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Mediating effects of tourism resource-based view and tourist value co-creation between cultural heritage conservation and tourism development towards tourist experience quality

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to study the effect of cultural heritage conservation (CHC) and tourism development (TD) on tourist experience quality (TEQ), with cultural and tourism resource-based view (C&T RBV) and tourist value co-creation (TVC) as mediators. A quantitative research methodology was used: 900 samples were collected from tourists at cultural heritage sites, and data were analyzed using structural equation modeling. The findings show that both CHC and TD have a direct effect on TEQ. The direct effect of CHC on TEQ indicates that legal and policy support is most effective in improving TEQ. The direct effect of TD on TEQ is achieved by strengthening infrastructure development and tourism marketing. C&T RBV and TVC are mediators between CHC and TEQ, as well as TD and TEQ, with 6 observed variables. In conclusion, this research confirms that CHC and TD have a direct effect on TEQ, and that C&T RBV and TVC are significant mediators. The analysis results provide practical implications and guidance on the optimization of cultural heritage site management strategies, innovation of TD models, and promotion of tourist TVC. This research offers a new perspective for the development of cultural heritage tourism while providing guidance for heritage site management, optimization of TD models, and tourist TVC.

Keywords: Cultural heritage conservation, Resource-based view, Sustainable heritage tourism, Tourism development, Tourist experience quality, Tourist satisfaction, Value co-creation.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the global heritage tourism market has shown significant growth, with research focusing on cultural heritage value assessment, conservation and development models, and tourist experiences. Since the World Heritage Convention in 1972, cultural heritage conservation (CHC) has gained international attention. The Chinese government has consistently recognized the importance of CHC. As President Xi Jinping emphasized in May 2022, there is a need to promote the protection and utilization of cultural relics and heritage while exploring their multiple values and spreading cultural symbols and products that reflect the essence of Chinese culture and spirit [1]. Later, the China Cultural Tourism Industry Panorama Report of 2023 reveals that the global cultural tourism market accounts for 40% of the total tourism industry, with cultural tourism growing at an annual rate of 15%. In 2023, domestic tourism reached 826 million visitors, generating over 753.4 billion RMB in revenue, underscoring the robust growth of cultural heritage tourism in China. Additionally, in 2023, UNESCO described cultural heritage as both tangible and intangible assets that hold significant historical, artistic, scientific, cultural, and social value. The rapid growth of cultural heritage tourism has increased economic revenue and stimulated related industries. In 2023, users engaged in intangible cultural heritage consumption reached 249 million, with a 12% increase from 2022. The average expenditure on intangible cultural heritage products rose from 349 RMB to 430 RMB, marking a 23% annual growth [2].

A range of research on CHC has been conducted from various perspectives and disciplines to enhance tourist experiences, satisfaction, and the intention to revisit by using both internal and external factors. The external factors include information quality and system design, and the internal factors include perceived authenticity and emotional healing. Poria et al. [3] proposed that satisfaction in heritage tourism depends on authentic and memorable experiences. Cho et al. [4] conducted research using Attention Restoration Theory and found that emotional healing significantly affects tourist satisfaction and revisit intentions. According to Tom Dieck and Jung [5], information and system quality are key factors that influence tourists' attitudes and behaviors. To further explore the quality of tourist experiences, scholars have integrated various disciplines. Chung et al. [6] suggested that information presentation is dependent on enriched content and enhanced aesthetic quality. Bec et al. [7] discussed how tourist satisfaction was significantly improved by augmented reality and virtual reality technologies that enhance heritage conservation and visitor experiences. For improving satisfaction, Tsai [8] discussed the significance of user engagement and perceived authenticity.

In existing research, CHC and tourism development have been emphasized as important for enhancing the quality of the tourist experience. In many studies, Chen and Chen [9], Wu and Li [10], Domínguez-Quintero et al. [11] and Genc and Gulertekin Genc [12] perceived that authenticity has been found to significantly influence tourist satisfaction and loyalty. Yang, et al. [13] found that tourists' cultural identity and emotional attachment impact their experiences and intentions to revisit. Augmented reality has been used to enhance the quality of the visitor experience [14, 15]. The sustainable development of heritage tourism depends on a balance between conservation and the economic, social, and environmental benefits. Capecchi, et al. [16] studied heritage tourism for urban revitalization with an emphasis on the importance of cultural policies and strategic management. However, there is a research gap concerning how to balance cultural heritage conservation (CHC) and tourism development strategies and their specific influence on tourist experience quality [17].

Feng and Ma [18] discussed how heritage tourism has been shifted from a museum-centered model to a diversified, integrated approach focused on visitor participation and interactivity. This model improves tourist experience quality (TEQ) while supporting heritage conservation and transmission. Perceptions of cultural heritage tourism experiences are also influenced by personal characteristics and behavioral traits [12, 19-22]. However, in previous studies, Kostakis and Lolos [23] and Cerisola and Panzera [24] have only made limited efforts have been made to explain how CHC and tourism development (TD) influence TEQ.

