



EXPLORING PLACE ATTACHMENT IN HERITAGE TOURISM: A CASE STUDY OF BAGANSIAPIAPI CHINATOWN, INDONESIA

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Abstract

This article aimed to explore place attachment in Bagansiapiapi, focusing on the cultural heritage surrounding Chinatown. The goal is to preserve the uniqueness of local cultural heritage to enhance the attractiveness of sustainable heritage tourism and improve the economy and well-being of the local community. 193 residents and 193 tourists were stratified and randomly completed the questionnaire. The twelve key informants were purposive sampling selected by semi-structured interviews and observation at the research location by photo documentation. Place attachment is influenced by historical, belief, cultural, and social factors significant. Bagansiapiapi Chinatown demonstrates a strong sense of place attachment by focusing on two key aspects: emotional attachment and memories experience. These findings are expected to contribute to sustainable heritage tourism preservation in Bagansiapiapi and promote cultural heritage as a tourist attraction aligned with the sustainable cities and the welfare of the local communities. This study provides an innovative method for preserving cultural heritage for tourism stakeholders. It focuses on place attachment established by cultural heritage and applied as a reference for sustainable development by practitioners in various sectors, including tourism planners and government officials. This research examines the relationship between place attachment and cultural heritage tourism in Bagansiapiapi. It analyzes how cultural heritage influences the identity of the Chinese community and offers strategies for sustainable tourism development to enhance economic growth while preserving cultural heritage.

Keywords: Place Attachment, Heritage Tourism, Bagansiapiapi Chinatown, Cultural Heritage, Historical Buildings

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INTRODUCTION

Heritage tourism has emerged as a key sector in global tourism, with cultural and historical destination significance playing a crucial role in attracting visitors (Timothy, 2020). This type of tourism reflects the desire to engage with the past while connecting with the present of a destination, fostering an appreciation for its traditions, culture, and history (Park et al., 2019). The success is fundamentally dependent on the sustainability of heritage tourism and the concept of place attachment, which influences the behavior of visitors and the preservation of local cultural and environmental values (Ajuhari et al., 2023; Avifah et al., 2022). As tourism continues to evolve, place attachment offers insights into how residents and tourists interact with heritage sites, contributing to the growth of sustainable tourism and cultural heritage preservation.

Studies on place attachment in heritage tourism have shown its important role in influencing tourist behavior and site sustainability. For example, studies in Melaka and George Town have shown that cultural motivation increases place attachment, especially affective attachment, and place dependence, increasing tourists' desire to recommend places (Latiff et al., 2020). In addition, the sustainability of intangible cultural heritage in George Town and Melaka has been associated with strong connections between people and places, characterized by a sense of loss, justice, and purpose among local communities (Nian et al., 2019). Similarly, in Bagansiapiapi's Chinatown, understanding the nuances of place attachment can offer valuable insights into how residents and visitors form relationships with the heritage site, contributing to both the preservation of cultural identity and the promotion of tourism.

This research examines place attachment in heritage tourism in Bagansiapiapi Chinatown, a location rich in cultural and historical heritage. Meanwhile, there have been limited studies on how heritage tourism has the potential to influence place attachment and contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage as a tourist attraction to enhance the economic growth of the local community. This study aims to explore various aspects of place attachment in Bagansiapiapi Chinatown and identify the factors that strengthen this attachment. Specifically, it will identify factors that influence strong place attachment and analyze how such attachment can support sustainability and enhance the attractiveness of heritage tourism in the region.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Place Attachment

Place attachment reflects a strong emotional connection to a location and contributes significantly to a sense of belonging and personal fulfillment (Alcindor et al., 2021; Mandal et al., 2023; Sari et al., 2018). Research has shown that place attachment influences personal experiences, perceptions of a place, residential status, memories, lifestyle, and overall quality of life (Novianti et al.,

2018). The place attachment dimension includes four main aspects: place dependence, place identity, social bonds, and affective attachment. The historic bridge is both a physical infrastructure and an emotional, and cultural emblem that enhances communal cohesion (Yao & Rasidi, 2024). These factors collectively help to define the relationship individuals have with the meaning of a place.

