

**FACTORS INFLUENCING DESTINATION
LOYALTY ON ETHNIC TOURISM IN GUIZHOU
PROVINCE, CHINA: THE MODERATING ROLE
OF CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE
MEDIATING ROLE OF TOURIST
SATISFACTION**

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UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

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by

HUANG XIAOXU

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CB-SEM	Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modeling
CMV	Common Method Variance
CQ	Cultural Intelligence
CR	Composite Reliability
DI	Destination Image
DL	Destination Loyalty
DMOs	Destination Management Organizations
GDP	Global Gross Domestic Product
HTMT	Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio
KOLs	Key Opinion Leaders
MAE	Mean Absolute Error
MV	Marker Variable
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling
QDN	Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture
QN	Qiannan Buyi and Miao Autonomous Prefecture
QXN	Qianxinan Buyi and Miao Autonomous Prefecture
RMSE	Root Mean Squared Error
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
SOR	Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory
TEQ	Tourist Experience Quality
TPB	The Theory of Planned Behavior
TS	Tourist Satisfaction
UGC	User-generated Content
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor

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**FAKTOR YANG MEMPENGARUHI KESETIAAN DESTINASI DALAM
PELANCONGAN ETNIK DI GUIZHOU, CHINA: PERANAN MODERASI
KECERDASAN BUDAYA DAN PENGANTARA KEPUASAN PELANCONG**

ABSTRAK

Pelancongan adalah ialah komponen penting dalam pasaran pelancongan domestik China, terutamanya wilayah Guizhou memainkan peranan yang penting dalam sektor ini. Namun begitu, kesan daripada pandemik dan persaingan daripada wilayah-wilayah etnik lain telah menimbulkan cabaran terhadap pemulihan dan pertumbuhan pelancongan di Guizhou. Bagi menonjolkan diri dalam persekitaran persaingan yang sengit ini, Guizhou amat memerlukan strategi untuk menarik pelancong baru dan mengekalkan pelancong sedia ada, sekali gus mewujudkan kelebihan daya saing dan manfaat ekonomi yang mampan. Selaras dengan itu, objektif kajian ini adalah untuk menyelidik faktor-faktor utama yang mempengaruhi kesetiaan pelancong ke Guizhou sebagai destinasi utama dalam konteks pelancongan etnik, serta menjelaskan mekanisme bagaimana faktor-faktor ini membentuk kesetiaan dalam kalangan pelancong. Dengan mengintegrasikan teori tingkah laku terancang dan teori rangsangan-organisma-tindak balas, kajian ini mencadangkan rangka kerja penyelidikan yang menjelaskan hubungan antara imej destinasi, kualiti pengalaman pelancong, kandungan yang dijana oleh pengguna (UGC), kepuasan pelancong, kecerdasan budaya (CQ), dan kesetiaan destinasi. Melalui pensampelan berasaskan tujuan (purposive sampling), data telah berjaya dikumpulkan daripada 328 orang pelancong dan dianalisis menggunakan perisian SPSS serta Pemodelan Persamaan Berasaskan Varians (PLS-SEM). Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa imej destinasi, kualiti pengalaman pelancong, UGC, dan kepuasan pelancong adalah anteseden

penting yang mempengaruhi kesetiaan destinasi pelancong di Guizhou. Imej destinasi, kualiti pengalaman pelancong, dan UGC memberi impak yang signifikan dan positif kepada kepuasan pelancong. Selain itu, kajian ini mendedahkan peranan pengantara kepuasan pelancong dalam hubungan antara imej destinasi, kualiti pengalaman pelancong, dan UGC dengan kesetiaan destinasi. CQ mempunyai kesan sederhana positif terhadap hubungan antara kepuasan pelancong dan kesetiaan destinasi. Penemuan ini memberikan perspektif teori baharu dan sokongan empirikal untuk meneroka kesetiaan destinasi dalam bidang pelancongan etnik. Di sebalik sumbangan teori, kajian mengesyorkan agar organisasi pelancongan dan agensi kerajaan lebih bersedia, bersikap positif dan terbuka kepada pelancong. Menubuhkan pasukan profesional untuk mengendalikan dan menyelia UGC di media sosial menyumbang kepada mendapatkan kepercayaan pelancong dan meningkatkan emosi positif mereka. Usaha pembangunan infrastruktur dan perlindungan warisan budaya disyorkan untuk membentuk imej destinasi yang menggalakkan dan menarik. Selain itu, menyediakan produk dan perkhidmatan pelancongan baharu untuk pengalaman pelancongan yang lebih unik dan tidak mudah dilupakan boleh meningkatkan kepuasan pelancong dan kesetiaan destinasi. Langkah-langkah praktikal ini menyumbang kepada meningkatkan kepuasan pelancong dan kesetiaan destinasi mereka terhadap pelancongan etnik.

**FACTORS INFLUENCING DESTINATION LOYALTY ON ETHNIC
TOURISM IN GUIZHOU PROVINCE, CHINA: THE MODERATING ROLE
OF CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE MEDIATING ROLE OF
TOURIST SATISFACTION**

