

The Development Status and Challenges of Times Faced by Uyghur Traditional Costume -Taking Hotan Prefecture as an Example

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Abstract. Clothing, as a unique existence, is one of the most representative material heritage of the Uyghur people. Through combing the existing literature and independent fieldwork, this study finds that the current development of traditional Uyghur costumes is not only impacted by the market economy but also influenced by contemporary cultural trends. Despite facing challenges in terms of pricing as a commodity, traditional Uyghur clothing continues to hold cultural significance within Uyghur society, demonstrating the necessity to address these issues. We can try to take corresponding measures from different levels, such as increased industrial support from the government, active promotion and publicity within the community, and the participatory efforts of individuals. Finally, this paper emphasizes the need for comprehensive protection of endangered traditional cultures, which is a complex and systematic mission and needs joint efforts of different subjects to ensure the orderly transmission of Uyghur cultural heritage.

Keywords: Xinjiang region; Clothing culture; Uyghurs; National integration.

In history, Uyghurs have formed their own unique cultural symbols with their hospitable national character and rich and diverse national characteristics, among which costume is the most representative existence. Generally speaking, Uyghur costumes are closely related to the figure, shape, and activity environment of Uyghur people. In their aesthetic concepts, height, width, and beauty are the most important. Therefore, the costumes they make are often loose and free. Among them, the male coat is knee-length, with wide sleeves, no collar, no buttons, and a long belt under the waist. Female clothes are mostly wide-sleeved straight dresses, which have strong privacy and large activity space. Most of their coats are of uniform width at the shoulders, chest, and waist hem, with straight outline lines, which provides people a sense of comfort, looseness, stability, and convenience. Both types of clothes show the characteristics of sand prevention and rapid heat dissipation (Pan, 2020; Zhang, 2016). The reason why their costumes have developed such distinctive features is largely due to the continuous contact with neighboring ethnic groups and the changes in the overall social environment.

However, this kind of contact with the outside world has also had a certain impact on the clothing culture of the Uyghur people. For example, the lack of interaction between clothing producers and the market due to the influence of traditional concepts has become the most obvious problem. Therefore, based on the on-the-spot investigation, this paper tries to sort out the development and changes of traditional Uyghur costumes in history, and at the same time, deeply analyzes the difficulties faced by them in contemporary conditions, and puts forward corresponding suggestions, hoping to solve the problems encountered by Uyghur costumes at present.

1. Introduction

Since the Uyghurs from Mongolian grassland met with the indigenous peoples in southern Xinjiang around 840, the local culture has embarked on the road of integration and exchange [Overview of Uyghurs in Xinjiang Yearbook (2016)]. The unique geographical structure and diverse ecological environment of “three mountains and two basins”, coupled with its advantageous position in the main traffic road of the Silk Road, greatly facilitated the exchanges and integrations between the eastern and western ethnic groups, created opportunities for the formation of Uyghur costume culture, and laid

the foundation for its changes in a certain sense. At present, the research on this change mainly focuses on the production materials, techniques, cultural integration, and so on.

1.1 The progress of production materials

Material, the fabric of clothing, is the most important factor and material basis that constitutes the style of clothing and its overall aesthetics. Without the use and collocation of materials, clothing is worthless. However, it is not advisable to pay too much attention to the form of the material, so we should pay more attention to the artistic sense brought by the material itself. As Mr. Wang Zhenfu mentioned in the book *Architectural Aesthetics*, “When we pay attention to the form of a work of art and ignore the value brought by the basic materials that make it, we miss the best opportunity to improve the overall effect on the road of creating beauty” (Wang, 1987). Meanwhile, materials have different intuitive feelings through their different texture and comfort. In their research on Uygur costumes, Tu Lafu and Wu Qikong emphasized the influence of clothing materials as a material basis on clothing effects, and thought that clothing, as a symbol of national spirit, is an organic integration of material, aesthetics and practicality, while the comfort and concept brought by materials with different textures are often different (Tulafu and Wu Qikong, 2015).

