



## MEASURING DESTINATION IMAGE: A CASE STUDY OF HUE, VIETNAM

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**Abstract:** There is a general consensus about the significance of the role played by tourist destination image in the process of destination decision-making and the choice of visitors. In addition, several studies have proven the strong relationship between destination image and visitors' preference or visiting intentions. Hue city, the ancient capital of Vietnam has various favorable conditions to become an attractive tourist destination for both domestic and international tourists. This paper aims to measure the tourists' perception on destination image of Hue. Besides the desk study on previous studies regarding the destination image, a multi-cultural sample of 1003 tourists was conducted with structured questionnaires. The research found that the functional image of Hue saved in the visitors' minds is a historic and royal destination with many appealing monuments and great food, of which the most prominent attractions are the Citadel, pagodas and the complex of Nguyen kings' tombs. For the psychological image in the tourists' perception, Hue's atmosphere is very peaceful and hospitable thanks to the quiet space and friendly welcoming people. The outcomes of this research are expected to be used as a valuable reference for the local policy makers, governmental agencies, tourism companies and other relevant stakeholders.

**Keywords:** destination image, image measurement, Hue city

### 1 Background and problems analysis

The dramatic growth of global tourism has created lots of challenges in tourism marketing. The development of tourism over the world offers more choices of destinations to consumers. Thus influencing consumer decision making by an efficient destination positioning strategy is one of the main tasks of tourism destination planners and marketers in which creation and management of an individual and appealing perception or image of the destination is the primary concern (Calantone et al. 1989: 25).

Located in the central region of Vietnam, Hue city has a high potential for tourism development. In addition to the advantage of abundant tourism resources with the complex of Hue monuments recognized by UNESCO as World Cultural Heritage, Hue has a diversity of natural resources such as beaches, mountains, lagoons, and hot springs. In 2013 Hue welcomed 1.76 million overnight arrivals including 753,000 international and 1,010,000 domestic visitors (HDCST 2014: 3). However, in recent years though there has been a growing number of tourists to Hue, this growth remains slow through the years. Furthermore, with the strong development of tourism today there has been an increasing number of destination choices for tourists. This makes the destination management organizations fall under tough circumstances to operate in fiercely competitive environments. In order to achieve the goal set by the provincial authority for the tourism industry which is to increase the number of international arrivals to 1.7 million

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in 2015 and then to 2.5 million in 2020, Hue destination management organizations should come up with effective positioning and breakthrough strategies for Hue tourism.

To successfully expand into the targeted markets, Hue must be favorably differentiated from its competitors and positively positioned in the minds of the buyers of which building a positive image of Hue is the priority of the destination's marketing strategy. To do so measuring the target image of Hue in the minds of visitors is a crucial task. The overall objective of this study is to figure out the target image of Hue in the minds of tourists.

## 2 Destination image: theoretical background

A cautious and systematic overview of related literature is an indispensable step for any successful research. In this part relative documents have been logically indicated and discussed within the scope of the study's objectives.

### 2.1 Destination Image

The term 'destination image' is conceptualized and defined by numerous studies. However, determining an exact meaning of the term 'destination image' is problematic. Echtner/Ritchie (1991: 2) stated that many of the definitions of destination image used in previous studies are quite vague and this statement has been still valid up to now.

Past definitions of destination image have been various; however, there has been no single and officially recognized definition for 'destination image' till present. Table 1 shows some typical definitions of destination image among different researchers.

**Table 1.** Definitions of destination image used by researchers

Author/s	Definition
Reynolds (1965: 69)	A complex and selective mental processes carried out by individuals from a flood of selected impressions.
Hunt (1975: 1)	Perceptions held by potential visitors about an area.
Crompton (1979: 18)	Sum of belief ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination.
Calantone et al. (1989: 25)	Perceptions of potential tourist destinations.
Font (1997: 124)	Set of beliefs and impressions that the public holds of the named product and to some extent it is part of the product.
Ahmed et al. (2006: 59)	What tourists think or perceive about a state as a destination its tourism resources its tourism services the hospitality of its hosts its social and cultural norms and its rules and regulations which influence their consumer behaviour.
Bigné et al. (2009: 2)	All that the destination evokes in the individual; any idea belief feeling or attitude that tourists associate with the place.

Source: Matos 2012: 109

Upon the examination of 'destination image' definitions it is obvious that many of these definitions are quite ambiguous. In the simplest way Hunt (1975: 1) defines 'destination image' as the impressions that a person holds about a region in which he or she does not reside. Destination image is also considered as "*the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination*" (Crompton 1979: 18).

