

Innovations

A Study on Gangneung Danoje Festival Customs in the East Asian Context: With a Discussion on the Protection and Mutual Learning of Regional Cultural Heritage

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Abstract: *As a time-honored traditional cultural event in East Asia, the Dragon Boat Festival has developed diverse expressions across regions, with South Korea's Gangneung Danoje Festival (a UNESCO-listed intangible cultural heritage) and China's various Dragon Boat Festival customs as typical examples. This paper adopts the "East Asian context" as its analytical perspective to compare and interpret these two festive practices. It first sorts out their historical origins, core rituals and cultural connotations, clarifying differences in forms such as religious sacrifices versus folk customs and similarities in cultural essence like respect for nature and ancestor worship. Then, it explores their interactive relationships within the East Asian cultural circle, analyzing how geographical proximity and historical exchanges have shaped their shared cultural genes and regional characteristics. Finally, focusing on the protection and mutual learning of regional cultural heritage, the paper discusses challenges faced by East Asian traditional festival inheritance such as globalization impacts and homogenization risks, and proposes practical paths for cross-border cultural mutual learning including joint heritage declaration, academic exchange platforms and cultural creative product cooperation. The study aims to provide theoretical references for the sustainable protection of East Asian regional cultural heritage and promote in-depth exchanges and common development of traditional cultures in the region.*

Keywords: *Gangneung Danoje Festival; Chinese Dragon Boat Festival Customs; East Asian Context; Regional Cultural Heritage; Cultural Protection and Mutual Learning*

1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Traditional festivals are core carriers of East Asian cultural heritage, bearing the historical memory and cultural values of regions including China, South Korea, and Japan. Among them, the Dragon Boat Festival (known as Dano in South Korea) has a history spanning over two thousand years, and its development in different countries has formed unique regional expressions. South Korea's Gangneung

Danoje Festival, inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List in 2005, and China's diverse Dragon Boat Festival customs—such as dragon boat racing, zongzi-making, and hanging mugwort—are typical representatives of this diversity, reflecting the shared cultural genes and local adaptations within the East Asian cultural circle.

Against the backdrop of globalization and rising emphasis on intangible cultural heritage protection, both China and South Korea have established systematic policy frameworks for heritage preservation, while international organizations have promoted regional collaborative mechanisms. China's 14th Five-Year Plan for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2021-2025) clearly proposes strengthening systematic protection of traditional festivals, launching the Traditional Festival Revitalization Plan, and actively promoting joint applications for shared heritage projects with other countries. Complementing this domestic policy, China and South Korea signed the Agreement on Cultural Heritage Exchange and Cooperation in 2005, which established a mechanism for exchanging protection experiences, sharing research data, and supporting bilateral collaborative projects—laying an institutional foundation for cross-border communication on festival heritage. At the international level, UNESCO's East Asia Office launched the "Heritage as Fashion" project in 2025, aiming to connect intangible cultural heritage with modern industries and promote collaborative protection among China, South Korea, Japan, and other regional countries, while also advocating for integrated protection of material and intangible heritage to enhance community participation.

In this context, comparing and interpreting Gangneung Danoje Festival and Chinese Dragon Boat Festival customs is not only academically significant for exploring the origin and evolution of East Asian traditional culture but also practically valuable for addressing challenges like cultural homogenization and insufficient policy synergy. It can provide insights into how to translate institutional agreements into concrete practices of cultural mutual learning, and how to balance heritage authenticity with contemporary vitality—issues highlighted by South Korea's early experience with the Cultural Heritage Protection Act (1962) and China's gradual improvement of its legal system since the Intangible Cultural Heritage Law (2011).

1.2 Literature Review

Existing studies on Gangneung Danoje Festival mostly center on its heritage application process and shamanistic cultural interpretations, with a focus on analyzing its ritual structure—such as shamanistic sacrifices and folk performances—and the role of local community autonomy in protection, as seen in comparisons with South Korea's other heritage villages like Yangdong and Hahoe. Scholars have also noted how South Korea's centralized institutional support, including dedicated funding for inheritors and systematic documentation, has sustained the festival's vitality.

For Chinese Dragon Boat Festival customs, research mainly focuses on regional

diversity—such as the prominence of dragon boat racing in southern China versus northern zongzi-making traditions—and the impact of national policies. Studies have examined how China's Traditional Festival Revitalization Plan and the listing of Dragon Boat Festival as a national legal holiday (2008) have influenced its modern inheritance, as well as the challenges of over-commercialization in tourist-oriented areas. Recent works also explore digital protection efforts, such as the integration of festival customs into the China Traditional Village Digital Museum.

However, most studies treat the two festivals as independent subjects, lacking in-depth discussions under the "East Asian context." While some comparative studies have emerged—such as analyses of Sino-Korean differences in heritage legislation and institutional mechanisms—few have connected policy frameworks to specific festive practices to explore how bilateral agreements like the 2005 Sino-Korean Cooperation Agreement have shaped cultural interaction. There is also a gap in research on how UNESCO's regional initiatives, such as the "Heritage as Fashion" project, can facilitate practical collaboration between the two countries in festival heritage protection. Additionally, existing literature rarely addresses how to avoid the "origination dispute" trap and build a mutually beneficial protection network, a key issue highlighted by public discussions following Gangneung Danoje's UNESCO listing.

1.3 Research Objectives, Methods and Innovation

The main objectives of this study are threefold: first, to clarify the historical connections and contemporary differences between Gangneung Danoje Festival and Chinese Dragon Boat Festival customs, focusing on how policy environments have shaped their respective development paths; second, to analyze the effectiveness and limitations of existing Sino-Korean cultural heritage cooperation mechanisms in the context of festival protection; and third, to propose feasible paths for cross-border cultural mutual learning that align with both national policy goals and UNESCO's collaborative principles.

In terms of research methods, this paper will adopt three complementary approaches: literature analysis to systematically sort through historical documents, policy texts (including China's 14th Five-Year Plan for Intangible Heritage and South Korea's Cultural Heritage Protection Act), and academic works; comparative study to contrast the two festivals' core rituals, inheritance models, and policy supports; and policy analysis to evaluate the implementation effects of bilateral cooperation agreements and international initiatives like UNESCO's integrated protection project.

The research innovation lies in two aspects: first, constructing an analytical framework that links "policy mechanisms—festive practices—cultural mutual learning," moving beyond isolated discussions of either culture or policy to reveal how institutional arrangements influence the transmission and evolution of traditional festivals; second, proposing a "shared heritage network" model tailored to East Asian festivals, which draws on lessons from Sino-Korean

cooperation experiences and UNESCO's regional projects to address homogenization and miscommunication challenges. This framework aims to provide a new perspective for balancing national cultural identity with regional collaborative protection.

2 Theoretical Foundation: Core Concepts and Analytical Framework

2.1 Definition of Core Concepts

2.1.1 Intangible Cultural Heritage

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH), as defined by UNESCO in the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), refers to living expressions inherited from ancestors and passed on to descendants, including traditions, rituals, performing arts, and festive practices—all of which reflect a community's cultural identity and historical continuity. A key criterion for ICH recognition is its “living nature”: it is not a static relic but evolves with social contexts while retaining core cultural connotations.

