

Analysis on Evolution, Design and Application of Women's Traditional Coats in Beijing in the Late Qing Dynasty and the Early Republic of China

Based on the Collection of Ethnic Custom Museum of Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology

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ABSTRACT

Women's traditional coats, the common dress worn by a large number of women in Beijing during the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China, are one of the indispensable dress in the wardrobe of women during the Republic of China, occupying an important position in the history of modern Chinese clothing. Based on the collection of Ethnic Custom Museum of Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology, this paper takes the structure of traditional coats as research object, and classifies female coats from the late Qing Dynasty to the 1920s in Beijing combined with historical pictures and materials. The style and structure of traditional female coats in different periods were sorted out, and the evolution rules and reasons were studied, from which the unique modeling characteristics were absorbed and applied to modern clothing design.

Keywords: women's traditional coats, late Qing Dynasty, Republic of China, Beijing, evolution, fashion design

I. INTRODUCTION

袄 (Ao, women's traditional coats), a phonogram, enjoys the radical of "衣", and shares the pronunciation of "天". The original meaning refers to a lined coat. Women's traditional coat is daily clothing of the modern women of Han nationality, a jacket with lining based on a short jacket. Women's traditional coat is equipped with standing collar, slant opening by right or front opening, slit on the lower hem, and knee length. The thin one is called jacket while the thick women's traditional coats. It also serves as a general term for a traditional blouse. It can be divided into big one and small one based on length. The term "women's traditional coats" in this paper refer to lady's coat which is suitable for the upper half of the body and is lined and suitable for all seasons and needs to be matched with the lower part of the coat. The costume in the late Qing dynasty and early Ming Dynasty changed rapidly and was full of innovation. The integration of old and new endows the costume in this period a brand-new

landscape. A new look has been given to the women's traditional coats. In this paper, 37 pieces of women's traditional coats collected by Ethnic Custom Museum of Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology are studied to analyze and sort out their style in the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China.

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN'S TRADITIONAL COATS IN BEIJING IN LATE QING DYNASTY

The women's traditional coats in the late Qing Dynasty share some features of those of Han nationality in the Ming Dynasty. Since the rulers of the early Qing Dynasty equated acceptance of Manchu clothing with that of their rule, Han people were forced to change their headwear and clothing. Jin Zhijun, a surviving adherent of the Ming Dynasty, proposed to the Qing court the "ten that change and ten that don't change". Women were not forced to change to manchuian clothes, so most clothes of Han women in the Qing Dynasty still followed the style of female coats of the Ming Dynasty.








Due to the long-term influence of Manchu culture and royal atmosphere, the clothing in Beijing in the late

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Qing Dynasty were more sedate and dignified, mostly in red and purple, with embroider and binding, to highlight wealth and longevity. Since the Qing dynasty had not been overthrown, the political center of China was still in Beijing, where women's dresses were conservative and loose, decorated with embroideries and in red and green, which also influenced other major cities.

By sorting out the women's traditional coats collected in Ethnic Custom Museum of Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology, 17 pieces of blouse in the late Qing Dynasty were found, which presumably belonged to Han women from relatively rich family in the late Qing Dynasty. According to sleeve types, there were 11 women's traditional coats with big sleeves and 6 with narrow sleeves. Based on open front, there were 12 women's traditional coats with slant opening and 5 with a front opening. It falls into two camps based on length, the first is waist-length but not to buttock, 13 pieces in total, and buttock-length, 4 pieces in total.


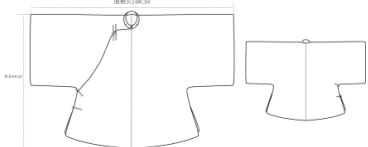
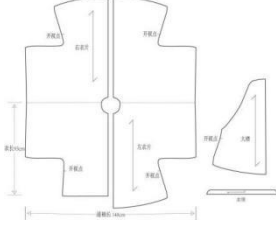

