

Research on Tourists' Cultural Perception of Zhoucun Ancient Commercial Town Historic and Cultural Block

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Abstract: The continuous evolution of society has elevated human needs from basic material necessities to encompass spiritual and cultural aspirations. Against the backdrop of cultural and tourism integration, historical and cultural streets like Zhoucun Ancient Mall have seen increasing vibrancy in tourism activities. This paper synthesizes relevant scholarly research on historical and cultural districts and explores tourists' perceptions. It identifies ten key indicators to gauge tourists' cultural perception based on the cultural significance and expressive forms of Zhoucun Ancient Mall. A structured questionnaire was designed accordingly, and empirical analysis was conducted using SPSS software. The findings describe and analyze tourists' cultural perceptions comprehensively, followed by variance calculations to discern differences in perceptions across variables such as age, occupation, and gender. Identified issues include inadequate publicity, indistinct cultural distinctiveness, and inefficient spatial utilization. Finally, recommendations are proposed, emphasizing enhanced publicity, thematic enrichment, and spatial restructuring, aimed at bolstering tourists' cultural experiences and fostering the cultural tourism potential of Zhoucun Ancient Mall.

Keywords: Zhoucun ancient commercial town, historic and cultural block, tourists' cultural perception

1. Introduction

In the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China report, the significant role and importance of cultural construction were profoundly elucidated. This impetus also facilitated systematic institutional integration and continuous convergence in the tourism and cultural industries, achieving remarkable development outcomes. Research data from the China Tourism Academy indicated that in the first half of 2019, over 80% of tourists participated in cultural tourism activities, with more than 26% of them spending over one-third of their total travel expenses on cultural experiences^[1]. Even amid the COVID-19 pandemic's impact in the first half of 2021, cultural tourism performance exceeded expectations, with an increasing number of urban and rural residents engaging in spiritual and cultural consumption, willing to pay higher costs for cultural leisure.

"Historic and cultural block" refer to regions of significant historical and cultural value, serving as important carriers for cultural display and inheritance^[1]. Zhoucun Ancient Commercial Town, a unique cultural tourism resource in Zibo City and a prominent 4A-level tourist attraction, is a rare ancient commercial district north of the Yangtze River with extensive global influence. However, with ongoing social progress, increasing visitor cultural sophistication, and challenges such as indistinct cultural features, inefficient space utilization, and low product quality, obstacles to cultural tourism development persist in Zhoucun. Therefore, exploring tourists' cultural perceptions of the historic cultural district of Zhoucun under different cultural variables is advantageous. This approach can enhance the quality of cultural perception from the tourist perspective, meet the growing cultural demands of tourists, and promote the tourism development of Zhoucun Ancient Commercial Town while preserving and inheriting local cultural characteristics.

Domestic and international research on historic and cultural blocks began in 1982, with scholars examining various aspects of tourism in these areas. Biling Lan et al. (2012) noted that people from different backgrounds have varying value judgments of these districts, suggesting that assessment systems should be tailored to specific contexts^[2]. Bin Lv et al. (2013) emphasized that the definition of historic cultural districts results from the comparative assessment of cultural connections, socioeconomic factors, and residential values^[3]. In terms of tourism development, Xiaolong Ma et al.

(2005) proposed tourism development plans based on analyses of actual cases ^[4], while Jiaming Liu et al. (2010) advocated for the differentiation of tourism functional zones and the sale of innovative products, promoting a "6E Tourism Experience Model" ^[5]. Scholars have also put forward theories such as "organic renewal," "micro-circular protection and renewal," "initial healing," and "hematopoietic regeneration" for protection efforts. Different countries have adopted diverse strategies for developing historic cultural district tourism. For instance, Chang T. et al. in Canada highlighted cultural heritage tourism as a means of regional economic development. Singapore's approach focuses on innovation while balancing the preservation of physical objects with factors like municipal infrastructure and commercial atmosphere. Teo, Peggy, and others summarized the development effects of cultural heritage and found that restored traditional buildings are particularly attractive to tourists, proposing a "museumification" approach to tourism development. In the United States, the development of historic cultural district tourism emphasizes the harmonious development of historical relics, urban areas, and the environment, rather than solely pursuing economic goals.

