

CULTURAL ATTRIBUTES AND APPLICATION BARRIERS OF FISH LANTERN INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN CHINESE-STYLE RESTAURANT SPACES: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY

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Abstract

Fish lantern traditions combine bamboo-frame craft, painted surfaces, light, movement, and festival symbolism, yet their use in contemporary Chinese-style restaurants is often reduced to decorative objects. This study pursued two objectives: (1) to identify the cultural, visual, material, and experiential attributes of fish lantern intangible cultural heritage that are relevant to restaurant space, and (2) to examine current applications, perceived barriers, and stakeholder expectations before a separate design-development phase. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design integrated field observation at 28 restaurants and eight fish lantern heritage bases, 30 semi-structured interviews, and 405 valid questionnaires across six Chinese cities (total participant $n = 435$). The questionnaire showed good internal consistency (overall Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$); exploratory factor analysis supported five dimensions (KMO = .84, Bartlett's test p

$< .001$, cumulative variance = 78.65%). Respondents reported moderate cultural cognition ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.92$) but a low evaluation of current market applications ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 0.85$). In contrast, demand for integrated design was high ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.78$), and agreement with inheritance and innovation was highest ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 0.75$). Qualitative analysis identified four recurring attributes - auspicious and communal meanings, recognizable fish morphology, bamboo-and-paper materiality, and dynamic light-and-shadow experience - alongside five barriers: superficial symbol use, single-form display, weak functional integration, limited cultural explanation, and cost or maintenance

concerns. The findings show that a restaurant can support living heritage only when cultural meaning, spatial function, and visitor experience are treated as an integrated system. This article establishes the evidence base for later design and prototype evaluation without prematurely presenting the design phase itself.

Keywords: fish lantern, intangible cultural heritage, Chinese-style restaurant, spatial experience, mixed methods

Introduction

The 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage defines intangible cultural heritage (ICH) as practices, representations, knowledge, and skills that communities recognize as part of their heritage and continually recreate in response to their environment (UNESCO, 2003). This definition shifts attention away from preserving an isolated object and toward sustaining the knowledge, participation, and social contexts through which heritage remains meaningful. Contemporary safeguarding therefore concerns transmission and continued practice as much as documentation. UNESCO's current operational texts similarly place community participation and sustainable development at the center of implementation (UNESCO, 2024).

Fish lantern traditions illustrate this living relationship between craft and event. Regional forms vary, but the practice commonly combines a shaped bamboo framework, paper or textile covering, painted color, internal illumination, and collective performance. The fish is not only an image. It participates in seasonal ritual, expresses wishes for abundance and communal well-being, and becomes animated through light and movement. Recent research on fish lantern dance has emphasized the need to create contemporary contexts for transmission rather than relying exclusively on occasional festival display (Mei, 2024).

Chinese-style restaurants are a plausible everyday context because they combine service, circulation, material atmosphere, visual communication, and repeated public contact. At the same time, commercial use creates a risk: heritage may be detached from its makers and reduced to an easily recognizable motif. Heritage scholars have long argued that heritage value is produced through cultural practice and interpretation, not located automatically in an object (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004; Smith, 2006). A lantern-shaped pendant therefore does not by itself constitute living inheritance. Its value depends on how the symbol is explained, how craft knowledge is represented, whether

the setting supports meaningful participation, and whether restaurant function remains clear and safe.

The broader research project includes both evidence gathering and a later design-development phase. For analytical clarity, the present article focuses on the first two research objectives and separates the empirical evidence from the subsequent design phase. It does not claim that a completed spatial scheme has already been validated. Instead, it analyzes what the fish lantern means, how it is currently used, and what problems a future design response must address.

The translation of a living tradition into a restaurant also raises a question of scale. A festival performance is temporary, collective, and often embedded in a familiar local setting, whereas a restaurant interior is permanent, regulated, and encountered by visitors with different levels of prior knowledge. The design task is therefore not to reproduce the original event in miniature. It is to identify which relationships make the tradition intelligible and then determine how those relationships can remain visible within everyday dining. Meaning, craft process, practitioner authorship, sensory atmosphere, and opportunities for participation become linked analytical concerns rather than separate decorative choices.

