

Current Status, Hot Topics, and Trends in Chinese Cultural Heritage Protection Research in the New Era (2013-2024)

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Abstract

Using CiteSpace bibliometric software, this study conducted a visual knowledge map analysis of 561 CSSCI journal articles on cultural heritage preservation research indexed in China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) from 2013 to 2024. It systematically examined the current state, research hotspots, and trends in cultural heritage preservation studies, clarifying the overall development trajectory of this field. Findings reveal that the volume of cultural heritage preservation research publications has shown an overall upward trend. Research themes have gradually shifted from value interpretation and institutional regulation toward digital technology empowerment and urban-rural development integration. However, research efforts remain fragmented, and theoretical integration is insufficient. Future research urgently requires deepening theoretical construction, bridging macro-strategies with micro-practices, and integrating interdisciplinary methodologies to advance high-quality development in cultural heritage preservation.

Keywords

Cultural Heritage, Preservation, CiteSpace Knowledge Map, Visualization

1. Introduction

Cultural heritage stands as a powerful testament to the splendid Chinese civilization and represents the invaluable legacy bequeathed by our ancestors. Safeguarding and passing on this heritage not only embodies reverence for and continuity of our historical lineage but also constitutes a responsibility and gift to future generations—benefiting both the present and future centuries. The Chinese Com-

unist Party is neither a proponent of historical nihilism nor cultural nihilism. Instead, it consistently regards the inheritance and promotion of outstanding historical and cultural traditions as a theoretical imperative and intrinsic requirement. To this end, in November 2021, General Secretary Xi Jinping explicitly stated at the 22nd Meeting of the Central Committee for Comprehensively Deepening Reform that efforts should be strengthened to protect and utilize cultural relics, preserve and transmit cultural heritage, advance the development of socialist spiritual civilization, and expand the international influence of Chinese culture. In May 2022, during the 39th Group Study Session of the Political Bureau of the 19th CPC Central Committee, General Secretary Xi Jinping further emphasized the need to bring more cultural relics and heritage to life, fostering a strong social atmosphere for passing on Chinese civilization. He also called for systematic protection of intangible cultural heritage to better meet the people's growing spiritual and cultural needs and advance cultural confidence and self-reliance. We must promote the creative transformation and innovative development of China's outstanding traditional culture, continuously enhancing the cohesion of the Chinese nation and the influence of Chinese culture. This series of important statements has clarified the work requirements, value goals, and driving forces for the protection and inheritance of cultural heritage in the new era. However, research on cultural heritage protection in China remains relatively fragmented and lacks a systematic framework. Therefore, it is necessary to systematically review relevant literature and summarize the main characteristics, developmental trajectory, and major issues of existing domestic research findings to provide important reference and insights for advancing cultural heritage protection.

2. Overview of Cultural Heritage Protection Research Literature

2.1. Data Sources and Research Methods

To enhance the quality of sample literature and the reliability and validity of data, this study exclusively selected CSSCI journals (including the expanded edition) indexed in the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database as the sole source of sample literature. The search was conducted on December 13, 2025, with the following criteria: "Subject = Cultural Heritage" or "Cultural Heritage Protection," and a time range from "January 2013 to December 2024." The selection of 2013 as the starting point reflects the significance of the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, which marked the entry of socialism with Chinese characteristics into a new era. After excluding call-for-paper notices, news reports, interviews, and similar documents, 561 valid Chinese-language articles were identified. CiteSpace software was then employed to visualize these sample documents, generating knowledge maps depicting author collaboration, research institutions, keyword co-occurrence, keyword clustering, and keyword timelines. This comprehensive visualization reveals the current state, hot topics, and future trends in cultural heritage preservation research.

2.2. Analysis of Research Phases

To gain a deeper understanding of the dynamic changes and evolutionary characteristics within the field of cultural heritage protection research, this study constructed a line chart mapping research years against publication volumes based on the annual distribution of CNKI literature (Figure 1). This analysis divided the evolution of core literature from 2013 to 2024 into three distinct phases: the Low-Volume Launch Phase (2013-2015), the Steady Growth Phase (2016-2020), and the High-Volume Fluctuation Phase (2021-2024).

Overall, from 2013 to 2024, domestic research publications on cultural heritage-related topics exhibited a development pattern characterized by “stepwise leaps followed by high-level plateauing.” This trend is closely aligned with the continuous introduction of major cultural policies at the national level. The period from 2013 to 2015 marked a low-level initiation phase for research. The 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed “building a socialist cultural powerhouse,” and supporting regulations for the Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage were progressively implemented. However, academic research response to these policies lagged, with publication growth remaining sluggish at an annual average of 10 - 20 papers. Research primarily focused on foundational topics such as “value interpretation” and “archival organization,” failing to achieve significant scale effects. From 2016

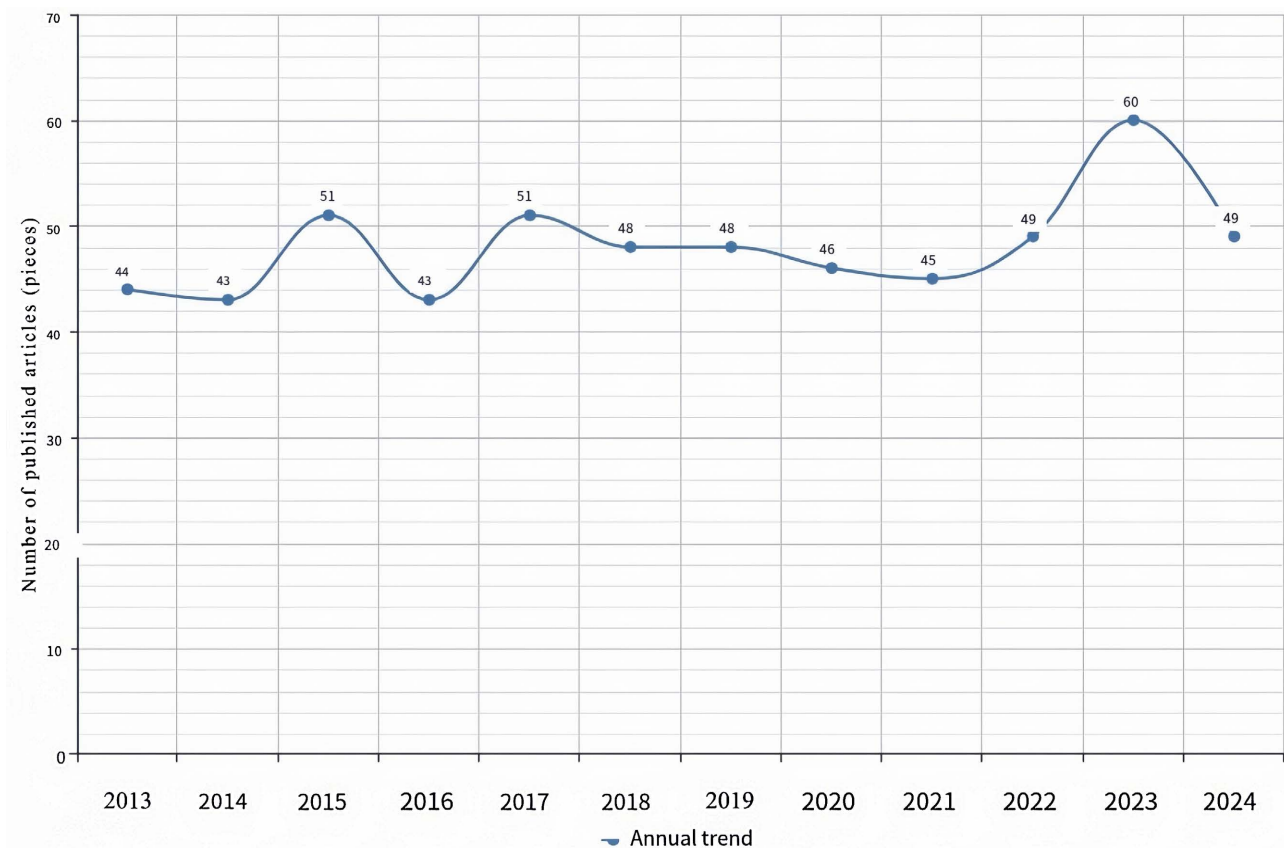


Figure 1. Changes in publication volume for cultural heritage protection research, 2013-2024.

