

Red heart at dark sites: The production of embodied patriotic ritual in tourism

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ABSTRACT

“Red tourism” serves political and educational functions. It could take dark tourism sites as the spatial basis for constructing the red experience, with patriotism cultivation as the result. Taking the Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders as a case study, this research integrates field survey data, spatial luminosity, and user-generated content. It explores how the museum space unifies the spiritual production of body (visual darkness), experience (dark and red experiences), and patriotism, illustrates how the official discourse constructs the sites as a red experience, and demonstrates the process of transforming abstract history into individual psychological experiences through bodily and personal narration. Furthermore, this research constructs an approach from individual to collective emotion and the production mechanism of patriotism. The study offers a new reference for tourism experience and provides a highly representative case and theoretical analysis for “dark” and “red” tourism.

1. Introduction

Tourism is closely related to nationalism (Pretes, 2003), and “red tourism” is a typical politicalized type of tourism in China. It is an important political propaganda measure (Zhang & Ma, 2020) and a functional way to spread and innovate socialist core values (Dai, Bai, & Liang, 2021). In China, red tourism has created a huge market. From 2004 to 2019, the number of red tourists increased from 140 million to 1.41 billion. The total number of red tourism arrivals in the first half of 2021 increased by 268.8% compared to 2019 (China Red Tourism Development Report, 2022).

The huge red tourism market brings not only economic benefits, but

more importantly, it has distinct political functions and is an effective means of strengthening patriotism education and national identity (Liu, Huang, Yu, Bao, & Mo, 2021) through ritual experience (Zhang & Liu, 2021). Red tourism contains monuments and symbols to honor the great achievements of individuals under the Communist Party of China’s leadership during the revolution. It uses the war as a backdrop and applies the revolutionary history, actions, and spirit as the emotional basis for organizing and welcoming visitors who engage in themed sightseeing, education, and remembrance activities (Fu, 2020).

It is worth noting that, historically, the analysis of the foregoing issues was exclusively within the scope of dark tourism since the basis of red tourist destinations is commonly a space that conveys the nature of

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war, sacrifice, or death. However, China produced its own characteristic vocabulary—red tourism—which has become an expansive product that integrates tourism, politics, and education (Jiao, Li, Tian, Wu, & Yang, 2022), and thereby has produced a huge market and communicated ideological values. There are political uses for tourism all over the world, such as “moral political tourism” (Connell, 2017). In previous dark tourism studies, researchers have identified the role of disaster sites in national identity, and have pointed out that the background space of disaster sites is the environmental basis for arousing residents’ collective memory (Qian et al., 2018) or unifying people as a community (Farrelly F. 2019; Soulard, Stewart, Larson, & Samson, 2023). At the regional level, moreover, the geographical location closely related to national political factors can trigger stronger patriotism (Liu, Li, & Li, 2021). Indeed, Gieling and Ong (2016) showed that the experience of visiting war sites can help promote the construction of national identity. Researchers have also found that some countries emphasize nationality in the construction of war tourism; for example, Vietnam emphasizes the solidarity issue and national heroes in war tourism (Biran & Buda, 2018; Nawijn & Biran, 2019; Sarkar, Chakraborty, & Valeri, 2021).

At the practical level, the experience production in the red tourism space takes the “dark” visual space as the carrier, such as different spatial brightness (Mowatt & Chancellor, 2011; Sun & Lv, 2021), but based on the political-laden narrative and the unique embodied process, the red emotion is constructed in a unique cultural background. This discussion is complex on practical levels and leads to the following questions: What is the embodied experience of red tourism at a dark site? How can dark historical facts be demonstrated to inspire the bodily and psychological participation of visitors? How can the grand narrative be transformed into a space of individual empathy? How can dark sites associated with death produce patriotic feelings? Answering the above questions can provide explanations and references for the cultivation of ideology, and provide specific paths for the political construction of tourism.

2. Literature review

2.1. From dark to red tourism

Visiting sites of death, disaster, and the seemingly macabre has been conceptualized as dark tourism (Foley & Lennon, 1996; Lennon & Foley, 2000; Stone & Sharpley, 2008). Researchers have also suggested the name “disaster tourism” (Wang, Chen, & Xu, 2019) to describe journeys to disaster memorials or disaster sites; “thanatourism” to describe journeys that are driven in part or entirely by the desire for actual or symbolic contact with death (Seaton, 1996). Previously, dark tourism researchers also differentiated among types of darkness/lightness according to the intensity of exposure to death or suffering associated with the destination. Furthermore, Biran, Poria, and Oren (2011) argued that the darkest sites that include sites of death are characterized by bigger political and ideological influence. Further, Chinese scholar pointed out the connections of dark tourism and red tourism by tracing it back to the study of communist heritage tourism (Gao, Zhang, & Wang, 2020).

Although the practice of red tourism has long existed, the concept of red tourism was officially proposed in the tourism market in the late 1990s (Yu, Zhang, & Chen, 2008). Since the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued the 2004–2010 National Red Tourism Development Plan Outline, more than 100 policies related to red tourism have been announced (Song, Liang, & Zhang, 2023) to promote the rapid development of red tourism and its research. In the past two decades, the research focus of red tourism has gradually evolved from macro resource development and strategy research (such as Lu, 2006; Ma, Li Liang, Li, & Bai, 2005) to micro experience and emotional research (such as Cheng, Wang, Tang, Shang, & Zhang, 2023).

In the deep exploration of the red experience, researchers have gradually realized the close intersection between red tourism and dark

tourism (Jin, Lu, & Zeng, 2017; He, 2012). From the perspective of the material foundation of tourism, red tourism destinations are usually based on war sites, sacrifice sites, or memorial sites, which coincide frequently with dark tourism destinations. Thus, in previous studies, war sites were typically considered dark tourism destinations (Cui, Cheng, Xin, Hua, & Yao, 2020; Shen, Wang, Liu, Wu, & Zheng, 2021). In China, most of the tourism resources related to World War II have been developed into red tourism (She & Zhang, 2011). From the perspective of the ritual process, red tourists achieve individual or collective identity (Xu, 2016) or transformative experiences (eg, Martini & Sharma, 2022) through experiencing the ritual process, which is also an important feature of dark tourism (eg, Fabros, Lopez, & Roma, 2023; Kidron, 2013). From the perspective of the political function of tourism, both red tourism and dark tourism often carries the task of political preaching (He, 2012). From a social perspective, the development of dark tourism in China has the similar educational and commemorative role as red tourism (Gao et al., 2020).

However, although both red tourism and dark tourism are often strongly associated with death, their core experience differ in both supply-side and experience-side. Dark tourism produces a series of complex experiences—both individual and collective—around “death,” such as voyeurism (Isaac, Nawijn, van Liempt, & Gridnevsky, 2019), fascination with suffering, remembrance (Bhati et al., 2021), and paying homage to victims of past atrocities (Nhlabathi & Maharaj, 2020). By contrast, besides many other emotions (such as anger, sadness, respect et al. that will be discussed later in this article), red tourism’s main theme locates on the collective emotions that produce patriotism. For example, in the Nanjing Holocaust victim’s memorial hall, few visitors expressed their motivation for death (Fang, Huang, Tu, & Wang, 2013). It has been pointed out that the way visitors experience a battlefield site has not been fully explored (Bornarel, Delacour, Liarte, & Virgili, 2021; Light, 2017; Miles, 2014); thus, an analysis of red tourism destinations can help us understand this unique but widely popular type of tourism.

