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Authenticity and Satisfaction: The role of government policy in Quanzhou Homestays' Service Quality

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of government policies on the service quality and tourist satisfaction of homestays in Quanzhou, China, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Results indicate positive perceptions of government efforts in maintaining homestay authenticity and ensuring safety, significantly affecting tourist satisfaction. The research identifies the importance of preserving cultural authenticity in enhancing the heritage tourism experience, with policy enforcement playing a crucial role. Recommendations focus on regulatory involvement and promotion of authentic cultural interactions. The study's limitations include its localized scope and suggests further exploration into cultural impacts on satisfaction in broader heritage settings.

Keywords: government policy, homestay service quality, tourist satisfaction, World Heritage

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1.0 Introduction

On the afternoon of July 25, 2021, at the 44th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee held in Fuzhou, Fujian, China, the city of Quanzhou successfully passed the deliberations and was inscribed in the "World Heritage List" with the title "Quanzhou: Emporium of the World in Song–Yuan China (Quanzhou Municipal People's Government, 2022)." Unlike many other World Heritage sites concentrated in specific areas, Quanzhou's 22 representative historical sites are dispersed throughout various corners of the city, with half located in densely populated urban areas surrounded by numerous residential houses (Quanzhou Municipal People's Government, 2022). In early 2023, as the pandemic was brought under control, the tourism market in Quanzhou experienced an explosive growth, witnessing a significant surge in the number of tourists. The city accommodated a remarkable 29.11 million overnight visitors, reflecting a substantial increase of 94.7% (Quanzhou Evening Paper, 2024).

Concurrently, the quantity of homestays also saw a substantial rise, including those renovated from old houses. Prior to 2016, the ancient city area of Quanzhou had around 58 qualified homestays with 431 rooms and 621 beds (Southeast Morning Post, 2021). However, in the first half of 2023 alone, the number of new beds in homestays reached 500 (Quanzhou city Licheng district government office, 2023). The disorderly growth of homestays in the ancient city area may potentially have a negative impact on the image of historical sites and the overall lodging experience for tourists (Quanzhou city Licheng district government office, 2023; Quanzhou Fengze District people's government, 2022). According to the tourism complaint announcement for the fourth quarter of 2023, Quanzhou received a total of 112 tourism-related complaints, with accommodation issues ranking second (Quanzhou cultural radio, 2024). Since 2022, various cities and counties in Quanzhou have initiated actions to rectify homestay operations, uncovering issues such as

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unauthorized construction, poor hygiene conditions, and safety hazards in some homestays (Quanzhou city Licheng district government office, 2023; Quanzhou Fengze District people's government, 2022).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the dynamic interrelations between government policies, homestay service quality in tangible factors, homestay service quality in intangible factors, and tourist satisfaction in homestay in the context of Quanzhou, a significant historical city in China.

Research question: How do government policies influence homestay service quality (both tangible and intangible factors) and tourist satisfaction within World Heritage sites, with a specific focus on the role of authenticity in heritage tourism experiences?

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 From homestay service quality to tourist satisfaction in homestay

Service quality has been extensively researched and applied across various industries (Ismail et al., 2016). It is defined as how well consumer needs are met and expectations delivered. Many researchers in tourism literature argue that service quality performance can be a suitable measure of tourist satisfaction, as satisfaction is likely when product or service performance meets expectations (Ismail et al., 2016).

Service quality is divided into tangible and intangible factors. Tangible aspects include the interior layout and design of homestays (Ogucha et al., 2017). Ismail et al. (2016) believed good design could lead to greater profits, effectively conveying the messages homestays want to share with guests. Another aspect is the environmental conditions, including color, lighting, equipment, and overall cleanliness within the homestay. Intangible aspects refer to elements that are not touched, such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy dimensions in service quality (Ismail et al., 2016). Reliability means consistency and dependability of the service, including delivering promised services accurately and on time (Li & Hou, 2023; Ogucha et al., 2017). Responsiveness refers to the quick, timely, and helpful responses of service providers to customer needs and requests (Li & Hou, 2023; Luvandwa et al., 2020). Assurance involves the confidence and guarantee of service quality by providers (Li & Hou, 2023; Ogucha et al., 2017). Empathy is the ability of service providers to understand and share the feelings of customers (Li & Hou, 2023; Ogucha et al., 2017).

