



## Research Article

JDSSI of M-SCHOLAR  
NO.00036 (A-2025)

# Exploring the Narrative Design Strategies of Intangible Cultural Heritage Tourism Brands: The Case of Linzhou Boat-Dwelling Culture

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Received: February 18, 2025

Accepted: May 3, 2025

Published: June 23, 2025

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**Publication Statement:**  
*Journal of Design Service and Social Innovation* focuses on design research and cultural dissemination, but does not involve any political views or cultural biases.

**Editor:**  
Devyn Zhao

**Abstract:** In recent years, the development model that integrates intangible cultural heritage with tourism has been strongly emphasized in national cultural policy, especially in villages and towns with intangible cultural heritage. These areas have enhanced their market attractiveness and competitiveness by developing tourism branding. However, tourism branding projects in China often face issues such as fragmented brand images and inadequate exploration of local culture. The study addresses the brand image of intangible heritage tourism from the perspective of narrative design. Focusing on Lianzhou Township in Guangdong Province, China, it explores the composition and design application strategies of tourism brand imagery by examining a narrative design framework that includes the narrative theme, structure, channels and visual expression of cultural and tourism brands. Through literature and field investigation, the study found that boat-dwelling culture -rooted in historical changes, traditional skills and local customs-serves as an important narrative element in shaping the cultural tourism brand of the town. Based on this finding, the study validates a narrative design strategy for brand development. Unlike conventional branding approaches that focus on visual image, this study aims to propose a new narrative design approach to tourism brand construction in intangible cultural heritage villages, offering meaningful insights for advancing rural revitalization.

**Keywords:** Intangible cultural heritage; Tourism branding; Narrative gene; Narrative design strategies

<https://doi.org/10.59528/ms.jdssi2025.0623a36>

## Introduction

Recently, Lianzhou Town, located in Guangdong Province, China, has committed to establishing itself as a model town for rural revitalization, with a focused effort on developing leisure agriculture and rural tourism [1]. In its development, this paper observes that Lianzhou's current tourism brand-building practices remain centered on agricultural research and farm-based experiences, lacking distinct differentiation from other rural towns. Despite being the heritage site of the boat-dwelling villagers' culture in Shatian Water Village, Guangdong Province, Lianzhou has not effectively explored its cultural characteristics. In the construction of a tourism brand, the display and promotion of unique culture are also important factors in enhancing the attraction of tourists [2].

The boat-dwelling people, also known as the Tanka, are a special ethnic group in China living and working on the water [3]. With the development of the times, the Tanka population has gradually settled on land, leading to the gradual disappearance of this

cultural group. However, some of their traditional folk practices—such as “saltwater songs” and “marriage on the water”—have been preserved and recognized as part of China’s intangible cultural heritage. As an endangered aquatic intangible heritage, Tanka culture should be paid more attention to and protected [4].

The construction of a rural cultural tourism brand is not only conducive to improving the regional external image, promoting and protecting local culture but also to encouraging the development of the regional economy. In addition, the method of brand narrative design can be used to effectively convey the brand culture and core values through story-based techniques, attract consumers’ attention, generate emotional resonance, and enhance brand recognition. Therefore, by analyzing and studying the construction of characteristic cultural tourism brands and taking the narrative design method as the strategic application, this paper attempts to construct a process of exploring local characteristic culture as the basis, analyzing unique local culture and exploring narrative genes as the means, to establish a tourism brand with custom characteristics.

## **1. Literature Review**

### **1.1. Tourism Branding**

A tourist destination brand comprises external factors such as city name, logo, tourism resources, etc. and internal factors such as city culture, tourism quality, marketing strategy, etc. In general, urban culture is considered the soul of a brand; the rich cultural heritage and unique cultural characteristics of a city can enhance its appeal and attract more tourists to visit and engage with it. Branding expert Davidson (1997) proposed the “brand iceberg” theory, which illustrates that only 15% of a tourism city’s brand is visible above the surface—representing external factors—while the remaining 85% lies beneath the surface. The above-water part is the external factor of the tourism city brand, while the underwater part is the internal factor of the tourism city brand. The design of a tourism brand image involves integrating a region’s natural landscapes, historical elements, and folk cultural characteristics with design techniques to create a distinctive visual symbol that resonates with the public. Scholar Huang Jun emphasizes that regional identity should be at the core of visual design in shaping the brand image of a tourist destination [5].

### **1.2. Narrative Design and Brand Narrative**

In short, narrative can be seen as a way of telling a story. Narrative design involves integrating story lines and elements into the design, making the expression more accessible and fostering an emotional connection with users. As such, narrative design places greater emphasis on the emotional experience of the audience [6]. Narrative design involves three key elements: the narrator, the story and the receiver which correspond to the designer, the narrative carrier and the audience, respectively. When narrative thinking is incorporated into the design, the designer can convey the story through symbols and sensory elements, thereby establishing an emotional connection with the audience [7].

According to Lawrence, the construction of brand narratives can be summarized into four

elements: theme, plot, characters and aesthetics [8]. A good brand narrative needs to have a theme centered on the brand's core values, a well-constructed storyline, characters that are recognizable to the user, and the sensory enjoyment pleasing to senses [9]. Narrative texts can be divided into the story layer and the discourse layer. The story layer consists of the themes, plot, and characters that make up the story events in the brand's narrative elements, while the discourse layer refers to how the events are told, i.e., how designers express the story through visual language. Consequently, the basic path of narrative design can be summarized into four steps: the establishment of the theme at the story level, the structural setting, and the path and visual expression at the discourse level [10].

