

# CULTURAL IDENTITY THROUGH YI PATTERNS: ANALYZING TRADITIONAL MOTIFS IN CHUXIONG FOR DESIGN APPLICATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the rich traditional patterns of the Yi ethnic group in Chuxiong and their potential for modern design application. The study analyzes representative Yi motifs with attention to their cultural significance and adaptability to contemporary cultural souvenir products. Through field documentation of Yi patterns in clothing, textiles, and artifacts, combined with literature and expert interviews, the research categorizes the motifs into thematic groups and interprets their symbolic meanings. Key findings reveal that Yi patterns function as cultural narratives from totemic animal symbols (e.g. the tiger) to cosmic elements and geometric designs each embodying aspects of Yi identity, beliefs, and aesthetics. Expert validation indicates that many of these motifs can be creatively adapted into product design while preserving their symbolic integrity, though careful consideration of scale, color, and context is required to maintain authenticity. The results underscore the importance of culturally grounded design strategies: integrating Yi patterns into modern products not only enhances aesthetic appeal but also strengthens cultural identity transmission. This study contributes a model for bridging intangible cultural heritage and innovative design, demonstrating how analyzing traditional motifs can inform sustainable cultural creativity.

**Keywords:** Yi Ethnic Patterns, Cultural Identity, Design Applicability, Chuxiong, Cultural Souvenir Design

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## INTRODUCTION

Traditional pattern design is a vital component of intangible cultural heritage, conveying the history, values, and identity of a community. Among the Yi ethnic group in Chuxiong, Yunnan Province, traditional motifs found on textiles and artifacts serve as visual languages that embody ancestral stories and cosmological beliefs, particularly through the embroidery practices of Yi women. However, the transmission of this knowledge is increasingly threatened. Rapid modernization and urbanization have weakened intergenerational continuity, while the commodification of Yi motifs in mass-produced tourist crafts often leads to superficial or decontextualized usage, undermining their cultural value.

These challenges highlight the need for new preservation strategies—ones that emphasize adaptive reinterpretation and active integration into contemporary design. As scholars such as Hobsbawm suggest, cultural continuity depends on innovation, not static replication. Within design research, traditional elements are increasingly seen as sources of creative inspiration, yet existing studies on Yi motifs often fail to capture their deeper symbolic meanings or demonstrate practical paths for authentic design integration.

This study addresses that gap by focusing on Research Objective 2: analyzing Yi patterns in Chuxiong with emphasis on their cultural significance and design applicability. Through a structured methodology including visual documentation, symbolic interpretation, and expert validation the research aims to uncover how these patterns can inform the development of culturally meaningful products. The remainder of this paper includes a literature review, research methods, analysis of key motif categories, discussion of design implications, and concluding reflections on integrating cultural identity into contemporary practice.

### Research Objectives

This research aims to explore and analyze the cultural identity of the Yi ethnic group in Chuxiong through their traditional patterns, and to examine their significance and applicability in contemporary cultural souvenir design.

## LITERATURE REVIEWS

### Yi Patterns as Cultural Symbols

Traditional motifs often embody layers of cultural meaning. In Yi society, patterns found on clothing, embroidery, architecture and ritual objects encapsulate mythologies, social values, and identity markers. Prior ethnographic studies of Yi art underscore that common designs are tied to belief systems (Wang et al., 2024). For instance, the Yi especially revere fire and the sun, and correspondingly red tones and flame-like shapes appear frequently as symbols of protection and vitality. The tiger is another potent symbol; regarded as the Yi's totem and ancestor spirit, it is often represented in decorative patterns to invoke strength and divine guardianship. Floral and natural motifs, such as eight-petal flowers or gourd (pumpkin seed) shapes, are also prevalent in Yi decoration, symbolizing fertility, beauty, and the ingenuity of Yi women artisans. Yi artisans traditionally favor bold red and black tones in embroidery, a trait evident in costume aesthetics across generations (Jiancai, 2023). These examples illustrate that Yi patterns function as a form of visual storytelling, with each motif carrying specific connotations (e.g. the Torch Festival flame patterns signifying prosperity and the warding off of evil). A holistic analysis of Yi design, therefore, must treat patterns as “holistic carriers of semiotic and socio-religious meaning,” rather than mere ornaments. This perspective aligns with recent design critiques that emphasize cultural alienation risks when symbolic depth is overlooked (Xiong & Vongphantuset, 2024). This interpretation follows a semiotic perspective, viewing each motif as a sign that conveys layered cultural meanings. Guided by Barthes' (1967) semiotic theory of signification, the study decodes how visual forms such as color, symmetry, and repetition construct social and cosmological messages embedded in Yi art. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is derived for this study:

H1: Individuals with greater prior exposure to Yi culture demonstrate a higher level of cultural recognition when evaluating Yi pattern-based cultural souvenir products.

