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Features of Developing the Visual Identity of the "Pingxiang No Culture" Cultural Brand.

Master's Thesis submitted for the degree of **Master**

Specialty B2 Design

Educational and Professional Program "Visual Communication Design"

The qualification work contains the results of independent research.

The use of ideas, results, and texts of other authors is properly referenced.

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ABSTRACT

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Master's Thesis submitted for the degree of Master, specialty B2 Design, Educational and Professional Program "Visual Communication Design." — Kharkiv State Academy of Design and Arts. Kharkiv, 2026.

This paper aims to investigate the application pathways of artistic elements such as Nuo masks, Nuo dance, and Nuo temples within Pingxiang Nuo culture in visual image design. By tracing their historical origins and cultural value, analyzing their forms, colors, patterns, and connotations, and integrating design cases with market demands, the study summarizes design methods and principles. Through design practice, it explores the modern translation and living transmission of Pingxiang Nuo culture, offering references for the integration of traditional culture and modern design. Nuo culture, as a "living fossil" of China's intangible cultural heritage, is also a treasure of Chinese folk art, and Pingxiang Nuo culture, the more robust branch on its developmental "boughs," reflects a more distinctive cultural charm through its unique regional characteristics. Typical representatives of Pingxiang Nuo—Nuo masks, Nuo dance, and Nuo temples—as important carriers inheriting the connotations of Pingxiang Nuo culture, embody the transformations that Pingxiang Nuo has undergone over its long historical development. They are of extraordinary significance for scholars seeking to understand the artistic connotations and cultural values embedded within them, including their implications for local folk culture and the spiritual and cultural dimensions of the people. The importance of these three is naturally self-evident.As typical representatives, Nuo masks, Nuo dance, and Nuo temples serve as important carriers inheriting the cultural connotations of Pingxiang Nuo, reflecting the transformations that Pingxiang Nuo has undergone over its long

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historical development. They are of profound significance for scholars in understanding the artistic connotations and cultural values embedded within them, including their impact on local folk culture and the spiritual culture of the people, and the importance of these three elements is self-evident. However, constrained by the impact of modern civilization, the ancient Nuo culture has been gradually abandoned in the tides of the times, with fewer and fewer people understanding it. Pingxiang Nuo urgently needs new impetus to enable traditional culture to "shed its old garments and don new attire." Therefore, this paper conducts a systematic study of the representative artistic elements of Pingxiang Nuo, namely Nuo masks, Nuo dance, and Nuo temples, and extends them into visual image design, excavating the cultural charm embedded within them to reinterpret them in new ways, and attempting to provide new reflections for the further transformation of traditional culture. This paper takes the design application of Pingxiang Nuo in visual images as its main research subject. It first discusses the origin and development of Nuo culture, then focuses on the historical origins, organizational composition, current development status, and value analysis of Nuo culture in the Pingxiang region, clarifying the historical heritage and development potential embedded in Pingxiang Nuo itself. Subsequently, it analyzes and studies the Nuo masks, Nuo dance, and Nuo temples among the artistic elements of Pingxiang Nuo. Through analysis, extraction, and decomposition from aspects such as form, color, pattern, and connotation, it interprets the unique artistic aesthetic characteristics of Pingxiang Nuo artistic elements, further revealing the cultural connotations and artistic aesthetic features of Pingxiang Nuo.This paper takes the design application of Pingxiang Nuo in visual images as its primary research subject. It first discusses the origin and development of Nuo culture, then focuses on the historical origins, organizational composition, development status, and value analysis of Nuo culture in the Pingxiang region, thereby clarifying the historical heritage and developmental potential embodied in Pingxiang Nuo itself. Secondly, it analyzes and studies the

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Nuo masks, Nuo dance, and Nuo temples among the artistic elements of Pingxiang Nuo. Through analysis, extraction, and decomposition of their forms, colors, patterns, and connotations, it interprets the distinctive aesthetic characteristics of Pingxiang Nuo artistic elements, further revealing the cultural connotations and artistic aesthetic features of Pingxiang Nuo. Thirdly, it analyzes application cases of Nuo culture in modern product design, from which it summarizes the design methods and principles for applying Pingxiang Nuo to visual image design, and considers how to integrate it with visual image design.Finally, based on the above research conclusions and needs analysis, the consumer persona and the design approach for visual identity were positioned. The artistic elements of Pingxiang Nuo were distilled through design into patterns and applied to various visual identities. The rich application carriers expanded the application market for Pingxiang Nuo visual identity design. Specific design examples were presented to showcase the design works. This design practice uncovered the aesthetic sensibilities of Pingxiang Nuo rooted in local folk traditions, and through the techniques of visual identity design, conveyed the cultural connotations embedded in Pingxiang Nuo, so as to achieve radiating promotion of Pingxiang Nuo among the public and enable its innovative reproduction under modern aesthetics.

The above research and practice conclude that applying Pingxiang Nuo to visual identity design can convey the aesthetic characteristics of its artistic elements and cultural connotations to consumers, providing certain reference ideas for the organic integration of traditional culture and modern design, further facilitating the design inheritance of traditional culture, and thereby exploring new paths for the development of traditional culture under modern aesthetics.

Keywords: Pingxiang Nuo culture; visual image; applied research; artistic elements

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INTRODUCTION

Relevance of the research: By summarising and synthesising relevant research on Pingxiang's Nuo culture, this paper provides a theoretical foundation and makes a contribution to the understanding of the intrinsic constituent elements of Pingxiang's Nuo culture—namely, Nuo masks, Nuo dance and Nuo temples. This helps to enrich theoretical research on Nuo culture in the Pingxiang region,and provides a theoretical basis for the public to gain a comprehensive understanding of Pingxiang's Nuo culture, as well as for the development and study of Nuo culture in other regions.From the perspective of contemporary design, research into Pingxiang's Nuo culture is not merely a process of design and development; rather, it is primarily

aimed at highlighting the cultural essence and artistic aesthetic value of Pingxiang's Nuo culture whilst ensuring its protection, transmission and innovative application. It offers design insights for the process of re-creating traditional cultures in other regions whose traditional cultures remain relatively unknown to the public, and also helps to promote the development of regional cultural industries, fostering distinctive local cultural industries so that traditional culture does not merely 'live' in the past, but is imbued with modern aesthetics, allowing it to 'live' in the present.

Purpose of the research: This paper provides a theoretical foundation by summarizing relevant research on Pingxiang Nuo culture. It contributes to supplementing the intrinsic constituent elements of Pingxiang Nuo culture—Nuo masks, Nuo dance, and Nuo temples—thereby enriching the relevant theoretical research on Nuo culture in the Pingxiang region and offering a corresponding theoretical basis for the public to comprehensively understand Pingxiang Nuo culture and for research on the development of Nuo culture in other regions.

