



Research on Cultural Identity and Consumer Behaviour from the Perspective of Modern Aesthetics: An Innovative Exploration of Chaoshan Kueh as an Example

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Abstract. Renowned for its variety, exquisite craftsmanship, and unique flavor, Chaoshan Kueh was added to China's provincial-level Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) list in 2013. However, as modern lifestyles and consumption patterns evolve, traditional production techniques are declining, leading to growing interest in the connection between food heritage and social-cultural sustainability. In this context, modern aesthetic design provides a novel approach to the innovation and preservation of Chaoshan Kueh. Using Chaoshan Kueh as a case study, this paper examines how cultural identity influences consumers' purchase intentions for ICH foods with modern aesthetic design, employing methods such as product design and field surveys. A total of 453 valid samples were analyzed using structural equation modeling. The results indicate that: (1) the three dimensions of ICH cultural identity—self-esteem identity, attributive identity, and cognitive identity—positively impact consumers' purchase intentions; (2) perceived value has a mediating effect on the partial impacts of self-esteem identity, attributive identity, and cognitive identity on purchase intention; (3) consumer knowledge has a positive moderating effect on the impact of self-esteem identity, attributive identity, and cognitive identity on purchase intention. Based on the empirical results, the paper also provides targeted and practical suggestions for ICH foods.

Keywords: Modern Aesthetic Design, Cultural Identity, Purchase Intention, Intangible Cultural Heritage

1 Introduction

In the globalization process, integrating modern aesthetic design with traditional culture has emerged as a significant trend, particularly for Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)[1]. As globalization advances, the interaction and fusion of diverse cultures have become more pronounced. Modern aesthetic design captures the essence of traditional culture and incorporates it into contemporary contexts, infusing it with new vitality[2]. Cultural identity is a key psychological concept that links individuals to their cultural background, shaping their attitudes toward brands and influencing purchase decisions.

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It plays a crucial role in both preserving and innovating traditional culture[3]. Chaoshan Kueh, a representative of Chinese traditional food, embodies rich local culture, historical significance, and the distinctive Chaoshan cultural spirit. Its intricate craftsmanship was listed in the provincial ICH inventory in 2013. However, as industrial production becomes more prevalent, lifestyles change rapidly, and fast food culture rises, people are increasingly concerned about the relationship between food heritage and social-cultural sustainability[4]. Modern aesthetic design, as an emerging trend, can effectively capture attention and evoke cultural identity through distinct styles and visual language[5]. This identity not only strengthens consumers' emotional connections but also boosts their willingness to consume[6]. However, empirical research exploring the link between modern aesthetic design, cultural identity, and consumer behavior remains limited, particularly in the context of traditional food.

Consequently, this study uses Chaoshan Kueh as a case for empirical analysis. We visited Chaoshan Kueh artisans at tourist sites in Chaoshan, learned about the ingredients and production techniques, and attempted to design the packaging of the products. Following this, we conducted a consumer behavior survey based on the designed products, addressing the following questions: 1) can food design with cultural attributes effectively arouse consumers' cultural identity? 2) How does cultural identity impact consumers' purchase intentions? This study addresses the theoretical gap and provides empirical evidence and suggestions for innovating the design and marketing of traditional cultural products. It aims to offer new insights into the expression of cultural identity and consumers' acceptance of traditional foods, thereby supporting the protection and promotion of cultural heritage.

2 Literature Review

ICH cultural identity refers to consumers' recognition of the ICH cultural value and its identity, which could lead to attitudes such as preference, pride, and belonging towards ICH products[7]. The formation of cultural identity is dynamic, and influenced by social, economic, and historical factors. It is shaped not only by cultural background but also by the collective impact of social groups, historical memory, and cultural symbols.

Due to the complex definition and content of cultural identity, there is currently no consensus on its measurement dimensions[8]. However, some researchers have undertaken preliminary explorations in this area. Huang and Lv, based on results from semi-structured focus interviews, categorized the cultural identity of ICH products into four dimensions: cultural self-esteem, affect commitment, group attribution, and product cognition. Product cognition specifically reflects consumers' understanding or knowledge of a particular product[7]. In the Song Brocade Products study, Li further divided cultural identity into attributive identity and self-esteem identity based on previous research. Specifically, attributive identity refers to consumers' sense of group belonging rooted in collectivist values, while self-esteem identity reflects individuals' pride in their national, ethnic, or local culture[8]. The above research also found that cultural identity can influence consumers' perceived value and purchase intention. Consequently, based on cultural identity theory and the characteristics of ICH foods, we

categorize cultural identity into three dimensions: self-esteem identity, attributive identity, and cognitive identity. This study examines how modern aesthetic design affects the cultural identity of ICH food and its impact on consumers' purchase intentions, and provides the following arguments.

