

Commodified Ethnic Costumes: Case Studies on Miao Women in Guizhou Province, China

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1. Commercialization of the Ethnic Costume of Miao People Since the 1980s

After the opening of China in 1978, tourism has developed into a promising industry. The seventh five-year plan,¹ which began in 1985, focused on developing tourist attractions and traffic networks in the country. Based on this plan, the China National Tourism Administration and the Civil Aviation Administration of China² have promoted unique tourism themes each year since 1992 and developed new foreign markets (So 1998). In 1982, the Provincial Tourism Administration was established in Guizhou Province (贵州省)—this region is examined in this chapter. In particular, the Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture (黔东南苗族侗族自治州) in southeastern Guizhou Province comprise a residential area for ethnic minorities, who constitute 75% of the population, thus the autonomous prefectural government developed ethnic tourism by designating villages and regions with rich ethnic customs and festivals as tourist spots since 1986 (*ibid.*). This led to economic benefits and commercialization of the cultural diversity of a hitherto marginalized ethnic minority, thereby creating a “tourism culture” that leverages specific elements of the ethnic minority culture (Nagatani 2007).

Consequently, foreign tourists began to visit southeastern Guizhou Province, and the ethnic costumes of the Miao (苗) soon became commodities. Regarding Chinese ethnic crafts, Takayama stated that Chinese tourists buy inexpensive souvenirs worth 5–20 yuan, whereas foreign tourists buy ethnic costumes and crafts at luxury hotels and antique shops for hundreds to thousands of yuan (2007: 252–253). The costumes that domestic tourists regard as the used clothes of ethnic minorities are valued as antiques and works of art by foreign tourists (Takayama 2007: 8–9, 252–254). This behavior is also observed in relation to the ethnic costumes of the Miao



people; foreign tourists value their artistry and design properties, thereby assigning commodity value to ethnic clothing. They seek old clothes embellished with elaborate artistic techniques, such as embroidery. These clothes are perceived as “Miao-esque” — specifically, to be characteristic of the Miao people of southeastern Guizhou Province — with various colorful and elaborate costumes, as opposed to the Miao people of other regions (Miyawaki 2003: 106).

This commodification has facilitated a mutually beneficial economic exchange between foreign tourists and Miao women who sell traditional dresses and fabrics (Oakes 2003). In a hotel that is popular among foreign tourists in Kaili City (Map 1) — the capital of the Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture — a shop sells Miao costumes, clothes, and textiles (Miyawaki 2003). At the hotel entrance, several Miao people, with stacks of costumes and textiles in hand, await tourists. Moreover, some sellers have rented apartments to store and display their collected costumes to buyers from Beijing and Shanghai.

Since the 1990s, foreign tourists have been visiting the provincial capital and the local market of Shidong Town (施洞镇) in Taijiang County (Map 1), which is a tourist spot near the research site. However, since the 2000s, their number has declined, and ethnic clothing trade has been slow. During the course of this research (2009–2011), the idea that clothing can be both a product and source of income has impacted the clothing-related practices of Miao women, although the magnitude of the impact depended on each woman’s economic situation and experience with foreigners. Therefore, focusing on this topic through case studies of the Miao people in Guizhou Province, this chapter clarifies how changes in the value of ethnic clothing since the 1980s have affected the Miao women.

2. Development of Research on the Miao Ethnic Costumes and Conducting Exhibitions

Since the establishment of New China, clothing has attracted the most attention among all aspects of the Miao ethnic culture (Schein 2000: 54, 61). During the 1950s, researchers in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) began studying Miao ethnic costumes as a culture and art form; these studies have increased rapidly since the 1980s (Yang 1998: 315). Studies on the ethnic costumes of the Miao people published since the 1980s have focused on women’s clothes, thereby using clothing as a marker for classifying the Miao people’s subgroups, analyzing the meanings of patterns and

motifs of decorations, or demonstrating production processes and techniques. With the expansion of research on Miao clothing, women of the Hmu, a subgroup of the Miao people in southeastern Guizhou Province, became an “exemplary center” in the Miao people’s ethnic costume culture (Suzuki 2012: 463).

