



Chinese Costumes and the Spirit of Chinese Aesthetics

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Abstract: The aesthetics of Chinese costume is the crystallization of traditional Chinese artistry and at the same time is not without dregs, such as the suppression of its subjectivity, restraint of human body and segregation of different social classes. In contemporary China, Chinese costume keeps changing with the aesthetic needs of the time. Under such circumstances, filtration, screening and sublation have become the basic methods to inherit and carry forward the essence of traditional Chinese costume. It is contemporary Chinese people's due responsibility to demonstrate the spirit of Chinese aesthetics via dressing, take the initiative to spread such a spirit, and showcase the unique charm of Chinese aesthetics by the light of nature.

Keywords: Chinese costumes; Chinese aesthetics; traditional Chinese artistry

In *Term Explanation*, Liu Xi, a scholar in the Eastern Han Dynasty, argued that “clothes are something that people put on to keep warm and stay cool and serve as a shield to protect the body.” His definition explained the basic utility functions of clothes, i.e. protection and shield. However, from ancient times until now, costumes have served not just utility purposes, but also aesthetic ones. Costumes have been artwork, as well as utility. While they have been used to decorate people, they have remained an object with independent aesthetic significance.

The spirit of Chinese aesthetics stands for the core, soul, or essence of the shared aesthetic value, consciousness, realm, ideal and style of various ethnicities in China. Such a spirit is exhibited in dynamic historical development, rather than a static state. Costumes exist both in tangible and intangible forms. The intangible,

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which mainly includes design concepts, design principles, aesthetic senses, aesthetic ideals, and aesthetic styles, relies heavily on the tangible. The tangible forms of Chinese costumes are the perceptual appearance of Chinese aesthetics and the vividly demonstrated aesthetic taste, ideals, values and styles. The intangible form, on the other hand, is a tributary of the spirit of Chinese aesthetics and it consciously carries the multiple connotations, significance and ideas of Chinese aesthetics. Throughout history, Chinese costumes have kept and enriched the spirit of Chinese aesthetics and maintained its “cultural root.” Wearing a traditional Chinese costume is a way of practicing Chinese aesthetic culture, as the spirit of Chinese aesthetics is embodied in Chinese costumes. Chinese costumes and the spirit of Chinese aesthetics, through interaction, inter-penetration and interplay, form a relationship of intertextuality. The spirit of Chinese aesthetics can be interpreted in Chinese costumes, while Chinese costumes can be appreciated from an aesthetic perspective. In this sense, the study of Chinese costumes is about the study of Chinese life aesthetics, aesthetic culture, as well as aesthetic spirit. How do Chinese costumes gear themselves to the spirit of Chinese aesthetics and thus achieve internal and external consistency?

1. Implicit aesthetic image constructed by self-constraint aesthetic value orientation

The concept of “being implicit” had been advocated since the pre-Qin period both by Confucianism and Taoism. As recorded in *Doctrine of the Mean*, “Being impartial and moderate is the fundamental basis of the world, while being harmonious is a universal principle followed by all people. When ‘moderation’ and ‘harmony’ are achieved, everything will be in right place and all

living things will grow and prosper.” “Moderate and harmonious” means temperate, impartial and against extremes. Such a philosophy is manifested as “being implicit.” For example, in “Horseshoe” *Zhuangzi*, a carefree life is depicted as “having food in mouth and playing joyfully. And according to the *Book of Changes*, “keeping a low profile helps to retain virtue.” “Being implicit” requires keeping one’s own counsel and gathering (rather than publicizing) insights. In *Type of Poem*, Jiao Ran, a poet of the Tang Dynasty claimed that “a quality poem is supposed to exhibit its vigor and elegance in a subtle and implicit way.” In *Appreciation of 24 Poems*, Sikong Tu started the appreciation of “implicit beauty.” In Chinese culture, the term “*yunjie*,” meaning being cultured and restrained, is very much appreciated because of the prolonged aftertaste it leaves. Originally, “*yunjie*” was associated with human character. For example, in “Huan Rong Annal” *Book of the Later Han*, there is a depiction that “Always in Confucian clothing, Huan Rong was considered to be a polite and moderate person who stood for the virtue of ‘*yunjie*.’” A similar example can be found in “Xue Guangde Annal” *Book of the Later Han*, where there is a comment that “Xue Guangde was a gentle and cultivated person who possessed the virtue of ‘*yunjie*.’” Later, the term “*yunjie*”, along with the term “being implicit,” was extensively applied to art criticism in Chinese history. Many artists have implemented the philosophy of “being restrained and implicit” in their creation of poems, novels and calligraphy works and their design of Chinese gardens to convey profound meanings and a lasting charm. The artistic dialectics of “being implicit” was uncovered by the *Elegance of the Bamboo and Spring* (a book on painting written by Guo Xi, a painter and painting theorist of the Northern Song Dynasty) in “You are not supposed to project a high mountain in a picture by painting the peak of it.

Instead, you should add some fogs or clouds around its waist to set off its towering magnificence. Likewise, you are not supposed to present a long river by showcasing its origin. Rather, you should outline its winding route to leave its endless stretch to imagination.” This is in fact a basic principle of traditional Chinese landscape paintings. Such “restrained and implicit” conveyance is widely adopted in Chinese art and can be understood as a type of aesthetic image presentation. The image of Chinese costumes is not meant to create a strong visual impact. Instead, it is designed to trigger “boundless” “intangible” imaginations and fantasies of “limited” “tangible” costumes. In essence “being restrained and implicit” requires patient endurance and self-control. It is precisely through a “restrained and implicit” design approach that Chinese costumes arouse boundless imagination.

In terms of style, traditional Chinese costumes cover the body from neck to feet. This is due to the ancient Chinese view that it is improper to have one’s body and figure exposed. According to Confucianism, man should always refrain from selfish desires and guard against basic instincts. Such a view fostered an aesthetic value-orientation which attaches great importance to self-discipline. As explicitly stated in *Baihu General Principles*, “Clothes are used to cover or disguise the body.” In other words, costumes serve as a cover or shield for the body and downplay its “sexuality,” which is in line with the Chinese people’s earliest concept of aesthetics. Ignoring the sexuality of the human body and the existence of sexual desire, Chinese costumes pay little attention to body shape and physical characteristics but highlight clothing functions of disguise and decoration. Traditionally, exposing your body was deemed indecent and shameful, while having it covered was deemed civilized. That is why traditional Chinese costumes downplay body shape and other sensory stimuli

and highlight a sense of solemnness, decency and implicitness. Being long and loose, both men’s gowns and ladies’ dresses could stretch to the feet, or even to the ground, leaving only the wearers’ head, neck and hands uncovered. In order to blur the feminine curve of breast, waist and hip, female costumes mainly featured cross-collars, long gowns, big sleeves and robes. The frequently adopted cross-collars, with one collar overlapping the other, leave the female neck partly hidden and partly visible. This design can be found in the dresses of the Han Dynasty, which featured cross-collars, a silk waist-belt and ties on both ends. Even in the Tang Dynasty, a period known for being socially liberal, the uncovered part between neck and breast was limited. *Qipao*, a one-piece dress for women in the Qing Dynasty, was characterized by stand-up collars (which tightly encircle the neck to prevent any possible improper thought or association) and long sleeves (in both broad and narrow fashion). The fact that other people could not see the wearer’s body except face and neck enhanced the mystique of the female figure and thus aroused huge aesthetic interests. In ancient China, special designs were added to men’s wear to disguise masculinity (male private part). For example, royal costumes in dynastic China were attached with “*fu*” (a narrow-cuffed, knee-length tunic tied with a sash), which was designed to cover men’s private parts. “*Fu*” had served for “fig leaf” purposes for dynasties. One of its earliest sayings can be found in the *Book of Songs*, which goes like “the red *fu* stretches down from waist to knee.” The abovementioned designs were combined to form the “embarrassment-hiding” philosophy in Chinese costume aesthetics.

In terms of structure, Chinese costumes, with special designs to have the body covered, should fall into the category of wrap costume. This wrap costume, consisting of a loose upper garment and a broad dress, is cloth consuming. Typically, it

only has two pieces, the back piece and the front piece. Without clear divisions of front, back, body and sleeves, this costume is of a planar structure. When stretched horizontally, it exhibits in a two-dimensional “cross” structure, which stresses a symmetric and even layout, harmonious design, and straight and narrow presentation. Primarily relying on linear composition, wrap costumes can form a loose three-dimensional shape, retain original cloth texture and naturally fit the body. The significant interspace between body and cloth allows airflow inside, which subsequently is fairy-like and elegant.

Also, wrap costumes feature multiple layers, which can tightly cover the body and prevent accidental exposure. The more layers a wrap dress has, the better covering effect it delivers. In *Beginners' Mind*, there is a depiction quoted from *Memories of the Eastern Palace of the Jin Dynasty* that “The Crown Princess to be has a crimson double-layered gauzy dress, a purple green double-layered silk dress, a red green yarn-patterned double dress and a purple jade yarn-pattern double dress.” Back then, it was common for women from aristocratic stratum to wear “double-layered dresses,” “double dress” and garments with multiple layers. For the empresses of the Qing Dynasty, apart from their imperial robes, they were also required to wear an imperial gown and an imperial dress. The multi-layered heavy costumes slowed movement and at the same time vaguely showed their figure, thus creating a sense of majesty and sedateness. Another example is a loose dress with top sleeves, which was popular in the flourishing period of the Tang Dynasty. One such dress was sewn with as many as 12 pieces of silk cloth, and its width reached 3.48m. Such a loose and long dress made it inconvenient for the wearer to move. Given that, it also needed to be matched with a pair of high-pointed silk shoes, whose heads hooked the lower hem of the dress to allow normal walking. Thus, movement and posture

were forced to present in a sedate and dignified way. Thus, the aesthetics of Chinese costumes have been characterized as being implicit and sedate.

