

# *A Study on the Colour of Shrouds in Yulin, Shanbei*

—An analysis of the causes of "blue surface with red inside"

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**Abstract:** The shroud is the last suit of clothes in the lifelong journey of people, which has rich meanings, but it is seldom studied in academic circles. In Yulin, a city that locates in northern part of Shaanxi (Shanbei), the shape of the shroud is still the same as that of the Qing Dynasty. The color they prefer to use is "blue surface with red inside". By means of literature reading and field investigation, the author studies the custom phenomenon of "blue surface with red inside" of the shroud in Yulin area, and probes into the causes of its formation

In Yulin, Shanbei, the shroud is also called the old shroud, while the local people generally think that the color of the old shroud should be "blue surface with red inside". "Hengshan County Records" contains the "County funeral ceremony simplified. At the beginning and end of the gentry' life, silk and cotton are used for clothing, with blue on the surface and red on the inside, while grey and black are not allowed." According to Shi Yilong's Chinese folklore and funeral annals: "In the vicinity of Yulin and Hengshan, the shrouds of the elderly were all silk and cotton, blue surface with red inside. It is forbidden to wear gray and black mottles." It seems to be a common rule for the colors of shrouds in the Yulin region of Shanbei. However, why use red and blue instead of other colors?.

## 1. The reason for the Blue Surface

There is a saying in Shanbei goes "people become gods after death." Therefore, human death is a new process from the human world to the divine world. The people of Shanbei believe that the soul after the death of a clan can influence the prosperity of future generations. In his "Funeral History", Chen huawen said, "Human beings have a soul is a belief that primitive people, including many modern civilisations, believed that the soul is necessary for human beings to live. The English Cultural Anthropology Taylor called the belief in the soul of man and of all animals and plants 'animism'." It is believed that the soul of a kinsman is a blessing and a curse to the offspring after death, so the living should never neglect the funeral and sacrifice of the kinsman. Since the deceased went to another world to be a god, and this divine world is imagined to be similar to the human world. Therefore, the wearing degree is the same as that in the world. Coupled with the concept of living with death as if nothing had happened, the local people must make efforts to achieve the saying."People have some when they are alive and some when they are dead. So they value life and respect death. As the Book of "Rites of Xunzi" says, "life is the beginning of human

beings; death is the end of human beings. They are always good, and humanity is over. "Under the control of the concept that people die as gods, treat death as life, and live and die well. The shroud is made according to the style and color of the clothes at birth. It is also a representation of everyday clothes.

A special point to be made here is the study of the colors of the traditional styles that are still in vogue in Shanbei's shrouds, which are not a reproduction of the clothes that people wear today. There is a problem here which requires a special explanation. This article studies the color of the traditional style that is still popular in northern Shaanxi shroud, and this kind of traditional shroud is not a representation of the daily clothes worn by the people. It is because of the lag and inheritance of folk-custom. In the change of dynasties and society, the shroud will also change with the times, but the changing speed is very slow. Therefore, it will appear different from the clothing popular in the society at that time after the completion of the social changes. Just as in the late Tang Dynasty and early Song Dynasty, people are still dressed in the Tang dynasty clothing, after undergoing the system reform before gradually changing. And in the late Yuan and early Ming Dynasty, the people still wear "Hufu" and only gradually changed after the reform. At the end of the Ming Dynasty and the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, after experiencing the bloody game between the imperial court and the common customs of the common people, the government issued a "Ten rules to be observed, ten rules need to be avoided" policy to make the people accept the changes in clothing customs. There is a slower cycle of change, especially in the case of shrouds, so the majority of Shanbei's shrouds today are not the clothes people wear today, but the styles and colors of the Qing Dynasty shrouds. Therefore, the present Shanbei Shroud is mainly the style and color of the late Qing Dynasty, and the folk shroud of the Qing Dynasty was the reproduction of the daily costumes of the time. Here we are talking about the reappearance of everyday clothes in the late Qing Dynasty rather than the reappearance of clothes in the period of the Republic of China. There is a very important reason for this: although new-style clothes were advocated in the period of the Republic of China, their influence was confined to urban areas only China's vast rural areas still wear the clothes of the previous regime. Coupled with Shanbei's poverty, backwardness and isolation, the impact is minimal.