Researchers can examine attribute-based satisfaction, overall satisfaction, or both types. Specifically, overall satisfaction is the total satisfaction with a destination, while attribute-based satisfaction is satisfaction with various attributes of a destination (Nghiem-Phú, 2018). This study focuses on accommodation attributes in heritage tourism, namely tourists' satisfaction with homestays. There has been much research exploring the relationship between homestay service quality and satisfaction from various aspects. Li and Hou (2023), in their study on Guilin homestays, investigated service quality issues identified from negative reviews and suggested improvements. In Bangkok, researchers found that service innovation and quality significantly improved customer satisfaction and loyalty in the homestay sector (Wonganawat et al., n.d.). A study in Kalibukbuk Village, Bali, by examining service quality dimensions, revealed their impact on guest satisfaction (Diwyarthi et al., 2020). Meanwhile, research in Nyeri and Laikipia Counties, Kenya, focused on how service responsiveness critically enhances guest satisfaction in homestays (Luvandwa et al., 2020). Although numerous studies have already addressed the service quality of homestays, this research focuses on homestays located within World Heritage areas, which possess certain cultural values and unique architectural styles and spatial layouts. These factors all influence the demand for service quality. Based on this, the current study sets forth the following hypotheses:

H01: homestay service quality in tangible factors have no significant effect to tourist satisfaction in homestay.

H02: homestay service quality in intangible factors have no significant effect to tourist satisfaction in homestay.

2.2 From Government policies to homestay service quality, and tourist satisfaction in homestay

Good policies play a vital role in heritage sites in terms of education, social cohesion, economic growth, and environmental sustainability (Labadi et al., 2021). Consequently, these policies also play a key role in shaping the quality and sustainability of homestay accommodations. From providing guidelines for the protection of cultural heritage and ensuring environmental sustainability, to enhancing tourist satisfaction through improved accommodation facilities and service quality at heritage sites (Sanyal et al., 2023; Thakur et al., 2023). Sanyal et al., (2023) and Thakur et al., (2023) have examined the distribution and management of homestays in the Indian Himalayan region, focusing on the impact of customer reviews and government policies on sustainable tourism. The study discusses the effectiveness of government incentives, the challenges faced by homestay operators, and the importance of integrating local communities and sustainable practices into the tourism model to enhance tourist experiences and satisfaction. Despite numerous studies on policies and homestays at World Heritage sites, few have combined all three aspects, especially in the context of heritage sites in the early stages of rapid development (Abd Rahim et al., 2023; Hamzah et al., 2023; Ismail et al., 2016; Ogucha et al., 2017). Homestays in Quanzhou, as a complement to hotels, offer diverse styles to cater to the evolving tastes and preferences of tourists seeking novel experiences (Pramesti et al., 2023). Therefore, based on the above content, this study makes the following hypothesis:

H04: Government policies have no significant effect to homestay service quality in tangible factors.

H05: Government policies have no significant effect to homestay service quality in intangible factors.

H06: Government policies have no significant effect to tourist satisfaction in homestay.

2.3 Heritage Tourism Theory

Heritage tourism is defined as "travel to visit places, events, and activities that have cultural, historical, or natural significance in order to gain knowledge, experience, and understanding, and to promote heritage protection and sustainable development (Ahmad, 2006)." Alexandros Apostolakis introduced authenticity as a core concept, unifying theoretical paradigms as both a marketing tool and a key factor in tourism motivation, impacting the image of tourist attractions (Apostolakis, 2017). The role of authenticity typically refers to how tourists perceive the authenticity of heritage sites and how this perception affects their experience and satisfaction. Authenticity may involve the protection, restoration, and presentation of historical heritage sites (Apostolakis, 2017). Past research has applied the concept of heritage tourism authenticity, such as in visitor experiences where authenticity's role in providing extraordinary experiences, especially at events like music festivals, is highlighted (Skandalis et al., 2024). In cultural heritage preservation, studies emphasize maintaining authenticity in heritage sites (Kalenjuk Pivarski et al., 2023), and in gastronomy and ethnic heritage, the significance of authenticity in ethnic gastronomy is shown to enhance the tourism experience and promote the sustainability of heritage (Rudan, 2023). Tourists often seek to experience "real" culture and history, making authenticity at heritage sites a key factor in their satisfaction and overall tourism experience, underscoring the importance of government policies in protecting and managing these sites. Despite many studies on the authenticity of heritage tourism, few have focused on homestays within this context, where government policies can impact the authenticity and preservation of heritage sites, thus affecting the homestay service quality and, consequently, tourist satisfaction.