2.1 ICH Cultural Identity and Purchase Intention

Cultural identity is essential for the sustainable development of ICH[9], and consumers' selection of ICH brands involves a process of cultural identification with these brands[10]. Research indicates that a stronger cultural identity towards a product can lead to higher purchase intention. For example, Gomez and Torelli found that consumers are more favorable toward products that align with their cultural identity[11]. Zhang et al. demonstrated that cultural identity positively affects the purchase intention for ICH products[12]. Venugopal Muthuswamy and Basri's study on Confucian culture revealed that cultural identity directly influences purchase intention, positively affecting consumer willingness to buy[13]. Huang and Lv urged that all four dimensions of cultural identity—cultural self-esteem, affect commitment, group attribution, and product cognition—enhance consumers' purchase intention for ICH products[7]. Li's research indicated that while attributive identity positively impacts purchase intention for ICH products, self-esteem identity does not significantly influence purchase intention, possibly due to the influence of other variables[8]. Based on these findings, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: The (a) self-esteem identity, (b) attributive identity, and (c) cognitive identity of ICH culture identity have a positive impact on purchase intention.

2.2 The Mediating Effect of Perceived Value

The influence of perceived value on purchase intention is evident across various products and serves as a crucial predictor of consumer behavior[14]. For example, Liu et al. found a significant positive relationship between perceived value and purchase intention in their study of ICH shadow puppetry tourism souvenirs[15]. Pant et al. observed a significant positive effect of perceived value on purchase intention in their research on Indian organic food products[16]. Additionally, some studies suggest that perceived value may have a mediating effect on the relationship between cultural identity and purchase intention[3, 14]. Consequently, this study supposes that a stronger cultural identity towards ICH food may lead to higher perceived value, thereby positively enhancing purchase intention. Based on these findings, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: The (a) self-esteem identity, (b) attributive identity, and (c) cognitive identity of ICH culture identity have a positive impact on perceived value.

H3: Perceived value has a mediating impact on the effect of (a) self-esteem identity, (b) attributive identity, and (c) cognitive identity on purchase intention.

2.3 The Moderating Effect of Consumer Knowledge

Consumer knowledge, a concept from cognitive psychology, refers to the information stored in an individual's memory that influences their thoughts and behaviors[17]. It plays a crucial role in how consumers choose and evaluate products, as they seek rational justifications to support their purchasing decisions[18]. Consumers' decision-making process largely depends on the product information or experiences stored in their memory[19]. Enhanced product knowledge and information allow consumers to make more informed and rational purchasing decisions, thoughtfully evaluate the purchase process and its outcomes, and encourage repeat purchases[20]. When consumers possess extensive knowledge, they project their understanding onto products, which influences their willingness to purchase. Conversely, consumers with limited knowledge may struggle to connect with the product's cultural attributes, resulting in lower consumption willingness and difficulty in making purchase decisions[21]. In this study, it is introduced as a moderating variable to explore how cultural identity impacts consumer behavior. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Consumer knowledge has a moderating impact on the effect of (a) self-esteem identity, (b) attributive identity, and (c) cognitive identity on purchase intention.

3 Research Method

Consumer guidance is considered one of the most effective tools to optimize consumers' consumption experience of traditional cultural foods[22]. We analyzed the region's intrinsic spirit, aesthetic values, and symbolic meanings. Following this, we tasked the designer with creating food packaging that integrates traditional Chinese festival elements with local Chaoshan customs while preserving the authentic cultural characteristics of Chaoshan Kueh, as illustrated in Fig. 1. Subsequently, a consumer behavior survey was conducted based on the designed product.



Fig. 1. ICH food product and package designed by researcher team.

3.1 Questionnaire Design and Measurement

The questionnaire is divided into three sections. The first section assesses participants' awareness of Chaoshan Kueh, starting with a screening question: "Have you ever bought Chaoshan Kueh?" to ensure sample validity. The second part addresses variables such as ICH cultural identity, perceived value, consumer knowledge, and purchase intention. All items are measured on a 5-point Likert scale, with values ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Specifically, there are 11 questions concerning ICH cultural identity. Based on the findings of Huang and Lv[23] and Kuang and Zhan[14], and taking ICH characteristics into account, we categorized these questions into three dimensions: self-esteem identity, attributive identity, and cognitive identity. There are four questions about perceived value, designed based on the findings of Sheth, Newman, and Gross[24]. Consumer knowledge is assessed with four items, derived from the research of Ding et al. [18] and Liu et al.[15]. Purchase intention is measured using four questions, with the scale referencing Liu et al. [15]. The scales were adapted and designed based on the opinions of experts. The third part of the questionnaire collects participants' basic information.

