THE ART OF CHINESE SILK EMBROIDERY AND HOW COSTUMES REFLECTED THE SOCIAL STATUS OF ITS WEARER'S IN THE QING DYNASTY (1644 - 1911)

BY

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INTRODUCTION

As a Hong-Kong born Chinese, I have been influenced by Chinese civilization since I was born. Because of this I have developed a great interest in Chinese culture. As fashion design will be my profession, I would like to study more about the history of costume in different countries. China is the first one that interests me. Actually, I found that there are many books on Chinese costume written by Westerners. When I looked at the Bibliography section of many books written on Chinese costumes by Westerners, I found the research is usually from Western museums and other references to Western writers but not to Chinese reference books or writers. I think this was because it was quite far away for Westerners to travel to Mainland China to do research, and therefore it was easier for them to do research in Europe, and more especially in Canada and America. As a result, they might only get information from a Westerner's point of view. Most Chinese reference books refer to Chinese museums and Chinese writers. I have read a book entitled 5000 Years of Chinese Costumes which was written by two Chinese writers (Professor Zhao Jingshen and Mr. Zhenfei), English Edition, 1987. I was surprised that there were seventy-eight references in the Bibliography, most of them written by Chinese writers but six of them were either Japanese or

Korean. I believe Chinese writers can give more detailed and specific information about Chinese costume as they have a deeper knowledge of their culture. I did not get a chance to do research in China, but I still hope I can approach this subject from a Chinese point of view.

China is a country with a rich historical background and a profound civilization. Chinese costume is considered an excellent feature of Chinese civilization until the collapse of the Qing Dynasty which was the last Dynasty before the establishment of the new Republic of China. Sun Yatsen was chosen and inaugurated as China's first President on 1st January, 1912.

Chinese costume relates to politics, ideology, military history, economics, culture and arts. The main task of this thesis is to study how costumes reflected the social status of its wearer's and Chinese art in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

I have chosen Qing Dynasty costume because it was the most magnificent an complicated in the history of Chinese costume and was the last dynasty that reflected Chinese culture by its sumptuous court dress which was decorated in rich silk embroidery patterns which were considered status symbols.

The Qing Dynasty began in 1644 when the ninth son of Abahai was installed on the Dragon Throne as the Shunzhi Emperor at the age of seven. Abahai died on the 6th of June 1644. Before his death, in 1632, Abahai issued a new dress system. He ordered that the Manchus and the Chinese officials should dress the same to prevent discrimination (**see Fig. 1**). He ordered that all Chinese males had to shave the front part of their heads as well and their hair be taken back from the crown and sides and plaited in a long tail to hang down the back (**see Fig. 2**).

Fig. 1 Military Official

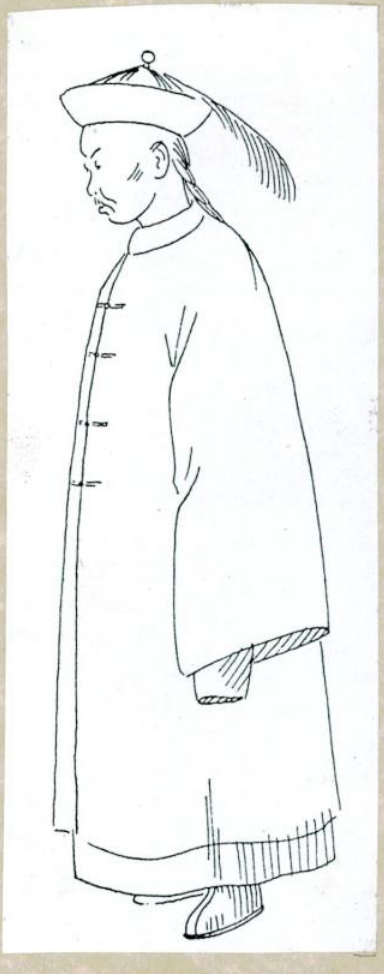

Fig. 2 Government Official Peking 1900

CHAPTER ONE

SILK

THE DISCOVERY OF SILK

When I was referred to research that was made by Jan Chapman, who is in charge of Far Eastern Art in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, she said that of the common people and the upper classes in the Qing Dynasty, 90% were common people and less than 10% were upper class (Ref. 1).

Most of the upper class consisted of the imperial family, which included the Emperor, the Empresses and court officials. Upper class people always used silk to make clothes but the common people mainly used cotton. So, in this thesis an account of the common people's costumes is presented as a supplement to be discussed although the major emphasis is on the upper class's costumes.

For thousands of years in China, humans lived in a very primitive way - in caves. They had nothing to wear but leaves and grass. Later, they used animal skin to protect their bodies against the cold.

At the end of the Old Stone Age (approximately before 4000 B.C.), a race of people existed whom we called Peking Man, who lived in the hilltop Zhoukoudian which

is now near the south-western district of Beijing. Zhiyu Man, who lived in what is now called Su County, Shaanxi Province and Hutouliang Man, who lived in Yangynan County, Heibei Province. Evidence has been found by archaeologists proving that these men used needles made of animal bone to make simple stitches and sew pelts into clothes. Then, we can say that the history of Chinese costume begins.

Another big phase in the history of Chinese costume was the discovery of silk. One can say that silk is the symbol of China because China was the birthplace of silk and the silk weaving art. Nowadays, China is the chief supplier of an off-white wild silk known as tussah and supplies 80% of the world's demand for this material (**Ref. 2**).

Chinese silk was initially discovered around 2640 B.C.. Here is a description of the Empire of China and of Chinese Tartary written by Father Jean-Baptiste Du Halde:

> *It was from Greece that Europe received the gift of silk, which in the days of the Roman Empire was worth its weight in gold. The Greeks owed it to the Persians ... who own that it was from China that they first learned the art of rearing silkworms. To find other references to silk as remote in time as those relating to China would indeed by difficult. The most ancient writers of that empire attribute its discovery to one of the wives of the Emperor Huang Ti. She was called Siling and later, as a mark of honour, Yuen Fei.* ***(Ref. 3).***

So, the lady called Empress Siling was credited with the discovery of silk. In later years, Empresses would spend a lot of their time watching silkworms growing. The princesses, the ladies of rank and people in general were encouraged to rear silkworms. Silk weaving was developed in later years after silk was discovered. Once discovered and cultivated, silk broke new ground in the prehistoric custom of self adornment and Shamanistic costume decoration (I will mention this in the next paragraph), which predated weaving as far back as Mesolithic times. So the prehistoric custom of self adornment and Shamanistic costume decoration developed into embroidery on hemp cloth in Neolithic times and so embroidery on silk fabrics was a natural progression therefrom.

THE FOUNDATION OF SILK EMBROIDERY

The earliest Chinese civilization sprang up in the Yellow River Valley from approximately 8000 B.C.. People lived in the Mesolithic way, hunting and fishing by using tools made of stone. Later, around 4000 B.C., agriculture developed and became the Neolithic period. In the Yellow River Valley, successive stages are each identified by their pottery artifacts: Yang-shao Painted Pottery, Lung Shan, Black Pottery and Hsiao-t'un and Gray Pottery. Silk was in cultivation during the Yang-Shao Painted Pottery period and probably in the Shang Dynasty since knife-

cut silkworm cocoons were found among their artifacts. As shown in **Figure 3**, Neolithic embroidery and textile designs were already found on Yang-Shao Pottery; this shows us a Shaman wearing a tiger mask, with very abstract sawtooth, lozenge and zigzag designs on the shoulders and chest and a high Chinese type collar which is nowadays called a mandarin collar by Westerners. In my opinion, the reasons it is called a mandarin collar are:-

(a) This type of stand-up collar has been found in China since ancient times.
(b) Mandarin was the name of Chinese government officials and they had great respect from the Chinese people.
(c) Mandarin is the Chinese spoken language.
(d) European women's dresses copied this type of stand-up collar to give an oriental touch to their fashions, and this collar is thus often referred to as a 'mandarin collar' by Westerners.

The types of patterns on his garment were probably typical Yang-Shao embroidery or weaving patterns. Neolithic silk embroidery was continually in progress as is evidenced by the discovery of the many Yang-Shao needles which were made of bone ivory and bronze (**Ref. 4**).

Fig. 3 Pottery lid in form of Costumed Shaman with tiger mask

Fig. 4 Idealized portrait, c. 1640 A.D. of Shih Huang-Ti, the first Emperor

Chinese Neolithic silk embroideries, such as those with the zigzag bands and lozenge designs, were also found in the early Shang Dynasty (1558-1051 B.C.). A fragment of plain weave embroidered silk, preserved in the patina pattern edged with z-twisted silk. Also, the fragmentary design seems to be a combination of zigzag bands and lozenges (Ref. 5). These designs are similar to the Yang-Shao Painted Pottery motifs. It shows that the art of embroidery was established as early as the Shang Dynasty and was inherited from the Neolithic cultures of the Yellow River.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHINESE SILK TRADE IN THE HAN EMPIRE

The formation of the Han Empire was from the time when power in northern China was consolidated under the Chin Emperor, Shih Huang-Ti (who was to be known in history as the "First Emperor") in the third century B.C. (see Fig. 4). Later, in 206 B.C., the new Han Empire was formed under Liu Pang Emperor. During the Han Empire, the pattern of modern Chinese society appeared, which meant the economy of the empire reached a prosperous stage. Agriculture developed rapidly. Silk trade expanded tremendously because the Empire made a huge effort to supply silk as presents to its neighbouring countries, as the Emperor wanted to extend the Empire's influence amongst them (see Fig. 5). The famous "silk route" was the passage for

	floss-silk in pounds (*chin*)	rolls of silk
51 B.C.	6,000	8,000
49 B.C.	8,000	8,000
33 B.C.	16,000	18,000
25 B.C.	20,000	20,000
1 B.C.	30,000	30,000

Fig. 5 Han gifts of silk in the first century B.C.

