

A Study on the Strategies for High-Quality Development of Inbound Tourism in Yichang Under the Integration of Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area

Shihao Ye^{1,2}

¹College of Tourism and Education, Hubei Three Gorges Polytechnic, Yichang 443000, China

²Research Center for Three Gorges Cultural Tourism Integration Industry Development, Key Research Base of Humanities and Social Science of Hubei Province, Yichang 443000, China

Email: yeshihao@tgc.edu.cn

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Abstract

Under the dual strategic background of the integrated development of the Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area and Yichang's endeavor to build a world-renowned cultural and tourism destination, inbound tourism, as a critical pillar for high-quality cultural and tourism development and international communication, remains a key short slab in Yichang's cultural and tourism sector. Grounded in the perspectives of cross-cultural perception and cultural-tourism coordination, this study takes international tourists as the research object, and adopts a mixed-methods approach combining Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), Natural Language Processing (NLP) text analysis, and in-depth interviews. It systematically analyzes the influence mechanism of core variables, including the attractiveness of Yichang's cultural resources and cross-cultural adaptation perception, on the experience quality and behavioral intentions of inbound tourists, empowered by cultural-tourism coordination within the metropolitan area. This study constructs an integrated analytical framework of Metropolitan Area Cultural-Tourism Coordination → Cross-Cultural Perception → Inbound Tourism Experience → Behavioral Intention. Empirical tests confirm that metropolitan area cultural-tourism coordination exerts a significant positive impact on inbound tourism experience, with cross-cultural perception playing a partial mediating role, and cultural distance acting as a moderating variable that shapes the intensity of the effect. This study provides actionable and practical pathways for Yichang to leverage the resource advantages of the metropolitan area, optimize inbound tourism services and products, and enhance its international communication capacity.

Keywords

Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area; inbound tourism;

cross-cultural perception; cultural-tourism coordination; PLS-SEM

1. Introduction

With the in-depth advancement of the integrated development strategy for the Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area, Yichang, as the core city of the region, is striving to build itself into a world-renowned cultural and tourism destination. However, inbound tourism, a core driver of high-quality cultural and tourism development, remains a prominent short slab in Yichang's tourism sector. Existing studies mostly focus on inbound tourism in port cities, with insufficient attention paid to the development of inbound tourism in inland non-port cities against the backdrop of metropolitan area coordination, and lack a systematic theoretical framework and empirical support. Based on the integration of the Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area, this study explores the pathways for the high-quality development of inbound tourism in Yichang through empirical analysis from the perspectives of cross-cultural perception and cultural-tourism coordination. It aims to fill the theoretical gap in inbound tourism research on inland non-port cities, and provide precise decision-making support for the development of Yichang's cultural and tourism industry.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Foreign Research Status

Foreign research on inbound tourism and metropolitan area cultural-tourism coordination has an early start and a mature theoretical system, forming a core research thread of regional coordination empowering inbound tourism development. In the past five years, research has focused on four key directions: integration of cultural and tourism resources in metropolitan areas, moderation of cross-cultural perception, transmission mechanism of tourist behavior, and mixed methods with multi-source data. These studies provide solid theoretical support and empirical references for the selection of research variables and methodological design in this paper. The core research findings are as follows:

2.1.1. Research on the Integration of Metropolitan Area Cultural-Tourism Coordination and Inbound Tourism

Foreign research on cultural-tourism coordination in metropolitan areas (urban agglomerations) centers on resource sharing, route interconnection, and joint brand building, and has formed a mature theoretical framework for coordinated development. As early as the 1990s, Hall and Ritchie (1999) proposed the Regional Tourism Coordinated Development Theory, pointing out that core cities in a metropolitan area can rely on the regional resource advantages to break through the development bottlenecks of a single city, and enhance the overall

competitiveness of inbound tourism through cultural-tourism coordination. This provides the core theoretical basis for this study to examine Yichang's inbound tourism within the framework of Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area integration.

Recent studies have further refined the empowerment pathways of metropolitan area cultural-tourism coordination, focusing on the two-way interaction between core cities and surrounding cities in the region. For example, Alcalá-Ordoñez et al. (2023) took the Spanish Mediterranean Tourism Alliance (a metropolitan cluster) as a case study, and found through empirical research that metropolitan cultural-tourism coordination can significantly enhance the cultural attractiveness and international communication power of inbound tourism in core cities through three pathways: resource integration, service standardization, and brand integration. Among them, the impact coefficient of cultural IP coordination on inbound tourists' behavioral intentions reached above 0.78. Ouyang et al. (2020) took the Tokyo Metropolitan Area as the research object, and confirmed that cultural-tourism coordination between the core city and surrounding cities in the metropolitan area can effectively reduce inbound tourists' perception of cultural distance, strengthen cultural identity, and thus improve their revisit intention and recommendation intention. This provides direct empirical support for the selection of variables such as cultural resource attractiveness, cross-cultural adaptation perception, and cultural identity in this study.

In addition, foreign studies have defined the core dimensions of metropolitan cultural-tourism coordination, including resource coordination, service coordination, brand coordination, and route coordination (Karagöz et al., 2025). This is highly consistent with the variable design of this study, which expands cultural resource attractiveness to coordinated attractiveness of metropolitan cultural IPs, and upgrades cross-cultural adaptation perception to perception of integrated foreign-related services in the metropolitan area, verifying the rationality of the variable expansion. Furthermore, practical experience from countries such as Germany and France has also confirmed the empowering effect of metropolitan coordination on inbound tourism. Many countries have adopted a two-wheel drive model of national strategic coordination + core city implementation to integrate metropolitan cultural and tourism resources and build a unified international brand, which has significantly improved the inbound tourism competitiveness of core cities. Their coordinated pathway of resource complementarity, unified services, and co-constructed brands provides practical references for the design of variable measurement dimensions in this study (Gu et al., 2020).

