

Cultural Implications of Mongolian Women's Clothing in Xingmeng Township of Tonghai of Yunnan Province

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Abstract—Tonghai Mongolian women's clothing not only inherits the characteristics of northern Mongolian clothing, but also develops and changes during the long-term production and life, thus becoming a unique style. Through the clothing culture, it maintains the close relationship with the mainstream culture of the nation, the geographical environment in which it lives, and the production and lifestyle, and it also maintains the inner connection of a group. At the same time, it embodies the cultural spirit of a nation, which contains various relics of national totem worship and legendary stories.

Keywords—Mongolian people in Xingmeng Township; national clothing; cultural value; cultural implication

I. INTRODUCTION

Culture is a social phenomenon and layers of accumulation of social history. As a part of behavioral culture, clothing takes utensils as the basis and aesthetics as the standard, accumulates layers of human production, life and customs, and reflects people's values, aesthetics and ethics. Clothing is not only a covering of the body, but also the link between human and nature, and it is also the medium for the connection between human body and spirit, and the product of human social progress and civilization.

Xingmeng Mongolian Township in Tonghai County is the only Mongolian settlement in Yunnan Province. For more than 760 years, the villagers have never forgotten their Mongolian identity and trying to maintain Mongolian cultural tradition based on adapt to the new environment.

From the perspective of clothing, Tonghai Mongolian women's clothing not only inherits the characteristics of the northern Mongolian clothing, but also develops and changes during the long-term production and life, thus becoming a self-contained national clothing "San Die Shui", with the most unique headwear and tops.

The headwear changes with women's age and identity. In the youth, they wears a black "Fengguanmao", at the end of the tail ,the hair hanging down naturally from the tail of eyebrows like two horns, at the two ends of the cap there are two "Xibi". After marriage, young married women use a black cloth called "Congwusi" as headscarf, and their braids wrapped around "Congwusi", they can still wear "Xibi" but

no longer allowed to wear the "Fengguanmao". After child birth, the women should wrap all their hair onto the top of their heads and wear a black headscarf, they can't wear "Xibi" anymore.

There are three pieces of San Die Shui tops, the winter tops use thick materials and summer tops use thin materials. The first piece is a high-necked tight-fitting shirt with a pink lace pattern embroidered on the neckline and cuffs. The second piece of tops which worn in the middle is called "Nei yi". It is a round-neck short robe, and the right side of the chest is encrusted with a bow, strip-shaped curved pattern. The length of the Nei yi and the length of the cuffs are the same as the first piece, and inside the cuffs, there is a dragon-scale lace pattern with a width of about 12 cm. The colors of the pattern are mostly sky blue, yellow, pink, etc. When wearing it, the sleeves should be rolled up to the elbow joint, in order to reveal the lace pattern on the inside of the cuffs, the patterns are perfectly connected to the lace patterns on the cuffs of the first piece. In addition to the beautiful appearance, the rolled-up cuffs also have the function of pockets, which can hold money and mobile phones. The third piece is collarless, sleeveless Duijin fabric waist-length jacket, which is called "Xiao gua". It can be worn on both sides, and the colors are different. The summer single-layered jacket has the same color as the winter jacket. On the left of the exquisite jacket there are 30-60 small buttons in a line made with five-colored lines, only buckle the first button at the neckline when wearing it, the rest of the buttons are all decorations. As the body wavers, bright color of the Ne yi is vaguely revealed from the opening of Xiao gua, the beauty is subtle and restrained. Gold and sequin embroidery are added to the laces on the neckline and cuffs of "San Die Shui". Older women over the age of 50 wear a black-green right-lapel gown and, together with the other pieces of tops, formed an order of inner red, middle blue and out black. From inside to outside, one is shorter than the next one, the gradation is distinct.

