

A Study on the Quality of Tourism Experience of Historical and Cultural Blocks Under the Background of Urban Renewal—A Case Study of Yongqing Fang in Guangzhou

Hongjuan Tan¹, Kaiying Guo^{1,2*}, Cuiyi Lin¹, Jing Li¹

¹School of Management, Guangzhou Xinhua University, Guangzhou 510520, Guangdong Province, China

²School of International Tourism and Management, City University of Macau, Macau 999078, China

*Corresponding author: Kaiying Guo, guokaiying91@163.com

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Abstract: Sound evaluation of the quality of tourism experience of historical and cultural blocks under the background of urban renewal is of great significance for integrating culture and through tourism. Yongqing Fang Alleyway is an example of micro-transformation in Guangzhou. Therefore, this paper aims to create a system of evaluation of tourism experience using questionnaire surveys and statistical tools. The results indicate that: (1) The evaluation system of tourism experience quality in historical and cultural blocks consists of five dimensions: revival of cultural heritage, environmental atmosphere, tourism projects and activities, tourism services, and overall subjective experience; (2) The comprehensive evaluation of tourism experience quality of Yongqing Fang is favorable, manifested by high evaluation of environmental atmosphere index and architectural historical features, low evaluation of tourism service index, tourism novelty, consumer price, and interactive project participation. Based on the above analysis results, this paper seeks to put forward suggestions to optimize the evaluation of tourism experience quality in Yongqing Fang, which provides a reference for testing and improving the micro-transformation effect of historical and cultural blocks.

Keywords: Tourism experience; Tourism experience quality; Historical and cultural blocks; Yongqing Fang

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1. Introduction

With the increase of urbanization, the previous development of urban areas and large-scale demolition and reconstruction have caused many problems to the renovation of historical and cultural blocks, such as cultural loss, vitality decline and social tensions, etc. This is how micro-transformation occurs. Micro-transformation is a gradual improvement of living conditions and public facilities, promoting the overall improvement through local metabolism^[1]. The development of tourism and micro-transformation of historical and cultural blocks are mutually reinforcing, as the former can prevent historical and cultural blocks from falling into “museum-style” rigid protection^[2] and produce effective ways to protect and utilize the neighboring environment^[3]. As Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Wuhan, Nanjing, and other cities have completed their urban reconstruction pilot projects, their historical and cultural blocks reflecting urban culture have been updated into tourist attractions as well as leisure areas and are favored by tourists. Therefore, improving the quality of tourists’ experience and effectively integrating culture, tourism and

business are not only important goals in micro-transformation of historical and cultural blocks but also an inevitable choice to promote the sustainable development of historical and cultural blocks.

At present, the research on the renewal of urban historical and cultural blocks revolves around the fields of architecture, urban planning, history, art, sociology, etc., and focuses on the “space”-oriented research [4]. This includes spatial reconstruction and spatial interpretation [5,6], transformation mode and path [7,8], as well as protection of cultural heritage [9-11]. Due to the importance of tourism, culture, and leisure in historical and cultural blocks, some scholars have begun to pay attention to the satisfaction of tourists in historical and cultural blocks [12] and their travel experience [13]. Most research are done by analyzing online texts. So far, little research has been conducted based on the specific background of urban renewal to study tourists’ experience quality in visiting historical and cultural blocks by collecting data through questionnaire surveys.

As Guangzhou Yongqing Fang serves as a pilot project for the protection and utilization of national historical and cultural blocks, a national 4A-level tourist scenic spot, and the first batch of national tourist resorts, its tourism development offers a good example of the renewal of national historical and cultural blocks. Based on the case study of Yongqing Fang, this study integrates the specific background of micro-transformation, and uses the sound evaluation scale of tourism experience quality for reference to discuss the tourism experience of tourists and further enrich the research on the renewal of historical and cultural blocks as well as the quality of tourism experience. Thus, it can be used as a reference for the tourism development in the micro-transformation of historical and cultural blocks.

