

Co-Designing Cultural Heritage: Case Studies of Chinese-Indonesian Identity

Inne Chaysalina¹, Glary Dharmada²

chaysalinainne@gmail.com¹, glary357@gmail.com²

Visual Communication Design

Faculty of Design and Technology

Universitas Bunda Mulia

ABSTRACT

The preservation of Chinese-Indonesian culture is increasingly challenged by urban development, generational shifts, and fragmented top-down policies. This study investigates how a collaborative design approach—grounded in participatory planning, stakeholder co-creation, and visual communication—can foster sustainable and inclusive cultural preservation. Using a qualitative multi-case study method, four culturally significant urban centers—Singkawang, Jambi, Surabaya, and Glodok—were analyzed. Data were collected from academic literature, government reports, and media sources, then thematically triangulated to reveal patterns of stakeholder-driven preservation. The findings show that Visual Communication Design plays a vital role in shaping cultural identity, amplifying narratives, and facilitating community dialogue through visual storytelling, media engagement, and identity design. A co-design framework is proposed to integrate cultural heritage into tourism, education, and urban revitalization. This research contributes practical strategies for inclusive heritage policies and supports the role of design in advancing Sustainable Development Goals related to culture and community.

Keywords: Chinese-Indonesian culture, cultural preservation, collaborative design, visual communication, stakeholder engagement

INTRODUCTION

Visual communication design serves as a powerful intercultural medium, capable of conveying cultural values in a contextually relevant and visually engaging manner (Indriati, 2021). As a discipline, it integrates principles of communication and creative expression through various media by organizing elements such as imagery, typography, color, and layout (Wahyuningsih, 2015). Within this framework, visual communication becomes not only a symbolic tool but also a medium for cultural dialogue and shared memory. Communication, as defined by Liliwerti (2001, as cited in Cuhandi et al., 2025), is the exchange of meaning

through verbal and nonverbal symbols within human systems and environments. Among these, visual communication—through illustrations, visual narratives, and spatial design—functions as a dynamic channel for transmitting cultural identity. This process plays a crucial role in how traditions are interpreted, remembered, and recontextualized within contemporary society.

Accordingly, cultural heritage can be developed, articulated, and facilitated through a collaborative design approach grounded in the discipline of Visual Communication Design. This approach not only reflects but also actively constructs cultural meaning through participatory engagement, media representation, and spatial storytelling. Chinese-Indonesian culture continues to grow and adapt despite its historical status as an immigrant ethnic group long settled in the archipelago (Ruby & Hidajat, 2022). Its preservation is a vital aspect of safeguarding Indonesia's rich cultural diversity and national identity. However, modernization and globalization pose significant challenges to sustaining traditional cultural values, particularly in terms of recognition, intergenerational transmission, and the shifting dynamics of social participation (Hiswara et al., 2023).

Nan & Cayadi (2019) emphasize that preserving Chinese culture requires the collaboration of diverse stakeholders, including governments, local communities, the private sector, and the media. In response to this, the present study investigates strategic cultural preservation efforts in four culturally significant areas—Singkawang, Surabaya, Jambi, and Glodok—through a collaborative design approach. This approach integrates principles of participatory planning and co-creation, enabling more inclusive and sustainable preservation models that are responsive to local needs.

Visual Communication Design holds a strategic position in aligning heritage with urban, social, and economic change. It enables stakeholders to co-create narratives through media strategies, spatial interventions, and community-led storytelling. In this context, design becomes not only a communication medium but also a collaborative method for preserving identity. This study proposes a design-driven

framework that fosters stakeholder engagement in cultural policy, community tourism, and heritage revitalization. The findings are expected to offer practical insights for preserving Chinese culture as part of Indonesia's national heritage while also contributing to local economies, employment, and sustainable cultural tourism (Krisnadi & Natalia, 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Cultural Preservation of Chinese Culture in Indonesia

The preservation of local culture is essential, as it is often regarded as intangible heritage passed down from one generation to the next, and must therefore be safeguarded to ensure its continuity. In the context of rapid globalization, the urgency to preserve local cultural identities has become increasingly apparent. The Chinese ethnic community in Indonesia, although historically perceived as immigrants, has adapted to local traditions for centuries and has made significant contributions to both the cultural and economic landscapes of the nation (Ruby & Hidajat, 2022). Therefore, preserving cultural diversity—including Chinese-Indonesian heritage—is crucial as an integral part of Indonesia's rich and pluralistic cultural legacy.

