

Preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage Authenticity in Cultural Landscapes: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

This paper conducts a comprehensive literature analysis to explore the relationship among tourism, Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), and cultural landscapes, focusing on authenticity. With the global tourism industry's growth and escalating competition, ICH assumes a pivotal role, especially in developing countries where communities highly value it for its authenticity. Simultaneously, studying the interactions among these elements creates opportunities for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage's authenticity, developing authentic tourism experiences, and fostering authenticity in cultural landscapes. This assessment explores how authenticity in intangible cultural aspects is experienced through tourism in cultural landscapes, enhancing development thinking in research and practice. The study examines scholarly publications from 2018 to 2024, emphasising authenticity's protective role in tourism development, cultural landscape construction, and intangible cultural heritage preservation. The review summarises findings, identifies trends, and underscores key ideas. The results emphasise the significance of experiencing and preserving intangible cultural heritage's authenticity in cultural landscapes amid tourism development. Integrating tourism authenticity principles with cultural landscape construction and intangible cultural heritage exhibitions, based on the literature review, offers new perspectives and theoretical support for academic research and practical applications, potentially promoting sustainable tourism, cultural landscape development, and intangible cultural heritage preservation. Furthermore, the review identifies authenticity perception methods and conservation strategies for successfully integrating tourism development with cultural landscape

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construction for sustainable development amid dynamic changes. Outcomes provide insights for tourism operators, cultural preservation practitioners, and scholars, offering theoretical support for sustainable cultural landscape development. It introduces novel perspectives and theoretical foundations for academic research and practical applications, with the potential to advance sustainable tourism and cultural landscape development.

INTRODUCTION

In the field of cultural heritage research, cultural landscapes have been classified as the fourth category of heritage in the World Heritage List. In China, research that combines cultural heritage with cultural landscapes plays a constructive role in promoting the evolution and preservation of cultural heritage. Globally, cultural landscapes are recognised as a primary tourism driver in many regions within the intensely competitive context of the global tourism industry, providing robust support for destinations to distinguish themselves (Maxim & Chasovschi, 2021). This is particularly evident in the tourism sector centred around intangible cultural heritage, where various forms of expression enrich the visitor experience, thereby enhancing its dissemination and visibility (Zhao et al., 2024).

The attention to authenticity is not only of global significance but also plays a positive role in cultural heritage research in China. With the continuous rise of heritage tourism, aimed at authentically experiencing places, activities and artifacts that reflect cultural history and stories, it has become one of the fastest-growing niche markets in the tourism industry (Ironsides & Massie, 2020).

In recent years, authenticity has emerged as a potent concept in cultural conservation practices, sparking significant discussions on heritage assessment, its values, and the implementation of conservation practices (Delakorda, 2021). The enduring significance of culture in enhancing destination allure and regional authenticity has prompted the recognition of cultural tourism as a distinct subset within the heritage industry, drawing attention to considerations in management, science, and politics (Nag & Mishra, 2023).

In developing countries, cultural tourism is perceived as a pathway to achieving economic prosperity and providing opportunities for residents (Ma & Mohame, 2023). However, research indicates that this comes with some challenges, such as over-crowding, pollution, and harm to local traditions and customs. The rapid development of cultural heritage tourism in China has also brought forth a series of challenges, including poor visitor experiences, excessive commercialisation, and the loss of cultural authenticity (Tang et al., 2019).

In order to comprehensively understand how intangible cultural heritage and cultural landscapes contribute to the preservation of authenticity in tourism, this systematic review aims to analyse the current knowledge base through a synthesis of research findings, conceptual frameworks, and best practices. The review critically examines existing studies to identify key facilitators, obstacles, and consequences related to this integration. It aims to create new opportunities and pathways for preserving authenticity in intangible cultural heritage, developing authentic tourism experiences, and cultivating authenticity in cultural landscapes.

The review will adhere to a systematic process, ensuring accuracy in the selection and evaluation of key papers. Employing a systematic review approach to identify common themes, patterns, and gaps in the

literature, this review enables us to provide recommendations for future research and practice, supported by a substantial dataset. It dedicates itself to preserving authenticity in contemporary intangible cultural tourism landscapes, advancing the knowledge base and providing meaningful data for designers, decision-makers, and scholars. It achieves this objective by examining the factors that influence the authenticity of tourism experiences, the presentation of cultural landscapes, and the preservation of intangible cultural heritage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to its extensive cultural and artistic value, intangible cultural heritage is well-suited for development within the tourism industry. Authenticity holds significant importance in the tourism development of intangible cultural heritage (Tian et al., 2020). Heritage tourism allows visitors to directly experience both tangible assets, such as landscapes and architecture, and intangible heritage, including history, folklore, and traditions, both of which are essential resources for heritage tourism (Yu & Xu, 2019). Research on authenticity opens up new opportunities for integrating intangible cultural heritage with tourism development and cultural landscapes. This review integrates past studies and emphasises relevant findings to investigate how tourism development, cultural landscapes, and intangible cultural heritage can preserve authenticity.

