





Research on the Cultural Connotations of Decorative Art in Slab Shelf Dwellings

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Abstract: The crisis in the preservation of their skills demonstrates the extent to which the architectural cultural heritage of the ethnic minorities is being protected. The decorative art of Slab Shelf Dwellings is a tangible representation of the cultural system built by the southwest mountainous peoples. Through field mapping, craftsmen's interviews, and pattern genealogy, this study systematically dissects the various themes, modeling logics, and spatial compositional features of the decorative art in Siji Ji Village in Meigu County, the core inheritance area of the intangible cultural heritage "Liangshan Yi Folk Dwelling Skills." In the semi-agricultural and semi-pastoral livelihood, it is discovered that: (1) The ternary combination of animal and plant motifs, natural abstract motifs, and production tool motifs maps out the synergistic relationship of "Nature-Human-Technology"; (2) The decorative motifs realize the spatial translation of the primitive religious cosmogony and the pragmatic construction logic through the compositional technique of continuous motifs; and (3) Liangshan Ji Village, influenced by the Han architectural culture, has become the most significant locatiOn in the history of the Chinese people worldwide. (3) Liangshan residences, which are affected by Han architectural culture, exhibit multicultural traits, and Yi culture maintains its individuality while assimilating Han culture, further illustrating the cultural importance of the unity of diversity. This study establishes for the first time an interpretative framework for the decorative art and culture of the product rack houses, which provides a value cognitive foundation for the living inheritance of ethnic minority architectural cultural heritage in the Southwest region.


1 INTRODUCTION


1.1 The State of Traditional Architectural Decoration in Liangshan

The exquisite art of the Slab Shelf Dwellings, a quintessential example of southwest mountain architecture, reflects the cultural DNA and knowledge of the Yi people. Early buildings were usually constructed of wood, and the ornamental art was presented through carvings and paintings attached to beams, pillars, gables, and other components (Yang and Tang, 2021) (Figure 1). These structures are a physical expression of the semi-

agricultural and semi-pastoral subsistence and primitive religious cosmology. The decorative culture is experiencing a crisis as a result of the loss of knowledge about handicraft, the deterioration of cultural identity, and the breakdown of ecological adaptation. This is because the aging of artisan groups and the lack of lumber make it impossible for wooden houses to meet the requirements of contemporary living. Wooden structures have gradually given way to brick-concrete homes (Figure 2). In this sense, both theoretical reconstruction and salvage preservation benefit from a systematic examination of the significance of the ornamental culture of Slab Shelf Dwellings.

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Figure 1: Examples of Slab Shelf Dwellings in Sijiji Village.



Figure 2: Current status of the Sijiji villagers' residences.

1.2 The Current Research Status of Traditional Architectural Decoration in Liangshan

Established studies on Liangshan architectural decoration focus on two dimensions: domestic scholars focus on pattern classification and innovative design research. Yang Xixian (Yang and Tang, 2021) explores the path of national cultural identity through the innovative design of modern architecture and architectural decoration patterns; Ni Jianlin (2007) explains the origin of decoration from the perspective of primitive art; Chen Xiaoqin (Chen and Tang, 2019) and others believe that the architectural forms and decorations of the Liangshan Yi people are affected by factors such as social structure, religious culture and living customs. Su Tianlin (2020) has the changes of the residential culture centred on the fire pit in the construction of new villages, and puts forward the protection and inheritance strategy of the architectural culture. Guo Yannan (2022) sorted out the formal characteristics and decorative connotations of architectural components and proposed how to apply pattern and colour innovation in architectural decoration through practice.

Foreign academics' studies of the architecture of the Liangshan region are typically more focused on the thorough generalization of architectural elements

and the in-depth examination of architectural culture (Gamage, and Hyde, 2012; Bamo and Huang, 2000). From the micro perspective of the decorative carriers of the Slab Shelf Dwelling architectural decorative culture, in-depth research is still lacking despite the fact that previous studies on the national culture, inheritance and evolution, and decorative characteristics of Liangshan architecture have been involved (Ye, 2017; Li, 2021; Fan and Cheng, 2008). In order to provide fresh viewpoints and theoretical support for the legacy of the architectural culture in Liangshan Prefecture, this paper begins with the themes, modeling, and compositional forms of the architectural decoration of the Slab Shelf Dwellings in the prefecture. It then uses fieldwork data and diagrams to focus on the relationship between their architectural decorations and aesthetics, functions, and concepts.

