Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH) (e-ISSN : 2504-8562)
2025, Volume 10, Issue 4, e003358
DOI: https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v10i4.3358

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Cultural Influences and Tourist Attachment: Exploring Cultural Elements in Destination Loyalty of Luoyang City, China

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KEYWORDS:
Cultural Elements
Destination Loyalty
Luoyang City

CITATION:
Yi, Y., & Suhaida Mohd Amin. (2025). Cultural Influences and Tourist Attachment: Exploring Cultural Elements in Destination Loyalty of Luoyang City, China. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH), 10*(4), e003358. https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v10i4.3358

ABSTRACT

Cultural elements play a crucial role in shaping tourists' attachment to destinations and influencing their loyalty. As cultural tourism gains increasing importance in the global tourism industry, understanding the role of cultural factors in destination loyalty has become essential for sustainable tourism development. This study examines the impact of two key cultural dimensions—preservation of local culture and heritage, and personal experience in local culture—on destination loyalty to Luoyang city, China, a city renowned for its deep historical and cultural significance. Using a sample of 520 respondents, data were collected through a structured survey and analyzed using SPSS to assess the relationships between these cultural factors and destination loyalty. The findings reveal that both the preservation of local culture and heritage and personal cultural experiences have a significant positive impact on tourists' emotional attachment and loyalty to the destination. Specifically, cultural heritage conservation enhances the authenticity and attractiveness of the destination, while tourists' immersive experiences in local traditions, arts, and customs deepen their emotional connections and intentions to revisit. These findings suggest that effective cultural heritage management and enriched cultural experiences are crucial for fostering long-term destination loyalty. Tourism policymakers and destination managers should prioritize the integration of cultural heritage conservation with interactive visitor experiences to strengthen tourists' emotional engagement. This study contributes to the growing body of research on cultural tourism by providing empirical evidence on how cultural preservation and personal cultural interactions enhance destination loyalty, offering practical insights for cultural tourism planning in heritage-rich cities.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the literature on cultural tourism by highlighting the impact of heritage preservation and personal cultural experiences on destination loyalty. Its primary contribution is finding that these factors enhance loyalty, offering insights for tourism development in heritage-rich destinations.

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1. Introduction

Tourism plays an essential role in China's economy and business landscape. China has emerged as a leading global travel destination, attracting tourists from countries such as Thailand, Japan, South Korea, Russia, and the United Kingdom. According to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China, China welcomed approximately 64.88 million foreign visitors, reflecting an increase of 82.9% compared to the previous year, with visa-free entries alone reaching 20.11 million, up by 112.3% in 2024 (Jia, 2025). This substantial growth highlights the robust recovery of China's inbound tourism sector following the global pandemic.

Luoyang City, located in Henan Province, China, is one of the oldest cities in Chinese history, renowned for its rich cultural heritage and historical significance. As a capital city for 13 dynasties, Luoyang City is often considered the cradle of Chinese civilization (Dong & Shen, 2023). It is home to numerous UNESCO World Heritage Sites, including the Longmen Grottoes and the Grand Canal, both of which contribute significantly to the city's prominence as a cultural tourism destination. These cultural assets attract millions of visitors each year, making Luoyang a key destination for those seeking to explore China's ancient history and heritage (Xue et al., 2014).

Destination loyalty refers to a tourist's commitment to revisit a destination and recommend it to others, based on emotional attachment and satisfaction with their experiences at the destination (Oliver, 1999). It is a key factor for the long-term success and sustainability of tourism in any destination (Hosany & Gilbert, 2010). Loyalty in tourism is not only about repeat visitation but also about the emotional and psychological bond tourists form with a place, which is influenced by factors such as cultural heritage, personal experiences, and the quality of the services offered (Cetin & Bilgihan, 2015). This emotional attachment often leads to a strong sense of belonging and a desire to share the experience with others, thus fostering positive word-of-mouth and promoting the destination's reputation (Chen & Rahman, 2017).

