Testing the associations between quality-based factors and their impacts on historic village tourism

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ABSTRACT

This paper develops a conceptual model to examine the associations between quality-based factors (e.g., perceived value (PV), historical authenticity (HS), experience quality (EQ), and administrative quality (AD)) and either travel intention (TR) or preservation attitude (PR). A case study was conducted at a typical historic village in Zhejiang province, China. Using partial least squares (PLS) regression analysis, we observe direct effects of PV, EQ, and AD on TR. Additionally, the direct effects of PV, EQ, and HS on PR are validated. This study reveals the critical mediating role of PV between quality-based factors and either TR or PR. In contrast, the impact of HS on TR is fully mediated by PV. These major findings deepen our understanding of rural tourism, and corresponding managerial implications to improve rural tourism are suggested.

1. Introduction

Over the past five years, the revitalization of rural areas has become a central issue. As a result, in 2018, the Chinese State Council released a package of policies known as the "No. 1 central document", which depicts a roadmap for a rural revitalization strategy. Although rural tourism is occasionally faulted for exerting uncertain negative effects (Gu & Ryan, 2010), it has been widely adopted to boost the local economy and to restore the vitality of less developed rural areas (Bao, Meng, & Zhang, 2015; Chen, Li, & Li, 2013; Ryan & Huang, 2013; Su, 2011). Different from the few star villages in rural areas of southeast China such as Hongcun, Xidi, and Wuyuan, most ordinary historic villages have not yet received sufficient attention from tourists (Zhou, Zhong, & Liu, 2015), even though they have good potential for rural tourism development. Therefore, deepening research on the motivation to choose a travel destination and investigating the important factors that might influence tourist behaviours are imperative issues not only for economic purposes but also for cooperative urban-rural development and social wellbeing.

Tourist behaviours include the intention to choose a travel destination and subsequent evaluations, which, in turn, include experience quality (EQ), subjective attitude, perceived value (PV), and satisfaction (Chen & Tsai, 2007). In research on tourist behaviours, investigating

travel intention (TR) is key for conceptualizing how an individual is pulled towards a destination due to its perceived attractiveness (Crompton, 1979), and the constructs employed in the model of TR vary due to the different perspectives taken. The associations between EQ, satisfaction and behavioural intentions have been adequately investigated (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Cronin, Brady, & Hult, 2000). Other researchers have further emphasized the role of PV in various scenarios (Kashyap & Bojanic, 2000; Oh, 2000; Petrick, 2004; Petrick, Morais, & Norman, 2001; Tam, 2000). Travelling to historic villages, which involves entering human settlements in the countryside with the intention of experiencing the natural/built/cultural environment (e.g., architecture, artwork, the landscape, traditions, and folklore) that reflect the indigenous characteristics in an authentic manner (Lu, Chi, & Liu, 2015), can be classified as rural tourism. From a more tourist-oriented perspective that emphasizes personal preference and value (Apostolakis & Jaffry, 2005), what tourists perceive in historic villages is associated with their visiting experience (Chen & Chen, 2010; Yi, Day, & Cai, 2014). In other tourism contexts, EQ has been considered to positively affect the evaluation of a destination, and other quality-based factors (e.g., service quality, satisfaction, and PV) have been gradually employed to examine such evaluations (Cronin et al., 2000; Hutchinson, Lai, & Wang, 2009; Loureiro & González, 2008).

These previous studies have been excellent attempts to investigate

quality-based factors to advance our understanding of TR and preservation attitude (PR). However, there is an urgent need to enrich existing theories by introducing the construct of historical authenticity (HS), which plays an important role in shaping the distinguished characteristics of historic villages but has scarcely appeared in prior studies. To the best of our knowledge, attempts to combine quality-based factors with HS to investigate TR are still limited; hence, a much deeper understanding of their relationships is needed. In addition, academics have presented concerns with regard to the concept of preservation, which helps prevent the so-called constructive damage caused by unguided planning and unreasonably hasty development (Gao & Wu, 2017; Guo & Sun, 2016), because the management of historical tourism is always fraught with tensions between the requirements of economic development and preservation, especially with respect to undeveloped historic villages (Wang & Bramwell, 2012). Although preservation is extremely necessary for the sustainable development of rural tourism, previous studies have not addressed it. Moreover, previous studies have mostly focused on well-known rural tourist sites where data collection is relatively easy (Wu, Cheng, & Ai, 2017). Theories based on well-developed destinations should be cautiously implemented with regard to predictions concerning ordinary historic villages that do not receive sufficient attention from tourists and that are not well prepared for rural tourism (Apostolakis & Jaffry, 2005). To fill the above knowledge gaps, this study aims to examine HS, EQ, administrative quality (AD), PV, and their relationships with tourists' TR or PR with regard to Furong village, China, an ordinary historic village that gives visitors a rich taste of Chinese culture and history.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 briefly reviews the literature on the major concepts, and a conceptual model is established with a series of hypotheses. Section 3 introduces the general methods, instrumental variables, data preparation, data analysis, and background of the selected case. Section 4 presents the analytical results of the empirical analysis of this case study. Section 5 summarizes the main findings along and provides a discussion. Section 6 ends with the limitations of this study and concluding remarks.

2. Literature review

Our research draws on the theory of the hierarchy-of-effects model and the cognitive-affective-conative framework that succeeded it (Lavidge, & Steiner, 1961; Oriade & Schofield, 2019), which is suitable for this research because it accommodates important quality-based factors to establish an integrative model that makes it possible to understand the association between perceptions and TR (Oriade & Schofield, 2019). This research also adopts the EQ-TR model developed by Chen and Chen (2010), who believe that quality attributes and PV precede TR. In particular, increasing attention has been paid to the concept of EQ due to the inclusion of aspects such as emotions and feelings, as well as the social reactions in EQ (Cole, Crompton, & Willson, 2002; Deshwal, 2016). Historic village tourism is different from routine tourism consumption. Tourists tend to experience a place only a limited number of times, and they decide to visit mainly for the purpose of experiencing rather than just receiving services or the derivatives. Therefore, in examining TR with respect to experiencing historic villages, it is appropriate to include EQ and PV in the conceptual framework. As tourist activities in historic villages are mainly based on experiences and feelings, our research modifies the typically adopted benefit-sacrifice approach by focusing on the emotional aspect of PV and placing less emphasis on economic utility (Gallarza & Gil Saura, 2006). Some studies have reported that PV is associated with TR and PR (Petrick, 2004). Among the feature characteristics, authenticity is also considered a critical attribute of a historical destination, and it is usually adopted to analyse EQ in the context of cultural tourism (Boyd, 2002; Li, Shen, & Wen, 2016) because the strongly featured images of a historic village will make tourists cherish it and consider the visit

worthwhile (Lindblom, Lindblom, Lehtonen, & Wechtler, 2017). For instance, some researchers have established that the association between authenticity and EQ can predict tourist satisfaction (Domínguez-Quintero, González-Rodríguez, & Paddison, 2018). Therefore, based on the EQ-TR, this research adopts these quality-based factors as applicable predictors of TR and PR (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Cronin et al., 2000; Petrick, 2004; Tam, 2000), and these constructs can be reasonably adopted in the context of historic village tourism (Cronin et al., 2000; Hutchinson et al., 2009; Loureiro & González, 2008).

