

# Modern Meaning of Han Chinese Clothing(漢服)

Howei · Eun-Young Lee\*\*

Master degree, Graduate school of Clothing and Textiles, Paichai University  
Prof., Dept. of Clothing and Textiles, Paichai University\*\*

## 한 후의 현대적 의미

호 위 · 이 은 영\*\*

배재대학교 의류패션학과 대학원 · 배재대학교 의류패션학과 교수\*\*  
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### Abstract

한 후란 중국의 전통 복장을 말하는 것이다. 한 장(漢裝)이라고도 하며 고대 복장이라고도 한다. 영어로는 silk robe 라고도 한다. 한 후는 한 나라 이후 명나라까지 만주가 정복하기 전인 1644년까지 입혀졌던 중국의 전통복장이다. 최근 중국에서도 전통복장에 대한 새로운 모색이 일어나고 있다. 중국 전통복식으로 대표되는 치파오는 만주족의 한족 말살 정책의 일환으로 간소화 시킨 복식이다. 따라서 중국 전통의복은 만주족에 의해 사양길을 가기 전 고대 한 조의 복식이 중국전통을 대표한다고 할 수 있다.

전통적인 한 후 스타일은 벨트를 매며 여밈이 있고 좁은 소매 혹은 넓은 소매가 특징이다. 한 족이 한 나라, 상 왕조, 송나라, 당나라때 입었던 한 후가 중국의 복식을 대표하는 복식이며, 주나라의 윈의는 튜닉과 스타일의 결합으로서 아직도 상류그룹이 입고 있다. 당나라에서는 동방의 문화와 혼합되어 화려하거나 사치스럽게 수정되었고 만주가 침범하여 한 후는 더 이상 전통복으로 입히지 못하였다.

한 후의 현대적의미를 볼 때 역사적으로는 는 베트남에서 기모노에 이르기까지 그 원형을 볼 수 있고 한 후를 통해 중국전통 복식의 원류를 찾을 수 있다. 연구방법으로 문헌과 시각자료를 활용 하였다. 한 후의 현대적 의미는 전통의 새로운 자각과 세계화 현대화의 노력이라 할 수 있다. 치파오로 규정된 중국복식에 반해 전통 한 후에 대한 올바른 인식과 활용은 세계화와 오리엔탈이미지에 녹아 있는 한 후 디자인의 디테일을 통해 현대적 모색을 활용하고 있다. 충분한 시각 자료가 부족하지만 현대적 노력이 앞으로의 중국이미지의 재고를 가져올 것이다.

**키워드:** 한 장(漢裝)(Han jang), 고 장(古裝)(Ko jang), 한 후의 현대적 의미(Modern meaning of Han fu), 치파오(Qipao), 세계화(Internationalization)

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Corresponding author ; Eun-Young Lee

Tel. +82-17-435-5621, Fax. +82-42-520-5576

E-mail : el@pcu.ac.kr

## I. Introduction

Han Chinese clothing or Han fu (traditional Chinese: 漢服 simplified Chinese: 汉服 pinyin: hànfú Wade-Giles: Han fu), is also known as Hanzhuang (漢裝), Hua fu(華服), or guzhuang(古裝, meaning “ancient costume”), and sometimes referred in English simply as Silk Robe<sup>1)</sup> (especially worn by the gentry) or Chinese Silk Robe. All of these refer to the historical costume of the Han Chinese people, which was used for thousands years until before the conquest by the Man chus and the establishment of the Qing Dynasty in 1644. The terminology Han fu was taken from the Book of Han, it said to “then many people came to the court to pay respect to the King and were delighted with the Han costume [Chinese].”<sup>2)</sup>

Now, Han fu is only used only for historical reenactment, people’s hobby and as a costume of rite of passage ceremonies, or as a ceremonial costume worn by religious priests. It can be frequently seen Chinese television series, films and other forms of media entertainment. However, there is currently a movement in China and overseas Chinese communities in the world to wear Han fu in Chinese festivals and celebration or even daily life.

