

INLAND WATER REPRESENTATION IN FOREIGN FILMS SHOT IN VIETNAM IN THREE DECADES: REFLECTION ON THE FILM CONTEXTS AND FILM TOURISM

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Abstract:

[1] Research issue

In the past, war was the factor that brought foreign film crews to Vietnam but today, the majestic and diverse natural landscape is the attraction, turning Vietnam into a good place for foreign filmmakers. The water image attracts the audience not only because it shows certain meaning to the film background but also because it reveals a new destination for tour-goers.

[2] Research method

Using the text-based approach with content analysis, the study analyzes five films shot in Vietnam in three decades: *L'amant* (Jean-Jacques 1991), *Indochine* (Regis Wargnier 1992), *The Quiet American* (Phillip Noyce 2002), *The Chinese Botanist's Daughter* (Dai Sijie 2006), and *Kong: Skull Island* (Jordan Vogt-Roberts 2017) to answer two questions: (1) how the inland water representation in foreign films shot in Vietnam reflects the film contexts (cultural, economic, political), and (2) what makes the audience interested in the waterscapes narrated in the films in terms of tourism.

[3] Findings & Conclusions

The water image in film shows livelihood of the local people and their living standards in the region; political regime's impacts on their lives; agricultural infrastructure that supports them to make a living; and relationships among people living on or around the waterscapes.

The audience recognizes the lesser-known destinations in the films and this urges them to explore prominent inland water attractions; join local culture activities at little-visited area; and inspire other filmmakers to share the waterscapes in their potential films to the world.

The research also recommends both the foreign film producers and the local ones to reflect the waterscapes in the recent times, especially when Vietnam applied the renovation policy and it becomes an emerging country with overpopulation.

Keywords: film contexts, inland water representation, narratives of waterscapes

Theme: Discourses, representations and narratives of inland waters in cultural texts and arts (visual art, literature, film, TV, (social) media etc.)

Introduction

Foreign films shot in Vietnam

In many years from renovation policy, Vietnam attracted foreign filmmakers with landscapes and war-themed stories from the north to the south and three film releases could prove this: *The Lover* (Jean-Jacques Annaud, 1992), *Indochine* (Re1gis Wargnier, 1991) and *Dien Bien Phu* (Pierre Schoendoerffer 1992) (Blum 1997). They were shot in Vietnam in a trend of tourism in this country that was called “Maison de L’Indochine” or “mysterious Indochina”, not only telling stories but also introducing local landscapes to French travelers. If war stories are what attracted foreign filmmakers in 1990s, water and mountainous landscapes have been more appealing in recent years. *The Quiet American* (Phillip Noyce, 2002), *The Chinese Botanist’s Daughter* (Dai Sijie, 2016), and *Pan* (Joe Wright, 2015) are examples of film scenes with waterscapes narrated with stories. Son Doong in Quang Binh, Ha Long Bay, Ninh Binh, Tam Coc, Sapa, Hoian, Danang, Hanoi, Saigon and other places were chosen for film shooting, allowing audiences around the world to enjoy watching both stories and landscapes and urging them to book a tour to Vietnam.

Landscape in films

Human and environment are not separate but integrated and this relationship is explored in films through the human’s daily activities (Mumcu & Yilmaz, 2018). Audiences are inspired by the landscapes in films and eager for traveling to these places to discover the local culture, politics and economy. War-themed films shot in Vietnam introduced Vietnamese landscapes to global movie watchers not because of the local nationalism but because of local contexts that can support the stories and scene settings. Vietnam is viewed in a different way in the eye of foreign directors in comparison to that of the local ones. Cultural, political and economic landscapes are narrated in terms of war or other themes in conjunction with filmmaking efforts to achieve the hearts and wins of Vietnamese audiences and those who prefer Vietnam (Duong 2014). Some films choose the landscapes as the local settings are appropriate to their films though their stories are not Vietnam-related.

