



## The Language of Tibetan Clothing: Gong Aning

### ABSTRACT

Tibet has a long history, mainly composed of the integration of Hu, Qiang, and Puyue, among which the Qiang has the deepest influence on Tibetan culture. Tibetan clothing has gradually formed in these cultural exchanges, characterized by a wide clothing silhouette, long sleeves and large skirts, bright colors, and the habit of wearing trousers and boots. Tibetan culture is famous for its inclusiveness and diversity, and clothing is constantly improved in decoration and materials, forming modern characteristics. This article explores in depth the styles, colors, patterns, and materials of Tibetan clothing language, revealing its cultural connotations. At the same time, this article also focuses on exploring the differences and characteristics between Tibetan clothing language and other ethnic clothing languages, to highlight its unique artistic charm and aesthetic value. **Keywords:** Costume design; Tibetan costume language; Tibetan robe,

### INTRODUCTION

Tibetans have a long history. They were originally formed by the integration of three major ethnic systems: the Hu ethnic system, the Di-Qiang ethnic system, and the Pu-Yue ethnic system. Among them, the Di-Qiang ethnic system has exerted the most far-reaching influence on the Tibetan costume language culture and constitutes the main body of the current Tibetan costume language culture. As early as the period when the cultures of these three ethnic groups were in an uncertain state of integration, Tibetan costumes gradually developed some of the costume characteristics that they possess today. For example, they feature a wide clothing silhouette, long sleeves and a large front placket; the common clothing colors include red, blue, brown and black; and Tibetans generally have the habit of wearing long trousers and long boots. Tibetan costume language culture is a branch of Chinese ethnic costume culture. Through the research on Tibetan costume language culture, this study aims to arouse people's in-depth thinking about ethnic costume culture, analyze how to better integrate Tibetan costume language with modern design, and connect ethnic culture with world culture.

Costumes, as important cultural symbols, bear the responsibility of spreading ethnic culture in the inheritance of traditional ethnic culture. Tibetan robes, as a representative of Tibetan culture, contain profound cultural connotations behind them, which are worthy of in-depth research and dissemination. In response to the country's advocacy of cultural confidence and the call for the protection of intangible cultural heritage, this research focuses on exploring the combination of traditional Tibetan robe shapes and modern fashion trends to realize their innovative application.

By using modern fashion design methods and technologies to carry out innovative design on traditional Tibetan robe culture, this study intends to present this unique costume form to the public in a more modern and practical way. This can not only meet the aesthetic and wearing needs of modern consumers, but also inject new vitality into the inheritance and development of traditional Tibetan robe culture (see Figure 1.).



Figure 1. Tibetan Costumes

The purpose of this research is to understand the development history, types and characteristics of the costume language of Tibetan robes. Secondly, it collects modern garments that share similarities with Tibetan robes in terms of structural design and traditional pattern design, analyzes and summarizes their characteristics, and based on this, conducts innovative design. Finally, through the systematic organization and research on the costume language of Tibetan robes, this research summarizes and concludes their typical costume forms.

The significance of this research lies in recognizing the diverse characteristics of Tibetan costumes, rooting the spiritual culture contained in traditional Tibetan robes in the needs of modern costumes, and promoting the industrial development of Tibetan costumes, which conforms to the premise of the diversified development of China's costume industry. Moreover, if the cultural elements of Tibetan costume language are to achieve innovation while preserving tradition, it is not only necessary to focus on their rich colors and forms, but also to attach importance to the cultural connotation of the costume language, as this is its true value. Therefore, the proposal of this design practice is also to better inherit the traditional Tibetan costume language culture, enabling costumes to possess both the charm of traditional culture and integration with current fashion elements. This is also the concept that contemporary fashion designers should uphold.

