

# The Connetions between Place Attachment and Sustainable Conservation of Ancient Bridge in Yunnan Province: A Review

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## Abstract

Place attachment is a full-fledged psychological theory that might serve as a theoretical foundation for conserving ancient bridge cultural sites. Consequently, we reviewed the literature to explore the capacity of place attachment to foster or engage with the preservation of sustainable built heritage. Specifically, reseacher studied whether Bai people can acquire place attachment to ancient bridge. Whether it then influence the behavior of residents on the ancient bridge, thus accomplishing the goal of sustainable conservation. Gonçalves et al., (2020) pointed out in his research that conserving a building should encompass not only its physical structure but also the behavior of nearby residents. In making these theoretical connections, two key assumptions emerged as the most important strategies. They are also the contributions of this study: 1. The special human-geographical environment creates a strong place attachment of the Bai people to the ancient bridge; 2. Place attachment might be a factor affecting the Bai people's behavior, and it is crucial in the sustainable conservation of the ancient bridge. This work is highly significant in providing guidance to scholars in the field of sustainable conservation of the ancient bridge architectural heritage resources in Yunnan.

**Keywords:** Place Attachment, Behavior, Ancient Bridge, Sustainable Conservation, Bai People

## Introduction

Socio-cultural sustainability, as a dynamic socio-historical process, is a crucial component of the sustainable conservation of architectural heritage (Albert, 2015). Socio-cultural sustainability emphasizes the importance of community engagement and identity in conservation. Encouraging community participation and architectural interaction can strengthen individuals' sense of belonging and identity with heritage buildings, hence promoting social cohesion (Axon, 2020). Consequently, architectural heritage frequently constitutes a significant aspect of a community's identity and collective memory. Gonçalves

*et al.*, (2020) introduced a novel concept of using behavioral science in architectural heritage conservation. He believes that the preservation of a structure should encompass not only the structure itself but also the behavior of surrounding inhabitants. He posits that behavior, as an aspect of social culture, coexists with architectural heritage resources. It is important to note that place attachment is an important factor in encouraging people to spend time in their community activities or daily activities (Mihaylov *et al.*, 2020). This indicates this place attachment is closely connected to behavior. Place attachment directly affects people's behaviors and decisions in specific places. The intensity of place attachment influences individuals' perceptions and interactions with their affiliated places, thereby impacting the social, economic, and environmental development of such areas. Therefore, this study focuses on place attachment as a dimension influencing the daily activities of Bai ethnic residents on ancient bridges. It further attempts to explore whether place attachment can be considered an underlying reason behind the behavior of Bai residents, and subsequently become a key factor in the sustainable protection of ancient bridges in Yunnan. One of the objectives of this study is to assess whether the unique human-geographical environment has contributed to the place attachment of Bai ethnic residents towards ancient bridges. The second objective is to explore the relationship framework between place attachment and the sustainable conservation of these ancient bridges. In this research, place attachment is viewed as a driving factor that encourages Bai residents to increase the frequency of their daily activities on the bridges.

Ancient bridges, as a type of heritage resource, are a form of architectural cultural heritage. In normal, heritage resources have been crucial throughout the history of human development. Many of them are widely protected and praised, while apart of them have not received the proper respect, care, or preservation (Cucco, 2022). Ancient bridges, in particular, have long been recognized and valued in Europe and North America, where the importance of heritages resources has always been acknowledged. In contrast, although China began constructing bridges earlier than Europe, it has only recently garnered public attention towards these structures (Knapp *et al.*, 2020).

