

# Application of Cultural Elements in Hotel Space Design: A Case Study of Cantonese Cultural Theme Hotels

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**Abstract:** This study examines how Cantonese cultural elements can be translated into contemporary hotel space design without reducing regional culture to superficial decoration. Using Cantonese cultural theme hotels as the empirical context, the paper integrates critical regionalism, authenticity theory, place attachment, neuroaesthetic interpretation and cross-cultural cognition into a design evaluation framework. A mixed-method design is proposed and demonstrated through three cases: White Swan Hotel in Guangzhou, Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion in Penang and Shangri-La Nanshan in Shenzhen. The qualitative analysis identifies two groups of design resources: tangible elements, including wok-ear walls, Manchurian windows, cold alleys, patios and Lingnan garden devices; and intangible elements, including tea ritual, Cantonese opera, local cuisine and service scripts. A quantitative C-A-B model is then used to explain how objective and existential authenticity influence spatial aesthetics, place identity, place dependence and customer loyalty. The findings suggest that successful cultural hotel design depends on the transformation of cultural logic rather than literal replication. The study contributes a design framework for culturally grounded, environmentally responsive and commercially sustainable hotel interiors.

**Keywords:** Cantonese culture; hotel space design; cultural theme hotel; Lingnan architecture; place attachment; authenticity; cultural intelligence.

## 1. Introduction

Global hotel development has intensified the tension between operational standardization and the search for distinctive local experience. In the experience economy, customers evaluate hospitality spaces not only by functional efficiency but also by the memorable meanings produced through atmosphere, story and participation (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). For cultural theme hotels, design therefore becomes a medium through which regional identity, heritage interpretation and commercial service are assembled into a coherent spatial experience.

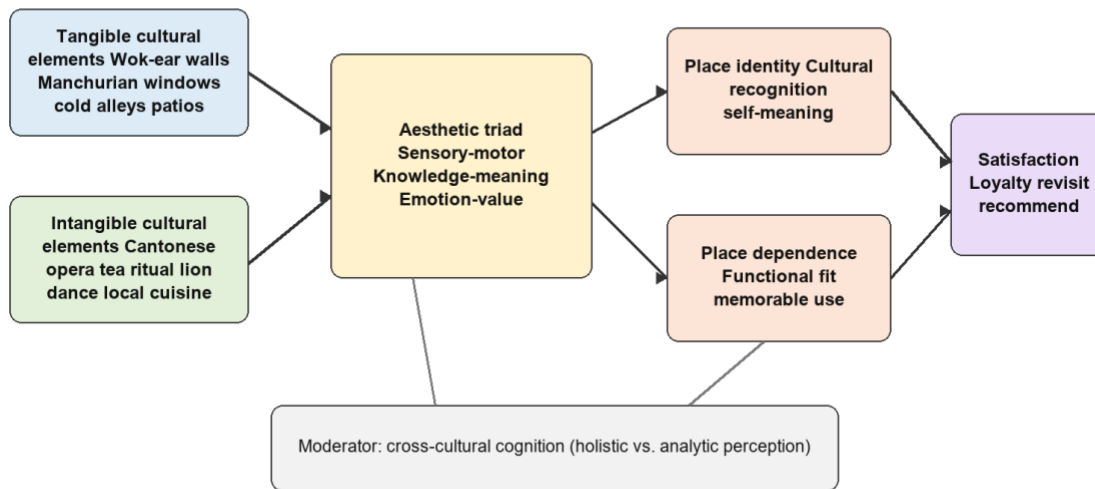
Cantonese culture, often discussed through the broader notion of Lingnan culture, provides a valuable context for this inquiry. Its spatial traditions developed in a hot-humid maritime environment shaped by trade, migration and cultural hybridity. Traditional Guangdong buildings use patios, cold alleys, doors, windows, local materials and ornamental craft as integrated responses to climate and social life (Song & Liao, 2022). Recent research on passive heat-protection design in Lingnan buildings further shows that shading, ventilation and heat-insulation strategies can be reinterpreted in contemporary architecture (Ji et al., 2023).

However, many cultural hotels still rely on direct visual borrowing: a motif is copied, a pattern is enlarged, or a local symbol is placed in a lobby without relation to circulation, light, service or guest behaviour. Such design risks staged authenticity, in which the cultural image appears legible but the lived experience becomes shallow (Chhabra et al., 2003; Wang, 1999; Li et al., 2024). The problem is not whether cultural symbols should be used, but how they can be translated into spatial systems that support aesthetic cognition, place attachment and loyalty.