To achieve this purpose, the **following objectives** are set:

1. Systematically sort out the origin and development of Nuo culture, with a focus

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on clarifying the historical origins, organizational composition, development status, and cultural value of Pingxiang Nuo, and reveal its historical heritage and inheritance potential.

2. Analyze the representative artistic elements of Pingxiang Nuo, starting from the forms, colors, patterns, and connotations of Nuo masks, Nuo dance, and Nuo temples, and distill their artistic aesthetic characteristics and cultural symbols.

3. Summarize the application experience of Nuo culture in modern product design, analyze relevant cases, generalize referable design methods and principles, and clarify the path for combining Pingxiang Nuo with visual image design.

4. Propose design ideas for Pingxiang Nuo visual image design, combine market demand with consumer profile portraits, distill Pingxiang Nuo artistic elements into patterns, and apply them to multiple types of visual image design.

Object of the research – This study aims to explore the paths and methods for integrating the artistic elements of Pingxiang Nuo masks, Nuo dance, and Nuo temples into modern visual identity design through systematic analysis and design transformation, thereby achieving the modern interpretation and design inheritance of Pingxiang Nuo culture.

Subject of the research –Design strategies, methods, and practical applications for the visual identity of Pingxiang Nuo culture

Chronological framework of the research – Pingxiang Nuo culture can be traced back to the Shang and Zhou dynasties. During the Wanli period of the Ming dynasty, Nuo mask carving techniques reached maturity, and in the mid-to-late Ming dynasty, a flourishing pattern of "a general every five li, a Nuo deity every ten li" took shape. In 2006, the Xiangdong Nuo mask carving technique was inscribed on the first batch of the national intangible cultural heritage list, and in 2021, Pingxiang Nuo dance was selected for the fifth batch of the national intangible cultural heritage list. Contemporary design practice began with a

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campus inheritance model in 2016, entered a stage of systematic cultural and creative product development around 2023, and has gradually expanded since 2025 into digital communication fields such as AR interaction, AI short videos, and gamification design, demonstrating a clear trend of transition from static preservation to living transmission.

Territorial framework of the research – The study focuses on Pingxiang City in Jiangxi Province. In terms of spatial distribution, Pingxiang's Nuo culture exhibits a pattern of 'concentration at the core and radiation to the periphery', with Xiangdong District serving as the core area for the transmission of Nuo mask carving techniques, and Shangli County being the region with the highest concentration of Nuo temple remains and Nuo dance schools; whilst Chexiang Village in Nankeng Town, Luxi County, is renowned for its Tang Dynasty heritage site featuring the 'three treasures' of Nuo temples, Nuo masks and Nuo dance.

Research methods: Literature review, field research, case study analysis, design semiotics and design practice. Firstly, the literature review method was employed to systematise relevant theories on Nuo culture, Pingxiang Nuo and visual identity design, thereby establishing a research framework; secondly, the fieldwork method was utilised to conduct on-site investigations of Nuo masks, Nuo temples and Nuo dances in locations such as Xiangdong District, Shangli County and Chexiang Village, Nankeng Town, Luxi County, collecting visual, physical and oral materials; Thirdly, the case study method was employed to summarise experiences of applying Nuo culture in contemporary design; combined with the design semiotics approach, visual elements of Pingxiang Nuo were extracted, simplified and reconstructed; finally, the design practice method was utilised to produce visual identity design works, with the effectiveness of the designs verified through interviews and questionnaires. These diverse methods complemented one another, forming a research pathway comprising 'theoretical

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review – field research – element analysis – design practice – effectiveness evaluation'.

Practical significance of the research: From the perspective of contemporary design, research into Pingxiang's Nuo culture is not merely a process of design and development; rather, it is primarily aimed at highlighting the cultural significance and aesthetic value of Pingxiang's Nuo culture whilst ensuring its protection, transmission and innovative application. This approach provides design inspiration for the process of revitalising traditional cultures in other regions that remain relatively unknown to the public. It also helps to promote the development of regional cultural industries and foster distinctive local cultural sectors, ensuring that traditional culture does not merely 'live' in the past, but is imbued with modern aesthetic sensibilities so that it 'lives' in the present.

Practical significance of the research: From the perspective of contemporary design, research into Pingxiang's Nuo culture is not merely a process of design and development; rather, it is primarily aimed at highlighting the cultural significance and aesthetic value of Pingxiang's Nuo culture whilst ensuring its protection, transmission and innovative application. This approach provides design inspiration for the process of revitalising traditional cultures in other regions that remain relatively unknown to the public; it also helps to promote the development of regional cultural industries, fostering distinctive local cultural sectors, so that traditional culture does not merely 'live' in the past, but is imbued with modern aesthetic sensibilities, enabling it to 'live' in the present.

Structure and scope of the thesis.

The work consists of an introduction, three chapters, conclusions, a list of references (20 items), and an illustration album (15 items). The main body of the research comprises 30 pages, the total volume with appendices is 39 pages.

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CHAPTER 1

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE ISSUE. RESEARCH METHODS

1.1. Review of the Literature

Research Status in China

Literary works that explore Nuo culture include, amongst others: *Nuo Opera Masks*, *The Genealogy of Chinese Nuo Deities* and *The Art of Chinese Shamanic and Nuo Masks*. These works have made significant contributions to both the theory and practice of Nuo culture in China. Among them, *The Art of Chinese Shamanic and Nuo Masks*, edited by Mr Xue Ruolin, is an authoritative work that systematically examines and researches the culture of Chinese Nuo masks. The book's core achievement lies in its being the first to present Nuo masks—found across all regions and among all ethnic groups in China—as a complete cultural system from a macro perspective. It is not merely an art catalogue; rather, from multidimensional perspectives encompassing history, folklore and art studies, it traces in depth the origins of Nuo masks in ancient shamanic rituals, revealing their sacred role as a medium of communication between humans and deities, as well as their deep roots in agrarian civilisation. The work provides a detailed analysis of the artistic characteristics and stylistic differences in the form, colour and materials of Nuo masks from various regions, whilst interpreting the folk beliefs and cosmogonies embedded within these visual symbols. It clearly illustrates the functional evolution of Nuo masks from religious ritual objects to folk artworks, thereby comprehensively establishing the artistic genealogy of Chinese Nuo masks. Mr Lin He's *Tracing Ancient Nuo* is a pioneering work in the field of Nuo studies. Aimed at tracing the ancient origins and primordial forms of Chinese Nuo culture, the book challenges the traditional view that regards Nuo merely as a simple ritual for warding off evil spirits. Mr Lin He creatively proposes that ancient Nuo culture is

