

Research Article

A Matter of Perspective: A Discursive Analysis of the Perceptions of Three Stakeholders of the Mutianyu Great Wall

—JIEYUN FENG, LUYAO DAI, JINLIN JIANG, AND RINING WEI

Abstract—This study aims to investigate the different and competing perspectives of stakeholders of cultural heritage sites by examining the Mutianyu Great Wall in China. **Literature review:** Most studies focus on investigating the tourism destination image from the perspective of only one stakeholder, and only a small amount of research has attempted to integrate the perspectives of competing stakeholders into a single study. **Research questions:** 1. How did the business operator perceive the Mutianyu Great Wall? 2. How did UNESCO perceive the Mutianyu Great Wall? 3. How did international tourists on TripAdvisor perceive the Mutianyu Great Wall? 4. What are the dynamics among the three stakeholders' perceptions? 5. In those dynamics, what are the contested issues in the Great Wall's heritage preservation and tourism development? **Methodology:** The study adopts a discursive approach to social constructivism in examining the images of the site as perceived by the three important stakeholders. It incorporates qualitative thematic and multimodal discourse analysis with quantitative high-frequency word analysis, supplemented by an interview with the heritage site administrator and a field trip. **Results:** The business operator perceived the Mutianyu Great Wall as a scenic spot for modern rural tourism, UNESCO emphasized its historical and cultural significance, and international tourists perceived it as a hybrid image. **Conclusions:** The study identified a preservation-growth continuum and showed different and even competing perspectives. It also discussed two contested issues in the field. The study contributes to heritage studies by developing an interdisciplinary discursive framework and suggests practical implications to heritage management and professional communication.

Index Terms—Cultural heritage site, discourse analysis, social constructivism, stakeholder.

China now ranks second in the world in terms of the number of its world heritage sites, with 52 historical and cultural heritage sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List [1]. Despite China's high ranking in World Heritage sites, a long-standing debate has concerned the conflict between heritage preservation and tourism development. For instance, Xinhua News reported that six UNESCO-listed heritage sites in China received warnings regarding their poor management by the World Heritage Committee [2]. The committee identified common problems related to tourist overcrowding and the damage incurred by the overdevelopment of tourist facilities. In another case, the project to extend the cable cars at Mount Tai (a World Natural and Cultural

Heritage site) triggered debate as well. Some prominent Chinese scholars jointly called for the termination of the project due to environmental concerns [3]. The debate ended with the project's completion, and the site management received no warnings for potentially damaging the heritage site.

As a matter of fact, the preservation-growth dilemma is not confined to China. Both developing and developed countries face similar challenges [3], [4]. Even the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world, was issued a "Yellow Card" by the World Heritage Committee in 2014 due to insufficient dredging, water pollution, and harbor development [5].

To explore the dilemma, the Great Wall, a famous symbol representing ancient China, was selected as the research site for the present study. This section of the paper introduces the historical and cultural significance of the Great Wall, and gives the rationale for choosing the Mutianyu section of the Great Wall as our research focus.

The Great Wall is one of the best known and most popular tourism sites in China. Its historical and

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Practitioner Takeaway

- Cultural heritage sites must be managed in such a way that the competing perspectives of all stakeholders—business operators, heritage preservation organizations, and tourists—are addressed.
 - This study's discursive approach to social constructivism examines images of the Mutianyu section of the Great Wall of China as perceived by these stakeholders to determine the dynamics among their perceptions and identify contested issues.
 - The article contributes to heritage studies by developing an interdisciplinary discursive framework and suggests practical implications to heritage management and professional communication.
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cultural significance is well acknowledged worldwide, as it was among the first six sites in China designated as World Heritage sites in 1987. Nearly 10 million tourists arrive annually to the three major sections of the Wall located in Beijing: the Mutianyu section, the Badaling section, and the Simatai section [6].

Among various sections of the far-stretching Wall, the Mutianyu section in the Huairou District of Beijing was selected as a specific case for this research. This selection was made in consideration of its high national rating and special attractiveness to international tourists. This heritage site is rated a 5A scenic spot, the only one in the Huairou District of Beijing given the highest tourism rating in China and, thus, provides a role model for other Chinese tourist attractions [7]. Moreover, this section has a strong “international” flavor because international tourists have accounted for more than 40% of the total visitors in recent years [8], the highest among all sections of the Wall. It has also been visited by a number of foreign heads of state, heads of government, and other important leaders [8], [9], a fact that endows the site with a unique “diplomatic culture” and enhances its global recognition and impact. In addition, this site ranks at the top of “Things to do in Beijing” on TripAdvisor (the world’s largest tourists’ review website) and has received more than 10,000 reviews globally, taking first place among all 1467 Beijing attractions.

Various stakeholders who hold different perspectives are involved in the heritage tourism of the Mutianyu Great Wall. The primary stakeholders include the business operator, the UNESCO authority, and tourists. Zhang et al. found that tourists want to see a World Wonder and enjoy the heritage experience [10], while the business operator of the site focuses on developing the tourism zone and enhancing its business revenues. (The business operator of the Mutianyu Great Wall mapped out a blueprint in 2011 in which it aimed to develop the site into an international holiday

resort with an area of 24 km², and to increase the number of tourists per day from 10,000 to 30,000 [11].) By comparison, UNESCO emphasizes the site’s cultural and historical significance, and advocates the integrity and authenticity in preserving this world-famous heritage site. This perspective is well reflected in its official document, *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* [12].

This paper continues with a review of heritage tourism literature and previous studies concerning tourism destination image (TDI). Next, it presents the research questions and research methodology used in this study. Then, it provides the results of the detailed analysis and concludes with a discussion of the implications of this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section situates our five research questions in the broader literature on heritage tourism, TDI, and professional communication. We first describe our theoretical orientation and then review the previous studies on heritage tourism, TDI, and new media, with a focus on reviewing the stakeholders’ different perspectives on tourism destinations.

Theoretical Orientation: A Discourse Approach to Social Constructivism In the past few decades, social constructivist discourse has emerged as a very powerful model for explaining how knowledge is produced in the world [13]. In social constructivism, discourse is of central importance in constructing the ideas, social processes, and phenomena that make up our world [14]. It interrogates the nature of social action by dealing with how actions and meanings are constructed in and through texts and talk [14]. “Discourse” in this study is defined as language and other social semiotic symbols embedded in social and historical contexts [15].

When it comes to heritage tourism, discourse analysis concerning different agents reflects the

different and often competing perspectives of various stakeholders. Discourse provides much hard evidence about the psychological experiences of tourists and of other agents in heritage management by capturing subtle moments in mental fluidity.

Therefore, this study follows a view of discourse-based social constructivism to investigate the Mutianyu Great Wall. In this case, broadly speaking, the TDI of the Mutianyu Great Wall is a socially constructed concept, assembled through the texts produced by different stakeholders. TDI is also a subjective concept [16], “a subjective interpretation of reality” [17], in that different social positions and interests will result in a diversity of images.

In our study, two features are worth noting. First, discourses are not confined to writing or speaking; rather, they embody bimodal text—language and visual images—that functions together to create various meanings and makes impacts on viewers [15], [18]. Second, discourses are always contextual, as they are produced by people who are socially and culturally embedded, rather than by isolated individuals [19], thus indicating that discourses are situated in cultural contexts [20]–[23]. Therefore, it is essential to recognize the importance of the social, cultural, historical, and economic factors involved. Following this line, this research adopts a sociocultural-context-sensitive view and situates the discourse analysis in the broad landscape of Chinese society and the global setting at large.

Based on a discourse approach to social constructivism, Fig. 1 reveals that our study investigated the texts produced by the business operator, UNESCO, and tourists, from which the study obtained the self-perceived image on the supply side and the others-perceived images on the demand side. Finally, the study discovered and discussed the dynamics and tensions among the three important stakeholders.

Previous Studies of Heritage Tourism Heritage tourism is a subset of cultural tourism [24] and focuses on “the priceless and irreplaceable assets, not only of each nation, but of humanity as a whole” [25]. Heritage tourism has emerged as one of the most popular forms of tourism [26] and is “one of the most significant and fastest growing components of tourism” [26], [27], occupying part of a niche market [24]. Surugiu and Surugiu have suggested that the popularity of heritage tourism

would increase in the coming years and that its growth rates would exceed the world average of overall tourism growth [28].

Heritage and tourism are increasingly intertwined, as heritage attractions are prominent in tourism development and marketing activities [29]. On the one hand, a conflict paradigm was popular in defining the relationship between tourism and cultural heritage management in the 1980s and 1990s [30]. For instance, Nuryanti found that the complex relationship between the two was usually revealed in the tensions between tradition and modernity [31]. Li et al. suggested that the tensions and conflicts were more pronounced in developing countries [32]. On the other hand, some scholars observed that the preservation–tourism relationship was more than a dichotomy. McKercher et al. outlined a continuum reflecting different levels of maturity in the relationship based on research in Hong Kong [30]. In addition, a case study of Viking heritage tourism by Halewood and Hannam showed that a Viking market was almost inevitable and had even become part of the fun in the whole tourist experience [33].

Recently, some scholars have noted that heritage tourism witnessed a shift from product center to visitor orientation. Apostolakis and Jaffry found that this type of tourism was undergoing a transformation from product-led development of heritage attractions (focusing on exhibits and education) to a visitor-centered orientation [34]. To focus on this issue, Chen and Chen highlighted the role of tourist experience in the heritage tourism context, and suggested that tourists would have more positive perceptions about the destinations if they enjoyed better experiences [26].

