A Practical Study of Typography in Cultural Brand Image Design

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ABSTRACT

In the context of globalization, brand fonts, as an important medium of cultural communication, face the problems of "focusing on form but not meaning" and "fragmentation of cultural expression". With the core concept of "form and meaning come together", this paper proposes a font design path that integrates the structure of Chinese characters and ethnic patterns, and explores a systematic way of expression from form to meaning and from the surface to the interior. By deconstructing the structure of Chinese characters, analyzing the cultural connotation of ethnic patterns, and conducting comparative studies with design cases such as Guiren Lai, the advantages of this path in cultural extraction, visual expression and audience empathy are verified. The study shows that integrating the shape of Chinese characters with the meaning of nationalities can effectively enhance the cultural expression and recognition of brand fonts, providing theoretical support and practical direction for cultural brand design.

Keywords: Typography, Form and Idea, Ethnic Patterns

INTRODUCTION

In the deepening context of globalization, visual design has become an important means of cultural identity and difference expression. Especially in the brand visual system, font design, as the core medium for conveying cultural images and values, is transforming from a tool for "reading" to a carrier for "feeling". However, the current mainstream brand font design generally exists the problems of "focusing on shape but not meaning", similarity in form, absence of cultural symbols, etc., and lack of systematic expression of the deeper connotations of national culture. According to China Design Trend Report 2023, more than 64% of brands fail to effectively utilize local cultural resources in font design, resulting in a lack of cultural memory and emotional connection in brand visual language.

This study aims to provide a systematic approach to font design that balances cultural heritage and aesthetic innovation, and to provide theoretical references and practical support for the strategic transformation of brands in cultural expression and spatial creation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the context of globalization, typography is becoming an important carrier for cultural expression and brand construction. Xu Ping (2012) proposed the design path of "from form to meaning", emphasizing the logic of embedding cultural meaning in visual design. Shi Changhong (2021) demonstrated the feasibility of "structure-integrated" fonts through the integration of Chinese character structure and ethnic patterns. Zheng Shuyang (2015) argues that ethnic motifs are not only decorative, but also carry the memory and spiritual structure of ethnic groups, and their systematic application is inspiring for font design. Li Yanzu (2019) further classifies fonts into "structural fusion" and "symbolic construction", emphasizing the synergistic innovation between the structure of Chinese characters and cultural images.

On the level of spatial culture, Zhang Zhenhui (2021) suggests that fonts can be used as a medium for the translation of national visual culture, while Wang Zhong (2017) and Wu Ming (2018) emphasize the activation of the visual language of art for the spirit of the city in the concept of "soft city". These ideas provide a theoretical basis for the cultural translation of fonts in restaurant space and brand naming.

Therefore, the strategy of "symbiosis of form and meaning", which combines ethnic patterns and font shapes, not only helps to enrich the visual language system, but also provides a new expression path for local cultural brands.
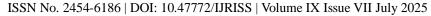
METHODOLOGY

This study explores the integration of ethnic culture and typeface design, aiming to investigate innovative forms of cultural visual language in brand spaces through the combination of Chinese characters and ethnic patterns. Guided by the design philosophy of "form and meaning intertwined," the research examines the application effects and cultural expressive value of typeface structural reconstruction and pattern integration within brand identification systems.

During the research process, a combination of case analysis and graphic language deconstruction methods was employed. First, multiple ethnic typeface design examples from the "Gui Ren Lai" restaurant brand were selected, including representative typeface styles from seven ethnic groups: Miao, Dong, Zhuang, Yao, Hui, Yi, and Han. The study focused on analyzing the relationship between the basic structure of Chinese characters, the logic behind pattern selection, and their cultural implications. In each case, the researcher systematically examined the font's structural layout, stroke transformations, ornamental patterns, color schemes, and application scenarios, and conducted cultural semantic analysis in conjunction with ethnic artistic traditions.

To enhance the scientific rigor of the analysis and the accuracy of visual expression, the study also compares survey data with source literature on patterns to ensure that design elements have a genuine ethnic cultural foundation. Additionally, the study focuses on the visual tension and emotional atmosphere of fonts in actual spaces, such as the overall aesthetic appeal and cultural resonance in scenarios like restaurant private room signage, wayfinding systems, and menu design.