3.0 Methodology

The study employs a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design, focusing on tourists in Quanzhou's homestays. Data were collected via random sampling using a questionnaire survey on the Wenjuanxing platform. The questionnaire, derived from existing literature (Ismail et al., 2016; Ogucha et al., 2017; Thakur et al., 2023), aimed to explore the interplay between government policies, homestay service quality in tangible factors, homestay service quality in intangible factors, and tourist satisfaction in homestay. SPSS was utilized for data cleaning and descriptive statistics, while SmartPLS was used for further data analysis.

The sample size for this study was determined using G-power analysis, which accounted for an effect size of 0.15, an alpha of 0.05, and a power of 0.95. The initial calculation required a sample size of 138 participants. To accommodate a potential dropout rate of 20%, the adjusted final sample size was set at 166 individuals. In practice, the survey yielded 265 responses, with 247 of these being valid for analysis.

4.0 Findings

4.1 Demographic Statistics

The participant demographics reveal a varied profile within the sample of 247 individuals. In terms of gender, 75.3% identified as male, while 24.7% identified as female. The age distribution indicates that 67.6% fall within the 18-27 years old category, 30.8% are aged between 28-37, and a small percentage (1.6%) are 38 years old and above. Examining income levels, 21.1% earn CNY 20000 or less, 33.6% earn between CNY 20001 and 50000, 31.6% earn between CNY 50001 and 100000, and 13.8% earn CNY 100001 and above. In conclusion, the majority of participants are male, aged between 18-27 years old, with a significant portion having an income between CNY 20001 and 50000.

4.2 Inferential Statistics

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation, and reflective indicator loadings of items

Items		M	SD	Loading
GP01	Government policies effectively preserve the traditional character of homestays within the World Heritage area.	4.903	1.538	0.801
GP02	The implementation of government policies improves the overall quality of homestay services.	4.838	1.612	0.863
GP03	Government regulations ensure the safety and security of homestay accommodations.	4.725	1.54	0.867
GP04	Government promotional activities significantly enhance the visibility of homestays.	4.939	1.454	0.859
HSQFF01	The homestay offers a clean and well-maintained surrounding environment.	5.547	1.084	0.885
HSQFF02	The homestay maintains its traditional architecture and design features effectively.	5.364	1.026	0.897
HSQFF03	The layout of the homestay facilitates a genuine experience of traditional living.	4.947	1.409	0.927
HSQFF04	Modern amenities are integrated without compromising the homestay's traditional character.	5.02	1.36	0.852
HSQIF01	The homestay staff are friendly and welcoming.	5.158	1.496	0.861
HSQIF02	Communication with the homestay staff is clear and effective.	5.267	1.173	0.833
HSQIF03	The homestay responds promptly to any issues or requests I have.	5.3	1.004	0.796
TSH01	My satisfaction with the homestay is largely due to its preservation of traditional aspects.	4.789	1.305	0.865
TSH02	My stay at the heritage homestay met my expectations for experiencing traditional culture.	5.057	1.293	0.864
TSH03	I am satisfied with how the homestay blended traditional features with modern comforts.	5.024	1.189	0.879
TSH04	I feel my understanding of the local culture has improved after my stay.	5.02	1.153	0.889
TSH05	I would recommend this heritage homestay for its authentic traditional experience.	5.142	1.183	0.833

(Source: Authors, 2024)

The results from Table 1 show that all items related to government policy impacts, homestay service quality, and tourist satisfaction

have strong reflective indicator loadings well above the 0.7 threshold, indicating high reliability. Mean scores are high, suggesting positive perceptions, and standard deviations are reasonable, reflecting consistency in responses (Hair et al., 2019). The findings suggest areas of strength, particularly in maintaining traditional architecture and providing clean, well-maintained environments, alongside high levels of satisfaction with the blend of traditional and modern elements.

