

Sustainable Development of the Xoan Singing Heritage in Hung Lo Ancient Village

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Abstract: Xoan singing is a unique intangible cultural heritage of Vietnam, recognized by UNESCO as a representative intangible cultural heritage of humanity (December 8, 2017) and associated with the ancestral land of Phu Tho. Hung Lo ancient village, where Xoan singing tradition is preserved and promoted, has become a tourist attraction through organizing unique cultural performances and experiences. This article studies the current status of conservation, exploitation and development of Xoan singing for tourism in Hung Lo ancient village, evaluates the effectiveness and barriers, and proposes solutions to sustainably develop this heritage in the context of integration and socio-economic development. Research methods include field surveys, interviews with artisans, tourists and cultural managers. The results show that the combination of preserving traditional culture and exploiting tourism services has created economic value, while raising public awareness of heritage conservation and promotion.

Keywords: Xoan singing, Hung Lo Ancient Village, Phu Tho Community Tourism.

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Research Paper

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I. INTRODUCTION

Xoan singing represents a quintessential form of traditional folk performing arts indigenous to Northern Vietnam, with its origins traced back to the era of the Hung Kings, the legendary founders of the Vietnamese nation. This art form embodies not only profound spiritual and ritualistic significance but also stands as a distinctive cultural emblem, reflecting the enduring communal spirit and collective identity of the Vietnamese people.

In recent years, Phu Tho Province has placed strong emphasis on leveraging Xoan singing as a cultural asset for tourism development, aiming to simultaneously safeguard intangible cultural heritage and create signature tourism products capable of attracting both domestic and international visitors. Several heritage sites across the province have been designated as focal points for Xoan performance-based tourism, including the Hung Kings Temple National Historical Complex, Lai Len Shrine, An Thai Communal House, and Kim Dai Communal House. Among these, Hung Lo Ancient Village has emerged as the most favored destination, renowned for its centuries-old traditional houses, a 300-year-old communal house, and the Hung Lo Ancient Shrine, which preserves millennia-old historical and cultural values.

This paper endeavors to analyze the operational model of integrating Xoan singing into community-based tourism in Hung Lo Village, assess its socio-cultural and economic impacts, and propose strategic orientations for the sustainable development of this traditional performing art in conjunction with local tourism activities.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

The research team employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies as outlined below:

1. **Field Survey Method:** Comprehensive on-site fieldwork was conducted at Hung Lo Communal House, enabling direct observation of Xoan performances and related cultural activities. Additionally, the researchers participated in Xoan-themed tourism experiences to critically evaluate their visitor appeal, authenticity, and cultural resonance.
2. **Qualitative Interview Method:** A series of in-depth semi-structured interviews were undertaken with key stakeholders, including Xoan artisans, cultural heritage managers, local community representatives, and tourists. These interviews provided a rich corpus of data concerning perceptions, evaluations, and aspirations regarding the current state,

challenges, and prospects of Xoan-based tourism development.

3. **Documentary Collection and Analysis:** Secondary data sources were systematically reviewed, including Phu Tho's official reports on cultural and tourism development, previous academic studies on Xoan singing, and tourism performance reports of Hung Lo Village from 2020–2025. This literature synthesis facilitated comparative analysis and contextual validation of the current tourism practices within the study area.
4. **SWOT Analysis Method:** A SWOT analytical framework was applied to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with the integration of Xoan singing into tourism activities. The findings served as a foundation for formulating evidence-based strategic recommendations to enhance its sustainability and competitiveness.
5. **Quantitative Analysis Method:** The Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) was employed to quantify the average annual growth trajectory of visitor arrivals to Hung Lo Village for Xoan-related experiences. This metric provided insight into the long-term growth dynamics and the potential scalability of Xoan singing as a tourism attraction.

III. RESEARCH FINDINGS

3.1. Theoretical Framework

Xoan singing, an indigenous performing art of Vietnam's northern delta, was inscribed by UNESCO in 2017 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Within this context, the concept of *intangible cultural heritage* is defined as “*spiritual and cultural creations associated with a community or individual, together with related tangible objects and cultural spaces, embodying historical, cultural, and scientific values, reflecting communal identity, and continuously recreated and transmitted across generations through oral traditions, craftsmanship, performance, and other forms of expression*” (as stipulated in Clause 1, Article 4 of the Law on Cultural Heritage 2001, amended by Clause 1, Article 1 of the Law on Amendments to the Law on Cultural Heritage 2009).