It is worth noting that there are most ancient bridges in Yunnan, China. There are 139 ancient bridges, accounting for 33.3% of the total number, with the majority (125) dating back to the Ming and Qing dynasties in Yunnan. Among these 129 Ming and Qing dynasty bridges, 28 are Fengyu bridges (ZHANG, 2018). In 2007, Tongjing Bridge and Caifeng Bridge were designated by the state as key national architectural heritage protection sites. The Fengyu bridge is a unique type of bridge. Its most distinctive feature is the construction of a roof atop the bridge, providing shelter from wind and rain, which is how it earned the name "Fengyu(wind-and-rain) bridge (see in the Figure 1)." Tongjing Bridge and Caifeng Bridge are typical Fengyu bridges located in Bai ethnic villages. Several residents are distributed on both sides of the bridge, making it essential in the village. The bridge serves not only as a transportation link connecting both sides but also as a central place for community culture and social activities. According to UNESCO, heritage preservation involves protecting and maintaining the original condition of heritage sites such as monuments, buildings, and cultural sites, as well as ecosystems and landscapes. Therefore, focusing on the harmonious and lasting human-environment relationships between residents and ancient bridges in the preservation of Yunnan's ancient bridges is a key aspect of architectural heritage protection. Research on villagers' daily behaviors is an important way to study these people-place

relationship, as it can reveal the connections between people and places (Li *et al.*, 2023; Chesterman *et al.*, 2021). Thus, place attachment has become a significant component in the study of people-place relationship. In such a research background, it is particularly important to pay attention to the study of the sustainable conservation of Yunnan ancient bridges.

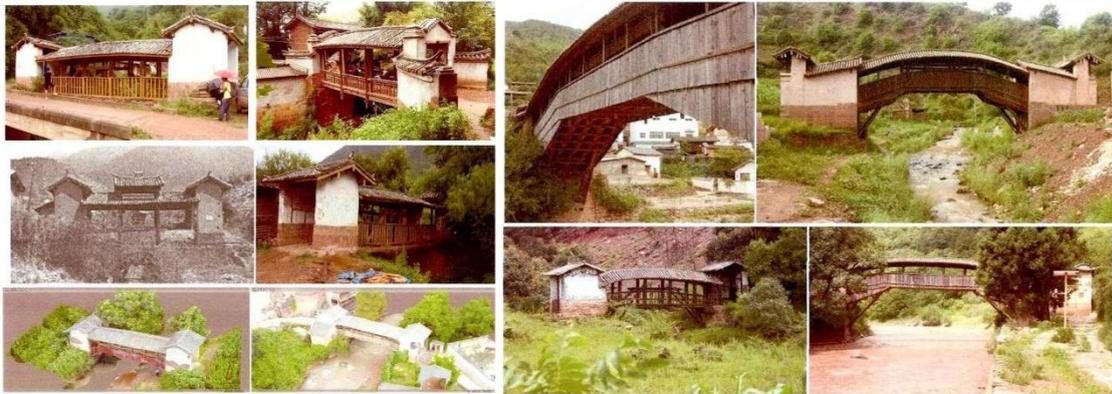


Figure 1: Fengyu ancient bridge

In previous studies pertaining to the conservation of ancient bridges, a significant number of researchers have directed their attention towards the examination of bridge structures (e.g. Liu & Lei, 2012; Pannuzi, 2016; Renting *et al.*, 2022), cultural aspects (e.g. Babić, 2014; Schachinger, 2020) and materials (e.g. M. Karaveziroglou *et al.*, 2001; Brencich & Morbiducci, 2007; G. H. JACK, 1926). As illustrated in Figure 2, according to the search of authoritative websites, lack of papers have studied its people-place relationship. Yet, modern society has forgotten that the conservation of bridges heritage resources should not only safeguard the heritage itself, but also pay attention to people-place relationship. Gonçalves *et al.*, (2020) indicate, conservation of sustainability is closely tied to the intention-behaviour taken by neighboring inhabitants, and their behavior interacts with the spatial layout. However, this viewpoint mainly applies to conserve building resource heritage, little is present about ancient bridges heritage. In other words, This study is in line with (Gonçalves *et al.*, 2020) suggestion that The sustainable preservation of architectural heritage is closely related to the intentional behaviors of nearby residents. This study plans to conduct a thorough and in-depth analysis of ancient bridges in order to protect the people-place relationship around the ancient bridge. This activity is an important contribution to the conservation of ancient bridges. In other words, this study aligns with the suggestion made by Gonçalves *et al.*, (2020) that if people do not pay attention to it, the spatial patterns created by residents' initial intentional behaviors will gradually disappear over time. This leads to a loss of ecological landscape in the conservation of architectural heritage.

