

Exploring host-children's engagement in tourism: Transcending the dichotomy of universalism and cultural relativism

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ABSTRACT

Globally, considerable numbers of child workers are engaged in the tourism industry. Despite international efforts to eradicate all forms of child labour, the number of child labourers in the service industries has increased due to the ambiguity and challenges in defining child labourers in tourism, the dichotomic views on child labour, and the absence of children's voices in research. This paper explores host-children's perception of their engagement in tourism and proposes a transformative paradigm to transcend the dichotomy of universalism and cultural relativism. Employing photo-elicitation interviews with 82 Cambodian host-children, this paper identifies both favourable and unfavourable perceptions of host-children's engagement in tourism. Hence, it is argued that host-children's engagement in tourism should not be seen as black and white but as a complicated social phenomenon. Based on the findings and discussion, a conceptual framework is proposed to demonstrate how the transformative paradigm guides to address host-children's engagement in tourism.

1. Introduction

Globally, 160 million children, one in ten children aged 5 to 17, were engaged in economic activities at the beginning of 2020 (International Labour Office & United Nations Children's Fund, 2021). The rising poverty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to see a further 8.9 million children becoming involved in child labour by the end of 2022 (International Labour Office & United Nations Children's Fund, 2021). Approximately 20% of child labour is engaged in the service industry, including the tourism and hotel sectors (International Labour Office & United Nations Children's Fund, 2021). Consequently, children's engagement in tourism-related work tends to be accepted as a necessary evil when they are confronted with poverty, lack of education, and other social conditions (Hagedoorn, 2013; Monterrubio et al., 2016). Due to the nature of child labour - which is often illegal, invisible and hidden away from the public - it is estimated that more children are engaged in tourism-related jobs (Hagedoorn, 2013). These working children face physical and psychological risks (International Labour Organization, 2017, pp. 2012–2016). Additionally, due to the nature of tourism work and a higher chance of encountering strangers (tourists), child labour in tourism is exposed to a greater risk of sexual exploitation and trafficking

(Castilho et al., 2018; Curley, 2014). Acknowledging the seriousness of child labour, the United Nations set a goal to eradicate all forms of child labour by 2025 (Goal 8.7). International and multinational governments, non-government organisations and corporations, including those in the tourism sector, are committed to protecting child workers from abuse and exploitation. Despite the international endeavours to prevent child labour and to eradicate all forms of child labour, the number of children in child labour has increased by over 8 million since 2016, and the percentage of children engaged in the service industry also increased from 17% in 2016 to 20% in 2020 (International Labour Office & United Nations Children's Fund, 2021).

Four conundrums have been identified to offer possible explanations for the sluggish progress in protecting child workers, especially those in tourism. Firstly, tourism-related work is considered a light, non-hazardous and acceptable level of work for children (Hagedoorn, 2013). While child sexual exploitation and trafficking in the tourism context have received growing international attention and are addressed as an urgent issue, tourism-related works such as selling souvenirs, performing shows or guiding tourists are considered comparatively lighter and safer work for children (Hagedoorn, 2013). As a result, the children engaged in tourism are often excluded from the child protection

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policies and have received limited scholarly research, although they are also exposed to the risks of long working hours, insecure jobs, low wages, often infringed labour law, and precarious education (Hagedoorn, 2013; Yang et al., 2019).

Secondly, the definition of child labour is ambiguous and very limited. Child labour refers to economic activity generating an income that directly or indirectly benefits children (Bhukuth, 2008). As a result, some children engaged in tourism are not considered child labour, although they are also exposed to mental, physical, social and moral dangers. For example, although children engaged in voluntourism are associated with the risks of commodification, humanitarian gaze and trafficking (Miller & Beazley, 2022; Mostafanezhad, 2014), they are not considered child labourers. As such, the experience of children who are not formally engaged in tourism work has been overlooked by policy-makers and scholars alike.

Additionally, child labourers in tourism have not received sufficient scholarly attention, and their voices are silent (Yang et al., 2019). The silence of child labourers in tourism pertains to the dominance of adult-centric views in tourism research (Canosa & Graham, 2022). In social science research, including tourism, children are considered vulnerable subjects with limited cognitive and linguistic capabilities (Khoo-Lattimore, 2015; Van den Hoonaard, 2018; Yang et al., 2022). Although many researchers have disputed the children's incapability to participate in research, children are still often assumed unable to give consent to participate in research, requiring special approval and permits to involve them in research. (Van den Hoonaard, 2018; Yang et al., 2022). Given this reason, research on children (especially those in child labour who are considered more vulnerable subjects) is likely to rely on secondary data or voices of adults such as their parents, governments/NGO staff or tourists (Yang et al., 2019). Since children own their unique insider views of their experiences in different social and cultural contexts that adults cannot recognise, the silence of children results in the failure to provide a safe place to fulfil children's need and want (Canosa & Graham, 2022; Kellett, 2005).

Lastly, epistemologically, there are controversial debates about child rights and child labour. Universalists argue that all children should be protected by eliminating children's engagement in economic activity (Brando, 2019). On the other hand, cultural relativists argue that eliminating children's engagement in economic activity is an impractical and neo-colonial attempt that does not consider the fact that "child labour is not a homogenous phenomenon" (Bhukuth, 2008, p. 387). Cultural relativists have criticised universalists for their reckless ban on children's engagement in work without considering their various situations and cultures, which - in turn - pushes children to find hidden and more exploitative work (Brando, 2019). However, cultural relativism has also been critiqued as it risks legitimating the abuses or exploitation within a culture (Lavalette & Cunningham, 2004). Despite the intense tensions between universalism and cultural relativism, few studies have attempted to approach child labour issues in tourism with the aim of bridging the two opposing stances.

Acknowledging the four conundrums for child labour in tourism, this paper aims to understand children's engagement in tourism from the children's own perspectives. This study contributes to the existing tourism literature by shedding light on child labour and profiling the voices of a neglected stakeholder group. This paper also attempts to discuss host-children's engagement in tourism, which may iron out the current dissonance between universalism and cultural relativism. The attempt to approach the issue of child labour with a view of transcending the dichotomic epistemologies will propose a new paradigmatic framework to child labour research, which is still fledgling due to continuous controversial arguments. Based on the findings and discussions, implications for policies and initiatives to promote the rights of children engaged in tourism and recommendations for future research will be provided.

2. Literature review

2.1. Host-children in tourism

In tourism studies, children have been under-researched (Canosa et al., 2016; Khoo-Lattimore, 2015). Although children have received growing scholarly attention in tourism scholarship, the views of children have been neglected in tourism for two main reasons (Canosa et al., 2016; Khoo-Lattimore, 2015; Poria & Timothy, 2014; Yang et al., 2019). Firstly, children tend to be considered inappropriate research subjects who cannot effectively express their own opinions and thoughts due to their limited cognitive and linguistic competencies (Khoo-Lattimore et al., 2015). Secondly, in social science, including tourism, children are often taboo research subjects as they are considered vulnerable subjects who are deemed incapable of giving consent to participate in the research (Canosa & Graham, 2016; Van den Hoonaard, 2018). The agency of children has been recognised in recent years, yet it is required to obtain complicated and special research permits to involve children in research (Canosa & Graham, 2016; Van den Hoonaard, 2018). Adult-centric tourism research has entrenched the assumption that childhood is a mere process to becoming an adult, depriving children of social agent rights (Canosa et al., 2018). However, children have a unique insider perspective that cannot be experienced in the same way as the perspective of adults (Canosa et al., 2018; Kellett, 2005). The absence of children's voices results in policies and practices failing to reflect the complicated childhood experiences in various social and cultural contexts (Canosa & Graham, 2022). Therefore, this research explores children's engagement in tourism by adopting a child-centred approach to respect children's right to social agency.

