

Article

Mountain Outdoor Tourism and Tibetan Mountain Guides' Place Identity: The Case of Mt. Siguniang Town

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Abstract: This paper aimed to investigate the factors influencing the place identity of Tibetan mountain guides, in Mt. Siguniang Town, in the context of the development of mountain outdoor tourism. Based on Breakwell's Place Identity Process Theory of distinctiveness, continuity, self-esteem, and self-efficacy, this paper analyzed data, collected by semi-structured interviews and the observation method, through content analysis and interpretivism. The research analysis provided the following conclusions: (1) The influencing factors on self-efficacy are economic income, family reunion, and community development; (2) The influencing factors on self-esteem are external evaluation, host-guest interaction, professional identity, and self-identity; (3) The influencing factors on continuity are career change, host-guest interaction, and personal growth; (4) The influencing factors on distinctiveness are sense of belonging and natural environment; (5) Among the factors, only influencing factors on distinctiveness had no significant association with mountain outdoor tourism. Factors regarding the other three dimensions were correlated with mountain outdoor tourism. The findings of this study could contribute to further research in mountain outdoor tourism and place identity, as well as provide references for local management and tourism development.

Keywords: mountain outdoor tourism; place identity; Mt. Siguniang Town; Tibetan mountain guide



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1. Introduction

For reasons of income under the impact of the pandemic, international tourism now attaches greater importance to mountain tourism. The inclinations of tourists have gradually shifted from sightseeing to mountain outdoor activities, so as to experience the sense of sports and exercise [1]. As a methodology for studying the emotional interaction between people and place, place theory has continuously improved, and has been applied widely in tourism research, since it was proposed in the 1970s [2]. Place theory has been applied in areas such as traditional public community residents [3], tourist destination residents [4], tourist sites of landscape planning and resource protection [5], urban and rural planning [6], ancient town residents [7], and so on. Some scholars have researched occupational groups in tourist destinations. Ma [8] discussed the influence of microenterprise owners' place identity on their behavioral tendencies in Weizhou Island's rural tourism. Suzanne [9] employed constructivism and interpretivism studying to study wilderness and cultural tour guides' place identity and assessed how they engaged, enhanced understanding, and expanded the goals of sustainable tourism. However, research on the place identity of occupational groups like mountain guides in tourism destinations are rare. Studies thus far have been more concerned about how mountain guides are affected by climate change and

how they adapt [10], the role of guides in trekking tours [11], how guides create value for customers [12], and so forth.

Before outdoor tourism in Mt. Siguniang Town, the main industries were livestock and agriculture, which had low economic returns under the shocks of the modern economy, and residents lived in poor conditions. Yet some outdoor explorers from Japan, South Korea, and other countries came to Mt. Siguniang in the 1970s, attracted by its distinctive mountain outdoor resources [13]. There were no particular administrative and specialized services relating to mountain outdoor tourism at that time, but some local Tibetans earned extra income by providing travelers with accommodation, porter services, leading of horses, and guidance. As more and more travelers came to the mountain, the local government established departments, such as Mt. Siguniang Administration and Outdoor Activity Management Centre, assisting in the management and development of mountain outdoor tourism. The local government attaches great importance to the development of Mt. Siguniang Town and has invested a total of 379,560,000 US dollars in mountain outdoor construction (data source from Mt. Siguniang Management Bureau). Importance is also attached to the man–land relationship and the participation of local residents, promoting tourism development and increasing the income of residents in an approach of ecological protection, economic development, and local resident participation. Nowadays, the local villagers with labor capacity participate in mountain outdoor tourism-related work in different areas, which has greatly improved economic incomes and living standards. In addition to rising income, greater development lies in the transformation of the roles and identities of villagers, shifting from those of farmers, herders or miners to mountain guides, mountaineering assistants, and professional coaches, during the development of mountain outdoor tourism in Mt. Siguniang Town (See Figure 1).



Figure 1. Mountain guides being trained. Source: photo by author.

Mt. Siguniang town has not changed geographically, but the place identity of the mountain guides who live there has changed. By probing into the Tibetan mountain guides' place identity, we can not only explore the cultural, social, and spatial evolution of Mt. Siguniang Town under the development of mountain outdoor tourism, but also spotlight the sense of place of Tibetan mountain guides in Mt. Siguniang town, and further discuss their experience and identity [14]. Therefore, this paper, taking Mt. Siguniang Town as a case study and local mountain guides as the research subjects, explores the factors affecting the place identity of mountain guides under the development of mountain outdoor tourism by means of anthropological methods [15], and provides a new perspective for the study of place identity and mountain outdoor tourism.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Research Overview on Mountain Outdoor Tourism

There is no clear and unified definition of mountain outdoor tourism so far, and people tend to mention outdoor sports, mountain tourism, sports tourism, and so on. Defined by the World Tourism Organization, mountain tourism refers to a type of tourism activity with distinctive characteristics, is conducted in limited geographical spaces, such as hills, mountains, etc., and is also limited to specific landscapes, terrain, climate, biodiversity (flora and fauna), and local communities. Internationally, outdoor tourism is expressed as outdoor entertainment, outdoor leisure, nature tourism, outdoor adventure, and so on [16]. Burch [17] elaborated on outdoor tourism early on. He considered it to be a mode of travelling, different from the regular "leisure sightseeing", which has the following three main characteristics: it is conducted in the natural environment, it involves sports participation, and has a leisure orientation. Typical examples of outdoor activities associated with adventure recreation and tourism are rock climbing and ice climbing, mountaineering, mountain skiing, whitewater kayaking and rafting, canyoning, mountain biking, surfing, skydiving, paragliding, and BASE jumping [18]. In China, Guo [19] paid attention to outdoor tourism at a relatively early time and proposed a definition based on outdoor tourism being a combination of outdoor sports and tourism. Cheng and Li [20] summarized outdoor tourism as a kind of travelling mode that is different from regular travel agency group tours, and which pays more attention to the independent participation of tourists who participate in one or more outdoor sports in natural scenery, as leisure and entertainment. In recent years, with the rapid development of mountain outdoor tourism and outdoor sports, Chinese scholar Liu [21] believes that mountain outdoor tourism is a title based on the type of outdoor tourism destination, which refers to a summation of non-sedentary travel, and all the relationships and phenomena that occur in search of a spiritual pleasure experience in the natural mountain environment. This view considers complex mountain landforms, bodies of water, forests, and so forth, as the carrier, and participating in mountain climbing, rope sports, field expansion, bicycle riding, gliding, and other sports as the form of exercise.

