

# Deep reflection on the changes of Dong Face-Blackening Ceremony in tourism development

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ISSN: 2243-7754  
Online ISSN: 2243-7762

OPEN ACCESS

Received: 25 May 2024

Available Online: 1 August 2024

Revised: 25 June 2024

DOI: 10.5861/ijrsl.2024.033

Accepted: 25 July 2024

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## Abstract

The Dong "Face-Blackening" ceremony, an integral part of the Dong ethnic minority's cultural heritage in China, has faced significant transformations under the pressures of modernity and tourism. This study seeks to address the gap in academic literature regarding these changes by examining the ceremony's origins, symbolic meanings, and ritual processes, alongside the impacts of tourism development. Through qualitative research, including interviews, field observations, and analysis of secondary sources, this study reveals the dual nature of tourism's influence: while it has brought economic benefits and wider recognition to Dong culture, it has also led to cultural distortion and transmission crises. Key findings highlight the need for a balanced approach to cultural preservation and tourism development. This research contributes new insights into the sustainable management of cultural heritage, emphasizing the importance of cultural education, community engagement, legal protection, and the integration of culture with sustainable tourism practices. One significant recommendation is the implementation of comprehensive cultural education programs in schools and communities to foster a deep appreciation and connection to Dong cultural heritage among the younger generation.

**Keywords:** Dong Face-Blackening Ceremony, cultural heritage, tourism development, cultural preservation, sustainable tourism

## Deep reflection on the changes of Dong Face-Blackening Ceremony in tourism development

### 1. Introduction

The transformation of the Dong "Face-Blackening" ceremony amid the rise of tourism presents a complex and thought-provoking challenge. As tourism continues to expand, local governments and communities have sought to adapt and package traditional cultural practices to attract visitors. This economic drive has led to the commercialization of the "Face-Blackening" ceremony, often resulting in a dilution of its original cultural essence and ritualistic significance. While tourism has broadened the audience for Dong culture and increased global awareness, it has frequently come at the cost of cultural authenticity, leading to concerns about cultural distortion.

Social modernization and urbanization have further complicated the preservation of traditional customs in Dong regions. As agrarian lifestyles give way to urban living, younger generations have shown decreasing interest in and identification with their cultural heritage. This generational shift poses significant challenges to maintaining cultural continuity, as the traditional practices of the Dong people become increasingly overshadowed by modern lifestyles.

Globalization has introduced external influences that often marginalize Dong cultural traditions. The influx of foreign cultural elements has led to the simplification and modification of the "Face-Blackening" ceremony, eroding its original meanings and significance. The interplay between globalization and local traditions has created a precarious balance between maintaining cultural integrity and adapting to contemporary societal changes.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach. Enhancing cultural education within schools and communities is vital for fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of Dong traditions. This includes integrating traditional knowledge and skills through cultural bearers and elders and encouraging active community participation in preserving cultural practices. Additionally, implementing robust legal frameworks is essential to safeguard Dong cultural heritage. Governments must enact and enforce policies that protect and promote the authentic practices of the "Face-Blackening" ceremony while supporting initiatives that deepen cultural understanding without compromising its integrity.

By achieving a balanced integration of cultural preservation and tourism development, the Dong "Face-Blackening" ceremony can navigate contemporary challenges and continue to thrive. Through deliberate efforts to preserve cultural authenticity while embracing the benefits of tourism, this important tradition can enrich both local identity and global cultural diversity.

**Background of the Study** - The Dong "Face-Blackening" ceremony is an ancient cultural practice deeply rooted in the rich traditions of the Dong ethnic minority in China. Known for its vibrant rituals and profound symbolic meanings, this ceremony holds a significant place in the cultural heritage of the Dong people. The ritual involves participants blackening their faces, a practice believed to ward off evil spirits, foster community solidarity, and pay homage to ancestors. Despite its deep historical roots, this ceremony, like many indigenous traditions, is transforming due to the influences of modernity and tourism.

In recent years, the tourism industry has increasingly spotlighted the "Face-Blackening" ceremony, drawing visitors from around the globe. This growing interest has prompted various adaptations and modifications of the traditional ritual to cater to tourist expectations and demands. While this has contributed to economic benefits and heightened awareness of Dong culture, it has also raised concerns about the authenticity and preservation of the original ceremonial practices. The interplay between tourism development and traditional cultural practices presents a complex dynamic that warrants closer examination.

