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A structural model on national identity, tourism ethnocentrism, and domestic tourism intentions: taking a Chinese Youth perspective

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Tourism ethnocentrism, a positive in-group bias, has been identified as a symbolic factor that encourages travelers to choose domestic travel locations to aid in the growth of their home nation and its tourism sector. Given the global rise of ethnocentrism, tourism development must comprehend the influence of tourism ethnocentrism on travel aspirations. Based on this, this study collected questionnaire data from 476 Chinese tourists to examine the influence mechanisms of national identity, tourism ethnocentrism, and domestic tourism intentions and to explore the mediating roles of destination security perception, and destination trust, within the context of Social Identity Theory. In addition, a multi-group analysis (MGA) in PLS-SEM was used to capture the effect of age on the path relationships between the different variables. The findings suggest that tourism ethnocentrism can significantly influence domestic tourism intentions, while destination security perception and trust mediate between the two. Also, the study confirms that different ages, genders, and education levels influence the mechanism of political identity on tourism ethnocentrism. Therefore, tourism managers must consider the ethnocentrism of tourists and the positioning of the destination in their minds to reasonably satisfy the tourists' needs and promote the destination's long-term development.

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Introduction

With the acceleration of globalization and the improvement of people's living standards, the movement of people between countries has brought opportunities for the development of the tourism industry, and the enormous economic and social benefits have made the tourism industry occupy an essential place in national development and international exchanges (Stepchenkova et al., 2018). However, due to political, economic, and historical reasons, some countries inevitably have conflicts, which leads to the unpredictability of international relations and profoundly affects the development of each country's economy and tourism industry. Under such a background, the people of each country will have a more robust national identity and a tendency of tourism ethnocentrism towards their own country compared with foreign countries (Stepchenkova et al., 2020; Verlegh, 2007). National identity is a sense of belonging; the stronger a person's sense of belonging as a country member is, the more likely he or she is to make that country his or her tourist destination (Lever et al., 2023). Ethnocentrism, defined in its simplest form as "favoring one's group over an outside group" (Stepchenkova, 2023), is a pervasive, often unconscious belief in the perceived superiority of one's racial group or one's own culturally bound, pervasive customs and preferences (Stepchenkova et al., 2018). In the field of tourism, previous studies have confirmed that the type of tourism activities (Liu et al., 2024; Yang and Xuegang, 2024), visa policies (Viet Hoang et al., 2021; Yingwu Zhang, 2023), as well as religious experiences and values (Jingyan Liu, 2015; Rahman et al., 2022), have a significant role in stimulating tourists' intrinsic motivation and behavioral intentions. However, it is worth noting that although these factors can explain tourists' behavioral intentions, most of them focus on objective conditions or subjective perceptions formed later in life, ignoring a more fundamental and potentially influential dimension - ethnocentrism. It is deeply rooted in an individual's personality and has lifelong effects (Dejaeghere et al., 2012; Hooghe and Wilkenfeld, 2008). In addition, with the attenuation of the world's economic development, countries are now more inclined to localization compared to globalization (Lv Bin, 2020), and there has been a gradual focus on ethnocentrism in terms of macroeconomic development (Kock et al., 2019; Wel et al., 2018). In consumer research, it is used to explain the phenomenon of customers' preference for home goods over imported goods; of course, this preference is not absolute. Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2004) argue that preference for local consumption can be affected by product type and that the effect of ethnocentrism on willingness to consume depends on country-specific configurations and product categories. For example, consumers may prefer local consumption of vegetables and fruits. However, Wong CY (2008) found that the level of ethnocentrism among young Chinese consumers does not directly affect their perceptions of product quality or their willingness to purchase high-involvement products, such as cars and cameras, so it is important to consider these two aspects together. Especially in the context of globalization, it is reasonable to believe that the effect of ethnocentrism on domestic country/region bias may vary by country/region and commodity category (Evanschitzky et al., 2008) and is linked to nationalism and patriotism (Shimp and Sharma, 1987). While ethnocentrism has been more commonly used to explain consumer behavior over the past three decades or so (Ma et al., 2023), tourists are a particular class of consumers because they engage in consumer behavior away from their local environments and spend their money on experiences rather than material goods (Font, 1997). As it has grown and strengthened, international tourism has become an essential form of global cultural exchange and dissemination (Boukamba et al., 2021). Significant cultural

differences often exist between countries and regions, which satisfy tourists' desire for heterogeneity and drive their consumption. However, patriotism and ethnocentrism can transform these cultural and national differences into barriers to tourism consumption due to psychological barriers and considerations of possible damage to the country's political and economic interests (Liu et al., 2014; Ng et al., 2007). Thus, the core idea of ethnocentrism is closely related to tourism, given its particular characteristics (Kock et al., 2019). Theoretically, ethnocentrism influences tourists' perceptions and awareness of potential destinations, affecting their intention to travel. This is similar to the findings of Plog (1974) study on tourists' behavioral patterns. According to Plog (2001), "Allocentrics" have open and varied leisure interests, and a place does not have to be newly discovered or completely natural for adventurers to appreciate its qualities (Plog, 2002). Thus, the geographical location of a destination is not the only factor that attracts travelers of different personality types; their preferences are also influenced by their familiarity with the place. "Allocentrics" prefer to visit destinations that are unfamiliar to them, while "Psychocentrics" prefer destinations that are common and familiar to them (Plog, 2001).

However, in current tourism research, limited studies use ethnocentrism to analyze tourists' behavioral intentions, and most related studies select country image (Stepchenkova et al., 2018), destination image (Lever et al., 2023; Stepchenkova et al., 2018), and so on as mediating variables. At the same time, the existing results are less likely to consider the influence and role of tourism destination-related variables in the tourism ethnocentrism framework. However, the tourism destination is also essential in the whole tourism process, which affects the tourists' travel intentions and attitudes to a certain extent. Consequently, considering the paucity of recent studies and the significance of ethnocentrism for the growth of the domestic tourist industry (Stepchenkova, 2023), this paper takes China as an example, focuses on the impact of tourism ethnocentrism on domestic tourism intentions, and selects two variables, namely, tourism destination security perception and tourism destination trust, to analyze their mediating role between tourism ethnocentrism and domestic tourism intentions. This study constructs a new theoretical framework on tourism ethnocentrism, which, on the one hand, helps to promote an understanding of the impact of ethnocentrism on tourists' behavioral intentions, provides a more comprehensive view of tourism ethnocentrism, and expands the practice of related theories in the field of tourism research; on the other hand, it helps destination researchers and practitioners understand the relationship between personal belonging, destination perception, and behavioral intentions. It provides guidelines for realizing the sustainable development of tourism.

Literature review

Social identity theory. Social Identity Theory (SIT), proposed in the 1970s by European social psychologists Tajfel et al. (1979) and Turner et al. (1987), is an essential theory for revealing group behavior and intergroup relations and is most concerned with how group membership affects the perceptions of individuals within the group. SIT is an interpretive framework that focuses on the psychological basis of intergroup relations and highlights the importance of group belonging. The fundamental idea is that human thought processes are greatly influenced by the concepts of individual and group identity (Brewer, 1991). Additionally, one's self-concept as a group prototype plays a crucial role in determining acceptable cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral reactions toward others (Hogg, 2000). Group identity emerges when an individual recognizes a group of individuals as a distinct

entity separate from others, possesses common characteristics with the group, acknowledges membership in the group, forms an emotional connection with the group, and prioritizes its interests (Turner et al., 1987). This process is consistent with the cultural consumption mentioned by Lash (2010) in his study. He argues that Chinese consumer culture has shown a unique style under the interweaving of globalization and localization and that consumption is no longer purely about material satisfaction but is also imbued with complex socio-cultural connotations. In this context, Lash (2010) further suggests that individuals demonstrate their identity by consuming specific cultural products, that such consumption behavior is often associated with specific social groups, and that cultural consumption is one of how individuals express their social identity and seek a sense of belonging to a group. In addition, SIT argues that individuals, to define their self-identity, will categorize themselves into groups similar to them regarding their values, beliefs, and other aspects. Then, they will compare the in-group with the out-group. In the comparison process, they will form a social identity with their group (Tajfel and Turner, 2004; Tajfel et al., 1979) and cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally identify with the in-group or discriminate against the out-group. Therefore, Social Identity Theory can effectively elaborate on the formation process of identity and belonging to in-group favoritism and explore the influence mechanism between related variables, providing a solid theoretical foundation for this paper's research.