In addition, the dry and changeable climate in Xinjiang Province creates a good environment for the growth of cotton and hemp. Simultaneously, the vast grassland also lays the foundation for leather production (Tulafu and Wu Qikong, 2015). Wang Feng mentioned the living environment of desert oasis leads to a lot of dust in Xinjiang. The hot surface and dry land make people prefer a nomadic society to a traditional farming society. In addition, the vast pastures and grasslands make animal leather and wool naturally become important materials for local clothing production. The living habits of continuous migration bring about changes in lifestyle and production methods, and at the same time, the practicality of clothing, such as the ability to prevent sandstorms, keep out the cold, and safety, has become a problem that cannot be ignored by local people (Li, 2019).

1.2 The development of production techniques

Hanging yarn knitting plays an important role in the traditional Uygur clothing production techniques. It mainly uses wood products as a bracket to fix the yarn, hang it, and start knitting. Meanwhile, the flat yarn knitting method is also very popular. But later, with the hardening of the yarn softness, the hanging technology became more mature and the coverage was wider. However, as this knitting method usually has some problems such as poor control of gravity intensity, which may lead to warp breakage, it can not meet the practical needs. Just at this time, the local people inadvertently found that two pedal warp beams and waist-controlled weaving beams could effectively control the strength of warp yarns, so they slowly developed the prototype of a waist machine, and the local clothing production techniques underwent important changes [Shackle Sattar & Li Qiang, 2015].

Later, the evolution tended to be diversified, and the efficient textile technology provided the clothing with ample space for development, which mainly benefited from the diversified weaving methods that emerged in the historical period. For example, in the weaving techniques of the Mongolian Oirat tribe in Xinjiang, card weaving, original breast loom, and biased weaving are the main techniques, and the original breast loom is one of the most primitive loom types in China. Plain weave jacquard fabrics can be woven through the ups and downs of the natural shed produced by the beam splitter and the thread shed produced by the hand-held thread heald. The warp is drawn by rotating back and forth, so that the operator does not have to manually pull the thread as before, which gives the textile technician more possibility to concentrate on the clothing content, and the feature that the card is convenient to control the width also improves the efficiency of this new textile technology. In addition, their finger knitting techniques are mainly divided into biased twill weave and biased double-layer weave, and biased twill weave is knitted by exchanging the warp positions of the left and right warp groups. Biased double-layer weave is a pattern formed by the intersection of two groups of warp yarns and the exchange of upper and lower layers of surface warp yarns and

inner warp yarns. Moreover, this kind of skill has been passed down from generation to generation by words and examples. Until today, some ethnic groups in Xinjiang still use traditional knitting skills (Ge, 2019).

1.3 Multi-cultural exchanges

As an important carrier of Xinjiang culture, clothing shows different characteristics because it is influenced by religious factors and historical elements in different regions, and even the same nation shows different performances due to the influence of different surrounding cultures. Since ancient times, Xinjiang has been a multi-ethnic living area, mainly through nomadism and farming to maintain the basic life, which enables different ethnic groups to arrange their own production and life according to their own needs, which greatly promotes the exchanges between different ethnic groups in the same area, and also makes their clothing culture show the characteristics of learning from each other. Especially with the introduction of silk, cotton, and wool textiles and sericulture technology, the local people's clothing has changed greatly, and frequent trade exchanges have enabled the upper class and the public to achieve and wear the same materials in clothing.

At present, with the acceleration of the information age, new cultural elements are constantly being injected into Xinjiang's national costumes. Especially after a large number of new costumes are put into the market, the exchanges between different national costumes become more frequent, and modern clothing brands are becoming more and more popular in Xinjiang, such as Chanel, Adidas, UNIQLO, and so on.

