

Feasibility Study on the Application of Paper-Cutting Art in the Design of Costume for Ethnic Minorities in Yunnan

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Abstract

Paper-cutting art is an important form that carries the profound historical culture and folk artistic charm of the Chinese nation. Ethnic minority costumes in Yunnan serve as a crucial carrier of diverse cultures, ethnic characteristics, and aesthetic values. This study systematically explores the historical and cultural background, craftsmanship, styles, and regional features of paper-cutting art and ethnic minority costumes through qualitative methods such as literature review, field investigation, case study, and in-depth interviews. The study reveals the current development status of both and analyzes the feasibility and necessity of applying paper-cutting art in the design of Yunnan ethnic minority costumes. The research indicates that the incorporation of paper-cutting art elements, by influencing design expression and cultural symbols, can enrich the aesthetic connotations of Yunnan ethnic minority costumes, enhancing their ethnic characteristics and aesthetic value. The application of paper-cutting art in the design of Yunnan ethnic minority costumes shows significant potential.

Keywords: Paper-Cutting Art, Yunnan Ethnic Minority Costumes, Design, Application

1. Introduction

Yunnan paper-cutting art is an important form of expression within traditional Chinese culture, with a history spanning several centuries. Paper-cutting is not only a decorative art but also a folk craft with profound cultural significance. In the field of costume design, paper-cutting serves as a powerful medium for conveying cultural narratives and symbolic meanings. With the rapid pace of modernization and the exponential growth of global fashion, many traditional art forms, including paper-cutting, are at risk of being neglected or even disappearing. In ethnic minority costume design, the gap between traditional culture and modern design

aesthetics is widening. The current challenge lies in how to create designs that remain true to their cultural roots while appealing to modern consumers.

In recent years, there has been growing interest in incorporating traditional Chinese art forms, such as paper-cutting, into contemporary fashion. However, the application of Yunnan paper-cutting in ethnic minority costume design remains limited in both scope and depth. While many design attempts have used paper-cutting elements, they often serve merely as superficial decoration without a deeper understanding or application of their cultural meaning. In modern society, the integration of paper-cutting art with ethnic costumes faces challenges related to inheritance and development, the dilution of cultural connotations, the disconnection between functionality and modern design needs, and a lack of effective integration with modern design trends and innovative approaches.

The further innovation and deeper integration of Yunnan paper-cutting in contemporary ethnic costume design still holds great potential. This research aims to promote the inheritance and preservation of traditional culture, foster innovation in cultural design, stimulate economic and market development, advance education and research, and enhance social and cultural exchange and integration.

Research Objective

Based on an in-depth study of the history, materials, craftsmanship, regional characteristics, functions, and symbolic meanings of paper-cutting art and ethnic minority costumes, this research explores how paper-cutting art elements can enrich the aesthetic connotations of Yunnan ethnic minority costumes, enhance their aesthetic value, and demonstrate the possibility and necessity of cultural inheritance.

2. Literature Review

1. Yunnan Paper-Cutting Art

1.1 Regional Characteristics of Yunnan Paper-Cutting Art

Among the 26 ethnic groups in Yunnan, paper-cutting traditions are found in the Han, Bai, Yi, Naxi, Dai, Miao, Mongolian, Achang, De'ang, Blang, and Wa groups. The paper-cutting art of these ethnic groups serves various purposes: some are used for religious beliefs and ceremonial customs, displayed in temples for ornamental purposes, while others are primarily used for decorative patterns on costumes, showcasing vibrant embroidery designs. Due to the diverse cultures of these ethnic groups, the forms and styles of their paper-cutting art vary significantly (Zhao, 2004).

Yunnan is located in the southwestern border of China, with a complex and diverse geographical environment that has fostered a rich array of ethnic cultures. Yunnan paper-cutting art is deeply influenced by the local ethnic cultures, displaying distinct regional

characteristics. For instance, the paper-cutting works of Yunnan's ethnic minorities often feature strong national flavors and religious elements, with themes such as the Dai people's Water-Splashing Festival and the Yi people's Torch Festival. The region's location on the plateau, mild climate, and rich plant and animal resources are also reflected in the paper-cutting works. Common floral patterns, such as rhododendrons and orchids, appear frequently in the designs. These flowers not only hold ornamental value but also carry profound cultural meanings.

