kim, and Yeoman 2019). Particularly the experiences of host populations in tourism encounters represent an intriguing lacuna in the literature. Indeed, Park et al. (2019, 6) find that a large share of research on food and tourism in Asia has focused on China and Hong Kong, “predominantly from the perspective of the international tourist, more precisely, Western tourists” exploration of “Asianness” (Park, Kim, and Yeoman 2019, 6).

This paper responds directly to this knowledge gap by focusing on the feeding of a tourist boom from a host perspective. The “exploration of the foodways of other” (Long 1998, 181) through tasting food or even learning how to cook local dishes, has become a central part of tourism (more on foodways below). Still, the extent to which tourists travel because of food tends to be exaggerated in travel magazines and the tourism industry (Hall et al. 2016), and tourists are often less adventurous in their travel foodways than both the industry and researchers tend to assume (Cohen and Avieli 2004). Tourist services thus often work hard to provide safe and comfortable experiences that simultaneously “conform to imagined exoticisms” (Tarulevicz and Ooi 2019, 828), in the process sanitizing local food cultures in the interest of the safety of tourists (Sin et al., 2021). By focusing on adaptation, we map out how hosts develop the skills and acquire the necessary ingredients for satisfying tourists’ demand and analyze how the co-evolution of food preparation and food provisioning practices have been shaped by interpretations of tourists’ food practices. Instead of adopting food tourism’s focus on the consumption of the exotic, we emphasize the mundane workings of a local tourism-food nexus. We accomplish this by employing a food lens to tourism, rather than the other way around, and specifically by zooming in on food practices and the systems of provision that enable them.

Specifically, the paper studies food in Vietnam’s recent tourism boom. Our case is the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Hoi An, a small town in Central Vietnam that is famous, among many other things, for its food. We draw on theories of practice, building on a growing scholarship on the ways in which food practices co-shape and are organized by broader socio-material arrangements as well as habituated patterns of behavior (e.g., Ward, 2016; Neuman, 2019). Here we are particularly interested in two main aspects of practices; how they change over time (e.g., Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012) and the skills and competences required by and employed in the performance of particular cooking practices and how these are learned (Fuentes and Samsioe 2021; Halkier 2021; Torkkeli, Janhonen, and Mäkelä 2021). We combine this with a “systems of provision” approach (Fine 2002; Bayliss and Fine 2020) in order to study how the ingredients necessary for feeding a tourism boom arrive in Hoi An. In addition, we employ the broad concept of “foodways” as a way to study the role of food culture in practices, as explained below.

The main empirical material analyzed consists of observations and interviews with restaurant owners and suppliers in Hoi An during spring and fall 2019 recruited through purposive sampling. Out of 15 interviews, 12 were with restaurant owners, two with restaurant employees, and one interview with a supplier of foreign foods. Four of these informants were foreigners from Western countries living permanently in Hoi An or Da Nang, a major city and a tourist attraction located 30 km north of Hoi An. With long experience living in Hoi An and working in the local food sector, we treat these foreigners also as hosts in this study. We carried out follow-up interviews through phone calls and video calls with four of the restaurant owners during the first lockdown for COVID-19 pandemic in Vietnam. The restaurants were diverse, from mid-range to high end. Seven of these served both Vietnamese and “Western” food, four focused mainly on foreign food, two served only Vietnamese food while one focused on fusion food of Vietnamese and Western European origins. Some of the restaurants were newly established, while others had been serving food for tourists for more than a decade. Many restaurant owners thus had extensive experience in acquiring foreign ingredients, and one of our informants owned a business supplying European-style food to restaurants in Central Vietnam. In addition to these main interviews, we performed short, semi-structured conversational interviews with tourists, discussing their food expectations, preferences and experiences in Hoi An. We performed 18 such interviews, with tourists from Australia, Germany, Japan, Korea, France, Singapore and the United States. These tourist interviews have contributed with important background information on different tourists’ approaches to food in Hoi An.

Our research also benefits from the fact that all authors have lived in Hoi An during different long and short periods between 2010 and 2022. The first author visited Hoi An every year between 2010 and 2019, with visits ranging from a few days to several months. We have observed and indeed tasted parts of the many changes Hoi An has gone through the past decade and are able draw on knowledge gathered through innumerable meals and conversations with hosts and tourists. While none of us have experienced Hoi An as the quiet town it used to be, we have seen first-hand the unfolding of the latest stages of accelerated tourism development that have dramatically transformed the town into a major tourist destination. With one author coming from Hanoi and two authors coming from different countries in Northern Europe, we have also experienced our own variegated foodway encounters which partly triggered this research.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. We start by introducing the theoretical framework, before proceeding to introduce the recent tourism booms in Vietnam and Hoi An. We then zoom in on what tourists eat and hosts’ adaptations and strategies for providing this food, focusing on “tailored authenticity”, innovation, skills and ingredients. Finally, we touch on the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and reflect on possible futures of food and tourism in Hoi An.