Previous Studies of Tourism Destination Image (TDI)

Research on TDI emerged in the 1970s. John Hunt is generally recognized as the founding father of this field of research, as he first highlighted the significance of “image” in tourist destination development. Generally speaking, TDI is defined as the impressions that a person or persons hold about a place where they do not reside, or what consumers (e.g., tourists) think about the natural environment, climate, and people of a region [16]. The importance of TDI is universally acknowledged today [35]. It not only affects tourists’ subjective perceptions before the trip but also influences their subsequent behaviors in the decision-making process [36], [37]. Meanwhile, it is also an indicator for assessing the success of destination marketing [38], [39].

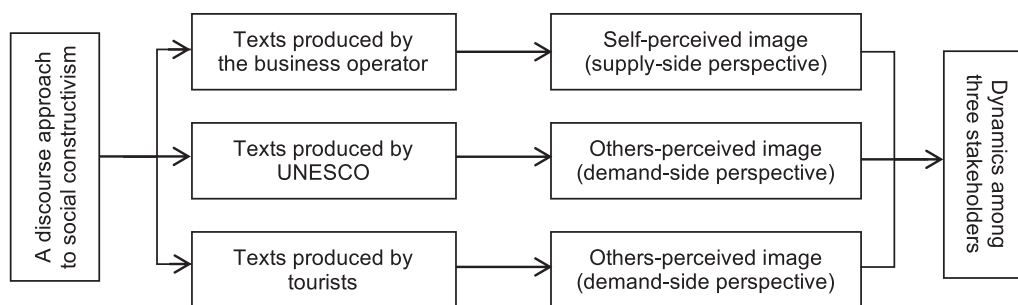


Fig. 1. Discourse approach to social constructivism.

To this point, there have been two widely held TDI conceptualizations in previous studies—the tourist-centered perspective and the multiagent perspective. The first group of studies is based on the tourists’ side, examining how information sources influence tourists [40], [41], or analyzing their psychological attributes [39]. The second stream of studies is more macro-centered and relates to both supply-and-demand sides in TDI. These studies not only involve tourists’ mental perceptions but also take into account the government and tourism service suppliers. To elaborate on the interrelationship, some scholars have adopted the notions of “projected image” (images produced by official publicity materials and marketing campaigns) and “perceived image” (images perceived by tourists and other demand parties) to describe the images created from both the supply and demand sides [42], [43].

When it comes to research methods, three major methods are used in the data collection and analysis of TDI, namely, quantitative (onsite) questionnaire survey, quantitative content analysis, and qualitative discourse analysis. Among the three methods, the structured or semistructured questionnaire (usually Likert-scale-based) is still the most widely used instrument [35], [44]–[47]. However, questionnaires are usually researcher-driven [48] and partly ignore respondents’ initiatives. More recently, some online data have been analyzed by means of computer-assisted quantitative content analysis, such as word frequency counts, semantic/social network analysis, and accordance analysis [49], [50]. This approach is widely applied in China, but the implicit messages and contextual factors can rarely be handled by computers.

Thus, to overcome the various drawbacks, tourism researchers have given greater recognition to the qualitative dimensions of TDI [51], believing that such dimensions are more holistic. They pay attention to both texts and contexts, including

examining geographical, cultural, and political factors. Researchers are increasingly using discourse analysis to evaluate TDI through published materials online or offline [43], [52], or through texts derived from in-depth interviews [53], [54], allowing effective identification of destination image variables [48].

Different Stakeholders’ Perspectives of Tourism Destinations

Previous studies have mainly focused on a single dimension of TDI, in which the image of one destination was examined from only the perspective of one stakeholder, usually from tourists or local residents. Scholars have conducted extensive research on the TDI of tourists [51], [55], [56]. In particular, they concluded that the Badaling Section and the Mutianyu Section of the Great Wall were seen by domestic tourists as overly developed due to the crowds of sightseers, a fact that negatively impacted heritage protection [7].

Other scholars have chosen local communities as their research targets, revealing that local people often hold mixed sentiments about heritage sites. In the case of the Great Wall, Su and Wall examined the emotional and functional attachments of the local people to the heritage site at the Badaling and Mutianyu sections [57]. They showed that the locals felt strengthened pride in their communities and a greater willingness to stay because of more local job opportunities. Su and Wall further explored local people’s community participation at the two sections [58], [59]. These studies suggested that although local people noticed the negative environmental, social, and cultural impacts of tourism on their daily lives, they generally held a positive attitude about the economic benefits. Nevertheless, villagers’ participation in tourism planning and management decision-making was minimal.

Despite the relative scarcity of this line of research, some researchers have shifted to study TDI from the standpoint of more than one stakeholder. One

early such study is that of Choi et al., identifying the different image representations of Macau on the internet by analyzing the contents from a variety of web information sources (e.g., Macau's official tourism website, websites of tour operators and travel agencies, online travel magazines, travel guide websites, and online travel blogs) [52]. Recently, Ji and Wall compared the images projected by the government of Qingdao City in Shandong Province, People's Republic of China, with those perceived by visitors. It found that although the two types of images shared certain similarities, the key focuses showed salient differences, thus indicating that the government-projected images of Qingdao were only partially observed by visitors [43].

Previous Studies of New Media The internet has fundamentally changed the way that organizations communicate with their main stakeholders. Internet-based user-generated content (UGC) has received extensive attention for the way it facilitates environmental scanning and empowers dialogue with the public [60]. It has shifted communication from monologue into dialogue, and transformed the general public from news readers into news makers [61].

Despite the changing environment, some scholars have observed that many organizations still hold the old mindset and adopt a self-centered approach. For example, Yin et al. studied the case of the ConocoPhillips oil spill incident in China and concluded that in response to mounting online criticisms, ConocoPhillips exhibited little interest in engaging with the Chinese public and showed poor communication in terms of corporate social responsibility (CSR) [62]. In another case, Han and Zhang offered an in-depth analysis on the closing of a Starbucks café inside the Forbidden City under the pressure of a Web-based activist campaign [63]. This study indicated that a public empowered by new media should receive due attention in organizational communication research. It demonstrated the active role that the public played and highlighted the need to give voice to the public and take their perspectives into consideration.

In the tourism sector, online travel communication is now largely shaped by new media content due to the changing communication dynamics [64], [65]—that is, the old one-way communication from tourism practitioners to tourists [40] being replaced by a dynamic and circular interaction between authoritative information and public opinions [66], [67]. With the policies formulated with reference to

potentially cost-effective UGC, practitioners can adjust their communication strategies to tackle tourists' complaints and better cater to their needs [68], [69].

Summary Most previous studies focus on examining the TDI from the perspective of only one stakeholder, and very little research has attempted to integrate the perspectives of different stakeholders into a single study. If a more holistic approach were adopted, a comprehensive picture would likely be obtained, and various root causes and problems in heritage protection and tourism development could be revealed and discussed.

This study aims to enrich heritage-management research by providing an interdisciplinary discursive perspective, examining the different perspectives of heritage site stakeholders through discourse analysis. Meanwhile, this study also contains practical implications, providing suggestions to business operators of heritage sites regarding their management, to UNESCO concerning its World Heritage designation mechanism, to the government for its heritage management policy formulation and implementation, and to enhancing professional communication in the internet age.

Research Questions We believe that studying TDI offers us an inclusive approach to hear the voices of different parties based on the images created by each of them. The debated issues in heritage tourism can, thus, be comprehensively explored. Therefore, to investigate the controversial issue of heritage preservation and tourism development, and the different and competing perceptions of various stakeholders, the present study focuses on the TDIs created by three stakeholders, namely, the business operator, UNESCO, and international tourists. Specifically, we formulate the following five research questions:

- RQ1.** How did the business operator perceive the Mutianyu Great Wall?
- RQ2.** How did UNESCO perceive the Mutianyu Great Wall?
- RQ3.** How did international tourists on TripAdvisor perceive the Mutianyu Great Wall?
- RQ4.** What are the dynamics among the three stakeholders' perceptions?
- RQ5.** In those dynamics, what are the contested issues in the Great Wall's heritage preservation and tourism development?

We assume that in exploring the perceptions of the various stakeholders, different voices and perspectives concerning the Mutianyu Great Wall can be obtained and analyzed. The business operator, UNESCO, and international tourists are our research focus for three reasons.

First, the business operator is a primary stakeholder. The values and operations of the business operator largely shape how the site is presented, and this company greatly affects how tourists and UNESCO perceive the site. In this study, the business operator is defined as “a company responsible for the daily operation of a scenic spot (e.g., a heritage site) for business purposes.” The operator of the Mutianyu Great Wall is the Beijing Mutianyu Great Wall Travel Service Corporation (co-owned by Financial Street Holdings, Beijing Huaisheng City Construction & Development Co. Ltd., and Beijing Huairou State Owned Assets Co. Ltd.), a privately owned business.

Second, UNESCO plays a unique and authoritative role in the site construction. It has accorded the privileged status of the World Cultural Heritage site to the Great Wall and has demonstrated the global recognition of its historical and cultural value.

The third stakeholder, international tourists, bears high relevance to the site as well. It is defined here as “all the tourists visiting the site from foreign countries and regions, and those from Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan.” International tourists have become a main marketing target for the business operator, especially when the company is striving to strengthen its “international outlook” in future developments (based on our interview with the site administrator, May 10, 2016).

