

Preserving Tay traditional culture through community-based tourism: A case study of Pac Ngoi village, Ba Be, Vietnam

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ABSTRACT:

In the context of globalization and the commercialization of indigenous cultures, community-based tourism (CBT) is considered a crucial tool for simultaneously generating livelihoods and supporting the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. This article focuses on the case study of Pac Ngoi village (Ba Be, Vietnam), where the Tay community continues to preserve many traditional cultural values such as stilt houses, Then singing, the Long Tong festival, the Tinh lute, and local cuisine. The study employs a mixed-method approach combining qualitative (20 semi-structured interviews, participant observation) and quantitative methods (150 surveys) to analyze the relationship between CBT development and the preservation of Tay culture. Findings reveal that CBT in Pac Ngoi significantly contributes to cultural preservation: 72% of residents affirmed that festivals and traditional practices are better maintained thanks to tourism; 80% of homestay households retain the stilt-house architecture; and 87% of visitors reported gaining deeper understanding of Tay culture after their experience. However, challenges remain, including 22% of tourists noting the staged performance of cultural practices, infrastructure limitations (average score 3.3/5), and inequality in benefit distribution (3.1/5). These findings confirm the dual role of CBT: while it serves as a driver for safeguarding living heritage, it also carries the risk of commodification if not properly managed. The article recommends strengthening the agency of Tay communities, establishing transparent benefit-sharing mechanisms, integrating education with tourism for intergenerational transmission of culture, and investing in infrastructure aligned with landscape protection of Ba Be Lake.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Within the context of globalization and the commercialization of indigenous cultures, community-based tourism (CBT) has been recognized as a mechanism that both creates livelihoods and supports the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage among ethnic minority groups. In Northeast Vietnam, Pac Ngoi village (Ba Be, Thai Nguyen) – situated within the ecological space of Ba Be National Park and the Ba Be Ramsar Site – provides a representative case for examining the relationship between CBT development and the preservation of Tay cultural practices, including stilt houses, cuisine, indigo clothing, and Then ritual performances. From an environmental perspective, Ba Be's designation as a Ramsar Site in 2011 affirms its unique hydro-ecological karst lake value and establishes an institutional foundation for promoting sustainable tourism development in the region [19].

Culturally, the Then practice of the Tay and Nung was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (2019). This inscription not only acknowledges the heritage value but also sets expectations for tourism models linked to preservation, where the community assumes a central role in transmitting and performing heritage. Pac Ngoi, where Then remains embedded in everyday life, has thus become a focal point for research on the interaction between living heritage and cultural tourism products [19].

Theoretically, this study draws upon CBT frameworks that emphasize community participation ladders, power distribution, and social capital in tourism planning and governance [10]. This approach enables both quantitative and qualitative assessment of participation levels across product design, benefit management, and monitoring of cultural-environmental impacts, thereby explaining how CBT can (or cannot) deliver conservation outcomes [11]. Simultaneously, regional standards such as the ASEAN Community-Based Tourism Standard provide guiding principles and operational criteria (governance, economic, socio-cultural, and environmental dimensions) for assessing the standardization level of CBT destinations. Comparing Pac Ngoi's

practices against this standard helps identify policy–practice gaps and propose pathways for upgrading destination quality in alignment with cultural preservation goals [2].

At the local level, prior studies in Ba Be National Park highlight factors influencing residents' support for tourism development (e.g., perceptions of costs–benefits, distributional equity, and trust in management authorities). However, such studies seldom disentangle the mechanisms through which CBT affects Tay cultural preservation outcomes at micro-levels (households, clans, cultural troupes) and community levels (village institutions, customary rules). This research gap underscores the need for in-depth case study research in Pac Ngoi, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to trace cultural value chains in tourism products and the institutional conditions for sustainability [7].