to 2020, cultural heritage protection research entered a steady growth phase. With the release of the Three-Year Action Plan for “Internet Plus Chinese Civilization” and policy documents like the Opinions on Implementing the Project for Inheriting and Developing China’s Excellent Traditional Culture, research output increased significantly. Publication volume in 2018 showed a significant increase compared to 2015. Research keywords gradually shifted toward areas such as “digitalization,” “visualization,” “traditional villages,” and “cultural spaces.” Methods like GIS, VR, and knowledge graphs began to see relatively widespread application in research. Furthermore, the synergy between the Ministry of Culture and Tourism’s 2019 “Intangible Cultural Heritage + Technology” initiative and the 14th Five-Year Plan’s emphasis on “strengthening systematic protection of important cultural and natural heritage and intangible cultural heritage” fueled sustained research momentum during this phase. Publication volume peaked in 2020, with emerging high-frequency thematic clusters including “digital humanities,” “immersive communication,” and “knowledge archaeology.” From 2021 to 2024, related research entered a phase of high-level fluctuation. The “Opinions on Further Strengthening the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage” and the 20th CPC National Congress’s call to “intensify the protection of cultural relics and heritage” were successively issued, explicitly emphasizing that cultural heritage protection should proactively integrate into major national strategies and play an active role in rural revitalization and new urbanization. The 2023 Central Document No. 1 also repeatedly mentioned initiatives such as the “Cultural Industry Empowering Rural Revitalization Plan” and the “Agricultural Heritage Protection and Utilization Project,” further grounding research themes in rural revitalization, individual inheritance, interactive mechanisms, and regional coordination. Annual publication volumes stabilized at around 40 articles. Agricultural Culture Inheritance and Protection Project,” and “Strengthening the Protection and Utilization of Important Agricultural Cultural Heritage.” Consequently, research themes further delved into rural revitalization, individual inheritance, interactive mechanisms, and regional coordination. Annual publications stabilized at over 40, with anthropology, experimental psychology, and big data evaluation methods gradually converging. This marked the emergence of a new developmental characteristic in cultural heritage protection research: “micro-practice-governance mechanisms-quantitative analysis.”

2.3. Analysis of Authors and Research Teams

To gain a deep understanding of the development status within a specific research field, one can begin by analyzing its core author group, whose research achievements reflect the field’s research level and primary research directions to a certain extent. According to Price’s theory, authors who have published m papers or more can be regarded as core authors, where $m = 0.749 (\eta_{\max})^{1/2}$, and η_{\max} represents the author’s maximum publication volume. In this study, $\eta_{\max} = 10$, yielding $m \approx 2.3$. Therefore, authors with ≥ 2 publications are regarded as core authors in this

field. Statistics reveal 37 core authors in this field, with 7 having 3 or more publications and only 3 having 5 or more: Peng Zhaorong (10 articles), Zhang Jijiao (8 articles), Zhang Ying (7 articles). This indicates a relatively limited number of highly productive authors, suggesting research efforts remain dispersed and significant research potential exists. Additionally, using CiteSpace software with authors as node types, an author collaboration network diagram for this field was generated (Figure 2). The analysis report indicates 294 author nodes connected by 68 links, with a network density of 0.0016. The sparse connections and dispersed distribution among core authors, coupled with overall low node density, suggest relatively loose collaborative ties within this field. Cooperation primarily occurs within institutional or organizational boundaries, indicating a lack of multi-tiered, cohesive research teams. Academic exchange and collaborative research efforts require further enhancement.

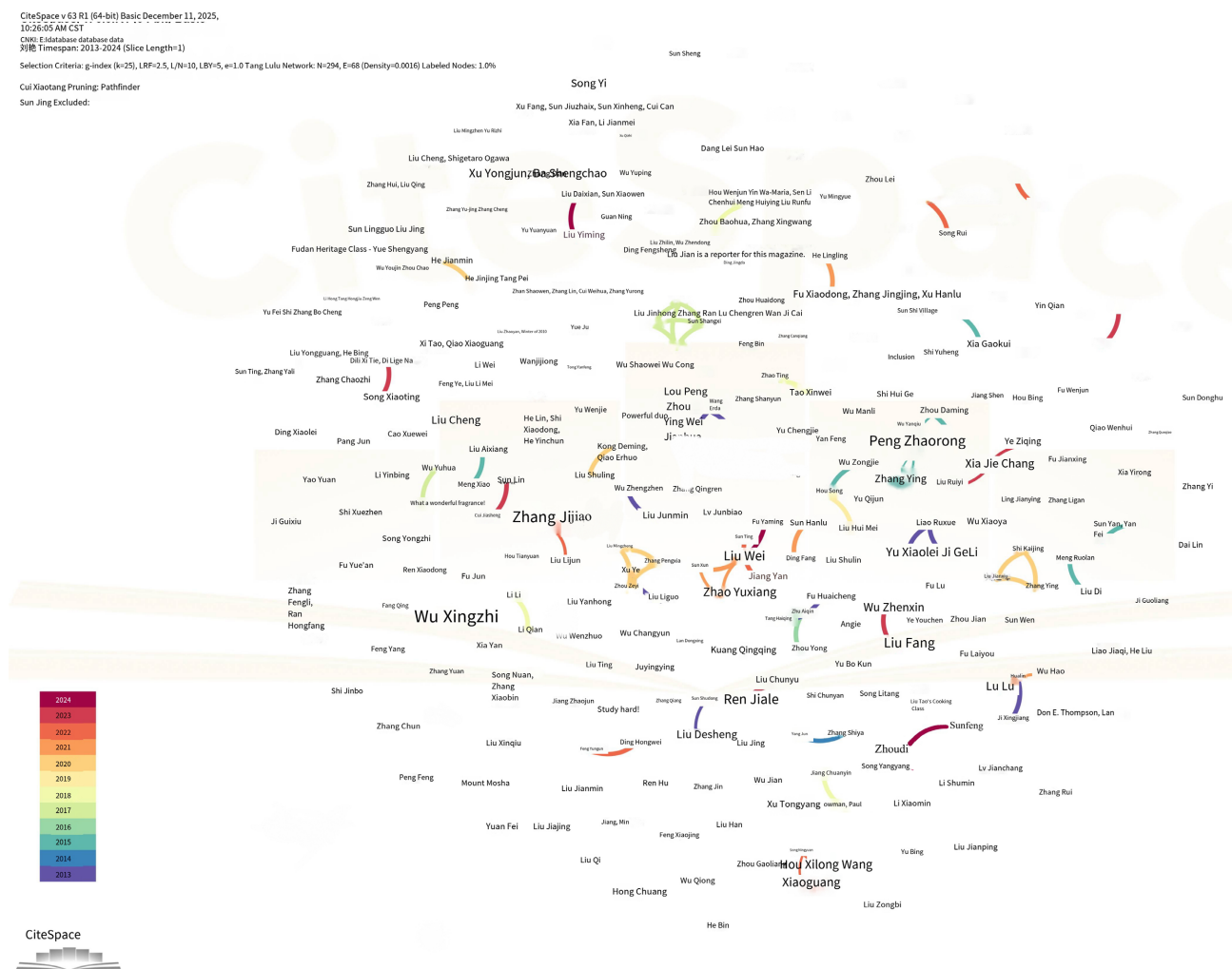


Figure 2. Author collaboration network diagram.

