



Discussion On the Costumes Culture and Aesthetics

in Chinese Ethnic Minority Films

*Perbincangan Mengenai Budaya Kostum dan Estetika dalam Filem
Etnik Minoriti Cina*

Yang Sidian, Kartini Binti Aboo Talib Khalid
Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA)
National University of Malaysia (UKM)

ABSTRACT

This article uses the use of costumes in Chinese ethnic minority films as an entry point to discuss the relationship between ethnic minority costumes, costume culture, and minority culture in ethnic minority films. For example, the costumes in films about different ethnic minorities are closely related to the unique living environment, development history, and daily life of that ethnic group. At the same time, the minority costumes appearing in these films reflect the religious culture, ecological culture, and humanistic culture of the minority. When film creators process and use these costumes from an artistic perspective, they usually do so to shape the characters, express the core emotions of the film, or highlight the thematic features of the story. These practice-based explorations will provide reference and reference for the future creation and innovation of Chinese ethnic minority films and the dissemination and development of Chinese ethnic minority costume culture. At the same time, as a mass media, films can spread the culture of ethnic minorities through such channels, which can enhance the public's understanding of the cultural characteristics and aesthetic connotations of Chinese ethnic minority costumes, and help strengthen the protection and inheritance of Chinese ethnic minority costume culture.

Keywords: Chinese ethnic minority films; Film costume; Costume culture; Art aesthetics; Chinese ethnic minority culture

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini menggunakan penggunaan kostum dalam filem etnik minoriti Cina sebagai titik masuk untuk membincangkan hubungan antara kostum etnik minoriti, budaya kostum dan budaya minoriti dalam filem etnik minoriti. Sebagai contoh, pakaian dalam filem tentang etnik minoriti berbeza berkait rapat dengan persekitaran hidup yang unik, sejarah pembangunan, dan kehidupan harian kumpulan etnik tersebut. Pada masa yang sama, pakaian minoriti yang muncul dalam filem-filem ini mencerminkan budaya keagamaan, budaya ekologi, dan budaya kemanusiaan minoriti. Apabila pencipta filem



memproses dan menggunakan kostum ini dari perspektif artistik, mereka biasanya berbuat demikian untuk membentuk watak, meluahkan emosi teras filem atau menyerlahkan ciri tematik cerita. Penerokaan berasaskan amalan ini akan memberikan rujukan dan rujukan untuk penciptaan dan inovasi filem etnik minoriti Cina pada masa hadapan dan penyebaran dan pembangunan budaya kostum etnik minoriti Cina. Pada masa yang sama, sebagai media massa, filem boleh menyebarkan budaya etnik minoriti melalui saluran sedemikian, yang dapat meningkatkan pemahaman orang ramai tentang ciri-ciri budaya dan konotasi estetik pakaian etnik minoriti Cina, dan membantu mengukuhkan perlindungan dan warisan orang Cina. budaya pakaian etnik minoriti.

Kata kunci: Filem etnik minoriti Cina; Kostum filem; Budaya pakaian; Estetika seni; Budaya etnik minoriti Cina

INTRODUCTION

Ethnic minority costumes are an important part of the symbolic language of Chinese minority-themed films. They are intuitive, and the beauty and connotation of costumes are easy to interpret. Understanding the ethnic minority costumes in the film will help to follow the basic rules of film and television language and promote the realization of film and television narrative strategies, such as fully and naturally attracting more audiences, moving people's hearts in conjunction with the plot and scenes, and stimulating people's thinking or thinking. Resonance (Liu, 2009). To analyze the characteristics of costumes in movies based on Chinese ethnic minorities, we need to start from the two aspects of the origin and development of minority costumes themselves, as well as the reprocessing and re-creation of costumes in movies, to find out the relationship between costumes and culture, etc. relationship between elements. Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, extended from social practice theory, explores the relationship between social sciences and humanities, emphasizes the impact of the cultural field on social structure and personal destiny (Sun, 2011). Liu, (2009: 101-132) argued that the intertwined and contested binary oppositions between material, economic, and cultural dimensions . Within this theoretical system, costume has "field" characteristics and is an external manifestation of "habitus." That is, people use costume to express the collective similarity of classes (Zhang, 2004) and to distinguish class structures (Oklobia & Bakare, 2009), which enriches the functions of clothing in the traditional sense.