Fig. 6 With needle as brush, Suzhon Embroidery

the silk trade between China, central Asia, northern India, the Parthian Empire and the Roman Empire. It linked the valley of the Yellow River to the Mediterranean and passed through the cities of Kansu and the oases of what is now the self-governing territory of Sinkiaug, the Pamirs, Transoviania, Iran, Iraq and Syria.

As a consequence, the Chinese silk trade and the art of Chinese silk embroidery were well-established during the Han period.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SILK INDUSTRY IN THE QING DYNASTY

In fact, Chinese silk and embroidery are inter-related subjects. The reason is that when talking about Chinese embroidery, this automatically means silk embroidery. As silk fibers are triangular so they reflect like prisms. Silk is rich in protein. It is protein that gives it a pearly sheen and a luxurious look. For this reason, silk became the favourite yarn to embroider with a thousand years ago and nowadays it is still popular to embroider with. Silk embroidery workers embroidered on most cloths like silk, cotton, linen, velvet or gauze; for example in **Fig. 6**, a tourist recorded a scene of a young woman using a needle just like a paint brush at the Suzhou Embroidery Research Institute. She stitched a silk

cat depicted on both sides of a nylon gauze panel (Ref. 6). This silk cat is life-like and the shininess of the embroidered piece is just incredibly spectacular.

Sericulture was mastered by the Chinese and was greatly encouraged by the Kangxi Emperor (1662-1722) in the Qing Dynasty. In 1712, the Emperor announced that the first volume of the Yu Zhi Geng Zhi Tu ("Imperial Pictures of Ploughing and Weaving") was published. This volume consisted of Woodblock prints accompanying the text they illustrated and also described silk manufacture by breaking the whole process into twenty-three stages which were represented by colour engravings showing the breeding of silkworms and the working of raw silk. These came from a paperboard album (25 cms x 32 cms) which is now kept by the National Library in Florence (Ref. 7).

This album shows that the quality of silk was carefully managed by a diligent sericulture process, including the study of the proper climate and bad types of soil which could result in bad cultivation of the mulberry trees, whose leaves are the silkworms' food. Great care has to be taken of these creatures and they must be kept at an even temperature as they are sensitive to atmospheric changes. The silk is unwound from the cocoons, then steamed, reeled and

finally spun. The tools employed at the time were extremely simple but produced the best quality silk fabric. It is difficult for me to describe the tools briefly and clearly as I am not a specialist in this aspect, so it would be easier to understand by looking at them than by reading about them (**Fig. 7**).

In the mid-eighteenth century, during the reign of the Qianlong Emperor (1736-1795) of the Qing period, the Emperor built a shrine in Peking for the patroness (the Empress) of silk at which the annual sacrifice to Heaven and the official imperial ceremony took place. (I will explain this in the next chapter in detail). Those sacrificial and ceremonial traditions had been followed by several past Emperors. Finally, by 1935, imperial involvement with the silk shrine had come to an end because of the dilapidation of the ritual rearing halls, although worship was still continued by silkworkers. Silk cultivators gave thanks to their ancestors. This ritual still plays quite an important part in sericulture in China.

The Chinese believed that this worship would bring peace, good health and would fulfil their wishes. In **Fig. 8** they give thanks to their ancestor and ask they be granted success in sericulture in the year ahead. The worship includes some special items. The Chinese would worship their ancestors. The shrines would be

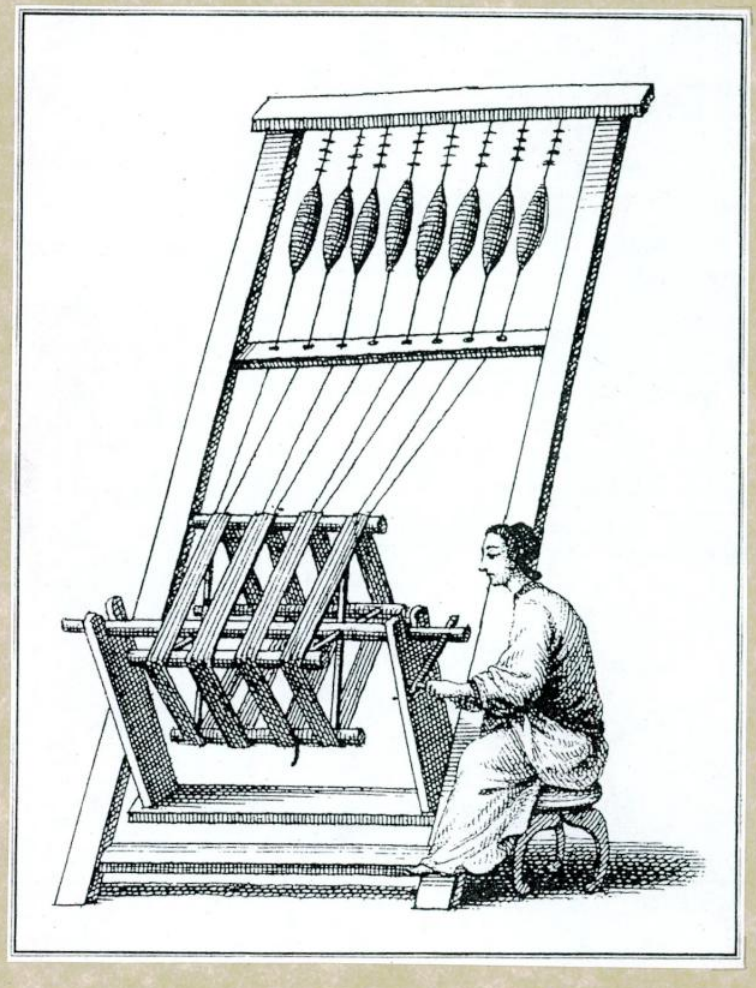

Fig. 7 Reeling Instrument in the Qing Dynasty (1622-1712)

Fig. 8 Silk cultivators giving thanks to their ancestors at the end of the season

in the form of carvings of their family names and words of appreciation were also carved on a red wooden board. The worship was ceremonious and it included wax candles, three small cups of rice wine, two bundles of flowers and incense which the Chinese believe their ancestors like the smell of.

Silk was an extremely valuable commodity in the past and even now, silk is still considered a luxurious fiber. It produces beautiful silk cloth. I love silk myself. Every time I hold silk cloth, I feel it is full of life. Nowadays, even with the best technology and with good strains of cocoon, it still take about 600 silkworms to produce 1.70 metres of silk cloth (Ref. 8), 110 cocoons to make a silk tie, 630 to make a silk blouse (Ref. 9). Just imagine how many silkworms have to be killed in a day. Mulberry plantations spread out in China in order to supply adequate leaves for silkworms. One hint for growing mulberry tress is that the soil has to be neither too strong nor too hard. A field that has been freshly tilled after remaining fallow for a long period is most suitable. In the provinces of Tche Kiang and Kiang Nan in China, where the best silk is produced, the soil is extremely nutritious because the ground is mixed with mud dredged from channels that thread through the countryside which are cleaned every year. Because of this, the mulberry trees grow particularly

healthily and they can satisfy the fussy silkworms' appetite.

A special technique which is an advantage for growing mulberry trees is to skilfully shape the trees by hand according to the rules of that art, so that leaves can grow in a good position where the picker can collect them in only one day. Otherwise, it can take a week to pick them, and this will lower the efficiency of the whole process (**Ref. 10**).

The British botanist Robert Fortune visited China three times between 1853 and 1856. He estimated that millions of cottagers were involved in silk manufacture (**Ref. 11**). Nearly all the space available in the cottages was used to accommodate the mats. A mat was an instrument that people used to contain silkworms in their various stages of development; during this time the silkworms completed their life cycles. Those that escaped death to be selected for breeding were stored in cool aired rooms. It is amazing what noise the silkworms produce when they munch the leaves.

Besides the private silk manufacturers, there was a Weaving and Dyeing Office, the Zhi ran ju, which was situated in the capital of Peking until 1843. It was set up in the reign of the Kangxi Emperor to produce

textiles for the Imperial Court. Also, there were three cities of Suzhou, Hangzhou and Nanjing where the Zhi zao ju Weaving Offices, were situated.