2.2. Red tourism and patriotic ritual at dark sites

Red tourism based on dark sites is closely related to rituals. In some dark destinations, visitors face death-related realities through rituals consisting of blood (realistic or symbolic) and exposure to death (Podoshen, Yan, Andrzejewski, Wallin, & Venkatesh, 2018). These rituals, which are built around sacrifice and death are especially associated with collective emotions such as nationhood (Slade, 2003) or nationalistic pride (Hyde & Harman, 2011) in the traditional dark tourism, and also connected with concepts such as pilgrimage remembrance (Dunkley, Morgan, & Westwood, 2011; Kidron, 2013; Stone, 2012), collective obligation (Dimitrovski, Senić, Marić, & Marinković, 2017; Kang, Scott, Lee, & Ballantyne, 2012; Tang, 2014), and learning processes relating to responsibility (Isaac et al., 2019).

In traditional dark tourism research, a major issue lies in its moral contradictions. In the past, positive and negative emotions have been seen as opposites and mutually exclusive (Nawijn & Biran, 2019). In this context, the discovery of some positive or meaningful experiences, such as ceremony, memorializing, and awe, in dark tourism has become an important explanation to alleviate any moral contradiction (Wang, Shen, Zheng, Wu, & Cao, 2021). Unlike the above patchwork of explanations, the concept of “red tourism” provide a resolution for the moral dilemma of dark tourism with a clear value focus (Chen & Xu, 2021). As Collins-Kreiner (2016) states, dark tourist destinations can be reconstructed as quasi-religious shrines, thus integrating the negative and positive emotions of dark sites into the red experience. Red tourism must construct a “red” experience that is based on facts with war as the background and thereby realize the process of spiritual construction. In this process, space plays a fundamental role. As Martini and Buda (2020) discovered, a tourism experience can be an effective socio-spatial encounter. That is, through the construction of collective ceremony in dark sites, red tourism produces the individual’s national consciousness,

national identity, and patriotic actions (Guo, Chen, & Luo, 2021), and thus reconstructs the disaster into a future-oriented space with patriotism as the ultimate goal.

2.3. Visual embodiment in dark/red tourism

Embodiment is crucial in the subjectivity of the tourism experience (Miller and Casino, 2020). There is a classic concept in hospitality research, namely servicescape, which originally describes the embodied experience of the environment such as comfort, signage clarity (Taheri, Olya, Ali, & Gannon, 2020) and how the design of environments could produce specific buyers' emotional effects that enhance his/her purchase probability (Kotler, 1973, p. 50). In recent years, the concept of servicescape has evolved from physical surroundings to also include social components (Lin, Gursoy, & Zhang, 2020), especially when it is used in heritage study, the symbolic experience (Gilmore & Magee, 2018) and visitor interactivity are considered to be important elements (Ardley, Taylor, McLintock, Martin, & Leonard, 2012). Dark tourism researchers pointed out the importance of consumers' active participation in completing the servicescape (Chronis, 2007) and its function in the co-creation of societal mission (Magee & Gilmore, 2015). Due to dark tourism's controversial nature, dark sites as a servicescape need to be legitimized (Chronis, 2019). Based on the above, this study conducts a more targeted exploration regarding servicescape theory, focusing on the ritual activity which contains symbolic experience, co-creation, and the legitimization process of gazing at dark events.

Within the framework of embodiment, the visual sense is considered to be the dominant sense (Agapito, 2020; Krishna, 2012), and is closely related to embodied and affective particularities (Jensen, 2016a, 2016b). As a result, the visual analytic approach in tourism research has been useful for gaining deeper insights and understanding (Cheng & Edwards, 2015). For example, Huang and Wang (2018) discovered that in the same destination, different "day and night" brightness could result in distinctive perceptions. In dark tourism, visual study is particularly important. Indeed, research has shown that the visual sense in dark tourism could affect dozens of emotions (Xie & Sun, 2018; Sun & Lv, 2024), and different degrees of visual darkness lead to different levels of emotions (Lv, Lu, Xu, Sun, & Yang, 2022; Lv, Luo, et al., 2022). However, previous visual study in dark tourism mainly focused on photos and videos, and most of the study materials were posted by tourists after they had visited a site (e.g., Cheng & Edwards, 2015; Fusté-Forné, 2022; Wang, Tsai, & Tang, 2019). Against this background, researchers have pointed out the limited use of visual resources (Light, 2017). In dark tourism, the tourist's on-site experience is considered the key to decoding the complex physiological process; thus, the use of "on-site" visual materials should be further explored.

3. Research gaps and objectives

Although previous explorations of dark sites involved topics such as collective identity, collective memory or narrative (Podoshen et al., 2015). But overall, the patriotic related feelings in dark tourism was mostly discussed as one of the multiple emotions, while red tourism takes patriotic experience as the ultimate experience, becoming a unique case. Red tourism based on dark sites with Chinese political characteristics takes the production of patriotic feelings as the ultimate purpose, which is different from the framework of previous dark tourism. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify the process behind the production of a red tourism experience that is based on dark sites.

Additionally, previous dark tourism research using visual methods often applied pictures and videos that are ex post materials. To understand red experiences generated from traditionally dark sites, research is needed to explore the multi-dimensional experience based on the visual experience and the on-site body. This calls for the application of visual material that is produced from on-site data collection and direct visual measurement.

Studies have discussed the emotional results at the individual level; however, in red destinations that are based on dark sites, the curial spirit lies in the production of collective activities and experience (Wang, Li, Fu, Hou, & Lu, 2024), such as the model of "red tourism experience-collective memory-national identification" developed by Qian, Zheng, Wang & Guo (2023). How, then, can dark historical facts and the construction of an on-site experience be transformed into collective political emotion? To provide answers to these questions, we take the Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders as the case. This museum is considered to be at the darkest edge of the dark tourism spectrum and has a high political significance (Stone, 2006; Zhang, Yang, Zheng, & Zhang, 2016). It combines the characteristics of dark tourism destinations and the core of the red tourism spirit, thus is considered a prime object for investigation.

Based on the above, the research objectives are as follows: explaining the process of the red experience production on dark sites by exploring the spatial and the content design; explaining the ritual process that transforms the dark historical experience into red spiritual result; discovering the connection between disaster and patriotism, body and experience, individual and collective. In brief, disclosing the transformation from "dark" to "red".

4. Research methods

4.1. Research case

The Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders is located in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, China. It is situated on the site of the Nanjing Massacre, and is the place where the victims are buried. Established in 1985, this memorial hall is one of the "300 national red tourism classic scenic spots" published in *The List of National Red Tourism Classic Scenic Spots* (Liu, Huang, Yu, Bao, & Mo, 2021), the first of China's patriotism education bases, the first of China's national key cultural relics protection units, the first of China's national first-class museums, and it is the venue for China's national public memorial ceremony. It could be considered as the most representative red tourism destination (Liu, Huang, et al., 2021) and dark tourism destination (Shen et al., 2021). The focus of the present study is the main hall in the memorial. According to the specified tour route, it contains nine themed regions, presented in chronological order: Region 1, names and photos of victims; Region 2, the situation before the fall of Nanjing; Region 3, the Nanjing defense war; Region 4, Japanese atrocities in Nanjing; Region 5, humanitarian rescue; Region 6, what the world knows and Japan's cover-up; Region 7, Nanjing after the massacre; Region 8, post-war investigation and trial; Region 9, human memory and vision for peace.

4.2. Data collection and analysis

Data collection comprised two approaches. One approach was field data collection of spatial illuminance in the memorial hall. This method is used in previous studies regarding how the lightness in museum influencing visitors' emotions (eg. Wang, Nagai, Liu, Zou, & Liang, 2020; Wang, Nagai, Zhu, Liu, & Zou, 2019) and proved effective. From February 6 to 15, 2022, the research team conducted on-site illuminance measurements by using an illuminance meter. The detailed steps are described in Study 1.