In terms of findings and results in mountain outdoor tourism, there is still relatively little related research in China. Tan et al. [1] conducted a study on the spatial evolution of production, life, and ecology in mountain outdoor tourism sites. Zheng [22] studied mountain outdoor tourism in Guizhou Province by using RMP theory, and Song [23] conducted a study on the planning characteristics of mountain outdoor tourism in Yuntai Mountain Scenic Area and Jiuzhai Valley Scenic Area in China. Internationally, in the Web of Science, ProQuest, Google Scholar, and other literature databases, attempts to retrieve the theme of mountain outdoor tourism resulted in no relevant research being found, with researchers paying more attention to mountain tourism. Hussain et al. [24] examined the role of social media in the sustainable development of tourism in Pakistan's mountain tourism, revealing a positive correlation between tourist intentions and the sustainable development of rural mountain tourism. Demirovic et al. [25] explored the application of socio-ecosystems (SEs) in mountain tourism. Djordjevic et al. [26] conducted a study to figure out the potential impact of climate change on mountain tourism development

planning and made relevant recommendations. In general, most research has focused on the sustainable development of mountain tourism [27–30], while less research has focused on mountain outdoor tourism.

2.2. Research Overview on Place Identity

First proposed by Proshansky et al. [31], place identity is the core concept of environmental psychology. He defined place identity as part of the self, an individual identity concerning the physical environment through the complex interaction of ideas, beliefs, preferences, emotions, values, goals, skills, and behavioral trends that exist consciously and unconsciously. Wen Yue T. [32] summarized correlational studies and proposed that place identity is the recognition of a place as part of the self-perception of social roles. Research on tourism based on place identity is extensive and has achieved some results [33–35]. In conclusion, after Proshansky proposed the concept of place identity, the research in this area has largely developed and extended definitions, but all reflect the feature of close connection and interaction between place and people.

There are different views regarding the division of place identity's dimensions (See Table 1). Altman and Low [36] contend that place identity is a one-dimensional and integral concept that cannot be divided into independent parts. Lalli [37] proposed a "Residential City Identity Scale", which divided place identity into five dimensions, namely external evaluation, overall attachment, commitment, continuity, and familiarity. Liu et al. [38] divided place identity into cognition, emotion, and intention in their analysis of the impacts of traditional festivals on place identity. Yang [39] and Huang [40] divided place identity into awareness, recognition, and engagement.

Table 1. Classification table of place identity dimensions.

Representative Figures	Dimension Division	Dimension Explanation
Breakwell	Four-dimension	Distinctiveness, continuity, self-esteem, and self-efficacy
Low, Altman	One-dimension	Cannot be divided into separate parts, constituent features, or dimensions
Lalli	Five-dimension	External evaluation, overall attachment, commitment, continuity, and familiarity
Liu Bo	Three-dimension	Cognition, emotion, and intention
Zhao Hongjie	Six-dimension	Historical culture, environment, differentiation, attachment, self-efficacy, and commitment
Yang Mingzhi, Huang Yuting	Three-dimension	Awareness, recognition, and engagement

Breakwell [41] takes the identity process as being based on the dimensions of place identity, namely distinctiveness, continuity, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. Distinctiveness refers to the attributes of the place that distinguishes the individual from others, continuity refers to the part of the place that can be associated with the environment in the past, self-esteem refers to a positive evaluation of oneself, or the group with which one identifies, and, finally, self-efficacy refers to a person's belief that he or she can complete certain actions or tasks [42,43]. So far, Breakwell's identity process theory has been widely applied [44]. Wang and Xu [42] indicated that social exchange theory is a useful tool for predicting residents' perceptions and attitudes toward tourism. They used four dimensions as a theoretical basis to assess residents' perceptions of the impact of tourism from a new perspective. Knzi [45] used four dimensions of place identity to examine the relationship between place,

climate, place attachment, and place identity. By quantitative and qualitative methods, Ginting et al. [46] examined the features of four dimensions of place identity in Karo District, Indonesia, and proposed suggestions as to how to promote competitiveness in tourism sites by enhancing place identity.

3. Mt. Siguniang and Methodology

3.1. Introduction to Mt. Siguniang Town

Mt. Siguniang Town, formerly known as Rilong Town, covers an area of 587 square kilometers, and is located in the eastern part of Xiaojin County, Aba Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, China (See Figure 2). Mt. Siguniang Town has an average altitude of 3000 m [47] and is nearly 200 km away from the provincial capital, Chengdu. It takes only 4 h to reach Mt. Siguniang Town from Chengdu, making Mt. Siguniang the closest high-altitude mountainous scenic spot to the first-tier cities in China [48]. Mt. Siguniang Town governs over five administrative villages, namely, Changping, Jinfeng, Shuangdiao, Shuangqiao, and Shaba. By 21 March 2021, there were 997 households and 3105 people of Han, Hui, Qiang, and other ethnic groups, of which the Tibetan population accounts for 76.89%.



Figure 2. Mount Siguniang's Location in China. Source: www.chinadiscover.com (accessed on 23 May 2022).

The ethnic Tibetans in Mt. Siguniang are known as Jiarong Tibetans, who are the result of the long-term integration of Tibetan garrisons and immigrants with the indigenous Zhang Zhung people during the eastern invasion of Pugyel in ancient times. “Jiarong” is named after Murdo Holy Mountain and means “the mountain and river of the queen” in the Tibetan language. Every year on the fourth day of the fifth lunar month, the Jiarong

Tibetans in Mt. Siguniang hold a pilgrimage, which is a religious occasion and also one of their most important festivals. The local Tibetans dress up in their ethnic costumes, carrying tributes, such as chhaang (a highland wine popular in parts of the eastern Himalayas and Newar communities), meat, like beef and mutton, and roasted steamed buns, and people worship Mt. Siguniang in Chaohanping of Haizi Valley, where prayer flags are placed to pray for the protection of the mountain god and to seek well-being, peace and abundant grain. The local characteristic Tibetan culture, along with the unique scenery, attracts more and more tourists, and, with the development of tourism, more than 70% of the people in the town are engaged in mountain outdoor tourism service, and mountain guides are mainly local Tibetans (source from Mt. Siguniang administration).

