

## Research on Sustainable Protection and Inheritance of Overseas Chinese Hometown Cultural Heritage: A Case Study of Xiangshan Ancient City

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### Abstract

Due to its unique nature, the protection and utilization of overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage face many practical challenges and ongoing debates. In the past, the protection of overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage primarily focused on the material aspect and achieved significant short-term results, but it was not sustainable in the long run. Building upon the shortcomings of three previous approaches, a transformation is proposed towards a sustainable mode. Using Xiangshan Ancient City as a case study, this research analyses the sustainable potential and impact of overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage from both the supply and demand sides. It considers both material and social aspects, covering three dimensions: people, objects, and events. Subsequently, sustainable protection and inheritance strategies are proposed, including 5 aspects.

**Keywords:** sustainability; overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage; protection and inheritance; Xiangshan Ancient City

### 1. Introduction

Overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage is a special category of Chinese regional cultural heritage, mainly located in the southeast coastal areas (including Guangdong, Fujian, Hainan and Zhejiang). Overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage not only has unique value at the material space level, but also carries special cultural connotations, endowed with profound humanistic spirit and national sentiment. The overall protection of Chinese historical and cultural heritage began in the early 1980s when the first batch of national historical and cultural cities were recognized, and after four generations, the protection and restriction of the material space level have gradually matured to a certain extent, and a relatively complete system for the protection and utilization of historical cities, towns, villages, and other areas has been formed. Therefore, when heritage protection enters the 4.0 stage in China, the regeneration and sustainable utilization of historical and cultural heritage have to be considered. Focusing on the dimension of overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage, based on years of research on the protection and utilization of historical and cultural cities in overseas Chinese hometowns, this research takes Xiangshan Ancient City in Zhongshan, Guangdong Province as an example to summarize new ideas for the sustainable protection and inheritance of cultural heritage in overseas Chinese hometowns, with a view to solving practical problems such as unclear property rights, resource mismatch, and inefficient utilization caused by neglecting sustainability in the past practices in overseas Chinese hometowns.

### 2. The specificity of overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage and the typicality of Xiangshan Ancient City

#### 2.1. Overseas Chinese culture and overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage

Overseas Chinese culture is formed in the life process of overseas Chinese in overseas and returned countries, and it is a comprehensive culture that integrates the culture of both their ancestral homeland and their host country [1]. This cultural phenomenon can be regarded as a cultural transformation process [2]. The elements of traditional culture are redefined and shaped

in the new geographical and cultural background, forming a cross-cultural and cross-border cultural construction. Overseas Chinese culture is one of the most important components of the cultural landscape in the southeast coast of China. Protecting and inheriting overseas Chinese culture is of far-reaching significance to maintain cultural diversity, strengthen cultural identity, preserve historical memory, and promote cultural exchanges and social cohesion in overseas Chinese hometowns.

Overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage carries the connotation of overseas Chinese culture and reflects the social activities, social relations and ideology of overseas Chinese, and is a branch of regional cultural heritage [3]. The immovable overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage is mainly formed when the overseas Chinese promote the construction of cities and towns, such as overseas Chinese houses, factories, schools, hospitals, parks, etc. The movable overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage is mainly formed when the overseas Chinese participate in political, economic and cultural activities, as well as in their daily lives, such as the genealogy of the overseas Chinese and the related documents, manuscripts and canonical works, etc. The intangible overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage includes the lifestyles, religious beliefs, folk customs, and values of overseas Chinese.

From the urban and rural spatial dimension, the overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage hometown is mainly distributed in historical cities and traditional villages. In recent years, the overseas Chinese hometown areas have paid more attention to rural revitalization, so previous research has focused more on traditional villages in overseas Chinese hometowns, with insufficient attention paid to the study of ancient cities in these areas. As the spatial pattern, industrial structure, land use and population differentiation of the ancient cities are quite different from those of traditional villages, whether the research conclusions can be applied still needs further exploration. In addition, the traditional protection and utilization model limited to material space in the past has shown remarkable results in a certain space and time range, but this effect is limited and unsustainable. This mode relies heavily on government finance and ignores the subjectivity of private forces [4], thus losing the long-term sustainable power of cultural heritage protection and inheritance in overseas Chinese hometowns. In conclusion, this research takes the ancient city in overseas Chinese hometowns as the main research object, and analyses its dynamic protection and inheritance based on the sustainable perspective.