ABSTRACT

Ethnic tourism is a crucial component of China's domestic tourism market, with Guizhou playing a significant role in this sector. However, the impacts of the pandemic and competition from other ethnic provinces have posed challenges for Guizhou in terms of tourism recovery and growth. To stand out in this intensely competitive environment, Guizhou urgently needs to determine how to attract new tourists and retain existing ones, thereby creating sustainable competitive advantages and economic benefits. Accordingly, the research objective of this study is to investigate the key factors influencing tourists' destination loyalty in Guizhou's ethnic tourism and to clarify the mechanisms through which these factors shape loyalty. By integrating the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory, this study proposes a research framework elucidating the relationships between destination image, tourist experience quality, user-generated content (UGC), tourist satisfaction, cultural intelligence (CQ), and destination loyalty. Through purposive sampling, data were collected from 328 tourists and analyzed with SPSS and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results indicate that destination image, tourist experience quality, UGC, and tourist satisfaction are crucial antecedents affecting tourists' destination loyalty toward ethnic tourism in Guizhou. Destination image, tourist experience quality, and UGC significantly and positively impact tourist satisfaction. Additionally, the study reveals

the mediating role of tourist satisfaction in the relationship between destination image, tourist experience quality, and UGC with destination loyalty. CQ has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty. The findings provide a new theoretical perspective and empirical support for exploring destination loyalty in ethnic tourism. Beyond the theoretical contributions, the study recommends that tourist organizations and government agencies should be more prepared to ensure they have a positive and open attitude toward the arrival of tourists. Establishing professional teams to operate and supervise UGC on social media contributes to gaining tourists' trust and enhancing their positive emotions. Infrastructure development and cultural heritage protection efforts are recommended to shape a favorable and attractive destination image. Additionally, providing novel tourism products and services for a unique and memorable tourist experience can enhance tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty. These practical measures improve tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty toward ethnic tourism.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This chapter offers a comprehensive overview of the entire research, commencing with an introduction of background, followed by a problem statement, research questions, and research objectives. Subsequently, it elucidates the study's significance from theoretical and practical standpoints. Additionally, it includes definitions of crucial terminologies and outlines the content structure, setting stages for the subsequent chapters.

1.2 Background of the Study

Tourism is widely recognized as a prominent global industry. Through tourism, people can temporarily escape their daily environments and visit destinations with natural wonders, historical landmarks, or exotic cultures (Song & Yuan, 2021). However, the tourism sector remains highly vulnerable to a range of crises, such as crime, terrorism, natural calamities, epidemics, and political unrest (Dayour et al., 2020), all of which can cause severe damage to the tourism sector or even the entire economy of a country (Najar & Rather, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 is an example of such a crisis. Countries imposed strict travel restrictions to curb the spread of the pandemic, leading to a dramatic halt in national and international tourism.

Crises in the tourism industry have disastrous effects on tourist arrivals, tourist expenditures, capital expenditures, and employment generation (Senbeto & Hon, 2020). The tourism industry in nearly all regions worldwide has recovered to 2019 levels. As shown in Figure 1.1, the tourism sector contributed 9.90 trillion U.S. dollars to the global gross domestic product (GDP) in 2023, accounting for 9.1% of global GDP, only 1.3% below the pre-pandemic share. Employment in this sector increased by 27.4 million, reaching 330 million workers (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2024). By 2024, the tourism sector is projected to generate 11.10 trillion U.S. dollars and create 348 million jobs, marking a historic peak. According to the report from World Travel & Tourism Council (2024), the tourism sector’s contribution to global GDP is expected to grow at an annual rate of 3.7%, reaching approximately 16 trillion U.S. dollars by 2034 while providing 449 million jobs. It can be concluded that the prospects of the tourism industry are up and coming.

	\$ Total GDP Contribution	
2019	10.4% USD 10.3 TN	-48.4% 2020 change
2023	9.1% USD 9.9 TN	+23.2% (-4.1% vs 2019) Annual change Total Economy change: +2.7%
2024 Estimated	10% USD 11.1 TN	+12.1% (+7.5% vs 2019) Annual change Total Economy change: +2.2%
2034 Forecast	11.4% USD 16 TN	+3.7% CAGR ² 2024-2034 Total Economy CAGR ² : +2.4%

	👤 Total Travel & Tourism Jobs	
2019	334MN = 10.5% of global jobs	-69.5MN 2020 change (-20.8%)
2023	330MN = 10% of global jobs	+9.1% (-1.4% vs 2019) Annual change
2024 Estimated	348MN = 10.4% of global jobs	+5.5% (+4.1% vs 2019) Annual change
2034 Forecast	449MN = 12.2% of global jobs	+101.1MN 2034 vs 2024 New jobs

Figure 1.1 Global Tourism Overview

Source: Adopted from World Travel & Tourism Council (2024)

Most countries worldwide are multi-ethnic, and ethnic conflict is one of the problems that threaten domestic stability in these countries (Roychoudhury, 2015). Besides religious and cultural factors, economic factors are considered the leading causes of ethnic conflicts (Onwuzuruigbo, 2010). Tourism contributes to fostering economic growth, generating employment, and alleviating poverty, thereby driving social prosperity and offering distinct prospects for women, minority groups, and young individuals (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2024). Thus, the tourism industry is seen as an effective means to promote the development of ethnic regions and maintain regional stability (Sharpley, 2022).

In Australia, the United States, and some countries in Asia and Europe, areas and regions with high concentrations of individuals who belong to the same ethnic group have been developed as tourism destinations (Maruyama & Woosnam, 2015). Besides generating economic income and employment, the tourism industry fosters local competition and investment. Overall, tourism contributes to multi-level development in ethnic areas, helping to diminish economic fragility in job creation, investment opportunities, and production enhancement (Canh & Thanh, 2020).

1.2.1 Ethnic Tourism in China

China is characterized as a unified country comprised of multiple ethnicities, boasting 56 distinct ethnic groups, with the Han ethnicity constituting over 90% of the population, leaving the remaining 55 ethnic groups collectively known as ethnic minorities (Tu & Zhang, 2020). Table 1.1 presents the ethnic groups in China.

