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Dali on Paper · Tea-Space Scenery: Reflections and Research on Paper-Media Cultural and Creative Design for a Five-Square-Meter Tea Space

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Abstract: As cultural tourism consumption shifts from "purchasing souvenirs" to "participating in cultural experiences," regional cultural and creative design is gradually moving beyond the replication of isolated symbols toward an integrated construction of scenario, material, behavior, and narrative. Taking "Dali on Paper · Tea-Space Scenery" as its theme and a tea space of approximately five square meters as its application boundary, this paper draws on regional resources including Cangshan Mountain and Erhai Lake, Bai architecture and tie-dye, Jiama prayer culture, the Tea-Horse Road, and Heqing Bai handmade paper to explore cultural translation and product-system construction for paper-media cultural and creative design in a small-scale tea setting. The study proceeds through five dimensions: semantic extraction of regional culture, user-behavior touchpoints, material grading, visual systems, and product hierarchy. It also discusses interim practices including the "Shan You Mu" base visual identity, the "Cha You Shen Zhu" Jiama reinterpretation, tea-message tags, coasters, narrative booklets, packaging, and cut-paper works. The study argues that the value of paper media should not be limited to flat printing and tourist souvenirs; instead, Dali culture should be embedded in the tea-drinking process through a chain of products that can be read, touched, used, interacted with, and taken away. The current proposal still requires further verification through physical prototyping, water-resistance testing, and user evaluation.

Keywords: Dali Cultural and Creative Design; Five-Square-Meter Tea Space; Paper-Media Design; Heqing Handmade Paper; Jiama; Cultural Translation

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1. Introduction

Changes in the context of cultural tourism consumption have gradually shifted the evaluation of regional cultural and creative design from whether local symbols are present to whether a perceptible, participatory, and memorable cultural experience is formed. Experience-economy theory emphasizes that experience can constitute an independent form of value distinct from goods and services, providing a methodological basis for cultural and creative design to move from "selling objects" toward "organizing experiences." Research on tea-drinking spaces likewise indicates that contemporary tea consumption increasingly values thematic narratives, multisensory experience, interaction, and emotional value. [1-2]

Dali's natural landscapes, Bai folk customs, Jiama, tie-dye, the Tea-Horse Road, the Three-Course Tea tradition, and

traditional handmade papermaking provide a rich content base for paper-media cultural and creative design. However, simply printing Cangshan Mountain, Erhai Lake, the Three Pagodas, or ethnic patterns on postcards, packaging bags, and souvenirs can easily lead to symbolic repetition and a disconnection from the use scenario. Research on cultural translation suggests that intangible-cultural-heritage cultural and creative design needs to address visual elements, material processes, narrative structure, and contexts of use simultaneously, so that both cultural imagery and cultural context enter the design. [3]

Accordingly, this paper takes "Dali on Paper · Tea-Space Scenery" as its central theme. "Dali on Paper" emphasizes the use of paper and papermaking processes to carry Dali's regional culture, while "Tea-Space Scenery" emphasizes the ways in which this cultural content unfolds at the tea setting, tea table, and micro tea space. Rather than treating interior-space design as the primary subject, the study regards an approximately five-square-meter space as an experimental boundary for paper-media products and organizes an interconnected product system around the user's behavioral sequence of arrival, recognition, tea selection, waiting, tea drinking, reading, communication, and departure.

2. Foundations for Translating Dali Regional Culture into Paper Media

2.1 From "Element Extraction" to "Cultural-Semantic Extraction"

The design transformation of Dali regional culture first requires a clear hierarchy of resources. Natural spatial imagery includes Cangshan Mountain, Erhai Lake, wind, clouds, moonlight, plants, and seasonal change; everyday culture includes tea drinking, market-going, social interaction, rest, and handicraft; traditional customs and crafts include Bai architecture, tie-dye, Jiama, and handmade papermaking. Compared with merely extracting outlines, "semantic extraction" pays greater attention to what these elements mean in local life: Cangshan is not only a mountain form but also a stable geographical background; Erhai is not only a water pattern but also an experience of flow, openness, and wind; tea is not only a cup and leaves but also a rhythm of pausing, sharing, and staying. Theories of seeing similarly suggest that the meaning of images is closely related to the viewer's context; therefore, regional visual forms should not be mechanically reproduced outside their situations of use. [11]