This study addresses this problem by asking four questions. First, which tangible and intangible Cantonese cultural elements are most transferable to contemporary hotel interiors? Second, how do these elements influence perceived spatial aesthetics and cultural immersion? Third, how do place identity and place dependence mediate the relationship between cultural design and customer loyalty? Fourth, how should hotels adapt their design and service strategies for culturally diverse guests whose holistic or analytic modes of perception differ (Nisbett et al., 2001)?

The contribution of the paper is threefold. It connects Lingnan architectural knowledge with hospitality design practice; it combines authenticity, neuroaesthetic and place-attachment perspectives in one explanatory framework; and it proposes a practical design strategy that treats cultural hotel space as an ESG-oriented system rather than a decorative theme.

### Cantonese Cultural Hotel Design Mechanism



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework linking Cantonese cultural elements, aesthetic processing, place attachment and loyalty.

The hotel is an especially useful site for examining this issue because it combines dwelling, consumption, mobility and representation in one environment. Unlike museums, which can separate conservation from daily use, hotels must make cultural meaning compatible with check-in efficiency, room comfort, food service, maintenance, safety and revenue management. A Cantonese cultural hotel therefore cannot depend on isolated heritage displays. Its design has to guide the guest from arrival to departure through a sequence of recognisable but usable cultural encounters. This sequence includes the threshold, the lobby, corridors, rooms, restaurants, gardens, lighting, scent, acoustic atmosphere and staff interaction.

The Cantonese case is also relevant beyond South China. Cantonese migration, maritime trade and diasporic settlement have carried Lingnan spatial memory to Hong Kong, Macao, Southeast Asia and other overseas Chinese communities. The Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion in Penang shows that Cantonese cultural space is not a closed regional style; it is a hybrid system shaped by trade routes, clan networks, materials, craft exchange and colonial urban form. This hybridity makes Cantonese hotel design an appropriate case for studying how cultural elements can be locally specific and internationally readable at the same time.

For this reason, the paper treats cultural elements as design knowledge rather than decorative resources. A window, patio or roofline is not only an image but also a device that organizes light, airflow, privacy, social hierarchy and memory. A tea ritual is not only a service activity but also a temporal structure that slows movement, changes posture and creates opportunities for interpersonal interpretation. This broader definition allows the study to evaluate cultural design through spatial performance, psychological response and managerial implementation rather than through visual resemblance alone.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Cantonese Cultural Elements and Lingnan Spatial Ecology

Lingnan architecture is both a cultural language and an environmental technology. Wok-ear walls, patios, cold alleys, arcades and richly crafted windows are not isolated visual signs; they reflect relationships among climate, family order, trade culture and everyday ritual. Song and Liao (2022) show that traditional Guangdong buildings combine structural materials, ventilation design and architectural art to achieve ecological adaptation and cultural expression. Ji et al. (2023) similarly argue that passive heat-protection heritage in Lingnan architecture can inform modern low-carbon design.

In hotel space, these elements can be translated at different levels. A literal level may preserve recognizable forms such as Manchurian windows or Lingnan garden courtyards. An abstract level may reinterpret roof curves, spatial porosity, layered thresholds and shaded corridors through contemporary materials. A behavioural level may embed tea, cuisine, opera, music and craft into service sequences. Zhong (2018) emphasizes that innovative use of Lingnan elements requires transformation rather than mechanical imitation.

The ecological dimension of Lingnan design is particularly important for hotel interiors because hospitality buildings are intensive users of energy. Lobbies, restaurants, corridors and guest rooms require stable thermal conditions, yet they also need openness, daylight and visual drama. Traditional Lingnan strategies such as shaded alleys, deep eaves, courtyards and porous boundaries suggest a passive environmental vocabulary that can reduce dependence on mechanical cooling when adapted carefully (Ji et al., 2023; Song & Liao, 2022). In contemporary hotels, this vocabulary may appear as layered facade screens, ventilated atria, shaded drop-off spaces, water-cooling microclimates or transitional semi-outdoor lounges.

At the symbolic level, these strategies also produce cultural legibility. The guest does not need expert knowledge of building history to feel the difference between a sealed international lobby and a shaded, planted, porous interior that recalls Lingnan garden space. The design communicates through bodily comfort before it communicates through written explanation. This point is significant because many hotel guests encounter Cantonese culture as temporary visitors. Spatial ecology can therefore become an accessible entry point: guests first perceive coolness, shade, filtered light and garden rhythm, and only later learn that these qualities are rooted in local architectural intelligence.

