

The Mechanism of Guan Gong's Broadsword Performance in Guan Di Temple to Stimulate the Courage of Tourists: A Qualitative Study Based on Tourist Perception

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of deep integration between sports tourism and China's outstanding traditional culture, how living performances at cultural heritage sites effectively convey spiritual values has become a crucial issue. This study examines the Guan Gong Broadsword Performance at Haizhou Guandi Temple in Shanxi Province, employing qualitative research methods from the perspective of tourist perception to explore the psychological mechanisms that stimulate visitors' sense of courage. Through semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis with 28 tourists, the research reveals that the performance serves as a direct trigger for courage through "impactful bodily symbols" (strength, speed, shouts), while "contextualized spatial resonance" (sacred spaces) amplifies the emotional significance of bravery. Ultimately, through tourists' "interpretation and emotional internalization," the performance completes a three-stage dynamic process from sensory impact to self-projection. The study concludes that as a form of "bodily communication," the Guan Gong Broadsword Performance effectively transforms traditional cultural spirit into personal psychological assets within specific cultural spaces, providing crucial theoretical foundations and practical insights for designing immersive cultural heritage tourism experiences and empowering spiritual values.

Keywords: Guan Gong Culture; Guan Gong's Broadsword; Sense of Courage; Qualitative Research

1. Introduction

In the era of deep integration between the global experience economy and cultural tourism, contemporary travelers are undergoing a profound shift in preferences—from superficial sightseeing to immersive experiences that

emphasize deep engagement and spiritual value. This trend has unlocked unique potential in the creative fusion of sports tourism and cultural heritage, transforming static cultural symbols into dynamic, perceptible emotional resources through physical engagement. In recent years, the Chinese government has actively promoted this integration. The "Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Integrated Development of Sports Tourism", jointly issued by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the General Administration of Sport, explicitly calls for "exploring the spiritual essence of traditional sports culture" to fulfill the mission of cultural soul-casting in the modern era [1].

Driven by both policy and practice, the culture of Wu Sheng (Guan Gong culture), as an outstanding representative of China's excellent traditional culture, has made its core spiritual system of "yong"—that is, courage and martial spirit—a valuable resource for cultivating positive psychological qualities in the nation. Guan Yu, respectfully called Guan Gong, was a famous historical general during the Three Kingdoms period in China, later deified and becoming the embodiment of the spirit of "loyalty, righteousness, and bravery" [2]. The "Broadsword" he wielded was not merely a weapon but also a tangible symbol of his martial valor and moral integrity. Therefore, the "yong" in Guan Gong culture is far more than mere physical courage; it is a virtue closely tied to moral principles such as loyalty and justice, constructed by culture. The Guandi Temple in Jiezhou, Shanxi, as the core pilgrimage site of Guan Gong's hometown and an important carrier of Wu Sheng culture, has innovatively launched sports tourism projects such as the "Guan Gong Broadsword Performance" and "Wu Sheng Martial Arts Demonstration," aiming to convey this profound spiritual value to contemporary tourists[3].

However, a closer examination of current practices and academic research reveals a

significant gap. In practice, most existing projects remain at the superficial entertainment level of "physical experience," lacking clear psychological mechanisms to effectively transform external "heroic" performances into tourists' internal "courage" emotional experiences. Academically, current literature primarily follows two relatively independent approaches: the first focuses on narrative dissemination of martial culture and interpretation of static spatial symbols [4], while relatively neglecting the core role of dynamic bodily practices in emotional transmission; the second, regarding emotional experience studies in tourism, either relies on affective geography and semiotic theories to explore environmental one-way influences [5], or emphasizes courage generation mechanisms in special contexts like extreme sports [6]. This research landscape systematically overlooks a critical question: In specific contexts of cultural heritage sites, how are dynamic bodily actions carrying profound cultural significance (such as Guan Gong's Broadsword dance) perceived, interpreted, and ultimately trigger personal courage in tourists? This psychological black box between "watching" and "feeling" remains inadequately explored [7].

