Article

A Study on the Sustainable Development of Historic District Landscapes Based on Place Attachment among Tourists: A Case Study of Taiping Old Street, Taiwan

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Abstract: Historic districts should be sustainably developed by preserving historic architectural landscapes and developing tourism. Researchers have found that attachment to a place positively influences pro-tourism and pro-environment behaviors among tourists, indicating that exploring the landscape planning of historic districts from the perspective of place attachment is a noteworthy topic of sustainability. However, there are few studies on how historic district landscapes ignite tourists' place attachment. Using a historical district named Taiping Old Street in Taiwan as an example, we investigated the association between tourists' landscape evaluation and place attachment in historic districts. This study mainly adopted questionnaire surveys and used partial least squares structural (PLS) equation modeling for survey data analysis. (1) The study identified three dimensions of tourists' landscape evaluation of historic districts: visual preference, cultural heritage value, and authenticity. (2) The stimulus–organism–response (SOR) model was combined with the studies by previous scholars and a conceptual model put forward for the relationship between tourists' landscape evaluation, destination image, and place attachment. (3) The model was verified, and we found that (i) tourists' landscape evaluation in terms of cultural heritage values and authenticity had significant positive effects on destination image; (ii) tourists' visual preference, evaluation of authenticity, and destination image had significant positive effects on place attachment; and (iii) tourists' destination image influenced the impact of authenticity and cultural heritage values on place attachment. This study provides both theoretical references for the formation process of place attachment from a landscape perspective and suggestions for landscape planning in the sustainable development of historic districts of a similar type.

Keywords: sustainability; landscapes; historic districts; place attachment; destination image; visual preference; cultural heritage value; authenticity; stimulus–organism–response (SOR) model

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background and Motivation

In Goal 11 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) proposed making "cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable" by strengthening "efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage" with detailed rules [1]. Historic districts are part of the cultural heritage of a city, and protecting historic architectural landscapes can lead to sustainable urban features [2]. As indicated by the International Congresses of Modern Architecture in the Athens Charter in 1933, "all the buildings and blocks of historical values shall be properly preserved without damage." By definition, sustainable development should strive to protect the environment and develop the economy [3]. Therefore, historic districts should be sustainably developed with a focus on landscape protection and economic growth. In the research on the sustainable development of historic districts, on the one hand, scholars have discussed preserving

and restoring historic districts, i.e., planning historic districts, from the perspective of the landscape [4–6], and on the other hand, they have discussed the economic development of historic districts from the perspectives of cultural heritage tourism and the commercial value of reconstructing old buildings [7,8]. Planning and development are the focus of tourism geographers [9], and a tourism-based orientation is one method of fostering the sustainable development of historic districts [10]. Tourism plays an important role in the pursuit of Goal 8 (inclusive and sustainable economic growth) of the SDGs [11], and sustainability in the context of tourism aims to strike a balance between the economic, environmental, and social needs of all stakeholders [12]. Tourists are important stakeholders in sustainable tourism [13]. Therefore, the landscape planning of historic districts from the perspective of tourists is a sustainability topic worthy of attention.

In 2011, UNESCO's General Conference adopted the Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape. The Historic Urban Landscape approach shifts the emphasis from monumental architecture to the conservation of urban values that undergird the life of the city [14], which means that the sustainable development of the landscapes of historic districts not only entails the preservation of old buildings but should also focus on the needs of modern people. As for modern people, the landscapes of historic districts have cultural heritage tourism value, and making the landscapes of historic districts appealing to tourists is conducive to the sustainable development of such districts. When a tourist likes a place, it leads to a positive emotional connection between the tourist and the place, which is called place attachment [15–17]. Features in older places are more likely to cause place attachment than features in new ones [18], and tourists tend to have place attachment to historic districts [19], which indicates that place attachment is worth focusing on for historic districts. As a positive emotion between people and place, the place attachment of both local residents and tourists could have positive effects on their friendly behaviors toward the place. Place attachment has been found to have positive effects on the community citizenship behavior and the online word-of-mouth behavior of the residents [20–22] and positively influences the environmentally responsible behavior, local satisfaction, and destination loyalty of the tourist; the tourist's intentions to recommend the tourism destination; and the tourist's willingness to revisit the destination [17,23–25]. These studies indicate that place attachment could have positive effects on pro-environmental and pro-tourism behaviors, stimulating the sustainable development of the place in terms of environmental protection and the progress of the tourism economy. Thus, from the point of view of sustainable development, it is worth having a discussion on the place attachment of tourists to historic districts.

A large number of researchers have used place attachment as an independent or mediating variable in studies to probe into its impact on tourists' behavioral intentions [17], while there have been few investigations into the formative factors of place attachment. Lewicka [26] indicated that there are few studies on the theoretical dimensions of environmental aesthetics in the predictors of place attachment. As landscape features [27] and environmental satisfaction [28] can impact place attachment, the development of attachment to a place in a tourist may be related to landscape elements to a certain extent. However, little research is available on how landscape stimulus functions in tourists' place attachment. To explore whether the stimulation of the landscape can trigger people's attachment to that place, we conducted field surveys and interviews with local residents and tourists in a historic district called Taiping Old Street. We found that, compared to local residents, tourists are more sensitive to landscape perception, especially in environmental aesthetics. Tourists' image cognition toward a city is based on the natural and cultural landscape, while that of local residents is determined by their degree of familiarity with the city, which is mainly relevant to daily life [29]. It is the degree of familiarity that may lessen people's degree of interest in the surrounding visual landscape [30]. Therefore, it is appropriate to take tourists who have high landscape sensitivity as the research object in this study, which is designed to explore how to initiate place attachment via landscape stimulus. Considering the current research gap and the significance of landscape planning and tourists' place attachment in the sustainable development of historic districts from

the perspective of tourism, the goal of our research is to investigate how stimulating the landscape of a historic district encourages tourists to become attached to that place.

1.2. Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore from the perspective of landscapes the process of tourists getting attached to historic districts, the aim being to provide a reference for the design of sustainable historic district landscapes. To achieve the research purpose, we need to answer the following two questions: (1) What aspects do tourists consider when evaluating the landscape of historic districts? (2) What is the association between landscape evaluation by tourists and their attachment to historic districts? In an effort to find a solution to the issues under study, we put forward two research objectives:

(1) To identify the dimensions of tourists' evaluations of the landscapes of historic districts.

(2) To establish a model of the correlation between tourists' landscape evaluations and attachment to a place.

For the first research objective, we primarily referred to a theoretical framework for landscape planning and evaluation [31] and other studies concerning landscape theory [32] and identified the dimensions of tourists' evaluation of the landscapes of historic districts in the context of the features of the research setting, including visual preference, cultural heritage value, and authenticity. For the second research objective, we referred to the stimulus–organism–response (SOR) model proposed by Mehrabian and Russell [33] and the SOR model modified by Belk [34]. We hold the view that the landscape of a historic district can be regarded as the environmental stimulus (S) of the site for tourists; destination image refers to tourists' mental images of the site and can be taken as a kind of emotional and cognitive expression of the organism (O); and place attachment can be taken as tourists' psychological response (R) toward the site. Combining pertinent literature, we then designed a conceptual model of the association between tourists' landscape evaluation and destination image, as well as place attachment.

We hold the view that investigating how tourists get attached to a historic district due to its landscape stimulus, that is, exploring the correlation between tourists' landscape evaluation of a historic district and their place attachment, would provide suggestions for local tourism and landscape planners to sustainably develop that historic district. In addition to theoretical discussion, an empirical study of specific cases is also essential to realize the research purpose. We took a historical district named Taiping Old Street in Taiwan as an example for survey research. The reason for selecting this case and its representativeness will be elaborated on in the next section.

