

## Article

# “Can Intelligence Make You Happy?” The Influence of Tourists’ Cultural Sustainability and Intelligence on Their Flow Experience

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**Abstract:** Chinese culture has been developed over five thousand years, and the ways in which to retain its sustainable development and maintain its rich spiritual treasures are critical issues. In order to address this critical issue, this study examines whether cultural intelligence can promote positive emotions and a flow experience. The results from 509 valid samples reveal that cultural intelligence contributes to a flow experience through a path of “perception–enjoyment–flow”. Cultural experience, perceived aesthetics, perceived authenticity and the awakening of enjoyment are effective conduction factors in the process. Furthermore, this study confirms that creative performance has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between cultural intelligence and cultural experience, perceived aesthetics, and perceived authenticity. The findings clarify the links of the influence of cultural intelligence on tourists’ flow experience, and expand the theoretical framework for research on flow experience and the scope of the application of flow theory.



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**Keywords:** cultural intelligence; flow experience; cultural and creative; creative performance; authenticity

## 1. Introduction

With the gradual integration of culture, creativity and tourism, culturally sustainable development has become an emerging trend to integrate creativity into the traditional culture of tourist destinations [1]. Zhang et al. [1] asserted that enhancing tourists’ flow experience is a critical means by which cultural and creative destinations can gain a superior status in a fiercely competitive market. However, the flow experience of tourists has received little attention in previous studies. In discovering the critical factor of tourist satisfaction, the flow experience literature has widely recognized the importance of influencing tourists’ levels of engagement in tourism activities [2]. Appealing to tourists’ desires for a flow experience can encourage them to pay more attention to the process of tourism and stimulate their exploratory behaviour to achieve deep learning and understanding, thereby making it easy for tourists to have in-depth experiences and obtain satisfaction [3]. Indeed, the positive association among tourists’ emotions, attitudes and behaviours (such as satisfaction, loyalty, revisiting intention, and environmental responsibility behaviour) is well documented [2–4], and such a positive association will change in a positive direction when the tourists experience pleasure. Therefore, a positive association among tourists’ emotions, attitudes and behaviours is crucial for the sustainable development of cultural and creative tourism.

Although a flow experience contributes to the creation of positive effects on tourists’ satisfaction and happiness [2], the current research on tourists’ flow experience is still quite limited. Flow originates from the mutual interaction between individuals and external elements, and is characterised by a high concentration of individual attention. Therefore, it was mainly used to explore the human–computer interaction experience in the early stage, and has been extensively studied in gaming, education, and internet research [5–8]. As

the research continues to deepen and expand, scholars have found that outdoor recreation can provide participants with a sense of challenge and focus, which coincides with flow characteristics [3,9]. Flow experience has been gradually applied to the research of adventure tourism, theme tourism, mountaineering tourism, and cultural and creative tourism, which shows high participation and strong feelings of experience [1,2,10,11]. In addition, as the state of individual flow comes with a strong sense of participation, such exploratory behaviour will lead to positive behaviours and emotions in individuals [12]. The relevant studies mainly focus on the “consequence” analysis of the flow experience, including the positive influence on tourists’ emotions, behaviour, and acculturation [4,13].

Furthermore, some scholars have explored the “antecedents” of flow experience, proposing that destination design, authenticity and entertainment activities can promote tourists’ flow experience [1,3,11]. However, few studies have explored the influence of individual characteristics on tourists’ flow experience from internal factors. Importantly, individual characteristics will lead to differences in tourism experience even in the same tourism type [14]. Especially in cultural and creative tourism, destination culture is regarded as the core tourist attraction and a critical element of the experience. Individuals’ understanding of and ability to adapt to diverse cultures will directly affect the tourism experience’s quality and emotional value [15]. The higher the cultural intelligence of the tourists is, the easier it is to perceive the cultural connotation of local tourism and enhance immersion and pleasure in the tourism experience [15,16]. Therefore, the individual’s level of cultural cognition, understanding and adaptability plays a major role in tourists’ flow experience. In order to fill in the research gap on the “antecedents” of tourists’ flow experience, this study takes cultural and creative tourism as the research background. It explores the influence mechanism of cultural intelligence on tourists’ flow experience from the perspective of individual characteristics.

In the context of cross-cultural tourism activities, Frías-Jamilena et al. [17] asserted that cultural intelligence helps tourists to adapt to multicultural tourism environments. The higher the level of cultural intelligence, the stronger tourists’ cognitive ability will be to appreciate the cultural aspects of a destination [18]. Previous studies have proven that tourists’ cognition of the external environment will affect their emotional state, thereby resulting in a change in behavioural intention [19]. In the process of a cultural and creative tourism experience, tourists’ cultural perceptions and participation can stimulate their pleasure and positive emotions, thus exerting a positive effect on the flow experience [1]. In this way, this study constructs the theoretical path of “cultural intelligence–perception–enjoyment–flow experience”. The perception of tourists in the process of the tourism experience includes cultural product experiences, environmental aesthetic perceptions and authenticity perceptions [20,21]. Consequently, against the backdrop of cultural and creative tourism, variables such as cultural experiences, perceived aesthetics and perceived authenticity are introduced to construct the causal relationship between cultural intelligence and tourists’ flow experience.

In summary, the purpose of this study is to answer the following questions. First, does cultural intelligence affect the flow experience in the context of cultural and creative tourism? Second, what is the intermediary mechanism and effect path between cultural intelligence and the flow experience? Third, what role does creative performance play in the process of influencing the path? In order to address these unanswered questions, this study sought to establish an integrated theoretical model that combines the mediation-moderation process between cultural intelligence and flow experience. Theoretically, by exploring the antecedents of cultural and creative tourists’ flow experience at the individual level, this paper compensates for the deficiency of the formation of flow experience in the research perspective and enriches the field of flow experience. Practically, the research sheds light on the management and innovation of cultural and creative destinations, contributing to the enhancement of the attractiveness and market competitiveness of destinations.

## 2. Theory and Hypotheses

### 2.1. The Definition of a Cultural and Creative Tourism Destination

Cultural and creative tourism is an emerging tourism trend that takes a destination's cultural resources and creative forms as key attractions [1,16]. Additionally, a tourism destination is regarded as an aggregation of related products, services and facilities aimed at satisfying the demands of tourists, which can create space for different stakeholders to experience and interact, and is a prerequisite for successful tourism behavior [22,23]. Combined with scholars' discussions on the concept of cultural and creative tourism, and tourism destinations, this article defines a cultural and creative tourism destination as a tourism space that relies on local cultural resources, takes cultural elements and creative forms as the core attraction, and integrates related tourism facilities, tourism products and service elements. It aims to meet the cultural and creative tourists' demands for culture and a novel and creative tourism experience.

### 2.2. Flow Experience

Flow theory advocates that flow experience is an experience in which the individual is fully engaged in something, and is immersed in the psychological state of enjoyment [2]. Following this logic, in such a state, people will not have negative emotions, such as worry, anxiety or boredom, and will instead experience an obvious sense of enjoyment and temporal distortion [24]. A flow experience emphasizes high concentration and the balance between skills and challenges. In other words, someone is likely to be fully focused and immersed in activities when their skill level matches the challenge [4]. Therefore, it was often used in the fields of games, education, networking and so on in the early stage [5–8]. With the deepening of the research, scholars have found that flow experience also contributes to the self-improvement of individuals. In the process of a flow experience, individuals' learning motivation, self-worth perception and high-quality output will be positively affected [6].