The following question must be addressed in the research: Why has only Miao clothing attracted such attention and been the subject of numerous books? According to Diamond, ethnic minority cultural studies in China generally highlight the diversity of customs and traditions (风俗习惯 in Chinese) among ethnic groups, in addition to well-composed photographs and motley descriptions. For the Miao people, ethnic costumes are a good example of their unique customs (Diamond 1995: 97–99). Key markers of this cultural diversity, that is, easily observable factors, are selected (e.g., housing, ethnic costumes, ornaments, hairstyles, handicrafts, marriage customs, and rituals), and references to other cultural factors and social lives of people remain rare. Such ungeneralized cultural elements are listed along with superficial commentaries and discussed as the features of a unified ethnic group (e.g., the Miao) (*ibid.*: 97–98).

The characteristics of domestic studies of ethnic minority cultures in China, which emphasize the diversity of key cultural markers and unity of ethnic groups, can also be identified in international studies of Miao clothing. In particular, various colorful images of the ethnic Miao culture have proliferated through the elucidation of techniques and presentation of collections. Therefore, studies by Chinese or international researchers on the Miao ethnic costumes have focused only on the costumes themselves, far removed from their significance in the social lives of the people who wear them.

Since 1978, when China embarked on the path of reforms and globalization, Miao ethnic costumes have been attracting global attention, courtesy of exhibitions both in China and abroad. In May 1981, Mitsukoshi (a well-established department store in Japan) and Binobi (a publishing company in Japan) collaborated for the “Ethnic Costumes Exhibition of China’s 55 Ethnic Minorities,” which included a special exhibition of the “Guizhou Miao embroidery, wax dyeing, and folk crafts” across six cities, including Tokyo. This marked the first time China exhibited the costumes of its ethnic minorities; more than 60,000 people visited the exhibition over 53 days (Ma 1980: 58). This served as a crucial turning point to transform the value of Miao ethnic costumes.

In the same year, *Kishu Myaозoku Shishu* (貴州苗族刺繡 , Chugoku Bijutsuka

Kyokai Kishu Bunkai and Chugoku Jinmin Bijutsu Shuppansha 1981) was published by Binobi as the first edition of the Chinese Craft Art Series/Chinese Ethnic Minority Dyeing, Weaving, and Embroidery Series. This was the first book on Miao ethnic clothing published outside China after the Cultural Revolution ended, and stated that ethnic costumes have been collected by the Guizhou Branch of the China Artists Association (hereafter referred to as the Guizhou Branch of CAA) for 30 years since the establishment of New China (*ibid.*: 5). In his book, Zhengrong Ma, a former employee of the Guizhou Branch of CAA, who supplied costumes for the exhibition in Japan, stated:

At the end of the 1970s, just after the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution came to an end, some related Japanese institutions began attaching importance to Chinese folk crafts, and they wished to publish a complete art series on Chinese crafts. They contacted Guizhou Province's Publicity Department and the Guizhou Branch of CAA and decided to collect folk crafts and artistic works from Guizhou, and I was put in charge of this work. (Ma and Ma 2002: 284)

Subsequently, nine books under the Chinese Craft Art Series/Chinese Ethnic Minority Dyeing, Weaving, and Embroidery Series were published in Japan between 1981 and 1986. *Chugoku Shosuminzoku Fukushoku* (中国少数民族服飾, Chuo Minzoku Gakuin and Jinmin Bijutsu Shuppansha 1981) was published as a catalog of the "Ethnic Costumes Exhibition of China's 55 Ethnic Minorities." These books indicate that the costumes and embroideries of the Miao people attracted attention among the costumes of Chinese ethnic minorities. In addition to the independently published books on the embroidery of the Miao of Guizhou Province, many pages in *Chugoku Shosuminzoku Fukushoku* (*ibid.*) are devoted to their ethnic costumes. Interest in the traditional costumes of Chinese ethnic minorities was cultivated through attraction to the costumes of the Miao women of southeastern Guizhou Province, which were hailed as an "exemplary center" of Miao clothing culture since the 1980s (Suzuki 2012: 463). The Miao clothing culture was considered as an "exemplary center" of the ethnic minority clothing culture as a whole.