During Chinese costumes' long process of evolution, their “full disguise” was gradually transformed to “half disguise,” which can be exemplified by the development of *Qipao*. Originating from Manchu robes in the Qing Dynasty, *Qipao* ushered in its heyday in the Republic of China era, during which a series of improvements were made in its cut, length, waistline, collarband, as well as side-slits. More specifically, Western-style slim cut was adopted to highlight feminine curves; the hemline was lifted from ankle to knee and above; the interspace between body and cloth was narrowed; the waistline was tightened; the stand-up collars were gradually lowered and even eliminated; and the side-slits were further raised toward the thigh. This *Qipao* reform indicates the improvement of Chinese women's status and the gradual liberation of the old-fashion social atmosphere. Even so, it still retains implicit elegance and beauty unique to Chinese costumes. Evidently, there is a contradiction between “disguise” and “exposure” in *Qipao*. While it has the body covered, it also highlights feminine curves through the slim cut. This disguise-and-exposure contradiction creates an attractive, yet by no means obscene image of Chinese women. Because of that, it has become a perfect example of Chinese costumes. When a woman is in *Qipao*, her lower jaw is held high by the collarband, her head maintains upright, her waist is tightly wrapped, her belly looks flat, her legs are encircled by the skirt and therefore her paces are kept small. Being a symbol of sex appeal, *Qipao* also makes its wearer look more elegant, graceful, restrained and charming.

It is precisely “disguise” that triggers curiosity and imagination. By contrast, “full exposure” leaves nothing to enjoy in retrospect. The “mostly hidden



Qipao

and partly visible” technique adds endless charm to *Qipao*. According to Chinese aesthetics, the divinity of dragon needs to be set off by floating clouds; the mystique of human can only be created by adding disguise to the body. A lasting charm and aftertaste is what the restrained and implicit Chinese costumes strive to achieve. As pointed out by Qian Zhongshu(1990), “clothes, originally used to cover and ‘hide’ the body, also help to showcase it”(p.6). As mentioned above, the “disguise” function of Chinese costumes endows wearers with a mystique and unique appeal. With limited styles, Chinese costumes manage to breed profound charm; in an implicit approach to costume structuring, it successfully exhibits the rich connotations of Chinese culture. What Chinese costumes have been pursuing is not sex appeal, but profound implications and a great cultural taste. Accordingly,

maximizing the exposed area is not appreciated, while exquisite design is preferred. In this way, a metaphor-based aesthetic standard is established, which is very much in accordance with the aesthetic image preference of Chinese people. In ancient China, an image-based mindset was advocated. For example, the *Book of Changes: An Interpretation* held that “craftsman should be inspired by object images.” The reason for “observation-based image extracting” lies in the image’s representation of a human ideal. As a perceptual existence, or an “object image,” costumes are of potential aesthetic value and become the objective basis of aesthetic images. Endowing limited elements with boundless significance and attaching a moral to the image is what makes Chinese costumes sophisticated. Such a unique charm, being implicit and meaningful, can touch people deeply. Human feelings and temperaments are projected to costume images, which interact with the subject and bring about “image beyond image.” The cultural conveyance of Chinese costumes fully demonstrates its aesthetic taste through boundless implicitness.

2. Strict aesthetic norm shaped by power, hierarchy and order

Ancient Chinese costumes not only served such practical purposes as covering the body and protecting against the cold, but also gave full play to the social function of “class differentiation and status indication.” “Record on Example” *Book of Rites* argued “Costumes are to beautify the human image.” According to Zheng Xuan’s notes, “The human image here refers to the appearances of the masses.” And Kong Yingda explained, “Costumes bring dignity and solemnity to people.” Thus, it can be seen, traditional Chinese costumes could help raise the wearer’s mental activity and indicate his or her social status and class. Ancient Chinese

people applied natural order to their dress code, took advantage of sensible and intuitive costume features to highlight differentiation and hierarchy, and placed people in an orderly social structure to ensure social stability. Basically, their application of the natural order to dress code can be summarized as follows.

First, costume designs helped to regulate people's social behavior and power. As an old saying goes, "A man's social class is marked by the costume he is in, while his power and official title is marked by the pattern of his official costume." Moreover, in dynastic China the royal costumes, court dress and military uniforms all demonstrated the rigid and clear hierarchy of the patriarchal society. A complete set of emperor's costumes consisted of royal cap, black garment and light crimson gown, along with accessories like *fu* (silk belt), fur belt, waistband, *xi* (shoes) and jade tassel string. Black garment and light crimson gown were the basic form of royal costumes. The color "black" here refers to black with a reddish tint, while "light crimson" refers to a hue close to light red. It was in the Zhou Dynasty that the system of royal costumes was established. As recorded by "Sifu-Chun'guan" *The Rites of Zhou*, there were six royal costumes for the emperor in accordance with different worship targets, which respectively were *qiu*, *gun*, *bi*, *cui*, *xi* and *xuan* costumes. As Confucius said in *The Analects of Confucius*, "To me, Yu is simply impeccable in daily life, he was always in plain clothes; but when on worship occasions, he would put on his best costumes." There is a depiction of royal costumes in "The Second Year of Duke Huan of Qi" *The Commentary of Zuo* that "Garment items below are applied to manifest dynastic hierarchy: *gun* costumes, crown, "*fu*" (a narrow-cuffed, knee-length tunic tied with a sash), jade tablet, waistband, gown, leg wrappings and

shoes, as well as crown decorations like *heng*, *dan*, *hong* and *yan*—Embroidered patterns on formal costumes, such as fire, dragon, white-and-black battle axe and black-and-blue male figures are to demonstrate literary grace." *Gun* costumes derived the name from their pattern, i.e. *gun* (meaning winding dragon); and as mentioned, *heng*, *dan*, *hong* and *yan* were belts and decorations on the crown. These elements all served to echo the ancient system of Chinese costumes and indicated social class differentiation. The patterns of fire, dragon, white-and-black battle axes, as well as black-and-blue male figures were all embroidered on royal costumes as magnificent decorations. The very existence of these delicate and complete costume accessories indicates that the system of costume design and structure started in the Zhou Dynasty.

Second, costume patterns helped to mark wearers' identity and social status. According to "Sifu-Chunguan" *The Rites of Zhou*, the ceremonial costumes for the Emperor of the Zhou Dynasty for sacrificial rites consisted of "black garment and light crimson gown" which were embroidered with twelve patterns; while the ceremonial costumes for duke, marquis and earl for sacrificial rites were respectively embroidered with nine, seven and five patterns. As clearly recorded by "Yiji" in "Record of Yu" *Book of Documents*, Emperor Shun once ordered Yu to make patterned official costumes "to indicate the background of people; of those patterns, the sun, the moon, stars, mountains, dragons and pheasants were drawings; while tigers & long-tailed monkeys, alga, fire, white rice & pollen, white-and-black battle axes, and black-and-blue male figures were embroideries; five colors were applied to the official costumes to highlight the wearers' social status." The abovementioned twelve items formed the "twelve patterns" on ancient official costumes. In the early era of the Eastern Han Dynasty, the

system of official costume patterns was established. According to Kong Yingda, a Confucian of the Tang Dynasty, “The sun and the moon are patterns for the Emperor’s costumes; the patterns from dragon to white-and-black battle axes and black-and-blue male figures are for the costumes of feudal dukes or princes; alga and fire are patterns for the costumes of the literati; and white rice and pollen are for the costumes of the officialdom. Costumes of a particular social class may include patterns for its lower classes, but not vice versa. Five colors are applied to highlight the wearers’ corresponding social statuses” (Li, 1991, p. 116). One’s social status was explicitly indicated by the patterns on his official costumes.

Third, costume textures also indicated the wearers’ identity and social status. In ancient China, garment fabrics mainly fell into the categories of Chinese linen, grass cloth, silk and fur. Featuring simple weaving techniques, Chinese linen and grass cloth were popular among the common people. As held in *Discourse on Salt and Iron*, “Common people do not have the chance to wear silk clothes until they reach 70. For the majority of their life, they wear clothes made of Chinese linen, which is why common people were also called ‘*buyi*’ (meaning clothes made of Chinese linen)” (Wang, 1992, p.350). According to “Royal Regulations” *Book of Rites*, “Silk clothes in original colors were for senior citizens of the Shang Dynasty.” Silk clothing was a luxury used to show respect for the elderly. Silk, in general, and brocade, embroidery and figured woven silk in particular were high-end apparel fabrics. Known for their exquisite patterns and soft touch, these fabrics were made through a time and energy-consuming process, for which they were quite expensive and gradually became exclusive to the nobility. The “Silk Clothes-Eulogies of Zhou” in *Book of Songs* described silk clothes as “being *fou*.” And Mao Heng, a scholar in the late Warring