2.1. Historical authenticity

Historic villages embody profound historic connotations and well-preserved cultural meanings. The experience of historic village tourism can generate the "intimacy of relations and authenticity" (MacCannell, 1973, p.589), with tourists enjoying reading about local traditions and gaining historical knowledge. The HS concept was introduced to address the experience of exploring how real lives take place within a specific environment visited by tourists (MacCannell, 1973). Poria, Butler, and Airey (2004) noted that authenticity gives rise to a sense of nostalgic emotion that fulfils tourists' curiosity about living in real historic settings. As an experience-related phenomenon, authenticity generally contains a sense of genuineness or tradition (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010).

The perception of authenticity can be socially constructed and perceived based on the objective properties of the destination as a result of a subjective interpretation (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Cohen, 1988; Frost, 2006; King, 2006). In historic villages, authenticity is represented by the built environment of the destination, which, in turn, affects the evaluation of the PV of the destination (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010). As one of the most important attraction attributes in the context of historical tourism, authenticity plays a fundamental role in deriving the overall value of the destination (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Murphy, Pritchard, & Smith, 2000; Tapachai & Waryszak, 2000).

Among the dimensions for evaluating landscape characteristics, HS has been particularly emphasized to describe the appreciation of historical continuity and richness (Tveit, Ode, & Fry, 2006). Although the relationship between authenticity and EQ has not been fully explored, some researchers have identified a positive correlation between these two constructs (Apostolakis & Jaffry, 2005; Yi et al., 2014; Domínguez-Quintero et al., 2018). Boyd (2002) indicated that authenticity affects tourists' evaluations of the relics in historical places and the corresponding appreciation experiences in the context of heritage tourism. Additionally, Lindberg, Hansen, and Eide (2014) highlighted the possible association between authenticity and destination attractiveness, which contributes to motivating tourists' TR. Specifically, previous research has indicated that authenticity exerts a fundamental influence on tourists' intentions to visit heritage sites and that it helps intensify the uniqueness of touristic experiences, which, in turn, reinforces the degree of PV and TR (Chen & Chen, 2010). Naoi (2004) pointed out that authenticity influences tourists' overall evaluations of historical districts. According to Frost (2006), the opportunity to experience the unique characteristics of a place is likely to have a significant impact on tourists' perception of HS and to reinforce PR formation. Therefore, based on the above discussion, we propose the following hypotheses:

H-1a: HS positively contributes to PV.
H-1b: HS positively contributes to EQ.
H-1c: HS positively contributes to TR.
H-1d: HS positively contributes to PR.

2.2. Experience quality

Since the 1980s, the development of experimental approaches has facilitated relevant studies on customers' affective responses (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). The service quality model was

developed based on expectancy disconfirmation theory to examine the discrepancy gap between consumers' expectations and perceptions of performance (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). Recent studies in tourism acknowledge the importance of EQ. As a very important driver of leisure and tourism activities, EQ is a specific subjective mental state that describes people's emotional reaction to their desired social-psychological benefits (Chan & Baum, 2007). Specifically, Otto and Ritchie (1996, p.169) defined EQ as "the affective component of the service experience that has been shown to comprise the subjective, emotional and highly personal responses to various aspects of service delivery which lead to satisfaction with the service overall". In addition, Chang and Horng (2010, p.2403) extended the definition of EQ, stating that EQ is "a representation of how customers emotionally evaluate their experiences as they participate in consumption activities, other customers, customers' companions, and other elements". Therefore, EQ is a psychological measure of a tourist's overall attitude towards tourism activities (Domínguez-Quintero et al., 2018).

Prior studies have indicated that EQ is a multi-dimensional concept that refers to various aspects according to a particular context. By using tourist attractions as an example, Otto and Ritchie (1996) identified four dimensions of EQ: hedonic, peace of mind, involvement and recognition. Similarly, four other dimensions—immersion, surprise, participation, and fun—were extracted from a study of theme parks (Kao, Huang, & Wu, 2008). In the rural tourism context, our research is based on the contention that the realization of EQ is based more on affective and hedonic experiences than on functional and utilitarian experiences (Otto & Ritchie, 1996).

Prior studies have suggested that EQ is an important determinant of PV (Duman & Mattila, 2005; Mcdougall & Levesque, 2000) and of TR (Chen & Chen, 2010). The EQ paradigm is widely involved in user-related studies and is associated with other quality-based factors such as satisfaction, destination attributes, and PV (Cronin et al., 2000; Hutchinson et al., 2009; Loureiro & González, 2008).

Based on previous studies and the existing literature, we propose the following hypotheses:

H-2a: EQ positively affects PV.
H-2b: EQ positively affects TR.
H-2c: EQ positively affects PR.

2.3. Perceived value

As the widely used concept in leisure and tourism studies, PV is rooted in equity theory (Bolton & Lemon, 1999); it derives from subjective worth, which originates from the desired benefits of products, services, and procedures and is usually considered the ultimate motivation to purchase activities (Lovelock, 2000; Quintal & Polczynski, 2010; Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002; Zeithmal, 1988). PV is defined as the trade-off between the benefits consumers receive and the sacrifices they make in consuming a product/service (Zeithmal, 1988).

Gale (1994) regarded the concept of PV as a self-reported unidimensional construct, whereas Petrick and Backman (2002) argued that PV consists of several dimensions: quality, monetary price, non-monetary price, reputation, and emotional response. Among them, there are two fundamental underlying dimensions, quality and monetary price, which refer to the functional aspects of PV (Kozak, 2003; Lin & Wang, 2012; Bigne, Sánchez & Sanchez, 2001), and reputation and emotional response, which refer to the affective aspects of PV (Jewell & Crotts, 2009; Bigne et al., 2001; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). In addition to monetary value, an increasing amount of attention is being paid to the emotional/social aspects of PV (Gallarza & Gil Saura, 2006; Lee, Phau, Hughes, Li, & Quintal, 2015). Furthermore, in addition to the utilitarian and functional benefits, the PV of visiting historic villages involves fantastic touristic experiences with physical environments and rural customs. In this research, we mainly focus on the affective aspects.

Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002) pointed out that PV is the ultimate goal of

consumption experience, and it has received more attention from the marketing perspective as an important measure of TR (Cronin et al., 2000; Lee, Yoon, & Lee, 2007; Oh, 2000). Although Petrick (2004) specified that PV is an important determinant of TR in the context of cruise tourism, its role in TR with respect to rural tourism has yet to be well addressed. According to the behavioural model proposed by Mehmetoglu (2010), personal values and norms – the emotional affinity with the setting of a place – are the main psychological determinants of environmental awareness, from which PR derives. Based on the above studies and literature review, we propose the following hypotheses:

H-3a: PV positively affects TR.
H-3b: PV positively affects PR.

