

# The Changes of Toe-Up-Warped Shoes in Different Dynasties from the Perspective of Archaeology

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**Abstract:** Toe-up-warped shoes have a very important position in the costume system of ancient China. They represent the political characteristics, etiquette regulations and customs in different periods and regions. Based on archaeological data, this paper analyzes the origin of toe-up-warped shoes and its evolution in the past dynasties, and analyzes the functions of toe-up-warped shoes in the ancient society and in the costume system from multiple perspectives. The paper also explains the social significance and aesthetic values of toe-up-warped shoes.

## 1. Introduction

In the history of human development, shoes, although seemingly inconspicuous, actually have an indispensable position. They record the struggle between human beings and nature, as well as the cooperation and competition in the society. In the long history of China, shoes of different periods and different regions are in varied colourful splendour. The shoe making techniques gradually mature. Among the many wonderful footwear categories in ancient China, toe-up-warped shoes play an important role in the history of clothing because of its long development track, the unique shape, the rich connotations and the important cultural values.

## 2. The Origin of Toe-Up-Warped Shoes

The toe-up-warped shoes refer to the shoes with upward warped part at the toe cap. Similar shoes can be found in the history of footwear development at home and abroad. The Poulaine shoe appeared in Europe in the 14th century is an example. It has a long and warped toe, and the length of the toe represents the position of owner. Although the toe-up-warped shoe is not unique to China, it is one of the significant characteristics of Chinese ancient shoes that has been kept for thousands of years. The image data related to the toe-up-warped shoes can be traced back to the Four Dam Culture of the Neolithic Age (2000 B.C.). On the Huoshaogou Site of Yumen, Gansu Province, a painted pottery pot with the shape of a naked chest woman was unearthed. The girl's posture is dignified and natural. She puts hands on the waist; her legs are upright, with feet close together. She wears on a pair of large, flat bottomed boots with the toes obviously upward warped.

## 3. The Development of Toe-Up-Warped Shoes

In the thousands of years of development, the shapes of toe-up-warped shoes changed greatly in different periods and regions, reflecting the corresponding style of the times.

### 3.1 From Xia And Shang Dynasties to the Warring States Period

In the Xia and Shang Dynasties, toe-up-warped shoes became the shoes for emperors and officials, namely the “Xi” used in sacrifice ceremonies and court meetings. In 1935, a headless stone statue was unearthed in the Tomb HPKM1217 excavated in Yin ruins of Houjiazhuang. The figure wears leggings and toe-up-warped shoes. Among the Shang Dynasty jade figures unearthed, there are also images of toe-up-warped shoes.

The etiquette system of Zhou Dynasty was further improved on the basis of Xia and Shang Dynasties; the dress system was also more complete. The emperor and ministers need to wear different clothes; and the post of “Si Fu” was specially set up to take charge of dress. As an important part of clothing, shoes were also included in the scope of “rule of etiquette”, and became a visual symbol in etiquette. Among them, Xi shoes are the most noble toe-up-warped shoes, which can only be worn by the emperor and the queen. In rites of the Zhou Dynasty, there were very detailed regulations on the structure, colour and materials of Xi. The height of Xi shoes can be up to 7-8 cm. The Xi has “heavy platforms”, which means the sole is composed of two layers. The upper layer is made of cloth; the lower layer is made of wood. The upper surface is made of silk. In the Zhou Dynasty, there was red, white and black Xi, of which red was the top, while the Queen’s Xi was red, blue and purple, of which purple was the top. On important occasions such sacrifice or celebration, the emperor and the queen wear red and purple Xi respectively. In addition, there were also leopard shoes specially designed to cope with rain and snow environment, that is, heavy platform shoes made of leopard skin. Other toe-up-warped shoes have single layer sole, and the manufacturing process is much simpler. The materials are mainly ko-hemp, silk and linen.

During the Warring States period, the Emperor of Wuling in Zhao Kingdom advocated “shooting on horse in Hu dress“. “Boots” were introduced into the Central Plains. But the development of Xi was not affected. In this period, the upper surface of Xi was mainly made of leather, ko-hemp and silk.

