

Utilising Cultural Values For Tourism Development In Southern Vietnam

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Abstract:

Southern Vietnam is characterised by numerous unique cultural values expressed through various production activities, beliefs, customs, festivals, literature, arts, food, fashion, transportation, and more. The cultural values have not only facilitated the emergence and growth of tourism in the industry but also influenced the scale, variety, quality, and efficacy of tourism operations. How have these cultural values been utilised for the advancement of tourism in Southern Vietnam in recent years? What problems have occurred during this exploitation process? What solutions are required to enhance the efficient and sustainable utilisation of Southern Vietnam's cultural assets in tourism development? This essay will aim to address these inquiries.

Keywords: *Southern Vietnam, cultural values, tourism development, exploring cultural values.*

1 Introduction

Cultural values, established by individuals in various cultures over time, influence the objectives, methods, and behaviours of individuals within such societies once established. They represent a type of social capital. Values stem from human interactions with environment and society, mirroring the essence of civilization. Cultural values inside each community, such as ethnic groups or nations, always create a connected and mutually reliant system. Cultural value systems, like culture itself, are subjective. To determine the value of something or the level of values, it is necessary to consider the specific spatial, chronological, and cultural settings ¹in which it exists. Without these circumstances, it is challenging to assess the usefulness or detrimental aspects of a specific ethnic group's culture. Ultimately, values or truths must be precise and particular (Ngo Duc Thinh, 2010). I agree that while utilising the traditional values of Southern Vietnam for tourism development, they should be placed inside a particular space, time, and clearly defined cultural context.

2 Content

2.1 Cultural Values of Southern Vietnam

Southern Vietnam covers an area of 6,130,000 hectares and has the highest fertility among all the plains in the country. It consists of 19 provinces and cities in two regions: the Southeast and the Mekong Delta. The Southeast area comprises six provinces and cities: Dong Nai, Binh Duong, Binh Phuoc, Tay Ninh, Ba Ria-Vung Tau, and Ho Chi Minh City. The Mekong Delta region has 13 provinces and cities: Long An, Tien Giang, Ben Tre, Vinh Long, Tra Vinh, Dong Thap, Can Tho, Hau Giang, Soc Trang, An Giang, Kien Giang, Bac Lieu, and Ca Mau. Southern Vietnam stands out for its several unique cultural traits when compared to other regions in the country. Southern Vietnam's creation was a result of the merging of influences from Cham, Khmer, Chinese, and eventually Western cultures, which were integrated into the Vietnamese cultural base. In the early 16th century, historical records indicate that Southern Vietnam was mostly undeveloped wilderness, with

the exception of the residence places of the indigenous Stieng and Chro Ro peoples in the Southeast region. Khmer, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Cham migrant communities split the land, built canals, produced crops, inhabited, and traded in the region, leading to it being referred to as the "new lands" (Tran Duc Cuong, 2014; Son Nam, 2009).

Southern Vietnam is currently inhabited by ethnic Vietnamese and several minority groups, including indigenous people like the Stieng, Chro Ro, and Ma, as well as migrants such as the Khmer, Chinese, Cham, Tay, Nung, Muong, and Tho (Nguyen Tuan Triet, 2005). Southern Vietnam is a multi-ethnic region, but the ethnic Vietnamese, who make up approximately 26 million people, constitute 90.9% of the population and are the major cultural group. In addition to the primary Vietnamese cultural group, there are also Khmer, Chinese, and Cham ethnic groups. Cham cultural features influenced the Vietnamese in Central Vietnam, while the small and isolated Southern Cham community did not have a substantial impact on Vietnamese culture in the region. The author posits that the cultural values of Southern Vietnam are expressed in both material and spiritual culture, showcasing a blend of Vietnamese culture with influences from other ethnic groups such as the Cham, Khmer, and Chinese in the riverine plain setting.

