

Case Study of Developing Visual Derivatives of Dong Community's Mo Shi Wen in Guangxi Province, China

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Abstract

As an integral part of human civilization, traditional culture faces the risk of being lost, marginalized, or even forgotten in modern society. The Dong ethnic group, one of China's 56 officially recognized ethnic minorities, possesses a rich cultural heritage. A defining feature of Dong culture is its exceptional wooden architecture, characterized by intricate designs and sophisticated construction techniques that hold both practical and symbolic significance. Among these architectural elements, the "Mo Shi Wen" stands out as a particularly significant cultural symbol. Efforts to preserve and revitalize the "Mo Shi Wen" and other aspects of Dong heritage require innovative approaches that integrate modern design with traditional symbols. This study focuses on the development of visual derivatives that incorporate "Mo Shi Wen" into modern design. To achieve this, the research includes interviews with ordinary members of the Dong community, culturally knowledgeable practitioners, and local officials. Based on an authentic photograph of "Mo Shi Wen," the study develops three symbolic representations—'Middle,' 'Front,' and 'Back'—which were illustrated using the professional drawing software Procreate on an iPad. Through the case of developing visual derivatives of the "Mo Shi Wen" culture, this study verifies the feasibility and significance of integrating traditional cultural elements with modern design. Furthermore, the findings offer new perspectives on the protection of traditional culture and provide a practical reference for the application of modern design concepts in cultural communication. In the future, the effective integration of traditional cultural elements with contemporary design principles will further safeguard and promote the inheritance and development of traditional culture.

Keywords: Dong Culture, Mo Shi Wen, Visual Derivatives

Introduction

Both intangible and tangible cultural heritage, characterized by uniqueness, rarity, and irreproducibility, should receive equal attention and be safeguarded by all of humanity (Labadi, 2024). Santa and Tiatco (2019) defines heritage as "passed from one generation to the next, something that can be conserved or inherited, and something that has historic or cultural value." Similarly, Timothy (2018) believe that an inheritance from the past that is

valued and utilized today, and what we hope to pass on to future generations. The adoption of the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage formally differentiates tangible cultural heritage from intangible cultural heritage, recognizing the significance of the intangible dimension within cultural heritage (Keitumetse, 2006). Given the widespread commitment to cultural heritage preservation, the pressing threats of its decline, and the social necessity for cultural diversity, Hou et al. (2022) identifies language expression, artistic performance, social customs, knowledge, and traditional crafts as the primary elements of intangible cultural heritage. These growing concerns have drawn increased global attention to the value of cultural heritage.

As one of the most populous countries with one of the longest continuous histories, China has gained international recognition for the diversity of its intangible cultural heritage (Helen, 2016). Research on the value and significance of intangible cultural heritage has become an important focus in academic discourse (Alivizatou, 2008; Melis & Chambers, 2021). The Dong ethnic group, one of China's 56 officially recognized ethnic minorities, possesses a rich cultural heritage deeply intertwined with its natural and social environment. With a population of approximately three million, the Dong people primarily inhabit the mountainous regions of Guizhou, Hunan, and Guangxi provinces. Their history, documented as early as the Qin and Han periods (221 BC–220 AD) and gaining more prominence during the Song Dynasty (960–1279 AD), is distinguished by a unique combination of traditions, language, and artistic expression (Lam, 1994; Xu et al., 2018).

A defining feature of Dong culture is its exceptional wooden architecture, distinguished by intricate designs and sophisticated construction techniques that embody both practical and symbolic significance (Kong, 2016). Among these architectural elements, the Mo Shi Wen stands out as a particularly important cultural feature. Mo Shi Wen refers to the symbols used by skilled Dong artisans, known as Zhang Mo Shi, during the construction process (Chew, 1997). These symbols, comprising 13 distinct characters, are typically inscribed on a specialized measuring tool called Jiang Gan and on various wooden components of buildings (Chen, 2024). Their primary function is to convey essential information regarding the placement, usage, and connection methods of construction materials, effectively serving as a visual guide for artisans.

