

**AGE STRATIFICATION AND INDIVIDUAL AESTHETICS IN THE
CLOTHING OF THE YI ETHNIC GROUP'S SODI WOMEN IN
PANZHIHUA CITY**

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the connection between age stratification and individual aesthetics in the clothing of Sodi women from the Yi ethnic group in Panzhihua City through in-depth interviews. The research reveals that the clothing of Yi Sodi women demonstrates distinct age-stratified characteristics in color, patterns, and styling. These characteristics not only reflect how social norms influence individual aesthetics but also illustrate how individuals express their personal styles within these normative frameworks. The younger generation, through innovative designs and personalized styling, embodies modern aesthetic concepts while preserving traditions. This study highlights that Yi ethnic clothing serves not only as a means of cultural inheritance but also as a crucial tool for individual self-expression and identity construction.

Keywords: Clothing style; Age Stratification; Individual Aesthetics; Yi Ethnic Group, Cultural Inheritance

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Panzhihua City, located at the border of Sichuan and Yunnan Provinces in southwestern China, sits on the eastern edge of the Hengduan Mountains. Since ancient times, it has functioned as a vital corridor for the migration and integration of various ethnic groups. As one of the most ethnically diverse regions in Sichuan Province, it is home to the Han, Yi, Lisu, Miao, and other ethnic communities, creating a unique pattern of cultural symbiosis. The clothing of Yi Sodi women, as a vital component of ethnic culture, not only embodies rich historical and cultural connotations but also reflects the age stratification and individual aesthetic concepts within Yi society. Against the backdrop of globalization and modernization, examining the interactive relationship between age stratification and individual aesthetics in Yi Sodi clothing is crucial for understanding the dynamic balance between ethnic cultural inheritance and individual expression.

The clothing culture of Yi Sodi women embodies a rich phenomenon of age stratification. This stratification system not only reflects the ethnic group's worldview but also conveys the transformation of social roles. This study aims to explore the age-stratified characteristics of the clothing worn by Yi Sodi women in Panzhihua, analyze how individuals express their aesthetic preferences within the framework of social norms, and further investigate the impact of this interactive relationship on the inheritance of Yi clothing culture. Through in-depth telephone interviews, this research aims to uncover the mechanisms behind the evolution of Yi

clothing in modern society and how individual aesthetics balance tradition and modernity, thereby understanding the adaptation processes of ethnic minority cultures modernization.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes an in-depth interview method, focusing on 95 Yi Sodi women aged 14 to 79 in Panzhihua City, conducted through telephone interviews. The interview questions revolved around clothing color, patterns, styling, and individual aesthetic choices, aiming to gather firsthand data and understand the personal perceptions and usage habits of Yi Sodi women concerning their attire.

3.0 AGE STRATIFICATION CHARACTERISTICS OF YI SODI WOMEN'S CLOTHING IN PANZHIHUA CITY

3.1 Color Stratification

In-depth Interviews reveal that the clothing color system displays distinct characteristics stratified by age. Variations in color can reflect the wearer's age, marital status, and gender. (Zheng, 2017; Gao, 2022). Among adolescent girls (aged 14-25), clothing colors predominantly showcase high-saturation hues such as bright red, hot pink, and light yellow, resulting in strong contrasts with black base fabrics. Young female interviewees often remarked that these vibrant colors "bloom youth like mountain flowers" (direct quote from a 21-year-old respondent), embodying the pursuit of vital energy (Guo, 2018). The clothing styles of middle-aged women (26-50 years old) transition to muted tones like liver brown, dark green, and deep blue, along with a notable increase in the use of black. The attire of older women (over 51 years) is further simplified, dominated by large swathes of black, with color retained only in local elements like sky-blue headscarves. A 79-year-old elder explained: "Black is the color of ancestors—wearing it feels like being wrapped in wisdom."

