

RESEARCH ON MUSEUM VISITOR BEHAVIOR: A CASE STUDY OF LIANGZHU MUSEUM IN HANGZHOU

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Abstract

This study investigates visitor behavior characteristics at Liangzhu Museum in Hangzhou. Research findings show that the majority of visitors are Hangzhou residents and tourists from within Zhejiang Province. Traveling with friends and family is the predominant visitation pattern; both local and non-local visitors generally have clear visitation purposes, although non-local visitors have lower awareness of Liangzhu Museum and mostly visit during business trips, shopping, or other activities; visitor satisfaction is remarkably high, but repeat visitation intention and rate remain low. The study indicates that the museum currently lacks independent ability to attract non-local visitors and relies on Hangzhou's comprehensive tourism destination image and functions to fulfill its tourism potential. These findings provide reference for cultural attraction development in Hangzhou and offer general guidance for local museum tourism development in economically advanced regions.

Keywords: Museum Tourism; Visitor Behavior; Liangzhu Museum; Urban Tourism; Hangzhou City

Introduction

Museum tourism, as the name implies, is a type of tourism product or activity that is based on museums [1]. With the development of urban tourism, museums have been regarded as a significant platform in serving the presentation of unique urban history and culture and the promotion of cultural tourism in urban areas [2]. The Chinese cities that have availed themselves of domestic tourism, like Beijing and Xi, in addition to the popular European tourism destinations like London and Paris, have long developed museums as among the best tourist attraction sites globally. China is rapidly constructing museums, and "China is ushering in the new peak of its third wave of museum construction phase" [3]. In the meantime, museum tourism was not paid appropriate attention in most cities, and the related research should be strengthened.

International tourism scholars have long been interested in museums as tourism-related sites, and they have been studying the employment of museum visitor information-gathering since the late 1920s. The bulk of the research has been on museum visitors [4]. Recent research has utilized qualitative research methods in characterizing the behavior of museum visitors, whereas previous research adopted quantitative research methods [5]. In general, studies of international scholars regarding museum visitor behavior primarily focus on visitation motivation, expectations, memories and emotions, authenticity, interpretation systems, visitor experiences, and satisfaction. Some of the scholars have examined museum tourism using the supply perspective [6].

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In the domestic sphere, there has been the acknowledgment of the inherent relationship between museums and tourism by some scholars who suggest initial concepts of museums stepping into the tourism industry and carrying out some surveys of museum patrons. These studies, however, fail to generalize and uplift the museum tourism developmental trends with regard to the direction of behavior of museum visitors or delve deeper into the museum tourism [7].

Hangzhou is a popular national historical and cultural city in China, known for its rich museum resources. Hangzhou has the most significant cultural heritage exhibited in such tourist sites as the Liangzhu Museum (the so-called Liangzhu). It is one of the most modern museums in Hangzhou with the finest facilities and tourism services [8]. The visitor behavior of Liangzhu Museum and its connection to the urban tourism of Hangzhou may be studied and summarized to manage the local museums and create additional historical and cultural destinations in the economically advanced areas.

Research Methods and Data

Research Methods

The given study is also a combination of the on-site in-depth interview and the structured questionnaire survey, with the statistical analysis program SPSS 12.5 to manage the received data. This paper involves detailed interviews with 13 visitors of the Liangzhu Museum (6 local, 5 non-local, and 2 French) on 15 September 2005 to inquire about their motivations for visiting the Liangzhu Museum, their impressions, and their perceptions towards Hangzhou museum tourism. After sorting out the interviews, a visitor behavior survey questionnaire for the Hangzhou Liangzhu Museum was prepared and randomly distributed among the visitors at the tourist center between September 22 and 24, 2005.

Research Data

One hundred and ninety-three questionnaires were handed out and returned, leading to a 100% response rate. A total of 189 valid questionnaires were obtained among them, which made the rate of validity 97.7% [9].

The following points need to be clarified regarding the research data:

Survey timing.

Taking into account the potential variations in the sources of visitors and demographic factors of weekends and weekdays, the questionnaire survey was realized in the period between September 22 and 24 (Thursday-Saturday). Although Liangzhu Museum had a monthly free entry day (September 20), Tuesday, the announcement of the number of local visitors could have diminished the proportion of the sample to local visitors.