In visual language, the enclosure, blank space, and framed views of Bai architecture can be translated into layout structures and the framework of paper screens; the blue-and-white palette, diffused edges, and incomplete symmetry of tie-dye can become paper textures and auxiliary patterns; the ridgelines of Cangshan, the water ripples of Erhai, and the imagery of "wind, flowers, snow, and moon" can be transformed into low-saturation supporting graphics with generous negative space; and the routes, post stations, handwritten tea notes, and aged-paper textures of the Tea-Horse Road can be translated into narrative booklets, packaging, and map-based paper products. In this way, regionality no longer means "tourist-attraction illustration" but becomes an integrated relationship among content, structure, material, and behavior.

2.2 Jiama: From Woodblock Form to a Mechanism for "Visualizing Wishes"

Dali Jiama is one of the most distinctive traditional visual resources in this project. Related studies indicate that Jiama in Bai communities of Dali is closely connected with folk blessing, ritual practices, and the expression of everyday wishes; research has expanded from documentation, classification, and folklore studies to visual-symbol analysis and cultural and creative development. The design value of Jiama lies not only in formal features such as vigorous carved lines, black-and-white contrast, and centralized composition, but also in the cultural mechanism through which real-life wishes are named, given images, and put into concrete use. [6-7]

Therefore, the "Cha You Shen Zhu" ("Tea with Divine Aid") series does not directly copy traditional deity images. Instead, it extracts the logic of "wish - naming - image-making - use" and transforms contemporary tea experiences and everyday emotions such as "lingering sweetness," "stealing a moment of leisure," "feeling at ease," and "meeting one another" into original themes. The images may retain structural features of traditional Jiama, including a stable central axis, the juxtaposition of text and figures, solid blocks, and a carved quality, while clearly presenting themselves as contemporary cultural and creative images rather than actual folk deities. This approach establishes a clearer relationship between cultural boundaries and communication with younger audiences (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. "Cha You Shen Zhu" Jiama graphic series (Image source: MengMeng Zhou, Midterm Defense PPT, Paper-Media Product Design for a Five-Square-Meter Tea Space Based on Dali Characteristics, p. 22, 2026.)