The issue of authenticity is at the core of the literature in the development of cultural heritage and tourism (Abascal, 2019; Ironside & Massie, 2020). The transformation of intangible cultural heritage into tourism activities has become commonplace worldwide. Since incorporating the concept of intangible cultural heritage into its Cultural Heritage Law, the cultural and tourism industry has not only emerged as a significant vehicle for disseminating intangible cultural heritage but also to ensure its continued existence (Lemay-Perreault, 2021). Cultural landscapes are often associated with World Heritage and play a crucial role in the global tourism industry, warranting further academic research.

In World Heritage sites, authenticity is not only a crucial consideration but also a driving force for attracting visitors. Tourism destinations can appeal to more tourists seeking profound cultural experiences by preserving and disseminating the authenticity of local cultural heritage. In developing countries, tourism can serve as a pathway to economic prosperity and employment opportunities by offering authentic cultural experiences (Zhou et al., 2018; Carbone et al., 2019; Farrelly et al., 2019). Authenticity plays a central role in maintaining and understanding cultural landscapes (see Figure 1). The pursuit of authenticity in culturally specific environments imbues architectural settings with unique meanings and beliefs. The authenticity of intangible cultural heritage is particularly crucial, as it involves the inheritance of cultural customs, traditions, and collective memories (García-Esparza, 2019).

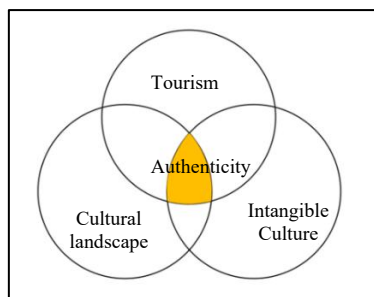


Fig. 1. Reflections on the Connection Between Tourism, Cultural Landscapes, Intangible Culture and Authenticity

Source: Authors (2025)

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Identification

In selecting several appropriate papers for this report, the systematic review process comprises three (3) main stages. The first step involves keyword identification and the search for linked, similar terms based on thesauri, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, and previous research. Consequently, upon determining all relevant keywords, search strings were created on the Scopus and ScienceDirect databases. In the first step of the systematic review process, this study successfully retrieved 439 papers from the two (2) databases.

The identification stage involves searching for research materials relevant to the predetermined research question. The keywords employed are cultural landscapes, tourism, and authenticity. Hence, the first step is to identify the keywords and search for similar or equivalent phrases in previous studies. Following the determination of all pertinent phrases, search strings were created for the Scopus and ScienceDirect databases (see Table 1). Thus, in the first part of the advanced search process, this study effectively retrieved 167 papers from the databases.

Table 1. Search Strings for cultural landscape, authenticity, and tourism

Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Cultural landscape" AND "authenticity" AND "tourism") AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBSTAGE "final")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE "j")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, "English"))
ScienceDirect	"Cultural landscape" AND "authenticity" AND "tourism"

Source: Authors (2025)

Screening

In the first step of the screening process, duplicate papers should be excluded. The initial stage omitted 272 articles, and the second stage involved the screening of 167 articles based on several inclusion and exclusion criteria set by the researchers. Literature (research articles) served as the primary criterion as it is the main source of practical information. This also encompassed the exclusion of current publications in the form of systematic reviews, reviews, meta-analyses, meta-syntheses, book series, books, chapters, and conference proceedings. Additionally, the review specifically focused on papers written in English. It is important to note that the timeframe for selection was set at six (6) years (2018-2024) (see Table 2). A total of 105 publications were excluded based on specific parameters.

Table 2. The Selection Criterion is Searching

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English	Non-English
Timeline	2018 – 2024	< 2018
Literature type	Journal (Article)	Conference, Book, Review
Publication Stage	Final	In Press

Source: Authors (2025)

Eligibility

In the third step, the eligibility phase, a total of 105 articles were prepared. At this stage, a thorough review of the titles and key content of all articles was conducted to ensure compliance with inclusion criteria and alignment with the research objectives of this study. Consequently, 73 reports were excluded, as they were omitted from the full text due to being off-topic ($n = 14$), having insignificant titles ($n = 16$), or being unrelated to the evidence-based research objectives ($n = 43$). Finally, 32 articles remained available for review (see Figure 2).