METHODOLOGY

This section describes the methodology used to conduct the research. It introduces the research methods used to investigate the three stakeholders and provides the sampling rationale in detail. It also explains how we ensured the credibility and trustworthiness of the data analysis.

Business Operator Two researchers collected all of the texts, including verbal messages and pictures, from the operator’s official English-language website on April 6, 2016. This official website provides the most comprehensive and authoritative platform for international visitors to access information about the heritage site. There

was only one English-language page, and all of the texts were downloaded for study. All of the texts were decoded using qualitative thematic and multimodal analysis. Thematic analysis is related to decoding the main messages contained in the paragraphs or sentences; multimodal analysis is concerned with how the verbal texts and photos act together to create and deliver coherent meanings.

UNESCO To explore the image perceived by the UNESCO organization, two researchers downloaded all of the texts on UNESCO’s English-language homepage on the Great Wall on April 4, 2016. On this website, UNESCO gives the most comprehensive official evaluation of the heritage that is accessible to the public.

In addition to the verbal texts, all of the pictures on the Gallery page of UNESCO were also collected. Since all of the photos on the website centered on the Wall’s ancient architecture, four photos were randomly chosen for illustrative purposes. We employed the same thematic and multimodal analysis applied to the business operator data.

International Tourists To investigate the perceived image of the Mutianyu Great Wall held by international tourists, we collected English-language reviews from TripAdvisor, having regard for three considerations. First, online travel reviews are written by active and unsolicited tourists; therefore, they are believed to express visitors’ authentic and diverse opinions [70], [71]. Moreover, since English is a lingua-franca in the world, English-language reviews are assumed to represent visitors’ opinions from as many countries and regions as possible. Finally, the study chose TripAdvisor as it plays a dominant role in the world’s online travel market [72]. It is the world’s largest travel review website, with 390 million monthly visitors and 500 million credible reviews written under strict writing guidelines and editorial inspection [73].

On April 6, 2016, all of the English-language reviews (written texts only) on the Mutianyu Great Wall homepage were collected. The reviews were written by people from more than 100 countries. In collecting reviews, we used “visiting time” as a filter. Travel reviews posted between June 1, 2011 and April 30, 2016 were collected. June 2011 was selected as the starting point since at the end of May 2011, the Mutianyu Great Wall was inscribed on the National 5A Scenic Spot List, marking a milestone in its tourism development. April 2016 was chosen as the completion point, as the

TABLE I
DATA COLLECTION

| Stakeholders | Sampling Details |
|-------------------------------|---|
| The business operator | Source: The official English-language website of the operator* Data: Promotional materials of the Mutianyu Great Wall |
| UNESCO | Source: The official English-language homepage of UNESCO** Data: Evaluative materials of the Great Wall |
| International tourists | Source: The TripAdvisor homepage of the Mutianyu Great Wall *** Raw data: 8480 English-language reviews Data processing: 1. Deleting the reviews excluding the visiting time (351 reviews); 2. Deleting the reviews posted before June 2011 (80 reviews); 3. Collecting the remaining reviews (8049 reviews). Total Valid Reviews Collected: 8049 reviews |
| Stakeholder Dynamics | Interview: Two researchers' interview with an administrator from the business operator (May 10, 2016) Field trip: Two researchers' field trip to the site (May 10, 2016) |

*<http://www.mutianyugreatwall.com/index.php?case=archive&act=list&catid=40>.

**<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/438>; <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/438/gallery/>.

***https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g294212-d325811-Reviews-Great_Wall_at_Mutianyu-Beijing.html.

researchers finished all of the other data collection at that time. The raw data comprised 8480 English-language reviews. After we deleted 351 reviews that did not specify the visiting time and another 80 reviews posted before June 2011, the valid usable data comprised 8049 reviews.

In the analysis, we applied the quantitative methods of word frequency counts and keyword search using WordSmith 5.0. Word frequency counts enabled us to reveal the general perceptions of the international tourists. In the process, only content words were included, with all of the grammatical function words filtered out. The keyword search was used to select typical examples. In addition, we adopted the qualitative methods of manual coding and thematic analysis. These techniques allowed us to decode the implicit subtle meanings in the reviews that were difficult to discern using quantitative analysis. It has been observed that qualitative approaches are more holistic [74], [75] and help to better formulate the true image of a particular destination [76].

Stakeholder Dynamics To obtain the insiders' accounts of the site's business operations and to explore the dynamics among the three stakeholders, an interview with a site administrator and a field trip were conducted. Two researchers conducted a 1.5-hour interview with a site administrator (anonymity preserved for his privacy) on May 10, 2016. The interview was conducted in Chinese, and seven semistructured questions were asked concerning the international tourists,

international marketing strategies, promotion of the Great Wall's history and culture, and heritage conservation. The interview was recorded and transcribed in Chinese. In addition, two researchers undertook the fieldwork on the same day. Both the interview and the fieldwork observations offered much insight into research questions 4 and 5.

All of the data-collection details are illustrated in Table I.

Assuring Credibility and Trustworthiness To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative exploration, all of the texts were coded and analyzed by two researchers. In addition, the entire data analysis was cross-checked by a third coder. The three coders reached a consensus about all of the data coding. Moreover, to further triangulate our research findings, the interview with the administrator from the business operator and the field trip observations helped us to enrich our knowledge and incorporate the insiders' perspective in the research.

RESULTS

In this section, we first analyze the three images constructed from the perspectives of the three stakeholders and their respective contextual environment. Then, we expound on the dynamics among the three stakeholders and two contested issues in the Great Wall's heritage preservation and tourism development.



Fig. 2. Three watchtowers on the *Zhengguan* platform.

Business Operator’s Perspective: Rural Tourism-Centered Image In this section, we mainly analyze the four themes identified in the image of the Mutianyu Great Wall. Then, we support our findings with an interview of a site administrator and our field trip. Finally, we contextualize our results in the macropolitical and socioeconomic situations of China.

The operator perceived the Mutianyu Great Wall mainly as a site for rural sightseeing and recreation. Although the overall description was very brief with only one page of content, the highlights include the following four themes: unique architectural design, impressive natural beauty, delicious local food, and modern tourist facilities and rich recreational activities.

Theme 1: Unique Architectural Design: Two unique architectural features of the Mutianyu Great Wall are a special gateway platform and densely spaced watchtowers. Example 1 from the operator’s website introduces the unique structure of the gateway platform. Three watchtowers were built on one big platform, the largest platform named *Zhengguan* (see Fig. 2), with the larger tower in the middle and a smaller tower on each side. Since this structure is rarely seen in the other sections of the Wall, the company is very proud of this unique design. Example 2 describes another special feature, the densely spaced watchtowers distributed along the Wall. This design actually adapts to the altitude differences and steep slopes of the area, revealing the ancient Chinese philosophy of harmony with nature.

Example 1: *The general gateway platform is composed of three hollow enemy*

towers, which are connected together. The towers on both sides are small and the middle tower is fairly large. . . . Such a special architecture of gateway platform is unusual in the whole Great Wall.

Example 2: *Enemy towers are closely packed. Four enemy towers were founded from the first Mu-word tower (large angle tower) to the fourth Mu-word tower (general gateway platform), a distance of less than 500 meters.*

Theme 2: Impressive Natural Beauty: The operator emphasized the high forest coverage, clean water, and unpolluted natural environment in the area. Example 3 states that the forest coverage at the Mutianyu Great Wall is as high as 96%, the highest among all sections of the Wall. Fig. 3 presents three pictures, which showcase the unpolluted natural environment and beautiful scenery of the heritage site, such as the blue sky, bright green plants, and crystal-clear waterfalls. In addition, according to social semiotics [77], [78], light and bright colors are often associated with positive and joyful moods while dark colors create a gloomy atmosphere. In Fig. 3, the light colors of the pictures imply a light-hearted and enjoyable outdoor tourism experience.

Example 3: First, this scenic area features flourishing grass and forests. Forest coverage has accounted 670 for 96%, higher than that in any other sections of the Great Wall. [First, this scenic area features flourishing grass and forests. Forest coverage has accounted 670 for 96%, higher than that in any other sections of the Great Wall.]

Theme 3: Delicious Local Food: A series of pictures and promotional verbal texts are employed to “sell” local cuisine to international tourists. Fig. 4 shows six local food photos posted online with various local dishes exhibited, including *jiaozi*, noodles, grilled fish, and Beijing roast duck. Owing to the bright colors, close-up shots, and delicate dish arrangement, the dishes look very attractive and appetizing. Moreover, a number of local dishes are listed in the verbal texts of Example 4, such as grilled fish, noodles with beef stew, and food made from local organic vegetables. These dishes are highly recommended for their distinctive flavors and “healthy, delicious, and nutritious” ingredients.



Fig. 3. Natural beauty.



Fig. 4. Local cuisine.



Fig. 5. Tourist facilities and recreational activities.

