

# Challenges in Safeguarding Cultural Heritage: A Case Study of Chinese Traditional Villages in Huangpu District, Guangzhou, China

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## Abstract

The cultural heritage of Huangpu District's villages reflects Lingnan culture's rich history and traditions. However, urbanisation, demographic shifts, and globalisation threaten its survival. This research highlights the need for comprehensive strategies combining government support, community participation, and technological innovation to safeguard cultural heritage. Urbanisation has transformed Huangpu District's rural landscape, displacing communities and eroding traditional sites and practices. Demographic shifts, particularly the migration of younger generations to urban centres, have left rural villages with ageing populations, challenging cultural transmission. Globalisation and cultural homogenisation have introduced modern lifestyles that overshadow traditional practices, further eroding rural areas' unique identity. Despite these challenges, opportunities for sustainable development through cultural preservation exist. Initiatives such as cultural tourism, educational programs, and digital preservation can balance modernisation and tradition. By valuing and protecting its cultural heritage, Huangpu District can serve as a model for other regions, ensuring future generations appreciate and celebrate its unique cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** Cultural Heritage, Urbanisation, Huangpu Distric, Traditional Sites, Cultural Homogenisation

## Introduction

Cultural heritage is a cornerstone of community identity, fostering social cohesion, driving economic development, and promoting environmental sustainability. In China, preserving rural cultural heritage has become increasingly challenging due to the pressures of modernisation and urbanisation. Huangpu District in Guangzhou, renowned for its rich Lingnan culture, unique architectural styles, and vibrant festivals, exemplifies these challenges. The district's villages serve as critical cultural and historical reservoirs, yet they face significant threats from rapid

industrialisation, urban migration, and insufficient policy measures (Wu and Zhang 2021; Zhao 2024).

The significance of this study lies in understanding the multifaceted impact of modernisation on cultural preservation, particularly in regions like Huangpu District, where cultural heritage is deeply intertwined with the community's identity and history. The rapid pace of industrialisation in Huangpu District has led to the transformation of traditional landscapes and the displacement of local communities (Wu and Liu, 2023). As factories and modern infrastructure replace traditional buildings, the unique architectural styles that once defined the district gradually disappear. This loss of physical heritage is compounded by the erosion of intangible cultural practices, such as traditional festivals, crafts, and customs, which are integral to the community's identity. Urban migration further exacerbates this issue as younger generations move to cities for better economic opportunities, leaving an ageing population struggling to maintain these cultural traditions (Qiu et al., 2022). Inadequate policy measures have also contributed to the decline of rural cultural heritage in Huangpu District (Sheng et al., 2022). While national and local policies are aimed at cultural preservation, their implementation often falls short due to a lack of resources, coordination, and enforcement. Additionally, the focus on economic development sometimes overshadows the importance of cultural preservation, leading to decisions that prioritise short-term gains over long-term sustainability (García, 2024). This imbalance highlights the need for more comprehensive and integrated policy approaches that consider economic and cultural objectives.

This research explores traditional villages' cultural preservation challenges in Huangpu District by examining the interplay between urbanisation and cultural heritage. Through a comprehensive mixed-methods approach, the study seeks to identify and analyse the factors and challenges these villages encounter to preserve their cultural image and identity. The research will provide a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics at play by evaluating the validity and consequences of these challenges.

The importance of this research extends across several domains and stakeholders. For policymakers, the study will underline the urgency of developing more robust and coordinated policy measures that integrate cultural preservation with economic development goals. It will offer evidence-based recommendations for policy initiatives that balance modernisation with the need to protect and preserve cultural heritage. For cultural practitioners and heritage organisations, the research will provide practical, evidence-based strategies for safeguarding cultural heritage while adapting to contemporary challenges. These strategies will help practitioners develop sustainable models for heritage conservation that can be implemented in similar contexts facing the pressures of urbanisation and industrialisation. For local communities this research emphasises the critical role of local communities in cultural preservation efforts. The study will encourage active participation and engagement from community members by fostering a sense of ownership and pride in their cultural heritage. This involvement is crucial for cultural practices and traditions' long-term sustainability and vitality. For academia and future research, the study will contribute to the broader understanding of the dynamics between urbanisation and cultural heritage. It will be a valuable resource for researchers and scholars interested in cultural preservation, urban studies, and sustainable development.

Preserving rural cultural heritage in Huangpu District is a multifaceted challenge that requires a holistic and collaborative approach. By examining the interplay between urbanisation and cultural heritage, this research proposes sustainable strategies that balance modernisation with the conservation of cultural identity. This study is crucial not only for protecting the unique cultural heritage of Huangpu District but also for providing a model that can be applied to similar regions facing the pressures of modernisation worldwide.

### *Defining Rural Culture in Huangpu District*

Rural culture in Huangpu District is deeply rooted in Lingnan traditions, shaped by historical, economic, and environmental factors. It encompasses tangible elements like traditional architecture, agricultural practices, and handicrafts, as well as intangible components such as festivals, oral traditions, and spiritual beliefs (Tan and Nguyen, 2024). This multidimensional cultural heritage reflects the district's long history, from its agricultural origins to its integration into Guangzhou's urban framework.

Lingnan culture, characterised by unique architectural styles, folk art, and cuisine, is a cornerstone of the district's identity. Structures such as ancestral halls and temples symbolise spiritual beliefs and community cohesion, while culinary traditions like Huangpu roast goose and Luogang bamboo rice highlight the relationship between agriculture and local gastronomy (Zhao 2024; Huang and Li 2023).

