

From “Traffic” to “Retention” in Cultural Tourism: A Process Perspective on Tourist Ritual Perception and Mechanism

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of deep culture-tourism integration, tourism rituals, while bearing the dual functions of cultural activation and tourist retention, face the practical dilemma of “difficulty converting traffic into retention.” This is attributable to existing research predominantly adopting a static perspective, which has failed to deeply explore the staged evolutionary process of tourist ritual perception and its cross-level transmission mechanisms. To address this gap, the present study proposes an integrated “Design-Perception-Behavior” framework: establishing merchant ritual design features as the core stimulus source to resolve the pre-perception generation black box and the “supply-demand disconnect” issue; pioneering a tourist ritual perception scale from a process perspective to investigate the staged evolutionary patterns of ritual experiences; and constructing a cross-level theoretical model of “Individual-Place-Group” to systematically analyze the multiple pathways and boundary conditions through which ritual perception drives Intention to Extend Stay. This research advances tourism ritual studies from static representation to process-based analysis, and by exploring internal mechanisms and boundary conditions, provides innovative solutions for destinations to optimize ritual design and enhance cultural contextual adaptability.

Full Text

How to Turn Tourist “Traffic” into “Retention”? A Process-Based Study on Tourist Ritual Perception and Its Functioning Mechanism

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of deep cultural-tourism integration, tourist rituals serve the dual function of cultural revitalization and visitor retention, yet face the practical dilemma of “failing to turn traffic into retention.” This stems from existing research predominantly adopting a static perspective, which neglects the phased evolution of tourists’ ritual perception and its cross-level transmission mechanisms. To address this gap, this study proposes an integrated “design-perception-behavior” framework: it establishes business ritual design characteristics as the core stimulus to resolve the antecedent “black box” of perception formation and the “supply-demand misalignment” issue; pioneers a process-based tourist ritual perception scale exploring the phased evolution of ritual experiences; and constructs a cross-level “individual-place-group” theoretical model to systematically analyze the multiple pathways and boundary conditions through which ritual perception drives Intention to Extend Stay. This research advances tourist ritual studies from static characterization toward process-based analysis. By investigating underlying mechanisms and boundary conditions, it provides innovative solutions for destinations to optimize ritual design and enhance cultural-contextual adaptability.

Keywords: tourist ritual, tourist ritual perception, intention to extend stay, process perspective, ritual design

1. Problem Statement

The cultural-tourism industry, propelled by digital marketing and influencer economy, is experiencing unprecedented “traffic prosperity.” Destinations compete to launch festival promotions and viral check-in strategies, continuously breaking visitor arrival records. However, beneath this prosperity lies profound “retention anxiety”: existing research confirms that short-term visitor growth at tourist destinations fails to establish significant positive correlations with visitor experience quality (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021), revisit intention, or destination stickiness (Li et al., 2023). This systematic predicament of “traffic is easy to gain, retention is hard to achieve” has become a core bottleneck constraining high-quality development of the cultural-tourism industry. Against the national strategic backdrop of deep cultural-tourism integration, how to leverage cultural genes to construct cultural experience scenarios that deeply attract visitors and establish lasting connections—achieving a value transition from “traffic harvesting” to “retention cultivation”—has become an urgent proposition for both academia and industry.

Tourist rituals, as carriers of destination cultural living performance (Shi et al., 2022), serve as a “cultural key” to unlock retention anxiety through symbolic narrative and situational performance. Their unique value lies in penetrating the entire tourist experience process (motivation triggering → on-site immersion → memory retention), providing a natural “spatiotemporal carrier” for converting instantaneous traffic into lasting retention (Huang Lihua & Cao Xishen, 2021). Economically, meticulously designed rituals are key “traffic engines” for activating consumption chains and increasing per-customer spending (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). Culturally, rituals become critical carriers for cultural heritage activation and meaning construction through symbolic narrative and situational performance (Liu Jiaying, 2023). Socially, rituals effectively promote host-guest emotional integration and cross-cultural consensus, serving as media for destination social bonding (Zhou Kai & Zhang Yan, 2022; Woosnam et al., 2009). Critically, the programmatic, symbolic, and interactive nature of rituals endows them with unique potential to “anchor” tourists in the present moment, stimulating deep immersion and meaning construction (Lu et al., 2024)—the crucial psychological foundation for generating “retention” (Turner, 1969; Collins, 2004).

However, existing research remains limited to static outcome orientations, inadequately exploring the core process of how “traffic” transforms into “retention” through ritual experiences—the generation mechanism and impact pathways of “tourist ritual perception.” Specifically, three gaps exist: First, current research overemphasizes terminal static representations of ritual utility (e.g., “sense of ritual,” “uniqueness”) (Bai Shizhen et al., 2021), neglecting the dynamic process of individual perception evolving with ritual progression (Lu et al., 2024). This oversight hampers explanations for significant variations in tourist experience depth and memory intensity under identical ritual contexts. Second, research fails to systematically deconstruct the complete causal chain of “design stimulus (supply side) → perception response (demand side) → behavioral transformation (retention).” Moreover, fragmented research confined to single levels (e.g., individual emotional responses or place attractiveness) cannot reveal the multiple collaborative pathways through which ritual perception drives retention conversion. Third, understanding of key contextual variables’ moderating effects is insufficient. Existing research has not examined how ritual participation modes, cultural distance, ritual types, and tourist identity affect outcomes, weakening the universality and practical guidance value of findings. These research gaps not only hinder theoretical depth in understanding the ritual experience “black box” but also constrain destinations’ ability to enhance retention conversion efficiency through ritual experience optimization in practice.

Consequently, this study focuses on the phased generation process and multi-level influence mechanisms of tourist ritual perception. First, it scientifically defines the connotation of tourist ritual perception, capturing its evolutionary trajectory with ritual progression based on multi-source data. Second, it establishes ritual design characteristics as antecedent influencing variables of perception, providing foundational basis for design optimization. Third, it empirically

investigates the multiple pathways through which ritual perception influences intention to extend stay and the moderating effects of key contextual variables. Through these investigations, this study aims to decode the core mechanism of ritual experience-to-retention conversion, providing scientific support for destinations to enhance visitors' intention to extend stay through ritual design optimization, cultural-contextual adaptation, and participation mode adjustment.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Rituals and Tourist Ritual Perception Since “ritual” was established as an independent research object in the late 19th century, academic focus has shifted from exploring its social origins to explaining its social functions (Bell & Kreinath, 2021). The conceptual core of ritual points to symbolic practices under cultural regulation—achieving cultural value transmission through programmatic behaviors that consolidate collective experience (Rook, 1985). This practice embodies three essential attributes: formal normativity requires pre-set scripts, ritualized settings, and specific audiences (Gainer, 1995); process repetitiveness manifests as stable behavioral rhythms and performance regulations (Tetreault & Kleine, 1990); and meaning productivity constructs collective memory through symbolic reproduction (Durkheim, 1912).

