

## Purpose-built cultural tourism attraction and ways forward: A case study of Gaozhuang Xishuangjing

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### Abstract

This study examines Gaozhuang Xishuangjing (hereafter GZ), a purpose-built cultural tourism attraction, to assess its potential cultural heritage values and management challenges. Research has primarily focused on existing cultural heritage tourism; this study addresses the newly constructed attraction GZ and its role in cultural conservation. This study applied qualitative methods to gather first-hand data from 52 domestic respondents and 10 key informants from two rounds semi-structured interviews, supplemented by observations and document analysis. The findings demonstrate the complex impacts of cultural tourism and highlight the necessity of adopting a multi-stakeholder approach for sustainable management. By engaging local communities and tourists, GZ can link cultural conservation and business development, offering a model for long-term sustainability. The study underscores the importance of collaboration between local villages and communities, managers and policymakers to formulate strategies for and support diverse initiatives in cultural heritage preservation. Additionally, these insights can allow managers to anticipate the challenges of cultural tourism and policymakers to foster a more integrated cultural-business landscape.

**Keywords:** Cultural tourism, Cultural conservation, Cultural management, Multi-stakeholder approach.

## Introduction

In recent decades, the cultural turn worldwide has ‘inextricably linked tourism and culture as a resource of local identity in the face of globalisation’ (UNWTO, 2018). A report by UNESCO (2021) predicts that cultural tourism, a rapidly expanding sector in the industry, will contribute 40% to global travel and significantly influence the global labour market. It ‘has been viewed as a desirable, *good* form of tourism for nations and regions to develop because it generates cultural, social and economic benefits’ (UNWTO, 2018).

However, although the marriage between culture and tourism gave birth to diverse cultural tourism projects and attractions, it does not seem to tighten the collaboration of the two sides, because ‘their languages are fundamentally different’ (UNWTO, 2018), in which ‘culture and tourism are constituted in different forms of human activities’ (Tadesse, 2023). ‘The discussion of heritage, or, broadly speaking, culture, in relation to economic development is not neutral’ (Ken and Verdini, 2022). This aspect could partially explain why the definition of cultural tourism excludes cultural heritage management. According to Du Cros and Bob (2020), ‘the definition of cultural tourism is tourism-related, which identifies cultural tourism as a form of tourism and not a form of cultural heritage management’.

In cultural heritage management, a new approach redefines heritage through a non-Eurocentric lens, reshaping cultural management. It views cultural heritage as a dynamic and evolving process, reconsidering its relationship with economic development. As Ken and Verdini (2022) notes, ‘cultural heritage is not just about professional practices but is tied to the historical formation of development discourses’.

Recently, *creative-led strategies* in western post-industrial cities, less developed countries and even non-urban areas emphasise the convergence of culture and tourism (Verdini, 2020). ‘Cultural and creative industries are booming in Asia as well, with China leading the way’ (Gu, Lim and Connor, 2020). As one of the cultural products and creative economies, purpose-built cultural tourism attraction (PBCTA), also known as *traditional style culture* reconstruction, serves purely political and economic needs (Su, 2018) and is widely recognised in China as a case of conservation and reconstruction (Ken and Verdini, 2022). Liu and Kirdsiri (2023) assert that PBCTA spreads throughout the nation, which leverages the wealth of cultural heritage, resources and policy support to revitalise and preserve cultural diversity in domestic China. Gaozhuang Xishuangjing (GZ) is one of such projects.

However, purposely reconstructed cultural tourism attraction ‘might be more arguable through the lens of cultural conservation’ (Ken and Verdini, 2022), which is frequently criticised by cultural heritage scholars. ‘Much discussion has been on the inevitable conflicts of heritage tourism for the past 30 years’ (Jiang, 2022). Consequently, the potential value and cultural management of PBCTA may be undervalued and receive less attention. Previous studies focused on the creativity and innovation of existing cultural heritage attractions (Su, 2018; Rudan, 2023), analysed the successful model of the Song Cheng theme park (Hu, 2024). Zhou et al. (2023), Quan-Baffour (2023) and Zhao et al. (2023) as well as Cranmer et al. (2023) elucidated the rural-based or community-based approach. Nevertheless, much room remains for the discussion on PBCTA through the perspective of cultural heritage management.

Therefore, this study selected GZ, a newly constructed cultural tourism attraction, as a case study to discuss its potential value in cultural conservation and, importantly, to provide a multi-stakeholder approach for its long-term development and management to mitigate the current challenges towards cultural tourism. Hence, the objectives of this study are as follows:

1. to explore GZ's potential as a cultural heritage and place-making project;
2. to identify cultural tourism management challenges for GZ's sustainable development in the local context; and
3. to propose a multi-stakeholder approach for GZ's long-term cultural conservation and business sustainability.

## Literature Review

PBCTA lacks an official definition but can be understood as 'man-made buildings, structures and sites that are designed specifically to attract visitors and meet their needs' (Swarbrooke, 2015). In this study, PBCTA refers to a purpose-built attraction with cultural features that cater to contemporary needs.

Discussions about PBCTA focus on the tourism context. PBCTA requires adaptation to dynamic environment in which the multi-stakeholder relationship create uncertainties. PBCTA should therefore be reviewed first from a cultural tourism perspective to comprehend its current state. Subsequently, it should be examined using the guidelines of cultural tourism management to ensure sustainable management and planning. Lastly, it requires coordination and balance between benefits and profits among multiple stakeholders.

### Cultural Tourism

The term *cultural turn* has gained momentum globally both in the heritage field and in tourism. Culture and its heritage and conservation is becoming increasingly integrated with the tourism industry in recent years. These 'soft' cultural capacities have been transformed from 'being valuable in [their] own right to being useful for business and economics' (Alasuutari, 2016; De Beukelaer et al., 2020; Gu et al., 2020). As a resource, 'culture and its heritage can be used in a number of ways by heritage operators, developers, planners and the public' (Tomas et al., 2018). Therefore, 'it is hard to see anything that is not cultural' (UNWTO, 2018). As a vehicle, tourism bridges tourists and culture by offering a participation-based or immersive experience to elucidate and appreciate culture and its diversity through 'attractiveness and competitiveness' (Su et al., 2024).

