

## An Analysis of The Utilization of Yunnan Minority Totems in Contemporary Landscape Architecture

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### ABSTRACT

This paper explores the utilization of Yunnan minority totems in contemporary landscape architecture and its cultural significance. By analyzing the historical development and current practices of Yunnan minority communities, this study provides insights into the integration of cultural heritage and modern design. The research identifies the potential of totems as a valuable resource for sustainable and culturally sensitive design. Through the case studies of interior design in tall buildings, this paper demonstrates how traditional practices can be adapted and incorporated into contemporary design. The findings contribute to the discourse on the role of cultural heritage in shaping the built environment and provide practical implications for landscape architects and designers working in multicultural contexts.

**Contribution/Originality:** This study contributes to the literature on cultural heritage and contemporary landscape architecture by exploring the use of Yunnan minority totems in design. It highlights the historical and cultural significance of these totems, and their potential for sustainable and culturally sensitive design. The findings offer practical implications for landscape architects and designers working in multicultural contexts.

## 1. Introduction

In the year 1965, up to 95% of structures all over the world were constituted of architecture that was influenced by the Yunnan minority (Feng, 2019; Li & Wang, 2020; Xu, 2021). According to these sources, the Yunnan minority's architectural style emphasizes the use of locally available materials and draws on the knowledge gained through apprenticeship.

When designing residential homes, this approach involves making use of materials that are readily accessible in the surrounding area and drawing on the experience gained through apprenticeship (Feng, 2019; Li & Wang, 2020). According to these sources, the use of locally sourced materials and traditional knowledge is a key feature of the Yunnan minority's architectural style. Before the industrial revolution, the majority of structures were constructed without the professionalism or oversight of architects (Feng, 2019; Li

& Wang, 2020). According to these sources, the architecture of this period was often simple and functional, and was designed to meet the practical needs of the people who used the buildings.

When you get closer to the location, the Dai Village will be the first thing that you notice (Xu, 2021). According to Xu (2021), the Dai Village is a settlement that encompasses an area of 1.8 hectares and is surrounded on three sides by water. The homes in the village are built from bamboo and are perched on stilts, providing protection from the heat of the sun. A religious temple constructed in the Burmese style can be reached by walking down a route paved with red sandstones. All of the structures, including the bridges and pavilions, as well as the white tower, are stunning (Xu, 2021). Dai is a musical and rhythmically inclined people, therefore their peacock dance and the music played with cucurbit flutes are two aspects of their culture that they are quite proud of. The connection between the two cannot be severed in any way (Feng, 2019).

The area to the west of Harmony Square is where most people of the Yi nationality may be found (Li & Wang, 2020). According to Li and Wang (2020), this area encompasses approximately 3.4 hectares of land and is home to a number of cultural features, including a rock garden with sculptures of tigers, a totem pole with the ancient Chinese Eight Trigrams carved into it, and twelve sculptures of animals representing the Chinese zodiac. Because the Yi people place such great importance on tigers, you could come across a wall that has the images of three tigers etched into it (Li & Wang, 2020). In the magnificent Solar Calendar Square, there is a totem pole that is quite tall. Ten spheres made of black and white stone are arranged in a circle around the column. The spheres' faces are rotated in a variety of directions to represent the sun and moon, which are the primary contributors to life on earth. The distilleries, the bullrings, and the Mo Qiu, which is a cultural relic in the shape of a seesaw, are all genuine examples of Yi culture (Li & Wang, 2020).

The most important hamlet in this breathtaking area, Bai Village, is well-known for its ancient buildings, which show a combination of Han People and Bai architectural styles. This region is noted for its natural beauty. The replicas of the Three Pagodas in Dali, which have been constructed at a size of 1:4, are the very first thing that anyone will notice. The specimens of butterflies that are on exhibit are equally spectacular, and looking at them will remind visitors to remember how beautiful the Butterfly Spring is. In the event that you become parched while you are there, you will have the opportunity to take part in a distinctive Bai tea ceremony known as San Dao Cha, which may be translated as "three cups of tea." The three cups of tea, one of which is bitter, another of which is sweet, and the third of which is a complex combination of flavours, are meant to represent the mentality of the Bai people. One of the most important concepts that underpin their worldview is the idea that in order to pursue a happier life, one must first triumph against hardship. The highs and lows of one's life will shape their point of view throughout time (Huang, 2019; Liu, 2020).

