Article

The Overlooked Contribution of National Heritage Designation in City Branding and Tourism Management

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Abstract: The designation of cultural heritage, especially the World Cultural Heritage Site, is extensively discussed regarding its impacts on tourism destination branding. However, the impact of the designation(s) of World and/or National Cultural Heritage Site on affective city image and behavioural intention is still under-researched. This study aims to investigate the respective impact of visitors' awareness of the world and national heritage status on existential authenticity perceived at the heritage site, affective city image, and behavioural intention. The quantitative research method was employed to test the proposed structural model. A structured questionnaire was sent, and 363 valid responses were collected from domestic visitors at the Xiaoling Tomb of the Ming Dynasty, China. The results demonstrate that cultural heritage designation, whether it is a world or a national one, when recognised by domestic visitors, determines the shaping of a positive affective image of the city hosting the heritage site, as well as visitors' future intentions. However, visitor awareness of the world status and national status does not condition the affective city image and behavioural intentions in the same manner. This research takes the lead to stress the significant role of national heritage status in city branding and urges managerial attention.

Keywords: visitor awareness; World Cultural Heritage Designation; National Cultural Heritage Designation; existential authenticity; affective city image; behavioural intention

1. Introduction

To brand a city as a destination for heritage tourism, attracting consumers and investments in cultural and creative industries has become one of the main objectives of regeneration for many historical cities [1]. In city branding, cultural heritage can be used to form a city's identity [2] and to promote the city's image to target audiences [3]. Designated cultural heritage sites, especially the ones listed as World Heritage Sites, acting as an important part of the functional facets of the place brand [4], have been extensively discussed and debated regarding their impacts on reinforcing the place identity and modifying the place image [5], as well as on determining visitors' decision making and destination choice [6]. Visitors' awareness of the heritage designation can form an emotional attachment to the site. Such an emotional bond, linked to the representational dimension of the place brand [7], is deemed to be a vital communication objective for heritage management and destination branding [5,8]. Hence, understanding and measuring the impact of heritage designation awareness on people's emotional attachment to the destination is key to building a positive destination image and attracting more visitors to a city.

Unlike visitors' awareness of World Heritage Site designation, visitors' awareness of national heritage sites designation has been rarely discussed in English-language literature in city marketing [9], especially regarding its influence on people's perceptions of the city hosting the site. There are different names used to indicate sites, especially cultural

heritage sites, recognised at a national level, such as the National Historic Landmarks and National Monuments recognised by the federal government in the U.S., the Major Historical and Cultural Sites Protected at the National Level in China, and the buildings, battlefields, monuments, parks, gardens, and shipwrecks included in the National Heritage List for England. Worldwide, it is indisputable that the conservation and promotion of national heritage sites will strengthen the national and patriotic feeling of the inhabitants and increase the attractiveness of the sites aimed at visitors. Meanwhile, the social and cultural ends of national heritage conservation are harmoniously linked with economic interests in urban tourism and related cultural industries [10]. Therefore, it is worthwhile to study the significance of national heritage awareness in triggering visitors' emotional connections with the sites and the city, enhancing local identities [11,12].

This article reveals visitors' awareness of World Heritage Site designation and national heritage site designation and how it respectively and dis-similarly affects the shaping of emotional attachments to the heritage site and the city hosting the site. It further analyzes behavioural intentions of domestic visitors to recommend and revisit the city. In the current research, we particularly focus on the cultural sites designated as World Heritage Sites and the cultural sites included in the list of national heritage sites. In short, we name these two types of sites as World Cultural Heritage Sites (WCHS) and National Cultural Heritage Sites (NCHS). The notions of existential authenticity [13] and affective city image [14] are employed in this study to analyse visitors' affective reflections on the site and the city. Compared to the role of WCHS designation, how crucial is the NCHS designation in reinforcing a city's identity and image in a domestic context? Should the public awareness of NCHS designation be increased for the goals of urban rebranding? In response to these questions, the authors first reviewed the relevant literature, then conducted a questionnaire survey with 363 domestic visitors of the Xiaoling Tomb of the Ming Dynasty, which is a designated WCHS and a NCHS in the city of Nanjing. The Chinese city of Nanjing needs rebranding with its cultural resources for urban regeneration goals. Based on the statistical analysis of the collected data, the authors presented the findings of the study. These findings theoretically clarify the differentiation between the respective influence of WCHS and NCHS awareness on existential authenticity, the affective city image, and behavioural intention. They also serve as the basis for setting strategies to facilitate the contribution of heritage tourism to city branding and sustainable urban development.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Visitor Awareness of World Cultural Heritage Site Designation

In the existing literature, most of the attention has been given to the heritage sites with WCHS status in the operationalisation of heritage designations in brand building. While many empirical studies have investigated the correlation between visitor awareness of WCHS designation and one's emotional bond with the heritage site [8,15,16], they have rarely taken into account the connection between such awareness and the shaping of the image of the city.

Similarly, studies revealed the impact of WCHS designation on people's behavioural intentions before their visits, such as intention to visit [17], motivations [6], and willingness to pay [18]. The impact of the WCHS status on decision making before the visit has even led to intense debates [19,20]. Nevertheless, there are a rare number of studies on the relationship between visitors' awareness of WCHS status and their behavioural intentions [18].

