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Consensus on Chinese Yi Craft Cultural Factors That Influence The Practice of Local Design

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Abstract

Craft is an essential part of Yi traditional culture, and it makes sense for inheritance and development, as well as the protection of local culture. Therefore, designs of cultural products commonly look for inspiration in craft culture. However, research has shown that designers have encountered difficulties integrating Yi craft cultural factors into design practices. This study aims to identify the most prominent Yi craft cultural factors that influence local design practices. Based on a literature review, a nominal group technique was used to arrive at a consensus on the factors influencing the Yi craft culture in local design practices. NGT is a method of data collection using tiny group discussions to reach a consensus. This study revealed 37 common Yi traditional craft culture factors that influence local design practices after NGT discussions, of which the first five are considered the most prominent. The findings can be used as a reference for designers to improve and deepen their local design practices. In addition, a method is provided to smooth the transition from traditional Yi craft culture to modern design and the creation of ethically and aesthetically appropriate products.

Keywords: Chinese Yi, Yi Craft Culture, Cultural Factors, Local Design Practice, NTG

Introduction

China is a multi-ethnic country, and integrating ethnic cultures into designs have become a popular method in Chinese cultural and designs of creative products (Ji et al., 2020). Yi is one of the ethnic groups with a large population and a long history in China. Perumal (2021) argues that understanding the cultural artifacts and handicraft skills of ancestors can enhance creativity and build confidence of its people. Tangible and intangible knowledge of culture and cultural artifacts help designers to find novel ideas in designs. The rich traditional Yi craft culture provides resources for local designers.

At the same time the rise of culture-centered creative industries in the Yi area has promoted local economic growth and industrial development. As such the local enterprises and businessmen have actively developed products related to craft culture and have displayed them in the market (Xiao, 2013). Designers have noticed that designing Yi cultural features into a product is beneficial in creating its identity in the market and enhancing the individual consumer experience. It has become an indisputable fact that Yi craft culture,

influences the designs of products. In order to attract the attention of consumers and gain recognition for the products, many designers are exploring the integration of culture and designs (Wang et al., 2021; Zhang, 2019). The attempt to integrate presents a challenge for designers and stakeholders to determine which are the most prominent factors in craft culture that influence local design practices. Therefore, in market competition, raising the cultural value of a product has become an issue that cannot be ignored in the design process.

Research Methods

The main objective of this research was to identify the most prominent cultural factors that influence Yi traditional craft culture in local design practices. Literature indicates that Nominal Group Technique (NGT) is effective in identifying problems, generating recommendations, and establishing priorities that help to generate solutions (Islam, 2001; Søndergaard et al., 2018). The technology has two main stages, group discussion and voting stage (Dang, 2015). NGT is suitable for identifying problems related to cultural elements that rely on decision-making of experts based on their experience or skills (Deip et al., 1977; Varga-Atkins et al., 2011). Perumal et al (2019) used NGT sessions to identify common cultural artifacts and the causes for preferences. Thus, it can be concluded that NGT is appropriate for this research on craft culture. Moreover, using NGT for research has the following advantages: encourages minority views to be published; allows for a period of reflection; overcomes some of the problems of group interaction; produces a combination of qualitative and quantitative data; the process focuses on group rather than individual data.

The NGT collects data from experts through highly structured meetings (Madi et al., 2011). Members of the expert group should have basic knowledge to ensure the reliability of the data collected. The selection criteria for participants were: participants should have extensive experience in Yi Autonomous Prefecture; participants should have worked in the relevant field for at least 5 years. This is to ensure that participants have an in-depth understanding of Chinese Yi craft culture.

