

# *Study on Cultural Inheritance and Aesthetic Value of Class System of Dress in Qing Dynasty*

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**Abstract:** China's Qing Dynasty emphasized the class ritual system to consolidate the centralization of power, and had strict norms for the class system of clothing. The clothing of the Qing Dynasty is the most complex and complicated in the clothing culture of the past dynasties. The characteristics of the clothing mainly absorb the Manchu and Han customs. It not only retains the basic patterns and color system passed down for thousands of years, but also endows the clothing with deeper class meaning and becomes the symbol of The Times, so that the future generations can continue to explore its rich aesthetic and cultural value. Today, the Qing Dynasty dress culture can still bring us the inspiration and value of using traditional culture to innovate design and inherit the ethnic group spirit. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the cultural inheritance and aesthetic value of the class system of clothing in Qing Dynasty, and to provide useful reference for modern clothing design. Through in-depth research on the class system representation and value embodiment of Qing Dynasty clothing, this paper intuitively shows the class division, production process characteristics and aesthetic characteristics of Qing Dynasty clothing, reveals the important position of Qing Dynasty clothing in cultural inheritance and its unique artistic charm, in order to provide references for research in related fields.

## **1. Introduction**

As an important part of the costume culture in the feudal society of China, the costume class system in the Qing Dynasty not only embodies the strict hierarchy and social order, but also contains rich cultural connotation and aesthetic value. This system, through the material, style, color, pattern and other details of clothing, exquisitely shows the hierarchical structure and values of Qing society. Through the study of the class system of clothing in the Qing Dynasty, the historical logic, cultural inheritance and artistic expression behind it can be deeply understood, thus revealing its unique position in the history of ancient Chinese clothing, and providing useful reference and inspiration for modern clothing design, so that modern clothing designers can draw inspiration from it and innovate the design concept and elements of modern clothing. This paper comprehensively discusses the cultural inheritance and aesthetic value of the dress class system in the Qing Dynasty, in order to provide a new perspective and reference for the research of related fields, and further promote the research and development of Chinese dress culture.

## 2. Qing Dynasty Clothing Class System Representation

China is known as the "kingdom of clothing", the origin of Chinese clothing can be traced back to 18,000 years ago, with totem worship of body painting, patterned face, hair, and gravel, shell, animal bones and other raw materials processed into the head and neck ornaments constitute the original clothing system. Then primitive ancestors invented the spinning wheel to extract color from minerals and plants, and then to the development of weaving industry and dyeing technology... As a synthesis of material culture and social consciousness created by human beings in social practice, clothing records the development process of society [1]. In the feudal period, the dress system, as an external form to mark the rank and standardize the etiquette, had become an important means to establish and consolidate the feudal order in the Zhou Dynasty. In the last feudal dynasty in China, the dress system of the Qing Dynasty was even more complex.

### 2.1. The Dress System under the Feudal System

#### (1) Belief culture

In feudal society, people could not make a reasonable explanation for various phenomena in nature, and attributed them to the legend of heaven and earth, which was caused by the wrath of heaven and earth. Therefore, they Revere and Revere heaven and earth, worship heaven and earth in different forms, and pray for communication and dialogue with the god of heaven and earth, and gradually become a faith. Specifically to the clothing, the crown clothing is the most solemn clothing used by the emperor for the ceremony, through the form of clothes to show the relationship between heaven, earth and people, heaven (dry) for clothing, the ground (Kun) for the dress.

#### (2) Ritual inheritance

Chinese dynasties followed Confucianism and ritual was the core of Confucian culture. The function of ritual system as a ritual order society and normative behavior supported the establishment of the ancient legal hierarchy. The dress system of the past dynasties was mostly established on the basis of the etiquette system.

In the early Qing Dynasty, the authorities formulated the "ten from ten not from ten" system, forcing the overall social clothing trend full, the important symbol of the emperor's dress - twelve chapter pattern followed the Ming Dynasty's imperial clothing system; In the flourishing period of Kangqian, in order to strengthen the scale of rule, those in power determined a more stringent class system of clothing [2].