2.2. National Cultural Heritage Site Designation and Visitor Awareness

Compared to the extensive literature on the awareness of WCHS status, there are only a few numbers of studies on the awareness of NCHS status in tourism management and city branding. Among them are local pride [21] and national identity [11,12]. The status of NCHS is closely linked to the national identity [22], as stated in the guidelines of national heritage sites' listings in various countries, such as Australia [23] and the UK [24]. This is also the case in China. According to the 'Regulations on the Application and Selection of

National Key Cultural Relics' promulgated by The State Administration of Cultural Relics in China [25], the cultural sites to be protected at the national level in China should meet at least one of the following criteria: the site should be (1) typical and representative in the course of human origin and evolution; (2) symbolic and representative in the origin and development of Chinese civilization and the formation and development of China's consciousness of being a unified multiethnic country and a community of the Chinese nation; (3) directly related to major historical events, revolutionary movements, or famous figures, or directly related to the history of the Communist Party of China, the history of the People's Republic of China, the history of reform and opening up, or major events and important figures in the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics; (4) representative buildings, cultural landscapes, historical sites, or achievements in construction planning that highlight the creativity and spiritual pursuit of the Chinese nation. Three out of four main criteria of selection are linked to nation-state building. Similar to many other countries, the sense of identity attached to most national heritage sites in China is deeply influenced by the narratives chosen to strengthen an idea of state and nation, ranging from prehistory to contemporary time.

Given the proven linkage between NCHS and the national identity, it is still under-researched how the awareness of NCHS designation influences domestic visitors' affective connections to the site and the hosting city, as well as their behavioural intentions after visits. Even so, a few cases suggest that the visitor awareness of NCHS designation has a substantial impact on the shaping of people's feelings and emotions bound up with the hosting site and city. For instance, Jager and Sanche [26] stressed that awareness of the national history reflected in the national heritage site helps connect Canadians' hearts and minds to the national inheritance. Ceylan and Eravci [27] proved that domestic visitors' awareness of the historical significance of the national inheritance positively affects the city brand and its economic value based on the investigations of Ayancık, Boyabat, Durağan, and Erfelek in the province of Sinop in Turkey.

2.3. Existential Authenticity

Existential authenticity has been extensively used to describe people's feelings, emotions, and sensations perceived during the visit [28–30]. Existential authenticity [30] denotes a sense of enjoyment and escape. It derives from the process of exploring one's true self in an alien environment that is distant from one's daily routine.

The correlations between existential authenticity and visitors' emotions [31], memorable tourism experiences [32], the sense of being at home [33], and the loyalty to a destination [34,35] have been substantially testified in the recent literature.

There have been many scaling efforts on existential authenticity [30,36–39]. Researchers have developed different measurement items to portray the emotional courses that affect the assessment of the perceived authentic quality. The items proposed by Kolar and Zabkar [13] are reflective and based on a combination of multiple sources. Meanwhile, compared to other measurement items, they are more elaborate and less case-specific. Hence, this set of items is adopted in this research to construct the concept of existential authenticity.

2.4. Affective City Image

The affective city image refers to individuals' subjectively experienced feelings toward the city [40]. Sahin and Baloglu [41] argue that the affective dimension of a city's image is crucial in evaluating a city. Ekinci and Hosany [42] also treat the affective city image as a determinant factor forecasting individuals' opinions about a city and their inclinations to recommend it. The affective image of a city has been widely acknowledged and adopted as a construct, which is composed of several affective items describing an individual's emotional reactions [43,44]. These items are used to assess the emotional reaction and feelings about the city. The most commonly used items are '*pleasant*', '*relaxing*', '*pretty*', and '*exciting*' [14]. These four items, having been successfully tested in many case studies worldwide, are adopted in the scope of this research to compose the affective image of the city.

2.5. Hypotheses

This section proposes a theoretical model with specific hypotheses concerning the correlations among aforementioned notions of visitor awareness of heritage designation, existential authenticity, affective city image, and behavioural intentions [45]. These hypotheses correspond to the research questions raised in the introduction section.

As explained in Sections 2.1 and 2.3, the awareness of heritage designation as a brand helps in forming an emotional attachment to the site, triggering positive feelings and behaviours [8,46,47]. Existential authenticity is a subjective quality visitors perceive at the site. It portrays personal feelings, emotions, and sensations generated at the heritage sites [28,30]. Hence, visitor awareness of site designation is a factor that is linked to the increase in existential authenticity. Although the WCHS and NCHS designation differs at administrative levels, they are both brands that emphasise the significant status of certain sites. Therefore, awareness of either designation should be positively correlated to the existential authenticity perceived at the sites. Hence, we propose the first hypothesis as follows:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Visitors' awareness of either heritage designation (WCHS or NCHS designation) or both designations should significantly influence existential authenticity.*

As concluded in Section 2.1, studies are still lacking in terms of the impact of either WCHS or NCHS designation on visitors' emotional connections with the city. Nevertheless, from an existential perspective, a visitor can be considered a mindful and organised explorer of experience [48]. Visiting the heritage sites within a city plays an important role in the integrated process of 'making sense' of a city, which contributes to one's feelings, memories, and practical knowledge about the entire urban environment. Affective city image is one of the main outcomes of this process. Hence, visitors' subjective attitudes to the sites should act as a predictor of their feeling about the city hosting the sites. Therefore, awareness of heritage designation, which influences one's emotions bonded to the site, should have a subsequent effect on the shaping of affective city image.

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *Visitors' awareness of either heritage designation (WCHS or NCHS designation) or both designations should significantly influence the affective city image.*

In addition, existential authenticity, constructing the context-based emotional feelings attached to a specific site, acts as a key factor in building up a sense of place or a feeling of belonging [30]. It should be able to determine the formation of the affective image of a city [49].

