

# "Extinction" or "Replacement"?-Functional Evolution and Symbolic Reproduction of Ancestral Hall Culture in the Process of Modernization

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**Abstract:** Based on 503 valid questionnaires and secondary data, this study empirically examines the functional evolution and symbolic reproduction of ancestral hall culture in the process of modernization. The study found that the function of ancestral halls is transforming from a single sacrificial site to a multi-faceted and complex cultural carrier. Functional perception shows generational differentiation: 48.31 percent of respondents still see it as a "family identity mark", but 28.83 percent of ancestral halls have expanded new functions such as tourism reception in the past five years. Economically, there is a coexistence of path dependence and innovation. Income mainly relies on government subsidies (46.52%) and donations from relatives (43.54%), while market-oriented income such as tickets (8.95%) and cultural and creative products (15.11%) still accounts for a low proportion. The main forces driving the transformation are local governments (41.57%) and clans/councils (26.13%). Correlation and regression analysis further revealed the "cognitive-emotion-behavior" transmission mechanism: cognition of ancestral hall function significantly positively predicted emotional attitude ( $\text{Beta}=0.354$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), while the sense of responsibility for cultural inheritance directly drove willingness to participate ( $\text{Beta}=0.257$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). The study suggests that the survival of ancestral hall culture is not a simple "disappearance" or "replacement", but rather a creative transformation through "functional adaptation" and "symbolic reconstruction", and the key to its successful inheritance lies in the dynamic balance of institutional guarantee, subject collaboration and symbolic innovation. In the future, challenges such as digital empowerment and intergenerational integration need to be focused on to promote its dynamic inheritance.

**Keywords:** Ancestral Temple Culture; Functional Evolution; Symbol Reproduction; Modernization Process

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background and Significance

As a carrier of traditional Chinese culture, the functions of ancestral halls have evolved with social development. In the agricultural era, it served the functions of sacrificial ceremonies, clan governance, and moral education. Urbanization has weakened its traditional role, but in the context of globalization, it has been rejuvenated through functional adaptation and symbolic reconstruction: government intervention through conservation and development, and innovative clan activities attracting the younger generation, transforming it from a closed symbol to an open cultural platform. Studies show that clan culture still influences contemporary life<sup>[2]</sup>, digital technology offers new paths of inheritance, but intergenerational differences remain a challenge. The transformation of ancestral halls has reference value for rural revitalization.

This study constructs a "function-symbol" framework to reveal the logic of the transformation of ancestral halls from sacrificial sites to cultural carriers. Empirical evidence shows that functional evolution is<sup>[4]</sup> complex and suggests that the model of combining tradition and innovation is instructive for underdeveloped regions, emphasizing the synergy of policy guidance and clan innovation. The study found that the willingness of young people to participate is crucial<sup>[5]</sup> to inheritance and suggested that a sense of cultural belonging be enhanced through digitalization. The research provides cultural solutions to the modern identity crisis and lays the foundation for ancestral hall innovation in the digital age.

## 1.2 Current State of Research at Home and Abroad

Research on the modern transformation of ancestral temple culture presents a multi-dimensional pattern. International research focuses on the functional evolution of overseas Chinese clan organizations, such as Rachel S. K. Chan, who found that transnational clan networks maintain cultural continuity<sup>[3]</sup> through innovation, but pay insufficient attention to local transformation. Domestic research is divided into two main lines: one is the structure-function perspective, where scholars point out that ancestral halls are shifting from bloodline organizations to public spaces with both traditional and modern functions<sup>[6-7]</sup>; The second is the semiotic perspective, focusing on the integration of traditional and modern symbols in the reconstruction of architectural space. In recent years, research on the governance perspective has emerged, but research on economic functional innovation and digitalization remains weak. Existing research has limitations such as the disconnection between functional and symbolic analysis, regional sample imbalance, and lagging research on digital transformation. This study fills the gaps by constructing a "function-symbolic" linkage framework and combining national samples.

## 2. Research Methods

### 2.1 Questionnaire Data Analysis

#### 2.1.1 Study design

To fully explore the transformation and inheritance of ancestral hall culture in the process of modernization, this study surveyed different groups through self-designed questionnaires to gain an in-depth understanding of the functional changes of ancestral halls in modern society, as well as people's cognition, emotional attitudes and behavioral tendencies towards them<sup>[10]</sup>.