The cultural values of Southern Vietnam, influenced by its riverine environment, are evident in several aspects such as production activities, beliefs, customs, festivals, literature, arts, food, fashion, housing, and transportation modes. The production methods of Southern residents showcase the most distinct and diverse riverine plain characteristics in the country due to their unique geographical conditions. The Vietnamese legacy of wet-rice agriculture thrived on the vast and fertile alluvial plains of the delta areas due to its high suitability for rice farming. Southern Vietnam annually generates 50% of the nation's rice output and contributes over 4 million tonnes of rice exports. Southern Vietnam is responsible for 70% of the country's fruit production and is the greatest area for cultivating industrial crops. Southern Vietnam has an extensive network of rivers and canals and is bordered by the sea on two sides, making it the country's most abundant fishery region, supporting fishing, aquaculture, and seafood processing industries. Southern Vietnam boasts the country's highest density of bird gardens, located in almost every province in the Mekong Delta region, particularly in Ben Tre, Dong Thap, Bac Lieu, and Ca Mau. Binh Duong is known for its traditional craft villages specialising in wood carvings, pottery, and lacquer paintings. Trade in the region also possesses unique river-related features. Historically, significant Southern commerce centres developed on riverbanks and canals to aid in the transit of commodities. The Mekong Delta features floating markets like the Cai Rang Floating Market in Can Tho and the Phung Hiep Floating Market in Hau Giang, where all business transactions occur on the water.

Southern Vietnam, being a multi-ethnic region, is a convergence point for many religious beliefs introduced by migrant populations and the origin of new indigenous faiths. It is the region with the highest religious diversity in Vietnam. Southern Vietnam not only adopted and evolved religions such as Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam, but also uniquely spawned various indigenous faiths in the late 19th to early 20th centuries, including Buu Son Ky Huong, Cao Dai, and Hoa Hao. Despite having a smaller number of adherents, these "indigenous sects" still fulfilled the spiritual requirements of settlers in the new territories. Additionally, Catholicism and Protestantism have significant numbers of followers. Moreover, they upheld traditional beliefs by venerating the Lady of the Realm at Nui Sam (Ba Chua Xu), honouring Village Guardian Spirits at communal residences, and revering the Whale Spirit (Ca Ong) in coastal communities (Nguyen Huu Hieu, 2011; Nguyen Dang Duy, 1998).

Southern Vietnamese customs have roots in Northern and Central regions but have included various components from the Khmer and Chinese ethnic groups. Southern Vietnam hosts a wide variety of festivals, including agricultural-fishery festivals, festivals honouring national heroes and figures, belief and religious festivals, and hybrid festivals. Although several celebrations began in Central Vietnam, they all have Southern regional traits. The Ky Yen festival is regularly celebrated at the village's community houses twice a year to show appreciation to the Village Guardian Spirit, deities, and ancestral dignitaries for their contributions to the region's establishment and progress. The Nghinh Ong (Whale

Worshipping) festival is the primary cultural and spiritual event for inhabitants in coastal regions. Local government organises sombre celebrations for festivals honouring historical personalities and national heroes who explored and protected the regions.

Southern Vietnam has a wealth of indigenous literature and culture. This comprises folktales that depict the land exploration endeavours, connected to local terrains, heritage locations, and historical personalities. An vast array of folk songs, lullabies, agricultural songs, love songs, bua chanting, tài tử chamber music, and other theatrical arts such as tuồng and rôi are included in the collection. The cải lương reformed theatrical arts quickly gained popularity as a national art form in Southern Vietnam by combining the Southern accent, achievements of folk music and theatre arts, and Western-influenced spoken drama.

Southern Vietnamese lifestyle is vividly reflected in their culinary culture. Southern Vietnam's abundant and diverse food sources are due to its wetlands, canals, rivers, and lush woods. Southern people have created numerous unique native cooking techniques due to the diverse range of resources available. They frequently include a variety of fruits such as coconut, pineapple, and mango in meals like cháo lẹ lẹ (sweet rice porridge), sautéed eel with lemongrass and chilli, grilled snakehead fish, and sour fish soup. These foods have gotten deeply rooted in people's minds and have been showcased in literary and artistic creations. Dried seafood, pork, and fish sauces are essential components of Southern cuisine. Southern Vietnamese used both cultivated plants and animals as well as wild flora and fauna such as lotus stems, morning glory stems, peanut shoots, bitter vegetables, rats, frogs, bats, field crabs and more. This versatile assortment demonstrates the population's ability to adjust to nature and cleverness.