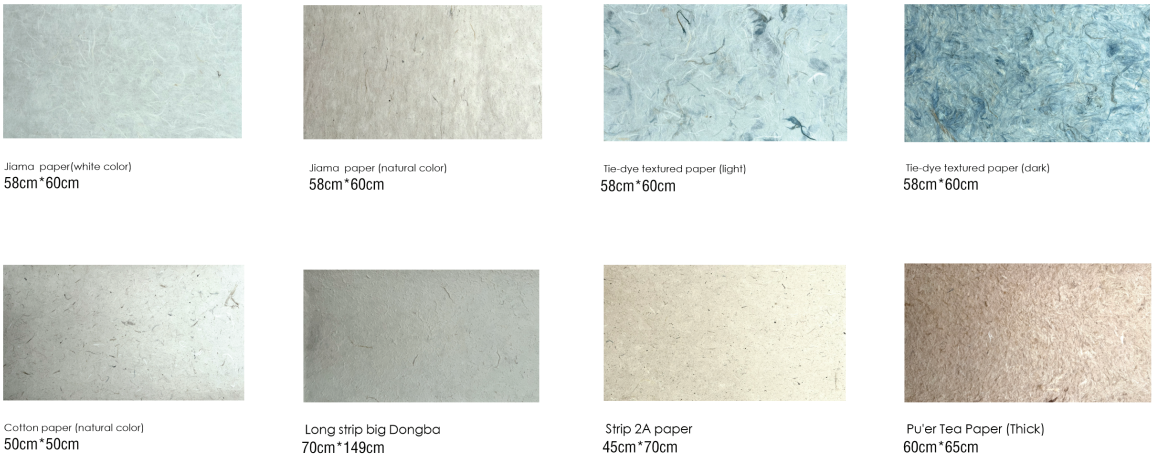


2.3 Heqing Bai Handmade Paper: From Background Material to Regional Medium

The regional character of paper media comes not only from graphics printed on paper but also from the paper's own origin, fibers, processes, and history of use. Public sources indicate that the traditional handmade papermaking technique of Heqing, Dali, was included in the second batch of Yunnan Province-level intangible cultural heritage protection projects in 2009. The technique is mainly practiced in Longzhu Village, Songgui Town, Heqing County. Local handmade paper uses plant fibers such as paper-mulberry bark as important raw materials and involves multiple procedures including soaking, steaming, rinsing, pulping, sheet forming, pressing out water, pasting sheets, and drying. [4-5]

The fiber distribution, natural color variation, deckled edges, ink absorption, and changes in thickness of handmade paper provide tactile conditions for embossing, folding, binding, and cutwork that differ from machine-made paper. Sansom's discussion of the cultural history of paper shows that paper has long participated in writing, packaging, tickets, games, and everyday life; its significance is not limited to carrying information. For this project, Heqing handmade paper should be prioritized for postcards, tea-message tags, cultural cards, narrative-booklet covers and inserts, Jiama cut-paper works, and outer packaging, so that the material's origin itself becomes a narrative clue that it comes "from Dali." [10] (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Heqing handmade paper and related paper samples and specifications (Image source: MengMeng Zhou, Midterm Defense PPT, Paper-Media Product Design for a Five-Square-Meter Tea Space Based on Dali Characteristics, p. 31, 2026.)



3. Scenario Logic and User Touchpoints in a Five-Square-Meter Tea Space

3.1 Approximately Five Square Meters as a Design Boundary

The "five-square-meter tea space" is not an interior scheme defined by a fixed length-to-width ratio, but a small-scale, lightweight, and replicable cultural unit for tea activities. Its advantages lie in the limited number of furnishings, the short distance between users and tabletop objects, and the ease with which paper media can become a visual focus. It can be embedded in a corner of a teahouse, a guesthouse common area, a bookstore, a cultural and creative shop, an exhibition, a market, or a pop-up space. The smaller the space, the more important it becomes to reduce duplicated functions and allow each paper-media item to carry multiple roles in information, use, culture, and communication.

Yi-Fu Tuan's research on spatial experience emphasizes that a sense of place is related to time, experience, and emotion. From this perspective, five square meters does not necessarily imply an impoverished experience. On the contrary, waiting, refilling, conversation, and lingering during tea drinking provide natural time for reading and touching paper media. The design emphasis of a small space should therefore shift from "functional zoning" to "behavioral nodes," allowing paper media to appear progressively over the course of the experience. [9]

3.2 User Journey and Paper-Media Touchpoints

Based on the interim research, target users can be summarized as young tourists willing to engage in cultural consumption, groups interested in design and handicrafts, light or moderate tea-culture enthusiasts, and people seeking a brief period of rest within everyday urban life. Their needs include functional concerns such as readable tea menus, water-resistant coasters, and portable packaging, as well as experiential concerns such as contemporary Eastern aesthetics, understanding of regional culture, commemorative collecting, emotional relaxation, and social sharing. Norman's theory of emotional design argues that product experience involves visceral, behavioral, and reflective levels; accordingly, the paper-media system needs to move beyond "first-glance attraction" toward "ease of use" and "memory formation." [8]

Accordingly, the user journey can be organized as a continuous path of "arrival/recognition - tea selection - waiting - tea drinking - reading/communication - departure/takeaway." Entrance cards and brand marks support recognition; tea menus and tea-message tags support selection; Jiama story cards and postcards enter the waiting period; coasters and tabletop paper products participate in tea drinking; narrative booklets support longer reading; and packaging, postcards, and tea-message tags become objects for commemoration, gifting, and secondary communication when users leave. Paper media thus ceases to be a static display in the space and becomes a temporal medium within tea-related behavior.