1.3. Research Site and Scope

This study explores from the perspective of landscapes the process of tourists getting attached to historic districts. As tourists' landscape evaluation of historic districts and their place attachment are concerned with the specific site that they visit, and currently there is a lack of research on how tourists get attached to a historic district on the basis of its landscape stimulus, we decided to select a typical historic district as the site of the case study. Therefore, we chose Taiping Old Street, located in Douliu City, Yunlin County, Taiwan (shown in Figure 1). In Chinese, the direct translation of the term "lǎojiē" is "old street" and it is used to refer to old streets or blocks within cities or settlements, it can refer to a single street or a cluster of buildings in a neighborhood [35], indicating that the term "old street" can refer to "historic district." According to Article 3 of Chapter 1 of the Cultural Heritage Preservation Act (as amended in 2016 by Taiwan), historic districts belong to the category of "groups of buildings," meaning that the landscapes in historic districts are focused on the architectural environment. With an overall length of about 600 m, Taiping Old Street used to be the most prosperous commercial street in the city before the 1970s [36]. Over 80 buildings are mostly Baroque architectures in Taiping Old Street, where the buildings are mainly used for small retailing businesses [36,37]. The buildings (shown in Figure 2) on this street present features from different historical periods, beginning

in 1908, with diverse styles, including Chinese southern-Fujian-style buildings, Japan's traditional–western mashup-style buildings (influenced by European Baroque architecture), as well as the local Fude Palace (a temple for worshiping the local God of the Land in Chinese Taoism) [36]. In the wake of urban development and the establishment of new business areas, this old commercial street is no longer the commercial center for local residents [38]. Nevertheless, buildings on Taiping Old Street are of significant historical cultural and artistic value, which has drawn great attention from local government and residents and is recognized as valuable local cultural heritage [37,38].

Figure 1. The location of Taiping Old Street.

Choosing Taiping Old Street as the research site is relevant in terms of the sustainable development of historic districts. Taiping Old Street is an old commercial street with a declining commercial role in local businesses under urban development. However, various old buildings on the street have tourism value as a cultural heritage. We hold the view that investigating tourists' landscape evaluation of the historic district and determining specific types of landscapes that can ignite tourists' place attachment could provide a reference for the sustainable development of historic districts from the perspective of landscape planning. Taiping Old Street can be regarded as a typical historic district rich in old building resources with commerciality. This study on Taiping Old Street mainly focuses on the old architectural environment on both sides of Taiping Road that tourists visit, excluding the internal environments of the buildings.

Figure 2. Building landscape of Taiping Old Street. (**a**,**b**) Street houses. (**c**) Baroque-style street houses with traditional Chinese patterns. (**d**) Street houses integrated with Roman pillars and traditional Chinese couplets. (**e**) Fude Palace (a temple for worshiping the local God of the Land). (**f**) Street house in Japanese style.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Dimensions of Tourists' Landscape Evaluation

As landscapes can describe a wide range of features, including physical entities, living spaces, and social–cultural constructs [39], and since buildings can reflect features of urban landscapes [5,40], this study considers historic districts as a type of urban landscape. Landscapes can be evaluated in different dimensions. Terkenli [31] established a theoretical framework for landscape planning and evaluation and supported its rationality via a case study. This framework has been verified and cited by later scholars and adopted in research on historic urban landscapes, cultural heritage landscapes, and landscape theories [39,41,42]. According to the framework [31], landscapes can be divided into three

interwoven elements: a visual aspect (form), a cognitive aspect (meaning), and an experiential aspect (functions, processes, and human experiences). Other relevant landscape theories adopt structures similar to those of Terkenli's three dimensions [31]. For instance, Tuan [43] took the view that landscapes should be analyzed from visual and perceptual aspects, which stand for the visual aspect and the cognitive and experiential aspects of Terkenli's framework, respectively. Xia and Chiou [32] put forward that the landscape of cultural heritage sites comprises an external material basis, an internal physical sense, and the core of culture, which can be seen as the visual, experiential, and cognitive aspects of Terkenli's framework, respectively. Therefore, this study mainly refers to Terkenli's framework [31] and proposes that landscape evaluation by tourists includes visual, cognitive, and experiential aspects.

Regarding historic districts, landscape evaluation by tourists has visual, cognitive, and experiential dimensions. We hold the opinion that, first, the visual preference of tourists corresponds to the visual aspect (form). As the visible landscape is the most direct and available landscape information source, visual perception is the most important method by which tourists perceive an urban landscape [44], and whether they prefer or like a visual landscape is the most important aspect on the basis of which they evaluate a historic district landscape. Second, tourists' evaluations concerning the cultural heritage value of the old street landscape correspond to the cognitive aspect (meaning). The historic districts reflect the history and culture of a city, and cultural heritage resources are the main features of historic district tourism [45]. Meanwhile, tourists' cognition of the cultural heritage value of the historic district landscape is an important aspect of their evaluation of the historic district landscape. Third, tourists' evaluation of authenticity corresponds to the experiential aspect (functions, processes, and human experiences). The historic districts are of cultural heritage value, and the authenticity of cultural heritage tourism is of interest to tourists [46,47] and is experienced by the tourists themselves in historic districts. Thus, this study proposes the dimensions of tourists' landscape evaluations regarding historic districts, as shown in Figure 3.
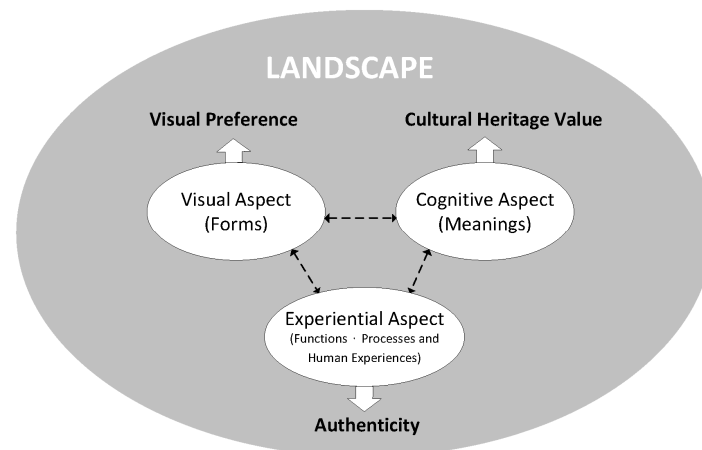
Figure 3. Dimensions of tourists' landscape evaluation. Note: Revised from Terkenli [31].

2.1.1. Visual Preference

On the basis of information processing theory, humans process the information they receive rather than merely responding to stimuli. People form visual references after processing different pieces of visual information [48]. Kaplan and Kaplan [49] divided the means by which people process environmental information into four kinds: immediate understanding, immediate exploration, inferred understanding, and inferred exploration. These four means correspond to four visual information factors that can predict environmental preferences, coherence, complexity, legibility, and mystery, referred to as the preference matrix (shown in Table 1). Coherence means that the elements in a scene are uni-

form or well-organized. Complexity means a great quantity of elements. Legibility means that the information can be easily identified (i.e., via distinctive elements or way finding). Mystery refers to the accessibility of the information [49–52]. Recent scholars have not only adopted the preference matrix in research on the natural environment but have also verified that the factors of the preference matrix can be used to predict the environmental preference of people in built environments [51,53,54]. As the four factors of the preference matrix are visual properties [51], they are adopted in this study to predict tourists' visual preferences with regard to historic districts. Additionally, coherence, complexity, legibility, and mystery can be adopted as independent variables to predict people's environmental preferences [53]. This study defines visual preference as a formative variable and takes these four factors (coherence, complexity, legibility, and mystery) to predict tourists' visual preferences with regard to historic districts.

Table 1. The preference matrix.

	Understanding	**Exploration**
Immediate	Coherence	Complexity
Inferred/Predicted	Legibility	Mystery

Source: Kaplan and Kaplan [49].