Apart from that, The researchers have also summarized the situatedness on place attachment from 2005 to the present (see Figure 3). Research results indicate that studies on place attachment within the context of migration have become the dominant focus, representing the most widely discussed area in academic discourse. Following closely are discussions related to community and family attachment, highlighting the significant theoretical and practical implications of place attachment's formation and maintenance within these social units. However, it is regrettable that there is a lack of research in the existing literature addressing place attachment in specific historical or cultural heritage contexts, particularly in the unique setting of ancient bridges. To date, no scholars have



## Literature Review

It is noted that less research has been done on the invisible factors in the sustainable conservation of ancient bridges. In particular, there is no literature on place attachment and sustainability conservation. This study aims to establish a possible link between sustainability conservation and Bai residents' place attachment, rather than only conserving the tangible components of the structures. Specifically, the questions that guide us are: Are ethnic enclave, religious areas and architectural heritage prone to place attachment? Can the place attachment affect sustainability conservation? The ancient bridges in Yunnan are architectural cultural heritage that have existed for over 500 years. At the same time, Bai ethnic residents live around these bridges, imbuing the area with a rich ethnic culture. Researchers reviewed relevant empirical literature, first generalizing the physical environment, and then identifying specific studies that link sustainable preservation with place attachment. This research considers the potential impact of place attachment on sustainable preservation and suggests directions for future research. In doing so, we used a tripartite model (place attachment-behavior-sustainable preservation) as the main focus of the literature review.

### *Place Attachment*

Place attachment is a positive emotional connection that falls under the category of sense of place. It has a positive impact on individuals, satisfying certain emotional needs (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006;. Approximately four decades ago, an increasing number of people started to pay attention to research related to place attachment, and the related research has continued to rise steadily. Place attachment is a dimension of emotional connection between place and individual (Stedman, 2003). In the other word, place attachment refers to a positive emotional connection to a specific location. This emotional bond has a beneficial influence on individuals, fulfilling certain emotional requirements (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006; Hashem Hashemnezhad, 2013).

### *Place Attachment and Ethnic Enclave*

Previous studies have demonstrated that an environment with an ethnic culture increases the likelihood of the development of place attachment. For instance, Mazumdar *et al.*, (2000) pointed out in their article that an ethnic enclave has an inherent attraction, like an invisible centripetal force. It serves as a center, a focal point, a physical space that people feel the need to visit. The locals are strongly drawn to it. They feel they must live there, as their emotional attachment is deeply rooted in that place. Shutika, (2008), while examining ethnic integration among immigrants, posited that ethnic activities can enhance community belonging. Jelić & Stanić, (2014) posits that a more homogeneous population in terms of ethnicity or race may result in a heightened sense of belonging or loyalty to the location. This is mostly due to homogeneous groups sharing similar cultural practices, languages, religious beliefs, and social norms, promoting mutual recognition and trust, and cultivating a sense of community. Moreover, these groups are predisposed to form tight social networks, affording people a sense of belonging and security. Additionally, shared history and collective memory enhance their emotional bond to the location, strengthening their attachment to it. Skovse, (2018) argues that a common ethnic language helps fortify bonds among inhabitants, hence deepening their emotional attachment to the locale. This reinforces Jelić & Stanić, (2014) assertion, when the ethnic or racial backgrounds of a population are more consistent or similar, and their sense of belonging or attachment to that place is likely to be stronger.

Patwardhan *et al.*, (2020) believes that hosting religious festivals rich in ethnic and cultural elements can enhance emotional togetherness, which partially mediates the impact of place attachment on loyalty to a place. Barcus & Shugatai, (2022) conducted a study on how the Kazakh community maintains and develops their place attachment through positive memories of their homeland, material artifacts, traditional festivals, music, and handicrafts. The study concludes that ethnic culture provides a strong foundation for place attachment. Similarly, place attachment plays a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage and ensuring its transmission. Ilbury, (2022) directly points out that place attachment is related to the ethnic and cultural lineage of the community.