The narrative theme of a tourism brand is the main and core of the brand story, which is determined by the history, development, and symbols of the destination. The narrative theme can be divided into dominant themes and sub-themes. The dominant theme defines the uniqueness of the brand. This theme is developed by selecting historically significant events, which are then reorganized in a logical sequence to form the plot of the story. Corresponding characters are introduced, and these characters drive the progression of the plot. The aesthetics of narrative focuses on making a lasting impression on consumers through sensory clues, which can be conveyed in various forms, including visual, textual and other means, to capture and stimulate consumers' interest. Also, it emphasizes that brands move consumers through sensory clues, which can be manifested in various ways such as visual and textual, to evoke emotional responses from the audience [11].

### **1.3. Boat-dwelling Culture (Tanka Culture)**

Searching for the keywords of "boat-dwelling culture" through the literature platform, the paper found that there are about 76 relevant literatures. It summarized the literature, and roughly classified the research related to boat-dwelling culture into five major themes: design, tourism, culture itself, music, and education.

At present, most of the research areas are concentrated in Hainan and Guangxi, and there is a research gap in Lingnan area. In the aspect of cultural research, it mainly discusses the aspects of costumes, festivals, beliefs, etc. In terms of design, it mainly involves research of visual symbols, space design, APP interface and so on. In the tourism industry, the focus is on analyzing and researching aspects such as tourist preference, attraction, development proposals and models. From the aspect of tourism, most of the research is based on the preference and attraction of tourists, and the development of proposals and modes, etc. Several scholars have put forward proposals on tourism development, but there is still a research gap in how to develop and promote the inheritance of boat-dwelling culture through the tourism industry.

## **2. Analysis of Brand Storytelling Strategy for Intangible Cultural Heritage Product**

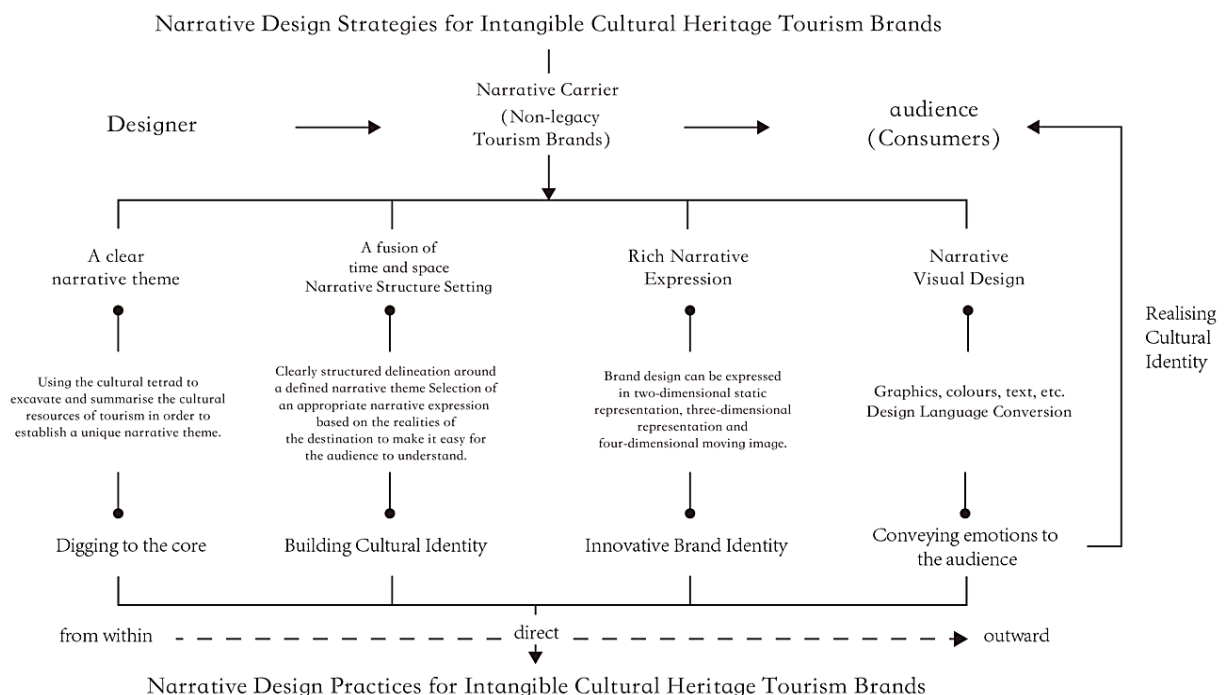
A brand narrative typically addresses three key questions: "What is the story to tell?" "How to tell the story?" and "In what scenario to tell the story?" The first question defines the

narrative theme. The second involves the narrative structure, including characters and a compelling storyline—distinctive characters and a smooth, rich plot are more likely to evoke empathy from the audience. The third refers to the brand's visual identity, using symbols to effectively convey the brand's story to the public, thereby completing the storytelling process [12].

The method of communicating the brand story to the public is the behavioural approach that completes the storytelling process. By integrating the path of narrative design, the study conducts in-depth research and strategy around four key components: narrative theme, narrative structure, narrative path and visual expression [13]. This approach aims to build cultural identity and shapes a new brand image by exploring the internal core elements. Therefore, the empowerment and development of intangible cultural heritage tourism brands through the integration of “narrative + design” can be maximized (Figure 1).