The core social function of ritual lies in dynamic generation of emotional energy: it can evoke strong emotional resonance in the present (Goffman, 2017) while, more importantly, continuously accumulating “emotional energy” (Collins, 2004) to longitudinally guide subsequent behavioral decisions. This dual emotional mechanism of “immediate evocation-extended drive” forms the theoretical foundation for understanding how tourist ritual experiences transform into visitor behavior.

When embedded in tourism contexts, ritual's cultural transmission function faces unique tensions: as deep experience carriers, tourist rituals shoulder the dual mission of “traffic conversion” and “cultural revitalization” (Shi et al., 2022). However, host-guest cultural cognitive biases often lead to “symbolic misreading and supply-demand misalignment” (Lu Junyang, 2021), triggering resource misallocation and experience depreciation. More critically, existing research remains fixated on macro-level static effect descriptions (Bai Shizhen et al., 2021), lacking deconstruction of perception's phased evolution: neither tracking the evolutionary trajectory of individual cognition during ritual participation nor revealing the dynamic logic of group interaction. Therefore, revealing the “process black box” of tourist perception and systematically analyzing its generation pathways and evolutionary mechanisms become the core entry point for overcoming dilemmas in tourist ritual experience design and efficacy transformation.

2.2 Tourist Ritual Perception and Related Concepts Tourist ritual perception refers to tourists' dynamic process of symbolic decoding and meaning ne-

gotiation regarding destination-performed rituals within the liminal spatiotemporal context of tourism. While sharing the same symbolic interaction domain as consumption ritual perception (Fei et al., 2021), it exhibits essential differences: (1) In goal orientation, consumption rituals pursue functional utility (e.g., satisfaction enhancement), whereas tourist ritual perception serves cultural meaning construction; (2) In power structure, consumption ritual perception reflects customer-dominant logic, while tourists occupy a culturally marginal position in tourism contexts (MacCannell, 1973) with limited power; (3) In perceptual tension, tourist ritual perception must continuously address the internal tension triggered by evaluations of “constructed authenticity,” a core conflict absent in consumption ritual perception. Consequently, concepts and scales of consumption ritual perception cannot capture the core characteristics of tourism contexts, necessitating the development of specialized scales to depict its dynamic process and unique mechanisms.

The particularity of tourist ritual perception stems from tourism context characteristics: First, **liminal detachment** (Turner, 1969): tourists temporarily detach from daily identities, undergoing meaning reconstruction in high emotional immersion, distinguishing it from the programmatic repetition of consumption/organizational rituals. Second, **cultural distance tension** (Cohen, 1972): as “cultural intruders” (MacCannell, 1973), tourists must continuously negotiate the symbolic metaphors of others (e.g., interpreting the sacredness of sacrificial dances), whereas consumption rituals are rooted in shared cultural contexts. Third, **commodification-authenticity paradox**: as cultural commodities, tourist rituals’ core perceptual conflict lies in “authenticity” evaluation—a demand significantly absent in organizational/consumption rituals.

As shown in Table 1, differentiation from related concepts further reveals tourist ritual perception’s characteristics of phased evolution, cultural negotiation mechanisms, and inherent tension nature. However, existing research has yet to systematically analyze its internal evolutionary mechanisms. Therefore, developing specialized scales must break through static measurement paradigms, constructing a research framework integrating “process stage tracking” and “core mechanism deconstruction” to fill this critical theoretical gap.

Table 1 Core Differences Between Tourist Ritual Perception and Related Concepts and Their Implications for Scale Design

Core Differentiation Points	vs. Tourist Ritual Perception	Implications for Scale Design
Consumption Ritual Perception (Fei et al., 2021)	Goal orientation: Functional utility vs. cultural meaning construction	Add cultural metaphor decoding items

Core Differentiation Points	vs. Tourist Ritual Perception	Implications for Scale Design
Organizational Ritual Perception (Zhang Haizhou et al., 2018)	Power deconstruction: Customer centrality vs. tourist cultural marginalization	Add narrative dominance perception items
Tourist Ritual Perception (Bai Shizhen et al., 2021)	Perceptual focus: Service satisfaction vs. authenticity negotiation tension	Strengthen symbolic decoding mechanism measurement
Tourist Ritual Interaction (Lu et al., 2024)	Group attributes: Internal members vs. cross-cultural temporary community Participation logic: Rule internalization vs. meaning negotiation Emotional foundation: Organizational identification vs. liminal empathy Temporal attributes: Static outcomes vs. dynamic processes Measurement paradigm: Terminal states vs. stage evolution Mechanism depth: Utility evaluation vs. cognitive-emotional feedback Research perspective: Supply-side behavior vs. supply-demand matching Interaction unit: Behavioral observation vs. meaning co-construction	Add cross-cultural adaptation measurement items Adopt retrospective event diary method Develop process-anchored items Integrate multi-source data Construct “design-perception” mapping

2.3 Antecedents of Individual Ritual Participation Current research on antecedents of tourist ritual experiences presents a fragmented landscape, focusing on three factor categories:

Motivation-driven: Based on psychology’s “motivation-behavior” framework,

core motivations for ritual participation include faith-driven motives (e.g., religious pilgrimages, Brooks et al., 2016), emotional comfort (e.g., wandering, recreation, curiosity, exploration needs, Haab, 1998), and symbolic decoding needs (e.g., desire for novel experiences and cultural learning, Lu et al., 2024).

Relationship bonding: Rituals serve as media for relationship reproduction (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021), driving deep participation through emotional bond strengthening (Wei Haiying et al., 2018) and cultural information sharing that promotes tourist-destination connections.

Moderating effects of individual traits: Gender and “fresh start mindset” exhibit interactive effects on tourist ritual experiences and well-being (Li Hao et al., 2023): males demonstrate stronger behavioral control under high mindset levels, while gender differences become non-significant at low levels. Additionally, tourists’ cultural capital and other cognitive factors may moderate symbolic decoding efficacy.

2.4 Outcomes of Tourist Rituals Existing research demonstrates that tourist rituals exert multi-level impacts:

Individual level: Meticulously designed destination rituals significantly enhance tourists’ immersion, satisfaction, and sense of meaning (Li Hao et al., 2023), evoke authentic experiences and deep emotional resonance (Huang Lihua & Cao Xishen, 2021), and subsequently strengthen well-being and revisit intention (Ran Yaxuan et al., 2018; Bai Shizhen et al., 2021).