Previous decades witnessed tourism as 'an increasing important source of external capital' (Richards, 2023), which 'continues to be among the foremost vehicles for cultural exchange, providing personal experience' (ICOMOS, 1999). These 'cultural tourisms will continue to grow into the foreseeable future as tourists are looking for an increasingly authentic experience' (McKercher, 2023). It has become an 'increasingly complex phenomenon with multi-dimensional factors, which presents many challenges and opportunities' (ICOMOS, 1999). Consequently, 'cultural tourism has become the inextricable focus in tourism academia' (Richards, 2018; Zhou et al., 2023). The

research on cultural tourism is now ‘shifting its focus to sustainability, ethnic cultural diversity and integrity rather than the development and use of cultural resources’ (Yu et al., 2023).

Recently, ‘culture and its resources have encouraged and driven an exponential growth in tourism to heritage destinations through city branding and marketing its unique qualities’ (ICOMOS, 2022). This is seen as cultural expressions and products. Ashworth and Brian (2012) explored how cultural heritage and technologies shaped city branding in post-industrial Europe, noting that ‘heritage evolves to address societal changes (Maria, 2017). Their insights remain relevant, especially in Asia, where China is leading the way (Gu et al., 2020). GZ exemplifies how *place branding* and *cultural events* drive local economies. Bob and Hilary (2012) argued that this type of cultural theme park satisfies tourists’ heritage interests without conflicting with conservation. However, the case is seemingly untrue for the timing of the message as these PBCTAs ‘are seen as heritage and symbols nowadays’ (Maria, 2017); examples include the presentation of the Berlin Wall and the rebuilt Wurzburg to replicate their appearance in pre-war Germany for tourism purposes (du Cros et al. 2020). Furthermore, PBCTAs ‘in urban planning are conceptualised as *contemporary cultural property* whose lot of values are lacking due to their level of generality’ (Maria, 2017).

PBCTA connects GZ and, therefore, raises the following question: how should PBCTA be assessed through heritage? What challenges does it face? Ashworth et al. (2012) discussed these purposeful constructions:

... were initiated by distinctiveness, balance, and universality, which were devised to be different but ultimately becoming the same, is a non-place-bound code conveying a generalised and non-locally specific historicity (Ashworth et al., 2012, p. 16).

The ‘non-place-bound’, is understood as losing ‘local authenticity’ (Keidar et al., 2023; Ooi et al., 2010) by the ‘commodification and touristification’ of local cultural products and human relations (MacCannell, 1973; Ooi et al., 2010). It eliminates the ‘complete and honest local culture and story’ from purpose-built pictures. It reflects that ‘the attraction operators do not seem to be devoting much attention to the issue of sustainability’ (Swarbrooke, 2015).

How then can PBCTA projects be sustainable to conserve local culture? The answers to this question may necessitate reconsideration from the bi-lens perspective of culture and tourism. This notion then directs towards cultural tourism management.

### **Cultural Tourism Management**

Ken and Verdini (2022) notes ‘managing cultural heritage places requires the sustainability’. Its essence is to ‘resolve the tension between conservation and development’, in which ‘the nexus between them is today primarily related to tourism and residential attractiveness’ (Ken and Verdini, 2022). Essentially, it aims to manage change and mitigate any negative impacts. Hence, cultural tourism management is a ‘strategic management of cultural resources for the destinations, including the challenge of managing tourist flows through different routes or combined products’ (UNWTO, 2022).

The shift from a tangible to an intangible focus of cultural heritage steers cultural management towards the living heritage residing in the local communities and their associative values and issues. Moreover, the *change* considers additional factors due to the complex and dynamic context and situation of cultural tourism, which involves a wide range of stakeholders. It requires co-management (Ken and Verdini, 2022; ICOMOS, 2022; Richards, 2021) to enable the co-creation of cultural tourism management processes, which leads to a multi-stakeholder view.

### **Multi-Stakeholder Approach**

Freeman introduced the stakeholder theory in 1984 (Freeman, 2010; Salman et al., 2023). Over the past two decades, this concept has gained prominence (Spadaro et al., 2023), attracting ‘scholars’ eyes in different fields covering the tourism industry’ (Viglia et al., 2023), thereby becoming key to successful tourism development (Phanumat et al., 2015; Waligo et al., 2013). The multi-stakeholder approach is much discussed in sustainable tourism, including ecotourism contexts (Ahmad Salman et al., 2023), post-COVID rural tourism resilience (Nasution et al., 2023; Spadaro et al., 2023) and earlier by Phanumat et al. (2015) in Thailand from the community-based perspective.

Involving stakeholders becomes increasingly decisive in sustainable tourism management through which ‘participation moves away from hierarchical decision-making to equalise the power between all parties involved and to promote an equally desirable situation in tourism planning and development for everyone involved’ (Phanumat et al., 2015; Ottaviani et al., 2023). The reason is that ‘stakeholder groups influence tourism development in many ways’ (Waligo et al., 2013). Thus, it requires collaboration between ‘a range of significant actors in a given area of work’ (Dodds, 2015), including ‘governments, regional groups, local authorities, non-governmental actors, international institutions and private sector’ (Dodds, 2015).

This concept is underscored by ICOMOS (2022), which advocates cooperation among stakeholders in tourism for cultural heritage conservation to achieve sustainable goals from different aspects.

A research gap exists in the discussion of multi-stakeholder approach in the PBCTA context through the lens of cultural heritage management and conservation, especially when it prevails in China and Asian contexts. Hence, exploring the case of GZ is warranted.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

Qualitative methods were adopted for collecting data given the study’s objective of exploring and explaining social phenomena. Methods include semi-structured interviews, observations and document surveys, providing extensive information from different perspectives (Turner et al., 2021). Respondents were divided into five groups based on the impact levels of GZ: the local community (core villages and other residents), official agencies (developers, staff and Cultural and Tourism Offices of

Jinghong and XishuangBanna), businesspersons in GZ, tourists and scholars.