## 2.2 Authenticity, Aesthetic Cognition and Place Attachment

Authenticity is central to cultural hotel design. Wang (1999) distinguishes object-related authenticity from existential authenticity, a distinction that is useful for hotel interiors. Object-related authenticity concerns whether a material, craft or architectural detail appears historically grounded. Existential authenticity concerns whether guests feel a meaningful state of self, relation and cultural participation. A hotel may display authentic objects yet fail to produce existential authenticity if the spatial story is fragmented.

The aesthetic triad further explains why cultural design influences perception. Neuroaesthetic research suggests that aesthetic experience depends on sensory-motor, knowledge-meaning and emotion-valuation systems (Chatterjee & Vartanian, 2014; Xie et al., 2022). In a Cantonese cultural hotel, this means that guests respond simultaneously to material textures and light, to cultural knowledge activated by symbols, and to emotional value created by atmosphere. Place attachment then converts this perception into durable affective bonds, especially in culturally revitalized heritage environments (Chan et al., 2024). Scannell and Gifford (2010) define place attachment through person, process and place dimensions, while Jorgensen and Stedman (2001) conceptualize sense of place as an attitude consisting of identity, dependence and affect.

Authenticity in this context should not be reduced to historical accuracy. A restored timber screen may be objectively authentic, but if it is placed in a corridor where guests cannot understand its function or cultural role, its experiential value remains limited. Conversely, a newly fabricated screen may be historically new but experientially meaningful if it regulates light, frames a tea ceremony and helps guests understand the logic of Lingnan domestic space. Wang's (1999) distinction between object-related and existential authenticity is therefore essential for hotel design, because hospitality spaces are judged through use as well as representation.

The aesthetic triad clarifies the psychological process behind this judgement. Sensory-motor response occurs when the guest follows a curved roofline, touches stone or wood, or moves from a narrow passage into an open court. Knowledge-meaning response occurs when the guest recognizes a reference to Cantonese craft, garden culture or maritime exchange. Emotion-valuation response occurs when these perceptions produce comfort, curiosity, nostalgia or pride (Chatterjee & Vartanian, 2014; Xie et al., 2022). A successful hotel space aligns these three systems. If a design is visually rich but physically uncomfortable, the sensory-motor system weakens the experience. If a design is comfortable but culturally illegible, the knowledge-meaning system remains underused.

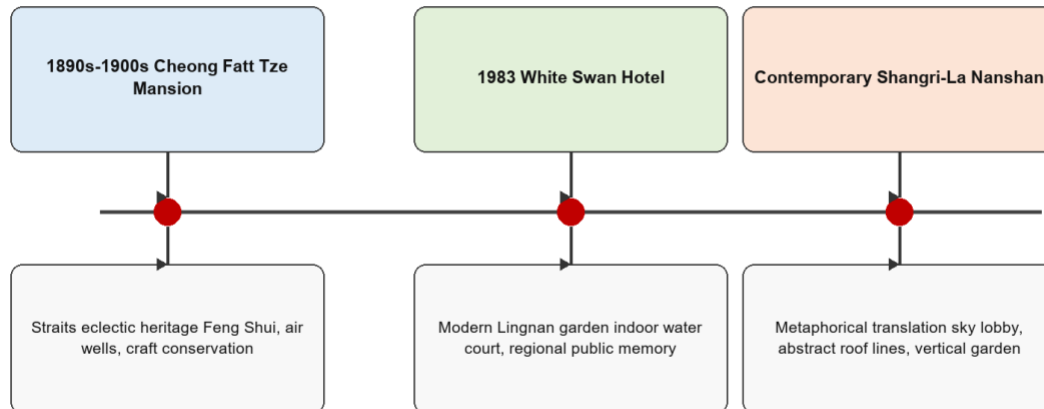
Place attachment extends this argument from immediate perception to longer-term behavioural intention. Guests may first be attracted by novelty, but loyalty is more likely when a hotel becomes associated with personal identity, meaningful memory or functional dependence (Li et al., 2024). Scannell and Gifford's (2010) tripartite framework suggests that attachment involves the person, the psychological process and the place itself. In a cultural hotel, this means that design must connect the guest's background and expectation, the affective process of immersion, and the physical setting of rooms, public spaces and services. Place identity and place dependence are therefore not abstract outcomes; they are built through repeated micro-experiences across the stay.

