

A Study on the Role of Outfit in the Wedding Ceremonies of the Yi Ethnic Group in Ganluo County

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Abstract: The outfits of the Yi ethnic group in Ganluo have different forms of meaning in different scenarios, such as birth ceremonial costumes, childhood ceremonial costumes, and wedding ceremonial costumes. The Yi wedding ceremonial clothing is the main subject of this study. With the author being part of the cultural identity, as well as the combination of field research, this paper provides an in-depth elaboration on the role of clothing in the Yi wedding ceremonies through diachronic and synchronic research methods.

Keywords: Ganluo county; Yi marriage customs; Etiquette; Outfit role

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1. Introduction

Genep pointed out in his book “The Rites of Passage” that most people have to go through some important rite in their life experience, from one age stage to another, from one social role or social status to another ^[1]. This includes birth, marriage, pregnancy, death, and so on, by marking the different stages of their roles with a transitional rite of passage. Turner points out that objects, activities, relationships, events, gestures, and spatial and temporal aspects in a ritual setting are symbolic ^[2]. Turner states that transitional rituals are not limited to culturally defined turning points in life, but can also be performed in open and public, as well as in secret and isolation ^[3]. Ceremonial clothing can be an indicator of the stages of life, as in the traditional concept of the Yi people, each stage of life is represented by different cultural clothing, from birth to adulthood to marriage to death, each stage has a different dress style and color taboos. The Yi women in different stages of life have different dress patterns, which embody the cultural psychology and collective identity consciousness of the different ethnic groups ^[4].

A Yi woman undergoes a coming-of-age ceremony at the age of 15 or 16, which is called *Shalaluo* in Yi language, meaning changing of a child’s skirt. This ceremony is more common in the Ganlo areas that speak the *Yinuo* and *Shengzha* dialects. This coming-of-age ceremony is held by a fire, where a woman with

many children and grandchildren from the village dresses the bride. Then, the girl is taken to the bottom of a tree or beside a rock for the ceremony by changing into a three-tiered pleated skirt. This marks the end of the ceremony, in which the girl is allowed to socialize with members of the opposite sex to get married and have children. At this point, the girl will no longer be considered part of her family and will be separated from them.

This ceremony contains the cultural connotation of the Yi procreation traditions. However, this ceremony does not exist in the Qumusu area at Tianba, southwestern part of Ganluo. According to Ma, the rite of passage is held in a patriarchal culture to control the residency and safety of the soul ^[5]. The change of hair ornaments, earrings, skirts, and other accessories in the dressing of the coming-of-age ceremony signifies that the woman has to begin to take on her responsibilities and duties, by getting married, having children, and playing a good motherly role.

2. Wedding tradition and outfit in Tianba, Ganluo

For the Yi wedding, both the bride and the groom have to wear newly-made wedding clothes. Especially when the bride gets married, she has to accept the new decoration made by other women for her. The bride should wear a new colorful dress, drape a dark blue shawl, spread out her braids, wear a triangular turban bundled from a three-foot-long red cloth, and then finally have a beautiful flower scarf tied with a floral cloth placed on her head. When the Yi girls in Ganluo are at the age of marriage, their mothers will prepare a set of Yi dress dowry, and those who can sew will personally make the wedding clothes for their daughter. The dress is divided into an inner long-sleeved layer and an outer coat layer, both of which are placketed on the right. The outer coat layer is unbuttoned to be loose and comfortable for the bride at the time of the bride snatching. The chest area and ends of the sleeve of the dress are embroidered with a variety of motifs of plants, shapes, buildings, and other embroidery, which is the similarity between pleated skirts and girl's dresses. The head-dress consists of two parts, one of which is the gauze worn on both sides of the head and the forehead, just enough to conceal the face, while the other consists of a collar sewn to a scarf that is shown to be particularly delicate, dignified, and temperate ^[6].

2.1. Crying marriage song “Marriage Origin”

The Yi crying marriage song “Marriage Origin” is recorded as follows:

When mountain and stone get married, who shall be the one in charge? The oak forest shall be the matchmaker. What shall be used for the wedding? Leaves and red flowers shall be used for the wedding. When nobles of the *Heiguo* tribe get married, who shall be the one in charge? *Makodachi* shall be the matchmaker. What shall be used for the wedding? Gold and silver shall be used for the wedding ^[7].

