

Chapter 6 Charms of Traditional Clothing and Art Craft

Introduction

As one of the earliest civilization, China enjoys the level of clothing, adornment and handicrafts which reflects the economy, culture and people's minds in different historic periods. Chinese traditional clothing and handicrafts not only represents rapidly changing fashion trend in a society, but also indicates the relationship between dressing and craftsmanship in different time period. This lesson will not provide you the whole history, but display the distinguished features of traditional clothing and crafts in typical dynasties. In terms of daily dressing and adornment, we hope you will know about life of common Chinese people aesthetically and emotionally.



Lesson One Traditional Clothing and Handicraft

In traditional Chinese culture, ancient clothing is the most popular, national, and diversified part, which is also full of the sense of times, vitality, and practical value.

--Professor Chen Fang in the National Forum of Dunhuang Clothing and Accessories

Chinese Clothing Before Qin Dynasty (Paleolithic-221 BC)

Regarding the origin of clothing, ancient Chinese people have several guesses including for protection, embarrassment and decoration. According to the historic records and status, clothes are mainly made of animal furs in this period of time, in other words, Chinese ancient people have already learned the technology of sewing together animal skins. Although the clothing materials were pretty common, such as linen, natural silk and furs, Chinese people began to make the accessories of what they called “ clothes”. Jade, as the symbol of luck and preciousness in Chinese culture, was carved as the ornament of the clothes under limited conditions. The pursuits of the beauty promoted the development of Chinese clothing.



(Shape C Jade Dragon) c 字玉龙

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Neck Ornament

Excavated in Neolithic Sites. Photoed by Li Zhanqiang

Chinese Clothing in Chu and Han Dynasty (206 BC-202 BC)

Most of Chinese clothes of Chu and Han Dynasty are very long and narrow according to the lanky body of ancient Chinese people. Shenyi (深衣) is one kind of classical Chinese clothing styles in this period of time. There were two kind of Shenyi, which are the curving- front robe (曲裾) and the straight- front robe (直裾). The Chinese literal meaning of the name Shenyi is to cover the whole body in many layers of cloth. The leader of Han dynasty believed the ethics of Zhou Li- the book containing rituals and rule of behaviour and garments in this period of time. Thus, in traditional morals, it is necessary to forbid the contact between male and female before the formal marriage. Besides restriction of behaviour, Special colors were also used for clothing in harmony with nature and ceremony. Ancient Chinese people prefer to wear green in spring, red in summer, yellow in autumn and black in winter. For Chinese ancient people who lived in Chu Dynasty, most of them believed that they were the sons and daughters of the God of fire, thus they preferred to wear Shenyi patterned with Phoenix rising from the ashes. Despite the set of etiquette, dressing of female were still kept the romantic elements such as fabulous waistline and long dress, and the slim dancing females were appeared in many craft and paintings.



西汉高冠、曲裾衣（马王堆一号汉墓出土 绘制）

Clothing (Shen Yi) from Han Dynasty-Painting for the clay figurines

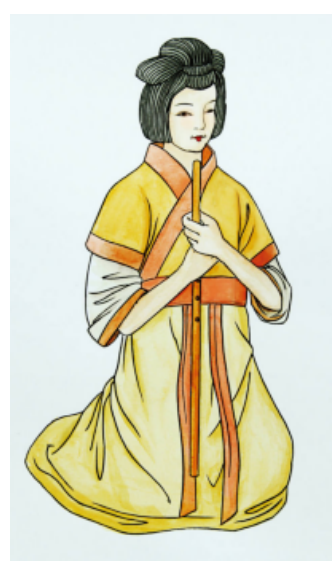


西汉长袖曲裾深衣（据江苏铜山县 江山西汉墓 出土俑 手绘）

Clothing (Shen Yi) from Han Dynasty-Painting for the clay figurines

Chinese Clothing in Wei, Jin, South and North Dynasties (222 AD-589 AD)

It is the most changing period with political chaotic in Chinese history, and it brought with frequent changes in clothing as well. In general, the dressing was influenced by the style of Han Dynasty, but it also had its own characteristic. This Chinese historic period was rife with frequent wars and conflicts, people had more opportunities to wear military uniforms, thus many kinds of clothes even for females' dress at that time were like military uniforms but more beautiful. The most famous one is Liang Dang (襌裆) which was decorated the vest outside the gown and tied with a silk belt. It is normal to wear the vest inside the gown previously, however, this abnormal feature of clothing indicated the mentality of the people in the unstable society. Besides, one of the hair style (十字髻) Shi Ziji, literally referred to cross-shaped, was very popular among females, especially for young girls. They preferred to set hair to form a cross-shaped chignon leaving a small mount of hair on both sides, and used a hairpin to fix it.



乐女-根据陶俑绘制 Female Flute Performer-Painting for the clay figure

Chinese Clothing in Tang Dynasty (618 AD- 901 AD)

There is no doubt that Tang Dynasty was the peak in economic development and human civilization in the whole history of China. What are worth mentioning in this period are not only limited to clothing, but also politics, land area, as well as culture exchanges. Many foreign students, diplomats, business men, monks and even artists visited the capital city Chang An every year. Sorts of exotic dressing poured the fresh blood for Chinese people's dressing unceasingly, as a result, the clothing style of this period is more colorful and freedom. Throughout more than 300-year's history of Tang Dynasty, clothing has undergone three stages. Initially, the style of clothing inherited the main feature of Ru Qun (襦裙) from Han Dynasty which had long skirts and big sleeves. In medium term, Hu Fu (胡服) which is characterized by military uniform, was particularly popular with female. In the late stage, Women of Tang Dynasty did not have to abide by the traditional ritual of dressing, therefore the females' dress with plunging neckline was acceptable and popular. In general, the variety of dressing styles became the trend under a relaxed social social atmosphere.