Cultural variations also play a role in shaping place attachment. For example, family connections in Spain are central to forming place attachments. This bond fosters solidarity across both intergenerational and intragenerational relationships, highlighting the importance of familial ties in creating emotional links to places (Lebrusán & Gómez, 2022). Memories are another critical element of place attachment, with nostalgia as a valuable lens through which past relationships with places are examined. Nostalgia emphasizes the emotional significance of these memories, enabling individuals to relive their past experiences and integrate them into their present lives, thereby deepening their attachment to a place (Chen & Dwyer, 2018).

Historic places, in particular, play a key role in fostering place attachment through their ability to evoke meaningful memories and emotions. For instance, in Edinburgh, Scotland, historic environments offer opportunities to reflect on past lives with feelings of pleasure, satisfaction, pride, and admiration. These experiences often enhance happiness, pride, and self-esteem, as individuals draw on positive memories and moments associated with living in or visiting such places (Irani et al., 2023; Wang, 2023). Additionally, changes in the physical and visual aspects of a place can amplify place attachment by evoking stories and memories tied to its history.

The formation of place attachment relies not solely on individual emotional experiences but also on the social and historical dimensions of a place. Social interactions and communal bonds within a place contribute to a collective sense of belonging and identity (Madgin et al., 2016). Place attachment focuses on two main aspects: emotional attachment and experience memories. This place attachment contributes to the preservation of sustainable heritage tourism is essential in Bagansiapiapi, as well as promoting cultural heritage as a tourist attraction to improve the welfare of the local community.

Heritage Tourism

Heritage reflects the past but remains essential in contemporary contexts by connecting communities to their history and culture. An important aspect of heritage tourism management is the concept of place attachment, which describes the emotional bond individuals form with a location, enhancing the meanings and experiences they derive (Graham & Ashworth, 2005). Heritage tourism provides a spatial experience that intertwines tangible and intangible elements, fostering a connection between visitors and heritage. It aligns with the place attachment

concept, where emotional ties to a location enrich tourist experiences (Poria & Ashworth, 2009).

Heritage tourism fulfills visitors' desire to engage with representations of a place's historical and cultural narratives, creating profound and memorable experiences through connections with cultural and historical elements (Park et al., 2019). The combination of tangible and intangible cultural heritage is fundamental to culture-based interpretation and the preservation of local values, which are central to the heritage tourism experience (Santa & Tiatco, 2019). Unique characteristics of a heritage site significantly shape visitors' emotional connections to the place, which, in turn, enhances the depth of their tourism experience (Lin & Rasoolimanesh, 2023). Moreover, preserving cultural traditions and their associated values and meanings is crucial in supporting place attachment through intergenerational transmission (Lee et al., 2018; Ruan et al., 2024). Cultural heritage contributes significantly to creating meaningful tourism experiences. The interplay between tangible and intangible heritage elements, place attachment, and cultural preservation efforts highlights the importance of maintaining cultural values for future generations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Bagansiapiapi Chinatown (Figure 1), located in Rokan Hilir Regency, Riau Province, Indonesia. The location is an attractive tourist destination due to the Bakar Tongkang Festival. The festival is a part of the national 100 events calendar (Ginting et al., 2022).