States period, explained “*fou*” as “bright and beautiful”(Li,1999, p.1366). Indeed, silk garments do look beautiful and luxurious. According to *Paraphrasing Texts and Words*, “Brocade is a patterned fabric made in Xiangyi.” According to *Term Explanation—On Colorful Brocade*, “Brocade and gold are homophones in Chinese (both of which are pronounced ‘jin’). Because brocade-weaving is energy and time consuming, it is almost as expensive as gold. That is how the Chinese character for brocade is formed, with the left part being gold and the right part being cloth.” Brocade, as an equivalent of gold, became a precious item. There is a lyric in “Odes of Zheng” *Book of Songs*, which goes like this, “People put on linen coat or gown to cover their brocade clothes or dress inside.” There were two purposes for this practice. One was to protect the luxury brocade garment inside; the other was to disguise the beauty and gorgeousness of the brocade garment. Thus, brocade garments had already been a symbol of distinguished identity for the aristocracy in the Zhou Dynasty and low-ranking officials were not allowed to wear them. Fur clothing usually referred to coats made of animal fur and its application also followed an established hierarchical dress code. As quoted from “July, Odes of Bin” *Book of Songs*, “Process the raw fox skin and make a fur coat for child.” This sentence implies that a fur coat was for aristocratic gentleman only. According to “Jade-Bead Tassels of the Royal Cap” *Book of Rites*, a white fox fur coat, matched with a brocade gown, is for the Emperor; a tiger fur coat is for the right minister while a wolf fur coat is for the left minister; the literati are not allowed to wear a white fox fur coat (Li, 1999, p. 899). As recorded in “Garment” *Baihu General Principles*, “A white fox fur coat is for the Emperor, a yellow fox fur coat for kings, a gray fox fur coat for high-ranking officials, and a lamb fur coat for the literati.” Back then, fur coats for the Emperor and dukes were made with

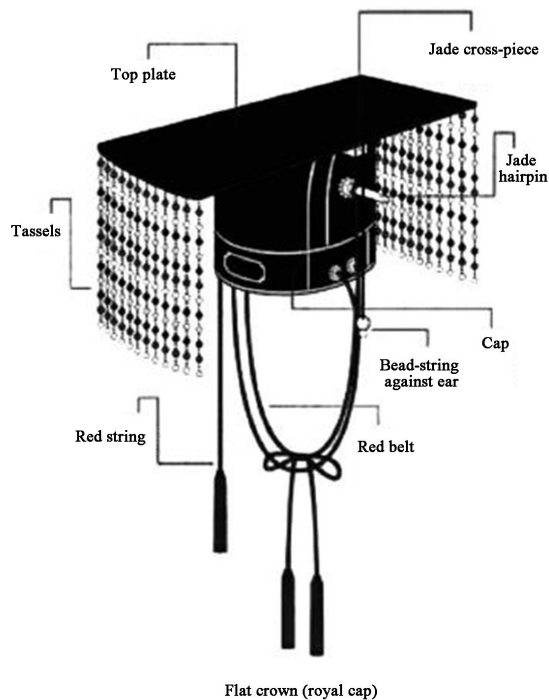
a whole piece of fur without any decoration to sleeves, while fur coats for high-ranking officials featured leopard fur-decorated sleeves. Social status was marked by fur types, as well as fur colors.

Fourth, costume colors also helped to regulate the people's dress code. The color-based dress code originated from the "five virtues" symbolized by the ancient Chinese "five elements," each of which was matched with a corresponding direction, season and color. The five colors of blue, red, yellow, white and black respectively represented the five directions of east, south, central, west and north. These five colors became the five pure colors. In ancient China, pure colors were deemed the noblest, followed by two color-mixed colors and multiple color-mixed colors. According to "Jade-Bead Tassels of the Royal Cap" *Book of Rites*, "One cannot enter a government organ without wearing proper colored costumes, i.e. pure-colored clothes and two color-mixed dress." As explained by Kong Yingda, "The five pure colors refer to blue, red, yellow, white and black; the five two colors-mixed colors are green, rose red, green, purple and faint yellow." Properly-colored costumes here refer to official costumes in colors which are bright but not garish. In ancient China, pure colors were deemed noble, while mixed colors were inferior. As recorded in "Dress Code" *Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals*, "The common people are not allowed to dress in colors." In the Sui and Tang Dynasties, the introduction of a sound and complete system of official ranks gave rise to a corresponding system of official costumes colors. As recorded in "Official Costumes" *New Book of Tang*, the colors of official costumes fell into four categories, with (the brightest and purest) "yellow" for the Emperor, "purple" for princes and officials at or above level three; "red" for officials at level four and five, "green" for officials at level six and seven; and blue for officials at level eight and nine.

Later, under the reign of Emperor Gaozong of the Tang Dynasty, relevant regulations were further specified, according to which "military officers and civil officials at or above level three must wear purple official costumes matched with a golden belt; those at level four and five must respectively wear deep red and light red official costumes matched with a golden belt; those at level six and seven must respectively wear deep green and light green official costumes matched with a silver belt; those at level eight and level nine must respectively wear deep blue and light blue costumes matched with a stone belt; and common people must wear yellow costumes matched with a bronze-iron belt" ("Biography of Emperor Gaozong" *Old Book of Tang*). Later costumes colors were gradually finalized and stereotyped.

Fifth, caps and shoes also served as indicators of the wearer's social status and official rank. A royal costume was matched with a royal cap, which featured a plate on top and tassels in front. The number of tassels adopted was in accordance with an official rank. As recorded in "Jade-Bead Pendants of the Royal Cap" *Book of Rites*, "There are twelve jade-bead tassels on the Emperor's cap." As stipulated by "Officials in Charge of Royal Caps, Offices of Summer" *Rites of Zhou*, "The Emperor's cap is decorated with twelve jade-bead tassels, the duke's cap with nine, the high-ranking officials' cap with seven and the low-ranking officials' cap with five." In addition to that, there is also a passage in "Officials in Charge of Royal Caps, Offices of Summer" providing detailed dress codes for different aristocratic strata as follows, "Dukes' costumes (except the royal cap) is similar to that of the Emperor; marquis' and earl's costumes (except the royal cap) are similar to that of dukes; viscount's and baron's costumes (except the royal cap) are similar to those of marquis and earls; under-aged aristocrats' costumes (except the royal

cap) are similar to those of marquis and earl; high ministers' costumes (except the cap) are similar to that of under-aged aristocrats." The Emperor's cap was decorated with 12 tassels on both ends of the top plate and each tassel had 12 jade beads. In total, there were 288 jade beads on 24 tassels. The duke's cap was decorated with 9 tassels, each of which had 9 jade beads; marquis' and earl's caps were decorated with 7 tassels, each of which had 7 jade beads; viscount's and baron's caps were decorated with 5 tassels, each of which had 5 jade beads; high ministers' and nobles' caps were respectively decorated with 6, 4 and 2 tassels according to their ranks. For officials below prime minister level, their caps were only decorated with tassels in the front of the top plate, not in the rear. Tassels differed in materials, as well as amount. The Emperor's tassels consisted of jade beads in the five colors of red, white, gray, yellow and black; while the duke's tassels consisted of jade beads in the three colors of



gray, white and red. In line with the royal costumes were platform shoes. For the Emperor, red platform shoes were of the highest grade, followed by white and black shoes. For the Empress, black platform shoes were of the highest grade, followed by blue and red shoes ("Offices of the Heaven" *Rites of Zhou*).

Sixth, accessories helped define differences in social positions. In addition to tassels on the Emperor's cap, other accessories were also applied in accordance with different official ranks and social status. Take "fu" (a narrow-cuffed, knee-length tunic tied with a sash) as an example. The Emperor's *fu* was a rectangle piece painted with the three patterns of dragon, fire and mountain in dark red; duke's and the marquis' *fu* was painted with the two patterns of fire and mountain in bright red; high ministers' and nobles' *fu* was painted with only one pattern, i.e. mountain. The second example was "ceremonial waistband." As recorded in "Jade-Bead Pendants of the Royal Cap" *Book of Rites*, "The Emperor wears a plain waistband with colorful hems; dukes wear plain waistbands with plain hems; high-ranking officials wear plain waistbands with pendant hems; the literati wear white processed-silk waistbands with pendant hems; refined scholars wear brocade waistbands; disciples wear raw silk waistbands." The waistband hem (*pi*) here refers to edges embellished with colorful paintings. Apart from that, there were hierarchical differences in jade plates and ribbons. According to "Jade-Bead Pendants of the Royal Cap" *Book of Rites*, "The Emperor wears a white jade plate on a black silk ribbon; dukes and marquises wear a dark jade plate on a red silk ribbon; high-ranking officials wear a green jade plate on a pure silk ribbon; royal heirs wear a red jade plate on a dark-blue silk ribbon; the literati wear a jade-like stone plate on a yellow-red silk ribbon; Confucius, with no official title, wore 5 cun-diameter ivory rings

on a yellow-red silk ribbon.” Thus, the hierarchical “rites” were demonstrated by such a system of jade plates in different colors and shapes, matched with corresponding silk ribbons. As recorded in “Offices of Spring” *Rites of Zhou*, “Jade is used to make six ritual articles to worship heaven, earth, east, south, west and north.” The six ritual articles are gray *bi* (a round flat piece of jade with a hole in its center) for worshipping heaven, yellow *zong* (a long hollow piece of jade with rectangular sides) for worshipping earth, blue *gui* (an elongated pointed tablet of jade) for worshipping east, red *zhang* (a “half *gui*”-like jade tablet) for worshipping south, white *hu* (tiger-shaped jade) for worshipping west and black *huang* (semi-annular jade pendant) for worshipping north. Thus, the six ritual articles of gray *bi*, yellow *zong*, blue *gui*, red *zhang*, white *hu* and black *huang* formed a jade system which directly corresponded to worshipping heaven, earth and the four major directions. It was also mentioned in the “Offices of Spring” that “Jade is used to make six tokens to signify the hierarchical differences between the monarch and his subjects and indicate formality in exchanges between nations. To be specific, the Emperor uses *zhen gui*; dukes use *huan gui*; marquises use *xin gui*; earls use *gong gui*; viscounts use *gu bi*; barons use *pu bi*.” These six jade tokens were endowed with auspicious motifs and again directly corresponded to the political hierarchy. Ancient Chinese people developed a peculiar affection for jade. As Xu Sheng of the Eastern Han Dynasty put in *Paraphrasing Texts and Words*, “Jade is a beautiful stone symbolizing five virtues. Its gentle and mild texture, internal-external consistency, clear knock sound, great tolerance and smooth appearance respectively correspond with the five noble virtues of benevolence, righteousness, wisdom, bravery and self-discipline.” The five virtues that jade symbolizes are combined to form the highest standard for human character. Jade was

endowed with multiple cultural and humanistic connotations by ancient Chinese. Being a symbol of purity, magnificence, benevolence, elegance and luxury significantly increased its aesthetic value. And such a symbolic meaning explains why a jade plate was a must for a man of noble character in ancient times. In a way, jade served as a reminder of self-discipline. Jade mirrored the ideal personality of ancient Chinese people. As the old saying goes, “Without a proper reason, a man of noble character should always have their jade plate on, for jade is compared to human virtue.” As an equivalent to human virtue, jade was deemed an integration of beauty with benevolence. Moreover, in the Qing Dynasty, official accessories such as court beads, court waistbands, gold head-bands, collar-bands and ear rings indicated hierarchical differences according to their scarcity, quality and quantity.

