



## ARTICLE

# Guardians of Rural Heritage: Exploring Residents' Attitudes towards the Inheritance of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Chinese Traditional Villages

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## ABSTRACT

As pivotal agents in traditional villages, residents play a crucial role in the preservation and continuation of intangible cultural heritage within these villages. Grounded in the theory of planned behaviour, this study examines residents' attitudes toward the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in traditional Chinese villages, using Zhaoxing Dong Village as a case study. To explore these attitudes in depth and from multiple dimensions, the research collected questionnaire data from 246 village residents. Analytical methods, including Pearson correlation coefficients and mediation effect tests, were employed to investigate the relationships between residents' perceptions, their willingness to inherit, their actual inheritance behaviors, and demographic differences. The findings indicated that residents generally exhibited positive attitudes regarding cultural heritage inheritance; however, their actual inheritance behaviors were relatively low. A significant positive correlation was observed among residents' perceptions of cultural inheritance, their inheritance willingness, and actual inheritance actions, with perceptions exerting a strong positive influence on actual behaviours. This willingness to inherit also partially mediated this relationship, underscoring its crucial role in translating perceptions into actions. Moreover, factors such as age, educational background, and length of residence were significantly associated with residents' inheritance perceptions and behaviours. Finally, specific policy and practice recommendations are proposed to promote residents' broader, deeper, and more active engagement in the inheritance and safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage.

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## ARTICLE INFO

Received: 4 April 2024 | Revised: 14 April 2024 | Accepted: 20 April 2024 | Published Online: 5 May 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55121/nc.v3i2.182>

## CITATION

Shen, H., Yu, L., Aziz, N.F., et al., 2025. Guardians of Rural Heritage: Exploring Residents' Attitudes towards the Inheritance of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Chinese Traditional Villages. *New Countryside*. 3(2): 22–39. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55121/nc.v3i2.182>

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**Keywords:** Intangible Cultural Heritage; Traditional Village; Inheritance Intention; Willingness; Actual Behaviours

## 1. Introduction

In the current context of rapid globalisation and increasing cultural homogenisation, the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) have gained global attention<sup>[1–3]</sup>. UNESCO's efforts to safeguard diverse cultural expressions highlight the urgency of maintaining the practices, knowledge, and skills passed down through generations<sup>[4, 5]</sup>. The inheritance of ICH represents not only reverence for and remembrance of the past, but also provides value and educational resources for future generations<sup>[6, 7]</sup>. Scholars have noted that the key to ICH inheritance lies in preserving cultural diversity, strengthening social cohesion, and facilitating intergenerational communication<sup>[1, 8, 9]</sup>. Additionally, ICH plays a crucial role in enhancing community identity and cultural pride and fostering local development<sup>[10–12]</sup>.

Against this backdrop, traditional villages, as vital components of cultural heritage<sup>[13]</sup>, not only preserve a rich array of folk customs, skills, and medicinal knowledge but also embody significant historical, artistic, scientific, and economic values<sup>[14]</sup>. According to the “Guidelines for Strengthening the Protection and Development of Traditional Villages” issued by China's Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Culture in 2012, traditional villages are defined as villages that were established early, possess rich cultural and natural resources, and hold substantial historical, cultural, scientific, artistic, economic, and social values, thereby warranting protection. Only those villages that are officially recognized and listed in the national directory of traditional villages are designated as such<sup>[13]</sup>. Additionally, policy notices issued by the offices of the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development and the Ministry of Finance in China for the years 2023 and 2024 have reiterated the importance of the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in these traditional villages, further underscoring the necessity of researching the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in traditional villages.

However, despite widespread recognition of the importance of safeguarding ICH, there remains a lack of research on how to effectively promote and sustain its transmission within traditional villages. In particular, a comprehensive

understanding of residents' perceptions, willingness, and behaviours related to protecting and inheriting their cultural heritage has yet to be fully developed. With lifestyle changes and waning interest in traditional culture among younger generations, many forms of ICH are at risk of disappearing<sup>[5, 15]</sup>. Additionally, the local community, as stakeholders and primary actors in the preservation of intangible cultural heritage, can promote local economic development through these preservation efforts, thereby becoming direct beneficiaries of such actions<sup>[16–18]</sup>. Therefore, this study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of community residents' attitudes and behaviours toward ICH inheritance and explored the underlying motivations and challenges. By analysing the mechanisms of inheritance and the degree of resident participation, this study seeks to reveal how to more effectively protect and transmit these cultural treasures while promoting sustainable development in local communities.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Current Research on ICH and the Limited Understanding of Residents' Perceptions of Cultural Inheritance

In recent years, researchers have conducted extensive studies on the protection and inheritance of ICH, including the preservation of intangible heritage<sup>[19–21]</sup>, the intersection of ICH and tourism development<sup>[22–24]</sup>, perceptions of and attitudes towards ICH<sup>[25–27]</sup>, and the establishment of protection systems for inheritors<sup>[28–30]</sup>. For example, Skublewska-Paszowska et al. summarized the commonly used 3D technologies for ICH preservation, including 3D visualization, 3D modeling, augmented reality, virtual reality, and motion capture systems<sup>[19]</sup>. Yan and Li also consider digital technology as a new approach to protecting ICH<sup>[21]</sup>. Cerquetti et al., in their study of winery tourism in small Italian villages, found that the enhancement of ICH can promote the sustainable development of rural tourism, provided that the local community is involved, dialogue and collaboration are established among various local actors, and appropriate professional skills are introduced<sup>[22]</sup>. Su et al. found that the

subjective vitality of the audience significantly influences the authenticity experience in their study of the audience of Quanzhou Puppet Theater<sup>[27]</sup>. Zhang, Cai and Zhan emphasized the importance of establishing an effective training system for ICH inheritors and proposed ideas and frameworks for constructing such a system<sup>[30]</sup>. These studies provide valuable insight into the value of ICH and strategies for its protection.