In addition to basic personal information, the questionnaire also included self-defined variables. The ancestral hall Function cognition section aims to understand how respondents view the role of ancestral halls in contemporary society, whether they still consider them as the core venue for ancestral worship, or whether they have transformed into other functions such as cultural exhibition halls and tourist attractions. This section can explore how modern social

changes affect the functions of traditional cultural sites. Theoretically, the cognition of ancestral halls is closely related<sup>[9]</sup> to the theory of social function, which emphasizes that the meaning of social symbols is shaped through continuous social interaction, and therefore the individual's cognition of ancestral halls is also influenced by their social background<sup>[15]</sup>.

The questionnaire also examines the influence of the urban and rural context and the force of the subject on ancestral temple culture. By understanding the ancestral halls that respondents are most familiar with and have most frequent contact with, as well as the roles of different entities that drive the transformation of ancestral hall functions, such as local governments, clan councils, and tourism companies. To understand whether the transformation of ancestral temple cultural heritage is not only influenced by individual contact, but also by different social forces and policies.

The degree of economic function support examines the economic role of ancestral halls in modern society, especially the income obtained through ticket sales, venue rental fees, and cultural and creative products. Through these incomes, ancestral halls are able to sustain and develop their cultural activities. This variable, referring to Yang Zhuowei's research, highlights how ancestral halls can obtain economic support in a commercial context to ensure the sustainability<sup>[7]</sup> of their long-term operations and cultural heritage. Emotional attitudes measure respondents' emotional dependence and identification with ancestral halls. The questionnaire explores how individuals emotionally connect with ancestral halls by assessing their sense of pride in ancestral halls, emotional warmth, and views on excessive commercialization. The variable is based on the theory of emotional identity<sup>[16]</sup> and the research of Li Yajuan and Hou Dejuan, which suggests that emotional attitudes have a significant impact on individual behavior, especially in terms of cultural identity and cultural inheritance. With the passage of time, the emotional significance of ancestral halls may change, especially among the younger generation, where the intensity of emotional identity may weaken.

Willingness to participate in ancestral hall activities is a variable that directly reflects whether an individual is willing to engage in ancestral hall cultural activities. Social

participation theory<sup>[17]</sup> holds that social participation not only reflects an individual's interest in cultural activities, but also reveals the interaction between the individual and society and the accumulation of social capital. So this study assesses their interest and engagement in ancestral hall activities by designing questions to investigate the frequency of their past participation in ancestral hall activities and their willingness to participate in the future. Based on this, the design of the sense of responsibility for cultural heritage focuses on individuals' sense of responsibility for the inheritance of ancestral temple culture. The questionnaire measures the sense of responsibility for cultural heritage by asking respondents whether they are willing to pass on ancestral temple culture to the next generation. The variable was measured with reference to Liu Wei<sup>[14]</sup>, whose research suggests that an individual's sense of responsibility in the social environment can influence their behavior, especially in terms of cultural protection and inheritance, but there is now a problem of generational breakdowns caused by weakened generation customs.

To sum up, this questionnaire designs multiple dimensions of variables and combines theories from sociology, psychology, and economics to provide a multi-angle perspective for in-depth analysis of the transformation and inheritance of ancestral temple culture. Each part is designed to reflect the cognitive and behavioral tendencies of respondents in different social contexts and cultural settings, providing solid data support for the study.

#### 2.1.2 Data collection

This study explores the functional changes and symbolic reproduction of ancestral hall culture in modern society based on an analysis of 503 valid questionnaires. The sample covered diverse demographic characteristics to ensure representativeness and provide a reliable basis for subsequent statistical analysis.

#### 2.1.3 Tests of reliability and validity

##### (1) Reliability test

The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient test was conducted on the reliability of the questionnaire. The results in Table 1 show that the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients of each dimension are all above 0.7, indicating that the questionnaire scale has good internal consistency and reliability. The overall results are relatively reliable and can provide a solid data foundation for subsequent analysis.

##### (2) Validity test

The validity of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and the Bartlett sphericity test scale was used in this study. Table 2 results show that the KMO value is 0.876, which is a high level, and the chi-square value of the Bartlett sphericity test is 4861.939, with  $p < 0.001$ , indicating that the scale has appropriate sampling suitability and structural validity in the measurement and is suitable for further statistical analysis.