## 2.1. Narrative Theme of Intangible Cultural Heritage Product Brands

The theme of the narrative, as the core content of the Intangible Culture Heritage tourism brand, runs through the entire brand narrative design, affecting not only the positioning of the brand but also the formulation of the structure of the discourse layer, the choice of narrative channels, and the final visual presentation. The reason for the unsuccessful construction of tourism brands in many regions is the insufficient consideration of the narrative theme and the lack of exploration and positioning of the local culture [14].



**Figure 1.** Strategic Framework for Tourism Brand Narrative Design (drawn by the authors)

## **2.2. Narrative Structure Setting of Intangible Cultural Heritage Product Brands**

Narrative structure refers to the overall framework of the story, including the organization and arrangement of events. It can be divided into linear and non-linear narratives. A linear narrative emphasizes the completeness of the story, the unity of space and time, causality in the plot, and continuity. In contrast, a non-linear narrative involves the omission of time, repetition, retrogression, and fragmented storytelling. This approach transforms traditional “ephemeral” narratives into modern ones, shifting from a chronological structure to a “co-temporal” one, thereby moving from a focus on time to one on space [15].

This paper develops sub-themes from scattered narrative themes, and considers brand narratives, products and travel services from the perspective of users. It aims to construct a logical and coherent storyline to engage users and imbue the tourist destination with deeper spiritual meaning. By doing so, the paper seeks to create an emotional connection, reducing users’ resistance to commercial promotion and fostering a strong emotional and brand bond. Ultimately, this approach aims to transform the benefits of the tourist destination.

## **2.3. Narrative Paths of Intangible Cultural Heritage Product Brands**

The narrative channels of an intangible cultural heritage product brand can be divided into two-dimensional expression, three-dimensional expression and four-dimensional expression. The two-dimensional expression refers to the use of graphic media such as brand logos, IP designs, illustrations, and posters in brand narratives [16]. Brand identity serves to present consumers with a cultural tourism brand recognition system that condenses and sublimates memory symbols, allowing the audience to intuitively grasp the characteristics of the tourist destination through visual symbols. Additionally, it helps distinguish the destination from others, making it easier for people to identify and form imaginative associations [17].

Secondly, creating a regional cultural IP for storytelling involves shaping the images and personalities of IP characters, which can provide consumers with a unique experience rooted in local characteristics and foster emotional connection.

Three-dimensional concerns the medium of three-dimensional stereoscopic latitude, such as product packaging and derivatives of related cultural and creative products. Narrative elements on product packaging are also a common vehicle for brand expression.

Four-dimensional expression refers to the fusion of space and time through the design of the web design, APP, AR and other media. In the age of digitization of electronic products, we can use four ways to transcend the limits of time and space, more real and quick to show the cultural spread of the destination.

## **2.4. Analysis of the Current Situation of Intangible Cultural Heritage Product Brands**

### **2.4.1. Serious Homogenization and Lack of Cultural Uniqueness**

Many intangible heritage product brands rely heavily on the direct use of traditional patterns, colors, and visual symbols (such as paper-cutting and embroidery designs) without exploring the deeper cultural meanings. For instance, many “intangible heritage town” brand logos feature only silhouettes of ancient buildings as core elements, failing to reflect the uniqueness of local cultural traits. The brand stories often focus on generalized expressions such as “long history” or “exquisite craftsmanship” without honing in on a distinct core theme. Brands like Canton embroidery and Suzhou embroidery frequently adopt the “craftsmanship heritage” slogan but fail to emphasize the essential differences between the Lingnan water village culture and the Jiangnan literati aesthetic.

### **2.4.2. Insufficient Depth of Cultural Resources Mining**

The development of intangible heritage brands often prioritizes material culture, such as cultural relics, clothing, while overlooking the integration of behavioral (technical processes), institutional (community regulations), and spiritual (beliefs and philosophies) aspects. For example, Jingdezhen ceramic brand emphasizes the “ancient burning method”, but it has nothing to do with the narrative of kiln god belief and craftsman ethics. Technology applications such as AR/VR are mostly used for scene restoration (such as virtual ceramic workshops) and lack the depth mapping of cultural logic. User interaction only stays in the “watching” stage and fails to convey the cultural connotation of the system through task design, such as simulated kiln fire regulation.

### **2.4.3. The Homogenization of Brand Narrative Structure**

Relying on the unidirectional story line of “historical origin-technical display-modern innovation,” the non-linear narrative (such as user co-creation branch) is ignored. For example, the Fujian Tulou scenic area is centered around the “family migration history” as its main narrative, but tourists are unable to engage in multiple narratives by assuming different roles (such as patriarchs or craftsmen). The relevant brand IP characters (e.g., “guardians of intangible heritage”) are often designed as symbolic images, lacking detailed backstories and emotional arcs. Similarly, the “Embroiderer A-Mei” IP for a Miao embroidery brand features only an image design, without a narrative that traces her journey from apprentice to cultural inheritor.

### **2.4.4. The Imbalance Between Marketization and Inheritance**

Some intangible heritage products, in trying to cater to the consumer market, are stripped of their cultural context and undergo “fast digestion” transformation. For example, the traditional blue print cloth is simplified into printed T-shirts, ignoring the spiritual connection between “plant dyeing process and nature worship. Branding is often driven by external teams, with local residents being relegated to the role of “cultural performers.”

For example, the Dong ethnic song tourism program invites villagers to sing in duet, but the rules of the duet (at the institutional level) have not been transformed into rules of interaction, resulting in a superficial cultural significance.

