

Evaluation of Cultural Landscape Perception in Traditional Villages from the Perspective of Tourist Perception: A Case Study of Huangdu Dong Village in Tongdao

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Abstract:

Cultural landscapes in traditional villages serve as important carriers of rural regional culture, historical memory, and everyday ways of life. Taking Huangdu Dong Village in Tongdao, Hunan Province, as a case study, this paper examines tourists' perceptions through a questionnaire survey across eleven dimensions of cultural perception. The results show that tourists rated clothing culture, folk activity culture, and handicraft culture most highly, followed by food culture and architectural culture, whereas paving culture and water-system culture received relatively lower evaluations. Overall, cultural landscapes characterized by strong locality, high visual recognizability, and rich participatory experience are more likely to generate positive perceptions, while landscape elements with stronger functional attributes and insufficiently explicit cultural meanings tend to remain at the perceptual margins. Accordingly, this paper proposes optimizing the cultural landscapes of traditional villages through enhanced cultural expression, landscape interpretation, interactive experience, interpretive systems, digital communication, and facility coordination, with the aim of providing references for their conservation and utilization as well as the improvement of rural tourism quality.

Keywords:

Traditional Villages, Cultural Landscape, Tourist Perception, Perception Evaluation, Rural Tourism

1. Introduction

Traditional villages are important material and spatial carriers of China's outstanding traditional culture. They embody settlement patterns, architectural forms, modes of production, folk traditions, and local knowledge systems shaped through long-term historical evolution, and therefore possess significant historical, cultural, and research value [12]. Against the backdrop of rural revitalization and the integrated development of culture and tourism, traditional villages, with their distinctive regional cultural resources and landscape characteristics, have gradually become important spatial carriers and destinations for rural tourism [9]. However, with the advancement of urbanization, market-oriented development, and the involvement of tourism capital,

some traditional villages are facing problems such as landscape homogenization, cultural hollowing-out, spatial commercialization, and ecological degradation [16,14]. These issues have affected their original landscape patterns, spatial textures, and cultural characteristics to varying degrees, thereby weakening the historical authenticity, regional uniqueness, and tourism experience quality of traditional villages [5,6,18].

The value of cultural landscapes in traditional villages lies not only in their objective historical, regional, and cultural attributes, but also in the processes through which tourists perceive, interpret, and experience them [1,2]. Existing studies have mostly examined the conservation and utilization of traditional village cultural landscapes from the perspectives of heritage protection, resource management, and tourism development [14,17]. However, insufficient attention has been paid to how tourists, as perceiving subjects, recognize, experience, and evaluate different cultural landscape elements. In addition, tourism research has increasingly focused on tourist perception, tourism experience, and place identity. Previous studies indicate that tourists do not passively receive landscape information; rather, they construct an overall understanding of destinations through the combined effects of visual observation, bodily participation, cultural interpretation, and emotional experience [15]. Landscape attractiveness derives not only from objective material forms, but is also closely related to whether tourists can identify cultural meanings, develop emotional resonance, and obtain differentiated experiences [17,16]. Nevertheless, in the context of traditional village tourism, different types of cultural landscape elements may vary in their modes of presentation, degrees of recognizability, and experiential value in tourist perception [14]. Without systematic identification of such differences, landscape optimization and tourism development in traditional villages may remain limited to resource listing or experience-based judgment, making it difficult to respond precisely to tourists' experiential needs. Therefore, identifying the evaluative differences and underlying causes of cultural landscapes in traditional villages from the perspective of tourist perception is of great significance for enhancing the targeted conservation and utilization of cultural landscapes, improving the quality of traditional village tourism, and revitalizing cultural value.