National identity. National identity refers to the degree to which individuals perceive themselves as belonging to a group, driven by their desire for positive group interaction, self-worth, and social identification (Verlegh, 2007). In this context, it pertains to a nation that shares a historical territory or homeland, common myths and historical recollections, uniform legal rights and responsibilities for all members, and a collective economy where members can move within the territory. The relationship between tourism and national identity has received increasing attention from scholars. It has been studied in several research areas such as heritage tourism (Zhang et al., 2018), festival tourism (Zhang et al., 2019), and rural tourism (Silva and Leal, 2015). The research focuses on the interaction between tourism and national identity promotion, and establishing tourists' national identity. Researchers have argued that tourism contributes significantly to national identity formation (Packer et al., 2019). Lepp and Harris (2008) noted that government officials believe tourism can shape foreign consumers' national identity. However, it is undeniable that cultural presentations in tourism are often based on stereotypes, and the theory of "Staged Authenticity" suggests that in the process of tourism development, cultural tourism products are artistically processed and refined to be presented to the tourists, creating a "Staged Authenticity" (Urry, 1990). Packer et al. (2019) emphasized the positive significance of the war heritage interpretation. In addition, referring to existing research results at home and abroad, it can be found that scholars are not unique in the division of national identity dimensions, Ha and Jang (2015) in their study based on the eight questions used by the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) to assess national identity and eventually divided it into two dimensions: national identity and ethnic identity; Miller and Ali (2014) in their study focused on how to measure national identity, and in order to compare the differences in national identity among individuals within a country, divided national identity into four dimensions: national attachment, national pride, patriotism, and cultural identity; some scholars also believe that the country is a community containing institutions, culture, and national blood, and the construction of its identity needs to be carried out from the different dimensions

of the system, culture, and ethnicity, and therefore, in their study, they treat ethnicity identity, political identity, and cultural identity as indispensable to national identity. Identity is one of the three fundamental dimensions indispensable to national identity (Nan Zeng, 2020; Wu, 2015). However, considering that the concept of ethnic identity is written in the same way as tourism ethnocentrism in the Chinese context and that there is a crossover between the contents of the two, this paper argues that the in-groups (groups of which an individual is regarded as a member) perceived by nationalism and tourism ethnocentrism are the same as those of their own country. Therefore, this study does not adopt the ethnicity identity dimension of national identity. Moreover, Ning Wu (2021) suggests that cultural identity is the root of national identity and serves as an intermediate link to form a positive interaction between ethnic and political identity, and that political identity is the dominant factor in the construction of modern national identity, which is the final destination of ethnic and cultural identity. This shows the importance of cultural and political identity in national identity. Based on this, this paper refers to Burgoyne and Routh (1998) and Lv (2010) related studies, and divides national identity into two dimensions, cultural identity (CI) and political identity (PI), for the subsequent research.

Tourism ethnocentrism. The concept of ethnocentrism, developed and introduced into science over a hundred years ago by Sumner (1907), is usually defined as favoring one's group (in-group) over out-groups (Stepchenkova, 2023). Moreover, this preference is usually associated with patriotism, nationalism, and various demographic and economic variables such as gender, age, and educational attainment (Caruana, 1996). It offers a strong idea that one's people are the center of the world and are more significant and superior to others (Salvati et al., 2020). Later, with the depth of research, ethnocentrism was gradually applied to various disciplines such as sociology, psychology, philosophy, and management. Scholars use consumer ethnocentrism to explain that consumers are more willing to buy domestic products than foreign products, especially in marketing (Shankarmahesh, 2006; Shimp and Sharma, 1987; Siamagka and Balabanis, 2015). Tourists, a distinct category of consumers, allocate their funds towards experiences rather than tangible products (Font, 1997). This behavior has resulted in tourism ethnocentrism, which pertains to individuals' deeply rooted views and emotional obligations to advance their country's tourism business (Kock et al., 2019).

As mentioned above, national identity emphasizes the individual's feelings towards the state itself and its derivatives, the patriotic feelings of the subject of the identity, and the exclusivity of the national identity towards other states (Sidanius et al., 1997). It follows that its core is consistent with tourism ethnocentrism favoring its in-groups, and the correlation between the two has been confirmed in several studies. Typically, individuals who enjoy their residency are more inclined to believe that tourism contributes to the economy. Similarly, those with a stronger sense of national identification tend to prefer domestic tourism more (Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2004; Gonzalez-Fuentes, 2019). In addition, Lever et al. (2023) concluded that a person's national identity positively influences their tourism ethnocentrism. Based on this premise, the subsequent hypothesis is put forward.

H1: National identity has a positive effect on tourism ethnocentrism

H1a: Cultural identity has a positive effect on tourism ethnocentrism

H1b: Political identity has a positive effect on tourism ethnocentrism

Domestic tourism intentions. Domestic tourism intentions are tourists' willingness to choose a domestic destination as a place to visit (Todorović et al., 2023). It indicates the subjective probability that tourists will visit a domestic destination shortly (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2000). In general, domestic tourism is essential in terms of tourist arrivals and economic contribution (Massidda and Etzo, 2012), and, compared to inbound tourists, domestic tourists tend to be more loyal, more likely to be satisfied, and promote positive word-of-mouth (Larsen and Wolff, 2019). Therefore, understanding tourists' domestic tourism intentions and the factors influencing them is essential for promoting economic and tourism development in the country. Scholars have explored the factors affecting domestic tourism intentions (Abubakar and Ilkan, 2016; Shen and Wu, 2022). However, a review of relevant research results reveals that most of the studies on domestic tourism intentions have been conducted in the context of developed countries (Eusébio et al., 2017; Jeuring, 2017), and there is still much room for research, as there has been less attention to and research on developing countries' domestic tourism intentions.

In addition, with the deepening of the research, studies on ethnocentrism and tourism intention have gradually increased. The empirical results show that tourism ethnocentrism believes that tourism development in their countries should be supported and will positively impact tourists' domestic tourism intentions (Kock et al., 2019; Todorović et al., 2023). Zhang et al. (2017) argued that the sentiment of tourism ethnocentrism directly affects tourism intention and that when tourists perceive a domestic tourism destination as part of the in-group, they will have positive sentiments towards it. Based on this premise, the subsequent hypothesis is put forward.

H2: Tourism ethnocentrism has a positive effect on domestic tourism intentions.

Destination security perception. The security perception is a combination of tourists' judgment regarding the stability of the place and the safety of their possessions. The excellent aspects of the destination include its stability, orderliness, favorable surroundings, and dependable and amiable local tourism personnel, all of which contribute to a satisfying vacation experience for tourists (Zou and Yu, 2022). Destination security perception is closely related to a destination's sustainability, and a destination's success depends on its ability to provide a safe and secure environment for its visitors. Throughout their journey, travelers are exposed to various information on the destination. They then process this information based on their thoughts and feelings, ultimately forming a comprehensive evaluation of the place's safety (Ma et al., 2023).