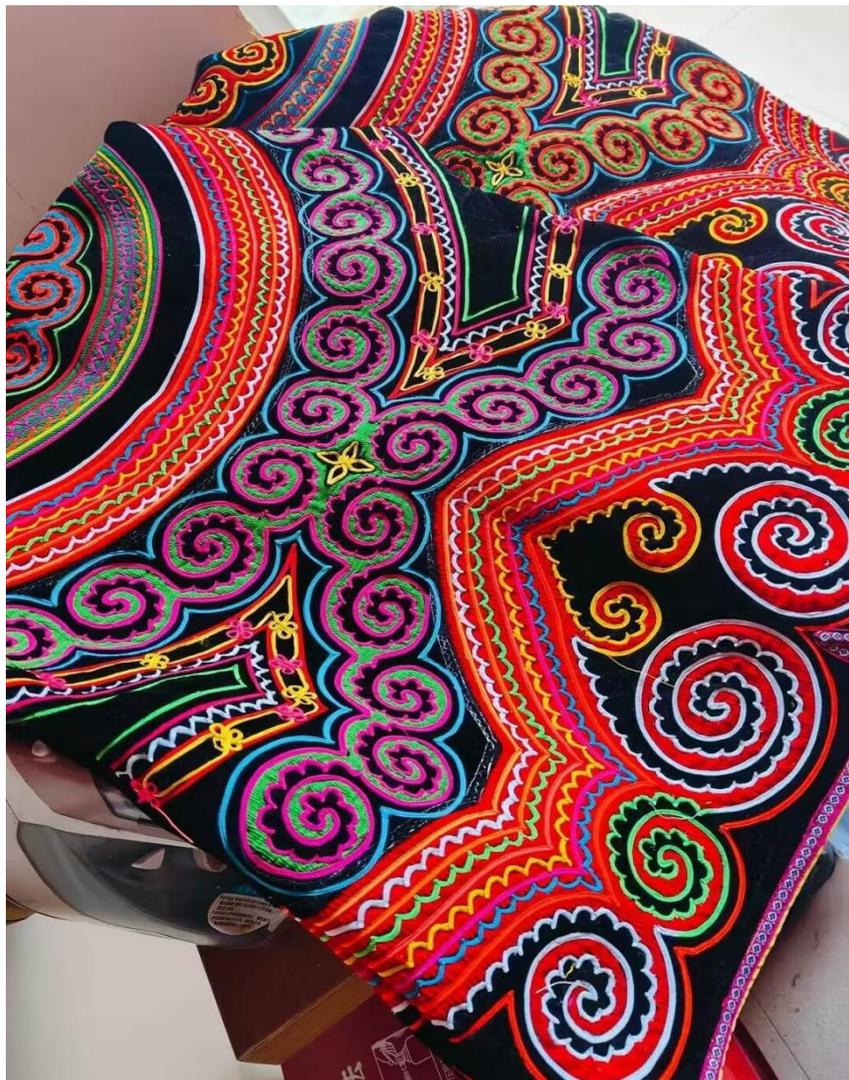
Notably, this age stratification is reflected not only in the main body colors but also in every detail of the accessory system: young women's belts are often woven with multicolored silk threads, and silver ornaments are adorned with tassels; middle-aged women's silverware highlights a sense of weight; elderly women retain the most traditional plain wide belts and simple headscarves. This systematic color stratification mechanism serves both as a visual coding of life courses and as a system for identity recognition within the ethnic group.

3.2 Pattern Stratification

The study reveals that the use of patterns in the clothing of Yi Sodi women also shows remarkable age-stratified characteristics, a stratification that both follows traditional norms and incorporates individual aesthetic choices. The most representative goat horn pattern, a traditional symbol of warding off evil and blessing in Yi culture, shows notable differences in application across age groups (Shi, 2023). Teenage girls' jackets feature various goat horn patterns (Figure 1); In the clothing of middle-aged women, goat horn patterns not only decrease in number but also tend to become more regular, mostly serving as linear decorations; whereas the attire of elderly women nearly completely abandons goat horn patterns in favor of simple linear designs that exude a profound and mysterious aesthetic (Ding, 2023).

Such generational differences in pattern selection reflect significant cultural reasoning: the dynamic styling of goat horn patterns resonates with the psychological trait of young people seeking vibrancy, while geometric patterns such as straight lines and meander patterns appeal to the aesthetic preferences of middle-aged and elderly individuals who value simplicity. It is noteworthy that interviews indicate that pattern selection is not merely a passive acceptance of traditional norms.

Figure 1 Patterns of goat horns decorating the jacket



3.3 Collocation Stratification

Existing research predominantly approaches the subject from the perspective of cultural anthropology, emphasizing the function of clothing as cultural symbols. However, it insufficiently explores the role and agency of individuals in this process. The collocation system of Yi Sodi women's clothing, however, displays strict and layered characteristics of age segregation. Its fundamental components consist of mid-length robes, front-buttoned jackets, multi-layered pleated skirts, headscarves, woven belts, embroidered waist pouches, and various

silver ornaments. Girls can only adopt this complete collocation after undergoing the "child-skirt replacement" ritual (Liu & Zhou, 2025). The combination of these components undergoes systematic changes as they age.

The clothing collocation of adolescent females features a distinct "superimpositional" aspect. They often wear multiple colorful waist pouches over pleated skirts. The waist pouches are shaped like long strips, adorned with embroidered patterns on the surface and tassels at the bottom (Liu, 2017) (Figure 2). In contrast, the collocation of middle-aged and elderly women shifts to a "subtractive aesthetics": the styling is simple with fewer patterns, and silver ornaments mainly consist of plain hoops, exuding solemn elegance. It is important to note that these collocation norms are not applied mechanically; many interviewees indicated they make personal adjustments within traditional frameworks. For example, middle-aged women may choose waist pouches with special embroidery patterns to showcase their taste, illustrating that clothing practices embody a creative integration of cultural norms and individual aesthetics. This dynamic balancing mechanism serves as the internal drive for the ongoing inheritance of Sodi clothing culture.