Looking at the domestic research directions on the costume language of Tibetan robes, they can be divided into the following three parts:

First, research on the form of Tibetan robes. For example, in *Study on the Structure of Typical Tibetan Costumes and The Wisdom of Tibetan Robe Structure* written by Wang Lijuan, typical Tibetan costumes in China are taken as the main research objects. On the basis of field investigations, a detailed structural map of typical Tibetan robes has been established, which also provides necessary references for this research. In *Discussion on the Structure of Traditional Tibetan Costumes*, Shao Shiru mainly focuses on the silhouette structure of Tibetan robes and their wearing methods.

Second, research on traditional Tibetan costume patterns, which involves studies on pattern elements and colors. For instance, *The Application of Traditional Tibetan Auspicious Patterns in Fashion Design* by Yu Yiqing and *Exploration on the Application and Development of Tibetan Costume Auspicious Patterns in Modern Graphic Design* by Hu Xiaolei. Both of these materials conduct in-depth research on the specific categories and spiritual connotations of traditional Tibetan costume patterns; the latter also proposes to explore a combination form of Tibetan costume patterns that meets modern aesthetic needs.

Secondly, in *A Study on the "Five Colors" and "Five Blessings" Edge Decoration Patterns of Khampa Tibetan Robes* written by Chen Guo and Liu Ruipu, Khampa Tibetan robe artifacts are taken as the research object. The book proves that there is an inseparable connection between the "Five Colors" in Tibetan robes and the "Five Elements" in Han culture, reflecting the "unified and diversified" characteristics of Chinese ethnic costumes.

Third, research on the historical development and changes of Tibetan costume language. Shao Huifen's *A Brief Discussion on the Changes of Tibetan Costumes in Tibet* points out that in addition to cultural exchanges with the inland society, the changes in "cultural space" and the



influence of "status symbol" cannot be ignored as factors that promote the changes of Tibetan costumes. Zhuang Han, in his article On the Reasons for the Formation of Typical Tibetan Ethnic Costume Forms, puts forward that there is a close relationship between costume forms and geographical environment factors. In different regions of Tibet, the dressing styles of the people vary greatly. In Liu Wanyu's article Integration of Fashion and Tradition - Innovation and Exploration of Tibetan Ethnic Costumes, the focus is on how to combine fashion and tradition, and how to inherit traditional Tibetan costumes through industrial innovation methods.

## METHODS

### Research Content

The research content on Tibetan costume language culture is mainly divided into the following three parts:

First, focus on the basic content of Tibetan costume language culture, including the historical origin, development process, and religious influence related to Tibetan costumes, and understand the content related to public concepts in the current social environment.

Second, explore the current society's understanding, values, and attitudes towards Tibetan costume language, including people's comprehension of Tibetan costume language culture, as well as the material and spiritual acceptance and integration of this costume language culture.

Finally, conduct research on the physical objects of Tibetan costume language culture, costumes that integrate Tibetan cultural ideology, and wearing methods, along with a review of the current status of original Tibetan costume language.

### Research Methods

**Literature Research Method:** For the topic of this paper, the development of Tibetan costume language is elaborated from a vertical perspective by searching literature materials on websites such as CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure). This ensures a comprehensive and accurate understanding of issues related to traditional Tibetan costumes.

**Iconography Research Method:** By accurately interpreting image materials of Tibetan costumes, and analyzing and cross-verifying them with relevant literature materials, the accuracy of literature and image materials is ensured.

**Comparative Research Method:** Conducting vertical comparisons of traditional Tibetan costumes helps gain a clear understanding of the historical context of Tibetan costumes and the reasons behind their emergence. Horizontal comparisons, on the other hand, reveal the similarities and differences between costumes in different regions, thereby better highlighting the unique characteristics of each region's costume language.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Origin of Tibetan Robe Costume Language

The origin of Tibetan robe costume language can be traced back to the primitive nomadic tribes on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. Early Tibetan costumes mainly used leather, felt, and wool as materials. With the passage of time and social progress, these costumes gradually developed into ethnic costumes with a unique style. During the Tubo Period, there were already many records about Tibetan costumes. Starting from the Tang Dynasty, Tibetan costumes gradually absorbed elements of Central Plains culture, such as silk and embroidery techniques. In the Yuan Dynasty, Tibetan costumes were further influenced by the Mongolian people, leading to the emergence of many new styles and decorative methods.