Table 1

The List of Participants in Fieldwork

Participants	Origin	Expertise	Years of Experience
Participant 1	Liangshan	Ethnological study	16
Participant 2	Liangshan	Yi Craft study	10
Participant 3	Liangshan	Culture product design	11
Participant 4	Liangshan	Intangible cultural heritage protection	20
Participant 5	Liangshan	Yi culture	10
Participant 6	Liangshan	Industrial design	6

The NGT does not have a fixed number of participants, which facilitates the flexible setting of sample size (Manera et al., 2019). This study selected six Yi cultural experts through purposeful snowballing to participate in the NGT discussions. Experts who attended the discussion had at least 5 years of work experience in the relevant fields. As shown in Table 1, the participants are all from Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, and they include two Yi cultural experts, two designers, one craft cultural researcher and one Yi intangible cultural heritage protector. The NGT meeting process was adapted based on the usual NGT steps (Madi et al., 2011), and is shown in Figure 1.

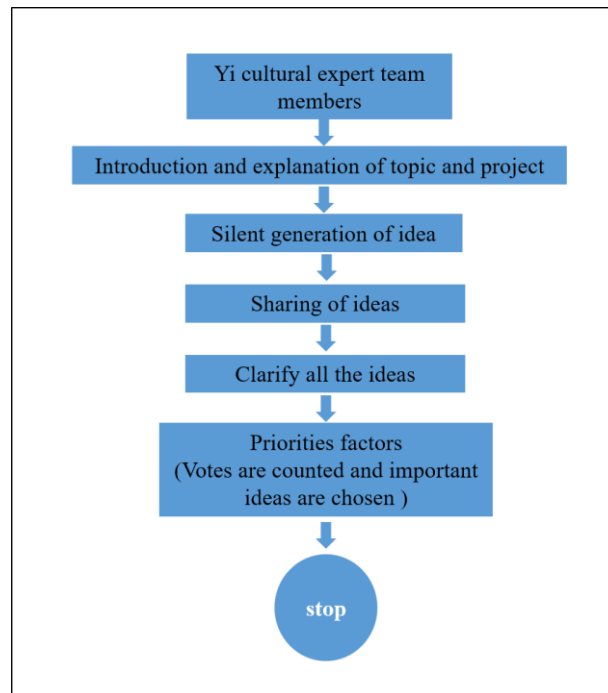


Figure 1. Stages in the Nominal Group Technique (NGT)

The research question mentioned below guided the NGT discussions: *What are the most prominent Yi Traditional Craft Cultural Factors?*

First of all, the host briefly introduced the participants and explained the topic of the meeting. The NGT members were given 10 minutes to come up with ideas. During this time there was no discussion among the participants and the answers were written individually. After 10 minutes, the proposed Yi craft cultural factors were shared, clarified, and discussed in the group. The final filtered lists were aggregated, and the factors were voted and prioritized.

Results

Some material evidence was provided before the meeting to inspire the participants to think, namely pictures of traditional Yi craft objects and Yi cultural design products. Participants agreed that the craft objects showed cultural factors such as Yi handicrafts, material preferences, decorative styles and aesthetic characteristics. Cultural design product images helped participants compare and observe salient factors applied in the design. For example (see Figure 2), some participants observed that the colors and patterns of cultural design products No. 5 come from craft objects No. 4. The cultural design product No. 10 is inspired by traditional Yi materials and embroidery, and experts have recognized that its shape is derived from traditional children's caps. Based on the experts' existing knowledge of Yi craft culture, they provided their own ideas by comparing and observing the provided evidence and pictures.