However, many preservation efforts remain top-down and limited in community participation. Cultural expressions risk being commodified or disconnected from their social roots. To counter this, cultural preservation must be rooted in participatory and inclusive frameworks that allow communities to shape their own narratives and practices. Visual Communication Design offers a way to facilitate such community engagement by enabling the co-creation of visual artifacts, narratives, and platforms that resonate with local identity.

B. Stakeholder Collaboration for Sustainable Cultural Sustainability

Collaboration among multiple stakeholders plays a critical role in driving sustainable innovation (Ardhiyansyah et al., 2023). A collaborative design approach offers opportunities to develop solutions that are more inclusive and responsive to community needs. This is particularly relevant in the context of

cultural preservation, as it directly engages local communities in decision-making processes, resulting in solutions that are more accepted, contextually grounded, and enduring.

Sustainability has now become a central focus in numerous academic and policy-related studies. The Indonesian government has formulated development strategies that integrate national and regional efforts to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Mujab & Nugraheni, 2024). Sustainable design considers not only environmental concerns but also social and economic dimensions. The SDGs emphasize the importance of sustainability in community development (Sudirman & Lestari, 2023).

In this regard, Visual Communication Design serves as both a strategic and tactical tool. Through stakeholder co-creation, designers can mediate between diverse interests—government, community, private sector, and media—to visualize shared goals and translate cultural values into tangible experiences. Whether through heritage branding, community exhibitions, or digital storytelling, VCD supports long-term preservation by bridging cultural memory with future innovation.

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

Preserving cultural heritage in multicultural societies requires more than conservation—it calls for participatory approaches that empower local communities as co-creators of their cultural future. This research draws upon three interconnected theoretical lenses: participatory design, cultural sustainability, and stakeholder engagement. Together, these frameworks provide the conceptual basis for understanding how collaborative ecosystems can support cultural preservation efforts through Visual Communication Design.

A. Participatory and Collaborative Design

Participatory design enables those affected by design outcomes to take part in shaping them (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). In cultural contexts, collaborative design promotes co-creation among citizens, experts, and institutions. It values lived experience and allows heritage to evolve organically through dialogue and shared authorship. In the context of Visual Communication Design, participatory design practices manifest through community-engaged projects such as co-created exhibitions, visual storytelling workshops, and collaborative branding efforts for heritage spaces. These initiatives foster inclusion and ensure that design outcomes are culturally grounded and socially relevant.

B. Cultural Sustainability

According to Soini & Birkeland (2014), cultural sustainability is achieved when communities maintain and develop their identities over time, adapting to change without losing authenticity. The UN's SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) explicitly connects cultural heritage to sustainable development. Thus, the resilience of heritage lies in its capacity to adapt through locally driven innovation. Within VCD practice, this sustainability is supported by the creation of visual systems—logos, symbols, environmental graphics—that help communities communicate evolving identities while preserving core values. Design becomes a vehicle for continuity through change.

C. Stakeholder Engagement

Freeman (2010) emphasizes the importance of involving all relevant actors in decisions that affect shared goals. In heritage preservation, stakeholders range from temple caretakers and business owners to local governments and digital media activists. Effective engagement distributes responsibility and power, fostering a sense of ownership over cultural narratives and outcomes. Visual Communication Design supports this engagement by acting as a bridge between diverse actors—translating intangible heritage into communicable forms such as posters, infographics, digital campaigns, and spatial design. Through visual means,

stakeholders are not only informed but also involved in shaping the cultural narrative.