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *Existential authenticity, perceived on the heritage site, significantly influences affective city image.*

The affective image of a city is proven to predict people's future behavioural intentions [42,50–52], and the existential authenticity is hypothesised to positively influence the affective city image. Based on these arguments, the authors infer that existential authenticity determines future behavioural intention [45] indirectly, mediated by affective city image. As existential authenticity is also a precondition for the visitor's loyalty to a site, it is most likely that it directly affects visitor's revisit and recommendation intentions. The Hypotheses 4 and 5 are presented as follows:

Hypothesis 4 (H4). *Existential authenticity significantly influences visitors' behavioural intentions.*

Hypothesis 5 (H5). *Affective city image significantly advocates visitors' behavioural intentions.*

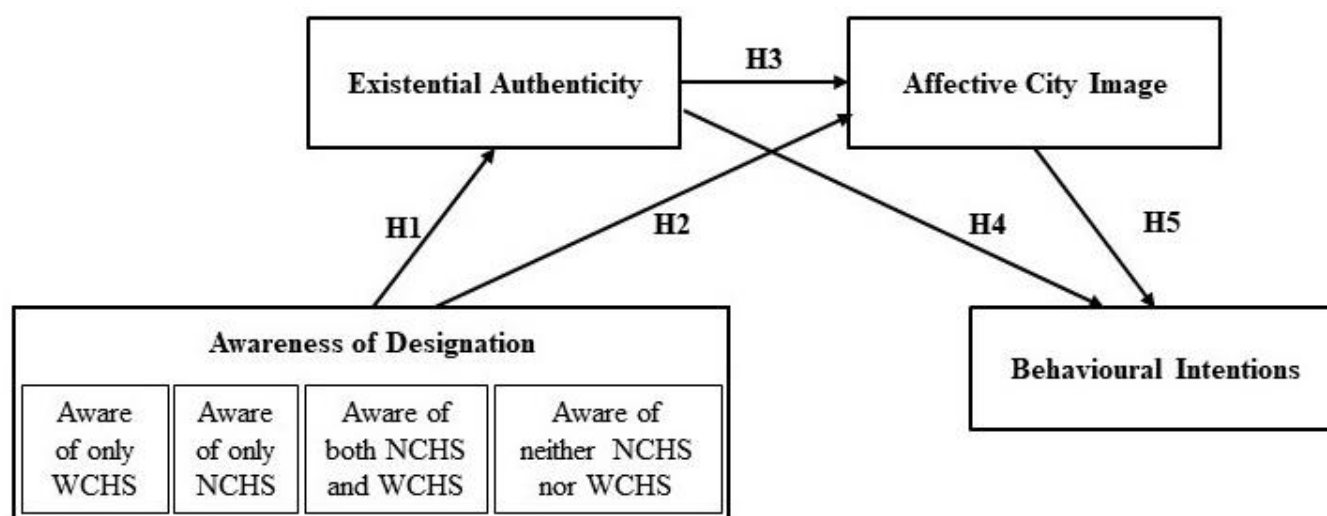Figure 1 explicates the theoretical model based upon the hypotheses.

Figure 1. Theoretical model based upon the hypotheses.

3. Methodology

Corresponding to the research questions and proposed hypotheses, we employed a methodology composed of the following steps: (1) we selected a heritage site that is both a WCHS and an NCHS in Nanjing as the case in our research; (2) we conducted a questionnaire survey among the domestic visitors at the heritage site in Nanjing to collect data regarding visitors' demographic information and personal attitudes towards the site and the city; (3) we used the Structural Equation Modelling to analyze the collected data based on the theoretical framework.

3.1. Nanjing as an Illustrative Case

Many cities in China and worldwide employ the local cultural heritage as a powerful instrument to boost cultural economy and reform the city brand [53,54]. The Chinese city of Nanjing is one of them [55]. Nanjing welcomes around 1 trillion tourists annually, and most of them are domestic tourists [56]. Tourism contributes greatly to the local economy of the city. For instance, in 2021, 13.3% of the Gross Domestic Product of Nanjing came from the prosperity of tourism [57]. It was chosen as the case study due to its manifold cultural resources and urban regeneration objectives apart from its good performance in tourism. Since the latter half of the 2010s, Nanjing has entered a crucial period of industrial transformation, during which the development of creative industries and city branding have become the focal points of the city. The thriving of cultural and creative industries has led more domestic visitors to consume cultural products.

The challenges in (re)branding faced by Nanjing include the lack of distinctive themes [58] and physical assets demonstrating existing themes. For instance, '*Ancient Capital of China for Six Dynasties*' has been the most well-known theme of the city, which was employed to brand itself. However, due to natural disasters and wars, there remained very few heritage sites associated with these *six ancient dynasties in 'South China'*, from 222 A.D. to 589 A.D, i.e., the *Wu*, the *Dong Jin*, the *Liu-Song*, the *Nan Qi*, the *Nan Liang*, and the *Nan Chen*. The existing cultural properties preserved in the city mostly date back to the *Ming Dynasty* (1368–1644) and the *Qing Dynasty* (1644–1912), and the Republican period (1912–1949). Hence, the most visited heritage sites in Nanjing, such as The Xiaoling Tomb of the Ming Dynasty, Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum, and The Presidential Palace, are not ones embodying the theme of '*Ancient Capital of China for Six Dynasties*', but rather, the national history after 1368. It is urgent to adaptively formulate a new image of Nanjing built upon the accessible cultural heritage resources to attract domestic visitors.