### **Practices, foodways and systems of provision**

Our theoretical and ontological point of departure is that the basic unit of society is made of practices and that a practice perspective provides unique insights into human action, including food provisioning and consumption (see Neuman, 2019; Warde, 2016). Much has been written about the practice turn in the social sciences

(see Hui, Schatzki, and Shove 2017; Schatzki 2018 for overviews). Practice approaches have become dominant in sociological research on food consumption in recent decades (see Warde, 2016) and have recently gained popularity also in broader food studies (Brembeck and Fuentes, 2017; Nelson et al. 2017, Neuman, 2019; Fuentes and Fuentes 2022). Although practice theories come in many shapes, a shared starting point is that society consists of a nexus of practices that link and influence each other (Hui, Schatzki, and Shove 2017). A practice is, according to Reckwitz (2002, 249):

a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, “things” and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge.

This definition points to practices as put together by things people say and do, but also how these “doings” and “sayings” are shaped by forms of knowledge or understandings that “exist” in society beyond individual actors. Reckwitz also specifically adds “things” in his definition, and parts of the practice turn have seen a strong re-orientation toward materiality and how agency is “distributed” between human actors, their bodies, and the socio-material context they operate in (see Wilhite 2008). A popular simplification which also guides this article, is that practices consist of elements in the form of materials, meanings, and competences that must be understood together to make sense of practices and how they change (Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012).

While practice-theoretical approaches have both made important contributions in their own right and grown increasingly sophisticated over time, social theories function as lenses to understand reality and will always be better at explaining some aspects of society than others (Warde 2017; Schatzki 2018). Theodore Schatzki (2018), one of the leading scholars in the recent practice turn, indeed argues that practice theories should be coupled with other complimentary theoretical approaches. Here, we supplement the practice approach with two other approaches in order to highlight the role of food culture and political economy and commodity supply chains in shaping practices. First, and overall, we employ the well-established food studies concept of “foodways”. As explained by Timothy and Ron (2013, 99), foodways is much more than food and include for example “the culinary smells, sights, sounds, and eating practices of a people or region”, as well as cooking methods, recipes, ingredients, dining customs, and social connotations. While broad, we find this concept useful for analyzing the role of food cultures in practices, entering practices as a form of taken for granted “general understandings” (see e.g., Welch and Warde 2017) of what constitute food and what constitutes a proper meal (see also Hansen 2022a). This is relevant for understanding both what tourists do (not) eat and how hosts attempt to adapt to what they think tourists want to eat. We are particularly interested in what we approach as “foodway encounters”, referring to the cultural encounters at play when tourists eat at a destination and hosts cook for them (see also Mak et al., 2012). Finally, we employ the systems of provision (SOP) approach, defined by Ben Fine (2002, 79) as “the inclusive chain of activity that attaches consumption to the production that makes it possible”. From the SOP approach, society consists of different provisionary systems that must be studied separately, including food systems (see Fine et al., 1996; Bayliss and Fine, 2020). In this paper, we employ

this approach to understand how food items and ingredients make it to a place where they were usually not found and where there has traditionally been limited possibility of acquiring them.

## Food and tourism in Vietnam

Over the past four decades, Vietnam has rapidly, yet gradually, been opening up to the world after prolonged periods of war and relative isolation. Much academic attention has been given to the political and economic changes this opening has involved (e.g., Vasavakul 2019), as well as the many social transformations *Đổi Mới*—the set of market reforms officially adopted by the communist regime in 1986—has led to (see Nguyen-Marshall et al., 2012). Within the realm of food, research has documented both the dramatic changes in agricultural production and systems of provision since *Đổi Mới*, and the many changes in food practices and urban food environments that have taken place alongside processes of rapid economic development (Hansen 2022b; Wertheim-Heck and Raneri 2019).

Comparatively little attention has been given to tourism (although see Brickell 2011; Gillen 2016, 2018; Lloyd 2003), although this sector represents both a central part of development strategies and one of the most obvious manifestations of Vietnam's opening to the world. From hardly any foreign visitors in the early 1990s, tourism has developed into an important sector in the Vietnamese economy. According to Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (2019), in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic ground this industry to a halt, more than 18 million foreign visitors crossed the borders into Vietnam, the vast majority of whom were Asian, including almost six million Chinese and more than four million Korean visitors. These two groups have represented the brunt of the new rapid increase in foreign visitors to the country. In addition, according to the same statistics, Vietnam welcomed a million North Americans and more than two million European visitors (including work-related travel) (Department of Tourism 2019). Furthermore, Vietnam's booming middle classes have contributed to domestic tourism also taking off, reaching 85 million trips in 2019. Since the lifting of restrictions and the full reopening for international tourists in March 2022, domestic tourism has reached record-high levels while international tourist arrivals are significantly lower than pre-pandemic levels but expected to grow (VietnamPlus 2023).