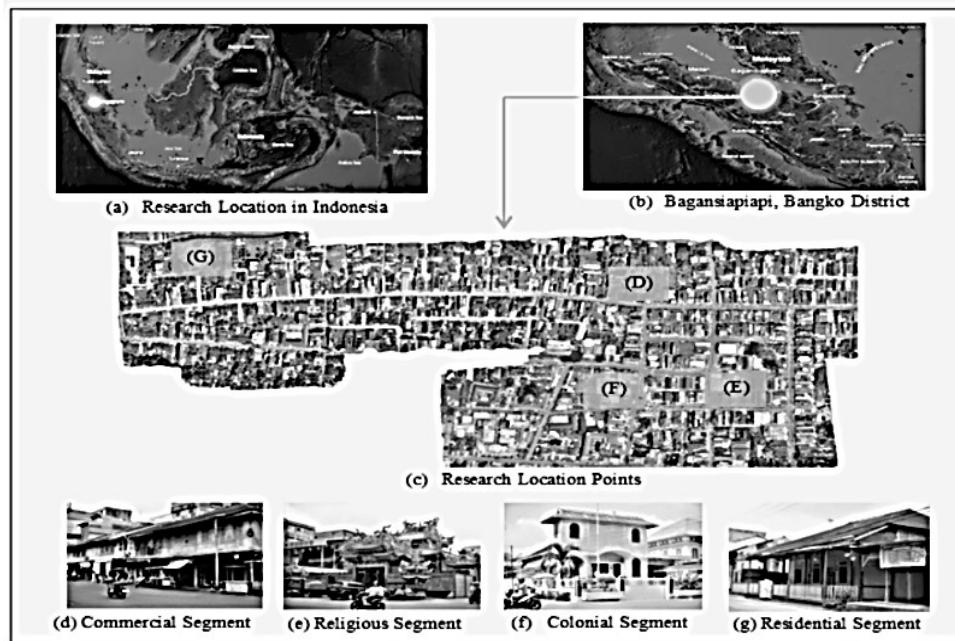


Figure 1: Research Area

Source: Google Earth (a-b) Author's Analysis (c-g)

The location is based on four criteria: heritage area, uniqueness, activities, and tourist attraction (Aleksandrova & Aigina, 2017; Jahan, 2019; Nugroho & Hardilla, 2020; Zhao, 2021). This study focuses on locations divided into four streets: Jalan Perniagaan-Commercial (PK), Jalan Kelenteng (KL), Jalan Merdeka (MK), and Jalan Perniagaan-Residential (PM). The segments are divided based on the main functions and daily activities.

This research uses mixed methods that combine quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon based on relevant experiences and information (Creswell, 2010; Jin et al., 2020). In the quantitative approach, a questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale was used to measure respondents' perceptions, with high reliability and validity (Sari et al., 2018). The sample used stratified random sampling and the Cochran Method to determine the sample size (Sugiyono, 2019), with 386 respondents consisting of residents and tourists. The qualitative approach involved observation and semi-structured interviews with 12 key informants, including government officials, community members, entrepreneurs, academics, residents, and tourists, who were selected based on their roles in tourism planning and heritage site protection. Data triangulation is employed to enhance evidence from multiple approaches, including theoretical triangulation that combines multiple perspectives to broaden understanding of phenomena (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Flick, 2018).

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of the distributed questionnaire results (Figure 2), Jalan Perniagaan (PK) shows that respondents are satisfied with the uniqueness of the Ing Hok Kiong Temple (4.17) in the KL segment and enjoy the atmosphere created (4.18) on Jalan Kelenteng and Jalan Perniagaan, resulting in a high overall average (4.17). While also showing an emotional attachment between individuals and the physical form of the building as well as the atmosphere in the area. Almost the same as PK, Jalan Kelenteng (KL) clearly shows that respondents are pleased with the uniqueness of the building (4.22) Ing Hok Kiong Temple and enjoy the atmosphere (4.06) on Jalan Kelenteng and Jalan Perniagaan, with an overall average score (4.14). Although slightly lower than PK, these findings still indicate a good appreciation for the visual elements and atmosphere, even though the level of emotional attachment is not as strong as in PK. Meanwhile, respondents on Jalan Merdeka (MK) gave an average rating of the uniqueness of the building (3.01) as ordinary with Ing Hok Kiong Temple and the atmosphere in the area of Jalan Kelenteng and Jalan Perniagaan (2.88), resulting in the lowest average score (2.95). These results indicate that the MK segment has a low level of emotional attachment because this segment serves a governmental or office function. These findings are supported statement by a cultural heritage expert: "Emotional attachment to an area is greatly influenced by its social function in people's lives. Areas with social functions, such as housing, commercial centers, or community interaction spaces, tend to create strong emotional bonds because they are often part of daily activities and community experiences."