Given these research gaps, a research framework Figure 1 was developed to examine tourist experience quality at cultural heritage sites. This study explores ways to improve tourist experience quality by enhancing authenticity, optimizing experience quality, providing institutional support, and leveraging technological advancements. By including cultural and tourism resource-based view (C&T RBV) and tourist value co-creation (TVC) as mediating factors, this research contributes to both theoretical advancements and practical applications in heritage tourism management.

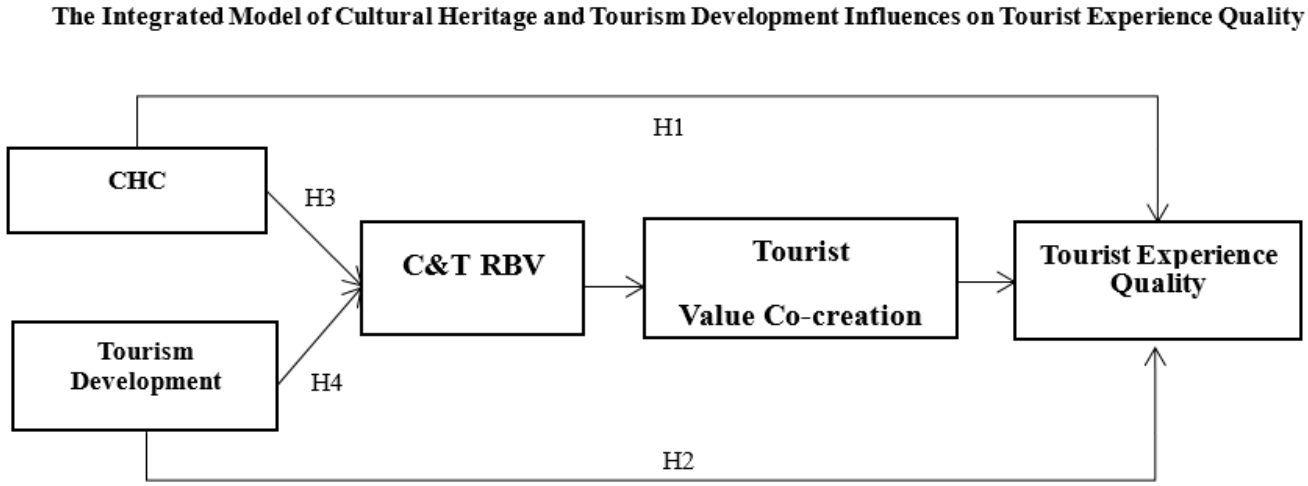

Figure 1.
Proposed research framework.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Tourist Experience Quality

Wang and Li [25] defined experience quality as the consumers' overall perception and evaluation of a product or service during the consumption process. Zeithaml et al. [26] defined tourist experience quality (TEQ) as the tourists' comprehensive assessment of tourism products and services, encompassing their overall perception, emotional response, and satisfaction throughout the travel experience. TEQ includes the tourist's perception of overall value when evaluating tourism products or services [27]. Value perception includes not only pricing and service quality but also the uniqueness of the tourism experience. The perceived value significantly influences the tourist's satisfaction and behavioral intentions. TEQ provides a comprehensive assessment of tourists' evaluations of destinations, services, and overall experiences, directly affecting their satisfaction and loyalty.

Ratnasari et al. [28] and Alsiehemy [29] studied the emotional aspects of tourism, focusing on positive emotions (e.g., comfort and pleasure) in shaping the tourist's intentions and satisfaction. Harfst et al. [30] point out from an analytical perspective that enhancing TEQ can effectively address the inherent tensions between cultural heritage conservation and tourism development. Campos et al. [31] highlight the importance of tourist engagement in experience co-creation, suggesting that active participation leads to a more enriching and fulfilling tourism experience. Kesgin et al. [32] discussed that food and dining experiences make a significant contribution to tourists' overall quality of life from the perspective of culinary tourism and further enrich the conceptual scope of TEQ.

Existing research leaves several gaps in the literature. For instance, Ratnasari et al. [28] noted that the effect of emotional experiences on tourists' behavioral intentions has not been sufficiently explored in some contexts. Alsiehemy [29] Emphasizing the relationship between service quality and sustainable tourism, both of which demonstrate promising directions for future research. These gaps suggest that the conceptualization of TEQ requires further refinement and expansion. Through theoretical analysis and empirical research, scholars have identified perceived value, emotional experience, service quality, experience co-creation, destination attributes, tourist engagement, perceived risk, and social interaction as potential factors of TEQ. These factors affect tourist satisfaction and loyalty and play an important role in the long-term competitiveness and sustainable development of tourism destinations.

2.2. Cultural Heritage Conservation, Tourist Experience Quality

CHC creates authentic and immersive experiences for tourists by preserving historical sites and artifacts [9, 31, 33]. It is defined as a multifaceted effort encompassing material conservation, socio-cultural impacts, and legal and policy support. These dimensions not only directly affect the quality of the tourist experience but also indirectly enhance overall tourist satisfaction and loyalty through various mechanisms within heritage tourism destinations. Moreover, cultural heritage conservation (CHC) involves a comprehensive process of preserving both tangible and intangible heritage, ranging from artistic works to urban landscapes, which is directly related to systematic research and understanding of cultural heritage [34, 35]. Previous studies have demonstrated that CHC influences the quality of the tourist experience [36]. Material conservation efforts, such as preserving historical sites, monuments, and artifacts, enhance the authenticity and aesthetic appeal of destinations, thereby shaping the overall tourist experience [37]. Additionally, CHC fosters cultural transmission and innovation, contributing to the sustainable development of heritage tourism destinations [38]. Legal and policy support also plays a crucial role in CHC by establishing regulations and frameworks to protect heritage sites, promoting sustainable tourism practices, and ensuring the long-term preservation of cultural heritage, ultimately enhancing the quality of the tourist experience [39, 40]. Based on these findings, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H_1: Cultural Heritage Conservation has an effect on Tourist Experience Quality.

