

Research on Tourism Brand Building in Shapingba District from the Perspective of Cultural and Tourism Integration: A Case Study of Sunac Cultural Tourism City

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Abstract: From the perspective of cultural and tourism integration, this paper uses Sunac Cultural Tourism City in Chongqing's Shapingba District as a case study to explore its tourism brand-building model and provide corresponding suggestions. First, relevant literature was reviewed to understand the theoretical foundations of cultural and tourism integration, cultural tourism brands, and brand building. Then, authoritative data was collected from official websites to conduct an in-depth analysis of the area's cultural and tourism resources. This study introduces an overview of the cultural and tourism resources in Shapingba District and analyzes the development status and brand-building situation of Sunac Cultural Tourism City. Using the SWOT analysis method and based on the theoretical foundation, this paper comprehensively evaluates the advantages, disadvantages, opportunities, and threats in the brand building of Sunac Cultural Tourism City. The aim is to offer effective suggestions for tourism brand building in the Shapingba District, thereby promoting the integration and development of the cultural and tourism industries. This research holds both theoretical and practical significance for promoting tourism brand-building and the integration of cultural and tourism industries in the Shapingba District.

Keywords: Cultural and tourism integration; Brand building; Development

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1. Introduction

In the report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party emphasized the deep integration of culture and tourism, highlighting the cultural and tourism industries as important directions in the "Cultural Power" strategy. In January 2021, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism emphasized in a meeting on the development plan for culture and tourism during

the 14th Five-Year Plan that both the cultural and tourism sectors play a significant role in economic and social development, as well as in enhancing national comprehensive strength. With the deepening trend of cultural and tourism integration, industries now focus more on complementing resources and coordinating development. The meeting laid out tasks in artistic creation, public services, industry and market systems, and technological innovation to promote the deep integration and innovative development of the cultural and tourism industries. As the economy of brands continues to grow, building tourism destination brands that reflect unique characteristics is crucial for gaining a competitive advantage in the tourism market. Sunac Cultural Tourism City, a newly emerging tourist attraction in Chongqing, has achieved considerable success as the tourism industry gradually recovers. However, compared with similar competitors, it still lacks brand strength and recognition. A valuable tourism brand requires high quality as its foundation. To ensure the sustainable development of Sunac Cultural Tourism City, it is essential to build a brand that reflects regional characteristics and possesses strong brand recognition. Therefore, this research explores the current state of brand building in Sunac Cultural Tourism City within the context of cultural and tourism integration, providing insights and suggestions for the brand building of other scenic spots in Shapingba District.

2. Literature review

2.1. Research on cultural and tourism integration

Scholars have expressed different views on the integration of culture and tourism. Craik^[1] argued that cultural and tourism integration better meets the needs of tourists and enhances tourism value. Saarinen *et al.*^[2] emphasized the deep integration of local tourism with cultural resources, suggesting that this promotes the sustainability of natural ecosystems and the fairer distribution of social resources. Liu^[3], in his study of the European Capitals of Culture and cultural tourism, found that the integration of culture and tourism positively impacts economic prosperity, urban image shaping, and economic development. Xu^[4] proposed that the integration of culture and tourism requires the support of new marketing concepts to enhance brand recognition and promote cultural inheritance and development. In 2018, China officially established the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, marking the start of an active push for cultural and tourism integration as part of its strategy. The book *Tourism and Cultural Synergy*, published in the same year, pointed out that the synergy between the cultural and tourism industries is also a key driver of cultural and tourism integration. Han^[5] found through research that tourist satisfaction is largely influenced by the degree of integration in aspects such as market, functionality, and resources.

2.2. Research on cultural tourism brands

Scholars hold differing views on the connotation and significance of cultural tourism brands. Previous studies pointed out that the development of cultural tourism brands relies on the integration of various types of resources. Through resource integration, a cultural tourism brand system can be built to promote the development of cultural tourism brands^[6]. Domestic scholars generally believe that the rise of cultural tourism brands stems from the prosperity of the cultural tourism industry. The benefits of branding can feed back into the industry, driving its development and contributing to local economic and social growth. Foreign scholars' research on tourism brand building is relatively mature and in-depth. Chaisawat^[7], using Thailand as a brand study example, elevated tourism brand building to a strategic level, suggesting that tourism brands are key

carriers for transforming resources into products. Alhemoud and Armstrong ^[8] proposed that tourism brands should offer consumers high-quality tourism experiences, focusing not only on brand promotion but also on improving consumer experiences and satisfaction. This, in turn, helps shape a positive brand image, enhances brand recognition and reputation, and increases the demand for “tourism destination brands.”