This distinction is important because commercial visibility can generate both safeguarding opportunities and interpretive risks. Repeated exposure may support recognition, education, and demand for skilled making, but repetition can also normalize a simplified image until the image replaces the practice in public understanding. A credible application should therefore enable visitors to recognize the fish lantern while also encountering evidence that it belongs to a regional, communal, and evolving cultural system. The present study treats this balance as an empirical question by comparing heritage-base observations with restaurant applications and by examining how practitioners, operators, designers, and consumers describe the same objects from different positions.

Research Objectives

Objective 1 was to identify and analyze the cultural meanings, visual features, material qualities, and experiential attributes of fish lantern ICH that are relevant to Chinese-style restaurant spaces. Objective 2 was to investigate current applications and synthesize the views of designers, restaurant operators, heritage practitioners, and consumers regarding

application barriers and experience needs. Together, these objectives ask what should be understood before fish lantern heritage is translated into a commercial interior. They also directly support the revised title by naming both the investigated attributes and the analyzed barriers.

Literature Review and Conceptual Lens

Living Heritage as Cultural Process

The living-heritage perspective challenges the idea that safeguarding is achieved when a form is copied accurately or stored securely. UNESCO (2003) places communities, groups, and practitioners within the definition of ICH, while Smith (2006) describes heritage as a cultural process through which values are negotiated and identities are performed.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004) further shows that heritage production can lift practices out of their ordinary context and reframe them for display. This reframing can generate visibility, but it can also make a practice appear fixed and finished. Applied to restaurants, these arguments imply that cultural visibility must be paired with interpretation, practitioner participation, and opportunities for renewed use.

Commercial interiors are not neutral containers. They select which elements are enlarged, simplified, illuminated, photographed, or associated with a brand. Such selections may broaden public contact with fish lantern culture, but they may also overemphasize a single red-and-gold image while concealing regional variation and hand-making knowledge. The evaluation of a fish lantern restaurant should therefore consider cultural legibility, acknowledgment of origin, and the relationship between representation and active transmission.

Semiotic, Material, and Experiential Dimensions

Semiotics provides a practical lens for distinguishing a sign from the cultural relationship it represents. Signs acquire meaning through codes and conventions rather than through appearance alone (Chandler, 2017). In fish lantern culture, fish morphology, scale patterns, color, bamboo structure, translucency, light, and collective movement operate as an interconnected sign system. A literal fish outline may offer immediate recognition, whereas material joints, filtered light, or rhythmic repetition can communicate craft and

movement more subtly. The key analytical issue is whether transformed signs remain culturally intelligible and contextually appropriate.

Material and atmospheric theories reinforce this relational view. Tanizaki (1977) treated shadow as an active component of spatial perception rather than an absence of light. Kuma's anti-object position likewise emphasizes relationships among material, body, and environment instead of the isolated architectural object (Kuma, 2008). These ideas are particularly relevant to a lantern tradition whose form becomes legible through a thin skin, an inner light source, and movement. They suggest that bamboo texture, translucency, scale, and light distribution may communicate the heritage more effectively than a large static replica.

From the service perspective, the experience-economy framework proposes that settings create value by staging memorable and participatory experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). A restaurant may therefore become a recurring contact point for cultural learning, but experience staging should not be confused with spectacle. Heritage-based experience requires credible cultural content and respect for operational needs. Venturi's (1966) defense of complexity also cautions against purist solutions: a restaurant must accommodate symbolic expression together with lighting, circulation, privacy, maintenance, and food service.

Previous Fish Lantern Applications and the Research Gap

Existing work supports the value of contemporary application but remains limited in empirical scope. Mei (2024) examined fish lantern dance inheritance in universities and highlighted education and repeated participation. Lin and Wang (2025) explored direct transformation of Shatoujiao fish lantern dance elements into a catering-space proposal, including zoning, color, lighting, and furniture. Their work demonstrates design potential, yet it begins primarily from a design proposition. Less attention has been paid to the evidence that should precede design: which attributes different stakeholders consider essential, why current

restaurant applications are judged weak, and where cultural intentions conflict with operational constraints. This study addresses that gap through field observation, interviews, and a multi-group questionnaire.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that cultural translation should be assessed at more than one level. At the semantic level, visitors need enough information to connect the fish form with auspicious, communal, and regional meanings. At the material level, the construction should make craft knowledge perceptible rather than conceal it behind an industrial substitute. At the spatial level, light, movement, sequence, and proximity should support perception without obstructing service. At the social level, the relationship with practitioners should remain visible through attribution, collaboration, or opportunities for renewed participation. Failure at any one level can weaken the others: accurate morphology without context becomes a motif, while interpretation without convincing material or spatial experience can feel detached from the setting.