Images of inland water in films

Waterway areas with surrounding activities are increasingly explored and re-created for tourism and entertainment (Olsson, 2016). Inland water can input more values tourism development thanks to imaginative images screened in films. Water flow in both urban and rural areas supports tourism in more ecological trends and it is watched via films with beautiful environment and livable landscapes (Qiu *et al.*, 2018). Highlighting the Vietnamese scene through cinema is a practical handshake between tourism and art, bringing Vietnam's image to the world and promoting tourism, as a form of combination between tourism and entertainment. *Yellow Flower on the Green Grass* (Tôi thấy hoa vàng trên cỏ xanh, Victor Vu, 2015) made the audience ecstatic with the beautiful scenery and the river view of Phu Yen, bringing the tourism growth of this land to 25% compared to 13% in the previous period. *The Immortal* (Người bất tử, Victor Vu, 2018) depicts scenes of rivers in Quang Binh and Tu Lan cave or Vong Canh hill overlooking the Perfume River in *Dreamy Eyes* (Mac Biec, Victor Vu, 2019). The audience not only sees the image of the river in the form of a landscape or small landscape, but also the life of the residents along the two sides of the river also exploited meticulously (An Dinh, 2020).

This research uses content analysis with text-based approach to examine inland water representation in foreign films shot in Vietnam in three decades from 1990s to 2010s. The context of the feature film plays an important part in visual expression, giving millions of audiences around the world a sense of different regional and cultural characteristics, creating excitement to the audience, and they will want to go to that land. Thanks to the possession of many pristine and majestic natural landscapes and a long, beautiful coastline, Vietnam has become a destination for international filmmakers for many years. Many foreign movies filmed in Vietnam have surprised audiences around the world, because the image of the country and people of Vietnam is beautifully shown through famous cinematic works.

There is limited research on how water is reflected in films when there are more foreign producers chooses Vietnam as a destination for filming, regardless of Vietnam-themed or non-Vietnam-themed movies. By analyzing five films: *The Lover* (Jean-Jacques, 1991), *Indochine* (Regis Wargnier, 1992), *The Quiet American* (Phillip Noyce, 2002), *The Chinese Botanist's Daughter* (Dai Sijie, 2006), and *Kong: Skull Island* (Jordan Vogt-Roberts, 2017), the research aims to answer two questions:

RQ1: How does the inland water representation in foreign films shot in Vietnam reflects the film contexts (cultural, economic, political)?

RQ2: What makes the audience interested in the waterscapes narrated in the firms in terms of tourism?

Literature Review

Inland water representations in films

Inland waters, including fresh water and saline water, represent ecological, economic and cultural systems that the dwellers depend on (Martin, 2016). Water resources make major contributions to the economy development for the people living in the areas that inland waters flow. In Vietnam, inland waters are used to supply water for rice fields, produce aquaculture, attract tourists with the aim to increase jobs and incomes for farmers (Phuong *et al.*, 2006). The image of Vietnamese inland waters reflected in the cinema, is expressed through the local characteristics linked to the local landscape, animals, plants, customs and festive cultures. Vietnam has 2,372 rivers with a length of 10 kilometers or more, 109 of which are main rivers. The total area of the river basins is 1,167,000 square kilometers while the inland waters is 331,578 km² (accounting for 38%) (Thanh Tam, 2008). With diverse regions, rich weather and splendid cultural colors from the age of folk songs to contemporary poetry and paintings, Vietnam not only deserves to be a tourist stopover but also for foreign film crews.

Foreign films shot in Vietnam

It was a long time when filmmakers from America and Europe rushed to Vietnam to depict Vietnam war and produce war documentaries, so the war in particular and Vietnam in general was known as the battlefields through the international media (Kleinen, 2003). After 1975, Vietnam was also regarded as a stereotype with “Vietnam syndrome” genre while war films and anti-war films remained with both camera objectivity and subjectivity. Landscape was used as metaphor in war films and made more cinematic to create a voyeuristic desire for the audience and “landscape in cinema is a

technical, economic, cultural and semiotic production” (Costa, 2006, 247, cited in Duong, 2014). After 1975, foreign filmmakers came to Vietnam to make Vietnam-themed films though they were Vietnam war or other themes, so capturing Vietnam’s geography in film became a tactic to aestheticize emotions about the country. Since the post-renovation, Vietnam has turned a good destination for foreign adventurous filmmakers thanks to its dense jungle, mighty mountains, giant rice fields, long inland waters, ancient architecture and scenic sites recognized as World Natural Heritage. Through the lens of landscape in films, cinema can draw audiences to the facts of historical, cultural and political contexts that landscape is the sole witness for ages.