2.4. Analysis of Publishing Institutions

Using CiteSpace software to conduct institutional analysis on the valid sample

documents yielded the institutional distribution map for cultural heritage preservation research, shown in **Figure 3**. Analysis revealed that the 561 papers involved 226 research institutions, encompassing cultural heritage research institutes, universities, as well as publishing houses, government departments, and social organizations. Among these, institutions with ≥ 5 publications included the Institute of Ethnic Literature, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (5 papers), the Institute of Anthropology, Xiamen University (5 papers), the China Cultural Heritage Research Institute (6 papers), and the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (8 papers). Only two institutions published 4 papers each: the School of Information Management at Wuhan University and the Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research, Chinese Academy of Sciences. Fourteen institutions published 3 papers each. In terms of publication volume, cultural heritage research institutes and universities held a clear advantage, constituting the primary research entities. Regarding inter-institutional collaboration, only 80 connections were formed among the 226 nodes, with a node density of 0.0031. This indicates relatively limited ties between different universities and cross-regional institutions, suggesting room for improvement in cooperation. Therefore, it is necessary to further broaden research topics and perspectives in cultural heritage protection studies while enhancing collaboration and exchange among different research teams and institutions.

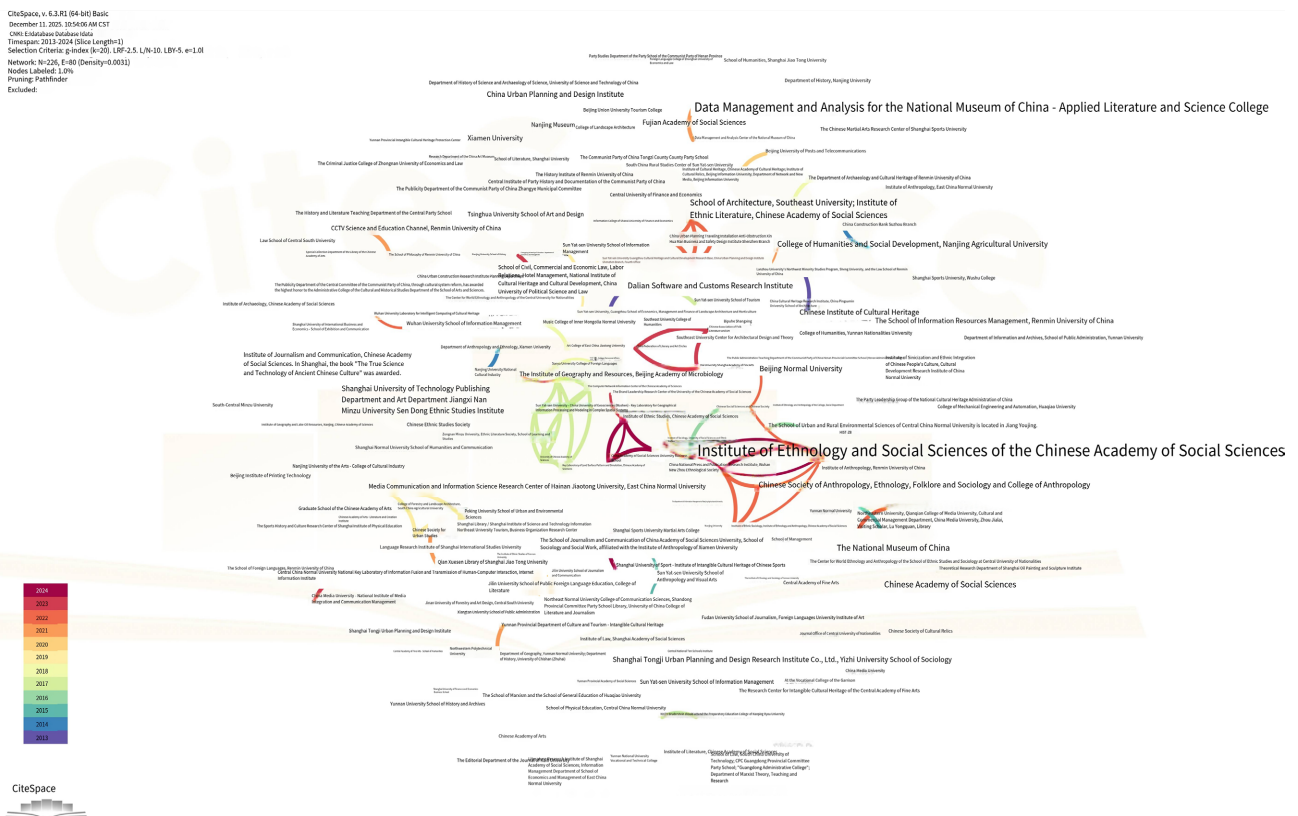


Figure 3. Institutional distribution map.

3. Analysis of Hot Topics and Trends in Cultural Heritage Protection Research

3.1. Hot Keyword Analysis

Using CiteSpace to analyze keywords and generate a co-occurrence map, with “Keyword” set as the network type and time slices divided by year, the top 20 high-frequency keywords were summarized and extracted, then ranked by frequency from highest to lowest. Specific results are shown in **Table 1**. Combining **Table 1** and **Figure 4** reveals that “cultural heritage” appears most frequently, reflecting the primary research focus during the search. Keywords such as “digital humanities,” “rural revitalization,” “Xi Jinping,” “ethnic minorities,” “traditional culture,” and “cultural relics protection” also appear frequently, indicating the main areas of interest and phased research hotspots in China’s cultural heritage protection studies.

Table 1. List of high-frequency vocabulary in cultural heritage protection research from 2013 to 2024.

No.	Frequency	Centrality	Year of First Appearance	Key Term	No.	Frequency	Centrality	Year of First Appearance	Keyword
1	379	1.48	2013	Cultural Heritage	11	4	0.05	2013	Heritage
2	28	0.42	2013	Protection	12	4	0	2014	Ethnic Minorities
3	13	0.12	2021	Digital Humanities	13	4	0.01	2016	Belt and Road
4	9	0.05	2015	Digitalization	14	4	0.47	2018	Japan
5	7	0.06	2019	Rural Revitalization	15	4	0.01	2015	Preservation and Inheritance
6	5	0.16	2020	Xi Jinping	16	4	0.05	2019	Cultural Heritage Preservation
7	5	0.07	2014	Anthropology	17	4	0.08	2015	Heritage
8	5	0.02	2019	Grand Canal	18	4	0	2016	Silk Road
9	5	0.01	2015	Traditional Culture	19	3	0.01	2023	Chinese Civilization
10	4	0.01	2021	Protection and Utilization	20	3	0.01	2014	Authenticity

3.2. Keyword Clustering Analysis

Using CiteSpace software for keyword clustering analysis, keywords with similar characteristics were grouped into clusters to generate a keyword cluster map for cultural heritage protection research, as shown in **Figure 4**. The Q value measures the significance of the network structure, while the S value represents the average silhouette coefficient of the clusters. In **Figure 5**, $Q = 0.6817$ ($Q > 0.3$) and $S = 0.9966$ ($S > 0.5$), indicating a relatively ideal clustering effect. Smaller cluster numbers encompass more keywords. Primary cluster labels include: #0 Conservation, #1 Heritage, #2 Rural Revitalization, #3 Digital Humanities, #4 Anthropology, #5 Communication, #6 Digitization, #7 Cultural Heritage Preservation, #8 Knowledge Archaeology.