Culture is one of the main factors that influence the experience customers have alongside affecting their loyalty level to the destination. Citing the works of Song et al. (2025), cultural heritage and local traditions are critical factors that lead to tourists' positive emotions and reappraisal of a destination, encouraging them to revisit the place and encourage other people to do the same as well. In the same regard, Su et al. (2023) noted that cultural values and sense of heritage mattered, since tourists wanted destinations to remain true to their culture. Historical sites, cultural places, the production of local food, and regular festivals entice tourists and make them travel back to the same place due to the intention that the places give people unforgettable experiences. Cultural factors play out an overarching function in destination loyalty as identified in the current literature. According to Xu et al. (2021), it is said that cultural experiences bring great satisfaction to tourists and thus contribute to destination loyalty. Their study therefore states that it is the cultural endowment such as the history and culture brands which attract and engage the tourist eventually making them come back for more and recommend others to visit the same destination. Moreover, using a sample of international tourists, Croitoru et al. (2024) have established that cultural facilities and activities enhance satisfaction and customers' loyalty. Tian et al. (2020) also established their research showing the argument that cultural authenticity is another significant feature that fosters an impressive experience and builds the bond between the tourists and the site. However,

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Zhang and Walsh 's (2020) analysis yields opposite results where although cultural factors were found to increase satisfaction, they do not have the same direct positive impact on destination loyalty when satisfaction is not taken into account. This shows that cultural aspects need to significantly increase the perceived tourist experience in order to influence loyalty.

The preservation of local culture and heritage assets plays a crucial role in shaping destination loyalty. Tourists visiting cultural sites assess their value from scenic, educational, and social perspectives (Wang & Leou, 2015). Verma and Rajendran (2017) emphasized the significance of historical nostalgia in attracting heritage visitors, suggesting that tourism managers utilize historical monuments and structures to evoke nostalgia and enhance tourist appeal. Historical sites carry deep cultural significance for local communities, making them particularly engaging for culturally sensitive tourists seeking meaningful experiences (Esfehani & Albrecht, 2018). The conservation of historical places often adopts an adaptive reuse approach, ensuring authenticity while enhancing their attractiveness to tourists (Chong & Balasingam, 2019). For example, the preservation of heritage sites along Musi Riverside in Palembang has successfully increased tourist visits following restoration efforts (Lussetyowati, 2015).

Beyond heritage preservation, tourists' personal experiences in local culture—such as participating in traditional festivals, sampling local cuisine, and experiencing cultural practices—plays a vital role in strengthening destination loyalty. These immersive experiences foster a deeper emotional connection with the destination (Chen & Rahman, 2017). Research indicates that tourists who actively take part in local cultural activities are more likely to develop a sense of attachment, resulting in greater satisfaction and a higher likelihood of return visits (Richards, 2018). By creating lasting memories and offering a more comprehensive understanding of the destination, these experiences are essential in cultivating long-term tourist loyalty.

1.1. Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to explore how the preservation of local culture and heritage, alongside personal cultural experiences, influences destination loyalty in Luoyang City, China. The study aims to offer insights into how these factors shape tourists' loyalty to heritage-rich destinations like Luoyang City. The findings aim to provide tourism managers with valuable recommendations for enhancing cultural tourism strategies, focusing on both heritage preservation and fostering interactive cultural experiences that can strengthen the emotional connection between tourists and the destination.

2. Literature Review

Loyalty is a multidimensional concept that has been extensively examined and defined across diverse academic fields. Fundamentally, it signifies a deep sense of commitment, attachment, or allegiance to an individual, group, organization, or cause. It is commonly marked by a steadfast willingness to support and uphold the object of loyalty, even when confronted with difficulties or opposition.

Destination loyalty is a key concept in tourism research, referring to tourists' likelihood of revisiting a destination and recommending it to others (Oppermann, 2000). Loyalty plays a crucial role in the sustainable development of tourism destinations by fostering repeat visits, positive word-of-mouth, and long-term economic benefits (Yoon & Uysal,

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2005). The concept is often examined through behavioral loyalty (revisit intentions and recommendations) and attitudinal loyalty (emotional attachment and preference) (Chen & Gursoy, 2001). Previous studies have identified various determinants of destination loyalty, including tourist satisfaction (Chi & Qu, 2008), perceived value (Petrick, 2004), and destination image (Zhao et al., 2024). The influence of cultural factors on destination loyalty has gained increasing attention, particularly in the context of heritage and cultural tourism (Wang et al., 2021).

Cultural tourism has been recognized as a key factor in driving destination loyalty, particularly in heritage cities (Richards, 2018). Tourists who seek cultural experiences tend to develop stronger loyalty due to the uniqueness and depth of their interactions (Du & McKercher, 2020). Studies have shown that destinations with rich cultural heritage attract repeat visitors, especially when they offer immersive and participatory experiences (Sobitan & Vlachos, 2020).