This article regards costume as a kind of film symbolic language and aims to confirm Bourdieu's interpretation of the role and significance of costume by cultural capital by analyzing the styles, characteristics, and connotations of costume in Chinese ethnic minority films. This article selects the most representative film works based on the Bai ethnic group in Dali, the Mongolian ethnic group, and the Kazakh ethnic group in Xinjiang, and analyzes the ethnic minority costumes in them, thereby exploring the



costume culture and ethnic minority culture displayed through costume in the film. The results of theoretical research provide a reference for the creation of film and television works with the same theme, such as how to fully and naturally attract more audiences through the clever use of costume language based on following the basic laws of film and television language and promoting the realization of film and television narrative strategies. Together with the plot and pictures, it touches people's hearts and arouses people's thinking or resonance. At the same time, the purpose of effectively promoting ethnic minority costume culture and minority culture is achieved.

COSTUME CULTURE IN CHINESE ETHNIC MINORITY FILMS--THE DALI BAI AS AN EXAMPLE

OVERVIEW OF DALI BAI COSTUMES

The Bai people are an ethnic minority located in southern China. They are the 14th largest ethnic group in China, with a population of approximately 1.6 million. Historically, the Bai people in Dali once established the Dali Kingdom. China's Yunnan, Guizhou, Hunan, and Guangdong provinces are the modern Bai settlement areas. Dali Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province is an area where the Bai people are concentrated, with Erhai Lake as the center and radiating to all sides. The costumes and living customs of the Bai people are relatively fixed, and their minority characteristics are relatively clear. Yang (2015) found that the famous American philosopher John Dewey once said: "The role of customs in shaping individual behavior far exceeds any impact that individuals can have on traditional customs..." The specific customs, life, and thoughts of the Bai people make the traditional production elements of Bai costume still exist in the costume of the Bai people. The costumes of the Bai people, as cultural symbols, connect the cultural traditions of the Bai people (Du & Chen, 2020), allowing the characteristics of this nation to be preserved and developed.

THE COSTUME IS BORN OUT OF A UNIQUE LIVING ENVIRONMENT

As one of the forms of social life and culture, film costumes have a distinct cultural symbolic meaning when used in them. The most primitive function of the costume is to keep out the cold, keep warm, and protect the body. Therefore, costume culture is closely related to the climate and geographical environment of the area where it was born (Zang, 2021). The materials and styles of Bai costumes reflect their practical functionality adapted to the living environment (Zheng & Hou, 2021). For example, the topography of Dali Autonomous Prefecture is relatively complex. The overall trend is high in the northwest and low in the southeast. It is interlaced with mountains, valleys, and basins, and there are many dams between the intersecting mountains. The climate is a typical high-altitude monsoon climate, with abundant sunshine, strong ultraviolet rays, warm winters, and cool summers. The rainfall distribution varies greatly



throughout the year. There are obvious dry seasons and rainy seasons. The local people have the dressing habit of "covering them with felt hats" and wearing hats during the day. Shade from the sun and use felt to keep out the cold at night. Therefore, we can see that the middle-aged and elderly men in the film "Five Golden Flowers" habitually wear felts.

The Bai area of Dali has many natural scenery and a long history of cultural resources, so the costume of Bai women often has gorgeous decorations. For example, they will wear embroidered headscarves, tie-dyed headscarves, patterned headscarves, or multi-layered headscarves that complement the natural beauty of the area. The main character in the film "Five Golden Flowers", Vice President Jinhua's love suit, wedding celebration dress, and work clothes are all typical Bai costumes. Among them, the love dress has a white lining with a dark red collar, and on the lower body, she wears a knee-length waistband and light green trousers. The hem of the waistband is decorated with bright embroidery patterns, and her head is decorated with a single braided white tasseled scarf (Pang, 2011). Such characters give people a fresh and beautiful feeling. At a glance, the audience will be reminded of the beautiful natural scenery in Dali and the beautiful mountains and rivers nurturing nice people.