During the study of historic cultural districts, Xingguang Ge (2000) asserted the importance of imbuing cities with "sentiments" to evoke historical memories and foster a sense of attachment ^[6]. This article adopts the most common definition: historic cultural districts are areas designated by provincial, autonomous regional, and municipal governments due to their rich heritage conservation, ability to authentically represent traditional layouts and historical features, and significant scale ^[7]. Cultural perception is fundamentally influenced by cultural factors and constitutes the cognitive process of culture. In cultural perception studies, Shuping Guo (2002) explained that cultural perception involves experiencing and understanding the external objective world through language within specific cultural contexts ^[8]. Jianchang Zhao (2010) posited that tourism fundamentally involves tourists' pursuit of destination cultures, shaping cultural perceptions in their minds ^[9].

2. Zhoucun Ancient Commercial Town: Current Status of Tourism and Cultural Overview

2.1 Overview of Zhoucun Ancient Commercial Town

Located in the eastern part of Shandong Province, Zhoucun Ancient Commercial Town is one of the five administrative districts of Zibo City. It serves as a crucial junction connecting inland areas with coastal trade routes and is renowned as the birthplace of the prominent Lu merchants. Zhoucun Ancient Commercial Town is situated in the old city area of Zhoucun, primarily comprising three ancient commercial streets: Yinzishi Street, Dajie Street, and Sishi Street, with a total area of approximately 50,000 square meters. Within the ancient town, numerous buildings from specific historical periods such as guesthouses, markets, and large residences retain their original Ming and Qing architectural styles. It stands as the sole well-preserved complex of Ming and Qing era buildings in Shandong Province and was officially designated as a historical and cultural district by the Shandong Provincial Government in 2020, with a core protected area covering 19.7 hectares ^[10]. The streets of Zhoucun Ancient Commercial Town encompass nineteen open-to-public attractions including Zongyuan Mansion, Qianfo Temple, Jintian Wushui Stele, and Daranfang, each contributing to the distinct historical charm of merchant culture, silk culture, and architectural heritage, hence earning the moniker "Living Millennium Ancient Commercial Town." In 2004, it was recognized as a National 4A-level scenic spot ^[11].

2.2 Cultural Aspects of Zhoucun Ancient Commercial Town

2.2.1 Architectural Culture

The streets of Dajie are replete with ancient relics and a multitude of shops, showcasing diverse architectural styles predominantly dating back to the Ming, Qing, or Republic of China periods, featuring traditional blue-brick and wooden structures. Since its establishment as a port in 1904, merchants from various regions have converged here, bringing with them architectural influences from their hometowns. The streets exhibit a blend of Huizhou, Jinan, and European styles, amalgamating Eastern and Western aesthetics to evoke the lingering charm of the Ming and Qing dynasties. Zhoucun Ancient Commercial Town stands as the sole relatively intact complex of Ming and Qing-era commercial buildings in northern Jiangsu, aptly referred to as the "China's Living Museum of Ancient Commercial Streets."

2.2.2 Lu Merchant Culture

Emerging as a pivotal hub of commerce due to its strategic location, Zhoucun became one of the four major inland ports during the late Ming and early Qing periods. Approval by the Qing government in 1904 and the subsequent opening of the Jiaozhou-Jinan Railway transformed it into a pivotal town renowned as "the gathering place of the world's goods." As a testament to its prosperity, Zhoucun Ancient Commercial Town once hosted over 5,100 businesses and accumulated a total capital of 6.5 million taels of silver in its heyday, surpassing the total for the entire province. In 2010, the China Business History Society awarded Zhoucun the honorary title of "Origin of Lu Merchants in China."

