

Cultural and Tourism Integration in Public Libraries: Theoretical Connotations, Contemporary Value, and Development Paths (Postprint)

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This study examines the theoretical connotation, contemporary value, and development pathways of culture-tourism integration in public libraries, aiming to provide reference for promoting the healthy and sustainable development of this undertaking.

[Method/Process] By integrating relevant theories and practices of culture-tourism integration and all-for-one tourism, and through literature review, online research, case analysis, and field investigation, this research clarifies the theoretical connotation of culture-tourism integration in public libraries, analyzes its contemporary value, and elucidates its development pathways, thereby broadening the research horizons of culture-tourism integration in public libraries.

[Results/Conclusion] The substantial development of future culture-tourism integration in public libraries can be achieved through cultivating demonstration libraries, improving regional linkage mechanisms, and constructing an all-for-one development pattern for culture-tourism integration in public libraries.

Full Text

Public Library Integration of Culture and Tourism: Theoretical Connotation, Contemporary Value, and Development Paths

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Abstract: *[Purpose/Significance]* This paper analyzes the theoretical connotation, contemporary value, and development paths of cultural-tourism integration in public libraries, aiming to provide reference for promoting the healthy and sustainable development of this undertaking. *[Method/Process]* Integrating theories and practices of cultural-tourism integration and global tourism, this study employs literature review, web-based investigation, case analysis, and field research to clarify the theoretical connotation, distinguish its contemporary value, and elaborate its development paths, thereby expanding research perspectives on public library cultural-tourism integration. *[Result/Conclusion]* The future development of public library cultural-tourism integration can be achieved by cultivating demonstration libraries, improving regional linkage mechanisms, and constructing a comprehensive development pattern for all-domain integration.

Keywords: public library; cultural-tourism integration; theoretical connotation; contemporary value; development path

The relationship between public libraries and tourism has a long history. Since the establishment of the Manchester Public Library in England in 1852, free public libraries have flourished worldwide, with the Manchester Library now serving as a renowned local tourist destination, demonstrating the library sector's longstanding emphasis on cultural-tourism integration. Following the formation of China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2018, cultural-tourism integration in public libraries has become a hot topic in academic circles and a key direction for active practice in various institutions. Existing research often focuses on specific practices such as tourism information services [1], cultural and creative product development [2-3], study tour services [4-5], and library embedding in hotels [6], or examines development paths through analysis of multiple typical cases, proposing integration from perspectives including top-level design [7], policy formulation [8], basic guarantees [9], deepening cultural core values [10], staff development [11], and service element innovation [12]. While providing diverse theoretical references, these studies rarely address the theoretical connotation and contemporary value in depth, and research on development paths could be more closely integrated with global tourism theory and practice. To further expand research horizons, this paper clarifies these important issues to provide reference for promoting the healthy and sustainable development of public library cultural-tourism integration.

1 Theoretical Connotation of Public Library Cultural-Tourism Integration

In academic research and practical exploration, "public library cultural-tourism integration" has been frequently applied and recognized for its positive functions in promoting cultural inheritance and tourism development. However, no consensus exists on its conceptual definition, necessitating detailed examination to overcome conceptual overgeneralization.

Culture essentially represents humanization or anthropogenesis [13]. Due to differences in production and lifestyle, cultures exhibit certain variations among regions, ethnic groups, and even within the same region or ethnic community. Tourism, in essence, involves temporary departure from one's usual environment [14]. "Integration" represents the reconciliation and blending of two elements with commonalities, while "fusion" denotes the coordination and consistency achieved through this process—fusion is the purpose and result, with integration as its prerequisite and pathway. Academic views on the juncture of culture and tourism remain divided: macro-level perspectives emphasize promotion, such as the "soul and vessel" or "poetry and distant horizon" metaphors, while micro-level views offer more theoretical rigor, suggesting culture possesses tourism attraction attributes [15], tourism facilitates cultural exchange [16] and experiential inheritance [17], both intersect at cultural identity [18] while providing spiritual consumption services [19], and that cultural-tourism integration represents the linkage of tourism, culture, and creative industries [20].

Connecting these understandings, I argue that from a material perspective, cultural-tourism integration originates from cultural heterogeneity arising from different production and lifestyles among communities; from a spiritual perspective, it stems from humanity's pursuit of cultural identity and tourism's accessibility in fulfilling this quest. As an emerging theoretical and practical direction formed by the intersection of cultural undertakings, cultural industries, and tourism, public library cultural-tourism integration warrants examination of its theoretical connotation, contemporary value, and development paths—questions every researcher and practitioner must address. Through analysis, the basic connotation can be understood as follows: driven by cultural identity and leveraging public libraries' cultural-tourism resources and services, public library cultural-tourism integration aims for mutual enhancement of culture and tourism by providing tourism products, services, or scenes with distinctive library characteristics and rich cultural cores. This integration positions libraries as principal participants, achieving "two-way compatibility" rather than simple superposition of culture and tourism—a multi-level, multi-angle fusion that synthesizes theory and practice. It represents the organic unity of cultural content analysis, selection, circulation, and reproduction, alongside processes of cultural meaning construction and deconstruction, with public libraries as the main body and tourism as the form.