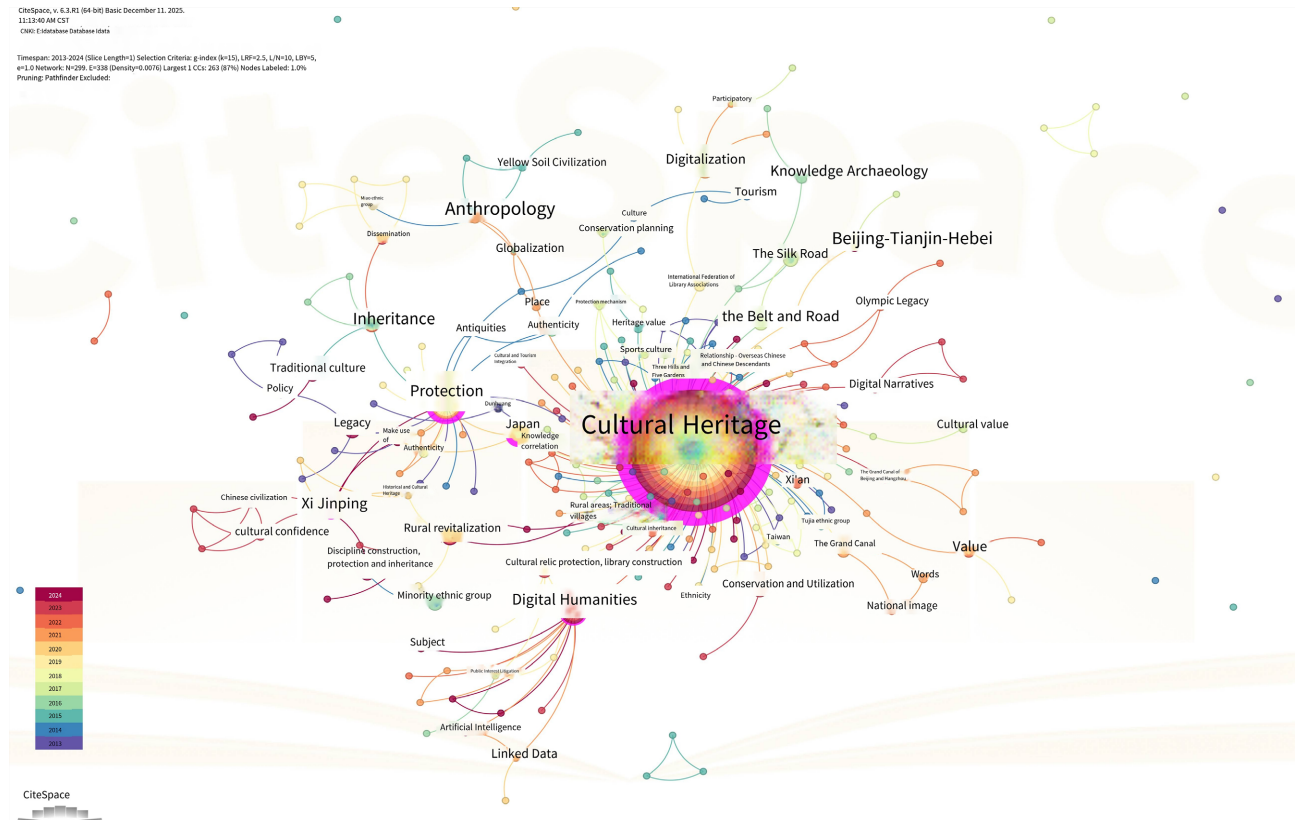


Figure 4. Keyword co-occurrence map.

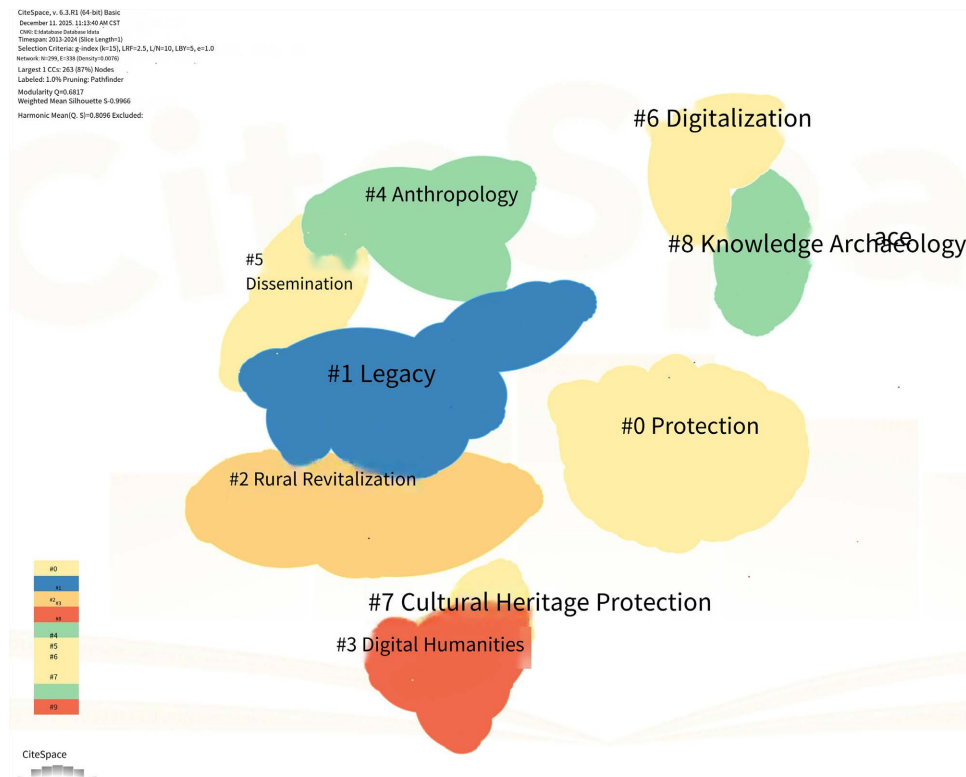


Figure 5. Keyword clustering diagram.

Based on the keywords within each cluster, the “Cluster Exploration” function in CiteSpace generated the keyword clustering results table shown in **Table 2**. The S-value indicates the quality of the cluster, with all clusters in the table having S-values greater than 0.9, indicating overall high clustering quality. The average year reflects the temporal distribution characteristics of keywords within each cluster, and the label terms were selected from the top 5 high-frequency keywords in each cluster.

Table 2. Keyword co-occurrence network clustering list.