The second data collection approach was the use of user-generated content (UGC), which is considered an effective way to understand complex experiences in dark tourism (Cui et al., 2020). As one of the most important travel websites in China, Mafengwo has more than 130 million registered users and provides travel strategies covering more than 60,000 destinations around the world (Mafengwo, 2022). It is one of the most important travel review platforms in China. The data excavation procedure was conducted from February 26 to March 28, 2022, and the collected data included all comments posted on the website regarding the Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing Massacre by

Japanese Invaders from January 2019 to February 2022. In total, more than 3526 comments were recorded, low-quality samples (content too short, duplicate, unrelated to the memorial, etc.) were deleted, and 814 comments containing images were retained. From those 814 comments, 102,000 words and 2619 pictures were captured.

Data analysis comprised three different methods. The first was data analysis of the spatial luminosity in the museum (Study 1), the second was a quantitative analysis of the UGC text (Study 2), and the third was a qualitative content and semantic analysis of the text and pictures obtained from both the website and the field investigation (Study 1 and Study 2). The content analysis based on tourists' comments is commonly used in tourism studies, including thematic analysis (Sinclair-Maragh & Simpson, 2021), emotional words analysis and deep reading to the comments (Bigne, Fuentes-Medina, & Morini-Marrero, 2020). In analyzing emotional experience, researchers apply online reviews, read into the emotional tone, calculates the number of specific words and produces the percentage of a specific emotion category (Yousaf & Kim, 2023). This is also one of the approaches used in this study.

5. Study 1: embodied and psychological experience in the Nanjing Memorial Hall space

5.1. Study process

Study 1 was a joint analysis of the visual-psychological space experience, which comprised the illuminance experience and spatial content experience. Precious study has showed that the stimulation of visual darkness affected dark tourists' psychological experience and behavioral intentions (Lv, Lu, et al., 2022). This study aims to explore more specific experiential content beyond previous research. To begin, a spatial distribution and spatial luminosity measurement procedure was conducted in the Nanjing Memorial Hall. For the measurement method of brightness, we referred to the study of Wang et al. (2020) and Wang, Nagai, et al. (2019). In this study, the space area was divided into 9 grids and 266 measuring points. The illuminance was measured at each point. This point-grid measurement method is widely used for brightness measurement in indoor spaces such as museums, and is an ideal method for brightness measurement in irregular spaces with multiple light sources. The measurement adopts the commonly used metering equipment in lighting engineering, and the Smart Sensor AS803 illuminance meter was used for measurement. It ranges from 1 to 200000 Lux, with a measurement frequency every 0.5 s. This device is particularly capable of measuring low brightness scenes. It ensures the reliability of the actual measurement results.

First, each of the nine theme regions was divided into viewing space (exhibition areas where photos, pictures, audios or videos are displayed) and traffic space (transition zone between different exhibition areas). Then 266 measuring points in total were identified according to the contents. Second, for viewing space, to ensure accurate measurement, we simulated the height and distance of human eye. At each measuring point of viewing space, the illuminance meter was set facing the exhibition board at a height of 1.5 m from the ground and a horizontal distance of about 1.5–2.0 times the height of the exhibit. Third, at each measuring point in the traffic space, the illuminance meter was used to measure and record the data at a height of 1.5 m from the ground. In the traffic space, illuminance values were measured along the corridor and the visiting route/passage in the museum.

We used multiple measurements to ensure the accuracy of the data results. Three researchers were invited to conduct the measurement process independently. Once three researchers measured the consistent values of a measuring point, that this value was recorded. If there was a significant difference between the measurement results, three researchers then independently measured it again until a consensus was reached. This ensured that the measured results are trustworthy. A total of nine regions comprising 266 illumination points were identified to measure spatial brightness. Next, for each of the nine regions, the

average values for the viewing space and traffic space regions were calculated, and a visual luminosity experience map of the space of the Nanjing Memorial Hall was created (Fig. 1).

At the same time, the study conducted content analysis on the theme areas (Names and photos of victims- The situation before the fall of Nanjing- Nanjing defense war- Japanese atrocities in Nanjing- Humanitarian rescue- What the world knows and Japan's cover up- Nanjing after the massacre- Post war investigation and trial- Human memory and vision of peace) and also on the visitors' comments regarding each area. After measuring the dark-light process, this study descriptively matched the spatial content, process of experience, and changes in brightness. Manual analysis was performed to discover themes, which is an approach proved effectively by previous researchers (Nikoline & Dybsand, 2020). This analysis of the spatial environment and content construction lays the foundation for the subsequent analysis of the ritual process.

5.2. Results

Fig. 1 illustrates the darkness/brightness of illuminance level in each of the 266 squares; the darker the physical space was, the darker the color shown on the map was. The reviews about each of the nine regions posted on the Mafengwo website were analyzed, including the experience characteristics reported for each specific region. As illustrated in Fig. 1, the darkest space is the entrance region (lower right). Then, as the tourists' visiting path moves to the left, the space gradually becomes brighter, reaching the brightest level at the exit (upper left). In terms of spatial content, the visual experience of different illuminance levels corresponded to different topics, which also produced different tourist experiences.

Further analysis showed that the process of experiencing the Nanjing Memorial Hall comprised three parts. The first part contained Regions 1 to 4, with the themes of "names and photos of victims" (Region 1), "the situation before the fall of Nanjing" (Region 2), "Nanjing defense war" (Region 3), and "Japanese atrocities in Nanjing" (Region 4). A dark visual tone characterizes these four areas, and the dark atmosphere created depressing experiences, as exemplified by this visitor's comment: "*with gray walls, dim lights and choking voices, it's really painful to imagine that the living people were slaughtered*" [R1-C1-L3]. The second part includes regions 5 to 8. In Region 5 ("humanitarian rescue"), the brightness of the light begins to increase and the overall atmosphere brightens slightly. In Region 6 ("what the world knows and Japan's cover-up"), the light brightens significantly, and in Region 7 ("Nanjing after the massacre") and Region 8 ("post-war investigation and trial"), the light continues to brighten. Thus, the story of seeking justice is told with the background of a gradually lightning space, as conveyed in this example: "*The lights of the venue gradually brightened, the signatures on the surrender and the court's sentence restored calm in Nanjing*" [R7-C33-12]; "*Then we continued to walk, the light changed from dark to slightly brighter, which tells the story of Nanjing city and its people, step by step out of the haze and developing into the present Nanjing*" [R7-C34-14]. The third part contains Region ("human memory and vision of peace"), in which the light creates an atmosphere of victory and hope. At the exit, the height of the wall gradually sloped downward from the exit point to farther away from the exit, as people walk out, the view of the sky gradually opens up, finally ushering in the highest degree of brightness. As one visitor expressed: "... *Only when we remember history, turn grief and anger into strength, and strive to create a better life, will we emit more dazzling light like 'peace' and 'dove of peace' in the square ...*" [R9-C11-L10].

