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Contextual Adaptation and Design Refinement of Guofeng Visual Symbols in AIGC Microdramas

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Abstract:
Dense ornament, modern footwear in a period setting, and difficult-to-read inscriptions raise different questions about visual design in AI-generated microdramas. This article examines these questions through guofeng, or traditional Chinese-style visual expression. Its materials comprise screenshots from three microdramas labeled as AI-generated and a set of images themed around Song dynasty aesthetics. Qualitative visual analysis considers how decorative density, historical references, and written language relate to the narrative. A hybrid image may follow a fictional premise, while a recognizable traditional form may still lack a clear cultural role. These distinctions matter when judging what needs correction. The proposed refinements concern the choice of cultural themes, checks on key historical forms, the treatment of text, and visual hierarchy. Each is tied to decisions about characters and settings. Human judgment remains necessary to determine whether the symbols belong within the work's world and serve its story. The discussion is limited to the available images and does not assess complete series.

Keywords:
AI-generated content; microdramas; guofeng visual expression; visual symbols; design refinement

1 Introduction and Objects of Study

Generative AI now forms part of microdrama production, including the creation of characters, settings, and visual effects. Guangming Daily discusses this development in its report on the China Netcasting Services Association's Guidelines for Microdrama Creation. The report puts industry releases in the first quarter of 2026 at approximately 128,000 microdramas. About 122,000 were AI microdramas, accounting for more than 95% of the total [1]. These are release figures for one quarter. They provide no direct measure of viewing or audience preference. For costume and fantasy works, the growing supply brings a design problem into focus: how architecture, dress, objects, and writing can form a coherent visual world.

AIGC microdramas are defined here as short episodic works whose principal images or video are produced with generative AI. These works may still involve human scriptwriting, editing, and post-production. The term guofeng visual symbols covers recognizable forms associated with traditional Chinese culture. Examples include garment structures, architectural components, motifs, and calligraphic writing. Their meaning depends on where and how they are used. A motif placed in one story may have a different role in another. Looking traditional is therefore only one aspect of cultural expression.

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Chen and Huang examine the integration of AI microdramas with traditional Chinese cultural heritage [2]. They emphasize human agency and value-oriented guidance alongside technological application in the contemporary expression of traditional culture. Their argument provides a starting point for considering guofeng imagery. A design analysis still has to explain what a symbol does within a scene: how it relates to a character, why it belongs in that space, and whether it contributes to the plot. This article addresses those relationships through visible details and considers where correction may be needed.

Table 1 lists the four sets of images used for qualitative visual analysis. The comparison concerns formal features, the way symbols are combined, and their appropriateness to the setting. AI-generation declarations are visible in the first three screenshots. They establish the stated involvement of AIGC in those works. The Song Dynasty Elegance page carries related tags; its image serves only as a reference for visual organization. The analysis stays within what the screenshots show. A frame cannot represent an entire series, and these materials cannot establish how common a problem is across the industry.

Table 1. Visual materials and analytical focus

Work or series	Frame or source	Detail examined
Qin Shi Huang: My All-Star Lineup of Chinese Icons	Episode 6	Relationship of ornament to the figure and background
Crossing the Mortal World in Song, Nurturing Spring through Everyday Care	Episode 1	Modern footwear within the time-travel premise
Entering the Inner Palace with My Own Soundtrack	Episode 3	Whether background writing is legible and meaningful
Song Dynasty Elegance	Image posted by Master Lu	Organization of symbols in a street-market scene

2 Main Issues in the Use of Guofeng Visual Symbols

The materials bring several distinct issues into view. Dense ornament shapes the hierarchy of one image. Elsewhere, a modern object appears in a historical setting, while background writing in another frame resists reading. Each needs a different kind of assessment. The first calls for attention to composition, the second to the story's premise. With text, the immediate concern is whether it conveys meaning. Reading the visual details in relation to the work's established world helps keep these judgments specific.

2.1 Imbalance between Decorative Density and Narrative Function

Gold ornament extends across the clothing, seat, and wall in the Episode 6 screenshot from Qin Shi Huang: My All-Star Lineup of Chinese Icons (Figure 1). The figure occupies the central axis. Yet the foreground and background share similar colors and intricate motifs, which may make the figure's outline harder to distinguish. The concern here is the relationship between decorative density and visual hierarchy in this frame. It gives no basis for assuming that the same difficulty occurs throughout the series.

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Figure 1. Decoration of the character and background in Episode 6 of Qin Shi Huang: My All-Star Lineup of Chinese Icons

Source: Screenshot from the work's playback page.

Rich decoration does not necessarily reduce image quality. Palace settings can use dense motifs to communicate power and ceremonial order, but important props, character actions, and environmental ornament should carry different informational weights. When details primarily reinforce a "costume drama" label without an intelligible connection to identity or plot, symbols risk remaining at the level of atmosphere. Limitations in guofeng expression therefore cannot simply be attributed to an excess of elements. Analysis should also ask whether the elements have a clear narrative purpose and whether viewers can recognize that purpose.