## *2.2. The Great Xiangshan Cultural Circle and Xiangshan Ancient City*

### *2.2.1. Xiangshan Culture and the Great Xiangshan Cultural Circle*

From a geographic perspective, the Xiangshan culture refers to a special regional culture formed in Zhuhai, Zhongshan and Macao, where the history and culture of these three areas have the same roots, forming the Great Xiangshan Cultural Circle. The conceptual connotation of Xiangshan culture is intertwined with but different from "Lingnan culture" and "Pearl River culture", etc. The core and soul of Xiangshan culture is the fusion saltwater and freshwater civilizations. On one hand, centrally reflects the cultural characteristics of the three major ethnic groups in Lingnan culture, namely, Guangdong, Fujian and Hakka. On the other hand, as a typical immigrant society constantly absorbing foreign cultural inputs, multiple cultures collided and exchanged, transformed and upgraded, and demonstrated the cultural spirit of openness and communion. The social and cultural network of the Xiangshan region is intricate but strong and powerful, laying down the tone of the highly open and inclusive Great Xiangshan Cultural Circle.

### *2.2.2. Typical significance of Xiangshan Ancient City*

Xiangshan Ancient City is located in Zhongshan, Guangdong Province, which is the hometown of the great man Dr. Sun Yat-sen and was approved as a National Historical and Cultural City in 2011. In the 22nd year of Shaoxing in the Southern Song Dynasty (1152 AD),

Xiangshan was established as a county, and its original territory included the present-day Zhongshan, Zhuhai, Macao, as well as parts of Panyu District in Guangzhou and Shunde District in Foshan. The scope of Xiangshan Ancient City is from Yixian Lake in the north to Baishi Creek in the south, from Lianfeng Mountain in the east to Shiqi River in the west, a total of 2.42 square kilometers (Fig. 1).

Since ancient times, the Xiangshan region has been one of the most active areas in China in terms of foreign trade and immigration, and it is also one of the most concentrated areas in China in terms of the distribution of overseas Chinese. Since the establishment of Xiangshan County, Xiangshan Ancient City as the birthplace of Xiangshan culture, has always been the political and economic center of Xiangshan region, and also retains a large number of overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage. Therefore, this research takes Xiangshan Ancient City as a typical case, and analyses the protection and inheritance paths and strategies of overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage for sustainability.

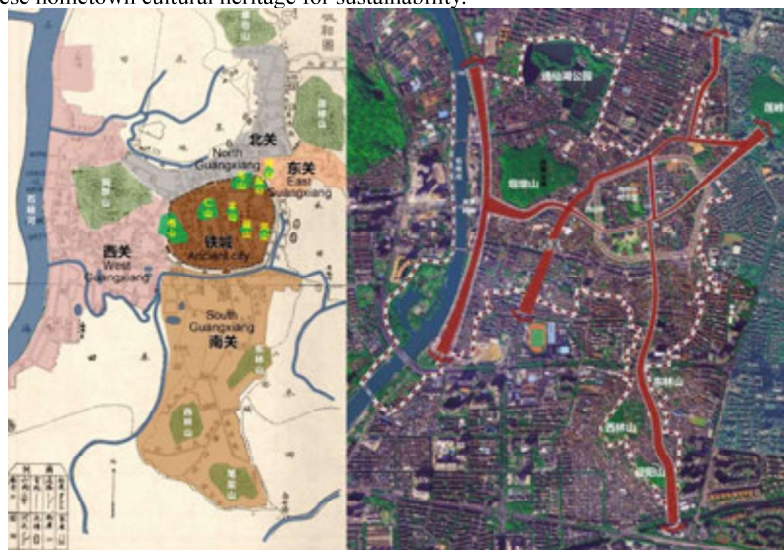


Fig.1. The scope of Xiangshan Ancient City

### 3. Realistic dilemmas and sustainable transformation in the protection of overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage

#### 3.1. Previous coping models

In the actual protection practice, the interests of all parties are often intertwined and complicated, which makes the implementation effect and theoretical research diverge from each other [4], causing a wave of reflection on the heritage protection in recent years. According to the protection route of the overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage hometown for more than 40 years since China's reform and opening-up, three modes could be summarized (Tab. 1). One is the traditional mode (Mode T), which takes the sample type and static protection as the guide to fix the overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage in a certain historical period and cultural form; The second is the destruction mode (Mode D), which tends to follow economic interests and carry out low-quality renovation, demolition and construction; The third is the passive mode (Mode P), which maintains the original state but allows its overall decline and the people to live in poverty. There are certain practical problems in the actual implementation of the above three coping modes, which leads to the difficulty in reconciling the contradictions

between the "reformers" and the "fixers" involved in the protection and utilization of the overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage [5].

