

Examining The Synergistic Relationship Between Chaoshan Intangible Cultural Heritage and Cultural Tourism Development

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Abstract

This study explores the synergistic relationship between Chaoshan's intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and cultural tourism development, using Chaoshan cuisine as a focal point. Amidst the challenges posed by globalization and modernization, safeguarding ICH has become a pressing issue. Chaoshan, designated as a "City of Gastronomy" by UNESCO, serves as a prime example of how cultural heritage can be integrated into tourism to promote sustainable development. However, rapid commercialization has led to the dilution of cultural authenticity and value, raising concerns about how to balance economic growth with cultural preservation. Through a mixed-method approach involving quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, this research investigates how traditional cultural elements can be effectively incorporated into tourism practices to foster both cultural dissemination and economic benefits.

The findings indicate that digital media and technology play a crucial role in expanding the reach of Chaoshan's heritage, while culinary tourism emerges as a powerful medium for heritage transmission. The study suggests strategies for enhancing the cultural tourism appeal of Chaoshan, including the development of comprehensive food tourism routes and community-based cultural programs. These recommendations aim to ensure the sustainable development of Chaoshan's cultural tourism, preserving its rich heritage while contributing to local economic growth.

Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage; Chaoshan Cuisine; Cultural Tourism; Synergistic Development

Introduction

The rapid advancement of globalization and modernization has presented unprecedented challenges and complex opportunities for the preservation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). As an essential part of human history, society, and cultural development, ICH embodies the diversity and value systems of human civilization, carrying unique historical, social, and cultural significance. UNESCO has repeatedly emphasized that safeguarding ICH is not only a necessary means of maintaining cultural diversity but also a critical approach to promoting sustainable development on a global scale (Bitušíková, 2021). Amid the risk of cultural homogenization posed by globalization, how to preserve, transmit, and innovate these invaluable cultural resources in a rapidly changing world has become a pressing issue for governments and academia worldwide.

In this context, China has elevated ICH protection to a national strategic level, emphasizing the synergy between cultural heritage preservation and cultural tourism development. As a vital vehicle for the transmission and promotion of ICH, cultural tourism integrates cultural elements into tourism experiences, thereby not only stimulating local economic growth but also enhancing cultural identity and soft power. Yan et al., (2024) noted that ritualized experiences in ICH tourism represent an innovative and appealing type of emerging product. However, as commercialization intensifies, the conflict between excessive development and cultural preservation becomes increasingly prominent. Preventing the erosion of cultural authenticity and preserving the intrinsic value of heritage in the face of economic incentives remains a significant challenge for the sustainable development of ICH globally.

The Chaoshan region, a crucial area for ICH preservation in China, boasts a rich cultural landscape. Its unique language, Chaozhou cuisine, traditional crafts, and folk arts are not only symbols of regional cultural pride but also provide a solid resource base for the prosperity of the tourism industry. Chaozhou cuisine, as a vital representative of this heritage, has gained national and international recognition for its exquisite culinary techniques and distinctive flavours. In 2023, Chaozhou was designated as a "City of Gastronomy" by UNESCO. However, the rapid development of cultural tourism in the region has led to a series of challenges, including the homogenization of cultural landscapes, the over-commercialization of cultural heritage, and the gradual dilution of cultural value. While the growth of cultural tourism has driven local economic development to some extent, the core issue remains how

to achieve sustainable cultural tourism development while preserving the essence of cultural heritage in Chaoshan.

This study focuses on the synergistic relationship between ICH and cultural tourism by using Chaoshan cuisine as a case study, exploring how traditional cultural elements can be effectively integrated into modern tourism practices. By doing so, the research not only addresses how to protect and transmit local cultural heritage within a rapidly expanding tourism industry but also aims to reveal the dual driving mechanisms between cultural dissemination and economic benefits, ultimately providing theoretical support and practical guidance for the innovative integration of culture and tourism. The significance of this study lies in promoting the creative transmission of ICH on the one hand and supporting sustainable local economic growth through cultural tourism on the other, thereby achieving a win-win development of culture and economy.

Research objectives

1. To explore the value and appeal of Chaoshan cuisine in cultural tourism
2. To evaluate the impact of cultural tourism on the preservation and development of Chaoshan culinary heritage
3. To formulate strategies for the synergistic development of Chaoshan cuisine and cultural tourism.