Example 4: The main *north-south* flavor, all kinds of cooking, the rack of lamb with grilled fish, all kinds of cold dishes . . . a strong western characteristics of banquet dishes . . . *beef stewed noodles* . . . *peasant special natural green food, healthy, delicious and nutritious!*

Theme 4: Modern Tourist Facilities and Rich Recreational Activities: The business operator spotlights the modern tourist infrastructure in the area and the rich recreational activities. Fig. 5 portrays some of the modern tourist facilities provided by the business operator in the form of transportation (such as electric cars for sightseeing) and various recreational activities

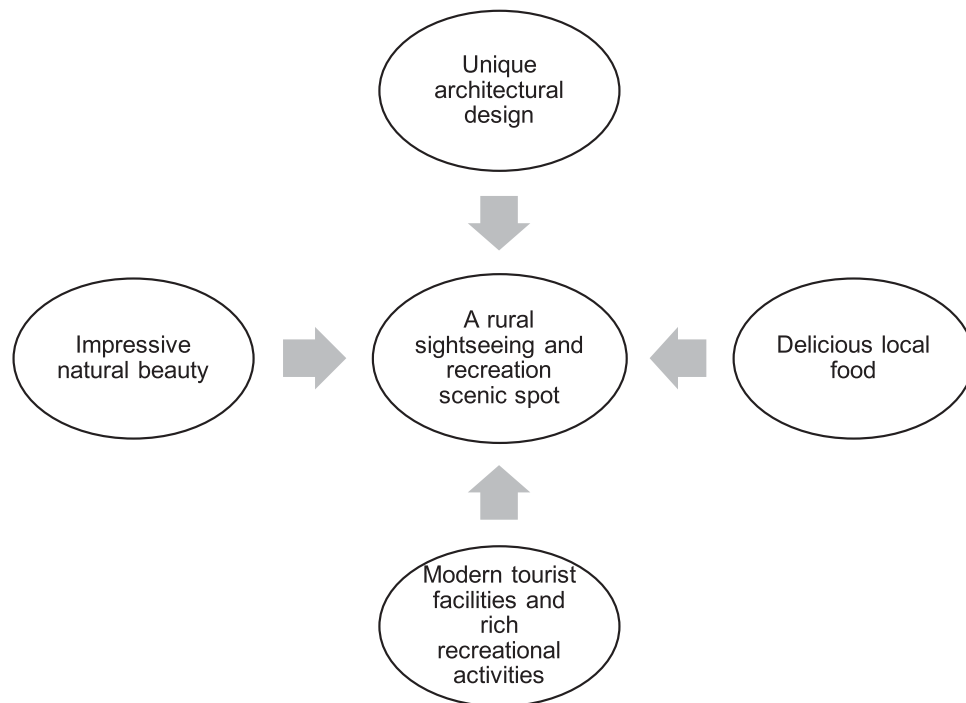


Fig. 6. Image perceived by the business operator.

(such as horse-drawn carriage sightseeing, special bike rides, and grass skiing). In terms of color design, the overall green background creates a fresh and comforting environment; the contrasting colors of pink and green make a strong visual impact on the viewers and imply an entertaining atmosphere. Because several tourists are having fun in the photos, viewers are likely to resonate with them and have an indirect recreational experience. The modern facilities and recreational activities act as an essential component in modern rural tourism but have little connection with the Great Wall's heritage.

To summarize, from the business operator's perspective, the site is a scenic spot for rural sightseeing and outdoor recreational activities, not a center for appreciating historical and cultural heritage (see Fig. 6). The unique and ancient architectural design is mentioned only briefly and functions mostly as a tourist attraction. It seems that the operator attaches more importance to the exterior appearance of the Wall rather than to its implicit and profound historical and cultural significance.

Promotion of Rural Tourism in China: As mentioned above, the operator perceives the famous UNESCO-inscribed site as a scenic spot for rural sightseeing with inadequate attention to its historical and

cultural underpinnings. Framing this perspective in the Chinese context will help to explain the phenomenon because there is a great interest in promoting rural tourism in the nation.

The Chinese government is driven by the socioeconomic imperative to generate income and relieve poverty in rural China [79], so rural tourism has become a practical choice to increase rural residents' income. The economic and social benefits of rural tourism have prompted the government to spur the growth of this sector, with a series of rural tourism promotion campaigns launched by the China National Tourism Administration since the 1990s [80]. These campaigns include the "China Rural Tourism Year" in 1998, the "Chinese Life Tourism Year" in 2004, and the "National Recreational Agriculture and Rural Tourism Forum" in 2015. These campaigns have greatly enhanced the popularity of rural towns and villages among Chinese travelers. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, recreational, agricultural, and rural tourism attracted 2.2 billion tourist arrivals in 2015, generating more than RMB 440 billion (approximately USD 65 billion) in revenues, creating 7.9 million job opportunities (6.3 million for rural residents), and benefiting 5.5 million rural households. From a macroperspective, during the 12th National Five-Year Plan period (2011–2015), this sector witnessed an annual 20%

growth in both tourist arrivals and business revenues [81].

Apart from the benefits of socioeconomic development in rural areas, the growth of rural tourism also provides city dwellers with opportunities to escape from the hustle and bustle of city life, finding places to seek pastoral pleasure. Specifically, the rapid modernization and urbanization have greatly boosted the number of middle-class families, with an average annual disposable income of RMB 31,195 (nearly USD 5000) for Chinese urban residents in 2015 [82]. Rural tourism has become not only desirable, but also affordable. Moreover, the environmental cost and health risks are high for people in cities. Many urban citizens work under considerable pressure and live in a stressful urban environment, including air pollution, traffic congestion, little access to green space, and little time for outdoor activities. Stressful working days prompt urban residents to seek weekend relaxation and to get in touch with nature in rural villages. Furthermore, upgraded rural infrastructure and better transportation between cities and rural areas (e.g., extended networks of express trains) also facilitate urban residents' travel to rural environments.

Because of the interest in rural tourism in China, the operator of the Mutianyu Great Wall has followed the trend and promoted the heritage site as a rural scenic spot to international tourists in striving to enhance its international outlook. As for the site administrator mentioned in our interview, the privately owned company had to focus on profit. The number of tourists and visitor consumption are critical to the business. The total developed area of the Mutianyu Great Wall site was 28 km² in 2016, and the company planned to expand it to 52 km² in the future by building an international resort there. This would attract more international tourists and encourage them to extend their stay, thus increasing their average expenditure per capita.

UNESCO Perspective: History- and Culture-Centered Image In this section, we analyze the four themes in the site's image as perceived by UNESCO and focus on how its website constructs a history- and culture-centered image. Then, we discuss UNESCO's role as a faithful but idealistic guardian.

On its official website, UNESCO portrays the Great Wall as bearing high historical, cultural, and

artistic value. The four themes we identified on UNESCO's website include ancient Chinese civilizations, political and military strategic thinking, outstanding artistic and literary value, and vulnerability to modern tourist facilities and activities.

Theme 1: Ancient Chinese Civilizations: The following three examples elaborate on the Wall's cultural significance in terms of ancient Chinese civilizations. Specifically, Example 5 emphasizes the Wall's significant role in ancient cultural collision and exchanges. Examples 6 and 7 demonstrate the Wall's cultural significance as an "exceptional testimony to the civilizations of ancient China" because of its "unparalleled national and cultural significance."

Example 5: ... reflects *collision and exchanges between agricultural civilizations and nomadic civilizations* in ancient China ...

Example 6: ... bear *exceptional testimony to the civilizations* of ancient China ...

Example 7: ... *the unparalleled national and cultural significance* of the Great Wall to China is still recognized today ...

Theme 2: Political and Military Strategic Thinking: The following three examples indicate that the Wall embodies far-sighted political and military strategic thinking. In the excerpts, the Wall is praised as a security safeguard (see Example 9) that protected China from aggression based on "far-sighted political strategic thinking and mighty military and national defense forces" (see Example 8) through the "changing political context" (see Example 10).

Example 8: ... significant physical evidence of *the far-sighted political strategic thinking and mighty military and national defense forces* ...

Example 9: ... national symbol for *safeguarding the security of the country and its people* ...

Example 10: ... construction history illustrates ... *adaptation to changing political contexts* ...

Theme 3: Outstanding Artistic and Literary Value: Examples 11–13 depict the Wall as an example of military architecture of outstanding artistic and

literary value. This lengthy phrase incorporates two layers of meaning. The Wall bears significance in the art of architecture because of its “superb military architecture, technology and art” (see Example 11) and “successive advances in defense techniques” (see Example 12). It is also an important inspiration in the literature, as revealed in Example 13 where it is described as “an essential reference in Chinese literature.”

Example 11: ... an outstanding example of the *superb military architecture, technology and art of ancient China* ...

Example 12: ... construction history illustrates *successive advances in defense techniques* ...

Example 13: Because its construction implied suffering, it is one of *the essential references in Chinese literature*.

Theme 4: Vulnerability to Modern Tourist Facilities and Activities: In its overall positive evaluations, the UNESCO website acknowledged the Wall’s maintenance of integrity and authenticity. The two notions of “integrity” and “authenticity” are defined in UNESCO documents and relevant comments about the Wall that are available on UNESCO’s website. “Integrity” refers to the preservation of all the valuable material and spiritual elements, historical and cultural information, the building methods in different times and places, the complete route, and the various architectures of the Wall. On its website, UNESCO notes that all of these elements have been integrally preserved to the present date. “Authenticity” is defined as the retaining of the original location, material, composition, form, technology, layout, and structure of the existing elements of the Wall. Concerning this feature, UNESCO shows admiration for the authentic preservation of all of these elements and the Wall’s military concepts.

