

A Deep Analysis of the Artistic Features of the East Baro Calendar's 24 Solar Terms

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ABSTRACT

Dongba script of Naxi nationality and the 24 solar terms of China are both rich traditional cultural elements. It is a very meaningful research direction to explore the connection between them and make innovations. Through in-depth study of the history, culture and lifestyle of Naxi nationality, this paper understands the origin, evolution and application field of Dongba script, and studies the status of the 24 solar terms in China's traditional farming culture, as well as its profound connection with Han culture. The commonality between Dongba script and the 24 solar terms is mainly analyzed, such as whether there are common symbols, symbols or ideological connotations, and the similarities in expressing nature, seasons and the relationship between human and nature are discussed. The application potential of Dongba script in modern visual design is studied, how to use it to express specific concepts in the 24 solar terms, and how to give traditional characters new characteristics of the times through modern methods to enhance their contemporary appeal. It is investigated whether there is influence of Han culture in Naxi culture and the mutual influence and integration between the two. It is studied how Naxi people understand and inherit the 24 solar terms and find out whether there is a unique interpretation of them. At the same time, innovation is carried out in the process of protecting traditional culture, so as to adapt to the needs of modern society, improve people's attention to and communication awareness of traditional culture, and ensure the continuation of its vitality. Focus on field investigation in Lijiang, Yunnan Province, to gain a deep understanding of the local culture's attitudes and practices towards Dongba script and the 24 solar terms. Through case studies, understand the local folk activities, farming traditions, and the inheritance of traditional culture. Through writing and painting in Dongba script, give a new interpretation of the 24 solar terms, making them more Naxi cultural characteristics, and consider integrating this innovative form into the local daily life, such as in festival activities, art performances, or cultural exhibitions. Through in-depth research and comprehensive application of these aspects of thinking, provide useful insights for the development and innovation of Dongba culture and the 24 solar terms, promote the integration of these two traditional cultures, and make them shine with new vitality in contemporary society.

Key words: The 24 Solar Terms, Dongba Culture, Modern Design, Man and Nature, National Inheritance, Intangible Cultural Heritage

Chapter 1: Introduction

Section 1: Research Background

Intangible cultural heritage, accumulated over hundreds or even thousands of years, is a cultural treasure passed down through generations by the Chinese people. It embodies the wisdom and hard work of our ancestors and holds significant historical and cultural value. One of the key aspects of China's current intangible cultural heritage development is how to adapt it to the needs of the new era, integrating it into modern society's spiritual and cultural construction. Numerous innovative designs for the modernization of traditional intangible cultural heritage in China have emerged, providing this study with a deeper research direction and a broader scope of reflection. This paper selects two forms of intangible cultural heritage for further exploration: Dongba culture and the 24 solar terms of the Chinese lunar calendar. Both are representative of rich historical and cultural significance. By combining these two forms and using digital media as a vehicle, this research aims to redesign them in a modern context, exploring how to organically integrate the 24 solar terms with Dongba culture, thus enabling intangible cultural heritage to merge into the new era.

Dongba character is a living form of culture that evolved over the long history of the Naxi people. It is known as the only surviving pictographics, and its unique textual meanings and shapes offer new design ideas for modern creativity. Moreover, Dongba character encompasses various fields such as religion, folklore, language, history, geography, literature, art, philosophy, and astronomy. As such, it holds immense research value.

The 24 solar terms in the Chinese lunar calendar are a key concept in traditional Chinese culture, representing the crystallization of ancient Chinese wisdom. They reflect the sun's movement along the ecliptic and the Earth's position in its orbit. This system originated in ancient China and illustrates people's understanding of seasonal changes and their observations of natural laws, marking the maturation of ancient Chinese agriculture. By integrating astronomy, the Twelve Laws of pitch pipes, and the philosophy of yin and yang, it achieved a significant level in the history of agricultural thought. The 24 solar terms accurately depict the rhythm and cycles of nature, emphasizing harmony between humans and nature. They serve as a cultural guide for both modern agricultural production and daily life. Their value goes beyond practical agriculture, permeating Chinese cultural traditions, where many festivals, customs, and folklore are linked to these solar terms. As science and technology have advanced, modern researchers have studied the 24 solar terms in depth through disciplines like meteorology and astronomy. Observations and calculations have confirmed the scientific foundation of the solar terms, and researchers have explored their application in contemporary society. However, research on the 24 solar terms remains limited, with insufficient studies focused on individual terms.

By integrating the symbolic concepts of Dongba culture into the 24 solar terms, we can deepen people's understanding of intangible cultural heritage through modern design.

Section 2: Research Significance

1. The Importance of Protecting and Preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage

Intangible cultural heritage is a concrete expression of the original culture of various ethnic groups. It represents the essence of human civilization and is a valuable treasure of each ethnic group's cultural legacy. The formation of intangible cultural heritage embodies the wisdom and thoughts of different peoples, while also driving the continuous development of social productivity. However, with the progress of time, intangible cultural heritage has

gradually faded from people's view as social production mode continues to evolve. Many intangible cultural practices are losing their social foundation and cultural space. Therefore, the question of how to protect and preserve this heritage, and safeguard these cultural treasures, presents a significant challenge for modern society.

2. The Potential Contribution of Intangible Cultural Heritage Modernization to Social Development

Intangible cultural heritage embodies rich cultural connotations, representing the experiences and insights gathered by our ancient ancestors through continuous practice. The fundamental requirements of socialist modernization include both material and spiritual wealth, which have been ideals perpetuated and pursued by intangible cultural heritage. As a dynamic and vibrant entity, intangible cultural heritage can invigorate modern design by incorporating traditional elements, stimulating design thinking, and making it better suited to the needs of contemporary society. Simultaneously, this integration can enhance cultural exchanges among various ethnic groups, raise awareness of intangible cultural heritage, and foster a sense of identity regarding traditional culture, ensuring its transmission in new forms. Moreover, the modernization of intangible cultural heritage can provide new momentum for economic development. Many intangible heritage projects possess unique craftsmanship and skills that can be transformed into competitive cultural products through innovative design and branding. This not only supports the development of related industries but also generates economic benefits and creates additional employment opportunities.

Section 3: Research Objectives

1. Research Objectives

This research aims to analyze and interpret existing literature and practical data to reveal the current status and development trends of the chosen topic. Additionally, the study will propose solutions to address relevant issues.

2. Research Questions

China's cultural heritage is diverse and abundant, requiring significant material and financial investment for its protection and preservation. Current research reveals a lack of relevant talent, inadequate legal protection policies, insufficient national emphasis on traditional culture, and an incomplete understanding of traditional cultural concepts among the public. Furthermore, the transmission of skills and methods is outdated. For instance, in Dongba culture, knowledge is traditionally passed down only from male to male and only within the same family, making it challenging for the general public to fully grasp its intricacies. This study focuses on the integration of Dongba character and the 24 solar terms with modern design, aiming to facilitate the widespread dissemination of traditional culture in contemporary society.

Section 4: Research Innovations

1、Innovative Research Perspective

1. The Naxi people's modes of production and lifestyle differ from those of the Han nationality, typically following the changes of the four seasons as a standard. A thorough investigation into the basis of agricultural production activities by the Naxi ancestors in Dongba culture is necessary.

2. The interconnected aspects between the two cultures.
3. Integrating traditional culture into modern design, extracting the essence of Dongba character symbols, and conducting an in-depth study of Dongba character from a semiotic perspective to leverage its design nature as a symbol.

2、 Innovative Research Methods and Presentation Forms

(1) Research Methods

1.Field Investigation

By conducting field research on Dongba culture in Lijiang, this method involves interviewing and communicating with local Naxi people, collecting data related to Dongba culture, and documenting the investigation process and outcomes.

2.Literature Review

This method involves reviewing and evaluating existing research on the 24 solar terms and Dongba culture to provide references for further study. The primary sources of this review are China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), Baidu Library, and relevant books.

3.Data Analysis

Collected data will be thoroughly analyzed to identify patterns and trends, ultimately leading to conclusions.

(2) Innovative Presentation Forms

1. Combining the two traditional cultures and presenting them through modern design.
2. The modernization and redesign of traditional culture offer a new approach to protecting intangible cultural heritage.

Chapter 2: Current State of Research at Home and Abroad

Section 1: Research on the Current State of Dongba Culture

1. Scholars from over 10 regions and countries in China and around the world have conducted systematic research and innovative introductions of Naxi Dongba culture from various angles, including philology, mythology, religious studies, history, and calligraphy art, using their findings as references for modern design. In 1997, the ancient city of Lijiang was listed as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site, and in 2003, the "Three Parallel Rivers" was included as a World Natural Heritage site. Additionally, Dongba manuscripts were inscribed in the Memory of the World Register.

