

Etiquette and Customs Interaction and Media Convergence in Huizhou: A Perspective on Rural Cultural Revitalization

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Abstract Huizhou etiquette and customs culture, as a significant element of China's rural cultural system that integrates ethical profundity with the warmth of everyday life, embodies the collective memory and cultural identity of the regional community. In the context of social transformation characterized by informatization and globalization, the social structures and spatial domains that underpin traditional etiquette and customs are undergoing disruption. Focusing on Huizhou region as a case study, this paper investigates the transmission mechanisms and paths of identity reconstruction associated with etiquette and customs culture within the framework of media convergence. The research is conducted at three levels. First, at the symbolic catalyst level, the refinement of symbols and contextual translation facilitate the dynamic regeneration of Huizhou etiquette and customs symbols and reactivation of cultural significance. Second, at the media dimension level, a multi-dimensional communication system encompassing “the digital, social, and community layers” is constructed. Third, at the field identity level, the study analyzes how media convergence reorganizes material, social, and spiritual spaces to promote the reshaping of cultural identity among individuals and communities. Research indicates that the integration of digitalization, interactivity, and spatialization has transformed Huizhou etiquette and customs from static cultural heritage into a dynamic identity system, thereby facilitating a cultural cycle that “originating from the people and returning to the people”.

Keywords Huizhou etiquette and customs, Media convergence, Symbolic catalyst, Cultural identity, Rural revitalization

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In real-world contexts, material, social, and technical cultural heritages are comparatively easier to preserve. However, certain memory-oriented cultural heritages, owing to their profound dependence on social structures and cultural contexts, are challenging to transmit and revitalize in a substantive way. With the transformation of social structures and the disintegration of spatial domains of inheritance, the erosion of collective memory has become an inevitable phenomenon^[1]. Huizhou etiquette and customs culture constitutes a vital component of China's rural cultural framework, integrating profound ethical values with the conviviality of daily life, and embodying the collective memory and cultural identity of the local community. This study begins with an examination of the current conditions in Huizhou and explores the manifestations of Huizhou etiquette and customs from an individual practical perspective. It proposes strategies for the preservation of Huizhou etiquette and customs from the perspective of rural revitalization and seeks to enhance the modes of expression of these cultural practices through the lens of technological inclusivity. The principle of “originating from the people and returning to the people” represents the optimal trajectory for the culture of etiquette and customs.

1 Development, evolution and dissemination revolution of Huizhou etiquette and customs culture from the perspective of rural cultural revitalization

1.1 Development context and artistic features of Huizhou etiquette and customs culture

Huizhou etiquette and customs, rooted in Zhu Xi's *Family Rituals*, incorporate the distinctive geographical environment of Huizhou into the Confucian etiquette and customs characteristic of southern Anhui's clan culture. This integration fosters Huizhou's lasting reputation as “the birthplace of the Cheng-Zhu School” and as “the southern lands of Zou and Lu (ancient cultural hubs in Shandong)”. Huizhou etiquette and customs can be classified into two categories: normative etiquette and customs that regulate individual behavior in everyday secular life, and culturally transmitted etiquette and customs that govern clan interactions within ceremonial contexts. The overall characteristics are as follows: (i) pronounced regional distinctiveness. Ancient Huizhou was organized according to clan lineages. As Cheng Qieshuo noted in his *Spring Sail Journey Record*, each village was inhabited by a single clan, with no intermingling of other

surnames. The villages of ancient Huizhou possess long histories. For example, the Wang clan of Pingyang and the Cheng clan of Guangping migrated to Huizhou as early as the Han Dynasty, leading to the development of relatively well-established cultural traditions. The County Annals document that “among the various surnames in the county, Cheng and Wang are the oldest and most populous clans; approximately half of their members held official positions within the region and cherished its clear and beautiful mountains and waters, leading them to reside there for extended periods to raise their descendants.” Consequently, Huizhou etiquette and customs preserve the distinctiveness of its villages and the exclusivity of the region. (ii) Strong disciplinary and regulatory functions. Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism emphasized “the veneration of ancestors and respect for clan elders”. Clans employed cultural symbols, including clan regulations, communal property, and portrait inscriptions, to integrate various aspects of clan members' lives. Historian Qian Daxin put forward that “genealogy constitutes a branch of historiography, as the records of individual families are inherently connected to the broader history of the nation.” Therefore, the scope of Huizhou etiquette and customs, and disciplinary

