

Exploring the Path of High-Quality Development in the Cultural Tourism Industry Empowered by Film and TV Series

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Abstract: In recent years, with the popularity of numerous TV series and films, audiences have moved beyond mere viewership and stardom following to engaging in on-site sightseeing and check-ins at actual filming locations. Concurrently, regional tourism strategies have increasingly emphasized the marketing of these locations, further attracting fans and viewers for tourism and consumption. Against the backdrop of the national strategy for the integration of culture and tourism, the film and television industry serves as a powerful cultural medium that can attract attention and evoke strong emotions, plays a significant empowering role in the cultural tourism sector. This paper attempts to outline the internal mechanisms of this empowerment, analyze current existing problems, and propose paths for high-quality development from the perspectives of mechanism innovation, IP operation, and scene construction.

Keywords: Film and TV Series; Cultural Tourism Industry; Empowerment.

1. Introduction

As "Generation Z" and "Generation Alpha" become the main force of consumption, the traditional sightseeing mode is gradually declining, replaced by the experience economy centered on emotional resonance, cultural experience, and scenic immersion. In this context, film and television works are no longer merely vehicles for entertainment but have evolved into powerful bonds connecting audience emotions with physical spaces.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism issued the Domestic Tourism Improvement Plan (2023–2025). The plan explicitly proposes to 'promote the orderly development of new business forms in tourism' and emphasizes 'advancing the "Tourism+" and "+Tourism" models to foster the in-depth integration of tourism with culture, sports, agriculture, transportation, commerce, industry, aerospace, and other fields. [1] The "Travel with Micro-Dramas" creation plan released by the National Radio and Television Administration in 2024, along with the State Council's policy guidance on "Unleashing the Potential of Tourism Consumption," marks the elevation of film-tourism integration from spontaneous, scattered market behaviors to a national industrial strategy. This integration is not a simple addition but a reconstruction of local images through visual storytelling, transforming abstract cultural symbols into tangible tourism products, thereby triggering a consumption craze shifting from "watching the show" to "entering the scene."

Film and TV series works are not only cultural products but also platforms and mediums for cultural dissemination, possessing the critical function of self-propagating the cultural content they carry.[2] In-depth research into the mechanisms and paths of film-empowered cultural tourism holds significant theoretical and practical significance. Regarding industrial economic transformation, film-tourism integration serves as a key lever for driving local economies from resource-dependent to content-innovation-driven models. Especially in the less developed central and western regions, a hit series can often instantly revitalize dormant

cultural tourism resources, becoming a new engine for rural revitalization. From the perspective of cultural communication, this model provides concrete landing scenarios for telling China's stories well. Film and television works excavate regional cultural textures through vivid audio-visual language, while tourism experiences make these cultures tangible and participatory. The synergistic effect of both greatly enhances the communication power and influence of Chinese culture. Therefore, exploring high-quality integration paths possesses profound strategic value for constructing a modern cultural tourism industry system.

2. Practical Models of Integrating Films, TV Series with Cultural Tourism

The transformation of filming locations into film tourism destinations is a phenomenon frequently observed during the dissemination of numerous film and TV productions. [3] We have witnessed the phenomenal trend where a single drama ignites an entire city. The TV series *The Knockout* brought Jiangmen's old streets back into the public eye; the animated film *Chang'an* awakened the collective memory of Xi'an's historical culture; and the TV series *Blossoms Shanghai* triggered a phenomenal check-in craze at Shanghai's Huanghe Road and the Fairmont Peace Hotel. Audiences are no longer satisfied with passively "watching" stories in front of a screen; instead, they yearn to physically travel to filming locations or narrative settings, seeking a sense of presence and completing the identity transformation from viewer to tourist.

With the recovery and high-quality development of the tourism industry, practices relating to film, culture, and tourism have gradually increased. Currently, the integration of film and television with cultural tourism in China presents a diversified and segmented development trend. Based on observations of recent typical cases, this paper categorizes them into three types: emotional empowerment of natural landscapes, image reconstruction of urban culture, and the immersive transformation of film and television bases.

