

Article

The Service Experience Innovation Model of Cultural Tourism in Historic Districts: A Case Study on Zhongshan Road in Quanzhou, Fujian Province of China

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Abstract: This study aimed to elucidate how consumers engage in cultural activities in Quanzhou and analyze innovative service experiences in this ancient city. We also sought to create a model integrating humanistic innovations into the enhancement of service experiences. We used an exploratory case study approach, combining secondary data analysis with on-site observations. The findings include the following: (1) The tourist experience in cultural tourism involves six stages: “Connect and Attract”, “Orientate”, “Interact”, “Extend and Retain”, “Advocate”, and “Recollect”. (2) We developed the TESP model for innovative cultural tourism services in Quanzhou, with four dimensions: Technological, Experiential, Systemic, and Platform. The Platform dimension introduces the Hub and Service Process sub-dimensions. Additionally, the study suggests that creating a sense of place in historic districts relies on traditional culture, emphasizing the core competitiveness, identity, and culture of a locality. (3) Integrating “humanistic innovation” into cultural tourism is essential, utilizing digital platforms and interpersonal networks to promote core values and thus foster local economic prosperity. The research outcomes hold practical significance for cultural heritage tourism in Quanzhou, as well as for the study and implementation of service and experience innovations among experience providers, practitioners, managers, and marketing professionals in the field.

Keywords: service experience innovation; humanistic innovation; sense of place; cultural tourism; historic districts; cultural heritage



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1. Introduction

Cultural heritage, as one of the most significant elements of tourism, attracts a large number of visitors every year [1]. Cultural heritage sites typically represent a collection of diverse cultural elements, which may not necessarily be organically interconnected. The richness and complexity of cultural heritage are reflected in visitors' experiences [2].

Quanzhou, formerly known as the “City of Ci-Tong”, boasts numerous prestigious historic and cultural titles, including “Formerly the Largest Port in the East”, “The Starting Point of the Maritime Silk Road”, and “The Capital of East Asian Culture”. These titles fully attest to Quanzhou's rich historic and cultural heritage, as well as its diverse cultural customs and traditions, making its culture a promotional focal point in attracting domestic and international tourists. In 2021, China successfully applied for the World Cultural Heritage project “Quanzhou: Emporium of the World in Song-Yuan China”, which was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List on 25 July. The Chinese government has implemented a series of policies and promotional measures, offering visitors opportunities to truly understand Quanzhou's World Heritage status through monthly cultural activities and experiential projects [3].

Quanzhou is currently focusing on the development of its cultural tourism economy, a sector that has only been a focus for three years. Therefore, there is a significant need to prioritize innovation in its development. Innovation, as an economic activity focused

on commercial interests, exhibits three main characteristics that reflect the current cultural tourism development in Quanzhou: “Constructing new facilities or equipment: Continuously opening new stores or hosting special exhibitions on Zhongshan Road”, “Introducing new merchants: Zhongshan Station continues to invite bids from relevant cultural and creative brand merchants”, and “Enhancing leadership among new personnel: The cultural tourism group continues to provide training for guides in the ancient city”. Looking at these aspects, it becomes evident that emphasizing service experience innovation is crucial for economic activities in cultural districts or cultural tourism businesses [4,5].

The primary objective of this study was to understand the process of consumer engagement in cultural activities in Quanzhou and to analyze innovative approaches to the service experience at cultural events in Quanzhou’s ancient city. Furthermore, we attempted to construct a service experience innovation model integrating humanistic innovation that facilitates collaboration with promotional strategies from government cultural departments.

In summary, the research questions were as follows: (1) How is service experience managed in cultural tourism in Quanzhou’s ancient city? (2) How does cultural tourism in Quanzhou’s ancient city explore service experience innovation? (3) How is humanistic innovation integrated into Quanzhou’s cultural tourism services? The researchers hope that, through this study, they can continue to promote the development of Quanzhou’s cultural tourism sector, enabling tourists, local businesses, and government departments to collectively create value in, and achieve the benefits of, cultural tourism development.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Development Overview of Cultural Tourism in Quanzhou

The city of Quanzhou boasts a rich cultural history, encompassing diverse elements, such as religious culture, Maritime Silk Road culture, and Minnan culture, all of which are worth exploring in depth. It is precisely due to the abundant and diverse cultural tourism resources in Quanzhou, with its various attractions offering distinct culinary specialties and unique craftsmanship, that the city has gained a competitive edge in cultural tourism [6]. To date, Quanzhou has made significant progress in several aspects, including investment in cultural and creative talents (the establishment of the West Street Visitor Center and Zhongshan Station, attracting different cultural and creative entrepreneurs to sell their products), urban micro-improvement projects (such as the Goldfish Lane micro-improvement project and the enhancement project for the demonstration section of Zhongshan Middle Road), the integration of relevant tourism departments (Quanzhou Cultural Tourism Group and its subsidiaries), and the positioning of cultural and creative tourism brands (Quanzhou: A World Maritime Trade Center in Song-Yuan, China).

As technology advances, the three main catalysts driving the paradigm and model of cultural tourism services comprise an internet-centered focus, information-centered values, and experience-centered goals [7]. Benefiting from strong support from national policies for the development of the cultural tourism industry and the broad market for cultural tourism, municipal governments can closely observe the current trends in this type of tourism through Quanzhou’s application for World Heritage City status. They can align with policies and utilize new media technologies to integrate culture with new media technologies. The service process is inherently involved in developing the cultural industry chain, including cultural tourism, cultural and creative products, specialty cuisine, cultural intellectual property (IP), etc. Through continuous practical innovation, cultural heritage is developed and strengthened.