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one of the key sources that gave rise to the Yangtze River civilisation and, indeed, the entire Chinese civilisation. He further elaborates that Nuo is not a 'ritual' exclusive to the Han Chinese of the Central Plains, but rather an indigenous cultural system originating in southern China and rooted in a profound agrarian civilisation. It was originally a comprehensive cultural phenomenon, integrating sacrificial rites, song and dance, drama, fertility cults, and astronomy and calendrics; it represented a holistic expression of the way of life and beliefs of ancient peoples under the concept of 'animism'. *Chinese Nuo Culture*, edited by Chen Yuehong and Xu Xinjian, is a comprehensive work that systematically expounds on Chinese Nuo culture. It treats Nuo culture as a comprehensive cultural system that spans Chinese history and is widespread across multiple ethnic groups. The book systematically traces the evolution of Nuo from ancient sacrificial rituals to later folk opera and folk customs, revealing the rich historical and cultural information it carries as a 'living fossil'. Liu Xianzhong's *A Study of the Art of Gan Nuo Masks* takes Jiangxi (abbreviated as 'Gan'), a major centre of Nuo culture, as its scope and focuses on its most representative visual symbol—the Nuo mask—conducting an in-depth and meticulous study of the art form itself. The core of the work lies in the fact that it does not merely present a catalogue of masks; rather, it begins with the visual formal language—including form, colour, ornamentation and craftsmanship—to systematically analyse the artistic characteristics, stylistic schools and underlying aesthetic concepts of Gan Nuo masks. The study clearly delineates the stylistic differences and commonalities of Gan Nuo masks across different regions (such as Nanfeng, Wuyuan and Pingxiang), and establishes a typological spectrum ranging from the sacred to the secular. It explores in depth how the masks, through their exaggerated forms, symbolic colours and patterned motifs, express the characters, functions and divine status of the deities, revealing the creative wisdom of 'conveying meaning through imagery'. Mr Zeng Zhigong's *Nuo Culture of Nanfeng, Jiangxi* is an 'encyclopaedic' work that provides an in-depth analysis of local Nuo culture. As

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a local scholar, Mr Zeng Zhigong, drawing on his extensive fieldwork experience and intimate knowledge of local archives, has produced an extremely systematic and meticulous record and analysis of the historical origins, ritual practices, organisational structures of performance troupes, performance forms and folkloric context of Nanfeng Nuo. The author demonstrates a high degree of empirical rigour and comprehensiveness of source material. The work provides a detailed account of the entire ritual process of Nanfeng Nuo, the lineage of numerous Nuo troupes, and the content of over a hundred traditional performances, whilst also offering a meticulous classification and interpretation of the rich and diverse array of Nuo masks.

Case Study

The interactive game "AR Nuo Journey," launched in 2025, was spearheaded by the Xiangdong District Cultural Center. A team of experts from Tsinghua University served as technical and design mentors, while Peng Guolong, a representative inheritor of the Xiangdong Nuo Masks—a National Intangible Cultural Heritage—provided guidance throughout the project. The design approach centered on the Nuo culture—a national-level intangible cultural heritage project in Xiangdong District—transforming the ancient legends of the Twelve Divine Beasts into an interactive "cultural adventure." All 12 Nuo masks were meticulously modeled in 3D; by scanning specific display panels within the scenic area, visitors could bring the static masks to life on screen. Each Nuo deity location is equipped with exclusive audio, featuring dialogue tailored to local industries—for example, the "Tou Wu" mask at the navel orange farm recommends local navel oranges, while the "Fei Wei" mask at the crayfish farm introduces local culinary specialties; The project is delivered through an AR interactive game covering 12 Nuo deity sites in Lashi Town, linking rural landmarks such as the navel orange farm, the crayfish farm, Love Island in Zhuyuan Village, and the Daxingtang Reservoir, thereby transforming rural resources into the game's "natural stage"; In terms of practical outcomes, the

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process of visitors searching for the masks serves as an immersive rural tour, driving a boom in business for nearby restaurants and homestays, and turning local specialty agricultural products into “hot commodities.” The project also served as an entry in Tsinghua University’s “Design+” Innovation and Entrepreneurship (International) Competition, with university faculty guiding a student team from Xiangdong District Secondary Vocational School in its implementation, thereby cultivating local talent with both an understanding of intangible cultural heritage and technical skills. For this study, this case demonstrates the path by which Nuo masks have evolved from static displays to interactive experiences, and its “culture + technology + industry” integration model has expanded the boundaries of application scenarios for visual identity design.

Foreign Research Status

As a branch of China’s Nuo culture system with distinct local characteristics, Pingxiang Nuo culture has received relatively little specialized attention in the international academic community due to its regional and cultural specificity. Therefore, when broadening the perspective to the broader field of Nuo culture, one can identify a number of representative scholarly works by international scholars, most of which focus on the theatrical aspects of Nuo, mask art, and ritual practices. Japan began researching Chinese Nuo culture relatively early and has accumulated substantial achievements. Its research is characterized by a deep foundation in historical sources, meticulous fieldwork, and a broad comparative perspective within East Asia. Professor Ritsuko Hirota’s *The Origins of “Ghosts”: Masks and Rituals in China* is a landmark work in this field. Through long-term fieldwork and rigorous textual analysis, she systematically cataloged the forms, genealogy, and cultural significance of various ghost-mask images in Chinese Nuo theater and ritual ceremonies. Her research goes beyond mere morphological description to reveal the complex role of “ghosts” in Chinese folk beliefs—they are both malevolent spirits to be exorcised and supernatural beings

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that can be appeased and coexisted with. Ritsuko Hirota demonstrates how ghostly imagery has gradually evolved from a simple religious symbol for exorcism into a cultural vehicle that embodies folk moral values, communal memory, and aesthetic sensibilities. This research approach challenges the simplistic view of Nuo as merely an expression of horror or the bizarre, and establishes a solid theoretical foundation and platform for dialogue in comparative studies of beliefs in spirits and mask culture across East Asia—particularly among China, Japan, and Korea. Professor Tian Zhong Yicheng's research, beginning with the macro-structure of Chinese theatrical history, has brought about a paradigm shift in the field. In his seminal work *A History of Chinese Theater*, he forcefully challenges the traditional narrative of theatrical history centered on urban commercial theaters and scripts written by literati elites. Pioneeringly shifting his focus to rural society, he argues that the true origins of Chinese theater are deeply rooted in rural ritual ceremonies—particularly in "ritual theater" led by clan organizations. Through in-depth fieldwork on Nuo rituals in Jiangxi, Guizhou, and other regions, Tian Zhongyicheng meticulously depicted the performance forms, organizational structures, and transmission mechanisms of Nuo opera across different regional societies. His research revealed the internal dynamics and developmental trajectory of Chinese theater as it gradually differentiated from and became independent of religious rituals, ultimately moving toward professionalization and commercialization, thereby greatly enriching and reshaping the theoretical landscape of Chinese theater's origins and development. European scholars, on the other hand, have largely approached the subject from a cross-cultural comparative perspective. In *Chinese Nuo Opera and European Carnival*, French scholar Ban Qianwen attempts to compare Nuo-like rituals in China and Europe; fellow French scholar John Lagerwey, through fieldwork in the Fujian, Guangdong, and Jiangxi regions, documented the forms of Nuo's survival in local societies in his *Traditional Hakka Society* series. German scholar Andreas Breiter's research approach integrates musicology,

