

How did the Beliefs Influenced the Begining of Chinese Fashion?

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Abstract

Research issues: How did begin the history of clothing in China? How did the beliefs influenced on the clothing and it's development in China?

Methods used in the research: Gathering informations in the books, on the web, in the articles, author`s own knowledge

Result: Link between early belifs and clothing in China; also linked some Chinese mythology with European mythology

Main conclusions: Early-dated clothing, alongside beliefs influenced the evolution of Chinese fashion

Keywords: Chinese clothing, Chinese mythology, Chinese history

Preface

Garments has always been since their beginings signature of social status, lifestyle, aesthetics and cultural concepts, as in other parts of the Earth, so as in China, always being the most truest and straightforward reflection of any given time an culture. So, we may say the history of garments is at the same time a history of the development of a civilization [1].

When we describe the necessities of living, clothing is among first: garments, food, shelter and means of travel. There is a wealth of archeological findings in China that are showing the development of garments across Chinese cultures, as well as their potrayals in ancient Chinese mythology, history books, poems and songs, novels and drama [1].

Ancient Chinese clothing was a symbol of their dignity, embodiment of their culture and an essential part of their social status. Lower social class wore hemp clothes which were durable, loose fitting and comfortable to work in the field. Upper class wore dyed silk clothing that could be turned into a fancy design. Lower class people could be punished for wearing silk. And the colors of clothing were also resticted to special people, eg. only Emperor could dres sin yellow, while poor were allowed to wear blue and black color [2].

Historical Background**The Mythological History of China**

According to Sima Qian, the greatest Chinese historian who lived 145 B.C.-90 B.C., in the Han Dynasty, they were three Sovereigns in the Chinese history, the Heavenly Sovereign or Fu Xi, the Earthly Sovereign or Nuwa, and the Tai or Human Sovereign, Shennong. The

Heavenly Sovereign had twelve heads and ruled for 18,000 years. He also had 12 sons who helped him rule the world; they divided humanity into different tribes, to keep them organized. There can be a connection between 12 sons of Heavenly Sovereign with the astrology and 12 moths of the year. The Earthly Sovereign, who lived for 18,000 years, had eleven heads and caused the sun and moon to move in their proper orbits. She was the king of fire, and also created several famous Chinese mountains. For Nuwa it is said that she made human kind out of clay: she molded the clay and bake it, the ones that were good baked become Chinese, the ones who were overbaked became barbarians; and for the last, when she was with the end of the material, she threw pieces of mud behind herself, and in that way come to exist the people of the lowest social status. That legend is easily to be linked with Buddhism since Buddhism came from India where the system of castes between humans exists even today. This legend can also be linked to the Book of Genesis in which Jewish, Christian and Muslim God makes the first two people, Adam and Eve or in Muslim version Adem and Hava out of earth. The Human Sovereign had only seven heads, but he had the longest lifespan of all the Three Sovereigns - 45,000 years (in some versions of the story, his whole dynasty lasted that long). He drove a chariot made of clouds and coughed the first rice out of his mouth. That legend can be linked to the Greek legend of Apolon/Helies, Ancient Greek god of Sun who drives a Sun across the sky in his chariot. Again according to Sima Qian, the Five Emperors were the Yellow Emperor, Zhuangxi, Emperor Ku, Emperor Yao, and Shun [3].

For the yellow Emperor, Huangdi or Xuanyuan Huangdi, is told to been born about 2704 B.C. and to have begun he ruled as emperor from 2697 B.C.-2597 B.C. His reign is credited with the introduction of wooden houses, carts, boats, the bow and arrow, and writing.