## 2.3 Cross-Cultural Cognition and Cultural Intelligence

Cantonese cultural hotels serve both domestic and international guests. Cross-cultural psychology indicates that East Asian cognition often privileges contextual relationships and holistic atmosphere, whereas Western cognition more often emphasizes focal objects and analytic attributes (Nisbett et al., 2001). These differences do not create fixed visitor types, but they do imply that a cultural hotel must communicate simultaneously through mood, narrative, service clarity and functional comfort.

Cultural intelligence is therefore part of spatial design management. Ang et al. (2007) define cultural intelligence as the capability to function effectively in culturally diverse situations. For hotels, this capability is expressed not only in staff training but also in signage, interpretation, room information, ritual scheduling and service recovery. A design that is culturally rich but difficult to understand may satisfy insiders while excluding outsiders; a design that over-explains everything may weaken immersion. The managerial challenge is to balance cultural depth with accessible interpretation.

### Case Evolution of Cantonese Cultural Hotel Space



**Figure 2.** Case evolution of Cantonese cultural hotel space across heritage conservation, modern Lingnan expression and contemporary abstraction.

Cross-cultural interpretation does not mean simplifying culture until it becomes generic. Rather, it requires layered communication. The first layer should be intuitive and atmospheric, allowing any guest to enjoy proportion, comfort, sequence and material quality. The second layer should provide accessible explanation through captions, staff narration, room literature or digital guides. The third layer may offer deeper cultural learning through curated activities, craft workshops or food rituals. This layered approach reduces the risk that international visitors misread regional symbols while also avoiding excessive explanation for guests who already understand them.

Cultural intelligence also has implications for evaluation. If a hotel measures only satisfaction scores, it may miss how different guest groups interpret the same cultural cue. Analytic visitors may praise functional clarity but overlook symbolic richness; holistic visitors may praise atmosphere but tolerate weaker explicit explanation. The design evaluation framework therefore needs to include both spatial variables and service variables. Staff capability, interpretive materials and operational timing should be treated as part of the cultural design system rather than as separate management issues (Ang et al., 2007).

### 3. Methodology

The study uses a mixed-method design. The qualitative phase applies comparative case analysis to identify design translation strategies in three culturally significant hotels. The cases were selected for theoretical relevance: White Swan Hotel represents modern Lingnan garden interpretation; Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion represents adaptive reuse and diasporic Cantonese-Peranakan hybridity; and Shangri-La Nanshan represents contemporary metaphorical translation in a high-rise luxury setting. The thematic coding procedure followed the logic of systematic qualitative analysis, moving from open codes to higher-order design themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The quantitative phase operationalizes the design mechanism through a C-A-B model. The model assumes that cultural design first shapes cognition through objective authenticity and existential authenticity; these perceptions influence affective response through spatial aesthetics and place identity; and affective bonds then support behavioural outcomes through place dependence and loyalty. The path coefficients reported in this paper are used as an analytical demonstration of the proposed model and are aligned with the questionnaire constructs described in the original study document.

Data interpretation followed three linked procedures. First, case materials were read for recurring spatial elements, including threshold, enclosure, ventilation, water, garden, colour, craft and symbolic form. Second, these elements were coded according to their mode of translation: preservation, adaptation, abstraction or operationalization. Preservation refers to the direct conservation of existing heritage fabric, adaptation refers to the reuse of traditional devices for contemporary functions, abstraction refers to the reinterpretation of cultural form through new materials, and operationalization refers to the conversion of intangible culture into service and ritual. Third, the coded themes were connected to the C-A-B model in order to explain how design decisions may influence cognition, affect and behavioural intention.

The mixed-method structure is appropriate because cultural hotel design cannot be evaluated by visual analysis alone. Visual analysis can identify motifs and spatial composition, but it cannot explain whether guests interpret these motifs as authentic or whether such interpretation affects loyalty. Conversely, survey modelling can test relationships

among constructs, but it cannot specify the design mechanisms that produce those constructs. Combining case interpretation with model demonstration therefore allows the study to move from design description to explanatory analysis.

The study also recognizes the limitations of using three cases. The cases are not intended to represent all Cantonese cultural hotels. Instead, they function as theoretically purposeful examples that reveal three design conditions: heritage conservation, modern regional synthesis and contemporary metaphorical expression. Together, they make it possible to compare how the same cultural system can be expressed through different historical periods, ownership structures, building types and guest expectations.

