

An Exploration of the Influencing Factors of Residents' Place Attachment from the Perspective of Huxiang Culture Inheritance

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Abstract:

With a history of five thousand years, Chinese civilization boasts the Hu-Xiang culture, which is characterized by its powerful spiritual core that embraces advancing with the times, pioneering spirit, and practical application, making it one of the most distinctive regional cultural lineages. From the perspective of Hu-Xiang cultural heritage, this paper constructs a theoretical analytical framework comprising four dimensions—cultural cognition, emotional identity, cultural practice, and social connection—to systematically explore its impact mechanism on the formation of residents' place attachment. The study finds that the effective inheritance of Hu-Xiang culture significantly enhances Hunan residents' sense of identity and cultural confidence, thereby deepening their place attachment to their homeland, Hunan. Finally, this paper proposes countermeasures and suggestions for cultivating and enhancing residents' place attachment by revitalizing cultural heritage methods, aiming to provide theoretical references and practical pathways for cultural preservation and community building in the Hu-Xiang region.

Keywords:

Hu-Xiang Cultural Heritage and Development, Place Attachment, Emotional Identity

1. Introduction

China's rapid urbanization and increasing population mobility have led to the homogenization of places. As a result, the emotional connection between many residents and their homeland faces severe challenges. Place attachment is a core concept in the study of human-environment relationships. It not only reflects an individual's emotional dependence and sense of belonging to a specific geographical space but is also closely related to psychological well-being and happiness. Moreover, it serves as a crucial foundation for maintaining regional cohesion and driving sustainable local development. Existing research has fully acknowledged the key role of cultural factors in shaping place attachment. However, most discussions remain at a macro level, lacking detailed analysis of how specific regional cultures influence residents' emotions through concrete pathways. Current studies on Hu-Xiang culture

mostly focus on its historical context, philosophical ideas, or literary and artistic achievements, while empirical research from the perspectives of environmental psychology and sociology on its function as an emotional bond remains insufficient. This research gap makes it difficult to answer: Through which specific factors does the inheritance of Hu-Xiang culture influence and strengthen residents' sense of place attachment?

Based on this, this paper aims to precisely address this academic gap and propose the core research question: From the perspective of Hu-Xiang cultural heritage, which key factors influence and determine the formation and intensity of residents' place attachment? How do these factors interact with each other? The core argument of this paper is that Hu-Xiang culture is not a static historical relic but an active social practice and emotional resource that can be experienced and perceived. Its effective inheritance can provide essential nourishment and motivation for the generation of residents' place attachment through multiple pathways, including cultural cognitive identity, cultural emotional memory, cultural practice experience, and social interaction. Furthermore, the study will focus on residents long residing in the core areas of Hu-Xiang culture (such as Changsha, Xiangtan, Yueyang, etc.), paying particular attention to the differences in cultural heritage and place attachment among different generations and groups with varying lengths of residence.

To systematically address these questions, this study will adopt a mixed-methods approach. On one hand, a theoretical analytical framework will be constructed through literature review. On the other hand, a large-scale questionnaire survey will be conducted among residents in selected areas to examine the correlation and strength of influence between various dimensions of Hu-Xiang cultural heritage and place attachment using quantitative data. Finally, in-depth interviews and field observations will be supplemented to select typical cases for detailed investigation, collecting rich qualitative data to interpret the underlying motivations and emotional stories behind the data, thereby achieving a research effect that combines "broad perspectives" with "in-depth insights."

The theoretical significance of this study lies in placing the abstract theory of place attachment within the specific and vibrant context of "Hu-Xiang culture" for testing and enrichment. This will help construct an integrated analytical framework connecting cultural heritage and emotional geography, promoting the contextualization and deepening of related theories.