About seven thousand wage-earning workers served in the Imperial factories but the government accepted private weaving workshops. These outside commissions sometimes did not fulfil their orders. Nevertheless, even the weaving establishments directly under imperial control sometimes could not finish their orders in time. An articles in the newspaper called The Peking Gazette in 1890 reported that the imperial silkworks were nearly at an end with only four more years to produce silk. The number of workers declined in the three official factories since the eighteenth century. However, the Commissioner of Imperial Maritime Customs, F. Kleinwachter, based in the Nanjing area reported that the production of the imperial textile had become irregular (Ref. 12). He implied that some very expensive dress silks, which were produced on the official looms, were available to anyone who could afford to buy them. It showed that the demand for silk was reduced by the end of the Qing Dynasty. I think the reason for the reduction of demand for silk was that China had faced a change after the Opium War of 1840 and came into a modern stage after the Revolution of 1911, the overthrow of the rule of the Qing Dynasty. At the end of the Qing

Dynasty young Chinese people went to study abroad and they were increasingly influenced by the progressive thinking of the West. As a consequence, when these groups of young Chinese students returned to China, they started to react and to break the old laws of feudalism. They started to wear tailored suits from the West and cut off their long plaits of hair.

It was the first time officials in China had to face such big problems which they could not ignore and had to take action. This resulted in the imperial official no longer having the leisure time they had in the past. One consequence of this was that they no longer had the time to order more new silk clothes for court and ceremony from the imperial factories.

CHAPTER TWO

HOW CLOTHES REFLECTED THE WEARER'S SOCIAL STATUS IN THE QING DYNASTY

At the end of the first chapter, I mentioned that China was faced with the Revolution of 1911 which overthrew the rule of the Qing Dynasty. Soon after the establishment of the Republic, the general order was issued that all males had to cut off their long queues. The first major change was to abolish the traditional custom of identifying one's social status by one's headgear and clothing (Ref. 13). The history of headgear is a long one and cannot be dealt with in this thesis.

Clothes represented the wearer's social status in China and this had been so from dynasty to dynasty. It reached its extreme in the Qing Dynasty as all the clothes of the upper class in this period were luxurious since the silk industry had developed extremely well and the art of silk embroidery grew simultaneously. Therefore, there was a big gap between the upper class and the lower class.

I would like to divide this chapter into two sections and in each section I have a statement to discuss. The first statement is "Chinese Costumes reflected men's social status in the Qing Dynasty". The second

statement is "Chinese Costumes reflected women's social status in the Qing Dynasty".

The first statement refers to men's Chinese costumes because clothes represented the men's social status in the Qing Dynasty. Men's clothes were definite and specific, especially in court costumes. Symbolism like dragon motifs, badges of rank, twelve symbols and five colours were extremely important in defining the wearer's status. These symbols reflected Chinese civilization and religions like Taoism, which was one of the most common and important religions in old China. The second statement is about women playing an important part in Chinese family life. There will be a description of clothes among the upper class women who were usually referred to a court women, while the lower class women were actually the common people in the Qing Dynasty.

CHINESE COSTUMES REFLECTED MEN'S SOCIAL STATUS IN THE QING DYNASTY

In the Qing Dynasty, from 1644 to 1911, similarly to every dynasty before the Qing Dynasty, the Emperor was the only person who could act as a mediator between Heaven, Earth and the people. In every year, he had to make sacrifices and offerings to appease the forces of nature which had been disturbed by human activities during the preceding year. **Figure 9** shows the Altar

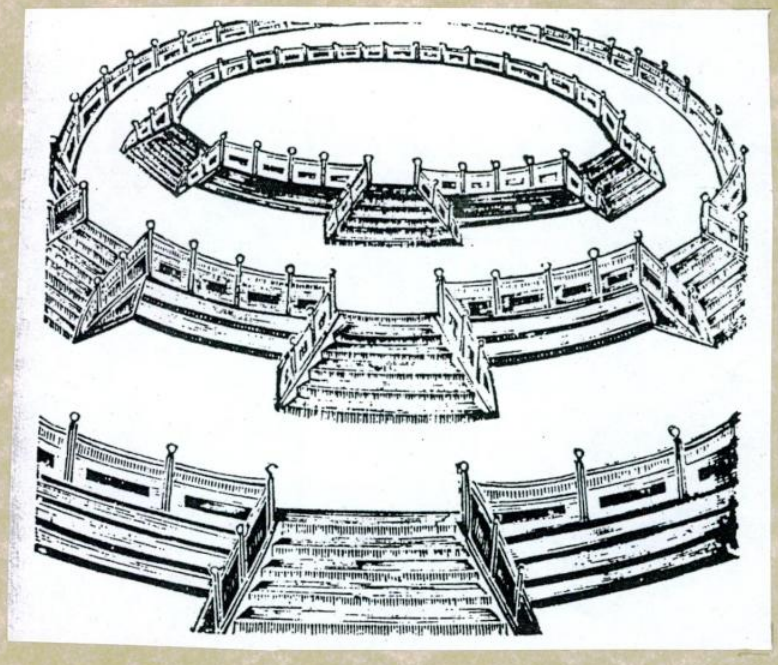

Fig. 9 The Altar of Heaven where the Emperor stood to represent Humanity

Fig. 10 The Dragon, a symbol of imperial power

of Heaven where the Emperor made sacrifices to Heaven during the early hours of the morning on the winter solstice. Through the body of the Emperor, who was ritually prepared for this act, could the spirit world and the material world be bound together in perfect harmony and the cycle of rebirth and spring could commence once more. Taoism arose from this concept. Actually, Taoism was founded by the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu, of the Eastern Chou dynasty in the fifth century B.C.. Taoism affirms nature and the universe and the human being's spiritual, moral and ethical relationship to that universe. Therefore, since the universal laws are essentially good, the moral person is whoever lives most in accordance with natural law. Taoism affected Chinese costume because it affected Chinese art.

> *Taoist aesthetics perceive art as a ritual activity that unifies the artist with the cosmic or universal principle, the Tao, and gives it a defined expression on the physical and cognitive human level* (Ref. 14).

Chinese art expressed by embroidery in Chinese costumes was perfect in that it reflected the universal philosophy of the Tao. Ying and Yang were the complementary positive and negative forces of the universe. The interaction of forces produced the

basic components of the visible universe. The Chinese viewed these as the wu xing or five activities: wood, fire, earth, metal and water. The wu xing also paralleled directions within the terrestrial realm: north, south, east, west and centre. It also represented the five colours: black, red, blue, white and yellow respectively. Natural phenomena were explained by the interaction of these wu xing and if these wu xing were balanced well, the environment would be stable. Environmental stability was a requisite for human existence. Therefore, as I have stated, the Emperors played an important role in balancing Heaven and Earth.

In China, the imperial symbol of the dragon (**see Fig. 10**) had represented the Emperor's authority since the first century A.D.. The dragon was the symbol of yang and it was originally conceived as a rain-maker (**see Fig. 11**). Therefore, the Emperor was also needed to ensure that there was enough rainfall for the irrigation works as they were extremely essential to agriculture in old China.

Emperor's status and power were reflected by the Qing costume. The Emperor's court coats were decorated by the symbols of universal order; for example, **Fig. 12** shows an imperial winter long pao. The Chinese character long means dragon and pao means robe. This

