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Review of doctoral dissertation of MS Qihang Qiu entitled: „The Role of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Tourism Place Making”

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1. Subject and Formal Basis of the Review

The review is conducted based on:

- Resolution No. 031/2023/2024 of the Scientific Council of the Discipline of Socio-Economic Geography and Spatial Management at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań dated March 28, 2024, regarding the appointment of a reviewer in the proceedings for awarding the doctoral degree to Mr. Qihang Qiu, appointing me as the reviewer of his doctoral dissertation.
- The Act of July 20, 2018, *Law on Higher Education and Science* (Dz.U. z 2020 r., poz. 85 z późn. zm.).

The subject of the review is the doctoral dissertation comprising a series of four publications entitled "The Role of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Tourism Place Making," along with a self-report summary and keywords and attached declaration forms of co-authors of the forwarded papers. Three of these publications are co-authored (Article 1, Article 2, and Article 4), while one (Article 3) is authored solely by the doctoral candidate.

In my evaluation, I examine whether the doctoral thesis meets the criteria set out in section 187, items 1 and 2 of the Law on Higher Education and Science. This review constitutes a substantive, methodological, and formal evaluation, specifically concerning the overall theoretical knowledge of the doctoral candidate in the discipline of socio-economic geography and spatial management, as well as the ability to conduct independent scientific work.

2. General Assessment of the Dissertation: Objectives, Research Hypotheses, Literature Review, and Research Methods

The doctoral dissertation of MS Qihang Qiu consolidates a series of four related publications, three of which were written in collaboration. The co-authors' declarations unequivocally indicate that his contribution to the research and the creation of these publications was dominant. This contribution was manifested in:

- Article 1 (92%): research concept and design, data acquisition, analysis, and interpretation.
- Article 2 (93%): research concept and design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation, paper drafting and revisions, and funding acquisition.
- Article 3 (100%): publication and study results.
- Article 4 (80%): research concept and design, data collection, paper drafting and revisions, and funding acquisition.

Overall, the presented cycle of thematically related scientific articles published in recognized international scientific journals such as the International Journal of Tourism Research (John Wiley & Sons Ltd.), Journal of Destination Marketing & Management (Elsevier), and Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management (Elsevier) pertains to a cohesive research scope of the doctoral candidate, both independent and in collaboration with other researchers, on the role of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) in tourism place making. The articles chronologically present the successive stages of research within the dissertation, supported by the Polish National Science Center (Narodowe Centrum Nauki) under the grant: „The role of intangible cultural heritage in tourism place making: A comparative study of selected Polish and Chinese cities” (grant number: 2021/41/N/HS4/02081).

The dissertation, written in English, has a theoretical-empirical character and demonstrates a certain degree of interdisciplinarity. Motivating the choice of research topic, the doctoral candidate pointed out the need to:

- consider the interface of intangible heritage and human geography in the context of tourism destinations,
- apply an interdisciplinary framework of cultural studies, human geography (place making), and tourism management (destination marketing).

In her considerations, the doctoral candidate used a broad literature review of the subject, diverse in type, including recent scientific articles in recognized international journals and publications. However, she devoted little attention to the economic aspects of the tourist product of the area and behavioral economics in relation to consumer (tourist) behaviors and decision-making processes.

The selected literature reflects current debates in the field of human geography, culture, marketing and tourism destination management and this selection is appropriate as it covers a variety of perspectives to the issues raised, although it could have been expanded to include the economic aspects of the regional tourism product and behavioral economics identified earlier in the review. In addition, a significant amount of data and survey results were utilized.

The Author correctly formulated three main research objectives and corresponding cognitive research questions. The research objectives were formulated as follows:

1. To understand the value of ICH and popular ICH resources.
2. To identify the tourism place making process while integrating ICH resources.
3. To confirm ICH's role in differentiating a city and ultimately serving as a destination marketing and management tool.

