A Systematic Review of Community-based Tourism in Vietnam: A Critical Perspective

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Abstract: This study provides an overview of the publication trends in the field of community-based tourism (CBT) in Vietnam to enhance our understanding of “where we are” in the course of sustainable tourism development and its research. The foundation of this work is based on the annals and review of 59 published academic documents in this field from 1986 to 2020. In addition to our retrospective findings of CBT publication trajectories, the qualitative thematic analysis delineated three predominant perspectives: “development supporters,” “protectionists,” and “community developers.” We argue that the evolution of CBT publication in Vietnam has achieved certain progress that shifted from the initial domination by Western authors to some level of academic localisation in the later phase. However, during this academic localisation, domestic scholars revealed their bias in research perspectives, as the majority advocated the viewpoint of economic growth. The study calls for a “balanced” approach domestically to enrich CBT policy and research.

Keywords: A critical perspective, community-based tourism (CBT), publication trends, qualitative thematic analysis, Vietnam


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Introduction

The term “community-based tourism” (CBT) is commonly understood as a form of “local tourism” that has gained popularity as an anti-mass tourism alternative since the 1980s (Jafari, 2001). However, its progenitor could be traced back to the campaigns of the 1970s, promoting local community participation in bottom-up developmental initiatives (Reid et al., 2004). Later, Murphy pioneered the successful integration of this initial idea into the tourism field through his seminal works, such as “Tourism: A Community Approach” (1985) and “Community-driven Tourism Planning” (1988). Since then, CBT has become the centre of a rich body of tourism literature, examining it at various scales. Some studies have explored CBT at the macro level and thus derived managerial implications and policy recommendations (Murphy, 1988; Tosun, 2000; Truong et al., 2014). Others have focused specifically on the micro-level of CBT pertaining to the term “community,” identifying “who are they,” and deciphering governance and distributional issues among stakeholders (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Okazaki, 2008; Tan, Ubukata, & Cong Dinh, 2022).

In Vietnam, the emergence and development of CBT is closely aligned with the transformation of the country’s political economy. Prior to 1986, Vietnam faced serious consequences of the war, which lead to poverty and famine (Mok & Lam, 1997). The new regime (the Communist Party of Vietnam, CPV) was not completely convinced of the merits of the tourism sector. In 1986, the sixth CPV National Congress approved the renovation package known as “Doi Moi” to promote socio-economic growth by shifting to a free market system. The opening up of the country stimulated the tourism industry through global integration, in the context of a renewed international interest in Vietnam. Consequently, the total number of visitors increased more than fourfold between 1990 and 1994. The number of overseas travellers reached one million in 1995 and five million 15 years later. In 2010, the tourism industry turnover was approximately US$5 billion—a tenfold increase over 1995 and 20 times over 1990 (Vietnam National Administration of Tourism [VNAT], 2020a). The total turnover from tourism in 2019 was $32.8 billion, contributing to 9.2% of the national GDP (VNAT, 2020b).

In addition to such quantifiable growth, the tourism industry has also transformed in character after Doi Moi. Particularly, this transformation observed the emergence of new forms of tourism businesses and unfamiliar tourism niches, including the origin of the CBT concept under different names, such as community tourism (đu lịch cộng đồng” in Vietnamese) or community development in tourism (phát triển cộng đồng du lịch). The government has progressively considered CBT a dual tool for cultural preservation and poverty alleviation. The term CBT was formally conceptualised in the 2017 Law on Tourism as a confirmation of this, which states that it refers to “a type of tourism developed on the basis of the cultural
values of the community, managed, exploited and benefited by the local community” (Government of Vietnam [GOV], 2017, p.2).

The introduction of CBT and its growth in practice have inspired a myriad of academic works in Vietnam on its various aspects. Some studies have examined CBT in terms of economic development, job creation, and income opportunities (Pham, 2020; Pham Hong et al., 2021), whereas others have focused on tourism governance and interactions among stakeholders (Ngo et al., 2019; Phuc & Nguyen, 2020). Furthermore, some studies have investigated cultural issues, community development, and behaviour (Cuong, 2020; Hieu et al., 2018). In the course of this long journey, however, to the best of our knowledge, a comprehensive examination of the evolution of CBT, the state of CBT research, and its practice is yet to be conducted. This may lead to the lack of a comprehensive understanding of current works on CBT and forecast a bleak and unpredictable future on the way toward sustainability in tourism without any intervention. Perhaps, it is time to look back and examine our progress thus far to gauge “where are we now” after more than 35 years of research (Anderson et al., 2001).

With specific reference to the context of Vietnam, this study seeks: (1) to provide an overview of the progress in publication trends, theoretical approaches, and methods used in the CBT field according to three main stages: the period from 1986 to 2004 (the country had no Tourism Law), from 2005 to 2016 (the first approval of the Law of Tourism), and 2017 onwards (since the law was revised); (2) to delineate and analyse the predominant perspectives/themes that emerged in the field; and (3) to outline the current research gaps and propose some potential tracks for future works.

Methodology

The research procedure was split into two main phases, which also considered the structure of the methodological approach. We began with a brief review of the transformation of Vietnam’s tourism industry and associated policy changes. Thereafter, we chronicled and systematically reviewed CBT-related literature published from 1986 to 2020 (inclusive) in Vietnam.

Changes in Vietnam Tourism Policies

First, we collected all of the most prominent tourism-related documents in Vietnam after the country was completely reunified in 1975, including the National Action Plans for Tourism Development (NAPTD), Master Plan for Tourism Development (MPTD), National Strategy for Tourism Development (NSTD), Law on Tourism, and other governmental policies. The two main sources used were the Institute for Tourism Development Research (VNAT) website (https://www.vietnamtourism.
gov.vn) and the conference on “Policy for developing community-based tourism and training human resources for community-based tourism development in Vietnam” hosted by VNAT in 2018. The folder was added after the further reading of works on tourism policy analysis, including Cooper (2000) and Truong (2013).