Cluster ID	Cluster Size	Label Words (Top 5)	S-Value	Average Year
0	123	Preservation; Digital Humanities; Cultural Heritage; Rural Revitalization; Knowledge Archaeology	1	2018
1	27	Preservation; Heritage; Policy; Thailand; Utilization	0.976	2015
2	15	Rural Revitalization; Xi Jinping; Chinese civilization; Historical and Cultural Heritage; Cultural Confidence	1	2019
3	11	Digital Humanities; Artificial Intelligence; Information Management; Embodiment; Interactive	1	2021
4	9	Anthropology; Place; Jiexiu; Loess Civilization; Globalization	0.999	2016
5	8	Communication; Transmission; Dematerialization; Media; Public Archaeology	0.993	2017
6	6	Digitalization; IFLA; Experience Design; Disaster Risk; Creativity	0.994	2018
7	5	Cultural Heritage Protection; Public Participation; Procuratorial Recommendations; Public Interest Litigation; Cultural Heritage Sharing	0.999	2017
8	5	Knowledge Archaeology; Silk Road; Silk; Cultural Diversity; Calendars	0.995	2016

3.3. Keyword Salience Map and Time Zone Map Analysis

By conducting keyword emergence analysis (including emerging keywords, emergence intensity, and their start and end dates) and temporal zone analysis on the research subjects, we can systematically present the developmental trajectory and phased evolution characteristics of this research field. Based on the analysis results in **Figure 6**, the following features can be summarized: First, regarding the starting years when keywords became research hotspots, topics such as “preservation,” “preservation and inheritance,” “Tujia ethnic group,” and “anthropology” primarily emerged between 2013 and 2014, representing relatively early research trends. In contrast, topics like “national image,” “value,” and “dissemination” only began to emerge prominently in 2021-2022, exhibiting distinct late-stage characteristics. Second, regarding the duration of research hotspots, topics like “digital humanities” and “conservation and utilization” maintained sustained interest for three years. Topics such as “anthropology” and “transmission” followed with a two-year duration. Third, 2019 and 2021 marked “burst periods” for keyword emergence in this field, with each year seeing over three hot keywords, indicating concentrated releases of research attention. Fourth, in terms of keyword emergence intensity, “digital humanities” ranked first with an intensity of 4.41. This aligns closely with the current emphasis on digital technology applications in cultural

heritage conservation practices and the backdrop of digital and intelligent development. It reflects the academic community's widespread focus on innovating cultural heritage conservation methods through digital technology and network media to promote the "living and sustainable" transmission of cultural heritage. Additionally, keywords such as "Belt and Road," "sports culture," "Silk Road," and "Grand Canal" also exhibit high emergence intensity, gradually emerging as significant focal points within cultural heritage preservation research.

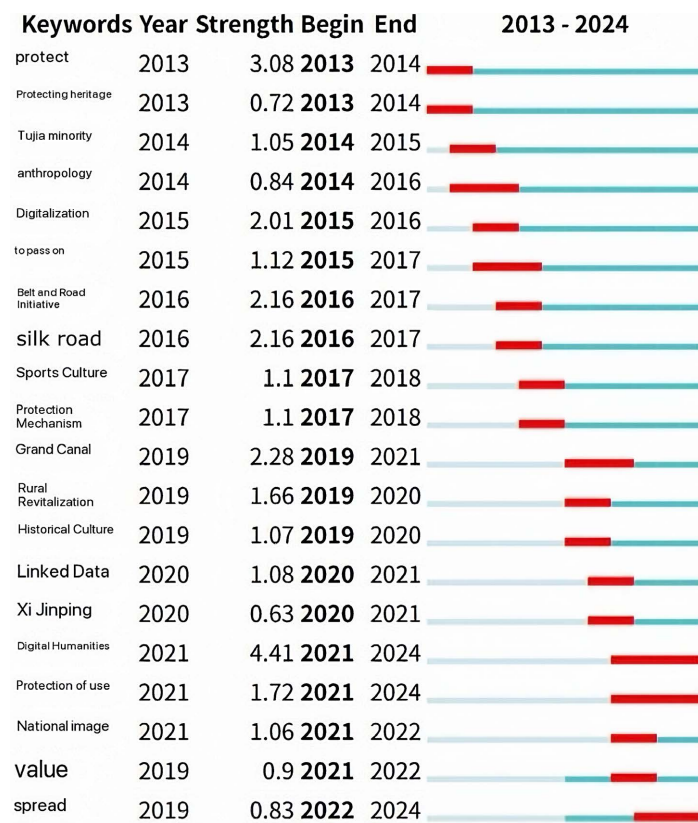


Figure 6. Keyword emergence map.

In recent years, research on cultural heritage preservation in China has revealed a relatively clear four-stage evolutionary trajectory through CiteSpace's time-zone maps (Figure 7): From 2013 to 2015, research primarily focused on the institutional foundation phase following the implementation of the Cultural Heritage Protection Law of the People's Republic of China and the Intangible Cultural Heritage Law of the People's Republic of China. Centered around high-frequency keywords such as "protection," "heritage," and "cultural relics protection," this period established an initial analytical framework centered on value interpretation, protection entities, and legal norms. From 2016 to 2018, research progressively incorporated technological and spatial perspectives such as "digitalization," "digital humanities," and "visualization." Clusters #3 and #6 rapidly expanded, signifying the systematic integration of GIS, virtual reality, and spatial metrics into cultural heritage studies. From 2019 to 2021, clusters like "anthropology," "knowledge archae-

ology,” and “communication” developed in cross-disciplinary ways, deepening multidisciplinary integration. Research began focusing on digital ethnography, immersive communication, and the contemporary transformation of cultural heritage to respond to cultural-tourism integration practices and the application of new technologies like 5G and VR. From 2022 to 2024, the “rural revitalization” node surged as the dominant theme, closely intertwined with “living heritage transmission,” “individual bearers,” and “interactive mechanisms.” Research focus shifted further to community and individual levels, emphasizing endogenous development drivers, benefit-sharing mechanisms, and cross-regional collaborative governance. In summary, existing literature has evolved through a trajectory of “institutional interpretation → digital-spatial turn → multidisciplinary deepening → rural revitalization integration.” Future research is expected to expand in directions such as the symbiosis of virtual and real worlds through “digital twins + artificial intelligence,” the coupling of traditional ecological knowledge with carbon sink functions, studies on micro-level emotions and inheritance psychology, collaborative governance of linear cultural corridors, and quantitative assessment of cultural heritage protection performance. This will gradually form a new multidimensional integrated paradigm encompassing “technology-ecology-subject-institutional” dimensions.