2.1.2. Cultural Heritage Value

According to Article 1 of UNESCO's World Heritage Convention, groups of buildings may have historical, artistic, or scientific value [55]. A historic district with characteristic groups of buildings can also have historical, artistic, or scientific value. However, UNESCO's definition of groups of buildings involves evaluation criteria for the cultural heritage values that differ from those aspects perceived by tourists. Scientific values need to be assessed with specialized knowledge and are, therefore, not applicable to tourists. In contrast, historic and artistic values are accessible to tourists. The artistic value of a historic district is mainly reflected in the architectural art of the groups of buildings, while tourists' perceptions of the artistic value of the cultural heritage of a historic district are usually reflective of its aesthetic aspects [39,56–59]. Historical value is also of great significance to cultural heritage tourism [39,60,61]. Studies have shown that cultural heritage tourism not only has aesthetic and historical value but is also closely associated with social value [61,62]. Therefore, this study measured tourists' cognition of the cultural heritage value of historic districts according to three aspects: aesthetic value, social value, and historical value.

2.1.3. Authenticity

At the Nara Conference on Authenticity, authenticity was defined as "genuine, original, honest, and holy" in relation to the World Heritage Convention [63]. Expectations of an authentic experience have been shown to motivate tourists' visits to cultural heritage destinations [64]. In the field of tourism, authenticity has typically been divided into three types: object-based authenticity, existential authenticity, and constructive authenticity [65]. Object-based authenticity is an objective judgment concerning a physical location and/or structure. Existential authenticity focuses on human feelings and experiences that result from object-based authenticity [46,64,65]. Constructive authenticity refers to the theoretical discussion of authenticity [58]. Kolar and Zabkar [46] defined authenticity as the authenticity tourists experience at scenic spots, including the perceived object-based authenticity and existential authenticity of relevant activities. This view has also been referenced and verified by other studies on cultural heritage tourism [64,66,67]. This study regards tourists' experienced authenticity during their visits to the historic district as the true and original culture and history of the place and classifies their experienced authenticity into object-based authenticity at a substance level and existential authenticity at an activity level.

On the basis of the literature, this study examines tourists' landscape evaluations of the historic district according to three dimensions: visual preference, cultural heritage value, and authenticity.

2.2. Place Attachment

A "place" is a space to which people give value and significance [15]. Tuan [68] proposed that a sentimental or emotional link exists between individuals and a specific place; this link gradually turns into a deep-rooted attachment. This is place attachment and has been regarded as a bond or identification with a place [69] or as an individual emotional and affective bond to a specific place [70,71]. There are some differences in the definitions of place attachment given by scholars, but the consensus is that place attachment is a positive emotional linkage between people and a place [17,70,71]. Due to the abstract concept of place attachment, researchers have divided the measurements of place attachment into several dimensions. Many tourism researchers have supported the views of Williams and Vaske [72], who divided place attachment into two dimensions: place dependence and place identity [17]. Place dependence involves dependence on the resources of a place and is manifested as a functional attachment, whereas place identity reflects an emotional or symbolic attachment with abstract and symbolic meanings [23,73]. This study defines tourists' place attachment as the attachment between tourists and the visited site. By adopting the view of Williams and Vaske [72], this study classifies place attachment into two aspects for measurement. One is place dependence, that is, a personal attachment to the place's function for need gratification. The other is place identity, that is, a personal attachment concerning the emotional connection with or symbolism of the place.

2.3. Destination Image

The destination image is the tourists' mental image of a tourism destination, defined as the integration of their beliefs, thoughts, and impressions regarding a tourism destination [74–76]. The key to defining a destination image is interpreting the image. Researchers equate the image with perception [74] and memory [77]. It thus appears that the destination image is the interpretation and feeling of the tourists themselves regarding the environmental information of the place they visit, which includes not only the cognition of the environmental information of the destination but also the tourists' own emotions toward the destination. Researchers in the tourism field have indicated that tourists' destination image includes perception/cognition and emotional evaluation [76,78]. Concerning the measurement of the destination image, Baloglu and McCleary [78] divided the destination image into two dimensions, cognitive image and affective image, which were cited and verified by later scholars [76,79]. The cognitive image of a location includes the sum of people's attitudes toward the location and its features, while the affective image involves the place evaluation upon travel demand [78,80]. This study defines a destination image as a mental impression of the place visited and divides it into cognitive image and affective image. The cognitive image is the mental impression formed at a substantial level, whereas the affective image is abstract and emotional.

3. Research Design

3.1. The Hypotheses and the Conceptual Model

As has been mentioned in the above literature review, place attachment is regarded as a bond or identification with a place [69], and such a bond is related to the surrounding environment [68,70,71]. However, place attachment is a complex emotion that is not necessarily a direct reaction stimulated by people's landscape information. We believe that in the process from tourists' perception of the landscape environment of the historic district to the formation of place attachment, the human brain processes the relevant landscape information. As the destination image is the tourists' mental image [74–76,81], it can be the mind impression that tourists form after their brain processes the landscape information of the destination. Therefore, when analyzing the formation process of tourists'

place attachment to the historic district, it is necessary to analyze the relationship between tourists' landscape evaluation, destination image, and place attachment.

3.1.1. The Effect of Tourists' Landscape Evaluation on Destination Image

We divided tourists' landscape evaluation into three dimensions, visual preference, cultural heritage value, and authenticity, and the effect of tourists' landscape evaluation on the destination image will be discussed in line with these three aspects.

First, despite a lack of research on the relationship between tourists' visual preferences and destination images, scholars have probed into the functions of visual landscapes in the local image of a place. For example, Harun et al. [82] studied a royal town in Malaysia and discovered that landscape elements have abundant cultural and architectural significance and play a significant role in a town's image. Vela et al. [83] performed a meta-analysis of the relevant literature and found that visual landscapes are the key element of local brand images.

Second, scholars have proven that cultural heritage is a critical tourism resource and has positive effects on attractive image shaping. For example, Szubert et al. [84] compared four destinations in Poland and suggested the vital role of cultural heritage in attractive image shaping; Harun, Fairuz, and Nordin [82] analyzed the role of urban heritage in determining the image of a royal town; and Vitić-Ćetković et al. [85] indicated that cultural heritage is an important aspect of a tourist destination that should be protected and developed to attract tourists.

Third, some studies have indicated that authenticity plays a positive role in the tourist experience and has great significance for the image of tourist destinations. For example, Seyfi et al. [86] proposed that authenticity is one of the key factors affecting cultural tourist experiences in a destination. Lee, Lin, Choe, and Li [47] verified the significance of authenticity in the tourism experience through the case of Sanfang Qixiang in Fuzhou, China. Sang [87] analyzed the significance of authenticity in local culture with regard to local brand image creation in rural tourism in Tibet.

On the basis of the literature, the following hypotheses were proposed for historic districts:

H1. *Tourists' visual preference has a significantly positive effect on their destination image.*

H2. *Tourists' evaluation of cultural heritage values has a significantly positive effect on their destination image.*

H3. *Tourists' evaluation of authenticity has a significantly positive effect on their destination image.*

3.1.2. The Effect of Tourists' Landscape Evaluation on Place Attachment

Next, we will discuss the effect of tourists' landscape evaluation on place attachment in terms of three aspects: visual preference, cultural heritage value, and authenticity.

First, despite the lack of research on the effect of tourists' visual preference on place attachment, scholars have found a correlation between environment and place attachment. For instance, on the basis of cases in rural and urban areas in China, Chen, Hall, Yu, and Qian [28] proved the effect of residents' environmental satisfaction on place attachment. García-Martín et al. [88] found a relationship between people's perception of multiple landscape values and place attachment. Zhang et al. [89] found that the "architecture" and the "indicative symbol" among environmental visual elements predict people's place attachment; as visual perception is the most important means by which tourists perceive a city [44], we hold the view that there is a connection between tourists' visual preferences and their place attachment.