However, there remains a significant gap in the literature concerning residents' perceptions of the inheritance of ICH. While residents play a crucial role in ICH inheritance, as direct stakeholders and primary agents of transmission in traditional villages, they directly impact the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage<sup>[15]</sup>. Existing research has primarily focused on residents' attitudes and intentions, with less attention paid to how residents perceive and evaluate the inheritance of cultural heritage, particularly in the face of modernisation challenges and societal changes.

Residents are living carriers and inheritors of local culture; their willingness and behaviours regarding protecting cultural heritage form the foundation of cultural inheritance<sup>[11, 31]</sup>. They play a critical role in maintaining the vitality and continuity of culture<sup>[32, 33]</sup>. Residents' understanding of the value of cultural heritage and their attitudes concerning inheritance activities substantially influence the promotion or hindrance of cultural inheritance<sup>[34]</sup>. Therefore, a deeper exploration of residents' perceptions and understanding of ICH inheritance is essential for promoting effective cultural inheritance. The research gap in this field highlights the need for further attention to residents' perceptions and evaluations of the cultural inheritance process.

## **2.2. Lack of Research on Residents' Actual ICH Inheritance Behaviors**

Despite recognition of the importance of ICH inheritance, a research gap remains concerning residents' actual behaviours in this process, as many studies have predominantly focused on exploring residents' general ICH attitudes and intentions, as previously mentioned. Among the studies that have incorporated a behaviour component, Luo et al. analysed residents' views and intentions regarding the protection of Nüshu, a unique syllabic script used by women, and found that behavioural attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control significantly impacted their

intention to protect it<sup>[11]</sup>. Similarly, Báez-Montenegro et al. examined the willingness of residents in Chile to pay for cultural heritage preservation and revealed a positive correlation between willingness to pay, educational level, and cultural habits<sup>[35]</sup>. Vondolia et al., in their study on the protection of traditional Kente weaving techniques in Ghana, discovered that the public generally considers investments in the protection of such intangible cultural heritage to be justified<sup>[36]</sup>. Zabielskis, in his analysis of heritage conservation in Macau and Penang, found that conservation efforts were predominantly geared towards tourism development, often overlooking the living experiences and identities of local residents<sup>[37]</sup>.

However, in-depth exploration and understanding of residents' practical involvement in the daily maintenance and inheritance of cultural heritage remain lacking.

Additionally, studies in the field of psychology have identified a discrepancy between intentions and actual behaviours<sup>[38]</sup>, a phenomenon known as the "intention-behaviour gap." This implies that residents' positive attitudes towards cultural inheritance do not always translate directly into specific actions for protection and inheritance, highlighting the complex factors influencing behaviour. Therefore, a thorough investigation into residents' actual behaviours in ICH inheritance is important not only to fill the current gap in the literature but also to provide an empirical basis for developing effective strategies for cultural protection and inheritance. This requires moving beyond mere studies of attitudes and intentions to delve into the realities of residents' participation in cultural inheritance activities and the various factors that influence their behaviour.

## **2.3. Application of the Theory of Planned Behaviour**

The theory of planned behaviour (TPB), originally derived from Fishbein's multi-attribute attitude theory<sup>[39]</sup>, was further expanded by Ajzen with the addition of perceived behavioural control<sup>[40]</sup>. Ajzen later focused on the psychological motivations behind individual behaviours<sup>[41]</sup>. This theory has been predominantly applied to study humans' driving, psychological, and consumer behaviours and gradually applied in rural tourism, especially in the study of tourist behaviour<sup>[42-45]</sup>. However, its application from the perspective of residents in rural tourism areas remains relatively

unexplored.

In the context of ICH inheritance, this study adopted the TPB as its theoretical foundation to explore the relationships between ICH inheritance-related perceptions, willingness, and actual behaviours of residents of traditional village tourism sites. The TPB provides a robust framework for understanding and predicting residents' behavioural patterns in cultural inheritance, particularly how their intentions translate into actual actions. By employing this theory, this study aimed to construct a comprehensive theoretical model to explain and predict the decision-making process of residents regarding ICH inheritance activities.

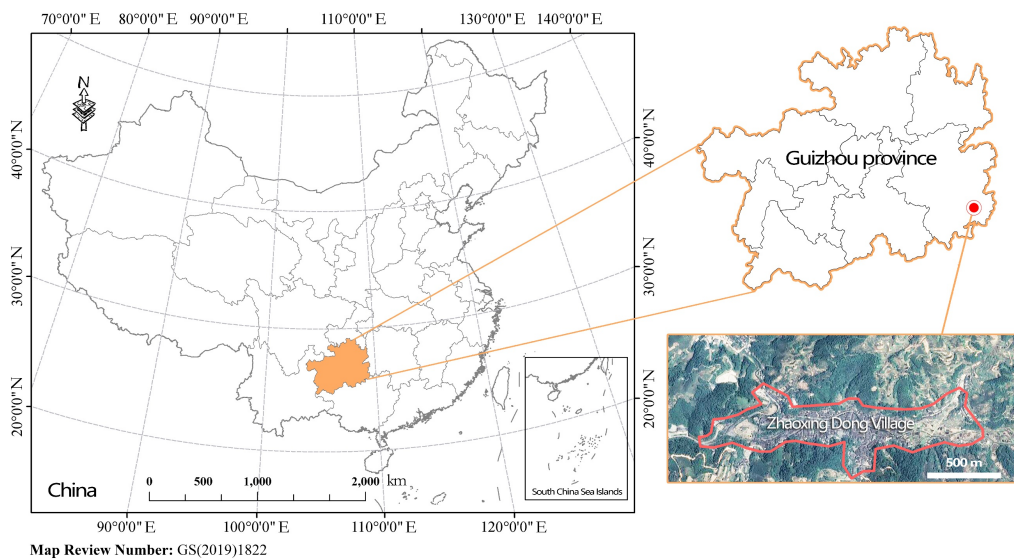
The application of the TPB in the study of ICH inheritance not only helps fill the existing gaps in the literature but also provides an empirical basis for developing effective strategies and measures for cultural inheritance. In particular, it contributes to the understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying residents' participation in cultural