**Table 1. Reliability Analysis**

Questionnaire	Number of items	Cronbach $\alpha$ coefficient
Ancestral hall function cognition	7	0.853
Economic function support	4	0.732
Emotional attitude	4	0.749
New feature engagement intention	5	0.816
Factors hindering the inheritance of ancestral temple culture	4	0.789

**Table 2. Results of Validity Analysis**

KMO values		0.876
Bartlett sphericity test	Approximate chi-square	4861.939
	df	276
	p value	0.000

#### 2.1.4 Descriptive analysis

##### (1) Statistical descriptive analysis of sample demographic characteristics

Table 3 shows the statistical results of the demographic characteristics of the sample. There were slightly more males than females among the respondents. The age structure was predominantly middle-aged and young, with the 19-30 age group being the largest, followed by the 31-45 age group. The majority of household registrations are rural, and the proportion of current residences in urban-rural fringe areas, traditional villages and urban communities is relatively balanced. The educational attainment is moderately high, with 69.39 percent having a college degree or higher. In terms of occupational distribution, corporate workers make up the largest proportion, followed by freelancers and individual/private sector workers. The annual household income is mainly concentrated in the range of 60,000 to 100,000 yuan and 100,000 to 200,000 yuan. In terms of geographical distribution, samples from South China account for a significant proportion. Significantly higher than other regions, mainly due to the regional setting of the study population and the convenience of sampling.

South China has a more active tradition and cultural background in the inheritance of ancestral temple culture, with the largest number of preserved ancestral temples in the country and the most diverse forms of functional

transformation. Therefore, the questionnaire distribution in the early stage was prioritized to cover this region, and the dissemination nodes were concentrated in South China, resulting in a South China bias in the collected samples.

**Table 3. Statistical Results of Demographic Characteristics of the Sample**

Name	Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	male	269	53.48
	female	234	46.52
Age	≤18	22	4.37
	19-30	190	37.77
	31-45	156	31.01
	46-60	95	18.89
	≥61	40	7.95
Household registration type	Rural household registration	323	64.21
	Urban household registration	125	24.85
	Urban household registration	55	10.93
Current place of residence	Traditional villages	164	32.6
	Urban-rural fringe	175	34.79
	Urban communities	164	32.6
Highest degree	Primary school and below	19	3.78
	Junior high school	32	6.36
	High school/secondary vocational school	103	20.48
	Junior college/Undergraduate	297	59.05
	Graduate and above	52	10.34
Occupation	Student	54	10.74
	Farming	45	8.95
	Individual/Private	62	12.33
	Civil servants/public institutions	35	6.96
	Corporate employees	192	38.17
	Freelancing	80	15.9
	Retired	35	6.96
Annual household income (ten thousand yuan)	< 3	26	5.17
	3-6	53	10.54
	6-10	189	37.57
	10-20	164	32.6
	> 20	71	14.12
Whether the family still has a genealogy/generation	Yes and complete	103	20.48
	Yes, but incomplete	190	37.77
	no	70	13.92
	Unclear	140	27.83
Location	Northeast Region	18	3.58
	North China	24	4.77
	East China	38	7.55
	South China region	305	60.64
	Central China	39	7.75
	Southwest Region	35	6.96
	Northwest Region	44	8.75

(2) Statistical descriptive analysis of ancestral halls in urban and rural context and subject power

Table 4 shows that the ancestral halls most

frequently visited by respondents are mainly located in their own towns and old urban areas of county towns. In the past five years, ancestral halls have mainly seen an increase in tourist

reception and the introduction of commercial changes are local governments and operations. The main forces driving these clans/councils.

**Table 4. Statistics on the Urban and Rural Context and Main Forces of Ancestral Halls**

Names	Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
The most familiar or frequently encountered ancestral hall address	This village	70	13.92
	This township	212	42.15
	Old town town	145	28.83
	Urban tourist attractions	59	11.73
	Urban residential community	17	3.38
Major changes to the ancestral hall in the past five years	Functions remain the same	82	16.3
	Increase tourism reception	145	28.83
	Change to community service	72	14.31
	Introducing business operations	144	28.63
	Digital display	42	8.35
	Building renovation	76	15.11
The main force driving change	Local governments	175	41.57
	Clan/Council	110	26.13
	Travel company	14	3.33
	Village collective/community	108	25.65
	Foreign capital	6	1.43
	Online platforms	8	1.90

(3) Statistical descriptive analysis of ancestral hall economic function

Table 5 shows that, from the perspective of respondents' cognition, the income sources of ancestral halls are highly dependent on traditional channels, with government subsidies and donations from relatives being the main components. In contrast, the perceived proportion of market-based income sources such as tickets and venue rental is very low. In addition, 28.63 percent of respondents believed that their ancestral halls had no income.

