

Research on the Innovative Design of Yunnan Intangible Cultural Heritage tile cat Image

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Abstract: Driven by the development of modern design and the need for the protection of intangible cultural heritage, the innovative application of the image of tile cat has become an important topic to promote the inheritance of national culture. Based on the traditional image of tile cat, this study analyzes its cultural symbolic meaning and artistic characteristics in Yunnan, and explores its application form and value in contemporary design. The main purpose of this study is to explore the innovative path of tile cat in modern art design by exploring the symbolic connotation and artistic style of tile cat, so as to promote the modern expression of national traditional art. The research methods include literature analysis, field research and image analysis, revealing the potential application value of tile cat shape in graphic design, cultural and creative products and public space decoration, and trying to find a concrete path suitable for the innovative design of tile cat image, and propose a design framework combined with current design trends. The study shows that the unique shape and cultural symbolism of tile cat are not only suitable for symbolic processing and artistic innovation, but also have strong market potential. Therefore, it is proposed to integrate the image of tile cat into modern design through design strategies such as element extraction, symbol transformation and scene application, which not only retains the national cultural characteristics but also meets the contemporary aesthetic needs. This study provides innovative ideas for the inheritance of Yunnan tile cats in modern art design, and puts forward practical suggestions for the inheritance and revitalization of national art in the contemporary environment, providing a reference for promoting the innovative development of China's traditional national culture.

Keywords: Tile cat; IP image design; intangible cultural heritage; tourist attractions.

1. Introduction

The tile cat, also known as the “Roof-Ridge Tiger,” is a unique architectural folk symbol from Yunnan, found extensively in regions such as Kunming, Chenggong, Yuxi, Qujing, Chuxiong, Dali, and Wenshan. For centuries, tile cats have stood silently on rooftops, enduring the ravages of time while guarding homes and beliefs, symbolizing protection against evil, disaster prevention, and blessings. Perched atop the ridges of buildings, these figures remain steadfast in their quiet watch over households and faith, embodying people's hopes for a good life and their reverence for the unknown. The tile cat merges elements of religious symbolism, architectural decoration, and folk art, capturing Yunnan's rich cultural heritage and offering a distinct form of artistic expression. With its lifelike design, profound symbolism, and prominent role in local customs, the tile cat holds high artistic value and remains a cherished emblem of folk culture in Yunnan.

The tile cat image holds significant potential for enhancing local tourism and cultural and creative industries. By innovatively redesigning the tile cat, it is possible to revitalize and expand contemporary expressions of Yunnan's ethnic art, providing new momentum for the cultural creative sector. Academic research on the tile cat can deepen understanding of Yunnan folk art and expand the possibilities for tile cat-inspired innovation in modern design. Such studies not only uncover the core value and cultural significance of the tile cat but also support a systematic exploration of related cultural symbols and historical heritage.

At present, the research on the intangible cultural heritage of Yunnan tile cats at home and abroad mainly focuses on the

historical origins and traditional significance of tile cats, production techniques and skills, artistic expression and style characteristics, as well as protection and inheritance. Li Rui's research analyzed the artistic uniqueness of Yunnan tile cats and their design application value. By exploring the expression of tile cat images in modern design, she thought about the contradiction and unity between ethnic folk art and modern art, and provided new insights for the inheritance and development direction of contemporary ethnic art [1]. Qian Fang et al. deeply analyzed the proportions, structure and exaggerated shapes of Yunnan tile cat culture and its plastic arts, showing the unique mysterious aesthetics and interest of tile cats [2]. Based on the artistic characteristics and cultural value of tile cats, combined with the development of regional cultural IP, Feng Qiyue summarized a living inheritance path that adapts to modern society [3].

2. Literature Review

At present, the research on the intangible cultural heritage of Yunnan tile cats at home and abroad mainly focuses on the historical origins and traditional significance of tile cats, production techniques and skills, artistic expression and style characteristics, as well as protection and inheritance. Li Rui's research analyzed the artistic uniqueness of Yunnan tile cats and their design application value. By exploring the expression of tile cat images in modern design, she thought about the contradiction and unity between ethnic folk art and modern art, and provided new insights for the inheritance and development direction of contemporary ethnic art [1]. Qian Fang et al. deeply analyzed the proportions, structure and exaggerated shapes of Yunnan tile cat culture and its plastic arts, showing the unique mysterious aesthetics and interest of

