

# Visual Symbols of Yunnan Ethnic Minorities in Digital Illustration Design

Shoulei Xu<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Yunnan College of Business Management, Kunming, Yunnan 650106, China

## ABSTRACT

In the ethnic minority areas of Yunnan, due to the influence of multiple factors such as historical evolution, geographical location, religious beliefs, and social changes, a unique visual symbol language has been formed. This language is the external expression of the working people's aesthetic cognition, value orientation, and ideology. Studying and interpreting their cultural connotations and spiritual civilization is also necessary. It is also an essential source for its inheritance, application, and development. Therefore, through in-depth research on the pattern elements of Yunnan's ethnic minorities, comprehensive analysis from different aspects, and the integration of digital illustration design technology, its design thinking and methods are integrated with the ethnic symbols in contemporary design, thus creating a unique design and cultural characteristics.

**Keywords:** *Yunnan ethnic minority patterns, Digital illustration design, Cultural heritage, Visual symbols.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Yunnan is a province with brilliant and diverse cultural and artistic forms and has 25 ethnic minorities. This article aims to explore the use of visual symbol elements of Yunnan ethnic minorities in digital illustration design to interpret the combination of tradition, modernity, and design techniques. At the same time, this article will use the principles of design, semiotics, aesthetics and anthropology to deeply analyze the relationship between ethnic minority traditional culture and modern design.

## 2. ANALYSIS OF VISUAL SYMBOL ELEMENTS OF ETHNIC MINORITIES IN YUNNAN

Yunnan Province has 25 ethnic minorities, each with its unique pattern element set and artistic creation techniques. These pattern elements are regarded as the concentrated expression of ethnic culture and characteristics, forming their cultural codes. These pattern sets include representative materials, images, traditional craft expression techniques, colours and text language. By studying the rich and colourful ethnic pattern element sets[1],

representative artistic expression techniques can be extracted. In digital illustration design, three factors need to be considered: the composition of Yunnan ethnic minority pattern elements, the extraction principles of Yunnan ethnic minority visual symbol elements, and the application of Yunnan ethnic minority symbol elements in digital illustration technology.

### 2.1 Pattern Elements Composition

The pattern elements of Yunnan's ethnic minorities are famous for their unique composition forms and characteristics. The decorative patterns of the Yi people are mainly geometric shapes, such as triangles, rhombuses, and squares, with clear boundaries and symmetry. These patterns are often used to decorate clothing, headdresses and accessories, wood carvings and murals on buildings. The decorative patterns of the Dai people are mainly natural elements such as wavy lines, flowers, animals and plants, showing smooth curves and delicate details. The Bai people's decorative patterns focus on using lines and dot elements to form complex and delicate geometric patterns. The decorative patterns of the Hani people are based on natural and life scenes such as landscapes, flowers,

birds, and figures, and express details and layers through changes in lines and colours.

## 2.2 Color Elements

The many ethnic groups living in Yunnan often have their unique conventions on colours and convey corresponding information through colours. Due to the similarities in their living environments and the differences in their cultures, the same colour symbol element may have different interpretations among different ethnic groups, which have both commonalities and individuality. For example, the Naxi people worship black. In the Naxi culture, black is considered sacred and auspicious, representing power, mystery and solemnity ("Figure 1"). The Naxi people believe that blacks can drive away evil and protect their families and communities from bad influences. Therefore, the Naxi people often use black decorations and clothing in their daily life and traditional rituals to express their reverence and belief in black. This cultural characteristic of worshipping black often makes black elements appear in the art and handicrafts of the Naxi people, adding a unique charm to their culture and art. The Dai people mostly like water red, light yellow, light green, and sky blue; the Dong people like earth red, date red, purple red, yellow and green; the Qiang people are good at using cyan and white as headscarves.



Figure 1 Naxi nationality.

a Drawn by Guo Kaixiang.

This diversity and difference make the colour elements of Yunnan's ethnic minorities have rich cultural connotations and unique expressions. In digital illustration design, designers need to understand and respect the understanding and preferences of different ethnic groups on colours in

order to convey their cultural significance accurately. By using the correct colour elements, designers can create works with depth and emotional resonance while showing the diversity and unique charm of Yunnan's ethnic minority culture.

## 2.3 Themes and Decorative Symbol Elements

The pattern styles of many ethnic minorities are derived from daily life, showing diverse forms and a wide range of themes. Taking the Yi culture as an example, its common themes include geometric figures, flowers and plants, birds and beasts, religious beliefs and ethnic totems. Totem animals such as dragons, unicorns, and deer often appear in the Yi people's decorations. These totems symbolize strength, auspiciousness and blessings ("Figure 2"). The culture of the Naxi people also has rich and diverse themes and decorative symbol elements. Its creative inspiration often comes from flowers, birds, mountains and rivers in nature, forming romantic and poetic decorations. For example, lotus, peony, peacock and other patterns are often seen in the decorations of the Naxi people. These patterns imply purity, wealth and auspiciousness.