2.3. Research on tourism brand building

Zhang ^[9] argued that building tourism brands should involve the reasonable use of media resources and extensive promotion, while also actively introducing resources to support the development of rural tourism brands. By creating tourism-related topics, programs can achieve a win-win outcome of positive word-of-mouth and policy implementation ^[9]. Lin ^[10] suggested that local brands are not merely marketing products but also embody deep cultural heritage. They can be disseminated and developed through various channels, thereby forming unique cultural values and playing an important role in the tourism market. Zou ^[11] pointed out that homogenization is currently a barrier to many tourism brands. He proposed that representative, culturally attractive, and competitive elements should be integrated into personalized brand genes, and by using the “RAC” model, tourism destinations can be redesigned to create distinctive regional characteristics and city identities.

3. Research methods

3.1. Literature analysis

A wide range of data was collected and organized, analyzing relevant literature on cultural and tourism integration, tourism brand building, and cultural tourism cities to provide the theoretical foundation for this paper. Domestic and international research results were studied to understand the latest development trends, providing theoretical support for this study.

3.2. Online survey method

Authoritative data was obtained from official websites such as the Shapingba District Cultural and Tourism Commission’s statistical information, the Shapingba District Government’s Statistical Yearbook, and travel platforms like Fliggy Travel.

3.3. SWOT analysis

SWOT analysis was used to conduct a comprehensive assessment of Chongqing Sunac Cultural Tourism City.

4. Research results

4.1. Overview of cultural and tourism resources in Shapingba District

The cultural and tourism categories in Shapingba District can be roughly divided into five types: red tourism, green ecological tourism, cultural heritage tourism, new landmark tourism, and campus cultural tourism. The most popular tourist attractions are Ciqikou Ancient Town and Sunac Cultural Tourism City, with the highest ratings being given to Baigongguan and Zhazidong. Currently, the district has two municipal-level “Cultural Industry Demonstration Parks,” one “Cultural Industry Demonstration Base,” three cultural and creative industrial parks, and is home to 31 large-scale cultural enterprises. There are over 200 travel agency stores and seven tourism scenic spots, including four national 4A-level and three national 3A-level scenic spots. The

district is rich in cultural resources, including anti-Japanese war culture, red culture, Bayu culture, and rural culture. Notable examples include seven A-level traditional tourist attractions, such as the Martyrs Cemetery, Ciqikou Ancient Town, Gele Mountain Forest Park, and residences of anti-war celebrities. In recent years, new “Internet-famous” tourist destinations such as the Chongqing Art Museum and Sichuan Fine Arts Institute University Town Campus have also emerged. These abundant cultural resources provide a solid foundation for the continuous development of cultural industries, promoting the integration and layout of industries.

4.2. Number of tourists and tourism revenue in Shapingba District over the years

Table 1 shows the annual tourist visits and comprehensive tourism revenue in Shapingba District during 2016–2022, while Figure 1 compares the visitor numbers at Sunac Cultural Tourism City and Ciqikou Ancient Town during the 2022–2023 holidays.

Table 1. Annual tourist visits and comprehensive tourism revenue in Shapingba District (2016–2022)

Year/Index	Tourist visits		Comprehensive tourism revenues	
	Number (hundreds)	Year-over-year growth	Chinese Yuan (million)	Year-over-year growth
2016	3,185.8		117.8	
2017	3,318.3	4.16%	123.1	4.52%
2018	3,467.1	4.48%	127.0	3.18%
2019	3,800.8	9.63%	143.5	12.97%
2020	2,368.5	-37.66%	84.9	-40.82%
2021	3,252.6	37.32%	157.1	85.04%
2022	2,001.2	-38.47%	92.1	-41.10%