Similarly, Kotler/Gertner (2004: 42) define destination image as: "*The sum of beliefs and impressions that people hold about a place. Images represent a simplification of a larger number of associations and pieces of information connected to a place. Destination image is a product of the mind trying to process and pick out essential information from huge amounts of data about a place.*"

Upon the examination of the above list it is obvious that many of these definitions are quite ambiguous. The term 'destination image' is frequently described as simply "*impressions of a place*" or "*perceptions of an area*". Hence, the image visitors have of a destination is principally subjective because it is based on the perception each tourist has of where they have been to or have heard of (San Martin/Rodriguez 2008: 267).

Destination image has been one of the fundamental areas of tourism study for more than three and a half decades. To be successful, destinations need to promote their cities, countries, and places in a way that communicates the destination image to their potential customers (Kavoura 2014).

## 2.2 The Importance of Destination Image

In the years of 1970s destination image was recognized as a critical factor in a tourist's destination choice process (Mayo 1975: 15). In recent years, a lot of studies have proved a strong relationship between destination image and tourists' decision-making process. Especially many researchers have noticed that tourists are probably choosing the destinations which have positive and distinctive images. Goodall (1992: 3-4) states that when other factors such as prices are similar among destinations then destination image is the decisive element in holiday choice of visitors. Therefore destination image is supposed to have a stronger influence on the visitors' choice of destination as compared to other factors such as behavioural and socio-demographic (Lee et al. 2006: 817-818). Hankinson (2004: 7) sums up the importance of destination image as follows:

"In an increasingly competitive market, therefore, destination marketers must seek a fuller understanding of the nature of images held by both individuals and organizations in order to build more favorable brand images and thereby enhance a destination's attractiveness and economic development."

Thus marketers are interested in the concept of *tourist destination image* mainly because it directly links to the visitors' decision-making and the sales of tourist products and services. Mac Innis/Price (1987: 474-475) suggest that imagery appears in the overall consumption experience of a tourist. Before purchasing a vacation, indirect consumption may happen through destination image. During vacation imagery of a place can add value and increase satisfaction to a tourist. After the trip destination image can have a reconstructive role in which people recall the experience through memories and local souvenirs.

### 2.3 The Formation of Destination Image

Many researchers have investigated the factors influencing the formation of destination image. According to Echtner/Ritchie (2003: 38-39), the formation of destination image is not a simple process in which tourists develop a mental construction based on a few selected impressions recollected from a number of impressions.

Destination image can be determined by a big variety of factors. In the early development stage of building a theoretical framework, Gunn's seven-stage theories (1972: 120) were quite useful. The theories cover a continuous building and modifying of image which are made up of three kinds of image: *organic image* formed by naive non-tourist information about the destination, *induced image* formed by promoted information and *modified induced image* – the result of personal experience of the destination. Gunn's seven-stage theories also imply that the images held by potential visitors, non-visitors and returned visitors are different.

Later on, Stabler (1998: 137) confirms that destination image formation is determined partly by *demand* and *supply* factors in which the demand factors will form the organic image, whereas the supply factors will create the induced image.

Shortly afterward, Baloglu/McCleary (1999: 871) design a PATH model to explain the process of forming the image towards a tourist destination. The model shows that *sources of information, age and level of education* are factors influencing the cognitive and perceptual assessment. Beerli/Martin (2004: 658) agree with these authors suggesting that personal factors along with the different information sources will impact the perceived destination image.

Meanwhile, other authors suggest that *psychological factors* such as tourist's motivation and cultural values are powerfully impacting the formation of the tourist destination image even before the place is visited (Martin/Rodriguez 2008: 264). According to Echtner/Ritchie (2003: 39), tourists can still have an image of a destination even if they have never been exposed to any form of commercial information or they have never visited the destination before. This means that the information gathered from non-commercial sources such as historical, political, economic and social aspects is incorporated into the foundation of destination image. Meanwhile, the information obtained by tourists from a promotional effort of the destination will provide tourists with images of the places (through advertising literature, magazine articles, guidebooks, television promotion package tours) and these images are considered as induced images (Gunn 1988; Molina et al. 2010). In this perspective, promotional activities play an essential role in the formation of the tourist's destination-induced image. It can be concluded that the organic image is beyond the control of the destination, but the induced image is directly formed by the destination's marketing efforts (Ahmed et al. 2006).

The process of destination image formation points out two important things:

- Firstly, it suggests that people can have an image of a destination even if they have never visited it before.
- Secondly, as there are changes in destination image before and after visitation, it is desirable to separate the images of people who have visited the place and those who have not.