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folklore studies, and theater studies. Not only has he traveled to China on multiple occasions to study Nuo opera performances and participate in academic seminars, but he has also turned his attention to similar rituals in Europe. In his article “Nuo: A Symbiotic Phenomenon of Early Human Culture?”, he explores, from a theoretical perspective, the universality and particularity of Nuo as an ancient cultural phenomenon within the spiritual world of early humanity. By comparing Nuo with Greek masked rituals, he has expanded the cross-civilizational dialogue surrounding Nuo culture. Among scholars in Europe and the United States, Kenneth Dean of McGill University in Canada, who had conducted fieldwork in Fujian, drew upon the results of his long-term research to write two books: *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of Southeast China* (1993) and *Lord of the Three in One: The Spread of a Cult in Southeast China* (1998). John Lagerwey of the École Française d’Extrême-Orient compiled the results of his research in Fujian, Guangdong, and Jiangxi, publishing a 10-volume series titled *The Hakka Traditional Society Series*. German scholar Rudolf Brandel authored *The Nuo Ritual and Its Sociopsychological Functions in the Yongxing Dashi Community of the Yao Clan in Liujie Township, Guichi, Anhui*. Furthermore, Nuo culture is equally widespread in Europe and the Americas, as seen in the “Kechina” folk activities of the American Indian and Pei tribes, as well as the “Pexit” folk activities in Gastein, Austria. French scholar Ban Wengan pointed out: “(The two) differ in form, but they share a common expression of humanity’s anxiety toward nature.” After studying Nuo culture in Anhui, Shanxi, and other regions of China, German scholar Brandel concluded: “Nuo is a phenomenon common to the ancient peoples of the world.” This recognition of a transnational, shared phenomenon lays the groundwork for incorporating Nuo culture into the world.

Case Study

The 2025 Red Dot Design Award-winning project “The Art of Facial Masks,” a visual identity design for a mask culture brand, was created by a design team from Lingnan University of Science and Technology in Taiwan. The project

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uses traditional mask culture as its core visual resource, reinterpreting it through modern branding and visual expression; In terms of design methodology, the team systematically extracted the visual characteristics of traditional mask culture. While preserving the depth and artistic sensibility of this heritage, they transformed it into a modern brand visual language that emphasizes the fusion of craftsmanship, aesthetics, and modernity. By constructing a brand visual system, they gave traditional mask culture a recognizable and communicable contemporary form. The design was applied to brand visual elements, including a logo system, a visual identity system, and brand communication materials; In terms of practical outcomes, this project has received recognition through international design awards, validating the feasibility of transforming traditional mask culture into a contemporary form through systematic brand design. Its core value lies in transforming mask culture from a mere display of cultural heritage into a brand visual asset with market appeal; For this study, this case demonstrates a design pathway for transforming mask culture from “cultural heritage” into “brand visual assets.” Its “craftsmanship—aesthetics—modernity” trinity of design principles can serve as a methodological reference for the brand-building of Pingxiang Nuo’s visual identity—that is, moving beyond the application of a single motif to construct a complete, highly recognizable visual identity system.

1.2 Research Methods

Literature Review Method: The purpose is to systematize relevant theories on Nuo culture, Pingxiang Nuo, visual communication design, design semiotics, and the revitalization of intangible cultural heritage; In this study, this method is primarily used to trace the origins and development of Nuo culture, with a focus on clarifying the historical origins, organizational structure, and intangible cultural heritage designation process of Pingxiang Nuo. It involves reviewing

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existing research on Pingxiang Nuo masks, Nuo dances, and Nuo temples, as well as synthesizing methodological approaches from design semiotics, visual identity design, and cultural and creative design to provide a theoretical foundation for the extraction and reconstruction of elements.

Field Research Method: Aims to obtain firsthand visual materials, artifacts, ritual data, and oral accounts; in this study, the researcher primarily visited Mashan Town, Paishang Town, and Lashi Town in the Xiangdong District to investigate Nuo mask carving techniques and the lineage of master artisans, and traveled to the Shidongkou Nuo Temple in Chishan Town, Shangli County, and the Xiaojian Nuo Temple in Dongyuan Township to examine Nuo temple architecture, divine statues, decorative patterns, and Nuo dance rituals; and to Chexiang Village in Nankeng Town, Luxi County, to study the Chexiang Nuo Temple, Song Dynasty-era Nuo masks, and Nuo dance movements. Through photography, surveying, video recording, and interviews, a visual database of Pingxiang Nuo elements was established.

Case Study Method: The objective is to summarize experiences in applying Nuo culture and intangible cultural heritage (ICH) elements in modern design. In this study, cases primarily selected include Nuo-themed cultural and creative products, visual identity design for ICH, and regional cultural brand design. The analysis examines methods of element extraction, approaches to form simplification, logic behind color schemes, and types of application media to derive design methods and principles that can be adapted, thereby clarifying pathways for integrating Pingxiang Nuo culture with visual identity design.

Design Semiotics Method: The objective is to transform Pingxiang Nuo cultural elements into designable visual symbols; In this study, visual symbols—including forms, colors, patterns, and materials—are primarily extracted from Nuo masks, Nuo dances, and Nuo temples. The study analyzes their signifier and signified, as well as their extension and intension, to interpret their cultural

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symbolic meanings. Through encoding, decoding, simplification, and reconstruction, a modern visual design language is formed.

Design Practice Method: Aims to validate the research conclusions through concrete design works; in this study, the extracted visual elements of Pingxiang Nuo culture are primarily applied to visual identity design. Design content includes logos, patterns, posters, packaging, cultural and creative merchandise, and dynamic visuals. Through design practice, the feasibility of the element extraction and reconstruction strategies is tested, and the design works are showcased to evaluate their cultural dissemination effectiveness and market acceptance.