2.2. From Cultural Heritage Preservation to Cultural Tourism Experiences

Culture represents the foundation of the survival and sustainable development of heritage sites [8]. Moreover, the integration of cultural heritage conservation into cultural development can be coupled with cultural experiences [9]. By presenting common value propositions, stakeholders can benefit from interactions through service exchanges, offering cultural services and developing cultural values, achieving comprehensive resource inte-

gration and value co-creation, and thus promoting the dissemination of cultural brands in historic districts and the development of cultural services [10]. On the other hand, cultural organizations seek to increase value by utilizing local creative cultural resources to ensure that they have a solid business foundation to showcase their cultural characteristics [11]. Scholars also emphasize the need to adopt a multi-domain view of sustainable development to successfully transition to a paradigm of value co-creation [12].

During the process of delivering cultural experiences, employing sensory experiences as part of business operations is a key factor in innovative service thinking. Both enterprises and customers are engaged in creating and consuming stories. The essence of “stories” lies in conveying and communicating messages, and because stories have the power to captivate consumers, it is essential to construct a memorable narrative prior to the sensory experience. The narrative should be compelling and evoke pleasant memories that are deeply rooted in consumers’ minds.

In the context of heritage tourism, there are mutual relationships between the destination’s image, authenticity, tourist engagement, and tourist satisfaction concerning tourist experiences. Increasing tourist participation in local activities directly enhances tourist satisfaction and proves that the “desire to participate in heritage experiences” is considered one of the primary motivations behind heritage tourism. Additionally, the richness of tourist information and cost-effectiveness are dimensions that can be explored in future research [13].

Furthermore, the Experience Cycle model proposed by Dubberly and Evenson [14] outlines five major steps that can describe the process of a cultural experience. The entire experience cycle consists of five stages.

These stages can be summarized as follows: (1) “Connect and Attract”: Customers acquire information about activities through media, friends, the internet, etc., sparking curiosity and interest in participating (consumers learn about current cultural events through platforms like WeChat Official Accounts or Douyin). (2) “Orientate”: Customers begin gathering information to understand the content of the activities (visiting the actual venue to understand the theme and content of the event in advance). (3) “Interact”: Customers actively participate in activities, experiencing the value and satisfaction they derive from the event (actual participation in activities and the intangible atmosphere). (4) “Extend and Retain”: Customers derive happiness and satisfaction from the activity, anticipating future participation (continuous innovation in cultural activities allows for sustained participation). (5) “Advocate”: Customers share their positive experiences with friends and family or on the internet, spreading information and their experiences of the activity, attracting more people to participate (sharing experiences and insights online through platforms).

Furthermore, Varnali suggested that future research on customer experience could benefit from pattern recognition techniques, which may better accommodate details in the context of complex systems’ self-organization, such as experience cycles resembling touchpoints, potentially encompassing deeper experiential journeys [15]. Leung and Loo described the application of experience cycles for interactive dining experiences within smart service networks and developed an intelligent dining experience framework optimizing interactions among smart technology, service personnel, restaurant managers, customers, and their collective experiences [16]. Glushko and Nomorosa [17] offered insights from the customer’s perspective, suggesting that customers naturally desire to experience interrelated, overlapping services in an integrated and comprehensive manner, thereby expressing the intention of customers to embark on a “customer journey” or “experience cycle”. Therefore, this study examined the service experience process of Quanzhou tourism based on the Experience Cycle Model and the Customer Experience Journey perspectives and proposes new experience steps accordingly [14,16,17].

2.3. From Service Innovation to Humanistic Innovation

Schumpeter proposed “Innovation Theory” in 1934 [18], positing that innovation involves the achievement of new combinations of production elements and conditions that have not previously existed, serving as the driving force behind economic growth. Chacke and Frankle view innovation as a novel concept targeted at meeting current or future potential needs, thereby enhancing or developing existing functionalities to achieve commercial objectives [19,20].

Service innovation refers to businesses offering various forms of services and providing consumers with different consumption experiences, encompassing the concepts of both product and process innovation [21]. It owes its prominence to the driving forces of information technology, making it a core factor in the pursuit of technological and economic feasibility in service innovation by enterprises. However, cultural tourism service innovation differs from product innovation because the products and services offered in cultural tourism vary from place to place, with different experiential elements, such as paying respects at the Kaiyuan Temple or receiving red eggs at the Confucius Temple. Therefore, service innovation in cultural tourism involves providing consumers with services in new ways, leaning towards process innovation.

Voss [22] proposed a process for service innovation, which begins with the acquisition and analysis of market needs through technical methods. From this analysis, new concepts and service prototypes are developed. These prototypes undergo internal testing within the enterprise or through consumer experiences to identify and address any shortcomings. Subsequently, the refined service prototype is introduced to the market. Over time, and with changes in the market, this new service must undergo continuous improvement to facilitate the emergence of the next innovation, much like the continuous evolution of cultural experiences based on the collection of feedback. Tourists engage in communication via various social media channels to express their opinions and suggestions regarding their travel experiences [23], contributing to ongoing service improvement. Scholars such as Buonincontri et al. suggest that destinations and travel service providers should proactively collect such feedback, as it may lead to significant collaboration opportunities [24]. Specifically, this helps them to better understand visitor needs, facilitates the optimization of the co-creation process, and further enhances the travel experience.

Furthermore, through actual cultural experiences, one can assess whether there is any ongoing or continuous improvement in service innovation. Therefore, consumers’ perception of the usage of products/services after innovative changes is an inherent process. Della Corte, Savastano, and Storlazzi proposed a TES framework for the revitalization and management of cultural heritage, comprising three dimensions: Technological, Experiential, and Systemic [25]. The Innovation axis primarily involves (1) the type and intensity of tourism involvement and (2) the generation of value for the system offering.

In past research on cultural tourism, the focus has primarily been on cultural innovation and innovation in tourist destinations. Mei-Yu Wang et al. conducted research on destination innovation in Quanzhou heritage tourism and proposed the concept of Cultural-Innovation-Based Innovation (CIBI). This concept encompasses cultural production, creative communication, demonstration of lifestyles, and transformation, enriching and expanding the theoretical knowledge of cultural innovation [26]. The experiential elements mainly manifest during the prototyping and testing phases, expressed through communication, cultural creativity, and festivals. In response to the trends in new technology, new values, and new generations, various forms of humanistic innovations emerge. Through ecosystem evolution, these innovations create socially meaningful outcomes.

