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Cultural Industry in Development of Culinary Tourism in Vietnam

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Abstract

Culinary tourism represents an emergent phenomenon that has garnered attention globally, including in Vietnam, in recent years. In conjunction with this, the notion of the cultural industry is increasingly recognized as a mechanism for disseminating national cultures worldwide amidst the rapid exchanges characteristic of contemporary society. Nations endowed with rich gastronomic traditions have adeptly leveraged the cultural industry to enhance culinary tourism within their borders, thereby establishing themselves as global exemplars, as seen in countries such as Korea, Japan, and China. Although Vietnam is revered as a

culinary utopia, the cultural industry has yet to significantly catalyze the robust development of its culinary scene to achieve global prominence akin to that of other nations. This article synthesizes the experiences of culinary tourism alongside the application of cultural industry strategies to bolster culinary tourism in various countries, while also examining the prevailing conditions in Vietnam in recent times. Consequently, it aims to extract pertinent lessons for Vietnam and propose several strategic recommendations to advance this form of tourism both currently and in the future.

Keywords: Cultural Industry, Development Tourism, Culinary Tourism, Vietnam

1. Introduction

In the contemporary global landscape, individuals embark on journeys to discover novel territories, savor diverse cuisines, and gain insights into the lifestyles of the inhabitants of the regions they traverse. Tourism activities are delineated as "activities associated with human excursions beyond their habitual place of residence for a duration not exceeding one consecutive year, aimed at fulfilling the requirements of sightseeing, relaxation, entertainment, education, exploration of tourism resources, in conjunction with other legitimate objectives" (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2017: 2) [6]. The notion of the cultural industry emerged in the 1930s of the 20th centuries. The advancement of the cultural industry globally has facilitated robust economic growth in various nations, enabling them to attain international recognition through both traditional and contemporary media platforms. The dynamic cultural movements have fostered significant intercultural exchanges and acculturation among various cultures, including European American, Taiwanese, Korean, and others. In present-day Vietnam, cultural movements are unfolding in a particularly dynamic manner. The cultural industries of these nations have contributed to the extensive dissemination of their cultural practices worldwide. Consequently, these influences permeate political and economic spheres, thereby accelerating national development.

Tourists engage in various sightseeing endeavors, investigating the locales they traverse in search of novel experiences. When a geographical area is influenced by human activities, it engenders cultural exchanges and acculturation between indigenous populations and external entities. The interplay between natural geography and cultural exchanges serves as the foundational basis for both ethnic and regional cultures; thus, alterations in these elements will, by necessity, instigate transformations in ethnic and regional cultures. In practical terms, these two determinants exhibit variability across different regions and are not static throughout historical contexts" (Ly Tung Hieu, 2019: 44) [5]. Consequently, individuals are compelled to travel, as remaining stationary and relying solely on virtual experiences via screens in the contemporary technological era is insufficient for genuine engagement.

In the territory of Vietnam, the spectrum of tourism-related activities exhibits remarkable diversity. As per the data disseminated by the General Department of Tourism, during the initial six months of the year 2023, the nation welcomed in

excess of 5 million international tourists (specifically, 5,577,664), while the influx of domestic tourists approached approximately 64 million individuals engaging in tourism-related endeavors, culminating in a total revenue generated from the tourism sector amounting to around 343.1 trillion VND (Online Database of Tourism Statistics - Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, no date provided).

Professor Philip Kotler, a preeminent authority on branding globally, has posited that the Vietnamese tourism sector should endeavor to establish Vietnam as "the kitchen of the world" to significantly enhance its appeal to international travelers. Consequently, in pursuit of this aspiration to become the kitchen of the world, it is imperative to disseminate knowledge regarding Vietnam and its culinary heritage to a global audience. This undertaking represents a fundamental objective of the cultural industry.

2. Literature Review

Numerous scholarly texts have been authored regarding culinary culture and the cultural industry.