**Table 5. Statistics on the Economic Functions of Ancestral Halls**

Names	Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
The main source of known ancestral hall income	Tickets	45	8.95
	Venue rental	19	3.78
	Cultural and creative products	76	15.11
	Government subsidies	234	46.52
	Donations from relatives	219	43.54
	No income	144	28.63

(4) Symbolic cognition and affective attitude statistical descriptive analysis

Table 6 shows that respondents consider the main symbolic meaning of ancestral halls to be family identity markers, followed by ancestral worship and local cultural landmarks. There was

less awareness of tourism resources and community public cultural spaces, accounting for 11.33% and 2.58% respectively.

**Table 6. Statistical Results of Symbolic Cognition and Emotional Attitudes**

Name	Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
The main symbolic meaning of the ancestral hall	Ancestral worship	102	20.28
	Local cultural landmarks	88	17.50
	Family identity mark	243	48.31
	Tourism resources	57	11.33
	Community public cultural spaces	13	2.58

(5) Descriptive analysis of engagement behavior and willingness statistics

Table 7 shows that among respondents who participated in ancestral hall activities in the past year, 51.89% participated once and 21.87% did not. The main types of activities participated in were ancestral worship ceremonies and tourist receptions. In terms of future willingness to participate, 28.23 percent of respondents were very willing to participate, and 37.7 percent were relatively willing.

(6) Statistical descriptive analysis of Intergenerational and cultural heritage

Table 8 shows that 55.47% of respondents knew

some family generation names, and 18.09% knew and recited them clearly. Regarding the explanation of ancestral hall culture to the next generation, 60.04% of respondents were willing or relatively willing, and 28.63% were very willing.

**Table 7. Results of Participation Behavior and Willingness**

Name	Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
The frequency of attending ancestral hall events in the past year	0 times	110	21.87
	1	261	51.89
	2-3 times	94	18.69
	4-6 times	28	5.57
	≥7 times	10	1.99
Types of activities participated in	Ancestral worship ceremony	252	50.10
	Clan meeting	43	8.55
	Artistic performances	44	8.75
	Tourist reception	134	26.64
	Public welfare Lectures	47	9.34
	Never attended	53	10.54
Willingness to participate in ancestral hall activities	Very willing	142	28.23
	More willing	190	37.77
	Generally	92	18.29
	Not very willing	51	10.14
	Not willing at all	28	5.57

**Table 8. Intergenerational and Cultural Heritage Statistics**

Names	Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Do you know the generation name of your family?	Be clear and recite	91	18.09
	Know Part	279	55.47
	Have heard of it	96	19.09
	No idea at all	37	7.36
Would you be willing to explain ancestral	Very willing.	144	28.63
	More willing	158	31.41
	See their interests	147	29.22

hall culture to the next generation?	Not very willing	31	6.16
	Not at all	23	4.57

### 2.1.5 Correlation analysis

Table 9 shows the results of the correlation analysis among the variables. It can be seen from the table that the inheritance mechanism of ancestral temple culture presents a clear cognitive-emotion-behavior path. The core drivers are ancestral hall function cognition and emotional attitude, and there is a significant positive relationship between the two, indicating that the deeper an individual's understanding of ancestral hall function, the stronger their emotional identification with it. The two together form the basis of the willingness to inherit, and both show a highly significant positive correlation with the willingness to participate in new functions, indicating that the improvement of cognition and emotion can effectively encourage people to try to participate in the new functions of the ancestral hall.

Given that both the willingness to participate in ancestral hall activities and the sense of responsibility for cultural inheritance are scored in reverse, the significant positive correlation between the sense of responsibility for cultural inheritance and the willingness to participate in ancestral hall activities actually means that the stronger the sense of responsibility of an individual, the stronger the willingness to participate in activities, and the two are in the same direction, together constituting positive inheritance behavior. But there is a significant negative correlation between emotional attitude and sense of responsibility for cultural inheritance. The more positive the emotional attitude of an individual, the stronger the sense of responsibility for cultural inheritance actually is. That is, the more positive the emotional attitude of the group toward the ancestral hall, the stronger the self-reported sense of responsibility for cultural inheritance is, indicating that emotional identification can be transformed into active responsibility. In addition, the factors that hinder the inheritance of ancestral temple culture are significantly positively correlated with almost all positive variables, especially with the cognitive function of ancestral temples. The deeper one's understanding of the ancestral hall and the more emotionally involved one is, the more one can perceive the existing obstacles to inheritance in reality. Economic functional support is positively

correlated with emotional attitude, suggesting that emotional identification may promote economic support, but it has no significant correlation with ancestral hall functional cognition, indicating that rational cognition is not the main driving force of economic support. In summary, the effective inheritance of ancestral temple culture depends on the synergy of cognition, emotion and sense of responsibility.