Through comparative analysis of graphic techniques across different fonts, this study identified the "from form to meaning" expression mechanism of ethnic culture in font design and proposed a systematic visual strategy applicable to the construction of multi-ethnic brand identities, aiming to explore practical design pathways for the contemporary expression of ethnic culture.

Analysis

Traceability and Definition of the Concept of "Form and Idea"

The term "form and meaning" originates from traditional Chinese art and philosophical aesthetics, which is an aesthetic that emphasizes the unity of form (shape) and connotation (meaning). As early as in "Zhuangzi", "I Ching" and other ancient canonical texts, there are "form" and "God", "meaning" and "realm" Later, Wang Xizhi and Gu Kaizhi put forward the theory of calligraphy and painting that "form and god" and "transmitting god to write", and Fang Dongshu, an aesthetician of the Qing Dynasty, pointed out that "god and form will be, and the meaning and the realm are born", thus laying down the principle of "form and meaning". Thus, the cultural context of "form and meaning are born together" was established. In the field of design, "form and meaning are born together" refers to the fact that the design form (form) does not exist in isolation, but is closely integrated with the emotion, function and cultural meaning (meaning) it expresses, and the process of mutual development. The form is set for the meaning, and the meaning is born through the form, which ultimately achieves a high degree of unity between the beauty of the form and the meaning of the content.

Form and Idea in Modern Design

In the context of modern design, "form and meaning" has been transformed into a cross-cultural and cross-media design thinking method. It not only exists in traditional furniture, architecture and ceramics, but also influences contemporary visual communication design, product design and space planning. Designers are gradually realizing that "form" cannot exist in isolation, but must assume the responsibility of conveying meaning. In the design world, the earliest trace back to the "form-meaning symbiosis" and "Design Semantics" proposed by Klaus Krippendorff in the 1980s formed a cross-cultural theoretical dialogue. According to Klaus Krippendorff, the form of a product is not only the physical structure, but also the function of "meaning construction", and the designer should guide the user to understand and experience the culture, function and emotion conveyed by the product through the form. This is highly consistent with the concept of "form and meaning come together": design is not "making things", but "making meaning".

In the field of graphic design, the concept of "symbiosis of form and meaning" is not unique to Eastern aesthetics, and many Western design masters have also put forward design theories that are highly compatible with it. Paul Rand emphasized in his representative works "Reflections on Design" and "A Designer's Art" that the design should strike a balance between aesthetics and functionality, and that graphics should not only be eye-catching, but must also clearly convey meaning and realize the unity of form and intention. German designer Anton Stankowski puts forward the theory of "visualizing the invisible process", advocating the use of abstract graphics to express the invisible relationship, structure and dynamics, and his works reflect the depth of the form to the meaning of the bearing. Louis Danziger, on the other hand, advocates the concept of "economic means serving clear communication", believing that the form must be adapted to the content to realize the maximum expression effect with minimum resources. These theories together reflect the integration and symbiosis of "form" and "meaning" in graphic design, i.e., the visual elements of design are not only the surface of aesthetics, but also the deep expression of content, concepts and cultural intentions.

Definition of a cultural brand

The important brand theory systematically proposed in How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding (2004). Holt points out that brands should not be viewed merely as commercial symbols of products or companies, but rather as carriers of cultural meaning and symbolic media of social identity. Cultural brands construct "brand myths" with symbolic power by responding to contradictions and tensions in social culture, thereby establishing deep cultural agree with specific groups.

Unlike traditional "function-oriented" or "communication-oriented" brand strategies, cultural brands emphasize that the source of brand value does not lie in isolated communication actions but in the social context and cultural narratives in which they are embedded. Successful cultural brands often build a unique and consistent brand image through long-term accumulation, transforming the brand into a cultural phenomenon rather than merely a market commodity. Brands like Apple, Nike, and Coca-Cola have achieved this leap from product brands to cultural symbols by continuously shaping and updating cultural symbols that resonate with the spirit of the times.