#### **2.4.5. Disconnections Between Theory Application and Practice**

Many projects mechanically replicate the “story layer - discourse layer” framework, without adopting the specific characteristics of intangible heritage adjustments. For example, a tea brand directly applied the “brand iceberg theory,” and simplified the “ancient tea road” as a transportation road map, neglecting the integration of deeper narrative elements such as the horse gang statute (institutional layer) and the Zen philosophy of tea (spiritual layer). The brand effect is often measured primarily by economic indicators such as customer traffic and sales, but there is a lack of assessment regarding the depth of cultural communication (e.g., users’ awareness of the value of intangible heritage) and ethical compliance (e.g., whether cultural symbols have been misused).

### **2.5. Analysis of the Current Situation of Brand Narrative Design for Intangible Cultural Heritage Products**

#### **2.5.1. Narrative Theme: Insufficient Cultural Depth and Symbolization Dilemma**

Many brand narratives of NRL products are limited to superficial labels such as “traditional craftsmanship” and “spirit of craftsmanship,” lacking a systematic refinement of cultural genes. For instance, several ceramic brands center around the theme of “millennium kiln fire,” but fail to incorporate deeper elements like the kiln god belief (spiritual layer) and the fuel ratio system (institutional layer) into their narrative framework, rendering the theme hollow. The Longquan Treasure Sword, on the other hand, adopts “the way of the sword is the way of mankind” as its core philosophy, integrating the concept of “the way of the vessel is carried by the way” into its brand narrative through documentaries on sword masters and the experience of sword forging. However, visual symbols - such as traditional patterns - are often mechanically reproduced, detached from their original cultural context. For example, the Miao embroidery brand overuses the “Mother Butterfly” totem without explaining its symbolic meaning in the creation myth of the ethnic group, reducing the symbol to a mere decorative element.

#### **2.5.2. Narrative Structure: Linear Dominance and Passive User Roles**

Brand storytelling often follows a linear framework of “historical origin—technology display—modern innovation,” positioning the user merely as a passive recipient of information. For example, a tea brand might showcase the tea-making process through a short video, but it fails to incorporate interactive elements, such as allowing users to simulate the ancient method of stir-frying, thereby resulting in a lack of engagement and participation. The institutional layer (e.g., industry statute) and spiritual layer (e.g.,



nature worship) of NRL culture have not been transformed into branchline plots. For example, although Fujian Tulou Tourism has set up the main line of “family migration,” it has not opened up the “family rules and regulations,” “rammed wall collaboration” and other sub-tasks, thus weakening the sense of cultural immersion.

### **2.5.3. Narrative Path: Technology Dependence and Media Imbalance**

AR/VR technology is predominantly employed for scene reproduction (e.g., virtual ancient villages), but often lacks the construction of a cultural logic framework. For instance, a blue dye brand introduced an AR try-on feature, yet failed to communicate the deeper significance of “the relationship between plant dyeing and festive seasons” (behavioral layer) and “the dyeing workshop labor division” (institutional layer) through interactive tasks. Furthermore, the design of cultural and creative products tends to prioritize formal innovation while neglecting narrative consistency and coherence. For example, a lacquerware brand transformed traditional items into modern stationery, yet the product packaging merely labeled them as “intangible heritage technology” without elaborating on the connection between “lacquerware and rituals” (the spiritual layer) through visual narratives.

### **2.5.4. User Cognition: Risk of Emotional Decoupling and Cultural Misinterpretation**

Brand IP characters (e.g., “guardians of intangible heritage”) lack background stories and growth arcs, making it difficult to trigger emotional resonance. For example, a silver jewelry brand’s “Miao A-Mei” IP only has an image design, but does not build the conflict and breakthrough from apprentice to inheritor. The narrative content is dominated by external teams, and the local community is reduced to a “cultural performer.” For example, in the tourism program of the Dong ethnic song, villagers participate in the duet but do not intervene in the narrative design, resulting in the “rules of the duet” (institutional layer) not being transformed into interactive rules, and the cultural significance is only on the surface.

### **2.5.5. Theoretical and Practical Disconnection: Instrumentalization of Methodology**

Many brands have directly adopted the “story layer-discourse layer” model without adapting it to the specific characteristics of NRL. For example, an embroidery brand copied the “brand iceberg theory,” separating the “aesthetics of embroidery” (material layer) and “women’s community collaboration” (institutional layer), without establishing the connection between the two through storytelling. The effectiveness of these brands is often measured by sales and traffic, overlooking the depth of cultural communication. For instance, an intangible heritage bazaar may measure success by the number of visitors but fails to assess users’ understanding of the “ethics of craftsmanship” (e.g., taboos on acquiring materials).



### **3. Exploring the Narrative Genes of Boat-Dwelling Culture (Tanka Culture)**

#### **3.1. Overview and Development History of Boat-Dwelling People**

According to Prof. Zhang Shouqi of Sun Yat-sen University, the word “boat-dwelling” originates from the ancient South Vietnamese language, which means boat. Thus, boat-dwelling people are those who live on small boats. They are categorized into “sea-dwellers,” “river-dwellers” and “pearl-dwellers.” In terms of geographical location, the boat-dwelling people of Doumen in Guangdong Province are located at the mouth of the Pearl River, which is at the junction of the sea water and the river water. Therefore, there are both sea-dwellers and pearl-dwellers in Doumen. The boat-dwelling families have been drifting on the water for many years, forming such a special group of residents and a unique set of boat-dwelling culture [17].

#### **3.2. Lifestyle Changes and Retention**

The field investigation of this study goes deep into the daily life and festival environment of the boat people in Linzhou Township. Through interviews with local residents, this paper summarizes the current living conditions and lifestyles of boat dwellers.

