

The Current Development of Cross-Border Tourism Between Vietnam and China: A Perspective from Vietnam

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Abstract

This article aims to identify the current development of cross-border tourism between Vietnam and China. The paper analyzes the perception and strategy of cross-border tourism development in the two countries, especially in the context of China's implementation of the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI). The article emphasizes that Vietnam and China have recently made efforts to promote cross-border tourism development. At the same time, Vietnam and China see cross-border tourism development as a significant part of comprehensive border cooperation between the two countries. However, the development plans for cross-border tourism between the two countries are still mainly on the desk, not yet implemented effectively. Thus, its achievements are relatively modest. Besides, the article emphasizes that the interests of the people living in the border area, especially the Vietnam side, are almost "forgotten" in the development of cross-border travel between the two countries. Besides, the article

also analyzes the challenges that the two sides are facing, especially the Vietnam side, in promoting the development of cross-border tourism between the two countries.

Key words: Vietnam, China, Vietnam - China border, tourism, cross-border tourism

1. Introduction

The Vietnam-China land border has a total length of 1,400 km, of which the land border is 1065,652 km, and the water border is 383,914 km. Both Vietnam and China are important tourism markets for each other. China is Vietnam's key source of tourists, mainly cross-border tourism. According to the leaders of the two countries, cross-border tourism cooperation has made an important contribution to enhancing exchanges and mutual understanding between border localities of Vietnam and China, contributing to cooperation between the two countries (*Vietnamtourism* 2020). At the same time, developing cross-border tourism will help improve the lives of border residents, especially ethnic minorities here. In addition, the exchange and cooperation between Vietnam and China have taken place strongly, in which tourism is considered one of the effective cooperation channels. In the context that China is strengthening its "go out" strategy, especially promoting the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI), as a result, tourism cooperation between the two countries is increasingly focused.

Theoretical framework: Tourism can function as a viable strategy for transboundary regions to overcome border-related barriers that otherwise inhibit socio-economic development and political cooperation (Prokkola, E. K. 2007). The absence of participative cross-border cooperation leads to growing competition between neighbouring areas, duplication of efforts in marketing or infrastructure development, and faltering regional innovation due to weak knowledge transfer (Ilbery, B., & Saxena, G. 2011); (Ioannides, D., Nielsen, P. Å., & Billing, P. 2006); (Stoffelen, A., & Vanneste, D. 2017); (Weidenfeld, A. 2013). Besides, Stoffelen and Vanneste (Stoffelen, A., Ioannides, D., & Vanneste, D. 2017) emphasized that several research gaps exist when it comes to explaining the note's lack of success in attempts to establish tourism governance in borderlands. First, the tourism planning literature covers border only simplicity by reflecting on territorial limitations of decision-making power. Second, studies on cross-border tourism generally concentrate on the transnational level, ignoring the fact that territorial delimitations ranging from municipal and regional boundaries to national borders all pose management complexities (Lovelock, B., & Boyd, S. 2006). Third, both cross-border governance research and cross-border tourism studies have paid sparse attention to power relations. Yet, tourism planning scholars have widely acknowledged that destination-level governance is highly politicized and involves power relations among different stakeholders, who aim at shaping the tourism system in their favour. They have shown that the distribution and use of power are key to understanding the development direction of tourism in destinations and for deducing who profits from these processes (Farmaki, A., Altinay, L., Botterill, D., & Hilke, S. 2015).

Regarding the drivers of cross-border tourism, Timothy (1995, 2005) highlights the dependence of cross-border tourism upon specific regional conditions. Therefore, these drivers are highly contextualised, but some common patterns can be observed (Timothy, D. J. 1995); (Timothy, D. J. 2005). In addition, Timothy (2005) emphasizes a set of factors influencing tourism in border contexts: First, the contrast in terms of the economic, social, and cultural amenities in the part of the borderlands that hosts tourist attraction points needs to be sufficiently high. Second, the tourist that crosses the border

will have to be equipped with enough knowledge about the amenities available in the attractive part of the borderlands. Third, potential cross-border tourists need to find enough attractions to be persuaded to undertake a cross-border shopping trip. And, finally, the border needs to be permeable enough for shoppers to cross it easily (Timothy, D. J. 2005).

