

THE DESIGN CHARACTERISTIC OF LATE 15TH CENTURY MING DYNASTY COSTUMES IN THE JIANGNAN REGION

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ABSTRACT

The costumes of China boast a rich historical legacy with profound cultural significance. During the Ming Dynasty, the evolution of costume culture introduced new elements and distinctive design attributes. This research aims to identify Ming folklore artifacts by examining the characteristic features of late Ming Dynasty costumes, particularly focusing on the Jiangnan region. The costume culture in this area epitomized the folk traditions of the Ming Dynasty. As the late Ming Dynasty witnessed the nascent stages of capitalism in the Jiangnan region, there was a noticeable surge in the ostentatious display of wealth among the emerging civic class, especially reflected in their attire. The costumes in the Jiangnan region during this period underwent significant transformations and innovations in terms of fabrics, shapes, and colors, setting a precedent for the attire of subsequent historical periods. The methodology of this research is qualitative. To gather comprehensive data, this research employs methodologies such as in-depth interviews, document analysis, and fieldwork analysis. The study delves into the design features, aesthetic nuances, and cultural characteristics of late Ming costumes. This exploration encompasses the historical and cultural contexts of late Ming attire, the materials utilized, the external forms and colors, as well as the accompanying accessories. Each category of costumes contributes to delineating distinct design characteristics. Through this research, it is anticipated that a deeper understanding of the unique aspects of late Ming Dynasty costumes will be disseminated to future generations. The goal is to impart knowledge and appreciation for the cultural significance embedded in the attire of this historical period.

Keywords: Design, Characteristics, Costumes, Late Ming Dynasty and Jiangnan Region

Introduction

Material culture refers to the physical objects, artifacts, and tangible aspects of human societies that are created, used, and preserved over time. These artifacts embody the material expressions of a culture, representing the way people live, work, and interact within a given society. Material culture encompasses a wide range of items, including tools, costumes, architecture, art, technology, and everyday (McDonnell,2023) The Ming Dynasty in the 15th century was a prosperous period for the development of material culture in ancient China, with a developed social economy, affluent people's lives, vibrant social customs, exceptionally prosperous folk activities, and greater development of production technology than in previous generations. Against this social background, a large number of costumes of various kinds, exquisite design and excellent production emerged (Chen,2022)

Costumes and garments are recognised as an important product in the history of human development. the development of human history, there is also a constraint reform and the evolution of garments took place in the history of the Chinese Revolution. Boasting a cultural heritage that extends over 5,000 years, China possesses an exceptionally rich and extensive cultural legacy. China, boasting a millennia-spanning civilization, has witnessed the birth of numerous generations of Chinese descendants and navigated through the transitions of numerous dynasties (Shen, 2018). Within this extensive history, certain enduring artifacts stand as carriers of the rich tapestry of Chinese civilization. (Chen, 2019). The history of Chinese costumes is also recognised as a road of cultural changes worn on the bodies of individuals. There are different Chinese dynasties present and the traditional attire of all these dynasties is made of priceless materials and associated with the cultural heritage of Chinese history. This particular situation has been associated with making a significant amount of contribution to the evolution of Chinese culture and the study of Chinese history and culture is made by the costumes of the Chinese dynasties. There are several aspects of the philosophy, culture, customs, artistic beliefs, aesthetics, and other information of the dynasties associated with the costumes worn by people at that period (Ding & Li, 2019). Rather than evaluating and analysing the aspects associated with the evaluation of costumes, this research is associated with representing the situation in the late Ming dynasty. The purpose of this research is to reveal the design concept system of Ming Dynasty folklore relics through the design analysis of typical folklore relics in the context of the costumes in the Ming Dynasty and to have a more holistic and clear understanding of Ming Dynasty folklore relics (Han, 2016).

Literature Review

According to Zujie (2020), costumes can be recognised as folklore artifacts as they are imbued with different types of cultural and traditional significance, and associated with the representation of customers, beliefs and stories associated with a particular community or group. From the context of folklore, costumes are associated with different types of features and characteristics. One of the major features of costumes as

folklore artifacts is the cultural expression and often associated with representing the unique cultural identity of a particular community. The primary rationale behind this is they are significantly associated with some specific symbols, colours, and designs that further represent deep cultural meaning and are further passed down through generations. In addition to this, there are some specific folklore costumes present that are significantly related to playing some symbolic roles in these events and also represent themes like harvest, fertility, protection and the supernatural. Along with this, they are often worn by participants. The primary reason behind this is to invoke the spirits or gods related to these specific rituals (Wu, Su & Zhang, 2023). Along with this, storytelling is another major feature of costumes can be associated with telling stories and legends of a community's history along with mythology as well. For instance, in case attire has been worn by a particular character in folk tales the costumes may further help convey the narrative and connect the audience to the storytelling tradition as well. Moreover, costumes in a particular folklore can be also associated with the representation of a source of pride and identity for a particular community.