TABLE I. PICTURES OF WOMEN'S TRADITIONAL COATS IN BEIJING DURING THE LATE QING DYNASTY

Number	Pictures	Features
"Fig. 1"		big sleeves, slant opening, waist-length but not to buttock
"Fig. 2"		big sleeves, slant opening, waist-length but not to buttock
"Fig. 3"		big sleeves, slant opening, waist-length but not to buttock
"Fig. 4"		big sleeves, slant opening, waist-length but not to buttock
"Fig. 5"		big sleeves, slant opening, waist-length but not to buttock
"Fig. 6"		big sleeves, slant opening, waist-length but not to buttock
"Fig. 7"		big sleeves, slant opening, waist-length but not to buttock

Number	Pictures	Features
"Fig. 8"		big sleeves, slant opening, buttock-length
"Fig. 9"		big sleeves, slant opening, buttock-length
"Fig. 10"		big sleeves, slant opening, buttock-length
"Fig. 11"		big sleeves, front opening, waist-length but not to buttock
"Fig. 12"		narrow sleeves, slant opening, waist-length but not to buttock
"Fig. 13"		narrow sleeves, slant opening, buttock-length
"Fig. 14"		narrow sleeves, front opening, waist-length but not to buttock
"Fig. 15"		narrow sleeves, front opening, waist-length but not to buttock
"Fig. 16"		narrow sleeves, front opening, waist-length but not to buttock
"Fig. 17"		narrow sleeves, front opening, waist-length but not to buttock

The analysis of pictures and styles reveal that the most representative styles of women's traditional coats in Beijing during the late Qing Dynasty were large sleeves, slant opening, waist-length but not to buttock. A detailed analysis is made for the blue coats in "Fig. 3" (as shown in "Table I"). This is the dress worn by the elderly Han women in the late Qing Dynasty with round standing collar, placket by right, flat sleeves, wrist-length sleeves and wide cuff. It has a clothes length of 93 cm and a sleeve length of 148 cm.

TABLE II. THE STRUCTURAL FEATURES OF THE REPRESENTATIVE STYLES OF WOMEN'S TRADITIONAL COATS IN BEIJING IN LATE QING DYNASTY

Items	Related information		Pictures
Late Qing Dynasty Women's traditional coats	Collar	standing collar, low collar stand height	
	Sleeve	shorter sleeve length, wrist-length	
	Bodice	buttock-length jacket baggy Detached, slit on both sides	
	The whole	Women's coats of Han aristocrats in the late Qing Dynasty Expensive fabrics, heavy decorations Curveless design	
The pattern of women's traditional coats in late Qing Dynasty	round standing collar, placket by right, flat sleeves, wrist-length sleeves and wide cuff		
The cutting of women's traditional coats in late Qing Dynasty	no dart, no shoulder stitching, the front and back pieces are connected by the shoulder collar, and the left and right pieces are roughly symmetrical.		
Renderings of similar styles	Picture 18: A small-footed woman from a wealthy Han family, Beijing, 1900. Photographed by James Ricalton Image provided by: Huachen Image		

The tailoring of women's traditional coats in the late Qing Dynasty adopts the traditional form of connecting the sleeves, without dart or shoulder seam. The front and back pieces are connected by the shoulder collar, and the left and right pieces are roughly symmetrical. Chest, waist, shoulders and buttock were flat without obvious curve change.



The costume of the Beijing area in the late Qing Dynasty inherited the traditional style. The concept of baggy clothing is still prevalent among women in the late Qing Dynasty. The overall shape is concise and solemn with no new style structure, with the characteristics of traditional clothing of the Han nationality and the plain feelings of Manchu culture.

III. CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN'S TRADITIONAL COATS IN BEIJING IN THE 1910S

After the establishment of the Republic of China, the political center shifted from Beijing to Nanjing and was close to Shanghai. Women's wear then was dominated by Shanghai style. Compared with other fashionable areas, Beijing is less affected by western culture. The collection of Ethnic Custom Museum of Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology include 8 pieces of blouse in the 1910s, which presumably belonged to women in the early years of the Republic of China with relatively superior economic conditions. All of them were narrow-sleeved blouse. As for open front, they are all women's traditional coats with slant opening. They are divided into 2 types based on collar, the first is standing collar, a total of 6 pieces; while the other is round collar, 2 pieces in total.