Second, researchers have demonstrated that some authenticity-related concepts can influence place attachment or sense of place. For instance, in a survey of two nature-based tourism destinations in Australia, Jiang et al. [90] found a positive and significant effect of existential authenticity on place attachment. On investigating two Chinese World Heritage

sites, Yi et al. [91] found that tourists' perceived authenticity can be an antecedent to place attachment. On the basis of a case study of Sichuan, China, Cong et al. [92] found that humanistic authenticity is the major promoting factor by which potential tourists form place attachment.

Third, there are few studies on the relationship between tourists' perception of the cultural heritage value of a place and place attachment. As we know, most research related to cultural heritage tourism looks into tourist experiences at places of cultural heritage or explores the function of cultural heritage resources. For instance, Buonincontri et al. [93] put forward that visitors' experience at heritage sites has a positive effect on place attachment, and Cicalò [94] proposed that cultural heritage constitutes a fundamental resource for place image in smaller towns. These studies all take cultural heritage as a resource but do not discuss tourists' perceptions of cultural heritage value. Although some scholars have discussed the relationship between the cultural value of intangible cultural heritage perceived by tourists and place attachment [95], they did not consider the cultural heritage value of physical landscapes. We believe that it is difficult for tourists to directly perceive the cultural heritage value from the physical landscape of a historic district; that is, they cannot form place attachment directly from the perception of the cultural heritage value of the historic district. Therefore, this study does not discuss the relationship between tourists' evaluation of the cultural heritage value and place attachment.

On the basis of the literature, the following hypotheses were proposed for historic districts:

H4. *Tourists' visual preference has a significantly positive effect on their place attachment.*

H5. *Tourists' evaluation of authenticity has a significantly positive effect on their place attachment.*

3.1.3. The Effect of the Destination Image on Place Attachment

As the destination image is the tourists' mental image of a tourism destination [74,76] and place attachment refers to the emotional bond to a specific place [70,71], both these concepts are concerned with the place and emotions. The relationship between destination image and place attachment has been an issue of concern in academic circles. For instance, after a study of residents and tourists in two cities in Sweden, Strandberg et al. [96] found that an affective destination image could affect positive public praise via place attachment. After investigating tourists in hotels in Mauritius, Prayag, and Ryan [97] found that destination image and place attachment are antecedents of tourist loyalty and that the former would affect the latter. On the basis of the investigation data of tourists in Antalya, Tasci et al. [98] suggested that destination image affects place attachment in a place-oriented concept. Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed for historic districts:

H6. *Tourists' destination image has a significantly positive effect on their place attachment.*

3.1.4. The Formation of Place Attachment from a Landscape Perspective

According to information-processing theory, tourists process received information in the brain rather than just reacting to a stimulus. The destination image is the tourists' mental image [74–76,81] and is the result of a stimulating factor [78], indicating that people process the stimulating factor from the landscape and form certain mental impressions. According to research findings, destination image influences tourists' place attachment [96,98]. Tourists' destination image may influence the impact of landscape evaluation on place attachment. According to the stimulus–organism–response (SOR) model, different environmental elements can function as stimuli (stimulus), which would be processed by human (organism) emotion and cognition and lead to mental, attitudinal, or behavioral response (response) [33]. Further dividing the environmental stimulus into situation and object variables, Belk [34] modified the SOR model and took the situation and the object as the stimulus, which would give rise to a behavior response in humans (organism) after they

have processed the information. On the basis of the views of Mehrabian and Russell [33] and Belk [34], we hold that the landscape of historic districts is a stimulus, the destination image is a kind of mental image formed by tourists as an organism, and place attachment is a response to the human–place emotional link. The landscape stimulus can be divided into two types, a situation stimulus and an object stimulus. The visual landscape can be taken as the object stimulus, while both authenticity and cultural heritage values can be taken as the situation stimulus, as the latter two are formed only after tourists' experience of and cognition of the site. According to information-processing theory, the SOR model, and previously proposed hypotheses, we predict that tourists' destination image plays a mediating role in the association between landscape evaluation and place attachment. Therefore, the following hypotheses were proposed for historic districts:

H7. *Tourists' destination image performs a mediating role in the influence of visual preference on place attachment.*

H8. *Tourists' destination image performs a mediating role in the influence of authenticity on place attachment.*

H9. *Tourists' destination image performs a mediating role in the influence of cultural heritage values on place attachment.*

On the basis of the literature, we proposed the research structure shown in Figure 4.
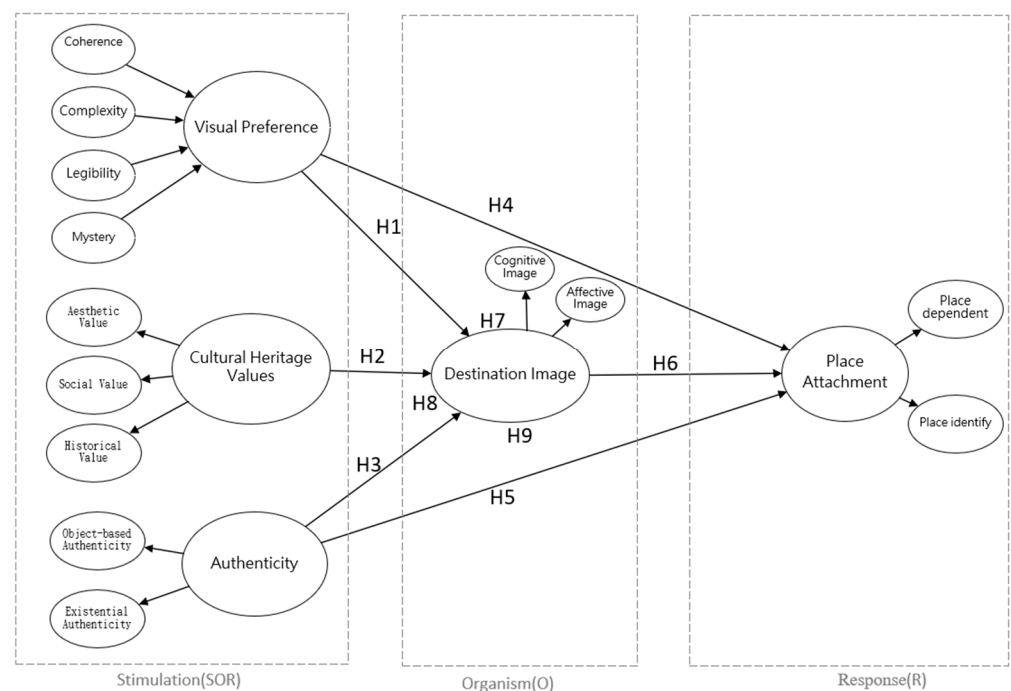
Figure 4. Concept structure of the research. Note: The concept structure is inspired by the stimulus–organism–response model.

3.2. Research Method and Process

The study used a questionnaire survey divided into two stages. The first stage involved analyzing the research setting and the literature, which provided the research hypotheses and the conceptual structure. The second stage involved preparing the questionnaire for the survey, obtaining the survey data, and performing a statistical analysis using Smart PLS 3.3.3 software(created by SmartPLS GmbH, Oststeinbek, Germany). The reason we adopted the partial least squares (PLS) structural equation model was its adaptability to the formative variables, as the variable of visual preference is a formative variable in this

study. After conducting our two-stage research, we verified our hypotheses in the research structure and, on the basis of our results, suggested landscape designs for historic districts from the perspective of tourists' place attachment.

3.3. Measurement Scales

The questionnaire consisted of two sections: the first included items for the research constructs, and the second collected demographic information.