The research objectives are: (i) to identify core Tay cultural components currently being tourismized in Pac Ngoi; (ii) to measure and interpret the extent of community participation and empowerment within the CBT value chain; (iii) to evaluate CBT's impacts on preservation indicators (practice continuity, intergenerational transmission, cultural norms); and (iv) to propose policy and governance recommendations aligned with ASEAN standards and the Ramsar - UNESCO framework. The study contributes empirical evidence from a long-standing CBT destination in Northern Vietnam, adds to international debates on CBT as a tool for safeguarding living heritage in sensitive ecosystems, and offers a practical evaluation framework for comparable destinations in the region.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1. Literature review

Globally, community-based tourism (CBT) is regarded as an important instrument for safeguarding cultural heritage while creating sustainable livelihoods for local communities [14], [6]. Studies in South America and Southeast Asia indicate that CBT not only helps maintain traditional identities but also enhances social empowerment, strengthens governance capacities, and improves household incomes [16], [9]. In Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia, CBT is often linked to the revitalization of festivals, cuisine, and traditional crafts, thereby increasing young people's engagement with heritage [8].

At the same time, a number of studies highlight persistent challenges, including cultural commodification, conflicts of interest between communities and businesses, and the risk of “staged” representations of tradition [4]. Consequently, successful models generally require substantive community participation, transparent management mechanisms, and alignment with local development policies [3].

In Vietnam, numerous scholarly works focus on the role of CBT in sustainable development and cultural preservation among ethnic minority regions. Nguyễn Thị Thuý (2016) shows that CBT in the Northwest has contributed to the revival of many folk songs and traditional crafts [10]. Phạm Trung Lương (2018) analyzes CBT as a pathway to poverty reduction [12], while Trần Hữu Sơn (2019) underscores the risk of identity loss in the absence of quality control mechanisms [18].

For the Northern uplands specifically, the study by Đặng Thị Thuý and colleagues (2020) on Lac Village (Hòa Bình) demonstrates that CBT has encouraged the participation of Tay and Thái people in preserving stilt-house architecture, cuisine, and festivals [5]. However, few in-depth studies investigate concrete cases such as Pac Ngoi (Bắc Kạn), where multiple Tay cultural values converge and have been developed into a flagship CBT destination associated with Ba Be Lake.

From this review, several points emerge:

International research emphasizes CBT frameworks and their link to cultural preservation but pays relatively less attention to the specific contexts of Vietnam's ethnic minorities. Domestic research remains largely at a general level and has yet to examine in detail how Tay communities practice cultural preservation within their lived spaces and tourism livelihoods. A significant gap lies in evaluating the effectiveness of the CBT model in Pac Ngoi—a site with strong tourism potential that simultaneously faces pressures of commercialization and cultural change.

2.2. Theoretical foundations

Community-based tourism theory

CBT is grounded in theories of sustainable development and community participation. Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation highlights the degree of community power in development decision-making [1]. In tourism, meaningful participation enhances local autonomy and mitigates dependence on external enterprises [17].

Cultural conservation theory

The rationale for conservation in tourism draws on the framework of intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2003). Activities such as festivals, folk songs, architecture, and traditional cuisine among the Tay constitute elements of “living heritage” that must be sustained through community practice. The literature on cultural sustainability further argues that culture should be preserved not merely as a tourism resource but as the bedrock of social identity [15].

Sustainable livelihoods theory

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (DFID, 1999) helps explain how communities mobilize human, social, natural, and cultural capital to develop tourism without degrading resources. Applied to CBT, the framework emphasizes balancing economic development with cultural–ecological preservation.

Proposed analytical framework

This article combines three theoretical strands: (i) community participation in CBT, (ii) safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, and (iii) sustainable livelihoods. This integrated framework clarifies the relationship between the preservation of Tay traditional culture and CBT development in Pac Ngoi, while enabling an assessment of success factors, challenges, and the overall sustainability of the model.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a case study approach in Pac Ngoi village, Ba Be district, Thai Nguyen province. Pac Ngoi is one of the most prominent community-based tourism (CBT) destinations in Northeast Vietnam, where the Tay people have preserved numerous traditional cultural values while simultaneously experiencing strong influences from tourism development.

Data collection methods

To ensure both depth and comprehensiveness, the research combines qualitative and quantitative methods:

In-depth interviews: Approximately 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted with three key groups:

- (i) Pac Ngoi residents (10 individuals),
- (ii) tourism and cultural management officials (5 individuals), and
- (iii) domestic and international visitors (5 individuals).

Quantitative survey: A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed to two primary groups:

- (i) tourists who had experienced homestays and CBT services, and
- (ii) residents directly engaged in tourism activities.