2.1. Emotional Empowerment of Natural Landscapes

The core mechanism of this model lies in the use of audio-visual language by film and television works to transform originally objective and silent natural landscapes into meaningful spaces carrying specific emotions and life philosophies. Traditional sightseeing often stops at the superficial consumption of visual spectacles, whereas film narratives inject soul into the scenery.

The 2023 hit series *Meet Yourself* is a typical representative of this model. Instead of relying on traditional intense plot narratives, the series used a slow-paced lens language to showcase the pastoral scenery and humanistic society of Dali. The pastoral landscape of Dali was deeply bound with social psychological needs for a slow life and escaping the rat race, making the "Windy Courtyard" not just a filming location, but a synonym for a lifestyle aspired to by urban populations, successfully driving the healing-style transformation of Yunnan tourism. For urban audiences in front of the screen, Dali is no longer merely the geographical Cangshan Mountain and Erhai Lake, but a spiritual sanctuary.

Similarly, the 2024 phenomenal series *To the Wonder* used delicate cinematography and a soothing narrative rhythm to transform the natural landscapes of Altay—its grasslands and snow-capped mountains—from mere physical geographical coordinates into a deep alignment with the audience's social psychological needs for healing and freedom. When tourists travel to these filming locations, they are essentially seeking the emotional projection of the characters in the play and attempting to obtain psychological comfort and resonance by placing themselves in the same physical space. This model successfully transforms natural resource advantages into high-value-added emotional consumption products, promoting the leapfrog development of the cultural tourism industry in remote areas.

2.2. Image Reconstruction of Urban Culture

The empowerment of cultural tourism by urban-themed film and television works is mainly reflected in the excavation, amplification, and even reconstruction of a city's historical memory and cultural temperament through visual storytelling, thereby activating old urban spaces.

The TV series *Blossoms Shanghai*, aired in 2023, was not a documentary-style reproduction of 1990s Shanghai, but a highly stylized artistic reconstruction. Through single-camera shooting, frame-dropping editing, and rich, colorful lighting effects, director Wong Kar-wai endowed Huanghe Road and Jinxian Road with a dreamlike gilded texture, reshaping them into dramatic spaces full of the charm of the era. This awakened the city's collective memory and triggered a large-scale City Walk craze. This visual aesthetic reshaped the public's perception of Shanghai's Haipai culture. After the series aired, the Peace Hotel launched a high-priced "Blossoms Set Menu," and the pork chop with rice cake shops on Huanghe Road saw long queues. This indicates that what tourists are consuming is not the current Shanghai, but the "Old Shanghai" visualized by Wong Kar-wai through a nostalgic filter. The film successfully transformed the city's historical memory into consumable cultural tourism products.

The animated film *Chang'an* pioneered a new path of cultural synesthesia. With extreme oriental aesthetics, it revived the atmosphere of Chang'an found in Tang poetry, achieving a poetic reshaping of Xi'an's urban image and

successfully activating the cultural genes of the city. When tourists visit the Giant Wild Goose Pagoda or the Grand Tang Dynasty Ever-bright City, they are no longer just looking at physical architecture, but are engaging in a poetic verification spanning a thousand years. This image reconstruction proves that whether through realistic reproduction or cultural expressionism, film and television works can redefine urban landmarks, transforming physical spaces into check-in sanctuaries carrying profound cultural imagination, and triggering the audience's impulse to seek their cultural roots.

2.3. Immersive Tour of Film and TV series Bases

Traditional film and TV series bases mainly rely on crew filming and simple sightseeing tours. However, in the era of the experience economy, this model faces the challenge of diminishing marginal utility and is transitioning towards a pan-immersive model. Taking Hengdian World Studios as an example, it has vigorously promoted a "Film+" strategy in recent years.

First, the deepening of experience. Hengdian launched large-scale immersive performance projects such as *Step into the Movie*, allowing tourists to wear costumes and experience remaking classic film scenes under the guidance of professional directors, realizing the leap from watching a play to acting in a play. Second, the generalization of space. It is no longer limited to closed scenic spots but aims to build the entire town area into a "film-themed town," embedding film elements into catering, accommodation, and transportation. However, with the development of on-set special effects technology, this model also faces challenges; the demand for physical set construction may decline. Film bases must break away from singular reliance on film crews and enhance their own hematopoietic capacity through the innovation of cultural tourism products.