2.2.3 Silk Culture

Known as the "Home of Silk," Zhoucun is one of the earliest centers of sericulture in China. Within Zhoucun Ancient Commercial Town, the ancient Silk Market and Chou Market still preserve the unique ancient Chinese silk professional streets. According to "Shangshu and Yugong," records of Zhoucun's silk culture date back a millennium. Today, silk culture in Zhoucun continues to innovate and develop, injecting continuous vitality into the silk industry through initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative.

2.2.4 Religious Culture

Zhoucun hosts numerous temple fairs, notably held at Qianfo Pavilion within the Ancient Commercial Town. Festivities such as the March 15th worship of Tai'an Grandmother, April 8th worship of Guanyin, and July 15th tribute to Houji attract merchants of various faiths, facilitating exchanges and trade, and providing rich data for the study of local religious culture.

2.2.5 Culinary Culture

Zhoucun's crispy and aromatic Shaobing, paper-thin with sesame seeds on one side and crispy pores on the other, has roots dating back to the sale of "Hu Bings" in Shandong in 160 AD, with the "Hu Bing Oven" entering Zhoucun during the mid-Ming Dynasty. The continuous improvements by local bakers led to the current Shaobing's creation. It was officially named "Zhoucun Shaobing" in 1979 and listed in the national intangible cultural heritage directory in 2007.

2.2.6 Celebrity Culture

Besides its strategic location, Zhoucun's status as a renowned commercial center owes much to local celebrities and officials' efforts. Notable figures such as Sanyi Sheng, who rescued King Zhou Wen, strategist Zhao Hu, founder of the Lingling School Chen Zhongzi, Taoist Bai Tugong, and the filial son Dong Yong, all left behind vivid stories reflecting ideals of honesty, integrity, and diligence, resonating widely with the populace.

2.2.7 Festival Culture

Zhoucun Ancient Commercial Town annually hosts cultural festivals, featuring traditional celebrations such as cheongsam shows, Hanfu exhibitions, lantern festivals, and folk performances during holidays. The CCTV program "Traveling Across China" featured a special episode "Entering Zhoucun," showcasing local cultural specialties, conducting product exhibitions, and inviting folk artists.

2.2.8 Xinzi Culture

Zhoucun Xinzi is a comprehensive form of folk art integrating handicraft techniques, silk culture, and local stories. Originating from the Ming and Qing periods, it evolved from influences such as stilts, acrobatics, and yangge dancing. Performances often recreate classic scenes from the locally popular drama "Daranfang" or draw inspiration from legends and theatrical traditions. In June 2008, it was listed in the second batch of "National Intangible Cultural Heritage."

2.2.9 Opera Culture

Originally known as Zhouguzi Opera, Wuyin Opera was named after a nun named Zhou who was skilled in singing folk tunes and wandered to beg. Gradually spreading and undergoing professional transformation, it evolved into the "Zhouguzi Opera Troupe," represented by popular works such as "The Tooth Grinder," "Mother-in-Law's Back Talk," and "Wang Xiaogan." Highly acclaimed by the masses, the master of Wuyin Taiyin, Xian Yingtao, was invited to perform in Beijing and was received by Chairman Mao and other leaders. It was officially renamed "Wuyin Opera" in 2006 and was listed in the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage.

2.2.10 Lantern Culture

Zhoucun lanterns were popular during the Ming and Qing dynasties, especially during the Lantern Festival when every household would hang lanterns to express joy for the festival. During Emperor Qianlong's southern tour, he heard of Zhoucun lanterns and was impressed by the festivities, leading to the accolade "the number one village under heaven." Today, Zibo lanterns use silk from Zhoucun, combined with Zibo ceramics, glass, and other materials, integrating painting, music, and other art forms, giving them high artistic value. In 2014, it was listed in the fourth batch of national intangible cultural heritage.