Reflections of contexts in films

Films can draw more attention from audiences who find themselves closer to stories narrated in a frame thanks to cultural content (Craig *et al.*, 2005). Cultural elements are depicted with the daily life of characters and people in the story through the way they share ideas, communicate or trade. Besides, economic concepts in films can illustrate an issue that describes the film background or the age of history in which the story takes place (Don & Scott, 2003). Song Lang (Leon Le, 2018) brought the audiences back to the years of 1980s in Vietnam when the living standards were low, a lot of people were in debts, and *cai luong* still attracted audiences. Political culture and social contexts were censored in Vietnam’s film industry after 1975 and though there are more freedom to produce films, political context is carefully examined from the year of 2002 when Vietnam’s government began to recognize the practical necessity of private film studios. *The Legend of Quan Tien* (Truyện thuyết về Quán Tiên, Dinh Tuan Vu, 2020), awarded the Silver Kite in the 2020 Kite Awards, was set in Truong Son during anti-American era, in which the characters showed many inner levels in war times: longing for love, hidden sexuality, torn between mission and instinct, between patriotism and personal affection, between the determination to sacrifice and choosing to live for oneself. This transforms the film industry from propaganda purpose to more commercial purpose to appeal to more viewers.

Waterscapes narrated in films

Vietnam has an intricate river system and together with it, there are life activities, cultural activities and festivals on the river and along the river. Investing a lot in the scene to highlight the waterscapes on the big screen becomes a trend that many directors are pursuing. *Furie* (Hai Phuong, Le Van Kiet, 2019) is “bold Vietnamese” action movie because the scene in the film is very bold in Mekong Delta river identity: countryside markets, floating markets, express coaches... The message about the people, culture and inland waters of Vietnam is shared on the screen to bring the nation's image to the world, changing their perception from a Vietnam war to a peaceful and safe destination. The image of majestic mountains, poetic rivers, warm people with distinctive culture has become artistic values in the film setting and promotion of local culture. In the South of Vietnam, inland water images are depicted by pictures of children swimming on rivers, boats replacing means of transport, markets not meeting on land but on rivers and life floating on the water. Highlights in the film *Furie* are the Mekong Delta floating market with fruits full of boats, simple meals of the people, quiet rivers or the hardship of water workers. Attaching to the waterscape in the movie is the character's money exchange scene with the people around the floating market, Cai Rang, a symbol of the peaceful and rustic beauty of not only Can Tho but also the West of the river.

Tourism destinations by film fanatics

There are true connections between film productions and film locations to motivate tourists to go to the territories they watch in a film (Di Cesare *et al.*, 2009). It is a cause-and-effect relationship between destination images in films and decisions on choosing a travel site. Films are not official media to promote tourism but gradually become publicity to influence foreign tourists' destination choice decision (Iwashita, 2008). They can help to increase awareness of historical sites, landscapes and travel locations, creating interests in travelling to the areas described in films. The context of a feature film plays an important part in visual expression, giving millions of audiences around the world a sense of different regional and cultural characteristics, exciting the audience who then wants to go to the land. That is the strength of cinema compared to other arts. Thanks to the possession of many pristine and majestic natural landscapes and a long, beautiful coastline, Vietnam has become a destination for international filmmakers for many years. *Kong: Skull Island* (Jordan Vogt-Roberts, 2017) performed about 70% of the scenes in Vietnam, including the scenes shot in Quang Binh, Quang Ninh and Ninh Binh. In particular, the film studio in Ninh Binh has become a tourist destination attracting hundreds of thousands of domestic and foreign tourists to visit and admire the firsthand and legendary artifacts used in the film.