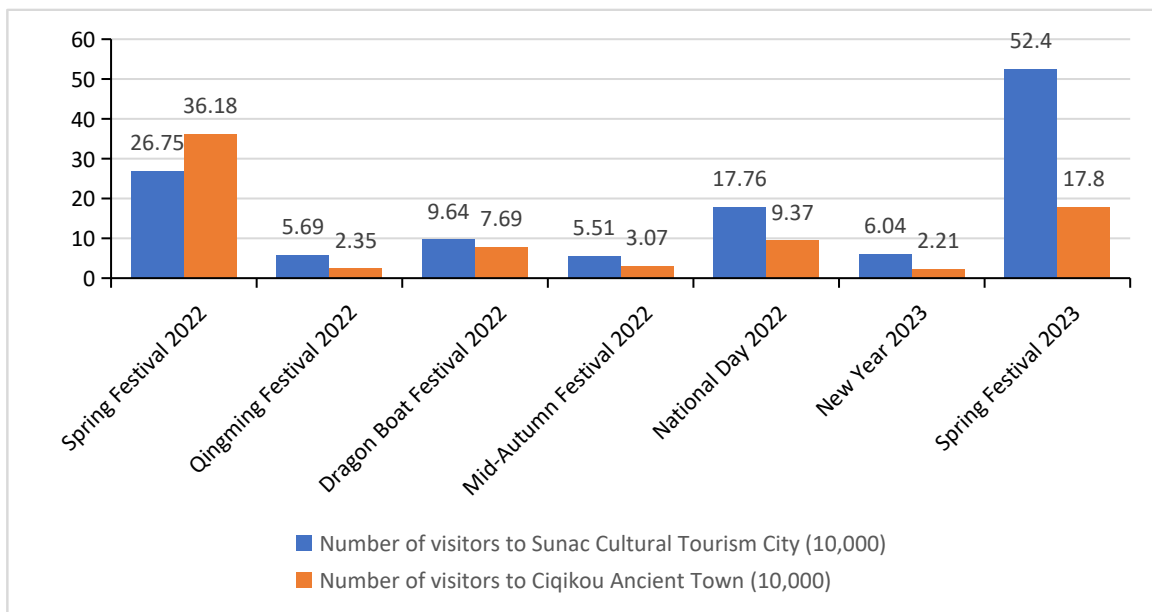


Figure 1. Comparison of visitor numbers at the two most popular attractions during holidays in the Shapingba District

In 2023, during the May Day holiday, the number of tourists in Shapingba District reached a historical high, surpassing 2.43 million, a 276.47% increase compared to 2022, and 170.89% of the same period in 2019. Comprehensive tourism revenue reached 875 million yuan, a 307.16% increase from 2022. During the 2023 Mid-Autumn Festival and National Day holiday, the total number of tourists exceeded 2.98 million, an increase of 165.36% compared to 2022, and a 45.06% increase compared to 2019. Comprehensive revenue reached 1.13 billion yuan, up 97.75% from 2022 and 55.95% from 2019. Overall, the performance exceeded expectations.

4.3. Number of star-rated hotel rooms in Shapingba District over the years

Figure 2 shows the total number of star-rated hotel rooms in Shapingba District between 2017 and 2021.

