

AN ESSENTIAL STUDY ON SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES IN THE CONTEXT OF CULTURAL TOURISM DESTINATIONS IN AN ANCIENT WATER TOWN IN CHINA.

Yu Xiangxian 1*, Zurinawati binti Mohi 1

1 Lincoln University College, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia.

*Corresponding author: Yu Xiangxian, Lincoln University College, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia.

ABSTRACT

Ancient water towns in China that are historically important are cultural landscapes in their own right. They show the traditions, customs, and unique architectural styles that have been handed down from generation to generation for an endless amount of time. The many bodies of water that were used to build each of these villages were the basis for their formation. However, rapid growth of tourism, worries about the environment, and the needs of modern development are all making these places more stressed out. Because of this, it is become harder for these places to keep their reputation as places that are good for the environment. The aim of this study is to investigate the sustainability challenges faced in facilitating cultural tourism initiatives to save historic water towns in China. The findings of this study elucidate many critical difficulties related to sustainability such as decline of the environment, the growth in population, the stealing of cultural traditions, and the tension between getting material things and keeping cultural artefacts. Cultural tourism may make these issues worse, but it can also help people find ways to solve them. This impact may be effectively achieved via several methods, such as encouraging heritage-sensitive practices, strengthening local economies, and increasing public understanding of the need of protecting cultural assets. Cultural tourism, with the support of qualified experts, may mitigate the challenges associated with sustainability. There are several benefits to cultural tourism, such as that it gets people involved in their communities, keeps infrastructure up to date, and encourages tourists to be ecologically friendly. On the other hand, unrestricted cultural tourism threatens the validity of cultural traditions and their ability to adapt to the effects of environmental change. The fact that cultural tourism is becoming more popular is what makes this danger possible. To ensure the ongoing preservation of China's historic water towns and their economic development for future generations, it is imperative to adopt environmentally sensitive cultural tourism practices.

Keywords: Sustainability challenges, ancient water town, cultural tourism, China.

INTRODUCTION

China's old water villages are identified as the ancient towns with complicated canal networks, stone bridges, and historic buildings. The cities that are seen to be living monuments to China's past are the ones that keep China's cultural and historical importance alive. These cities are also where the history of the country is kept, and they are also where it is found. People from all

around the globe are going to these cultural tourism spots to see them. These people are travelling to these places in great numbers so that they may fully experience the ancient culture of China. These visitors want to visit these cities since each one has its own personality and a rich history. These neighbourhoods are not only nice to look at, but they also play an important function in the community. They help keep cultural traditions alive and make sure that the community's daily activities go well. By participating in these activities, which are offered to visitors, they may form a deeper connection with the culture of the area they are visiting (Qin et al., 2021). However, the rapid growth of the tourism industry has raised serious questions about the corporation's ability to continue to make money with its business. Some individuals are worried about how well these locations will hold up over time for a number of reasons, one of which is that they are worried about how long they will last. These people are scared that these places won't be able to survive the test of time. There have been difficulties there, such as pollution, traffic jams, and the advertising of activities that have been going on there for a long time. Tourism is great for the economy and gives people a chance to learn about other cultures, but there are still many problems that need to be solved in order to protect cultural and natural resources and acknowledge one's roots in a certain place (Cao et al., 2023). To solve these problems, one need to come up with more complete plans that take into consideration the fact that the environment, culture, and society may still be there in the future. It is also important to give equal weight to the growth of these processes and not just the money they make. Based on this, the goal of this study is to look at the main sustainability problems that are making it hard for cultural tourism to continue in China's old water towns for a long period of time.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Ancient water villages in China are well-known cultural artefacts that show the country's unique building designs, social customs, and historical practices (Lu & Ahmad, 2023). One reason these towns are popular with cultural tourists is because they feature homes that are hundreds of year's old, lovely canals, and stone bridges. These cities, which serve as living records, are in charge of keeping China's cultural history alive. Because this kind of tourism has become more popular in the last few decades, local economies have benefited, people from different cultures have learned more about each other, and people from all over the world have become more interested in China's physical and intangible cultural treasures. All of these things have happened because this kind of travel has gotten increasingly popular (Dang et al., 2021). Despite these advantages, there are growing concerns about the long-term viability of tourism since the number of travellers is growing so quickly. There are a lot of people visiting the region, which is creating serious sustainability related challenges. Some of the effects of this condition include overcrowding, stress on infrastructure, and damage to the environment. This is especially true for ecosystems that are delicate and depend on water to stay alive. When traditional crafts and activities are turned into shows that are meant to amuse visitors, the culture may lose its authenticity because of the need to make money. There are many problems that local communities and governments face when it comes to finding a balance between protecting cultural artefacts and growing the tourism business (Gao et al., 2021).