2.3. Tourism Development, Tourist Experience Quality

Tourism development is the process of establishing and maintaining a tourism industry in a particular location. Tourism development factors have been analyzed in a variety of studies. For instance, Shea [41] demonstrated the direct impact of infrastructure and cultural resources on the tourist experience by an examination of tourism experiences in Tokyo. Similarly, Zheng et al. [42] revealed through empirical research and found the critical role of tourism innovation and sustainable development in enhancing destination attractiveness. The influence of sustainability factors on tourist experiences from the aspect of environmental psychology was studied by [43]. Several researchers Chen et al. [44], Hasan et al. [45], Pai et al. [46] and Shin and Jeong [47] argued that cultural heritage tourism destinations can be improved in traditional factors such as infrastructure and service quality. Pai et al. [46] and Shin and Jeong [47] discussed multiple dimensions (cultural resource development, policy support, and technological innovation) that are involved in the development of cultural heritage tourism products. Chang, et al. [48] argued that differentiating cultural heritage tourism from other tourism products within a region is essential since these TD strategies are very appealing to cultural tourists. Allameh et al. [49] analyzed the relationships between the quality of sports tourism activities, destination image, perceived value, tourist satisfaction, and destination loyalty through a structural equation model and confirmed the critical role of TD factors in enhancing the quality of tourist experiences. Based on these studies, it can be hypothesized that TD influences TEQ in various ways that enhance tourist satisfaction and loyalty, including improving service quality, developing infrastructure, offering creative products and services, and applying smart technologies. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H_2: Tourism Development has an effect on Tourist Experience Quality.

2.4. Mediating Roles of C&T RBV, Tourist Value Co-Creation

C&T RBV focuses on the effective use and management of cultural and tourism resources. The co-creation of value theory describes the interactive process between consumers and businesses. The theory emphasizes the significant role of consumers in experiences, personalization, and interaction that can improve customer satisfaction and loyalty. Early studies show that C&T RBV and TVC are key factors that influence TEQ Brent et al. [50] and Hatipoglu et al. [51]. Kruesi and Bazelmans [52] describes that C&T RBV focuses on how a tourist destination's competitiveness and the quality of experiences depend on the uniqueness of its cultural and tourism resources, their efficient development, and sustainable management. TVC is the process in which tourists participate in the design, development, and experience of tourism products, collaboratively creating value with tourism service providers [53]. The co-creation process enhances tourists' engagement and personalized experiences and also significantly improves their satisfaction and loyalty [54]. For example, using interactive experiences and feedback, tourists participate more fully in tourism activities, leading to better experiences [55]. Therefore, using C&T RBV and TVC as mediating variables provides a more complete explanation of the ways through which CHC and TD factors influence TEQ. This approach furthers the application of resource-based theory in tourism and value co-creation theory while offering new perspectives on the sustainable development of tourist destinations. Based on the above research foundations, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H_3: C&T RBV and TVC mediate between Cultural Heritage Conservation and Tourist Experience Quality.

H_4: C&T RBV and TVC mediate between Tourist Development and Tourist Experience Quality.

Based on the literature review, the research model for this study demonstrates the connection among observed and latent variables as shown in Figure 2.

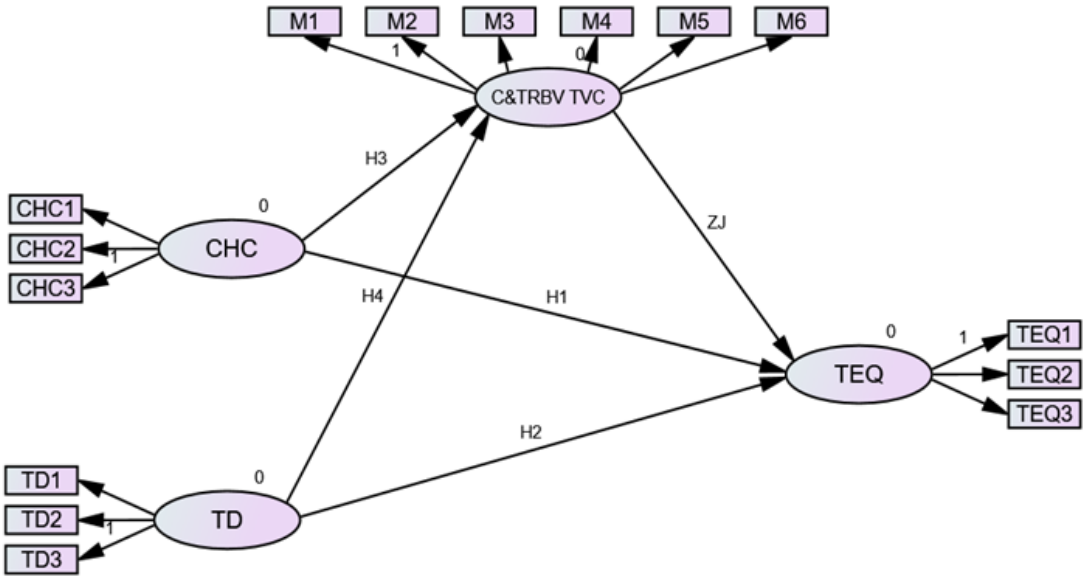

Figure 2.
The research model.