inheritance activities.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Study Case

Zhaoxing Dong Village, located in southeastern Liping County, Guizhou Province, China, has a history dating back over 860 years (**Figure 1**). Renowned as the largest and oldest Dong village in the nation, it is often referred to as the “Premier Dong Village.” Additionally, Zhaoxing Dong Village was included in the first batch of pilot units for the protection of national ethnic and folk culture by China in 2003. In 2009, the local Grand Song of the Dong was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Furthermore, it is also recommended by UNESCO as one of the top ten global destinations for “returning to nature and reverting to simplicity”<sup>[46]</sup>.



**Figure 1.** The geographic location map of Zhaoxing Dong Village.

Zhaoxing Dong Village has preserved the rich cultural and folkloric traditions of the Dong people. The songs and dances of the Dong ethnic group are distinctive, with famous cultural expressions such as the Grand Dong song, Dong dance, Lusheng dance, Duoye dance, Spring Ox dance, and Flower Shoulder Pole dance, which all reflect the unique Dong culture. Exquisite Dong costumes, Dong Pa (hand-woven cloth), colourful ribbons, and embroidered bags are just a few examples of their fine craftsmanship. A variety of tradi-

tional sports, such as flower drum tossing, shuttlecock kicking, Spring Ox playing, stilt walking, Lusheng stepping, Dong chess, and bird fighting, add to the cultural diversity. Rich in ethnic customs, Zhaoxing Dong Village hosts a multitude of folkloric activities, such as blocking-the-door wine, drum tower singing, flower bridge singing, wax printing, tie-dyeing, fishing, bonfire parties, the Sa (shaman) worshipping festival, Lusheng festival, Mud Man festival, Lifting the Official festival, and song hall stepping. These activities not only embody



the essence of traditional Dong culture but also make Zhaoxing Dong Village an ideal destination for both domestic and international tourists to experience the Dong way of life<sup>[47, 48]</sup>. Photographs of the village can be found in **Figure 2**.



**Figure 2.** Photographs of Zhaoxing Dong Village.

Source: Self-photographed.

Zhaoxing Dong Village was selected as the research site based on the following aspects.

1. Zhaoxing Dong Village is characterized by its rich cultural features and profound historical significance, representing a crucial aspect of China's Dong ethnic culture<sup>[49]</sup>. This village was listed in the first batch of traditional Chinese villages in 2012.
2. With the progression of modernisation and the growth of the tourism industry, Zhaoxing Dong Village, while maintaining its traditional cultural practices, confronts numerous challenges in the protection and inheritance of ICH<sup>[50]</sup>. These include preserving the authenticity and vitality of traditional culture amid tourism development.
3. Zhaoxing Dong Village was feasible as a case study for practical operations. The openness of the village faci-

tated data collection and field research, making it an ideal location for in-depth study and analysis.

Additionally, China boasts vast territories, diverse ethnic groups, and complex natural conditions. The different geographical environments, cultural backgrounds, and architectural landscapes have created unique traditional villages<sup>[51]</sup>. Moreover, due to the different cultural backgrounds of residents across different regions, the findings of this study may have limitations in terms of general applicability.

### 3.2. Construction of the Evaluation Index System

This study initially analysed and collated existing literature related to the cultural inheritance of traditional villages, identifying pertinent preliminary indicators. Subsequent interactions with the residents of Zhaoxing Dong Village facilitated the collection of their perceptions and feelings toward cultural inheritance and further refined and validated the practical applicability of these indicators. To ensure the scientificity and effectiveness of the index system, a preliminary survey was conducted in the case village to assess the feasibility of the selected indicators in real-world applications.

Finally, the study selected five experts in the field of traditional village research, each with over ten years of research or professional experience. This group included two university professors, two members from local government rural revitalization bureaus, and one practitioner focused on the preservation of traditional village heritage. The researchers organized these experts to engage in thorough discussions and reviews of the evaluation index system. Through their professional insights, the system was meticulously optimized, ensuring that it accurately reflects the multidimensional characteristics of ICH inheritance.

By integrating these steps, this study developed an evaluation index system encompassing three aspects: cultural inheritance perception, inheritance willingness, and actual inheritance behaviour, comprising a total of 20 items. Cultural inheritance perception was further subdivided into cognitive, emotional, and value dimensions. This system covers the classification standards for ICH set by the United Nations and the specific cultural characteristics of Zhaoxing Dong Village (see **Table 1** for details). The establishment of this system aimed to provide a comprehensive and scientific evaluation tool for this study to enhance the understanding of the mechanisms behind ICH inheritance.