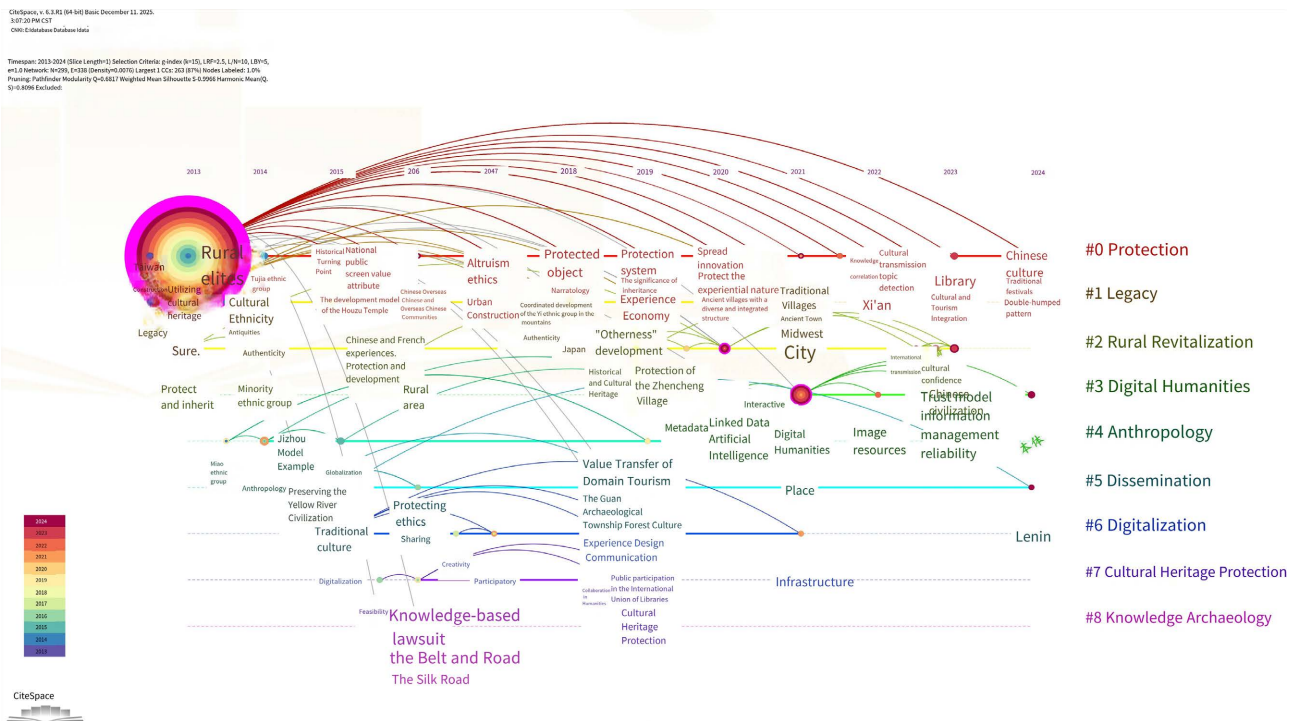


Figure 7. Keyword clustering timeline.

4. Analysis of Cultural Heritage Protection Research Content

CiteSpace, as a bibliometric analysis tool, can reveal the current research status and hotspots in a relatively objective manner. However, it may, to some extent,

neglect research topics with significant academic value but whose co-occurrence features are not obvious. To address this limitation, this paper first selects the research topics with high frequency of occurrence or mediating centrality in the keyword co-occurrence network and clustering structure. Then, it further combines the representative studies and viewpoints of scholars in related fields for comprehensive judgment. Finally, it classifies the research on cultural heritage protection into six hot topics: research on the value of cultural heritage protection, research on principles of cultural heritage protection, research on cultural heritage protection and urban development, research on standards for cultural heritage protection, research on digitalization in cultural heritage protection, and research on cultural heritage inheritors.

4.1. Research on the Value of Cultural Heritage Preservation

Cultural heritage serves as a vital carrier and expression of China's outstanding traditional culture, while also bearing witness to the nation's historical development. It possesses significant cultural value and social functions. Safeguarding cultural heritage contributes to fostering a strong sense of community among the Chinese nation and upholding ethnic unity. [Chen \(2023\)](#) elaborates on how cultural heritage preservation fosters patriotic sentiment, enriches spiritual heritage, and strengthens cultural identity by examining six key characteristics of ethnic historical and cultural heritage: spirituality, diversity, symbolism, and others. This approach achieves the goal of solidifying the consciousness of the Chinese national community. Safeguarding cultural heritage is crucial for promoting the dissemination and development of China's outstanding traditional culture. Currently, academic discourse often adopts the theoretical perspective of the "Two Integrations," particularly the "second integration," to demonstrate the vital role of cultural heritage preservation in achieving the creative transformation and innovative development of China's fine traditional culture. [Ma \(2024\)](#), after deeply studying General Secretary Xi Jinping's thoughts and practices on cultural heritage, contends that cultural heritage embodies the spiritual identity of China's fine traditional culture, providing rich resources for its contemporary development. Protecting cultural heritage helps reduce social divisions and promote social harmony. [Tong \(2013\)](#) elaborates on the theoretical logic and practical pathways for fostering a sound social mindset and building a harmonious society by highlighting the emotional power, integrity resources, and well-being sources inherent in cultural heritage. Safeguarding cultural heritage contributes to cultivating new-era talents with robust vitality, dialectical rationality, and social responsibility. [Yuan \(2020\)](#) analyzed the educational value of cultural heritage in nurturing innovative spirit, cultural sentiment, and social responsibility from the perspectives of cognitive resources and behavioral resources. [Gong \(2023\)](#) traced the aesthetic education journey of cultural heritage, highlighting its fourfold educational functions: nurturing through scenery, form, culture, and environment. Safeguarding cultural heritage also generates positive ecological benefits. Scholars primarily

elaborate on the crucial role of cultural ecological conservation areas in achieving Chinese-style modernization characterized by harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature. Notably, the development of national cultural parks not only forms integrated cultural-economic belts but also achieves an organic combination of cultural preservation and ecological governance (Wang, 2022b).

4.2. Research on Principles for Cultural Heritage Protection

Principle of Integrity. Lin (2020) contends that the actual value of cultural heritage lies in its indivisible “integrity”—encompassing both the temporal and spatial dimensions of its historical formation, as well as its locality and subjectivity. **Principle of Authenticity.** This principle has consistently been a central topic in cultural heritage research, interpreted by scholars from diverse perspectives. Wang and Li (2023) interpret authenticity from a subject-object standpoint, arguing that while preserving the original appearance of cultural heritage, efforts should be made to enhance the subject’s perception and experience of the heritage object. Yang and Xie (2018) discussed authenticity through the more China-specific concepts of “restoring old as old” and “restoring old as new,” arguing that authenticity in cultural heritage preservation does not equate to rigid conservatism but rather necessitates innovation to achieve sustainable utilization of heritage. **Principle of Vitality.** “Let cultural relics speak, let history speak, let culture speak” constitutes the core tenet of General Secretary Xi Jinping’s heritage philosophy. Academic research has applied this principle to intangible cultural heritage (ICH) domains. Xiao and Xi (2022) proposed three principles—intrinsic authenticity, ecosystem integrity, and adaptive living—based on the fundamental characteristics of ICH cultural spaces, aiming to achieve dynamic preservation. Similarly, Li (2024) proposed the dynamic conservation principles of vitality, everydayness, and diversity based on the immaterial, human-centered, shared, and practical nature of intangible cultural heritage itself. **The Principle of People-Centeredness.** People-centeredness is the most distinctive feature of Marxism. Guiding China’s cultural heritage endeavors with Marxism means upholding respect for and leveraging the vital role of the people in cultural heritage protection. Ma and Gao (2024), through in-depth analysis of Xi Jinping’s important discourses on cultural heritage, clarified that heritage protection must adhere to a people-centered value principle, recognizing the people as the true owners of cultural heritage. **Historical Principle.** Qi (2023) examined the current state of cultural heritage protection within a legal framework, analyzing the interplay between time, cultural heritage, and heritage security. The study emphasizes adopting a dynamic developmental perspective to understand heritage protection practices and timely updating conservation concepts.

4.3. Research on Cultural Heritage Preservation and Urban Development

Current academic discourse primarily explores the relationship between cultural heritage preservation and urban development, as well as how to balance the two.