Therefore, after reviewing previous literature, we can find that the starting point of the above research focuses on the material of clothing inheritance and the culture it contains, ignoring the challenges faced in the development of traditional Uyghur clothing at present. Therefore, this paper will trace back to the reasons that led to the dilemma of the times, and at the same time put forward suggestions to help them get out of it, aiming to help reshape the traditional cultural elements of Uyghur.

2. The current challenges faced by Xinjiang clothing culture

Under the influence of the information age, different cultural elements are constantly injected into Xinjiang's national costumes. The influx of modern clothing brands and a large number of new clothing put into the market make it more difficult to inherit the clothing of non-ethnic groups.

2.1 The impact of trend culture

With the acceleration of the information age, urbanization, and globalization, emerging technologies are changing more rapidly, and cultures and thoughts around the world are more closely linked. The constant emergence of "trend" culture and "street" culture has had a great impact on the young people with strong consumption power in China, but at the same time, it has also caused the traditional costumes to fall into the development crisis and even hit the bottom. For young people, fashionable street culture, Hong Kong style, and Japanese style are becoming the accepted beauty, which gradually makes national traditional costumes become marginal costumes that are not accepted by young cultures.

As a result, the traditional clothing similar to Uyghur is gradually fading out of the youth's field of vision, and its attraction to them is gradually weakening. Fortunately, the Internet also gives traditional producers more possibilities. Through this channel, they can sell their products on the online sales platform, which enables groups still interested in national culture to protect their unique clothing culture by means of timeliness. Unfortunately, under the influence of fashion culture and other regional cultures, the living space of traditional Uyghur costumes is shrinking, and the main customers are mostly local residents. Moreover, due to the small number of audience and poor economic income, the life of skill inheritors is difficult, so they have no intention of inheriting

traditional skills and yearn for more fashionable occupations, which makes the development of traditional costumes with little living space become slower.

2.2 The squeeze of the market economy

Another problem faced by traditional clothing is the pressure brought by the market economy. First of all, the continuous development of the market economy has brought more and more fierce price competition, while small-scale suppliers strive to compete for limited consumers, so as to keep down commodity prices. This forces businesses to lower prices to maintain sales, thus continuously squeezing profit margins, resulting in a decline in gross profit. Secondly, many small suppliers usually emerge in the market supply chain, and each supplier may have its own clothing style, which intensifies the competition among different individual suppliers. However, it is difficult for traditional clothing suppliers to know the development trend of the market economy in time, and they often have a certain distance from the current consumption pattern, which makes it difficult for them to occupy a favorable position in the consumer market. With the community-based market, the phenomenon of market fragmentation is becoming more and more serious, which also forms a consumption squeeze on traditional clothing, and the demand differences between different communities are not the same, which also makes the market more dispersed and difficult to operate on a large scale. Thirdly, price competition, supplier competition, and market fragmentation make the market economy increasingly complex, and traditional clothing makes it difficult to change the previous cultural background, which leads to the obvious lack of ability to resist risks in the face of the market economy. To maintain market competitiveness, traditional clothing needs to find its own core competitiveness and gain the right to speak in the consumer market of diversified groups.

2.3 The deviation of market positioning

First of all, the traditional Uyghur costumes have strong national characteristics, that is, bright colors and exquisite patterns, but these characteristics have not attracted the attention of the mainstream market well. Compared with the modern aesthetic point of view, they have not highlighted the aesthetic feeling they deserve. As a result, many consumers may think that the colors and patterns of traditional clothes are too bright or not in line with their personal style. Secondly, the use of traditional Uyghur costumes in modern society is usually limited to specific occasions, such as traditional festivals or weddings, which limits the opportunities for daily wear and reduces the motivation for buying. In contrast, daily clothes are more convenient, which greatly weakens the market competitiveness of traditional Uyghur clothes. From this point of view, daily differences have become one of the important factors that lead to the lack of competitiveness of traditional Uyghur costumes in the mainstream market. To sum up, the overall style of Uyghur traditional costumes deviates from the group demand in the mainstream market, which makes it difficult for traditional costumes to find a suitable market positioning.