The origins of Mo Shi Wen are deeply rooted in the Dong people's historical reliance on oral traditions and craftsmanship, as the Dong language, while spoken, lacks a formal written system (Chen, 2021). Beyond its practical application in construction, this symbolic system serves as a cultural artifact that encapsulates the community's accumulated knowledge and heritage. It exemplifies the ingenuity of the Dong people and underscores the significance of preserving their identity through the intergenerational transmission of knowledge (Lan et al., 2025).

Despite its historical significance, Mo Shi Wen faces considerable challenges in contemporary society. The rapid advancement of globalization and industrialization has introduced unprecedented pressures on cultural traditions (Friedmann, 2005; Raikhan et al., 2014). As an integral part of human civilization, traditional culture is increasingly at risk of being lost, marginalized, or even forgotten in modern society. The forces of modernization, global integration, and shifting social values have contributed to a decline in traditional

practices, including architectural craftsmanship (Ugah et al., 2024). Many younger members of the Dong community, influenced by urbanization and modern education, exhibit a diminishing interest in mastering these ancestral skills (Ping & Chuangprakhon, 2023). Furthermore, the absence of formal documentation and the limited academic research on Mo Shi Wen further threaten its continuity as an essential component of Dong cultural heritage (Li, 2024).

Preserving and revitalizing Mo Shi Wen and other aspects of Dong heritage necessitate innovative strategies that integrate traditional symbols into modern contexts. Modern design, as an interdisciplinary art form, is not only a means of material product innovation but also a vital tool for cultural expression and dissemination (Galchynska et al., 2023). Through design, the core values, historical memory, and cultural sentiments embedded in traditional heritage can be transformed into visual language, facilitating renewed recognition and understanding among younger generations. The fusion of traditional culture with contemporary design is not merely a necessity for cultural inheritance but also an inevitable trajectory for cultural innovation and development (Liu et al., 2025). This integration can breathe new life into traditional culture while simultaneously imbuing modern design with profound cultural significance. In the context of contemporary society, such exploration holds both practical relevance and long-term value. The research and development of new applications—such as incorporating these symbols into contemporary product designs—can enhance their accessibility and relevance, fostering a deeper appreciation of Dong culture both within and beyond the community.

This study addresses these challenges by investigating the meanings and potential modern adaptations of the 13 symbols in Mo Shi Wen. The contributions of this paper are as follows: (1) Cultural expression integrating heritage and innovation. The creative transformation of traditional culture has been successfully achieved by adapting the traditional customs and artistic forms (such as costumes and festival decorations) of Mo Shi Wen into modern visual products. This approach not only preserves the diversity of minority cultures but also revitalizes them, imbuing them with contemporary significance and dynamism; (2) Promoting the synergistic development of cultural and creative industries and the community economy. By developing visual derivatives embedded with cultural meaning, this case study fosters the growth of local cultural and creative industries. Moreover, this business model provides a novel pathway for the economic development of ethnic minority regions, demonstrating how cultural resources can drive sustainable economic growth; (3) Enhancing cultural participation and identity among community members. In the process of developing Mo Shi Wen's cultural visual derivatives, community members actively participate in the creation of cultural products, strengthening their cultural confidence and sense of belonging. At the same time, this engagement cultivates their creative abilities and fosters innovation within the cultural and creative industries. (4) Exploring a sustainable cultural-economic model. Through the development and promotion of Mo Shi Wen's cultural visual derivatives, this research successfully achieves a balance between cultural and economic value, offering valuable insights for the sustainable development of ethnic minority regions. This model can be extended to the preservation and commercial development of other ethnic cultures, providing a meaningful reference for broader applications.

Literature Review of Dong Community's Mo Shi Wen

Concepts and Origins of Dong Community's Mo Shi Wen

Mo Shi Wen refers to the written symbols developed by Dong carpenters in the past. During the construction process, Mo Shi Wen was exclusively used as a notation system to document the placement of wooden components (Fang et al., 2024). Specifically, it indicated where holes should be cut and where tenons and mortises were to be made, detailing their precise locations.