This definition aligns with the policy practices of both China and South Korea. China's Intangible Cultural Heritage Law (2011) emphasizes ICH as a “carrier of national cultural identity,” requiring protection to balance “authenticity” and “contemporaneity”—a principle embodied in its Traditional Festival Revitalization Plan, which supports adapting dragon boat racing and zongzi-making to modern community life. South Korea's Cultural Heritage Protection Act (revised 2020) similarly frames ICH as a “community-shared asset,” with provisions for funding local inheritors of practices like Gangneung Danoje's shamanistic rituals, ensuring the festival remains rooted in its original social functions while engaging younger generations. For this study, ICH serves as the foundational concept to assess how Gangneung Danoje Festival and Chinese Dragon Boat Festival customs maintain cultural essence amid policy-driven adaptation.

2.1.2 cross-border cultural mutual learning

cross-border cultural mutual learning refers to the process of cross-border exchange, reference, and co-creation among cultures within a geographically or culturally connected region. In the East Asian context, it is distinguished by three key characteristics: historical continuity, institutional collaboration, and community participation. Unlike general cultural exchange, it prioritizes “mutual benefit” over one-way transmission, aiming to strengthen shared cultural bonds while preserving regional uniqueness.

Historical continuity is evident in East Asia's long-standing cultural interactions—such as the spread of solar term traditions (including the Dano/Dragon Boat Festival) via the Sinic cultural circle—which laid the groundwork for modern mutual learning. Institutional collaboration, as seen in the 2005 China-South Korea Agreement on Cultural Heritage Exchange and Cooperation and UNESCO's East Asia “Heritage as Fashion” project, provides structured channels for sharing protection experiences (e.g., China's digital museum techniques and South Korea's community inheritance models).

Community participation ensures mutual learning is not limited to government-level agreements: local groups, such as Chinese dragon boat teams participating in South Korea's Dano cultural festivals and Korean folk artists joining China's Dragon Boat performances, translate institutional goals into tangible cultural interaction. For this study, cross-border cultural mutual learning is the core lens to explore how the two festivals can serve as platforms for cross-border heritage collaboration.

2.2 Analytical Framework of “East Asian Context”

To interpret the relationship between Gangneung Danoje Festival and Chinese Dragon Boat Festival customs, this paper constructs an analytical framework centered on “East Asian context,” which integrates two interrelated dimensions: cultural homogeneity and regional cultural heterogeneity. This framework avoids treating East Asian culture as a monolith or reducing the two festivals to isolated local practices, instead highlighting their dynamic interaction within a shared yet diverse cultural space.

2.2.1 Cultural Homogeneity in East Asia

Cultural homogeneity provides the foundational bond for the two festivals' shared origins and core values, rooted in three interwoven factors: Confucian cultural traditions, agricultural civilization, and the solar term system.

Confucianism, as a dominant ideological framework in East Asia for millennia, shaped the festivals' emphasis on community cohesion and filial piety. For example, both festivals involve family gatherings—Chinese families making zongzi together and Korean communities participating in Gangneung Danoje's collective rituals—reflecting Confucian values of “harmony within the group.” Agricultural civilization, meanwhile, explains the festivals' connection to seasonal cycles: both originated as rituals to pray for harvests and ward off summer pests, a common need in East Asia's rice-farming societies. The solar term system (a shared legacy of ancient East Asian astronomy) further unites them: the Dragon Boat Festival falls on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, while Gangneung Danoje is celebrated around the same solar period (near the Summer Solstice), linking both to the region's shared understanding of seasonal change.

This homogeneity is not static. It has been reinforced by modern institutional efforts, such as UNESCO's classification of both festivals under “East Asian traditional festive practices” and the 2005 China-South Korea cultural heritage agreement, which explicitly recognizes their shared cultural roots. These efforts lay the groundwork for cross-border mutual learning, as they frame the festivals not as competing “cultural symbols” but as complementary expressions of a common heritage.

2.2.2 Regional Cultural Heterogeneity

Regional cultural heterogeneity accounts for the distinct forms and development paths of the two festivals, shaped by local history, social structures, and policy

priorities. This heterogeneity does not contradict homogeneity but rather reflects how shared cultural genes adapt to specific contexts.

First, historical and religious differences have shaped ritual focuses. Gangneung Danoje retains strong shamanistic elements—such as “gut” (shamans who perform traditional shamanistic rituals) to honor local deities and ancestors—rooted in Korea's indigenous shamanism (Muism) and the region's historical role as a center for folk religious practices. In contrast, Chinese Dragon Boat Festival customs are more secularized, with traditions like dragon boat racing (originally a ritual to appease river gods) evolving into community sports, and zongzi-making linked to the commemoration of Qu Yuan (a Warring States poet)—a narrative shaped by China's long history of literati culture and state-led storytelling.

Second, policy priorities have reinforced these differences. South Korea's ICH protection focuses on “local autonomy”: Gangneung Danoje is managed by local community councils, with funding from the central government directed to supporting inheritors and preserving original rituals (e.g., training shamans and documenting traditional performances). China's policy, by contrast, emphasizes “national integration”: its Traditional Festival Revitalization Plan promotes standardized practices (e.g., national dragon boat racing competitions) while supporting regional diversity (e.g., protecting unique zongzi styles in Guangdong and Hunan), reflecting its goal of balancing national cultural identity with local characteristics.

This heterogeneity is critical for mutual learning. It ensures that cross-border collaboration does not lead to “cultural homogenization”—a risk highlighted by UNESCO's warnings about globalization—but rather allows both countries to draw on each other's strengths: China can learn from South Korea's community-led inheritance models, while South Korea can reference China's approach to integrating festivals into national cultural education and digital protection.

3 Historical Evolution and Current Status of Two Festivals

3.1 Gangneung Danoje Festival: From Local Ritual to World Heritage

The historical roots of Gangneung Danoje Festival trace back to the Three Kingdoms Period of the Korean Peninsula, spanning 57 BCE to 668 CE. It emerged then as a seasonal ritual tied to the “Dano” solar term—an East Asian shared tradition marking the transition to summer. Early records, such as Samguk Sagi or Chronicles of the Three Kingdoms, note that Dano rituals in coastal regions like Gangneung focused on praying for maritime safety and bountiful harvests, reflecting the area's reliance on fishing and agriculture. Over the Goryeo Dynasty (918–1392) and Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910), these rituals gradually integrated with indigenous Muism (shamanism), incorporating “gut” ceremonies—shaman-led rituals to honor local deities and ancestors—and folk performances to strengthen community cohesion. By the late Joseon era, Gangneung Danoje had evolved into a multi-day event, with rituals centered on the local Namdaecheon River and performances like ganggangsullae (circle

dances) and pansori (narrative singing) becoming core elements.

In modern times, Gangneung Danoje's trajectory shifted significantly with efforts to preserve its authenticity amid social change. The festival faced decline in the mid-20th century due to urbanization and the decline of traditional community structures, prompting local scholars and residents to launch protection initiatives in the 1960s. These efforts aligned with South Korea's Cultural Heritage Protection Act enacted in 1962, which designated Gangneung Danoje as an "Important Intangible Cultural Heritage" in 1967, providing state funding for documenting rituals and training inheritors. A pivotal milestone came in 2005, when UNESCO inscribed it on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity—recognizing its role as a "living expression of community identity" and its unique integration of shamanistic rituals and folk art.