Figure 1: Dai paper-cut peacock spreading its tail Figure 2: Yi paper-cut happiness & contentment



Source: bilibili



Source: www.puchedu.cn

1.2 The Folk Function and Symbolic Meaning of Yunnan Paper-Cutting Art

Yunnan paper-cutting art is deeply integrated into the daily lives and rituals of local ethnic minorities, playing a dual role in both practical application and symbolic meaning. These paper-cuttings are often used in various ceremonies, festivals, and daily activities. The patterns they feature are not merely decorative; they carry specific meanings related to local customs, beliefs, and values. For example, paper-cutting is commonly used in rituals to seek blessings, ward off evil spirits, or ensure good luck. This practicality also extends to the strengthening of social bonds within communities through the creation and use of these artistic forms, thereby supporting the continuity of cultural traditions (Jiang & Zhao, 2010).

The symbolic meanings of Yunnan paper-cutting art are wide-ranging and diverse, often reflecting the spiritual beliefs and philosophical concepts of local ethnic minorities. Common symbolic patterns include dragons, birds, and plants, each representing different cultural beliefs such as totem worship, fertility, protection, and harmony. For example, in many ethnic groups' paper-cutting works, the image of the dragon may not be as refined as in imperial culture but is more abstract, symbolizing natural primal forces and protective functions. These symbolic patterns are deeply rooted in local folklore, with each design carrying narratives that reflect community values and worldviews.

1.3 Paper-Cutting Craftsmanship**

Yunnan paper-cutting craftsmanship has made positive explorations in both inheritance and innovation. Many paper-cutting artisans pass down their skills through family and master-apprentice relationships. At the same time, modern paper-cutting art continues to innovate,

constantly incorporating new elements and techniques to meet the aesthetic demands of contemporary audiences.

2. Yunnan Ethnic Minority Costumes

2.1 Types and Functions of Yunnan Ethnic Minority Costumes: Yunnan ethnic minority costumes can be broadly categorized into daily wear, wedding attire, festive clothing, and funeral garments. Each type of costume has its own unique ethnic characteristics in both form and function. Daily wear emphasizes practicality, ceremonial costumes embody religious and cultural symbolism, wedding attire expresses happiness and well-wishes, festive costumes are filled with celebration and ethnic identity, while funeral garments reflect the ethnic group's unique understanding of life and death.

Figure 3: Typical costumes of the Yi, Dai and Bai ethnic groups in Yunnan



Source: Author

2.2 Costume Styles: Yunnan ethnic minority costumes are diverse and rich in style, each with its own distinctive features. The costumes of the Zhuang, Yi, Dai, Bai, Lisu, and Miao ethnic groups, among others, not only reflect the aesthetic pursuits of each group but also carry rich cultural connotations (Guo, 2021). These costumes hold significant value for modern design, offering meaningful references and application potential (Ai, 2019).

2.3 Dyeing Techniques in Ethnic Minority Costumes: A common characteristic among the dyeing methods used in Yunnan ethnic minority costumes is the traditional use of natural plant-based and mineral dyes, such as indigo, safflower, and yellow gardenia. These dyes not only produce vivid colors but are also eco-friendly and resistant to fading. The use of these traditional fabrics and dyes reflects not only the wisdom and aesthetic pursuits of Yunnan's ethnic minorities but also their respect for and dependence on nature and the environment.

2.4 Cultural Symbols in Yunnan Ethnic Minority Costume Design: In Yunnan, where multiple ethnic groups coexist, clothing is not only a functional item for warmth and protection but also a symbolic representation of deep cultural heritage and artistic value. Cultural symbols in clothing serve not only as expressions of aesthetics but also as carriers of ethnic identity, social status, and historical memory. The use of symbols elevates clothing beyond mere functionality, turning it into a significant medium for conveying ethnic spirit and transmitting cultural

values. In the design of Yunnan ethnic minority costumes, these symbols are often expressed through patterns, colors, embellishments, and styles, each playing a specific symbolic role in different contexts.

