

# CONTEMPORARY CONSTUMES DESIGNS FROM GAOSHAN ETHNIC CULTURE IN ZHANGZHOU CITY, THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Wang Xulian<sup>1</sup>, Chaiyot Wanich Wattananuwat<sup>2</sup>

Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Bangkokthonburi University,<sup>1,2</sup>  
China,<sup>1</sup> Thailand<sup>2</sup>

Email: [sovannahoeurn@gmail.com](mailto:sovannahoeurn@gmail.com),<sup>1</sup> [350398721wang@gmail.com](mailto:350398721wang@gmail.com)<sup>2</sup>

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## Abstract

This article aims to explore the contemporary costumes design under the background of Gaoshan Ethnic costumes culture. 1) investigation and inscription Gaoshan Ethnic costumes Culture, costumes making process and costume significances. 2) Analysis, classification, and element extraction of Gaoshan Ethnic costumes characteristics, and analysis of contemporary Gaoshan costumes brands. This study adopts a mixed research method, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, including field surveys, literature analysis, expert interviews, and questionnaire analysis. Qualitative research, guided by the United Nations, UNESCO, and the International Council on Monuments and Sites, explores ethnic culture, intangible heritage, and quality management. Following the Bura Charter Guidelines, it proposes a quality management plan for costumes culture. Quantitative analysis involves surveys on six factors-culture, costumes design, fashion, market, economy, and communication-yielding 230 valid data points, analyzed using SWOT to explore the Contemporary market development of ethnic costumes. The study, based in Zhangzhou, examines Gaoshan Ethnic costumes, documenting 14 groups with a focus on Paiwan attire. **The results show that** it recreates a traditional Paiwan women's outfit and categorizes elements such as tops, bottoms, colors, patterns, materials, and accessories to compile a Gaoshan traditional costumes display. Extracted elements are used for Contemporary costumes innovation. This research contributes to preserving Gaoshan traditional costumes, inheriting

craftsmanship, promoting ethnic elements, and fostering sustainable economic, cultural, and social development in Zhangzhou's Gaoshan communities.

**Keywords:** Costumes Design; Contempoorary Costume; Gaoshan Ethnic Culture

## Introduction

Gaoshan, a unique carrier of ethnic culture, reflects distinct ethnic and artistic characteristics. Influenced by Baiyue customs and later Han culture, it evolved into men wearing shirts and women wearing skirts, featuring geometric, animal, and symbolic motifs like clouds, the sun, and mountains, often adorned with feathers and flowers. Recognized as a national intangible cultural heritage in 2008, it holds high research value. However, public awareness in mainland China remains limited, and Contemporary ization and ethnic integration pose challenges to its inheritance, including cultural loss, difficulty in preserving traditional craftsmanship, and a shortage of skilled inheritors. In Taiwan, traditional shell bead craftsmanship has been replaced by industrial production, highlighting the urgency of cultural preservation. To address this, mainland Chinese governments have introduced policies supporting ethnic regions, with Zhangzhou City actively promoting cultural inheritance through tourism, inheritor training, and project guidance, creating new opportunities for the continuation of Gaoshan traditional costumes culture.

This study is based on the current status of Gaoshan costumes culture development in Zhangzhou City (Fig.1) and carried out a practical research activity. It aims to comprehensively investigate and record the current status of Gaoshan costumes culture inheritance, sort out and classify costumes types, and integrate research materials (Fig.2) to enrich cultural connotations and arouse the public's attention and cherishment of ethnic minority culture. By strengthening the design of Contemporary Gaoshan costumes from the perspective of traditional culture, enriching the variety of characteristic ethnic costumes products in the market, promoting the recognition and inheritance of Gaoshan culture and other ethnic minority cultures, opening up new ideas for the sustainable development of Gaoshan costumes culture, and promoting the economic and cultural prosperity of Gaoshan areas.



**Figure 1:** Map of Zhangzhou, Fujian, China.



**Figure 2:** Paiwan and Puyuma Tribe Traditional Costumes.

## Research Objectives

1. To investigation and inscription Gaoshan's Ethnic costumes Culture, costumes making process and costume significances.
2. To analyze, classification and element extraction in Gaoshan's Ethnic costumes identities, and analyze it in comparison with Contemporary Ethnic costumes.