In conclusion, destination image is one of the most important elements of a tourist destination as it influences tourists' travel decision-making cognition and behaviour at a destination as well as satisfaction levels and destination loyalty. It is confirmed that a destination with a

strong image is more easily differentiated from its competitors (Sönmez/Sirakaya 2002: 185). However, it is difficult for tourists to obtain a clear image of a destination without having visited before (Govers/Go 2003: 15). In this context, there are three factors that determine the destination image in potential tourists' mind: (1) *tourism motivations*, (2) *social-demographic characteristics*, and (3) *information about the destination* (Beerli/Martin 2004: 626-627). Concerning information about the destination, Govers/Go (2005: 79) report that social networks on the internet can play a significant role as a source of destination information for potential tourists making it possible for potential tourists to configure a stronger and lighter image of a destination.

## 2.4 The Components of Destination Image

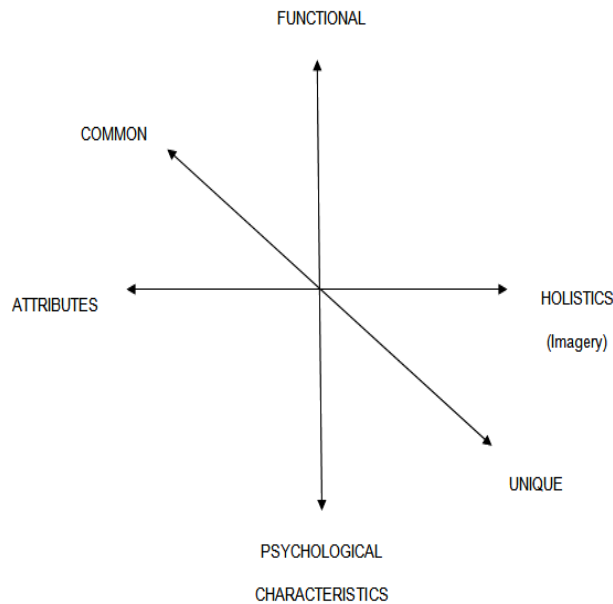
According to Milman/Pizam (1995: 21), a destination image consists of three components: (1) *the product* (e.g. the quality of the attraction), (2) *the behaviour and attitude of the host*, and (3) *the environment* (e.g. weather, scenery and facilities). Meanwhile, Stepchenkova/Morrison (2006: 945) suggest that destination image is a multi-faceted composite construct which contains interrelated *cognitive* and *affective* evaluation woven into *overall impression*. However, Gartner (1993: 196) and White (2004: 311-312) state that the destination image consists of *cognitive affective* and *conative/behavioural* components.

In another approach, destination image is divided in two main dimensions: *attribute-based* and *holistic*, and each dimension contains *functional* and *psychological* characteristics (Baloglu/McCleary 1999: 871; Echtner/Ritchie 2003: 41-43). Govers/Go (2003: 15) add that destination images can also "*range from those based on 'common' functional and psychological traits to those based on more distinctive or even unique features events feelings or auras*". However, the common/unique dimensions of destination image presented by Echtner/Ritchie (2003: 43) are important but often ignored (*see figure 1*).

In fact, tourists are motivated to visit somewhere unique or at least different to their everyday surroundings. Common functional attributes are comparable traits such as price, climate and types of accommodation. Unique functional attributes consist of the icons and special events that form part of a destination image such as cultural heritages and local traditional festivals. Common psychological attributes consist of the friendliness of the local people, for instance, whereas unique psychological attributes include feelings associated with holy lands.

According to the theory of Echtner/Ritchie (2003), destination image is not only the perceptions of separate destination attributes but also the holistic destination impression. Destination image includes functional characteristics which concern the more tangible aspects of the destination and psychological characteristics which point to the more intangible aspects.

In this study, the destination image dimensions of Echtner/Ritchie (2003) are applied in measuring the destination image of Hue with the combination of scale evaluation and open-ended questions as the sources of information gathered from tourists in Hue.



**Figure 1.** The components of destination image (Source: Echtner/Ritchie 2003: 40)

### 3 Methodology

The research applies quantitative method and undertakes the following steps:

- *First*, a desk study with a thorough review of available relevant literature researches and articles was undertaken to get a comprehensive understanding of destination image concept and its significant role in tourism management and development.
- *Second*, secondary data were collected based on the available specialized reports from governmental authorities, enterprises and other sources to get the general knowledge about the tourism development in Hue.
- *Third*, a structured questionnaire was developed, tested and administered to tourists of various nationalities on different tourist sites in Hue city.

In this research, the questionnaire survey was prioritized in use as it was the most convenient way to collect information from a large number of respondents.