Although scholars have conducted in-depth exploration of flow experience in different research fields, it is undeniable that pleasure and deep enjoyment have always been considered as the typical manifestations of a flow experience [25]. Based on this view, many scholars have proved that enjoyment is the key source of flow experience [26,27]. Tourists' enjoyment will be directly affected by the tourism experience [28]. Previous studies have shown that despite the complexity and diversity of the experience of cultural and creative tourism, culture is a core attraction of such tourism and supports the development of the tourism industry [29]. Therefore, tourists' experiences and perceptions of cultural and creative tourism mainly revolve around the destination's culture, for the following reasons. First, as the most direct way to acquire cultural perceptions in the tourism experience, cultural experience includes viewing and participating in the cultural products and activities of the destination, which is an important part of the tourism experience. Second, authenticity is the key to enhancing the perception of cultural value that reflects the uniqueness and value of a culture [30]. For example, Zhang et al. [1] proposed the "authenticity–flow experience" model, with destination authenticity as the perceptual object based on the belief that cultural and creative tourists' perceptions of authenticity will stimulate their enjoyment and satisfaction, and thereby enhance the flow experience. Finally, as an attribute of the destination environment, aesthetics are also an explicit form of regional culture that can improve the aesthetic pleasure of the senses, and are thus considered an important manifestation of the value of the tourism experience [31,32]. Consequently, the cultural experience, perceived authenticity and perceived aesthetics that enhance tourists' experiences and other aspects at the cultural and creative tourism destination are highly representative in the measurement of the tourism experience and cultural perceptions.

In the process of cultural perception and experience, the adaptability of tourists to different cultures is particularly important. According to Ang et al. [33], cultural intelligence is a significant standard for the measurement of individual cultural adaptability. It can

enhance tourists' intrinsic interest in culture and improve their ability to put this intention into practice [34]. As a result, cultural intelligence determines tourists' adaptability and ability to understand cultural difference against the backdrop of cultural and creative tourism, which also affects their degree of cultural perception [33]. In addition, creativity is a critical means of cultural output and dissemination in cultural and creative tourism [20]. Tourists are typically fond of innovative travel experiences, and the level of creativity in tourist destinations will affect their travel experience [1,35]. Consequently, creative performance is introduced as the moderating variable in the influence path of cultural intelligence on cultural perception.

In conclusion, under the effect of cultural intelligence, there are three links in the generation of tourists' flow experience: intelligence, perception, and enjoyment. The relevant theoretical model is below (Figure 1).

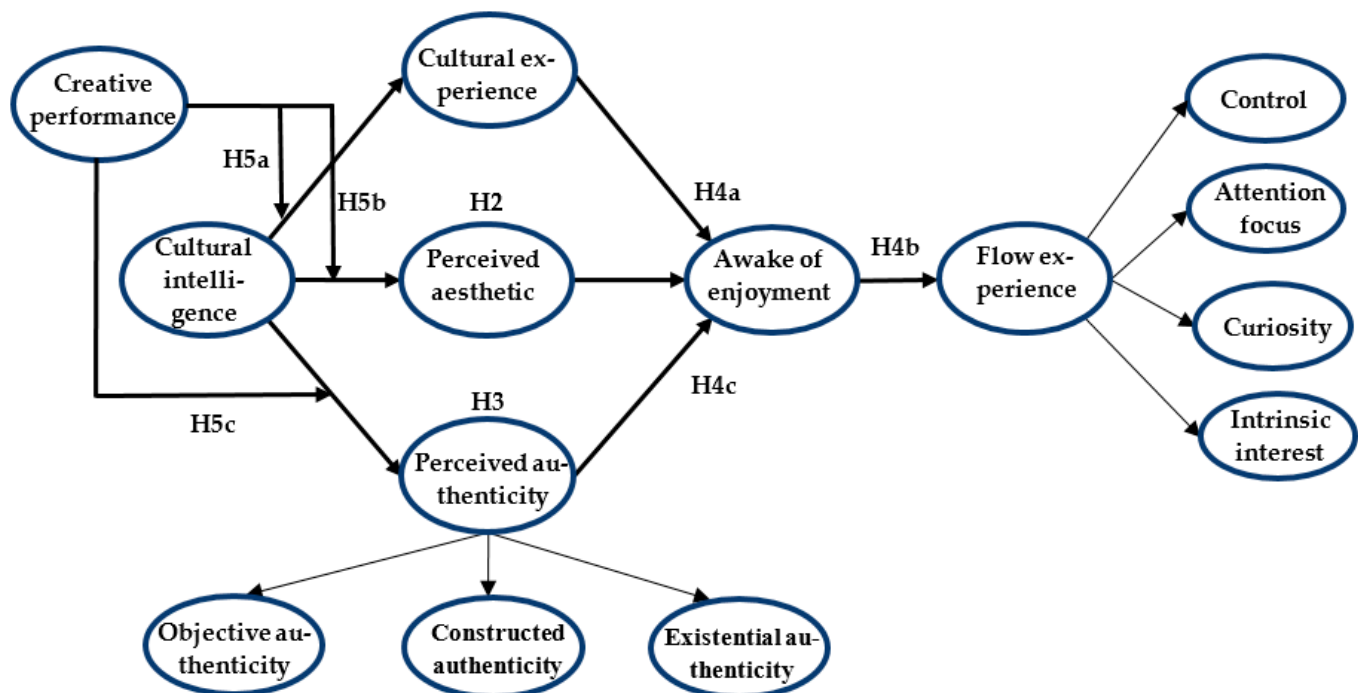


Figure 1. Research framework of the hypothesized model.

### 2.3. Cultural Intelligence

Cultural intelligence (CQ) is proposed in the context of economic globalisation, reflecting people's willingness and ability to adapt, learn and interact effectively in a cross-cultural environment [18]. In developing the concept of CQ, Ang et al. [33] developed a four-dimensional structure of "meta-cognition, cognition, motivation and behaviour". Metacognitive CQ and cognitive CQ determine the overall knowledge of other cultures [36]. The former reflects the individual's ability to learn and understand cultural knowledge before and during cross-cultural interaction. The latter refers to the individual's basic understanding of the target culture [33,37]. Furthermore, motivational CQ reflects an individual's interest in different cultural experiences, and represents the confidence to continue to function after encountering obstacles in cultural experiences and interactions [36]. Finally, behavioural CQ refers to the ability to effectively adjust and perform verbal and nonverbal behaviours in the cross-cultural environment [37,38].