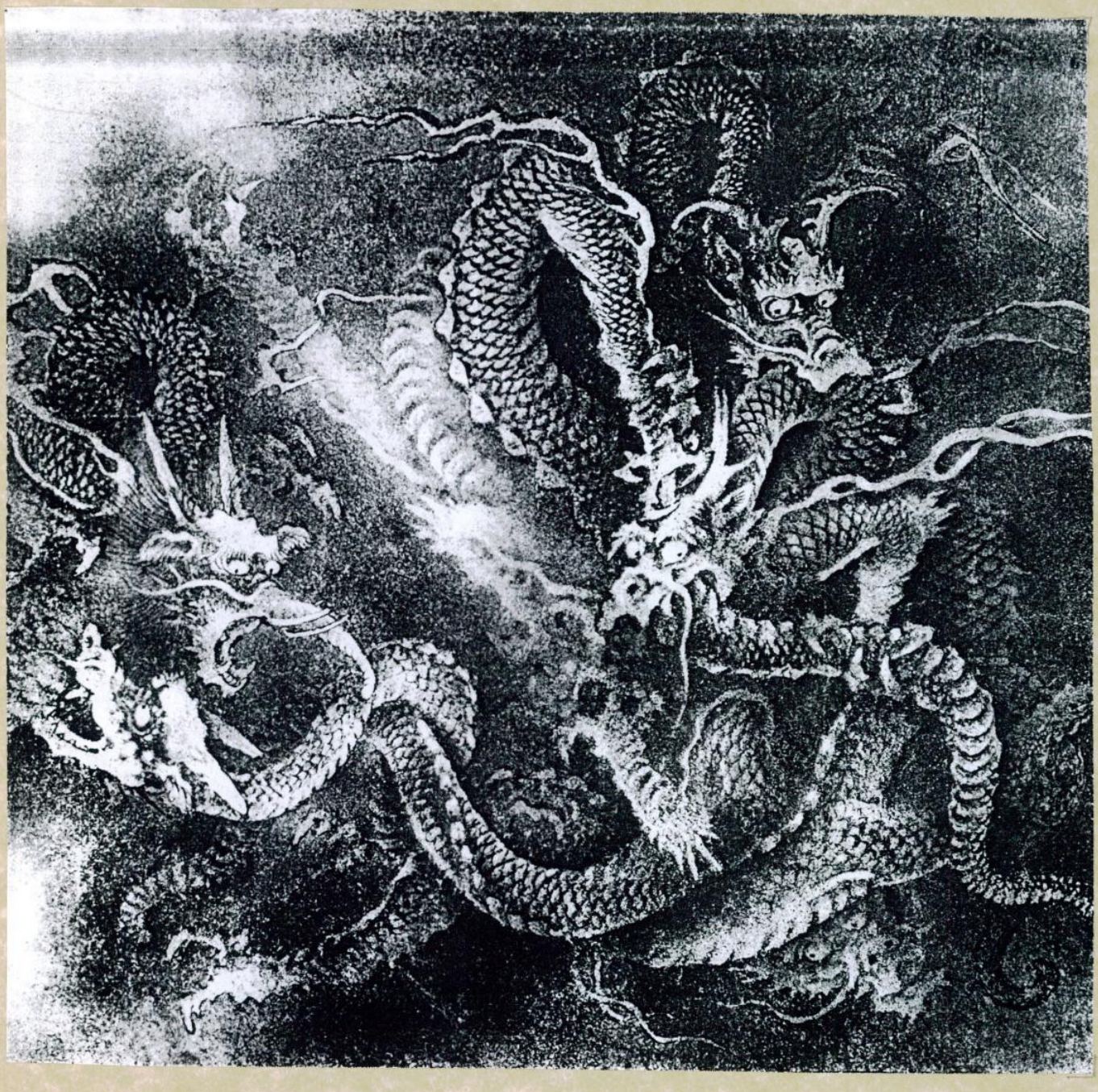

Fig. 11 Five Intertwined Dragon, Chinese Painting

Fig. 12 The Twelve Symbols, a winter long pao slightly padded with silk floss

long pao is slightly padded with silk floss. In this long pao, there are diagonal bands and rounded waves at the hem representing the universal ocean surrounding the earth, which is symbolized by the rose prism-shaped rocks at the centre of the waves. Above are the dragons surrounded by clouds, which means the coiled and twisted dragons are flying in the sky of the earth to bring rainfall. It also means the Emperor rules his empire by balancing the universal forces of ying and yang, creating harmony between those forces in order to control the environment.

When the front and the back of this long pao lie flat on the surface, (**see Fig. 13**) we can see the arrangement of the eight dragons on the robe and the ninth dragon is actually placed on the inner coat flap on the front. Why do there have to be nine dragons? It is because nine symbolized the ancient Chinese world with fields and the ideal field division was called the well-field system. The well-field was actually derived from the Chinese character, well (**see Fig. 14**). It reflected the ideal relationship between the farmers and the landowner. The well-field is situated in the middle, protected by two rings encircling it (**see Fig. 15**). The first circle occupied the main points of the compass whereas the outer circle occupied the secondary points of the compass. The Emperor's long pao reflected the same

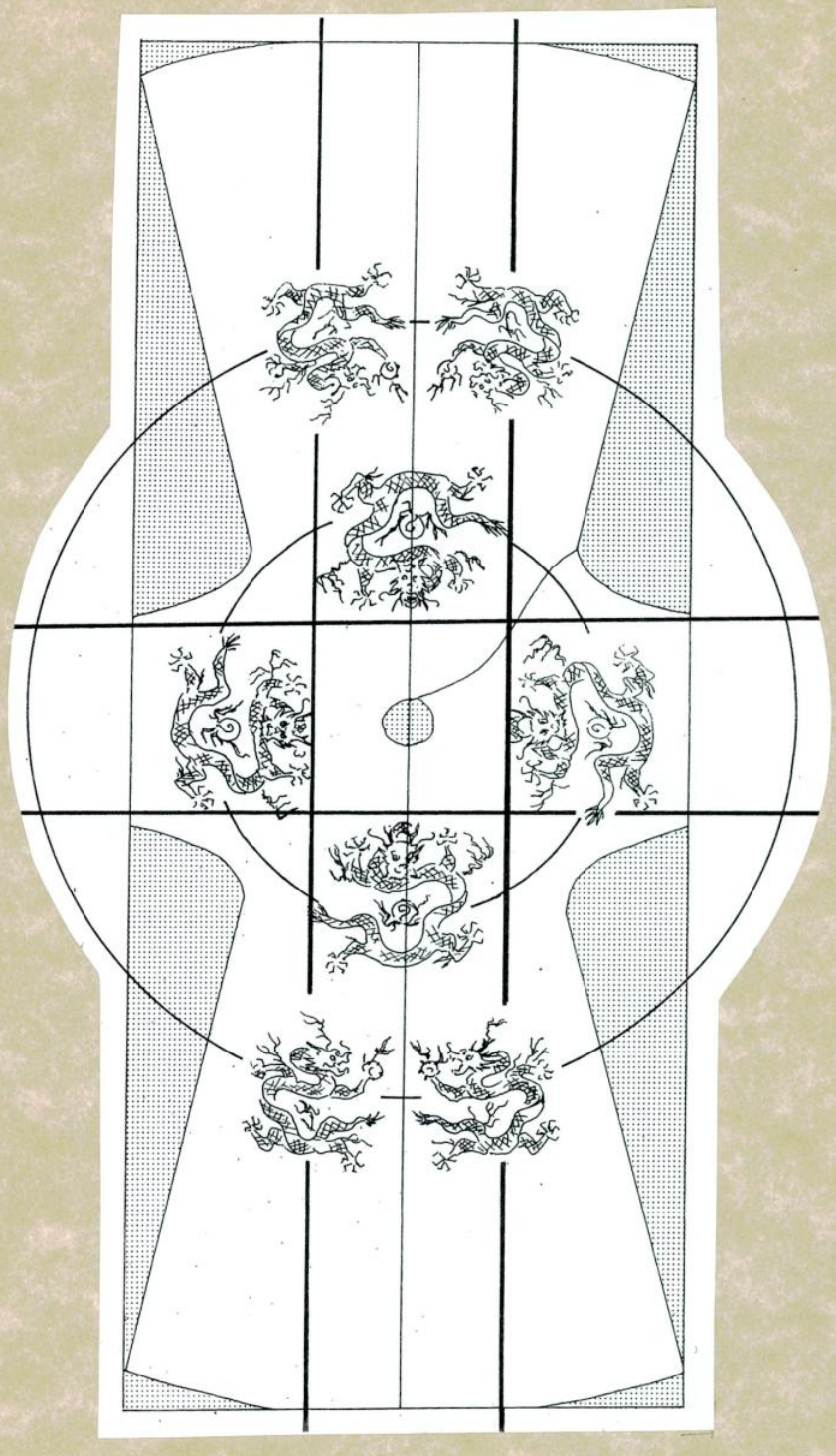

Fig. 13 The arrangement of the eight dragons in a dragon robe

Fig. 14 The character, ching, meaning well

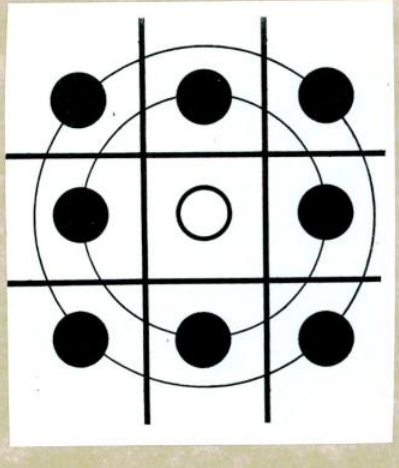

Fig. 15 Eight fields created two rings of defence protecting the inner field

principle of centrality and of power.

Besides the dragons, the waves, the clouds and the earth on this long pao, another set of symbols can be found called the twelve symbols. These symbols were associated with the authority of the Emperor. In this long pao the twelve symbols can be found in the arrangement of three concentric rings according to the importance of the symbols. (**See Table 1**).

TABLE: THE TWELVE SYMBOLS ON THE MEN'S LONG PAO

TABLE 1

FIRST RING
LOCATED FROM THE NECK TO THE WAIST LEVEL
The Sun is above the head of the dragon at the left shoulder. **(See Fig. 16)**
The Moon is above the head of the dragon at the right shoulder. **(See Fig. 17)**
The Constellation is above the head of the dragon at the chest. **(See Fig. 18)**
The Rock is above the head of the dragon at the back. **(See Fig. 19)**
SECOND RING
LOCATED AT WAIST LEVEL
The Fu is at the right side of the front dragon. **(See Fig. 20)**
The Axe is at the left side of the front dragon. **(See Fig. 21)**
The Paired Dragon is at the right side of the back dragon. **(See Fig. 22)**
The Pheasant is at the left side of the front dragon. **(See Fig. 23)**

Fig. 16 The Sun

Fig. 17 The Moon

Fig. 18 The Constellation

Fig. 19 The Rock

Fig. 21 The Axe

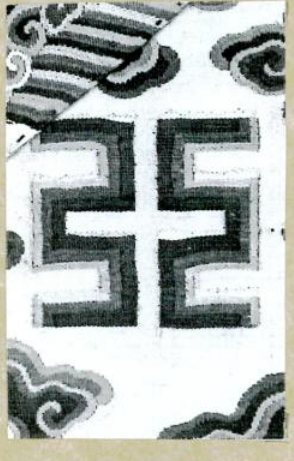

Fig. 20 The Fu

Fig. 23 The Pheasant

Fig. 22 The Paired Dragon

THIRD RING

LOCATED AT KNEE LEVEL

The Water Weed is at the right side of the front right dragon. **(See Fig. 24)**

The Pair of Ceremonial Cups are at the left side of the front left dragon. **(See Fig. 25)**

The Flame is at the right side of the back dragon. **(See Fig. 26)**

The Plate of Millet is at the left side of the back left dragon. **(See Fig. 27)**

While all the imperial power belonged to the Emperor, order and stability were transmitted through the courtiers, functionaries and officers who were in charge of the actual governing of China. Therefore, the costumes of the important bureaucracy were symbolized by distinct patterns to mark their rank.