2 Contemporary Value of Public Library Cultural-Tourism Integration

2.1 An Effective Strategy for Enhancing Cultural Soft Power

Cultural soft power refers to the cohesion, mobilization, and spiritual drive exerted internally by a nation's traditional culture, values, ideology, and other cultural factors, as well as the penetration, attraction, and persuasion generated externally [22]. Amid globalizing economics, politics, and technology, culture

increasingly becomes a vital source of national cohesion and creativity. Confronted with exchanges, collisions, and conflicts among global diverse cultures, the importance of cultural soft power becomes more prominent. As a distribution center for human civilization achievements and a platform for cultural resource sharing, public libraries can ride the wave of cultural-tourism integration to actively explore diverse cultural-tourism product and service output models. By creating cultural scenes and routes and concretizing their abstract, static cultural-tourism resources into dynamic, living presentations for the cultural and tourism markets, libraries can deepen internal cultural cohesion and mobilization while strengthening external cultural penetration and attraction. Thus, public library cultural-tourism integration benefits the refinement and sophistication of cultural undertakings and industries, enhancing cultural confidence and consciousness through subtle integration, fostering regional, ethnic, and national cultural identity, establishing core cultural values amidst cultural globalization, and thereby improving regional, ethnic, and national cultural soft power to promote the great development and prosperity of socialist culture with Chinese characteristics.

2.2 A Necessary Move to Promote Global Tourism

Global tourism, a new concept and model proposed based on China's national conditions, has become a societal trend with global influence. Libraries are widely regarded as cultural symbols and manifestations [21]. With abundant cultural and environmental resources, public libraries align with cultural-tourism integration in functional attributes and cultural inheritance concepts, making them important tourism development subjects in this era. As global tourism further develops, the supply structure of cultural-tourism products and services gradually optimizes, with new carriers such as cultural-tourism towns, study tours, and creative parks emerging to provide important references for public library cultural-tourism integration. Facing the new development period of the "14th Five-Year Plan," global tourism urgently needs quality improvement, capacity expansion, and structural upgrading to build a high-quality, multi-level tourism supply system [23]. As a crucial component of cultural-tourism integration subjects, public libraries' core elements—including cultural heritage, collection resources, architectural features, and wide distribution—naturally couple with tourism [7]. By providing tourism information services, participating in cultural-creative product development, and organizing study tour activities, libraries can embed their services into the global tourism industry network, create cultural-tourism atmospheres, fill gaps in tourism public services, enrich supply subjects and models, improve destination spatial systems, optimize the development environment, and enhance social and economic benefits.

2.3 An Era Mission to Empower Library Transformation and Upgrading

Constrained by their nature as public welfare cultural institutions, public library cultural-tourism integration still faces controversies, restrictions, and challenges. However, we must recognize that the wheel of progress constantly moves forward, and the sustainable development of public libraries depends on their ability to innovate, adapt, and seize opportunities while assuming era responsibilities. In this new era of cultural-tourism integration, public libraries should, while strengthening cultural responsibility and ensuring basic services, advance with the times and innovate according to circumstances. They must break through traditional service barriers, actively develop theoretical research on cultural-tourism integration, root themselves in practical exploration, expand integration directions horizontally, and deepen integration content vertically. With an open attitude toward integration, they should respond to controversies; through active integration practices, they should break restrictions. While enhancing regional and national cultural soft power and promoting global tourism development, they should empower their own functional expansion and morphological construction, facilitating transformation from traditional to composite public libraries in the cultural-tourism integration era and demonstrating powerful vitality in keeping pace with the times.

3 Development Paths for Public Library Cultural-Tourism Integration

Using the “point-line-plane” framework and integrating public library cultural-tourism integration with global tourism theories and practices, I propose three development paths: cultivating demonstration libraries, improving regional linkage mechanisms, and constructing a comprehensive all-domain development pattern, as shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper].

3.1 Identifying Focal Points: Cultivating Demonstration Libraries for Cultural-Tourism Integration

As a recent development, public library cultural-tourism integration lacks systematic and mature models. Provincial culture and tourism departments have announced pilot units for cultural-tourism public service institution integration, with many public libraries included. These pilot libraries must adapt measures to local conditions, institutional circumstances, and timing, considering available cultural, environmental, spatial, and location resources to accurately identify integration focal points and further develop into demonstration libraries.