2. Mr. Fang Guoyu's "Ten Characteristics" vividly interprets the nature and features of Dongba character from different perspectives. His research on Dongba pictograms, proto-characters, radicals, single characters, character groups, text segments, words, word groups, speech segments, borrowed characters, variants, structure of words, language recording, and pictorial writing has been summarized into the following points:

- (1) Iconography-based
- (2) Distinct features
- (3) Variations of original forms
- (4) Symbolic representation of events
- (5) Enriched by other scripts
- (6) Combination of meaning
- (7) Numerical meaning per character
- (8) Meaning of numbers in text
- (9) Complementary phonetic and semantic elements
- (10) Representation of meaning through sound

In addition, Mr. Li Lincan also had unique insights into the nature and characteristics of Dongba character, earning him the title of "Master Moxie." In July 1938, after graduating from the Hangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, Mr. Li walked from Hualing, through Guizhou, to Kunming. Along the way, he was deeply influenced by the ethnic customs and natural landscapes, which greatly impressed him, as he had grown up in Han-majority areas. Upon arriving in Kunming, he was influenced by Mr. Shen Congwen and Mr. Xiao Zuobin, which led him to begin his research on Naxi character, also known as Dongba character. During the period of the War of Resistance Against Japan, the National Central Museum was frequently relocated, eventually settling in the southwest, where ethnic minorities lived. This sparked a wave of interest among scholars to focus their research on these minority groups. Against this backdrop, Mr. Li conducted field investigations, traveling from Lijiang northwards across the Jinsha River to Baidi, where he participated in the Naxi festival of "Sanduo Festival." Following his investigation into the local ceremony of worshiping the heavens, he wrote one of the most detailed and valuable reports on Naxi rituals: *The Naxi Heaven-Worship Ceremony in Beidi Village, Zhongdian County*. At the same time, Li studied phonetic transcription methods with scholars from the Institute of History and Philology at the Academia Sinica, which enabled him to transliterate and translate Dongba character. In June 1944, he officially published the first dictionary of Dongba pictographs-*Dictionary of Moxie Pictographs*, followed by *Dictionary of Moxie Phonetic Characters* in August 1945, which was the first phonetic dictionary of Dongba script in China. Unlike Fang Guoyu, Mr. Li categorized Dongba character into "Six Writing Systems," summarized as:

1. Imagery
2. Representation of Objects
3. Representation of Sound
4. Specialization
5. Borrowing

Mr. Li Lincan was one of the earliest domestic scholars to study Dongba character, and his phonetic transliteration work laid the foundation for further research on Naxi language by later scholars.

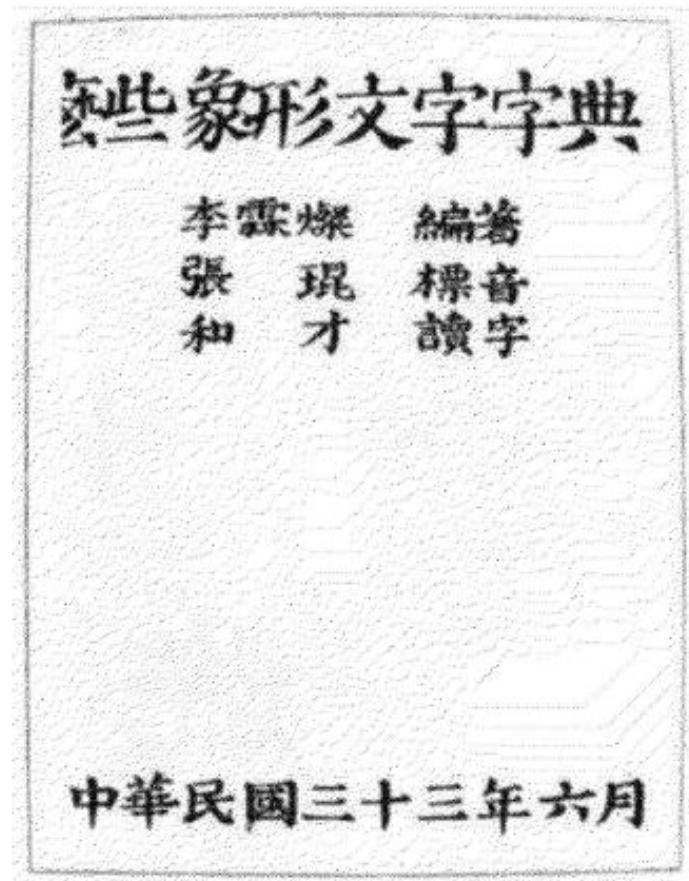


Figure 1: A stone-printed page from Li Lincan's representative work on Dongba culture (published in 1944 in Lizhen, Nanxi County, Sichuan Province).

3. In the 1980s, a wave of young scholars sparked a research boom on Dongba culture, with the volume of research steadily increasing over the years. The depth and scope of this research also continued to expand. In recent years, the publication of the *Complete Annotated Collection of Naxi Dongba Manuscripts* in 100 volumes has led to Dongba manuscripts being successfully included in UNESCO's *Memory of the World Register*. New research achievements in the fields of religion, philosophy, literature, and art related to Dongba culture have continually emerged. Since the 1980s, the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences also established a specialized institute—the Dongba Culture Research Institute—in the Naxi people's homeland to further this research. In 1999 and in 2003, significant academic seminars¹ on Dongba culture were held in Lijiang:

¹ He Jinguang: The Development Trend of Research on Naxi Dongba Culture [J]. Journal of Yunnan Nationalities University(Philosophy and Social Science), 2007.

(1) In 2003: The Fifth Annual Meeting of UNESCO's Asia-Pacific Cultural Heritage Management Conference.

(2) In 2004: The World Heritage Forum.

The hosting of academic seminars has attracted a large number of international scholars to visit and research Dongba character in Lijiang. Dongba culture has promoted the development of Lijiang's cultural tourism industry, boosted the local economy, and become a new productive force in reality.

3. Internationalization of Dongba Script Research: Western scholars were the first to recognize the research value of the Naxi Dongba character. After China implemented its reform and opening-up policies in the 1980s, many foreign researchers flocked to China, leading to a peak in Dongba culture studies. Key milestones include:

(1) In 1867, French missionary Pere Desgodins discovered the "Dongba scriptures" in Yunnan and sent his transcribed version of the *Goler's Requiem* back to Paris.

(2) In the early 20th century, botanist Joseph Rock traveled extensively through Yunnan's Nujiang, Diqing, and Lijiang regions between 1922 and 1949. He collected and organized local ethnographic data and botanical specimens. Rock established the Yunnan Expedition Headquarters for the National Geographic Society in Lijiang and conducted in-depth research on Naxi culture, including its history, geography, and ethnic languages. In 1945, Harvard University acquired the Dongba scriptures he brought back from China in 1943, and in 1949, Rock published his monumental work, *The Naxi-English Encyclopedic Dictionary*. Rock collected approximately 8,000 volumes of Dongba scriptures during his time in China, which are now housed in libraries across Europe and the United States.

(3) Tarin Lacopeur (France): The first to make Dongba culture known to the world, he published *The Origin of Scripts Near Tibet* in London in 1894, which included a manuscript copy of a Dongba pictographic text. Over the next several decades, these Dongba texts were sold and scattered throughout Europe and America.

(4) In 1913, French scholar Bacque compiled his findings on the Naxi Dongba script and published the book *LESMOSO*, based on the script and his observations.

Research Methods:

(1) Field Investigation

(2) Collaboration with Naxi Scholars

(3) Conducting Field Surveys in Naxi Villages using Western cultural anthropology theories and methods for a comprehensive study of Naxi Dongba culture.

(4) Local Scholars Adopting an Open Approach to receive foreign exchange students.

4. Comparative Research Findings—The Dongba culture has historically had close interactions with Tibetan and Bai cultures, influencing each other politically, economically, and in religious culture, particularly between Dongba beliefs and Tibetan Buddhism. The creative methods used in Dongba paintings bear similarities to the techniques employed in Tibetan thangka painting. Dongba religion features around 30 religious rituals that express the faith concepts of the Naxi people, primarily reflecting their natural worship and fertility beliefs. Dongba religion originated from the early Bon religion of Tibet and has absorbed elements from Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism.

