

# AN INVESTIGATION ON THE ADAPTATION OF TRADITIONAL NAXI COSTUME ELEMENTS INTO CONTEMPORARY CLOTHING

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## ABSTRACT

The Naxi ethnic group in China has a rich and extensive history. Their remarkable traditional attire has been recognised and designated as a "living" culture by the United Nations (Wang, 2017). Nevertheless, due to shifting trends and lifestyles, contemporary society, particularly the younger generation, is progressively disregarding traditional attire. As a result, designers have incorporated diverse influences, such as blending contemporary ideas with traditional cultural features, in order to create "modern clothing" that may endure and gain international recognition while preserving the legacy of fashion. Hence, it is imperative to foster the development of Naxi heritage, just as it is done for other ethnic groups. This includes the crucial integration of Naxi motive aspects into contemporary culture. This study aims to investigate the attributes of traditional clothing elements of the Naxi ethnic group. It will employ questionnaires to examine the community's perspectives and preferences regarding the innovative design of Naxi clothing elements. The objective is to both preserve the cultural essence of these elements and achieve innovative designs. By doing so, Naxi clothing can showcase the allure of new culture and art.

**Keywords:** Naxi ethnic group, Traditional costume, Heritage, Modern clothing, Inspired design

## INTRODUCTION

The Naxi ethnic group, which has been in existence since the Han Dynasty, is one of the minority groups in China. Currently, the bulk of this ethnic group resides in Yunnan, China. According to the 2021 data from the National Bureau of Statistics, the projected population of the Naxi ethnic group in Yunnan is approximately 323,800 inhabitants. Naxi traditional dress culture, a significant aspect of the long-standing Naxi culture, possesses a distinctive visual allure owing to its diverse range, vibrant colours, and plenty of unique patterns and styles (Ma, 2016). Furthermore, every piece and design found on Naxi traditional dress carries a cultural significance and conveys historical and social evolution. As an illustration, the embroidered seven star appearance worn by Naxi women represents the skill and bravery of Naxi women (Wang, 2014).

Presently, there is a growing emphasis in contemporary fashion on national attributes, particularly the incorporation of ethnic traditional culture into the design of modern garments. As a result of the co-infiltration of contemporary and traditional ethnic art, contemporary apparel designs increasingly incorporate traditional patterns. Utilising traditional artistic elements is now a key component of contemporary fashion design and a current trend. For instance, contemporary clothing designs incorporate hues that are associated with traditional cultures. Consequently, contemporary apparel design not only fulfils utilitarian needs but also incorporates distinctive artistic qualities by incorporating ethnic and cultural elements (Li & Zhang, 2021), thereby enabling the expression of traditional cultural attributes. Additionally, contemporary trends among young individuals are apparel designs that combine elements of ethnicity and modernity, which piques their interest more. This demonstrates that the practical, durable, and traditional Naxi ethnic attire has the capacity to be incorporated into contemporary design.

The fusion of traditional Naxi attire with contemporary fashion effectively conveys the cultural and artistic character of the Naxi people to the next generation. The desire to safeguard Naxi culture and identity indirectly contributes to the advancement of the Naxi people by raising the significance of Naxi cultural impact on modern clothing design and enhancing the cultural allure and artistic value of traditional Naxi attire (Wang, 2014). Thus, incorporating features of Naxi attire into contemporary clothing design serves as an alternate method to globally promote the relatively lesser-known Naxi culture.

