

# Research on the Emotional Design of Cantonese Opera Cultural and Tourism Complex Based on the Spirit of Place

Yiyin Deng, Han Chen\*

South China Normal University, Guangzhou, Guangdong, 510000, China

## ABSTRACT

Under the background of cultural-tourism integration and traditional cultural renewal, urban and rural spaces are facing the loss of regional features and insufficient humanistic care. As a cultural carrier born in Foshan, Cantonese Opera urgently needs innovative inheritance and promotion. The return of the spirit of place can effectively reduce people's alienation towards urban space. Taking the spirit of place theory as the basis and Foshan Dijiao Market renovation as the case, this paper explores the practical path of emotional design in reshaping cultural identity and spatial belonging. This study enriches the application of place theory in opera cultural space construction, and provides new ideas for the living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage and preventing the homogenization of urban spaces.

## KEYWORDS

Spirit of place theory; Cantonese opera; Cultural and tourism complex; Emotional design

## 1 Introduction

In the process of urbanization, spatial homogenization has caused the loss of cultural memory carriers, turning spaces into cold containers without humanistic warmth. As a treasure of Lingnan culture, Cantonese Opera contains unique regional cultural genes in its singing, performance and folk customs. However, its traditional inheritance is out of line with modern cultural tourism consumption, so it is urgent to realize living inheritance through innovative spatial design. The theory of spirit of place highlights the cultural and emotional value of space, offering a new theoretical perspective for the design of Cantonese Opera cultural and tourism complexes. Reshaping relevant spaces with emotional design can strengthen cultural identity and provide new ideas for the modern transformation of intangible cultural heritage.

## 2 Analysis of Relevant Concepts

### 2.1 Deconstruction of the Connotation of the Spirit of Place Theory

Norwegian architectural theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz first systematically proposed place theory, pointing out that space gains special meaning through human activities and provides people with a sense of security and identity. He called the unique atmosphere of a place the "spirit of place", which is formed by people's perception and practice in the space. Place is an integrated entity composed of material and spiritual aspects: it relies on physical space and is endowed with characteristics and stories by history and culture, and promotes communication between people and the site to shape and enrich the spirit of place.

### 2.2 Application Value of the Spirit of Place Theory

The spirit of place consists of material and immaterial dimensions. The material dimension refers to the physical features of space, such as architectural forms and textures, which are reflected in Lingnan opera stages and Cantonese Opera red boats. The immaterial dimension includes cultural memory, lifestyle and emotional identity, represented by opera performance styles, folk customs and local stories, which together form the spiritual core of Cantonese Opera cultural space.

### 2.3 Connotation Analysis of the Emotional Design Concept

The emotional design theory links human emotions with products. By analyzing the internal structure of products, it seeks emotional resonance between products and users. Through emotional design, users generate positive emotional responses and psychological experiences, thereby achieving the design goals. In the research on emotional design theory, Donald Norman proposed that human emotional experience of products can be divided into three levels: the visceral level, the behavioral level and the reflective level.

### 2.4 Application Value of the Emotional Design Theory

The three levels of emotional design each have their own focuses in the Cantonese Opera cultural and tourism

complex: the visceral level creates the first impression through multi-sensory stimuli such as color, sound and texture; the behavioral level enhances the sense of participation through narrative moving lines, technical interaction and co-creation experiences; the reflective level triggers in-depth cultural identity with the help of cultural memory sharing, community activities and symbolic metaphors, realizing the emotional sublimation from perception to resonance.

### **3 Research on the Current Situation of Cantonese Opera Culture and Its Spatial Construction**

#### **3.1 Overview of Cantonese Opera Culture in Guangdong**

Lingnan Cantonese Opera, a key symbol of Lingnan culture dating back to the Ming and Qing dynasties, carries long-standing cultural memory and emotional connections. Shaped by Lingnan's regional and cultural environment, it integrates the merits of Yiyang and Kunqu Operas, uses Cantonese, and forms a unique artistic style with equal emphasis on singing, recitation, acting and acrobatics. With various role types and distinctive musical instruments, it presents a strong Lingnan style and has spread widely at home and abroad, becoming an important carrier of cultural inheritance. As a national intangible cultural heritage, it has profound historical and humanistic value, providing creative inspiration and emotional resonance for the emotional design of Cantonese Opera cultural and tourism complexes based on the spirit of place.