Overall, the museum presents three parts with different levels of brightness corresponding to the different content themes. The tourist experience demonstrates the following pattern: visitors first enter the dark disaster space, then gradually experience fighting for justice conveyed by dark facts and space, and finally reach the brighter spaces where they can embrace a bright reality and future hope. The purpose of

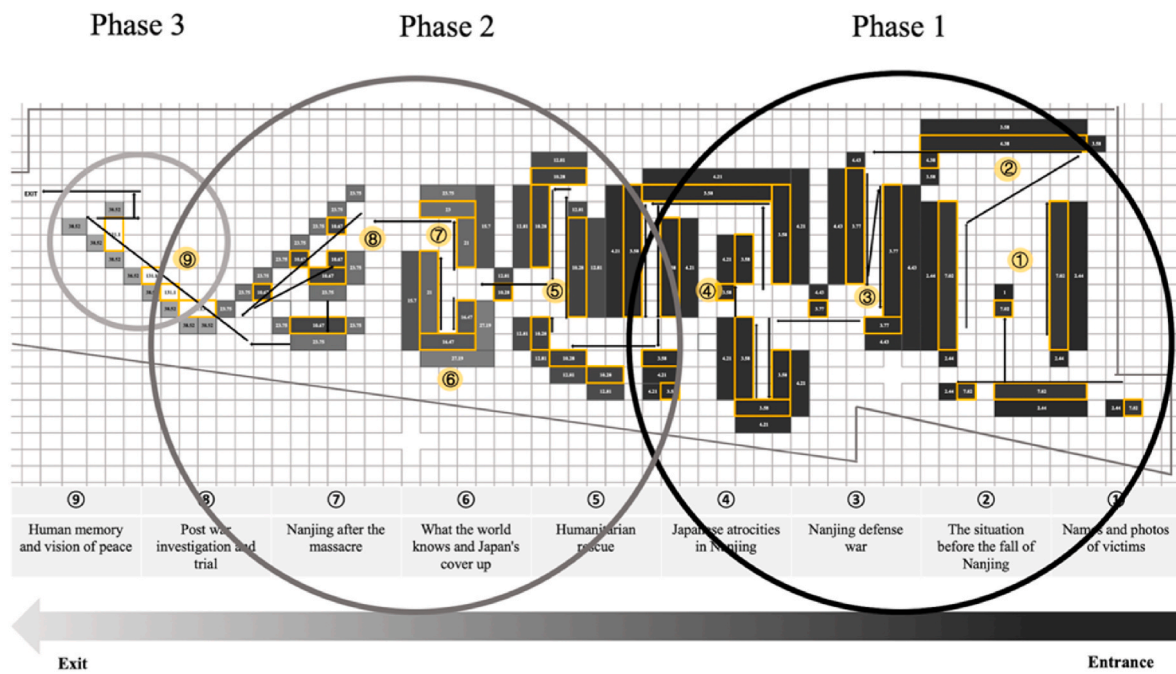


Fig. 1. Distribution of spatial luminosity and memorial topics (The Yellow shading grid represents the traffic space, and the other grids are the viewing space). (For interpretation of the references to color in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the Web version of this article.)

Table 1
Conceptualization sampling of coding.

No.	RE1	RE2	RE3	RE4	RE5
Experience	anger	sadness	mourning	remembrance	respect
Coding examples	... dark lights, dignified eyes and heavy breathing form a torrent of grief and anger ... [R2-C51-L4]	watching an old man talk about the process of moving the body, I didn't have the heart to finish it, for fear that I would cry ... [R1-C2-L2]	... entering the memorial hall there is the high name wall and the names of the victims ... wish them rest in peace ... [R1-C2-L2]	... the wall of the list of victims' heroes is engraved with fresh lives deserving our remembrance ... [R1-C38-L25]	... now, I have to praise the greatness of Chinese soldiers! The strength of the Chinese people! [R3-C3-L9]
Inter-coder reliability	0.83	0.89	0.77	0.63	0.82
Representing color	brown	blue	yellow	green	purple
Concentration ranking	9 regions' concentration ranking of RE1	9 regions' concentration ranking of RE2	9 regions' concentration ranking of RE3	9 regions' concentration ranking of RE4	9 regions' concentration ranking of RE5
Region1 names and photos of victims	2ed	1st	1st	1st	3rd
Region 2 the situation before the fall of Nanjing	4th	3rd	4th	8th	8th
Region 3 the Nanjing defense war	3rd	4th	3rd	5th	2ed
Region 4 Japanese atrocities in Nanjing	1st	2ed	2ed	9th	9th
Region 5 humanitarian rescue	6th	5th	5th	3rd	5th
Region 6 what the world knows and Japan's cover-up	5th	9th	7th	4th	6th
Region 7, Nanjing after the massacre;	7th	6th	6th	7th	1st
Region 8, post-war investigation and trial;	8th	8th	8th	6th	7th
Region 9, human memory and vision for peace.	9th	7th	9th	2ed	4th

these changes in light and of architectural design structures is to guide the psychological experience of visitors from a dark experience to a final integrated experience.

6. Study 2: red experience in dark sites

6.1. Study process

Study 2 was an analysis of tourists' experience of the Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders as reported in their online reviews about the nine spatial regions. First, an overall evaluation was made of the content of 814 reviews, which comprised 102,000 words, and then the reviews that clearly corresponded to any of the nine regions were divided accordingly. Second, we use the coding method to extract the experience of tourists from comments, based on which we can delete information unrelated to the research topic (such as the quality of the mental hall, reception services, and visiting precautions, etc). Specific dimensions of the tourists' red experiences in each of the nine regions were scored. Specifically, the coding process adopted the measurement categories for red experiences (RE) in red tourism, verified by Liu, Huang, et al. (2021): RE1–anger, RE2–sadness, RE3–mourning, RE4–remembrance, and RE5–respect. In accordance with the coding method for experiences (Sun & Lv, 2021), 1 point was given for each occurrence of any of the above five experience-related words found in the online reviews. The scoring process was completed by three researchers with dark tourism research experience. The inter-coder reliabilities were calculated as follows: RE1–anger (0.83), RE2–sadness (0.89), RE3–mourning (0.77), RE4–remembrance (0.63), and RE5–respect (0.82); these were higher than 0.60 and were thus considered acceptable (Landis & Koch, 1977; Pearce & Wang, 2019) (Table 1). Finally, a score figure was devised to illustrate the concentration levels of red experience in each of the nine regions in the memorial hall. One color was assigned to each dimension of red experience: brown–anger, blue–sadness, yellow–mourning, green–remembrance, and purple–respect. As shown in Figs. 2 and 3, the proportions of the circles represent the density of the reviews in a given region (Fig. 2); the color transparency (i.e., the degree to which the background grid can be seen behind the color) indicates the intensity of a specific experience in each theme region. The opaquer the color, the more concentrated that experience was in that region (Fig. 3).

6.2. Results

In terms of overall experience concentration, the total number of reviews about Japanese atrocities (Region 4), a vision for peace (Region 9), and the names of victims (Region 1) were the largest; these three regions stimulate tourists to comment most spontaneously. The distribution of experiences (anger, sadness, mourning, remembrance, and respect) showed that different experiences concentration in different regions (Fig. 2). More specifically, the experience concentration of anger was the highest in the region showing the massacre atrocities and the lowest in the vision for peace region; the experience concentration of sadness was the highest in the region of victim names and the lowest in the region showing post-war trials; the experience concentration of mourning was the highest in the victim names region and the lowest in the region showing a vision for peace; the experience concentration of remembrance was the highest in the region of victims' names and the lowest in the region showing the massacre atrocities; the experience concentration of respect was the highest in the region showing humanitarian rescue during the massacre and the lowest in the region showing the atrocities.

7. Patriotic ritual process: red heart on dark sites

The previous text elaborated on the different dark-light experiences and specific emotional experiences at each stage during the museum tour, these experiences ultimately point to the concept of “red heart”. Previous researchers have pointed out that the essence of red tourism is to connect individuals with the history and future of the country, construct identity, and build a sense of collective belonging, social cohesion, and national identity (Xu, 2016). The patriotic heart condensed by these emotions is the metaphorical “red heart”. In Chinese cultural practice, “a red heart” is used to describe a patriotic heart. Next, this study goes beyond descriptive exploration and analyzes the intrinsic mechanisms of the emotional experiences discovered in the previous study, it illustrates the transition from “dark” to “red” through ritualistic processes.