2. Research design

2.1. Construction of evaluation system of tourist experience quality

Tourism experience includes tourists’ experience of specific tourism products such as catering, accommodation, transportation, scenic spots, shopping, and entertainment in a tourism activity [14]. At present, the “expectation-satisfaction” model is widely used in the evaluation of tourism experience quality [15-17]. Some scholars have designed their evaluation models of tourism experience quality based on the influencing factors of tourism experience. Depending on the types of tourism activities and the characteristics of scenic spots, the evaluation indexes of tourism experience quality are different, most of which involve reception conditions, service quality, tourism activities, environmental atmosphere, and so on [18,19]. However, for micro-transformed historical and cultural blocks, the revival of cultural heritage and the value of tourism are important. Therefore, this study is done based on the general elements of previous scholars’ tourism experience in visiting historical blocks with the addition of the elements of revival of cultural heritage according to the research of scholar Tang Pei [20]. The quality of cultural heritage revival refers to tourists’ evaluation of the visit of historical and cultural blocks and the revival of cultural products, which is a part of the tourism experience quality of historical and cultural blocks. At the same time, in order to improve the rationality and effectiveness of the scale, members of the research group went to Yongqing Fang block for observation and interview three times to supplement and adjust the measurement items, consulting the opinions and suggestions of relevant experts on revising the scale. After much effort, an evaluation system is created for tourism experience quality of historical and cultural blocks with five first-level indicators namely: revival of cultural heritage, environmental atmosphere, tourism activities, tourism services and overall experience, and 26 second-level indicators (see **Table 1**).

2.2. Scale Test

2.2.1. Data collection

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the questionnaires were mainly distributed through online channels such as Questionnaire Star and WeChat from December 2021 to February 2022 along with on-site filling and

on-site interviews. A total of 235 questionnaires were collected with 229 valid questionnaires obtained after deleting invalid questionnaires.

2.2.2. Analysis of basic characteristics of respondents

The sample structure is as follows: the ratio of males to females is moderate. 77.3% of respondents are between 15 and 35 years old while those with degrees from junior colleges and universities make up 84.7%. Most tourists' occupations are students (40.6%) and staff of public institutions (20.1%) and about 49.8% of respondents' income is over RMB 3,600 (\$534). About 85% of tourists live in Guangdong, with 39.7% travelers from Guangzhou. Besides, the tourists' revisit rate is high, with 44.1%, 37.6%, and 18.3% of travelers visiting once, twice, and more than three times respectively.

2.2.3. Reliability, validity, and exploratory factor analysis

Table 1. Exploratory factor analysis of tourism experience quality

Common factors	Measuring item	Mean value	Factor load	Population mean of dimensions	Reliability coefficient	Variance contribution rate/%
Revival of cultural heritage	Architectural styles featuring history and culture	4.21	0.503	4.05	0.795	14.610
	Authenticity of protection	4.00	0.525			
	Exploration of cultural connotation	4.14	0.604			
	Characteristics of cultural products	4.03	0.582			
	Interpretation service level	3.87	0.500			
Tourism projects & activities	Strong interaction and participation	3.83	0.611	3.97	0.814	14.266
	Great entertainment and leisure	4.09	0.540			
	Distinctive themes	4.03	0.591			
	Diverse activities and projects	3.90	0.615			
Environmental atmosphere	Rich connotations of activities	4.00	0.422	4.08	0.852	13.827
	Diversified historical scenes	4.01	0.421			
	Booming business scenes	4.16	0.733			
	Clean and comfortable environment	4.17	0.648			
	Friendly residents in the neighborhood	4.01	0.488			
Tourism services	Beautiful landscape design	4.18	0.503	3.92	0.815	11.371
	Reasonable spatial layout	3.93	0.658			
	Distinctive service facilities (catering, accommodation, shopping, etc.)	4.03	0.514			
	Convenient and fast transportation	4.05	0.631			
	Professional and enthusiastic service personnel	3.97	0.454			
	A perfect and functional navigation system and	3.75	0.666			
	Reasonable consumer price	3.82	0.688			

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Common factors	Measuring item	Mean value	Factor load	Population mean of dimensions	Reliability coefficient	Variance contribution rate/%
Overall experience	A happy and comfortable trip to Yongqing Fang	4.08	0.570	3.99	0.831	9.506
	What you see and hear in Yongqing Fang meets your expectations	3.86	0.493			
	Yongqing Fang enables you to feel novelty and excitement	3.75	0.642			
	What you see and hear in Yongqing Fang allows you to enjoy the beauty	4.08	0.610			
	The trip to Yongqing Fang enables you to learn history and culture	4.18	0.419			