**Table 1.** Evaluation index system of residents' attitudes towards intangible cultural heritage inheritance.

Variable	Item	References
Cultural Inheritance Perception	Cognitive Dimension	X1 Level of knowledge of traditional culture, history, and folklore
		X2 Level of knowledge of traditional customs, folk activities, or sports
		X3 Level of knowledge of traditional Dong ethnic dances and songs
		X4 Level of knowledge of traditional craftsmanship techniques
	Emotional Dimension	X5 Degree of affection for traditional cultural history
		X6 Degree of affection for traditional customs, folk activities, or sports
		X7 Degree of affection for traditional Dong ethnic dances and songs
		X8 Degree of affection for traditional craftsmanship techniques
	Value Dimension	X9 Evaluation of the value of village culture
		X10 Evaluation of the richness of the cultural atmosphere in the village
		X11 Evaluation of the influence of village culture
		X12 Evaluation of the importance of cultural inheritance in the village
Inheritance Willingness		X13 Willingness to recommend or introduce the village's cultural history to others
		X14 Willingness to become a cultural heritage inheritor
		X15 Willingness to participate in cultural inheritance activities voluntarily
		X16 Willingness to pay for cultural protection and inheritance
Actual Inheritance Behaviours		X17 Frequency of participation in traditional folk activities, sports, or celebrations in the past year
		X18 Frequency of participation or use of traditional craftsmanship techniques in the past year
		X19 Frequency of sharing village traditional stories, legends, or history with younger generations or others in the past year
		X20 Frequency of participation in traditional Dong ethnic dances and songs in the past year

### 3.3. Scale Design

The survey instrument employed in this study was structured into two primary segments: (1) residents' demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, age, educational background, occupation, and duration of residency) and (2) the three key dimensions of the scale—perception of cultural heritage inheritance, inheritance willingness, and actual inheritance behaviours. These dimensions were further divided into 20 items, each measured using a 5-point Likert scale to ensure robust reliability and validity<sup>[60]</sup>. The scale ranged from “completely unaware” to “very aware,” reflecting the degree of residents' awareness and understanding, scored progressively from 1 to 5.

### 3.4. Data Collection and Sample Characteristics

From November 3 to 5, 2023, a field survey was conducted in Zhaoxing Dong Village, employing a random sampling technique to engage with local residents. In total, 250 questionnaires were distributed during the study period. After excluding those with unclear or incomplete responses, 246 valid questionnaires were retained; an effective response rate of 98.4%. Among the respondents, gender distribution was relatively balanced, with men accounting for 46.75% and women 53.25% of the sample. A detailed demographic breakdown of the respondents is presented in **Table 2**.

**Table 2.** Residents' demographic statistics (n = 246).

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	115
	Female	131
Age	<18	22
	18–30	65
	31–40	39
	41–50	57
	51–60	28
	>60	35
Education	Junior high school or below	161
	High school	43
	Junior college	23
	Undergraduate	19
	Postgraduate	0
Occupation	Student	22
	Individual business owner	69
	Enterprise or institution employee	16
	Farmer	67
	Worker	23
	Retired	9
	Other	40
Length of residence (year)	<21	88
	21–30	38
	31–40	32
	41–50	46
	>50	42

### 3.5. Analysis Methods

This study utilized SPSS 26.0 to quantitatively analyse the survey data. Initially, the reliability of the scale was assessed through a reliability analysis. Subsequently, the validity of the scale was evaluated using the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's test of sphericity. Relationships be-

tween the various dimensions of the scale were determined using Pearson's correlation coefficients. A mediation effect test was conducted to examine the mediating role of inheritance willingness on the relationship between cultural inheritance perceptions and actual inheritance behaviours. Finally, a differential analysis was conducted to determine the impact of residents' demographic characteristics on ICH

inheritance activities.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Analysis of Residents' Perceptions, Inheritance Willingness, and Actual Inheritance Behaviours

As seen in **Figure 3**, residents of Zhaoxing Dong Village exhibited a high level of perception of cultural inheritance (mean score: 3.89) and a strong inheritance willingness (mean score: 3.94). This indicates a positive attitude toward cultural inheritance and a robust willingness to inherit. However, the mean score for actual inheritance behaviour (3.36) was notably lower than for the former two.

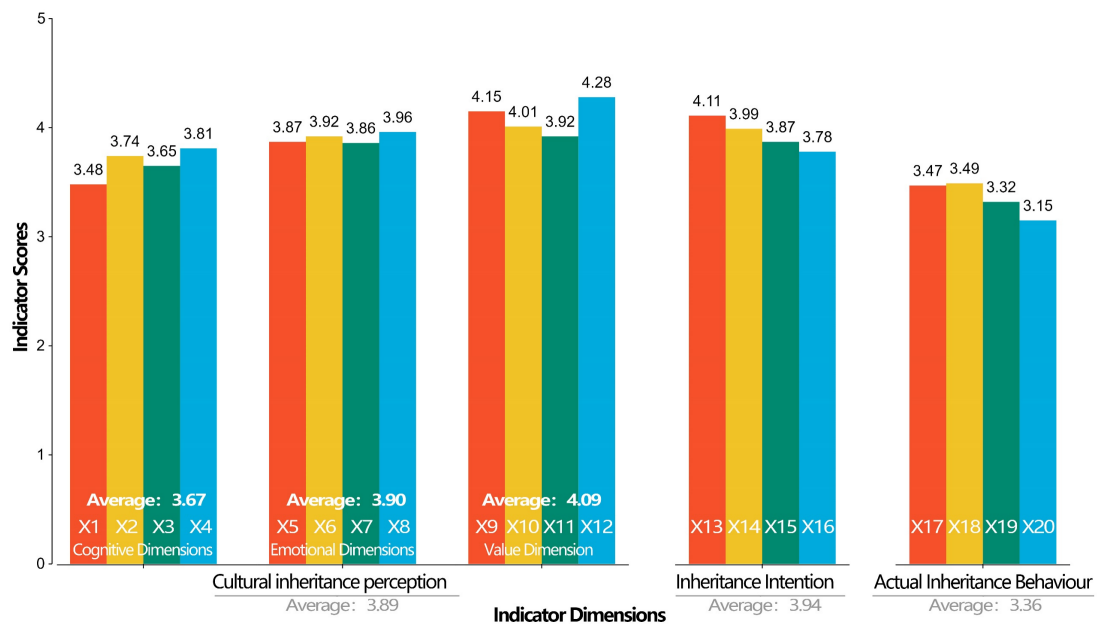
#### 4.1.1. Analysis of ICH Inheritance Perceptions