Following the success of exhibitions and publications in Japan, in April 1984, a grand "Exhibition of Clothing and Ornaments of China's Miao People" was conducted at the Cultural Palace of Nationalities³ in Beijing, wherein approximately 600 Miao

ethnic costumes were exhibited. Based on their linguistic classification, they were organized into five types and 21 categories, including Xiangxi, Qiandongnan, Qianzhongnan, Chuanqiandian, and Hainan. Subsequently, the illustrated book *Zhongguo Miao zu Fushi* (中国苗族服饰, Minzu Wenhua Gong 1985) was published along with an English language edition. The exhibition was attended by many foreigners and the book not only triggered a strong interest in Miao ethnic costumes among Chinese and foreign collectors, but also significantly influenced subsequent studies of the Miao ethnic costumes (Yang 1998; Xi 2005). This laid the foundation for the Miao clothing exhibition in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Museum of History 1985) from October 1985 to February 1986, and in the United States (China Institute in America 1987) from October 1987 to January 1988. A worldwide craze was sparked for Miao clothes, particularly used clothes, and costumes were commercialized as antiques. This was accompanied by the mass publication of books on Miao costumes, which proliferated the image of “colorful” Miao costumes and customs (Schein 2000: 61–62).

3. Survey Site

Since the 1980s, the ethnic costumes of the Miao women in southeastern Guizhou Province have been famous worldwide, with numerous overseas exhibitions and books depicting attractive photographs. In China, the commercialization of ethnic minority cultures coincides with the development of the tourism industry. Consequently, the Miao people, particularly those living in or near tourist spots, profited economically from this.

This chapter focuses on the Miao women living in non-tourist places, and clarifies the change in the social significance of their traditional dresses after commercialization since the 1980s. This research focuses on a farming village (hereafter, S village) in Mahao Township, Shibing County, Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture, Guizhou Province (Map 1). Shidong Town in Taijiang County, which is a commercial hub for the surrounding villages and a tourist site, approximately 6 km away, is discussed in this chapter. Fieldwork was conducted in S village for one year (March 2010–April 2011), and in T village in Shidong Town for three months (July–October 2009).

Guizhou Province in southwestern China has a population of approximately 34,750,000, among which 36.1% are ethnic minorities, such as the Miao, Puyi, and

Dong, according to the Sixth National Population Census of PRC in 2010 (Guowuyuan Renkoupucha Bangongshi and Guojia Tongjiju Renkou he Jiuye Tongjisi 2012). The Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture is in southeastern Guizhou Province, and its capital is Kaili City. Shibing County lies in the north of this prefecture. S village, in the Mahao Township, is situated at the southern end of Shibing County and is contiguous with Shidong Town in northern Taijiang County across the Qingshui River (Map 1).

The people belonging to Hmu, a Miao subgroup, and those of Han (汉) ethnicity live in S village. The two sub-groups of Hmu people speak different dialects, dress differently, and practice different customs. One of the sub-groups is called Hebian Miao (河边苗) in Chinese, and its members refer to themselves as the Hmub⁴ in the Miao language. The members of the second sub-group, called Gaopo zu (高坡族)⁵ in Chinese, refer to themselves as Hmaob in the Miao language. In this chapter, for convenience, the following names are used hereafter: “Hebian Miao,” “Gaopo Miao (高坡苗),” and “Han.” In the Qingshui River basin area from southern Shibing County to northern Taijiang County, an area encompassing S village, the Hebian Miao are the majority population (Map 1). This chapter focuses on Hebian Miao, who play a major role in the production and use of ethnic costumes in this region.



Map 1. The Hebian Miao area

During the 1730s, many Han people migrated to the Miao district in Guizhou Province because of the Qing Dynasty's *gaitu guiliu* (改土归流) policy⁶ of appointing local administrators in minority areas. Han merchants reached the Qingshui River basin of southeastern Guizhou Province in search of timber (cedar) during the mid-18th century (Takeuchi 1994: 92). From the end of the Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China period, Shidong Town—the center of the Hebian Miao area, which includes S village—flourished as a timber trading port. Since the Qing Dynasty era, Shidong flourished as a local market, with frequent inflow and outflow of merchants and goods amid the expansion of wood distribution (Suzuki 2012: 333–335).

Thereafter, the wood trade was banned. However, Shidong continued to function as a commercial center during the current research fieldwork: a market was conducted every six days and attracted people from neighboring villages, including S village. In 1986, when tourism flourished in the Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture, Shidong was recognized as a tourist spot (So 2001: 91). During the 1990s, many foreign tourists visited the area. The Sisters' Meal Festival of the Hebian Miao, which is advertised both in China and abroad as a seasonal festival of the Miao, is conducted every year in Shidong Town. Silver artisans producing silver ornaments are also concentrated in Shidong Town, thus leading to the town often being considered the center of the Hebian Miao culture.

