



# THE IDEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF ANCIENT CHINESE CLOTHING CULTURE



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ZHANG, Bin; YANG, Ping The ideological background of ancient Chinese clothing culture. *Trans/Form/Ação: Unesp journal of philosophy*, Marília, v. 47, n. 4, "Eastern thought", e0240061, 2024.

**Abstract:** China has been known as a country of clothing since ancient times, and its clothing culture is dazzling. Any nation's art and culture have their specific philosophical thought background. Behind the Chinese costume culture, it also contains the ancient Chinese people's ideological connotation. Ancient Chinese society spanned five thousand years, the social trend of thought was constantly changing, and the clothing system was also constantly updated. Through the study of the ideological history background of ancient Chinese clothing culture, we can broaden the research angle of ancient Chinese philosophy and more comprehensively understand the traditional clothing culture.


**Keywords:** Clothing Culture. Ideological Background. Chinese Philosophy.

ZHANG, Bin; YANG, Ping El trasfondo ideológico de la antigua cultura indumentaria China. *Transformação: revista de filosofia da Unesp*, Marília, v. 47, n. 4, "Eastern thought", e0240061, 2024.

**Resumen:** China es conocida desde la antigüedad como un país de indumentaria, y su cultura indumentaria es deslumbrante. El arte y la cultura de cualquier nación tienen su trasfondo específico de pensamiento filosófico. Detrás de la cultura indumentaria china, también se encuentra la connotación ideológica del antiguo pueblo chino. La antigua sociedad china abarcó cinco mil años, la tendencia social del pensamiento cambiaba constantemente, y el sistema de vestimenta también se actualizaba constantemente. A través del estudio del trasfondo histórico ideológico de la cultura del traje de la antigua China, podemos ampliar el ángulo de investigación de la filosofía de la antigua China y comprender más ampliamente la cultura del traje tradicional.

**Palabras clave:** Cultura de la Indumentaria. Antecedentes ideológicos. Filosofía china.

Received: 28/06/2023 | Approved: 08/08/2023 | Published: 25/01/2024

 <https://doi.org/10.1590/0101-3173.2024.v47.n4.e0240061>



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## THE IDEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF ANCIENT CHINESE CLOTHING CULTURE

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**Abstract:** China has been known as a country of clothing since ancient times, and its clothing culture is dazzling. Any nation's art and culture have their specific philosophical thought background. Behind the Chinese costume culture, it also contains the ancient Chinese people's ideological connotation. Ancient Chinese society spanned five thousand years, the social trend of thought was constantly changing, and the clothing system was also constantly updated. Through the study of the ideological history background of ancient Chinese clothing culture, we can broaden the research angle of ancient Chinese philosophy and more comprehensively understand the traditional clothing culture.

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### INTRODUCTION

Zuo Zhuan once wrote: "Because China is a country of rituals, it is called "Xia", and "Xia" has elegant meaning; The clothing of Chinese people is very beautiful, so they are called "Hua" (Zuo, 2025, p. 33). It can be seen that clothing has long been closely related to Chinese culture and has become the outreach of Chinese civilization. Because of this, our country is also known as the country of clothing and the state of rituals. It can be said that it is under the indoctrination of clothing culture that Chinese people have formed a unique cultural mentality and national character with Oriental characteristics. Judging people by appearance, the distinction between honorable and humble clothings, and the distinction between superior and inferior colors are the unique Orientals' value cognition and ethical thinking. By combining Chinese ancient clothing culture with its corresponding ideological background, we can more deeply understand the relationship between the two and understand how the philosophical trend of thought affected the ancient people's daily life. This paper will be based on the analysis of ancient Chinese history, but will not discuss each dynasty in detail. Instead, the content is selected and divided according to whether the philosophical trend of thought has undergone large-scale changes.

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## 1 ORIGIN OF CLOTHING CULTURE - PRE-QIN PERIOD

Pre-Qin refers to the historical period before the establishment of the Qin Dynasty (221 BC, 21st century BC). The pre-Qin period includes five periods: Xia, Shang, Western Zhou, Spring and Autumn, and Warring States.