2.4 The restriction of cost and price

Traditional Uyghur costumes are usually completed through complicated production processes, including embroidery, knitting, and special fabric selection. These tedious production processes take a long time and also have high technical requirements, which makes the production cost of traditional Uyghur costumes relatively high, thus increasing the price of the costumes.

From the perspective of fabrics, traditional Uyghur costumes have used relatively high-cost fabrics such as silk and wool since ancient times to ensure their quality and durability. This further pushes up the cost of clothing itself, and ultimately directly affects the sales price of clothing. At the same time, because the main suppliers of traditional Uyghur costumes rely on pure hand-making, their production scale is usually small. In contrast, clothing in the mainstream market is usually produced on a large scale, so that the cost advantage can be obtained.

In terms of cultural value, traditional Uyghur costumes pay attention to the expression of symbolic meaning and historical value, which makes its contained value heavier, and the importance of

expressing value through price has also become a channel, so the price of traditional costumes is pushed up from the side.

3. The promotion of the new development of traditional costumes

Based on the challenges that the traditional clothing industry is facing, it needs the participation of different people and institutions to promote the development of traditional clothing, and a very important part is the participation of government agencies.

3.1 The increase in industrial support by the government

In the future development of minority costumes, the government should take the initiative to play a leading role and continuously strengthen its support for related industries. For example, in the post-COVID-19 era, by establishing a perfect reward and compensation system for traditional garment processing enterprises and reducing industrial taxes, the pressure on relevant units can be reduced from the cost, thus enhancing their market competitiveness to a certain extent. At the same time, the government helps proceed with the promotion of related industries, promotes the popularization of new media in Xinjiang, creates more convenient sales channels, actively expands national costume processing enterprises to expand the market scale, makes good use of the superior geographical location of Kashgar Prefecture and other places, strengthen trade with Central Asian countries, and increase the export volume of enterprises.

At present, there is still room for the Xinjiang local government to strengthen its support for traditional clothing manufacturing enterprises. In order to protect and publicize national culture and promote cultural inheritance in an orderly manner, government agencies and relevant departments can first put more energy into their daily work and continuously promote the modernization of the traditional clothing manufacturing industry. Secondly, the government can organize the inheritors of traditional costume skills with rich production experience to guide relevant enterprises in a planned way, and actively absorb modern elements while retaining traditional culture, so as to promote the combination of traditional and modern times and bring forth the new, so that traditional costumes can better meet the needs of the market economy. Thirdly, the government can make the best use of existing resources to establish a cultural protection fund and improve the cultural awareness of Uygur costumes by promoting education and publicity and offering training on traditional crafts, so that the younger generation can have more knowledge of their own national culture and urge them to fundamentally support the development of national costumes.

In addition, the government can also increase the support for research on the history of clothing in Xinjiang, and promote technical experts to use modern digital virtual clothing modeling software, such as CLO3D and STYLE3D, to analyze the shape and restore the clothing cultural relics unearthed in Loulan, Yingpan, Astana and other tombs (Shen et al., 2023), to combine traditional clothing culture with modern technology and examine history with a vision that conforms to modern development. Through these virtual restored objects, we can not only show the appearance of unearthed costumes in a more intuitive way but also enhance the interest of the display. In addition, the government can actively support the opening of clothing exhibition halls in museums in order to spread Xinjiang clothing culture more widely.

These measures not only help to deepen people's understanding of Xinjiang Uygur's traditional costume culture but also conducive to promoting cooperation between different subjects and expanding protection channels.