Szytniewski et al. (2017) and Spierings and van der Velde (2013) denote the familiarity/unfamiliarity or similarities/differences with the foreign culture on the border as driving or impeding force of cross-border tourism, cross-border tourism development might be used not only for economic development but also to “strengthen regional images, shape identity narratives, and facilitate cross-border interactions.” (Szytniewski, B. B., Spierings, B., & van der Velde, M. 2017); (Spierings, B., & van der Velde, M. 2013); (Stoffelen, A., & Vanneste, D. 2017) However, tourism development at a border is also associated with challenges and barriers of different kinds and sources (administrative, institutional, language-and mentality-related ones, etc.), which makes it necessary for planners and policymakers to engage in “region-building” for tourism, development (Merkmann, M. 2003); (Prokkola, E. K. 2007). Besides policy approaches, Smetkowki et al. (2017) point to the strategy of developing border regions through market forces (Smetkowki, M., Németh, S., & Eskelinen, H. 2017).

According to this argument, tourism development in cross-border regions will initially be driven by low-level, or informal, activities, through the exploitation of price and tax differences, but over time turn into a more comprehensive tourist industry with a broader range of services besides shopping. It is likely to assume that this more viable tourism sector may contribute to the economic development of the border region, while its existence will still be based upon border asymmetries (Andersen, J., & O’Dowd, L. 1999).

In addition, the development of cross-border community-based tourism is also one of the criteria to evaluate the development of Vietnam-China cross-border tourism. Community-based tourism is a form of tourism where the local community has substantial control over, and involvement in its development and a major proportion of the benefits remain within the community (Denman 2001). The idea of community-based tourism mainly emphasizes the active participation and empowerment of local people in the tourism opportunity (Asker, Boronyak, Carrard, and Paddon 2010); (Nelson 2008); (Anstrand 2006); (Sharpley 2008); (Sebele 2010). The rationale for community-based tourism is the search for successful strategies for conservation and development. It consists of a moral perspective that argues that management of local people accompanied by devolved decision-making is preferable since it can be accountable and sustainable in the long term and the commercialization, monopolization, and accumulation of benefits from tourism among the local community (Mountain Institute 2000). Forstner (2004) stated that, at the local level, community-based tourism projects can contribute towards maximizing the gains from tourism. They combined the services delivered by different community members through joint planning and management hence seeking to spread the benefits of local tourism development among different households (Forstner, K. 2004).

Hatton (1999) stated that community-based tourism is one type of tourism that includes high levels of community involvement under the sustainability umbrella. This means that community members are involved in just about every aspect of tourism in their village, e.g, Lodging, food, guiding, and craft sales. It is often viewed at the opposite end of the spectrum from large-scale, all-inclusive, mass tourism resorts owned by corporations that have limited economic linkages to communities or some residents of the

local community being hired in low-skilled and low-paid jobs (Michael J. Hatton 1999). Hatton also identified several goals of community-based tourism. The first is that achieving local participation. In community-based tourism, most tourism activities are developed and operated by local community members. In addition, the revenues are directed towards the community through various potential ways, such as cooperatives, joint-venture community associations, businesses that employ local people, or the range of entrepreneurs starting up or operating small and medium-sized enterprises. The second major goal for community-based tourism is respect for local culture, heritage, and traditions. Community-based tourism can also reinforce or save local culture, and heritage, especially when the environment is part of the attraction (Michael J. Hatton 1999).

Furthermore, neopopulist approaches to tourism development emerged that assumed that bottom-up, rather than top-down, tourism development is advisable. Tourism development became more preferable through the empowerment of communities through skill, knowledge, and resources of the community. Neopopulist approaches mainly stressed the importance of increased participation of the host community in tourism development rather than it being state-controlled or market-led (Scheyvens, R. 2002). Meanwhile, Swarbrooke (1999) emphasized sustainable tourism includes an approach to tourism, which emphasizes the importance of the host community, the way tourism participants are treated, and the desire to maximize the economic benefits of tourism for the host community. The concept of sustainability embraces the environment, people, and economic systems (Swarbrooke, J. 1999).