**Table 1.** Case selection and cultural design translation logic

Case	Cultural position	Key spatial elements	Design translation
White Swan Hotel, Guangzhou	Modern Lingnan hospitality landmark	Indoor water court, garden scenery, regional public memory	Recreates Lingnan garden atmosphere in a modern hotel lobby.
Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion, Penang	Adaptive reuse of Cantonese-diasporic heritage	Feng Shui layout, air wells, blue facade, craft conservation	Converts mansion heritage into boutique hospitality experience.
Shangri-La Nanshan, Shenzhen	Contemporary luxury interpretation	Sky lobby, abstract roof lines, vertical greenery, art installation	Uses metaphor rather than direct copying to express Cantonese spirit.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

Across the cases, the most important finding is that cultural elements become persuasive when they shape relationships among movement, perception and activity. In White Swan Hotel, the indoor garden does more than beautify the lobby. It changes the guest's arrival tempo by replacing the purely transactional lobby with a scenic sequence of water, stone, vegetation and layered views. This sequence recalls Lingnan garden logic while also solving a hospitality problem: it gives guests a memorable orientation point and a shared social space. The cultural element therefore performs aesthetic, navigational and social functions at the same time.

Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion demonstrates a different mechanism. Its cultural value is inseparable from conservation, but its hotel value depends on making conservation inhabitable. Guests experience the building through rooms, courtyards, tours, breakfast spaces and circulation routes. The air wells, blue facade, timber details and symmetrical plan produce authenticity because they remain part of daily use rather than museum-like display. The case also shows the importance of maintenance and interpretation. Without careful conservation, heritage fabric loses credibility; without explanation, many guests may see only visual charm and miss the environmental and cosmological logic of the house.

Shangri-La Nanshan illustrates the possibility and risk of abstraction. A high-rise luxury hotel cannot reproduce an old Lingnan house without contradiction. Its design therefore uses curvature, vertical planting, roofline rhythm and artistic references to suggest cultural belonging. This strategy is appropriate for a contemporary urban hotel, but it requires restraint. If abstraction becomes too weak, culture disappears into generic luxury; if it becomes too literal, the hotel risks theatrical imitation. The case suggests that metaphorical design works best when supported by material consistency, clear narrative and operational rituals.

##### 4.1 Tangible Cultural Elements: From Sign to Spatial System

The case analysis indicates that tangible Cantonese elements are most effective when they structure spatial experience rather than simply decorate surfaces. In White Swan Hotel, water, rockery, vegetation and layered thresholds produce an interiorized Lingnan garden. In Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion, the air wells, symmetrical plan and craft details demonstrate how environmental order and cultural symbolism can be conserved within adaptive reuse. Bahauddin and Soon (2019) show that the mansion's Form School Feng Shui logic supports natural ventilation and lighting, indicating that cultural order and environmental performance are mutually reinforcing.

In Shangri-La Nanshan, the design strategy shifts from preservation to abstraction. Instead of copying historical roofs, the hotel extracts curvature, rhythm, colour and garden atmosphere as contemporary spatial metaphors. This approach is consistent with critical regionalism, which argues for place-sensitive design that resists placeless international style without returning to nostalgic imitation (Frampton, 1983).

The tangible elements identified in the cases can be grouped into three design scales. At the architectural scale, patios, atria, rooflines and shaded corridors organize environmental comfort and circulation. At the interior scale, windows, screens, furniture, colour and craft create atmosphere and visual identity. At the object scale, tea sets, artworks, textiles, signage and amenities provide close-contact cues that guests can touch, photograph and remember. A coherent cultural hotel should connect these scales. When the architectural scale suggests one narrative and the object scale suggests another, the experience becomes fragmented.

Material selection is a critical part of this coherence. Cantonese cultural design does not require the exclusive use of historical materials, but it does require material logic. Stone, timber, ceramic, glass, metal and fabric should be chosen for their ability to express tactility, climate response and craft memory. For example, a Manchurian-window reference is more convincing when it actually filters coloured light than when it appears only as a printed motif. Similarly, a cold-alley reference is more convincing when it affects airflow, shade or spatial compression than when it is only named in a brochure.