Place level: In destination governance, rituals fulfill three functions— “resource integration-cultural inheritance-image shaping” : providing frameworks for tourism resource activation (Lu Junyang, 2021); serving as living carriers of cultural heritage to promote intangible cultural continuity (Liu Jiaying, 2023); and enhancing cultural attractiveness and brand recognition through unique experiences (Shi et al., 2022).

Group level: Based on emotional solidarity theory, public rituals can evoke solidarity and emotional intimacy, consolidating group relationships. In tourism contexts (host-guest/tourist interactions) and ethnic regions, rituals promote emotional solidarity, social bonding, ethnic identity, and social integration (Zhou Kai & Zhang Yan, 2022; Tang et al., 2023).

2.5 Research Review Although domestic and international scholars have made progress in conceptual definition, dimensional measurement, and effect testing of tourist ritual perception, methodological approaches remain entrenched in “static paradigms,” making it difficult to track perceptual changes across stages. Based on systematic literature review, this study identifies the following critical research gaps:

First, **conceptual and process-based measurement tools are absent.** Existing research predominantly relies on cross-sectional data to measure terminal

states like “sense of ritual” (e.g., Bai Shizhen et al., 2021), with item designs fixated on utility endpoints (e.g., “feeling sacred”), unable to explain phenomena of “same ritual triggering differentiated perceptions.” Although Lu et al. (2024) introduced an interaction perspective, they failed to anchor the temporal path of perception internalization, resulting in blurred conceptual boundaries. Stage-based scales are urgently needed to decode the perception “black box.”

Second, **multi-level mechanisms are fragmented**. While existing research has verified fragmented effects of rituals (e.g., individual immersion, place cultural attractiveness), it neglects the internal mechanisms of effect transmission. Particularly lacking is systematic integration of ritual’s core function as a “relationship reproduction carrier” and its boundary conditions within tourism contexts, necessitating cross-level models for deeper mechanism deconstruction.

Third, **research perspectives and methods lag**. Current research predominantly relies on cross-sectional data, making it difficult to capture perceptual evolutionary trajectories. More critically, disciplinary barriers between psychology, anthropology, and service management hinder revelation of key mechanisms. Future research must integrate multi-disciplinary theories, combine mixed methods (grounded theory, eye-tracking, longitudinal experiments), and construct cross-level research frameworks to enhance mechanism explanatory power.

3. Research Framework

This research series centers on “tourist ritual perception,” establishing “ritual design characteristics” as the key stimulus for perception generation. Through scale development, mechanism integration, and boundary analysis, it achieves the transition from static outcomes to process-based analysis.

The specific research design comprises four interconnected sub-studies (as shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]). **Study 1** defines the conceptual boundaries of tourist ritual perception from a process perspective, developing a high-reliability and validity scale, and verifies the antecedent relationship of “ritual design characteristic intensity → perception.” Study 1’s scale and baseline model provide methodological support for subsequent mechanism research. **Study 2**, grounded in embodied cognition theory and focusing on the individual level, examines how ritual perception influences intention to extend stay, revealing the parallel mediating effects of situational involvement and meaning construction, and identifies the moderating role of participation mode (participatory/observational). **Study 3**, employing tourism authenticity theory and focusing on the place level, explores how ritual perception influences destination identity and intention to extend stay through shaping authenticity experiences, and tests the non-linear moderating effect of cultural distance. **Study 4**, based on emotional solidarity theory and focusing on the group level, compares path differences of “ritual perception → emotional solidarity → intention to extend

stay” across ritual types, and examines the moderating role of identity, deepening understanding of group-level emotional dynamics.

3.1 Study 1: Connotation, Measurement, and Nomological Network of Tourist Ritual Perception from a Process Perspective This study first systematically explains the connotation of tourist ritual perception from a “process perspective.” It strictly follows psychological scale construction procedures—conceptual definition, item generation, expert review, pre-testing, etc.—to construct and validate the “Tourist Ritual Perception Scale.” Based on this, the study selects theoretically relevant antecedent and outcome variables to construct a nomological network (see Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper]) to clarify the new concept’s characteristics (Hinkin, 1998).

Figure 2 Nomological Network Model of Tourist Ritual Perception

3.1.1 Connotation of Tourist Ritual Perception Focusing on the individual level, this study defines tourist ritual perception as: the phased psychological process through which tourists, based on their unique cognitive schemas, emotional states, cultural backgrounds, and immediate experiences, interpret, evaluate, and assign meaning to tourist ritual scenes (e.g., physical environment, atmosphere) and processes (e.g., symbolic presentation, script performance). This definition reflects four characteristics: **Contextuality:** Tourist perception is always rooted in specific cultural and spatial contexts; **Interactivity:** Perception emerges through interactions between tourists and other participants, physical environments, and symbolic systems; **Emotionality:** Emotional arousal and energy accumulation are key mechanisms driving ritual influence; **Processuality:** Perception evolves temporally—initially focusing on environmental atmosphere, during deep interaction concentrating on symbolic decoding and emotional resonance, and during integration completing meaning construction. Focusing on this process perspective helps more precisely reveal how tourist rituals shape visitor experiences, providing theoretical support for destinations to optimize ritual experience design.

3.1.2 Scale Development for Tourist Ritual Perception This study strictly follows scale development protocols (Churchill, 1979; Hinkin, 1998) to construct a tourist ritual perception scale focused on “design efficacy evaluation.” Given that ritual design characteristics (e.g., symbolic arrangement, process architecture) constitute the object of perception, this study establishes “business ritual design” as the logical benchmark for perception measurement. The specific operational process is as follows: First, extract design characteristic dimensions based on tripartite interview data to identify core dimensions of ritual design (context/symbol/process design). Second, operationalize antecedent variables by converting these dimensions into the 前置 variable—“ritual design characteristic intensity”—to measure the objective existence of key design features (e.g., “whether it includes a clear opening segment”) and the intensity of feature manifestation (e.g., “the systematic degree of symbolic cultural display”). Third,

use this variable as the stimulus anchor for the “tourist ritual perception” scale to ensure subsequent perception evaluations target specific design objects.

