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Development of tourism culture in Vietnam today

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Abstract---Developing cultural tourism aligns with the potential and strengths of Vietnam's tourism industry, as well as the general development trends of humanity. The entire Vietnamese tourism sector focuses on developing cultural tourism to help Vietnam become a crucial hub in the region and globally, creating momentum to boost the development of other sectors and industries, and making tourism a key economic driver. This article focuses on clarifying the role of cultural tourism in socio-economic development, the current state of cultural tourism development in Vietnam, and some solutions to maximize the potential of cultural tourism in Vietnam today.

Keywords---Development, Tourism Culture, Vietnam.

Introduction

The relationship between culture and economy is fundamental to the socio-economic development of nations. This dialectical relationship plays a crucial role in maintaining the economic, political, cultural, and social stability of each country. Developing cultural tourism also means closely linking culture with economic development; “Integrating cultural development with tourism development, striving to make tourism a spearhead economic sector, while protecting and preserving cultural resources for future generations” (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, p. 145-146). Tourism, especially cultural tourism, is an effective means to enhance cultural soft power, promote national cultural values, attract international visitors for sightseeing, tourism, leisure, investment, and business, thereby increasing income for localities and the country.

Tourism is a method and a path to harness cultural soft power, which many countries are choosing to invest in and develop. Cultural tourism provides lively experiences for visitors, showcasing the unique cultural features of a community, locality, or nation. Cultural tourism not only generates revenue for localities,

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individuals, and businesses in this service sector, creates jobs, transforms livelihoods, contributes to social welfare, and reinvests in the preservation of cultural heritage, but also plays a significant role in building emotional connections and trust with visitors, especially international tourists.

Studying the current state and solutions to effectively leverage cultural tourism for socio-economic development is a practical issue for Vietnam's development today.

Research Method

This article is based on the approach of various data sources, including research projects, articles, and other documents on the development of cultural tourism in general and in Vietnam. It utilizes scientific research, books, scientific journals published by reputable research institutions, and information extracted from the websites of organizations, press releases, and some foreign magazines to clarify related content.

Research methods: The article employs interdisciplinary social science research methods such as analysis, synthesis, comparison, systematization, and generalization.

Results and Discussion

The Role of Cultural Tourism in Socio-Economic Development

Culture is a broad concept with many interpretations, encompassing all aspects of human material and spiritual life. Most researchers agree that culture consists of all material and spiritual values created by humans in their practical social activities to meet the needs of existence and development. In summary, culture represents the human attribute of creativity and transformation of reality towards humanistic values, promoting social progress. It distinguishes humans from animals, and differentiates individuals and communities from one another. Additionally, culture signifies the level and quality of human life.

Culture, or culture within the economy, is not external but an intrinsic factor and an internal driving force in the socio-economic development process. Studying culture in economics involves examining the role of culture in socio-economic development and the interaction between culture and economy. Culture exerts its role by infiltrating and impacting the economy, while the economy also shapes and constrains culture, providing conditions and resources for cultural activities. As an endogenous force of development, culture must be based on the economy.

Today, the development of a nation depends not only on economic growth, scientific and technological advancements, natural resources, but also heavily on human resources, quality of life, and the richness of material and spiritual life. It is not by chance that the 1992 World Bank (WB) Report stated that economic growth is merely a fundamental means to achieve development, but it is an imperfect indicator of progress. Indeed, while the economy is a decisive factor in social progress, the standard for assessing social development is not solely based

on economic factors. Recognizing this, our Party has always emphasized the relationship between economic growth and cultural development, as well as the implementation of social progress and equity. The Resolution of the Fifth Plenum of the Party Central Committee (V) affirmed: "Culture is both the result of the economy and a driving force for economic development. Cultural factors must be closely linked with social life and activities, law, and discipline, transforming into the most crucial endogenous resource for development" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 1998, p. 55). The 11th National Congress of the Party emphasized: "Properly handling the relationship between economy and culture to ensure culture truly serves as the spiritual foundation of society, a driving force for socio-economic development and international integration" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2011, p. 126).

In the Strategy for Developing Vietnam's Cultural Industries until 2020, with a vision towards 2030, cultural tourism is identified as one of the 13 cultural industries. With its rich cultural heritage, leveraging culture to create attractive tourism products is a vital resource for tourism development. Vietnam recognizes culture as a driving force for tourism development. The Strategy for Developing Vietnam's Cultural Industries until 2030 has set specific targets for cultural tourism industries to account for 10-15% of the projected \$18 billion in revenue from tourists. By 2030, the cultural tourism sector is expected to make up 15-20% of the total \$40 billion in tourism revenue. In practice, tourism serves as a method and path through which many countries are investing in and maximizing the economic potential of cultural values, developing to enhance the soft power of culture. Simultaneously, cultural resources are also leveraged for tourism development.