#### 4.2 Intangible Cultural Elements: Ritual, Service and Multisensory Memory

The study also finds that intangible cultural elements are essential for avoiding a purely visual theme. Tea ritual, Cantonese opera rhythm, morning tea culture, craft demonstration, scent, music and food can transform a static interior into a participatory cultural environment. These elements support existential authenticity because guests do not merely look at culture; they enact and interpret it through bodily experience ((Wang, 1999; Xie et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2024).

The implication for hotel design is that space planning should be coordinated with operations. A tea lounge, for example, should not only display Cantonese furniture but also control acoustics, light, seating rhythm, service pace and interpretive language. In this way, cultural experience becomes a managed sequence rather than a background theme.

Intangible culture strengthens the design system because it introduces time. A guest may see a window or courtyard once, but a ritual unfolds through sequence, waiting, participation and memory. Tea service, local breakfast, Cantonese music, craft demonstration and guided storytelling can slow the pace of consumption and make the hotel stay more reflective. These activities also help guests understand why particular spatial forms exist. A tea ritual framed by filtered light, garden views and quiet acoustics makes the cultural logic of the space easier to feel than a written explanation alone.

The managerial challenge is to avoid turning intangible culture into staged entertainment detached from local meaning. A lion dance, opera excerpt or tea ceremony can become superficial if scheduled only as spectacle. The stronger approach is to embed intangible culture into ordinary service moments. Arrival tea, corridor scent, room naming, breakfast sequencing, staff language and evening soundscape can all carry cultural meaning without demanding excessive attention. In this sense, cultural hotel design requires collaboration among interior designers, brand managers, food and beverage teams, human resources and local cultural practitioners.

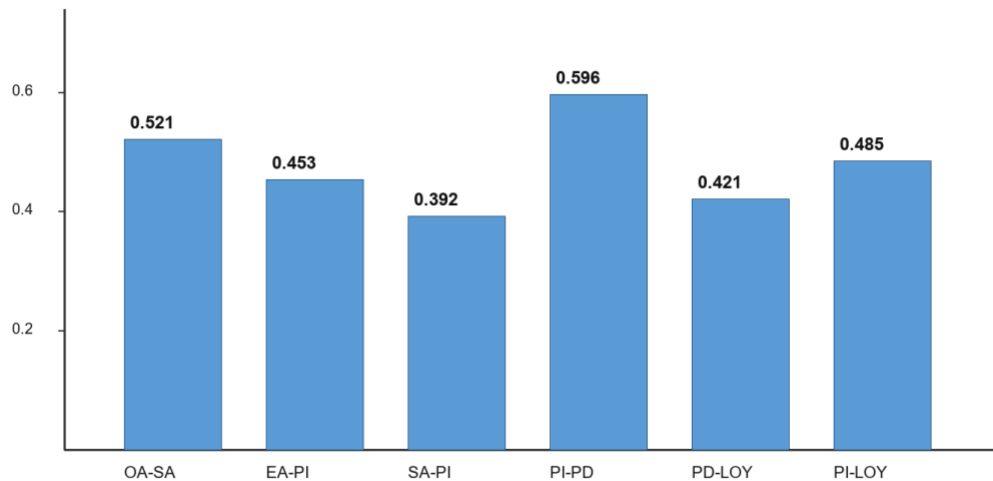
#### 4.3 Quantitative Model: Authenticity, Place Attachment and Loyalty

The SEM results support the proposed logic of cultural design influence. Objective authenticity has a strong effect on spatial aesthetics, suggesting that guests respond to the perceived credibility of material and formal cues. Existential authenticity has a strong effect on place identity, indicating that participatory cultural experience helps guests connect the hotel with self-meaning. Place identity strongly predicts place dependence and customer loyalty, consistent with place-attachment theory (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001; Scannell & Gifford, 2010).

Table 2. Standardized path results for the proposed C-A-B model

Path	Standardized coefficient	T statistic	p value	95% CI	Result
Objective authenticity -> Spatial aesthetics	0.521	7.458	< .001	[0.384, 0.655]	Supported
Existential authenticity -> Place identity	0.453	6.921	< .001	[0.312, 0.589]	Supported
Spatial aesthetics -> Place identity	0.392	5.514	< .001	[0.265, 0.521]	Supported
Place identity -> Place dependence	0.596	9.145	< .001	[0.468, 0.722]	Supported
Place dependence -> Customer loyalty	0.421	6.632	< .001	[0.298, 0.543]	Supported
Place identity -> Customer loyalty	0.485	7.218	< .001	[0.355, 0.612]	Supported

### Standardized Path Coefficients in the C-A-B Model



OA = objective authenticity; EA = existential authenticity; SA = spatial aesthetics; PI = place identity; PD = place dependence; LOY = loyalty.