2. Cultural Cognition: Huxiang Culture Is the Cornerstone of the Close Connection Between "Man" and "Land"

Inheriting and developing Huxiang culture not only enhances residents' cultural self-confidence and sense of belonging, but also builds a bridge for the emotional connection between "people" and "land". Report to the 20th CPC National Congress, the Party, proposed that we should develop rural characteristic industries, broaden the channels for farmers to increase their income and get rich, adhere to the integrated development of urban and rural areas, and smooth the flow of urban and rural factors, so as to finally realize rural revitalization [1]. Huxiang culture is the soul of Huxiang residents and the cognitive cornerstone for residents to establish local identity. When residents know the literary and ideological treasures left by Qu Yuan and Jia Yi in Huxiang; Understanding the thoughts and practices of Wang Chuanshan, Wei Yuan, Zeng Guofan, Mao Zedong and other historical figures, and accurately grasping the

spiritual core of “worrying about the world, perseverance and eclecticism” [2], they will rationally realize the unique value and profound connotation of local culture. This profound cognition can be effectively transformed into cultural self-confidence and self-esteem, which makes a resident who has a good history of Huxiang feel a strong sense of pride as a Hunan native, thus psychologically attaching himself to this land that has nurtured brilliant culture. On the other hand, if residents lack basic knowledge of the historical context, spiritual connotation and contemporary value of Huxiang culture, it will be difficult to truly establish local identity. This lack of cultural cognition will make the emotional connection lose the soil on which to grow. Local identity, like passive water and trees without roots, can neither take root at the individual emotional level, nor can it support lasting local attachment and active community participation. Therefore, building a multi-level and full-coverage system of Huxiang culture communication and education has become a basic project to cultivate residents’ local attachment and enhance regional cohesion. This system should be based on school education, social education as an extension, and media communication as an extension, and form a cultural education mechanism that is organically connected and promoted in coordination. Promoting the creative transformation and innovative development of Huxiang culture by taking various measures can not only effectively enhance residents’ cultural identity and local attachment, but also inject sustained and profound cultural soft power into promoting the integration of urban and rural cultures and realizing the strategy of rural revitalization.

3. Emotional Identity: Huxiang Culture Is the Internal Driving Force of Local Attachment

In the theoretical framework of “cultural cognition-emotional identity-cultural practice-social connection”, emotional identity is in the core hub position. If cultural cognition is the “rational cornerstone” of residents’ objective understanding of Huxiang culture, then emotional identification is the key process to internalize and sublimate this objective knowledge into personal subjective value judgment and emotional experience, and it is the “internal drive” to trigger and maintain deep local attachment. It marks that Huxiang culture belongs to individual knowledge system from the outside and has been transformed into emotional strength and spiritual home integrated into its blood. This sense of identity does not come out of thin air, but comes from residents’ spiritual resonance to the core values of Huxiang culture, aesthetic empathy to local cultural symbols, emotional integration in collective memory, and finally points to a positive sense of cultural pride and belonging, thus closely and emotionally binding the land of “I” and “Huxiang” together.

3.1. The emotional appeal of Huxiang cultural core

Huxiang culture is not a cold historical statement or accumulation of cultural relics, but its most touching place is that it contains a set of inspiring values and spiritual characteristics. When residents understand and accept these spiritual cores through cognitive learning or life, they will have a profound value resonance, thus forming a strong emotional identity. A large number of politicians, strategists and thinkers have emerged in Hunan since modern times, which have profoundly influenced the historical process of China. From Wei Yuan’s “seeing the world” to Zeng Guofan and Zuo Zongtang’s “rejuvenating the famous ministers”, from Tan Sitong’s “I laugh at the sky from the horizontal knife” to Huang Xing and Cai E’s revolutionary practice,

until Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi and other founding fathers [3], this historical scene is “only Chu has the material, and Si prospers” When a Hunan resident, old or young, is studying and tracing this history, it is hard not to be overwhelmed by emotion. This kind of pride is not narrow regionalism, but comes from the sincere admiration for the sages in their hometown who took the world as their responsibility and dared to be the first in the world. This kind of emotion will lift the individual from the ordinary self and make him feel that he is part of this great spiritual tradition. When an individual agrees with this spiritual value, he is no longer just a geographical resident, but a successor of this glorious history and a member of the spiritual community. This identity of “We Hunanese” is full of emotional charm because of its lofty value, which greatly strengthens the attachment to Hunan, the land that breeds this spirit. Secondly, Huxiang culture is not only related to the grand narrative above the temple, but also deeply rooted in the philosophy of daily life. “Practicing the world” emphasizes seeking truth from facts and practicing, and opposes empty talk [4]; “Perseverance” is embodied in the personality traits commonly known by Hunan people as “eating hard, bullying hard and being bored”. This spirit is embodied in the enterprising spirit of Hunan people in starting a business, in the persistence of scientific research, and in the optimism and tenacity of ordinary people in the face of life difficulties.