As illustrated in **Figure 3**, the high scores across the cognitive, emotional, and value dimensions demonstrate residents' positive attitudes toward cultural inheritance. Comparing item scores within the cognitive and emotional dimensions reveals residents' levels of knowledge and regard for the village's ICH followed a similar ranking: traditional craftsmanship > traditional customs, folklore, or sports activities > traditional Dong songs and dances > traditional culture,

history, and legends. In the value dimension, item scores ranked as follows: importance of cultural inheritance (4.28), value of village culture (4.15), richness of the cultural atmosphere (4.01), and cultural influence (3.92). This ranking reflects residents' high recognition and positive evaluation of the village's cultural value.

#### 4.1.2. Analysis of Inheritance Willingness and Actual Inheritance Behaviours

As indicated in **Figure 3**, residents demonstrated a positive attitude toward participation and support for the cultural inheritance of their village. Specifically, item X13 scored 4.11, indicating that residents were generally willing to promote and introduce their village's culture and history to the outside world. Item X14 scored 3.99, reflecting residents' proactive willingness to become cultural inheritors. Item X15 (score 3.87) suggests residents were inclined to participate in cultural inheritance activities without compensation. Item X16, despite a relatively low score of 3.78, indicates a certain level of willingness among residents to bear the economic costs of cultural protection and inheritance. Additionally, the actual inheritance behaviour score was 3.36, revealing residents engaged in cultural inheritance activities to a certain extent, although the frequency of participation was not particularly high.



**Figure 3.** Scores for various dimensions of intangible cultural heritage inheritance.

## 4.2. Analysis of the Relationship Between Residents' ICH Inheritance Perceptions, Willingness, and Actual Behaviour

### 4.2.1. Reliability and Validity Test

SPSS 26.0 was used to test the questionnaire's latent variables using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Generally, a Cronbach's alpha value greater than 0.7 indicates high data reliability<sup>[61]</sup>. In this study, the overall Cronbach's alpha value was 0.892 (**Table 3**); the values for cultural inheritance perceptions, inheritance willingness, and actual inheritance behaviours were 0.837, 0.835, and 0.790, respectively, which

exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.7. Thus, the questionnaire was considered to have high internal consistency and reliability.

Validity analysis is a key method for assessing the consistency between data measured by a survey questionnaire and the anticipated research content<sup>[62]</sup>. SPSS 26.0 was employed to conduct the KMO and Bartlett's sphericity tests for various dimensions of the scale. The results (**Table 4**) revealed a KMO value of 0.862, which exceeded the standard threshold of 0.7. Bartlett's test of sphericity indicated a p-value of 0.000 (**Table 4**), which was less than 0.05, suggesting high data validity and suitability for further analysis.

**Table 3.** Results of questionnaire reliability analysis.

Reliability	Overall	Cultural Inheritance Perception	Cognitive Dimension	Emotional Dimension	Value Dimension	Inheritance Willingness	Actual Inheritance Behaviour
Cronbach's $\alpha$	0.892	0.837	0.753	0.805	0.730	0.835	0.790

**Table 4.** KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity results.

KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.862
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approximate Chi-square Degrees of freedom p-value
	2054.577 171.000 0.000

### 4.2.2. Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient Analysis

Spearman's rank correlation coefficient analysis was employed to examine the relationships between cultural inheritance perception and its cognitive, emotional, and value dimensions; inheritance willingness; and actual inheritance behaviors. As indicated in **Table 5**, it is evident that:

1. There is a strong correlation between the cognitive, emotional, and value dimensions of cultural inheritance perception. Specifically, the emotional dimension shows a very strong correlation with the overall cultural inheritance perception (correlation coefficient of 0.864\*\*), indicating that emotions play a significant role in cultural inheritance perception.
2. Cultural inheritance perception exhibits a strong posi-

tive correlation with inheritance willingness (correlation coefficient of 0.625\*\*), suggesting that cultural inheritance perception significantly influences the willingness to inherit.

3. Although the correlations between cultural inheritance perception, its dimensions, and actual inheritance behavior are generally lower than those with inheritance willingness, they are still statistically significant. This indicates that while perception and willingness are important, their conversion into actual behavior is less pronounced.
4. There is a direct positive correlation between inheritance willingness and actual inheritance behavior (correlation coefficient of 0.451\*\*). This demonstrates that a higher willingness to preserve cultural heritage is associated with more frequent actual inheritance activities.