2.5. Research Objectives and Questions

With the significant growth in both tourism revenue and visitor numbers, Wanshan Ancient Town is facing several challenges in balancing Cultural Heritage Conservation (CHC) and Tourism Development (TD). There is a notable gap between the high demand from tourists for quality cultural experiences and the current capacity of tourism services to meet those expectations. This study suggests that improving the quality of the tourist experience requires attention to the Cultural & Tourism Resource-Based View (C&T RBV), which focuses on the effective management and utilization of cultural and tourism resources, as well as the Theory of Value Co-Creation (TVC), which emphasizes the interactive process between consumers and businesses. Two main research questions were postulated: (1) How do CHC and TD affect TEQ? (2) How do CHC and TD relate to TEQ through the mediating role of C&T RBV and TVC?

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Sampling Procedure

Data were collected from tourists who visited Zhusha Ancient Town, located in Wanshan District, Tongren City, Guizhou Province, China. Zhusha Ancient Town is recognized as a National Historic and Cultural Town and an Industrial Tourism Demonstration Base. It was also included on UNESCO's Tentative World Heritage List in 2022. Data collection was conducted between August and October 2024, using both online and onsite surveys. The sample size was determined based on the guidelines from Hair et al. [56] which recommends a sample-to-variable ratio of 1:20. With 45 observed variables in this study, the required sample size was 900 samples. A total of 1,138 surveys were collected, of which 900 valid responses were retained after excluding 238 incomplete questionnaires, resulting in a response rate of 79.09%.

Among the 900 respondents, the sample was evenly split between males and females, each accounting for 50.0%. Half of the respondents were between the ages of 20 and 30, followed by 28.0% aged 31 to 45, and 34.4% between 46 and 60. Additionally, 65.2% of respondents held a bachelor's degree or diploma. Regarding occupations, 20% were educators, 18% were healthcare professionals, 15% worked in cultural and artistic fields, and 12% were employed in business or finance.

3.2. Measurement

All instruments were adapted from prior studies. CHC followed Zatori et al. [57] and Abdurahiman et al. [58] comprising physical conservation, sociocultural impact, and legal/policy support. TD was based on Rahmafitria et al. [59] and Mak et al. [60], including infrastructure development, tourism marketing, and community involvement. TEQ drew from Parasuraman et al. [61], Chen and Chen [9] and Gallarza et al. [62] covering perceived value, satisfaction, and loyalty. C&T RBV was informed by Barney [63] and Schofield et al. [64], encompassing resource efficiency, conservation, and innovation. TVC was measured per Prebensen et al. [65] through activities, engagement, and interactive experience. All measurement items for each construct in this section were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale as strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). Each respondent took approximately 10 minutes to complete the survey. This study was approved by the ethical review board of Mahachulalongkorn-rajavidyalaya University, certification number R.379/2024.

All questions were evaluated for content validity by five qualified experts specializing in cultural heritage conservation, tourism, service management, marketing research, and psychology/behavioral economics. Based on their feedback, each item in the research instrument achieved an IOC value greater than 0.80, indicating strong alignment with the intended objectives and meeting the acceptable threshold recommended by Rovinelli and Hambleton [66]. A pilot study involving 30 participants was conducted to assess internal consistency reliability. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.837 to 0.878, exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.60, as suggested by Bonett and Wright [67].

3.3. Convergent Validity Analysis

CFA was used to reveal the factor loadings of the four constructs (CHC, TD, TEQ, C&T RVB, TVC) that underpin the study and to assess the model fit. The model adequacy was assessed by the fit indices suggested by Kline [68]. In any data analysis, the convergent validity of CFA results should be supported by item reliability, construct reliability, and the average variance extracted [9]. The chi-square test is often very sensitive to sample size; therefore, c^2/df was used as an alternative in the current study. Given the sensitivity of the chi-square test to sample size, the c^2/df ratio was utilized as a more suitable measure in this study.

Table 1 demonstrates that the estimated construct reliability (CR) ranges from 0.796 to 0.831, exceeding the critical threshold of 0.7, indicating satisfactory reliability. The average variance extracted (AVE) values range between 0.567 and 0.621, surpassing the recommended threshold of 0.5. These results indicate that the measurement model exhibits good convergent validity. Therefore, the hypothesized measurement model is reliable and meaningful for testing the structural relationships between constructs. The results in Table 1 show that all standardized factor loadings (λ) fall within the range of 0.50 to 0.95, confirming that the study achieves convergent validity [56]. Furthermore, all critical ratios (CR) exceed 1.96 at a significance level of $p < 0.001$, further substantiating the model's convergent validity. Cronbach's α values for all constructs exceed 0.7, demonstrating good internal consistency. Additionally, the AVE values for all constructs, as presented in Table 1, are greater than 0.5, further supporting the study's convergent validity.