All the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients of measurement items in this questionnaire are 0.955. The Cronbach's coefficients of each factor range from 0.795 to 0.852, which is higher than the lowest standard of 0.600 [21]. This shows that the scale has good internal consistency and is reliable. The results of exploratory factor analysis have revealed that the KMO value of all measurement items is 0.946, while the load values of standardized factors are all higher than 0.400, which indicates good sample adequacy. Meanwhile, the value of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is 3431.558, with the significance level reaching 0.000, which indicates that the survey data have a strong correlation. The principal component analysis method is used to reduce the dimension of 26 measurement items. After the orthogonal rotation of the maximum variance, there are 5 factors with characteristic roots greater than 1. The cumulative contribution rate is 63.580% which is greater than 50%. This means that these 5 factors explain 63.580% of the total variables.

3. Analysis of survey results

The tourists' average perceptions of various dimensions and elements of tourism experience in historical and cultural blocks are shown in **Table 1**. The tourism experience quality is divided into five grades: "very bad," "bad," "average," "good," and "excellent," and their corresponding score intervals are (1, 1.8), (1.8, 2.6), (2.6, 3.4), (3.4, 4.2), and (4.2, 5). The comprehensive score of tourism experience quality in Yongqing Fang historical and cultural buildings is 4.01, which means "good." Among the factors, environmental atmosphere has the highest score of 4.08 in experience quality while tourism service has the lowest score of 3.92.

3.1. High quality of revival of cultural heritage and improvement of interpretation service

The average value of tourists' evaluation of Yongqing Fang's cultural heritage revival is 4.05. The scores of architectural styles featuring history and culture, cultural connotation exploration, and characteristic cultural products are greater than 4.05, while the scores of the authenticity of protection (4.00) and interpretation service level (3.87) are relatively low. It can be seen that in the micro-transformation of Yongqing Fang, while the original urban lanes and neighborhoods are maintained, some nostalgic blocks are restored such as Xiguan Arcade, Xiguan Celebrity Blocks, and Jinsheng Cinema. Besides, an open and low-density place is constructed for a new experience in the form of "Squares, Lanes, Alleys, and Alleyways". However, due to the cleaning of the facades and interiors of some blocks and the addition of new materials and decorations that do not resemble the traditional Lingnan dwellings, the place becomes less authentic. This in a way ruins the tourists' experience. Most of the residents are relocated after micro-transformation and thus the historical and social structure cannot be completely preserved. Hence, it fails

to present the residents' real life. Besides, the low score of interpretation service level is because tour guide explanations that are available at Yongqing Fang are expensive and appointment in advance is needed to be made on the WeChat official account. Although the electronic guide map is free, it cannot provide real-time interactions and timely updates.

3.2. Good overall experience quality of tourism project activities but low interaction and participation

The total evaluation of tourists' experience quality of tourism projects is good with a score of 3.97. The scores of three elements of experiences, such as great entertainment and leisure, distinctive themes, and rich connotations of activities, are all higher than 3.97, while interaction and participation scored the lowest which is 3.83. After micro-transformation, Yongqing Fang has witnessed high-quality humanities and arts activities, for example, Guangdong International Youth Music Week, the 12th China International Youth Art Week, and "Yongqing Fang style" Street Opening Vitality Week, "enjoy Yongqing" large-scale public space art activities, etc. Themed activities will be held as well as exhibition events featuring dance, drama, intangible cultural heritage, music, and other elements during traditional festivals. The tourism activities feature distinctive themes and rich connotations, but tourists will not participate in the activities if they are not interested in the events or have limited knowledge of Guangfu culture, Lingnan culture, and Xiguan culture.