### 3.2 From Qin and Han Dynasties to Wei and Jin Dynasties

The shoes of the Qin Dynasty were boots and toe-up-warped shoes. In the pictures of the First Emperor of Qin draw by later generations, it can be seen that he had a dignified image with his feet on high and warped Xi. In the Qin Dynasty, most of the infantry wore squared, toe-up-warped shoes, namely the Fangtou shoes.

In the Han Dynasty, toe-up-warped shoes underwent more abundant changes. They were more closely related to the concept, etiquette and daily life of the ancients; their connotations were greatly expanded. During the Western Han Dynasty, there were significant changes in the toe cap of toe-up-warped shoes. For example, in 1972, four pairs of green silk shoes were unearthed in the No.1 Mawangdui Han Tomb in Changsha, Hunan Province. The toe cap of the shoes has two small sharp corners; these shoes should be the predecessor of toe-up-warped Qitou (double-head) shoes (show in Figure 1). Toe-up-warped shoes of Han Dynasty are also unearthed in No. 168 Fenghuangshan Tomb of Jiangling, Hubei Province. In addition, in many painted bricks and painted wooden figurines unearthed in western Han tombs, we can find figures of different identities wearing toe-up-warped shoes with different shapes.



Fig.1 Silk Shoes Unearthed from Mawangdui Han Tomb.

In the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, the development of toe-up-warped shoes

entered a very important period, forming a variety of new styles and more sophisticated production techniques. As the Northern Dynasties were dominated by ethnic minorities, boots were more popular, but the southern emperors followed the ritual system of wearing Xi. During this period, there were different styles of toe caps, such as Yuntou (cloud toe) shoes, Fengtou (phoenix head) shoes, Juyun (cloud gathering) shoes, Lifeng (standing phoenix) shoes, Fenshao (split top) shoes, Qinmian (piano face) shoes, Wengtou shoes, Feitou shoes and Jiutou (bird head) shoes. At that time, silk and brocade were the main materials used to make the shoes; leather, linen and other materials were also used.

### 3.3 From Sui and Tang Dynasties to the Five Dynasties

Although the history of Sui Dynasty is short, there are many figurines, like civil officials and dancing girls, wearing toe-up-warped shoes. The Xi of Sui Dynasty was made of silk. In Liben Yan's *The Painting of Emperors*, Emperor Wen of Sui Dynasty also wore Xi, while the courtiers behind him were dressed in toe-up-warped shoes.

Tang Dynasty is another peak period of the development of toe-up-warped shoes. Toe-up-warped shoes are described in all kinds of paintings, terracotta figures and poems of the Tang Dynasty. In the Dunhuang murals, there are benefactors wearing various styles of toe-up-warped shoes. In the Tang Dynasty, women's toe-up-warped shoes had different shapes. The shoes could have square, round or pointed toe. They could be divided into several petals, or increased to several layers; there were Yuntou (cloud toe) shoes, Quetou (bird head) shoes, Fengtou (phoenix head) shoes, and Ruyi shoes. There were a lot of materials used for making shoes, such as brocade, silk, leather, linen, and yellow grass. The brocade shoes of Tang Dynasty with composite flower patterns and Yuntou toe cap unearthed from the No. 381 Astana Tomb of Turpan, Xinjiang Province occupy a prominent position in the history of Chinese shoes (Figure 2). This pair of brocade shoes are gorgeous in shape and well made, reflecting the exquisite shoemaking and brocade skills of the Tang Dynasty. The toes of the shoes are high and warped, just like the clouds turning inward. The toe was made of silk threads with eight colours. The vamp was made of four kinds of silk threads to form the brocade of composite flower patterns; the inside part of the shoes was made of silk threads with seven colours to weave the brocade with colourful stripes, as well as flower and bird patterns.



Fig.2 Unearthed Brocade Shoes of Tang Dynasty with Composite Flower Patterns and Yuntou Toe Cap.