### **Integrating Heritage Motifs into Modern Design**

The challenge of preserving intangible heritage has led scholars to explore ways of bringing traditional art into contemporary use. Smith (2006) notes that heritage gains life when actively used to produce identity and value in new contexts. In design fields, this has given rise to culturally oriented design frameworks. For example, Yijing and Sharudin (2023) propose strategies for the integration of traditional symbols with modern product design, emphasizing that designers should maintain the cultural essence of motifs even as they innovate. Their study highlights several approaches relevant to Yi patterns: reinterpreting traditional symbols through modern aesthetics, introducing advanced materials or technologies to express motifs, and expanding the application of heritage symbols to new product categories. The goal is “innovative design while maintaining cultural heritage”, ensuring that products gain new creative vitality without alienating the symbol’s original meaning. This approach aligns with heritage theory, particularly Smith’s (2006) notion of heritage as a living and negotiated process. It provides the analytical basis for balancing innovation with authenticity in the study’s evaluation of design adaptation. Recent scholarship has examined how bronze drum motifs and Yi patterns in Chuxiong can inspire design innovation while preserving cultural context (Liu, 2025). They stress the importance of excavating and refining traditional elements with the highest cultural and artistic value, then organically integrating them into product design to create items with authentic cultural character. Such integration not only preserves heritage motifs but also enhances the soft power of culture by making it tangible and accessible to the public.

Accordingly, the following hypothesis is derived for this study:

H2: Aesthetic preference for Yi traditional pattern designs significantly influences consumers’ purchase intention.

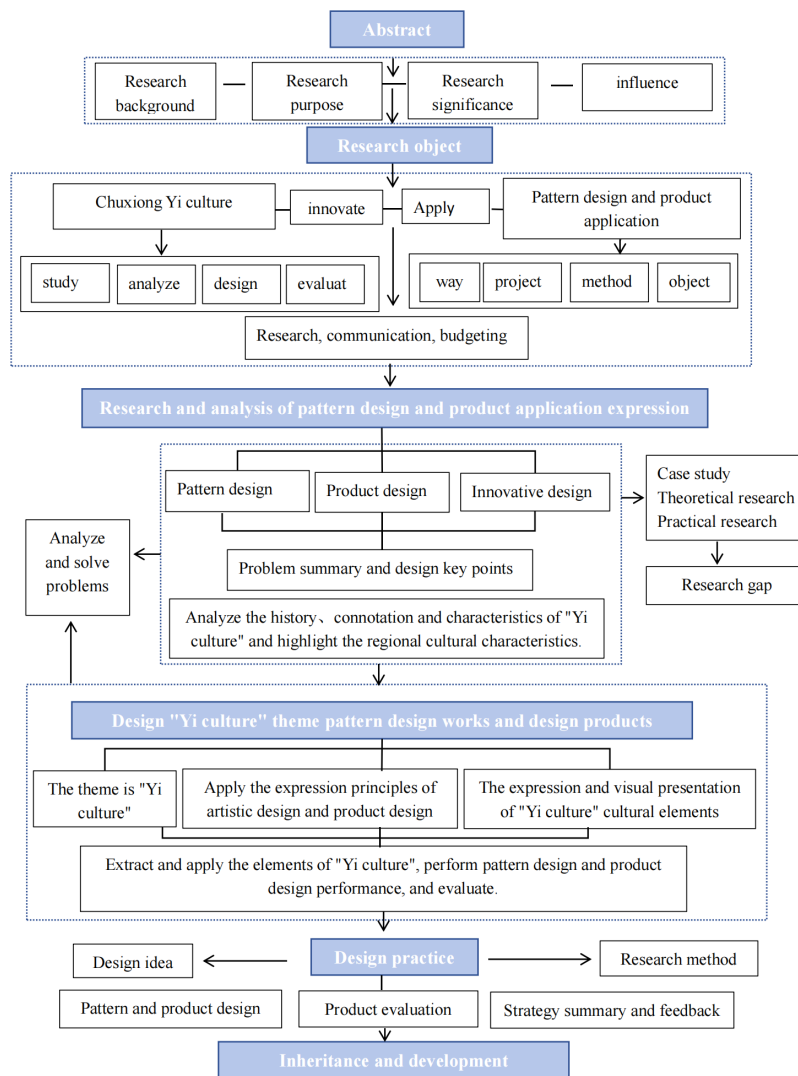
### **Design Theory and Cultural Identity:**