3.2. Overview of Mt. Siguniang's Mountain Outdoor Tourism

Mt. Siguniang scenic area has been rated as a national 4A scenic spot, a national geological park, and a World Heritage Site of the Sichuan Giant Panda Habitat. It is a comprehensive mountain outdoor scenic spot, integrating sightseeing, mountaineering, expeditions, rock climbing, camping, gliding, rafting, orienteering, ice climbing and other leisure tourism activities [49]. Many international events, such as the Bicycle Open Race, International Mountaineering Festival, Super Trail Running Tour in Mt. Siguniang, and the International Ice Climbing Festival [50], as well as ethnic festivals, like the Traditional Pilgrimage Festival [51], are held there every year. Mt. Siguniang has rich flora and fauna resources, an obvious vertical height difference, and a U-shaped valley formed by the Quaternary glaciation. All these have contributed to it becoming one of the international outdoor sports resorts and attracting outdoor enthusiasts from all over the world [52]. The core attractions in the area include its most-famed four mountains, namely Dafeng (Eldest Sister Peak), Erfeng (the Second Sister Peak), Sanfeng (the Third Sister Peak), and Yaomeifeng (the Fourth Sister Peak), and its three valleys, namely Shuangqiao Valley, Changping Valley, and Haizi Valley (See Figure 3).

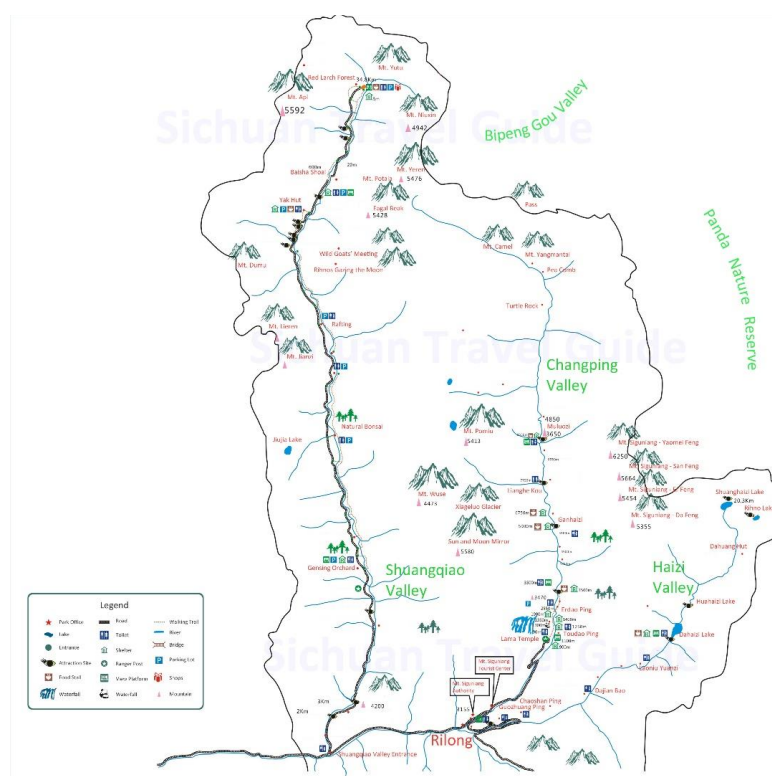


Figure 3. Map of Mt. Siguniang Scenic Area. Source: www.sichuantravelguide.com (accessed on 3 November 2022).

Mt. Siguniang Outdoor Activity Management Center has been training mountain outdoor employees since 2014 and has so far established 34 institutions of mountain outdoor tourism, including more than 300 certificated professional mountain outdoor sports practitioners and 194 mountain guides and mountaineering assistants are [53]. Mt. Siguniang mountain scenic spot received 12,800, 15,157, 16,704, and 18,063 mountain outdoor tourists from 2016 to 2019, which indicated an increase in the number of mountain outdoor tourists of 10% per year. The mountain outdoor industry contributes more than 50,000,000 RMB (\$7,163,300) to the local economy every year, which has effectively helped the local people to get out of poverty (see Table 2).

Table 2. Expense of Mountain Outdoor Tourists in Mt. Siguniang [54].

Year	Mountain Outdoor Tourist Number	Average Expense on Items of Each Tourist (USD)							
		Total Expense for Each Tourist	Ticket	Horse	Accommodation	Transportation	Catering	Shopping	Guide Charges
2016	12,800	525	28	37	74	56	89	93	148
2017	15,157	643	33	66	88	65	105	110	176
2018	16,704	710	36	73	97	73	116	121	194
2019	18,063	767	39	79	105	78	126	131	209

Even under the shock of the pandemic, Xiaojin Kaitu Outdoor Sports Co., Ltd., Aba Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, China in Mt. Siguniang Town still received more than 5000 mountain outdoor tourists in 2020, with an annual operating income of more than 5,000,000 CNY (\$716,330) and a net profit of more than 500,000 CNY (\$71,633). At the same time, the annual income of the company's sixteen employees, who are mountain guides, also reached 80,000 to 100,000 CNY (\$11,461–\$14,327) (Source from Mt. Siguniang Administration). These employees are all local villagers who have obtained outdoor guide professional qualifications and six of them were once in poverty-stricken households [55].

3.3. Methodology

There are two parts to this section. The first part details the process of data collection and collation, and the second part introduces the methods of data analysis and explains why the presented respondents provided the expected data by employing feasibility analysis and interpretivism.

3.3.1. Data Collection

This study used observational methods and semi-structured interviews to collect data. From August to November 2020, the authors conducted field research in Mt. Siguniang Town and carried out interviews with 24 residents. Most of them were local Tibetans with an age span from 28 to 66 years old, including local administrators, mountain outdoor service providers, mountain outdoor practitioners (mountain guides), scenic rescue team members, and residents not engaged in mountain outdoor tourism. Before the interview, we explained the purpose of the interview to the respondents, obtained the consent of respondents in advance, and recorded the entire interviews. Interviews, ranging from 0.8–3.5 h, revolved around 4 dimensions of place identity and involved discussions on the residents' views on the development of outdoor tourism, their sense of identity as mountain tour guides, their sense of belonging to their hometown, and the changes brought to themselves under the development of mountain outdoor tourism (Figure 4).