Tab.1. Previous three coping modes

Mode	Characteristics	Advantages	Problems
Mode T	specimen-based, static protection	Apply to a small number of original buildings with specimen value, so that they become the original material carriers of cultural memory.	Extreme dependence on local government finances has resulted in a degree of resource mismatch.
Mode D	Low-quality renovation, major demolition	In the short term, it will stimulate local economic development, increase local financial income and slightly improve the quality of the human environment.	Irreversible damage will be caused to heritage resources; a large amount of "antique garbage" may be produced, leading to excessive commercialization.
Mode P	General decline, a mass impoverishment	In the short term, heritage resources can be preserved without burdening local revenues.	Allowing precious heritage resources to decline will result in the disappearance of historical values, the loss of traditional craftsmanship and local cultural memories.

### 3.2. Realistic dilemmas and sustainable transformation

After more than 40 years of practical exploration on the protection and utilization of overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage, it is obviously unrealistic to adopt the T model to completely protect and repair, which also imposes a burden on government finance and regional development [6]. In the process of improving the system construction, supervision and control of historical and cultural heritage in China, in recent years, Mode D has also been alerted by all regions, gradually rectified and banned. Therefore, in the current context, the hometown of overseas Chinese is forced to adopt Mode P to passively cope with the large amount of overseas Chinese housing resources. Based on the above background, the author proposes that the sustainable protection and inheritance of overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage hometown should be considered in the protection 4.0 stage. With the help of the application of new technology and institutional construction, changes should be realistically controlled rather than prevented from evolution, so as to achieve a dynamic balance between cultural inheritance and social needs in the process of protection and utilization, and form a sustainable mode (Mode S). Finally, an innovative model led by the Mode S and driven by Mode T will be formed, and this change in the concept of sustainable heritage protection will also become the key to breaking through the bottleneck and creating value in the future of overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage protection and inheritance.

## 4. Exploration of sustainable protection and inheritance practices of overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage: taking Xiangshan Ancient City as an example

### 4.1. Paths of sustainable protection and inheritance

According to the above analysis, it can be seen that the effectiveness of the static specimen-type heritage protection mode is extremely limited, while the sustainability-oriented heritage protection and inheritance is continuous, stable and broadly inclusive. In order to solve the practical dilemma, this research takes Xiangshan Ancient City as an example to conduct an empirical study, and analyses the sustainable potentials and sustainable impacts of overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage from both the supply side and the demand side, respectively, and puts forward the corresponding strategies of sustainable protection and inheritance (Fig. 2).

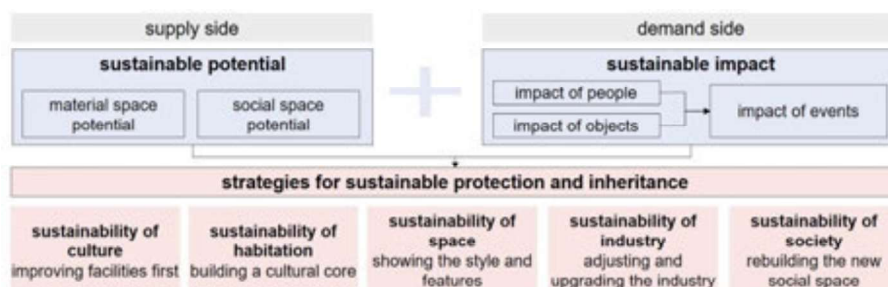


Fig.2. Path of sustainable protection and inheritance of overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage

#### 4.2. Analysis of sustainable potential

Based on the comprehensive consideration of both material space and human needs, this research analyses the sustainable potential of overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage from two levels. The potential of material space is "tangible", while the potential of social space is "intangible", which are closely intertwined and intuitively oriented to the sustainable preservation and inheritance strategy of overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage.