The first part focused on the constructs in the conceptual model, including visual preference, cultural heritage value, authenticity, destination image, and place attachment. The items in the sub-construct "affective image" of destination image adopted the semantic difference scale, while the other items adopted a 7-point Likert scale. The items used previous scholars' research as a reference, and with the help of two translation experts, we translated the English scale to achieve idiomatic expressions in Taiwanese and modified them according to the characteristics of the study area. Once we had prepared the questionnaire, five experts from related fields were invited to assess the items, and the Delphi method was adopted to validate the content. After three rounds of modifications, the most appropriate items for the constructs were determined. Then, to determine the validity of the questionnaire and ensure that it was understandable, three tourists who had been to Taiping Old Street were selected. In the pilot test stage, 50 questionnaires were distributed, and 40 valid responses were collected. SPSS 26 software(created by IBM Corporation, New York, NY, USA) was used to analyze the pretested results and identify Cronbach's alpha and Pearson's correlation coefficient. Three items with Cronbach's alpha values of less than 0.6 were deleted. After the pilot study, we conducted a formal questionnaire. Table 2 presents the constructs and sources of measures in the first part of the questionnaire.

Table 2. Construct and sources of measures.

Construct	Sub-Construct	Sources
Visual preference (VP)	Coherence (COH) Complexity (COM) Legibility (LEG) Mystery (MYS)	Kaplan and Kaplan [49]; Herzog and Kropscott [50]; Li and Liang [52]
Cultural heritage value (CHV)	Aesthetic value (AES) Social value (SOC) Historical value (HIS)	Yen [99]; Mascari, Mautone, Moltedo, and Salonia [57]; Stephenson [39]
Authenticity (AUT)	Object-based authenticity (OBJ) Existential authenticity (EXI)	Kolar and Zabkar [46]; Bryce, Curran, O'Gorman, and Taheri [64]
Destination image (DI)	Cognitive image (COG) Affective image (AFF)	Prayag and Ryan [97]; Russell and Pratt [80]
Place attachment (PA)	Place dependence (DEP) Place identity (IDE)	Williams and Vaske [72]; Bricker and Kerstetter [100]; Tasci, Uslu, Stylidis, and Woosnam [98]

The second part of the questionnaire collected information on demographic variables, including gender, age, education level, current residence, and occupation.

4. Results

We adopted questionnaires for data collection and used Smart PLS 3.3.3 software to verify the research model and analyze the influence relationships between the latent variables. To test the model, the report is divided into a measurement model and a structural model. First, the measurement model evaluates the reliability and validity of the research constructs. Then, the structural model tests the research hypotheses, including their path coefficients, mediation effects, etc. [101].

4.1. Data Collection and Sample Characteristics

Due to the COVID-19 Omicron pandemic in Taiwan during the formal questionnaire survey stage, we adopted an online survey format in place of paper surveys. The questionnaire was given to Meta Survey Marketing Research Co., Ltd., which located in Taipei, Taiwan, and had the largest sample size in Taiwan, for questionnaire data collection. The survey company used its official LINE account to distribute the survey to the Taiwanese public from March 31 to April 11, 2022. The respondents were rewarded with LINE points. During the questionnaire's collection stage, to ensure that individuals did not answer the questionnaire multiple times, it was ensured that each Internet protocol address could be used to answer the questionnaire only once. We also set up sample screening questions to ensure that the respondents were Taiwanese tourists who had been to Taiping Old Street. A total of 500 questionnaire responses were received, of which 403 were valid. On the grounds of the population size of Taiwan, the sample size of this study exceeds the statistically recommended 384 (when the confidence level is 95%, the confidence interval is 5). Of the 403 participants, 46.2% ($n = 186$) were male and 53.8% ($n = 217$) were female. Those aged between 20 and 49 were the largest group, and their occupational categories, educational levels, and current residences were widely distributed. The sample thus achieved good representativeness. Table 3 displays the demographic information.

Table 3. Demographic information of participants ($n = 403$).

		Percentage (%)			Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	46.2	Educational level	Primary school or below	0.5
	Female	53.8		Junior high school	8.2
				Senior high school (vocational)	24.6
				University (junior college)	50.6
				Master's degree or above	16.1
Age	20–29	28.5	Occupation	Full-time student	7.4
	30–39	32.3		Government functionary	6.5
	40–49	28.8		Education/Training personnel	7.9
	50–59	7.9		Marketing/Sales/Service/PR practitioner	24.8
	Above 60	2.5		Management staff	19.1
				Production personnel	5.0
				Design/Art personnel	6.5
				Others	22.8
Number of visits	0		Current residence	Taiping Road area, Douliu City	
	1~5	89.5		Non-Taiping Road area in Douliu City	12.7
	6~10	6.5		Non-Douliu City, Yunlin County	17.6
	11 and above	4.0		Non-Yunlin County Area, Taiwan	69.7
				Non-Taiwan Area	

4.2. Measurement Model

According to the recommendations of previous researchers [101,102], the measurement model should exhibit internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha > 0.7), item reliability of reflective indicators (outer loadings > 0.7), formative indicator weights (outer weights > 0.2 and significance at the 95% confidence level), composite reliability (>0.8), and discriminant validity. The Fornell–Larcker criterion has often been used to estimate discriminate validity using the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) to compare the correlation of constructs.

In the measurement models, the construct of a visual landscape is a formative variable, while the other constructs are reflective variables. As is shown in Table 4, the outer loadings of the items were all more than 0.7, the outer weights of the items were all more than 0.2, and all reached the 95% significance level; t > |1.96| and $p < 0.05$. The data met the recommendations of previous researchers [101,102]. The data indicated that all items had item reliability, and both reflective and formative constructs corresponded consistently with the conceptual model in the study.

Table 4. Outer loadings, outer weights, and significance test.

Construct	Item	Outer Loadings	Outer Weights	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	p Values
Visual preference	Coherence		0.253	0.024	10.444	0.000
	Complexity		0.339	0.015	22.549	0.000
	Legibility		0.332	0.017	19.148	0.000
	Mystery		0.387	0.014	27.529	0.000
Coherence (COH)	COH-1	0.849		0.019	45.224	0.000
	COH-2	0.821		0.031	26.543	0.000
	COH-3	0.700		0.046	15.227	0.000
Complexity (COM)	COM-1	0.810		0.028	28.679	0.000
	COM-2	0.712		0.032	22.114	0.000
	COM-4	0.850		0.015	57.568	0.000
Legibility (LEG)	LEG-1	0.765		0.035	21.885	0.000
	LEG-2	0.869		0.015	58.639	0.000
	LEG-3	0.836		0.018	46.800	0.000
	LEG-4	0.783		0.022	35.892	0.000
Mystery (MYS)	MYS-1	0.810		0.025	33.023	0.000
	MYS-2	0.891		0.013	66.187	0.000
	MYS-3	0.772		0.024	31.860	0.000
	MYS-4	0.852		0.019	45.908	0.000
	MYS-5	0.838		0.018	47.490	0.000
Cultural heritage value	Aesthetic value	0.918		0.011	82.906	0.000
	Social value	0.917		0.011	79.980	0.000
	Historical value	0.911		0.013	69.966	0.000
Aesthetic value (AES)	AES-1	0.810		0.025	32.786	0.000
	AES-2	0.831		0.021	40.085	0.000
	AES-3	0.835		0.021	39.817	0.000
	AES-4	0.787		0.025	31.846	0.000
	AES-5	0.794		0.031	25.869	0.000
Social value (SOC)	SOC-1	0.760		0.031	24.738	0.000
	SOC-2	0.716		0.033	21.819	0.000
	SOC-3	0.839		0.022	38.544	0.000
	SOC-4	0.848		0.020	42.612	0.000
	SOC-5	0.790		0.027	29.729	0.000
Historical value (HIS)	HIS-1	0.851		0.024	35.161	0.000
	HIS-2	0.884		0.015	59.298	0.000
	HIS-3	0.850		0.019	45.531	0.000
	HIS-4	0.733		0.033	22.385	0.000
	HIS-5	0.812		0.022	36.545	0.000
Authenticity	Object-based authenticity	0.956		0.005	181.953	0.000
	Existential authenticity	0.956		0.005	177.018	0.000
Object-based authenticity (OBJ)	OBJ-1	0.832		0.027	31.149	0.000
	OBJ-2	0.861		0.018	48.068	0.000
	OBJ-3	0.863		0.017	49.996	0.000
	OBJ-4	0.833		0.018	45.620	0.000
Existential authenticity (EXI)	EXI-1	0.768		0.027	28.295	0.000
	EXI-2	0.822		0.021	38.824	0.000
	EXI-3	0.843		0.019	44.925	0.000
	EXI-4	0.857		0.018	47.835	0.000
	EXI-5	0.795		0.024	33.259	0.000
	EXI-6	0.802		0.027	29.794	0.000