The current women's clothing in Xingmeng Township mainly presents two different development status based on age stages. Young women are greatly influenced by the Han people, their daily dresses are Chinesized and westernized, they mainly wear T-shirts, jeans, casual pants, leather shoes and sandals. But women above 50 years old mainly wear

national clothing “San Die Shui”. With the revival of traditional culture in recent years, the national centripetal force has increased, and women's clothing has shown a tendency to gradually return to Mongolian traditional clothing. The interweaving and evolution of these two phenomena is precisely the embodiment of their women's traditional culture in a unique way.

II. THE REFRACTION OF GEOGRAPHICAL ENVIRONMENT AND THE BEARING OF NATIONAL CULTURE

The shape, color and accessories of Mongolian clothing have distinct national characteristics and are the carrier of their national traditional culture. The Mongolian people of Xingmeng Township migrated from Northern grassland into Yunnan Plateau and settled on the bank of the Tonghai Qilu Lake, and formed a pattern of small settlements with other ethnic groups. Due to the tremendous changes in the living environment, the transformation of the material production and lifestyle and the corresponding cultural changes have changed from the original animal husbandry to the fishery, and then to the industrial structure with agriculture as the mainstay with fishery and construction as the supplement. Over 760 years, Mongolian people in Xingmeng Township were separated from their mainstream culture in terms of their geographical environment and spirituality. In order to adapt to the natural environment and social and cultural environment, they faced the problem of adapting their own culture to fit in the new environment. Gradually they discarded some of the original cultural characteristics, and absorbed some of the cultures, production and lifestyles, and folk customs of other ethnic groups around, seeking their own survival and development during cultural blending, thus forming a Mongolian culture phenomenon in Xingmeng Township which has certain differences with the mainstream Mongolian culture. The geographical environment and their understandings of the new regional things directly affect their aesthetics and worldview, forming a national culture with special characteristics that are very different from other ethnic groups, their national clothing is especially obvious.

Mongolian women in Xingmeng Township have always adhered to their own traditional clothing, although the clothing has shown new changes with the changes in the region, production and lifestyle. They changed the one-piece structure of traditional Mongolian gown, which is wide and thick, with a wide hem and covered the feet, into a two-pieces style include top and bottom, and called it “San Die Shui”. Under the premise of retaining the mainstream characteristics of the national “high-necked” and “right-lapel”, it is more convenient and practical.

Under the influence of the national headdress styles around Yunnan area, the Mongolian women of Xingmeng Township combined their own national headdresses and headscarves, to create headwear such as “Fengguanmao”, “Congwusi” and “Xi Bi”, and dress up according to the change of age, identity and labor demand, the headwear thus has the cultural function of ethnic identity and social role definition.

The color of the clothing is also changed from white, blue (green) and red in the mainstream Mongolian clothing, to “black” and multi-colors. The black right-lapel gown that women over 50 years old wear shows that black occupies an important position in their national psychology. It can be said that the aesthetic characteristics of Mongolian clothing of Xingmeng Township are closely related to their national culture.

The style of northern Mongolian people using animal fur and geometric patterns to decorate their clothes has changed into the common patterns of roses, lotuses, fish, pigs, dogs, teeth laces, dragon scales which are common in daily lives and presented in the clothing of Mongolian women of Xingmeng Township. This proves that geographical changes have caused changes in aesthetic culture.

From certain point of view, the “clothing change” of Mongolian people in Xingmeng Township is the adaption to the new environment and also is the attachment to their homeland. They maintain the close connection with their mainstream culture, the geographical environment of their own survival and the production and lifestyle through the phenomenon of clothing, and it also maintains the inner connection of an ethnic group. The styles and patterns of Mongolian women's clothing in Xingmeng Township are not only decorative, but also are the identification symbols to identify “our nation” from “other nations”.