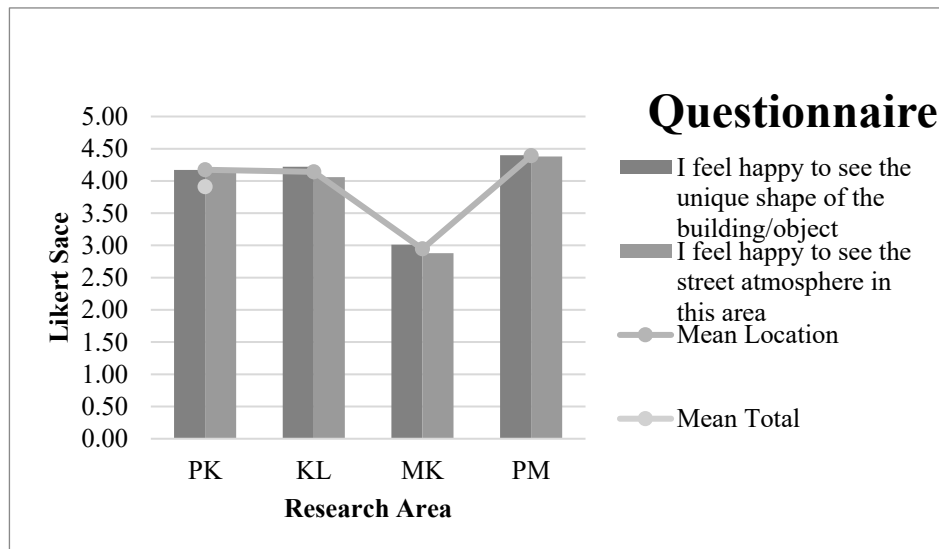


Figure 2: Aspect of Feelings (Emotional Attachment) in Tangible Heritage (Building)
Source: Author's Analysis (2024)

On Jalan Perniagaan-Residential (PM), respondents strongly agreed with their feelings of pleasure in seeing the uniqueness of the Ing Hok Kiong Temple (4.40) and the atmosphere of the Jalan Kelenteng and Jalan Perniagaan (4.38), showing the highest cumulative average (4.39). These findings indicate that PM is the area with the highest appreciation compared to other segments. The uniqueness of the building design and the street atmosphere are the main factors that strengthen the emotional attachment between the respondents and this area. This finding was supported by the statement of the Head of Tourism, Arts, Culture, Youth, and Sports, who said: "The Bagansiapiapi Chinatown has a unique and comfortable experience for visitors. One of the main attractions is the atmosphere that preserved the authenticity and depth of Chinese culture, which has existed for a long time. Visitors can feel the calm atmosphere, even though in the city center. The unique architecture of the old Chinese shophouses, with their traditional designs, generates for many people a fascinating sensation and evokes memories."

To summarise, Bagansiapiapi Chinatown's visually unique elements such as Chinese architecture and the presence of cultural landmarks contribute to the creation of strong emotional attachments. It is reflected in the high average score (3.91) which indicates the level of emotional attachment of the residents to the area. Urban landscapes, especially historic buildings, have a significant impact on forming individuals' emotional attachment to a place. The unique visual characteristics and historical value of urban landmarks create a sense of place identity and strengthen social connections among residents. As a result, this emotional attachment can contribute to an increased sense of belonging, community attachment, and individual well-being, especially in historical areas (Fard & Paydar, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). In areas abundant in historical or cultural significance, the uniqueness of place perception often influences the formation of profoundly emotional attachment. These attachments tend to develop through repeated experiences and close interactions with the place, strengthening an individual's connection with their environment (Li et al., 2023).