Research Methodology

Text-based approach in films

Describing the content of films is not an easy task but it is possible to describe, organize and manage the film content (Vassiliou, 2006). The visual elements are analyzed in terms of motion vectors including "background subtraction, color histogram, changes in color, shape, lighting... per video frame". These vectors are produced and edited to depict an image on the scene, bringing intended meaning. Inland water is captured and changed in films to represent the background linked to daily cultural activities the surrounding people do and to attract the audience to find out or travel to the sites. MPEG-7 is an appropriate tool to understand the narrative world and represent it in the background contexts.

Content analysis in films

Movies are understood as media of communication and studied in film texts, film contexts and filming techniques (Mikos, 2013). Analyzing films systematically becomes objective and is verified inter-subjectively, so this process can support this academic study to understand the inland water representations in films with their components: intentions of producers, film structures and messages for the audience. Films, therefore, are a communication process in which moving images are studied to see how they convey their meaning with the viewers. The textual structure of film is analyzed to understand the film contexts (political, economic, cultural) set in inland water sites perceived in daily doings of the people. From this point, the research uses content analysis in an applied context that helps to form identity for inland water, sometimes called waterscapes, and show its representation. Hall (1997:61) states that "representation is the process by which members of a culture use language to produce the meaning". With movies, they are moving images, sound, background music, words of dialogues, languages, narratives, and graphics.

The summary of five films

The Lover (Jean-Jacques, 1991) was based on novel *The Lover* by Marguerite Duras (1984) bringing the audience back to Indochina in the 1920s with the story of a young French girl living in Sadec and an older Chinese man living in a small house in Cholon. The story is associated with inland waters, the gardens and houses in the Mekong River Delta, the bustling street markets and busy canal system in Cholon.

Indochine (Regis Wargnier, 1992) was also set in the French colonial period when the French withdrew from Indochina to make way for the Americans, told from the perspective of the female owner of the rubber plantations. The film spans many Vietnamese waterscapes of many regions and beautiful scenes, the old customs and the old people going through the motions with the lens of the French cameraman in the end of the colonial regime.

The Quiet American (Phillip Noyce, 2002) was set in the years near the end of the French colonial period in Vietnam, leading viewers to follow the footsteps of war correspondent Thomas Fowler in uncovering the political secrets of the imperial countries towards Vietnam. The film took place mainly in Saigon in the 50s of the last century, with the serene beauty appearing through the lanterns at the tea shops, the old cycloists, and the immense streets.

The Chinese Botanist's Daughter (Dai Sijie, 2006) is a collaboration between France and Canada directed by a Chinese director, Dai Sijie. Based on a completely true story, the film revolves around the unruly love and the hidden horrifying truths of two young Ming and An. Set in China in the 1980 - 1990, the film has a sensitive content that is banned from shooting in China, forcing director Dai Sijie to shoot the film entirely in Vietnam - where there are certain scene similarities. Tam Coc - Bich Dong is the main scene of the film, with charming pictures of mountains and forests of Ninh Binh.

Kong: Skull Island (Jordan Vogt-Roberts, 2017) is an American monster film depicting Vietnam after war when a team of scientists came to an uncharted island in the Pacific where they faced the mighty Kong. The film was nominated for the best visual effects at the 90th Academy Awards. Most of the scenes were shot in Vietnam, in which inland waters and their landscapes were revealed in Trang An (Ninh Binh), Tam Coc (Hoa Lu district, Ninh Binh), Van Long Natural Reserve, Tu Lan cave system and Ha Long Bay.

Findings

THE LOVER (Jean-Jacques Annaud, 1991)

The film settings are through the point of view of a young French girl who studies in a school in colonial Saigon. It is as a “museum aesthetic” when the objects prepared in props reflect French colonial time with French architecture still maintained in years (Higson, 1993). The city representation in film is depicted in detail, from roundabout and docks to traffic and French businesspeople. Indochina is re-built, recalling French culture imposed in Vietnam, including boulevards, buildings, food and beverages, lifestyles and French language. These settings help to develop the film contexts via a love story, the livings of French people in Vietnam, the Vietnamese under the colonial authority and a country on the way of civilization.