Hua xia Clothing (華夏衣冠, or called Han Clothing, 漢服) has been known as the Chinese style of clothing for several thousand years. This kind of garments was the one of representatives of millenniums’ ancient Oriental Civilization. In the 17th century, the Ming(明) Dynasty (the last empire of the Han millenniums) was descended by Manchu. Huaxia culture gradually disappeared in people’s life, which included Chinese styles of clothing, Huaxia hairstyles, and Huaxia spirt.

Qipao was thought as typical Chinese costume as a results of ruling policy of Qing Dynasty from Manchuria. However, some people didn’t accept Qipao as traditional costume. After Qing dynasty, Qipao is thought as the modern Chinese traditional

costume. Now today, most Chinese people wear western style costume in daily life.

Han fu influences the costume in East and Southeast Asian countries, which is the Japanese kimono and the Vietnamese áo tứ thân, Since these countries were part of the cultural Sinosphere, the costume of these countries were much influenced by Han fu.

The purpose of this study is to find the origin of Han fu, and to evaluate the modern and traditional Han fu and the movement of Han fu in world. Aesthetic meaning of Han fu, is specially focused deeply. This study though many articles, books, painting and pictures from several countries.

## II. Han fu’s background and style

### 1. Historical background

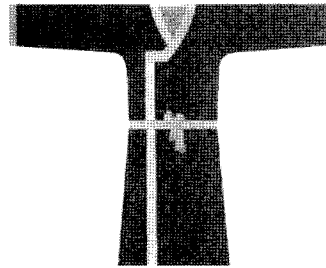
Since 5,000 years ago, the Han Chinese started weaving. Han Costume maintained its unique characteristics for a long time. The Y-shaped collar, belting style (button free) and wide sleeves had been the major symbols of the Sino Kingdom, and they have not been changed since Zhou Dynasty (1027 B.C.) until to the end of Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). As Han people’s culture can represent Chinese Culture, the Han Chinese Costume is one of the most representative costumes in China.

The Western Zhou Dynasty (11th century BC -711 BC), established in a feudal system, consolidated the empire by a strict social class system and formulated a set of extremely exhaustive and thorough etiquette to standardize society and stabilize the country. Each person’s social class was symbolized with different styles of Han fu. As Han fu was one of the important things in the politics, stipulations of wearing very strict.

The form and style of Zhou Dynasty’s Han fu is similar to that of the Shang Dynasty’s with few changes. The style was slightly looser compared to



<Fig. 1> The Western Zhou dynasty costume style  
<http://www.hxtimes.com/articles/clothing/history1>, 4th century BC



<Fig. 2> The Eastern Zhou dynasty costume style  
[www.baidu.com](http://www.baidu.com), 11th century BC

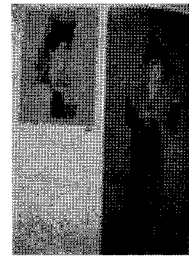
that of the Shang Dynasty's.

There were two kinds of sleeve styles: broad and narrow. The collar were crossed and tied to the right, known as “Jiaoling Youren(交领右衽)”. The Yi had no buttons but had a sash tied around the waist for closure. Sometimes people also hung ornamental decorations of jade on the waist sash as well. The length of skirts and trousers was varied from knees to ground.

In the Eastern Zhou Dynasty, the “deep robe” (shenyi) was appeared with a combination of tunic and skirt. The upper and lower halves were cut separately but sewn as a single unit. An additional change was occurred in the shaping of the left side of the costume into a corner, fastened on the chest. Perhaps because of Confucians influence, disapproving a hierarchical society with social changes based on personal merit, the shenyi was swiftly adopted. There were still existed elite group, and they used more ornate fabrics and grandiose details.

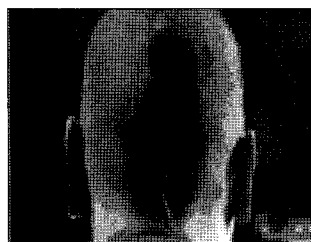
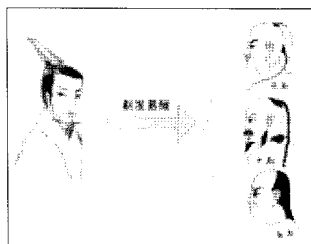
In the Tang(唐) Dynasty, ancient Chinese clothing had directly influenced on the clothing of other

Oriental cultures. The Japanese Kimono was modeled after the normal national clothing of the Han(汉) nation. Wang Wei(王维), a famous poet of the Tang Dynasty, said the origin of Japanese-style clothing was the clothing style of the Han Dynasty, a great dynasty of ancient China.



