

Current Status, Challenges, and Pathways for the Integration of Local and Immigrant Cultures in Dongguan under the 'Dual Ten Thousand' Context

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Abstract: In Dongguan, a quintessential immigrant city of China, the dynamic interplay between local and immigrant cultures has been a consistent focal point. As Dongguan transitions into the "Dual Ten Thousand" era, characterized by a GDP surpassing one trillion RMB and a population exceeding ten million, the cultivation of cultural identity emerges as a pivotal factor for ensuring social cohesion and sustainable development. This research delineates three key findings. The evolution of the relationship between local and immigrant cultures has traversed three distinct phases: initial conflict (around 2000), subsequent mitigation (post-2007 with initiatives such as "New Dongguanese"), and eventual dilution (post-2014 as official distinctions waned). Presently, cultural amalgamation is intricate, encompassing (1) intergenerational disparities among locals (traditional older generations versus progressive youth), (2) diverse perceptions of integration among migrants contingent upon economic security and Household Register status, and (3) the coexistence of a geographically circumscribed local culture alongside a fragmented immigrant culture. To promote integration and fortify cultural identity, Dongguan must amplify the prominence of its local culture to forge a unified urban identity, facilitate inter-group dialogue, and prioritize migrant well-being by enhancing employment opportunities, healthcare provisions, and educational systems.

Keywords: Immigrant City, Local Culture, Immigrant Culture, Cultural Integration, Cultural Identity

1. Introduction

1.1. Immigrant city

Dongguan exemplifies a typical immigrant city, as evidenced by data from the 7th National Population Census indicating that non-local residents constitute three-quarters of its permanent population [1]. This demographic composition reflects a dynamic trend over time. The transition began between 1994 and 1995 when the ratio of local to non-local residents shifted from parity to an imbalance. By 200-2001, the ratio surpassed 1:2, further increasing to 1:3 by 2003-2004. The peak occurred in 2005-2006, with a ratio of 1:3.5, followed by a slight decline. Recent data from 2024 reveals a stabilized ratio of 1:2.5 [2]. Consequently, Dongguan can be classified as an "immigrant society" [3] with a 30-year history of such demographic dynamics.

The dynamic between "locals and non-locals" in Dongguan is not a recent phenomenon but rather a longstanding issue that has evolved over approximately three decades. The current resurgence of interest in this topic is attributed to Dongguan's transition into a new phase of urban development characterized by the goal of achieving a population of ten million permanent residents and a GDP of one trillion yuan.

1.2. The new starting point of the "double ten-thousand city"

The attainment of the "dual ten-million milestone" signifies Dongguan's initiation into a new phase of urban advancement. In 2021, Dongguan ascended to the status of the 15th "dual ten-million city" in China, denoting the achievement of a GDP exceeding one trillion yuan alongside a populace of ten million. This juncture in Dongguan's urban evolution is a momentous occasion warranting commemoration. However, it is imperative to grasp the profound import and implications of this milestone. It serves not only as a validation of the developmental strides made in recent decades but also as an indication that Dongguan has joined an elevated echelon of urban centers. Consequently, it is paramount to refine the urban development paradigm and chart a course toward "high-quality development." Dongguan must not solely prioritize economic advancement but must also harmonize efforts to realize comprehensive and synchronized progress across all domains encompassing the economy, society, culture, and ecology. The city should not only accentuate its "hard power" but also fortify its "soft power." Solely through the confluence of robust hard and soft powers can Dongguan confidently navigate competition and advance resolutely.

1.3. Urban integration and urban identity

According to data from the 7th National Population Census, as of November 1, 2020, Dongguan's resident population totaled 10.4666 million, with a household-registered population of 2.6388 million and a floating population of 7.9522 million. Notably, Dongguan leads cities in the Pearl River Delta in terms of the proportion of its floating population. Specifically, 6.1935 million individuals originated from other provinces, while 1.7587 million were from within the province. Consequently, the migrant population constitutes the predominant segment of Dongguan's permanent population, enjoying a definitive numerical advantage.