Southern Vietnamese prefer the áo bà ba, a lightweight shirt with pockets, and the checkered khăn rằn, a scarf/bandana used for several purposes in the riverine area. There are three basic types of homes in Southern Vietnam: houses built along roads, stilt houses along canals and rivers, and floating houses on waterways. Floating houses are used as both homes and sources of income for families involved in fish farming, river transportation, trade at floating markets, and water-based wholesale/retail activities.

Southern people had to modify their transportation methods to suit the distinctive terrain of the region for moving and transporting products. On land, they utilised ox-carts, horses, bicycles, pedicabs, trucks, and other modes of transportation. They used various types of watercraft like as canoes, sampans, rafts, barges, and ferries on the waterways. Boats and ships in the Mekong Delta were crucial for transportation, subsistence, and housing for those involved in ferrying, trading, and fish farming. Despite advancements in road infrastructure in Southern Vietnam, water transport remains prevalent due to its compatibility with the riverine landscape (Phan Thi Yen Tuyet, 1993).

In addition to the riverine features, the cultural values of Southern Vietnam are also expressed through cultural blending. The cultural space of Southern Vietnam is an expansion of Vietnam's cultural realm to a new territory, where Vietnamese, indigenous ethnic groups, and immigrant ethnic groups from the Southeast and Southwest regions have all played a role in its growth. From the outset, the culture of Vietnamese settlers in this region incorporated aspects of Cham, Khmer, and Chinese cultures, and was subsequently affected by Western culture. The Southeast region is now identified as having the largest immigrant population. The region has developed numerous economic hubs, cultural, scientific, and technical centres that collaborate both domestically and internationally. Southern Vietnam is currently experiencing rapid cultural interaction and acculturation. Consequently, there are few cultural phenomena in this region that are exclusively Vietnamese, as they are always influenced by other civilizations. Cultural intermingling is a defining cultural characteristic of Southern Vietnam. The culture of Southern Vietnam is both comparable to and different from the underlying culture of the Northern and Central regions of Vietnam.

2.2. Current Status of Exploiting Cultural Values for Tourism Development in Southern Vietnam

Culture as the raw element shaping tourism operations includes attractions and artefacts for travellers to encounter and appreciate. Cultural aspects are classified as cultural tourism

resources from the standpoint of the tourism industry. These include historical and cultural relics, cuisine, festivals, customs, traditions, beliefs, religions, literature, and arts. Cultural resources, together with natural resources, are essential factors for tourism growth in a specific area. Cultural heritages, including historical locations, architectural works, art forms, customs, festivals, traditional crafts, as well as economic, political, and social achievements, cultural and artistic facilities, museums, are resources that the tourism sector can benefit from. These resources have a crucial role in establishing and influencing the scale, variety, quality, and efficiency of tourism operations (Nguyen Thi Kim Lien, 2017). Thus, tourism development in Southern Vietnam must consider the exploitation of the cultural values discussed. Exploiting these cultural values in the Southern area not only leads to economic growth but also helps preserve and protect the nation's cultural traditions.

An evaluation of the present circumstances indicates that provinces and cities in Southern Vietnam have made significant progress in utilising the region's unique cultural features for tourism growth in recent years.