Within the paucity of studies on children in tourism, child labourers in tourism have received even less scholarly attention (Yang et al., 2019). While sexually exploited child labourers in tourism contexts have been neglected in academia, non-sexually exploited children have been relatively more neglected in tourism research (Yang et al., 2019) due to the ambiguous definition of child labour. According to the *International Labour Organization, 2023*, child labour is defined as:

Work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It refers to work that:

- is mentally, physically, socially, or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and/or
- interferes with their schooling by: depriving them of the opportunity to attend school, obliging them to leave school prematurely, or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work. (Para. 2).

This definition does not clarify what actually constitutes work that is "mentally, physically, socially, and morally dangerous and harmful to children". Neither does it define what is meant by excessively long and heavy work. Since tourism-related work is considered relatively easy and safe for children, children engaged in non-sexual jobs or voluntourism/slum tourism may not be categorised as child labourers (Hagedoorn, 2013). However, these tourism-related jobs lead to the economic, physical and psychological exploitation of children and prevent children from going to school (Hagedoorn, 2013). Furthermore, many tourism jobs are invisible and hidden away from the public, such as domestic work at home and washing dishes behind a restaurant. Due to this invisibility, it is hard to identify, control and study child workers in tourism. Therefore, this paper will address these challenges by broadening the foci of child labour in tourism to host-children who are formally and informally engaged in tourism.

Despite the difficulties in identifying child labourers in tourism, a handful of studies have explored child labourers in tourism, focusing on the cause and consequences of child labour (Al-Frehat & Alhelalat, 2015; Magablihi & Naamneh, 2010), the political-economic role of domestic

child workers (Bakas, 2018), tourism impacts on children's perception of tourism (Buzinde & Manuel-Navarrete, 2013) and health (Himmelgreen et al., 2012), and voluntourism experiences and motivations (Carpenter, 2015). While these studies on child labour in tourism have considered child labour as a social phenomenon, they have not been observed to understand child labourers' lived experiences in tourism, which is a valuable resource for children's emancipation and empowerment (Canosa & Graham, 2022; Josefsson & Wall, 2020). To fill the identified gaps, this paper explores how host-children perceive their engagement in tourism from their own perspective.

2.2. Controversial antipodean views on child labour

While child labourers in tourism have been under-researched, the rights of general child labourers have been continuously debated. The International Convention on the Rights of Child (UNCRC) (1989) is an international agreement on childhood, guiding how to address global justice for children and safeguard them from harm (Brando, 2019). The UNCRC protects children from work through Article 32, "State Parties recognise the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful of the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development". This article identifies opposing moral epistemologies that underpin child labour as a human rights issue. While proponents of both approaches aim to ensure children are safe to implement their rights, the two stances are antipodes (Brando, 2019).

One moral epistemology is universalism, which implies "a normative commitment" (Brando, 2019, p. 272). In the child labour context, universalism underpins the protectionist view (known as zero-tolerance of child labour) (Abebe & Bessell, 2011; Lavalette & Cunningham, 2004). Protectionism is based on the 'human becomings' conception of childhood, perceiving children as passive actors, lacking agency, weak, vulnerable, and in need of protection (Peleg, 2013). Thus, the protectionists believe that childhood is a time for children to be in school and to play, out of danger under the protection of work abuse and exploitation – a philosophy arising from the Global North (Abebe & Bessell, 2011; UNICEF, 2021), and claim that child labour should be abolished (Abebe & Bessell, 2011). The protectionist ideologies were exported to the Global South, resulting in the development of their schooling and the international and national anti-child labour movement and laws (Abebe & Bessell, 2011; Boyden, 1997). Al-Frehat and Alhelalat (2015) explored the economic and social characteristics of child labour in tourism in Jordan. They found that poverty, hereditary parents' work, high illiteracy and lack of interest in children's education are the factors pushing children to engage in tourism-related work. Similarly, Magablii and Naamneh (2010) also identified poverty and an unsatisfactory educational system as the main factors. As the child workers in tourism are often under-educated and socially vulnerable, they are often engaged in informal settings, such as street work, begging and commercial sexual exploitation, which increase the risks of abuse, exploitation and trafficking (Edralin, 2002). Consequently, working from a protectionist stance, they argue that child labour in tourism is a social issue associated with exploitation; thus, it must be eradicated (Al-Frehat & Alhelalat, 2015; Sharma et al., 2012).

However, universalism has invited critiques of Western centrism; that is, universalism imposes dominant political powers and values from the Global North on the rest of the world (Brando, 2019). As the Global North's own values and norms play roles of universal values and norms, universalism tends to simplify the diverse constructions and understanding of childhood and children's lives in different societies (Brando, 2019) and incriminate other Global South's cultures of abusing children (Hanson & Nieuwenhuys, 2020, pp. 101–120).

Another critique of universalism relates to the adult-centric view (Canosa & Graham, 2022). The human rights principles can be interpreted differently depending on "who interprets their interests, which

interests are evaluated, and to what extent are children's own views considered", resulting in various understandings of the meanings of justice (Brando, 2019, p. 275). However, human rights treaties and other global initiatives are often adult-driven based on universal understandings of children as vulnerable beings in need of being saved and protected (Canosa & Graham, 2022). The adult-driven universal assumption, which does not consider children's views, diminishes children's active engagement with their rights (Hanson & Nieuwenhuys, 2020). It leads to a failure to provide a safe place for vulnerable children who experience injustice in the tourism industry (Canosa & Graham, 2022).

In response to the critiques on universalism, cultural relativism argues that every society has underlying cultural values that are equally important; thus, there are no universally good or bad practices, but they are relative to each culture (Dahre, 2017; Kanarek, 2013). Hence, cultural relativists call for the decolonisation of childhood, arguing that the child (human) rights principles need to be interpreted and understood in the cultural and local social context (Dahre, 2017; Jiménez, 2021). The new sociology of childhood supports cultural relativism as it acknowledges that different cultures shape different views on the roles of children and the meanings of childhood (James et al., 1998; Lavalette & Cunningham, 2004). The new sociology of childhood argues that past historical conceptualisations of childhood were oppressive and often in violation of their rights and autonomy, and all children should afford agency and choice, including the right to benefit from work (Abebe & Bessell, 2011; Lavalette & Cunningham, 2004). Indeed, while child labour is often framed as victimhood by global standards, many children seek their labour rights regarding empowerment, fairness and participation (Canosa & Graham, 2022; Josefsson & Wall, 2020). Consequently, the new sociologists value listening to children's voices in related policies and research (Lavalette & Cunningham, 2004). For instance, Canosa and Graham (2022) discuss the injustice of child labour in tourism, where the adult-centric protectionist view is prevalent and calls for a child-centric approach to address child rights. With the cultural relativist stance, Monterrubio et al. (2016) found that host-children tend to voluntarily participate in the work in tourism due to its financial benefits and contribution to children's emotional well-being (including self-esteem, happiness and collective pride), the development of the social and cognitive skills, and obtaining more knowledge about the natural environment. Consequently, working in tourism, which provides education, enjoyment, and economic gains (Bakas, 2018; Bromley & Mackie, 2009), can empower children to control their destiny (Seraphin et al., 2022).

