

# Study on the Protection and Inheritance of Chaoshan Intangible Cultural Heritage from the Perspective of Local Theory

## -- Taking Chaoshan Qianci as an Example

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### Abstract

**This study examines Chaoshan Qianci (a UNESCO-listed cultural heritage site) through a local theory framework, investigating how local knowledge, tourist participation, perceived value, and local attachment influence intangible cultural heritage protection behaviors. Employing a combination of literature review, questionnaire surveys, and quantitative analysis, the study collected data from diverse sources including Chaoshan residents, tourists from Guangdong Province and beyond, cultural practitioners, and students, yielding 307 valid responses. Results demonstrate that the acquisition of local knowledge, tourist engagement, perceived value, and local attachment all significantly enhance heritage protection efforts. The study proposes a five-dimensional strategy encompassing cognition, experience, emotion, institutional support, and innovation to achieve dynamic preservation and sustainable development of Chaoshan Qianci.**

### Keywords

**Local theory; protection of intangible cultural heritage; Chaoshan Qianci; value perception; local attachment.**

### 1. Introduction

In the wave of globalization, cultural competition has become a core manifestation of a nation's soft power. Cultural confidence, as the essence of national spirit, serves not only as a spiritual pillar for national development but also as a crucial defense against cultural homogenization. In recent years, China has vigorously promoted the construction of cultural confidence, aiming to enhance national cohesion through the promotion of indigenous culture. Intangible cultural heritage serves as an important vehicle for showcasing national cultural confidence, preserving historical memories and collective wisdom of a nation. Proper protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage hold significant importance for maintaining cultural diversity. For instance, Chaoshan Qianci, as a typical representative of intangible cultural heritage, its artistic forms and historical accumulation are indispensable components in building cultural confidence.

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) transforms abstract cultural concepts into tangible spiritual bonds through concrete techniques and symbolic systems, providing profound support for cultural confidence. Take Chaoshan Qianci as an example: this art form, using colored ceramic tile inlaying techniques, embodies the collective memory of ancestor veneration and blessings-seeking in the Chaoshan region. By leveraging artistic expression, it enhances social and cultural identity. The regional characteristics of ICH not only infuse vitality into local cultural pride but also showcase the openness and innovation of Chinese culture through international dissemination (e.g., digital exhibitions and cross-border joint exhibitions). This dual function of fostering cultural consensus domestically and boosting international discourse power

externally makes ICH a cultural bridge connecting tradition and modernity, local and global, thereby providing a practical foundation for cultural confidence.

Originating in the Ming Dynasty, Chaoshan Qianci (a traditional Chinese architectural ornament) embodies local folk beliefs through mythological and natural motifs, serving as a multidimensional symbol of Chaoshan's cultural richness. However, contemporary challenges confront this heritage: urbanization erodes traditional architecture, drastically shrinking Qianci's application scope; while modern material technologies and fading cultural identity among younger generations have caused intergenerational transmission gaps and market demand imbalances. These contradictions mirror the universal survival dilemmas of intangible cultural heritage in industrialized societies—how to preserve cultural DNA while forging new value connections with modernity. Addressing this challenge is not only crucial for intangible cultural heritage's sustainable development but also a pivotal breakthrough for building cultural confidence rooted in local realities.

This study systematically traces the development trajectory of Chaoshan Qianci since the Ming Dynasty, exploring its dual roles as architectural ornamentation and a cultural vessel for ancestral worship. It elucidates Qianci's pivotal role in shaping Chaoshan's cultural identity, folk belief systems, and aesthetic expressions. Through historical documentation and field research, the study deciphers the evolution of Qianci craftsmanship from traditional architectural decoration to cultural symbolism. It addresses practical challenges including reduced application scope, intergenerational transmission gaps, and technological impacts amid globalization and urbanization, providing historical foundations and practical references for intangible cultural heritage preservation.

## 2. Literature review

The place theory posits that a sense of place constitutes an individual's emotional connection to specific locations, encompassing two dimensions: local attachment and place identity. Local attachment emphasizes people's positive emotional attachment to a place, reflecting the psychological dependence mechanism within specific spatial environments. Closely related to intangible cultural heritage, Chinese scholars Yan Jing and Shu Zhangwen highlight that the theory underscores the uniqueness of each locality. As vital components of local culture, intangible cultural heritage showcases the history, traditions, skills, and values of local communities<sup>[1]</sup>. Through in-depth research on local historical culture, we can better understand regional cultural characteristics. Scholar Wang Ting argues that studying place theory helps people grasp the inherent patterns of cultural inheritance and development, effectively promoting preservation and innovation efforts. Additionally, the theory explores how historical contexts and local culture influence people's thinking and behavior<sup>[2]</sup>.