Overall, existing studies have provided a relatively rich theoretical foundation for resource identification, value assessment, conservation, and utilization of cultural landscapes in traditional villages. However, from the perspective of tourist perception, the perceptual differences among different types of cultural landscape elements and their underlying mechanisms require further investigation. On the one hand, research on cultural landscapes in traditional villages continues to place greater emphasis on resource ontology, conservation, and management, while paying insufficient attention to tourists' subjective experiences. On the other hand, although tourism experience studies have highlighted tourist perception, they have not fully addressed the differentiated evaluation of various cultural landscape elements within traditional villages.

Therefore, identifying perceptual differences in the cultural landscapes of traditional villages from the tourist perspective has both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it helps deepen the understanding of tourism experience mechanisms and cultural perception processes in traditional villages. Practically, it can provide more targeted evidence for landscape optimization, cultural interpretation, and tourism product enhancement, thereby promoting the coordinated integration of

cultural heritage conservation, tourism quality improvement, and local cultural communication.

2. Study Area and Data Collection

2.1. Case Selection

Huangdu Dong Village is located in Huangtu Township, Tongdao Dong Autonomous County, Huaihua City, Hunan Province. Situated in the core area of the “Hundred-Mile Dong Cultural Corridor,” the village has a long history of more than 700 years. It was opened to the public in 1995 and has been under the unified management of Tongdao Huangdu Folk Tourism Development Company since 2010. In 2015, Huangdu Dong Village was included in the third batch of the Chinese Traditional Villages List. In 2016, it was designated as a national AAAA-level tourist attraction and renamed “Tongdao Huangdu Dong Ethnic Cultural Village.”

As a typical Dong traditional village, Huangdu Dong Village possesses abundant cultural landscape resources and distinctive ethnic characteristics. The overall village landscape has been well preserved, and its public buildings are highly distinctive, including representative Dong architectural landscapes such as drum towers, wind-and-rain bridges, and stilted wooden houses. At the same time, the village retains a relatively complete Dong folk cultural system, including song and dance, clothing, traditional sports, festival activities, and food culture, giving it considerable cultural display value and tourism appeal. Given its typicality, cultural integrity, and foundation for tourism development, Huangdu Dong Village is a representative and practically significant case for this study.

2.2. Evaluation Dimensions and Scale Design

Based on a review of studies on cultural landscapes in traditional villages, and considering the perceptibility and experiential characteristics of tourists’ visits, this study constructed a perception evaluation scale for cultural landscapes in traditional villages. In this paper, the cultural landscape of traditional villages is understood as an integrated landscape system composed of material spatial environments, production and living scenes, and folk cultural displays. Therefore, the construction of indicators considers not only spatial environmental elements such as architecture, space, water systems, plants, paved roads, and service facilities, but also cultural elements that reflect local cultural characteristics and ways of life, including handicrafts, clothing, folk activities, agriculture, and food.

Accordingly, this paper divides the perception evaluation of cultural landscapes in traditional villages into eleven dimensions: architectural culture, spatial culture, water-system culture, plant culture, paved-road culture, service-facility culture, handicraft culture, clothing culture, folk activity culture, agricultural culture, and food culture [12]. The questionnaire consists of two main sections. The first section collects respondents’ demographic characteristics, including gender, age, occupation, education level, place of residence, and income level. The second section measures tourists’ perceptions and evaluations of the above eleven types of cultural landscape elements.

The evaluation was measured using a five-point Likert scale, with scores assigned as follows: “very dissatisfied = 1,” “dissatisfied = 2,” “neutral = 3,” “satisfied = 4,” and “very satisfied = 5.” This scale is concise and easy for respondents to understand

and complete, making it suitable for the quantitative analysis of tourists' subjective perceptions.

2.3. Data Collection and Reliability Test

The survey was conducted from February 25 to 26, 2025. Data were collected through a combination of offline and online methods. For the offline survey, face-to-face questionnaires were administered, with investigators assisting tourists in completing the forms. For the online survey, questionnaires were distributed via QR codes to expand sample coverage and improve survey efficiency. A total of 230 questionnaires were distributed, and 210 were returned, yielding a response rate of 91.3%. After invalid responses were removed, 209 valid questionnaires were obtained, with an effective response rate of 99.5%.