Historical records on the Dong ethnic group indicate that this community did not develop a fully structured written language. As a result, the Dong people relied on symbols with practical meanings to record significant events. Mo Shi Wen is a set of such symbols used by Zhang Mo Shi (masters of Dong architecture), who are responsible for overseeing the construction of houses within the Dong community (Chang, 2023). The Zhang Mo Shi play a crucial role in the construction process, including designing architectural plans, estimating materials, supervising preparations, crafting and assembling large wooden components, coordinating labor, and ensuring quality control and project progress (Figures 1 and 2). Before commencing a construction project, they conduct site visits to take measurements and, based on the topographical features and functional requirements, determine the shape and structural framework of the building. Through precise calculations and measurements, they manually create a proportionally scaled-down architectural model. Once the design process is complete, they use Mo Shi Wen to label materials, enabling other construction workers to accurately interpret and execute the architectural plans (Shen et al., 2022).



Figure 1. Mo Shi Wen symbols are practically applied by Zhang Mo Shi

丿(前)	㇇(后)	㇇(左)	㇇(右)
∨(上)	∟(下)	㇇(中)	㇇(天)
土(土)	㇇(挂)	井(梁)	乡(枋)
川(柱)			

Figure 2. Translations of Mo Shi Wen symbols (from Mo Shi Wen to Mandarin)
Azimuth Symbols of Dong Community's Mo Shi Wen

The symbols depicted in Figure 3 represent the meaning of "Up," indicating that the engraved material should be placed at the top.



Figure 3. The up symbol in Mo Shiwen

The symbols depicted in Figure 4 represent the meaning of "Down," indicating that the engraved material should be placed at the bottom.



Figure 4. The down symbol in Mo Shiwen

The symbols depicted in Figure 5 represent the meaning of "Left," indicating that the engraved material should be placed at the Left.



Figure 5. The left symbol in Mo Shiwen

The symbols depicted in Figure 6 represent the meaning of "Right," indicating that the engraved material should be placed at the Right.



Figure 6. The right symbol in Mo Shiwen

Factors Contributing to the Decline of Dong Community's Mo Shi Wen

However, Mo Shi Wen has been gradually fading from contemporary practice. The decline in demand for Zhang Mo Shi, the master carpenters responsible for leading Dong construction projects, has significantly contributed to this phenomenon. Traditionally, the construction of a Dong building required the coordinated efforts of multiple carpenters, led by a Zhang Mo Shi. This master carpenter oversaw the structural planning, procurement of materials, and overall execution of the project. Proficient in Mo Shi Wen, the Zhang Mo Shi used this specialized script to pre-mark each pillar, guiding other carpenters on where to drill holes and how to proceed with construction. As a unique system developed specifically for Dong architecture, Mo Shi Wen was understood exclusively by Zhang Mo Shi and skilled Dong carpenters. Consequently, the dramatic decline in the number of Zhang Mo Shi—driven by reduced market demand—has rendered Mo Shi Wen increasingly obsolete, pushing it toward extinction (Mao, Li, & Mao, 2020). There are four main reasons.

1. Influence of Traditional Cultural Hierarchies

Historical records rarely document the succession of Mo Shi Wen carpenters. This omission can be attributed to the traditional Chinese occupational hierarchy, which historically prioritized scholars over craftsmen. As a result, the heirs of Mo Shi Wen, who were primarily villagers and manual laborers with limited formal education, were regarded as less prestigious than scholars. Despite their remarkable skills and contributions, Dong carpenters remained largely overlooked in academic discourse, and their names rarely appeared in historical records, even though their craftsmanship was meticulously passed down through generations (Cheng, 1997).

2. Abandonment Due to the Modern Architectural System

The introduction of Western architectural practices further marginalized the traditional succession of Dong carpenters. While this shift elevated the status of modern architects, it simultaneously excluded Mo Shi Wen carpenters from professional recognition. Lacking formal education in modern construction techniques and official qualifications, these skilled craftsmen—who had long been responsible for the design and construction of Dong buildings—were no longer acknowledged within the evolving architectural framework. Consequently, they were forced to abandon large-scale urban projects and retreat to rural areas, where they continued working on small-scale residential constructions. Over time, the dominance of urban construction led to the near disappearance of Mo Shi Wen carpentry traditions (Mao, Li, & Mao, 2020).