7.1. Ritual process from “dark” to “red”

Turner and Turner's (1969) “ritual process” has been used to explain many ritual-related phenomena in tourism. Although dark tourism

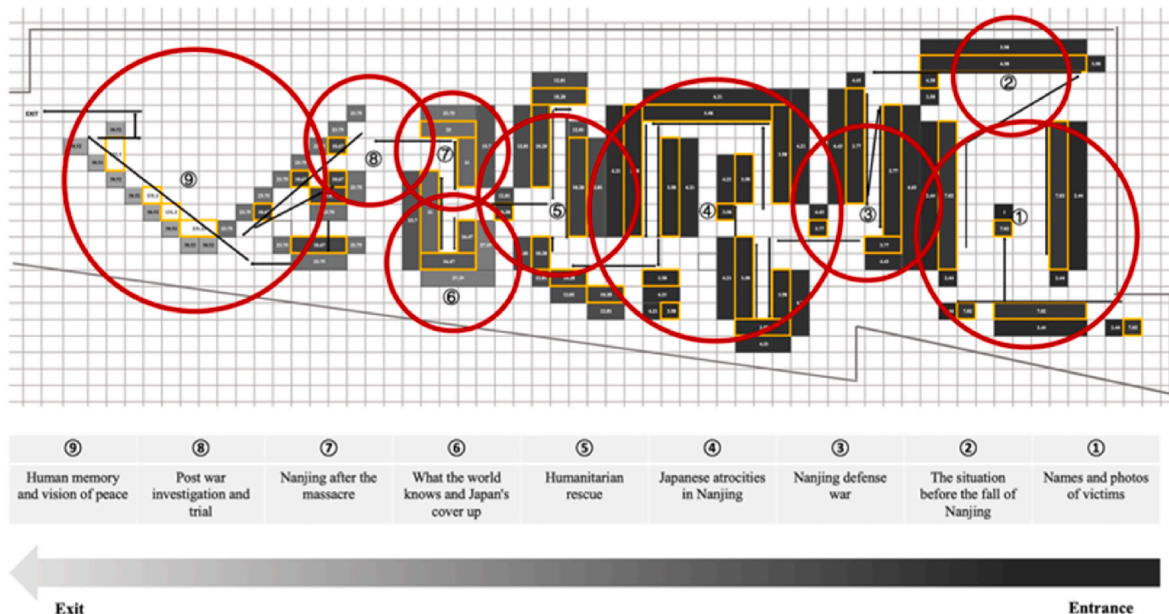


Fig. 2. The density of spontaneous comments regarding each region.

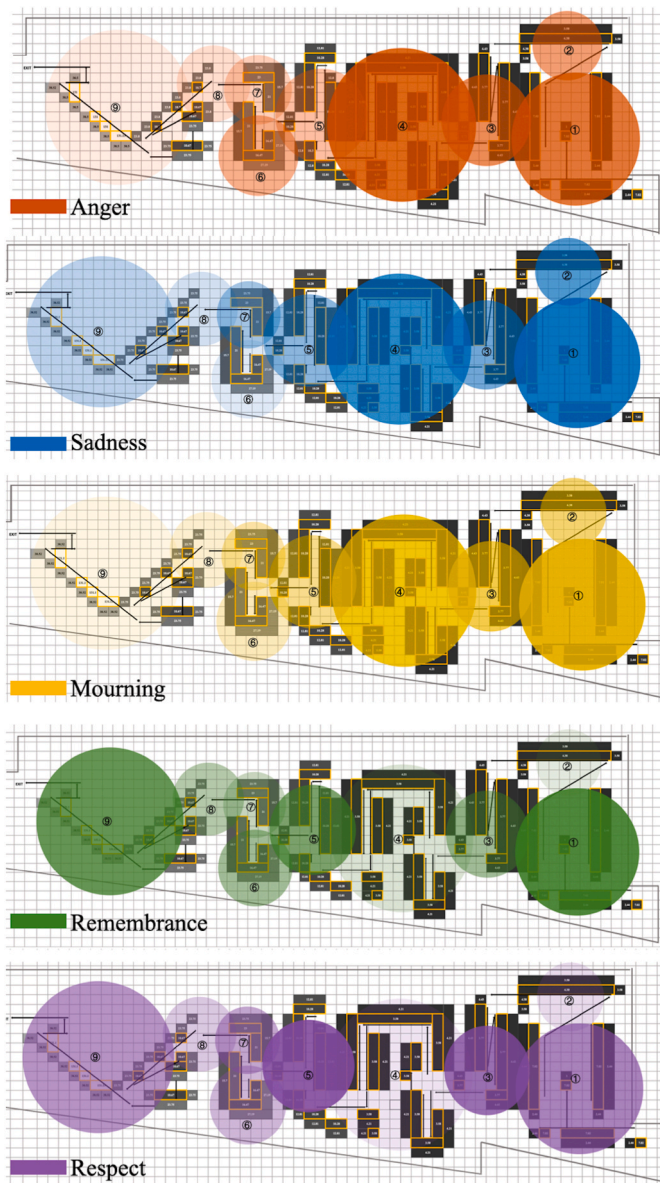


Fig. 3. The route of 5 dimensions of red experience. (For interpretation of the references to color in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the Web version of this article.)

stimulates negative emotions (eg. Kidron, 2013), it is designed to show a peaceful and hopeful future in some cases (eg. Gibson, Yai, & Pratt, 2021; Jang, Sakamoto, & Funck, 2022). In the case of Nanjing, the

present study found that red tourism experiences on dark sites had the following ritual process: “dark historical facts - justice in the darkness - recovery after darkness - red future and hope” (see Fig. 4).

(a) Dark historical experience (dark space/experience of anger and sadness)

Recording and displaying historical facts is one of the basic tasks of dark sites, and it is also the primary mission declaration of history museums. From the visitor’s perspective, understanding facts is the objective basis for their experiences. At the first step of the ritual, the memorial hall guides visitors to learn historical facts and details. Visitors can obtain and digest information through reading, listening, asking, and interacting with displays. To strengthen the authenticity of the presented history, the museum combines macro narration (e.g., repeated occurrences of the number 300,000, which represents the number of victims in the Nanjing Massacre) and personal narration (e.g., personal photos, victims’ names archive, audio and video recordings of the massacre, audiovisual documentary of a victim’s experience in their words, and a simulated dialogue with survivors) to create a somber atmosphere that is dimly lit to construct a heavy sense. At this stage, participants experience darkness physically and anger/sadness psychologically. At the cognitive level, visitors experience a dark narrative that is completely different from the values they share in the real world and learn the logic of “if my country is not strong, I will suffer”.

(b) Justice in darkness and recovery after darkness (increased brightness, experience of mourning, remembrance, and respect)

At the second and third steps of the ritual process, the participants first experience a “silver lining” in the dark history. That is, they experience some light in the dark background (i.e., international rescue and self-struggle) and then the process of obtaining justice (i.e., post-war recovery and trial). At this stage, participants grasp a sense of humanity and fighting in the dark: “the international humanitarian rescue shone a glimmer of hope into the almost dark world at that time” [R5-C29-L22]; a sense of justice after darkness: “when we get to the last chapter, everyone’s facial expression was a little subtle and relaxed. This is the most famous Tokyo Trial in history, Japan’s unconditional surrender!” [R8-C32-L16]; and a sense of the reconstruction of values in the final stage, reconfirming justice in the current world: “justice will come, no matter how late. The mob will eventually pay the price for their actions” [R8-32-L22]. Finally, the participants acknowledge that the realization of justice requires a strong and unyielding collective struggle and are ready to return to the real world.