#### (3) Classification of clothing

The core of the Qing Dynasty clothing class system was built on its strict and fine hierarchical system, which was like a mirror that clearly reflected the power structure and identity differences of feudal society. From the emperor at the top to the common people at the bottom of society, everyone's clothing is a symbol of their social status and identity. Through the meticulous norms of color, pattern, texture, etc., an intuitive and complex visual hierarchy network is constructed.

In the use of color, the grade division of Qing Dynasty clothing is particularly clear. Bright yellow, this bright and dazzling color, has been given the supreme meaning, exclusive to the emperor and the empress, symbolizing the supreme authority and honor of the imperial power. However, for ordinary officials and civilians, this color is taboo, and they must abide by the rules and choose more low-key colors to highlight their identity and status [3]. This strict distinction of colors not only reflects the strict hierarchy of feudal society, but also gives costumes a strong political significance.

The choice and application of patterns is also an important part of the class system of clothing in the Qing Dynasty. Dragon robe, as a symbol of the emperor's status, the five-clawed golden dragon embroidered on it is unique, representing the holiness and majesty of imperial power. Other officials,

depending on their rank, used four - or three-clawed pythons as dresses. Although these pythons were equally gorgeous, they were obviously different from the dragon robes in details, thus highlighting the relationship between the emperor and his ministers [4]. In addition, a variety of auspicious and symbolic power patterns such as peony, auspicious clouds, sea water cliff, etc., are also widely used in different levels of clothing, through the complexity and sophistication of the pattern to further distinguish the identity and status of the wearer.

In terms of texture, Qing clothing also reflects the rigor of the hierarchy. The costumes used by senior officials and royal family members are mostly made of silk, brocade and other precious materials with fine texture and high gloss, and are embellished with gold and silver thread, gems and other ornaments, making the costumes more gorgeous and dazzling. Ordinary people can only use cotton, linen and other relatively cheap materials made of clothing, these clothes in texture and visual effects naturally can not be compared with the royal family's clothing.

The class system of clothing in Qing Dynasty established a complex and fine hierarchy through strict regulations on color, pattern and texture. This system not only reflects the power structure and identity differences of the feudal society, but also shows the unique aesthetics and superb skills of the Chinese nation in dress culture. At the same time, it also provides us with a unique perspective to examine and understand the historical and cultural background of feudal society.

## 2.2. Development of the Costume Class System in the Qing Dynasty

### (1) Unity in diversity

After the Manchu occupied the Central Plains, the dressing characteristics of the upper class continued the characteristics of Manchu dress, while integrating the clothing elements of the Ming Dynasty and other ethnic groups (mainly the Mongols).

In order to alleviate the intensifying ethnic contradictions, the system was relaxed to allow the color and pattern of clothing into the Han clothing characteristics; At the same time, according to the principle of "men do not follow women", Han women in the Qing Dynasty still followed Ming style clothing. From the Song Dynasty to the Ming Dynasty, the "Beizi" was renamed "cloak" and continued to be used in the Qing Dynasty. And this cloak is a cloak with sleeves, also known as "cloak" or "cloak" cloak. Inside wear a "jacket", full of clear jacket, generally for the front, small sleeves, round collar [5]. Secondly, according to the principle of "old never from young", young children are still dressed in Ming style.

The development of diversity and integration not only maintains the characteristics of Manchu, but also absorbs the essence of other ethnic costume cultures, reflecting the exchange and collision between different ethnic cultures.

### (2) Time signs

The official dress system of Qing Dynasty was a stage of innovation and development, which integrated the dress system of successive dynasties. In order to demonstrate national characteristics and authority, the rulers forced the policy of shaving hair and dressing easily. Han men wore Manchu clothes, and mandarin coats became one of the common clothes for men [6].