Based on the conceptual uniqueness of “tourist ritual perception” established in Section 2.2 and the scale design implications in Table 1, this study adopts a “supply-demand” dual-perspective integration strategy: systematically mapping objective dimensions of supply-side design characteristics while precisely capturing demand-side perceptual evaluations of design efficacy, thereby breaking through static measurement limitations and deconstructing the perception black box. Therefore, in conceptual structure and item development, the study integrates inductive and deductive perspectives:

First, conduct in-depth interviews with three stakeholder groups—managers, designers, and tourists (see Table 2)—supplemented by online travelogues and open-ended questionnaire data. Apply grounded theory to 自下而上 extract design dimensions; then, through triangulation, have supply-side (managers/designers) parse design element logic while demand-side (tourists) locate perceptual focus pathways, ultimately constructing a “design dimension → perceptual evaluation” mapping framework that depicts cultural negotiation processes. Simultaneously adjust scale items to align with design efficacy evaluation objectives.

Table 2 Tripartite Interview Questions and Objectives

Stakeholder	Interview Questions	Objectives
Managers	What is the strategic positioning of tourist rituals? What are the core criteria for successful tourist rituals? How to balance cultural authenticity and ritual attractiveness?	Extract design goals and dimensions
Designers	What are the core design processes and elements of tourist rituals? What are the design strategies for ritual opening, climax, and conclusion? What are the symbolic, narrative, and emotion-mobilization strategies?	Deconstruct design elements and logic
Tourists	Which ritual segments/elements reflect “meticulous design” ? How do these designs affect your cognition/emotion? How do you understand designers’ intentions?	Locate perceptual focus, decode pathways, and cultural negotiation mechanisms

To capture the phased evolution patterns of perception, this study adopts the

“retrospective event diary method” (Churchill, 1979). Respondents are required to report, in one session after the ritual concludes, their perceptions and evaluations across three phases according to ritual progression, for example: “Initial contact phase: The lighting gradient design effectively guided my focus to the ritual theme; Deep interaction phase: The collective cheering design triggered strong emotional resonance...” This method overcomes spatiotemporal limitations of traditional fixed measurements, systematically tracking perceptual evolutionary trajectories. Based on multi-source data integration, this study preliminarily constructs the dimensional system and measurement items for tourist ritual perception (see Table 3):

Table 3 Dimensions and Sample Items of Tourist Ritual Perception

The tourist ritual I most recently experienced...

Initial Contact Phase (Context Design Perception) 1. The opening segment design cut off my connection with daily life in a short time. 2. The lighting/music changes at the beginning made me quickly enter the ritual atmosphere.

Deep Interaction Phase (Symbol Design Perception) 1. The symbol design in the ritual (e.g., props/costumes) made me feel the unique charm of local culture. 2. The unique design of symbols and narratives helped me understand their local connotations.

Meaning Integration Phase (Process Design Perception) 1. The ritual process design naturally pushed me to participate in key actions (e.g., following dances/chants). 2. The transition design between segments made the experience coherent without breaks.

Overall Evaluation Phase (Overall Design Efficacy) 1. The overall ritual design prompted me to reflect on my relationship with local culture. 2. At the ritual's conclusion, I felt I had deeper understanding of the cultural spirit it contained.

Note: The scale will be further refined, revised, and improved subsequently.

This scale strictly follows methodological individualism principles, focusing on individual tourists' subjective experiences and symbolic decoding processes: all items require respondents to report personal subjective feelings, evaluations, and cognitions. Group consensus statements (e.g., “Everyone thinks...”) are explicitly excluded; data originate from individual self-reports, with statistical analyses strictly limited to the individual level. In data collection, questionnaires are completed in one session after rituals conclude to avoid process interference, with method adaptation according to research contexts—for example, in Study 2, embedded situational experiments are planned to balance ecological validity and rigor: through group manipulation, participatory (performance involvement) and observational (static viewing) groups are established to test participation mode effects; quality control includes embedded attention filter questions (e.g., “Did you actively follow ritual actions?”) to enhance response validity.

3.1.3 Nomological Network of Tourist Ritual Perception As mentioned, this study introduces the independent variable “ritual design characteristic intensity” to measure the objective existence, implementation clarity, or manifestation distinctiveness of key design features (e.g., opening segment, symbol system, process rhythm) in target rituals. Through tourists’ decoding and evaluation of tourist ritual design efficacy, their ritual perception is activated, ultimately driving outcome variable changes.

According to the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework (Russell & Mehrabian, 1974), meticulously designed ritual characteristics (e.g., context, symbols, process) constitute key environmental stimuli (S). Existing research confirms such physical environment design is crucial for shaping user experiences (Bitner, 1992). The intensity of these stimuli directly influences tourists’ internal cognitive and emotional states (O). Specifically, higher-intensity design characteristics (e.g., more explicit ritual opening atmosphere creation, more systematic symbolic cultural display, smoother ritual process rhythm) provide richer, more consistent environmental cues that reduce cognitive load, thereby promoting more effective information processing, symbolic decoding, and emotional arousal, ultimately positively influencing overall evaluations of ritual design efficacy—namely, tourist ritual perception (O). Therefore:

Proposition 1-1: Ritual design characteristic intensity positively influences tourist ritual perception.

Tourist rituals construct cultural interaction carriers through symbolic situational design (Bai Shizhen et al., 2021). Tourists initiate dual processing through ritual perception: at the cognitive level, perception triggers symbolic decoding (e.g., understanding sacrificial prop symbolism), promoting cognitive schema updating; at the emotional level, perception stimulates emotional resonance (e.g., collective excitement), inducing flow states (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013). Both pathways synergistically promote cultural meaning reconstruction (Liu Jiaying, 2023). According to cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1991), tourist ritual perception enhances cognitive levels through meaning parsing and promotes flow experiences through emotional integration. Thus:

Proposition 1-2: Tourist ritual perception positively influences cognitive enhancement.

Proposition 1-3: Tourist ritual perception positively influences flow experience.

According to cultural capital theory (Lareau & Weininger, 2003), tourists with high cultural capital possess stronger symbolic decoding abilities, enabling more efficient extraction of cultural metaphors in design (e.g., identifying totem symbolism), thereby amplifying the driving effect of design characteristics on perception. Conversely, low cultural capital individuals may weaken this pathway through decoding failure. Therefore:

Proposition 1-4: Tourists’ cultural capital positively moderates the effect of ritual design characteristic intensity on tourist ritual perception; that is, the

higher the cultural capital, the stronger the positive relationship between ritual design characteristic intensity and tourist ritual perception.