Despite the growing attention on the Dong "Face-Blackening" ceremony within the tourism industry, there remains a noticeable gap in the academic literature regarding the specific changes and challenges this tradition faces in the modern context. While some studies have explored the broader impacts of tourism on ethnic cultures, few have delved deeply into the nuanced transformations of this particular ceremony. This gap is significant, as it leaves a crucial aspect of cultural heritage under-explored, potentially hindering effective preservation and sustainable tourism development strategies.

This paper will delve into the origins, symbolic meanings, ritual process, and the changes and challenges of the Dong "Face-Blackening" ceremony in modern society. This research aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Dong "Face-Blackening" ceremony's origins, symbolic meanings, ritual processes, and the changes it has undergone due to tourism development. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for stakeholders, including cultural preservationists, policymakers, and the tourism industry, to develop strategies that balance cultural integrity with economic benefits. The study's findings will contribute to academic discourse and offer practical insights into the sustainable management of cultural heritage in the face of globalization and tourism pressures.

## 2. Literature Review

The Dong ethnic group is a minority in southern China with a unique culture and historical background. The Guyu Festival in Zhaoqing is one of the important traditional festivals of the Dong people. The "Face-Blackening" ceremony, as one of the core activities of the Guyu Festival, not only holds profound cultural significance and social functions but also reflects the beliefs and lifestyle of the Dong people (Li, 2023). The Dong people, an ethnic minority group in Guangxi, China, are renowned for their unique cultural practices, including the face-blackening ceremony. This ritual, deeply rooted in Dong tradition, has undergone significant changes due to the growing influence of tourism development in the region. (Xing et al., 2020; Zhu & Liu, 2020; Zhu & Han, 2020).

Historically, the face-blackening ceremony was a sacred event, marking important life transitions and serving as a means of cultural preservation. (Xing et al., 2020; Zhu & Han, 2020) However, as the tourism industry has expanded, the ceremony has been increasingly commodified, with some aspects being transformed to cater to the interests of visitors. (Zhuang, 2011)

The process of commodification has led to a shift in the way the ceremony is perceived and practiced. Whereas the ritual was once a deeply personal and communal experience, it has now become a performative spectacle, with Dong people adopting new techniques and styles to appeal to tourists. (Zhuang & Altman, 2015; Zhuang, 2011)

This transformation has had both positive and negative implications for the Dong community. On the one hand, the increased attention and commercialization of the face-blackening ceremony have helped to raise awareness of Dong culture and generated economic opportunities for the local population. (Zhu & Liu, 2020; Zhu & Han, 2020) On the other hand, the authenticity and spiritual significance of the ritual have been compromised, as the Dong people have had to adapt their practices to meet the demands of the tourism industry. (Zhuang & Altman, 2015; Zhuang, 2011)

The challenge now lies in striking a balance between preserving the cultural integrity of the face-blackening ceremony and harnessing the benefits of tourism development (Zhu & Han, 2020). This requires a nuanced approach that involves the active participation and input of the Dong community, as well as the collaboration of local and regional authorities, to ensure that the cultural heritage of the Dong people is safeguarded while also allowing for sustainable economic growth. (Zhuang & Altman, 2015; Zhu & Liu, 2020).

## 3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the changes and challenges faced by the Dong "Face-Blackening" ceremony in the context of tourism development. The qualitative approach is chosen due to its strength in providing deep insights into cultural practices, meanings, and the impacts of socio-economic changes.

This methodology allows for a comprehensive understanding of the nuanced transformations and the perspectives of various stakeholders involved.

Field observations were conducted in several Dong villages known for practicing the "Face-Blackening" ceremony. These observations aimed to document the ritual process, participant behaviors, and the overall atmosphere during the ceremony. Detailed field notes and photographs were taken to capture the authenticity and context of the ceremony.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with key informants, including Dong cultural heritage bearers, village elders, local government officials, and tourism operators. The interviews focused on their perspectives regarding the origins, symbolic meanings, and changes in the ceremony. Questions also explored the perceived impacts of tourism on the ceremony and the broader Dong cultural heritage. Moreover, Secondary data, including historical texts, academic articles, and tourism reports, were analyzed to provide a background on the Dong "Face-Blackening" ceremony and its evolution over time. This analysis helped contextualize the primary data within a broader historical and socio-cultural framework.