Literature review

1. Theories and Practices of Intangible Cultural Heritage Preservation

UNESCO's definition of cultural heritage includes not only tangible assets but also intangible elements such as oral traditions, performing arts, and social practices. The 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage highlights the significance of these elements for social diversity and sustainable development (UNESCO, 2003). Despite global efforts, many countries need help in identifying, documenting, and managing ICH effectively (Ortiz & Madariaga, 2022).

China, possessing one of the world's richest ICH resources, has integrated ICH preservation into its national strategy, establishing over 1,300 recognized items since 2006 (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2023). At the same time, initiatives such as the Tang Paradise in Xi'an demonstrate effective

ICH management, but broader challenges persist, including declining inheritor numbers and limited public engagement.

The Chaoshan region, with its rich cultural heritage—including Teochew opera, Chaozhou embroidery, and Chaoshan cuisine—plays a significant role in promoting local identity and tourism. However, it faces transmission crises, with fewer inheritors and waning interest among younger generations. Recent innovations, such as digital documentation and themed cultural tourism routes, have shown promise in revitalizing local heritage, yet concerns over-commercialization and authenticity remain. Preserve the development of Chaoshan's ICH; it is essential to enhance youth engagement through diverse communication strategies and interactive experiences. Collaborative efforts across sectors are needed to balance preservation with tourism development, ensuring the dynamic transmission of cultural heritage while contributing to global cultural diversity.

2. Cultural Tourism and Intangible Cultural Heritage

Integrating culture with tourism is crucial for creating rich, sustainable tourism experiences. Research shows that cultural tourism not only stimulates economic growth but also plays a vital role in heritage preservation and community development. For instance, studies on China's Laoshan Taoist district highlight how cultural tourism supports regional development by creating jobs and enhancing infrastructure (Jiawei & Mustapha, 2024). Similarly, research in Hunan's traditional villages emphasizes the role of cultural creativity and preservation, particularly during times of economic hardship (Chen & Li, 2022).

In the Chaoshan region, integrating culinary traditions into the tourism experience has become a powerful tool for regional cultural tourism growth. As a UNESCO-recognized "City of Gastronomy," Chaoshan's rich culinary heritage attracts both food enthusiasts and cultural tourists. The immersive nature of Chaozhou cuisine—renowned for its distinctive flavours and intricate techniques—enhances not only cultural tourism appeal but also deepens cultural understanding. Integrating food tourism into Chaoshan's broader cultural strategy promotes both economic development and cultural preservation.

Cultural tourism is essential for safeguarding and transmitting ICH. Through community engagement and creative promotion, ICH has become part of modern life and the tourism industry. Chaoshan active community participation is critical to effectively protecting ICH. Recreating and adapting traditional crafts for contemporary use ensures their preservation, while tourism provides a vital platform for income generation and the continuation of cultural practices.

3. Culinary Culture

Chaoshan culture, a significant branch of Han culture, has developed uniquely in the regions of Shantou, Chaozhou, and Jieyang. At its core is Chaoshan cuisine, celebrated for its meticulous cooking techniques and deep cultural connotations, which embody the region's distinct values and way of life (Huang & Gu, 2020). In 2023, UNESCO designated Chaozhou as a "City of Gastronomy," elevating Chaoshan cuisine to international prominence and integrating it into the global cultural tourism landscape. This recognition has not only preserved the culinary traditions but also enhanced the region's tourism potential, illustrating the symbiotic relationship between cultural heritage and economic development. In World Heritage sites, gastronomy can act as an effective medium to enhance the social engagement with the destination and provide visitors with a sensory immersion into its heritage. This approach enriches the overall visitor experience by enabling them to connect more deeply with the cultural identity of the site through culinary traditions (Lima et al., 2024).

The delicate flavours and refined techniques of Chaoshan cuisine provide an immersive cultural experience that goes beyond the plate. Integrating culinary heritage into tourism strategies enriches visitor experiences and strengthens cultural identity. Recent efforts, such as culinary festivals and digital promotions, have significantly boosted the global influence of Chaoshan cuisine, making it a key driver of both cultural dissemination and economic growth.

4. Synergistic Development of Cultural Heritage and Tourism

The integration of cultural heritage and tourism is crucial for achieving sustainable development. Cultural tourism enhances the appeal of destinations and plays a vital role in preserving heritage and strengthening community identity (Sun & Wang, 2023). Effective models of cultural tourism incorporate local traditions into visitor experiences, allowing tourists to engage deeply with the cultural context. For example, Tang and Xu, (2023) argue that cultural integration in tourism is not just about showcasing traditions but also about creatively designing experiences that immerse visitors in the local lifestyle and cultural narratives. This approach offers a richer, more meaningful tourism experience that promotes both cultural appreciation and economic benefits.