It has been established that the sentiment of tourism ethnocentrism influences tourists' perception of tourism destination security. When travelers consider the location as part of their group, they have positive emotions about its security perception (Arikan and Shenkar, 2013). In this scenario, travelers have unwavering trust in the location, subconsciously perceiving it as a safer place, and try to maintain a positive perception of the destination (George, 2010). That is, tourists' positive feelings about a destination increase their sense of security about the destination. In addition, in exploring mainland Chinese tourists' willingness to travel to Hong Kong, China Ma et al. (2023) found that the positive emotions of tourism ethnocentrism positively affect the destination security perception.

Tourism necessitates individuals to depart from their accustomed living places and journey to unfamiliar regions. The destination and the tourist's typical place of residence always have objective environmental variations. These differences might cause

uncertainty and unfamiliarity, which in turn can impact the level of trust among tourists (Font, 1997). Therefore, destination security perception is a key, if not the most important, factor in tourists' decision-making about their willingness to travel (Armstrong and Mok, 1995; Liu et al., 2014). When tourists' destination security perception is high, they will develop a favorable opinion of the destination, increasing their likelihood of traveling (Ma et al., 2023). On the contrary, when tourists' destination security perception is low, they will have an unfavorable image of the location, and their willingness to travel will drop (Li et al., 2019). Based on this premise, the subsequent hypothesis is put forward.

H3: Tourism ethnocentrism has a positive effect on destination security perception.

H4: Destination security perception has a positive effect on domestic tourism intentions.

Destination trust. The study of trust first originated in the 1950s, when the American social psychologist Deutsch (1958) defined trust as the behavior of an individual who chooses to make a belief despite a scenario in which he or she anticipates a possible negative outcome of an event. As objects of trust, tourism destinations are not fundamentally different from other trusts. Scholars Armstrong and Mok (1995) believe that destination trust is a perceived state in which tourists are free to behave in their own way at the destination and are willing to bear the possible negative consequences of doing so. At the same time, Abubakar et al. (2017) define destination trust as the ability of visitors to perceive the reliability and credibility of critical features of a destination.

Like the destination security perception, destination trust is also a positive perception and emotion that tourists have towards a destination. Moreover, studies have shown that destination security perception is related to establishing destination trust, as it can make the people concerned feel less vulnerable, thus generating trust and facilitating interactions with unfamiliar environments (Rousseau et al., 1998). Meanwhile, Abubakar and Ilkan (2016) argued that destination trust occurs when destinations provide reliable and trustworthy services to tourists and are free from dangers and nuisances. When tourists perceive that the destination is safe. In addition, when consumers perceive that a destination's safety and key features are relevant, they are more inclined to possess optimistic dispositions and heightened self-assurance, bolstering trust in the destination (Jago et al., 2003).

Meanwhile, Jeaheng et al. (2020) suggested that destination trust service providers affect behavioral intentions and that destination trust is essential for tourists to generate intentions to travel. Trust affects consumer travel planning decisions based on content sharing, information search, satisfaction, desire, and perception (Liu and Shih, 2021). Therefore, destination trust has been recognized as an essential prerequisite for behavioral outcomes, and relevant empirical results demonstrate that destination trust influences tourists' intention to visit tourist destinations (Verma et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2017). Based on this premise, the subsequent hypothesis is put forward.

H5: Destination security perception has a positive effect on destination trust.

H6: Destination trust has a positive effect on domestic tourism intentions.

In addition, researchers have done pertinent studies on the situation of tourism destination security perception and tourism destination trust as mediating variables. For example, Ma et al. (2023) verified the mediating role of destination security perceptions between tourism ethnocentrism and tourism intentions. Meanwhile, Sodawan and Hsu (2022) found that

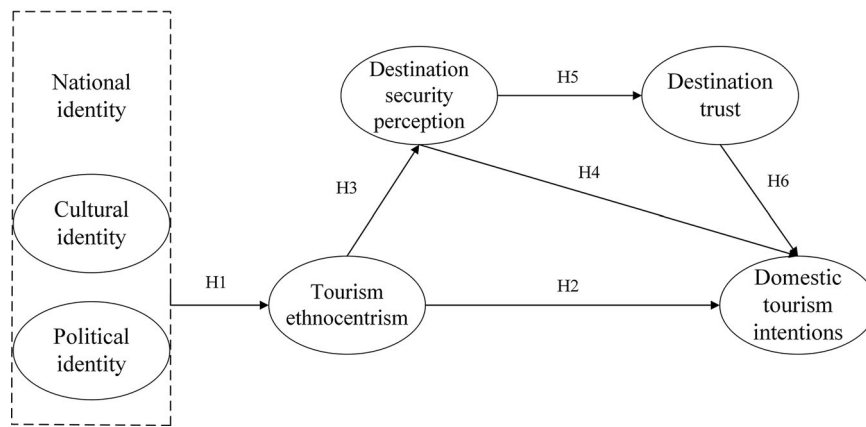


Fig. 1 Conceptual model. Note: The figure illustrates the relationship of the conceptual model based on social identity theory. Destination security perception and destination trust are chain mediators of the relationship between tourism ethnocentrism and domestic tourism intentions.

destination trust directly affects tourists’ intention to travel and confirmed the indirect relationship of destination trust as a mediator. Han et al. (2021) had a similar finding that destination trust as a mediator indirectly affects visit intention. Based on this premise, the subsequent hypothesis is put forward.

H7: Destination security perception mediates the relationship between tourism ethnocentrism and domestic tourism intentions.

H8: Destination trust mediates the relationship between destination security perception and domestic tourism intentions.

H9: Destination security perception and destination trust as chain mediators between tourism ethnocentrism and domestic tourism intentions.

In summary, the theoretical framework of this study is shown in Fig. 1.

Study method

Study case. There are two reasons why Kaifeng City in China was selected as a case site for this paper. First, with its rich historical and cultural resources, Kaifeng has been developing tourism for many years and has gradually become a typical tourist destination. According to the Kaifeng City Statistical Bulletin¹, Kaifeng City received 99.836 million tourists in 2023. The tourism revenue was 72.788 billion yuan, which accounted for about 25–30% of the city’s GDP, and the tourism industry has gradually become a pillar of the city’s economic development (Wang et al., 2023b). Second, China is an ancient civilization with a long history. After thousands of years of baptism by wind and rain, it has formed a unique Chinese culture, and under this cultural bondage, the Chinese people have also formed universal customs and preferences. Kaifeng, as one of the first historical and cultural cities in China, has nurtured not only the Song culture, which is inherited from the Han and Tang dynasties and inspired by the Ming and Qing dynasties but also the everlasting Yellow River culture, the patriotic culture represented by Jiao’s spirit, as well as colorful folk culture, which not only carry forward the inheritance of the traditional Chinese culture but also evoke a sense of national pride and cultural identity of the tourists as Chinese citizens. National pride, as well as cultural identity, and this positive perception is also a reflection of tourists’ ethnocentrism and national identity (Stepchenkova et al., 2018), which is in line with the research theme of this paper. Therefore, this paper takes Kaifeng, China, as a case site and adopts a questionnaire survey to conduct the relevant research.