3. Impact of the Urban Modern Construction Model

China's rapid urbanization has led to the dominance of modern construction methods, overshadowing traditional rural architecture. The widespread use of reinforced concrete and

glass curtain walls in cities has resulted in a homogenized urban landscape, stripping regions of their distinctive architectural characteristics. Influenced by urban culture and economic development, rural villagers began favoring Western-style homes, often imitating city buildings. As their construction preferences shifted, the heirs of Mo Shi Wen carpenters—despite their exceptional craftsmanship—could no longer meet the growing demand for modern aesthetics and Western-style housing. Consequently, the traditional construction model and its associated cultural heritage were left without a sustainable foothold (Cheng, 1997).

4. Collapse of the Traditional Rural Cultural System

The decline of Mo Shi Wen culture is also closely tied to the disintegration of traditional rural cultural structures. In the past, clan leaders and local gentry played a crucial role in preserving and transmitting cultural heritage, maintaining historical records, and upholding rural traditions. However, rapid urban economic growth created a siphon effect, drawing skilled laborers—including clan leaders and gentry—away from rural communities and into urban areas. As these key figures departed, the traditional rural cultural system disintegrated. With the loss of clan records and oral histories, the heirs of Dong carpenters also lost crucial documentation of their family legacies and cultural traditions, further accelerating the erosion of Mo Shi Wen heritage.

Methodology

This study employed semi-structured interviews, incorporating both closed-ended and open-ended questions. A total of 10 respondents participated (see Table 1), including two ordinary members of the Dong community and eight officials from the Sanjiang Dong Autonomous County. The nearest settlement to the county administration was Doujiang Township, where the researcher resided. The first author conducted interviews in three townships—Doujiang, Guyi, and Zhouping—engaging with the chairpersons of each. Participants were selected through purposeful sampling, ensuring that they met specific criteria to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2005). The selection criteria included local leaders, government officials, and culturally knowledgeable practitioners with a deeper understanding of Dong heritage than the average community member.

As noted by McIntosh and Morse (2015), the primary goal of semi-structured data analysis is to generate "a comprehensive and accurate descriptive conclusion of participants' points of view." To achieve this, the study employed thematic analysis using an inductive approach. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded, allowing for accurate transcription, coding, and thematic analysis of the responses.

Table 1

Demographic information of the respondents

No	Name	Age	Education	Job
1	Muke Yang	29	Bachelor	Official in Doujiang Township government
2	Ge Wu	28	Tertiary	Official in Doujiang Township government
3	Yu Yang	32	Middle School	Average Person in Doujiang Township government
4	Ping Liu	30	Tertiary	Official in Guyi Township government
5	Xun Zhang	28	High School	Official in Guyi Township government
6	Jianguo Wu	37	High school	Average Person in Guyi Township government
7	Guoyi Yang	36	Bachelor	Official in Zhouping Township government
8	Wanbo Yang	44	Bachelor	Official in Zhouping Township government
9	Guangyao Wu	29	Tertiary	Official in Zhouping Township government
10	Mei Liu	27	Tertiary	Official in Zhouping Township government

Developing of visual derivatives of Mo Shi Culture*'Middle' Symbol in Mo Shi Wen*

The study designed the 'Middle', 'Front', and 'Back' symbol in Mo Shi Wen based on below this true photo of Mo Shi Wen, which was illustrated by using the professional drawing software Procreate on IPAD.

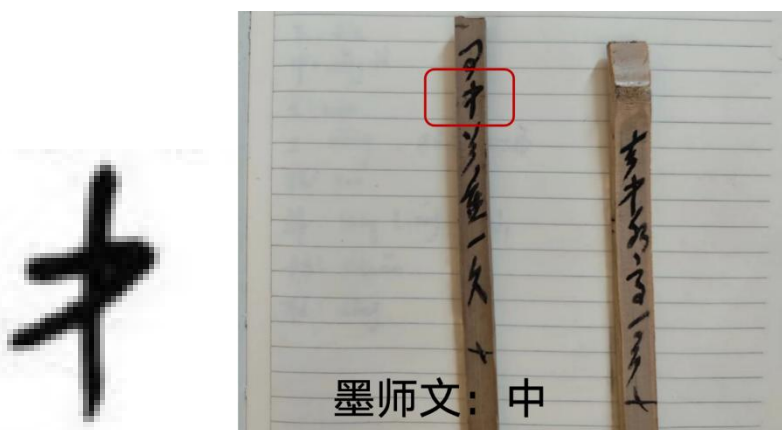


Figure 7. The 'Middle' symbol in Mo Shi Wen

The symbols depicted in Figure 7 represent the meaning of "Middle," indicating that the engraved material should be placed at the Middle.