The specific research questions were addressed in subsequent scientific articles forming the cycle, namely:

1. Which ICH resources have been discussed most extensively in recent years? What are the prevailing research trends and future directions in ICH tourism? (Article 1)
2. How can ICH be effectively employed for tourism place making? (Article 2)
3. Does ICH have the capacity to render a place distinct, and if so, how? (Article 3)
4. How does the labeling of ICH contribute to destination marketing? (Article 4)

These objectives were achieved based on adequate research using properly selected diverse research methods and data sources, i.e., systematic literature review (previous research), meta-analysis literature review (previous research), content analysis (tourist reviews on TripAdvisor), and structural equation modeling (questionnaire survey).

However, the self-report did not formulate research hypotheses related to the adopted research objectives arising from the posed research questions, which can be seen as debatable. Formulating research hypotheses concerning the entire dissertation and verifying them during the research process organizes the work's concept and allows for the assessment of the conducted research's usefulness in drawing final conclusions. Additionally, deriving research hypotheses supported by the literature of the subject allows for clearly situating the research issues within the discipline's theory and identifying research gaps.

Below is an evaluation of the individual publications forming the doctoral dissertation. They constitute a logical sequence and structure of research resulting from the formulated research problems and dissertation objectives. It is noteworthy to positively assess the gradual deepening of research questions in subsequent scientific articles forming a cohesive whole.

Article 1

Qiu, Qihang, Yifan Zuo, and Mu Zhang. "Intangible cultural heritage in tourism: Research review and investigation of future agenda." *Land* 11.1 (2022): 139. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.3390/land11010139>

This article introduces the research context, indicating the research subject and its relationship with human geography, cultural studies, tourism management, and destination marketing, as well as the direction and nature of research conducted by researchers dealing with intangible cultural heritage in tourism.

Positives:

- a comprehensive literature review, grouping articles according to different criteria: spatio-temporal distribution of papers, research content, and methods used,
- attention to identifying significant side issues conducted by international researchers, e.g., pointing out threats related to the commodification of heritage mentioned in the literature,
- combining quantitative and qualitative analysis,
- identification of research trends, future research directions, and up-to-date specific research problems addressing current social and economic challenges,
- graphic visualization and illustration of data and research results (although this task was realized by the co-author).

However, it would be beneficial to use certain indicators to present the quantitative distribution of the characteristics of scientific articles instead of interpreting these numbers nominally. Highlighting the potential for further research in the undertaken issues, including proposing specific research questions.

A critical reservation regarding this article is the lack of a broader discussion of perspectives fitting into the interdisciplinary nature of considerations concerning tourist behavior and destination marketing, addressing this issue only briefly within the "review findings" section. The literature review, as proposed in the article, could have been an opportunity for a deeper embedding of the research topic within scientific theories.

Article 2

Qiu, Qihang, Xiaomei Liang, and Yifan Zuo. "Identifying European and Chinese styles of creating tourist destinations with intangible cultural heritage: A comparative perspective." *International Journal of Tourism Research* 25.2 (2023): 266-278. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.2567>

This article represents the next research step and refines the research on the tourism place making process in terms of ICH. It also includes a comparison of distinct place making styles in China and Europe. However, the simplification of treating Europe as a uniform area for comparison with China was noted by the doctoral candidate.

Positives:

- providing a new and comparative perspective on using ICH as a place making tool based on a cross-region study,
- providing a complete place making framework and comprehensive factors by concluding two different approaches in Europe and China,
- comprehensive conceptualization of place making in the context of tourism,
- graphic illustration of data and processing of qualitative information.

Article 3

Qiu, Qihang. "Identifying the role of intangible cultural heritage in distinguishing cities: A social media study of heritage place and sense in Guangzhou, China." *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management* 27 (2023): 100764. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2023.100764>

This article specifies the function of ICH in distinguishing cities and creating diverse places and sensory experiences, with additional data sources and content analysis.

Positives:

- use of a proven method in tourism research, content analysis using tourist reviews on TripAdvisor, to address an original research problem, expanding knowledge on tourist perception and the creation of a tourist destination image,
- inclusion of geostatistical information to obtain additional knowledge about the analyzed phenomenon,
- identification of both theoretical and managerial implications,
- information-rich graphic visualization of data and research results.