Measurement. Based on the requirements of questionnaire design and management of conceptual dimensions in existing studies, this study designed a questionnaire for empirical research on the relationship between national identity (NI), tourism ethnocentrism (TE), destination security perception (DSP), destination trust (DT), and domestic tourism intentions (DTI). The questionnaire consisted of six parts: Referring to Phinney (1992), Lv (2010), and Zhang and Ma (2020) studies in the national identity section, a total of nine indicators in two types of dimensions cultural identity (CI) and political identity (PI) were designed to explore the extent of individuals’ participation in the group; The tourism ethnocentrism section refers to Lever et al. (2023) and Wang et al. (2021) ethnocentrism theories and their application in the field of tourism, and a total of six indicators were designed to measure tourists’ perceptions and attitudes toward domestic and international tourism; Referring to George (2010) classic scale, the destination security perception section designed a total of six indicators to measure tourists’ security perception while traveling in the country; Measuring the level of travelers’ destinations trust, this study refers to Abubakar and Ilkan (2016), and Sodawan and Hsu (2022) related studies on trust in destinations, and a total of five indicators were designed; The domestic tourism intentions section refers to Sodawan and Hsu (2022) study on visit intention to explore travelers’ intention to visit their home country. The demographic profile includes gender, age, occupation, monthly income level, and educational attainment. Of the six sections, the first five sections use a 5-point Likert scale (1 - strongly disagree; 2 - disagree; 3 - neutral; 4 - agree; 5 - strongly agree).

Data collection and analysis. During the questionnaire design phase, the initial self-administered questionnaire had to be translated into Chinese because the indicators were from English-speaking countries. Lecturers majoring in English at Henan University were invited to translate the questionnaire according to Brislin (1980) reverse translation procedure. After the first Chinese version was completed, two other professors in the field of tourism at Henan University were also invited to check the questionnaire for unclear expressions in the context of tourism terminology. Then, 15 tourists were randomly selected to fill out the questionnaire before the formal research. Based on their feedback on comprehension, clarity, and length, the measurement items were further modified, and the final version was used for the main study. This study obtained data by collecting questionnaires through the offline distribution of self-administered questionnaires (convenience sampling) in

Table 1 Demographic profile.

Demographics	Frequency	Percentage %	Demographics	Frequency	Percentage %
Gender			Education level		
Male	219	46.0	High school and below	208	43.7
Female	257	54.0	College/University	208	43.7
Age (years)			Postgraduate	60	12.6
18–24	114	23.9	Occupation		
25–34	157	33.0	Party and State organs/social organizations/ enterprise and public institutions staff	76	16.0
35–50	150	31.5	Professional and technical staff	73	15.3
51–64	45	9.5	Social production service and life service workers	94	19.7
Older than 65	10	2.1	Manufacturing and related personnel	21	4.4
Monthly income (RMB)			Agriculture, forestry, and fisheries production and support staff	25	5.3
Less than 2000	127	26.7	Soldier	0	0
2001–4000	98	20.6	Student	117	24.6
4001–6000	134	28.2	Others	70	14.7
6001–8000	75	15.8	N = 476		
More than 8001	42	8.8			

Kaifeng City, China, in November 2023 (Akhoondnejad, 2016). The survey locations were concentrated in the city’s major scenic spots, business districts, and transportation hubs, and Chinese tourists were selected to fill out the questionnaires by random sampling. Team members introduced the study and the primary content of the questionnaires to the respondents before the questionnaire began, and the respondents completed the questionnaires based solely on their perceptions and wishes. In this way, the data collection of this study was completed. In addition, the data analysis in this study was conducted using SPSS 26.0 and Smart PLS 4.0. Initially, SPSS was employed to evaluate the demographic features of the sample and conduct a descriptive statistical analysis of the study’s structure. Furthermore, the PLS-SEM algorithm was implemented using Smart PLS to evaluate the soundness of the research model (Pikkemaat et al., 2020). Finally, Bootstrapping with 5000 sub-samples was utilized to check the significance of path coefficients (Hair et al., 2017a). Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) is an advanced statistical method for social sciences that has proliferated in tourism research (Hair et al., 2017a). PLS-SEM analysis combines factor analysis and regression to examine latent construct relationships simultaneously. As the model includes both first- and second-order constructs, the application of PLS-SEM is well justified (Pikkemaat et al., 2020).

Analysis results

Demographic profile. Table 1 displays the demographic characteristics of the participants in this study. More precisely, 46% of the participants identified as male, while 54% identified as female, resulting in a well-balanced ratio of males to females. The respondents’ age breakdown is as follows: 114 (23.9%) were aged 18–24, 157 (33.0%) were aged 25–34, 185 (31.5%) were aged 35–50, 45 (9.5%) were aged 51–64, and 10 (2.1%) were aged 65 and older. Over 55% of the participants possess a college/university degree or higher level of education. The majority of respondents have occupations such as students (24.6%), workers in social production service and life service sectors (19.7%), and individuals working in party and state organs, mass organizations, social organizations, enterprises, and public institutions (16%). There is a wide range of occupations among the respondents. Furthermore, almost 50% of the participants reported a monthly income below ¥4000. Based on these demographic characteristics and the reference dataset, the sample collected in this study is representative to a certain extent.

Table 2 Results of CFA for the measurement model.

Constructs	Items	Loadings	Alpha	CR	AVE
CI	CI1	0.689	0.716	0.824	0.540
	CI2	0.759			
	CI3	0.717			
	CI4	0.773			
PI	PI2	0.649	0.732	0.823	0.541
	PI3	0.746			
	PI4	0.865			
	PI5	0.661			
	TE	0.665			
TE2	0.804				
TE3	0.829				
TE4	0.844				
TE6	0.704				
DSP	0.753	0.730	0.832	0.553	
DSP2	0.777				
DSP4	0.763				
DSP5	0.679				
DT	0.757				0.837
DT2	0.780				
DT3	0.806				
DT4	0.775				
DT5	0.774				
DTI	DTI1	0.801	0.809	0.874	0.634
	DTI2	0.800			
	DTI3	0.772			
	DTI4	0.810			

Assessment of the measurement model. The alpha, factor loading, average variance extracted (AVE), and combined reliability (CR) were calculated in measurement modeling and convergent validity. The analysis found that the factor loading coefficients of the indicators DSP3 and TE5 were less than 0.4, while the factor loading coefficients of the indicators PI1 and DSP6 were between 0.4 and 0.6, and that the deletion of this indicator significantly improved the AVE value of this measurement variable. Therefore, the above indicators were deleted (Hair et al., 2017a). Finally, four indicators, PI1, DSP3, DSP6, and TE5, were deleted in this study, and a total of 26 indicators were retained. As shown in Table 2, the alpha value of each latent variable is above 0.70 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981); the CR value is also high, above 0.82 (Netemeyer et al., 2003), indicating that the internal consistency test of each latent variable has high reliability, and the combined reliability test is passed. Meanwhile, the

factor loading coefficients of each observed variable are more significant than 0.6 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988), and the AVE values are above 0.50, which indicates that the data validity test has passed (Nurul Alam et al., 2023).

Furthermore, discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker index and the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT). Table 3 demonstrates that the square root of the AVE for all constructs was more statistically significant than their correlations. Additionally, all HTMT values were below the threshold of 0.9, indicating a solid discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015).

Assessment of the structural model. The structural model’s reliability and validity were assessed after the measurement model’s evaluation. The importance of the model is contingent upon the t-value, standard error, and path coefficient. The path coefficient value determines the acceptance or rejection of hypotheses during the partial least squares (PLS) bootstrapping procedure.

The direct impact effect relationships between the variables are shown in Table 4 and Fig. 2, and the causality hypotheses are supported except for hypothesis H1a. Specifically, cultural identity has no significant effect on tourism ethnocentrism ($\beta = 0.084, t = 1.435, p > 0.05$), rejecting hypothesis H1a; And there is a significant correlation between political identity and tourism ethnocentrism ($\beta = 0.241, t = 4.709, p < 0.05$), supporting hypothesis H1b; Tourism ethnocentrism significantly and positively affects domestic tourism intentions ($\beta = 0.093, t = 2.310, p < 0.05$), so it supports hypothesis H2; Tourism ethnocentrism significantly and positively affects destination security perception ($\beta = 0.225, t = 5.268, p < 0.05$), so the hypothesis H3 is supported; There is a significant correlation between

destination security perception and domestic tourism intentions ($\beta = 0.207, t = 4.410, p < 0.05$), so hypothesis H4 is valid; Meanwhile, destination security perception significantly affects destination trust ($\beta = 0.538, t = 14.281, p < 0.05$), therefore hypothesis H5 is accepted; Destination trust significantly and positively affects domestic tourism intentions ($\beta = 0.464, t = 10.163, p < 0.05$), hypothesis H6 is confirmed.