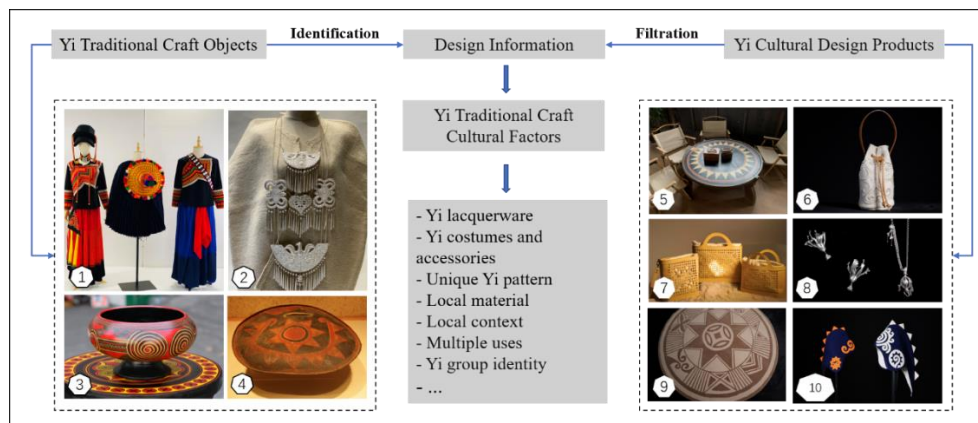


Figure 2. Methods of Extracting Yi Craft Cultural Factors (Source: pictures provided by the Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture)

Figure 3 shows the filtration process of Yi craft culture factors. The 6 experts in this study had listed the names of 72 Yi craft cultural factors. Duplications and factors with similar meanings were combined, and reworded before these were approved by the participants. The names of unrelated factors were removed from the list with the consent of the participants. In the final filtered list, 37 Yi Craft Cultural Factors were prioritized.

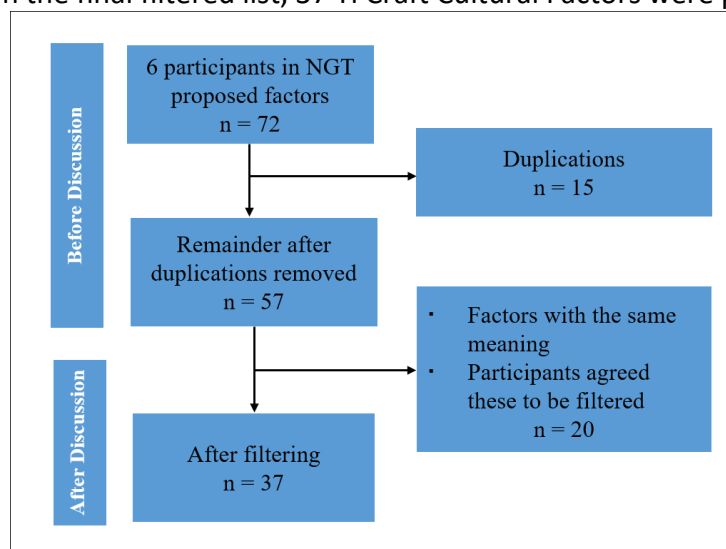


Figure 3. The Filtration Process of Factors

During the discussion process of the NTG group, researcher found that some keywords were described differently, but expressed the same meaning that was clarified by the NTG members. For example, one participant wrote Yi historical stories and myths, but was clarified when he explained that these were related to the historical origins. Another participant proposed Yi proverbs and scriptures, which he believed reflected history and inspired the designs. Both the explanations were considered to be factors of historical origin. To avoid cluttering the keywords, the researcher and the NTG group summarized the two descriptions as "historical origins." Other keyword filtering was agreed by all participants, as listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Factor Filtering in NTG Discussion Process

No.	Listed factors before filtration	Final factors after filtration
1	Property and status symbols	Wealth and status symbols
2	Status and Wealth	
3	Yi historical stories and myths	Historic origin
4	Yi proverbs and scriptures	
5	Yi costumes and accessories	Yi costumes and accessories
6	Daily clothing and accessories	
7	Yi symbols, drawings and patterns	Yi visual design elements
8	Local motif and pattern of Yi	
9	Aesthetic pleasure	Aesthetically pleasing
10	Beauty	
11	Daily utensil decoration	Yi style decoration
12	Features of architectural decoration	
13	Silver	Material preference of Yi
14	Silver, iron, bamboo	
15	Local raw materials of Yi	
16	Inheritance and protection of cultural heritage	Cultural heritage protection
17	The system of inheriting culture	
18	Belief	Religious beliefs
19	Natural worship	
20	Traditional ritual	

In Table 3, the total votes of the Yi craft cultural factors were based on the experiences of experts in their areas of preferences. Items are rated on a scale from 1 to 37, with 1 being the most prominent and 37 being the least prominent. In this study the lowest mean indicated the most prominent Yi craft cultural factors, while the highest mean indicated the least prominent Yi craft cultural factors.