Case Study of City Font Design for "Charming China"

In Shi Changhong's "Charming China" city font design series, Chinese characters serve as the visual medium, deeply integrating ethnic cultural symbols into the form of the characters, thereby pioneering a practical paradigm for modernizing and translating local culture. This series breaks through the superficial patterns of local cultural characteristics and Chinese character design by deeply understanding the intrinsic meaning of local cultural characteristics, reconstructing the expression methods of visual elements, and exploring innovative pathways for combining local cultural elements with Chinese characters. Taking the characters "Beijing" as an example, the designer replaces the lower half of the character "Beijing" with a Peking Opera mask, and the strokes of the character are composed of the beard from the Peking Opera mask, thereby endowing the static text with richer regional cultural connotations and enhancing its narrative quality. This design strategy validates the theory proposed by Jiangnan University that "graphic elements must undergo scientific deconstruction before being integrated into the framework of Chinese characters," achieving a transformation of patterns from decorative elements to structural entities.

Figure 1. "Charming China" city font design series

(Source:https://www.sohu.com/a/191654863_769300)

The cultural translation and innovation of the series are primarily manifested in the construction of a homologous symbolic system. The "Zang" font creatively integrates the architectural form of the Potala Palace with the structure of Chinese characters, utilizing its unique layered architectural features to create a distinctive typographic aesthetic. The interior of the character cavity incorporates the multi-layered windows of the Potala

Palace. This multi-layered symbolic integration not only achieves semantic enhancement of regionally unique patterns but also condenses unique cultural styles into perceptible visual forms. The design of the "Xi'an" font, inspired by the ancient city gates of Xi'an, similarly retains unique regional cultural symbols while offering a dual expression of aesthetic charm and cultural depth.

Figure 2. "Charming China" city font design series

(Source:https://www.sohu.com/a/191654863_769300)

Figure 3. Miao font design

(Source:https://www.sohu.com/a/191654863_769300)

Case Study of Guirenlai

Take the Guangxi-based restaurant brand Guirenlai as an example. The brand is positioned as a culinary brand representing the ethnic groups of Guangxi's twelve cities. Its private dining room designs must incorporate distinct ethnic characteristics and cultural elements. Therefore, while striving for unique design aesthetics, the designs must also embody rich cultural connotations and ethnic identity. In this design, various ethnic patterns are combined with simplified Chinese characters to maintain maximum recognizability while infusing the space with unique ethnic cultural content and a distinctive aesthetic appeal.

Structural fusion font

In font design or visual design, "structural fusion" usually refers to a design strategy in which two or more cultures, symbols, graphics, or structural elements are organically reconstructed and fused into a unified whole.

This fusion is not only reflected in visual appearance, but also emphasizes the coordination and unity of the elements in terms of structural logic, cultural connotations, and visual order.

Like the design of the Miao ethnic group's surname, this design takes the character "Miao" as its visual core, seamlessly blending the structure of Chinese characters with traditional Miao ethnic patterns to create a cultural expression that conveys meaning through form. In terms of typographic structure, the design selects the "grass radical" component as its starting point, replacing it with the distinctive silhouette of Miao women's headdresses. It incorporates the unique contours and patterns of silver ornaments, allowing the text and graphics to transition seamlessly. Within the character's form, common Miao sun patterns and floral motifs are embedded. These patterns are not merely decorative symbols but also carry profound cultural implications related to the Miao ancestors' migratory history and collective memory.

In Miao culture, the sun pattern symbolizes life and ancestor worship, while floral patterns originate from Miao women's observations of nature and emotional attachments. According to ethnographic research records, after the Miao ancestors, led by Chi You, were defeated in the Battle of Zhuolu, the tribe was forced to migrate southward, embarking on a thousand-year journey of migration. During this process, due to the lack of a systematic written language, Miao women recorded the mountains, rivers, plants, migration routes, and significant events they encountered along the way through embroidery and clothing patterns. These patterns gradually evolved into the rich pattern language found in modern Miao clothing, forming a cultural expression system where "images replace text."

Therefore, in this typeface design, the Chinese character "Miao" is no longer an isolated textual symbol but a cultural container that carries the history of the ethnic group, women's memories, and visual narratives. This design not only elevates the cultural sophistication of brand spaces (such as private room decorations) but also establishes a stronger sense of ethnic identity and emotional resonance visually, providing a culturally profound expression path for cultural brand design.