Figure 8. Display of the Phoenix Motif in Dong Embroidery



Figure 9. Display of coin flower Motif in Dong Embroidery

The phoenix motif in Dong embroidery symbolizes auspiciousness and harmony, representing the ideas of bringing fortune and welcoming good luck, as well as warding off evil and preventing disasters. It is also characterized by its graceful form.

The coin flower motif in Dong embroidery signifies the continuous flow of wealth and the attraction of prosperity. It also embodies the harmony of heaven, earth, and humanity, bringing peace and hope to the people.



Figure 10. The visual representation of the 'Middle' symbol of Mo Shi Wen by the Author

Considering the visual structural arrangement, the first author combined the phoenix and coin flower motifs from Dong embroidery to form the font design of the Mo Shi Wen 'Middle' character. As shown in the red box in the Fig 10, these two motifs have been distilled into their symbolic forms in this design practice. It can be said that this design interconnects the cultural elements of the Dong ethnic group, creating a unique visual representation that is exclusive to Dong culture. Below in Fig 11 this visual font representation can be leveraged in cultural dissemination work, especially in local tourism. Therefore, a Derivative product like the poster is viable.

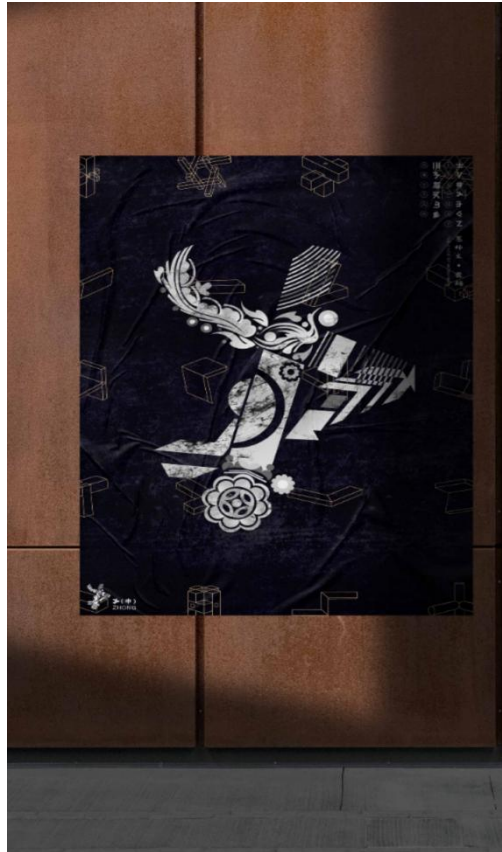


Fig 11. Applicable derivative

'Front' Symbol in Mo Shi Wen

The symbols depicted in Figure 12 represent the meaning of " Front," indicating that the engraved material should be placed in Front.



Figure 12. The 'Front' symbol in Mo Shi Wen

Figure 13 shows two Dong cultural elements: one is the distinct roof eaves of the Dong Building named the 'Wind and Rain' Bridge, and the other one is the Dong Women with Dong Featured attire. The shape of a stroke of the 'Front' symbol in Mo Shi Wen is consistent with a Dong Building named 'Wind and Rain' Bridge.



Figure 13. The Dong building named the 'Wind and Rain' bridge and the Dong women.

The symbol (Fig 14) designed by the first author is mainly consist of four Dong cultural parts. The first author designed the broad pattern of the Dong wind and rain bridge. Considering the structural coherence of the design, this pattern is more suitably placed at the top of the 'Front' Mo Shi Wen character. The two bowl motifs in the central red box represent the distinctive Dong ethnic cuisine, particularly the dish "oil tea." The pattern in the lower red box symbolizes the traditional clothing worn by Dong women. The pattern at the bottom is taken from the silver necklaces worn by Dong women. All of these motifs have been distilled and designed by the first author. Below in Fig 15, this visual font representation can be leveraged in the package design, especially in souvenir stores in local attractions for tourists. This can, to some extent, better exhibit the Dong culture to outsiders and better achieve the goal of cultural spreading.