Moreover, cultural tourists tend to be more involved in destination conservation efforts and exhibit higher levels of word-of-mouth recommendations (Stebbins, 1996). Therefore, integrating cultural preservation with interactive experiences is a crucial strategy for enhancing destination loyalty in heritage cities (Timothy, 2011).

2.1. Luoyang City as a Tourist Destination

Luoyang City boasts a rich historical and cultural heritage. As the capital of 13 dynasties over a span of 4,000 years, it is recognized as one of the cradles of Chinese civilization. The city is home to several UNESCO World Heritage Sites, including the Longmen Grottoes, inscribed in 2000, and sections of the Grand Canal, such as the Huiluo Barn and Hanjia Barn, which were designated in 2014 (Barrett, 2005). These cultural treasures highlight Luoyang's historical significance and its enduring influence on Chinese heritage.

The increased demand of tourism can be proven in China Statistical Yearbook, rose from 128 million person-times to 141 million person-times for overseas visitors (Bei, 2025). Despite that, China government still aims to boost cultural and tourism development by increasing its allocation up to 106.5 billion yuan in 2021 (Xin, 2020). This might due to travel and tourism industry in China had higher contribution to GDP, from 5.9% in 2010 to 9.3% in 2021 (Wen, 2023). By this mean, tourism sector plays vital role in contributing its GDP and overall economy development**.** Luoyang City exemplifies a prominent tourist destination contributing significantly to China's GDP. Renowned for its rich cultural heritage, including the UNESCO-listed Longmen Grottoes and the celebrated annual Peony Festival, Luoyang attracted approximately 135 million visitors in 2023, generating over CNY 104 billion in tourism revenue (Hao, 2024). This tourism activity substantially contributes to local and national economic growth.

2.2. Preservation of local culture and heritage

The preservation of local culture and heritage plays a crucial role in fostering destination loyalty by enhancing the cultural appeal and authenticity of a place. Tourists often assess heritage sites based on their scenic, educational, and social value, which influences their overall experience and likelihood of revisiting (Wang & Leou, 2015). The conservation of historical and cultural assets not only safeguards a destination's unique identity but also strengthens its attractiveness to visitors who seek meaningful and immersive experiences (Esfehani & Albrecht, 2018).

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One of the key elements in cultural preservation is the strategic use of historical nostalgia to engage heritage tourists. Verma and Rajendran (2017) emphasized that historical nostalgia significantly influences visitors' emotional connections with a destination, and tourism managers can leverage this by maintaining historical monuments and structures to evoke a sense of the past. Similarly, the adaptive reuse of historical sites—repurposing heritage buildings while maintaining their authenticity—has proven to be an effective method for sustaining cultural tourism (Chong & Balasingam, 2019). For example, the restoration of heritage sites along the Musi Riverside in Palembang successfully increased tourist interest and visitation, demonstrating the positive impact of well-executed preservation efforts (Lussetyowati, 2015).

Overall, preserving local culture and heritage ensures the long-term sustainability of tourism destinations by maintaining their historical significance, cultural depth, and emotional resonance with visitors. Effective conservation strategies not only protect cultural assets but also enhance the tourist experience, leading to greater satisfaction and destination loyalty.

2.3. Personal experience in local culture

Engaging in personal experiences within a local culture significantly enhances tourists' emotional connection to a destination, fostering a deeper sense of attachment and loyalty. Tourists seek authentic and immersive cultural interactions, such as participating in traditional festivals, engaging with local artisans, or experiencing regional cuisine, which provide meaningful memories and enrich their overall travel experience (Kim et al., 2010). These firsthand encounters allow visitors to develop a stronger appreciation for the cultural identity of a destination, increasing their likelihood of revisiting and recommending it to others (Buhalis et al., 2020).

Cultural immersion also plays a crucial role in shaping tourist satisfaction and engagement. Scholars argue that interactive and participatory experiences, rather than passive observation, lead to a greater sense of cultural appreciation and attachment (Cajiao et al., 2022). For instance, Jing and Loang (2024) found that tourists who actively engage in local cultural activities—such as learning traditional crafts or taking part in folk performances—report higher satisfaction and stronger emotional bonds with the destination. Furthermore, Amaro et al. (2023) introduced the concept of the experience economy, highlighting that destinations offering unique, memorable, and interactive cultural experiences are more likely to cultivate visitor loyalty.