practices was exceptionally broad, encompassing normative behaviors such as “proper education”, “diligent household management”, and “industrious labor”. (iii) Profound ethical thought. Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism emphasized “the cultivation of virtue as a means to guide the populace”. It valued not only the cultural transmission of “clan governance through etiquette” within ceremonial contexts but also placed greater emphasis on “self-restraint through etiquette” and “the attainment of its perfection” in secular life. Consequently, whether in “governmental settings” or “daily life”, the existence of the Huizhou people was deeply shaped by disciplinary practices and value orientations. These include the ethical principle that “virtue takes precedence over talent”, which promoted prudent behavior and an understanding of appropriate limits; the value-based admonition that “those who judge right and wrong often cause discord”, thereby encouraging filial piety and friendship; and the neighborly etiquette exemplified by “yielding to those bearing heavy burdens or ascending slopes”, which fostered acts of neighbors care. All discourse practices, shaped by “etiquette” and “customs” that are simultaneously similar and diverse, as well as heterogeneous yet structurally analogous, have collectively contributed to the formation of the identity recognition among the people of Huizhou. (iv) “Top-down” hierarchical sequence integration. During the author’s fieldwork in Jixi County, it was observed that grand sacrificial ceremonies are conducted on numerous significant occasions, including the Spring Festival, Lantern Festival, Spring Equinox, Qingming Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, Chongyang Festival, Autumnal Equinox, and New Year’s Eve. The hierarchical structure of these ceremonies is distinctly delineated. Roles such as the chief offerer (chief priest), assisting offerer (sub-priest), lead chant master, assisting chant master, wine steward, assistant wine steward, ritual guide, assistant ritual guide, prayer reader, ritual assistant, among others, each fulfill specific duties. Each position adheres to strict responsibilities and a defined order, reflecting the historical heritage and cultural identity of the Huizhou people.

1.2 Dissemination characteristics and practical predicaments of Huizhou etiquette and customs culture under media changes

At various historical stages, the dissemination media, content forms, and social functions of Huizhou etiquette and customs culture have exhibited distinct characteristics. In traditional

society, tangible media such as ancestral halls, tablet inscriptions, and family precepts served to propagate etiquette and customs and to transmit collective memory. In contemporary society, characterized by digital media, the dissemination of etiquette and customs is progressively transitioning toward networking, visualization, and reproduction within virtual spaces. However, the renewal of media forms has not automatically led to the continuation of identity. Under the combined effects of “accelerated information flow” and “spatial fragmentation”, contemporary Huizhou villages face significant challenges, including “limited comprehension”, “low recognition”, and “difficulties in promoting the dissemination” of etiquette and customs culture. Consequently, the “vitality” and “authenticity” of these etiquette and customs are at risk of erosion.

2 Optimization of the path of etiquette and customs interaction and media convergence from the perspective of rural revitalization

Drawing upon the research framework of cultural semiotics theory concerning “symbols, texts, and symbol domains”^[2], a field investigation was undertaken in rural areas, regarded as micro-units embodying a fusion of etiquette and customs culture. This study employed an analytical approach encompassing “symbolic morphemes, media dimensions, and spatial fields” to examine the representational forms and dissemination mechanisms of etiquette and customs interactions grounded in the geographical characteristics of Huizhou. Furthermore, it synthesized universal mechanisms underlying cultural production, thereby offering methods and pathways for global cultural research.

2.1 Symbolic catalyst: reactivation of cultural significance

The cultural dissemination of Huizhou etiquette and customs can be regarded as a multi-level flow and re-encoding system of symbols. With the evolution of media structures, the traditional symbols underpinning Huizhou etiquette and customs—such as ancestral halls, memorial archways, family precepts, sacrificial ceremonies, clothing patterns, and local folk songs—exhibit a characteristic dual structure, encompassing both “internal consolidation and external expansion”^[3]. On the one hand, it regards “etiquette” as the core value system, embodying the universal ethical order inherent in Confucian culture; on the other hand, it considers “custom” as its ontological practice, reflecting

local, emotional, and experiential cultural expressions. This dual mechanism endows Huizhou etiquette and customs with both cross-regional significance and distinctive regional symbolic representations.