The data collected from interviews, focus groups, and field observations were subjected to thematic analysis. This involved coding the data to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the ceremony's origins, symbolic meanings, ritual processes, and changes due to tourism. Themes were categorized into broader topics such as cultural authenticity, economic impacts, and community responses. Furthermore, Comparative analysis was used to contrast the traditional practices of the ceremony with its current manifestations influenced by tourism. This comparison highlighted specific changes and their implications for cultural preservation and authenticity.

To enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, triangulation was employed by cross-verifying data from multiple sources (field observations, interviews, focus groups, and secondary data). This approach ensured a comprehensive and balanced understanding of the research problem.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the interviews and focus groups. Participants were briefed about the study's purpose, their rights, and the confidentiality of their responses. The research was conducted with a high degree of cultural sensitivity, respecting the traditions and values of the Dong community. Efforts were made to ensure that the research process did not disrupt or disrespect the ceremonial practices. To protect participants' identities, pseudonyms were used, and any identifiable information was removed from the data. All data were securely stored and only accessible to the research team.

While this study provides valuable insights into the changes and challenges of the Dong "Face-Blackening" ceremony, it is not without limitations. The qualitative nature of the research may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study's reliance on participants' self-reported data may introduce biases. Despite these limitations, the study offers a rich, contextualized understanding of the ceremony's evolution and the impacts of tourism development.

## **4. Discussion**

### *4.1 Origins and Symbolic Meanings of the Face-Blackening Ceremony*

**Origins.** The Dong "Face-Blackening" ceremony can be traced back to ancient agricultural society. Its original purpose was to ward off evil spirits and disasters, and to pray for a good harvest. According to Dong legends, the ceremony initially commemorated ancestors who bravely sacrificed themselves in battle, smearing their bodies with mud to hide. Over time, this act evolved into a blessing ritual, symbolizing the Dong people's reverence for their ancestors and their hopes for a bountiful harvest.

**Symbolic Meanings.** Exorcism and Disaster Prevention: The Face-Blackening ceremony symbolizes the expulsion of evil and misfortune. By smearing mud, people believe they can avoid disasters and ensure the peace

and prosperity of the community.

**Blessing and Harvest:** The act of blackening the face also represents prayers for a bountiful harvest and happiness. As a symbol of the earth, mud applied to the body signifies closeness to the land and respect for nature.

**Unity and Harmony:** Through collective participation in the Face-Blackening ceremony, the Dong community strengthens its internal cohesion and harmonious atmosphere, enhancing a sense of ethnic identity.

### **Process of the Face-Blackening Ceremony**

**Preparation Stage:** Prior to the Guyu Festival, the Dong people engage in thorough preparation, including thoroughly cleaning the village, preparing all the necessary ritual items and ornaments, and carefully selecting capable performers to take on the important roles in the ceremonial proceedings.

**Selection of Time and Place:** The Face-Blackening ceremony is usually held during the Guyu Festival, with the specific date and time determined by the village elders or respected religious leaders according to traditional customs and auspicious timing. The ceremony typically takes place in prominent public areas of the village, such as in front of the central drum tower or the ancestral hall, where the entire community can participate.

**Preparation of Materials:** The main materials used in the Face-Blackening ceremony are mud and water, which are sometimes mixed with aromatic herbs, spices, and other natural elements to enhance the spiritual and symbolic effects of warding off evil spirits and inviting blessings.

**Conducting the Ceremony:** The ceremony begins with the ritual performers, often the revered village elders or other respected community members, solemnly smearing the prepared mud mixture onto their own faces and bodies, setting the tone for the sacred ritual.

**Prayers and Offerings:** At the start of the Face-Blackening ceremony, the village elders or appointed priests conduct heartfelt prayers and make offerings, expressing deep gratitude to the ancestors and deities for their protection and blessings, and fervently praying for a bountiful harvest and peace in the coming year.

**Collective Face-Blackening:** Guided and led by the elders, the villagers enthusiastically come together to smear the prepared mud mixture onto each other's faces and bodies. This communal act is accompanied by joyful laughter, warm blessings, and a strong sense of unity and shared cultural identity within the Dong community.