3. Analysis of Tourists' Cultural Perception in Zhoucun Ancient Commercial Town

3.1 Questionnaire Survey

The measurement sample of the survey questionnaire consists of all tourists who have engaged in tourism activities in the historical and cultural district of Zhoucun Ancient Commercial Town. The questionnaire was distributed via the Wenjuanxing platform, starting on April 2, 2022, with a deadline for responses by April 30, 2022. A total of 242 questionnaires were collected initially. After excluding 28 invalid questionnaires (due to respondents selecting "strongly agree" or "strongly disagree" for all options, or leaving open-ended questions unanswered or irrelevant), 214 valid questionnaires remained, achieving a response rate of 88.4%. For the analysis of tourists' cultural perception measurement indicators, reliability and validity of the data were analyzed first. The collected data were examined using SPSS. Results from Table 2 and Table 3 indicate that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient exceeds 0.8, indicating high data reliability. The KMO value of 0.798, falling between 0.7 and 0.8, suggests good data validity. With both high validity and reliability, the conditions for further analysis are met.

3.2 Data Analysis

3.2.1 Analysis of Basic Tourist Information

From the survey statistics in Table 1, it is evident that the sample comprises 50.47% males and 49.53% females, indicating a nearly equal gender distribution. Regarding age, the largest proportion falls within the 21-30 age group (38.79%), followed by the 31-45 age group (31.78%), reflecting a trend towards younger tourists visiting the historical and cultural district. Educationally, the majority hold college degrees or higher (41.12%), with only 13.55% having education levels below junior high school. This indicates that tourists visiting Zhoucun Ancient Commercial Town generally have higher educational backgrounds, suggesting that its distinctive cultural heritage is more appealing to visitors with higher levels of education. In terms of occupation, the majority are company employees (31.78%), followed by government officials and employees of public institutions (18.22%) and students (16.82%). In terms of monthly income, the majority fall into the moderate to upper range, with 36.92% earning between 3000 to 5000 yuan and 31.31% earning between 5000 to 10,000 yuan. Most tourists originate from within Shandong Province, indicating a preference for short-distance travel.

3.2.2 Analysis of Specific Measurement Indicators

(1) Analysis of Overall Tourists' Perceptions

Table 1 Descriptive statistics

Names	Mean ± standard deviation	Mean 95% CI(LL)	Mean 95% CI(UL)
Culinary Culture	4.949±0.221	4.919	4.978
Opera Culture	4.911±0.285	4.873	4.949
Lu Merchant Culture	4.883±0.363	4.835	4.932
Silk Culture	4.827±0.437	4.769	4.886
Architectural culture	4.953±0.212	4.925	4.982
Religious Culture	4.949±0.221	4.919	4.978
Lantern Culture	4.379±0.812	4.270	4.487
Xinzi Culture	4.930±0.274	4.893	4.967
Celebrity Culture	4.724±0.516	4.655	4.793
Festival Culture	4.822±0.407	4.768	4.877

Descriptive statistical analysis of the data from Table 1 reveals that the mean values of the 10 measurement indicators range from 4.379 to 4.953, indicating an overall positive perception. Among

them, the highest mean value is for Ancient Architectural Culture at 4.953, followed by Shaobing Culture, Religious Culture, Core Culture, and Opera Culture, all scoring above 4.9. In contrast, Lantern Culture has the lowest perception score at 4.379, possibly related to spatial limitations in the scenic area that prevent the display of large lanterns, warranting attention.

(2) Analysis of Cultural Perception Differences among Tourists by Gender Grouping

According to Table 2 data, significant differences ($p < 0.05$) in perceptions of Lu Merchant Culture and Silk Culture exist between different genders. This indicates that male and female tourists perceive these two cultures differently. Females tend to have a higher perception of Silk Culture compared to males, while males perceive Lu Merchant Culture more positively than females. These differences may stem from varying interests influenced by gender disparities.