The Xiaoling Tomb of the Ming Dynasty is one of the cultural sites listed as the national cultural property following 'Regulations on the Application and Selection of National Key

Cultural Relics' (Figure 2). It is also the only site designated as a World Heritage Site (Figure 3) as a part of the Imperial Tombs of the Ming and Qing Dynasties [59]. The Xiaoling Tomb of the Ming Dynasty is the mausoleum of the Hongwu Emperor, the founder of the Ming dynasty. It lies at the southern foot of Purple Mountain, located east of the historical center of Nanjing (Figure 4). The Xiaoling Tomb was constructed from 1381 to 1405, damaged during the Taiping Civil War in the mid-19th century, and partially restored during the Tongzhi Era (from the 1860s to 1870s). The main part of Xiaoling Tomb is basically composed of 14 elements, as shown on the map inside the heritage site (Figure 5). One of the most significant elements, 'Fang Cheng Ming Lou' (City Gate Tower), was restored with a new roof in 2008 (Figure 6). Due to its designations as both an NCHS and a WCHS, this site was selected as the main case to justify the proposed hypotheses.

Figure 2. The stone tablet at The Xiaoling Tomb of the Ming Dynasty indicating its status as a national heritage site; The Chinese characters on the tablet mean that The Xiaoling Tomb of the Ming Dynasty was listed as one of the National Key Cultural Relics in China by The State Council of the People's Republic of China on 4 March 1961. The stone tablet was constructed by People's Committee of Jiangsu Province. (Source: Authors).
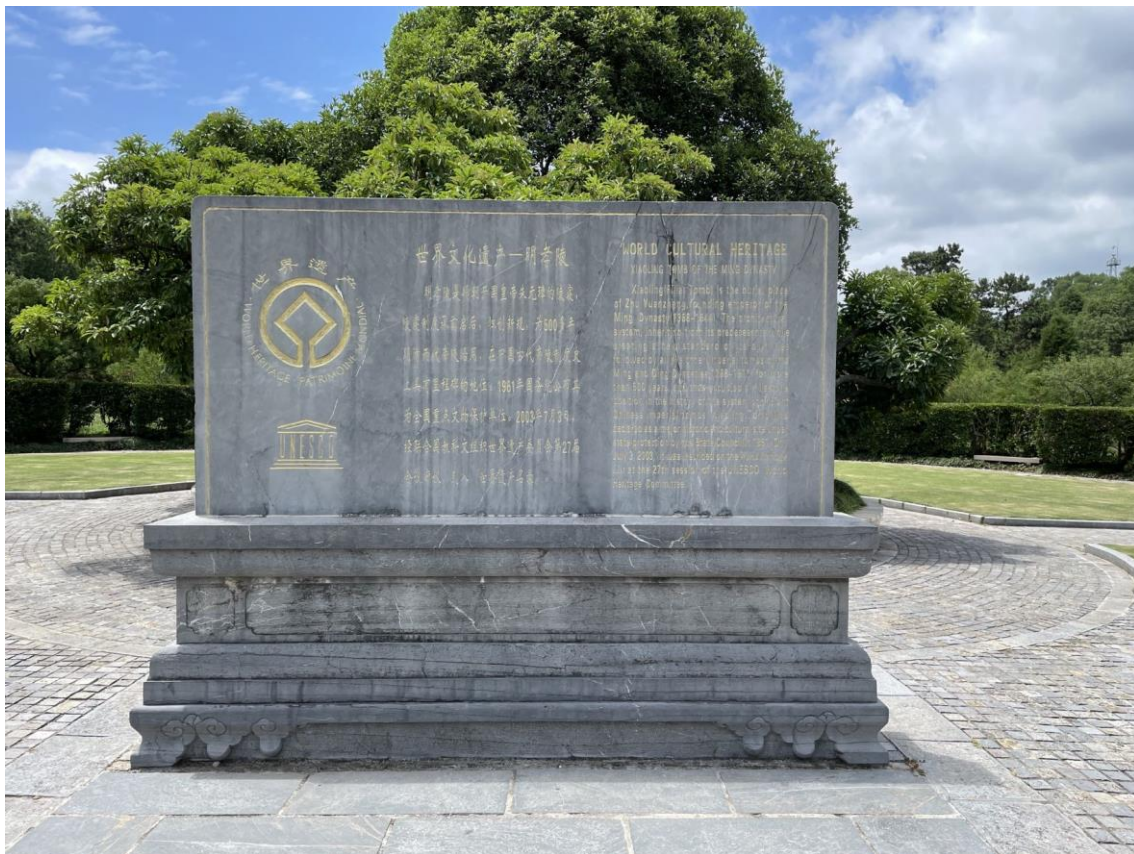
Figure 3. The stone tablet at The Xiaoling Tomb of the Ming Dynasty indicating its status as a World Heritage Site; the logos at the left part of the tablet respectively indicate World Heritage and UNESCO. The Chinese texts carved in the middle are translated from the English texts at the right. They briefly introduce the historical background of The Xiaoling Tomb of the Ming Dynasty, its status as a national heritage site announced in 1961, and its status as a World heritage site announced in 2003 on the 27th session of the UNESCO World heritage committee. (Source: Authors).
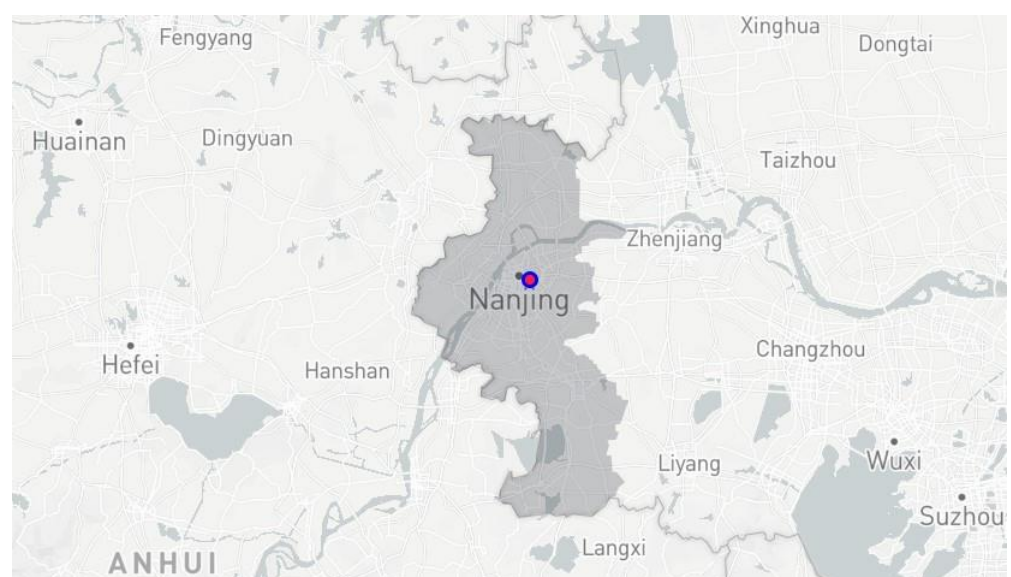
Figure 4. The location of The Xiaoling Tomb of the Ming Dynasty (the red dot) in the city of Nanjing (the boundary of the city is in grey color). (Source: Authors).