Conclusions to Chapter 1

This chapter focuses on the research topic of visual image design in Pingxiang’s Nuo culture and has completed three foundational tasks: a literature review, case analysis, and the development of a research methodology. In terms of domestic research, existing studies have largely focused on the essence of Nuo culture, the design of Nuo masks, Gan Nuo art, and Nanfeng Nuo culture. Works such as Xue Ruolin’s *The Art of Chinese Shamanic Nuo Masks*, Lin He’s *Tracing Ancient Nuo*, Chen Yuehong and Xu Xinjian’s *Chinese Nuo Culture*, Liu Xianzhong’s *A Study of Gan Nuo Mask Art*, and Zeng Zhigong’s *Nuo Culture in Nanfeng, Jiangxi* provide theoretical support for this study regarding the genealogy, regional styles, and symbolic meanings of Nuo culture; however, systematic research on the visual identity design of Pingxiang Nuo remains limited, and most studies tend to focus on single-aspect analyses of Nuo masks or Nuo dances. Regarding international research, scholars such as Ritsuko Hirota and Kazunari Tanaka from Japan, as well as Ban Wenggan and Lao Gewen from France, have primarily approached the subject from the perspectives of dramaturgy, folklore, and cross-cultural comparison, emphasizing fieldwork and ritual theory. While their work provides diverse points of reference for Nuo culture research, few of their findings have been directly applied to the realm of design transformation, and specialized design research focused on Pingxiang Nuo remains particularly scarce. In terms of representative case studies, the interactive game “AR Nuo Quest” demonstrates the path by which Nuo masks have transitioned from static displays to interactive experiences, while the

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brand visual design for “The Art of Facial Masks” validates the feasibility of transforming mask culture from “cultural heritage” into “brand visual assets.” Together, these examples indicate that traditional mask culture can be disseminated in the contemporary era through systematic, branded, and digital design.

In summary, although existing research has accumulated relatively rich findings regarding the essence of Nuo culture, mask art, the origins of Nuo drama, and cross-cultural comparisons, the following shortcomings remain: First, research has largely been concentrated in areas such as Nanfeng, Chizhou, and Meishan, while specialized research on Pingxiang Nuo remains relatively weak; Second, research subjects tend to focus on a single type, such as Nuo masks or Nuo dance, while studies treating Nuo masks, Nuo dance, and Nuo temples as an integrated visual resource remain insufficient; Third, research approaches lean heavily toward theoretical interpretation, with few practical examples of comprehensive design transformation and visual identity systems; Fourth, while foreign research has provided a comparative perspective and methodological references such as semiotics and memetics, studies directly addressing the visual identity design of Pingxiang Nuo remain scarce. Therefore, this study−which takes Pingxiang Nuo masks, dances, and temples as its subjects and focuses on visual identity design−is both necessary and feasible. The theoretical resources, case studies, and research methods outlined in this chapter lay the theoretical foundation and methodological framework for the element analysis, strategy development, and design practice in subsequent chapters.

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CHAPTER 2

ANALYSIS OF DESIGN THEORY AND PRACTICE

2.1. The Theoretical Foundations and Principles of Visual Identity De

Visual identity design is a systematic design activity that uses symbols as a medium, communication as its goal, and culture as its core. The visual identity design for Pingxiang Nuo must address three key challenges: the extraction of elements, their modern adaptation, and their effective communication. Design semiotics provides methods for the translation of meaning. Through the relationships between signifier and signified, extension and intension, and encoding and decoding, it connects the forms, colors, and patterns of Nuo masks, Nuo dances, and Nuo temples with the personalities of their deities, the concepts of warding off evil and inviting good fortune, and local folk beliefs, thereby achieving a dual translation of cultural meaning into visual symbols. Visual communication design provides methods for formal organization. Through graphics, color, typography, layout, and visual identity systems, it transforms Nuo cultural resources into a modern visual language characterized by distinctiveness and communicative power. Theories of the living transmission of intangible cultural heritage and cultural and creative design provide the logic for this transformation, emphasizing that protection is the prerequisite, transformation is the path, dissemination is the means, and recreation is the goal—requiring design to integrate into contemporary life while respecting cultural authenticity. Based on the above theories, visual identity design should adhere to five principles: cultural authenticity, distinctiveness, systematicity, contemporary relevance, and practicality. These three aspects and the principles mutually reinforce one another, collectively forming the theoretical framework for Pingxiang Nuo visual identity design and providing a basis for subsequent element analysis, extraction, simplification, reconstruction, and application.

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2.2. Classification and Aesthetic Analysis of Visual Elements in Pingxiang Nuo Culture

Pingxiang Nuo culture centers on Nuo masks, Nuo dances, and Nuo temples, which correspond to the three dimensions of "object—body—space," respectively, and together form a complete system of visual symbols. This section classifies and analyzes these three types of elements based on their form, color, patterns, and connotations, compares their commonalities and differences, and distills design symbols that can be adapted for other contexts. Nuo masks are the most central visual symbols of Pingxiang Nuo. Their forms are robust and rugged, and their colors are vivid, primarily featuring a five-color palette of red, black, yellow, white, and green. The patterns include symbols such as flaming eyebrows, fangs, and animal horns. Different roles correspond to distinct divine natures and functions, embodying both sacredness and theatricality. Nuo dance uses bodily movement as its medium, preserving Tang Dynasty dance steps such as the "Three-Step Gang" and "Five-Direction Steps." The movements are vigorous and rustic, while costumes, props, and masks combine to create a dynamic visual spectacle; the ritual sequence endows the performance with a sense of narrative and order. Nuo temples serve as the spatial vessels of Nuo culture. Their architectural styles blend Ming and Qing dynasty influences with local characteristics, featuring rich decorative patterns. The spatial layout centers around the shrine and altar, and the spirit of the place embodies the community's faith and folk identity. The commonality among these three types of elements lies in their shared core belief of warding off evil and inviting good fortune, combining both symbolic and decorative functions; the differences lie in the fact that masks tend to be static symbols, Nuo dance tends to be a dynamic performance, and Nuo temples tend to be spatial venues. The unity of the sacred and the secular, the symbolic and the decorative, and the static and the dynamic constitutes the complete aesthetic characteristics of Pingxiang Nuo's visual

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elements. Through this classificatory analysis, this section identifies the transformable symbolic resources of these three categories: Nuo masks provide resources for form and color; Nuo dance provides resources for movement and narrative; and Nuo temples provide resources for space and patterns, laying the foundation for subsequent design extraction and reconstruction.