The cultural industry encompasses the sectors engaged in the conception, production, and commercialization of creative content, which may manifest as either goods or services. This notion evolved from the term "culture industry" posited by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, who contended that mass media exerts deleterious effects on societal structures. The primary objective of these industries is to entertain and manipulate audiences by depicting an idealized representation of reality through various media platforms. In the early twenty-first century, gatekeepers operating within cultural industry frameworks serve as formidable intermediaries—and obstacles—between creators and the consuming public. The advent of the Internet has the potential to disrupt this dynamic. Artists have increasingly sought to engage with audiences through online platforms. Certain individuals, particularly within the music domain, have experienced notable success in this arena; however, most musical ensembles establish a digital presence with the aspiration of enticing a recording label to offer them a lucrative contract. While it is plausible to envision significant transformations in this context, the specific nature of these changes remains ambiguous. It is conceivable that as Internet usage proliferates (and as automated systems become more prevalent for information curation), a greater number of individuals may seek direct connections with artists. Alternatively, through the implementation of micropayment systems, wherein users remunerate a nominal fee for the utilization of copyrighted materials online, an increasing number of individuals may opt to download music, films, and literature from the Internet, thereby circumventing traditional distributors such as record shops, cinemas, and bookstores, while still necessitating the involvement of record labels, film production companies, and publishing houses. Furthermore, various cultural institutions, including museums, are progressively establishing online platforms. The impact of these digital initiatives on their operational modalities remains uncertain. Presently, it is challenging to conceive that the ability to view artworks online will significantly influence museum attendance—except to the degree that individuals who encounter images on the Internet might be sufficiently captivated to visit the museum physically. However, as technological advancements continue, it may become feasible to replicate museum artifacts with a degree

of fidelity that closely approximates the original works. Would individuals then opt to forgo museum visits in favor of engaging with art and cultural heritage through their digital devices? While this scenario appears improbable, it is noteworthy that a significant number of contemporary consumers express a preference for experiencing orchestral music via compact discs rather than attending live symphonic performances. Should a similar trend emerge regarding the observation of physical artifacts, museums could face substantial challenges. Conversely, performing arts organizations may thrive in this prospective landscape, as audiences might increasingly 'attend' concerts in larger numbers if they are able to experience virtual 'live' performances within the comfort of their own homes at their convenience. Visual artists may adapt their creative processes and sales strategies, generating works intended for digital scanning and earning a microroyalty each time their creations are viewed. The ramifications for art markets, as well as for artists, artworks, and audiences, are profoundly significant.

There exist a multitude of prominent methodologies for the examination of television as a commercial sector. Critics from the left have historically perceived the television sector as a progressively potent cultural enterprise that bears resemblance to other sectors within the framework of monopoly capitalism. Edward Herman and Robert McChesney (1997) concentrate on the unavoidable ascendance and perpetuation of colossal corporations, alongside the absence of genuine television alternatives that contest the prevailing political-economic paradigm. Despite the burgeoning array of cable networks, one finds it arduous to identify any progressive alternatives to the predominantly harmonious corporate narratives. The preeminent television entities have consistently augmented their influence as they construct a global media landscape. Notably, the advent of space satellites facilitates the seamless transmission of audiovisual content from any location to another. McChesney contends that the aspiration for television to serve as a vehicle for mass education and democratic enlightenment has devolved into a system predominantly dedicated to the commercialization of products and the evasion of contentious presentations that would enlighten the citizenry. Conservative neoclassical industry analysts refute the cultural uniformity that leftist critics lament. Benjamin Compaine asserts that television programs encounter competition from a plethora of sources within popular culture. Bruce Owen and Steven Wildman (1992) concur with television executives who assert that they operate within a highly competitive environment characterized by incessantly evolving supply and demand dynamics. They emphasize that no global television producer or network possesses the capacity to compel audience engagement. With the proliferation of channels provided by cable and satellite services, it is increasingly untenable to assert the lack of diversity or choice within the contemporary television industry framework. With the emergence of novel television technologies, the television enthusiast is empowered to exert control over their viewing experience, curating their preferred programming. As profit-driven entities comprising the television sector expand their channel offerings, proponents of neoclassical economics and industry proprietors argue that viewers are likely to experience enhanced satisfaction. Both factions approach their inquiries with entrenched presuppositions. Leftists

recognize the system's inefficacy; neoclassicists maintain its effectiveness. A third cohort, comprising industrial organization economists, may commence their analysis from a relatively less ideologically driven standpoint. They endeavor instead to elucidate how varying industry frameworks engender disparate forms of corporate and industrial behavior. Television industries are not homogenous, nor are their societal and political ramifications uniformly beneficial or detrimental to public welfare. The industrial organization economists meticulously describe and scrutinize the structure, conduct, and performance of each sector, eschewing assumptions regarding what values may signify good or poor performance. While the refusal of industrial organization economists to adopt a normative stance may be perceived as a strength, it concurrently diminishes their capacity to advocate for specific public policy recommendations, apart from acquiescing to the criteria of performance that policymakers themselves present. Industrial organizational analysts cannot assert that they possess the optimal solutions to the industrial challenges that critics may raise. They can proffer only marginal adjustments, acknowledging that capitalism seldom yields the most effective media policies when left unrestricted, and a radical alternative to capitalism appears not to foster a more enlightened and educated citizenry.