The conservative trend of thought gradually replaced the romantic trend of thought prevailing in the middle and late Ming Dynasty, and the economic prosperity in the early Qing Dynasty provided a material basis for the production and development of clothing, and the style of clothing paid attention to the complexity and delicacy of skills and patterns. In the Qing Dynasty, which had not changed much in style for nearly 300 years, the colors and wide and narrow edges of the clothing became the highlights of the Qing Dynasty clothing.

### 3. The Value of Dress Class System in Qing Dynasty

#### 3.1. Dress Aesthetics in the Institutional System

##### (1) Color lending

Before entering the customs, the Manchu had their own unique color preferences and symbolic meanings. Under the influence of the Chinese traditional five-element theory and Confucianism, they integrated with the Han culture after the establishment of the Qing Dynasty and formed a distinctive color derivation system.

Yellow, especially bright yellow, is a symbol of imperial power, representing the supreme status. The substitution of this color emphasizes the exclusive position of the emperor and the majesty of the royal family; Red was called "Zhu" in the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, and it was the color of the ceremonial dress of the princes. In the Han Dynasty, ministers with merit were allowed to paint the doors of their homes in red, and "Zhu men" or "Zhu hu" became the name of the nobility. In the Qing Dynasty, red was also often used in the costumes of the court and nobles [7]. The color aesthetic characteristics of Qing Dynasty clothing are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Aesthetic characteristics of costume color in Qing Dynasty

Colour	Symbolic meaning	Class identity
Bright yellow	Imperial power, supremacy	Emperor
Golden yellow	Royal family	Such as princes and princes
Apricot	Honourable	The crown prince and other secondary positions
Bright red	Noble and noble	Nobleman
Purple, blue, green	Might	Senior, middle and junior officials
Cyan, white, black	Plain and simple	Toiling masses

Purple because of its dye was very rare at that time, since the Southern and Northern Dynasties of the five-class public clothing system, to the Tang Dynasty and Song Dynasty, Ming and Qing dynasties, senior officials often use purple in the official clothing to show their status.

Blue was often used by mid-level officials in the official dress system of the Qing Dynasty; Green is used as the color of junior officials; Green, white, black three colors are more plain and simple, belong to the clothing colors of the toiling masses.

Color, as an intuitive and strong visual element, serves as a proxy for different class identities and social status. This phenomenon of color borrowing not only reflects the hierarchical differences in feudal society, but also shows the unique dress aesthetics at that time [8].

##### (2) Decorative pattern

The themes of clothing patterns in Qing Dynasty were extensive, including natural elements, myths and legends, auspicious symbols, religious elements, etc. Through these patterns, people expressed their yearning for a better life, reverence for gods and spiritual sustenance [9]. However, the actual application of strict regulations, rare birds and exotic animal patterns mainly symbolize identity and status, and more appear in the clothing of princes and nobles, better distinguish between official classes and grades. Dragon and phoenix patterns and other special patterns highlight the supremacy of imperial power. The official dress pattern varies according to the grade, such as crane pattern for the first grade of civil officials, golden rooster pattern for the second grade of civil officials, in order to distinguish the level.

Ordinary people's clothing patterns are simple and simple, subject matter and quantity are limited, most of them are common auspicious patterns, and the shape and process are simple. Aristocratic

clothing patterns are more exquisite and complex, the material and technology are superior, in addition to auspicious patterns, there are unique patterns.

Flower and plant patterns were widely used in Qing Dynasty clothing patterns, and continued the realistic style of Song Dynasty patterns. The upper class chase and show off the wealth status, a large number of symbols of wealth peony pattern, begonia pattern. Flower and plant patterns are often presented in a combination of forms, such as chrysanthemums and daffodils often appear in combination on clothing, symbolizing "jade Yi full hall". This type of combination was loved by the people because of its auspicious and beautiful connotations, and was widely used in traditional costumes in the Qing Dynasty. Many patterns use symmetrical or center symmetric forms, giving people a sense of stability and gravitas; At the same time, we pay attention to balanced distribution, and achieve visual balance through the adjustment of pattern size, density, color, etc., and the pattern layout is clear, highlighting the main pattern, and matching auxiliary patterns to enrich the overall effect (Table 2).