The reliability test results of the questionnaire are shown in Table 1. The Cronbach's α coefficient was 0.918, and the standardized Cronbach's α coefficient was 0.955, both indicating a high level of reliability. This suggests that the scale has good internal consistency and is suitable for subsequent analysis.

Table 1. Results of the Questionnaire Reliability Test.

Cronbach's α coefficient	Standardized Cronbach's α coefficient	Items	Sample size
0.918	0.955	11	209

2.4. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

The demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 2. Female respondents accounted for the majority of the surveyed tourists, representing 59.8% of the sample, while male respondents accounted for 40.2%. In terms of age structure, respondents aged 31–50 constituted the dominant group, accounting for 64.1% in total. Regarding education level, respondents with junior college and undergraduate degrees represented a relatively high proportion, together accounting for 58.4%. The occupational distribution was relatively diverse, with the category of "other" accounting for 44.1% and enterprise employees accounting for 20.6%. Income levels were mainly concentrated between CNY 3,001 and 8,000, accounting for 59.8% in total.

Overall, the sample covers tourists from different age, education, occupation, and income groups, indicating a certain degree of representativeness and providing a basis for subsequent analysis.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents.

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	84	40.2%
	Female	125	59.8%
Age	< 18	10	4.8%
	18–24	28	13.4%
	25–30	19	9.1%
	31–40	69	33.0%
	41–50	65	31.1%
	51–60	15	7.1%
	> 60	3	1.5%
Education	Junior high school or below	38	18.2%
	High school	41	19.7%

	Junior college	69	33.0%
	Undergraduate	53	25.4%
	Master's degree or above	8	3.7%
Occupation	Retirees	9	4.3%
	Others	92	44.1%
	Enterprise workers	43	20.6%
	Students	31	14.8%
	Government/institutional personnel	34	16.2%
Average monthly disposable income	< 1,000 RMB	31	14.8%
	1,001–3,000 RMB	31	14.8%
	3,001–5,000 RMB	76	36.4%
	5,001–8,000 RMB	49	23.4%
	8,001–10,000 RMB	3	1.4%
	> 10,001 RMB	19	9.2%

2.5. Data Analysis Methods

Based on the valid questionnaire data, this paper statistically summarizes tourists' perception evaluation scores for the eleven cultural landscape dimensions and calculates the mean score for each dimension, thereby comparing the relative perceived level of different cultural landscape elements. On this basis, the evaluation differences among the dimensions are interpreted in relation to the characteristics of cultural landscapes in traditional villages and the patterns of tourist perception. Optimization suggestions are then proposed accordingly. As this study is a single-case perception evaluation study, its focus is to reveal the overall evaluation characteristics and differences in tourists' perceptions of different cultural landscape elements. Therefore, descriptive statistical analysis is mainly employed.

3. Results

3.1. Perception Evaluation Results of Cultural Landscapes in Traditional Villages

Figure 1 presents the mean perception evaluation scores for various types of cultural landscapes in Huangdu Dong Village, Tongdao. Overall, the scores for all dimensions are above the medium level, indicating that tourists generally hold a relatively positive attitude toward the cultural landscapes of Huangdu Dong Village. However, clear differences remain among different landscape types.

According to the ranking of mean scores, clothing culture and folk activity culture received the highest evaluations, both scoring 4.06. Handicraft culture ranked next, with a mean score of 4.00. Food culture and architectural culture scored 3.95 and 3.93, respectively, indicating relatively high levels of evaluation. Agricultural culture, spatial culture, plant culture, and service-facility culture scored 3.88, 3.87, 3.86, and 3.86, respectively, showing relatively stable performance. Paved-road culture and water-system culture received the lowest scores, at 3.80 and 3.68, respectively. These results suggest that tourists' perceptions and evaluations of different cultural landscape elements are not evenly distributed, but instead show a clear hierarchical pattern.