Local respondents met specific criteria: they had no language barriers, they were key persons in the village and they were familiar with GZ. Businessmen and vendors were initially introduced by official staff and then randomly selected based on their businesses. Tourists were randomly chosen from Yunnan locals and non-locals. Scholars were introduced as well.

To ensure validity, a Chinese expert and professor evaluated the drafted research structure, process and interview questions. Revisions were made to ensure clarity and accuracy and to prevent bias and ethical issues.

**Data Collection Process**

Data were primarily collected via in-depth interviews, supplemented by observations, document analysis and second-hand data. The first round involved semi-structured interviews with 52 valid respondents, aimed at gathering general feedback on GZ. The number of participants was sufficient for data saturation, and interviews continued until no new information emerged. Interviews were conducted offline in Jinghong and at the GZ site as well as online from 28 February to 30 April 2022.

Respondents were briefed about the research, and those who agreed to participate filled out consent forms. Based on the answers received on the first day of interviews, more questions were added. Interviews were conducted randomly in Mandarin and local dialects, each lasting about 35 minutes.

Following the first round, an expert recommended a second round focused on local participation, authenticity and sustainability. The second round was conducted from 28 July to 4 August 2023, involving ten key informants representing the five stakeholder groups: two local community members, two businesspeople (local and non-local), two scholars (local and non-local), two tourists (local and non-local), one GZ staff member and one local governmental officer. Although the original plan involved a group discussion, we eventually conducted individual interviews to avoid potential stakeholder conflicts.

All interviews were recorded with the respondents’ consent. The researcher made notes during each interview. Later, the researcher listened to the recordings to organise information (Table 1).

**Table 1: Three major questions designed for the first-round interview**

Major questions and sub-questions	Research objectives addressed
1. How do you think of GZ in terms of your experience with local culture? <i>Sub-questions:</i> What did you see/hear/feel/know in/from GZ? What was your first impression of GZ? Is it authentic or not? (see Liu et al., 2023)	1. To explore GZ’s potential as a cultural heritage and place-making project.

<p>2. What are the problems in GZ? <i>Sub-questions:</i> Did you have a positive or negative experience in GZ? Why or why not? What were the impacts that GZ has on locals?</p>	<p>2. To identify cultural tourism management challenges for GZ's sustainable development in the local context.</p>
<p>3. What do you want to see in the future in GZ? <i>Sub-questions:</i> How (and in what way) do you think GZ can present a more satisfied/local experience to you? Would you be willing to participate in events and activities in GZ? What are the future plans in GZ? How would GZ contribute and bring benefits to locals and the culture?</p>	<p>3. To propose a multi-stakeholder approach for GZ's long-term cultural conservation and business sustainability.</p>

## Data Analysis

The collected data were processed via four steps to ensure validity and reliability. First, the recorded audios were transcribed using the Feishu application. The researcher listened to and read the transcripts twice to ensure accuracy, using interview notes as references. After revising the transcripts (from the local dialect to standard Mandarin), content analysis was applied, as 'it's suitable for identifying patterns and themes through systematic text analysis' (Hsieh et al., 2005; Soonsap et al., 2023).

Nvivo was used for coding and classification based on keywords. The researcher consulted with the expert to recheck the accuracy, validity and reliability of the analysis. Finally, the transcripts were translated from Mandarin to English, and each sentence was coded based on the research objectives. A native English speaker then proofread and checked the translated transcripts.

## Data Sources

- Survey documents
- Secondary materials
- Information from respondents
- Observation

The findings were derived from four main sources: survey documents, which elucidated current trends; secondary materials from previous studies on GZ, highlighting its values and challenges; data from informants, which provided updated, first-hand information compared with pre-COVID-19 studies; and participatory (joining local activities and GZ travel) and non-participatory field observations.

Although studies have previously explored GZ, this study remains crucial due to its updated insights, particularly in terms of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In contrast to Han (2013) and Du (2019), this study goes beyond discussing symbolic

cultural features, exploring their potential value as cultural heritage. Furthermore, the findings provide detailed information on existing problems, challenges and management issues compared with studies by Zhang et al. (2018) and Yu (2021). Finally, it expands on the findings of Liu et al. (2023), which emphasised the concept of reconstructed authenticity.

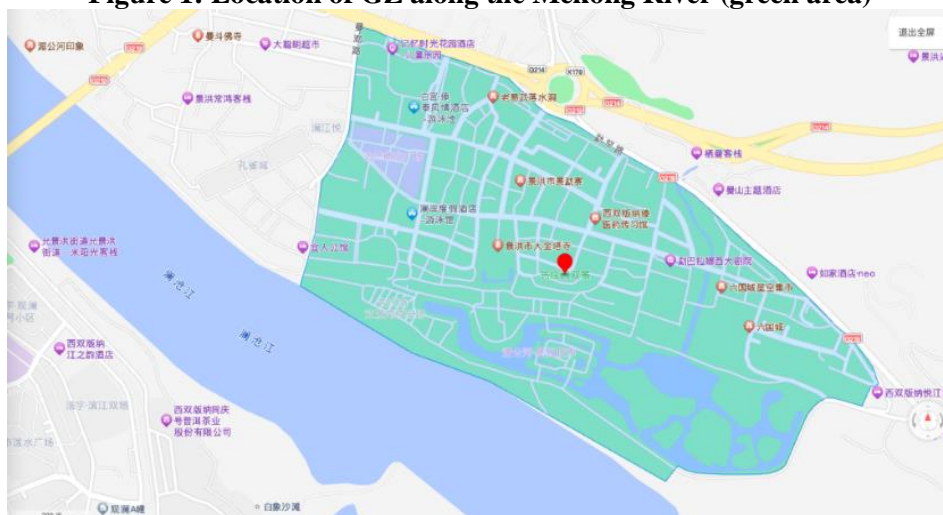
### Case Study Description

In 2009, the Haicheng Group founded GZ, a privately owned PBCTA in Jinghong City, Yunnan Province (see Figure 1 for the location of GZ). Managed by Jingland Cultural Tourism Company, GZ provided national and provincial support for the night-time economy and local cultural revitalisation. Its location on the China–Southeast Asia border also strengthened the Southeast Asian network by highlighting the unique Dai–Thai cultural features of the Mekong River basin.