As a result of this, it may become easy to differentiate one group from another and further developing a sense of belonging among members will become easy as well (Yang, Yue & Wang, 2021). At the same time, there is also a tradition of wearing festive costumes on specific holidays. These costumes are usually painted with animal and plant motifs related to the festivals. This type of clothing expresses people's good wishes and prayers during festivals. The custom of wearing auspicious clothes on festivals was very popular during the Ming Dynasty and was followed by the ruling class as well as the common people (Li,2021) . Figure 1 is an auspicious costume in the collection of the Shandong Museum. Successive rulers of China had great respect for the Confucius family, and this Chinese dress was owned by the Confucius family. Not a court dress, nor a daily garment, but similar in style to civilian clothes, the jiqi was ornately decorated and was usually worn during festivals and auspicious ceremonies. The collar of this kimono has a unicorn as the centerpiece, and the four beasts, Xiezhi, lion, tiger, and small unicorn, are woven in color, with a small unicorn as the centerpiece. These auspicious animal motifs symbolize the wearer's outstanding status and nobility.



Figure1: Late Ming Dynasty Folkloric Costume

Sources: Shangdong Museum

From the context of preservation, the folklore of costumes can be recognised as a means of preserving and transmitting cultural traditions from one particular generation to another. All these costumes that are specifically handmade are passed down within families and communities. The primary rationale behind this is to ensure the continuity of cultural practices and generate a sense of culture for the next generation as well. However, with time folklore costumes have been associated with evolving and reflecting the changes of the cultural dynamics (Wu, 2023). These adaptations can further associated with revealing insights into the way a community responds to social, economic and environmental changes. A similar situation has taken place in the folklore artifacts related to costumes in the Late Ming Dynasty. Each costume is a unique representation of the local folklore, traditions and values of a particular group.

Hence, the characteristics of costumes related to the Jiangnan Region can be different from those of other regions, differentiating them from other regions. Such as daily wear jewellery, the late Ming period in the southern region of gold and silver inlaid gemstone jewellery is most common, jadeite, coral and other precious materials are also used in jewellery production. In other areas, often only gold, silver and jade-based, rarely see other gems used. In addition to this, Folklore costumes vary widely across regions and communities. Each costume is a unique representation of the local folklore, traditions and values of a particular group. Folklore costumes often showcase the artistic skills and craftsmanship of a community. They are created with attention to detail and can incorporate various materials, such as textiles, bead features and more (Yang, Yue & Wang, 2021). Folklore costumes are also associated with a preservation in museums and cultural institutions, where they are also associated with educational artifacts. They allow visitors to learn about the traditions, beliefs and history of different cultures. Hence, they play a vital role in preserving and transmitting folklore traditions and are rich sources of cultural expression and understanding.

During the Ming Dynasty, folklore artifacts were discovered. Their design and cultural value reflect ancient China. They were an integral part of daily lives and practices whether it is cultural or religious. They encompass a range of objects that have a notable meaning in people's lives. The artifacts define the refined lifestyle of the people of the period. In the present day, the research on Ming folklore artifacts defines a great artistic value and provides a macroscopic perspective. The vibrant colours of the artefacts are highly praised (Kuang, 2019). Apart from this, as identified by Wu (2023), there are several distinctive features associated with the costume designs of the Ming Dynasty that reflect the fashion and culture of that era. The specific characteristics of costumes may include robes and layers, simplicity and elegance, wide sleeves, headwear, footwear, and accessories. Most of the clothes worn by people in the Ming Dynasty are associated with multiple layers. In this context, it needs to be mentioned that men typically wore cross-collared which were known as pao with a special feature of front opening.