The purpose of this article is to identify the current development of cross-border tourism between Vietnam and China. The paper analyzes the perception and strategy of cross-border tourism development in the two countries, especially in the context of China's implementation of the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI). The results of the research presented in this article are based on the desk analysis and data analysis further backed up with qualitative and quantitative research methods. Desk analysis included an in-depth review of the relevant scientific literature (books and articles) and available Internet sources. To gather the results of the relevant scientific research. The data analysis included collecting, processing, and interpreting the cross-border cooperation activities as well as the policies of the two countries toward the development of cross-border tourism. For these purposes, relevant current statistical databases published by customs, border guards, and local governments of the two countries were also used. In addition, we have also conducted surveys in areas of the Vietnam-China land border such as Mong Cai (Quang Ninh province), Huu Nghi border gate (Lang Son province), Cao Bang province, and Lao Cai province. These surveys help us better understand the current situation of cross-border tourism between Vietnam and China.

Material and methods: The results of the research presented in this article are based on the desk analysis and data analysis further backed up with qualitative and quantitative research methods. Desk analysis included an in-depth review of the relevant scientific literature (books and articles) and available Internet sources. To gather the results of the relevant scientific research. The data analysis included collecting, processing, and interpreting the cross-border cooperation activities as well as the policies of the two countries toward the development of cross-border tourism. For these purposes, relevant current statistical databases published by customs, border guards, and local governments of the two countries were also used. In addition, we have also conducted surveys in areas of the Vietnam-China land border such as Mong Cai (Quang Ninh province), Huu Nghi border gate (Lang Son province), Cao Bang province, and Lao Cai

province. These surveys help us better understand the current situation of cross-border tourism between Vietnam and China.

This article is structured as follows: the first section is a brief introduction on the research problem, as well as introduce the theoretical framework of the article. In particular, the article emphasizes that cross-border tourism cooperation is an important issue in bilateral cooperation between Vietnam and China. The second section dedicated to give a thorough discussion on perceptions and strategies of Vietnam and China toward cross-border tourism development. Vietnam has recently made efforts to promote cross-border tourism development. Vietnam and China see cross-border tourism development as a significant part of comprehensive border cooperation between the two countries. However, the development plans for cross-border tourism between the two countries are still mainly on the desk, not yet implemented effectively. Thus, its achievements are relatively modest. Next, still in the same section, the article emphasizes that the interests of the people living in the border area, especially the Vietnam side, are almost “forgotten” in the development of cross-border travel between the two countries. The fourth section analyzes the challenges that the two sides are facing, especially the Vietnam side, in promoting the development of cross-border tourism between the two countries. Finally, the article concludes by summarising all the findings.

2. Perceptions and Strategies of Vietnam and China Toward Cross-border Tourism Development

The land border between Vietnam and China is contiguous with 7 provinces of Dien Bien, Lai Chau, Lao Cai, Ha Giang, Cao Bang, Lang Son, and Quang Ninh of Vietnam with Yunnan Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region of China. Vietnam and China signed an Agreement on the management of the two countries’ land borders in 1999. This is an important basis for the two sides to promote border cooperation, including tourism. In 2011, the two countries signed the Protocol amending the Agreement and the Protocol on the Implementation of the Road Transport Agreement. Accordingly, means of transport of the two countries are allowed to pass through 7 pairs of border gates and 9 additional routes for transporting goods and passengers deep into the territory of the two countries (see Table 1).

Table 1. Pairs of border gates serving Vietnam - China transport activities

No.	Border Provinces of Vietnam	Names of pairs of border gates	Border Provinces of China
1	Lai Chau	Ma Lu Thang/Jin Shui He	Yunnan
2	Lao Cai	Lao Cai/Hekou Lao Cai/Hekou (rail)	Yunnan
3	Ha Giang	Thanh Thuy/Tianbao	Yunnan
4	Cao Bang	Ta Lung/Shui Kou	Guangxi
5	Cao Bang	Tra Linh/Longbang	Guangxi
6	Lang Son	Huu Nghi/Youyiguan Dong Dang/Pingxiang (rail)	Guangxi
7	Quang Ninh	Mong Cai/Dongxing	Guangxi

(Source: Authors’ statistics)