The rural culture of Huangpu District is a vibrant tapestry woven from the threads of its rich history and diverse influences. The district's traditional architecture is a testament to its cultural heritage, with ancestral halls, temples, and old residential buildings as symbols of the community's spiritual beliefs and social cohesion (Juarez, 2023). These structures, often adorned with intricate carvings and vibrant paintings, reflect the unique architectural styles of the Lingnan region. The preservation and restoration of these buildings are crucial in maintaining the district's cultural identity and providing a tangible link to its past.

Agricultural practices in Huangpu District are another significant aspect of its rural culture (Qu and Wang, 2023). The district's fertile land and favourable climate have long supported a variety of crops, including rice, fruits, and vegetables. Traditional farming techniques, passed down through generations, are still employed today, ensuring the sustainability of local agriculture. These practices contribute to the district's economy and play a vital role in preserving its cultural heritage. The relationship between agriculture and local gastronomy is particularly evident in the district's culinary traditions. Dishes such as Huangpu roast goose and Luogang bamboo rice are not only delicious but also serve as a reminder of the district's agricultural roots (Broad et al., 2022).

Handicrafts are another important element of Huangpu's rural culture. The district is known for its skilled artisans who produce many traditional crafts, from pottery and weaving to paper-cutting and embroidery (Bellver et al., 2023). These crafts are often showcased during local festivals and cultural events, allowing residents and visitors alike to appreciate the district's artistic heritage. Continuing these crafts is essential in preserving the district's cultural identity and passing on traditional skills to future generations.

Festivals and oral traditions are integral to the cultural fabric of Huangpu District (Shao and Zoh, 2024). Festivals such as the Dragon Boat and Mid-Autumn Festival are celebrated enthusiastically, featuring traditional music, dance, and food. These events allow the community to come together and celebrate their shared heritage. Oral traditions, including folktales, legends, and proverbs, are important to the district's cultural heritage (Ahmed and Kousar, 2023). These stories, passed down through generations, offer valuable insights into the district's history, values, and beliefs.

Spiritual beliefs play a significant role in the rural culture of Huangpu District (Sheng et al., 2022). The district has numerous temples and shrines where residents practice various religious and spiritual traditions. These practices, which include ancestor worship, Taoism, and Buddhism, are deeply ingrained in the community's daily life and contribute to the district's cultural identity (Cao, 2024). The residents' spiritual beliefs are often reflected in their customs, rituals, and festivals, providing a sense of continuity and connection to the past.

The rural culture of Huangpu District is a rich and multifaceted heritage that encompasses a wide range of tangible and intangible elements (Zhu and Li, 2024). From traditional architecture and agricultural practices to handicrafts, festivals, and spiritual beliefs, this cultural heritage reflects the district's long history and integration into Guangzhou's urban framework. The preservation and promotion of this heritage are essential in maintaining the district's cultural identity and ensuring that future generations can continue to appreciate and celebrate their unique cultural heritage.

#### *Challenges in Cultural Preservation*

Preserving rural culture in Huangpu District faces numerous challenges, many of which stem from broader social and economic changes. These challenges can be categorised as follows:

##### a) Urbanisation and Cultural Erosion

The rapid expansion of urban areas has led to the displacement of rural communities and the loss of traditional landscapes. The transformation of rural villages into urban spaces often results in the destruction of historical sites and a decline in the visibility of traditional practices (Shen et al., 2024). Rural areas' physical and cultural landscapes are increasingly altered as urbanisation progresses. Traditional architecture, agricultural lands, and cultural landmarks are often replaced by modern infrastructure, leading to the erosion of cultural heritage. This process disrupts the continuity of cultural practices and diminishes the sense of identity and belonging among rural communities. The challenge lies in finding a balance between development and preservation, ensuring that the cultural essence of rural areas is not lost in the pursuit of urban growth (Shen and Chou, 2022).

##### b) Demographic Shifts and Generational Gaps

The migration of younger generations to cities for better opportunities has left villages with ageing populations. This demographic shift threatens transmitting cultural knowledge and skills, as younger generations often lose interest in traditional practices (Wu and Zhang, 2023). The exodus of young people from rural areas to urban centres results in a significant generational gap, where the elderly remain the custodians of cultural heritage. With fewer young people to learn and carry forward traditional practices, cultural knowledge is likely lost over time. Additionally, the ageing population may face difficulties in maintaining cultural sites and

organising cultural events, further exacerbating the decline of rural culture (Maziliauske, 2024). Efforts to engage younger generations and create opportunities for them to connect with their cultural roots are essential in bridging this gap.

#### c) Economic Pressures and Funding Constraints

Limited resources for cultural preservation exacerbate the challenges. Rural areas often lack the financial means to maintain historical sites or support cultural initiatives. This is compounded by prioritising economic development over cultural conservation (Stephenson and Damerell, 2022). Economic pressures can lead to the neglect of cultural heritage, as limited funds are directed towards more immediate needs such as infrastructure and public services. The lack of financial support for cultural preservation projects makes restoring and maintaining historical sites, organising cultural events, and supporting local artisans difficult. Moreover, the economic benefits of cultural tourism are often overlooked despite the potential for rural culture to attract visitors and generate revenue (Quan-Baffour, 2023). Addressing funding constraints and recognising the economic value of cultural heritage are crucial steps in ensuring the sustainability of rural culture.

#### d) Globalisation and Cultural Homogenization

The influence of global and urban cultures has led to the marginalisation of rural traditions. Younger residents are increasingly drawn to modern lifestyles, while traditional practices are perceived as outdated or irrelevant (Huang and Li, 2023). Globalisation brings a wave of cultural homogenisation, where global trends overshadow local traditions and customs. The allure of modernity and the desire to assimilate into urban culture can lead to abandoning traditional practices. This shift in cultural values poses a significant threat to the preservation of rural culture as the unique characteristics that define rural communities are gradually eroded. To counteract this trend, it is important to promote the value and relevance of rural traditions, highlighting their significance in shaping cultural identity and fostering community cohesion (Zhang et al., 2024).