Humans play dual roles as carriers of culture and valuable resources. In Dongguan, the substantial migrant population provides essential labor and intellectual contributions to economic and social development [4], however, this rapid advancement simultaneously places demands on social governance, public services, and environmental sustainability [5]. As China confronts an aging population and declining birth rates, cities that can retain and sustain a dynamic population are better positioned for competitiveness. Dongguan, unlike many inland cities experiencing population outflows, maintains a significant migrant population and attracts a net population influx. Maximizing the potential of the migrant population in Dongguan to foster genuine integration across economic, social, psychological, and cultural dimensions [6], promoting harmonious coexistence with local residents, and fostering a sense of pride and belonging among its ten million inhabitants are critical for the city's economic prosperity, social cohesion, and long-term stability. This endeavor is pivotal for Dongguan to surpass the "dual-million" milestone, achieve its urban development goal of becoming a high-quality bay area city, and collectively build a splendid new homeland.

The theme of "urban integration and urban identity" encompasses various dimensions, including economic, social, cultural, and psychological aspects. This paper seeks to explore this theme primarily through a cultural lens.

2. Concept definition, key issues, and research design

2.1. Core concepts

This research project focuses on three fundamental concepts: indigenous culture, immigrant culture, and multicultural integration. Their implications are delineated as follows:

Local culture, also referred to as Guanyi culture, encompasses the lifestyle, values, customs, language expressions, and material manifestations such as architecture, relics, landmarks, and handicrafts of the indigenous population in Dongguan.

Immigrant culture, also known as foreign culture in this context, encompasses the lifestyles, values, customs, language expressions, material manifestations, and other aspects of the migrant population residing in Dongguan.

Multicultural integration in Dongguan involves the amalgamation of local and immigrant cultures, resulting in a new urban cultural hybrid. This amalgamated urban culture incorporates elements from both local and immigrant cultures, and is widely embraced by both original residents and newcomers in Dongguan [7].

2.2. Key issues

Individuals act as both transmitters and practitioners of culture. This study centers on exploring the dynamic between native residents and immigrants in Dongguan, focusing on their mutual acknowledgment. The study addresses the following key inquiries:

1) The characteristics, compositions, attractions, and influences of the local and immigrant cultures in Dongguan. 2) The reciprocal influence and coevolution of local and immigrant cultures in Dongguan. 3) Perception, acceptance, and recognition of local residents and indigenous culture in Dongguan among various migrant populations. 4) Perception, acceptance, and recognition of migrants and their cultures by local residents in Dongguan, China.

2.3. Research design

2.3.1. Literature reports

The existing literature can be broadly categorized into two main groups. The first group comprises theoretical academic works that provide academic definitions and theoretical implications of terms such as indigenous culture and immigrant culture. Notably, studies focusing on Dongguan offer valuable theoretical insights for this investigation. The second group encompasses empirical reports on Dongguan, its indigenous culture, and immigrant culture. These reports include the 7th National Population Census Report, Dongguan's Population Development Plan, the annual Statistical Bulletin of the National Economic and Social Development of Dongguan City, and the Report on Dongguan's Urban International Competitiveness. These sources are utilized to gain a comprehensive understanding of Dongguan, adopt a comparative analytical approach, and elucidate Dongguan's developmental positioning within the Pearl River Delta region, nationally, and globally.

2.3.2. Social surveys

Prior to initiating the social survey, the research team classified the target respondents and formulated the survey methodologies. The survey was conducted between March 2024 and September 2024.

1) Classification of the types of survey objects

Table 1: Classification marking table of objects to be investigated

Major Category	Sub-category	Mark	Feature
Dongguan Local Residents	Generational Dongguan Natives	1A	At least three generations have lived in Dongguan.
	Second-generation Migrants in Dongguan	1B	Born and raised in Dongguan, or raised there without being born in the city.
Dongguan Migrant Population	Migrants with Local Hukou	2A	Typically professionals or key contributors to Dongguan society, classified under local household registration policies
	Migrants without Local Hukou	2B	Large-scale and widely distributed, primarily blue-collar workers (industrial laborers).