Thereafter, we downloaded and used a content analysis technique for each selected document. The purpose of this study is not to analyse tourism policy, because it does not explicitly discuss issues related to power relationships and the tourism policy-making context (Hall, 1994). Instead, it aims to determine which policies are closely connected to the formation and development of CBT. Simultaneously, this study helped us identify the most prominent timelines of tourism transformation. As a result, the period before 1986 was briefly introduced for comparison purposes, and the three historical periods were intensively noted. In the first period (1986–2005), Vietnam had no laws on tourism. The nature of tourism gradually shifted from political purposes only (pre-1986) to dual economic-political aims under open-door policies. The first law on tourism was approved in the second period (2005–2017). Tourism was identified as a key sector in a market-oriented economy. The law was rewritten in 2017. Since then, tourism has become an important tool for ensuring balanced and sustainable development. As a part of this approach, some key features of tourism and government rhetoric on CBT at each stage were recorded and highlighted for further discussion on academic progress.

A Systematic Review of the Literature

Data collection

This study is based on a systematic review of the prominent peer-reviewed literature on tourism in Vietnam recorded in the Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) databases. To guarantee that there has been no omission, all tourism articles on Vietnam were collected by using the search terms “tourism” and “Vietnam,” and within a 35-year timespan (1986–2020 inclusive). The search was conducted in May 2021 and saved in an Excel file for further analysis. The initial sample consisted of 897 documents, of which 354 and 543 were from WoS and Scopus, respectively (Table 1). For the abstract, before being analysed in the screen analysis, a manual scanning and cleaning technique of the documents was conducted by the first author to eliminate errors. Concurrently, only full-text scholarly articles were selected, excluding commentary, editorial publications, research notes, and conference proceedings (Ruhanen et al., 2015). After the filter was applied to the list of 897 papers, the results were narrowed down to 601 articles for further processing.
Table 1. Searched results and criteria for data collection

<table>
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<th>Items</th>
<th>WoS</th>
<th>Scopus</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searched result</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dropped</td>
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<td>287</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstracts reviewed</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>601</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Inclusion criteria           | – Peer-reviewed English articles  
– Themes: community tourism, CBT, community-based ecotourism, pro-community development tourism in rural areas  
– Keywords: community involvement in CBT, tourism-poverty nexus, economic and livelihood in local tourism, stakeholders’ participation and collaboration in tourism planning, and so on. |
| Exclusion criteria           | – Non-peer reviewed literature, not in English  
– Opinion pieces, editorials, reviews, book chapters and conference proceedings  
– Articles beyond the scope of the current study, e.g., visitors’ perceptions, tourist spending, destination marketing, travel and event research, and airlines. |

The next step involved re-screening the articles according to the eligibility criteria and research scope, which involved five main stages (Figure 1). First, to ensure that the screening process was rigorous, 601 cleaned abstracts were independently screened by two researchers. Each abstract was categorised into “yes,” “no,” or “perhaps.” Articles were voted “yes” if the reviewers felt that they met the criteria set out from the beginning, whereas they were assigned “no” if they did not. The “perhaps” decision was made when reviewers felt confused between “yes” and “no” or could not decide based only on the abstract. At the end of this stage, 26 articles were assigned “yes” by both authors and continued to be identified as such for the final decision. Similarly, 466 documents were removed because both reviewers tagged them as “no.” A total of 109 papers were classified differently and re-screened by both researchers to make the final decisions. In some situations, the first author fully read the articles before making a final decision. A final list of 59 articles explicitly concerning the field was created for in-depth analysis. Appendix 1 provides the full bibliographic reference list.
Data analysis

After downloading 59 full articles deemed eligible and conducting a preliminary inspection, the data were processed using the six-step qualitative thematic analysis (QTA) method to track the development of academic research in the CBT field in Vietnam (Figure 2). QTA is a qualitative analysis method aimed at revealing key themes in a specific field by sorting and describing an available database (Bhati et al., 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method was chosen as the primary one because such qualitative outcomes help to define a specific and detailed picture of the research phenomenon (Berbekova et al., 2021). In other words, it helps the reader visualise the “overall story” that different themes reveal about the CBT topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this process, the MAXQDA software, a powerful tool package for qualitative analysis (Nguyen et al., 2021), was used to assist in structuring and sorting the dataset via a highlight and colour tagging system. This work gradually revealed three coherent themes of CBT evolution: economic-oriented, cultural critic, and community development, which we describe in detail in the Results section.
Results

In this section, we begin with a summary of the tourism policy changes that have impacted CBT development in Vietnam. Thereafter, we provide the publication profiles of 59 academic articles with a summary of the research distributions, research trends, main theoretical approaches, and methods used. Finally, by using the QTA analysis, we further analysed three emerging perspectives in the field of CBT during the 1986–2020 period.

CBT and Tourism Policy Change

Prior to 1986, Vietnam closed its doors to the world after a long period of war. In 1978, the VNAT was established to shepherd groups of “foreign friends” under the highest level of state management to control all tourism activities nationwide (Truong, 2013). Thus, visitors were rare, with approximately 6,130 in 1960 and 36,910 in 1975 (Tran, 2005), among which most “friends” were political delegates from the former Soviet Union (Mok & Lam, 1997). There were also no laws or legislative frameworks to guide tourism and business operations during this period (Tran, 2005).

