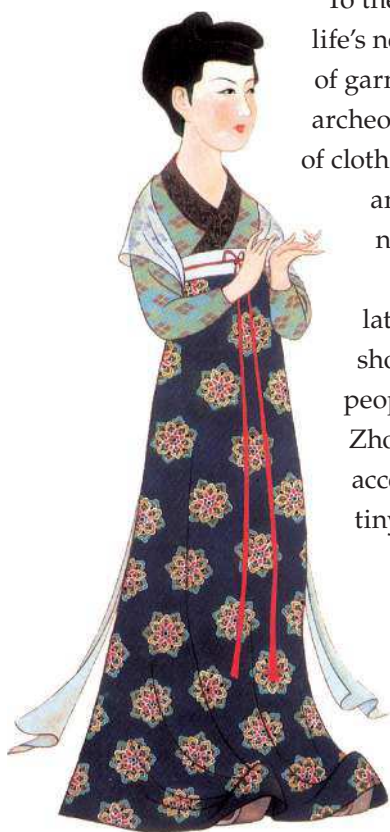


Preface

From the time that clothing first became part of people's lives it has represented differences in social status, lifestyle, aesthetics and culture. Clothing has always reflected the social and historical scenes of a given time. The history of clothing can therefore provide insights into the development of civilization.

To the Chinese, clothing ranks very highly among life's necessities. In a country with a long history of garments and ornaments, there is a wealth of archeological findings illustrating the development of clothing, in addition to the evidence preserved in ancient mythology, chronicles, poems, songs, novels and drama.

Chinese clothing can be traced back to the late Paleolithic age. Archeological findings have shown that approximately 20,000 years ago the people who lived in what is now known as the Zhoukoudian area of Beijing were already wearing accessories, in the form of meticulously carved tiny white stone beads, olive-colored pebbles,



Sui Dynasty women wore short jackets with short sleeves and long skirts. They tied the skirts at chest height, which made them look very elegant. This style of dress can still be seen on Korean women (Painted by Gao Chunming, selected from *Lady Garments and Adornments of Chinese Past Dynasties* by Zhou Xun and Gao Chunming)



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animal teeth, clam shells and bones. Appearance was probably not the main concern of the people wearing accessories at this time, for accessories were also used as a means of protection against evil. People had also developed the technique of sewing together animal skins.

Over a thousand archeological sites dating to the Neolithic age (6,000–2,000 BC) have been found in China, across almost all areas of the country. The major means of food production during this age had transitioned from primitive hunting and fishing to more stable agriculture. There is also early evidence of weaving and pottery making. Ancient painted pottery from 5,000 years ago was found in Qinghai Province of western China, decorated with dancing figures. Some of the figures have decorative hair accessories, while others have ornamental waist bands. Some wear skirts which are more reminiscent of western-style clothing than traditional Chinese attire. In the neighboring province of Gansu, similar items were excavated, decorated with images of people wearing what



A colored pottery bottle with a "head" shape bottle neck excavated in Dadiwan, Gansu Province in 1973, a relic from 5,600 years ago. (Photograph by Li Zhanqiang)



This picture shows the colored pottery basin excavated in Tongde County, Qinghai Province in 1975, with a pattern of people in skirts dancing and holding hands. This kind of skirt is unusual in traditional Chinese clothing. (Photograph by Li Zhanqiang)



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A necklace, jade plate and fragment of jade excavated in a Neolithic site. (Photograph by Li Zhanqiang)

was later called the *guankoushan*. This was a typical style of early clothing which consisted of a piece of material with a hole in the middle for the head and a rope tied at the waist, giving the garment a dress-like appearance. Another piece of pottery shows a young girl with long hair, decorated with intricate patterns which give the appearance of a beautiful dress. In addition to the clay pots, images of early Chinese clothing were found in rock paintings, which show people wearing earrings. Historical items have also been found in the Daxi Neolithic site of Wushan, Sichuan, including earrings made of jade, ivory and turquoise in a variety of shapes.

