Research on the Construction of Meaning in Literary Tourism Destinations from a Constructivist Perspective: A Case Study of the Brontë Sisters' Hometown

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Abstract: The close relationship between literature and tourism is well-established. Literary authors and their works often attract numerous readers due to their personal influence and unique artistic conception presented in their works. Consequently, places associated with literary authors and their works frequently become desired tourist destinations for readers. Every year, numerous Brontë enthusiasts from around the world journey to Haworth, in search of traces left by the Brontë sisters. The economically disadvantaged town has evolved into a literary pilgrimage site, significantly boosting local tourism. Based on the theory of constructivism, this paper analyzes the construction process of Howorth Town from different perspectives such as local government, tourists, and writers' works, and further underscores the significant role of literature in tourism.

1. Introduction

As a collective cultural practice, the rise of English literary tourism began in the late 18th century and developed into a significant industry in the 19th century. The transportation revolution provided the initial impetus for the surge in tourism, while the development of railways not only enhanced mobility in England but also considerably reduced travel time and distance. The Renaissance and religious reforms emancipated people's minds, leading to an increasing emphasis on self-worth and the pursuit of individual freedom, providing a spiritual foundation for travel. Simultaneously, the immense wealth generated during the Industrial Revolution in the mid-18th century laid a solid material foundation for modern tourism. This period also witnessed the growth of the urban middle class, creating a substantial market for the tourism industry. With money and leisure, the subjective conditions for traveling became increasingly favorable, prompting more individuals to embark on journeys. Addison often carried a copy of Horace's works on his journeys, and for him, "The greatest pleasure I took in my journey from Rome to Naples was seeing the Fields, Towns and Rivers, that have been described by so many classic authors, and have been the scene of so many great actions". [1] British literary tourism was thus born from the cultural precedent. Many travelers began visiting places related to classical literature, and the practice of enriching literary readings through travel gradually became mainstream. Over time, an increasing number of tourists flocked to places associated with literature. In the historical context, "the practice of visiting places associated with

specific books for the purpose of savoring works, places and their interrelationships has evolved into a commercially valuable phenomenon" [2]. Consequently, "Brontë Country" as one of the "Literary Country"—Haworth town, emerged on the English tourist map.

In 2020, Samet Çevik [3] published an article summarizing eight types of literary tourism. The tourism destination of Haworth studied in this article falls into the first two and the fifth types. The first two types are (1) Actual places associated with authors. (2) Significant places in the works. Tourists may visit some places mentioned in the novels and the fusion of reality and imagination gives these places special significance. Every year, numerous Brontë enthusiasts from around the world come to Haworth, primarily visiting the Brontë Parsonage Museum and the Brontë Graves to trace the footsteps left by the Brontë sisters, which is primarily based on the connection to the Brontë family undoubtedly [4]. This precisely exemplifies the two types. Busby and Klug proposed "travel writing" as the fifth type of literary tourism, defining travel writing as 'a medium through which places and people have been reinterpreted and communicated to wider audiences.' *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, published by Elizabeth Gaskell after Brontë's death, acts as a "travel writing" and imparts new meaning to Brontë Charlotte and Haworth, attracting a large number of tourists. The construction of Haworth as a literary tourism destination not only promotes the development of local tourism but also brings visitors closer to the inner world of the Brontë sisters, making them achieve emotional resonance.

2. Constructivism

As a philosophical methodology and research paradigm, constructivism has profoundly influenced fields such as education, philosophy, literature, sociology, international political science, and other social sciences. Constructivism has also exerted a significant impact on tourism research, with an increasing number of scholars consciously or unconsciously adopting a constructivist perspective in their research practices. The formal development of this theory was marked by American social psychologist Gergen's article titled *The Social Constructionist Movement in Modern Psychology*, published in the *American Psychologist* in 1985. Gergen argued that sociocultural is a crucial determinant of knowledge production, with a focus on how the core power of culture constructs knowledge and types of knowledge [5]. From a constructivist viewpoint, reality is not predetermined but continually constructed through practices and interactions. Therefore, it is imperative to analyze the social construction process and also to examine how different groups engage in social construction from their respective perspectives, interests and positions.

Literary tourism destination is a product of social construction, which is created and expanded to attract tourists through marketing efforts. Scholars who hold a constructivist stance often define the construction objects as tourism destinations, the culture and image of tourist sites, and the construction subject as tourism production operators, local governments and cultural intermediaries. They also identify the construction pathways as tourism advertising, promotional brochures or postcards, travelogues, popular culture, mass media and tourism websites, etc., and limit the construction effect to the formation of destination brand, activation of tourist motivation and shaping of travel experience [6]. Tourists themselves also interpret tourist destinations for multiple purposes such as leisure and entertainment. The construction process of literary tourism destination is actually a dynamic process jointly constructed by developers and tourists, which is ultimately accepted and recognized.

