

Moral gaze at literary places: Experiencing “being the first to worry and the last to enjoy” at Yueyang Tower in China



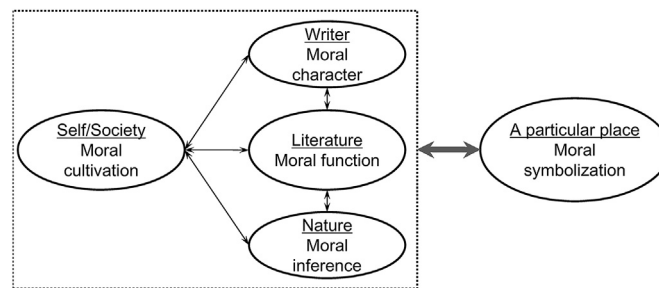
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HIGHLIGHTS

- The moral aspect of literature and literary/cultural tourism is examined.
- The concept of moral gaze characterizes many tourism phenomena.
- Moral gaze is a general way of thinking, feeling and acting involving morality.
- Five aspects are covered: literature, writer, nature, self and society, and place.
- Moral gaze helps explain why a place is attractive and how it is experienced.

GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT



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ABSTRACT

This study examined the literary tourism phenomena at Yueyang Tower in China using a multi-method approach. The concept of moral gaze emerged from the analysis of data about touristic provision and experience at this site and relevant Chinese traditions. The moral gaze can be seen as a general way of thinking, feeling and acting that involves morality. It is reflected in at least five inter-related aspects in the Yueyang Tower case, including: the moral function of literature, the emphasis on the moral character of the writer, the moral inference from nature usually expressed in literature, the moral cultivation of the visitor self and the society, and the place as moral symbolization. This concept of moral gaze contributes to the understanding of literary tourism and the attractiveness of a destination, and may be used to help improve tourism product development and interpretation to create more meaningful experience.

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1. Introduction

Literary tourism involves visits to “places celebrated for literary depictions and/or connections with literary figures” (Squire, 1996, p. 119). Accordingly, there are two components of the literary tourism, one is the touristic place, and the other is the text and/or

writer. It is the tourist activities that connect the two (Jiang & Xu, 2016b). It is interesting to explore what kinds of connections there are and what structures and factors influence the connections. Relating to the contents and functions of literature, the most important roles of literature involve aesthetics (Yuan, 2014) and moral development (Nie, 2006, 2014a, 2014b; Carr & Davis, 2007; Carr, 2005, 2014; Gao, 2009; Mejia & Montoya, 2017). However, while morality features sometimes as the purposeful and dominant theme in a literary work, tourism at places with such literary moral connections are yet to be studied.

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At a more fundamental level, morality is an essential feature of human societies and humans are encouraged to be ethical and moral beings. The contribution of morality to positive experience, individual well-being and societal flourishing across culture and history has been studied by positive psychologists (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005; Maslow, 1964). Sixteen years of research on moral elevation, defined as “the emotional response to witnessing acts of moral beauty” (p.412), have shown its positive effects, such as pleasant feelings of warmth, feeling uplifted, moved, and optimistic about humanity, as well as motivating affiliation with others and moral action tendencies (Pohling & Diessner, 2016). However, such positive experience of morality has seldom been studied in the tourism context, while studies about ethics in tourism have addressed more “negative” or problematic issues in this field (Lovelock & Lovelock, 2013).

This study proposes the concept of moral gaze and explores in the light of such moral gaze how a literary tourist attraction is formed and what characterizes the tourism provision and experience, specifically with respect to literary tourism at Yueyang Tower in Hunan province in China. Yueyang tower was first built in 214 for watching military training (Zou, Wang, & Li, 2008). It became popular as a scenic tower during the Tang dynasty (618–907) and was visited by scholar-officials and poets who left dozens of poems to today (PCHCTP, 2015). Yet its national fame was established by a prose written by FAN Zhongyan in 1046, *An Account of Yueyang Tower*, at the request of TENG Zijing who was demoted to Yueyang to be local administrator in 1044 and rebuilt the tower a year later (Zou et al., 2008). This literary association is still the main reason for visiting this place, and the role of morality in this case will be examined later after relevant backgrounds are introduced.

The paper is structured as follows. The literature review first summarizes existing research on literary tourism, which identifies a lack of research with regard to moral experience. Then the moral traditions in China are introduced in general and with respect to literature. In these two contexts, the case of Yueyang Tower is presented. A multi-method approach is taken to explore tourism at Yueyang Tower, including participant observation, interview, documentary research and use of online visitor-generated content. The theme of moral gaze emerges from a content analysis of the collected materials and is presented in the findings section, leading to a conceptual framework summarized in the conclusion section. Implications and directions for further research are discussed in the last section.

