



Promoting river cultural values in developing floating market tourism in the Mekong Delta

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Article Info

ISSN (online): 2582-7138

Volume: 05

Issue: 03

May-June 2024

Received: 18-03-2024

Accepted: 19-04-2024

Page No: 258-263

Abstract

The floating market is one of the unique and characteristic cultural heritages of the Mekong Delta people. They appeared very early to meet the goods trading needs of residents living along the river. With their unique charm and uniqueness, floating markets in the Mekong Delta have quickly become an impressive tourism product that needs to be preserved and developed sustainably. This article focuses on researching the cultural values of the Mekong Delta floating markets, the current status of exploiting these cultural values in tourism development, and proposing some solutions to promote them. This cultural value in sustainable development in the Mekong Delta region.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54660/IJMRGE.2024.5.3.258-263>

Keywords: River culture, tourism, floating markets, Mekong delta

1. Introduction

Culture is an indispensable part of human life and society, it reflects the creation and development of people's daily activities, production and social interactions. From the habits and living practices of each community in different areas, they have formed unique and distinctive cultural features, bearing distinct characteristics for each land. These cultural values also become a valuable resource in the tourism sector.

With the development of society and the improvement of human life, tourism has become an important and indispensable part of modern life. The rise of tourism is not only a reflection of prosperity but also an expression of the human need to explore, experience and learn about the world around us.

Tourism resources, including natural landscapes, cultural heritage and unique travel experiences, have become an important and valuable factor for tourism development in each country and regions. They are a source of new economic opportunities, generating income for local communities and promoting the development of related industries such as hotels, restaurants, and tourism services. Furthermore, tourism resources also help promote understanding and integration between cultures, promoting international exchange and cooperation. Therefore, preserving and promoting tourism resources is an important task to ensure that they can be used and utilized in a sustainable way, not only for the present generation but also for future generations. Hybrid. This requires special care and attention to protect the diversity of tourism resources and ensure that they are not destroyed or lost due to unsustainable tourism practices.

Vietnam is known as a country with cultural diversity with a richness and diversity of ethnic groups and regions. Each nation and region has its own unique culture and identity. Among them, the Mekong Delta is famous for its flat terrain, fertile land and interlaced rivers. The richness of nature has created unique styles and lifestyles of local residents, liberal and rich in harmony with nature. They live close to the natural environment, consider themselves a part of nature, and the floating market is one of the cultural symbols that represents this.

Nowadays, preserving and developing the culture of floating markets has become an important priority, not only to serve the goals of developing trade and tourism, but also to protect and maintain cultural identity. Unique ethnic group of the Mekong Delta.

2. Content

1. River characteristics of the Mekong Delta

The Mekong Delta is part of the Mekong Delta. This is a fertile and vast plain, with an area of about 40,640.7 km² (accounting for about 12.3% of the country's area). The delta is located adjacent to the Southeast region, to the North is Cambodia, to the Southwest is the Gulf of Thailand, and to the Southeast is the East Sea. The Mekong Delta is also known as the Southwest region, or the West for short.

The Mekong Delta includes 13 provinces and cities: Can Tho, An Giang, Dong Thap, Long An, Tien Giang, Vinh Long, Ben Tre, Tra Vinh, Soc Trang, Hau Giang, Bac Lieu, Ca Mau, Kien Giang.

The Mekong Delta is a low plain (average altitude is only about 2m above sea level), is a place with heavy rainfall (average annual rainfall is from 1600 - 1800 mm), and is also downstream. of the Mekong River, these are favorable conditions for forming a dense river network.

The Mekong Delta has a dense system of rivers and canals, including many natural river systems: Tien and Hau rivers, Vam Co river system, Cai Lon - Be Be river system, Giang Thanh river, and other tributaries. From large rivers, they branch into small rivers, such as Tien River, which branches into Co Chien, Ham Luong, Ba Lai, Cua Dai, and Cua Tieu rivers; Hau River branches out to Dinh An and Tran De estuaries, ... Along the Tien River and Hau River, there are many large and small rivers and canals connecting to the interior of the field, such as Hong Ngu canal, Can Lo canal, Ca Nai canal, Mang Thit canal, ... O Mon River, Can Tho River, Chau Doc River, So Thuong - So Ha River.