The Doi Moi policy was introduced in 1986. This new program included a series of policy packages aimed at decentralising the economic system, restructuring government ministries and bureaucracies, encouraging private activities, and allowing investments in foreign trade. Following the 1986 open-door policy, the government experienced a series of breakthrough changes in tourism, including internal governance and outside investment encouragement during the 1986–2004 period. Vietnam’s annual tourism campaign was first issued in 1990. The 1995–2010 MPTD and NSTD for 2001–2010 were introduced for the first time. The restructuring of VNAT in 1990 and the establishment of the Vietnam Tourism Association (VITA) in 2002 were affirmations of the key roles of the tourism sector, and they promoted its development (VNAT, 2020b). Notably, the central government gradually encouraged privatisation and allowed foreign investors to participate in the tourism sector. This indicates that the government changed its perception by considering tourism as a political vehicle (pre-1986) toward a dual goal, which was both political and economic.

At this time, the Vietnamese government’s vision focused on how to grow the economy massively through large foreign exchange earnings and increased tourism revenue. The national tourism growth rate reached 30–40% and foreign exchange sources averaged 25% per year during the period between 1990 and 1995 (Figure 3). For the first time, international arrivals reached one million in 1994 and peaked at 2.14 million in 2000, 7 times higher than in 1990 (VNAT, 2020a). The total revenue from tourism in 2000 was $0.75 billion, 15 times higher than that in the last decade.
Together with the increased demand for experience tourism, outside assistance and participation facilitated the inauguration of new tourism types, including CBT, in Vietnam in the 2000s (Ngo et al., 2019). Such initiatives feature a new tourism experience aimed at attracting visitors and, ultimately, are highly profitable.

Later, the Tourism Law was enacted in 2005 as a turning point for tourism development in Vietnam. A series of tourism policies and regulations was launched. The 2006–2010 NAPTD was developed in 2006. Vietnam was officially approved as a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) at the beginning of 2007 as a sign of global capitalist markets and tourist attractions. The NSTD during 2001–2010 emphasised the target of turning tourism into a spearhead sector and transforming Vietnam into an important tourist destination in Asia. Similarly, the 2005 Law on Tourism clearly identified tourism businesses and also signified the need for “tourism socialisation” whose ultimate goal was to “lift the country out of the underdevelopment state” (GOV, 2005). All serve the “industrialisation and modernisation” of the country (GOV, 2005) through rapid economic development and foreign currency collection. The country welcomed 4.25 million foreign visitors in 2008 compared to more than 250,000 foreign visitors in 1990 (VNAT, 2020b). A 2010 estimate recorded 28 million domestic arrivals, Vietnam’s earnings from tourism as US$4.8 billion, and that direct employment in the sector accounted for 1.4 million jobs (VNAT, 2020a). Aside from this quantifiable growth, many new business types emerged, including collective, privately owned, and joint venture enterprises. Though the role of the Vietnamese central government as an entrepreneur directly participating in the tourism sector weakened, its role as a promoter intensified. In this state, CBT-focused policies cannot be developed in isolation; instead, they must be integrated as part of a broader set of national tourism agendas.

The next milestone in tourism development, the Law on Tourism, was updated in 2017 to deal with the negative effects of tourism in the national context and to respond to current international campaigns. National strategies and tourism master plans were also gradually revised to include sustainable tourism as a key goal, rather than only focusing on the economic aspect (Truong & Le, 2016). Till 2030, the NSTD “will emphasise on sustainable and inclusive tourism development on the basis of green growth, maximising tourism’s contribution to the United Nations’ SDGs” (GOV, 2020, p.1). In 2019, tourism contributed over 9.2% to the national GDP compared to 5% in 2011 (VNAT, 2020a). The number of domestic tourists has increased 85 times, from one million in 1990 to 85 million in 2019. The total tourism receipt was $32.8 billion in the same year. Aside from various state-owned enterprises being reformed into joint-stock forms (VNAT, 2020a), “new-style” tourist cooperatives owned and managed by local communities in CBT destinations were established across the country. In this context, CBT, which is a sustainable form, has gradually become popular in both legal documents and practice. The definition of
CBT and its roles were first officially stated in Vietnam’s Law on Tourism in 2017. The establishment of the Vietnam Community-based Tourism Association (VCTC), under the direct management of the VITA, aims to connect and promote the model of CBT across the country and participate in policy advocacy meetings, which is a landmark on the road to development of CBT in Vietnam.

![Figure 3. Vietnam tourism statistics over the 1986–2019 period](Source: VNAT, 2020a, 2020b)

In brief, the development of CBT in Vietnam is closely related to the country’s political-economic transition. Before 1986, tourism was not considered an economic sector in its own right; rather, it was a “politic-in” imperative. From Doi Moi to 2004, tourism shifted from political only to a dual target. It was also gradually “marketised” and “integrated” through a series of open-door policy packages. This has led to the emergence of new types of tourism, including CBT. In the period after the 2005 tourism law was enacted, tourism became a spearhead economic sector. Thus, CBT has been integrated as a small niche in the overall mass tourism industry with a focus on attracting as many visitors and as much profit as possible. It was not until 2017 that the concept of CBT was officially integrated into the legal system to support this field in the sustainable development strategy. It is argued that this evolution captures a top-down approach characterised by the strict management of the central government. This may be in stark contrast to the original bottom-up idea of CBT in Western countries; however, this analysis goes beyond the scope of the research.

**Publication Profile**

In general, there has been immense growth in the number of CBT publications since the country’s renovation: 1986–2004 (two articles); 2005–2016 (19 articles); and 2017 onwards (38 articles) (Figure 4). The year 2000 saw the first work on CBT, which was conducted in the Sa Pa destination, internationally published in...
the journal of *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* by two foreign authors, Michaud and Turner. It took four years to publish the next work on CBT, and this was also a work written by two international experts, Lask and Herold, who used a neutral “Observation Station” model to call local research units to oversee the implementation of the local tourism plan. Although the number of articles on CBT has increased gradually, this volume has not been evenly distributed over the years. Indeed, while the average publication volume was less than five articles per year until 2016, nearly two-thirds (38 articles) were written in the 2017–2020 period.