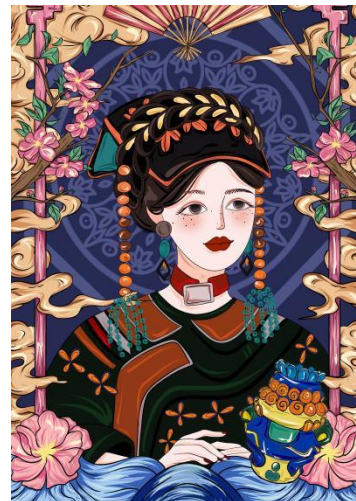


Figure 2 Yi nationality.

a Drawn by Guo Kaixiang

These symbolic patterns reflect the ethnic minorities' love for nature and their close connection with the environment, as well as for life and the pursuit of beautiful things. In the field of digital illustration design, designers can skillfully use the themes and decorative symbol elements of

the Yi and Naxi ethnic groups to create works with visual impact and cultural connotations.

### **3. PRINCIPLES FOR EXTRACTING VISUAL SYMBOL ELEMENTS OF YUNNAN'S ETHNIC MINORITIES**

During historical evolution, ethnic styles have shown the characteristics of continuous change. However, this change is mainly reflected in the external form, and its essence is relatively stable [2]. Therefore, when extracting ethnic elements, designers must think deeply about their origins. Modernizing traditional graphics is not a simple grafting or copying but giving them a new contemporary meaning [3]. When applying ethnic elements, they are mainly expressed through three aspects: shape, colour and material. These three expression methods are both independent and mutually infiltrated. The expression of ethnic shapes needs to consider the use of ethnic colours and the requirements of ethnic materials; when displaying ethnic colours, it needs to be controlled within the range of ethnic materials, and the materials must also meet the corresponding requirements; and the expression of ethnic materials needs to meet the needs of ethnic shapes, and the colours of the materials also need to be coordinated with each other. Ethnic shapes are the main line, and colours and materials must be adjusted and standardized according to different ethnic styles. After clarifying the design style, the design of ethnic furniture needs to achieve a unified and coordinated effect in terms of colour and material.

#### **3.1 Modeling**

The essence of graphic elements is the artistic accumulation of people's emotions towards the objects they worship during historical development. The creation of these graphics is the crystallization of wisdom created by the hard work and long-term struggle of primitive ethnic minorities. Therefore, when using graphic elements in digital illustration design, it is necessary to consider the unity of symmetry, balance, neatness, obvious contrast, coordinated proportion, rhythm and rhyme, diversity and pluralism. Only by mastering these laws of formal beauty can designers lead people to discover beauty and create unique works. Improving artistic taste and cultivating aesthetic levels can enhance people's sensitivity to beauty. Through the visual perception of the structural beauty and rhythmic beauty of artistic graphics,

people can fundamentally master the objective evaluation criteria of formal art, thereby stimulating the inner impulse for beauty.

In digital illustration design, graphic elements can be used as a display model, but the key lies in expressing their unique beauty through modern design techniques. There is a must to appreciate the pure pattern art, depict the ethnic sentiments of the time and place as much as possible, and bring us into the most realistic realm [4]. For the ethnic style of Yunnan's ethnic minorities, it is necessary to interpret it deeply in order to design digital illustrations that are widely applicable and unique to ethnic minorities.

#### **3.2 Color**

When applying graphic elements to objects of different fabrics and textures, the harmony of tones and textures is essential to achieve visual harmony and unity. When displaying the wall decoration of Tibetan costumes in digital illustration design, multiple graphics of a single colour can be directly expressed in a hand-painted manner. Through digital illustration technology, designers can accurately control the changes in colour brightness to create a rhythm in the graphic hierarchy. At the same time, using the texture effect of illustration tools, designers can simulate the texture of clothing and patterns, adding visual realism and richness.

In digital illustration design, various graphic elements can be used to show the beauty and uniqueness of Tibetan costumes. For example, draw Tibetan-style patterns, embroidery and decorative elements, such as traditional Tibetan patterns, dragons, deer, lotus, peony, and peacock. Dynamic and vivid decoration can be created through clever graphic arrangement and layout. Following the above design principles, combined with the technology and creativity of digital illustration, designers can create a charming Tibetan costume wall decoration, showing its beauty and uniqueness while maintaining an elegant and humorous style.