4. Results

4.1. Data Analysis and Results

Analysis of the structural equation, as shown in Figure 3, revealed that the model influences of perception model with CHC, TD, C&T, RBV, TVC, and TEQ congruent with the empirical evidence. The overall model indicates that $\chi^2 = 141.246$, $df = 85$, $p = 0.000$. Technically, the p-value should be greater than 0.05 or statistically not significant to indicate that the

model fits the empirical data. Therefore, the $\chi^2/df < 5$ was used as a common decision rule for an acceptable overall model fit. The standardized $\chi^2 = 1.662$ (e.g., 141.246/85), indicating that the fit is acceptable. In addition, other goodness-of-fit indicators include RMSEA = 0.027 GFI = 0.953, AGFI = 0.942, IFI = 0.981, TLI = 0.976, and CFI = 0.980. Comparison of these data with the corresponding cut-offs shown in Table 1, the hypothetical model fits well with the empirical data. In the total model, the estimates of the structural coefficients provide a basis for testing the proposed hypotheses.

Table 2 provides the results for testing hypotheses and the 4 hypotheses are supported. In the analysis of hypothesis 1, CHC has an effect on TEQ with a path coefficient = 0.275, a critical ratio = 5.334 ***, $p < 0.001$, while CHC with three observed variables (CHC1, CHC2 and CHC3) have an effect on TEQ. In particular, CHC3, which is legal and policy support, has the highest factor loading value of 0.698, suggesting that it has the strongest explanatory power for CHC. At the same time, CHC3 also had the highest build reliability (CR) value of 0.822, demonstrating the best internal consistency. Therefore, CHC3 would be particularly strengthened to enhance TEQ.

The analysis of hypothesis 2, TD has an effect on TEQ with a path coefficient of 0.336, a critical ratio of 6.389, ***, $p < 0.001$, while TD with three observed variables (TD1, TD2, and TD3) has an effect on TEQ. In particular, among the three observed variables of TD, TD1 (which is infrastructure development) has a factor loading value of 0.670, TD2 (which is tourism marketing) has a factor loading value of 0.660, and both of the construction reliability values of 0.831 and 0.822 are relatively high. It demonstrates that the construction reliability (CR) for infrastructure development (TD1) and tourism marketing (TD2) is slightly higher than that of local community participation (TD3).

In the analysis of Hypothesis 3, the indirect effect of CHC on TEQ through C&T RBV and TVC was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.077$, CR = 2.19, $p = 0.001$), accounting for 11% of the total effect as shown in Table 2 and Table 3. This finding suggests that efforts in cultural heritage conservation enhance tourist experiences partially through the value of resources-based view and co-creation in the cultural and tourism sectors.

Similarly, Hypothesis 4 is supported by a significant indirect path from TD to TEQ via C&T RBV and TVC ($\beta = 0.083$, CR = 2.2, $p = 0.001$), representing 12% of the total effect as shown in Table 2 and Table 3. This indicates that the impact of tourism development on the quality of tourist experiences is, in part, mediated by strategic tourism resource management and value co-creation activities. The results showed that the mediator variable has 6 observed variables, including effective measures for the efficient use of resources, resource protection and conservation, resource development and innovation, co-creation activities, engagement, interactive experience, and feedback mechanisms, with the value of $\lambda > 0.7$, AVE > 0.5, CR > 0.7. It demonstrates that each dimension is reliable and valid, with a significant effect on the underlying variable C&T RVB, TVC (which was later changed to RBVCO).

Overall, these findings highlight the critical mediating role of C&T RBV and TVC, reinforcing the importance of integrated, resource-based, and co-creative approaches in enhancing tourist experiences through heritage and development initiatives.

4.2. Path Coefficients and Predictive Ability

When examining the total effect of CHC and TD on TEQ, in terms of direct and indirect effects, all hypotheses were supported. The path analysis reveals that both CHC and TD have significant direct and indirect effects on TEQ, confirming the overall importance of these constructs in shaping tourist perceptions and satisfaction, as shown in Table 2 and Table 3. The direct path from CHC to TEQ is significant ($\beta = 0.231$, $p = 0.001$), and the total effect increases to 0.308 when accounting for mediation, indicating a partial mediation by C&T RBV and TVC (indirect effect = 0.077). Similarly, TD exhibits a strong direct effect on TEQ ($\beta = 0.308$, $p = 0.001$), and a higher total effect of 0.391 when the mediating influence is considered (indirect effect = 0.083), again suggesting partial mediation.

The mediating role of C&T RBV and TVC is statistically significant for both CHC and TD, although the effect sizes of the indirect paths are relatively modest (11% and 12% of total effects, respectively). This suggests that while direct investment in heritage and tourism development is crucial, strategic resource utilization and value co-creation activities amplify their impact on tourist experience quality.

In summary, the path model supports a partially mediated framework, where CHC and TD enhance TEQ both directly and through the mediating mechanisms of resource-based strategies and value co-creation in the tourism sector.