The context of this study is the ethnic enclave within the background of Bai culture. The ancient bridge for Bai inhabitants reflects their rich history and culture, representing their homeland's cherished memories and cultural heritage (Huang, 2011). Consequently, the ancient bridge serves not merely as a physical structure in the lives of Bai inhabitants, but also as the essence of their cultural memory and identity. Moreover, several traditional festivals and ethnic activities are held on the bridge (Zhang, 2007). The ancient bridge, being the sole public place in the community, has emerged as the focal point for cultural interchange and festival events. Temple fairs, traditional festivals, and markets are frequently conducted in proximity to the bridge (see in the Figure 5). The residents' social relationships are strengthened, and the sense of community cohesion and belonging is augmented. Local records indicate that the Bai population constitutes over 97% of the two villages where the bridges are situated. This indicates that area inhabitants exhibit a significant uniformity in culture, language, religious beliefs, and social traditions. This cultural uniformity not only develops stronger connections within the community but also establishes the foundation for the development of place attachment. The ancient bridge in Yunnan, as an ethnic enclave, fosters and enhances place attachment through its unique and rich cultural heritage. They are consistent with previous research findings (Mazumdar *et al.*, 2000; Shutika, 2008; Jelić & Stanić, 2014; Skovse, 2018; Patwardhan *et al.*, 2020; Barcus & Shugatai, 2022; Ilbury, 2022).



Figure 5: Traditional festival activities of Bai nationality on the ancient bridge

#### *Place Attachment and Religious Place*

Published literature indicates that the religious beliefs of a place can play a significant role in shaping people's attachment to it (Najafi & Shariff, 2011; Puspitasari & Hanan, 2022). Moreover, there is a positive correlation between religious participation and place attachment. In other words, local residents have a greater opportunity to understand and

appreciate the region's religious aspects, leading to a stronger emotional connection to religious sites (P.-S. Chen & Chang, 2015). Nursanty & Husni, (2020) argues that religious sites host religious activities that imbue the area with meaning, transforming it into a place and strengthening place attachment. Patwardhan *et al.*, (2020) presents a similar viewpoint in his article, stating that hosting religious festivals rich in ethnic and cultural elements can enhance emotional togetherness. This emotional togetherness partially mediates the impact of place attachment on loyalty to a place, demonstrating that religious activities can strengthen emotional attachment to a place. Furthermore, several articles indicate that research findings suggest religious activities can enhance place attachment (Ruttanavisanon & Agmapisarn, 2022; Benoit *et al.*, 2021; Mei *et al.*, 2022).

In this study, the Bai people primarily reside in the ethnic minority regions of Yunnan Province, China. They exhibit many religious beliefs, including Buddhism, Taoism, and indigenous faiths. For example, in the traditional Bai religion, certain natural elements, such as grass, flowers, stones, and significant objects, are objects of worship. The ancient bridge itself, along with the temple located around or within it, is also worshipped by residents as an expression of their faith. They earnestly pray for happiness and safety through religious practices like lighting incense. Therefore, the Yunnan ancient bridge, with its religious significance and activities, has stimulated and strengthened the formation of place attachment. This finding is consistent with previous research (Najafi & Shariff, 2011; Chen & Chang, 2015; Nursanty & Husni, 2020; Benoit *et al.*, 2021; Mei *et al.*, 2022; Ruttanavisanon & Agmapisarn, 2022; Puspitasari & Hanan, 2022).



Figure 6: Religious place on bridge area

#### *Place Attachment and Architectural Heritage*

Lewicka, (2011) points out that physical factor can play an independent role in place attachment, as people may develop attachments to the physical attributes of a place, such as its beautiful natural surroundings, opportunities for recreation and relaxation, or stimulating physical environments. Similarly, Najafi & Shariff, (2011a) argues that architectural features can enhance place attachment. Specifically, architecture evokes memories of the past and a sense of belonging to one's homeland through specific forms, styles, and symbolic meanings, thereby reinforcing place attachment. Socio-cultural memories embedded in architecture also promote place attachment (Khakzad & Griffith, 2016). In addition, multiple studies have shown that residents have a strong sense of identity and attachment to architectural heritage (Ujang, 2016; Stober *et al.*, 2018; AlSadaty, 2018; Mei *et al.*, 2022). These studies generally agree that historical buildings can easily transition from "potential cultural memory" to "actual cultural memory," serving as pillars of memory for the surrounding community. The

maintenance and continuation of place memory are crucial for sustaining the attachment between residents and their built environment. The speed at which these memories are established depends on environmental factors related to the creation of a religious atmosphere in that place, such as lighting, architectural colors and materials, and natural vegetation.