Preserving rural culture in Huangpu District is a complex and multifaceted challenge. Urbanisation, demographic shifts, economic pressures, and globalisation all contribute to the erosion of cultural heritage (Zhu et al., 2023). Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that balances development with preservation, engages younger generations, secures funding for cultural initiatives, and promotes rural traditions' value. By recognising and addressing these challenges, it is possible to safeguard the rich cultural heritage of Huangpu District for future generations.

#### e) Opportunities for Preservation

Despite these challenges, rural culture in Huangpu District offers numerous opportunities for sustainable development. One of the most promising avenues is cultural tourism, which has the potential to preserve heritage while generating economic benefits. Projects highlighting local festivals, traditional crafts, and historical landmarks have attracted domestic and international visitors, showcasing the potential for heritage-based economic growth (Turner et al., 2022). By promoting cultural tourism, the district can create a sustainable model that preserves its rich cultural heritage and provides economic opportunities for local communities.

Cultural tourism initiatives in Huangpu District have focused on various aspects of the district's heritage. Local festivals, such as the Dragon Boat Festival and the Mid-Autumn Festival, are celebrated enthusiastically and attract visitors from far and wide (Luo, 2024). These festivals allow tourists to experience the district's unique cultural traditions, including traditional music, dance, and cuisine. Additionally, promoting traditional crafts, such as pottery, weaving, and paper-cutting, has helped preserve these skills and provide a source of income for local artisans. Historical landmarks, including ancestral halls, temples, and old residential buildings, are also key attractions that offer visitors a glimpse into the district's rich history and architectural heritage (Wang et al., 2022).

Moreover, community-driven initiatives and technological advancements provide innovative solutions for cultural preservation. Digital archiving, virtual tours, and educational programs have proven effective in raising awareness and fostering intergenerational knowledge transfer (Cai et al., 2024). Digital archiving involves the creation of digital records of cultural artefacts, documents, and practices, ensuring that they are preserved for future generations. Virtual tours allow people worldwide to explore the district's cultural heritage from the comfort of their homes, increasing accessibility and interest in the district's traditions. Educational programs, both online and offline, play a crucial role in teaching younger generations about their cultural heritage and encouraging them to take an active role in its preservation (Bansal and Choudhary, 2024).

Community-driven initiatives are essential in ensuring the sustainability of cultural preservation efforts. Local communities are the custodians of their cultural heritage, and their involvement in preservation projects is crucial (Mekonnen et al., 2022). Community-led projects, such as the restoration of historical sites and the organisation of cultural events, empower residents to take ownership of their heritage and ensure its continuity. These initiatives also foster a sense of pride and identity among community members, strengthening social cohesion and resilience (Butu et al., 2023).

Technological advancements have also opened up new possibilities for cultural preservation (Ausat et al., 2023). Digital tools and platforms have made documenting, sharing, and promoting cultural heritage easier. Social media, for example, has become a powerful tool for raising awareness about cultural traditions and events, reaching a global audience and attracting visitors to the district. Developing mobile applications and interactive websites has also enhanced the visitor experience, providing detailed information about cultural sites and activities (Koutsabasis et al., 2022).

In conclusion, while preserving rural culture in Huangpu District faces significant challenges, there are also numerous opportunities for sustainable development. Cultural tourism, community-driven initiatives, and technological advancements offer innovative solutions for preserving the district's rich cultural heritage. Huangpu District can create a sustainable model that preserves its heritage, generates economic benefits, and fosters social cohesion by promoting cultural tourism, engaging local communities, and leveraging digital tools. The continued efforts to preserve and promote rural culture will ensure that future generations can appreciate and celebrate the unique cultural heritage of Huangpu District.

### *Location of the Study*

Huangpu District, situated in the eastern part of Guangzhou City, is historically and culturally significant. The district is characterised by a blend of rural and urban landscapes, with traditional villages coexisting alongside modern industrial zones. These villages are rich in cultural assets, including ancestral halls, Lingnan-style architecture, and traditional agricultural practices (Huang and Li, 2023). The juxtaposition of rural and urban elements creates a unique cultural landscape that reflects the district's historical evolution and integration into the broader urban framework of Guangzhou.

Prominent cultural sites in Huangpu District include the Huangpu Ancient Village, known for its well-preserved Lingnan architecture, and the Polo Temple, which hosts the annual Polo Temple Fair, a celebration of the South China Sea God (Jiao et al., 2023). The Huangpu Ancient Village is a testament to the district's rich cultural heritage, with its traditional buildings, narrow alleys, and ancestral halls offering a glimpse into the past. Intricate carvings, vibrant paintings, and unique structural designs emblematic of Lingnan culture characterise the village's architecture. Preserving these architectural treasures is crucial in maintaining the district's cultural identity and providing a tangible link to its historical roots.

The Polo Temple, another significant cultural site, is a focal point for religious and cultural activities in the district (Sukwai et al., 2022). The annual Polo Temple Fair is a significant event that attracts locals and visitors, featuring traditional performances, rituals, and festivities celebrating the South China Sea God. This event serves as a platform for cultural expression and fosters community cohesion and a sense of shared heritage. The temple is an architectural marvel, with ornate decorations, statues, and historical artefacts reflecting the district's spiritual and cultural traditions (Jiayan and Kiyai, 2023).