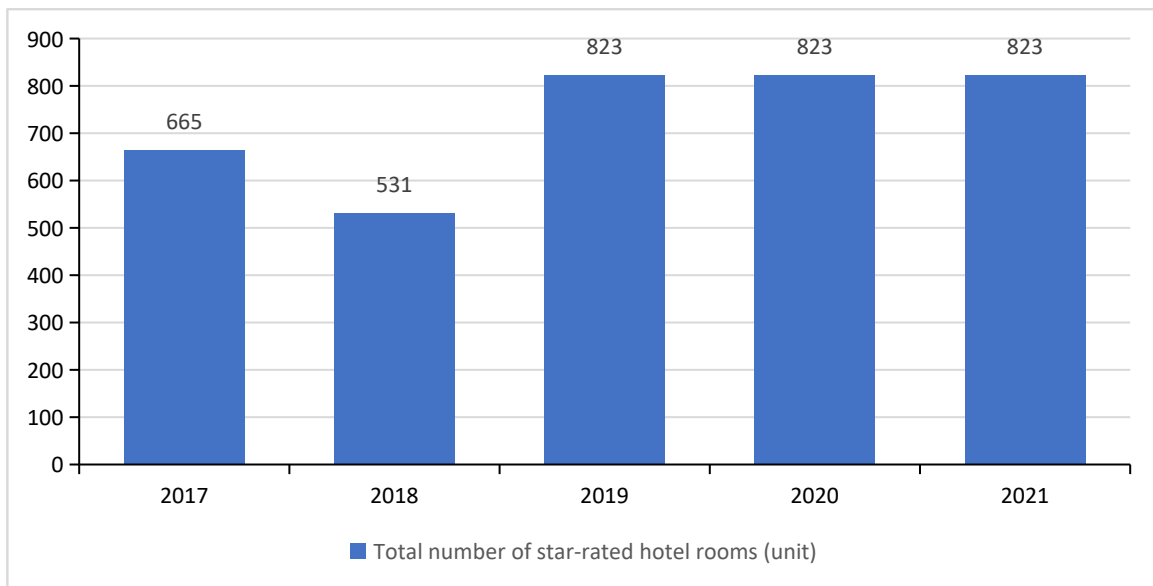


Figure 2. Total number of star-rated hotel rooms in Shapingba District (2017–2021, statistical yearbook data for 2022 unavailable)

4.4. Data analysis

The data indicates that tourists have the highest satisfaction with red tourism attractions in the Shapingba District, as these sites carry significant historical and cultural value, representing key moments in China’s revolutionary history. The district has excelled in the preservation and development of these red tourism attractions, with effective protection and restoration efforts. Sunac Cultural Tourism City and Ciqikou Ancient Town are popular due to the diverse and unique tourism experiences they offer. Sunac Cultural Tourism City, in particular, provides a one-stop tourism experience that includes multiple theme parks, hotels, and commercial facilities, meeting tourists’ needs for culture, leisure, and entertainment.

Before 2020, the number of tourists and tourism revenue in Shapingba District maintained stable growth. However, both indicators dropped in 2020 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the following year, the tourism industry in the district showed signs of recovery as the pandemic was brought under some control. Unfortunately, in 2022, due to the recurrence of the pandemic, fierce market competition, lack of innovation in tourism products, and economic downturns, both visitor numbers and tourism revenue plummeted, leading to poor performance in the tourism sector.

The Spring Festival is the busiest period of the year in terms of visitor numbers. Initially, Ciqikou Ancient

Town attracted more visitors than Sunac Cultural Tourism City, but over time, the number of visitors to Sunac Cultural Tourism City steadily increased, reaching its peak during the 2023 Spring Festival. This suggests that Sunac Cultural Tourism City likely invested considerable resources and effort in marketing, including advertising campaigns, online promotions, and strategic partnerships. These efforts helped raise the visibility and exposure of Sunac Cultural Tourism City, attracting more tourists.

The record-breaking tourist numbers during the May Day holiday in 2023 were driven by pent-up demand for travel after the pandemic restrictions were eased. The extended holiday provided more travel opportunities, and Shapingba District may have upgraded its tourism products and services to attract more visitors. Subsequent increases in tourist numbers during other holidays reflect a growing appreciation for travel freedom, as more people opt for vacations that offer relaxation and cultural enrichment. This success can also be attributed to effective tourism marketing strategies, with businesses continuing to refine these strategies to attract more visitors. Sunac Cultural Tourism City, as a key tourist destination in Shapingba District, likely benefited from and contributed to the increased visitor numbers and revenue through its active participation in these marketing efforts.

The steady increase in the number of star-rated hotel rooms in the Shapingba District reflects the government's determination to promote tourism development. Sunac Cultural Tourism City, as a major project within the district, has likely benefited from government policies such as financial subsidies and tax breaks, fostering its growth and the development of its partner star-rated hotels. Investors remain optimistic about the market prospects, investing not only in upgrading existing hotels but also in building new star-rated hotels. As a result, policy support and increased investment have contributed to the rise in the number of star-rated hotel rooms in Shapingba District.

4.5. Current development of Chongqing Sunac Cultural Tourism City

Chongqing Sunac Cultural Tourism City comprises six sections: Sunac Yule Town, Sunac Cultural Tourism City Hotel Cluster, Sunac Sea World, Sunac Water World, Sunac Snow World, and Sunac Mall. Additionally, the city emphasizes integrating local Chongqing culture. For instance, its stage shows incorporate elements of Chongqing's anti-Japanese war culture, Shaci culture, and Bayu culture. In its commercial spaces, the city also integrates Chongqing's food culture, allowing visitors to distinctly experience the unique cultural symbols of Chongqing. On November 18, 2020, Chongqing Sunac Cultural Tourism City was recognized as a "New Landmark of Fashion in Chengdu-Chongqing," underscoring its influence and appeal.