The bridges are heritage structures originating from Bai culture, existing for more than 500 years. It is worth noting that the ancient bridges in Yunnan are recognised and designated as protected structures see in the figure 6 (Yunlong County culture and tourism Bureau, 2013). The bridges themselves are a reflection of Bai architectural art, characterized by its unique structure and adorned with carvings of Bai cultural patterns, showcasing the craftsmanship and aesthetic values of the Bai people (Huang, 2011). As a historical relic, the ancient bridge has witnessed the changing lives and social development of the Bai people over generations, becoming an essential component of their collective memory and identity. Therefore, the Yunnan ancient bridge, as a heritage site within the Bai village, has stimulated and reinforced the formation of place attachment. This finding is consistent with previous research (Lewicka, 2011 ; Najafi & Shariff, 2011a ; Khakzad & Griffith, 2016 ; Ujang, 2016; Stober *et al.*, 2018; AISadaty, 2018; Mei *et al.*, 2022).



Figure 6: The introduction of the ancient bridge is recorded on stone tablets

### *Behaviour and Place Attachment*

In the field of sociology, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) proposed by Ajzen, (1985) is widely used as a primary theoretical approach to explain behavioral intentions and actual behaviors (Yuzhanin & Fisher, 2016). This theory establishes a connection between individuals and places and emphasizes the dynamic processes between people and their surroundings. In the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), there are three independent factors that influence behavioral intentions. The first two factors are attitude and subjective norm. As described in Ajzen, (1985), Attitude belongs to the realm of personal factors and refers to an individual's favorable or unfavorable evaluation of the behavior under consideration. Subjective norm is a social factor. It describes the pressure and expectations an individual perceives from specific social groups. It reflects the individual's perception of how much others expect them to engage in a particular behavior. These pressures and expectations may come from family members, friends, colleagues, or societal cultural values. The third factor is more distinctive; it can influence both intentions and behaviors directly and is referred to as perceived behavioral control (PBC). TPB can be used to explain a variety of behaviours because it is a broad and simple model (Bae & Kang, 2008).

Numerous studies have demonstrated that the sense of place is the primary factor in determining how closely humans relate to the environment, with Place dependency, Place attachment, and Place identity serving as its three subordinate dimensions (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001; Hawke, 2011; (Ram *et al.*, 2016; Vong, 2013). However, other academics disagreed with this, arguing that the sense of place is a broad notion that encompasses how people experience, perceive, and ascribe significance to different places (Hashem Hashemnezhad, 2013). It follows that both positive and negative emotions are linked to a sense of place. The positive feeling is known as place attachment in N. Chen & Dwyer, (2018) research, and the place identity, place dependence, etc. is considered to be the subdimension for evaluating place attachment. The sense of place is believed to be a big scale of the interaction between a person and a place. Jorgensen & Stedman, (2001) illustrate how these ideas connected to a feeling of place might be structured within the broad framework of an attitude that includes conscious, emotional, and cognitive reactions to the physical environment. According to the Theory of Planning Behaviour (Ajzen, 1985), attitude can influence intention, whereas intention impacts behaviour. As a result, place attachment is another element influencing behaviour (Figure 7). Place attachment is a significant factor in encouraging people to spend time in their local neighbourhoods and take part in activities like socialising with their neighbours (Mihaylov *et al.*, 2020).