Article 4

Qiu, Qihang, and Yifan Zuo. "'Intangible cultural heritage' label in destination marketing toolkits: Does it work and how?" *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management* 56 (2023): 272-283. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2023.06.025>

This article illustrates the most advanced quantitative research in the cycle, using structural equation modeling based on a questionnaire survey to confirm the destination marketing function of ICH labeling as a tool affecting tourists' intention to visit a destination.

Positives:

- formulation and verification of research hypotheses using the SEM method,
- identification of moderating variables affecting the examined relationships (not only considering their explanatory function),
- employing the stimulus-organism-response (SOR) theory to explore how ICH site labeling affects tourists' behavioral intentions (however, there are many different theories to discuss referring to tourist behavior and decision-making processes, such as nudge theory, value-belief-norm theory, etc. – thus a more comprehensive approach would be needed to embed the research proposal in theory),
- the study of tourists' behavioral intentions (to visit an ICH site/tourist destination) opens new research perspectives due to the existence of a certain gap between the assessment of perceived behavior and actual behavior – it constitutes a good starting

point for deepening considerations using experimental methods or agent-based simulations (e.g., Agent-Based Modeling).

A significant challenge in such research is the need for a holistic approach to explaining tourist behavior stimuli, reflected both in the broader use of interdisciplinary theories and the parameterization of the model (consideration of interactions between variables).

3. Originality of the Scientific Problem Solution

The research topic chosen by the doctoral candidate is cognitively interesting and has valuable utilitarian character. It responds to current scientific challenges faced by science and practice, as noted by the doctoral candidate in the presented works. The rapid technological development requires the skillful integration of traditional statistical data and research methods with methods utilizing new data sources and information, including those from user activities on online platforms or collected by devices (big data).

The research conclusions imply recommendations in the field of territorial unit management for local policy, particularly regarding destination marketing, tourism policy, and broader applications, such as seeking ways to shape the spatial behaviors of consumers (tourists), considering the needs of sustainable development. This arises from the possibility of applying the methodological solutions developed in spatial research to optimize decisions at various levels of territorial management and create the image of tourist destinations.

The research topic undertaken in the dissertation is not only intriguing but also inspiring for other researchers, including those representing other scientific disciplines. The doctoral candidate indicates possible and desirable further research directions based on systematically drawn conclusions and synthesis of individual research fragments.

In-depth reasoning, consistently indicating various research limitations and future research directions, constitutes a strong point of the work. It also reflects the doctoral candidate's research reliability and critical attitude towards her own research.

4. Formal-Technical Aspects of the Dissertation (Language, Graphics, Footnotes, References)

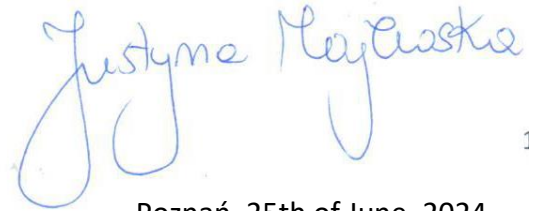
The dissertation is very meticulous and aesthetically pleasing in terms of editorial quality. The Author took care of the language, the appearance of the content, tables, charts, and maps. The graphic illustrations are correct and clear, supporting the reasoning process and constituting a valuable analytical processing of the research material. The research work is based on a range of scientific literature, which has been appropriately referenced.

5. Conclusion

The reviewed dissertation is substantively and formally correct, possessing significant originality in the approach and solution of the research problem. The doctoral candidate demonstrated a high level of conceptual, analytical skills and the ability to draw conclusions based on independently designed and conducted empirical research. The doctoral candidate also demonstrated adequate knowledge in the discipline of socio-economic geography and spatial management and the ability to conduct independent scientific work.

Thus, I conclude that the doctoral dissertation of MS Qihang Qiu entitled „The Role of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Tourism Place Making” meets the requirements of Article 187, items 1 and 2 of the Act of July 20, 2018, *Law on Higher Education and Science* (Dz.U. z 2020 r., poz. 85 z późn. zm.) and I recommend to the Scientific Council of the Discipline of Socio-Economic Geography and Spatial Management at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań that it be accepted and allowed for public defense.

dr hab. Justyna Majewska, prof. UEP

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Justyna Majewska". The signature is written in a cursive style with large, flowing letters. To the right of the signature, there is a small number "1".

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