3.2 Pretest, Sampling and Data Collection

To test the validity of the scale, we first invited 63 consumers to participate in a pre-survey. The pre-test results showed that all variables had a Cronbach's α of 0.70, indicating good reliability of the survey tool and suitability for formal research. The formal survey was conducted in September 2023, with questionnaires distributed in the Chaoshan region and online survey platforms, with the questionnaire designed to allow each user to submit their response only once. A cumulative of 453 valid samples were collected after deducting 32 samples answered at unreasonable speed and by those who did not know Chaoshan Kueh from a total of 485; the valid response rate was 93.40%. Descriptive analysis showed that the gender ratio of the respondents was close, with 50.60% male and 49.40% female; the majority of respondents were aged 19-29 (39.30%); the main education level was college degree (70.40%); and the monthly disposable income was mainly in the range of RMB 3,001-5,000 yuan (64%). Additionally, 93.60% of participants were aware that Chaoshan Kueh had been recognized as ICH, and 72.10% of participants had purchased Chaoshan Kueh before.

4 Empirical Results

To examine the cultural identity of customers on ICH food and its influence on perceived value and purchase intention, we assessed the reliability and validity of the scale and then analyzed the impact of cultural identity on these factors.

4.1 Reliability and Validity

The reliability and validity of the scale were analyzed using IBM SPSS 26.0. The Cronbach’s α of the three dimensions of cultural identity, perceived value, consumer knowledge, and purchase intention ranged from 0.797 to 0.873. With a CITC greater than 0.50, the scale demonstrates strong internal consistency. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value exceeded 0.70 and Bartlett’s test was significant, confirming the suitability of the data for factor analysis. Factor loadings for the six constructs ranged from 0.670 to 0.869, and the Accumulation Percentage of Explained Variance (APEV) ranged from 64.72% to 72.69%, indicating good convergent validity and effective explanation of most of the construct information.

4.2 Structural Equation Model

To investigate how ICH cultural identity—encompassing self-esteem identity, attributive identity, and cognitive identity—affects consumers’ perceived value and purchase intention for Chaoshan Kueh, we developed a structural equation model. In this model, ICH cultural identity served as the independent variable, perceived value acted as the mediating variable, and purchase intention was the dependent variable. Moreover, IBM AMOS 28.0 was employed for fit testing, as shown in Fig. 2. The results indicate that $\chi^2/df = 1.731$, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.040 (<0.08), parsimony goodness-of-fit index (PGFI) = 0.708 (>0.50), normed fit index (NFI) = 0.940, incremental fit index (IFI) = 0.974, tucker-lewis index (TLI) = 0.968, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.974—all exceed the recommended fit values, indicating that the overall fit of the model is good.

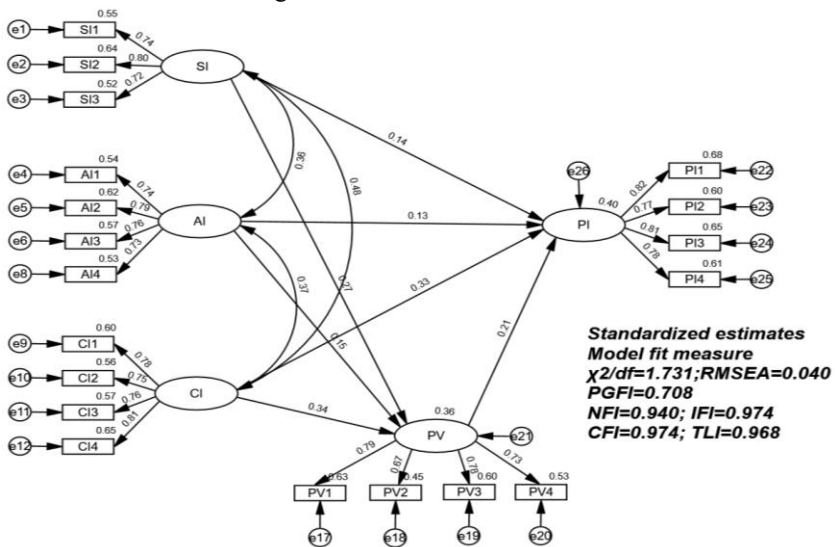


Fig. 2. Results of the proposed model.

