


# Chapter 2


## A Theoretical Inquiry Into Residents' Support for Sustainable Cultural Heritage Tourism in Qufu, China

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter examines the theoretical foundations of residents' support (RS) for sustainable cultural heritage tourism (SCHT) in Qufu, China, the birthplace of Confucianism. It explores the economic, sociocultural, environmental, and political factors influencing residents' attitudes towards tourism. Integrating frameworks like social exchange theory, place attachment, and community participation, it discusses how local involvement drives the sustainability of heritage tourism. Key challenges such as overcrowding, environmental degradation, and rising living costs are addressed, highlighting residents as crucial stakeholders. Residents' support is essential for preserving cultural integrity and maximizing socio-economic benefits. A balanced approach aligning residents' needs with tourism goals can foster resilience, community involvement, and long-term sustainability. The chapter calls for ongoing research and policy development to enhance resident engagement.*

### INTRODUCTION

Heritage protection and tourism development have increasingly converged to form a unified model, where Cultural Heritage Tourism (CHT) utilises the historical and cultural value of sites to drive tourism activities. CHT, a rapidly expanding segment, involves visiting not only tangible sites like historical buildings and landscapes but also engaging

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with intangible elements such as traditional lifestyles, customs, and local cuisine. The integration of these tangible and intangible assets provides tourists with a variety of cultural experiences, promoting an immersive understanding of heritage sites' authenticity. This fusion has made CHT one of the fastest-growing segments of global tourism, driven by a rising interest in engaging with cultural heritage in a modern context (Mzembe et al., 2023). The evolving concept of cultural heritage, now encompassing historic buildings, cultural landscapes, living heritage, and community traditions, has significantly shaped CHT's trajectory. With more UNESCO World Heritage Site designations, countries are increasingly recognising the need to balance tourism development with cultural preservation (Zhang, 2022). This shift has stimulated worldwide interest in heritage tourism, which was valued at approximately \$556.96 billion in 2021, according to the UNWTO (Grand View Research, 2022). This growth is driven by changes in consumer preferences, new cultural expressions, and continuous innovations in digital technology, all of which have reinforced cultural tourism as a significant economic driver (Katsoni & Spyriadis, 2020). In the Asia-Pacific region, which includes China, India, and Japan, cultural heritage resources are particularly abundant. China, one of the four great ancient civilisations, is a key player in global heritage tourism, boasting 57 UNESCO-listed heritage sites as of September 2023, making it the second-largest globally in terms of the number of heritage sites (UNESCO, 2023b). While the integrated development of culture and tourism has driven economic growth, it has also led to several challenges, such as environmental degradation, overcrowding at popular sites, and the erosion of cultural landscapes due to over-commercialisation and unmanaged visitor flows (Zhang, 2022). The sustainable tourism development (STD) model offers a potential solution to these problems, shifting focus from mass tourism to quality-oriented tourism that prioritises preserving cultural heritage while fostering local economic development. The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have provided a global framework for promoting sustainable cultural heritage tourism (SCHT) (Chin & Zhang, 2023). China's 14th Five-Year Plan for Culture and Tourism Development has been instrumental in integrating the preservation of intangible cultural heritage into tourism activities, encouraging traditional performances and local craft production to enhance cultural offerings (Li & Li, 2024). The SDGs, which emphasize environmental protection, social participation, and equitable development, are central to shaping a sustainable model for heritage tourism that benefits both residents and visitors (Sharma & Aulakh, 2023). For SCHT to be effective, it must incorporate the perspectives and active participation of local communities. This is especially relevant in destinations like Qufu, the birthplace of Confucius, where heritage sites are deeply embedded in the community's social and cultural fabric. Community participation ensures that tourism development respects local traditions and contributes to residents' well-being, rather than merely catering to external economic interests (Lerario, 2022; Liu et al., 2023). When residents are engaged as active stakeholders, they are more likely to support sustainable tourism practices, ensuring the long-term preservation of both the tangible and intangible elements of cultural heritage (Sharma & Aulakh, 2023).

This chapter explores how residents' support can be leveraged to ensure the sustainability of CHT in Qufu, integrating theoretical frameworks such as Social Exchange Theory, Place Attachment, and Community Participation to examine the factors influencing residents' perceptions and willingness to support tourism initiatives. By considering residents as active agents rather than passive recipients of tourism development, the chapter argues that fostering a deeper understanding of communities' roles in SCHT is essential. It emphasizes the importance of aligning tourism policies with local needs to create a resilient model of heritage tourism that preserves the cultural and historical essence of sites like Qufu while contributing to regional socio-economic development. This chapter aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on sustainable tourism by offering insights into how resident engagement can be a cornerstone for achieving sustainable outcomes in heritage-rich destinations (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). By adopting an inclusive approach, Qufu can serve as a model for other cultural heritage sites striving to balance economic development with the preservation of cultural values for future generations (Lerario, 2022).

## **CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM IN CHINA**

As one of the four ancient civilisations, China's long history, vast land, and multi-ethnic distribution pattern have provided the world with heritage resources with different cultural connotations, styles and characteristics of the times. Among these countless heritage resources, 57 of them in China have been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage

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