The individuals are categorized into two primary groups with four subcategories, as indicated in Table 1. It is important to highlight that, in this study, foreign immigrants in Dongguan are further classified into two groups: individuals originating from within Guangdong Province and those from outside the province, for comparative analysis. Individuals who are non-Chinese nationals are not currently included in the examination.

2) Survey methods

A questionnaire survey was conducted online, tailored to the research focus and aimed primarily at young students in Dongguan. Utilizing a random sampling technique, a total of 208 valid responses were collected, comprising 37 local students and 171 immigrant students, with 138 originating from within the province and 33 from other provinces. The sample distribution broadly mirrored the demographic composition of students from various regions attending universities in Dongguan.

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with Dongguan residents (excluding young students), with 5-10 participants from each of the identified categories: Type 1A, Type 1B, Type 2A, and Type 2B. Face-to-face interviews were utilized to facilitate detailed discussions aimed at uncovering the genuine sentiments and perceptions of the participants. Prior to the interviews, an interview guide was developed, tailored to the specific characteristics of each participant group. The sampling technique employed was snowball sampling.

3. Research findings

3.1. Three stages of the cultural integration process

The integrated development of Dongguan's local culture and immigrant culture has undergone a historical evolution. Research based on interviews and literature from around 2000 reveals a period of conflict between the two cultures. Local residents displayed exclusionary attitudes towards immigrants, labeling them with terms such as Waidilao(outsiders), Beilao(northerners), Mangliu(vagabonds), Mingong(migrant workers), Dagongzai(young male migrant workers), and Wailaimei(young female migrant workers). By 2007, the government introduced the term "Xinguanren (New Dongguan Residents)" to address immigrant-related issues directly. Various initiatives were implemented to support immigrants in integrating into Dongguan society, thereby improving relations between locals and newcomers. Post-2014, the consolidation of the "Xinguanren Service and Management Bureau" culminated in its abolition by the end of 2018. The official discontinuation of the term "Xinguanren" signifies a deliberate government effort to minimize distinctions between locals and immigrants [8].

In conclusion, the integrated development of Dongguan's local and immigrant cultures, as an immigrant city, has long been a governance focus. However, the new goal of achieving a population of ten million and a GDP of one trillion yuan presents fresh demands. The current situation is not inadequate but rather insufficient. Addressing how to effectively realize tangible and perceptible

diversified integration, foster a "cultural identity among the ten-million population," boost social cohesion in Dongguan, and bolster the city's overall competitiveness and sustainability are pressing issues that require in-depth examination and resolution in light of these new circumstances.

3.2. The degree of cultural integration and its presentation are unevenly distributed

The survey revealed a nuanced landscape of cultural integration between local residents and immigrants in Dongguan. The extent and expression of this integration vary notably among different resident groups in Dongguan. Broadly, these variations can be categorized into three main aspects:

3.2.1. The cultural conservatism of the older generation contrasts with the cultural openness of the younger generation within the local community

Significant generational disparities exist among Dongguan locals (Type 1A) regarding the challenge of integrating local and immigrant cultures. The elderly, predominantly grandparents, typically exhibit strong cultural conservatism, often displaying narrow-mindedness and hostility by either rejecting immigrants and their cultures or harboring prejudices. In contrast, the younger generation, particularly those born in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, demonstrate higher levels of education, broader perspectives, and extensive knowledge. The majority of them advocate for cultural inclusivity, embrace diverse cultures, and exhibit optimism towards cultural amalgamation. Nevertheless, as the non-local population progressively becomes the majority in Dongguan, the older conservative demographic is dwindling and has become exceedingly rare.

Both the "older generation" and the "new generation" of Dongguan residents exhibit shared traits, including a strong sense of pride in their Dongguan heritage, a deep-rooted identification with their hometown and its cultural heritage, and a predominantly local social network.