The scholar Pham Hong Thai has produced a series of articles pertinent to the cultural industry, with particular emphasis on the advancements observed in developed nations such as Korea and Japan, which are recognized as the epicenters of emerging cultural trends, particularly in the realm of culinary practices. The discourse surrounding the cultural industry in Japan and Korea has been subsequently published as a foundational textbook utilized in academic institutions.

In its definition of Culinary Tourism, the World Food Travel Association asserts: "Culinary tourism is the act of traveling to taste a place in order to get a sense of that place" (World Food Travel Association (WFTA), n.d.). Similarly, reflecting on the concept of culinary tourism, Vuong Xuan Tinh articulated: "It is about food as a subject and medium, as a destination and means, of travel. It is about individuals discovering foods that are new to them as well as using food to discover new cultures and ways of life" (Vuong Xuan Tinh, 2018)^[11].

In the paradigm of cultural industries, UNESCO elucidates that these are sectors engaged in the production of both tangible and intangible artistic and creative outputs, possessing the capacity to engender wealth and income through the utilization of cultural values and the generation of knowledge-driven products and services, encompassing both contemporary and traditional cultural paradigms. A salient characteristic shared by cultural industries is their reliance on creativity, cultural knowledge, and intellectual property to fabricate products and services, alongside their inherent cultural significance (Statistics on Cultural Industries: Framework for the Elaboration of National Data Capacity Building Projects - UNESCO Digital Library, n.d.)^[8]. Culinary tourism elucidates the mechanisms through which the burgeoning interest in international cuisine is broadening palates and fostering profitability across various economic sectors. This phenomenon is thoroughly examined in the scholarly work "Culinary Tourism" authored by Lucy M. Long (2013)^[4]. Furthermore, this study articulates how

tourism synergistically intertwines personal experiences with the cultural and societal contexts of the destinations that individuals traverse to savor such culinary offerings.

3. Methodology

Within the parameters of this scholarly investigation, we employ qualitative research methodologies, scrutinize and integrate scholarly documents from prior researchers, while concurrently applying insights regarding the cultural industry to elucidate the challenges faced by the cultural industry in the promotion of culinary tourism in Vietnam.

4. Findings and Discussion

In fact, to this day, Vietnam remains a nation characterized by an exceedingly rich and diverse culinary landscape. Nevertheless, visitors to Vietnam predominantly recall dishes such as Pho, spring rolls, bun cha, and banh mi, which are highly esteemed by travel and culinary platforms or are favored by heads of state. Tourists possess limited knowledge regarding the numerous other varieties of cakes and cuisines that exist within Vietnam. At one point, banh xeo garnered international attention; however, the promotional efforts and representation of this dish were not effectively leveraged to enhance its popularity among global tourists and diners. The World Food Tourism Association estimates that international tourists allocate 25-35% of their travel expenditures to food and beverage-related activities (Son, 2023)^[7]. To capitalize on this significant economic opportunity, the tourism industry should develop culinary maps to entice tourists to participate in food-focused tours. Korea and Japan have emerged as prominent examples of nations successfully promoting their respective cuisines to a global audience. Both countries have pursued similar objectives, aiming to showcase their culture, country, and people to the world through culinary means. Notably, Korea's achievements in this regard are particularly noteworthy and offer valuable lessons for other countries seeking to emulate its success. The strategic development of the Korean cultural industry, including initiatives like sending students to study abroad in countries with advanced cultural industries such as the United States, France, and Western Europe, has yielded significant results. Upon their return, these students have contributed to the global dissemination of Korean culture, with music, movies, TV series, fashion, and entertainment styles gaining international recognition (Cultural industry enhances national soft power, n.d.)^[2]. The culinary sector also plays a crucial role in promoting Korean culture and economy. Korean cuisine, with its unique flavors and dishes, has become increasingly popular worldwide. Market development companies have been instrumental in expanding the global reach of Korean culinary products. The success of the historical drama "Dae Jang-geum" and its associated stories has contributed to the popularity of Korean medicine and kimchi. Vietnamese tourists visiting Korea often express a desire to purchase Korean ginseng and Angong Niu Huang Pills, a traditional medicine used to treat stroke. Additionally, they seek to experience Korean cuisine, with kimchi being a particularly sought-after dish. As a result, Korea has become synonymous with kimchi and is often referred to as the "land of kimchi."