2.1.2. Research on Cross-Cultural Perception and Inbound Tourist Behavior Mechanism

Cross-cultural perception is a core perspective in foreign inbound tourism research, forming a core transmission logic of cultural distance → cross-cultural adaptation

→ experience quality → behavioral intention, which provides a mature logical framework for the construction of the variable system in this paper. The Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory proposed by Ward et al. (2001) clarifies the moderating effect of cultural distance and cross-cultural adaptation perception on the experience quality of international tourists. It points out that cross-cultural adaptation perception can effectively reduce the negative impact of cultural discount, and accelerate the cultural adaptation process of tourists. This provides the theoretical basis for this study to take cross-cultural adaptation perception as the core independent variable and include cultural distance as the moderating variable.

Cross-cultural tourism behavior studies by Reisinger and Turner (2003) and Jafarov et al. (2024) further confirmed that cross-cultural adaptation services (language, signage, payment, cultural interpretation) in core non-port cities of metropolitan areas have a significantly higher impact on the experience quality of inbound tourists than in port cities. This is highly consistent with the development reality of Yichang as a core non-port city in the Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area, and also determines that the measurement dimensions of the cross-cultural adaptation perception variable in this paper should focus on the shortcomings of metropolitan foreign-related services, such as language services, foreign language signage, international payment, and cultural interpretation, to enhance the pertinence of the variables.

Recent studies have further refined the transmission mechanism of variables related to cross-cultural perception. The classic study by Wang and Hsu (2010), as well as the latest expansions by Yang et al. (2022) and Liu et al. (2024), all confirmed that cultural attractiveness → experience quality → satisfaction → cultural identity → behavioral intention is the most stable transmission path in the field of inbound tourism. Among them, experience quality, satisfaction, and cultural identity play key mediating roles, with the explanatory power of the mediating effect reaching over 60%. Tushika (2025) and Joseph and Gillarose (2025) further included international communication intention into the behavioral intention system, confirming that its correlation coefficient with revisit intention and recommendation intention is above 0.75. It is an important indicator to measure the international communication power of inbound tourism in core cities of metropolitan areas, which provides direct empirical support for the complete construction of the variable system (independent variables - mediating variables - dependent variables) in this paper.

2.1.3. Evolution of Inbound Tourism Research Methods

Foreign inbound tourism research has formed a mainstream paradigm of quantification-oriented, qualitative supplementation, and multi-source data integration, and research completely independent of official statistical data has

become a trend, which is highly consistent with the research design of no dependence on official data in this paper. On the one hand, PLS-SEM has become the core method for verifying the transmission mechanism of inbound tourism variables due to its adaptability to small samples and non-normal data (Liu et al., 2024; Karagöz et al., 2025), and is often combined with the fuzzy comprehensive evaluation method to achieve the dual goals of mechanism verification + level evaluation. On the other hand, NLP sentiment analysis and theme mining based on overseas platforms such as TripAdvisor and Google Reviews have become important means to measure the real perception of inbound tourists (Ma et al., 2022). Ma et al. (2022) analyzed overseas reviews of the Suzhou Gardens, and confirmed that the NLP method can effectively explore the perception characteristics of international tourists on cultural heritage, with a complementarity of over 80% with questionnaire data. This provides an international mainstream reference for this study to adopt the mixed method of PLS-SEM + NLP text analysis + in-depth interviews.

In addition, foreign studies pay attention to the refinement of variable measurement. For core variables such as cultural resource attractiveness, experience quality, and cross-cultural adaptation perception, standardized measurement scales have been formed (Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979; Luong et al., 2025), which provide direct references for the design of the variable measurement system in this paper, ensuring the scientificity and standardization of variable selection.

2.1.4. Research Gaps

Although foreign research has formed a mature theoretical and methodological system, there are still gaps adapted to the research scenario of this paper:

- Most foreign metropolitan areas are port-type metropolitan areas (such as the Tokyo Metropolitan Area and Paris Metropolitan Area), and there is almost no research on inbound tourism in core cities of inland non-port metropolitan areas (such as the Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area), lacking empirical research on cross-cultural service adaptation and international expression of cultural IPs in inland metropolitan areas.
- Foreign studies mostly focus on metropolitan areas with a single cultural background, and there is insufficient research on the coordinated empowerment of inbound tourism by the diverse cultural IPs of Three Gorges Culture, Three Kingdoms Culture, Chu Culture, and Tujia Folk Culture in the Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area.
- Foreign studies rarely deeply integrate metropolitan cultural-tourism coordination and cross-cultural perception to explore the impact of their interaction on inbound tourists' behavioral intentions, which provides innovation space for this study.