Data Abstraction and Analysis

One of the assessment procedures employed in this study is a comprehensive analysis, utilised to investigate and synthesise various research designs (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods). The aim of this competency research is to uncover significant themes and sub-themes. The data collection stage is the initial step in developing this theme. Figure 2 illustrates how the authors systematically examined assertions or materials relevant to the current research question from the 439 articles. Subsequently, the authors reviewed recent key papers on tourism, cultural landscapes and the authenticity of intangible cultural heritage. The methods adopted in all investigations and research findings are under scrutiny in the study (see Figure 2).

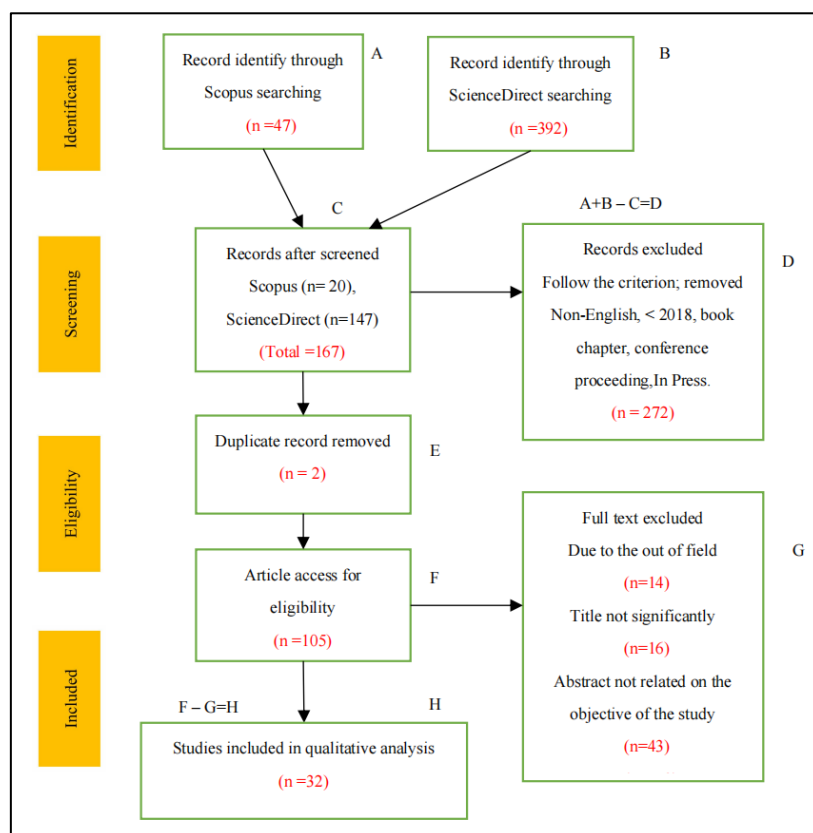


Fig. 2. Flow Diagram of The Proposed Searching Study

Source: Authors (2025)

FINDINGS

Synthesis Meta-Analysis

Expressing the Intangible Cultural Authenticity through Tourism and Cultural Landscape

Since the mid-1990s, the concept of authenticity has become increasingly crucial in landscape studies, particularly in the evaluation of cultural landscapes, emphasising regional specificity (Shin & Pae, 2022). The study explores how the cultural landscape of tourist destinations is protected, represented, and its impact on the authenticity experience. It reveals that cultural landscape conservation and maintenance measures have a direct impact on tourists' authenticity experiences.

However, the excessive commercialisation of the region, such as the rise of bars, restaurants, and coffee shops, also makes the area prone to losing its original characteristics. Additionally, the lack of appropriate protective measures and insufficient use of correct restoration knowledge and materials during conservation activities are significant factors influencing authenticity (Kırmızı & Karaman, 2021). In terms of the authenticity of cultural heritage, the maintenance of traditional historical materials, structures, crafts, and the preservation of historical appearances are essential. Particularly in China, the understanding of authenticity may differ from that in Europe, but the importance of authenticity in preserving traditional cultural heritage is more pronounced. Nevertheless, the maintenance of authenticity may require continual adjustments and changes to adapt to evolving needs (Liu, 2023).