### 1.1 XIA, SHANG AND ZHOU DYNASTIES

In the Western Zhou Dynasty, the hierarchy was gradually established, and the Zhou Dynasty set up the official posts of “sifu” and “internal sifu” (Both are the officials’ names who are in charge of the emperor’s auspicious and inauspicious clothing and distinguish their colors and uses.) in charge of royal clothing. According to the literature records and the analysis of unearthed cultural relics, the Chinese official clothing system was initially established in the Xia and Shang Dynasties and has been perfected in the Zhou Dynasty. According to the cultural relics unearthed in the Zhou Dynasty, the basic shape of the up-clothing and down-skirt has been established. From the clothing styles on the unearthed artefacts, it can be found that the clothing styles of this period were mainly narrow sleeves, and the skirts were usually near the knees, with patterns on the collar, sleeves and skirts, and the waist was tightened with belts (Chao, 2012, p. 39). The skirt of the lower body is also distinguished by differences in material, color, pattern and so on, and there is no difference in shape. The clothing used to resist cold, in the pre-Qin period, were fur, robe and *jian*. Fur is leather clothing, and the character of it in oracle bone inscriptions is like the shape of fur turned out and leather hidden in the inside. The up-clothing and down-skirt system is the earliest clothing system. The form is relatively simple, so the coat is also called “duan”, has the meaning of beginning and is used for sacrifice and military clothing to show respect for the ancients. Due to the straight cut, it also has the meaning of correctness.

As Mr. Wang Jiping said:

The most important thing in the development of human clothing is the formation of the clothing system. This is an important system that affects the development of clothing in ancient society. The clothing system is the regulation or standard that distinguishes different social classes and clothing forms on different occasions. The emergence of the clothing system is a product of class society and a system established by the rulers to establish their authority (Wang, 1998, p. 29).

The literature that reflects the clothing system in detail can be found in *The Rites of Zhou*. In *The Rites of Zhou* wrote: “There is one servant in the Tianguan’s internal department<sup>3</sup>, two female imperial guards, and eight people in charge of the queen’s six clothes. There are

<sup>3</sup> Tianguan: Tianguan is an official name in the Zhou Dynasty. The highest position in the Tianguan system is Zhongzai, who is in charge of the royal family’s finances and palace affairs.

two scholars in the spring court, two in the government, one in history, one in the Qing, and ten in the disciples, serving the emperor and his wife's dressing" (Ji, 2001, p. 32). These people are specifically responsible for the emperor and the empress's clothing production and specific wear, in the use of various preparations, to express their dignity and status so that they meet the requirements of the rituals. The essence is to emphasize the hierarchical status.

The clothing system has strict and detailed regulations on the clothing of each grade. This hierarchical system is not only reflected in the difference between the ruling class headed by the emperor of Zhou and the common people, but also in the differences in respect and inferiority within the ruling class. Kong Yingda said:

Heavenly destiny has virtue so that it occupies a position. Destiny has the ethics of high and low, and there is a difference between high and low positions, so it has to be named, and so on, and like things to show it. The first official system was the five-clothing one, so it is also a sign of high and low. There are grades in service, so there are differences in respect and inferiority (Wang, 2020, p. 67).

The "five clothes" here refers to the five auspicious clothing, marking the difference between the grades of different levels of nobility and emperor, reflecting the hierarchy. In addition, there are five mourning clothing, marking the distance between different people and the deceased in the patriarchal blood, reflecting the blood level. In this way, through the display of clothing, the people's political status at all society's levels and the closeness and patriarchal blood relatives' estrangement can be displayed at all times. The individuals' position in society is double agreed so that everyone can be content with their duties and abide by the rules to achieve the purpose of maintaining social order.