Table 1. Product levels and scenario roles of paper media in the five-square-meter tea space

System level	Core products	Primary scenario role	Material recommendation
Recognition layer	Logo, entrance card, tea menu	Establish spatial identity and basic information	Handmade paper / standard specialty paper
Experience layer	Coasters, tea-message tags, tabletop cultural cards	Support tea selection, tea drinking, and interaction	Washable kraft paper / hand-made paper
Narrative layer	"Cha You Shen Zhu" series, hand-drawn narrative booklet	Carry regional culture and short/long-form narratives	Heqing handmade paper + machine-made paper
Takeaway layer	Postcards, packaging, cultural cards	Commemoration, gifting, and secondary communication	Handmade paper + functional packaging materials

4. Constructing the "Dali on Paper · Tea-Space Scenery" Paper-Media Cultural and Creative System

4.1 A Two-Layer Structure of Basic Visual Identity and Cultural Narrative

In the interim design, "Shan You Mu" serves as the basic visual identity and spatial-recognition system. Its graphic structure combines a mountain peak, paired leaves, a valley-shaped negative space, and a stream-like curve, emphasizing stability, growth, negative space, and flow. The basic visual language should remain concise and restrained and can be combined with paper texture through debossing, embossing, or monochrome printing. "Cha You Shen Zhu," by contrast, undertakes the

cultural translation of Jiama and the communication of emotion. The two systems do not need to be identical in form, but they should establish a shared order in type scale, border proportions, paper color, negative space, and dimensional standards, thereby preventing traditional elements, brand graphics, and product decoration from competing with one another

A low-saturation color system can be developed from Erhai blue, the gray-white tones of Cangshan, the warm color of tea liquor, off-white paper, and plant colors. Layouts emphasize negative space and stable axes, while auxiliary graphics are extracted from mountain forms, water ripples, Bai window latticework, tie-dye textures, and tea-route imagery. The point of this strategy is not to "put every Dali element into the design," but to establish hierarchy: the basic visual system provides recognition, Jiama provides narrative, natural and architectural imagery provides support, and the paper material itself provides tactility and a sense of authentic origin.

4.2 From Individual Products to a "Few but Interconnected" System

The initial concepts included tea-mat paper, coasters, tea labels, tea-message tags, small paper screens, paper lamps, hanging works, and packaging, providing a foundation for a complete product spectrum. Interim practice further consolidated the products into four categories - core information, consumption experience, communication and commemoration, and spatial support - and produced experiments including a paper-media clock, handmade notebooks, Jiama tea gift boxes, loose-tea bags, detachable-bookmark packaging, handmade-paper vases, and envelopes. In combination with the scenario logic developed in the subsequent thesis, the final system should remain "few but interconnected": rather than displaying every work at once, it should retain the products that most directly respond to user behavior and the research questions (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Combination of interim experimental paper-media cultural and creative products (Image source: MengMeng Zhou, Midterm Defense PPT, Paper-Media Product Design for a Five-Square-Meter Tea Space Based on Dali Characteristics, p. 44, 2026.)



Tea-message tags can create light interaction around themes such as "lingering sweetness," "stealing a moment of leisure," and "meeting one another." As the product that comes into the most direct contact with tea and water, the coaster should prioritize water resistance, abrasion resistance, and embossing clarity. Postcards and cultural cards support short-form reading and takeaway communication. A hand-drawn narrative booklet can carry a complete story, using a material shift from machine-made paper to Heqing handmade paper to express the perceptual transition from the fast pace of the city to Dali's slower rhythm. Cut-paper Jiama can use side lighting to create a double-layer image of the physical form and its projected shadow, allowing it to enter a five-square-meter space with a relatively small physical volume.

4.3 Material Grading, Craft Processes, and Adaptation to Water-Adjacent Environments

Paper-media design in a tea space must directly address water, tea liquor, humidity, and friction. If every product uses highly absorbent and relatively costly handmade paper, rapid deformation may occur, and "intangible-cultural-heritage material"

may be misused as a decorative label. Materials should therefore be graded according to intensity of contact: cultural reading and collectible items should prioritize Heqing handmade paper; coasters used near water and requiring durability may use washable kraft paper or other functional papers; layers in direct contact with food should use inner-packaging materials that meet sealing, moisture-proofing, and safety requirements, while handmade paper can be used for outer sleeves, belly bands, labels, or gift-box linings.

