

# The Research of Value of Female Costume in Ethnic Group Construction Based on the Social Gender<sup>\*</sup>

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The social gender theory is a historical analysis method which is beneficial to explore the system of human organization activities around “male” or “female” activities. Historically, the process of human socialization is also a process of social gender institutionalization. Therefore, the paper tried to analyze the connotation of ethnic women’s costume from the social gender perspective to help people realize further the women’s state in sexism society and value in ethnic group constructing and developing. Firstly, the paper sets forth the characteristic of “group” of ethnic people female costumes. The next, the paper explored the costume how to set up a system of ethnic standard in inner group so as to maintain the social order. Subsequently, the paper points out, with the rapid evolution of society, more and more ethnic people men participate cities construction and outer social activities. Consequently, most of minority men wear modern clothing instead of their traditional clothing, only women still insist in wearing the traditional clothing. Finally, according to research above, the authors consider that ethnic people female costumes emerge strong gender content which reflects more constraints rather than equality between men and women. Besides, it is certain that women have irreplaceable value in ethnic group construction and development.

*Keywords:* ethnic group, female clothing, social gender, development

## Introduction

As an important part of traditional culture, ethnic costumes concentrate relatively to reflect people culture, gender culture, and decoration art. Particularly, women’s costumes are vivid and various, which present their ethnic group culture and custom.

Many experts and researchers have taken relevant researches around clothing based on esthetics, sociology, anthropology, ethnography, and so on. With the development of feminist research, a new perspective of research emerges that is social gender. The social gender theory is a historical analysis method provided by, which argues social gender is a system of human organization activities. Every culture has its own social gender system and organizes the people to work on standard of “male” or “female” activities, in another words, the process of human

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<sup>\*</sup> This paper is funded by Ministry of Education of China (No. 10YJA760047).

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socialization is also a process of social gender. Actually, in the sexism society, to women, the rights to express their opinions are quite limited, and in the existing bisexual society, unequal social gender is obvious. Ethnic people women's clothing are vivid is just to embody the unbalance of clothing gender culture from certain significance. With the social gender theory to analyze the connotation of women's costume color and style are beneficial us to realize the essence of ethnic costume and women's state in sexism society as well value in ethnic group construction and development.

### To Strengthen the Coherence of Group

As one of carrier of non-verbal communication, costume conveys an information which "my wearing represents my ethnic identify". In many ethnic people living area in China, women's clothing always attract people's attention, not only the unique style but also the rich color as well the marvelous decoration which are always highlights, and compared with the male's costume, the female costumes are preserved more complete and stable. According to the research, almost ethnic people females costumes have an outstanding characteristic of "group" (see Figure 1); when they take part in some collectivity ceremonies, most of ethnic people women always wear clothing with the same style and pattern, especially, the unitive color which emphasizes the coherence to distinguish own group from other groups and effectively ensure the group construction not to be interfered. Besides, all rights and obligations can be developed in inner group so that they can keep the group stability. Huayao Dai people living in a village of Xi Shuang Ban Na area of Yunnan province. The embroideries of girl costumes are almost same around neighbor villages. They have a criteria which the chief of girl in villages allocates the patterns and no one can do against that. Again, when white Miao people, living in Zhaotong area of Guizhou province, make the batik for their dress, they always use whorl patterns which have never been changed although women have created other patterns like birds, plants, beasts, and so on. Because the pattern of whorl records the history of white Miao people ancestors who were living in the bank of river. They use the whorl as symbolization of their ancestors and group history, meanwhile, they also keep the highly coherence of group to distinguish from other groups.



(a) Married women costume of De ang people, the more the colorful waist bands, the more the wooer.



(c) Tuliang group of Zhuang people; they wear the black costume to distinguish themselves from other people.



(b) Miao people "hundred birds clothing" for ceremony, the highly unitive color tone.



(d) Short skirt Maio people of Guizhou province.



Figure 1. The coherence of ethnic people female costume to embody the different group.

