

# Analysis of Regional Characteristics and Ethnic Cultural Integration of Chenggong Tile-cat

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**Abstract:** Tile-cat, one of the unique roof beasts in China, is usually secured on the roof ridge of the main house, implying the traditional concept of "Warding off evil and receiving blessings". Chenggong tile-cat is a traditional folk art in Chenggong District, Kunming City, Yunnan Province. It is based on a tiger and crafted by skilled folk artists, becoming a divine beast that guards its home and ward off evil and filth. At present, the academic community has achieved fruitful results in the study of tile-cats in other regions of Yunnan, especially in Dali and Heqing. These achievements provide reference and inspiration for the research of this paper. However, there is still a lack of research on the Chenggong tile-cat, which provides ample space for this study. Based on this, this paper will conduct on-site research on the Chenggong tile-cat, analyze and explore its regional characteristics and ethnic cultural integration, and reveal its unique regional characteristics through the analysis of its geographical location, artistic style, production technology, usage, and cultural connotation. At the same time, based on historical background, explore the integration process of tile-cat art and ethnic culture, and evaluate the cultural value of tile-cat in modern society.

**Keywords:** Chenggong Tile-cat; Regional Characteristics; Ethnic Culture; Fusion Analysis.

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## 1. Introduction

Tile-cat is mainly distributed in Kunming, Dali, Yuxi, Chuxiong, Qujing, Lijiang and other places in Yunnan. Due to different regions of transmission, its names also vary. In some places, it is called "neither one thing nor the other" because it is like a cat but not a cat, like a tiger but not a tiger, like a lion but not a lion. Some are called "Jiangji Tiger", which means a tiger that can drive away ghosts and bring good luck to the people. Another name is "Zhenji Tiger", which refers to the function of being placed on the ridge of a house and stabilizing it[1]. Chenggong tile-cat is not only a handicraft, but also a symbol and carrier of local culture. Its regional characteristics are significant, and its image design, production process, and use all reflect the unique natural environment, historical culture, and social life of the local area. At the same time, Chenggong tile-cat is closely connected to the local ethnic culture, reflecting the exchange and integration of multiple ethnic cultures. Therefore, analyzing the regional characteristics and ethnic cultural integration of Chenggong tile-cat not only helps to deeply understand the cultural connotations of this art form, but also promotes the inheritance and development of local culture.

## 2. The Regional Characteristics of Chenggong Tile-cat

### 2.1. Defining Regional Characteristics and Their Impact on the Image of Tile-cat

The regional characteristics of the Chenggong tile-cat can be defined as the unique regional characteristics and cultural charm of the tile-cat art image, which is influenced by various factors such as natural environment, historical culture, and ethnic traditions within the specific geographical range of Chenggong. Chenggong is located in the Dianchi area of Kunming City and is a multi-ethnic community, with the Yi

and Han ethnic groups being the two main ethnic groups. The integration of diverse cultures has made Chenggong tile-cat have distinct regional characteristics in image shaping, artistic style, production techniques and uses, as well as cultural connotations, which are manifested in the following aspects:

#### (1) In terms of Image-building

**1) The regional characteristics of form design:** The form design of Chenggong tile-cat is deeply influenced by the local ethnic culture. For example, Yi Nationality tile-cat usually exhibit the characteristics of being made of unglazed yellow clay, with diamond shaped Bagua plaques on the chest, thick and powerful limbs, displaying a sense of majesty and strength (Figure 1). Han Nationality tile-cat, on the other hand, pay more attention to delicate and exquisite craftsmanship, with more diverse forms, such as a cylindrical or jar shaped body, upright front legs, and a curled tail (Figure 2). These morphological differences are the concrete manifestation of regional cultural characteristics in the image of tile-cat.

**2) Regionality of color application:** In the Chenggong area, people also have unique regional preferences for the use of color. This preference is reflected in the production of tile-cat. For example, Yi Nationality tile-cat tend to use bright colors such as red and yellow to express their enthusiasm and vitality. Han Nationality tile-cat may pay more attention to color harmony and balance, using more delicate color combinations.

**3) The regional characteristics of decorative elements:** The decorative elements of Chenggong tile-cat also reflect the local regional characteristics. For example, whether it is a tile-cat from the Yi or Han ethnic groups, decorative elements such as Eight Trigrams Array, Fu characters, and animal patterns can be seen on its body (Figure 3 and Figure 4). These elements not only enrich the artistic form of tile-cat, but also reflect people's pursuit of a better life.