Through the tourism boom, countless places within Vietnam have undergone significant transformations, often involving complex mixes of actors in Vietnam's "socialist market economy" (Gillen 2016). In Hoi An this has been manifested as intense touristification that has permeated the local economy. Despite its role as an important harbor between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, then known as Faifoo, Hoi An was still a poor and remote town in the late 1980s. In the early 1990s, foreign backpackers started making it to the town and Hoi An reportedly had four hotels and hotel restaurants catering to visitors by the end of the 1990s. When the town was listed as UNESCO World Heritage site in 1999, tourism started booming. Now, Hoi An is deeply "touristified," welcoming more than 5 million staying tourists in 2019, 4 million of them foreign (Khánh 2019) and was in 2019 home to more than 600 different hotels, hostels, homestays, and resorts.

The spatial expansion of the tourist economy over the past decade is one of the most obvious ways that Hoi An has become "touristified," in addition to the dramatic

expansion of commercial businesses within the Ancient Town itself. As a picturesque heritage site, the Ancient Town is at times jam-packed with tourists. Most of the days the streets are open to pedestrians and cyclists only, but even so the streets can be challenging to traverse through the crowds. Although some locals still live in the Ancient Town, they have to a large extent sold their property and moved to surrounding areas. Indeed, over time the touristy area of Hoi An has gradually expanded beyond the Ancient Town to occupy seemingly ever-increasing parts of the town. Touristification has a clear spatial expression as neighborhoods that were considered “local” before are now full of restaurants, bars, massage spots, beauty parlors, and other services catering to tourists. It has even expanded on the Thu Bon river – a key waterway running through Hoi An, as large land reclamation projects for tourism infrastructure have been fulfilled in recent decades.

In recent years, tourism development in Hoi An has taken a new turn, influenced by neighboring Da Nang’s strong growth in tourism. Da Nang, with around one million inhabitants, welcomed an estimated 8.7 million tourists in 2019 (VietnamPlus 2019). The dramatic increase in East Asian, mainly Chinese and Korean, visitors to Da Nang has led to a spike in day trips to Hoi An. Often part of package tours, large number of buses with groups of tourists arrive every day during peak season. In addition to Asian tourists, backpackers from Europe, Australia and the US still arrive in large numbers, along with large numbers of older Western tourists. A visit to Hoi An is on the itinerary of many traveling to Vietnam, and many tour operators include the town as a must-see destination, with the local food scene as one of many attractions.

Hoi An’s transformation from a quiet backwater to a tourist town welcoming millions of visitors every year has brought along considerable food transformations. Yet Hoi An has hardly been subject to research, with the major exception of Nir Avieli’s food ethnographies in the town, tracking the many transformations of the town through the lens of food (see Avieli 2012), with attention to topics such as dog meat consumption (Avieli 2011), tourism and heritage (Avieli 2013), vegetarianism (Avieli 2014), and food taboos (Avieli 2019). In the following, we build on this research to analyze hosts’ approach to feeding the touristification of Hoi An.

## Feeding Hoi An’s tourism boom

Before the influx of tourists started in the 1990s, the options for eating out in Hoi An were limited and the eateries would cater only to local people. One of the local actors we interviewed had experience from the onset of the local tourism boom. He explained how a number of small businesses back then served food and drinks for locals along the Thu Bon river. These were typically small family-run eateries (*quán ăn*) that had fixed locations with tables and chairs, or mobile stalls (*gánh hàng rong*) moved around by the cook themselves, both of which are still common all over Vietnam. Since the tourists were attracted to the areas around the river, they started frequenting these eateries. In his words:

Before tourists came to Hoi An, along the river in the town, local people also served some food, some drinks. To local people only. But then when tourists came, they also went to those places. And then people changed and changed, from local food to local people to local food to foreigners. (Vietnamese restaurant owner, March 2019)

He told us that people running these places gradually started changing their business model alongside the arrival of tourists. In fact, we were told, the very idea of a “restaurant” was foreign to most Hoianese in the early 1990s and, according to the restaurant owner, first adaptations of restaurants (*nhà hàng* as opposed to *quán ăn*<sup>1</sup>), where customers can dine in and enjoy waiter services, were only established around 1992 to 1993. The way that foreign tourists enjoyed food, especially Western tourists, he explained, was significantly different from how local Vietnamese enjoyed their meals. High clothed table, with proper chairs, and cutlery, quickly became essential for these new restaurants. To attract foreign tourists, the restaurants changed their menus, as well as the design, furniture and decorations, and serving manners. This informant also noted that after these first developments, a few early restaurants catering to foreign tourists were opened inside the few hotels in town. The early growth of these exclusive hotel restaurants in Hoi An serving both Vietnamese and international food were also reiterated by other interviewees, who used to work as chefs or kitchen staff at these venues and later on ventured out to open their own restaurants.