2.4. Administrative quality

The tendency of decentralization, which allows local authorities or communities to develop their own customized tourism policies, has been an important force affecting rural tourism in China over the past decade (Lu et al., 2015). Under the socialist system, party leadership has long been endowed with financial and governmental power in Chinese villages (Gao & Wu, 2017). Therefore, the concept of collective organization prevailed in many villages, and village management was shaped by collectivism. Since the implementation of the reform and opening up in the 1970s, the state has gradually devolved economic management to the local level, with rights related to agricultural production being given to households and villagers. Moreover, by implementing the system of villager autonomy, the state has delegated the power of social management to the grassroots level to realize rural self-management and self-service in a collective way. In addition, some non-governmental organizations, such as rural associations and economic cooperatives, have exerted an increasingly larger impact on the social and political lives of villages. Therefore, the AD of the unified multi-governance model of rural grassroots units is assumed to play a vital role in rural tourism development.

Previous studies on rural tourism showed that in the Chinese context, AD is positively associated with issues of cleanliness and the aesthetics of rural destinations and that it further affects the degree of EQ, PV, and TR. Historical assets and customs tend to be well preserved by local organizations with high-quality administration systems (Li, Ryan, & Cave, 2016). Based on the literature review and for practical purposes, we propose the following hypotheses:

H-4a: AD positively affects TR.
H-4b: AD positively affects EQ.
H-4c: AD positively affects PV.
H-4d: AD positively affects people's perception of HS.

2.5. Travel intention

In line with the theory of reasoned action, behaviour reflects an individual's attitude towards the immediate outcome of certain behavioural intentions (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Jang, Bai, Hu, & Wu, 2009; Moutinho, 1987). Although intention does not necessarily lead to actual behaviour, it contributes to determining the probability of occurrence of certain behaviours (Ajzen, 1991). As a kind of behavioural intention, TR is an individual's desire or commitment to travel to specific destinations. Within the same theoretical context, TR can positively affect the occurrence of actual tourism behaviour.

Many studies have addressed TR with some possible predictors, and in some circumstances PV, EQ, and HS are believed to exert a positive effect on TR (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Chhabra, Healy, & Sills, 2003; Lindberg et al., 2014; Petrick, 2004; Petrick et al., 2001). However, to the best of our knowledge, few attempts have been made to examine the important role of TR in the context of rural tourism, especially with

regard to historic villages, although Lindblom et al. (2017) indicated that destination beliefs mediate the effect of cognitive and affective country images on individuals' TR with respect to rural areas.

2.6. Preservation attitude

PR is related to the growing tendency of environment-benign attitudes and pro-environmental behaviours as a great number of cultivated tourists begin to pay attention to the unexpected impacts on historic places exerted by tourism activities (Kim, 2012; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Ho & Mckercher, 2004). Some previous studies have indicated that tourists' positive attitudes towards preservation tend to result in more civilized touristic outcomes and contribute to co-creative tourism (Marques & Borba, 2017). Therefore, PR plays a very important role in formulating sustainable tourism for historic villages, which were originally established to address fundamental needs, such as residence, commerce, and transportation, rather than the derivative purpose of tourism (Chen & Chen, 2010). For rural villages with rich historic values, the development of tourism-related industries is a widely adopted strategy for counteracting a declining economy and job losses. However, in the effects that they have, tourism-related industries are a double-edged sword, i.e., the impact of tourism on the physical and intangible cultural assets of historic villages and the subsequent modification or even damage to the authenticity of local characteristics tend to be inevitable and should be carefully anticipated in the revitalization process (Ho & Mckercher, 2004; Ilcan & Lacey, 2015; Indera Syahrul, Fukami, & Ahmad, 2014). In this sense, people's attitude towards protecting historical assets should be regarded as an important strategy tool, and it should be integrated into rural revitalization schemes to improve the competitiveness of rural places.

Finally, a model of the conceptual relationships in this study is proposed as follows (Fig. 1).

3. Method and data

3.1. Background of the case

A village is a social organization established by a group of families coherently living as a settlement in a rural area. As the most important carriers of social and cultural diversity, historic villages have become attractive rural tourism destinations that combine leisure, recreation,

and education (Ryan & Huang, 2013). In 2003, the Administration of Cultural Relics of China designated the first group of "historic and cultural villages", which reflect traditional features and local ethnic characteristics and carry rich historical values or commemorative importance within certain historical periods. By 2014, 107 "historic and cultural villages" in China had been officially designated. Some provinces and cities have also officially announced different levels of historic villages. To a large extent, in this study, the historic village concept refers not only to the officially designated "historic and cultural villages" and renowned tourist villages that are developed for tourism but also to more ordinary rural settlements that are long established but that remain intact with the original characteristics of the spatial configuration, buildings, folklore, and rural customs.

Furong village, a typical ancient historic village in Wenzhou city, Zhejiang province, China, was selected as the case study (Fig. 2). Furong village is located in the middle reaches of the Nanxi River, which is approximately 50 km away from Wenzhou city. At present, Furong village covers an area of approximately 14.3 ha, and approximately 3000 villagers live among 443 households. Furong village was established by the Chen clan as a blood village during the Song Dynasty (976–983 B.C.), and its history is more than 1000 years old. Like many historic villages in eastern Zhejiang province, Furong village is geographically isolated by the mountainous environment, and there are difficulties communicating with the outside world. In this area, the strict patriarchal clan system is firmly passed down, which facilitates the maintenance of antiquities with original characteristics.