2 OVERVIEW OF SLAB SHELF DWELLINGS IN SIJIFI VILLAGE

2.1 Broad Details about Shijiyoshi Village

Siji Ji Villiage, which was included in the second batch of Chinese communities in 2013, is a natural settlement hamlet situated in the northeastern region of Meigu County, Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture. In order to integrate agriculture and animal husbandry for their production and living needs, the villagers decided to dwell close to the mountain's summit, where the terrain is comparatively easy. The hamlet is located in a high mountainous location with an average elevation of 3,000 meters (Figure 3). All of the residents are Yi ethnic. Prior to the liberation, when the Yi ethnic group lived in an area that was a slave society, Liangshan Mountain was divided into three provinces: Sichuan, Kang, and Dian. Following the liberation, regional ethnic autonomy was realized, and the homes of Siji Jiji Village are a cultural microcosm of this history. The living practices of the Liangshan region were chosen to be a part of the Fifth Batch of the People's Republic of China's Intangible Cultural Heritage List in 2021.

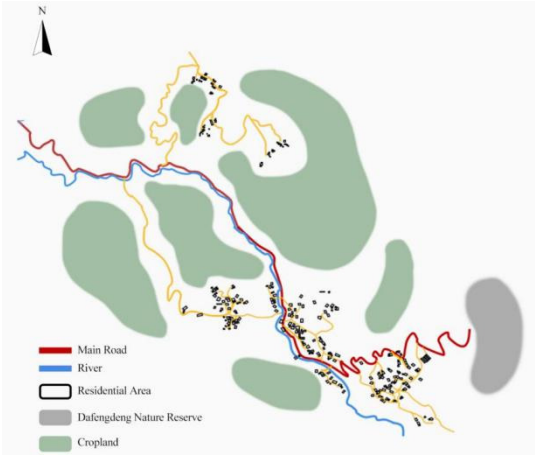


Figure 3: The Village Form of Sijiji Village.

Cultural practices and religious beliefs are strongly related. The Year of the Yi is traditionally observed from November 17 to November 21. With wrestling, horse racing, bullfighting, sheep fighting, and grinding ear autumn activities (Yi 2024), the Yi people's "Torch Festival" is a powerful and passionate event that demonstrates their brave and audacious nature. According to an oral remark made by MuPoYiHa, a member of the SiJiJi Village village committee in July 2023, BiMo cultural witchcraft activities involve three "superstitions": each family needs chickens, pigs, and sheep. The villagers exhibit strong local features by dressing in "felt, kanji, right-over-oblong, trailing skirt, hairpin, and green pajamas" (Figure 4) during weddings and funerals. The locals' comprehension of the unknown world and their yearning for a better existence are reflected in this blending of religious rituals, culture, and art. It is also crucial for them to preserve communal togetherness and preserve their national culture.

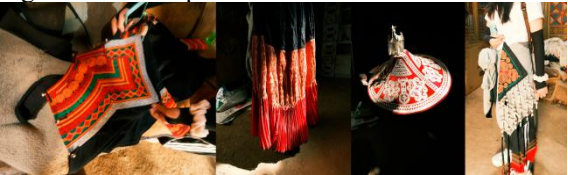


Figure 4: Dress for weddings, funerals and other events

2.2 Slab Shelf feature

Each ethnic culture's decorations have their own symbolic meanings. Slab Shelf Dwelling is one of the most notable examples of the widely dispersed residential buildings in the Liangshan Yi area, with Meigu County at its center. It is renowned for its unique "Slab" wooden structure system, which has gradually evolved from the early purely longitudinal frame structure to the half-slab structure and finally

evolved into the mature structure system dominated by horizontal slogans. The original patterned decorations are still present in the house's construction style, namely on the partition walls, arches, squares, and columns inside, as well as the eaves and purlins beneath the eaves (Table 1). Despite the design's simplicity, it gives the room a spooky color by adorning some items with symbols of warding off evil spirits, like an ox's head or horns.

Table 1: Research Data Sheet for Yoshimura's Four Seasons Product Shelf Building Decoration.