#### **3.3 Materials**

The matching of different materials is the different elements contained in the materials [5]. In digital painting design, selecting and applying materials are crucial to creating satisfactory decorative paintings. As an external form of artistic expression, the texture, tone, texture, grain, and decorative graphics of materials will affect decorative paintings' style and visual effect.

Designers can create diversity in decorative paintings by drawing the visual effects of different materials. By using changes in colour and texture, the appearance of wood, stone, and metal can be simulated, adding a sense of reality and layering to decorative paintings. In addition, the colour tone of the material is also an essential factor that needs to be considered in digital painting design. Different materials have different colour characteristics. Harmony and unity can be created in decorative paintings by reasonably selecting and matching colours ("Figure 3").



Figure 3 Zang nationality.

a Drawn by Guo Kaixiang

#### 4. APPLICATION OF YUNNAN ETHNIC MINORITY SYMBOL ELEMENTS IN DIGITAL ILLUSTRATION TECHNOLOGY

Digital illustrations play an essential role in modern art design, while ethnic minority visual symbols are an important part of China's excellent traditional culture and have unique artistic value. Integrating digital illustrations with traditional folk culture can enrich the visual symbol elements and cultural connotations of digital illustrations and contribute to the inheritance and development of traditional folk culture.

In digital illustration design, incorporating visual elements such as architecture and clothing that are visual symbols of Yunnan's ethnic minorities can reflect the unique charm of Yunnan's local culture. For example, adding traditional patterns of Dali Bai's gable impressions can create a unique cultural atmosphere. In addition to architecture with local characteristics, elements such as clothing, food, and crafts in Yunnan's local

culture can also be applied to digital illustration design. By using beautiful colours and patterns to express traditional Bai embroidery, tie-dyeing and other crafts, the beauty of Yunnan culture can be transformed into an unforgettable visual image.

The application of visual symbol elements of Yunnan's ethnic minorities can also be approached from the perspective of history and traditional culture. Through the form of time series, Yunnan's historical evolution and cultural characteristics can be presented individually. In digital illustration design, the application of visual symbol elements of Yunnan's ethnic minorities is diverse. Through clever arrangement and expression, the connotation of Yunnan culture can be fully demonstrated. The application of visual symbol elements of Yunnan's ethnic minorities can inject more abundant cultural elements into digital illustration design, making it more three-dimensional and vivid.

Digital illustration design incorporates visual symbol elements of Yunnan's ethnic minorities, which have incredibly high artistic value and rich cultural connotations. By combining patterns, colours and other cultural elements in Yunnan's ethnic minority culture, designers can attract more people's attention and highlight the unique charm and folk characteristics of Yunnan's ethnic minority culture. Traditional architecture, arts and crafts, and food culture are also creative sources of digital illustration design.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

Digital illustration design has been widely used as an emerging design form in various fields. This paper summarizes the following research results through the study of visual symbol elements of Yunnan ethnic minorities and digital illustration design:

The application of visual symbol elements of Yunnan ethnic minorities in digital illustration design can give the design works an intense traditional ethnic and cultural atmosphere, enhance its cultural connotation, and highlight local characteristics.

The application of visual symbol elements of Yunnan ethnic minorities in digital illustration design effectively promotes local traditional culture. By creating and disseminating digital illustration design works with regional characteristics, the purpose of protecting and promoting local traditional culture is achieved. In addition, the combination of visual symbol elements of Yunnan

ethnic minorities and digital illustration design has a wide range of applications in the commercial market, which enhances the market competitiveness of digital illustration design products, shapes a unique brand image, meets the needs of modern consumers for cultural products, and creates more significant economic benefits.

The rational use of traditional folk culture elements of Cantonese in digital illustration design helps to broaden design ideas. It has a positive impact on the inheritance and development of local traditional culture.

Therefore, combining visual symbol elements of Yunnan ethnic minorities with digital illustration design has become an important research direction in digital illustration design.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Du Jiang, Fang Meichen, Wan Sixin. Research on the application of symbolic elements of Yunnan Ethnic minorities in visual communication design [J]. Research of Design Arts, 2020(01): 96-99.
- [2] Wu Xiaoqing. The Application research of Yunnan Minority Elements in Furniture Design [J]. Footwear Craft and Design, Vol.3 No.12 Jun.2023.
- [3] Lu Chunlian, Mai Xiaolan. Application of Guangfu traditional folk culture elements in Digital illustration design [J]. Art Education Research, 2023:112-114.
- [4] Yu Honggang. The application of Yunnan Minority elements in Packaging Design [J]. Art of Design, 2016 (05): 32-38.
- [5] Luo Binbao. Discussion on the influence of Artificial Intelligence drawing Technology on Illustration design [J]. Discussion, 2023 (09): 42-43.