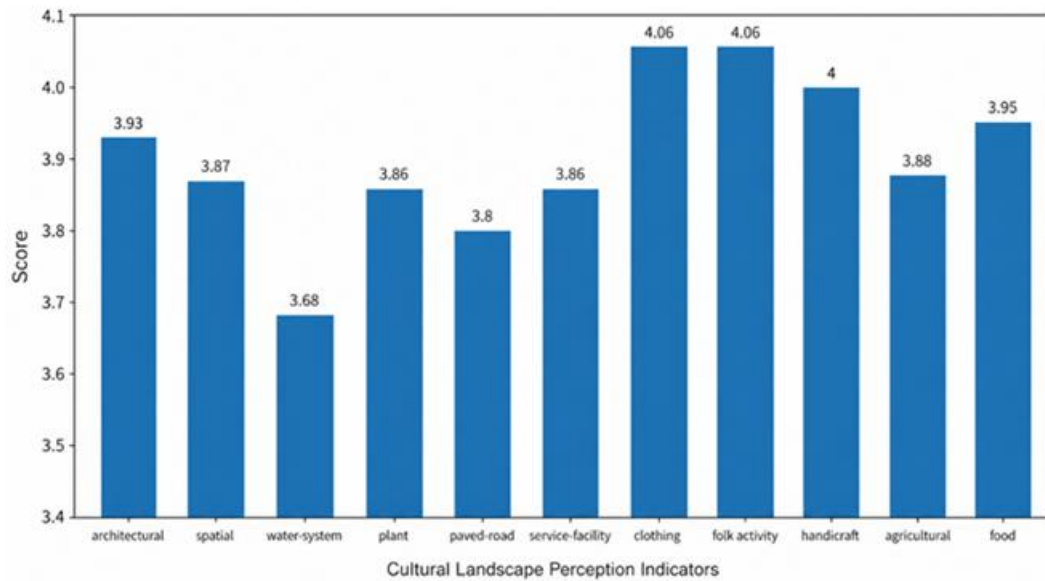


Figure 1. Perception Evaluation Scores of Cultural Landscapes

3.2. Interpretation of Perceptual Differences among Cultural Landscape Elements

The results indicate that tourists' perceptions of cultural landscapes in traditional villages are not uniformly distributed, but instead show evident typological differences. Among the eleven dimensions, clothing culture, folk activity culture, and handicraft culture received relatively high evaluations, suggesting that tourists are more likely to form positive perceptions of cultural landscapes characterized by distinctive local symbols, strong visual recognizability, and participatory experiential attributes [8]. This finding is consistent with existing views on the construction of tourist experience, which emphasize that tourists' evaluations of destinations are shaped not only by landscape objects themselves, but also by the combined effects of visual stimulation, bodily participation, cultural understanding, and emotional resonance [11]. Clothing and folk activities are usually performative, ritualized, and interactive, enabling tourists to develop an intuitive understanding of Dong culture within a short period of time. Handicrafts, through their craftsmanship details, material textures, and cultural meanings, transform local culture into concrete objects that can be viewed, touched, and consumed. Therefore, cultural landscapes based on dynamic display and symbolic expression are more likely to become central elements in tourists' memories and evaluations.

Food culture and architectural culture also received relatively high scores, indicating that tourists pay attention not only to dynamic cultural landscapes with ornamental and participatory qualities, but also to static cultural carriers that embody local lifestyles and aesthetic characteristics. Traditional architecture embodies local construction techniques, ethnic aesthetics, and settlement spatial order, and thus constitutes an important basis for tourists to identify the overall image of traditional villages [12]. Food culture, through the integration of taste experience and everyday customs, expands tourists' multisensory understanding of local culture [3]. These results suggest that tourists' perceptions of cultural landscapes in traditional villages are not limited to "visible" spatial forms, but extend to the dimensions of lived culture that can be participated in, tasted, and experienced.