Craft processes should also serve meaning. Embossing or debossing is suitable for highlighting the "Shan You Mu" logo and paper fibers; cutwork can transform the solid areas of Jiama into spatial light and shadow; folding and binding suit tea-message tags, leaflets, and narrative booklets; and spatial paper products such as lamps and screens require control over volume, structural stability, and distance from water sources. For high-contact products such as tea-mat paper and tea labels, material substitution or moderate surface treatment can improve splash resistance, but heavy lamination should not completely obscure the tactile quality of paper.

5. Series Development, Market Pathways, and Evaluation

The market transformation of "Dali on Paper · Tea-Space Scenery" should not remain at the level of selling scattered souvenirs; it should establish continuity between spatial experience and takeaway consumption. Individual products can meet immediate purchasing needs, sets can serve guesthouses, teahouses, and cultural and creative shops, and experience-oriented products can be combined with tea tasting, paper-craft making, material interpretation, and pop-up display. The lightweight, updateable, foldable, and compact-to-transport qualities of paper media make it suitable for seasonal thematic renewal and light-asset display in Dali cultural-tourism settings. At the same time, postcards, tea-message tags, packaging, and narrative booklets can continue to be written on, collected, gifted, and shared after leaving the space, extending the duration of cultural communication.

Evaluation should not rely only on whether the design "looks good." The current design can establish a subsequent testing framework across six dimensions: cultural recognition, material perception, functional usability, visual unity, spatial adaptability, and emotional response. In particular, testing should examine whether users perceive specifically "Dali characteristics" rather than a generalized "Chinese style," whether they can distinguish the tactile differences between handmade and ordinary paper, whether the coasters and packaging are genuinely usable, whether the Jiama reinterpretation is clearly understood as contemporary original design, and whether display within five square meters feels crowded. Because formal user-sample testing has not yet been completed, these judgments should be treated as design hypotheses and an evaluation plan rather than as validated user conclusions.

Table 2. Dimensions and validation priorities for subsequent design evaluation

Evaluation dimension	Core question	Suggested validation method
Cultural recognition	Do users perceive specific Dali characteristics rather than a generalized "Chinese style"?	Interviews, keyword recall, identification of cultural sources
Material perception	Do users notice differences in fiber and tactility between handmade and ordinary paper?	Blind-touch comparison, material-preference records
Functional usability	Are the coasters, tea tags, booklets, and packaging convenient and durable?	Water-/abrasion-resistance tests, on-site observation
Visual unity	Do the basic visual identity and Jiama series establish a clear hierarchy?	Co-display evaluation, recognition-consistency testing
Spatial adaptability	Does the five-square-meter display feel crowded, and are items easy to access and store?	Simulated display, circulation observation
Emotional response	Do tea-related messages and paper-media interactions support relaxation, communication, and memory?	Post-experience interviews, brief scales

6. Conclusion

"Dali on Paper · Tea-Space Scenery" takes Dali regional culture as its content foundation, paper and its craft processes as the

medium, and an approximately five-square-meter tea space as the behavioral boundary. It attempts to place cultural-element extraction, material research, visual translation, user touchpoints, and the product system within a single design logic. Its core purpose is not to increase the number of cultural and creative product categories, but to allow paper media to assume different roles at different moments in the tea-drinking process: providing information and supporting functions while also building cultural memory through Jiama narratives, the tactility of handmade paper, mountain-and-water imagery, and interaction with tea-related messages.

The evolution across the three stages of project documentation shows that the project has gradually moved from an early, relatively broad “paper-media product list” toward a scenario-based, systematic, and material-oriented design method. On the one hand, it reduces the stacking of regional symbols and strengthens authenticity through cultural semantics and material provenance; on the other hand, it establishes a visual hierarchy through “Shan You Mu” and “Cha You Shen Zhu” and forms an experiential chain through tea-message tags, coasters, narrative booklets, packaging, and cut-paper works. The key to subsequent research is not to continue expanding the number of products, but to complete a material archive, physical prototypes, water-resistance and structural tests, and small-sample user validation with approximately 20-30 participants, so that design judgments can move from proposal-based reasoning toward testable practical conclusions.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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