The current disconnection between emotional identification and responsibility is a potential problem. Future inheritance work will not only need to enhance cognition and cultivate emotions, but also think about how to effectively transform positive emotions into a strong sense of personal responsibility and concrete participation actions.

**Table 9. Results of Correlations of Variables**

	Willingness to participate in ancestral hall activities	Awareness of ancestral hall functions	Economic function support	Emotional attitude	New feature engagement intention	Sense of responsibility for cultural inheritance	Factors hindering the inheritance of ancestral temple culture
Willingness to participate in ancestral hall activities	1						
Awareness of ancestral hall functions	0.009	1					
Economic function support	0.023	0.106*	1				
Emotional attitude	0.002	0.354***	0.265***	1			
Willingness to participate in new features	0.027	0.395***	-0.036	0.426***	1		
Cultural heritage responsibility	0.257***	-0.077	0.043	0.158***	-0.083	1	
Factors hindering the inheritance of ancestral temple culture	0.048	0.472***	0.244***	0.443***	0.373***	0.113*	1

\*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*  $p < 0.01$  \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

#### 2.1.6 Correlation analysis

In the previous correlation analysis, it was found that there is a significant positive relationship between the functional cognition of ancestral halls and emotional attitudes. As an internal psychological driver, the sense of responsibility for cultural inheritance is very likely to be the cause of the behavioral tendency of willingness to participate in ancestral hall activities. Therefore, it is suitable to be used as a predictor variable for further regression analysis. Similarly, a broad range of emotional attitudes is more likely to shape a specific sense of responsibility. The rest of the variables may have a bidirectional relationship, so no regression analysis is conducted.

Table 10 shows the first group of regression analyzes showed a significant positive predictive effect (Beta = 0.360,  $p < 0.001$ ) on the perception of ancestral hall functions, indicating that the deeper the perception of ancestral hall functions, the stronger the respondents' emotional identification with ancestral halls. The model explained 12.5% of the variation in emotional attitude ( $R^2 = 0.125$ ), and the model as a whole was significant ( $F = 71.612$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ),

suggesting that ancestral hall function cognition is an important driver of emotional identification. The second regression analysis showed that the sense of responsibility for cultural inheritance had a significant positive predictive effect on the willingness to participate in ancestral hall activities (Beta = 0.271,  $p < 0.001$ ), further indicating that the stronger an individual's sense of responsibility for cultural inheritance, the stronger their willingness to participate in ancestral hall activities. The model explained a 6.6% variation ( $R^2 = 0.066$ ) in willingness to participate in ancestral hall activities, and the model as a whole was significant ( $F = 35.298$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that sense of responsibility is an important psychological factor driving participation behavior. The third regression analysis showed that emotional attitude had a significant negative predictive effect on cultural heritage responsibility (Beta = -0.180,  $p < 0.001$ ), and this negative relationship indicated that the more positive the emotional attitude, the stronger the cultural heritage responsibility of the individual. The model explained 2.5% of the variation in cultural heritage responsibility ( $R^2 = 0.025$ ), and the overall model was significant ( $F$

= 12.777,  $p < 0.001$ ). Although the  $R^2$  of the three groups of models was in the range of 0.025 to 0.125, which was relatively low, given the interweaving of multiple situational factors among psychosocial and behavioral variables, this explanatory power was within the acceptable range under the exploratory research framework. and the models themselves performed well in terms of statistical significance. It is sufficient to reveal the transmission context between cognition, emotion, responsibility and behavior.

Combining the results of the three regression groups, it can be seen that emotional attitude, by enhancing the sense of responsibility for cultural inheritance, indirectly promotes the willingness to participate in ancestral hall activities, forming a transmission path from ancestral hall function cognition to emotional attitude, and then to sense of responsibility and behavior. All three models reached statistically significant levels, further verifying the key roles of cognition, emotion, and responsibility in the inheritance of ancestral temple culture.

