

A Brief Exploration of the Application of Dai Ethnic Clothing Elements in Visual Design

Su Ting^{1*}, Rina Abd Shukor¹

¹ City Graduate School, City University Malaysia

*Corresponding Author: 2509521918@qq.com

Received: 2 January 2025 | Accepted: 9 February 2025 | Published: 15 March 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55057/ajress.2025.7.1.45>

Abstract: *Dai ethnic clothing boasts vibrant colors, distinctive styles, and exquisite woven craftsmanship. Against the backdrop of the continuous fading of ethnic minority cultures due to various reasons, how can Dai ethnic clothing adapt to the development of modern society? How can it play a positive role in promoting Dai culture? These questions have drawn the attention of scholars engaged in Dai ethnic culture. This paper will take a modern design perspective to briefly categorize and classify the application of Dai ethnic clothing elements in visual communication. By elucidating the stylistic features of ethnic attire and conducting a detailed analysis of Dai ethnic clothing elements, the study ultimately derives conclusions about their application in contemporary design.*

Keywords: Dai Ethnic, Clothing Elements, Visual Design

1. Introduction

The Dai ethnic group is a unique minority group in Yunnan Province, characterized by a mix of larger scattered settlements and smaller clustered communities. They primarily reside in the river valleys and flat regions of the southern and western parts of Yunnan Province, including areas such as Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture, Menglian Dai and Lahu Autonomous County, Gengma Dai and Va Autonomous County, Jinggu Dai and Yi Autonomous County, Jinping Miao, Yao, and Dai Autonomous County, and Xinping Yi and Dai Autonomous County. As time has passed, the attire of many ethnic groups in China has been lost, with even fewer related valuable images available. This poses a significant challenge to the preservation of minority cultures. Amidst this backdrop of cultural erosion, how can the Dai culture adapt to the requirements of the new era and actively thrive?

Dai ethnic clothing features vibrant colors, unique styles, and exquisite woven craftsmanship. This article will start with Dai ethnic clothing elements, applying them to modern design as a means of promoting Dai culture.

2. The Constituent Elements And Cultural Significance Of Dai Ethnic Clothing

Ethnic Clothing Elements refer to the forms and constituent components of various ethnic costumes, including both material and spiritual elements. Material elements are tangible components, including forms, fabrics, and craftsmanship. Meanwhile, spiritual elements

denote the elements that reflect specific concepts and aesthetic consciousness developed by each ethnic group during their own cultural evolution, such as colors and patterns.

2.1. Elements of Dai Ethnic Clothing

Elements of Dai Ethnic Clothing: Taking styles as an example within the material elements, Dai ethnic clothing can be roughly categorized into different styles based on geographical regions, namely "Shui Dai" (Water Dai), "Han Dai" (Dryland Dai), "Hua Yao Dai" (Floral Waist Dai), and "Hei Dai" (Black Dai). Shui Dai region refers mainly to the Dai population in Xishuangbanna, including areas like Menglian, Lancang, and Ruili. Shui Dai young women generally wear a short tight-fitting jacket with narrow sleeves and a long tube skirt as the lower garment. Han Dai region is primarily in Dehong Prefecture, including places like Baoshan, Tengchong, Changning, Gengma, and Lincang. Young women in this region often wear light-colored short jackets with a wide lapel on the upper body, paired with black trousers and a colorful embroidered or wrapped waistband. Hua Yao Dai region is focused around Yuanjiang and Xinping. Typically, Hua Yao Dai women wear an outer and inner short jacket with an open front, with the inner piece being a form-fitting undergarment and the outer piece significantly shorter. As the outer jacket is shorter, the waist is exposed, necessitating a wide, colorful ribbon to be wrapped around the waist, which is the origin of the name "Hua Yao Dai" (Floral Waist Dai). For the lower body, they usually wear three to five black tube skirts, each displaying its hem, creating a graceful and appealing overall posture. Hei Dai region is centered in Wenshan Zhuang and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, with the Dai population in Maguan County, including parts of Wenshan and Hekou counties. Black is considered beautiful, and black is the main color in their clothing. Hei Dai women typically wear a diagonally-closed upper garment made of double-layer black fabric, paired with a blue tube skirt. In summary, the hallmark of Dai ethnic clothing styles generally involves short jackets with front closures or diagonal closures for the upper body, paired with long tube skirts that accentuate beautiful curves for the lower body.

2.2. The Spiritual Elements in Dai Ethnic Clothing

Dai ethnic clothing is rich in spiritual elements, and this article takes patterns as an example. The pattern elements in Dai ethnic clothing can be roughly categorized into the following types based on themes: geometric patterns (such as the frequently seen "swastika" pattern and "cross" pattern), animal patterns (such as peacocks and elephants), plant patterns (such as banana flower patterns and lotus flower patterns), as well as other patterns related to Dai Buddhist scriptures, for instance. These patterns can be further divided based on their forms: standalone motifs and continuous motifs. Standalone motifs refer to individual patterns that can form independent decorations, while continuous motifs are composed of one or more basic patterns and can be repeated in two or four directions. This categorization helps in the subsequent analysis, recombination, and utilization of patterns.