Figure 4. Miao font design

(Source: Illustrated by the author)

Zhuang font design

The design of the character "壮" is based on the standard structure of Chinese characters, retaining the recognizable form of the character while reconstructing the strokes with typical Zhuang ethnic patterns. In particular, three types of totemic forms—spiral patterns, meander patterns, and straight lines—are employed to showcase the essence of traditional Zhuang craftsmanship.

Swirl patterns and loop patterns frequently appear in Zhuang traditional textiles and bronze crafts, and are believed to be closely related to natural forces, ancestor worship, and the cycle of life. These patterns are commonly found in Zhuang folk crafts such as brocade, bronze drums, lacquerware, and silver jewelry in the Guangxi region. Their repetitive and symmetrical geometric arrangements reflect the Zhuang totem patterns' cultural concepts of eternity, inheritance, and good fortune.

In terms of font structure, the left side of the character "Zhuang" is reimagined as a vertical arrangement of swirls combined with dense straight lines, forming a graphic band. This design not only maintains the visual logic of the writing direction but also echoes the vertical pattern composition characteristic of Zhuang traditional textiles.

The right side, "土," employs more densely arranged swirl patterns to reinforce symmetry and rhythm, further enhancing visual tension and decorative appeal.

Additionally, the overall design features a green background, closely aligning with the natural ecology of the Lingnan region where the Zhuang people reside. This color scheme also provides psychological resonance for future practical applications, such as booth naming, tableware graphics, and brand signage.

Figure 5. Zhuang font design

(Source: Illustrated by the author)

Yi font design

In the typographic design of the character "Yi," the designer took the original structure of the Chinese character as the foundation, integrating plant patterns and octagonal patterns from the traditional decorative patterns of the Yi ethnic group, thereby achieving a deep integration between the form of the Chinese character and its ethnic cultural connotations. The character "Yi" itself has a unique structure, with upper and lower components stacked on top of each other and numerous strokes, presenting a stable, upright, and robust visual characteristic, which resonates with the Yi ethnic group's cultural emphasis on order and tradition in their graphic language.

In the stroke filling of the character "Yi," the design selected two representative Yi patterns: plant motifs and octagonal motifs. Plant motifs are commonly found in Yi ethnic group's clothing embroidery, silverware engraving, and artifact textures, often featuring vine-like and leaf-like patterns, symbolizing the continuity of life and the prosperity of all things in nature. The use of these patterns enhances the visual vitality and cultural flexibility of the character "Yi," endowing the font with both structural tension and a "living" texture.

The octagonal pattern is an important geometric symbol in Yi decorative patterns, originating from the worship of the sun, moon, and stars. It represents the eight directions of the universe and symbolizes the "harmonious integration of all aspects of the world." In the design, the octagonal pattern is integrated into the central and horizontal stroke structures of the character "Yi," enhancing its decorative and ceremonial qualities while resonating with the ritual and artifact cultural traditions embodied by the character. For example, the original meaning of "Yi" refers to ritual vessels, symbolizing the spirit of rules and respect for tradition; the geometric symmetry of the octagonal pattern serves as a graphical expression of this spirit.

Figure 6. Yi font design

(Source: Illustrated by the author)

Dong ethnic group font design

In the design of the character for "Dong" (侗), the designer used the structure of the Chinese character itself as the framework, selecting typical Dong geometric patterns and drum tower totems as decorative elements to fill in the space, thereby achieving a balance between structural stability and cultural symbolism in the font's appearance. The original character for "Dong" is composed of the radical for "human" (亻) and the character for "same" (同), with its original meaning referring to the Dong ethnic group or matters related to the Dong people, carrying a strong ethnic connotation.

In the design, the strokes of the radical "亻" are replaced with diagonal geometric patterns from Dong brocade. These patterns are commonly found in traditional Dong textile crafts, featuring diverse structures such as diamond shapes, sawtooth patterns, and waves, symbolizing the complexity of mountains, rivers, and daily life. This graphic language not only preserves the visual traces of ethnic craftsmanship but also enhances the font's decorative appeal and recognizability. The use of these patterns reflects the cultural essence of the Dong people, who live among the mountains, value weaving, and hold totemic beliefs.