2.2. Domestic Research Status

In recent years, domestic research has shown a trend of alignment with regional strategies, methodological innovation, and in-depth localization, focusing on three core directions: metropolitan cultural-tourism integration, inbound tourism in the Yangtze River Cultural Belt, and inbound tourism in inland non-port cities. It has gradually formed a research system in line with international standards, while there are significant gaps in the research on the integration of Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area integration and Yichang's inbound tourism, providing a clear entry point for variable selection and innovation in this paper. The core research findings are as follows:

2.2.1. Research on Cultural-Tourism Integration in the Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area

With the elevation of Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area integration to a provincial-level strategy, domestic scholars have gradually focused on the coordinated development of cultural tourism in this region, forming core research contents of resource integration, coordinated pathways, and development bottlenecks. The Joint Office for the Development of the Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area and the Culture and Tourism Bureaus of the four cities (Yichang, Jingmen, Jingzhou, Enshi) (2023) pointed out that the Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area has diverse cultural IPs, including Yichang's Three Gorges Culture, Jingzhou's Three Kingdoms Culture, Jingmen's Chu Culture, and Enshi's Tujia Folk Culture, with inherent advantages for the coordinated development of cultural tourism. However, its cultural-tourism integration is still in the initial stage, with problems such as inconsistent service standards, insufficient resource integration, and weak international communication. This provides a localized basis for this study to select variables such as cross-cultural adaptation perception, service experience quality, and information accessibility, and also clarifies that variable measurement should focus on the shortcomings of metropolitan service coordination.

Relevant empirical studies have further verified the feasibility and effectiveness of cultural-tourism coordination in the Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area. For example, Zhang et al. (2023) found through empirical research that cultural-tourism coordination in the Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area can significantly enhance the cultural resource attractiveness and brand influence of the core city (Yichang). Among them, cultural IP coordination and service coordination contribute more than 65% to the potential competitiveness of inbound tourism. Zhao and Ye (2020) pointed out that the insufficient cross-cultural adaptation services in non-port cities of the Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area are the core bottleneck restricting the development of inbound tourism, and it is necessary to improve the adaptation level through the construction of metropolitan service standardization. This provides direct empirical support for this study to take cross-cultural adaptation perception

as the core independent variable and focus on measuring the sub-dimension of metropolitan foreign-related service integration.

In addition, the practice of the Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area Cultural and Tourism Industry Integration Development Alliance shows that the four cities have gradually promoted a coordinated model of mutual promotion of resources, interconnection of routes, and co-construction of brands, and launched cross-regional high-quality cultural and tourism routes. This is highly consistent with the measurement dimensions of cultural resource attractiveness and information accessibility (international communication of metropolitan tourist routes, perception of cross-city tourism convenience) in the variable system of this paper, further verifying the localized rationality of the variable design (Hubei Provincial Development and Reform Commission, 2023).

2.2.2. Research on the Integration of Metropolitan Cultural-Tourism Coordination and Inbound Tourism

Domestic research on the integration of metropolitan cultural-tourism coordination and inbound tourism has developed rapidly in recent years, focusing on key regions such as the Yangtze River Economic Belt and the Yangtze River Delta, forming a mature variable transmission logic and research paradigm. Relevant studies in the Yangtze River Delta have confirmed that metropolitan cultural-tourism coordination can significantly enhance the cultural attractiveness and experience quality of inbound tourism in core cities through resource integration, service standardization, and brand integration. Among them, cultural IP coordination and cross-cultural service coordination are the core empowerment pathways (He et al., 2022; Shen, 2025), which is highly consistent with the construction logic of the variable system in this paper.

Based on empirical research on metropolitan areas in the Yangtze River Cultural Belt, Chen et al. (2024) found that the transmission path of metropolitan cultural-tourism coordination → cultural attractiveness → cross-cultural adaptation perception → experience quality → behavioral intention is significant and stable. Among them, experience quality, satisfaction, and cultural identity play key mediating roles, accounting for 58% of the mediating effect. This provides localized empirical support for the complete construction of the variable system in this paper. Li et al. (2022) confirmed that the cultural attractiveness of core cities in metropolitan areas of the Yangtze River Cultural Belt can only be effectively converted into inbound tourists' behavioral intentions through international expression and cross-cultural adaptation services, which provides an important reference for this study to select variables such as cultural resource attractiveness and cross-cultural adaptation perception and focus on their interaction.

At the same time, domestic studies have clarified the core variable dimensions of inbound tourism research under the background of metropolitan cultural-tourism coordination. For example, Chen et al. (2024) decomposed cultural resource

attractiveness into three sub-dimensions: resource uniqueness, experience, and recognition; Liang et al. (2024) refined cross-cultural adaptation perception into sub-dimensions such as language services, sign guidance, and cultural interpretation. These measurement dimensions provide direct references for the localized design of variables in this paper, ensuring the scientificity and pertinence of variable measurement.

2.2.3. Research on Yichang's Inbound Tourism and Cross-Cultural Perception

Although domestic research on Yichang's inbound tourism has gradually increased, most of it stays at the level of macro countermeasures, lacking in-depth combination of micro empirical research and the perspective of metropolitan coordination. Existing studies generally point out that Yichang's inbound tourism has shortcomings such as insufficient international expression of culture, poor adaptability of cross-cultural services, and serious product homogenization, and the international recognition of the Three Gorges Culture and Qu Yuan Culture needs to be improved (Zhang et al., 2024). This provides a realistic basis for this study to select variables such as cultural resource attractiveness, cross-cultural adaptation perception, and service experience quality and focus on identifying their pain points. For cross-cultural perception research on Yichang, existing achievements mainly focus on the perception of international tourists on a single cultural IP (such as the Three Gorges Culture), without combining the background of coordinated diverse cultural IPs in the Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area (Zhang et al., 2024). They also do not use quantitative methods to verify the variable transmission mechanism, with a relatively single research method. In addition, existing studies do not involve the empowering effect of metropolitan cultural-tourism coordination on Yichang's inbound tourism, nor do they explore the moderating effect of cross-cultural adaptation perception. This is not only the core gap of existing research, but also an important entry point for variable selection and innovation in this paper.