Figure 1: "Cross" Pattern

2.3. Cultural Significance in Dai Ethnic Clothing

Dai ethnic clothing patterns are often closely related to religious beliefs. For example:

Animal Patterns: The prominent elephant motifs and elephant trunk patterns reflect the deep connection between the Dai people and elephants. In the Dai creation epic "Pata Ma Ga Peng Shang Luo," it is mentioned that in the beginning of the creation of the world, everything was unstable and floating. To stabilize the world, a divine elephant named "Zhang Yue Lang Wan" was created. The elephant's trunk held up the sky, and its feet held down the earth. The legend of the "elephant's daughter" further led the Dai people to believe that they are descendants of elephants. Therefore, elephant-related patterns and related abstract motifs are common in Dai textile designs.

Geometric Patterns: Triangular patterns also hold rich symbolic meaning in Dai culture. These patterns symbolically encapsulate the Dai people's environment, living by the mountains and water.

Plant Patterns: Plant patterns also reflect religious beliefs. For instance, the lotus flower pattern, influenced by Buddhism, is widely used.

Other Patterns: The "swastika" pattern and spiral patterns are common in traditional Chinese culture and represent good luck and auspiciousness.

Overall, the patterns in Dai ethnic clothing carry significant cultural and religious meanings, illustrating the close connection between their attire and their beliefs.



Figure 2: "Swastika" Pattern

3. The Modern Design Application Of Dai Ethnic Clothing Elements

Specifically, in terms of how to apply elements of Dai ethnic clothing to modern visual design, you can generally approach it from two aspects. On one hand, there is the concrete application of elements, such as the recombination of colors, abstraction and deconstruction of patterns, and the adaptation of styles. On the other hand, there is the abstract application, which involves delving into the intricate thoughts and consciousness gradually revealed through an in-depth study of Dai ethnic clothing. This consciousness serves as a source of inspiration for designers, embodying the conceptual and abstract influence of Dai ethnic clothing on modern visual aesthetics.

3.1. Specific Application

3.1.1. Application of Dai Ethnic Clothing Styles in Visual Design



Figure 3: Silhouette of Dai Ethnic Girls

The outer contour of clothing represents the specific manifestation of the combination of lines and surfaces within clothing elements. The image of the front-opening short jacket and long tube skirt is a refinement of the overall elements of Dai ethnic girls' attire. After refinement, the process of reconstruction and redesign follows, which can be achieved through methods such as localized exaggeration, simplification of complexity, and complexity from simplicity, along with the use of contrasting fabrics to attain the final effect. In the context of modern visual design, the overall image of Dai ethnic girls can also be transformed into a silhouette pattern, serving as an element used in various designs like packaging, posters, books, and more. It can also be incorporated into the overall style of product packaging, thereby enhancing the product's appeal and concurrently promoting Dai culture from a different perspective.

3.1.2. Application of Dai Ethnic Clothing Patterns in Visual Design

When it comes to the application of patterns, the first thing to consider is the symbolic and referential meaning of ethnic patterns. For instance, seeing a certain pattern may immediately evoke thoughts of a particular ethnic group or a specific culture. Ethnic culture condenses into a symbol, and this symbol serves as a medium between the ethnic culture and the audience. The ethnic group can use this medium to promote their culture, while the audience can gain insight into the culture of that ethnic group. The primary approach to pattern application involves extracting elements and arranging them in a repetitive and coherent manner to form a continuous and unified background effect. Another method involves the "extraction-reconstruction" technique, where the required patterns are rearranged and recombined based on specific product data. Through layout design, certain elements can be emphasized by exaggerating them, using color or background patterns to enhance them, thereby highlighting the distinctive features of the Dai ethnic group. This approach prevents the design from becoming a chaotic composition of Dai ethnic clothing elements without careful thought.

3.2. Design Philosophy of Dai Ethnic Clothing

As modern society continues to develop, people's living ecological environment is increasingly threatened by economic development. Clothing intuitively reflects the geographical characteristics of different regions and also embodies human beings' yearning for and pursuit of nature. The Dai people's close relationship with water has formed a profound hydrological culture, and therefore, Dai ethnic clothing also reflects the Dai people's love for water. The Dai people attach great importance to the protection of forests because forests are a necessary condition for ensuring a water source. Therefore, when combining Dai ethnic clothing elements

with modern visual design, it is necessary to think from an ecological perspective and express the Dai people's love for the ecological environment from the perspective of creative concepts. In their daily production and life, the Dai people often need to work in the water. Women wear tube skirts, and when they need to work in the water, they can conveniently roll up the hem of the skirt to knee-length for easy work in the water. What's more characteristic is the convenience the long tube skirt brings to Dai women when bathing in the river. They often wrap themselves in tube skirts and slowly walk into the river. As they wade deeper into the water, they gradually roll up the skirt. When the river water is below chest level, they wrap the skirt around their heads. After bathing, as they slowly walk out of the water, they unravel the skirt from the top of their heads, walking out of the water with the skirt wrapped around them again. This demonstrates that Dai ethnic clothing is simple, elegant, and highly practical. Therefore, when creating modern visual designs, it's also important to consider whether they have sufficient functionality in daily life and avoid being overly ornamental without substance.