Recent case studies demonstrate the benefits of applying design theory to heritage preservation. Xin et al. (2024) showed that using a narrative design framework for an intangible cultural artifact (the Huaiyang Mud Dog toy) significantly increased its cultural value and market appeal as a souvenir. By systematically analyzing the Mud Dog’s historical background, styles, and production techniques, and then reimagining them through storytelling-driven design, the project strengthened users’ emotional resonance and sense of cultural identity associated with the product. This success underscores how an academic design approach can contribute to both heritage protection and innovation. Similarly, other studies have employed participatory design and co-creation with local artisans for ethnic crafts, finding that involving community expertise helps ensure authenticity and boosts acceptance of the final designs (Bosi & Hu, 2022; Meng et al., 2020). These works inform the present study by suggesting that careful collaboration and theoretical grounding can turn traditional Yi patterns into contemporary designs that educate and inspire. The theoretical lens of design studies, emphasizing participatory and narrative approaches, guides the methodological integration of local knowledge into design interpretation. This ensures that cultural identity is not only represented but actively co-constructed through design. Moreover, they highlight an important outcome: culturally informed products can evoke pride and continuity within communities while also engaging tourists or consumers, thereby creating economic opportunities for heritage bearers. Yi communities, much like other indigenous cultures, express identity through artistic forms passed down intergenerationally, often led by women (Harrell & Yongxiang, 2003).

Accordingly, the following hypothesis is derived for this study:

H3: Perceived cultural authenticity embedded in the design positively affects consumers’ willingness to purchase Yi-themed cultural products.

In summary, the literature indicates that Yi patterns carry rich symbolism crucial to cultural identity, and that bridging such heritage with modern design requires a balance of innovation and authenticity. This study builds on these insights by performing an in-depth analysis of Yi motifs in Chuxiong and examining how design adaptation can be done in a culturally sustainable way. By drawing from cultural semiotics, heritage theory, and design frameworks, we aim to contribute to a growing body of knowledge on culturally oriented product design that both preserves and revitalizes intangible heritage. From the literature review, the conceptual framework can be drawn as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1** Conceptual Framework

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To investigate Yi traditional patterns and their design applicability, this study employed a multi-step qualitative approach combining visual analysis and expert consultation. The research was conducted in Chuxiong, focusing on motifs encountered in traditional Yi attire, crafts, and architectural decor. Below is an overview of the methodological steps:

To investigate Yi traditional patterns and their design applicability, this study employed a multi-step qualitative approach combining visual analysis and expert consultation. The research was conducted in Chuxiong, focusing on motifs encountered in traditional Yi attire, crafts, and architectural décor. Notably, the qualitative methodology was also guided by the study's hypotheses: data collection and analysis were structured to explore variations in

cultural recognition of motifs (H1), the influence of motif aesthetics on audience interest (H2), and the role of perceived authenticity in acceptance of Yi-inspired designs (H3). While detailed quantitative testing of H1-H3 is beyond this paper's scope, the qualitative insights gleaned from the following steps provide initial support for these propositions. Below is an overview of the methodological steps:

### **Pattern Collection and Documentation**

A broad sample of representative Yi patterns was first gathered through field observations and archival research. Fieldwork involved visits to local villages, cultural museums, and heritage sites in Chuxiong known for Yi art. Photographs, sketches, and notes were taken of recurring motifs on clothing, embroidery, wooden carvings, and ritual artifacts. Community elders and artisans were informally consulted during field visits to understand context (for example, which festival or purpose a particular motif is used for). This empirical collection was supplemented by reviewing ethnographic records and visual archives of Yi designs, ensuring both contemporary and historical patterns were included. By the end of this stage, we compiled a visual database of dozens of distinct motif specimens with variations.