#### 3.1 Questionnaire Design

After a pilot survey in January 2013 with 50 respondents, the data collection was conducted for more than one year: from February 2013 until August 2014. This ensures to cover a complete cycle of a year. The questionnaire is divided into four parts:

- The *first part* consists of questions regarding the personal information about respondents including nationality, age, gender, and education.
- The *second part* is about respondents' travel experience in Hue.
- The *third part* includes 14 statements about Hue with multiple-choice questions that visitors have to rate their level of agreement on the performance of the attributes. This part

helps to understand what visitors think about the attributes that might create Hue image, such as appealing historical - cultural attractions, friendliness of local people, peaceful atmosphere, unique lifestyle of local people, good foods, special costumes, good quality of tourism staff and services, etc.

- The *fourth part* contains two open-ended questions, which help to explore further opinions of visitors on what kinds of attributes/attractions are most important for them as well as most suitable for Hue. There is also a space that visitors can give their remarks or recommendations which help to improve the current images of Hue.

The questionnaire was designed in English and Vietnamese. The English version was used to collect empirical data from international English-speaking visitors and the Vietnamese one was used for domestic tourists. Additionally, a German version was prepared, but in practice most Germans used the English version. To prepare and use other languages, for instance, Thai Chinese or Korean would have gone beyond the scope of this thesis.

### 3.2 Survey Design

The survey was conducted as a face-to-face-interview carried out by the author and only two colleagues from university to avoid a distortion happened by using too many interviewers. A total of 1003 completely filled-in questionnaires have been collected.

A convenience sample of respondents was selected because they were “in the right place at the right time”. Convenience sampling is the most feasible sampling method because it is difficult to use other methods to draw a sample at a tourist destination due to the undefined availability of the target population. The tourists were chosen randomly regardless gender, age, and countries/regions of origin. However, the balance between numbers of international and domestic tourists – shown by official Vietnamese tourism statistic - was intentionally noticed to ensure the purposes of the research.

As the image of a destination is strongly influenced by the knowledge from previous visits and even by the experience of the current stay, this survey tried to exclude this impact by splitting the tourists in two groups:

- visitors who just arrived in Hue and had no chance to experience anything in the city; the tourists who visited Hue not the first time were identified by a question and could be assigned to the other group later;
- visitors who stayed already at least one night in Hue and had enough time to experience the city.

Due to these two groups, the chosen interview places were quite different. For the first group, the visitors were met at the main important entrances to Hue, such as Phu Bai airport, Hue train station, and bus stops.

For the second group, places to interview were more diversified as following:

- Famous tourist attractions, such as the Citadel, Tu Duc Tomb, Khai Dinh Tomb, Thien Mu Pagoda, etc. The tourists were easily caught after they finished their sight-seeing and took a rest in front of the attraction’s gates.

- Famous streets for tourists with many restaurants, café shops, hotels, such as Pham Ngu Lao Street, Chu Van An Street, Le Loi Street, etc. There, the tourists had more time to talk to the interviewers and willingly to answer the questionnaires.
- Bus stops and Hue train station: The tourists leaving Hue for home or other destinations were interviewed when they were waiting for the shuttle buses to the airport or buses to other destinations in Vietnam. Train station was also a good place to conduct the survey as the tourists had a lot of free time when waiting for delayed trains.

## 4 Findings

The findings of visitor survey in this study unveil the visitors' perceptions on the destination image of Hue. Visitors' profiles and their ratings on the performance of Hue attribute-images as well as their opinions on the holistic and unique images of Hue are also adequately presented in this part of the paper.

## 5 Visitors' Profiles

The sample of 1003 respondents comprises of 53.4% female and 46.6% male visitors. As children are not included in the survey, the ages range from 17 to 74 years. Visitors aged 31-45 years old represent the most of the sample with 44.0%.

**Table 2.** Visitors' profile

<b>Gender</b>	Female (53.4%), male (46.6%)
<b>Age</b>	17-30 years (28.5%), 31-45 years (44.0%), 46-60 years (23.4%), >60 years (5.1%)
<b>Education</b>	University/college (79.6%), vocational school (6.4%), high school (13.7%), Secondary & primary school (0.3%)
<b>Origin</b>	Vietnam (48.9%), Europe (25.3%), North America (10.2%), Asia (8.9%), Australia & New Zealand (5.5%), others (1.2%)
<b>Number of previous visits</b>	- First time (75.4%) - Second time/ third time (21.8%) - More than three times (2.8%)
<b>Source of information</b>	- Internet (63.1%) - Travel guide/brochures (38.1%) - Words of mouth (26.3%) - TV/Radio (23.2%) - Newspaper/Magazine (18.2%) - Hue is part of my package tour (16.1%) - Social network: Facebook Twitter (11.7%)

*Source: Own survey 2013/14*



Regarding the level of education, most visitors (79.6 %) in the sample hold an academic degree (bachelor or even higher). The international visitors hold more often a university degree (87.7 %) than domestic guests (71.0%).