COSTUME HAS A UNIQUE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The ethnic minority costumes of the Bai people in Dali have experienced changes in primitive society, the Bronze Age, the Nanzhao Kingdom, the Dali Kingdom, and the Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties, forming a relatively fixed form of Bai costumes in modern times (Zhang, 2016). The influence of each historical period has also become different elements of costume culture, which have been preserved. For example, in primitive society, the costumes of the Bai ancestors emphasized functionality and ease of work, so the sleeves only reached the elbows. This style of shirt sleeves has been retained to this day: Jinhua in the ironworks and livestock farms in the film "Five Golden Flowers" wears white shirt sleeves that reach the elbows, making it easier to work. Even if the sleeves are slightly longer, they will be habitually pushed to the elbow position during work.

During the Nanzhao Kingdom and Dali Kingdom periods, as the living areas of the Bai ancestors became increasingly stable and their productivity gradually increased, a tribe was formed. The convergence of tribal culture is reflected in the costumes: for example, in the Erhai area, both men and women tie their hair into a bun; due to the development of Central Plains culture, men's costume is mostly double-breasted clothes, and they are distinguished by color, and they prefer white appeared, and this kind of costume culture is still preserved in modern times. In the movie "Five Golden Flowers", the male protagonist Jianchuan Apeng's love and dating costumes are all double-breasted gowns and white shirts; the gowns are simple in color and have no pattern embellishments, highlighting a larger area of white; although the male protagonist is the hair is short but

still decorated with a white scarf, creating an effect similar to a bun, showing a unique ethnic mark.



FIGURE 1. The first female lead and the male lead characters of the golden flower in love suits screenshot from *Five golden flowers* (The film screenshot created by Yang, 2024)

COSTUME IS A REFLECTION OF PEOPLE'S DAILY LIVES

The geographical environment of a certain area is closely related to people's daily lives, and costumes that serve labor production will also reflect the shadow of people's work. For example, the Dali area is located at the intersection of the famous Southern Silk Road and the Ancient Tea Horse Road, so the handicraft industry has been relatively developed since ancient times. Due to economic integration, cultural prosperity has been promoted. The Han, Bai, Yi, Tibetan, and other ethnic groups all live harmoniously here. The Bai people in this area have early mastered the method of dyeing clothes with plant pigments. For instance, the tops, skirts, and headscarves of men and women in "Five Golden Flowers" are often dyed cyan with natural dyes. At the same time, inheriting the characteristics of Han costumes, the Bai costumes in Dali gradually integrated the long coats of modern Han women with the costumes of the local people and evolved into the apron in Bai women's costumes. Such as, all the

female figures in "Five Golden Flowers" wear dark black or gray aprons, with the ends of the aprons hanging down in front of their bodies.



FIGURE 2. The screenshot of the male and female protagonists in the film's *Five Golden Flowers* wearing cyan costumes (The film screenshot created by Yang, 2024)

In the early days, the Bai people usually had to carry heavy objects to transport production materials, and provided services in this way in exchange for rewards. To reduce physical discomfort, increase support points for carrying items, and increase the stability of the items being carried, men usually pad their backs with felt, and women use ropes or braids to secure their headscarves. Such costumes with the shadow of production labor have gradually changed with the evolution of people's lifestyles. For example, after they no longer need to carry goods on their backs, the headdresses on women's heads have become more complicated and colorful, more decorative than functional; the patterns and colors of the headdresses also have a more Bai ethnic flavor. These symbolic costumes also appear in large numbers in "Five Golden Flowers": felts appear on the shoulders of the young male supporting characters; the headdresses and buns that frequently appear on women's heads use a large amount of white, highlighting the Bai people's custom of "honoring whiteness"(Du & Chen, 2020; Pang, 2011; Zang,2021).