Table 2: Aesthetic characteristics of Qing Dynasty dress patterns

Pattern subject matter	Symbolic meaning and use	Application hierarchy	Pattern features and examples
Natural element	It reflects the beauty of nature and symbolizes harmony	At all levels	Flowers (such as peonies, malonia), plants (such as chrysanthemums, daffodils), landscape, etc., realistic style, often in combination forms, such as "jade Yi Mantang"
Myths and legends and auspicious symbols	Express good wishes and spiritual sustenance	All classes, but the nobility is more exquisite	Dragon and phoenix pattern (symbol of imperial power), bat (blessing), auspicious cloud (auspiciousness), lotus (purity), etc., complex shape, profound meaning
Religious element	Fear of God, spiritual belief	Nobles and some officials	Buddhist and Taoist related patterns, such as lotus seats, eight diagrams, etc., reflect religious belief and status
Rare birds and exotic animals	Status symbol	Maharaja	Phoenix, Kirin, lion, etc., the material is superior, the craft is exquisite, distinguish the official class and grade
Official pattern	Distinguish the grade, highlight the grade	Officer	Crane (first grade civil official), golden rooster (second grade civil official), peacock (third grade civil official), etc., depending on the grade
Civilian pattern	Simple and plain, auspicious meaning	Common people	The common auspicious patterns, such as plum blossom, bamboo, fish (more than every year), are simple in shape and craft

### (3) Production process

The production process of the court clothing in the Qing Dynasty is extremely complex, covering a variety of advanced techniques such as rice embroidering bead embroidery, makeup brocade and weaving gold satin. Rice beading is famous for its delicate beading process. Craftsmen need to thread small beads onto the silk thread one by one, and then embroider them carefully on the clothing to form bright and dazzling patterns, highlighting the ornate and delicate clothing. Makeup

brocade, through the complex "flower digging" process, weave colorful patterns on the fabric, these patterns are rich in color and distinct layers, as if the flowers in nature are blooming on the fabric, giving people a strong visual impact. Weaving gold satin, is woven into the fabric of gold or silver thread, forming a golden or silver shining decorative effect, making the dress more noble and luxurious. The production process is usually drawn in Beijing, and sent to Nanjing, Suzhou, Hangzhou and other weaving bureaus in the south of the river for weaving. Nanjing, Suzhou, Hangzhou and other places in the Jiangnan area have been the major cities of China's textile industry since ancient times. During the Qing Dynasty, the weaving bureaus in these places undertook the important task of making costumes for the court. Each weaving bureau not only has exquisite weaving skills and rich experience accumulation, but also gathers a large number of excellent craftsmen and designers. According to the design requirements of the court, they combined with their own craft characteristics and technical advantages, carefully woven a variety of fine texture, beautiful patterns of clothing materials. These materials not only met the needs of the court's clothing, but also promoted the development and progress of China's textile industry.

### 3.2. Cultural Inheritance in the Dress System

#### (1) Cultural implication of costume development in Qing Dynasty

The costume system of the Qing Dynasty was a process of gradual development and improvement. From the beginning of the 17th century to the middle of the 18th century, it took about 150 years to complete the Imperial Ritual Apparatus Scheme after the unremitting efforts of Tianming, Tiancong, Chongde, Shunzhi, Kangxi, Yongzheng, Qianlong and other dynasties [10], as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Schematic Diagram of Imperial Rites

Throughout the development of the Qing Dynasty clothing, from the change of Emperor Taiji to the Qing Dynasty, the Qing Dynasty 11 emperors ruled for 276 years. The establishment, prosperity, weakness and even collapse of the Qing Dynasty directly affected the major changes of Chinese costume culture and artistic style, reflected the hierarchical system, carried aesthetic concepts and adapted to life style, and was the result of the great integration of Manchu and Han cultures. While retaining Manchu characteristics, it absorbed a large number of Han costume cultures, which absorbed each other and constantly changed. It is the continuation and reform of the traditional clothing system handed down from generation to generation in China for thousands of years.