Na me	Eaves Beam Decoration	Slab Shelf Decoration	Partition Wall Decoratio
JiaSi Yibu			
AKu Tieri			
MuP o GeF u			
Shuo Ri ErZh u			
AZe Ding Ji			

3 CULTURAL FEATURES OF SLAB SHELF DWELLINGS' ARCHITECTURAL EMBELLISHMENTS










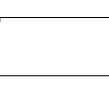
The fact that ornamentation is a component of culture cannot be disputed. Architectural decoration uses certain themes, styles, and compositions to highlight the beauty of art. Thus, in terms of subjects, styles, and organizational forms, architectural decoration exhibits its distinct creative traits. The following





categories and summaries of the cultural aspects of architectural decoration are based on the thorough gathering and examination of field survey data:

3.1 Decorative Subject

Since then, the people of Sijiyoshi Village have documented their history, culture, farming, and religious beliefs via architectural embellishments. Based on the field investigation, the themes of the architectural decorations of the Slab Shelf Dwellings may be summed up in the following categories (Table 2): Natural patterns, which are frequently found in sun and mountain patterns, represent the devotion of nature and express people's love and respect for it by mimicking natural phenomena. Patterns found in plants and animals, such as the common fish eye, frog, pumpkin seed, and sheep horn patterns, demonstrate how dependent humans are on both their religion and plants. Typical tool motif patterns, fire sickle patterns, etc. These patterns emphasize the importance of production tools in day-to-day life and symbolize the fundamental role of labor and production. Coin patterns, net patterns, back patterns, and other abstract patterns—geometric patterns made by rearranging points, lines, and surfaces—showcase creative talent while also signifying wealth and good fortune.

Table 2: Categories of Decorative Patterns in Slab Shelf Dwellings

Category	Original Drawing	Decorative Schematic	Element
(1) Natural Patterns			Sun
			Mountain
(2) Animals and Plants Patterns			Sheep horn
			Frog
			Pumpkin Seed

(3) Tools Patterns			Scythe
(4) Geometric Patterns			Coin

It is evident that the architectural embellishments of the Slab Shelf Dwellings perfectly capture the culture of the Liangshan Yi people. Whether they are geometric patterns, animals, or plants, they all convey the locals' respect for the natural world and their intense desire for a better living in their semi-pastoral and semi-agricultural society. These ornamental motifs transmit rich cultural connotations and historical recollections while also reflecting the residents' lives, production practices, and spiritual beliefs in addition to their aesthetic preferences.

3.2 Design Characteristics

At a deeper level, modeling is a crystallization of the routine aesthetic actions ingrained in political and cultural symbols, in addition to being a direct outcome of material production. In Liangshan, Slab Shelf Dwellings are a type of typical residential building. Their rich and distinctive decorative modeling elements not only capture the local way of life and culture, but also their distinct aesthetic art. The outdoor through-fang structure, the indoor arch and through-double structure, and the partition wall are considered the main research areas in this study because some studies have indicated that the decorations of the interior walls of houses are primarily concentrated at 1/2 – 3/4 of the ground (Guo 2022) (Figure 5).



- (a) Exterior beam structures
- (b) Wooden slab shelves
- (c) Interior partition walls

Figure 5: Decorative Carriers of Slab Shelf Dwellings in Sijiji Village.

3.2.1 Exterior Beam Structures, Known as Eave Beams

The first kind is an outside square, often known as an eaves square. The picket fence beneath the eaves, which is typically separated into three sections, supports the distinctive look of the product-frame boarding house architecture. The eaves' primary decorative colors—black, red, and yellow—as well as white and blue (Figure 6) demonstrate the locals' emotional orientation. In addition to geometric shapes with symbolic connotations, the decorative motifs also contain animal and plant motifs like bamboo joints and cow horns. In addition to improving the building's beauty, this type of decoration honors the local culture and the environment.



Figure 6: Decorative colours.

3.2.2 Wooden Slab Shelves

The second category is product frames made of wood. The majority of buildings in Liangshan use wooden frame construction, which primarily uses product and wood frame construction. Since the roof of the entire building serves as the top support for the structure, the roof's decoration primarily reflects that of the wooden frame structure. The bucket truss structure is identical to the wooden truss structure in that it is composed of a row of columns, each of which is run through horizontally with a square to create a purlin frame. Together, these two structures form the entire roof, which serves as the primary support for the roof. The typical way to decorate an indoor product frame is to utilize horn carving, which is also frequently used in exterior house eaves beneath the eaves square (Yang et al., 2021)). The indoor product frame is typically divided into three, five, nine, or eleven levels. For instance, the product frame's horizontal square head has a distinct aesthetic style because to its deft modeling integration into the cow horn components. High contrast and solid colors are frequently

employed in color selection, which emphasizes the decoration's visual impact even more.