3.3.2. Data Analysis

Analysis methods adopted were the interpretivism paradigm [56] and content analysis methodology [57]. Content analysis includes quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis [58], and the research adopted the qualitative data analysis of Miles and Huberman [59], instead of quantitative processes, such as coding. In the data forming

phase, the names of the interviewees were transformed into numbers for privacy, and the interview contents were transcribed and proofread. In the data reduction phase, to facilitate understanding of the respondents' narratives and normalization of content, repeated words or sentences without substantive meaning in the interviews were deleted during the verbatim transcription, based on Bailey's approach [60]. Some dialects, valuable to the contextual understanding or for further analysis, were retained, and a narrative manuscript of over 600,000 words was formed in this phase. In the phase of data display, the interview contents were classified into Breakwell's four dimensions, based on a thorough understanding of theory and previous studies. To improve the reliability and effectiveness of the data, the interview data was compared for similarity and repetition, and content with low relevance was excluded, to more clearly reflect the influencing factors on place identity. Finally, content analysis of relevant cases and conclusions in previous research was validated to conclude the influencing factors on the place identity of Tibetan mountain guides.



Figure 4. Interview scene. Source: photo by author.

The specific analysis of five samples may not be statistically pervasive and persuasive as a result of the large sampling, but it was sufficient to generate the expected data by adopting interpretivism in this study. One of the first authors conducted 30 years of exploration and long-term anthropological investigation in Mt. Siguniang Town. He has been the head coach of the Mountain Rescue Team and the consultant for the Mt. Siguniang Scenic Area since 2008, witnessing changes and growth of the mountain guides over the years. Meanwhile, the five Tibetan mountain guides selected as research subjects were certificated through occupational guide examinations. All of them had experienced the occupational transition from herdsmen to full-time mountain guides, and, with an age span from 28 to 59 years old, had witnessed almost the entire development of outdoor tourism in Mt. Siguniang as they developed in experience.

The term “mountain guide” refers to professional or technical personnel who lead and help team members or customers achieve their expected goals in mountaineering activities, according to the Interim Measures for Mountain Guides Management of China Mountaineering Association. Mountain guides can be divided into four levels: mountaineering assistant, primary guide, intermediate guide, and advanced guide. This paper aimed to explore the factors that affect the place identity of mountain guides in four dimensions, by conducting case studies on five individuals to accumulate a case study on prototypicality (See Figure 5).



Figure 5. Tibetan mountain guides of Mt. Siguniang. Source: photo by author.

The four dimensions of Breakwell's place identity theory were utilized. In this study, "self-esteem" refers to the mountain guides' positive evaluations of themselves, or the group, with their identities, and "self-efficacy" refers to the mountain guides' beliefs in their satisfaction of demands, fulfillment of occupation, and adaptability to the change of environment. Regarding "continuity", in this study it refers to the retentivity and development between mountain guides' self-identity and the place, and "distinctiveness" refers to the property that distinguishes the place from other places, including the unique relationships among mountain guides, experience of connections, and environment of the place. Table 3 shows basic information about the research subjects.

Table 3. Basic information about respondents.

Name	Ethnicity	Gender	Age	Occupation	Education Background	Interview Time
RES1	Tibetan	Male	41	Mountain guide	Primary school	27 October 2020
RES2	Tibetan	Male	59	Mountain guide	Primary school	27 October 2020
RES3	Tibetan	Male	28	Mountain guide	Vocational vocation	29 October 2020
RES4	Tibetan	Male	30	Mountain guide	Junior college	29 October 2020
RES5	Tibetan	Male	41	Mountain guide	Primary school	30 October 2020
RES6	Tibetan	Male	47	Administer director	Master	27 October 2020
RES7	Tibetan	Female	35	Section chief	Junior college	31 October 2020
RES8	Tibetan	Male	46	Administer officer	Junior college	26 October 2020
RES9	Han	Male	51	Administer officer	Junior college	11 August 2020
RES10	Han	Male	66	Village secretary	Primary school	21 November 2020
RES11	Tibetan	Male	44	Village chief	Vocational education	11 August 2020
RES12	Tibetan	Male	36	Head of mountaineering company	Junior college	24 October 2020
RES13	Han	Male	30	Mountaineering Company founder	Junior college	25 October 2020
RES14	Tibetan	Male	46	Head of mountaineering company	Primary school	29 October 2020
RES15	Tibetan	Male	35	Head of mountaineering company	Junior high	30 October 2020
RES16	Han	Male	37	Innholder	Senior high	25 October 2020
RES17	Han	Male	41	Innholder	Junior high	25 October 2020
RES18	Tibetan	Male	62	Sanitation worker	Junior high	30 October 2020
RES19	Tibetan	Male	30	Mountain rescuer	Junior high	25 October 2020
RES20	Tibetan	Male	53	Mountain rescuer	Junior high	25 October 2020
RES21	Tibetan	Male	35	Mountain rescuer	Vocational education	28 October 2020
RES22	Tibetan	Male	37	Rescuer	Vocational education	28 October 2020
RES23	Tibetan	Male	46	Rescuer	Senior high	31 October 2020
RES24	Tibetan	Male		Resident		31 October 2020

4. Findings

Combined with previous research, the content in this section is divided into four parts, namely self-esteem, self-efficacy, continuity, and distinctiveness. These four dimensions of place identity are a heuristic method for examining place identity [61], as well as a powerful interpretive tool for this study [62]. Therefore, an analysis on the influencing factors of mountain guides' place identity is presented in this section.

4.1. Self-Esteem

Self-esteem refers to the mountain guides' positive evaluations of themselves, or the group, with their identities. This part investigated which factors in the self-esteem dimension influenced their sense of place identity. The results indicated that the influencing factors were external evaluation, host–guest interaction, professional identity, and self-identity.

Approving outdoor tourism development in Mt. Siguniang, the mountain guides constructed professional identity and improved self-identity through their new occupation.

“Now I feel proud when I say that I’m from Mt. Siguniang.” “We used to be called porters, now people call us mountain guides.” “If Street vendors hear that I’m from Xiaojin County, they will ask me where I’m from and when they know I’m from Mt. Siguniang where people have higher income, they will sell me two dimes for something that is only worth one dime. That made me feel has more dignity.” (RES3)

Mt. Siguniang was a meaningful living space for them, as they not only lived there, but also earned a living on its land. Mountain outdoor tourism brought guides economic benefits, deeper self-identity, and material and spiritual rewards. Mountain guides repositioned themselves and established self-esteem and self-efficacy [63], approving of the change in their environment. This was consistent with Martin's conclusion [64] that residents' place identity changes with their social class or status.