By providing opportunities for authentic cultural engagement, destinations can enhance their competitive advantage and ensure long-term visitor loyalty. Tourism planners should focus on creating interactive cultural experiences, enabling tourists to connect with the local community and traditions in a way that fosters deep emotional investment (Seyfi et al., 2019).

3. Research Methods

This study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the influence of the preservation of local culture and heritage, as well as personal experiences in local culture, on destination loyalty in Luoyang, China. A survey-based approach was employed to collect data from tourists who visited cultural heritage sites in the city. Ethical approval was obtained from UiTM's Research Ethics Committee before data collection began. The

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results of the data collection will be analyzed using statistical tools to identify patterns and relationships between the variables. The design is based on previous studies that highlight the importance of cultural engagement in shaping tourists' attachment to destinations and fostering loyalty (Siahaan & Saragih, 2025).

The sample for this study consists of tourists who had visited prominent cultural heritage sites in Luoyang, such as the Longmen Grottoes, White Horse Temple, and other significant local landmarks. Participants were selected through convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is often used in tourism studies due to its practicality and efficiency in obtaining a diverse group of participants (Chiu et al., 2016). The data collection occurred over two months, through both online and face-to-face questionnaire distribution at major tourist attractions. This method ensures the inclusion of a wide range of visitors, both local and international, and allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural experiences and their impact on loyalty.

The sample size was determined using confidence interval estimation—a method widely adopted by marketing researchers and national polling organizations (Burns & Bush, 2014). This technique is especially effective when the population is vast or undefined, as it calculates the minimum number of responses needed for accurately estimating proportions. In this calculation, the standard normal deviation is set to 1.96 for a 95% confidence level, with a 50% proportion (0.5) and a ±5% confidence interval (0.05). Using the formula provided by Burns and Bush (2014):

$$n = z^2 (p)(1-p)/ e^2$$

$$= 1.962(0.5) (1-0.5)/ 0.052$$

$$= 384.16$$

The initial sample size of 385 was calculated using the above formula, representing the minimum required sample size without accounting for non-response rates or invalid data.In order to ensure enough valid samples, more than 500 questionnaires will be issued.

The main data collection tool was a structured questionnaire, which was developed based on a review of relevant literature on cultural tourism, destination loyalty, and heritage preservation. The questionnaire consisted of three primary sections: (1) Preservation of Local Culture and Heritage, (2) Personal Experience in Local Culture, and (3) Destination Loyalty. These sections were specifically designed to capture key variables that previous research has identified as significant in understanding destination loyalty (Knežević, 2017b). Each item on the questionnaire was measured using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 represented "strongly disagree" and 5 represented "strongly agree." This scale is widely used in social science research as it offers a simple and effective way to measure attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors (Joshi, 2015).

The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were first used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample. Subsequently, Pearson correlation analysis was employed to examine the relationships between preservation of local culture, personal cultural experience, and destination loyalty. Multiple regression analysis was used to test the predictive power of these factors in explaining destination loyalty, following the approach suggested by Hayes et al. (2013). A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was adopted for all statistical tests.

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4. Results

This section presents the results of our statistical analyses, focusing on the reliability and validity of the constructs used in this study. We employed multiple measures to assess the internal consistency and overall reliability of our measurement instruments. Reliability analysis was conducted using two primary measures: Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability. Cronbach's Alpha is a measure of internal consistency, indicating how closely related a set of items are as a group. Composite Reliability is an additional measure that takes into account the different outer loadings of the indicator variables. Table 1 presents the reliability and validity measures for all constructs used in this study.

Table 1: Reliability and Validity Measures

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
CULTURAL FACTORS			
Preservation of local culture and heritage	8	.896	.888
Personal experience in local culture	12	.934	.886
DESTINATION LOYALTY	7	.879	.944

The cultural factors construct was divided into two subconstructs: "Preservation of local culture and heritage" and "Personal experience in local culture". Both demonstrated excellent reliability with Cronbach's Alpha values of .896 and .934 respectively, and Composite Reliability values of .888 and .886. These values exceed the recommended thresholds suggested by Bland and Altman (1997), indicating robust measurement consistency for these constructs. These findings align with similar research in the tourism field. For instance, Kim et al. (2022) reported Cronbach's Alpha values ranging from 0.87 to 0.93 for cultural factors in their study on destination attributes, supporting the high reliability observed in our study.