In 2010, Vietnam and China signed a “Tourism cooperation agreement between Vietnam and China for the period 2010-2013”. Moreover, on June 29, 2010, China issued a document: “Some opinions of the State Council of the Central Committee of the CCP on deepening the implementation of the Western Exploitation Strategy”. In which, it is clearly defined the construction of Dongxing Key Opening and Exploration Experimental Zone, which has officially been upgraded to a state-level key development strategy, it became the leading pilot zone in the opening up of the border development of China’s Guangxi (*Nánguó zǎobào* 2015). In April 2015, China also announced the Guangxi Border Development Opening and Opening Plan (2015-2020), which clarifies the “One Ring and Three Belts” plan, in which the three belts include: Economic Cooperation Belt Nanning – Fangcheng – Dongxing (China) – Mong Cai and coastal areas (Vietnam) aimed at ASEAN; Economic cooperation belt in coastal areas from Nanning - Chongzuo - Pingxiang (China) - Dong Dang (Vietnam); Economic cooperation belt in the periphery from Nanning - Jingxi (China) - Tra Linh (Vietnam). And, One Ring is the Guangxi Border Gate Economic Cooperation Ring (*Fángchénggǎng shì rénmin zhèngfǔ* 2017); (*Nánguó zǎobào* 2015). Vietnam and China also signed “tourism cooperation plan between Vietnam and the China from 2017 to 2019” in 2017, “Plan for cultural and tourism cooperation between Vietnam and China for the period of 2019 – 2021”, and “Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation in the field of cultural industry between Vietnam and China” in 2019 (*Baochinphu* 2010); (*Tạp chí du lịch* 2019).

The two sides also implemented cooperation activities within the framework of the “Two Corridors, One Belt” program proposed in May 2004, including the economic corridor Kunming (China) - Lao Cai - Hanoi - Hai Phong (Vietnam), economic corridor Nanning - Lang Son - Hanoi - Hai Phong (Vietnam), and Economic Belt: Lao Cai- Hanoi- Hai Phon - Quang Ninh (Vietnam) and Yunnan (China). In 2016, China and Vietnam issued a Joint Statement and emphasized strengthening the development of the strategic connection between the two countries, promoting the connection of the BRI of China with the “Two Corridors, One Belt” of Vietnam. To accelerate BRI connectivity with the “Two Corridors, One Belt” Plan, China and Vietnam are actively promoting the establishment of the Dongxing-Mong Cai Transboundary Economic Cooperation Zone, to lead the development in the border area of the two countries, improve the level of connectivity between the two countries. On the other hand, the two sides have also strengthened cooperation through the Pan-Tonkin Gulf Economic Cooperation Forum. This Forum is part of the “One Axis, Two Wings” initiative proposed by China in 2006. It is also an important factor in promoting comprehensive cooperation between Vietnam and China in general, including cross-border tourism cooperation.

Along the Vietnam - China border, the two sides have established 04 cross-border tourism cooperation zones such as Mong Cai - Dongxing, Dong Dang - Pingxiang, Ban Gioc - Detian, Lao Cai - Hekou. In particular, the Mong Cai - Dongxing cross-border tourism cooperation zone takes the Bac Luan estuary cooperation area as the center, this Vietnam - China bilateral cooperation nuclear zone covers an area of about 15 square kilometers, and tourists of the two countries can freely travel and shop in this area, and at the same time enjoy many border policies and preferential travel policies (Huáng Àilián 2016).

In addition, the construction of border-gate economic zones in the two countries also creates an important premise to promote cross-border tourism. Since 1996, the Government of Vietnam has started piloting the construction of the Mong Cai economic zone through the approval of a number of preferential mechanisms for this economic zone. Mong Cai border gate on the Vietnam - China border is the first area to apply some

policies of the border gate economic zone. After that, Vietnam continued to allow the pilot application of several mechanisms and policies at several border gates of Lang Son province (in 1997), Lao Cai province (in 1998), and Cao Bang province (in 1999). In 2001, Vietnam issued Decision No. 53/2001/QĐ-TTg on policies for border-gate economic zones, which apply to all border-gate economic zones, and in 2008 issued a decision to officially establish a border gate economic zone. Dong Dang - Lang Son border gate economic zone is the first, followed by Thanh Thuy border gate economic zone, Ha Giang province (in 2009), Mong Cai border gate economic zone, Quang Ninh province (in 2012), Cao Bang province border-gate economic zone (in 2014). Up to now, Vietnam has had 12 border-gate economic zones or areas where the policy of border-gate economic zones has been applied along the Vietnam-China land border.