By contrast, agricultural culture, spatial culture, plant culture, and service-facility culture, although scoring above the medium level, show less prominent perceptual advantages than the aforementioned cultural landscapes. These elements often combine landscape and functional attributes and are more commonly embedded in the everyday production and living environment of the village. Because they partly overlap with tourists' daily experiences, their cultural distinctiveness and novelty are relatively limited, making it more difficult for them to generate strong perceptual impressions within a short visit. In particular, although spatial culture and service-facility culture play important supporting roles in the overall tourism experience, their value often exists in a "backgrounded" manner and is less directly or vividly displayed than elements such as clothing, folk activities, and handicrafts.

Paved-road culture and water-system culture received relatively lower evaluations, suggesting that functional infrastructure landscapes are more likely to occupy a marginal position in tourists' perceptual systems. On the one hand, roads and water systems primarily serve basic functions such as circulation organization, spatial connection, drainage, and irrigation, making their cultural characteristics less directly recognizable than elements such as clothing and folk activities. On the other hand, without adequate cultural interpretation, scene-making, and experiential transformation, tourists may find it difficult to understand the local wisdom, historical memory, and symbolic meanings embedded in these landscapes. Therefore, although such landscapes are important components of the spatial system of traditional villages, they are more likely to be perceived as background environments rather than core experiential objects in tourism contexts.

3.3. Formation Mechanism of Cultural Landscape Perception in Traditional Villages

Based on the above results, tourists' perception evaluations of cultural landscapes in traditional villages are mainly shaped by landscape visibility, cultural locality, experiential participation, and information interpretability. First, landscape elements with distinctive colors, unique forms, and strong symbolic features are more easily recognized and remembered by tourists within a limited visiting time. Second, the more prominent the local cultural attributes are, the more effectively they strengthen tourists' perceptions of the destination's "otherness" and uniqueness. Third, compared with passive viewing, participatory and interactive experiences are more conducive to enhancing tourists' interest, memory, and evaluation. Finally, when landscapes lack necessary cultural explanation and narrative translation, their perceived value may be weakened due to insufficient cultural readability, even if they possess considerable intrinsic value.

Thus, tourists' perceptions of cultural landscapes in traditional villages are not determined solely by the landscape objects themselves, but are formed through the combined effects of "visibility–participation–interpretability." Cultural landscapes with higher visibility, stronger participation, and better interpretability are more likely to receive positive evaluations, whereas landscape elements with prominent functional attributes, implicit cultural information, or monotonous modes of display are more likely to remain at the margins of tourist perception. Therefore, the enhancement of cultural landscapes in traditional villages should focus not only on improving the physical environment, but also on transforming potential cultural value into tourism experience content that tourists can perceive, understand, and participate in through cultural interpretation, experience design, and display innovation.

3.4. Strategies for Enhancing Cultural Landscapes in Traditional Villages

Based on the above findings, this paper proposes strategies for enhancing cultural landscapes in traditional villages from three aspects: cultural translation, experience strengthening, and systematic optimization.

(1) Strengthening the cultural translation of low-perceived landscape elements

In response to the relatively low evaluations of paved-road culture and water-system culture, the cultural expression and visual recognizability of functional landscape elements should be enhanced while respecting the authenticity and overall character of traditional villages. Local traditional materials, craft patterns, historical imagery, and everyday memories can be incorporated into the moderate landscape treatment of paving nodes, waterfront interfaces, and spaces along circulation routes. In this way, basic environmental elements such as roads and water systems can be transformed from purely functional spaces into landscape carriers that integrate cultural display, spatial guidance, and tourism experience. Meanwhile, interpretive panels, guide systems, digital navigation, and scenario-based narratives should be used to improve tourists' understanding of the historical origins, cultural functions, and local meanings of landscape elements such as architecture, water systems, roads, and agriculture, thereby enhancing the readability and perceptibility of cultural landscapes in traditional villages.

