

Incomplete Representation of Cultural Heritages in Scenic Spot: Shanghai Tianzifang

---The Neglection of Intangible Cultural Heritages

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Abstract: This paper focused on understanding the lack of intangible cultural heritage in heritage tourism attractions in Shanghai. There was already past literature illustrated the significance of intangible cultural heritage and the problem of not giving enough attention to those heritages. This research, different from past literatures, aimed to understand this problem on a smaller scale. The research is based on Shanghai, China, specifically. The case study on Tianzifang was made aiming to reveal defects in the scenic spot. A survey will then be released to investigate Shanghainese. This survey could directly understand which heritage site and element respondents mainly values. Indirectly the survey also implied the amount of attention respondents pay to intangible cultural heritage. This paper is not committed to providing tourists with the “best” plan to travel to Shanghai. Instead, based on Shanghai, this paper attempted to sort out hidden problems in Shanghai heritage tourism attractions. At last, this paper will propose an imagination of tourism attraction that provides more substantial cultural experiences to tourists to vigorously promote local heritage.

Keywords: Cultural heritage, tourism, Shanghai

1. Introduction

The definition of culture remained debatable while all cultural anthropology works based on this term. Some believe that it's tangible. Others claim that culture is conceptual. However, the ambiguity of the definition didn't decrease the value of cultural heritages. Cultural heritages showed significant economic and social values which led to the rapid development of cultural heritage tourism. This research aims to explore the potential defects in the cultural heritage tourism system by analyzing a specific case —— tourism attraction Tianzifang in Shanghai. The purpose of the research is to reconsider the harm that tourist attraction will bring to cultural heritage sites and to encourage rethinking the balance between the preservation of heritage and the profit that tourism can bring.

2. Literature Review

The tourism industry existed mainly for educational or recreational purposes in the early world. Moreover, historical evidence also proved that journeys originated from luxury lifestyles and searched for amusement [1].

Although traveling as an entertainment might only reserve for nobles back then, it's recently opened to a wider population. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) suggested that in 2007 there was a total of 903 million tourists that spent 625 billion USD [2]. Besides, the tourism industry provided roughly 100 million employees globally. In short, the tourism industry already became one of the prominent drivers of economic growth. Tourism could classify into numerous types. It could include urban tourism, cultural tourism, religious tourism, seaside tourism, and more [3]. Among them, cultural heritage as "one of the most important and ubiquitous tourism resources in the world" made heritage tourism a notable form of tourism [4]. Defining heritage could be extremely complicated. People today generally agreed that heritage is what humankind inherits from the past and utilizes in the present [5,6]. The vague definition leaves room for misunderstanding. For instance, heritages are not always old [7] and tangible. Though architecture and other materialized heritage have a remarkable position in heritage tourism, intangible tourism is also worth receiving attention. Language, music, dance, religion, folklore, art forms, traditional knowledge, gastronomical traditions, social relations, rituals, hunting methods, and ceremonies, all those components together formed a complete heritage of a specific culture [8-10].

Such false assumption of heritage thus caused the focus of promotion and consumption to be clearly on tangible heritage in tourism destinations [11]. "limited interest has been shown by academics in the relationship between tourism and intangible cultural heritage" [2].

Traditional tourism entrepreneurship and development today was burning the cultural heritage of a region in exchange for high profit. Traditional tourism entrepreneurship and development take a capitalist approach, resulting in lower benefits for host communities [12]. The flourishing tourism industry raised local housing prices, due to a serious upgrade of the city aiming to attract more tourists. Inhabitants, unable to afford growing housing prices, either passively or actively left their hometown. The host communities are the ones who inherited those intangible cultural heritages. Gentrification of local inhabitants leads to the slow vanishing of regional cultural identity [13].

However, intangible cultural heritage is still an indispensable part of heritage tourism. "According to some estimates, between 50 and 80 percent of all domestic and international travel involves some element of culture such as visiting museums and historic sites, enjoying music and arts, or being immersed in the living culture of a destination." [14]

Past literature already realized the plight intangible culture heritages are currently facing. In the paper "Planning for intangible cultural heritage in Tourism: challenges and Implications" Esfehni made a detailed description of difficulties intangible cultural heritage faced. A well-constructed envision of binding intangible heritages into recent tourism was proposed in there as well. However, the paper's discussion was more generalized to the entire heritage tourism industry. This paper will follow the conclusions Esfehni made to understand intangible cultural heritage's situation in attractions in Shanghai.