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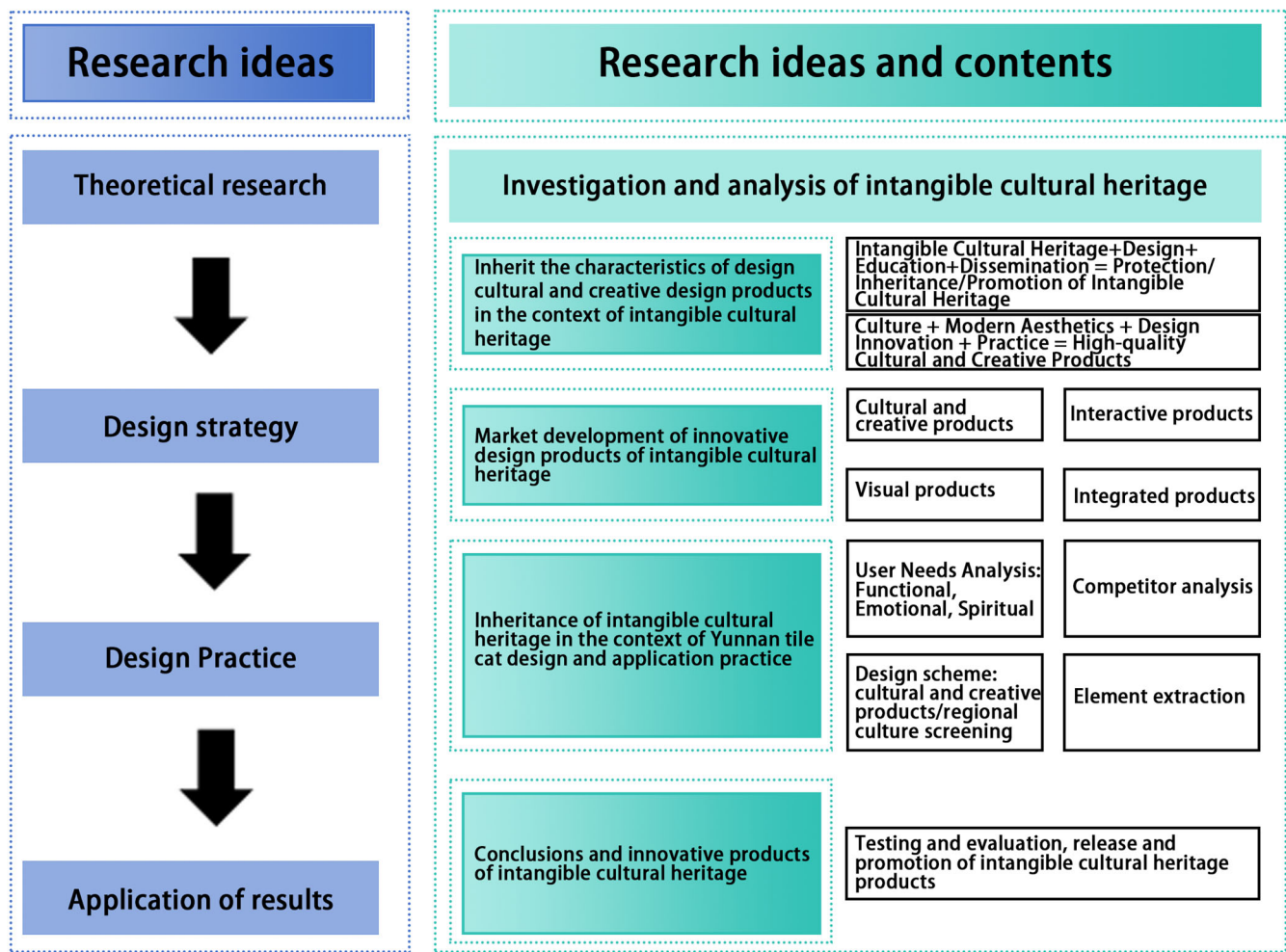


Figure 1. Overall framework of this research

In terms of the core concept and value extraction of the tile cat image, Sun Rui proposed a redesign method to make the image and values of the tile cat more widely accepted and recognized by the public[4]. Yin Yanhua applied the tile cat elements to modern design, and explored the possibility of integrating traditional art and modern design from the perspective of shape and aesthetic characteristics, providing reference for related fields [5]. In addition, Zhang Teng also interpreted the scientific composition principle of the tile cat, and through the analysis of its cultural connotation, revealed the unique strength of Yunnan's life spirit, and further clarified the significance of the tile cat cultural innovation[6].