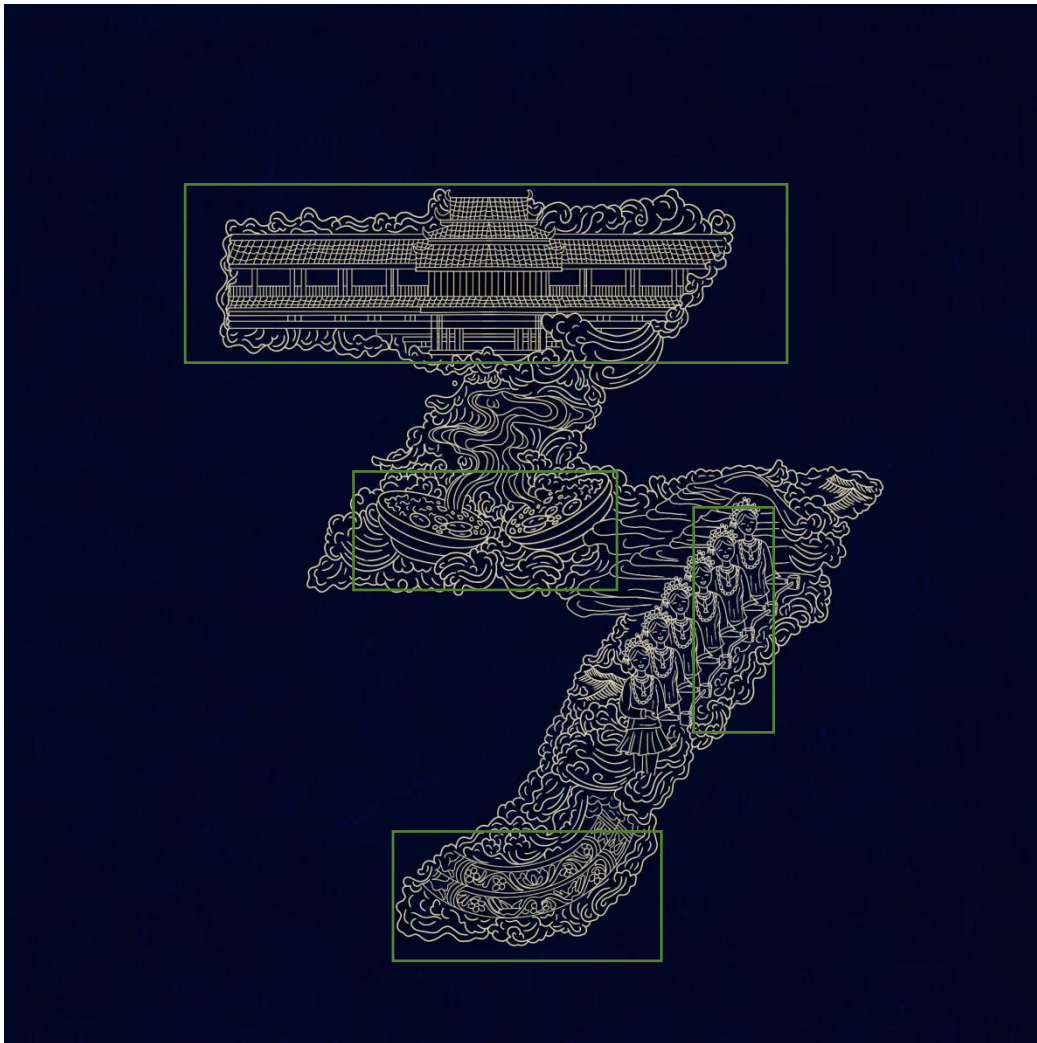


Figure 14. The visual representation of the 'Front' symbol of Mo Shi Wen by the Author



Fig 15. Applicable Derivative

'Back' Symbol in Mo Shi Wen

The symbols depicted in Figure 16 represent the meaning of " Back," indicating that the engraved material should be placed at the Back.