“I used to be fond of smoking and drinking alcohol, but now I don’t smoke or drink. I’ve changed a lot because whenever I receive a group of tourists, I am affected.” (RES1)

“Once a time, a lady came to climb the mountain for the last time, and she said ‘please take me up anyway, I didn’t have altitude sickness, I really wanted to climb up the top of the snowy mountain to see the world from the summit. And it might be the last chance in my life,’ She climbed along the way step by step, slowly and feebly. After she came back from the summit, she died the second year. Being able to climb up the summit may be her only wish in life, and it just happened to me, and I helped her to realize her wish. She was very grateful to me at the time, and I still remember that when she got into the car, she kept waving her hand and saying goodbye as tears streamed down her face. After all, only our sincere efforts can gain that. Although it’s a hard job, I am very satisfied with it because I have a sense of accomplishment from it and helped others to accomplish some things while making a living.” (RES1)

Tourists who could not reach the summit, for their own physical or psychological reasons, realized their wishes with the assistance of the mountain guides. Under the circumstances, positive relationships between the tourists and mountain guides formed through the efforts paid by the guides in fulfilling the wishes of the tourists. This was an interactive process that differed from conventional tourism, and it helped mountain guides develop a sense of achievement, made them feel respected by tourists, strengthened their identify with their occupation, and, ultimately, intensified their place identity. Bogan et al. [65] found that adventure tourists take risks and challenges intellectually, physically, and emotionally in a study of adventure tourism in the tourist area of Brasov County, Romania, which created intrinsic rewards and provided opportunities for enjoyment and personal development. This was similar to the change for guides in mountain outdoor tourism. The guide in Mt. Siguniang Town is different from the tour guide in other tourism activities. In mountainous areas, the forms of activities have certain risks because

tourists usually engage in mountain outdoor tourism activities like mountaineering, hiking, rock climbing, ice climbing, and so on. The guides had a deeper exchange with tourists, being with them, answering their questions, introducing the Tibetan culture and landscape to them, and ensuring their safety. Similarly, tourists, in turn, also shared their outside cultures and ideas with the guides. The guide and the tourist had a great chance to establish friendship in this process. In general, after guides helped tourists reach the summit of the mountain, most tourists had a mixture of gratitude and trust, even requesting the same guide to lead them in future tourism activities in Mt. Siguniang. Meanwhile, guides became more professional, as well as having more opportunities to communicate with highly-educated people, which might assist in their achieving individual enlightenment. The work interactions and experiences brought Tibetan guides a sense of pride and positive self-esteem [32] by reinforcing their positive perception of their self-worth and social value. Consequently, it increased their place identity to Mt. Siguniang [66]. This was similar to what Beedie P. [67] mentioned in his study, wherein tourists who participated in mountain outdoor activities were usually the educated class with wealth and time, while guides were usually the under-educated class living in the countryside with limited social opportunity. The mountaineering interaction between the two transcended these differences and established a mutually beneficial relationship. Thus, in terms of self-esteem, the formation of mountain guides' place identity could be concluded as flowing from occupation identity → self-identity → place identity.

4.2. Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to mountain guides' beliefs in their satisfaction of demands, fulfillment of occupation, and adaptability to the change of environment. This part investigated which factors in the self-efficacy dimension influenced their place identity. The results indicated that the influencing factors were economic income, family reunion, and community development.

Higher incomes and a higher standard of living have an important impact on shaping a person's sense of place [68]. Moreover, residents who have more attachment to a place are more likely to perceive the positive aspects of tourism development and be more supportive of tourism development.

"Now by developing tourism, there is no problem in meeting basic living needs, and we can eat and wear well at least." (RES1)

"In the whole of Mt. Siguniang Town, every village has changed a lot with the help of tourism. Especially in our Shuangdiao Village, we all make more money than before. Otherwise, people of my age may all go out to work. But now, we can not only take care of our families but also live a comfortable life in the hometown." (RES2)

Residents' feelings for the place are based on the economy to an extent. In the case of residents with good incomes in rural tourism, residents are satisfied with their status of life and have a strong sense of place in general [69]. Yin et al. [70] proposed a theoretical model of "sense of place–development expectation–impact perception" and found that the stronger the sense of place residents had the higher were their expectations for the development of rural tourism, and the stronger their ability to perceive the impact of tourism.

"Mountain guide is a long-term job for Tibetan residents, and how do you feel about it comparing to work outside?" (Question from the interviewer)

"Oh, this is a down-to-earth job! I can get paid after guiding, which is different from working in the construction industry. People like me with low education is easy to forget how much we should get paid as time passes, and we will get shorter-paid if encounters a bad contractor." (RES2)

According to the interviews, guides worried about being cheated, due to lack of education, in their previous jobs. However, as mountain guides, they could get paid the

next day after leading guests in the mountain, which was stable for making a living and brought them a sense of security.

In terms of community transformation, guides described many changes brought by tourism. The living conditions of the community were poor before the 1980s, when mountain tourism had not yet developed in Mt. Siguniang. There were inconveniences in transportation on dirt roads, no electricity, excretion using pit latrines, and collecting water from wells or ditches at distance. Modes of production were backward and incomes maintained by primitive farming could barely put food on the table.

“For those days, we didn’t have enough to eat and even cannot get full three meals a day sometimes. We used kerosene lamps for lighting and collected water from wells or ditches in wooden barrels. As for habitation, only very few people can build brick and cement dwellings, and most of them built mud huts by stacking stones as the main structure and filling them with mud. So, if ‘house’ gets leaked, we repair it by filling muds, and when it’s raining, the sound of ticking from roof and outside will fill the whole house.” (RES2)

According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, human needs can be described as a five-tier model, namely, physiological, safety, love and belonging needs, esteem, and self-actualization. Better living conditions and a well-appointed community can meet the safety needs of residents. Before mountain outdoor tourism developed in Mt. Siguniang, residents were poor and local social security was unstable. For example, some people fought in the streets after getting drunk and the residents’ awareness of sanitary conditions and the environment was poor. However, the overall look of the community has undergone tremendous changes under the development of mountain tourism. Specifically, people have built or repaired houses, infrastructures like water and electricity facilities are well-founded, and social security is stable. Therefore, the physiological and safety needs of Tibetan guides and other residents are guaranteed, and the industrial structure has shifted to tourism and living conditions have been largely boosted [71].