#### **3.2 Exploration of Cantonese Opera Cultural and Tourism Spaces in Guangdong**

Lingnan cultural and tourism spaces have been integrating tradition and modernity through local cultural heritage and innovation. Guangzhou Yongqing Fang Cantonese Opera Art Museum, as a typical example, adopts the idea of "renovating the old as the old" and combines Lingnan architecture with opera culture to provide immersive experiences. Liwan District, the birthplace of Cantonese Opera, has built an ecological protection zone for inheritance, performance and research, and held various activities to enhance cultural identity. However, many projects still suffer from shallow cultural expression, insufficient immersion and single interaction modes, which brings new requirements for the emotional design of Cantonese Opera cultural and tourism complexes based on the spirit of place, and makes it necessary to strengthen emotional connections through spatial narrative and innovative participation.

### **4 Emotional Design Strategies Based on the Spirit of Place**

#### **4.1 Respecting the Established Spirit of Place**

Respecting the existing spirit of place in cultural and tourism design requires integrated strategies from space, culture and function. In terms of space, we should preserve the original texture and landmark features, avoid large-scale demolition, and integrate historical traces into modern design through landscapes and lighting to connect tradition and contemporary. Culturally, we need to dig into local culture, extract folk and intangible cultural heritage symbols, and integrate them into signs, decorations and interactive devices so that visitors can feel the cultural connotation naturally. Functionally, we should inherit and upgrade the original functions of the site to meet modern tourism needs; for example, repurposing ancient buildings as cultural and commercial spaces can satisfy diverse demands while retaining its cultural attributes, thus realizing the inheritance and renewal of the spirit of place.

#### **4.2 Creating Spatial Experience Based on a Sense of Belonging**

Cultivating a belonging-centered spatial experience in cultural and tourism design relies on strategies of emotional resonance, cultural identity and interactive participation. For emotional resonance, spatial narrative should explore the site's historical stories and cultural memories, weaving fragmented historical elements into narrative threads via thematic scene design—such as reproducing traditional living scenes with landscape installations or interpreting regional legends through light and shadow art—to build emotional bonds for tourists in immersive visits. To strengthen cultural identity and shape place characteristics, local cultural symbols need to be extracted and translated into spatial language, with traditional crafts and folk elements integrated into architectural styles, decorative details and landscape sketches; cultural experience zones should be established to provide hands-on opportunities for learning traditional skills and participating in folk activities, deepening tourists' cultural understanding and recognition through practice. For enhanced belonging, an interactive participation system is needed, with diverse installations and activities designed to encourage tourists to co-create spatial content—for example, creative exhibition areas and cultural theme events can turn tourists from onlookers into creators and disseminators of spatial stories, helping them develop emotional belonging to the place through participation.

#### **4.3 Diversified, Composite and Innovative Functions**

Achieving diversified and integrated functions based on the spirit of place involves three strategies: demand integration, time-space linkage, and business format integration. First, we can combine the needs of tourists, residents, and businesses by integrating cultural experience, leisure, and commerce in one space, such as setting cultural exhibition halls with themed catering and creative retail. Second, we can strengthen time-space linkage by designing different

scenes for day and night as well as seasons, extending visitors' stay through daytime sightseeing and nighttime light shows or performances. Third, we can innovate business formats by breaking functional boundaries, for example, using a "front store and back workshop" model for intangible cultural heritage or combining landscapes with immersive theater. These integrated designs enhance the attraction and vitality of the site, and further strengthen the spirit of place and emotional value of cultural and tourism spaces.