(c) Red future and hope (high level of brightness, experience of respect and remembrance)

Hope and reflection are not only the ultimate aim of the memorial,



Dark history → Justice in the darkness → Recovery → Red future and hope

Fig. 4. Color experience and content change in the ritual process of red tourism. (For interpretation of the references to color in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the Web version of this article.)

but also the sublimation of visitors' red experience. In a study of a dark destination, Tutu (1999, pp. 33-36) pointed out that although the narrative process introduces past events, it actually locates the possibility of the future. In their study of Alcatraz and Robben Island, Strange and Kempa (2003) argue that these places should be built into memorials that can reflect the great victory of the human spirit in confrontation with evil forces, and the belief that freedom and human dignity defeat oppression and humiliation. In the last region of the memorial hall for the victims of the Nanjing Massacre, namely "human memory and vision of peace," there is a tall column engraved with the sentence, "Never forget the past, it teaches the future"; this summarizes ritual participation and ritual interaction, which transform emotions into identity (Yang, Liu, Li, & Zhou, 2023). At this stage, through the comparison between their current happy life and the dark past, the participants established the belief that the future of the nation will be better, and confirmed the understanding that individual happiness and national power are inseparable.

7.2. Consistency between body and experience

As the smallest spatial scale, the body has both social and biological attributes (Wang, Lin, Jiang, & Zhu, 2017). Continuous physical participation is the key to the continuous production of patriotism. As Fig. 2 illustrates, the distribution of five dimensions of red experiences in the Nanjing Memorial Hall had the following characteristics: experiences with relatively negative attributes (anger, sadness, mourning) were concentrated in the first half of the visit, while experiences with relatively positive attributes (respect and remembrance) increased in the second half of the visit, which was consistent with the change in brightness across the spaces (Fig. 1), and reflected a consistency in the represented embodied and psychological experiences. As the facts became more positive, the concentration of positive experiences increased. For example, in the region of showing the humanitarian assistance that was provided for the people in Nanjing by the international community, the most important experience was "respect." In the region of post-war investigation and trial, the most important experiences were "respect" and "remembrance." Furthermore, the spatial brightness of these two regions tends to be high, reflecting a tonal consistency across facts, visual experience, and psychological experience.

7.3. The production of patriotism from individual narration

The production of patriotic feelings in visitors at the Nanjing Museum can be constructed through three approaches. First, the museum has miniaturized the macro history. In the transmission of dark facts, the museum not only describes atrocities through macro historical descriptions and statistics, but also transforms grand narratives into personal stories through, for example, oral recordings of individual cases, a display of victims' names and photos, and simulated dialogues with survivors. This mechanism creates empathy in the individual, as shown in this visitor's comment: "the walls are full of people who died in the Nanjing Massacre, and there is a starry sky above the roof, as if all the dead people have turned into a star in the sky to protect today's peaceful world ..." [R1-C29-L2]. Second, empathetic visitors can imagine historical facts as if it described their own situation and can thus have a profound experience of the cruel history: "the Japanese aggressors are cruel and savage, I can't help to imagine their ferocious faces and the helplessness of the victims, imagine how suffering it is for the survivors watching their relatives die under the Japanese butcher's knife and machine gun" [R4-C27-L4]. Third, the visitors transform the historical facts into individual experiences, and ultimately realize their deep patriotism: "... I am really here and can he feel that history has really happened!" [R9-C2-L5]. Finally, visitors achieve a high degree of unity between personal feelings and collective patriotic feelings: "... as Chinese, we must remember history—never forget the past, it can be a teacher for the future"; "Only by

commemorating and remembrance, can our nation strengthen itself, know that darkness could be beaten, and China's dragon can rise and take off" [R9-C7-L26].

7.4. A model of red heart production at dark sites

Based on the production process of red experiences explored earlier, a model of red heart production at dark sites is summarized (Fig. 5). It illustrates the inherent relationship between dark sites and red tourism and the mechanism of tourists' onsite experience produced by spatial luminosity, rituals, and narratives. Rituals are implemented through bodily co-presence and emotional energy (Xiang, Huang, Gao, & Lai, 2022), the patriotic ritual process especially requires a dual presence of mind and body. In terms of embodied experience, dark sites design a spatial brightness experience from dark to light; In terms of narrative, it creates a ritual process from negative facts to positive values in narrative. Previous studies have pointed out, narration management is closely related to spiritual tourism, and narrative methods have a significant impact on the result of spiritual experiences, such as nostalgia (Bandyopadhyay, 2022) or identity formation (Prince, 2021). In the narrative of red tourism, tourists undergo a transformation from grand narratives to individual stories, transform historical facts into individual patriotic emotional experiences based on individual empathy, and achieve the ritual process of patriotic feelings. Overall, red tourism takes dark sites as a material foundation and is guided by red values. Through the transformation of physical experience, psychological experience, and narrative experience, the moral contradictions of dark sites have also found a rationalized value construction path.

8. Discussion

Due to the intersection between red tourism and dark sites, this article mainly explores how to transition from the dark base to the red experience. Red tourism based on dark history needs to undergo a transformation process from the display of the negative facts to profound positive experiences. Through the analysis of spatial brightness design, narrative construction, ritual process, and physical and psychological experiences, the study analyzed the process of red tourism production, and pointed out a path in which the red values could be used to solve the moral contradictions of dark sites as tourism destinations.

The present findings offer theoretical contributions in four distinct contexts. First, the research explored the type of tourism that has strong political characteristics (red tourism), identified its intersection and differences with traditional dark tourism, analyzed the red experience and the ultimate result of patriotism, revealed how dark sites break through the taboo of death and its moral constraints (Su & Park, 2022; Zheng et al., 2018), and realized the legitimacy of dark sites by introducing the "red".

Second, this study illustrated the symbiosis of positive and negative experiences in red experience, and analyzed how to produce red experience in dark sites through embodied spatial visual experience and content construction. In the study of dark tourism of concentration camp, Goulding and Pressey (2023) illuminated the various atmospheres attached to the multiple spaces, this paper further distinguished different spaces and their ritual process experiences. In addition, the previous work has discussed positive and negative emotions separately in dark tourism experiences (Nawijn, Isaac, Gridnevskiy, & Liempit, 2018), as well as the range of contrasting feelings (Laing & Frost, 2019); the present study further explored the red experience by integrating both positive and negative experiences, and analyzed their production process.

Third, the exploration of luminosity in this study goes beyond the traditional "darker-lighter" analysis in dark tourism. In terms of symbolic significance, previous researchers have proposed the chromaticity of dark tourism from the perspective of destination content, such as the dark tourism spectrum (Stone, 2006); the lighter (entertainment and

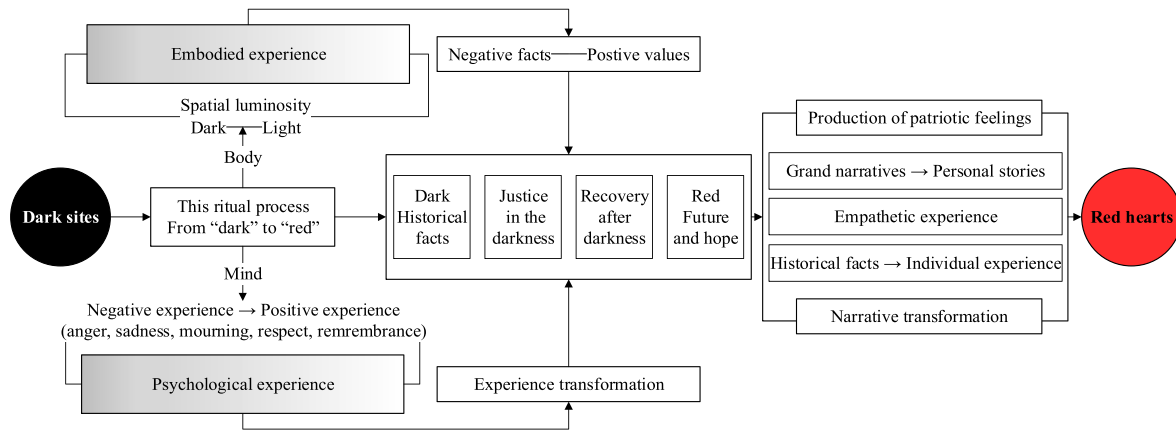


Fig. 5. A model of red heart production at dark sites. (For interpretation of the references to color in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the Web version of this article.)