Authentic representation of heritage through interactive experiences, such as traditional craft-making and participation in local festivals, enables tourists to become active participants in cultural preservation. Zhao et al., (2023) emphasize that such deep engagement not only enhances visitor satisfaction but also supports the sustainable transmission of cultural heritage.

In the Chaoshan region, the integration of culinary heritage with cultural tourism has created a distinctive model that capitalizes on local cultural resources to develop a unique tourism experience. By combining traditional culinary arts with modern tourism practices, Chaoshan has successfully positioned itself as a leading destination for cultural and culinary tourism. This synergy between heritage and tourism serves as a valuable model for other regions seeking to leverage their cultural assets for sustainable development.

5. Knowledge gap

Although extensive studies have explored the relationship between cultural heritage and tourism development, significant gaps remain in understanding the multifaceted integration of Chaoshan's intangible cultural heritage (ICH)—such as Chaozhou cuisine, embroidery, and opera—with cultural tourism. Most research focuses on single cultural elements, lacking an in-depth analysis of mechanisms that support the synergistic development of multiple cultural forms. Additionally, existing literature often adopts a single-disciplinary approach, overlooking the complex interactions between cultural preservation and tourist behaviour from multidisciplinary perspectives, such as sociology and psychology.

Moreover, there is a lack of empirical studies on how to effectively incorporate Chaoshan ICH into its "City of Gastronomy" tourism strategy and address challenges related to infrastructure, marketing, and capacity building among local cultural practitioners. Future research should focus on the comprehensive integration of cultural heritage and tourism, interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks, and innovative branding strategies to support the sustainable development of Chaoshan cultural tourism.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a mixed research method, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods. By integrating qualitative and quantitative elements, a comprehensive analysis of the research questions is conducted, which helps to explore the inheritance and innovation of Chaoshan intangible cultural heritage in cultural tourism.

1. Research Design

The research is structured to explore the integration of Chaoshan's unique cultural elements into the tourism industry. The study utilizes a sequential explanatory design, starting with a quantitative

survey to identify patterns and followed by qualitative interviews to gain deeper insights into the identified trends.

2. Research tools

Quantitative Survey: A structured questionnaire is designed to collect data from tourists and local stakeholders about their perceptions of Chaoshan cultural heritage and its impact on tourism.

Qualitative Interviews: Semi-structured interviews are conducted with local artisans, cultural experts, and tourism operators to explore the challenges and opportunities in integrating intangible cultural heritage with tourism development.

3. Data collection

The survey lasted three months and was conducted through various online channels and disseminated through social media platforms. To ensure the reliability and validity of the survey results, a pilot was conducted among a small number of tourists. Using survey method as a mixed research method has many advantages for the inheritance and innovation of Chaoshan intangible cultural heritage. First, it can efficiently collect a large amount of data from different respondents. The target sample size of 875 tourists provides ideal data access in a relatively short period of time.

In order to collect qualitative data, semi-structured interviews with six people working in the protection of intangible cultural heritage were considered. An interview plan was developed in the form of initial interview questions to guide the conversation during the interview process.

4. Data Analysis

Quantitative methods have been considered to interpret the survey data of approximately 800 participants. Microsoft Excel has been used as the primary tool to process the survey data and produce graphs and figures as required to facilitate presentation of the data.

A thematic analysis approach has been chosen for the interpretation of qualitative data collected through interviews and the development of findings.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the theory of cultural capital, this study explores the synergistic relationship between Chaoshan intangible cultural heritage and cultural tourism development. By analyzing how cultural

resources are transformed into cultural capital, the dual benefits of tourism and cultural heritage can be promoted (Figure 1).