In summary, the current "Film + Cultural Tourism" has initially formed a relatively mature operational model. However, it also exposes obvious problems of prioritizing traffic over retention and prioritizing vision over experience. For instance, after *The Knockout* popularized Jiangmen, although local tourist numbers surged in the short term, the heat faded extremely quickly due to a lack of subsequent in-depth cultural tourism product development. This reflects that China's current film-tourism integration is still largely in a passive undertaking stage where localities rush to respond only after a film becomes a hit, lacking pre-emptive planning and full industrial chain layout at the inception of film projects. How to break industry barriers and achieve the pre-integration of film and cultural tourism is the core proposition that urgently needs to be solved in the next stage.

3. Existing Problems and Pain Points in the Film-Empowered Cultural Tourism Industry

Although the tourism industry is developing rapidly, a review of industrial practices in recent years reveals deep-seated structural contradictions such as supply-demand mismatch, broken industrial chains, and content alienation. These issues directly constrain the sustainable development of the industry.

3.1. The Dilemma of being a Flash in the Pan

Unlike traditional tourism resources which possess

constant attraction, film-induced tourism is highly time-sensitive. Taking *The Knockout* as an example, during the series' broadcast, the daily visitor volume in Jiangmen's Changdi Historical and Cultural District surged. However, merely six months later, as the popularity faded, tourist traffic in most areas rapidly declined, except for core check-in points. This flash in the pan traffic places a tremendous test on local tourism reception capacity, service quality drops during peak periods, while facilities sit idle and wasted during troughs.

During the initial popularity of *To the Wonder*, filming locations such as Habahe County saw a massive influx of tourists in a short time. This led to skyrocketing hotel prices and a lack of available rooms, along with frequent issues regarding parking and restroom access within scenic areas. Such disparities easily trigger a backlash of negative public opinion online. Furthermore, the serious lag in soft power services characterized by a lack of service awareness, uneven quality of service personnel, and even price-gouging phenomena severely damages the beautiful "filter" created by the drama, making it difficult to convert traffic into lasting retention.

3.2. The Experiential Gap of the discrepancy between the Screen and Reality

Film is the art of light and shadow, filmmakers beautify reality through lighting, color grading, and camera work. For instance, in Wong Kar-wai's *Blossoms Shanghai*, scenes often carry intense aestheticism and a specific atmospheric tone of the era. However, when tourists arrive at the actual locations harboring expectations based on cinematic imagery, they often face noisy crowds, modern utility poles, and unrepaired old architecture. This gap between the reality and the film easily triggers negative emotions in tourists, subsequently backlash against the city's image.

Additionally, some film and television works exaggerate or fictionalize local culture for dramatic effect. Tourists arriving with a perception rewritten by the film often find that real folk customs differ vastly from the movie. If a tourism destination deliberately mimics the inauthentic culture found in the film to cater to tourists, it risks losing the authenticity of its own culture, leading to cultural vulgarization.

3.3. The Long-Term Absence of Pre-planning

Currently, the vast majority of successful cases are unintentional outcomes rather than intentional designs. It is often only after a film or TV series work unexpectedly becomes a hit that local cultural tourism departments hastily intervene to start promotion. This "postponed" development model also leads to waste of resources. After the production team leaves, the exquisite set designs are dismantled. When it comes to developing tourism later, they have to restore them all over again, thus missing the golden window period for publicity and promotion.

Moreover, there is an absence of benefit-distribution mechanisms. Currently, it is difficult for film copyright holders to directly profit from subsequent tourism ticket sales or comprehensive revenue. This results in a lack of motivation for them to cooperate with cultural tourism departments on long-term IP operations after the series has aired. Cooperation between the two parties often stops at joint promotion during the broadcast period. Once the popularity fades, the partnership terminates, making it difficult to form a closed commercial loop of "film-induced traffic + cultural tourism monetization + feedback for creation."

4. Paths for High-Quality Development in the Cultural Tourism Industry Empowered by Film and TV Series

Addressing the aforementioned pain points, this paper proposes comprehensive optimization strategies ranging from policy mechanisms and product forms to IP operations and marketing communication. The aim is to propel the integration of film and cultural tourism from a mere physical superimposition to a chemical reaction.