Table 2 Variance results for gender groups

Names	gender: (mean \pm standard deviation)		p
	Male (n=108)	Female (n=106)	
Culinary Culture	4.93 \pm 0.26	4.97 \pm 0.17	0.131
Opera Culture	4.90 \pm 0.30	4.92 \pm 0.27	0.500
Lu Merchant Culture	4.94 \pm 0.25	4.83 \pm 0.45	0.034*
Silk Culture	4.75 \pm 0.51	4.90 \pm 0.33	0.016*
Architectural culture	4.94 \pm 0.23	4.96 \pm 0.19	0.539
Religious Culture	4.93 \pm 0.26	4.97 \pm 0.17	0.131
Lantern Culture	4.45 \pm 0.66	4.30 \pm 0.94	0.172
Xinzi Culture	4.94 \pm 0.25	4.92 \pm 0.30	0.777
Celebrity Culture	4.74 \pm 0.50	4.71 \pm 0.53	0.639
Festival Culture	4.82 \pm 0.38	4.82 \pm 0.43	0.953

(3) Analysis of Cultural Perception Differences among Tourists by Age Grouping

As per Table 3 significant differences in ratings of Opera Culture and Silk Culture are evident across different age groups. Ratings for Opera Culture increase with age, with older adults having the highest perception of Opera Culture. Conversely, ratings for Silk Culture decrease with age, with older adults showing the lowest perception. This trend may be related to changes in silk quality over time.

Table 3 Variance results for Age groups

Names	age: (mean \pm standard deviation)					p
	Under 20 years old (n=24)	21 to 30 years old (n=83)	31 to 45 years old (n=68)	46 to 60 years old (n=24)	Over 60 years of age (n=15)	
Culinary Culture	4.96 \pm 0.20	4.99 \pm 0.11	4.93 \pm 0.26	4.92 \pm 0.28	4.87 \pm 0.35	0.206
Opera Culture	4.75 \pm 0.44	4.80 \pm 0.41	4.92 \pm 0.28	4.93 \pm 0.26	4.96 \pm 0.19	0.010
Lu Merchant Culture	4.96 \pm 0.20	4.90 \pm 0.34	4.90 \pm 0.35	4.71 \pm 0.55	4.87 \pm 0.35	0.136
Silk Culture	4.90 \pm 0.35	4.87 \pm 0.38	4.83 \pm 0.38	4.71 \pm 0.55	4.47 \pm 0.74	0.005
Architectural culture	4.92 \pm 0.28	4.99 \pm 0.11	4.91 \pm 0.29	4.96 \pm 0.20	5.00 \pm 0.00	0.177
Religious Culture	5.00 \pm 0.00	4.98 \pm 0.15	4.91 \pm 0.29	4.92 \pm 0.28	4.93 \pm 0.26	0.287
Lantern Culture	4.42 \pm 0.65	4.48 \pm 0.67	4.41 \pm 0.76	4.29 \pm 1.04	4.33 \pm 1.28	0.222
Xinzi Culture	4.92 \pm 0.28	4.96 \pm 0.19	4.93 \pm 0.31	4.92 \pm 0.28	4.80 \pm 0.41	0.312
Celebrity Culture	4.63 \pm 0.65	4.72 \pm 0.53	4.75 \pm 0.50	4.71 \pm 0.46	4.80 \pm 0.41	0.846
Festival Culture	4.92 \pm 0.28	4.86 \pm 0.39	4.84 \pm 0.41	4.71 \pm 0.46	4.60 \pm 0.51	0.079

(4) Analysis of Cultural Perception Differences among Tourists by Education and Income Grouping

Tables 4 and 5 indicate that tourists with different levels of education and monthly income exhibit the most significant differences in perceptions of Celebrity Culture. Higher levels of education and income correspond to greater interest and perception of Celebrity Culture.