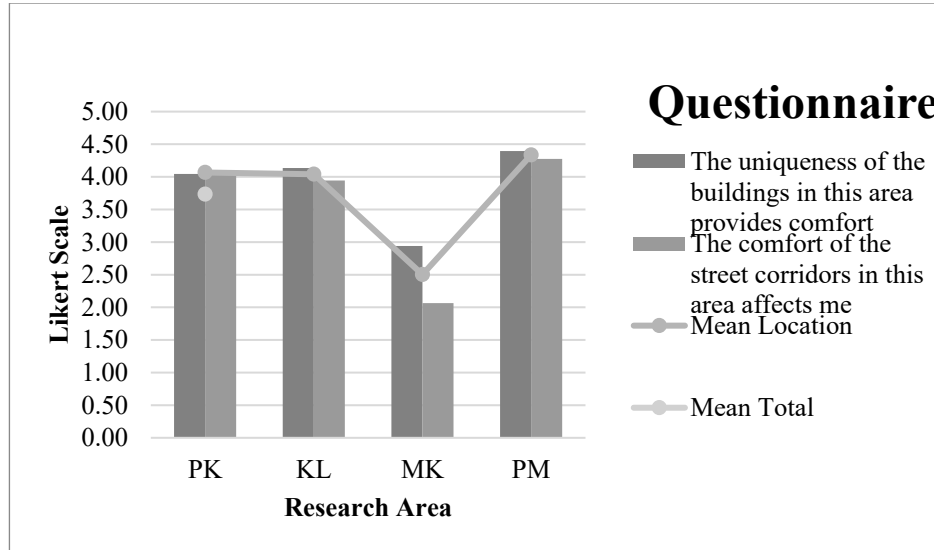


Figure 3: Aspect of Comfort (Emotional Attachment) in Tangible Heritage (Building)
Source: Author's Analysis (2024)

Questionnaire statement Figure 3, respondents on Jalan Perniagaan (PK) agree that the uniqueness of the Ing Hok Kiong Temple provides a fairly high level of comfort (4.05). Additionally, the comfort of the Jalan Kelenteng and Jalan Perniagaan corridors also has a strong influence on visitors (4.09). Overall, PK has a high average (4.07), reflecting a positive perception from visitors. The same results were found in KL, with respondents agreeing that the uniqueness of the Ing Hok Kiong Temple provides comfort (4.14), and the comfort of the Jalan Kelenteng and Jalan Perniagaan corridors influences visitors (3.95). With a high average (4.04) but slightly lower than PK, this still indicates a good perception of the comfort and uniqueness of the area.

Consequently, respondents in MK averaged the uniqueness of the buildings (2.97) and disagreed on the comfort aspect of the street corridor (2.07). The result is a disagreed overall average (2.50). It indicated that MK's situation does not provide a strong level of comfort for visitors. This finding is supported by the statement of the Community Leader, who said: "The Chinatown on Jalan Merdeka has significant historical value as an important part of Chinese cultural identity. However, comfort still needs to be improved because some historical buildings function as private residences. For example, sidewalks and lighting are still limited, reducing the attractiveness for visitors and tourists." However, the respondents strongly agree that the uniqueness of the Ing Hok Kiong Temple, which provides comfort (4.40), as well as the comfort of the Jalan Kelenteng and Jalan Perniagaan corridors, influences visitors (4.28). This results in the highest

overall average (4.34). This value indicates that PM has a higher appeal compared to other street corridors.