3. Methodology

This paper will combine a survey with a case discussion of Tianzifang to argue the defects of Shanghai heritage tourism attractions.

3.1. Why Shanghai

Shanghai is the region studied in this paper due to its unique characteristics. Shanghai as a heritage tourism destination attracted millions of travelers each year. Those travelers are either attracted by the modernity of this grand city or by the city's unique cultural heritage. During the 20th century, Shanghai was segregated into different districts that reigned directly under Western powers. This unique historical background fostered the assimilation between Western and Eastern cultures.

However, in the 21st century, Shanghai was also one of China's most prominent trading centers. "This was a result of a series of reforms in the city including industrial restructuring, housing reform, and infrastructure rebuilding. To keep up with the time, many parts of the infrastructure system need to be repaired, particularly in the old central city" [15].

In general, Shanghai is a prototype of a city that needs to balance its modern features and historical and cultural imprints.

3.2. Why Tianzifang



Figure 1: The map for the entire Tianzifang

Tianzifang is a series of commercialized old alleys in Shanghai known for its 20th-century Shikumen housing style. There are also several prominent factories of fragrance and cigarettes. Such architectural style was a combination of Western Chinese and English architectural styles. These alleys today are transformed into a shopping center with outstanding cultural characteristics. They claimed that those alleys are a perfect spot for travelers to experience the charm of life in 20th-century Shanghai.

Tianzifang is explicitly analyzed due to its fame and its typicality.

The analysis of Tianzifang will base on first-hand graphic records I took and personal observations.

3.3. Survey design

The survey was designed with careful consideration of stratification. It requires respondent to name at least one place or thing in Shanghai that they believe best represents the cultural heritage of this place. This survey aimed not to find a travel checklist full of locations that were "recommended by local inhabitants", but to analyze the similarities between all answers and get some of the most prominent heritage elements that Shanghainese valued.

The time it takes to understand and blend into a culture varies between people. In this survey, only the answer of residents who lived in Shanghai for over 8 years will be analyzed. This is intended to gain a more representative sample of how Shanghainese understand their hometown.

The survey also collected basic information such as gender and income level. Both factors could greatly impact a person's understanding of this city. For instance, income level could determine where a person lives and where they carry out their daily activities. Thus, asking these questions is supposed to prevent answers to the survey from misrepresenting extra populations.

Finally, within just a few decades, Shanghai has undergone drastic changes, both physical reconstruction of the city and a wide mental revolution. Hence the survey particularly asked where the place embody 19th/20th-century Shanghai heritage and where the site represent modern Shanghai heritage. This separation should break the misassumption of heritage attractions that must be old.

The entire survey will attach to this paper at appendix.

4. Look Close into Tianzifang

Tianzifang was a typical example of the creative recreation of historical accommodation blocks. By pure observation, there are three main problems I noticed in my journey in those alleys:

- The exploitation and further damage of historical buildings
- The disruption of local inhabitant's life
- The lack of intangible heritage within the alleys

4.1. The exploitation of historical buildings



Figure 2: An alley in Tianzifang where the facade of the historical building was altered

Tianzifang, as it claimed, is worth noticing due to its well-protected Shikumen architectural style. However, the facade of lots of buildings in the alley were already redecorated or changed into another style. Shops repaint the lower half of the building. European style storefront was common and attracted numerous young tourists to leave their photos in front of it. Such transformations might make individual shops more desirable to tourists but damaged the harmony of the style of the entire block.

As a site that displayed Shanghai architectural style to tourists, Tianzifang even acquiesces in reconstructing and destroying ancient buildings.

4.2. Disruption of local inhabitant's life



Figure 3: Signs of real residents living in Tianzifang

Even today Tianzifang was already intensely commercialized. There are still around a hundred families living in those alleys. Flooding tourists unquestionably brought inconvenience to residents. Since Shikumen was a Chinese version of an English lane house, the inner space of each building was minimal. At the same time, usually several (two to four) families will share a building. Also, the lighting condition in buildings is poor. Hence, in the past, inhabitants in those buildings spent a large portion of life outdoors. However, today thousands of tourists forced residents to stay within the buildings and occupied almost every square meter of those alleys. Several warning signs (the picture at the lower left corner) are also painted on the wall asking tourists not to take pictures of those private buildings where inhabitants still lived in. The privacy of local inhabitants is widely invaded. The noise from tourism activity in the block also greatly impacted people's daily lives.