Young girls will accompany the bride with felt-covered heads to sing “Mother’s Daughter” while spinning a few turns, and each girl will be in tears after the felt is removed. This is a parting scene between close companions that is quite touching. Then, the bride starts to get dressed up, bride snatching will start when she is done ^[8]. The Yi folk song “Making the Dowry” is as follows:

What are you making? Who are you making it to wear? A girl wearing a turban and betrothal gift, friends and relatives that see it each will give praises. We are making the necklace, making it for the girl to wear, and the groom will smile upon seeing it. We are making the dowry and the headscarf, making it for the girl to wear, and the groom will smile upon seeing it... ^[9].

In the Ganluo area, the bride has to wear a Yi dress when singing the crying marriage song with a black outer coat, and she has to cover her face while crying and listening. In the old days, the girls sang the song by themselves, but now the village women sing the crying marriage for them. The crying marriage songs in Tianba,

Ganluo mainly consist of songs such as “Gold and silver bracelets”, “*Amorija*”, “*Jada*”, and “Geese flying over” which still circulate in the village. These songs are sung as duets or sing-along, with euphemistic and long tones that show the reality and bleakness of the crying marriages.

2.2. Bride decoration

After singing the crying marriage song, the Yi dowry began to be displayed. Family members will lead the bride outdoors to sit on a bamboo basket in the shade of trees and begin the bride’s decoration. The bride’s non-widow sister is the most suitable person to perform the decorating. The decorator will drink one or two mouths of wine before combing the bride. After combing, a cloth is draped over the bride’s head, with a veil and flower headdress added, and a simple tailored-made dress is put on. The red skirt is favored in Northern Zhaojue, while the blue and white skirt is favored in the East. The Shizhe district regards a borrowed skirt to be the best, as it is said to avoid pain and illness, and the skirt lender is thanked with wine and meat. When the bride is finished with her makeup, she covers her head with a piece of felt and rests a little^[10]. The lower skirt called *Pingyi* and silver headdress silver called *Ori* in Yi language need to be borrowed, and two kilograms of white wine must be repaid to the lender each upon returning. Borrowing the *Shupa* required the male family to carry a piece of meat on his back. The clothes vest is made by others, while all the dowries are handmade. With the continuous improvement of living standards, families nowadays will prepare a dowry for their daughters, without having to borrow from elsewhere.

At the end of the crying marriage song, the bride wearing a full set of new clothes, pants, and shoes, steps out of the door at the appointed moment while guided by the village women. At this moment, the parents can no longer look out of the door and have to weep silently at home. The bride sits demurely on a mat spread outside the door, with hands clasped. The headdress is symbolically combed by a little girl with a suitable Chinese zodiac sign. The bride’s head is first sprayed with *Gangan* wine, and combed with a Yi wooden comb, then the wooden comb is given to a local blessed woman to finish combing. The hair braid passed on by the mother is used to braid the combed hair into a single braid, with the tip wrapped with red string and tied into a bow style^[10]. Several women will fix the cotton scarf together at one end, wrapping from right to left for nine turns, forming the shape of a large hat, with the last layer covering the top. This covers the chin of the bride from the shoulder, with only a small part of the chin shown, to express the shyness of the Yi girl. The *Ori*, a red cloth collar inlaid with silver pieces and sewn with silver tassels is wrapped around the scarf and sewn in place with a needle. Three strings of agate beads with silver tassels are crossed to form nine triangles at the top of the headdress and fixed in the middle with a needle. The nine corners are also sewn together with the scarf. The bride’s headdress is thus completed after two white feathers are inserted. The hand ornaments consist of two silver bracelets and three rings that are passed down from the family or bought beforehand. When Yi girls in Tianba get married, the wedding dress is usually all handmade by relatives. The wedding dress consists of two parts, one is the long-sleeved round-neck right-placketed dress worn inside, and the other is the long-sleeved right-placketed dress worn outside. Only the inner dress needs to be buttoned, while the outer dress does not. The inner dress is red, while the outer dress is royal yellow, which is bright and colorful when viewed from afar. As for the lower wear, the pleated skirt has many pleats and is in tricolors of red-green-pink or red-green-yellow. The waist area of the skirt has a red or green ring, while the hemline has a red or pink ring. The hemline also has a colorful circle of appliqués. The belt is generally golden yellow. A decorative purse embroidered with patterns is hung diagonally on the right of the belt. The purse used to be filled with threads and needles in the past but is now mainly filled with a bit of cash given by the mother that represents traveling money to express the love of the mother^[7].