In 2023, the Korean government allocated approximately 790 billion Won (622.5 million USD) to aid small and medium enterprises and startups in the content sector. The

nation's cultural content exports soared to a record \$12.4 billion in 2021, fueled by a worldwide surge in its Cultural Industry. This industry has transformed Korea from being one of Asia's poorest countries in the 1960s to having the 4th largest economy in Asia and ranking 10th globally by GDP in 2020.

Vietnamese gastronomy has garnered recognition from numerous international publications, with CNN identifying pho as one of the global dishes featuring the finest broth, banh bot loc as an essential culinary experience for visitors to Vietnam, banh mi as one of the most enticing sandwiches worldwide, and banh cam as one of the premier 30 most delectable fried pastries. The Hong Kong news outlet SCMP has highlighted the distinctive Vietnamese specialties of cha ruoi, cao lau, bun ca cham, and bun quay as essential dishes to sample in Vietnam. In parallel, Australia's Traveller travel magazine has listed Vietnamese banh cuon among the ten appealing dishes that tourists ought to savor in 2023 (Son, 2023) ^[7]. Leveraging these advantages, we aim to harness the influence of global media, thereby continuing to disseminate promotional clips that advocate for tourism as well as for the culinary landscape of Vietnam. Nevertheless, the prominent Vietnamese culinary brands recognized as cultural specialties within the realm of Vietnamese gastronomy have struggled to expand their presence over time, or, having entered the international market, have not sustained longevity sufficient to establish themselves as an integral aspect of Vietnamese culinary identity. A pertinent illustration of this phenomenon is the renowned Pho 24 brand, which has achieved international acclaim. Upon reaching a significant level of development, the brand was acquired by foreign entities (thus no longer under Vietnamese ownership), subsequently impacting its operational integrity and national essence, as the cultural identity associated with that brand cannot equate to that of its original Vietnamese stewardship. Consequently, Pho 24 remains confined to approximately 20 establishments in Ho Chi Minh City and has not yet garnered the strength necessary to penetrate other international markets and maintain a robust presence abroad, despite the ambitious plans and aspirations of the Pho 24 proprietor extending beyond Vietnam to the global stage.

The instance of Banh Xeo Muoi Xiem once captivated gastronomic aficionados. Nonetheless, to the present day, that brand has faded from public consciousness owing to the franchising process, which, if executed proficiently, may flourish; conversely, if poorly managed, it may lead to the demise of a national culinary identity. We have established aspirations for the foundational platform of Vietnamese tourism to revolve around its cuisine, which serves as a strategic asset to both retain visitors and entice them to return. "Vietnam's tourism development strategy to 2030 has delineated culinary tourism as a pivotal product line that contributes to augmenting the competitive edge and reputation of Vietnamese tourism" (Son, 2023) ^[7]. Vietnam possesses a historical context of diplomatic relations, whether manifested through enforced cultural exchange or voluntary engagement, a narrative that has been documented and remains indisputable. Consequently, to allure a significant influx of French tourists and those from the Francophone community, we can enhance our approach towards this demographic. There exists a substantial opportunity to leverage the culinary aspect during the epochs of domination and colonization. While this may