To fix the problems of sustainability in ancient water towns, any entire plan should stress the need of protecting the environment, preserving culture, and getting people involved in their communities. Every single one of them is a necessary part that has to be in all comprehensive strategies. It is very important that the authenticity of these cultural sites is not affected in any way as more and more people visit them. This is because it is important for preserving the aspects of human history in the form of ancient water towns in China (Shen & Chou, 2021). The aim of this research is to examine the fundamental sustainability challenges encountered by cultural tourist sites in China's ancient water towns.

THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The goal of this research is to assess the most significant sustainability challenges adversely affecting cultural tourism in China's ancient water towns. Because tourism is growing so quickly in these areas, they are facing more environmental damage, traffic jams, and commercialisation of their cultures. Given that these communities are in danger of losing their ecological integrity, cultural authenticity, and social health, the goal of this research is to identify and study the biggest threats they face. The goal of this project is to show how tourism can help both growth and the preservation of historic sites at the same time. One of the study's goals is to highlight the need of sustainable practices that find a balance between the good things that tourism does for the environment and the necessity for conservation actions to happen in the future. The aim of this study is to offer insights that may aid businesses associated with tourism industry and local communities in developing strategies to safeguard the cultural and ecological integrity of historic water towns while maintaining their viability as tourist destinations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Assessment of the possibility of cultural tourism in academic circles have been about historic places. This is because the fight between preservation and development is strongest at historic locations. Experts say that cultural tourism does a lot of things, such as teaching people to accept cultural differences, helping economies grow, and increasing people's understanding of cultural riches from across the globe. The growing number of tourists visiting China's historic water towns might be an example of this tendency. Everyone knows that these water towns are famous for how beautiful they are for anybody who visits them. But to fix the problems with sustainability that have come up because of their triumphs, one need to have solutions from both the academic and practical communities (Clement et al., 2025). One of the most evident problems is environmental pressure in management of sustainability considerations in ancient water towns of China. Since of this, the fragile balance of nature in these areas is at risk since tourism causes growth, which frequently leads to water contamination, rubbish accumulation, and abuse of natural resources because of high influx of tourists. On the other hand, social concerns are also quite important to a lot of individuals. Research has shown that cultural commercialisation occurs when traditional arts and festivals are modified to align with visitor

expectations. Because of this, the cultural activity loses its original integrity, which is a result of the monetisation of culture. Urbanisation and overpopulation affect community life, leading to conflicts between those who gain from tourism and those who live in the areas where visitors are placed. These fights are happening because communal life is being disrupted. These fights are a direct result of the growth of cities and the number of people living in them in recent years (Hristov et al., 2021).