Scholars widely agree that cultural heritage is by no means a “burden” on urban development, but rather a strategic resource imbued with multiple values. Peng (2014), adopting a “homeland-property” perspective, underscores the importance of land and the interconnected memories of living communities in constructing local identity, highlighting cultural heritage’s role as the foundation and repository of a city’s historical context and collective memory. Li and Zhang (2017), through case studies of York in the UK and Kyoto in Japan, reveal that the rational utilization of cultural heritage can effectively stimulate tourism and creative industries, thereby injecting sustained vitality into urban revitalization and achieving the transformation from “cultural resources” to “cultural capital.” Although the multiple values of cultural heritage have gained widespread recognition, in the context of the accelerated modernization and urbanization process, its protection practices still face severe challenges. Among these, “constructive destruction” has become a prominent issue in the current field of cultural heritage protection. This concept mainly refers to the large-scale demolition and reconstruction carried out in the process of urbanization, which, due to the one-sided pursuit of short-term economic benefits, causes continuous and even irreversible damage to historical cultural heritage and its overall environment, thereby weakening the authenticity, integrity, and historical continuity of cultural heritage. Miao (2014) noted that in “Chinese-style urban renewal,” government performance-driven agendas and developers’ profit motives often push historical sites to the brink of “constructive destruction.” Much preservation work remains confined to individual artifacts, neglecting the historical environments and cultural ecosystems upon which they depend. Tang (2013) analyzes that since the founding of the People’s Republic, cultural heritage preservation has largely depended on external political and economic objectives, often instrumentalizing its intrinsic cultural value. Such issues lead to historic districts losing their “authenticity of life,” becoming cultural shells that significantly diminish the effectiveness of heritage conservation. To address these challenges, scholars have proposed pathways for synergistic development across conceptual frameworks, planning, management, and implementation. Zhao and Wu (2023) introduced capital circulation theory, arguing that in new-phase urban renewal, cultural heritage should be positioned as a key element for enhancing spatial quality and driving innovative consumption through forward-looking, integrated planning. Successful heritage preservation hinges on rational utilization. Case studies compiled by Li and Zhang (2017) demonstrate that transforming heritage into cultural exhibitions, creative industries, commercial spaces, and community public areas revitalizes sites. Simultaneously, excavating and showcasing intangible cultural heritage—such as festivals, crafts, and traditional customs—deepens visitor engagement and experiential richness.

4.4. Research on Standardization and Systematization in Cultural Heritage Preservation

Academic discourse on cultural heritage protection standards has developed sys-

tematic discussions regarding standard definitions, evaluation approaches, supporting mechanisms, and international alignment. Regarding the definition of standard content, Wang (2022a) argues that intangible cultural heritage protection standards should not be confined to narrow technical specifications but rather constitute a “broad standard concept integrating technology and culture.” Formally, this should encompass management standards like regulations and operational guidelines; substantively, cultural standards must be organically embedded within technical standards. This perspective finds resonance in the field of tangible cultural heritage. Liu and Xu (2019) argue that in safeguarding ancient trail cultural heritage, metadata standards should be redefined based on heritage attributes while reusing international norms, thereby reflecting cultural specificity and achieving alignment between “global technical syntax” and “local cultural semantics.” Regarding evaluation standards, research generally focuses on the tension between “Outstanding Universal Value” (OUV) and “cultural authenticity.” Wang (2023) employs the Marxist labor theory of value to demonstrate the objective reality of cultural heritage value, arguing that evaluation criteria should pursue the unity of truth and practice. Zhang and Wang (2015) note that Eastern “cultural authenticity” emphasizes wholeness, continuity, and living transmission, presenting structural differences from Western standardized evaluations grounded in “material authenticity.” They recommend that China’s village evaluation systems should place greater emphasis on living culture, intangible elements, and community development potential. Scholars have also conducted comparative studies of cultural heritage protection standards domestically and internationally. Ma (2018) observes that China’s intangible cultural heritage listing criteria prioritize historical, artistic, and ethnic identity values, whereas international conventions emphasize ethical dimensions such as community participation, respect, and rights—revealing significant divergences in value orientations. Wang (2021) systematically elucidates the three core international standards established by the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage—alignment with international human rights, mutual respect, and sustainable development. She notes the growing prominence of these standards in convention implementation and recommends China’s alignment with them when implementing the Intangible Cultural Heritage Law. Sun (2024) analyzed the revision process of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, highlighting how the World Heritage system continuously adjusts its classification framework—such as by introducing special categories like cultural landscapes—to respond to global strategic and cultural diversity needs. This demonstrates the dynamic evolution inherent in international standards themselves.

4.5. Digital Research on Cultural Heritage Protection

As the Digital China initiative advances, digital technologies are reshaping the cul-

tural heritage preservation and transmission system with unprecedented depth. Emerging technologies have permeated the entire lifecycle of cultural heritage conservation, demonstrating significant value across three dimensions: storage and processing, service development, and exhibition and dissemination. Digital technologies have pioneered new pathways for cultural heritage storage, evolving from digitization to intelligent management. Wang and Hou (2023) argue that smart data, as an advanced organizational form of information resources, possesses four key characteristics: semantic richness, computability, traceability, and trustworthiness. Leveraging technologies such as photogrammetry and 3D modeling, it enables the construction of digital twins for cultural heritage, facilitating cross-institutional resource integration. He and Yuan (2023) utilized GIS systems to construct digital maps of intangible cultural heritage, achieving spatial information visualization and overcoming the limitations of text-based documentation. Digital technology has propelled cultural heritage from static preservation toward dynamic utilization. Liu (2024) analyzed the “agricultural heritage + digital collectibles” model using agricultural cultural heritage digitization as an example. This approach transforms traditional farming wisdom into tradable data assets, forming integrated online-offline industrial clusters. Such an elemental transformation not only activates heritage’s economic value but also enables sustainable cultural IP operations through vertical e-commerce platforms. The integration of digital technology and new media has reconfigured audience experience paradigms. Liu and Zhang (2024) critique the lack of presence in traditional digital museums, proposing a three-dimensional design framework based on perceptual, behavioral, and emotional layers. Yu (2024) cites the Dunhuang Research Academy’s “Digital Grotto of Buddhist Scriptures” project as a prime example, arguing that its RPG-gamified narrative structure transforms users from passive recipients into active participants, achieving “narrative transmission.” Zhang and Du (2023) further note that new media dissemination of cultural heritage exhibits strong trends toward media and technological convergence, with issues like copyright ownership warranting further attention and research. Scholars observe that while digital technology empowers cultural heritage preservation, it also introduces significant risks, particularly concerning copyright ownership and data security. The digital recreation of cultural heritage involves complex copyright issues. Liu and Li (2024) propose utilizing Creative Commons licenses to achieve reasonable rights confirmation, offering an institutional solution for digital rights in cultural heritage. Through empirical evaluations of “Cloud Tour Dunhuang” and “Digital Forbidden City,” Hong and Li (2024) found that system security scored 0.108 in weighting, yet both platforms received only moderate ratings for feedback timeliness, exposing shortcomings in privacy policies and response mechanisms. Additionally, some scholars contend that inconsistent technical standards exacerbate data integration challenges, while uneven resource allocation further traps underdeveloped regions in the digital divide.