Therefore, to discuss the choice of the color of the shroud, we should first make a clear choice of the color of the Qing Dynasty of Shanbei folk clothing. The choice of Chinese traditional clothing color is restricted by many factors such as social class status, folk custom taboo and so on. In China's feudal society, the Ruling class marked a clear level of color, civilians cannot be arrogated to, coupled with the constraints of the economic level, people can actually wear less color. So what are the main colors of the people in the Qing Dynasty? The American historian Will Durant, in his famous book, 'China's heritage', also recorded the usual colors of Chinese men's clothing in the first half of the 20th century: "men wear trousers and robes, almost all of them are blue. It is obvious that Chinese men (at least in the Qing Dynasty) were heavily dressed in blue and still left a deep impression on the observers." .....It is obvious that this passage illustrates the common phenomenon of Chinese men wearing more blue clothes in the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China, and gives the external observers a very intuitive overall impression." In the early years of the Republic of China, the "Hengshan County "records: Men's and women's clothing materials are all made of domestic cotton and earth cloth. Therefore, the import market is extremely rare. Men wear short clothes, still white, and blue, often wear fur to protect against the cold " It was a national fashion for men to wear blue. Shanbei men's clothing was no exception, but was it also popular for women to wear blue in their clothing? " . "There are 300 million people in China wearing blue clothes. Men, women and children are all the same. These clothes are wide and unstyled, and there are less than five types of clothing and sizes in the country. "said Peng Zeyi, who compiled "Information on the History of Modern Handicraft Industry in China". It can be said

that blue clothing was a national phenomenon from the late Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China, regardless of gender or age. It can be inferred that the primary color of the civilians in northern Shaanxi was also blue. Even in the 1990s, this kind of dress still existed in the rural areas of northern Shaanxi. At the end of the Qing Dynasty, the colors of the people's clothes was mainly blue, so it is natural that the color of the shrouds in Shanbei is now blue. At this point, we understand why the colors of the traditional shroud in northern Shaanxi is blue.

## 2. Why red inside

Red, as mentioned in this article, is the positive red, that is, red and Zhu, one of the five positive colors in ancient times. They have a distinguished status and have always been respected by the Chinese. During folk weddings, full moons and festivals, red is widely used. Hematite and Rubia cordifolia, which are used to make red dye, are easily available, therefore, the folk use red is very common. Generally speaking, red is used for clothing on festive occasions. People prefer red and believe that red can bring good luck. Therefore, the use of red in the shroud seems to be quite inconsistent with the festive implication contained in red. Then why should red be used in the shroud? To explain this, we need to discuss the red worship of Chinese people.

One of the sources of red worship is the sun worship or fire worship. "Bai Hu Tong Yi San Zheng," said: "Red is the 'chi' of the midday sun. Therefore, the Zhou Dynasty was upright and the color was still red." Red symbolizes the sun. The sun to bring light, warmth, and promote the growth of all things, which has been in the history of agricultural society in China is the hope of harvest, resulting in the worship of the sun. "The word 'Red' borrows the image of 'fire' and is from the fire. "Because red symbolizes the sun and fire, red has the warmth and brightness of the Sun and fire, and therefore contains the vision of hope and harvest. Therefore, red is often used in weddings or important festivals to express people's hopes for the future. Because of this, the shroud appears to be in conflict with red. But this is not the case.

Shanbei customs believe in ghosts and prefer shrines. As the saying goes in Shanbei, "People become gods after death." People in Shanbei believe that the dead can be turned into gods to influence future generations. Mr. Wu Bing'an said, "The outstanding reflection of clan concept and family concept in Ghost belief is the ghost concept dominated by blood relationship." It is characterized by the belief that the ancestral spirit is sheltering and protecting the souls of future generations and has the mysterious power to bless one's own clan." Based on this concept, it is believed that the clothes worn by the deceased's relatives are not only necessary to satisfy the deceased's needs in the other world, but also have the power to influence the living. If the clothes of the dead have an auspicious meaning, This kind of auspicious meaning will affect future generations; if the clothes of the dead are shabby, the decrepitude will also impoverish the future generations. They believe in "like attracts like" or "like leads to like" , as James George Frazer called it, so they try to dress the dead in clothing that has a very auspicious meaning, and avoid giving details. Therefore, most of the designs of the shroud are the blessing of longevity. Because they can bring Fukuju's well-being to future generations; Black, gray and other fierce, suffocating colors are not used for shrouds. Naturally, the choice of color in the shroud is the most enthusiastic, the most festive red will be able to bring prosperity to future generations. As the Yin-Yang School: Chang Ziwen said: " With ash, you will have a silly child (ash in the local dialect refers to stupidity and low IQ); With black, later born child dark; With red, we can bless future generations to lead prosperous lives. " The use of red in the shroud is precisely the breeding of the endless hope for future generations.