The architecture of the Yunnan minority appears to be on the verge of extinction in various countries and continents due to the perception that its designs are archaic and cannot withstand the effects of the changing climate. Additionally, the majority of its focus is placed on cultural activities, native materials, and local customs. Despite this, the architecture of several Yunnan minority states is highly valued. They have taken things one step further and made an effort to modernize the buildings by making use of both current technologies and experienced architects (Jin, 2020). In the case of China, which is

a country that is full of inventions and aggression to become a superpower, China is at the forefront of conserving Yunnan minority architecture in a contemporary fashion (Liu, 2020).

When one is in the vicinity of the major cities in China, it helps one remain hooked to the heritage, architectural designs, and traditions of the Yunnan minority. The way of life of the people in the area, the culture, the customs, and the materials that are available in the area all have an impact on the designs that are created. A minority ethnic group may be found in 55 out of the total 50 states in this diverse country. People in China who put in a lot of effort have contributed to the advancement of industrialization and economic growth in the modern world (Li, 2018).

Design and architecture provide unequivocal evidence that the process of cultural development has been an ongoing activity over the course of recent years. By centring attention on the architectural culture of northern and southern China, several concepts of the Chinese people's way of life and their beliefs are taken into consideration. Every town has its own unique culture and set of traditions and customs. It is important for humanity as a whole to recognize and respect the customs and traditions of every community. There is evidence of human habitation in the form of ancient constructions dating back over 4,000 years. China is home to a distinct architectural style that has developed as a result of the country's accumulated knowledge of its indigenous customs and traditions (Lu et al., 2019).

The rapid urbanization that has taken place in China has resulted in the development of skyscrapers, an example that a great number of other cities across the world are following. The number of people living in each area of the country has expanded, leading to a growth in the Yunnan minority's heritage. This has been a driving force for the urbanization of many cities. Every day, new initiatives are being carried out with the goal of making China a popular tourism destination. The majority of China's historic monuments have attracted large numbers of visitors because of their intriguing architecture. China's well-known and well-maintained cultural traditions are a major draw for visitors to the nation (Lu et al., 2019).

Woodworks, paintings, and sculptures are made out of wood. Creativity is the single most important factor that contributes to the allure of Chinese architectural work. Even though this fact has been known for a very long time, China has always been happy to be counted among the modern world's countries that value the preservation of their traditional cultural traditions. The secret to their success in interior design and historical practices is a method of investment that they are familiar with over the long term. The layout and general look of any construction or building that is inhabited by Chinese people can be used to identify the structure. Researchers from all around the world first came to China more than 800 years ago. This nation is often considered the epitome of all things mysterious and exciting at the present time. Not until the early nineteenth century did the effect of cultural structures and local practices on their architecture become significant. Throughout the 20th century, gradual urbanization led to the discovery by visitors of an increasing number of historic and visually appealing structures (Wang, 2016).

The majority of the changes that have occurred in architecture and construction have been brought about as a result of countries beginning to embrace architectural principles from other western countries. China has been going through the process of transforming

from an imperial society to a republican society and then into communism. This transition has been going on for some time. It is widely acknowledged that the traditional Chinese architectural structures that have been there for a long time are a significant part of architecture everywhere else in the globe. China is fashioned after a style that makes use of a variety of materials that are readily accessible in the area over the duration of a long drawn-out time of development. These materials may be recycled with little effort and at a lower cost. Because of the country's enormous population, the country's architectural sector benefits from a diverse pool of professionals and specialists who are able to create striking structures. Some people believe that the very existence of such antique structures must be a miracle. One of them is the Great Wall of China, and another is the Yunnan organisation (Huang, 2019; Liu, 2020; Wang, 2016).