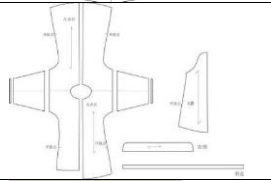

TABLE III. PICTURES OF WOMEN'S TRADITIONAL COATS IN BEIJING IN THE 1910S

Number	Pictures	Features
Fig. 19		narrow sleeves, standing collar (higher), slant opening
Fig. 20		narrow sleeves, standing collar (higher), slant opening
Fig. 21		narrow sleeves, standing collar (higher), slant opening
Fig. 22		narrow sleeves, standing collar (higher), slant opening
Fig. 23		narrow sleeves, standing collar, slant opening
Fig. 24		narrow sleeves, standing collar, slant opening

Number	Pictures	Features
Fig. 25		narrow sleeves, round collar, slant opening
Fig. 26		narrow sleeves, round collar, slant opening

The analysis of the egg green women's traditional coats in "Fig. 21" reveals that it is flat cut with sleeves connected, with no dart or shoulder stitching. The right side of the garment is separated from the front part and connected to the front part, and the left and right sides of the garment are separated. The seam on the side of the garment is curved with curly hem. The structure of the garment body is more fit to the human body than that of the flat and straight garment body, but it is not a three-dimensional tailoring method. Due to the limitation of the amount of cloth, sleeves are connected to each other, so as to save the fabric and ensure the integrity of the garment (as shown in "Table IV"). Such cutting technique was common in women's traditional coats in Beijing in the 1910s.

TABLE IV. THE STRUCTURAL FEATURES OF THE REPRESENTATIVE STYLES OF WOMEN'S TRADITIONAL COATS IN BEIJING IN THE 1910S

Items	Related information	Pictures	
Women's traditional coats in the 1910s	Collar	Saddle collar ear-length collar	
	Sleeve	shorter sleeve length wrist-length	
	Bodice	knee-length jacket, baggy body, curved hem, slits on both sides	
	The whole	Compared with the late Qing Dynasty, it was more decorative open front and cuff. There are decorative patterns.	
The pattern of women's traditional coats in the 1910s	standing collar, right opening, slits on both sides lining inside, welt decorations on the placket and cuff There are five pairs of buttons at the placket		
The cutting of women's traditional coats in the 1910s	This is a flat cut connecting the sleeves, without dart or shoulder seam. The right side of the garment is divided into two parts, which are connected with the big part. At the same time, there are small pieces under the armpit of the big part, and there are segments at the left and right sides of the sleeve.		
Renderings of similar styles	"Fig. 27" Yan Ling Hua Ying in 1911. Beijing prostitute Chunhua Yuxian		

The most representative style of the 1910s was standing collar, right slant opening, slits on both sides, inner lining, and welt decoration on the placket and cuff. The difference between the girth and the hem is small, and the curve of the bottom pendulum is slightly curved line. It enjoyed hip-length and square edges, matching pants or skirts. The distinctive shape of the collar is obviously higher than that of other ages, which is called "saddle collar/ingot collar". Eileen Chang once described them as stiff collars parallel to the tip of the nose, like shy metal collars stacked one foot high, forcing women to stretch their necks. Then it gradually lowered and became less rigid, and the lines of the clothes gradually softened. After the May 4th Movement in 1919, more women took part in social life. High collars were abandoned because of the inconvenience, and women's traditional coats with round collar also emerged.












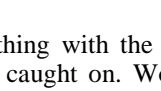
In the period of the Republic of China, the loose bodice and sleeves of women's traditional coats gradually changed to short, tight one, which is convenient and reflects the curvy female body. The 1910s were the opening days of the women's traditional coats revolution, which was getting under way.

IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN'S TRADITIONAL COATS IN BEIJING IN THE 1920S

In the 1920s, female coats with short jackets were first worn by foreign schoolgirls, which was introduced thanks to the spread of Western ideas. The fashion trend led by prostitutes was broken, which once again confirmed the anti-traditional thought in the Republic of China. By the late 1920s, all people, regardless of their status, wore mandarin sleeve and Ao skirts.