As a local intellectual property (IP) and city landmark (Figure 2), GZ has been listed among Yunnan’s top night-time economy sites over the past five years, attracting nearly 10 million tourists annually. In 2023, it was named one of the 12 provincial cultural industry zones, contributing significantly to local economy by creating over 30,000 jobs in the creative sector (Zhou, 2023). GZ transformed the local traditional tourism mode (single-function) into a comprehensive and multi-functional cultural tourism attraction (Figure 3), becoming a must-visit photo spot (Figure 4) and a tourism pillar alongside the Night Market (Figure 5), Golden Pagoda (Figure 6), Gan’bai Street (Figure 7) and Dai Disco Livehouse (Figure 8).

Despite its success, GZ has faced criticism regarding the authenticity and sustainability of its cultural tourism, which has affected its reputation. While previous studies discussed some challenges, an in-depth analysis of cultural tourism management remains lacking.

**Figure 1: Location of GZ along the Mekong River (green area)**

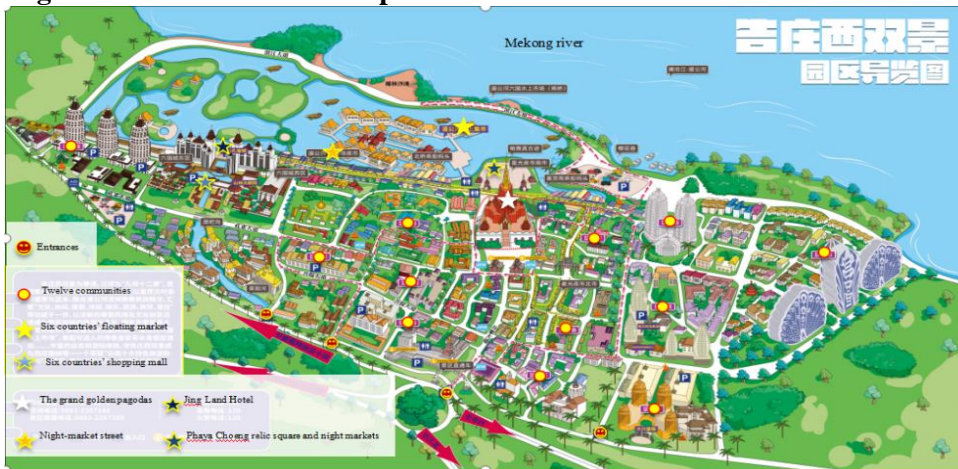




**Figure 2: Full view of GZ from the opposite side of Mekong River**



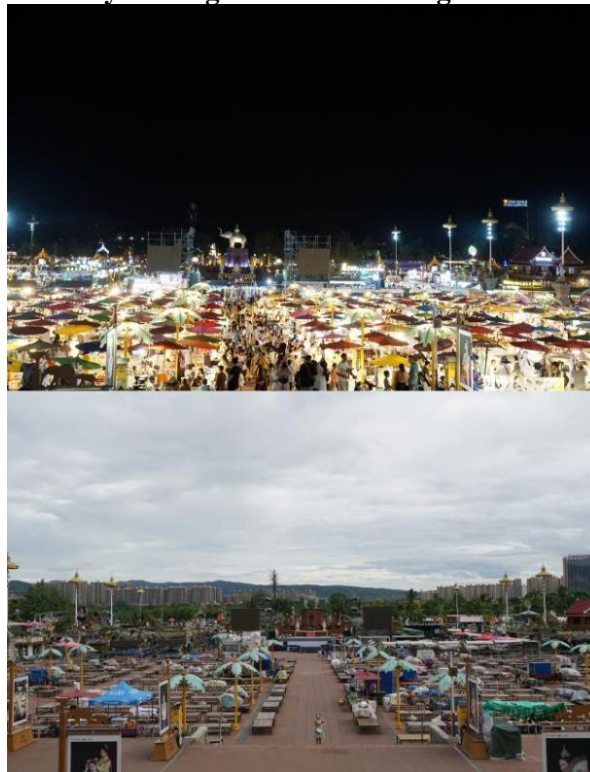
**Figure 3: Official tourism map of GZ with marked attractions and locations**



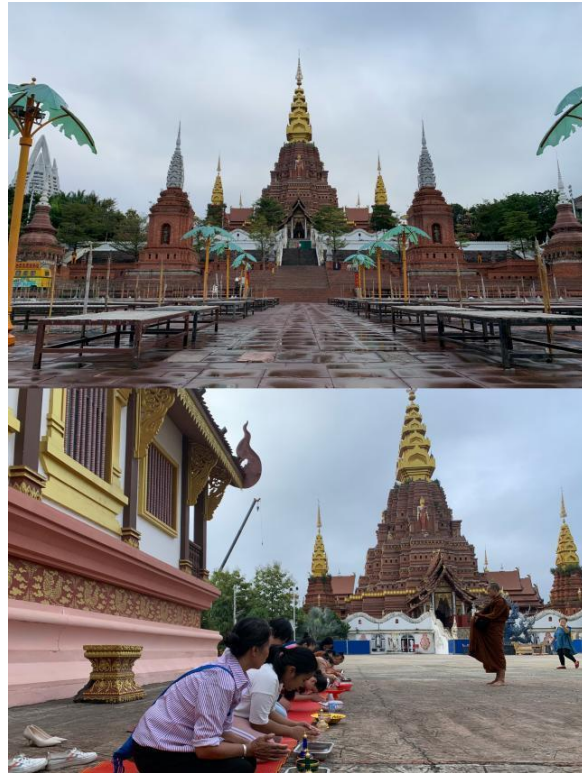
**Figure 4: People taking photos**



**Figure 5: Day and night views of the Night Market in GZ**



**Figure 6: Back and front (photo-shooting point) views (with morning merit-making activity) of the Golden Pagoda**



**Figure 7: Gan'bai Street of GZ, one of the major attractions below the Golden Pagoda and costume renting shops at daytime**