2.3. Research Hypotheses, Design Implementation Strategies and Summary of Findings in This Chapter

Building on the theoretical review and element analysis presented in the first two sections, this section proposes research hypotheses, constructs a design transformation pathway, and summarizes the core findings of this chapter to provide a foundation for the design practice in Chapter 3. Based on the theories of design semiotics, visual communication design, and the living transmission of intangible cultural heritage, this study proposes the following hypothesis: through a design pathway of "extraction—simplification—reconstruction—application," the visual elements found in Pingxiang's Nuo masks, Nuo dances, and Nuo temples can be transformed into a visual design language with modern recognizability; the design outcomes will help enhance public awareness of and identification with Pingxiang's Nuo culture, while strengthening its dissemination. Centered on this hypothesis, this study constructs a four-stage design transformation process: First, element extraction—selecting representative visual symbols from the forms and colors of Nuo masks, the movements and postures of Nuo dance, and the decorative patterns of Nuo temples; second, form simplification—stripping away intricate details through geometric, flat, and abstract treatments to retain core recognizable features; Third, symbolic reconstruction: based on modern aesthetics and visual order, the extracted elements are combined, transformed, and recoded to form a new visual language; fourth, application to various media: the reconstructed symbolic system is applied to logos, patterns, packaging, cultural and creative derivative products, and digital

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media to test its feasibility and communicative power. The findings of this chapter can be summarized in three points: First, it clarifies the supportive roles of design semiotics, visual communication design, and intangible cultural heritage (ICH) cultural and creative theory in the visual identity design of Pingxiang Nuo; second, it completes the classification and aesthetic analysis of three types of elements—Nuo masks, Nuo dances, and Nuo temples—and distills transformable symbolic resources; third, it proposes research hypotheses and a design transformation pathway of "extraction—simplification—reconstruction—application." These findings collectively form the theoretical framework and methodological basis of this study, laying the foundation for subsequent design practice.

Core Requirements

The core lies in establishing a trinity comprising a theoretical framework, a genealogy of elements, and research hypotheses and pathways for transformation.

1. Systematize theories in design semiotics, visual communication design, the living transmission of intangible cultural heritage, and cultural and creative design, and distill five principles: cultural significance, distinctiveness, systematicity, contemporaneity, and practicality;

2. Conduct a "object–body–space" classificatory analysis of Nuo masks, Nuo dance, and Nuo temples; extract transformable symbols based on form, color, patterns, and connotations; and compare their commonalities and differences;

3. Propose the research hypothesis and design transformation pathway of "extraction–simplification–reconstruction–application," and summarize the findings of this chapter.

Conclusions to Chapter 2

This chapter focuses on the theoretical foundations and practical framework for the visual identity design of Pingxiang's Nuo culture, completing three key

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tasks: theoretical synthesis, element analysis, and the formulation of research hypotheses. First, this chapter constructs a theoretical framework of "meaning extraction—form organization—contemporary transformation" from three dimensions: design semiotics, visual communication design, and the theories of living intangible cultural heritage transmission and cultural and creative design. It also distills five design principles: cultural significance, distinctiveness, systematicity, contemporaneity, and applicability. Second, this chapter classifies and conducts an aesthetic analysis of three types of visual elements—Nuo masks, Nuo dance, and Nuo temples, clarifying the transformable symbols—such as the forms and colors of Nuo masks, the movements and postures of Nuo dance, and the decorative patterns and sense of place in Nuo temples—and comparing the commonalities and differences among these three categories in terms of sacredness versus secularity, symbolism versus ornamentation, and static versus dynamic aspects. Third, this chapter proposes a research hypothesis: through a design process of "extraction—simplification—reconstruction—application," the visual elements of Pingxiang Nuo can be transformed into a visual design language with modern recognizability, and a design transformation pathway—from element selection to application on various media—is established. In summary, this chapter has established the theoretical framework, the genealogy of elements, and the research hypothesis, providing the theoretical basis, methodological support, and an actionable pathway for the design practice in Chapter 3.

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CHAPTER 3

DESIGN PROPOSAL

The third chapter substantiates the design proposal, outlines the prerequisites for practical implementation, etc. The title of this chapter should reflect the specific task, for example:

3.1. Concept of the Design Proposal

This design proposal draws on three visual elements from Pingxiang's Nuo culture—Nuo masks, Nuo dances, and Nuo temples—and follows a process of "extraction—simplification—reconstruction—application" to propose the core design concept of "Nuo: New Visions." Its aim is not to replicate the forms of traditional Nuo rituals, but rather to translate the rugged, intense, and sacred visual DNA of Nuo culture into a visual identity system with contemporary recognizability and communicative power, thereby transforming Pingxiang Nuo from a regional intangible cultural heritage symbol into a modern design language that is perceptible, communicable, and applicable.

Decomposition of Design Goals

With "Nuo" as the core concept, the overall objective of this design is to construct a visual identity system for Pingxiang Nuo that combines cultural distinctiveness with modern communicative power. To achieve this goal, the project is broken down into five sub-objectives: cultural extraction, visual translation, system construction, application across media, and communication validation, forming a complete chain from resources to design and from design to application. First, the objective of cultural extraction. Systematically organize the three categories of visual elements—Nuo masks, Nuo dances, and Nuo temples—to extract forms, colors, patterns, movements, and spatial symbols, thereby establishing a visual element atlas for Pingxiang Nuo. Second, the objective of visual translation. Through geometric, flat, and abstract techniques, traditional

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symbols are simplified and reconstructed while retaining core identifying features to form a modern visual language. Third, the objective of systematic construction. With the reconstruction of symbols at its core, a visual identity system was established that encompasses logos, standard typography, standard colors, auxiliary graphics, and application guidelines, ensuring consistency and scalability in the design. Fourth, the objective of media application. The visual system was applied to various media, including packaging, posters, cultural and creative merchandise, and digital media, to expand the dissemination channels for Pingxiang Nuo culture. Fifth, the objective of dissemination validation. Through design exhibitions and feedback evaluations, the effectiveness of the outcomes in terms of cultural identity, aesthetic expression, and market acceptance will be assessed, and directions for optimization will be proposed. These five sub-objectives build upon one another in a progressive manner: cultural extraction serves as the foundation, visual translation is the core, systematic construction provides the framework, application across media is the focal point, and dissemination validation serves as the feedback mechanism. By breaking down these objectives, this section transforms the overarching design concept into actionable design tasks, providing a clear direction and evaluation criteria for subsequent design practice.

3.2. Structural, Plastic, and Graphic Solution of the Design Concept

Centered on the core concept of “Nuo,” this section elaborates on the structure, form, and graphic solutions of the design concept from four perspectives—visualization and graphic solutions, design from cultural and academic dimensions, an overview of chapter-level design, and overall visual consistency—to clarify the specific content and methods of the design practice.

1. Visualization and Graphic Solutions

Visualization and graphic design serve as the core methods of this project, aiming to transform the visual elements found in Pingxiang’s Nuo masks, Nuo

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dances, and Nuo temples into a graphic language that is recognizable, applicable, and communicable. The specific approach comprises three levels: First, element extraction and form simplification. Core symbols such as flaming eyebrows, fangs, animal horns, and the five-color system are extracted from the Nuo masks. Through geometric, flat, and abstract treatments, intricate details are stripped away while retaining distinctive features. From the Nuo dance, movement postures such as the “Three-Step Gang” and “Five-Direction Steps” are extracted and transformed into dynamic trajectories and silhouette poses; architectural outlines, decorative patterns, and spatial layouts are extracted from Nuo temples and transformed into grid structures and border graphics. Second, symbolic reconstruction and systematic organization. The extracted elements are reorganized according to a three-tier structure of “primary symbols—secondary graphics—decorative patterns,” forming logos, standard typography, standard colors, secondary graphics, and visual guidelines. Third, medium adaptation and extended applications. The graphic system is applied to various media—including packaging, posters, cultural and creative merchandise, and digital media—to establish a comprehensive solution ranging from core symbols to diverse applications.