**Figure 3.** Standardized path coefficients in the proposed C-A-B model.

The path results should be read as evidence of a cumulative process rather than as isolated effects. Objective authenticity contributes to spatial aesthetics because credible cultural cues make the environment more meaningful and visually organized. Existential authenticity contributes to place identity because guests who participate in meaningful cultural activities can relate the hotel experience to their own self-understanding. Spatial aesthetics then supports place identity by turning sensory pleasure into symbolic attachment. Finally, place identity and dependence contribute to loyalty because guests are more likely to revisit or recommend a hotel that they see as both meaningful and functionally distinctive (Al-Azab & Abulebda, 2023).

The strongest coefficient in the model is the path from place identity to place dependence. This suggests that emotional identification may precede functional dependence in cultural hotel settings. Guests first decide whether the place matters to them symbolically; only then do they evaluate whether the hotel is difficult to replace. This finding is important for operators because loyalty cannot be produced only through loyalty programmes or service efficiency. Those mechanisms matter, but they become more powerful when attached to a spatial identity that guests can remember and describe to others.

The results also help explain why cultural hotels sometimes fail despite high investment in design. If objective authenticity is weak, guests may perceive the environment as artificial (Sarantakou et al., 2024). If existential authenticity is weak, they may admire the design but remain emotionally distant. If place identity is weak, satisfaction may not become loyalty. The model therefore provides a diagnostic tool: managers can identify whether a design problem lies in cultural credibility, experiential participation, aesthetic perception, identity formation or functional dependence.

#### 4.4 Cross-Cultural Interpretation

The model should be interpreted through a cross-cultural lens. Guests with holistic perceptual habits may respond strongly to atmosphere, continuity and symbolic resonance, while guests with more analytic habits may evaluate the clarity of information, room functions, circulation and service efficiency (Nisbett et al., 2001). Cultural intelligence can bridge these differences by aligning spatial storytelling with service explanation, signage, multilingual interpretation and staff responsiveness (Ang et al., 2007).

Cross-cultural interpretation should be incorporated early in the design process rather than added after opening. For guests unfamiliar with Cantonese culture, the hotel should provide clear narrative anchors: what the main design idea is, why certain forms appear, and how guests can participate without feeling excluded. For guests who already know Cantonese culture, the hotel should avoid over-simplification and should preserve enough subtlety to sustain recognition and pride. This dual communication can be achieved through multilingual interpretive layers, staff storytelling, curated routes and digital media that guests may choose to use or ignore.

The cross-cultural issue is also relevant to room design. International guests often evaluate room function through bedding, bathroom layout, lighting control, acoustic privacy and technological convenience. If cultural design interferes with these expectations, it may reduce satisfaction even when public spaces are admired. Therefore, cultural expression in guest rooms should be precise and usable: filtered light, craft details, artwork, textile references, tea amenities and

spatial calm can communicate culture without compromising comfort. Public areas can carry stronger narrative intensity, while rooms should balance identity with rest.

## 5. Design Implications

First, designers should treat Cantonese cultural elements as generative rules rather than decorative inventories. Wok-ear walls can inspire roofline rhythm and acoustic zoning; Manchurian windows can inform light filtering and colour atmosphere; cold alleys and patios can be translated into shaded circulation, atriums and passive ventilation. This rule-based approach supports both cultural continuity and contemporary usability.

Second, hotel operators should integrate space, service and interpretation. Cultural rooms, tea lounges, restaurants, corridors and public art should be linked by a coherent narrative. The narrative must be legible enough for first-time international guests yet subtle enough to preserve immersion for culturally knowledgeable guests.

Third, cultural hotel design should be evaluated as an ESG mechanism. Environmental value comes from passive cooling, adaptive reuse and material conservation; social value comes from craft revival and community memory; economic value comes from differentiation and loyalty; and governance value comes from cultural intelligence and interpretation standards.