“It’s obvious that the development of the community is getting better and better. In the past, there were all barren lands, and now it’s occupied by hotels and Homestay Hotel.” (RES5)

“Now, Mt. Siguniang town’s security is the best in Xiaojin County.” (RES3)

“To be honest, it has benefited us a lot since the government developed mountain tourism in Mt. Siguniang. Many villages have become very clean and tidy, have more constructions and a much better ecological environment.” “The outcome relies on everyone’s effort! The village head and secretary supervised villagers every day, even though they were so busy. Besides, the community is covered with monitoring now, and the violence rate declined a lot under the surveillance.” (RES2)

“I needn’t worry about feeding, the sanitary condition is good, and my life fares well.” (RES2)

As a community with good transportation and resources can meet needs, the sense of place becomes stronger and more dependent on the place [72]. The mountain guides had a strong dependence on the production and living functions provided by Mt. Siguniang, and commonly wished that tourism development could improve their living standards [73]. Economic interests were of great significance to the development of mountain outdoor tourism, which has had a positive and direct effect on the place identity of Tibetan guides [74]. This also corroborated the general experience in social exchange theory that in the community of a tourist destination, if locals believe that the benefits outweigh the costs in the exchange, they support and participate in the local tourism industry, and the exchange factors can be tangible [75] or intangible, including economic interests and non-economic factors [76] or life quality [77,78].

“For our family, we all can earn money just in our hometown rather than going out to work and can take good care of family since tourism was developed.” (RES2)

“Now I don’t have to go out to work anymore, and this is the best choice.” (RES1)

Mountain guides replied with similar answers many times in the interview, indicating that the guides cared highly about the fact that working in Mt. Siguniang took care of the family and met needs for affection. Their children did not have to become “left-behind children” and the old did not have to become “empty nesters” at home anymore, which avoided the emergence of emotional rupture in a family and avoided the emergence of “other space” phenomena effectively [79]. Mountain outdoor tourism met their economic needs by promoting guides’ income and met their affection needs by facilitating being with the family. It strengthened their belief in, and self-efficiency to, Mt. Siguniang which was not only their hometown but also satisfied their needs. Their subjective perceptions of comfort and security in Mt. Siguniang were enhanced [80], and positive place identity expedited.

4.3. Continuity

Continuity refers to retentivity and development between mountain guides’ self-identity and place. This part investigated which factors in the continuity dimension influenced their sense of place identity. The results indicated that the influencing factors were career change, host–guest interaction, and personal growth.

Living and working at the place, the guides identified with the experience that the place brought to them as it fulfilled their specific needs and brought them symbolic meaning in return [72]. These symbolized their experience in the place and different degrees of dependence on the place, developing different levels of place identities.

“Oh, I enjoy my work. I have been working on the farm since I was a child, and I have been herding for 8 years since I was 16 years old. I enjoy the time with the mountain.” (RES2)

When asked about the different work feelings between herding in the past and guiding at present, the respondent replied,

“The major change is probably that tourists have better manners and ours are too. For example, our spoken Chinese was neither like mandarin nor Sichuanese (a dialect in China) before, but now we can speak comparatively standard Mandarin. Another case is that guides threw cigarette butts everywhere in the past, but now they retain butts in their bags.” (RES3)

Residents’ participation and empowerment of tourism are key factors in sustainable tourism development and management [81]. Respondents showed their sense of ownership and self-awareness towards environmental protection ensuring the sustainability of their economic income. At the same time, they also taught tourists to protect the ecological environment through their model behavior [82]. They had a strong perception of the impact of local tourism, and their identification with the place of Mt. Siguniang was a continuous process, which meant past and future behaviors were interrelated [83,84]. Mountain guides engaged in herding and farming before and had now become professional guides, and the fact that they liked working in the mountain did not change. Thereby, it showed that their early lives relying on the mountain consumed the resources of the mountain, but they now had a deeper recognition that they needed to retain and ensure the continuity of Mt. Siguniang.

“Now I have higher status in society. My income is relatively better and I can go to the restaurant from time to time.” (RES3)

The development of mountain outdoor tourism provided the residents of backward Tibetan villages with jobs as mountain guides. The particularity of this job, such as climbing the Eldest Sister Peak (5025 m), the Second Sister Peak (5276 m), or the Third Sister Peak (5355 m), meant guides needed to stay with tourists in the mountains for at least two or three days, and most of these tourists were elite people from the cities. In the process of contact and communication with tourists, Tibetan guides broadened their horizons, learnt

new knowledge, and achieved self-improvement [85]. Comparing guides' self-identity in the present and past, places created continuity in different periods [86]. From this perspective, guides had made continuous progress during the development of tourism by widening their horizons and cognition by being in contact with people from big cities, which promoted their identification in the development of mountain outdoor tourism and deepened their place identity regarding Mt. Siguniang. This was in line with the conclusion made by Kinanthi et al. [87] that the specialty of place and interaction with tourists influenced the attitude of Tibetan mountain guides and supported the sustainable development of tourism.

4.4. Distinctiveness

Distinctiveness is the property that distinguishes the place from other places, including the unique relationship among mountain guides, experience of connection, and the environment of the place. This part investigated which factors in the distinctiveness dimension influenced their place identity. The results indicated that the influencing factors were a sense of belonging and the natural environment.

"Compared with Chengdu and Guanxian (Dujiangyan), I think there is more comfortable because of the fresher air and natural environment. My son asked my wife and me to have a physical examination in the city by the end of the year; it's dizzying with so many cars. Everywhere is foggy because the air is not so good, and I feel stuffy the whole day. I guess I'm not used to it because the air in Mt. Siguniang is so fresh." (RES2)

Human beings have always depended on nature to survive, and even the progress of urban civilizations has not been able to separate them from their natural environment [88]. The natural environment offers individuals an opportunity to develop place identity to a place [89] because of the distinctiveness or specialty of that place [90]. At the same time, the natural environment tends to increase an individual's positive mood towards the environment [91,92]. Individuals with rich experience in the natural environment may express stronger emotional attachment to the place than individuals with less experience [93].