At the beginning of the film, a ferry crossed the Mekong River carrying farmers in brown clothes or retailers with rudimentary tools such as rickshaws, chicken coops and piglet sties. In another river scene, people traded at a river wharf with many boats gathering, stalls mostly made of thatched roofs and a jeep carrying a French family weaving through the middle of the market on the wharf. Three yellow-clad monks walked in front of a church where a group of Frenchmen in white had just left. The main male character drove a black car from Vinh Long to Sa Dec through the fertile fields of Indochina, clusters of water hyacinths drifting on the river and birds perching on tree branches. The ferry came to the dock, busy trading at the ferry terminal, mostly small; from a distance a few buffaloes and a farmer walked across a flooded field. The car was running on a bridge across a canal, which was struck by a wooden stick, and under the bridge a few boats were rowing.

From that fateful ferry, the two main characters rushed into each other, like two flies, ignoring the present, not thinking about the future. Their love is the secret corner of the house where Cholon is busy, dirty, sultry, uncomfortable with the noise and mixed in with the humid sound of people. The characters paced back and forth with scenes of a crowded Cholon and a magnificent Saigon. Initially, director Annaud intended to choose another Asian country such as Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, where there were better facilities for filming. But in the end, he still had to choose Vietnam because he felt that it had to be Saigon to describe the colonial atmosphere that Marguerite Duras described in her work. Nha Rong Wharf, Majestic Hotel, Le Hong Phong highschool, Le Quy Don highschool, Binh Tay Market, Me Coc Wharf, Zoo and Botanical Garden, around the Independence Palace... depicting and reproducing colonial times through the film. The small riverside ferry terminal was filmed in Cat Lai. Director Nguyen Vinh Son, one of the three deputy directors of the scenes in Vietnam of this movie, said that at that ferry the crew only needed to build a gate, a market and a few small houses in front, then they could create the city of ferries crossing the Mekong River in the early 20th century.

INDOCHINE (Regis Wargnier 1992)

Indochine was screened with French colonial construction, daily lives of people working in rubber plantations, the labor of Vietnamese working class, the growth of communism and the exploitation of French colonists (Ravi, 2002). From a melodramatic story, the film tells a failure of the French colony and societal practices in the region (Blum 2002). The presence of French people in Vietnam forces the local ones to fight back and struggle to survive due to the harsh rule of French colonialism. Besides, Indochine brings the audience the landscapes and waterscapes and reminds them of the time buried nearly a century. Stretching back to the 1930s, the film is set when the seeds of revolution began to boil in the minds of every oppressed Vietnamese and ended in 1954 when the French colonialists finally left Southeast Asia. Indochina is the story of the country and people of Vietnam through the eyes of the owner of the rubber plantations Éliane Devries, played by Catherine Deneuve.

The inland water is fully utilized in the film with scenes of daily activities and cultural activities along the riverbanks such as a funeral scene, a boat race scene, or a selection of workers to work for plantations. The French controlled travels at the river wharfs, blocked the boats to check whether they transported drugs and issued a curfew to the boats not crossing the designated areas. Many scenes of Ha Long Bay were introduced with the image of a boat with large sails running across the river rowed by Indochinese soldiers. Wooden mansions were built to serve the French and the labor market was organized to provide the wealthy Southern people with the laborers working in the plantations, coal mines or factories. A view of a small river running along the foothills

and from the riverbank, we saw mining slaves and a group of thin Indochinese carrying a French officer on a bamboo chair. On another riverbank, there was a stream of people leaving their homeland slowly, poorly and hopelessly.