Wu, Se-Hwa proposed the H-EHA model of humanistic innovation. He argued that with the changing world, innovation processes have evolved drastically, presenting entirely different cases from the past. Innovations in various domains are centered around humans and can be categorized into four domains: physical, mental, cultural, and geographical. The relevant elements are continually monitored across four points: Humanity, Ecosystem, Hub, and Asterism [27].

Among the four types of humanistic innovation, there is the category of “Experiential Innovation”, which primarily emphasizes the evocation of emotional responses from customers during consumer experiences, with products or services serving as vehicles for these experiences. As experience has become a crucial component of the service economy, enterprises (particularly in the cultural tourism sector) provide products (such as cultural or creative goods) or services (such as World Heritage cultural experiences) to allow customers to experience pleasure during the consumer process, emphasizing the emotional aspect of the customer experience.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research Methods

This study adopted a single-case study approach to conduct exploratory research, primarily aiming to investigate the causes and processes of events through data collected from multiple sources. The data were collected using documentation, archival records, interviews, participant observation, etc. Because single-case studies are rich and explorative, they are particularly suitable for exploring complex events and phenomena, especially those involving, for example, on-site participation in cultural activities on Zhongshan Road to further elucidate the development process of the research case area and to enable the triangulation of the research results. In this study, we attempted to construct a theoretical framework through exploratory research in a complex environment. Therefore, the case study method was an appropriate choice for this work [28,29].

3.2. Research Subjects

The selection of the research object was based on the following factors: (1) The historic district of Zhongshan Road in Quanzhou has a history going back over a century, dating back to historical records. (2) It boasts numerous cultural heritage sites and intangible cultural heritage elements, signifying its cultural significance and richness. (3) It is recognized as the most significant traditional commercial street in Fujian Province, showcasing its economic and cultural importance. (4) The cultural tourism in the area attracts over 100,000 visitors daily, highlighting its popularity and significance in the tourism sector.

Quanzhou, with its rich and distinctive history, boasts numerous cultural heritage sites and intangible cultural elements. These characteristics set it apart as a standout destination among many popular spots for influencers. Its variety of traditional cuisine, picturesque landscapes, and unique craftsmanship showcase Quanzhou’s deep historical roots and its status as a land rich in cultural heritage, with significant potential for cultural tourism development.

Furthermore, with the widespread use of the internet in daily life, Quanzhou can leverage the trend of new media marketing. Platforms such as TikTok, Bilibili, and other social media channels can be utilized for promotion and targeted marketing, allowing young people and visitors from afar to become acquainted with Quanzhou and igniting their enthusiasm for travel. In terms of tourism data, during the 2023 Mid-Autumn Festival and National Day period, Quanzhou’s ancient city received over 100,000 visitors daily, totaling 1.212 million tourist visits, marking a 139.7% increase compared to previous figures. The tourism revenue amounted to CNY 1.03 billion, reflecting a 143.2% year-on-year increase [30].

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection and analysis in this study consisted of three steps: First, through collection of secondary data and literature (involving over 30 pieces of literature), 15 relevant database folders were compiled, containing key information related to cultural experiences, service stages, and innovation processes. Secondly, social media comments from official WeChat accounts, official interview videos, and observation notes and personal photographs from actual participation in diverse experiential activities in the case study area over the past year were collected to gain in-depth understanding of innovative activities

and promotional methods [29]. Finally, the data were classified and compared to summarize the relevant discourse and ultimately draw conclusions and provide recommendations.

For data collection, initially, the relevant literature, including promotional webpages, articles in international journals, reports, columns, and other sources provided by the Quanzhou Municipal Government regarding the World Heritage City campaign and cultural events held on Zhongshan Road, were gathered. The purpose of this was to gain an in-depth understanding of the case background, including cultural activities, industry integration, and experiential processes.

The analytical framework for the case initially adopted the TES framework proposed by Della Corte, Savastano, and Storlazzi for the revitalization and management of cultural heritage sites, which includes the dimensions of Technological, Experiential, and Systemic aspects [25]. During the data analysis phase, the researcher conducted data collection and conducted ongoing comparative analysis. Regarding on-site experiences, interviews were conducted with friends, relatives living around Zhongshan Road, and relevant professionals to understand their experiential insights through discussions. Finally, the thematic and content aspects of cultural experiential activities held in the past year were closely examined to allow them to serve as a basis for further data analysis.

To ensure data accuracy, this study utilized secondary data, official primary data, and interview data. These were organized into verbatim transcripts of the interviews needed for the research, while retaining the video URLs of audio–visual interview data to enhance research validity. Additionally, the research team categorized and compared the answers to questions for different interviewees to cross-validate the data [31].

3.4. Case Introduction and Description

Quanzhou's Zhongshan Road historic and cultural district boasts rich cultural resources and landmarks. Situated in the core area of Quanzhou's ancient city (Li Cheng District), Zhongshan Road occupies a unique position. Spanning an area of 6.41 square kilometers, Quanzhou's ancient city features Zhongshan Road as its centerpiece, characterized by distinctive architectural features. Along its corridors, column-style arcade buildings convey the essence of Nanyang-style architecture, blending traditional Quanzhou residential characteristics with elements of maritime culture. The road stands as a historical epitome of the fusion of Chinese and Western commercial street architecture, representing one of the few remaining and most well-preserved continuous arcade commercial streets in China. Zhongshan Road is a testament to Quanzhou's commercial prosperity and has profoundly influenced Quanzhou's commodity economy throughout history [32].

As a case study, Zhongshan Road in Quanzhou, designated as a national-level historic and cultural street, stands at the heart of Quanzhou's ancient city. Surrounding it are seven UNESCO World Heritage Sites, diverse experiences inspired by Minnan and Maritime Silk Road cultures, and numerous shops imbued with the memories of old Quanzhou residents. Together, these elements form the unique historic and cultural essence of Quanzhou's ancient city, attracting numerous visitors from both domestic and international destinations to experience and appreciate the charm and heritage of the ancient city (Figure 1).