esthetic experiences) and darker sides (educational and escapist experiences) (Hwang, Park, Lee, Son, & Olya, 2023). This study introduced red on the basis of dark-light dimension, explaining how they work together and bring about a red experience in specific ways. In terms of “darker-lighter” visual sense, although visual research is an important theme and methodology in tourism research, previous analyses typically focused on ex post visual materials, such as pictures and videos (e.g., Jensen, 2016a, 2016b; McMullen, 2020; Scott, Zhang, Le, & Moyle, 2019). The present study analyzed visual luminosity on-site, which reflects the overall spatial atmosphere, and showed the consistency and interaction among spatial brightness, atmosphere, and experience.

Fourth, the present research integrated the body (the visual sense), experience (five dimensions of red experience) and political spiritual, and explored how the dark tourism destination is constructed by patriotic narrative. In terms of research scope, although there are classic theories such as servicescape that describe the impact of the service environment on consumer behavioral tendencies (Chao, Fu, & Liang, 2021), this study analyzed the specific ritual interaction in dark tourism’s servicescape. In terms of content, while previous studies have highlighted the educational function of dark sites (Cohen, 2011; Kim & Barber, 2021), this research further illuminated the ideological education of collective patriotic mentality, and revealed how the museum transforms the grand national history into individual sympathy through individual embodied experiences. The previous study pointed out that narratives of loss and hope affect emotion (Tucker & Shelton, 2018), this research further explored in detail how the transformation process of red tourism’s narrative shapes red patriotism. Earlier, Adu-Ampong (2023) proved that heritage tourism narratives stimulate plural public memories of the past, we further analyzed the possibility of tourism narratives to transform historical memories into empathetic experiences. Working from the Chinese traditional idea that the concept of “nation” is greater than “society” (Sun, 2015, p. 275), this study analyzed the approach of individuals experiencing collective emotion, and outlined the mechanisms underlying the construction of patriotism in red tourism. This ritual process also reflects the uniqueness of spiritual tourism in its transformation characteristics (Willson et al., 2013).

9. Practical implications

Based on the above, we propose the following practical suggestions. Firstly, museums should provide rich historical details in their displays, providing descriptions of specific events and details beyond grand historical narratives, in order to ensure visitors’ empathic perception of historical truth. Adding rich archaeological content can increase historical details, strengthen the dialogue between contemporary society’s experience and history, and promote the preservation of collective

memory through experience. Secondly, as a public institution, red tourism museums can expand their social functions beyond the management of historical exhibits, encourage the public to collect material testimonies and witnesses’ stories, and add individual narratives to museum content. The concretization of history can better stimulate sympathy and experience among visitors and the narratives can further be used by market practitioners (Soulard, McGehee, Stern, & Lamoureux, 2021). Thirdly, in terms of spatial design, the case of the Nanjing Museum can serve as a good inspiration. The design of the museum’s lighting change is an important element in shaping the experience. Lightning can not only construct the negative and positive experiences through the change of brightness, but also shape different types of emotions through different colors (such as dark and red). Besides light, space (such as the vastness and narrowness of space) and sound (such as sad and uplifting music) can also be used to jointly create the ritual process. Fourthly, museums can strengthen continuous communication after visits. From this study, it can be seen that visitors’ comments are posted after the visit, demonstrating their interest in historical events and expectations for the future. Museums can connect interested visitors through the establishment of digital communities and provide a platform for exchanging views and supplementing evidence. This not only helps to promote national education, expand museum functions, but also helps to dynamically preserve history.

10. Conclusions

Red tourism destinations that are located on massacre sites intersect with traditional dark tourism, but the core is red experience. This study explored the process of discovering a red spirit in dark spaces using a framework of five dimensions of red experiences: anger, sadness, mourning, remembrance, and respect. The production of red experiences is not simple emotion integration, but a process of the integration and construction of bodily, spatial, and content experiences. Biological research has clearly demonstrated the influence of light on psychological experience (Li et al., 2022). Focusing on a dark space and the red experience of it, this research found that anger, sadness, and dark visual experiences show spatial consistency, while the sense of reverence, remembrance, and light visual experience show spatial consistency.

Furthermore, the negative and positive experiences in the production of red experience are symbiotic and work jointly toward producing the ultimate experience, that is, patriotism. Indeed, previous studies have identified the positive and negative experiences present in dark sites (Nawijn et al., 2018; Zheng, Zhang, Qiu, Guo, & Zhang, 2020). The present study found that, in addition to the binary judgment, there is a collective ritual process for realizing patriotism: it begins with a dark history of the past, and through a graduated experience of the lighting,

narrative content, and red experience of the venue space, the museum actualizes the visitors' recognition of the consistency between national destiny and individual wellbeing.

Additionally, traditional Chinese culture avoids death-related themes to a great extent, and "invisible death" (Stone, 2020) is typical in Chinese culture; however, by introducing "red" into dark sites, a museum leverages visitors' sense of identity and responsibility (Zheng, Zhang, Qian, Zhang, & Nian, 2016), and constructs the discourse tone for dark sites by generating patriotism. Previous studies have only discussed dark experiences or red experiences; by contrast, this study analyzed the connection of space luminosity and personal experience, and revealed how the spatial discourse constructs red experience on the basis of dark history and realizes the transformation from dark to red.

Finally, in red tourism that is based on dark sites, spatial construction transforms abstract history into personal suffering through individual narration, and closely connects collective memory with individual experience. Previous studies have pointed out that in traditional Chinese culture, the idea that the nation is the most important organizational principle of Chinese society (Sun, 2015, p. 275), which is clearly reflected in the ritual process of red tourism. Taking tourism with a distinctive national political color as an example, this study explored how red tourism located on dark sites realizes the connection and coupling between disaster and patriotism, body and experience, individual and collective, and the ultimate "red" experience.

11. Limitations and future research

According to the dark tourism spectrum and its association with death (Stone, 2006), the Memorial Hall of the Victims in the Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders could be regarded as one of the darkest tourist attractions. This study identified the content of and changes in the intensity of experience at this site. The analysis based on this case clearly identified the changes from dark experience to red experience. However, the process of transformation from dark historical experience to patriotism in many other red tourist destinations with less connection with death also deserves further exploration. Additionally, this study mainly analyzed the embodied experience of the visual sense; however, future embodiment studies could examine multiple sensory experiences, including hearing (Jensen, 2016a, 2016b; Wilson, Chambers, & Johnson, 2019), touch, taste, and temperature (Kock & Ringberg, 2019). In the coding of reviews, we found that tourists mentioned both visual and acoustic experiences, such as "dim lights and choking voices". Integrating luminosity and acoustical data for analysis would be very valuable. In fact, there are also soundscapes arranged in Nanjing Memorial. For example, one display in a little dark room in Nanjing's Memorial Museum features the sound of water. Visitors hear only the sound of water drops every 12 s. Each drop of water represents a life that has lost. This area is designed to generate a powerful emotional response in visitors, and it reflects the substantial importance of sound on emotional experience. This is also a promising future direction for dark/red tourism research. Moreover, not only Chinese tourists but also a large number of international tourists have visited Nanjing Memorial Hall. Thus, in the future, data from international tourists on TripAdvisor

or Virtualtourist can be used, especially those comments from Japanese tourists, for cross-cultural comparisons study. This will yield valuable findings and more generalized theories and knowledge.