This definition underscores the dynamic, living nature of intangible heritage, highlighting its continuous process of cultural reproduction, adaptation, and social transmission. In this sense, Xoan singing is not merely a performance art but also a collective memory and a vessel of cultural continuity, deeply embedded in the socio-spiritual life of local communities.

Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) Method

To quantitatively assess the long-term growth trajectory of Xoan singing-related tourism, this study employs the Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR)

model. CAGR serves as a key indicator for measuring the mean annual growth rate of a given variable—such as visitor arrivals, tourism revenues, performance frequency, or the extent of cultural tourism exploitation—over a defined temporal interval.

$$\text{CAGR} = (\text{Vi}/\text{Vf})^{1/n} - 1$$

The application of CAGR enables researchers to capture macro-level growth patterns and identify long-term sustainability trends within the Xoan singing tourism model. Moreover, it provides a comparative analytical basis for evaluating performance efficiency across different timeframes or in contrast with other forms of cultural tourism development.

SWOT Analytical Framework

The SWOT analytical model is employed as a strategic diagnostic tool to evaluate the internal and external factors influencing the development of Xoan singing tourism. This framework examines four fundamental dimensions: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats—each contributing to a holistic understanding of developmental potential and constraints.

Strengths (S): Intrinsic advantages inherent to the subject of study, including cultural authenticity, skilled artisanship, favorable geographical setting, accumulated expertise, and established heritage branding.

Weaknesses (W): Internal deficiencies or constraints, such as limited infrastructure, inadequate human resource capacity, lack of systematic management, or insufficient marketing strategies.

Opportunities (O): External enablers that create favorable conditions for development, encompassing shifting market dynamics, supportive government policies, heritage tourism trends, and growing cultural consumption among visitors.

Threats (T): External challenges that may hinder development, such as intensified competition, economic volatility, policy fluctuations, or sociocultural changes that disrupt traditional practices.

By integrating SWOT analysis within the broader research framework, the study seeks to illuminate contextual dynamics, latent potentials, and associated risks, thereby establishing a foundation for strategic planning, policy formulation, and sustainable heritage management.

3.2. Current Status of Xoan Singing Tourism in Hung Lo Ancient Village

Hung Lo is one of the most representative ancient villages of Phu Tho Province, distinguished by its over 300-year-old communal house, dedicated to the worship of At Son Dai Vuong, Vien Son Dai Vuong, and

Ap Dao Quan Dai Vuong. This communal house serves as the central venue for Xoan singing performances, welcoming visitors to experience this traditional art form during their cultural journeys to Phu Tho.

Since the implementation of the program “Xoan Singing in Ancient Villages”, initiated by the People’s Committee of Phu Tho Province in 2013, Xoan performances designed for tourism have become a cultural highlight that draws increasing numbers of visitors, particularly during major festivals such as the Hung Kings’ Death Anniversary (*Gio To Hung Vuong*).

The An Thai Xoan Guild, one of the four oldest and most authentic Xoan guilds in Phu Tho, plays a pivotal role in these performances. Prior to each show,

the artisans provide visitors with a detailed introduction to the historical origins, thematic content, and artistic significance of Xoan singing. They then present the three traditional performance phases—ritual singing (Hat Tho), interlude singing (Hat Qua Cach), and festival singing (Hat Hoi)—which together offer an immersive insight into the cultural depth and historical continuity of the art form.

Visitors not only enjoy live performances but also have the opportunity to interact directly with artisans, learn basic Xoan melodies, and experience the traditional ritual space within the centuries-old Hung Lo Communal House. Such engagement fosters a sense of authentic cultural participation and enhances the experiential value of heritage-based tourism.



The An Thai Xoan Guild performing for an international tourist delegation at Hung Lo Ancient Communal House.

According to statistics from the Tourism Promotion Information Center under the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Phu Tho Province, Hung Lo Ancient Village has witnessed a steady increase in

both domestic and international visitor arrivals for sightseeing and Xoan performance experiences. The detailed figures are presented below:

STT	Visitor Category	Năm	Number of Tour Groups	Number of Visitors
1.	International visitors	2020	7	139
2.	International visitors	2022	20	245
3.	International visitors	2023	20	344
4.	International visitors	2024	28	356
5.	International visitors	2025	27	388
Total (2020–2025)			102	1.472
1.	Domestic visitors	2020	210	7.229
2.	Domestic visitors	2022	20	745
3.	Domestic visitors	2023	124	7.410
4.	Domestic visitors	2024	282	7.898
5.	Domestic visitors	2025	136	6.760
Total (2020–2025)			772	31.332

Source: Tourism Promotion Information Center, Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Phu Tho Province (2025).