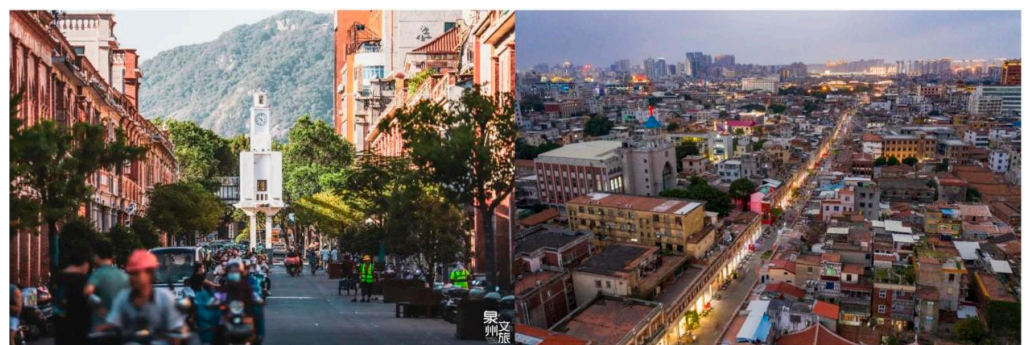


Figure 1. A view of Zhongshan Road in Quanzhou (source: Quanzhou Culture Tourism).

In terms of policy measures, the Li Cheng District is implementing a strategy of “attracting one batch, optimizing one batch, and eliminating one batch” to promote the entry of businesses into the market, construct a branded commercial circle, and enhance pedestrian and customer flow. Simultaneously, efforts are being made to revive traditional brands, supporting establishments like Yuanhetai, Shuimen Guozi, and Bingzhengtang, among others. These traditional stores are encouraged to adopt corresponding “old storefront” signage, such as the Da Shanghai Barber Shop, Qingzhen Restaurant, Locke Photography Studio, and Orthopedic Hospital, allowing the old memories of Quanzhou residents to gradually return.

Moreover, the layout includes emerging business formats like the entry of Luckin Coffee, Baoren’s flagship store, and Qixu Zhonglou Hotel. Cultural and creative spaces such as the Cai Guoqiang Art Museum, the Overseas Chinese Museum, and the Cultural and Tourism Exhibition Hall are introduced to showcase cutting-edge fashion and trends, creating new cultural landmarks for Quanzhou. Through actively promoting festivals and events, including Minnan specialty performances, children’s Nanyin flash mobs, song and dance strolls, and intangible cultural heritage exhibitions and experiences, as well as the “Li Enjoy Life Cloud Shopping Festival”, the area aims to continuously attract crowds and ignite commercial activity [33,34].

In December 2023, the Li Cheng District Committee and District Government organized the Quanzhou Zhongshan Road Commercial Street Centennial Celebration and the 2023 “Silk Road Friendship City” Cooperative Development and Exchange Conference. This event aimed not only to showcase the century-long splendor of Zhongshan Road but also to sustainably stimulate market vitality, creating an overall image, new business formats, and a more vibrant atmosphere in the commercial district.

4. Research Findings and Discussion

4.1. Consumer Cultural Tourism Service Experience Process

Based on the event held in Zhongshan Road, Quanzhou, in December 2023, researchers observed that consumers directly or indirectly experienced the event on site, echoing Dubberly and Evenson’s Experience Cycle model [14]. Firstly, tourists learned about the ongoing cultural activities through platforms like WeChat official accounts or TikTok, initiating the process of gathering information and understanding the event content, corresponding to the first two stages of the experience cycle model, “Connect and Attract” and “Orientate”. Secondly, tourists actively participated in cultural activities, experiencing enjoyment and satisfaction, aligning with the third and fourth stages of the experience cycle model, “Interact” and “Extend and Retain”. Many attendees at the event used their smartphones to capture moments and later shared their experiences through social media, achieving the fifth stage, “Advocate”. Finally, after the cultural event experience concluded, participants reflected on the innovative aspects, reaching the sixth stage, “Recollection”, and anticipating the opportunity for another cultural tourism experience in Quanzhou.

In summary, cultural experiential activities in Quanzhou form a cyclical experience, where each step in the cultural experiential cycle corresponds to various activities. The main difference lies in the gradual increase in the proportion of visitors using social media, gradually aligning and connecting with the cultural experiential process in Quanzhou (Figure 2).

Through Quanzhou’s rich historic and cultural heritage, coupled with the municipal government’s focus on emerging industry development hotspots and current key tasks in the past one to two years, the aim is to unleash the potential of tourism consumption and promote high-quality development in the tourism industry. In this process, service experience innovation becomes a key strategy aimed at opening up new markets for existing services and providing a completely new World Heritage experience for tourists and local residents. This is not only an enhancement of existing services but also a fresh interpretation of service experiences, designed to satisfy the ever-changing demands within

cultural tourism in a unique and appealing way. Through this service experience innovation, the tourism industry in Quanzhou can stand out in a fiercely competitive market (Figure 3).



Figure 2. Zhongshan Road multicultural exhibition (source: Voices of Haisi Quanzhou Cultural Tourism).



Figure 3. The cultural experience process among the new generation (source: images taken for this study).

Quanzhou currently boasts Zhongshan Road, a historic street imbued with numerous tangible and intangible cultural heritage elements. This vibrant street vividly showcases the native lifestyle of Quanzhou urban residents and the unique local cultural traditions, which can provide a “narrative” axis for cultural experiences [35]. Through heritage tourism, visitors can directly experience the cultural landscapes, performances, local cuisine, handicrafts, and cultural activities of the past and present. Therefore, it is widely regarded as a tool for community economic development [36].