Table 1.1 The Fifty-six Ethnic Groups in China

Type	Name of Ethnic Group					Total
Ethnic Majority Group	Han					1
Ethnic Minority Groups	Zhuang	Manchu	Hui	Miao	Uyгур	55
	Tujia	Yi	Mongolian	Tibetan	Bouyei	
	Dong	Yao	Chaoxian	Bai	Hani	
	Kazak	Li	Dai	She	Lisu	
	Gelo	Dongxiang	Lahu	Shui	Va	
	Naxi	Qiang	Tu	Mulam	Xibe	
	Kirgiz	Daur	Jingpo	Maonan	Salar	
	Blang	Tajik	Achang	Pumi	Ewenki	
	Nu	Jing	Jino	Deang	Bonan	
	Eluosi	Yugur	Ozbek	Moinba	Oroqen	
	Drung	Tartar	Hezge	Gaoshan	Lhoba	

In 2023, China’s tourism industry contributed approximately 1.3 trillion U.S. dollars to global GDP, ranking second to the United States (Statista Research Department, 2024). Nearly all of China’s tourism revenue over the past three years was estimated to be derived from domestic tourism, as strict travel restrictions have effectively halted inbound tourism since 2020 (Agne, 2024). During the tourism crisis, domestic tourism played a crucial role in mitigating fluctuations in international tourist arrivals, stabilizing production, fostering investment, and sustaining tourism revenue (Canh & Thanh, 2020).

Since 2011, China’s domestic tourism has experienced continuous growth, as shown in Figure 1.2. In 2019, domestic tourism revenue reached 858.77 billion U.S. dollars, attracting 6.01 billion tourists (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). After experiencing significant setbacks caused by the pandemic to the entire tourism system, domestic tourism revenue rebounded to 737 billion U.S. dollars, and tourist arrivals recovered to 4.89 billion in 2023 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024).

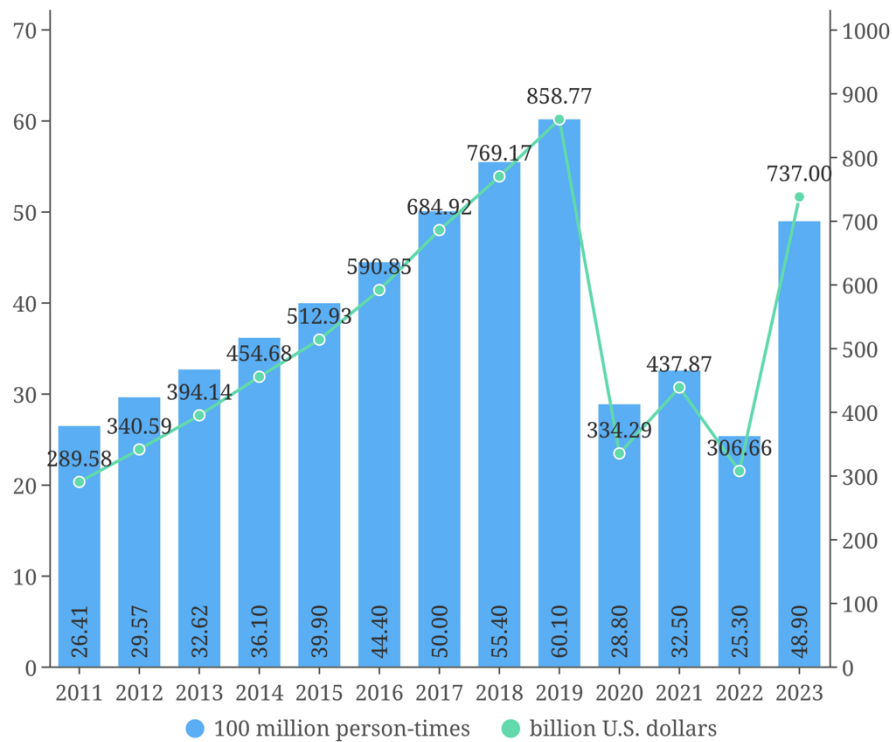


Figure 1.2 Domestic Tourism Development in China from 2011 to 2023
 Source: Data Adopted from National Bureau of Statistics (2024)

During the COVID-19 pandemic and travel restrictions, China’s domestic tourism market became increasingly mature, accompanied by tourist preferences and behavior shifts. In the post-pandemic era, Chinese tourists have shown a strong enthusiasm for novel and unique experiences, exhibiting higher expectations and greater digital awareness (Giulia, 2023). One notable trend in China’s domestic tourism is the growing interest in heritage sites and cultural landmarks, as tourists seek more profound engagement with diverse ethnic cultures and landscapes (Giulia, 2023), creating a surge in ethnic tourism.

Ethnic tourism in China stems from the unbalanced development and economic disparities between the eastern and western areas of the country (Cohen, 2016). There

are eight ethnic provinces in China: Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (Guangxi), Guizhou Province (Guizhou), Inner Mongolia, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region (Ningxia), Qinghai Province (Qinghai), Tibet, Xinjiang, and Yunnan Province (Yunnan). As shown in Figure 1.3, ethnic minorities are concentrated in the western areas, where most are remote and mountainous; in contrast, most Han nationalities reside in the plains of eastern and central China. This topographical characteristic has led to comparatively lower levels of transportation infrastructure and industrialization in minority areas. Consequently, their primary economic sources rely on agriculture and animal husbandry, often yielding limited economic benefits and value (Yang et al., 2008).