Table 1.
Constructs, items, standardized factor loadings (λ) critical ratios (CR), and Cronbach alpha.

Construct	Items	Mean	SD	λ		Cronbach Alpha	Critical ratios (CR)		Average variance extracted (AVE)	Construct reliability（CR）
				Question	Observable variable		Question	Observable variable		
CHC1: Physical Conservation	CHC1.1	3.24	0.96	0.806	0.665	0.8	-	14.599 ***	0.582	0.806
	CHC1.2			0.746			20.89***			
	CHC1.3			0.734			21.254***			
CHC2: Socio-cultural Impact	CHC2.1	3.29	0.98	0.805	0.685	0.806	-	14.367 ***	0.589	0.811
	CHC2.2			0.74			22.245***			
	CHC2.3			0.756			22.069***			
CHC3: Legal and Policy Support	CHC3.1	3.25	1.01	0.837	0.698	0.816	-	-	0.607	0.822
	CHC3.2			0.752			21.902***			
	CHC3.3			0.745			23.68***			
TD1: Infrastructure Development	TD1.1	3.22	1.03	0.823	0.67	0.826	-	14.117 ***	0.621	0.831
	TD1.2			0.734			21.613***			
	TD1.3			0.806			22.265***			
TD2: Tourism Marketing	TD2.1	3.26	1.01	0.831	0.66	0.816	-	13.992 ***	0.607	0.822
	TD2.2			0.738			19.511***			
	TD2.3			0.765			20.101***			
TD3: Local Community Involvement	TD3.1	3.35	0.94	0.832	0.686	0.785	21.034***	-		
	TD3.2			0.697			20.368***		0.567	0.796
	TD3.3			0.723			-			
TEQ1: Perceived Value	TEQ1.1	3.28	0.98	0.807	0.605	0.806	21.697***	-	0.589	0.811
	TEQ1.2			0.764			21.621***			
	TEQ1.3			0.73			-			
TEQ2: Satisfaction	TEQ2.1	3.27	0.99	0.868	0.64	0.809	20.509***	12.903 ***	0.606	0.821
	TEQ2.2			0.731			21.196***			
	TEQ2.3			0.728			21.556***			
TEQ3: Loyalty	TEQ3.1	3.3	0.97	0.823	0.661	0.803	20.634***	13.029 ***	0.587	0.81
	TEQ3.2			0.721			-			
	TEQ3.3			0.751			19.647***			
M1: Efficient Use of Resources	M1.1	3.29	1.01	0.841	0.549	0.818	18.97***	-	0.611	0.825
	M1.2			0.76			-			
	M1.3			0.741			22.571***			
M2: Resource Protection and Conservation	M2.1	3.28	0.98	0.817	0.584	0.795	21.027***	12.423 ***	0.577	0.803
	M2.2			0.748			-			
	M2.3			0.709			20.087***			
M3: Resource Development and Innovation	M3.1	3.3	1.02	0.827	0.584	0.821	19.599***	12.240 ***	0.613	0.826
	M3.2			0.738			-			

	M3.3			0.782			20.477***			
CV1: Co-creation Activities	CV1.1	3.3	0.97	0.795	0.637	0.799	19.357***	13.101 ***	0.578	0.804
	CV1.2			0.758			-			
	CV1.3			0.726			19.733***			
CV2: Engagement	CV2.1	3.31	0.98	0.837	0.575	0.803	19.435***	12.083 ***	0.588	0.81
	CV2.2			0.734			-			
	CV2.3			0.725			-			
CV3: Interactive Experience and Feedback Mechanism	CV3.1	3.34	0.96	0.767	0.587	0.796	20.89***	12.316 ***	0.57	0.799
	CV3.2			0.746			21.254***			