Table 3
Votes and Mean Ranking of Yi Craft Cultural Factors

Priority	Yi Craft Cultural Factors	Total Votes	Mean	Priority	Yi Craft Cultural Factors	Total Votes	Mean
1	Yi Handicraft skill	40	6.66	20	Habits and customs	117	19.5
2	Aesthetically pleasing	49	8.16	21	Folk art	130	21.66
3	Creative thinking	52	8.66	22	Yi characters	133	22.16
4	Functionally appropriate	56	9.33	23	As gifts	134	22.33
5	Yi visual design elements	60	10	24	Yi embroidery	135	22.5
6	Craftsmen	61	10.33	25	User friendly	135	22.5
7	Emotional connection	63	10.50	26	Yi costumes and accessories	138	23
8	Historic origin	76	12.66	27	Durability	143	23.83
9	Multiple uses	78	13	28	Soft to use	149	24.83
10	Yi style decoration	84	14	29	Sustainability	150	25
11	Local context	88	14.66	30	Tool	155	25.83
12	Use occasions	89	14.83	31	Religious beliefs	156	26
13	Local image of Yi	90	15	32	Blessing	157	26.16
14	Material preference of Yi	90	15	33	Bionic design	168	28
15	Yi lacquer three colors	91	15.16	34	Wealth and status symbols	174	29
16	Innovative design	94	15.66	35	Music and dance	181	30.16
17	Fashionable	100	16.66	36	Cost	192	32
18	Yi group identity	102	17	37	Frugality	195	32.5
19	Gender factors	113	18.83				

*Items rated on a scale of 1 to 37 (1=most prominent to 37=least prominent)

Discussion

Madi et al (2011); McMillan et al (2016) proposed to select the five most prominent items from the pool of ideas as the NGT results. According to the descriptive statistics of Table 3, Yi handicraft skill was ranked as the top priority with a mean score of 6.66, followed with Aesthetically pleasing (2th, M=8.16), Creative thinking (3th, M=8.66), functionally appropriate (4th, M=9.33), Yi visual design elements (5th, M=10) ranked within the top five. Based on the results of the discussion among the group of experts on this Yi craft culture, the above five items were highly trusted and accepted as the most prominent Yi craft culture factors.

The results proved that Yi cultural experts believed that Yi handicraft skill played the most important role in local design practices. In addition to the Yi handicraft skill factor, other factors such as Aesthetically pleasing, Craftsmen, Functionally appropriate, Yi visual design elements were also considered as necessary priority factors in the cultural product designs. According to the statistical results, some other craft culture factors like Craftsmen (6th,

M=10.33), Emotional connection (7th, M=10.50), Historic origin (8th, M=12.66), Multiple uses (9th, M=13), Yi style decoration (10th, M=14) also had a high frequency of influence on designs.