**Singing and Dancing Celebration:** After the completion of the sacred Face-Blackening ritual, the villagers gather to celebrate with traditional songs and dances, focusing on themes of gratitude, blessings, and their profound love for life and hopes for the future.

### *4.2 Development of the Face-Blackening Ceremony*

An important aspect of social interaction among young Dong men and women: "Blackening his face to find out who secretly admired/like you."

According to the "Liping Prefecture Annals," the custom of the "Guyu" activities in Zhaoxing originated during the Ming Dynasty's Wanli period, over 500 years ago. It expresses a dual meaning of agricultural culture and courtship customs. During this special festival, in addition to eating black rice, passionate traditional activities such as "throwing youyou" and "face-blackening" are performed. These are important aspects of social interaction among young Dong men and women and are highlights of the Guyu Festival.

According to Lu Xingtao's mother, in the past, on the night of Guyu, young Dong men would cover their faces and go to the door of the girl they once admired but who was already engaged to another young man. They would throw some candies into the girl's home as a blessing and to express their former affection and regret that they could not be together. This is the origin of the Guyu Festival.



(The above picture comes from the Internet: when the girl likes this man, will smear the man with black face, this is the way they express their love for man)

After dinner, as the sky darkened, the Zhaoxing Dong village became lively. Firecrackers were set off here and fireworks lit up there. The "face-blackening" activity was about to start. Lu Xingtao and her friends had prepared black rice and the "pot soot" used for face-blackening. The act of covering their faces with black soot or mud is seen as a way for young Dong people to connect with their ancestors and celebrate their cultural heritage.

The Face-Blackening ceremony has been a deeply rooted and integral part of the Dong people's culture for centuries, holding immense symbolic meaning and cultural significance within their community (Yang & Zhang, 2020). The ritual's ancient origins, steeped in tradition and belief, have endured through generations, serving as a testament to the Dong people's reverence for their ancestors and their connection to the land (Hu, 2012).

At nightfall, Lu Xingtao slightly closed the door, turned off the light, and saw someone quietly push open the door and throw a youyou filled with candies into the house, but no one came in. Lu Xingtao poured out the candies, filled the youyou with black rice, beer, and other items, and placed it back in the hall, then waited quietly in the dark.

Suddenly, a masked young man rushed into the house, grabbed the youyou, and ran out. Lu Xingtao, quick-witted, ran out from the dark and smeared the young man's face with her soot-covered hands. Her friends closed the door, and the young man, holding the youyou, dodged and "fought back," trying to escape but still got his face smeared with soot. During the struggle, the young man finally ran out of the door. The girls did not chase him but closed the door again. The young man shared the black rice and beer in the youyou with his friends outside, who laughed heartily at his soot-covered face.

In the faint light outside, Lu Xingtao realized with a mix of surprise and delight that the young man she had playfully blackened with soot was none other than Lu Hongsheng, the one she had secretly admired for some time. The unexpected encounter during the Guyu Festival's face-blackening celebration had revealed his hidden feelings for her, leading to this symbolic and intimate moment of connection between the two young Dong people.

The soot-covered face ended Lu Hongsheng's secret admiration for Lu Xingtao, revealing his hidden feelings in a playful and symbolic manner during the Guyu Festival celebration. After Lu Hongsheng left, another young man arrived at Lu Xingtao's door, carrying candies and accompanied by his friends, and the face-blackening activity was performed once again, continuing the long-standing tradition. This is the oldest Guyu Festival in the Dong village, conveying warm blessings, pure love, heartfelt admiration, and the regret of not being able to become life partners among the young people of the community.

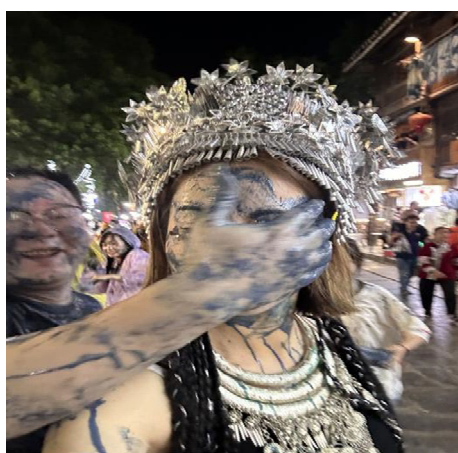
Today, the "Guyu" activities in Zhaoxing have evolved into a form of entertainment enjoyed by everyone in

the village. Throwing youyou is no longer limited to young men secretly admiring girls; the tradition has become more inclusive, with people of all ages participating in the festive celebrations. The entire Zhaoxing Dong village had a "sleepless night" filled with laughter, camaraderie, and the vibrant spirit of their cultural heritage.