Of the sample of 1003 visitors surveyed 48.9% are domestic, and 51.1% are international tourists. The Vietnamese respondents come from 48 provinces/cities, which means from nearly all areas of the country. However, the aggregation in bigger regions shows that most tourists are coming from the “neighbourhood” (the Middle of Vietnam). Among the European visitors, the French (26.6% of European guests) are the biggest group, followed by the British (25.0% of European guests), and the German (14.3% of European guests). About the Asian respondents, visitors from Japan (26% of Asian guests) and Thailand (22% of Asian guests) are the biggest groups of Asian visitors in this survey.

Among the interviewed visitors – both international and domestic, 75.4% of them visited Hue for the first time. This rate is even much higher for international visitors with up to 86.5% visiting Hue for the first time. Regarding repeating tourists, 16.8% visited this city for the second time, 5.0% three times, and 2.8% four times and more.

Concerning sources of information about the destination of Hue used by visitors, “*internet*” is the most powerful source of information which has formed the initial image of Hue destination in the visitors’ minds. 63.1% of visitors used internet to get information about Hue. “*Travel guide/brochure*” is the second source of information strongly impacting the visitors’ perception of Hue with 38.1%. “*Words of mouth*” has a considerable effect on the visitors’ minds, which occupies 26.3%. Followed are “*TV/Radio*”, “*newspaper/ magazine*” and “*social network*”, which account for 23.2%, 18.2%, and 11.7%, respectively. Besides, 16.1% of visitors get information about Hue since the destination is part of their package tour.

### 5.1 Visitors’ Assessment on the Performance of Hue Attribute-Images

The third part of the questionnaire contains fourteen attribute-images of Hue, and the visitors were asked to choose one option from 1 (*totally agree*) to 4 (*totally disagree*) for each attribute. Normally, to evaluate participants’ perceptions, researchers often use 5-point or 7-point Likert questions to gather quantitative information (Weaver et al. 2007: 341). It has been believed that when using 5-point or 7-point Likert questions, interviewees are given a chance to choose the centre point if they are not sure about the answer. However, in reality, participants are likely to select the centre point for questions that they are not sure about the answers. Hence, the application of 5-point or 7-point questions might result in wrong findings (Dawes 2008: 63). In order to avoid this weakness, the use of 4-point Likert questions in this study helped the respondents choose the most accurate answer.

Table 3 summarizes the results of the visitors’ assessment on Hue attribute-images. “*Delicious food and cuisine*”, “*friendly and welcoming people*”, “*many unique historic attractions*”, “*peaceful atmosphere*”, and “*specific traditional long dresses for women*” are the five attributes getting the most positive assessment from the visitors. For the foods, there is no doubt that it is highly appreciated by the visitors, especially the domestics (mean = 1.38). An interesting finding is that Hue foods are highly appreciated by the international respondents (mean = 1.68) despite the fact that Hue foods are normally very spicy. Hue people are also well known for their mild-

ness and tenderness in comparison with those in the other regions of Vietnam. This might explain why the evaluation of the visitors for this attribute's performance is quite high (mean=1.66). The attribute "many unique historic attractions" also gets the third highest agreement from the visitors on its performance (mean=1.69). This result is consistent with the fact that Hue is a destination containing various historical and cultural relics with the Complex of Hue Monuments recognized as World Heritage by UNESCO.

"Peaceful atmosphere" and "specific traditional long dresses for women" get the same appreciation value from the visitors (mean=1.70). This is understandable since Hue is a destination with slow living pace, not too noisy and crowded like other bigger cities in Vietnam. Moreover, the locals are quite friendly and gentle. These elements help to create a relaxing and peaceful atmosphere for the visitors. The attribute "specific traditional long dresses for women", which is considered as a symbolic image of Hue women and also the rich inspirations for the many poets and writers up to now, is highly appreciated by the visitors.

Of the fourteen attributes, "unique lifestyle of local people" gets the lowest appreciation from the visitors (mean=1.99). Respectively, followed are the attributes "well-skilled and hospitable tourism staff" (mean=1.95), "traditional means of transport" (mean=1.93), "a wide range of cultural activities" (mean=1.92), "local souvenirs and handicraft products" (mean=1.91), and "specific performances of Hue's folk songs" (mean=1.90). It is unexpected that the respondents show their lowest appreciation on the performance "unique lifestyle of local people". Hue is well-known as a place that still reserves lots of traditional and religious rituals of the ancient natives, and Hue people are also famous for their bashful and reticent characteristics, especially for women. However, in this study, visitors seem not to realize fully about this typical attribute of Hue. This is perhaps due to the lack of tourism products for tourists and promotion that includes locals' lifestyle, etc.