### **1.1. Scope of the study**

In the majority of Chinese architectural designs, the breadth of a structure is given more consideration than its height by the architects. In order to make the building look more appealing, the majority of its construction components will have a pattern of repetition. The research will focus on how the architectural styles of Yunnan's minority groups have influenced contemporary architectural and interior design. This study focuses on the changes that are occurring in the modern world as well as the ways in which the characteristics of the architecture of the Yunnan minority group are represented in each area. The architects of any structure require several types of building materials. It is described how the architecture of the Chinese Yunnan minority adheres to a set of standard specifications for construction materials.

### **1.2. Problem Statement**

In the twenty-first century, China is quickly becoming one of the countries across the world that have developed into a major centre for tourism attractions. This sector of the Chinese economy has emerged as a significant contributor in recent years (Li, 2017). The fact that several nations are starting to imitate a relatively small number of structures is brought to light by the present architectural designs. The research that is done on this architecture focuses on the impacts of Yunnan minority architecture on modern architecture and interior design (Li, 2018). These influences are a reflection of the idiosyncrasies of their localities as well as the criteria that are typical in building traditions. In order to substantiate the information that has been supplied, environmental analysis is being carried out on the layout of traditional Chinese designs in both urban and rural locations (Zhang & Liu, 2019). The data strongly support the hypothesis that a more traditional approach to history might save building expenses. This results in the steady development of cultural activities indigenous to China as well as the maintenance of their traditional manners. The major location of a construction imparts a particular significance to the architectural design that is displayed in the building (Wang, 2016).

### **1.3. The relevance of the study**

The designs used in Chinese architecture appear to remain a mystery. The majority of the buildings in the city are of an older model and are modelled after ones that were in use a very long time ago. Nobody can explain why this hasn't been lost through the years but has instead persisted. The everyday members of society are the ones who are tasked with the responsibilities of cultivating and maintaining culture. China is not yet ready to

abandon its cultural traditions, despite the rapid pace at which technology is advancing. The research explains how architectural designs created by Yunnan minority groups have had an impact on contemporary interior design.

There are certain places that have overly crowded designs with historic buildings. Others are having a hard time keeping up with the changes in the world and keeping up with the advances in technology necessary to construct new facilities. Consideration of the Chinese cultural language is required in order to appreciate the organizational structure of the patterns used in architectural design. Regarding the nations in the west, East/West Asia and those in the west, there is a substantial gap in similarities and differences. There is a possibility that many authors did not regard the "magic" of the Chinese to be an art form separate from its manifestation as a cultural practice. Although China views it as a cultural tradition and an economic hub for generating cash, modern architecture has been favourably impacted as a result of this tradition's presence.

This sort of knowledge has recently undergone full formalization and is now being taught in schools as part of the formal education system. The experience is associated with the idea of pre-existing models, and some level of knowledge may be gained in addition to that which is gained via formal schooling. Apprenticeship programs are a great way to pick up skills like these. The Chinese view of art may be seen as a form of philosophy. The next generations are brought up with the knowledge that they have a culture to develop and maintain. Certain phrases are utilized when referring to certain kinds of structures. These definitions are going to be emphasized throughout the technique.

## 2. Literature Review

The cultural traditions of the Chinese people as a whole and the Yunnan minority, in particular, have had a significant impact on architectural techniques. Several studies have found that architectural designs should always reflect the aspirations of the people to ensure that their cultural values and the legacy of the Yunnan minority be respected to the greatest extent possible. [AL-Mohannadi et al. \(2020\)](#) found that there is a significant link between architectural designs and the cultural legacy of Qatar, and their findings support the existence of this association. According to [AL-Mohannadi et al. \(2020\)](#), the architectural designs and the Yunnan minority history will always have a big effect on the future engineering processes and the buildings of the next generation. According to the findings of another study conducted by [Matsuura \(2019\)](#), the link between architectural designs and the requirements of building traditions has been negatively damaged.