Survey method

In this study, the authors have used a cluster sampling technique to survey the visitors who were entering the visitor center in a comprehensive manner, as described by [10]. As an additional way of enhancing sample representativeness, families or group tours were considered single samples. The author explained the purpose of each questionnaire before it was sent and obtained consent. The high-quality questionnaires were due to the use of air conditioning and chairs, which ensured that respondents responded to the questions in a comfortable, serene, and cordial atmosphere, making it easy to do so.

Survey subjects

Liangzhu Museum has a specific percentage of foreign visitors as a part of its visitor structure, majorly consisting of those from France, Japan, and the United States. This study focused on domestic visitors and foreign visitors to Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan since the foreign visitors cannot be systematically researched.

Results and discussion

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

The following fundamental characteristics of Liangzhu Museum visitors can be demonstrated by the demographics of the sample used in the present research. Regarding the

gender ratio shown in Figure 1, the proportion of male visitors is somewhat higher, which indicates that when families visit the site together, it is typically the males who complete the survey questionnaires. Additionally, some female respondents may be reluctant to disclose their actual gender, contributing to a perceived gap between the genders. As a matter of fact, there is no great difference in terms of gender in visitors. The majority (67.5%) is composed of middle-aged and young visitors aged 20–42 years, but visitors less than 19 (mostly students) and older than 43 are also significant. This age pattern may be influenced by preferential admission arrangements and visitor price sensitivity, because reduced or free admission can lower the cost barrier for students and older visitors [11]. Compared to the high-income visitors in the West Lake scenic region, over a quarter of tourists earn more than 5,500 yuan per month. There is the presence of local and out-of-province visitors compared with in-province visitors, resulting in a U-shaped distance decay curve. This pattern can be interpreted through tourism distance-decay theory, which argues that travel flows generally decrease as distance and travel costs increase, while a distinctive destination image or special-purpose travel can partly offset the decay effect [12]. Tourists are learned, 73.8% having a college education. The actual education system of people visiting museums is much higher because of numerous primary and secondary school children who visit museums during holidays.

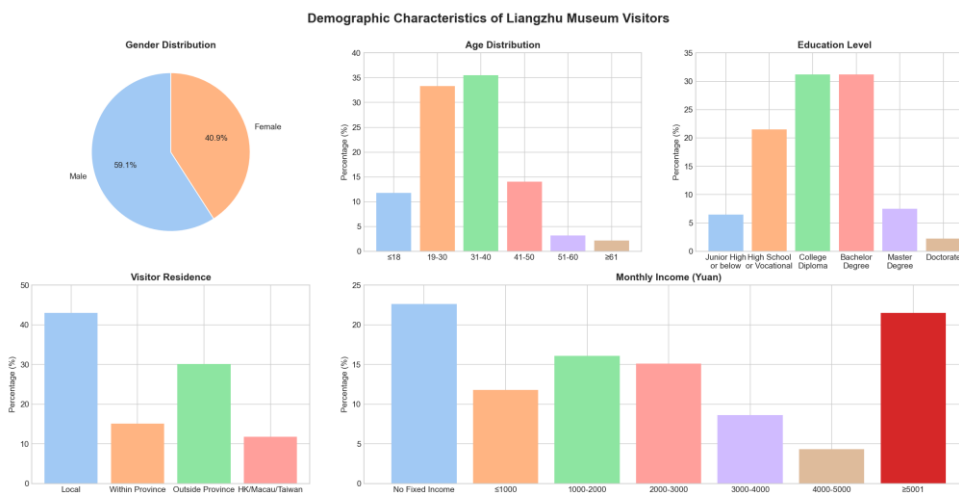


Fig. 1. Demographic Characteristics of Liangzhu Museum Visitors

Source: Visitor Survey at Liangzhu Museum, September 2024

Visitation Patterns

According to figure 2, a body of research in the international context suggests that social interaction is among the possible and valuable motivators of a museum visitor [13]. Most visitors do not visit on their own, and visits to museums are usually done in groups with family members or friends. The survey conducted in the Hangzhou Liangzhu Museum proves this. The survey revealed that 53% of the visitors in the Liangzhu Museum went there with friends, 31% with family, and most as parents with children. Interviews reveal that the initial reason behind the parents coming here was to have fun and to learn. Only a small number of visitors came alone (16%).

Visitation Purpose and Intention

This paper explores the purposes and intents of visitors to the Liangzhu Museum on two levels. It is stated (Fig. 3) that visitors who were not locals came to Hangzhou to sightsee (37.2%), conduct business (32.5%), take a vacation (13.8%), and visit friends and relatives (10.6%), although only 16.7% had plans to visit Liangzhu Museum. The data indicates that foreign tourists are not familiar with the Liangzhu Museum and fail to travel to Hangzhou to see its attractions [14].