With the formation of different social classes came the creation of rules and regulations on daily attire, in order to distinguish the rich from the poor. The Zhou Dynasty (1,046–256 BC) instigated national laws on clothing and personal accessories, creating different categories of clothing including court attire, army uniform, mourning attire and wedding attire. This tradition was broken during the Spring and Autumn Period (770–476 BC) and the Warring States Period (475–221 BC), when rigid rules on clothing and accessories were



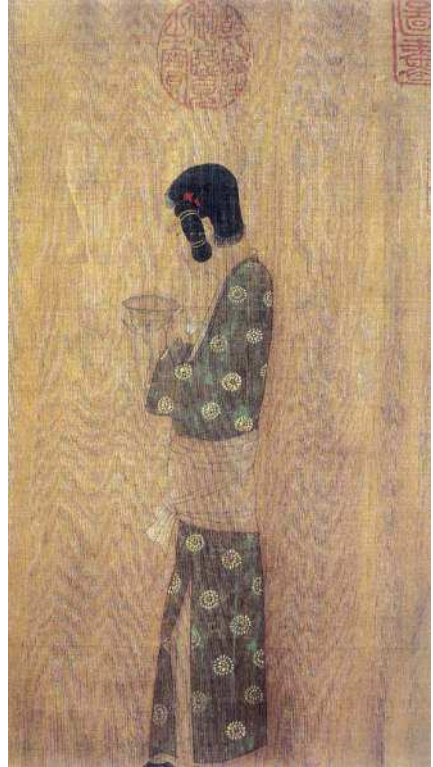
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abolished, and the extravagant style of the aristocracy developed.

The rulers of the Han Dynasty (206–220 AD) followed the Zhou Dynasty in establishing laws on clothing and accessories. The style of dress was simple, and clothing colors were categorized according to the seasons: spring green, summer red, autumn yellow and winter black.

The Wei, Jin and Northern and Southern Dynasties (220–589) represented a period of ideological diversity, cultural prosperity and significant scientific development, despite frequent wars and changes in power. During this period, the Wei and Jin developed a distinctive aristocratic style. The traditional Han culture was transformed by northern nomadic tribes when they migrated into central China and settled down with the Han people, influencing, and being influenced by, the Han style of dress.

When China was reunited during the Sui Dynasty (581–618), the Han dress code was revised again. During the Tang Dynasty (618–907) that followed, a strong national power and a more relaxed social order led to a new clothing style. For example, women typically wore a low-cut, short shirt dress or even narrow-sleeved men's clothing. By



This picture shows a Tang Dynasty lady with a “double-drooping-bun” and wide waist wrap. In the eighth century, Chinese Tang dresses spread into Japan and then exerted a great influence on the Japanese kimono. The kimono styles at that time had names such as “Tang grass,” “Tang flower” and “Tang brocade” and these continue to be used even today. (Detail from the Tang painting *Tuning Qin and Drinking Tea*, selected from *Lady Garments and Adornments of Chinese Past Dynasties* by Zhou Xun and Gao Chunming.)



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the time of the Song Dynasty (960–1279), the Han women had developed the tradition of chest-binding, resulting in the rise in popularity of the elegant, cloak-like garment *beizi*, favored by women of all ages and all social backgrounds. The Yuan Dynasty (1206–1368) was established by the Mongols when they unified China. Mongols at that time wore *mao li*, or triangular hats, and men often wore earrings. The official dress code became a mixture of Han and Mongol styles. When power again transferred to the Han people, the rulers of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) created laws prohibiting the previous dynasty's Mongol language, surnames and clothing, resulting in a return to the dress style of the Tang Dynasty. The official uniform of the Ming Dynasty was intended to reflect a sense of dignity



At the end of the nineteenth century, sewing machines imported from western countries had already been used in the traditional clothes industry. (*As Beautiful as Evening Primrose* painted by Wu Youru)



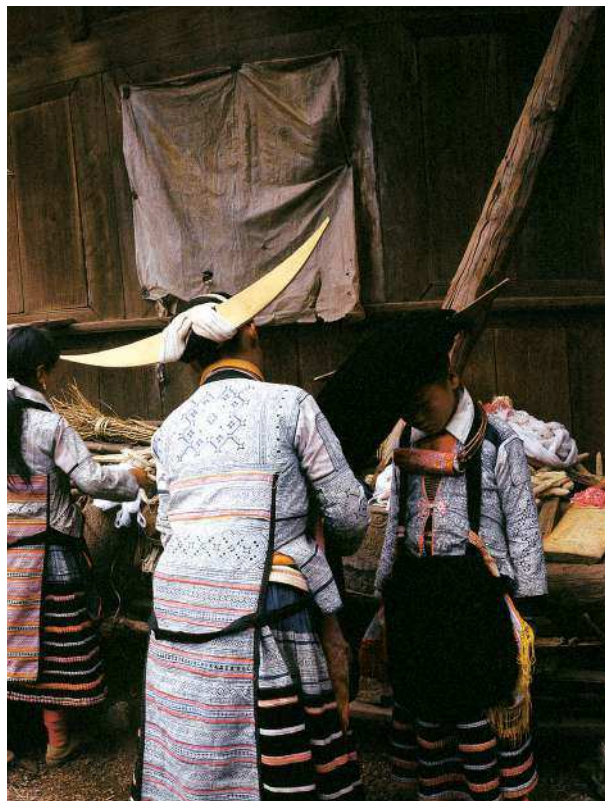
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and splendor, as demonstrated by the complex forms, styles and dressing rituals of the emperor and officials of all levels.