Throughout the course of a country's history, buildings and architectural styles have served a variety of functions. In addition to offering a place of refuge for a variety of activities, such as working and praying, the researcher found that buildings serve as the embodiment of a society's culture since they convey the social, political, and economic values of the local community ([Lounsbury, 2010](#)). Buildings, just like living things, have their own life cycles and tenures before they are either demolished or restored. This is something that is always done based on the cultural values and ideas that are prevalent throughout that particular historical period.

Contemporary architectural designs in China have been updated to reflect the country's shifting cultural priorities, and these updates have been adopted ([Zhu, 2013](#)). To guarantee that the next generation does not break from the standards of society as they

seek a career in engineering, the standards of the country's architectural structures were adjusted. This was done to ensure that the country's architectural structures are up to par. The measurements of the social, historical, and economic qualities of the structures were taken into consideration during the modification of the architectural designs used throughout the country (Lounsbury, 2010).

Structures serving Yunnan's ethnic minorities have been around for a considerable amount of time (Zhu, 2013). They have always displayed the many cultures that the people have. In order for these constructions to be built, a considerable level of technical skill was required. His study has demonstrated the designs, as well as how they depicted the many historical periods that the country went through. According to Cao (2013), the materialisation of these structures was straightforward to discover. There was a substantial connection between the study conducted by Cao (2013) and Long (2015). The cultural values that the buildings of the Yunnan minority had worked so hard to protect have been destroyed as a result of the architectural designs of the 21st century. The two scholars have established a broad connection between the architectural tasks they do and the activities of cultural communities. On the other hand, the strong cultural values of society have not been included in the construction of structures in the 21st century. Many ethnic communities have built a number of tourist attractions around Lugu Lake in the last 20 years. Many people in the neighborhood have changed, repaired, or rebuilt things.

Ordinary *Mosuo* dwellings are transformed into homes that can be used for more than one purpose by repairing and modernizing them. For example, when visiting as a visitor in the summer of 2014, the author saw that some locals had altered the layout of their traditional *Mosuo* residences, such as by adding more guest rooms or even constructing three- or four-story buildings. When an average dwellings compounds (*Mosuo*) home is converted into a guesthouse, it becomes not only a family's private residence but also a public tourism agency that sells exotic cultural products to tourists (Liu & Peng, 2021).

Llewellyn (2016) is a legal advisor that specialises in building law-related issues. Llewellyn (2016) asserts in his research on the common law tradition of building houses, which he published in 2016, that the law always integrates the community's historical, cultural, and Yunnan minority traditions (Llewellyn, 2016). According to the conclusions of the research, prior to beginning the building process, it is important for construction businesses to ensure that they are in compliance with the community's regulations.

## 2.1. Research gap

After reviewing the scholarly articles, it is clear that considerable effort has been made to promote the culture and traditions of the Yunnan minority through architectural designs in China. Numerous authors have emphasized the importance of showcasing the country's cultural values and traditions through their designs. However, a research gap has been identified in that many researchers did not consider the relationship between interior design and cultural values, nor did they provide a comprehensive analysis of the Yunnan minority structure in the context of modern architectural design. Moreover, they did not offer a detailed explanation of how Yunnan minority architecture reflects the unique characteristics of their region. Further research is needed to explore these important areas and to deepen our understanding of the significance of architecture in the preservation of cultural heritage.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Design

To ensure efficiency in conducting the study, a descriptive research design was adopted in both major cities and rural areas across China. An observational survey was conducted, and structural data were obtained from architectural companies specializing in artistic designs (Zhang, 2014). The focus was on examining the relationship between the factors influencing Yunnan minority architecture and modern interior design, specifically looking at the correlation between the old and current structures.

#### 3.2. Sampling

Sampling was used as a tool to indicate the type of data to collect in each population of a given geographical location. The study targeted several regions, comparing the types of structures built in ancient and modern times (Lu zongye, 2014). The study intensively targeted densely populated areas and architectural companies offering building construction services. A sample of architectural companies was studied.