Huangdi himself is credited with defeating “barbarians” in a great battle somewhere in what is now Shanxi and that victory put him in the leadership of the tribes throughout the Yellow River (Huang He) plain. Some myths also credit him for the introduction of governmental institutions and the use of coin money. Huangdi’s wife Leizu or Xi Lingshi was reputed to have discovered sericulture thus when the mulberry moth’s cocoon fell into her tea, which was hot, she picked it with her nail and the cocoon started to unwind and she came up of the idea to use that thread for weaving and making clothes, and according to legend she also taught women how to breed silkworms and weave fabrics of silk. For Huangdi is thought to have an exemplary wisdom whose reign was a golden age. According to legend, he had dreamed of an ideal kingdom whose tranquil inhabitants lived in harmonious accord with the natural law and possessed virtues remarkably alike those incorporated in the early Daoism. The legend to the Golden age of mankind can be linked to the Roman poem *Metamorphose* by Ovidius. After waking up from his dream, Huangdi thought how to incorporate these virtues in his own kingdom, to ensure order and prosperity among the inhabitants. Upon his death he was said to have become an immortal. Now is Huangdi worshiped as a first legendary Chinese ancestor [4, 5].

Archeological Remains

Finding of the oracle bone inscriptions in the village Xiaotun, near Anyang in northern Henan Province historically authenticated the Shang Dynasty by indirect means. The oracle bones do not include any records unconnected with divination, neither include any extended narrative; they are mainly isolated sentences, usually propositions about the future. The site where the remains were found was traditionally called Yinxu Yin Ruins, the Remains of Yin; Yin is the traditional name for the Shang Dynasty last capital and an alternative name for the Shang Dynasty. That all led to the first major archeological excavation in China that revealed the Shang were a great and powerful dynasty capable of maintenance of a large labour force over long periods of time, but the Shang rulers were not the benevolent sage kings imagined by later scholars and philosophers, and it could be demonstrated in the large-scale human sacrifices as well as animal sacrifices, all confirmed by the oracle bones inscriptions and the discovery of thousands of human sacrifices accompanying the large tombs, in building foundations and in cemeteries for sacrificial victims [5].

The *Human, Dragon and Phoenix Painting*, painted on the white silk, which is the earliest traditional Chinese painting found so far, dating about 2,300 years ago, discovered in a tomb of the Chu Kingdom near Changsha in Hunan Province. It was used as a banner in traditional Chinese funerals, it is the profile of a woman dressed in a garment with full sleeves and a long skirt; she has her palms together, as she is praying; a flying phoenix with its tail curving upward is on top of her head, and on her right side is a twisting dragon which rises to the sky, though one foot of the dragon has been stripped off. Some of the scholars believe that the woman in the picture is a portrayal of the one who is buried in the tomb, and the phoenix and dragon are leading her up to heaven; others say that it is a portrayal of a witch who is praying for the deceased, with the phoenix and dragon as her guides; and some are saying that the fighting between phoenix and dragon is a struggle between good and evil, and the woman is praying for good to conquer evil.

Twenty-four years after the *Human, Dragon and Phoenix Painting* was discovered, another painting on the silk was discovered, also in

a Chu Kingdom tomb. It depicts a man wearing a thick hat, holding a rein in one hand and a sword in the other, and he is riding a dragon boat; it has been called *Dragon Boat Riding Painting*. Experts believe that it depicts soul of the buried person rising up to heaven [6].

The Early Development of Garments in China

The development of garments in China can be traced back to the Paleolithic age, which archeological findings that date approximately 20,000 years ago, people of the primitive Zhoukoudian civilization were wearing, according to archeologists, personal ornaments, in the form of tiny white stone beads, olive-colored pebbles, animal teeth, clam shells, fish bones and bone tubes, all meticulously perforated. Ornaments were besides in the means of aesthetic used as a protection against evil [1].