Together, these frameworks offer a robust lens for analyzing how design-led, stakeholder-centered strategies can preserve cultural heritage in a way that is inclusive, sustainable, and contextually responsive. They also clarify the interdisciplinary role of VCD—not just as a communication tool, but as a participatory method of cultural co-production.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative multi-case study approach to investigate collaborative design strategies in Chinese cultural heritage preservation across four Indonesian cities: Singkawang, Jambi, Surabaya, and Glodok (Jakarta). The qualitative method is selected for its ability to capture socio-cultural meanings, contextual depth, and stakeholder dynamics related to cultural sustainability. As the study is situated within the discipline of Visual Communication Design, emphasis is placed on how visual media, spatial narratives, and co-created visual artifacts emerge from these local contexts.

- Data collection was conducted through secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journals, heritage studies, local government policies, community organization reports, and digital platforms such as social media and local news portals. These sources were selected for their relevance in representing stakeholder voices and cultural expressions, particularly those communicated through visual means. Visual data—such as photographs of rituals, heritage architecture, and community media—were included to enrich interpretation from a design perspective.
- Sampling followed a purposive strategy, focusing on regions known for strong Chinese cultural presence and stakeholder-driven initiatives. The selected locations were analyzed for diversity in geography, socio-political context, and preservation practices. This diversity allows for comparative insights across multiple urban and cultural settings.

- The analytical procedure employed thematic content analysis combined with source triangulation to identify recurring patterns, strategies, and stakeholder roles. The analysis was structured around key indicators: stakeholder involvement, preservation methods, cultural identity transmission, and SDG alignment. Specific attention was given to how design-related interventions—such as visual campaigns, community murals, and event branding—functioned as tools for cultural communication and collaboration.

This method enables the study to offer grounded insights into how collaborative design enhances the relevance, inclusivity, and resilience of cultural preservation efforts, particularly under urban and generational pressures. It also allows the research to critically reflect on the contribution of Visual Communication Design not only as an analytical lens but also as a transformative practice within heritage discourse.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study reveals that Chinese cultural preservation in Indonesia is deeply embedded in local contexts, shaped by historical continuity, socio-political dynamics, and the evolving role of multi-stakeholder collaboration. Through a qualitative analysis of four culturally significant regions—Singkawang, Jambi, Surabaya, and Glodok—the research identifies recurring patterns of successful cultural preservation driven by a collaborative design approach supported by Visual Communication Design practices.



Figure 1. Tatung ritual in Singkawang
source: Kemenparekraf.go.id, 2024

In Singkawang, cultural heritage preservation is strongly linked to historical migration patterns of Hakka and Tiochiu communities since the 18th century. The city, often dubbed the “City of a Thousand Temples,” showcases vibrant expressions of Chinese culture, such as the Cap Go Meh festival and the Tatung ritual (Zakariya, 2023). These cultural performances are not only spiritual but also visual spectacles, rich in symbols and communal identity markers.



Figure 2. Government support and active local community participation in the Tatung ritual in Singkawang
source: Kemenparekraf.go.id, 2024

Government-led revitalization, combined with grassroots participation, has transformed these events into cultural tourism attractions. Visual elements such as ritual costumes, banners, and festival branding play an essential role in shaping public perception and promoting engagement. The presence of heritage architecture, like the Tjhia family house, reinforces spatial narratives that are visually communicative and educational (Maulana, 2014).

In Jambi, cultural integration between the Chinese and indigenous populations has fostered a harmonious environment. This is reflected in language use, cuisine, and shared religious spaces (Mulanari et al., 2024). The sustainability of this integration stems from strong community ownership of cultural expressions, enabled by participatory practices and grassroots initiatives (Sutanto et al., 2024). Religious institutions like the Siu San Teng Temple serve as both spiritual anchors and cultural landmarks (Safari & Hartati, 2019). Furthermore, local cultural organizations not only maintain traditional practices such as Chinese New Year and Cap Go Meh celebrations but also embrace innovation through performance groups like the Leng Chun Say Lion Dance Team, which actively engages younger generations and promotes cultural visibility through digital platforms.



Figure 3. Leng Chun Say Lion Dance Community
source: www.instagram.com/lengchunsay_liondance, 2025

Cultural groups such as the Leng Chun Say Lion Dance Team effectively utilize digital platforms to promote heritage and engage younger generations (Azzahro, 2023). These visual and performative strategies demonstrate how VCD intersects with media and youth culture to sustain living traditions.