As an important part of China's traditional culture, Chaoshan region boasts a rich intangible cultural heritage. To date, Chaoshan has established a list including 1 UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage item and 17 national-level intangible cultural heritage protection items. These heritage projects encompass traditional crafts such as Chaoshan embroidery, carving, and sculpture, local operas like Chaoshan opera, and folk activities such as gongfu tea, forming a diverse cultural carrier. They are not only the cultural roots of Chaoshan people but also enrich the diversity of Chinese culture, showcasing the unique charm of local characteristics. Li Li and others from Hanshan Normal University mentioned in their research that, in terms of classification, the intangible cultural heritage applications in Chaoshan region mainly focus on folk dance, quyi (folk performance arts), folk art, and folk customs. From the perspective of tourism development, these intangible cultural heritages will have high appeal to visitors and great potential for developing cultural tourism products<sup>[3]</sup>.

Chaoshan Qianci art is deeply rooted in Chaoshan's cultural heritage, with its distinctive artistic style and craftsmanship reflecting the aesthetic sensibilities and cultural legacy of the Chaoshan people. The visual language of Qianci is highly expressive, with its works' power and aesthetic appeal stemming from unique materials and techniques<sup>[4]</sup>. In terms of color, Qianci art predominantly uses overglaze enamel in shades of blue, green, and red, complemented by traditional glaze pigments, creating a rich and layered palette. The themes of Qianci art are deeply rooted in local culture, often drawing inspiration from Chaozhou opera, showcasing a strong regional identity and a vibrant sense of everyday aesthetics.

Although Chaoshan Qianci has been listed as a national intangible cultural heritage, its preservation and inheritance face numerous challenges. Yin Jianqiang from the Macau University of Science and Technology pointed out three major difficulties: the traditional Qianci craft is on the verge of extinction, the market for traditional Qianci decorations is narrow and limited, and the cultural inheritance environment for traditional Qianci has yet to take shape<sup>[5]</sup>. Due to the long-term commitment and patience required to learn Qianci skills, coupled with limited economic returns, fewer and fewer young people are willing to pursue this craft. Feng Hanzi from Hanshan Normal University mentioned in her research that with the development of the times and changes in modern architectural forms, Chaoshan Qianci has faced social marginalization. In the new media environment, the protection and development of Chaoshan Qianci have gained new opportunities. Breaking through the limitations of traditional forms of expression and creative themes, fully exploring the uniqueness of Chaoshan Qianci's artistic language, can better integrate this art form into contemporary social life<sup>[6]</sup>. Xie Zelin and colleagues from South China Normal University proposed strategies to build a new context for the protection and development of Chaoshan Qianci under new media forms, aiming to bring fresh opportunities for its development<sup>[7]</sup>.

### 3. Research Design

#### 3.1. Research Hypotheses

(1) the relationship between the acquisition of local knowledge and the acts of protecting intangible cultural heritage.

Local knowledge, deeply rooted in a region's natural environment, historical traditions, and social practices, possesses contextual and irreplaceable cultural uniqueness. Dong Xiaopei and Wei Guomin emphasize that the preservation of folk intangible cultural heritage must be grounded in a contextual understanding of "local knowledge," including systematic documentation of dialects, ritual norms, and belief systems, to ensure the integrity of its cultural essence<sup>[8]</sup>. Accordingly, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: The acquisition of local knowledge positively influences the acts of protecting intangible cultural heritage.

(2) The relationship between tourist participation and the acts of protecting intangible cultural heritage.

By engaging in intangible cultural heritage (ICH) experience programs, tourists not only deepen their understanding of ICH but also spontaneously promote its preservation through cultural resonance, facilitating their transition from passive observers to active participants in ICH conservation<sup>[9]</sup>. Liu Shao 'ai and Lin Yingxing's research further demonstrates that tourist participation in ICH cultural tourism not only allows visitors to experience the charm of traditional culture but also enhances their awareness of ICH's value through interactive activities, thereby promoting its living inheritance. Tourists' participation is described as "a significant driving force for the preservation and development of ICH"<sup>[10]</sup>. Therefore, tourist

participation plays a positive role in tourists' acts of protecting intangible cultural heritage. This study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: Tourist participation has a positive impact on tourists' acts of protecting intangible cultural heritage.

(3) The relationship between value perception and the acts of protecting intangible cultural heritage.

Multiple studies have demonstrated a strong correlation between "perception of value" and "acts of protecting intangible cultural heritage" when examining influencing factors. For instance, research indicates that tourists' perception of cultural heritage value significantly influences their conservation intentions, with higher perceived value leading to stronger conservation intentions<sup>[11]</sup>. Further studies reveal that educational perception of value has the most significant positive impact on conservation intentions<sup>[12]</sup>. Additionally, research in intangible cultural heritage study tours shows that educational perception of value, social perception of value, and situational perception of value all positively influence conservation behaviors<sup>[13]</sup>. These findings collectively demonstrate that perception of value plays a pivotal role in protecting intangible cultural heritage. Based on the above research findings, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: The perception of value has a positive impact on acts of protecting intangible cultural heritage.