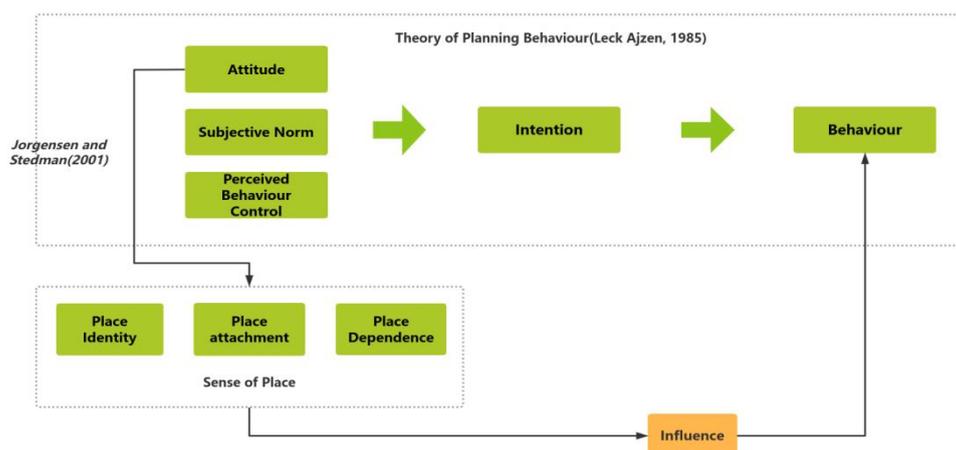


Figure 7: Relationship Framework Between PA and Behavior

Similarly, Low & Altman, (1992) examine the various definitions of place attachment in the literature and claim that the concept's emotional component serves as one of its most distinguishing characteristics. They emphasize that others in the field feel that place attachment extends to cognition and behavior, but they don't overstress this quality: "That is, interplay of affect and emotions, knowledge and beliefs, and behaviours and actions in reference to place" (p. 5). It is crucial to emphasize aspects of cognition (such as views and perceptions), affect (such as emotions and feelings), and synergy (such as behavioral intent and commitment) when attempting to connect a sense of location with certain behaviors. Studies on attitudes, for instance, distinguish between completion and instrumental behavior. The former refers to behavior as a means to an end and is motivated by attitudes with a solid cognitive foundation. The latter is the completion act, which is driven mostly by an emotional attitude and is done for one's own gain, amusement, or interest (Millar & Tesser, 1989; Tesser, 1995; Wilson *et al.*, 1989). To put it simply, some people have attitudes towards things that

are more cognitive in nature, whereas other people may have attitudes that are more emotionally driven. These differences have an impact on behavior's motivations.

To sum up, place attachment can influence and promote Bai residents' behavior in the bridge area to a large extent.

### *Sustainable Conservation and Behaviour*

The concept of sustainability was initially formed around three fundamental pillars: environmental, economic, and social. Through the cumulative impact of worldwide debates and conferences, the idea has over time evolved into a more complex and complete framework. Specifically, culture was established as the fourth element of sustainable development during the Johannesburg Earth Summit in 2002 and subsequently supported at the World Summit of Local and Regional Leaders in 2010. The research filed on social sustainability, Munro, (1995) contends that in order for an activity or development to be considered to have social attributes, it is necessary to preserve particular social relationships, norms, organisational frameworks, and values. Another explanation of social sustainability is that it refers to the well-being of the maintenance or improvement of human and future generations (Forrest & Lee, 2003; Pugh, 2014). Its objectives are social cohesion and integrity, social stability and improved quality of life. In the field of cultural sustainability research, Throsby, (1997) believes culture plays a formative role in shaping individuals' identities and beliefs, therefore fostering social cohesion. In summary, culture influence on or is a key element of social relations, social structures, values, norms, customs, rules, concepts of fairness, and behaviors. Rapoport, (2000) has distinguished two dimensions (social and ideological dimensions) of elements that determine culture: the social dimension including kin-ship, family structure, social network, identity, status and so forth; and the ideological dimension encompassing values, ideals, images, norms, standards, expectations, rules, and so forth. This analysis emphasizes the impact of social attributes on culture and hence their intricate interdependence. The century-long activities of generations of Bai residents on the ancient bridge have formed a unique cultural attribute. For example, The Bai people pray to the bridge as their faith. This behavior is not just a cultural manifestation, but a key component of a sustainable society. Through such behavior, the ancient bridge can maintain stability and cohesion among villagers in the changing environment, and realize knowledge transfer and value sharing between generations.