Figure 1. Yi Nationality tile-cat



Figure 2. Han Nationality tile-cat

The author took a selfie at the Tile-cat Museum, 2023.12



Figure 3. Eight Trigrams Array tile-cat



Figure 4. Fu characters tile-cat



Figure 5. Tile-cat 1

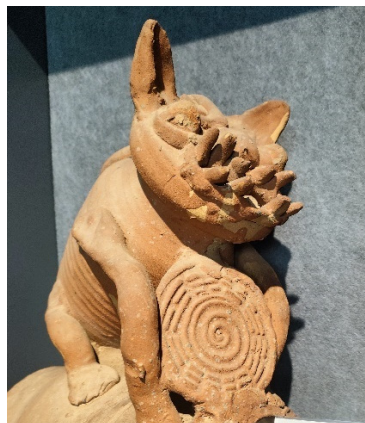


Figure 6. Tile-cat 2



Figure 7. Tile-cat 3

**(2) In terms of artistic style**

Chenggong tile-cat is a unique folk art in the Chenggong area of Yunnan Province. It is made of clay and has a unique artistic style, mainly reflected in the following aspects:

**1) Naive and lovely image:** The image of the Chenggong tile-cat is usually described as innocent and lovely, as if it were a curious child. This image gives people a sense of familiarity and warmth, making the tile-cat not only a ridge

decoration for enjoying a life of ease and comfort, but also an artistic decoration in people's lives (Figure 5).

**2) Exaggerated design:** The production process of tile-cat has a long history in the Heqing area, passed down from generation to generation, and continuously improved. In terms of appearance, Chenggong tile-cat often use exaggerated techniques, such as a wide mouth, protruding eyes, and teeth, to make the entire image more vivid and interesting (Figure 6).

**3) Rich facial expressions:** The facial expressions of the Chenggong tile-cat are very rich, sometimes appearing cute and playful. These rich facial expressions make tile-cat more

humanized and more likely to resonate and be loved by people (Figure 7).

**4) Unique Color:** Chenggong tile-cat usually uses a predominantly green gray color tone, which is consistent with the color of the house tiles, making tile-cat more harmonious and unified in residential buildings. At the same time, the green gray color also gives people a sense of stability and simplicity, enhancing the artistic charm of the tile-cat.

## 2.2. Production Process and Purpose

### (1) The production process of Chenggong Tile-cat

**Table 1.** The production process of Chenggong Tile-cat

Number	Production process	Detailed steps
1	Stores reserve	Prepare tools such as clay, tiles, knives, combs, sandpaper, etc. Clay should have a fine texture without impurities, while tiles should be made of local traditional green tiles, which are hard in texture and have a smooth surface.
2	Mixed clay	Mix the clay with an appropriate amount of water and stir evenly until it reaches the appropriate softness and hardness for shaping.
3	Create a prototype of a tile-cat	Take a piece of clay with a size of and roughly shape the body, head, limbs, and other parts of the tile-cat according to its shape.
4	Detail carving	Use tools such as knives and combs to carve and shape the features, hair, and other details of the tile-cat.
5	Firing	Place the prototype of the tile-cat with the production number in a well ventilated area to dry, and then place it in a kiln for firing. Control the temperature and time to ensure that the texture of the tile-cat is hard and the color is bright after firing.
6	Glazing	After firing, glaze the tile-cat to increase its glossiness and protection, and extend its service life.

### (2) The Use of Chenggong Tile-cat

**Table 2.** The Use of Chenggong Tile-cat

Number	Purpose	Detailed description
1	Decorate	Place it in a prominent position at home or in the office as a decoration to beautify the environment.
2	Folk beliefs	Regarded as items with mysterious powers, they ward off evil spirits and bless peace. In some important folk activities, people will place tile-cats to pray for good luck and peace.
3	Cultural inheritance	Carrying rich cultural connotations and historical information, by making and appreciating tile-cat, one can gain knowledge of local history, culture, folk customs, and other aspects, thereby enhancing their sense of identification and belonging to traditional culture. At the same time, it also injects new vitality into the inheritance and development of the local handicraft industry.

## 2.3. Cultural Connotations

Tile-cat, as a traditional handicraft and mythical beast, has rich cultural connotations, mainly reflected in the following aspects:

**(1) Tiger totem worship:** the prototype of tile-cat is a tiger, which means a tiger that can eat ghosts. This is the integration of the Central Plains Ridge Beast culture and Yunnan tiger culture totem worship. According to relevant information, people of the Yi, Bai, and Naxi ethnic groups believe that tigers are their protective gods, able to drive away demons, bring them good luck and peace, and bless them for generations. However, the Yi and Naxi ethnic groups revere black tigers, while the Bai ethnic group reveres white tigers[1]. Tigers are regarded as animals with mysterious powers, and the tile-cat, as the incarnation of tigers, is also endowed with a similar sacred mission.