### 2. Development of Tibetan Robe Costume Language

The development of Tibetan robe costume language is a long process. In the early stage, the styles and colors of Tibetan robes were relatively simple. As history advanced, the styles, colors, patterns, and decorations of Tibetan robes gradually became richer. At the same time, the costume

language of Tibetan robes was also influenced by other ethnic cultures. For example, during the Tubo Dynasty, the exchange between Tibetan culture and Central Plains culture, Indian culture, and other cultures brought new elements and inspirations to the costume language of Tibetan robes.

In modern times, with the rapid development of Tibetan society and the advancement of modernization, the costume language of Tibetan robes has also undergone significant changes. On the one hand, traditional Tibetan robe styles and patterns have been better protected and inherited,



becoming one of the important representatives of Tibetan culture. On the other hand, modern design elements and materials have been introduced into the production of Tibetan robes, making them more fashionable, diverse, and personalized.

### 3. Characteristics of Tibetan Robe Costume Language

#### a. Color Characteristics

Tibetan robes come in a rich variety of colors, with common ones including white, red, yellow, blue, and green. These colors not only reflect nature but also carry profound religious and cultural implications. Through different color combinations and matches, Tibetan robes not only embody the Tibetan people's love and awe for nature and life but also demonstrate their longing and pursuit for a better future (see Figure 2.).



Figure 2. Colors of Tibetan Robe Costumes

#### b. Material Characteristics

The material selection of Tibetan robes emphasizes practicality and comfort. Common materials include wool, yak hair, and Tibetan cashmere. These materials not only have excellent thermal insulation properties but are also soft, breathable, and wear-resistant. Meanwhile, the Tibetan people are skilled at utilizing local resources—for example, they use silk threads and cotton threads for decoration, making Tibetan robes more elegant and generous (see Figure 3.).



Figure 3. Materials of Tibetan Robes

#### c. Craftsmanship Characteristics

The handcraftsmanship of Tibetan robes is exquisite and unique. Common craftsmanship techniques include embroidery, printing, and piping. These techniques not only require superb skills and patience but also contain profound cultural connotations and aesthetic concepts. Through these techniques, the Tibetan people skillfully embroider auspicious patterns, religious symbols, and other elements on Tibetan robes, turning the robes into works of art with profound cultural connotations (see Figure 4.).



Figure 4. Craftsmanship of Tibetan Robes

#### 4. Aesthetic Value and Cultural Connotation of Tibetan Robe Costume Language

##### a. Aesthetic Value

The Tibetan robe, an ancient costume originating from the snow-covered plateau, is not only a necessity for the daily life of the Tibetan people but also a carrier of their culture, beliefs, and aesthetic pursuits. Its unique colors, patterns, materials, and styles all reflect the Tibetan people's pursuit of beauty and love for life.

The color selection of Tibetan robes is not only elegant and generous but also contains profound cultural connotations and good wishes. The patterns on Tibetan robes are mostly auspicious patterns, religious symbols, and other elements, which not only give the patterns a strong religious flavor but also embody the Tibetan people's awe and love for nature and life. Tibetan robes come in a variety of styles; different styles can not only adapt to different climates and occasions but also show the personality and aesthetic pursuit of the Tibetan people.

##### b. Cultural Connotation

As the traditional costume of the Tibetan people, Tibetan robes have not only absorbed cultures such as Central Plains culture, Indian culture, and Nepalese culture but also integrated the unique cultural characteristics of the Tibetan people themselves. This integration of diverse cultures endows Tibetan robes with unique and rich charm in terms of aesthetics, and at the same time reflects the close connection with the unique religious beliefs of the Tibetan people, such as the culture of "integrating multiple Tibetan Buddhism traditions into one".