3.2. Emotional identity as a psychological motivation to connect cognition and practice

Emotional identification not only comes from the resonance of abstract spirit, but also comes from the aesthetic experience and emotional projection of specific cultural symbols. The material and immaterial carriers of Huxiang culture, as containers of emotions, bear rich collective memories and homesickness. On the one hand, the unique natural and cultural landscape has become the concrete object of homesickness. The word “Xiaoxiang” itself contains profound poetic and aesthetic images. The vast Dongting Lake, the beautiful Xiangjiang River, the majestic Hengshan Mountain and the quiet Yuelu Mountain have surpassed their physical existence and been endowed with unique cultural personality and emotional color after thousands of years of chanting by literati. On the other hand, life-oriented cultural symbols permeate daily life, forming emotional dependence. Just like the “spicy” of Hunan cuisine is not only a taste experience, but also an emotional expression of cultural character. It symbolizes a warm, unrestrained and straightforward attitude towards life. Many Hunan people in a foreign land often miss an authentic hometown dish the most. This “taste homesickness” is one of the most direct and physiological manifestations of emotional identity. Similarly, the intonation and vocabulary of Hunan dialect contain a unique sense of regional humor and expression, which can instantly close the psychological distance in the communication with fellow villagers and produce the intimacy of “one’s own”. These elements of life, such as diet and language, subtly shape the emotional structure of residents because of their daily and repetitive nature. This adaptation and love for lifestyle makes “place” the only choice to meet emotional needs, thus generating a deep sense of local dependence.

Emotional identity plays a key role in the four-dimensional framework. It recognizes knowledge and enlightens practice, which is the psychological engine to urge residents to change from “knowing” to “loving” and then from “loving” to “acting”. Emotional identification can strengthen and deepen cultural cognition. When an individual has a positive feeling for Huxiang culture, he will be more motivated to

actively and deeply understand relevant historical knowledge and character stories. Emotion provides continuous motivation and significance for cognition, making cultural learning no longer a task, but a pleasant emotional demand. Emotional identification is the fundamental motivation to drive cultural practice. The reason why residents are willing to spend time and energy to participate in cultural activities such as dragon boat rowing, singing Huagu opera and making Hunan embroidery [5] is often not utilitarian, but emotional. Because they “love” this culture, they can get happiness, satisfaction and a sense of belonging from it. A strong sense of cultural pride will encourage individuals to consciously become disseminators and defenders of culture. As a psychological converter, emotional identity transforms rational cultural cognition into fiery emotional energy, which in turn drives active cultural practice and maintains local social behavior.

4. Cultural Practice: Huxiang Culture Strengthens Local Attachment Behavior

In the formation mechanism of local attachment, if cultural cognition constructs the cornerstone of rationality and emotional identity ignites the internal drive, then cultural practice constitutes the key path to transform cognition and emotion into a stable and lasting behavioral connection. Practice is the most vivid and vital form of cultural inheritance, and it is also the fundamental guarantee for local attachment to “land” from the psychological level to daily life and be continuously strengthened. Huxiang culture is not a static exhibit in museums, but is active in streets, dining tables and festivals through the daily practice of millions of Hunan residents. This persistent and physical participation has established a kind of “physical memory” and “habitual connection” between residents and Huxiang land, thus deepening local attachment into an almost instinctive lifestyle and emotional fetter. This chapter will deeply discuss how cultural practice can strengthen residents’ local attachment step by step through three main behavior paths: participatory practice, life practice and innovative practice.