Ethnic Custom Museum of Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology collected 12 women's traditional coats in the 1920s. The sleeve and hem of women's coat in the 1920s are very innovative. Such unique blouse has obvious characteristics of the times and aesthetic value.

TABLE V. PICTURES OF WOMEN'S TRADITIONAL COATS IN BEIJING IN THE 1920S



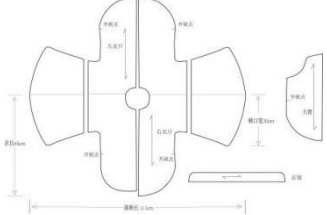

Number	Pictures	Features
Fig. 28		Narrow sleeves, slant opening, Curved hem, Right angle
Fig. 29		Narrow sleeves, slant opening, Curved hem
Fig. 30		Narrow sleeves, slant opening, Curved hem
Fig. 31		Mandarin sleeve, slant opening, curved hem
Fig. 32		Mandarin sleeve, slant opening, curved hem
Fig. 33		Mandarin sleeve, slant opening, curved hem
Fig. 34		Mandarin sleeve, slant opening, curved hem
Fig. 35		Mandarin sleeve, slant opening, curved hem
Fig. 36		Mandarin sleeve, slant opening, curved hem
Fig. 37		Mandarin sleeve, slant opening, curved hem
Fig. 38		Mandarin sleeve, slant opening, curved hem
Fig. 39		Mandarin sleeve, slant opening, curved hem

In 1920, clothing with the aesthetic orientation of "line of beauty" caught on. Women's traditional coats also changes accordingly with lower collar stand height, waistline, and emphasis on the curves of the chest, waist and hips. Mandarin sleeve is the biggest change in women's traditional coats. After the transformation in the 1910s, the women's traditional coats in the Republic of China ushered in the peak period, with a brand-new change and development. Although the mandarin sleeve jacket continues to adopt a flat straight cut, the bodice is relatively suitable for daily life, the length has also been reduced. "Fig. 39" in "Table V" shows straight and round shape with rounded corners that was popular in the late 1920s. Compared with the female coat in the 1910s, the length of the coat was shortened from

buttock-length to waist-length, and the collar height was reduced by 2-3cm, which was more convenient for

women's daily life.

TABLE VI. THE STRUCTURAL FEATURES OF THE REPRESENTATIVE STYLES OF WOMEN'S TRADITIONAL COATS IN BEIJING IN THE 1920S

Items	Related information		Pictures
Women's traditional coats in the 1920s	Collar	standing collar, low collar stand height	
	Sleeve	wrist-length, loose wrist The cuffs are flared.	
	Bodice	waist-length jacket fit garment curved hem, slit on both sides	
	The Whole	It's called the civilized new dress, Influenced by Western-style clothing, the feminine lines are highlighted.	
Sketch of style of women's traditional coats in the 1920s	standing collar placket by right, mandarin sleeve wrist-length sleeve		
Cutting of women's traditional coats in the 1920s	Although the shape of sleeves is different from that of traditional sleeves, the overall structure of the traditional raglan sleeve is still adopted.		
Renderings of similar styles	Fig. 40: Beiyang Pictorial, Issue 6, 1926. Ms. Hu Huixin and Ms. Zhang Liqing		

The above analysis reveals that "mandarin sleeve" tops appear in the 1920s. At first, the body and hem were relatively straight, and then slightly expanded, and the hem gradually became an arc. In the mid to late 1920s, its body evolved into the silhouette of a straight round dress, with extremely short length.

At this time, the mandarin sleeve blouse, far cry from the loose women's clothing in the late Qing Dynasty, was short and narrow. The transition from covering the female body to highlighting the curvilinear beauty of female body was under way. The mandarin sleeve jacket of this era experienced changes from baggy to narrow, and from long to short. Fitted tops make it more convenient and comfortable for women to wear or participate in social activities. The civilized new dress represented by lined short gown and long dress gradually prevailed women's dress in this period.