"We like to hang out around the mountains after being at home for a long time. The air is fresh and our life becomes better here, so we all feel contented." (RES2)

"I like the feeling of being in the mountains. I have been in Chengdu for many years but I'm just a passerby for Chengdu. However, Mt. Siguniang is my hometown where I prefer to live in. In addition, the development of my village is still getting better and better." (RES4)

Proshansky et al. [31] discuss the concept of place identity, arguing that by attaching oneself to a place in the geographical sense, one acquires a sense of belonging that can bring meaning to life [94]. The longer guides lived in the community, the deeper their memories and the stronger their sense of belonging to Mt. Siguniang Town. Immersion in the architectural and natural landscape of Mt. Siguniang for a long time generated a sense of closeness and familiarity with it, so they had a stronger sense of identity [95]. A more comfortable and unique ecological and living environment made guides more dependent on Mt. Siguniang, which, in turn, led to a deeper sense of attachment and belonging. This finding was consistent with the conclusion of Fullilove [96] that people developed a sense of belonging and affection for the places they lived and grew up in their early years, and the connection with the place was interrupted when they left the familiar environment, which might trigger strong psychological reactions, such as nostalgia, getting lost in life, etc.

"To be a mountain guide indeed has certain risks, but I still stick to this job. I have an emotional attachment to it because I had engaged in the outdoor industry in my early years, and it's relatively free for working outdoors. I don't like fixed work stations; it makes me feel a little constrained." (RES4)

“The income gap is not big, the income of working outside is slightly higher than home-town, but it is more comfortable to stay at home.” (RES3)

These mountain guides were born and grew up in Mt. Siguniang town, and even though they had the experience of working outside, they preferred to stay in their home-town because they felt free and satisfied, which could mitigate various negative effects and generate a strong sense of self-awareness [97], making them view the mountain as better than the hustling city. Mt. Siguniang evoked memories and environmental experiences in the place. The unique natural environment of Mt. Siguniang had distinctive symbols and a sequential psychological cognition for guides. They developed an ineradicable sense of belonging and attachment to Mt. Siguniang because the place brought experiences combining unique emotion, nature, familiarity, and comfort, resulting in the establishment of a strong emotional connection and internal identification with the place.

5. Discussion

The research investigated the influencing factors regarding Tibetan mountain guides' place identity in Mt. Siguniang Town under the development of mountain outdoor tourism. The result indicated the following: the influencing factors on self-efficacy were economic income, family reunion, and community development; the influencing factors on self-esteem were external evaluation, host–guest interaction, professional identity, and self-identity; the influencing factors on continuity were career change, host–guest interaction, and personal growth; the influencing factors on distinctiveness were the sense of belonging and the natural environment (See Figure 6). Among them, only the influencing factors on distinctiveness had no significant association with mountain outdoor tourism, while the factors influencing the other three dimensions were generated under mountain outdoor tourism.

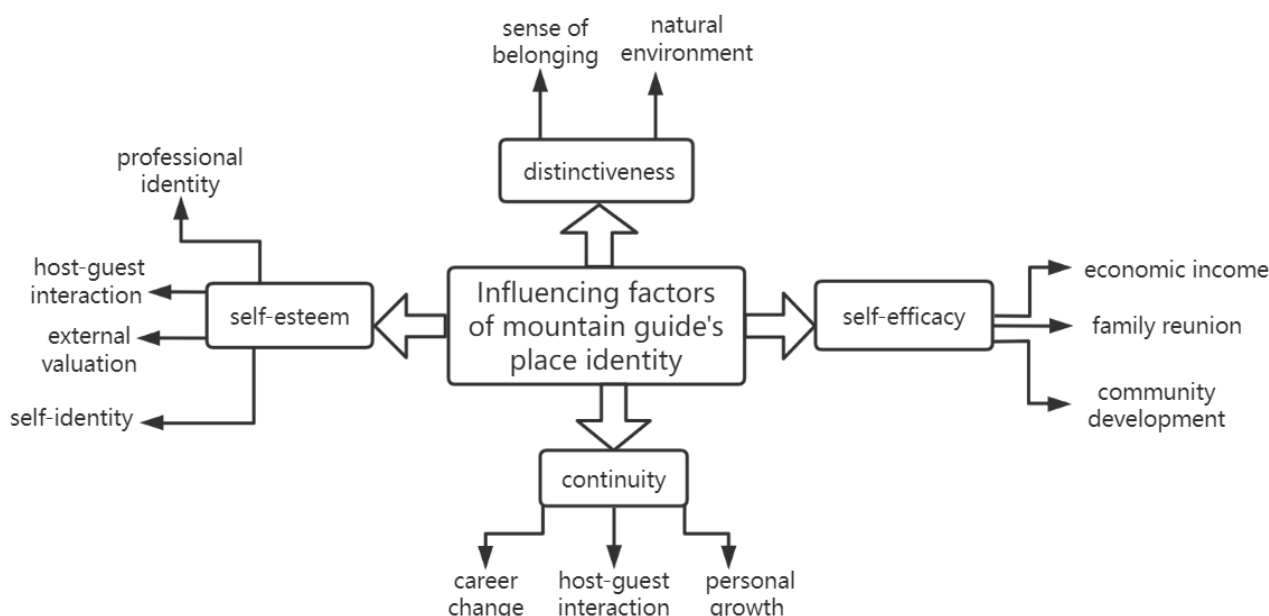


Figure 6. Influencing factors of mountain guide's place identity.

In the mountainous area, hunters and farmers became the first guides as mountaineering focus shifted to tourism and recreation [98]. In this study, with the development of mountain outdoor tourism in Mt. Siguniang Town, some Tibetan residents became mountain guides. The development of mountain outdoor tourism brought fundamental changes.

The results showed that, with Breakwell's place identity as the theoretical basis, Tibetan mountain guides' place identity in Mt. Siguniang Town was affected by multiple factors in the four dimensions. Still, there were overlapping factors in the dimensions. Host–guest interaction appeared both in self-esteem and continuity, which indicated that this

influencing factor had a more significant role in enhancing mountain guides' place identity. This coincided with the conclusions of Wang and Sun [99] that host–guest interaction can not only deepen the relationship among people but also deepen the relationship between people and places. With the help of the emotional connection between people and place, the boundaries of guides' cognition could expand, and people's place identity become strengthened.

In the dimension of self-efficacy, with the development of mountain outdoor tourism, economic income, family reunion, and development of the community met the production and living needs of mountain guides who could have assurance over the place and self. This phenomenon was consistent with the conclusion of Chen et al. [100], who used Breakwell's four-dimensional place identity to study the place identity of the Francophone population in Guangzhou, and concluded that having life and production within the scope of control can create a sense of efficacy and satisfaction for individuals.