In summary, the service experience innovation on Zhongshan Road in Quanzhou aligns with the Quanzhou Municipal Government’s initiative, as mentioned in the Li Cheng News on 28 November [37]. The government has actively explored and implemented strategies to revitalize the century-old commercial street. Zhongshan Road and its surrounding business districts have been positioned as integrated cultural, commercial, and tourism leisure areas. This involves encouraging the development of high-end retail, specialty dining, and thematic leisure and entertainment businesses. Furthermore, there is a strong emphasis on attracting high-quality international and local brands and establishing time-honored brands, intangible cultural heritage, traditional handicrafts, and cultural creativity. The transformation and enhancement of storefront images, along with the introduction of new concepts, technologies, and designs, are aimed at facilitating the upgrading of business models on Zhongshan Road.

4.2. Innovative TESP Model of Cultural Tourism Service Experience in Historic Districts

The advancement of technology and societal progress have significantly transformed the field of service innovation, making the experience process more technologically advanced and diversified. In the TES model, the focus is primarily on cultural heritage, leveraging information and communication technologies, as well as providing rich, comprehensive, and complex services, which have had profound effects, surpassing the core

products of archaeology. As a new case of cultural heritage, the research case will usher in new developments and practices in service innovation, reflecting the changing times and the growing emphasis on cultural tourism.

This study adopted the service innovation TES model proposed by Della Corte, Savastano, and Storlazzi as the analytical framework for the case analysis [25]. Furthermore, it extended and developed the TESP model for service experience innovation in historic districts. Its detailed description is as follows:

I. Technological

1. Induced Level: For instance, Quanzhou actively promotes the “Quanzhou: Emporium of the World in Song-Yuan China” World Heritage tourism project. Regarding social media platforms, the promotion and live streaming of on-line activities are conducted through platforms such as Weibo, official public WeChat accounts, Bilibili, TikTok, Xiaohongshu (RED), and relevant official promotional videos.
2. Organic Level: (1) Seasonal festival events are continuously introduced, such as the “World Heritage Two-Year Anniversary. Ancient Architecture Music Season” in July, and the “Centennial Zhongshan Road Minnan Flash Mob” event. (2) The street’s cultural and creative spaces consistently introduce new cultural and creative products and permanent exhibitions: Zhongshan Road, as the former main artery of Quanzhou’s ancient city, with its row-style arcade architectural style, showcases the characteristics of Quanzhou’s diverse cultural integration. It not only carries a rich cultural history but also reflects the lifestyle of Quanzhou’s people. On 27 July 2022, a new landmark on Zhongshan Road, Zhongshan Station (Zhongshan Road Visitor Service Center), officially opened. As the visitor service center of Zhongshan Road, it provides in-depth local cultural experiences for the general public and visitors, showcasing and promoting various aspects of Quanzhou culture [38]. (3) Guided tours are offered around the buildings of the national-level tourist leisure street: “Two Towers in the East and West, One Street in the North and South”. Zhongshan Road in Quanzhou has a long history. It was built up with row-column arcade buildings in the 1920s, with a total length of about 2.5 km, containing rich architectural culture. It combines the traditional characteristics of Quanzhou residential buildings and integrates the essence of maritime cultural architecture, making it a successful example of the integration of Chinese and Western cultures throughout history.
3. Skill Level: This includes “traditional culture” with street-side offerings, such as bamboo shoot jelly, sugar paintings, stone flower paste, preserved fruits, and noodle soup; “traditional crafts” including Dehua porcelain, paper-cut lanterns, Minnan red bricks, and kung fu tea; “performing arts” such as Huoding Gongpo (Fire Cauldron), chest drum dances, Southern Shaolin martial art performances, Five Ancestor Boxing, Peking Opera, Nanyin (Southern Tunes), and puppetry.

II. Experiential

1. Events: In July, the “World Heritage Two-Year Anniversary and Ancient Architecture Music Season” was held at the Confucius Temple Square near Zhongshan Road. In August, the “Ancient City Walk Routes” featured six routes through the ancient city, passing through Zhongshan Road, among others. Additionally, various interactive performances and events were organized, such as cultural exhibitions or creative market experiences near the Suqing Gate Plaza on West Street and the site of Deji Gate, research and learning activities at the Zhengyin Academy near the Confucius Temple, and worship at the Tianhou Palace at the rear of the southern section of Zhongshan Road. Quanzhou Hotel (Quanzhou Guesthouse) and the Cultural Tourism Promotion Team set up a Minnan story salon in the Donghui Building lobby of the hotel from 27 September to 6 October during the Golden Week, featuring heritage DIY handicraft lantern areas and

storytelling sessions about Quanzhou's heritage, cuisine, and famous figures, aiming to promote Quanzhou's culture. These elements were mainly related to Quanzhou's historic and cultural heritage, including World Heritage sites, local cuisine, and stories of notable individuals.

2. Animation: This included the permanent exhibition "Hello Quanzhou: Poster Exhibition" on the second floor of Zhongshan Station and the art exhibition by Cai Guoqiang's family at Space 175 on Zhongshan Middle Road.
3. Community involvement: During the Spring Festival, there were installations of special zodiac rabbit art for tourists to take photographs with. During the Lantern Festival, lanterns were hung along the Zhongshan Road arcade. For the May Day holiday, there were temple fairs and the Quanzhou Lantern Festival, and Quanzhou Cultural Tourism, jointly with local businesses and hotels, launched the "Guidebook to the Ancient City" to engage the community.
4. Multi-cultural experiences: The multi-cultural experiences included intangible cultural heritage and Minnan culture. On the streets, both international brand products and local brand experiential projects could be found, making the experience diverse and rich. Intangible cultural heritage experiences included regular "Nan Yin performances" at No. 11, Goldfish Lane's "Ancient City Nan Yin Pavilion" and "Yuanxiao tasting" at the neighboring Hai Si Jin Feng old brand shop. Minnan cultural experiences included trying the "Crab and shrimps women's hairpin flower cultural experience" on West Street. The "West Street Visitor Service Center" offered Minnan cultural products on the first floor and operated a "Tea Culture Space" in collaboration with Quanyan Mingcha.
5. Brands: With the experiences offered on these streets, there were a wide array of branded shops, including both international brands selling products and local brands offering experiential projects, catering to the preferences of the visitors [39].