The Miao in Shidong are wealthier than those in the surrounding villages (Ho 2011). According to the women of S village, the Hebian Miao women of Shidong are affluent, have many costumes and silver ornaments, and play a key role in seasonal festivals. Moreover, they are famous in the village for their mercantile spirit—they sell traditional costumes to foreigners and silver ornaments to the Miao. Among the women in S village, the Hebian Miao women of Shidong were perceived as having distinct personalities from the other Hebian Miao.

S village has a registered population of 567 people (296 men and 271 women) in 123 households, although half of them do not reside in the village. Several villagers (286 individuals) of productive age (10–49 years) have left for coastal areas in China to work as migrant laborers or for further studies in other cities within the province. The residents of the village at the time of this research (281 individuals) were assigned to different ethnic groups by household based on self-reports by the heads of households. Table 1 presents the population by ethnic designation and distribution of age groups (school-age and pre-school-age children are counted separately).⁷

Table 1. S village population at the time of research

Ethnic affiliation	Household	Resident population in S village												Total
		Preschool age	Elementary school	Junior high school	10s	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s	70s	80s	Unclear	
Han	37	16	13	4	3	8	17	24	12	7	7	3	9	123
Hebian Miao	45	13	27	6	0	9	7	18	22	20	7	4	3	136
Gaopo Miao	9	3	3	1	0	0	2	4	0	2	7	0	0	22
Total	91	32	43	11	3	17	26	46	34	29	21	7	12	281

Regardless of sex or ethnicity, it has become commonplace for village residents to migrate for work after graduating from junior high school at the age of 18 years, when a resident ID card is issued. Strictly speaking, almost no junior high school students reside in the village because the school is far from the village. They stay in student dormitories and return home only for the weekend. Apart from children and the elderly, the only other residents included those with means of livelihood, such as shopkeepers or constructions, pregnant women, nursing mothers, the ill, or those who had temporarily returned for marriage and house construction.

In S village, Hebian Miao and Gaopo Miao do not intermarry; however, the Han and Hebian Miao, and the Han and Gaopo Miao do intermarry. However, Hebian Miao parents opposed the idea of their children marrying into a Han family. Differences in the three “ethnic” categories in S village manifested through marriage decisions and clothing.

4. Involvement in Ethnic Clothing as a Commodity

The rapid collectivization of agriculture during the 1950s caused a serious food shortage in China, which stagnated ethnic costume production in S village. Following the 1978 reforms, the contract responsibility system was introduced, and the distribution of agricultural products was liberalized. The agricultural sector grew drastically, thereby stabilizing the livelihoods of rural peasants and helping them to resume cloth production.

The ethnic clothing of the Miao people has changed drastically since the 1980s in three aspects: (1) traditional everyday wear has become formal wear; (2) some materials used to make clothes are produced in other provinces; and (3) traditional

craft techniques have declined (Yang 1998: 305–306). Specifically, ready-made Western clothes have replaced ethnic costumes, which are primarily worn during festivals or rituals. Moreover, the practices of cultivating cotton, sericulture, spinning, weaving, and cultivating and mixing dyestuff have been abandoned, and off-the-shelf yarn and cloth produced in other provinces are now used. Starting from approximately 1993 onward, the villagers began migrating for work to coastal areas and earning relatively more money, and around the same time, the sale of costume materials, decorative items, and silver ornaments began to increase. Costumes became more gorgeous, the number of costumes that a person owned increased, and clothing came to be considered a prestigious good, demonstrating a family's economic status.

As traditional dresses started being sold in the market, courtesy of tourism, their value increased significantly. As noted earlier, worldwide attention on the ethnic clothing of the Miao since the 1980s and development of ethnic tourism in Shidong Town since 1986 resulted in ethnic costumes being treated as commodities (Ho 2011: 168, 330). However, the sale and purchase of traditional costumes and textiles, as in Shidong Town, did not frequently occur in S village. Some villagers sold used costumes because of economic hardships. Although they did not sell their costumes as proactively as sellers of Shidong Town, this commodification affected the value of their costumes.