3.2.2. Variations in the perception of cultural integration exist among immigrants from diverse social strata

Significant disparities exist in attitudes toward cultural assimilation among diverse immigrant groups in Dongguan. Immigrants with Dongguan household registration, established careers, and social networks exhibit a strengthening sense of belonging to the city with prolonged residency. They express optimism regarding cultural assimilation, aspiring for their offspring to embrace Dongguan's local culture while also valuing aspects of their own heritage. Conversely, immigrants with Dongguan household registration but lacking stable employment and social ties are less sanguine about cultural integration. They lean towards their native culture but remain open to engaging with Dongguan's local customs. Immigrants without Dongguan household registration view the city as a temporary stop for financial gain due to their transient status. They lack a strong sense of identity or attachment, showing minimal interest in cultural assimilation and limited interaction with local residents.

This phenomenon suggests that cultural integration does not precede economic and social integration for immigrants in their process of developing identity and a sense of belonging to regions and cultures outside their hometowns. Time is a crucial factor that must be considered, with cultural integration typically being an outcome rather than a driver. While it is possible for new cultures resulting from cultural integration to appeal to immigrants, Dongguan currently lacks such "cultural capital."

3.2.3. The lack of dominance in the localization of native culture and the decentralization of immigrant culture diversification

Research indicates that various groups in Dongguan, including local residents, second-generation Dongguan individuals, immigrants with Dongguan household registration, and the significant floating population without such registration, perceive a lack of distinctiveness in Dongguan's local culture. While the traditional local culture holds appeal for older Dongguan residents due to its regional and traditional attributes, it struggles to resonate with younger generations and newcomers. Despite the presence of certain folk customs and culinary traditions that garner interest, barriers such as language differences, limited cultural engagement opportunities, and inadequate integration with mainstream culture hinder active participation. Insufficient promotion and publicity further contribute to the perceived lack of attractiveness and influence of Dongguan's local culture, particularly among immigrants and within the broader context of the Pearl River Delta, Guangdong Province, and nationwide.

The immigrant culture in Dongguan is characterized by diversity and a lack of a singular dominant foreign culture. Research indicates that the floating population in Dongguan originates primarily from Hunan Province, followed by the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Sichuan Province, Jiangxi Province, Hubei Province, Henan Province, Guizhou Province, Chongqing Municipality, Anhui Province, Shaanxi Province, among others. The immigrant culture in Dongguan encompasses a variety of influences, such as Huxiang Culture, Lingnan Culture, Sichuan-Chongqing Culture, Chu Culture, Jiangxi Culture, and Central Plains Culture. Despite the prevalence of individuals from Hunan and the widespread presence of Huxiang Culture, characterized by its associations with commerce and cuisine in the Pearl River Delta and beyond Guangdong Province, its impact in Dongguan is limited due to regional distinctions, outsider status, and competition among various foreign cultures. As a result, Huxiang Culture in Dongguan coexists alongside other cultural expressions, contributing to the overall cultural equilibrium in the region.

3.2.4. Summary

In conclusion, the intricate integration of Dongguan's local culture and immigrant culture is characterized by complexity and diversity. This integration, shaped by residents of varying backgrounds and cultural expressions, entails a dynamic interplay of competition and coexistence among heterogeneous cultures. However, the absence of a dominant culture hinders deeper integration, leading to a tendency for distinct cultural forms to maintain their core identities, resulting in primarily superficial integration at lower levels. For instance, while there is a general consensus among interviewees regarding dietary preferences and taste profiles, higher-level integration in areas such as values and cognitive frameworks remains limited. Furthermore, interactions between local and immigrant cultures are sparse, with mutual influence occurring at a relatively low level. These cultures predominantly operate in isolation, with only sporadic points of convergence.

3.3. Perceptions of cultural integration among different types of residents

3.3.1. Young students

1) Local young students in Dongguan

Students in Dongguan exhibit a strong sense of pride and identification with their hometown, often overestimating the local population's share of the total permanent population. Moreover, they perceive Dongguan's influence within the Pearl River Delta, Guangdong Province, and nationally as being above average.