4.3. Lack of intangible heritage

Tangible heritage such as architecture still left traces in Tianzifang. Whereas intangible cultural heritage entirely disappeared in those alleys. Tianzifang introduced itself as a place where Western and Eastern cultures integrated. Culture did mix thoroughly in those alleys. Tourists could find representative cuisine from all around China, including Chengdu Chuanchuan(up-right of the pic) and Changsha stinky tofu.

Moreover, Western fast food such as cheese hotdogs, French fries (up-left of the pic), and beer also win high popularity in Tianzifang. There's even a tiny alley with a strong Europe style. Numerous small pubs are selling "Spanish" beer (the lower one of the pic) to foreign travelers who visit to experience Shanghai heritage.



Figure 4: Shops with cultural characteristics of other regions

Based on those observations, the word culture invasion might be more appropriate instead of claiming Tianzifang as a center of cultural integration.

5. Survey answer analysis

In total seventeen responses were received. Only one of the responses is from someone who lived in Shanghai for three years or even less. The other sixteen responses are all from people who lived in Shanghai for over 10 years. The survey asked respondents how representative Tianzifang is to the Shanghai heritage. On a scale of 1 to 10, the average score of all 16 answers is 4.56. This score means that these sixteen respondents didn't agree that Tianzifang adequately represented Shanghai's cultural heritage.

Analyzing all 16 answers, the multicultural heritage that Shanghai embodied was mentioned repeatedly. In response no.17, the respondent reckoned that only walking on the streets of Shanghai could allow a tourist to experience a harmonious blend of old and new culture in Shanghai. Respondent 16 directly gave out two streets that she believed well displayed the diverse cultural heritage mutually existing within the city.

In all 16 responses, this survey's most nominated heritage site was still the famous building complex at the Bund (Waitan). On one hand, this once again proves the importance of tangible cultural heritage in heritage tourism. On the other hand, intangible cultural heritages in Shanghai is once again forgotten even by the people who inherited them.

6. Conclusion

Shanghai has a rich cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible. Yet many intangible cultural heritages did not receive promotion and protection like some tangible heritage. Tianzifang is an example of how scenic spots mistreat local inhabitants, ignoring that inhabitants are the core of preserving and performing intangible heritages. On the other hand, the survey showed how residents failed to realize their importance to local cultural heritage.

Though the problems of Shanghai heritage tourism attractions are obvious, there's still possible solutions. There's lots of streets mentioned by respondents when they are asked which place in Shanghai tourist could sense the most Shanghai heritages. City walk, which means people would travel a region by purely walking on public streets, recently received increase attention online. Maybe encouraging tourists to really walk into city, into blocks where people lived their life and spent their time is a good way to introduce intangible cultural heritage. Dialects people use on street and traditional restaurant standing in the corner could all help newcomers to peek into a normal routine of a day in Shanghai.

Also, perhaps Tianzifang as a scenic spot, didn't completely failed to carry its purpose. When walking in those alleys, I met a tourist come from Milan, Italy. Out of curiosity, I asked him whether he could sense unique Shanghai heritage from those alleys. That tourist told me that he's completely new to the building structure and the narrow alley in Tianzifang. He said that he had a great experience in it. This short conversation made me wonder that whether it's me who's too skeptical toward Shanghai heritage site.

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Survey

Your age:

- Under 11
- Under 27
- Under 42
- Under 58
- Under 73
- Above 74

Your gender

- Male
- Female
- Other

Did you born in Shanghai?

- Yes
- No

How long you've lived in Shanghai?

- 3 years or under
- 5 years or under
- 8 years or under
- 10 years or under
- 15 years or under
- 16 years or above

Where did you live/work?

- Huangpu district
- Xuhui district
- Changning district

- Jingan district
- Putuo district
- Hongkou district
- Yangpu district
- Minhang district
- Baoshan district
- Jiading district
- Pudong district
- Songjiang district
- Qingpu district
- Fengxian district
- Chongming district

(Open-ended questions)

the place in Shanghai that best represents the life and culture of Shanghai people?

Where in Shanghai can best embody old Shanghai and Shanghai-style Shanghai culture? (Why?)

If foreigners come to Shanghai, where would you recommend them to visit?

In your opinion, how representative of the local culture is Tianzifang, a famous tourist attraction in Shanghai representing old Shanghai culture? Scale 1-10

What is the most important thing about traveling for you?

Your(or your family's) income level?