However, cultural relativism has also been criticised for fostering "unjustifiable indifferences" (Dembour, 2012, p. 59). Cultural relativism is likely to over-emphasise the role of culture in determining individuals by not considering their deviation from a culture (Dembour, 2012). Furthermore, cultural relativism posits an ideological dichotomy between collectivist societies and individualist societies, claiming that the human rights ideology of individualist societies cannot be applied to collectivist cultures (Dembour, 2012). This position leads to using culture as a tool to justify and excuse the dominant moral and political elite's abuse of power over relatively powerless social groups such as children (Dahre, 2017; Dembour, 2012). Hence, as universalism imposes the dominant Global North concept of child rights on the rest of the Global South population, cultural relativism also imposes the dominant cultural concept of child rights on the rest of the powerless social groups within their culture (Brando, 2019).

The intense tension between the antipode positions of universalism and cultural relativism has impeded the effectiveness of protecting children from the violation of their rights. Hence, several scholars have tried integrating the characteristics of universalism and cultural relativism (Dahre, 2017; Dembour, 2012). For example, Dembour (2012) advocates taking the in-between position like a pendulum with the *dialogical dialogue* approach of Panikkar (1982). Panikkar insists that the ultimate goals of the two positions are instilling justice and achieving

human dignity. Panikkar argues that we need to acknowledge that “our truth is not the whole truth” (p.71), and we have to accept that there are multiple ways to achieve justice and human dignity (Dembour, 2012). For example, while human rights are one way to achieve human dignity and justice, adopted by universalists, *li* (referring to good manners) is another way prevalent in Confucian societies (Dembour, 2012). Hence, Panikkar (1982) warns about the risks of judging other people’s lives, assuming we know better than them, and encourages us to engage in dialogue to listen to the people. Despite the call for taking the in-between position, the attempt to address child labour or host-children with integrated approaches is not observed in tourism scholarship. Based on Panikkar’s dialogical dialogue approach, this study discusses host-children’s engagement in tourism with the aim of moving away from taking an either-or approach while the characteristics of both universalism and cultural relativism are considered. To do so, it will employ the transformative paradigm as its theoretical framework.

This paper addresses the existing research gaps on host-children in tourism by exploring how host-children in the Global South perceive their own engagement. A conceptual framework (Fig. 1) is devised to reconcile universalism and cultural relativism, considering that universalism and cultural relativism share a common purpose of instilling justice and achieving human dignity (Panikkar, 1982). As visualised in Fig. 1, this paper aims to reconcile the antipodean views of host-children’s engagement in tourism by intersecting universalism and cultural relativism based on the transformative framework. The reconciliation will be achieved by answering three research questions (RQ):

RQ 1. How do host-children perceive children’s own engagement in tourism?

RQ 2. To what extent, if any, are host-children’s perceptions of their engagement in tourism related to social and cultural values?

RQ 3. To what extent is host-children’s engagement in tourism safe from physical and psychological abuse and exploitation?

3. Methodology

3.1. Transformative paradigm and the researchers’ positionality

The transformative paradigm views that the world is socially constructed with unequal power distribution, and researchers, as privileged persons, need to aim to achieve justice and equality for the oppressed groups by understanding cultural diversity (Mertens, 2007). According to Mertens (2010a), the transformative paradigm believes that there is a truth that is not relative, but the opinions about the truth (in this case, child dignity and social justice for children) are relative. The acceptance or rejection of the opinions about the truth as real is determined by the privileged (Mertens, 2010a), which is consistent with the critique of universalism. Therefore, the transformative ontological assumption recognises the dangers of ignorance of the privileged and their influential power in the construction of reality and denies the equal legitimacy of multiple socially constructed realities by “rejecting cultural relativism” (Mertens, 2010a, p. 7).

The authors’ transformative perspective underscores the intricate complexities of our world, defined by diverse cultures, economic strata, and governance dynamics. Amid this intricate continuum, certain nations wield superior economic, political and social advancement. In this context, our study acknowledges that the prevailing privileges of Global North adults have significantly shaped perceptions regarding child dignity and social justice. Notably, we recognise the Global North’s universalist stance as a powerful force in shaping opinions on children’s involvement in tourism. Yet, we caution against equating multiple

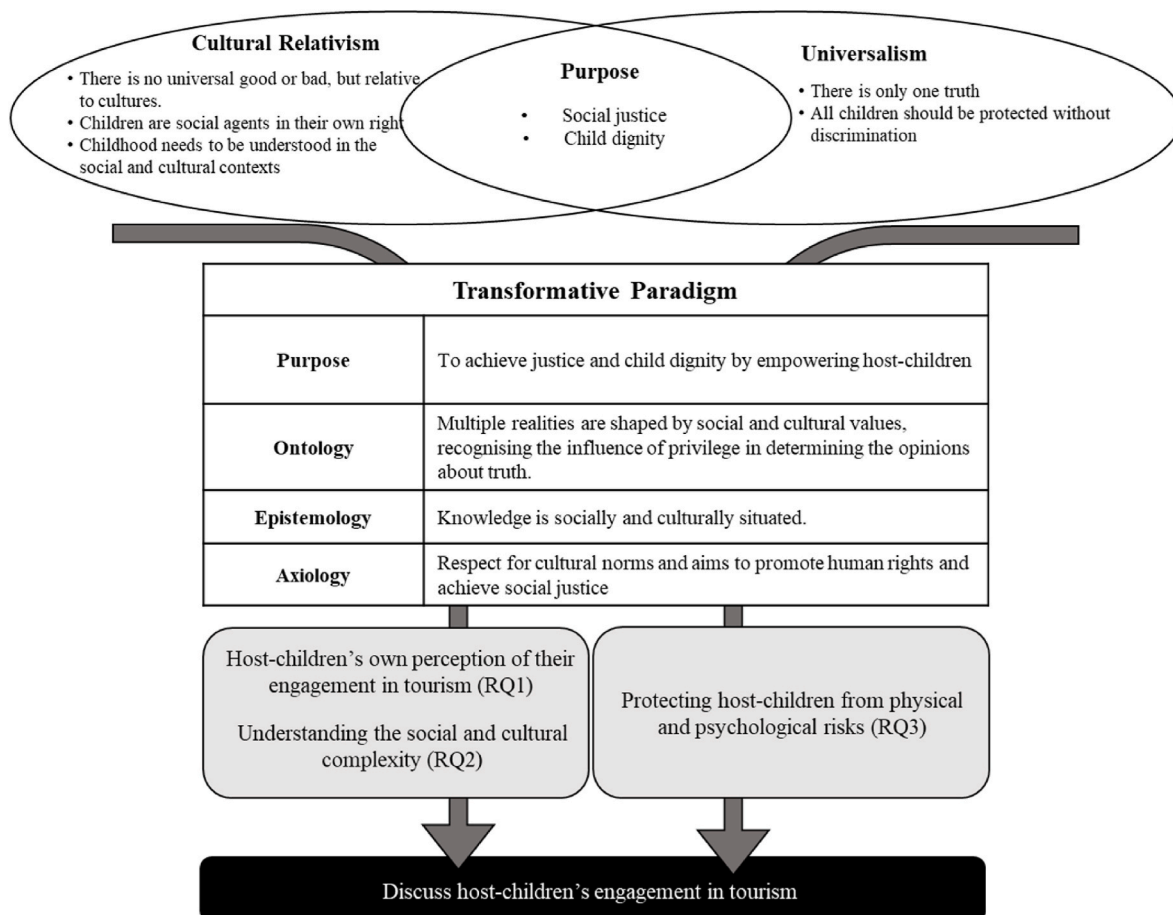


Fig. 1. Theoretical framework adopting transformative paradigm as a tool to integrate universalism and cultural relativism.