**Figure 8: Dai Disco Livehouse, one of the most attractive check-in points for tourists at night-time**



## Results

### Potential Values of GZ

#### *Secondary Materials and Information from Respondents*

According to secondary sources (Du, 2019; Han, 2013; Liu et al., 2023; Yu, 2021; Zhang et al., 2018), GZ, though a new PBCTA, holds potential architectural, aesthetic and socio-cultural value. It is known for its distinguished architecture style (stilt wooden house, religious architecture and SE style), symbols (local features like peacocks, elephants, Hinayana Buddhist statues and palm trees) and cultural activities, festivals and events (e.g. the water sprinkle festival, Loy Krathong festival, local music festivals and the local food festival, etc.). These aspects align with the first-round interview, in which participants highlighted Dai and SE cultural features. The potential significance of GZ lies in its reconstructed cultural and social identity. Liu et al. (2023) suggested that GZ can evolve into a new form of authenticity over time.

### Challenges and Problems in GZ Towards Cultural Tourism

While GZ boosts tourism and local economic growth, it faces challenges that may impact its authenticity and sustainability in cultural tourism.

#### *Challenges from the Survey of Documents*

Hoi An Protocols (2009) outline six threats to authenticity in Asia: loss of traditional knowledge, urban renewal, environmental pollution, commercialised cultural products, loss of sense of place and compromising the spiritual dimension. This is echoed in the ICOMOS Charter (2022), which emphasises community-centred approaches and stakeholder collaboration in cultural tourism planning and management. GZ faces four of these issues.

Overgrown tourism leads to cultural commodification, offering tourists inauthentic representations that confuse both tourists and younger locals. Furthermore, tourists'

lack of awareness of local customs can result in inappropriate behaviour, potentially irritating residents. Additionally, the influx of tourists accelerates urbanisation and demographic shifts, increasing conflicts between locals and outsiders. Moreover, inadequate interpretation of heritage, as noted by the Burra Charter (2013), China Principles (2015), Tilden (2009), Jiang (2022) and Boccardi (2018), threatens GZ's authenticity and sustainability.

### ***Challenges in Interviewees' Information and Observation***

The following keywords were highlighted by respondents as the major challenges to GZ in terms of socio-cultural, environmental and economic aspects.

#### **Over-commercialisation (as per all respondents<sup>1</sup>)**

Respondents highlighted over-commercialisation as one of the main issues in GZ, impacting authenticity and leading to product homogeneity and high costs. According to previous research on GZ tourism (Liu et al., 2023), 25% of GZ Night Market booths were run by local businesspeople in 2021, contributing to cultural and demographic shifts. Although GZ symbols are well-researched, their use is superficial (Zhang et al., 2018; Yu, 2021) due to ineffective and inadequate cultural interpretation. Additionally, homogenous products in the Great Pagoda area—such as 44 identical Dai barbecue stands and 20 Dai salad hawkers (rough estimate by the author as on 11 April 2022)—led to unsustainable competition among vendors, causing high turnover and instability in the Night Market, as mentioned by businesspeople and tourist groups.

#### **Dongbei Night Market (as per Local and Tourist Respondents): Lack of Authenticity**

The over-commercialisation of the area has earned it the nickname *Dongbei (northeast of China) Night Market/GZ*. This mainly stems from the distinct cultural characteristics and lifestyles of the Dongbei people in GZ, not just their presence, which has led to misunderstanding and conflict among locals and tourists (Liu et al., 2023). In particular, their loud voices easily elicit annoyance, and the sale of Dongbei food (dumplings) as local (Dai dumplings) delicacies raise questions on the authenticity of GZ and highlight its over-commercialisation.

#### **Poor Management (as per Business and Tourist Groups)**

Poor management practices in GZ, such as inadequate interpretation and presentation of the local culture, were highlighted by five respondents. Du (2019) mentioned an interpretation service, but none was observed during the study. The QR code in the Great Pagoda area (the main attraction) did not function when tested in 2022 and 2023. Other respondents, except for locals, official staff and scholars, do not know the cultural value of GZ, indicating a lack of information. A local noted, 'GZ has the body [structure], but it is without soul yet'. Although few interviewees mentioned this issue,

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<sup>1</sup> Respondents' citation presented in the paper are coded with RF\_L = respondent-first round-local; RF\_T = respondent-first round-tourist; RF\_B = respondent-first round-businesspeople; RF\_S = respondent-first round-scholar; RF\_O = respondent-first round-official. RS\_L = respondent-second round-local; RS\_T = respondent-second round-tourist; RS\_B = respondent-second round-businesspeople; RS\_S = respondent-second round-scholar; RS\_O = respondent-second round-official.

it significantly impacted tourists’ understanding. The design concept (replicating traditional Xishuang Banna), cultural meanings, material utilization, and decorations should be interpretable by the public rather than only by designers and developers.

Ashworth and Tunbridge (2000) and Jiang (2022) highlighted inevitable conflicts between heritage and tourism, which is evident in the unsound management of maintenance and landscape. It was highlighted in the conflicts among stakeholders (businesspeople and management side; informants (slow responsive feedback on reported issues and benefit issues); cultural shock and conflicts between locals and tourists and between businesspeople and tourists; increasing price of GZ consumption and local income between local people and businesspeople. Although these issues are prevalent in various locations, drawing attention to them and taking steps to address them are crucial. The first-round interviews and observations highlighted the two abovementioned points.