Conservationists and developers alike commonly talk about the necessity for heritage-sensitive design, mechanisms for managing visitors, infrastructure that is good for the environment, and community involvement as important measures that must be taken to find this balance. Research conducted on various cultural tourist destinations indicates that the active involvement of locals in decision-making processes through participatory approaches is a crucial factor that enhances the preservation of cultural heritage and the social sustainability of the region (Liang et al., 2022). Although academic research globally offered many significant foundations, there exists a scarcity of studies directly related to China's historic water towns. On the other hand, tiny number of studies that look at their sustainability challenges as a whole, even though their importance is expanding across the world. Following the knowledge gap, promotion of sustainable tourism while making sure the historically important places stay around for a long time, more research are needed more to look at environmental, socio-cultural, and economic factors.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the influence of sustainability challenges on cultural tourism?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design: The quantitative data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 25. Through the computation of the odds ratio and 95% confidence interval, one determined the strength and direction of the statistical association. The researchers established a p-value threshold of less than 0.05 for statistical significance. The data was examined with a descriptive methodology to identify its most significant characteristics. Data enhanced by computational tools for statistical analysis, together with data collected by questionnaires, surveys, and polls, is often assessed using quantitative methods.

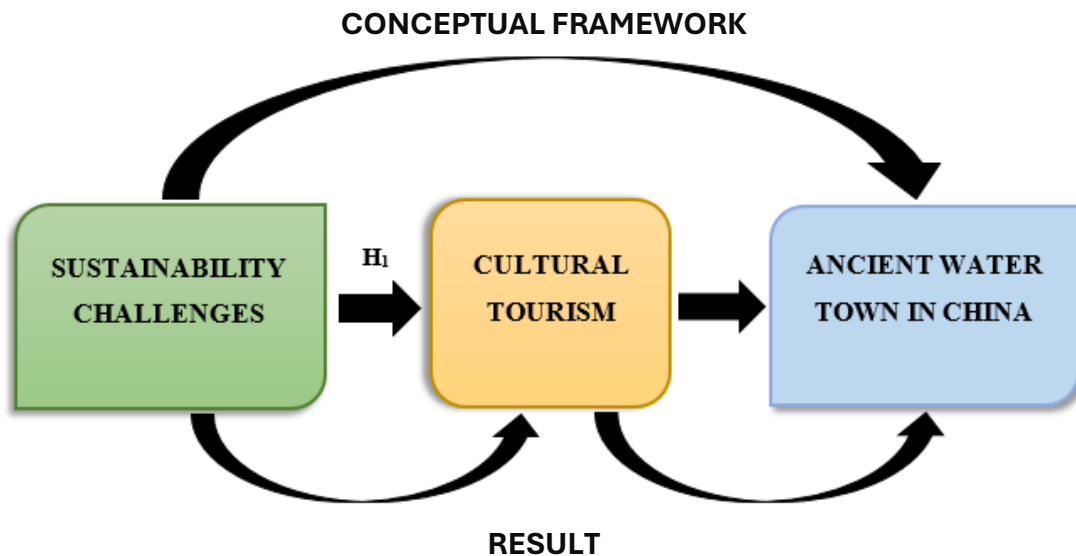
Sampling: Participants were requested to complete questionnaires as a component of the research while using simple random sampling method. Following the selection of 530 participants as the minimum sample size for the research using the Rao-soft tool, 650 questionnaires were sent. After gathering 589 answers, 45 were discarded due to incompleteness, resulting in a total of 634 responses.

Data and Measurement: The primary instrument used to collect data in the research was a questionnaire survey. Part B of the survey used a five-point Likert scale to collect feedback on

the attributes of online and offline channels, while Part A solicited fundamental demographic information. Numerous more sources, including internet databases, supplied the secondary data.

Statistical Software: The statistical analysis for this research was conducted with SPSS 25 and MS Excel.

Statistical Tools: The researcher used descriptive analysis to get a fundamental comprehension of the data. The researcher must analyse the data using ANOVA.



Factor Analysis: Factor Analysis (FA) is often used to examine the fundamental component structure of a set of measurement items. It is theoretically feasible for non-obvious causes to influence the scores of observable variables. One model-driven methodology is the FA technique. The primary aim of this research is to elucidate the links among observable phenomena, their underlying causes, and measurement errors. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Method may be used to assess the appropriateness of data for factor analysis. The researcher verifies whether the participant count is enough to appropriately represent the whole model and all its variables. Multiple variables may exhibit shared variation, and statistical measures evaluate this potentiality. Factor analysis often produces superior outcomes with less hierarchical data. KMO generates integers ranging from zero to one. A KMO score ranging from 0.8 to 1 indicates adequate sampling.