The literature also indicates why authenticity should not be defined as literal copying. Living heritage is continually recreated, and restaurant interiors necessarily introduce new constraints of duration, safety, maintenance, and audience. The relevant question is whether transformation preserves intelligible cultural relationships and enables continued knowledge transmission. This approach allows abstraction, modular construction, or contemporary lighting when the resulting system still communicates origin, craft logic, and communal significance. It also creates a clearer basis for later evaluation because a proposal can be examined against stated cultural and operational criteria rather than judged only by visual similarity or novelty.

Methodology

Research Design

A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was used to connect qualitative interpretation with quantitative pattern description. Mixed methods are appropriate when neither numerical measurement nor contextual interpretation can answer the research questions independently (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The first stage combined literature review, field observation, and semi-structured interviews. The second stage used a structured questionnaire derived from the qualitative themes. Integration occurred by comparing observed practices and interview themes with the direction and relative strength of questionnaire scores.

The analysis is intentionally bounded. It identifies attributes and barriers but does not present a final restaurant design, design prototype, or post-occupancy evaluation. Those

tasks belong to a subsequent design-phase article. This boundary prevents expected design outcomes from being reported as if they were already tested findings.

Table 1
Participants and
Data Sources

Source	Quntity	Scope purpose	Analytical
Field observation	28 restaurant; 8 heritage bases		Six core cities plus representative fish lantern regions
Semi-structured interviews	30 Participans		Designers, operators, fish lantern heritage practitioners, and consumers
Questionnai re	405 valid responses		Designers, operators, and consumers in six cities

Document	n, and visitor response	
current	Identify cultural	Describe cognition, current
applications	attributes, application	application, design demand,
, circulation,	barriers, and	experience demand, and
material	stakeholder	inheritance attitude
use,	expectations	
lighting,		
interpretatio		Integrated mixed-methods evidence base

Participants and Sampling

The qualitative stage used purposive sampling to include people able to discuss cultural meaning and spatial implementation in detail. Thirty interviews involved restaurant interior designers, restaurant operators or brand managers, fish lantern heritage practitioners, and consumers. Field observation covered 28 Chinese-style restaurants and eight fish lantern heritage bases. The sites provided contrast between commercial display and practice-based heritage contexts.

The quantitative stage retained 405 valid questionnaires from designers, operators, and consumers in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Chengdu, and Hangzhou.

Combined with the 30 interview participants, the participant total was 435. To maintain a consistent denominator throughout the analysis, sample quantities are reported at the qualitative-and quantitative-stage levels rather than as subgroup totals.

Instruments and Measures

The semi-structured interview guide addressed knowledge of fish lantern culture, perceived core attributes, examples of restaurant use, operational problems, regional differences, and desired forms of cultural experience. A standardized observation checklist examined six domains: spatial layout, stylistic coordination, fish lantern application, lighting and shadow, cultural interpretation, and visitor behavior. Interview and observation prompts were refined after pretesting and expert review.

The questionnaire contained demographic and screening questions plus five Likert-scale dimensions: cultural cognition, evaluation of current market application, design preference and integration demand, cultural dining-experience demand, and agreement with inheritance and innovation. Items used a five-point response scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A 40-person pretest was used to revise ambiguous or repetitive items.

Table 2

Reliability and Construct-Validity Summary

Measure	Value	Interpretation	
Cultural cognition	alpha = .86	Good	internal consistency
Current market application	alpha = .82	Good	internal consistency
Design preference and integration demand	alpha = .88	Good	internal consistency
Cultural experience and emotional identity	alpha = .89	Good	internal consistency
Inheritance and innovation	alpha = .85	Good	internal consistency
Overall questionnaire	alpha = .87	Good	internal consistency

Exploratory factor analysis
.84; p

KMO =

Five-factor solution
supported

< .001

Cumulative explained variance coverage	78.65%	Adequate	construct
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Data Collection, Analysis, and Ethics

Observation records and interview transcripts were organized through familiarization, initial coding, category development, theme review, and interpretation. This procedure followed the logic of thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2006), while keeping the coding questions tied to the two research objectives. Questionnaire analysis included frequencies, means, standard deviations, internal-consistency reliability, and exploratory factor analysis. Because the available dataset did not provide complete test statistics for proposed group comparisons or regression models, the revised results do not claim statistically significant group differences, correlations, or predictive effects.

