A Model for Sustainable Tourism Development of Hot Spring Destinations Following Poverty Alleviation: Understanding the Tourists’ Perspective

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Abstract: Few studies have examined the issue of the sustainable destination development of hot spring from tourists’ perspective. This study thus proposes a model for sustainable tourism development of hot spring destinations following poverty alleviation in local communities. This model is based on environmental (environmental cognition), sociocultural (hot spring experience, food experience, and attitude toward cultural landscape), and economic (revisit intention) dimensions (factors) of sustainability. The analysis of 271 valid on-site questionnaires about the Conghua hot spring destination in Guangzhou, China, showed that the attitude toward cultural landscape, hot spring experiences, and environmental cognition are the important factors that influence the intention of tourists to revisit hot spring. These findings are based on the level of importance; however, food experience did not play a significant role. Through the cultural landscape, the connection between tourists and destinations is strengthened, which helps to increase the likelihood of tourists revisiting the destination. This study found that the purpose of cultural legacy can be achieved while balancing environmental development issues, and is one of the guidelines for sustainable development in poverty alleviation in destination.

Keywords: hot spring; sustainable tourism; poverty alleviation; cultural landscape; Guangzhou; Conghua hot spring destination

1. Introduction

Many of the Earth’s natural resources have been exploited for human development, and serious environmental problems have emerged, such as global warming and ocean pollution. In this development process, the market scale of tourism has expanded, raising a concern about sustainable development [1–4]. Since the nature of sustainable development is holistic and multi-sectoral [5,6], many studies have relied on environmental, socio-cultural, and economic considerations to understand the sustainable and tourism development [3,4,7–9]. As the definition of sustainable tourism refers to the economic, social, and environmental aspects, the term is defined as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities (p. 12)” [10]. In the process of sustainable development, the environmental and economic benefits are more visible than the sociocultural impacts, making the sociocultural aspect of sustainable tourism less researched [5]. Moreover, this aspect should not be applied to sustainable tourism as a single concept or principle [3]. It has been recommended that understanding the sustainability framework of different types of tourism or research will help to successfully promote and expand the intellectual value of sustainable tourism [2,5].

The concept of sustainable tourism can be seen as an adaptive paradigm, proposing flexible and adaptive solutions to different resource development goals or situations [2].
Among the various types of tourism, hot spring tourism is referred to as an experience-based activity involving hot spring resources that is enriched with cultural characteristics; through this type of tourism, tourists can experience local specialties, such as wearing a yukata (Japanese traditional casual wear) after taking a dip in a spring in Japan [11] or drinking mineral water at the Karlovy Vary spa treatment [12]. Previous studies have mainly focused on hot spring resources as a means for tourism development, whether in terms of corporate management [1] or behavior of tourists visiting hot spring [13–15], with more research conducted from the perspective of resource utilization. Few studies have been conducted to expand or explain the sustainable development model of hot spring tourism from a tourists’ perspective and the interaction process between the tourist and the destination. However, researchers have indicated that the antecedents of tourists’ behavioral intentions differ depending on the type of the destination [14]. Thus, based on the environmental, sociocultural, and economic framework proposed by most sustainable tourism studies, this study selected research constructs suitable for the characteristics of hot spring tourists, including environmental cognition, hot spring experiences, food experiences, attitude toward cultural landscape, and revisit intention, to realize the sustainable destination development.

The unique, natural, or socio-human attributes of a hot spring destination that attract tourists to the destination also create a healthy physical and spiritual tradition at the destination [1,16]. In terms of the practical management, destination management organizations (DMOs) consider the premise of tourism development damage through local environmental renovation or facility improvement. This enables the destination to continuously enhance the tourist market attention and develop in a more diversified direction, increasing the adaptability of the destination concerning the external environmental changes and achieving the goal of sustainable development [2]. The environmental conditions of a tourist destination, as cognized by tourists, have a significant impact on the tourist experience [17].

Hot spring tourism is an experience-based tourism activity. Specifically, the on-site experience of hot spring tourism is an important experience. Tourists use hot spring pools as a therapy or for stress recovery [13,15,18], and even for leisure and social purposes, which promote the emotional connection between hot spring tourists and the destination and affects their loyalty to that destination [15]. Hot spring tourism provides a healthy and pleasant psychological experience [13,14], as well as a multi-dimensional experience, which creates a balanced and sustainable value for the local environment [1]. In addition, memorable tourism experiences are also related to local food experiences derived from the food service environment; staff interaction to the food culture can also create positive memories of local food experiences [19]. Food experiences have a compensational effect on the hot spring travel process and increase the likelihood of tourists’ revisits to hot spring destinations [14]. Whether from a visitor experience or a marketing perspective, food experience is an important factor that creates unique memories and economic benefits [20].