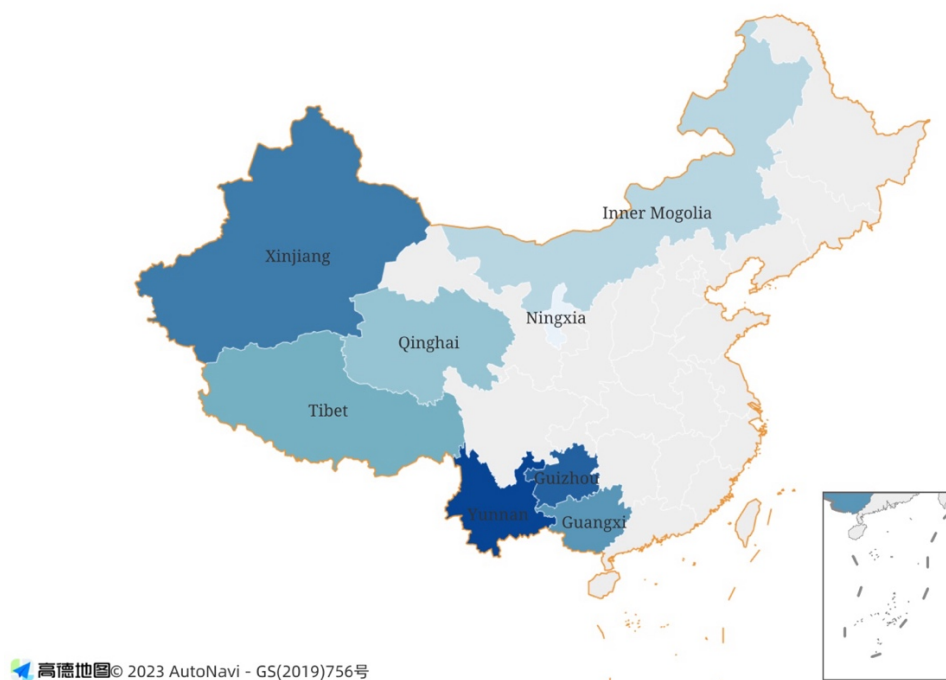


Figure 1.3 Eight Ethnic Provinces in China¹

¹ The shades of color represent the number of ethnic minority groups that lived in each province for generations. (Yunnan: 25; Guizhou: 17; Xinjiang: 13; Guangxi: 12; Tibet: 6, Qinghai: 5; Inner Mongolia: 4; Ningxia:4)

With China's economic shift towards liberalization, the eastern region witnessed the emergence of an urban middle class with disposable income (Cohen, 2016), further exacerbating economic inequality between the eastern and western regions. The Chinese government has implemented various measures to improve the underdeveloped conditions and backwardness in ethnic minority areas, and one such measure is developing ethnic tourism (Tu & Zhang, 2020). The allure of ethnic tourism lies in the seemingly "exotic" culture of a minority, providing tourists with extraordinary cultural experiences (Wang et al., 2020). Minority people and their lifestyles are observed, photographed, and even interacted with as living spectacles by tourists (Li et al., 2021). The Han nationality, seeking a more authentic and simpler lifestyle, are often attracted to the exoticism of minority regions, making them typical tourists (Graburn, 2015). Ethnic tourism serves as a significant driving force for promoting local employment, improving living standards, and integrating minorities into mainstream society (Zhou, 2014).

Since 2012, ethnic tourism in China's eight ethnic provinces has continuously grown, as presented in Figure 1.4 (refer to APPENDIX A for detailed data). Although COVID-19 has substantially impacted the global tourism industry, signs of recovery are now evident. Before the pandemic, Guizhou consistently held the top position in tourism revenue among the ethnic provinces for eight consecutive years. However, the province's tourism recovery results fell short of expectations. Specifically, Guizhou's tourism revenue has consistently lagged behind that of Guangxi after the pandemic. In

2022, Guizhou’s tourism revenue was 78.69 billion U.S. dollars, nearly 18.3% behind that of Guangxi.

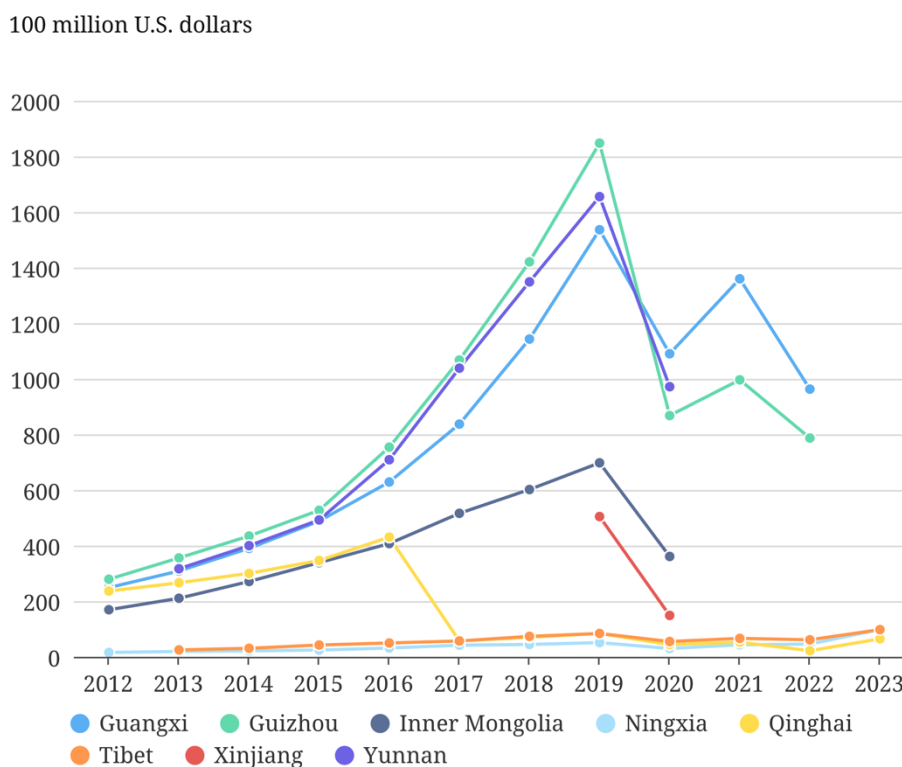


Figure 1.4 Tourism Earnings in China’s Eight Ethnic Provinces from 2012 to 2023

Source: Data Adopted from Each Province’s Statistics Bureau Websites (see APPENDIX B)

Looking at the tourist arrivals, Guizhou has experienced sluggish growth after the pandemic. In contrast, more tourists have chosen Guangxi as their destination, as depicted in Figure 1.5. In 2022, Guizhou attracted 492.07 million tourists, while Guangxi’s tourist arrivals reached 589.14 million. Compared to pre-pandemic peak levels, Guizhou’s tourist arrivals declined by 56.7%. This situation indicates that Guizhou faces significant challenges in attracting and retaining tourists.