Table 4. *Cont.*

Construct	Item	Outer Loadings	Outer Weights	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	*p* Values
Destination image	Cognitive image	0.928		0.009	104.897	0.000
	Affective image	0.925		0.010	96.523	0.000
Cognitive image (COG)	COG-1	0.831		0.021	39.518	0.000
	COG-2	0.878		0.014	60.698	0.000
	COG-3	0.825		0.019	42.449	0.000
	COG-4	0.793		0.030	26.791	0.000
Affective image (AFF)	AFF-1	0.864		0.016	54.466	0.000
	AFF-2	0.829		0.021	40.055	0.000
	AFF-3	0.844		0.017	48.335	0.000
	AFF-4	0.809		0.024	33.994	0.000
Place attachment	Place dependence	0.955		0.005	187.405	0.000
	Place identity	0.957		0.005	208.423	0.000
Place dependence (DEP)	DEP-1	0.754		0.026	29.242	0.000
	DEP-2	0.816		0.020	40.843	0.000
	DEP-3	0.891		0.012	74.724	0.000
	DEP-4	0.907		0.009	97.378	0.000
	DEP-5	0.844		0.017	48.772	0.000
Place identity (IDE)	IDE-1	0.842		0.015	56.207	0.000
	IDE-2	0.830		0.022	37.843	0.000
	IDE-3	0.820		0.021	38.973	0.000
	IDE-4	0.889		0.012	75.811	0.000
	IDE-5	0.876		0.016	55.450	0.000

Note: Bootstrapping was conducted 5000 times.

As shown in Table 5, the reliability and convergent validity of the research constructs meet the recommendations of previous researchers [101,102]. All Cronbach's alpha values were more than 0.7, all composite reliability values were more than 0.8, and all average variance extracted (AVE) values were more than 0.6. These results show that all the constructs in this study had good reliability and convergent validity. The method used for evaluating discriminant validity was the Fornell–Larcker method, which compares the square root of the AVE with the correlation of the constructs. The square root of the AVE was greater than the correlation (Table 6), which means that the model had good discriminant validity.

Table 5. Reliability and convergent validity.

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Coherence	0.716	0.835	0.629
Complexity	0.703	0.835	0.629
Legibility	0.830	0.887	0.663
Mystery	0.889	0.919	0.694
Cultural heritage value	0.903	0.939	0.838
Aesthetic value	0.870	0.906	0.659
Social value	0.851	0.893	0.627
Historical value	0.884	0.915	0.685
Authenticity	0.906	0.955	0.914
Object-based authenticity	0.869	0.911	0.718
Existential authenticity	0.899	0.922	0.664
Destination image	0.835	0.924	0.858
Cognitive image	0.852	0.900	0.693
Affective image	0.857	0.903	0.701
Place attachment	0.905	0.955	0.914
Place dependence	0.898	0.925	0.713
Place identity	0.905	0.930	0.726

Table 6. Fornell–Larcker criterion.

	Authenticity	Cultural Heritage Value	Place Attachment	Destination Image	Visual Preference
Authenticity	**0.956**				
Cultural heritage value	0.818	**0.915**			
Place attachment	0.694	0.564	**0.956**		
Destination image	0.856	0.782	0.690	**0.926**	
Visual preference	0.700	0.729	0.654	0.666	**1.000**

Note: The elements in bold are the square roots of the AVE; the off-triangle elements are Pearson's correlations of the constructs.

4.3. Structure Model

After evaluating the measurement model, a structural model analysis was performed to determine whether any of the hypotheses were valid. The first evaluation criterion for partial least squares (PLS) structural equation modeling was the explainable variance (R^2) of the endogenous latent variables. R^2 is an index of the size of the total variance, as explained by exogenous variables. A value of R^2 below 0.19 has a weak explanatory ability, values more than or equal to 0.33 have moderate explanatory ability, and values more than or equal to 0.67 are substantially influential [101]. The next step was to test whether the path coefficients, including the positive and negative directions, met the assumptions and their strengths. Chin [101] recommended a value of more than 0.2 and significance at the 95% confidence level.

In this study, the PLS analysis provided standardized estimates; a significance test using a resampling technique (bootstrapping method) was performed with replacements. As per the path analysis in Figure 5, the R^2 of the destination image was 0.755, and the R^2 of the place attachment was 0.558, indicating that the explainable variance of the endogenous latent variables had above moderate explanatory ability.
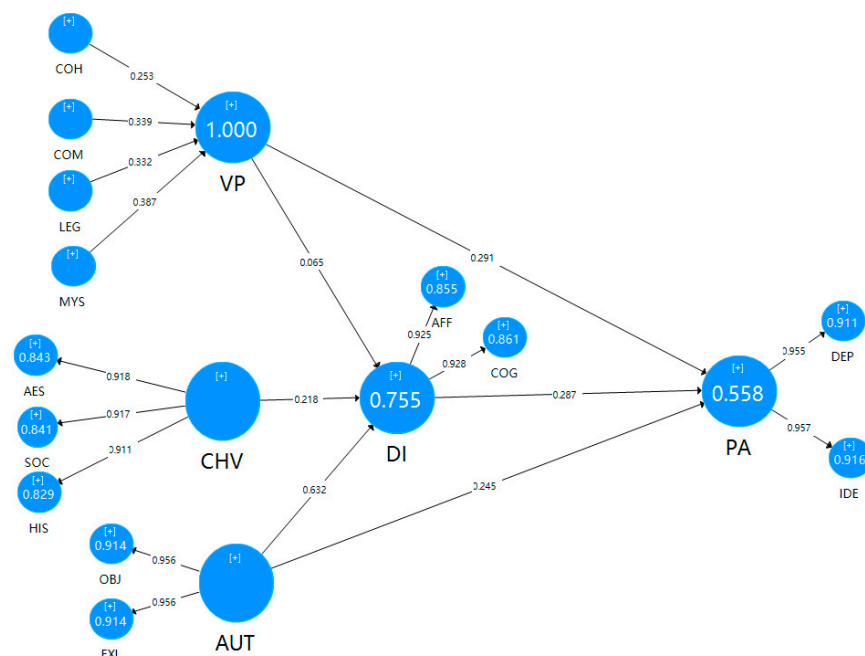
Figure 5. The path coefficients and R^2 of the structural model. Note: VP = visual preference, CHV = cultural heritage value, AUT = authenticity, DI = destination image, PA = place attachment, COH = coherence, COM = complexity, LEG = legibility, MYS = mystery, AES = aesthetic value, SOC = social value, HIS = historical value, OBJ = object-based authenticity, EXI = existential authenticity, DEP = place dependence, and IDE = place identity. The "+" symbol in the figure means that this figure hides the items of the questionnaire.

The next step was to test whether the path coefficients met the assumptions. As shown in Table 7, with the exception of visual preference → destination image (path coefficient value = 0.065; *p* value = 0.291), which was non-significant, all other paths were significant, which means that visual preference has a significant positive effect on the destination image.

Table 7. Significance of path coefficients.