Figure 2 Waist pouch styles



4.0 EXPRESSION OF INDIVIDUAL AESTHETICS IN THE CLOTHING OF YI SODI WOMEN

4.1 Individualization of Color Selection

The study reveals that the application of colors in the clothing of Yi Sodi women exhibits a distinct feature of "flexibility within norms," representing a breakthrough in aesthetic research

dominated by Western centrism. Respondents frequently noted that while ethnic traditions establish specific color norms for various age groups, there is still flexibility for personal adjustments in practice. While maintaining vibrant tones overall, it is essential to highlight the individuality of adolescent females by incorporating light green, light blue, and a combination of red, yellow, and black hues (Li, 2018). Color choices for middle-aged women, however, consider their age, personal preferences, and societal perceptions—a selection that often reflects the balancing wisdom of mature women between individual expression and social expectations. Elderly women, on the other hand, emphasize the texture of colors. This color practice, which both adheres to traditions and integrates individual aesthetics, vividly illustrates the subjectivity and creativity of Sodi women in cultural inheritance, offering a significant perspective for understanding the living heritage of ethnic minority clothing cultures.

4.2 Personalized Application of Decorative Elements

Decorative elements in the clothing of Yi Sodi women, including silver collars (Figure 3), earrings, necklaces, bracelets, and waist pouch tassels, each possess unique characteristics and also offer space for individual self-expression (Li, 2021). Interview results indicate that young women prefer to wear bold and distinctive silver ornaments to emphasize youthful vitality; middle-aged women place greater importance on the texture and craftsmanship of silverware, opting for simple and elegant styles; elderly women often choose traditional silver ornaments to express solemnity and tradition. These variations in silver ornament selection provide the missing subjective perspective in traditional craftsmanship research.

Figure 3 Styles of silver collars



Additionally, the length and color combination of waist pouch tassels have become significant means of personal style expression. Young women prefer waist pouches with bold patterns and bright colors, while middle-aged and older women opt for those with simpler patterns and solid colors. The personalized use of these decorative elements not only reflects individual aesthetic styles but also illustrates the balance individuals strike between tradition and modernity.

4.3 Innovation in Patterns and Collocations

Yi Sodi women also demonstrate notable creativity in patterns and their arrangement. Some young women create innovative designs inspired by traditional goat horn patterns, evolving these patterns into three-dimensional shapes and blending in modern elements to highlight new dimensions of cultural interaction, thereby making them more fashionable (Chun, 2023). In routine collocation, individuals express their uniqueness by adjusting the colors of headscarf patterns (Figure 4), the styles of belts, and other elements. These innovations in patterns and collocation not only reflect personal aesthetic needs but also foster the inheritance and development of Yi clothing culture.

Figure 4 Colors of headscarf designs



5.0 INTERACTIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AGE STRATIFICATION AND INDIVIDUAL AESTHETICS

5.1 The Constraints and Guidance of Social Norms on Individual Aesthetics

In the fields of sociology and psychology, the influence of age stratification on individual aesthetic concepts has been extensively studied. It is argued that age is a significant factor affecting individual aesthetic choices, and notable differences in aesthetic preferences exist among individuals of various age groups.

Age stratification constrains and guides individual aesthetics through elements like color, patterns, and combinations. Social norms dictate that women of different age groups wear clothing that aligns with their age characteristics, which somewhat limits individual aesthetic choices. However, these norms also offer a framework for self-expression. Interview results indicate that most Yi Sodi women consider social norms when selecting clothing while simultaneously making adjustments based on their personal aesthetic preferences.

5.2 Breakthrough and Reshaping of Social Norms by Individual Aesthetics

The younger generation breaks through and reshapes the social norms of traditional clothing through innovative designs and personalized expressions. Interview results show that while maintaining the basic elements of traditional clothing, young women attempt to incorporate modern fashion elements, making traditional clothing more contemporary (Pan & Gong, 2024). These breakthroughs and reshaping not only promote the innovation of Yi clothing culture but also drive its inheritance and development, addressing the gap in exploring individual agency in Yi clothing research.

5.3 Clothing as a Dual Carrier of Identity

The clothing of Yi Sodi women embodies a sense of identity and belonging to their proud ancestors, cherished homeland, and vibrant art (Zhang, 2017). It serves not only as a vehicle for cultural inheritance but also as a vital means for individuals to express themselves and build their identity. By wearing garments that align with age norms, individuals gain social recognition and respect, reflecting their identification with social roles. Additionally, through personalized color choices and the use of decorative elements, they express their aesthetic styles and showcase their confidence. Interview results indicate that most Yi Sodi women experience this dual sense of identity when wearing their clothing, displaying a strong sense of ethnic self-identity and confident spirit (Zhang, 2019).

6.0 CONCLUSION

Through in-depth interviews and field investigations of the clothing of Yi Sodi women in Panzhihua City, this study reveals age-stratified characteristics in their attire and the aesthetic expressions of individuals within this framework. The research finds that age stratification both constrains and guides individual aesthetics, while individual aesthetics break through and reshape social norms through innovative designs and personalized expressions. The clothing of Yi Sodi women serves not only as a medium of cultural inheritance but also as a vital tool for individuals to express themselves and construct their identity identities.

Sample scope to thoroughly investigate the age stratification and individual aesthetic differences of Yi Sodi women's clothing across various regions. Additionally, exploring multidisciplinary perspectives, such as cultural anthropology and social psychology, will further facilitate discussion.

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