Furthermore, from aspects such as the style, color, and pattern of the costume, we can see the life changes and cultural inheritance of the Tibetan people in the long history. These characteristics make Tibetan robes one of the important carriers for the cultural inheritance and development of the Tibetan people, and also make unique contributions to the diversity of world culture.

#### Application Analysis of Tibetan Robe Costumes in Modern Fashion Design

##### 1. Classification of Traditional Tibetan Robes

###### a. Double-sleeve Style

The "double-sleeve-worn" Tibetan robe is a traditional Tibetan costume, characterized by both arms being inserted into the sleeves. This design not only provides excellent thermal insulation when the temperature is low but also wearing the double-sleeve robe is regarded as a sign of respect for deities when entering religious venues such as temples and monasteries.

In Tibetan areas, men and women wear Tibetan robes in different ways. When men wear them, they usually lift the hem of the robe to the knee and then tie the waistband. This way of wearing keeps the waistline low, highlighting the tall and strong image of men. When women wear Tibetan robes, the hem hangs down to the instep before tying the waistband, making the waistline appear higher and thus emphasizing women's upright and slender posture.

From a functional perspective, the design of Tibetan robes attaches great importance to practicality. For the convenience of movement, when tying the waistband, the front body of the robe is required to remain flat, while the back body forms folds. The waistband is also designed to be lower at the front and higher at the back, and the front hem should not be too long—this not only ensures comfort but also facilitates walking. In addition, to enhance the carrying function of the robe, a large pouch is formed around the waist when tying the waistband. This pouch can not only

hold items but also be used to carry children when necessary, demonstrating the practicality and versatility of Tibetan robes (see Figure 5.).



Figure 5. Large Pouch Formed by Tying the Waistband When Wearing Double-sleeve Robes

**b. Single-sleeve Style**

The Tibetan-inhabited areas in Northwest China are characterized by large temperature differences between day and night, cold winters, and hot summers. This climate requires locals to have clothing that can adapt to such extreme weather conditions. As the traditional costume of Tibetans, Tibetan robes—with their wide sleeves and special wearing method—perfectly meet this demand.

The sleeves of Tibetan robes feature a unique design that allows free adjustment with temperature changes. When the sun is bright at noon and the temperature rises, Tibetans will take off one sleeve (see Figure 6.) to expose their arm, thereby regulating their body temperature. This way of wearing not only adapts to climate changes but also reflects the casual and free-spirited nature of the Tibetan people.

The material of Tibetan robes is also of great importance. They are generally made of materials with good thermal insulation properties, such as wool and cashmere. This allows the robe to be used as a quilt on cold nights, providing warmth for Tibetans. This multi-functional costume design fully demonstrates the wisdom and creativity of the Tibetan people.



Figure 6. Wearing Method of Tibetan Robe with One Sleeve Taken Off and Hanging Behind the Back

**c. Sleeveless Style**

When the sun is abundant and the temperature is high during the day, or when both hands are needed for labor work, not only one sleeve of the robe can be taken off, but both sleeves can also be removed (see Figure 7.). These sleeves are then piled around the waist and tied or wrapped with a waistband, which can quickly lower the body temperature.

Generally, men wrap the sleeves around the front waist when wearing the robe, while women wrap the sleeves around the back waist.



Figure 7. Wearing Method of Tibetan Robe with Both Sleeves Taken Off and Wrapped Around the Waist

### Structure of Tibetan Robe Costumes

As a representative of traditional Tibetan costumes, Tibetan robes, with their diverse styles and unique structures, fully demonstrate the profound heritage of Tibetan culture. According to structural differences, Tibetan robes can be divided into several categories:

**Classic Tibetan Robe Structure:** This type of Tibetan robe is known for its classic design and craftsmanship, such as the jacquard silk long-sleeve yellow robe and the Tianhua brocade Tibetan official robe. They are made of high-quality silk satin, decorated with exquisite patterns and textures, reflecting the magnificence and nobility of Tibetan costumes.