##### 4.2.1. Material space potential

###### 1. The integrity of the city pattern

"Xiangshan County Local Gazetteer" records the construction of rammed earth city walls during the Song Dynasty, which is also the earliest record of the city construction in Xiangshan Ancient City. Based on the street and alley names listed in the "Zhongshan Gazetteer" during the Song Dynasty, combined with the length of the city wall recorded in the "Xiangshan County Local Gazetteer" (approximately 1425 meters), it is estimated that the location of the Song Dynasty city wall was around the vicinity of today's Renhouli, Shoushanli, and Qixing-Chudi. (Fig. 3).

In the 26th year of the Ming Dynasty (1393 AD), Chen Yu, the defender of Xiangshan County, expanded the city on the basis of the old county seat and built a new brick castle, while the earthen castle built in the Song Dynasty was changed into a military camp. Since then, it had been repaired several times. Compared with the Song Dynasty, the perimeter of the wall during the Ming Dynasty expanded from about 1425 meters to about 2117 meters; west half of the wall location can be calibrated according to the 1933, 1959 Xiangshan County map, the east half of the wall can be identified according to the 1911 Xiangshan County map, presumably the location of the Ming wall in today's Pasha Street, Xiaojiaochang street, Gongjian Alley, Zhian Street, Changtai Street, Fangta Street, and Shanghebo (Fig. 3). There were four gates in total. The south gate was called Fumin Gate, which was located approximately between the intersections of Zhian Street and Changtai Street; the west gate was Dengying Gate, situated roughly between the foot of the Xishan Mountain and the intersection of Minzu Road; the east gate was Qixiu Gate, situated near the post office on Sun Wen Middle Road; and the north gate was Gongchen Gate, located approximately at the Banyan Tree intersection of Taiping Road and Gongchen Road.



Fig.3. Speculation of the location of the city wall

### 2. The uniqueness of the ancient cityscape

Due to the integration of functions such as trade and education, four closely connected areas (Guanxiang) - east, west, south, and north - gradually formed outside the ancient city, maintaining close ties with the main city. These four Guanxiang areas are vast, covering a much larger area than the main city, thus forming the unique city layout of "small city and large Guanxiang" in Xiangshan Ancient City (Fig. 4).

During the continuous development of Xiangshan Ancient City, the four Guanxiang areas gradually evolved into urban spaces with different functions and characteristics. The West Guanxiang embodies the characteristics of commercial culture, the South Guanxiang represents the clan culture, the East Guanxiang showcases the educational culture, and the North Guanxiang manifests the folk culture. The division of labor and functions among these four Guanxiang areas complements the main city.



Fig.4. The layout of "one main city and four Guanxiang areas"

### 3. The wisdom of urban planning that harmonizes with nature

The site of the ancient city is located in the north of Wugui Mountain, near the river, which is a natural harbor and can avoid the wind and waves. It is located to the east of Qi River but not close to it, with Yandun Mountain and Lianfeng Mountain to the north, reflecting the practical principles in "Guanzi". The terrain slopes from north to south, with the Jiuqu River

winding past the southern outskirts, creating an overall pattern of "facing the sun and backed by shade."

In addition to the "Jiuqu River Surrounding the City", the "Seven-Star Peaks Guarding Renshan Mountain" is an even more unique landscape pattern that existed since the inception of the city's construction. According to the "Xiangshan County Gazetteer," the selection of the city's location was based on the formation of the Big Dipper from ancient Chinese astronomical systems, embodying the simple planning ideology of imitating the heavens and following the laws of nature. There were originally 8 mountains within areas, and the landscape pattern was basically intact. Yingshan Mountain, Fushan Mountain, and Phoenix Mountain have been flattened, while Shoushan Mountain and Yingshan Mountain are now the locations of the Radio and Television University. Renshan Mountain is the site of the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall, and Yueshan Mountain and Xishan Mountain still serve as mountain parks (Fig. 5).