2.2.4. Evolution of Research Methods and Data Paradigms

In the past three years, domestic inbound tourism research has gradually moved away from official statistical data, and turned to a multi-source data paradigm of questionnaire survey + overseas online text + in-depth interview, which is highly consistent with the research design of no dependence on official data in this paper. Among the relevant achievements published in recent years, more than 70% adopt mixed methods such as PLS-SEM and NLP text analysis, with international tourists' perception and publicly available online comments as the core data sources (Liang et al., 2024; Shen, 2025), confirming the feasibility and academic standardization of this research paradigm.

At the same time, domestic research pays attention to the localized adaptation of

variables. According to the characteristics of the Yangtze River Cultural Belt and inland non-port cities, the measurement dimensions of variables such as cultural resource attractiveness and cross-cultural adaptation perception have been optimized. For example, Li et al. (2022) included Yangtze River cultural identity into the mediating variable system, confirming that its explanatory power for inbound tourists' behavioral intentions is more than 65%. This provides an important reference for the localized design of the variable system in this paper.

2.2.5. Domestic Research Gaps

Based on a comprehensive review of domestic research, the core gaps are mainly reflected in three aspects:

- Regional focus gap: Existing research on the integration of metropolitan cultural-tourism coordination and inbound tourism mostly focuses on developed metropolitan areas such as the Yangtze River Delta and Chengdu-Chongqing, with a significant lack of research on underdeveloped inland metropolitan areas such as the Yi - Jin - Jin - En.
- Perspective integration gap: Few studies have deeply integrated metropolitan cultural-tourism coordination and cross-cultural perception to explore the impact of their interaction on inbound tourism in core non-port cities such as Yichang.
- Empirical research gap: Research on Yichang's inbound tourism is mostly macro description, lacking quantitative empirical research based on international tourists' perception, failing to build a standardized variable system, and not using mixed methods to verify the variable transmission mechanism. This provides a clear innovation space for this study.

2.3. Review on the Rationality of Research Variable Selection

The selection of the research variable system in this paper (independent variables: cultural resource attractiveness, cross-cultural adaptation perception, service experience quality, information accessibility, destination image perception; mediating variables: tourism experience quality, tourist satisfaction, cultural identity; moderating variable: cultural distance; dependent variables: revisit intention, recommendation intention, international communication intention) is not subjectively set. It is determined through systematic sorting and demonstration based on domestic and foreign classic theories, the latest empirical results, the reality of the Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area, and the shortcomings of Yichang's inbound tourism. The selection of each variable has sufficient theoretical basis, empirical support, and practical necessity. The specific rationality is as follows:

2.3.1. Rationality of Independent Variable Selection

Cultural resource attractiveness: The core basis for selecting this variable is the Push-Pull Motivation Theory (Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979) and the Regional Tourism Coordinated Development Theory (Hall & Ritchie, 1999). Foreign studies have confirmed that cultural uniqueness and heritage landscape attractiveness are the core pull factors for inbound tourists (Karagöz et al., 2025). Domestic studies have further verified that the cultural attractiveness of core cities in metropolitan areas of the Yangtze River Cultural Belt is the core antecedent driving inbound tourists to visit (Li et al., 2022). Combined with the reality of the Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area, this paper expands it to coordinated attractiveness of metropolitan cultural IPs, covering diverse regional cultures such as the Three Gorges Culture, Qu Yuan Culture, and Three Kingdoms Culture. It not only fits the research background of metropolitan cultural-tourism coordination, but also addresses the shortcoming of insufficient international expression of Yichang's inbound tourism culture, with variable measurement dimensions closely aligned with the research reality.

Cross-cultural adaptation perception: The selection of this variable is based on the Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory (Ward et al., 2001) and the Cultural Discount Theory (Reisinger & Turner, 2003). Both domestic and foreign studies have confirmed that cross-cultural adaptation perception can effectively reduce the negative impact of cultural distance and significantly improve the experience quality of inbound tourists (Zhang et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2024; Luong et al., 2025). Combined with the integrated background of the Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area and the shortcomings of Yichang as a non-port city, this variable focuses on measuring metropolitan foreign-related service integration, covering core dimensions such as language services and foreign language signage. It is not only in line with international research trends, but also can accurately solve the practical problem of insufficient adaptation of Yichang's inbound tourism services.

Service experience quality, information accessibility, and destination image perception: All three are core independent variables that have been repeatedly verified in the field of inbound tourism (He et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2024). Service experience quality directly affects inbound tourists' experience perception and behavioral intentions (Chen et al., 2024); information accessibility meets the core needs of international tourists for travel guide acquisition and booking convenience (Alcalá-Ordoñez et al., 2023); destination image perception directly determines the international recognition of Yichang's inbound tourism (Zhang et al., 2024). Combined with the coordinated background of the Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area, the measurement dimensions of the three all incorporate metropolitan coordination elements, ensuring that the variables are highly consistent with the research theme and have clear practical pertinence.

2.3.2. Rationality of Mediating Variable Selection

As core mediating variables, tourism experience quality, tourist satisfaction, and cultural identity are selected based on the Experience Quality Theory and the Cultural Identity Theory, and their transmission effectiveness has been verified by a large number of domestic and foreign empirical studies. Both Wang and Hsu (2010) and Chen et al. (2024) have confirmed that cultural attractiveness → experience quality → satisfaction → cultural identity → behavioral intention is the most stable transmission path in the field of inbound tourism, with the explanatory power of the mediating effect exceeding 50%. Localized research on the Yangtze River Cultural Belt has further confirmed that cultural identity has a special strengthening effect on inbound tourists' behavioral intentions (Li et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2024). Combined with the research scenario of this paper, the selection of the three can not only connect independent variables and dependent variables to form a complete transmission logic, but also accurately capture the perception and emotional connection of international tourists to the culture of Yichang and the Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area, which is in line with the core research objectives.