The unique visual character of the buildings and the comfort of the environment in Bagansiapiapi Chinatown have an important role in creating a positive impression and emotional attachment for visitors (3.74). Research shows that aesthetic elements, especially historical or cultural visual attractiveness, contribute to a sense of nostalgia and emotional attachment, which affects an individual's attachment to the place. This emotional attachment is closely related to the material features of the environment and the resulting social atmosphere (Friesinger et al., 2022; Meng et al., 2024). In addition, improvements in MK areas have to enhance the area's attractiveness by increasing visitor satisfaction and strengthening their emotional attachment to the location. Therefore, it might increase the area's attractiveness as a tourist destination (Meng et al., 2024).

Table 1: Aspect of Sensory Visual (Memory Experiences) in Tangible Heritage (Building).

Statements	PK		KL		KL		KL		TOTAL	
	F	P (%)	F	P (%)	F	P (%)	F	P (%)	F	P (%)
Temple Roof	35	9.07	47	12.18	11	2.85	28	7.25	121	31.35
Ing Hok Kiong Temple	26	6.74	26	6.74	31	8.03	21	5.44	104	26.94
Bank Bagan (Bank BRI)	11	2.85	7	1.81	9	2.33	7	1.81	34	8.81
Row of Houses	5	1.30	3	0.78	4	1.04	0	0.00	12	3.11
Chinese Shophouses	1	0.26	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	0.52	3	0.78
Chinese Houses	1	0.26	3	0.78	0	0.00	2	0.52	6	1.55
Water Tanks	0	0.00	1	0.26	1	0.26	3	0.78	5	1.30
lanterns	3	0.78	3	0.78	11	2.85	8	2.07	25	6.48
Bakar Tongkang Procession	11	2.85	5	1.30	27	6.99	25	6.48	68	17.62
Flag	3	0.78	3	0.78	2	0.52	0	0.00	8	2.07
Total Respondents	96	24.87	98	25.39	96	24.87	96	24.87	386	100

Source: Author's Analysis (2024)

According to Table 1, respondents agreed that the most dominant visual element is the temple roof (31.35%). Respondents identified that the main factor of the elements affected their memories. It indicates that the distinctive ornaments, colors, and roof shapes provide significance in building visual identity and attachment to the place. As a heritage building, Ing Hok Kiong Temple has a strong visual attraction (26.94%), confirming that its architectural aspects and historical value contribute to the emotional attachment of visitors. In addition, cultural processions of Bakar Tongkang received considerable attention (17.62%). It has a strong visual representation that evokes collective memories and creates emotional attractiveness. Other buildings, namely Chinese shophouses and Bagan Madjoe Bank (Bank BRI), had less influence on respondents' visual memories (8.81% and 0.78%). It shows that although they have historical value, the visual appeal of the two buildings tends to be less prominent compared to more iconic elements. Lanterns, as decorative elements, also play a significant role (6.48%) in strengthening the atmosphere of Chinese culture. The visualization of lanterns provides an authentic atmosphere that supports the creation of an emotional attachment to the place. The Ing Hok Kiong Temple in Bagansiapiapi has a main gate with three doors, one on the right and one on the left side, and the main door in the center consists of two red door leaves. Above the gate, the roof is adorned with ornaments in the form of dragons and deities. At the ends of the roof, are decorations of dragons, phoenixes, or other mythological creatures that symbolize luck, protection, and prosperity (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Ing Hok Kiong Temple and Roof Ornament of the Ing Hok Kiong temple
Source: Author's Analysis (2024)

In summary, visual elements of the temple roof, Ing Hok Kiong temple, and the Bakar Tongkang ritual procession play a key role in forming experiential memories that foster visitors' attachment to the place. These elements demonstrate the importance of combining visual, symbolic, and emotional aspects in heritage buildings to support cultural tourism. These elements can enhance the attachment that makes visitors want to return (Madgin & Lesh, 2021).