Fig.5. The location of "Seven-Star Peaks Guarding Renshan Mountain"

#### 4. The exemplary nature of modern construction

On April 15, 1925, Xiangshan was renamed Zhongshan in honor of Dr. Sun Yat-sen. Under the convergence of Chinese and Western cultures, Zhongshan has developed a relatively complete urban planning concept, especially during the period when Zhongshan was recognized as a national "model county" in 1929, which supported its large-scale construction and renovation campaign, both economically and politically. Zhongshan's campaign was spearheaded by the plan of "building new roads and constructing the county town", which built the urban skeleton of modern Zhongshan city. As the county town of Zhongshan city, Xiangshan Ancient City has preserved the complete arcade streets and public facilities built during the Republic of China period (Fig. 6), which centrally reflects the construction achievements of the "model county" during the Republic of China era.

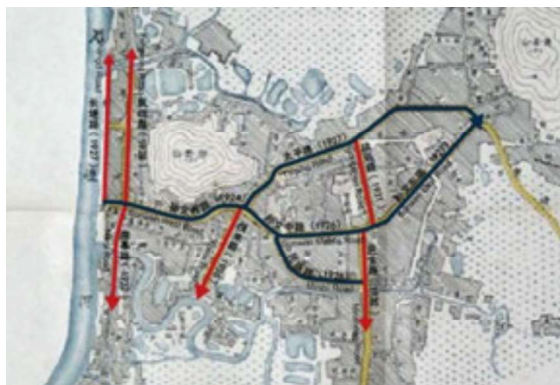


Fig.6. Construction time and location of 10 roads during the Republic of China

### 5. The exemplary character of the overseas Chinese hometown architecture

Under the combined influence of the traditional culture of the ancestral homeland and the overseas culture of the expatriate countries, the architecture in Xiangshan Ancient City also exhibits a unique fusion of traditional Chinese style and Western and South Asian styles. The proportion of architectures from the Republic of China and before is about 26%, including towers, temples, pawnshops, traditional dwellings (Lingnan houses, bamboo tube houses) from the Qing Dynasty and before, as well as schools, churches, theaters, hospitals, factories, libraries, arcade shops, merchant houses and western-style dwellings from the Republic of China period (Fig. 7).

The architectural styles in overseas Chinese hometowns are diverse, and the most representative architectural styles are Western-style mansions, arcades, etc. The Western-style mansions often appear in the form of multi-story overseas Chinese residences or cottages, with two stories being the most common, and some extending to three or four stories. The arcade buildings are narrow and deep inside, resembling bamboo tubes, and are commonly known as "bamboo tube houses." They often appear in a single plane form, or in combinations of two or more. The facade along the street usually includes Manchu windows, colored glass windows, balcony railings with elaborate patterns, elaborate pediments, etc. The roof often combines a flat roof with a pitched roof.



Fig.7. Style and elements of overseas Chinese hometown architecture

#### 4.2.2. *Social space potential*

##### 1. The leadership of celebrity culture

Since the Ming and Qing dynasties, Xiangshan Ancient City has nurtured many talents due to its special geographical location and cultural and historical environment. A group of modern celebrities in Zhongshan, represented by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, had changed the course of Chinese history and promoted the modernization of China. For example, Zheng Guanying, the earliest theorist, enlightenment thinker, and industrialist with a complete reformist ideology in modern China; Zheng Zaoru, the first Chinese ambassador to a foreign country; Rong Hong, the "father of modern overseas students" in China and the pioneer of Chinese compradors, all of them had a significant impact on Dr. Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary thoughts.

##### 2. The richness of Xiangshan culture

Under the evolution of the vicissitudes of life, the local Lingnan culture has fused with the Central Plains culture from immigrants, the Western culture and the Southeast Asian culture from overseas, developing in harmony and coexistence, thus forming the unique Xiangshan culture. The diverse folk culture, the hybrid overseas Chinese culture integrating Chinese and Western elements, the commercial culture that connects the world, the philanthropic culture of universal love and mutual assistance, and the illustrious celebrity culture are all important components of Xiangshan culture. The modern openness and enlightenment of thoughts have made Xiangshan culture a trendsetter, with characteristics of diversity, inclusiveness, openness, and leadership, and profound modern value.