To achieve the objectives of cultural industries in cultural tourism, in 2017, the Politburo (12th Tenure) issued Resolution No. 08-NQ/TW on January 16, 2017, aimed at developing the tourism sector into a key economic sector with five viewpoints, three basic goals, and eight tasks. The Party's consistent viewpoint that "Developing tourism into a key economic sector" is a crucial strategic orientation for national development, creating momentum to promote the growth of other sectors and fields.

To institutionalize the Party's guidelines and create favorable conditions for sustainable tourism development in Vietnam, achieving high growth and becoming a truly key economic sector within the national economy, the Government and the Prime Minister have issued numerous documents and policies to enable the breakthrough development of Vietnam's tourism industry.

The Current State of Cultural Tourism Development in Vietnam

Vietnam is a country with diverse natural resources, climates, as well as cultural and culinary heritage, and a long coastline with many beautiful beaches, creating a unique overall picture. Man-made factors such as world-class resorts, eco-tourism areas, and spiritual tourism are contributing to its strength in attracting a large number of domestic and international visitors. In recent years, Vietnamese tourism has made remarkable progress and is recognized on the global tourism map. According to the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, in 2019

alone, Vietnam's tourism industry welcomed 18 million international visitors, an increase of 16% compared to 2018; served 85 million domestic visitors (a 6% increase compared to 2018). Total revenue from tourists is estimated at over 720 trillion VND (a 16% increase compared to 2018). In 2019, Vietnam also received numerous global tourism awards such as: World's Leading Heritage Destination, Best Golf Destination 2019, Top Destination in Asia, and Top Culinary Destination in Asia. These achievements contribute to promoting economic restructuring; preserving and promoting the value of cultural heritage and natural resources; creating numerous jobs and improving the people's livelihoods; boosting international integration and promoting the image of the country and its people.

Currently, the country has approximately 40,000 listed cultural sites. Of these, around 10,000 are classified at the provincial or city level; over 3,460 are at the national level; 107 are special national monuments, and 164 are national treasures. There are 8 UNESCO World Heritage Sites and 14 UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity sites. In the UNESCO Memory of the World program, Vietnam has 7 documentary heritage sites listed. Additionally, Vietnam has 9 UNESCO Biosphere Reserves. Many cultural heritage sites have become complete cultural-tourism products, serving both as a driving force and a goal for the development of the key tourism sector, while gradually transforming the economic structure of the localities where the heritage is located, providing practical and sustainable benefits to the community and the local areas. With such abundant cultural heritage potential, Vietnam is well-positioned to develop cultural tourism.

At the "Developing Vietnamese Cultural Tourism" forum organized by the Vietnam Tourism Association, Mr. Nguyen Trung Khanh, Director General of the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, stated that cultural tourism has been defined by UNESCO as a type of tourism where the primary goal of tourists is to explore, experience, and consume tangible and intangible cultural products at tourist destinations.

Dr. Nguyen Anh Tuan, Director of the Institute for Tourism Development Research, also affirmed that Vietnam has significant potential for cultural tourism development due to its rich and diverse resources. Vietnam boasts 5 tangible cultural heritage sites, 1 mixed heritage site, 14 intangible cultural heritage sites, and 7 documentary heritage sites recognized by UNESCO; more than 4,000 national cultural monuments, 128 special national monuments, over 400 intangible national cultural heritages, and more than 9,000 provincial-level monuments.

In practice, many cultural tourism products have become distinctive brands, setting Vietnamese tourism products apart. Many destinations with world cultural heritage have become highlights on the Vietnamese tourism map and must-visit spots for tourists, especially international visitors, such as: the Trang An Scenic Landscape Complex (Ninh Binh), the Imperial City of Hue (Thua Thien Hue), the My Son Sanctuary, and the Ancient Town of Hoi An (Quang Nam). Numerous successful cultural tourism programs have been developed and implemented, creating a brand for Vietnamese tourism, such as the Central

Heritage Road, Vietnam's Ancient Capitals, and the Green Road in the Central Highlands.