realities' legitimacy, mindful of the inherent hazards in this approach. Hence, in seeking justice for host-children, the transformative paradigm will be adopted as a tool to bridge universalism and cultural relativism to address host-children issues. Underpinned by the transformative paradigm, this paper will discuss host-children's engagement in tourism to instil social justice with an understanding of their perspectives and social and cultural values but without legitimating the potential abuse and exploitation within the culture.

3.2. Research context: Cambodia

This study is based in Cambodia, where children's involvement in economic activity is widespread (UNICEF, 2018). According to the National Institute of Statistics (2013), about 20% of Cambodian children are economically active, which is the highest rate in South East Asia (Kim, 2011). Approximately 18% of economically active children in Cambodia are below the minimum working age of twelve (UNICEF, 2018). Child workers in Cambodia play an important role in the household. About 49% of economically-active children are domestic workers as unpaid labour (UNICEF, 2018). Due to Cambodia's high reliance on tourism, it is estimated that more than 7.7% of the working children are engaged in the accommodation and food-service sectors (International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour & Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, 2014). The children often work in an informal tourism working environment, which is related to the risks of dropping school enrolment, trafficking, and physical, psychological, and sexual exploitation (Beddoe, 2003; Curley, 2014).

Universal human rights concepts were introduced to Cambodia through the Paris Agreements by the United Nations in 1991 (Ledgerwood & Un, 2003). With the universalist stance, Cambodia has tried to eliminate the worst forms of child labour in alignment with the International Labour Organization's guidelines by ratifying the minimum age convention (No. 138), the worst forms of child labour convention (No. 182), and the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (International Labour Office & International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, 2014). Also, in 2008, the Garment Manufacturers Association in Manufactures Association in Cambodia (2008) defined light work for children as "the work that does not affect the health as well as mental and physical development of the employed children and does not affect their regular school attendance, involvement in orientation programs or vocational training required by the competent authorities", including working at sales booths, like souvenir sellers (Article 2). Although the Cambodian government allows children's engagement in light work, their visitor code of conduct guides tourists not to buy items or give money to children (APSARA National Authority, 2015). Despite the government's legal commitment, the legislation related to hazardous and light child labour is ambiguous and inconsistent, resulting in a lack of effectiveness in protecting children (Guarcello et al., 2009). The definition of child labour is vague as it is hard to discern if the work physically or mentally affects children (Guarcello et al., 2009), and the children in informal settings have been neglected in the Cambodian Labour Law (Guarcello et al., 2009). It is very challenging to monitor and enforce child labour laws due to limited government capacity (Guarcello et al., 2009), the nature of child labour (Hagedoorn, 2013), and a culture of corruption (Rahman, 2016).

3.3. Data collection

This paper explores Cambodian host-children's engagement by listening to their own voices. This paper adopts UNCRC's definition of a child as "every human being below the age of eighteen years" (1989, Article 1) to comprehensively discuss children's engagement in tourism from their rights perspectives. To listen to Cambodian host-children's voices, the first author took two field trips to Siem Reap and Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

3.3.1. The field trips

The first field trip was conducted for 13 days to become familiar with Cambodian culture and to secure the child participants' recruitment. During this trip, three pilot interviews with eight host-children from NGOs were conducted (two were individual interviews, and one was a group interview with six children). Reflecting on the experiences of the pilot studies, the primary research data plan was amended prior to a second field trip. For example, although initially, individual interviews with host-children were planned, the generational and colonial power gaps between the Korean adult researcher from Australia (the first author) and Cambodian child participants were observed from the pilot studies entailed individual interviews. Despite the author's endeavour to build rapport with the child participants by staying at one of their houses for five days, they felt coercion from the individual interview setting and answered only 'yes' or 'no'. The issue was addressed by replacing individual interviews with group interviews for primary data collection.

The second field trip was taken three months later and lasted for 15 days. During the second field trip, the primary data were collected from 42 children from three NGOs that provide education to children from low-income families. These host-children from NGOs engaged in tourism in various forms, such as performing Khmer dances for tourists, working at restaurants (as vocational trainees), and providing homestay experiences. With verbal consent from both the host-children and their guardians (NGO staff), twelve group interviews were conducted, with each group comprising two to five children of similar age. Additionally, data were collected from 32 host-children who were accidentally encountered on the street, using informal chats and observation. In total, across the two field trips, data were collected from 82 host-children consisting of 50 host-children within NGOs (including eight host-children for pilot studies) and 32 host-children on the street. Table 1 summarises the data collection methods in the two field trips.

3.3.2. The data collection methods

The group interviews with children within NGOs included researcher-driven photo-elicitation interviews (PEIs) and semi-structured interviews. A PEI is a qualitative research technique using photographs or images to elicit participants' responses and insights (Copes et al., 2018; Harper, 2002). A PEI is a useful research tool to involve children who have a power differential from an adult researcher with limited verbal skills and cognitive development to engage in traditionally-styled interviews (Poku et al., 2019; Pyle, 2013). Researcher-driven PEI asks for participants' feedback and opinions about the photos that researchers selected (Copes et al., 2018). The visual stimuli help researchers obtain rich and thoughtful reflections from the participants (Copes et al., 2018). The externally produced photos by a researcher enable researchers to capture overlooked parts of participants' lives (Marsh et al., 2017). Hence, this research adopts researcher-driven PEI using the photos of four types of host-children that were most commonly observed by the first author during her first field trip, that is: children begging tourists for money (Fig. 2); children performing traditional shows (Fig. 3); commercialised children in a slum tourism destination (Fig. 4); and a child selling souvenirs (Fig. 5). While the three pictures were taken by the first author, the photo of children in traditional customs (Fig. 3) was purchased from Shutterstock as a result of searching for child labourers – because the author was not sure if paying for the children to take a picture of them was an ethical decision at that time. The purchased photo (Fig. 3) was as effective as other

Table 1
Summary of data collected from two field trips.

	Children with NGOs	Children on the street
Field Trip 1	8 Children (2 individual interviews & 1 group interview)	n/a
Field Trip 2	42 Children (12 group interviews, including researcher-driven PEIs)	32 Children (Informal chats & observation)



Fig. 2. Picture of child beggars used for PEIs.