The original settlement layout of Furong village is still well preserved and includes many buildings that were constructed in the Ming Dynasty, including 5 official mansions, 18 ancestral halls, and more than 30 vernacular dwellings (Fig. 3). For defensive purposes, Furong village has seven village gates, among which the east gate is the main entrance. Facing east, the whole village is square shaped, and it is surrounded by pebble walls that are more than 2000 m long and 2 m high. Furong village was listed as a provincial cultural relic and conservation unit in 2005 and then upgraded to a national unit in 2006. Fortunately, the tide of reform in the 1980s and the subsequent development of the industrial economy did not have much of an impact on this village. A great deal of "village culture" has been well preserved.
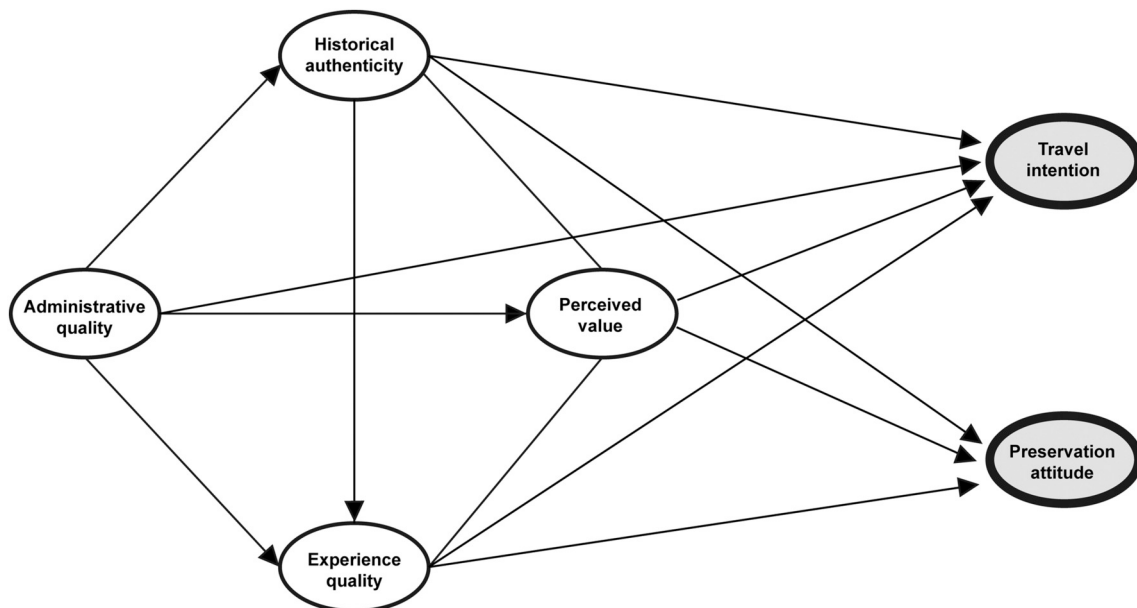

Fig. 1. The conceptual model.
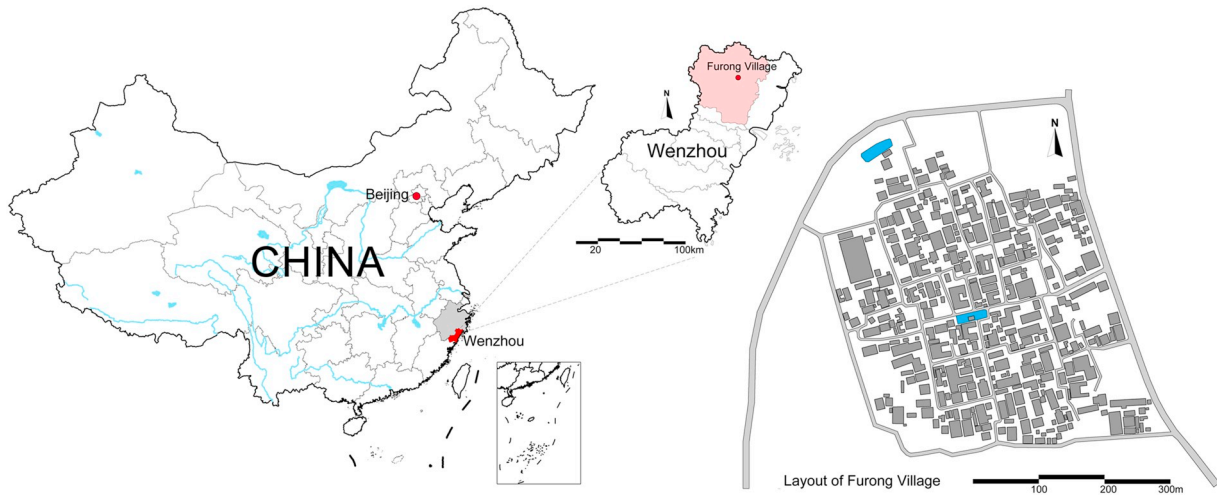
Fig. 2. Location of the case study and the layout of Furong village.

3.2. Instrument

This research used a multi-item measurement for each factor; to that end, the following steps were taken. First, all the factors and the corresponding items were defined based on evidence from the literature adapted for the research context. The operational definitions and sources of these constructs are presented in Table 1. Accordingly, some items were slightly modified to fit our study context. Detailed descriptions of the actual wording are given in Appendix A. Second, items were measured by a structured questionnaire that was administered in Chinese. After the questionnaire was drafted, a pre-test was performed with a sample of 52 respondents to eliminate confusion over

terminology and ambiguous expressions, which ensured easy readability for the respondents. Ultimately, twenty items (Appendix A) were retained in the final survey, which used a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

3.3. Data preparation

On-site field investigations were conducted at Furong village, a typical historic village in Zhejiang province, China, between July 26 and August 15, 2018. During this three-week period, one group from the team conducted interviews around key points throughout the village, such as gateways, main corridors, the clan hall, and public places with

Fig. 3. Documents of the architectural survey of historic buildings.

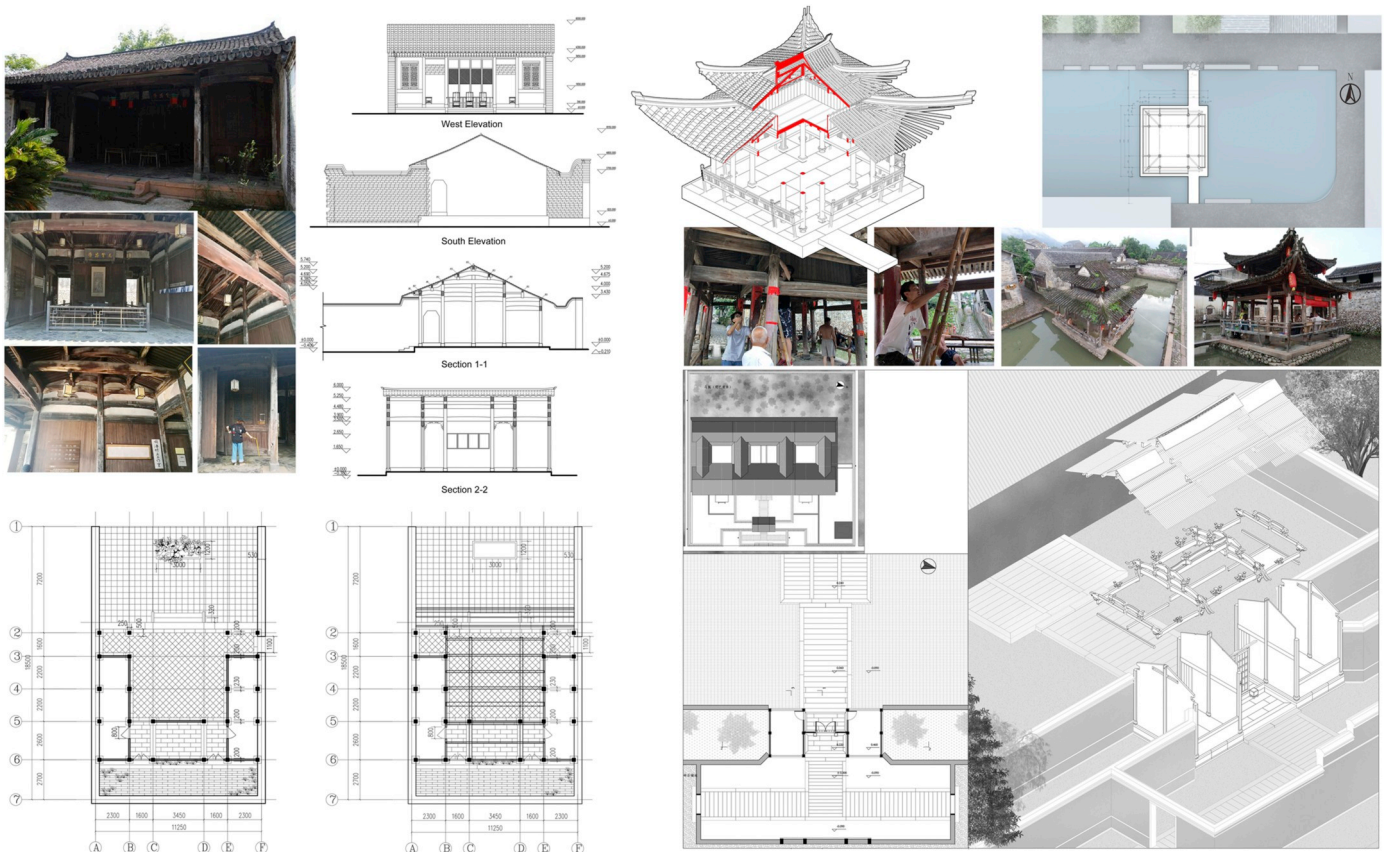**Table 1**
Operational definitions of the constructs