<Fig. 3> Tang dynasty costume, 仕女圖, 新疆吐魯番  
 Unearthed, AD7th century, [www.baidu.com](http://www.baidu.com)

Unfortunately, the Manchurians conquered China and changed the natural evolution of the Han Costume. Duoergun, one of the Emperor in Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) ordered “All Hans should change their costumes into the Manchurian ones, anyone disobeyed should be executed”. After 50



<Fig. 4> ManChu hair style, [www.baidu.com](http://www.baidu.com)

years of wars, the Han finally gave up their custom and costume, and Manchurian costume became the only legal Chinese Costume during the following 300 years. Qipao and Tangzhuang, although usually regarded as traditional Chinese costume, are not regarded as Han fu by advocates of Han fu revival. Qipao and Tangzhuang are considered to the relatively recent clothing styles, and cannot represent the whole history of Chinese clothing.

After the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, Manchu dress and the Manchu Hair style disappeared quickly. Today most Han Chinese wear western-style clothing, and Han Chinese clothing is largely unrecognized. Recently Chinese people wear Han fu outdoors, it seems Japanese dress.

## 2. Han fu style

The style of Han Chinese clothing can be summarized as containing garment elements that are arranged in distinctive and sometimes specific ways. This may be different from the traditional

garment of other ethnic groups in China. Most notably the Manchurian influenced Chinese clothes “Qipao” is popularly accepted and recognized as the Chinese style of “traditional” Chinese costume.

Han-Chinese clothing had been changed and evolved with the fashion of history since its assumed beginning in the Shang dynasty. Many of the earlier designs are more gender-neutral and simple in cuttings. Later garments incorporate multiple pieces with men commonly wearing pants and women commonly wearing skirts. Clothing for women usually accentuates the body's natural curves through wrapping of upper garment lapels or binding with sashes around the waist.

Each dynasty has its own style of Han fu as they evolved only few styles are disappeared and recorded in history.

A complete Han fu garment is assembled from several pieces of clothing.

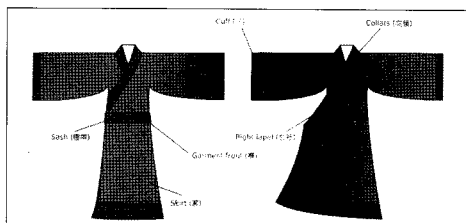
- a. Yi (衣): right wrapped style robe, and worn by both sexes.
- b. Pao (袍): wide long type coat, worn only by men in Han fu.



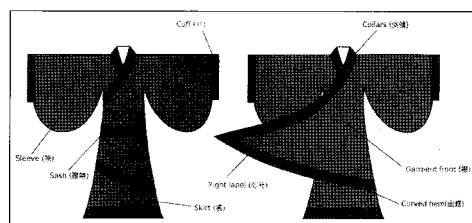
<Fig. 5> typical Manchu costume, AD 1644-1911  
中華五千年文物集刊服飾篇上



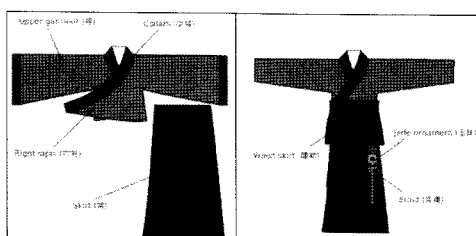
<Fig. 6> typical Han costume style, AD 7th century  
<http://tiba.baidu.com>