Fig. 3. Picture of child performers used for PEIs.



Fig. 4. Picture of commercialised children in a slum tourism destination used for PEIs.



Fig. 5. Picture of child selling souvenirs used for PEIs.

photos taken by the researcher by letting the child participants immerse themselves in the photo and share their experiences and opinions of children's engagement in performance for tourists.

Although other photos were taken with their verbal consent, the children's faces in the photos were blurred to protect their privacy and safety. The child participants of PEI were asked to describe why and how these children were engaging in tourism in the photos and their perceptions of children's engagement in tourism. The PEI was followed by a semi-structured interview asking how they engage in tourism and how their engagement in tourism has changed their lives. The interviews were audio-recorded.

Due to the ethical issues in obtaining the guardians' consent, different research techniques were adopted for children encountered on the street. According to Wilfond (2007), observational research data from children can be used without guardians' consent when research has sufficient social value. Consequently, with the host-children on the street, informal semi-structured chats were conducted as a part of observation instead of formal interviews due to the challenges in obtaining their guardians' consent. The informal chats were structured similarly to the interviews with children within NGOs, including their opinions and perceptions of children's engagement in tourism and the impacts of their engagement in tourism on their lives. The chats were made in public for the children's and the researcher's safety. Additionally, their engagement in tourism was observed. The chats and observations were recorded on paper.

3.4. Data analysis

In the data analysis process, all participants were coded to ensure confidentiality. The codes provide information about participants' age, gender and whether they were under the care of NGOs or on the streets.

Each participant was given a unique alphabet letter code, age, and gender following either (N) for the participants within NGOs or (S) for the children on the streets. For instance, (N)A^{10, M} indicates a ten-year-old boy under an NGO, while (S)B^{7, F} refers to a seven-year-old girl on the street. All group interviews, including PEI and semi-structured interviews, were transcribed verbatim.

The transcriptions and notes recorded on paper were analysed thematically using MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software. The themes are based on the host-children's perception of children's engagement in tourism and the related social and cultural values (see Table 2). The second and third authors have cross-checked the data to ensure consistency and reliability.

3.5. Findings

This study explored how and why Cambodian host-children perceive their engagement in tourism and identified both favourable and unfavourable perceptions of their engagement in tourism.

The demographic profile of the participants is presented in Table 3.

3.6. Favourable perceptions of host-children's engagement in tourism

This study identified three main reasons for Cambodian host children's favourable perceptions of their engagement in tourism – poverty, the privatisation and corruption of education, and the position of children in a family and in the tourism industry.

3.6.1. Overcoming poverty through engagement in tourism

The primary reason for the favourable view of host-children's engagement in tourism (except for begging) was poverty, which is often cited as the main factor of child labour in developing countries (Al-Frehat & Alhelalat, 2015; Magablih & Naamneh, 2010). Many participants described Fig. 5, saying that “they do not have a choice. Their parents do not have enough money. Anyway, she needs money to survive. So, children need to sell souvenirs to make money” ((N)AS^{15, F}). Additionally, several children expressed their favourable perception of Fig. 4, in which tourists take photos of host-children, and their favourable perception pertains to their poverty. For example, when asked for his opinion about commercialising the host-children by posting their picture on social networks, (N)A^{17, M} stated, “I think it's a matter of caption of the posts. If the caption is about ‘help them’ or ‘donate for children’, I think it's okay”.

3.6.2. Accessing quality education through engagement in tourism

Another observed reason for being favourable to children's engagement in tourism pertains to the education system in Cambodia. The education system in Cambodia has been privatised, requiring the students to pay for extra instruction before and after public school (Brehm & Silova, 2014). The funds for private tutoring are often used as additional income for teachers who are paid meagre salaries, which has been explicitly related to teachers' corruption (Brehm & Silova, 2014). Thus, children are unable to find value in public school classes and are keen to

Table 2
Examples of themes and coding.

Perception of host-children's engagement	Social and Cultural Values	Example quotations
Favourable	Theravada Buddhism: Karma Theravada Buddhism: Benevolence	(N)AC ^{14, F} : “I can pay back my goodness to my parents.” (N)X ^{14, M} : “Tourists visit here (Cambodia) to enjoy. They want to feel happy.”
Unfavourable	Theravada Buddhism: Benevolence	(N)X ^{14, M} : “Children should not beg for money because tourists do not want to see them begging.”

Table 3
Demographic profile of the participants.

Children within NGOs (Individual & group interview)					
	#	NGOs	# of children in a group	Age range	Gender
Field Trip 1	1	A	1	11	F
	2	A	1	11	F
	3	C	6	14–16	3F 3M
Total # of children within NGOs during Field Trip 1			8	11–16	5F 3M
Field Trip 2	1	A	2	15–17	1F 1M
	2	A	4	12–16	2F 2M
	3	A	3	12–14	3F
	4	A	5	7–12	4F 1M
	5	B	4	13	4M
	6	B	2	16	1F 1M
	7	B	4	14–15	4M
	8	B	4	11–14	4F
	9	B	4	11–13	4F
	10	C	4	13–15	4F
	11	C	4	13–16	4M
	12	C	2	15–17	2F
Total # of children within NGOs during Field Trip 2			42	7–17	25F 17M
Total # of children within NGOs			50	7–17	30F 20M
Children on the street (Informal chats & observation)					
	Engagement in tourism		# of children	Age range	Gender
Field Trip 2	Child vendor		21	8–16	15F 6M
	Resident in a slum destination		4	6–14	3F 1M
	Restaurant workers		3	11–16	1F 2M
	Child beggars		2	6	1F 1M
	Boat drivers		2	14	2M
Total # of children on the street			32	6–16	20F 12M

receive private tutoring. Accordingly, the Cambodian education system drives host-children to engage in tourism for various reasons. Firstly, many poverty-stricken children tend to engage in tourism to make money for private classes, although Cambodia provides public education for free. For example, (S)J^{13, M} explained why he sold souvenirs to tourists, saying, “I need to make money for the private class. Taking only public school is not enough, but my family cannot afford my private class”. Secondly, host-children tend to engage in tourism through an NGO, offering education for free instead of going to public school. The host-children within NGOs thought their engagement in tourism by performing shows to gather donations from tourists or working at a restaurant contributes to their institution, providing continuous education to them. (N)AC^{14, F}, who was receiving education from an NGO for free, explained why she danced for tourists, “we are dancing for tourists to help [her NGO]”. Lastly, host-children perceive engagement in tourism per se as a learning opportunity. For instance, as child vendors interact with foreign tourists, they can learn languages and cultures; as (S)V^{13, F} stated, “I love to interact with tourists because I can speak to tourists in English. My English skill has been improved a lot since I started selling souvenir”. Similarly, engagement in tourism is also viewed as a chance to learn life skills, which is often identified as a factor for the interest in child labour in developing countries (Jariego, 2017). For instance, several children voice out that they respect the children in Fig. 3 of the traditional dance team, saying, “They look professional. They practise with professional dance team I also want to learn traditional dance and become a professional dancing teacher” ((N)AC^{14, F}).