Based on the statistical data presented above, it can be observed that from 2020 to 2025, the number of international tour groups visiting Hung Lo Ancient Village increased from 7 to 27, representing a growth of 285.7%, while the number of international visitors rose from 139 to 388, equivalent to a 178.4% increase.

After 2023, the growth rate began to moderate, indicating that the market had entered a phase of stable post-pandemic recovery and consolidation.

Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) for International Visitors (2020–2025):
 $CAGR (2020 - 2025) = (388/139)^{1/5} - 1 = 22,8\%$ per year

This result shows that the average annual growth rate of international visitors reached approximately 22.8%, a highly positive indicator for the global promotion and international recognition of Xoan singing as a cultural tourism product.

International visitors accounted for 4.5% of the total number of tourists to Hung Lo Communal House during the period (1,472 out of 32,804 total visitors). Although this proportion remains relatively small, the rapid and consistent growth trend signals considerable potential for expanding the international market segment in the near future.

Domestic Tourism Trends

The total number of domestic visitors reached 31,332, which is approximately 21 times higher than that of international tourists, confirming that domestic tourism remains the primary market base for Hung Lo's cultural tourism activities.

Following a temporary decline during the COVID-19 period (2020–2021), domestic tourism recovered swiftly, peaking in 2024 with 7,898 visitors before experiencing a slight decline in 2025.

The number of domestic tour groups fluctuated significantly due to seasonal factors, tourism stimulus policies, local festival schedules, and the fact that the year-end festival tourism season of 2025 had not yet commenced at the time of data collection.

Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) for Domestic Visitors (2020–2025):

$$\text{CAGR (2020 - 2025)} = (6.760/7.229)^{1/5} - 1 = -1.34\% \text{ per year}$$

This slight negative growth rate (−1.34% per year) suggests a sign of market saturation among domestic visitors. Therefore, the development of innovative and diversified tourism products is essential to revitalize visitor interest and sustain long-term demand.

In 2024, domestic visitors accounted for 25.2% of the total number of tourists during the five-year period, while this share decreased to 21.6% in 2025, indicating a possible dispersion of tourism demand due to increasing competition among domestic destinations.

Supplementary Cultural Experiences

In addition to Xoan singing performances, Hung Lo Ancient Village has introduced traditional experiential activities, such as making *bánh chưng* (square sticky rice cakes) and water puppet shows, thereby enriching the cultural tourism experience and enhancing the overall attractiveness of the destination.

3.3. Socio-Economic and Cultural Impacts

The integration of Xoan singing heritage into tourism development in Hung Lo Ancient Village has resulted in the creation of a distinctive cultural tourism product, attracting both domestic and international visitors. The Hung Lo Community-Based Cultural Tourism Site has drawn a substantial number of tourists, thereby enhancing local household incomes, particularly for women, and creating employment opportunities in tourism services as well as in the production of OCOP (One Commune One Product) handicrafts and agricultural specialties.

However, service operations remain fragmented, and revenue from tourism-related activities is still relatively modest. In many cases, infrastructure improvements continue to rely heavily on state budget allocations. Nevertheless, in 2024 alone, the site welcomed approximately 10,000 visitors, contributing significantly to the sustainable economic development of the local community.

The inclusion of Xoan singing in tourism not only supports cultural preservation but also helps revitalize traditional practices and provides opportunities for knowledge transmission and cultural dissemination to wider audiences. Xoan artisans and performers engage directly with tourists through singing demonstrations and workshops, ensuring the continuity and vitality of this ancient art form.

Additionally, various folk games, craft-making activities, and traditional performances are harmoniously integrated into the tourism programs, reinforcing the cultural authenticity and heritage value of Hung Lo Ancient Village.

Tourists have expressed high appreciation for the immersive cultural experiences offered in the historic setting of Hung Lo Communal House, where the authenticity and emotional resonance of Xoan melodies leave a lasting impression on their visit to the ancestral land of Phu Tho.

Overall, the program has contributed to raising community awareness about the role of cultural heritage in local economic development, while effectively preserving and promoting the enduring value of Xoan singing in contemporary society.

3.4. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT)

Strengths
 Xoan singing is a unique and invaluable form of intangible cultural heritage, rich in historical and artistic significance, attracting tourists with a deep interest in authentic cultural experiences.