Participants received information about the study purpose, voluntary participation, withdrawal, and data use. Interview recording required permission. Personal identifiers were excluded from the analytic dataset, and records were stored with restricted access. Field photography was limited to permitted areas. These procedures were intended to reduce privacy risk and to respect heritage practitioners as knowledge holders rather than treating them solely as sources of decorative imagery.

Integration occurred through comparison rather than through the mechanical conversion of one dataset into another. Observation documented what was physically present, interviews explained why participants valued or criticized those conditions, and questionnaire scores indicated whether the direction of the qualitative themes was visible across a larger respondent group. Convergence increased interpretive confidence when low evaluations of current practice accompanied repeated accounts of superficial symbolism or weak functional integration. Divergence was retained as an analytical signal rather than removed: for example, enthusiasm for cultural innovation coexisted with concerns about cost, cleaning, safety, and misrepresentation. This integration logic kept the study focused on the two objectives while avoiding causal claims that the available descriptive data could not support.

Results

Cultural and Spatial Attributes of Fish Lantern Heritage

The integrated qualitative evidence produced four recurrent attribute groups. The first was symbolic and communal meaning. Participants associated the fish form with abundance, continuity, good fortune, and relationships between communities and water-based livelihoods. Interview and field materials also emphasized that fish lanterns are activated collectively through making, carrying, procession, and viewing. The finding distinguishes the cultural practice from a generic fish motif. When a restaurant displays the form without origin, story, or evidence of craft, the most socially important layer becomes difficult for visitors to perceive.

The second group concerned recognizable visual structure. Fish profiles, rhythmic scales, fins, eyes, segmented bodies, and bright accents made the tradition immediately identifiable. However, respondents did not require exact copying in every context. They accepted abstraction when the relationship among fish morphology, pattern rhythm, and light remained legible. This suggests that cultural recognition depends on a coherent set of signs rather than on literal repetition of a single object.

The third group involved material and craft evidence. Bamboo framework, tied joints, hand-painted surfaces, paper or textile translucency, and visible variation were repeatedly distinguished from mass-produced plastic decoration. Participants valued natural texture and lightness, yet operators also raised concerns about cleaning, fire safety, humidity, durability, replacement, and long-term maintenance. Material authenticity was therefore desired but could not be separated from the technical requirements of food-service interiors.

The fourth group was dynamic atmosphere. Fish lantern heritage is experienced through illumination, shadow, movement, and changing viewpoints. Static ceiling pendants captured only part of this quality. Observations suggested that the most engaging examples used layered light, partial views, rhythmic repetition, or a sequence along circulation routes. Participants also responded positively to opportunities to learn about making or regional variants. The results frame experience as a combination of sensory atmosphere and cultural interpretation, not as visual novelty alone.

Current Application Barriers

Five barriers recurred across observations and interviews. First, superficial symbol use was common. Fish silhouettes, lantern-like pendants, or red-and-gold palettes were often applied after the spatial layout had already been determined. These additions signaled a broad Chinese theme but did not explain the specific fish lantern tradition. Second, expression was usually limited to one form, most often a hanging light or wall decoration. Repetition without hierarchy weakened both visual impact and cultural depth.

Third, heritage elements were frequently disconnected from restaurant function. Oversized pieces competed with signs, reduced clear height, complicated cleaning, or interrupted circulation. In other cases, culturally prominent displays were placed where customers could not approach or read them. Designers and operators therefore described a practical conflict between symbolic ambition and service efficiency. Fourth, cultural explanation was weak. Labels, maker attribution, regional context, and opportunities for participation were uncommon, which left customers to interpret the objects as generic decoration.

Fifth, implementation was constrained by cost, maintenance, and coordination. Custom craft required time and communication between designers, operators, and practitioners. Operators worried about cleaning, replacement, fire performance, and the commercial return of cultural installations. Heritage practitioners, by contrast, were concerned that simplification or low-cost imitation could distort the practice. These positions were not mutually exclusive; they revealed the need for an early coordination process before formal design development.