ETHNIC CULTURES EMBODIED IN THE COSTUMES OF CHINESE MINORITY FILMS- TAKE THE MONGOLS AS AN EXAMPLE

OVERVIEW OF MONGOLIAN COSTUMES

The Mongols referred to in this article are the Mongolian residents living in present-day China, with a population of 6 million. They mainly live in China's Inner Mongolia



Autonomous Region, the three northeastern provinces, and the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Mongolian costume is closely related to the grassland environment and climate in which it lives. Animal fur is often used as the main material. It is vividly called the "people on horseback"(Ge & Zhang,2020). It has a long history of development and its origin can be traced back to the tribal period. From ancient tribes' hand-sewn animal skins to making clothing, to the Yuan Dynasty, Kublai Khan established a unified dynasty, which promoted cultural integration and the progress of handicrafts. Silk fabrics were introduced to the Central Plains, bringing a new revolution in Mongolian costume production. The development and transformation of Mongolian costumes reflect rich artistic aesthetic value and historical and cultural significance. Mongolian-themed film works and Mongolian costumes have a mutual influence and complementary relationship in terms of cultural communication and aesthetic symbols (Mu,2022).

THE CULTURE OF POWER WORSHIP

In addition to being self-contained, the Mongolian minority costumes form the Mongolian costume culture and fully demonstrate the characteristic culture of the minority. People have integrated their worship of nature and life rooted in their blood into their costumes (Narigela,2022). For example, in the movie "Heavenly Grassland", the plot progresses to wintertime, and Huzi is wearing the typical costume of a Tengger boy - a dark gray Mongolian robe. The fabric of the robe is stiff and the pattern is wide and thick, which visually makes the tiger look tougher, stronger, and healthier. This kind of robe reflects the Mongolian people's worship of heroes and strength. Because the living environment, eating habits, and lifestyle of the Mongolian people determine that most ethnic people are physically strong, energetic, and powerful. The grasslands also advocate the law of the jungle. Only individuals who are strong enough can compete for more life and survival resources. This has created the Mongolian people's worship of strength. Therefore, Mongolian costumes are mostly Mongolian robes that look large and heavy, such as Barhu Mongolian robe, Horqin Mongolian robe, and Ordos Mongolian robe. In particular, the traditional Mongolian robe has wide cuffs, a full neckline and shoulders, and a loose overall shape. Take "Tuya's Marriage" as an example. In the wedding plot, even the thin Senger will give people a tall and strong feeling after wearing a Mongolian robe; people collectively wear Mongolian robes at the important event of the wedding, which further proves the recognition and attention of this costume and the admiration for the sense of strength and vitality.

THE CULTURE OF LIFE WORSHIP

The Mongolian people have lived in the grassland for a long time, and the color of the grassland is relatively simple. In summer, it is endless green, and in spring, autumn, and even winter, it is endless yellow and white. The color space is more spacious,

reflecting the singleness of the background of life. If the Mongolian people want to resist this monotony, show their warm and bold character, and show their respect and worship for life, they will supplement it with rich colors to embellish their Mongolian costumes. Such as, for the Mongolian people, each color has its unique meaning of life: red represents flames, representing passionate and unrestrained life; bright blue represents the sky and rivers, representing the source of life given by nature to the grassland; deep color represents the source of life given by nature to the grassland; the brown color represents the earth, the habitat that sustains the vitality of all living things. These colors are reflected in the costume, and we can see the bold color matching of Balhu's costume and Horqin's costume. Also in the wedding plot of the film "Tuya's Marriage", we can see that people mostly wear gorgeous Mongolian robes with life colors such as emerald green, bright blue, and pink as the main body.



FIGURE 3. In the film of *Tuya's wedding*, the people attending the wedding collectively wear gorgeous Mongolian robes with the color of life as the main body (The film screenshot created by Yang, 2024)

In addition to colors, Mongolian people also imprint their worship of life on their costumes by enriching patterns and decorations. For example, in the movie "Carved Saddle", there are many Mongolian robes decorated with swastikas that mean longevity, and Mongolian robes decorated with peony patterns that mean happiness, which means long life and long happiness. At the same time, these colorful patterns are often used to decorate Mongolian robes with main color blocks such as dark brown, navy blue, and dark green. They complement the colors and further highlight the Mongolian people's respect for life.

THE CULTURE OF THE UNITY OF HEAVEN AND HUMANITY

The Mongolian people originated from the Orgun River Basin, and the idea of "harmony between man and nature" is rooted in their national blood, that is, the national ecological outlook. It requires man and nature to achieve unity and peaceful coexistence.