Over 1,000 Neolithic (6,000B.C.-2,000B.C) archeological sites have been found across China. In the change from the hunting society to sedentary with more stable form of agriculture, was labor division first appeared in weaving and pottery making. 5,000 years old painted pottery pots found in Qinghai, province of western China, are decorated with dancers imitating the scene of hunting. Some of the painted dancers wear decorative braids on their heads, while others have ornamental tails on the waist; some of them wear full skirts which are rarely seen in traditional Chinese attire and are more similar to the whalebone Western world skirts. In the neighboring province of Gansu, similar vessels were excavated, on which are painted images of people wearing what is called „Guankoushan“, a typical style found in the early human garments: a piece of textile with a slit or hole in the middle from which the head comes through, with a rope tied at the waist, which gives the garment a dress-like appearance. Another vessel portrays an image of an attractive young girl, with short bangs on the forehead and the long hair in the back; against the facial features and below the neck is found a continuous pattern with three rows of slanting lines and triangles. It is supposed to represent a young girl in a beautiful dress with intricate patterns. Images of primitive Chinese garments were also found on the rock paintings of the early people wearing ear ornaments; there were even found historical artefacts, including ear ornaments made of jade, ivory and turquoise in round, oblong, trapezoid and even semi-circle shapes in the Dashi Neolithic site of Wushan, Sichuan [1].

Differentiation of the Clothing

With the establishment of the social statuses, there began to exist rituals distinguishing the respectable from the humble, leading eventually to the formation of rules and regulations on daily attire. Rules on garments in China started taking shape in the Zhou Dynasty (1,046 B.C.-256 B.C.), regulating the royalty down to the commoners, and these regulations were recorded in the national decrees and regulations. Garments in the Zhou Dynasty were already classified into sacrificial, court mourning and wedding attire and army uniform. The tradition was once broken during the Spring and Autumn Period (779 B.C.-476 B.C.) and the Warring States Period (475 B.C.-221 B.C.), in which hundred schools of thoughts debated and numerous warlords fought for power; and as a result, rigid rules on garments and ornaments were replaced by diversity of style, in which the aristocracy went after extravagance [1].

The Ancient Chinese gave great importance on having and looks of the upper and lower garments on important ceremonial occasions, believing in its symbolism of the greater order of heaven and earth. At the same time co-existed one piece style, starting from the *shenyi*

of the Warring States Period, which has developed into the Han Dynasty robe, the large sleeved *changshan* of the Wei and Jin Period, down to the contemporary *qi bao*, all of them in the form of a long robe in one piece; so as it can be seen, Chinese garments took these two above-mentioned basic forms [1].

The style of *shenyi* (or deep garment), which literally means wrapping the body deep within the clothes, is deeply rooted in the traditional mainstream ethics and morals of China which forbids the close contact of the male and the female; even husband and wife at that time were not allowed to share the same bathroom, the same suitcase, or even the same clothing lines. A married woman when visiting her mother's home was not permitted to eat at the same table with her brothers; a woman going out had to keep herself fully covered – these rules and rituals were recorded in great detail in the Confucian Book of Rites. The *shenyi* is made up of the upper and lower garment, tailored and made in a unique way; there is even a special chapter in the Book of Rites detailing the make of it: It is said that the style of *shenyi* must conform itself to the rites and rituals, fit for the rules with the proper square and round shapes and the perfect balance; long enough to not to expose the skin, but short enough not to drag on the floor; the forepart is elongated into a large triangle, with the part above the waist in straight cut and the part below waist bias cut, for ease of movement; the underarm section is made for flexible movement of the elbow (generous length of sleeves reaches the elbow when folded from the fingertips); it is fit for both officials and soldiers; ranks second in ceremonial wear, functional, not wasteful and simple in style. It is made mostly of linen, except for black silk in sacrificial ceremonies garments; sometimes a colorful decorative band is added to the edges, or even embellished with embroidered or painted patterns. When *shenyi* is put on, the elongated triangular hem is rolled to the right and then tied right below the waist with a silk ribbon, called *dadai* or *shendai*, on which a decorative piece is attached; later on leather belt with normally belt buckle appeared in the garment of the central regions as the influence of nomadic tribes. Belt buckles became an emerging craft at the Warring State Period. They ranged from 3 to 30 cm in length, and they were made from stone, bone, wood, gold, jade, copper or iron, with extravagant ones decorated with gold and silver, carved in patterns or embellished with jade or glass beads [1].