Construct	Operational definition	Source
Historical authenticity	Tourists' perception of the historical authenticity in the village, including the built environment and local history and culture.	Domínguez-Quintero et al., 2018; Lu et al., 2015
Experience quality	The degree of enjoyment and relaxation when visiting the village.	Dean & Suhartanto, 2019
Perceived value	Tourists' subjective opinions of the affective value of the village.	Dean & Suhartanto, 2019; Chen & Chen, 2010; Lee et al., 2015
Administrative quality	The overall perceived quality of the management and administration of the village.	Li, Ryan, & Cave, 2016
Travel intention	Tourists' willingness to visit the historic village.	Chen & Chen, 2010; Oriade & Schofield, 2019
Preservation attitude	Tourists' attitude towards the preservation of the historic village.	Chhabra et al., 2003; Chen & Tsai, 2007

important functions, while another group from the team conducted architectural surveys of the important historical buildings. Given that Furong village is not a well-known destination that is well prepared for tourism, only a few people travel to the village for the purpose of visiting it. Therefore, we also took into account some occasional visitors, such as people from outside the village who were visiting relatives, artists who did outdoor sketching in this village, and hikers who were passing by. A total of 174 visitors agreed to be interviewed and were guided to complete the questionnaire. The privacy and anonymity of all respondents were appropriately guaranteed before they completed the questionnaire, after which they were provided with a gift as a reward. Ultimately, 142 valid questionnaires without missing data or unexpected errors were involved in the final statistical analysis; thus, the effective response rate was 81.6%. Although partial least squares (PLS) regression analysis does not require a distributional assumption (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010), the approximate normality of each continuous variable was examined, which resulted in a skewness from -1 and $+1$ and a kurtosis from -3 and $+3$.

Regarding demographic characteristics, we collected each respondent's age, gender, residence, educational level, and income (Table 2). The majority of the respondents were either young or middle-aged. Those over 60 years of age accounted for 6.3%. In terms of gender, the respondents were 48.6% male and 51.4% female. More than half of the respondents (58.5%) lived in urban areas, whereas 27.5% lived in rural areas. In terms of educational level, 25.4% had graduated from middle school or below, 26.8% had a high school-level education, and 47.9% had at least entered college or graduated from college. The respondents were separated into five groups according to their annual income: less than 30,000 per year (38.7%), 30,001–50,000 (16.2%), 50,001–80,000 (16.9%), 80,001–120,000 (16.9%), and over 120,000 (11.3%).

3.4. Data analysis process

The data analysis process involved several steps. First, the data distribution was checked based on the descriptive statistics. Next, the measurement model was analysed to identify the proposed factors for the measurement model. In this regard, there were several criteria that needed to be met, including internal scale consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Then, the structural model was validated with the path significance values, R^2 values, and f^2 values of the

dependent variables.

For the data analysis, the PLS approach using SmartPLS software version 3.0 was preferred because of the advantages of PLS over other multiple regression methods for the presented case study: PLS regression analysis performs more complete estimations simultaneously for the structural model (i.e., the associations between the determinant variables and the dependent variables) and the measurement model (i.e., the associations between the latent variables and measuring items) (Bagozzi & Yi, 1989). In view of the following reasonable limitations of this study, PLS regression analysis is a better option than other covariance-based structural equation modelling (SEM) methods, such as LISREL, Mplus, and AMOS, for the following reasons: (1) it can deal with the small sample size used in our case study (Fornell & Bookstein, 1982). For most ordinary historic villages, rural tourism is normally under-developed or immature. Furong village, for instance, has attracted few tourists thus far, which resulted in a limited sample size. Therefore, the PLS method is a good option for this situation. (2) PLS regression analysis is a better solution for making predictions with optimal predictive accuracy and for developing exploratory theories in the early stages (Fornell & Cha, 1994). (3) PLS regression analysis can be applied to complex models that involve many variables or factors, which can be either reflective or formative; this ability facilitates the examination of complicated interactions among determinant variables, dependent variables, and moderating factors (Fornell & Cha, 1994).

4. Results

4.1. Measurement model

The measurement model was tested for each factor to ensure scale reliability and validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Gerbing & Hamilton, 1996), which specifies the posited relationships of the observed variables to the latent factors by extracting the common variance.

The internal scale consistency of all items within each construct can be measured using the composite reliability (C.R.) and Cronbach's alpha. The results indicate that the scale consistency measures of all factors are above 0.8; thus, they exceed the recommended criterion of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2010).

For convergence validity, the factor loadings and cross-loadings within each latent construct were extracted; they are presented in

Table 2
Demographic statistics (percentage).

Age		Gender		Residence		Education		Annual income (RMB)	
≤18	7.00%	Male	48.60%	Tier 1–2	31.70%	Mid-school or under	25.40%	≤30,000	38.70%
19–25	31.00%	Female	51.40%	Tier 3–4	26.80%	High school	26.80%	30,001-50,000	16.20%
26–35	26.80%			Town	14.10%	College or above	47.90%	50,001-80,000	16.90%
36–45	23.90%			Rural area	27.50%			80,000-120,000	16.90%
46–60	4.90%							≥120,001	11.30%
≥61	6.30%								

Note: Tier measures the position of a city in terms of its political, economic and social importance.