Table 2: Aspect of Sensory Auditory (Memory Experiences) in Tangible Heritage (Landscape)

Statements	PK		KL		KL		KL		TOTAL	
	F	P (%)	F	P (%)	F	P (%)	F	P (%)	F	P (%)
Fireworks	51	13.21	50	12.95	29	7.51	52	13.47	182	47.15
Vehicles	5	1.30	2	0.52	0	0.00	7	1.81	14	3.63
Human Activities (Cooking, Talking)	10	2.59	16	4.15	23	5.96	19	4.92	68	17.62
Musical Instruments	12	3.11	3	0.78	35	9.07	6	1.55	56	14.51
Bell	16	4.15	11	2.85	6	1.55	6	1.55	39	10.10
Swallow Sound	2	0.52	16	4.15	3	0.78	6	1.55	27	6.99
Total Respondents	96	24.87	98	25.39	96	24.87	96	24.87	386	100

Source: Author's Analysis (2024)

Based on the analysis of the distributed questionnaires (Table 2) along the PK, KL, MK, and PM Street corridors, the sound of fireworks (47.15%) is the element that has the highest percentage. Fireworks displayed with various shapes and colors spark joy and nostalgia, especially during the Lunar New Year along Jalan Perniagaan (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Fireworks illuminate the sky of Bagansiapiapi City on the night of the Chinese New Year or Imlek

Source: Author's Analysis (2024)

It shows that the distinctive characteristics of fireworks, such as explosions or bangs, significantly affect the auditory experience and memories. The sound of musical instruments (14.51%) also stands out as an important element, reflecting the role of traditional instrument sounds in creating a unique and memorable atmosphere. Furthermore, the sounds of cooking or talking in human activities (17.62%) contribute to a dynamic social atmosphere, generate a sense of community connection, and enhance the street corridor. The sound of bells (10.10%) is distinctive as religious activities representative of local culture rooted in local traditions. Meanwhile, the sound of swallows (6.99%) contributes to a calm natural atmosphere and balances the other sound elements in the street corridor. Following the key informant of Tourism Academician Universitas Riau's statement: "Memories of listening to the sound of fireworks at night illuminated during Chinese New Year and Cap Go Meh celebrations around the Ing Hok Kiong temple or flying tang lung make the atmosphere happy."

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In summary, uniqueness and infrequent sound elements, fireworks, bells, and musical instruments tend to be more memorable and contribute significantly to the formation of memories of visitors' experiences. The diversity of auditory elements, including natural and cultural sounds, and human activities, creates a holistic experience that makes the street corridor more interesting and memorable (Degnen, 2016).

CONCLUSION

Place attachment in Bagansiapiapi Chinatown was influenced by historical, religious, cultural, and social factors. A strong emotional bond between the residents and the place is a relationship through unique visual elements and historical value inherent in iconic buildings such as the Ing Hok Kiong Temple and cultural activities like the Bakar Tongkang Festival. These factors strongly play an important role in shaping emotional attachment and memory experiences and strengthen visitors' attachment to the place. This research also reveals that place attachment is closely related to the cultural experiences associated with the heritage. Visual elements, such as temple roofs and traditional celebrations, along with distinctive auditory elements like fireworks and musical instruments, enrich the tourist experience, making it more impressive and evoking a sense of nostalgia. It contributes to the identity of the Chinese community in Bagansiapiapi and strengthens social ties among residents.

This research highlights the exploration of place attachment to cultural heritage in shaping the identity of the Chinese community in Bagansiapiapi, demonstrating how preservation can lead to sustainable tourism development. It has focused on enhancing visitor satisfaction through the promotion of cultural heritage as a tourist attraction, Bagansiapiapi can continue to strengthen its emotional and social connections with visitors, contributing to the well-being of the local community and economic growth.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank the parties who helped in the process of completing this research. Special thanks to the Universitas Sumatera Utara and all parties who contributed to this study.

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Received: 2nd May 2025. Accepted: 10th September 2025