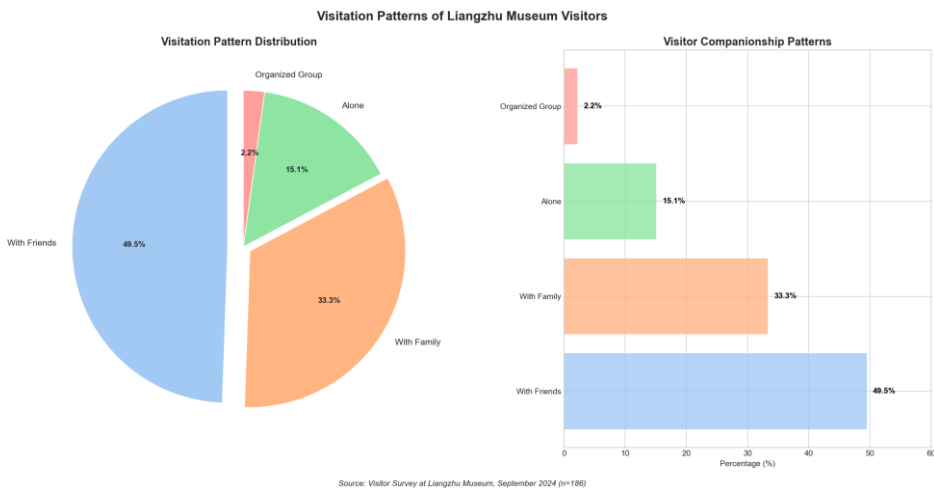


Fig. 2. Visitation Patterns of Liangzhu Museum Visitors
 Source: Visitor Survey at Liangzhu Museum, September 2024

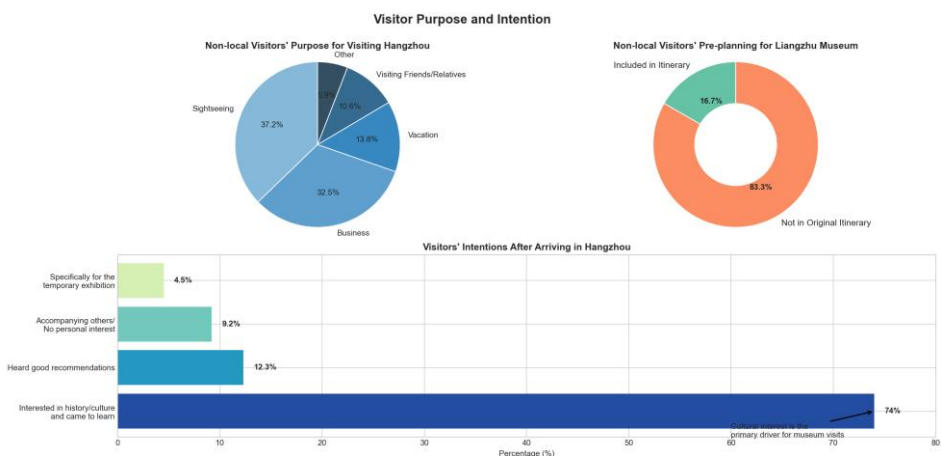


Fig. 3. Visitor Purpose and Intention
 Source: Visitor Survey at Liangzhu Museum, September 2024

Second, non-local visitors, together with local visitor’s post-arrival in Hangzhou, had high intentions to visit the Liangzhu Museum. A maximum of 74% of travelers were absolutely interested in the history, culture, and cultural relics of Hangzhou and came to learn about and explore them. They may have been unaware of anything about the Liangzhu museum in the past, but as they gain awareness of it through their mental faculties, they become interested in visiting it. These are the most significant visitors to the museum. 12.3% of the visitors came based on positive recommendations they heard and wanted to have a glimpse. The word-of-mouth worked to their advantage. The most competitive quality of the tourism attractions, which cannot be replaced, is positive word-of-mouth promotion [15]. Word-of-mouth tourism is a significant proportion of the Liangzhu Museum’s visitors and is increasing. The 9.2% of visitors were also those who were either accompanying friends or family members or were set up by their work groups or schools and uninterested in them. These visitors have a low objective of visitation, and they are passive visitors to the museum rather than cultural tourists.