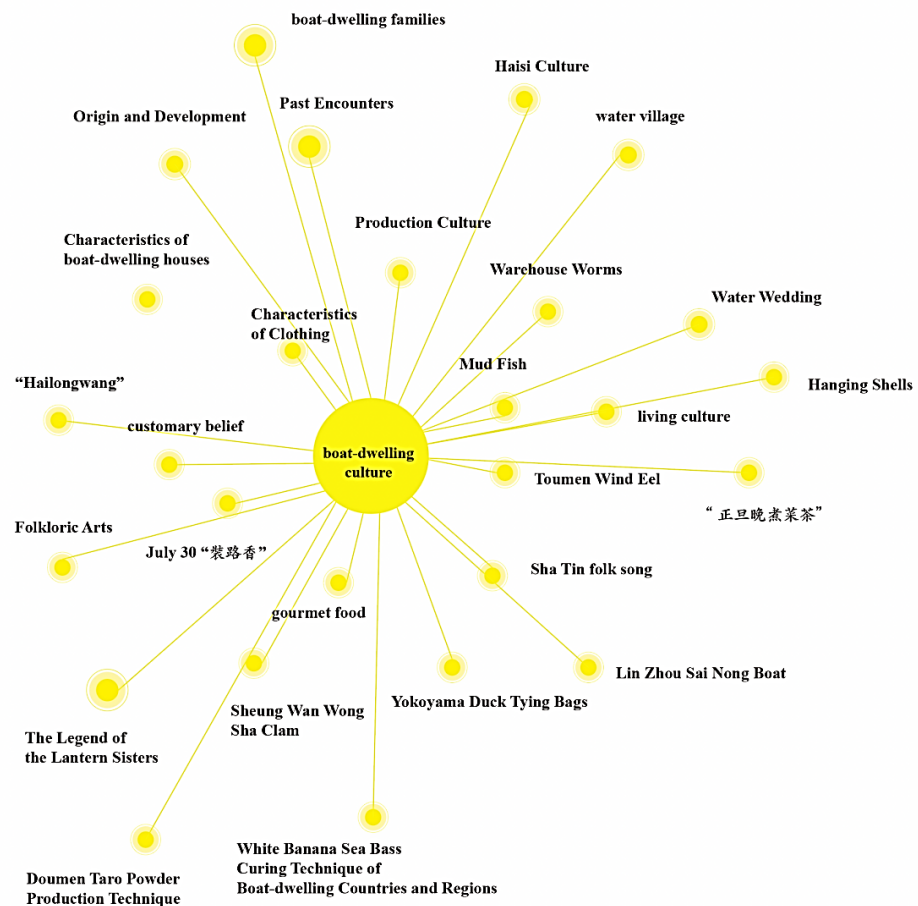
At present, the boat-dwellers have gone ashore to live in three or four-story buildings, but the villages still live by water. According to Uncle Huang, boat-dwellers still maintain the habit of fishing. Even when they are no longer at sea, they often catch fish near the water to prepare meals, a common practice in their daily life. Over time, their production methods have evolved from traditional sea fishing to breeding fish and shrimp in closed ponds. Today, nearly every household utilizes modern and advanced equipment for breeding and production.

However, the boat-dwelling people also continue many traditional customs and habits, such as the July 30<sup>th</sup>'s incense installation. Every year on July 30<sup>th</sup>, the whole village gathers to perform fire dragon dance as a pray for blessings. The salty water song (Shatian folk song) is also an indispensable part of the life of the boat-dwelling people.

The boat-dwelling people have transitioned from living at sea every day to relying on their own means, no longer having to drift at sea for years. Although their production methods and homes have significantly changed, reflecting an improved quality of life, they still maintain their unique traditional cultural practices.

#### **3.3. Organization of Boat-dwelling Cultural Resources in Linzhou Township**

This paper mainly collects the relevant cultural resources around the boat-dwelling culture and tries to make a visual cultural dispersion map to facilitate the subsequent classification and screening of cultures (**Figure 2**).



**Figure 2.** Cultural Dispersion Map of Boat-Dwelling Families (drawn by the authors)

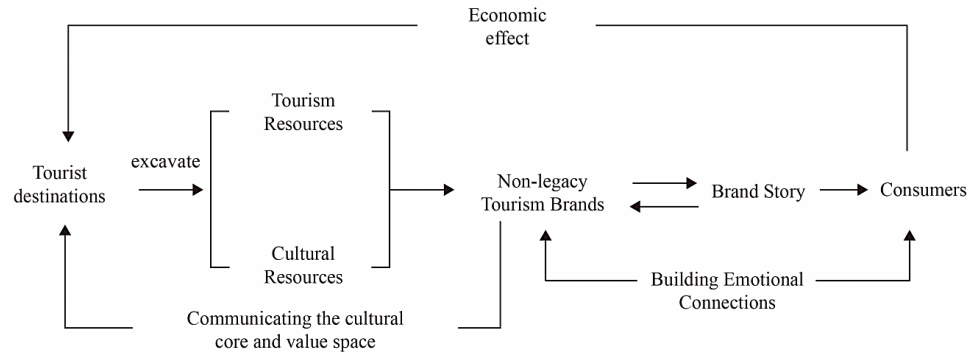
The culture of boat-dwelling families is divided into two aspects: production and life. This paper summarizes the cultural customs of boat-dwellers' families in fishery production, folk skills of aquatic life, and five cultural categories in daily life, including clothing, food, shelter, marriage, festival beliefs, and stories and legends. It comprehensively understands and analyzes the culture of these families, explores the genes of stories, and summarizes and classifies the organized cultural resources.