Dr. Nguyen Anh Tuan provided examples showing that the development of cultural tourism products has brought significant benefits in terms of income, employment, and socio-economic development for localities and for Vietnam as a whole. Total revenue from tourism has increased more than fivefold, from 96 trillion VND in 2010 to 720 trillion VND in 2019, with an average annual increase of 26.9%, contributing over 7-8% of GDP and having a ripple effect on 13.9% of GDP; creating over 1.2 million direct jobs and 3.6 million indirect jobs (Duong, 2023).

Vietnam has received several notable awards from the World Travel Awards, including: World's Leading Heritage Destination (in 2019, 2020, and 2022); Asia's Leading Cultural Destination (2019); Asia's Leading City of Culture (2019) - Hoi An; Asia's Leading Culinary Destination (2019); World's Leading Entertainment Destination - Memory Island Hoi An; and World's Leading Cultural Tourist Attraction - Sun World Fansipan Legend (2022).

Dr. Phan Thanh Hai, Director of the Department of Culture and Sports of Thua Thien Hue Province, shared that the exploitation of tourism and services from cultural heritage has played a central role in the local economy, with social revenue from tourism services based on traditional cultural values holding a high proportion. Statistics from 1990 to 2019 show continuous growth in all indicators. The number of visitors to Thua Thien Hue increased from 81,500 (1990) to 4.817 million (2019); revenue rose from 154 billion VND (1990) to 12 trillion VND (2019); and its contribution to the province's GDP increased from 7% (1995) to over 12% (2019). Notably, 85% of tourism in Hue is cultural heritage tourism.

This demonstrates that Hue's cultural heritage plays a crucial role in socio-economic development, particularly in tourism and services. As a result, the ancient capital Huế has preserved its ancestral cultural values well, and the cultural heritage of the ancient capital has become a foundation, motivation, and asset for Thua Thien Hue to advance and develop its economy and society sustainably. For many years, Thua Thien Hue has been consistently voted as a safe and friendly tourist destination in Vietnam. In March 2023, Canada's *The Travel* magazine named Hue one of the 10 most beautiful cities in Vietnam that visitors should explore and experience.

With such abundant cultural heritage potential, Architect Hoang Dao Cam from the Institute for Tourism Development Research believes that Vietnam has a significant advantage in developing cultural tourism. "Culture is a particularly important factor for tourism and one of the key factors influencing tourists' choice of destination. Culture truly is the internal driving force behind economic development, which is why promoting cultural tourism is an issue that needs attention. Our long-standing cultural traditions and historical depth will be a solid foundation for tourism development specifically and for our country's socio-economic development in general," affirmed Architect Hoang Dao Cam.

Sharing the same view, Ms. Nguyen Thi Huyen Trang from the Trang An Scenic Landscape Complex Management Board (Ninh Binh) believes that tourism products based on cultural values are increasingly becoming a trend and a preference among modern tourists who are increasingly focused on quality and experiential services. Therefore, cultural values have become a crucial resource for both localities and the nation to develop tourism in general and heritage tourism in particular. "Properly exploited heritage sites will contribute to leaving a positive impression on tourists, providing them with clearer and deeper insights into the local cultural values that are still present. This makes them feel intrigued and want to return, thereby boosting the tourism development of a region or country. In other words, a well-planned approach to leveraging heritage values will be an essential foundation for success in the tourism industry, facilitating socio-economic development and making tourism a truly key economic sector" (Ha, 2022).

In practice, many destinations in Vietnam such as Hanoi, Ha Long, Da Nang, Hoi An, Quang Binh, Ho Chi Minh City, Phu Quoc, etc., have been recognized by international travel magazines and top global travel information websites as among the most culturally rich, attractive destinations in Asia, with the most stunning landscapes in the world, and spectacular natural wonders. Many hotels in Vietnam have been ranked among the top luxury resorts, top hotels in the world, and top hotels with outstanding service globally, with some recognized for their design and construction as the best in the Asia-Pacific region.

Recently, Vietnamese tourism has experienced remarkable growth. In 2019 (before the Covid-19 pandemic), total revenue from Vietnam's tourism industry reached 700 trillion VND, marking a breakthrough in competitiveness. The World Economic Forum (WEF) published the Global Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019, which showed significant improvement in Vietnam's tourism competitiveness, moving from 67th out of 136 countries to 63rd out of 140, a 4-place increase from 2017.