In terms of the types of tile cats, Ma Jia compared the tile cats of Heqing and Binchuan, pointing out that the two have similarities in terms of production materials, firing sites and makers, but the Heqing tile cat is an exaggerated hollow shape, implying "receiving blessings" and "receiving good luck"; while the Binchuan tile cat is a realistic solid shape, rough and simple[7]. The Heqing tile cat is a unique folk ridge-guarding mythical beast in Yunnan. As a symbol of primitive religious

culture, it carries the Bai people's worship of primitive beliefs such as nature, souls, totems and witchcraft[8]. The early Heqing tile cat's mouth and head shape were respectively expressed as "tsuru fish mouth" and "single horn". With the complex evolution of the shape, the tiger shape of the Heqing tile cat is metaphorically expressed in the relationship between the dragon spine and the tile cat. The tiger type is a composite type that combines the characteristics of the shapes of the aoyu, xiezhi, tiger, ox, and snake. There are three main theoretical reasons for its origin. The first is the misleading name of "jiangjiyu", which generalizes the meaning of tiger. Tiger is the totem of the ancestors of the Bai nationality [9]. The image of Heqing tile cat products is divided into three styles: traditional, cartoon, and modern. The traditional type is mostly tile cat ornaments, while the cartoon type gives rich colors to the shape of the tile cat and adopts a cute style. It is often used in illustrations and packaging. The modern type extracts the unique characteristics of the tile cat and redesigns it to show the charm of the tile cat [8]. The common shapes of Yunnan tile cats are shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. The shape of the Yunnan tile cat (picture from the Internet)

These studies have jointly promoted the innovative application of tile cat intangible cultural heritage in modern design, and provided new paths and practical basis for the contemporary inheritance of national culture. This study mainly extracts the morphological characteristics of tile cats in Heqing, Yunnan, and conducts innovative design of IP images.

3. Design Practice

3.1. Feasibility Analysis

As living standards improve, people increasingly seek spiritual and cultural fulfillment, driving a rising demand for cultural and creative products. The Yunnan tile cat, a unique piece of Yunnan's folk heritage, embodies rich cultural significance and distinctive artistic value. As an integral part of the Bai and other ethnic cultures, it also stands as a representative of China's intangible cultural heritage.

On the market demand level, interest in traditional culture is rising, especially for cultural products that embody regional and ethnic characteristics. The tile cat, as a symbol rich in cultural meaning and artistic style, demonstrates substantial market potential. Through innovative design and brand-oriented operations, tile cat IP-based cultural and creative products could attract a broad consumer base. In terms of technological innovation, integrating tile cat's distinctive elements with modern technology could revitalize its cultural value in contemporary society, using this as a foundation for IP design that enhances public awareness of regional intangible heritage. Marketing efforts can leverage social media, e-commerce platforms, and new media formats like short videos and live streams to capture the interest of younger consumers effectively. However, developing tile cat IP products faces certain risks and challenges, such as maintaining product quality and authenticity, preventing

counterfeit items, and balancing the preservation of traditional culture with the need for innovation.

3.2. The tile cat IP image design

In the design process, it is essential to retain the original cultural significance and distinctive form of the tile cat, while extracting, adapting, and slightly transforming its design elements to better align with contemporary aesthetics. tile cats are generally either glazed or unglazed (displaying the natural color of the clay). The glazed versions are typically in Yunnan's characteristic green glaze, and the figures are crafted from yellow clay, molded into diverse postures—sitting or standing, with expressions that range from serene contemplation to intense focus. Their appearance is often endearingly stout and full of strength, giving them high visual recognizability. The color scheme frequently uses black and white contrasts, resonating with the rainy, humid climate of Yunnan and adding symbolic depth to the design.

In terms of color design, traditional Yunnan colors—such as blue, white, and red—are combined with modern palettes to enhance the tile cat's stylish appeal and visual impact. Digital technology expands the range of expressions for the tile cat IP across 2D, 3D, and animated formats, enabling broader applications in cultural products, animation, and social media emoji packs. The ultimate goal of this IP design is to transform the tile cat from a traditional folk symbol into an appealing cultural brand, fostering the dynamic preservation and innovative development of Yunnan's intangible heritage in contemporary society. For this project, the tile cat IP's color scheme focuses on a blue and white palette and incorporates local patterns, with creative updates in both shape and color. The “Meow Little Wa” IP character is shown in Figure 3, the emoji pack in Figure 4, and related product designs in Figure 5.