Section 2: Research Status of the Lunar Twenty-Four Solar Terms

1. The twenty-four solar terms are natural seasonal patterns discovered by the Chinese in

their production and daily life, based on the Earth's position relative to the Sun and the resulting changes in the angle and duration of sunlight. Among these, eight key points are particularly significant, known as the "Four Arrivals" (Lichun, Lixia, Liquiu, Lidong) and "Two Equinoxes" (Chunfen, Qiufen) and "Two Solstices" (Xiazhi, Dongzhi). This system was established during the Western Zhou Dynasty and was largely shaped during the Warring States period. The twenty-four solar terms are interconnected with celestial phenomena, calendars, climate, phenology, agricultural activities, and regulations, and traditional society has developed a series of beliefs and rituals around these seasonal markers.^[2]

2. Ancient people believed that the internal driving force behind the operation of the twenty-four solar terms was the flow of yin and yang. At different solar terms, yin and yang occupy different positions in the universe. As stated in *Guanzi: Cheng Ma*, the changes in yin and yang correspond to the seasons: spring, autumn, winter, and summer. In the annual cycle, the first half of the year, represented by Lichun and Lixia, corresponds to the rising of yang and the decline of yin, while the second half, marked by Liquiu and Lidong, reflects the opposite. The summer solstice represents the peak of yang energy, while the winter solstice signifies its lowest point. Yin and yang symbolize warm and cold climatic properties, respectively. The belief in the "Way of Heaven" suggests that people should live in accordance with these seasonal characteristics, arranging their activities according to the solar terms—celebrating in spring, appreciating in summer, punishing in autumn, and enacting discipline in winter. Consequently, specific beliefs, taboos, and ritual activities have developed around these seasonal markers. The spring equinox rituals are the most elaborate. *Rites: Monthly Orders* records: "On the day of Lichun, the eastern outskirts welcome the spring." However, as times have changed, the ancient welcoming ceremony has gradually been replaced by "whipping spring" and other official and folk rituals, such as "beating the spring ox," "entering spring," and "singing spring." In summer, when yang energy is at its peak, welcoming and summer rituals are held. According to the concepts of yin, yang, and the five elements, the summer solstice is a time when yin energy begins to rise, prompting ancient practitioners to hold rituals to support this energy. As noted in *Records of the Grand Historian: Fengshan*, "On the day of the summer solstice, offerings are made to the earth deities with music and dance." Due to the competition between yin and yang energies during this period, it is advisable to stay indoors, rest, and peacefully navigate through summer. In autumn, as yin energy starts to grow, the welcoming autumn rituals express themes of containment and submission to the yin world. In winter, people hold welcoming winter rituals and ancestral worship activities to seek divine protection from their ancestors. The winter solstice marks the starting point for calculating the twenty-four solar terms and represents a transitional period between old and new. The "Counting Nines" game is essentially a ritual with magical significance, aimed at invoking the arrival of spring during the cold winter. In summary, through these belief rituals, ancient people achieved communication between heaven and earth, thus realizing a harmonious relationship between humanity and nature, ensuring happiness and well-being in their lives.

3. The twenty-four solar terms embody rich philosophical connotations, primarily reflecting the concept of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. Based on the idea of the unity of heaven and humanity, as well as a holistic view of the universe, these terms emphasize the observation of the relationships between seasonal changes, climate variations, plant growth, animal life, and human activities, making full use of subjective initiative to harness natural laws.^{[3][4]} The China Agricultural Museum has established and implemented the *Five-Year Plan for the Protection and Inheritance of the Twenty-Four Solar Terms (2017-2021)*, published the *Newsletter on the Protection and Inheritance of the Twenty-Four Solar Terms*, and held an international academic seminar on the twenty-four solar terms in

² Xiao Fang: The value and significance of inheriting the 24 solar terms [J]. Folk Culture Forum, 2017.

³ Sui Bin, Tang Zhiqiang: The historical context of the twenty-four solar terms [J]. Ancient and Modern Agriculture, 2022.

2020, focusing on promoting solar term culture and facilitating cooperation and exchange. Additionally, the museum, in collaboration with the China Folk Association, has set up a research center for the twenty-four solar terms. They are diligently implementing the decisions and deployments of the Party Central Committee and the State Council on promoting excellent traditional culture, innovating mechanisms, and taking a series of effective measures to actively advance the inheritance and protection of the twenty-four solar terms:

(1) Strengthening academic research to establish the theoretical foundation and practical basis for the protection and inheritance of the twenty-four solar terms.

(2) Actively pursuing "heritage application" to protect and pass down the twenty-four solar terms.

(3) Coordinating planning and improving mechanisms to promote and disseminate the twenty-four solar terms.

As a living heritage, the twenty-four solar terms encapsulate the ethical concepts and universal practices of the Chinese people, transforming into a typical representation of Chinese values.

4. After the successful application for heritage status of the twenty-four solar terms in 2016, the quantity of literature on the topic has significantly increased, making the twenty-four solar terms a new focal point for academic research. A review of the literature indicates that the origins of the twenty-four solar terms can be traced back to the Xia and Shang dynasties, with their formation solidifying during the Warring States period and their finalization occurring during the Qin and Han dynasties.

In 2012, Shi Yan published an article titled *An Exploration of the Twenty-Four Solar Terms in Manchu language*, which delves into the intrinsic connection between the Manchu language's twenty-four solar terms and the socio-economic forms of the Manchu people. The article explicitly points out that the Manchu twenty-four solar terms represent a gradual transition from a hunting-based economy to an agriculture-based economy, providing a new perspective for understanding and researching the regional characteristics of the twenty-four solar terms.

Subsequently, in 2016, Zhang Su published an article titled *The Current Situation and Thoughts on the Heritage Protection of the Origin of the Twenty-Four Solar Terms*. Using the Dengfeng area in Henan Province as a case study, this article provides a detailed description of the existing cultural relics related to the twenty-four solar terms and local customs. Based on this foundation, Zhang Su proposed a series of practical recommendations aimed at strengthening the dynamic inheritance and protection of the solar terms. He suggested establishing pilot programs for dynamic inheritance, enhancing basic research, editing popular science series, and creating a national-level museum for the twenty-four solar terms to promote their comprehensive protection and inheritance.

Additionally, Long Xiaotian explored the regional application of the twenty-four solar terms culture in Guangxi in his article *Diverse Local Customs, Shared Temporal Sequences: The Culture of the Twenty-Four Solar Terms in Guangxi*. Through a detailed analysis of the cultural implications, beliefs, and rituals associated with the twenty-four solar terms in Guangxi, Long Xiaotian reveals the unique charm and far-reaching influence of this regional culture.

5. Research publications on the twenty-four solar terms in China exhibit the following characteristics:

(1) There is a significant amount of general popular science discussion, but it lacks originality and suffers from severe homogenization.

(2) Original academic research needs to be strengthened; there is a scarcity of recorded

materials on the twenty-four solar terms, along with a lack of archaeological discoveries and relevant literature.

(3) Research on individual solar terms is insufficient.

6. The twenty-four solar terms were introduced to Japan in 552 AD, and additional approximately eleven minor festivals were incorporated based on the solar terms. In contemporary Japan, the Spring Equinox is a public holiday. During the Three Kingdoms period in Korea, the Chinese calendar *Yuanjia Calendar* was used, which evolved into a local calendar by 1433. In Vietnam, the Chinese *Shoushi Calendar* was introduced in 1324, and after six significant modifications, the solar terms were adjusted to better align with the local conditions, ultimately resulting in a unique Vietnamese calendar.

Chapter 3 Analysis of the Combined Stylistic Characteristics of Dongba Character and the Twenty-Four Solar Terms

Section 1: Compatibility of the Two Images

Representing the twenty-four solar terms using Dongba characters, this section takes "Jingzhe" (Awakening of Insects) as an example, employing design interventions to serve traditional culture and enhance modern society's understanding of the functionalities of both the twenty-four solar terms and Dongba script.

1. The Relationship Between Humans and Nature

Both the twenty-four solar terms and Dongba culture place great emphasis on the relationship between humans and nature, emerging as a means to facilitate production activities. The life cycles of all things are also related to the solar terms.

The twenty-four solar terms are an indispensable part of the agricultural time system, serving agricultural production activities and agricultural life. They arise from the observable phenomena in nature. Ancient peoples' understanding of time originated from their observations of phenology. The maturity of astronomical observation techniques led to the development of celestial calendars, which, after refinement, resulted in a lunar calendar that combines the solar year and the synodic month. Astronomer Xi Zezong has explicitly pointed out that the three traditional Chinese scientific paradigms of Yin-Yang, Five Elements, and Qi are key to understanding the formation of the twenty-four solar terms. Scholars like Hu Yan, Zhang Yixin, and Lu Tianyu emphasize the agricultural ethics embedded within the twenty-four solar terms, such as respect for natural cycles, benevolence towards the land, moderation in taking and giving, and careful management, highlighting their significance for modern agricultural production.