Given that CQ helps to complete tasks effectively in a cross-cultural environment, many studies have used CQ to explain the positive outcomes of individuals in learning and work. It covers cross-organizational integration [13,38,39], learning and work performance [34,40–42], and knowledge interaction [38,43,44]. However, the utility of CQ

goes far beyond study and work. Frías-jamilen et al. [17] pointed out that tourism activities are based on a high level of interaction between individuals with different cultural backgrounds, as is consistent with the functional environment of cultural intelligence. Furthermore, a destination's culture is the crucial source of flow experience and positive emotions for tourists [1,15]. As CQ affects the effectiveness of cultural interactions between tourists and the destination, tourists with high CQ are more likely to perceive, understand and utilise the cultural resources of the destination to meet their experience expectations [17].

#### 2.4. Cultural Experience

Tourists' perceived value in destinations comes from experience-based products and service-based products, and the former are more likely to bring an unforgettable personal experience to tourists [20,45]. Previous studies have asserted that high levels of cultural interactions for tourists in a cross-cultural environment can enable them to achieve deep cultural participation and an elevated tourism experience, thereby generating happiness [29]. Consequently, in order to enable tourists to obtain a better travel experience, tourism destinations usually promote interesting cultural activities to attract tourists into participation, and to stimulate their positive emotions [20]. Tourists' intrinsic interest in cultural activities represents their primary motivation for participation in tourism activities that allow them to experience different cultures. Importantly, cultural intelligence is considered to serve as a measure of individuals' willingness and confidence to adapt and learn in a cross-cultural environment [8,17]. Therefore, tourists with high levels of CQ not only have a strong willingness to participate but also invest more attention and energy in the experience process [34]. Setbacks will not diminish their confidence during their experience [36]. Importantly, CQ is conducive to reducing cultural distance and helping individuals better understand local culture [37]. As a result, tourists with high CQ are more likely to achieve high-quality cultural perceptions and experiences that facilitate the awakening of enjoyment. Accordingly, the subsequent hypothesis is proposed:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1):** *Cultural experiences will mediate the relationship between cultural intelligence and the awakening of enjoyment.*

#### 2.5. Perceived Aesthetics

In cultural and creative tourism, perceived aesthetics and enjoyment are essential elements of aesthetic value [32]. Perceived aesthetics is the aesthetic response of one or more senses to environmental stimuli, which will affect individual information processing after being internalized, such that aesthetic quality can be regarded as the result of the interaction between individuals and the environment [46]. When tourists perceive aesthetics in tourism activities, the impact of the tourism destination environment on the tourist experience is direct and profound [47]. In cultural and creative tourism, tourists interact with the overall environment of the destination and form sensory perceptions; thus, tourists' enjoyment is also influenced by the environmental aesthetics of the destination [47,48]. In addition, the aesthetic process is also considered a cognitive process, and different individuals have different perceived aesthetics and judgement [31]. For cultural and creative destinations, environmental aesthetics are an important form of cultural concretization [48]. A destination's aesthetic value extends beyond its own external physical attributes to include a deeper cultural value and social significance [32]. However, it is difficult to reach a consistent view on aesthetic experience when appreciating cultural products from different cultural norms. The conveyance of such cultural and aesthetic values requires tourists to have a higher ability to realise an aesthetic understanding of and identify with cultural and creative tourism environments. Significantly, CQ enables tourists with different cultural backgrounds to understand and adapt to destinations' cultural connotations and cultural thinking, and to make rational judgements on tourism environments [17]. It will promote the aesthetic perception and identity of cultural and creative tourism destinations.

**Hypothesis 2 (H2).** *Perceived aesthetics will mediate the relationship between cultural intelligence and the awakening of enjoyment.*

### 2.6. Perceived Authenticity

Authenticity reflects the uniqueness and historical connotations of a local culture [30]. The perception of authenticity stems from interactions between tourists and destinations, and includes elements such as objects, buildings, people, activities and food [49]. In the process of perceiving authenticity, tourists will experience desire and express enthusiasm for further interaction, which will trigger pleasant emotions [1,50]. However, the assessment of authenticity involves individual subjective judgement. Tourists with dissimilar cultural and social backgrounds have different perceptions of authenticity [51]. Moreover, tourists' perceptions of authenticity are easily generated during interactions with the destination environment, and such experience is driven by tourists' desire for authenticity [49]. Therefore, due to the different cultural distances between individuals and destinations, and the different degrees of individual desire for cultural authenticity, there are divergences in the perception of authenticity. Tourists with high CQ have enough interest in, and understand the universality and diversity of cultures [52]. They can break away from the original cultural thinking inertia and effectively adapt to the uniqueness and locality of different cultures [53]. Similarly, high-CQ tourists' existing understanding of the destination culture also contributes to the perception of cultural value in the authentic experience [1,17]. Subsequently, it can be inferred that cultural intelligence can affect tourists' perceptions of the authenticity of cultural and creative tourist destinations, and can thereby promote their enjoyment. The following hypothesis is proposed:

**Hypothesis 3 (H3):** *Perceived authenticity will mediate the relationship between cultural intelligence and the awakening of enjoyment.*

### 2.7. Awakening of Enjoyment

Tourists' cultural experiences and value perceptions are the basic premises for the stimulation of the flow state in cultural and creative tourism, and the flow experience is a state based on extreme enjoyment [1,3]. Even if tourists have experienced and perceived the value of different cultures, it is difficult for this experience and perception to directly produce pleasant reactions. The awakening of enjoyment is considered to produce an emotional state of delight and satisfaction, which is a personal perception based on the external environment [54]. In the context of cultural and creative tourism, the sense of enjoyment derives from tourists' cultural experiences, interactions and perceptions [1]. Moreover, the awakening of enjoyment is related to the degree of external environmental stimulation, and is a transition from a dormant state to a highly excited state, reflecting a strong sense of individual pleasure [55]. Previous research has proven that when people are in a positive emotional state, their range of attention will shrink and their attention will be highly focused, which allows them to immerse themselves in a state of selflessness [56]. In other words, a positive emotional state is also a crucial indicator of the flow experience [1,57]. Thus, it can be inferred that the awakening of enjoyment can lead tourists to focus on the flow experience. In addition, cultural experiences and perceptions give tourists the desire and enthusiasm to participate in depth, which may stimulate their feelings of excitement and enjoyment [50]. Meanwhile, visual aesthetic experience can also directly affect tourists' feelings of enjoyment [46]. In general, a highly euphoric mood can trigger the flow experience of tourists by encouraging them to immerse themselves in a state of concentrated enjoyment. Therefore, the research hypothesis is as follows:

**Hypothesis 4a (H4a).** *The awakening of enjoyment will mediate the relationship between the cultural experience and the flow experience.*

**Hypothesis 4b (H4b).** *The awakening of enjoyment will mediate the relationship between perceived aesthetics and the flow experience.*

**Hypothesis 4c (H4c).** *The awakening of enjoyment will mediate the relationship between perceived authenticity and the flow experience.*