2.2 Unclear Boundaries between Historical Context and Hybrid Styles

Symbols in historical subjects have temporal and institutional contexts. Without a consistent basis for clothing structures, artifact functions, and architectural forms, imagery may produce only a generalized impression of the past. Yet the title Qin Shi Huang: My All-Star Lineup of Chinese Icons already suggests an imagined historical setting. Dragon-carved seating and gold wall ornament alone cannot establish that the work contradicts historical fact. More appropriate questions concern whether it defines the scope of historical rewriting and whether exaggerated forms follow internally consistent premises. Details requiring historical judgment should be assessed against archaeological evidence or reliable specialist research.

In the Episode 1 screenshot from Crossing the Mortal World in Song, Nurturing Spring through Everyday Care, a long dress, wooden staircase, and red high heels appear together (Figure 2). The page description identifies a time-travel premise, so the footwear may signal the character's modern identity. The image therefore cannot directly establish a "cross-cultural mixing error." The design question is whether the modern object is explained within the narrative and whether that explanation remains consistent in subsequent shots. Deliberate time travel, fantasy, or parody should be examined for its expressive role. Only details lacking narrative support and consistency justify further investigation as possible generation errors.

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Figure 2. Red high heels in a period setting in Episode 1 of Crossing the Mortal World in Song, Nurturing Spring through Everyday Care

Source: Screenshot from the work's playback page.

Contextual appropriateness thus involves both historical accuracy and coherence within an invented setting. Historical representation requires verification of forms and the conditions of their use; fantasy requires recognizable rules for its world. The two may adopt different degrees of realism, but both should establish a basis for combining symbols. Treating every hybrid style as a mistake constrains creative possibilities, while disregarding contextual differences undermines symbols' capacity to distinguish periods, identities, and spaces.

2.3 Disconnection between Textual Form and Meaning

Inscribed plaques and paired column inscriptions combine visual decoration with linguistic expression. Their characters, wording, and placement all help construct a setting. In the screenshot from Episode 3 of Entering the Inner Palace with My Own Soundtrack, some background characters have unclear structures and merged strokes, making them difficult to read reliably (Figure 3). Screenshot resolution and depth of field may also affect recognition, so the image does not establish that all the text consists of nonexistent characters. Nevertheless, visible text that fails to convey clear meaning has a limited capacity to identify a place, communicate ceremonial language, or signal a character's identity.



Figure 3. Text on background plaques and paired column inscriptions in Episode 3 of Entering the Inner Palace with My Own Soundtrack

Source: Screenshot from the work's playback page.

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Textual problems differ from other decorative discrepancies. Motifs can be abstracted to a degree, but text carrying narrative information must be correct, legible, and appropriate to the setting's function. Even fully formed characters can disconnect form from meaning if the wording of paired inscriptions does not suit the space. Correction should therefore assess both character forms and textual meaning. Simply "looking like calligraphy" is not an adequate completion standard.

3 Possible Sources of Visual Discrepancies

The screenshots show the resulting images, not how they were made. Possible explanations must therefore remain tentative. The following discussion draws on technical literature and design considerations to examine conditioning in generative tools, the specificity of instructions, and review after generation. It cannot identify the cause of a discrepancy in a particular work. Nor can an image reveal the relative amounts of material from different dynasties in a training dataset. Claims that every unusual choice was made to attract traffic would go beyond the available evidence as well.

Rombach et al. introduce text and other conditioning inputs through cross-attention in their latent diffusion models [3]. This provides a way to guide image generation. It does not, by itself, verify the history of what appears in the image. An input such as "ancient palace" leaves the period and many architectural details unspecified; "luxurious clothing" says little about dress conventions. The resulting image may meet a broad stylistic expectation without locating it in a particular cultural context. This is a possible limitation of such instructions. It does not establish which model the microdramas used, or imply that the cited models can automatically date an artifact or determine historical dress rules.

An unusual detail may also be intentional. In Wang's account of AI-generated absurdist microdramas, some departures from realism belong to content strategies shaped by technological conditions and user demand [4]. A visual anomaly alone is thus insufficient to identify a generation error. The plot and available production information need to be considered. Creative instructions raise a separate concern: broad templates reused across different characters, periods, or spaces may leave works looking similar. An apparently complete frame can still show little adjustment to its particular subject.

Local discrepancies may remain in a finished work if review stops at overall appearance or smooth transitions. A traditional symbol also has a use and a meaning to check. Writing in the background, accessories worn by a character, and props that reappear deserve attention individually. In an episodic series, the check extends beyond one frame. Correcting an object in one shot can create a mismatch with its next appearance unless the change is carried through. Review of form and function across the sequence is needed to catch that problem.

4 Refining the Design of Guofeng Visual Symbols

Refinement should respond to the preceding issues while remaining appropriate to microdrama production. Cultural themes define the range of symbols to select; verified sources provide a basis for form; narrative design gives symbols specific purposes; and post-production correction ensures their final presentation. These

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requirements should be implemented in character and setting design rather than remain broad stylistic descriptions.