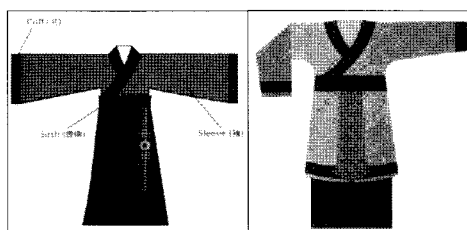
<Fig. 7> Zhiju Shenyi style, after AD 220  
<http://www.artcn.cn/art>



<Fig. 8> Quju Shenyi style, 221 BC-before AD 220  
中華五千年文物集刊服飾篇下



<Fig. 9> Ruqun style, 206 BC-AD1644  
<http://tieba.baidu.com>



<Fig. 10> Bixi style, 11th century BC  
 中華五千年文物集刊服飾篇上



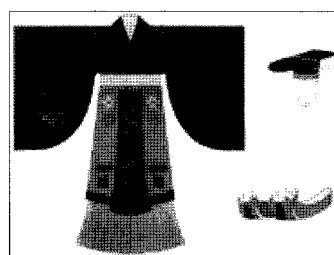
<Fig. 11> 歌樂卷圖,  
 Song, Beizi



<Fig. 12> 吳全節十四像



<Fig. 13> 沈度像



<Fig. 14> Mianfu style

Song, Changyi, after 206 BC chaofu, AD 1368—1644  
<http://www.cn-cosmetic.com/images>, AD 1368—1644 中華五千年文物集刊服飾篇上

- c. Ru (襦): Open cross-collar shirt. The Ru means the short Chinese-style jacket. The short Chinese-style jacket skirt means the short Chinese-style jacket matches skirt.
- d. Shan (衫): Open cross-collar shirt or jacket that is worn over the Yi.
- e. Qun (裙) or Shang (裳): Skirt for women and men respectively.
- f. Ku (褲): Trousers or pants.

### 3. Ancient Han fu' influence

In the ancient times, Han fu had influenced many nationalities ,including: Northern Wei Dynasty, Japan and Vietnam.

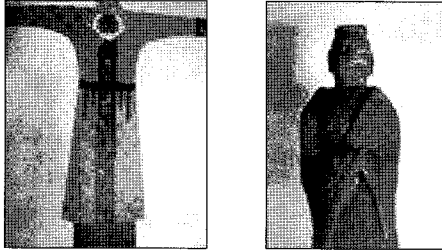
- 1) The Chinese Northern Wei Dynasty Xianbei Nationality been changed began wear Chinese costume

XiaoWen emperor of Northern Wei Dynasty

forbade wearing Xianbei clothing and people must wear Chinese clothing on AD 495th January 13, Northern Wei Dynasty. XiaoWen emperor carried out a series of policies vigorously, which includes:

- (1) People were forbidden to wear Xianbei clothing and must wear Chinese clothing;
- (2) People were forbidden to speak Xianbei language and take Chinese as only general language;
- (3) All Xianbei people moved to Luoyang's must take Luoyang as the native place and be buried in Luoyang. It was not permitted to send the body back to the hometown Pingcity. Change Xianbei surname into Chinese surname. It started from the imperial family by changing the surname Tuoba to Yuan, "Many other surnames had been changed which is countless."<sup>3)</sup> It was also stipulated that the eight major surnames of Xianbei Nationality had the same social status with Han people four prime aristocrat surname Cui, Lu, Li, the Zheng. It was stipulated that other Xianbei aristocrats also belonged to a certain social grade.

(4) Xianbei people with the surname were forbidden to get marriage.



<Fig. 15,16> Northern Wei Dynasty Xianbei Nationality costume, AD 386—534  
<http://www.cn-cosmetic.com/images> [www.tianya.com](http://www.tianya.com)

## 2) Japanese clothing kimono

The kimono is called “Zhuo wu” or “the Wu clothing” in Japan which means that the clothing was transmitted from the place of Wu (the area of Jiangsu and Zhejiang now) in China<sup>4</sup>). In Japan’s Nara period, the same time with China’s middle Tang Dynasty, Japan sends out many ambassadors to China to study China’s cultural art, the laws and systems including the clothes system. At that time they also promulgated “clothes command” by copying Tang Dynasty’s system. The initial period kimono copied the Tang style. The later splendid 12 single Chinese coats are also called “the Tang Dynasty clothing” (Li North Korea formal clothes long coat are also called the Tang clothes, although they already had many national characteristics). Although the kimono defeted from Chinese clothing,