The study highlights the multidimensionality and dynamism of authenticity by analysing the process of seeking and preserving authenticity in a region's cultural heritage, especially when dealing with intangible cultural heritage. In the process of conservation and revitalisation, there is a specific consideration for the integrity and dynamism of cultural heritage. Furthermore, the research highlights the significance of seeking authenticity within a specific cultural context. Finally, the research findings emphasise the importance of understanding and preserving the interaction between intangible and tangible heritage within cultural landscapes, as well as how this interaction influences the authenticity and integrity of cultural heritage. This reflects a comprehensive and critical perspective, asserting that the authenticity of cultural heritage tourism and landscapes is crucial for maintaining cultural diversity and identity (Yanan et al., 2024).

The study reveals that tourists associate the authenticity of heritage sites with objective authenticity, such as architectural elements and memorabilia, as well as the existential experience of personally engaging with the community during visits. Additionally, the preservation of cultural landscapes, along with the architectural environment, such as traditional houses, is considered crucial for the sustainable development of regional tourism. These elements contribute to maintaining the authenticity of the area. Finally, through an analysis of practical challenges related to cultural heritage preservation, such as the loss of traditional houses and conflicts among diverse stakeholders, the study emphasises the urgency and necessity of safeguarding cultural landscapes and preserving their authenticity (Shin & Pae, 2022).

Perceiving the Intangible Cultural Authenticity Through Tourism and Cultural Landscapes

The perceptual authenticity of tourists towards heritage sites can generate a clear understanding of cultural heritage. Additionally, the emotional experiences of tourists in the area, particularly their perception of authenticity, can evoke a profound comprehension of heritage culture. For instance, the perceived authenticity by tourists can shape a distinct sense of cultural inheritance, which proves crucial in establishing an emotional connection between tourists and cultural heritage. Simultaneously, research

indicates that tourists' spatial perception of cultural heritage is initially formed through the perception of physical objects, reflecting the functional aspects of space that enable tourists to directly comprehend the site (Zou et al., 2023).

Tourists perceive authenticity through interpersonal interactions with locals, indicating that genuine experiences can foster an emotional connection between tourists and the destination (Cheng et al., 2023). The perception of authenticity by tourists is influenced by cultural backgrounds, goals, motivations, expectations, as well as pre-existing impressions and prior knowledge of the destination. Tourists differentiate the authenticity of their visit by comparing their preconceived notions of a place with the actual tourism experience (Tiberghien et al., 2020). This study constructs a model outlining the impact of tourists' perceptions of authenticity in rural tourism on sustainable development, utilizing grounded theory. The influencing factors encompass four (4) dimensions: visual perception, experiential perception, utilitarian perception, and interactive perception (Zheng, 2024).

The study indicates that involving tourists in a knowledge process regarding the community's past and present livelihoods and the utilisation of natural resources can enhance tourists' experiences without compromising the local understanding of authenticity. Providing tourists with insights into the historical and current aspects of community livelihoods and natural resource utilisation can elevate the significance and effectiveness of authenticity among stakeholders (Gundersen & Rybråten, 2022).

Many scholars have been studying the authenticity of tourism, but inherent tensions persist in the processes of cultural preservation, authenticity, and commercialisation. Striking a balance between conservation and development becomes challenging when promoting tourism development, particularly without the active engagement and positive mindset of stakeholders. Additionally, tourists compare experiences across different destinations, necessitating stakeholder involvement and positive attitudes to construct a favourable image of tourist destinations (Nag & Mishra, 2023). The widespread engagement of various stakeholders in urban planning and conservation decision-making processes is also crucial for ensuring the authenticity and sustainability of cultural landscapes (Kırmızı & Karaman, 2021). Understanding authenticity should also take into account the perspectives of local residents, as they may have entirely different views on authenticity (Shin & Pae, 2022).

Preserving the Intangible Cultural Authenticity Through Tourism and Cultural Landscape Conservation

In recent years, tourism development at Chinese cultural heritage sites has grown rapidly, yet it faces numerous challenges such as poor visitor experiences, excessive commercialisation, and the loss of cultural authenticity. Scientific and reasonable tourism development not only contributes to the evolution and extension of authenticity, but also enhances cultural heritage protection (Tang & Zou, 2024). A profound heritage tourism experience necessitates the integration of site visits and knowledge acquisition with personal experiences or individual heritage (Moore et al., 2021). The importance of authenticity in tourism has been highlighted in previous research, which suggests preserving authenticity by avoiding excessive commercialisation and thematic exaggeration, illustrating the relationship between tourists and cultural heritage (Zheng, 2024).