![Figure 4](image)

**Figure 4.** The number of CBT publications in Vietnam in the 1986–2020 period

In addition to the number of publications, some attributes of the articles, including subject area and journal category, were used for further analysis. These criteria were deduced from the journal’s descriptions using WoS and Scimago academic databases, as suggested by De Jong et al. (2018). As a result, it was found that prior to 2005, there were only two categories of tourism, leisure, and hospitality management (TLHM), and geography, planning, and development (GPD); however, research in recent years has become more diverse with 11 subject categories. This reveals that despite being interdisciplinary, published CBT studies are explicitly driven by a small number of sub-disciplines. However, TLHM and GPD still largely prevail, accounting for 40.98% and 21.31% of subject categories, respectively, compared with others, such as archaeology (one article), forestry (one article), sociology and political science (three articles). In more than a third of the century, 42 peer-reviewed academic journals were selected for publication. Among
these, the three journals with the highest number of articles were *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* (five articles), *Annals of Tourism Research*, and *Current Issues in Tourism* (three articles each).

**Methodological Designs and Research Distributions**

By using the “word count” technique, the data revealed the dominance of qualitative research with more than a half (52.5%), followed by quantitative literature with 32.2%; a small segment (15.3%) used mixed method (Table 2). In the largest segment, the articles were mostly focused on in-depth face-to-face interviews and household surveys, combined with personal field observations (17 out of 31 or 54.8%), with interest, although less evident, in ethnography/phenomenology and historical-political analysis. Notably, most early-stage studies used qualitative techniques, while mixed and quantitative methods have been applied frequently in recent years. Factor analysis, including ANOVA and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), prevailed among quantitative publications.

The results also indicate the overwhelmingly dominant trend of case studies (94.9%), compared with a relatively smaller subset of the dataset (5.1%) that could be categorised as conceptual studies, as it aims to analyse relevant policy and/or theoretical aspects. Within the case study research, Sapa, a small mountainous town in north-western Vietnam, is the most attractive destination for tourism scholars with 10 papers, followed by six articles on Hoian city (central part); Hue former capital (central part), Halong Bay (northeast), and Phu Quoc island (Mekong delta) share four papers each. The results also reveal that out of 59 papers, 13 and 11 studies were conducted on world heritage sites and protected areas/national parks, respectively. One-third (32.2%, 19 papers) of tourism research refers to ethnic minority communities. As is apparent from this result, the majority of tourism scholars are interested in famous tourist destinations in Vietnam, especially in the central areas (e.g., Hoian city or Halong Bay); very few studies have been conducted in the periphery and less well-known regions, with a few exceptions, such as CBT in the Dong Van Karst Plateau Geopark (Powell et al., 2018) and Khmer cultural tourism in the Mekong Delta (Long, 2020). The results reveal that the treatises and theoretical underpinnings implied in the context of Vietnam’s CBT studies are not relatively common (83.1%), though there are a few (e.g., game theory or social exchange theory).

Over the last 35 years, most CBT studies in Vietnam have been conducted by Western scholars and co-authors (38.9% and 37.2%, respectively), whereas only 14 articles were independently written by Vietnamese academics. However, only Vietnamese scholars have increased their presence, especially in the latest phase, indicating that some level of academic localisation is taking place. With regard to authorship, 131 authors from 95 institutions have contributed to 59 articles. These
authors are clustered into three groups: one-time authors (contributing to only one paper) are dominant at 87.8%; moderately contributing authors with two to three papers, occupying 10.8%; and only two Vietnamese authors (Truong, D. V. and Vu, M. H.) contributed intensely (1.4%), with four papers each.

Table 2. Methodological approaches and distributions

<table>
<thead>
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<td>(or not clear)</td>
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<td>(100.0)</td>
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<tr>
<td>approaches</td>
<td>Others (multi-</td>
<td>1 (14.2)</td>
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<sup>a</sup>Note: Values on the right and below the parentheses are the comparison percentages in the same horizontal and vertical categories, respectively.
Three main perspectives emerged

After familiarisation with the database, we performed coding and theme identification, which were manually conducted through active re-reading of each article and the repetition of the process. It should be noted that this analysis is data-driven rather than inductive, which means that the process of determining the main point of view did not rely on any pre-existing arguments (Berkovka et al., 2021). As a result, the QTA analysis gradually revealed three coherent groups in which tourism scholars shared similarities in perspectives about how CBT is theorised; “development supporters,” “protectionists,” and “community developers,” as clustered in Table 3.

“Development supporters”, accounting for the largest proportion (39 publications), consider CBT as a pro-growth approach and emphasise CBT initiatives as being a potential engine for local economic benefits, increasing jobs, and income improvement. Some authors have supported this perspective explicitly by using the terms “fast-growing economic,” “net profit,” “cash income,” and “stimulation in tourism-related business opportunities” (Long, 2020; Pham, 2020; Vu & Ngo, 2019). For example, Pham-Do and Pham (2020) used income disparity among three community groups (tourism only, fishing only, and mixed income) as the main indicator to investigate the efficiency of tourism development in Nha Trang. Others masked their economic motives with discourses on what they call “resident responsive” or “community interest” in tourism planning. In these publications, CBT issues have often been quantified through a range of socioeconomic criteria via local communities’ perceptions of the perceived costs and benefits of tourism, as influenced by the social exchange theory.