The central "同" (tong) component of the character cleverly incorporates the symbolic structural pattern of a drum tower. The Dong drum tower serves as the spiritual and decision-making center of the village, embodying strong cultural identity and clan memory. Incorporating the drum tower's structural pattern into the center of the character preserves the original character's readability while deeply embedding the cultural core of the "Dong" character, making the entire character a unified cultural symbol system of "structure-symbol-image."

Additionally, delicate horizontal decorative borders are added to the edges and bottom of the character, resembling the patterns found on Dong silverware and fabric seams, giving the character a layered, embroidery-like aesthetic and enhancing its ethnic aesthetic qualities. These elements not only attract visual attention but also evoke cultural associations with the Dong way of life among the audience.

Figure 7. Dong font design

(Source: Illustrated by the author)

Symbolic Construction

"Symbolic structural design" refers to a design method in typography or visual design that involves introducing graphic, symbolic, or ornamental elements with specific cultural symbolic meanings to symbolically reinforce and culturally redefine the typography. Unlike the "structural integration type," which emphasizes the reconstruction of form and structure, the symbolic structural design type places greater emphasis on the incorporation of symbolic meaning. By adding graphics with strong cultural symbolism into the font, it transcends the textual information itself, becoming a visual expression of ethnic identity, historical memory, or spiritual beliefs.

Hui font design

The design of the "Hui" character font is based on a standard square frame structure as its visual foundation, with highly decorative cultural reinterpretations applied to its interior and edges. It incorporates typical Islamic-style plant scroll patterns (Arabesque). These decorative patterns are widely found in Hui Muslim mosque architecture, stone carvings, textiles, and everyday household items, reflecting the Islamic cultural tradition's pursuit of graphic design, repetition, and order under the artistic development path of "no idol worship."

From a visual composition perspective, the character's perimeter is adorned with symmetrically distributed lotus-leaf-shaped scroll patterns, forming a decorative logic of central radiation and patterned encirclement that aligns seamlessly with the structural characteristics of the "Hui" character (outer frame containing an inner structure). This design approach not only preserves the readability of the Chinese character "回" but also elevates its decorative quality to a level imbued with spatial ritualistic significance, evoking cultural associations with elements such as the doors and windows of mosques and the latticework of minarets.

In particular, the symmetrical pattern in the central part of the character serves as a visual focal point and symbolizes the pursuit of "center and order" in Hui culture, a cultural mindset deeply reflected in the geometric composition of Islamic architecture. By embedding this cultural imagery into the central structure of the Chinese character, the design forms a visual language model of "external inclusiveness—internal religious and orderly connotations" when conveying Hui culture.

Furthermore, this design of embedding patterns into the "hui" character possesses high extensibility. For example, it can be applied to the naming of private dining rooms in halal restaurants, wayfinding signage, and festive scene decorations, visually reinforcing cultural recognition while functionally fulfilling dual objectives of spatial navigation and aesthetic experience.
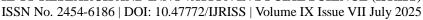

Figure 8. Hui font design

(Source: Illustrated by the author)

Han Chinese font design

In the design of Han Chinese characters, this case study takes the character "Han" as its central design element, integrating traditional Han Chinese jade pendant culture with bronze ornamental patterns to explore cross-disciplinary fusion pathways between the visual form of Chinese characters and traditional decorative aesthetics. In terms of character design, the stroke structure is ingeniously reconfigured into jade pendant ribbon patterns. These patterns were originally used for ritual vessel ornaments and the decorative beams of palace architecture, often appearing in symmetrical, interlocking, or intertwined forms, symbolizing ritual propriety, hierarchy, and auspiciousness. By reshaping the structure of Chinese characters through these traditional patterns, the design not only enhances the cultural distinctiveness of the character forms but also maintains the basic

readability of the text, achieving a harmonious unity between traditional visual symbols and modern typographic language.