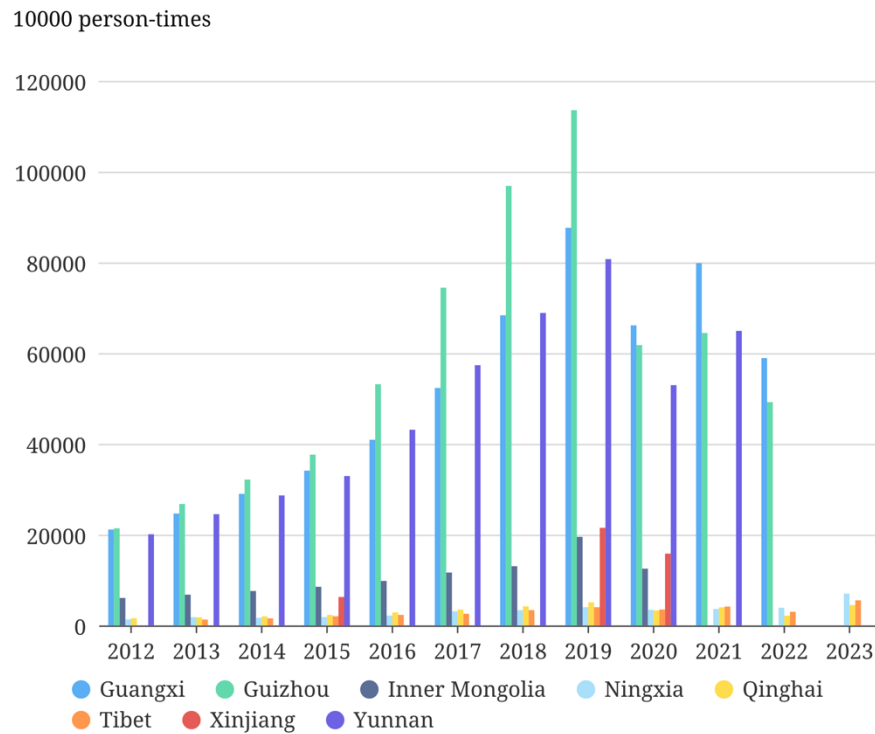


Figure 1.5 Total Number of Tourists in China’s Eight Ethnic Provinces from 2012 to 2023
Source: Data Adopted from Each Province’s Statistics Bureau Websites (see APPENDIX B)

Since the reform and opening-up policy was initiated, tourism has been an important component of China’s domestic economy (Agne, 2024). With the easing of travel restrictions and shifts in tourist preferences, ethnic tourism has become a new focal point (Giulia, 2023). The diverse ethnic cultures and unique landscapes of China’s ethnic provinces have supported this travel boom. Given Guizhou’s substantial share in the ethnic tourism market, it is essential to understand the key factors influencing the recovery and development of ethnic tourism in the province.

1.2.2 Ethnic Tourism in Guizhou

Guizhou, located in the southwestern part of China, is one of the country's eight ethnic provinces. Apart from the Han nationality, the province is home to 49 minority ethnic groups (Li et al., 2021). Among these minority groups, 17 have been residing here for generations, with Miao, Buyi, Dong, Tujia, Yi, Gelao, and Shui being the most prominent.

Guizhou is comprised of nine prefecture-level administrative units: Guiyang, Liupanshui, Zunyi, Anshun, Bijie, Tongren, Qianxinan Buyi and Miao Autonomous Prefecture (QXN), Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture (QDN), and Qiannan Buyi and Miao Autonomous Prefecture (QN). The development of ethnic tourism in Guizhou primarily relies on local ethnic tourism destinations and unique ethnic cultures. The heterogeneous culture and pristine natural environments in ethnic areas attract tourists, and these unique resources can be leveraged for economic gains within the tourism industry (Trupp, 2014).

According to data from Statistics Bureau of Guizhou Province (2023), the province's ethnic tourism destinations include 71 tourism attractions (national and provincial levels) and 80 historical and cultural relics, distributed across the nine administrative units in Guizhou, as listed in

Table 1.2. The assessment of tourist attractions is based on criteria such as "Service Quality and Environmental Quality Rating Guidelines," "Landscape Quality Rating Guidelines," and "Tourist Opinion Rating Guidelines." The attractions are

classified as national or provincial after assessment, and those achieving the corresponding quality grades are publicly announced by the National Tourism Scenic Spot Quality Rating Institution (Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People’s Republic of China, 2023).

Table 1.2 Distributions of the Ethnic Tourism Destinations in Guizhou

Regions	Tourist Attractions		Historical and Cultural Relics
	National level	Provincial level	
Guiyang	1	8	5
Liupanshui	0	5	2
Zunyi	1	6	14
Anshun	3	3	11
Bijie	2	2	7
Tongren	3	7	8
QXN	1	6	8
QDN	3	7	20
QN	4	9	5
Total		71	80

Source: Data Adopted from Statistics Bureau of Guizhou Province (2023)

In 2019, Guizhou attracted approximately 1135.27 million tourists, with tourism revenue reaching 184.78 billion U.S. dollars, accounting for 73.4% of the province’s GDP (Statistics Bureau of Guizhou Province, 2023), setting a record high since 2012. However, due to the ongoing restrictions on mobility caused by COVID-19, the contribution of tourism revenue to the province’s GDP experienced a sharp decline. In 2022, the tourism revenue stood at roughly 78.69 billion U.S. dollars (constituting 26.01% of the province’s GDP), and the tourist arrivals were around 492.07 million person-times (Statistics Bureau of Guizhou Province, 2023).