2.5 Challenges and Difficulties Faced by Yunnan Ethnic Minority Costumes: According to a study by Sun Ting, the transmission of Naxi ethnic costumes in Lijiang has faced significant challenges due to the impact of the tourism industry and the influx of external cultures (Sun, 2022). In the context of globalization and modernization, Bai ethnic costumes are also encountering conflicts between tradition and modernity, and between local and external cultures. On one hand, Bai costumes need to maintain traditional cultural features while adapting to the needs and aesthetics of modern society. On the other hand, the transmission and recognition of Bai costumes require innovation and fusion while respecting and protecting ethnic culture (Zang, 2021). The Dai ethnic costume culture, as an important ethnic cultural resource along the Southern Silk Road Economic Belt, faces challenges due to economic transformation and cultural discontinuity. Problems in the transmission of Dai costume culture include a lack of transmission motivation, unclear transmission mechanisms, and inadequate teaching standards (Li, 2022). In a study by Li Dan, it was emphasized that protecting and inheriting the Miao ethnic costume patterns is not only a respect for ethnic culture but also an important contribution to maintaining cultural diversity (Li, 2006). Almost all studies have mentioned the difficulties and challenges faced by the inheritance and innovation of ethnic costumes. The need for inheritance protection and innovation of Yunnan ethnic minority traditional costumes has become urgent and important (Shu & Chen, 2024).

3. Methodology

This study focuses on the historical background and development status of paper-cutting art and Yunnan ethnic minority costumes. It employs qualitative research methods, including literature review, field investigation, and in-depth interviews, to explore the feasibility and necessity of applying paper-cutting art in the design of Yunnan ethnic minority costumes. The researchers used the following methods and tools to collect data and conduct qualitative analysis:

1. Literature Review

This study systematically reviews the historical background, types, materials, production processes, and development status of paper-cutting art and the traditional costumes of ethnic minorities in Yunnan Province. It aims to lay a historical and theoretical foundation for this research. Additionally, related literature on ethnic costume design has been gathered to support the innovative design of paper-cutting art in Yunnan's ethnic minority costumes.

2. Field Investigation

The researchers conducted field studies in traditional paper-cutting art areas within ethnic minority settlements in Yunnan Province. These regions are primarily concentrated in the autonomous prefectures of Chuxiong, Dali, Xishuangbanna, Lijiang, and Wenshan, covering typical ethnic villages, as well as places where ethnic costumes are produced and sold. These visits provided firsthand information on the creators' design concepts, production techniques, and the cultural significance behind the crafting processes. Additionally, the study explored the impact of incorporating paper-cutting art into ethnic costumes on consumer experiences and the transmission of cultural content through products.

3. Case Study

The collection and analysis of innovative design cases involving the application of paper-cutting art in costume design.

4. In-depth Interviews


In-depth interviews were conducted with inheritors, producers, and stakeholders involved in paper-cutting art and ethnic costumes.





4. Results

1. Composition Features of Yunnan Paper-Cutting Art

Yunnan paper-cutting works exhibit distinctive ethnic styles, rich regional characteristics, vibrant spirit, and high aesthetic value. Paper-cutting is popular among various ethnic groups in Yunnan, with each group having its own unique style. Notable examples include the Naxi, Dai, Miao, Yi, and Bai paper-cuttings. These works reflect lifestyles of different ethnic groups and local flavors. The patterns in Yunnan paper-cutting are largely influenced by local customs, thus forming a unique style that combines folk traditions. The pattern design of Yunnan paper-cutting also emphasizes rhythm and balance, with careful attention to symmetry and proportion, giving entire work a sense of rhythm and aesthetic harmony.

Table 1: Patterns and line features of Yunnan paper-cutting

Ethnic	Typical patterns	Other patterns	Pattern characteristics	Line characteristics	Typical Cases
Naxi	Fushouhua	Fireworks, lanterns, window decorations, ceiling decorations	Is themed on happiness and longevity, and the cutting technique is neat and symmetrical. It is a branch of paper-cutting with auspicious patterns.	It is mostly made by various overlapping cutting methods, with strong regularity, more positive patterns and fewer negative patterns, focusing on decorative interest, common arcs, and attention to coordination.	