Furthermore, in the design of the radical "three-dot water," elements of the taotie pattern are incorporated. This pattern first appeared on Shang and Zhou dynasty bronze ware, featuring a majestic and symmetrical design symbolizing exorcism and protection, commonly used in ritual vessels and tripods. In this design, the application of the taotie pattern not only aligns with the contextual needs of the dining space regarding "food" and 'vessels' but also evokes emotional resonance among viewers regarding the concept of "food rituals" in traditional culture. It is worth noting that recent surveys on cultural symbols indicate that the use of traditional totem patterns in commercial space design has been increasing year by year. According to the "2022 China Cultural Creative Design Development Report," approximately 68% of designers actively incorporate traditional patterns with cultural memories into brand visuals to enhance brand differentiation and emotional connection.

Additionally, the extensibility of design is also reflected in spatial creation. Using the character "Han" as a visual anchor not only enhances the cultural sophistication of the space but also aids in the construction of a brand's unique semantic system. This design extension from typographic visuals to environmental context enables the brand to not only possess cultural vitality but also achieve the deepening of commercial functionality and the enhancement of experiential quality.

Figure 9. Han font design

(Source: Illustrated by the author)

Yao font design

This typeface design is based on the character "Yao" as its structural framework, employing the stable structural form of modern typefaces while incorporating the typical geometric symmetrical patterns found in Yao ethnic group textiles, thereby achieving a deep integration of text and pattern. In the design, horizontal, vertical, and slanted strokes are not traditional single lines but are instead filled and restructured by embedding traditional Yao decorative patterns such as the "rice grain pattern" and "loop pattern." This approach ensures the font retains its recognizability while gaining stronger visual texture and cultural significance.

The Yao people are a typical brocade-weaving ethnic group, and geometric patterns are widely used in their clothing, backstraps, headscarves, and other daily utensils, symbolizing natural order, totem beliefs, and ethnic

identity. This typeface design draws on these indigenous patterns to create a strong sense of rhythm and ornamentation within the character forms, presenting a cultural expression that transitions from "symbol" to "symbolism." For example, the continuous diamond patterns on the vertical strokes symbolize farming, weaving, and reproduction, while the intersecting patterns in the horizontal strokes symbolize the connection between heaven and earth, reflecting the "symbolic representation of objects" characteristic of the Yao ethnic group's graphic language.

This design approach not only enhances the font's visual recognition but also elevates its cultural carrying capacity, representing a bold attempt to seamlessly integrate textual functionality, ethnic aesthetics, and cultural narrative. It breaks through the traditional design limitations of prioritizing form over meaning, organically combining the essence of Chinese characters with the graphic language of ethnic minorities, embodying strong regional and ethnic characteristics, and providing a new formal pathway for contemporary brand font design.
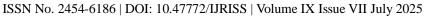

Figure 10. Yao font design

(Source: Illustrated by the author)

Comparative analysis with global case studies

Globally, the incorporation of ethnic cultural elements into design is gaining increasing attention, particularly in brand and public space design. The key challenge lies in achieving a harmonious blend of respect for cultural heritage and innovative design. Take the integration of Indigenous art in Australia as an example. The National Gallery of Australia has incorporated Indigenous dot painting art into its brand visual system. Through long-term collaboration with Indigenous artists, the gallery ensures the cultural authenticity and narrative integrity of the patterns. This collaborative design approach not only preserves the sacredness of Indigenous culture but also endows the visual language with distinct regional characteristics and cultural depth.

The Kenyan brand "Sandstorm" has incorporated Maasai patterns and color systems into its bag designs. The brand not only considers the symbolic meaning of Maasai totems in its designs but also supports the development of local communities through a feedback mechanism, establishing an ethically sustainable design approach. This approach demonstrates that ethnic patterns in contemporary commercial design are not merely visual symbols but also serve as a medium for carrying identity, history, and cultural memory.

Comparing the design explorations of the "Gui Ren Lai" brand, which blends Chinese ethnic patterns with the forms of Chinese characters, reveals that the key to respectful presentation lies in the designer's deep understanding of the cultural context, collaborative creation with the ethnic group, and sensitive judgment of the design context. These global cases not only validate the applicability of the "form and meaning intertwined" design logic in multicultural contexts but also provide referenceable international paradigms for the contemporary expression of Chinese ethnic culture.
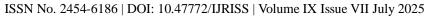
FINDINGS