Figure 16. The 'Back' Symbol in Mo Shi Wen

The wooden constructive structure of the classic Dong building is shown in Fig 17, which inspires the first author. Its three-dimensional structure served as a model for the design of the 'Back' of Mo Shi Wen character.



Figure 17. The Wooden Constructive Structure of the Dong Building

Ultimately, the design of the 'Back' character in Mo Shi Wen is based on the three-dimensional wooden framework constructed by Dong carpenters in reality. The integration of the Mo Shi Wen font with Dong architectural structures highlights the traditional practical function of the Mo Shi Wen script. Specifically, it was exclusively employed as a symbolic writing system used by Dong carpenters in the construction of Dong architecture. The figure on the right is the derivative also developed by the first author, which more comprehensively restores the wooden architectural structures built by the Dong carpenters, integrating the Mo Shi Wen 'Back' character within. This serves as a poster specifically designed to showcase the connection between Dong architecture and Mo Shi Wen characters. It can be used at local tourist sites featuring Dong wooden architecture to educate visitors, and also placed in relevant textbooks to teach future offspring of the Dong people, thereby better achieving cultural sustainability and dissemination.



Figure 18. The visual representation of the 'Back' symbol of Mo Shi Wen and applicable derivative by the Author

Results and Discussions

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the importance of developing new cultural derivatives for the Dong community. This research required an investigation of two key aspects: first, the significance of preserving Dong culture, and second, the role of cultural derivatives as a means of heritage preservation. The interview questions were structured around these two dimensions, which serve as critical drivers in the design of new cultural derivatives for the Dong community. Specifically, the interviews examined the reasons for cultural decline, personal attitudes toward cultural preservation, and perceptions of culturally specific derivatives.

The interviews were analyzed using a thematic approach, incorporating transcript analysis and iterative synthesis cycles to identify emerging themes. The key themes and sub-themes derived from the qualitative analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Summary of Major Themes and Sub-Themes of the Qualitative Analysis

Content		Themes	Sub-themes
Culture dimension	Attitude towards their own culture	Dying reasons	No originated written text
			A wide range of interests
Derivatives dimension	Attitude towards their own culture	Whether or not give importance of culture	Culture meritocracy
			Nostalgia
		Whether or not wish culture to be better-preserved and revived	Positive
			Neutral
	Attitude towards cultural derivatives	Whether or not support to create derivatives stand for Mo Shi Wen culture	A high-efficient shortcut to longer cultural lifespan
			Potential economic benefit
		Whether or not cultural derivatives as a new pattern is significant for Mo Shi Wen culture	Internality
			Externality
	Both internality and externality		

The findings identified multiple factors contributing to the decline of Dong culture, including sinicization, limited economic returns, political interventions, inadequate cultural inheritance practices, and the absence of traditionally documented texts. As Muke Yang, an official in the Doujiang Township Government and one of the interviewees, explained, written records on this subject are scarce, making it akin to assembling a puzzle with only a few scattered pieces. Even when rare documents emerge, they often read more like fragmented folk tales than a coherent historical account.

Beyond the reliance on oral tradition—where knowledge was transmitted verbally without written documentation—another significant factor was the pursuit of economic gain. The strong economic and cultural influence of urbanization led suburban villagers to embrace city life by constructing Western-style homes, often replicating urban architectural designs in great detail. As a result, the countryside is now scattered with a mix of ancient European styles, American aesthetics, and neoclassical buildings, contrasting starkly with the past. Traditional buildings with distinct regional traits and indigenous craftsmanship have become increasingly rare, struggling to survive in an environment dominated by modern Western-style designs and industrial construction methods. Consequently, the intricate Mo Shi Wen patterns that once adorned buildings have largely been replaced by contemporary designs.

Moreover, the difficulty in earning a sustainable livelihood deterred potential successors, further contributing to the decline of this once-thriving tradition. The emergence of a new

architectural system in China marginalized skilled artisans who had long been responsible for designing, constructing, and managing architectural projects. Without formal academic credentials or industry certifications, Mo Shi Wen inheritors found themselves excluded from the modern construction industry. They were neither recognized as builders nor could they claim the title of architect within this transformed professional landscape. Lacking the necessary qualifications to adapt to the new system, these once-revered craftsmen were forced to retreat to rural areas, where they could only engage in small-scale residential construction. Over time, even these opportunities diminished as urban architectural trends permeated rural communities, further eroding traditional practices. Today, the legacy of Mo Shi Wen has nearly faded, with few, if any, inheritors left to continue its tradition.