Hung Lo Ancient Village offers a picturesque traditional landscape, and its tourism infrastructure has

been progressively improved, facilitating cultural performances and visitor engagement.

The active participation of local artisans and community members in the preservation and promotion of Xoan singing ensures the sustainable vitality of this heritage art form.

Weaknesses

The limited number of young successor-artisans poses a risk of heritage erosion in the future without adequate policies for training and talent retention.

Promotion and branding of Xoan singing remain localized, with limited reach and recognition beyond the provincial level.

Tourism infrastructure remains uneven and underdeveloped, constraining the site's capacity to accommodate growing tourist demand. Moreover, complementary tourism resources in the surrounding area are insufficient, and activities are largely cultural in nature, lacking diversification into eco- or adventure tourism.

Opportunities

Strong governmental support through provincial and national programs dedicated to cultural preservation and promotion provides favorable conditions for further development.

Cultural and community-based tourism is gaining popularity among both domestic and international travelers, offering a market advantage for Xoan singing tourism.

The integration of Xoan singing into community tourism models offers opportunities to develop signature tourism products that appeal to diverse visitor segments, particularly international cultural tourists.

Threats

The pressure of modernization and rapid socio-economic transformation may dilute or distort the authenticity of Xoan singing if not carefully managed.

Competition with other cultural tourism destinations—both within and beyond Phu Tho Province—necessitates strategic innovation and differentiated development approaches to maintain competitiveness and cultural integrity.

3.5. Solutions for Developing Tourism Activities in Hung Lo Ancient Village in Association with Xoan Singing Heritage

Heritage Preservation and Promotion

Xoan guilds should prioritize the safeguarding of the original values of the Xoan singing heritage, ensuring the preservation of its authentic performance

spaces, lyrics, dance movements, and ritual traditions within the temples and communal houses of Hung Lo Ancient Village.

The transmission of Xoan singing to younger generations should be strengthened through community clubs, training workshops, and local educational programs. In addition, the digitization and audiovisual documentation of performances, along with the creation of an online Xoan Heritage Library, will contribute to the long-term preservation and global dissemination of this cultural heritage.

Development of Tourism Products

Encouraging the development of homestay services, craft village tourism, and local gastronomy will allow visitors to immerse themselves in the traditional atmosphere of the ancient village and engage directly with local cultural life. Such experiential tourism models not only diversify the product offerings but also promote inclusive community participation and economic empowerment among residents.

Infrastructure and Facility Improvement

Continuous investment in and upgrading of tourism infrastructure—including transportation routes, bilingual signage, and standardized sanitation facilities—is essential to improve visitor accessibility and comfort. At the same time, the preservation of the traditional village landscape—its ancient houses, wells, tree-lined roads, and village gates—should remain a priority to maintain its authentic cultural character and create a lasting aesthetic and emotional impression on visitors.

Human Resource Development

It is crucial to enhance the capacity of local human resources by organizing training programs for tour guides, interpreters, and community members involved in tourism. Training should focus on visitor hospitality, hygiene and food safety, heritage interpretation, and intercultural communication, particularly to improve interactions with international tourists. Such efforts will ensure professionalism and sustainability in the local tourism workforce.

Promotion and Partnership Development

Promotional campaigns for Hung Lo Xoan Singing Tourism should be intensified through mass media, social networks, and national and international tourism events. Building a distinctive tourism brand identity — “Hung Lo Xoan Singing” — associated with the image of the ancient village and its heritage space will enhance recognition and market appeal.

Furthermore, establishing strategic linkages between Hung Lo and other heritage sites, such as the Hung Kings Temple Complex and other Xoan guilds in Phu Tho, as well as cultural destinations in the Northern Midland region, will expand tourism networks.

Partnerships with travel agencies and tour operators should also be strengthened to make Hung Lo a regular stopover on heritage tourism itineraries to the ancestral land of Phu Tho.

IV. CONCLUSION

The integration of Xoan singing into tourism development in Hung Lo Ancient Village has demonstrated its dual effectiveness in both heritage preservation and cultural-economic enhancement in the modern era. The synergy between artistic performance, cultural immersion, and historical space has produced a unique and marketable tourism product, generating income while reinforcing local cultural identity.

For sustainable development, it is essential to continue investing in heritage conservation, artisan training, infrastructure expansion, and strategic promotion, while fostering community participation. These measures will lay the foundation for the growth of responsible and sustainable heritage tourism in Phu Tho Province, contributing to the long-term vitality of Xoan

singing as both a cultural treasure and a driver of socio-economic development.

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