#### **4.4 In-depth Public Participation**

To achieve in-depth public participation in cultural and tourism design based on the spirit of place, strategies can be developed from participation mechanisms, interactive scenarios, and co-creation platforms. A hierarchical participation mechanism can be built to improve public engagement step by step through guided tours, themed workshops, and creative practices, such as using a digital guide system, opening intangible cultural heritage experience classes, and providing professional creation tools for people at different levels. Meanwhile, immersive interactive scenarios can be designed by combining audio-visual technology and spatial narrative, including role-playing and story-solving activities to strengthen the public's sense of immersion. In addition, a public co-creation platform should be established to invite residents, tourists and cultural enthusiasts to join in spatial content creation and management; collecting creative proposals, implementing outstanding projects and launching a point reward system helps form a positive cycle of "participation-feedback-optimization", making the public co-shapers of the spirit of place and bringing sustainable vitality to cultural and tourism spaces.

## **5 Renovation Practice of Dijiao Market in Foshan**

### **5.1 Project Background and Site Analysis**

#### **5.1.1 Project Background**

As Lingnan's most representative traditional opera, Cantonese Opera was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009, but urbanization has severely challenged its living space, with culture-tourism integration offering new prospects for its inheritance. Foshan, an important birthplace of Cantonese Opera, preserves abundant Cantonese Opera-related material cultural heritage in its historical urban area; Dijiao Market, located in the core of Foshan's Nanhai District, was built in the Ming Wanli period and once an important performance venue for Cantonese Opera red boat troupes. It has 7 existing historical buildings (including a Qing opera stage ruin, a Republican teahouse and an early PRC cultural station) covering 2,300 square meters, which carry rich Cantonese Opera cultural memories and represent traditional Lingnan commercial-residential spaces.

#### **5.1.2 Site Analysis**

Dijiao Market, a typical traditional Lingnan commercial and residential settlement, is rich in Cantonese Opera cultural memories, and its buildings from the Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China present the unique texture of Lingnan water towns, but long-term functional changes have greatly weakened its cultural attributes. Although the building facades are well kept, many renovations have destroyed the original internal layout; the precious old opera stage ruins have been divided into commercial shops, and scattered cultural elements lack a systematic display. The site has an obvious functional imbalance: commerce takes the dominant place while cultural space is squeezed, resulting in broken cultural narration and unbalanced visitor flow. Interviews show that local residents, especially young people, have a growing sense of cultural alienation and weak identity, making the inheritance of Cantonese Opera more difficult. In addition, the damaged spatial structure has blurred the traditional "front store and back yard" pattern and rational internal circulation, gradually making the site lose its unique value as a carrier of Cantonese Opera culture.

### **5.2 Construction of Emotional Design for the Spirit of Place**

#### **5.2.1 Respecting the Existing Spirit of Place**

The renovation and design of the Cantonese Opera cultural and tourism complex is first based on respecting the spirit of place accumulated in history. Through the investigation of the existing spatial texture of Dijiao Market in Foshan, three important elements of the spirit of place are identified: the spatial pattern of traditional opera stages, the ritual process of Cantonese Opera performances and the collective memory of residents. In the exhibition hall design, a "micro-renovation" strategy is adopted to preserve the historical traces of the original buildings, such as restoring the roof of the traditional brick and wood structure and retaining the time-honored grey brick walls. At the same time, digital media technology is used to activate the presentation of place memory, dynamically displaying important historical moments in the development of Cantonese Opera on the walls. Special attention is paid to protecting the spatial usage habits formed by local residents for a long time, and the oral memory of local residents is recorded and displayed through digital means. This respectful design method makes the renovated space not only inherit the historical context but also provide a carrier for new cultural activities.