Dai	Buddha statues, pagodas, temples, bodhisattvas, gods, bodhi trees	Elephants, peacocks, cattle, sheep, banana trees, coconut trees, etc., show the subtropical natural scenery.	Umbrella flowers, wall flowers, hanging lamps, hanging towers, Buddhist banners, and Buddhist niche flowers are the most common	The lines are delicate and smooth, and the composition is complex and exquisite	
Miao	Human head and butterfly body	Jiang Yang Creates Human Beings	Reflecting the creation myth and legends of human origin, primitive witchcraft rituals, and belief in multiple gods	The lines are simple and smooth, yet delicate and exquisite, showing the unique artistic style and aesthetic taste of the Miao people.	
Yi	Camellia japonica, camellia	Fire pattern, sun pattern, fire heart pattern, rooster pattern, dragon and wind pattern	Pay attention to the integrity and rhythm of the composition, and mostly combine practicality and aesthetics	The thickness is staggered, the straightness is orderly, and often forms an independent picture, which pays great attention to the integrity and rhythm of the composition.	
Bai	Plants, Animals, People	Flowers, fruits, camellia, bees, butterflies	Plant and animal patterns are often paired, one moving and one still, to reflect the principle of "one yin and one yang is the way".	The lines are connected, solid and smooth, showing the exquisite and delicate artistic characteristics.	

Source: Author

2. Techniques and Artistic Methods of Paper-Cutting

The traditional techniques of Yunnan paper-cutting mainly include cutting, engraving, perforating, and layering. Cutting is the most basic technique, where scissors are used to cut out various patterns and figures from paper. Engraving requires the use of knives to carve detailed lines and textures, suitable for expressing intricate designs and details. Perforation, which combines cutting and engraving, creates a hollow effect, adding depth and three-dimensionality to the work (Chen, 2023). Layering involves stacking different colors of paper to create rich colors and patterns through varying layers. These traditional techniques require exceptional craftsmanship and patience, representing the accumulated wisdom and experience of paper-cutting artists over time. These techniques enable artists to create diverse and exquisitely beautiful paper-cutting works, demonstrating the unique charm and cultural value of Yunnan's paper-cutting art.

The artistic methods used in Yunnan paper-cutting are diverse, based on the creator's intentions and style preferences. These include positive carving, negative carving, a combination of both, multicolor cutting, filled color cutting, woodprint cutting, and spray-painted cutting.

Table 2: Expression techniques of Yunnan paper-cutting

Classification	Technique	Characteristics	Presentation effect
Paper cutting	Cut out the parts outside the pattern and keep the original points, lines and surfaces of the pattern	Delicate and exquisite	Exquisite craftsmanship and smooth lines give people a delicate and elegant feeling
Intaglio Paper Cutting	Cut out the pattern itself, leaving only the part outside the pattern, and use the backing paper to highlight the content of the pattern.	The lines are not necessarily connected, and the work as a whole appears blocky	heavy, deep
Yin and Yang paper cutting	First, use positive carving to cut out the outline of the main pattern, and then use negative carving to trim the decoration. Sometimes positive and negative carving are used in parallel.	There are negative carvings in positive carvings and positive carvings in negative carvings, making the works complement each other.	richer and more layered
Color paper cutting	Mainly using positive engraving, large areas are hollowed out to leave room for coloring	Colored paper blocks are pasted on the back of the work. They are usually cut from black or gold paper. Different colors are pasted according to skin color, clothing, utensils, flowers and trees, etc.	Through color matching and collage, the color effect and layering of the work are enhanced
Coloring Paper Cutting	When coloring, use the pen drawing method to paint the color within the line outline	The flat painting effect is similar to the color paper cutting, but the technique is different	More vivid and colorful
Woodblock Printing Paper Cutting	After woodblock printing, engraving or dyeing is performed. Use an airbrush to spray the color on the backing paper or mounted paper cutting.	A form of paper cutting that combines printing and cutting	With the style of woodblock New Year paintings
Inkjet paper cutting	After woodblock printing, engraving or dyeing is performed. Use an airbrush to spray the color on the backing paper or mounted paper cutting.	The lines are rich in color and expressive	Delicate and layered artistic effect