III. Systemic

1. Integration with commercial activities and craftsmanship: Surrounding the area, there are various cultural and creative shops, such as West Street Visitor Center, Zhongshan Station, Fuli Minnan Urban Complex, Jiezi Bookstore, Xiaoxicheng (culture spaces), and Baishuihaoxi (Song Dynasty Aesthetic Tea House). These establishments contribute to the integration of commercial activities and craftsmanship, creating synergy between industries.
2. Tourist chains: Connecting West Street, Kaiyuan Temple, Confucius Temple, Shibosi Site, Tianhou Palace, and Deji Gate Site, the launch of the World Heritage tourist route enriched cultural tourism. A local tourism practitioner told reporters, "Several years ago, most tourists visiting Quanzhou came from Xiamen and stayed for only half a day without overnight stays. Nowadays, more and more tourists come specifically to Quanzhou. This year, City Walk has become very popular, and Quanzhou is a city perfectly suited for city walking, attracting many young people".
3. Integration with institutional authorities: A project to renovate the demonstration section of Zhongshan Middle Road was undertaken; surrounding trees were removed, and the area was transformed into a pedestrian street. Goldfish Lane underwent minor renovation projects, and high-quality attractions were introduced, such as cultural and creative industries, tea houses, cafes, bookstores, and arts and crafts studios, enriching the cultural lives of residents.
4. Integration with the local community: This can include integrating small-scale creative cultural experience projects, such as bamboo weaving, flower arranging, and traditional Southern-style crafting skills, to create a "one street, three lanes, multiple points" lifestyle network system, as well as reintroducing Minnan characteristic formats and activating currently vacant and old-fashioned arcade spaces.

5. Cultural exchange and learning: As can be seen when walking through the ancient city of Quanzhou, Minnan-style red brick houses are ubiquitous, embellished with modern “Western-style buildings”, arcades, and shophouses brought back by modern Quanzhou people from Southeast Asia, blending seamlessly with the city’s red bricks and tiles, creating a Quanzhou-specific atmosphere that combines Eastern and Western influences to create internal and external fusion [40,41].

IV. Platform

1. Hub: The Hub function focuses on the investigative, research, and interactive aspects of the government’s approach to overall innovation and development in the cultural tourism industry. For example, the implementation of the “Quanzhou Cultural Tourism Development Promotion Regulations”, issued in 2023, aims to encourage and support the enhancement of tourism functions in historic and cultural districts such as Quanzhou Zhongshan Road, Xijie, the southern part of the city, Jinjiang Wudian Market, and Yongchun Wuli Street. It also emphasizes the revitalization of material cultural heritage, such as historic buildings, traditional architectural features, and cultural relic protection units, and the introduction of tourism products featuring characteristics of Quanzhou’s historic and cultural city [38]. Therefore, in the Hub aspect, the Quanzhou municipal government plays a leading role, fostering a mutually dependent relationship between Quanzhou’s cultural tourism department and businesses in the Zhongshan Road historic district, continuously constructing the entire ecosystem [27]. The relevant departments (Quanzhou municipal government and Ancient City Protection and Development Command) actively conduct investigations and research. They have also received national-level awards for the comprehensive enhancement of Zhongshan Middle Road and Jinyu Lane, with these projects selected as national demonstration cases for historic and cultural preservation and inheritance. After several years of development, the ancient city’s appearance has been completely transformed, and the living environment of its residents has significantly improved, setting an example when it comes to social interactions.
2. Service process: The service process is divided into two parts, the “Experience Cycle” and “Sense of Place”. The “Experience Cycle” corresponds to the previous consumer service experience process. This part mainly focuses on tourists’ experience sharing. Through early information sharing on social media among other tourists, interest in visiting Quanzhou is generated. Subsequently, tourists personally experience the activities and record their experiences in videos or articles. The entire cycle of experiencing, documenting, and sharing the experience on platforms on the internet is highlighted as a focal point in the service process. The “Experience Cycle” involves a comprehensive understanding of tourists’ experiences and their journey, as analyzed by Varnali Della Corte’s research [25]. It facilitates the enhancement of experiential, cognitive, and emotional aspects of products or service experiences. On the other hand, “Sense of Place” relies on traditional culture as its foundation, emphasizing unique and appealing images that highlight the core competitiveness, identity, and culture of a place [42]. On Zhongshan Road, the preservation of the arcade architecture from the Republican era and traditional festive activities contributes to the preservation, protection, and exhibition of local culture. Meanwhile, businesses in the historic district, while contributing to modernization efforts, still prioritize traditional culture. Elements such as “Maritime Silk Road culture”, “Minnan characteristics”, and “traditional old-brand shops” distinguish it from other regions.

Furthermore, the innovation processes regarding the service experience should correspond with preserving Quanzhou’s “cultural symbols”. The cultural experience of Zhongshan Road in Quanzhou can be expanded by focusing on the research direction and discussing individual aspects of the TES model. After integrating and summarizing

cultural activities and related exhibitions, it is evident that, with advancements in technology and the evolution of society, the analysis has expanded some of the arguments originally proposed in the TES model. This study extended and developed the TESP model for innovative service experiences in historic districts (Figure 4).