Table 4 Variance results of educational background groups

Names	Education background: (mean ± standard deviation)				p
	Junior high and below (n=29)	High school, technical secondary school and vocational high school (n=75)	Junior college or bachelor's degree (n=88)	Bachelor's Degree or above (n=22)	
Culinary Culture	4.90±0.31	4.95±0.23	4.95±0.21	5.00±0.00	0.416
Opera Culture	4.89±0.45	4.88±0.25	4.87±0.18	4.86±0.35	0.996
Lu Merchant Culture	4.90±0.31	4.88±0.40	4.91±0.29	4.77±0.53	0.473
Silk Culture	4.76±0.61	4.78±0.37	4.78±0.37	4.77±0.57	0.997
Architectural culture	4.97±0.19	4.93±0.25	4.95±0.21	5.00±0.00	0.609
Religious Culture	4.93±0.26	4.96±0.20	4.94±0.23	4.95±0.21	0.931
Lantern Culture	4.31±1.07	4.43±0.81	4.42±0.74	4.14±0.71	0.449
Xinzi Culture	4.86±0.35	4.92±0.27	4.95±0.26	4.95±0.21	0.430
Celebrity Culture	4.36±0.73	4.69±0.54	4.74±0.51	4.83±0.38	0.003
Festival Culture	4.76±0.44	4.83±0.38	4.86±0.38	4.73±0.55	0.421

Table 5 Variance results of occupation groups

Names	occupation: (mean ± standard deviation)					p
	Under 1,000yuan (n=31)	1,000 to 3,000yuan (n=32)	3,000 to 5,000yuan (n=79)	5,000to10,000yuan (n=67)	Morethan 10,000yuan (n=5)	
Culinary Culture	4.94±0.25	4.94±0.37	4.96±0.19	4.99±0.12	5.00±0.00	0.055
Opera Culture	4.87±0.34	4.81±0.40	4.92±0.27	4.97±0.17	4.80±0.45	0.082
Lu Merchant Culture	4.90±0.30	4.84±0.37	4.87±0.40	4.91±0.34	4.80±0.45	0.885
Silk Culture	4.74±0.51	4.78±0.42	4.86±0.45	4.85±0.40	4.80±0.45	0.699
Architectural culture	4.90±0.30	4.91±0.30	4.96±0.19	4.99±0.12	5.00±0.00	0.267
Religious Culture	5.00±0.00	4.88±0.34	4.95±0.22	4.96±0.21	5.00±0.00	0.237
Lantern Culture	4.35±0.91	4.38±0.79	4.38±0.94	4.43±0.61	3.80±0.45	0.584
Xinzi Culture	4.90±0.30	4.98±0.49	4.96±0.19	4.97±0.17	4.90±0.23	0.869
Celebrity Culture	4.73±0.51	4.00±0.71	4.65±0.61	4.66±0.60	4.82±0.38	0.006
Festival Culture	4.84±0.37	4.72±0.52	4.86±0.35	4.84±0.41	4.60±0.55	0.357

(5) Analysis of Cultural Perception Differences among Tourists by Occupation and Place of Origin Grouping

In the grouping by occupation and place of origin (table 6), the p-values are all greater than 0.05, indicating that different occupations and places of origin do not lead to significant differences in tourists' perceptions of culture. This comprehensive analysis provides insights into how various demographic factors influence tourists' perceptions of cultural elements, highlighting areas where cultural promotion and visitor engagement strategies can be tailored for different groups.