The patriarchal clan system had begun to take shape in the Xia and Shang Dynasties. It is generally believed that Xia Qi created the hereditary system of the throne. In the Shang Dynasty, the throne was sometimes inherited from brother to brother and, sometimes, from father to son. In the middle of the 11th century BC, after Zhou conquered Yin, on the one hand, he enfeoffed princes on a large scale, and on the other hand, he recognized the power of local clans and, finally, formed a set of patriarchal clan management system centered on the lineal primogeniture system. Corresponding to the patriarchal system, ancient totem worship passed through the intermediate form of "emperor" worship in the Shang Dynasty and was further humanized into ancestor worship in the Western Zhou Dynasty (Chao; Yu, 2007, p. 32). People, in the period of Yin and Shang, respected the emperor and gods, while people in Zhou shifted the focus of social consciousness to respecting heaven and emphasizing virtue, forming a culture of "[...] taking heaven as the ancestor and virtue as the foundation". The main manifestation of this culture, in reality, is the suburban sacrificial system in the Western Zhou Dynasty: "The Duke of Zhou sacrificed Hou Ji, the founder of the Zhou Dynasty, on the outskirts of the city, and let it be sacrificed together with Heaven. In the Ming Hall (the

place where the emperor proclaimed politics and religion and held great ceremonies), the ancestor King Wen of Zhou was sacrificed to match with God” (Shi et al., 2017, p. 29).

There are two most important types of state sacrifices in ancient Chinese society: one is offering sacrifices to heaven and earth, and the other is offering sacrifices to ancestral temples. Needless to say, ancestral temple sacrifices represent ancestor worship, but of course, the emphasis is on “filial piety” related to blood kinship in the world. Even if the heaven and the earth are worshipped in the suburbs, according to the *Book of Filial Piety*, “[t]he nature of the heavens and the earth is precious to man, there is nothing greater than filial piety in human behavior, nothing is greater than filial piety than a strict father, and nothing is greater than a strict father who matches the sky, so the Duke of Zhou is a man” (Shi et al., 2017, p. 31). The heaven’s time and the worship of ancestors and gods emphasize the “filial piety” in the world. Whether it is the ancestors’ “virtue” who “matched the heavens with virtue”, or the “filial piety” embodied by the ancestors worshipped in the ancestors’ suburbs of later generations, they all emphasize the world’s affairs and order. Similar to the emphasis on the patriarchal blood relationship in the Western Zhou Dynasty, the clothing system under the cultural background of the Western Zhou Dynasty also embodies the feudal patriarchal thought with virtue and filial piety as the backbone. Specifically, the specific manifestations of “virtue” and “filial piety” are the auspicious five-clothing system and the mourning five-clothing system mentioned above respectively (Chen, 2011, p. 78).

## 1.2 SPRING AND AUTUMN AND WARRING STATES PERIOD

The end of the Spring and Autumn Period to the Warring States Period is known as the “Axial Age” of Chinese intellectual history. This period is also the most important period for the development of ancient Chinese clothing culture. Confucianism, Mohism and Taoism all developed their own clothing concepts. Among them, the clothing thought of Confucianism has the greatest influence.

Confucius is the founder of Confucianism and the defender of the ritual system since the Western Zhou Dynasty. He tried his best to explain “rituals” with “benevolence”, hoping to return to the stable state of the ruler and ministers’ order, and the elders and younger ones’ order stipulated by the rituals. Therefore, his view of clothing is mainly the view of the ritual system of clothing. He believes that clothing should conform to the rituals, express the rituals and play the role of the rituals to regulate behavior. In Confucius’ time, the official clothing system, established in the Western Zhou Dynasty, had been destroyed. There are two main reasons for the destruction. First, the decline of the Zhou Dynasty; second, the development of production technology and trade exchanges, in the Spring and Autumn Periods, provided a material basis for the breakthrough of the law of “Jewels and jade are not sold in the market” in the Western Zhou Dynasty. No matter how expensive silk

fabrics are, as long as they are rich enough, they can be worn, which provides the possibility for the destruction of the official clothing system. Moreover, the new development of dyeing and weaving technology also brought new clothing styles that did not exist before. These new clothing styles could not be stipulated in the original ritual system, which also constituted damage to the original official clothing system objectively.