The respondents are about to agree with the good performance of the attribute "well-skilled and hospitable tourism staffs". The average agreement levels of both international and domestic visitors were approximately the same; it should be taken into account that up to nearly 10.5% of domestic respondents disagree on this attribute, and this rate for the international ones is 7.4%. This would imply the higher expectation for service quality standards, but might be also the cultural understanding issue and language barrier which require the tourism businesses to pay more efforts in improving the skills of their staffs for better service delivery.

For the attribute "traditional means of transport" (cyclos, dragon boats, etc.), it sounds justified when the respondents show their good assessment on this feature. Visitors normally find it easy and exciting to get around the city for sightseeing or get to the key tourist attractions in Hue with the assistance of the specific traditional means of transportation such as cyclos and dragon boats. Of which dragon boat is unique and the visitors hardly find it anywhere else in Vietnam. The convenience that these types of traditional transport means bring about for the visitors when visiting Hue is undeniable, yet they are also one of the main sources for the visitors' complaints on the problem of cheating price and annoyance. This posed the local tourism authority to a tough challenge to deal with.

Another attribute which also receives lower level of agreement among 14 attributes is "specific local souvenirs and handicraft products" with 16.7% of disagreement/total disagree-

ment. This reflects the reality that in spite of the availability of various souvenir shops in Hue, the number of souvenirs and handicraft products which show local identities are still missing.

Regarding to the attribute “specific performance of Hue’s folk songs”, the finding is pretty surprising as while most local people assumed that this definitely is a specific feature that can generate special impression for the visitors, it does not seem to be totally agreed by the respondents. Up to 17.2% of the domestic respondents even rate disagree/totally disagree on this attribute. This raises the question to the local authority to screen and improve the management as well as organization of Hue’s folk song performances.

Concerning “can’t rate”, four attributes getting the highest percentage among the fourteen are “specific performance of Hue’s folk songs”, “unique lifestyle of local people”, “local souvenirs and handicraft products”, and “interesting traditional festivals and events” with the percentage value of 46.1%, 35.9%, 34.2% and 34.1%, respectively. The data show that most of the “today” visitors cannot rate their evaluation on these attributes as they have not experienced them yet. However, even the group of *first-time visitors* arriving in Hue “today”, who had no experiences in Hue before, are hardly to rate their opinions, and a few number of not first-time and first-day in Hue also cannot give their opinions on these attributes. This implies that this group of visitors did not experience these offers of Hue neither when they were in Hue before nor at this time.

**Table 3.** Visitors’ assessment on the performance of Hue’s attributes

Attributes	Mean*	Can’t rate	Attributes	Mean*	Can’t rate
Many unique historic attractions	1.69	12	Delicious food and cuisine	1.52	93
Featured architecture	1.73	16	Specific performances of Hue’s folk songs	1.90	462
A wide range of cultural activities	1.92	254	Local souvenirs and handicraft products	1.91	343
Unique lifestyle of local people	1.99	360	Specific conical hats for women	1.76	268
Interesting traditional festivals and events	1.78	342	Specific traditional long dresses for women	1.70	245
Peaceful atmosphere	1.70	90	Well-skilled and hospitable tourism staff	1.95	306
Friendly and welcoming people	1.66	103	Traditional means of transport (cyclos, dragon boats, etc.)	1.93	265

(\*): 1: Totally agree – 2: agree – 3: disagree – 4: totally disagree

Source: Own survey 2013/14

## 5.2 Open-ended Questions and the Responses

In order to complement the scale-items analysis, it is very important to consider the tourists' answers to the two open-ended questions. The study uses two open-ended questions to discover the most suitable images of Hue in the visitors' point of view and to explore the most unique components of Hue image, which the visitors will recommend to their friends and relatives after their trips in Hue. The responses to open-ended questions supply more holistic functional and psychological characteristics of the destination image as well as allow the unique images of Hue to emerge.

Table 4 shows the answers for the first open question *"What images do you think are the most suitable for Hue?"* with responses having the frequencies of over 10%.

According to Pearce (1988: 58), the image attributes are considered holistic and strong if more than 20% of people think of them. Based on the above findings, the associating images that generate a strong impression on visitors are "peaceful and safe", "hospitable", "appealing monuments", "historical and royal", and "food".