In the context of media convergence, the catalyst process of symbols must transition from “static preservation” to “dynamic translation”, thereby allowing traditional symbols to re-enter the public communication system and revitalize their cultural significance. The construction of the symbolic media pathway system should encompass the following aspects. (i) Selection and refinement of symbols. It is essential to identify “high-energy meaning units” within the symbol system, including core cultural symbols such as loyalty, filial piety, chastity and righteousness, farming and learning as a family tradition, as well as ancestor worship and veneration. These symbols should be reinterpreted through multimodal forms—such as digital imagery, spatial installations, and interactive exhibitions—to enhance cultural recognition and dissemination. (ii) Context translation and situation reconstruction. Through media convergence, traditional symbols are integrated into contemporary communication contexts. By utilizing digital technologies to develop immersive etiquette and custom experience scenarios—such as virtual sacrifices, digital ancestral halls, and augmented reality (AR) interactions with folk customs—the semantic revitalization of “ancient etiquette for modern application” can be realized within new contexts, thereby endowing cultural catalysts with the capacity for intergenerational transmission. (iii) Narrative renewal and symbolic recoding. The symbolic system of Huizhou etiquette and customs is reconstructed using cross-media narrative techniques. Through mediums such as documentaries, short videos, and animations, the symbolic vocabulary of traditional etiquette is transformed, and new narrative logics are attributed to these symbols. For example, the narration of “filial piety” can be reinterpreted as an emotional dialogue within contemporary family ethics, while the etiquette of “ancestral worship” can be adapted into a communal participatory practice that fosters collective memory. In conclusion, the primary objective of symbolic catalysts is the formation of identity. Through interactive media platforms and mechanisms of cultural co-creation, audiences should be transformed from passive recipients into active co-producers of cultural meaning, thereby establishing a value cycle that progresses from “dissemination” to “resonance” and ultimately to “consensus”.

2.2 Media dimension: communication carrier and exchange mechanism of Huizhou etiquette and customs interaction

Huizhou etiquette and customs emerge from the interplay between two cultural frameworks: “etiquette” and “customs”. A complex intertextual relationship exists between the “etiquette” associated with the national political order and the “customs” rooted in local social life^[4]. The distinctiveness of Huizhou etiquette and customs resides in its integration of both “literate society” and “non-literate society”, resulting in a complex, multi-layered cultural system characterized by the interplay between “writing” and “practice”. For example, the Tangyue Archway Cluster in Shexian County serves not only as a physical memory where documents and buildings coexist but also as a symbolic element embodying the values of “loyalty, filial piety, chastity, and righteousness”. The inscriptions preserve the ritualized framework of Confucian ethics, while the physical presence and ritualistic performances contribute to the emotional narrative within popular culture. Emperor Qianlong conferred upon this folk symbol the designation of “a locale exemplifying unparalleled filial piety and benevolence under heaven, the foremost village south of the Yangtze River distinguished by its embroidered robes”, thereby imbuing it with national significance and exemplary status. This act reflects the reciprocal relationship between “the political legitimacy of etiquette” and “the emotional identification of customs”.

Under the context of media convergence, the dissemination of Huizhou etiquette and customs manifests as a three-dimensional resonance structure of “digital layer, social layer, and community layer”. This multi-layered resonance mechanism forms an optimized pathway system for transitioning the dissemination of Huizhou etiquette and customs from traditional to modern modalities. (i) Digital layer: reconstruction of memory through technological media. The emergence of digital platforms has introduced novel carriers for preserving traditional etiquette and customs. Formats such as short videos, virtual exhibition halls, digital family trees, and digital archives of intangible cultural heritage have facilitated the visualization, interactivity, and contextual reproduction of Huizhou etiquette and customs. For example, activities such as “cloud ancestral worship”, “virtual ancestral halls”, and “online performance of Huizhou wedding customs” have facilitated the transition of traditional ceremonies beyond physical spaces, thereby allowing cultural memories to be

preserved and transmitted through technological media. As Asman articulated, vivid memories gradually transition into memories that are mediated by external media. This transformation does not represent the disappearance of tradition but rather the reproduction and preservation of memory forms^[5]. (ii) Social layer: interactive renewal of rituals and activities. Media diffusion encompasses not only the dissemination of technology but also the reconstruction of social practices. Through social activities such as festival ceremonies, intangible cultural heritage performances, and cultural markets, Huizhou etiquette and customs have undergone a rebalancing between the ritualistic aspects of “etiquette” and the everyday nature of “customs”. For example, the folk activities associated with “the Three Festivals of Huizhou” (Qingming Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, and Mid-Autumn Festival) not only perpetuate the social cohesion function inherent in local beliefs but also serve as public rituals that reaffirm cultural identities. The repetitive nature of these rituals reinforces social memory, while media involvement broadens the reach of their cultural impact. Through the integration of online and offline channels, the dissemination of Huizhou etiquette and customs has transitioned from “reproduction” to “re-experience”, thereby facilitating the revitalization of their cultural significance. (iii) Community level: co-creation mechanism and identification resonance. The vitality of Huizhou etiquette and customs is fundamentally sustained by active community participation. The convergence of media technologies has empowered villagers to transition from passive recipients to active co-producers in the dissemination of these cultural practices. Through mechanisms of “cultural co-creation”, such as villagers’ storytelling, collaborative production of folk documentary films, engagement in cultural live streaming, and the creation of rural short plays, traditional culture is revitalized with personal experience and emotional expression, thereby facilitating its transformation into a lived practice that reinforces community identity. The concept of “the creative function of text”, as proposed by Lottman, is exemplified in this context: cultural significance is no longer the exclusive domain of a single subject but is continuously reconstituted through the dynamic interaction among multiple subjects. In conclusion, the shift from “one-way communication” to “co-creation and sharing” constitutes a fundamental mechanism for the contemporary revitalization of etiquette and customs culture. The proliferation of media has

acted as a transformative agent within social and cultural structures, converting Huizhou etiquette and customs from a “closed tradition” into an “open system”, thereby establishing a dynamic and fluid cultural ecosystem.