Figure 4. Government support in the revitalization of the Chinatown area in Kembang Jepun, Surabaya

source: <https://www.akurat.co/>, 2022

Surabaya represents a model of heritage-based urban revitalization. Chinatown areas like Tambak Bayan and Kembang Jepun have seen government initiatives to repaint historic buildings and activate cultural corridors (Rusnaningtias & Al-Fatihah, 2025). Community tourism groups such as POKDARWIS apply storytelling and CBT (community-based tourism) to promote Chinese festivals and crafts.



Figure 5. Go community and local resident involvement in supporting Chinese new year celebrations in Kapasan, Surabaya

source: <https://www.kompasiana.com/>, 2024

Visual storytelling becomes a tool for place-making, where murals, signage, and public art installations reflect cultural narratives and spatial identity (Putra, 2017; Wicaksono et al., 2023). Visual Communication Design facilitates these processes by offering tangible media for engagement, documentation, and education.

Glodok, Jakarta's historic Chinatown, reflects a unique hybridity between Chinese and Betawi cultures. The area's long history—marked by migration and urban shifts—has resulted in blended practices visible in food, rituals, language, and built environment (Fatimah, 2014).



Figure 6. Petak sembilan Glodok
source: <https://travel.kompas.com/>, 2023

Festivals like Chinese New Year are inclusively celebrated, known locally as “Lebaran China” (Nabilah & Setiawan, 2023), reinforcing the communal adoption of culture. The Jin De Yuan Temple (built in 1650) stands as a visual monument of religious and cultural identity (Adhiwignyo & Handoko, 2015). Public-private partnerships and local organizations have led efforts to revitalize Glodok through events, signage, and media coverage—demonstrating the importance of cross-sector visual strategies in maintaining cultural relevance.

The comparative table below synthesizes key findings across the four cities, highlighting how visual and participatory design interventions differ by context yet share common principles of collaboration, community ownership, and place-based identity.

City/Region	Key Cultural Features	Preservation Strategies	Stakeholders Involved	VCD Related Elements
Singkawang	Cap Go Meh, Tatung Ritual, Vihara Tri Dharma, Tjhia Family House	Community-based tourism, government event sponsorship, heritage architecture	Local government, Hakka/Tiochiu communities, tourism offices	Festival branding, ritual iconography
Jambi	Siu San Teng Temple, Chinese New Year, Barongsai, Multifaith Integration	Community centers, cultural performances, interethnic collaboration, digital promotion	Local communities, cultural orgs, religious leaders, media	Social media visuals, youth engagement
Surabaya	Kembang Jepun, Kapasan Dalam, Tambak Bayan, Community Festivals	Urban revitalization, CBT, community tourism groups, cultural storytelling	Municipal government, POKDARWIS, cultural heritage groups	Murals, signage, spatial narratives
Glodok (Jakarta)	Petak Sembilan, Jin De Yuan Temple, Chinese-Betawi Acculturation	Cultural hybridization, public-private partnerships, inclusive festivals, media promotion	Community leaders, government, business sector, cultural NGOs	Event visuals, public-private media

Table 1 Comparative table of Chinese cultural preservation in Indonesia
source: author's documentation

The analysis across the four cities demonstrates that cultural preservation is most effective when designed collaboratively and grounded in visual culture. Participatory design enables community agency; cultural sustainability is reinforced by media that reflect evolving identities; and stakeholder engagement thrives when communication is visual, inclusive, and distributed. Visual Communication Design acts as both process and product: enabling the co-creation of artifacts that carry cultural meaning and serving as an interface between diverse actors. From social media content to architectural graphics, VCD connects

tradition with modern platforms, ensuring cultural continuity in the face of modernization.

These results reinforce the theoretical foundation laid out earlier, while also supporting several Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 11 (sustainable cities), SDG 16 (inclusive institutions), and SDG 4 (quality education). Design, in this context, becomes a tool of cultural diplomacy, education, and empowerment. To operationalize these collaborative preservation practices, several strategic pillars were identified across the case studies. These include: (1) formal collaborative frameworks that involve cross-sector forums; (2) community empowerment through education and cultural leadership; (3) digital integration via social media and visual documentation; and (4) public–private partnerships for cultural funding and promotion. These strategies emerged not as theoretical ideals, but as grounded practices observed in the field.



