

## Lisu Costumes Cultural Connotations and Functional Enlightenment

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### Abstract

Clothing is a dominant symbol of Lisu culture with a rich culture. It is an epitome of a nation long historical development of economic, cultural and technology level. Clothing embodies the traditional concept of Lisu formed thousands of years' aesthetics, religion, philosophy and other aspects. Lisu costumes revealed the unique cultural features and functions of communication and etiquette.

**Key words:** Lisu costumes culture; Cultural connotation; Etiquette function

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### INTRODUCTION

Clothing is a product of human in the productive labor process, with the development of productive forces, the establishment of private ownership and class formation, clothing was given more meaning. In addition to aesthetic outside, clothing is the most intuitive identification for gender, identity, grade level, etc.. Lisu costume has rich cultural connotation, also is a unique culture and art by the creation of Lisu. Clothing as a carrier of culture, symbols, making a complete interpretation of the Lisu people aesthetic, religion, politics, philosophy and other traditional concept formed for thousands of years, which

contains Lisu cultural structure in deep psychological accumulation (Sun, 1996).

### 1. LISU CLOTHING STYLE

Lisu mainly distributed in Yunnan Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture, Liangshan Prefecture in Sichuan, and the rest scattered in Lijiang, Diqing, Dali, Dehong, Chuxiong and Baoshan, staggered mixed with Han, Bai, Yi and Naxi. Residence has a vast range of branches, with highlighting geographical characteristics. Thereby presenting numerous colorful clothing styles. The author made an analysis by taking the example of Nujiang, Dehong, Weixi and Sichuan apparel.

Lisu people like to wear the national costume, which has distinct regional characteristics. According to color, clothing can be divided into white, black, and with flowers. Nujiang Lisu women like to wear right lappet coat and linen dress. Women who got married wearing large ear copper ring, which can hang down shoulder. Headwear is mainly by coral and pearl-based materials. Some of them like wearing a portion of agate, seashells and silver strings in front of the chest, called "Labolidi". Some of plastrons value 1-2 heads of cattle. Lisu women do not wear a black dress but wear pants, right lappet coat tied apron, wearing a green scarf and wear ear coral. Lisu men and women dress are roughly the same as Nujiang people, but women wear pants, tied an apron at the waist. Yongsheng, Dehong Lisu dress is bright, women like to inlaid lace on the blouse and skirt, wrapped cloth head scarf, wearing large copper earring and coral, and the skirt is too long on the ground, the skirt dragging swing when walking, that seems very pretty and charming. Men wears linen gown or blouse, knee-length pants with blue cloth headscarf. Some people tress long hair at the back of the head. Headman or some wealthy men wearing a bunch of red coral in the left ear, showing their honor and dignity. Men wear knives and hanging arrow bag, which made by

bear and monkey skin. With the improvement of social life, changes have taken place in Lisu costumes, primitive simplicity and elegant Lisu costumes seem more colorful.

*Description of the World* in Song Dynasty recorded that Liangshan, Sichuan resident “wearing summer dress, but to go cave, vertebral hairpin, feet, or felt or leather, with the Yi Man custom.” Sichuan Lisu men wear striped linen pants and women wear right lappet coat, shoulders with red and yellow line sewing pattern, inlaid sleeves embroidered stripes, wearing a linen crepe skirt, tied ribbon at the waist and wear earrings. Old Dechang Lisu men were happy to allow the bunch of hair to grow, called “Kai Pi”, avoid touching by other people. Other regions such as Dali, Baoshan and other places have different characteristics. Those cities are close to the land influenced by the Han modern dress considerably.

*Vesey Travelogue* in Qing Dynasty recorded ancient Lisu costumes in detail: “Male held hair wear hairpin, using knitting grass as tassel to decorate in hair... with knee-length pants and long clothing, often out of Paley edge, women pulled tress hoop, with clothes collar and tied skirts and pants.” According to the survey, the modern Lisu has the tradition of weaving straw to tassel to decorate hair, Because of locked traffic, Vesey Lancang River region’s costume rarely influenced by outside, relatively indicted ancient Qiang people’s clothing style, combined with multi-ethnic inhabited, multi-religious coexistence, Vesey Lisu costume formed a variety of genres, except for Zhiye town Tongle village as the representative of the genre, also has Yongchun river basin and other genres.