Set Bootstrap to draw samples 5000 times, construct 95% confidence intervals, calculate the indirect effects of the multi-mediation condition, and the results of the mediation effect test are shown in Table 5 (Hayes and Scharkow, 2013). As shown in Table 5, $\beta = 0.047$ for the path of tourism ethnocentrism \rightarrow destination security perception \rightarrow domestic tourism intentions, with a 95% confidence interval of [0.023, 0.076], which does not contain 0, indicating that the mediating effect is significant, and hypothesis H7 is established; The $\beta = 0.250$, 95% confidence interval of [0.193, 0.314] for the path of destination security perception \rightarrow destination trust \rightarrow domestic tourism intentions does not contain 0, indicating that the mediation effect is significant, and hypothesis H8 is established; $\beta = 0.056$ for the path of tourism ethnocentrism \rightarrow destination security perception \rightarrow destination trust \rightarrow domestic tourism intentions, with a 95% confidence interval of [0.032, 0.088], which does not contain 0, suggesting that the mediating effect is significant, and hypothesis H9 is established.

Results of multi group analysis. After evaluating the structural model, a multi-group analysis of tourist age was conducted to understand the effect of age on the mechanism of tourist travel intention formation. Before conducting a multi-group analysis, it is important to ensure that each group has enough respondents to meet the required sample size threshold (Cheah et al., 2023). Kline (2018) recommends that each group contain at least 100 observations for such analyses. Moreover, many previous studies have examined generational differences and the effects of age on behavior, often dividing respondents into two

Table 3 Discriminant validity Fornell-Larcker criterion.

	CI	DSP	DT	PI	TE	DTI
CI	0.735					
DSP	0.289	0.744				
DT	0.294	0.538	0.779			
PI	0.509	0.366	0.442	0.735		
TE	0.207	0.225	0.362	0.284	0.773	
DTI	0.346	0.478	0.609	0.415	0.308	0.796

Discriminant validity Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT).

CI						
DSP	0.408					
DT	0.372	0.685				
PI	0.732	0.492	0.537			
TE	0.245	0.271	0.417	0.312		
DTI	0.453	0.616	0.723	0.527	0.341	

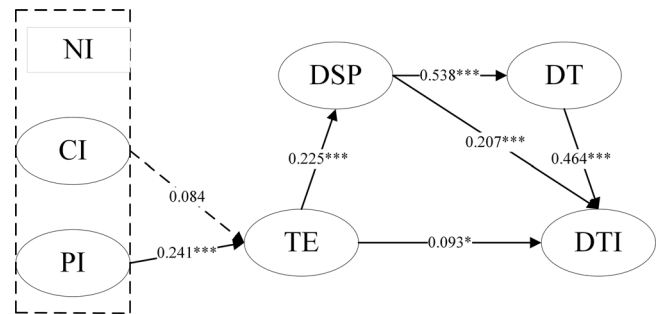


Fig. 2 Structural model assessment. Note: The figure illustrates the PLS model results with standard beta values and p-values between dependent and independent variables.

Table 4 Path coefficient (direct effect) results.

Hypothesis	Relationships	Beta	S. D	T-Value	P-Value	Confidence intervals	Decision
H1a	CI -> TE	0.084	0.059	1.435	0.151	(-0.016, 0.209)	Rejected
H1b	PI -> TE	0.241	0.051	4.709	0.000***	(0.142, 0.342)	Supported
H2	TE -> DTI	0.093	0.040	2.310	0.021*	(0.014, 0.174)	Supported
H3	TE -> DSP	0.225	0.043	5.268	0.000***	(0.145, 0.311)	Supported
H4	DSP -> DTI	0.207	0.047	4.410	0.000***	(0.111, 0.298)	Supported
H5	DSP -> DT	0.538	0.038	14.281	0.000***	(0.462, 0.610)	Supported
H6	DT -> DTI	0.464	0.046	10.163	0.000***	(0.375, 0.550)	Supported

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

Table 5 Mediation effect results.

Hypothesis	Relationships	Beta	S. D	T-Value	P-Value	Confidence intervals	Decision
H7	TE -> DSP -> DTI	0.047	0.014	3.384	0.001**	(0.023,0.076)	Supported
H8	DSP -> DT -> DTI	0.250	0.031	8.042	0.000***	(0.193,0.314)	Supported
H9	TE -> DSP -> DT -> DTI	0.056	0.014	3.936	0.000***	(0.032,0.088)	Supported

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

age groups, often with a cut-off of 35 years (Dash, 2025; Wang et al., 2023a). Therefore, for this study, the age of tourists was divided into two groups of <35 years old ($n = 271$) as well as ≥ 35 years old ($n = 205$) for data analysis. Additionally, before conducting the multi-group analysis, an invariance test was conducted using the Measurement Invariance of Composite Models (MICOM). This step ensures that perceptions of the structure are similar across groups, thus confirming that any differences observed between foreign and domestic tourists are due to actual feature differences. MICOM consists of three consecutive steps. Step 1 assesses configural invariance; Step 2 assesses compositional invariance, and Step 3 checks for equality of composite means and variances (Hair et al., 2017b). Partial measurement invariance is confirmed if steps 1 and 2 are confirmed. In addition, if step 3 is met, full measurement invariance is set (Henseler et al., 2016). Configuration invariance is satisfied as both groups use the same metrics. In addition, the second condition was also satisfied as no significant differences were found between the two groups when measuring compositional invariance. However, the third step revealed significant differences in cultural identity and tourism ethnocentrism between the two groups of tourists. Although the third requirement was not fully met, partial measurement invariance was supported to proceed with the PLS-MGA (Henseler et al., 2016). Meanwhile, the visitors' gender (divided into two groups, male, $n = 219$, and female, $n = 257$) and education level (divided into two groups, high school and below, $n = 208$, and college and above, $n = 268$) were similarly analyzed in multiple groups based on the above criteria. The summarized results of the invariance test are shown in Table 6.

Table 7 summarizes the results of the multi-group analyses to compare the differences in the mechanisms of influence among tourism ethnocentrism, destination security perception, and tourism intentions across tourists' age, gender, and education level. First, the results show that different age, gender, and education groups do not show significant differences in the effects of tourism ethnocentrism on domestic tourism intentions ($\Delta\beta = 0.066$, $p = 0.529$; $\Delta\beta = 0.150$, $p = 0.167$; and $\Delta\beta = 0.057$, $p = 0.596$); There were also no differences between age and education groups in the effect of tourism ethnocentrism on destination security perception ($\Delta\beta = -0.147$, $p = 0.166$; $\Delta\beta = 0.002$, $p = 0.974$). Similarly, there was no difference in the path of the effect of destination security perception on domestic tourism intentions ($\Delta\beta = 0.136$, $p = 0.470$; $\Delta\beta = -0.061$, $p = 0.731$; $\Delta\beta = 0.169$, $p = 0.315$) and destination trust ($\Delta\beta = -0.078$, $p = 0.394$; $\Delta\beta = -0.038$, $p = 0.666$; $\Delta\beta = 0.042$, $p = 0.627$) in the influence path of destination trust on domestic tourism intention ($\Delta\beta = -0.026$, $p = 0.892$; $\Delta\beta = 0.093$, $p = 0.595$; $\Delta\beta = -0.034$, $p = 0.829$), no significant differences were observed between the different age, gender, and education groups. In contrast, there were significant differences among different groups in the path of cultural identity on tourism ethnocentrism as an influence, with female tourists ($\beta = 0.110$) identifying more strongly than male tourists ($\beta = 0.038$) and showing a positive influence in the group of tourists <35 years old and with college and higher