Visualization and Graphic Solutions

Element Extraction and Form Simplification: Core symbols such as flaming eyebrows, fangs, animal horns, and the five-color system were extracted from Nuo masks. Through geometric, flat, and abstract treatments, intricate details were stripped away while retaining distinctive features; movement postures such as the “Three-Step Gang” and “Five-Direction Steps” were extracted from Nuo dance and transformed into dynamic trajectories and silhouette poses; Extract architectural outlines, decorative patterns, and spatial layouts from Nuo temples, transforming them into grid structures and border graphics.

Symbol Reconstruction and System Organization: Reorganize the extracted elements according to a three-tier structure of “primary symbols—secondary

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graphics—decorative patterns" to form logos, standard typography, standard colors, secondary graphics, and visual guidelines, thereby establishing a unified and scalable foundation for visual identity.

Media Adaptation and Extended Applications: The graphic system is applied to various media, including packaging, posters, cultural and creative merchandise, and digital media, establishing a comprehensive solution that spans from core symbols to diverse applications, thereby testing the design's recognizability and communicative impact across different contexts.

2. Design in the Cultural and Academic Dimensions

Design transformation must be underpinned by cultural foundations and academic research to avoid misinterpretation of symbols and formalism without substance. This design establishes cultural and academic foundations in three aspects: First, literature-based evidence. Drawing on works such as *The Art of Chinese Nuo Masks*, *Tracing Ancient Nuo*, and *A Study of Gan Nuo Mask Art*, as well as research on Pingxiang Nuo, this project systematizes the genealogy of Nuo mask roles, the symbolism of the five colors, and the meanings behind the patterns, ensuring that the graphic translation is well-founded. Second, fieldwork evidence. Through field investigations in the East Hunan region, Shangli County, and Chexiang Village in Nankeng Town, Luxi County, we collected images of actual Nuo masks, decorative patterns from Nuo temples, and video footage of Nuo dance movements, establishing a first-hand visual database to provide physical references for element extraction. Third, semiotic basis. By applying design semiotics methods—such as signifier and signified, extension and intension, and encoding and decoding—we analyzed the cultural significance embodied in the forms, colors, and patterns of Nuo masks, systematically translating them into modern visual language to ensure that the design outcomes possess both academic grounding and cultural authenticity.

3. Overview of the Design's Chapter Structure

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The chapter structure of this design unfolds across three tiers—"Foundational System—Application System—Digital System"—forming a complete framework that extends from core symbols to diverse media. The first tier is the Foundational System, which includes logo design, standard typography, standard colors, auxiliary graphics, and visual guidelines. It addresses the consistency and systematic nature of visual identity and serves as the core foundation for the design's development. The second tier is the application system, which includes physical media such as packaging design, poster design, cultural and creative merchandise, and exhibition materials. It extends the foundational system to specific usage scenarios, testing the design's feasibility and recognizability. The third tier is the Digital System, which includes motion graphics, short videos, AR interactions, and social media visuals. It expands the dissemination channels for Pingxiang Nuo culture across digital media and enhances engagement with younger audiences. These three tiers correspond to identity construction, contextual application, and contemporary dissemination, respectively, forming a clearly structured and progressively layered design framework.

4. Overall Visual Uniformity

Overall visual uniformity is a key control dimension for ensuring the quality and harmony of a design system. It is primarily managed through four aspects: graphic density, color weighting, typographic rhythm, and medium adaptation. Regarding graphic density, maintain the proportional relationship between the primary symbol and secondary graphics, control the distribution density of decorative elements, avoid excessive complexity or oversimplification, and ensure a clear visual focal point. Regarding color weighting, based on the five-color system of the Nuo masks, the proportions of primary, secondary, and accent colors are reasonably allocated to balance cultural symbolism with visual harmony. Regarding typographic rhythm, we use grid systems, modular layouts, and white space control to establish a hierarchical relationship between

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information elements and a natural reading rhythm, creating a design that is unified yet dynamic. In terms of medium adaptation, we ensure that the logo, graphics, and colors maintain consistent recognition and visual harmony across different sizes, materials, and media. Through these controls, the design system achieves a balance between cultural identity and modern aesthetics, enhancing overall visual quality and communication effectiveness.

3.3. Technical Support and Testing

Software Design: Primarily used Adobe Illustrator to create vector illustrations of logos, supplementary graphics, and standard typefaces, ensuring clarity and consistency across different sizes; used Adobe Photoshop to retouch, cut out, and color-correct images—such as Nuo masks and Nuo temple decorations—collected during field surveys; Figma is used to establish visual identity system guidelines and layout templates, facilitating systematic management and adaptation across multiple platforms; Blender is utilized to create 3D models and dynamic demonstrations of certain Nuo masks and Nuo dance poses, enhancing the richness and precision of design presentation.

Data Processing: Images and video materials of Nuo masks, Nuo temples, and Nuo dances collected in areas such as Xiangdong District, Shangli County, Chexiang Village, Nankeng Town, Luxi County, and other locations; screened the most representative visual elements based on the four dimensions of “form—color—pattern—meaning”; and performed vectorization and symbolization to establish the Pingxiang Nuo Visual Element Library, providing a data foundation for graphic translation.

Presentation Formats: The design outcomes are presented in various formats, including a visual identity manual, thematic posters, packaging designs, physical cultural and creative merchandise, and dynamic demonstration videos. These formats balance the needs of both static displays and digital dissemination, forming a comprehensive system of outcomes that are visually engaging,

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functional, and shareable, and are adaptable to different contexts such as exhibitions, presentations, and online promotion.

Testing and Optimization: User testing was conducted with a selected target audience to gather feedback across three dimensions—cultural recognition, visual aesthetics, and communication effectiveness—to identify shortcomings in the design. Based on the test results, iterative optimizations were performed to adjust graphic details, color ratios, and layout structures, ensuring the design outcomes better align with modern aesthetics and communication needs. Through the "testing—feedback—optimization" cycle, a Pingxiang Nuo visual identity design system was ultimately developed that combines cultural depth with market adaptability.