Another management issue that emerged in the second-round interviews was GZ’s carrying capacity, emphasised by ICOMOS (2022). One scholar noted the overcrowding at GZ during the Chinese Spring Festival after COVID-19 while other local attractions remained empty. This led to a spike in accommodation costs and resource shortage. A scholar commented, ‘There was no guidance or distribution to other places’, and tourists remarked, ‘Resources in GZ are limited and don’t reflect local diversity’, echoing the abovementioned issues. Poor management created significant challenges for GZ and the local community.

**Ways Forward from the Multi-Stakeholder Approach**

In the second round, the main issue identified was GZ’s lack of authenticity in cultural representation and local identity, leading to locals’ reluctance to participate. Tourists, businesspeople and a scholar also noted concerns about carrying capacity and inauthenticity. However, the scholar mentioned that ‘it is a marketing issue and the market will solve the problems’. Managers barely mentioned management-related challenges, whereas government agencies mentioned the same challenges and cultural conflicts as those discussed in the first round. Table 2 summarises the highlighted terms from the first and second rounds of data collection.

**Table 2: Highlighted words from the two rounds data collection**

Landmark/check-in site
Distinguished cultural features
Tourism influx contribution
Superficial/inauthentic experience
Cultural diversity
Interpretation

Informants from the first and second rounds of interviews mentioned GZ as a landmark in Jinghong and Yunnan province:

*GZ itself is a successful IP already, with not only Jinghong’s cultural features but also the SE’s. (RS\_O1, local authority)*

*I don't know what Jinghong's tourism would be without GZ. It establishes a new tourism mode in the local area and attracts more tourists. (RF\_O3, local authority)*

*We are here because GZ goes viral on social media, which is a must-go check-in attraction. It gives us the feeling of SE. (RF\_T13,14, non-local tourists)*

Moreover, all local informants from the first round stated that they would recommend GZ to non-local friends, because it is a name card of Jinghong.

One local informant responded:

*GZ is a miniature of Jinghong, where tourists could have a quick look and experience. (RF\_L8, local)*

All respondents, with the exception of the authority and managerial agency, also mentioned the 'inauthentic and commercialised' issues.

*We expected GZ to be our signature brand, but it's overly commercialised, as evidenced by the expensive consumption and the presence of non-local businesspeople. (RS\_L1, local)*

Another stated:

*Like our human, GZ has its 'body' (structure) now, but it needs to create its 'soul' (local connection). (RF\_L9, local)*

*Jinghong has more diversity than GZ presents; GZ could do more and better to bring and connect local cultural diversity. (RS\_T9, non-local tourist)*

However, a local scholar noted, the commercialisation contributed a significant influx to the local.

*It attracts millions of tourists; after its reopening last spring, GZ was fully packed. The fact that it is a commercial project does not pose a problem. The point is how to guide, manage and connect these resources to the locals' diversity. (RS\_S1, scholar)*

In addition, several respondents discussed interpretation as one of the most influential points.

*I saw no interpretation in GZ, not even signage. The area is vast and I was unsure of where to explore. (RF\_T11, non-local tourist)*

A local resident also mentioned this issue:

*There was no interpretation to help the public understand the culture and meaning beyond the viewpoints. (RF\_L8, local)*

Even the local staff working in GZ did not know the meaning of GZ given that interpretation plays a fundamental role in cultural tourism and conservation (Liu et al., 2023).

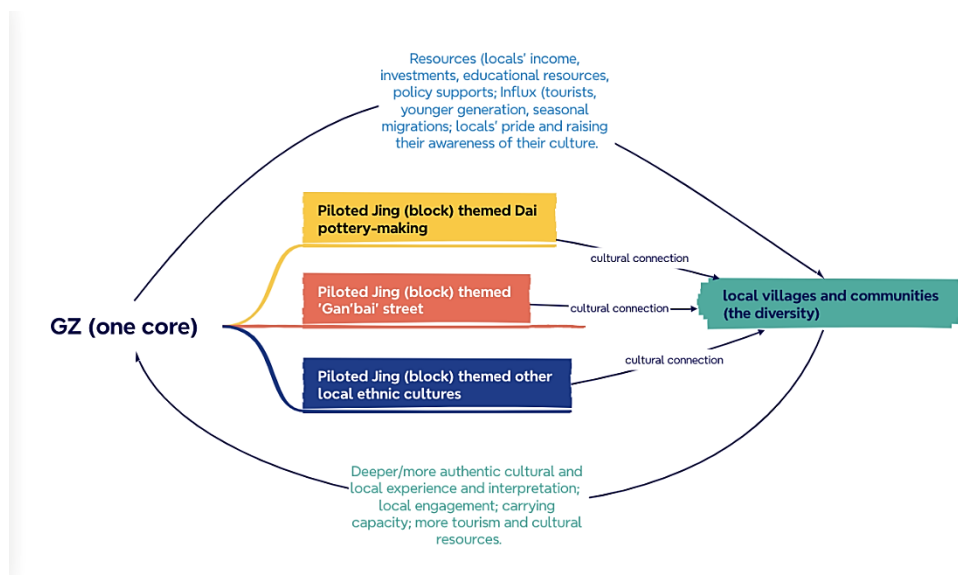
Regarding poor management, respondents who ran businesses in GZ mentioned the ineffective and inefficient managing system:

*It has already been few months after my feedback of the very small matter (broken street light in front of my shop), but it is still broken. (RF\_B9, non-local businesspeople)*

*They (the managerial agency) are very irresponsible when we asked for maintenance but the fastest when collecting the rental fee'. (RS\_B2, local businesspeople)*

Accordingly, the researcher proposes ‘one core and its diversity’ (Figure 9). This principle emphasises balancing central attractions with surrounding local communities and cultural resources.