Confucius also tried to find a deep “quality” for the “style” of clothing through the pursuit of the aesthetic ideal of “gentle and refined”, so as to rebuild the culture of rituals and music. In Confucius’ aesthetic concept, if a person’s simplicity is greater than his literary talent, he will appear vulgar; if his literary talent is greater than his simplicity, he will inevitably be vain. Literary talent and simplicity must be properly coordinated, and, only in this way, one can become a real gentleman. Among them, “style” refers to a person’s external image, which is embodied in the beauty of clothing and costume, and “quality” refers to a person’s inner qualifications and moral beauty. The reason why Confucius believed that the “style” and “quality” of clothing are closely related to people’s moral character is largely related to the ethical tendency of his thought (Geng, 2021, p. 78). *Liren Chapter in the Analects* believes that choosing to be neighbors with benevolent people is a manifestation of aesthetic ideals. The rule of rituals was an important strategy in ancient Chinese society and politics. Confucius first recognized and emphasized the necessity of rituals, and then focused on the discussion of benevolence. In his thought world, kindness and beauty, style and quality are inseparably linked. Among them, beauty is not broad and boundless, but must be regulated and constrained by goodness; quality does not exist in isolation, but must be expressed through style, and the pursuit of quality also pays attention to the recognition of virtue.

From the external form, clothing is mainly manifested in the pursuit of “beauty”; from the internal level, it is reflected in the pursuit of “goodness”; that is, clothing should be consistent with people’s moral cultivation. Only when the “style” and “quality” of clothing match, it can have real beauty. In *Taibo*, Confucius praised Yu’s rich and beautiful behavior of offering sacrifices and sacrificial clothes in spite of his extremely poor conditions of food, clothing and transportation, and praised his virtue of building water conservancy for the people’s benefit. In essence, this is a specific explanation of the cultivation method of benevolence: from inner morality to outer clothing, we should restrain ourselves, and follow the rules of rituals between words and deeds (Lv, 2023, p. 61). In *Zi Lu*, Confucius put forward the idea of name rectification. Name rectification means the rectification of name and distinction, requiring that the emperor’s, minister’s, father’s and son’s all words and deeds should abide by their distinction and not do anything that exceeds their distinction. To rectify the name, it is particularly important to consider people’s clothing and social status. In *Zuo Zhuan · Zhaogong 12 Years*, Qiuming Zuo wrote that “[...] gentlemen and villains, each has a specified color of clothes. To show respect to the noble people with certain rituals, and to the humble people through the hierarchy rules to make them afraid”, which indicates that the society’s members

are not equal. From clothing to social status, there are differences between different individuals. Different clothes indicate different social statuses. In short, the “style” of clothing reflects the people’s hierarchical nature in ancient society: the lower-class people cannot wear the nobility’s clothes, and the upper-class aristocrats cannot wear the lower-class working people’s clothes. In which class you belong, you wear clothes that fit your class status (Li, 2015, p. 152). Therefore, it is against rituals to usurp one’s status in the choice of clothing, and it will be regarded as an indecent act. It can be seen that Confucianism hopes to embody the content of “[...] ritual: through the carrier of clothing, so as to regulate people’s dress and behavior and realize the purpose of maintaining class order and consolidating its rule” (Wang, 1998, p. 52). The source of this thought is directly superior to the Western Zhou Dynasty.

## 2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF CLOTHING CULTURE - QIN AND HAN DYNASTIES

The Qin Dynasty is defined as 221-206 AD, and the Han Dynasty, as 206-220 AD. In terms of historical background, this period was a key period for the formation of China’s political and social structure. The emperor of Qin also received the six countries’ military flags and established the clothing system, and the Qin system was generally retained in the Han Dynasty. The clothing of The Three Kingdoms and Jin Dynasties basically inherited the old system of the Qin and Han Dynasties. After the war of the Qin Dynasty, the monarchs of all dynasties paid attention to rest, and ruled without doing anything to restore vitality. The society’s development, the progress of culture and the exchanges between nationalities made the material more abundant. There appeared the ancient Chinese society’s first prosperous period, which reached a peak in politics, economy and culture.