Today, Gangneung Danoje retains its traditional structure as a five-day festival held annually in early June, with core rituals and practices closely guarded by local communities. Key elements include the "Seongjuje" (ritual to honor the mountain god), where shamans offer prayers for community prosperity; the "Byeolsingut" (village ritual) along the Namdaecheon River, which symbolizes purification and renewal; and folk performances that invite residents to participate, such as mask dances and traditional music shows. Protection measures include a "community inheritance committee" composed of local elders, artists, and scholars, which oversees ritual authenticity, and government-funded programs to train young inheritors—including workshops for gut shamans and pansori singers. However, the festival also faces challenges: urban migration has reduced the number of local participants, and growing tourism has raised concerns about "ritual commercialization," with some performances adjusted to cater to visitors rather than retain cultural meaning. To address these issues, the committee has implemented rules limiting tourist-focused modifications and launched campaigns to engage Gangneung's youth through school-based cultural education programs.

3.2 Chinese Dragon Boat Festival Customs: Diversity and Cultural Core

The Chinese Dragon Boat Festival has a layered historical evolution spanning over 2,000 years, with origins rooted in ancient seasonal rituals before integrating regional legends and cultural values. Early records from the Warring States Period, spanning 475 to 221 BCE, describe "Duanwu"—the festival's Chinese name meaning "Fifth Day of the Fifth Lunar Month"—as a time to ward off summer diseases and evil spirits. Practices like hanging mugwort and calamus on doorways, drinking realgar wine, and bathing in herb-infused water were widespread in agricultural communities, reflecting the need to protect health amid rising temperatures. By the Han Dynasty, which lasted from 206 BCE to 220 CE, the festival became linked to the legend of Qu Yuan—a patriotic poet of the Warring States era who drowned himself in the Miluo River. Locals rowed boats to search for his body and threw rice into the water to feed fish, giving rise to two iconic customs: dragon boat racing and zongzi-making (glutinous rice wrapped in

bamboo leaves).

Over subsequent dynasties, the festival expanded geographically, adapting to local cultures and forming diverse regional expressions. In southern China—particularly in Guangdong, Fujian, and Hunan provinces where rivers are abundant—dragon boat racing evolved into large-scale community events, with teams competing in elaborately decorated boats to the rhythm of drums. In northern regions where waterways are fewer, customs focused more on family-centered practices: making zongzi (with fillings ranging from sweet red bean to savory pork, reflecting local tastes), wearing sachets filled with herbs, and flying kites. By the Qing Dynasty, spanning from 1636 to 1912, the Dragon Boat Festival had become one of China's "Four Traditional Festivals," with its cultural core—combining seasonal health protection, ancestor respect, and community unity—firmly established.

In contemporary China, the Dragon Boat Festival has been revitalized through policy support and public engagement, while retaining its regional diversity. A key turning point was 2008, when the festival was designated a national legal holiday, allowing families to gather and participate in traditional activities. Two years later in 2009, UNESCO inscribed "Dragon Boat Festival, China" on its Intangible Cultural Heritage List, recognizing its role as a "carrier of Chinese cultural identity." Policy support has since intensified under initiatives like the Traditional Festival Revitalization Plan launched in 2017 and the 14th Five-Year Plan for Intangible Heritage Protection covering from 2021 to 2025. These policies fund projects such as preserving regional zongzi-making techniques, organizing national dragon boat racing championships, and integrating festival culture into school curricula. Digital protection efforts have also emerged: the China Traditional Village Digital Museum documents local Dragon Boat customs—such as the "dragon boat blessing" ritual in Zhejiang's Jiaying—and makes them accessible online.

Despite these successes, the festival faces modern challenges. Urbanization has weakened some regional practices: in large cities like Beijing and Shanghai, traditional rituals like hanging mugwort are less common, and zongzi is often purchased from stores rather than made at home. Commercialization has also become an issue—some brands have launched overpackaged zongzi products, shifting focus from cultural meaning to consumerism. To address these trends, local governments have launched targeted initiatives: Guangdong's Foshan City hosts "community dragon boat workshops" to teach residents how to build small boats and participate in races, while Hunan's Miluo City—Qu Yuan's legendary burial place—organizes annual "Qu Yuan Memorial Ceremonies" to emphasize the festival's historical and cultural roots. These efforts aim to balance modern adaptation with the preservation of the Dragon Boat Festival's core values: family, community, and respect for tradition.

4 Comparative Interpretation of Two Festivals in the East Asian Context

This chapter focuses on comparing and interpreting Gangneung Danoje Festival and Chinese Dragon Boat Festival customs under the East Asian context. It first

clarifies their differences and similarities in form and content, then explores the underlying cultural connection mechanisms, revealing how shared regional cultural genes and historical interactions shape their coexistence and development.

4.1 Comparison of Form and Content

The two festivals, while rooted in the same East Asian cultural context, have formed distinct expressions due to regional historical and social differences, yet they still retain overlapping core cultural connotations.

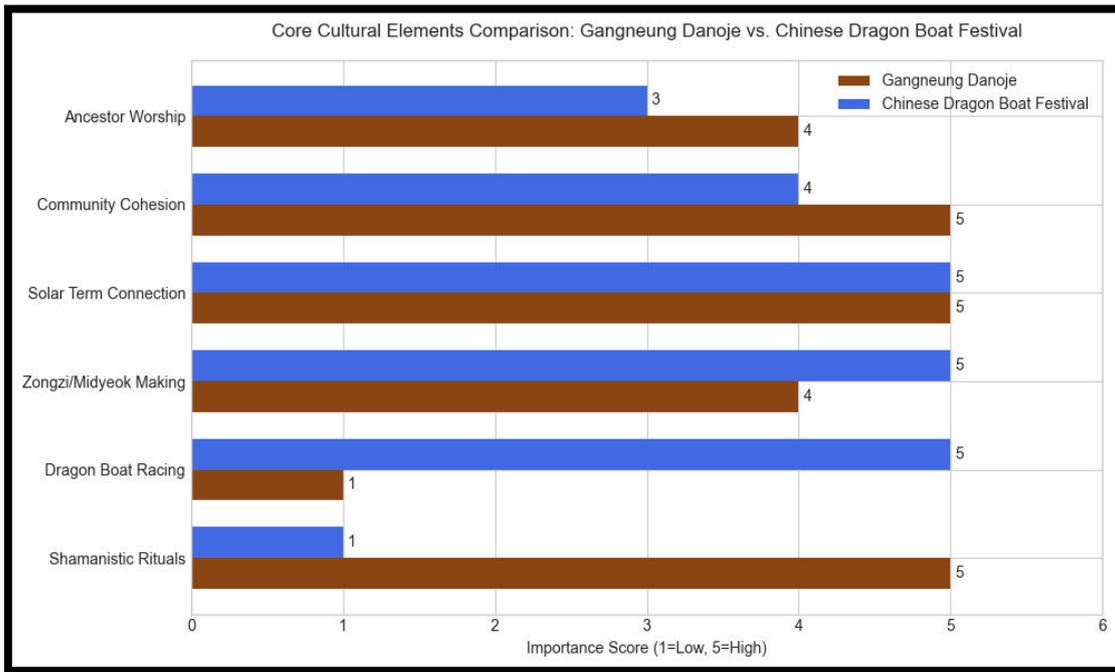


Figure 1: Core Elements Comparison of Gangneung Danoje vs. Chinese Dragon Boat Festival