### 2.8. Creative Performance

Cultural and creative tourism is considered to be an experience with strong participation and authenticity, which helps tourists learn more about local traditional culture, relevant knowledge and special skills [35]. Therefore, in cultural and creative tourism, innovation is an effective approach to promoting cultural activation and acceptance for several reasons. First, creativity denotes the degree of novelty of the cultural experience. Against the background of tourists' continuous pursuit of new tourism experiences, such a creative experience mode has been identified as the key to enhancing tourism attraction, and is conducive to improving tourists' enthusiasm for participating in cultural activities, enhancing their cultural experience [35,58]. Second, in the travel process, visual aesthetics encourage people to make "beauty" and "ugliness" judgements, which may have an impact on their travel experience [31]. Aesthetic expression largely depends on the creativity and uniqueness of designers [59]. Accordingly, excellent creative performance can improve aesthetic value and enhance the influence of cultural intelligence on perceived aesthetics. Finally, cultural and creative tourism is regarded as a learning process that can stimulate tourists' creativity and imagination [58]. The establishment of imagination and connections between the external forms and the cultural connotations of relevant cultural activities and products will be beneficial in strengthening tourists' perceptions of the authenticity of traditional regional elements, including culture, art, products and heritage. These findings indicate that creative performance might enhance aesthetic value and improve tourists' willingness to participate. Consequently, creative performance serves as a catalyst in the process of the influence of individual cognition on cultural perception and experience (cultural experience, perceived aesthetics and perceived authenticity). Thus, the research hypothesis is as follows:

**Hypothesis 5a (H5a).** *Creative performance positively moderates the relationship between cultural intelligence and the cultural experience.*

**Hypothesis 5b (H5b).** *Creative performance positively moderates the relationship between cultural intelligence and perceived aesthetics.*

**Hypothesis 5c (H5c).** *Creative performance positively moderates the relationship between cultural intelligence and perceived authenticity.*

## 3. Research Method

### 3.1. Measures

A questionnaire survey was used to collect the data. In order to ensure the reliability and validity of our measurement instruments, the previous relevant literature was reviewed and summarized in this study. According to the 7 variable categories in this study, we selected and sorted the appropriate mature scales that have been verified by international authorities. Specifically, we first converted the original scale into the Chinese version through the "translation and back-translation" approach proposed by Brislin [60], such that the questionnaires could be adapted to the Chinese context. Second, according to the actual situation of cultural and creative tourism, the content of the scale was reasonably modified and improved. Finally, a 7-point Likert scale was used for the items corresponding to each variable in the instrument, where "1" represents "strongly disagree", and "7" represents "strongly agree". The specific sources of items are as follows:

(1) Cultural intelligence was measured using Frías-Jamilena et al.'s scale [17], which was developed in tourism research using Ang et al.'s scale [33]. An example item is "I can communicate with the local people by relying on my current cultural knowledge". (2) The cultural experience variable refers to Jang et al.'s [61] measurement items, which were

used to assess the degree of tourists' experience of the culture of the tourist destination. An example item is "I have participated in cultural exhibitions with local characteristics". (3) For the creative performance variable, six measurement items from the research scale of Darvishmotevali et al. [62] were used to assess the tourists' evaluations of local cultural creativity. For example, the item "The cultural and creative tourist destination is good at innovating traditional culture" was used. (4) The measurement items for the awakening of enjoyment variable were from Ayeh et al.'s [63] measurement scale, which was used to measure the degree of tourists' pleasure created by cultural and creative tourist destinations. An example item is "I think the tour process is very interesting". (5) The flow experience measurement refers to the scale of Zhang et al. [1] and Huang [25], and includes four variables—namely control, attention focus, curiosity and intrinsic interest—which can measure the investment degree of tourists when visiting cultural and creative tourist destinations. An example item is as follows: "Here, I feel like I don't get distracted". (6) The measurement items of the perceived aesthetic variables are from the research scale of Hung et al. [20]. An item example is as follows: "The layout of this cultural and creative tourist destination is very attractive". (7) The scale of Zhang et al. [1] was used for the perceived authenticity variable, and included measurements of objective authenticity, constructed authenticity and existential authenticity. An item example is as follows: "The cultural and creative destination excellently reflects the cultural heritage". More details are in the Appendix A (Table A1.)

### 3.2. Data Collection

The questionnaire survey mainly adopts the method of offline and online investigation, taking cultural and creative tourist destinations as the research object (such as Kulangsu, Tsan-tshù-uann, Wudianshi Traditional Blocks, Yuanhe 1916 Creative Industrial Park, Three Lanes and Seven Alleys). In the offline investigation process, a research team composed of 5 research assistants went to cultural and creative tourism destinations to investigate the tourists, and elaborated upon the survey purpose and filling rules to ensure the quality of the questionnaire through the face-to-face survey. Furthermore, the research assistant clarified that the survey is anonymous to encourage the respondents to fill out the questionnaire as they really think. For the online survey, we designed an online questionnaire using the Internet questionnaire platform Wenjuanxing, and then send relevant web links to the respondents through social platforms such as WeChat and QQ to obtain data. In the online survey, the researchers emphasized the points for attention on the Internet in advance, and kept the online status so as to answer the questions of the respondents at any time. Because the survey sample was aimed only at individuals with cultural and creative tourism experience, the number of visits was taken as the first item, which not only ensures the effectiveness of the interviewees' response but also enhances the convenience of the research. In the actual investigation process, all of the questionnaires were anonymous. In order to ensure the reliability of the questionnaire data, we also explained the purpose of the study to the interviewees, emphasizing that we would not disclose any personal information about them. A total of 700 questionnaires were sent out, and 696 were recovered from August to October 2020. After eliminating invalid samples, 509 valid questionnaires were obtained. The proportion of males in the sample was 43.2%, and the proportion of females was 56.8%. In terms of age, the proportion of the 21–30 year olds in the sample was the largest, reaching 36.0%. In terms of educational background, 52.8% of the sample were undergraduates. In terms of income, more than 50% of the sample had a monthly income below RMB 5000.

## 4. Result

### 4.1. Data Analysis

The mean value, standard deviation, correlation coefficient, variance inflation factor (VIF) and other statistical values of each variable were calculated in the study. As shown in Table 1, there was a significant positive correlation among the variables. In addition, in the



multicollinearity test, the highest value of the variance inflation factor (VIF) was 3.49, which is less than 5.0 [1]. Therefore, there was no multicollinearity problem among these variables.

**Table 1.** Means, standard deviations, correlations and discriminant validity.

| Variables                 | Mean  | S.D.  | 1.           | 2.           | 3.           | 4.           | 5.           | 6.           | 7.           | VIF  |
|---------------------------|-------|-------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------|
| 1. Cultural intelligence  | 4.749 | 1.085 | <b>0.753</b> |              |              |              |              |              |              |      |
| 2. Cultural experience    | 4.559 | 1.165 | 0.565 ***    | <b>0.838</b> |              |              |              |              |              | 1.69 |
| 3. Creative performance   | 4.630 | 0.951 | 0.565 ***    | 0.575 ***    | <b>0.780</b> |              |              |              |              | 2.34 |
| 4. Awake of enjoyment     | 5.113 | 1.015 | 0.519 ***    | 0.484 ***    | 0.665 ***    | <b>0.863</b> |              |              |              | 2.76 |
| 5. Flow experience        | 4.744 | 0.928 | 0.568 ***    | 0.560 ***    | 0.689 ***    | 0.743 ***    | <b>0.846</b> |              |              | 3.49 |
| 6. Perceived aesthetic    | 5.094 | 1.002 | 0.432 ***    | 0.369 ***    | 0.550 ***    | 0.674 ***    | 0.702 ***    | <b>0.875</b> |              | 2.52 |
| 7. Perceived authenticity | 4.913 | 0.973 | 0.501 ***    | 0.532 ***    | 0.628 ***    | 0.679 ***    | 0.745 ***    | 0.707 ***    | <b>0.851</b> | 2.90 |

Note: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . The square roots of the average variance extractions are shown on the diagonal, in bold.