### 2.1 OVERVIEW OF CLOTHING IN QIN AND HAN DYNASTIES

**Figure 1** - Painted pottery figurines of the Western Han Dynasty



Source: Sichuan Museum

In addition, in the clothing system of the Qin Dynasty, almost all the auspicious clothes, worn by the emperors of the Zhou Dynasty, were abandoned, and only the clothes, called “Junxuan<sup>4</sup>”, were kept, which was also inherited by the Han Dynasty. According to the *Book of the Later Han Dynasty·Yufu Zhi*: “Since the imperial throne of the Warring States period, Qin eradicated the rituals, and the clothing of the suburban priests all wore Junxuan. Han Dynasty inherited the Qin Dynasty”. All officials below the emperor of the Qin and Han Dynasties wore Junxuan for sacrifices (Chen, 2021, p. 97).

## 2.2 THE CONCEPT OF CLOTHING SYSTEM IN QIN AND HAN DYNASTIES AND THE THEORY OF FIVE CYCLIC VIRTUES

The concept of the clothing system in the Qin and Han Dynasties was inseparable from the “Theory of Yin-Yang and Five Elements” and the “Theory of Five Cyclic Virtues”. The Theory of Yin-Yang and Five Elements is a philosophical school developed based on “divination” during the Warring States period. It uses the concepts of yin, yang and five elements to summarize the various natural phenomena, in an attempt to explain the order of the universe and its internal connections.

It is generally believed that the meaning of yin and yang existed as early as before the Shang and Zhou dynasties, and the prototype of their characters can be seen in the inscriptions of the Yin Ruins. The theory of yin and yang, represented by *The Book of Changes*, believes that the creation and change of all things originate from the two qi of yin and yang, and uses the unity of opposites, interconnection and restriction of yin and yang to explain the universe (Wu, 2021, p. 21). The earliest record of the view of the Five Elements in history should be traced back to *Shangshu·Hong Fan*. Based on King Wu’s deeds, belonging to the Zhou Dynasty, asking about the way of heaven and government in Yin Shang Jizi, he put forward the view that the five substances of water, fire, wood, gold and earth transformed all things. Yin-yang and the five elements were not related at first. Zou Yan, a man of the Warring States Period, used the principle of the change of yin-yang to explain the law of movement of the five elements, and combined the two into one, creating the Theory of Yin-Yang and Five Elements (Feng, 2018, p. 54). This thought quickly became the most popular thought in the Warring States and Qin and Han Dynasties, and it was infecting all fields.

The Theory of Five Cyclic Virtues thus became the historical philosophy for explaining the change of dynasties in the pre-Qin and Han Dynasties. Previously, to become the emperor, one had to “receive orders” (accept God’s orders to control the four directions), and “revolution” (remove the orders of heaven received by the previous emperors). During the Warring States Period, the emperor’s authority gradually eroded invisibly, and there was no certainty as to which vassal king would become the emperor. Therefore, the traditional theory

<sup>4</sup> Junxuan: An all-black garment, in the Qin Dynasty, continued to be used in the Han Dynasty and was abolished in 59 AD.



of “receiving orders” was gradually replaced by the new theory of Five Elements (Zhang, 2021, p. 99). Because the theory of Five Elements believes that “fate” should be the fate of the five elements, not the heaven’s old destiny. The emperor must have obtained a certain virtue in the five elements, and heaven then showed its conformity to make him the emperor. If the current emperor’s virtue declines, a new emperor who embodies another virtue in the five elements will replace him. Social history operates in accordance with the order of the five elements, and it is successfully manifested in the change of dynasties in history. For example, Shang Tang used gold to defeat Xiamu, and Wen Wang used fire to defeat Shangjin.