In the Qing Dynasty, after 1759, all members of the Manchu Court were ordered to wear plain, dark three-quarter length overcoats. The Emperor wore circular roundels called gun fu as well as all the imperial family, but they were called pu fu, a reference to the shape of Heaven. The unrelated nobles, civil and military officials wore the square badges on their chest and back. Those badges represented their status in court. **(See Tables 2 and 3).**

Fig. 24 The Water Weed

Fig. 25 The Pair of Ceremonial Cups

Fig. 26 The Flame

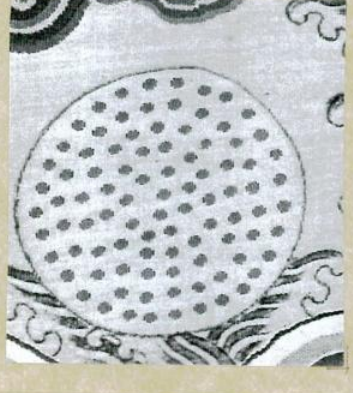

Fig. 27 The Plate of Millet

TABLE: IMPERIAL NOBLE'S RANK INSIGNIA

TABLE 2

CLASS	INSIGNIA FOR COURT OVERCOAT	COURT COAT COLOUR
Emperor	four medallions with front-facing five clawed long; symbols for sun and moon on shoulders, shou at chest and back (see Fig. 28)	bright yellow (or other colour as specified)
Heir-apparent	four medallions with font-facing five-clawed long	orange
1st degree prince	four medallions: two front facing five-clawed long at chest and back; two profile five-clawed long at shoulders	brown
2nd degree prince	four medallions: all profile five-clawed long	brown
3rd degree prince	two medallions with front-facing four-clawed mang at chest and back	blue
4th degree prince	two medallions with profile four-clawed mang	blue
5th degree noble (Duke)	two squares with front-facing four-clawed mang at chest and back (Fig. 29)	blue
6th degree noble (Marquis)	two squares with front-facing four-clawed mang at chest and back (Fig. 29)	blue
7th degree noble (Earl)	two squares with front-facing four-clawed mang at chest and back (Fig. 29)	blue
8th degree noble (Sons-in-law of 1st degree princes)	two squares with front-facing four-clawed mang at chest and back (Fig. 29)	blue
9th degree noble	two squares: ch'i-lin	blue
10th degree noble	two squares: lion (Fig. 30)	blue

Fig. 28 Emperor's summer gun fu

民公補服圖

Fig. 29 Imperial Duke's pu fu

都御史補服圖

Fig. 30 Censor's pu fu

11th degree noble	two squares: leopard	blue
12th degree noble	two squares: tiger	blue

TABLE: CIVIL OFFICIAL'S AND MILITARY OFFICIAL'S RANK INSIGNIA

TABLE 3

CLASS	INSIGNIA FOR COURT OVERCOAT	COURT COAT COLOUR
1st degree official	two squares: Manchurian crane (civil); qi-lin (chinese mythical creature) (military) **(See Figs. 31 and 32)**	black (blue)
2nd degree official	two squares: Golden pheasant (civil); lion (military) **(See Figs. 33 and 34)**	black (blue)
3rd degree official	two squares: Malay peacock (civil); leopard (military) **(See Figs. 35 and 36)**	black (blue)
4th degree official	two squares: Goose (civil); tiger (military) **(See Figs. 37 and 38)**	black (blue)
5th degree official	two squares: Silver pheasant (civil); bear (military) **(See Figs. 39 and 40)**	black (blue)
6th degree official	two squares: Egret (civil); panther (military) **(See Figs. 41 and 42)**	black (blue)
7th degree official	two squares: Mandarin duck (civil); rhinoceros (military) **(See Figs. 43 and 44)**	black (blue)
8th degree official	two squares: Quail (civil); rhinoceros (military) **(See Fig. 45)**	black (blue)

Fig. 31 First-rank Civil Official's insignia, manchurian crane

Fig. 32 First-rank Military Official's insignia, gi-lin

Fig. 33 Second-rank Civil Official's insignia, golden pheasant

Fig. 34 Second-rank Military Official's pu fu with lion insignia

Fig. 35 Third-rank Civil Official's insignia, Malay peacock

Fig. 36 Third-rank Military Official's insignia, leopard

Fig. 37 Fourth-rank Civil Official's insignia, goose

Fig. 36 Third-rank Military Official's insignia, leopard

Fig. 37 Fourth-rank Civil Official's insignia, goose

Fig. 38 Fourth-rank Military Official's insignia, tiger,

Fig. 39 Fifth-rank Civil Official's insignia, pheasant

Fig. 40 Fifth-rank Military Official's insignia, bear

Fig. 41 Sixth-rank Civil Official's insignia, egret

Fig. 42 Sixth-rank Military Official's insignia, panther

Fig. 43 Seventh-rank Civil Official's insignia, mandarin duck

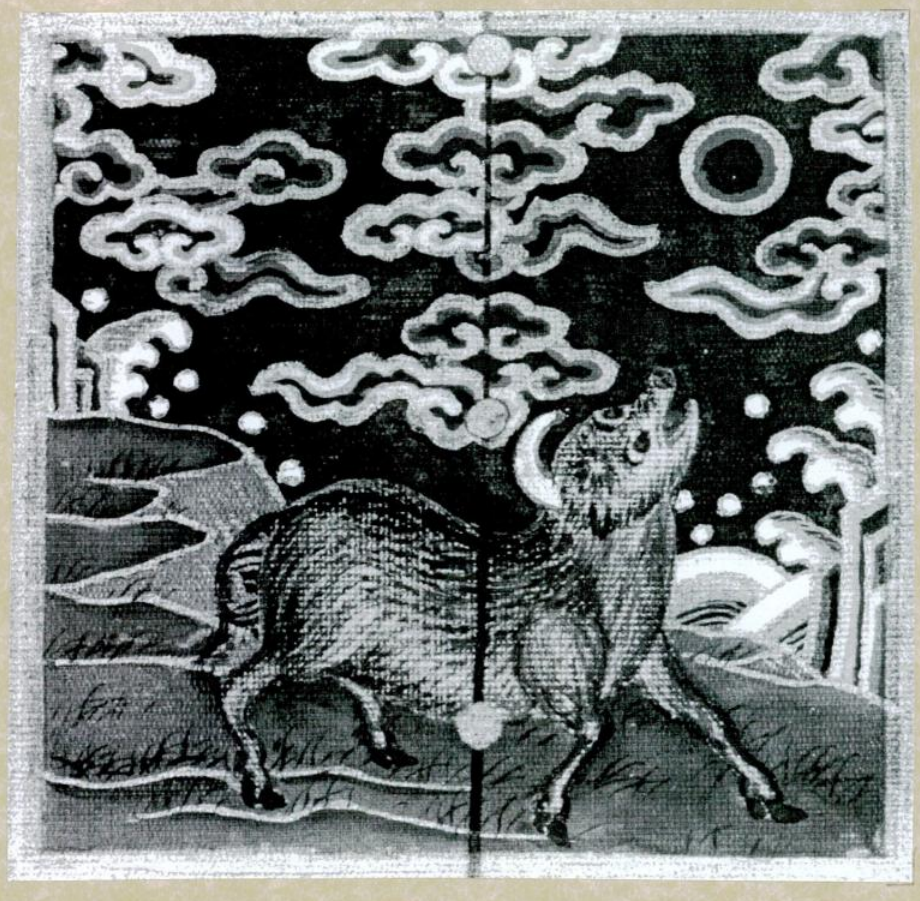

Fig. 44 Seventh-rank Military Official's insignia, rhinoceros

Fig. 45 Eighth-rank Civil Official's insignia, quail

9th degree official	two squares: Paradise fly-catcher (civil); sea horse (military) (See Figs. 46 and 47)	black (blue)

The Qing court costumes represented the wearer's status mainly by symbols and colours, although headgear and accessories also formed part of the wearer's status.

MEN'S COSTUMES OF THE COMMON PEOPLE IN THE QING DYNASTY

However, the lower class, which meant the ordinary citizens in the Qing Dynasty, did not wear any dragon robes. Actually they were not allowed to wear any clothes which had dragons adorned on them because it was the privileged symbol of the Emperor. Also the ordinary people were not allowed to wear yellow as this colour was reserved for the Emperors and the Empresses.