4.1 Memories of Costume Sales: Clothing as an Income Source

The cloth and costume trade flourished in Shidong Town during the 1990s. In S village, a few Miao women sold ethnic dresses to foreign and local buyers. During the research fieldwork, the author inquired about the reasons for selling or not selling ethnic costumes in the past.

The main reason for selling clothing in the past was economic difficulties. They required money for their daily needs: transportation, tuition fees, electricity, clothing, sugars, spices, other condiments, luxuries such as tobacco, agricultural expenditures (e.g., charges of herbicides, seeds, and borrowing water extractors), and other basic consumables. These expenditures are usually financed by revenue from rice and vegetable cultivation, remittances from migrants, and the main business of the household (e.g., shopkeeping and construction). The sale of ethnic clothing did not garner sufficient support to address the daily expenses of households. However, it was

a convenient source of income during emergencies or when a large amount of money was required, such as school fees. A case in which clothes are sold to raise funds is discussed below.

Case 1

JZ is a 51-year-old Hebian Miao woman with five daughters aged between 12 and 27 years; her only son died when he was 10 days old, and her husband succumbed to alcoholism a decade ago, when her youngest daughter was two years old. She remembers getting married at the age of 17 or 18 years, recounting,

I didn't know he was poor [when I got married].⁸ [My husband's] house was small, and there was barely enough to eat. My parents wanted me to get married; they said, 'they have good affinities.'⁹ My husband's matchmaker came to see my house, but I was married without [even once] seeing my husband's house. In those days, we got married without seeing the house [that is, the economic situation]; we looked at the people, their affinities. Back then, women were stupid; now, a girl marries after seeing the house. I think that's wise.

The eldest daughter (27 years old) lost her husband in a motorcycle accident when her son was aged one year old. At the time of the research field work, JZ was raising this son, who was aged four years old, because the eldest daughter had migrated for work. JZ's second daughter was 25 years old. After this daughter fell in love with a Han man at her workplace, she fell out of contact with her mother, and there were now delays in her remittances to JZ. The third daughter, aged 22, was a third-year university student, and the fourth girl, aged 18–19 years, was a third-year senior high school student. JZ's youngest child was 12 years old and a junior high school student. The two younger girls lived in school dormitories and did not return home on weekends in order to save transportation expenses. JZ managed to make ends meet despite the cost of school fees. She received remittances from her eldest daughter, borrowed money from relatives, her 82-year-old father supported her with rice, and she hand-crafted souvenirs, such as embroidered wall hangings. JZ owned four ares of rice fields,¹⁰ but there were no helpers or water buffaloes, thus she relied on her neighbors to till the paddy fields using their water buffalo. She could hardly expect a

profit from her fields because she had to pay them for their work.

She had sold her ethnic costume for the first time when her husband died.

After my husband died, I sold my aprons—I was about 40 years old. A big dragon motif was woven into them; I sold them for 80 yuan. [In addition to that] I sold two more aprons to pay for my child's school fees. I sold them for 600 yuan to a merchant who came from the county capital.¹¹ I also sold a jacket for about 200 or 300 yuan. [In addition to that] I sold cloth socks for 40 yuan a pair, and a jacket (called a *hob mongl hnob* in the Miao language) for 200 yuan.

She distinctly remembered what she sold and for how much.

There were several other cases similar to that of JZ, wherein people sold ethnic costumes to overcome economic distress and pay school fees. These cases show that the sale of ethnic costumes was prompted by financial circumstances. Miao women from S village were forced to sell their costumes and clothing items for their children. These were treated as sources of immediate income amid economic distress. Although clothes are a potential source of funds, they are not usually traded for money. As stated below, the value of clothes has been influenced by the fact that they can serve as a commodity after use, and they have not been a commodity—because of the women's avoidance—even if they potentially can be.

4.2 Resistance to Commercialization and Penetration of Standards for Commercial Value

Although women in S village were neither interested nor involved in selling ethnic costumes as commodities, they sometimes sold them to foreign tourists who visited Shidong in the 1990s. However, their husbands encouraged them to sell their clothes to ease their financial burdens.

PL, a Hebian Miao woman aged 65, recalled a conversation with foreigners in the local market.