In addition to the above-mentioned observed physical facilities and intangible travel experiences, tourists are also attracted by the unique tourism landscape of the destination. This landscape refers to the cultural landscape that results from the continuous interaction of the natural environment and culture (human interference) over time [21,22]. The cultural and environmental attributes of different destinations create different cultural landscapes, which are closely related to tourists’ expectations and attitudes [23,24]. Cultural landscapes are contended as memories, legacies, and shared values for people [25]. Many hot spring destinations have a long history of interactions between human activities and environmental resources. Tourism development is a mediator of change in, as well as part of, the cultural landscape, and tourists have different attitudes toward the landscape of hot springs in different stages of development [21]. Enhancing the concept of environmental and social sustainability also has an impact on the nature of economic and tourism development of destinations [26].
In addition, the economic development of a destination depends on the flow of tourists to maintain the destinations’ operations [2]. When the economy of a tourist destination is weak, it is easy to become a victim of human capital, and environmental degradation becomes forced. To make a destination economically sustainable, it is important to promote the likelihood of tourists’ revisits besides increasing the number of the first-time visitors [27]. Therefore, the sustainable development of a destination must be considered from the perspective of subsequent and long-term development, and it is a matter of resolving environmental, social, and economic conflicts, as well as a philosophical issue of balancing different stakeholders [6,26].

In 2002, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) mentioned that sustainable development could reduce poverty in three ways: socially, economically, and environmentally [28]. In 2017, as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, this declaration position regarding sustainable tourism was advocated as a tool to advance the universal 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development [29,30]. All of these propositions relate to the core goals of sustainable development and poverty alleviation, as well as resource allocation. Poverty alleviation is not only a short-term economic effect created by tourism development, but also the goal of sustainable development of the local community [31]. Recently poverty alleviation tourism policy has had a direct or indirect impact on destinations in China. The relationship between tourism development and poverty alleviation should be understood within the framework of different contexts [32] or the perception of poverty alleviation from different stakeholders (e.g., tourists’ perspectives) [33]. Therefore, this study uses hot spring tourism in view of its health and cultural characteristics as the research context, which has rarely been addressed in previous poverty alleviation tourism studies. The framework of the research was grounded in the cognition (perception)–affection–attitude–behavior process to examine the predictive validity of modeling the relationships among tourists’ environmental cognition, hot spring experience, food experience, and attitudes toward cultural landscape on tourists’ revisit intentions (see Figure 1).

![Proposed model for the study.](image)

Figure 1. Proposed model for the study.

Therefore, this study contributes to the literature on sustainable tourism development by empirically confirming these relationships from the perspective of tourists in the context of a hot spring destination. Its findings should assist hot spring destination management/marketing organizations (DMOs) to maintain repeat tourists for economic development by emphasizing the renovation and improvement of cultural and environmental aspects following poverty alleviation.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Hot Spring Tourism and Sustainable Development

Hot springs resources have been known for their therapeutics. They can be used as a water resource for industry or energy, as well as for recreation or tourism, and feature as one of the oldest forms of water tourism [1]. Generally, there is still a lack of an unanimously agreed definition of hot spring tourism in the tourism literature [34]. Scholars believe that hot spring tourism is a combination of hot spring resources and tourism for the purpose of participating in and experiencing hot spring resource-related activities in a hot spring destination [35]. Lin proposed that hot spring tourists participate in hot spring-related
and dining experiences, and enjoy the cultural environment of the hot spring’s location for purposes of health care and leisure [14,36]. In this study, hot spring tourism was defined as a type of tourism involving hot spring resources and environmental experiences for tourists in a hot spring destination. Recently, with the emergence of new health problems in modern society, such as life stress, lack of exercise, and chronic diseases, hot spring tourism has become a popular choice for tourists as an on-site destination activity that can enhance tourists’ health and psychological well-being [13–15,37]. The evolution of hot spring tourism is not only beneficial for the economic development of hot spring destinations, but also for sustainable use of resources between water and tourism industry as a tourism business strategy [1].