The sam fu was the name of the outfit commonly worn by the ordinary people (see Fig. 48) during the Qing Dynasty. Nowadays, the sam fu is still found in China and worn by farmers in rural areas. However, the sam fu is rarely seen. Sam means the upper garment and fu means the trousers. The sam for men was originally in the Manchu style in the Qing Dynasty. An overlap was

Fig. 46 Ninth-rank Civil Official's insignia, paradise fly catcher

Fig. 47 Ninth-rank Military Official's insignia, sea horse

Fig. 48 Shanghai, a commercial street, ordinary people wearing sam fu, 1880

Fig. 49 A shopkeeper and his family wearing the sam fu and white cotton socks, Guaugzhou, 1861-1864

added to the right side and fastened with loops and toggles. Later, the overlap style of men's sam was changed to a centre front opening style, again with loops and toggles, with slits at either side together with long straight sleeves that covered the hand but had no cuffs. Underneath the sam, fu were worn and actually derived from the nomadic Manchus who wore animal skins wrapped around their legs while on horseback to prevent chafing. Fu were worn tightly bound with tapes around the ankles and usually white cotton socks were worn over them (see Fig. 49).

Black and blue were the most popular coloured for sam fu. The fu tau meant waistband. It was usually wide which helped the wearer to step easily into the fu. It was made in a lighter, coarser surface of fabric to prevent the garment from slipping down and it was folded over and secured with a belt or cord. A white-coloured fu tau, referred to as Baak tau do lo, literally meaning white head - is the sign of a desire for long life.

Fabrics used for sam fu were hemp, cotton, worsted wool and were commonly used by the lower class people. In addition when I referred to the book called Traditional Chinese Clothing, the garments made for the lower class people were used in an economical way (see Figs. 50 and 51). They show the seams of the sam

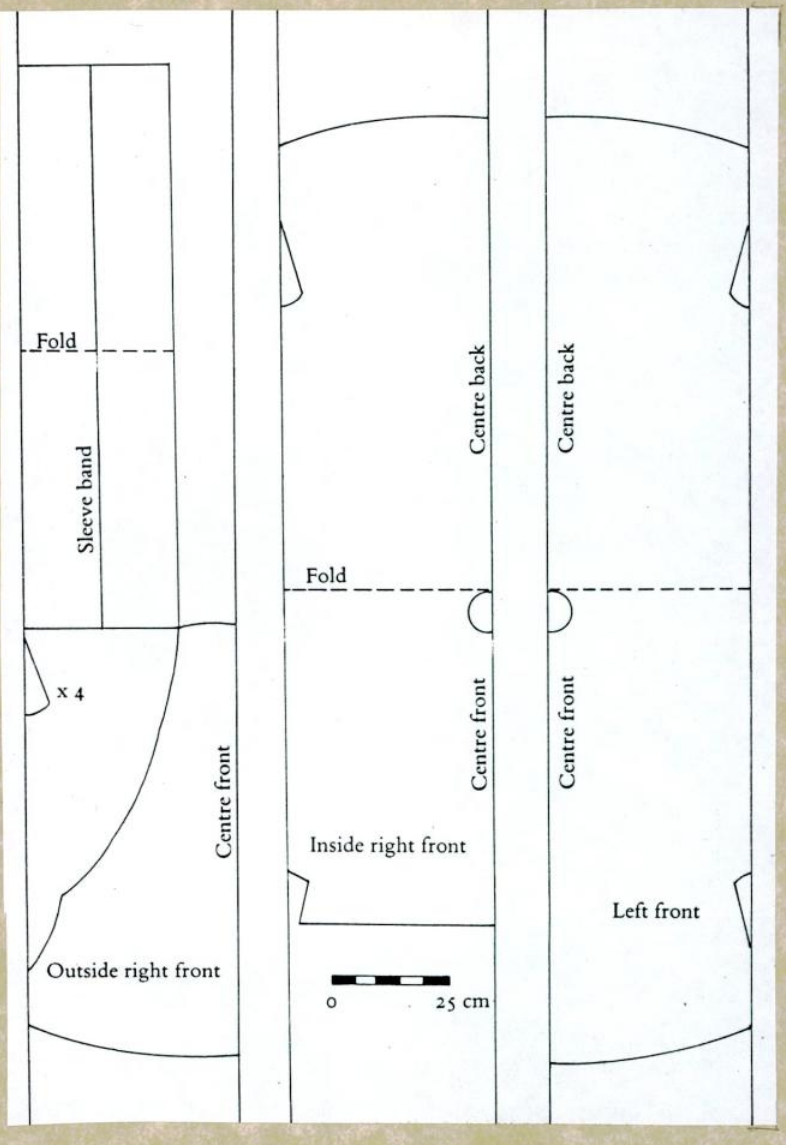

Fig. 50 Layout of Woman's cotton sam, 1865-1900

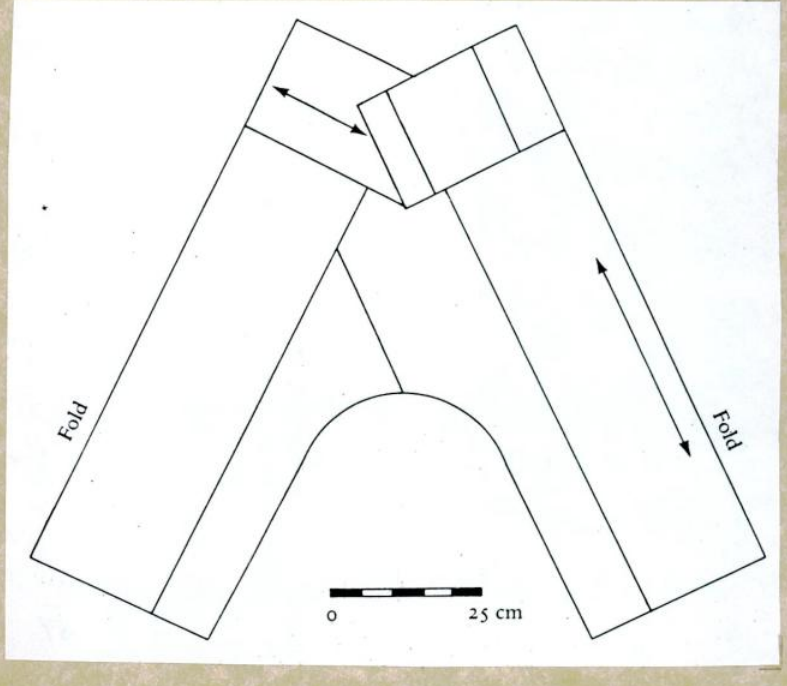

Fig. 51 Four-seamed style of fu, Hong Kong, early twentieth century

fu were on the fold, such as the shoulder seams of the sam, the under arm seams of the sleeve bands of the sam and the side seams of the fu. This was the reason why Chinese clothes were so two-dimensional until the Revolution of 1911 overthrowing the rule of the Qing. There were drastic changes in clothing in the 1930s, especially in Shanghai, the centre of fashion in China at which time women's clothing adopted many features of Western fashions (see Fig. 52).

Besides the sam, there was also an outer garment worn by the ordinary people. It was similar to the sam except that the sleeves were longer and wider. On formal occasions, people wore a more formal outer garment called ma kwa, literally riding jacket, which derived from the Manchu's riding jacket. It was usually worn with a cheung sam (long robe) underneath and with a matching fu, white socks and black cloth shoes (see Fig. 53). Figure 54 shows a gentleman who is carrying two bird cages. He seems to belong to the middle or upper class because he is wearing a cheung sam with a short jacket which looks like a ma kwa and has fu underneath his cheung sam.

CHINESE COSTUMES REFLECTED WOMEN'S SOCIAL STATUS IN THE QING DYNASTY

In my opinion, there were some important components which made the Chinese costume so marvellous and so

Fig. 52 A woman in short sleeved dress, 1930s

Fig. 53 Four generations, aged 13 to 85 years, all wearing ma kwa over cheung sam

Fig. 54 Bird-fancier wearing ma kwa over cheung sam and fu underneath cheung sam

distinctive from dynasty to dynasty. The first component was already mentioned in the first chapter, which was silk. The discovery of silk directly affected China so that it became the centre of embroidery art of the East. When one of the earliest known European embroideries appeared, the Bayeux Tapestry in A.D. 1070, it was embroidered linen. Silk embroidery had already been practised in China for at least three thousand years beforehand. The second component is embroidery, especially silk embroidery.

Embroidery had already been practised by the Chinese since the Yang-Shao Pottery period in the Neolithic time (3000 B.C.) when they only had some simple tools to do embroidery such as needles made of bones, ivory and bronze.

Embroidery reached into every aspect of Chinese life during the Qing Dynasty and became a major Eastern art form comparable to Western oil painting - the national artistic expression. When Chinese silk embroidery appeared in Rome in the third century B.C., the Romans were extremely surprised by this fabulous Chinese silk embroidery and they aptly described the art as "painting with the needle" (**Ref. 15**).