The abovementioned costumes, styles, patterns, textures and colors, along with other accessories such as hats and shoes, all served as indicators of corresponding social status and hierarchical order. They were applied to “differentiate superiors from inferiors,” “highlight social status” and “indicate official rank.” They were combined to form a sound and complete symbol system. In this sense, it is fair to say that for ancient Chinese costumes, their substance, i.e. styles, patterns, textures and colors, along with other accessories such as hats and shoes, fell into the “signifier” category, while hierarchical order fell into the “signified” category. These substances, deprived of real content, became formal symbols and subsequently served the purpose of aesthetic judgment. The signifier and the signified of these costumes cannot be separated. In terms of formal symbols, the signified outweighed the signifier, for the former indicated a particular identity, status and power. The materiality of Chinese costumes was abstracted to formal symbols. Thus, costumes became duplicates of

those symbols. For ancient Chinese costumes, formal beauty lays not so much in external factors such as style, pattern and color, but more in the “signified” behind those symbols, namely, social status and power. Costumes in violation of hierarchical requirements and social norms of that time would be deemed ugly. It is the sense of hierarchy and social norm that determined costume design, mix-and-match, as well as etiquette. The primary yardstick for ancient Chinese costumes was not about the beauty of a formal symbol, but about hierarchy. Costume styles, patterns, textures and colors, along with corresponding accessories such as hats and shoes, belong to a presentation layer; while their connotations form a content layer. The existence of the presentation layer is to exhibit the content layer. Ancient Chinese costumes formed a system of aesthetic culture, which was based on a “symbol-symbolic significance” model.

3. Contrary aesthetic styles resulted from varied concepts and tastes

Throughout the several thousand years-long development of Chinese aesthetics, its aesthetic style kept changing, mainly alternating between exquisite decoration and natural representation. According to Zong Baihua (1981), “exquisite decoration” is the shared defining feature of costumes patterns and poetry of the Chu Kingdom, poetry of the Han Dynasty, rhythmical prose of the Six Dynasties, poems by Yan Yanzhi, porcelain of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, traditional Chinese embroideries and Peking opera costumes; while “simple and unadorned representation” is the primary characteristic of bronzeware and earthenware of the Han Dynasty, calligraphy of Wang Xizhi, paintings by Gu Kaizhi, poems by Tao Qian, as well as ceramic whiteware of the Song Dynasty (p.59). The Chinese aesthetics appreciates both exquisite

magnificence and fresh, simple and unadorned beauty. The two aesthetic styles are distinctively embodied in Chinese costumes. In this sense, traditional Chinese costumes represent various Chinese aesthetic tastes, ideals and concepts.

Exquisite and magnificent beauty demonstrates the hierarchical system of Chinese costumes. Royal costumes, topping the Chinese costumes hierarchy, were regarded as the best example of such exquisite and magnificent beauty. Designed for ancient emperors for ceremonial occasions, royal costumes were required to present the most gorgeous, most luxurious and solemnest imperial ethos. The idiom “gorgeous hat and costume” (meaning “assume dignified airs like people who wear coronets”) in the Chinese language highlights the Chinese aesthetic preference for gorgeous, solemn and luxurious royal costumes. In terms of design, color, pattern and accessory, the royal costumes were close to perfect. Royal costumes featured complicated parts, which mainly included caps, cap plates, tassels, rolled brims, jade hairpins, bead-strings against the ear, upper garments, deep-red gowns, waistbands, fur belts, sleeves, *fu*, white crepe tunics, red shoes, etc. The more complicated and exquisite a costume design was, the higher manufacturing technology and aesthetic standard it required. The “twelve patterns” on royal costumes were of exceptional magnificence and luxury. In accordance with different worship targets and the wearer’s social status, there were six types of royal costumes (*qiu*, *gun*, *bi*, *cui*, *xi* and *xuan*), which were accordingly matched with different caps, patterns and accessories. This royal costume system extended from the Shang Dynasty to the Ming Dynasty, with each dynasty having its own specifications. There are two main reasons to explain the gorgeousness of these royal costumes. First, bright colors, distinct patterns and complicated and exquisite decorations were applied to cater to the taste of

royal costume wearers, i.e. the ruling class. Second, royal costumes were primarily prepared for major sacrificial ceremonies and rituals, whose solemnity and reverence needed to be reassured against a gorgeous and luxurious fashion style. Moreover, the social hierarchy and political order were also indicated by such a fashion style.

Corresponding to the six types of royal costumes were six types of royal dresses for the Empress and madams with a royal title or rank. As recorded in “Offices of Heaven” *The Rites of Zhou*, “The garment office is responsible for preparing six types of the Empress’ dress, i.e. *huiyi*, *yudi*, *quedi*, *juyi*, *zhanyi* and *luyi*.” “The *Huiyi* dress is painted with black *hui* birds, the *yuzhai* (*yudi*) dress is painted with a little blue harrier, and the *quezhai* (*quedi*) dress with a bird figure.” Given that the Queen’s top three dresses of *huiyi*, *yudi* and *quedi* were all painted with *zhai* bird patterns, the three ceremonial dresses were collectively referred to as the “three *Zhais*.” This *Zhai* dress was a type of one-piece made of brocade or grosgrain, with a white crepe under skirt. The *Huiyi* dress was black, the *yudi* blue and the *quedi* red. *Huiyi* was the Empress’ dress for worshiping late emperors. It featured 12 rows of colorful long-tailed pheasant patterns on the body, a white-and-black battle axe patterns on the neckband, as well as red shady cloud & dragon patterns on the sleeves and oblique collars. The *Yudi* was the Empress’ dress for worshiping late royal eldership and was only second to *Huiyi*. The dress was made of silk and painted with pheasants and other colorful patterns. It was not until the Tang and Song Dynasties that the standard design was identified as “nine rows of colorful pheasant patterns on blue silk.” The collarband was decorated with a white-and-black battle axe pattern; while the *fu* was decorated with two rows of a colorful pheasant pattern. The *Quedi* was the Empress’ sacrificial garment for

ordinary ritual sacrifices and ancestral worship. Its red upper garment distinguished it from the *Huiyi* and its pheasant pattern was also had a red color. Matched with the six types of the Empress’ dresses were jewelries for the worship ceremonies. As recorded in “Odes of Zheng” *Book of Songs*, “How I wish I can keep you company till old, with my hair tied with a bun and decorated with six pairs of jade hairpins.” According to Mao Heng’s notes, this hair-style was “a bun mixed with the wearer’s own hair and hairpiece and decorated with hairpins; the headwear included jade hairpins which indicated class identity.” As recorded in “Offices of Heaven” *The Rites of Zhou*, “(hair-dress) official is responsible for the Empress’ hair-dressing, the whole process of which includes putting on a hairpiece, adding some ornaments, combing the real hair, as well as clipping more jade hairpins.” According to Zheng Xuan’s explanation, “the Empress’ hairpins are made of jade; cross-hairpins are only matched with worship dresses and hang behind both ears; one hairpin is inserted through the bun.” “A bun mixed with real hair and hairpiece and decorated with six pairs of jade hairpins” was a standard hairstyle of the Empress and duchesses for worship ceremonies. Their headwear includes hairpins, hair clasps, cross-hairpins (for bun-fixing purposes), as well as a hairpiece. The six pairs of hairpins were clipped to the mixed bun and a pair of *tian* (ear pendants made of jade beads) was hung beside the mixed bun. Such a magnificent hairwear, matched with the *zhai* dress (*huiyi*, *yudi* and *quedi*), highlighted the grace and elegance of the Empress and madams with royal titles. The worship dresses and accessories of the Empress and madams with royal titles indicated the concept and system of hierarchy in ancient China and the proportional relations between the costume’s exquisiteness and the wearer’s social status. Costume aesthetics was artificially fixed within the framework of the social

order and was objectified as a general symbol of social hierarchy, etiquette culture, etc. Under such circumstances, the beauty of traditional Chinese costumes became something not to be “arrogated.” Exquisite and magnificent elements were applied to highlight the wearer’s identity, status and power, and to showcase his or her respect for the target of worship.