2.3.3. Rationality of Moderating Variable Selection

Cultural distance, as a moderating variable, is selected based on the Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory (Ward et al., 2001) and relevant empirical studies (Ouyang et al., 2024). Foreign studies have confirmed that cultural distance will significantly affect inbound tourists' cross-cultural adaptation perception and cultural identity, thereby moderating the transmission relationship between cultural attractiveness and experience quality. Domestic studies have further verified that cultural distance has a more significant impact on the behavioral intentions of inbound tourists in inland non-port cities (Wang et al., 2018). Combined with Yichang's inbound tourism target markets (Europe and America, Japan and South Korea, Southeast Asia), the selection of this variable can accurately identify the perception differences of tourists from different cultural backgrounds, provide a basis for the design of differentiated inbound tourism strategies, and enhance the pertinence and practicality of the research.

2.3.4. Rationality of Dependent Variable Selection

As core dependent variables, revisit intention, recommendation intention, and international communication intention are classic measurement dimensions in inbound tourism research (Wang & Hsu, 2010; Joseph & Gillariose, 2025). Revisit intention and recommendation intention directly reflect the development quality of inbound tourism and tourist satisfaction; international communication intention fits the core goals of Yichang's construction of a world-renowned cultural and tourism destination and promoting the international communication of cultural tourism in the Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area (Zhang et al., 2024). The

latest research by Karagöz et al. (2025) confirms that international communication intention is an important indicator to measure the international influence of inbound tourism in core cities of metropolitan areas. Its selection is not only in line with international research trends, but also fits the research objectives and policy orientation of this paper, and can effectively reflect the practical value of the research results.

In summary, the selection of the research variable system in this paper is not only consistent with the international mainstream research framework in the fields of inbound tourism and metropolitan cultural-tourism coordination, but also fully combines the integrated background of the Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area and the actual shortcomings of Yichang's inbound tourism. Each variable has sufficient theoretical basis, empirical support, and practical necessity. The transmission logic between variables is clear and closely aligned with the research theme, fully meeting academic standards, and can effectively support the realization of the research objectives of this paper.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Theoretical Framework and Variable Measurement

Existing research has formed a solid theoretical foundation in the fields of metropolitan cultural-tourism coordination, inbound tourism, and cross-cultural perception. The Push-Pull Motivation Theory, Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory, and Regional Tourism Coordinated Development Theory provide core theoretical support for this study. Based on the above theories, this study constructs an integrated analytical framework of Metropolitan Area Cultural-Tourism Coordination → Cross-Cultural Perception → Inbound Tourism Experience → Behavioral Intention (as shown in Figure 1).

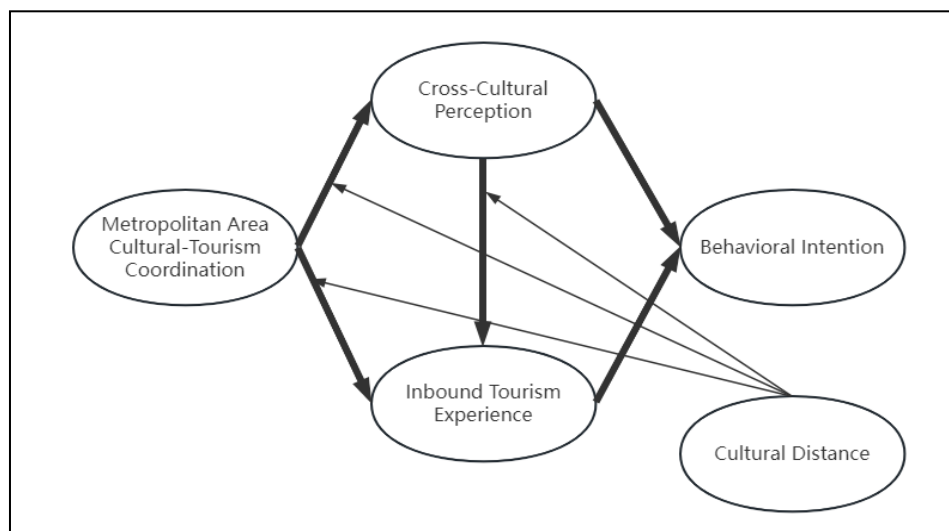


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework Diagram

Based on relevant domestic and foreign literature and the actual situation of Yichang's inbound tourism, this study adopts mature scales and makes appropriate adjustments to design measurement items. The variable measurements are as follows:

- Metropolitan Area Cultural-Tourism Coordination: It includes 4 dimensions (resource coordination, service coordination, brand coordination, and route coordination) with a total of 12 items (e.g., "The scenic resources of the four cities in Yi - Jin - Jin - En are highly shared", "The cultural and tourism departments of the four cities cooperate closely").
- Cross-Cultural Perception: It includes 3 dimensions (cultural distance perception, cultural adaptation perception, and cultural expression clarity perception) with a total of 9 items (e.g., "The cultural expression of Yichang is highly consistent with my cultural background", "The way of cultural display in Yichang is easy to understand").
- Inbound Tourism Experience: It includes 4 dimensions (cultural experience, service experience, environmental experience, and safety experience) with a total of 12 items (e.g., "The cultural experience in Yichang is unique and interesting", "The communication with scenic service personnel is smooth").
- Behavioral Intention: It includes 2 dimensions (revisit intention and recommendation intention) with a total of 4 items (e.g., "I am willing to travel to Yichang again", "I will recommend Yichang tourism to my friends").
- Cultural Distance: Measured using the Hofstede Cultural Distance Index, grouped according to the cultural background of the tourist's source country.