The First Emperor of Qin has the world. According to the “Theory of Five Cyclic Virtues”, water virtue resides in restraining the fire of Zhou, so the Qin Dynasty system adopts the water virtue. And because, in the five elements of yin and yang, the number one of yang and the number six of yin are matched with water at the same time. Water is located in the north, and the matching color is black, so Qin favors black and the number six. The First Emperor of Qin set the first day of October as the beginning of the year, with black clothes and flags, and six as the number, such as six inches for talismans, six feet for public transportation, and six horses for rides. The Yellow River was renamed Virtue Water. These are all manifestations of the formal implementation of the five virtues theory. In the Han Dynasty, the rulers believed that, after the Han Dynasty inherited the Qin system, it was considered to be earth virtue. According to the “Theory of Yin-Yang and Five Elements”, the earth is better than water. Earth is yellow, so the color of the clothing is yellow. The practitioners combine the theory of Yin-Yang and Five Elements with the concept of the five aspects of astrology and think that the earth symbolizes the center; wood is blue, symbolizing the east; fire is red, symbolizing the south; gold is white, symbolizing the west; water is black, symbolizing the north. As a result, the five colors of green, red, black, white and yellow were regarded as normal colors, and yellow was regarded as the color of the emperor’s court clothing. Later, it is believed that the symbol of the emperor’s unity represents the color of all parties in the world. So, the color of the emperor’s clothing must be changed according to the season: cyan for the first month of spring; red for the first month of summer; yellow for June; and white for the first month of autumn. In the first month of winter, the emperor wears black to form customs. In addition to the normal colors, according to the belief that Yin and Yang and the Five Elements complement each other, the intermediate colors are prepared to be between the five colors, which are mostly used by the common people in their clothing (Zhang, 2015, p. 13). The color of Chinese Han Dynasty clothing, combined with the belief in ancient normal colors, constitutes the base color of Chinese traditional clothing, which has been passed down from generation to generation.

### 3 METAPHYSICS AND COSTUMES OF WEI, JIN, SOUTHERN AND NORTHERN DYNASTIES

The period of the Wei and Jin Dynasties was a period of diversified thinking and cultural integration. Under the double conflicts of frequent wars and regime changes, the cultural consciousness in this period had a great change. A new trend of thought, that is, metaphysics, began to appear. Metaphysics is a kind of thought that worships Laozhuang. Due to the decline of official Confucianism in the late Han Dynasty, the literati and scholar-officials began to pursue new self-value and the final destination of each soul after repressed thoughts for hundreds of years. Metaphysics derived from the worship of nature, the wave of idle talk, the elegant and free temperament from vulgarity and Buddhism metaphysics had a great impact on the clothing culture of Wei, Jin and Southern Dynasties.

Metaphysics worships nature. Because of the ritual law of the Confucian famous religion, the scholars, in the Wei and Jin Dynasties, wanted to get rid of the bondage of the ritual law, and began to pursue nature and release themselves. This shift in perception is also reflected in the styles and fabrics of clothing. “Wearing a robe and tying a wide belt” became a popular fashion standard for men at that time, especially for literati and scholars. The seven sages of the bamboo forest, in the Wei and Jin Dynasties, loved this kind of clothing and often laid bare one’s bosom and arms, with disheveled hair and bare feet, to show their lack of formality. *Jin Ji* records: “Xie Kun and Wang Cheng’s disciples imitated the people in the bamboo forest, with their heads loosened hair naked and bare, and there are roads in all directions.” *The Family Instructions of Master Yan* also said that the scholar-bureaucrats of the Liang Dynasty were all fond of wearing a robe and tying a wide belt, with big crowns and high shoes (Wang, 2021, p. 53). Influenced by metaphysics, women’s clothing, in the Wei and Jin Dynasties, also featured loose and elegant clothing. The upper body was often relatively simple, the lower body was wide, and the skirts were loose. Scholars in the Southern Dynasties also held naturalistic values in clothing. Among the many styles of the Southern Dynasties, long robes were the most popular ones, as shown in Figure 2. *A New Account of the Tales of the World* describes “shirt” many times, “In the twelfth year of Jin Xiaowu, it was winter, and he didn’t wear double clothes during the day, but he wore five or six layers of single-layered shirts, and he was tired at night” (Liu, 2021, p. 137). The fabrics of the shirts are mostly yarn, silk, and cloth, and the overall style is elegant. The jacket was still a clothing style recognized by all classes during this period. It is loved by people because of its warmth. It is a short coat style, mostly filled with cotton wool, which has the effect of keeping warm. Cloth is mostly used for cloth, and other silk fabrics are also used, such as gauze and leno. The upper class of the gentry mostly wears silk fabric jackets.