Destination Loyalty constructs both exhibited excellent reliability, with Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.879, and Composite Reliability values of 0.944 respectively, surpassing the benchmarks set by Bagozzi and Yi (1988). These high reliability scores are in line with other tourism studies, such as Chi and Qu (2008), who reported Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.94 for destination loyalty.

Regression analysis was employed to examine the relationship between the preservation of local culture and heritage, personal experience in local culture, and destination loyalty. This section is designed to address Research Objective: To investigate the influence of cultural heritage preservation and personal cultural experiences on destination loyalty.

The findings on the influence of cultural factors on destination loyalty reveal significant results. Table 2 presents the model summary, which reveals a strong positive correlation, with a correlation coefficient of 0.888, indicating that 78.8% of the variance in destination loyalty is explained by the predictors: personal experience in local culture and preservation of local culture and heritage. The adjusted R-square value of 0.787 reinforces the model's robustness, while the standard error of 0.40722 suggests a relatively low level of prediction error.

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Table 2: Model Summary of cultural factors towards destination loyalty

Model Summary				
Model	**R**	**R^2**	**Adjusted R^2**	**Std. Error of the Estimate**
1	.888[a]	.788	.787	.40722

a. Predictors:(Constant), Personal_experience_in_local_culture, Preservation_local_culture_and_heritage

Table 3 shows that the ANOVA results indicate the model is statistically significant (F = 959.205, p < 0.001), confirming that the set of predictors collectively contributes to explaining the variance in destination loyalty.

Table 3: ANOVA of cultural factors towards destination loyalty

ANOVA[a]						
Model		**Sum of Squares**	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
1	Regression	318.131	2	159.065	959.205	.000[b]
	Residual	85.734	517	.166		
	Total	403.865	519			

a. Dependent Variable: DESTINATION_LOYALTY
b.Predictors:(Constant),Personal_experience_in_local_culture,Preservation_local_culture_and _heritage

Table 4 displays the regression coefficients, demonstrating that both predictors exert a significant effect on destination loyalty. Preservation of local culture and heritage has a slightly higher impact (β=0.493, p<0.001) compared to personal experience in local culture (β=0.451, p<0.001). For every one-unit increase in the preservation of local culture and heritage, destination loyalty increases by 0.493 units, holding other factors constant. Secondly, for every one-unit increase in personal experience in local culture, destination loyalty increases by 0.451 units, holding other factors constant. These findings suggest that both cultural factors play a crucial role in fostering destination loyalty among tourists.

Table 4: Coefficients of cultural factors towards destination loyalty

		Unstandardized Coefficients		**Standardized Coefficients**		
Model		**B**	**Std. Error**	**Beta**	T	Sig.
1	Preservation_local_culture_and_heritage	.495	.031	.493	15.714	.000
	Personal_experience_in_local_culture	.450	.031	.451	14.376	.000

a. Dependent Variable: DESTINATION_LOYALTY

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study provide robust evidence that cultural elements are not merely peripheral aspects but are central to shaping both tourists' attachment to and loyalty toward Luoyang City, China. The study emphasizes that the Preservation of local culture and heritage is fundamental; by safeguarding historical sites and traditional practices, Luoyang City becomes a living archive where history is experienced in its most

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authentic form. This active preservation enhances the destination's overall authenticity and attractiveness, making it a beacon for cultural enthusiasts.

Equally important is the role of Personal experience in local culture. When tourists immerse themselves in local traditions, arts, and customs—whether through hands-on workshops, traditional performances, or guided tours through ancient neighborhoods—they engage with the cultural narrative on a personal level. These enriching encounters foster deeper emotional bonds, significantly boosting the likelihood of revisits and recommendations. The study illustrates that these personalized cultural experiences, alongside robust heritage conservation, serve as vital pillars for sustainable tourism development.

Tourism policymakers and destination managers are thus encouraged to adopt strategies that integrate effective cultural heritage conservation with dynamic and immersive cultural experiences. Investing in both Preservation of local culture and heritage and facilitating Personal experience in local culture can transform heritage cities like Luoyang into sustainable, culturally vibrant destinations that appeal to a wide spectrum of tourists. Overall, this study contributes valuable empirical evidence to the field of cultural tourism and offers actionable insights for the planning and management of tourism in heritage-rich cities.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The researchers used the research ethics provided by the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Teknologi MARA. All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants according to the Declaration of Helsinki.

Acknowledgement

Part of this article was extracted from a doctoral thesis submitted to Universiti Teknologi MARA, Melaka.

Funding

This study received no funding.

Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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