In the period of Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms, the shape of toe-up-warped shoes was basically the same as that of the Tang Dynasty. The women in the palace drawn in the *Picture of Palace* by Wenju Zhou of the Southern Tang Dynasty and the female benefactors of the Five Dynasties depicted in the murals of Yulin Grottoes wear different styles of toe-up-warped shoes. According to Zongyi Tao's *Farming in Nan Village* in the Yuan Dynasty, the tradition of foot-binding and three inch "golden lotus" started from the palace dance of the South Tang Dynasty, and gradually influenced the people, forming the foot-binding culture lasting for nearly a thousand years.

### 3.4 Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties

The emperors and queens of Song Dynasty still wore Xi in sacrifice ceremonies. In the Northern Song Dynasty, the emperor wore Mian (the crown), as well as red socks and red Xi, that is, "red socks and red shoes". In the upper class of the Northern Song Dynasty, foot binding was popular among women. The shoes with small and upward warped toes were made. Fengtou was the toe cap commonly seen. The upper of the shoe was red tone-based and embroidered. The name was "three

inch golden lotus”. Later, because of southward moving of the Song court, the custom of foot binding spread to the people and gradually became popular. The toe-up-warped bow shoes suitable for small feet also came into being. In 1974, the “Luo Shuang Shuang” silver shoes were unearthed in the Tomb of Shengzu Shi and His Wife buried in the 10th year of Xianchun of the Southern Song Dynasty. The shoes are 14cm long, 4.5cm wide and 6.7cm high (shown in Figure 3). The toe is upward warped; the topline is decorated with honeysuckle patterns; the rest of the upper surface is decorated with composite flower patterns; the inner sole of the shoe is engraved with line pattern and the words of “Luo Shuang Shuang”. In addition, in the portraits of emperors and empresses of all dynasties, the empress of emperor Shenzong of Song Dynasty wears gorgeous toe-up-warped shoes; the palace maids behind her also wear arch shaped toe-up-warped shoes. In the archaeological materials of the Song Dynasty, the images of toe-up-warped shoes are common.



Fig.3 The “Luo Shuang Shuang” Silver Shoes of Southern Song Dynasty.

Liao, Jin and Yuan Dynasties were in the period of conflict and integration of Hu and Han customs; shoes and boots underwent tortuous development under the influence of various nationalities. At that stage, boots became the mainstream shoes. However, the Han nationality’s Xi was inherited. The bottom of Xi was still composed of double layers, but the material used became leather. Due to the change of the material, the height of heavy platform shoes was also reduced. At the same time, the cloth footwear uppers changed to leather uppers; the toe of Xi was made according to the shape of Ruyi (a kind of S shaped utensil of ancient China), with jewellery and other decorations inlaid. In this period, there were also Yutou (cloud toe) boots, E’tou (goose head) boots and pointed bow shoes.

By the Ming Dynasty, Yuanzhang Zhu, the emperor Taizu, advocated to restore the cultural tradition of the Han Nationality. He issued an imperial edict that “the dress (including shoes) should follow the Tang tradition”, and formulated a complete and detailed dressing system of the Ming Dynasty. The toe-up-warped shoes, which were mainly suitable for the upper middle class, had a good development. The active commercial economy and mature folk skills of the Ming Dynasty also laid the foundation for the development of shoe culture. In the Ming Dynasty, women’s toe-up-warped shoes were mainly made of silk; the Fengtou (phoenix head) shoes were relatively common (shown in Figure 4). The description of shoe ornaments and names of Ming Dynasty in *Journey to the West* also reflects the development of toe-up-warped shoes.



Fig.4 Stone Shoes with Phoenix Heads Unearthed from Ming Tomb.

At one time, the Qing government carried out the Manchu dress system by force. But later, the government adopted Zhijun Jin’s proposal to implement the measure of “ten rules and ten forbidden behaviours”; dresses in the Qing Dynasty underwent a full integration process. According to the rule of wearing shoes in the Qing Dynasty, boots were commonly used. They could be worn by all ministers, civil and military officials as well as the common people, but civilians and lower class could not wear boots. Only the cap of emperors’ and dignitaries’ shoes could be slightly raised. Although foot binding was explicitly prohibited by the government, it was still popular among the

people. By the middle and late Qing Dynasty, Manchu women usually wore flowerpot soled shoes, while Han women with bound feet usually wore flat soled bow shoes. The toe-up-warped shoes were basically out of the stage of history.