**Figure 9: Proposed ‘one core and its diversity’**



In GZ, the ‘one core’ refers to the key tourist landmarks of the Golden Pagoda and the Night Market. ‘Its diversity’ includes 12 ‘Jings’ (blocks). On a citywide scale, GZ is the ‘one core’, while ‘its diversity’ represents local communities. With this understanding, various stakeholders are required to play their respective roles.

### **Roles**



**Official agencies.** This term refers to governmental bodies and the managerial agency of GZ. Their primary roles involve encouraging policy-making and ensuring effective planning and management, which is fundamental for solving the identified problems.

**Governmental bodies.** They create policies to encourage locals and attract non-local businesspeople (domestic and SE region), fostering an authentic SE vibe rather than just a commercial brand. Furthermore, they provide business training to locals and non-locals to improve their skills and cultural understanding, promoting a healthy business environment. Additionally, these bodies should enhance market systems, including capacity management and price control.

**Managerial agencies.** They could design each Jing as a themed cultural community, encouraging businesspeople to offer unique products, which would reduce competition and enhance cultural diversity. Pilot blocks could feature Dai food, ethnic costumes and traditional crafts such as pottery and weaving. Furthermore, interpretative services such as tourist maps and cultural guides could help deepen the public's understanding of the area.

Apart from cultural content, managerial agencies could establish a *Jing-themed* management system to increase businesspeople's awareness of their responsibility of creatively improving the quality of their products and services. Alternatively, they could provide an effective and responsive managing system to address issues and gather feedback from businesspeople and tourists.

**Scholars.** They could serve as consultants, helping with policy-making, cultural training and coordination between local communities and the government, thereby fostering cultural sustainability.

**Businesspeople.** Businesspeople drive the economy and act as context interpreters, playing a crucial role in the GZ. They should focus on long-term product sustainability instead of short-term profit and view themselves as cultural co-creators.

**Local community.** Locals play crucial roles as providers of cultural authenticity, value and interpretation. Therefore, they should recognise the importance of their culture and diversity, especially the younger generation of locals. With this awareness, they can actively participate in GZ activities by showcasing representative products or skills. It is essential for them to develop business skills to succeed both in the GZ and in local areas and thereby implement the 'one core and its diversity' model and build networks. Additionally, this approach is key to addressing the authenticity and interpretation challenges in GZ.

**Tourists.** Tourists serve as cultural consumers, economic contributors, value co-creators and potential business investors. The 'one core and its diversity' concept could enrich their experience and meet cultural needs. Their actions can reshape culture, influencing both the public and other tourists. Instead of engaging in superficial consumption, they should focus on preserving culture by gaining a deeper understanding, supporting local products and being mindful of feedback on social media. This approach may also encourage tourists to invest in GZ or nearby areas.

The ‘one core and its diversity’ approach could support a healthy tourism marketing and conservation system by promoting cultural diversity in GZ businesses and products. It can enhance the understanding of the local culture and involve more locals in presenting their heritage, leading to more authentic cultural experiences for tourists. Thus, in turn, it would boost local identity, generate income and help revive intangible cultural heritage. Piloting themed blocks in GZ can extend this model to local villages, encouraging them to showcase their unique specialities, such as Da weaving and pottery making.

## Discussion and Conclusion

### Understanding the Potential Value of PBCTA

From the temporal perspective, culture denotes the past and continuity, while tourism indicates the present and transience. The PBCTA, designed to perform a cultural function, should be evaluated through the lens of cultural heritage and management to ensure sustainable conservation and development of both culture and tourism.

Given the role of cultural tourism in boosting the economy, it is essential to integrate the PBCTA into cultural heritage management. Recognising its potential value in fostering cultural and social connections, rather than dismissing it as pseudo-heritage is important. In other words, PBCTA should be regarded as a heritage worthy of discussion, analysis and management within the tourism industry. As Ken and Verdini (2022) state, ‘Cultural heritage places need to function in economic terms if we want to protect them’. PBCTA, with its potential value, is one such place, but it is often neglected. While it primarily serves tourism, it could play a more active role in conserving and protecting cultural heritage and its diversity.

Therefore, understanding and acknowledging PBCTA’s potential value could enhance mutual understanding between the two concepts, thus fostering collaboration and rendering PBCTA a truly purposeful heritage.

GZ, with its eye-catching economic and influx contributions, could serve as a successful example. Its success brings resources to local society, such as capital, policy support and employment opportunities. However, viewing GZ as merely pseudo-heritage or a *short-lived* tourism project may undermine its value in cultural heritage management. Conversely, if room exists for debate about its potential value, then it would reap more benefits and provide guidance for management and planning.

### Recognising Challenges Beyond the Current Success Based on Potential Value

Government agencies responded in terms of local cultural authenticity:

*‘GZ itself is already an IP; it presents the SE atmosphere to the public; if people want to experience local culture, we have other cultural routes, such as ethnic villages for the cultural experience’. (RS\_O1, local authority)*

Moreover, in response to complaints from tourists and other general issues, the government respondent stated that ‘we [the local cultural tourism department], along

with other functional departments like the market regulatory authority, have already taken action to solve the food hygiene problem and the photo-shooting trickery'. The exclusive solution of separating local cultural connections from GZ would be unsustainable.

Recognising these challenges and problems is crucial as the 'economic discourse might fall into the trap of the business thinking model' (Ken and Verdini, 2022). The abovementioned findings in terms of problems have indicated a trap beyond the success of an eye-attracting economy, where it may fall into a 'short-life' trap as success is derived from external factors or 'the superficial use of the symbols and cultural features' (Yu, 2020; Zhang et al., 2018) instead of the internal system (local cultural connection). Natural disasters, such as *special time* (COVID-19 lockdown), social media spreading, selling point (exotic landscape), the pleasant weather and location factors (RF\_B13), which gives the project only 'a body but without soul' (RF\_L9). Furthermore, the lack of internal elements has raised or could potentially raise conflicts between the following:

- (1) locals and outsiders (tourists, businesspeople and seasonal migrants);
- (2) locals and developers;
- (3) locals and government agencies;
- (4) businesspeople and tourists;
- (5) businesspeople and developers;
- (6) businesspeople and businesspeople;
- (7) businesspeople and government agencies; and
- (8) government agency and developer.