Huangpu District's strategic location and historical importance make it a focal point for cultural preservation and sustainable development studies. The district's rich cultural assets and dynamic urban environment present unique opportunities for heritage conservation and cultural tourism (Ma and Guo, 2023). Efforts to preserve and promote the district's cultural heritage are essential in ensuring that future generations can appreciate and celebrate the unique cultural identity of Huangpu District. By balancing development with preservation, the district can create a sustainable model that safeguards its cultural heritage and contributes to its economic and social well-being.

### **Materials and Methods**

The research adopts a mixed-methods approach to explore the challenges and opportunities in preserving Huangpu District's cultural heritage. This comprehensive methodology ensures a thorough understanding of the various factors influencing cultural preservation and provides a robust framework for analysing the data collected.

### *Data Collection*

Data collection involves multiple methods to gather qualitative and quantitative data. Field observations are a crucial component of this process. Researchers visit villages and cultural sites to document physical conditions, community activities, and local practices from May 2024 to July 2024. These observations (421 respondents) provide valuable insights into the current state of cultural heritage in Huangpu District and help identify areas that require

attention. By immersing themselves in the local environment, researchers can better understand the community's cultural context and everyday experiences.

Interviews are another key method of data collection. Conversations with residents, cultural practitioners, and policymakers offer diverse perspectives on cultural preservation. These interviews help uncover the challenges the community faces, the strategies employed to preserve cultural heritage, and the aspirations for the future. By engaging with a wide range of stakeholders, researchers can gather rich, nuanced data that reflects the complexity of cultural preservation efforts in Huangpu District.

Surveys are used to gather quantitative data on challenges and initiatives related to heritage conservation. Questionnaires targeting stakeholders involved in heritage conservation provide a broader understanding of the issues at hand. The quantitative data collected through surveys can be analysed to identify trends, patterns, and correlations, offering a comprehensive overview of the district's current state of cultural preservation.

#### *Archival Research*

Archival research is essential to the study, providing historical context and validating the findings from field observations, interviews, and surveys. Researchers analyse historical records, policy documents, and previous studies on Huangpu District's cultural heritage. This analysis helps trace cultural practices' evolution, identify historical influences, and understand past policies' impact on cultural preservation. By examining archival materials, researchers can build a solid foundation for their study and ensure their findings are grounded in historical evidence.

#### *Theoretical Framework*

The study employs Social Cognitive Theory to analyse how cultural practices are learned, transmitted, and adapted within the community (Xu and Yu, 2023). The Social Cognitive Theory emphasises the role of observational learning, imitation, and modelling in acquiring cultural knowledge and skills. By applying this theoretical framework, researchers can explore how cultural practices are passed down from generation to generation and how they adapt to changing social and environmental conditions.

Social Cognitive Theory also highlights the importance of self-efficacy and collective efficacy in cultural preservation (Hamann et al., 2024). Self-efficacy refers to individuals' belief in their ability to perform specific tasks, while collective efficacy refers to the shared belief in the community's ability to achieve common goals. By examining these concepts, researchers can gain insights into the factors that motivate individuals and communities to engage in cultural preservation efforts and the challenges they face in maintaining their cultural heritage (Abdul Aziz et al., 2023).

The mixed-methods approach adopted in this research provides a comprehensive framework for exploring the challenges and opportunities in preserving Huangpu District's cultural heritage. The study offers a holistic understanding of cultural preservation factors by combining field observations, interviews, surveys, archival research, and Social Cognitive Theory. This approach ensures the validity and reliability of the findings and provides valuable



insights that can inform future efforts to safeguard the rich cultural heritage of Huangpu District.

### Results

The provided demographic data offers a comprehensive insight into a specific population, shedding light on various socio-economic indicators (Table 1). The population exhibits a balanced gender distribution, with men at 47.3% and women at 52.7%. The age distribution is predominantly middle-aged, with 45-54 years being the largest group (43.7%), followed by 55-64 years (33.0%). Marital status shows that nearly half the population is married (47.3%), while 29.9% are divorced or separated. Education levels indicate that 40.6% have completed secondary education, and 32.3% have vocational or technical education.

The occupational data reveals that government employees form the largest group (29.2%), followed by business owners (22.1%) and farmers (19.7%). Income levels are concentrated in the middle-income range, with 54.4% earning between US\$1,000 and US\$1,499. Household sizes are mostly three members (41.3%); residency data shows a stable community, with 37.1% having lived in their current location for 6-10 years. This demographic overview highlights a mature, middle-income population with diverse occupational sectors and long-term residency, providing valuable insights for policymakers and community planners.

Table 1  
*The Demographic of the Respondents*

	Frequency ( <i>n</i> )	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	199	47.3
Female	222	52.7
<b>Age</b>		
18-24	23	5.5
25-34	30	7.1
35-44	18	4.3
45-54	184	43.7
55-64	139	33.0
65 and above	27	6.4
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	51	12.1
Married	199	47.3
Divorced/Separated	126	29.9
Widowed	45	10.7
<b>Education Level</b>		
No formal education	13	3.1
Primary education	63	15.0
Secondary education	171	40.6
Vocational/Technical Education	136	32.3
Bachelor's Degree	30	7.1
Master's Degree	8	1.9
<b>Occupation</b>		
Business owner/Entrepreneur	93	22.1
Private sector employee	56	13.3
Government employee	123	29.2