Accurate positioning of integration focal points endows libraries with recognizability to avoid the common pitfall of homogenized tourism products and services and the trap of blind imitation. It also enhances sustainable development potential by establishing development frameworks for subsequent product and service series. Therefore, when promoting cultural-tourism integration, public

libraries should first emphasize accurate focal point positioning. These focal points may include inherent advantages such as architectural design, historical culture, science and technology, information services, and themed activities, or regional advantages like natural ecology, cultural landscapes, and folk customs. Focal points can be content-dimensional, focusing on various products or services themed around specific cultural factors; form-dimensional, concentrating on particular product or service types containing diverse cultural elements; or a combination of both. In essence, focal point positioning requires libraries to enhance cultural consciousness, develop resource utilization awareness, keenly capture potential advantageous elements, and comprehensively plan and integrate available cultural-tourism resources from the perspective of optimizing tourist experiences.

The Qinhuai District Library in Nanjing serves as an example. As the only public library in Jiangsu Province selected as a cultural-tourism public service institution integration pilot, it focuses on regional culture, deeply cultivating the Qinhuai cultural factor to create the “Touring Qinhuai” brand. Leveraging local literature resources and connecting historical sites, cultural resources, and tourism routes, the library employs multiple integration approaches including “reading + lectures + walking” activities, amplifying the symbolic value of this focal point in cultural-tourism integration and injecting contemporary vitality into local documents. This successfully constructs tourism content transformation, allowing tourists to experience Qinhuai culture during their visits [24]. Other libraries have also been selected as provincial pilot units, but due to late starts, insufficient promotion, and inadequate development depth, these pilot libraries have yet to effectively exert radiating effects. Deeper consideration is needed on how to utilize the development advantages of pilot construction to cultivate demonstration libraries that elevate regional cultural-tourism integration levels and explore replicable, scalable experiences for China’s public library cultural-tourism integration undertaking.

3.2 Aligning Axes: Improving Regional Linkage Mechanisms

The current landscape of public library cultural-tourism integration practice in China shows vigorous development, with many libraries identifying their focal points and conducting rich exploratory practices. However, even within the same administrative region, the fragmented geographical distribution of integration subjects and lack of communication mechanisms result in a disconnected, discrete overall pattern. Points fail to connect into clearly identifiable cultural-tourism integration axes, hindering resource flow and preventing cohesive development. Therefore, aligning axes and establishing robust regional linkage mechanisms among cultural-tourism integration subjects to form collaborative circles constitutes a breakthrough measure for energizing public library cultural-tourism integration.

3.2.1 Improving Regional Linkage Between Public Libraries and Other Cultural-Tourism Integration Subjects Culture and tourism authorities at all levels and individual libraries must comprehensively consider location conditions, core advantages, constraints, and focal points to establish basic strategies for coordinated planning of branded, linked cultural-tourism integration within regions. Using internal connections among cultural factors such as history, figures, events, customs, and cultural relics as brand threads [25], they should organically connect cultural-tourism integration subjects—including public libraries—into distinctively oriented cultural-tourism integration axes. Collaborative development among subjects on these axes strengthens connections between libraries and other cultural-tourism entities, avoids resource duplication or inefficient consumption, improves regional resource sharing, and leverages the influence of axis subjects to further increase library visitor traffic. Nanjing’s Changjiang Road exemplifies this: “One Changjiang Road, half of Nanjing’s history.” Along this road distribute Nanjing Library, Jiangning Weaving Mansion, Nanjing People’s Hall, Zhongshan Square, Presidential Palace, and other heritage sites and modern cultural landscapes, naturally forming an axis rich in Nanjing’s historical and cultural resources. Additionally, the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region’s Department of Culture and Tourism launched the “Walking through Guangxi” public service brand, innovatively releasing the “Guangxi Public Cultural Venues Guide Map” in hand-drawn format, showcasing 54 free municipal-level and above public cultural venues, including 17 public libraries [26], providing focal points for library cultural-tourism integration.

3.2.2 Improving Regional Linkage Among Public Libraries Culture and tourism departments should vigorously promote and guide inter-library regional connections by establishing intra-regional and cross-regional alliances for library cultural-tourism integration industries or undertakings. These alliances would strengthen collaborative control and differentiation of each library’s integration focal points to deepen concept, function, industry, market, service, and communication integration. This approach addresses issues of small scale, scattered resources, and brand homogenization, enabling concentrated efforts that release economies of scale while demonstrating differentiated development. Only by establishing robust regional linkage mechanisms among all types of cultural-tourism integration subjects, including libraries themselves, can we promote intensive, specialized development of public library cultural-tourism integration and ensure coordinated, orderly, and sustainable development.