**Table 10. Results of Regression Analysis**

Predictor variables	Predicted variable	B	Standard error	Beta	t	p	$R^2$	F
Ancestral hall function cognition	Emotional attitudes	0.360	0.042	0.354	8.462	0.000***	0.125	F (1,501)=71.612, p=0.000
Cultural heritage responsibility	Willingness to participate in ancestral hall activities	0.271	0.046	0.257	5.941	0.000***	0.066	F (1,501)=35.298, p=0.000
Emotional attitude	Cultural heritage Responsibility	-0.180	0.050	-0.158	-3.575	0.000***	0.025	F (1,501)=12.777, p=0.000

\*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*  $p < 0.01$  \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

### 2.1.7 Summary

To sum up, the questionnaire has good reliability and validity, and the data follow a normal distribution. Preliminary analysis suggests that ancestral hall function cognition, emotional attitude, and sense of responsibility for cultural inheritance are key factors influencing willingness to participate, and there is a transmission path from cognition to emotion, then to sense of responsibility and behavior, laying the foundation for further research.

## 2.2 Integration and Analysis of Secondary Data

This study constructed a multi-dimensional analytical framework for the modern transformation of ancestral hall culture by systematically collecting and organizing three types of secondary data. In terms of literature, the focus is on academic achievements on the transformation of clan culture at home and abroad from 2015 to 2025, including journal articles, dissertations and research monographs. Through co-occurrence analysis of key terms, it is found that existing research mainly focuses on three core topics: "functional evolution", "symbolic reconstruction", and "governance transformation", but lacks in-depth exploration of communication models in the digital context. As Fang Fei et al. pointed out in their research, the idea that the reproduction of traditional public cultural spaces in rural areas requires the

collaborative participation<sup>[9]</sup> of government and private forces provides an important reference for this study to analyze the interaction mechanism of the subjects.

Policy text analysis covers cultural heritage protection documents from central to township governments, with a particular focus on special policies for the revitalization and utilization of traditional culture introduced after 2020. Through content coding, it is found that the policy orientation shows a shift from "static protection" to "living inheritance", among which documents such as "Opinions on Implementing the Project for the Inheritance and Development of Fine Traditional Chinese Culture" explicitly encourage the transformation of traditional spaces such as ancestral halls into cultural service carriers. It is notable that local governments have generally adopted a "categorized governance" strategy in policy implementation, strictly controlling ancestral halls listed as cultural relics protection units while allowing functional innovation for general ancestral halls. This differentiated policy provides institutional space for the transformation of ancestral halls.

The study found that more than 60 percent of ancestral halls were digitized in 2023, offering online sacrifices or virtual exhibitions. Cloud-based ancestral halls blend traditional rituals with modern communication methods. Young netizens have innovatively interpreted



ancestral hall culture, such as incorporating clan emblems into creative products and performing ancestral worship with pop music. The study, using triangulation, combined with policy texts, operational data and academic theories, reveals three major characteristics of the transformation of ancestral halls: functional superposition, subject diversity and cross-domain communication. In 2025, the deep application of digital technology is reshaping the cultural inheritance path of ancestral halls, which not only enhances communication efficiency but also brings the risk of dilution of cultural connotations.

### **3. Functional Evolution and Symbolic Cognition Analysis of Ancestral Hall Culture**

#### **3.1 Evolution of Ancestral Hall Functions and Economic Characteristics**

The function of ancestral halls is undergoing a transformation from a single ritual to a multi-functional combination, presenting a feature of the superimposition of tradition and modernity. The data shows that 48.31 percent of respondents still view ancestral halls as family symbols, and 20.28 percent insist on their ancestral worship function, indicating that traditional perception is still dominant but has diverted; At the same time, 28.83 percent of the ancestral halls that have changed in the past five years have expanded into new functions such as tourism reception (see Table 5), reflecting the trend of diversification of the functional system. Yang Zhuowei pointed out that this transformation essentially reflects the process<sup>[7]</sup> of cultural evolution under the change of social structure.

In terms of economic function, ancestral halls show obvious path dependence and progressive innovation characteristics. The income structure is still dominated by government subsidies (46.52%) and donations from relatives (43.54%), with a relatively low proportion of market-based income such as ticket sales (8.95%) and venue rental (3.78%), indicating that the economic transformation is still in its early stages. Scholars such as Yu Mingjun believe that the economic function of ancestral halls has been enhanced<sup>[4]</sup> through gradual innovation, which is manifested in the coexistence of traditional financing mechanisms (bloodline fundraising and government special funds) and new business forms (tourism development, cultural and

creative products and venue rental).