3.2 Study 2: Participation or Observation? How Participation Mode and Tourist Ritual Perception Influence Intention to Extend Stay

Study 2 focuses on the individual level, analyzing how tourist ritual perception drives intention to extend stay by shaping embodied cognition and emotional states based on embodied cognition theory, and examines the moderating effect of participation mode (participatory/observational) on the “perception → embodied state” pathway, thereby deepening understanding of micro-level behavioral transformation mechanisms. The theoretical model is shown in Figure 3 [Figure 3: see original paper].

Figure 3 The Effect Model of Participation Mode on Tourist Ritual Perception

3.2.1 Tourist Ritual Perception, Situational Involvement, and Meaning Construction

As the embodied carrier for tourists to perceive destination culture, tourist rituals satisfy tourists’ needs for atmosphere and order through proceduralized situations and actions. Ritualized actions produce control compensation effects, attracting tourists to focus attention on ritual situations and actions, thereby unconsciously integrating into them (Xue Haibo, 2015). Moreover, rituals’ fixed steps and controllable behavioral patterns provide tourists with “completable” and “controllable” task cues, enhancing participation and immersion (Ran Yaxuan et al., 2018). In public festival rituals, positive emotions spread among participants, and this emotional sharing further promotes tourists’ integration into ritual situations, enhancing their pleasure, specialness, and sense of meaning.

As carriers of situations and symbols, tourist rituals shorten the distance between tourists and destination culture by transmitting symbols of spirit, culture, and values (Xue Haibo, 2015). Ritual symbols and processes not only affect participants’ interpersonal interactions and engagement but also deepen their perception of the ritual environment (Shi et al., 2022). For example, in the Yi Torch Festival, on-site rituals not only demonstrate how Yi people celebrate festivals but also convey their unique cultural values, thereby promoting tourists’ deep perception of ritual meaning. Therefore, based on embodied theory and emotional perception theory, this study proposes:

Proposition 2-1: Tourist ritual perception positively influences situational involvement.

Proposition 2-2: Tourist ritual perception positively influences meaning construction.

3.2.2 Mediating Role of Situational Involvement

According to social exchange theory, individuals make corresponding behaviors based on reciprocity principles after evaluating whether the counterpart can create value for them. In

tourism contexts, situational involvement, as a positive emotional resource triggered by tourists' deep participation, can serve as an exchange commodity in the tourist-destination relationship, influencing psychological states and triggering different behaviors. Interaction theory further posits that situational involvement originates from the dynamic process of individual-environment interaction, representing a positive experience stimulated by concentrating attention on current interactions. When individual skills match current actions and personal goals align with situational conditions, situational involvement occurs more easily (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013). Research shows that tourists' deep participation and situational involvement significantly enhance their experience value, subsequently prompting positive reciprocation behaviors like sharing (Lu Junyang, 2021).

Based on the above analysis, this study proposes:

Proposition 2-3: Tourist situational involvement mediates the relationship between tourist ritual perception and intention to extend stay.

3.2.3 Mediating Role of Meaning Construction Rituals, as core carriers of cultural tradition, provide participants unique opportunities for meaning construction through meticulously designed performances and symbolic elements (Hobson, 2017). Individuals assign special meaning to rituals by perceiving symbols, actions, and processes, thereby constructing cultural understanding. Due to rituals' causal ambiguity, individuals tend to rely more on perceptual information for meaning construction. Research shows that rituals significantly enhance individuals' sense of meaning in both work and consumption contexts (Kim et al., 2021), which further influences their perceptions and behavioral intentions.

In tourism contexts, rituals become symbolic expressions of culture and values through destinations' unique artistic, festival, and order designs (Lu et al., 2024). Recent studies show that tourist rituals can enhance tourists' cultural identity (Zhang et al., 2019) and improve their tourism experience value through emotional arousal and meaning construction (Li et al., 2023). For example, Zhang et al. (2019) found that tourists participating in local festival rituals more easily develop emotional attachment to destinations, thereby extending stay duration. Additionally, Li et al. (2023) noted that symbolic interaction and collective participation in tourist rituals significantly promote tourists' meaning construction processes, thereby influencing behavioral intentions. Based on this, this study proposes:

Proposition 2-4: Tourist meaning construction mediates the relationship between ritual perception and intention to extend stay.

3.2.4 Moderating Role of Participation Mode Tourists typically participate in tourist rituals through two modes: participatory and observational. Research shows that participatory rituals significantly enhance participants' sense

of control (Tian et al., 2018), self-efficacy (Brooks et al., 2016), and pleasure (Vohs et al., 2013). However, participatory and observational modes may exhibit significant differences in tourist perception and its effect on experience value (Li et al., 2023).

For participatory mode, tourists are usually at the center or core area of rituals with higher engagement. This deep participation not only helps enhance situational involvement but also produces control compensation effects through rituals' programmatic, patterned, and repetitive actions (Tian et al., 2018), thereby promoting meaning construction. Specifically, participatory participants can more deeply perceive ritual cultural connotations through bodily actions, emotional investment, and symbolic interaction, thereby stimulating stronger situational involvement and more profound meaning construction experiences (Li et al., 2023). Moreover, tourists in participatory mode often enhance destination cultural identity through role-playing and collective interaction in rituals, further improving their experience value (Zhang et al., 2019).

In contrast, tourists in observational mode are mainly at the ritual periphery and need to actively integrate into ritual situations. Due to lack of direct bodily participation, observers' situational involvement is typically lower, relying more on ritual's inherent attractiveness and external performance (Li et al., 2023). Additionally, observers who do not directly participate in ritual actions and performances may have more marginal meaning construction, making it difficult to achieve the depth of participatory participants. Based on this analysis, this study proposes:

Proposition 2-5a: Participation mode moderates the relationship between tourist ritual perception and situational involvement. Specifically, when participation mode is participatory, tourist ritual perception significantly enhances situational involvement; when observational, this effect significantly weakens.

Proposition 2-5b: Participation mode moderates the relationship between tourist ritual perception and meaning construction. Specifically, when participation mode is participatory, tourist ritual perception significantly enhances meaning construction; when observational, this effect significantly weakens.

3.3 Study 3: Does More Authentic Ritual Experience Strengthen Tourists' Intention to Extend Stay? The Non-linear Moderation of Cultural Distance Study 3 builds on tourism authenticity theory (Cohen, 1988) and cultural distance theory to construct a place-level integrated model. Authenticity theory explains tourists' core demand for "authentic symbols and meanings," while cultural distance theory analyzes differential mechanisms of cross-cultural perception. This section focuses on how ritual perception drives intention to extend stay through authenticity experiences and destination identity, and identifies cultural distance's moderating role in transmission pathways. The theoretical model is shown in Figure 4 [Figure 4: see original paper].