4.1.1 Key Differences

The most obvious difference lies in their ritual orientation: Gangneung Danoje leans toward religious and ritualistic nature, while Chinese Dragon Boat Festival customs are more secular and life-oriented. Gangneung Danoje takes shamanistic rituals as its core—from the “Seongjuje” to honor mountain gods to the “Byeolsingut” for village purification, every link is led by shamans and follows strict traditional procedures, emphasizing communication between humans and deities. These rituals are deeply tied to Muism, Korea's indigenous religion, and maintain strong sacredness. In contrast, Chinese Dragon Boat Festival customs are integrated into daily life: southern regions focus on dragon boat racing, a competitive community activity that combines sports and celebration; northern regions emphasize family-centered practices like making zongzi and wearing herb sachets, with little religious symbolism. Even the Qu Yuan legend, which underpins many customs, is more of a cultural narrative that strengthens national identity rather than a religious belief.

Another difference is regional expression scope: Gangneung Danoje is a concentrated local practice, while Chinese Dragon Boat Festival customs show obvious multi-regional diversity. Gangneung Danoje is unique to Gangneung City, with its rituals closely linked to the local Namdaecheon River and community structure—its inheritance relies on the specific geographical and social environment of Gangneung, and there is no widespread replication in other parts of South Korea. Chinese Dragon Boat Festival, by contrast, adapts to different regional conditions across the country: Guangdong and Fujian have large-scale dragon boat races due to their abundant waterways; Hunan's Miluo City highlights Qu Yuan memorial ceremonies to align with local historical legends; northern provinces like Shandong and Hebei focus on food customs such as “five-color glutinous rice” and “garlic eggs.” This diversity stems from China's vast territory and varied local cultures, forming a “unified core with regional variations” pattern.

4.1.2 Core Similarities

Despite differences, the two festivals share deep cultural similarities rooted in East Asian common traditions, the most prominent being their connection to seasonal solar terms. Both are held around the fifth lunar month, a period corresponding to the transition from late spring to early summer in East Asia—when temperatures rise, pests multiply, and agricultural production enters a critical stage. Gangneung Danoje's rituals of praying for harvests and warding off disasters, and Chinese Dragon Boat Festival's practices of hanging mugwort, drinking realgar wine, and bathing in herb water, all reflect the East Asian agricultural civilization's adaptation to seasonal changes. This connection to solar terms is a shared legacy of the ancient East Asian astronomical calendar system, which once spread widely through the Sinic cultural circle and became a common cultural code for regional festivals.

Both festivals also emphasize community and family cohesion as a core social function. Gangneung Danoje requires the entire local community to participate—residents take turns preparing ritual supplies, performing folk dances, and hosting visitors, with the festival serving as a bond to strengthen community identity. Chinese Dragon Boat Festival similarly promotes collective unity: dragon boat racing requires teams to coordinate closely, turning it into a symbol of community solidarity; family gatherings for zongzi-making and ancestor worship reinforce blood ties. This focus on group harmony aligns with Confucian cultural values that have long influenced East Asia—“harmony within the community” and “filial piety” are embedded in the practical links of both festivals, becoming a shared social value expression.

Additionally, health and 祈福 (blessing) are common cultural cores of both festivals. Gangneung Danoje's “Byeolsingut” ritual includes elements of purifying the village and driving away diseases, with shamans praying for residents' health; Chinese Dragon Boat Festival's traditions of hanging mugwort (believed to repel insects) and drinking realgar wine (once thought to prevent poisoning) are direct health-preserving practices. Both reflect the East Asian concept of “harmony

between humans and nature”—by following seasonal rules and performing specific rituals, people seek to avoid disasters and maintain physical and mental well-being. This concept is a key part of East Asian traditional philosophy, connecting the two festivals beyond regional differences.

4.2 Cultural Connection Mechanism in the East Asian Context

The similarities and interactions between the two festivals are not accidental; they are shaped by long-term historical communication channels and shared cultural genes in the East Asian region, forming a stable cultural connection mechanism.