4.1 Participatory Practice: Ritual Sense, Collective Carnival and Periodic Strengthening

Participatory practice mainly refers to residents’ conscious and active participation in Huxiang cultural activities with strong ceremony and publicity. This kind of practice is usually closely connected with specific time, space and community, and strongly awakens and strengthens the sense of local identity in the collective atmosphere through highly structured behavior patterns. The annual periodic festival practice, such as the Dragon Boat Festival, is a model to strengthen local attachment. Qu Yuan has an indissoluble bond with the land of Huxiang, and his tragic story of dying in the river has injected profound Huxiang cultural connotation into the Dragon Boat Festival. In the waters around the Miluo River and Hunan, the annual Dragon Boat Festival is not only a sports competition, but also a large-scale, high-intensity cultural practice and emotional ceremony. Residents participate in rowing, drum beating or cheer as spectators, and their bodies are directly integrated into this collective action to commemorate the sages. The loud sound of gongs and drums, the touch of splashing water, the slogan of Qi Xin’s cooperation and the fragrance of Zongzi in the air all constitute a strong “sensory encirclement”. This kind of embodied experience is far more direct and profound than text reading or classroom teaching. The appreciation and participation of local literary and artistic activities,

such as watching Huagu Opera, xiang opera and participating in Huagu, deepen cultural identity in aesthetic experience. As an artistic treasure of Huxiang culture, Huagu Opera is deeply loved by Hunan people for its lively and humorous performances, plot close to life and authentic and simple dialect singing. Residents watching performances in theaters, squares or rural stage is not only a kind of entertainment, but also a kind of cultural edification and emotional connection [6]. The worldly wisdom and values of Huxiang contained in the operas infiltrate the audience in a subtle way. When a person can hum authentic excerpts from Huagu Opera, his/her connection with Huxiang culture will advance from emotional appreciation to behavioral possession, and his/her local attachment will be more subjective and proud.

4.2. Innovative Practice: Contemporary Continuation of Active Creation, Identity Empowerment and Attachment

Cultural practice is not a static copy, but also includes creative transformation and innovative development in the new era. Innovative practice refers to the behavior of residents (especially the younger generation) reinterpreting, re-creating and re-spreading Huxiang cultural elements by using new ideas, technologies and media [7]. This kind of practice is very important for maintaining the vitality of Huxiang culture in the era of globalization and information, and attracting the new generation to establish local attachment. Creative product design and digital content creation based on Huxiang cultural elements [8]. Young Hunan designers have transformed the cornices and arches of Yuelu Academy, the patterns of Mawangdui Han Tomb and the interesting vocabulary of Hunan dialect into fashionable stationery, fashion brand clothes, digital illustrations or short videos. In this process, practitioners are no longer passive cultural receivers, but active cultural interpreters and creators. This creative behavior itself is a deep expression of local attachment. Through creative labor, they combine their personal talents with local cultural resources, giving traditional culture new vitality and attraction. This kind of behavior, on the one hand, is a proud display of local culture, on the other hand, it is also an active construction and dissemination of the collective identity of “Hunan people” in virtual space. In the interaction and praise with others, the local identity of practitioners is constantly confirmed and strengthened. This practice breaks the time and space limitation of traditional cultural inheritance and opens up a new and more participatory field for the cultivation of local attachment.

Cultural practice works together to strengthen residents’ local attachment through three paths: ritual sense and collective energy of participatory practice, daily infiltration and body memory of life practice, and subject creation and empowerment of the times of innovative practice. Practice is the behavioral process of welding the abstract “Huxiang Culture” with the concrete “My Life”. It makes culture touchable, experiential and creative. Through continuous behavior participation, residents are no longer bystanders of culture, but become “people in the drama” of culture, and their local attachment has also changed from a static psychological state to a dynamic and generative lifestyle and identity.

5. Social Connection: Huxiang Culture Builds the Thread of Local Attachment

In the complex structure of local attachment, its strength depends not only on the emotional bond between the individual and the physical environment, or the spiritual

fit with the symbolic meaning of the place, but also on the social relationship network embedded by the individual in the place. This is a crucial dimension, which expands local attachment from an individual's private psychological feeling to a perceivable and reliable collective existence. Huxiang culture, as a living social practice, its inheritance process itself is a huge and precise weaving process of "meaning network". This network is interwoven by multiple relationships such as blood, geography, career and literature, which closely connects individuals and forms an "imaginary community" and a real life community. When residents have a stable and emotional interaction with their families, neighbors, fellow villagers and wider communities through the shared Huxiang cultural symbols, values and behavior patterns, local attachment will be supported by a solid social context [9]. This chapter aims to deeply analyze how Huxiang culture, as a powerful adhesive, provides indispensable social capital and relationship guarantee for the generation and consolidation of residents' local attachment by constructing two core paths: horizontal community ownership and vertical intergenerational inheritance.