The film dealt with the most important events of Vietnamese history in the final years under the domination: from the Yen Bai uprising, the growth of the Communist movement, the conflict between the French themselves, and then close with the Geneva Agreement, helping to put an end to the French presence in Vietnam. Éliane loved the country with the image of rivers associated with the rubber granary, the rice granary and the coal granary. The character witnessed the worries of both French and Vietnamese people of all classes before the revival of a half-alive country that half-colonial. A series of beautiful scenes from the mountains to the inland waters were screened through the lens of the French. For foreigners who have never set foot in Vietnam, the movie was an invitation that could not be better. Most of the beautiful scenes of the rivers in Vietnam are shown in the movie, from Ha Long Bay to Tam Diep, or beautiful scenes in Dinh Bang, Hue, Phat Diem. The Vietnamese in the film were very diverse in appearance and personality: from strong Western youths to black-toothed old men who smile as beautifully as they were on French postcards at the dawn of the century.

THE QUIET AMERICAN (Phillip Noyce, 2002)

The story begins in Saigon in 1952 when Vietnam was under French colonial rule. The Americans joined with the French to promote the anti-communist movement to eliminate the communist international movement that had been growing strongly since the Second World War and the birth of the State of China in 1949. British war journalist Thomas Fowler reflects on the events and tense atmosphere in Saigon during the beginning of receiving economic aid from the US. Besides the love triangle between Fowler, Phuong and Pyle, there are hidden plots towards major changes on the battlefield in South Vietnam. Fowler realizes that behind Pyle's quiet, gentle look there are lies. The psychological change in Pyle is an increasingly obvious example of Fowler's premonitions about the future of war in Indochina: United States will oust France and go directly into the war in Vietnam.

The image of the river is detailed in the film, with boats running on the river and an oil lamp being lit in the boat cage. A corpse in a white suit float in the river, identified as being killed with a knife. On another riverbank, there is a small temple in a quiet setting with a single boat docked at the wharf. Some armed soldiers appear, breaking the silence, and from here we can see the little gems on the other side of the river. A man in a conical hat runs a boat on a river full of water hyacinths while a soldier hides behind the trees and tries to shoot the man on the boat. The trading is bustling in the evening and on the riverside, there are even street vendors.

Saigon of the 50s of the last century is recreated in the film, with the ancient beauty shown through the teahouses with lanterns, the old cyclos, the spacious streets with little traffic. Most of the film's scenes take place in Vietnam, stretching from South to North including Ho Chi Minh City, Hoi An ancient town, Ninh Binh and Hanoi. Street scenes are depicted in the cities and the scenes in Ninh Binh show Viet Minh occupying military bases when the French retreat from Ninh Binh.

THE CHINESE BOTANIST'S DAUGHTER (Dai Sijie, 2006)

Throughout the film, that is the image of a wild garden planted with countless precious medicinal herbs of the pharmacologist Chen in the 80s of China. The character An Chen lives with Mr. Chen,

her father who is said to have always been cold and arrogant since her mother died when she was 10 years old. The second main character is Min Li, lacking family affection because she lived in an orphanage since childhood, only focusing on researching medicinal herbs as a motivation, suddenly changes when she enters Mr. Chen's medicinal garden. Min Li meets An Chen. The two talk, learn medicinal herbs, share joys and sorrows, and go together to pick herbs until feelings arise between them. In the deep mountain with the spread of medicinal herbs, the love between the two girls is growing and passionate despite Mr. Chen's objections.

The river flows through the hills and on the banks of the river, the monks stand quietly. This Chinese movie is set in Vietnam. When being asked why choosing the Vietnamese setting for a Chinese film, director Dai Sijie said that the natural setting in Vietnam is suitable for the film story, which happened in the 1980s. The image of the Northern Rivers is featured with a wooden wharf, people rowing boats on the river, activities of riverside people as weddings. People are influenced by Buddhism, using the small Buddha statue as a reminder of the religion they place their faith in or having a prayer before opening the bird cage to release the birds. The monks pray for An Chen by the riverside, and before the death of Min Li, she requests that her ashes be mixed with An Chen's ashes. The monk brings the ashes to a table by the riverside, mixes the two characters' ashes together on a tray, and then the abbot scatters their ashes into the river while the monk chants and prays for their release. The film ends with a sea scene in Ha Long Bay.