Local students in Dongguan are optimistic about the integrated development of local and immigrant cultures. They perceive a level of superficial integration between the two cultures, with no apparent barriers or prejudices hindering interactions between local and non-local students. The local students anticipate that immigrants will gradually assimilate into Dongguan's culture, eventually identifying as true Dongguan residents. While local students are open to forming close relationships and even families with non-local students, they acknowledge that cultural integration remains incomplete. Interactions between locals and immigrants are primarily limited to non-essential aspects such as dietary preferences. Furthermore, social interactions often result in the formation of distinct social circles among locals and non-locals, impeding deeper integration.

2) Out-of-town young students in Dongguan

The majority of non-local students in Dongguan originate from Guangdong Province, with a minority hailing from other regions, aligning with the typical student demographic of local universities. Non-local students commonly perceive Dongguan's manufacturing industry as its prominent characteristic. Nevertheless, they find the local culture to be heterogeneous and relatively unremarkable, lacking distinctive traits and influence, despite their curiosity about it.

Non-local students engage in daily interactions that closely resemble those of local students, forming their own social circles. They typically hold favorable opinions of local students, fostering harmonious relationships and being open to developing close bonds, including forming familial connections. Nonetheless, an underlying psychological barrier exists.

Non-local students express reservations about remaining in Dongguan post-graduation, primarily citing concerns regarding salary levels and living expenses, rather than cultural assimilation. They perceive the coalescence of local and immigrant cultures in Dongguan as an overarching trend, with both cultures expected to maintain their distinct cultural identities.

3.3.2. Local residents in Dongguan

1) Type 1A

Residents of Dongguan typically exhibit a strong sense of pride and identification with their hometown. They perceive themselves as simple and kind individuals who prioritize a relaxed lifestyle over career ambition, particularly in contrast to immigrants. The local culture of Dongguan, rooted in traditional folk customs and dietary practices, is characterized by its affiliation with the Lingnan cultural sphere, imbued with a rural essence and a conservative ethos that resists significant influence or alteration by immigrant cultures. Despite the distinctiveness of certain local cultural elements, their visibility and impact remain limited due to inadequate promotion, hindering their ability to significantly resonate with immigrants. Pessimism prevails regarding the prospects of a harmonious fusion between local and immigrant cultures, as residents anticipate substantial challenges arising from linguistic and conceptual disparities. Moving forward, fostering increased interaction, mutual understanding, identification of commonalities, and a gradual pursuit of harmonious coexistence are deemed essential for both communities.

2) Type 1B

The phenomenon typically exhibits a dual nature, characterized by a sense of "belonging both locally and elsewhere," leading to a wavering sense of identity with Dongguan. While individuals may not perceive themselves as authentic Dongguan natives, their birth and upbringing in Dongguan, along with their local social connections, are undeniable. This dual identity is particularly pronounced during traditional festivals, where customs are often passed down from previous generations, yet seamlessly integrate local elements without discord.

Their understanding of the native Dongguan culture is inadequate due to limited exposure. They perceive only certain aspects of Dongguan's culture as unique, viewing it as lacking a coherent independent system with minimal influence. While immigrant culture may subtly affect the local

culture, its impact is not readily apparent. Conversely, immigrant culture significantly influences local culture, particularly in educational contexts.

Dongguan boasts a well-established industrial sector and enjoys widespread recognition. However, to ensure its future growth, it is imperative to bolster its cultural impact. This endeavor should transcend superficial elements like cuisine and instead prioritize safeguarding, exploring, disseminating, and nurturing the profound local heritage. By establishing a comprehensive cultural framework, fostering ideological consciousness, and fostering tangible influence, Dongguan can pave the way for a more robust cultural presence.

The prospects for the diversified integrated development of Dongguan's local culture and immigrant culture are viewed with caution. Nonetheless, it is acknowledged that integration represents a significant overarching trend. Both factions are urged to transcend their insular enclaves, fostering mutual understanding, communication, and collaboration to facilitate deeper integration. Furthermore, safeguarding the rights and welfare of immigrants, as well as addressing livelihood concerns, are deemed paramount. These actions constitute essential prerequisites for cultural integration and can be purposefully steered.