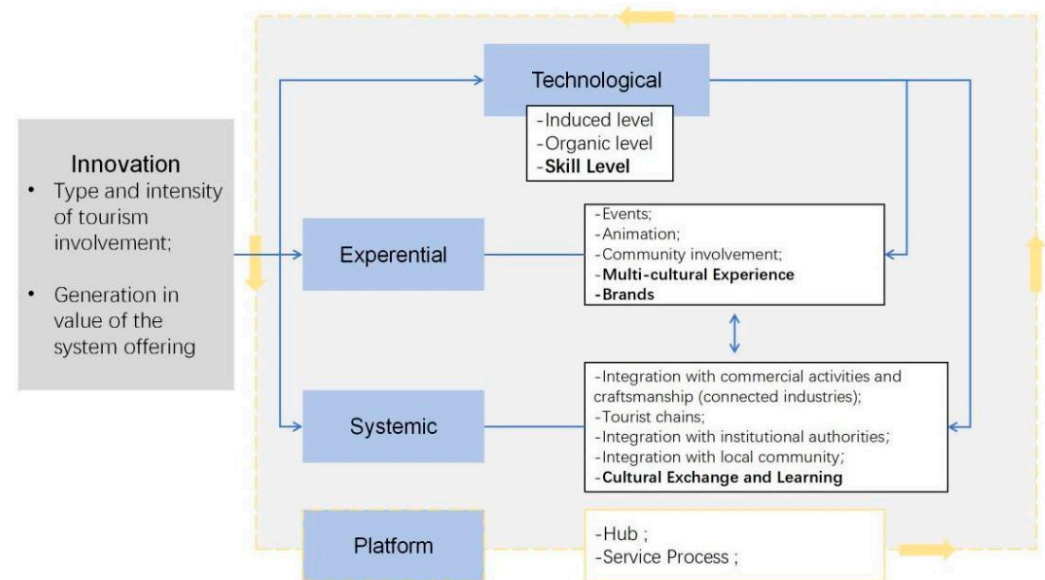


Figure 4. Quanzhou's Zhongshan Road TESP model for service experience innovation.

Furthermore, this study also identified that, in terms of systemic integration with the local community, attention should be paid to the trend of online community development. Many tourists express their opinions through social media platforms, and this information can be further analyzed to serve as materials and feedback for street service innovation. In conclusion, the innovative Platform dimension of this study emphasizes the utilization of diverse digital engagement channels for the promotion and management of historic neighborhoods in the current era of cultural tourism development. This model is applicable not only to traditional festival contexts but also to the development and experiential innovation of other cultural heritage sites.

In summary, this study extended the TES model proposed by scholars and constructed an innovative model for cultural tourism service experience in Quanzhou. It introduced a fourth dimension, namely, Platform, integrating Quanzhou's current cultural tourism service experiences into the concept of a humanistic innovation hub. This becomes a critical facet for the ongoing development and innovation of cultural tourism.

4.3. Cultural Tourism in Historic Districts with Humanistic Innovation

In various regions, the human-centered approach is evident, reflecting innovation in everyday life across four domains: mental, cultural and historic, geographical, and physical. In historic districts, humanistic innovation is manifested in each of these domains. (1) In the mental domain, the proliferation of smartphones and technological advancements has led to a growing trend among the new generation to share knowledge and experiences. Consequently, an increasing number of visitors to historic districts are inclined to share their exploration experiences and processes, enhancing the experiential and professional aspects within this domain. (2) In the cultural and historic domain, the emphasis is placed on cultural heritage preservation, necessitating dissemination through various media channels such as smartphones and major social platforms. World Heritage culture has seamlessly integrated into daily life, becoming an integral part of everyday festivities. Dissemination efforts are continuously promoted through platforms like WeChat, TikTok, and Bilibili. Cultural innovation is showcased through exhibitions at nearby World Heritage museums, allowing the public to gain insights into the historic district of Zhongshan Road.

With the increase in events, social media platforms also play a crucial role in promoting Quanzhou to a wider audience, particularly among young people who are eager to share their experiences. (3) In the geographical domain, innovations have been introduced in daily transportation with the launch of the new “Dang” bus service tailored to Quanzhou’s World Heritage sites. In leisure tourism, new guesthouses and hotels have been established near West Street and Zhongshan Road to cater to the needs of visitors. Work and retail spaces, exemplified by the West Street Visitor Center and Zhongshan Station, offer enhanced service experiences to meet evolving demands. (4) In the domain of physical wellbeing, the focus lies primarily on health aspects. For instance, the previously organized “Maritime Silk Road Quanzhou Ancient City Walking” event emphasized both physical and mental health, making City Walk a tangible trendsetter. The realm of humanistic innovation in historic districts is notably rich in both the “cultural and historic” and “geographical” domains. From the perspective of the experiencers, one can profoundly perceive how the historic streets of Zhongshan Road, guided by humanistic values, are propelled by the spirit of humanity within lifestyle and socio-technological advancements.

Through research, it is evident that in the processes of humanistic innovation, increasing emphasis is being placed on integrated development, with each element being critical. Scholars focusing on service product innovation utilize digital technology to create value for manufacturers and customers. The concept of Digital Service Innovations, as explored by these scholars, corresponds to the integration of digital technology into the core operations of manufacturers and existing service products, thereby providing significant value [43]. This corresponds to the roles of “community connectors” and “energy accumulators” in the platform aspect of the TESP model. The purpose is to further construct new forms of interaction in historic districts and to deepen the collection and utilization of data through digital platforms to create value. Gao [44] proposed four principles of Alternate Cultural Paradigms that can correspond to humanistic innovation, two of which are noteworthy. (1) Independent Focus on Culture and Power: The diverse Maritime Silk Road culture serves as a focal point for promotion in the historic district of Zhongshan Road. Government authorities have the power to allocate and utilize resources related to this culture and can sustain its development through humanistic innovation. (2) Integration of Liberation and Application: Regarding heritage sites and historic districts that have seen innovative development in the past three years, the performance of humanistic innovations is key to improving lifestyles and conditions. By involving local businesses, solutions to individual problems can be collectively addressed.

4.4. General Discussion

According to Lv Xiujia, Director of the Quanzhou Municipal Bureau of Culture, Radio, Television, and Tourism, in an interview with China Travel News, Quanzhou will focus on “building brands, striving for billions, and enhancing capabilities” in the future, particularly in the cultural and tourism fields. This strategy aims to fully promote high-quality development in Quanzhou’s cultural and tourism economy by focusing on the three elements of resources, customers, and services. Through this research, there is an opportunity to demonstrate how relevant departments continue to innovate their services to achieve the goal of Quanzhou’s cultural and economic tourism development [45].