Figure 5. The 'Schematic diagram of restoration of the Ming Tomb' shown on a standing information board within the 'Zhongshan Mountain National Park'; It briefly introduces the historical background of the Ming Tomb and indicates the 14 main components of the heritage site. (Source: Authors).

Figure 6. 'Fang Cheng Ming Lou' (City Gate Tower) inside The Xiaoling Tomb of the Ming Dynasty. (Source: Authors).

3.2. Data Collection

A set of questions was designed to gather visitors' attitudes toward existential authenticity regarding The Xiaoling Tomb, affective image of Nanjing, and future behaviours

related to the city (see Supplementary Materials Data). Additionally, relevant sociodemographic information was collected. The prior-to-visit awareness of national and world heritage designations of The Xiaoling Tomb was set as the last two questions to avoid any disturbance to the answers to other questions.

A questionnaire was conducted face-to-face in Nanjing from 25th September to 15th December 2019. All respondents confirmed that they had visited The Xiaoling Tomb. In total, 363 valid responses were collected out of 401, with a response rate of 90.5%. Among all the questions, the ones regarding existential authenticity, affective city image, and behavioural intentions were designed as five-point Likert scale questions. Regarding the visitor awareness of heritage designations, two questions were asked at the end of the questionnaire. The one concerning the NCHS designation was asked before the one about WCHS designation. Domestic visitors were asked to choose 'yes' or 'no' to answer the questions. Since some visitors might know this site was listed as a WCHS and that a WCHS was always an NCHS, asking the question concerning visitors' knowledge of NCHS designation first could eliminate any answers produced by a process of deduction.

The respondents were mainly young or middle-aged highly educated people (Table A1). Furthermore, 48.2% of them were females, whereas 51.8% were males. As stated by Kempiak, Hollywood [60] visitors who have completed higher education constitute the majority of the heritage visitors and they have a higher willingness to pay for heritage tourism. Moreover, Preko and Doe [61] argued that two vital factors determine young visitors' satisfaction and behavioural intentions: historical/cultural attraction as an extrinsic factor and knowledge-seeking as an intrinsic factor. Thus, this sample surely represented an adequate target market, not only for Nanjing, but also for other historical cities with abundant cultural heritage resources.

3.3. Data Analysis

The authors applied the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to analyse the interview data regarding the hypotheses. The 'Awareness of Designations', formulated as a multicategorical independent variable, was converted to a group of dummy variables [62] in SEM. The variable 'Awareness of Designations' had four categories of awareness conditions: 1. aware of both NCHS and WCHS designations; 2. aware of only NCHS designation; 3. aware of only WCHS designation; 4. unaware of both designations (reference category). The authors conducted the normality test and evaluation of construct validity before the model estimation. According to the collected data, 23% of respondents were only aware of WCHS designation, 29% were only aware of NCHS designation, 32% aware of both designations, and 16% aware of neither WCHS nor NCHS. The internal consistency, construct validity, and convergent validity were examined and illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Statistical results (Standardised Factor Loadings, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted) testifying to the internal consistency, construct validity, and convergent validity of the model.