<Fig. 17> Ancient Japanese costume  
<http://upload.wikimedia.org>



<Fig. 18> Kimono  
<http://img3.pcpop.com>

after a long period of development, it has already had own national characteristics. After JiangHu period, the waistband of female clothing gradually broadens and the knot of the waistband transfers to the back forming all sorts of styles which is the major difference between kimono and the Chinese clothes. The decorative design on kimono dress also has obvious Japanese characteristics.

## 3) Vietnamese clothing

Vietnamese was called JiaoZhi in ancient times (it was called “Annan” in China), A.D. 968 years, Leader Ding (Ding huan) established Ding Dynast (Da Qu Yueguo), and became an independent feudal dynasty. Two years later (AD970) he conferred himself as emperor.<sup>5</sup>) Their clothing, especially the palace formal clothes, were almost the same as that of Chinese Han Nationality. Take Vietnamese last emperor’s clothes for example, it was almost the same as that of the Ming Dynasty emperor but just a little smaller. More than 200 years after the Qing occupied China, Vietnam, a country connecting with China’s south area, still preserved Ming Dynasty’s clothes, which could be reflected in the precious pictures and others documents preserved by France colonizers from the end of 19 century the initial period of 20th century. There is a typical example: the elegant imperial robe wore by Fang Su Ya (Auguste Francois,1857 year on August 20th-1935 July 4), French Consul in Yunnan province in the picture taken in 1898 ’s picture, was misunderstood by many people to be



<Fig. 19> Ancient Vietnam costume  
<http://cache.tianya.cn>



<Fig. 20> Ancient China costume,  
AD 1368—1644

the emperor's imperial robe ancient times or the attire in Chinese drama. In fact, the clothes of Fang Su Ya were the court dress of Vietnamese emperor, which looked the same as the court dress of ministers in Ming Dynasty.

#### IV. Modern meaning of Han fu

China is an ancient nation. 5, 000 years of civilization has given birth to the unique Chinese culture. Confucianism in ancient China occupies a major position, so China's costume shapes also been branded a profound Confucian "stigma". Confucianism attaches great importance to etiquette and values the doctrine of the mean, therefore Chinese traditional costume has always accompanied with the characteristics of complexity and variety. This fully embodies the Chinese traditional costumes culture. When Eastern culture and Western culture mixed together, China's traditional costume and Western costume systems mingled with each other, which makes garment sector pays more attention to the cultural essence of the ancient orient and the East complex flickering eternally on the costume arena.<sup>6)</sup> In the modern fashion design, a full and sufficient combination of the style, and local, fabric characteristics, patterns and various small elements is made in the traditional Chinese costume, which makes Chinese cultural essence continuously popular in the fashion world. The long finished oriental culture no longer only represents the traditional and national essence; it is

also quickly becoming a popular world fashion. Even the fashion industries which innovate quickly every year put an eye on the East Complex and absorb inspiration and creativity from it.

##### 1. Internationalization and Modernization

###### 1) Internationalization—Han fu's integration with the Western clothing system

Compared with western fashion system, traditional Chinese clothing takes the human body first and the three-dimensional structure as a foundation. At the same time focus on personalized decorations and changeable novelties. At the end of the 20th Century, under the premise of Western dress patterns acting as the world fashion standard, many factors of Chinese fashion apparently are not compatible with the modern fashion in a short term. So there is a need to further understand of Chinese traditional costumes and use the art of design to re-integrate and use the fashion clothing carrier for re-interpretation and then manufactured garments to re-promote traditional Chinese costume.