4.6. SWOT evaluation of Sunac Cultural Tourism City's brand development

4.6.1. Strengths

- (1) Strong brand background: Sunac Cultural Tourism City is backed by Sunac Group, a large enterprise with deep involvement in real estate, cultural tourism, and other sectors. This background gives Sunac Cultural Tourism City an inherent advantage in brand building, leveraging Sunac Group's brand influence and resource network to quickly establish market recognition.
- (2) Rich cultural resources: The project incorporates a wealth of local Chongqing culture, such as anti-Japanese war culture, Shaci culture, and Bayu culture, offering visitors a rich cultural experience.
- (3) Comprehensive facilities: The city boasts large-scale Sunac Mall, outdoor theme parks, top-tier stage shows, and a cluster of star-rated hotels, meeting a wide range of visitor needs.

4.6.2. Weaknesses

- (1) Increasing market competition: With the rapid development of Chongqing's tourism industry, new tourism projects are constantly emerging, intensifying market competition. Compared to similar tourism products like Disney and Fantawild, Sunac Cultural Tourism City's brand appeal is not yet strong enough to draw visitors specifically to its location.
- (2) Challenges in cultural integration: Integrating local Chongqing culture can pose challenges in achieving a balance between cultural authenticity and a compelling tourist experience.
- (3) Lack of brand differentiation: The current brand positioning and cultural content of Sunac Cultural Tourism City do not stand out significantly compared to other similar products on the market, which may result in lower brand recognition and recall among the target audience.
- (4) Need for stronger brand promotion and marketing: Despite excelling in hardware development and resource allocation, there is still room for improvement in Sunac Cultural Tourism City's brand promotion and marketing efforts.

4.6.3. Opportunities

- (1) Growing market demand: With the increasing demand for high-quality tourism experiences, Chongqing Sunac Cultural Tourism City is poised to attract more visitors.
- (2) Policy support and cultural tourism trends: Governments at various levels have introduced policies to support the development of the cultural and tourism industries. Meanwhile, cultural tourism has become a new trend with the popularity of cultural tourism programs. Sunac Cultural Tourism City can seize this opportunity to strengthen its cultural content and enhance its brand's market influence.

4.6.4. Threats

- (1) Changes in the economic environment: Fluctuations in the economic environment may affect consumers' travel budgets and demand for tourism.
- (2) Rapid changes in consumer demand: As consumer demands evolve rapidly, there is increasing emphasis on the quality and service of cultural tourism projects. If Sunac Cultural Tourism City fails to accurately respond to changes in consumer preferences and innovate accordingly, its brand appeal and competitiveness could be affected.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

This study, from the perspective of cultural and tourism integration, delved into the development of tourism brands in Shapingba District, with a particular focus on Sunac Cultural Tourism City. The research found that Shapingba District's red tourism attractions are highly favored by tourists due to their rich historical and cultural significance, alongside effective preservation and development efforts. Meanwhile, Sunac Cultural Tourism City has emerged as a new highlight in Shapingba's tourism landscape by providing a one-stop tourism experience and a rich array of cultural resources, meeting visitors' diverse needs. However, the tourism industry in Shapingba District has faced challenges in recent years due to factors such as the pandemic, market competition, and insufficient product innovation. Nevertheless, Sunac Cultural Tourism City has managed to enhance its brand awareness and influence through effective marketing strategies, attracting a large number of tourists. Furthermore, government support and investor optimism have injected new momentum into the

district's tourism development.

It is recommended that Shapingba District, in promoting deeper integration of culture and tourism, fully leverage Sunac Cultural Tourism City as a leading example. The district should further explore local cultural resources and effectively combine them with tourism resources to create unique tourism products and enhance the value of the regional tourism brand. At the same time, tourism enterprises like Sunac Cultural Tourism City should increase efforts in brand marketing and promotion, utilizing multiple channels to raise brand awareness and reputation to attract a wider range of visitors. Given the rapidly changing market demands and tourist preferences, these enterprises should proactively innovate tourism products and services, offering more personalized and high-quality tourism experiences. Additionally, Shapingba District should strengthen cooperation and exchange with surrounding tourism destinations to jointly promote the coordinated development of the tourism industry, fostering a mutually beneficial situation. The government should also continue to introduce supportive policies for the development of the cultural tourism industry, optimize the investment environment, and provide a better development platform for tourism enterprises like Sunac Cultural Tourism City.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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