## Literature Reviews

As one of China's ethnic minorities, the Gaoshan people's clothing culture contains profound historical heritage and unique artistic value. As one of the Gaoshan people's settlements, Zhangzhou City is of great significance for the study of its clothing culture. In terms of the historical evolution of Gaoshan clothing, many research results have outlined its development context for us. The Compilation Committee of the Complete Works of Chinese Ethnic Minority Design (2019) has shown the rich historical and cultural connotations and historical value of the Gaoshan people's transition from nakedness to natural

objects covering the body to cloth shading to fur waistbands to linen cloth to dyeing, weaving and embroidery to decoration. The study of the origin of the name "Gaoshan people" by Jia Yi (2020) shows that the name has evolved through many historical periods, and different names reflect the political background and ethnic cognition at that time. Chen Guoqiang (1986) found in his study of the development process of the Gaoshan people that their ethnic origins are multi-source, mainly related to the ancient Yue people in the southeastern coastal areas of mainland China, and they have been continuously integrated with the Han and other ethnic groups in the course of historical development. The origin of the Gaoshan people and other ethnic groups can be explored from archaeological materials, documentary records, etc.

The characteristics and value of clothing are the key areas of research. Huang Wei (2022) used comparative analysis to conduct a modeling study on the placket, collar, sleeves, pants, skirts and other aspects of Gaoshan clothing, and comprehensively explained the detailed design of Gaoshan clothing from the perspective of clothing design; Li Shali (2000) pointed out in "Traditional Costumes of Taiwan's Aboriginals" that the traditional clothing of the Gaoshan people belongs to the Fangyi system, mainly in red, yellow and black. Men mostly wear vests, short jackets, shawls, shorts, waist skirts, embroidered feather crowns, long robes, etc., with headscarves and leg wraps; women have short coats and long skirts, aprons, knee pants, etc., and wear aprons and headscarves; both men's and women's clothing are decorated with exquisite patterns, and there are also some accessories such as hats, headdresses, ear necks, chests, wrist ornaments, waist ornaments, leg ornaments, tattoos and bags; the materials used in clothing vary from person to person and from status to status, and research on them has great artistic value; Xu Qiang & Chen Dongsheng (2016) used traditional weaving techniques to embroider the unique totem patterns of the Gaoshan people, which not only preserved the essence of traditional craftsmanship, but also added unique artistic value to the clothing. Wei Qing (2021) conducted in-depth research on the artistic value of Gaoshan traditional clothing and its innovative application in modern design. Gaoshan clothing has rich historical, social, aesthetic, scientific and related values, such as reflecting cultural exchange and integration, promoting the development of ethnic tourism economy, embodying unique aesthetic concepts, and containing material science and process technology knowledge.

From the current research status at home and abroad, domestic research mainly focuses on clothing patterns, colors, shapes, materials, headdresses, etc., covering multiple dimensions such as historical culture, skill inheritance, innovative design and sustainable development. Lai Wenlei (2021) proposed in the study of the extraction and design development of Gaoshan clothing elements that when extracting elements, we should respect cultural traditions, maintain cultural authenticity, focus on combining innovation with modern aesthetics, and achieve sustainable development. We can extract elements such as colors and patterns through literature research and field research, and apply them to clothing design and other fields; Xiang Chunlei & Chen Dongsheng. (2021) discussed the continuation and innovation of Atayal traditional clothing in modern design; Huang Yanling (2021) discussed how to effectively develop Zhangzhou's tourism and cultural products in the context of global tourism to enhance the local cultural tourism competitiveness. Wu Mengru (2020) discussed how to combine the cultural elements of ethnic costumes with modern fashion to achieve innovation and diversification of clothing design. Deng Xiangpeng, (2019) discussed the popular trends shown at the China International Fashion Week, pointing out that designers have combined traditional elements with modern design to create fashionable works with a sense of the times and cultural depth. Xia Fan (2020) discussed the decline of ethnic minority clothing culture in modern society and the possibility of its regeneration. Guo Hao (2021) explored the strategies of how ethnic costumes can achieve internationalization and branding in the context of globalization, and proposed the path of ethnic costume branding. These studies not only provide a theoretical basis for the modern inheritance of Gaoshan costumes, but also promote their development in the modern clothing industry.