As a member of nature, if humans want to obtain permanent tranquility and peace, they must reproduce and grow following the laws of nature. This culture is deeply reflected in national costumes: such as, Yan & Luan (2022) found that in the film "An Enslaved Princess", we can see that the characters' costumes are all typical robe structures, that is, wearing robes outside, heels, and boots. The robes are generally longer, even can be as long as the instep. This kind of costume mainly takes into account the natural life needs of people living in alpine areas who need to resist the severe cold: grazing robes on horseback can protect knees and calves; sleeves protect hands; slanted lapels can prevent cold air from entering; wearing robe bundles the waist can prevent cold air from convection up and down and preserve body heat. The materials for the robe are also taken from nature, including the skins of hunting animals and grazing livestock.



FIGURE 4. The characters wearing the robes image of the film *An Enslaved Princess*
 (The film screenshot created by Yang, 2024)

The culture of nature and harmony between man and nature has gradually turned into a kind of folk culture during the development and evolution of the Mongolian people and is reflected in their costumes (Han, 2021). For instance, because men have advantages in strength and physical strength in the nomadic production method, they are the concrete transformation of "Heaven", the power that dominates people's daily lives, that is, Mongolian men have absolute authority in family life. This kind of authority is shown in the "belt", a sign of manliness. People wear belts to tightly bind the soul and body given by "God". Belts cannot be given away easily, so in the movie "Genghis Khan", Borte knelt and tied Temujin's love belt.

ARTISTIC PROCESSING AND USE OF COSTUMES IN CHINESE ETHNIC MINORITY FILMS- THE CASE OF XINJIANG KAZAKHS

OVERVIEW OF KAZAKH COSTUMES IN XINJIANG

The Kazakhs in China referred to in this article are mainly concentrated in the northern Tianshan Mountains in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, showing the



characteristics of large settlements and small distribution. The Kazakhs in Xinjiang live in cold plateaus, river valleys, pastures, and other areas all year round. Therefore, their costume has strong characteristics of nomadic life in the alpine grasslands. After a long period of development, Kazakh traditional costumes are closely related to the living environment, customs, religious beliefs, and totems. The Kazakhs have created unique national traditional costumes. Kazakh-themed film and television works have become an important channel for spreading Kazakh traditional clothing culture, showing the Kazakh costume style and aesthetic characteristics, and spreading Kazakh costume culture more widely (Lu, 2017).

PORTRAYAL OF CHARACTERS

Although ethnic costumes have overall characteristics, they change with the changes in people's lifestyles and living status. In the process of creating ethnic minority-themed films, for the sake of artistic processing and application, these costumes will first be used as one of the important tools and means of character creation to strengthen visual image elements. For example, it should be used to express the character's identity, personality, and characteristics. Take the film "An Eternal Lamb" as an example, the male costumes have changed along with the changes in the male characters. At the coming-of-age ceremony for little boy Harry, teenagers, young people, middle-aged people, and old people wore different costumes respectively: when children became adults, they put on white shirts, short waistcoats, belts, and Kazakh hats that represented adults. flower hat. The father of the "new" young man and his father's peers wear long robes; but the family status of different characters, that is, the individual identities, are highlighted through the fabric and embroidered patterns of the robes. At the same time, the characteristics of the characters will be highlighted through changes in clothing accessories and color matching. For example, the person who cut off the pigtailed for the little boy Harry to complete the coming-of-age ceremony was a highly respected old Kazakh man. He wore a red hat, which symbolized the saint's The little boy's uncle is usually taciturn and wears dark clothes in this scene, which represents his dull and introverted character. In the film, Akhtai has fewer scenes but changes clothes more often. In this plot, he is Wearing a silver robe with mink velvet "Pancha" shows his handsomeness and passion, and also inspires Ukubala to resist forced marriage (Rabiya, 2017).