(4) The relationship between local attachment and acts of protecting intangible cultural heritage.

Local attachment, as an emotional bond between individuals and their local communities, can enhance conservation awareness and behavioral tendencies toward local resources. Tang Wenyue's research found that tourists' local attachment significantly positively influences their attitudes toward resource protection<sup>[14]</sup>, indicating that local attachment strengthens tourists' proactive attitudes toward conservation, which may subsequently influence their conservation behaviors. Xiang Lanlin et al. also demonstrated through empirical analysis that local attachment enhances residents' conservation consciousness toward local cultural resources, with stronger local attachment leading to greater inclination to protect cultural heritage, including intangible cultural heritage items<sup>[15]</sup>. Additional studies confirm a significant positive correlation between residents' local attachment and their conservation attitudes toward heritage. Research emphasizes that residents' dependence on and emotional identification with natural environments strengthen their initiative and sense of responsibility in heritage protection, particularly when local attachment is impacted by tourism development, making fluctuations in conservation willingness more pronounced<sup>[16]</sup>. Based on these findings, this paper proposes the following hypothesis:

H4: Local attachment has a positive impact on acts of protecting intangible cultural heritage.

### 3.2. Questionnaire Design and Distribution

This study's questionnaire design adopts a local theory perspective, integrating core elements of Chaoshan Qianci's intangible cultural heritage (ICH) protection and transmission while referencing relevant literature to construct the scale. The questionnaire comprises two core modules: The first section focuses on respondents' basic information, including gender, age, residential area, and occupation type, aiming to analyze potential correlations between respondents' background characteristics and their ICH protection practices. The second section employs the seven-point Likert scale method, measuring five core variables: acquisition of local knowledge, tourist participation, perception of value, local attachment, and acts of protecting ICH. These five variables comprehensively depict individuals' cognitive processes and behavioral decisions in ICH protection through four dimensions— "knowledge, action, emotion,

and intention." This approach not only aligns with local theory's focus on the interplay between cultural space and human practice but also provides concrete intervention directions for policymakers to enhance public awareness and stimulate conservation actions.

Among the variables, the dimensions of 'acquisition of local knowledge,' 'tourist participation,' and 'local attachment' are adapted from Zhang Hongxia's<sup>[17]</sup> study, while 'perception of value' (items 14-22) references Zhang Min's<sup>[18]</sup> research, and 'acts of protecting intangible cultural heritage' (items 29-40) is based on Xiao Qi's<sup>[19]</sup> study.

The survey was conducted through a hybrid online-offline approach, targeting Chaoshan residents, tourists from Guangdong and beyond, cultural professionals, and students across multiple age groups and occupational backgrounds to ensure comprehensive data coverage and representativeness. Online, electronic questionnaires were generated via the Wenjuanxing platform and distributed through targeted social media channels like WeChat and Weibo to Chaoshan cultural communities, intangible cultural heritage enthusiasts, and university student groups. Offline, field surveys were conducted at Qianci cultural sites (including Chaozhou Kaiyuan Temple, Qinglong Ancient Temple, Qianci Museum, and local ancestral halls) as well as schools and communities. The survey was completed in March 2025, with 320 questionnaires collected. After excluding invalid responses, 307 valid responses were retained, achieving an effective response rate of 95.9%.

## 4. Data Analysis

### 4.1. Descriptive Statistics Analysis

A total of 307 participants were involved in this survey, with 132 males (43.0%) and 175 females (57.0%) in the sample. The participants were distributed by age as follows: 6 individuals (2.0%) aged 20 or younger; 45 (14.7%) aged 21-30; 104 (33.9%) aged 31-40; 88 (28.7%) aged 41-50; 54 (17.6%) aged 51-60; and 10 (3.3%) aged 60 or older.

In terms of residence, 165 participants (53.7%) lived in Chaoshan, 77 (25.1%) lived in other parts of Guangdong province, and 65 (21.2%) lived outside Guangdong province.

Regarding occupations, 58 participants (18.9% of the total sample) were students, 92 (30.0%) were education/culture workers, 51 (16.6%) were corporate employees, 47 (15.3%) were freelancers, and 59 (19.2%) belonged to other occupations.

### 4.2. Reliability and Validity Analysis

To ensure data validity and consistency, this study conducted reliability and validity analysis. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was used to measure reliability, with a standard threshold of 0.70. The analysis was performed using SPSS 28.0 software. The results showed that the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients for local knowledge acquisition, tourist participation, perceived value, local attachment, and acts of protecting intangible cultural heritage were 0.897, 0.780, 0.876, 0.839, and 0.902, respectively. All values exceeded the 0.70 threshold, indicating good reliability in this study. The KMO values for the acquisition of local knowledge, tourist participation, value perception, local attachment, and acts of protecting intangible cultural heritage were 0.829, 0.778, 0.934, 0.888, and 0.947 respectively, all exceeding the 0.70 threshold with significance levels below 0.001, indicating strong validity of the study.