The emergence of the twenty-four solar terms is rooted in nature. Even before their establishment, ancestors had discovered the correlations between natural phenomena and seasonal timing, utilizing this knowledge to commence agricultural activities. The term "Xia" (Summer) originates from the pictogram of a cicada, while "Qiu" (Autumn) derives from the pictogram of a cricket. The calls of cicadas and crickets signify the arrival of summer and autumn, which is similar to the way Dongba characters express and record the creatures of nature. However, compared to the visual representations in Dongba character, Chinese characters have undergone a process of abstraction through continuous simplification and evolution. The first emperor of the Five Emperors, Shaozhao, established calendar officials, and officials divided the seasons according to the arrival and departure of birds. The determination of Spring Equinox and Autumn Equinox was based on the return and departure of swallows, while Winter Solstice and Summer Solstice were indicated by the call of the cuckoo: "Cuckoo calls in summer, stops in winter." The determination of Lichun (Beginning of Spring) and Lixia (Beginning of Summer) was based on the calls of the green bird: "Green bird calls for Lichun, stops for Lixia," while the arrival and departure of the red bird indicated the approach of Liqiu (Beginning of Autumn) and Lidong (Beginning of Winter). Zhuanxu recorded seasonal timings and observed celestial changes, stating, "Mengchun (the first month of spring) is the beginning, and at that time, Lichun is established," transitioning from phenology to astronomical observations and formulating the *Zhuanxu Calendar*, which became a reference for farmers in tilling and sowing. Yao and Shun emphasized "respecting natural times," and the *Book of Documents: Yao Dian* recorded the phenological phenomena of the ancient "Four Equinoxes" (Spring Equinox, Summer Solstice, Autumn Equinox, Winter Solstice) and the constellations of bird, fire, void, and Sirius, combining phenology with celestial phenomena to delineate the solar terms for the first time. In ancient China, the production mode predominantly revolved around agriculture, supplemented by animal husbandry, which heavily relied on the natural world. The ancients early recognized the

importance of not missing agricultural timing for production. The growth and development of crops exhibit a strong seasonal rhythm; thus, accurately grasping the rhythm of the twenty-four solar terms serves as the primary driving force for production activities. As understanding of agricultural activities and climatic phenomena deepened, an additional sixteen solar terms were incorporated on the foundation of the "Four Seasons and Eight Festivals" during the Spring and Autumn periods. The twenty-four solar terms correspond not only with seventy-two phenological indicators but also align with the twelve months of the calendar, representing a scientific summary of the experiences and laws of the ancestors' production and life, providing a basis for subsequent agricultural practices.

The twenty-four solar terms, derived from nature, not only influence agricultural activities but also impact people's dietary habits. Each season's food corresponds to the natural products available during that time, reflecting a response to the seasonal climate; for example, eating dumplings and lamb in winter.

The twenty-four solar terms originated during the agricultural civilization period, while Dongba culture emerged in the era of primitive civilization. Both were developed by ancient peoples to align with natural laws and fulfill their production and life needs. The concept of "observing objects to derive symbols" is fundamental to the Naxi people's character creation. Early Naxi ancestors observed phenomena in nature and abstractly represented them in Dongba character. The earliest carriers of this script were stone and wood, known in Naxi as "Sijiu Lujiao." The early residences of the Naxi ancestors varied, leading to different shapes and forms of the objects they observed, which resulted in multiple ways to write a single word. For example, the term for "forest" could be represented in many forms due to the diverse vegetation encountered as the Naxi people migrated from tropical regions to Lijiang, varying with altitude. Thus, Dongba character has various representations for "forest," including terms for pine trees, fir trees, bamboo, etc. Dongba religion, which venerates all things as having spirits, represents a natural religion transitioning from a primitive form to a civilized one. Nature is seen as a sacred existence; for example, mountains are viewed as the abodes of gods, and water as a means of divine baptism. These symbolic meanings reflect the Naxi people's reverence and awe for nature. In Dongba character, nature is depicted as vibrant and full of life, symbolizing the vitality and spiritual energy of the Naxi people. Additionally, animals such as horses, cattle, sheep, and deer have various representations because of their significance in the Naxi way of life, being important targets for hunting and pastoralism. The diverse animal imagery reflects the Naxi's reliance on nature. The Naxi religious text, the *Dongba Scriptures*, contains many chapters that describe the relationship between humans and nature, detailing how the Naxi protect and respect nature while utilizing natural resources for agricultural production, hunting, and gathering. Adhering to principles of moderation, they maintain a harmonious relationship with their environment, which is rich in resources, showcasing the intrinsic bond between humans and nature. The *Dongba Scriptures*, authored by Dongba priests, serve two primary purposes: one for religious activities and the other for recording Naxi historical legends. The *Creation Scripture* falls into the second category, suggesting that gods influence and control nature. According to this text, the god Yinggeding produced a white egg from which a white chicken emerged, representing the divine angel of grace. The chicken's call could not be too high or too low, for the harmony of the earth depended on it. At that time, no birds or wild beasts could fly; the white chicken nested in clouds and grass, producing nine pairs of snow-white eggs, among which deities controlled weather changes and biological activities on the ground.



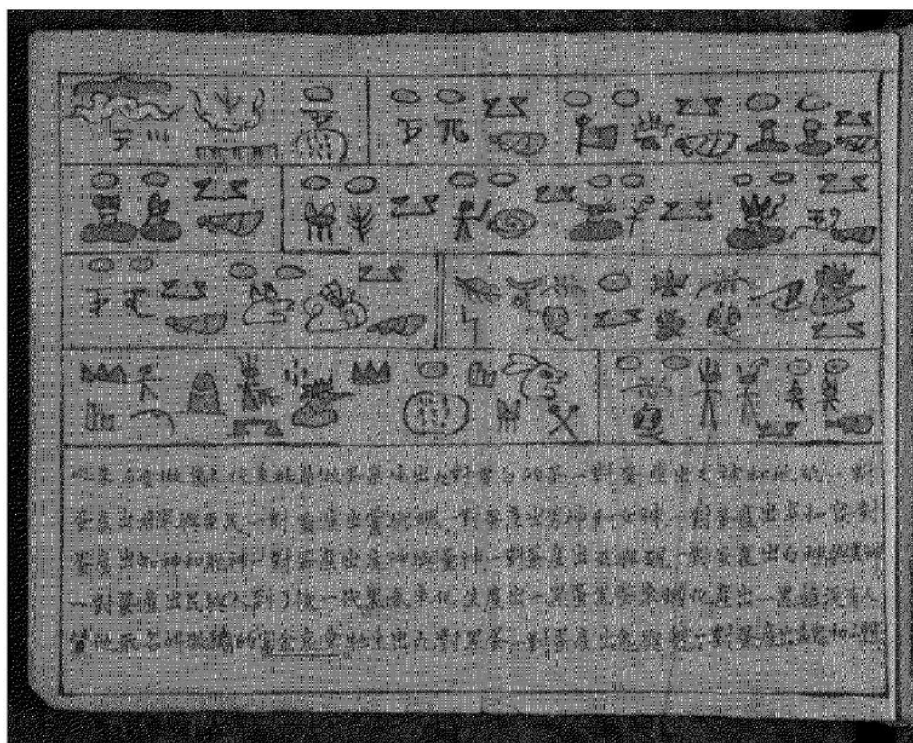


Figure 2: Display of the Inner Pages of the *Creation Scripture*

In addition, the Naxi people's natural worship also reflects their emphasis on nature. The reason the Naxi do not use the twenty-four solar terms for agricultural production activities is that agricultural civilization differs from commercial culture and nomadic culture. Agricultural civilization can be self-sufficient, not relying on external factors but rather conforming to nature, respecting peace, sufficiency, tranquility, and stability. The primary practices include praying to deities and performing rituals to honor heaven and earth. The ceremonies dedicated to nature deities are called "祭署" (jìshǔ). The personified form of nature deities among the Naxi is depicted as a human figure wearing a lotus crown entwined with two snakes, with a snake coiled around the lower body. The "署神" (Shǔshén) is the master of the natural world, and the Naxi people express gratitude to the nature deities for their gifts and protection through the 祭署 ceremony. They ask for forgiveness for any offenses and believe that if natural resources are used wisely, the nature deities will ensure abundant harvests and favorable weather.