In the context of deepening globalization, cultural visual communication has become an important dimension of national soft power competition. As one of the basic carriers of cultural expression, typeface design plays an increasingly important role in brand visual identity and spatial cultural creation. However, domestic brand typeface design currently faces widespread issues such as "emphasizing form over meaning," "cultural symbolization," and "visual fragmentation," particularly in the visual expression of minority cultures, which is notably lacking. According to data from the "China Font Design Status Survey Report (2022)" released by China Industry Research Network, approximately 72.4% of commercial font design projects focus on optimizing the shapes of generic Chinese characters, while designs involving cultural semantics and ethnic visual characteristics account for less than 8%. Among China's 56 ethnic groups, traditional patterns from fewer than 15 ethnic groups are widely used in modern visual communication fields, primarily as decorative patterns, lacking systematic expression and semantic construction. Guangxi, as a region with a diverse ethnic population, is home to multiple ethnic groups such as the Zhuang, Yao, Miao, Dong, Shui, and Maonan, each with rich visual pattern systems. However, these elements are severely marginalized in contemporary brand design. Especially in regional cultural brands such as catering and tourism, the phenomenon of "all stores looking the same" is widespread, and ethnic identity cannot be effectively identified through visual language. Therefore, there is an urgent need to explore a visual design method that can maintain textual recognizability while strengthening cultural expressiveness, thereby empowering regional brands.

Fonts as a bridge between ethnic cultural narratives and spatial emotional construction

From a communication studies perspective, fonts are not only the visual representation of language but also a visual medium for ethnic identity and collective memory. By integrating ethnic patterns, visual imagery, and the structure of Chinese characters, the written language system can be transformed into an "ethnic identity code," forming a symbolic and systematic cultural communication language. The series of font design explorations based on the "Guirenlai" platform represents an initial experiment in this systematic approach. Additionally, according to the "National Style Aesthetic Trends Report" released by Tencent Research Institute in 2021, among young consumers aged 18 to 35, over 78% of respondents prefer brand identification forms that blend local culture with visual aesthetics, particularly in sectors such as catering, apparel, and cultural creativity. Ethnic culture is transitioning from "aesthetic curiosity" to a new phase of "identity recognition" and "emotional belonging." Therefore, the "ethnic cultural integration design based on typography" approach proposed in this paper not only enhances the cultural information density of visual systems but also facilitates the re-entry of ethnic culture into the public eye through contemporary, everyday expressions, expanding the contemporary dissemination space for ethnic symbols and providing regional brands with robust cultural support and distinctive advantages.

The combination of patterns and Chinese characters in brand font design is more expressive.

In contemporary brand typography design, as consumers increasingly value cultural identity and spiritual values, design no longer merely pursues formal aesthetic appeal but places greater emphasis on cultural depth and the power of symbolic communication. The concept of "form and meaning intertwined," originating from China's ancient aesthetic system, emphasizes the harmonious integration of 'form' and "meaning," a principle fully manifested in painting, calligraphy, and object design. Incorporating this philosophy into brand typography design, particularly when combined with culturally significant ethnic patterns, can effectively enhance the emotional expression and narrative function of typefaces, elevating them from visual symbols to cultural mediators.

Ethnic patterns serve as abstract expressions of a group's historical memory and aesthetic consciousness, often rooted in their unique living environment and social structure. Take the Li ethnic group as an example: living between the hills and rainforests of Hainan, the spiral patterns and plant motifs commonly found in Li brocade reflect their perception of the natural growth logic of the environment; the Hezhe people, who rely on fishing and hunting for their livelihood, feature "water wave patterns" and "fish patterns" in their clothing, reflecting their dependence on and reverence for rivers and fish; the Miao people's butterfly patterns originate from the "Butterfly Mother" myth, serving as a visual representation of the ethnic group's origins. These patterns are not merely decorative but function as totemic cultural maps, carrying strong symbolic meaning and aesthetic value. For ethnic groups without written language, patterns even directly serve the function of writing and recording. For example, Li brocade is referred to as "a history book without words," highlighting its profound visual memory attributes.