After that period, the figure of toe-up-warped shoes only exists in a number of ethnic groups, such as the Tibetan boots, the embroidered shoes of Yi nationality, the embroidered shoes of Miao nationality, the hook back embroidered shoes and hook back clogs of the Korean nationality, as well as embroidered shoes and tiger head children's shoes of the De'ang nationality.

#### **4. Functions of Toe-Up-Warped Shoes**

Among many ancient shoes, the toe-up-warped shoe has attracted people's attention because of its ritual functions, cultural connotations, the particularity of users and the beauty of its shape. In the history of footwear in China, toe-up-warped shoes had many functions besides protecting the feet; they were given social, political, regulatory, etiquette and aesthetic significance.

First, they play a role in the ritual system. From Xia and Shang Dynasties to Qing Dynasty, Xi, as the most noble toe-up-warped shoes, was exclusively used for the emperors and queens in important rituals and activities such as sacrifice and pilgrimage. The ancients also stipulated the matching relationship between clothing and footwear in different occasions. Moreover, the toe-up-warped shoes of dignitaries and rich merchants were also different from those of ordinary people in shape and fabric. In some dynasties, the ordinary people were even not allowed to wear toe-up-warped shoes. Therefore, the shoes become symbols of political and social status. It can be seen that the political and ritual significance of Xi is irreplaceable.

At the beginning of the emergence of the toe-up-warped shoes, the styles for men and women were basically the same. With the passage of time, the status of men and women in the society changed; the social positions and value judgments for men and women also changed. The difference between male and female toe-up-warped shoes became increasingly obvious. In the generations of women's shoes, Fengtou shoes were all highly regarded. In the Wei, Jin as well as Southern and Northern Dynasties, the styles of Lifeng shoes and Yuhua Feitou shoes were all exclusive for women.

Second, the toe-up-warped shoes show ancients' respect and belief of "heaven". Chinese traditional culture advocates the concept of "the unity of heaven and man"; people strive to integrate with the nature and live with the environment in harmony. Qian Sima of the Western Han Dynasty wrote in *Historical Records: Biographies of Diviners*, "like heaven, hats and earth, shoes." Its original meaning is a world of difference. But from the literal meaning, we can see the ancient people's connection and analogy between heaven, earth and clothing. The upturned toes, similar to the upturned top eaves in ancient architecture, can reflect ancient people's care for the heaven and the earth. It shows the concept of connecting the heaven and the earth and integrating all things.

Third is the practical functions. Ancient Chinese costumes are dominated by skirts and gowns, and the costumes are long and down to the floor, especially for the upper middle class. Therefore, the up-warped shoes can support the hem of the skirt and gowns; people would not stumble when they stand or walk. Secondly, the most easily damaged part of a shoe is the toe, so the hardness and fastness of the toe is very important. The toe of the warped shoes is thick because of the moulding needs, which can not only protect the toe, but also extend the service life of the shoes.

Fourth is the decoration function. The toe is the most eye-catching part of the shoe, and also the part which is convenient for decoration. The ancients gave full play to the decoration function of the cap in toe-up-warped shoes. Chinese people have always been famous for attaching importance to "image" and "face"; the toe is the face of shoes. Its decorative value should not be underestimated.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Toe-up-warped shoes went through thousands of years from its birth to decline; they also developed and changed according to the etiquette, custom, politics, religion and aesthetic trends of different times. Why they can be passed down from generation to generation? One reason is that the

ruling class promoted and supervised the dress etiquette system for political purposes. But the most important as well as the fundamental reason is, toe-up-warped shoes conform to the practical needs of ancient clothing, demonstrate the clothing concept, the aesthetic identity and the cultural conversion of the Chinese nation, and embody the expectation of traditional Chinese culture for clothing. It can be said that toe-up-warped shoes are the epitome and witness of the thousands of years of Chinese history.

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