**(2) Suppressing evil and seeking good fortune:** The main cultural function of tile-cats is to suppress evil and seek good fortune, and to support the feng shui of residential buildings. The people of Yunnan firmly believe in the mysterious role of the tile-cat. They transform the tiger into a tile-cat and place it on the top of the house, hoping that it will use the power of the tiger to ward off ghosts and evil spirits, and protect its own home. This is their understanding and reverence for nature

and the universe, believing that it can strengthen the atmosphere of the house, suppress ghosts and gods, undertake the responsibility of guarding the house for the homeowner, and pray for blessings.

**(3) Folk beliefs and customs:** In Yunnan folk culture, there are strict regulations and considerations for the placement and sacrificial ceremony of tile-cats. For example, when placing a tile-cat, a "consecration" ceremony is held, usually in the second or eighth month of the lunar calendar, with an even number of auspicious days, and Duke Duan is invited to preside over it[2]. This belief and custom reflect people's reverence and respect for the tile-cat, and also enrich the local folk culture.

Of course, in addition to the above, the Chenggong tile-cat also has many meanings in its design. The three pointed tips on top of the head represent timing, geographical advantage, and human harmony, while the middle "human harmony" is made very high, representing the hope of elders that their children can meet noble people. The shape of the nose is like a bone, indicating that the life of the tile-cat is given by parents. The "Heavenly Gift Mother Bone" educates children to be filial to their parents. The exaggerated big mouth indicates the absorption of wealth and the absorption of good things. Tile-cat is not only a totemic image, but in fact, it represents traditional Chinese virtues.

### 3. The Integration of Ethnic Culture and the Development of Chenggong Tile-cat

#### 3.1. The Integration of Ethnic Cultures

As a unique cultural phenomenon in Yunnan, Chenggong Tile-cat reflects the integration of the Central Plains Ridge Beast Culture and Yunnan Tiger Totem Worship. This integration is the result of multiple factors working together, including history, geography, ethnicity, religion, and other aspects.

Firstly, from a historical perspective, the Yunnan region has long been in a state of multi-ethnic settlement, and cultural exchange and integration between different ethnic groups are inevitable. The ridge animal culture in the Central Plains was introduced into Yunnan with the spread of Han culture, and combined with the local tiger totem worship, it formed a unique image of tile-cat. This image not only retains the characteristics of the Central Plains Ridge Beast, but also integrates the national characteristics of Yunnan, becoming a new cultural symbol.

Secondly, from a geographical perspective, Yunnan region has a complex terrain, with natural geographical conditions such as mountains and rivers forming a relatively closed geographical environment. This environment promotes communication and integration among various ethnic groups, and also enables the inheritance and development of tile-cat culture in Yunnan region. At the same time, Yunnan region has abundant natural resources, providing sufficient material sources for the production of tile-cats.

Again, from an ethnic perspective, Yunnan region is a place where multiple ethnic groups reside, and cultural exchange and integration between different ethnic groups are the norm. As a cultural symbol, Tile-cat not only reflects the influence of Central Plains culture, but also integrates cultural elements of various ethnic groups in Yunnan region. For example, the shape of the tile-cat is often engraved with the character "Wang", which is related to the Yi nationality worship of tigers; The name "Stone Cat" of tile-cat is a way of addressing tigers in Kunming dialect, which also reflects the special emotions of Yunnan region towards tigers.

Finally, from a religious perspective, the religious beliefs in Yunnan region are diverse, and each ethnic group has its own belief system and mythological legends. Tile-cat, as a mysterious cultural symbol, is closely related to local religious beliefs and mythological legends. For example, Tile-cat is believed to have the ability to enhance home atmosphere, suppress ghosts and gods, and promote feng shui, which is related to local folk beliefs. At the same time, the shape and decoration of the tile-cat also reflect the worship and reverence for gods.

#### 3.2. The Relationship between Chenggong Tile-cat and Ethnic Culture

There is a close connection between Chenggong tile-cat and ethnic culture, which is not only reflected in tile-cat as a carrier and symbol of ethnic culture, but also in its production process, artistic style, and cultural connotation.

Firstly, as a carrier of ethnic culture, Chenggong tile-cat embodies the integration and inheritance of ethnic culture. In the Yunnan region, there is a long history of cultural exchange and integration among various ethnic groups, and tile-cat, as one of its cultural phenomena, is a vivid manifestation of this

integration and inheritance. The production process and artistic style of tile-cat not only incorporate elements of Han culture, but also retain the unique characteristics of ethnic minority culture, becoming a product of multicultural integration.