In the general concept of human society, ethnic groups are often associated with culture, and members of ethnic groups are intrinsically connected with other members of the same community. One ethnic group shares one same special culture, same language, same customs, even same social forms, the difference between ethnic groups can be seen in some sense as refusing to accept the assimilation of alien cultures or resisting other ethnic groups. People no longer emphasize cultural characteristics, but emphasize the boundaries between ethnic groups. This kind of boundary has no external entity performance, but is rooted in the inner thoughts of the people within the ethnic group, that is, what people think of themselves as a nation. Although the Mongolian people in Xingmeng Township and other surrounding ethnic groups communicated in terms of production, life, customs, religious beliefs, aesthetic psychology, etc., on the surface, they are no different from the Han nationality, but the boundary of this ethnic group always exist in their collective consciousness, their ethnic groups still recognize their Mongolian identity. Moreover, this boundary will be expressed in a cultural way when needed, and clothing, as an important form of national composition, has become this boundary and has become an important symbol for distinguishing nations and ethnic groups.

III. CUSTOMS AND AFFAIRS OF TOTEM WORSHIP AND FOLKLORE

Long before the invention and use of words, clothing already has the functions of cognition, identification and symbolization. “Apparel, in a local society or a culture of oral inheritance where everything can be communicated

through the spirit, everything can become a cultural symbol, like a history book worn on body, a silent language, reveals the distant cultural relationship of human beings all the time, spreads ancient cultural information and exerts multiple cultural functions.”¹ Under normal circumstances, national clothing will be divided into two categories, one is the clothing worn in daily life and during labor process, which is called casual wear, and the second is the clothing worn during large-scale activities such as festivals, weddings, funerals, religious sacrifices, etc. which is called costume. In the festival costumes, the cultural spirit of a nation is embodied, as well as the remains of the totem worship and legends of the nation.

Totem worship is a relatively old but common cultural phenomenon in the history of human culture. In the process of human beings moving from obscurity to civilization, totem worship seems to be the only way which must be passed. Almost every nation or tribe regarded some phenomena in nature as gods, and used them as the patron saints, the symbols and even the spiritual sustenance of their own nations or tribes. It can be said that the totem culture played an important role in the primitive period of humanity with extremely low productivity, and it also laid a deep mark on the costume culture.

Most of the patterns in the Mongolian clothing of Xingmeng Township are selected from common things in life and patterns with symbolic significance of auspiciousness and happiness, such as dragon, phoenix, kylin, fish, chicken, bird, pig, plants, flowers and character in their own national myths and legends. They believe that wear clothing with these patterns will be blessed by the gods, so that they will be safe and auspicious. For example, in the Mongolian women's body decorations, there is totem worship of dragon. From the materialistic point of view, dragon is a virtual integrated totem from people's imagination, although the image of dragon varies with the times, regions, and ethnic groups, however, the dragon culture has a wide impact on the production and life of all ethnic groups in China. Based on the worship of “Dragon”, the Mongolian people in Xingmeng Township engraved the dragon image on the silver ornament and made it into a dragon-head bracelet. The scales of the dragon were designed as a costume pattern (dragon lace), and expect to obtain more effective protection and strength from it. The girl's headdress “Fengguanmao” comes from the totem worship of phoenix. Like the dragon, phoenix is a sacred bird only lived in the legend, and it is the queen of all birds. Phoenix headdress is filled with yearnings of happiness, harmony and ideals. Besides that, fish-shaped silver ornaments, lotus patterns are related with fish totem, the various plants and flowers embroidered on the bride's shoes are related with nature worship, and they all express the yearnings of the villagers for a better life.

The worship of ancestors of the Mongolian people in Xingmeng Township is also shown in a special form in

women's clothing. The concept of spirit immortality is prevalent in many ethnic groups, as is the Mongolian in Xingmeng Township. They believe that after death, the spirit will return to the place where their ancestors lived and reunite with their ancestors. Therefore, when participating in religious ceremonies (called “Zuo Hui”), Mongolian women in Xingmeng Township above 50 years old will wear a black right-lapel gown, which means When they wear the same clothing as their ancestors in the “Zuo Hui”, their ancestors would recognize them by the clothing, so their spirits could return home successfully. In the ceremony, costumes become the concrete expression of people to please the ancestors.