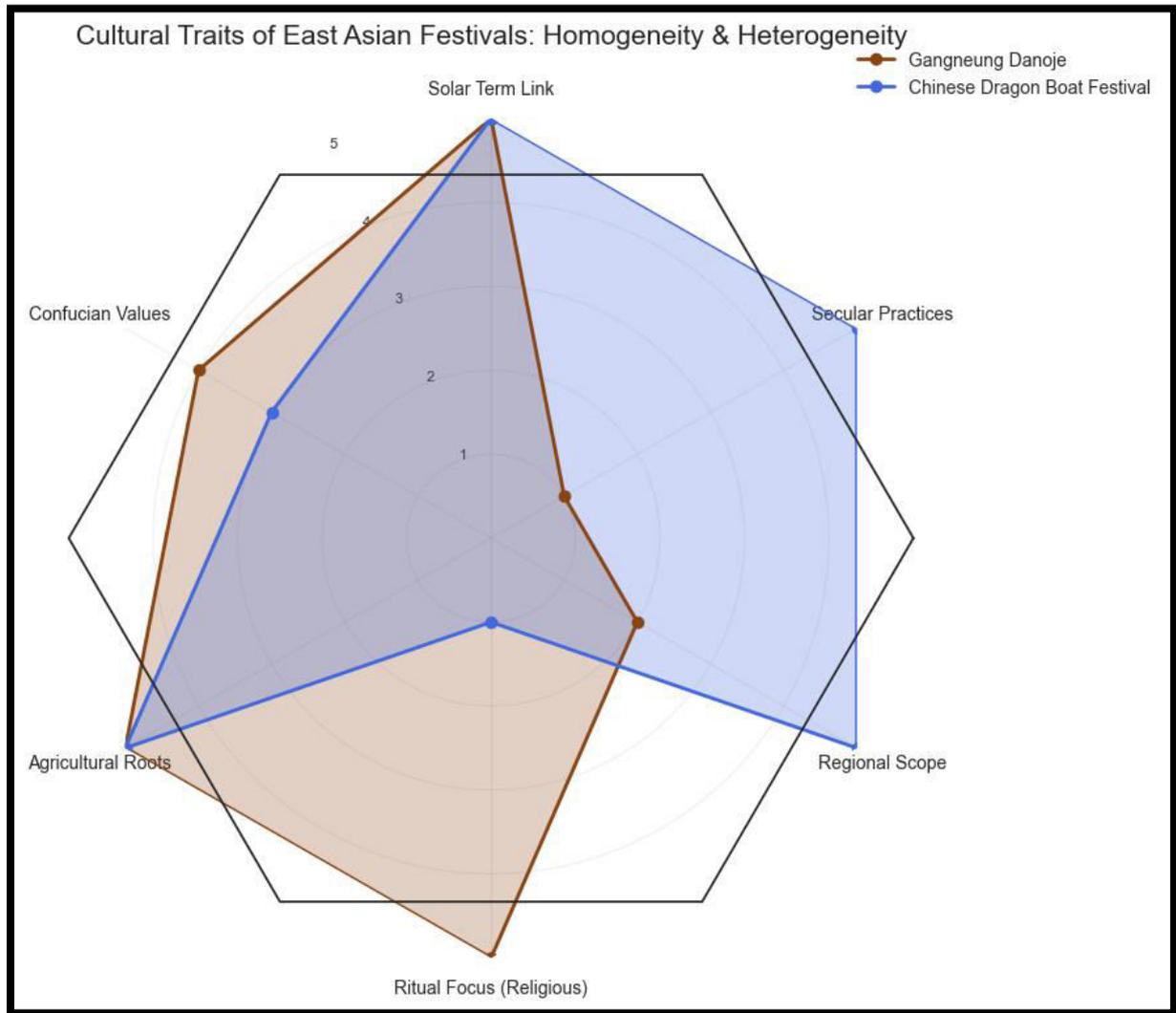


Figure 2: Radar Chart of East Asian Festival Cultural Traits

4.2.1 Historical Communication Channels

Ancient East Asia's cross-border cultural communication—driven by trade, diplomatic envoys, and academic exchanges—laid the foundation for the spread of Dano/Dragon Boat Festival traditions. The “Dano” solar term culture originated in ancient China and spread to the Korean Peninsula and Japan through the Sinic cultural circle during the Han and Tang dynasties. Historical records such as *The History of the Three Kingdoms* note that Korean envoys to the Tang Dynasty

brought back knowledge of solar term rituals, which later integrated with local shamanism to form early Dano practices in Gangneung. Meanwhile, maritime trade between China's coastal regions and the Korean Peninsula promoted the exchange of festive customs—for example, boat-related rituals (ancestors of dragon boat racing and Gangneung's river rituals) were shared among coastal communities, as both relied on water resources for survival and needed to pray for maritime safety.

The spread of the Chinese writing system (Hanja) further facilitated the transmission of festival culture: Ancient Korean scholars used Hanja to record Dano rituals, referencing Chinese documents on seasonal customs; Chinese literati also documented Korean Dano practices in travel notes, creating a two-way record and communication loop. This textual exchange ensured that the core meaning of the festival—seasonal adaptation and 祈福—was preserved during cross-border spread, avoiding the loss of cultural essence. Even after modern times, this historical connection has been reinforced by institutional cooperation, such as the 2005 China-South Korea Cultural Heritage Cooperation Agreement, which lists “traditional festival exchange” as a key project, allowing contemporary scholars to trace the historical origins of the two festivals and promote in-depth dialogue.

4.2.2 Shared Cultural Genes

The two festivals' lasting connection is more fundamentally rooted in shared cultural genes in East Asia, with agricultural civilization and ancestor worship being the most critical. East Asia is one of the world's earliest agricultural civilization centers, and both China and South Korea have long histories of rice farming. This common agricultural background made seasonal changes a core concern for both societies—Gangneung Danoje's prayers for good harvests and Chinese Dragon Boat Festival's rituals tied to agricultural busy seasons (such as preparing for summer planting) both reflect the agricultural civilization's “respect for seasons and nature.” This shared survival need formed a common cultural psychological basis, making it easier for festival customs to resonate across borders.

Ancestor worship, a core part of East Asian traditional culture, also connects the two festivals. Gangneung Danoje's “Seongjuje” ritual includes honoring ancestors who developed the local land, while Chinese Dragon Boat Festival's family gatherings often involve offering zongzi to ancestors, expressing gratitude for their legacy. This focus on ancestors is not just a religious practice but a way to inherit family and community memory—both festivals use ritual actions to pass down historical narratives (such as Gangneung's village founding stories and China's Qu Yuan legend) to younger generations, maintaining cultural continuity. This shared emphasis on “memory inheritance” ensures that the two festivals, despite regional differences, play the same role in preserving collective cultural identity.

Confucian cultural values, which have influenced East Asia for millennia, further consolidate this connection. Confucianism's emphasis on “community harmony”

and “filial piety” is reflected in both festivals: Gangneung Danoje's collective ritual participation embodies Confucian “public good” values, while Chinese Dragon Boat Festival's family-centered customs align with Confucian “family ethics.” Even as modern societies change, these values remain implicit in festival practices—for example, Gangneung's youth participation in rituals to respect elders, and Chinese communities organizing public dragon boat races to promote neighborhood unity. These practices show that shared Confucian values provide a “cultural bridge” for the two festivals, allowing them to maintain mutual understanding and interaction in the East Asian context.

5. Protection and Mutual Learning of East Asian Regional Cultural Heritage

Against the background of globalization and regional cultural integration, the protection of East Asian traditional festivals represented by Gangneung Danoje Festival and Chinese Dragon Boat Festival customs not only requires independent efforts from each country but also urgent cross-border mutual learning and collaborative actions. This chapter first analyzes the core challenges faced by the inheritance of these two festivals, then proposes feasible paths for cross-border cultural mutual learning, and finally takes existing China-South Korea festival cooperation practices as cases to extract experience and lessons.

5.1 Challenges Faced by Inheritance of Traditional Festivals

The inheritance of East Asian traditional festivals is currently confronted with dual pressures from external globalization impacts and internal modern adaptation, which directly threaten the authenticity and uniqueness of festival culture.

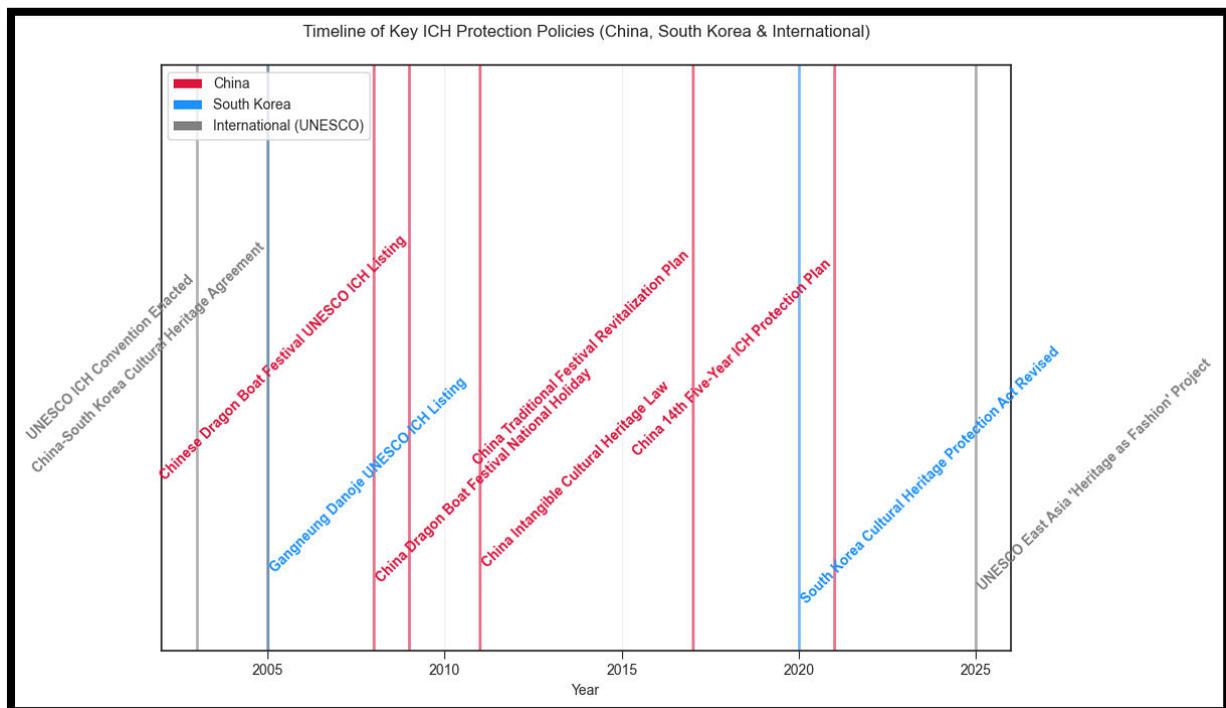


Figure 3: Timeline of ICH Protection Policies (China & South Korea)