### **Literature Review of Symbolism**

In parallel with collecting the visuals, we conducted a focused literature review of Yi art and symbolism to interpret the meanings and origins of the documented patterns. Ethnographic texts, folklore studies, and previous research on Yi costumes were analyzed to trace how each motif is described culturally (e.g. a spiral motif might be linked to a legend, a color might have ritual significance). This provided preliminary insight into which motifs are considered sacred, auspicious, or decorative. By triangulating field notes with documented sources, we ensured that our understanding of each pattern's cultural significance was well-grounded and not solely based on outsider interpretation.

### **Pattern Categorization and Analysis**

Once patterns and their presumptive meanings were documented, we conducted a comparative visual analysis to categorize the motifs. Drawing on observed structures and themes, the patterns were organized into groups according to their formal characteristics and symbolic content. For instance, motifs were grouped by subject (animal forms, plant forms, geometric forms, etc.) and by composition (border repeats, central medallions, colors used). We iteratively refined these categories by examining commonalities and differences: e.g., several floral motifs might differ in detail but share a symbolic theme of fertility. This step resulted in a taxonomy of Yi pattern types, which then served as a foundation for evaluating their potential design applications. Each category was analyzed for its visual complexity, recognizability, and adaptability key factors that influence how a motif can translate to product design.

### **Expert Interviews for Cultural Validation**

To validate our interpretations and assess design feasibility, we carried out semi-structured interviews with experts intimately familiar with Yi culture and design. The panel of experts (nine individuals in total) included: (a) Yi cultural scholars (local historians and anthropologists), (b) master artisans (experts in Yi embroidery and craft), and (c) professional designers who have experience incorporating traditional elements into modern products. In interviews, we presented the categorized patterns (using visual examples) and inquired about each motif's accepted cultural meaning, any taboos or required usage context, and ideas for modern adaptation. We also asked designers about practical considerations (scalability of the pattern, color constraints, etc.) when using these motifs on products. The expert feedback was used to verify the cultural accuracy of our symbolism interpretations and to gather criteria for pattern adaptation. For instance, experts confirmed the central significance of the tiger motif and advised that any design use should respect its status (e.g., positioning it prominently and not trivializing it). They also identified which patterns are most and least adaptable-for

example, a very intricate ceremonial pattern might lose detail when miniaturized on a small product, whereas a simpler geometric border might transfer well to contemporary textiles.

### Synthesis of Design Criteria

Finally, the insights from the expert consultations were synthesized into a set of design guidelines for applying Yi patterns. While this paper centers on the analysis phase, it is informed by these guidelines to discuss design applicability. The criteria addressed questions such as: which motifs are suitable for which types of products? (e.g., floral motifs on fashion accessories, bold animal motifs as logos or central decorative elements); what modifications are acceptable? (e.g., simplifying complex patterns, altering colors slightly while keeping symbolic ones like red and black intact); and How to maintain cultural coherence (ensuring the motif is placed in a manner consistent with its traditional significance). These criteria form the bridge between analysis and actual design, ensuring that when Yi patterns move from traditional context into modern products, they do so in an authentic and aesthetically pleasing way. Evaluation of pattern adaptability is further informed by quantitative measures in the broader study (e.g., user surveys), but those results are beyond the scope of this paper.

This methodological process—from documentation to validation—ensured a thorough understanding of Yi patterns from both emic (insider cultural) and etic (design applicability) perspectives. By combining visual anthropology methods with design research, we established a reliable foundation for analyzing how Yi motifs can be honored in new design contexts. The next section presents the results of the pattern analysis, including the identified key categories of Yi motifs along with their cultural meanings and design potential.


## RESEARCH RESULTS

### Yi Pattern Categories and Cultural Significance

The analysis revealed a diverse yet classifiable spectrum of Yi traditional patterns in Chuxiong. The motifs can be broadly grouped into four key categories based on their subject matter and symbolic themes: 1) Floral/Natural Motifs, 2) Animal Totemic Motifs, 3) Cosmic/Elemental Motifs, and 4) Abstract Geometric Motifs. These categories emerged from recurring patterns documented in clothing and crafts, and each carries distinct cultural significance that ties into Yi cosmology, values, and daily life. Importantly, these findings align with ethnographic records of Yi art, which note that Yi embroidery and decoration commonly feature animals, plants, celestial symbols, and geometric shapes intertwined with ethnic meaning. Table 1 provides an overview of the four motif categories, including illustrative examples, their cultural meanings within Yi society, and notes on their applicability to modern design.