**Figure 2** - Long robes from the Southern and Northern Dynasties



Source: <https://www.allhistory.com/>

#### **4 TRANSFORMATION OF CLOTHING CULTURE IN TANG AND SONG DYNASTIES**

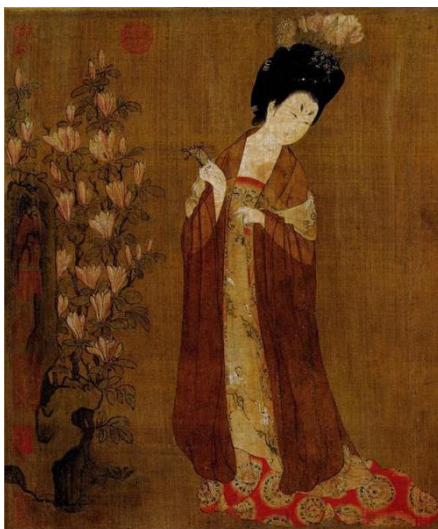
In the history of our country's development, the Tang Dynasty was one of the most prosperous dynasties. It was politically stable, the country was rich and the people were peaceful. The policy of foreign exchange was relatively tolerant. The frequency of trade with residents of bordering territories was relatively high. Politics, art and other aspects were unprecedentedly strong, creating an atmosphere full of vitality and freedom, focusing on character and personality development. The Tang Dynasty was dominated by the Han nationality and accommodated some foreign cultures. The main elements of the clothing were based on the traditional culture of the Han nationality and, at the same time, would incorporate the national elements of foreign cultures, presenting the characteristics of luxury, freedom, grandeur and grace as a whole. Economic activities in the Song Dynasty were very active, and international economic exchanges were frequent, but most of the exchanges were land cession and compensation. Under the condition of financial difficulties, the emperors of various dynasties have repeatedly proposed that clothing should be "simple" and "no extravagance". Especially for women's clothing, the requirements are particularly strict. During Ningzong's time, he once set fire to the women's gold and stone jewelry in the court, except to the emperors' and concubines' one, so as to warn the world. Due to economic constraints, Song people's clothing changed from Tang people's rich and prosperous style to cold and thin (Chang, 2015, p. 87).

In terms of ideology and culture, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism became the theoretical basis for the establishment of the Tang Dynasty. The conflicts between Confucianism and Taoism, and Confucianism and Buddhism, began in the pre-Qin and Six Dynasties, respectively. But after entering the Tang Dynasty, the conflicts among the three gradually weakened and disappeared, making Tang people have unprecedented tolerance, generosity, and

loose vision and mind. This kind of thinking made people have no special taboos on dressing at that time, and naked clothing can be seen everywhere. In the heyday of the Tang Dynasty, the style of clothing was “graceful and handsome”. Loose clothes and big buns were popular. Strapless clothing was popular in the royal family, and the folks followed suit. In the paintings or servants of the Tang Dynasty, women can be seen wearing narrow-sleeved clothes, with their chests and half of their arms exposed, and long skirts tied above their breasts (See Figure 3). The prosperity and openness of Tang Dynasty clothing can be seen from this (Fei, 2023, p. 13). In addition, yellow became the emperor’s special color, also from the Tang Dynasty. In the fourth year of Zhenguan (630), Emperor Taizong issued an edict:

Purple is used for officials of the third rank and above, crimson for the fifth rank and above, green for the sixth rank and seventh rank, cyan for the eighth rank and ninth rank, gray for common people, yellow for the emperor only, and the common people were not allowed to wear red and yellow as miscellaneous decorations on their clothes (Li, 2012, p. 65).