The survey used a 5-point Likert scale focusing on: tourist satisfaction, community awareness, and the level of participation in cultural preservation.

Participant observation: The researcher directly engaged in homestay experiences, cultural performances, festivals, and community activities in order to record actual practices of cultural preservation linked with tourism development.

Data analysis

Qualitative data from interviews and observations were analyzed using thematic content analysis to identify recurring patterns and key themes related to cultural preservation, community participation, and tourist experiences.

Quantitative data from surveys were processed using SPSS. The analysis involved:

- (i) reliability testing of measurement scales (Cronbach's Alpha),
- (ii) exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis (EFA & CFA),
- (iii) regression analysis to determine relationships among tourist satisfaction, community awareness, and cultural preservation outcomes.

The study adhered to ethical research principles: participants were fully informed, participation was voluntary, anonymity was maintained, and data were used strictly for academic purposes. Furthermore, triangulation across interviews, surveys, and observations enhanced the reliability and objectivity of the findings.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1. Sample description

A total of 150 valid survey responses were collected, comprising 60 local residents (40%) and 90 tourists (60%). Among the tourist group, 75% were domestic visitors (68 individuals) and 25% were international visitors (22 individuals). The average age of local residents was 39.5 years, with 52% being female. Within the tourist group, the most common age range was 20–40 years (62%), the average length of stay in Pac Ngoi was 2.1 days, and 48% chose homestays for their experience.

The sample demonstrates a relatively balanced distribution between the supply side (local residents) and demand side (tourists), ensuring comprehensive coverage for analysis. Nearly half of the tourists opting for homestays underscores the strong appeal of this form of accommodation and reaffirms Pac Ngoi's status as a valuable cultural experience destination.

4.2. Survey results

4.2.1. Reliability of measurement scales

Economic benefits (EC) recorded the highest mean score (4.18/5), indicating that the community highly values tourism's positive income effects.

Tourist satisfaction (SAT) also achieved a high score (4.20/5), confirming the attractiveness of CBT products.

By contrast, equity in benefit sharing (EQ) scored only 3.10/5, and infrastructure (INF) scored 3.30/5, reflecting challenges regarding inequality within the community and limitations in physical infrastructure.

Other constructs, such as cultural sustainability (CS = 4.02) and authenticity perception (AP = 4.12), also achieved relatively high scores.

Internal reliability was strong, with Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.77$ across all scales, ensuring suitability for subsequent factor and regression analyses.

These findings indicate that while residents view tourism as a clear source of livelihood, tourists respond positively to their experiences. However, inequitable benefit distribution and weak infrastructure remain major barriers to sustainability.

Table 1. Details of measurement reliability

Scale	Code	No. of items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach's α
Economic benefits	EC	4	4.18	0.62	0.84
Social sustainability	SS	3	3.95	0.68	0.80
Cultural sustainability	CS	4	4.02	0.59	0.86
Authenticity perception	AP	4	4.12	0.57	0.85
Infrastructure	INF	3	3.30	0.74	0.78
Environment	ENV	3	3.42	0.71	0.79
Equity in benefit sharing	EQ	3	3.10	0.76	0.77
Governance/Management capacity	GM	3	3.25	0.73	0.76
Satisfaction	SAT	3	4.20	0.60	0.83
Loyalty / Revisit intention	LOY	2	4.05	0.64	0.74

(Source: SPSS Output)

4.2.2. EFA and CFA results

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA): KMO = 0.81; Bartlett's Test $p < 0.001 \rightarrow$ data are suitable for factor analysis. Five key factors were extracted, explaining 62.4% of variance, with factor loadings ≥ 0.5 .

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA): The measurement model demonstrated strong fit indices (CFI = 0.95; TLI = 0.94; RMSEA = 0.058; SRMR = 0.046). Composite Reliability (CR ≥ 0.77) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE ≥ 0.53) confirmed convergent validity, while MSV $<$ AVE confirmed discriminant validity.

These results validate that the measurement constructs employed in the study are robust and appropriate for causal analysis.

4.2.3. Regression results

Tourist satisfaction (SAT) was most strongly influenced by cultural sustainability (CS, $\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$), highlighting that Tay cultural elements constitute the "heart" of the tourist experience in Pac Ngoi.