3.2.3 Interior Partitions

Interior partition walls make up the third group. The interior partition walls are primarily composed of bamboo and wood, and they are embellished with panel inlays and columns. About 70% of the labor in the construction of residential buildings in the Liangshan area is done by carpenters on their own, using their exceptional abilities. The artisans meticulously draw lines during the painting process based on the various internal spatial structures and patterns, then precisely zone and color the frames to ensure that the entire area blends in with the natural surroundings.

3.3 Forms of Organization

The Slab Shelf Dwellings' ornamental patterns start with a single design and are created by skillfully arranging and combining several independent pattern parts to create a complex and cohesive whole pattern. The arrangement is clever, achieving a delicate synthesis of geometric abstraction and figurative components of flora and animals. The layout is harmonious with symmetry and harmony, as well as rhythmic and rhythmic. The ornamental patterns also display the ancestors' artistic intelligence; they employ repetitive and continuous processes to produce a smooth, continuous pattern that emphasizes plant and animal features, well-arranged geometric lines, and visual fullness and richness. For instance, the two-square continuous design on the square head of the ox horn is made up of appropriate patterns, bamboo joints, and geometric patterns; similarly, the indoor partition wall is made up of sheep's horn patterns and geometric patterns (Figure 7-8). The harmony and balance of the pattern organization in the Liangshan region's architectural decoration exhibits a particularly noteworthy artistic quality (Figure 9), and it has grown to be a significant symbol of the region's decorative art. This exquisite organization displays the locals' profound awareness and cultural heritage in addition to their desire of beauty and aesthetic excellence.

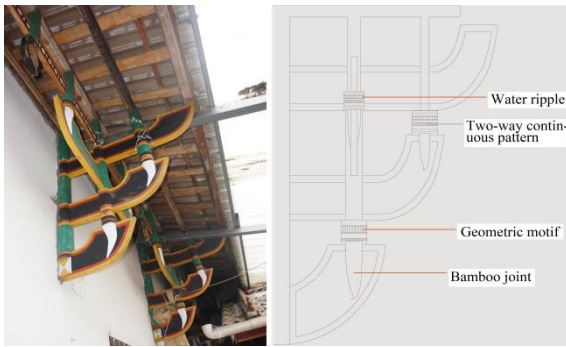


Figure 7: Organizational Forms of Exterior Beam Structures.



Figure 8: Organizational Forms of Interior Partitions.

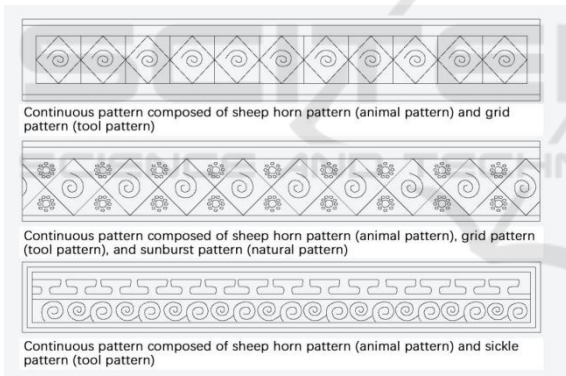


Figure 9: Organizational Forms of Interior Partitions.

4 THE CULTURAL CONNOTATION OF THE DECORATION ART OF SLAB SHELF DWELLINGS

4.1 Forms of "Nature-Human-Technology" Synergy

A distinctive trinity of animal and plant motifs, natural abstract motifs, and production tool motifs is created in the architectural and ornamental art of the Slab Shelf Dwellings. The region's semi-agricultural

and semi-pastoral way of life is strongly tied to this system, which was not created by accident. It shows how "nature, people, and technology" may work together harmoniously. For instance, the craftsmen skillfully carved the square heads of the slate structure into the shape of bull horns, a design that not only satisfies structural stability standards but also adds a distinctive decorative element to the building (Wang, 2023). Simultaneously, the materials for the slate roofs were carefully chosen, and premium woods such cold spruce, aspen, and pine were employed, which not only had outstanding physical qualities but also represented the local reverence for life and the natural world.