Foreign research focuses on the study of clothing skills, historical culture and spiritual connotation. Yuasa Hiroshi and Laichuan Xiaoji (2000) recorded in detail the clothing design, production technology and cultural symbolic significance of the Gaoshan Zou people in the 1960s and 1970s through a combination of images and text. Po-Hsun Wang & Chi-Shiung Tseng. (2014). Explored the expression of Gaoshan culture in textile design, and reflected the unique cultural characteristics and values of the Gaoshan people through the use of colors and patterns dyed from natural raw materials. Gowlland, (2022) deeply explored the inheritance and development of Paiwan traditional handicrafts. Naojiro Murakami and Guo Hui (1928) recorded the trade between Gaoshan

deerskin, cowhide, sheepskin, cotton cloth, linen and Zhangzhou's silk and woven fabrics, showing the activeness of the Gaoshan region's trade activities. Lee Suk-juan of South Korea (2016) mainly discussed the spiritual tradition and narrative aesthetics of the Gaoshan people. In summary, Gaoshan clothing has rich historical, social, aesthetic, scientific and related values. At present, the research on Gaoshan clothing has achieved certain results, but the research on the integration of Gaoshan clothing culture and economic development, brand building and management in Zhangzhou City still needs to be strengthened. In the future, we can explore in depth in this direction to promote the sustainable development of Gaoshan clothing culture in Zhangzhou City.

## **Research Methodology**

Based on the Burra Charter Guidelines issued by the International Council on Monuments and Sites and relevant documents such as China's Ethnic cultural protection policy, this study has established a solid theoretical foundation. To verify the theory's practical impact, the research team conducted field surveys in Songkeng Village, Hua'an County, Zhangzhou City, interviewing inheritance experts, scholars, and local residents. Interview agreements were established in advance to ensure informed consent and strict confidentiality of collected data.

The study employs multiple research methods: field surveys to document Gaoshan costumes through firsthand observation and experience; documentary data analysis via online sources, books, and videos; expert interviews with Five inheritors and scholars for qualitative insights; comparative analysis of 14 Gaoshan Ethnic groups' costumes to explore cultural similarities and differences (Table 1); and a multidisciplinary approach integrating anthropology, sociology, history, and art to assess the cultural value of Ethnic attire. The research progresses through three phases: compiling traditional costume data, extracting and innovating costumes elements, and merging traditional designs with Contemporary fashion. The effectiveness of this fusion hinge on successful element extraction and innovation, which in turn shapes Contemporary costumes design. Throughout the study, innovation and integration remain central challenges, continuously influencing the evolution of contemporary Gaoshan attire.

## Results

**Gaoshan costumes culture and skills display manual:** The "Handbook of Traditional Costume Culture of the Gaoshan People" includes the costume features of 14 Ethnic groups, including Atayal, Saisiyat, Bunun, Tsou, Rukai, Paiwan, Puyuma, Yami, Ami, Thao, Kavalan, Taroko, Seediq, and Sakilaya. The costumes of each Ethnic group are uniquely tailored. Common styles include Guantouyi, cross-collared clothes, bras, vests, long-sleeved tops and skirts. In addition to animal skins and barks, most are made of self-woven linen and decorated with colorful patterns to improve breathability and moisture absorption. The costumes are rich in patterns, including human figures, snake patterns, floral patterns, and Hui patterns, which have profound meanings and tell the historical evolution of the Gaoshan people. Many patterns are embroidered by the tribesmen with colorful silk threads. Every stitch and thread carry ancient legends and shows exquisite craftsmanship. The Gaoshan people pay attention to decoration in their costumes.

They wear crowns, forehead ornaments, ear ornaments, neck ornaments, chest ornaments, waist ornaments, as well as arm ornaments, hand ornaments, and foot ornaments. They are mainly made of natural materials such as shell beads, animal fur, and plants. They use unique techniques such as series connection, inlay, and arrangement to present a unique aesthetic style. In addition, like the Li people, the Gaoshan people have body decorations such as tattoos, face tattoos, and tooth dyeing, which reflect their unique aesthetic concepts and cultural pursuits. Gaoshan costumes is not only costumes to cover the body and keep warm, but also an artistic treasure that carries the national culture, and has important research value for skills. Its exquisite craftsmanship not only inherits the long-standing cultural traditions, but also shows the wisdom and creativity of the Gaoshan people to the world, becoming a shining pearl in the cultural treasure house of the Chinese nation.