5.1.1 Impact of Globalization: Dilution of Traditional Cultural Connotations

Globalization has accelerated the spread of Western culture and modern lifestyles, leading to the gradual dilution of the traditional cultural connotations of East Asian festivals. On one hand, the influx of Western festivals such as Christmas and Halloween has diverted the attention of young people—South Korea's 2023 cultural heritage survey shows that 68% of 15-24 year olds are more willing to participate in Christmas-themed activities than Gangneung Danoje Festival, and many young people only know the "folk performance" part of the festival but are unfamiliar with the shamanistic ritual connotations behind it. In China, similar phenomena exist: in first-tier cities like Shanghai and Guangzhou, more young people choose to spend the Dragon Boat Festival on travel or shopping rather than making zongzi with their families or participating in dragon boat races, and the connection between the festival and the Qu Yuan legend is gradually weakening.

On the other hand, the commercialization driven by globalization has distorted the original cultural meaning of festivals. For the Chinese Dragon Boat Festival, some brands have launched high-priced "luxury zongzi" packaged with gold foil or paired with wine, turning zongzi—a food carrier of festival memory—into a gift for social interaction, while ignoring its symbolic significance of "commemorating Qu Yuan" and "family reunion." For Gangneung Danoje Festival, the expansion of tourism has forced some ritual links to be simplified: the original three-hour "Byeolsingut" ritual has been shortened to 30 minutes to cater to the travel schedules of international tourists, and shamans have to add "photo sessions" after rituals, making the sacred ritual gradually become a "performance" for viewing. These changes have made the core cultural connotations of the festivals—such as respect for nature and community identity—gradually blurred.

5.1.2 Homogenization Risk: Loss of Regional Characteristics in Modern Adaptation

In the process of adapting traditional festivals to modern society, many regions have adopted similar "modernization" methods, leading to the risk of homogenization and the loss of unique regional characteristics. For Chinese Dragon Boat Festival customs, the promotion of "national unified celebration standards" in some areas has weakened regional diversity: for example, some northern cities without natural water conditions have built artificial lakes to hold dragon boat races, copying the southern festival model, while abandoning local traditions such as "five-color glutinous rice" and "garlic egg soaking." This has made the Dragon Boat Festival customs in different regions increasingly similar, losing the "local flavor" formed over thousands of years.

Gangneung Danoje Festival also faces the challenge of homogenization in its spread. In recent years, some other cities in South Korea have imitated Gangneung's model to hold "Dano festivals," but they only copied the form of folk performances and ignored the unique connection between Gangneung Danoje and the Namdaecheon River as well as local Muism traditions. As a result, these imitated festivals have become "generic folk events" without cultural uniqueness, and the original "local identity symbol" function of Gangneung Danoje has been

weakened. Additionally, the popularization of digital media has accelerated homogenization: short videos of dragon boat races or shamanistic performances from different regions are edited into similar "widely circulated content," and the audience can no longer distinguish the regional cultural differences behind these images, further eroding the uniqueness of each festival.

5.2 Paths for Cross-Border Cultural Mutual Learning

To address the challenges of cultural dilution and homogenization, East Asian countries need to establish a cross-border cultural mutual learning mechanism centered on "protection first, complementary advantages," and promote collaborative inheritance of traditional festivals through institutional, academic, and practical multi-dimensional cooperation.

5.2.1 Institutional Cooperation: Joint Application for Regional Cultural Heritage and Cross-Border Protection Agreements

Institutional cooperation is the foundation of cross-border cultural mutual learning, and the core lies in building a standardized cooperation framework through official agreements and joint heritage declarations. First, China and South Korea can take the lead in promoting the "East Asian Traditional Solar Term Festival" joint application for UNESCO regional intangible cultural heritage. This application will not treat Gangneung Danoje Festival and Chinese Dragon Boat Festival as separate heritage items but integrate them into the shared cultural context of East Asian solar term traditions, highlighting their common origins and complementary characteristics. This move can not only avoid "cultural ownership disputes" but also enhance the overall influence of East Asian festival culture in the international community.

Second, the two countries should further expand the scope of the 2005 China-South Korea Cultural Heritage Exchange and Cooperation Agreement, adding special clauses for traditional festival protection. For example, establish a "China-South Korea Festival Heritage Protection Joint Committee" composed of government officials, cultural heritage experts, and community inheritors, responsible for formulating unified protection standards (such as the minimum retention rate of traditional rituals) and supervising the implementation of protection projects. At the same time, set up a cross-border cultural heritage protection fund to support joint projects such as the documentation of shamanistic rituals in Gangneung and the digital preservation of dragon boat manufacturing techniques in southern China, ensuring that institutional cooperation is implemented in specific protection actions.

5.2.2 Academic Exchange: Establishing East Asian Traditional Festival Research Platforms

Academic exchange is the key to deepening mutual understanding of cross-border festival culture, and the core is to build a platform for knowledge sharing and joint research. First, establish an "East Asian Traditional Festival Research Center" jointly by well-known universities and cultural research

institutions from China and South Korea—such as Peking University, Seoul National University, and the China Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center. The center can regularly hold academic seminars (such as the annual "China-South Korea 端午文化论坛") and publish a joint academic journal "East Asian Festival Studies," focusing on topics such as the historical evolution of Gangneung Danoje and Chinese Dragon Boat Festival, and the comparison of modern inheritance models.

Second, promote the exchange of researchers and the sharing of research resources. For example, launch a "China-South Korea Festival Heritage Researcher Exchange Program," allowing Chinese scholars to conduct on-site investigations of Gangneung Danoje for 3-6 months and Korean scholars to participate in the documentation of Dragon Boat Festival customs in Hunan and Guangdong. At the same time, build a shared digital database of East Asian festival heritage, integrating historical documents (such as Joseon-era Dano ritual records and Chinese Ming Dynasty Dragon Boat Festival poems), audio-visual materials (such as video recordings of traditional rituals), and inheritor information, providing a data foundation for cross-border research and protection.