4.6. Research on Cultural Heritage Preservation and Inheritors

Bearers of cultural heritage, particularly those designated as representative inheritors, serve as the core agents and vital force in heritage preservation. During his field visits, General Secretary Xi Jinping repeatedly emphasized the need to “cultivate inheritors effectively, ensuring the legacy is passed down from generation to generation.” Current academic research primarily explores topics such as the inheritor system, the role of inheritors, and their current status, yielding a wealth of findings. Scholars widely recognize that effective inheritor protection must transcend a singular model of recognition and subsidies. It should account for the diverse types of cultural heritage projects and their inherent transmission patterns, focus on the authentic living conditions and intrinsic motivation of the inheritors themselves, and actively explore innovative preservation methods such as digitization. Regarding theoretical discussions on inheritor recognition and management systems, scholars generally highlight the limitations of a “one-size-fits-all” recognition model. Zhang (2019), in “Research on Protection Strategies for Collective Inheritors of Intangible Cultural Heritage Projects,” pointed out that for comprehensive projects involving multi-stage collaboration, such as Liaocheng woodblock New Year paintings, recognizing only individual inheritors is insufficient to ensure the preservation of complete techniques. Consequently, the author proposed the concept of “collective inheritors.” Yuan and Gu (2015) systematically outlined selection criteria for inheritors, emphasizing the necessity of preserving intangible cultural heritage in its “authentic form.” They categorized inheritors into three types—individual, group, and collective—advocating for differentiated management approaches. Wang (2019) introduced a cultural reception perspective, noting potential tensions between the institutionally defined identity of inheritors and their self-interpretation. Differences in identity recognition can influence the direction and effectiveness of their transmission practices. Facing practical challenges in preservation efforts, multiple studies have revealed structural dilemmas through empirical analysis. Jue et al. (2015) identified specific challenges such as uneven regional conservation efforts and shrinking living spaces for practitioners. Wang and Zhang (2022) found through quantitative analysis that national-level practitioners exhibit an elevated average age, a severe aging trend, and risks of generational succession gaps. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that practitioner protection involves not only institutional design but is also deeply intertwined with socioeconomic transformations. To better address the practical challenges faced by inheritors, Ma and Zhang (2021) proposed a new pathway through technological intervention. They advocate employing visual ethnography methods to authentically document transmission practices and cultural ecosystems through “thick description.” This approach, they argue, not only objectively preserves heritage but also strengthens inheritors’ cultural consciousness and agency, providing a medium-based support for the living transmission of intangible cultural heritage that transcends textual documentation.

5. Review and Outlook on Cultural Heritage Protection Research

5.1. Research Review

A CiteSpace visualization analysis of Chinese literature from CSSCI journals between 2013 and 2024 reveals that China's cultural heritage preservation research exhibits distinct phased evolution in terms of research scale, thematic structure, and methodological approaches. The annual distribution of publications indicates three phases: a low-level launch, steady growth, and high-level fluctuation. These trends closely align with national cultural policies, demonstrating the field's pronounced policy responsiveness and practical orientation.

In terms of research strength, the researchers and research institutions engaged in the study of cultural heritage protection have already established a certain scale, and the research strength is continuously strengthening. However, the cooperation and communication among research institutions, research teams, and researchers are still insufficient. The research strength shows a feature of overall dispersion and local concentration. The sample literature involves 226 research institutions and 294 authors. However, the density of the institution cooperation network is only 0.0031, and the density of the author cooperation network is 0.0016. The cross-institutional and cross-team cooperation connections are relatively limited. Although there are key authors such as Peng Zhaorong, Zhang Jijiao, and Zhang Ying with certain influence, and core research forces mainly composed of universities and research institutes (offices), these nodes have not yet played a significant bridging and connecting role in the overall cooperation network, and their radiation and leading influence on other research groups is weak. As a result, research cooperation is mostly limited to a small scope or within a specific team; there is a lack of stable interaction between different research directions, and the overall research pattern still shows a decentralized and individualized development feature.

Regarding research content and hotspot structures, co-occurrence and clustering analyses of keywords reveal that "cultural heritage," "conservation," "digital humanities," "rural revitalization," and "cultural relics protection" form the core research themes. High-frequency keywords are highly concentrated within major clusters such as #0 "Conservation," #2 "Rural Revitalization," and #3 "Digital Humanities," indicating a shift in research focus from early-stage value interpretation and institutional regulation toward digital technology empowerment and real-world application scenarios. Simultaneously, keyword emergence analysis reveals that topics like "digital humanities," "conservation and utilization," and "rural revitalization" exhibit high emergence intensity and duration, reflecting sustained academic attention to pathways for the living transmission and transformation of cultural heritage.

However, by combining the keyword clustering structure with the emergent timeline, it can be further discovered that the existing research still mainly focuses on empirical summaries, policy interpretations, and technical applications, while

the systematic theoretical explanation of the protection theory of cultural heritage in the context of the new era is relatively weak. Keywords such as “cultural heritage”, “digitalization”, and “agricultural revitalization” have high frequencies, but their centrality is generally low. They mainly serve the functions of identifying research objects or policy issues, and fail to play the role of a “bridge” connecting different research themes and knowledge domains. At the same time, normative theoretical keywords such as “cultural theory”, “governance”, and “value system” not only have low frequencies of occurrence, but also have low centrality and mediation, failing to form a stable advantage and not yet developing into core concept nodes across themes. This deficiency is not accidental. On the one hand, the research agenda in this field is strongly influenced by policy-driven funding priorities and application evaluation standards, which tend to emphasize problem-oriented approaches and immediate application results rather than abstract theoretical construction. On the other hand, the interdisciplinary nature of cultural heritage research leads to the dispersion of conceptual resources. Scholars selectively draw from history, anthropology, sociology, and digital humanities sciences, although this has promoted the continuous accumulation at the empirical level, it has to some extent restricted the formation of systematic theoretical construction, and therefore, in the co-occurrence network, the centrality of theoretical concepts is low, and a stable research cluster centered on theory has not yet been formed.

5.2. Research Outlook

First, in terms of research content, there should be a further systematic study on the protection concept of the cultural heritage of the Communist Party of China in the new era. From the results of keyword co-occurrence and clustering, issues with practical orientation, such as “digital humanities” and “agricultural revitalization,” occupy the central position in the research, while the centrality of keywords reflecting theoretical construction is relatively limited, indicating that the related research is still mainly based on empirical analysis. On one hand, starting from the Marxist theory of cultural production and practice, we can systematically analyze the production mechanism, subject relationships, and value transformation paths of cultural heritage in the contemporary social structure, thereby deepening the theoretical interpretation of core propositions such as “people-oriented” and “living inheritance”. On the other hand, we can utilize the theory of cultural ecology to explore the dynamic coupling relationship between cultural heritage and the natural environment, social structure, and regional development, providing a comprehensive analytical framework for explaining practical issues such as rural revitalization and national cultural parks. Additionally, we can introduce the theory of actor-networks to break the traditional binary opposition between the subject and the object, incorporating multiple actors such as digital technology, institutional design, and the inheriting entities into the same analytical network, thereby enhancing the explanatory ability for issues such as digital protection and multi-

party collaborative governance. By integrating the application of the above theoretical approaches, it is expected to facilitate the transformation of this research field from empirical description to theoretical construction.

Second, research perspectives should strengthen the integration of macro-strategies and micro-practices. Keyword timeline and emergence analyses reveal that research focus is gradually shifting toward rural areas, communities, and heritage bearers, yet findings remain fragmented. Future studies should comprehensively examine grassroots practices, inheritor mechanisms, and social collaborative governance within the national strategic framework, deepening understanding of the intrinsic mechanisms of “systemic protection” and “living transmission” of cultural heritage.

Third, research methodologies should promote deeper integration of quantitative analysis with normative and empirical studies. The low density of author-institution collaboration networks indicates dispersed research efforts and insufficient interdisciplinary collaboration. Future work should build upon bibliometric and case study findings by incorporating comparative research, quantitative evaluation, and interdisciplinary approaches to enhance the explanatory power and generalizability of research conclusions. Through these pathways, China’s cultural heritage preservation research can achieve synergistic advancement in both theoretical depth and practical effectiveness.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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