In recent years, Chinese fashion industry has developed by leaps and bounds, and a group of influential designers has appeared, which greatly promote the development of Chinese fashion industry. Of course, the improvement of life quality is the fundamental factor to stimulate the development of the fashion industry, because people could spend more money on the latest fashion and have a better condition to try different styles. Although foreign fashion brands flooding in China's apparel market, "China Complex" is still hesitate in many Chinese people's mind, so charming and unique "China Fashion" began to win certain market. Along with the development of science and technology, People's tempo of living becomes speedy, fashion cycle become faster. At the same time, as the new century approaches, garment sector set off a retro fashion. As the Oriental economy develops rapidly, people interest

to the Eastern culture more, which makes Chinese ancient costumes once again the focus of the world fashion. However, as fashion usually displays the sharp feature of the times, the retro pop will certainly not be a simple repetition of past. So the clothes will be packaged and reinterpreted in modern style. Therefore, the modern design of Chinese costumes should not only reflect the traditional culture rhythm, but also has to meet the modern aesthetic requirements.

Today, Fashion designers create with mixture of traditional and modern ideas. These new fashions also incorporate ancient motifs such as guardi deities, lions, and masks of Chinese opera characters. Chinese bronze is another source of printed, woven, embroidered, and applied design for clothes. Some of the distinctive designs include dragons, phoenixes, clouds, and lightning.<sup>7)</sup> Motifs from traditional Chinese painting also applied in woven or printed fashion designs.

## 2) Modernization—Han fu's applications in a modern fashion design

In the modern fashion design, the fold has become one of the most classic design elements in fashion design.<sup>[3]<sup>8)</sup></sup>

One of the other elements are patterns, nature itself does not matter what it sense, people according to their awareness of the concept and let the prevailing patterns have a certain symbolic significance, so the patterns have the symbolic meaning of happy, blessed and

beautiful. Modern fashion design can draw on ancient dress patterns in the form of refining, slim. At the same time, the decoration with religious totem is also a valuable material. From the point of view, many local features of ancient clothing can be fully applied into modern fashion design. It is common binding, big garment front, and decorative Chinese knot in fashion design. The color of ancient costumes have strict rules, many colors of the mare still used in fashion trend even today. These colors can be used for the creation of new materials clothing. Implicitly, ladies' style can be manifested through these colors, which provides more rich forms in modern fashion design.

Fashion styles which use Chinese traditional costumes as a source of inspiration, shows an extraordinary vitality. Although these garments are packaged with modern design methods, they are still full of the unique taste of Chinese culture. In these fashion with plenty of Chinese flavor, the common front details are big, embroidered hem and Chinese knot and so on. Hong Kong designers such as YinTai wei and Zhang Tianai has already became the focus of attention of Fashion media as they are the representatives to traditional source.

Chinese fashion does not only affect the Chinese people, but also become the leading part in other famous foreign designers' new works. A few years ago, the famous fashion designer Christie · Dior brought a "China wind" on the T stage, which has attracted worldwide attention towards Chinese style. Designs showed in



<Fig. 20> FAMORY  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki>



<Fig. 21> SILIQUE 2006  
中華五千年文物集刊服◆篇上



<Fig. 22> AnnaSui 2006  
[www.baidu.com](http://www.baidu.com)



<Fig. 23> Dior 2006  
<http://www.kepu.net.cn>



<Fig. 24> Escada 2006  
<http://campus.eol.cn>



international famous brand which are very familiar to Chinese people. These top garments designed with the application of Chinese elements express a luxury brand designer's understanding of Chinese elements, and it also reveals the top brands' attention towards china. More than 5,000 years of civilization and the long and splendid dress culture was fascinate to those foreigners, had to our Chinese people to realize that: Chinese tradition is not for only Chinese people any more, it is for over the world.

## 2. Identity—Modern Han fu movement

Identity , it mean's a person's self - affiliation (or categorization by others) as a member of a cultural group in the dictionary. In China, Han fu movment is a kind of reinstate, and find real tradition, and unity of historical confidence.

Han fu movement (traditional Chinese: 漢服運動 simplified Chinese: 汉服运动), or the Han fu subculture in China is a movement carried out to reinstate or revive Han fu in the early part of the 21st Century. Most of the people who support this movement are young people. Besides, it is supported by some internet forums which are trying to rediscover their cultural identity<sup>9)</sup>.

The main activity is to wear Han fu in public places, this is the reason for a public interest of Han fu creation.