Since the first hotels and restaurants opened in the early 1990s, the restaurants have rapidly expanded all over town, leading to a significant transformation of Hoi An’s food environments. Today, the restaurant sector comprises both street food – both in shape of the traditional food stalls and its modern and trendy manifestations – and fine dining, and a wide range of options in between. While we were unable to acquire official statistics, Tripadvisor listed 1038 places to eat in Hoi An at the time of writing. While there are many restaurants serving exclusively Vietnamese dishes to Vietnamese tourists or to foreigners and higher end restaurants serving exclusively foreign dishes, the restaurants serving both Vietnamese dishes and foreign foods dominate the scene. These are mainly small family-owned restaurants serving a bit of everything, often with higher prices than local eateries or food stalls, but very low prices compared to the higher end restaurants. These restaurants tend to look similar to each other and indeed may even have exactly the same menus, sometimes because new restaurants copy existing restaurants’ menus, as we return to below. Interestingly, there are no major international or domestic restaurant chains present in Hoi An, but some local businesses have been so successful that they now own several popular restaurants.

In the following, we zoom in on the adaptations made to feed tourists in Hoi An, starting with touristy foodways and “tailored” authenticity, moving on to skills and competences and finally addressing the ingredients needed to prepare food for tourists.

### **Tailored authenticity and touristy foodways**

Vietnamese food has achieved global recognition and eating (and sometimes cooking) Vietnamese food is emphasized by many tourists, including our interviewees, as a central reason to travel and an essential part of any visit to Vietnam. From a practice perspective, we could say it is a key tourist ritual (Bargeman and Richards, 2020). Yet, Vietnamese food can mean many different things and Hoi An is no exception. The foodways of tourists are shaped by culturally specific “general understandings” of what constitute food and what constitutes a proper meal. Western tourists rarely order pork intestine congee (*cháo lòng*) or fetal duck eggs (*trứng vịt lộn*). They often do not even order “hotpot” (*lẩu*), one of the most popular dishes



when Vietnamese go out to eat. While adventurous tourists try “extremes” such as snake meat or steamed pig brain, the latter which can now be had in delicate surroundings at a popular tourist restaurant in Hoi An, most tourists seem to find spring rolls, stir-fried rice and noodles, and the famous *bánh mì* as “acceptable” food, something our conversations with tourists confirmed.<sup>2</sup> That said, the growing popularity of Vietnamese cuisine worldwide also affects local tourist food practices. Popular Vietnamese dishes like *phở* or *bánh mì*, and Hoianese specialties, like *cao lầu*, *mì Quảng* or *bánh vạc*, are often frequently sought after by both domestic and foreign tourists, the latter playing a central role in in the partly tourism-inspired construction of culinary heritage in Hoi An (Avieli 2013).

Eating street food the traditionally local way, that is, sitting on the sidewalks or in the middle of the streets, has now also become a more common practice among foreign tourists. As such, the street food scene has also grown significantly in Hoi An to meet the increased interest of tourists for “authentic” dining experiences. Parts of the expanded street food scene is directly aimed at providing comfortable and manageable food spaces for experimentation among tourists. For example, some of these establishments have pictures of dishes and prices displayed in a menu or on the wall – practices traditionally uncommon in Vietnamese street kitchens. In general, the “authenticity” of local food has been gradually tailored to meet tourist expectations, both when it comes to preparing and serving food (Avieli 2013). This is partly linked to larger modernizing schemes in Vietnam (see e.g., Hansen 2022b; Harms 2009), similar to what Tarulevicz and Ooi (2019) find to be the case in Singapore, but also through more local adaptations to demand from tourists. It is well known from the literature that tourists may have considerable reluctance toward parts of local food cultures at tourist destinations, particularly if outside the most affluent parts of the world (e.g., Cohen and Avieli 2004). Avieli (2013, 131) has explained how dishes go through “adaptation, simplification and vulgarization” in the encounter with tourism, both in order to meet the palates of foreigners and due to shortcuts taken in the interest of profit and convenience and enabled by the limited knowledge of tourists of the foodways of locals. Modifications of “local food” was often mentioned among our informants as well, but explained also as a way of meeting tourist expectations without scaring them away:

We think that Europeans will prefer something local and native, but at the same time, we also have to offer something familiar to them, like in the décor or manner of serving. If we offer truly authentic, truly “local” and “native” food, European customers will not be able to eat them. [. . .] So, we have to change to suit European customers, in terms of taste, cooking process or serving. (Vietnamese restaurant owner, April 2019, translated from Vietnamese)

The modifications mentioned by our informants included changing cooking methods and for example to use meat or vegetables that suit foreign visitors’ taste buds or offering vegetarian or vegan options of Vietnamese dishes. Slight modifications, such as substituting fatty with lean meat in local specialties like *cao lầu* or *mì Quảng*, or avoiding serving bony fresh-water fishes, were commonly adopted by restaurants tailored for foreign tourists. Another experience of serving Western tourists, we were told, has been that they are less patient than locals. Many Vietnamese dishes, such as meat and fish slow cooked in clay pots, take very long time to make and would either have to be premade or left out of the menu. Meanwhile, according to several of our informants, the

tourists would like to order dishes on-demand from a larger menu. Therefore, there has been a focus on Vietnamese, and more generically “Asian”, dishes that can be made quickly, as an example of how food practices change in relation to temporal dynamics and requirements (see Greene et al. 2022).