3.3.3. Dongguan immigrants

1) Type 2A

Identity and belonging in Dongguan are primarily associated with economic standing, social status, and duration of residency. Immigrants residing in Dongguan for an extended period, holding secure jobs and enjoying elevated social standing, typically exhibit a more pronounced sense of identity and belonging. They demonstrate a proactive interest in familiarizing themselves with Dongguan's local culture and engaging in culturally themed events. Conversely, individuals with a weaker sense of identity and belonging may encounter challenges in discerning the manifestations of Dongguan's local culture.

These immigrants share a commonality in maintaining their native cultures and predominantly socializing with individuals from their own villages due to shared language and cultural similarities. They collectively perceive Dongguan's local culture as incongruent with its industrial prowess, thus minimally influencing immigrants. Nonetheless, cultural assimilation is feasible, with advancements noted in both the extent and caliber of integration compared to previous times, albeit requiring time. Vital measures include addressing livelihood concerns and facilitating venues, events, and chances for cultural engagement.

2) Type 2B

Primarily comprising industrial laborers and transient residents, this demographic exhibits a notable absence of stability, viewing Dongguan as a temporary sojourn. They typically face a dearth of cultural resources, information, and the requisite means and instruments to uphold their native cultures effectively. Susceptible to the sway of modern media, they seldom engage with indigenous cultural expressions in Dongguan or demonstrate interest therein. While some encounter cultural dissonance, few prioritize the imperative of cultural assimilation.

4. Conclusion

The influx of a substantial migrant population has been instrumental in the developmental success of Dongguan over the past four decades. As a prototypical immigrant city, the amalgamation of indigenous and immigrant cultures in Dongguan has evolved through historical legacies and contemporary imperatives in the era characterized by a population of ten million and a GDP of one trillion yuan. Research delineates three sequential phases in the cultural amalgamation process in Dongguan: initial conflict, subsequent mitigation, and eventual attenuation, with governmental

regulations and policy directives playing a pivotal role. Presently, the cultural fusion landscape remains intricate, marked by intergenerational distinctions, class disparities, and a tapestry of diverse coexistence patterns. Notably, this complexity is evident in the conservative cultural ethos of the local elderly populace juxtaposed with the progressive cultural outlook of the younger generation. Among immigrant cohorts, varying degrees of urban identity hierarchies exist, shaped by economic integration, settlement longevity, and social standing disparities. Furthermore, Dongguan's indigenous culture, characterized by robust regional traits but lacking distinctiveness, encounters challenges in deeply engaging immigrants. Conversely, immigrant cultures, diverse yet lacking a unifying theme, struggle to assert dominance within the urban cultural milieu, leading to a superficial coexistence of the two cultural realms over an extended period.

To foster cultural identity among its vast population, Dongguan must capitalize on its trajectory towards a city of ten million residents and a trillion-dollar GDP by establishing an inclusive urban cultural governance framework. This entails several key strategies. Firstly, Dongguan should prioritize the development of a robust cultural identity by revitalizing local cultural foundations and crafting a distinctive urban cultural brand that harmonizes traditional elements with contemporary dynamism. Secondly, the city should enhance public services and social welfare to bolster migrants' sense of belonging through initiatives addressing employment, education, and healthcare, thereby facilitating their economic and social assimilation into the cultural fabric. Thirdly, Dongguan should cultivate a platform for multicultural exchange, fostering intergenerational dialogues, facilitating cross-class interactions, and dismantling cultural barriers. Ultimately, through strategic policy guidance, resource coordination, and fostering collective empathy, Dongguan can forge a novel urban culture that seamlessly integrates indigenous and migrant cultural facets, transitioning from a state of "heterogeneous coexistence" to "pluralistic coexistence" between locals and non-locals. By uniting its populace through culture, Dongguan can realize its vision of becoming an authentic "Bay Area city," a formidable industrial hub, and a renowned cultural metropolis.

Acknowledgement

This work represents a phased outcome of the innovative project aimed at enhancing the characteristics of higher education institutions in Guangdong Province in 2024 (Project No.: 2024WTSCX355).

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