Table 6 Group variance results of place of origin

Names	place of origin: (mean ± standard deviation)					p
	Within Zibo City (n=66)	Other areas in Shandong Province (n=98)	Other provinces (n=44)	Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan (n=4)	Overseas (n=2)	
Culinary Culture	4.97±0.17	4.94±0.24	4.93±0.25	5.00±0.00	5.00±0.00	0.852
Opera Culture	4.86±0.35	4.94±0.24	4.91±0.29	5.00±0.00	5.00±0.00	0.506
Lu Merchant Culture	4.83±0.48	4.91±0.29	4.89±0.32	5.00±0.00	5.00±0.00	0.679
Silk Culture	4.73±0.60	4.88±0.33	4.84±0.37	5.00±0.00	5.00±0.00	0.219
Architectural culture	4.94±0.24	4.95±0.22	4.98±0.15	5.00±0.00	5.00±0.00	0.883
Religious Culture	4.97±0.17	4.93±0.26	4.95±0.21	5.00±0.00	5.00±0.00	0.783
Lantern Culture	4.21±1.09	4.44±0.63	4.48±0.70	4.50±0.58	4.50±0.71	0.395
Xinzi Culture	4.92±0.27	4.92±0.31	4.95±0.21	5.00±0.00	5.00±0.00	0.919
Celebrity Culture	4.70±0.53	4.71±0.54	4.80±0.46	4.75±0.50	4.50±0.71	0.839
Festival Culture	4.77±0.46	4.84±0.40	4.86±0.35	4.75±0.50	5.00±0.00	0.727

4. Existing Issues

4.1 Aging of Visitor Demographics and Loss of Off-Season Advantage

Survey data indicates that visitors to Zhoucun Ancient Commercial Town are predominantly aged

between 21 to 30 years (38.79%), followed by those aged 31 to 45 years (31.78%). This suggests a trend towards younger tourists, leading to a diminishing off-season cultural tourism dividend. Younger individuals, due to commitments such as education, work, and family, tend to travel during peak seasons like holidays, exacerbating the disparity between peak and off-peak periods. This is detrimental to the development of the scenic area. Thus, enhancing attractions for "less seasonally bound tourists" and implementing off-season discount policies are recommended.

4.2 Concentration of Visitors from Limited Geographic Areas and Low Visibility

Data from surveys show that visitors to Zhoucun Ancient Commercial Town mainly come from within Zibo City and other areas within Shandong Province. This concentration is partly due to proximity, making intra-provincial travel convenient and thus focusing the core customer market locally. However, inadequate publicity and influence beyond the province mean that tourists from other provinces may not even be aware of Zhoucun Ancient Commercial Town, reducing the likelihood of visits.

4.3 Lack of Distinct Cultural Tourism Themes

Despite the rich variety of cultural tourism offerings at Zhoucun Ancient Commercial Town, the promotion lacks focus and coherence. The lack of emphasis and cohesion in advertising leads to a superficial impression of many cultural resources among visitors. According to survey analysis, significant differences in perception exist across different genders and age groups regarding perceptions of the Lu (Shandong) merchant culture, silk culture, and opera culture. This segmentation undermines effective cultural resource promotion and visitor perception.

4.4 Inefficient Use of Scenic Area Space

Data analysis indicates that the perception of lantern culture is particularly low, at only 4.379, likely due to the prevalence of small, hanging lanterns in Zhoucun Ancient Commercial Town that occupy minimal space and are easily overlooked. Larger, more elaborate lanterns could significantly enhance cultural perception among visitors. However, constraints posed by the ancient town's structural texture and inefficient spatial layout prevent their effective display and storage.

4.5 Low Quality of Goods

Perceived differences in silk culture across various age groups suggest that older visitors have higher quality expectations but perceive lower quality offerings at Zhoucun Ancient Commercial Town. This reflects a lack of stringent supervision over the production and branding of silk products within the ancient town, undermining the perceived integrity of Lu merchant culture and visitor appreciation.

4.6 Over-reliance on Static Exhibits

Development of cultural resources at Zhoucun Ancient Commercial Town primarily revolves around static exhibitions. This results in significant disparities in the perception of celebrity culture among visitors with varying educational backgrounds and income levels. Visitors with higher education and income levels tend to have broader knowledge and better cultural acceptance, while those with lower educational backgrounds may find exhibits reliant on textual and pictorial descriptions challenging to understand, thus reducing overall cultural perception.