Questionnaire Results

The questionnaire results showed a clear gap between cultural and design interest on one hand and perceptions of current practice on the other. Cultural cognition was moderate ($M = 3.28$), indicating that fish lantern heritage was recognizable but not deeply understood by all respondents. The mean evaluation of current market application was the lowest score ($M = 2.76$). In contrast, design preference and integration demand was high ($M = 3.85$), and agreement with inheritance and innovation was highest ($M = 4.01$). Cultural dining-experience demand was also above the scale midpoint ($M = 3.62$).

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for the Five Questionnaire Dimensions

Dimension	M	S	D	Relative
Cultural cognition of fish lantern ICH	3.	0.		
	28	92		Moderate
Evaluation of current market application	2.	0.		
	76	85		Low
Design preference and integration demand	3.	0.		
	85	78		High
Cultural dining-experience dem and	3.	0.		
	62	81		Moderately high
Agreement with inheritance and innovation	4.	0.		
	01	75		High

The pattern is more important than any single mean. Respondents were open to innovation and wanted more integrated cultural experience, yet they judged existing restaurant applications poorly. This result is consistent with the qualitative barriers and supports the second objective. It also shows why the design phase should not begin with a predetermined decorative vocabulary. The evidence base first needs to define cultural content, operational limits, and experience priorities.

Integrated Findings

Triangulation connected the two research objectives. Objective 1 identified an attribute system in which meaning, form, material, and dynamic atmosphere reinforce one another. Objective 2 showed that current applications tend to isolate the easiest visual signs while neglecting material credibility, cultural explanation, movement, and function. The low application score and high integration demand quantitatively mirror this qualitative diagnosis. The combined evidence therefore supports three criteria for subsequent design

work: cultural legibility, operational compatibility, and experiential continuity. These criteria are findings of the present study; the specific design response remains outside its scope.

The integrated pattern shows that the four cultural-spatial attributes and the five barriers are not independent lists. Symbolic meaning is weakened when cultural explanation is absent; material credibility is reduced when maintenance pressures lead directly to generic substitutes; dynamic atmosphere is lost when the lantern is treated as a static object; and visual recognition becomes repetitive when a single motif is applied without hierarchy. Conversely, the same design decision may answer several concerns at once. A well-positioned, maintainable component that reveals its bamboo logic, acknowledges its maker, filters light, and supports circulation can connect meaning, craft, atmosphere, and function without multiplying decorative elements.

This relationship also explains the questionnaire pattern. The low mean for current market application should not be read as rejection of fish lantern culture in restaurants, because demand for integration and support for inheritance and innovation were substantially stronger. The contrast instead indicates dissatisfaction with the quality and depth of existing translation. Stakeholders appear willing to accept contemporary transformation when it is culturally legible and operationally convincing. For the subsequent phase, the results therefore function as boundary conditions: a proposal should demonstrate how it retains cultural relationships, solves practical constraints, and creates a coherent experience before visual preference alone is used as evidence of success.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results support the living-heritage view that continuity cannot be reduced to the preservation or copying of a form. UNESCO (2003) emphasizes community recognition and ongoing recreation, while Smith (2006) treats heritage as a cultural process. The observed restaurant practice often reversed that priority: an isolated fish-lantern image was made visible, but the making process, communal use, regional context, and practitioner relationship were less visible. The problem is therefore not that restaurants commercialize heritage in every case. It is that commercialization can detach the sign from the practices that give it meaning.

This interpretation also aligns with Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's (2004) account of heritage as metacultural production. Moving fish lantern culture into a restaurant inevitably reframes

it. Reframing can create repeated public contact and economic opportunities, but it can also freeze a living practice into a brand image. The findings suggest that responsible reframing requires explicit links to practitioners, origin, and transmission. A short interpretive text, credited craft process, workshop, seasonal event, or rotating regional presentation may be more consequential for living heritage than adding more lantern-shaped objects.

The identified attribute system is consistent with material and spatial theory. Tanizaki (1977) showed that shadow participates in the perception of material and atmosphere, and Kuma (2008) emphasized relationships rather than autonomous objects. Respondents' attention to translucent skin, bamboo structure, internal light, and movement similarly indicates that fish lantern identity emerges from relations among material, light, body, and route. This helps explain why static replicas were often considered insufficient. It also provides a theoretical reason to evaluate atmosphere and circulation together rather than treating lighting as a final decorative layer.