The functional transformation shows regional differences: in South China, there is an emphasis on kinship fundraising; in the Yangtze River, there is an integration of culture and tourism; and in the north, there is a practice of "cultivating ancestral halls through culture". Clan, government and market collaboration: Clan inheritance of culture, government policy support, market innovative operation. The current challenges include single fundraising, uneven distribution and talent shortage, and institutional innovation is needed. In the future, we need to strike a balance between cultural conservation and economic vitality and build an inclusive development framework.

#### **3.2 Recognition of Ancestral Hall Symbols and Emotional Attitudes**

The perception of ancestral hall symbols shows generational and regional differences: 48.31% of respondents view it as a family symbol (prominent among South China and middle-aged and elderly groups), while younger urban residents are more inclined to position it as a "cultural landmark". Wang Baohua noted that the traditional educational function is transforming into an inclusive cultural symbol<sup>[5]</sup>. Emotional attitudes diverged: Scholars such as Zhang Jun confirmed that traditional emotional connection mechanisms were still effective [6], but 21.87 percent of respondents (especially urban youth) showed alienation. The transformation is driven by three mechanisms: cultural memory screening, value reconstruction and media innovation, forming a "memory-value-media" linkage system. The intergenerational differences are significant: the elderly focus on ethics, the middle-aged on social interaction, and the young on cultural consumption. Regional differences are as follows: Clan areas retain the attribute of ancestral worship, urbanized areas focus on community functions, and tourist areas highlight commercial value. Digital communication (such as short videos in 2025) brings new forms of presentation, but deep identity remains to be seen. Emotional intensity is positively correlated with genealogical integrity and engagement frequency, and a balance between traditional sacredness and modern engagement is needed. The key to living inheritance lies in the dynamic balance of symbolic innovation and emotional resonance.

## 4. Influencing Factors and Mechanisms of Ancestral Hall Culture Inheritance

### 4.1 Participation Behavior and Willingness to Pass on

The inheritance of ancestral temple culture depends on social participation and the willingness to pass it on, showing intergenerational differences: middle-aged and elderly people prefer traditional rituals, while young people prefer innovative forms. Scholar Qi Menghan emphasizes the key role of cultural education and family atmosphere in inheritance [1]. The completeness of genealogies and digital channels respectively affect the participation of different groups, and the clan network effect is significant in South China [11]. The willingness to pass on is driven by cultural identity, practical value and emotional connection, with significant regional differences. Intergenerational conflicts are prominent, young people have insufficient understanding of traditions, and middle-aged and elderly people face a gap in inheritance, in contrast <sup>[12]</sup> to scholar Liu Yuan's observation that clan culture maintains hometown ties. Economic incentives need to balance commercialization and cultural sanctity, scholar Xu Xiaofang points out that clan culture exerts influence<sup>[2]</sup> through the concept of filial piety and social capital. In the future, a balance needs to be sought between innovative forms of participation and the protection of core values to achieve the modern transformation of traditional culture.

### 4.2 Identification of Key Impact Factors

The inheritance of ancestral temple culture is influenced by multiple factors, mainly including institutional environment, subject interaction, cultural adaptation and technological infiltration. Policy guidance and clan self-adjustment jointly shape the inheritance trajectory, such as the "Three-Year Action for the Revitalization and Utilization of Cultural Heritage" in 2025 promoting the functional transformation of ancestral halls. The multi-subject game is obvious: clan elders maintain traditions, the government promotes publicization, businesses focus on development, and the younger group is more receptive to innovation. Cultural adaptation is manifested in the fusion of tradition and modernity, and the transformation of ancestral hall functions into complex spaces. Pan Juan pointed out that ancestral worship and

modern values can form a "parallel faith pattern"<sup>[8]</sup>. Technology brings innovations such as virtual sacrifices, but it also widens the intergenerational digital divide. Regional differences call for tailored measures, and in the future, attention should be paid to digital communication and intergenerational integration.

### 4.3 Verification of the Mechanism of Inheritance

The inheritance of ancestral hall culture follows a three-dimensional interactive mechanism of "institutional guarantee - subject coordination - symbol reconstruction". At the institutional level, local governments complement clan autonomy through policy support (such as inclusion in the list of revitalized cultural heritage), providing resource guarantees while respecting the autonomy of clans in ritual norms, achieving a balance between cultural protection and innovation. As Pan Juan points out, "Ancestral worship is the source of traditional family power,"<sup>[8]</sup> and the modern institutional environment perpetuates this core function through legitimacy.