	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Farmer/Agricultural worker	83	19.7
Retired	40	9.5
Unemployed	13	3.1
Student	10	2.4
Other	3	0.7
<b>Income Level</b>		
Less than US\$500	48	11.4
US\$500 - US\$999	106	25.2
US\$1,000 - US\$1,499	229	54.4
US\$1,500 - US\$1,999	33	7.8
US\$2,000 and above	5	1.2
<b>Household Size</b>		
1 (Live alone)	23	5.5
2	68	16.2
3	174	41.3
4	118	28.0
5 or more	38	9.0
<b>Residency</b>		
Less than 1 year	3	0.7
1-5 years	56	13.3
6-10 years	156	37.1
11-20 years	151	35.9
More than 20 years	55	13.0

Next, the survey data provides a comprehensive overview of a village community's cultural engagement and attitudes (Table 2). Participation in cultural activities varies, with 3.6% never participating, 34.2% rarely participating once a year, 32.3% engaging occasionally a few times a year, 24.7% participating monthly, and 5.2% being active weekly. This indicates that while most of the population engages in cultural activities to some extent, there is room for increased regular participation.

Similarly, 5.9% never engage in preserving local traditions, 30.4% rarely engage once a year, 32.3% occasionally engage a few times a year, 18.5% engage monthly, and 12.9% engage weekly. This suggests a strong base of individuals committed to preserving their cultural heritage, with the potential to increase efforts among those who engage less frequently.

Regarding initiatives to preserve or promote the village's cultural heritage, 58.2% have been involved, while 41.8% have not. This indicates a relatively high level of community engagement in cultural preservation initiatives, which is a positive sign for the sustainability of the village's cultural heritage.

The practice of traditional skills or crafts is almost evenly split, with 49.2% still practising these skills and 50.8% not practising them. This balance suggests that traditional skills and crafts are critical, with efforts needed to encourage and support their continuation for future generations.

Optimism about the future of the village's cultural heritage varies, with 8.3% very pessimistic, 22.1% pessimistic, 20.9% neutral, 43.0% optimistic, and 5.7% very optimistic. This positive

outlook suggests that the community has hope and confidence in preserving and promoting their cultural heritage.

In summary, the survey data highlights a community engaged with its cultural heritage to varying degrees, with the potential to increase engagement levels. The community shows a relatively high level of involvement in cultural preservation initiatives and a balanced practice of traditional skills and crafts. The overall optimism about the future of the village's cultural heritage is a positive sign, indicating a hopeful outlook for the sustainability and promotion of cultural practices. These insights can be valuable for developing targeted strategies to enhance cultural engagement and preservation within the community.

Table 2  
*Cultural Engagement and Attitudes*

	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>How often do you participate in cultural activities in Huangpu District?</b>		
Never	15	3.6
Rarely (once a year)	144	34.2
Occasionally (a few times a year)	136	32.3
Often (monthly)	104	24.7
Very often (weekly)	22	5.2
<b>How frequently do you try to preserve local traditions or cultural practices?</b>		
Never	25	5.9
Rarely (once a year)	128	30.4
Occasionally (a few times a year)	136	32.3
Often (monthly)	78	18.5
Very often (weekly)	54	12.9
<b>Have you ever been involved in initiatives or projects to preserve or promote Huangpu District's cultural heritage?</b>		
Yes	245	58.2
No	176	41.8
<b>Do you or your family members still practice any traditional skills or crafts?</b>		
Yes	207	49.2
No	214	50.8
<b>How optimistic are you about the future of Huangpu District's cultural heritage?</b>		
Very Pessimistic	35	8.3
Pessimistic	93	22.1
Neutral	88	20.9
Optimistic	181	43.0
Very Optimistic	24	5.7

Lastly, the data collected about various facets of cultural development in Huangpu District provides a comprehensive overview of the current situation, emphasising strengths and areas requiring improvement (Table 3).

Table 3

*Perception of change in Huangpu District*

	Mean Score
<b>Cultural Inheritance and Protection</b>	
The process of modernisation has negatively impacted the cultural inheritance in my village.	3.8
Urbanisation poses a significant risk of losing traditional skills in our village.	3.3
The current protection mechanisms for rural cultural heritage in my village are inadequate.	3.4
<b>Cultural Innovation and Development</b>	
The rural culture of my village is facing challenges in maintaining its traditional characteristics.	3.5
There is a lack of consciousness and ability for cultural innovation in our village.	3.3
<b>Cultural Industry Development</b>	
The cultural industry in our village has a diversified range of products and services.	3.4
Our village's cultural industry is developing at a pace that supports sustainable growth.	3.3
Our village's scale of cultural enterprises is sufficient to meet economic goals.	3.3
<b>Cultural Facilities and Services</b>	
The available cultural facilities in my village meet the needs of the community.	3.3
Cultural services provided in my village are varied and innovative.	3.4
There is a significant need for improved cultural facilities in our village.	3.3
<b>Cultural Talent Development</b>	
There is a sufficient number of cultural talents in our village.	3.5
Our village's quality of cultural talents meets cultural development's demands.	3.3
Our village has effective mechanisms for training and retaining cultural talents.	3.3
<b>Cultural Market Maturity</b>	
The cultural market in my village is well-regulated and competitive.	3.3
Market players in the cultural industry of our village have strong market competitiveness.	3.3
There is a need for better policies to support the cultural market in our village.	3.3
<b>Cultural Policies and Regulations</b>	
The cultural policies in our village are adequate to support cultural development.	3.3
Implementation of cultural policies and regulations is practical in our village.	3.5
Our village requires more targeted cultural policies to guide development.	3.3
<b>Satisfaction with the current situation</b>	
How satisfied are you with the current efforts made by local authorities to preserve cultural heritage in your village?	3.3
Do you believe that the cultural identity of your village has changed significantly over the past decade?	3.3

The impact of modernisation on cultural inheritance in Huangpu District is significant, with a mean score of 3.8, indicating challenges in preserving traditional cultural elements. Urbanisation, scoring 3.3, further endangers traditional skills, and existing protection measures, scoring 3.4, are inadequate, highlighting the need for more effective strategies.