### 4.3. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The confirmatory factor analysis results show that the model has a good fit, with chi-square/degrees of freedom=1.171<3; RMSEA=0.024<0.08; CFI=0.981>0.9; IFI=0.981>0.9; TLI=0.980>0.9. All the indicators meet the ideal requirements, indicating that the model has a good fit.

#### 4.4. Common Method Bias

This study employed Harman's single-factor method to assess common method bias. The unrotated exploratory factor analysis revealed that the first common factor accounted for 44.468% of the variance, which falls below the 50% threshold, indicating no significant common method bias in this research.

#### 4.5. Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis revealed that the acquisition of local knowledge ( $r=0.735$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), tourist participation ( $r=0.770$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), perceived value ( $r=0.891$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), and local attachment ( $r=0.896$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) were all positively correlated with acts of protecting intangible cultural heritage. These findings provide preliminary support for the hypothesis testing.

#### 4.6. Regression Analysis

Hypothesis H1 posits that the acquisition of local knowledge positively influences the acts of protecting intangible cultural heritage. The results show a significant impact coefficient of 0.660 ( $T=18.894$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), confirming the positive relationship between local knowledge acquisition and intangible cultural heritage protection. Hypothesis H1 is thus supported.

H2 posits that tourist participation positively influences acts of protecting intangible cultural heritage. The study reveals a significant correlation coefficient of 0.685 ( $T=21.040$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), confirming the positive relationship between tourist participation and the protection of intangible cultural heritage. This supports H2.

H3 posits that value perception positively influences the acts of protecting intangible cultural heritage. The results show a significant correlation coefficient of 0.885 ( $T=34.287$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), confirming the positive relationship between value perception and heritage protection behaviors. This supports the hypothesis H3.

H4 posits that local attachment positively influences acts of protecting intangible cultural heritage. The study reveals a significant correlation coefficient of 0.835 ( $T=30.599$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), confirming the positive relationship between local attachment and these protective behaviors. The regression analysis results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Results of regression analysis

hypothesis	path	coefficient	T	P	verification result
H1	acquisition of local knowledge→acts of protecting intangible cultural heritage	0.660	18.894	<0.001	established
H2	Tourist participation→acts of protecting intangible cultural heritage	0.685	21.040	<0.001	established
H3	perception of value→acts of protecting intangible cultural heritage	0.885	34.287	<0.001	established
H4	local attachment→acts of protecting intangible cultural heritage	0.835	30.599	<0.001	established

## 5. Conclusion and Strategy

### 5.1. Conclusion

This study reveals key drivers of Qianci conservation in Chaoshan through empirical analysis. The acquisition of local knowledge establishes the knowledge base for conservation by deepening public understanding of Qianci's history and craftsmanship. Tourist participation fosters cultural identity through interactive experiences, transforming visitors from passive observers to active participants. Meanwhile, value perception (functional, emotional, and educational) and local attachment (dependence and identification) significantly enhance conservation willingness through emotional resonance and cultural belonging.

### 5.2. Research Implications

The study proposes a systematic five-dimensional strategy. First, it establishes an integrated knowledge network combining community education, digital dissemination, and school education. Second, it develops a tiered experiential model and leverages technology to enhance cultural tourism scenarios, thereby stimulating participation motivation. Additionally, it strengthens emotional connections through oral history initiatives, community co-creation, and festival IP. Third, it promotes policy innovation and facilitates collaboration among industries, schools, and research institutions to ensure an environment conducive to heritage preservation. Finally, it establishes a dynamic monitoring system and public participation platform to guarantee the sustainability of the strategy.

The study proposes a conservation model characterized by "government leadership, community participation, market-driven mechanisms, and public co-construction," underscoring the vital role of multi-stakeholder collaboration and cultural innovation. However, the scope of the sample and long-term impact assessment still require further expansion. Future research could integrate theoretical frameworks such as cultural ecology to explore cross-regional dissemination and globalization pathways for Qianci craftsmanship, thereby providing more comprehensive theoretical and practical support for intangible cultural heritage preservation.

### Funded projects:

1. Guangdong Province's 2025 Educational Science Planning Project "Research on the Mechanism of Empowering High-Quality Development of County-Level Cultural Tourism Economy through Higher Tourism Education under the Guidance of the 'Double Hundred Action' " (2025GXJK0579);
2. Zhaoqing University's 2024 School-level Curriculum Ideological and Political Reform Demonstration Project: "Ideological and Political Culture and Tourism".

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