Dependent Variables	Independent Variables	Original Sample (O)	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	*p* Values	R²
Destination image	Visual preference	0.065	0.061	1.057	0.291	
	Cultural heritage value	0.218	0.059	3.700	0.000	0.755
	Authenticity	0.632	0.071	8.911	0.000	
Place attachment	Visual preference	0.291	0.060	4.881	0.000	
	Authenticity	0.245	0.081	3.009	0.003	0.558
	Destination image	0.287	0.076	3.794	0.000	

In the PLS analysis, if the relationship between the latent variables can be completed through another latent variable, this effect is called an indirect or mediating effect. In this study, the mediation effect test was performed, and the significance was estimated using a bootstrap procedure that was resampled 5000 times. Table 8 lists the paths of the model mediation effects. The mediation effect of visual preference→destination image→place attachment was 0.019 (b = 0.019, t = 0.882, and *p* > 0.05) and the confidence interval contained 0, indicating that a mediation effect did not exist. The mediation effect of authenticity→destination image→place attachment was 0.181 (t = 3.638 and *p* < 0.001) and the confidence interval did not contain 0, indicating that a mediating effect existed. The mediation effect of cultural heritage value→destination image→place attachment was 0.062 (t = 2.708 and *p* < 0.05) and the confidence interval did not contain 0, indicating that a mediating effect existed.

Table 8. Mediation effect.

Path of Mediation	Mediation Effect	Standard Deviation	T Value	*p* Value	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Visual Preference → Destination Image → Place Attachment	0.019	0.021	0.882	0.378	−0.012	0.066
Authenticity → Destination Image → Place Attachment	0.181	0.050	3.638	0.000	0.096	0.288
Cultural Heritage Value → Destination Image → Place Attachment	0.062	0.023	2.708	0.007	0.024	0.113

Note: Bootstrapping was conducted 5000 times.

As shown in Table 9, the path coefficient, the mediation effect of the structure model, and the significance test support H2, H3, H4, H5, H6, H8, and H9 but not H1 and H7. We found the following: (1) Tourists' landscape evaluation in terms of cultural heritage value and authenticity had significant positive effects on the destination image. (2) Tourists' visual preference, evaluation of authenticity, and destination image had significant positive effects on place attachment. (3) Tourists' destination image influenced the impact of authenticity and cultural heritage value on place attachment.

Table 9. The results of the hypotheses.

Hypotheses	Path Coefficients	Mediation Effect	T Value	Result
H1: Visual Preference → Destination Image	0.065		1.057	Not Supported
H2: Cultural Heritage Value → Destination Image	0.218		3.700 ***	Supported
H3: Authenticity → Destination Image	0.632		8.911 ***	Supported
H4: Visual Preference → Place Attachment	0.291		4.881 ***	Supported
H5: Authenticity → Place Attachment	0.245		3.009 **	Supported
H6: Destination Image → Place Attachment	0.287		3.794 ***	Supported
H7: Visual Preference → Destination Image → Place Attachment		0.019	0.882	Not Supported
H8: Authenticity → Destination Image → Place Attachment		0.181	3.638 ***	Supported
H9: Cultural Heritage Value → Destination Image → Place Attachment		0.062	2.708 **	Supported

Note: Bootstrapping was conducted 5000 times. ** $p < 0.01$, and *** $p < 0.001$.

5. Discussion

We analyzed the research results in line with the research objectives and probed into the findings, combining the previous literature and site features. First, regarding the dimensions of tourists' evaluation of historic district landscapes and measurement model data of different dimensions, we discussed the types of historic district landscapes favored by tourists. Second, regarding the model of the relationship between tourists' landscape evaluation, place attachment, and the data of the structural model, we discussed the formation process of tourists' place attachment on the basis of landscape stimuli of historic districts. These discussions would provide a reference for the sustainable development of the landscapes in the historic districts of the type represented by this study case.

5.1. The Dimensions of Tourists' Landscape Evaluation

We put forward that tourists' landscape evaluation of historic districts are divided into three dimensions: visual preference, cultural heritage value, and authenticity. Visual preference is a formative construct, and cultural heritage value and authenticity are reflective constructs. The measurement model data indicate that all the items had item reliability, and both reflective and formative constructs corresponded consistently with the conceptual model in the study.

We proposed four factors that can predict the visual preference of historic districts: coherence, complexity, legibility, and mystery. According to the values of the outer weights and the significance level, we demonstrated that the factors in Kaplan and Kaplan's preference matrix [51] are formative factors of visual preference, providing a reference for predicting the visual preference of historic districts. Among the four formative factors, coherence featured the lowest outer weight, at 0.253, and mystery featured the highest, at 0.387. This shows that in this research setting, tourists have the lowest preference for visual landscape feature coherence and the highest preference for visual landscape feature mystery. We believe that this result is related to the features of the research setting and Taiwan's culture. First, Taiping Old Street has a variety of architectural styles, which results in a lack of consistency in the street landscape. Nevertheless, Taiwan is a region featuring diverse cultures, and the varying architectural styles are accepted by Taiwanese people and can be seen as a feature that appeals to Taiwanese respondents. Second, the old buildings in this research setting have a variety of decorative patterns, which often have corresponding symbolic meanings. For example, one old building is decorated with the pattern of a magpie standing on the branch of a plum blossom, which means "very happy." The magpie is a symbol of happiness, while "plum blossom" is homonymous with the word "eyebrow." This is a traditional auspicious Chinese pattern symbolizing joy and good luck. The information symbolized by these patterns needs inferred exploration to understand, which is a visual formation representing mystery. We hold the opinion that among the four formative factors of tourists' visual preference, the lowest preference for coherence and the highest preference for mystery reflect an acceptance of diversified style groups of old buildings in historic districts.

On the basis of the literature and an area analysis, we proposed three factors to measure the cultural heritage value of historic districts: aesthetic value, social value, and historical value. According to the values of the outer loadings, reliability and convergent validity, and significance level tests, we demonstrated that the three factors reflect the cultural heritage value of historic districts. All three factors had high outer loading values, with aesthetic value having the highest. This indicates that tourists' perceptions of the cultural heritage value in a historic district mainly reflect its aesthetic value. In terms of the measurements of authenticity, this study mainly used the scale of Kolar and Zabkar [46] for reference and verified its rationality. Two factors were used to measure the authenticity of historic districts: object-based authenticity and existential authenticity. According to the values of the outer loadings, both had the same high value, indicating that both the material and human aspects of historic district landscapes are important for the authenticity experienced by tourists. In our view, among the factors pertaining to tourists' evaluation of cultural heritage values, aesthetic value features the highest outer loading value, representing the most significant cultural heritage tourism value of historic districts with rich building recourses. Among the factors of tourists' evaluation of authenticity, both object-based authenticity and existential authenticity feature high outer loading values, representing the importance of both material and humanistic aspects in the experience design of the historic district landscape.

5.2. The Model of the Relationship between Tourists' Landscape Evaluation and Place Attachment

Through the results of our structured model, we discussed the association between tourists' landscape evaluation (visual landscape, cultural heritage value, and authenticity) and destination image and place attachment. We discussed the results of the structure model in terms of destination image, the forming process of place attachment, and the mediating effect of destination image.

(1) The R^2 of the destination image was 0.755. Thus, H2 (cultural heritage value $\rightarrow$ destination image) and H3 (authenticity $\rightarrow$ destination image) were supported, denoting that tourists' perceptions of a place's cultural heritage value and experiential authenticity were formative factors for the destination image. These results are consistent with former researchers' findings that cultural heritage is a critical tourism resource and has positive effects on destination image [84,85]. Authenticity played a positive role in the image of tourist destinations [47]. However, the result of H1 (visual preference $\rightarrow$ destination image) was not supported, and although the path coefficients of visual preference $\rightarrow$ destination image were positive, the value was not significant. This result regarding H1 is inconsistent with the view of previous scholars [82,83], who found that the visual landscape is important to the building of a local image. We believe that the reason for this result is related to the environmental features of the research objective. The visual landscape investigation in this study mainly focuses on the buildings around the old street. Taiping Old Street is a naturally formed historic commercial street with bicycles, automotive traffic, and so on, as well as food stands and restaurants. This means that the visual approach is not the only perceptual approach for tourists; auditory and olfactory sensations could also have played a role. As a result, in terms of historic districts with buildings of commerciality, the visual aesthetics of landscape do not have a significant influence on tourists' destination image. Tourists' cognition of cultural heritage values and authenticity experiences should be highlighted in the creation of the destination image of historic districts.