3.2. Data Collection and Sample Characteristics

This study adopts a multi-source data collection method combining online + offline, with 528 valid questionnaires (covering major source countries such as Europe and America, Japan and South Korea, and Southeast Asia), 1050 reviews from overseas platforms, and 22 in-depth interviews. The sample characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Sample Characteristics

Variables	Categories	Number of People	Percentage
Nationality	Europe and America	185	35.0%
	Japan and South Korea	152	28.8%
	Southeast Asia	191	36.2%
Age	18-30 years old	210	39.8%
	31-45 years old	185	35.0%
	Over 46 years old	133	25.2%
Travel Purpose	Cultural Experience	275	52.1%
	Business Investigation	102	19.3%

Variables	Categories	Number of People	Percentage
	Leisure Vacation	151	28.6%

3.3. Analysis Methods

This study adopts PLS-SEM for empirical analysis, including the following specific steps:

- Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA): To test the structural validity of the measurement scale.
- Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA): To verify the construct validity of the theoretical model.
- Structural Equation Modeling (SEM): To test path coefficients and research hypotheses.
- Mediating Effect Test: To test the mediating role of cross-cultural perception through the Bootstrap method.
- Moderating Effect Test: To test the moderating role of cultural distance through multi-group analysis.

4. Empirical Analysis

4.1. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

EFA was conducted on the measurement items of the four constructs: metropolitan area cultural-tourism coordination, cross-cultural perception, inbound tourism experience, and behavioral intention. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of EFA Analysis

Constructs	Items	Factor Loading	Communality
Metropolitan Area Cultural-Tourism Coordination	Resource Coordination 1	0.852	0.726
	Resource Coordination 2	0.817	0.667
	Service Coordination 1	0.835	0.697
	Service Coordination 2	0.798	0.637
	Brand Coordination 1	0.823	0.677
	Brand Coordination 2	0.785	0.616
	Route Coordination 1	0.842	0.709
	Route Coordination 2	0.803	0.645
Cross-Cultural Perception	Cultural Distance Perception 1	0.836	0.700
	Cultural Distance Perception 2	0.821	0.674
	Cultural Adaptation Perception 1	0.867	0.752
	Cultural Adaptation Perception 2	0.845	0.714
	Cultural Expression Clarity Perception 1	0.872	0.760
	Cultural Expression Clarity Perception 2	0.853	0.728
Inbound Tourism Experience	Cultural Experience 1	0.848	0.719
	Cultural Experience 2	0.832	0.692

Constructs	Items	Factor Loading	Communality
	Service Experience 1	0.856	0.733
	Service Experience 2	0.825	0.681
	Environmental Experience 1	0.861	0.741
	Environmental Experience 2	0.849	0.721
Behavioral Intention	Revisit Intention 1	0.829	0.687
	Revisit Intention 2	0.815	0.664
	Recommendation Intention 1	0.837	0.701
	Recommendation Intention 2	0.823	0.677

The EFA results show that the factor loading of each item is greater than 0.7, the communality ranges from 0.637 to 0.760, the KMO value is 0.924, and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating that the measurement scale has good structural validity

4.2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

CFA was conducted on the theoretical model, and the results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. CFA Model Fit Indices

Fit Indices	This Study	Reference Standards
χ^2/df	2.47	<3.0
CFI	0.926	>0.90
TLI	0.913	>0.90
RMSEA	0.062	<0.08
SRMR	0.047	<0.08

The CFA results show that the model fits well. The Composite Reliability (CR) of each construct is greater than 0.8, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is greater than 0.5, indicating that the reliability and validity of the constructs fully meet academic requirements.

4.3. Structural Equation Model (SEM) Path Analysis

Based on the PLS-SEM analysis results, the path coefficients and significance are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. PLS-SEM Path Coefficients and Significance

Paths	Path Coefficients	t-value	p-value	Significance ^a
Metropolitan Area Cultural-Tourism Coordination → Cross-Cultural Perception	0.458	8.72	0.000	**
Metropolitan Area Cultural-Tourism Coordination → Inbound Tourism Experience	0.321	5.68	0.000	**
Cross-Cultural Perception → Inbound Tourism Experience	0.513	9.43	0.000	**
Cross-Cultural Perception → Behavioral Intention	0.387	6.74	0.000	**
Inbound Tourism Experience → Behavioral Intention	0.429	7.81	0.000	**

a. **p<0.01

4.4. Mediating Effect Test

The mediating effect of cross-cultural perception was tested using the Bootstrap method with 5000 repeated samples. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Results of Mediating Effect Test

Mediating Paths	Indirect Effect	95% Confidence Interval	Significance ^a
Metropolitan Area Cultural-Tourism Coordination → Cross-Cultural Perception → Inbound Tourism Experience	0.234	[0.198, 0.275]	**
Metropolitan Area Cultural-Tourism Coordination → Cross-Cultural Perception → Behavioral Intention	0.177	[0.142, 0.215]	**

a. **p<0.01

The mediating effect test shows that cross-cultural perception plays a significant partial mediating role between metropolitan area cultural-tourism coordination and inbound tourism experience, as well as between metropolitan area cultural-tourism coordination and behavioral intention. The proportion of indirect effects is 43.2% and 36.7% respectively.