## 4. Introducing Narrative into the Brand of Boat-Dwelling Cultural Tourism

### 4.1. The Relationship Between Narrative and Intangible Cultural Heritage Product Brands

Intangible cultural heritage product branding takes culture as the main support and spreads the local cultural characteristics through the branding of tourism destinations. Based on the brand narrative method and the narratology research theory, this study combines the design of the visual image itself to present a narrative structure with brand culture and connotation. This approach allows design work to communicate more effectively with the audience through storytelling. To put it simply, the narration externalizes the connotation of the brand

by telling stories to consumers, making it easier to recognize and connect with the brand. This connection leads to a positive emotional experience, helps consumers recognize the cultural value of the brand, and ultimately drives consumption (**Figure 3**).



**Figure 3.** Relationship Between Narrative and Intangible Cultural Heritage Tourism Brands (drawn by the authors)

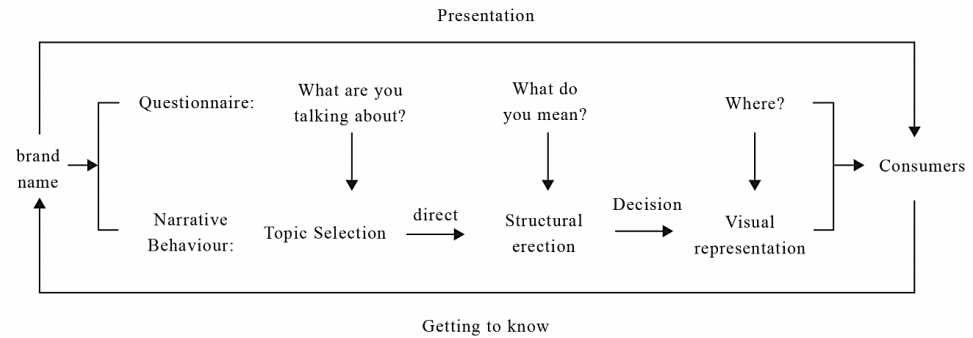
## 4.2. The Role of Narrative in Intangible Cultural Heritage Tourism Branding

Based on the above analysis of the current state of tourism brand image in Lianzhou Township, three key pain points can be identified. First, the tourism brand lacks cultural connotation and does not exhibit local uniqueness or exclusivity. Second, there is no comprehensive or systematic visual representation of the brand, and the product development process is fragmented. The differences and individuality of tourism products and services are crucial not only for the quality of the tourism experience but also for shaping the brand identity of the destination [18]. Third, the brand positioning is unclear, particularly in terms of the connection between the brand, products, and services. This lack of clarity leads to weak emotional communication with tourists, failing to meet their psychological and emotional needs and resulting in a diminished ability to attract visitors. Narrative design is to stand in the perspective of tourists and consider the emotional experience of tourists, because it is easier for tourists to accept and resonate with stories. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the local history and culture to find the narrative factors, so as to present the spiritual connotation of the tourist city. Therefore, integrating storytelling design into intangible heritage tourism brands could effectively address the identified pain points in current brand building.

## 5. Tourism Brand Narrative Design Strategy Discussion

### 5.1. Brand Narrative Design Strategy Application

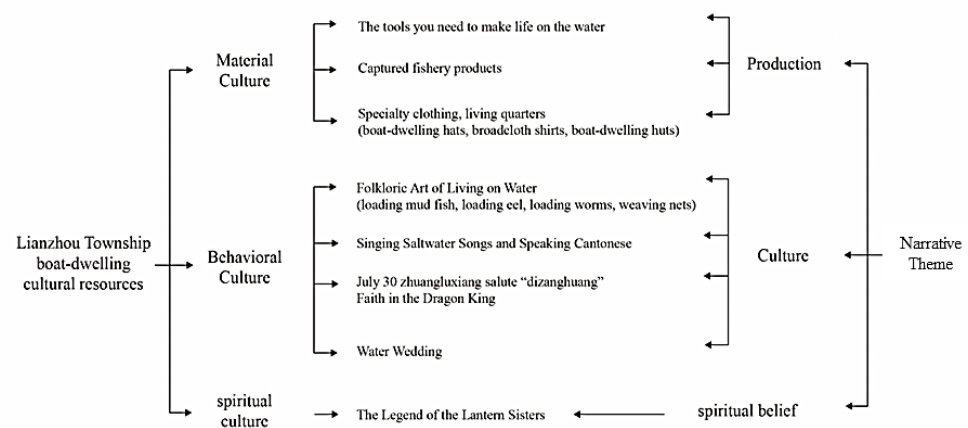
Based on the brand narrative strategy and design approach analyzed above, a problem-solving-oriented application framework can be derived to guide design practice (**Figure 4**).



**Figure 4.** Brand Narrative Strategy Application Framework (drawn by the authors)

### 5.1.1. Identify Topic

Based on the above analysis of the various boat dwelling culture types in Lianzhou Township, this study classifies the narrative themes of boat dwelling culture with the help of the cultural tetrad and summarizes them in four aspects: material culture, behavioral culture, institutional culture and spiritual culture. However, since boat dwelling culture does not have a systematic form, the paper excludes this concern. Finally, the study proposes a classification of narrative themes for boat dwelling culture tourism branding and establishes an information framework for cultural resource selection and storytelling. The information framework of cultural resource stories is established, as shown in **Figure 5**. According to Dong Chengxiong's (2016) cultural "four-division method," the narrative theme of the NRH tourism brand needs to systematically sort out the local cultural resources from the four layers of cultural dimensions: material, behavioral, institutional, and spiritual, so as to clarify the direction of the theme and guide the subsequent design (**Figure 5**).