#### (2) Spiritual expression of national culture

Although the Qing Dynasty clothing abandoned many traditional shapes and forms in appearance, its spirit and the whole Chinese clothing culture are in the same line. The clothing of



Qing Dynasty embodies the custom of Manchu people in shape and style, and is the spiritual sustenance of Manchu people's bravery, tenacity and pioneering spirit. In addition, it retains the hierarchical content that has been preserved for thousands of years. Qing Dynasty costumes pay attention to etiquette and hierarchy, which all reflect the spirit and national pride of a country of respect and propriety in traditional Chinese culture.

The production technology of Qing Dynasty clothing is exquisite, and the style of decoration is the most complicated in the history. The Manchu clothing has unique style, bright colors and exquisite patterns, which all reflect the Manchu people's love and pride in their national culture and the artisan spirit of inheriting traditional Chinese culture.

#### **4. The Enlightenment of Qing Dynasty Dress Culture in Modern Dress Design**

In recent years, more and more Chinese and foreign fashion designers have extracted elements from traditional Qing Dynasty clothing and applied them into their design styles, showing unprecedented visual effects of clothing, once again proving the great charm and tenacious vitality of traditional Chinese culture.

The bright colors of Qing Dynasty costumes provide rich inspiration for costume design. Designers often use red, yellow, blue and other colors commonly used in Qing Dynasty clothing to create clothing works with strong visual impact and cultural connotation. At the same time, fashion designers also need to adjust and match these colors according to the trends and needs of modern fashion to make them more fashionable and personalized. Designers should pay attention to its metaphorical and functional features while modernizing and applying color culture. The traditional color character should be fully considered, and according to the characteristics of the design object and the use scene, the traditional color should be selected in accordance with the cultural image. In the practice of color matching, we should pay attention to the recombination and reasonable matching of colors, fully consider the connection between traditional color attributes and clothing, adjust the attributes of colors appropriately, and harmonize with product semantics.

The traditional patterns in Qing Dynasty clothing have also been widely used in modern clothing design. Traditional patterns can be simplified and abstracted, or combined with modern patterns to create new patterns with both traditional charm and modern aesthetic, adding unique artistic value and cultural connotation to clothing.

The shape and exquisite craftsmanship of Qing Dynasty clothing have also been inherited and carried forward in modern clothing design. Modern clothing design often draws on the style characteristics of Qing Dynasty clothing, such as the innovation and improvement of cheongsam, the launch of short cheongsam, improved version of cheongsam, so that it is more in line with modern women's lifestyle and aesthetic needs. Designers can also apply traditional crafts such as embroidery, edging and piping to modern clothing design, which not only adds a gorgeous texture to clothing, but also reflects the respect and inheritance of traditional culture. At the same time, it combines modern technology and technology to make it more in line with the needs of modern production and consumption.

Modern fashion design is a global field, and the unique charm of Qing Dynasty clothing culture has attracted the attention and reference of designers from all over the world. Through the research and application of Qing Dynasty clothing culture, modern designers can create clothing works with more cultural heritage and artistic value, promote the exchange and integration between different cultures, and continue to promote the development and progress of global fashion culture.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Clothing is a mirror of human material and spiritual civilization, and the clothing system of Qing

Dynasty witnessed the changes of The Times. Clothing has always recorded the changes of history in its own way. The interweaving of silk threads, the cutting of cloth and the design of styles are their silent language, telling the changes of the rise and fall of dynasties, the traces of cultural integration, and the embodiment of aesthetic value and cultural inheritance. The clothing system of Qing Dynasty was the last stage of the development of ancient Chinese clothing. Although its process ended with the collapse of the last feudal dynasty, its value was far beyond itself. Qing Dynasty costume culture has a wide range of applications and important significance in modern fashion design. Fashion designers should fully explore the connotation and charm aesthetic value of Qing Dynasty clothing culture, combine it with modern fashion, and make greater contributions to promote the development and inheritance of Chinese fashion culture.

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