education ($\beta = 0.243$; $\beta = 0.223$), and showing a negative influence in the group of tourists ≥ 35 years old and with high school and less education and ≥ 35 years old with high school or less education showed an adverse effect ($\beta = -0.031$; $\beta = -0.096$). For the relationship between political identity and tourism ethnocentrism, there were significant differences across age, gender, and education ($\Delta\beta = 0.246$, $p = 0.000$; $\Delta\beta = 0.092$, $p = 0.000$; $\Delta\beta = 0.455$, $p = 0.000$), with tourists ≥ 35 years of age, males, and with high school education or less ($\beta = 0.405$; $\beta = 0.333$; $\beta = 0.567$) showed a stronger association than <35 years old, female, college and above-educated tourists ($\beta = 0.159$; $\beta = 0.241$; $\beta = 0.113$). Moreover, there was a difference between genders in the path of tourism ethnocentrism's influence on destination security perception ($\Delta\beta = -0.247$, $p = 0.020$), with tourism ethnocentrism playing a relatively minor role in influencing male tourists' ($\beta = 0.164$) destination security perception.

Conclusion and Implication

Conclusion. This paper presents an empirical study of national identity, tourism ethnocentrism, destination security perception, destination trust, and domestic tourism intentions and their correlations and draws the following conclusions:

First off, national identity does not necessarily directly affect tourism ethnocentrism. Political identity can have a beneficial impact on tourism travel ethnocentrism; this is consistent with Ma et al. (2023) findings that tourists' political identity significantly affects their perception of the country as a tourist destination and changes the image of the destination in their minds. Political issues elicit identity perceptions of potential tourists as they relate to the core interests of different ethnic groups or countries, prompting tourists to consider their identity, ethnicity, and nationality when making decisions (Arikan and Shenkar, 2013). And the stronger the interest in the country's development and the more supportive of the country's institutional policies, the more likely it is that people will identify with it and see it as a relaxing and enjoyable place with worthwhile attractions and value for money (Roccas et al., 2006). An individual who possesses a profound sense of identity and a strong emotional connection to the principles and beliefs of their nation is more inclined to experience a sense of duty to engage in domestic travel (Lever et al., 2023). Furthermore, this study's findings suggest no explicit association between cultural identity and tourism ethnocentrism. One possible explanation is that ethnocentric attitudes are formed during adolescence (Aboud, 2003), are deeply rooted in an individual's personality, and have a lifelong impact (Hooghe and Wilkenfeld, 2008; Yves et al., 2012), whereas China is a multi-ethnic country with a diversity of cultures across ethnic groups with different levels of awareness of the concept of tourism ethnocentrism (Lv, 2010). On the other hand, from a globalization perspective, more and more people can lead a double life (Stevens et al., 2021). Participants usually master more languages, easily move between cultures, have residences in two (or even more) countries, and pursue their economic, political, and cultural

Table 6 Results of invariance test.

Constructs	Compositional invariance (Step-2)			Equality of composite mean and variances (Step 3)						
	Configural invariance (Step-1)	Original correlation	Correlation permutation mean	Permutation P-Value	Partial measurement Invariance	Mean difference	P-Value	Variance difference	P-Value	Full measurement Invariance
Age										
CI	Yes	0.975	0.967	0.471	Yes	-0.215	0.006	0.09	0.287	Yes/No
DSP	Yes	0.999	0.997	0.657	Yes	-0.129	0.077	0.142	0.215	Yes/ Yes
DT	Yes	0.999	0.999	0.521	Yes	0.159	0.042	-0.138	0.179	Yes/No
PI	Yes	0.994	0.983	0.754	Yes	-0.099	0.156	-0.06	0.333	Yes/ Yes
TE	Yes	0.999	0.994	0.922	Yes	0.311	0.001	0.023	0.434	Yes/No
DTI	Yes	0.999	0.999	0.254	Yes	-0.096	0.157	0.289	0.021	No/ Yes
Gender										
CI	Yes	0.977	0.969	0.497	Yes	0.213	0.010	-0.267	0.062	Yes/No
DSP	Yes	0.993	0.997	0.080	Yes	0.057	0.266	-0.269	0.070	Yes/ Yes
DT	Yes	1.000	0.999	0.893	Yes	-0.014	0.445	0.024	0.458	Yes/ Yes
PI	Yes	0.986	0.985	0.382	Yes	0.072	0.209	-0.071	0.304	Yes/ Yes
TE	Yes	0.999	0.995	0.956	Yes	0.123	0.093	0.093	0.227	Yes/ Yes
DTI	Yes	0.999	0.999	0.261	Yes	0.343	0.000	-0.265	0.051	Yes/No
Education										
CI	Yes	0.963	0.965	0.313	Yes	-0.176	0.030	0.115	0.257	Yes/No
DSP	Yes	0.999	0.997	0.640	Yes	-0.015	0.430	-0.096	0.312	Yes/ Yes
DT	Yes	1.000	0.999	0.977	Yes	0.205	0.014	-0.046	0.399	Yes/No
PI	Yes	0.995	0.984	0.806	Yes	-0.145	0.058	0.035	0.413	Yes/ Yes
TE	Yes	0.991	0.995	0.171	Yes	0.285	0.001	-0.015	0.468	Yes/No
DTI	Yes	0.998	0.999	0.086	Yes	-0.092	0.148	0.241	0.060	Yes/Yes

Table 7 Results of multi-group analysis.

Constructs	Hypothesis	β	β	Δβ	P-Value
Age		≥35 years	<35 years		
	CI -> TE	-0.031	0.243	-0.274	0.000
	PI -> TE	0.405	0.159	0.246	0.000
	TE -> DTI	0.120	0.054	0.066	0.529
	TE -> DSP	0.221	0.368	-0.147	0.166
	DSP -> DTI	0.246	0.110	0.136	0.470
	DSP -> DT	0.656	0.734	-0.078	0.394
	DT -> DTI	0.581	0.607	-0.026	0.892
Gender		Male	Female		
	CI -> TE	0.038	0.110	-0.072	0.000
	PI -> TE	0.333	0.241	0.092	0.000
	TE -> DTI	0.133	-0.017	0.150	0.167
	TE -> DSP	0.164	0.411	-0.247	0.020
	DSP -> DTI	0.178	0.239	-0.061	0.731
	DSP -> DT	0.674	0.712	-0.038	0.666
	DT -> DTI	0.636	0.543	0.093	0.595
Education		High school and below	College and above		
	CI -> TE	-0.096	0.223	-0.318	0.000
	PI -> TE	0.567	0.113	0.455	0.000
	TE -> DTI	0.105	0.047	0.057	0.596
	TE -> DSP	0.294	0.292	0.002	0.974
	DSP -> DTI	0.290	0.121	0.169	0.315
	DSP -> DT	0.718	0.676	0.042	0.627
	DT -> DTI	0.556	0.590	-0.034	0.829

interests in each country (Shin, 2012). Therefore, in the broader context of cultural intermingling and multiethnic integration, there may not be a significant effect between cultural identity and ethnocentrism, which is also consistent with the findings of Wagner et al. (2012), who argued that cultural identity could coexist with a multicultural perspective and that a variety of social, cultural, and situational factors may moderate its relationship with ethnocentrism.