The differences in the identification of cultural value, protection types and standards, public participation, as well as institutional responsibilities and management approaches, all influence the authenticity and integrity of cultural heritage (Csurgó & Smith, 2022). Through a study of the top ten (10) most popular rural tourist destinations in China from 2011 to 2021, a model was developed to examine the impact of tourists' perceptions of authenticity on the sustainable development of rural tourism. The research results indicate that these destinations scored highly in perceived authenticity, and tourists have a strong

awareness of the authenticity of these villages. Simultaneously, tourists assign higher priority to areas with high authenticity, providing sufficient funds for tourism development, thereby stimulating their willingness to contribute to ecological conservation and cultural heritage. Through specific cases and statistical data, the study demonstrates the positive impact of authenticity on the sustainable development of rural tourism, emphasising its importance in the psychological perception of tourists. The research proves that we can use tourism to protect the authenticity of intangible cultural heritage (Zheng et al., 2023).

In regions possessing cultural heritage, there should be a heightened focus on strategies such as promotion, communication, and value enhancement to achieve tourism appeal. Generally, the emphasis on authenticity in cultural landscapes or heritage tourism is not merely to attract tourists but also involves preserving the original authenticity of cultural heritage, preventing the 'Disneyfication' effect caused by mass tourism, thus maintaining the uniqueness and locality of the heritage (Panzera et al., 2021). Through the analysis of World Cultural Heritage sites, the study delves into the coordinated green development of tourist experiences and the commercialisation of tourism, ultimately constructing an evaluation indicator system. Scientifically and reasonably developed tourism not only contributes to the development and extension of authenticity but also enhances the protection of cultural heritage (Xiao et al., 2023). Research suggests the protection of intangible cultural authenticity through cultural landscapes (Zheng, 2024).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This systematic review investigates the theme of 'Preserving authenticity in cultural landscapes, when tourism meets intangible cultural heritage'. The research findings indicate how authenticity can be preserved and inherited within the non-material cultural heritage tourism landscape. The process of extracting authenticity from non-material cultural heritage, followed by the presentation of authenticity in the cultural landscape, ultimately contributes to the experience of authenticity in tourism.

In dealing with intangible cultural heritage, attention should be directed towards the multidimensionality and dynamism of the authenticity of non-material cultural heritage. The maintenance of traditional historical materials, structures, and techniques, as well as the preservation of historical appearances, is considered a necessary means of safeguarding the authenticity of intangible cultural heritage. However, maintaining authenticity requires flexible adjustments to adapt to evolving needs, reflecting the challenging and dynamic nature of authenticity preservation.

The authenticity presentation of cultural landscapes can be analysed from multiple perspectives to comprehensively assess and showcase the authenticity of cultural landscapes. For instance, examining the unique characteristics of the region, including traditional craftsmanship, local architectural styles, and cultural heritage, provides a means to display the authenticity of the cultural landscape. Preserving and inheriting these features highlights the authenticity of the cultural landscape, preventing the loss of original characteristics due to excessive commercialisation.

The authenticity of the tourism experience hinges on maintaining the original state of the cultural landscape or showcasing its authenticity and effectively extracting intangible cultural elements. However, threats to the authenticity of tourism may arise from excessive commercialisation, a lack of appropriate conservation measures, and the insufficient use of restoration knowledge and materials.

Many studies on the authenticity of tourist destinations overlook the experiences of residents, instead focusing solely on those of tourists, which limits the existing research. Residents may have entirely different perspectives on authenticity, yet they lack sufficient platforms and resources to express their thoughts and

interests. Additionally, there is a lack of understanding of the views of intangible cultural heritage inheritors, and a deficiency in conducting comprehensive and multidimensional perceptual surveys on authenticity.

In summary, the authenticity of tourist experiences, the retrieval of authenticity in intangible cultural heritage, and the presentation of authenticity in cultural landscapes are interconnected. It necessitates a balanced consideration of maintaining regional uniqueness and locality while taking into account tourist experiences, the preservation of cultural heritage, and the sustainable development of the region.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial, or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

Lin Xiaofeng carried out the research, collected and analysed the data, and prepared the manuscript draft. Nur Huzeima Mohd Hussain conceptualised the main research idea, developed the theoretical framework, and supervised the overall research progress. Asmalia Che Ahmad contributed to the research design, methodological refinement, and critical review of the manuscript. Liu Shiyu assisted with data curation, preparation of figures, and verification of analytical results. Lu You supported the literature review, resource provision, and cross-checking of the final manuscript.

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