3. "Haworth" Literary Tourism Construction

3.1. Experiencing the Real "Wilderness"

Literary works endow specific spaces with distinct culture and symbolic meaning, contributing to socio-cultural reconstruction of tourism destinations. Through literary texts, novels convey spatial information infused with legendary stories to readers, thereby inspiring tourists to travel. Literary tourism destination has also emerged as the times require. Top Withens, a hilltop ruins near Haworth, Yorkshire, is the site where literature takes place. It was at this place that Emily found inspiration to create *Wuthering Heights*. The eerie, gloomy and mysterious atmosphere, as well as iconic environment of vast wilderness in the book, seems to symbolize the primitive, bleak, wild and secluded. The construction of scenes in the literary work to some extent portrays the artistic conception of seclusion in the town, offering tourists an opportunity to experience the literary beauty and discover their authentic self in the tourism space, and infusing meaning into the tourist destination. Furthermore, a journey to the birthplace of literature can inspire tourists to reevaluate literature in the context of the real world and even cultivate a unique sense of personally experiencing the classic literary creation process.

The content and ambiance of literary works, as well as the background of the authors, hold a decisive significance in the construction of literary tourism. Tetley and Bill Bramwell conducted a survey on "the characteristics that allow visitors to feel the Haworth's literary connections" in their article titled *Tourists and the cultural construction of Haworth's literary landscape*. This survey took place on the slope of Haworth's main street, with 230 visitors being interviewed. Notably, 62.6% of the respondents had read Brontë's novels or seen their dramas, 40.6% believed that the rural environment of the town is related to the author's works, while 36% linked the town's wilderness characteristics to the author's works [7]. This finding indicates the significant impact of the Brontë sisters' works on visitors to explore Haworth, particularly the depiction of wilderness scenes in Emily's *Wuthering Heights*. One of the respondents remarked, "As driving through the wilderness, I imagined seeing Wuthering Heights". Some tourists explained, "we had read these works in school, and the wilderness and town show the atmosphere in the works". As a result, we can find that the artistic conception depicted in these works consciously or unconsciously constructs the tourist destination when visitors explore Haworth. Tourists have already formed preliminary imaginations of Haworth through reading related literary works before embarking on their journey and carry with the imaginations on their travel. The construction of literary works imbues new meaning and connotation into tourist destinations, not only allowing visitors to experience the "wilderness" scenes in the works but also better stimulating visitors' thinking. Visiting the place where the works are created has also become another tourism motivation for tourists.

3.2. Creating Cross-Temporal Dialogues

Most tourists visit the former residence of literary giants with a sense of reverence, not only to admire literary predecessors, but also to explore the origin of literary works, return to the literary scenes and engage in a cross-temporal dialogue with the authors. Crompton asserts that a tourist destination's image is a composite of individuals' beliefs, perceptions, and impressions of the destination. [8] As early as 1850, Charlotte Brontë complained to a friend in a letter that "all sorts of people are starting to come to Haworth' parsonage and knock on her door" [9], which indicates that Haworth had already begun to establish its own image and spark tourist intentions to travel. In 1857, Mrs. Gaskell published *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, a biography that made more people aware of the significance of surroundings and the Brontë Parsonage in understanding the work itself. Based on this, the government focused on constructing Haworth's image as "Brontë Country". In 1893, one of

the world's oldest literary societies, the Brontë Society of England, was founded, after which the society spared no effort to begin collecting relics of the Brontë family. In 1899, the society initiated an annual hiking event, which is a tradition developed in the early days of tourism.

In 1928, the Brontë Parsonage was transformed into the Brontë Parsonage Museum, with a mission to "invite visitors to explore the home of the world's most famous literary family, the Brontë sisters, in Haworth, to see how they lived and where they created their groundbreaking novels". Since then, Haworth has become a captivating literary tourism destination for countless visitors. The Brontë Parsonage Museum serves as a quintessential example of literary tourism, with the government's dedication to recreating the Brontë family's former home in the museum. During visiting, imaginative tourists can travel back to the era when the Brontës lived, engaging in a soulful dialogue. Exploring the homes of authors provides tangible evidence of the authors' lives and creative activities, while also stimulating a sense of "behind-the-scenes" awareness. This enables readers to follow the footsteps of authors, experience the scenes when authors are creating and seek out the things that once inspired authors to create.