The common output among these studies is that they propose a number of solutions to improve the host’s capacity to welcome tourists and satisfy guests, to attract more visitors, increase competitiveness, and ultimately increase the turnover from tourism activities. For example, Long (2020) has argued that to improve the competitiveness of Soc Trang’s ecotourism associated with the Khmer culture, outside investors must be called on to build resorts, food services, ceremony halls, and homestays in Khmer houses. In addition, Khmer people should be endowed with tourism knowledge and skills, and willing to introduce their religious rituals to visitors. Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2018) recommended that Thai Phien villagers in Da Lat City should have a business collaboration with travel enterprises and participate in agro-tourism community business courses, not only to “appeal to both domestic and international tourists” but also to “bring economic contribution to local communities.” Suntikul et al. (2016) emphasised that organising various types of traditional festivals and establishing new museums should be encouraged in Hue City to attract more tourists and promote local cultural and historical values. Notably, 38 out of 39 CBT-advocating papers (97.5%) were published 2005 onwards, when the first law of tourism was approved; such voices were rare previously. Another finding
is that the percentage of the co-author group was the largest at 48.7%, followed by domestic-only scholars (30.8%). In contrast, few foreign authors advocated CBT as an idea for economic growth.

“Protectionists”, in turn, position CBT from a cultural critique-driven approach. This group often critiques economy-based tourism development; instead, supports a reduction or capping off tourist numbers on a small scale, and focuses significantly on preserving cultural values and respecting local norms and identity. The “protectionists” do not aim to oppose CBT; however, they have argued that the CBT programs should be strictly analysed from various perspectives to answer the important question posed by Cuong (2020) regarding whether CBT development has become more necessary than the risk of alienation or even disappearance of the long-held local cultural heritages. These scholars have tried to offer cautionary evidence that with the rapid development of tourism, socio-cultural norms, indigenous lifestyles, and the structure of the host society, particularly in unspoiled and out-of-the-way locations, have been gradually transformed or even disrupted. Michaud and Turner (2017) were prescient in advocating caution and offered a caveat that the Sa Pa marketplace, which is a traditional cultural space of the minority Hmong people, is rapidly “turning into something ever closer to a standard” trade market of the majority Kinh with a fast-growing tourist influx. Sa Pa’s current CBT has spawned unbalanced outcomes as the Kinh group has been gradually encroaching on the market space of the Hmong to serve tourism, resulting in most of the economic benefits flowing into the pockets of the former group.

Similarly, Briain (2014), based on 18 months of fieldwork in the northern region, denounced that the traditional musical cultures of ethnic minorities have been changed, commodified, and repackaged as part of the state-directed “folkloricisation” in the modern tourism programs. By using the metaphor of an overripe pineapple to illustrate the CBT situation in Hoi An heritage sites, Avieli (2015) strongly criticised that though it looks sweet and fragrant (for outsiders), those who know pineapples see the “cracks in the skin and smell the first odours of rot.” He implied that at first glance, tourism may seem to help improve locals’ lives and protect historical and cultural values; however, the truth is that, it hardly holds “material heritage” and possibly contributes to the destruction of “the old and authentic” due to modernity and greed.

Regarding authorship, though most of the protectionists are foreign authors (80.0%), a small group of Vietnamese scholars have gradually paid more attention to this critical standpoint recently. For example, Cuong (2020) used a mixed analysis of political economy and psychology, implying that although CBT ideas supposedly benefit some explicit economic values for local residents, their development definitely causes the assimilation of the ethnic minority communities and their members. The whole process of assimilation happens gradually and individually in several
consecutive generations (normally from 22 to 33 years), with initial changes in outfits, jewellery, voice, and behaviour; subsequently, “internal changes of essence,” such as emotion, belief, and even culture take place. He explained that CBT projects at the local level are mostly supported by governmental agencies and international organisations; therefore, irrespective of efficient management, the traditional and exotic identities of minority groups will ultimately disappear. In the long term, CBT ventures do not work for, or even destroy, them.

“Community developers”, meanwhile, perceive CBT from a community development-driven approach based on which some researchers perhaps consider CBT to fall somewhere between the pro-economic viewpoints and critical perspectives. Although few studies have used this approach (8.5%) and are relatively vague, the “community developers” seem to capture some important ideas regarding the concept of community development as the main premise for their analysis. They regard “development” as being synonymous with “improvement,” rather than mere “growth,” which is reflected by positive transformations, such as poverty reduction, gender equality, and community empowerment, all of which comprise both ethical and functional aspects. The advocates of this approach seek to understand the relationship between local involvement, norms, and the community’s power structures, which is a key aspect of community development first; this can, in turn, help CBT proponents “in their quest for a socially just tourism industry” (Blackstock, 2005). In this way, community empowerment and anti-oppressive, bottom-up, and community-driven approaches could be central to contemporary community development practices that would ground CBT in its larger socio-political context (Blackstock, 2005). For example, Tran and Walter (2014) first examined the context of local CBT through a gender perspective. By using the Longwe empowerment framework, the authors indicated that although Giao Xuan women have experienced increased self-confidence and become vocal in CBT activities, inequities in social class and family care as well as the problem of violence against women are serious challenges for CBT projects.

Following these findings, the authors suggested that CBT programs should provide interest-free loans or a sliding fee structure for poor members; childcare guidelines for female participants; and anti-violence training courses for both men and women. Similarly, research on the tourism-poverty alleviation linkage by Truong (2017) indicate that tourism development strategy has inadvertently made informal sectors, such as street vendors, more difficult and vulnerable. He argued that because most current tourism policies, such as the government’s ban on street vending in heritage tourism areas, ignore the voices and concerns of the non-economic sectors, it leads to reduced incomes and increased conflicts, ultimately leading to a poverty trap cycle for poor households. Thus, muted voices should be integrated into CBT development strategies at multiple levels to help them escape such
pitfalls. Occasionally, the topics on the CBT-sustainability livelihood nexus (Hieu et al., 2018), “everyday politics” and community resistance (Turner, 2012), along with tourism planning issues in world heritage sites using the core-buffer zoning framework (Jones et al., 2020) have been introduced in this portfolio. Notably, this group is dominated by either foreign-only or co-authors, and there were no Vietnamese-only papers published in this sub-field.