As shown in Table 2, the reliability coefficients were all above 0.7, indicating a high degree of internal consistency [64]. Furthermore, all of the CR values were above 0.7. Meanwhile, and AVE values were above 0.5, which was within the ideal value range. In addition, Table 1 indicates that the square root of the AVE values of the variables were all greater than the correlation coefficients among the variables, which confirmed that the discriminant validity was acceptable.

#### 4.2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

As seen in Table 2, the standardized coefficients of the factor loadings of the items were all greater than 0.6. Furthermore, fit indices were used to measure the fitness degree of the variables to the data ( $\chi^2 = 1813.965$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.691$ , CFI = 0.931, IFI = 0.932, TLI = 0.925, GFI = 0.843, AGFI = 0.819, RMSEA = 0.058). The results showed that the fit indices all fulfilled the requirements.

#### 4.3. Common Method Bias

Harman's single factor detection method was used to further test and control the common method deviation. All of the variables were analyzed by SPSS 23.0 software, and the exploratory factor analysis was conducted without rotation. The results showed that the variance interpretation percentage of the first common factor was 49.320%. According to the 50% critical value proposed by Harrison et al. [65], it can be concluded that there was no serious common method bias problem in this study.

#### 4.4. Hypotheses Testing

Structural equation modelling is often used to calculate the relationship between multiple latent variables, and can effectively improve the accuracy of the mediating and moderating effect test by controlling for the measurement error. Therefore, AMOS21.0 software was introduced to analyse the paths in this study. As shown in Figure 2, the overall model presented a good fitting degree ( $\chi^2 = 1664.138$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 3.460$ , CFI = 0.917, IFI = 0.917, TLI = 0.908, GFI = 0.833, AGFI = 0.805, RMSEA = 0.070).

Under the mediating effects of cultural experience, perceived aesthetics and perceived authenticity, cultural intelligence had a significant indirect effect on the awakening of enjoyment ( $\beta = 0.128$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ;  $\beta = 0.272$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ;  $\beta = 0.265$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Thus, hypothesis 1, hypothesis 2 and hypothesis 3 were supported.

The awakening of enjoyment played a significant mediating role in the effect of cultural experience, perceived aesthetics and perceived authenticity on flow experience ( $\beta = 0.098$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ;  $\beta = 0.292$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ;  $\beta = 0.247$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 4a, hypothesis 4b and hypothesis 4c were all supported.

In regard to the mediating effect test, as is consistent with the proposal of Preacher and Hayes [66], the bootstrap method was applied to analyse the confidence intervals of the mediating effect. As shown in Table 3, the interval from the minimum to the maximum

of each path did not contain 0. Thus, the mediating effects in hypotheses 1 through 4c were all supported.

As shown in Table 4, the interaction item of cultural intelligence and creative performance presented a significant positive effect on cultural experience, perceived aesthetics and perceived authenticity ( $\beta = 0.534, p < 0.001$ ;  $\beta = 0.392, p < 0.001$ ;  $\beta = 0.488, p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 5a, hypothesis 5b and hypothesis 5c were supported.

The simple slope test can further explore the moderating effect of creative performance. As shown in Figure 3a–c, cultural intelligence obtained a significant positive relationship with cultural experience, perceived aesthetics and perceived authenticity when creative performance was high. Hypotheses 5a to 5c were further supported.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics, correlations and discriminant validity.

| Constructs               | Mean  | S.D.  | Standardized Factor Loading | Standardized Error | t-Value    | Cronbach's $\alpha$ | CR    | AVE   |
|--------------------------|-------|-------|-----------------------------|--------------------|------------|---------------------|-------|-------|
| Cultural intelligence    |       |       |                             |                    |            | 0.835               | 0.838 | 0.567 |
| Item 1                   | 4.686 | 1.322 | 0.671                       |                    |            |                     |       |       |
| Item 2                   | 4.802 | 1.392 | 0.865                       | 0.084              | 16.225 *** |                     |       |       |
| Item 3                   | 4.984 | 1.295 | 0.810                       | 0.076              | 15.562 *** |                     |       |       |
| Item 4                   | 4.523 | 1.297 | 0.644                       | 0.073              | 12.857 *** |                     |       |       |
| Cultural experience      |       |       |                             |                    |            | 0.873               | 0.876 | 0.702 |
| Item 1                   | 4.525 | 1.302 | 0.886                       |                    |            |                     |       |       |
| Item 2                   | 4.418 | 1.307 | 0.838                       | 0.041              | 23.004 *** |                     |       |       |
| Item 3                   | 4.733 | 1.307 | 0.787                       | 0.042              | 21.083 *** |                     |       |       |
| Creative performance     |       |       |                             |                    |            | 0.903               | 0.903 | 0.609 |
| Item 1                   | 4.656 | 1.102 | 0.787                       |                    |            |                     |       |       |
| Item 2                   | 4.617 | 1.134 | 0.785                       | 0.054              | 19.098 *** |                     |       |       |
| Item 3                   | 4.570 | 1.190 | 0.812                       | 0.056              | 19.937 *** |                     |       |       |
| Item 4                   | 4.813 | 1.206 | 0.797                       | 0.057              | 19.487 *** |                     |       |       |
| Item 5                   | 4.491 | 1.127 | 0.750                       | 0.054              | 18.062 *** |                     |       |       |
| Item 6                   | 4.631 | 1.191 | 0.751                       | 0.057              | 18.088 *** |                     |       |       |
| Awake of enjoyment       |       |       |                             |                    |            | 0.920               | 0.921 | 0.745 |
| Item 1                   | 5.198 | 1.115 | 0.866                       |                    |            |                     |       |       |
| Item 2                   | 5.157 | 1.134 | 0.861                       | 0.039              | 25.847 *** |                     |       |       |
| Item 3                   | 5.175 | 1.115 | 0.905                       | 0.037              | 28.374 *** |                     |       |       |
| Item 4                   | 4.919 | 1.158 | 0.818                       | 0.042              | 23.587 *** |                     |       |       |
| Flow experience          |       |       |                             |                    |            | 0.798               | 0.805 | 0.677 |
| Control                  |       |       |                             |                    |            |                     |       |       |
| Item 1                   | 4.499 | 1.242 | 0.740                       |                    |            |                     |       |       |
| Item 2                   | 4.876 | 1.088 | 0.905                       | 0.057              | 18.793 *** |                     |       |       |
| Attention focus          |       |       |                             |                    |            | 0.842               | 0.840 | 0.725 |
| Item 3                   | 4.399 | 1.131 | 0.791                       |                    |            |                     |       |       |
| Item 4                   | 4.479 | 1.146 | 0.919                       | 0.055              | 21.342 *** |                     |       |       |
| Curiosity                |       |       |                             |                    |            | 0.852               | 0.842 | 0.728 |
| Item 5                   | 4.800 | 1.113 | 0.858                       |                    |            |                     |       |       |
| Item 6                   | 4.849 | 1.104 | 0.866                       | 0.040              | 25.092 *** |                     |       |       |
| Intrinsic interest       |       |       |                             |                    |            | 0.879               | 0.869 | 0.689 |
| Item 7                   | 4.819 | 1.193 | 0.880                       |                    |            |                     |       |       |
| Item 8                   | 5.083 | 1.133 | 0.796                       | 0.038              | 22.596 *** |                     |       |       |
| Item 9                   | 4.896 | 1.160 | 0.839                       | 0.037              | 24.810 *** |                     |       |       |
| Perceived aesthetic      |       |       |                             |                    |            | 0.907               | 0.908 | 0.766 |
| Item 1                   | 5.147 | 1.081 | 0.853                       |                    |            |                     |       |       |
| Item 2                   | 5.041 | 1.067 | 0.894                       | 0.040              | 26.150 *** |                     |       |       |
| Item 3                   | 5.092 | 1.125 | 0.878                       | 0.042              | 25.441 *** |                     |       |       |
| Perceived authenticity   |       |       |                             |                    |            | 0.846               | 0.852 | 0.660 |
| Objective authenticity   |       |       |                             |                    |            |                     |       |       |
| Item 1                   | 4.657 | 1.133 | 0.697                       |                    |            |                     |       |       |
| Item 2                   | 4.953 | 1.173 | 0.867                       | 0.073              | 17.713 *** |                     |       |       |
| Item 3                   | 4.951 | 1.131 | 0.860                       | 0.070              | 17.606 *** |                     |       |       |
| Constructed authenticity |       |       |                             |                    |            | 0.889               | 0.940 | 0.887 |
| Item 4                   | 4.864 | 1.160 | 0.901                       |                    |            |                     |       |       |
| Item 5                   | 4.833 | 1.208 | 0.890                       | 0.036              | 28.203 *** |                     |       |       |
| Existential authenticity |       |       |                             |                    |            | 0.930               | 0.932 | 0.733 |
| Item 6                   | 5.065 | 1.191 | 0.801                       |                    |            |                     |       |       |
| Item 7                   | 4.984 | 1.236 | 0.876                       | 0.048              | 23.399 *** |                     |       |       |
| Item 8                   | 4.965 | 1.180 | 0.900                       | 0.046              | 24.358 *** |                     |       |       |
| Item 9                   | 4.959 | 1.150 | 0.870                       | 0.045              | 23.155 *** |                     |       |       |
| Item 10                  | 4.898 | 1.248 | 0.833                       | 0.050              | 21.761 *** |                     |       |       |