**Table 5.** Correlation coefficient analysis results.

	Cultural Inheritance Perception	Cognitive	Emotional	Value	Inheritance	Actual Inheritance
Cultural inheritance perception	1					
Cognitive dimension	0.694**	1				
Emotional dimension	0.864**	0.368**	1			
Value dimension	0.795**	0.294**	0.612**	1		
Inheritance willingness	0.625**	0.268**	0.616**	0.576**	1	
Actual inheritance behaviour	0.494**	0.242**	0.480**	0.432**	0.451**	1

Note: \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

#### 4.2.3. Mediation Effect Test

Regarding the mediating role of inheritance willingness between cultural inheritance perception and actual inheritance behavior, this study conducted a mediation test using the bootstrap method in SPSS 26.0. Bootstrapping is a resampling method that treats the original sample as a whole and draws numerous new subsamples through repeated sampling with replacements to obtain statistical measures<sup>[63]</sup>. By repeating the sampling 5000 times, a 95% confidence interval was calculated.

As shown in **Table 6**, the total effect of cultural inheritance perception on actual inheritance behaviour was 0.857, indicating a strong positive relationship between the two. The mediation test results revealed the lower and upper limits of the 95% confidence interval did not include 0, and the related p-values were less than 0.05, indicating the presence of both

indirect and direct effects. This suggests that inheritance willingness partially mediated the relationship between cultural inheritance perception and actual inheritance behaviour.

Furthermore, the study tested the mediating effects of inheritance willingness between the cognitive, emotional, and value dimensions and actual inheritance behaviour. The results showed significant total effects between all dimensions and actual inheritance behavior. The results are presented in **Tables 7–9**. The results indicate that the 95% confidence intervals for the mediating paths of all three dimensions (cognitive, emotional, value) do not include zero, and the p-values for each path are less than 0.05. This confirms the presence of both indirect and direct effects, demonstrating that inheritance willingness indeed plays a partial mediating role between the various dimensions (cognitive, emotional, value) and actual inheritance behavior.

**Table 6.** Mediation effect test results.

	Effect	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Lower Level Confidence Interval	Upper Level Confidence Interval
Total effect	0.857	0.097	8.864	0.000	0.667	1.048
Direct effect	0.603	0.121	4.972	0.000	0.364	0.842
Indirect effect	0.254	0.076			0.115	0.409

**Table 7.** The test results for the mediating role of inheritance willingness between the cognitive dimension and actual inheritance behavior.

	Effect	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Lower Level Confidence Interval	Upper Level Confidence Interval
Total effect	0.283	0.073	3.894	0.000	0.140	0.426
Direct effect	0.153	0.069	2.215	0.028	0.017	0.288
Indirect effect	0.131	0.035			0.066	0.204

**Table 8.** The test results for the mediating role of inheritance willingness between the emotional dimension and actual inheritance behavior.

	Effect	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Lower Level Confidence Interval	Upper Level Confidence Interval
Total effect	0.630	0.074	8.544	0.000	0.484	0.775
Direct effect	0.427	0.091	4.677	0.000	0.247	0.607
Indirect effect	0.202	0.054			0.098	0.313



**Table 9.** The test results for the mediating role of inheritance willingness between the value dimension and actual inheritance behavior.

	Effect	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Lower Level Confidence Interval	Upper Level Confidence Interval
Total effect	0.715	0.096	7.473	0.000	0.526	0.903
Direct effect	0.426	0.113	3.778	0.000	0.204	0.648
Indirect effect	0.289	0.066			0.165	0.426

### 4.3. Analysis of Demographic Differences among Residents

To examine the impact of various demographic variables on residents' cultural inheritance perceptions, inheritance willingness, and actual inheritance behaviours, a between-groups difference analysis was conducted using demographic variables as grouping factors. Since gender had only two options, an independent samples t-test was

employed, while one-way analysis of variance was used for the other variables. In terms of gender and occupation, residents showed no significant differences in their cultural inheritance perception, inheritance willingness, or actual inheritance behaviour. Regarding age, significant differences were observed in residents' perceptions of cultural inheritance ( $p = 0.033$ ). As indicated in **Table 10**, the age groups below 18 years and above 60 years scored lower than the other age groups, particularly residents aged over 60 years.

**Table 10.** Age differences.

Variable	Age	<i>n</i>	Mean $\pm$ Standard Deviation	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Cultural inheritance perception	<18	22	3.847 $\pm$ 0.465	2.471	0.033
	18–30	65	3.950 $\pm$ 0.544		
	31–40	39	3.855 $\pm$ 0.517		
	41–50	57	4.018 $\pm$ 0.498		
	51–60	28	3.880 $\pm$ 0.395		
	>60	35	3.670 $\pm$ 0.397		

Concerning educational level, residents with different educational backgrounds demonstrated significant differences in their perception of cultural inheritance ( $p = 0.042$ ) (**Table 11**). It was found that the higher the educational level, the higher the score.

Regarding length of residence, residents exhibited significant differences in cultural inheritance perception, inheritance willingness, and actual inheritance behaviour ( $p$

$= 0.003, 0.048, \text{ and } 0.017$ , respectively). The results presented in **Table 12** indicate that residents who had lived in the area for more than 50 years scored lower in cultural inheritance perception and inheritance willingness than the other residence-groups. Moreover, residents with less than 21 years and more than 50 years of residency showed notably lower scores in actual inheritance behaviour than the other groups.