As one of the few remaining pictographic scripts in the world, Chinese characters inherently possess high graphicity and cultural symbolism. The character formation methods outlined in the Six Principles of Chinese Character Creation—pictographic, ideographic, compound ideographic, and phonetic-semantic—essentially combine "form" and "meaning," giving Chinese characters a natural advantage for integration with graphic patterns. In brand typeface design, when the structure of Chinese characters is skillfully embedded into the formal logic of ethnic patterns, it not only does not compromise their recognizability but also enhances their graphic tension and cultural depth. This expression method of "meaning within form, form within meaning" transcends the functional scope of modern typefaces, becoming a key breakthrough for cultural brand design.
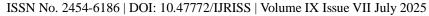
Therefore, organically integrating the cultural symbolism of ethnic patterns with the structural beauty of Chinese characters to create a "text-and-image unity" visual context in typeface design is the direction cultural-oriented brands should pursue. Unlike fast-moving consumer goods brands that rely on high-frequency exposure to build recognition, cultural-oriented brands depend more on their deep spiritual values and cultural narratives to gain 认同. As one of the most core information output symbols of a brand, typefaces serve as the bridge for this cultural transmission. When typefaces not only embody the form of Chinese characters and the meaning of ethnic patterns but also integrate regional aesthetics and humanistic contexts, they cease to be neutral expression tools and instead become deep resonance touchpoints between brand culture and consumer emotions.

How designers can ensure respectful representation of ethnic cultures in commercial settings

In a commercial design environment, ensuring respectful representation of ethnic cultures requires the integration of cultural sensitivity principles throughout the entire design process. First, designers should conduct thorough research on ethnic patterns, symbolic meanings, and usage taboos by reviewing ethnographic, local, and intangible cultural heritage materials to avoid cultural misinterpretation and misuse. For example, the Yi ethnic group's eight-pointed star pattern symbolizes cosmic order and should not be arbitrarily altered; while the

Tibetan "卐" symbol is a auspicious pattern, it may lead to misunderstandings in Western contexts. Second, cultural stakeholders should be involved in the design process, including ethnic artisans or inheritors, to ensure the design is supported by cultural interpretive authority. For example, the Australian "Yarrkalpa Typeface" invited Indigenous elders to participate in naming and structural design throughout the font development process, ensuring cultural contextual accuracy. Additionally, design outcomes should establish a cultural usage authorization mechanism, clearly indicating sources and usage boundaries. Adopting the WIPO traditional knowledge label approach can effectively prevent cultural appropriation. Finally, design institutions should establish cultural ethics guidelines through internal training and institutional frameworks to help teams cultivate cultural humility, positioning designers as mediators of cultural transmission rather than dominant actors. Through these measures, ethnic cultures can be authentically represented in brand design while being presented to the public and market with respect.

CONCLUSION

When exploring the practical approaches to typography design in cultural brand identity design, we must not only focus on the visual impact of typography but also delve into its underlying cultural significance and social value. Through the analysis of various materials and case studies, this paper reveals how typography design serves as a bridge connecting brands, consumers, and culture. In modern society, typography design has become an indispensable component of brand identity. It is not merely about the aesthetic design of typefaces but also encompasses the cultural connotations and emotional expressions they convey. For example, by incorporating elements with specific cultural backgrounds, brands can establish an emotional connection with consumers and enhance their sense of identification with the brand. This design strategy not only attracts the attention of the target audience but also enhances the brand's recognizability and influence.

The innovative path of typography design should be based on a deep understanding of the brand positioning and target market. Selecting fonts that align with the brand's spirit can better achieve the shaping of the brand image. Some brands may choose traditional fonts to convey their long history and cultural connotations, while others may prefer modern fonts to showcase the brand's innovation and modernity. Additionally, the application of digital technology is driving the diversification and personalization of typography design.

However, effective font design is not merely a technical issue but also an artistic creation. It requires designers to have a deep understanding of culture and keen visual perception. Incorporating storytelling into font design can make the design more appealing and emotionally resonant. Additionally, designers should continuously explore new design methods and push the boundaries of font design to ensure the brand stands out in a highly competitive market.

In summary, typeface design plays a crucial role in cultural-driven brand image design. Through careful design, typefaces can effectively convey brand messages, establish emotional connections with the brand, and enhance brand image. Future typeface design will continue to evolve toward greater personalization, diversity, and deeper integration with culture. As society and technology evolve, the importance of typeface design will only grow, offering endless possibilities and innovative space for brand image design.

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