(2) Enhancing the experiential depth of advantageous cultural landscapes

The relatively high evaluations of clothing culture, folk activity culture, and handicraft culture indicate that participation and experience are important factors influencing tourist perception. Therefore, the supply of experiential cultural landscapes should be further strengthened. Cultural experience scenes that are viewable, participatory, consumable, and memorable can be developed around Dong clothing, traditional song and dance, handicraft techniques, festival customs, and agricultural activities. For example, activities such as clothing experience, handicraft making, traditional song-and-dance interaction, and agricultural participation can be introduced to encourage tourists to shift from passive viewing to active engagement. At the same time, excessive performativity and symbolization of folk activities should be avoided. Greater attention should be paid to the integration of everyday life, authenticity, and scene-based experience, so that advantageous cultural landscapes can be transformed from short-term viewing resources into deep experiential content with sustained appeal.

(3) Promoting the coordinated optimization of landscape character, service facilities, and digital communication

The enhancement of cultural landscapes in traditional villages requires not only the improvement of individual landscape elements, but also the coordinated optimization of the overall landscape character, service facilities, and communication system. Although service facilities are primarily functional, their materials, colors, scale, and forms also influence tourists' perceptions of the overall village landscape [10]. Therefore, localized design of public service facilities should be strengthened to ensure their coordination with traditional architectural styles, spatial patterns, and ethnic cultural elements, and to prevent modern facilities from disrupting the landscape atmosphere of traditional villages. In addition, short videos, social media, digital maps, and smart tourism platforms can be fully used to systematically communicate the distinctive cultural landscapes of traditional villages. Digital

technologies such as AR and VR may also be explored for historical scene restoration, interactive storytelling, and immersive experience, thereby improving tourists' recognition and understanding of village cultural images as well as their willingness to visit.

3.5. Research Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, it is based on a single case, and the sample was drawn from tourists visiting Huangdu Dong Village during a specific period. Therefore, caution is needed when generalizing the findings to other types of traditional villages. Second, this study mainly uses questionnaire data and descriptive statistical analysis to reveal perceptual differences among cultural landscape elements. It has not yet incorporated interview data, tourist behavior, or more advanced statistical models to further examine the formation mechanisms underlying these differences. Future research can be extended in three directions. First, comparative studies of different types of traditional villages can be conducted to improve the generalizability of the findings. Second, tourists' demographic characteristics, visiting behavior, and emotional experiences can be integrated to further analyze the mechanisms shaping perceptual differences in cultural landscapes. Third, multi-source data, including questionnaires, interviews, behavioral observation, and online textual data, can be combined to construct a more explanatory evaluation model of cultural landscape perception in traditional villages.

4. Conclusions

Taking Huangdu Dong Village in Tongdao as a case study, this paper reveals the differentiated characteristics of cultural landscapes in traditional villages from the perspective of tourist perception. The findings show that tourist perception is not determined solely by the cultural value of landscape elements themselves, but is more strongly influenced by their visibility, participatory quality, and interpretability. Cultural landscapes with distinctive local symbols, high visual recognizability, and strong experiential attributes are more likely to generate positive evaluations, whereas landscape elements with stronger functional attributes, implicit cultural information, or insufficient modes of display tend to remain at the margins of tourist perception.

Therefore, the enhancement of cultural landscapes in traditional villages should not be limited to the preservation of physical forms. Greater attention should be paid to cultural interpretation, scene-making, and experiential transformation. By strengthening the cultural expression of landscape elements and enhancing tourist participation, the implicit historical memories, local knowledge, and living culture embedded in villages can be transformed into tourism experience content that tourists can perceive, understand, and participate in, thereby promoting the coordinated advancement of cultural heritage conservation and rural tourism development.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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