I had gone to the market wearing a [old] jacket that foreigners love. [As expected,] A foreigner offered to buy it for 200 yuan. I said I would sell it for 500 yuan, but [the foreigner] told me that he would not buy it because it was expensive. My husband told me to sell it for 200 yuan. I got angry at him and

said I would have fewer clothes to wear.

An interaction between a husband who recommended selling clothes and a wife who refused to do so was also observed during a bargain involving the author.

Case 2

The author wanted to buy a jacket from ZS, a Hebian Miao woman aged 66. She called her daughter—a migrant laborer—to discuss the selling price while trying to sell the jacket to the author for 600–700 yuan. Meanwhile, her husband who makes a living by farming with ZS and repairing shoes said that he heard a jacket sold at 10,000 yuan in the neighboring village, and that he would not sell below this price. Therefore, the author abandoned the purchase because of the high price. ZS did not say anything on the spot, but looked at her husband coldly.

Later, she told the author,

A selfish man in T village sold his wife's and children's clothes without their permission. His wife got angry and divorced him and married a man in M village. If my husband did this, I would not forgive him, even if he died. I make my own dresses, so I will decide whether to sell them. If I do not agree with him, he cannot decide [whether to sell them or not]. If he sold them without asking, I would divorce him. I do not like him anyway, even if he does not sell them, but I would want to get divorced even more if he sold them. I would be apoplectic.

Although she said it jokingly, she seemed to be serious.

These are notable examples of differences in how clothing is perceived by a wife who cannot easily treat personally handcrafted clothing as a commodity, or who wants to retain the right to sell them, and a husband who is eager to sell them for immediate cash or at a higher price. Miao women make the ethnic costumes themselves, believing that they or their daughters will wear them. Therefore, for Miao women in S village, costumes are prized possessions, even if they are poor. Therefore, wives cannot forgive their husbands' interference with the sale of their clothes. They strongly believe that the ultimate right to sell costumes belongs to the women who made them.

In Shidong, a tourist spot, there was a rather aggressive movement toward

the commercialization of ethnic costumes and other clothing items. For example, the author heard that the women created new motifs for costumes, based on the assumption that they would become commodities, and embroidered them inside their homes, lest other women stole their designs. However, there was no such movement in S village to produce ethnic costumes solely for sale. Rather, they had negative perceptions regarding the tendency of the Hebian Miao women of Shidong to produce or process ethnic costumes exclusively for sale. LL, a Hebian Miao woman aged 58, criticized the women in Shidong as follows:

There is a Hebian Miao woman in Shidong who is good at sales and can process jackets to look older. She washes and dries them in the sun and repeats [this process] twice. She calls them 'old clothes' and sells them, but she is actually deceiving people. If you wash your own clothes, you could not wear them anymore. I wash only the ones I have worn many times or have stored for a long time. I cannot wear the clothes that have been washed for ceremonies, thus I have no choice but to wear them as everyday clothing.

Miao women in S village consider Shidong women, who are involved in producing and processing ethnic costumes as commodities, to be different from themselves. These Miao women in S village have resisted the pressures and temptations to sell their traditional attire, despite pecuniary concerns, husbands' demands for sale, or pressure from tourists. Their attitudes differ radically from those of Shidong women, who proactively commercialize their clothes.

Although the sale of clothes was often prompted by economic pressures, tales of drawing the praise of tourists toward their costumes, being asked to sell them, and in particular, declining such offers were proudly narrated. FZ, a Hebian Miao woman aged 74, happily recalled: "In Shidong, some foreigners approached me, but as I did not understand what they wanted, I asked my son [who was there], who said that [those foreigners] praised the clothes [I made]." Similarly, LB, a Hebian Miao woman aged 73, proudly narrated: "I was told [by some foreign tourists] that they wanted to buy the clothes I was wearing for 200 yuan. I was over 50–56 or 57; I declined the purchase." Additionally, some women shared how local Chinese officials offered them a fee for an opportunity to wear clothes or offered to buy clothes for 10,000 yuan, although these women did not sell them.