Economic benefits (EC, $\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$) also had a significant impact, reflecting the interlinkage between community benefits and tourist satisfaction.

Authenticity perception (AP, $\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$) played an important role, consistent with the global trend of tourists seeking authentic cultural experiences.

Infrastructure (INF, $\beta = 0.12$, $p < 0.05$) had a smaller but still statistically significant effect.

The model explained 62% of the variance in satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.62$).

For loyalty/revisit intention (LOY), only satisfaction (SAT, $\beta = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$) was a decisive factor, explaining 44% of variance ($R^2 = 0.44$).

Thus, tourist satisfaction is primarily driven by cultural, economic, and authenticity-related experiences, rather than infrastructure. This finding aligns with the nature of CBT, where culture represents the core value.

4.2.4. Perceptions of CBT and cultural preservation

Survey results showed that 82% of local residents agreed that CBT has delivered clear economic benefits, contributing to improved livelihoods, job creation, and higher incomes.

Furthermore, 72% of respondents affirmed that Tay traditional festivals—such as Long Tong, Then singing, and the Tinh lute—have been revived and better maintained through tourism. This demonstrates that CBT functions as a dual catalyst, simultaneously enhancing household economies and revitalizing the community's cultural foundations.

From the tourist perspective, 87% stated that their experience in Pac Ngoi deepened their understanding of Tay culture. Among these, 78% highly valued traditional cuisine, 65% were impressed with stilt-house architecture, and 52% expressed interest in spiritual rituals and communal activities.

These figures indicate that Tay culture is not only sustained internally within the community but also disseminated externally through tourism, thereby increasing its symbolic value and attractiveness. Pac Ngoi has effectively become a “living cultural stage” where Tay traditions are both preserved and shared with the wider world.

4.2.5. Cultural preservation practices

Survey data from Pac Ngoi residents confirmed that CBT has created favorable conditions for the continuation and revival of traditional cultural practices in daily life. Specifically, 65% of residents indicated that traditional crafts such as brocade weaving, basketry, and musical instrument making have been revitalized and now enjoy stable markets through tourist demand.

Notably, 80% of homestay households retain traditional wooden stilt-house architecture, which serves not only as accommodation but also as the “soul” of Tay cultural identity conveyed to visitors.

In addition, some households have proactively organized classes teaching Then singing and the Tinh lute to younger generations, combined with performances for tourists. These activities provide supplementary income while ensuring continuity of cultural heritage, mitigating the risk of generational rupture.

However, one notable challenge emerged: 22% of tourists reported that certain cultural activities appeared “staged.” This suggests that some rituals and practices are no longer naturally embedded but instead re-enacted for tourist consumption. Such trends risk commodifying Tay culture, reducing authenticity, and undermining long-term conservation value.

Table 2. Detailed perceptions and practices of cultural preservation through community-based tourism in Pac Ngoi

Survey content	Respondents	Percentage (%)	Interpretation
Community-based tourism generates clear economic benefits	Residents	82%	Confirms tourism’s positive impacts on income, job creation, and livelihoods.
Traditional festivals (Long Tong, Then singing, Tinh lute) have been revived and better maintained thanks to tourism	Residents	72%	Tourism acts as a catalyst in revitalizing intangible cultural practices.
Experience in Pac Ngoi enhances understanding of Tay culture	Tourists	87%	Visitors gain direct access to local cultural values.
High appreciation for traditional cuisine	Tourists	78%	Cuisine becomes a highlight of the cultural experience.
Impressed by stilt-house architecture	Tourists	65%	Traditional architecture is effectively preserved and showcased.
Interest in spiritual rituals and communal activities	Tourists	52%	Tay cultural rituals remain attractive in the modern context.
Traditional crafts revived due to tourism	Residents	65%	Products such as brocade, basketry, and musical instruments gain new markets.
Homestay households retain traditional wooden stilt-house architecture	Residents	80%	Stilt houses are regarded as the “soul” of Tay culture, serving both living and tourism purposes.
Households open classes to teach Then singing and Tinh lute to younger generations	Người dân	Not quantified	Helps ensure continuity and intergenerational transmission of culture.
Tourists perceive signs of “staged” cultural performances	Tourists	22%	Some rituals/performances appear commodified, reducing authenticity.