4.1. Mechanism Innovation: Promoting Front-loaded Film-Tourism Integration and Benefit Sharing

To break the long-term predicament of lagged development, the cultural tourism mindset must be front-loaded to the source of film creation. It is recommended that local cultural tourism departments take the lead in establishing a library of film themes and location resources, building an incubation platform for "Scripts + Destinations." During the scriptwriting stage, cultural tourism experts should be introduced to participate in planning, evaluating the tourability of scenes and their value for subsequent development. For instance, screenwriters can consciously set specific, easily preserved scenes, such as specific teahouses or landmark buildings to bury easter eggs for future tourism check-ins.

Simultaneously, a policy exchange of attracting productions with scenery and driving scenery with productions should be implemented. Local governments should issue more targeted support policies, moving beyond simple venue rent reductions to explore copyright exchange or benefit-sharing models. For example, local governments could provide financial support or free venues in exchange for tourism development authorization of the film IP within a negotiated period, including scene retention, image usage, and merchandising rights. Thereby, the production crew reduces costs while the scenic spot acquires the IP, achieving a win-win situation.

4.2. Product Upgrading: Virtual Technology and Immersive Deep Integration

Future film tourism must transcend simple scenic spot check-ins and transition towards deep physical experiences and emotional immersion. Addressing the issues of sets being dismantled after filming or the discrepancy between real landscapes and cinematic images, Augmented Reality (AR) or Virtual Reality (VR) technology can be utilized to restore scenes from film works. Tourists at scenic spots can use mobile phones or AR glasses to see original film footage or dynamic performances of virtual characters superimposed onto real ruins. For example, at scenic spots related to the animated film *Chang'an*, tourists could use AR to see a virtual image of Li Bai reciting poetry before their eyes, achieving interaction across time and space and compensating for the regret that what you see is not what you get.

Additionally, immersive entertainment can be deeply implanted by converting film stories into participatory games or Live Action Role-Playing products. Utilizing IP from films with strong plots and logic, large-scale real-world scripted games or immersive dramas can be developed at filming locations. Tourists are no longer bystanders but change into costumes and play roles to drive the plot forward. This

entering the play experience can significantly extend tourist stay times and drastically increase per-customer spending. Furthermore, film aesthetics can be extended to themed accommodation and dining. For instance, by recreating classic meals from movies or creating film-themed hotels, tourists' immersion in the film world is reinforced through multiple sensory channels such as taste and touch.

4.3. Operational Advancement: Full Industrial Chain IP Asset Management

The core of film-empowered cultural tourism lies in IP. Drawing on the mature experiences of Disney and Universal Studios, films should be used as traffic entry points to build a profitable closed loop across the entire industrial chain. The systematic development of cultural and creative merchandise should be strengthened. High-quality, collectible merchandise should be designed based on props, character images, and classic lines from film works. For example, hardcore models can be developed for sci-fi films, while co-branded aromatherapy products or journals can be developed for art-house films. Merchandise should become the material carrier connecting film emotions with real life.

Furthermore, utilizing key nodes such as film release anniversaries or film festivals, events like fan meetings, theme music festivals, and filming location marathons should be organized. Through the creation of a sense of ritual, the activity of fan communities can be continuously activated to maintain IP heat, solving the problem of being a flash in the pan.

"Film + Cultural Tourism" is not a simple "1+1" addition,

but a profound reconstruction regarding space, narrative, and experience. For Chinese cinema, cultural tourism integration provides an opportunity to transform from single box office revenue to diversified copyright revenue, helping to extend the industrial chain and enhance resilience against risks. For the tourism industry, films inject a scarce cultural soul, making landscapes no longer cold natural existences but meaningful spaces full of emotional warmth. Film content will become the core gene of urban soft power, while cultural tourism experiences will become the physical carrier for the extension of film IP value. In this process, only by adhering to cultural confidence and balancing commercial logic with humanistic ecology can film-cultural tourism integration become a strong engine for telling China's stories well and promoting regional economic revitalization, allowing every excellent film and television work to become a cultural bridge connecting the world and China.

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