Insufficient sampling requires remedial measures if the KMO is below 0.6. Formulate an informed estimate; the majority of writers use 0.5 for this, hence a typical range is 0.5 to 0.6. A significant proportion of the overall correlations are partial correlations when the KMO value approaches zero. The presence of significant correlations severely impedes component analysis. The following are the approval criteria established by Kaiser:

The outcomes within the range of 0.050 to 0.059 were unsatisfactory. Significantly below the industry average between 0.60-0.69. A mediocre grade often ranges from 0.70 to 0.79. Quality marks are denoted by a value ranging from 0.80 to 0.89. There is a significant variance between 0.90 to 1.00.

Table 1. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Method.

| KMO and Bartlett's Test | | |
|---|---------------------------|----------|
| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy. | | 0.867 |
| Bartlett's Test of Sphericity | Approx. Chi-Square | 3252.968 |
| | df | 190 |
| | Sig. | .000 |

This substantiates the assertions on the sample's execution. Researchers assessed the statistical significance of the correlation matrices using Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The sample is considered adequate according to the KMO criteria when the value surpasses 0.867. Bartlett's sphericity test yields a p-value of 0.00. Bartlett's sphericity test findings demonstrate that the correlation matrix deviates from an identity matrix and is statistically significant.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE

Sustainability Challenges: Sustainability issues include difficulties with the environment, society, culture, and the economy. When one consider about historical water cities, one can see that there are many issues that need further research. One of these worries is utilising too much water in fragile ecosystems that depend on it. Civilisation also has to deal with pollution, trouble with getting rid of trash, and running out of water. Some of the most important social and cultural aspects to think about include the possibility of cultural commercialisation, the danger of congestion, and the chance that the lives of the people who live there will be disrupted. There is also a chance that the fast money from tourists will be put ahead of steps to safeguard the environment. When one think about these problems, it's easy to see how hard it is to keep historical monuments safe while still bringing in more people. If these flaws are not solved, the areas where they exist will lose their originality, individuality, and capacity to adjust with the surroundings. Sustainability issues are vital for understanding how historic towns satisfy the demands of visitors (Wenting et al., 2021).

MEDIATING VARIABLE

Cultural Tourism: "Cultural tourism" indicates vacations that focus on the history, culture, and natural beauty of a given region. The goal of these holidays is to give guests a better knowledge of and respect for the culture of the people who live in the area. Ancient water towns are cultural

tourist sites that show off a lot of different things, such canal systems, traditional festivals, handicrafts, and ancient buildings. The preservation of historic buildings is another thing that is getting a lot of attention. It connects the past to the present, which helps protect cultural treasures and get the word out about them. It also helps communities sell their cultural assets and make money for the community, in addition to helping them promote their cultural assets. Cultural tourism has a good effect on many different places when it is at its best. The pride that people in a community feel in themselves, the knowledge that people from other cultures have of each other, and the customs that have been handed down from one generation to the next are all examples of these attributes. If this is not managed in a manner that is sustainable, it might cause difficulties in the future. If there is too much commercialisation, crowding, and fake performances, the celebration's authenticity and cultural value might be compromised. This is because there is a chance that the celebration may be too commercialised. If there are no rules in place to stop this from happening, cultural tourism might make environmental and ecological concerns much worse in the ancient water towns of China (Chen et al., 2021).