Nature nurtures life and sustains all things. Both the Han and Naxi people show their reverence for nature. Throughout the development of human civilization, the relationship between humans and nature has undergone various changes, from the most primitive hunting and gathering to the agricultural era, and then to the modern industrial age. Humanity's attitude toward nature can be seen as gradually shifting from awe to utilization, and ultimately to protection. Although this process has not been smooth, the experiences summarized by our ancestors have made us aware of the importance of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.

2. Naxi and Han Culture

With the development of time, the Naxi people have gradually become Sinicized, and many customs and traditions related to Han culture can be found in Naxi life. For example, many Naxi people can communicate fluently in Chinese, facilitating communication with Han people. At the same time, Dongba culture has absorbed a large number of Han cultural elements, such as Confucianism, Taoism, and Tibetan Buddhism, which have combined with the indigenous Naxi culture to form a unique Naxi culture. In addition, the Naxi people's

architectural designs also feature many elements related to Han culture, such as quadrangle courtyards and wooden structures. The decorative arts of Naxi architecture have also incorporated symbols from Han culture, such as cloud brocade patterns and ruyi designs. These aspects of Han culture have enriched Naxi culture, making it more diverse and vibrant. The cultural exchange between the two is bidirectional, with the dissemination of traditional culture also enriching the cultural connotation of the Han nationality. The aesthetic approaches and thinking of the Naxi people, which differ from those of the Han, have injected new vitality into Han culture.

3. Influence of Religious Concepts and Rituals

Dongba religion originated from primitive shamanism and absorbed elements from Tibetan Buddhism, Bo religion, and Taoism, ultimately forming a unique ethnic religious form of the Naxi people. Taoism has changed the Naxi people's views on life and death. The Naxi Dongba believe that after death, the soul transforms into a snake, which returns to the totemic sacred place and is reincarnated through pregnant women. Later, influenced by Taoism, the concept of "Jingwu" was established. "Jing" refers to the five elemental qualities of a person: metal, wood, water, fire, and earth; "Wu" means to combine or enclose. The combination of the five elemental qualities is primary, deviation represents illness, and fragmentation signifies death. Laozi said, "One gives birth to two, two gives birth to three, and three gives birth to all things. All things bear yin and embrace yang, and harmony is achieved by the combination of qi." The Naxi ancestors' method of character creation comes from natural life, reflecting on "images" and then progressing to "Dao."

As Dongba religion is a primitive form of religion, it believes in animism and emphasizes harmony between humans and nature. It has distinct features of primitive religious beliefs, namely ancestor worship and nature worship. However, Dongba religion is not purely primitive; it incorporates various elements from foreign religions and exists in a transitional stage from primitive to humanistic religion. The term "Dongba" is derived from the ancient Dongba character, meaning "wise" or "intelligent," serving as a bridge between heaven, hell, and humans. Dongba teachings are passed down patrilineally, only from male to male, and outsiders' understanding of Dongba is limited to learning, unable to participate in rituals and sacrificial activities. Dongba practitioners are ordinary workers who receive corresponding rewards after conducting rituals and sacrifices.

The Naxi people regard natural phenomena closely related to their lives as divine. They consider "Tian Festival" (Heaven Worship) as one of the most significant sacrificial ceremonies. This festival is an internal rite for the same clan, with outsiders not allowed near the sacrificial site, highlighting its importance. The ceremony is presided over by a Dongba, conducted within fixed sacrificial locations by families or clans. The purpose of the ritual is to praise the ancestors' entrepreneurial history, unite the community, enhance cohesion, and maintain the connection between humans and nature deities, reminding the clanspeople to remember to revere the natural gods and pray for peace.^[5]

The worship of family deities is also a crucial part of Dongba rituals, focusing on the veneration of the household deity (family god). The spiritual pillar of a Naxi family is the ancestral pillar located by the fireplace, praying for the deities to protect the family's health and bring wealth to the household.

⁵ Liu Mengmeng: The application of myths and sacrificial rituals in Dongba culture in art creation [D]. Master's Thesis of Yunnan Art University, 2013.



Figure 3: Naxi Dongba Blessing and Sacrifice Ceremony

The twenty-four solar terms absorbed the Daoist concept of "harmony between heaven and humanity," emphasizing the coordinated relationship between humans and nature, and are regarded as an important basis for Daoist cultivation. Daoism believes that by following natural laws, one can achieve enlightenment and attain immortality. Therefore, Daoism incorporates the twenty-four solar terms into its practices, stressing adherence to natural laws during cultivation to reach the state of "harmony between heaven and humanity." In Buddhism, the twenty-four solar terms are seen as guidance and teachings from Buddha. Buddhism holds that beings can learn the true essence of Buddha's teachings through observation of the twenty-four solar terms, ultimately achieving liberation. Incorporating the twenty-four solar terms into Buddhist practices emphasizes the necessity of following Buddhist teachings to attain inner peace and transcendence.

The cultural connotation of the twenty-four solar terms lies in following the philosophical rules of life and aligning with natural rhythms, resulting in specific religious rituals and beliefs. China, as an agrarian nation, established traditional state sacrifices based on natural rhythms: spring equinox for sun worship, autumn equinox for moon worship, summer solstice for earth worship, and winter solstice for heaven worship. Additionally, the royal court had the "Ritual of Welcoming the Qi." For example, after the beginning of spring, as the weather warms and rain falls, the ruler conducts sacrificial ceremonies in specific directions to pray for a bountiful harvest. *The Book of Rites: Monthly Orders* records the emphasis the Zhou dynasty placed on solar terms, with corresponding sacrificial ceremonies held on the first solar term of each season. On the day of the beginning of spring, the Zhou emperor, dressed in blue, led officials in a sacrificial ceremony in the suburbs to welcome the spring winds. Among the people, the custom of "whipping the spring ox" celebrates the beginning of spring and is viewed as a form of entertainment and communication that symbolizes blessings and prayers for a bountiful harvest, originating from ancient rituals honoring the ox deity. Meanwhile, dietary and health habits associated with the twenty-four solar terms also result from aligning with seasonal changes and correspond closely to natural produce. These rituals demonstrate humanity's compliance with and respect for natural laws, as well as reverence for life and the pursuit of existence. They are not only a cultural phenomenon but also a spiritual one.

In summary, the religious connotations contained within Dongba religion and the twenty-four solar terms essentially arise from the desire for a peaceful and happy life for the people,

reflecting the importance of agricultural culture in China's development. Through religious rituals, people pray for health and abundant harvests, fundamentally striving for an improved life. From the perspective of the relationship between humans and nature, religious beliefs and ritual activities have emerged, which continue to be practiced today, indicating that the idea of aligning with natural laws has permeated the entirety of China's development history.

4. Philosophy and Spirit

The Twenty-Four Solar Terms embody the concept of aligning with the heavens and adapting to the seasons, reflecting the value of harmony between humans and nature. This time system originated from the interaction between ancient Chinese ancestors and the natural world, demonstrating the respect and application of natural laws by the Chinese nation. It signifies "the Qi of heaven and earth is divided into four seasons." Each season has corresponding solar terms to mark time, guide agricultural activities, and organize tasks. Originating from the farming civilization in the Yellow River Basin, it possesses high scientific value.

As a spiritual symbol, the Twenty-Four Solar Terms represent the pursuit of harmony, auspiciousness, and prosperity, emphasizing the balance and coordination between humans and nature, as well as between humans and society. The Twenty-Four Solar Terms are not only a cultural heritage but also a practical value, reflecting the ecological civilization concept of the Chinese people, who love nature, respect all living things, honor natural laws, and express gratitude for nature's gifts. This idea is similar to the philosophical connotations embedded in Dongba culture. In various works of Dongba culture, we can see the pursuit and longing for auspiciousness and prosperity, as well as the reverence of the Naxi people for nature and deities. Primitive totems, mythological stories, and dances showcase the resilient and courageous characteristics of the Naxi people, inspiring individuals to pursue beauty and cherish peace in life. The philosophical thought of "Harmony between Heaven and Man" in Chinese culture is in line with the concept in the Dongba scripture that "humans and nature are brothers of different mothers." Both Dongba culture and the Twenty-Four Solar Terms are crystallizations of the wisdom of the Chinese people, integrating religion, art, and philosophical science while embodying a spirit of awe and respect for nature.