Atayal	Bunun	Saisiyat	Amis	Kavalan	Tsou	Seediq
						
Truku	Paiwan	Rukai	Tao	Thao	Puyuma	Sakizaya
						

**Figure 1:** Ditional dress of the 14 Gaoshan Ethnic groups.

2. Production of Gaoshan traditional costumes: selecting the design elements of Gaoshan costumes and using traditional techniques to design and produce one set of traditional costumes with Gaoshan characteristics. (Fig.2):



**Figure 2:** Paiwan traditional women's costumes production.

Characteristic analysis of traditional women's costumes of the Paiwan: The colours of traditional women's costumes of the Paiwan are mainly red, black and white, and the style is influenced by Han Chinese, with a large lapel and right overlap, a long blouse with a long skirt, and slits on both sides of the

blouse; the overall design is simple in structure, but a sense of magnificence is reflected through decorations and accessories. Embroidery handwork is delicate and complex, with prominent symbols of traditional motifs such as the Hundred Steps Snake, the Sun and the Ancestral Spirit, and necklaces, bracelets and headdresses made of natural materials such as beads and strings, seashells and feathers, which demonstrates the Paiwan's quest for beauty and dignity. Fabric selection: natural fiber fabrics such as hemp and cotton are commonly used.

Decorative materials: choose suitable accessories such as bead jewelry, feathers and thread.

Design and Tailoring: According to the standard of 165/90A, make the garment structure design, make the paper pattern, tailoring

Sewing: Adopt different sewing techniques such as flat sewing, lockstitch sewing and overlock sewing to ensure the firmness and durability of the garment.

Embroidery: choose the pattern of bead embroidery to produce traditional patterns such as Hundred Pace Snake, Sun and Ancestral Spirit.

Weaving: Weave headdresses, necklaces and other accessories using beads, feathers and other materials.

Finishing: Cutting threads, ironing fabrics, and conducting a thorough inspection of the costume to ensure that the stitching is secure and the decorations are intact. Innovative Design of Traditional Costume Elements of Gaoshan Tribe.

**Extraction of contents:** Extract the costumes styles, shapes, colours, patterns, embroidery techniques, weaving techniques, accessory designs, matching methods, etc. of the various Ethnic groups of the Gaoshan Ethnic group.

Colour elements: Bright and bold colours are commonly used in Gaoshan costumes, such as red, black and white. Red usually symbolises passion, bravery and vitality, and is often used for important parts or decorations in the costumes of the Gaoshan Ethnic. Black represents solemnity, mystery and authority, and is often used as the base or one of the main colours of the costume. White, on the other hand, signifies purity, sanctity and peace, and is also often seen in the costumes of the Takayama people. In addition to the basic three primary colours, other bright colours, such as yellow, blue and green, are

also used in the costumes of the Takayama people. The combination of these colours is often rhythmic and layered, giving a strong visual impact.

Pattern elements: the Gaoshan Ethnic worship nature and often use animal patterns such as snakes, deer and eagles (Fig.4), which present exquisite shapes and delicate textures; geometric patterns representing mountains, the sun or the moon, with repetitions, combinations and deformations presenting a colourful trend; botanical patterns of flowers, leaves, and fruits, with their beautiful shapes and vivid colours, reflect the Gaoshan Ethnic's praise for nature and their love of life. The flowers, leaves and fruits of the plants have beautiful forms and bright colours, reflecting the praise of the Gaoshan Ethnic for nature and their love of life.

Diamond pattern	Diamond pattern	Diamond pattern	Square pattern
			
Square pattern	Flower pattern	Triangle pattern	circular
			
cross	Geometric patterns	Linear pattern	
			

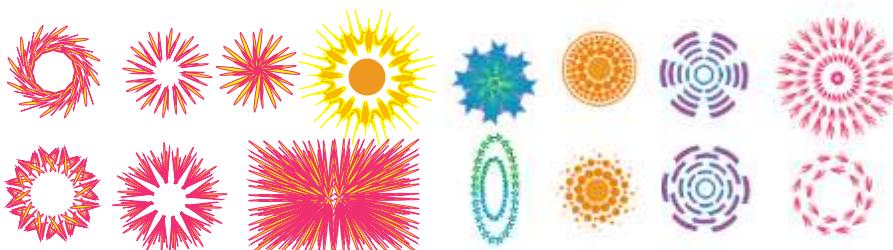
**Figure 3:** Paiwan Dress Patterns.

Material elements: The materials commonly used in Gaoshan costumes include hemp, cotton, tree bark and animal skin. These materials are all natural materials, featuring environmental protection, comfort and durability. Hemp and cotton are soft, breathable and moisture-absorbent, making them ideal for making summer costumes. Bark and animal skin are warm, waterproof and durable, making them suitable for winter or special occasions. Shells, beads and feathers are suitable for accessories.