Such a design also echoed certain aesthetic conception of the time. Take the Tang Dynasty as an example. Featuring a prosperous economy and progressive politics, the Tang Dynasty further strengthened the costumes’ functions of class indication and aesthetic statement, forming a standard system of royal costumes, court dress, official costumes and informal dress. Alongside the establishment of such a system of dress codes were an enterprising spirit and an advocacy of a full female figure and bright coloring. In such a context, exquisite and magnificent decorations became a much-sought-after fashion, which was reflected in many Tang verses. For example, “Jade plates rattle against each other, delivering crisp sound; golden cicadas shine with splendor, adding radiance to the hall” (*Going to the Court on the Day of Fenghe*, Wei Zheng); “Imagine a harmonious picture in which a couple of phoenixes flying joyously, spreading their wings and soaring high” (*The Sixth Poem on the Journey to Mount Tai*, Li Bai); “She wears a red gown inside and a little blue embroidered coat” (*Madam Shangyuan*, Li Bai); “The one in the sable fur coat cannot be Jizi; while the one in the feather coat looks like Wang Gong” (*A Poem Created on the River to Mr. Cui, Magistrate of Xuan City*, Li Bai); “Brocade dress with embroidered golden peacocks and silver kylins is a perfect match for the enchanting sceneries in late spring” (*Fair Ladies*, Du Fu); “She had dark black hair, and the face of a flower, with golden jewelry dangling from her hair; they spent the spring nights in the warmth

of a hibiscus tent” (*Song of Everlasting Regret*, Bai Juyi). All these Tang poems indicate there was no shortage of depictions of costumes such as the brocade gown, fur coat and cloak, and jewelries. In the Tang Dynasty, a dignified and elegant style was adopted in military uniforms, as well as costumes of the aristocracy. As recorded in *Institutional History of Tang*, “Dagger-battle axes, short spears and golden armor shines with boundless radiance—in the 19th year under the reign of Emperor Taizong, special envoys were sent to the Kingdom of Baiji (a regime on the Korean peninsula) to acquire golden paint and apply it to iron-armor to generate a yellow, purple and golden effect; apart from that, paints in multiple colors were applied to black iron, which was subsequently used to make ‘山-shaped’ (correspondent to the character for mountain) armor. Led by Emperor Taizong, a troop of tens of thousands of cavalries advanced, shining in all directions under the sky.” A similar scene was also depicted by Cen Shen in his verse “The general did not take off his golden armor at night; the army marches ahead during mid-night, creating loud sounds with dagger battle axes and spears” (*See the Western Expedition Army off at Zoumachuan*). The reason why exquisite and magnificent beauty was advocated in the Tang Dynasty lies in its economic boom and solid national strength. Splendid attire reflected social prosperity, harmony and peace.

However, behind the advocacy of splendid attire lay the emperors’ endless pursuit of luxury, which incited criticism among some thinkers and intellectuals. For instance, Mozi’s philosophy of “being against music” includes his view of the emperors’ and the aristocracy’s pursuit of luxurious costumes. According to Mozi, emperors wasted the common people’s money for food in making luxurious costumes not for the purposes of keeping warm or healthy, but simply for “looking good.” Seeing the negative impact of luxurious costumes

on social stability and regime consolidation, Mozi held that people should wear practical clothes good for health and skin, instead of pursuing excessively extravagant costumes. Such an apparel view, although out of political considerations, reveals an aesthetic longing for the simple and unadorned beauty of plain clothes.

This simple and unadorned beauty, which is the opposite of the luxurious style, is another major aesthetic style of Chinese costumes in history. Just as Xun Shuang wrote, “Excessive decoration will eventually develop into the opposite, i.e. a plain and neat style. Once the pursuit of luxury reaches its peak, this trend will inevitably turn to a simple and unadorned fashion. This simple and unadorned fashion attaches great importance to intrinsic and natural quality. According to *General Rites of Kaibao*, “The quintessential essence of natural law is supreme simplicity.” As recorded in the “Shangjiu, Bi Hexagram” *Book of Changes*, “Removal of decoration facilitates concise beauty.” Hence, it is better to return to an original nature. Real beauty lies in the texture of an object. Traditional Chinese aesthetics appreciates unfigured red paint, uncarved white jade and undecorated jewelry, because they do not need to be embellished to look beautiful. As recorded in *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, “Adding a yarn vesture on top of brocade clothes is to downplay the luxury.” When the pursuit of luxury and decoration comes to the extreme, the trend will return to plain and white. From a perspective of etiquette, Confucius also explained the relationship between decoration and intrinsic quality. He argued in “Bayi” *The Analects of Confucius* that “Ceremonies and rites should conform to the principle of simplicity and avoid extravagance.” Although the aesthetic ideal of Confucius was “balance of outward grace and solid worth,” he also stressed his preference for the purpose of rites rather than the form of

rites. Confucianism attaches great importance to being “temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous,” of which being “restrained” means self-control and convergence. When it comes to costumes, being “restrained” is embodied in the following aspects. First, cheap fabrics such as coarse linen are preferred and luxury fabrics such as silk and brocade are avoided. Second, excessive use of cloth is guarded against. Third, complicated and exquisite embroideries and patterns should be kept to a minimum. Fourth, pursuit of extravagant accessories should be discouraged.

Since the Song Dynasty, the aesthetic focus of traditional Chinese costumes gradually shifted from “appearance” to “decoration.” Anti-costume extravagance campaigns were successively launched by Emperor Taizong, Emperor Zhenzong and Emperor Renzong in the royal court of the Song Dynasty. During those campaigns, “embracing a simple and unadorned lifestyle” and “eliminating extravagance” were reiterated. In the proclamation of royal costume reform, Emperor Gaozong of the Song Dynasty held, “The worship of heaven is about simplicity and sincerity.” The shift of aesthetic trend from luxury and extravagance to simplicity and plainness had a lot to do with the influence of Neo-Confucianism in the Song Dynasty. As the mainstream ideology, the Neo-Confucian thoughts of Cheng Hao, Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi gave rise to the trend of an all-round following of learned Neo-Confucian scholars’ ideas from to costumes and accessories. Primarily influenced by Mencius’ view of costumes, Zhu Xi argued, “A good reputation is better than a luxury costume” (“Gaozi” Mencius). Philosophically, Zhu Xi’s aesthetic view of Chinese costumes was rooted in the “law of everything,” which was simple and unadorned, i.e. undecorated. Zhu Xi himself practiced a simple and plain dressing style and made himself an example in this regard. In the history of China, the Song Dynasty is

known for numerous refined scholars and literati in literature, painting, calligraphy, etc. Their talent was much appreciated, their character admired, and their dressing style followed. In such a context, an elegant and refined costume trend inevitably emerged. For example, “*lanshan*,” a white gown (featuring broad sleeves, round or cross collar, a seam on the lower hem and a waistband) was popular at the time. As recorded in “Annals of Official Costumes” *History of the Song Dynasty*, “*Lanshan* is made of white cloth and features round sleeves, a seam on the lower hem and a waistband. It is a preferred costume for successful candidates in the highest imperial examinations, young men from families produced public officials for generations, as well as students from schools at county or prefecture level.” As a casual wear, *lanshan* was popular both among high and low-ranking officials when they were not at work. It was usually made of plain cloth or white yarn, instead of exquisite brocade, satin or silk. Similarly, female costumes of the Song Dynasty advocated being “clean and plain.” For example, in the 5th year of Shaoxing of the Song Dynasty, Emperor Gaozong told his assistant minister, “Gold and jade accessories are for women and are luxurious and unsound items which can encourage unhealthy practice.” Court lady images of the Song Dynasty on “Dazu Rock Carvings” in Chongqing and the painting “Women’s Filial Piety Education” all feature plain narrow-sleeved short jackets and dresses and exhibit a simple and unadorned beauty. Costumes of the Song Dynasty featured a conservative and reserved style, as opposed to the luxurious and resplendent style of the Tang Dynasty. Simple and unadorned, Song costumes formed their own aesthetic genre. The Song Dynasty witnessed an obvious change in costumes fashion from luxury and magnificence to simplicity and elegance. A simple and unadorned style was preferred to the previous extravagant style.

4. Natural and reasonable aesthetic existence based on the principle of “unity of man and heaven”

Being an independent life, every individual has the right to pursue aesthetic pleasure brought about by costumes. However, Chinese aesthetics attaches great importance to the integration of a costume’s beauty with nature and the universe, i.e. the “unity of man and heaven,” a philosophy which is unique to the Chinese culture and is part of human culture. The word “heaven” in “unity of man and heaven” has been given many interpretations, among which are the “law of the universe,” the “mandate of heaven,” “nature” and “astronomy.” Confucius understood this “heaven” as “change of seasons and growth of all things,” holding that the mandate of heaven could be grasped and mastered. According to Confucius, “Those who have no idea of ‘mandate of heaven’ shall not be deemed a man of noble character.” Similarly, Mencius also understood this “mandate of heaven” as irresistible destiny. The “unity of man and heaven” ideology primarily refers to a “combined virtue of heaven and man.” Zhuangzi considered the word “heaven” here to be “law of the universe,” whose good grace or benevolence benefits countless generations to come not out of the secular virtue and morality; whose longer-than-primitive times longevity is not over-appreciated; and whose capacity to shape the “heaven” and “earth” is not deemed extremely ingenious. He advocated “doing nothing that goes against nature” and considered it to be the quintessential essence of “heaven.” Man can only expect to strike a balance and achieve harmony in life by conforming to nature. In “Dress Code” *Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals*, Dong Zhongshu understood “heaven” as the “law of nature,” which was in constant regular movement. “Heaven” was deemed the supreme