Overall, Lisu has varies in costumes, and distributed widely. In addition to the geographical environment, customs, aesthetics and other factors, costume presents colorful clothing style. The Nu River, Sichuan and Vesey dress is its microcosm. For example, along the Lancang River, Lisu due to the geographical environment, retaining the ancient Qiang people’s clothing style, while clothing is influenced by factors of history, geography, politics, economy, highlighting the different levels of productivity.

## 2. THE ECOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT IMPRINT OF LISU COSTUMES

As human beings essential thing, one of the main functions of clothing is to protect the human body, therefore the texture, style, color graphics, and other options are bound to adapt their living environment to reduce the sun, wind and frost. Therefore, Lisu costumes are bound to produce in its specific ecological environment. (Ibid.)

### 2.1 Regional Features

Lisu ancient system Di and Qiang descendant lived a nomadic life in history. Due to the natural environment and economic status differences, formed Lisu style clothing colorful situation. The main geographical features shown in headdress. Each region has a fixed style. Such

as Baoshan, Tengchong married women wrapped flower scarf, wearing “beads hat”, and large copper earring or coral. Sichuan Lisu women prominent characteristic headdress, leaving three angle hair in childhood. With age increasing year by year, at the age of 50, people fills the hair, wearing “bottom” bucket hat, shaving their hair around, decorated with small seashells braided red line, all of which reflect regional differences.

### 2.2 The Natural Economic Form

Relationship between the ancients apparel and geographical environment has been recognized. “Huainan zi, the original training” recorded:

People lived in South of the Jiuyi mountain, worked on the land less but more in the water. So people here cut hair and tattoo to image fish dragon image. Kua jacket volume is not so involved in travel. They wore skirt not trouser so as to wade into the water. They wore short-sleeved shirt and rolled up their sleeves to facilitate punting. These are decided by the characteristics of the aquatic life.

In order to adapt to the living environment of the mountains or the mid-levels district, wide trousers can effectively guarantee leg and joint flexibility to uphill or downhill, so wide-leg pants, skirt and cape are appeared. Clothing has more practical significance to mountain people’s life. Clothing style, length and thickness are differences with the environment and climate change. Forests with thorny, poisonous grass, and lots of mosquitoes. Lisu like leggings, both anti-virus and anti-insect thorns, can be described as anti-mosquito in summer, and warm in winter, and some have embroidered patterns on leggings, both beautiful and practical.

On the one hand the cold mountain climate, large temperature difference between day and night, mostly Lisu costumes with leather coat, waistcoat, etc., so that people do activities and changes in temperature or wear off to regulate body temperature, such as Sichuan Dechang Lisu. In old times, men and women wear hemp clothes, sheepskin, or wear jackets, sheepskin. Lisu young people like wearing the fine linen sewn waistcoat on a coat, commonly known as “Customs upper garment”. On the other hand, due to the mountains cold, the production of cotton is less but seed stem is more, so the clothing is to focus on wool and linen. Nujiang Lisu women’s wear plaid skirt or wool skirt made by fire grass areas, white and blue cloth, tied the waist line belt, wearing a “ole” hat, looked very pretty and charming. The above content profoundly reflect specific ecological environment and its economic forms of dress culture evolution inherent statute and profound impact.

## 3. THE EMBODIMENT OF LISU COSTUMES ORIGINAL

Religion is an important activity in Lisu social life, and the ceremony participants mainly for all levels of people.

These people appeared in the ceremony, on a specific mission and express certain thoughts and actions. In this process, the clothing became silent language of the people, which play the role for attending the ceremony from the norms of identity and strengthen ritual atmosphere. Lisu religion is still in a primitive stage, the content is much more diverse. As the Lisu integral part of the cultural system of clothing, interpreting the contents of the original religion of the Lisu without exception.