#### *4.3 Current Forms of the Dong Face-Blackening Ceremony*

The Dong "Face-Blackening" Ceremony is an important activity during the Guyu Festival, symbolizing the expulsion of evil spirits and the invocation of blessings. With societal development and increased external attention, the form of the face-blackening ceremony has undergone some changes in modern society.

The Dong Face-Blackening Ceremony, which was previously used by women to express affection for men they admired, was intended to signify their interest in the man. Nowadays, this Dong Face-Blackening Ceremony has turned into a popular entertainment activity where people smear black paint on each other just for fun.



*Figure 1. A man is blackening a woman's face.*



*Figure 2 Tourists are smearing each other's faces)*

The specific forms of the modern face-blackening ceremony are as follows:

##### ***Time and Place of the Ceremony***

**Fixed Festival Time:** The face-blackening ceremony continues to be held during the Guyu Festival, usually around the 20th day of the fourth lunar month. The timing of the ceremony is relatively fixed to facilitate the organization and promotion of this long-standing cultural tradition, allowing the Dong community to preserve and celebrate their heritage.

**Tourist Attraction Settings:** To attract tourists and increase exposure to this unique cultural practice, the face-blackening ceremony is often held at popular tourist spots or central squares within Dong villages. Some places have even constructed dedicated venues specifically for the display and performance of the face-blackening ceremony, providing a designated space to showcase this important aspect of Dong cultural identity to visiting audiences.

##### ***Participants in the Ceremony***

**Local Residents:** The main participants in the face-blackening ceremony are Dong villagers, especially the older generation, who are the core group responsible for preserving and performing this traditional cultural practice. As the keepers of this longstanding ritual, they play a crucial role in transmitting its significance and practices to the younger generations within their community.

**Outside Tourists:** With the development of tourism in Dong ethnic areas, more and more outside tourists are

invited to participate in the face-blackening ceremony to directly experience and engage with this unique aspect of Dong cultural heritage. Their inclusion not only increases overall participation in the ceremony but also serves as a valuable opportunity for cultural dissemination, allowing visitors to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the Dong people's traditions.

### ***Ceremony Process***

**Simplified Sacrificial Rituals:** To accommodate the needs and pace of modern society and tourists, the traditional prayers and offerings that were once an integral part of the face-blackening ceremony have been simplified, and in some cases, even entirely omitted. This streamlining of the ritual process aims to make the ceremony more accessible and appealing to visitors, but it also risks diminishing the depth and significance of the original religious and spiritual components.

**Symbolic Face-Blackening:** In performances catered to tourists, the face-blackening process has been reduced to a symbolic gesture. Instead of the intricate, traditional methods, villagers and tourists now simply smear a small amount of mud on each other's faces. While this symbolic action retains some of the ceremonial meaning, it lacks the depth and authenticity of the original ritual, making the ceremony more entertaining and performative in nature, rather than strictly adhering to its original religious and social significance.

**Interactive Segments:** To enhance the overall tourist experience, many interactive elements have been incorporated into the face-blackening ceremony. These include opportunities for visitors to take photographs with the participants, as well as invitations for them to join in singing and dancing performances. These interactive segments make the ceremony more engaging and participatory for the tourists, but they also serve to further transform the traditional ritual into a more performative and commercialized event.

### ***Form of the Ceremony***

**Performative:** Many face-blackening ceremonies have been adapted into fixed performance programs primarily for the purpose of attracting and entertaining tourists. This performative form makes the ceremony more commercialized and commodified, gradually diminishing its original religious, social, and community functions. The emphasis has shifted from preserving cultural traditions to creating visually appealing and engaging performances that cater to tourist preferences and demands.

**Multimedia Display:** Some areas have adopted the use of modern technology to showcase the history, significance, and cultural background of the face-blackening ceremony through multimedia presentations and exhibits. This allows tourists to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of Dong culture, partially compensating for the loss of cultural connotations and authenticity caused by the more performative and simplified adaptations of the ceremony. However, the multimedia approach also has its limitations in fully capturing the depth and complexity of the traditional ritual.