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to examine the mechanisms of courage perception in tourists, using the Guan Gong Broadsword Demonstration at Jiezhou Guandi Temple as a case study. Rather than constructing complex "space-action" symbolic frameworks, we focus on three core questions: What key elements in the performance trigger emotional responses? How are these perceptions processed and interpreted within a culturally sacred space? How does this experience transform fleeting emotions into enduring inner courage? The findings not only provide empirical evidence for immersive design at Jiezhou Guandi Temple and similar cultural heritage sites, but also offer new theoretical insights into the revitalization and psychological transformation of traditional cultural values in contemporary contexts.

2. Research Methods

2.1 Research Paradigm and Context

This study employs a qualitative research

approach, a choice grounded in the exploratory nature of the research question—our need to deeply understand tourists' complex subjective experiences and psychological processes. The qualitative method is particularly suited to capture rich, contextualized personal experiences, enabling participants to provide nuanced descriptive data from their own perspectives, thereby revealing the internal mechanisms of courage perception formation [8].

The research is conducted at the Guandi Temple in Haizhou, Yuncheng City, Shanxi Province, with particular focus on two core areas where regular performances of Guan Gong's Broadsword techniques are held: the square in front of Chongning Hall and the dedicated martial arts performance square. These spaces not only serve as physical embodiments of Guan Gong's cultural sanctity but also provide specific cultural contexts for dynamic bodily performances. As the central ritual space, Chongning Hall features Guan Gong statues and imperial plaques that constitute authoritative cultural symbols. In contrast, the martial arts performance square, functioning as a practice space, directly presupposes a context of "brave martial practice." This spatial difference offers a natural comparative framework for exploring the interactive influence between spatial and bodily practices.

2.2 Research Subjects and Sampling

This study specifically targeted tourists who actively paused to watch the Guan Gong Broadsword performance (lasting at least 5 minutes) in the described scenarios. We employed purposive sampling to maximize data richness and diversity. The sampling process emphasized covering diverse tourist demographics, including age groups (youth, middle-aged, elderly), genders (male, female), and familiarity with Guan Gong culture (experienced vs. unfamiliar), ensuring the sample adequately represented various types of experiencers. The study ultimately recruited 28 participants, with interviews conducted until theoretical saturation was achieved. Table 1 details the demographic characteristics of the respondents, including age, gender, cultural familiarity, and viewing locations, to ensure the sample's diversity and representativeness.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (N=28)

characteristic variable	class	sample number (n)	percentage (%)
age group	Young adults (18-30 years)	10	35.7

	middle age (31-50 years)	12	42.9
	Older (51 years and older)	6	21.4
	Mean (standard deviation)	38.6 (14.2)	
sex	male	15	53.6
	Female	13	46.4
Cultural familiarity	know sth. or sb. well	17	60.7
	be unfamiliar with	11	39.3
	(including foreign tourists)	(3)	(10.7)
Main viewing locations	In front of the Chongning Hall	16	57.1
	Yanwu Square	12	42.9

Note: This study employed an anonymous coding system (A01-D28) for all 28 participants, with subsequent analyses referencing these codes. The sample included tourists from diverse age groups, genders, and cultural backgrounds, ensuring information diversity.

2.3 Data Collection Methods

Data collection was mainly conducted through semi-structured in-depth interviews, supplemented by non-participatory observation to provide rich background information.

During the interview sessions, we developed a flexible interview outline as a guide, with core questions including: (1) "Could you describe your overall impression of the Guan Gong Broadsword performance you just watched? Which moment or action left the deepest impression on you?" (2) "How did you feel at that moment? Could you describe it in one or a few words?" (3) "Did this feeling evoke associations with 'courage' or 'bravery'? If so, what specific elements in the performance (such as movements, sounds, or the performers' expressions) triggered these associations?" (4) "Do you think the environment of the Guandi Temple influenced your experience during the performance?" Each interview lasted approximately 15-30 minutes. After obtaining informed consent from participants, the entire session was recorded and transcribed into text, resulting in approximately 80,000 words of interview materials.