The director chose many locations in Vietnam for filming including Tam Coc - Bich Dong, Trang An (Ninh Binh), Co Am pagoda (Hung Yen), Sapa (Lao Cai) and Ha Tay. The image of charming rivers, mountains and forests in Ninh Binh contributes to the poetry of the tragic love story between An Chen and Min Li. Pure, pristine and fanciful nature is the reason why the director chose Vietnam as the setting. Hanoi and the northern provinces on the film look rustic and plain. The beautiful visuals celebrate the success of the film as opposed to the sad ending of a homosexual love affair.

KONG: SKULL ISLAND (Jordan Vogt-Roberts, 2017)

The story took place in the 1970s when NASA's Landsat 1 satellite discovered a deserted island shaped like a human skull, where there were thousands of ships mysteriously missing. This place is called Skull Island, where Kong resides and where the expedition embarked on a deadly journey. Going deep into the home of Kong, the expedition felt that everything was strange and their rage sparked a war between humans and giant creatures when they decided to bomb in a geological test. The confrontation between the expedition and Kong, between Kong and other animals creates wars among the wild nature, set in the image of beautiful rivers and landscapes in Vietnam. Ancient Vietnamese culture is exploited through the scenes of aboriginal life, houses made of bamboo, giant buffalo emerging from the river, and tatami mats used in the village.

Sai Gon Port is introduced at the beginning of the film with people passing by, workers welding and upgrading ships for a long voyage. The ship leaves the light-filled port with many passengers on board on a journey called resource exploration but actually for exploring Skull Island. The ship moves at sea, passing an American warship participating in the war in Vietnam. After going through a fierce storm, the ship comes to a sea with beautiful scenery, Ha Long Bay, which in the movie is named Skull Island. A flock of white birds flies across small mountains rising out of the sea in the calm seascape of Ha Long Bay. In the process of passing through the island and being attacked by creatures on the island, the American soldiers crash the plane next to a gentle stream, surrounded by green trees.

Most of the scenes were shot in Vietnam, showing off the beauty of rivers and mountains. Ninh Binh, Quang Binh and Ha Long become Kong's home in the wild and majestic natural scenery. Vietnamese and international audiences can watch the natural beauty through the perspective of filmmakers from Hollywood. Location Manager Leann Emmett chose Ninh Binh because it has a unique rock structure that cannot be found anywhere else in the world. The film crew has traveled to many countries to promote the film, through which the image of Vietnam reaches the international public. The tourism industry of Quang Binh province also organizes many communication campaigns to promote tourism together with the film. Beautiful places such as Son Doong cave, Tu Lan caves, Nhat Le beach are promoted on the travel website TripAdvisor and tourism promotion clips are interspersed with scenes from the movie (Nguyen & Ha, 2017).

Discussion

Inland Water Representation and Film Contexts

River dwellers have a special relationship with the river in which they were born, enjoying their childhood and economic development along with the river that has been passed down through generations. Many areas of the population living along rivers or on rivers throughout Vietnam rely on rivers as a means of livelihood, from aquaculture to commodity trading and religious activities. The image of rivers is also associated with vast fields in the country with wet rice culture, and water is led into the fields by a system of interlaced canals. The water rice culture in Vietnam has developed since the 1990s and continues to be the main agricultural occupation (Dang *et al.*, 2007). Rivers, streams and waterfalls are the main sources of water throughout the country for consumption purposes such as drinking, bathing, cooking, production, and sports such as swimming, boating, and ecotourism (WARECOD, 2014).

The rivers and wetland ecosystem in the Mekong and the Northern region are depicted vividly with the lives of people along the riverbanks, going through local people from French colonialism to urbanization and industrialization. However, these landscapes "remained persistent defining elements of rural livelihoods and agricultural waterscapes" (Molle *et al.*, 2012). If *Indochine* is a beautiful picture of Ha Long Bay and the imperial city of Hue, *L'Amant* is the image of Mekong rivers and interlaced canals in the old Saigon Cho Lon. *Kong: Skull Island* is really a beautiful picture of an area of water, from the sea to the inland river, from streams to ponds. Ha Long Bay is really depicted as the charming beauty with more than 2,000 islands covered by fabulous vegetation and mysterious caves. The boats running up and down, the diverse cultural life, the busy trading as well as the political situation suitable for the different stages in each film, with camera objectivity, describing the specific film contexts.