In addition, tourism ethnocentrism can positively influence tourists' domestic tourism intentions, and the core concept of ethnocentrism has strong applicability in tourism research (Boukamba et al., 2021), which can be seen as patriotic behavior. This patriotic factor leads tourists to prefer "us" and exclude "them" (Amira et al., 2021; Viki and Calitri, 2008), which further influences tourists' behavioral intentions, suggesting that tourists' ethnocentrism is an important psychological factor to be considered in the study of tourism intentions (Luo and Zhai, 2017; Yu et al., 2020), that is, identity and psychological factors have the most important influence on tourists' willingness to visit (Ahmad et al., 2021). This result is consistent with consumer ethnocentrism research (Siamagka and Balabanis, 2015). While the Theory of Planned Behavior suggests that human behavior is driven by intentions and perceived behavioral control, the extended Theory of Planned Behavior proposed by Rozenkowska (2023) and Miguel et al. (2022) provides a coherent framework for understanding the complex processes that drive consumer purchase intentions. Ethnocentrism, as a cultural orientation and value that reflects limited rationality in planned behavior, represents cultural loyalty (Makrides et al., 2022), which manifests itself as bias or preference for products from a particular country or region based on perceived outcomes associated with consumption activities (Hoang et al., 2022). Consumer ethnocentrism affects consumer behavior towards purchasing domestically produced or imported products, with stronger consumer ideology leading to more pronounced behavioral, normative, and control beliefs (Rozenkowska, 2023).

This shows that ethnocentrism has an equally important impact on consumer behavioral preferences. In addition, there is also a mediating pathway between the two in the form of destination security perception, where security concerns about the actual presence of the destination, coupled with ethnocentrism (a psychosocial factor) influence tourists' domestic tourism intentions (Bremser and Abraham, 2024). When tourists rate the overall safety of a destination highly, they have a positive perception of the destination (Jingyan Liu, 2015), and their propensity to travel to that destination increases. As stated by Plog (1974), psychocentric tourists are cautious and conservative and therefore less suited to adventure and exploration, preferring familiar and relatively safe destinations (Litvin and Smith, 2016). In contrast, when tourists rate the overall safety of a destination as low, they have a negative view of the destination, and their propensity to travel there decreases (Li et al., 2019). At the same time, the study also confirms that there are two indirect paths between tourism ethnocentrism and domestic tourism intentions, consisting of destination security perception and destination trust that indirectly affect domestic tourism intentions, verifying the hypothesis of a chain mediation model.

In the third place, tourism destination security perception can contribute to the level of tourists' destination trust and influence their domestic tourism intentions. It has been shown that destination security perception is closely linked to trust constructs, as security is an essential basis for stimulating trust and facilitating communication (Rousseau et al., 1998). In other words, security perception as a positive perception leads to the development of positive attitudes among tourists, enhances confidence levels, and ultimately deepens trust in the destination (Jago et al., 2003). And the effect of destination trust on domestic tourism intentions can be explained by the fact that the higher the destination trust, the greater the tendency of tourists to visit domestic destinations, a finding that is consistent with Purbadharmaja et al. (2021) finding that destination trust can be viewed as an antecedent for generating travel intentions. In tourism, trust remains an effective means of minimizing perceptions of risk and uncertainty (Han and Hyun, 2013), and tourists are more likely to visit destinations they perceive as trustworthy and reliable (J Roodurmun, 2010). Therefore, destination trust (reliability, integrity, competence, and quality assurance) affects travel intentions in tourism (Abubakar and Ilkan, 2016). Moreover, according to the findings of Sodawan and Hsu (2022), trust is a necessary condition for generating willingness to travel to a tourist destination. In addition, the destination security perception positively affects domestic tourism intentions through the mediating role of tourist destination trust, indicating that there is a conduction effect of tourist destination trust between the destination security perception and domestic tourism intentions, and that the improvement of tourists' domestic tourism intentions can be realized by enhancing an individual's tourism destination trust.

Finally, the multi-group analysis showed that of all the hypotheses established in this study (H1b, H2-H6), significant differences between age groups were observed only in the path of political identity's influence on tourism ethnocentrism. In contrast, for the other paths of influence explored in this study, no significant between-group differences were demonstrated between age groups. These findings are consistent with previous studies (Liu and Shih, 2021; Ma et al., 2023; Sodawan and Hsu, 2022), suggesting that these relationships may be robust across age groups of tourists. In addition, specifically, older tourists showed stronger associations than younger tourists in the relationship between political identity and tourism ethnocentrism, suggesting that older people's political identity more prominently affects their tourism ethnocentrism. The life cycle

effect hypothesis states that individuals' political attitudes will change with different stages of life, which means that the political attitudes of younger and older groups may be more divergent (Dalton and Shin, 2014); as individuals grow older, they will gradually form a complete personality during the socialization process, and their political perceptions will gradually become more stable (Meeus et al., 2014). This means that older groups prefer a stable and harmonious political ecology and are more likely to have a strong collective consciousness and a higher sense of identification with the community (Meier et al., 2019). Whereas the prevailing assumption in the social science literature is that highly educated individuals will have lower levels of ethnocentrism than less educated individuals (Bobo and Licari, 1989; Hello et al., 2006), Meeusen et al. (2013) argued that there is a negative correlation between education and ethnocentrism, with highly educated people being able to organize information more effectively. They are more successful in extending these principles of tolerance and equality to other groups (Bobo and Licari, 1989). In addition, the study found differences between genders in the pathways of influence of political identity on tourism ethnocentrism and tourism ethnocentrism on destination security perception. Male tourists' political identity was more strongly associated with their perceived tourism ethnocentrism, whereas female tourists' tourism ethnocentrism had a more significant role in influencing their destination security perception. One possible explanation lies in the fact that all else being equal, men tend to think more about areas of belief such as authoritarianism, which strengthens the relationship between men's cognitive needs and their social beliefs (Kemmelmeier, 2010), whereas women are more likely to express concern and empathy in their interpersonal relationships as well as with external groups (Gault, 1997; Schieman and Van Gundy, 2000). Women tend to be less strict in their beliefs than men. However, they are often able to identify more threats to security than men, not necessarily because they feel more threatened but because they are more capable of thinking about security from perspectives other than their own (Stevens et al., 2021) and are more sensitive to environmental security issues.

Theoretical implication. This study makes the following three theoretical contributions to the existing literature. First, it systematically incorporates Social Identity Theory into the research framework of tourist ethnocentrism, revealing how national identity influences domestic travel intentions through tourist ethnocentrism, thereby expanding the theoretical boundaries of ethnocentrism within tourism contexts. Prior research on ethnocentrism has primarily focused on consumer behavior (Shimp and Sharma, 1987; Siamagka and Balabanis, 2015). Although some scholars have attempted to apply this concept to tourism (Kock et al., 2019; Todorović et al., 2023), their work has primarily examined its direct effects on travel intentions, with limited in-depth exploration of its antecedents and underlying psychological mechanisms. This study not only validates the applicability of ethnocentrism in tourism decision-making but also explicitly distinguishes between cultural identity and political identity. In doing so, it extends the scope of ethnocentrism research beyond consumer behavior and enriches the current body of knowledge in the field of tourist ethnocentrism.

Furthermore, this study provides empirical evidence that systematically elucidates the sequential mediating mechanism through which destination safety perception and destination trust translate tourist ethnocentrism into domestic travel intentions. Although numerous studies have widely demonstrated that destination trust influences travel intentions (Abubakar and Ilkan, 2016; Verma et al., 2019), and scholars often regard safety

perception as a prerequisite for trust (Rousseau et al., 1998), existing tourism research has not yet systematically examined the hierarchical relationship and transmission mechanism between these two constructs within the context of ethnocentrism. This study responds to Rousseau et al.'s (1998) classical proposition that "safety is the foundation of trust" by contextualizing it specifically within tourism settings, thereby enriching the antecedent literature on destination trust (Jago et al., 2003) and offering empirical support for understanding how tourists transition from affective preference to rational evaluation and ultimately form behavioral intentions.