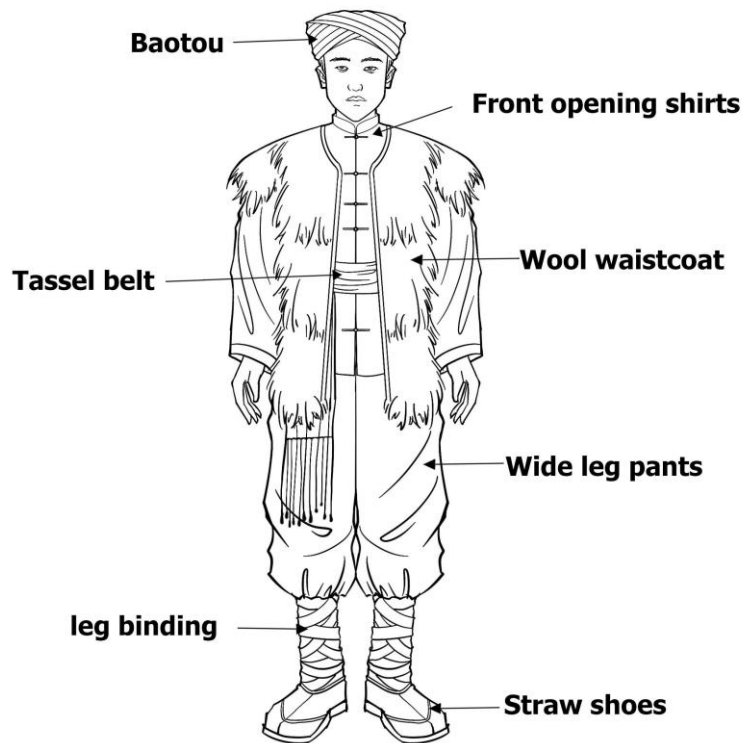
Consequently, this will enhance the dissemination of knowledge and foster greater comprehension and appreciation for the Naxi ethnic culture. This can facilitate the synchronisation of the advancement of modernization and innovation in current clothes, specifically apparel that draws inspiration from traditional Naxi characteristics. Hence, the primary objective of this project is to create contemporary attire that draws inspiration from Naxi elements. This study investigates the respondents' willingness to accept and their perception of incorporating the fundamental aspects of Naxi culture into contemporary clothing design. The aim is to create Naxi-inspired modern clothing that is rooted in traditional Naxi culture, while also incorporating modern fashion aesthetics, aligning with current trends, and fulfilling the visual and social needs of modern society.

## **NAXI TRADITIONAL COSTUME DESIGNS**

In ancient Naxi culture, men donned short garments and long trousers, while women wore short dresses and long skirts (Zhao, 2008). Prior to the Qing Dynasty, the attire of the Naxi people consisted of white garments for the youthful and robust individuals, but the elderly individuals donned black attire as a symbol of reverence and the esteemed status of the wearer.

### **Naxi Men Clothings**

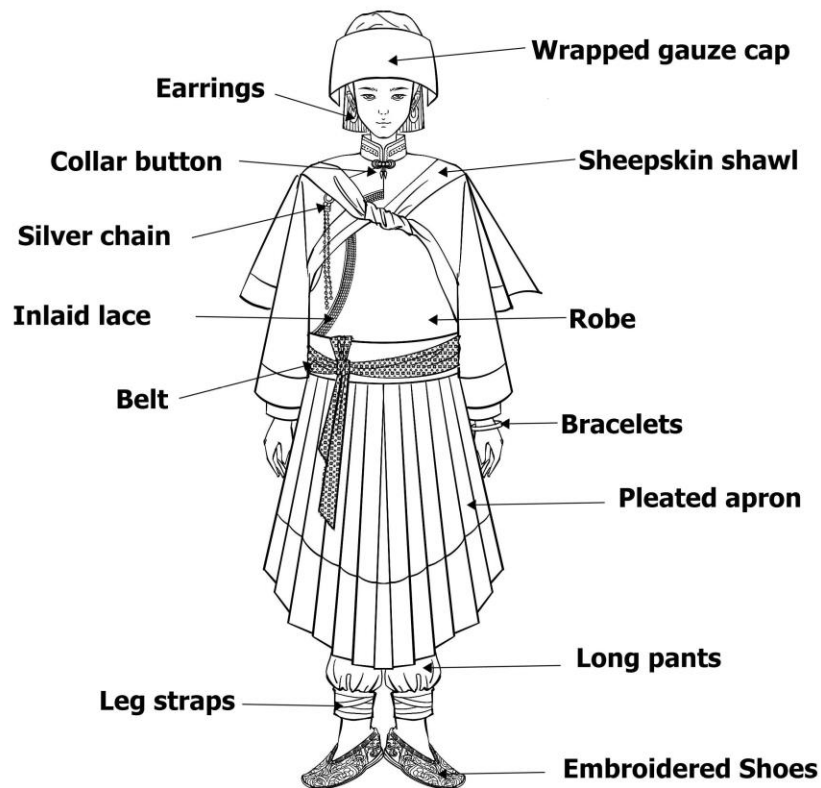
Naxi men's attire is characterised by its simplicity, vibrant hues, and an overall appearance that exudes purity and naturalness. The typical men's dress in the Lijiang area, generally referred to as the "three-piece" ensemble, comprises of a roomy jacket, a waistcoat, and pants (refer to Figure 1). Occasionally, additional embellishments such as a belt, hat, or headband are added. The majority of men's tops are characterised by long sleeves and stand-up collars. The predominant colour scheme is monochrome, with black, white, and red being particularly prevalent. Additionally, they may opt to wear sheepskin waistcoats depending on the prevailing weather conditions. The cuffs are typically adorned with floral motifs or vibrant hues to accentuate the elegance of the design. The majority of guys choose to wear wide-legged pants underneath to enhance comfort during their employment. The lower hem of the trousers frequently incorporates vibrant hues or intricately embroidered features to enhance the cultural significance. Furthermore, Naxi males adorn themselves with distinctive attire, including jackets, robes, and armour, for significant events.