By Han Dynasty, *shenyi* evolved into *qujubao* or curved gown, a long robe with triangular front piece and rounded under hem. Alongside *zhijubao* (a straight gown) was also popular, and it was also called *chan* or *yu*. In Historical Records are comments found of the disrespectful nature of wearing Chan and Yu to court. That taboo may have come from the fact that, before Han Dynasty, people in the central plains wore trousers without crotches, only two legs of the trousers that meet at the waist, thus making the wearer looking disgraceful in the outer garment not properly wrapped to cover the body. When in Confucian classics is dressing etiquette discussed, the outer garment is said not to be lifted even in the hottest days, and the only occasion allowing for lifting the outer garment is when crossing the river. There were even rules on not allowing sitting with the two legs forward., and the rule has to do with the clothing style of the time, when sitting in the forbidden posture may result in disgrace. Later on, alongside with the interaction with the riding nomads, people of the central plains, Chinese started to accept trousers with crotches [1].

The Han Dynasty style of wearing long gowns, *baofu* refers to long robes with the following features: it has lining which is depending on whether padded (if padded, the garment is called *jiabao* or *mianbao*); it most often comes with generously wide sleeves with cinched wrist; it has low cut collars to show the under garment and there is often an embroidered dark band at the collar, the wrists and the front hem, often of a Chinese mythical animal Kui or checker patterns. The *baofu* differ in length, the longer often wore by officials and older men, shorter mostly warriors or heavy laborers. The *shenyi* remained in women's garments. It developed thus that first the front lapel elongated and developed into a *shenyi* with wrap-around lapel [1].

China has a byword: People first discovered color in the distance and then observed patterns after coming close that origins from the Ancient China [7].

Royal Ceremonial Wear

Typical garments for Ancient Chinese emperors were the *mianfu* and the dragon robe, and they serve as a micro cosmos that exemplify the unique Chinese aesthetic and sense of the Universe. There is a story in Chinese history of, Dressed with yellow robe“ that happened 959 A.D. It tells about the beginning of the Song Dynasty when a general was dressed with the royal yellow robe by his supporters and that made him an emperor, throwing down a young emperor who took over the throne after the death of his father. Representation of the emperor by the, yellow robe“ started in the Han Dynasty. The Chinese Yin and Yang theories as well as of the Five Elements are trying to explain the independence and mutual rejection of gold (metal), wood, water, fire and earth where white represents gold, green represents wood, black represents water, yellow represents earth and red represents fire. In Zhou Dynasty, the superior color for garments was red, but by the Qin Dynasty (221 B.C.-206 B.C.) it was black that ranked highest among all garment colors and all of the officials wore black as much as they could. Following yellow color promoted to the highest place, favored by the Han emperors. And by the Tang Dynasty the court made official that no one except the emperor had the right to wear yellow color and this rule was passed all the way down to the Qing Dynasty. It was said that when did 11-year old Pu Yi (1906-1967), the last emperor of China saw his 8-years old cousin wearing yellow silk as his clothes lining, he grabbed his sleeve and said: „How dare you use yellow“; that story tells of the supreme status of yellow in their heart [1].

Yellow color is allowed to be worn only by the emperors because as the emperor personified the son of Heaven on the Earth, so he was only allowed to wear yellow which represents Earth, and of course they have believed that China is the Center of the Earth, so Emperor represents China, thus the Earth.

Being strictly specified which class should wear what on what occasion in Ancient Chinese culture, the garment which emperor wore on important occasions had a special name: *mianfu*. *Mianfu* is a set of garments including the *mianguan*, a crown with a bord that leans forward, as if the emperor is bowing to his subjects in full respect and concern. Chains of beads hang at front and back, normally twelve chains each, but also in numbers of nine, seven, five or three, depending on the importance of the occasion and the difference in ranks. The jade beads are threaded with silk, ranging

from nine to twelve in number. Hairpins are used to fasten the crown to the hair, and two small beadshang above the ears of the wearer, reminding him to listen with discretion. This, like the bord in front of the crown, has important political significance.