Table 2. Reliability and validity

Indicator	Cronbach's alpha	rho_a	rho_c	AVE	HTMT			
Variables					GP	HSQFF	HSQIF	TSH
GP	0.913	0.914	0.939	0.793				
HSQFF	0.869	0.873	0.911	0.719	0.795			
HSQIF	0.775	0.782	0.869	0.689	0.789	0.878		
TSH	0.917	0.917	0.938	0.750	0.688	0.812	0.860	

(Source: Authors, 2024)

The results from Table 2 show high reliability and validity across constructs (GP, HSQFF, HSQIF, TSH), crucial for research trustworthiness. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (rho_a, rho_c) exceed the 0.70 standard, indicating precise measurement. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.50 confirm construct validity, and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios below 0.90 ensure distinct constructs. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) analysis reveals no collinearity issues, with all VIFs below 5 and most below 3, indicating distinct constructs and indicators. The slightly higher VIF for GP03 does not significantly impact the model's validity (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 3. R-square, F-square and PLS-Predict of variables

Indicator	R-square	R-square adjusted	F-square			PLS-Predict		
			HSQFF	HSQIF	TSH	Average loss difference	t value	p value
Variables			HSQFF	HSQIF	TSH			
GP			1.036	0.804	0.013			
HSQFF	0.509	0.507			0.134	-0.570	6.779	0.000
HSQIF	0.446	0.443			0.175	-0.493	6.338	0.000
TSH	0.620	0.616				-0.445	5.317	0.000
Overall						-0.498	7.557	0.000

(Source: Authors, 2024)

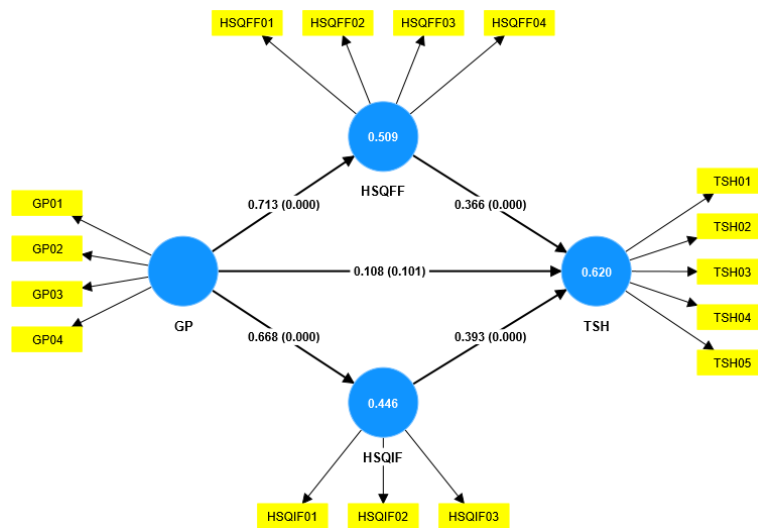


Fig. 1: Conceptual framework (Source: Authors, 2024)

The results presented in Table 3 highlight the R-square, F-square, and PLS-Predict values for the variables in question. The R-square values for HSQFF (0.509), HSQIF (0.446), and TSH (0.620) indicate moderate to substantial explained variance in each respective endogenous construct, with the adjusted R-square values closely mirroring these figures, which attests to the model's robustness. The F-square effects size values show a strong impact of GP on HSQFF (1.036) and HSQIF (0.804), and a lesser yet significant impact on TSH (0.013), suggesting that the predictor variable GP substantially affects the service quality factors and, to a smaller extent, tourist satisfaction (Hair et al., 2019).

The PLS-Predict results show negative average loss differences for HSQFF (-0.570), HSQIF (-0.493), and TSH (-0.445), with highly significant t-values (all above 5.317) and p-values at 0.000, strongly indicating predictive relevance and accuracy of the model. The overall average loss difference of -0.498 and a t-value of 7.557 reinforce the model's predictive power. These findings suggest that the hypothesized relationships meet the criteria for both explanatory power and predictive accuracy. This would indicate that the

requirements for a reliable and valid model are indeed met (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 4. Path coefficients

Hypotheses	Path	O	M	SD	T values	P values	CIs	Results
H ₀ 1	HSQFF -> TSH	0.366	0.361	0.063	5.823	0.000	[0.233; 0.476]	Supported
H ₀ 2	HSQIF -> TSH	0.393	0.393	0.064	6.141	0.000	[0.265; 0.515]	Supported
H ₀ 3	GP -> HSQFF	0.713	0.715	0.040	18.025	0.000	[0.630; 0.786]	Supported
H ₀ 4	GP -> HSQIF	0.668	0.669	0.042	15.842	0.000	[0.582; 0.746]	Supported
H ₀ 5	GP -> TSH	0.108	0.113	0.065	1.643	0.101	[-0.011; 0.245]	Rejected

(Source: Authors, 2024)

The assessment of the path coefficients from the PLS-SEM output indicates that the hypotheses H₀3 (GP -> HSQFF), H₀4 (GP -> HSQIF), H₀1 (HSQFF -> TSH), and H₀2 (HSQIF -> TSH) are supported. This is evidenced by the significant t-statistics (all well above the threshold of 1.96 for a 95% confidence level) and p-values of 0.000, which indicate statistical significance. The confidence intervals for these paths do not cross zero, further confirming their significance (Hair et al., 2019). The original sample path coefficients for these relationships are strong, with values ranging from 0.366 to 0.713.