The path coefficients reveal that self-esteem identity, attributive identity, and cognitive identity all have significant positive effects on purchase intention, thus supporting H1. We employed Bootstrap to test and evaluate the mediating effects in this study, with a sample size of 5,000 and a 95% confidence interval. The results indicate that self-esteem identity, attributive identity, and cognitive identity not only have a positive direct impact on purchase intention but can also indirectly influence purchase intention through perceived value. In other words, perceived value has a mediating effect on the partial impacts of self-esteem identity, attributive identity, and cognitive identity on purchase intention, supporting H2 and H3.

4.3 Examination of the Moderating Effect of Consumer Knowledge

To test the moderating effect of consumer knowledge on the relationship between ICH cultural identity and purchase intention, regression analysis was conducted with centralized cultural identity, consumer knowledge, and the interaction terms as independent variables, and purchase intention as the dependent variable, as shown in Table 1. The results show that the interaction term between self-esteem identity and consumer knowledge is significantly related to purchase intention($\beta = 0.183, t=4.546, P<0.001$). Similarly, the interaction term between attributive identity and consumer knowledge($\beta = 0.193, t=4.808, P<0.001$), as well as the interaction term between cognitive identity and consumer knowledge($\beta = 0.262, t=7.007, P<0.001$), are both significantly related to purchase intention. These findings indicate that consumer knowledge has a substantial positive moderating effect on the relationship between ICH cultural identity and purchase intention, thus validating H4.

Table 1. The moderating role of consumer knowledge

Dependent variable: PI		β	t	Adjusted R ²	F
Model 1	SI	0.276	6.572***	0.302	56.367
	CK	0.331	7.881***		
	SI×CK	0.183	4.546***		
Model 2	AI	0.258	6.348***	0.278	59.065
	CK	0.370	9.160***		
	AI×CK	0.193	4.808***		
Model 3	CI	0.364	9.447***	0.384	94.819
	CK	0.304	7.987***		
	CI×CK	0.262	7.007***		

Note: * $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$

5 Conclusion

This study examines the impact of ICH cultural identity on consumer behavior using Chaoshan Kueh as a case study. The findings indicate that, firstly, all three dimensions of cultural identity—self-esteem identity, attributive identity, and cognitive identity—

have a direct and significant positive effect on purchase intention. For ICH food, cultural identity remarkably enhances consumers' perceived value and purchase intention. Consumers' understanding and appreciation of the cultural stories behind ICH products, along with the pride and sense of belonging these products evoke, directly influence their purchase behavior, making it crucial for boosting purchase intention. Secondly, perceived value has a partial mediating effect on the impact of self-esteem identity, attributive identity, and cognitive identity on purchase intention. Consumers' perception of the authenticity of ICH food, along with the pride and sense of belonging it fosters, can directly or indirectly enhance consumption by influencing perceived value. Consumers' perceived value of ICH food can drive purchase intention. Thirdly, consumer knowledge has a significant positive moderating effect on the impact of self-esteem identity, attributive identity, and cognitive identity on purchase intention. The results indicate that consumers with high levels of knowledge exhibit a stronger purchase intention for ICH products compared to those with lower levels of cultural identity. Based on the aforementioned findings, we provide the following three suggestions.

First, it's important to strengthen the in-depth exploration of cultural connotations. The enhanced display of ICH product cultural connotations can be achieved through product packaging. A deeper understanding of cultural connotations can effectively stimulate customers' self-esteem identity, attributive identity and cognitive identity. Second, it's crucial to enhance consumer participation and interactive experiences. These interactions can enhance consumers' emotional experience through interaction, thereby increasing their perceived value. Third, it's essential to innovate the promotion of ICH culture. Lectures featuring experts, scholars, and ICH inheritors can be held to popularize ICH knowledge. In future research, we propose the following recommendations to address the limitations of this study: firstly, due to the origins of Chaoshan Kueh, the scope of this study is limited to Guangdong Province, China. It is recommended that future research expands its scope to explore or compare potential differences in perceived values. Furthermore, we suggest that future research explore more potential control variables and influencing factors, such as personal values, social class, psychological characteristics, etc., to more comprehensively understand the mechanisms behind consumer behavior formation.

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