5.2.3 Practical Interaction: Cultural Exchange Activities and Cooperative Development of Cultural and Creative Products

Practical interaction is the most direct way to promote cross-border cultural mutual learning, and the core is to transform abstract cultural concepts into tangible experience activities and products. First, hold regular cross-border festival exchange activities. For example, during the Dragon Boat Festival each year, invite South Korea's Gangneung Danoje folk performance team to participate in China's 汨罗 International Dragon Boat Festival, performing ganggangsullae and pansori; in return, send Chinese dragon boat teams to join Gangneung Danoje's river ritual activities, demonstrating dragon boat rowing techniques. These activities can allow residents of both countries to experience the uniqueness of each other's festivals on site and enhance cultural identity.

Second, carry out cooperative development of festival-themed cultural and creative products. China and South Korea can jointly design products that integrate the cultural elements of both festivals: for example, launch a "Dano-Dragon Boat" series of cultural and creative items, such as sachets combining Chinese herb-filled designs with Korean traditional embroidery, and zongzi gift boxes with packaging printed with Gangneung Namdaecheon River and Chinese Miluo River patterns. These products not only retain the cultural connotations of both festivals but also meet modern consumer needs, becoming a "cultural messenger" for cross-border promotion. At the same time, support cross-border e-commerce platforms to sell these products, expanding the influence of East Asian festival culture to more countries and regions.

5.3 Case Analysis: Existing Cooperation Practices between China and South Korea in Festival Culture

In recent years, China and South Korea have carried out a series of cooperative practices around traditional festivals, providing practical references for cross-border cultural mutual learning. These practices cover academic exchanges, cultural performances, and heritage protection, showing both positive results and areas for improvement.

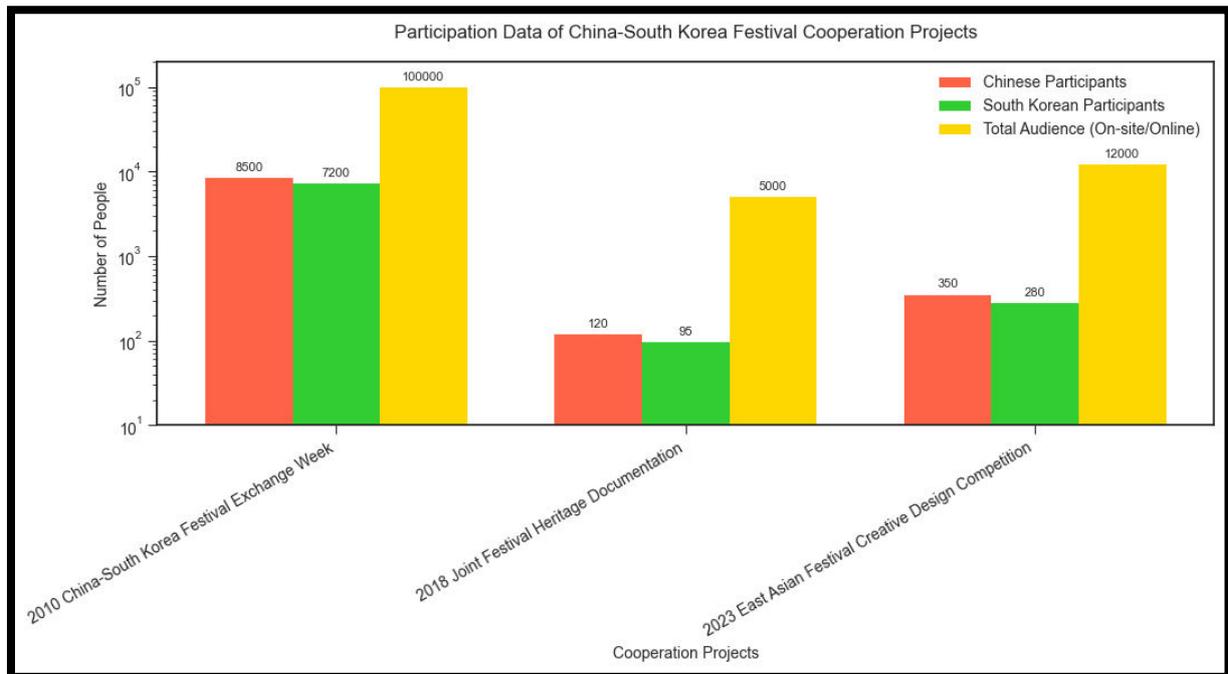


Figure 4: Participation Data of China-South Korea Festival Cooperation Projects

5.3.1 Overview of China-South Korea Dragon Boat Festival/Dano Festival Exchange Activities

The earliest large-scale cooperation dates back to 2010, when China's Hunan Province and South Korea's Gangwon Province jointly held the "First China-South Korea 端午 Culture Exchange Week." During the event, 50 Korean folk artists went to 汨罗, China, to perform Gangneung Danoje's Byeolsingut ritual fragments and ganggangsullae dances, while 30 Chinese dragon boat athletes went to Gangneung to participate in the Dano Festival's "River Blessing Ceremony" and held a friendly dragon boat race on the Namdaecheon River. This activity attracted more than 100,000 participants from both countries and was reported by major media such as Xinhua News Agency and South Korea's KBS, laying the foundation for subsequent cooperation.

In 2018, the two countries launched a more in-depth "China-South Korea Festival Heritage Joint Documentation Project." Organized by the China National Library and the National Library of South Korea, the project sent a joint team to record the 2018 Gangneung Danoje Festival and the 2018 Dragon Boat Festival in

Guangdong's Foshan City. The team used 4K video cameras and 3D scanning technology to document the entire process of shamanistic rituals, dragon boat manufacturing, and zongzi-making, and compiled a 500-page China-South Korea Festival Heritage Documentation Report, which was made public on the official websites of both libraries for free access by researchers and the public.

In 2023, with the support of the China-South Korea Cultural Exchange Foundation, the "East Asian 端午 Cultural Creative Design Competition" was held. The competition invited designers from both countries to create works based on the cultural elements of Gangneung Danoje and Chinese Dragon Boat Festival, and selected 30 outstanding works (such as a set of stamps combining Korean shaman masks and Chinese dragon boat patterns, and a traditional fabric design integrating pansori musical notes and Chinese herb patterns). The winning works were exhibited in Beijing and Seoul, and some were put into mass production and sold in both countries, achieving both cultural and economic benefits.

5.3.2 Experience and Lessons from Cooperation

The existing China-South Korea festival cooperation practices have accumulated valuable experience, while also exposing problems that need to be solved in future cooperation.

From the perspective of experience, first, community participation is the key to the sustainability of cooperation. In the 2010 exchange week, the joint team invited local inheritors—such as Gangneung's senior shaman Kim Soon-ja and Foshan's dragon boat maker Li Tianming—to participate in the planning and implementation of activities. These inheritors were familiar with the details of traditional rituals and could ensure that the exchange activities did not deviate from the original cultural connotations. For example, Kim Soon-ja adjusted the performance sequence of the Byeolsingut ritual according to the venue in 汨罗, while retaining the core links of "prayer" and "purification," making the performance both in line with local customs and authentic.

Second, technology-driven documentation helps promote long-term protection. The 2018 joint documentation project used advanced digital technology to preserve the dynamic process of festival rituals, which solved the problem of "easy loss of oral and behavioral heritage." For example, the 3D scanning of Foshan's dragon boat manufacturing process recorded the details of wood selection, carving, and painting, which can be used for inheritor training and academic research in the future. The public release of the documentation report also broke the "information barrier" between the two countries' heritage protection fields, allowing more people to understand the value of each other's festival culture.