2.3 Field identity: reshaping of cultural communities

From the perspective of media convergence, the symbolic domain constitutes a “media ecosystem” that integrates diverse media forms, including language, imagery, rituals, architecture, and sound, to generate and sustain cultural meaning through “cross-media coexistence”. Huizhou etiquette and customs develop within a multi-dimensional media space wherein their cultural symbols derive not only from the normative texts of the national etiquette system but also from the lived experiences of the local community. Through ongoing interaction and translation between these sources, a distinctive spatial representation system emerges.

Within the historical context of China, “etiquette” has traditionally been regarded as the institutional foundation of social order, whereas “custom” represents its vivid expression within folk society. These two elements are not antagonistic but have developed a pattern of mutual interaction and dynamic equilibrium throughout historical evolution. Gu Jiegang’s “accretion theory” elucidates the bidirectional construction mechanism whereby “the grand traditions” of the state and “the localized traditions” of regional areas are superimposed^[6], resulting in Chinese culture being an inclusive and progressive system. Huizhou etiquette and customs were developed within this interdependent framework of “etiquette and customs”. Their spatial organization embodies the political legitimacy of the national etiquette system, while simultaneously maintaining the cultural identity of the local society, which is grounded in familial affection, kinship ties, and geographical context.

Digital media is reshaping the structure of the space of etiquette and customs. Traditional ancestral hall sacrifices have been extended through live streaming on the Internet, virtual space performances, and digital family tree platforms. Folk festivals are spread across regions through short videos and online activities. The virtual and the real, history and the present, etiquette and customs resonate in the same medium space, making Huizhou etiquette and customs no longer confined to geographical boundaries but becoming a “multi-level and multi-node” digital memory network. Therefore, under the conditions of media convergence, the Huizhou

etiquette and customs space is no longer a static cultural site but functions as a dynamic mechanism for the construction of identity. Through experiential engagement and repeated participation within this space, the public continuously redefines their understanding of both themselves and their community through media interactions. The formation of this spatial identity is evident at three distinct levels. (i) Re-cognition of physical space: digital reproduction imparts new visual semantics to traditional spatial symbols such as ancestral halls, archways, and streets. (ii) Reorganization of social space: community co-creation and online interactions transform cultural spaces into central mediums for social cohesion. (iii) Re-internalization of spiritual space: through repeated ritual participation and media representation, individuals develop an “emotional geography” at the psychological level, thereby internalizing local culture as an integral component of their identity memory. Therefore, media convergence not only facilitates the innovation in the dissemination of etiquette and customs culture but also shapes the “field identity” structure of Huizhou social culture. Space transcends its traditional role as a mere container of culture, emerging instead as an active mechanism that fosters its ongoing development^[7].

3 Conclusions

Over an extended period of interaction between the national etiquette framework and local folk culture, Huizhou has developed a system of etiquette and customs that integrates profound ethical principles with the conviviality

of everyday life. The advent of media convergence has offered traditional culture a novel opportunity for revitalization within the contemporary communication ecosystem. Utilizing a digital, interactive, and field-based media framework, Huizhou etiquette and customs have transitioned from “static inheritance” to “dynamic extension”. From the perspective of cultural memory, the continuation of Huizhou etiquette and customs is a multi-layered process of reproduction. The recreation of symbols, spatial reorganization, and media integration collectively form the internal logic underpinning cultural inheritance. Etiquette establishes a value system and moral framework, whereas customs translate these elements into lived experiences through everyday practices. Media intervention facilitates more frequent and flexible exchanges between these components, thereby creating a self-regulating cultural system. In the contemporary context, this mechanism is extended through symbolic reconstruction, etiquette renewal, and digital domains. Media convergence not only broadens the scope of cultural dissemination but also reshapes the paths through which social memory and group identity are generated. In conclusion, the contemporary representation of Huizhou etiquette and customs should not be regarded merely as historical remnants, but rather a highly adaptable cultural system. This system employs symbols as language, space as the carrier, and the medium as the driving force, achieving a continuous chain of “tradition, modernity, and post-tradition”. In the context of globalization and informatization, this mechanism for inheriting etiquette and customs

through media convergence not only provides a model for the sustainable development of Huizhou culture but also offers a replicable example for establishing a cultural identity system in rural China and advancing cultural revitalization strategies.

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