In addition to adjusting Vietnamese dishes to the preferences of foreigners, local actors early on started experimenting with making “Western” food. While Western tourists often want to try local food, they tend to not want this for all meals. Many foreign tourists find it hard to start their days with standard Vietnamese savory breakfast dishes like rice porridge (*cháo*) or one of the many noodle soups. This was confirmed by the tourists we interviewed. The Western tourists we talked to preferred breakfast with bread, eggs and cheese, or banana pancakes, which in turn has become standard in all hotels, both in Hoi An and the rest of Vietnam. The pancakes, until relatively recently alien to the region, have become standard to the extent that the main backpacker routes of Southeast Asia are popularly known as “the Banana Pancake Trail”. Similarly, most Western tourists want their coffee hot and without condensed milk or sugar, the very opposite of many Vietnamese coffee drinkers. Several informants made a clear distinction between Western and Asian tourists. According to both our tourist interviews and local actors, Asian tourists eat more Vietnamese food than Western tourists. As put by one of the foreign restaurant owners, Western tourists need occasional “breaks” from local food:

Usually the Asian people can continue [eating Vietnamese food] for one or two weeks during their holiday. But the Westerners, after two, three, four days . . . they need pasta or pizza, they have kids . . . [they] need something that they know to make the body full again and the day after they continue to eat soup (European restaurant owner, April 2019)

This view of Western tourists needing comfort food from home in between their food explorations was confirmed by several of our tourist interviews and echoes other research (see Chang et al. 2021). These are foodways that local actors have had to make sense of when trying to feed tourists, and many saw the potential in focusing on the comfort food of foreigners, like one informant who ran a small hamburger restaurant:

Actually, when I first opened [the restaurant], most of the food I had was Vietnamese dishes . . . We didn’t have many customers, just a few. And also with a thousand restaurants in Hoi An that do Vietnamese food and [are] very successful . . . So we think we should do something different and the [idea of a]burger came out . . . Some people come ask for vegetarian burger and [it took] me like a month I think to practice it and come with a recipe and then I just add more Western stuff on the menu . . . And then I also deleted some Vietnamese dishes. (Vietnamese restaurant owner, April 2019)

While there was a stronger tendency among the Asian tourists we interviewed to eat more exclusively Vietnamese food when visiting, it is worth noting that some tourists from other Asian countries similarly seek more homely food in between their culinary explorations. In Hoi An, this can be observed through the rising numbers of Korean restaurants across the town that cater specifically to the growing numbers of Korean tourists.

The influx of Asian tourists has also led to another round of spatial expansions of the “practice geographies” (Volden and Hansen 2022) of the local tourism sector. In contrast

to most Western tourists, many Asian tourists stay in Da Nang and come to Hoi An on daytrips, often as part of package tours which include premade deals with specific restaurants. While many Koreans do not join these group tours or eat in these restaurants, the sheer volume of these package tours makes them a visible part of the Hoi An tourist scene. One restaurant owner explained that Korean food was not something other tourists would be looking for:

Because if you sell the Korean food you sell only for Koreans and the Korean people they just come at the lunchtime and the nighttime, they only want to go to the Ancient Town. (Vietnamese restaurant owner, March 2019)

In summary, the Hoianese food scene has adapted to the foodways of tourists but also co-shaped tourist food practice. In these hybridizing foodway encounters, hosts learn to offer what tourists want, including foreign dishes and tailor-made local dishes, while tourists explore (sanitized versions of) local dishes and cooking methods. Local actors have focused on both Vietnamese and Western food in seeking to feed the tourists. Preparing Western food, however, requires specific skills and ingredients that were not necessarily easy to get hold of in Hoi An. The rest of the analysis will focus on the competences and materials that make up social practices, unpacking how local actors acquire the knowledge to cook and serve food in new ways, and the ingredients required to expand menus that previously were targeting local palates.

### ***Innovation and skills: cooking foreign food***

During the course of the past 30 years, actors in the Hoi An food sector have found many ways of learning how to feed foreign tourists, often through specific foodway encounters. Several interviewees pointed at how for example Italian food was introduced through direct interactions with tourists. As summarized by a local entrepreneur, “year by year, they learned from tourists, some simple Western dishes.” Especially pasta dishes were easy to adapt to the local conditions as they neither required an oven nor cheese, which were expensive and hard to acquire. Such encounters have happened also later during the touristification process, as recounted by one restaurant owner who set up their family-run restaurant serving all kinds of food in the mid-2010s:

In the beginning, we only served Vietnamese food and then some tourists came and they showed us how to make some European dishes. That’s why we put these on the menu ... Spaghetti was added about 3 years after we opened (Vietnamese restaurant owner, April 2019 translated from Vietnamese)

Another way to learn non-Vietnamese foodways is through employment in the tourist sector. Some Vietnamese chefs had been trained in the foreign-owned resorts in Hoi An where they had worked together with foreign chefs. They gained hands-on experience and skills in preparing foreign dishes and later started their own restaurants and passed on this knowledge to their staff and employees. Several of our interviewees with family-run restaurants shared such stories, such as the owner of a highly popular restaurant:

My husband used to work for a restaurant in a 4-star resort ... [and] gained lots of experience while working there as a chef. So, Western or Vietnamese food, he knows perfectly how to make them. He also teaches our staff how to cook, especially the young

staff. Some of the young staff even went to work for these hotels after they get some experience with us. (Vietnamese restaurant owner, April 2019)

In the early years of the tourist boom, there were no restaurants focusing exclusively on foreign food and generally few restaurants that would serve foreign food other than pasta. There were, however, at least two early established restaurants, both started as family businesses, that started serving French dishes and pastry, and later served also other European dishes on top of the Vietnamese food on their menus. In recent years, a few Vietnamese entrepreneurs have opened restaurants in Hoi An with fully foreign concepts, such as sushi or American-style barbecue. The cases that we are aware of involve owners that have either traveled abroad extensively or have worked with foreign cuisines in Vietnam.

The tourism boom has not only led to a range of innovations in preparing food. Food networks have changed and new ones have emerged. One of the best examples is pizza. A large number of Hoi An's restaurants serve both Vietnamese food and pizza and pasta. It is curious how even the smallest tourist restaurants in Hoi An will offer wood-fired pizza. Tourists' desire for pizza has led to the development of a separate pizza "system of provision", or "pizza factories" as some of our informants called them. Several informants confirmed that restaurants serving pizza do not have their own pizza oven but rather order pizza from these "factories" that deliver it to the restaurant.

As with the stories of the early restaurants serving foreign food, the pizza business was established by locals who had previously worked for pizza restaurants. One can draw parallels between this and Avieli (2013) case on *bánh vạc* ("white rose" dumplings), a local specialty that is a fusion of Vietnamese and Chinese cuisine. He recounts how only one family in Hoi An produced these dumplings, and that all other restaurants would pick up a batch whenever tourists ordered it. For this practice, Avieli argues, the gamechanger was the increased availability of refrigeration, which allowed for buying a batch of white rose in advance and heating it up for the customer as they order it. However, when comparing to the *bánh vạc* supply chain unveiled by Avieli (2013), these "pizza factories" demonstrate a higher level of adaptation and thus, highlight an increasing complexity regarding the practices and systems involved in feeding tourists. While *bánh vạc* is a dish that arguably has a longer history in Hoi An's food scene, supplying the pizzas and constructing these "pizza factories" requires new technology (wood-fired oven), culinary skills (cooking with ovens or preserving the pizzas for deliveries), and ingredients (cheese, flour and different toppings). Thus, these stories show how many types of encounters, planned and unplanned, have led to locals accumulating knowledge on how to cook foreign food, or sometimes, to find ways to serve the foreign food without learning how to cook it. But this also bring us to another challenge facing restaurant owners as they feed the tourists with foreign dishes: Most of these dishes require ingredients that have traditionally not be available in a small provincial town in central Vietnam.

### ***Sourcing and handling ingredients***

Tourist destinations often demand vast infrastructures and resources beyond their borders. Hoi An is certainly no exception. Significant parts of the resources largely exist outside "local" practices, as the booming tourist industry requires

infrastructure and large quantities of food and ingredients which are not being or cannot be produced close to Hoi An. For example, traditional Vietnamese cuisine does not use dairy products and hence even common tourist dishes such as pizza and pasta often require ingredients that not that long ago the Hoianese had close to no experience of handling. When experimenting with foreign dishes such as burgers, many quickly found out that local meat, particularly beef, did not live up to the expectations of foreign tourists. These specific ingredients form the necessary materials of food practices but have tended to attract less attention in the literature than the experiences, preferences and practices of tourists and consumers.<sup>3</sup> These ingredients require both skills and other material arrangements. For example, they rely on practices established around “cold chains” (Rinkinen, Shove, and Smits 2019), and fridges were until recently not common in Hoi An. Some of our interviewees were concerned about expensive ingredients spoiling and mentioned the importance of good staff training on putting, for example, cheese and meat back in the fridge quickly. A foreign owner of a café and specialty store described the economic strain that cooling all these ingredients might impose in the Hoi An context:

My power bill is 4 times more than my rent. Just you know, from having cold rooms and freezers, proper handling the food . . . It's expensive to manage [frozen] food and to make sure that people aren't getting sick. So, customers would have no idea, they just take it for granted, you come to Vietnam and it's like going to a local grocery store in Denmark. (Foreign restaurant and specialty store owner, November 2019)

Many of our interviewees also shared stories of how difficult it used to be to get hold of the necessary ingredients for feeding foreign tourists. Some interviewees mentioned how it was still challenging to get specific ingredients delivered to Hoi An although these products had become widely available elsewhere in Vietnam. As such, to source these ingredients, the restaurants had to rely closely on their contacts and networks to negotiate access to crucial ingredients. One example is a Vietnamese restaurant owner who had lived abroad and now ran a highly popular fusion restaurant in town:

I asked my friends “hey where do you get your beef.” And I called them up and said hey I'm here in Hoi An and they said, “All the way to Hoi An?.” Yeah, funny, they always said “all the way to Hoi An?” Even 5 years ago they wouldn't even bring their beef up . . . [And] the French guy always had the ingredients for butter. So he monopolized it, he had his friends send it up from Saigon. So I always had to borrow his butter. (Vietnamese restaurant owner, April 2019)

The provisioning was often irregular. One restaurant owner talked about the difficulty of getting ham in the early 2000s and how you risked the provisioner telling you they would be back with more in three months. Many mentioned the important role played by Da Nang in the sourcing of ingredients. Previously, there used to be small specialty stores for imported food. Since then, Da Nang has continued developing into a major hub for anything foreign. Da Nang's recent tourist boom has brought along major investments from Vietnamese and foreign capital, including many of the internationally leading hotel chains. This, several participants pointed out, has paved the way for new sets of networks, or systems of provision, to feed the tourism sector, which in turn benefited the Hoi An food sector:

Five years ago, as larger hotels started opening, the supply chain became a little bit easier . . . It's all hotel-driven . . . There's at least 6 hotels that have opened in the last 4 years giving 3,000 rooms of Westerners coming in, and that's what's putting the demand on these companies that supply to Da Nang. So without the hotels developing, I don't think Central Vietnam would have those logistics that are in place now. (Foreign restaurant and specialty store owner, November 2019)

An important change was also the establishment of large wholesale markets and supermarkets in Da Nang in the 2000s. More recently, Hoi An has gone through a very visible expansion of “mini marts” and even a couple of stores with imported high-quality products have opened in the town. Another very significant but recent game changer was when the Da Nang based companies started offering delivery to Hoi An on a day's notice. This was experienced generally as greatly improving the convenience of ordering foreign ingredients. Others complained that the quality in general was too low, like two Vietnamese restaurant owners who had lived many years abroad:

Now in Vietnam, for the lower quality, it's the destination of all the companies of the world. To put their second or third grade of quality to Vietnam. Cheese, meat, all ingredients. (Vietnamese restaurant owner, April 2019)

There are guys who are selling, phone guys tell me fresh frozen fish and I say hmm-hmm, no man. I got fish here, it is cheaper and it is fresher and you cannot beat my price . . . And they say, “I'll deliver to the front door for you” and I say . . . I need to inspect it, you can't just bring me a box.” (Vietnamese restaurant owner, April 2019)

Our interviewees would develop different strategies to deal with quality issues, a hot topic all over Vietnam (see Ehlert and Faltmann 2019). A few of them were very wary in who to trust as they had experienced goods such as frozen meat being delivered by motorbike without proper cooling equipment. One interviewee said he would send back any meat delivered by motorbike, others that they would spend much time online finding trusted providers. These concerns aside, the feeding of Hoi An's tourism industry is an example of the dynamic and often unplanned development that systems of provision go through, co-shaped by supply and demand dynamics as well as by the broader political-economic context in which they take place. As Vietnam has become more deeply embedded in global supply networks while it has become easier to invest in the country as well as to run private companies than in the past, new possibilities for benefitting from the tourism boom have emerged, in turn enabling the establishment of new systems of provision for food. These systems take many different shapes and sizes, ranging from informal networks and direct connections to large supermarket and wholesale chains.

### **Concluding discussion: feeding a tourism boom**

The case of Hoi An shows both some of the outcomes of foodway encounters and the broad changes in practices and systems of provision required by touristification processes. The town's tourism boom has to a significant extent changed the local “culdiversity”, defined by Wilk (2006, 199) as “the diversity and recognized styles of cooking in a region”. These changes take a wide range of forms. Hoi An is indeed an example of messiness and multiplicity of food globalization (Montefrio 2021, 119), and a case in support for taking seriously the complexity of global-local flows of food and culture (e.g.,

Machin and Chen 2023). Hoi An could be used as a case for increased homogenization or hybridization of food cultures depending on the focus. It is certainly partly an example of the pizzafication of the world and of forms of culinary standardization embedded in late-capitalist mass tourism. It is also a case of how local food is sanitized in order to be acceptable for tourists' taste buds and of how a wide range of ingredients are imported to make tourists feel comfortable while away from home. But these foodway encounters also lead to different forms of explorations of the foreign, from both the host and tourist side (see also Avieli 2013, 2012), and thus also to hybrid culinary practices. The most important point for this article is not how best to categorize these food transformations, but rather how hosts have adapted to them and been part of defining them. Through a focus on foodways and social practices, we have shown how foreign restaurant owners have played a central role in this process, as well as how local owners have adapted in the form of skills and competences, for example changing cooking practices in order to serve tourists, both in the sense of learning how to cook foreign food and in the sense of adjusting local dishes toward a form of "tailored authenticity" to meet tourists' desire for culinary explorations safely between novelty and familiarity (see also Mak et al. 2012). These have not necessarily been straightforward and planned processes, but in many cases the outcomes of encounters with tourists or experiences from working in the tourism industries. Venturing into serving foreign foods has become a key strategy for benefitting from, and surviving in, the expansion of the Hoi An tourism economy. But standing out from the crowd with distinctly Western food is a laborious and risky strategy given the investment in equipment, ingredients and the invested time to learn the skills. Therefore, a more common approach, typical for small family-run restaurants, is a partial one, making mixed menus that incorporate more or less anything tourists may desire, from sanitized and simplified versions of local dishes to pizzas from "pizza factories". In Hoi An, the contemporary food scene has been colored by the vast number of these family-owned businesses. While competition has increased significantly, these businesses seem to be resilient and remain firmly embedded in Hoianese foodscapes.