4. Conclusion

Dai ethnic clothing features vibrant colors, distinctive styles, and exquisite weaving craftsmanship. Visual design, as a contemporary medium of communication, is rapid, extensive, and highly influential. The integration of Dai ethnic clothing elements with modern visual design seeks a balance between ethnic and contemporary aesthetics, creating works with ethnic characteristics that play a significant role in highlighting and promoting ethnic culture. Through the analysis, study, reference, and application of Dai ethnic clothing, and through the refinement of aspects like style, color, and patterns, a process of repetition, contrast, and redesign is undertaken to systematize, personalize, and diversify design works. Ultimately, this process aims to bring forth a return to nature that embodies ecological values.

References

- Ai, Juhong. "Dai Ethnic Clothing and the Ecological Environment of Dai Water." *Proceedings of the 2004 Annual Conference of the Chinese Ethnological Society*, 2004, pp. 262-270.
- Chai, Yilong. "A Brief Introduction to the Leisure Life of Yunnan Dai Ethnic Group." *Proceedings of the 2019 World Leisure Development Summit Forum*, 2019, p. 38.
- Gan, Zhiyu. "A Brief Analysis of the Aesthetic Art of Dai Ethnic Clothing." *Western Leather*, vol. 44, no. 24, 2022, pp. 76-78.
- Hu, Shixian. "Analysis of the Characteristics of Dai Ethnic Clothing." *Today's Ethnicities*, 2022(7), pp. 53-54. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1009-9360.2022.07.020>
- Huang, Junmin, Wang Ruiqiang, and Yang Zhaolin. "Analysis of the Evolution and Inheritance of Typical Costumes of Baiyue Ethnic Groups: A Case Study of Dai Ethnic Clothing." *Journal of Leshan Normal University*, 2014(2), pp. 108-110. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1009-8666.2014.02.023>
- Li, Zhongyuan. "On the Multifaceted Collectivity of Ethnic Clothing Patterns Featuring Mythical Beasts." *Proceedings of the 2011 Academic Forum of the School of Fashion, Wuhan Textile University*, 2011, pp. 138-142.
- Luo, Wenting, and Ma, Xinmin. "Research and Development Application of Dai Ethnic Jiang, Biqiong. "A Brief Analysis of Dai Ethnic Clothing Culture in Yunnan." *China Nationalities Expo*, 2017(10), pp. 13-14. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1007-4198.2017.10.007>
- Brocade Weaving Techniques in Yunnan." *Shandong Textile Economy*, 2020(5), pp. 20-23. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1673-0968.2020.05.006>
- Ma, Yubo, and Li Lun. "The Application of Handmade Dai Papermaking from Xishuangbanna Dai Ethnic Group in Modern Home Decoration Design." *Proceedings of the 2011 National*

- Symposium on Industrial Design Education in Higher Education Institutions and International Academic Forum, 2011, pp. 527-531.
- Ma, Xiao and Bai, Wenfeng. "Research on Ecotourism Planning and Traditional Residential Renewal Design of Huayao Dai Ethnic Group in Dianzhong Area: A Case Study of Pingzhai Village, Jiasa Town, Xinning County, Yuxi City." *Proceedings of the 23rd Annual Conference on Chinese Residential Architecture*, 2018, pp. 400-405.
- Shen, Yuhong, Yang Qixiang, and Zhou Changjun. "Mathematical Culture in Dai Ethnic Clothing in Dehong, Yunnan." *Journal of Mathematics Education*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2013, pp. 66-69.
- Sun, Haoran and Sun, Wenjuan. "Research on the Application of Ethnic Costume Elements in Modern Clothing Design." *Consumer Guide*, 2017(22), p. 9. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1672-5719.2017.22.018>
- Yang, Be. "Color Language Expression in Dai Ethnic Clothing." *Proceedings of the 2008 Forum of the School of Fashion, Wuhan University of Science and Technology*, 2008, pp. 333-337.
- Yuan, Wei. "Aesthetic Connotations of Clothing Colors for Dai Ethnic Minority Girls: A Case Study of Girls from the 'Water Dai' in Xishuangbanna Region." *Proceedings of the 2008 Forum of the School of Fashion, Wuhan University of Science and Technology*, 2008, pp. 366-370.
- Yuxiang, Wu. "A Discussion on the Cultural Elements of Dai Ethnic Clothing in Yunnan." *Ethnic Art Research*, 2005(2), pp. 42-48. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1003-840X.2005.02.006>
- Zeng, Yu, and Xu, Huiming. "A Brief Analysis of the Functional Expression of Dai Ethnic Clothing." *Shandong Textile Economy*, 2016(3), pp. 55-56. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1673-0968.2016.03.019>