Source: Author

3. Patterns and Styles of Yunnan's Ethnic Minority Costumes

Typical examples of Yunnan's ethnic minority costumes include those of the Bai, Yi, Dai, Miao, and Naxi peoples. The costume patterns of these ethnic groups are rich and distinctive, reflecting the unique cultural meanings of each group and their understanding of nature, society, and life.

In terms of fabric selection, Yunnan's ethnic costumes commonly use natural fibers such as cotton, hemp, and silk. These materials are not only comfortable and durable but also suitable for the diverse climates of Yunnan.

Table 3: Patterns and fabrics of clothing of ethnic minorities in Yunnan

Ethnic	Pattern	Color Matching	Fabrics
Yi	Mainly animals, plants and geometric patterns	The color contrast is strong, mainly black, but also likes the combination of red, yellow and other colors	Sheepskin, wool, felt, hemp, fireweed as raw materials
Bai	Plant patterns, animal patterns, natural scenes, geometric patterns	White is the most commonly used color in Bai ethnic group's clothing culture.	Cotton and linen
Miao	Geometric, animal, plant and other patterns	The color tones are red and black. Red is a warm color that represents light. Black is a cool color that represents darkness.	Cotton, linen, silk, leather
Dai	Flora and faunal motifs, geometric patterns and religious motifs.	Bright and lively, mainly red, yellow, green, blue, etc.	Cotton and Silk
Naxi	Frog Totem, Sheepskin	Mainly black	Cotton, linen and silk

Source: Author

4. Application of Paper-Cutting Art in Costume Design

According to the research, paper-cutting art, with its unique patterns and techniques, has been cleverly incorporated into modern costume design, enriching contemporary fashion with cultural significance and visual beauty, showcasing the perfect blend of tradition and modernity.

4.1 Transformation and Application of Paper-Cutting Patterns: When paper-cutting patterns are applied to costume design, they often undergo a series of adjustments, such as scaling, combining, and transforming. For example, traditional auspicious paper-cutting patterns such as the "Fu" character, "Xi" character, and "Double Happiness" symbol can be resized and adapted into embroidery or printed patterns to decorate the collar, cuffs, or hem of garments. This transformation not only preserves the traditional beauty of paper-cutting but also gives the design a personalized touch. Additionally, animal and plant patterns, such as fish, birds, and flowers, can be transformed into continuous or abstract patterns through appropriate modifications and systematic combinations. These can then be applied to larger areas of costumes, such as the skirt hem of a cheongsam or the back of traditional ethnic costumes. Through innovative design and combinations, more complex and enriched visual effects are achieved.

4.2 Material Selection and Craftsmanship in Paper-Cutting Art for Costume Design: The choice of materials and the realization of craftsmanship are key to the successful application of paper-cutting art in costume design. By selecting suitable materials such as chiffon, lace, and silk, designers can better showcase the lines and layers of paper-cutting patterns.

Furthermore, modern techniques such as laser cutting, digital embroidery, and 3D printing have introduced new vitality to paper-cutting art in costume design. These modern technologies combine traditional culture with contemporary innovation, demonstrating how paper-cutting art can be widely applied in costume design while enhancing its cultural value and aesthetic significance.

5. Protection and Innovation of Paper-Cutting Art and Yunnan's Ethnic Minority Costumes

Through the research, it was found that the protection, inheritance, and innovative development of paper-cutting art are crucial and urgent. As an important part of Chinese traditional handicrafts, paper-cutting art carries rich historical and cultural information, as well as ethnic sentiments. It serves as a bridge connecting the past with the present and is a crucial medium for expressing ethnic cultural confidence. At present, paper-cutting art faces challenges such as skill loss, shrinking markets, and weakened cultural identity, necessitating effective measures for its protection and inheritance. Protecting paper-cutting art means safeguarding this invaluable intangible cultural heritage, preventing it from gradually disappearing due to changing times, and ensuring that future generations can continue to appreciate its unique charm (Li & Xiao, 2023).