**Figure 5.** Information Framework of Cultural Resources of Boat-Dwelling Families (drawn by the authors)

The specific implementation path should start with the material culture layer for symbolic extraction and visual anchoring, sorting out representative artifacts, buildings, natural landscapes and other material carriers (e.g., traditional dwellings, handicrafts, and characteristic vegetation), and extracting visual symbols (e.g., patterns, colors, and materials), which can be transformed into the core IP and visual system of the brand. In the implementation of the narrative design strategy, the integration of brand themes should

be transformed into a feasible design path, a “cultural tetrad” list form should be established (**Figure 5**), four layers of cultural content should be listed horizontally, and corresponding narrative theme types should be marked vertically, such as the material layer “Artifact Epic,” spiritual layer “Spiritual Epic” or “Light of Faith” to choose the most contagious and differentiated theme [19].

It can be scored from the four dimensions of cultural uniqueness, experience and participation, emotional resonance, and commercial transformation, and prioritize the themes with high scores (e.g., the combination of spiritual culture and behavioral culture of “Song instead of writing” in the Dong National Anthem). The combination of surface material symbols and deep spiritual values, such as the “bat, deer, longevity, happiness” pattern of Huizhou wood carving (material layer), can be restored through AR technology (behavior layer), and associated with the “family praying auspicious culture” (spiritual layer), and then form a multi-dimensional narrative chain. Through layers of refinement, the “flatness” of the narrative theme can be avoided, and the integrity and depth of cultural expression can be guaranteed [20].

It is recognized that the deepest spiritual culture is the most central characteristic of a people. Through cultural research, the author understands the difficult historical background of the Boat People, from being unable to go ashore but adrift at sea, to being allowed to go ashore to work as farmers. The Legend of the Lantern A-Mei is unique to the Doumen District of Zhuhai. It tells the story of the hero, Ah Gen, and the heroine, Lantern A-Mei, who meet at sea, encounter various setbacks along the way, but never give up. The story follows Ah Gen’s selfless rescue of Lantern A-Mei, and they ultimately go ashore to live happily ever after by the sea. The Legend of Lantern A-Mei expresses the boat people’s yearning for the land and for a better life. The character of A Gen embodies the hardworking, brave and kind side of the boat people, and inspires their spirit to work hard to build a better home. Therefore, by choosing the background of the story, “Legend of the Lantern Girl,” as the theme of the story, and setting up two characters, Ah Gen and the Lantern Girl, to tell the story of their lives after going ashore, the sub-theme of boat people’s culture can be chosen to express the story.

### 5.1.2. Structural Conceptualization

The structural conception of the narrative is also the setting of the characters and plot of the story, the dispersion of the narrative according to the established narrative theme, the designer can use the expression of nested narrative, with the life of the two male and female characters of the boat family of Ah Gen and Lantern Amei portrayed. As the main line of the vein, the three sub-themes of mud fish transport, road incense loading on July 30, and water marriage are inserted as plots, enriching the connotation of the story and refining the characters, events, and scenes [21]. Together, they tell the story of the boat-dwelling culture through the different customs embedded in them.

The narrative structure design of intangible heritage tourism brands should focus on the three-step pattern of “theme-element-experience.” First, it should focus on the spiritual theme of “harmony between nature and man” and “eternal ingenuity”. Centering on

spiritual themes such as “harmony between heaven and man” and “ingenuity forever,” the narrative anchor is located, and the four cultural factors of material (symbol of objects), behavior (skills and rituals), system (community regulations) and spirituality (belief and philosophy) are disintegrated to serve as the basis for building relevant networks. Second, the theme-factor-experience model is designed by integrating the fragmented elements through the methods of “spatial-temporal link, symbolic metaphor and character task.” Furthermore, by integrating fragmented elements through “spatial-temporal linkage, symbolic metaphor, role tasks” and other methods, linear and grid experience paths are designed to reduce cognitive load through five-sense immersion (such as visual symbols, tactile interaction) and instant feedback (such as electronic badge rewards). Finally, the dynamic optimization of narrative logic with the help of users’ behavioral data not only retains the authenticity of culture, but also forms an “exploratory story network,” enabling tourists to change from passive recipients to active participants and feel the essence of culture. Therefore, visitors can change from passive recipients to active interpreters, naturally perceiving the full picture and depth of intangible heritage at a lower cost of understanding.

### 5.1.3. Multidimensional Presentation

The two-dimensional representation is the graphic media narrative design, which aims to quickly convey the cultural core and strengthen the brand recognition through visual symbols and IP construction. For the brand logo design, core visual symbols (e.g., patterns, colors, forms) are extracted from the intangible heritage material culture layer (architecture, artifacts, natural landscapes), which should comply with the principles of “easy to identify, strong correlation, and high extensibility.” Through user association tests (e.g., “What cultural scenes are associated with these symbols?”), it could verify the accuracy of symbol communication. Secondly, based on intangible heritage behavior and spiritual aspects (such as rituals and beliefs), the reflection on the background story of the design character, such as “Tang Ni” IP, can combine Ms. Tang Sancai with national trend aesthetics in practice, and the IP can be adapted into comics, short videos, peripheral derivatives (such as emoticons and blind boxes). Thus, a communication matrix of “light content + heavy interaction” is formed to achieve the purpose of “light content + heavy interaction” and realize the role of media narrative.