The author thinks that the red in the shroud is not only because red can protect the posterity, but also because red can protect the peace of the dead. This is to explore the red worship of another

important source-blood worship. In the "Origin of Art", Grosset says, "Australians use both red to signify entry into life and red to signify exit from life. The narinarians used Red Clay to decorate their dead bodies, and the custom was widespread. "This practice of decorating corpses with red has been found in archeology all over the world and some tribes still exist in Africa, Australia and America. "both humans and animals are born with the menstrual blood of their mothers. Blood is a symbol of vitality, and red blood has been worshipped since primitive times. The first people ate the smell of mutton and often saw people and animals die of blood loss, so that blood is the source of life." It can be said that in the hearts of primitive ancestors, blood is the source of life. Because of the worship of blood, there is a worship of red, the color of blood. Primitive people scattered hematite powder around the body or painted the bones red. Although its meaning is not clear, it undoubtedly shows the connection between red and life." The primitive people believed that the blood has the magic nature, therefore when carries on with the soul related sorcery many uses the red, red and the sorcery ghost has had the close contact. " Therefore, red is also worshiped along with blood. In ancient China, blood is also very common to ward off evil spirits, people believe that blood can drive away evil spirits, so red is also considered to have the efficacy of exorcism. "The book of Emperor Ming in the Southern Qi Dynasty" contains Emperor Ming of Southern Qi's "red clothes, clothes are all red, thought that hate wins. " . At least in Southern Dynasties, people started wearing red to ward off evil spirits. " With the Book, Zhao Chuo Biography" also contains: "The assistant minister of punishments, Xin Dan, once wore red trousers. as the saying goes, this is conducive to promotion. The emperor thinks this is witchcraft and will kill him "It is obvious that the custom of wearing red underwear to exorcise evil spirits and pray for good luck has been around for a long time, and this custom has not been cut off. Nowadays, in the year of the birth, people wear red pants or red close-fitting clothing to inherit the tradition. As mentioned above, the shroud is a reproduction and inheritance of traditional clothing, so the author thinks that the red in the shroud may be a kind of deformation of the red underwear, which has the meaning of using the red to drive away evil spirits from the tomb. The way to the other world is hard, the red color guards the dead, making them safe on the other side. This is also a filial piety for future generations.

Because red has the function of propitious implication and warding off evil spirits. Therefore, it was used in the shroud, protecting the prosperity of future generations and protecting the peace of the dead.

### 3. Conclusion

As mentioned above, the color of Shanbei's shroud inherited the characteristics of the Qing Dynasty's folk dress, and is a reproduction and reflection of the dress customs of the time. Most of the people of the Qing dynasty wore blue, so that the people of Shanbei used it as a color for their shrouds and as a default rule. The choice of blue is actually a product of the forces of economic level, hierarchical order and folk taboos. In ancient times, when Shanbei people was poor, the most important factor in the choice of colors for the common people was cheap and easy to obtain, on top of which, many taboos had to be evaded. Yellow is the monopoly of the emperor's House, purple is also a display of the status of dignitaries and relatives, indigo and green became signs of whoring business in Ming and Qing Dynasties, black and white were the fierce colors. Therefore, the common people in Qing dynasty wore mostly blue, probably because blue dyes were easily available and there were few taboos. The color of Shanbei's shroud, which retains the blue of everyday wear, is in fact the product of the idea that "viewing death as alive" and the soul will be immortal. On the premise of satisfying many restrictions, people choose red as the color of the shroud. Because the deceased has the ability to influence future generations, so its clothing use objects are contaminated with this ability, so people try to choose auspicious colors, hoping to bring

future generations auspicious. Red is the color of the sun and fire, representing light and warmth, so people use it to express their expectations for a better life in the future. Red is also the color of blood and has a solemn meaning. So people used it to repel evil spirits from invading the undead. It can be said that this is the people's greatest ability to meet their own hopes for a happy life and their love for their deceased relatives.

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