Section 2: Aesthetic Characteristics of the Twenty-Four Solar Terms

1. Visual Presentation



Figure 4: The Dongba Script of the Lunar Twenty-Four Solar Terms Created in Collaboration

with Yang Hongzhong, Director of the Cultural Museum in the Ancient Urban Area of Lijiang

The Dongba pictographic characters "When you see wood, you paint wood; when you see the stone, you paint stone." reflect the unique aesthetic and natural sentiments formed by long-term direct observation of the natural world. In the image, the Dongba character representing the fourteen solar terms is directly translated based on their meanings. Taking "Jingzhe" (Awakening of Insects) as an example, the two Dongba characters correspond to the phonetic sounds of "惊" (jing) and "蛰" (zhe).

The following two visual representations serve as references for modern design transformations of the Dongba script form for "Jingzhe."

(1) Katsumi Asaba⁶

The design style of Katsumi Asaba primarily focuses on typography, emphasizing the composition of points, lines, and surfaces in the typeface. It typically uses an ink wash style for presentation, showcasing a strong Eastern aesthetic, and employs black and white colors to reflect the beauty of simplicity and elegance in typography. The image shows its Dongba character design, integrating the Dongba characters into the packaging of brown rice tea.



Figure 5: Katsumi Asaba - Brown Rice Tea Packaging Design

⁶ Katsumi Asaba (1940-): Born in Yokohama, Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan. Graduated from Kanagawa Prefectural Technical High School, Kanagawa Prefecture, and the Kuwasawa Design Institute in Tokyo. He was also a member of the Japanese national ping-pong team.

The packaging design of "Brown Rice Tea" goes beyond the aesthetic appearance of Dongba script, focusing more on its graphic meaning. By arranging the characters for "person" and "tea" together, it reflects the growth environment and cultivation methods of brown rice tea, as well as its relationship with people. Although the grammatical structure of Dongba script is not adopted, this direct expression serves primarily as an explanatory function. The content is divided into two parts: the first part describes the production process of brown rice tea, while the second part conveys the feelings people experience after drinking it. Those unfamiliar with Dongba culture can still intuitively understand the formation process of brown rice tea and the happiness that follows. In the packaging design, elements such as rain, rice, farming, the moon, and rice grains use more concrete characters from Dongba character, allowing viewers to grasp their meanings easily. Presenting the meanings through pictorial symbols highlights the advantages of visual language, while abstract symbols express textual meanings, such as "eat," "run," and "blessing." The character for "point" in Dongba script generally signifies "abundance" or "many," and several Dongba characters with many points convey the rich connotation of brown rice tea, inviting careful appreciation. The central pattern of "Brown Rice Tea" is depicted with thick black lines to represent the sturdy tea bowl, while delicate lines depict the tea leaves. The tea leaves resting in the bowl create a contrast between thickness and thinness, enriching the details. Rice grains are used as decorative accents on the side, breaking the complete symmetry and dividing the planar space, making the overall text more impactful. The design of "Brown Rice Tea" is not merely surface-level but is based on an in-depth exploration of Dongba cultural elements and a thoughtful consideration of the structure of Dongba script. It serves as a typical case where the ethnic symbols are not simply appropriated; instead, the design emphasizes its internal logical structure and expressive function.

Katsumi Asaba believes that writing has three layers: the first layer is the text written on the surface; the second layer is the linguistic meaning of the text; and the third layer is the text that stimulates human senses and sparks imagination. His font design, although simple, possesses a strong personal character, skillfully blending modern design with traditional culture. In the design process, he standardizes the length, curvature, and angle of the strokes, incorporating handwritten details based on the characteristics of the text. This approach preserves the historical charm of the writing and creates a unique Eastern aesthetic, leaving a deep impression on those who see it. ^[7]

(2) Design of DONGBA NEW YEAR GIFT BOX

⁷ Song Yang: Analyzing the semantic function of Dongba characters from the packaging design of "Genmaicha" by Asaba Katsumi [J]. Fujian Tea, 2018



Figure 6

The design uses vocabulary from the Naxi Dongba script that conveys positive meanings, transforming the characteristics of pictographic writing into visual elements. The text employs bold black lines, creating a strong visual impact, while the overall design features bright colors as a background, allowing the key elements to stand out clearly. Each stroke of the Dongba text in the design is separate and not fully connected, highlighting the symbolic nature of Dongba writing and its characteristic of conveying meaning through "form," while still retaining its existing pictorial features. The design uses "New Year gifts" as a medium, embodying the author's best wishes for the Year of the Tiger, combining Dongba character with human emotions and giving it a unique sense of heritage.

2. Font Function

(1) Information Transmission

Dongba script possesses strong symbolism and rich historical and cultural connotations. It serves as the primary medium for the Naxi people to convey information, and its visual communication function in art design is evident. The use of Dongba characters in art design facilitates the transmission of Naxi culture, reflecting its cultural value.^[8]

(2) Art Presentation

⁸ Lan Wei: The Magical Naxi Dongba Character [M]. The Nationalities Publishing House of Yunnan, 2018



Figure 7: Dongba Font Design for the Lunar 24 Solar Terms

Dongba script is particularly significant in the development of Chinese characters. It is primarily a form used by the Naxi people to record their lives, express reproductive worship, and convey their awe of nature. Currently, the application of Dongba character is limited to Lijiang City, mainly manifesting as translations of Chinese characters displayed on wooden plaques or stone tablets. Its characteristics are outdated and unable to keep pace with the ever-changing design trends. The design of the Dongba font for the 24 solar terms (hereinafter referred to as "the design") aims to highlight the formal characteristics of Dongba character while incorporating the texture associated with writing on stones or wooden plaques. This approach retains an ancient charm while infusing modernity, making the redesigned Dongba character more attractive, expressive, and impactful. The lines of Dongba character are inherently relaxed and smooth, reflecting the Naxi ancestors' love for experiencing nature and their free-spirited attitude toward life. Besides everyday use, it also has decorative qualities, embodying a light and fluid atmosphere. The font is clear and readable; even after certain transformations to its appearance, it retains the original reading habits, making it easy to recognize. It meets public aesthetic requirements, showcasing the individuality and uniqueness of Dongba character. The uniqueness of Dongba character itself distinguishes it from other designs available in the market. While integrating modern design elements, it also incorporates traditional and rustic visual feelings, forming a unique style.

Form Expression: The design of the Dongba font for the 24 solar terms mainly focuses on the stroke, structure, and proportion. By adjusting the thickness, curvature, and connection of the strokes, and using bold black straight lines to highlight the symbolic features, the spacing and width of the characters are adjusted to create a richer visual effect, making the overall design more harmonious and aesthetically pleasing.

Texture Expression: The texture of the design is primarily reflected in the surface texture of the font. The author mimics the act of writing with a brush on wooden plaques, combining the printed and handwritten styles to give the font a more three-dimensional and tactile quality.

(3) Practical Applications

The design can be widely applied across various fields, such as packaging, advertising, and brand identification. In graphic design, font design can serve as an essential component of visual elements, coordinating with other graphics and color elements to create a harmonious

visual effect.

3. Font Design Analysis Using "Jing Zhe" as an Example

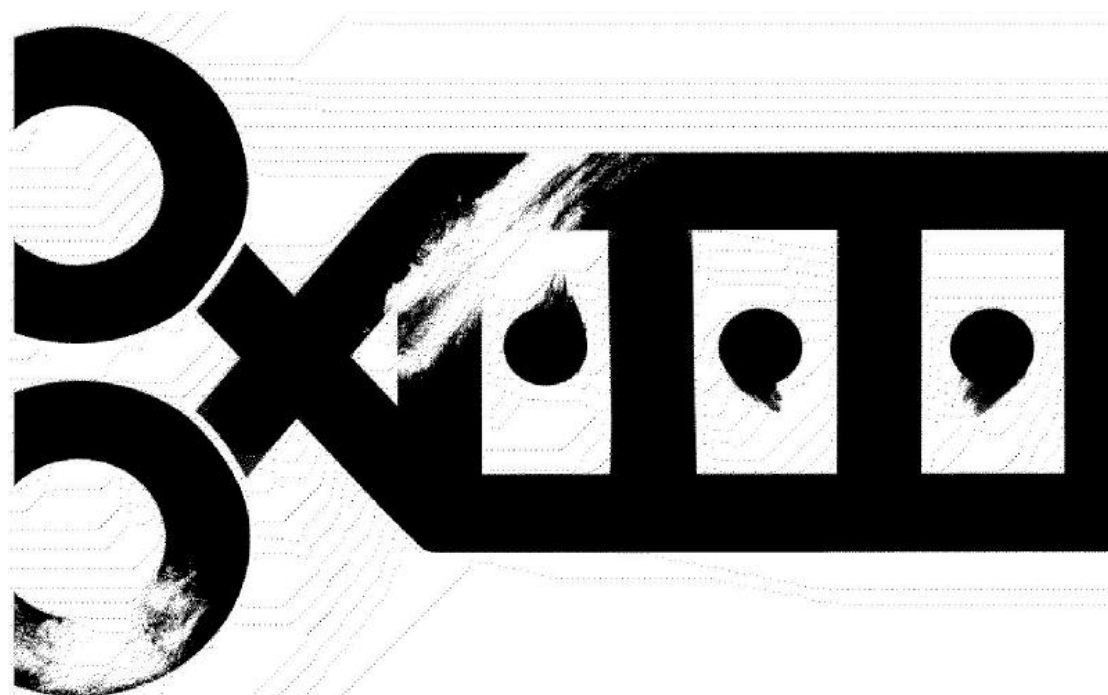


Figure 8: Font Design of "Jing Zhe" (Awakening of Insects)