However, hypothesis H₀5 (GP -> TSH) is not supported, as its p-value of 0.101 exceeds the conventional threshold for significance (usually p < 0.05), and its confidence interval includes zero, which implies statistical non-significance (Hair et al., 2019). The overall results demonstrate that the model has strong predictive validity for the supported hypotheses, while the rejected hypothesis highlights a potential area for further investigation.

5.0 Discussion

The findings of this study present a multifaceted understanding of the dynamic interrelations between government policies, homestay service quality (both tangible and intangible factors), and tourist satisfaction within the World Heritage context of Quanzhou. These results not only resonate with existing literature but also illuminate the nuanced impacts of such interrelations on heritage tourism. This discussion explores the relevant findings in relation to theoretical frameworks, identifies implications, and contextualizes the research within broader tourism and heritage preservation debates.

5.1 Analysis of Findings in Relation to Theory and Context

Government Policies and Homestay Quality: The strong support for hypotheses H₀3 (GP -> HSQFF) and H₀4 (GP -> HSQIF) underscores the critical role of government policies in enhancing both tangible and intangible aspects of homestay service quality. This aligns with the heritage tourism theory, which posits the centrality of policies in ensuring the sustainability and quality of tourism experiences at heritage sites (Labadi et al., 2021; Sanyal et al., 2023; Thakur et al., 2023). The significant improvements in homestay service quality observed in this study highlight the effectiveness of government interventions in preserving the traditional character of homestays and ensuring their safety and security. This finding supports the notion that well-conceived policies are essential for maintaining the authenticity and integrity of heritage tourism experiences, which is a key driver of tourist satisfaction.

Service Quality and Tourist Satisfaction: The findings support the hypotheses H₀1 (HSQFF -> TSH) and H₀2 (HSQIF -> TSH), indicating that both tangible and intangible service quality factors significantly contribute to tourist satisfaction. This corroborates previous research emphasizing the importance of service quality as a determinant of tourist satisfaction in various tourism settings, including heritage homestays (Ismail et al., 2016; Li & Hou, 2023). The study's emphasis on the positive impact of well-maintained environments, traditional architecture preservation, and staff responsiveness adds to the growing body of evidence that comprehensive service quality enhancement can lead to higher levels of tourist satisfaction.

The Limited Direct Impact of Government Policies on Tourist Satisfaction: The rejection of hypothesis H₀5 (GP -> TSH) suggests that the direct impact of government policies on tourist satisfaction might be less significant than their indirect effects mediated through service quality improvements. This indicates a complex interplay between policy interventions and their perceived benefits by tourists, emphasizing the need for policies to be closely aligned with the enhancement of service quality aspects that are directly experienced by tourists.

5.2 Implications Beyond the Current Research

Policy and Practice: The findings underscore the importance of strategic policy formulation and implementation to enhance the quality of homestay services within World Heritage sites. Policymakers should focus on creating comprehensive guidelines that not only protect the cultural and historical integrity of heritage sites but also ensure the provision of high-quality tourist accommodations. Emphasizing the development of both tangible and intangible service quality aspects can lead to enhanced tourist experiences and satisfaction.

6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

This study highlights the positive impact of government policies on homestay service quality and tourist satisfaction in Quanzhou, underscoring the value of authenticity and the preservation of traditional characteristics. Limitations include a focus on Quanzhou alone and the potential variability of tourist expectations. The research contributes to understanding the synergy between policy, service quality, and satisfaction in heritage tourism, suggesting that enhancing service quality and preserving authenticity are crucial. Recommendations

include continued government involvement in homestay regulation, emphasis on authentic experiences, and targeted training for homestay operators. Future research should explore the impact of cultural integration on tourist satisfaction and the potential for scalability of findings to other heritage sites.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

The research underscores authenticity's significance in heritage tourism and methodologically advances the analysis of policy, service quality, and satisfaction interrelations. Practical implications for heritage management and policy formulation are offered, with potential applicability to similar urban heritage contexts.

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