Cultural innovation and development face difficulties in maintaining traditional characteristics, with a score of 3.5. The lack of awareness and capacity for cultural innovation, scoring 3.3, suggests the need for fostering an innovative mindset to integrate tradition with modernity.

The cultural industry in Huangpu District shows a diverse range of products and services, scoring 3.4. However, the pace of development, scoring 3.3, and the scale of cultural enterprises, also scoring 3.3, indicate that growth may not be sufficient for sustainable development. Strengthening these enterprises is essential.

Cultural facilities and services partially meet community needs, with a score of 3.3. The diversity and innovation in cultural services, scoring 3.4, indicate the potential for improvement. The need for better infrastructure, reflected in a score of 3.3, underscores the necessity for modern and accessible cultural facilities.

Cultural talent development shows an adequate number of talents, with a score of 3.5. However, the quality of these talents, scoring 3.3, the mechanisms for training and retaining them, also scoring 3.3, need enhancement to meet cultural development demands.

Cultural market maturity is moderately well-regulated and competitive, with a score of 3.3. The market competitiveness of players, also scoring 3.3, and the need for better policies, reflected in the same score, highlight the need for targeted policies to foster a thriving cultural market.

Cultural policies and regulations, scoring 3.3, suggest that while policies exist, they may not be sufficient. The practical implementation of these policies, scoring 3.5, indicates effective execution, but more targeted policies are needed.

Satisfaction with current efforts to preserve cultural heritage, scoring 3.3, suggests moderate satisfaction. The belief that cultural identity has changed significantly over the past decade, also scoring 3.3, reflects notable change.

In conclusion, Huangpu District has strengths in cultural talents and policy execution. However, it requires improvements in cultural facilities, innovation, and targeted policies to preserve its cultural heritage while adapting to contemporary challenges.

## **Discussion**

### *Current issues*

#### a) Urbanisation and Cultural Erosion

Huangpu District's rapid urbanisation has significantly transformed its rural landscape. Villages are increasingly integrated into urban areas, leading to the loss of traditional sites and cultural practices. For example, expanding industrial zones has resulted in the demolition of ancestral halls, traditional homes, and temples, which serve as cultural and spiritual symbols for local communities (Shen et al., 2024). The encroachment of urban development into rural areas disrupts the harmony of these settlements, displacing residents and diminishing the visibility of traditional cultural elements. Infrastructure projects, such as highways and modern housing developments, further exacerbate this issue by fragmenting rural landscapes and eroding the unique identity of these areas (Wu and Zhang, 2021).

The transformation of rural villages into urban spaces often destroys historical sites with significant cultural value. Central to the community's spiritual and social life, Ancestral halls are particularly vulnerable to demolition. These structures serve as places of worship and

venues for important community events and rituals (Zhao and Hoon, 2024). The loss of such sites represents a profound disruption to the community's cultural fabric, severing the link between past and present. Additionally, the displacement of residents due to urban expansion leads to the fragmentation of communities, weakening social bonds and diminishing the sense of belonging among residents.

#### b) Demographic Shifts and Generational Challenges

The migration of younger generations to urban centres for better opportunities has left rural villages with ageing populations. This demographic shift creates a significant challenge in cultural transmission. Elders, the primary custodians of cultural traditions, often lack opportunities to pass down their knowledge to younger residents, who are increasingly disconnected from their roots (Wu and Zhang, 2023). The exodus of young people from rural areas results in a generational gap, where the elderly remain the sole bearers of cultural knowledge and practices. This gap threatens the continuity of cultural traditions as fewer individuals learn and carry forward these practices.

Traditional crafts, such as embroidery, paper cutting, and wood carving, face the threat of extinction due to the lack of apprentices willing to learn these skills. The same applies to traditional festivals and rituals, losing their vibrancy as fewer residents participate actively (Cai et al., 2024). The decline in participation in cultural activities reflects the broader societal changes prioritising modernity over tradition. Younger generations, influenced by urban lifestyles and global culture, often view traditional practices as outdated and irrelevant. This shift in cultural values poses a significant challenge to preserving rural heritage.

#### c) Economic Pressures and Limited Funding

Financial constraints remain a critical barrier to cultural preservation. Despite government efforts to promote rural revitalisation, resources allocated to cultural preservation projects are often insufficient. Many villages struggle to maintain historical structures, organise cultural events, or support local artisans (Deshmukh et al., 2024). The lack of financial support for cultural preservation initiatives hampers efforts to restore and maintain historical sites, leading to their gradual deterioration. For example, preserving the Huangpu Ancient Village requires substantial investment in restoration and maintenance. However, limited funding has led to the deterioration of its Lingnan-style architecture, jeopardising its historical and cultural significance (Lin et al., 2022).

Economic pressures also impact the ability of local communities to sustain cultural practices. The prioritisation of economic development over cultural conservation often results in allocating resources to more immediate needs, such as infrastructure and public services. This leaves cultural preservation projects underfunded and undervalued (Abouei and Tavasoli, 2024). Additionally, the economic benefits of cultural tourism are often overlooked despite the potential for rural culture to attract visitors and generate revenue. Recognising the economic value of cultural heritage and securing adequate funding for preservation initiatives are crucial steps in ensuring the sustainability of rural culture.