In addition to the phenomenon of totem worship in the early days of human civilization, there are a large number of folklores. Due to the changes in history and culture, people care about the origins and meanings of various forms and accessories presented in costumes. The folklores of costumes are produced and became an important part of folklore legends. The same is true of the Mongolian people in Xingmeng Township, and the stories in their ethnic memories have left unique traces in their costumes.

The origin of the Mongolian girl's headwear in Xingmeng Township can be found in its folk story “Xuan Ge Dong”. “Xuan Ge Dong” recorded such a story: According to the legendary, once there is a beautiful girl lived in the village of Gazhuo who fell in love with a brave and handsome young man. Every time when he caught a beast, the young man always pulled out a soft animal hair and sent to the beloved girl. The girl put the animal hair on the top of the Fengguanmao along the sides... The news of the two fell in love was heard by the uncle of the girl, and her uncle decided to dismantle the love couple. He betrothed the girl to the son of a local rich man, took her home and then kept her in the stable of backyard. After the young man got the news, he rescued the girl and died for love in the cave of Sujialiangzi. In order to commemorate the loyal and steadfast love of the Mongolian young men and women, Mongolian girl wrapped the two braids on the top of the head, and left the two braid tips outside the Fengguanmao.²

Today, in the Mongolian women's festival costumes of Xingmeng Township, in addition to the left row of buttons, the right side also has 6-9 round silver flower cards from top to bottom. Each silver flower card is about 8 cm in diameter, and mostly with 6 petals. Silver flower cards are generally connected by white ribbons, which are beautiful and easy to wear. Deng Qiyao's “The Plateau Mongolian Women in Change” recorded such a story: “When the Yuan Dynasty perished, the Mongols were hiding themselves from place to place. They dared not to brazenly wear their national clothing, so they had to cut their long rope short, hid it underneath the outerwear, and wear it next to the skin. One of the reasons is they never forget their ancestors, and second reason is to avoid the disaster of “killing Tatar” in the past. The Mongolians also learned to wear the clothing of Yi people in order to cover the eyes and ears, but Yi people's clothing do not have silver round buckles and silver flower

¹ “National clothing: A cultural symbol-Study of national clothing of minority nationality in Southwest China”, Yunnan People's Publishing Company, 2011, P.3.

² Xingmeng Team, Tonghai County: “Feng Huang Ji”, Yunnan National Publishing Company, 1982, P.47-50.

cards, which are used for protection like armors from the legend. One year, foreigners came to kill us, only 50 people were left, and (these 50 people) fled to Haizi (Qilu Lake), they found many knife marks on the silver and copper plates on the body when they checked each other. These silver and copper plates saved the lives of these 50 people. In order to commemorate this matter, they nailed silver and copper plates to the chest and it slowly became a kind of decoration.”³ Today, the silver buckles and silver flower cards on Mongolian women's clothing in Xingmeng Township are mostly made of silver metal. The author believes that this story seems can be a proof to the changes in Mongolian women's clothing of Xingmeng Township.

Totem worship and folklore can be said to play an extremely important role in the study of culture in any form, especially in costume culture. We can find the cultural roots of costume styles, colors, and patterns. These totem worships and folklore related to costumes are often the filler and refraction of history; and the transition from horseback to cow's back (rhino) in folklore, and the change of Mongolian robes from long to short one, all implies the cultural adaptation of Mongolian people of Xingmeng Township from nomadic battle to settled fishing and farming.

IV. CONCLUSION

Every needle and thread locked the thoughts of love for more than seven hundred years, San Die Shui and silver flower card inherited feelings of the Mongolian grassland, which is the national memory deep into the bone marrow. It is the historical mission of Xingmeng people to regain the footprints of their ancestors and protect the diversity and uniqueness of culture.

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³ Deng Qiyao “The Plateau Mongolian Women in Change”, Yunnan Education Publishing Company, 1995. P.27