Figure 4 The Effect Model of Cultural Distance and Tourist Ritual Perception

on Intention to Extend Stay

3.3.1 Tourist Ritual Perception, Constructivist Authenticity, and Existential Authenticity In cultural tourism contexts, authenticity experience is a crucial core demand for tourists (Chen Ruixia & Zhou Zhimin, 2018), essentially deconstructible into object-oriented constructivist authenticity and subject-oriented existential authenticity (Zhou Yaqing et al., 2007). The former emphasizes value judgments on tourism objects' (e.g., rituals) historicity and cultural nature through symbolic interpretation and social interaction (Cohen, 1988); the latter focuses on tourists' self-reconstruction and emotional sublimation by breaking away from daily life frameworks during participation (Wang, 2000). As the embodied carrier of destination culture (Lu et al., 2024), tourist rituals provide dual authenticity experience generation pathways through symbolic representation systems (e.g., costumes, actions, language) and situational immersion designs (e.g., festival atmosphere, collective interaction).

Constructivist authenticity formation depends on tourists' cognitive decoding and cultural anchoring of ritual symbols (Cohen, 1988). When tourist rituals construct legitimacy through historical tracing (e.g., traditional festival restoration) or authoritative certification (e.g., intangible cultural heritage), tourists can connect ritual actions with local cultural meanings based on symbolic interaction. For example, Lu et al. (2024) found that traditional artifacts (e.g., sacrificial props) and programmatic actions (e.g., dance choreography) in rituals significantly enhance tourists' cultural authenticity perception. This perception is essentially a social construction process whose evaluation criteria dynamically evolve with tourists' knowledge backgrounds and cultural reference systems (Cohen, 1988). Thus, tourists can generate constructivist authenticity through ritual symbols and cultural drivers.

Existential authenticity realization is closely related to tourists' embodied participation (Wang, 2000). In ritual contexts, tourists' bodily actions (e.g., dancing, sacrificing), emotional resonance (e.g., collective excitement), and temporal-spatial detachment (e.g., breaking away from daily roles) jointly constitute "liminal experience," prompting entry into a state of "authentic self" (Turner, 1969). For example, pilgrimage rituals' walking asceticism in religious contexts generates self-transcending reflection through bodily discipline and mental focus. This experience does not depend on objects' objective authenticity but originates from subjects' self-empowerment and existential awakening during participation.

Based on the above theoretical dialogue, this study proposes:

Proposition 3-1: Tourist ritual perception positively influences constructivist authenticity.

Proposition 3-2: Tourist ritual perception positively influences existential authenticity.

3.3.2 Chain Mediating Role of Constructivist Authenticity and Destination Identity According to tourism authenticity theory, authenticity is an important criterion for measuring tourist experience value, especially in cultural tourism (Wang, 2000). Tourists experience “real” local characteristics by perceiving authentic art and culture embodied in destination carriers (e.g., tourist rituals), satisfying their needs for local cultural authenticity and constructivist authentic experiences (Chen Ruixia & Zhou Zhimin, 2018). Constructivist authenticity emphasizes tourists’ subjective interpretation and meaning construction of cultural symbols, which not only enhances their perception of destination cultural authenticity but also further triggers emotional responses. According to affect theory, when individuals’ needs are satisfied, positive emotions emerge, subsequently triggering positive behavioral tendencies such as destination identity and intention to extend stay.

Existing research confirms that tourists’ authenticity perception has a significant positive impact on destination loyalty (Zhou et al., 2013), with destination identity playing a key mediating role. Specifically, when tourists’ constructivist authenticity needs are satisfied during tourist ritual perception, destination identity is enhanced, thereby positively influencing intention to extend stay. Based on this theoretical deduction, this study proposes:

Proposition 3-3: Constructivist authenticity influences intention to extend stay through the mediating role of destination identity.

3.3.3 Chain Mediating Role of Existential Authenticity and Destination Identity According to self-congruity theory, when tourists perceive high overlap between “real place” and “imagined place,” they exhibit stronger destination identity, further influencing behavioral intentions (Zhang et al., 2019). During tourist ritual participation, tourists temporarily break away from daily life constraints and immerse themselves in travel meaning through interaction with tourism situations (Chen Ruixia & Zhou Zhimin, 2018). This process enables tourists to experience existential authenticity—self-discovery, free expression, and emotional sharing through travel.

Existential authenticity emphasizes tourists’ exploration of self-essence and authentic emotional experiences during travel, which can significantly enhance their psychological attachment and sense of belonging to destinations (Li Hao et al., 2023). Research shows existential authenticity positively influences destination loyalty, with place identity being an important antecedent of destination loyalty (Zhou et al., 2013). Moreover, tourists’ word-of-mouth recommendation intention, as an important manifestation of destination loyalty, further verifies the close connection between existential authenticity and destination identity. Although Zhou et al. (2013) noted differences in effect between constructivist and existential authenticity, academia widely recognizes the positive role of authentic tourist experiences on behavioral intentions.

Therefore, this study proposes:

Proposition 3-4: Tourist existential authenticity and destination identity have a chain mediating effect between tourist ritual perception and intention to extend stay.

3.3.4 Non-linear Moderating Role of Cultural Distance The moderating mechanism of cultural distance on tourism experiences is essentially a dynamic process of cognitive resource allocation (Peng Dan, 2005). When cultural differences are moderate, they can stimulate tourists' exploratory desire and reconstruct meaning networks through embodied practice. However, exceeding cognitive load thresholds, information overload-induced anxiety triggers psychological defense (Schnotz & Kürschner, 2007), weakening authenticity experiences (Yu et al., 2020). In ritual contexts, this non-linear effect is particularly pronounced—as the “key” to cultural decoding (Turner, 1969), ritual's symbolic meaning deciphering efficiency depends on the match between cultural distance and cognitive schemas (Peng Dan, 2005).

Specifically, according to “optimal stimulation level theory,” moderate cultural differences can stimulate tourists' cognitive exploration of ritual symbols, promoting constructivist authenticity formation (Cohen, 1988). When cultural distance is below critical values, tourists can effectively decode metaphorical meanings in rituals through cultural schemas (Peng Dan, 2005), enhancing identification with cultural product authenticity (Zhang & Smith, 2019). However, excessive cultural distance exceeds individual cognitive load thresholds (Schnotz & Kürschner, 2007), causing symbolic interpretation failure and weakened authenticity perception. This mechanism aligns with the inverted U-shaped curve of “complexity-pleasure.”