#### d) Cultural Homogenisation and Modernisation

The influence of globalisation and urban culture has introduced modern lifestyles and values that overshadow traditional practices. Young residents often view rural culture as outdated,

favouring modern entertainment and technology over traditional festivals and crafts (Huang and Li, 2023). This cultural homogenisation is evident in the declining popularity of local dialects, such as Cantonese, as Mandarin and English gain prominence. The shift towards more widely spoken languages reflects broader societal changes prioritising global communication over local identity. Similarly, traditional culinary practices are being replaced by urban food trends, diminishing the uniqueness of rural cuisine (Zhao, 2024).

The adoption of modern lifestyles and values poses a significant threat to the preservation of rural culture. The allure of modernity and the desire to assimilate into urban culture can lead to abandoning traditional practices (Li et al., 2025). This shift in cultural values results in the erosion of the unique characteristics that define rural communities. To counteract this trend, it is important to promote the value and relevance of rural traditions, highlighting their significance in shaping cultural identity and fostering community cohesion.

#### e) Community-Driven Initiatives

Despite these challenges, several community-driven initiatives in Huangpu District demonstrate the potential for successful cultural preservation. For example, the Polo Temple Fair, an annual event celebrating the South China Sea God, continues to attract thousands of visitors and serves as a platform for showcasing local traditions (Podoler, 2024). The fair features traditional performances, rituals, and festivities celebrating the district's cultural heritage. By engaging the community and attracting visitors, the Polo Temple Fair helps to sustain cultural practices and promote cultural tourism.

Local artisans have also organised workshops to teach traditional crafts, fostering interest among younger generations and tourists. These initiatives highlight the role of community engagement in sustaining cultural heritage (Turner et al., 2022). Involving the community in cultural preservation efforts empowers residents to take ownership of their heritage and ensure its continuity. Community-driven projects, such as the restoration of historical sites and the organisation of cultural events, play a crucial role in preserving the district's cultural identity and fostering a sense of pride and belonging among residents.

In conclusion, while preserving rural culture in Huangpu District faces significant challenges, there are also numerous opportunities for sustainable development. Urbanisation, demographic shifts, economic pressures, and cultural homogenisation all contribute to the erosion of cultural heritage. However, community-driven initiatives and the promotion of cultural tourism offer innovative solutions for preserving the district's rich cultural heritage. By engaging local communities, securing funding for cultural initiatives, and leveraging digital tools, Huangpu District can create a sustainable model that preserves its heritage, generates economic benefits, and fosters social cohesion. The continued efforts to preserve and promote rural culture will ensure that future generations can appreciate and celebrate the unique cultural heritage of Huangpu District.

#### *Strategies for Cultural Preservation*

A multifaceted approach is essential to address the challenges identified. The following strategies are proposed:

**a) Strengthening Policy Frameworks**

Government policies should prioritise cultural preservation as part of rural revitalisation strategies. This includes increasing funding for heritage conservation, offering financial incentives to local artisans, and implementing regulations to protect historical sites from urban development (Shen et al., 2024). Governments can maintain and restore historical sites by allocating more resources to cultural preservation, preventing deterioration. Financial incentives for local artisans can encourage the continuation of traditional crafts, providing economic support and recognition for their contributions to cultural heritage. Additionally, implementing regulations to protect historical sites from urban development can prevent the destruction of culturally significant landmarks, preserving the unique identity of rural areas.

**b) Promoting Community Engagement**

Empowering local communities to take ownership of cultural preservation is crucial. Initiatives such as cultural festivals, craft fairs, and educational programs can foster a sense of pride and responsibility among residents (Lin et al., 2022). Community engagement is essential for the sustainability of cultural preservation efforts, as residents are the custodians of their heritage. By involving the community in cultural activities and decision-making processes, residents can develop a deeper connection to their cultural heritage and take an active role in its preservation. Cultural festivals and craft fairs provide platforms for showcasing local traditions and crafts, attracting visitors and generating economic benefits. Educational programs can raise awareness about the importance of cultural preservation and encourage younger generations to participate in these efforts.

**c) Leveraging Technology**

Technological advancements can play a pivotal role in preserving and promoting cultural heritage. Digital archiving of oral traditions, virtual tours of historical sites, and online platforms for showcasing traditional crafts can reach broader audiences and generate economic benefits (Cai et al., 2024). Digital archiving involves creating digital records of cultural artefacts, documents, and practices, ensuring their preservation for future generations. Virtual tours allow people worldwide to explore historical sites and learn about their significance, increasing accessibility and interest in cultural heritage. Online platforms for showcasing traditional crafts can provide artisans new markets and opportunities, promoting their work and generating income. By leveraging technology, cultural preservation efforts can be enhanced and more sustainable.

**d) Integrating Culture with Tourism**

Cultural tourism offers a sustainable model for heritage preservation. By developing tourism products that highlight unique cultural assets, Huangpu District can attract visitors while providing economic opportunities for local communities. Examples include guided tours of ancestral halls, culinary experiences featuring local cuisine, and performances of Cantonese opera (Leung, 2023). Cultural tourism can generate revenue that can be reinvested in cultural preservation projects, creating a positive feedback loop. Guided tours of ancestral halls and other historical sites can educate visitors about the district's cultural heritage, while culinary experiences can showcase traditional dishes and promote local gastronomy. Performances of Cantonese opera and other traditional arts can attract audiences and provide a platform for cultural expression. Huangpu District can create a sustainable model for preserving its heritage by integrating culture with tourism.