Submission declaration and verification

We confirm that this manuscript has not been published previously, it is not under consideration for publication elsewhere, its publication is approved by all authors and tacitly or explicitly by the responsible authorities where the work was carried out. If accepted, it will not be published elsewhere in the same form, in English or in any other language, including electronically without the written consent of the copyright-holder.

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Impact statement

In China, red tourism has a market scale of hundreds of millions of visitors and serves political ends. However, the basis of red tourist destinations is commonly a dark site that conveys the nature of war, sacrifice, or death. Therefore, a theoretical and practical question arises: how does red tourism merge with dark experience?

Thus, this research integrates multiple data and approaches to target this question. It explores the mechanism of physical experience, ritual processes, and psychological experience against a political backdrop producing a multi-dimensional space of "body-experience," "individual-collective," and "dark-red". It explains the process of transforming abstract history into individual psychological experiences, illustrates how the official narrative constructs the dark sites as a red experience, and demonstrates the approach from individual to collective emotion and the production of patriotism.

This study provides explanations and references for the cultivation of ideology and political construction in tourism.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

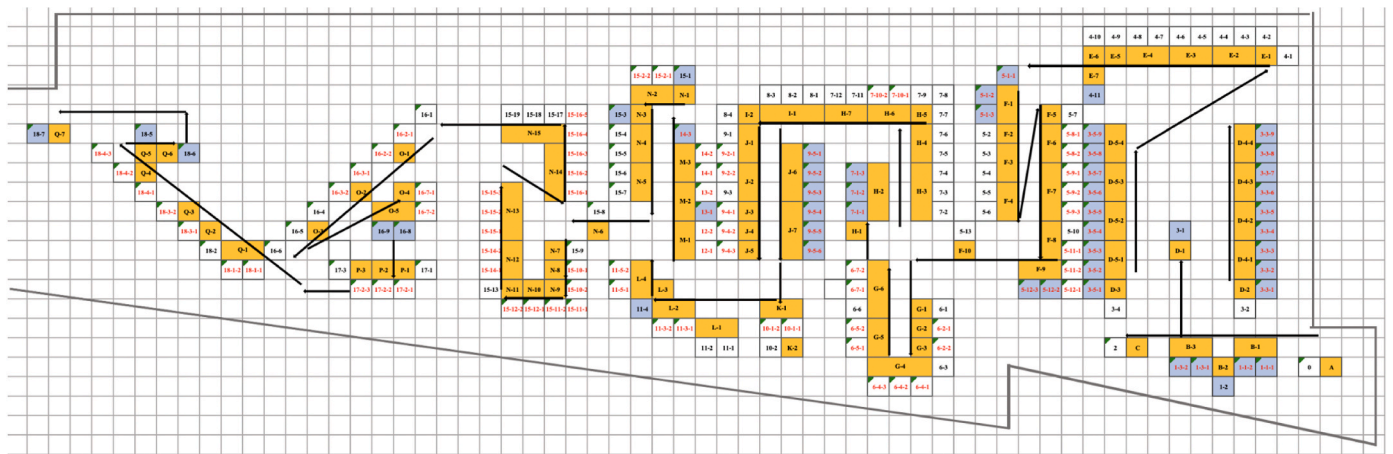
Jiaojiao Sun: Writing – original draft, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation. **Xingyang Lv:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Methodology, Conceptualization.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Location map of illuminance metering points in Study 1



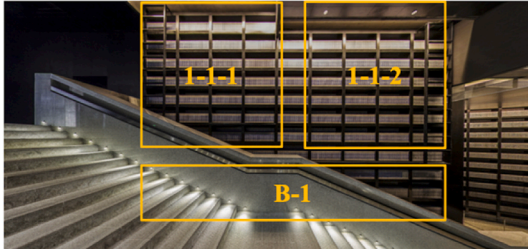
The Yellow shading grid represents the traffic space, and the other grids are the viewing space.
 The blue shading grid indicates the points where photos need to be taken.
 The red font indicates the area requiring light metering and averaging.

Appendix 2. Corresponding diagram of illuminance metering point and the space

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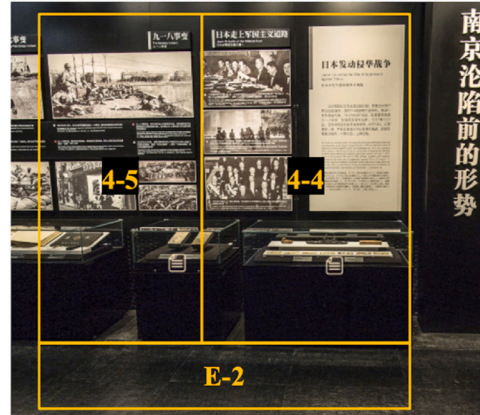
● 1-1-1; 1-1-2; B-1



● 1-2; B-2



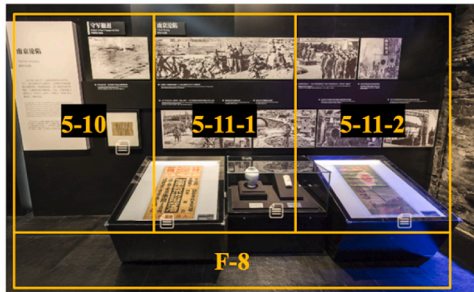
● 4-3; 4-4; E-2



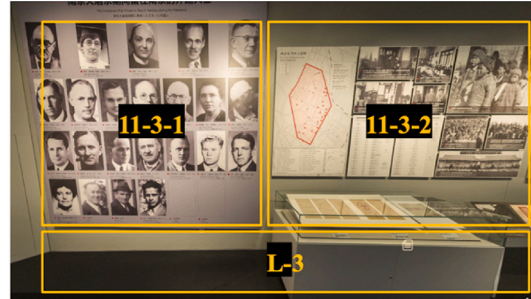
● 4-5; 4-6; E-3



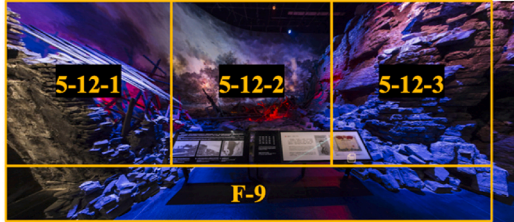
● 5-10; 5-11-1; 5-11-2; F-8



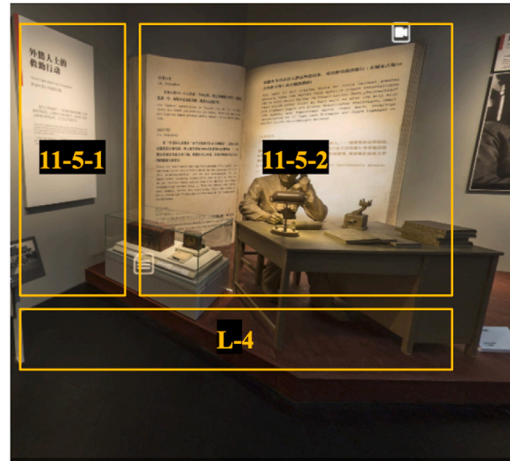
● 11-3-1; 11-3-2; L-2



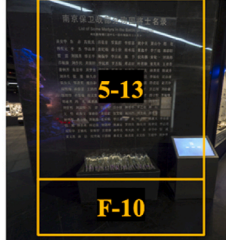
● 5-12-1; 5-12-2; 5-12-3; F-9



● 11-4; L-3



● 5-13; F-10



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