## ***4.4 Analysis of Reasons for Changes***

### ***Development of Tourism***

**Economic Drive:** The rapid development of tourism has brought considerable economic benefits to Dong ethnic areas. To attract tourists and capitalize on this economic opportunity, local governments and communities have had to package and adapt traditional culture. This economic drive has led to the commercialization of the face-blackening ceremony, where the focus has shifted from preserving cultural traditions to creating more visually appealing and entertaining performances for tourists. As a result, the original cultural connotations and ritualistic significance of the ceremony have been weakened, as the ceremony has been simplified and stripped of its deeper religious and social meanings. Supported by previous literature on the economic impact of tourism, the local Dong communities have embraced tourism as a major force in redefining and reshaping the content of their traditional ceremonies (Song & Yuan, 2020).



**Cultural Dissemination:** Through tourism, the Dong face-blackening ceremony has reached a broader audience, increasing the visibility of Dong culture. However, this form of dissemination often sacrifices cultural authenticity, resulting in cultural distortion. While tourism has helped to spread awareness of Dong cultural practices, the need to cater to tourist preferences has led to the simplification and commercialization of the ceremony. This has gradually diminished the original religious and social significance of the face-blackening ritual, as it has been transformed into a more performative and symbolic display for entertainment purposes. The challenge is to find a balance between promoting cultural exchange and preserving the integrity and depth of traditional Dong customs. Supported by previous literature on cultural impact of tourism, the local Dong Community has embraced tourism as a force to define the content of their cultural heritage, albeit in a divergent way from the government's perspective (Zhuang et al., 2019).

### ***Social Modernization***

**Changes in Lifestyle:** The process of modernization has significantly altered the traditional agricultural lifestyle in Dong ethnic areas, replacing it with modern urban living. Consequently, the younger generation's interest in and identification with traditional customs have considerably weakened. The shift towards more urban-centric ways of life has gradually diminished the appeal of the face-blackening ceremony among young people, posing substantial challenges to the preservation and transmission of Dong's traditional culture across generations. With this, the community-oriented social functions of the face-blackening ceremony have been gradually eroded in the face of broader social changes and the younger generation's diminishing connection to traditional Dong culture (Vo, 2022).

**Impact of Foreign Cultures:** Globalization has exposed the Dong ethnic group to a wider array of foreign cultures and modern lifestyles. This influx of external influences has posed significant challenges to the preservation of Dong traditional culture. The younger generation, in particular, has become increasingly receptive to these novel cultural elements, leading to the gradual marginalization of Dong's longstanding customs and practices. The influence of foreign cultures has not only simplified but also adapted the face-blackening ceremony, causing it to lose much of its original cultural essence and deep-rooted significance within Dong society. This cultural transformation driven by globalization has posed a pressing threat to the continuity and integrity of the Dong's unique cultural heritage. Thus, the previous literature on the impact of modernization and globalization on traditional cultures can help shed light on the Dong face-blackening ceremony's evolution (Yang & Zhang, 2020).

#### ***4.5 Strengthened Cultural Preservation Awareness***

**Government Support:** Governments have provided policy and financial support to promote the protection and inheritance of Dong culture. However, in practice, there is often a phenomenon of emphasizing economic development over cultural preservation, leading to issues of cultural commercialization and performative adaptation. While government initiatives have to some extent facilitated cultural preservation efforts, significant challenges remain in effectively protecting and transmitting the depth and authenticity of Dong cultural traditions. The government's focus on economic development has at times come at the expense of adequately safeguarding the integrity and continuity of Dong cultural heritage, requiring a more balanced approach that prioritizes both cultural preservation and sustainable development (Zeng, 2020).

**Community Engagement:** Community residents, especially the older generation, continue to actively preserve and protect traditional culture, participating in the organization and implementation of the face-blackening ceremony. However, due to the declining interest and diminishing involvement of the younger generation in traditional culture, the effectiveness and continuity of community engagement are significantly limited. Despite enhancing awareness of cultural inheritance and preservation among the community, practical challenges and barriers still persist, hindering the seamless transmission of Dong cultural traditions across generations. The active participation and commitment of the older generation are crucial, but the lack of younger generation engagement poses a serious threat to the long-term viability and sustainability of community-driven cultural preservation efforts

(Jiang, 2020).