The Qing Dynasty, lasting over 200 years (1644–1911), was a period which saw significant changes in clothing style. The rulers tried to force the Manchurian dress style on the Han people, and this was met with strong resistance. A later compromise by the government led to a combination of the two dress styles. The mandarin long gown (*changpao*) and jacket (*magua*) was the quintessential Qing style.

After 1840, China entered the modern era. Coastal cities, especially metropolises like Shanghai with their mixed population of foreign and native residents, led the change towards western style under the influence of European and American fashion trends. Industrialization in textile weaving and dyeing in the west brought about the import of low cost

The 2010 Spring/Summer Collections of China International Fashion Week was held in November 2009, in Beijing. The picture shows a Chinese designer's fashion show. (Zhang Yanshan/CFP)



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materials, gradually replacing domestic materials made in traditional ways. Fashionable and intricately-made ready-to-wear garments in western styles found their way onto the Chinese market, and large-scale, machine-operated dress-making became more popular than the time-consuming traditional techniques of hand rolling, bordering, inlay and embroidery.

Looking back at twentieth-century Chinese clothing, we see a wide array of styles of *qipao*, *cheongsam*, the Sun Yat-sen uniform, student uniforms, western suits, hats, silk stockings, high heels, Lenin jackets, military uniforms, bell-bottoms, jeans, miniskirts, bikinis and punk styles, all representing different eras. The *qipao*, now regarded as the typical Chinese dress style, only became popular in the 1920s. Originating as Manchurian women's dress, incorporating Han clothing techniques and the styles of twentieth-century western dresses, it has now evolved into a

The women of the "Long Horn Miao" group in Guizhou Province combing their huge coiled hair. (Photograph by Li Guixuan, provided by the image library of Hong Kong Traveling in China)



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major fashion item within the international fashion industry.

China, as a country made up of fifty-six ethnic groups that have continually interacted, has undergone continuous transformation in dress style and customs. Style distinctions are not only evident between different dynasties, but are also quite pronounced even in different periods within the same dynasty. The defining characteristics of Chinese clothing are bright colors, skilled craftsmanship and ornate detail. Diversity in style can be seen between different ethnic groups, living environments, local customs, lifestyles and aesthetic tastes. Chinese folk clothing is deeply rooted in the daily life and activities of the people and many traditional folk styles and accessories are still popular today, for example red velvet flower hair accessories, embroidered keepsakes, coil hats and raincoats made of natural fiber, not to mention the handmade children's tiger-head hats and shoes, pig-head shoes and cat-head shoes.

The progress of modernization is having an effect on the ethnic character of dress style. However, in rural areas a wide array of beautiful garments and ornaments are still very much part of the local lifestyle and landscape.

Pifa

Pifa was the most primitive hairstyle of the ancient Chinese. *Pifa* means "the hairdo without any styling." From the ancient Chinese's perspective, one should not damage one's skin and hair, for they are bestowals from one's parents. They felt that keeping hair and beards intact was as important as keeping fit. Ancient Chinese law used the punishment of hair cutting as a criminal penalty. Consequently, when an ancient Chinese person committed an error, he often cut off part of his hair to express his guilt. The fashion for not cutting hair in ancient Chinese communities has continued up to modern day.



The traditional image of a worker wearing a front closure Chinese jacket. (Photographed in 1950, provided by Xinhua News Agency photo department)



Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-18689-6 — Chinese Clothing
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The students of Beijing University wearing Scottish-checked skirts in the 1950s. (Photographed in 1954, provided by the Xinhua News Agency photograph department)



Fashionable young people on the streets. (Photograph by Chen Shu, provided by Imaginechina)

Four Chinese designers held a joint fashion show in Shanghai Fashion Week in October 2009. (Junying/CFP)