Construct and Source	Item	β	CR	AVE
Existential authenticity (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010) [13]	I enjoyed the arrangements, events, and celebrations at the site.	0.86	0.88	0.79
	This visit provided a thorough insight into the Ming Dynasty.	0.91		
	During the visit, I felt the related history, legends, and historical personalities.	0.88		
	I enjoyed the unique spiritual experience.	0.92		
	I liked the calm and peaceful atmosphere during the visit.	0.90		
	I felt connected with the local human history and civilization.	0.90		

Table 1. *Cont.*

Construct and Source	Item	β	CR	AVE
Affective city image (Papadimitriou et al., 2015) [14]	My visit to the city was unpleasant/pleasant	0.79	0.96	0.80
	My visit to the city was distressing/relaxing	0.86		
	The city is ugly/pretty	0.80		
	The city is gloomy/exciting	0.78		
Behavioural intentions (Wang & Hsu, 2010) [44]	Intention to revisit	0.89	0.88	0.65
	Intention to recommend	0.89		

Note: CR and AVE were calculated based on the factor scores generated from the CFA-mode.

The values of skewness and kurtosis (Table A2) were acceptable [63]; therefore, the normality assumptions were testified to [64]. All factor loadings were significant ($p < 0.001$) and higher than 0.80 [65]. The values indicating Cronbach's α (Table A3) were all larger than 0.74 [66]. Calculated CR and AVE (Table 1) indicated acceptable internal consistency and sufficing convergent validity of all constructs [67]. AVE of each construct was larger than its highest squared correlation with any other construct [68], as shown in Table A4; hence, discriminant validity of the measurements was confirmed.

Concerning the potential control variables (educational level, gender, and age), gender was not significantly correlated to any key variable; age was correlated to behavioural intentions and awareness of designation; the educational level was correlated with affective city image, behavioural intentions, and designation awareness (Table A3). Therefore, age and educational level were controlled in the model.

4. Results

For the estimated model (Table 2), goodness-of-fit indexes are acceptable: $X^2 = 3.35$, $p = 0.50$, CMIN/DF = 0.84 (<5) [68]; RMSEA = 0.00 (<0.06), $CI_{95\%}$ = 0.00 to 0.07 [69]; PCLOSE = 0.82; SRMR = 0.01 (<0.08) [70]; TLI = 1.00 (>0.95), CFI = 1.00 (>0.95) [69]. Age (on behavioural intentions = 0.05 *) and educational level (not significant on affective city image = −0.048, or on behavioural intentions = 0.03) are controlled in the model.

Table 2. Direct causal effects between factors are calculated based on the estimated model (incorporating the control variable of educational level and age).

Effects of	On	Direct Effects
Awareness of designations		
Aware of both designations	Existential authenticity	0.34 *** (0.10)
Only aware of WCHS designation	Existential authenticity	0.29 ** (0.11)
Only aware of NCHS designation	Affective city image	0.15 ** (0.05)
Existential authenticity	Affective city image	0.49 *** (0.04)
	Behavioural intentions	0.15 ** (0.05)
Affective city image	Behavioural intentions	0.75 *** (0.06)

Note: ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Standardised coefficients are shown with standard errors in parentheses. The effects of 'Awareness of designations' were calculated based on the condition that 'Unaware of both designations' was employed as the reference category.

As demonstrated in Table 2, H1 and H2 are both partially proven. H3, H4, H5, and H6 are all testified to. The correlations between different factors are visualised in Figure 7. When visitors are only aware of WCHS designation or aware of both WCHS and NCHS designations, they tend to perceive stronger existential authenticity at the site. When visitors are only aware of NCHS designation, they tend to hold an affirmative attitude regarding the affective image of the city. Existential authenticity is proven to directly determine the affective city image and behavioural intentions. The affective city image also directly affects behavioural intentions. Visitors' awareness of WCHS and both designations can influence their behavioural intentions via the mediation of existential authenticity and affective city image, while awareness of NCHS designation determines the behavioural intentions via the mediation of affective city image.
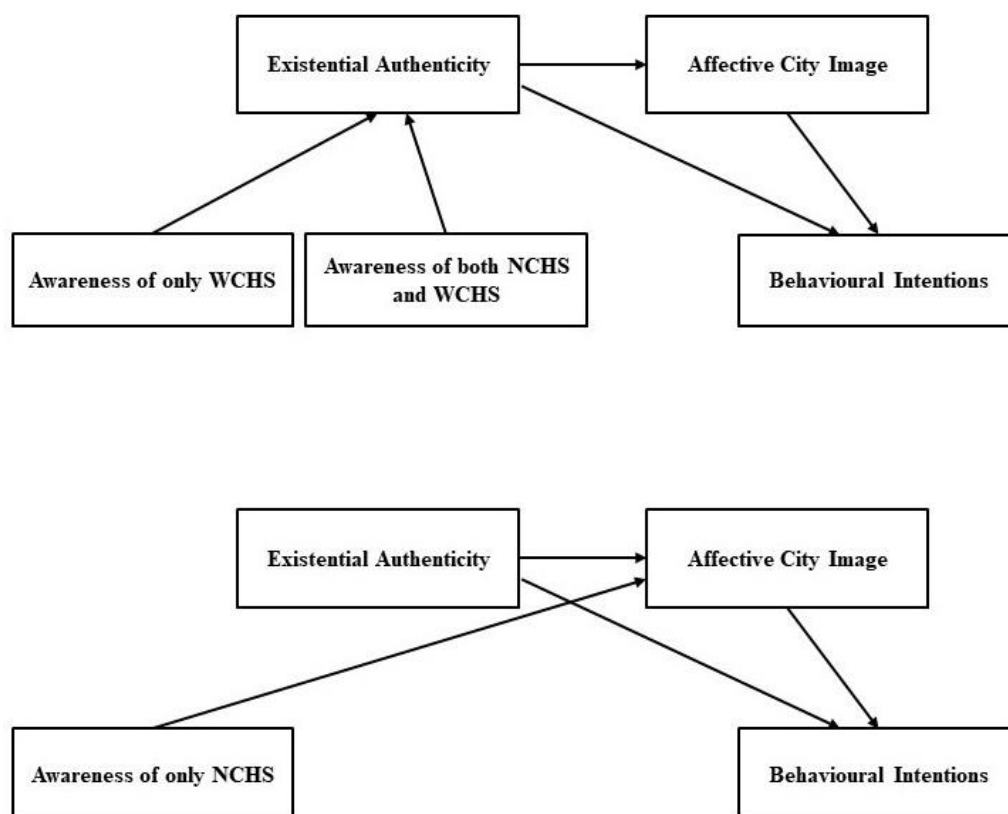
Figure 7. Diagrams indicating the causal relationships between variables in the estimated model (arrows represent direct causal effects).