Sustainability is an important concept in relation to tourism planning and development [1,2,5,6]. The concept of sustainability is applicable to many activities or situations and can easily become an ideology [5,6]. Therefore, to implement the concept of sustainability in the management of tourism destination, past studies have often used the environmental, sociocultural, and economic dimensions to understand the current situation and the problems of destination [3,4,7–9]. In 2015, the United Nations announced the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets [38]. In addition, the UNWTO declared 2017 the International Year of Sustainable Tourism Development. These efforts have led to tourism acting as a catalyst for bringing about positive changes and reducing negative impact, including addressing the five central pillars of: sustainable economic growth; social inclusiveness, employment, and poverty reduction; resource efficiency, environmental protection, and climate change; cultural values, diversity, and heritage; and mutual understanding, peace and security [29,30]. Therefore, the issue of sustainable development and pro-poor tourism has been further discussed [31,34,39], and it is emphasized that poverty alleviation needs to be geared toward helping locations achieve the sustainable development goals, such as improvement in infrastructure development, environmental cleanliness, service quality, and cultural exchange [32,33], as well as a positive impact on the operators of destinations by increasing the employment opportunities and income [32]. Therefore, it is helpful to fill the gaps in understanding the environmental, sociocultural, and economic influences on the sustainable development model of hot spring destinations after poverty alleviation and identifying the importance of sociocultural influences on the sustainable development model of hot spring destinations.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

Many studies on tourists’ behavioral intention or intention to revisit have adopted the theory of planned behavior [40] or a general model of traveler destination choice [41]. The theory of planned behavior explains that a person’s behavior is determined by behavioral intention, which in turn is impacted by the cognitive and affective factors that influence a person’s attitude [42]. In addition, a general model of traveler destination choice proposes that preferences and intentions decide the travelers’ final destination choice [41]. According to Woodside and Lysonski’s notions, before forming a preference, the long-term memory stored in tourists’ minds affects their preference for a destination through perceptual and affective constructs of a destination, and finally affects their behavioral intention and the actual decision. Thus, the understanding of tourists’ intention to revisit, as explained in studies on tourist behavior [43], tourist destination decision-making [44], and hot spring tourist decision-making [14,36], is dependent on the cognitive (e.g., environmental cognition) and affective (e.g., hot spring experience, food experience) determinants of tourists’ attitudes (e.g., attitude toward cultural landscape) toward a hot spring destination.

Scholars have reminded us that a general model of traveler destination choice is too standardized, making it impossible to extrapolate it to different contexts [14], and that tourists’ destination decision-making processes differ based on different people and groups [44]. Recent studies on the intention to revisit among hot spring tourists have
suggested that an applicable model of tourist behavior is beneficial for understanding whether people will revisit a certain hot spring destination [14,36]. However, more empirical studies on tourist behavioral intention are needed because scholars have suggested that personal attributes versus destination-based constructs are comparatively anchored to speculate on tourist behavior [45].

2.3. Environmental Cognition

The psychological behaviors or processes of tourists’ interactions with their environment have been the key focus of this research. Environmental cognition is defined as obtaining the information from the environment, conducting the internal mental processing of the information, and making the judgments based on this information [46]. Tourists receive and judge from a variety of environmental information to form short-term and long-term perceptions of a destination. The tourism environment of a destination is an atmosphere and an overall perception that is difficult to describe in concrete terms, but is of key importance [40]. Exploring the clues that influence tourism behavior in the destination environment, taking into account the tourists’ intentions and decisions, will provide a better understanding of how the destination environment is perceived by tourists [46,47]. Tourists’ behavior is influenced by information obtained from multiple sources [40], including the tourism infrastructure that tourists encounter along the way, the facilities of the hot spring activities and emotions experienced while participating in those activities, the local food, and the unique scenery. Scholars have pointed out that tourists’ awareness of the destination affects their emotions, and emotions further affect the tourists’ attitudes [48]. Thus, when tourists visit a destination after poverty alleviation, they obtain the cognition of the environment, and their emotions affect their attitudes toward the environment as a reference for future revisits and recommendations.

Measures of tourists’ environmental cognition have different scales for different types of tourists and environments/destinations. Scholars have opined that tourists’ environmental cognition is related to destination attributes, and it also influences the tourists’ destination choice behavior, including accessibility, overall cleanliness, other infrastructure [3,49], and accommodation [50]; moreover, all of these attributes are attractive to tourists. To continue to attract tourists’ attention, destinations make appropriate improvements in the tourism environment or facilities [2]. Especially when tourism alleviates poverty from tourist destinations, most of them bring positive development to the local infrastructure [39], and increase their competitiveness. Accordingly, tourists’ environment cognition of hot spring destination after poverty alleviation become an important factor in the destination choice [39,51] and a key factor in understanding the sustainable development of hot spring destinations [40].