<Fig.25> Han fu movement  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Ruqun>

According to the Asia Times Online, the Han fu movement may have begun around 2003 when a man called Wang Letian from Zhengzhou, China, first wore Han fu in public.<sup>10)</sup> This fact influenced others to follow him and the Han fu movement started from the forums which used initially about Han fu, but later it began to cover the cultural identity of China. Since the start of the movement, people's interest and discussion of Han fu has been observed.

Some people believe that the Tangzhuang (Qipao and Cheongsam) has had a tremendous influence for overseas and many foreigners to recognize them as the one of Chinese traditional costume but Han fu does not share the same influence or recognition in today's environment. But such recognition would be similar occasions of recognizing the Scottish kilt as a traditional costume, even though it was invented by someone and is not exactly traditional or historically correct.

Many feel that Han fu is out of date and old fashion. A similar example is why people in the West do not wear historical period costume (British people do not wear costumes of Elizabethan times in everyday life). Since Han fu is theoretically a historical 'period costume', it is unsuitable for wearing in the modern progressive society. However, since it has been worn for the majority of Chinese in history, it would not be considered as a historical "period costume." In fact, the use of Qipao is relatively recent, and would classify as a historical period costume.

In February 2007, a proposal to use Han fu for the official clothing of for the Chinese 2008 Summer Olympics was submitted to the Chinese Olympic Committee.<sup>11)</sup> After considering the proposal and debating on what the official clothing should be, the the proposal was rejected by the Committee in April.<sup>12)</sup>

## V. Conclusion

The study displays the traditional beauty of Han fu, its status in China and its development trend in future according to the research on the origin, development, basic pattern, different dynasty pattern of Han fu and Modern meaning of Han fu.

Han fu came from the aesthetic background of several thousands year of Chinacivilization. According to Tang Dynasty scholar Kong Yingda's official commentary to Zuo Zhuan and Shang Shu, Chinese clothing plays an important role in the Chinese ethnic identity. It says, "In China, there is the grandeur of rites and social conduct; that is why it is called Xia (夏). There is the beauty of dress and decoration; this is called Hua (華)." 13) The words Hua and Xia combine to form the word Huaxia (華夏), which is a name that is often used to represent the Chinese civilisation.<sup>14)15)</sup>

The Han fu culture is broad and profound, It consisted mainly two parts: "upper body part called Yi, lower parts of the body part called Shang" (Its meaning was the skirt in the ancient's times), "ShenYi" (one-piece style), "RuQun" (Short clothes) and so on types. Beside this, the ceremonial garments are the grandest official formal clothes of the king and officials. People always wear ShenYi, but RuQun which is only dressed by women. Whereas workers usually wear short clothes for the upper body and trousers for the lower part body. Headgear is an important part of Han tribe costume's decoration.

Modern meaning of Han fu is internationalization, Modernization, in modern China Han fu's identity. Internationalization means Han fu's integration with the Western clothing system. When it combines the style, parts, fabric characteristics, pictures and some little things of traditional Han fu with western cutting technology and appreciation sufficiently, it makes the costume have a new package and definition. Modernization means Han fu's applications in a modern fashion design. Chinese long history provided a wealth of material, pattern, color

particular style of Chinese philosophy, and many other elements which can be applied in modern design. China's traditional culture is one of the world properties. Various countries and people express the different form of costumes. This kind of relation is truly international connotation.

Some people thought that the Han nationality didn't have fixed national dress, and it had different costume styles. In each dynasty, such point of view is still interesting. It confused the two concepts of national and dynasty. Dynasty changes with history, however, the nationality does not change.

Finally, I want to say that, after years of development, Chinese costume has a certain visible influence and established a good image in the whole Chinese society. In my opinion, In festivals or ceremonial, Han fu can be used as activities costume, and I believed that Han fu can adapt easily to modern society after certain appropriate improvement. In nowadays' modern fashion design, Many designers combined the traditional and modern and produce a modern ethnic style, it is successful and impressive. However, do not copy the routines and to have their own innovation is the most important point to express Han fu's significance of beautiful, and it makes the world has a better understanding of Chinese beauty.

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