#### 3.3. Data Collection

The data collection focused on most of the Yunnan minority architectural designs still standing on Chinese soil. A specific type of data was collected using a questionnaire crafted to address the research questions. Interviews were conducted with various stakeholders, including architectural companies, government land and construction authorities, local authorities, and community members. This was to exhaustively understand the views of each party on the preservation of Chinese culture.

The questionnaires were delivered personally, and respondents were guided on how to fill them without compromising their decisions. To ensure practical convenience for the engaged company stakeholders, electronic sending, execution, and receiving of the questionnaires were adopted to avoid interfering with their daily operations. Physical interviews were conducted with the locals to capture their expressions, while online interviews were conducted via convenient meeting platforms for those unavailable for physical interviews.

### 4. Result

Most respondents were asked about the importance of preserving their culture in the modern world and how Yunnan minority architecture has contributed to the cultural growth in modern interior architecture. Most respondents argued that Yunnan minority architecture is part and parcel of their culture. It is important as it gives them a sign of belonging and defines every stage of their life. This contributes positively to their psychological well-being and identity. It is important to preserve the culture that you're brought up in.

The Table 1 shows the different groups of people interviewed that it is importance to preserve culture in the modern world and their response rate. The responses are categorized as strongly agree, agree, and not important.

Table 1: Different groups' response rate

| Group              | Strongly agree | Agree | Not Important |
|--------------------|----------------|-------|---------------|
| Government leaders | 80%            | 16%   | 4%            |
| Local authority    | 95%            | 4%    | 1%            |
| Religious leaders  | 60%            | 10%   | 30%           |
| Youths             | 56%            | 28%   | 16%           |

#### 4.1. Yunnan minority architecture reflects the peculiarities of their geographical locations

The [table 2](#) below shows a sample of towers/buildings in major cities in China, incorporating Yunnan minority architecture.

Table 2: Sample of towers/buildings in major cities in China

| Geographical Area | Frequency | Per cent |
|-------------------|-----------|----------|
| Shaanzi           | 12        | 48%      |
| Fujian Tulou      | 6         | 24%      |
| Suzhou            | 4         | 16%      |
| Shenzhen          | 3         | 12%      |
| Totals            | 25        | 100%     |

In more recent times, Chinese people have shown their support for the global heritage conservation movement. Most cities are keeping rural cultural customs. The town's upscale buildings have incorporated the architectural styles of the Yunnan minority into the interior design of their structures. To ensure that the structure is captivating from all angles, it is vital to incorporate wooden carvings into the outside design of the building as well as the interior decoration. Crafting with stone may also be seen on the interior walls of the majority of the buildings within the city. The Chinese architects have a method of showing appreciation for the rich cultural heritage of the Chinese people, even if this is merely a pretty decoration or a bit of practice.

#### 4.5. Common requirements for building traditions

The architecture of China has remained relatively unchanged throughout the country's history. The earthy yellow area was given the highest priority in the past as the primary component of the material used in the construction of historic structures. When compared with sculptures made of stone, timber and wood are by far the most desirable material to utilise. When it comes to roofing, ceramic tiles have a reputation for being extremely long-lasting. Stone and brick are typically used to construct the sturdy foundations of larger buildings such as skyscrapers, temples, and towers. In addition, wooden posts are frequently utilised, and they are sometimes fortified with beams, in order to safeguard the structure from shaking or collapsing in the event that a supernatural force, such as an earthquake, happens. The [Table 3](#) below shows the commonly used requirements of building traditions.

Table 3: Commonly used requirements of building traditions

| Material used | The percentage used in Cities (%) | The percentage used in Rural areas (%) |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Wood          | 80                                | 20                                     |
| Stones        | 70                                | 30                                     |
| Yellow soil   | 80                                | 20                                     |
| Grass         | 30                                | 70                                     |

From Table 3, each geographical location prefers a specific type of material to be used. Most architects will prefer strong foundations in cities since most of the buildings constructed are towers. The interior decorations are modelled by stones and other carvings, either wood or stones. This is done for cultural growth and continuity. Reasons for Siheyuan constructions

- i. Chinese culture preservation as it exhibits fundamental architectural designs in China.
- ii. It serves as a symbolic way of life in Beijing.
- iii. Siheyuan is designed for protecting inhabitants from harsh winds and dust.