Table 3
Reliability of the measurement model.

Construct	Item	Item reliability						Mean	S.D.	t	p	Factor reliability			AVE
		Outer loadings										C.R.	Cronbach's a	rho A	
EQ	EQ1	**0.935**	0.596*	0.598**	0.662	0.568	0.576	0.932	0.018	53.443	***	0.946	0.914	0.914	0.853
	EQ2	**0.929**	0.564	0.582	0.604	0.568	0.539	0.927	0.022	42.256	***				
	EQ3	**0.906**	0.594	0.570	0.612	0.575	0.603	0.904	0.024	37.913	***				
HS	HS1	0.413	**0.814**	0.479	0.505	0.365	0.608	0.801	0.070	11.687	***	0.913	0.856	0.871	0.777
	HS2	0.651	**0.904**	0.523	0.680	0.500	0.635	0.903	0.021	42.608	***				
	HS3	0.589	**0.923**	0.557	0.624	0.533	0.661	0.922	0.017	53.709	***				
AD	AD1	0.557	0.496	**0.873**	0.422	0.526	0.453	0.873	0.025	34.919	***	0.910	0.852	0.854	0.772
	AD2	0.576	0.505	**0.861**	0.383	0.482	0.390	0.858	0.032	26.677	***				
	AD3	0.535	0.554	**0.901**	0.424	0.559	0.491	0.900	0.019	46.912	***				
PR	PR1	0.663	0.679	0.468	**0.907**	0.446	0.571	0.904	0.035	25.704	***	0.962	0.951	0.951	0.836
	PR2	0.573	0.646	0.392	**0.928**	0.410	0.610	0.923	0.027	33.826	***				
	PR3	0.652	0.584	0.430	**0.917**	0.458	0.556	0.911	0.030	30.314	***				
	PR4	0.613	0.649	0.409	**0.933**	0.478	0.688	0.927	0.030	31.270	***				
	PR5	0.597	0.591	0.432	**0.885**	0.530	0.690	0.881	0.044	20.062	***				
TR	TR1	0.579	0.513	0.569	0.523	**0.933**	0.595	0.932	0.017	55.320	***	0.951	0.923	0.923	0.866
	TR2	0.584	0.497	0.532	0.438	**0.914**	0.586	0.912	0.029	31.450	***				
	TR3	0.562	0.484	0.562	0.457	**0.945**	0.611	0.944	0.013	75.320	***				
PV	PV1	0.414	0.587	0.361	0.457	0.491	**0.851**	0.845	0.060	14.206	***	0.929	0.886	0.906	0.814
	PV2	0.639	0.684	0.514	0.677	0.609	**0.938**	0.938	0.020	46.818	***				
	PV3	0.597	0.667	0.479	0.682	0.623	**0.914**	0.913	0.024	38.303	***				

Numbers in bold are the factor loadings with significance of higher than 0.7, which is according to (Hair et al., 2010).
* p < .05.
** p < .01.
*** p < .001.

Table 3. The results indicate that the factor loading of each item on the corresponding construct was above 0.7 and highly significant at the p = .001 level. Furthermore, the factor loading of each item was higher than its cross-loadings on other constructs. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), convergent validity can be established if the average variance extracted (AVE) is higher than 0.5 for all constructs, and the results indicate consistency with this criterion.

Discriminant validity was also tested in the measurement model to examine whether individual factors can be adequately distinguished from each other. According to the criteria of Fornell and Larcker (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), the square root of the AVE for each factor should be greater than its correlation with all other factors (Table 4). The values in bold along the principal diagonal in the factor correlation matrix (Table 4) are higher than the corresponding correlations of the other factors, (i.e., the off-diagonal elements in the corresponding rows and columns), which ensures discriminant validity since these factors are related more closely to their indicator items than to the other constructs. According to the heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) criterion (Ali, Rasoolimanesh, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Ryu, 2018), which is computed as the mean of all the correlations of the indicators measuring different constructs relative to the geometric mean of the average correlations of the indicators measuring the same construct, all the HTMT values are below 0.85, as suggested by Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2015).

4.2. Structural model

For the structural model, the significance of the paths was tested. The goodness of fit of the proposed model was examined with the R^2 values of the dependent variables, the structural path coefficients, and the effect size f^2 values (Ali et al., 2018). For statistical significance, 95% bias-corrected and accelerated (BCa) bootstrap confidence intervals with 5000 bootstrap iterations were used for all tests. Overall, eleven out of thirteen hypotheses in the proposed model were supported according to the criterion of a t-score > 1.96. The details of all the path coefficients in the model are presented in Fig. 4, and a summary of the hypothesis testing is reported in Table 5. For the mediation effect, we can also multiply two path estimates, and the t-score of the indirect effect can be obtained by dividing the sample mean by the standard error. The results reveal eight paths of indirect effect, as shown in Table 6.

For the conceptual model, approximately 53.5% of the variance in TR is significantly predicted by PV (β = 0.406 and t = 4.193), AD (β = 0.287 and t = 3.786), and EQ (β = 0.230 and t = 2.147), with moderately high explanatory power (R^2 = 0.535). HS (β = −0.07 and t = 0.570) has a non-significant effect on TR. According to this result, PV (f^2 = 0.155) appears to be a moderate influential determinant of TR, and AD (f^2 = 0.096) and EQ (f^2 = 0.052) follow in descending order

Table 4
Discriminant validity of the measurement model.

Construct	AVE	Discriminant validity					
		EQ	HS	AD	PR	TR	PV
EQ	0.853	**0.924**					
HS	0.777	0.634 (0.707)	**0.882**				
AD	0.772	0.632 (0.717)	0.590 (0.690)	**0.878**			
PR	0.836	0.678 (0.727)	0.690 (0.758)	0.467 (0.518)	**0.914**		
TR	0.866	0.618 (0.673)	0.535 (0.596)	0.596 (0.671)	0.508 (0.542)	**0.931**	
PV	0.814	0.621 (0.677)	0.719 (0.824)	0.507 (0.574)	0.683 (0.730)	0.642 (0.704)	**0.902**