Currently, the construction and development of border-gate economic zones have become the focus of the overall planning and many policies to support the border area of the Vietnamese Government. This will “become the hub of commerce, service, and tourism of the northern midland and mountainous region of Vietnam, the focal point of the economic corridor Hanoi - Lang Son - Nanning, Hanoi - Lao Cai - Yunnan and Hanoi - Mong Cai – Fangcheng”. In addition, the border gate economy will be a lever to develop urban areas or urban centers and residential areas concentrated along the border (*Baochinhphu* 2010).

Furthermore, on November 5, 2015, Vietnam and China signed an Agreement on Cooperation in Protection and Exploitation of Tourism Resources at Ban Gioc Waterfall (Vietnam) - Detian Waterfall (China). The Agreement took effect in June 2016 and the Decision approving the Plan to organize the implementation of the Agreement was signed by the Prime Minister of Vietnam on November 14, 2017 (*Baovanhhoa* 2019). Accordingly, the two sides have divided a certain area of Ban Gioc - Detian international tourism cooperation zone into a cross-border tourism cooperation zone between Vietnam and China.

The Chinese side is also promoting the construction of the border economic belt by promoting the establishment of 07 pilot zones for national key development in border areas. A key opening point for national development is that there are two areas located in the border area adjacent to Vietnam, Pingxiang and Dongxing areas of Guangxi. This has important implications for promoting economic development and tourism between the two countries, including cross-border tourism. In addition, Quang Ninh province and Guangxi signed a MoU on enhancing comprehensive cooperation in tourism between Quang Ninh and Guangxi. In which, it is emphasized that the two sides agree to strengthen cooperation in management and supervision of tourism activities, jointly ensure the order of the tourism market, ensure the safety of tourists, and create a healthy tourism environment; together with efforts to build Mong Cai-Dongxing border tourism to become a bright spot in the Vietnam - China border tourism cooperation.

3. How the Two Countries Promote Cross-Border Tourism Development: Achievements and Challenges

3.1. Achievements

Tourism relations between Vietnam and China in recent years have always developed in a positive direction and made much progress, including cooperation in tourism across the land border. In recent years, tourism cooperation between the two countries in general and cross-border tourism, in particular, has developed strongly. According to Chinese statistics, during the period from 2010 to 2016, the number of Chinese tourists to Vietnam

increased from 1 million to 2.68 million, an increase of 1.7 times, an average annual increase of 20%. During this time, Vietnamese tourists to China also increased rapidly, increasing from 150,000 arrivals to 300,000 arrivals, an average annual increase of 15% (Yú Hǎiyàn 2017). Nearly 5 million Chinese tourists were entering Vietnam in 2018, an increase of 23.9% over the same period, accounting for more than 30% of the total number of foreign tourists to Vietnam. In the first 4 months of 2019 alone, China is still the country with the highest number of visitors to Vietnam with 1.3 million arrivals (*Bộ Ngoại giao Việt Nam* 2019). In particular, cross-border tourism between Vietnam and China is a bright spot in tourism relations between the two countries.

Quang Ninh province (Vietnam) is considered an area with key cross-border tourism activities on the entire Vietnam-China border. Mong Cai area of Quang Ninh province, that has both land and sea borders with China, has become the area with the most favorable conditions in tourism development cooperation with Guangxi (China) market. The cooperation in tourism development between the two sides is interested in promoting, especially in the period from 2009 to the present. Meanwhile, Dongxing is the third largest land border gate in China. Since 2013, China has started allowing foreigners to do visa procedures at the Dongxing border gate, which creates favorable conditions for Vietnamese tourists to travel to China. The two sides have always maintained a good relationship of cooperation and development of border tourism with Dongxing city and Fangcheng area; the two sides had a tourism cooperation framework agreement between Mong Cai city and Dongxing city government with Jiangshan tourist resort located on the peninsula of Fangchenggang city (*Baoquangninh* 2019b).