**Tibetan Religious Costume Structure:** Mainly designed for religious rituals and activities, this category includes robes like the yellow satin lama robe and the crimson vest-style robe. Their colors and patterns are usually simple and elegant, highlighting the solemnity and sense of mystery of religion.

**Khampa Tibetan Robe Structure:** Khampa Tibetan robes are famous for their unique style and craftsmanship, such as the gold silk robe with leopard skin trim and the woolen blanket robe with tiger skin trim. These robes integrate the unique culture and aesthetics of the Khampa region, showing a strong regional characteristic.

**Baima Tibetan Costume Structure:** Baima Tibetan costumes are a unique branch of Tibetan costumes, featuring simple and elegant designs, such as the Baima Tibetan stand-collar slanted-front robe and the Baima Cipo slanted-front robe. These costumes reflect the lifestyle and aesthetic concepts of the Baima Tibetans.

Through the structural analysis of Tibetan costumes, we can see their similarities with the costumes of other ethnic minorities. This indicates that while inheriting its own culture, Tibetan costumes also have a certain degree of openness, capable of absorbing and integrating cultural elements from other ethnic groups. The combination of this inheritance and openness makes Tibetan costumes more colorful, becoming a treasure in the cultural treasure house of Chinese ethnic costumes.

### Characteristics of Tibetan Robe Costumes

As the traditional costume of the Tibetan people, one of the most prominent characteristics of the Tibetan robe is its wide sleeves. Beyond the wide sleeves, its structure is also distinctive. There are no slits at the front and back centers of the robe, and the entire body (including the front and back panels) is made from a single piece of fabric. This design not only ensures the integrity of the garment but also enhances its thermal insulation performance. At the same time, Tibetan robes adopt the traditional right-overlap placket style of Hanfu, with an attached inner placket, while the sleeves are attached separately. This design is not only elegant and neat but also allows free adjustment of the garment's tightness according to temperature changes, further enhancing its practicality.

Compared with Tibetan robes, the structure of classical Chinese finery is more complex. It has slits at the front and back centers, with the left and right panels each made from a single width of fabric, and the body and sleeves cut as one piece. Although this design showcases the exquisite craftsmanship and unique charm of Chinese finery, its thermal insulation effect may be slightly inferior to that of Tibetan robes when dealing with cold weather. Hanfu also has slits at the front and back centers, with the large placket being pieced together. While this design can demonstrate the solemnity and elegance of Hanfu, it is also difficult to match the thermal insulation performance of Tibetan robes.

As the traditional costume of the Tibetan people, the design of the Tibetan robe is full of

wisdom and ingenuity. Its wide sleeves, unique structure, and flexible placket style make it an ideal choice for coping with cold weather. At the same time, Tibetan robes carry rich cultural connotations and historical heritage, becoming an important part of Tibetan culture (see Figure 8.).

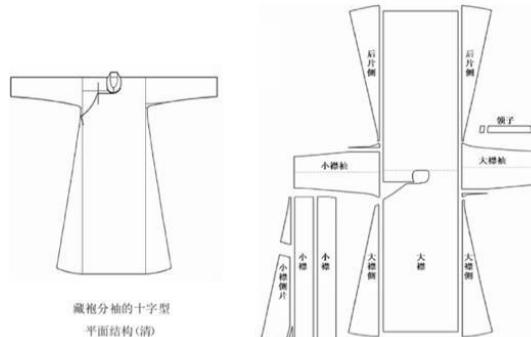


Figure 8. Flat Structure

### The Thrifty-focused Cross-shaped Flat Structure in Tibetan Robes

The flat structure of Tibetan robes, especially their three-panel cross-shaped design, is a major feature of Tibetan costumes. The front and back panels of the robe are made from a single piece of fabric without slits. This structure not only meets the daily needs of the Tibetan people but also reflects their careful consideration of fabric usage. Compared with Hanfu in the inland regions, although there are differences in cutting and pattern layout, both embody the Chinese nation's virtue of frugality.