Based on the above theoretical background, this study proposes:

Proposition 3-5: Cultural distance exhibits a significant inverted U-shaped moderating effect on the relationship between tourist ritual perception and constructivist authenticity. Specifically, when cultural distance is below a certain threshold, its increase strengthens the positive effect of ritual perception on constructivist authenticity; but when cultural distance exceeds the threshold, further increase weakens this positive effect.

Existential authenticity emphasizes tourists' self-actualization state after detaching from daily environments (Wang, 2000), while moderate cultural distance can enhance self-reflection and embodied experience by creating “liminal space” (Turner, 1969). Here, cultural differences act as catalysts promoting deep interaction between tourists and ritual scenes. However, excessive cultural distance triggers cognitive dissonance, activating psychological defense mechanisms that hinder existential authenticity achievement. This process aligns with the chained response path of “stimulus-emotion-behavior” in emotional appraisal theory.

Based on this analysis, this study proposes:

Proposition 3-6: Cultural distance has an inverted U-shaped moderating effect on the relationship between tourist ritual perception and existential authenticity. Within a certain threshold range, cultural distance increase strengthens the positive effect of ritual perception on existential authenticity; but when cultural distance breaks through the threshold, it weakens the positive effect.

3.4 Study 4: Which Ritual Type Is More Attractive to Tourists? The Effect of Ritual Type on Tourist Intention to Extend Stay Study 4 integrates interaction ritual theory (Collins, 2004) and emotional solidarity theory (Woosnam et al., 2009), focusing on group-level logic to reveal how tourists drive intention to extend stay by triggering ritual group emotional solidarity, and examines the boundary moderating effects of ritual type and identity. Its theoretical core is rooted in rituals' construction of temporary "experience communities," which have three characteristics (Collins, 2004): **symbolic consensus**—forming common focus (e.g., sacred object gaze, process following); **emotional reciprocity**—establishing strong emotional bonds (e.g., collective cheering, rhythmic dancing); and **norm generation**—internalizing shared behavioral norms (e.g., observing ritual etiquette). Through these three mechanisms, rituals serve as social integration media that cohere discrete individuals, driving individual behavior toward community identity transformation. The theoretical model is shown in Figure 5 [Figure 5: see original paper].

Figure 5 Moderating Effect Model of Ritual Type and Identity

3.4.1 Tourist Ritual Perception and Group Emotional Solidarity

Emotional solidarity refers to group identity and emotional attachment formed by individuals through continuous interaction (Woosnam et al., 2009). In tourist rituals' special liminal space (Turner, 1969), participants construct interactive fields transcending daily life through shared ritual practices. Based on Durkheim' s collective effervescence theory, tourist rituals reconstruct group relations through three-dimensional mechanisms: first, physical scenes' symbolic presentation, including sacred space layout and ritual artifact display; second, programmatic interaction guided by ritual scripts (Goffman, 2017), forming standardized behavioral frameworks; third, collective consciousness generated by situational co-presence (Collins, 2004), strengthening group identity through synchronized actions and emotional resonance. This multi-dimensional ritual participation mechanism helps dissolve social distance between tourists and hosts, prompting formation of temporary "insider" identity.

Existing research shows ritual participation intensity is significantly positively correlated with emotional solidarity levels (Joo et al., 2023). Specifically, ritual-specific cultural codes strengthen cognitive consensus through shared decoding of symbolic symbols, while programmatic interactions enhance relationship intimacy and promote emotional integration.

Based on this, this study proposes:

Proposition 4-1: Tourist ritual perception positively influences emotional solidarity levels.

3.4.2 Tourist Ritual Perception and Intention to Extend Stay Based on emotional contagion theory's bidirectional transmission model, tourist rituals can influence behavioral intentions through dual mechanisms of emotional arousal and meaning construction. From a micro-genesis perspective, multi-modal stimuli in ritual environments—including ritual music (acoustic dimension), sacred object display (visual dimension), incense rituals (olfactory dimension), etc.—trigger tourists' immersive experiences through synaesthesia (Hudson et al., 2019). This multi-sensory synergy prompts synergistic effects between emotional arousal and cognitive processing, ultimately translating into behavioral intention to extend stay.

Specific situational experiment results show that for every 1-unit increase in ritual participants' emotional energy, the probability of stay duration extension increases by 23% (Hansen & Mossberg, 2013). This transformation effect primarily stems from: metaphorical value of ritual symbols enhancing cultural identity, programmatic interaction increasing psychological ownership, and liminal experience reconstructing time perception. Therefore:

Proposition 4-2: Tourist ritual perception positively influences intention to extend stay.

3.4.3 Mediating Role of Emotional Solidarity Social ritual theory founder Durkheim (1912) discovered that collective rituals can construct "collective effervescence" through symbolic interaction, transforming this emotional energy into moral obligations and identity among group members. In tourism contexts, this mechanism materializes as tourists forming emotional bonds with destinations through ritual practices. This emotional attachment system contains three progressive dimensions: cognitive evaluation, emotional commitment, and behavioral loyalty (Lin et al., 2021).

Based on emotional solidarity theory, successful tourist rituals must meet three core conditions: symbolic capital sharing, interaction rhythm synchronization, and emotional energy reciprocity (Collins, 2004). Empirical research shows that when hosts and guests in tourism fields achieve these conditions through ritual performance, strong emotional solidarity connections form, manifesting as: (1) strengthened group belonging; (2) internalized moral obligations; (3) sustained behavioral commitment. Notably, this emotional solidarity has significant temporal extension—Stylidis et al.'s (2020) longitudinal study confirmed that the high emotional solidarity group's revisit rate was 2.3 times that of the control group over a 5-year observation period.

Regarding pathways, tourist rituals influence intention to extend stay through dual mechanisms: first, embodied interaction in physical fields (e.g., ritual performance spaces, cultural symbol decoding) directly strengthens emotional iden-

tity; second, constructing social-psychological fields of “we-ness” forms sustained emotional commitment (Joo et al., 2023). This dual-pathway mediating effect has been verified in cross-cultural research. Accordingly:

Proposition 4-3: Emotional solidarity mediates the relationship between tourist ritual perception and intention to extend stay.