Some women in S village considered selling old clothes. The natural wear and tear incurred when Miao women wear ethnic costumes does not impact the value of these clothes as commodities in the way that most commodities are affected by such damage. Although Miao women prefer to wear new clothes, when a costume becomes a commodity, it has higher market value when it is older, as seen from the Shidong example. These worn outfits were called “古董” (meaning antiques) by the Miao people in Chinese. Moreover, in S village, some people spoke of extreme cases where the Hebian Miao women of Shidong sold their clothes after wearing them once or twice. Some women in S village stated that they may sell their clothes after wearing them, although they were unlikely to do so. Several Miao women in the village engaged in retro-style embroidery, and one of the reasons for doing this was that they could be sold as antiques after they were worn. In S village, the income gained from selling clothes did not comprise a major portion of the total household income. During the research fieldwork, it was difficult to determine whether their clothing had a market value high enough to be traded as a commodity. In other words, it can be said that Miao women in S village considered the possibility of selling clothes as a future option.

5. Conclusion

This chapter considers the case of the Miao people of Guizhou Province and examines how changes in the value of ethnic costumes since the 1980s, when ethnic costumes were first sold as commodities, has affected the Miao women. Studies on the Miao ethnic costumes have primarily discussed the costumes themselves, far removed from their significance in the social lives of the people who wear them. This chapter focuses on Miao women inhabiting the periphery of tourist spots where traditional clothing had become commercialized, and analyzes their ambivalence toward commodified ethnic costumes in daily life.

For Miao women living in S village, ethnic clothing was a cherished possession not meant for sale. It was considered a source of funds during economic distress, but not as a means of people's livelihood. Therefore, although they were a potential source of cash, ethnic dresses were not expected to be sold. There were instances where husbands encouraged the sale of clothing; however, the wives—who had handcrafted the clothes for themselves or their daughters—refused to do so, insisting that the right

to sell rested entirely with them. These women also experienced emotional difficulty while treating a handmade item of clothing as a commodity. However, husbands often considered them a source of easy income and wanted to sell them quickly or at a high price. Furthermore, the Miao women in S village had negative perspectives about tourist spots, particularly the Miao women of Shidong, who designed and processed clothes to appeal to tourists. The women in S village have increasingly resisted the pressure and allurements to sell ethnic sartorial items, despite economic hardships, their husbands' demands for sale, or requests from tourists.

However, they were aware of the commercial value of used clothes, and not selling them led to value appreciation. Although the women sold their clothes with emotional difficulty, they felt proud when praised by tourists for their creations or when offered to buy their clothes, considering it a validation of the quality and value of their handcrafted ethnic dresses. Some S village women also considered the possibility of selling old clothes as a future option.

Thus far, the value of ethnic clothing has been discussed, but these results reflect the experiences of women in rural areas. The perceptions of unmarried urban women toward their clothing items vary greatly depending on, for example, whether the man they are courting is a Hebian Miao or a Han. Currently, majority of Miao women live in urban areas for the better part of the year. Therefore, future research can derive interesting results by examining how they value their ethnic costumes.

Notes

- * This study was sponsored by Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research, 19K20555, from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS).
- 1 A mid-term plan to achieve national economic and social development goals. In Socialist countries, such as China, annual economic management is based on annual plans, and the framework and targets are determined by medium-to long-term plans.
- 2 The primary agency in charge of the civil aviation business in China.
- 3 This is a comprehensive cultural facility established to promote interchange and unity among ethnic groups, and is one of the 10 largest buildings constructed in 1958–1959 to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the foundation of the nation (Amako et al. 1999: 1202).
- 4 Renderings of the Miao words follow the conventions in *Miao Han Cidian: Qiandong Fanyan* (Zhang 1990).
- 5 To the best of the author's knowledge, in S village, although sometimes called "Gaopo Zu,"

this group is not called “Gaopo Miao.”

- 6 This refers to a policy of replacing the indirect rule by native chieftains with direct rule by Han administrators in the minority areas.
- 7 There are cases where the “ethnicity” reported by heads of households differs from the records in the family registry. Furthermore, the Han and Miao inter-marry, and a household with a Han head can include a Miao woman. For intergroup marriages, it is common for one spouse to adopt the language, clothing, and customs of the other. Due to space limitations, this issue will be discussed in detail elsewhere.
- 8 Text in the brackets was added by the author. Hereinafter, the contents in brackets in interviewee responses denote additions by the author.
- 9 This refers to those of a good social standing and higher ranking in the social class among the Hebian Miao community.
- 10 Fields where one can harvest approximately 250 to 300 kilograms of rice.
- 11 The town where the county’s government is located.

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