4.1 Clarifying Cultural Themes and Visual Premises

A scene of ordinary urban life and a palace ceremony make different demands on the image. Street and alley scale, everyday objects, and the activities of residents matter to the former. The latter calls for attention to hierarchy and spatial order. Establishing the period, kind of space, and cultural orientation before generation gives these choices a basis. Dress, buildings, and objects can then be selected in relation to the same narrative environment. Even within a chosen period or region, variation remains. One color or motif cannot stand for the full range of its culture.

Figure 4 shows people, stalls, and objects arranged around street activities in Song Dynasty Elegance. The clothing colors are relatively coordinated, and the activity gives the details a shared context. Much of the scene's appeal lies in this sense of everyday life. Its organization offers a reference for linking a cultural theme with a combination of symbols. Historical accuracy is a separate matter: the screenshot cannot verify every form it contains. The useful lesson for production concerns how character activity and environmental detail are related. A new subject still needs visual rules of its own.



Figure 4. A street-market scene from the Song Dynasty Elegance series posted by Master Lu

Source: Screenshot from the posting page of the Master Lu account.

4.2 Verifying Key Historical Forms and Defining the Scope of Generation

The principal character's clothing, a frequently used artifact, or a central architectural space is a useful place to begin verification. Such elements are recognizable and carry substantial narrative weight. Museum collection descriptions, archaeological materials, and specialist illustrated catalogs can supply reference material. Recording the date, region, and use of each form helps make the basis of the choice clear. For a historical subject, evidence needs to be distinguished from conjecture. An invented world poses a related question: which details follow historical references, and which have been created for the story? Making that distinction explicit allows invention without treating an unsupported combination as historically established.

A verified reference becomes useful for generation when it is translated into visible requirements. "Traditional clothing" leaves many decisions open. A specification of collar structure, garment length, accessories, and use, supported by reference images, gives the creator something more definite to check. Adding words indefinitely is unlikely to resolve conflicting instructions. The practical emphasis can remain on the key forms,

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with errors corrected locally. Once a character or prop has been approved, that version can guide its appearance in later shots.

4.3 Strengthening Symbolic Storytelling and Correcting Text

A dragon, lotus, or crane does not carry one fixed meaning wherever it appears. Assigning them automatically to imperial power, purity, or longevity overlooks the setting in which they are used. A motif on a garment or object needs a reason to be there, whether it concerns the character's identity, an action, or a change in the plot. A recurring token illustrates the point. Its use and exchange can give it narrative and emotional weight; extra ornament alone cannot explain its role. Giving the symbol a purpose in the story also provides a basis for deciding which visual details to retain.

For a plaque, paired inscription, or letter, the wording can be settled before it is placed in the scene. Manual typesetting or writing allows the characters and their meaning to be checked first. The text can then be composited into the image, adjusting perspective, lighting, and surface appearance to suit the setting. Important writing also has to be readable at the intended viewing distance. A period setting may require a further check of script and usage conventions. An instruction to generate "accurate Chinese characters" leaves all these checks outstanding. If background writing cannot be made clear, reducing its prominence avoids asking illegible text to carry essential narrative information.

4.4 Adjusting Visual Hierarchy and Checking Shot Continuity

The shot's purpose provides a basis for deciding how much detail to retain. A close-up needs a recognizable face or action; an establishing shot has more room to describe the surroundings. Wang's discussion of negative space, rhythm, and visual guidance offers a reference for making these decisions [5]. Motif density, contrast, and lighting can be adjusted around the intended focus so that ornament has a clear relationship to the subject. This does not make minimalism a standard for all traditional settings. Reduction and negative space are useful where they serve the particular narrative.

A final review needs to follow recurring symbols through the edit. The same character's garment structure, an important prop's form, or the wording on a plaque ought to remain stable unless the story accounts for a change. It also matters what material is used for comparison. A restrained street scene and an elaborate palace scene perform different tasks and cannot be judged directly against one another. Comparisons are more useful when shot type and narrative purpose are similar. Replaying key passages alongside the visual specifications can reveal discrepancies missed when selecting individual stills. This connects the check on form with the check on continuity.

5 Conclusion

Guofeng visual design in AIGC microdramas needs to coordinate recognizable form, contextual appropriateness, and narrative function. The images examined here suggest that dense decoration, hybrid styles, and difficult-to-read text should be evaluated in relation to compositional hierarchy, a work's premises, and communicative needs respectively. Cultural expression cannot be assessed by counting traditional elements, nor should every unusual detail in an invented setting be treated as a technical error.

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Practical priorities are to clarify cultural themes, verify key forms, assign narrative roles to symbols, and complete corrections through text processing and shot review. Based on the available visual analysis, these recommendations require further evaluation through production processes and audience feedback. The study's materials are limited, and it includes neither whole-series coding nor audience research. Its conclusions therefore primarily concern design discussion at the case level.

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