2.4. Hot Spring Experience and Food Experience

In hot spring tourism, tourists’ experience is an important research area [13,52]. Experience is defined as a perceptual process acquired through a period of time or an activity [53]. Tourist experience can be understood as not only pure feelings or affection but also an explanation of behavior [20]; it is related to the mental process of time and place [52,54]. In Asia, some hot springs resources are used for leisure and tourism, emphasizing the psychological gains, such as psychological well-being [14,52] or attachment [15]. In contrast to general tourism activities, hot spring tourism also has a medical function, and there are studies to understand the health effects of hot spring tourism from the tourists’ viewpoint [1,13,14].

In addition, food experience at a hot spring destination is another important tourist experience. Food during travel may be a continuation of daily habits, but it may also become a motivating factor in the pursuit of novelty [20]. Whether tourists are looking for a familiar or novel food, it is a key impact on the tourist experience. A memorable local food experience of tourists is created in relation to experiencing co-creation, service landscape, and enhancement [19]. The authenticity and quality of local food affects the satisfaction and loyalty felt by tourists, which in turn has an impact on the long-term
development of tourist destinations [17]. Some studies have also found that food experience compensates the consumption of unique cuisines at hot spring destination [14]. A review of the research above shows that food experiences allow tourists to discover unique or authentic characteristics of local food, and it is also a way to deepen the tourist experience.

Although it is not clear whether local experience is a healthy perception of the hot spring experience or a familiarity and novelty of food experience, it is an important influence on tourist revisit behavior [15]. The intensity, continuity, and memory of this experience are more profound [48]. In addition to the visual experiences of traditional tourism, non-visual experiences can also be used to create deeper tourist memories [20]; the hot spring experience and food experience are also in line with the characteristics of such experiences. In view of the tourism environment and social interaction, the tourists’ environment cognition along their trip to the destination will also influence their experience [49]. Thus, the first and second hypotheses of this study model are as follows:

**Hypothesis 1.** *Environment cognition has a significant positive relation to tourists’ hot spring experience.*

**Hypothesis 2.** *Environment cognition has a significant positive relation to tourists’ food experience.*

### 2.5. Attitude toward Culture Landscape

Hot spring tourism has developed over a long period of time, so different hot spring destinations carry a number of historical and cultural connotations, and local nature and culture are deeply intertwined [14]. As a concept of cultural landscape, the character of any place evolves from the historical interaction between natural and cultural components of the landscape, and the evolution of human modification of the environment can be observed through the cultural landscape [21]. In a broader sense, natural resources are destinations’ physical features, which are also related to local specialties, traditional culture, and heritage [16]. Hot springs can be used to promote health tourism products using local natural resources, such as mineral waters or a peculiar microclimate [16]. In addition, people’s emphasis has been on the harmony between hot springs and the natural environment [1,13,15,16]. In short, the cultural landscape of hot springs provides the tourists with opportunities to interact with the surrounding environment, especially the cultural landscape related to hot springs, such as springs and the steam from hot springs.

From the viewpoint of vernacular landscape, it is possible to understand the history and culture of the past, so the cultural landscape gives the memories and the value of the place to different generations [25]. The development of hot spring destinations might be the same, but through different important landscapes of each location, different local values are recognized [24,25]. There is a dynamic interaction between physical landscape qualities, tourism promotion, tourists’ perceptions, and the tourism development and planning [21]. Therefore, the cultural landscape of a destination is related to tourists’ expectations and cognitions [24]. In the process of engaging in hot spring activities, tourists form a view of the local cultural landscape by seeing, touching, smelling, or tasting the perception or experience [14]. Through tourism activities (e.g., hot spring and food experience), tourists can reacquaint themselves with the local culture and values and further evoke a sense of identity with the place [24]. In this context, the third and fourth hypotheses of the study are inferred as follows:

**Hypothesis 3.** *Hot spring experience has a significant positive relation to tourists’ attitude toward cultural landscape.*

**Hypothesis 4.** *Food experience has a significant positive relation to tourists’ attitude toward cultural landscape.*
2.6. Revisit Intention

Revisit intent is an important concept in both tourist behavior and marketing research. The tourist intention to visit a destination is “the traveler’s perceived likelihood of visiting a specific destination within a specific time period” [41] (p. 8). A first-time tourist’s intention to revisit is related to the overall impression of the first visit; a repeat tourist’s intention relates to the memories evoked by the marketing of the destination or by the new attractions of the destination [55]. In the process of poverty alleviation, the infrastructure of the destination is enhanced/rebuilt and new attractions are created [31,33]. The addition of new features may attract both the repeat as well as first-time tourists [2,31].