From a horizontal perspective, to build a sense of community belonging based on cultural identity, the network of family and relatives is the most basic and core unit of cultural inheritance and social connection, and it is also the initial cradle of local attachment. In Hunan families, the transmission of Huxiang culture is not through rigid preaching, but permeates the nuances of daily life. The elders tell anecdotes or family history of local celebrities in dialect at the dinner table, teach the younger generation skills and the frugality and hospitality contained in making traditional foods such as bacon and Ciba, and organize family sacrifices and reunion activities on traditional festivals such as Spring Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival. These seemingly ordinary family interactions are actually constantly strengthening the dual recognition that "we are a family and we are from Hunan". As a primary group, family members have the closest emotional connection. When Huxiang culture becomes the "background color" of family communication and the common topic of emotional communication, the love for family and the recognition of local culture naturally merge into one. A person who is full of attachment to his family has a stronger sense of "root". This connection based on blood relationship and common life memory provides the most primitive and stable emotional safety pad for local attachment [10]. Secondly, the community and geo-network expand the social connection from the family to a broader public space, forming a neighborhood community of "mutual help". The collectivism tendency and the tradition of attaching importance to rural friendship in Huxiang culture provide cultural details for the formation of community cohesion. In many traditional communities or villages in Hunan, public activities based on common cultural customs are an important link to maintain social relations. This "sense of us" forged by common cultural practice has greatly enhanced the cohesion of the community. Living in such a community full of human touch and cultural vitality, residents' local attachment will become concrete and solid because of their rich and warm social interaction.

From a vertical perspective, the vertical social connection is mainly reflected in the intergenerational inheritance of culture. It connects the past, the present and the future, making individuals feel that they are a link in the endless historical and cultural river. This kind of "passing on from generation to generation" across time and space endows local attachment with a sense of historical depth and mission. The spiritual characteristics and heroic narration of Huxiang culture are the core resources to build a vertical connection. From Qu Yuan's quest and Jia Yi's worries, to Wang

Chuanshan's philosophy and Zeng Guofan's achievements, and then to the revolutionary practice of Mao Zedong and others, this spiritual pedigree of "worrying about the world and being the first" has provided Hunan people with a heavy collective memory and glorious identity heritage. When the elders tell the stories of these Huxiang sages to the younger generation, they are not only passing on historical knowledge, but also making a kind of "cultural blood" recognition [11]. This "dialogue" across time and space makes individuals transcend the limited life cycle and integrate self-identity into a more grand and lasting historical narrative, thus greatly deepening their emotional attachment to this land. A place is no longer just a current residence, but also a spiritual home full of stories and souls. Social connection is an indispensable "network support" in the mechanism of Hunan cultural inheritance affecting local attachment [12]. It constructs an emotional support system and identity space for residents in real life through horizontal community affiliation; Through vertical intergenerational inheritance, the individual and the local history and future are closely linked, which endows local attachment with historical depth and cultural mission. This social network woven by Huxiang culture makes local attachment no longer an isolated emotion floating in the individual's heart, but a concrete relationship carrier and continuous social interaction as nourishment.

6. Conclusions

Through systematic theoretical construction and rigorous empirical analysis, this study strongly proves that the inheritance of Huxiang culture is the key and deep-seated factor to shape and influence residents' local attachment. Its influence is not realized through a single and isolated path, but through a four-in-one mechanism with strict internal logic, interdependence and dynamic evolution: "cultural cognition-emotional identification-cultural practice-social connection". These four dimensions constitute a complete closed loop from the individual's internal psychology to the external behavior, and then from the individual to the community, all of which are indispensable, and jointly explain how cultural inheritance closely binds residents and places step by step. The theoretical value of this conclusion lies in that it transcends the traditional research paradigm that regards culture as a static background variable, and brings the inheritance of Huxiang culture into the analytical framework of local attachment as a dynamic and multidimensional process for the first time, clearly revealing the internal logical chain from cultural acceptance to emotional attachment. This "four-in-one" model is not only suitable for interpreting Huxiang culture, but also provides an analytical tool for understanding how other regional cultures (such as Qilu culture and Lingnan culture) affect local identity, enriching the theoretical connotation of local attachment and cultural geography.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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