3.6.3. The roles of host-children

This study identified the distinctive roles of host-children in a family and the tourism industry, and these roles pertain to the favourable

perception of host-children's engagement in tourism. Firstly, Cambodian host-children play the role of independent members of their families; thus, children tend to engage in economic activities to be financially independent. For example, (N)X^{14, M} described Fig. 5, saying, "I feel proud of her because she is making money by herself". Furthermore, most participants advocated for children's engagement in tourism as they were financially helping their families. For example, (N)AC^{14, F} stated that she wanted to engage in the dancing team of Fig. 3 because "[she] can pay back [her] goodness to [her] parents". Secondly, in tourism contexts, the PEIs and informal chats revealed that host-children engaged in tourism to 'please' tourists. For example, many children described that the girl vendor in Fig. 5 is selling souvenirs because "tourists love Khmer products. For tourists, she sells the Khmer souvenir" ((N)J^{12, F}). Also, regarding Fig. 4, that tourists take pictures of children in a slum tourism destination, several children said that it is okay for tourists to take pictures of children because "they love children and Khmer culture" ((N)S^{13, M}). Similarly, the child who was dancing for tourists within an NGO explained why she danced, saying, "we dance to show our dances and to make tourists happy". Similarly, another child explained why children needed to make tourists happy, saying that "tourists visit here (Cambodia) to enjoy. They want to feel happy" ((N)X^{14, M}).

3.7. Unfavourable perception of host-children's engagement

3.7.1. Exposure to physical risk

Unfavourable perceptions of their engagement were reported by some host-children. They expressed their concern about physical risks, while tourism-related work is known as an easy job for children compared to other industry work (Hagedoorn, 2013). For example, (N)AA^{11, F} raised concern about a child vendor in Fig. 5, saying that "they have to work outside in the hot weather for the whole day and they are carrying heavy vendor trays ((N)AA^{11, F})". Consistently, several host-children testified that they often get fatigued and body aches from carrying heavy vendor trays, practising shows and peeling coconut shells for tourists. Some children are exposed to obvious risks without being aware of them. For example, the first author observed that two 14-year-old boys who drove a boat for a package tour pulled out rubbish jammed in the running boat engine with their bare hands. Although they did not take it seriously, saying, "It's okay. We've driven the boat since we were 11 years old, but we have never had an accident" ((S)E^{14, M}), it was an obvious danger that should not be compromised.

3.7.2. Concern for trafficking and sexual offence

Additionally, several child participants depicted the risks related to trafficking and sexual offences. For example, (N)AR^{17, F} described host-children in Fig. 4, "sometimes, kids can follow a stranger who gives money. One day a tourist brought a kid without asking their parents". (N)BE^{16, M} shared his own experience of being kidnapped by a tourist, saying, "when I was nine, a tourist gave me a candy and said that he had more candies in his truck. ... In the truck, there were a few more other children. ... We jumped out of the running truck and ran away". Similarly, an 11-year-old boy ((S)AA^{11, M}), working at a restaurant, testified that he carried a piece of onion all the time as an antidote to anaesthesia that may be used for abduction. Furthermore, host-children are exposed to sexual violence. A six-year-old girl ((S)H^{6, F}), living in a slum tourism destination (where Fig. 4 is taken), replied, "I don't want to be raped", to the question of her perceptions of tourists.

3.7.3. Exposure to psychological risks

The data also reveal that host-children face not only physical risks but also psychological risks. Several other host-children expressed their emotional pain when they had to give up hanging out with their friends due to their work. For example, (S)AD^{16, F}, who works in a restaurant as a waitress, recalled her past before she engaged in tourism, saying, "when I was living in my hometown, I spent my spare time with my

family and friends. But, since I moved here to work, I cannot go out to play". Similarly, (N)G^{13, M}, who performs shows for his NGO visitors, expressed frustration when he had to stop playing football with his friends as he needed to attend performance practices. As another example, a few children shared their experiences of trauma and abuse. For instance, (S)AA^{11, M} stated that his restaurant owner constantly kept him under surveillance and verbally abused him if he made mistakes. Lastly, host-children tended to compare themselves with child tourists. (N)AH^{11, F} described a child tourist visiting her NGO: "she was cute because she had white skin and blond hair. And her clothes were beautiful and new". For another example, a boy ((S)AB^{11, M}), working in a restaurant near a beach, was asked his thoughts about child tourists visiting his restaurant and beach. He felt pessimistic about his life, saying that he had no idea because the child tourists were from another world from himself.

3.8. Host-children's engagement in tourism: complicated social phenomenon

This paper explored how Cambodian host-children perceive their engagement in tourism and revealed both favourable and unfavourable perceptions. In other words, considering host-children's own perspectives, engagement in tourism cannot be understood as a dichotomy – one either tolerates or rejects children's engagement. Indeed, the research found that even host-children with favourable perceptions tend to support children's engagement in tourism only under certain conditions. Firstly, host-children's engagement in tourism was acceptable as long as children engaged in tourism in an honest way and used the earned money for an appropriate purpose. While most children described the child beggars in Fig. 2 as pitiful, they said begging is unacceptable and perceived it as a shameful engagement because it is not a proper job. (N)AE^{13, F} stated, "begging is shameful The rich people will look down on them. If they needed money, they should go out to work, like selling something or planting vegetables".

The second condition is that the children's engagement is favourable only when they voluntarily do it after school without being forced. For example, (N)AV^{18, M} shared his thoughts about the child souvenir seller in Fig. 5, saying that "if she works in her free time after school with her parents, it is okay". Similarly, (N)AU^{18, M} observed that "sometimes, [child workers] do not go to school, as their parents push them to make money ... However, if they sell the souvenir after school as they want, it is okay". As such, children's engagement in tourism is a complicated social phenomenon that cannot be approached with a black-or-white dichotomy.

4. Discussion

4.1. A view on host-children's engagement in tourism

While this paper identified host-children's favourable perceptions due to the sociocultural complexity around poverty, the education system, and the children's roles in Cambodia, it also identified unfavourable physical and psychological risks that host-children face. This dichotomy resembles the tension of the dispute between cultural relativism and universalism. Although cultural relativism and universalism are antipodes, both moral epistemologies aim to achieve social justice and instil child dignity. Acknowledging the common purpose, this study proposed a transformative paradigm that aims to achieve social justice for the oppressed group (in this case, host-children) (Mertens, 2009) to integrate universalism and cultural relativism, as visualised in Fig. 6. Based on the reconciled conceptual framework, this research listened to host-children's voices, understood their social and cultural values (cultural relativism), and valued the host-children's protection from physical and psychological risks (universalism).