(2) The R^2 of place attachment was 0.558, indicating that visual preference, destination image, and authenticity had above-average explanatory power for place attachment. The path analysis showed that H4 (visual preference $\rightarrow$ place attachment), H5 (authenticity $\rightarrow$ place attachment), and H6 (destination image $\rightarrow$ place attachment) were supported, indicating that the formative factors of place attachment include tourists' visual preference, evaluation of authenticity, and destination image. These results are consistent with those of previous research regarding the correlation between the environment and place attachment [89], authenticity being an antecedent to place attachment [91], and the

effect of destination image on place attachment [97,98]. Accordingly, in terms of historic districts rich in old building resources with commerciality, tourists' place attachment should be developed taking into account landscape visual design, authenticity experience design, and destination image.

(3) The values of the mediating effect show that H7 (visual preference → destination image → place attachment) was not supported, while H8 (authenticity → destination image → place attachment) and H9 (cultural heritage value → destination image → place attachment) were supported. We believe that the reason H7 was not supported might be related to the formation process of visual preference. In this study, visual preference was related to the formative variables of the preference matrix of Kaplan and Kaplan [49]. The four indicators (coherence, complexity, legibility, and mystery) that form visual preference are the visual representation features after the visual information is processed by four means: immediate understanding, immediate exploration, inferred understanding, and inferred exploration. This means that the tourists processed the visual landscape information in their brains during the formation of the visual preference. According to the results of H1, H4, and H7, rather than the destination image, tourists' visual preference can directly influence place attachment. We can employ the stimulus–organism–response (SOR) model to find that coherence, complexity, legibility, and mystery represent four different kinds of visual information stimulation (S). Place attachment is the response (R) to the emotional bond between people and the place, while visual preference can be taken as the expression of the processing of visual information by the tourists (taking tourists as the organism). The results of H8 and H9 were supported, which can also be understood using SOR theory. To explain the process of tourists getting attached to a place, we can take the tourists' cognitive cultural heritage values and experienced authenticity as the information stimulation (S) perceived by the tourists in a place, place attachment as the response (R) to the emotional bond between people and the place, and destination image as the mental image formed by the tourists (taking tourists as the organism). Therefore, we believe that in historic districts with rich building resources, the large amount of visual environment landscape information received by tourists is a kind of material stimulus that can lead to the formation of visual preference, thus igniting place attachment. However, tourists' cognitive cultural heritage values and experience authenticity are based on situational stimuli and ignite place attachment via destination image.

6. Suggestions and Conclusions

6.1. Suggestions for the Sustainable Development of the Historic District Landscape

The research purpose of this study was to explore how the landscape stimulus of historic districts ignites tourists' place attachment. This study mainly put forward suggestions for the sustainable development of historic district landscapes, aiming at the landscape variables that can directly influence place attachment, including the dimensions of landscapes that should be focused on and the landscapes that should be primarily protected or renovated. These suggestions are suitable for historic districts rich in old building resources with commerciality. Such suggestions will serve as a reference for planning historic district landscapes and building landscapes that foster place attachment among tourists, thus promoting the sustainable development of the historic district landscape.

(1) H4 (visual preference→place attachment) was supported, indicating that when planning the landscapes of historic districts of a similar type, we should consider protecting and renovating historic district landscapes in compliance with the outer weight values of the four factors of visual preference in this study. The outer weight values show that the preference of tourists in terms of the visual information features of the historic district landscapes from the highest to the lowest are mystery, complexity, legibility, and coherence. Regarding mystery, we suggest that the details of carved patterns on old buildings be mainly displayed on paper brochures, tourism websites, display boards of the scenic spots, and other carriers, and the symbolic meanings of such patterns be noted in simple words so as to increase the mystery of the visual information of the landscape and attract tourists

to explore the information on the old buildings when visiting. Regarding complexity, we should preserve the primary form and color diversity of old street buildings, especially the form and color of original building elevations with diverse styles. Regarding legibility, we suggest that merchants who own shops in the historic districts design shop signs and logos that combine the different styles of the old buildings where they are located to improve the legibility of different buildings and shops in the groups of buildings in old streets. Regarding coherence, we suggest that the visual styles of commercial shops in historic districts be kept consistent with the old buildings where such shops are located to the greatest extent possible, but we do not recommend a unified style for shop signs or color modifications for buildings for consistent visual styling.

(2) H5 (authenticity→place attachment) was supported, indicating that, for historic districts of a similar type, we should consider the authenticity of landscapes when building historic district landscapes with an eye to tourists' place attachment. The outer loadings of both object-based authenticity and existential authenticity had the same high value, indicating that we should ensure the authenticity of the historic district landscape in both material and human respects. Thus, we suggest preserving the architectural form and original lifestyle by taking measures such as preventing damage to original buildings when renovating stores, enriching the presentation of old buildings and local display boards in shops, and preserving and organizing traditional cultural events so tourists can experience the culture and history of the historic district.

6.2. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to provide a reference for the design of sustainable historic district landscapes by exploring the formation process of tourists' place attachment to historic districts from the perspective of landscapes, identifying the dimensions of tourists' evaluation of the landscapes of historic districts, and establishing a model of the correlation between tourists' landscape evaluation and place attachment.

The theoretical values of the study can be divided into two aspects. First, based on the literature and features of historic districts, the study put forward three dimensions of landscape evaluation of historic districts, i.e., visual preference, cultural heritage values, and authenticity, and the corresponding measurement standards. As indicated by the results of the measurement model, these three dimensions have correlation and discrimination validity. This study provides a theoretical reference for dimension measurement for landscape evaluation of historic districts. Second, this study established a model of the correlation between tourists' landscape evaluation and place attachment. The overall framework of this research model refers to the modified SOR model by Belk [34], adopting the model, which was originally used in the field of consumption environment, in the tourism environment of historic districts. In line with PLS structural equation model data validation, this model verifies our hypothesis that tourists' cognitive cultural heritage values and experience authenticity are based on the situational stimulus, which needs to ignite place attachment via the destination image. The research model demonstrates how the landscape stimulus of historic districts ignites place attachment among tourists, providing a theoretical reference for the forming process of place attachment.

The practical value of the study lies in the reference it provides for the sustainable landscape planning of historic districts of a similar type. The study site could be regarded as a typical historic district rich in old building resources with commerciality. Thanks to the coverage of multiple regions in Taiwan and several age groups in the questionnaire samples, the sample size is statistically convincing and ensures that the research findings herein can be applied to historic districts of a similar type. The data results of different variables and factors of the measurement model and the structural model reflect the specific aspects based on which the landscapes of historic districts of a similar type could be planned to ignite place attachment among tourists. For instance, from the discussion of what kind of historic district landscapes tourists favor, it is clear that among the visual preference variables, tourists have the highest preference for mystery, which has to do with

the diverse style of groups of old buildings in the historic district. The discussion of what kind of landscape stimulus could ignite place attachment among tourists indicates that tourists' visual landscape preference, authenticity experience, and destination image could ignite place attachment among them. It has to do with the rich old building resources and commerciality in the historic district. Therefore, on the basis of the results, this study recommends the sustainable development of historic districts by focusing on (protecting or renovating) landscape dimensions.

This study has some limitations. Future studies may arrange for extension or supplementation as a solution to our current limitations. First, we took a historic district case that is rich in old building resources with commerciality. The findings and recommendations are applicable to this type of historic district. In future research, we will consider conducting comparative studies of historic districts in multiple cities or selecting other types of historic districts as the research object. Second, this is a cross-sectional study with a time limitation. Similar research across a longer time span would be useful. Third, tourists' perception of the environment does not include only visual elements. We believe that sound and taste are also important environmental factors in commercial streets in historic districts. In future research on the landscapes of historic districts, in addition to visual stimuli, we will consider other perceptions of tourists regarding landscapes.

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