### ***Impact Analysis***

**Loss of Cultural Diversity.** The simplification and commercialization of the face-blackening ceremony have led to the gradual disappearance of unique cultural elements among the Dong ethnic group, posing a serious threat to cultural diversity. With the development of tourism, cultural homogenization has intensified, causing traditional culture to lose its distinctive features and essence. This loss of cultural diversity not only diminishes the richness and uniqueness of Dong's cultural heritage but also deprives the world of the invaluable contributions that diverse cultural traditions can make to humanity's shared cultural tapestry.

**Crisis of Cultural Identity.** Modernization and the growth of tourism have reduced the sense of identification and pride among the younger generation towards traditional culture, leading to a crisis of cultural identity. The commercialization and performative nature of culture have weakened understanding and identification with traditional culture among the youth, exacerbating the crisis of cultural identity. As the younger generation becomes increasingly disconnected from their cultural roots, they risk losing the sense of belonging and purpose that a strong cultural identity can provide, potentially leading to a fragmented and disoriented sense of self.

**Weakening of Social Cohesion.** Traditional culture serves as a vital link that binds communities and ethnic groups together. Cultural distortion has undermined this cohesive function, resulting in reduced social capital within communities and weakened social cohesion. As traditional culture fades, community harmony and stability are threatened, impacting overall social cohesion. The loss of this cultural glue can lead to the erosion of community ties, the breakdown of traditional support systems, and the fragmentation of the social fabric, with far-reaching consequences for the overall well-being and resilience of the Dong communities.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The Dong face-blackening ceremony has undergone significant changes in modern society, bringing economic benefits and opportunities for cultural dissemination to Dong areas. Yet, it faces challenges such as cultural distortion and transmission crises. By strengthening cultural education, promoting community engagement, implementing legal protection, and fostering deep integration of culture and tourism, these challenges can be effectively addressed. This multifaceted approach will safeguard and pass down the valuable cultural heritage of the Dong people. Through concerted efforts, the Dong face-blackening ceremony and its cultural significance can continue to thrive and flourish in contemporary society.

The following are recommended strategies for Response:

- **Strengthen Cultural Education.** Establish traditional cultural education programs in schools and communities to enhance understanding and identification of Dong culture among the younger generation. Invite cultural heritage bearers, elders, and traditional practitioners to impart their knowledge, skills, and lived experiences, thereby improving the practical effectiveness and relevance of cultural transmission. Incorporate hands-on learning opportunities and interactive activities that immerse students in the rich tapestry of Dong traditions, fostering a deep appreciation and connection to their cultural heritage.
- **Promote Community Engagement.** Encourage and empower villagers, especially the younger generation, to actively participate in the protection, revitalization, and transmission of traditional culture through community-driven activities, cultural festivals, and intergenerational dialogues. Strengthen community cohesion, shared identity, and a sense of collective responsibility for safeguarding Dong cultural heritage. Provide platforms and resources for community members to collaboratively document, showcase, and celebrate their unique traditions.
- **Implement Comprehensive Legal Protection.** Governments should enact and enforce comprehensive

laws and regulations to strengthen the protection, preservation, and promotion of Dong cultural heritage. Provide sustained financial and policy support to ensure the continuity, development, and dynamic evolution of traditional culture, adaptable to modern contexts. Establish clear guidelines and mechanisms for community participation in decision-making processes, ensuring the voices and perspectives of Dong people are central to the development of cultural policies and programs.

- Foster Deep Integration of Culture and Sustainable Tourism. While developing tourism, prioritize the protection and inheritance of traditional culture. Collaborate with local Dong communities to design and implement tourism projects that have deep educational significance, cultural depth, and experiential authenticity, avoiding the commercialization, commodification, and superficializing of culture. Promote sustainable tourism models that generate economic benefits while safeguarding the integrity, uniqueness, and living practice of Dong traditions, strengthening community ownership and pride in their cultural heritage.

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**Fund Project:** General Project of the National Social Science Foundation in China, an empirical study on the path and effect of the creative transformation of Dong leisure culture in the border area of Hunan-Guangxi- Guizhou province (Fund number: 18BMZ063)