Figure 3. “Meow Little Wa” IP image design



Figure 4. “Meow Little Wa” emoticon package design

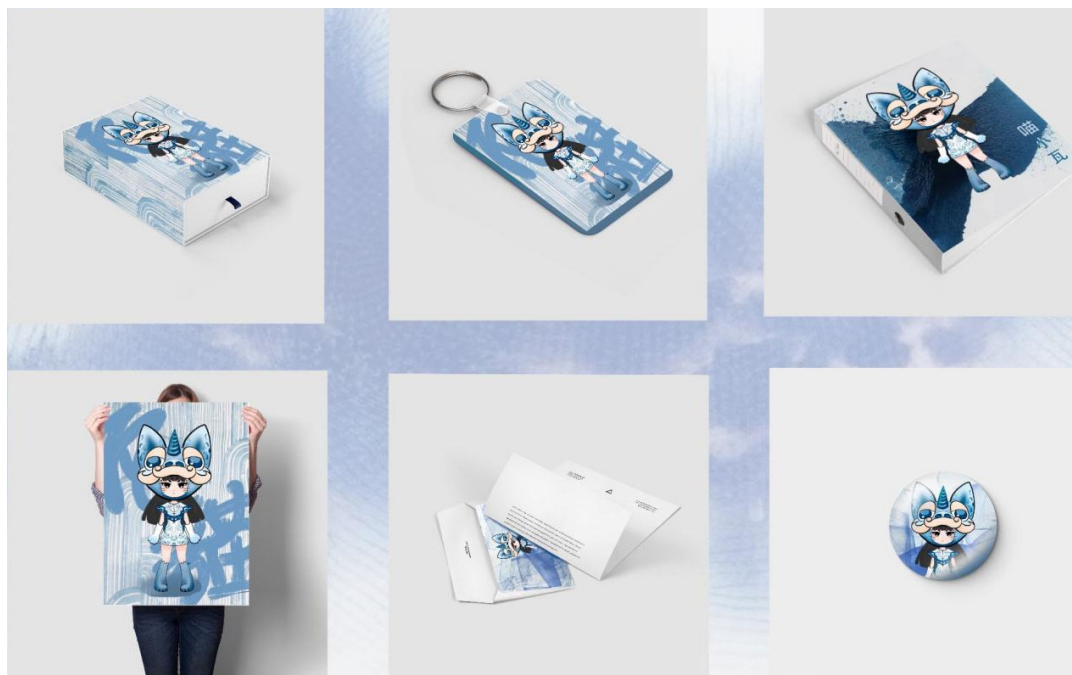


Figure 5. “Meow Little Wa” peripheral product design

4. Conclusion

In the context of cultural revival and upgraded consumption in today's society, the Yunnan intangible cultural heritage tile cat IP cultural and creative product project demonstrates high feasibility and significant market potential. As a unique cultural symbol of Yunnan, the tile cat's distinctive artistic style and historical value not only satisfy consumers' desire for traditional cultural elements but also offer an innovative medium for the dissemination of Yunnan's intangible heritage. By combining innovative design with digital technology, the tile cat IP can diversify its applications across various fields such as cultural products, fashion design, and digital media, thereby reaching a broader range of consumer groups.

In the future, the use of digital tools and new media formats, such as 3D modeling, AR/VR experiences, and animation design, will provide more vivid expressions of the tile cat image, enhancing its appeal among younger audiences. Additionally, a well-planned marketing strategy will further expand the reach of the tile cat IP. Promoting the products via social media, live streaming platforms, and e-commerce channels will not only increase brand recognition but also foster a stronger emotional connection with consumers. At the industry level, constructing a complete value chain from

design and production to sales, while ensuring the unity of quality and creativity, will lay a solid foundation for the long-term development of the tile cat IP.

However, the implementation of this project also faces several challenges and risks, such as how to maintain the cultural authenticity of the tile cat, how to avoid excessive commercialization that may dilute its cultural meaning, and how to address potential issues with counterfeit products and quality control in the market. To ensure the success of the project, collaboration and support from government, academia, and businesses are essential. Only through coordinated efforts from all parties can the tile cat IP cultural and creative products truly integrate their cultural and market value, paving new paths for the inheritance and innovative development of Yunnan's intangible heritage, while providing consumers with a richer and more diverse high-quality cultural experience.

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