Note: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

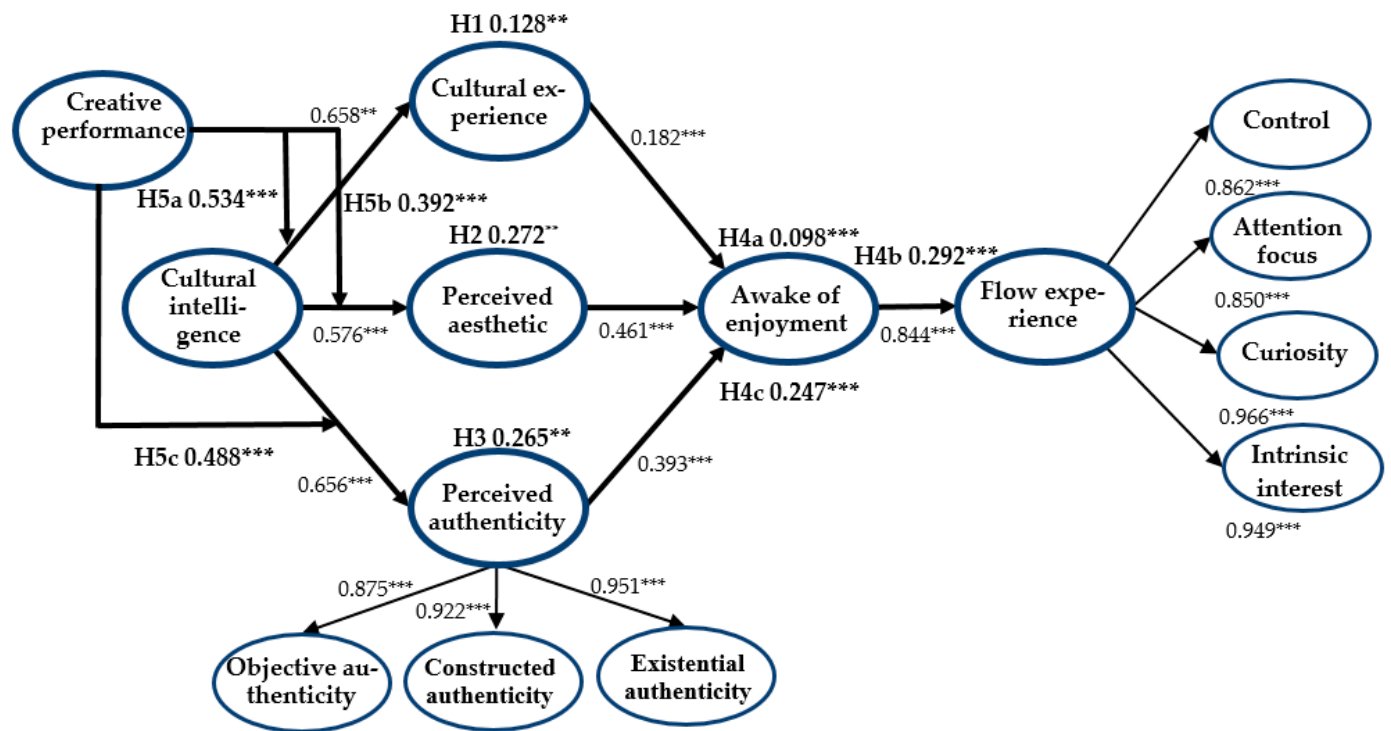


Figure 2. Results of the hypothesized model (\*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ).