Southern Vietnam is abundant in heroic historical characters and stories of resistance against foreign invaders, resulting in a wealth of valuable historical and revolutionary cultural artefacts. Several historical sites of special national significance have been acknowledged, such as the Central Office for Southern Vietnam Revolutionary Base Area in Tay Ninh province, the Independence Palace in Ho Chi Minh City, the Con Dao Prison historical site in Ba Ria - Vung Tau province, and the historical site of the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Loc Ninh and Bu Gia Map districts of Binh Phuoc province. Furthermore, there are sites dedicated to significant conflicts including the Rach Gam-Xoai Mut battles, battles along the Ham Luong river, events at the Ba Nui site, the Go Thap historical site, and the Ben Tre Uprising. Additionally, there are nationally renowned historical, cultural, and scenic sites such as Ba Den Mountain in Tay Ninh, the Oc Eo archaeological site in An Giang, and Bung Bac and Bung Thom in Ba Ria - Vung Tau. Southern province tourism authorities are emphasising the creation of revisitation trips to delve into the origins of revolutionary history, revisiting former battlefields in War Zone D, the Cu Chi Tunnels, and Phu Quoc and Con Dao prisons. Tourists, both local and foreign, can take tours to explore the lives of renowned historical people including Thu Khoa Huan, Vo Truong Toan, Nguyen Dinh Chieu, Ho Chi Minh, Nguyen Thi Dinh, and more.

The river and canal culture in Southern Vietnam is a unique and valuable asset when it comes to leveraging waterway cultural assets. The extensive network of rivers, canals, and creeks in the area has become a highly appealing tourism route for both local and international tourists. Aside from the primary activity of travelling on a variety of boats and ships at varying speeds, there are additional water-based tourism activities available. Visitors can explore fish farm areas, aquaculture regions, fish sauce production facilities, engage in fishing and angling activities, and learn to prepare and enjoy different seafood delicacies. A cruise journey between provinces in Southern Vietnam includes pauses at specified spots to disembark and experience the local culture, cuisine, and lifestyles of each region, highlighting the distinctive waterway culture of the area.

The Southern region has developed a variety of crafts with tourism potential, such as weaving, mat and carpet making, hat weaving, leaf weaving, brick and ceramic making, woodworking, wood carving, coconut-based handicrafts, and rattan, bamboo, and reed handicrafts in different provinces. A culinary arts category that includes cake, com (green sticky rice), and candy manufacturing in Ben Tre, Tra Vinh, Soc Trang, and Vinh Long. Additionally, activities such as dried food, pickled food, fermented pork roll, fish sauce, and condiment production in different provinces, as well as dried seafood processing in coastal and waterway provinces. A horticultural and bonsai craft group is available in Ben Tre, Tien Giang, Vinh Long, Dong Thap, and other locations. They offer several varieties of bonsai, including leaf bonsai, flowering bonsai, shaped bonsai, and old trees. There are several traditional craft villages with established reputations and reliable incomes for both businesses and workers. These include fish sauce production in Chau Doc, woodworking in Cho Moi, ancestor altar crafting in Go Cong, bamboo weaving in Tien Giang (producing items such as hats, mats, baskets, and bamboo blinds), pia cake making in Soc Trang, dried food production in Ca Mau, coconut product manufacturing in Ben Tre, and bonsai

cultivation in Sa Dec and Cho Lach. Domestic and foreign tourists can explore traditional craft communities in Southern Vietnam through excursions to learn about production methods and taste local specialties. This type of tourism not only broadens the range of local tourism offerings but also contributes to the preservation and promotion of the traditional culture of the Southern region.

Vietnam wants to exploit coastal and island cultural values in line with the 4th Party Central Committee's Resolution on building the maritime economy to become a maritime power.

Provinces in the South that have successfully utilised coastal and island cultural elements include Ba Ria-Vung Tau, Phu Quoc Island District (Kien Giang), and the Ca Mau Peninsula. In late 2014, the Vietnam Records Organisation identified 50 appealing sites in Vietnam. Ba Ria-Vung Tau Province was recognised for 9 locations, with 3 of them being sea and island-related, including Vung Tau Beach, Con Dao, and Long Hai Beach (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2018).

Phu Quoc Island District in Kien Giang, known as the "Pearl Island," is recognised as having the highest tourism economic growth potential in the Mekong Delta area and the country. Phu Quoc is set to transform into a coastal metropolis and a special economic-administrative zone under the central government by 2030, as per the Prime Minister's approved development plan. Phu Quoc will become a national and worldwide hub for eco-tourism, luxury resorts, and entertainment.