There are many antecedent variables that affect tourists’ intentions to revisit [41]; these variables differ depending on the study context or destination [56]. It has been noted in the literature that the distinctive cultural landscape of a destination creates a desire to visit [24,57]. Thus, the fifth hypothetical relationship of this study has been inferred. This study presents a model for sustainable development of post-poverty hot spring tourism based on environment cognition, hot spring experience, food experience, and attitude toward cultural landscape. The model embodies the characteristics of the post-poverty and hot spring tourism; furthermore, the measure of intention to revisit is based on the intention to recommend and revisit [14,55]. With the model, the process of sustainable development through the interaction between people and the environment might be understood.

**Hypothesis 5.** Cultural landscape has a significant positive relation to tourists’ attitude of cultural landscape.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study Area

The Conghua hot spring destination is situated 75 km from Guangzhou. The per capita gross domestic product of the region is lower than the average of Guangzhou City in the past, until 2020 [58]. Thus, the development of the tourism industry is an important economic factor in the region for poverty alleviation, and tourism and sustainability are the goals of the region’s development. Conghua is a celebrated scenic spot and health resort in Guangdong. Surrounded by mountains and forests, it characterized by accommodating weather and a tranquil environment. The destination boasts the rarest mineral-enriched soda hot spring in the world—the only other being in Switzerland—which has curative effects on ailments, including skin problems, digestive system, nervous system, and more, thus providing tremendous health care benefits [59].

The Conghua hot spring destination, which is often hailed as the “Top Spring of Lingnan,” has held its reputation for 500 years (since Ming and Qing dynasties). Through different periods of tourism development and policy support, many infrastructures, hot spring, and tourist facilities have been built and renovated, which have become part of the local cultural landscape, such as historic hot spring villas and buildings, stone bridges, pavilions, prune trees, the Guangdong Cadre Retreat, and Guangdong Hot Spring Hotel. The latter two are important historical landmarks that have hosted many state heads and political delegations. Up to now, the widely known Conghua hot spring destination has attracted many travelers [60].

3.2. Measurement and Pretest

The survey tool was an on-site self-administered questionnaire, which was based on key constructs, including environment cognition, hot spring experience, food experience, attitude toward cultural landscape, and revisit intention. The first part of the questionnaire asked respondents about their environment cognition of the Conghua hot spring destination after it was modified through tourism development and policy support for poverty alleviation; it was measured for three items, adopted from the previous research [17]. The second part refers to the hot spring experience; it was measured in
respect of four items, adopted from the previous research [15,18]. The third part refers to food experience; it was measured in respect of four items, which were adopted from the previous research [14]. The fourth part refers to attitude toward cultural landscape; it was measured in terms of four items, which were adopted from the previous research [23]. Finally, revisit intention adopts the intention to recommend, and it has been used in many past studies [14,55]. All the above items are measured by the 5-point Likert scale.

To understand whether each item in the questionnaire was clearly expressed to the respondents, 30 questionnaires were distributed among the tourists at the Conghua hot spring destination for pretest, and the revised items became the formal survey instrument with reference to the opinions collected in the pretest.

3.3. Formal Data Collection

The sample was conveniently sampled during the weekdays and holidays from June to August 2019. The participants were selected by a team of trained surveyors and the data were gathered in chosen sites (i.e., hot spring hotels outside, riverside trails, and a public park) The sample included the participants who were 18 years old or older. They participated in hot spring activities after tasting the local cuisine during the trip. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed, and 271 valid questionnaires were returned, with a response rate of 90%.

4. Results

4.1. Sample Profile

In the usable sample, the percentages of men and women were, respectively, 46.5% and 53.5%. The participants in the range of 18–30 years accounted for 44.3% of the total, and they were followed by 23.3% of those participants aged 51 or older. Most of the samples were from the 11 urban districts of Guangzhou and included those visitors (69.7%) who had stayed at the destination for 12–24 h. The distribution of this sample profile was similar to that of the previous hot spring studies conducted at the Conghua hot spring destination [14,15]. The sample profile depicted those tourists of all ages enjoy hot spring activities, and most are local visitors. These travel characteristics were also consistent with Guangzhou tourists’ choices for weekend travel [59]. Our sample profile was generally representative but with a slightly higher number of female participants.