**Table 4.** The most suitable images for Hue

Images	Percent (%)	Images	Percent (%)
1. Peaceful and Safe	30.2	7. Traditional and Conservative	15.0
2. Hospitable	28.7	8. Beautiful landscapes/Picturesque	12.7
3. Appealing monuments	27.9	9. The Citadel	12.3
4. Historical and Royal	24.8	10. Quite/Tranquil	12.2
5. Food	24.0	11. Unique/Special	12.2
6. Old/Ancient	15.1	12. People (nice tasteful)	11.6

Source: Own survey 2013/14

For the second question *"Please, list the most attractive or unique tourist attractions that you can think of in Hue."*, the responses with frequencies of over 10% include 10 attractions which are showed in table 5.

When being asked about the unique tourist attractions in Hue, the respondents indicate that the unique attractions including "the Citadel" (50.5%), "food" (36.9%), "pagodas" (35.8%), "King's tombs" (28.8%), and "royal architecture" (21.3%) are considered as strong components. It could be said that the Citadel, pagodas and the system of tombs belonging to the complex of Hue relics inherited from the Nguyen's dynasty, which were recognized as World Cultural Heritage, have become a strongly competitive advantage in the development of Hue tourism. Besides, delicious food is a distinctive offer of Hue that differentiates the place from other destinations.

**Table 5.** The most attractive/unique images for Hue

Images	Percent (%)	Images	Percent (%)
1. The Citadel	50.5	6. Local people and their daily life	18.2
2. Food	36.9	7. Shops/ Souvenirs	15.6
3. Pagodas	35.8	8. The Huong River	14.9
4. King's Tombs	28.8	9. Hue Festivals	11.5
5. Royal architecture	21.3	10. Aodai (Hue traditional dress)	12.2

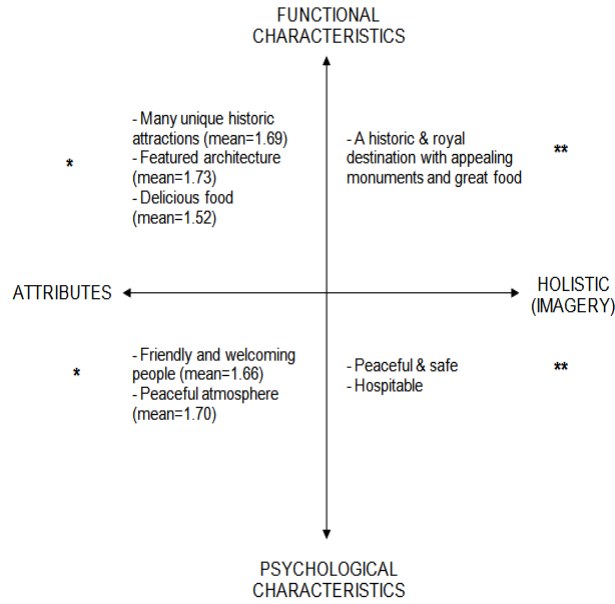
Source: Own survey 2013/14

### 5.3 The Combination of Scale Items and Open-ended Questions in Measuring Hue Destination Image

In this study, a combination of scale items and open-ended questions is used to measure the destination image of Hue. Scale items focus on more common attribute-based components of destination image, and they often bring the subjectiveness of the researcher. Meanwhile, the open-ended questions provide more objective detailed and holistic impressions on the destination. Hence, a combination of open-ended questions and scale items is completely necessary to cross-check and entirely measure the concept of destination image of Hue.

As illustrated previously in figure 1, the components of destination image are suggested to fall within three dimensions: *attribute-holistic*, *functional-psychological* and *common-unique*. As it is not easy to deal with three dimensions in the same figure, the components of destination image are separated into a series of two-aspect diagrams depicted in figures 2, 3 and 4. The source of the data either open-ended questions or scale items is also showed in each figure.

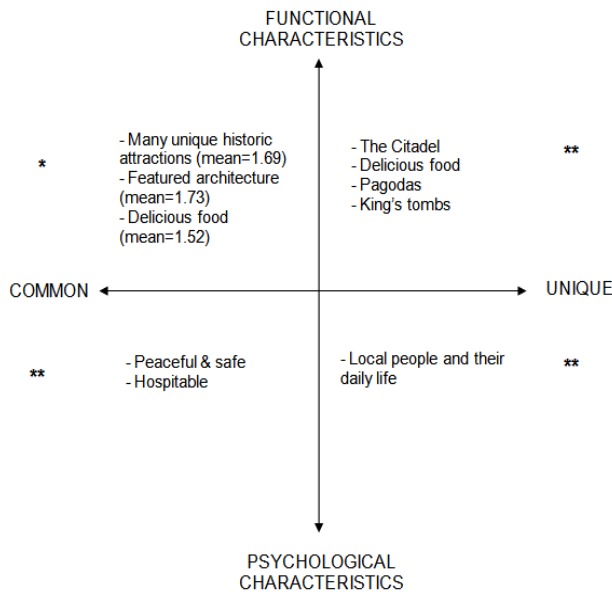
Figure 2 shows the attribute-holistic and functional-psychological components of Hue's image as a tourist destination. The scale items are the main source of data for the attribute information in terms of both functional and psychological characteristics. Alternatively, the holistic, functional and psychological imagery is supplied by the responses to the first open-ended question. Scale ratings for several functional attributes of Hue are presented in the upper left quadrant of the figure. These include the respondents' ratings of "many unique historic attractions", "featured architecture", and "delicious food". The lower left quadrant provides scale scores on some psychological attributes such as "friendly and welcoming people" and "peaceful atmosphere". On the other hand, the first open-ended question supplies data for the right side of the figure. Data from the first open-ended question reveal the functional and psychological holistic image of Hue.