Finally, this study incorporates a moderating perspective based on demographic variables. The multi-group analysis results indicate that the effect of political identity on tourist ethnocentrism varies significantly across tourists of different ages, genders, and education levels, offering theoretical guidance for destination managers. Although scholars have long acknowledged that demographic characteristics influence ethnocentrism (Caruana, 1996; Stepchenkova, 2023), few studies have systematically examined how these variables moderate key pathways in the formation mechanism of ethnocentrism. By treating demographic variables as contextual factors that moderate the translation of national identity into in-group favoritism (Meeus et al., 2010), this study reveals that ethnocentrism is not a static personality trait but a dynamic sociopsychological process shaped by one's social position. This perspective encourages future research to move beyond the individual psychological level and pay greater attention to how macro-level social structures shape tourism-related attitudes (Park et al., 2015), thereby deepening the theoretical understanding of tourist ethnocentrism.

Managerial implication. This study provides valuable insights and also has important management implications.

In the beginning, the analysis of tourism ethnocentrism in this paper shows that it is a rationalization phenomenon caused by perceptions. To enhance tourism ethnocentrism and attract domestic tourists, tourism practitioners might emphasize the practical aspects (national traditional culture, policy guidelines, economic development, etc.) of choosing domestic destinations, as tourism ethnocentrism is not solely symbolic but can also be influenced by practical considerations (Todorović et al., 2023). In addition, this study found that tourism ethnocentrism significantly influences domestic tourism intentions. Domestic tourism destinations should fully consider the advantages of tourism ethnocentrism and domestic tourism and reasonably combine the two when they are being promoted, helping tourists make more rational choices and further supporting domestic tourism by countering the adverse effects of tourism ethnocentrism.

Next, the results of this study suggest that destination security perception and trust likewise impact tourists' domestic tourism intentions, providing essential insights for all stakeholders in the tourism industry. Service providers, such as airlines, travel agencies, attractions, hotels, and restaurants, might be involved in delivering services either directly or indirectly. Service providers are crucial in delivering destination tourism and influencing guests' perception of the area (Sodawan and Hsu, 2022). Therefore, destination managers should improve the quality of services in all aspects of food, clothing, accommodation, and transportation in tourist destinations, create a safe, secure, and trustworthy destination place for tourists, and improve hardware facilities and services in addition to the emotional drive and attraction of attractions, to improve tourists' tourism destination security perception and trust in tourist destinations, and to encourage them to visit domestic tourist destinations.

Lastly, as a factor linking the International Tourism Association and world tourism development, tourism can help countries better channel domestic tourism flows. When promoting lesser-known sites, national tourism agencies should highlight the facilities and advantages these areas offer residents. It is essential to emphasize the ethnocentric nature of visiting tourists to increase awareness and attract visitors. Therefore, destination management organizations should use social media to express emotions such as pride, intimacy, and attachment to national values through posts (Lever et al., 2023). Furthermore, DMOs can employ nationalistic visuals such as flags and national anthems to foster a stronger connection to national ideals, reinforce the significance of domestic travel over international alternatives, and leverage tourists' ethnocentric convictions and desires to encourage domestic tourism. It is also important for destination managers to recognize differences in tourists' perceptions across age, gender, and education and that they can be provided with targeted content and information about activities that should resonate uniquely with each group (Lotfavi et al., 2025). By aligning tourism development strategies with perceptions of identity of different ages, genders, and education levels, stakeholders can promote a culture of environmental stewardship and pave the way for destination development.

Limitations and future research. This study possesses certain constraints that can be resolved in subsequent investigations. First, this study takes Chinese tourists as its target. Based on existing research, it uses the Chinese case to refine the theoretical framework of tourism ethnocentrism and further validate the research findings on tourism ethnocentrism. However, as China is a multi-ethnic country, and there are differences in the specific conditions of each country, further exploration is needed to see if similar findings can be found in other destinations in the East and Southeast Asian cultural sphere. Second, focusing mainly on the variable of ethnocentrism, this study used domestic tourism intentions as the outcome variable of tourism ethnocentrism and did not explore much about other factors affecting tourism intentions (e.g., income, language, distance, etc.). Future research should explore alternative outcome variables, such as tourist satisfaction and loyalty, to investigate the connections between tourism ethnocentrism and other factors. This will contribute to developing a more comprehensive framework for understanding tourism ethnocentrism and further add to the framework of mechanisms for influencing tourism intentions. Finally, this study divided the respondents' age, gender, and education level. It analyzed the impact of these factors on the research results. However, it did not explore the mechanism of the impact of the respondents' different occupations on the relationship paths because the high and low grouping is the cluster analysis path that is often used in structural equation modeling (Wang et al., 2023b). In contrast, the division of occupations cannot be measured in terms of high and low, and the existing research results in the field of tourism have also not discussed the situation of cluster analysis regarding the occupations (Azic and Sustar, 2022; Kim et al., 2024). Meanwhile, Kline (2018) recommended that cluster analysis include at least 100 observations per group for such analysis. However, the number of occupations of each respondent in this study mostly did not meet this requirement. Moreover, this study only considered the factors influencing Chinese tourists' domestic ethnocentrism and sense of belonging in the research, without thinking deeply about the influence of transnationality on tourists' tourism ethnocentrism and domestic travel intention under the globalization process. The data were not collected with important contextual factors such as the respondents' origin (urban or rural), the number of languages

they were proficient in, whether they often traveled to other countries, their previous travel experiences, and the purpose of their travel. Therefore, future research can refine the questionnaire based on this study to gain a deeper understanding of the differences between individual characteristics of respondents, such as recording important factors such as respondents' language, past travel experiences, travel purpose, and religious beliefs, choosing more appropriate moderating variables, and constructing more mature theoretical frameworks to explore the effects of respondents' ethnocentrism and domestic travel intention. This will further enrich the generalizability of the existing results in a broad context.

Data availability

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are not publicly available due to privacy concerns, but are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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Note

1 Data source: <https://www.kaifeng.gov.cn/>.

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Author contributions

Conceptualization, N.C.; methodology, L.W. and F.B.; formal analysis, F.B.; investigation, F.B.; data curation, L.W. and F.B.; writing—original draft preparation, N.C., L.W. and F.B.; writing—review and editing, Q.Y., Y.W. and W.S.; visualization, Y.W. and W.S.; supervision, Q.Y. and N.C.; and project administration, N.C. and Q.Y. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical approval

This study has been approved by the Academic Committee of the Research Institute for Study Travel at Henan University (October 18, 2023; No.: 2023-010LLYX-002), which is responsible for the ethical review of all research projects conducted by the faculty of the institute. The design and implementation of all procedures in this study have adhered to the ethical standards outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki, and the scope of approval encompasses all aspects of the research.

Informed consent

In accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, the researchers collected sample data from Chinese tourists in Kaifeng, China, in November 2023, by distributing self-administered paper questionnaires offline using a random sampling method. Before respondents began answering the questionnaire, the researchers explained the purpose of the study, the specific procedures, the scope of data use, data protection measures, the potential public disclosure of anonymized results, and the respondents' right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Respondents completed the questionnaire based solely on their own views and intentions, and provided their informed consent. All of this information (the study description and informed consent statement) appeared in the introductory section on the first page of the paper questionnaire. By continuing to complete the questionnaire, respondents indicated their informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation and the confidentiality of their responses. They could withdraw from the study at any time, according to their personal preference. The questionnaires were completed during the formal sampling survey period in November 2023, after receiving ethical approval on October 18, 2023.

Additional information

Supplementary information The online version contains supplementary material available at <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-026-07188-x>.

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