After the Covid-19 pandemic began to subside, from March 15, 2022, Vietnam began to normalize activities, including cultural tourism. In the first 6 months of 2022 alone, the number of international visitors to Vietnam reached 413,000, and domestic visitors reached 60.8 million (a 1.9-fold increase compared to the same period in 2021 and a 1.3-fold increase compared to the same period in 2019, before the pandemic). Travel agencies began to return to the market, with the number of international travel agencies registered for operation increasing nearly 15 times compared to the same period in 2021. The strong growth of domestic tourism helped achieve the 2022 target in the first 6 months. Total revenue from tourism reached 265 trillion VND. Additionally, data from Google's destination search tool shows that Vietnam consistently ranks among the top destinations globally in terms of growth in travel information searches, with an increase ranging from 50% to 75%. According to the latest report from the World Economic Forum, Vietnam's tourism development competitiveness index for 2021 ranked 52nd, an 8-place improvement from 2019, making it one of the top three countries with the best improvement globally. These figures demonstrate that tourism has become a cultural industry and is increasingly effectively leveraging cultural resources into Vietnam's soft power.

However, there are still limitations. For example, there is a shortage of labor in the tourism industry compared to actual needs. As of June 2020, there were about 2.25 million workers in the tourism sector, with direct employment around 750,000. The tourism industry needs nearly 40,000 additional workers annually, but only about 15,000 students and trainees in the field graduate each year. If this situation is not improved, the shortage of qualified personnel will become a major bottleneck for the industry's development. The proportion of trained labor in the tourism sector and those trained in the right specialties is very low, leading to a serious shortage of high-skilled workers.

Some solutions to promote the cultural tourism potential in Vietnam today

First of all, it is necessary to improve the quality of tourism human resources to be able to convey the maximum cultural content into tourism products. In order to meet the demand for quality human resources for the tourism industry in Vietnam, the Vietnam Tourism Occupational Skills Standards (VTOS) have been revised to suit the new context. The new VTOS standards have been expanded to include areas identified as important to Vietnam, such as tour guides, service on tourist ships and small accommodation operations, as well as expanded to 5 occupational levels from trainees to senior managers. All of these standards help workers, employers, teachers and students of tourism schools to study, apply and implement VTOS standards to improve the quality of tourism services as well as the effectiveness of tourism vocational training in a unified manner. The revised Vietnam Tourism Occupational Standards, in addition to inheriting the contents from the previous version, have been developed in accordance with Vietnam's regulations as well as standardized and compatible with international occupational standards and ASEAN Standards. The new version of Vietnam Tourism Occupational Standards will contribute to improving the quality of the tourism industry through implementation, orientation of training and regional integration.

From the application of specific standards in the tourism industry, education and training in this field will have specific orientations. After being trained, workers will be able to work effectively, meet market needs as well as ensure competition with workers from countries in the region as well as in the world.

Second, it is necessary to invest in diversifying tourism products and improving their quality. Diversification of tourism products has long been a frequent topic among popular tourist destinations worldwide. This often involves unique implementations that reflect the distinctiveness and identity of each location. Vietnam, with its tens of thousands of monuments and rich tangible and intangible cultural values including many heritage sites with hundreds or thousands of years of history and numerous renowned natural landscapes ranked both nationally and internationally has favorable conditions to develop specialized and unique tourism products, as well as large-scale tourism centers and types.

This diversity can create high-value, large-scale, and regionally significant tourism products that showcase Vietnam and its tourism offerings to the world, while also bringing global excellence to Vietnam.

Third, it is essential to further improve tourism promotion efforts and communication strategies to build Vietnam's image as a friendly, attractive, and safe destination. Enhancing promotional capabilities, cooperating with both domestic and international resources especially from the private sector will support tourism development and human resource growth in the sector. Government officials responsible for tourism should guide career orientation, forecast demand, and encourage the socialization of training and development in the tourism workforce. It is crucial to innovate the operational mechanisms of tourism management agencies to be more flexible and closely connected with the market and external partners. This will help proactively respond to external changes and demands, attract resources, and improve the effectiveness of supporting tourism development and local tourism workforce enhancement.

Conclusion

Tourism plays a decisive role not only in the development of the tourism sector itself but also significantly contributes to the industrialization and modernization of the country. Over the years, the tourism industry has made efforts to mobilize community involvement, economic sectors, and international support for human resource development. Although progress has been made, there are still many issues that need to be addressed.

The limitations and shortcomings are due to various reasons, but primarily because the tourism sector still lacks a long-term program or plan for human resource development. This gap means that there is no clear, systematic direction to meet the current demands. Therefore, developing human resources in tourism to meet the needs for rapid and sustainable tourism growth is essential. It will ensure that tourism becomes a key economic sector, making a positive and effective contribution to the country's industrialization, modernization, and knowledge-based economic development. With comprehensive solutions and strategies, the tourism sector can develop appropriate strategies to enhance and assert Vietnam's position on the global tourism map.

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