Table 1 summarizes four major categories of Yi motifs—floral/natural, animal/totemic, cosmic/elemental, and geometric—each with distinct symbolic meanings and corresponding design implications. These implications provide a practical foundation for the subsequent analysis, where they are examined through four dimensions of design adaptation: cultural sensitivity, visual complexity, color translation, and functional integration.

**Table 1** Key Categories of Yi Traditional Patterns (Chuxiong) and Their Design Implications

Pattern Category	Image	Cultural Meaning (Summary)	Design Implications (Summary)
Floral/ Natural Motifs		Symbolize beauty, fertility, and prosperity. Often appear in wedding attire.	Versatile for textiles and packaging; preserve symbolic elements when stylizing.

Pattern Category	Image	Cultural Meaning (Summary)	Design Implications (Summary)
Animal/ Totemic Motifs		Represent protection, strength, and bravery (e.g., tiger, horn, bird motifs).	Use prominently and respectfully; maintain key traits for recognizability.
Cosmic/ Elemental Motifs		Reflect worship of sun/fire; symbolize unity and hope (e.g., Torch Festival).	Suitable for emblems/logos; use symbolic colors to retain meaning.
Geometric Motifs		Enhance rhythm and reflect craftsmanship; often used as fillers or borders.	Adaptable for product design; retain cultural essence through distinctive features.

These design implications are directly reflected in the practical adaptation findings. For instance, geometric motifs noted in Table 1 as “adaptable for product design” correspond to the principle of visual complexity and scalability, while animal and elemental motifs requiring “prominent yet respectful use” align with cultural sensitivity and contextual appropriateness. Similarly, the emphasis on “symbolic color use” for floral and cosmic motifs resonates with color translation practices observed in modern applications.

As Table 1 illustrates, each category of Yi motif is rooted in cultural context—whether it be reverence for natural life, mythic ancestor worship, cosmological beliefs, or aesthetic traditions of ornamentation. These findings confirm that the cultural significance of Yi patterns is multifaceted: floral and fauna motifs often carry blessings or protective intentions, cosmic motifs encode religious reverence (for fire, celestial bodies), and geometric patterns demonstrate artistic ideals of symmetry and order. Notably, certain colors are intrinsically tied to these patterns’ meanings. Yi artisans traditionally favor a palette of bold colors like red, yellow, green, and black, where black often forms the base fabric (symbolizing the Yi’s identity as the “black Yi” in some regions) and bright colors are used in embroidery to highlight motifs[1]. Red, in particular, is widely used because it is associated with the sun’s warmth and the purifying power of fire in Yi belief. Observations in Chuxiong revealed that red thread was predominant in flame and floral patterns, consistent with its symbolic connotations. The vitality of these colors enhances the visual prominence of patterns like flowers (to stand out against dark cloth) and flames (to evoke fire), and any modern design application would need to consider this traditional color logic as part of the motif’s integrity.

#### **Pattern Adaptation Considerations for Design**

Beyond documenting and classifying the patterns, a core aim of the analysis was to evaluate how these traditional motifs can be applied to contemporary cultural products. The expert interviews and our design assessment highlighted several important considerations for adaptation:

##### ***Cultural Sensitivity:***

Certain motifs, especially the tiger and Torch Festival fire, hold sacred or communal importance. Experts cautioned that these should be used in contexts that honor their



significance (for example, a tiger motif might be well-suited for an item meant to symbolize Yi culture, but using it on a trivial novelty item could be seen as disrespectful). In design terms, this means choosing appropriate product types for each motif. The study considered wearable items (apparel, jewelry) and small souvenirs (home decor, stationery); we found that motifs like geometric borders or flowers are versatile for everyday items, whereas a motif like Tiger might be better on statement pieces or limited editions celebrating Yi culture.

This observation corresponds directly to Table 1's animal/totemic and elemental categories, where culturally significant symbols such as the tiger or Torch Festival fire are recommended for respectful and context-appropriate use to preserve meaning and authenticity.

#### ***Visual Complexity and Scalability:***

Traditional Yi patterns range from simple to highly intricate. When adapting to product design, scale is a crucial factor. Intricate embroidery patterns that look stunning on a large traditional jacket might lose clarity if miniaturized on a small souvenir (like a keychain or a phone case). Our analysis identified which motifs could be simplified without losing their essence. For instance, a complex scene of many elements might be deconstructed into standalone icons (a flower, a sun, a tiger head) that could be used individually. This process of motif simplification and extraction was informed by expert feedback—they helped pinpoint the core element of a pattern that must remain. As a result, design sketches were made showing simplified line-drawing versions of multi-colored embroidery, which were then evaluated for recognizability by Yi artisans. Those deemed still identifiable and meaningful were considered viable for use on modern products.