In addition, the Mekong Delta also owns an intricate canal system with a density of up to 8 - 10 m/ha. The canal system in the Mekong Delta has been mainly developed for more than a century, with the main purpose of developing agriculture and navigation. Up to now, the canal system has been woven thickly at all three levels: level 1 canal, level 2 canal, and level 3 intra-field canal. The first-level canal system plays the role of leading water directly from the main river to the fields (first-level canal connects Hau river with the West Sea in the Long Xuyen quadrangle and Ca Mau peninsula; Tien river with Vam Co Tay river in the West river region. Hau river; Tien river and Hau river). The secondary canal system has been expanded in many regions, especially rice-intensive areas along the Tien and Hau rivers, connecting primary canals together, with the task of distributing irrigation water and draining excess water to each area. in the infield. Level 3 canals (also known as intra-field canals) are the smallest canals but are the channels that directly carry water to and drain excess water from each field.

The intricate network of rivers, streams, and canals has made the living and production activities of the people of the Mekong Delta closely linked to the river element. In other words, the river element is a typical cultural feature of the Mekong Delta.

2. River cultural value in floating market tourism development in the Mekong Delta

The residents' lives associated with the river have created a unique culture of the Mekong Delta, which is the bond between people and the river and nature, such as growing rice and fishing. , or travel is mainly by boat, or monkey bridges spanning canals; The house is half on land, half on water, even the house is just a small hut in the middle of a vast river; The town here is also on the river. The floating market is a

unique feature of this area, forming river cultural values.



Fig 1: Cai Rang floating market - Unique cultural feature of Can

2.1. Floated market

Floating market is a type of market held on rivers, canals, etc. (which are usually main waterway routes). This type of market is often found in river delta areas. The market opens all day, but is usually busiest in the morning.

In the floating market, both sellers and buyers use boats as a means of transportation and movement. On the boats/boats, traders sell their goods. The main products are foods and agricultural products.

Mekong Delta Being a typical tropical monsoon country, fruits, potatoes, tubers, vegetables are very diverse and abundant, every season has its own unique agricultural products. Since then, some residents here have spontaneously formed the habit of buying and selling agricultural products in their free time or becoming a profession passed down from generation to generation. The intricate system of rivers and canals creates favorable conditions for canoes and boats to travel everywhere in the delta. Because boats and canoes can circulate freely everywhere in the delta, traders can go into every corner of the delta to buy agricultural products that farmers and gardeners sell in large quantities from their gardens. Cheap. This is the difference of the Mekong Delta compared to the whole country. In other places, due to the river system and dikes surrounding the river to prevent floods, boats and canoes cannot operate and cannot move everywhere in the delta.

In terms of origin, floating markets were born very early, associated with the living habits of people living near rivers and canals. When road traffic conditions are limited, people in river areas trade with each other mainly by boat/boat on the water, thereby forming a floating market.

The floating market operates almost spontaneously, formed by traders who have been trading on the river for a long time, along with local garden farmers and some local small traders. In the Mekong Delta, there are many floating markets, including famous floating markets such as Cai Rang, Phong Dien (Can Tho), An Huu, Cai Be (Tien Giang), Nga Nam, Tra Men (Soc Moon), Nam Can, Thoi Binh (Ca Mau).

2.2. Cultural value of floating markets

Floating markets are a form of buying and selling goods that take place based on the crystallization of the river environment and people's river trading practices throughout history.

The floating market is a colorful picture of the economy,

culture and society of the Mekong Delta. This is the place to trade, exchange and market many types of agricultural specialties of the Mekong Delta, and most are wholesale markets, only when they are almost sold out do they sell retail. And that's why the floating market often operates very early, usually at 3 - 4 am, when the sun has just risen, and it ends around 8 - 9 am.