Table 3. Three main perspectives\(^{a}\) of how CBT is theorised in Vietnam’s tourism literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding of extracts (sub-themes)</th>
<th>Main themes</th>
<th>Named Publications</th>
<th>Periods Publications</th>
<th>Authorship information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic benefits, income and jobs, foreign exchange earnings, business and market, selling local products, perceptions</td>
<td>Economic perspectives</td>
<td>Development supporters</td>
<td>39 (66.1)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0)</td>
<td>(63.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High leakage, alienation and assimilation, cultural change and degradation, authenticity issues</td>
<td>Critical perspectives</td>
<td>Protectionists</td>
<td>15 (25.4)</td>
<td>1 (6.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(50.0)</td>
<td>(26.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community empowerment, tourism and poverty, gender and inequality issues, community resistance</td>
<td>Community development perspectives</td>
<td>Community developers</td>
<td>5 (8.5)</td>
<td>1 (20.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(50.0)</td>
<td>(10.6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{a}\)Note: Values on the right and below the parentheses are the comparison percentages in the same horizontal and vertical categories, respectively.

**Discussion**

In general, the evolution of CBT research in Vietnam has achieved certain progress by shifting from the initial research dominated by Western scholars to some level of academic localisation with the participation of Vietnamese authors in the later phase. This is, in principle, a favourable change, which suggests the development of Vietnamese domestic academia. Their knowledge production may have the potential to reflect more science-based discussions and incorporate more local contexts into policy-making. In the course of this academic localisation, however, there are two points of view that should be highlighted: first, the bias of inbound scholars and second, the contribution of outbound authors.
In the case of the former, localisation appeared in the 2000s, coinciding with the birth of CBT, when Vietnamese scholars began to pay attention to the field of CBT under the co-author form. This trend became more conspicuous in the latest phase, after CBT was officially integrated into tourism law. As shown in Table 3, most Vietnamese authors, including both co-author and domestic author forms, focused on supporting CBT as a driver for positive contributions to the local economy, and employment and income opportunities; they are seen as “development supporters.” Most Vietnamese authors continue to pursue support for the CBT under the slogan of economic efficiency. The positivist perspectives of Vietnamese writers seem to have been influenced to some degree by the rapid growth orientation of the government. However, we criticise this because CBT, by its very nature, includes more than just economic benefit-centred factors. CBT differs from mass tourism in that it requires a low density of infrastructure and services (Murphy, 1988) and should encompass joint interests, collaboration ability, and trust (Tan et al., 2022). In fact, CBT initiatives should be examined from various perspectives. Therefore, domestic authors should pay more attention to the two remaining themes of CBT: sociocultural and community development dimensions. Studies on gender and empowerment (e.g., Bui et al., 2022), community resilience in uncertain situations (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic), local governance, and relationships between intra- and extra-communities are fertile fields. Furthermore, the assimilation process models of Cuong (2020) and the core zoning framework developed by Jones et al. (2020) should be tested and continuously improved.

In this sense, the latter focuses on the role of foreign authors. This role is not only reflected in the fact that they are pioneers in the field but also in the increasing number of publications, attracting the largest number of scholars and maintaining it until now. Initially, the CPV’s renewal policy with a series of stimulus packages for world market integration spurred rapid tourism development through increased visitor numbers and income. This also led to the emergence of alternative forms of tourism in Vietnam, including CBT, in the early 2000s, as the desire for interaction and experience increased the demand for foreign visitors. However, this has raised concerns about cultural preservation and changed the socio-cultural nature of some communities in CBT sites, which stimulates foreign scholars’ advocacy of caution as “protectionists” and “community developers.” They are not opposed to CBT tourism, but seek to criticise CBT in some aspects as the germs of its own destruction. However, this criticism seems to have been ignored by government politicians so far. The government has focused on the expansion of tourism regions, improvements in local infrastructure, and intensification of promotional activities as a justification for the tourism economic portfolio, largely contributing to the nation’s economic development. For example, the overall objective of the NSTD up to 2020 and Vision 2030 (2011) states that “by 2015, the country strives to attract
7–7.5 million international visitors with a total tourism revenue increase of 10–11 billion USD, creating 3 million jobs, and contributing 5.5–6% of the national GDP’ (GOV, 2011, p.2). Similarly, the Law on Tourism in 2005 clearly signifies the need for “tourism socialisation” by encouraging the development of “tourism products in accordance with the tastes of visitors” (GOV, 2005) and all aim towards “tourism development has really become a spearhead economic sector” (GOV, 2011).

These targets imply that economic growth is the top priority, and CBT’s role in contributing to the GDP and serving as a driving force for other sectors is the most important. Therefore, other issues, including community empowerment, cultural preservation, and poverty reduction, has become secondary (Truong, 2013). Although this is true, given that the country demanded a massive amount of foreign currency for its industrialisation and modernisation (Truong & Le, 2016), this may lead foreign scholars to continue critical work aimed at changing the mindset of developing CBT. Such critical perspectives were also found in many countries worldwide in the 2000s, such as in Blackstock (2005), Goodwin and Santilli (2009), together with Scheyvens (2002).