Meanwhile, UNESCO warns against dangers to the heritage site, whose integrity and authenticity are vulnerable to modern tourist facilities and activities. Specifically, the organization raises a criticism about negative impacts on “the visual integrity” and expresses explicit concerns about modern tourist facilities (e.g., a cable car) being built on the heritage site (see Example 14). In addition, the authenticity is “vulnerable to construction of inappropriate tourist facilities” (see Example 15).

Example 14: *The visual integrity ... has been impacted negatively by construction of tourist facilities and a cable car.*

Example 15: The authenticity of the setting of the Great Wall is *vulnerable to construction of inappropriate tourist facilities.*

Finally, four photos on the UNESCO’s official website were selected and analyzed (see Fig. 7). In the photos, the Wall is always placed in the middle and occupies the central space of the whole frame. The clay-made bricks have been weathered through thousands of years. Their gray and brown colors remind us of the long history of ancient China and make us feel a sense of solemnity. These pictures signify UNESCO’s emphasis on the Wall’s historical, cultural, and artistic dimensions.

To summarize, the UNESCO-perceived image of the Great Wall is a witness to ancient Chinese civilizations, an embodiment of political and military strategic thinking, and an example of military architecture of outstanding artistic and literary value, but its integrity and authenticity are vulnerable to modern tourist facilities and activities, especially to the construction of cable cars (see Fig. 8).

A Faithful But Idealistic Guardian: UNESCO is a faithful but idealistic guardian of heritage properties as it is very cautious and even conservative about heritage tourism development. The UNESCO stance is well reflected in the fundamental agreement of World Heritage Center, *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* [12]. The document was signed with the consideration that

the cultural heritage and the natural heritage are increasingly threatened with destruction not only by the traditional causes of decay, but also by changing social and economic conditions which aggravate the situation with even more formidable phenomena of damage or destruction. [12, p. 1]

In this statement, “changing social and economic conditions” include tourism development, which might pose threats to the conservation of heritage sites. UNESCO, as a guardian of world heritage sites, strives to fulfill its mission for heritage protection.



Fig. 7. Photos from the UNESCO Online Gallery.

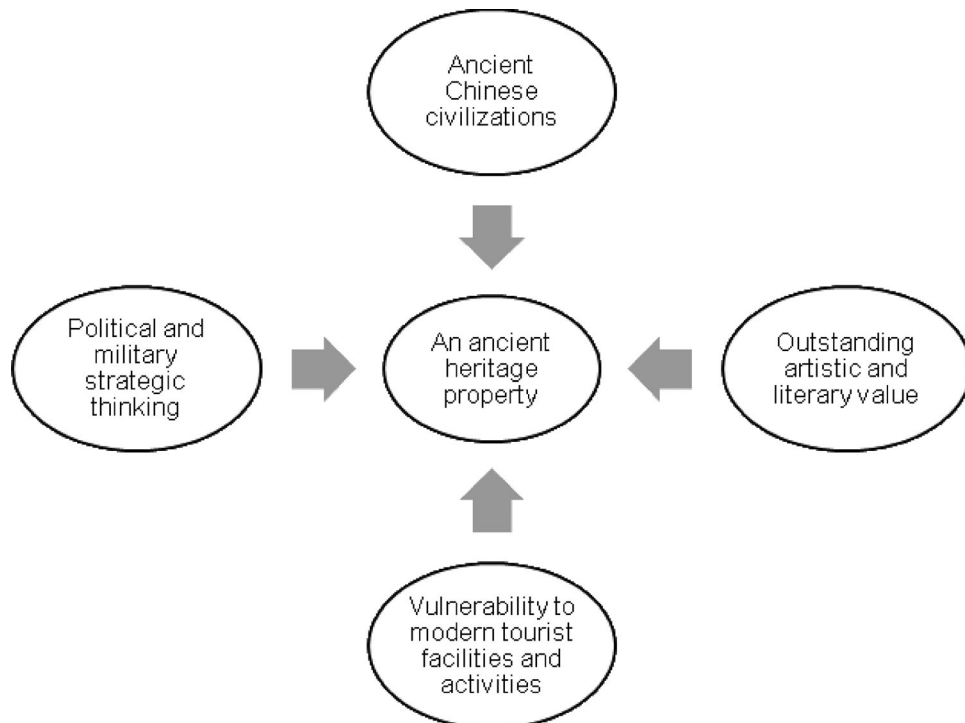


Fig. 8. Image perceived by UNESCO.

International Tourists' Perspective: Mixed Image In this section, we analyze the overall ratings of the Mutianyu Great Wall on TripAdvisor, and the high-frequency words in review titles and bodies. Then, we report on the two important

themes. From the international tourists' perspective, a mixed image is constructed.

Table II shows the international tourists' ratings of the Mutianyu Great Wall on TripAdvisor. The

TABLE II
OVERALL RATINGS ON TRIPADVISOR

| Rating | Number of Tourists | Percentage | Average Rating |
|---------------|--------------------|------------|----------------|
| 5 (Excellent) | 6505 | 80.82% | 4.78 |
| 4 (Very good) | 1363 | 16.93% | |
| 3 (Average) | 140 | 1.74% | |
| 2 (Poor) | 23 | 0.29% | |
| 1 (Terrible) | 18 | 0.22% | |
| Total | 8049 | 100.00% | |

average rating is 4.78/5.00, revealing the tourists' overall positive perceptions, with only 0.51% of the visitors providing negative feedback (poor and terrible).

WordSmith 5.0 was employed to quantitatively process all of the review titles. The titles are usually short, generally indicating the core feelings and highlighting visitors' most memorable travel experiences. Table III reports the results of the top 25 words of high-frequency occurrence, with the grammatical function words omitted. All of the words are positive, reinforcing the tourists' appreciation of the Mutianyu Great Wall as reflected in the previously reported high ratings. It is worth mentioning that compared with the underlying history and culture, the beautiful natural scenery at the Mutianyu Great Wall was much more impressive to the visitors, as evidenced in the higher frequency occurrence of words such as "view(s)," "beautiful," "breathtaking," "spectacular," and "stunning" and the lower frequency occurrence of history- and culture-related words such as "history."

In this study, two methods were employed to identify the recurrent themes in the review bodies: manual coding and analysis of the words of high-frequency occurrence. First, two coders conducted an intense manual coding of more than 200 reviews, attempting to find the most important themes in the reviews. These reviews were derived from all five rating categories (Excellent, Very good, Average, Poor, Terrible). This coding process finally generated four major themes: tourist facilities and services, natural environment, travelers' activities, and history and culture.

Second, to validate the qualitative results, the researchers conducted a quantitative study as well by collecting the words of high-frequency occurrence (freq. ≥ 100) and classifying them into different categories. The outcome further confirmed the four major themes discovered above, as the

classifications corresponded to the four themes. Table IV presents the top 10 words of high-frequency occurrence in each theme, and the total number of texts containing the words. The table shows that tourist facilities and services (13,883 texts) was the most frequently mentioned theme, followed by natural environment (7507 texts), and travelers' activities (6512 texts). However, history and culture (1883 texts) ranked fourth with only seven examples found. Table V provides the coding scheme of the thematic analysis in this study.

Theme 1: Tourist Facilities and Services: Tourist facilities and services was the most frequently mentioned theme in the review bodies. Our qualitative analysis found that the key topics were related to modern transportation facilities. At the Mutianyu Great Wall site, cable cars (chairlifts) and one toboggan are provided by the tourism service suppliers to help tourists save time, avoid tiring hiking, and find fun. The travel reviews indicated that most tourists enjoyed the cable car (chairlift) experiences and found the toboggan ride a great joy (see Examples 16–19). In addition, these facilities were also safe and time-saving (see Example 17). Hence, these facilities brought much convenience to tourists (see Examples 16 and 20) and were highly appreciated, as expressed by visitors' saying that they would do it again (see Example 18) and recommended the experience (see Examples 18 and 19). Specifically, the reviews noted that the climbing and hiking are very challenging for visitors (see Example 21), implying a practical need for modern transportation facilities.