Note: According to the criterion of Fornell and Larcker, the diagonal represents the square root of the AVE, and the off-diagonal elements are the correlation estimates; the HTMT values are reported in the parentheses. Numbers in bold are the factor loadings with significance of higher than 0.7, which is according to (Hair et al., 2010).
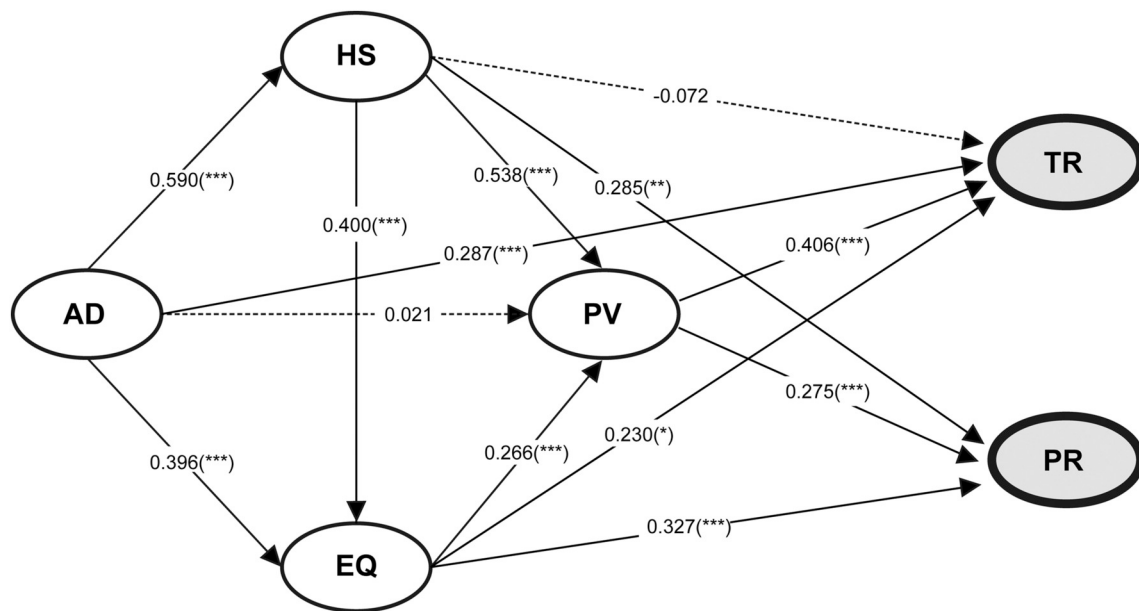
Fig. 4. Path analysis of the conceptual model.

with weakly moderate effects on TR. However, HS ($f^2 = 0.004$) has a non-significant and minimal effect on TR.

In parallel, more than 60% of the variance in PR is explained in descending order by EQ ($\beta = 0.327$ and $t = 3.317$), HS ($\beta = 0.285$ and $t = 2.798$), and PV ($\beta = 0.275$ and $t = 3.350$), with moderately high explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.606$). The path coefficients of the three direct predictors are all significant at $p = .05$. Among the three determinants of PR, EQ ($f^2 = 0.147$) has a moderate effect, and the weakly moderate impact of HS ($f^2 = 0.087$) on PR is similar to that of PV ($f^2 = 0.084$).

Additionally, approximately 56.3% of the variance in PV is accounted for by HS ($\beta = 0.538$ and $t = 5.657$) and EQ ($\beta = 0.266$ and $t = 3.084$), with moderately high explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.563$), whereas AD ($\beta = 0.021$ and $t = 0.236$) has a non-significant direct effect on PV. Compared with EQ ($f^2 = 0.081$), EQ ($f^2 = 0.356$) has a stronger effect on PV.

For EQ, almost 50.4% of the variance is accounted for by HS ($\beta = 0.400$ and $t = 3.806$) and AD ($\beta = 0.396$ and $t = 5.272$), with moderately high explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.504$), and both variables have a significantly positive effect with almost equal weight on EQ. Finally, AD ($\beta = 0.590$ and $t = 9.474$) has a significant positive effect on HS, with moderate explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.349$).

Table 6
Estimates of the indirect effects with a statistical significance of 95%

Path	Est.	Sample mean	S.E.	2.5% CI	97.5% CI
EQ → PV → PR	0.090	0.072	0.031	0.024	0.155
HS → PV → PR	0.148	0.145	0.058	0.055	0.274
HS → EQ → PR	0.160	0.130	0.057	0.032	0.243
EQ → PV → TR	0.108	0.109	0.046	0.033	0.219
HS → PV → TR	0.218	0.214	0.065	0.119	0.365
AD → HS → PV	0.318	0.312	0.071	0.181	0.446
AD → EQ → PV	0.105	0.105	0.039	0.039	0.192
AD → HS → EQ	0.236	0.235	0.069	0.114	0.369

5. Discussion and implications

The results indicate that EQ, PV, and AD are significant direct determinants of TR, and this finding is consistent with the supportive evidence of previous studies (Duman & Mattila, 2005; Forgas-Coll, Palau-Saumell, Matute, & Tárrega, 2017; Yu & Fang, 2009). In a recent study, Wu and Li (2017) indicated that AD increases the likelihood that tourists will revisit a destination. Among all the direct determinants of TR, the influence of PV is the strongest. This result is also consistent

Table 5
Estimates of the direct effects with a statistical significance of 95%.

Dependent variable	Path	Est.	Sample mean	S.E.	t	2.5% BCa	97.5% BCa	Result	f^2	R^2
PR	PV → PR	0.275	0.269	0.082	3.350(***)	0.111	0.434	S	0.084	0.606
	EQ → PR	0.327	0.322	0.099	3.317(***)	0.095	0.490	S	0.147	
	HS → PR	0.285	0.285	0.102	2.798(**)	0.108	0.500	S	0.087	
TR	EQ → TR	0.230	0.215	0.107	2.147(*)	0.048	0.450	S	0.052	0.535
	HS → TR	−0.072	−0.059	0.127	0.570	−0.333	0.156	R	0.004	
	AD → TR	0.287	0.291	0.076	3.786(***)	0.143	0.418	S	0.096	
	PV → TR	0.406	0.404	0.097	4.193(***)	0.227	0.598	S	0.155	
PV	EQ → PV	0.266	0.267	0.086	3.084(***)	0.085	0.421	S	0.081	0.563
	HS → PV	0.538	0.528	0.095	5.657(***)	0.339	0.698	S	0.356	
	AD → PV	0.021	0.021	0.091	0.236	−0.142	0.210	R	0.001	
EQ	HS → EQ	0.400	0.396	0.105	3.806(***)	0.174	0.560	S	0.210	0.504
	AD → EQ	0.396	0.393	0.075	5.272(***)	0.253	0.539	S	0.205	
HS	AD → HS	0.590	0.587	0.062	9.474(***)	0.455	0.694	S	0.535	0.349

* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.
*** $p < .001$.

with the proposals by Cronin et al. (2000), Oh (2000) and Forgas-Coll et al. (2017). Moreover, this finding has critical implications for the development of village tourism, and greater efforts can be made to increase tourists' understanding of the PV of the assets in historic villages. Our findings showed that the effect of AD on TR is greater than that of EQ, and this result similarly agrees with the evidence shown by Yu and Fang (2009). It is possible that in these villages, tourists are more sensitive to the lower level of AD compared with EQ. Thus far, the low level of AD has presented obstacles to the tourism development of historic villages even though they have good touristic potential. Therefore, as an important issue for local governments when formulating sustainable tourism strategies, the obvious gap in low managerial quality must be filled in a comprehensive manner to ensure EQ, which, in turn, leads to PV and TR.