#### 4.3. *Analysis of sustainable impact*

The sustainable impact of overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage is intuitively reflected in the "material" aspect of material space and the "people" aspect of social space. Meanwhile, the spatial composition of "material" and the complex and diverse factors of "people" directly affect the implementation of "events" [7]. Therefore, based on comprehensive consideration of material elements and human needs, this research analyses the most urgent and direct influencing factors for the sustainable protection and inheritance of overseas Chinese cultural heritage from the three perspectives of people, objects, and events.

##### 4.3.1. *The impact of people*

As more and more attention is being paid to historical and cultural heritage, the overseas Chinese hometowns, especially the majority of areas within and around ancient cities, have gradually become "regularized" and focused on the material space level [8]. Some historical buildings that have been officially recognized have been restored, a large number of old buildings and illegal structures that do not conform to the traditional style have been demolished, and many alleys and lanes have been gradually renovated. This has achieved a certain degree of environmental improvement and enhancement of the overall style of the ancient cities.

In the past, the protection and utilization of overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage generally focused on the transformation of the material space level, but neglected the governance of the social space level, which also directly led to the gradual loss of the "social autonomy" of the civil power in the process of participating in the protection of overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage [9]. In the 1980s and 1990s, for example, many overseas Xiangshan groups set up their own social organizations, returned to the ancient city to visit their roots, financed the renovation of their ancestral houses, built public services, and assisted those with the same surname who had difficulties in their lives, but such positive initiatives are now

diminishing. This also indicates that in the past, the bottom-up, self-organized private forces of the overseas Chinese townships in the process of formalizing the protection have been exhausted, the platform for private forces to shine is shrinking dramatically. Due to the lack of capital or formal authority, private forces can only be eliminated in the game with government entities.

#### 4.3.2. *The impact of objects*

architectural heritage in overseas Chinese hometowns is a very important part of the overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage. Among them, the protection of Overseas Chinese houses is currently the most tangled in the protection practice. Overseas Chinese houses refer to buildings whose property owners are overseas Chinese, foreign nationals of Chinese origin, returned overseas Chinese, or relatives of overseas Chinese. Although a large number of overseas Chinese houses are privately owned, the property owners, due to their long-term residence overseas, are unable to fully enjoy the right to possess and use these houses [10]. And with the passage of time, it is even impossible to get in touch with the property owner and his or her descendants. Overseas Chinese houses exhibit characteristics such as the separation of property owners from their properties in different countries due to the dispersal of property rights, as well as complex property inheritance. The unclear property rights can also lead to uncertainty in rights, responsibilities, and interests, triggering a series of property issues [11]. Due to the complexity of property rights, the government's efforts in protection work are often hampered. Although these overseas Chinese houses possess distinctive value and characteristics, they often face issues such as long-term vacancy, disrepair over the years, dilapidation, potential collapse hazards, and poor surrounding environments.

According to existing data, the total floor area of overseas Chinese houses within Xiangshan Ancient City reaches 134000 square meters, accounting for approximately 7.7% (Fig. 8). Most of these overseas Chinese houses were built during the Republic of China era and are an important part of the traditional architecture within the ancient city. Approximately 7% of these overseas Chinese houses are classified as protected buildings, about 31% are recommended for protection, and the remaining approximately 62% are traditional-styled architecture. However, due to disrepair over the years, many of these overseas Chinese houses have sustained varying degrees of damage and collapse, posing significant safety hazards. About 38% of them fall into the third and fourth quality categories. The ancient city is rich in overseas Chinese housing resources, but currently, most of the personnel responsible for their protection are elderly and officials, who can only conduct routine maintenance and cleaning of a small number of key houses. The protection and revitalization of overseas Chinese houses is urgent and requires immediate investment in funds, manpower, and intellectual resources.



Fig.8. Distribution of overseas Chinese housing

#### *4.3.3. The impact of events*

During the period of China's reform and opening-up, Zhongshan was at the forefront of institutional reform, opening up to the outside world, and attracting investment, etc. Relying on the "three to one complementary" industry, Zhongshan has become a representative of the development of cities in Guangdong and even in the whole country, and has become one of the "Four Little Tigers of Guangdong". As the political, economic and cultural center of Zhongshan, Xiangshan Ancient City has produced famous brands and has a good industrial foundation.