Today what we call Tang Zhuang “唐装” does not directly relate to the clothes of Tang Dynasty. In fact, Tang Costume inherited major characteristics of Chinese traditional costume with the style of western suits. Such designs are available for both Chinese and foreign people. In 2008 Olympic games, Chinese leaders spoke at the closing ceremony with the graceful Tang Zhuang attracting world wide

attention, and thus the fashion of Chinese style costumes came into being.



From *Visual history of Chinese Clothes*

Chinese Clothing in the Republic of China (1912AD - 1949AD)

As more and more western life modes, values, and culture were brought into the period of the Republic of China, the style of clothing has changed significantly. One of the well-known dress is Cheongsam (旗袍), which borrowed the pronunciation of Cantonese, and now cheongsam is called Qi pao in mandarin. The cheongsam, made by different kinds of materials, is a kind of body-hugging long dress for female, while the other version for male is Chang shan (长衫). The origin of cheongsam is from the traditional gown in Qing Dynasty, and was gradually influenced by European fashion. The design is a bold attempt in tradition Chinese clothing showing the beautiful curve lines of females' bodies, and hence it was welcomed by ladies and girls from middle and upper dressing up with jewelry and high-heel shoes. The civility, elegance and idiosyncrasy were fully displayed.



From *Visual history of Chinese Clothes*

How do you dress yourself appropriately in a occasion of a different culture ?

This is a eternal and universal topic for people all over the world.

Arts and Crafts in the Field of Utensil

Ceramics

China is a world-renowned ancient country of ceramics, which has long been one of the most significant traditional handicrafts in China. As early as the early Neolithic Age 8,000 years ago, earthenware was already made and used. During the mid-Shang Dynasty, porcelain in its rudimentary form started to appear. In terms of crafts, pottery and porcelain are both silicate products made at different stage of development, porcelain being derived from pottery. They differ in raw materials, firing temperature and physical properties. Pottery was not phased out when porcelain invented, but continued to develop on its own course parallel to that of porcelain.

During the late Neolithic Age, painted pottery emerged as an outstanding variety of handiwork. And the then Neolithic Culture was called Painted Pottery Culture, also known as Yangshao Culture, named after Yangshao Village, Mianchi County, Henan Province where relics abound in pottery painted with colorful patterns were first found. Painted pottery is a kind of earthenware in reddish brown or pale brown with red or black decorative patterns elegant in shape and exquisite in design. Painted pottery was distributed over a vast area, including the Yangshao Culture region in the upper and middle reaches of the Yellow River, the Dawenkou Culture region in the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River (dating back to 4,500–6,400 years ago), and the Hemudu Culture region in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River, of which Yangshao Culture was

the most flourishing. Painted pottery was superior in ornamentation. As people at that time used to place utensils on the ground, the ornamental patterns tended to take an upper position while taking into consideration at the same time the vertical view and the side view so as to embody an integral effect.



Painted earthen pot of the Ma Jia Yao Culture of the Neolithic Age, housed in the National Museum of China.

As time goes by, painted pottery fell into decline, replaced by black pottery arising from the lower reaches of the Yellow River and the eastern coastal area. The Black Pottery Culture was also called Longshan Culture, as remains of this culture were first discovered in Longshan County, Licheng City, Shandong Province. By that time, black pottery had begun to be made by wheels which, as an innovation in process, made the shape of the pottery perfectly round and neat, the thickness of the body even, and productivity in making pottery raised. In the

meantime, kiln sealing technique had been grasped, and the structure of the pottery kiln improved. The flame mouth was made smaller and the combustion chamber deeper so that the temperature of the kiln chamber became higher. Black pottery wares were jet-black in color, light in weight and bright beautifully on the surface. They were easy to string or to add ear-like handle. To make up for the blemish that as their dark appearance was hard to decorate, black pottery wares were often beautifully shaped.






Exercise After Reading






Part I. Matching

1. Shen yi	A. Chu and Han Dynasty
2. Qi Pao	B. Tang Dynasty
3. The earliest decoration for clothing	C. Jade
4. Hu fu	D. Cheongsam
5. Shi Zijin	E. Wei, Jin, South and North Dynasties Dynasties

Part II. Questions Discussed:

-  What is special about females' dressing in Tang Dynasty?
-  Can you find out the social environment from the way people dressed in Wei, Jin, South and North Dynasties?
-  Why Cheongsam enjoys popularity among Chinese ladies?

Part III. Group Discussion

-  What kind of factors will influence people's clothing in your country ?
-  Could you list some of your countries' traditional clothing ?
-  Could you please describe some dressing code in your country ?
-  If you will have an interview in China, what would you wear?
-  If you are invited to attend a wedding ceremony of your Chinese friend, what color will you wear ?

 If you will attend a funeral in China, what color will you wear?

Suggested Reading:

Book to Read: *Research on Ancient Chinese Clothes and Adornments* is written by Shen Congwen and published by the Commercial Press (HK) LTD (1981). This is an important study of ancient Chinese clothes and adornments. Entrusted by the late Premier Zhou Enlai, Shen Congwen finished this important research and this book has served as a national gift for state heads ever since.