Needlework was the Chinese women's expertise as every girl had to learn needlework before learning any other

thing during the Qing Dynasty. A housewife in the Qing Dynasty was highly respected and one can say that she was always the muse of her husband. The reason was that she was good at embroidery. Embroidery was highly respected in historic China both as an art form and also as a domestic talent. A husband would be proud of his wife if she was skilled at embroidery. Actually, the Chinese wife had to do all the embroidery for her husband's family. In the past, a Chinese family was usually big with six or ten sons or daughters, sometimes ten or twenty because in old Chinese tradition, a prosperous family in China should have lots of offspring, especially sons, as they carry on their family name. The family hoped their sons would pass examinations in which candidates were tested on their mastery of the Confucian classics. if their sons could pass the examination, their family name could be strengthened and they would be proud of him. Because of the above, there were many large families in China. The place where they lived soon became a small village and bore the name of the original family such as Wong or Lee. In addition, agriculture was mainly the way of Chinese family life, so the large family units could work on the land. This was another reason why the Chinese family was so large.

Because there were large families in China, it is

clear why the Chinese housewife had so much embroidery to do, such as the informal clothes of the family, children's wear, home accessories like table cloths, mirror covers (see Figs. 55 and 56) and the decorations for family ceremonies. The Chinese housewife could easily spend all her time everyday sitting in the garden or in her room doing embroidery (see Fig. 57 and 58). Figure 57 shows a Chinese lady working on an embroidery frame. By looking at it, I think the frame is about 22 inches long but I am unsure of the width as it is obscured by the window frame which is located at the bottom part of the illustration. However, I think the embroidery frame is square or slightly rectangular as the square and the rectangular frames were popular and used in the home and by professionals as they had the advantages of less wrinkling, stability and could usually accommodated large pieces of fabric. To refer back to Figure 57, the embroidery piece which the lady is working on seems to be a home decoration such as a wall decoration, since I can see embroidered bamboo leaves. Bamboo leaves are often found in Chinese painting and embroidery as an artistic expression. I have studied Chinese painting for ten years and that is why I believe they are bamboo leaves even though the image is blurred.

By referring to the description of Figure 57 the name

Fig. 55 Tablecloth, mythical beast, flower, scroll and thunder-line designs in gold couched thread, with green and blue couching accents on plain weave red silk ground

Fig. 56 Mirror cover. Flower, fruit, bat and Buddhist secular and Taoist figures in seed and satin stitches; some details in metal thread couching, galoon edgings

Fig. 57 Detail from "Palace Ladies" by Chiao Ping-chen. Hanging scroll, colour on silk

of this hanging scroll is called "Palace Ladies". Both ladies live in the Palace in the Qing Dynasty. It is quite obvious that they are wearing informal robes as they are doing embroidery in their leisure time. Their robes are embroidered richly on the shoulders, collars and cuff bands.

Figure 58 shows a lady leaning on her rectangular embroidery frame. The embroidery piece appears to be flowers and leaves which were another form of expression in Chinese painting, as described in a poem by Po Chu-i, describing the melancholy longing of a girl awaiting her lover : "*Wearily leaning on her embroidery frame, sad and still: Slowly she lets her green belt, and her coiffure hangs low*". **(Ref. 16).**

It depicts the lady waiting for her lover, but she can not do anything. She can only stay in her room to try to do her embroidery. This implies Chinese women or young ladies were not really honoured by doing embroidery. They were forced by their society to do embroidery and as a result there was a lack of social communication. The upper and middle class females in the Qing Dynasty had their feet bound. The reason for these bound feet was so they could not move about easily and therefore had to stay mainly in their houses and take up tasks which involved little movement of their feet e.g. embroidery (**see Fig. 59**).

Fig. 58 Album Leaf: "Wearily Embroidery" (detail) Ink and colour on silk

Fig. 59 "Woman Embroidery", water colour on paper, 1866-1898

Figure 59 shows a lady who is doing embroidery on a rectangular frame. A few points arise from this lady's portrait that I think are quite strange. This portrait shows the appearance of a lady of leisure, but a large frame is set up, which was not to be found easily in domestic embroidery, as this was probably confined to small articles, unless a private order for costume embroidery was made by the imperial court. If she had an order of embroidery to do from the imperial court, her appearance should not have been leisurely. No embroidery on her clothes usually means that she did not belong to the middle or upper class. However, she wears jewellery and her feet are bound. Manchu women imitated Han Chinese women's embroidery on shoes for bound feet. However, I think the shoes which this lady is wearing are not imitations and are genuine Han Chinese shoes (**Figs. 60 and 61**). The above two points contradict each other if the social setting of this portrait is right. I think, in fact, the social setting of this lady's portrait was not right. However, her portrait is a good example showing how women could not easily walk away from their houses, causing a lack of social communication. This is reflected in that in old Chinese society women stayed at home whereas men had to carry the burden of their family. As a result, women had a lower status in old Chinese society and this phenomenon did not change until the Revolution of 1911.

Fig. 60 Embroidered shoes for bound feet, Qing Dynasty. Early twentieth century

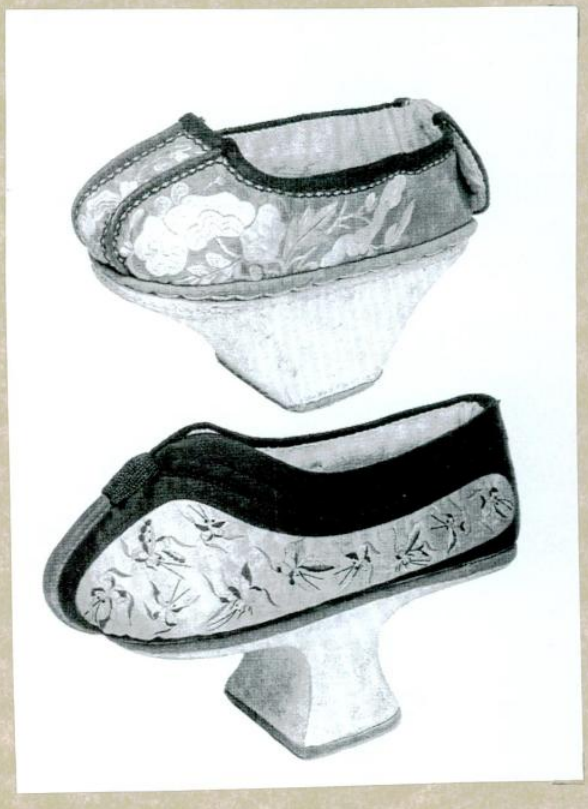

Fig. 61 Manchu Women's shoes, late nineteenth to early twentieth century

In the first part of this section (the second statement) I had already mentioned the upper class women; this meant court women and included the empresses, the imperial consorts and the officials' wives. The lower class women meant the common people who were usually the peasants and the women who fished for a living.

Of course, we do know there was a difference between the upper class and the lower class in terms of their clothing in Western countries. But in the Qing Dynasty of China, costumes of this period were sumptuous: therefore, a large difference was found between the upper and the lower class clothes of women. In the court, according to Huangchao liqi tushi, the 'Illustrated Precedents for the Ritual Paraphernalia of the Imperial Court' (**see Fig. 62**), commissioned by the Qianlong Emperor in 1759, this was to provide a comprehensive illustrated catalogue of all the ceremonial trappings of the court (**Ref. 17**). In Huangchao liqi tushi the women's court costume section said that when a woman married, she would take the rank of her spouse which meant she is permitted to wear the same rank of clothes as her husband. Therefore, costume also reflected the court women's status in the Qing Dynasty.

Women's court costumes in the Qing Dynasty were more

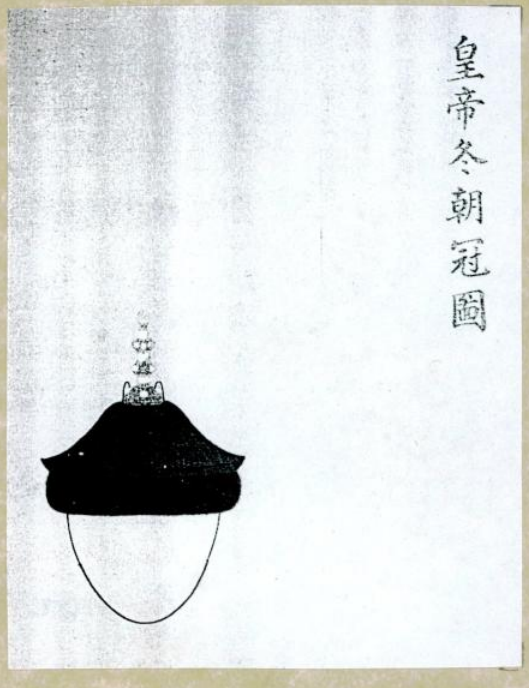

Fig. 62 Painting on silk of the Emperor's winter chao gua in Huangchao ligi tushi

elaborate and rare than men's costumes. One of the reasons for this may be that women usually lived a secluded life which meant they had no public duties outside the home. Therefore, it would allow them to interpret dress traditions in a freer way, and the costumes were more elaborate and formal, which evoked the styles of Ming court costumes, the Ming Dynasty being before the Qing Dynasty. Although Manchu women originally dressed differently from the Han women, it is not easy to distinguish the difference between them when referring to Museums' collections of Qing costume. However, in general, Manchu women usually wore full-length gowns with narrow sleeves while Han Chinese women (women in the Ming Dynasty) wore skirts beneath shorter robes with wider sleeves, for example **Figure 63**. This is one of the earliest chao pao worn by a Manchu woman who might be an imperial consort. This orange-coloured chao pao is a strange existing example from a private collection. In my opinion, the reasons are:-

(a) The major difference between this chao pao and the others is the sleeves. They look wider and it may be because of the influence of Han women's costumes.