### Cultural Hotel Design as an ESG Mechanism

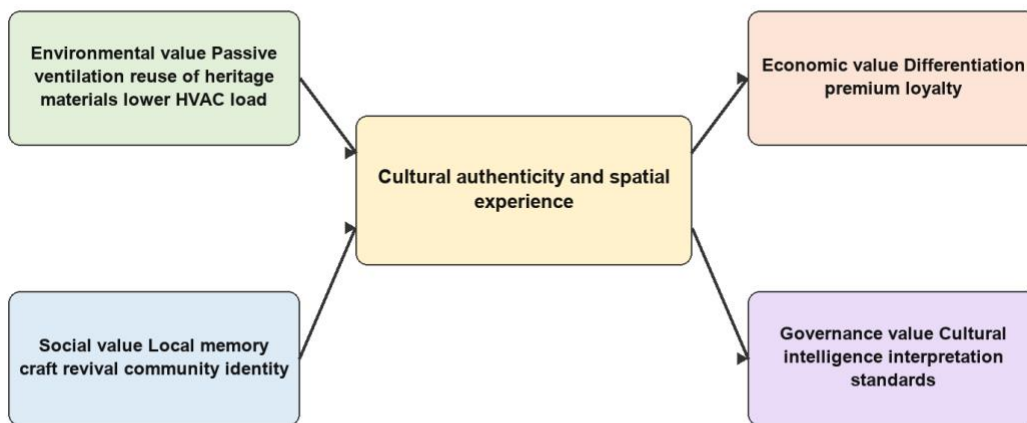


Figure 4. ESG mechanism created by culturally grounded hotel space design.

A practical design guideline can be organized in five steps. The first step is cultural diagnosis: designers should identify which elements are historically grounded, locally recognized and operationally transferable. The second step is spatial translation: selected elements should be converted into circulation, light, thermal comfort, acoustic zoning, material palette and view sequence. The third step is experiential programming: intangible culture should be embedded into service rituals and guest activities. The fourth step is cross-cultural interpretation: the hotel should provide layered explanation for different visitor groups. The fifth step is evaluation: guest feedback should measure not only satisfaction but also perceived authenticity, spatial aesthetics, place identity, place dependence and intention to recommend.

This guideline also helps avoid two common errors. The first error is over-decoration, where every surface is filled with cultural motifs until the space loses hierarchy and calm. The second error is under-translation, where designers claim cultural inspiration but leave guests with an interior that resembles any international luxury hotel. A balanced design uses fewer elements but gives each element more work to do. A window filters light, frames a view and carries history; a courtyard improves orientation, produces microclimate and stages social encounter; a tea service slows time, activates memory and supports staff-guest communication.

## 6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Cantonese cultural elements can contribute to hotel space design when they are translated into spatial systems, behavioural rituals and service experiences. The strongest design strategies do not reproduce tradition as a fixed image; they reinterpret climate wisdom, craft logic, symbolic memory and everyday ritual for contemporary hospitality.

The proposed framework explains this process through authenticity, aesthetic cognition and place attachment. Tangible cultural elements support objective authenticity and spatial aesthetics, while intangible elements support existential authenticity and place identity. Together, they increase place dependence and customer loyalty. Cross-cultural cognition and cultural intelligence moderate this process by shaping how different guests read and value the same space.

The study is limited by its reliance on selected case materials and a model demonstration based on secondary questionnaire constructs. Future research should collect primary guest data across multiple Cantonese cultural hotels, compare domestic and international visitor segments, and integrate physiological or eye-tracking data to examine how guests respond to specific cultural design elements in real time.

For hotel owners and developers, the findings suggest that cultural design should be treated as long-term brand infrastructure. A culturally grounded hotel may require more research, craft coordination and staff training than a standard interior package, but it can also create stronger differentiation and higher narrative value. This value is particularly important in destinations where luxury hotels compete with similar room standards and global service protocols. Culture becomes a strategic asset when it is credible, operationally supported and consistently maintained.

For heritage and tourism authorities, Cantonese cultural hotels can contribute to sustainable cultural transmission if they work with local communities and craftspeople. Hotels are not neutral containers; they can either commodify heritage or help keep it visible, useful and economically viable. Partnerships with artisans, museums, neighbourhood groups and cultural educators can reduce the risk of superficial theming. They can also ensure that the benefits of cultural tourism extend beyond the hotel property.

Future research should test the framework with primary survey data from multiple hotels and visitor groups. Longitudinal studies could examine whether place attachment formed during a stay persists after guests return home. Experimental studies could compare different design translations of the same cultural element, such as literal Manchurian windows versus abstract light screens, to determine which produces stronger aesthetic and emotional response. Digital methods such as online review mining, eye tracking and virtual reality simulation could further clarify how guests perceive cultural hotel interiors before and during travel.

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### Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declare no conflict of interest.

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