During the observation phase, researchers conducted detailed non-participatory observations of the performance and its spatial environment, documenting field notes. The notes captured performers' movement patterns, intensity control, vocal expressions, audience interaction dynamics, and visitors' immediate reactions (including facial expressions, body language, and exclamations). These observational materials provided crucial contextual supplements for interpreting

interview data.

2.4 Data Analysis Process

We conducted systematic analysis of transcribed text data using the six-step method proposed by Braun & Clarke [9]: (1) Data Familiarization: Repeatedly reading interview transcripts to immerse in the data and grasp overall content and underlying patterns. (2) Initial Coding: Identifying and labeling content in the text that contributes to answering research questions, generating over 100 initial codes. (3) Theme Discovery: Categorizing and combining different codes to form latent thematic clusters. (4) Theme Review: Verifying these themes against original data, refining, merging, or splitting them. (5) Theme Identification: Defining core themes and their sub-themes with clear conceptual names. (6) Report Writing: Through systematic analysis, three core themes and their sub-themes were identified, with their specific structure and representative code examples shown in Table 2.

2.5 Research Ethics and Assurance of Reliability and Validity

This study strictly adhered to academic ethical standards. Prior to interviews, we clearly explained the research objectives, procedures, and data usage to all participants, obtaining their verbal informed consent. We committed to maintaining strict confidentiality of participants' personal information, using pseudonyms throughout the research report. To enhance the study's validity and reliability, we implemented multiple strategies: conducting triangulation with samples from diverse tourist backgrounds; providing abundant original quotations to anchor analytical conclusions in data; conducting regular peer discussions to refine analytical frameworks and reduce researcher bias; and returning preliminary findings to selected participants for verification to strengthen member-checking validity.

Table 2. Subject Structure and Representative Code Examples

Topic Level	definition	Representative code example
Core Theme 1: The shocking physical symbols	The dynamic symbol system of the Guan Gong's Broadsword inheritors can directly cause the strong sensory impact and emotional shock of tourists through their body movements, voices and expressions.	Physical strength and speed: "the swing of the broadsword with the sound of wind", "the movement is strong and powerful", "the muscle lines are tight". The explosive shout: "the full and powerful shout", "the roar when exerting force", "the shout that strikes the heart". The eyes and the expression of the performer: the eyes with a bright and piercing look, the expression of the performer with a focused look, and the expression of the performer with a solemn look.
Core Theme 2: Contextualized spatial resonance	The static space symbol and dynamic performance in Guandi Temple interact with each other to construct an "emotional field" that can strengthen the meaning of "bravery" and deepen the emotional experience of tourists.	Sacred empowerment: "Dancing with a sword before the statue of Guan Gong feels particularly 'righteous' "; "The grand hall's ambiance breathes life into the movements." The difference of space type: "Watching the fight in the square makes it more realistic", "The solemnity and bravery can be felt in front of Chongning Hall". Space activation: "The temple has life because of the performance, and the performance has spirit because of the temple".
Core Theme 3: Self-projection and emotional internalization	It is a gradual process in which the tourists connect and integrate the brave symbols perceived from outside with their own experiences, cognition and emotion, and finally the sense of courage is transformed from a temporary external stimulus into a personal inner psychological asset.	Sensory stimulation and touch: "The blood boils", "The heart beats faster". Cultural association and meaning attribution: "I associate it with Guan Gong's passing through five passes and slaying six generals", "I feel that the action is no longer a routine, but the embodiment of loyalty, righteousness and bravery". Self-connection and empowerment: "I feel that the difficulties in my work are nothing", "I have the impulse to be brave".

3. Findings of the Study

3.1 Shocking Body Symbol-The Direct Trigger of Courage

Tourists 'perception of courage[10] primarily stems from their direct sensory engagement with the physical symbols of Guan Gong's Broadsword inheritors. These dynamic, forceful movements serve as the most primal and tangible embodiment of courage. Their impact instantly transcends cultural barriers, triggering the initial emotional resonance in tourists' minds[11].