Looking back at the ethnic tourism in Guizhou over the previous decade (as shown in Table 1.3), it is evident that the province’s tourism revenue and tourist

arrivals have experienced a slowdown in growth after the pandemic. The number of travel agency workers and star-rated hotels has shown a declining trend, and these two indicators are essential measures of the destination's hospitality capacity. Moreover, the average number of days of tourist stay has grown slowly, even stagnating. The average days of tourist stay serve as a direct precursor to the destination's profitability, as longer stays have a positive impact on accommodations, transportation, attractions, dining, and other general businesses, generating more tourism revenue (Cossío-Silva et al., 2019). In addition, the average room occupancy rate was merely 55.78%.

Due to stricter travel restrictions in the Asia-Pacific region, full reopening only occurred in 2023, with expectations that the region would return to pre-pandemic levels by the end of 2024 (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2024). The World Travel & Tourism Council (2022) has forecasted that the Asia-Pacific area would experience an annual average growth rate of 8.5% in tourism and travel GDP from 2022 to 2032, while the economic growth rate in the region is 4%. Guizhou has set a target to double the revenue from ethnic tourism and related industries by 2025 based on the 2019 baseline. In other words, Guizhou plans to achieve tourism revenue of no less than 369.57 billion U.S. dollars by 2025, aiming for significant economic growth and placing the per capita tourism consumption level among the top in the country (Guizhou Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism, 2021). Therefore, Guizhou's destination management organizations (DMOs) must innovate development strategies, reallocate resources, and work towards achieving these goals.

Over the past three years, although international travel has remained restricted, domestic tourism has experienced robust growth (Giulia, 2023). Following the surge in ethnic tourism post-pandemic, competition among destinations has become increasingly fierce. To stand out in this highly competitive environment, Guizhou's DMOs must attract new tourists while retaining existing ones to drive economic growth. Studies have shown that retaining 5% more customers can boost company profits by 25% to 85% (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990). This finding implies that maintaining current customers is more economically efficient than obtaining new ones, and even a minor decrease in the expense of customer retention can significantly boost profits (Singh et al., 2024). Therefore, loyal tourists are essential for a destination's long-term development and success.

Destination loyalty, which reflects a long-term relationship between tourists and a destination, has become a focal point in the tourism industry (Kusumah, 2024; Matyusupov et al., 2024). Repeated visits are a direct outcome of destination loyalty (Singh et al., 2024). When tourists return to a destination to relive their previous enjoyable experiences, they also promote additional tourists through word-of-mouth. This one-to-one communication subtly influences potential tourists and stimulates further demand (Fang et al., 2024). Loyal tourists tend to prolong their stay, participate in more activities, and promote favorable and positive word-of-mouth about the place they visited (Abdul Gapor et al., 2023; Stylidis et al., 2020). Consequently,

establishing destination loyalty supports sustained growth in a destination's revenue and enhances its market competitiveness and resilience to risk.

Although Guizhou boasts abundant ethnic cultures and tourism resources, drawing substantial numbers of tourists with its unique appeal, the province's tourism recovery post-pandemic continues to face significant challenges. Many in the industry believe that loyal tourists would drive tourism recovery (Fang et al., 2024). Accordingly, examining the factors influencing tourists' destination loyalty toward Guizhou's ethnic tourism carries strong practical significance. By gaining deeper insight into these factors, Guizhou's DMOs can more effectively optimize tourism products and services, improve tourist experiences, and enhance tourist satisfaction—thereby increasing the likelihood of return visits and recommendations. This stable relationship cultivated through higher destination loyalty could support the recovery and sustainable development of ethnic tourism in Guizhou.

Table 1.3 Developing Situation of Tourism in Guizhou Province from 2012 to 2022

Items	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total Number of Tourists (10000 person-times)	21401.18	26761.28	32134.94	37630.01	53148.42	74417.43	96858.12	113526.60	61781.49	64436.68	49206.88
Tourism Earnings (100 million U.S. dollars)	279.02	355.60	434.40	526.92	754.13	1067.52	1420.65	1847.83	867.76	996.32	786.85
Total Number of Travel Agencies (unit)	302	321	337	353	364	392	339	498	665	693	764
Number of Staff and Workers of Travel Agencies (person)	3624	3852	5242	5540	5873	6229	4572	5244	4159	4092	3231
The Number of Star-rated Hotels	368	377	358	343	308	286	203	239	231	232	242
Average Days Tourists Stay in Guizhou Per Capita (day/person)	1.43	1.41	1.44	1.51	1.85	2.15	2.08	2.7	2.03	2.03	/
Room Occupancy Rate (%)	64.3	59.9	57.7	58.5	61.7	59.5	57.4	61	39.1	54.4	40.1

Source: Data Adopted from Statistics Bureau of Guizhou Province (2023)

1.3 Problem Statement

Since 2012, Guizhou has maintained a leading position in both total tourism revenue and tourist arrivals among China's eight ethnic provinces for eight consecutive years. From 2012 to 2019, Guizhou's tourism revenue grew at an average annual rate of 31.01%, while tourist arrivals increased by 26.92% (see Table 1.3), indicating strong momentum and a dominant position in China's ethnic tourism market. However, Guizhou lost this edge post-pandemic as more tourists shifted to destinations such as Guangxi. Data reveal that in 2022, Guizhou's tourism revenue lagged behind Guangxi by 18.3%, and tourist arrivals fell short by 16.5% (see APPENDIX A), underscoring the difficulties and challenges Guizhou faces in its tourism recovery.