4.7 Monotonous Cultural Souvenirs without Distinct Features

Since 2019, Zhoucun Ancient Commercial Town has begun to focus on developing cultural and creative products. However, as of now, only two shops—Liangyou Bookstore and the Clay Sculpture Story Museum—offer cultural creative goods. These ventures are still immature in their business models and lack sufficient depth in cultural exploration, resulting in low integration of culture and merchandise. The traditional cultural souvenirs such as baked goods and silk, offered in numerous stores, are characterized by a lack of innovation, high repetition, and consequently receive low evaluations and comments indicating a lack of uniqueness.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Efforts to Reverse Seasonal Trends among Tourists

To address the issue of low visitor numbers during the off-peak season at the Zhoucun Ancient Commercial City and gradually reduce the seasonal tourism dividends, several strategies can be implemented: Adjusting ticket prices during non-peak tourism periods to attract young tourists with lower prices. Developing weekend district tourism products tailored to the needs of nearby short-distance tourists. If successful, this can secure a portion of fixed customer base and mitigate the negative impacts of seasonal tourism. Meeting the cultural tourism product needs of elderly tourists, such as nostalgic tours and photography tourism, to attract more elderly tourists and diminish seasonal tourism patterns.

5.2 Market Orientation and Enhanced Promotion Efforts

Targeting the market source, it is crucial for the government and tourism developers to define the overall tourism image of historical and cultural districts. Develop complementary cultural tourism products based on visitor demand. Strengthen online and offline promotional efforts, focusing on platforms like Douyin and Kuaishou to gradually increase visibility. Lastly, collaborate with surrounding scenic areas to form a cohesive regional tourism entity, fostering mutual growth. Promoting distinctive and valuable activities as annual branded events, such as the Lantern Festival on the fifteenth day of the lunar year and continuous two-day performances at the Xinsi, can establish a cultural tourism brand.

5.3 Digging Deeper into Unique Themes to Drive Development

Propose a distinctive tourism theme based on the cultural characteristics of Zhoucun Ancient Commercial City, such as "Encounter with Dry Dock". This theme, centered around dry docks but encompassing silk, merchant culture, and folk customs, ensures precision without clutter. Present diverse cultural resources in a sequenced manner to enhance cultural perception and foster the cultural image of Zhoucun Ancient Commercial City.

5.4 Reconstruction of Tourist Spaces

Due to the principle of protection before development, Zhoucun Ancient Commercial City faces significant spatial constraints. To fully showcase cultural resources, it is essential to rationalize the layout of scenic areas. Develop expansion areas like Fuhong Street and Huilong Street, and utilize technological methods for virtual space reconstruction. Employ 3D and holographic projection technologies to display large-scale lanterns and realistic scenes, enhancing visitors' cultural perception through visual and auditory stimulation.

5.5 Establishing Brands with Strict Control

Establish cultural brands for different categories, controlling market positioning, content depth, and product quality of cultural goods. Implement stringent inspection systems throughout production, factory, and sales processes, particularly for intangible heritage projects like Zhoucun baked cakes and silk craftsmanship, to redefine the spirit of the "honest, trustworthy, open, and inclusive" Lu brand.

5.6 Creating Immersive Interactive Performances

Comprehensively display cultural resources in a dynamic and immersive manner, utilizing popular immersive performances. Plan large-scale live-action cultural IP projects as routine attractions, complemented by street performances to diversify cultural tourism products. Introduce immersive experiences that engage visitors in role-playing and emotional resonance, effectively enhancing cultural perception.

5.7 Deep Exploration of Cultural Connotations and Active Product Innovation

For cultural and creative products, integrate tangible items like "Dry Dock" archways, lanterns, and performances with abstract elements such as brand spirit and craftsmanship. Create cultural products in

forms like ceramics, glassware, and postcards, combining cultural dissemination, utility, and artistic aesthetics to subtly enhance visitors' cultural perception.

5.8 Emphasizing Sustainable Development of Cultural Conservation and Development

Visitor surveys indicate a high awareness of ancient architectural culture, emphasizing sustainable development while maintaining authenticity. Strengthen supervision and management, raise conservation awareness, and achieve dynamic unity between conservation and development to sustainably safeguard the cultural heritage of the district.

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