3.1.1 The visual impact of power and speed is the initial touchpoint mentioned by almost all tourists

Guan Gong's Broadsword— This heavy weapon roars and whips with ferocity in the hands of its wielder, creating a powerful visual impact and magnetic appeal. A young male tourist (A03) captured the essence: "The Broadsword looks massive, but in the performer's hands, it comes alive. With every slash, chop, flick, and swing, the air buzzes with the sound of the blade slicing through the air. The sheer force and control are so intense they make me think 'unstoppable bravery'." Tourists widely interpret this awe-inspiring display as a psychological

metaphor for overcoming challenges and breaking through barriers. Another middle-aged visitor (A11) added: "The tense muscles and steady stance on their arms show it's not just showmanship—it's real skill. This tangible power makes you believe courage needs roots, forged through years of relentless practice."

3.1.2 Auditory symbols and facial expressions that transcend visual cues further deepen and enrich emotional engagement

The inheritors 'explosive shouts ("Hey!" "Ha!") at the moment of exertion, combined with their resolute, focused, and even slightly authoritative gazes throughout the drill, collectively create a powerful aura of valor. A female tourist (B07) keenly observed: "What truly made my heart race wasn't the movements themselves, but the master's thunderous shout with full breath control, paired with his piercing, unwavering gaze. At that moment, you didn't feel a performance, but a confidence and fearlessness radiating from within. This spirit of vitality moved me more than brute strength, making courage feel like a state of total focus and undivided attention." This multisensory synergy creates an immersive experience, transforming courage from an abstract concept into a tangible presence.

3.1.3 The synergistic effect of the body symbol

system is particularly critical in this process. Tourists do not perceive individual movements or sounds in isolation, but rather receive a "body symbol system" composed of "powerful movements," "the whistling of weapons," "outburst shouts," and "resolute gazes." This system requires no extensive cultural background knowledge as a prerequisite, as its inherent physical tension and emotional expressiveness alone are sufficient to instantly evoke tourists' awe, admiration, and even a longing for formidable strength. A foreign tourist (C19) translated: "I don't know much about Guan Gong's story, but the man wielding the sword looks incredibly powerful and focused. His shouts and gaze inspired me." This demonstrates that body symbols possess cross-cultural appeal, laying a solid physiological and psychological foundation for deeper emotional resonance.

3.2 Situational Spatial Resonance-The Amplifier of the Sense of Courage

A thorough analysis reveals that the courage inspired by the Guan Gong Broadsword performance stems not merely from the dynamic physical symbols themselves, but is deeply embedded within the sacred space of Jiezhou Guandi Temple. The static spatial symbols and dynamic physical performance mutually reinforce each other, collectively creating an emotional field with "highly condensed martial valor," significantly amplifying and deepening visitors' courage experience.

3.2.1 Sacred space provides authoritative cultural script and emotional background for bodily practice

Many visitors have explicitly stated that watching the Guan Gong Broadsword performance at the Guandi Temple, this "original site," offers a profoundly different experience compared to watching martial arts shows in theaters or public squares. A tourist familiar with Guan Gong culture (A12) emphasized: "You can clearly sense this is Guan Gong's home. When you watch performers wield the Guan Gong Broadsword before the solemn Chongning Hall under the 'Loyalty, Righteousness, and Divine Valor' plaque, you're not just witnessing martial arts training—you're seeing Guan Gong himself embodying his heroic spirit. This environment breathes life into the movements." Static symbols within the space—such as majestic statues and imperial plaques—serve as

weighty cultural texts that "endorse" and "qualify" the dynamic performance. They guide visitors to consciously connect the movements with Guan Gong's narrative of "loyalty, righteousness, and bravery," elevating superficial sensory stimulation to a deeper level of spiritual resonance.

3.2.2 Different spatial symbols and performance actions can evoke distinct emotional responses

The data reveals that performances at Chongning Hall (the core of sacrificial rituals) more effectively evoke a "reverent" courage deeply connected to "justice" and "responsibility." A visitor (A08) observing the show described: "Standing before the imposing statue of Guan Gong, watching performers execute each sword maneuver with precision, I felt an overwhelming sense of solemnity. This isn't impulsive bravery, but duty-driven courage rooted in faith—much like Guan Gong's valor in defending vital people and causes." Meanwhile, performances at Yanwu Square (the practice space) tend to inspire a "heroic" courage, strongly associated with "strength," "skill," and "real combat." A visitor (C05) watching the martial arts demonstration remarked: "Watching them spar beside the ancient stone carvings in Yanwu Square, amidst the flashing blades, I felt the raw tension and heroic spirit of ancient warriors sharpening their weapons before battle—a primal, unfiltered courage."