Recently, however, the Vietnamese government has gradually recognised the adverse impacts of growth-focused tourism development strategies on sociocultural aspects and local communities, especially vulnerable groups. This has resulted in changes in the central government’s thoughts with tourism strategies focusing more on pro-community aspects. The 2017 revision law on tourism is oriented towards sustainable approaches that are beneficial for local communities as well as poverty alleviation as an affirmation of this attitude. The concepts of sustainable tourism forms, such as ecotourism and CBT, have also been integrated into law. Most recently, the overall goal of the NSTD up to 2030 stated that “tourism is really a spearhead economic sector and sustainable development” (GOV, 2020, p.2). Perhaps the increasing influx of criticism from outsiders has certainly provided at least some impetus for the inclusion of pro-community and cultural preservation rhetoric in such policy documents.

In brief, upon reconsidering the process of publication localisation in the field of CBT in Vietnam, obvious parallels with the original formation of the CBT concept and its evolution can be seen. The pre-1960s period witnessed pro-tourism perspectives with a positivist discourse (“development supporters”) as a force for positive contributions to society and economic development (Smith, 2001). However, given a series of negative impacts, such as environmental pollution, cultural degradation, and an imbalance in the flow of benefits, tourism gradually attracted a great deal of criticism and opposed mainstream tourism (“protectionists”) during the 1970s (Jafari, 2001), which continues till date. Such “counterculture” movements opened up the concepts of alternative tourism forms (“community developers”) in the 1980s, including CBT (Ibid, 2001). Similarly, Vietnamese researchers initially
supported the CBT development philosophy; however, they gradually recognised the negative side and turned to the opposing and criticising aspects. A small emerging body of literature has gradually moved into the “protectionists” class recently, in which scholars discuss more community-centred issues, and the negative effects and potential pitfalls of local CBT programs. We argue that the involvement of international scholars and their ideologies may have exercised an increasing influence over the domestic authors’ works. In the context of the four platforms (advocacy, cautionary, adaptancy, and knowledge-based platforms) in Jafari’s (2001) research as a measure of the maturity of the tourism research field, there is some evidence that the CBT publication trend in Vietnam is shifting from the “advocacy” stage to “cautionary” stand. Nevertheless, the process of publication localisation in the field of CBT research is ongoing, and even expected to progress intensively in both size and sophistication in the years ahead.

Conclusion and Implications

Conclusion

The article discusses the evolution of CBT research in Vietnam, highlighting the progress made in recent years and the challenges that lie ahead. Although CBT was a new notion in Vietnam, in a short period of time, the study of this field has progressed through several major strides. In the 2000s, Suntikul et al. (2010) worried that published research on tourism in Vietnam is relatively rare, particularly in the English language.

Over the three decades since the Doi Moi program, 59 academic publications and an uptrend in the CBT field, a small niche of Vietnam’s tourism sector, show the tremendous evolution and energetic efforts of both domestic and international scholars in integrating these insights into global knowledge volume. It has also been noted that some level of academic localisation is ongoing, with the Vietnamese domestic academia developing rapidly. Nevertheless, the aforementioned signs suggest that CBT research in Vietnam is still at the take-off phase, and there is a lot of work to be done; this, at the same time, opens up opportunities for further research before reaching a certain height. By applying the QTA method, data-driven analysis revealed three main themes in the CBT field in Vietnam: growth advocacy, critical-based, and pro-community perspectives. Although the number of articles on these perspectives have increased over time, most of them focus heavily on the first perspective, especially in domestic scholarly communities. The two latter schools of thought seem to be less frequent and dominated by outsiders; thus, future studies should strategise to rebalance these groups. Additionally, we believe that the field of CBT is landing on an initial scientific foundation, and thus, should be upscaled to higher platforms—“adaptancy” and “knowledge-based.”
The article also highlights the role of foreign authors in CBT research in Vietnam. The author notes that foreign authors have been pioneers in the field and have contributed significantly to the growth of CBT research in Vietnam. However, foreign authors have also expressed concerns about the impact of CBT on cultural preservation and socio-cultural nature of communities in CBT sites. Foreign authors advocate caution and seek to criticise CBT in some aspects, which the government has largely ignored. The author argues that the government’s focus on economic growth has led to the neglect of community empowerment, cultural preservation, and poverty reduction.

**Practical Implications**

The practical implications of the article are significant. First, the article highlights the need for a more balanced approach to CBT research that takes into account the sociocultural and community development dimensions of CBT. Vietnamese scholars should pay more attention to these aspects and conduct more research in these areas. Second, the article emphasises the need for the government to adopt a more sustainable approach to tourism development that considers the impact of tourism on local communities and vulnerable groups. The government should focus on poverty alleviation and community empowerment, in addition to economic growth. Third, the article suggests that foreign authors can play a critical role in advocating for a more balanced and sustainable approach to CBT in Vietnam. Foreign authors can continue to highlight the impact of CBT on cultural preservation and socio-cultural aspects of communities in CBT sites, and provide recommendations for addressing these concerns.

**Theoretical Implications**

The article highlights the importance of considering the sociocultural and community development dimensions of CBT in research and policy-making. It argues that CBT is not just about economic benefits but involves a range of factors that need to be considered. The article also highlights the tension between economic growth and community empowerment, cultural preservation, and poverty reduction. We outline future research directions to fill the current knowledge gaps in CBT research. Within the framework of this research, we propose two potential research trends that may serve as the starting points to achieve this goal. First, the data analysis indicates that studies on tourism planning and policy analysis remain unsatisfactory, especially in the rapid socioeconomic and political transition context of Vietnam, which requires additional research. Regarding this, the application of political economy theory (e.g., Bianchi, 2002) and policy-making process frameworks (e.g., Hall, 1994) could
be potential orientations for understanding the complex broader contexts between political, economic, and community development in tourism.