### 3.1 Reflect the Totem Worship

Primitive Religion is produced in extremely low productivity. People fight against with nature. They don't understand many natural phenomena, but they do nothing. So they make natural things personification, and give it a supernatural power, in turn, to seek this power to help themselves. Thus gradually formed the primitive religion. (Guan, 2005, pp.75-76)

Totem worship is a kind of primitive belief that people have a closer relationship to some animal and plant ancestor worship, and ethnic identity is an important way. Lisu has its own totem worship. In the old time, Nujiang has tiger, sheep, bees, mice, monkeys, bears, birds, bamboo, shepherd's purse and millet and other dozens of clans, with its own name as a totem clan. For example, self-proclaimed "Kuo Pa" man, called buckwheat people, "La Pa" is tiger man and so on. Lisu traditional dress can still get a trace of totem worship. Lisu people believe that these animals and plants are their ancestor, and they like the pattern of leaves and flowers embroidered on clothing, reflecting their national religion. Lisu costumes totem worship, whether retained traces of ancestors from the pattern, and even the style, and to vary degrees, carrying Lisu long history. Lisu costumes and primitive totem worship are closely related, and this reflects the psychology of early man to obtain the blessing of low capacity to conquer nature by totem.

### 3.2 Witchery Culture

Lisu witchcraft activities are closely related to "Ni Pa", grilled to Lisu priests and shamans, Ni Pa is considered to be a grilled communicator between people and spiritual beings, and therefore respected by people and enjoy high prestige. Ni Pa held hand instruments when grilled practice, wearing hemp clothes and two large goat horn hats, his back with a long knife as a special dress for witches. Lisu history due to different geographical features highlights different characteristics of vestments. It has strict rules to show respect for the gods. Therefore Lisu costumes also reflect the traces of witch culture. In addition, a strong infiltration witch cultural and religious ideas of God figure symbol is widely used in clothing, also is protecting body spiritual objects, such as Ru word, Shi word and Ren word and Shou word etc., especially in track suits and grave clothes embroidered with multi shroud gossip, and other details of clothes (Sun, 1996).

## 4. LISU COSTUMES THE LEGEND, MYTHS AND HISTORICAL FACTS REFLECTED

Clothing as one symbol of the traditional culture, bearing the ancient history and mythology. Some scholars called the cloth "books of dress "and" legend of dress." pattern or decoration of clothing, which is an ancient myth, a microcosm of the history of the article. Lisu men wear "Baibuyi" and the woman wear the "Ole hat" perspective Lisu blood and affection, according to legend the war resisted foreign enemies in the ancient, Leader commonly used color cloth as prizes to reward the brave warrior, winning the more, got the more color cloth. In order to express missing and achievements, people decorated more clothes on hat, eventually came into being "Baibuyi." Concerned man's "Baibuyi" and woman's "Ole hat" have very touched legend, long ago a pair of young men and women fell in love, the guy all day hunted in the mountains, the body bare with only a piece of fur, the girl felt love dearly when she saw the guy was Scared over the body, she walked around the mountains to find wild hemp, twisted it into cloth and sewn into clothes to guy, in order to make the girl look more beautiful, the guy prepare Ole cap as tokens to the girl. From then the "Ole cap" became sweetheart tokens that lady gave them to guy, which has spread (Wei, 2004).

Dating back the legend of Lisu, you can get a glimpse of the traces of ethnic migration. Women like to use seashells accessories, with the ancient hunter-gatherer ancestors of migration. Seashells sheet was the first exchange of goods for money. Due to the migration to prevent, people often put the level seashells string clusters, across to the shoulder and arm or head. Men and women are wearing in old times, and later as a man hunting frequently, often lost, so it pays special women in custody. Passage of time, seashells sheet becomes Lisu women decoration. Through legends Lisu shell ornaments, we can explore family migration trajectory.