The main goods of the floating market are delicious agricultural products of the land favored by nature. However, due to the needs of market-goers, there are not only fruit and agricultural product canoes here, but also many other services: Pho, noodles, coffee, floating pubs,... and are divided into many groups: many groups such as agricultural products, handicrafts and household goods; unprocessed and processed food groups; essential daily household goods,... Thanks to that, at the market, hundreds of boats gathered to buy and sell very bustlingly. Usually, Vietnamese boats sell fruits and vegetables; Sailing boats of Khmer people carrying and selling ca lau (terracotta stoves); Chinese raft houses sell groceries, ... Boats carry household goods and ceramics from Bien Hoa, Ho Chi Minh City, Lai Thieu; Boats carrying roofing leaves, mats, mangrove charcoal, and seafood from Ca Mau, Rach Gia.

A highlight in trading activities in the Mekong Delta floating market is the appearance of bamboo trees. Beo tree is a long pole, made of bamboo, placed at the bow of the boat/boat. On the top of the tree are hanging agricultural products that the boat sells. Customers just need to look at that pole to know what items are being sold on that boat or boat. For example, if people want to sell oranges, they hang up a few fruits Orange, when selling mangoes, hang a few mango, when selling bananas, they hang them in bunches banana, ... Beo tree became a convention, a creative feature in advertising and marketing very early in the Mekong Delta floating market. That is also the difference between floating markets and other regular traditional markets. The beo tree is considered the soul of the floating market.



Fig 2: Bac tree Unique marketing method of floating

However there are 3 exceptions

- Hang but don't sell - Those are clothes. Floating market residents often live and function right on boats, so clothes are their daily necessities.
- Selling without hanging - These are food and beverage products.
- Hang one thing, sell another - That's hanging coconut leaves but selling boats.



Fig 3: The floating market is filled with laughter

The method of trading and buying at the floating market is also very unique, showing the typical culture of the river region: gentleness, sincerity, and sincerity. People of the lake place great importance on trustworthiness, and trading transactions still remain simple, rustic, innocent, open-minded, hospitable, etc., creating a friendly and open atmosphere of the floating market. Culture and human love are what make floating market culture unique.

Trading at the floating market is also unique in the way of delivery: delivery in a "tossing and turning" style. Two boats/boats are side by side, the seller tosses goods for the buyer to catch, very rhythmically and gracefully.

The floating market is not only a place for trading and shopping, but also a place for cultural exchange, creating the traditional beauty of the Mekong Delta. The floating market is also the place where many unique chants and responses are formed between merchant boys and garden girls, who meet each other at the market, and exchange arts with chants on the vast river "Eh au eh... This trip he carried sand. Another trip he carried lime. How do you make the fate of debt drag on, today it changes, tomorrow it goes away? Will you love me forever? Please love me, oh oh oh..".

With many unique and humane cultural features, the floating market has been a model culture for the Mekong Delta river culture in particular and Vietnam in general. There have been floating markets recognized as national intangible cultural heritage, such as Cai Rang floating market. These cultural values will be impressive tourism products that need to be maintained and promoted for sustainable development.

2.3. Developing floating market tourism in the Mekong Delta

With unique cultural features, but very close and friendly, and associated with nature, the floating market has been one of the attractive tourist products, attracting many tourists. "Floating market tourism is a specialty of the Mekong Delta because it cannot be found anywhere else in Vietnam." [first] According to Nguyen Trong Nhan, floating market tourism in the Mekong Delta appeared in the 80s of the twentieth

century when domestic and foreign tourists wanted to return to nature and penetrate the lives of residents. Merchants wanted to learn about the products of the newly discovered land, thereby promoting the birth of floating market tourism in the Mekong Delta ^[4].

Currently, floating markets in the Mekong Delta have been being developed to not only promote trade but also serve tourism development. There have been many travel companies investing in vehicles and organizing floating market tourism programs. Many localities have also paid attention to preserving cultural values and finding solutions to promote floating market tourism development.

Among the floating markets that are strongly developing in tourism, there are two floating markets that are being chosen by many domestic and foreign tourists as destinations on tours when visiting the Southwest region, which are Cai Be floating market in Tien Giang and Cai Rang floating market in Can Tho.

▪ **Cai Rang floating market**

Cai Rang floating market is about 6 km from Can Tho city center, located right at the confluence of 3 rivers (Cai Rang and Hau river branches), about 30 minutes by boat from Ninh Kieu wharf.

