



**CHINESE**  
CULTURE

# CLOTHING

**HUA MEI**



China Intercontinental Press



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# Preface:

## Beautiful Chinese Clothes



Painted pottery bottle with an opening in the shape of a human head. It was made about 5,600 years ago and was unearthed in Gansu in 1973. The bottle displays beautiful facial features, with short hair on the forehead and shoulder-length hair at the back of the head. The bottle's body has three layers of patterns consisting of arched triangles and lancets, that could be clothes.

Chinese clothing can be traced back to the primitive society of the late Paleolithic Period. Archaeologists have found that 20,000 years ago primitive people who lived near modern-day Zhoukoudian, Beijing, wore ornaments. The white small stone beads, yellowish green cobbles, animal teeth, blood clams and fish bones with furrows unearthed at Zhoukoudian are exquisitely pierced, and traces of hematite powder remain on hole walls. According to the places where they have been found, experts think that these items were necklaces. These people wore ornaments not just for decoration but also to ward off evil spirits and as part of prayer rituals. Long round openings still remain on unearthed bone needles, which demonstrate that ancient people of this period could sew animal hide with needles.

In Qinghai Province, in the west of China, painted pottery basins made more than 5,000 years ago have been unearthed. The patterns on these pottery basins look like dancers doing a hunting dance. The dancers wear plaited ornaments on their heads, tail ornaments hang around their waists, and some wear round skirts. A painted pottery bottle unearthed in Gansu also attracts the attention – it is painted to resemble a girl, with short hair on the forehead above the eyebrows, shoulder-length hair at the back of the head, clearly discernable facial features, and continuous patterns below the neck consisting of three layers of oblique lines, arcs, and triangles. It is thought that these patterns depict clothing.

Chinese clothing and head gear was formalized during the Western Zhou Dynasty (1046–771 BC). The Zhou Dynasty established official positions such as the “clothes minister,” “inner clothes minister” and “jade official”, responsible for the clothes and jade ornaments of the emperor and empress. There were different clothing rules for the emperor and for ordinary people. From the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD) onwards these rules were recorded in official history books such as *Records of Carriages and Clothing*.



Bone needle made by Upper Cave Man about 18,000 years ago.



Neck ornament from a Neolithic site.



Painted pottery basin made about 5,000 years ago, unearthed in Qinghai in 1995. The figures wear round skirts and dance hand in hand. These skirts are rare in traditional Chinese clothes.

During the Tang Dynasty (618–907) China was powerful, society was more open, and clothes were beautiful. Fashions changed more frequently and women wearing low-neck short gowns or men wearing narrow-sleeved dresses became a symbol of the greater social tolerance of the period. The Tang Dynasty was the most splendid era of Chinese clothing.



*Tuning the Lute and Drinking Tea (part)* by Zhou Fang (Tang Dynasty) depicts court ladies of the Tang Dynasty, the most accomplished period in the history of Chinese traditional clothes.





In November 2013, the China Fashion Week Spring/Summer 2014 was held in Beijing. This is a Chinese designer's collection.

After 1840, China became a modern society as the number of trading ports increased and more cosmopolitan cities, such as Shanghai, saw the integration of Chinese and Western cultures. Driven by European and American fashion trends, traditional Chinese clothes began to change.

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Chinese clothes underwent a period of integration with Western clothing and this fusion can be seen in cheongsams, long gowns, tunic suits, school uniforms, Western-style clothes, hats, silk stockings, and high-heeled shoes. After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, clothes that elevated the status of laborers, such as workers' clothes and farmers' clothes emerged. In the 1980s, after China began to reform and open up to the rest of the world, jackets, bell-bottomed pants, jeans, miniskirts, bikinis, professional suits, punk clothes, T-shirts, etc. were embraced by the Chinese people. Clothes, like people, have been witness to changing times.

China is a multinational country (with 56 different ethnic groups) and clothing styles and customs are constantly changing – like flowers in a garden, always providing color, interest and beauty.



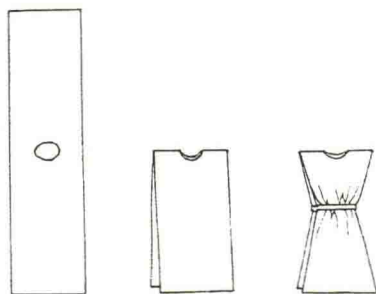




# **From Barbarism to Monarchy**



# From Ancient One-piece Dresses to Casual Garments and Gowns



The basic "cape" form  
(drawn by author).

On a painted pottery pot made more than 5,000 years ago in Xindian, Gansu, China, there are several single human figures. These figures seem to be standing talking or going out together, and are shown in the form of silhouettes. They wear knee-length waist-hugging long gowns similar to modern one-piece dresses. Many cultures have used this form of dress – official Chinese history books tell us that Japanese people wore “capes” in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, American Indians wore cape-style wrap coats in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and clothing cut with long openings in the middle of patterned cloth were used in Peru. This clothing style can be grouped under the heading of “cape”.

Making a cape involves folding a piece of cloth twice as long as the height of a person in two and cutting a round hole or vertical opening in the middle. The wearer puts his or her head into the hole and then secures the garment across the front and back with a rope, like a belt. Capes are simple and straightforward but still look beautiful today.

Ancient Chinese people had two main types of clothing: upper garments and skirts, symbolizing heaven and earth