god dominating everything and governing all gods. Dong Zhongshu's interpretation of "unity of man and heaven" includes five aspects. First, humans originate from heaven. Second, human and heaven are parts of one world. Third, there is a universal law that applies to both man and heaven. Fourth, interaction does exist between man and heaven. Fifth, regality is divine. There were many other Confucian interpretations of "unity of man and heaven" in the Song and Ming Dynasties. For example, according to Zhang Zai, "unity of man and heaven" means "man-and-heaven integration," "all things in an organic whole" and "combination of subject with object." Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi (two brothers who developed Neo-Confucianism) understood "heaven" as the law of the universe (Wang, 1981). According to Zhu Xi, "heaven" refers to "heavenly principles," which transcend all things and phenomena, form the "ontology" of everything, including the universe, and are expected to be observed by all. "One single law does exist in the universe that shapes the heaven and earth" (Zhu, 2010, p.3376). The "heavenly principles" form an absolute command that must be obeyed. "They cover both the intrinsic quality and superficial phenomena of all humans" ("Lilou 2" Mencius). Heavenly principles as a whole develop a powerful ontology of reason. Zhu Xi asked people to consciously observe the "heavenly principles." The philosophy of the mind, which was initially developed by Lu Jiuyuan and officially introduced by Wang Yangming, interpreted the "unity of man and heaven" as the integration of the human mind into the universe, attaching great importance to man's relationship with oneself deep inside. Historically, there were also many other interpretations, such as "man and heaven in connection," "man and heaven in common," "man and heaven in one" and "integration of man and heaven." Some interpretations are human oriented;

while others focus on the law of the universe. The former calls for adjusting the law of the universe to humans, while the latter requires man to follow the law of the universe. The word "unity" in the "unity of man and heaven" can also refer to connection, common and integration. Thus, the philosophy of "unity of man and heaven" is complicated and vague and includes a variety of uncertainties.

Emphasizing the unity of man and heaven, ancient Chinese people viewed costumes as a sensible representation of the "law of the universe," the "mandate of heaven" and the "principles of heaven."

First, costume styles should accord with the "law of the universe." "The Yellow Emperor had established the system of traditional Chinese costumes (comprising tops and bottoms) before he was able to govern the heaven and the earth by doing nothing that went against nature." In the eyes of ancient Chinese, the costume system of tops and bottoms symbolized the superiority of the heaven (tops) to the earth (bottoms) and exhibited the beauty of natural order. "Tops signified astronomical phenomena, which covered things below; while bottoms signified the earth, which contained things above" (Li, 1989, p.240). *Shenyi* (long dress in one piece) of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty was a costumes style "with its top and bottom part first separately tailored and then seamed together." As recorded in "Long Dress in One Piece" *The Book of Rites*, "In ancient times, there was a system of *shenyi* tailoring, which correspond with compass, bevel gauge, ink string, weight and cross-bar. It should not be too short as to have the skin exposed, yet not so long as to reach the ground. Two pieces at the front should be seamed together and added with a crochet. The waistband should be half the length of the skirt. The underarm part should be loose enough to allow flexible elbow movement. The sleeves should be kept as long as they reach the elbow joint when they

are folded. In general, *shenyi* features compass-shaped sleeves, a bevel gauge-shaped collar, an ink string-like vertical back, and weighing instrument-like lower hem. The skirt is made of 12 pieces of cloth, which stand for the 12 months of a year.” The orderly operation of the universe was reflected in *shenyi* via design, shape and structure. Thus, *shenyi* was endowed with exceptional “profoundness” symbolizing the whole universe.

Second, costume patterns should accord with the “law of the universe.” In ancient China, the “five costume sets and five patterns” were the objectified forms of the “mandate of heaven.” As recorded in *The Book of Documents*, “The five costume sets and five patterns were in line with the mandate of heaven.” According to *The Spring and Autumn Annals*, “There are nine patterns for the Emperor’s costumes in six colors and five patterns for officials’ costumes in five colors.” Du Yu explained, “The nine figures for the Emperor’s costumes are in blue and red; the five patterns for officials’ costumes are in red and white; the battleaxe pattern is in white and black; the male figure is in black and blue; and all the five colors are applied in embroideries in the five patterns.” A vivid depiction of the five colors can be found in Li Bai’s verse, “The phoenix flies 9,000 ‘ren’ high up to the sky; its feathers in five colors look spectacular” (The 4th poem of the *Gufeng Series*). The five costumes and five patterns varied according to the “principles of heaven.” The “12 embroidered patterns” respectively symbolize the mandate of heaven, stability, resilience, elegance and beauty, loyalty and filial piety, cleanliness, brightness, nourishment, decisiveness and discernment.

Third, costume colors should accord with the “law of the universe.” In ancient China, color was deemed an element of the universe. Accordingly, costume colors must show the wearer’s respect of and obedience to the “Principles of Heaven.”

Changes of costume colors signified changes of dynasty. In the history of China, the beginning of a new dynasty was always marked by the introduction of a new calendar and a change of royal costume colors. In the very early times of Chinese civilization, black was deemed a divine color that dominated all. That explains why the emperors’ costumes of the Xia, Shang and Zhou Dynasties were invariably black. The costume system of black tops and yellow bottoms symbolized the dark of the heaven (sky) at night and yellow soil of the earth. In the late Warring States period, colors were directly linked to *yin–yang* and the five elements (Jupiter, Saturn, Mercury, Venus and Mars), becoming symbols of the will and virtue of heaven. In the Qin Dynasty, black was the preferred color of “royal costumes, maojing (a worship-use mace) and banners. Under the reign of Emperor Wen of the Han Dynasty, yellow became the preferred color for royal costumes. During the Eastern Han Dynasty, Mars (representing the “virtue of fire”) was much appreciated, for which red became the preferred color of royal costumes. When it came to the Wei–Jin period, yellow remained the preferred color. In the Tang Dynasty, yellow costumes were the regular choice for emperors. Thus, yellow became the color exclusive to the Emperor. Apart from that, a color-based dress code was specified, stipulating purple for officials at level one, two and three, dark red for officials at level four, light red for officials at level five, dark green for officials at level six, light green for officials at level seven, deep blue for officials at level eight, light blue for official at level nine, and black and white for others. Moreover, the ancient Chinese people also changed their costume colors in accordance with the seasons. In the Western Han Dynasty, emperors followed the rule of seasonal change and developed a dress code based on the color of each season. In the Eastern Han Dynasty, the philosophy of “five elements”

was advocated. In such a context, the five colors of green, red, yellow, white and black were adopted to respectively correspond to spring, summer, late summer, autumn and winter.

Fourth, costumes fabrics should accord with the “law of the universe.” In ancient times, Chinese fabrics mainly fell into the categories of grass cloth, linen, silk, and cotton, all of which came from nature. Good for health and skin, these fabrics ensured comfort and were pollution-free. The application of silk, linen and cotton cloth gave rise to the development of formal costumes, which subsequently fostered dress codes. According to *The Book of Changes: An Interpretation*, “Previously, clothes were made of furs and were small; today, clothes are made of silk, linen and cotton and are bigger in size, for which they are also called ‘flowing gowns.’” Based on their performance, different fabrics were for different social classes. For example, silk and brocade were for the imperial household and the aristocracy; grass cloth and linen were for common people. The tradition of a costume culture was thus stratified and costume hierarchy and order were established. And the “five costumes of mourning” were all made of linen.

Fifth, costumes accessories should accord with the “law of the universe.” Dressing concerns the decoration of the body. Therefore, not only costumes, but also caps and shoes should accord with the “law of the universe.” There were altogether twelve jade-bead tassels in both the front and the rear of the top plate. The *Qiu* costumes featured twelve patterns, black upper garment and light crimson gown respectively symbolizing heaven and earth. The royal cap featured a top plate which was round in the front and square in the rear symbolizing “orbicular sky and rectangular earth”—the structure of the universe in the eyes of ancient Chinese. There was a “Milky Way belt” stretching from the center of the top plate through

the upper garment to the bottom of the garment symbolizing the blend of “heaven and earth.” In the history of China, royal caps with a round-shaped front and shoes with a square toe were the most common styles, which signified “holding up the heaven and supporting the earth. As a shawl for decoration purposes, cloud shawl (*yunjian*) embodies the profound Chinese philosophy of “unity of man and nature,” according to which “cloud is the quintessential essence of both heaven and earth.” It made its earliest appearance on the painted murals of *Guanyin* (a Bodhisattva) in Dunhuang of the Sui Dynasty, for which it was also called “Anuruddha cloud shawl.” In Buddhism, the Sanskrit term “Anuruddha” means “immortality” and “non-poverty.” Given that “Anuruddha cloud” is a typical symbol of Buddhism, it is more than natural to find a painted *Guanyin* in a cloud shawl. In ancient Chinese mythology, clouds were the mounts of immortals and Buddhas and also a natural phenomenon capable of producing rain to nourish everything. Therefore, it was also known as “auspicious cloud.” It was in the Tang Dynasty that the rudiment of the cloud shawl emerged, which was later developed into what was known as “*helizi*” and “*xiuling*” in the Five Dynasties and “*jiaha*” in the Liao Dynasty. The style of the cloud shawl was eventually fixed in the Yuan Dynasty. As recorded in “Annals of Official Costumes” *History of the Yuan Dynasty*, “cloud shawl is a unique costume style which is often decorated with blue crochet, embroidered square-shaped clouds in multiple colors, as well as gold inlays.” Resembling a fully unfolded cloud, it skillfully integrated with costumes. In terms of structure, cloud shawls generally fell into the categories of “radiation,” “rotation” and “symmetry.” Their radial patterns included four-direction radiation and eight-direction radiation to respectively symbolize the four seasons and eight solar terms of a year and demonstrate a



Qipao

wish for good luck to people in all directions. The coloring of a cloud shawl also followed the rule of the “five elements”-based “five colors.” The five colors of blue, yellow, red, white and black were applied as the basic colors, supplemented with other “secondary colors.” Its patterns mostly featured flowers, birds, fish, insects, mountains, rivers and other natural objects which symbolized good fortune and happiness.