3.2 The enhancement of promotion scope by the community

As a spatial field of daily life, community is closely related to individuals. If we strengthen the publicity and promotion of related clothing culture from the community level, it will certainly enhance the individuals' cognition at a deeper level, thus effectively improving people's cognition of traditional Uygur clothing. Specifically, first of all, the community can use public bulletin boards to

hold regular blackboard newspapers to show the development process of traditional costumes from the perspectives of historical origins and cultural exchanges, to show the historical origins of traditional costumes and enable residents to find interesting knowledge points from rich content. Secondly, the community can take advantage of the rich local national festivals, hold national costume knowledge and culture competitions and other activities, and mobilize residents' interest in learning and mastering traditional costume culture knowledge by guessing names, drawing patterns, and making handicrafts, to enhance individual enthusiasm at the overall community level. Thirdly, the community can make some simple cultural and creative products printed with traditional national costume culture and distribute them to residents as participation rewards in daily activities, to expand the publicity channels from subtle points. Fourthly, gradually the community can establish a perfect communication mechanism to encourage ordinary people to wear traditional national costumes in their daily lives, to maintain its influence in the group.

In addition, the community can also hold regular fashion shows, traditional dance performances, handicrafts markets, and food festivals to broaden the display channels of traditional costumes and attract more attention.

3.3 The expansion of participation channels by individuals

The task of protecting traditional costume culture in Xinjiang is urgent and arduous, and individual participation in promotion and protection is one of the effective ways to ensure its sustainable development. By receiving publicity and education from different institutions, individuals can not only strengthen their understanding and cognition of traditional Uyghur costumes from their own level, but also master the history, symbolic significance, and cultural background of costumes, and can better stimulate their multi-traditional interests.

First of all, what the local individuals can do is try their best to understand the traditional costume culture and support the purchase of traditional costumes within their own capabilities, so to promote the development of traditional costumes with practical actions. Secondly, as an important carrier of national traditional costume culture, the most important thing is to find a successor and pass on the ancient sewing and knitting skills to the next generation to ensure that the cultural skills of traditional costumes will not be lost in the wheel of history. Thirdly, individuals in other regions can support traditional Uyghur costumes on the one hand, and pay attention to the inheritors of traditional crafts on the other hand, such as recording the history and culture of traditional costumes, spreading the traditional production process through short videos, etc. They can make their own contributions in ways that they can achieve, to encourage the younger generation to learn related skills and help the traditional costumes to be passed down better. Protecting cultural inheritors is another practical scheme besides promoting culture, and it is also the most direct and effective inheritance of the national traditional costume culture, and it is also one of the best ways to ensure the sustainable development of national traditional costume civilization (Li, 2017).

Through these channels, when more people understand the value of traditional Uyghur costumes, they will definitely take an active part in more daily promotion activities, thus achieving the ultimate goal of preservation and inheritance. Therefore, individual participation will effectively promote the better continuation of traditional costume culture to a great extent.

4. Conclusion

Uyghur traditional costumes have undergone numerous changes in the course of historical development. Among them, the changes in production materials and manufacturing techniques are important factors that affect the changes of costumes and also promote the traditional costumes to retain many self-cultural and national characteristics. At present, although trendy science and technology make textile technology more modular, more modern, and make clothing manufacturing more large-scale, traditional clothing has a big survival crisis and faces many development difficulties due to the lack of competitiveness in the market economy.

Faced with these problems, traditional costumes should not only learn to integrate with market culture, broaden their development paths, and expand their living space, but also strengthen exchanges with fashion culture to increase the sense of the times of traditional costumes, thus enhancing the freshness of costumes. Therefore, it will develop in a more diversified aesthetic direction. In order to achieve these goals, the government, society, and individuals need to actively participate in the protection of traditional costume culture from different angles, each playing its role and making due contributions.

However, even if different subjects show a good momentum of participation, the protection of traditional costume culture still has a long way to go, and problems such as the inheritance of modern society with multi-elements are bound to become more complicated. Different subjects should prevent possible problems from their own perspectives and minimize the unknown risks faced by traditional costumes in the next development process.

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