3.3. Good overall experience quality of the environmental atmosphere and improvement of the rationality of the spatial Layout

The tourists' evaluation of environmental experience in Yongqing Fang scores 4.08 and the scores of diversified historical scenes, booming commercial street scenes, clean and comfortable environment and beautiful landscape design are greater than 4.08. To micro-renovate Yongqing Fang, tangled wires in the streets and lanes are rearranged and hidden in pipelines, which eliminates the potential of electric shock and optimizes the street landscape and lighting. In addition, the facade style and color of most blocks are renovated to make the landscape more harmonious and orderly, thus improving the overall aesthetics. While attention is given to protecting the street texture, commercial development is promoted to introduce new industries focusing on cultural creativity, special catering and maker space, and to build an ecological industrial cluster. This helps breathe new life into the old urban area and turn Yongqing Fang into a historical and cultural area suitable for living and leisure. In contrast, the indicator of reasonable spatial layout scores lowest (3.93). This is because the buildings of Yongqing Fang located in downtown Guangzhou with many alleys, features a tight spatial layout, which destroys travelers' experience of crowded roads when many tourists flood the block. Therefore, the route design and marking system need to be improved.

3.4. Improvement in business clusters, navigation Systems, and consumer prices like accommodation, transportation, and shopping

The total average score of tourists' evaluation of tourism service experience in Yongqing Fang is 3.92. Many tourists believe that catering, accommodation, and shopping services in Yongqing Fang are distinctive (4.03), transportation is fast and convenient (4.05), and service personnel are professional and enthusiastic (3.97). This is related to the unique food culture and intangible culture in the long history of Yongqing Fang. To activate and renew Yongqing Fang, many distinctive shops are opened. By the end of 2021, the first phase of renovating Yongqing Fang projects has attracted nearly 60 merchants and enterprises related to cultural creativity, boutique homestays, creative light food, cultural media, and time-honored brands, gathering exhibitions to experience "three carvings (tooth, jade, and wood carving),

Guangdong color and Guangdong embroidery”, Cantonese Opera and Art salon, master studios of intangible cultural heritage, Zhongshuge bookstore, Hey Tea drink chain, and other “online celebrity” culture and catering businesses. This gives rise to a unique landscape in Yongqing Fang in which new and old stores complement each other. Despite convenient public transportation in Guangzhou, the construction of parking lots is strengthened in Yongqing Fang to make it more accessible. As a result, the tourists are satisfied with that. Tourists are content with the service personnel for their code of conduct is in line with the requirements of the industry. However, the complete navigation system scores 3.82 along with the low score of “interpretation service” in the cultural revival, highlighting the shortcomings of Yongqing Fang.

3.5. Good overall experience quality evaluation, but insufficient novelty experience

Tourists evaluate the overall experience quality of five elements: relaxation and pleasure, meeting expectations, feeling novelty and excitement, bringing beauty and learning history and culture, with scores of 4.08, 3.86, 3.75, 4.08, and 4.18 which results in an average score of 3.99. This reveals that tourists’ evaluation of overall experience quality is favorable, as Yongqing Fang brings tourists better experiences in terms of education, aesthetics, and reclusion. Yet, they are dissatisfied with the novelty and excitement of their Yongqing Fang tour as what they have seen and heard has not fully.

4. Measures and suggestions

4.1. Adhere to the principle of maintaining texture and minor repairs, and spread the awareness of cultural heritage protection of micro-transformation subjects

To micro-renovate Yongqing Fang, while the street texture and spatial pattern of historical and cultural blocks are maintained, the public service facilities in the blocks should be further optimized, and the facade and internal structure of dilapidated houses should be transformed to create public space. Meanwhile, Vanke Group, the leading enterprise of micro-transformation, should take the following measures: First, regular lectures and training on cultural heritage must be organized to enhance the awareness of cultural heritage protection and improve the level of fixed-site interpretation services of internal service personnel, with more experts, professors and technicians on cultural heritage protection introduced. Second, the practice must be prevented from blindly following the trend of building large-scale sightseeing facilities such as glass observation decks that damage the overall style of cultural heritage. Respect must be shown to local basic historical facts to avoid fabricating and distorting heritage history when tourism marketing campaigns are promoted. Third, it is important to actively explore new modes such as creating an experience together and creating an experience for consumers, carry out the practice and innovation of cultural heritage revival, deeply explore the connotations of cultural heritage, and develop cultural, creative, and quality products with low prices that represent local characteristics.