3.2.3 Space as an active collaborator is fully demonstrated in this process

This study reveals that space functions not as a passive backdrop, but as an active "collaborator" in this process. Through its inherent cultural narratives and symbolic meanings, it provides contextualized interpretations and emotional empowerment to dynamic bodily symbols. Bodily symbols gain historical depth and cultural legitimacy within spatial contexts, while spaces become activated through these symbols—transforming from static historical relics into vibrant, perceptible emotional fields. An interviewee (B14) captured this dynamic interaction with precision: "Without those movements, the temple would remain the same, but it might lose its vitality; without this temple, the movements would stay the same, but they'd lack spiritual essence. Only when both coexist does the whole become complete." This synergy creates a "1+1>2" emotional amplification effect, collectively materializing and contextualizing the martial spirit of Wusheng culture into an

emotionally tangible experience for visitors.

3.3 Interpretation of Meaning and Emotional Internalization-The Formation Path of Courage

The ultimate formation of courage stems from tourists' completion of a series of internal, proactive psychological processing. This study identifies a clear, progressive path of emotional generation: from passive observation under sensory stimulation, to resonance through cultural associations, and ultimately to internalization through self-connection. This three-stage model reveals the intrinsic mechanism by which external cultural performances transform into personal psychological assets.

3.3.1 Sensory stimulation and emotional touch

In this initial phase, tourists primarily act as spectators, captivated by the physical attributes of bodily symbols (strength, speed, sound), triggering immediate and intense emotional responses. As one visitor (D22) described: "From the start, it felt so exhilarating—your blood boiled and your heart raced. The metallic sound of blades slicing through air made you tense yet thrilled." These reactions are predominantly physiological and emotional, manifesting as adrenaline surges, heightened focus, and instinctive awe. The emotions at this stage are largely instinctive responses to "power" and "danger," not yet elevated to the cognitive level of "courage," but they provide essential emotional groundwork for subsequent meaning interpretation.

3.3.2 Cultural association and meaning

As the performance unfolds, visitors consciously or subconsciously activate their cultural knowledge of Guan Gong, connecting the live show to legendary heroic deeds like "passing five checkpoints and slaying six generals" and "attending the assembly with a single sword" from historical accounts. This transforms admiration for physical prowess into recognition of "spiritual valor." A middle-aged visitor (A15) shared: "Watching this, I recalled Guan Gong's stories from Romance of the Three Kingdoms. These movements transcend mere martial arts routines—they embody the loyalty, righteousness, and courage depicted in the tales. This bravery isn't reckless; it's driven by conviction." This cognitive engagement phase allows visitors to synthesize sensory impressions into coherent narratives through dialogue

between personal cultural reserves and live performances, endowing sensory stimuli with cultural significance [12].

3.3.3 Self-projection and emotional internalization

This marks the pivotal shift where courage evolves from an aesthetic appreciation of external objects into a personal psychological asset. During this phase, visitors connect the symbolic courage demonstrated in performances with their own life experiences, professional challenges, or personal shortcomings, generating positive self-encouraging mental cues. A young female visitor (B08) who describes herself as introverted shared a telling example: "I'm usually quite timid and hesitant to speak in public. But after watching the performance—especially seeing their confident, fearless gazes—I suddenly felt compelled to be brave too. 'It was as if they were channeling energy into me, making me realize that when facing life's obstacles, I should act decisively like their sword-wielding dancers, without hesitation.'" Another male visitor (D25) navigating career challenges remarked: "Watching them execute every move with such focus and determination made me realize that workplace setbacks are nothing compared to their resolve. Their undistracted, forward-moving spirit truly inspired me."