**Table 11.** Differences in educational level.

Variable	Educational Background	<i>n</i>	Mean $\pm$ Standard Deviation	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Cultural Inheritance Perception	Junior high school or below	161	3.836 $\pm$ 0.469	2.769	0.042
	High school	43	3.958 $\pm$ 0.556		
	Junior college	23	3.972 $\pm$ 0.488		
	Undergraduate	19	4.139 $\pm$ 0.506		
	Postgraduate	0	0		

**Table 12.** Differences in duration of residence.

Variable	Residence Length	<i>n</i>	Mean $\pm$ Standard Deviation	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Cultural inheritance perception	<21	88	3.805 $\pm$ 0.484	4.056	0.003
	21–30	38	4.086 $\pm$ 0.564		
	31–40	32	3.815 $\pm$ 0.437		
	41–50	46	4.047 $\pm$ 0.495		
	>50	42	3.797 $\pm$ 0.419		



Table 12. *Cont.*

Variable	Residence Length	<i>n</i>	Mean ± Standard Deviation	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Inheritance willingness	<21	88	3.881 ± 0.737	2.438	0.048
	21–30	38	4.171 ± 0.637		
	31–40	32	3.961 ± 0.626		
	41–50	46	4.022 ± 0.767		
	>50	42	3.708 ± 0.703		
Actual inheritance behaviour	<21	88	3.205 ± 0.887	3.078	0.017
	21–30	38	3.678 ± 0.965		
	31–40	32	3.359 ± 0.798		
	41–50	46	3.538 ± 0.726		
	>50	42	3.179 ± 0.793		

## 5. Discussion

This study constituted an in-depth analysis of the attitudes of residents of Zhaoxing Dong Village towards the inheritance of ICH in traditional villages. The findings indicated that residents exhibited a relatively positive attitude toward cultural inheritance perception and inheritance willingness, supporting the findings of Li, Zheng and Dou<sup>[15]</sup> and Jaafar, Noor and Rasoolimanesh<sup>[32]</sup>. However, scores for actual practice of cultural inheritance were significantly lower, indicating that personal intention does not always directly translate into action, consistent with the intention–behavior gap<sup>[38]</sup>. Furthermore, there were significant differences among the three dimensions of cultural inheritance perceptions, with the cognitive dimension scoring significantly lower than the emotional and value dimensions and the value dimension scoring the highest. The cognitive dimension typically involves specific awareness and understanding of cultural heritage, requiring a certain level of education or specialised knowledge. Moreover, educational background can influence individuals' level of cognition<sup>[64]</sup>. Given that 65.45% of the study participants had a junior high school education or lower, the scores on the cognitive dimension could have been low because of a generally lower level of knowledge. The emotional dimension, which relates to personal emotional connections and responses to cultural heritage, is more intuitive and spontaneous; people more easily develop emotional connections with their own cultural backgrounds without requiring in-depth knowledge or understanding<sup>[15, 34, 65]</sup>. The highest scores in the value dimension reflect residents' widespread recognition of the importance and value of cultural heritage, which is consistent with the conclusions drawn by Fang et al.<sup>[66]</sup>.

The study also determined a significant positive correlation between residents' ICH inheritance perceptions (i.e., cognitive, emotional, and value dimensions), their inheritance willingness, and their actual inheritance behaviours. Specifically, cultural inheritance perceptions had a strong positive association with actual inheritance behaviours. This result is in line with Li, Zheng and Dou<sup>[15]</sup> and Dou, J. Li and B. Li<sup>[34]</sup>, who found a significant positive effect of cultural inheritance perceptions on willingness to inherit. Similarly, Huang identified a significant correlation between the intentions and actual behaviours of rural tourism residents participating in activities<sup>[58]</sup>, and Qiu et al. found value perceptions and emotional attitudes significantly influence tourism motivations and intentions<sup>[25]</sup>. Additionally, Gursay, Zhang and Chi found that enhancing residents' sense of identification and satisfaction with a place positively affects their understanding of heritage protection responsibilities and their willingness to act to protect heritage resources<sup>[67]</sup>. The finding of the partial mediating role of willingness to inherit between cultural inheritance perceptions and actual inheritance behaviours and between the cognition, emotional, and value dimensions and actual inheritance behaviours is particularly noteworthy. This finding underscores the importance of enhancing residents' willingness to inherit to promote actual inheritance behaviour.

This research also found that residents' demographic characteristics were significantly related to their attitudes towards ICH inheritance. Specifically, this paper found significant differences in perceptions of cultural inheritance based on age and educational level. The study found that groups aged below 18 and above 60 scored lower in cultural inheritance perception, with this trend being especially pronounced in residents over 60. The data shows that 97% of

those over 60 and 74% of those under 18 have an educational background of junior high school or less. This educational level impacts the cognitive dimension of cultural inheritance perception, suggesting a need for higher educational backgrounds for a better understanding of cultural heritage. Older adults may participate less in social and cultural activities due to health issues, mobility constraints, or retirement, leading to a disconnect from ongoing social and cultural developments and impacting their perception and understanding of cultural inheritance<sup>[68]</sup>. Dou, J. Li and B. Li also found that older residents have a weaker perception of cultural inheritance<sup>[34]</sup>. Residents under 18, primarily high school students and younger, are still in the learning phase and lack social experience, contributing to their lower perception of cultural inheritance. Additionally, the researchers found higher levels of education correlated with stronger perceptions of cultural inheritance, which is consistent with Li, Zheng and Dou<sup>[15]</sup> and Alhefnawi, Lawal Dano and Istanbuli<sup>[69]</sup>.