The rivers flowing on the mainland and the mountain slopes are associated with the image of the mountains, and the local people living and doing business. Films, in addition to their artistic value, also highlight the river culture associated with the location chosen as the film's setting. Mekong rivers are associated with vast fields, while northern rivers are associated with majestic mountains. Rivers passing through fields, mountains, the city, the countryside, even caves throughout all regions of Vietnam make the movies come to life, not only inspiring the filming crew but also attracting audiences. Rivers in all parts of Vietnam are selected to be included in the films as a testament to a country with endless beauty and untapped potential for Vietnamese and international filmmakers.

Waterscapes and Film Tourism

Waterscapes geographically featured throughout the region of Vietnam are considered as the film context that filmmakers bring to the screen as semiotics of space and time. Accompanying the image of rivers and water are local characteristics such as people's activities, houses, utensils, costumes, cultural festivals, customs, beliefs and business methods. Inland water in the high mountains is associated with terraced fields, tea hills, stilt houses, ethnic people, but rivers in the South are linked with a sampan, coconut trees along the rivers and crept canals. These activities and images have attracted both local and international filmmakers. The number of moviegoers is less than that of TV series and social media platforms, but cinema is also one of the communication channels for the national image and promotion of Vietnam's tourism.

Cinema conveys aesthetic values from real life such as inland waterways, mountains, marinas... Ninh Binh in *Kong: Skull of Island* and Van Long wetland in the Red River Delta are incredible limestone karsts. This lagoon is now ideal for travelers who can sit on boats enjoying the rich limestone ecosystems. Many scenes in *Peter Pan* (Hogan, 2003) are also shot in Ninh Binh, Phong Nha- Ke Bang National Park, as the outdoor settings of the mythical Neverland. The area is covered with hundreds of caves, grotto systems, and underground rivers. In *The Lover*, colonial heritage no longer exists but many places in Cho Lon and Mekong Delta regions are chosen to depict the French colonialism in the past Vietnam.

The film context using the image of inland water is a guarantee of Vietnamese identity that not only tells a story but also introduces ecotourism to Vietnamese and international tourists. The element of identity is especially meaningful when producers want to bring their works to the world. The message about the Vietnamese people and the country is conveyed even though the films are at different times and tell different stories. The use of cinema to promote and develop tourism has been applied in the world for a long time, but has been particularly appreciated in Vietnam in recent years. Foreign films shot in Vietnam have proven effective in promoting landmarks through cinema, for example, director Jordan Vogt-Roberts was appointed as Vietnam Tourism Ambassador for the 2017 – 2020 term. According to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Vietnam (2020), 5% of the world's tourists visit places that are set in movies. When the film viewers are attracted by the filmed location, they intend to visit the sites thanks to their curiosity about the real scene behind the film's setting.

Conclusion

The water image in film shows livelihood of the local people and their living standards in the region; political regime's impacts on their lives; agricultural infrastructure that supports them to make a living; and relationships among people living on or around the waterscapes. The audience recognizes the lesser-known destinations in the films and this urges them to explore prominent inland water attractions; join local culture activities at little-visited area; and inspire other filmmakers to share the waterscapes in their potential films to the world. Both the foreign film producers and the local ones to reflect the waterscapes in the recent times, especially when Vietnam applied the renovation policy and it becomes an emerging country with overpopulation. Vietnam has great potential for river landscapes and Vietnamese and international cinema will become an effective tourism promotion channel for Vietnam's tourism, especially in the post-COVID-19 period. Vietnam will continue to be a destination for international filmmakers thanks to its natural waterscape advantages that are suitable for a variety

of different film settings. Limited in five films, the research is expected to analyze more inland water representation in films in Vietnamese films in the future to have a clearer view of waterscape images in local films.

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