FIGURE 5. In the film *An Eternal Lamb*, a little boy becomes an adult and wears the costumes that represent an adult
(The film screenshot created by Yang, 2024)

EXPRESSION OF CORE EMOTIONS

As one of the languages of film and television, costume is usually used to express the emotions of characters and the emotions of film and television stories in different chapters, and then promote the main line of the film. For example, in the movie "An Eternal Lamb", Ukubala is disgusted with forced marriage, but she keeps suppressing her emotions until the handsome and swaggering Akhtai appears, and her idea of resisting the traditional marriage system is suppressed. She was completely ignited, so she dressed herself up carefully. Not only did she put on a golden satin coat, but she also put on a ring, which hinted at the character's inner emotional fluctuations and also revealed the subsequent emotional direction, that is, to meet Akhtai's love and the rise of resistance further demonstrate the character's inner yearning for a better future at this moment. After Ukubala became a widow, her clothes were mostly plain colors, and she would often appear in pictures wearing a dark headscarf. She would also wear a white salar on her shoulders at her remarriage wedding. It not only conforms to the traditional costume habits of Kazakh women but also hints at the changes in their emotions at this moment and the subtle changes in their life destiny. At the end of the movie, Ukubara puts on the "Kymishek" (a white shawl with embroidered patterns worn by Kazakh women after giving birth) (Shi, 2022) that is often worn by middle-aged and elderly women of her ethnic group, which not only strengthens the character's fate It also highlights the maternal responsibility and mission that the character has returned to at this time.



FIGURE 6. In the film *An Eternal Lamb*, Ukubara wears a Khimishek on her head
(The film screenshot created by Yang, 2024)

HIGHLIGHTING THEMATIC FEATURES

Films are a concrete form of expression of the creator's image thinking, which not only highlights the unique personal aesthetics but also has a specific theme of the film. For instance, the film "Orphan Love" is a work created by local filmmakers in Xinjiang, with the main theme of ethnic minorities resisting invaders. In the film, the language of costume and the color of the costume is cleverly used: when the male and female leader first meet, the protagonist wears a burgundy skirt, and when she goes to play by the river, she wears a red and white skirt and a red floral hat. Here, red is both love and life, paving the way for the later red regime to serve as the gathering force behind to help the Kazakh people fight against aggression. The theme of the movie "Fishermen" is that the Kazakh people's lifestyle of living for water and grass has been changed with the service and help of the government. People's lives have gradually stabilized, people's horizons have gradually broadened, and the country's favorable policies have enabled ethnic minorities to move forward. On the road to wealth. As the dramatic conflicts in the film unfolded, the costumes also changed, and gradually only the distinctive feature of married women wearing headscarves and married men wearing ethnic back hats remained. It coincides with the theme clues of the protagonist Hasimu from being unwilling to go down the mountain to raising fish and encountering investment problems after going down the mountain, from encountering technical problems in fish farming to overcoming the problem and reaping success.



FIGURE 7. In the film *Fisherman*, Women in headscarves and men in ethnic backhats
(The film screenshot created by Yang, 2024)

CONCLUSION

Chinese ethnic minority films highlight distinctive minority cultural characteristics, such as poetry culture, music culture, and religious culture. To a large extent, these cultures will be reflected through costume to achieve the purpose of highlighting the theme, advancing the story, and strengthening the emotions of the characters. The ultimate purpose of analyzing the language of costume in films is to provide ideas for the creation of ethnic minority films so that creators can take into account the communication characteristics of new and old film and television media, as well as the needs of diverse audiences and the need to spread local ethnic culture so that the film can both it has the mysterious and romantic characteristics of ethnic minorities and can bring the audience more moving and touching aesthetic experiences. At the same time, the research on this topic can show China's national cultural tradition and diversity by analyzing the cultural characteristics of ethnic minorities (Clark, 1987). To assist in the dissemination, inheritance, and development of China's ethnic minority culture, relevant staff can try to use film as a medium and use new media channels to promote ethnic culture. On the other hand, big data can be used as a thinking template to collect market evaluations and feedback on ethnic minority film.



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Yang Sidian
Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA)
National University of Malaysia (UKM)
43600 Bangi, Selangor, MALAYSIA
p121516@siswa.ukm.edu.my

Kartini Binti Aboo Talib Khalid
Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA)
National University of Malaysia (UKM)
43600 Bangi, Selangor, MALAYSIA
k_khalid@ukm.edu.my