In the reliability analysis, two items were removed from food experience, and the reliability of each research construct after deletion was greater than 0.6 [61]. However, values \( \geq 0.60 \) were considered tolerable if a construct had fewer items (e.g., 6 or less) [50]. Environmental cognition (three items), hot spring experience (four items), food experience (two items), attitude toward cultural landscape (four items), and revisit intention (two items) were used in the subsequent structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis.

4.2. Measurement Model Testing

Following the SEM guidelines offered by Anderson and Gerbing [62], the measurement model was first conducted to assess its overall suitability containing all study constructs. The assessment of the adequacy of the measurement model revealed that it reasonably fit the data \( (\chi^2 = 136.11, \text{df} = 80, p < 0.001, \text{NNFI} = 0.94, \text{CFI} = 0.96, \text{RMSEA} = 0.051, \text{GFI} = 0.94, \text{SRMR} = 0.050) \). As shown in Table 1, all composite reliability values in both groups were between 0.62 and 0.80, and the multi-item scales were greater than the minimum criterion of 0.60 [63], indicating an adequate level of internal consistency in each construct.

Furthermore, we used the \( t \) values ranging from 4.11 to 8.03 for loadings for each indicator that reached statistical significance and had a value that was \( \geq 0.4 \), which demonstrated convergent validity [62]. Finally, we tested the discriminant validity, which is justified if the variance extracted estimated for any pair of factors was greater than the square of the correlation between these two factors [64]. As shown in Table 2, the results confirmed this criterion, providing evidence discriminant validity.
Table 1. Means, factor loadings, and reliabilities for environmental cognition, hot spring experience, food experience, attitude toward cultural landscape, and tourists’ revisit intention.

| Scale Item                                      | Mean | Factor Loadings | t-Value a | CR |
|------------------------------------------------|------|-----------------|-----------|----|
| Environment cognition                           |      |                 |           |    |
| Convenient transportation and infrastructure.   | 4.11 | 0.69            | –         |    |
| Comfortable and clean destination.              | 3.98 | 0.62            | 7.52 ***  |    |
| Reasonable price and value for money in the category of food and souvenirs. | 3.79 | 0.59            | 7.32 ***  |    |
| Hot springs experience                          |      |                 |           |    |
| Bathing in a hot spring can be physically and mentally refreshing. | 4.06 | 0.68            | –         |    |
| It is interesting to experience the diversity of recreation facilities at the hot spring destination. | 3.86 | 0.50            | 5.40 ***  |    |
| It helps to understand the concept of hot spring integrated with Chinese medicine to maintain health. | 3.75 | 0.54            | 4.93 ***  |    |
| It creates awareness of various bathing themes (such as herbal baths). | 3.32 | 0.43            | 4.11 ***  |    |
| Food experience                                 |      |                 |           |    |
| I experienced a type of local food-related activity. | 3.87 | 0.88            | –         |    |
| I enjoyed the local cuisine.                   | 3.85 | 0.75            | 5.11 ***  |    |
| Attitude toward Cultural Landscape             |      |                 |           |    |
| I identify strongly with the landscape of hot spring villas and hotels. | 3.78 | 0.60            | –         |    |
| The landscape of hot spring steam means a lot to me. | 3.82 | 0.71            | 8.03 ***  |    |
| Early hot spring retreat buildings cannot be substituted for other hot spring area buildings. | 4.12 | 0.69            | 7.93 ***  |    |
| The landscape of hot spring fountain facilities was very special to me. | 3.61 | 0.50            | 6.38 ***  |    |
| Revisit intention                               |      |                 |           |    |
| I intend to recommend.                          | 3.54 | 0.76            | –         |    |
| I intend to revisit.                            | 3.74 | 0.69            | 5.85 ***  |    |

Note: a t-value > 3.291 (p < 0.001, indicated by ***).