Additionally, our findings show an indirect effect of the authenticity of historical properties on TR via the mediating effect of PV and EQ. In particular, the importance of PV should be emphasized since it simultaneously mediates the effect of HS and EQ on TR. This finding reveals that the authenticity of historical properties might not necessarily function how we anticipated in the context of rural tourism in China. Nevertheless, academics have shown increasing tendencies to highlight the direct effect of historical attributes, which are expected to automatically contribute to rural tourism and entice tourists to visit by helping them connect with the past and form good memories (Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Ram, Björk, & Weidenfeld, 2016; Yuksel, Yuksel, & Bilim, 2010). Given that authenticity that delivers rich meaning to a destination might help enhance the attractiveness of a historic village and promote its brand, there is still the long-term need to ensure that the authenticity of a historic village can be fully accepted by tourists through effective educational methods and immersive instructive activities pertaining to the local culture.

Additionally, the results of this study indicate that both HS and EQ have significant direct effects on PV. This result is consistent with previous studies, indicating that tourists' appreciation of rural tourism can be enhanced by improving EQ, preserving historical assets, and recognizing the embedded cultural connotations (De Keyser & Lariviere, 2014; Hutchinson et al., 2009; Loureiro & González, 2008; Wu et al., 2017). This finding also agrees with the contention that historical and authentic cultural attributes can easily intensify tourists' common understanding of historic villages through the value identification effect because in the East Asian context, collectivism is widespread and because historic villages are excellent carriers reflecting this persistent ideology in China (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2004). Interestingly, the effect HS on PV is stronger than the effect of EQ. In contrast, AD has a non-significant and negligible effect on PV, which implies that endogenous quality-based attributes in historic villages (e.g., HS and EQ) still play an essential role in value identification. Maintaining the integrity and authenticity of these endogenous qualities is fundamental to realize sustainable rural tourism; furthermore, excavating and cultivating these exogenous values can increase the long-term benefits. If local developers create fake antique buildings to indulge tourists or, even worse, carry out large-scale demolition projects in historic villages for so-called "tourism infrastructure improvement" to pursue short-term benefits, these actions will be harmful and short sighted. To achieve sustainable rural tourism, local authorities should issue policies to prevent such rapid and harmful developments. It is necessary for local authorities to collaborate with professional institutions to supervise development with appropriate planning programmes. However, this does not mean that endogenous qualities should be neglected. For instance, the results showed that AD significantly affects HS, EQ, and TR. In addition to its direct effect, AD showed a significant indirect effect on TR via the mediation effect of EQ. At the same time, AD indirectly affected PV via the mediation effect of HS and EQ. AD also had an indirect effect on EQ via the mediation effect of HS. These findings show that AD can contribute to rural tourism as an exogenous variable.

The findings also revealed that HS, PV, and EQ all have a significant direct effect on PR. In particular, PV was ultimately a critical mediator of EQ and HS, and in turn, their indirect effects influence PR. The results show that people's PR can be consciously mobilized by PV and EQ. Compared with EQ, the effect of the historical value of authenticity relies on long-term immersion with education and training, which are in short supply in most historic villages. This finding is consistent with the argument that managerial issues are beneficial in delivering better EQ for entrepreneurial activities in rural tourism (Di Betta & Amenta, 2013). The findings also reinforce our confidence in highlighting the validity of cultural and value-oriented strategies not only for the purpose of attracting more tourists but also for PR formation and sustainable tourism.

6. Conclusion and future research avenues

This research contributes to the theory of tourist behaviours in the historic village context. The proposed model consisted of HS, EQ, AD, and PV to interpret TR and PR with respect to historic village tourism. In general, the hypotheses in this research were mostly supported, with acceptable values of explanatory power for the predictions. These results reinforce the contribution of PV as a mediator of the effect of various quality-based or experience-oriented factors (e.g., HS, AD, and EQ) on the desired outcome measures (e.g., TR and PR) in the context of rural tourism. This study conceptually expanded the concept of PV by including HS, AD, and EQ. The results showed that the PV of historic villages is significantly affected by HS and EQ and that AD has a non-significant direct effect on PV and affects tourists' perceptions of HS. As an important property of historic villages, HS clearly plays an indirect role in influencing TR via the mediation of PV. Moreover, EQ, AD, and PV were validated as significant predictors of TR, whereas EQ, HS, and PV were significant predictors of PR. The results revealed eight statistically significant paths of indirect effects between these variables.

Regarding managerial implications, as our findings confirm, the importance of the different factors in tourists' behaviours will allow tourism institutions and local authorities to have a better understanding of how these factors affect tourists' TR, which can then be used in planning and directing their own future marketing strategies, policies, and plans. Recognizing these factors and their importance should enable managers to develop more sophisticated positioning strategies. For instance, the results of this research show that the important effect of HS on tourists' TR is affectively oriented by PV. This finding has substantial implications for realizing sustainable rural tourism through the formulation of appropriate management strategies for maintaining integrity and authenticity.

Further work is still needed to mitigate some of the possible limitations of this study. First, most ordinary historic villages receive little attention from tourists, which resulted in a relatively small sample size in the case study presented. Therefore, generalizing these findings to tourists' TR should be done cautiously. In future studies, we should investigate more similar villages and enlarge the sample size to validate the proposed model with more robust results. Second, because our study was conducted based on a Chinese case and in a relevant Chinese cultural context, there is a need to test more cases to further validate the proposed model in different contexts. Comparisons based on more cases in other countries can be attempted to test the cross-cultural connotations in a broader background. Moreover, other independent variables should be incorporated to enhance the proposed model and its comprehensiveness and explanatory power.

Appendix A. Item wording of the described factors

Factors		Item wording
Historical Authenticity (HS)	HS 1	The built environment of this village is an authentic portrayal of ancient life and customs.
	HS 2	This village presents local history and culture very well.
	HS 3	This village arouses feelings of authentic history and culture.
Experience Quality (EQ)	EQ 1	I have felt at ease and relaxed during the visit.
	EQ 2	I have had fun while visiting this village.
	EQ 3	Visiting such a historic village has been a good and instructive learning experience.
Perceived Value (PV)	PV 1	In my opinion, this village is very important.
	PV 2	The village has a high overall value.
	PV 3	Compared with the expenses, I received reasonable quality travelling to this village.
Administrative Quality (AD)	AD 1	This village is well managed by the local people.
	AD 2	I can feel that the administration in this village is good.
	AD 3	In general, this village can provide good service.
Travel Intention (TR)	TR 1	I intend to travel to such a place.
	TR 2	I will revisit this village or a similar place.
	TR 3	I will encourage friends and relatives to travel to such a place.
Preservation Attitude (PR)	PR 1	It is necessary to preserve the historical buildings in this village.
	PR 2	It is necessary to preserve the overall structure of this village.
	PR 3	It is necessary to protect the surrounding environment.
	PR 4	It is necessary to protect the local history and culture of this village.
	PR 5	It is necessary to protect the lifestyle and customs.

Note: Items asked on 7-point Likert scales ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

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