Styling elements: The shapes of Gaoshan costumes are usually loose and comfortable, suitable for the lifestyle and labour needs of the Gaoshan Ethnic.

Men's costumes are usually simple and generous, mainly robes and shorts, while women's costumes are more gorgeous and colourful, mainly long skirts and blouses.

**Innovative Applications:** Analyse the colours used in the costumes of the various Ethnic groups of the Gaoshan Ethnic and extract the main colour combinations. Colour extraction tools or hand-drawn colour cards can be used to identify the colours commonly used in costumes, as well as the emotions and cultural significance conveyed by these colours. Organise and classify the patterns used by each Ethnic group, and summarise typical geometric patterns (Fig.5), animal patterns, plant patterns, etc. Analyse the shape, composition and symbolic meaning of these patterns, and extract representative pattern elements. To summarise the materials and production techniques of the costumes of the various Ethnic groups of the Gaoshan Ethnic group, such as weaving, embroidery, printing and dyeing, etc., and to extract the unique material and process characteristics, so as to provide reference for subsequent design applications. To analyse the style structure of the costumes of various Ethnic groups of the Gaoshan Ethnic, analyse the cutting style, proportion relationship and wearing style, and extract the characteristic style elements.



**Figure 4:** Innovative sunbursts Fellowship design.

**Element recombination:** Recombine the extracted elements of colour, pattern, material and style to create a new design that is both characteristic of the Gaoshan Ethnic culture and in line with Contemporary aesthetics (Fig.4). Different combinations can be tried to explore more innovative possibilities. **Application of Contemporary design techniques:** Combine Contemporary design techniques, such as simplification, abstraction and exaggeration, with the extracted elements. For example, simplifying complex patterns into simple geometric shapes, or boldly matching and innovating traditional colours. **Cross-disciplinary application:** Apply the elements of the Gaoshan dress to different

fields, such as costumes design, interior decoration, graphic design, product design, etc. Through cross-discipline application, the influence of the Takayama culture can be expanded, and at the same time, new creativity and inspiration can be brought to these fields.



**Figure 5:** Innovative design with Gaoshan elements.

## Discussions

The study of clothing design under the contemporary Gaoshan culture reveals how this ethnic group strikes a balance between inheritance and innovation in modern society. Gaoshan clothing is not only a tool for wearing, but also an important carrier of cultural identity and historical inheritance. The study shows that while respecting tradition, modern design actively absorbs modern design concepts to form a unique clothing style, which not only retains traditional elements but also meets the aesthetic and functional needs of contemporary consumers.

In terms of materials and craftsmanship, the study points out that Gaoshan traditional clothing mostly uses natural materials such as cotton, linen and silk. These materials are not only environmentally friendly, but also have good breathability and comfort. On this basis, modern designers are increasingly introducing new environmentally friendly materials and technologies, while still attaching importance to traditional handicrafts such as embroidery and weaving. This fusion makes clothing more modern and market competitive while retaining cultural characteristics. Color and pattern are another major feature of Gaoshan clothing. Bright colors and complex patterns are not only beautiful, but also carry rich cultural connotations. In modern design, designers have reinterpreted these traditional elements, using simplified patterns and color matching that is more in line with modern aesthetics, making clothing more fashionable and attracting the attention of young consumers.

In addition, the combination of functionality and fashion is also an important finding of the study. Modern Gaoshan clothing design no longer simply pursues beauty, but takes the practicality of clothing into consideration. Designers are committed to creating clothing that is suitable for daily wear and can meet the needs of special occasions, which enhances the market adaptability of clothing. Cultural identity is also emphasized in contemporary Gaoshan clothing design. By conveying cultural symbols, modern design allows the younger generation to express their cultural identity more confidently. This cultural confidence is not only reflected in the choice of clothing, but also in the positive attitude of participating in cultural activities and festivals.

Finally, with the revival of ethnic culture and the development of tourism, the market potential of Gaoshan clothing has gradually been recognized. The study suggests that the use of digital marketing and social media platforms to promote the clothing culture of the Gaoshan people can effectively expand its market influence and promote the inheritance and development of traditional culture. These research results not only provide a rich theoretical basis for the design of Gaoshan clothing, but also point out the direction for design innovation in practice.