The locals' keen awareness of and strong reliance on the natural world is reflected in the widespread use of animal and plant motifs as well as natural abstract patterns. Humans view the selection and blending of these patterns as the outward expression of regional culture and spirit in semi-pastoral and semi-agricultural life. Technically speaking, production tool patterns are a clear representation of human technology. Thus, under the semi-agricultural and semi-pastoral livelihood, the ternary combination pattern system of the product rack-type boarding house is a vivid depiction of the interaction and synergy between nature, humans, and technology, which profoundly reflects the local community's unique cultural connotation and survival wisdom.

4.2 Methods of Translation for Pragmatic Construction Logic and Primitive Religious Cosmology

As the fundamental components with aesthetic and cultural significance, decorative motifs play a significant role in the compositional rules of architectural decoration. The decorative motifs of Slab Shelf Dwellings present the original abstract primitive religious cosmology in the architectural space with the aid of the continuous pattern composition law of repetition, interphase, and reversal. This allows for the gradual development of a comprehensive system of cultural expression from the material basis to the spiritual pursuit. The building serves as a place of dwelling as well as a vehicle for cultural expression and inheritance thanks to the deft integration of ornamental elements into the structure, which is predicated on the building's structural integrity. A unique viewpoint for the study of architectural ornamentation and cultural history is offered by this type of spatial translation, which not only reflects human discovery and pursuit of the spiritual realm but also exhibits a balanced

understanding of pragmatism and artistry in the material world.

4.3 The significance of Han and Yi Cultures

The architectural culture of the Han people has a significant influence on the residential buildings' structural integrity and aesthetic design in the Liangshan region. Meigu County residential appearances, including the Han architecture's roof ridge curved up, end nose wings, roof concave curved, structural wall columns, arch, etc., as well as modeling features, like the typical "double eaves" and wooden structure using the "perforated tube" and "hanging mountain" construction, are examples of multi-cultural manifestation. The architectural design of residential buildings in Meigu County is the crystallization of multi-culturalism, as evidenced by the features of the buildings, including the curved roof ridges of Han Chinese buildings, such as the wings of the end noses, the concave curvature of the roofs, and the structural elements, such as the archways and the columns of the mountain walls. The slate roof's architectural embellishment is a striking representation of China's multiculturalism. From a historical perspective, the Yi people's forefathers moved to the Liangshan region gradually since the Tang Dynasty, and various migrations have created the current pattern. The regional architectural style evolved throughout the Ming and Qing eras as a result of landlord economics, Han migration, and land reclassification. The Yi culture selectively absorbed and preserved its distinctiveness at this time, despite the Han culture's influence, underscoring the traits of cultural unity and pluralism. In terms of architecture, the product frame structure demonstrates the tolerance and blending of various cultures by combining Central Plains architectural technology with a timber construction. It is currently widely accepted that the pierced bucket type housing is the ancestor of the product frame structure, which is a significant example of the architectural fusion and interchange between the Central Plains and Liangshan regions.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The fan-frame plank house is a unique cultural icon in Liangshan Prefecture that is essential to understanding its architectural decoration culture. Important elements to consider include the composition, form, and topic matter. The decorative

elements of the fan-frame plank homes in Sijijicun are thoroughly examined in this essay, which also looks at the harmonious and balanced pattern organization, beautiful and distinctive form features, and ornamental themes inspired by nature. The study finds that: (1) The tripartite combination system of animal and plant patterns, natural abstract patterns, and production tool patterns in the "nature-human-technology" synergy vividly depicts the interaction between nature, humans, and technology under the semi-agricultural and semi-pastoral livelihood mode, exposing the local area's distinct cultural connotations and survival knowledge. (2) The structure is a significant carrier for cultural inheritance and expression, striking a balance between practicality and creativity, and achieving the spatial translation of the primal religious cosmology and the pragmatic construction logic through the continuous pattern composition rule. (3) It is based on the idea of cultural assimilation. Strong evidence of cultural interchange and integration between the two regions can be found in the fan-frame plank house's architectural design and construction, which are influenced by Han culture while maintaining the distinctive features of the Yi people. In addition to being a priceless part of Liangshan Prefecture's historical culture, the fan-frame plank house's architectural decoration art offers a distinctive viewpoint and a wealth of resources for research on architectural decoration, cultural inheritance, and interethnic and intercultural exchange. In order to foster the growth of traditional ethnic arts and culture, as well as to improve national cohesiveness and cultural confidence, future efforts should be made to further increase research and protection.

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