At the same time, the two sides regularly hold talks, develop and implement cooperation mechanisms, manage border tourism activities. Every year, the two sides coordinate to organize alternately the Vietnam - China Trade and Tourism Fair in Mong Cai city and Dongxing city; effectively implement the model of welcoming Chinese tourists using travel documents to visit Mong Cai city; effectively maintain the self-driving tourist car model traveling across the border between the two countries. In particular, the operation of the “2 countries - 4 destinations” tourist route (Ha Long - Mong Cai - Dongxing - Guilin) achieved many positive results. In November 2018, the two countries marked the milestone of welcoming the 10 million tourists to enter and exit through Mong Cai and Dongxing international border gates. So far, about 70% of Chinese visitors to Quang Ninh province in Vietnam are by road, through Mong Cai International Border Gate (*Baoquangninh* 2019b).

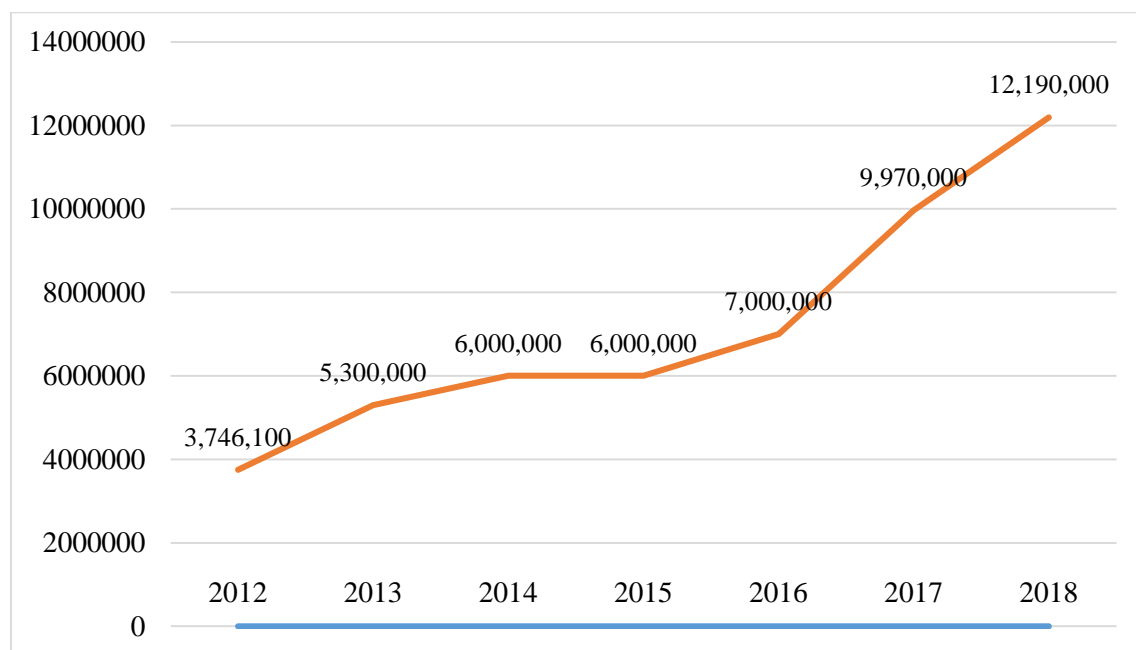
Besides, the two sides have also organized many activities to strengthen cross-border tourism routes such as Dongxing - Mong Cai one-day tour, and Dongxing - Mong Cai - Tra Co two-day tour and Dongxing - Tra Co - Ha Long Bay three-day tour. In 2015, Dongxing city and Mong Cai city, on May 17, 2015, the launching ceremony of the route “Red tourism - Following in Uncle Ho’s footsteps” and the Vietnam - China border people’s festival took place at Dongxing border gate, Fangchenggang City, Guangxi (China) - a place bearing the historical imprint of Vietnam - China relations, the starting place of the ships to support the resistance war against the US to save the country of the Vietnamese people (*Bienphong* 2015).