3.3.4 Individual differences in the internalization process

Tourists familiar with Guan Gong culture typically achieve a quicker transition from the second to the third stage, as they possess a well-developed framework of meaning. In contrast, those unfamiliar with the cultural context may rely more on the initial sensory impact and universal human emotional resonance to internalize the experience. Regardless of the approach, the outcome remains consistent: through personal narratives, tourists transform Guan Gong's "courage" and the inheritors' "courage" into their own unique sense of bravery. This demonstrates that the ultimate courage stems from tourists actively "claiming" and "applying" cultural symbols to their lives—a creative product born from the collision between cultural symbols and individual life histories [13].

4. Discussion

4.1 Theoretical Contribution: Revealing the

Core Role of "Embodied Communication" in Cultural Heritage Tourism

The core finding of this study clearly delineates the pathway of courage perception formation: "shocking bodily symbols → situational spatial resonance → meaning interpretation and emotional internalization". The primary theoretical contribution of this model lies in shifting the research focus from static, vision-centered cultural symbol interpretation to dynamic, multisensory "bodily communication". Traditional cultural heritage research often portrays tourists as passive information receivers or meaning interpreters. However, this study reveals that during the Guan Gong Broadsword performance, visitors are first struck by an embodied, pre-reflective sensory force (such as the Broadsword's wind, shouts, and visual impact of power). This direct physical engagement serves as an emotional trigger preceding and surpassing cognitive interpretation. This aligns with the "embodied cognition" theory, which posits that cognition and emotion are not isolated from the brain but are closely linked to the body's sensory and motor systems. The bodies of Guan Gong Broadsword inheritors become "living mediums" for cultural spirit (bravery), whose communicative efficacy far exceeds that of pure textual narratives or static statues. Therefore, this study advocates that when evaluating the spiritual value transmission efficacy of cultural heritage sites, "physical practice" must be considered a core element equal to "material remains." This provides a new theoretical perspective for understanding the "living" protection and inheritance of cultural heritage [14].

Secondly, this study refines the application of affective geography in tourism research. While we did not conduct complex deconstruction of "space-action" symbolic superposition at the operational level, tourists' perceptual data clearly confirmed the co-constructive relationship between spatial and bodily practices. Our findings indicate that space is not a homogeneous background. Its inherent cultural narratives (such as the sanctity of Chongning Hall and the practicality of Yanwu Square) exhibit "selective affinity" with different types of bodily symbols (e.g., the solemn knife-holding posture and intense combat movements), thereby evoking distinct emphases on courage (awe-based bravery vs. heroic bravery). This

suggests that future research on affective geographical analysis of cultural heritage sites should more precisely consider the "compatibility effects" between specific spatial symbols and particular bodily practices, rather than simply discussing space's universal impact on emotions.

4.2 Practical Implications: The Transformation of Experience Design from "Cultural Display" to "Spiritual Empowerment"

The findings of this study provide direct and operational enlightenment for the management and operation of cultural heritage sites and experience design.

First, the Guandi Temple in Jiezhou and similar cultural tourism sites should redefine the value of their living cultural performances. Managers must recognize that core objectives like the Guan Gong Broadsword Demonstration shouldn't merely focus on "entertaining tourists" or "showcasing skills," but should aim to achieve "the transformation and empowerment of cultural spirit." This means that in training inheritors and planning projects, we should transcend standardized movements while emphasizing the cultivation and transmission of spiritual essence. For instance, we should guide inheritors to understand and externalize the spiritual symbolism behind each movement, while paying attention to the emotional expressiveness of non-verbal cues like eye contact and shouts. This approach transforms them into authentic "carriers" of cultural spirit rather than mere "performers."

Secondly, experience design should intentionally construct a complete journey of "sensory-emotional-meaning." Based on the generative path of this study, managers can: (1) Enhance sensory touchpoints: Optimize venue layouts to ensure visitors clearly perceive the dynamic power of movements and the whistling sound of weapons; strategically schedule performance timing and pacing to prevent sensory fatigue-induced dullness. (2) Deepen spatial storytelling: Through audio guides, signage, or digital media, skillfully link spatial symbols (such as plaques and statues) with performance actions before or during shows, actively guiding visitors to engage in "cultural associations" while avoiding didactic tones and preserving ample space for self-exploration. (3) Create internalization opportunities: After

performances, design brief interactive segments or reflection spaces—such as inviting visitors to share experiences, offering cultural souvenirs related to the "courage" theme, or setting up message walls reflecting the performance's spirit—to encourage visitors to complete the final step from "resonance" to "self-projection," transforming fleeting tourism experiences into lasting spiritual resources.