In terms of subject synergy, clan elders, the government and market institutions form functional differentiation and resource integration: elders maintain ritual legitimacy, the government promotes facility transformation, and the market participates in symbol transformation. Multiple parties form synergy through consultation mechanisms, but the universality of the synergy model still needs to be further verified.

Symbol reconstruction follows the logic of "selective retention - creative transformation": the core sacrificial space retains its sanctity, and the ancillary space integrates new functions such as education and exhibition to achieve the modern expression of cultural genes. As Li Yajuan et al. put it, the concept of family in modern society is "more of an identification in terms of historical sentiment and cultural concept"<sup>[13]</sup>, and this emotional foundation underpins the effectiveness of symbolic reconstruction.

Intergenerational inheritance relies on a chain mechanism of "cultural contact - emotional identification - behavioral investment". Digital technologies (such as virtual reality) have enhanced the experience of the younger generation, but it is necessary to pay attention to

the moderation of technological intervention. In terms of economic operation, the "core area protection - peripheral area development" strategy is commonly adopted. Income is still mainly based on government subsidies and donations from relatives of the clan, with a low proportion of commercial income. Institutional constraints are needed to ensure transparent income distribution.

Research shows that inheritance effectiveness is closely related to local cultural ecology: traditional regions rely on bloodline networks, while urbanized regions recreate identity through public cultural services. In the future, there will be a need to focus on the long-term effects of digital inheritance, especially the ability to transform virtual participation into physical input.

## 5. Conclusions and Prospects

### 5.1 Research Conclusions and Practical Implications

This study shows that ancestral temple culture did not face "extinction" or "replacement" in the process of modernization, but achieved "creative transformation" through "functional adaptation" and "symbolic reconstruction". The empirical data revealed that the transformation presented three characteristics: functionally, from a single sacrificial site to a multi-faceted and complex cultural carrier, but the economic income was still highly dependent on the traditional path; In terms of symbolic cognition, there is a pattern of intergenerational and regional differentiation where "family identifiers" and "cultural landmarks" coexist; In terms of inheritance mechanisms, follow the interactive model of "institutional guarantee - subject synergy - symbol reconstruction", where the cultural identity and willingness to participate of the younger group are key variables. This transformation process provides important implications for the revitalization and utilization of traditional architectural heritage in the context of modernization.

### 5.2 Research Limitations and Future Prospects

This study has certain limitations. In terms of sample coverage, the proportion of respondents from South China is relatively high, which may affect the universality of the conclusion. Fang Fei et al. have pointed out that "the

misplacement and absence of power, class and capital in the process of spatial production"<sup>[9]</sup>, and such regional differences need to be further explored.

Methodologically, current measurements of cultural cognition rely mostly on self-assessment and lack objective behavioral data; Economic function analysis also fails to fully distinguish between urban and rural differences; Intergenerational studies focus more on behavior than mechanism, and in the future, hybrid methods and tracking designs will be needed to enhance the explanatory power.

Future research can be expanded in four directions: Theoretically, the mechanism of "modern transformation of cultural genes" should be analyzed in depth, especially the process by which traditional symbols are integrated into contemporary life through "memory screening - value revaluation", as pointed out by Li Yajuan. The contradiction between the closed nature of family culture and the openness of modern society provides an entry<sup>[13]</sup> point for this. In practice, comparisons between urban and rural areas and among regions should be strengthened to explore the differences in the effectiveness of different activation models. Technically, attention should be paid to the boundaries of digital empowerment and vigilance against the dissolution of cultural authenticity by instrumentalism. An assessment framework of "technology intervention - cultural integrity" can be constructed and the experience of overseas ancestral halls transforming into "transnational social support networks"<sup>[3]</sup> can be drawn upon. Policy measures should be tailored to the different stages of development of ancestral halls, such as establishing a "cultural value - economic vitality" matrix, implementing classified governance, and exploring ways to incorporate ancestral hall culture into the national education system.

In addition, intergenerational studies should delve deeply into the psychological mechanisms by which young people move from cultural exposure to emotional internalization, and economic analysis should focus on the balance between marketization and cultural purity in the cultural industry. Overall, research on the modern transformation of ancestral halls requires a combination of macro trends and micro mechanisms, and the use of multiple methods to advance together, in order to provide a solid theoretical basis for cultural practice in rural

revitalization.

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