4.2. Enrich the forms of tourism activities to build a sound interactive mode of tourism experience

First, Yongqing Fang should be guided by the needs of tourists, incorporating the elements of “Guangdong,” and further optimizing the leisure and recreation space with various activities such as cultural experience, festivals, performances, experiences of intangible cultural heritage, photography, etc., so that tourists can understand and enjoy the culture through special activities. Second, with the help of virtual reality technology and digital media, a sound and smell landscape with the historical and cultural characteristics of Yongqing Fang can be created, such as the cries of old brands such as Jigonglan and the smell of Xiguan traditional cuisine, which presents a vivid and multifaceted historical and cultural block to tourists by stimulating their hearing and smell. Third, it is important to launch 1-2 immersive classic products of tourism performing arts and boutique projects integrating the culture of Yongqing Fang block, to enhance the interaction among tourists and plots, actors, and residents, thus promoting tourists’ participation. In

addition, night-themed activities can be enriched in Yongqing Fang, such as unique night markets and distinctive places for tourists to take photos, showing different local lifestyles, and encouraging tourists to experience different situations.

4.3. Adhere to the principle of aesthetic experience to further enhance the environmental atmosphere

With good protection of historical blocks during the development of Yongqing Fang, most tourists are satisfied. In the future, the protection of historical blocks should be maintained and updated regularly. Spatial layout and tour routes in the block are important factors affecting tourists' aesthetic experience. According to the author's field investigation, the streets and lanes in Yongqing Fang are relatively narrow, so when it is flooded with tourists, the road will be crowded, which affects tourists to watch the beautiful scenery of the historical and cultural blocks and take photos. Therefore, it is imperative to improve the spatial layout and routes and make it more accessible. It is suggested to add leisure facilities on the road to disperse the flow of people and to design diversified tour routes to expand the tourist capacity in the scenic spot, which helps to improve the tourists' psychological capacity and thus the quality of the tourism experience.

4.4. Improve the navigation system and optimize the price system

At present, the navigation system and consumer prices in the block have exerted the most negative impact on the quality of the tourist service experience. To improve the interpretation system in Yongqing Fang, manual and intelligent interpretation can be added to each scenic spot, and it can be charged in sections, with more vivid and interesting language. In addition, intelligent navigation can be constructed to improve the navigation system by using VR cloud tour technology, AR multi-scene application, and other technologies, in an effort to improve the quality of tourists' experience. Moreover, according to the survey results, most tourists are middle-income groups and are not satisfied with the prices of catering, accommodation, and shopping in Yongqing Fang. This means that product prices will be regulated in Yongqing Fang.

4.5. Use Digital Technology to Improve the Novelty and Excitement of Block Tourism

In the development of Yongqing Fang, digital technologies can be used, such as AR and VR technologies to create real historical scenes, and reproduce Xiguan life and Yongqing Fang in history, so that tourists can immerse themselves in the real Yongqing Fang life. Smart tourism technology can not only increase tourists' novelty and excitement during their trips but also enhance their interactive experience, thus improving the quality of tourists' experience.

5. Conclusion

As a national pilot project for the protection and utilization of historical and cultural blocks, a national 4A-level tourist attraction, and the first batch of national tourist resorts, the tourism development of Yongqing Fang in Guangzhou is a model benchmark for the organic renewal of historical and cultural blocks in China. This study takes it as a research case, based on tourists' perceptions, and on the basis of the previous mature tourism experience scale for historical districts, and for the specific context of micro-renovation, an evaluation system with 5 dimensions and 26 indicators of revival of cultural heritage, environmental atmosphere, tourism projects and activities, tourism services, and overall subjective experience is constructed. Then, the data obtained through experts' evaluation, field questionnaires and interviews were used to make a comprehensive evaluation of tourism experience quality. The findings of this paper are of great significance for the sustainable development of historical and cultural blocks. The paper discusses the countermeasures and suggestions to improve the quality of tourists' tourism experience in a macroscopic

way. Detailed investigation and discussion from different perspectives such as neighborhood environment, tourism activities and service quality will be needed in the future to further enhance the practicality of the research results.

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