5. Discussion and Conclusions

5.1. Theoretical Contributions

The results have confirmed that cultural heritage designation, whether in the form of WCHS or NCHS status, when recognised by domestic visitors, determines the shaping of a positive affective image of the city hosting the heritage site, as well as visitors' future intentions of recommending and revisiting the city. However, visitor awareness of the WCHS status and that of the NCHS status does not condition the affective city image and behavioural intentions in the same manner. Compared to other instances of awareness, awareness of only WCHS and both heritage statuses exhibit a significant and direct influence on the existential authenticity perceived at the heritage site, indirect influence on affective city image through the mediation of existential authenticity, and successive indirect impact on behavioural intentions via affective city image. The awareness of the NCHS status strongly and directly impacts the affective city image while it indirectly influences behavioural intentions by shaping a positive affective image.

The main contribution of the article is to acknowledge that, compared to WCHS designation, NCHS designation is more directly linked to the emotional aspect of the city image, which composes the representational facet of the city brand [7]. Since the representationality and functionality are the two dimensions clarifying the strength of a brand [71], the close causal connection between NCHS designation and the city brand stresses the potential role of NCHS in city branding.

5.2. Practical Applications

Given the significant impact on people's affectional attachment to a city and future behaviours made by visitor awareness of heritage designations, it is worthwhile to explore why such influence varies across WCHS and NCHS statuses. Heritage professionals, tourism practitioners, urban policymakers, and marketers can strategise how to shape a more positive affective city image and improve revisit and recommendation intentions by identifying the reasons behind people's divergent perceptions on WCHS and NCHS statuses. It may be people's respective interpretations of these two statuses that cause the varied causal effects.

As argued in Section 2.2, the creation of NCHS supporting the concept of the nation-state is embedded in the nationalised local past and intertwined with the collective memories ascribed to a site and, more so, to a city. The memories are mostly corroborated by a sequence of historical events. These events happened not only at the site, but also at some other locations all over the city. When domestic visitors are aware of the NCHS designation, they instinctively link the city to the national history and recall the role of the city in crucial periods of time in the country. The recalled memories can imbue visitors' perceptions of the urban environment with emotions, which bear on personal interests and concerns [72]. Hence, the memories consequently condition people's affective connections to the city.

Not all domestic visitors are familiar with the WCHS designation. Some visitors have an imprecise insight into the designation [16]. Only a few people know the actual meaning of it [73]. Nevertheless, the WCHS designation, which serves as a marker of authenticity and quality, gives prestige to a heritage site and lures visitors in [74]. It ensures a high level of engagement during the visit [16] and a stronger emotional commitment to the site [75], which result in the enhancement of the existential authenticity perceived at the site.

Stakeholders should take the necessary measures to better promote heritage sites with NCHS and WCHS designation and facilitate the shaping of a desirable affective image as well as positive behavioural intentions. As a part of the nomination process, a national cultural heritage status is an indispensable prerequisite for the acquisition of a world heritage status. In the world heritage nominations submitted by the state party, a comparative analysis should be conducted in terms of the cultural significance of the properties in question. This analysis should compare the significance of nominated properties with other similar properties, whether or not listed as a world heritage site, both at the national and international levels [76]. As such, the importance and uniqueness of the heritage nationwide acts as one of the preconditions for world heritage nomination. A thorough understanding of the universal, national, and local values of the properties should also be demonstrated in the nomination file by stakeholders at various institutional levels, including local communities, to ensure appropriate conservation of the nominated cultural properties [76]. Overall, the nationwide cultural significance and heritage values should be justified prior to World Heritage listing.

The statutory procedure of heritage designations is not known by most domestic visitors, according to the results of the survey: 23% respondents recognised The Xiaoling Tomb only as a WCHS, not an NCHS. Once informed about the correlation between the two designations, the domestic visitors who are only aware of the WCHS status of a site will be able to recognise its NCHS status. This associated awareness can help generate a positive affective city image in visitors' minds, consequently raising behavioural intentions.

Since a recognised NCHS status determines the affective city image and behavioural intentions, all the NCHS located in one city can be branded as collectively targeting

domestic visitors. In almost every big city in China, there exist a great number of cultural heritage sites protected at the national level. This is also common in big cities in other countries. Strategies can be implemented to classify the NCHSs into groups and thematise them [77]. Developing and disseminating national themes and narratives related to the sites can increase the awareness of national designation of them. Visiting the cluster of national heritage assets one by one, with their statuses in mind, visitors' subjectively experienced positive feelings attached to the city, generated at each site, can be accumulated and represented as a desirable city image.