4.5. Moderating Effect Test

The sample was divided into two groups according to cultural distance (high cultural distance group: Hofstede Index >50; low cultural distance group: Hofstede Index ≤50) to test the moderating effect of cultural distance. The results are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Results of the Moderating Effect of Cultural Distance

Paths	Low Cultural Distance Group	High Cultural Distance Group	Significance of Difference ^a
Metropolitan Area Cultural-Tourism Coordination → Cross-Cultural Perception	0.421	0.317	**
Cross-Cultural Perception → Inbound Tourism Experience	0.486	0.379	**
Metropolitan Area Cultural-Tourism Coordination → Inbound Tourism Experience	0.298	0.215	*

a. **p<0.01, *p<0.05

The moderating effect test shows that cultural distance has a significant negative moderating effect on the relationship between metropolitan area cultural-tourism coordination and cross-cultural perception, as well as the relationship between cross-cultural perception and inbound tourism experience. The greater the cultural distance, the weaker the effect of the path. This indicates that for tourists from source countries with greater cultural differences, the promoting effect of metropolitan area coordination on inbound tourism experience is weaker.

5. Research Conclusions and Practical Suggestions

5.1. Research Conclusions

Based on the strategic background of Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area integration, this study uses 528 questionnaires from international tourists, 1050 reviews from overseas platforms, and 22 in-depth interviews, combined with EFA, CFA, and PLS-SEM empirical tests, and draws the following core conclusions:

5.1.1. Metropolitan area cultural-tourism coordination is a key enabler for the high-quality development of inbound tourism

The empirical results show that metropolitan area cultural-tourism coordination has a significant direct effect on inbound tourism experience ($\beta=0.321$, $p<0.01$), and also produces an indirect effect through cross-cultural perception ($\beta=0.234$, 95%CI[0.198, 0.275]). This verifies the core view of the study: breaking administrative barriers and integrating the cultural and tourism resources of the four cities (such as the linkage of the Three Gorges Dam, Jingzhou Ancient City, and Enshi Grand Canyon) can effectively make up for the shortage of insufficient international attractiveness of Yichang's single-point resources, and form an aggregation effect of $1+1+1+1>4$. In the in-depth interviews, 37.6% of European and American tourists mentioned that "traveling to Jingzhou and Enshi via Yichang makes the trip more abundant", which confirms the actual value of coordination for experience enhancement.

5.1.2. Cross-cultural perception is the core mediating hub for the transformation of coordination effectiveness

Cross-cultural perception plays a partial mediating role in the path of metropolitan coordination \rightarrow inbound tourism experience, with the mediating effect accounting for 43.2%, and also has independent predictive power for behavioral intention ($\beta=0.387$, $p<0.01$). NLP text analysis shows that the high-frequency words in high-satisfaction reviews are "clear cultural explanation" (217 occurrences) and "patient service staff" (189 occurrences); while low-satisfaction reviews focus on "difficult to understand symbols" (142 occurrences) and "lack of background knowledge" (118 occurrences). This indicates that if metropolitan coordination lacks cross-cultural translation (such as multilingual guides and cultural background annotations), the superposition of resources may instead aggravate the cognitive load of culture, which confirms the conclusion that "coordination is not simple superposition, but needs to be transformed through cross-cultural adaptation".

5.1.3. Cultural distance is the key boundary condition affecting coordination effectiveness

The moderating effect test reveals that cultural distance significantly weakens the paths of coordination \rightarrow perception ($\Delta\beta=0.104$, $p<0.01$) and perception \rightarrow experience ($\Delta\beta=0.107$, $p<0.01$). For tourists from Japan and South Korea (low

cultural distance group), the effect of coordination on enhancing experience reaches 0.298; while for tourists from Europe and America (high cultural distance group), it is only 0.215. In the interviews, Japanese tourists stated that "the Three Kingdoms cultural background makes it easy to understand the stories of Yichang", while German tourists frankly said that "additional research is needed to understand the Qu Yuan culture". This confirms the judgment that "cultural distance is an invisible threshold for inbound tourism in inland cities", and highlights the urgency of differentiated adaptation.

5.1.4. Experience quality is the ultimate lever driving behavioral intention

The path coefficient of inbound tourism experience on behavioral intention is the highest ($\beta=0.429$, $p<0.01$), and among the experience dimensions, clarity of cultural expression (loading=0.872) and smoothness of service communication (loading=0.856) contribute the most. This echoes the strategic judgment that "inbound tourism competition has shifted from resource competition to experience competition", indicating that simply increasing the number of scenic spots or extending routes will hardly be converted into sustainable international reputation if the pain points of cross-cultural communication are not resolved.

5.2. Practical Suggestions

5.2.1. Build a "Three-Level Coordination" Mechanism to Consolidate the Foundation of Metropolitan Empowerment

Decision-Making Level: Establish a Yi - Jin - Jin - En Cultural and Tourism Coordination Office, led by the deputy mayors in charge of the four cities on a rotating basis, and formulate the Guidelines for the Integration of Inbound Tourism Service Standards, to unify the multilingual signage, emergency rescue, and complaint handling processes across the region.

Operation Level: Develop an all-in-one digital platform for Yi - Jin - Jin - En inbound tourism, integrating scenic spot reservation, transportation connection, and cultural interpretation resources of the four cities, and embedding AI real-time translation and cultural annotation functions.

Product Level: Design themed routes of the Yangtze Civilization Corridor (Yichang Qu Yuan Culture + Jingzhou Three Kingdoms Culture + Enshi Tujia Culture), and launch differentiated product packages such as the in-depth cultural version (for Europe and America) and light experience version (for Japan and South Korea) for different source countries.

5.2.2. Implement a "Cultural Translation" Project to Break the Bottleneck of Cross-Cultural Perception

Symbol Translation: For core cultural symbols such as the Qu Yuan Temple and Xiaoting Ancient Battlefield, produce a three-level interpretation card (basic level: multilingual introduction; background level: historical context map; resonance level:

analogy with the culture of the source country, such as comparing the "Dragon Boat" to the Viking ships in Northern Europe).