Table 3. Testing of the mediation effect.

| Hypothesis Path   | Estimates | Standard Error | Bias-Corrected 95% CI |       | Result  |
|---|-----------|----------------|-----------------------|-------|---------|
|   |           |                | Lower                 | Upper |         |
| H1: Cultural intelligence → Cultural experience → Awaken of enjoyment   | 0.128 *** | 0.037          | 0.065                 | 0.207 | support |
| H2: Cultural intelligence → Perceived aesthetic → Awaken of enjoyment   | 0.272 *** | 0.049          | 0.186                 | 0.381 | support |
| H3: Cultural intelligence → Perceived authenticity → Awake of enjoyment | 0.265 *** | 0.052          | 0.179                 | 0.389 | support |
| H4a: Cultural experience → Awaken of enjoyment → Flow experience        | 0.098 *** | 0.027          | 0.049                 | 0.154 | support |
| H4b: Perceived aesthetic → Awaken of enjoyment → Flow experience        | 0.292 *** | 0.040          | 0.217                 | 0.374 | support |
| H4c: Perceived authenticity → Awaken of enjoyment → Flow experience     | 0.247 *** | 0.045          | 0.168                 | 0.348 | support |

Note: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Table 4. Testing of the moderation effect.

|     | Hypothesis Path   | Estimates | Standard Error | Results |
|-----|---|-----------|----------------|---------|
| H5a | Cultural intelligence → Cultural experience                           | 0.057     | 0.062          | support |
|     | Creative performance → Cultural experience                            | 0.102     | 0.087          |         |
|     | Cultural intelligence * Creative performance → Cultural experience    | 0.534 *** | 0.079          |         |
| H5b | Cultural intelligence → Perceived aesthetic                           | -0.077    | 0.076          | support |
|     | Creative performance → Perceived aesthetic                            | 0.294 **  | 0.091          |         |
|     | Cultural intelligence * Creative performance → Perceived aesthetic    | 0.392 *** | 0.096          |         |
| H5c | Cultural intelligence → Perceived authenticity                        | -0.109    | 0.070          | support |
|     | Creative performance → Perceived authenticity                         | 0.279 **  | 0.087          |         |
|     | Cultural intelligence * Creative performance → Perceived authenticity | 0.488 *** | 0.095          |         |

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

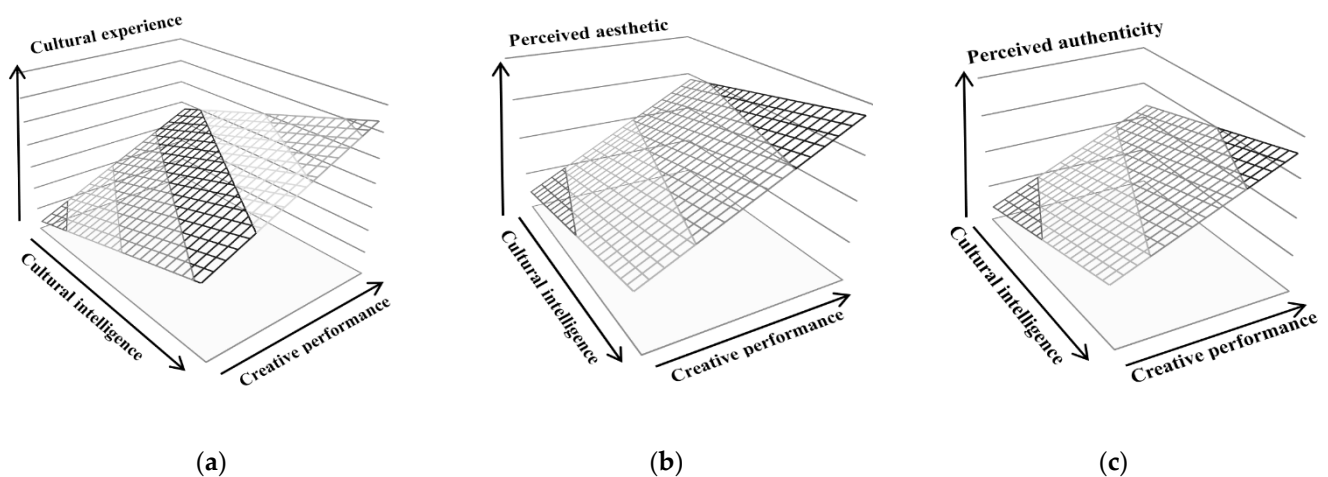


Figure 3. Moderating effect.

## 5. Conclusions and Discussion

### 5.1. Discussion

First, cultural intelligence plays a leading role in the flow experience of tourists, presenting a logical relationship of “perception–enjoyment–flow”. In the process of a cultural and creative tourism experience, individuals possess a distinct adaptability and cognitive ability in interacting with different cultures, which leads to differences in the degree of tourists’ participation, cultural perception and experience effects. Therefore, cultural intelligence greatly affects the generation of the flow experience. When tourists’ cultural intelligence is high, their understanding and cultural cognitive ability are also enhanced. As a result, they can more easily grasp the cultural connotations conveyed by the tourist destination, and a strong desire for a deep experience and interaction will be produced [34]. Meanwhile, tourists with high levels of cultural intelligence can realize the cognition of the external environment and the control of their behaviour through appropriate language and action, and they can achieve harmony and balance between themselves and the cultural and creative environment [4].

Second, cultural experience, perceived aesthetics, perceived authenticity and the awakening of enjoyment are effective conduction factors in the process of the influence of cultural intelligence on tourists’ flow experience. The interaction between people and the external environment is the basic premise for the achievement of a flow experience [3]. In the process of the cultural and creative tourism experience, the tourists’ interaction is closely related to culture, and this cultural interaction is embodied in the direct experience of cultural activities, the perception of visual aesthetic value, and the perceived authenticity of traditional culture [20,32,49]. Therefore, the influence of tourists’ cultural intelligence on the flow experience is realized through the perception of the cultural experience, aesthetics and authenticity. However, the flow experience is a state of high euphoria [1]. Our results prove that the awakening of enjoyment plays a key mediating role in this development path. In other words, the higher the cultural intelligence of the tourists, the easier it will be for them to realize cultural perception and pleasure; therefore, the emotions of enjoyment and excitement will also be promoted, which will trigger the flow experience.

Third, the creative performance of cultural and creative tourist destinations has an essential and positive moderating effect on the relationship between cultural intelligence and cultural experience, perceived aesthetics, and perceived authenticity. Under the current background of an in-depth integration of culture and tourism, cultural types in different places tend to be saturated. Thus, creative performance is of great significance for cultural communication and the development of cultural tourism [35]. Influenced by the particularity of a regional culture and the diversity of tourists’ cultural backgrounds, the deep perception and understanding of a local culture not only requires tourists to show high levels of cultural cognition and adaptability but also requires tourist destinations

to present and embody cultural connotations in appropriate forms. It is obvious that creative performance plays a promoting role in the influence of cultural intelligence on cultural perception and experience. On the one hand, the novel expression of culture can enhance the attraction of tourism and improve tourists' participation interest and experience degree. On the other hand, creative performance is capable of stimulating tourists' learning willingness, creativity and imagination [35]. It is easy for tourists to feel the inner culture of a tourism destination, including the perception of aesthetic value and cultural authenticity, through various forms of cultural activities or products.

### 5.2. Theoretical Contribution

First, previous studies have conducted in-depth discussions on the effect of tourists' flow experience and the influencing factors of the external environment [3,4,10]. However, few studies have explored the influence of cultural intelligence on the flow experience from the perspective of individual characteristics. From an innovative perspective of individual characteristics, this study analyses the effect of cultural intelligence on flow experience against the backdrop of cultural and creative tourism, which extends and supplements the research on flow experience. Furthermore, several studies have demonstrated that emotional intelligence (EQ) contributes to the enhancement of subjective wellbeing [67,68]. However, there is still a gap in the empirical evidence on whether cultural intelligence contributes to the production of positive emotions. This paper proves that cultural intelligence can trigger enjoyment by enhancing cultural experience, providing a theoretical supplement for the study of the relationship between cultural intelligence and positive emotions against the background of tourism.