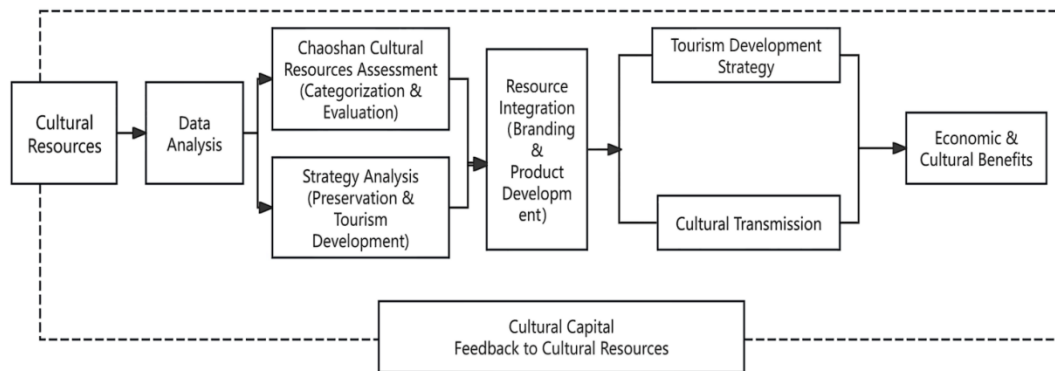


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework (Source: Constructed by researcher, 2021)

Research Results

1. Summary of Questionnaire

The survey gathered feedback from 866 participants, with a diverse age distribution. The largest demographic was the 18 to 25 age group, making up 33.49% of respondents, followed by the 25 to 35 age group at 16.97% and the 35 to 45 age group at 13.86%. Younger respondents (under 18 years old) and older participants (45 to 60 years old and over 60 years old) also contributed significantly, accounting for 18.71% and 16.97% respectively. The gender distribution was nearly balanced, with women representing 51.04% and men 48.73%.

Interactive workshops were the most preferred type of cultural experience, with 62.12% of respondents showing interest in hands-on activities that offer direct learning opportunities. This indicates a strong preference for participatory and experiential learning. Cultural performances such as traditional opera and folk arts also attracted significant interest (33.26%), reflecting an appreciation for experiencing culture through the performing arts.

Nearly half of the participants (47.46%) expressed a desire to engage in food-related activities, underlining the importance of Chaoshan cuisine in cultural tourism. However, only 15.24% were interested in the production of cultural and creative products, indicating a lesser attraction to the creative process of crafting cultural items compared to culinary experiences.

The survey revealed that interactive workshops were the most popular activity, with 62.12% of respondents expressing a preference for hands-on, engaging experiences that offer direct learning opportunities. This suggests a strong interest in participatory and experiential learning. Cultural performances, such as traditional opera and folk arts, were also highly anticipated, with 33.26% of respondents indicating their eagerness to attend such events, reflecting an appreciation for experiencing cultural heritage through performing arts.

Moreover, 30.37% of participants favored historical lectures and educational activities, emphasizing their inclination towards learning about cultural heritage through academic methods. Food experience activities, which provide a sensory approach to exploring Chaoshan's culinary heritage, attracted 47.46% of respondents, highlighting the significant role of cuisine in cultural tourism. However, only 15.24% of respondents were interested in cultural and creative product production, suggesting that fewer participants are drawn to the creative process of crafting cultural products (Figure 2).

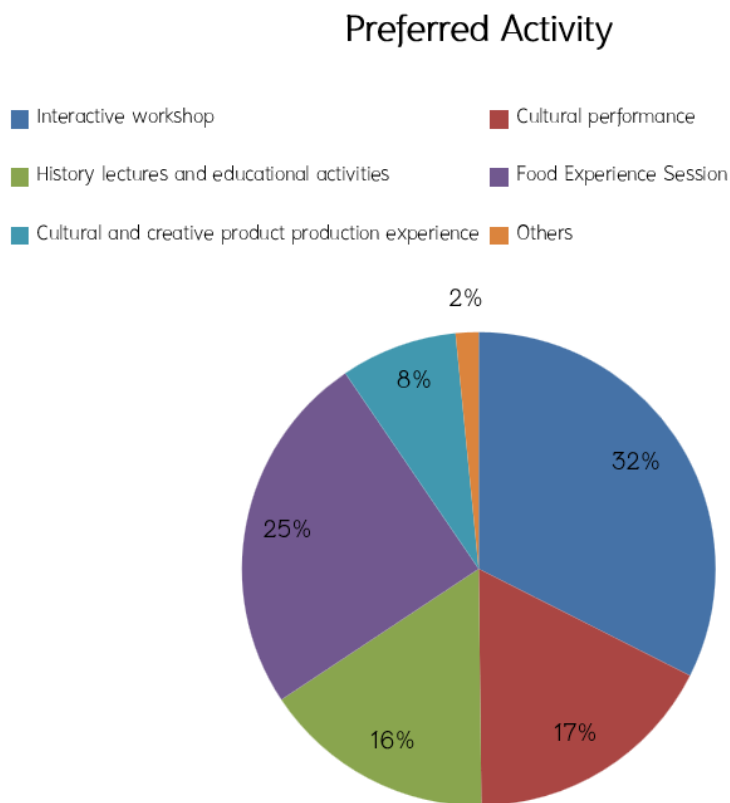


Figure 2 Types of intangible cultural heritage experience activities expected by tourists (Source: Constructed by researcher, 2024)