(b) The length of the sleeve seems to be shorter than any other chao pao. It seems to have the bottom half of the sleeve missing, usually black in colour, just before the horsehoof cuff.

Fig. 63 A woman's orange-coloured chao pao

Here an inquiry arises: Would it be because the background of this photograph is black and therefore the missing part of the sleeve cannot be visualized? In general, photographs of this kind of Chinese costumes usually present the full garment, unless only the details of embroidery or symbols were focused on.

(c) When compared to a more normal chao pao in **Fig. 31** the wave design at the hem of the strange chao pao seems to be missing at least two and three layers of waves, as also does the triple-peaked mountain motif which emerges from the centre of the waves.

(d) A chao pao in an orange colour is unusual as the colours that usually are found are yellow, golden yellow, incense colour, apricot-yellow, brown and blue black. All these colours represented the wearer's status and will be discussed in later paragraphs.

Chao fu was the most formal costume in the Qing wardrobe. Men and women both wore chao fu. Chao fu actually means court dress. Women's chao fu consisted of three separate garments which included a chao pao, an unbelted garment worn with a cape called piling (**see Fig. 64**) and a pleated underskirt. Chao pao was divided into winter chao pao and summer chao pao. The winter chao pao had three types of styles while the

Fig. 64 Empress Xiaoxian in chao fu, a cape on the shoulders called piling

summer chao pao had two types of styles. The different types of chao pao are shown in table form below (**See Table 4**).

TABLE: THE CONSTRUCTION OF WOMEN'S WINTER CHAO PAO

TABLE 4

FIRST TYPE
Full length, side fastening Tapered sleeve with horsehoof cuff Lined with white fur and trimmed with sable The upper sleeve was joined to the shoulder of the bodice and the seam was covered by brocade facing and epaulette-like projections above the shoulders
SECOND TYPE
Tailored in two sections: A hip-length bodice attached to a pleated skirt The sleeve were composed with the upper sleeve being attached to the bodice at the shoulders and again covered by epaulettes The skirt section was gathered by box pleats
THIRD TYPE
It was almost the same as the first style except it was trimmed with black fox and had a central slit at the rear **(See Fig. 65)**

The women's summer chao pao had two different types. The construction of the first and the second types of chao pao were the same as the second and third type of

Fig. 65 First-rank imperial consort's winter chao pao, third style

winter chao pao respectively. In all cases, the summer chao pao was usually made of gauze or satin and lined with a light material. Besides Table 4, I would like to explain in what position in society women could wear the appropriate types, colours and decorated dragons of chao pao in Table 5.

TABLE: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WOMEN'S CHAO PAO

TABLE 5

RANK	TYPE OF CHAO PAO	COLOUR	DRAGONS
Empress Dowager, Empress, Huang Gui Fei	Winter: first and third type Summer: first and second type	yellow	front facing long on chest, back and shoulders, two profile long at front and back at the lower part
Second imperial consorts	Winter: first and third type Summer: second type	golden yellow	front facing long on chest, back and shoulders, two profile long at front and back at the lower part
Third imperial consorts	Winter: first and third type Summer: second type	golden yellow	front facing long on chest, back and shoulders, two profile long at front and back at the lower part
Other imperial consorts	Winter: first and third type Summer: second type	incense colour	front facing long on chest, back and shoulders, two profile long at front and back at the lower part
Consorts of the crown prince	Winter: first and third type Summer: second type	apricot yellow	front facing long on chest, back and shoulders, two profile long at front and back at the lower part

Consorts of first and second rank princes	Winter: first and third type Summer: second type	brown	front facing long on chest, back and shoulders, two profile long at front and back at the lower part
Wives of other nobles	Winter: second and third type Summer: second type	blue black	front facing mang on chest, back and shoulders, two profile mang at front and back at the lower part
Wives of officials of the first, second and third ranks	Winter: second and third type Summer: second type	blue black	front facing mang on chest, back and shoulders, two profile mang at front and back at the lower part
Wives of officials of the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh ranks	Winter: second and third type Summer: second type	blue black	two confronting mang on front and back

Figure 66 shows an imperial noblewoman's chao pao which is in a private collection. According to the description from the book entitled Imperial Wardrobe on page 176, illustration PL 155, it says this was a summer chao pao of the wife of an imperial duke. Actually, I think this chao pao was a winter one because I can understand the chinese characters that are written on the top right hand corner of the figure. In addition, by referring to **Table 4**, I think this winter chao pao was the third type of style and the colour was blue-black, but I have a suspicion that either the dragons or the chinese characters on the painting were wrong as if this chao pao was for the

貝勒夫人冬朝袍圖

Fig. 66 Imperial noblewoman's winter chao pao

wife of an imperial duke, the dragons should be the four-clawed mang instead of the five-clawed long which is shown on this chao pao.

The second time of chao fu was chao gua. The chao gua was a sleeveless garment which was worn over the chao pao. The chao gua had three distinct types; for the Empress Dowager, Empress and Huang qui fei (the second wife of the Emperor, (see Table 6); all of these chao gua were in a dark-blue colour. There is no difference between the summer and the winter chao gua except the summer ones use lighter fabrics.

TABLE: THE CONSTRUCTION OF WOMEN'S CHAO GUA

TABLE 6

FIRST TYPE
Tailored in three sections:
The upper bodice, from the waist to the knee and from the knee to the hem
SECOND TYPE
Tailored in two sections:
A hip-length sleeveless bodice attached to a pleated skirt with a vent at the rear
THIRD TYPE
Tailored all in one: Full length

TABLE: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WOMEN'S CHAO GUA

TABLE 7

RANK	TYPE OF CHAO GUA	PATTERN
Empress, empress dowager and huang gui fei	First and second types	2 ascending profile long on front and back
Second and third degree imperial consorts	First and second types	2 ascending profile long on front and back
Consort of the crown prince	First and second types	2 ascending profile long on front and back
Wives of first and second rank princes	Third type	4 profile long on front and back
Wives of other nobles and officials	Third type	2 ascending profile mang on front and back

Figure 67 shows a pleated underskirt which could be worn with chao pao and chao gua to complete the full outfit of chao fu by all the imperial women.

WOMEN'S COSTUMES OF THE COMMON PEOPLE IN THE QING DYNASTY

In fact, lower class women wore sam fu whose shapes were similar to the men's. The sam worn by women had a right overlap and were fastened by loops and toggles. From the mid to the nineteenth century, the sam were cut very large and long, and were calf-length with big wide sleeves. Fu were also worn by women. These were tubes of cloth attached to a waistband, with gussets to form the crutch to allow movement of

Fig. 67 Pleated underskirt of an imperial daughter-in-law

Fig. 68 Two girls wearing decorated sam and fu, with bound-feet shoes, accompanied by their maid

the legs. **Figure 68** shows two Chinese ladies wearing calf-length sam and angle-length fu, which helped to conceal swollen ankles caused by foot-binding. These two ladies seem to belong to an upper class of ordinary people because only the upper class women would bind their feet, while the lower class women, for example the housemaid (**see Fig. 68**) shows ordinary feet with a pair of black cloth shoes. In addition, we can also see the embroidery and the braiding along the edges of both ladies' sam fu which reflect their higher status in Chinese society. In contrast, their maid wears an ordinary blue black sam fu, which suggested her lower status in Chinese society.

In general, unmarried women wore fu with their sam whereas married women wore a skirt over their fu, and this was usual among the middle and upper class women.

CONCLUSION

To understand Chinese costume is not easy, as China has a long and profound civilization. Therefore, it was necessary for me to look back over several centuries in order to capture some of the history of Chinese costumes, including some of its mythology, symbolism and the development of the shapes of costumes.

The dress system of the Qing Dynasty was the most complicated and luxurious in the history of Chinese costumes. Qing court costumes were extravagantly sumptuous, bore the demonstration of conspicuous leisure such as the projecting sleeves of the court robe to frustrate manual labour. No doubt, the shapes of Chinese clothes were changed in the Qing Dynasty, but compared to the variations of Western costumes, it would hardly be noticed. In fact, when I compared the clothes after the new Revolution of 1911 to the clothes during the Zhou Dynasty in the Bronze Age (**see Figs. 69 and 70**) they looked much the same, especially the silhouettes. Actually, Chinese costume had not changed much from dynasty to dynasty. It was static. I think the reason for this is that Chinese people always wanted to retain all their old traditions and customs as they are superstitious. Therefore, the sumptuous Chinese costumes were considered as static, but not fashionable.

Fig. 69 Rectangular collared robe with narrow sleeves, Western Zhou Dynasty

Fig. 70 Flannelette jacquard long gown with patterns of pine and crane, early twentieth century

However, Chinese costumes are admirable, especially the art of silk embroidery. This was an excellent artistic expression which could be found on Chinese costumes.

I hope I have created a clear picture of the Qing costumes, how important the discovery of silk was which affected the Chinese economy and the international development of the art of silk embroidery; also, how Chinese costumes reflected the wearer's social status in the Qing Dynasty.

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