Figure 7. Flowchart of stakeholder collaboration in Chinese cultural heritage preservation
source: author's documentation

The comparative analysis also led to the formulation of an action-oriented flowchart (Figure 7) that maps stakeholder roles in cultural preservation. Government actors contribute to inclusive governance, local communities to place-based stewardship, business actors to the cultural economy, and media institutions to public awareness. These roles are interconnected through design interventions—visual identity systems, spatial narratives, and participatory media—that support the co-creation of cultural value. Visual Communication Design facilitates this collaboration by serving as a shared language across sectors.

The inclusion of this strategic framework within the analysis phase affirms that preservation is not only a cultural concern, but also a systemic, designable process involving multiple agents and disciplines. As such, the proposed model is both descriptive (explaining what is happening) and prescriptive (offering how it can be replicated in other contexts).

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the preservation of Chinese-Indonesian cultural heritage through a collaborative design approach, focusing on four culturally significant urban areas: Singkawang, Jambi, Surabaya, and Glodok. In addressing the research problem—namely, the fragmentation and top-down nature of cultural preservation efforts—the study demonstrates how participatory frameworks, when supported by Visual Communication Design (VCD), can foster more inclusive, adaptive, and sustainable heritage strategies.

The main findings reveal that successful preservation occurs when local communities, governments, media, and private actors co-create narratives and design interventions that reflect both traditional values and contemporary realities. In each region, visual communication tools—ranging from festival branding and spatial storytelling to digital media and community identity systems—play a pivotal role in translating intangible heritage into accessible, engaging, and context-sensitive formats. These outcomes highlight the novelty of the research: the positioning of VCD not only as a medium of expression but also as a participatory methodology that supports stakeholder empowerment, cultural continuity, and place-based identity.

Furthermore, the study contributes a design-driven preservation framework that can be replicated in other multicultural contexts. This framework integrates cultural heritage with community tourism, urban revitalization, and educational initiatives. In doing so, it aligns with key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 8 (creative economy), and SDG 16 (inclusive institutions).

In conclusion, cultural preservation should no longer be seen as a static act of documentation, but as a dynamic, co-designed process. Visual Communication Design offers both tools and strategies for enabling dialogue, strengthening ownership, and visualizing shared futures. By embracing design as a collaborative and culturally responsive practice, this study redefines how heritage can be preserved—not only for remembrance but also for innovation, identity, and intergenerational relevance.

Strategic Recommendations:

1. *Formal Collaborative Frameworks* – Establish inter-stakeholder forums in each region, comprising representatives from government, community, business, and media to guide structured preservation programs.
2. *Community Empowerment* – Provide education and capacity-building for locals to manage cultural sites and lead traditional events, encouraging long-term engagement.
3. *Technology and Media Integration* – Leverage digital platforms (websites, social media, interactive apps) to document, promote, and expand cultural narratives to wider audiences.
4. *Public–Private Partnerships* – Engage business actors to fund heritage initiatives, including site revitalization, cultural tourism promotion, and cultural product development.

Action Plan:

To implement these strategies effectively, concrete and systematic steps are necessary:

1. *Planning*: Develop detailed work plans via multi-stakeholder forums.
2. *Education & Training*: Organize workshops on heritage management and cultural entrepreneurship.
3. *Revitalization*: Restore historical areas and cultural infrastructure with cross-sector support.

4. *Promotion*: Launch cultural campaigns through media and digital storytelling.
5. *Monitoring & Evaluation*: Regular assessments and stakeholder reviews to ensure program relevance and improvement.

Ultimately, cultural preservation in a multicultural society is not merely about protecting the past, but about co-designing the future. Through participatory methods, inclusive narratives, and strategic visual communication, heritage becomes a living system—continuously shaped by those who inherit, inhabit, and reinterpret it. By positioning Visual Communication Design as both a communicative and collaborative practice, this study reframes design not just as a support tool, but as an active agent in sustaining identity, fostering dialogue, and envisioning culturally resilient futures.

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