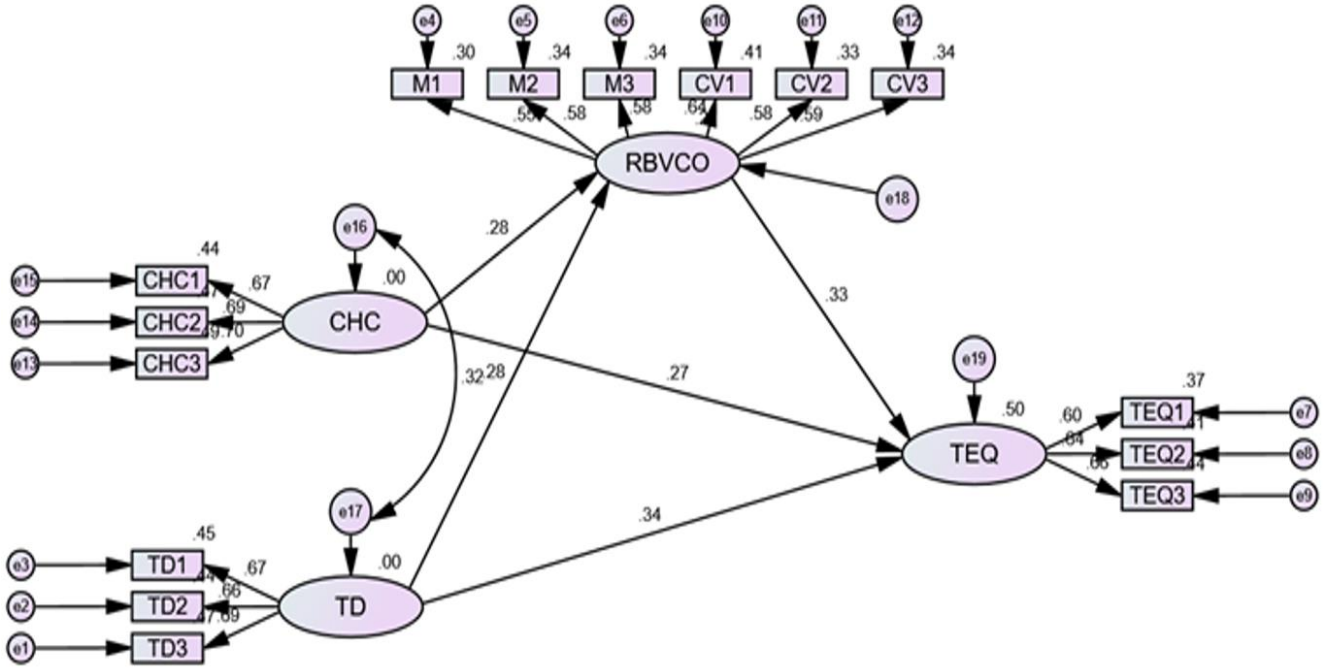

Figure 3.
The results of testing the hypothetical model. Note: Chi-square $\chi^2 = 141.246$ (df = 85, p = 0.000), Q = 1.662, RMSEA = 0.027 GFI = 0.953, AGFI = 0.942, IFI = 0.981, TLI = 0.976, and CFI = 0.980, - CR is fixed; *** p < 0.001. ; a: path coefficient, b: critical ratio, c: squared multiple correlation (The results only show the significant relationships identified.).

Table 2.
Hypothesis testing results.

Hypotheses	Path	Hypothesis content	Coefficients	SE	CR	Remark
H1	CHC→ TEQ.	CHC has an effect on TEQ.	0.275	0.043	5.334***	Supported
H2	TD →TEQ.	TD Factors has an effect on TEQ.	0.336	0.048	6.389***	Supported
H3	CHC→C&T RBV→TEQ	C&T RBV and TVC is a Mediators Variable between CHC and TEQ.	0.077	0.0352	2.19***	Partial mediation
H4	TD→C&T RBV→TEQ	C&T RBV and TVC is a Mediators Variable between TD Factors on TEQ.	0.083	0.0377	2.2***	Partial mediation

Note: $\chi^2(84, 0.238) = 92.884$, $\chi^2/df = 1.106$, RMSEA = 0.011, GFI = 0.925, AGFI = 0.900, NFI = 0.969, IFI = 0.997, TLI = 0.996, CFI = 0.997.

Table 3.
Direct, indirect and total effects of relationships.

Hypotheses	Path	Direct	Indirect	Total	P	Effect ratio
H1	CHC→ TEQ.	0.231	0.077	0.308	0.001	33%
H2	TD →TEQ.	0.308	0.083	0.391	0.001	44%
H3	CHC→C&T RBV→TEQ	-	0.077	0.077	0.001	11%
H4	TD→C&T RBV→TEQ	-	0.083	0.083	0.001	12%

Note: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01.

5. Discussions and Conclusion

The analysis results found that cultural heritage conservation and tourism development have both direct effect and indirect effect on tourist experience quality which comply with several previous researches [9, 27, 31, 36, 69, 70]. The results from these studies show that CHC and TD not only directly affect TEQ, but also indirectly affect through complex mediation processes, providing theoretical support for the sustainable development of heritage tourism. This finding is consistent with Wendt et al. [71] and Zhang et al. [40] research on the impact of infrastructure on the travel experience and highlights the importance of service quality to improve visitor satisfaction and loyalty [45]. This study provides practical guidance for heritage site managers to improve the quality of the tourist experience and promote the sustainable development of the heritage tourism field.

5.1. Contribution to Theoretic Development

The interaction between cultural heritage conservation and tourism development and its effect on tourist experience quality has become a critical issue in contemporary tourism research. With the rapid growth of the global cultural heritage tourism market, how to achieve sustainable tourism development while preserving cultural heritage has become a focal point