People can become avid word-of-mouth marketers following their fantastic experience at the visitation, which will provide the museum with an opportunity to market. In the Treasures of Liangzhu Civilization Exhibition of the museum, only 4.5% of visitors attended the exhibition because of the occasion, indicating a weak interest in temporary exhibitions. The results of the one-way ANOVA analysis indicate that Hangzhou local visitors and non-local visitors to the Liangzhu Museum do not differ significantly regarding their intentions to visit the museum ($p=0.729>0.05$).

Awareness Rate and Cognitive Channels

According to the survey findings, the level of awareness of different cultural attractions in Hangzhou usually was low among non-local visitors before traveling there. Figure 4 reveals that the awareness rate in West Lake, Lingyin Temple, Leifeng Pagoda, Liuhe Pagoda, and Yue Fei Temple was only above 50%, and it was only 45.8% in the Liangzhu Museum. Other than Liangzhu Museum, West Lake and the China National Silk Museum were 30% or above.

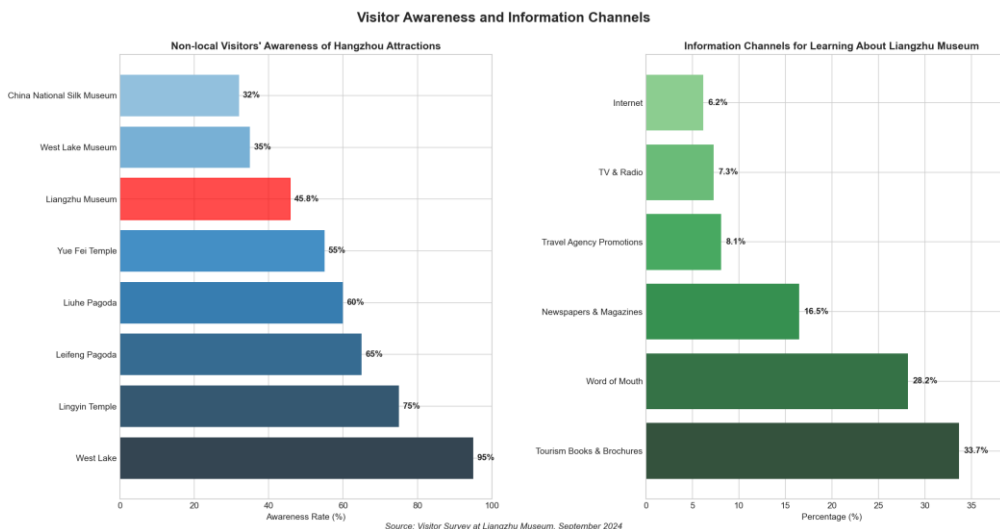


Fig. 4. Visitor Awareness and Information Channels
 Source: Visitor Survey at Liangzhu Museum, September 2024

The moderate level of pre-visit awareness of Liangzhu Museum by visitors (45.8%) and the very high level of their intent to visit the museum (74% very interested) show the importance of the critical role information channels play in forming actual visitation intentions. Sample visitors were consistent in their channels of answers to the Liangzhu Museum in terms of importance, such as tourism books and brochures (33.7%), recommendation of others (28.2%), and newspapers and magazines (16.5%), whereas travel agency promotion (8.1%), television and radio promotion (7.3%), and internet promotion (6.2%) were weak. The use of print and word-of-mouth rather than digital channels was more predominant, so further research is required since the poll was conducted in 2024, when digital media is more promotional [16]. Although 16.7% of non-local visitors had Liangzhu Museum in their itinerary even before their arrival in Hangzhou, the remaining ones discovered it in a number of ways once they had arrived. This trend gives importance to utilizing the destination-based approaches to advertising, which include the placement of museum information in strategic locations like transportation centers, accommodations, and commercial centers.

Satisfaction and Revisit Intention

The precious and rich exhibits, the modern facilities, and the services provided by the Liangzhu Museum were not only able to give the visitors a vivid image of the history of the location, but also the survey shows that visitors expressing satisfaction with their museum visit

accounted for 98.4% of all surveyed visitors, among which nearly 30% indicated they were "surprisingly, very satisfied," and not a single visitor expressed "regret" about their visit (Figure 5). This very high level of satisfaction can possibly represent the quality of the museum experience as well as the possible bias of social desirability in self-reported satisfaction. These results of the positive satisfaction are consistent with the large contribution of word-of-mouth recommendations (28.2%) through the information channels of the visitors.