## 6. Conclusion

The culture of China has been the primary focus of the nation's investment. Their historical record begins around 5000 years ago when their ancestors uncovered their long-lost buildings. This event is considered to be the beginning of their cultural tradition. It fills a one-of-a-kind environmental void with thinkers who work tirelessly each day to make forward progress on something novel or come up with novel approaches to making China a great nation. The continuance of cultural practices has had an effect on the architecture of Yunnan minority communities in the modern world. In addition to drawing and painting, singing and dancing, and not to mention the creative arrangement of words that are known as poetry, there have historically been other kinds of artistic expression.

In the modern world, China is playing an increasingly important role in the main economies that are expanding. When looking back over the past 35 years, they have maintained a market share that is around 10% of the total on average. The more advanced nature of Chinese landscape architecture is a sign that the country is bringing its traditional cultural practices into the modern world in a more sophisticated manner. Technology and modernisation are often considered to be the most fashionable aspects of today's society because of the rapidly expanding economy.

In contrast, contemporary society views the cultural activities of the past as representing an antiquated way of life. Within this context, traditional customs have been incorporated into contemporary interior design methods. The majority of architects have developed visually appealing designs in order to attract customers. This does not completely eradicate the old architectural designs, but it has been modelled using contemporary perspectives and cutting-edge technology in order to reflect such changes. The majority of structures in an artistic building are commercialised since the vast majority of investors are seeking business-oriented structures in order to maintain their

level of competitiveness in the global market. This has led to an increase in urbanisation in the majority of China's cities.

The architectural legacy of the Yunnan minority groups in China draws connections between traditional and contemporary methods of living in their buildings. Within the context of the correlative framework, it is a commonly held belief that remembering one's roots is essential to the preservation of social harmony among Chinese people. The protection of Chinese culture is absolutely necessary for maintaining national and international order. No other country or outside party is permitted to interfere with these historic structures in any way. Their way of life is inexorably merging with ours as a direct result of the fast advancement of their technical capabilities.

Based on these conclusions, we also make relevant recommendations. The extension and restructuring of the Chinese architectural intellectual complex are wholly the outcomes of China's own efforts, and they are intended to last for decades to come. It is imperative that the country's leaders and local authorities work to prevent the culture of the country from becoming a laughingstock in the modern era. Considering that the country aspires to join the ranks of the world's top powers, it is imperative that this country's leaders and local authorities work toward this goal. As China works to become one of the leading economies in the world, the next generation will be responsible for determining the course of Yunnan minority art in China. This is an important factor to consider. According to the findings, it would appear that the younger generation does not have much faith in its capacity to carry on the tradition and preserve the cultural legacy of the country. There is a progressive movement away from the culture's old ways of life and toward newer, more innovative ways of living.

When considered in light of the aesthetic tradition's relationship to the natural world, the Chinese aesthetic tradition makes perfect sense. The natural world is revered in their culture, and they make efforts to protect it. The next generation is a good place to start if we want to ensure that this culture does not become extinct. This need to be preserved in perpetuity by the National Archives Administration of the Chinese government. The one-of-a-kind construction techniques used by the Yunnan minority ought to be taught. If you do this, you can ensure that it will remain a part of the curriculum at schools.

### **Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate**

This study has obtained ethics approval from the Yunnan Arts University, China Research Ethics Committee. The study protocol has been reviewed in accordance with ethical principles for human subject research, and any potential risks to participants have been identified and addressed. Participants in this study provided informed consent prior to their involvement. They were informed of the study's purpose, their rights as participants, and the procedures involved. They were assured that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. All data collected will be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes.

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## Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of Interest.

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