Example 16: *The cable cars and toboggans were a lot of fun and a welcome respite from all those hours of climbing!* (Review 5476)

Example 17: *The cable car ride up/down was actually fun. I was afraid it would be terrifying, but it's clearly safe and it's quick!* (Review 5466)

TABLE III
TOP 25 WORDS OF HIGH-FREQUENCY OCCURRENCE IN REVIEW TITLES

| Rank | Word | Freq. | % | Texts | % | Type |
|------|--------------|-------|------|-------|-------|---------------------|
| 1 | Great | 2488 | 6.78 | 2221 | 27.59 | |
| 2 | Amazing | 679 | 1.85 | 672 | 8.35 | |
| 3 | Best | 304 | 0.83 | 302 | 3.75 | |
| 4 | Worth | 263 | 0.72 | 263 | 3.27 | |
| 5 | Views | 242 | 0.66 | 242 | 3.01 | Nature |
| 6 | Awesome | 229 | 0.62 | 229 | 2.85 | |
| 7 | Beautiful | 215 | 0.59 | 214 | 2.66 | Nature |
| 8 | View | 193 | 0.53 | 193 | 2.40 | Nature |
| 9 | Good | 180 | 0.49 | 178 | 2.21 | |
| 10 | Fantastic | 156 | 0.43 | 156 | 1.94 | |
| 11 | Breathtaking | 152 | 0.41 | 152 | 1.89 | Nature |
| 12 | Nice | 120 | 0.33 | 118 | 1.47 | |
| 13 | Wow | 119 | 0.32 | 108 | 1.34 | |
| 14 | Wonderful | 117 | 0.32 | 116 | 1.44 | |
| 15 | Wonder | 115 | 0.31 | 112 | 1.39 | |
| 16 | Excellent | 114 | 0.31 | 114 | 1.42 | |
| 17 | Fun | 113 | 0.31 | 113 | 1.40 | |
| 18 | Better | 110 | 0.30 | 110 | 1.37 | |
| 19 | Spectacular | 92 | 0.25 | 91 | 1.13 | Nature |
| 20 | Stunning | 85 | 0.23 | 85 | 1.06 | Nature |
| 21 | History | 77 | 0.21 | 76 | 0.94 | History and culture |
| 22 | Impressive | 75 | 0.20 | 73 | 0.91 | |
| 23 | Highlight | 74 | 0.20 | 74 | 0.92 | |
| 24 | Incredible | 72 | 0.20 | 72 | 0.89 | |
| 25 | Lifetime | 69 | 0.19 | 69 | 0.86 | |

Note: Top 25 high-frequency words in a word list based on 8049 texts (one review title is treated as one text) are presented. A total of 36,672 tokens (individual words) were identified. The "Freq." column shows the number of times that each word appears, and the first "%" column indicates the percentage in the total tokens. The "Texts" column lists the number of texts containing these words, and the second "%" column is the percentage in the total 8049 texts. For example, "Great" appeared 2488 times in the 8049 texts, representing 6.78% of the identified tokens. "Great" occurred in 2221 texts or 27.59% of the total 8049 texts used for the word list.

Example 18: *The toboggan was a ton of fun. If we were not a bit rushed, I would have done it again! . . . Enjoy!* (Review 3549)

Example 19: We went up the chair lift, *which is an experience in itself!* . . . *I did this and would recommend you try it if you*

have the chance! So much fun and exciting. (Review 1104)

Example 20: The cable car was *convenient.* (Review 966)

Example 21: Next—*the Wall is a continuous road of uneven steps* so be prepared for a

TABLE IV
TOP 10 WORDS OF HIGH-FREQUENCY OCCURRENCE IN REVIEW BODY

| 1. Tourist Facilities and Services | | | | 2. Natural Environment | | | |
|------------------------------------|----------|--------------|-------|------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------|
| No. | Word | Texts | % | No. | Word | Texts | % |
| 1 | Car | 2775 | 34.48 | 1 | Views | 1690 | 21.00 |
| 2 | Cable | 2663 | 33.08 | 2 | Steep | 1247 | 15.49 |
| 3 | Toboggan | 1703 | 21.16 | 3 | View | 1005 | 12.49 |
| 4 | Ride | 1319 | 16.39 | 4 | Beautiful | 796 | 9.89 |
| 5 | Fun | 1264 | 15.70 | 5 | Far | 607 | 7.54 |
| 6 | Lift | 1126 | 13.99 | 6 | Weather | 509 | 6.32 |
| 7 | Guide | 928 | 11.53 | 7 | Mountain | 456 | 5.67 |
| 8 | Bus | 765 | 9.50 | 8 | Clear | 426 | 5.29 |
| 9 | Driver | 692 | 8.60 | 9 | Spectacular | 422 | 5.24 |
| 10 | Chair | 648 | 8.05 | 10 | Scenery | 349 | 4.34 |
| Total | | 13883 | | Total | | 7507 | |
| 3. Travelers' Activities | | | | 4. History and Culture | | | |
| No. | Word | Texts | % | No. | Word | Texts | % |
| 1 | Walking | 1223 | 15.19 | 1 | Chinese | 561 | 6.97 |
| 2 | Climb | 1035 | 12.86 | 2 | History | 532 | 6.61 |
| 3 | Steps | 997 | 12.39 | 3 | Restored | 395 | 4.91 |
| 4 | Walked | 724 | 8.99 | 4 | Unrestored | 107 | 1.33 |
| 5 | Hike | 583 | 7.24 | 5 | Preserved | 103 | 1.28 |
| 6 | Pictures | 483 | 6.00 | 6 | Tombs | 91 | 1.13 |
| 7 | Climbing | 475 | 5.90 | 7 | Western | 94 | 1.17 |
| 8 | Photos | 455 | 5.65 | Total | | 1883 | |
| 9 | Hiking | 332 | 4.12 | | | | |
| 10 | Effort | 205 | 2.55 | | | | |
| Total | | 6512 | | | | | |

Note: Top 10 high-frequency words based on 8049 texts (one travel review, excluding the title, is considered as one text) are presented. These words are thematically classified. The "Texts" column lists the number of texts containing these words, and the "%" column is the percentage in the total 8049 texts. For example, "Car" occurred in 2775 texts, or 34.48% of the total 8049 texts. The "Total" row shows the number of texts containing the words in each theme. (For each theme, if one text contains several listed words, the words are counted several times.)

strenuous hike on an often slippery, steep surface. *Not the place for those who need assistance walking.* (Review 5837)

Meanwhile, some tourists expressed worries about the commercialization at the centuries-old heritage site (see Examples 22–24). They worried that the

place was becoming too commercial and touristic. The heritage nature of the site was overshadowed by the modern and commercial atmosphere. However, the real need for modern facilities could not be denied (see Example 24).

Example 22: Not the first time I had visited but a first for my wife, *what was noticeable*

TABLE V
CODING SCHEME OF THEMATIC ANALYSIS

| Themes | Examples |
|--|---|
| Tourist Facilities and Services | transportation, tourist infrastructure (e.g., cable cars, toboggan, restrooms, warning signs, and barrier-free structures), shopping, medical service, catering, travel guiding |
| Natural Environment* | weather, air (pollution), natural landscape |
| Travelers' Activities* | hiking, mountain climbing, photo taking |
| History and Culture | architecture, building technology, ancient culture and art, history |

*The study did not elaborate on these two themes due to their slight relevance to the central topic of heritage preservation and tourism development, as well as a concern for economy of space.

- was the increasing commercialization not sure that is a good thing.* (Review 7949)
- Example 23: *My only complaint is that it is very commercialized. . . Too many people approaching tourists to sell things. This World Heritage Site should be respected and maintained properly.* (Review 7151)
- Example 24: It is a bit *commercialized* at the entrance and *very modern* but *this makes for some good facilities that are needed.* (Review 613)
- Westernization is another issue of concern. Some tourists were upset by the opening of a Western chain restaurant at the site—"seemed odd," "surprisingly," "sadly," "loses some of its charm," and "didn't expect" (see Examples 25–27). Paradoxically, one restaurant was crowded—"Needless to say it was packed" (see Example 27), with many tourists enjoying the American burgers.
- Example 25: *Surprisingly, there was a Burger King at the bottom, although it was closed. Seemed odd to find one at such an iconic Chinese landmark.* (Review 2461)
- Example 26: Now there is an entire tourist Center—they *sadly even have Burger King.* Nothing against them, only that *it loses some of its charm.* (Review 7144)
- Example 27: *Didn't expect to see Burger King in amongst all the Chinese shops though. Out of place. Needless to say it was packed.* (Review 6702)
- Theme 2: History and Culture:** In contrast, history and culture is the least mentioned theme in the tourist-perceived image, as evidenced by the low-frequency occurrence of related words in review titles and textual content. A closer analysis found that although some reviews touched upon the long history and culture of the Wall, those accounts were very brief, simple, and vague. In Examples 28–30, expressions such as "thousands of years of Chinese history," "the history . . . is amazing," and "an awe-inspiring piece of Chinese history" all refer to the historical and cultural dimensions of the Mutianyu Great Wall, but there were no elaborations on these observations. To some extent, the absence of English brochures and a very limited number of English signboards probably hindered international tourists in looking into the splendid history and culture—"lacking historical information" (see Example 31); "no available guides in English" (see Example 32). Nevertheless, a small number of visitors expressed their desire to know more—"an internet search for information" (see Example 31); "wonder [wander] around . . . and poke guess"; "really wanted to know more"; "look up some historical facts" (see Example 32).
- Example 28: We were overwhelmed by these two places which are *steeped in thousands of years of Chinese history.* (Review 805)

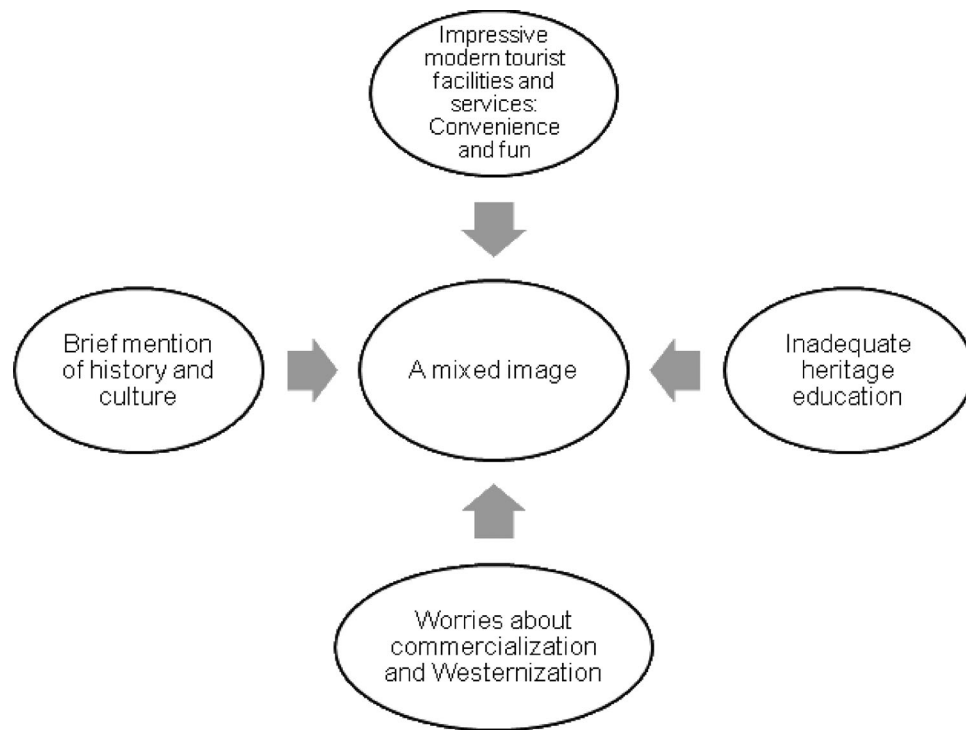


Fig. 9. Image perceived by international tourists.