of attention in both academia and practice. This study constructs a theoretical framework to examine the effect of cultural heritage conservation and tourism development on tourist experience quality, introducing RBVCO, which is cultural heritage and tourism resource-based view, and tourist value co-creation as mediating variables, thereby providing a new perspective for cultural heritage tourism research. First, this study confirms the significant positive effect of cultural heritage conservation and tourism development on tourist experience quality, which is consistent with the findings of Park and Jeong [36]. The study reveals that cultural heritage conservation directly enhances the quality of tourist experiences by improving the authenticity and cultural identity of heritage sites, while also indirectly enhancing tourist experiences through the effective utilization, conservation, and innovation of resources. This finding provides new theoretical evidence for the synergistic relationship between cultural heritage conservation and tourism development, highlighting the crucial role of cultural heritage conservation in enhancing tourist experiences. Second, this study introduces RBVCO as mediating variables and reveals their partial mediating roles in the relationship between cultural heritage conservation and tourist experience quality, which aligns with the studies of Brent et al. [50] and Hatipoglu et al. [51]. The analysis results further enrich the application of resource-based theory in tourism and value co-creation theory. By verifying the mediating roles of RBVCO, this study provides new theoretical support for the sustainable development of cultural heritage tourism, emphasizing the importance of tourist participation and interactive experiences in enhancing tourist experience quality. This study examines the direct effect of tourism development on tourist experience quality and confirms the partial mediating roles of RBVCO in this relationship, which is consistent with Allameh et al. [49] and Mohammadi et al. [53] and further emphasizes the role of tourism development in enhancing the quality of the tourist experience through infrastructure optimization and service quality improvement. By verifying and confirming the synergistic relationship between tourism development and cultural heritage conservation, this study provides a new perspective for the theoretical advancement of cultural heritage tourism.

Through the analysis of the effects of cultural heritage conservation, tourism development, and the mediating variable RBVCO on tourist experience quality, this study offers theoretical support for the sustainable development of cultural heritage tourism. The findings indicate that the synergy between cultural heritage conservation and tourism development, along with value co-creation achieved through resource optimization and tourist participation, are key factors in enhancing tourist experience quality and provide new directions for theoretical research in cultural heritage tourism while also offering practical guidance for optimizing heritage site management and tourism development models, contributing to the high-quality development of cultural heritage tourism.

5.2. Practical Implications

With the rapid growth of the global cultural heritage tourism market, achieving sustainable development while preserving cultural heritage has become an urgent issue that tourism managers and local governments need to address. This study empirically analyzes the impact of cultural heritage conservation and tourism development on tourist experience quality and considers the mediating role of RBVCO, providing practical guidance for the management optimization and sustainable development of cultural heritage tourism destinations.

The study reveals that cultural heritage conservation has a significant positive effect on tourist experience quality. This finding indicates that managers of cultural heritage sites should emphasize the conservation and development of cultural heritage to enhance authenticity and cultural identity, thereby increasing tourist satisfaction and loyalty. In particular, legal and policy support has the strongest explanatory power and the best internal consistency in cultural heritage conservation; therefore, this area should be particularly strengthened to enhance tourist experience quality. The study highlights the importance of tourism development factors such as infrastructure and service quality in shaping tourist experience quality. Tourism sites should optimize infrastructure development and provide high-quality tourism services to directly improve tourist experience quality. In particular, infrastructure development and tourism marketing have relatively high construct reliability in tourism development, indicating that these areas are particularly critical for enhancing tourist experience quality. Furthermore, the study confirms the mediating role of RBVCO. This indicates that interactive tourism activities play a crucial role in enhancing the experience of tourists at cultural heritage tourism sites. Tourism managers should promote value co-creation through resource optimization and tourist engagement to improve tourist experience quality. For example, using digital technology and interactive experience projects to enhance visitor engagement with heritage sites, especially in an era of information overload, highlights the necessity of incorporating high-experience human-machine interaction elements, which can further enhance tourist experience quality.

Finally, this study suggests that tourism managers and local governments should emphasize the coordinated advancement of cultural heritage conservation and tourism development when formulating policies. By optimizing resource management, improving service quality, and enhancing tourist engagement, the dual objectives of cultural heritage conservation and tourism development can be achieved. This not only contributes to improving the quality of the tourist experience but also provides theoretical support and practical guidance for the long-term development of tourism destinations. This study offers practical insights into the sustainable development of cultural heritage tourism, assisting local governments and tourism managers in formulating scientifically sound policies to promote the high-quality development of cultural heritage tourism.

5.3. Limitations and Further Research

Like any research, this study has important theoretical and practical significance but also presents certain limitations, which provide directions for future research. First, this study employs a convenience sampling technique, with the sample limited to tourists in Zhusha Ancient Town. This may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future research could adopt broader sampling methods, such as stratified random sampling or multi-stage sampling, to enhance the representativeness and generalizability of the results. Second, data collection in this study was confined to a specific period (September to October 2024), which may introduce temporal bias and fail to capture variations in tourist experiences across different seasons

or time periods. Therefore, future research could adopt a longitudinal study design to collect data at multiple time periods, providing a more comprehensive assessment of the impact of cultural heritage conservation and tourism development on tourist experience quality. Third, this study primarily focuses on the influence of cultural heritage conservation and tourism development on tourist experience quality but does not explore other potential factors, such as tourists' individual characteristics, cultural backgrounds, or travel motivations. Future research could incorporate these variables to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the formation mechanisms of tourist experience quality. Lastly, this study introduces cultural heritage and tourism resource-based views and tourist value co-creation as mediating variables but does not examine other possible mediators or moderators, such as technological applications, community engagement, or policy support. Future research could further explore the roles of these factors to enrich the research framework of cultural heritage tourism. While this study offers new perspectives on cultural heritage tourism research, it also has certain limitations. Future studies can refine sampling methods, adopt longitudinal research designs, and incorporate additional variables to deepen the understanding of the relationship between cultural heritage conservation and tourism development, thereby providing more comprehensive theoretical support and practical guidance for the sustainable development of cultural heritage tourism.

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