Regarding the Dong community's attitudes toward their cultural heritage, the findings revealed a strong sense of cultural value and nostalgia for Mo Shi Wen. While many participants expressed a deep desire to preserve this unique tradition, they also recognized the challenges involved. Jianguo Wu, an official in the Guyi Township Government, shared his sentiments: "We deeply cherish and miss Mo Shi Wen culture; it is a treasure passed down by our ancestors. However, in underdeveloped areas like ours, there are no skilled professionals to create cultural derivatives. If someone could help us achieve this, it would be truly wonderful." Similarly, Wanbo Yang, an official in the Zhouping Township Government, articulated the collective expectations of the Dong people: "As Mo Shi Wen cultural derivatives continue to develop, they will inevitably enrich our cultural landscape. By incorporating Zhuang cultural elements into signage, posters, guidebooks, and packaging for local souvenirs, we can enhance the tourist experience, making it more immersive and meaningful. Additionally, offering culturally inspired souvenirs such as backpacks, notebooks, keychains, and phone cases at tourist destinations would not only add charm and practicality to visitors' purchases but also attract more tourists and stimulate the local economy, creating a mutually beneficial outcome for both the community and visitors."

Beyond examining modernization's impact on traditional culture, this study also explored the significance of culturally specific derivatives for the Dong community. The findings revealed overwhelming support among Dong residents for the development of Mo Shi Wen derivatives, citing benefits such as cultural preservation, increased tourism, and enriched visitor experiences, all of which could generate economic opportunities. Notably, the research uncovered the Dong people's aspiration to leverage Mo Shi Wen derivatives as a means of integrating their heritage into modern life, fostering a positive cultural image, and sparking interest—especially among younger generations. This aligns with prior studies on tourism marketing, which suggest that cultural symbols, such as emojis, can enhance a destination's appeal and create favorable impressions among visitors, a concept known as destination marketing (Distel et al., 2022).

Conclusion

Given the uniqueness, rarity, and irreproducibility of Dong culture, it requires enhanced preservation efforts. This study employed qualitative interviews to examine the significance of developing new Mo Shi Wen derivatives for the Dong community. Thematic analysis was conducted to document the fading cultural elements, identify the underlying causes of their decline, and explore the attitudes of Dong community members toward Mo Shi Wen culture and culturally specific derivatives.

The primary factors contributing to the endangerment of Dong cultural traditions became evident through an analysis of the broader patterns of civilizational decline, with an additional factor being the absence of written documentation. This study identified Margaret Mead's concept of prefigurative culture as a key explanation for the challenges in cultural inheritance. In the Dong community, artistic traditions, particularly Mo Shi Wen, have undergone an inversion in transmission patterns. As a result of shifting toward a prefigurative cultural model—one that is future-oriented and in which cultural knowledge is primarily transmitted from younger generations to their elders—the community faces significant difficulties in preserving its heritage. This shift fundamentally deviates from traditional cultural preservation practices.

Furthermore, the thematic analysis revealed that, beyond merely safeguarding their cultural heritage, Dong community members also view cultural derivatives as a means of achieving economic benefits. The research highlights four essential functions of Mo Shi Wen derivatives: serving as a reliable supplement or alternative to written texts, facilitating cultural sustainability and dissemination, fostering positive perceptions of the region among outsiders, and enhancing local tourism. In response to the strong support expressed by Dong participants, this study initiated the creation of Mo Shi Wen cultural derivatives to address these needs.

Overall, the findings provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of Mo Shi Wen culture within the Dong community. They offer an in-depth analysis of the causes of cultural extinction, propose more extensive preservation strategies for indigenous cultural heritage, and present an assessment of the cultural consciousness among Dong community members. These insights will be invaluable for future research on cultural preservation and sustainable development in indigenous regions.

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