As part of the cultural experience process [13], Quanzhou has organized numerous cultural activities this year, mainly around the ancient city area and cultural heritage sites. “Desire to participate in heritage experiences” has become one of the main motivations driving heritage tourism in Quanzhou. Rich tourism information can be continuously obtained from online platforms, and the high cost–performance ratio is reflected in the abundant choices of travel experiences and high levels of multicultural participation.

Regarding the service experience innovation in Quanzhou, it is indeed a new topic. While previous studies may have focused on different aspects, they all include culture [26]. The service experience innovation process in this study resonates with the concepts of creative communication (emphasizing cultural symbols and spiritual transmission), demon-

strations of cultural life (emphasizing cultural immersion, activation, and interaction), and cultural transformation creation (emphasizing the combination of traditional and modern elements). Moreover, it involves explicit innovation elements, such as technology, aesthetics, and creativity.

Finally, due to certain objective characteristics of urban spaces, including their uniqueness, aesthetics, culture, and sense of place, residents and tourists in the Zhongshan Road historic district, through monthly cultural activities, are able to experience and appreciate the complex environment and interactive processes, providing them with new perceptions of urban spaces. This reflects innovative development with a focus on service experience, leading to the recognition of service experience innovation and ultimately achieving the goal of humanistic innovation [46].

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

The present study conducted a detailed analysis and review of the service experience in the Zhongshan Road historic district in recent years. It explored the impact of service experience innovation and humanistic innovation on the development of historic districts influenced by the trend of heritage tourism. Through the TESP model and the perspective of humanistic innovation, the researchers analyzed the current experience mode in the Zhongshan Road historic district of Quanzhou and examined the application of management approaches and new technologies in the context of technological development. The research findings not only propose feasible innovative strategies for practical service experiences but also contribute to filling the knowledge gap in the research on service experience innovation and historic district tourism in Quanzhou at the theoretical level.

From a humanistic perspective, guiding cultural tourism allows the spatial identity of historic districts to be perceived as a form of urbanity that is rich in humanistic characteristics. As representatives of public environments, residents in these areas engage in complex environmental and behavioral interaction processes (cultural experiential activities) through various visual perceptions and physical activities. Urban spaces offer certain objective qualities such as uniqueness, aesthetics, culture, and sense of place, which provide possibilities in terms of public perception [46]. The increase in various types of cultural activities reflects the expansion of processes aimed at service innovation to enhance experiences, thereby achieving service experience innovation, ultimately realizing the goal of humanistic innovation.

Furthermore, integrating humanistic innovation into the cultural tourism service experience process is crucial. The four domains under humanistic innovation can resonate with the analysis of TES because its core lies in “people-orientated” principles. Therefore, all relevant aspects of life can be linked to the service experience innovations on Zhongshan Road, demonstrating their philosophical assertions. Additionally, the new branch experience category, Platform, and the Hub in the H-EHA model of humanistic innovation are interconnected, responding to Platform’s role as a manager in the promotion of cultural activities and resource allocation in the new era. It leverages digital technology platforms and interpersonal networks to advocate for core values, contributing to social prosperity and economic growth. Through the drive of philosophical assertions and textual stories, the TESP model and humanistic innovation can better reflect the impact of new technologies and new systemic contexts in creating a new look for historic districts.

5.2. Management Implication

Through the provision of products (such as cultural and creative goods) or services (such as cultural heritage experiences), businesses in the cultural tourism sector enable customers to experience pleasure during the consumer process. This indicates that the Quanzhou Municipal Government has gradually expanded its focus from service innovation to new service experience innovation. Within the four types of humanistic innovation, “experience innovation” has been fully demonstrated in this research.

The findings of this study hold practical value for heritage tourism, service innovation, and experience innovation research and implementation in Quanzhou. They are relevant to practitioners, employees, managers, and marketers involved in these domains. The study provides theoretical foundations and case interpretations regarding the importance of active engagement between tourists and service providers at destinations during the experiential process.

The TESP model and the humanistic innovation model serve as important tools for achieving this goal. The driving factors within the TESP model can be utilized as practical measures to enhance the service experience for tourists at each stage of their journey. They support the creation of interactive, personalized, and dynamic cultural tourism experiences within relevant cultural and tourism areas. Additionally, online platforms facilitate an understanding of cultural events during specific quarters, while offline activities enable direct participation, fostering interaction between tourists and related cultural and tourism departments [47,48].

Through data analysis, this study found that both the public and private sectors contribute to the innovation process of service experiences and cultural spirit, particularly through emerging technology platforms, such as social media, for promotion and feedback. The research results vividly illustrate the service experience innovation and cultural innovation processes undertaken on Zhongshan Road over the past year. Furthermore, they align with the recent efforts of the Li Cheng District Government to transform Zhongshan Road into a cultural tourism district that embodies the essence of “Min Nan charm”, “Chinese trends”, and “international style” along the Maritime Silk Road. By focusing on meticulous management, business enhancement, and event attraction, they have further stimulated the synergistic effect of “culture + commerce + tourism” in this historically significant district, yielding remarkable results [49]. These initiatives have facilitated innovation and diversified development in Quanzhou’s cultural industry and provide valuable insights and experience categories for related research cases [12,50].

5.3. Future Research Directions and Research Limitations

Although the case study method is a valuable approach that studies in-depth perspectives through various data collection methods, many scholars still question its feasibility in terms of accuracy, objectivity, rigor, and bias. Using this study, with a single case study, it may be challenging to address the potential for generalization. Deriving a framework from a limited set of exploratory interviews may be perceived as somewhat restrictive.

The incorporation of experiential innovation highlights the emotional experiences of customers during the consumer process, where products or services serve as media for providing such experiences. Therefore, future research directions could extend beyond expanding studies on service experience innovation to focus on other aspects of humanistic innovation, and even consider introducing new research subjects.

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