Drawing from the two previous design case studies, the author retains the visual artistic features of Dongba character symbols in the design, namely its pictographic nature, expressiveness, and artistic feel, while incorporating modern semiotic theories to create a symbolic design for the Dongba character "Jing Zhe." The author uses bold black lines to emphasize the symbolic nature of the character. In Dongba culture, most Dongba scriptures are written by Dongba priests on special Dongba paper, and the author integrates the texture of Dongba characters written with a brush on Dongba paper into the font design, enhancing the font's historical and authentic feel. The form of the Dongba characters for "Jing Zhe" is relatively pictorial, while also containing some abstract concepts. "Jing" resembles the shape of scissors, which can startle someone if it touches them, while "Zhe" looks like an insect. "Jing Zhe" reflects the natural phenomenon where living beings, influenced by seasonal rhythms, awaken, notably the spring thunder that rouses hibernating insects from the ground. To link these two characters, the author connects the separate fonts, creating a more harmonious and cohesive layout. Through redesigning the Dongba character for "Jing Zhe" and its simple symbolic recomposition, the diversity of symbol design is highlighted, encouraging interest in Dongba culture and showing that Dongba characters are not as difficult to understand and translate as they might seem.

(1) Aesthetic Characteristics

1. Quaint Beauty

Early Dongba characters were inscribed on wood and stone, primarily depicting the natural biological environment. The creation of Dongba characters had no constraints, reflecting a free, natural, ancient, and vivid style. Through observing the living beings of nature, the Naxi ancestors captured their dynamic and contour features, adding imagination, and created character forms through simple lines and dots. The font texture was designed to resemble being written on leaves or wood. For example, in the representation of the character "Zhe" in "Jing Zhe," it is clearly seen as an insect shape. However, "insect" can be depicted in various ways in Dongba script, indicating that there is no fixed standard in Dongba characters. This

pure, unstructured nature of the characters breaks away from the unified, standardized design methods of modern times, aligning with the contemporary pursuit of returning to simplicity.

2. Decorative Beauty

Decoration is one of the primary functions of visual communication, and Dongba pictographic characters inherently possess a unique and distinctive artistic personality. Through variations in line and contrasts in font structure and size, Dongba characters form diverse shapes, providing excellent decorative materials for visual design. Dongba characters not only serve as a medium for conveying information, but their graphic nature also makes them more interesting and decorative. The modernized design of the Dongba characters for "Jing Zhe" not only popularizes the Twenty-Four Solar Terms and Dongba culture but also can be used in various products, posters, and advertisements as decorative patterns, creating a unique style and conveying the essence of ethnic culture.

3. Symbolic Beauty

As a symbolic writing system, Dongba characters use simple lines to highly summarize and emphasize the structural features of objects, integrating meaning and form. Their symbolic features are distinct, expressions are clear, and they are easy to recognize, meeting the needs for symbol recognition in modern design. Although the translation of the Dongba character for "Jing Zhe" is based on phonetic transcription, its appearance visually conveys the meaning of "Jing Zhe": resembling scissors cutting a small insect, startling the insect, which reflects the phenomenon of "Jing Zhe."

(2) Structural Pattern

As a non-verbal language, symbols have the same functions and structures as verbal language in expressing emotions and conveying information. In Saussure's semiotics, symbols are divided into "signifier" and "signified." The "signifier" refers to the symbolic form of the object. The modernized design of Dongba characters for "Jing Zhe" (hereafter referred to as "the design") is an artistic expression of Dongba symbols, featuring strong symbolism and high content abstraction. The design is composed of different morphemes. Morphemes initially carry no meaning, but their combination lays the foundation for forming more advanced linguistic symbols. By extracting the morphemes from the design and carefully coordinating the points, lines, and planes, the structure of the design is adjusted to form the final symbolic shape. In addition to points, lines, and planes, the design also includes elements such as line thickness and stroke length. These relational elements determine the combination of symbols, achieving the goal of visually interpreting the grammatical structure of the text. The design uses thick black lines and smooth stroke handling to enhance the visual effect, while emphasizing the abstract meaning and compositional elements of the design. The "signified" refers to the meaning embedded in the symbol, i.e., the insect being startled by the scissors, hence the term "Jing Zhe."

(3) Concept Synthesis

As one of the twenty-four solar terms, "Jing Zhe" literally means the awakening of insects. The first symbol is pronounced "jing" in Naxi, and the second symbol is pronounced "zhe", forming "Jing Zhe" when combined. On the surface, it also conveys an image of insects being startled. The synthesis of this design incorporates both the cultural connotation of "Jing Zhe" in Han culture and the phonetic pronunciation of "Jing Zhe" in Naxi. This fusion of different expressions and techniques from Han and Naxi cultures allows the design to accurately and clearly represent both the external structure and inner meaning of "Jing Zhe."

Chapter 4: The Extension of Dongba Culture

Section 1: The Value of Dongba Culture

Dongba culture is a unique ethnic culture in Southwest China, with a profound historical background and distinctive artistic charm. It carries the traditions and wisdom of ancient Naxi, Yi, and other ethnic minorities, reflecting unique insights into nature, religion, life, and art. The core of Dongba culture lies in its respect and reverence for nature, a belief that has continued into modern society, reminding people to coexist harmoniously with nature and use its resources wisely. Through myths and legends, we can see the intelligence and courage of the Naxi ancestors. These stories are diverse and innovative, showing the creative spirit of the people. Dongba people would write the magnificent Dongba scriptures, presenting a series of beautiful images. These scriptures not only contain mythological stories but also religious rituals, poems, and dances, forming a unique system of literature, art, and religion. This unique artistic form is a reflection of the Naxi people's long-standing life practices and serves as a source of inspiration for creators in literature and art.

The Naxi people's pictographic script is a valuable historical material and a comprehensive archive. Dongba culture was not unearthed through archaeological excavation but has been a living tradition passed down through generations of Naxi people. It is currently the only surviving and still-used form of ancient writing, fully demonstrating the imagination and creativity of the Naxi ancestors, making it of great research value. Each Dongba scripture is a handwritten manuscript. While some content may be similar, the writing and layout vary, making each manuscript a valuable archival document from a scholarly perspective. Many of these scriptures are unique, rare copies, possessing significant authority and originality.

Additionally, the Dongba script contains insights into the daily lives of the Naxi ancestors, and these fascinating literary works still resonate with us today. Through Dongba culture, we can observe the Naxi people's reflections on life and the soul, as well as humanity's journey from ignorance to civilization. Their myths depict the struggle between good and evil, the cycle of life and death, emphasizing the eternal cycle of life and the immortality of the soul, helping people gain a deeper understanding of life.

Section 2: The Current Status and Development of Dongba Culture

Despite Dongba script's widespread recognition worldwide, its position in mainstream culture is not stable. Particularly in modern society, where various emerging cultures constantly challenge the status of traditional cultures, Dongba culture has gradually declined, even facing the threat of extinction. As the homeland of the Naxi people, Lijiang City in Yunnan Province has made significant contributions to the promotion of Dongba culture. Some of these efforts include: Opening Dongba ritual sites as tourist attractions, allowing visitors to learn about Dongba ceremonies; Building museums and cultural centers to serve as repositories of Dongba cultural knowledge; Standardizing shop and restaurant signs on Lijiang streets by using both Dongba character and Chinese characters; Offering Dongba character courses in schools and tourist sites, enabling students and visitors to experience the unique charm of the Dongba character.^[9]

⁹ Wang Jianqin: Analysis of the inbound tourism market in Dali and discussion on countermeasures [J]. Economic Research Guide, 2012

However, there are still many shortcomings. As a fourth-tier city, Lijiang primarily relies on tourism as its main economic driver, and the financial investment in Dongba culture remains insufficient. The museums are relatively small in scale, and the promotional efforts are lacking. Furthermore, the shop signs using Dongba script tend to be monotonous, lacking in visual appeal and creative design.