Relationship between sustainability challenges and cultural tourism: There is a complicated and constantly changing link between cultural tourism and environmental challenges. It is possible to connect the authenticity and quality of the tourist business to worries about the cultural tourism sector's ability to keep going for a long period. Problems like too many tourists, pollution, or destroying the environment may make communities lose their cultural and ecological integrity. There are several ways this may happen. This not only makes it less likely that people will come back to the venues in question, but it also makes it less likely that they will have a good time while they are there. If cultural tourism is just done to make money, it might become superficial and lose its attraction. This is because making money from customs is a good thing. Because of the way the tourist sector works, cultural tourism has the potential to make current sustainability problems worse if it is not managed properly. The reason for this is because cultural tourism is a kind of heritage tourism. This is because it puts even more stress on conventional resources, which are already limited since demand is always rising. Cultural tourism has the potential to help solve problems related to sustainability if it is handled carefully. This goal may be reached by getting visitors to do things that are good for the environment, safeguard historical sites, and learn more. Cultural tourism management is an important part of these efforts that must be put into place to make sure that authenticity is preserved and that the cultural and economic organisations involved will benefit in the long run. One of the most important things is how cultural tourism acts as a bridge between historic communities and worries about protecting the environment while attending to sustainability challenges faced in historic sites around China (Liang et al., 2022). Consequently, the researcher has developed the following hypothesis with an aim to evaluate the idea that cultural tourism has distinct sustainability challenges.

“H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between sustainability challenges and cultural tourism.”

“H₁: There is a significant relationship between sustainability challenges and cultural tourism.”

Table 2. H1 ANOVA Test.

| ANOVA | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|-----|-------------|----------|------|
| Sum | | | | | |
| | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| Between Groups | 39058.6941 | 227 | 5841.845 | 1037.812 | .000 |
| Within Groups | 491.803 | 361 | 5.629 | | |
| Total | 39550.4971 | 588 | | | |

This probe has revealed significant results. The F-value of 1037.812 significantly above the 0.05 alpha criterion, with a significance level of 0.000. This substantiates the alternative hypothesis, ***“H₁: There is a significant relationship between sustainability challenges and cultural tourism”*** while refuting the null hypothesis.

DISCUSSION

This research indicate that certain problems must be addressed to ensure the long-term profitability of cultural tourism in ancient water towns. Depending on the situation, these problems might be put into different groups. Pollution, traffic jams, and the loss of resources are some of the environmental stresses that might cause these places to lose their ecological and cultural integrity. The environmental issues are what caused this danger that one are currently confronting. If cultural tourism keeps growing without any limits, these concerns might become worse. Cultural tourism may have several effects, such as bringing economies back to life and protecting cultural treasures. For example, large levels of tourists put further stress on assets that are already prone to harm, and too much commercialisation may make things less real. Cultural tourism is not only a viable answer, but it is also a moderating factor that may turn problems into opportunities. Culture tourism also may encourage responsible conduct and build cultural resilience if it is planned with care for history, managed in a way that is good for the environment, and involves the community. Based on what it seen here, it seems like the best way to solve the challenges that come with sustainability is to find a middle ground between expansion and preservation. This would not only help cultural tourism flourish, but it would also help solve difficulties that have been raised regarding the industry's ability to stay viable. By focussing on the future and making sure that cultural tourism methods that are good for the environment are used while also lowering the bad effects, the many people involved in China can make sure that the historic water towns in China stay unique and lively in the long term.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the preservation of China's ancient water towns hinged on a combination of environmental concerns and tourism associated with cultural heritage. Cultural tourism is very important in the continuous fights against the degradation of the environment, the commercialisation of culture, and the limits that socioeconomic situations put on people. If it is properly cared for, it might inspire people to do things that are good for the environment, make money for the community, and protect historical treasures for future generations. But if it is done in a manner that is not sustainable, it will make the issues that it is meant to solve much worse. To make sure that old water towns stay around, it is very important to find a method to strike a careful balance between protecting cultural treasures and growing tourism. It is really important to establish this agreement so that these cities may keep going without any breaks. To build long-term resilience, one need to do a number of things. Some of these efforts are to pass laws that stress community involvement, ecologically friendly techniques, and long-term tourism management. If stakeholders accept that cultural tourism is not always clear-cut and learn how to use this knowledge to their advantage, they can help protect ancient water towns as lively cultural attractions that balance economic growth with cultural and environmental preservation. If stakeholders learn how to utilise this knowledge to their advantage, it is feasible to attend to present sustainability challenges faced in ancient water towns of China.

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