## New Knowledges



**Figure 7:** Diagram show the Preservation and Innovation of Gaoshan Traditional Costumes.

This study provides systematic new knowledge for the innovative design of Gaoshan clothing culture, including the organization and application of clothing culture, element extraction and innovative design, quality management and sustainable development, market analysis and brand strategy, and provides new theoretical basis and practical guidance for the modernization development of Gaoshan clothing culture.

## Conclusions

The study sorted out the traditional clothing of 14 branches of the Gaoshan people, especially conducted an in-depth analysis of the Paiwan clothing, and restored a set of traditional Paiwan women's clothing through modern technology. The study built a complete database of Gaoshan traditional clothing, covering clothing categories (tops, bottoms, etc.), colors, patterns, materials, accessories, etc., forming a systematic clothing culture display manual. By analyzing the cultural symbols, craft characteristics and decorative elements of Gaoshan traditional clothing, key elements that can be applied to modern clothing design are extracted. In the innovative design of clothing, combined with modern fashion trends, Gaoshan traditional patterns, color matching and handicrafts are used to develop modern clothing with ethnic characteristics. The study combines the international cultural heritage protection guidelines such as the "Bula Charter" to propose a quality management plan for clothing culture to ensure the value inheritance and application of Gaoshan clothing culture. The study not only focuses on the protection of clothing culture, but also explores the commercial promotion strategy of ethnic clothing in combination with market demand to achieve a win-win situation of cultural inheritance and economic benefits. The study conducted a market analysis of current Gaoshan clothing brands and used the SWOT analysis method to evaluate the competitiveness of ethnic clothing in the modern market from six dimensions, including culture, clothing design, fashion trends, market economy, and communication and promotion. Through the analysis of valid questionnaire data (230 copies), the study proposed a path for the modernization of ethnic clothing, including brand building, design innovation, and market promotion strategies, providing new ideas for the commercialization of Gaoshan clothing.

## Suggestions and Recommendations

Digital recording: Through high-definition imaging, 3D modeling, digital scanning technology and other means, the patterns, production processes and styles of Gaoshan clothing are fully digitally archived,

Further explore the combination of digital resources with virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technology to create an immersive clothing culture experience hall.

Establish a cultural heritage protection center: Establish a clothing culture heritage center in the Gaoshan gathering area, integrating display, education and training functions, inheriting the craftsmanship while injecting new vitality into it.

Cultural protection cannot be separated from community participation and support: Encourage community leadership: By guiding local residents to participate in costume production and inheritance projects, combine cultural protection with local economic development,

The research results show that Gaoshan costumes have unique patterns, colour and structural beauty, which can provide rich inspiration for modern clothing design. On this basis, the design needs to focus on the following directions:

Pattern innovation: Extract core elements such as traditional geometric patterns and natural totems (such as animals and plants), and apply them to fabric printing, embroidery or texture design of modern clothing through abstraction, simplification or repeated arrangement, so that traditional symbols have a modern and fashionable sense.

Colour expression: Combine the traditional colour contrast of the Gaoshan people (such as red, black, white, green, yellow and brown) with modern techniques such as gradient and splicing to adapt to different types of clothing and occasions.

Style innovation: Draw inspiration from the structural characteristics of traditional clothing (such as shawls, waistbands, wide sleeves, etc.), and integrate modern fashion design language through cutting and splicing techniques to provide consumers with clothing that is both culturally distinctive and practical.

Daily Light Series: Develop simple and practical modern clothing for mass consumers, integrating traditional patterns or decorations of the Gaoshan people, suitable for daily commuting or leisure scenes.

**Cultural derivatives:** Launch derivatives such as scarves, hats, bags, jewelry, etc., so that more consumers can experience the Gaoshan culture at a lower cost and enhance brand communication.

**Functional clothing series:** Combine modern technology (such as windproof, waterproof or smart fiber materials) to develop functional clothing, and integrate traditional culture into emerging fields such as outdoor clothing.

**Promote community economic development,** cooperate with craftsmen in Gaoshan areas, establish clothing production workshops, and create local employment opportunities.

**Product price positioning** needs to cover multiple consumer markets, which can not only meet high-end customization needs, but also provide people-friendly cultural derivative products to expand market coverage.

The focus in the future is on the comprehensive implementation from theory to practice, so that the Gaoshan clothing can not only be revitalized locally, but also shine on the fashion stage.

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