Cai Rang floating market is a unique and typical type of market of the Mekong Delta that cannot be found anywhere else in Vietnam. This is also the most typical, busiest, and famous market for the river culture of the West.



Fig 4: Trading at Cai Rang floating market

Cai Rang Can Tho floating market is a national intangible cultural heritage.

Cai Rang Can Tho floating market was formed in the early 20th century, mainly trading agricultural products, fruits, and specialties of the Mekong Delta. Specialties, delicious fruits, low prices, along with the friendliness of merchants are attractions for tourists to Cai Rang floating market. According to a survey by the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Can Tho, in recent years, over 70% of domestic and foreign tourists coming to Can Tho have chosen the floating market as a destination not to be missed in their itinerary me.

Table 1: Total number of visitors and tourism revenue of Cai Rang floating market, period 2015 – 2019 Unit: turns/billion VND

| Year | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|--------------------------|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| Total number of visitors | 30,000 | 50,000 | 120,000 | 145,000 | 224,485 |
| Revenue | 3.38 | 5.64 | 13.52 | 16.85 | 25,30 |

Source: Can Tho Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism

The number of tourists coming to Cai Rang floating market is increasing. In 2019, the number of visitors to Cai Rang floating market increased 7.5 times compared to the previous 4 years (2015). That also means that the amount of revenue from tourism has increased 7.5 times, bringing great revenue to Can Tho.

This attraction is also seen through the event "Cai Rang Floating Market Culture" organized by the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Can Tho City in collaboration with the People's Committee of Cai Rang District from July 9 - 11. /2022 has attracted over 84,700 visitors and shoppers. Also according to the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Can Tho city, in the first 6 months of 2022, the city welcomed more than 3.1 million visitors, an increase of 55% over the same period. Of which, there were more than 1.2 million visitors, total tourism revenue reached more than 2,042 billion VND, an increase of 57% over the same period. Coming to Cai Rang floating market, visitors can experience the real life of Thuong Ho residents, immerse themselves in the bustling and joyful atmosphere of Thuong Ho, from there they will feel proud of the intangible cultural value of Thua Thien Hue. Cai Rang floating market.

▪ **Cai Be floating market**

Formed a long time ago, Cai Be floating market (Cai Be town) is one of the floating markets with unique cultural features of the Southwest region. Like Cai Rang floating market, with unique living features, Cai Be floating market is one of the attractive tourist destinations of Tien Giang in particular and the Southwest in general.



Fig 5: Busy trade at Cai Be floating market - Tien Giang

Meeting on the section of Tien River bordering the three provinces of Tien Giang, Vinh Long and Ben Tre, Cai Be floating market is one of the largest floating markets in the Southern region. The market was also formed in conditions where traffic and road vehicles were not yet developed, so when there was a need to trade and exchange, people gathered to buy and sell on the river, by means of transport such as canoes and boats. .

In the early 19th century, Cai Be floating market was very prosperous: bamboo rafts filled canals, carrying rice, dried fish, dried areca nuts and all kinds of old tree bark and mangrove trees for sale all the way to Cambodia. By the end of the twentieth century, this place became one of the largest wholesale markets in the Southern region. In its heyday, Cai Be floating market operated day and night and often followed high water levels. The market opens from 3 - 5 am until late afternoon. Goods are very diverse and rich, from fabrics,

seafood to household appliances, drinks, but the most prominent is fruit. Today, due to people's needs, Cai Be floating market not only sells fruit or agricultural products, but also dishes. Small boats weave between fruit boats, mainly selling drinks and breakfast to market goers: wet cakes, noodles, porridge, noodle soup, coffee, iced tea, etc. Vegetables and fruits run from Nha Tho intersection to Long Hai entrance. This area often has large boats with a tonnage of 5 - 10 tons from other provinces carrying goods to buy and sell. The area selling rice and bran is located separately at a section of the river.