Since 2016, the two countries have piloted the operation of self-driving tourist cars between the two cities of Mong Cai and Dongxing through the Mong Cai international border gate. By 2018, this service continued to be extended and expanded, going deep into Ha Long city, however, the first bus between the two countries circulated to each other in June 2018. Accordingly, Vietnamese cars with 5-7 seats are allowed to

enter Guilin city, Guangxi, China, with a distance of 600 km. Similarly, China's cars can enter Ha Long city, Quang Ninh province with a distance of 180 km. On August 24, 2019, the Vietnam agreed to extend the pilot period of operation for Chinese self-driving tourist cars through the Mong Cai International Border Gate into the Ha Long city until the end of June 2020 (*Thanhnieu* 2019). During the pilot period of self-driving tourist cars through the Mong Cai border gate, there were 530 vehicles, with over 1,580 passengers entering and exiting. In which, there were nearly 500 turns of vehicles with nearly 1,500 turns of passengers entering Vietnam and 35 turns of vehicles with 106 turns of exiting vehicles (*Vovgiaothong* 2019).

Total tourists to Mong Cai in 2018 reached 2.7 million, reaching 108% of the plan, up 22% over the same period; payment to the state budget for tourism services reached 125 billion VND, up 13% over the same period (*Baoquangninh* 2019a). The Dongxing - Mong Cai border gate area in 2018 cleared more than 30,000 people a day, at the peak time it reached 46,000 people a day. In the summer of 2019, the number of people passing through the Dongxing - Mong Cai border gate reached over 30,000 times per day (see Figure 1 below) (*Chinanews* 2019).

Figure 1. Number of people passing through Mong Cai - Dongxing border gate over the years, 2012-2018



Source: The figure is based on the authors' statistics

Besides, Lao Cai province (Vietnam) is one of the localities where cross-border tourism between Vietnam and China has developed strongly. Tours departing from Lao Cai province to China are mainly short-term tours such as visiting Jianshui, Mile, and Pingbian; In contrast, tourists departing from China to Lao Cai province mainly visit the Sapa tourist area and the Lao Cai international border gate. The Lao Cai - Hekou border gate is one of the important border gate economic zones between Vietnam and China (*Baoquangninh* 2019b). Lao Cai city and Hekou district held the 16th annual meeting in 2016. At the meeting, the two sides agreed creating conditions to promote cooperation in the fields of economy, trade, culture, society, border management, and border people-to-people exchanges... (*Baolaocai* 2016). The two sides also discussed and agreed to continue exchanges and cooperation to strengthen the bilateral tourism and cultural

departments, establish a cross-border tourism cooperation zone and a border tourism pilot zone. Accordingly, the two sides also determined to hold periodic rotation on tourism talks (*Yúnnán shěng wénhuà hé lǚyóu tīng* 2016). In 2016, China's Yunnan province also launched a plan to develop and open up the Yunnan periphery (2016-2020), which emphasizes the Dian - Viet Economic Cooperation Belt with the core being the Hekou border gate as the connecting point of the Yunnan - Lao Cai - Hanoi - Hai Phong Economic Corridor. This strongly promotes cross-border tourism development (*Yúnnán xīng rénmin zhèngfǔ* 2016). In recent years, Chinese tourists to Lao Cai province have increased sharply. Every year, at the beginning of spring, about 50% of visitors to Sapa are from China (*Nhandan* 2019).

Moreover, the two sides also exploit tourist bus routes between the two countries and six destinations under the Road Transport Agreement. In addition, it is allowed to pilot the form of self-driving car tourism along with the "Two countries, six destinations" route, promote cooperation in tourism propaganda and promotion, exploit, and protect tourism resources, high-quality tourism services, building a healthy competitive tourism business environment. In addition, Vietnam also promotes the survey of locations in Honghe region (China) where the President Ho Chi Minh lived during the years 1940-1941 to study and form the tour "Red Address" (or Revolutionary relic tourism destination), survey, study and build Uncle Ho [Chi Minh]'s the memorial house at Yaochi Station, Mengzi district, Yunnan province. (*Vietnam.vnnet* 2019).

Besides, Lang Son province also strongly promotes cross-border tourism. Recently, Lang Son identified border tourism as one of the potential tourism types of this province. It contributes to promoting the general socio-economic development of this province. Due to the advantages of geographical border location, with 02 international border gates with China, and 10 border crossings with China, Lang Son has the advantage to exploit the Chinese tourist market. In recent years, Lang Son province has focused on developing infrastructure for trade and service development, so tourism facilities in the province's border gate areas have been improved. (*Baotintuc* 2019). Furthermore, on September 6, 2018, Lang Son and Guangxi organized the opening of a self-driving tourist route across the Lang Son - Guangxi border. Accordingly, Chinese self-driving cars will be allowed to visit and travel in Lang Son's Dong Dang Border Gate Economic Zone on specific roads (except for the border ring road) (*Tienphong* 2018).