Three-dimensional representation of the product and space narrative design is designed to make culture touchable and experienceable through physical carriers to enhance the user’s sense of participation. Through product packaging narrative, it is necessary to take into account the three elements of pattern, material and structure at the same time, that is, to use timeline (four seasons), space line (regional landscape) or intangible heritage process as narrative clues (such as Nongfu Sanquan Four Seasons bottle). It also matches cultural attributes (such as coarse pottery packaging for ceramic vessels, natural fiber paper for bamboo weaving), and combines functional design to echo the theme (such as raindrop bottle echoes the story of water). Thus, cultural and creative products can be derived from the base layer, experience layer and collection layer.



Four-dimensional representation can transform the limitations of time and space through the narrative design of digital media and then build an immersive cultural perception scene. With AR/VR technology, historical scenes can be restored. Through the gamification task, users can experience the traditional methods of ancient history, and by using the short video platform (Shake, Shutter) to release the “intangible knowledge” series, it can achieve lightweight dissemination. In addition, small programs/apps can be embedded in “intangible cultural heritage map navigation” to connect online and offline cultural and creative products. Furthermore, small programs/apps can be embedded in the “intangible cultural heritage map navigation” to link offline attractions and online story library.

#### 5.1.4. Narrative visual Performance

The visual expression design of intangible heritage tourism brands needs to be based on the “cultural quartering method” and extract the core symbols from four aspects, such as material, behavior, system and spirit, so as to build a visual language system of “graphic-text-color:”

- Graphic hierarchical expression: the use of image graphics (such as tourist guide ICONS) to reduce the basic cognitive threshold, the engagement of abstract graphics to strengthen the brand symbol memory, the application of image graphics to carry deep cultural narratives, and to achieve the dynamic optimization of user memory retention through A/B test.
- Multi-dimensional text narrative: Choose fonts that conform to the cultural tone (italic retro, pixel word innovation) to transform complex texts into symbolic phrases (such as such as “Three Character Sutra” for family rules and ancestral instructions) to adapt to the needs of multiple languages and try to meet the possibility of international communication.
- Color and mood management: by extracting the color spectrum of the intangible heritage material layer (Miao indigo, Northeast red, northeast green), adjusting the scene mood through saturation and brightness (high saturation color activates the festival atmosphere, low brightness color conveys Zen) to strictly avoid cultural taboos (such as national mourning color).

## Conclusion

Nowadays, there are still a large number of boat-dwelling families living in Lianzhou Township, Guangdong Province. Being a special ethnic group, this ethnic group has formed a unique boat-dwelling culture in the course of hundreds of years of change and possesses a higher value of tourism and culture. Based on the combination of culture and tourism, this study investigated and sorted out the boat-dwelling culture of Zhuhai, and analyzed it among other provinces, and came up with boat-dwelling festivals, customs and legends of Zhuhai, etc. Furthermore, based on the theory of brand design and the perspective of brand narrative, this study explores the construction of intangible heritage tourism brands, excavating the cultural resources of tourism destinations to build the brand’s uniqueness.



In the context of developing cultural tourism, utilizing narrative techniques to enhance the appeal and attraction of cultural brands, thereby improving their competitiveness in the market, is crucial. Finally, by combining design practice, this study will construct a recognizable brand image and brand IP for boat-dwelling culture and tourism, to better promote the culture and drive the economic development of rural tourism.

Therefore, it is evident that narrative design strategy plays a crucial role in the establishment of intangible cultural heritage tourism brands, which can not only enhance the cultural connotation and attraction of the brand, but also promote the inheritance and development of intangible cultural heritage. Through narrative design, the historical background, cultural connotation and unique value of intangible cultural heritage are integrated into the brand story, allowing tourists to more deeply understand and perceive the cultural value of intangible cultural heritage. Such deep cultural perception can enhance tourists' experience satisfaction and improve their loyalty to intangible cultural heritage tourism brands and word-of-mouth communication. Narrative design can inspire visitors' emotional resonance and establish emotional connection by telling stories, legends or histories related to intangible cultural heritage. By having emotional connection, narrative design strategy could promote tourists' brand identification and make them more willing to participate in and promote intangible cultural heritage tourism activities, thus expanding brand influence.

Narrative design can help to shape the unique personality of intangible cultural heritage tourism brands and make it stand out among many tourism brands where the distinctive brand personality can attract specific target groups and improve the market competitiveness of the brand. Besides, the strategy of narrative design can promote the inheritance of culture. Through narrative design, the inheritance process and skills of intangible cultural heritage can be shown to the public, which helps to improve social awareness and attention to non-genetic inheritance. This awareness of inheritance is conducive to the protection and promotion of intangible cultural heritage, so that it can be better inherited and developed in modern society. Also, from the research object of this paper, it reveals that narrative design can combine intangible cultural heritage with local economic development and promote the diversified development of regional economy. As a consequence, the establishment of intangible cultural heritage tourism brand can promote the development of local employment, tourism income and cultural industry, and promote the prosperity of regional economy.

In short, narrative design strategy has a profound impact on the establishment of intangible cultural heritage tourism brands. It can not only enhance the cultural charm and market competitiveness of brands but also promote the inheritance and development of intangible cultural heritage, injecting new vitality into the local economy.

#### **Author Contributions:**

Yuxin Shi contributed to the conceptualization, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, data curation, and visualization of the study, and was primarily responsible for writing the original draft. Cheng Cheong Lei was involved in funding acquisition, provided supervision and validation, and contributed to the review and editing of the manuscript.

#### **Funding:**

This study is the result of a research project of the Macao Polytechnic University (RP/ESA-05/2021).

#### **Acknowledgments:**

Not Applicable

#### **Conflicts of Interest:**

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to this research.

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