3.4.4 Moderating Role of Ritual Type Existing ritual types reflect differences in social relations, manifested in group member types and group consciousness. Ritual classification varies by domain (Lu Junyang, 2021; Stephenson, 2015). Ritual types can moderate emotional solidarity formation efficiency through participation intensity and cultural salience (Belk, 1988). Specifically, ritual types may moderate the effect of tourist ritual perception on emotional solidarity through group logic’ s triple mechanisms: for **periodic rituals** (e.g., traditional festivals/religious ceremonies), these have high cultural salience and stronger sacredness, more easily activating symbolic consensus and strengthening collective meaning decoding; they may also enhance emotional synchronization efficiency through emotional reciprocity; and promote behavioral coordination through norm generation, thereby significantly strengthening the transformation from ritual perception to emotional solidarity. In contrast, **daily rituals** (e.g., welcome performances/standardized shows) may weaken these triple mechanisms’ efficacy due to repeated exposure and programmatic replication (Goffman, 2017). Based on this:

Proposition 4-4: Ritual type significantly moderates the effect of tourist ritual perception on emotional solidarity. That is, different ritual types in tourism contexts have varying influence degrees on the relationship between tourist ritual perception and emotional solidarity.

3.4.5 Moderating Effect of Identity According to social identity theory, individuals have needs for group belonging (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Identity refers to individuals’ emotional attachment to their groups, which not only influences attitudes but also guides behaviors and mitigates negative intentions. High-identity individuals typically hold more positive group attitudes (Zhang et al., 2019). “Shared belief,” as the core mechanism of emotional solidarity, helps understand psychological connections in religious rituals (Durkheim, 1912). In tourism contexts, research findings on emotional solidarity between destination residents and tourists, tourist group identity’ s role in reducing uncivilized behaviors (Zhang et al., 2019), and core anime fans’ enhanced emotional solidarity due to self-identity at comic-cons (Tang et al., 2023) all confirm identity’ s moderating effect.

As a high-level moderating variable, identity determines the critical point for emotional experience transformation into specific behaviors. When tourists identify with cultural prototypes carried by rituals (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), emotional energy more easily transforms into stay decisions; otherwise, cognitive resistance may affect behavioral transformation. Based on this:

Proposition 4-5a: Identity significantly moderates the effect of tourist ritual perception on intention to extend stay: the stronger the tourist identity, the greater the effect of ritual perception on intention to extend stay.

Proposition 4-5b: Identity significantly moderates the mediating effect strength of emotional solidarity between tourist ritual perception and intention to extend stay: the stronger the tourist identity, the stronger the mediating effect of emotional solidarity.

4. Theoretical Construction

This study 致力于 overcoming limitations of traditional tourist ritual perception research in process dynamics and supply-demand synergy (Lu et al., 2024; Bai Shizhen et al., 2021), constructing a “design-perception-behavior” cross-level framework. The framework’s core innovations manifest in three aspects: first, developing process-based measurement tools to capture the phased evolution of tourist ritual perception; second, explaining cross-level influence mechanisms by analyzing multiple pathways and boundary conditions through which perception drives behavior; third, providing theoretical foundations for practice optimization to facilitate cultural-tourism “traffic” conversion to “retention.”

First, this study achieves key breakthroughs in measurement tool development. Based on manager-designer-tourist triangulation data, it develops a three-phase scale of “initial contact phase-deep interaction phase-meaning integration phase.” This tool’s innovation lies in: first, effectively resolving the “supply-demand fragmentation” problem in previous research (e.g., Lu et al., 2024) by mapping supply-side design characteristics to demand-side perceptual evaluation pathways; second, adopting segmented retrospective measurement methods to systematically track perceptual evolutionary trajectories, breaking through limitations of measuring only terminal static perceptions. This scale provides the first set of process-based measurement standards for tourist ritual perception research, with its embedded supply-demand synergy logic laying a solid measurement foundation for in-depth exploration of perceptual phased evolution patterns and multi-level influences.

Second, this study constructs an “individual-place-group” three-level integrated model to systematically explore the multiple pathways and boundary conditions through which tourist ritual perception drives intention to extend stay, helping compensate for fragmented theoretical explanations at single levels. At the individual level, based on embodied cognition theory, this study explores the dual-pathway mechanism through which ritual perception influences intention to extend stay via meaning construction and situational involvement, and identifies the moderating effect of participation mode (observational/participatory), deepening understanding of micro-level behavioral transformation mechanisms. At the place level, based on tourism authenticity theory, this study analyzes the pathway through which ritual perception influences destination identity

and intention to extend stay by shaping authenticity experiences; simultaneously, it explores the inverted U-shaped moderating effect of cultural distance in this pathway, providing critical threshold basis for destination cultural resource adaptive management. At the group level, based on emotional solidarity theory, this study explains the transformation pathway through which ritual perception influences intention to extend stay by promoting emotional solidarity, introducing interaction ritual chains' core logic (symbolic consensus → emotional reciprocity → norm generation), and examines the moderating effects of ritual type and identity, deepening understanding of how micro-level interactions drive macro-level group effects in tourism. These three-level mechanisms are interrelated, jointly forming an integrated theoretical framework explaining how tourist rituals facilitate “traffic” to “retention” conversion.

Third, the methods and tools proposed in this study have cross-domain application potential. At the measurement tool level, the developed three-phase process scale of ritual perception can be applied to red education, intangible cultural heritage activation, and other fields, such as tracking adolescents' emotional internalization trajectories in red study tour rituals, overcoming traditional measurement methods' process limitations. At the theoretical explanation level, this study provides explanatory frameworks for understanding immersive performing arts' emotional mobilization and cultural transmission. At the practical application level, this study offers multi-faceted value: the inverted U-shaped effect of cultural distance provides scientific basis for differential threshold design in cross-cultural governance; the group-level transmission chain of “symbolic consensus → emotional reciprocity → norm internalization” can be used to strengthen emotional stickiness in festival tourism and online community cohesion; and the deconstruction of individual embodied experience mechanisms provides theoretical guidance for situational transformation design of study tour curricula and risk management in adventure tourism. In summary, this study advances tourist ritual perception research from static outcomes to process analysis, with its core findings providing theoretical support for cross-domain practices including cultural-tourism integration, brand value shaping, and social-emotional governance.

Furthermore, this study provides destination managers with a process-based guidance framework for tourist ritual design. Managers can optimize key design elements such as ritual context, symbols, and processes according to the “contact-interaction-integration” perceptual evolution pattern. In cultural symbol presentation, they need to finely balance abstract depth and cognitive accessibility to avoid homogenization risks and prevent cross-cultural cognitive overload, achieving scientific management of cultural experience depth and breadth. Critically, this framework provides insights for managers to develop targeted intervention strategies based on understanding the temporal stages, core transmission mechanisms, and key boundary conditions (e.g., participation mode, cultural distance, ritual type) of ritual perception. This provides empirical basis for destinations to rationally plan resource investment priorities and achieve precise allocation under limited resource constraints, helping improve ritual experience design ef-

ficacy and “retention” conversion efficiency.

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