In addition, the Vietnam - China International Trade Fair, which has been held annually since 2010, is also a highlight in attracting tourists between the two sides. As a result, Chinese tourists now account for a large proportion of the total number of international tourists in Lang Son province. For example, in 2018, the total number of tourists to Lang Son reached more than 2.8 million, and international visitors reached 430,000, of which Chinese tourists accounted for about 80% of international visitors to Lang Son. Every day, Huu Nghi International Border Gate welcomes from 2,000 to 4,000 visitors, peak times can be up to 6,000 visitors per day (*Tienphong* 2018).

Besides, cross-border tourism activities between Vietnam and China in provinces of Vietnam such as Cao Bang, Ha Giang, and Lai Chau have also developed strongly. These localities have also been actively completing border infrastructure and tourism services to attract more Chinese tourists, as well as Vietnamese tourists to China traveling through the border gates of these localities.

3.2. Challenges

The two sides have not yet taken effective measures in promoting the mechanism of cross-border tourism cooperation between the two countries. The implementation of cross-border tourism cooperation between the two countries is still at a primitive level, mainly taking advantage of what is already there, without in-depth development or qualitative development. Some issues about the mechanism have not been completely resolved, especially the problem of facilitation of customs clearance is still taking place slowly. In addition, tourism infrastructure has not been promoted. Tour guide quality is relatively low, tourism products between the two sides have not been innovated, lacked attractiveness...

Besides, Vietnam has so far not had an overall strategy for tourism development along the Vietnam-China border. At the same time, the development of the border areas of the two sides is unbalanced. While the Chinese side has relatively fast and early development, the Vietnamese side has a relatively slower development. This affects the coordination of cross-border tourism development between the two countries. Furthermore, customs clearance procedures between the two countries are still complicated, leading to lengthy procedures, and affecting tourism activities across the border of the two countries. On the other hand, the legal system of the two sides is still not unified, there are still many shortcomings in the coordination of bilateral economic development cooperation, including tourism activities.

In addition, the influence of historical memories on the development of cross-border tourism between Vietnam and China, especially the 1979 Sino-Vietnam War. This war caused the people of both sides, especially the Vietnam side. In addition, rising tensions in the South China Sea also have a strong impact on cross-border tourism cooperation between the two countries. These painful historical memories also have a certain influence on the development of cross-border tourism between the two countries.

Furthermore, the question is about the benefit of border residents to the expansion of cross-border economic cooperation between Vietnam and China. The economic and trade cooperation across the border between Vietnam and China is constantly growing with trade turnover accounting for about 85% of the total turnover of goods across the border between Vietnam and neighboring countries (*QDND* 2021). However, the benefits of increased economic cooperation between Vietnam and China are mainly for businesses and the state, the benefits that people in the border areas have not received much.

Finally, lack of a bottom-up approach to cross-border tourism development between the two countries. In other words, the development of community-based tourism in the border areas has not been given real attention by the two governments. From the analysis of the two countries' policies in developing cross-border tourism above, it can be seen that the two countries currently focus mainly on promoting the construction of basic infrastructure elements for the development of cross-border tourism to connect with the larger tourism network of each side.

4. Conclusion

Cross-border tourism can be considered a spearhead in the people-to-people exchange relationship between Vietnam and China. Along with the comprehensive development of bilateral relations in recent years and increasing border cooperation between the two countries, cross-border tourism relations between the two countries have developed strongly in recent years. In addition, China has stepped up its BRI connection with Vietnam's "Two Corridors, One Belt" strategy, which has made an important contribution to promoting cross-border cooperation, especially in trade and tourism.

However, the imbalance in the level of development between the two countries in the border area also creates many challenges in cooperation in developing border tourism. On the other hand, the quality of cross-border tourism between the two countries has not been improved, and cooperation in developing cross-border tourism between the two countries has not been promoted. This challenges the two countries to make greater efforts and cooperate more closely in promoting cross-border tourism in the coming time.

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