On the other hand, women wore a similar type of robe known as qipao or ruqun, which also included a distinct collar featuring some decorative patterns. Along with

this, simplicity and elegance is another major feature associated with the costumes in the Ming Dynasty. Mainly clothes made of silk and satin were worn by people including solid colours and featured intricate embroidery. Wide sleeves are another major feature associated with Ming Dynasty clothing. Most of the women's clothes include wide and flowing sleeves. These sleeves represent the symbol of prosperity and style as well (Ding & Li, 2019). Headwear was another prominent feature of Ming Dynasty cloth and was worn by men and women. Men often emphasise wearing a gwan which is recognised as the official hat of the Ming Dynasty and represents their social status as well. Along with this, women mainly decorate their hair with different types of hairpins and ornaments. Along with this, more of the women wear their clothes with lotus shoes, whereas men typically wear flat-soled shoes. Accessories include different types of jewellery, belts and different types of ornaments made of pearls and jade. On the other hand, as evaluated by Wu, Su & Zhang (2023), in order to signify the rank and social status different types of pieces of clothing were worn by people in the Ming Dynasty. There were some certain colours, patterns and pieces of clothing present that were reserved for the imperial family. Due to being significantly popular all these characteristics associated with Ming Dynasty costumes had a significant impact on other Chinese dynasties and highly influenced traditional Chinese clothing styles as well.

These discovered designs from the Ming dynasty hold great value in the cultural, societal as well as political areas of China. Observing these designs or artifacts shows how the ancestors of the current generations had cultural and social beliefs. Their religious practices can also be observed through the artifacts as they express the lives of people. Their value-sharing with each other had a great influence on cultural mix-ups. The dynasty allowed foreign influence on their culture. These objects describe the whole historic value of that period. In addition to being valuable objects, fans served as blank canvases for imaginative expression. During the Ming Dynasty, painted fans frequently portrayed scenes from myths, stories, historical moments, and landscapes. The designs were mightily painted in explicit colours and fine brushstrokes, expressing the significance of the narratives or natural scenery.

Data Collection and Methodology

All necessary information for this research is attained through readings of previous research. In the study of Ming folklore artifacts, the study used qualitative research. The researcher will conduct qualitative research through in-depth interviews, document analysis, and fieldwork analysis. The objective of this research is a Ming folklore artifact based on costumes, which belongs to the category of design history, and it is difficult to complete field research. Therefore, I grouped the collected materials of Ming folklore artifacts into three categories: physical objects, images, and texts, and adopted the method of physical research. Second, the overall study of Ming folklore artifacts in objects, images, and texts is a process study that spans time. The researcher sets the study period during the survival of the Ming dynasty and obtains the whole process of folklore artifact based on costumes design activities through long-term

observation of folklore artifacts. The research adopts a holistic inductive strategy to understand the design ideas and design patterns of folklore artifacts.

The purpose and aims of investigating design components, materials, processes, and the use of folkloric artefacts based on costumes in daily life may not be consistent with realism's search for underlying structures and causal mechanisms. In addition, it has been identified that researchers have selected the physical research approach in this research, which entails the inspection and evaluation of physical artefacts. Therefore, this is in line with the positivism research philosophy, which aims to assemble empirical data by direct observation and measurement. As per the discussion of Hu (2021), an investigation into the cultural significance, historical context, design elements, materials, techniques, and the impact of folklore artefacts based on costumes on social and cultural practises in the late Ming Dynasty can be conducted by using qualitative data collection techniques such as interviews, literature, and fieldwork analysis.

Findings

Through the study, it is found that the following design characteristics are found in the costumes of Jiangnan area in the late Ming Dynasty.

Novelty in the form of costumes.

In the middle and late Ming Dynasty, the costumes in Jiangnan formed unique design characteristics. In the form, it paid attention to breaking through the original old clothing form and pursued novelty. On the basis of inheriting the traditional form of Hanfu, there are many innovations in the local area, such as the change from a single stand-up collar to a richer form of cross-neck, vertical collar and round collar. In addition, the soft hats worn by the scholars of the Ming Dynasty are also an example. The Ming Dynasty called this kind of soft hat "fang jin". Gu Qiyuan in its notes recorded the Nanjing city at the time of the dress situation of the scholarly officials with the hat before only one kind of square hat, now appeared " Han jin, Jin jin, Tang jin, Zhuge jin, Chun Yang jin, Dongpo jin, Yangming jin, Jiuhua jin, Yutai jin, Xiaoyao jin, Shamao jin, Huayang jin, Sikai jin, Yong jin " these a variety of names soft hat. In addition to the variety of styles of square jin, the Ming scholars also popular in the square jin decorated with ornaments, common such as "jade knot", "jade circle", "jade vase". As shown in figure 2 of the nanjing museum collection of " Portrait Book of the Ming Dynasty " of "Xu wei", the character wearing a floating jin before the "jade flower-shaped piece", the petal shape is complex, but without losing the decorative interest.