**Figure 1.** Naxi traditional men's clothing

### **Naxi Women Clothings**

Women will don a traditional dress characterised by a loose fit, wide sleeves, a shorter front hemline, and a longer rear hemline. The dress is accompanied by a pleated apron that resembles a skirt. The upper portion of the dress features a collar and is accompanied by a "right lapel". Additionally, a red "Pulu" vest is worn, which is fastened at the waist with a lavishly adorned belt. Subsequently, the cuff will be positioned on the arm, extending to the elbow. The sheepskin scarf is draped over the shoulders, with the back adorned with an exquisite "seven stars" design. He (1991) asserts that the "Seven Star" sheepskin scarf has the benefit of providing warmth to the body and offering extra protection to the shoulders and back during rainy weather. It has evolved into a significant emblem and representation of Naxi women's attire. A huge ebony cotton turban will be wrapped around their head, along with substantial silver earrings. Naxi women traditionally wear dark-colored trousers on the lower half of their body. These trousers are secured with a belt composed of black, white, and blue cotton cloth, which is sewed with pleats at the waist. Ultimately, women will don embroidered or fabric footwear.



**Figure 2.** Naxi traditional women's clothing

## PREVIOUS STUDIES

The presence of digital technology and the competitive nature of the Chinese clothing market have enhanced the variety of clothing concepts and designs. This has also heightened the local community's preference and desire for the quality of apparel designs offered in the market. This has motivated fashion designers to produce fashion designs that draw inspiration from certain cultures, resulting in a fresh and unique aesthetic. Traditional cultural features are being incorporated into modern garment design to add a distinct charm to the fashion industry (Zhang, 2016). Furthermore, as clothing globalisation progresses, "ethnic" fashionable clothing has gained widespread popularity. Many designers have incorporated the fundamental elements of ethnic clothing - deconstruction, reassembly, and fusion with modern fabrics, contemporary fashion, advanced sewing techniques, and unique craftsmanship. This results in an innovative and novel approach to fashion (Lu, 2016). These characteristics have emerged as the foundation of contemporary fashion design, propelling the market economy and advancing China's historic cultural legacy.

In Huang's (2016) research, the analysis focuses on the diversity of embroidered components used by the Zhuang ethnic group in Guangxi. These elements not only represent a vibrant culture and colour but also find application in current fashion design. This research aims to explore the integration of Zhuang needlework into contemporary clothing design, with the goal of preserving the cultural significance of Zhuang clothing. By doing so, it seeks to ensure the continued appreciation and popularity of Zhuang embroidery and clothes among a wider audience. Gao (2019) examined the creative manifestation of design, colour, pattern, and ornamentation among the She ethnic group in Fujian. The design of the "Phoenix Dress" apparel reflects the cultural features and conveys a profound and aesthetically pleasing message. The visual representation of traditional Chinese clothing is heavily affected by historical culture and social style, inheriting a wealth of creative legacy. Wang and Xun

investigate the significance of traditional Chinese ethnic cultural components in contemporary fashion design in the year 2023. They stressed the need of openly sharing design characteristics and cultural principles to promote design creativity and the creation of contemporary apparel items influenced by ethnic cultural motifs.

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In various nations, Qurashi (2020) conducted a study on traditional Siwa clothing in women's fashion. The aim was to develop innovative design solutions that strike a harmonious balance between traditional and contemporary elements. The primary objective was to preserve the original design of traditional clothing while enhancing its fashion appeal and catering to the preferences and sizes of consumers. The findings of Iuga's 2016 study indicate that the current popularity of local clothing in the Maramuresh region of northern Romania has garnered significant attention. This popularity is driven by two factors: the preservation of traditional local styles and the emergence of a new trend that blends traditional cultural characteristics. Every location possesses its unique traditional ethnic culture and dress. Conducting research on integrating modern fashion with sustainability is crucial for the production of new apparel that meets current demands and promotes sustainable practices. The ongoing trend involves the exploration of traditional clothing materials and elements by clothing design experts. This trend also highlights the potential for integrating Chinese ethnic traditional clothing culture with modern and contemporary styles for display in the fashion industry.