Black is the normal color of the emperor's upper garment and crimson of the lower garment. These colors symbolize the order of Heaven and Earth and should never be confused. Dragon is the dominant pattern embroidered on the emperor's clothing; another 12 kinds of decoration could be seen as well, as symbolic animals, or natural scenes with sun and moon and these patterns with the difference in complexity according to different ranks and importance of occasion are allowed on the lords as well.

Mianfu is fastened with a belt, under which a decorative piece called *bixi* or knee covering hangs down that originates from the days when people were wearing animal skins, using them for covering the abdomen and genitals from which *bixi* became the protector of the royal dignity and the emperor's is pure red. With the *mianfu* go silk shoes with double-layered wooden soles; material of soles vary depending on season, it can be flax or animal skin. The order of shoes' color importance is: red, white and black.

Embroidered dragon is the most outstanding feature of the Chinese royal attire; the number of embroidered dragons in Ming and Qing Dynasties had to be nine: on front and back of the two shoulders and two sleeves, inside the front lapel which displayed the royal prominence bestowed by the gods [1].

The motif of dragon on the emperor's royal attire certainly comes from long time ago, as in the neolithic culture of Yangshao, we find in the graves of the shaman's on the west side of corpse is the figure of the tiger made up of shells and on the east side is the figure of the dragon, also made up of shells. These figures were their representation of the stars on the sky. And shells were used as a way of payment for goods in those days. This all shows that the shaman was well respected and rich person, who served as a some sort of the leader.

The symbol of the empress was phoenix, the mythical king of all the birds. It has the head of a peacock, body of a swan and wings of a golden cockerel, they are believed to be messengers of happiness. The Chinese phoenix is not related to the bird that we know in the Western world that rises from the ashes and symbolises rebirth. Some literary sources claim that the mythical phoenix has its roots in a prehistoric, possibly ostrich-like large bird that used to live in China. It is an extremely kind creature, which is why legends of the phoenix do not contain any elements of vengeance. The bird simply shuns those who fail to meet its high moral standards. In fact, the phoenix is so docile, that it only consumes morning dew to avoid causing harm to any animals or plants. It also symbolises justice and graciousness. It does not tolerate lies or the abuse of power, which is why it never appears to people who engage in such amoral acts. The motif appears on historical objects dating back thousands of years, suggesting that its origins stretch back to the very beginning of Chinese culture. It is believed to only appear during times of peace and prosperity, and that rare treasures would be found where they stopped to rest. The original Chinese name of the phoenix, *feng huang*, incorporates the word for a male bird, *feng*, and a female one, *huang*. In this logic, the bird is actually a symbol of the union between femininity and masculinity, or yin and yang. The motif of phoenix is often depicted together with a motif of dragon, the symbol for masculinity and the

emperor. So, together, they symbolise the emperor and empress, or more commonly, a husband and his wife. The phoenix represents female virtues, such as charm and beauty and such as in the past phoenix was a motif on the empress's clothing (empresses even wore so-called phoenix crown), even nowadays wedding dresses worn by Chinese brides are often decorated with an image of the phoenix [8].

Conclusion

The early beginning of the fashion in China is connected to the need for covering-up the body from the cold, covering abdomen and genitals and to decorate oneself to get a protection from evil from the gods. The remains of that primitive clothing were still seen in the *mianfu*, emperor's official attire, under which a decorative piece called *bixi* or knee covering hangs down. *Bixi* originates from the days when people were wearing animal skins, using them for covering the abdomen and genitals from which *bixi* became the protector of the royal dignity, linked to the fact that an emperor was considered as a son of heaven.

It can be also concluded on the mythological stories that even in those days existed a way of communication between Asia and Europe, it probably was a trade route, a proto-Silk route.

Later development of Chinese fashion can be seen in the all-body coverage, with only head and hands to be seen, due to ethics. Also there can be seen the differentiation of the different kinds and colors of clothing for different social classes and occasions; there are still Chinese traditional weddings in which the bride wears red clothing, as a symbol of happiness. And of course, the yellow taboo of the emperor's clothing.

All of these are bringing us to conclusion that a clothing in China developed from the proto-clothing and moral beliefs and beliefs in general.

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