### To Embody the Ethic of Group

Ethic is one of part of social culture which is not only to adjust conflict between people benefit but also conceal and restrain people's appetency in order to set up a social system. As a material carrier of culture, it is no doubt that ethnic people female clothing has the function of ethic which can directly or indirectly reflect social ethic criteria and behavior standard in different ages and social groups; people can get information where she is from, how old she is, whether she has sweetheart, how about her skill for weave, what state of her marriage, and so on. We can find the information from above-mentioned women's costume, as well as women's head ornament, necklace ornament, chest ornament and waist ornament, and different color and style strongly shows the social criteria of groups (see Figure 2). For example, to Hui people, the scarf color of cover head is quite different in different age, for maid it should be vivid color like blue, the marriage women wearing black one while the old people is white. In many ethnic groups, there are some ceremonies for children mature, such as "wearing trousers ceremony", "wearing skirt ceremony", "wearing hat ceremony", "holing tooth ceremony", and "dying tooth ceremony". The wearer by changing the clothing show other people they have got the rights to participate sociality for love. The young women of Hani people distracted in Pinxin County and Mojiang County will embroider camellia, peony, and cuckoo under right clothing called "apntment flower" which is symbolization of single and metaphor for expecting sweet heart to take this "flower".







(d) The old women of Hui people wearing white head scarf.



(e) The maid of Hui people wearing blue head scarf.



(f) The married women of Hui people wearing black head scarf.



(g) Tattoo face for married women of Dulong people.

Figure 2. Different decoration to set up and strengthen the ethic criteria.

### To Undertake the Development of Group

In the society of sexism, men participate outer social activities more than women's, so men pay more attention to social function of clothing, because it represents the symbolization of social class, fortune, and dignity. Particularly, with the frequency of economy activities and development of society, more and more ethnic people men abandon their ethnic costume to wear modern clothing but women still wear their traditional dress (see Figure 3). Therefore, the male clothing of ethnic people is simple relative to women. During the development of ethnic people clothing, the phenomena which men's "etic" versus women's "emic" orientation is more and more outstanding. For instance, the tendency of Xijiang Miao people male's "etic" versus female's "emic" is breaking the culture rule of gender clothing balance and construct unbalance gender clothing model, men wear the fashion or suit like most men in the world and enjoy the harvest of material civilization and diverse creation, but they hope their women still maintain the traditional clothing, because they believe their women wear traditional dress more beautiful than modern one. We cannot stand to ask that if the male think traditional dress is more beautiful why they take off by themselves, from another aspect, why women can accept the reality? Whether they volunteer to undertake the duty of ethnic group development? Obviously, the answer is negative, because those women are limited at home and do traditional jobs and far away the modern society. Besides, man are afraid the loss of their existing positions. Therefore, they encourage their women stay at home to continue their traditional job, like weave and batik. That is why nowadays, we have just found some ethnic people feature from women's costume instead of men's.



(a) White Miao people women costume with a whorl pattern which records their ancestors history and remind themselves to remember.



(b) The contrast between women wearing traditional clothing and man wearing modern clothing.

Figure 3. The female dressing undertake the ethnic group history and development.

The clothing of women in Naxi people living Lijiang river of Yunnan province wearing a decoration named “Draping star and wearing moon” is a symbolization that they worship for sun, moon, and star, meanwhile it praises the moral of Naxi women who undertake the strong workload and never complain. Similarly, it reflects that women often undertake important role to keep a special ethnicity traditional culture.

Modern men and conservative women existing as a phenomena, which reflects adequately the unbalance of clothing and relation of unequal gender rights, that is, clothing as a symbolization of ethnic identity is fixed on women and makes them to undertake to develop the group history.

### Conclusions

The presentation manifests that the construction and development of ethnic people costume are dynamic, and the female have undertaken the important role during the group construction and development as well as ethic. Utilize the social gender theory to analyze ethnic people female costume will benefit us to understand deeply the essence of female costume rather than just superficial style. We can find whenever in the past or present, ethnic people women undertake the important role all the time; various ethnic costumes not only embody their diligence, intellectuality and tolerance but also women’s obedience and passiveness. Besides, it is worthwhile to note the unbalance gender system resulting in the excessive restraint to women, while colorful costumes are just camouflage. Therefore, when we enjoy the ethnic people’s colorful clothing especially women’s dressing, we should use multi-angle of view to observe it, not only share the female wisdom, but also realize their important position and value in ethnic group construction and development, in particular, when we highlight the protection of ethnic people traditional culture based on the current globalization.

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