(Source: Survey results)

4.3. Discussion

The findings confirm that community-based tourism (CBT) in Pac Ngoi has become an essential driver not only for local economic development but also for the preservation and revitalization of Tay cultural identity. Intangible values such as the Long Tong festival, Then singing, and the Tinh lute, alongside tangible elements such as stilt-house architecture, cuisine, and traditional attire, have been restored and maintained through tourism activities. These results are consistent with international research [14], [9] as well as domestic studies [5], [10], and reinforce UNESCO’s (2003) notion of intangible cultural heritage as a form of “living practice” inseparably tied to the community.

Nevertheless, the study also highlights several challenges that must be addressed. First, the risk of cultural commodification has already surfaced: 22% of tourists noted that some activities appeared “staged,” particularly in Then performances or brocade weaving, where the practices seemed oriented toward tourist entertainment rather than authentic ritual or daily life. This trend can undermine the authenticity of Tay culture and reduce heritage to a consumable product with limited long-term value.

Second, infrastructure remains inadequate, as reflected in the average score of 3.3/5. Weak infrastructure not only hampers tourist experiences but also restricts the community’s ability to maintain cultural activities. Additionally, environmental pressures are mounting, with 41% of households expressing concern

about waste and noise pollution, which threaten the natural landscape that is deeply interwoven with Tay cultural identity.

Third, inequality in benefit distribution emerged as a pressing issue, evidenced by the low equity score of 3.1/5. Households directly involved in tourism reap disproportionate benefits, while others feel excluded. This fragmentation risks eroding the communal solidarity of the “ban–muong” system, which traditionally sustains collective cultural activities such as festivals, courting songs, and village markets.

From these findings, several implications for Tay cultural preservation can be drawn:

Strengthen community agency: Empower the Tay community to play a central role in tourism management, decision-making, and monitoring, thereby minimizing risks of commodification and ensuring that local cultural voices are respected.

Establish transparent benefit-sharing mechanisms: Develop equitable systems of benefit distribution among households and stakeholders to preserve social consensus and prevent community fragmentation.

Integrate education with tourism: Encourage younger generations to learn Then singing, brocade weaving, and traditional cooking. This dual approach meets tourist demand for cultural experiences while nurturing long-term cultural identity.

Invest in infrastructure linked with environmental protection: Infrastructure development should go hand-in-hand with safeguarding Ba Be Lake’s ecological landscape—an environment intrinsically tied to Tay culture—to secure the sustainability of CBT.

In summary, CBT in Pac Ngòi demonstrates a dual role: it is both a powerful engine for preserving Tay culture and a potential source of cultural transformation if inadequately managed. A sustainable trajectory requires balancing cultural value exploitation for economic development with the safeguarding of cultural identity to maintain the long-term vitality of the Tay community.

V. CONCLUSION

The study conducted in Pac Ngòi village demonstrates that community-based tourism (CBT) is an effective tool for safeguarding and promoting the traditional cultural values of the Tay ethnic group. Findings from surveys and interviews confirm that CBT has contributed to the revival of intangible cultural practices such as Then singing, the Long Tong festival, and traditional crafts, while also preserving tangible heritage such as stilt houses, indigo clothing, and distinctive cuisine. At the same time, CBT has provided clear economic benefits, improving both the material and spiritual lives of local residents.

However, the research also warns of potential risks, including cultural commodification, inequitable benefit distribution, and infrastructural limitations. These issues can negatively impact the sustainability of tourism development and undermine Tay cultural identity if not properly managed.

Based on these findings, the article proposes four key policy implications:

Empowering community leadership – strengthening the central role of the Tay community in tourism governance and monitoring.

Ensuring transparent benefit-sharing – establishing equitable mechanisms to maintain social consensus.

Integrating education and tourism – encouraging young generations to learn and practice cultural heritage while engaging in tourism activities.

Investing in sustainable infrastructure – linking infrastructure development with ecological protection of Ba Be Lake.

These recommendations are not only relevant to Pac Ngòi but may also serve as guidelines for other CBT destinations in Northern Vietnam, where ethnic minority heritage forms the cornerstone of sustainable tourism development.

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