The questionnaire pattern is compatible with the experience-economy argument that customers value memorable settings beyond basic service (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). However, the study qualifies that argument by showing that novelty alone is not enough for a heritage setting. The high score for inheritance and innovation, paired with the low current-application score, indicates a demand for credible integration rather than for more spectacle. Operational concerns reported by restaurant managers further support Venturi's (1966) recognition of complexity: symbolic richness must coexist with circulation, safety, maintenance, comfort, and commercial use.

Comparison with recent fish lantern research clarifies the contribution of this first article. Mei (2024) demonstrates the importance of repeated participation in educational settings. The restaurant context differs because participation must fit short visits, food service, and brand operations, yet the same principle remains relevant: transmission requires more than viewing. Lin and Wang (2025) show how fish lantern dance elements can inform zoning, color, lighting, and furniture. The present study complements that design-oriented work by establishing empirical preconditions before design. It identifies which attributes stakeholders wish to retain and which barriers a later proposal must test.

Implications for Subsequent Design Development

The first implication is that cultural legibility should be translated into observable evaluation questions. A later proposal can be examined for whether visitors can identify the tradition, distinguish it from a generic fish motif, recognize evidence of bamboo-frame making, and connect the installation with a place, community, or practitioner. Interpretation does not need to dominate the dining environment, but it should be accessible at the point where curiosity is likely to arise. Maker credit, concise regional context, process imagery, menu-linked narratives, or scheduled demonstrations are possible mechanisms to be tested rather than assumed to be effective.

The second implication concerns operational compatibility. Cultural ambition will be difficult to sustain if an installation obstructs circulation, traps grease or dust, creates glare, reduces clear height, or requires replacement procedures that the operator cannot support. Future prototyping should therefore include cleaning access, fire performance, weight, fixing details, humidity, durability, repair, storage, staff routines, and life-cycle cost from the beginning. These requirements should not be treated as forces that automatically diminish authenticity. When discussed with practitioners, they can become design parameters for modular repair, replaceable skins, protected bamboo expression, or other transformations that retain visible craft logic while meeting restaurant conditions. Although developed in an elderly-care context, Liu and Mankhatitham's (2025) human-centered framework similarly integrates spatial organization, multifunctionality, and emotional support; the transferable principle is to coordinate these dimensions instead of treating them as isolated features.

The third implication is that experiential continuity should be evaluated as a sequence rather than as a single focal object. Entry, waiting, circulation, seating, service, and departure offer different durations and viewing distances. A later design can test whether light, shadow, partial views, repetition, and changing scale form a comprehensible rhythm across these moments. Participation should likewise match the restaurant context: a brief act of observation, touch, assembly, storytelling, or seasonal programming may be more credible than an elaborate activity imposed on every customer. The goal is to support voluntary cultural encounter without compromising dining comfort or turning heritage into compulsory spectacle.

Finally, evaluation should involve the stakeholder groups whose concerns shaped the present findings. Practitioners can assess cultural accuracy, attribution, and the visibility

of making knowledge; operators can assess safety, maintenance, staffing, and commercial feasibility; designers can assess spatial coherence and technical integration; and users can assess recognition, comfort, interest, and willingness to engage. Agreement is not expected on every detail. The value of a multi-stakeholder process is that trade-offs become explicit before implementation, allowing the later study to document why a transformation was selected and which cultural or operational risks remain. Such documentation would also make prototype testing more transparent and reduce the tendency to present aesthetic preference as proof of safeguarding.

In conclusion, fish lantern ICH offers a coherent cultural-spatial system rather than a collection of decorative motifs. Its relevant attributes include communal and auspicious meanings, recognizable fish morphology, bamboo-and-paper craft evidence, and an animated light-and-shadow experience. Current restaurant applications are judged weak when they use a single symbol, ignore function, omit interpretation, or rely on low-credibility materials. The quantitative results reinforce this assessment: current practice received the lowest mean, while demand for integration and innovative inheritance was high. A future design phase should therefore be evaluated against cultural legibility, operational compatibility, and experiential continuity.

Three limitations should guide interpretation. First, the quantitative sample was concentrated in six large Chinese cities, so findings may not represent smaller or rural markets. Second, the study examined one broad fish lantern category even though regional traditions differ in craft, performance, and meaning. Third, the source dataset supports descriptive and thematic conclusions but does not provide complete statistics for causal or predictive claims. The revised article therefore avoids claiming significant group differences or effects that cannot be independently checked. Design development, prototype testing, and post-occupancy evaluation are intentionally reserved for the second article.

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