Example 29: *The history the Great Wall represents is amazing.* (Review 990)

Example 30: *It's an amazing walk on an awe-inspiring piece of Chinese history.* (Review 82)

Example 31: *As with other Beijing historical sites, it is lacking on historical information. You basically get to see and walk on the Great Wall. Recommend completing an internet search for information first.* (Review 3826)

Example 32: *There were no available guides in English and we were all condemned to wonder [wander] around the wall and poke guess what this and that hole were from/for. I was quite disappointed, and really wanted to know more about the wall. If I were to suggest something, it would be to look up some historical facts about the wall before going.* (Review 3262)

The brief mentions of history and culture in the reviews showed that international tourists were not impressed, an impression that we can mainly attribute to the inadequate information and

education about the rich history and culture associated with the Wall. It seems that neither the government nor the site operator provided enough interpretive materials for the public to explore this Wonder of the World.

The researchers' fieldwork confirmed the inadequate heritage education. For instance, there were no signboards on the Wall to enrich tourists' historical knowledge, and English maps and brochures about the site were not even available at the tourist center on the day we visited. Instead, all we obtained was a free hard-copy of a shopping street guide with a detailed introduction to the local food, restaurants, hotels, and cable car service.

To summarize, 8049 travel reviews from international tourists conveyed a large number of complex messages, and our study chose only some key points for discussion. Based on the aforementioned analysis, the TDI of the Mutianyu Great Wall perceived by international tourists is summarized in Fig. 9.

Different Perspectives and Stakeholders' Dynamics

This study has identified a heritage preservation-growth continuum of the three important stakeholders of the Mutianyu Great Wall: the business operator, UNESCO, and international tourists (see Fig. 10).

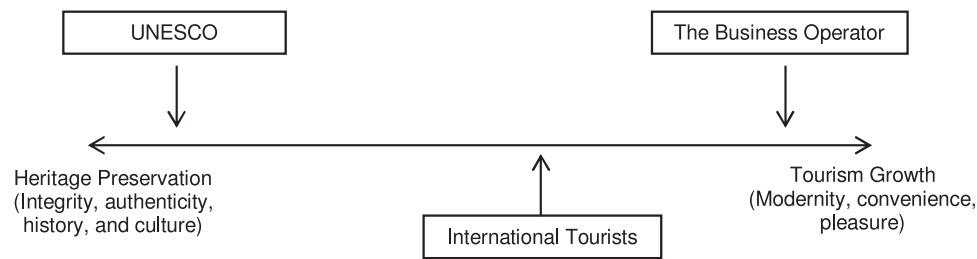


Fig. 10. Different stances of the stakeholders: A continuum.

UNESCO is placed at the left end of the continuum. It perceives the site as an embodiment of high historical, cultural, political, military, artistic, and literary value. As a result, the organization has issued warnings about the negative impacts of building cable cars and other “inappropriate” tourist facilities at the site. In other words, UNESCO has acted as a faithful and idealistic guardian protecting the invaluable treasures of the Great Wall.

On the other hand, the site operator is located at the right end of the continuum, reconstructing the site as a rural scenic spot that features natural beauty, rich cuisine, modern tourist facilities, and various recreational activities. Apparently, rural tourism development is the priority of the business operator as it primarily considers the heritage site as a major resource to generate commercial revenue. As a result, the operator is willing to fulfill only the minimal obligations of heritage preservation. In general, this case reflects the boom of rural tourism in China. The rapid growth in this sector is partly due to the Chinese government’s great emphasis on enhancing this industry, aimed at boosting socioeconomic development in rural areas. The growth is also fueled by city dwellers’ demands for pastoral pleasure amid the hustle and bustle of life.

In the continuum, international tourists are placed between the two extremes. In their perceptions of the Mutianyu Great Wall, tourist facilities and services were far more impressive than the history and culture. Most tourists considered that cable cars and other tourist facilities brought much convenience and fun to their trips, but they were also concerned about commercialization and Westernization. Meanwhile, a small number of tourists expressed their aspirations to experience more of the culture and history of the Wall.

This study has also identified the dynamics of the three key stakeholders, among which two issues are worth noting. The first concerns the complex

relationship between UNESCO and the business operator. We noticed that the influence of UNESCO on the site operator was weak. On our field trip, the only visible sign of that influence at the site was the World Heritage logo at the main gate, highlighting the global recognition of the Wall’s value, but it functions primarily as a marketing device. In our interview with the site administrator, he rarely mentioned UNESCO while attaching much importance to the annual monitoring of the Chinese government. In his understanding, UNESCO worked through the Chinese government, so it had little impact on the company’s business operations. Consequently, although UNESCO is a world-renowned organization affiliated with the United Nations, it seems to have been reduced to the status of a marginalized authority. In contrast, UNESCO’s criticism of the construction of cable cars and other tourist facilities at the Wall obviously has much relevance for the site operator. The operator, however, was not even aware of this critique, much less having formulated any plans to address the concerns as its keen interest lay in developing the site into a large rural resort.

The second issue is the international tourists’ mixed sentiments, which were linked to both UNESCO and the operator. Their perceived image of the Mutianyu Great Wall was largely similar to the operator’s self-constructed image as both highlighted the pleasure and fun derived from enjoying modern facilities and services. However, the tourist image diverged to some extent. Specifically, the tourists’ concerns over commercialization and Westernization coincide with the UNESCO warning against the threats posed by modern facilities and activities, and some tourists’ aspirations for greater historical and cultural content during their visits are consistent with the mission of UNESCO.

Contested Issues in the Great Wall’s Heritage Preservation and Tourism Development We discovered two contested issues in the Great Wall’s heritage preservation and tourism development,

namely, the issue of modernity and the issue of UNESCO's idealized standards of integrity and authenticity.

In the dynamic relationship, modernity has become a disputed topic in heritage management of the Great Wall. While UNESCO criticized modernity (e.g., the negative impact of the construction of cable cars), it seems that from the perspectives of the business operator and international tourists, modernity is almost inevitable.

First, the shortage of funds is a critical issue for the business operator. This problem is partly attributed to little government funding and few NGO donations. According to the site administrator, the company has invested a large amount of money in upgrading the tourism infrastructure at the site in recent years and incurred significant expense in the daily management (regular operation costs, the wages of more than 300 employees, and loan repayment), causing economic losses every year since its establishment. However, the entrance fee per person is RMB 45 (less than USD 7) as set by the Beijing Municipal Government. Entrance fees cannot realistically cover all of the operator's expenses. Therefore, the business operator did not reject having Western brands at the site, as long as they won the bids. Moreover, modern facilities and services, especially the cable car service, helped to generate revenues and reduce a large financial deficit. In essence, the market rule of "money talks" and the golden business standard of profit seeking seem highly applicable.

Second, modernity at the site is enhanced to an extent because heritage education is a subtle issue. As the administrator argued, tourist safety and protection of the Wall were major reasons for the lack of signboards. Moveable boards are dangerous and would possibly cause injuries to tourists when high winds blow. "No board installation is permitted without the government's prior approval, and minimal boards will protect the integrity of the heritage site." To our surprise, we observed that local vendors placed some flexible signboards along the Wall to lure tourists to their small stalls. The administrator responded that the operator was not empowered to regulate these vendors' behaviors, and it was reluctant to offend local vendors whose economic benefit and job opportunities could not be threatened. These accounts explain that although UNESCO has assigned responsibility to all World Heritage sites to "educate the current generation" to learn from much-admired history and culture, there are various obstacles to fulfilling this important mission.

The company had other reasons for fostering modernity. For example, it believed that the electric-powered (green energy) cable car was the best transportation vehicle in the mountainous areas due to its environmental friendliness, minimizing negative impacts on nature. To further complicate the situation, there exists a historical issue. The modern toboggan ride at the site is very popular, and the facility was constructed in the 1990s by a villager. So, it is now unlikely to be demolished as the usage right of the land on the mountains is collectively owned by local villagers. Moreover, the toboggan service creates job opportunities and generates income for the locals.