4.3 Limitations and Future Prospects

This study has several limitations that point the way for future research. First, while the qualitative research method allows in-depth exploration of mechanisms, the representativeness of the sample and the generalizability of findings require validation through larger-scale quantitative studies. Future research could develop measurement scales to quantify the weight of different physical symbols (such as strength, speed, and sound) and spatial elements in influencing courage perception, or even establish structural equation models to verify the three-stage pathways proposed in this study. Second, as this study focuses on a single case, the cross-cultural applicability of its conclusions needs further validation. Future research could conduct cross-case comparative studies, such as comparing how Zen-wu performances in Buddhist holy sites stimulate "mindfulness" or how Western knight culture performances shape "sense of honor," to refine more universally applicable theories of emotional arousal in cultural heritage tourism. Additionally, while this study primarily focuses on immediate emotional experiences, the persistence of courage perception and its long-term impact on tourist behavior warrant follow-up research.

5. Conclusion

This study examines the cultural practice of the Guan Gong Broadsword Demonstration at Guandi Temple in Haizhou, situated within the context of deepening integration between sports tourism and China's traditional culture. Through micro-level analysis of tourists' perceptions, it explores the psychological mechanisms underlying the development of courage in visitors. In-depth interviews and thematic analysis with 28 participants reveal a clear, progressive path of emotional formation. The findings demonstrate that tourists' sense of courage emerges not from isolated factors, but

through a dynamic, continuous process: beginning with the immediate impact of awe-inspiring physical symbols, amplified by contextualized spatial resonance, and ultimately internalized through active meaning-making and self-projection.

The core theoretical contribution of this study lies in its compelling demonstration of the pivotal role of "embodied communication" in transmitting spiritual values within cultural heritage tourism. The physical presence of Guan Gong's Broadsword inheritors—through their strength, speed, shouts, and gazes—serves as the most vivid and emotionally resonant living medium for embodying the "brave and martial" spirit. This revelation shifts the focus of cultural heritage tourism experience research from static textual and symbolic interpretation to dynamic, multisensory embodied practices, deepening our understanding of how cultural spirit is perceived, embraced, and transformed through bodily engagement. Furthermore, the study refines the application of affective geography in tourism contexts, confirming the "co-construction" relationship between sacred spaces and bodily performances. These elements mutually empower each other, collectively condensing and amplifying the efficacy of the "brave and martial" emotional field.

At the practical level, this study provides crucial insights for experiential design and value exploration in cultural heritage sites. It highlights that cultural attractions like Guandi Temple should transform their dynamic performance value from mere "skill demonstrations" or "entertainment spectacles" into profound "spiritual empowerment". Managers and planners should consciously design visitor experiences through the "sensory-emotional-meaning" generation pathway: optimizing viewing environments to enhance sensory impact, guiding cultural narratives to foster meaning associations, and creating reflective spaces to encourage emotional internalization. This systematic approach transforms the spiritual essence of traditional culture into personal psychological assets that visitors can perceive, resonate with, and internalize.

While this study has limitations in sample representativeness and case singularity, it paves the way for future research. Subsequent studies could employ quantitative methods to validate the influence weights of different symbolic

elements, or conduct cross-cultural and cross-type comparative studies to develop a more universal theory of emotional engagement in cultural heritage tourism. In summary, this research demonstrates that when Guan Gong's "bravery" transcends historical allusions and static statues, transforming into the dynamic movements and shouts of cultural inheritors, it achieves a timeless resonance in tourists' hearts. This vividly illustrates the vibrant pathways for traditional culture to achieve "creative transformation" and "innovative development" in contemporary times, providing micro-level empirical evidence from the tourism sector to bolster cultural confidence in the new era.

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