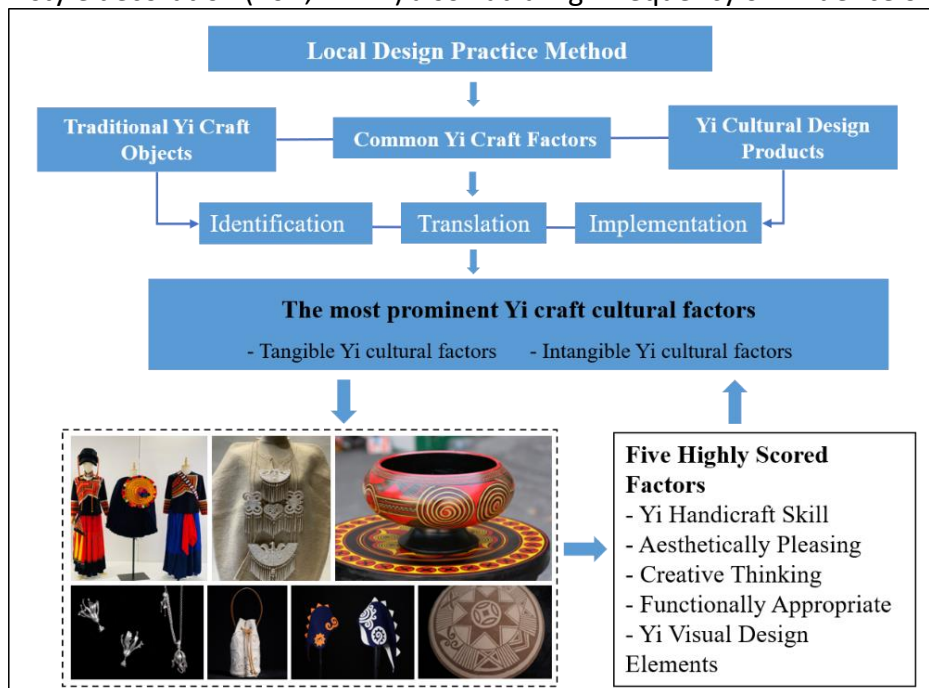


Figure 4. Local design practice method (drawn by Bujimo)

Most scholars (Berk, 2013; Tian et al., 2018; Yao, 2010; Yeh & Lin, 2011) have classified cultural factors that influence design into tangible and intangible factors. They argue that tangible factors affect the appearance and design style of a product through materials, patterns, shapes, etc.; Intangible factors are related to the meaning, value, emotion, etc. of product design. The Yi craft culture produced in this study also involves tangible and intangible factors. For example, the craft object marked No. 3 and No. 4 in Figure 2 is an indispensable utensil in the daily life of the Yi people in Liangshan. The distinct aesthetic of Yi can be seen in the visible colors, patterns, and shape features. In addition, lacquerware has intangible cultural meanings, such as hospitality, etiquette, a symbol of wealth, and a distinct identity.

As culture reflects an increasingly important role in the design field, cultural design is becoming the focus of design evaluation (Chiorean, 2018; Razzaghi & Jr, 2005). Figure 4 briefly summarizes the approaches to local cultural design practices obtained in this study. At present, a variety of traditional Yi crafts have obvious local characteristics and are still sold as daily consumer goods to the local people and as souvenirs to tourists (Chen, 2018). The researcher suggested that local designers could use this information to inspire creative thinking in the design process to create products that fit the current aesthetic. This is because combining the "folk" concept of traditional craft with the contemporary "fashion" concept, which is not only a solution to the crisis of traditional crafts, but also allows the combination of modern design and ethnic spiritual culture (Wang, 2021). This practice from culture to design brings possibilities to improve the economic growth of the industry, which is essential for the continuation of local craftsmanship (Zhan & Walker, 2019).

Conclusion

The research question posed in this study asks for the identification of Yi craft cultural factors that influence local design practices to provide designers with a reference for creating

cultural products with current aesthetics. To answer this question, six experts related to Yi craft culture participated in the NGT discussion and presented 37 common craft culture factors, resulting in the five most prominent factors from the voting priorities. These five factors are Yi Handicraft skill, Aesthetically pleasing, Creative thinking, Functionally appropriate and Yi visual design elements.

The findings reveal that local design practices are influenced by numerous factors of Yi craft culture, some of which stand out. These findings enhance the limited data on Yi craft culture from the past. The tacit and tangible knowledge of Yi craft culture was updated. NGT members argue that such knowledge helps to reflect the cultural meaning and value of a product. The benefit of a better understanding of culture is not only to develop culture-centric designs, but also to provide an advantage for participating in market competition.

Therefore, the researcher suggested that designers apply prominent Yi craft culture factors into their designs when creating novel products, and then traditional craft culture practices will increase and community identity will be enhanced. Simultaneously, the results provide a method for smoothing the transition from Yi traditional craft culture to modern design and the creation of ethically and aesthetically appropriate products. This also means that the results can provide flexible guidance for designers from different cultures in their local design practices.

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