## **THE VALUE OF NAXI CULTURE IN MODERN CLOTHING DESIGNS**

The wearing of traditional attire, which is closely tied to identity (Pangayan et al, 2018), has experienced significant changes over time and is gradually being disregarded in contemporary culture (Yu, 2006; Wu, 2016). The influence of this has been significant on Chinese attire, particularly traditional attire, serving as a symbol of cultural heritage for each ethnic group in China (Zou and Jin, 2018). Similarly, contemporary fashion trends are also exerting a substantial influence on Naxi clothing, leading to its growing abandonment by the younger population and a decline in public awareness of traditional Naxi attire. Current fashion designers consider it important to elevate the culture and legacy of Naxi clothes.

Furthermore, it is essential to recognise and comprehend the motivational potential of conventional components in contemporary design culture, as this is essential for considering customer preferences (Qiu et al, 2023). For instance, the selection of hues and design motifs, as well as the incorporation of cultural elements that align with current consumer preferences and trends. Currently, several research studies are employing the "human-centered design" approach to examine fashion clothes. However, there is a scarcity of available literature that delves into customer perceptions and preferences about ethnic-themed clothing on the market. As people's understanding and appreciation of heritage development grow, there is an

increasing need for innovative approaches to ensure functional connectivity in clothing. Design innovation plays a crucial role in the evolution of clothes, particularly in apparel that draws inspiration from the increasingly overlooked Naxi cultural elements. In order to cater to the particular preferences and aesthetic sensibilities of the public, it is essential to enhance the quality and balance of the fusion between modern and traditional elements in contemporary Naxi apparel.

This study aims to address the disparity in consumers' perceptions and preferences regarding ethnic-themed clothing designs in the Chinese market, specifically focusing on modern clothing designs with Naxi cultural themes. It seeks to achieve this by offering valuable insights into human-centered design (HCD) theory and providing design guidance for ethnic-themed clothing. This study is crucial for assessing the wearer's preferences in clothing design and determining the effectiveness of using Naxi components to create a contemporary clothing style that is influenced by Naxi culture and has a modern creative and visual sensibility. The fusion of Naxi culture with contemporary fashion is anticipated to spearhead the prevailing trend and pave the way for the expansion of indigenous clothes.

## METHODS

In order to prevent the flattening and homogeneity of products, the development of clothes inspired by Naxi components should incorporate unique designs that cater to consumer preferences. Additionally, the proportions of design elements should be adjusted to ensure that the clothing is visually and functionally coordinated. A comprehensive survey approach was implemented to gather the opinions and preferences of the community about the continuation of successful creative design and to establish a theoretical foundation for the development of modern apparel inspired by distinctive Naxi features. The research utilised random sampling to get input from a total of 110 respondents. This questionnaire assesses five primary areas: i) demographic data, ii) incorporation of traditional Naxi clothing design, iii) clothing categories, iv) inclusion of Naxi elements, and v) Naxi Motif Design Appertain.

## RESULTS

### Demographic Respondents

In this study, there were a total of 110 participants. Out of them, 55 were male and 55 were female, making up 50% each of the total number of questionnaire findings. This information is presented in Table 1.

Gender of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Male	50.00%
Female	50.00%

The participants aged between 21-30 years constitute 31.81% of the total, followed by 26.36% in the age category of 31-40, and 24.54% in the age range of 15-20 (See Table 2). This data indicates that over 81% of the participants are highly likely to purchase clothes goods on the market.

Age Levels of Respondents	Percentage (%)
15 - 20	24.54%
21 - 30	31.81%

31 - 40	26.36%
41 - 50	11.81%
Over 50	5.45%

### Modern Innovative Perceptions

The successful and sustained growth of contemporary clothes influenced by Naxi ethnic culture relies heavily on the perspectives and approval of the local population. This includes the promotion of traditional components, raising awareness, and ensuring market viability. Consequently, 87.14% of the respondents strongly agreed, according to the findings. (See Table 3). This indicates that younger adults have developed a strong affinity for the fusion of traditional cultural aspects with modern attire.