evoke sentiments of national pride, it concurrently serves as a historical account. For instance, visitors to the revolutionary historical site of the Cu Chi tunnels may partake solely in the consumption of cassava with sesame salt, thereby experiencing the tribulation endured by communist soldiers during the resistance struggle. From this cassava base, a plethora of additional snacks can be crafted, leaving an indelible impression on tourists visiting Cu Chi. Furthermore, we can infuse a sense of opulence into specific colonial dishes to illustrate the stark contrast between life during wartime, characterized by justice and injustice (a typical French meal comprises three courses: Appetizer: Soup and aperitif; main course: Beef and potatoes; dessert). These culinary offerings are entirely feasible and can be presented to tourists at a relatively modest expense, facilitating an experiential juxtaposition that underscores the sacrifices and adversities encountered by the Vietnamese populace in their pursuit of contemporary peace. Our diplomatic relations with the United States ensure that American culture constitutes an integral facet of Vietnamese culture. The interplay and acculturation with Western culture—particularly American culture—will enable visitors to appreciate not only the rich diversity of Vietnamese culinary heritage but also the inclusion of Western and American cuisines within the current culinary landscape. Additionally, our diplomatic ties with Japan, which occupied Vietnam during World War II, have fostered significant cultural exchanges between Japanese culinary traditions and Vietnamese cuisine, as well as with Russian and Chinese influences during the resistance against America. All these elements, if recognized and harnessed appropriately, can be transformed into distinctive offerings for the cultural industry.

The government necessitates a definitive strategic orientation and methodical investment in the cultural sector. Specifically, culinary traditions represent an aspect of identity that is inherently irreplaceable. Insights drawn from the experiences of the Korean government reveal a long-term vision that spans centuries. Emphasis should be placed on the cultivation of national culture, the formulation of strategic policies aimed at establishing a national cultural identity, the enhancement of the arts and culture, and the amelioration of the cultural lives of citizens alongside the elevation of their material standards of living. Establishment of investment mechanisms for cultural development funds, the organization of study and research initiatives, and the execution of experimental programs to foster culture, tourism, sports, and entertainment both domestically and internationally are paramount. Particular attention ought to be devoted to cultural subjects, with a mandate for the instruction of traditional crafts to students, making this education a prerequisite for graduation. It is essential to train educators capable of delivering systematic instruction while enforcing stringent regulations within universities to ensure consistent quality in cultural education. A synergistic approach involving the collaboration and engagement of ministries such as Foreign Affairs, Trade, Industry, and Culture, Sports, and Tourism is necessary to cultivate a collective recognition of the cultural industry's significance in the national economic development. Consequently, it is vital to initiate cultural cooperation ventures in conjunction with economic and political partnerships. The enhancement of human resources training and the amplification of state support serve as tangible indicators of the government's

commitment to the cultural sector. The establishment of research institutes and centers for teaching and application is essential. Every citizen serves as a sentinel on the cultural frontier; has education instilled in individuals a sense of patriotism and cultural consciousness? Narratives surrounding Koreans embodying a noble national spirit, persevering through adversity to elevate their nation, contribute to the fortification of a robust Korean identity. Individuals draw inspiration from these exemplars, promoting national resilience and progress. This manifests as an expression of national spirit and affection for the country, advocating for a dynamic Vietnam capable of resonating with the hearts of millions of its citizens. The populace possesses a historical legacy characterized by patriotism, diligence, and an unwavering adaptability to innovation. Alongside the state's initiatives to foster cultural development, there exists a shared understanding among the people that this progression will yield a Vietnamese culture with a pronounced identity. Vietnamese culinary traditions are poised to flourish domestically and gain international recognition.

5. Conclusion

In the contemporary landscape of international integration, any nation that possesses a developmental strategy will prioritize the preservation of its cultural heritage and traditional values, as the dynamics of cultural exchange and acculturation among nations and cultures occur with remarkable rapidity. Consequently, in instances where countries adopt strategies aimed at fostering mutual understanding, it is imperative that we, under the auspices of the Party and the State, formulate a robust strategy to substantially advance the cultural industry, which encompasses initiatives to safeguard and promote the intrinsic values of traditional Vietnamese cuisine. This endeavor constitutes a vital necessity and a mission that resonates with all Vietnamese citizens broadly and the tourism sector specifically. The determinants influencing tourists' destination choices are frequently rooted in cultural attributes, natural environments, and culinary offerings. Culinary excellence serves as a critical catalyst for the vigorous advancement of tourism. When the State commits to strategic investments with a long-term vision, Vietnamese cuisine is poised to attain prominence on the global culinary stage.

6. Author contributions

The author has collected documents of theses, dissertations, scientific proceedings, articles from the Information Center - Library of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, from prestigious websites of the Central Library of Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City, Ho Chi Minh Media Center website, Ministry of Health website, and Researchgate.

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8. Institutional Review Board Statement

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9. Informed Consent Statement

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11. Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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