## 5. LISU COSTUMES CULTURAL FUNCTION

### 5.1 Communication Function

Clothing has the distinction of sex, age division, marked or not adult social functions. As Jiayi said: "There are differences between gentle and simple. There is under clothing...reflected clothes and know its equal." Accessory is the key point of traditional clothing in gender, age, marital status, geography, and other aspects of the differences between rich and poor. The Nujiang Lisu area unmarried woman likes long hair, with "Ole" hat. Married women covered hair in the ole braid, wearing large copper earrings or silver earrings, neck wearing

a string of dozens of red, white and colored beads with varying lengths, long to abdomen. Hanging the decorated frieze with oblique agate, Tirana, coins, etc.. This decorative tape with black and white, and women seems to very pretty and charming, shiny, reflecting their economic status. Meanwhile, cane or silver jewelry also won favor with Lisu woman. Men's accessories are also distinctive, more adult men with short hair and with red, white and blue cloth kerchief, and the shape is like a flying saucer. Young guy likes decorating shell and accompanied by red wool tassels. Over the past times, wealthy families have a bunch of red coral beads prestige men still wear on the left ear in order to show their social status or wealth and dignity.

## 5.2 The Etiquette Functions

For clothing, wearing what kind of clothing is decided by the traditional rituals. The four ceremonial life of the nation, members of each stage must wear appropriate clothing and social etiquette. At the same neighborhoods of mass weddings and marriage and other major events, the national convention of wearing the national costume, otherwise they will be ostracized. This is the Lisu costumes refractive cultural etiquette function reflection. Lisu funeral is given priority to white and taboo bright colors. Costumes are still gifts. Lisu parents should get a skirt in her rite of the day, while the clothing and various accessories as a token of love to give to loved one is a typical example of a ceremonial function. Nujiang Lisu and other places men and women who are falling in love with each other, the girl will present elaborately embroidered "Hua Lexia" to the man, and the man places a gift to send back.

There is the visible that ethnic costumes have irreplaceable cultural meaning. "Hua Lexia" and a skirt by parents, are to act as a carrier of interpersonal communication, reflecting a communication function, while reflecting the Lisu praying, seeking luck. Getting a desire by the people for the most basic skirt rite is praying, clothed interpretation of the people for a better life, Lisu empowered in spirit through costumes. Clothing is through this silent language silently visual form to convey the language which cannot be expressed cultural significance. Lisu costumes reflect the auspicious directly through the body, by using "Xiang" and "Fu" way to maximize the acceptance of these auspicious patterns to bring their own fortune.

## 6. LISU COSTUMES THOUGHTS

With the development of commodity economy to bring new shocks to closure minority mountain, including

minority clothing culture facing a huge impact. Since some multi-ethnic clothing materials, decoration cumbersome, complex process, difficult to manufacture, wearing inconvenience, difficult to wash, many young people in minority areas have to wear Han clothing, and even in some areas have not seen national costume. In response to this situation, on the one hand to actively and urgent rescue ethnic costumes resources so as to avoid some of the distinctive national dress culture disappear, on the other hand, we must also take the initiative, purposeful, organized and planned to guide minority dress reform, organizing experts and fashion designers in the nation listening to opinions of the masses on the basis of the design of new national costume, while maintaining the basic characteristics of the premise of national dress, and strive generous, beautiful, simple, practical, ease of production and living, facilitating the organization of future large-scale machine production in order to meet the needs of modernization. It can be said that the Chinese clothing culture stage minority need to solve the problem, but also great challenges at this stage that Chinese ethnic costumes should face with (Guan, 2005).

Thus, the

national dress as a cultural symbol is the national carrier of culture. Anatomy this symbol has an important significance for our understanding of the national culture and spiritual psychological features and the way of life and to our understanding of history and culture of our nation. National costume materialized as a spiritual product that maintains the distinctive ethnic characteristics. The connotation of the geographical features, social characteristics, production, religion, folk characteristics, reflects the Lisu rich aesthetic taste and aesthetic psychology. Today, with the development of society and age, ethnic costumes and other cultural interpenetration, ethnic costumes will present a new situation. (Wei, 2004)

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