**Figure 3** - Figure of Ladies in Tang Dynasty



Source: Liaoning Provincial Museum

The idealist philosophy of the Song Dynasty formed a complete ideological system-Neo-Confucianism. It emphasizes the feudal ethical code and puts forward the principle of “keep the celestial law existence” and “kill off the human desire” in the attitude and life’s way. Zhu Xi constructed an ethical system oriented to social life. He not only explored philosophy, but also corrected the real life’s moral pursuit. And Cheng Yi tried his best to develop the point of view in *The Analects of Confucius·Yan Yuan* that “Do not look at what is contrary to propriety; do not listen to what is contrary to propriety; do not speak what is contrary to

propriety; do not do what is contrary to propriety” (Wang, 2018, p. 47). The result is that people follow feudal rituals, which invisibly restrains people’s psychology. As Confucianism gradually took the lead in social thinking, people’s aesthetic views also changed accordingly and it appears simple, clean, natural and relatively conservative reflected in the clothing of the Song Dynasty. It sharply reduces the prosperous style of the Tang Dynasty to the cold and emaciated literati style of the Song Dynasty. The relatively open, extroverted and warmly toned Tang-type culture turned to the relatively closed, introverted and elegantly toned Song-type culture.

## 5 NEW FEATURES OF CLOTHING CULTURE IN MING AND QING DYNASTIES

As the master of the clothing system of the feudal dynasties, the clothing system of the Ming Dynasty not only inherited the clothing system of the previous dynasties, but also developed it in some aspects. First of all, the Ming Dynasty was the last feudal dynasty ruled by the Han nationality in China. Its clothing system absorbed elements of traditional Han clothing, reflecting the inheritance of culture. Secondly, the Ming Dynasty strengthened the shackles of traditional ethics in society. *Kongzi Jiayu* once said that “[...] to be honest with rituals is to be far away from sin” (Zhou, 2008, p. 79). As a tool used by the traditional feudal system to rule society, “rituals” are also integrated into people’s daily life, especially reflected in the clothing system. After the founding of the Ming Dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang made detailed regulations on the royal family members’ clothing, hoping to reflect the dignity and inferiority in the clothing system and maintain the feudal political system with a strict hierarchy. He not only inherited the traditional clothing system, but also classified the official clothing and distinguished clothing strictly according to the system.

After the Qing Dynasty entered the customs, the clothing system was actively combined with Han traditional culture exchanges. On the one hand, it absorbed the hierarchical system of Chinese traditional clothing, and on the other hand, it also retained the Manchus’ cultural characteristics themselves. As a nomadic people, the Manchus have developed a rough and practical dressing style throughout a long history. The clothing elements often include mandarin jackets, cloaks and other activities suitable for activities.

The rulers of the Qing Dynasty combined the clothing structure of the traditional Han robe with large sleeves, and train and crown with the Manchus’ tight and narrow sleeves. And they used coercive means to promote it throughout the country in a short period. Since ancient times, China has had the tradition of integrating the ethnic minorities’ characteristics in the clothing system, from King Wuling’s “shooting on a horse in Hu dress”, who belonged to the Zhao Dynasty, to the compatibility of clothing in the Tang Dynasty. The royal family of the Qing Dynasty developed their own national characteristics, such as advocating martial arts and riding and shooting. From the clothing color, style and other aspects to absorb the

retro and solemn characteristics of the Han Dynasty. On the one hand, it continues to carry forward China's traditional strict hierarchical system, distinguishing between nobility and inferiority based on the clothing system; on the other hand, it also presents the multi-ethnic aesthetic characteristics, expanding the aesthetic style of Han clothing in terms of colors, patterns and other details (Cui; Niu, 2015, p. 49).

## CONCLUSIONS

China is one of the earliest countries to enter human civilization and has rarely stopped its historical progress in the process of development. Looking at China's social and historical background, it can be seen that China's clothing system has gone through different periods, such as the formation of the pre-Qin era, the development of the Qin, Han and Wei Jin eras, the peak of the Tang and Song eras, and then the complete and decline of the Ming and Qing ones. In each period, the regulation details and aesthetic connotation of clothing are closely related to the ideological and historical background of the times. People express their thoughts and ideas in clothing and embody their inner spiritual culture in the shape and system of clothing. The Hanfu can be passed down until now, which is inseparable from the drive of traditional Chinese cultural thoughts. Its distinctive dressing style, shape, way of dressing, color, pattern of clothing, etc., everywhere reflects the Chinese nation's traditional ideological connotation. It can be said that the form of clothing culture is the carrier of Chinese national civilization.

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