**Table 3.** Attitudes towards the inheritance and development of Naxi dress culture

Perceptions of Adaption Traditional Naxi Costume in modern clothings	Percentage (%)
Supports	87.14%
Disagrees	12.86%

### Clothing Categories Profile Perceptions

The majority of traditional garments do not accentuate the visually pleasing contours of the human physique and often employ a straightforward, unadorned design. To design contemporary garments influenced by "Naxi" motifs. The selection of the new clothing profile was conducted, as indicated in Table 4. Among the participants, 62.86% opted for the popular style, which was optimised. 17.14% chose the dress option, while 1.43% preferred the everyday work attire. Additionally, 18.57% selected the creative form of clothes to be showcased on stage. This indicates that most participants are more willing to enhance the contemporary clothing style of the new minimalist "Naxi" theme, and they contemplate basic embellishments such as sportswear.

**Table 4.** Preferences Clothing Categories that combine ethnic and fashionable design

Clothing categories	Percentage (%)
Daily Wear	62.86%
Dress	17.14%
Work Wear	1.43%
Creative Stage Wear	18.57%

### Inclusion of Naxi Costume Elements Perceptions

The components of shape, style, colour, fabric, craft, and pattern play a vital part in conveying the major connotation of clothes visually and also have a significant role in determining the garment's performance. The rise of consumer fashion has led to a focus on colour, pattern, and shape (such as embroidery and tie-dye) as key elements in the creation of contemporary clothes influenced by the "Naxi" ethnic group. According to the data in Table 5, 70% of the participants selected the colour component, 74.29% chose the pattern

element, and 85.71% chose the form factor (specifically embroidery and tie-dye). The majority of responses show a clear preference for classic and exquisite needlework as well as natural tie-dye. This involves selecting colours and patterns that complement the clothing style for a cohesive look. The utilisation of pattern elements, the traditional Naxi colour application, and the thoroughness of the fundamental Naxi shape will impact their inclination to don the novel design of contemporary attire put out in this investigation.

**Table 5.** Respondents' Preferences towards Inclusion of Naxi Costume Elements

<b>Costume Design Factors</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Forms (Embroidery and Tie-dye)	85.71%
Style	52.86%
Color	70.00%
Fabric	67.14%
Craft	68.57%
Pattern	74.29%

### **Naxi Motif Design Appertain Perceptions**

Motifs are a significant component in garment design, typically serving a decorative function. According to Table 5, the public's preference for the type of Naxi clothing design is widely popular, with a majority of 67.14%. The choice to inherit the implications of Naxi culture was made by 28.57 % of the population, while another 4.29 % decided for concrete concepts for fashion. According to prevailing trends, there are two methods for innovating Naxi designs. The first approach involves preserving the unique design of the classic theme while ensuring that the original features of the motif are not compromised. The second approach involves the fusion of traditional patterns and trendy cultural components through inventive designs, resulting in the transformation of classic motif designs into fashionable cultural elements. These two innovation paths can utilise the principles of formal beauty to implement innovative designs. By employing techniques such as rearrangement, replication, deformation, and displacement, they can create new motif patterns and arrangements with fresh ideas. This process results in a change in the overall shape of the motif while preserving its underlying meaning. The incorporation and advancement of trendy culture not only maintains the distinctive attributes of Naxi, but also enhances the appeal of the theme aspects for contemporary individuals.

**Table 6.** Respondents' Preferences of Naxi Motif Design Appertain

<b>Motif Design Concepts</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Popular Style	67.14%
Remain Traditional Style	28.57%
Fit to Fashions	4.29%

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The traditional Naxi attire encompasses intricate designs and components that hold profound historical importance. Its style, form, and substance serve as a reflection of the Naxi people's perspective on life. The exploration and development of the beautiful imagery of traditional Naxi clothing patterns, along with their cultural significance, should be widely pursued. Incorporating Naxi patterns and elements into modern clothing not only represents a



juxtaposition of modern and classic styles, but also serves as an innovative means of expressing traditional culture. This approach imbues the clothing with a rich historical and traditional essence, while also appealing to the younger generation of today. Traditional clothing represents the cultural legacy and serves as the foundation for contemporary fashion. Conversely, modernism signifies the progression and evolution of traditional components. This study examines the correlation between contemporary design, costume heritage, and the fashion development cycle. It emphasises the need for modern fashion designers to analyse and employ their creativity in merging traditional clothing patterns with modern designs. By incorporating traditional clothing patterns into modern clothing design, the study aims to promote Naxi ethnic culture, infuse a fresh perspective into modern fashion, and stimulate the growth of diverse clothing industries. This research aims to broaden the range of design themes, embrace contemporary fashion trends, achieve new design workmanship, and provide functional relevance for the widespread preservation of ethnic clothing culture, based on the perspectives of the respondents.

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