It's not hard to see, both social and cultural sustainability have the same core of emphasis on preserving and transmitting fundamental values, customs, and social cohesiveness. Their common goal is to set up an environment that respects diversity and supports heritage and community sustainability. The attributes of cultural and social significantly impact the values, norms, conventions, social structures, and ways of life of an environment, and are jointly comprised of it. As a result, social and cultural sustainability are difficult to separate and are often considered together (Chiu, 2004). In this study, the researchers regard society and culture as being related and jointly denote socio-cultural sustainability. In this study, the researcher views social and cultural aspects as a unified entity, collectively referred to as sociocultural sustainability. The underlying reason driving behavior is the collective nature of socio-cultural factors, known as place attachment.

In summary, based on the research direction of Gonçalves *et al.*, (2020), the researcher posits that resident behavior should be a key focus in the protection of architectural heritage.

Through the review, it was found that residents of places with identities such as ethnic enclaves, religious sites, and architectural heritage are more likely to develop place attachments. Notably, the Yunnan ancient bridge embodies all three of these identities, which fosters place attachment among the Bai residents. Furthermore, the literature review revealed that place attachment is one of the driving forces behind the behaviors of Bai residents at the ancient bridge. Therefore, place attachment should be incorporated into the sustainable protection strategies for architectural heritage.

### Conclusion and Future Directions

This literature review is grounded in two guiding theoretical frameworks: (1) Mihaylov *et al.*, (2020) revealed that place attachment can directly influence their behaviors, enhancing their engagement in local community activities and interactions with neighbors; and (2) Gonçalves *et al.*, (2020) suggests that behavior is a key factor in achieving the sustainable development of architecture. Hence, the study by reviewing relevant literature in the areas of place attachment, behavior, the setting of Bai culture and the ancient bridge and sustainable protection, identifies two crucial insights: 1. The unique human-geographical environment has fostered a strong place attachment among the Bai people toward the ancient bridges. 2. Place attachment may influence Bai residents' behavior, thereby contributing to the sustainable development of the ancient bridge (see Figure 8). However, this assumption needs to be verified by combining the data.

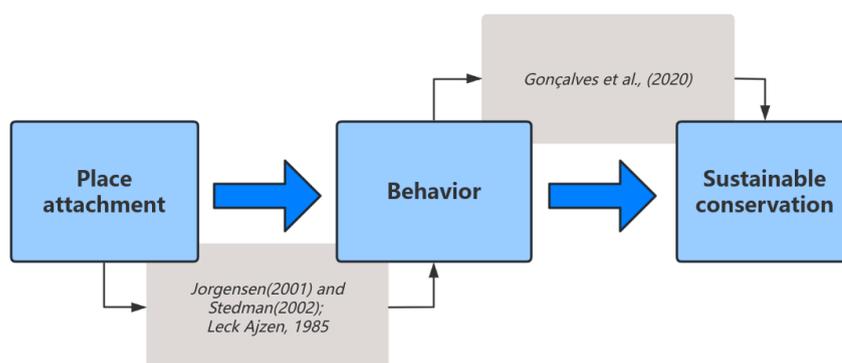


Figure 8: Relationship Framework Between place attachment, Behavior and Sustainable conservation

The study's theoretical contribution is a review of literature, illustrating that Bai people are more likely to foster a deep sense of place attachment to the ancient bridge. Besides, this research introduces place attachment into the sustainable conservation framework, suggesting it as a crucial motivator of behaviour. This enhances the cross-disciplinary interaction between people-place relationships and the conservation of cultural heritage. Furthermore, it addresses a gap in the current literature about the impact of residents' place attachment and behaviour on the sustainable development of heritage sites, offering a theoretical framework and analytical viewpoint for future empirical studies. It also possesses considerable implications for advancing community-based conservation initiatives.

Future studies may investigate two primary options. Initially, it should empirically examine whether and how place attachment influences residents' behavior, to clarify the role of emotional factors in public participation. Secondly, subsequent research may explore the role of behaviour in sustainable heritage conservation by integrating contextual variables and

longitudinal data. Employing varied samples and integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies will facilitate the examination of this mechanism's stability across distinct cultural and spatial contexts, hence enhancing comprehension of the interplay between place attachment, behaviour, and sustainable conservation.

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