Another key point of the article concerns the ways in which systems of provision for food change in the encounter with a tourism boom. Tourists are often only partially open to eating local food and contemporary tourism comes with firm expectations of access to a wide range of food, in many cases originating in the same place as the tourists. Many of these have traditionally been unavailable in Hoi An. Our findings show the many ways in which hosts have acquired resources as well as how demand for key ingredients for the tourism sector becomes materialized in systems of provision necessary for meeting the demand of tourists, such as the gradual establishment of cold chains that stretch across the country. As put by Rinkinen et al (2020: 6), "large-scale infrastructures and systems of provision [...] are designed and sized to enable certain ways of life," and these in turn strengthen patterns of supply and demand and contribute to their recreation.

Theoretically, taking seriously the materialities of food and food systems of provision opens avenues for new and grounded understandings of how food travels and how patterns of production and consumption change and are (re-) created. Furthermore, a practice approach allows us to uncover the mundane aspects of food and the continuity and gradualness involved in food transformations (e.g., Hansen 2022a). Our host informants reflected on incremental changes and learning processes over time, and even if they changed local dishes for the

benefit of tourists, these dishes remained recognizably local and Vietnamese. Given that tourists increasingly seek “authenticity,” new avenues for “properly” local food might open (see discussion in Mak et al 2012), although the majority of the tourism market will likely remain firmly within what are considered fairly safe explorations of “exotic” foodways. Further research is needed to understand how authenticity is negotiated in the encounter with new generations of tourists with different expectations embedded in their performances of tourist rituals and foodway explorations. For Hoi An, these new generations of tourists, as well as new post-pandemic tourism flows, such as a recent surge in Indian tourists to Vietnam (e.g., Vietnam Investment Review 2022), are likely to lead to new innovations and new foodway encounters that will add further complexity to local foodscapes.

Finally, a remaining question is if the dramatic disruptions brought along by the COVID-19 pandemic will lead to long-term changes. Around 80% of restaurants in the Ancient Town had closed their doors in 2021 (Zing News 2021) and many people working in the tourism sector returned to their rural hometowns. Popular walking streets with upmarket restaurants and boutique stores became occupied by vendors and hawkers selling local dishes for local people. Many restaurants that specialized in foreign food during the pre-pandemic period, were forced to reduce their menus or switch to serving local food and drinks for domestic tourists (VnExpress 2021). The restaurant owners we talked to had used different strategies to survive during the pandemic. The owner of a highly successful seafood restaurant that caters mostly to Vietnamese tourists said he had closed the restaurant part of his business but continued serving coffee and drinks to people living in the neighborhood (Phone interview in June, 2021). Also other informants confirmed that restaurant owners needed either to change the concept of their restaurant or close down entirely. The impression from our latest visit in fall 2022 is that the tourists are gradually coming back and that the town and its food environments are gradually returning to something at least closely resembling its pre-pandemic shape. Further research should look into how local actors experienced and coped with the pandemic disruptions of the tourism industry that so clearly unveiled how central tourism is to the local economy.

## Notes

1. The two terms, *quán ăn* and *nhà hàng* can sometimes be used interchangeably in daily Vietnamese conversations. However, *nhà hàng* (restaurants) normally refers to larger and more formal dining establishments that offer more diverse menus. *Quán ăn* (eateries), on the other hand, are usually smaller, more affordable, family-run establishments. Unlike mobile food stalls (*gánh hàng rong*), a *quán ăn* often has a fixed location, with tables and chairs for customer to sit down for their meals. However, due to its limited scale of operations, a family-run *quán ăn* often serves fewer dishes, sometimes only one or two main dishes (e.g.: a *quán phở* or *quán cao lầu* only serves the noodle dishes). As informed by our interviewees, we used the terms, *nhà hàng* and *quán ăn* in our paper to further highlight the transformations and changes to the food scene of Hoi An as rising demand and influences from



tourists require small eateries to provide more “professional and formal” dining experience in line with a *nhà hàng*.

2. *Bánh mì* literally means bread and can come in different shapes, but the name is now often associated with Vietnamese-style baguettes.
3. In contrast, other parts of the broad food literature, such as food regimes, have had a strong focus on particular commodities (e.g., Jakobsen and Hansen 2020; Wang 2018).

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