However, at present, the distribution of industries within the ancient city is relatively chaotic, and cannot effectively combine with the historical and cultural space, and the development of industrial integration is insufficient. The development and utilization of overseas Chinese cultural resources failed to form a whole industry chain, branding production and management, such as overseas Chinese architectural resources, overseas Chinese specialties and food, failed to be transformed into differentiated and competitive quality cultural and tourism resources. At the same time, Xiangshan Ancient City also has some common problems faced by other ancient cities, which further lead to the obstruction of industrial development, such as the quality of the human environment needs to be upgraded, the lack of display of core cultural characteristics, the aging population and the lack of vitality in the development of the area.

#### *4.4. Strategies for sustainable protection and inheritance*

The above research analyses the sustainable potential and impact of Xiangshan Ancient City from the supply and demand sides. Based on this, this research focuses on sustainability with "people" as the core, considering both material space and social space, and develops a strategy for the sustainable protection and inheritance of overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage from five dimensions: culture, habitation, space, industry, and society.

##### *4.4.1. Sustainability of culture*

With the change of history, Macao has become a special administrative region and Zhuhai has become a special economic zone, therefore, under the new situation, Xiangshan Ancient City should adhere to and inherit the traditional elements of the Xiangshan culture and make it more colorful [12], and to make the Great Xiangshan Cultural Circle more vibrant and powerful.

At the regional level, to build a regional cultural framework of "one core, three centers, one belt, one road and many points" (Fig. 9), and to shape a regionally competitive and unique cultural image. At the ancient city level, the first priority is to maintain the traditional spatial layout (Fig. 9); the second is to clarify the cultural heritage resources of the ancient cities and form a relatively complete system for cultural heritage exhibition and utilization (Fig. 10); and the third is to focus on promoting the protection and utilization of the architectural heritage in overseas Chinese hometowns and continue to promote the protection and restoration of overseas Chinese houses.



Fig.9. Spatial pattern of Xiangshan Ancient City



Fig.10. Display system of cultural symbols throughout the city

#### 4.4.2. Sustainability of habitation

According to the past practice of visiting and researching, the residents in the ancient cities in overseas Chinese hometowns often do not comment on the heritage protection work, and even have a certain degree of resistance, the most critical factor is that the heritage protection and utilization work has not been carried out with the consideration of solving the pain points of people's livelihoods, especially the simultaneous promotion of the infrastructure and the enhancement of the living environment. Take Xiangshan Ancient City as an example, it needs to be upgraded in terms of land structure, population development, facility supply, public space, municipal transportation and living environment.

Therefore, in order to realize the sustainability of Xiangshan Ancient City, the protection work should also take into account the improvement of the living environment, which generally includes six aspects: infrastructure upgrading, improvement of public service facilities, decongestion of non-ancient city functions, governance of backstreets and alleys, classified renovation of buildings, and restoration of landscape environment. Guided by the principle of "comprehensive improvement" and centered on "people" [13], priority should be given to facilities, leaving no weaknesses behind.

#### 4.4.3. Sustainability of space

By locally restoring the ecological and cultural space of the historical Xiangshan Ancient City [14], we aim to promote functional transformation and build an integral system of highlighting the mountains, brightening the water, constructing the city, expanding the lake, and rejuvenating the streets (Fig. 11).

Highlighting the mountains means to protect the circular texture pattern of the Yandun Mountain, restore historical memories, transform the three entrance spaces of Yandun Mountain, restore the park by combining with the Kanggong Temple site, and construct a cultural and creative arts block along the bank of Qijiang River and at the foot of Yandun Mountain.

Brightening the water refers to the restoration of the Jiuqu River, the improvement of the landscape on both sides, and the revitalization of Zhongshan's first electric plant (Diguang Electric Light Plant). We will renovate Yonganfang to form a refined and lively block characterized by water town style.

Constructing the city means to take the ring road of the Ming Dynasty city wall of the Xiangshan Ancient City as the starting point to renovate the seven historical areas along the route.

Expanding the lake means to relocate Guangming Market and move wholesale and logistics functions to other areas. The Yixian Lake will be expanded, and the Hougang Stream will be restored to connect with the Qijiang River and the Yixian Lake, forming a diversified space of water dock.

Revitalizing the streets means proposing plans for facade renovation and business updates, taking the arcade-style streets such as Sunwen West Road and Taiping Road as examples. The goal is to create an external showcase for the historical urban area and foster an open-air living district with the charm of urban life.