With the ethnic tourism boom post-pandemic (Giulia, 2023), it has become an important niche market that significantly contributes to the domestic economy. Reviewing the past decade, a key issue for Guizhou's ethnic tourism is the slow growth in tourists' average days of stay, with room occupancy at only half of the overall reception capacity (see Table 1.3), suggesting considerable potential for improvement in attracting tourists and extending their stays. Despite Guizhou's unique ethnic culture and rich tourism resources, strengthening destination loyalty has become central to the recovery of its ethnic tourism. In particular, against the backdrop of competing provinces like Guangxi and Yunnan enhancing their market appeal and brand influence, Guizhou urgently needs measures to retain existing tourists and drawback returning ones.

Guizhou aims to double its ethnic tourism revenue by 2025, targeting at least 369.57 billion U.S. dollars while striving to rank among the top in the country for per capita tourism spending (Guizhou Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism,

2021). However, relying solely on innovative products and attracting new tourists could not meet this goal. Guizhou must focus on increasing destination loyalty by building long-term, stable relationships with tourists, boosting repeat visits and willingness to recommend the destination, thereby ensuring a sustained increase in tourism revenue. Consequently, it is essential to thoroughly investigate the key factors influencing destination loyalty in Guizhou's ethnic tourism to strengthen its market competitiveness, enhance resilience to risk, and promote the sustainable development of ethnic tourism.

Previous research has demonstrated that tourist satisfaction (Abbasi et al., 2024; Elbaz et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2021), destination image (Najar & Rather, 2023; Nguyen & Duong, 2024; Trang et al., 2023), and tourist experience quality (Bai et al., 2024; Leo et al., 2021; Suhartanto et al., 2020) are crucial factors influencing destination loyalty. However, with the widespread adoption of WEB 2.0, user-generated content (UGC) has become a key iteration, particularly relevant to tourism destinations (Garner & Kim, 2022). UGC in social media influences the entire travel process (Nezakati et al., 2015). Compared to marketing materials on DMOs websites, tourists consider reviews or opinions posted by other tourists on travel forums, blogs, or social media platforms as more reliable (Gal-Tzur et al., 2020). Approximately 70% of travelers rely on UGC information when organizing and planning their travels (Cheung et al., 2022). This peer UGC significantly influences tourists' expectations and satisfaction with particular destinations (Garner & Kim, 2022), subsequently affecting their destination loyalty (Xu et al., 2023). However, the direct and indirect relationships between UGC and destination loyalty remain unclear.

Furthermore, prior research has indicated that the mediating role of tourist satisfaction between destination loyalty and its other influencing factors (Albaity &

Melhem, 2017; Bhat & Darzi, 2018; Cossío-Silva et al., 2019; Fang et al., 2024; Lee & Xue, 2020; Li et al., 2021; Tuu, 2024). This interaction is supported by SOR theory, specifically, destination image, tourist experience quality, and UGC as external stimuli, impacting and changing tourists' internal states (tourist satisfaction), which then triggers subsequent responses (destination loyalty). However, this relationship needs further examination in ethnic tourism.

Despite most previous studies demonstrating a positive and direct relationship between tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty, this relationship was not proven in the study by Leo et al. (2021). For such subtle differences, the inclusion of moderating variables is crucial. Additionally, in the original conception of TPB, perceived behavioral control (PBC) exists as a moderating variable (La Barbera & Ajzen, 2021). As most past studies only discovered its main effects, it was treated as an independent variable along with attitude and subjective norm (Ajzen, 2020; La Barbera & Ajzen, 2021). However, Ho et al. (2022) pointed out that this oversight may lead to missing opportunities for a deeper understanding of behavioral intentions. Thus, the inclusion of moderating variables is necessary both theoretically and empirically. Ethnic tourism is characterized by cultural heterogeneity (Li et al., 2021). Individuals growing up in nations with diverse cultural norms would form unique behaviors and ways of thinking. Therefore, from a cross-cultural perspective, ethnic tourism requires tourists to possess specific abilities to perceive and adapt to potential differences. Cultural intelligence (CQ) is considered tourists' capacity to effectively adjust and assimilate into destinations with diverse cultural backgrounds (Frías-Jamilena et al., 2018a). Specifically, tourists with high CQ can more objectively evaluate tourist destinations. Past research indicates that CQ can moderate the relationship between loyalty and its

antecedents (Paparoidamis et al., 2019). However, in the context of ethnic tourism, there remains a dearth of pertinent empirical support to substantiate this claim.

In summary, this study intends to investigate tourists' destination loyalty towards ethnic tourism, aiming to facilitate Guizhou in gaining a competitive edge, fostering sustainable tourism income, and advancing the recovery and progression of ethnic tourism in China. This study integrates TPB and SOR theory to examine the relationships among destination image, tourist experience quality, UGC, tourist satisfaction, CQ, and destination loyalty. By embracing these two theories, this study offers a more comprehensive understanding than applying a single theoretical perspective. In this study, tourist satisfaction is regarded as a crucial concept connecting destination loyalty and its antecedents, attempting to elucidate its mediating mechanism in ethnic tourism. Furthermore, given the differences in the association between tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty, this study also explores the moderating effect of CQ on this relationship.

1.4 Research Questions

Based on the previous background description and research problems, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Are there positive relationships between destination image, tourist experience quality, and user-generated content toward destination loyalty among tourists in Guizhou?
2. Are there positive relationships between destination image, tourist experience quality, and user-generated content toward tourist satisfaction among tourists in Guizhou?

3. Is there a positive relationship between tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty among tourists in Guizhou?
4. Does tourist satisfaction mediate the relationships between destination image, tourist experience quality, user-generated content, and destination loyalty among tourists in Guizhou?
5. Does cultural intelligence moderate the relationship between tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty among tourists in Guizhou?