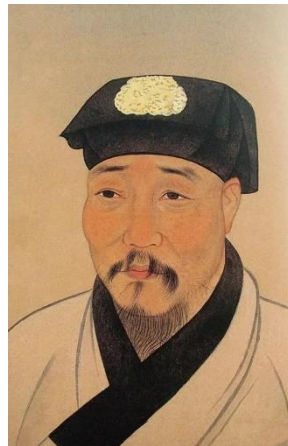


Figure2: Xuwei, Portrait Book of the Ming Dynasty
Sources: Nan jing Museum

Rich decorative patterns.

In the middle and late Ming Dynasty, the decorative patterns of costumes in Jiangnan were richer and more exquisite than those in other regions in the same period. The main decorative motifs of the costumes are botanical, animal, geometric, and artifacts. Patterns have obvious diversification, secularization tendency, especially with auspicious symbolism of the pattern by the consumers. In traditional Chinese culture, the swastika symbol, represented by the character "卐" (Wàn in Chinese), holds positive and auspicious meanings. It is not to be confused with the Nazi swastika, as the Chinese swastika has distinct cultural and historical significance.

The swastika in Chinese tradition is often referred to as the "Wan" character and is considered a symbol of good fortune, prosperity, and well-being. Its roots can be traced back to ancient times, where it was used as a sacred motif in religious and cultural contexts. In Buddhism, the swastika is a common auspicious symbol, representing the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, as well. The Ming Dynasty costumes were often decorated with 卐 and combinations of 卐 and other patterns, such as individual 卐, botanical pattern and 卐, cloud pattern and 卐, and curved water pattern and 卐, and so on. For example, figure 3 is a skirt found in the tomb of Li's family in Meili, Jiaying area in the Ming Dynasty, and the whole skirt pattern is dominated by chi dragon and tiger, back pattern, and 卐.



Figure3 : Skirt dominated by chi dragon an, tiger, back pattern, and 卍 in late Ming
Sources: Jiaxing museum

Expensive fabrics.

It can be seen from the study, the expensive silk fabrics are widely used in the production of clothing. Some silk fabrics and even gold, these fabrics have exquisite craftsmanship, gorgeous colours, exquisite patterns. Figure 4 shows late Ming Dynasty gold brocade, with gold fibers added to the fabric. The brocade is brightly coloured and highly decorative. Generally expensive costumes have with the matching jewellery. Figure 5 shows a gold headdress from the late Ming Dynasty. These jewellery with gold, gemstones by a variety of complex processes, made of sets of wear, gorgeous exception.

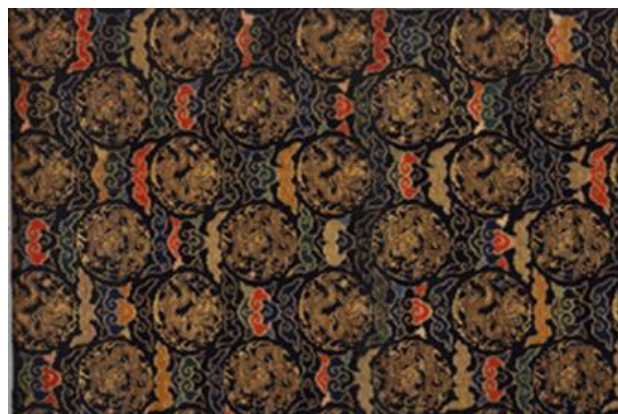


Figure 4: Late Ming Dynasty Embroidered Brocade
Sources: Palace Museum



Figure 5: Ming Dynasty Jewelled Gold Headdress
Sources: Beijing Capital Museum

Conclusion

Costume culture is an important part of the folk artifacts in Jiangnan area in the late Ming Dynasty, and through the study of the design characteristics of the costumes in Jiangnan area in the late Ming Dynasty, this research can understand the conceptual system of the folk artifacts at this time.

From the study, it can be seen that the costumes of Jiangnan area in the late Ming Dynasty had the design characteristics of novel shape, complex and gorgeous decorative patterns, expensive fabrics and exquisite accessories.

From these design characteristics, it can be seen that the aesthetic pursuit of costumes in the Jiangnan area in the late Ming Dynasty was to seek newness, differences and beauty. It can be seen that the unique folk culture environment of the Jiangnan area in the late Ming Dynasty created a unique costume design system in the Jiangnan area.

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