5.3. Limitation and Future Research

There are a couple of limitations tempering the genericity of this research. First, the results are generated based on a survey regarding the only WCHS in Nanjing, and is therefore restricted by the number of WCHSs in the city. The specificity of the case can possibly lead to some biases in the findings. Future studies can validate the findings through a comparative analysis of more cities with WCHSs nationwide and worldwide. Second, the questions in the questionnaire do not include how the visitors heard about and understood the heritage designation(s). Future studies should explore how the WCHS and NCHS designations are publicised, the meanings of the designations in visitors' minds, and the influence of the designation on the change of market value [78] in order to more precisely strategise how to raise the visitors' awareness.

5.4. Conclusions

This study fills a much-needed gap in the correlations between domestic visitor awareness of WCHS and NCHS, the affective city image, and behavioural intentions through a structured survey. The findings reveal that once visitors are informed of the world heritage designation, they tend to evaluate the perceived existential authenticity highly. Furthermore, their emotional attachment to the site facilitates the formation of a positive affective image of the city. This consequently furthers the visitors' intentions to recommend and revisit the city. While visitor awareness of the national heritage designation directly and positively determines the affective city image, that in turn raises behavioural intentions. These results unveil the prominent position of both heritage designations, especially of the NCHSs, in city branding, which urges managerial attention.

The authors argue for the necessity to publicise the WCHS designation together with the NCHS designation. NCHS as a status built upon the distinctive national values has been celebrated by stakeholders in the national and the local contexts. The informed connections between the two designations in visitors' minds can promote the emotional linkages between the WCHS brand and the city. The authors also propose to brand the NCHS located in one city collectively, by classifying and thematizing them as clusters and explaining their respective historical bonds to the national interests. This is to impress NCHS designation on domestic visitors' minds and to build up an affirmative affective city image after they visit the sites.

After the outbreak of COVID-19, due to international travel restrictions and quarantine measures in China, the development of tourism and other cultural industries in Nanjing and many other Chinese cities relies ever more on domestic visitor consumption. This article emphasises the significance of NCHS in forming a city's image and attracting domestic visitors to the city. This research not only unveils the power of NCHS status, which has been long overshadowed by that of WCHS, but also develops a new perspective in city reimaging and rebranding. Strategies developed in this article can be tentatively implemented in Nanjing, and other historical cities hosting World Cultural Heritage Sites or even only National Cultural Heritage Sites, with similar goals of rebranding in a time of urban transition. NCHS and WCHS, both acting as legacies of local cultures, can complement each other, defining local identities. Entrepreneurs, tourism practitioners, heritage practitioners, urban designers, and decision makers involved in the management of the historic built environment should broaden the horizons of heritage branding to

embrace National Cultural Heritage Sites in place-making strategies for a more prosperous and sustainable development of cultural industries and city branding.

Appendix A

Table A1. Description of social demographic data.

			Age			
Category	Under 18	18–25	26–30	31–40	41–50	51–60	Above 60
Frequency (%)	0.3	21.2	18.7	18.5	20.4	16.8	4.1

		Gender
Category	Female	Male
Frequency (%)	48.2	51.8

			Educational Level		
Category	Junior high school	Senior high school	Bachelor degree	Master degree	Ph.D. degree
Frequency (%)	1.4	5.2	54.3	29.5	9.6

Table A2. Means, Standard Deviations, Skewness and Kurtosis for all variables.

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Awareness of Designations [a]	2.23	1.07	0.32	−1.16
Existential Authenticity	4.30	0.65	−0.60	−0.38
Affective Image	4.08	0.61	−0.38	0.20
Behavioural Intentions	4.02	0.78	−0.36	−0.54
Educational Level	3.41	0.79	0.16	0.49
Gender [b]	1.48	0.50	0.07	−2.01
Age	4.04	1.52	0.12	−1.13

Note: [a] Categorical item (1 = aware of both designations, 2 = aware of NCHS designation only, 3 = aware of WCHS designation only, 4 = unaware of both designations). [b] Dichotomous item (0 = male, 1 = female).

Table A3. Pearson correlation matrix with Cronbach's α for all variables.

		1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Awareness of Designations [a]						
2	Existential Authenticity	−0.15 **	*(0.95)*				
3	Affective Image	−0.19 **	0.52 **	*(0.82)*			
4	Behavioural Intentions	−0.15 **	0.42 **	0.66 **	*(0.74)*		
5	Educational Level	0.75 **	−0.09	−0.20 **	−0.16 **		
6	Gender [b]	0.05	0.01	−0.03	0.01	0.03	
7	Age	−0.27 **	0.03	0.08	0.15 **	−0.27 **	0.06

Note: N = 363; the correlations are in the lower triangle of the matrix. Cronbach's α is in italics and in parentheses for each latent construct., ** $p < 0.01$. [a] Categorical item (1 = aware of both designations, 2 = aware of only NCHS designation, 3 = aware of only WCHS designation, 4 = unaware of both designations). [b] Dichotomous item (0 = male, 1 = female).

Table A4. Discriminant validity of the latent constructs.

	AVE and SC	1	2	3
1	Existential Authenticity	**0.79**	*0.27*	*0.17*
2	Affective City Image	0.52	**0.80**	*0.43*
3	Behavioural Intentions	0.42	0.66	**0.65**

Note: The correlations are in the lower triangle of the matrix, squared correlations in the upper triangle, AVE on the diagonal in bold.

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