Conclusions to Chapter 3

This chapter centers on the core concept of "Nuo" and documents the entire process of the Pingxiang Nuo visual identity design, from concept to implementation. Through goal decomposition, five sub-objectives were defined: cultural extraction, visual translation, system construction, application across media, and communication validation. Through project description, a graphic translation pathway of "extraction—simplification—reconstruction—application" was established, with cultural authenticity ensured through literature, field research, and semiotic analysis; Through software design, data processing, outcome presentation, and user testing, the project completed a visual identity system along with a variety of deliverables, including posters, packaging, cultural and creative merchandise, and dynamic videos. Testing and iterative optimization demonstrated that this approach can transform the visual elements of Pingxiang Nuo into a visual identity system that combines cultural distinctiveness with modern communicative power. This validated the feasibility of the design proposal and provided a methodological reference for similar visual identity designs of intangible cultural heritage.

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CONCLUSIONS

This paper focuses on the Nuo masks, Nuo dances, and Nuo temples of Pingxiang's Nuo culture, conducting a systematic study of their application in visual image design. Through literature review, field research, case studies, design semiotics, and design practice, this study traces the historical origins, cultural value, and visual characteristics of Pingxiang Nuo culture. It constructs a design transformation pathway of "extraction—simplification—reconstruction—application" and completes the design practice and validation using "Nuo·New Image" as the core concept. The main conclusions are as follows:

First, Pingxiang Nuo culture possesses rich visual resources and significant value for design transformation. Nuo masks, Nuo dances, and Nuo temples correspond to the three dimensions of "object—body—space," respectively, and their forms, colors, patterns, movements, and spatial elements collectively constitute a complete visual symbolic system. Nuo masks provide resources for form and color; Nuo dances provide resources for movement and narrative; and Nuo temples provide resources for space and patterns. A holistic examination of these three elements can overcome the limitations of single-type research and provide systematic material for visual image design.

Second, the modern transformation of traditional cultural elements requires theoretical support and methodological approaches. Design semiotics provides methods for the translation of meaning; visual communication design offers methods for formal organization; and theories on the living transmission of intangible cultural heritage and cultural and creative design provide the logic for transformation. The integration of these three areas forms five principles—cultural authenticity, distinctiveness, systematicity, contemporaneity, and applicability—ensuring a balance between cultural authenticity and modern aesthetics in design.

Third,"extraction—simplification—reconstruction—application" constitutes an effective design transformation pathway. Through element

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extraction, core symbols are selected; through form simplification, intricate details are stripped away; through symbol reconstruction, a modern visual language is formed; and through application to various media, dissemination scenarios are expanded. Design practice demonstrates that this pathway can transform the visual elements of Pingxiang Nuo into a visual identity system with high recognizability and communicative power.

Fourth, design practice has validated the feasibility of the proposal. With “Pingxiang Nuo Culture” as the core concept, the project produced outcomes including a visual identity system, posters, packaging, cultural and creative merchandise, and dynamic videos. Through user testing and iterative optimization, the effectiveness of the design was evaluated across three dimensions: cultural recognition, visual aesthetics, and communication impact. The results indicate that these design outcomes help enhance public awareness of and identification with Pingxiang Nuo culture, thereby strengthening its modern communicative power.

The innovations of this study lie in: examining Nuo masks, Nuo dances, and Nuo temples as an integrated visual resource, thereby transcending the limitations of single-type research; integrating design semiotics, visual communication design, and ICH cultural and creative theory to construct an interdisciplinary analytical framework; proposing a systematic four-stage design transformation pathway to establish an operational and replicable design process; and adopting a closed-loop methodology that combines literature review, fieldwork, case studies, design practice, and user testing to enhance the reliability of the research.

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APPENDIX A

1. Basic Visual Identity System Design

2. Applied Visual Design

3. Exhibition and Communication Design

Design [Nuo masks] using software such as Photoshop and Illustrator





Design of derivative products Visual





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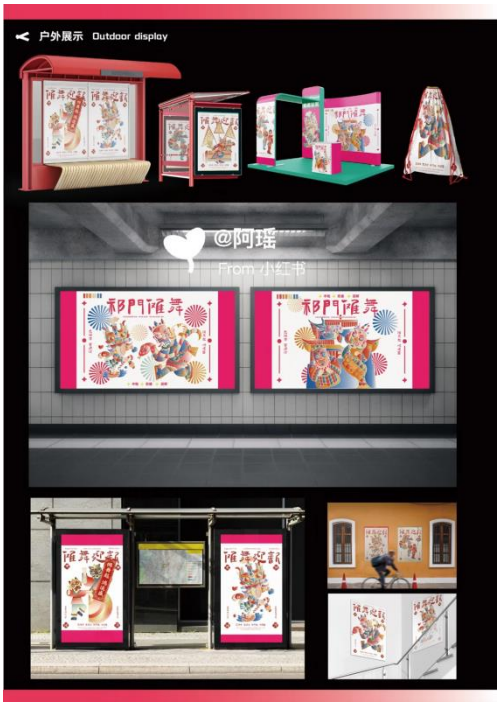
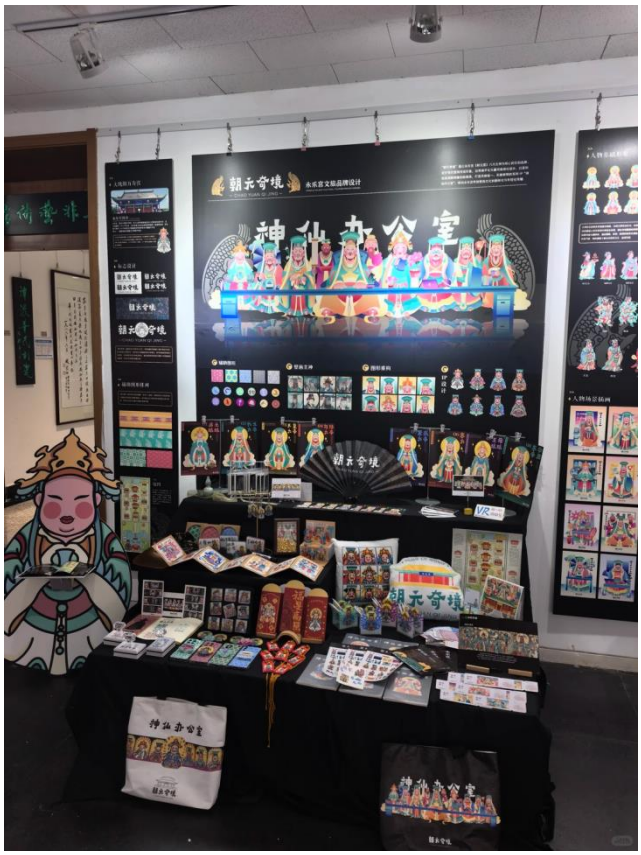


Physical exhibition



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APPENDIX B (sketch and project proposal)



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