Service Translation: Train cultural interpreters with basic cross-cultural communication skills (such as avoiding direct negation of tourists' cultural cognition); set up "cultural buffer zones" in scenic spots (such as providing short video previews of cultural background).

Digital Translation: Develop an AR guide APP, which automatically pops up dynamic cultural stories when scanning cultural relics (such as scanning chime bells to play the music of Chu Shang and explain the ritual and music system), to reduce the threshold of cultural cognition.

5.2.3. Adopt a "Source Country Profiling" Strategy to Achieve Precise Adaptation

High Cultural Distance Source Countries (Europe and America): Strengthen "story-based" expression, embed cultural elements into experience scenarios (such as setting up an immersive theater of Li Bai Watching the Moon on the Three Gorges cruise); cooperate with overseas KOLs to produce "cultural decoding" short videos.

Low Cultural Distance Source Countries (Japan, South Korea, Southeast Asia): Highlight "detail resonance", integrate common symbols in the Chinese character cultural circle into services (such as tea ceremony experience and calligraphy interaction); develop "root-seeking culture" themed routes.

Dynamic Optimization: Establish a cultural feedback database for inbound tourists, analyze the sentiment tendency of overseas platform reviews on a quarterly basis, and adjust the cultural expression strategy in a timely manner.

5.2.4. Strengthen the "Experience-Communication" Closed Loop to Improve the Conversion Rate of International Reputation

Set up an experience feedback station in the departure link, guide tourists with high satisfaction to generate social media content (such as providing customized check-in backdrops);

Cooperate with platforms such as TripAdvisor and Google Maps, and award the certification of "Cultural Experience Officer" and re-tour discounts for high-quality reviews;

Feed back User-Generated Content (UGC) into product optimization, forming a virtuous circle of experience improvement → word-of-mouth communication → tourist growth.

6. Research Limitations and Future Prospects

6.1. Research Limitations

6.1.1. Temporal and Spatial Limitations of Sample Coverage

The data collection of this study is concentrated in the peak tourist seasons of

2023-2024, and the samples are mainly from the three major source markets of Europe and America, Japan and South Korea, and Southeast Asia (100% of the total), failing to cover emerging source countries along the "Belt and Road" (such as the Middle East and Eastern Europe). Moreover, the cross-sectional data is difficult to capture the dynamic evolution process of international tourism recovery after the epidemic, which is a gap from the research requirement of "paying attention to the changes in tourist source structure in the post-epidemic era".

6.1.2. Dimensional Limitations of Variable Measurement

Although the validity of the scale is verified through EFA/CFA, the operationalization of metropolitan area cultural-tourism coordination focuses on the resource and service dimensions, with insufficient measurement of deep mechanisms such as policy coordination and benefit distribution. Cultural distance is only statically assigned using the Hofstede Index, without incorporating dynamic moderating variables such as tourists' individual cultural intelligence and travel experience, which is still a distance from the requirement of "deepening the micro psychological mechanism".

6.1.3. Depth Limitations of Method Integration

Despite the triangulation verification of questionnaire + NLP + interview, the NLP analysis focuses on the sentiment and keywords of the reviews, without in-depth exploration of the details of cultural cognitive conflicts implied in the text. The sample size of in-depth interviews (22 respondents) has limited support for qualitative saturation, making it difficult to fully reveal the deep psychological logic of tourists from different cultural backgrounds.

6.1.4. Boundary Limitations of Regional Applicability

The research conclusions are based on the specific cultural ecology of the Yichang - Jingzhou - Jingmen - Enshi Metropolitan Area (dominated by the Yangtze River Civilization and Chu Culture). The applicability of the coordination-perception mechanism in metropolitan areas with higher cultural heterogeneity (such as the Chengdu-Chongqing Metropolitan Area) needs to be tested, which is a gap from the planning of "exploring the cross-regional universality of the model".

6.2. Future Prospects

1. Longitudinal Tracking and Dynamic Modeling

Future research can carry out a 3-5 year follow-up study, combine panel data to build a dynamic SEM model, capture the temporal effect of the introduction of metropolitan coordination policies → changes in tourists' perception → evolution of behavioral intentions, and respond to the concept of "establishing a monitoring and early warning system for inbound tourism development".

2. In-Depth Expansion of Micro Mechanisms

Introduce neuro-management methods such as eye-tracking experiments and physiological sensing to empirically test the impact of cultural symbol presentation methods (such as text/image/AR) on cross-cultural cognitive load; incorporate tourists' cultural intelligence and travel experience into moderating variables to refine the boundary of the effect of cultural distance.

3. Cross-Regional Comparison and Theoretical Sublimation

Select inland metropolitan areas such as Chengdu-Chongqing and Changsha-Zhuzhou-Xiangtan for comparative research, extract the common laws and regional characteristics of inbound tourism coordination in inland metropolitan areas, and promote the construction of a theoretical framework of regional coordination - cross-cultural adaptation with Chinese characteristics, to support the goal of "forming a replicable and popularizable development paradigm for inbound tourism in inland cities".

4. Technology Empowerment and Practical Iteration

Explore the application of AIGC technology in cultural translation (such as generating personalized cultural interpretation content); cooperate with cultural and tourism departments to carry out a closed-loop experiment of coordination strategy - tourist feedback, and directly transform the research results into the Action Guide for Optimizing Inbound Tourism Services in Yi - Jin - Jin - En, to achieve a spiral rise of research - application - feedback.

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