Second, CBT is usually accompanied by community participation and stakeholder collaboration (Murphy, 1985; Okazaki, 2008; Tosun, 2000). However, there are very few contributions in Vietnam looking at how local communities participate in tourism or might be introduced to it; furthermore, it has not been explained to what extent and what is their threshold limit. Perhaps a re-connection to participation theories will be especially beneficial; for example, a three-rung typology of community participation in tourism programs developed by Tosun (1999), a three-step collaboration process developed by Healey (1998), or the model of the tourism life cycle (TALC) initiated by Butler (2006) may be appropriate applications. Proceeding into the new era, especially in the modern world’s uncertain context, the lack of adept expertise and a holistic view would do more harm than positively contribute to indigenous communities and their survival. Thus, we call for a “balanced” approach domestically to enrich CBT policy and research. We also argue that the application of a slow, cautious, and well-informed progression would create effective and balanced development that will serve the sustainable goals of CBT initiatives.

Limitations and Future Research

We admit that despite applying a rigorous methodology for coding, grouping, and analysing CBT literature, this article still has its limitations. For instance, while the QTA sought to assign each article to one of the three labels/themes mentioned above, in practice, each could contain many different perspectives and various aspects of the discussion, or be multidisciplinary. Moreover, some publications were unclear about the central theme. This could have led to the final decision being affected by subjective biases of the researchers. However, some approaches were applied to minimise these limitations. For example, together with MAXQDA, a six-phase QTA process was undertaken to ensure objectivity and rigor (see Appendix 2), as suggested by Walters (2016). Additionally, the process of several repeated readings, stringing data together, revising, and repeating was conducted by all authors from the beginning until the time of submission. Another limitation is that the domestic academic publications written in native languages were not targeted for analysis. This sometimes limits the understanding of the domestic scholars of CBT. Part of the reason for this is that Vietnam does not have a scientific database system like other countries, such as J-STAGE (Japan). Future research should address these limitations.

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare.

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References


Appendix 1. List of publications


### Appendix 2. Qualitative thematic analysis (QTA) method for identifying and naming the main themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence/Extracts</th>
<th>Coding of Extracts (sub-themes)</th>
<th>Main themes</th>
<th>Named</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The impacts of tourism development on... the economic well-being of communities...residents gain the highest income when they are working both in fishing and aquaculture as previously, as well as in tourism, not when they derive their sole income from tourism.” (Pham-Do &amp; Pham, 2020)</td>
<td>Income disparity issues</td>
<td>Economic aspects (economic-oriented perspectives)</td>
<td>Development Supporters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Opportunities with high economic efficiency...this is most promising economic sector...” (Hieu et al., 2018)</td>
<td>Economic benefit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“This model could increase the city's tourist appeal”; “contribution to local economic development by creating income-generating opportunities”; “further entice tourists”; “sale of garden products, fees from tourists...” (Kusakabe et al., 2015)</td>
<td>Generating income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“...has brought little in the way of direct economic benefit to people living in resettlement villages”, “income-generating opportunities” (Rugendyke &amp; Son, 2005), “want to welcome tourists” (Long, 2012)</td>
<td>Increasing foreign exchange earnings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It helps to promote the economic development, increase foreign exchange earnings, create jobs, and improve the living standards of local people” (Long, 2020)</td>
<td>Creating jobs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Tourism sector could provide more direct and indirect jobs than traditional livelihoods.” (Nguyen et al., 2018)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence/Extracts</td>
<td>Coding of Extracts (sub-themes)</td>
<td>Main themes</td>
<td>Named</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“There is little room left for cultural distinction and local desires”; “new social spaces” in the locality, “causing frictions and tensions” (Michaud &amp; Turner, 2017)</td>
<td>Change of social spaces, local behavior and lifestyle</td>
<td>Cultural and identity critique</td>
<td>Protectionists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The ways in which tourism can transform a culture” (Di Giovine, 2009)</td>
<td>Cultural change and degradation</td>
<td>Authenticity issues in destinations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The musical cultures...have been commodified and repackaged into the rapid tourism industry...detriment to the long-term preservation of Hmong traditional musical practices...crude imitation...the staging of more faux-cultural performances” (Lonán, 2014)</td>
<td>Authentication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“Unfair competition”; “bend the truth”; “often imitated clothing” (Thomsen, 2018)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“The original disappears from sight” (Trinh et al., 2014)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Calling for the communitas’ participation under the guise of raising income and protecting them in communitas-based tourism ventures...ultimately causes the assimilation of communitas and its members” (Cuong, 2020)</td>
<td>Alienation and assimilation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“community empowerment in community-based tourism” (Tran &amp; Walter, 2014); “everyday politics” and “community resistance” (Turner, 2012),</td>
<td>Community resilience and empowerment</td>
<td>Community development</td>
<td>Community Developers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Though tourism growth is necessary, the task of poverty alleviation should be regarded as being equally important” (Truong, 2013)</td>
<td>Tourism and poverty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence/ Extracts</td>
<td>Coding of Extracts (sub-themes)</td>
<td>Main themes</td>
<td>Named</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Greater self-confidence, more involvement and voice in community activities”; “male violence directed against women and the patriarchal gender norms”; “economic inequalities in the community” (Tran &amp; Walter, 2014)</td>
<td>Gender and inequality issues</td>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Financial rewards and benefits accrue for entrepreneurs, large-scale investors, and local officials” (Michaud &amp; Turner, 2017)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Lacks competent and adequate human resources” (Hieu et al., 2020); “CBT-sustainability livelihood nexus” (Hieu et al., 2018)</td>
<td>sustainbility in tourism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>