Secondly, the production process of Chenggong tile-cat also reflects the inheritance and innovation of ethnic culture. The production of tile-cat requires exquisite ceramic skills and rich cultural connotations, which are preserved and passed down through generations. During the production process, craftsmen will use their own experience and skills, combined with local cultural traditions and aesthetic habits, to artistically treat and innovate tile-cats, making each tile-cat have a unique artistic style and cultural connotation.

Finally, the cultural connotation of Chenggong tile-cat also reflects the essence and values of national culture. As a type of mythical beast that inhabits homes, tile-cat carries a profound foundation of folk beliefs and cultural customs. In the Yunnan region, people believe that tile-cats can ward off evil and avoid filth, eliminate disasters, and pray for blessings. This belief and custom not only reflect people's longing and pursuit for a better life, but also reflect the core values and spiritual pursuit of national culture.

In summary, there is a close connection between Chenggong tile-cat and ethnic culture. As a carrier and symbol of ethnic culture, tile-cat embodies the integration and inheritance of ethnic culture. Its production process reflects the inheritance and innovation of ethnic culture, while its cultural connotation reflects the essence and values of ethnic culture. This kind of connection not only enriches the artistic form and cultural connotation of tile-cat, but also promotes cultural exchange and mutual understanding between different ethnic groups.

### 4. The Cultural Value of Tile-cat in Modern Society

In modern society, Chenggong tile-cat, as a unique folk art form, has important cultural value. Mainly manifested in the following aspects:

**(1) Carrying and inheriting historical and cultural heritage:** As a symbol and carrier of local culture, tile-cat's production process, image design, and symbolism all reflect the local historical culture and folk customs. In modern society, the tile-cat is not only a work of art, but also a witness to history. It carries rich historical and cultural information, and has important value in protecting and inheriting local traditional culture and folk skills, enhancing cultural awareness and confidence.

**(2) Enriching people's spiritual life:** The image of tile-cat is unique and has profound implications, such as attracting wealth and treasures, warding off evil spirits and exorcising ghosts, all of which are in line with modern people's pursuit of life and spiritual needs. People can enrich their spiritual life by appreciating tile-cats, experiencing the beauty of art and the charm of culture.

**(3) Promoting the development of cultural tourism:** As a unique cultural product in Yunnan region, tile-cat has strong regional and ethnic characteristics, and is of great value in attracting tourists and promoting the development of local cultural tourism. By showcasing and selling tile-cat, more people can understand and appreciate the cultural characteristics of Yunnan region, promote cultural exchange, and promote the prosperity of tourism industry.

**(4) Promoting folk art:** The production of tile-cats requires exquisite ceramic skills and rich artistic imagination, representing the wisdom and creativity of folk artists. In modern society, by promoting and inheriting the craftsmanship of making tile-cats, folk art can be promoted and the innovation and development of folk art can be promoted.

## 5. Conclusion

Through the analysis of the regional characteristics and ethnic cultural integration of Chenggong tile-cat, we can draw the following conclusions:

Firstly, as a unique folk art piece in Chenggong District, Kunming City, Yunnan Province, Chenggong tile-cat has significant regional characteristics. Whether it is its unique production techniques, artistic style, or cultural connotations, they are deeply rooted in this land and closely linked to the history, culture, and beliefs of that time. As a cultural symbol of Chenggong and even Yunnan region, tile-cat carries rich local culture and ethnic emotions, and has become an important component of local culture.

Secondly, Chenggong tile-cat has demonstrated unique charm in the integration of ethnic cultures. Yunnan, as a province with multi-ethnic settlements. The cultural exchange and integration between different ethnic groups have provided rich nutrients for the development of tile-cat. In the process of inheritance, tile-cat not only retained the traditional elements of Han culture, but also absorbed the unique elements of ethnic minority culture, forming a unique and unique artistic style. This cultural integration not only enriches the artistic connotation of tile-cat, but also makes this traditional art form more inclusive and vibrant.

Finally, the regional characteristics and cultural integration of Chenggong tile-cat provide important support for its protection and inheritance. As a cultural phenomenon with

regional and ethnic characteristics, Chenggong tile-cat has gained widespread recognition and attention for its unique artistic value and cultural significance. By strengthening the research and inheritance of its production technology, artistic style, cultural symbolism, and other aspects, we can enable more people to understand and recognize this unique folk art form, and promote it to shine with new brilliance and vitality in the new era.

In summary, the regional characteristics and cultural integration of Chenggong tile-cat make it a unique and charming cultural phenomenon. We should cherish this traditional art form, strengthen its protection and inheritance, and continue to play an important role in modern society, making positive contributions to enriching and developing the ethnic culture of Yunnan and even China.

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