This design reasoning echoes Table 1's guidance that geometric and certain floral motifs—owing to their structural clarity—are most adaptable for modern product design across different scales and materials.

#### ***Color and Material Translation:***

The vibrant colors of Yi patterns are integral to their impact and meaning. Translating these to modern materials (prints, plastics, metals) requires maintaining color symbolism. For example, if a product cannot use textile dyes of the exact traditional hue, designers should match them as closely as possible or find analogues (maybe using a bright Pantone red to mimic the natural dye red). Also, some patterns rely on texture (raised embroidery, intricate weaving). In modern production, we might achieve a similar texture through embossing, laser-cut layering, or 3D embroidery on contemporary fabrics. A successful adaptation we noted was using digital embroidery techniques to recreate a traditional Yi floral pattern on a denim jacket—the modern thread and fabric differed, but because the pattern and colors followed the traditional design, the cultural essence was preserved and immediately recognizable to Yi consultants who viewed the prototype.

#### ***Functional and Aesthetic Integration:***

Finally, the results emphasized that simply slapping a pattern onto a product is not sufficient; the motif should be integrated into the product's overall design coherently. This often means adjusting the pattern layout or combining it with modern design elements. For instance, a repeating border pattern might be used as trim on a handbag or along the edge of a scarf, which fits naturally, whereas placing the same border pattern in the middle of a product might seem arbitrary. During the analysis, concepts were generated for various product types (scarves, T-shirts, bags, ceramic mugs, etc.) using different motifs. Each concept was evaluated for aesthetic balance—e.g., a circular sun motif worked nicely as a central graphic on a plate or coaster, while a stripe of geometric pattern enhanced the border of a shirt. The functional suitability was also considered: motifs with very sharp, pointed forms (like certain horn or blade patterns) could even influence the physical shape of a product (e.g., a pendant could be cut in the shape of that motif). The overarching principle is harmony between the motif and the product's form and function. The expert reviewers in design noted that patterns should neither



overpower the product nor appear as an afterthought; they should look as if the product was meant to have that pattern. This feedback loop was valuable in refining how patterns might be cropped, rotated, or combined with contemporary graphics.

In sum, the results demonstrate that Yi patterns are highly rich resources for design, provided their application is handled with cultural respect and creative adaptation. Many motifs (especially florals and geometrics) were found to transition into modern designs almost directly, needing only minor tweaks, whereas others (like narrative or highly sacred motifs) require more thoughtful reworking. Table 1 and the above considerations present both the opportunities and constraints: there is a clear opportunity to infuse modern products with Yi cultural identity (which can enhance the products' uniqueness and storytelling value), but there are constraints in terms of motif use (scale, context, etc.) that designers must navigate.

Building on the above adaptation findings and Table 1's implications, we interpret the results against the study's three hypotheses. Regarding H1, experts and master artisans with deeper cultural familiarity offered more nuanced and convergent interpretations of motif meanings, indicating higher cultural recognition. Consistent with H2, experts anticipated that clearer, aesthetically appealing renditions (e.g., simplified yet recognizable motifs) would increase audience interest and purchase inclination. In line with H3, both cultural scholars and designers emphasized that perceived authenticity—faithful symbolism validated by community experts—positively shapes willingness to adopt or buy Yi-themed products. Taken together, these qualitative patterns provide preliminary support for H1-H3, while rigorous statistical testing will be examined in subsequent quantitative work beyond the scope of this paper.

The next section will discuss these findings in a broader context, comparing with other cultural design integration efforts and reflecting on what this means for cultural sustainability and innovation.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The analysis of Yi patterns in Chuxiong demonstrates how traditional visual motifs can act as powerful bridges between cultural preservation and contemporary design. These motifs function as cultural carriers, embedding meanings of protection, celebration, and cosmological harmony. When thoughtfully integrated into product design, they enrich everyday objects with cultural depth, supporting Smith's (2006) view that heritage is an active contributor to modern identity. As Xin et al. (2024) suggest, embedding narratives in design fosters emotional connection and mutual respect benefiting both consumers and cultural communities.