**e) Investing in Education**

Education is key to ensuring the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge. Schools in rural areas should incorporate local history, traditions, and crafts into their curricula. This will instil a sense of cultural identity in young residents and encourage them to contribute to preservation efforts (Huang and Li, 2023). By teaching students about their cultural heritage, schools can foster a sense of pride and responsibility in preserving it. Educational programs can include hands-on activities, such as craft workshops and field trips to historical sites, providing students with practical experience and a deeper understanding of their cultural heritage. Additionally, involving elders and cultural practitioners in educational programs can facilitate the transmission of cultural knowledge and skills, ensuring their continuity.

**f) Balancing Modernisation and Tradition**

While modernisation is inevitable, it should not come at the expense of cultural heritage. A balanced approach that integrates traditional practices with contemporary lifestyles can ensure the sustainability of rural culture. For instance, incorporating modern design elements into traditional crafts can enhance their appeal to younger audiences and global markets (Wu and Zhang, 2023). Adapting traditional practices to modern contexts allows cultural heritage to remain relevant and vibrant. Urban planning should also consider the cultural significance of rural areas. By preserving historical landmarks and creating spaces for cultural activities, policymakers can maintain the unique identity of Huangpu District amid urbanisation (Ghahremani et al., 2021). This approach can preserve cultural heritage while accommodating modern development needs.

A multifaceted approach is essential for addressing the challenges of cultural preservation in Huangpu District. Strengthening policy frameworks, promoting community engagement, leveraging technology, integrating culture with tourism, investing in education, and balancing modernisation with tradition are key strategies for ensuring the sustainability of cultural heritage. By implementing these strategies, Huangpu District can preserve its rich cultural heritage for future generations while promoting economic and social well-being. The continued efforts to preserve and promote rural culture will ensure that the unique cultural identity of Huangpu District is maintained and celebrated.

**Conclusions**

The cultural heritage of Huangpu District's villages is a testament to Lingnan culture's rich history and traditions. However, the challenges of urbanisation, demographic shifts, and globalisation threaten its survival. This research highlights the need for comprehensive strategies that combine government support, community participation, and technological innovation to safeguard cultural heritage.

Urbanisation has significantly transformed the rural landscape of Huangpu District. The rapid expansion of urban areas has led to the displacement of rural communities and the loss of traditional sites and cultural practices. Integrating villages into urban spaces often destroys historical sites, such as ancestral halls, traditional homes, and temples, which serve as cultural and spiritual symbols for local communities. Infrastructure projects, such as highways and modern housing developments, disrupt the harmony of rural settlements, displacing residents and diminishing the visibility of traditional cultural elements. This erosion of cultural

heritage not only affects the physical landscape but also undermines the unique identity of rural areas.

Demographic shifts further exacerbate the challenges of cultural preservation. The migration of younger generations to urban centres for better opportunities has left rural villages with ageing populations. Elders, the primary custodians of cultural traditions, often lack opportunities to pass down their knowledge to younger residents, who are increasingly disconnected from their roots. Traditional crafts, such as embroidery, paper cutting, and wood carving, face the threat of extinction due to the lack of apprentices willing to learn these skills. Similarly, traditional festivals and rituals are losing their vibrancy as fewer residents participate actively. This generational gap threatens the continuity of cultural traditions and the transmission of cultural knowledge.

Globalisation and cultural homogenisation also pose significant threats to the preservation of rural culture. The influence of global and urban cultures has introduced modern lifestyles and values that overshadow traditional practices. Young residents often view rural culture as outdated, favouring modern entertainment and technology over traditional festivals and crafts. This cultural homogenisation is evident in the declining popularity of local dialects, such as Cantonese, as Mandarin and English gain prominence. Urban food trends are replacing traditional culinary practices, diminishing the uniqueness of rural cuisine. The adoption of modern lifestyles and values results in the erosion of the unique characteristics that define rural communities.

Despite these challenges, there are numerous opportunities for sustainable development through cultural preservation. Initiatives such as cultural tourism, educational programs, and digital preservation can help strike a balance between modernisation and tradition. Cultural tourism offers a sustainable model for heritage preservation by developing tourism products that highlight unique cultural assets. Guided tours of ancestral halls, culinary experiences featuring local cuisine, and performances of Cantonese opera can attract visitors while providing economic opportunities for local communities. Cultural tourism can generate revenue that can be reinvested in cultural preservation projects, creating a positive feedback loop.

Educational programs are key to ensuring the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge. Schools in rural areas should incorporate local history, traditions, and crafts into their curricula. By teaching students about their cultural heritage, schools can foster a sense of pride and responsibility in preserving it. Educational programs can include hands-on activities, such as craft workshops and field trips to historical sites, providing students with practical experience and a deeper understanding of their cultural heritage. Involving elders and cultural practitioners in educational programs can facilitate the transmission of cultural knowledge and skills, ensuring their continuity.

Technological advancements can also be pivotal in preserving and promoting cultural heritage. Digital archiving of oral traditions, virtual tours of historical sites, and online platforms for showcasing traditional crafts can reach broader audiences and generate economic benefits. Digital archiving involves creating digital records of cultural artefacts, documents, and practices, ensuring their preservation for future generations. Virtual tours

allow people worldwide to explore historical sites and learn about their significance, increasing accessibility and interest in cultural heritage. Online platforms for showcasing traditional crafts can provide artisans new markets and opportunities, promoting their work and generating income.

The findings of this study underscore the importance of cultural preservation in achieving sustainable development. By valuing and protecting its cultural heritage, Huangpu District can serve as a model for other regions facing similar challenges. The continued efforts to preserve and promote rural culture will ensure that future generations can appreciate and celebrate the unique cultural heritage of Huangpu District. By implementing comprehensive strategies that combine government support, community participation, and technological innovation, Huangpu District can create a sustainable model for cultural preservation that contributes to its economic and social development.

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