2. Literature review

2.1. Research on literary tourism

Studies on literary tourism have been growing in the recent two decades (Hoppen, Brown, & Fyall, 2014). The related writers, literary genres, works, and the relevance of place to the writer or work are listed in Table 1. Geographically speaking, literary tourism in Europe and North America seems to be developed and researched earlier, while that in developing countries like China is catching up in recent years. Temporally speaking, most studies involved literary figures and works in the modern era, while studies in China like Yu and Xu (2016) provided an extended historical perspective and involved a two-thousand-year history of the everlasting influence of ancient poetry that extends to contemporary tourism. Most studies focused on either the production side or the consumption side, with the exception of Jiang and Xu (2016a) examining both. In terms of the relationship between literary figures/works and place, the writers examined actually lived or traveled at these places, and often used these places as settings in their literary works, which are mostly novels. The authenticity of such associations has been a

major topic in research on literary tourism (Fawcett & Cormack, 2001; Herbert, 2001; Robb, 1998; Stiebel, 2004). Further, the duality of the fictive nature of novels and the physical reality of the places has been studied correspondingly in visitor experience (Herbert, 2001). Novels could also be easily adapted into television or film, hence novel reading and film watching may enhance each other and promote the attraction and development of both literary and film tourism (Fawcett & Cormack, 2001; Müller, 2006; Ryan, Zhang, Gu & Ling, 2009; O'Connor & Kim, 2014). The poetic experiences offered by Chinese classical poetry are also analyzed by Yu and Xu (2016). But the morality nature of literary works and related touristic experiences are yet to be explored.

2.2. Morality in chinese society, literary works and tourist behavior

Human societies share a moral nature and many moral values, while still have their peculiar cultural manifestations (Dahlsgaard et al., 2005; Maslow, 1964). Compared with many other civilizations, morality plays a more important role in social ordering and structuring in China. This is largely due to the influence of Confucianism. As summarized by Lin (2009a, p. 4), “Confucianism stood for a rationalized social order through the ethical approach, based on personal cultivation. It aimed at political order by laying the basis for it in a moral order, and it sought political harmony by trying to achieve the moral harmony in man himself.” Morality stands at the center of Confucianism and gives structure to personal cultivation and political order in ancient China; in short, it is rule of virtue (德治, Jiang, 2009). Confucianism and its ethical focus still underlies contemporary Chinese society (Xie, 1996), including tourist behavior (Fu, Cai & Lehto, 2016, 2015; Hsu & Huang, 2016; Kwek & Lee, 2010; 2015; Tse & Hobson, 2008; Wang & Lin, 2009) and service provision in the hospitality and tourism industry (Tsang, 2011).

Confucian teachings influence traditional attitudes toward travel (Wang, 2012). For example, for the purpose of filial piety, “While one's parents are alive, he should not travel faraway; if he travels, he must have a fixed destination (父母在, 不远游, 游必有方; *Analects*)”. Travel should help meet the life goal of a Confucian: “Cultivate individual moral character, harmonize the family, govern the state, and make the world peace (修身齐家治国平天下)”. Hence one should “read ten thousand books and travel ten thousand miles (读万卷书, 行万里路)”. When enjoying the landscape, travelers should enhance their moral character by learning from the virtues of nature (Lin, 2009b; Wang, 2012; Yan, 2014).

Confucianism's emphasis on morality also plays an important role in writing in Chinese tradition, which may be best summarized in a prototypic literary theory “Writings are for conveying truth” (文以载道, Liu, 2015). This theory had its seed in Confucius but was developed and formalized in the Ancient Prose Movement (古文运动) in Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) dynasties, in which certain scholar-officials aimed to revive Confucianism and reform the decadent and pompous style of writing (Chen, 1996a, 1996b). There is a popular misunderstanding and criticism that this theory literally means that literary works are valued as instruments for propaganda, yet Liu's (2015) structural analysis shows that it has its own distinctive qualities. Firstly, the conveyed truth is some Confucian Way with its characteristic focus on ethics and morality, which is originally conceived, enlightens and transcends rather than follows existing socio-political ideas or policies. Secondly, it does not mean that writing itself is not important. Instead, the writers following this theory learned and practiced profusely to perfect their writing and form their own individual styles, believing that beautiful writing would make a prose and the truth it conveys better appreciated and more popular. Thirdly, the conveying of truth is the expression of writers' genuine and courageous pursuit

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