3.3 Connecting Planes: Constructing a Comprehensive All-Domain Development Pattern

The “all-domain service” concept in public libraries and “global tourism” in the tourism sector have historically intersected [27], essentially representing the convergence of people’s needs for better cultural lives and better tourism experiences. Public library cultural-tourism integration should satisfy these cultural

and tourism needs as its starting point, adopting parallel strategies of collaborative and differentiated development to construct a comprehensive pattern featuring full-factor integration, full-time coverage, full-space connection, and full-experience optimization.

3.3.1 Full Demand Perception Full demand perception involves establishing a mechanism to understand segmented market demands for library-centered cultural-tourism integration. Through market research and tourist feedback, libraries should comprehend current recognition and future expectations, identify quality and potential customer groups, classify target audiences, and comprehensively perceive their cultural consumption preferences and tourism experience needs. This demand-side information provides scientific, precise support for constructing the all-domain network pattern.

3.3.2 Full Factor Integration Full factor integration promotes deep integration of the six tourism elements—“transportation, sightseeing, accommodation, dining, shopping, and entertainment”—with library elements in the cultural-tourism network pattern. First, we must change the vertical division of labor where “transportation, accommodation, dining, shopping, and entertainment” serve “sightseeing,” recognizing that each element can become a focal point for library cultural-tourism integration. “Transportation + libraries” includes examples like Egypt’s Alexandria Library, which emphasizes tourism affairs with dedicated departments and trained staff providing entertaining and enlightening experiences [29]. “Sightseeing + libraries” includes Wuhan’s city-wide libraries holding the “Love China, Welcome Military Games, Read Good Books—2019 Jiangcheng Reading Festival” at tourist attractions, blocks, and parks. “Accommodation + libraries” includes Suzhou Library’s partnership with the Scholarly Hotel Group, connecting hotel websites with the library’s online borrowing system for guest convenience. “Dining + libraries” includes the U.S. Library of Congress’s Madison Café, Asian snack bar, and Congressional-view cafeteria [30]. “Shopping + libraries” includes Shanghai Library’s “Piaoxiang Liucui” thread-bound notebook experience kit, using materials from its collection to provide an “exclusive ancient book binding” experience. Second, elements should mutually reinforce each other, such as providing library-themed accommodation and cultural-creative products in library study tour services, strengthening the cultural-tourism integration environment through tourism element integration.

3.3.3 Full Time Coverage Full time coverage ensures libraries participate directly or indirectly in cultural-tourism integration around the clock. While extended hours increase attractiveness, most libraries operate only during daytime. Since the night economy constitutes an important tourism component, the challenge lies in providing nighttime cultural-tourism integration services. Direct methods include extending nighttime hours to provide cultural leisure products, services, or venues, while indirect methods involve partnering with scenic area or commercial district homestays and hotels to embed services into

tourists' nighttime rest periods.

3.3.4 Full Space Connection Full space connection involves aligning intra-regional and cross-regional library cultural-tourism integration axes that interconnect beyond administrative boundaries, extending toward city clusters and nationwide to form a complementary, distinctive cultural-tourism integration network with libraries as participating subjects. This network should emphasize increasing connection density, such as leveraging demonstration libraries' radiating effects or utilizing surrounding and same-axis attractions' drawing power to transform loosely connected networks into tightly integrated ones.

3.3.5 Full Experience Optimization Full experience optimization focuses on tourists' comprehensive experiences to enhance alignment between library cultural-tourism integration supply and demand. First, optimize product experiences by endowing cultural-creative products with more narrative content, cultural connotations, and practical value while leaving appropriate creative space for tourists to add personal content, making these products beautiful carriers of memory and emotion. Second, optimize process experiences by reducing superficial tours and adding participatory cultural activities that enable tourists to experience their agency, engage multiple senses, trigger value perception and cultural identity, and enhance pleasure and fulfillment. Third, optimize atmosphere experiences by ensuring environmental design and activity settings align with specific cultural-tourism themes.

In the cultural-tourism integration era, public libraries must grasp the pulse of the times, further explore development directions for culture-tourism integration, innovate practices while respecting development laws of cultural undertakings, cultural industries, and tourism, and use innovative practices to inform theoretical research. This continuously enriches the connotation of public library cultural-tourism integration, demonstrates its contemporary value, refines and extends its development paths, addresses unbalanced and insufficient development, builds libraries into beloved culture-tourism complexes, satisfies people's needs for better tourism lives, and promotes coordinated development of material and spiritual civilization.

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