With unique living features, Cai Be floating market is one of the attractive Tien Giang tourist destinations visited by a large number of domestic and international tourists. At one time, the number of visitors to this place accounted for about 80% of the total number of tourists traveling to Cai Be district. According to statistics in the first 3 months of 2022, Cai Be district welcomed 3,846 domestic visitors to visit, and about 3,100 tourists to Cai Be floating market. This is also a tourist destination that is heavily exploited by travel companies. Almost every travel itinerary to the West has at least one or two schedules to explore Cai Be Floating Market. Thus, floating markets in general, Cai Rang and Cai Be floating markets in particular are unique cultural resources of the Mekong Delta, and have been exploited for tourism development. However, currently, activities at floating markets are revealing many shortcomings, the development of floating market tourism is not really commensurate with its inherent potential, affecting the quality of floating market tourism and floating market conservation work. Currently, some floating markets can no longer maintain their prosperous period and are facing certain difficulties. The cause of that situation is due to many objective factors, such as: because the current road transportation system has developed, the number of boats operating on the floating market has decreased rapidly; The system of markets and supermarkets on the mainland is strongly developed; Tourism products are poor, monotonous, do not satisfy tourists and are not strong enough to retain tourists; Retail activities of agricultural products to customers have not received attention and have not met the needs of tourists; Tourism facilities at the floating market such as stops, sightseeing spots, shopping spots for goods, souvenirs, etc. have not been invested properly; In particular, lake traders do not benefit from floating market tourism activities; The state of environmental sanitation is alarming, ... Therefore, the issue of preservation and conservation is an extremely urgent issue for Mekong Delta tourism in particular, and is important in preserving the beauty of the Mekong Delta. Vietnamese national culture in general.

2.4. Promoting values for sustainable development

Over time, along with many changes and diverse forms of buying and selling and trading goods, floating markets in the Mekong Delta still retain their own unique cultural features, but have not brought High value in tourism. So how to promote and develop sustainably?

Floating markets play both a role in commercial activities and as a tourism product. Promoting the value of floating markets will improve the lives of traders and help agricultural products find consumer markets; increase connections between urban and rural areas, between localities and the international community with the Mekong Delta; In particular, promoting the value of floating markets is also a

way to preserve national cultural identity.

The issue of promoting the value of the floating market in a sustainable way, enriching and diversifying the experiences for tourists when visiting the floating market is an important issue:

- There needs to be proper investment in floating market cultural resources, turning "floating market cultural resource materials" into spiritual dishes for people and tourists; Grasp the needs and tastes of tourists to create attractive and competitive tourism products in the market: develop retail services for fruits and agricultural products; Services selling souvenirs and local specialties, ... ^[2].
- Strengthen the development of community tourism; create conditions for local people to participate in tourism activities to benefit from tourism activities, helping them have more jobs and increase their income. Activities can include: ferrying boats to take tourists sightseeing, serving meals, selling souvenirs, performing local traditional music such as amateur music, etc.
- Develop floating market tourism while still maintaining the inherent soul of the traditional floating market, a cultural beauty of the floating market: friendliness, hospitality, respect for the merchant's reputation.
- Overcome and strengthen environmental protection issues at the floating market: organize trash collection activities and salvage trash from the river; Build public restrooms to serve tourists and local people; ... ensuring environmental hygiene, creating sustainable development.
- Strengthen food hygiene and safety inspection at floating markets.
- Propagating and raising awareness for the community about tourism development associated with preserving and promoting cultural heritage, understanding that floating market cultural heritage is the foundation to promote sustainable tourism development.

3. Conclusion

The river culture of floating markets in the Mekong Delta is a priceless heritage; is a unique cultural feature, expressing the uniqueness, rich identity and humanity of the people of the Mekong Delta. That's it is a valuable tourism resource that needs to be promoted and developed.

Although there have been significant efforts to develop floating market tourism in the Mekong Delta, there is still much potential that has not been fully exploited. There are many aspects that show inadequacies in managing, developing and marketing this tourism, from limited infrastructure to lack of information and funding in the right direction. Therefore, promoting the cultural value of floating markets in tourism development requires closer attention and investment. We need to create a perfect combination between traditional cultural preservation and sustainable development. This not only helps create many new business opportunities but also enhances economic and social efficiency, improving the quality of life for local people, At the same time, it preserves the beauty of national culture.

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