2. Summary of Semi-Structured Interview Results

The Chaoshan region is rich in intangible cultural heritage, particularly in the areas of wood carving and culinary traditions, which hold significant cultural capital. These elements are a crucial attraction for tourists interested in heritage tourism. The primary motivations for visitors to the Chaoshan area include leisure, cuisine, and the allure of traditional culture. The preservation and transmission of Chaoshan's intangible cultural heritage not only enhance tourists' motivation to visit but also improve their adaptability.

The research highlights the pivotal role of digital platforms like TikTok in promoting Chaoshan's intangible cultural heritage. Digital media extends the reach of traditional cultural practices, transforming them into interactive experiences that engage a modern audience. This finding is crucial for the strategic development of cultural tourism in the digital age.

Despite the success of integrating Chaoshan's heritage with tourism, challenges remain. There is a delicate balance required between maintaining cultural authenticity and catering to the demands of an expanding tourism industry. The UNESCO designation of Chaozhou as a "City of Gastronomy" enhances its global appeal but necessitates careful planning to preserve cultural values (Table 1; 2).

Table 1 Comparison of survey and interview results

Research Objective	Survey Findings	Interview Summary
<i>Understanding the Status of Chaoshan Intangible Cultural Heritage</i>	89.03% recognize the importance of heritage inheritance	Participants noted a high reverence for cultural practices and the importance of authentic experiences
<i>Exploring Innovative Approaches for Cultural Tourism and Heritage Inheritance</i>	Interactive workshops (62.12%) and technological engagements are highly anticipated	Innovative methods like VR and interactive storytelling highlighted as effective
<i>Comparative Analysis of Tourism Innovations</i>	Cultural performances (33.26%) and food experiences (47.46%) preferred	Chaoshan's integrated and participatory approach contrasted favorably with other cities

Research Objective	Survey Findings	Interview Summary
<i>Integration of Chaoshan Intangible Cultural Heritage with Cultural Tourism</i>	Strong willingness to engage in cultural activities (78.64% either 'Very willing' or 'More willing')	Emphasis on authentic experiences that allow active participation in cultural practices

Table 2 Comparison of survey and interview results: Factors of Cultural Heritage

Element	Survey Findings	Interview Findings
Intangible Cultural Heritage of Chaoshan	89.03% value heritage inheritance	Participants expressed high interest in cultural practices and the importance of preserving these traditions.
Preferences of Cultural Heritage in Tourism	64.78% influenced by cultural richness in travel choices	Cultural integration was deemed essential for authentic travel experiences by tourists
Interest in Activities for Learning Traditional Culture While Travelling	78.64% (Very willing or More willing) to engage in cultural learning activities	Tourists favored hands-on, participatory experiences and valued the depth they added to the travel experience
Interest Areas of Chaoshan Cultural Heritage	Toys, Tableware and Chaozhou Woodcarving were top interests	Authentic experiences in tea ceremonies, embroidery workshops, and traditional opera were highlighted
Types of Innovations	High anticipation for interactive workshops and technological engagements	Innovative methods like VR, digital storytelling, and interactive digital museums were preferred for enhancing cultural understanding

Discussion

The study reveals that Chaoshan's rich cultural heritage, particularly in wood carving and cuisine, significantly attracts heritage tourists. These elements not only draw visitors but also enhance their cultural engagement and adaptability.

Digital media and technology play a pivotal role in promoting cultural tourism, with platforms like TikTok effectively expanding the reach of Chaoshan's heritage. This digital integration transforms traditional cultural practices into interactive experiences, which is crucial for engaging modern tourists. The UNESCO designation of Chaoshan as a "City of Gastronomy" has further boosted its appeal, integrating culinary arts with cultural narratives and providing unique, immersive experiences. However, the challenge remains to maintain authenticity while catering to diverse tourist groups.