Table 2. Discriminant validity.

| Environmental Cognition | Hot Spring Experience | Food Experience | Attitude toward Cultural Landscape | Revisit Intention |
|-------------------------|----------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| Environmental cognition | 0.632                |                |                                   |                  |
| Hot spring experience   | 0.237                | 0.510          |                                   |                  |
| Food experience         | 0.172                | 0.209          | 0.819                             |                  |
| Attitude toward cultural landscape | 0.479 | 0.236 | 0.198 | 0.632 |                  |
| Revisit intention       | 0.185                | 0.314          | 0.231                             | 0.259            | 0.530           |

Note: The square root of average variance extracted is shown in the main diagonal.

4.3. Structural Model Testing

In the second step, the structural model was used to evaluate hypothetical relationships of proposed model. The results of the goodness-of-fit indices suggested that the structural model had adequate fit ($\chi^2 = 174.78$, df = 82, $p < 0.001$, NNFI = 0.92, CFI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.065, GFI = 0.92, SRMR = 0.070). As can be seen in Figure 2, the results indicated that environment cognition was positively related to hot spring experience ($H_1$) ($\beta = 0.91$, $p < 0.05$) and food experience ($H_2$) ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.05$). In addition, hot spring experience was significantly related to attitude toward cultural landscape ($H_3$) ($\beta = 0.86$, $p < 0.05$), but food experience was not ($p > 0.05$) ($H_4$). Finally, $H_5$ was supported, indicating that the path from attitude toward cultural landscape to tourists’ revisits intention was significant and positive ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.01$).

The direct, indirect, and total effects of all endogenous and exogenous latent variables in the structural models for hot spring tourists were seen in Table 3. The results of the effect analysis show that the total effect (the sum of the direct and indirect effects) of tourists’ revisit intentions is mainly influenced by attitude toward cultural landscape (0.35), followed by the indirect effect of hot springs experience on revisit intention through attitude toward cultural landscape. However, food experience had no effect on the revisit intention.
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Table 3. Summary of structural model.

| Antecedent Variable                  | Affected Variables |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
|                                      | Hot Spring         |
|                                      | Experience         |
|                                      | Food Experience    |
|                                      | Attitude toward    |
|                                      | Cultural Landscape|
|                                      | Tourists' Revisit  |
|                                      | Intentions         |
| Environment cognition                |                    |
| Direct effect                        | 0.91               |
| Indirect effect                      | 0.27               |
| Total effect                         | 0.91               |
| Hot spring experience                |                    |
| Direct effect                        | 0.86               |
| Indirect effect                      | 0.30               |
| Food experience                      |                    |
| Direct effect                        | n.s.               |
| Indirect effect                      |                    |
| Total effect                         |                    |
| Attitude toward Cultural Landscape   |                    |
| Direct effect                        | 0.35               |
| Indirect effect                      |                    |
| Total effect                         | 0.35               |

Note: n.s. means not significant.

5. Conclusions and Discussion

5.1. Conclusions

This study tests the relationship among environmental perceptions, hot spring experiences, food experiences, attitudes toward cultural landscape, and revisit intentions for understanding the contents of the sustainable development of a hot spring destination after poverty alleviation. The contribution of this study is to strengthen the position of socio-culture aspect in the development of sustainable tourism, which enhances the value and identity of tourists to a destination by linking them to the environment of the cultural landscape at hot spring and increases the tourists’ revisit rate. The findings of this study also provide guidelines, from cultural landscape to sustainable development of hot spring destinations after poverty alleviation without conflict and in balance with environmental development issues.

5.2. Theoretical Implications

The tourists’ revisit behavior has important theoretical implications for sustainable development of hot spring destination [2,27]. The results of the study indicate that tourists’ revisits to Conghua hot spring destination are mainly influenced by their attitude toward cultural landscape that can represent the history of the Chinese hot springs’ development. Historic hot spring buildings and retreats are of great significance to tourists. Tourists recognize the cultural landscape of Conghua hot spring destination and think that it cannot be substituted. Concurring with the results of previous studies, this study shows that cultural landscape may represent local values and could even be inherited for future
generations [25]. The results also highlight the importance of cultural landscape for sustainable tourism development and poverty alleviation. To sustain the effect of tourism development on poverty alleviation, the meaningful excavation of local cultural landscape can reinforce tourists’ impression of the destination and help enhance the likelihood of their revisit.

In addition, tourists’ environment cognition of a hot spring destination also affects their willingness to revisit, and this finding is consistent with previous studies [39]. The hardware investment in tourism poverty alleviation helps to significantly improve the infrastructure and environmental cleanliness of the destination, and the establishment of the institution is also reflected in the value of the services provided by tourists to the hospitality industry, which makes tourists willing to revisit a hot spring destination with a different perception of that destination. In addition, the hot spring experience is also an antecedent variable of the tourists’ revisit intention. These results are consistent with the findings of scholars [13,14]. Namely, the more positive the tourist’s hot spring experience is, the more likely he or she is to recommend it to others and revisit it on his or her own.