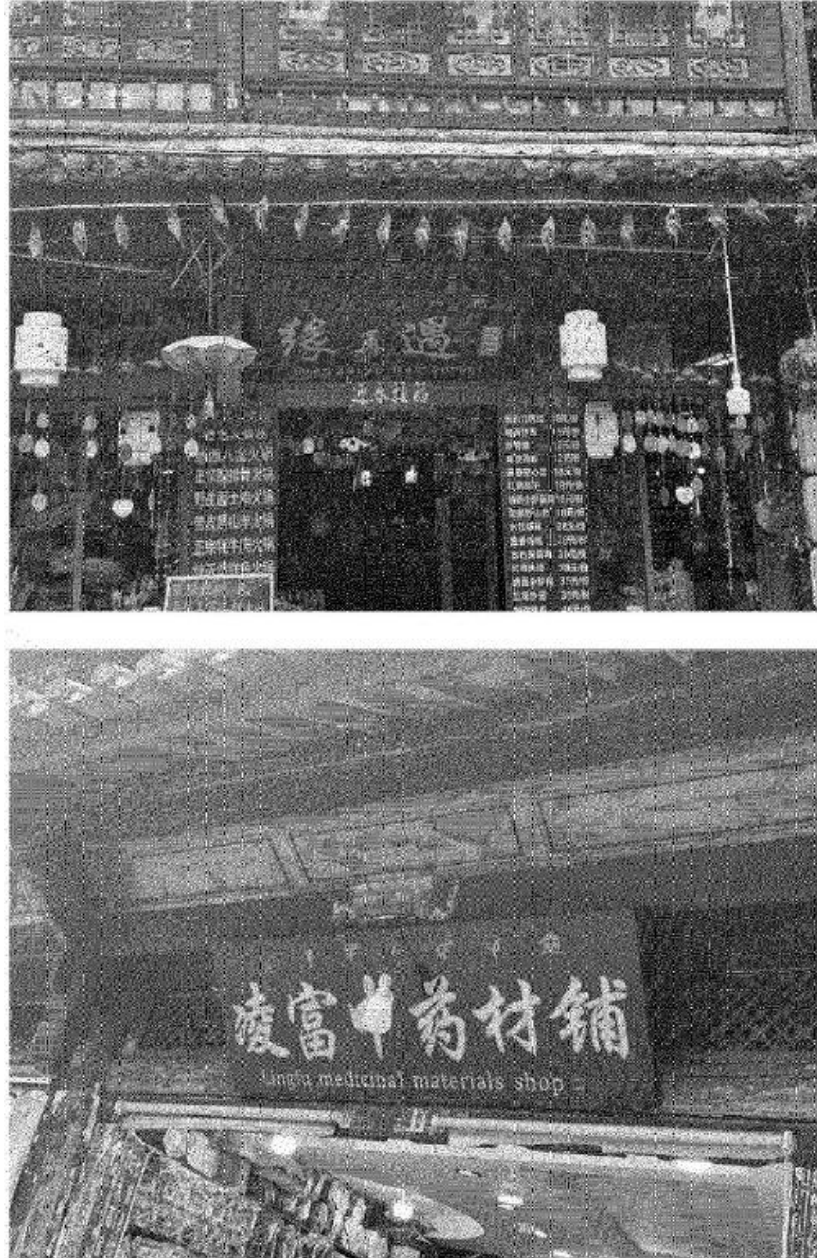


Figure 9: Shop signs in Lijiang Ancient City.

The popularity of Dongba culture is not high, and compared to traditional cultures such as Sichuan opera face-changing, Su embroidery, and Tibetan thangka, there is a scarcity of information, making in-depth research difficult. Although it is the only "living" pictographic writing, it is now in a state of endangerment, facing the dilemma of having no one to read it.

Section 3: The Balance of Inheritance and Innovation in Dongba Culture

The inheritance and development of Dongba culture is a challenging and important task that requires more scholars and cultural enthusiasts to invest in research and preservation. In the

fast-paced modern society, people are increasingly attracted to emerging cultures, leading to a neglect of traditional cultural inheritance. Due to the uniqueness of Dongba culture, there are very few Dongba practitioners who can translate Dongba characters and Chinese characters—only about ten, most of whom are elderly. Western scholar Locke wrote in the preface to his book *The Naxi's Naga Worship and Related Rituals*: “Under the current political system, Naxi religion is gradually becoming extinct; religious practices will (or have already) be banned. With the disappearance of Naxi religion, their religious texts will also gradually vanish. Even now, there are not many elderly Dongba practitioners who can read most scriptures.” Although it is currently impossible to translate Dongba scriptures, some meanings of Dongba characters can still be understood from existing materials, thanks to the efforts of several generations of scholars and experts.

As the new generation of Dongba cultural inheritors, we need to broaden our horizons and innovate our ideas, integrating modern elements into the existing foundation of Dongba traditional culture to revitalize it in the context of the new era. We can promote Dongba culture through lectures on Dongba cultural knowledge, exhibitions of Dongba calligraphy, live broadcasts explaining Dongba culture, and other means, allowing more people to learn about and appreciate Dongba culture online. However, we must avoid excessive commercialization, ensuring that Dongba culture is not reduced to mere consumer behavior, but rather that it is inherited and promoted on a spiritual level.

Section 4: The Extension of Dongba Culture

Dongba culture should not remain solely on paper; it needs to connect with the times and truly come alive to present itself to the world. We should draw the essence of Dongba culture from various fields such as literature, art, and media, using it as a model for research. In this new historical period, the application of Dongba character has far exceeded traditional religious and historical documentation, being widely used in modern design, artistic creation, and brand promotion, perfectly blending traditional culture with modern aesthetics. With advancements in technology, scholars have also begun to utilize digital techniques to systematically organize and analyze Dongba character, which undoubtedly aids in its better preservation and dissemination. Furthermore, modern means of communication, such as the internet, have greatly expanded the reach of Dongba culture, allowing it to step beyond national borders and engage with the world. At the same time, Lijiang, as the birthplace of the Naxi people, has a thriving tourism industry that provides a vast platform for the dissemination of Dongba culture to increase its influence gradually.

1. Application in Tourism Culture: Lijiang, as one of China's more famous tourist cities, attracts foreign visitors not only with its beautiful scenery but also with its rich historical heritage of Naxi culture. Currently, Dongba character is used not only for shop signs in Lijiang but also in the creation of cultural and creative products. By incorporating modern design elements and drawing on excellent modern design cultures from both China and abroad, the essence of Dongba culture can be fully expressed in existing cultural mediums, thereby enhancing Lijiang's reputation and increasing the economic benefits of tourism.
2. Application in Art Education: In recent years, the number of artists and scholars exploring Dongba culture has increased significantly. They not only apply Dongba culture to artistic creation but also introduce it into the field of art education. Learning Dongba character allows students to gain a deeper understanding of Naxi culture while also cultivating their aesthetic and creative abilities.
3. Application of Dongba Culture in Digital Technology: With the development of digital technology, Dongba script has begun to integrate with information technology. Today, as internet technology matures and science advances rapidly, this ancient traditional writing system is no longer limited to existing on paper. Scientists have begun to digitize Dongba script, making it easier to preserve and disseminate.

Conclusion

Intangible cultural heritage is a carrier of national memory and a crystallization of the wisdom and emotions of the people. In both the Naxi and Han peoples, we can see the process by which our ancestors adapted to nature, encompassing both historical significance and contemporary vitality. The protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage is a respect for history and an expectation for the future, as well as a commitment to respecting and preserving the diversity of human culture. As the process of modernization accelerates, the challenges facing intangible cultural heritage continue to increase, with urbanization and modernization exerting significant impacts on it. Therefore, it is crucial to strengthen protection efforts for intangible cultural heritage from different perspectives, raise public awareness and appreciation for it, and ensure that this precious cultural resource can be inherited and developed within the new context of the times.

This article is based on existing literature and materials, observing and exploring Dongba culture and the twenty-four solar terms. Using these two forms of intangible cultural heritage as a foundation, the study employs literature reviews and field investigations to gain an in-depth understanding of these cultures and explore the relationship between humans and nature. The development of intangible cultural heritage has previously been one-dimensional, gradually being forgotten in modern society. In response to the challenges currently facing intangible heritage, this article proposes a novel approach that, while ensuring the traditional applications of the twenty-four solar terms and Dongba character are incorporated into works, redesign to coordinate the connectivity between these traditions and modern design, hoping to promote the development of intangible cultural heritage.

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