5. Aesthetic spirit and characteristics from comparison

The spirit of Chinese aesthetics is the aesthetic soul of the entire Chinese nation and represents an aesthetic temperament unique to China. “The

fundamental purpose of traditional Chinese aesthetics is to promote the all-round development of people and social harmony” (Xia, 2014). While attaching great importance to the cultivation of human souls and the inner world, Chinese aesthetics also strives to explore human existence and well-being from an aesthetic perspective. It is believed that the improvement of humanity lies in moral cultivation as much as in life practice. The rich connotations and great vitality of Chinese aesthetics have been demonstrated by traditional Chinese costumes. The spirit of Chinese costume aesthetics is embodied in costume style, color, and pattern and is highly summarized as the Chinese people’s aesthetic pursuit, which comprises aesthetic perception, ideal, style and taste. For Chinese costume aesthetics, what truly matters is not specific forms like style, color or pattern, but the implications behind such meaningful forms. Being part of the spirit of Chinese aesthetics, the spirit of Chinese costume aesthetics enriches and enhances the specific forms. In other words, the implications are integrated into the forms. There is an inherent consistency between the two.

First, consistency exists in the pursuit of “image.” The costume-triggered aesthetic imagination gradually forms certain aesthetic images, which subsequently increase the cultural value of Chinese costumes, bring it closer to art and link it to the spirit of Chinese aesthetics. Second, consistency exists in the pursuit of harmony. Chinese people’s pursuit of harmony between man and costume, costume and accessories, costume structure and style, as well as costume sets and accessories is in consistency with the harmony required by Chinese aesthetics. Third, consistency exists in the pursuits of the “unity of internal and external beauty.” Whether it is about dress codes, costume patterns, or accessories, traditional Chinese costumes were designed to regulate the

wearers' moral conduct and prevent any possible breach of social norm. Fourth, consistency also exists in the pursuits of "unity of man and heaven." The unity of man and heaven is not only a concept of Chinese aesthetics, but also an aesthetic code of costume design. In a way, costumes objectify the "unity of man and heaven" in real life. The relationship between the spirit of Chinese costume aesthetics and that of Chinese aesthetics can be analyzed from a synchronic perspective. A range of aesthetic ideals and spirits emerging in different dynasties of China have exerted different impacts on the dress codes, costume styles and costume pursuits in corresponding dynasties at varied levels. From a diachronic perspective, however, the spirit of Chinese costume aesthetics and that of Chinese aesthetics were closely related to each other in ancient times, gradually separated from each other in modern times, and remain detached from each other in contemporary times. There is an urgent need to revive the spirit of Chinese aesthetics in today's costumes of China to continue such a spirit. Chinese costumes are a vivid carrier of the spirit of Chinese aesthetics and the best demonstration of the Chinese people's aesthetic standards, origins and values. Therefore, it can satisfy Chinese people's needs the most.

The Chinese costume with spirit of Chinese aesthetics exhibits specific characteristics as follows.

First, in terms of the costume-body relationship, more importance was attached to the costumes than to the body. In ancient China, the body was deemed something to be restrained; while costumes played a variety of roles and served multiple purposes. A diversity of complicated, delicate detailed understandings of the body have formed the foundation and source of a profound understanding of costume connotations. Culture-based systems of values and concepts are like a

piece of a garment, which gives the wearer an identity and social rights only when it is being worn (Liu, 1998). The significance of the body is by no means in isolation. Instead, it is gradually built amid a range of complicated historical, social and cultural relationships. Being part of a process or history, the human body is given a variety of interpretations concerning history, society, culture, politics, etc. Bodies have a dual nature, for which they are the unity of subject and object and the combination of physiological and cultural construction. In ancient times, Chinese people preferred to see bodies as an exhibit of mindset, cultural cultivation and political power (Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy, "Academia Sinica", 2002). The bodies of ancient Chinese people were the outcomes of the Chinese culture of a given period. In the context of an ever-changing society and culture in Chinese history, Chinese culture imposed a series of specific requirements on bodies. During the pre-Qin era, a healthy and robust body was much appreciated. In the *Book of Songs*, there was a portrayal of a female figure as "tall and slender." Since the Spring and Autumn and Warring States period, however, there was a significant change in people's aesthetic conceptions. Slim and delicate female figure replaced healthy and robust one as the mainstream aesthetic standard. During the Western and Eastern Han Dynasties, the aesthetic view of being "beautiful in appearance and clever in mind" was advocated. While appreciating external beauty, people of that time attached more importance to internal morality, developing a morality-over-beauty tendency. This to a large extent should be attributed to the profound influence of Confucian views of physical practice, "qi" transformation and rites. Such a view highlighted the inseparable relationship between human nature, human bodies and social construction; focused on the "shape-qi (essence)-heart" structure which called for life-and-

moral integration and a spirit-loaded human body; and emphasized the interaction between nature and human body due to their shared feature as outcomes of “qi” transformation (Yang, 1996). During the Later Han Dynasty and the Three Kingdoms period, with metaphysics becoming a new trend, Chinese aesthetics became more and more philosophy-oriented. The Wei-Jin period witnessed the emergence of a “self-awareness,” which was characterized by high appreciation of literary and artistic talent, profound thinking, openness and external beauty. In the Tang Dynasty, thanks to the economic boom and social stability, a well-developed plump female figure was aesthetically preferred. In such a context, it was a trend for women to wear low-cut dresses. When it came to the Song Dynasty, however, “Neo-Confucianism” and “*Tai Chi*” were regarded as the highest category of the universe and morality by Neo-Confucians, who consequently called for “cherishing heaven laws and denying human desires.” Exposing the body was deemed indecent and outrageous and costumes were used to cover it to help eliminate sexual desire. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the control of the body reached an extreme, i.e. foot-binding, which had both the female body and mind “imprisoned.” Throughout the history of China, the manifestation of the human body was very much ignored. So did people’s personal feelings towards costumes. By contrast, costumes’ role as an object was highlighted. Chinese culture’s shaping of the human body was made possible via a variety of dress codes and costume norms. The bodies of ancient Chinese people were arguably controlled by its culture in an all-round way. Now, in modern times, with the change in costume fashions, the bodies of Chinese people have been gradually set free. Under the influence of the traditional Chinese view of the human body, regarding human-costume relationships, bodies were understood by ancient

Chinese people as secondary to its integration into the universe. As a shield for the body, costumes were supposed to cover or disguise the body and therefore serve multiple purposes.

Unlike Chinese aesthetics, Western aesthetics exhibit a people-oriented view, namely, whether costumes are to serve people or the other way round. Since Socrates and Plato, Western philosophy has been characterized by a view that separates the soul from the body, with the soul at the fundamental and dominant position and the body at an affiliated and instrumental position. This view has been further highlighted since Descartes and the body even became the objective entity of subject of consciousness (rationality). It was not until the time of Nietzsche that this traditional view was subverted and the body was given more attention and the soul was deemed inseparable from the body. In modern times, Western scholars such as Merleau-Ponty and Michel Foucault strove to encourage resistance to the body’s being a rational subject. In Western society and artistic circles, there remains a certain gap between people’s physical appearance and their mindset. In ancient Greece, the beauty of the human figure was considered a manifestation of vitality and vigor. All admired figures, from vigorous and robust athletes and brave and strong war heroes to faultless god statues, were demonstrating and eulogizing the beauty of the human body. Masculine beauty was the perfect integration of health, strength and charisma; while feminine beauty was the crystallization of wisdom and charm. During the Renaissance period, with humanism being the lofty ideal, Westerners pursued personal liberty and individuality, adjusting their understanding of beauty from “God’s creation” to “nature’s creation,” raising human status from “God’s vassal” to the “essence of the universe.” In such a context, pursuit of external beauty was preferred. For example, Leonard Da Vinci carried

out more extensive and detailed research in body proportions, based on which he set a series of standards. Artists truthfully portrayed and engraved a variety of human sculptures to echo the themes of the time, i.e. recognizing real life and eulogizing earthly joy. In the paintings of Francois Boucher, female figures of the 17th and 18th Century were without exception elegant and beautiful; while male figures looked casual and elegant. In the 19th Century, Auguste Rodin, by injecting his true emotions into his human sculptures, managed to make every muscle of the sculpture so vivid that they looked like they could talk or feel. The Freikörperkultur (FKK) movement (Free Body Culture) of the 1920s had human bodies liberated to the maximum. These body-related philosophies and campaigns guided the way costumes served people and highlighted costumes' role as a human "shell." Under such influence, the human body was revealed, highlighted and beautified through three-dimensional structure.