### 5.2.2 Creating Emotional Spatial Experience

A sense of belonging is the core dimension of the spirit of place, and users' spatial identity is strengthened through multi-level experience design. In terms of spatial layout, a "central radial" structure is adopted, with the traditional opera stage as the core and various functional areas arranged around it, forming a strong centripetal force. A large number of local elements are used in material selection, such as decorative components made of traditional Foshan ceramic art and ground paving with Lingnan characteristic red sandstone. The lighting design pays special attention to creating a warm atmosphere, adopting a dimmable color temperature lighting system to simulate the light effect of traditional lanterns. In terms of soundscape design, classic arias from corresponding historical periods are played in different areas, forming a flowing sound landscape. All these measures have effectively awakened users' cultural memory and enhanced emotional connection.

### 5.2.3 Integration of Diverse Functions

This study puts forward an innovative four-in-one value transformation model of "cognition-experience-consumption-communication" for cultural and tourism spaces, realizing the integration of the cultural industry chain through the connection of the Cantonese Opera exhibition hall, performance stage and cultural and creative space. These three spaces form a progressive experience system: the exhibition hall uses a "time-space superimposition" narrative to build a cultural cognition system through physical and digital displays; the stage applies extended reality, holographic projection and motion capture to create immersive scenes and change passive viewing into active experience; the cultural and creative space breaks the traditional retail mode and establishes a "consumption-production-social interaction" system to upgrade cultural consumption. This functionally integrated structure not only forms a complete experience loop but also promotes a positive cycle of "cultural cognition-emotional resonance-creative expression-social communication".

### 5.2.4 In-depth Public Participation

The continuation and activation of the spirit of place rely on a multi-level and sustainable public participation system. In the design of Cantonese Opera cultural and tourism space, this research constructs a three-level participation framework of "observation - experience - creation": the basic level lowers the threshold of cultural cognition with an intelligent guide system, realizing the convenient access to Cantonese Opera cultural information; the interactive level enhances the depth and interest of artistic experience through immersive interactive devices; the creative level stimulates the public's cultural creativity relying on a professional creation platform. At the same time, a cultural co-construction mechanism is established to absorb local communities to participate in spatial operational decision-making, forming a multi-governance model. In addition, the public participation behavior is quantified through a cultural incentive system, and a personalized feedback mechanism is constructed to continuously improve the popularity and quality of participation, empowering the inheritance and innovation of the spirit of place in Cantonese Opera cultural and tourism space.

## 6 Conclusion

In summary, based on the theory of spirit of place, this study explores the emotional design of Cantonese Opera cultural and tourism complexes. Combining theory with the renewal practice of Foshan Dijiao Market, it forms a complete set of design strategies. By integrating the material and immaterial dimensions of spirit of place, and through strategies such as respecting the historical place spirit, building a sense of belonging, innovating integrated functions and encouraging public participation, this research can effectively activate Cantonese Opera cultural memory, strengthen the emotional bond between visitors and the space, and realize the living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage in contemporary cultural and tourism contexts.

## References

- [1] Wei Y L. Spatial Construction Based on the Spirit of Place: A Case Study of the Renovation of the Triangle Land in Daxicun, Yuli County[J]. *Planners*, 2018, 34(01):82-86.
- [2] Research on the Architectural and Interior Space Design of the Spirit of Place[J]. *Modern Urban Research*, 2024(01):66-69.
- [3] Yang H J, Li J, Tan Y X. Research on the Design of Qin Embroidery Themed Exhibition Space Based on the Emotional Design Theory[J]. *Furniture & Interior Design*, 2025, 32(01):77-84.
- [4] Zhao H X. Presentation and Perception of Cultural Space in Traditional Blocks under the Spirit of Place Theory[J]. *Social Sciences of Beijing*, 2024(05):97-109.
- [5] Zhang M M. Research on the Construction of the Spirit of Place in Dayang Ancient Town from the Perspective of Tourism Development[D]. Xiangtan University, 2019.
- [6] Xu Z L, He Y X, Ma Y F. Spatial Pattern of Cantonese Opera Cultural Landscape in the Pearl River Delta[J]. *South Architecture*, 2022(07):100-106.