Regarding length of village residence, it is noteworthy that residents who had lived in the village for over 50 years scored lower in their perceptions of cultural inheritance, inheritance willingness, and actual inheritance behaviours compared to other groups. Li, Zheng and Dou also found that older residents and those with longer residency duration showed a decline in their willingness to inherit<sup>[15]</sup>. They argued that such residents, having lived in the area for a long time, are prone to “cultural indifference,” which is compounded by limitations related to income and physical conditions, leaving older individuals with less energy to participate in cultural inheritance. Therefore, their perceptions of cultural inheritance, willingness to inherit, and actual inheritance behaviours are generally lower. Additionally, the study found residents with less than 21 years of residency, a group primarily comprising younger residents and newcomers, scored noticeably lower on actual inheritance behaviour. This may be because young people are more likely to be engaged in education or work, which may affect their interest in and ability to participate in cultural activities. For newcomers, their shorter duration of residence can mean they are still in the process of cultural integration. For example, Berry emphasized that immigrants need time and psychological adjustment to adapt and integrate into a new culture<sup>[70]</sup>; therefore, if they have not yet fully adapted to or deeply understood local traditions and customs, their participation in

cultural inheritance activities in terms of depth and extent may be limited.

## 5.1. Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study provides insight into the attitudes of residents of Zhaoxing Dong Village towards ICH inheritance in traditional villages, it has certain limitations. First, the limited sample size may affect the generalisability of our findings. This study relied primarily on a sample from Zhaoxing Dong Village, which may not fully represent the attitudes of residents from other regions or cultural backgrounds. Second, the use of a survey to collect data may preclude a deep exploration of the factors influencing residents’ attitudes and behaviours. Additionally, the survey may have been subject to social desirability bias, as respondents may have provided more socially acceptable answers. Future research could expand the sample scope to include residents from different regions and cultural backgrounds to enhance the universality of the findings. In-depth qualitative research methods, such as interviews or focus groups, could provide a deeper understanding of the motivations and barriers behind residents’ attitudes and behaviors toward cultural inheritance. Furthermore, future studies could explore the relationship between cultural inheritance perceptions and other socioeconomic factors and how these factors influence the practice of cultural inheritance.

## 5.2. Recommendations

The findings of this study offer guidance for formulating effective strategies for preserving cultural heritage sites. The following recommendations are made.

1. Enhanced education and awareness: Education and awareness of traditional cultural heritage should be strengthened, especially among residents with lower educational levels. This can be achieved through community activities, school curricula, and media campaigns.
2. Increased participation opportunities: More opportunities for cultural inheritance involvement for residents of different ages should be provided. For instance, cultural workshops and competitions for youth could be organised, as well as accessible cultural activities for older adults.

3. Fostering community engagement: Cultural exchange and participation within the community should be encouraged and facilitated. This could be carried out via community centers, festival events, and exhibitions.
4. Strengthening cultural identity: Residents' sense of cultural pride and motivation to participate in cultural events should be enhanced by reinforcing local characteristics and cultural heritage identity. This can be achieved by showcasing local cultural achievements, narrating historical stories, and emphasizing the importance of cultural heritage in contemporary society.
5. Policy support: Governments and relevant organisations should provide financial and in-kind support to promote projects for cultural heritage preservation and inheritance. This includes funding for cultural festivals, restoring historical sites, and supporting cultural and artistic groups.

Implementing these policies and practical suggestions could effectively enhance residents' perceptions of cultural heritage and promote broader and more active cultural heritage inheritance behaviour.

## 6. Conclusions

Applying the TPB, this study examined the attitudes of residents of Zhaoxing Dong Village toward the ICH of traditional villages, revealing the relationship between cultural inheritance perception, inheritance willingness, and actual inheritance behaviour. This study found a significant positive correlation between cultural inheritance perceptions, inheritance willingness, and actual inheritance behaviours. Notably, cultural inheritance perceptions demonstrated a strong positive association with actual inheritance behaviours, in which inheritance willingness played a partial mediating role. Generally, residents exhibited positive attitudes toward cultural heritage inheritance; however, the score for actual inheritance behaviours was relatively low, highlighting the intention–behavior gap. Additionally, the study found significant differences in ICH perceptions based on residents' age and educational background and in actual inheritance behaviour based on length of residence. Specifically, residents under 18 or over 61 years of age had weaker cultural inheritance perception, higher education levels were correlated with better cultural inheritance perception, and residence of less than 21 years was associated with weaker actual inher-

itance behaviour. These findings reflect the importance of age, knowledge level, and cultural integration in cultural inheritance.

This study makes three significant contributions to the literature. First, it fills a research gap regarding residents' perceptions of ICH inheritance and provides a new perspective on the role of residents in cultural inheritance. Second, by exploring the factors affecting residents' everyday behaviours in protecting cultural heritage, this study deepens our understanding of residents' actions in cultural inheritance practices. Finally, by applying the TPB to ICH inheritance, this study offers a new theoretical framework for understanding residents' psychological motivations in cultural inheritance activities.

## Author Contributions

Conceptualization, H.S. and L.Y.; methodology, H.S.; software, L.P.; validation, Y.L. (Yufeng Long); formal analysis, H.S.; investigation, X.X. and Y.L. (Yu Luo); resources, Y.L. (Yufeng Long); data curation, X.X.; writing—original draft preparation, H.S.; writing—review and editing, L.Y. and N.F.A.; visualization, Y.L. (Yu Luo) and L.P.; supervision, N.F.A.; project administration, H.S.; funding acquisition, Y.L. (Yu Luo). All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

## Funding

This work was supported by 2025 Hunan Provincial Social Science Achievement Evaluation Committee General Project (XSP25YBC315).

## Institutional Review Board Statement

IRB is approved by Huaihua University.

## Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

## Data Availability Statement

The data will be shared upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

## Acknowledgment

The author would like to thank three students (Bei Li, Xiting Yu, Zhe Yang) majoring in landscape architecture at Huaihua University for their help with the questionnaire in the early stages of this study.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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