Second, in terms of costume design, Chinese costume aesthetics attaches great importance to the satisfactory handling of the relationships between varied human needs and many "events." Costume design concerns satisfying human dressing needs in an appropriate way. Involving aspects such as material, craftsmanship, technique, performance and form, its internal factors can reflect the logical relationships between costume evolution structure and functional rationality. By contrast, its external factors can reflect the influences of culture, society, time-space environment, historical conditions and social ethics. Chinese costume design has always been trapped in a contradiction between the growing costume needs of different social classes and the variety of subjective and objective constraints of the times. Also, in design great consideration has been given to costume functionality, utility, aesthetic appeal and spiritual enjoyment. It is no exaggeration

to say that every alternation of the dynasties in Chinese history was invariably accompanied with the change of established fashion style. Behind Chinese costume design was a series of procedures of human relationship-based events, such as worship ceremonies, weddings and funerals. Because of this, designs attached great importance to the coordination between internal and external factors, or rather, harmony between costumes and human relationship-based events. The design philosophy of ancient China can be summarized as "utility orientation," "natural items in natural applications," "self-respect and cherishment of life" and "unity of knowing and action." *Liezi*, a Taoist classic included a series of key Taoist ideas, among which were "There is no such thing for all purposes" and "Each item has its own functions." The former justifies the existence of a diversity of designs and items. The latter points out that an "item" is made to satisfy a particular human's need. It is supposed to bring convenience to people's lives. Regarding costumes, there were human motives and needs beyond the satisfaction of a single-style costume. Under such circumstances, a series of costume designs came into being, such as royal costumes, court dress, military uniforms and daily wear. Different costumes served different purposes, which could not be randomly changed. Similar views were also expressed in "Talent Selection" *Liuzi*, which argued "All materials, when appropriately applied in accordance with time and place, can come into their due play." The criterion for "talent selection" is "appropriation." Therefore, what matters most is whether a costume is suitable for a particular person or a given occasion. According to *Book of Diverse Crafts*, "It takes all the factors of good timing, geographical convenience, quality materials and exquisite craftsmanship to make a superior item. If quality materials and exquisite craftsmanship fail to deliver a superior item, there must have been



Ladies with Hair-pinned Flowers

something wrong with the timing and geographic location.” This was a summary of the interactions among various item-making factors and it became a guiding principle of costume design in ancient China. This summary calls for respecting nature while making good use of it. More specifically, three types of costumes, i.e. fur coats (for winter), silk garments (for summer) and linen wear (for spring and autumn) were designed in accordance with the proceeding of the four seasons. A variety of formal costumes, such as court dress, official costumes, bian costumes (the Emperor’s costumes for daily meetings), worshiping costumes and travel wear were made for different geographic conditions, locations and occasions. Moreover, cotton, linen, silk and other natural fabrics were selected to maximize comfort. This fully demonstrated the higher-state unity of good timing, geographical convenience and good human relationships.

Third, in terms of structural design, Chinese costume aesthetics prefers a natural fabric-based

two-dimensional one-piece structure. The whole process of traditional costume design involves measuring, structural design, tailoring and sewing. In ancient China, when one was measured, he or she was supposed to stand still, with both legs slightly crossed and both arms fully unfolded to form a two-dimensional cross-shaped structure. Without upper shoulder seams, the front and back parts were in fact one piece of cloths; the sleeves were sewn onto the garment body. Such a one-piece structure is easy to tailor. One just needs to fold a piece of cloth into four parts, trim the excessive material at the underarms and upper waist to form a cross-shaped pattern, cut the front part open to form a peach-shaped forepart, and sew the side seams along both sleeve underarms to piece the front and back parts together. Such a column-like structure, lacking curve and arc, cannot highlight the waistline and is characterized by a large lower hem. Yet, its loose style allows the wearer to move freely and conveniently. The design principle of the cross-



shaped costume structure is “symmetry, stability and harmony,” which is similar to that of ancient Chinese architectural structure. For example, ancient Chinese architecture featured a roof with a reversed sag vertical curve (symbolizing the embrace of earth) and tilted hip knobs. Horizontally extending above the ground, such a roof structure manifests the ancient Chinese people’s pursuit of symmetry, stability and harmonious co-existence with nature. This is in stark contrast with such Western architectural style as Gothic architecture, which features a pointed arch symbolizing an upward force to slip the leash. Furthermore, the one-piece design structure of traditional Chinese costumes also relates to Taoism, which advocates “following the law of the universe,” “doing nothing that goes against nature” and “avoiding purposeful pursuit.” To echo such “eco-friendly” calls, ancient Chinese tailors preferred to use natural fabrics for garment-making and carefully avoided excessive tailoring.

Costume design in the West has been known for complicated structures, which center on the shape of the body, limbs and trunk. Tailored to the human figure, Western-style costumes are able to highlight the curved beauty of the human form. With the concept of three dimensions formed in the 13th Century, the Western world has been committed to highlighting the human figure. The introduction of the Greenland gown, a prototype of the “three-dimensional cut” fashion, marked a milestone in the history of Western fashion (Shi, 2002). It consists of 16 separate pieces of cloth in three dimensions, i.e. front, back and side, with the sleeves separately tailored. Such a fragmented curvilinear structure ensures a firm fit and highlights the curves of breast and hip. Western-style costume structures are in line with human body structures, delivering an obvious three-dimensional effect. Although both give consideration to the structure of the human body, traditional Chinese costume structures and Western structures differ primarily in shape, with

the former being a “round-shaped cover” and the latter being a “curvilinear shell.” Chinese costume aesthetics stress turning material resources to good account, for which there is little cloth cut off and a whole large piece left with multiple folds, resulting in a loose style. On the other hand, Western-style costumes, made of many pieces of cloth, are left with less interspace and fewer folds, thus creating a slim cut.

Fourth, in terms of costume styles, the aesthetics of traditional Chinese costumes advocate implication, connotation and a soothing style. Chinese costumes highlight the inherent temperament of the Chinese people. Traditional Chinese costumes in ancient times demonstrated natural grace, elegance, implication, as well as a pure and pristine state. The “balance of outward grace and solid worth,” an ideal held by Confucius, negates and transcends the existence of form and pursues a larger-than-form spirit. Likewise, traditional Chinese costumes do not focus on presenting the beauty of the body’s figure, but underline the beauty of inherent human qualities such as wisdom and faith. As Lin Yutang claimed in his essay collection *Feast of Life*, women’s wear in ancient China did not highlight the beauty of the figure, but focused on simulating the rhythm of nature. In his *Autumn Light Memories*, Jiang Tan, a renowned scholar of the late Ming Dynasty held, “I made a dress full of winter-sweets for Qiu Fu, who looked like a pristine green fairy in that dress; when it came to late spring, she wore that green-sleeved dress and vivid butterfly-shaped headwear, leaning against the railing without even noticing the passing of spring.” These words depicted a detached fairyland-like picture free from vulgarity. Such a style had a lot to do with the Chinese costume design—one-piece, which wraps the body in a conservative fashion. By contrast, the mainstream aesthetics of Western costumes value the beauty of the figure, which is mostly achieved by exposing

certain parts of the body and sometimes tightly wrapping the body in slim-fit wear.

Such aesthetic characteristics indicate the very essence of traditional Chinese costumes, which can be interpreted as follows.

First, Chinese costumes are an external showcase of politicized aesthetics. From the perspective of Chinese aesthetics, the human body is more than a natural being; it is also a “premise” to demonstrate political power. Classical Chinese aesthetics attached great importance to “understanding the law of the universe” and “drawing on the rigorous scholarship of the sages,” integrating the pursuit of beauty with political ambition. Chinese costumes, with implied political meaning, are a reflection of political aesthetics. The abstract political power was made visible via costumes. It is social and political stability, not pure beauty that traditional Chinese costumes truly pursue. In ancient times, Chinese costumes were appreciated from a hierarchical lens without applying any aesthetic yardstick. All relevant factors, from design and color to pattern, were endowed with political significance. For example, the pattern of “*fufu*” was a combination of a battleaxe and a male figure. A battleaxe held by a male figure signified power. In this way, political power was conveyed and manifested by traditional Chinese costumes.

Second, Chinese costumes are a display of implied and imagined symbols. They have become a signifier by virtue of visual symbols such as structure, design, style, color, fabric, texture, pattern and decoration. These different symbols gave rise to a variety of costumes with unique characteristics. The costumes’ symbols, along with their corresponding social status and identities, represent the intrinsic meaning of the Chinese costume system, which originated during the Zhou Dynasty. The abundant information contained in the costumes formed the symbolic

meaning of the symbols. The connotations of such costume symbols were associated with political power and royal hierarchy and thus evoked people's conceptions of those symbols. The differences in the "signified," which were based on symbolic significance, enriched the meaning and significance of traditional Chinese costumes. A range of factors had their influence on traditional Chinese costumes and at the same time were showcased by them.

Third, Chinese costumes are a representation of social norm's restriction of the human body. As the old saying goes, "Etiquette is all about thinking sensibly and behaving properly." This so-called "etiquette" is the physical practice of sensible decisions. All aesthetic factors of ancient Chinese costumes, from structure, design, style, function, standard and color to artistic conception, served to interpret social order and rules. They presented a way of existence, in which people of today can clearly prove social customs' constraint of human beings and the latter's obedience to certain social norms (Entwistle, 2005). Such obedience, to some extent, can gain recognition, a sense of security and respect within a particular group. Because costumes were deemed a symbol of social status, it was more than natural for the common people to follow the dress style of high-ranking officials and madams with royal titles for snob value. On the other hand, the aristocracy and the privileged would try every possible means to ensure their costumes different

from those of the common people. That explains why a complicated system of dress codes was formulated and introduced in ancient China. Having been strictly observed for thousands of years as a hierarchy-based social norm, such a costume system manifested the isomorphic relationship between human conception (inside) and human behavior (outside). The several thousand years-long extension of the rigid traditional Chinese costumes system relied primarily on its influence beyond the scope of life itself.

Conclusion

The aesthetics of Chinese costumes is the crystallization of traditional Chinese artistry and at the same time was not without dregs, such as the suppression of its subjectivity, restraint on the human body and the segregation of different social classes. In contemporary China, Chinese costumes keep changing with the aesthetic needs of the time. Under such circumstances, filtration, screening and sublation have become the basic methods with which to inherit and carry forward the essence of traditional Chinese costumes. It is contemporary Chinese people's due responsibility to demonstrate the spirit of Chinese aesthetics via dressing, take the initiative to spread such a spirit, and showcase the unique charm of Chinese aesthetics by the light of nature.

(Translator: Wu Lingwei; Editor: Yan Yuting)

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