2.3. Entering the groom's house

After the banquet, the “*Asihe*” antiphonal song which is also a type of crying marriage song is sung. The song is about a girl on horseback, horse riding is the norm in the past, traveling over nine mountains and nine rivers, across thousands of miles to marry into the groom's family. The song praises the girl's courage, pleads with the groom's family to cherish her, praises the groom's family for their great achievements, and praises the groom's family for their kindness and generosity. Finally, the bride continues to follow the singer with her guests while wearing the shawl and slowly follows the rhythm of the song to the groom's house step by step. The sisters-in-law of the groom will close and block the door until the singer reaches the center of the house, only then the groom and guests will be let in. Food is requested after entering the house. The shawl can also be taken off for the brothers to hold. As the bride has not eaten for one day and a night, she requests a pair of chickens from the groom's family ^[1]. The bride will eat while accompanied by a younger sister from the groom's family and perform the gift (*kaba*) exchange ceremony. The bride will give 100 yuan to the sister-in-law, and then the sister-in-law will give back double the money amount, which symbolizes that the sister-in-law welcomes the arrival of the bride and is happy to have the bride as sister-in-law. Finally, when entering the new house, the Yi people have placed great importance on taboos and etiquette since ancient times, so they do not have the custom of guests playing pranks with the newlyweds, but this phenomenon has emerged in recent years due to the influence of other cultures. The next day, the guests will return while the bride and brothers remain with the groom's family to wait for a home return date. After the bride is married into the groom's family, she can only return and visit her home after 3 days or 9 days based on the *Bimo* divination result ^[2].

3. The social significance of Yi costumes in wedding ceremonies

The Yi tribe in Liangshan is a slaveholder society that is divided into *Tusi*, *Bimo*, *Heiyi*, and *Baiyi*, and their costumes differ in style, color, and texture. In terms of color, the Yi people in Liangshan refer to black as the color of nobles, so the *Heiyi* clothing is mainly black, while the clothes of the *Baiyi* people are more bright and colorful. In terms of style, the higher the rank, the higher the number of layers of their dupatta and the more they have to wear wool and cotton shoes, while the people in lower ranks wear jute shoes. In terms of texture, the *Tusi* people generally wear clothing made of cloth and silk purchased from the Han area, the *Pimo* people wear eagle-clawed hats, vestments, boar tusks collars, and sheepskin bags, and so on, the *Heiyi* people wear cotton clothes, while the *Baiyi* people only wear wool and sackcloth clothing made by themselves. The difference in age groups is generally seen in the headdress. For example, female children wear cockscomb hats, while underage women wear a single braid with 11 layers of square cloth, silver earrings, and a plaided dress with three colors ^[2].

4. Conclusion

The uniqueness of weddings in the Yi tribe can be presented in their wedding clothing and ceremonies, The Yi clothing shows the different ceremonial processes of the wedding, presenting different cultural expressions in different ceremonial settings by changing the colors, shapes, and patterns of the costumes. The most prominent change is in the Yi headdress, which ranges from bright colors to plain colors and then to black color linings, which represent the cultural phenomenon of before, during, and after marriage. This also reflects the Yi people's identity status, such as gender and age, and the successful change in their social status. The Yi clothing which initially was a basic survival tool for the cold, now serves as a cultural identity for the tribe. The Yi clothing has been endowed with a cultural connotation that symbolizes power, dignity, faith, and so on. As mentioned

earlier, the Yi wedding ceremony is a rite of passage of life that showcases different Yi clothing characteristics in different scenarios.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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