These conflicts may widen the gap between cultural conservation and the tourism. Therefore, integrating GZ with local cultural diversity and resilience is essential rather than addressing problems in isolation.

### **'One Core and Its Diversity': Multi-Stakeholder Approach**

The 'one core and its diversity' solution (Figure 9) is proposed based on the understanding of its potential values and the current situation in GZ (challenges and successes). This principle differentiates itself from community-based tourism in terms of engaging and connecting with the local cultural community and encouraging participation. Specifically, this solution does not rely on pre-existing cultural heritage resources; instead, it stems from a recently established cultural tourism attraction that has created a new economic structure (an economy driven by aesthetics and photo shoots) that stimulates an influx of tourists. Therefore, GZ's advantage could strengthen cultural and economic networks with appropriate management, planning and stakeholder collaboration.

### **Conclusion**

This study examines the relationship between PBCTA and cultural heritage conservation and management through the lens of tourism. It aims to integrate cultural conservation and tourism development through PBCTA using GZ as a case study, which has driven economic growth but also faces criticism as pseudo-heritage.

The empirical findings indicate that GZ holds potential cultural significance, poses challenges to cultural tourism and necessitates multi-stakeholder solutions. The study underscored the necessity of understanding PBCTA's potential value. Doing so could be a significant step for cultural practitioners to understand the function of culture in the economic and tourism industries 'in order to find fair solutions for cultural conservation' (Ken and Verdini, 2022). Conversely, understanding the potential values of PBCTA from the cultural perspective could provide guidance for well-managed and planned cultural tourism management. The researcher proposes a GZ-based multi-stakeholder approach for sustainable tourism development and local cultural conservation that considers the potential value and current situation of GZ.

### **Implications and Limitations**

The systematic perspective in cultural tourism and its management involves the understanding and acceptance of the potential values of PBCTA, recognising the challenges beyond the current success and planning for suitable and sustainable cultural, managerial and economic development in a multi-stakeholder landscape.

First, understanding and accepting GZ's potential value is influential for both cultural conservation and tourism. For cultural practitioners, PBCTA could offer a strategy to preserve heritage for future generations while meeting modern cultural needs. Importantly, a co-created and co-managed purpose-built landscape could foster new cultural interpretations and diversity, ensuring 'the survival of ethnic and minor cultures' (Fang, 2008). For the tourism industry and managers, understanding these values could prevent cultural products from falling into commercial traps and guide sustainable management. Furthermore, understanding the potential value of GZ could encourage collaboration and increase local, businesspeople and outsider participation in value creation.

Meanwhile, recognising challenges to cultural authenticity and sustainability beyond the current success is crucial for policymakers and developers (managers). This understanding allows for the adjustment of management plans to ensure that they are sustainable and culture-friendly, emphasising local cultural connection and a sound managerial system in GZ. Recognising the essence of these challenges is critical for improving the current managerial system.

Furthermore, the 'one core and its diversity' multi-stakeholder proposal can encourage managerial and government agencies in GZ to re-think, re-evaluate and re-design a plan for systematic evaluation, management and conservation networking.

Notably, the fieldwork and data collection were primarily conducted in China during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since its re-opening, GZ has changed as an economic entity and tourism attraction. Cultural management and tourism sustainability are long-term processes, and the data presented in this study offer only a limited perspective. Further research on management practices, 'one core and its diversity' approach and stakeholder collaboration is necessary. Future studies should also focus on business stakeholders' involvement as their contributions and role are crucial for sustainable cultural tourism management and conservation.

## Practical Implications for Asian Business

Although it is not a new phenomenon, PBCTA makes the examination of its function in Asian contexts necessary, because it ‘is booming in Asia, with China leading the way’ (Ken and Verdini, 2022). These projects use culture and heritage to contribute to economic growth and social vitality. With its cultural diversity, Asia poses ‘so many different cultural resources involved as both consumers and producers of heritage products’ (Prideaux et al., 2008). These unique characteristics attract global attention. In this environment, cultural commodification is an inextricable and even ‘necessary mechanism for communities to conserve their heritage in the rapid flow of modernisation’ (Prideaux et al., 2008). The case of GZ demonstrates how culture monetises itself to meet contemporary needs and demands. It is one of the most successful cases in terms of the economic contribution and influx of tourists, which is worthy of discussion in similar cultural contexts in Asian countries.

The findings highlight the role of culture in a sustainable cultural tourism project and, importantly, the local cultural connection. However, this approach differs from the community-based approach, which proposes an economy-driven and influx-supported mode that emphasises ‘one core and its diversity’. Therefore, understanding the potential cultural values of PBCTA, how the culture commodifies and monetises itself to meet marketing demands and the creation of eye-catching and selling points through cultural resources are critical aspects for business agencies (developers, investors and the tourism industry). Meanwhile, business agencies should understand how and where the interactions between consumers and cultural products occur and how the culture and how different multi-stakeholders co-create and co-manage its heritage. Moreover, representing all relevant stakeholders and their roles in initial planning is crucial for policymakers and business agencies. Methodically approaching the situation is crucial to understand the flow and distribution of the economic benefits of tourist influx to the locals and to optimise these benefits for the culture of the locals. In addition, a close collaboration with cultural practitioners is necessary for a more suitable and sustainable management approach. Moreover, policymakers, managers and planners must anticipate these issues and identify and integrate them into a broad framework instead of viewing them as isolated issues. Doing so will help protect the cultural tourism industry and cultural preservation from problems that could jeopardise long-term success.

Lastly, the ‘one core (selling point) and its diversity (local cultural and community connection)’ proposal would also be applicable to a local community-based approach to initiate its eye-catching point and connect with other local resources to establish a cultural–economic networking system.

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