However, this integration process requires careful negotiation. Expert feedback revealed that even minor alterations, such as changing traditional colors, may disrupt symbolic meanings, raising concerns about cultural dilution and misappropriation. Therefore, participatory approaches involving local communities are essential to ensure authenticity and respectful outcomes (Sanders & Stappers, 2018). Designers must also balance cultural richness with practical considerations: while the most meaningful motifs are often visually complex, they can pose technical challenges for product application. This study adopted a strategy of "creative authenticity", simplifying motifs where necessary while retaining their core visual and symbolic identities. This interpretation draws directly from cultural semiotics, which views visual motifs as systems of signs that convey shared meanings. Applying this perspective allows the analysis to interpret Yi patterns not merely as decorative forms, but as signifiers of cultural identity and collective memory, thus reinforcing the semiotic reading introduced in the theoretical framework.

Comparative perspectives with other indigenous communities (e.g., Māori, Navajo) highlight shared opportunities and tensions. Yi motifs, though less globally known, offer a distinctive chance to shape design trajectories through respectful collaboration. The classification and validation framework developed in this study may serve as a reference for other cultural groups

seeking ethical integration of heritage into contemporary creative industries. This aligns with heritage theory, particularly Smith's (2006) view of heritage as an active process of negotiation. The study's approach to design adaptation embodies this dynamic—preserving symbolic authenticity while enabling creative transformation—illustrating how heritage theory informs the balance between innovation and continuity.

Importantly, this approach contributes to cultural sustainability. Incorporating Yi motifs into marketable products can create economic opportunities through craft production or licensing (Ning et al., 2022). Yi artisans expressed enthusiasm for broader recognition alongside aspirations for equitable benefits, emphasizing future priorities around intellectual property and shared authorship. Initiatives such as cooperative trademarks (e.g., authentic Yi design) could strengthen community agency, echoing UNESCO's (2019) calls for indigenous empowerment in creative economies.

Through systematic documentation, categorization, and expert-guided analysis, this study identified four primary thematic groups of Yi patterns-Floral/Natural, Animal/Totemic, Cosmic/Elemental, and Geometric Abstract-providing a structured foundation for design adaptation. Patterns with simple, bold forms are readily adaptable to textiles, fashion, and graphics, while more complex motifs can also be integrated with careful abstraction and contextual placement. Practical guidelines developed with Yi experts (e.g., appropriate color usage, scaling, and placement) demonstrate that authenticity and creativity can be mutually reinforcing rather than contradictory, thereby informing a concise framework for culturally sustainable design.

Synthesizing these findings, a concise framework for culturally sustainable design can be identified. It encompasses four interrelated principles: 1) Cultural Sensitivity-respect for symbolic hierarchy and appropriate contexts; 2) Simplification with Integrity-retaining essential visual identifiers when adjusting scale; 3) Color Fidelity-maintaining symbolic hues or their closest analogues; and 4) Coherent Integration-ensuring motifs harmonize with product form and function. Together, these principles offer a transferable model for integrating indigenous aesthetics into contemporary design with both authenticity and innovation.

Embedding Yi patterns into contemporary design has implications beyond aesthetics. It supports cultural continuity by evolving living traditions, enhances local cultural pride, educates wider audiences, and contributes to cultural tourism initiatives. Exhibitions or workshops could leverage the classification framework to illustrate the evolution of Yi aesthetics, helping consumers understand the cultural narratives behind the motifs. These findings also resonate with participatory and narrative design frameworks, which emphasize co-creation and contextual storytelling. By integrating Yi artisans' perspectives, the study operationalizes design theory as both an analytical and practical tool for achieving culturally grounded innovation.

Nevertheless, this study has limitations. The analysis focused on Chuxiong patterns and may not encompass the full diversity of Yi subgroups. Future research should expand motif archives across regions and conduct broader consumer testing to validate market reception. Additionally, not all traditional motifs are suited to modern applications, requiring ongoing dialogue between cultural preservation and design innovation.

In conclusion, Yi traditional patterns represent more than decorative heritage—they are visual markers of cultural identity, adaptable frameworks for contemporary creativity, and catalysts for cultural sustainability. Integrating these motifs into design, when done collaboratively and respectfully, enables heritage to thrive in new contexts while enriching modern design with authenticity and depth. Future work will involve prototype development, community and consumer evaluations, and exploration of digital archives to further expand the visibility and responsible use of Yi cultural heritage. This research demonstrates that thoughtful

collaboration between tradition and innovation can ensure that the cultural identity of the Yi ethnic group continues to flourish in modern creative landscapes.

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