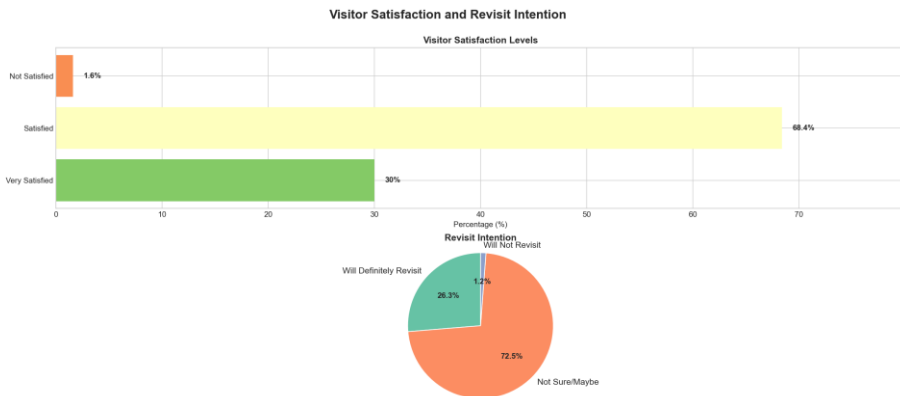


Fig. 5. Visitor Satisfaction and Revisit Intention
 Source: Visitor Survey at Liangzhu Museum, September 2024

However, the high level of satisfaction has not been translated into high revisit intentions. When it comes to answering whether the tourists were certain to go to the Liangzhu Museum again, 26.3% answered with "yes" and 72.5% with "maybe." This is a difference of satisfaction and intention that should be analyzed. Permanent exhibitions might do away with repeat visits, but only 4.5% attended temporary exhibitions, which demonstrates a lack of awareness or interest in changing content. The data were collected through interviews and indicated that an intriguing exhibition would influence a return visit or the accompanying family members, friends, or other guests who have never been to the restaurant before [17], showing that revisit motivations are not comparable to cultural learning and experience motivations.

Conclusions

Liangzhu Museum is highly valued in terms of historical artifacts and tourism viewing with excellent value and is thus a representative of the historical culture of Hangzhou. According to the visitor behavior studies, Liangzhu Museum is primarily a complement to the Hangzhou tourist system instead of a destination on its own among the non-locals. The statistics suggest that the local museums displaying local culture will not be able to transform into urban sightseeing in economically developed areas. The comparatively small area of cultural artifacts in the museum can be less appealing than such globally recognized locations as the Forbidden City in Beijing or the Terracotta Warriors in Xi'an. Moreover, the extensive potential for tourism operations in cities with an advanced economy can introduce competition in attracting visitors to a variety of attractions. These results are to be viewed with reservations since they are premised on a single case study, and the variables of museum tourism development should be vigorously researched in different environments.

The following implications arise from the aforementioned research findings regarding the development and management of similar local cultural attractions in economically developed regions:

The value of historical artifacts differs from the value of tourism development; therefore, it is crucial to have an objective measure of the prospects and possibilities for tourism development related to local historical and cultural heritage, as blind investment by the private sector in local museums poses significant market risks.

The apathy and fame of the city define the possibility of local historical and cultural resources being used as tourist attraction sites. Secondary marketing in a destination is likely to yield twice the results with half the effort.

The social benefits and tourism development should also be synergized by ensuring that the benefits of the development to the people—the protection, exhibition, and social education offered in the historic sites—should be highlighted.

Various limitations are to be considered in this study. To start with, sampled visitors were restricted to museum visitors, which removed the Hangzhou tourists who do not visit the museum. This survey technique is likely to overrepresent awareness, intention to visit, and satisfaction compared to a typical sample of the Hangzhou customers. Second, the timing of the poll in September 2024 could have influenced the visitor mix, especially local visitors who are underrepresented on the monthly free admission day. Third, the cross-sectional research restricts a temporal and causal result. Fourth, self-reports can introduce social desirability bias, which is the reason why the satisfaction rates are high (98.4%). Fifth, the fact that the study has solely focused on one museum does not generalize itself to other local museums or other cultural groups in other cities. Although the questionnaire is reliable (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.82$), future studies that will investigate aspects such as visitation motive and revisit intention might require more detailed measurement tools.

The following limitations should be considered by future studies to tackle these limitations: (1) sample the general tourist population to examine the non-visitor awareness and barriers; (2) carry out longitudinal studies across multiple seasons to capture any variations in time; (3) use comparative case studies of several different museums in different urban settings; (4) investigate the nature, characteristics, and life cycle of museum tourism products; and (5) examine how the museums and the urban tourism systems would mutually affect each other.

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