From the perspective of international tourists, taking a cable car is one feasible way to enjoy a relaxing outdoor experience as the Great Wall is characterized by long distance and lots of stairways, making the hike a challenge. In the TripAdvisor travel reviews, two older groups of international tourists to the Mutianyu Great Wall (aged 50–64, and 65 and above) accounted for 39.3% of all visitors. These people require suitable transportation facilities. In addition, the toboggan creates much fun to enhance younger people's outdoor experiences.

In view of the second issue, we question UNESCO's idealized standards of integrity and authenticity of heritage sites. As long as the organization designates World Heritage sites, those sites are inevitably subject to "tourist footprints and human intervention." The UNESCO designation itself naturally attracts a lot of tourists to the sites and is a sure way of guaranteeing a flow of tourism. Given the burgeoning flow of tourists and their practical needs, many tourism operators are attracted to investing in World Heritage sites. Rather than merely preserving a site, the designation has actually become a force for restructuring the site in the direction of tourism development. Therefore, it would be unfair to criticize modern construction at heritage sites by referring to the idealized UNESCO standards. Nevertheless, UNESCO issues various levels of warning as a result of undermined integrity and authenticity resulting from modernization.

The rule of pure integrity and authenticity is also problematic because of the multilayered nature of tourist needs. We have concluded that building cable cars and other tourist facilities becomes necessary and even desirable to "strengthen appreciation and respect by their peoples of the cultural and natural heritage [12, Article 27, p. 13]." First, many heritage sites across the world, such as the Great Wall, are located in remote and

mountainous areas. Visiting these sites can impose formidable physical requirements, especially for the very young, the elderly, and the disabled. As a result, building cable cars and other transportation facilities is almost unavoidable. Second, many tourists enjoy cable car and toboggan rides, which may go beyond the expectations of the UNESCO authority. Although a small number of tourists yearn to learn more about the heritage culture and history, many more tourists love the convenience and fun brought about by the modern-technology-assisted facilities and services.

Finally, the UNESCO standards seem overly idealistic for a large number of developing countries with heritage sites, as modern facilities and services are often used as important sources of revenue generation. These sites are often short of finances to sustain conservation values, or even ensure that they can survive, as international assistance is difficult to acquire, and domestic funds are very limited.

To summarize, with the good intention of informing and educating people of the dangers threatening heritage sites [12], [25], UNESCO, to some extent, makes the cycle of undermining heritage integrity and authenticity inevitable. The organization points a finger at other actors, as though it were a highly moral and innocent heritage guardian.

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATION, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Conclusion This section begins with a summary of the major findings and then provides the implications for research and theory, as well as for practice. It concludes by considering the study's limitations and suggestions for further research.

Major Findings: Through its discourse approach to social constructivism, the study found that the site operator perceived the Mutianyu Great Wall as a scenic spot for modern rural tourism. UNESCO emphasized its historical and cultural significance, and international tourists constructed a hybrid image of the site. More important, the study identified a preservation–growth continuum representative of the stakeholders. UNESCO, at one end of the continuum, acted as the guardian of heritage preservation while the site operator, located at the opposite end of the continuum, emphasized economic growth amid the promotion of rural tourism in China. The perceptions of international tourists were located between these two extremes, reflecting their multilayered needs.

Finally, the study discovered two contested issues: the issue of modernity and the issue of UNESCO's idealized standards of “integrity” and “authenticity.”

Implications for Research and Theory: The study's implication for research lies in broadening heritage-management studies through an interdisciplinary, discursive perspective. We have developed a discourse approach to social constructivism in TDI studies. By examining the themes and the multimodal discursive features of the stakeholders' images of the Mutianyu Great Wall, we revealed their different stances and identified various potential problems. These results, in return, show the value of studying multiple perspectives, because doing so elicits competing needs in a situation that, from an outsider's perspective, might only be viewed one way—for example, “Isn't it great that the Wall is a UNESCO site?”

While discourse analysis has traditionally been used to study discourse within the textual space, focusing on the word collocations and syntactic features or on how the texts are connected to make a coherent discourse, scholars recently have given more attention to situating discourse within the social space [18], [20]. This shift in paradigm moves toward more investigation of how discourses shape and are shaped by different views and ideologies, linking them more closely with sociocultural factors. In this instance, this study enriches the new group of discourse studies by illustrating how the discourses reflect the different stakeholders' perspectives about the Great Wall and explaining the underlying drivers. It also helps to integrate discourse studies with its neighboring disciplines by crossing disciplinary boundaries. By exploring the heritage site from a discourse perspective, we have undertaken interdisciplinary research.

Compared with the mainstream approaches in heritage studies, a discursive approach has its own advantages. For instance, the widely used questionnaire surveys are usually driven by researchers and tend to ignore respondents' initiatives. Computer-assisted quantitative content analysis is popular, but implicit messages and contextual factors cannot really be analyzed by computers. A discourse approach not only uses computer technologies in the quantitative corpus analysis, but also emphasizes the importance of using qualitative methods (e.g., manual coding in thematic analysis, multimodal interpretations, interviews, and field trips). It situates the discourse analysis in specific sociocultural contexts, treating the discursive event as an organic whole and

examining the interplay between the text and the context.

When it comes to heritage research, this study argues against a popular conflict paradigm in defining the relationship between tourism and cultural heritage management. By going beyond a dichotomous view, our case study of the Mutianyu Great Wall illustrates a continuum comprising the perspectives of different stakeholders. The notion of “continuum” in terms of heritage management was also discussed by McKercher et al. [30]. That study, however, addressed a different issue, a continuum reflecting different levels of maturity in the relationship based on evidence from the established urban destination of Hong Kong, implying that a partnership between heritage and tourism will be formed in the maturity stage of tourism development.

In addition, we also found that sightseers to the Great Wall both resisted and embraced modernity. This finding coincides with the case study of Viking heritage tourism by Halewood and Hannam [33], which showed that a Viking market was almost inevitable and had even become part of the fun in the whole tourist experience. To develop local cultural values, commodification is both rejected and welcomed.

Implications for Practice: In light of our research findings, this study provides practical suggestions to UNESCO, the Chinese government, the business operator, and the practice of professional communication.

We suggest that UNESCO consider adopting more realistic policies for the management of heritage sites. The most important issue is not whether the “integrity” or “authenticity” of heritage sites has changed. Rather, the focus should be on altering UNESCO’s designation mechanism, as well as how to achieve the delicate and difficult balance between heritage preservation and tourism development.

Faced with the mounting pressures of commercialization and Westernization, the Chinese government should play a more active role in upholding heritage preservation and “educating” tourists as it is not realistic to expect the profit-seeking operator to do so. In our understanding, the government should consider allocating more funds for heritage preservation, such as building a Great Wall museum free of charge to “strengthen [people’s] appreciation and respect” without any

regard for commercial considerations. In terms of law enforcement, the government should also ensure that adequate personnel are available to safeguard the Wall. Otherwise, the well-intended *Regulations on the Protection of the Great Wall* [83] can hardly be effective.

Furthermore, we suggest that the business operator should overcome its short-term-management style. In the short term, the natural beauty, local cuisine, and tourist facilities and services could promise a profitable future. However, expending short-term efforts to reap the profits from the site could damage its long-term viability as a tourist attraction. In the long run, the profound history and culture of the Mutianyu Great Wall is a far more valuable asset. If the operator had a far-sighted vision to promote the Mutianyu Great Wall’s history and culture, it could probably extend tourists’ length of stay and increase consumer spending at the site. All in all, the business operator should make greater efforts to enhance its CSR.

Finally, the study suggests that there is a clear need to establish channels of communication among various stakeholders in heritage tourism, especially when communication between the private sector (represented by the business operator) and the heritage sector (represented by UNESCO) is rare. This is similar to the view held by Aas et al. [84]. In the internet era, the business operator should regularly monitor public opinions to understand and analyze tourists’ needs, in particular, their needs for heritage experience. Doing so is likely to increase its business revenues and fulfill its CSR for heritage education as well. Besides, we have recommended that UNESCO alter its idealized standards of heritage integrity and authenticity by taking tourists’ viewpoints into consideration.

In general, communication practitioners in various organizations should abandon self-centered views, be more tolerant and considerate of other stakeholders, and try to think and act from different and more holistic perspectives. In particular, big data, which are easily available today, can facilitate the kind of dialogic, interactive, and faster communication needed to achieve this goal.

Limitation of the Study We recognize one limitation of our study. The tourist reviews selected were all derived from English-language data, so international tourists not using English in their

reviews were not represented. It would be ideal to include data from reviews written in other languages. Nevertheless, the limitation of our sampling criteria is mitigated for two reasons. According to our interview with the site administrator, the largest group of international tourists came from Europe and America in the years that we sampled, so choosing English-language reviews as our database is justified to a large extent. Furthermore, since English is a lingua franca across the world, many tourists who are not native English speakers may also use English in public communication for a wider readership.

Suggestions for Future Research In future research, we believe that by applying our discourse-based theoretical framework, scholars will be able to make cross-national comparisons between China and other countries in terms of addressing TDI and heritage sites, and to make an important contribution to studies of cultural heritage management. At the present stage, our research findings are based on a Chinese case alone. It remains to be seen whether our findings can be generalized to other contexts. It will be very

helpful and interesting to see more studies proceeding in this direction and identifying the dynamics among different stakeholders of heritage sites. In particular, we are keen to see comparative studies of other developing countries, given that all of these countries share the daunting task of economic development and expect high economic returns from heritage tourism.

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