**Figure 2.** The attributes/holistic and functional/psychological components of destination image of Hue

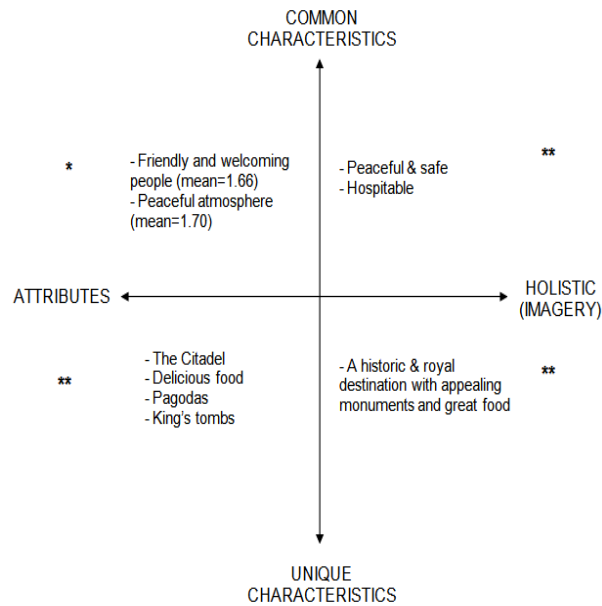
(Source: Own survey 2013/14)

Figure 3 illustrates the functional-psychological and common-unique components of destination image of Hue. Data on the right side of the figure are obtained from the responses to the second open-ended question which requires respondents to give examples of unique tourist attractions in Hue. In terms of functional and psychological characteristics, “the Citadel”, “pagodas”, “King’s tombs”, “delicious food”, and “local people and their daily life” can be considered unique to Hue.



**Figure 3.** The common/unique and functional/psychological components of destination image of Hue

(Source: Own survey 2013/14)



**Figure 4.** The attribute/holistic and common/unique components of destination image of Hue

*(Source: Own survey 2013/14)*

Figure 4, finally, shows the attribute-holistic and common-unique components of destination image. The scale items provide data for only one quadrant on the common attributes of image. The remaining three quadrants are fulfilled by the responses to the two open-ended questions. The figure shows that the holistic images of Hue are “peaceful and safe”, “hospitable”, and “a historic and royal place with appealing monuments and great royal food”.

However, the division of the image data into the three above figures is just a chance to examine the different dimensions of image components. The overall image of Hue as a tourist destination should be judged as the combination and interaction of all of the components: attributes holistic, common, unique, functional, and psychological.

Imagery is a specifically powerful tool in promoting a destination. It is imperative to communicate the appropriate holistic imagery, both functional and psychological to the potential travelers. In this study, a cross-check between scale items and the open-ended questions has been done to reveal the really objective holistic imagery of Hue.

## 6 Conclusion

Derived from the above mentioned justification, this research is conducted with the hope to give a hand to addressing the question in concern. The findings are then used as the major foundation for the suggestions proposed to improve the image of Hue destination.

The study results indicate that the functional image of Hue saved in the visitors’ minds was a destination with many unique historical attractions, of which the most prominent one is the Citadel. This fact might suggest that the perception on the images of Hue by the visitors was still pretty monotonous. For the psychological image in the minds of tourists, Hue’s atmosphere

is very peaceful and safe thanks to the quiet space and friendly welcoming people. Nevertheless, besides the positive images, the tourists also have negative associations when thinking about Hue, such as pleading street vendors, beggars and pursuing cyclo drivers, complex traffic systems, or the situation of cheating prices. The research results also showed that there are some significant differences in the assessments on Hue images of different clusters of visitors grouped by their age, gender, nationality, level of education, or time of arrival in Hue. In particular, there are a number of respondents who even could not rate anything about Hue attribute-components or response to the open questions in the questionnaire. This somewhat proves that the destination image of Hue in the minds of tourists is still vague.

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