Second, this study clarifies the logical relationships of the influence of CQ on tourists' flow experience, expanding the research framework of CQ and tourists' flow experience. Zhang et al. [69] proved that CQ has a positive effect on satisfaction and behavioural intention post-travel, but how CQ affects tourists' positive experiences in the process of tourism experiences is still unknown. By clarifying the logical relationship of "perception–enjoyment–flow" between cultural intelligence and flow experience, the study further deepens the understanding of the functional logic of CQ. It enriches the theoretical system of tourists' flow experience research [2,3]. Additionally, Zhang et al. [1] proposed that cultural perceived authenticity can enhance tourists' flow experience. While confirming this conclusion, we also found that cultural experience and perceived aesthetics also have a positive effect on tourists' flow experience.

Third, the findings reveal the role of creative performance in the cultural and creative tourism experience, and further provide a new condition for tourists to improve their flow experience. Previous studies suggested that a high level of innovation can enhance tourists' cultural experience and perceived value of authenticity [1,70]. However, under the influence of cultural intelligence, whether the level of destination creativity plays an important moderating effect still needs further demonstration. In this study, creative performance is introduced into the influence path of cultural intelligence on flow experience. The cultural experience and creative performance are still found to promote perceived authenticity even if individuals already have a high level of cultural intelligence. Furthermore, the conclusion also extended its scope to perceived aesthetics, and the moderating effect of creative performance was again confirmed. We excavated the effect of creative performance on cultural perception in cultural and creative tourism, further improving the understanding of the theoretical mechanism of the effect of cultural intelligence on cultural perception and experience.

### 5.3. Managerial Contribution

First, in order to satisfy the flow experience of tourists with different levels of cultural intelligence and to improve destinations' cultural services consciousness, specifically during the travelling process, tourists with high levels of cultural intelligence should be targeted for the provision of more tourism products with high-quality, rich cultural offer-

ings, such as cultural work exhibitions and special cultural programs. For ordinary tourists, a cultural service staff must be developed by strengthening the integration of the staff's cultural literacy and professional skills, optimizing the form of creative presentation, and breaking down acculturation barriers through cultural guidance and communication [71]. In addition to the core cultural products, scenic destinations should also expand auxiliary products of a weak cultural nature to provide more alternative tourism products for ordinary tourists.

Second, in order to improve tourists' experience and public interest in tourism projects, managers should make use of traditional cultural elements, and should enhance tourists' cultural experience and interactions through activities (such as traditional cultural festivals and local ethnic activities). Furthermore, trying to enhance the visual aesthetic effect of tourism products such as the landscape and live performance by means of technology and light projection can create a tourism environment with high ornamental value through the proper integration of culture and aesthetics to realize the unity of perceived aesthetic and cultural perceptions [69]. In order to avoid the loss of cultural authenticity, managers should establish a management responsibility mechanism to ensure the economic interests of relevant personnel and hire professionals to regularly maintain the destination's cultural heritage [1]. Additionally, enjoyment is directly related to the flow experience, so managers should explore the expression of different forms of culture and activity design, creating an interesting tourism experience atmosphere to stimulate the positive emotions of tourists [72].

Finally, attractive and designed cultural tourism products should be created, and the service modes of destinations should be innovated. For the enhancement of the overall sense of tourism product design and the novelty of the activities, the creativity of core tourism products should be highlighted, so as to realize the maximum innovation value in similar products (Liu, 2020). Additionally, the fiercely competitive environment requires managers to have the ability to capture and transform hot information, and to constantly innovate tourism activities based on the dynamic needs of tourists, in order to maintain the creative vitality of destinations. Furthermore, the personal creativity of the staff should be strengthened through organizing and training to break through the single service model of destinations, and to achieve high-quality tourism experiences for tourists [1].

#### *5.4. Limitations and Future Suggestions*

This study analyses the development path from cultural intelligence to flow experience, providing certain theoretical and practical significance. However, there are still some shortcomings that point to future research. First, although individual characteristics have an important impact on flow experience, this study analyses only the effect of cultural intelligence on flow experience. Due to the complexity of individual characteristics, there must still be further exploration of the leading factors that influence the flow experience. Future research can focus on other perspective—such as emotional intelligence, psychological distance and cultural distance—to improve the theoretical framework of tourists' flow experience. Second, the study confirms the mediating effect of the awakening of enjoyment on the relationship between cultural perception and the flow experience. However, the occurrence of the flow experience is based on a variety of factors, such as the balance of challenge and skill, and the sense of time distortion. Future research could further explore the antecedent combination configuration of tourists' flow experience by the qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) method.

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**Institutional Review Board Statement:** The ethic approval is not necessary, approved by the Ethics Committee of Huaqiao University.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** Not applicable.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Appendix A

**Table A1.** Variables and all of the corresponding items.

| Variable  | Item   |
|---|--|
| Cultural intelligence                                   | I can communicate with the local people by relying on my current cultural knowledge<br>I enjoy interacting with local people<br>I can socialize within the local culture, which is unfamiliar to me<br>I can control my non-verbal behavior when interacting within the local culture  |
| Cultural experience                                     | I have experience of local music<br>I have experience of the local opera culture<br>I have participated in cultural exhibitions with local characteristics   |
| Creative performance                                    | The cultural and creative tourist destination carries out the routine tasks in resourceful ways<br>The cultural and creative tourist destination comes up with novel ideas to satisfy my needs<br>The cultural and creative tourist destination provides multiple alternatives for problems<br>The cultural and creative tourist destination is good at innovating traditional culture<br>The cultural and creative tourist destination solves problems that other destinations cannot<br>The cultural and creative tourist destination proposes creative service measures |
| Awake of enjoyment                                      | I feel happy during the tour<br>I think the tour process is very interesting<br>The cultural and creative tourist destination is fun<br>The cultural and creative tourist destination is entertaining  |
| Flow experience<br><i>Control</i>                       | I couldn't help communicating with the locals<br>The cultural and creative tourist destination can stimulate my interaction  |
| <i>Attention focus</i>                                  | Here, I feel like I don't get distracted<br>Here, I am totally absorbed in what I'm doing  |
| <i>Curiosity</i>  | My curiosity is excited here<br>My imagination is aroused here   |
| <i>Intrinsic interest</i>                               | I will not be bored here<br>The process of visiting is intrinsically interesting<br>The projects here are fun for me to experience   |
| Perceived aesthetic                                     | The environment of the cultural and creative tourist destination is aesthetically appealing<br>The layout of this cultural and creative tourist destination is attractive<br>The style of the cultural and creative tourist destination is impressive  |
| Perceived authenticity<br><i>Objective authenticity</i> | I acquire knowledge of the cultural heritage here<br>The cultural and creative destination excellently reflects the cultural heritage<br>The cultural and creative destination presents a culture of life  |

Table A1. Cont.

| Variable                 | Item  |
|--------------------------|---|
| Constructed authenticity | Traditional life here can reappear<br>The traditional culture color here is very strong   |
| Existential authenticity | I revere the local culture<br>I can feel the meaning of cultural heritage<br>I can feel the magical culture here<br>The culture here is unique<br>I can experience the local life |

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