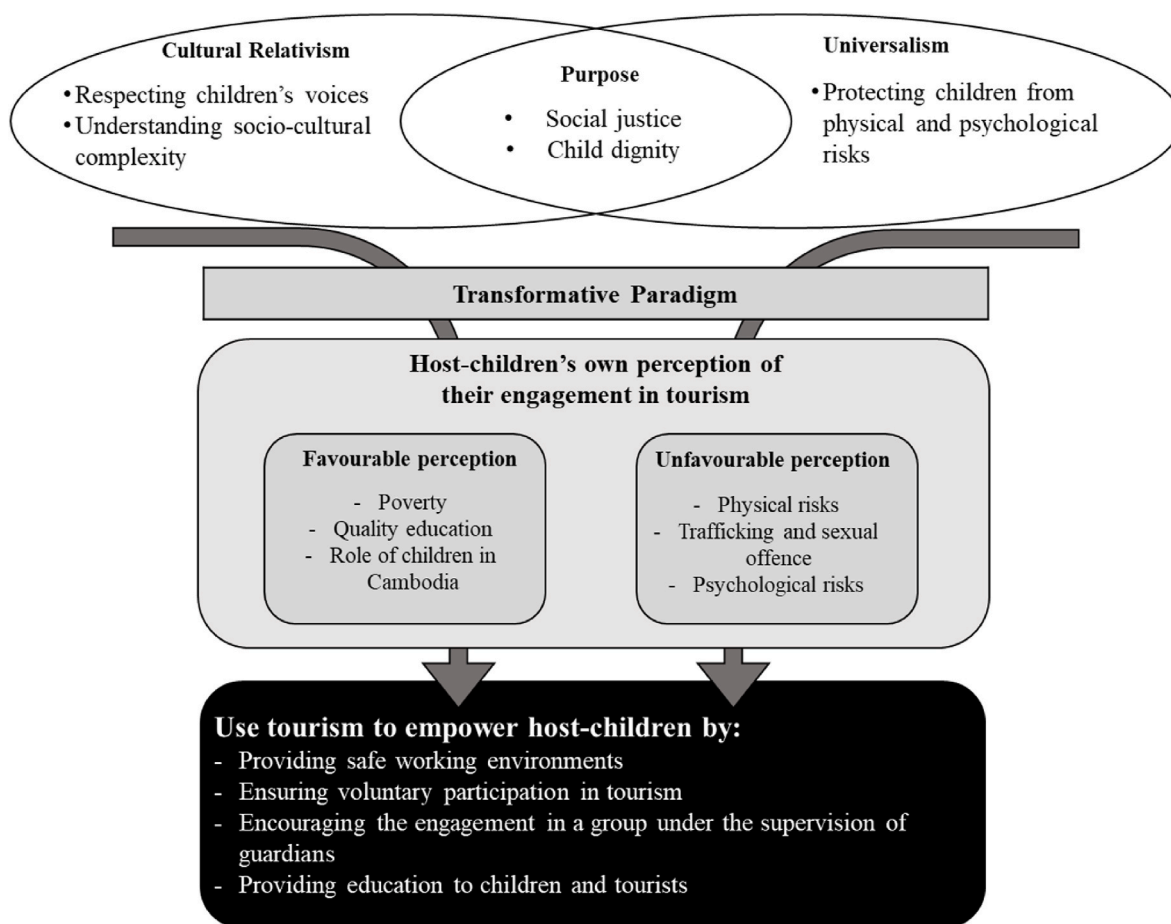


Fig. 6. Cambodian host-children's engagement in tourism through transformative paradigm.

4.1.1. Respecting host-children's voices

In research and in political and legal frameworks, the adult-centric view is prevalent, and host-children are framed as vulnerable victims in need of protection from adults. Since children have unique insider views on their own matters that adults cannot recognise (Canosa & Graham, 2022; Fairhall & Woods, 2021; Kellett, 2005), the silence of children has resulted in policies failing to recognise children's needs and wants and empowering them to demand justice for themselves (Canosa & Graham, 2022; Fairhall & Woods, 2021; Hanson & Nieuwenhuys, 2020, pp. 101–120). This paper listened to 82 Cambodian host-children's voices, allowing the development of policies for sustainable tourism development and empowering children by reflecting their needs and wants. As a result, this paper revealed that Cambodian host-children tended to be favourable to their engagement in tourism only when certain conditions were met. In short, from the host-children's perspective, their engagement in tourism is not black or white but grey, which calls for transcending the dichotomy of universalism and cultural relativism.

4.1.2. Transformative paradigm transcending universalism and cultural relativism

This paper employed a transformative paradigm to transcend universalism and cultural relativism by exploring the reasons for Cambodian host-children's perceptions of their engagement in tourism, with foci on the core ideologies of both moral epistemologies. Underpinned by the transformative paradigm, the first author believes that there is one absolute truth that children need to be "protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education ... health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development by economically, psychological

and politically empowering children and securing their safe working environment for social justice and child dignity" (United Nations, 1989, Article 32), which is the core ideology of universalism. In terms of physical and psychological exploitation, this paper revealed that host-children's engagement in tourism is a threat to children's safety, although it has been considered a relatively easy job for children (Hagedoorn, 2013). However, the transformative paradigm highlights that the multiple realities are shaped by unequal power relationships, and the opinions about the truth are determined by the privileged (Mertens, 2010a). As guided by the transformative axiology, we believe that the acceptance or rejection of the opinions about the exploitation of host-children has been determined by hegemonic Global North power and adults. Thus, we need to understand Cambodian host-children's favourable perception of their engagement in tourism by integrating the universal truth about child protection and the cultural relativist core ideology - sociocultural complexity in Cambodia.

Consistent with antecedent studies on child labour (Kim, 2011), poverty is the most distinct social factor pushing host-children into tourism. Cambodia is one of the poorest countries in South East Asia due to the civil war, the Khmer Rouge genocide, and systematic corruption (Asian Development Bank (ADB), 2020; Miller & Beazley, 2022). Although Cambodia has decreased 62% of the poor working shares in the Asia and Pacific region over the last ten years, roughly 13% of the Cambodian population lives below 1.9 USD per day, which is the national poverty line (ADB, 2020). Like other countries in the Global South, Cambodia has relied economically on tourism to reduce poverty, earn foreign currency and create incomes for locals (Chheang, 2008; Dwyer & Thomas, 2012), resulting in tourism's 21% contribution to Cambodia's GDP in 2019 (Rawlins et al., 2020). Due to the overreliance on tourism income, the COVID-19 pandemic, which decreased 80% of

tourism revenue and laid off tourism workers engaged in tourism, has seriously affected millions of children from poverty-stricken families (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Based on the transformative axiology, poverty is a factor that prevents people from accessing social justice and perpetuating their social inequalities (Mertens, 2010b). Consequently, poverty-stricken Cambodian host-children's engagement in tourism cannot be seen as evil.

This paper also identified that a universal approach could not be ideal for addressing Cambodian host-children's engagement in tourism due to Cambodia's privatised and corrupted education system. In Cambodia, as France's colonial legacy, international education has been developed, and public schools have been combined with private tutoring (Brehm & Silova, 2014). Many Cambodian children pay for four to 5 h of private tutoring every day before or after public school (Brehm & Silova, 2014). Since the private tuition fee is the teachers' additional income to their meagre salaries, Brehm and Silova (2014) reported that some teachers purposefully slow down their classes; thus, Cambodians tend to demand more private tutoring to cover the national curriculum. Privatised education has provided unequal education opportunities to children of lower socioeconomic status (Brehm & Silova, 2014). The privatised and corrupted education has encouraged host-children to earn money for private classes, receive free education from NGOs, and learn languages and other life skills by engaging in tourism. Based on the transformative ontological belief that multiple realities are shaped by social and cultural values and that the truth is determined by the privileged, the argument that host-children's engagement in tourism prevents children from access to education is a biased view from the privileged Global North with little understanding of Cambodia's education system.