Tourist destinations can be made surreal through visualization, promoting the construction of tourism brand. Today, when browsing the Yorkshire Attractions website, we can find that Brontë Parsonage Museum ranks first. Simultaneously, there are detailed description of various literary attractions and a map dotted with literary landmarks in the website. These literary attractions are labeled with specific locations and additional information about nearby dining, lodging, and more. Each attraction is thoroughly introduced and complemented with exquisite images, providing visitors with a more intuitive and concrete understanding of the places they intend to explore. In order to promote the diversity of attractions and businesses in the region, government tourism marketers have endeavored to transform places associated with Brontës into amusement parks or entertainment centers. Old buildings are now tourist shops selling a range of products, from Brontë soap and jams to T-shirts and stationery, and Tea rooms now offer "Heathcliff Sandwiches" and "Brontë Biscuits". Therefore, the construction of material space in tourist destinations is realized and the perception of the tourist destination's representational image by potential tourists in various spaces is shaped, arousing potential tourists to travel intentionally. Whether it's in terms of the tourist destination's image or the construction of tourism brand, Haworth is no longer merely a destination for Brontë enthusiasts but has become a travel hub. The government's material construction not only allows visitors to trace the footsteps of the Brontë sisters but also to experience the most genuine literary realm. Back to history, back to the heart.

3.3. Reconstructing the Ideal "Homeland"

In the process of social practice, discourse serves not only as a means of conveying information and expressing thoughts and emotions but also as a reflection of social phenomena and a builder of social practices [10]. After concluding their journeys, tourists often participate in the reproduction process of pre-established tourism discourse. In other words, they use their personal travel experiences to verify, refine, or modify pre-established tourism discourses [11]. Discourse possesses a notable degree of expressiveness and cohesiveness, and tourists engage in the evaluation and promotion of the town through discourse as a collective construction process. Notably, within the main body of constructing Haworth, tourists who were originally consumers have also unconsciously contributed to the profound construction of the tourist destination.

Mrs. Gaskell, besides being Charlotte's biographer, was also a visitor to Haworth. In the second chapter of *The Life of Charlotte Bronte*, she described Haworth as remote, inhospitable, the very steepness of its main street making a sort of barrier to the outside world and as if it were on the very edge of the civilized world and its people--brutal, surly, avaricious, vengeful--seem as near as makes

no difference to animals. [12]. Despite the portrayal being etched into the public's imagination for more than a century to come, it did not deter visitors from coming. Quite the opposite, as tourists seeking luxury and sunny environments might shun it, those looking to escape modern civilization often regarded Haworth as a "Mecca". Mrs. Gaskell, as a visitor, contributed to the discourse construction of Haworth. While her intention was not to promote it, her depiction did influence how tourists perceived the destination, generating the motivation for countless visitors to explore it. Matthew Arnold's [13] poem *Haworth Churchyard* also played the role in shaping Haworth's image, employing a distinctive language to create a mystical tourist experience. Tourist promotional slogans are the most straightforward means of kindling tourists' motivation to travel, which express a particular cultural significance through a certain imagery. In 1904, Virginia Woolf, after visiting Haworth, wrote, "Haworth expresses the Brontës; the Brontës express Haworth. They fit like a snail to its shell" (quoted in Tetley, 157). This promotional phrase more directly illustrates the image characteristics of the tourist destination, enticing more people to explore Haworth. Therefore, it is evident that tourists employ discourse to present and construct Haworth, contributing to the continuous development of tourism in the region.

4. Conclusion

Literary tourism is the result of the joint action of literature and tourism. Different actors in tourism behavior employ literary elements to expand the spatial imagination and construction of tourist destinations. Tourist destinations have also become unique literary landscapes due to the integration of literary elements. Haworth narrates legendary tales belonging to the place in its own unique manner. Whether via the construction of the Haworth tourist destination ambiance in literary works, allowing visitors to experience the authentic "wilderness" , or via the government's material construction creating a dialogue across time and space for tourists, or even via the tourists' discourse construction providing a realm of imagination, the multifaceted process collectively shapes the image of the tourist destination from various perspectives and realizes cross-temporal communication and interaction between authors, readers and tourists. The literary works have significantly driven the tourism industry in Haworth and the construction of Haworth tourist destination, in turn, influences the construction of the literary classics, further maintaining the classic status and enduring legacy of the Brontë sisters' works in a tourist way. Furthermore, the construction of Haworth tourist destination also plays a vital role in fostering a sense of national community. People visit a tourist destination for their admiration of the same literary place and this collective sense of appreciation forms an imaginary community. Tourists can envision visiting the tourist destination at the same time as members of the same ethnic group, creating the awareness that "cultural heritage is shared by tourists" and consolidating the national community.

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