In continuity, with the development of mountain outdoor tourism, mountain guides developed their self-identity and continuity through host–guest interaction, career change, and personal growth, which promoted their place identity. In terms of career changes, their occupation changed from farmers to guides, but they still identified with the mountains. The host–guest interaction promoted personal growth as they experienced continuous growth in the development of tourism. This was in line with Li and Zeng's study [86], wherein place connections provided and developed continuity over time. Furthermore, we also found that mountain guides in this case also had identity connection due to host–guest interaction and personal growth.

In terms of self-esteem, guides acquired this profession under the development of tourism. They established professional identity due to external evaluation and host–guest interaction, which promoted self-identity, and, finally, strengthened place identity. From this, the influencing factors in self-esteem could be summarized into a mechanism, i.e., from professional identity → self-identity → place identity. This supported the view of Williams et al. [101], who argued that place identity expresses an individual's self-identity to the place. However, the study in [102] showed that residents with high professional identity were opposed to tourism as a development strategy. This was in contrast to our findings, where the mountain guides with high professional identities were very supportive of the development of local tourism. Mountain outdoor tourism enabled them to have their professions, and their professional identities strengthened their place identities in turn, as well as supported the development of mountain outdoor tourism. This supported the view of Rekom et al. [103], who pointed out that tourism development could strengthen residents' place identity.

In the dimension of distinctiveness, a sense of belonging to one's hometown promoted place identity, which corresponded with Fried's conclusion [104] that individuals' sense of belonging to their hometown contributed to the development of their place identity. The natural environment in Mt. Siguniang made its residents feel comfortable and free, which enabled them to distinguish Mt. Siguniang Town from other places. This was in line with the conclusion of Moore and A.R. Graefe [105] that place identity enabled people to distinguish the place from other places. It is worth noting that there was no significant relationship between the mountain guides' place identity and mountain outdoor tourism in this dimension, as these factors co-existed, according to the interviews.

Furthermore, Proshansky et al. [106] argued that place identity is a substructure of self-identity and contributes to the way one defines oneself and how one thinks others define oneself. In this study, self-identity became a substructure of place identity, as self-identity was generated before place identity, but the two were interconnected, in that self-identity promoted place identity, and vice versa.

6. Conclusions, Contribution and Limitation

In summary, the development of mountain outdoor tourism in Mt. Siguniang brought tremendous changes to residents. Especially for mountain guides, who became a major

force promoting mountain tourism in this process. The guides achieved self-actualization by having their hometown transformed from an impoverished village to a place to be proud of [56]. According to the research, it was found that mountain guides' place identity was largely driven by economic interests [107], and the development of mountain outdoor tourism had changed the social structure of farming and grazing on barren lands in mountains [108]. In the interviews, guides elaborated on the various changes brought to "individuals" and "places" during this process. Respondents believed that they could make use of their skills and the development of tourism to meet their needs. Mountain outdoor tourism improved the livelihood of locals, and income increased as a direct result of the guides' sense of place identity. Compared with other occupations, guides could take care of their families while working in their hometown. It met their material and emotional needs simultaneously, which successfully combined life and work under the development of mountain tourism. More specifically, the place identity of mountain guides was stronger than that of other residents in Mt. Siguniang, and the contact hypothesis showed that residents who were in contact with tourists might have a more positive perception of the impact of tourism on the community than other residents [109–111]. Tibetan guides have lived in the mountains for many years, so the communication between guides was more sincere and close and they benefited from relationships built with the elites from the big city when guiding mountaineering activities. Therefore, guides gained genuine thoughts and expressions from urban people about the distinctiveness and scarcity of the environment in which they live, and had a stronger sense of place identity with the place. The occupation of mountain guide changed guides' social status while special host-guest interaction resulted in guides being respected and trusted by tourists. This further deepened their self-recognition and self-esteem, and facilitated the process of place identity from occupation identity → self-identity → place identity, while also facilitating the growth and continuity of the mountain guides as well as that of Mt. Siguniang. As a result, the guides preferred to stay in Mt. Siguniang Town where they grew up. Although the job of mountain guides has more risks than other regular occupations, none of the respondents indicated that the risks affected their choice of career and sense of place identity.

Furthermore, place identity also includes cultural identity [112]. Mt. Siguniang's local government, scenic managers, hotel operators, and other stakeholders created Tibetan cultural characteristics in signboards, buildings, and decorations, since local tourism largely highlighted Tibetan culture to attract more tourists. This gave rise to the question as to whether this designed ethnic culture distorts the original Tibetan culture in Mt. Siguniang. From another aspect, the locals did not pay much attention to recognizing differences between their culture and others at first, but when more and more people discovered the distinctiveness of Tibetan culture and the unique scenery of Mt. Siguniang, residents began to attach importance to local Tibetan culture and created a designed cultural atmosphere to cater for customers' tastes and tourism development in the new era [113]. Does mountain outdoor tourism have, in essence, a more positive or negative influence in terms of the culture of place identity? What is the impact on the Tibetan guides' sense of place identity from the perspective of traditional culture? These questions still need to be addressed.

The study could make contributions in related areas for the following reasons. First, this paper offers considerable research in mountain outdoor tourism, and we found few studies that have investigated mountain guides' sense of place identity, so we have supplemented the research in this area. Second, the four-dimensional analysis framework was fully developed, which provides a strong theoretical basis for this research. Previous studies, such as [114], on the influencing factors of place identity, have been mostly based on the individual, the local natural environment, and the social culture. There are some factors related to these three aspects in this study, but this paper strove to explore factors affecting the mountain guides' sense of place identity in the development of mountain outdoor tourism through a new perspective, i.e., through the four dimensions of Breakwell's place identity theory. Third, as there are still few studies on mountain outdoor tourism at home and abroad, this study has made new contributions in this regard.

In practice, this research could consolidate the local government's confidence in developing local tourism by providing views on promoting place identity of mountain guides, development of local communities, and further policy formulation. It also provides a reference for the development of other mountain scenic spots and Tibetan residential areas.

There are also some limitations in the research. No quantitative analysis method was used and the study sample was relatively small. Further research on this subject could consider quantitative and qualitative analysis methods to expand the sample size for conducting more in-depth research on residents and mountain guides.

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