Overall, Chaoshan has successfully merged cultural heritage with tourism, promoting both economic growth and heritage preservation. It is essential to refine strategies, utilize digital tools, and strengthen community involvement to ensure a balanced and inclusive cultural tourism environment.

New knowledge from research:

1. Digital Media's Impact on Cultural Tourism: The study uncovers the transformative role of digital platforms like TikTok in promoting Chaoshan's intangible cultural heritage. This highlights how integrating social media can effectively expand the reach of traditional cultural practices, engaging a global audience and modernizing the narrative around heritage tourism.

2. Culinary Heritage as a Tourism Driver: The research emphasizes the pivotal role of Chaoshan cuisine in cultural tourism, demonstrating how food experiences can serve as a powerful medium for heritage transmission and tourism growth. The findings suggest that culinary tourism, when combined with storytelling and interactive workshops, can significantly enhance cultural understanding and visitor engagement.

3. Challenges of Authenticity in Heritage Commercialization: The study identifies the delicate balance required between preserving cultural authenticity and meeting the demands of a growing tourism industry. It underscores the importance of developing tourism products that respect and reflect the true essence of local heritage, avoiding the pitfalls of over-commercialization.

4. Role of Community Participation: The research highlights that active community involvement is essential for sustainable cultural tourism. Local communities not only contribute to the authenticity of

the tourist experience but also play a crucial role in the preservation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage.

These insights contribute to the broader understanding of how digital innovation and community engagement can support sustainable cultural tourism, offering valuable guidance for other regions seeking to leverage their cultural assets for tourism development.

Suggestions

1. Based on Research Findings

Chaoshan has made notable strides in safeguarding its intangible cultural heritage (ICH), especially following its designation as a UNESCO "City of Gastronomy." This recognition has significantly boosted both local and international attention towards Chaoshan's cultural assets, with a strong focus on its culinary traditions. The preservation of artistic elements such as Chaozhou opera, embroidery, and traditional cuisine has been achieved through collaborative efforts between government initiatives and active community participation. Despite these advancements, challenges persist, particularly the threat of over-commercialization and waning interest among younger generations. Innovative measures like digital archiving and immersive cultural experiences have been implemented. However, further integration and creative strategies are necessary to ensure the authenticity and vitality of these artistic traditions.

Cultural tourism has played a dual role in influencing the protection and transmission of Chaoshan's ICH. Positively, it has generated economic incentives that support the continuation of cultural practices, fostered greater community involvement, and created platforms for cultural exchange. Visitors are drawn to participatory activities such as cooking classes, tea ceremonies, and cultural performances, which enhance their cultural engagement. However, the research also highlights the risks of excessive commercialization, which can compromise the authenticity of the heritage. Therefore, a balanced approach that prioritizes the preservation of cultural integrity while leveraging tourism for economic and social benefits is essential for the sustainable development of Chaoshan's ICH.

2. Future Suggestions

To fully leverage Chaoshan's status as a "City of Gastronomy," it is recommended to develop well-structured food tourism routes that connect vital cities such as Chaozhou, Shantou, and Jieyang.

These routes should offer a variety of culinary experiences, including cooking workshops, food tastings, and cultural festivals. Such an approach would provide visitors with a cohesive and immersive cultural journey, deepening their understanding of Chaoshan's unique culinary heritage.

Moreover, promoting local community participation in these activities is essential for maintaining authenticity and fostering economic growth. Engaging local artisans, chefs, and cultural practitioners not only enriches the tourist experience but also strengthens the financial foundations of these communities. Educational programs that integrate traditional cultural practices into local school curricula and community events can further ensure the long-term preservation of Chaoshan's intangible cultural heritage, passing it on to future generations.

Culinary tourism plays a central role in Chaoshan's cultural tourism development. The findings emphasize that food is a significant draw for visitors, with Chaoshan's cuisine offering a cultural experience beyond simple consumption. Cooking demonstrations, immersive food tours, and hands-on workshops have been successful in promoting both tourism and cultural education. However, the research highlights the potential for creating more structured culinary tourism routes that link major cities in the region, offering a seamless experience for tourists while preserving culinary traditions.

By implementing these strategies, Chaoshan can not only enhance its appeal as a cultural tourism destination but also ensure the sustainable development and preservation of its rich intangible cultural heritage, safeguarding it for future generations.

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