Similarly, Yunnan's ethnic costumes, as an essential treasure of Chinese ethnic diversity, are also facing unprecedented challenges. On one hand, the acceleration of modernization has led to the risk of losing traditional costume-making skills, as many complex handicrafts, such as embroidery and weaving, are being replaced by machine production. This has caused the unique features and cultural meanings of these costumes to fade. On the other hand, the phenomenon of cultural homogenization is becoming more pronounced due to ethnic integration, and the impact of modern lifestyles and aesthetics is gradually marginalizing, and in some cases, even erasing, the traditional styles of ethnic costumes. This poses a severe threat to the maintenance of ethnic cultural diversity and uniqueness. Furthermore, the younger generation's diminishing interest in traditional culture, as they lean more towards modern fashion trends, has led to a gradual loss of awareness and recognition of traditional costumes, further intensifying the transmission crisis.

Therefore, taking effective measures to protect and pass on Yunnan's ethnic minority costumes is not only a matter of respecting and safeguarding ethnic culture but also a contribution to cultural diversity. This will help protect national cultural security, promote ethnic unity, and foster social harmony.

Innovation, based on respect for tradition, involves improving and transforming ethnic costumes by incorporating aesthetic preferences, technological methods, and market demands. This ensures that the traditional flavor is preserved while meeting the aesthetic and lifestyle needs of modern people. At present, paper-cutting art is only being applied in modern costume design, where it has achieved certain success. The application of paper-cutting art in the design of Yunnan's ethnic minority costumes is undoubtedly an innovation. This not only expands the

application field of paper-cutting but also enhances its economic value. More importantly, it breathes new life into ethnic costumes, making them shine in the modern world.

5. Conclusion

1. Unique Characteristics of Yunnan Paper-Cutting Art

Yunnan paper-cutting art is a treasure of Chinese folk art, renowned for its unique regional characteristics and ethnic styles. It combines the aesthetic tastes and cultural connotations of multiple ethnic groups, showcasing a rich diversity of patterns and themes. In Yunnan, the delicate and exquisite paper-cuttings of the Dai people, the graceful and dynamic designs of the Bai people, and the ethnic features of the Yi people all reflect the infinite charm and profound cultural heritage of this art form. These paper-cutting works not only serve a decorative function but also play a crucial role as carriers of cultural inheritance for various ethnic groups, reflecting the people of Yunnan's aspirations and pursuit of a better life.

2. Yunnan's Ethnic Minority Costumes Fully Exhibit Unique Culture and Aesthetics

The costumes of Yunnan's ethnic minorities are vibrant and diverse, each with its distinct features. They fully demonstrate the unique culture and aesthetics of each ethnic group. These costumes often use natural materials and are intricately hand-embroidered with beautiful patterns, characterized by vivid colors and a sense of layering. They not only reflect the ethnic flavor but also carry deep historical and cultural significance and social functions, making them an important symbol of Yunnan's multicultural identity.

3. Potential of Applying Paper-Cutting Art to Yunnan's Ethnic Minority Costume Design

The application of paper-cutting art in modern costume design has already achieved some success. Designers have combined paper-cutting with modern fashion concepts to create many creative and ethnically distinctive garments. These works not only have decorative value but also express the wearer's personality and cultural depth.

The application of paper-cutting art in Yunnan's ethnic minority costume design holds great potential. The rich patterns and exquisite craftsmanship of paper-cutting complement the traditional aesthetics of ethnic costumes, enhancing both their cultural flavor and visual appeal. At the same time, the flexibility and innovation inherent in paper-cutting art provide limitless inspiration for the design of Yunnan's ethnic minority costumes, contributing to the inheritance and innovative development of ethnic costume culture. For both paper-cutting art and Yunnan's ethnic minority costumes, integrating paper-cutting into costume design is a win-win situation.

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