Fig.11. Overall style and feature system of Xiangshan Ancient City

#### 4.4.4. Sustainability of industry

There are a large number of vacant public houses and overseas Chinese houses in Xiangshan Ancient City, so on the basis of resource mapping, repair and remediation, further consideration should be given to the revitalization and utilization of these architectural heritage. The promotion of rent through the upgrading of the industry can not only improve the reality of insufficient funds for the protection of heritage, but also help to promote the localization of employment, so that manpower, intelligence and capital will flow back to the local area [15], thus restoring the vitality and attractiveness of the ancient city.

Firstly, promote the reuse of public housing. First of all, for vacant public housing, such as the former municipal party committee building, workers' cultural palace, Sihao Hotel, Hongqi Cinema, Zhongshan Department Store, etc., we will conduct unified planning and introduce new industry forms. In addition, we will promote the construction of demonstration areas for the utilization of public housing, select public housing clusters to collect and store sandwich houses, adjacent houses, etc., and promote the overall renovation and reuse of contiguous public housing. Finally, we will implement the relocation of government-subsidized housing in a distributed manner.

Secondly, improve the current industry type. At present, the overall industry type in Xiangshan Ancient City is relatively low-end, especially the Sunwen West Road, which is the most concentrated historical resources and the most prominent historical value characteristics in the ancient city. At the same time, the vacancy rate of the second and third floors and the rooftop is very high, and the business activity is not enough for most of the arcade streets in the ancient city. In view of the above analysis, the promotion of the industry type of Xiangshan Ancient City should give priority to the development of cultural industry types and time-honored brands, so as to form the complex industry model.

#### *4.4.5. Sustainability of society*

The protection and inheritance of overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage for sustainability emphasizes the construction of overseas Chinese social space, pays attention to the intricate but powerful social network relations in overseas Chinese society, strengthens the emotional connection of overseas Chinese, their descendants and residents to the overseas Chinese region and overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage, and reconstructs the "new social space".

One of the most prominent cultural features of Xiangshan region is its large number of overseas Chinese and returned overseas Chinese, numerous overseas Chinese-funded enterprises, numerous overseas Chinese donation projects, many pioneers of modern and contemporary overseas Chinese, and a wealth of cultural heritage related to overseas Chinese [16]. From the perspective of social space, to achieve sustainable protection and inheritance of overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage within Xiangshan Ancient City, there are three core strategies.

Firstly, "gathering overseas Chinese through history" means fully understanding the uniqueness of overseas Chinese culture and deeply grasping its special spiritual connotations and characteristics of the times. Secondly, "using overseas Chinese as a bridge" involves promoting the construction of a network of building owners in overseas Chinese hometowns, leveraging new technologies, methods, and platforms to establish a relatively complete network system for building owners in overseas Chinese hometowns, and resolving the conflict of scattered property rights of architectural heritage. Thirdly, "nurturing overseas Chinese with overseas Chinese" involves organizing activities, strengthening propaganda and exchanges, and consolidating the hearts and strengths of overseas Chinese to attract their investments. This enhances the local identity of overseas Chinese and their descendants towards their hometowns. Meanwhile, it provides residents of overseas Chinese hometowns with a "stage" for social activities to make a contribution [17], bridging the trust gap between residents, between residents and the government, and strengthening their sense of belonging, identity, and cultural confidence towards the ancient city.

## **5. Conclusions**

This research explores the protection and inheritance of overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage from the perspective of sustainability, considering both material and social dimensions. This shift in approach is a reflection on the practical difficulties faced by the

protection of cultural heritage in the past. It not only enhances and improves the protection system for overseas Chinese hometown cultural heritage, but also represents a historic leap and transformation from traditional protection methods in China. Focusing on practical research in the protection of cultural heritage, although this research cannot be directly translated into relevant theoretical methods, it still provides a certain reference and basis for overseas Chinese hometowns that are currently facing difficulties in practical protection and utilization.

#### Appendices

Supplementary information to this article can be found online at [http://www.zs.gov.cn/zswgxj/gkmlpt/content/2/2339/mpost\\_2339685.html#964](http://www.zs.gov.cn/zswgxj/gkmlpt/content/2/2339/mpost_2339685.html#964)

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