Phu Quoc currently offers marine tourism activities such as fishing, scuba diving, coral reef touring, visiting pearl farms at sea, and exploring small islands in the southern part of the island. There are around 75 water vehicles available to serve guests. Phu Quoc Island District received 2.24 million tourists in the first 10 months of 2016, marking a 62.4% increase compared to the same time in 2015. Out of them, 207,000 were international visitors, marking a 42% rise from the same period in 2015, achieving almost 70% of the 2016 target. Tourism revenue exceeded VND 2,534 billion, marking a 49.5% growth compared to the previous period and achieving 94.2% of the 2016 target. In 2017, Phu Quoc Island District received around 361,500 international travellers for sightseeing, tourism, and relaxation, marking a 72% increase from 2016.

3 Conclusion

Yet, the outcomes of utilising cultural values for tourism development in the South do not match the region's abundant cultural assets. The exploitation process has resulted in numerous effects that pose a threat to the sustainable development of the region. Tourism in the South has been facing challenges in identifying unique tourism products due to the similarity of offerings across different localities, as noted by industry professionals from 2006 to the present. Most areas in the region depend on the existing tourism resources for the growth of tourism. The primary tourism offerings include transporting guests via boats and ships, seeing orchards, showcasing Don ca tai tu (a type of folk opera), and exploring National Parks. Tourists can gain insight into the tourism offerings of a whole region by visiting just one province (Huu Nghi, 2015). The extensive overlap in waterway tourism products, eco-tourism, cultural, and spiritual tourism across different areas in the region has become common, diminishing the appeal of tourism in the South.

Currently, the South's tourist development simply discusses the use of cultural values without implementing concrete activities to achieve it. Due to little funding for developing tourism infrastructure, tourist destinations in the South typically fail to captivate tourists for more than a day. Tourism in the South heavily depends on natural resources without long-term investment or coordination across communities, resulting in a lack of appeal and unique features.

To effectively utilise and assess the significance of Southern cultural values in tourism development, we offer the following proposals inside this article:

Raise awareness at all levels, sectors, and localities on the significance of utilising cultural values for tourism development in the South, while also educating people on maintaining, preserving, and respecting their cultural values.

Conduct surveys and studies to evaluate the tourist potential of provinces and areas in the South, focusing on culture, history, people, traditional festivals, attractions, destinations, tours, routes, and unique tourism goods. Based on this, design an extensive tourism development strategy for the Southern area, as well as for each province and city, within a consistent and coherent framework to enhance regional advantages. In the Southeast region of the South, it is important to focus on this area due to its geographical and political benefits.

Enhance the training of tourism personnel in the Southern region, focusing on both managers and staff, by implementing suitable programmes to fulfil the demands of the tourism industry. This will lead to a constant enhancement of skills and professionalism in tourism-related tasks.

Develop distinct, appealing, varied, and abundant tourism offerings in each area and connect them across the region without duplication. Consistently enhance and elevate the quality of tourism offerings. Improve the standard of tourism services at various locations such as destinations, excursions, routes, lodgings, restaurants, and shopping areas to leave a positive impact on travellers. Create engaging and scientifically curated tours and routes within each local area and across provinces in the Southern region, with a well-balanced and appealing schedule, emphasising sea and island excursions.

Invest in and enhance infrastructure, tourism facilities, garden houses, islands, and traditional craft villages that reflect the cultural identity and strengths of each province. Ensure the provision of high-quality services in a safe, friendly, and sustainable tourism environment. Establish and expand tourism enterprises that match the size and tourism opportunities of the Southern region, with reputable brands, large service networks, and high efficiency.

Enhance tourism promotion and marketing efforts for the region and each locality using a variety of media channels, both nationally and globally, to attract tourists.

Enhance coordination and collaboration among municipalities in the region, tourism companies, national tourism centres, and Southeast Asian countries in order to efficiently utilise the tourism potential and strengths of the region. The government must establish precise processes and essential support policies to promote tourism growth in the South.

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