However, the lack of influence of food experience on tourists’ revisits is worth discussing, which is inconsistent with the past studies that indicate that food experience is an important factor for revisit [19,20]. From the model of sustainable development of a hot spring destination, it is evident that tourists’ food experience in the Conghua hot spring destination has no significant influence on the values of cultural landscape. This study concludes that the cultural landscape of Conghua hot spring destination is mostly related to the history of the development of hot spring resources and is not deeply connected to the local food or cuisines. While Guangzhou is known for its cuisines, the characteristics of hot spring cultural landscape may not have integrated into tourists’ food experience; thus it weakens the impact of food experience of this hot spring destination on tourists’ revisit intentions.

Finally, few studies have emphasized the importance of cultural landscape to tourists’ revisit intentions [24]. The cultural landscape can connect tourists and the natural environment [21], and the value of the cultural landscape of hot spring can be explored to complement the invisibility of social culture in the concept of sustainable tourism development. The tangible cultural landscape is the conductor of interaction between tourists and the destination environment, which not only inherits the local hot spring culture, but also recalls the local history of the past, making the post-trip experience more memorable for tourists and triggering the revisit factor.

5.3. Managerial Implications

The long-term development of the post pro-poor tourism destinations is an important issue for DMOs. Tourism toward Cultural Landscape, which is a kind of identity and shared value, needs to be designed so that tourists get a meaningful and memorable hot spring experience from the quality of the local environment, sociocultural, and economic improvement. For example, the cultural landscape of hot spring destination, which recreates the past, can highlight the uniqueness of the place and be recognizable in the tourism market. Consequently, the process of recovering or reconstructing the cultural landscape should be integrated with the local story or history, and more attention should be paid to the presentation of authenticity. These applications, in turn, can be promoted as new cultural practices integrated into the current tourist identity to the cultural landscape. The cultural depth of a hot spring destination can be enhanced through a variety of landscape renovations and enhancements; this can contribute to the long-term development of the destination (community) and achievement of economic sustainability. This managerial suggestion can also reflect the achievement of SDG 11, sustainable cities, and communities [38].

In addition, the proposed strategy of hot spring experience can emphasize the sensory, spatial, emotional, and spiritual aspects of hot spring tourism and the connection of these aspects to local resources and communities, giving meaning and results to these hot spring experiences through experiential marketing. Finally, Guangzhou has a well-
known culinary reputation in China, making food experience in the Conghua hot spring destination a potential development in practice. It is suggested to create a local identity for Conghua hot spring foods and drinks and, simultaneously, to combine food experience with the local cultural landscape to enhance tourists’ interest in the local food culture and increase the return rate of tourists. Introducing sustainability concepts into hot spring experiences and food events, such as recycling hot spring resources or promoting the consumption of locally sourced foods, can also achieve SDG 12, responsible consumption, and production [38].

5.4. Limitations and Future Research

One of the contributions of this study is to explain the importance of sociocultural aspect of sustainable tourism development. Compared to visualized economic indicators or environmental issues, sociocultural impacts on tourism development are intangible and for long term. Therefore, it is not possible to describe the effects of cultural landscape on poverty alleviation in numerical data as one of the limitations of this study. However, cultural landscape is also a research aspect that can be observed and explored in depth in future studies to illustrate its impact on the sustainable destination development [24].

In addition, although the special features of the Conghua hot spring destination in Guangzhou provide the rationale for the study site selection, this presents certain limitations. First, the construct of the hot spring experience was arbitrarily not removed from the proposed model despite its construct reliability value being close to the threshold value because the study site is famous for its hot spring resources and tourism. Thus, various types of hot spring resorts may have resulted in inconsistencies in the experiences of the respondents regarding the measurement items. It is suggested that subsequent studies conduct in-depth interviews to understand tourists’ experiences of hot springs and develop an appropriate scale to measure it. Second, it may be reasonable to illustrate the general importance of cultural landscapes to a destination, but it is not possible to replicate our sustainable model for the development of other hot spring destinations. Due to different types of destinations with various cultural landscape components, it is useful to continually understand the impact of cultural landscape on a destination to balance the possible conflicting interests of human activities and environmental development.

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