1.5 Research Objectives

Corresponding to the research questions, the research objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To investigate the relationships between destination image, tourist experience quality, and user-generated content on destination loyalty among tourists in Guizhou.
2. To investigate the relationships between destination image, tourist experience quality, and user-generated content on tourist satisfaction among tourists in Guizhou.
3. To investigate the influence of tourist satisfaction on destination loyalty among tourists in Guizhou.
4. To evaluate the mediating effect of tourist satisfaction on the relationships between destination image, tourist experience quality, user-generated content, and destination loyalty among tourists in Guizhou.
5. To examine the moderating effect of cultural intelligence on the relationship between tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty among tourists in Guizhou.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The outcomes of this study are anticipated to broaden the boundaries of existing literature and knowledge in the field of ethnic tourism. This section will elaborate on the significance of this study from both theoretical and practical perspectives.

1.6.1 Theoretical Significance

From a theoretical perspective, firstly, this study underscores the crucial role of tourists in advancing ethnic tourism. As stakeholders in the tourism industry and significant participants in tourism activities, tourists' destination loyalty can bring sustainable competitive advantages and tourism revenue to the destination. However, prior studies have primarily emphasized the support and collaboration of residents and DMOs in promoting ethnic tourism development and enhancing destination revenue (Fan et al., 2021; Lor et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2022), with less attention given to tourists.

Secondly, this study comprehensively considers tourist satisfaction, destination image, tourist experience quality, and UGC to investigate tourists' destination loyalty to ethnic tourism. Based on past research, tourist satisfaction (Elbaz et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2021), destination image (Najar & Rather, 2023; Trang et al., 2023), and tourist experience quality (Leo et al., 2021; Suhartanto et al., 2020) have been proven to be crucial aspects influencing destination loyalty, although this relationship needs further verification in the context of ethnic tourism. Additionally, until now, the direct and indirect impacts of UGC on destination loyalty have not been clarified. Incorporating all influencing factors contributes to a more holistic comprehension of destination loyalty.

Thirdly, this study integrates TPB and SOR theory to explain destination loyalty. Past research has used TPB (Stylos & Bellou, 2019) and SOR theory (Hsu et al., 2021; Jafar & Ahmad, 2023; Nieves-Pavón et al., 2023; Wei & Zhang, 2023) as single theoretical foundations to investigate tourists' destination loyalty and behavioral intentions. Some researchers have found that integrating TPB and SOR to investigate consumer behavior and behavioral intentions can provide a more comprehensive and appropriate explanation (Bhardwaj et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2023; Qi & Ploeger, 2021); however, such attempts are lacking in the field of ethnic tourism. This study proposes an integrated theoretical model to gain deeper insights.

Finally, this study investigates the mediating and moderating effects. Tourist satisfaction is considered an important concept connecting destination loyalty and its antecedents, supported not only by past empirical findings (Albaity & Melhem, 2017; Bhat & Darzi, 2018; Cossío-Silva et al., 2019; Lee & Xue, 2020; Li et al., 2021) but also by SOR theory. Moreover, as a modified TPB construct, CQ is employed to moderate the subtle variances in the positive relationship between tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty. Deliberating on mediating and moderating effects fosters a more profound comprehension of destination loyalty.

1.6.2 Practical Significance

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study on destination loyalty may have implications for people at the destination (including residents, vendors, and service providers), DMOs (including government agencies, non-profit organizations, tourism industry associations, and local community organizations), and other tourism destinations. Firstly, people at the destination can view the arrival of tourists with a more positive and friendly attitude. Maintaining an open and objective mindset during

interactions with tourists helps them better feel and understand the culture and customs of the ethnic tourism destination.

Secondly, this study can guide DMOs in crafting tailored development policies and marketing strategies. DMOs need to balance destination ecology and ethnic tourism development management in a more objective and reasonable way to cater to tourist requirements, improve tourist satisfaction, and consequently enhance their destination loyalty.

Finally, this study could have implications for other tourism destinations. Ethnic tourism destinations within the remaining seven ethnic provinces of China might derive insights from this study to refine their existing development strategies and enhance destination tourism earnings. Furthermore, destinations across different tourism contexts, such as rural, cultural, heritage, and island, may also find valuable insights from this study.

1.7 Definitions of Key Terms

Cultural Intelligence refers to tourists' ability to adapt to destinations with different cultures (Frías-Jamilena et al., 2018a). In this study, cultural intelligence refers to tourists' ability to adapt to and function effectively in tourism destinations with different ethnic cultures.

Destination Image refers to the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that tourists accumulate during their visit to a destination (Prayag et al., 2017). In this study, destination image refers to the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that tourists accumulate during their visit to ethnic tourism destinations.

Destination Loyalty refers to tourists' strong and enduring preference and emotional attachment to a destination (Jamaludin et al., 2018). In this study,

destination loyalty refers to tourists' positive attitudes and preferences towards ethnic tourism destinations, including the intention to revisit the destination and recommend it to others.

Ethnic Tourism refers to a form of tourism that markets the “quaint” customs of indigenous peoples and other exotic ethnic groups to the public (Smith, 1989). In this study, ethnic tourism refers to tourism centered around the seemingly “exotic” culture of a specific ethnic group, providing extraordinary cultural experiences for tourists.

Tourist experience quality refers to the perceptions of tourists after engaging in a series of tourism activities and interacting with various elements encountered during the tourism process (Rahmawati et al., 2022). In this study, tourist experience quality refers to the perception tourists feel after participating in a series of tourism activities and interacting with various things they encountered during their visit to the ethnic tourism destination.

Tourist satisfaction refers to tourists' overall response to the tourism products or services provided by a particular destination (Chi et al., 2020). In this study, tourist satisfaction refers to tourists' overall response to the tourism products or services provided by the ethnic tourism destination.

User-generated Content refers to media content created or produced by the public primarily disseminated on the Internet (Xu et al., 2023). This study applied the general definition.