The inappropriateness of the universalist approach could be found in the unique roles of Cambodian host-children to support themselves and their family as independent family members and to please tourists as hosts. These perceived roles of Cambodian host-children can be explained by their cultural value, especially the Theravada Buddhist epistemology, which is woven into Cambodians' daily lives (Chan & Chheang, 2008; Kent, 2016) and underpins Cambodian' "philosophical justification for human rights" (Ledgerwood & Un, 2003, p. 540). Since Theravada Buddhism respects individuals' autonomy, emphasising that each individual's enlightenment is their own responsibility (Ledgerwood & Un, 2003), Cambodian parents believe that their children have an innate destiny; thus, they tend to encourage their children to find their own path (Canniff, 2000). With the beliefs in Theravada Buddhism, Cambodian children tend to be proud of host-children who try to take responsibility for their lives by being financially independent with autonomy. Furthermore, Theravada Buddhism teaches that parents need to be venerated and respected as God (Premasiri, 1989, pp. 36–64) and cherish the virtue of benevolence, referring to the sacrifice of an individual's possessions, such as knowledge and labour. Hence, in a Theravada Buddhist society, as parents are placed in a higher hierarchy in a family, it is a cardinal virtue that children support their parents by sacrificing their possessions, such as labour (Premasiri, 1989, pp. 36–64). Therefore, in Cambodian society, although exploitation or forceful child work is perceived negatively, child workers (especially children from low-income families) are viewed as good children who show respect and gratitude to their parents and financially contribute to their families (Czymoniewicz-Klippel, 2015).

Benevolence is another value of Theravada Buddhism related to host-children's roles to please tourists. This study identified that host-children perceive that their job is to please tourists, and this finding is consistent with the argument of Miller and Beazley (2022) that Cambodian children engage in orphan tourism to make tourists happy. The host-children's intention to engage in tourism is related to the meaning of Theravada Buddhist hospitality, which is embedded in a discussion about benevolence (Munasinghe et al., 2017). In Theravada Buddhist culture, hospitality means doing good for the guest, unlike other cultures in the Global North, which view hospitality as a

compensatory reciprocal relationship (Munasinghe et al., 2017). Since Theravada Buddhism teaches that 'giving' and 'generosity' are a way to be benevolent and accumulate meritorious deeds for Karma (Munasinghe et al., 2017), host-children are expected to sacrifice their labour and be benevolent by engaging in tourism for their own Karma. Given the Theravada Buddhist beliefs, host-children's engagement in tourism tends to be favourable in Cambodian society. Based on the transformative epistemological beliefs that knowledge is socially situated in a complex cultural context, host-children's engagement in tourism is part and parcel of practising and manifesting their Theravada Buddhist beliefs.

In conclusion, based on the transformative paradigm, host-children's engagement in tourism can be a tool to empower the host-children by increasing "their capacity to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from growth processes in ways that recognise the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth" (Issah, 2018, p. 2894). To use tourism as an empowering tool for host-children, a safe working environment needs to be provided. Firstly, the Cambodian government needs to monitor host-children's engagement in tourism to ensure their voluntary participation in tourism rather than banning them from engaging in economic activities. Secondly, host-children need to be encouraged to engage in tourism as a group under the supervision of guardians. Lastly, education needs to be provided to both host-children and tourists. Host-children need to learn about their rights to autonomy and how they need to react when their rights are violated or when they face physical and psychological abuse. Tourists also need to be educated on the social and cultural values underpinning children's engagement in tourism to enable more meaningful interaction with host-children.

5. Conclusion

This study explored how Cambodian host-children perceive their engagement in tourism from their perspectives, making three contributions. Firstly, this paper sheds light on host-children – especially child labourers in tourism, who have been neglected in academia. Secondly, it contributes to advancing existing knowledge on child labour with controversial epistemologies – universalism and cultural relativism. The results of this paper identified that host-children's engagement in tourism is not black or white but grey, calling for transcending the dichotomy of moral epistemologies. A transformative paradigm was proposed as a bridge integrating the core ideologies of the two antipode stances, guiding a new approach to address host-children's engagement in tourism. Lastly, the attempt to bring children's voices to research empowers the host-children who have been silent in research. As a result of listening to 82 Cambodian host-children's voices, this paper identified that being free from poverty, getting a quality education and practising Theravada Buddhist beliefs are part of their needs and wants. Based on the findings, this paper directs policymakers and other stakeholders to provide safe and empowering places for host-children.

Despite the significant contributions, this paper has three limitations. Firstly, the authors are not local Cambodians. Although we are Asians, Asia is not homogenous, so there were limitations to fully understanding Cambodian culture. To minimise potential bias or misinterpretation, a local scholar was hired as an interpreter during the second field trip, and the first author and the interpreter exchanged reflective diaries after every interview. The data analysis was also cross-checked with other Cambodian scholars. Secondly, this paper did not compare the data from host-children within NGOs and host-children on the streets. Due to the ethical difficulties in obtaining consent from guardians of children on the streets, the data from children on the streets were collected in an informal way. Hence, the data from these children were used in a supplementary manner and could not be compared with the data from host-children within NGOs collected using the PEIs. However, the data implicitly showed that the perception of host-children's engagement might be different between the two groups. Hence, it is recommended to

compare the perceptions of participation in tourism between host-children within NGOs and on the streets in the future. Lastly, although the data suggests younger children held more favourable perceptions, our study did not differentiate by age. This choice maintains a holistic focus on children's tourism experiences, reflecting our commitment to universal rights. It is aligned with our transformative paradigm, contrasting positivist approaches. To gain segmented insights, we encourage future positivist research dedicated to understanding children's perceptions of tourism engagement across age groups.

Credit author statements

Dr Mona Ji Hyun Yang: Mona wrote the manuscript and collected and analysed data. She has drafted and significantly revised the manuscript in collaboration with her supervisors. It includes the introduction, literature review, data collection and analysis, findings, discussion and conclusion. **Prof Catheryn Khoo:** Catheryn cross-checked the data during and after the data collection and analysis. She contributed intellectual input to literature, findings and discussion. She also critically revised and edited the multiple drafts of the manuscript. **Dr Elaine Chio-Ling Yang:** Elaine conceived and designed this study. She cross-checked the data during and after the data collection. She contributed intellectual input to the introduction, literature review and discussion, and subsequent critical revisions and edits of multiple drafts of the manuscript.

Impact statement

This paper explores host-children's engagement in tourism, which is beneficial to wider society, especially the quality of life of host-children in a tourism destination. Firstly, this paper sheds light on host-children who have been neglected in research and political frameworks. Secondly, this paper guides policymakers to modify the policies fulfilling the needs and wants of host-children in the Global South by listening to host-children's voices. Furthermore, its attempts to explain host-children's perception with an understanding of the sociocultural complexities in Cambodia contribute to the western-centralised world to understand the host-children's issues from the Global South's perspective. Lastly, based on the transformative view, this paper argues that host-children's engagement in tourism needs to be supported within a frame of the universal moral standard rather than recklessly encouraging or against host-children's engagement in tourism. The argument improves host-children's quality of life by guiding stakeholders to use tourism to empower host-children.

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