V. EVOLUTION LAW AND REASON OF WOMEN'S TRADITIONAL COATS IN BEIJING IN LATE QING DYNASTY AND EARLY REPUBLIC OF CHINA

In the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China, women's clothing not only absorbed western culture, the emergence of more fitting cloth, but also preserved the traditional Chinese aesthetic, namely, placket by right and cross-shape tailoring. Generally speaking, women's traditional coats at the end of the 19th century is long and baggy with complex decoration. The 1910s witnessed its huge change in girth, bodice, clothes length and collar stand height.

Compared with Shanghai, Guangzhou and other developed fashion regions, Beijing is located in the inland and has been the national political center for many years. In the late Qing Dynasty, oppressed by the

concept of status and class under the rule of the feudal dynasty and the Chinese Neo-Confucianism, local women had to follow extremely strict regulations on dress. Ideological liberation emerged in China from the late Qing Dynasty fails to affect the society until the Republic of China, when the traditional concept of class began to change. The style of women's traditional coats takes working and daily needs into consideration.

The May 4th Movement and the New Culture Movement freed the minds of women, allowing ideas accepted by minority to be inevitable trend of thought in society. China's new intellectuals put forward various plans to liberate women, which had a great impact on China's urban society. Beijing then became the birthplace of new female ideas and new fashions. After the 1920s, the living environment of women improved thanks to the dissemination of liberation thoughts and the criticism of old customs. Women in Beijing became more and more open. Women with a sense of independence were respected by the society at that time, and female students who entered western-style schools began to lead the fashion. In this respect, western-style dress survive and thrive in Beijing.

VI. INNOVATIVE APPLICATION OF WOMEN'S TRADITIONAL COATS IN BEIJING IN LATE QING DYNASTY AND EARLY MING DYNASTY

The current redesign of traditional clothes has problems such as single style or over-traditional style. Innovative design based on traditional clothing is often subject to the inherent impression of traditional clothing, fails to integrate into the current trend, resulting in a small number of audiences.

This series of works takes women's traditional coats in Beijing in the late Qing Dynasty and early Ming Dynasty as research object, and carries out innovative design. The preliminary research results reveal the structural features, decorative patterns and details of the women's traditional coats from the late Qing Dynasty to the 1920s, and elements with contemporary fashion are selected for redesign in combination with the current fashion trend.



Fig. 1. A collection of women's dresses inspired by women's traditional coats in Beijing in the late Qing and early Ming dynasties.

The design of such series disassembles and reconstructs women's traditional coats and modernizes the traditional shape with the construction technique of silhouette. In view of the structural features of women's traditional coats, the bodice shape, the collar, the sleeve, the open front, the edge and etc. have been redesigned. The series are based on the color and pattern of women's traditional coats in Beijing in the late Qing Dynasty and early Ming Dynasty, with classical western pattern combined. The required elements are extracted and the asymmetric stitching technique is boldly adopted, thus interrelated and unique styles.

The styles of Chinese and Western clothing are integrated, presenting the traditional and modern, the East and the West in the works.

VII. CONCLUSION

The analysis on structural changes of women's traditional coats in Beijing from the late Qing Dynasty to the 1920s shows that the main features include placket by right, collar and slit at the lower hem. Nuances are also found in collar stand height, sleeve, radian of lower hem. Women's traditional coats in the late Qing Dynasty, followed the basic structure of that in the Ming Dynasty, experienced no huge change despite the invasion of Manchu culture. The style of women's traditional coats in the early Republic of China was dominated by that of prostitutes. The special style featuring "saddle collar" and buttock-length came into being due to aesthetic demand then. The 1920s witnessed the golden age of women's traditional coats, when civilized new dress caught on. The mandarin sleeve and curved hem are representative features. Based on the above analysis of the evolution of women's traditional coats in Beijing in the late Qing Dynasty and early Ming Dynasty, the design elements conforming to current trend are summarized, in a bid to redesign women's traditional coats.

After the 1930s, women's traditional coats were basically replaced by Qipao and Western female dress. In this era, the number of people wearing women's traditional coats was decreasing and no innovation in style was found. Women's Fig., which has been covered for a long time, has been highlighted. Instead of emphasis on clothing over people, people has been put front and centre, which conforms to the development of the times and the modern aesthetics.

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