In the design of Tibetan robes, the way the garment body and sleeves are joined is not based on three-dimensional considerations of the human body shape, but is limited by the width of the fabric. This design method, though seemingly simple, skillfully solves the problem of fabric utilization. At the same time, the joint design of the inner placket and the garment body not only avoids the discomfort caused by sewing on the shoulders but also subtly decorates the Tibetan robe, making it more aesthetically pleasing.

The "cross"-shaped structure of Tibetan robes shares similarities with the robes in northern China, which reflects people's common pursuit of costume structures under different environments. From the robes of the ancient Qiang people to the Tibetan robes of today, the stability and distinctiveness of their structures all indicate the adaptability and popularity of this robe structure in Tibetan-inhabited areas. The triangular gussets added to the side seams of Tibetan robes not only increase the looseness of the robe's hem for easier movement but also further enrich the style and design of Tibetan robes.

### Case Analysis of the Application of Tibetan Robe Costume Language in Clothing

At the Paris Fashion Week for Spring/Summer 2023, the brand SANKUANZ launched a striking series of fashion designs inspired by Mount Kailash. This collection skillfully integrates traditional Eastern imagery with modern fashion aesthetics, combining Tibetan traditional culture with modern street style to present a unique and layered visual effect. The wearing method of Tibetan robes is the core design element of this series. The designer cleverly used the loose, draped, and wrapped characteristics of Tibetan robes, combining them with the three-dimensional structure of modern clothing to create fashions that conform to modern aesthetics while retaining traditional charm.

The combination of a sky-blue loose suit jacket and a midi skirt not only showcases the simplicity and grandeur of modern clothing but also subtly draws on the unstructured shape of Tibetan robes through curved cutting and wrapping designs. The fabric is gathered around the waist to form a unique drape, which not only meets modern aesthetic standards but also reflects the charm of traditional Tibetan costumes (see Figure 9.).

The gray asymmetric crewneck knitted sweater paired with a gray wrapped midi skirt takes the wearing method of Tibetan robes to the extreme. The designer skillfully used the asymmetric shape to make the sleeves present an effect similar to that of a Tibetan robe with one sleeve removed. Additionally, through the wrapped design, a large number of folds are stacked to present a primitive and abstract state, making people feel as if they are on the plateau, experiencing the unique charm of traditional Tibetan costumes (see Figure 10.).



Figure 9. Combination of Sky-blue and Midi Skirt Asymmetric Crewneck Knitted Sweater



Figure 10. Combination of Gray Loose Suit Jacket And Gray Wrapped Midi Skirt

The combination of an all-black asymmetric design and wrapped styling stunningly presents the unique silhouette of Tibetan robes in modern fashion design. The exaggerated asymmetric outline not only creates a rough and primitive sense of power but also allows people to gain a deeper understanding of the profound cultural connotations of Tibetan costumes (see Figure 11.).



Figure 11. All-black Asymmetric Wrapped Outfit

## CONCLUSION

This paper conducts a systematic theoretical study on the shape of traditional Tibetan robes and analyzes and summarizes their application in fashion design. During the research process, a detailed analysis was carried out on the classification, structure, and wearing methods of Tibetan robes, laying a solid foundation for the subsequent design. Afterwards, the entire design process was analyzed from aspects such as design concept, material collection, and production craftsmanship. This innovative design will bring new inspiration and concepts to the field of modern fashion design. It is hoped that through the research of this project, more people will not only understand and appreciate the costume language culture of Tibetan robes but also promote innovation and development in the field of modern fashion design.