From the perspective of lessons, first, cooperation depth is insufficient, and there is a tendency to "focus on form over content". Most of the existing exchange activities are short-term events such as performances and exhibitions, and there is a lack of long-term cooperative projects in core areas such as inheritor training and ritual restoration. For example, the 2023 East Asian Duanwucultural creative

design competition stopped at the exhibition and sales stage, and did not establish a long-term mechanism for joint design and brand operation, resulting in the inability to continue the influence of the competition.

Second, cultural differences lead to occasional misunderstandings in cooperation. For example, during the 2010 dragon boat race in Gangneung, Chinese athletes added a "dragon head worship" link before the race, which was not part of Gangneung Danoje's traditional process. Some local residents believed that this behavior "interfered with the original ritual," leading to a small-scale dispute. This incident shows that in cross-border cooperation, both parties need to conduct in-depth pre-communication on the cultural connotations of festival rituals to avoid conflicts caused by cultural differences.

6. Conclusion and Prospects

This chapter summarizes the main research conclusions of the study, objectively analyzes the existing research limitations, and puts forward directions for future research—aiming to provide clear theoretical references and practical guidance for the protection and mutual learning of East Asian regional cultural heritage represented by traditional festivals.

6.1 Main Research Conclusions

Through the comparative interpretation of Gangneung Danoje Festival and Chinese Dragon Boat Festival customs under the East Asian context, and the analysis of cross-border protection and mutual learning practices, this study draws three core conclusions.

First, Gangneung Danoje Festival and Chinese Dragon Boat Festival customs share profound cultural connections rooted in East Asian shared traditions, while maintaining valuable regional heterogeneity. Both festivals originate from the ancient East Asian solar term culture and agricultural civilization, with core connotations centered on respecting seasons, strengthening community cohesion, and pursuing health and blessing—these shared cultural genes form the foundation for cross-border mutual learning. At the same time, their differences in ritual orientation (religious vs. secular) and expression scope (local concentration vs. multi-regional diversity) are not contradictory to cultural connection; instead, they reflect the adaptive evolution of East Asian traditional culture in different regional contexts. This "shared core with regional characteristics" pattern is the key to the long-term vitality of East Asian festival culture.

Second, the protection of East Asian regional cultural heritage must adhere to the core principles of "authenticity first, balance between protection and adaptation, and cross-border collaboration." The impact of globalization and the risk of homogenization have proven that single-country or single-region protection is no longer sufficient—only by taking "authenticity" as the bottom line (such as retaining core rituals like Gangneung Danoje's shamanistic ceremonies and Chinese Dragon Boat Festival's zongzi-making traditions) and avoiding over-commercialization or blind imitation can festival culture maintain its original

cultural connotations. Meanwhile, "adaptation" should be based on local conditions: China's integration of digital technology into heritage protection and South Korea's emphasis on community autonomy both provide effective models for balancing tradition and modernity. Cross-border collaboration, as an important supplement, can further break the limitations of national borders and promote the sharing of protection experience and resources.

Third, the existing China-South Korea festival culture cooperation practices have verified the feasibility of East Asian cultural mutual learning, while also highlighting the importance of "community participation" and "in-depth communication." The success of projects such as the 2018 China-South Korea Festival Heritage Joint Documentation Project and the 2023 East Asian 端午 Cultural Creative Design Competition lies in the full participation of local inheritors and the use of technology to support long-term protection. However, the problems of "form over content" and occasional cultural misunderstandings also remind us that cross-border cooperation needs to go beyond short-term performances and exhibitions, and establish a mechanism that covers inheritor training, ritual research, and product development. At the same time, pre-communication on cultural connotations is essential to avoid conflicts caused by differences in historical backgrounds or religious concepts.

6.2 Research Limitations

This study still has two obvious limitations, which need to be addressed in future research.

On one hand, the research lacks sufficient first-hand field investigation data. Due to regional and time constraints, this study mainly relies on existing literature, policy texts, and public reports to analyze the two festivals and their cooperation practices. It has not conducted on-site observations of Gangneung Danoje Festival's entire ritual process or in-depth interviews with local shamans and inheritors; nor has it carried out field surveys on the inheritance status of Dragon Boat Festival customs in less-developed regions of China (such as rural areas in western China). This may lead to a lack of detailed understanding of some micro-level issues, such as the actual difficulties faced by young inheritors or the specific impact of tourism on local festival traditions.

On the other hand, the research scope is limited to China and South Korea, and the perspective of the "East Asian context" needs to be further expanded. East Asian traditional festival culture also includes Japan's Tanabata Festival (which has connections with the solar term culture) and Vietnam's Tet Trung Thu (Mid-Autumn Festival), which are part of the regional cultural heritage system. This study only focuses on China and South Korea, failing to incorporate other East Asian countries into the analytical framework—resulting in an incomplete understanding of the overall pattern of East Asian festival culture and the potential for multi-country cooperation. In addition, the study's discussion of "cultural mutual learning" mainly stays at the level of traditional festivals, and does not link it with other types of intangible cultural heritage (such as traditional crafts or performing arts), which

limits the comprehensiveness of the research on regional cultural heritage mutual learning.

6.3 Future Research Directions

In response to the above limitations and the actual needs of East Asian cultural heritage protection, future research can be carried out in three directions.

First, expand the research scope to include more East Asian countries and conduct in-depth field investigations. Future studies can incorporate Japan, Vietnam, and other countries into the analytical framework, comparing the connections and differences between their traditional festivals and Chinese-South Korean festivals—for example, exploring the relationship between Japan's Tanabata Festival and the East Asian solar term culture, or the similarities between Vietnam's Tet Trung Thu and China's Mid-Autumn Festival. At the same time, conducting on-site investigations in Gangneung (South Korea), Miluo (China), Kyoto (Japan), and Hue (Vietnam) to collect first-hand data such as inheritor interviews and ritual videos will help improve the depth and authenticity of the research.

Second, strengthen the research on the application of digital technology in cross-border cultural heritage protection. With the development of technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and artificial intelligence (AI), there is new potential for the protection and dissemination of traditional festivals. Future studies can explore specific paths such as building a "East Asian Traditional Festival VR Experience Platform" (allowing users to immersive experience Gangneung Danoje's rituals or Chinese dragon boat races) or using AI to analyze the evolution laws of festival customs. In addition, researching how to use cross-border e-commerce platforms to promote the international dissemination of festival-themed cultural and creative products can further connect cultural protection with economic development.

Third, deepen the research on the construction of a long-term mechanism for East Asian regional cultural heritage mutual learning. Future studies can focus on the institutional design of multi-country cooperation—such as exploring the possibility of establishing an "East Asian Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Alliance" led by China, South Korea, and Japan, and formulating a unified regional heritage protection standard that takes into account the cultural characteristics of various countries. At the same time, researching the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in cultural mutual learning—such as supporting East Asian folk cultural associations to carry out regular festival exchange activities—can further supplement the limitations of government-led cooperation and form a multi-dimensional cooperation pattern involving governments, academia, communities, and NGOs.

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