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Regional Cultural Differences in China Reflected on Men's Traditional Costumes

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Key words: Regional cultural differences, Men's traditional costume, Chinese tradition

Introduction The Chinese traditional culture is very extensive and profound, and within the dominant there are distinctive sub-cultures in terms of ethnicity as well as geographic region. A notable difference was observed between the northern and southern regions of the country in many different aspects, including lifestyles, personality, and culture. China's North-South culture is generally bounded by the Yangtze River. In southern China, rich rain, water and mild climate helped form a distinctive and delicate atmosphere. However, in northern China, the dry, sandy and harsh weather helped form the northern people's simple and aggressive characters. These distinctive characteristics as well as lifestyles were often reflected on their respective subsystems, including architecture, folk arts, clothing, and other items (Cai, 1992).

Purpose of the Study The main purpose of this study was to examine the North-South culture difference in China through a particular cultural item- man's costume during the Modern Time in China. Clothing, especially the folk costume, is an important cultural tool that can be used as an expression of social and cultural identity (Barnes & Eicher, 1992; Karlson, 2007). Traditional costume represents the culture and historical heritage and embodies the past for particular members of a group (Eicher & Sumberg, 1995). The Modern Time covered in study was defined as the period from the late Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China (Cui and Zhang, 2009). This period is a very important transition period in the history of Chinese clothing (Shen, C,2002).

Traditionally, there were four types of long-sleeved tops for men's costume in China (Table 1), including Pao (a long robe), Ao (a short top garment with filling, like a coat), Gua (a short top garment without filling, but made of heavy fabric, like a jacket), and Shan (a short top garment made of thin fabric, like a shirt). These four types of men's costume differed from each other in terms of length, filling, and thickness of fabric. Due to the weather and distinctive lifestyles, there were also variations between the North and the South in terms of usage and structure of these top garments. This study aimed to compare the North-South culture difference in terms of the structure as well as pattern and color scheme of these four types of men's costume.

Methodology A convenience sample of 119 cross-shaped plane folk costumes from a folk costume museum in China were used in this study. Table 1 describes the makeup of the 119 costumes between the North and the South. First, a quantitative approach was taken to evaluate the difference on the

structural attributes in terms of clothing length, collar height, sleeve length, sleeve circumference, bust girth, and hem circumference. Then a comparison using T-test analysis was made between the North and the South for each type of costume. Secondly, a qualitative approach was taken to compare the color and pattern of the costumes between the North and the South.

| | Pao | Ao | Gua | Shan | Total |
|-------|---|---|--|---|-------|
| |  |  |  |  | |
| North | 16 | 17 | 18 | 9 | 60 |
| South | 24 | 5 | 24 | 6 | 59 |
| Total | 40 | 22 | 42 | 15 | 119 |

Findings: Affected by the differences of weather and culture between the North and South, costumes in these two regions demonstrated significant differences in terms of structure, color and pattern. 1) *Pao* was usually worn in the relatively cold weather. Noticeable differences were observed between the *Paos* from the North and the South in that the *Paos* from the North had a taller collar, a smaller hem circumference than those from the South. The ratio of the bust girth to the hem circumference was much smaller for the *Paos* from the North, suggesting a much straighter cylinder shape than the *Paos* from the South. 2) *Ao* is a jacket with filling, with length to crotch and is made of thick fabrics. The cuffs can be wide or narrow. The *Aos* were often worn in early spring or late fall. The *Aos* from the north was noticeably longer than those from the South. And the *Aos* from the North also were much shorter in sleeve length, but larger in hem circumference. The much wider hem circumference allowed the people in the North to wear more layers under the *Ao* during cold weather. 3) *Gua* has clothes length to waist. Cuffs of the northern male's *Guas* were wider than the south, and the sleeves and length of cloth were shorter as well. 4) *Shan*, with relative wide cuff girth, was usually made of light and thin fabrics and worn in warm weather, often in Summer. A *Shan* can have a collar or no collar. The *Shans* from the North, in general, had a wider cuff girth, shorter sleeve, wider bust and hem circumference than those from the south, reflecting a much relaxed and rough lifestyle in the North vs. a much delicate and well maintained lifestyle in the South. Additionally, a qualitative evaluation of the color and pattern of the 119 costumes indicated that the color and patterns in the South demonstrated a theme of simplicity, brilliance and quiet, leading to a graceful and elegant aesthetic feeling. On the contrary, the costumes from the North were characterized by vivid colors and rigorous patterns, reflecting the bold, enthusiasm and honest characteristics of northern people.

Conclusions Under the premise of Chinese traditional culture, the results of this study revealed the noticeable structural and design differences between the male costumes from the North and the South. The findings will not only enhance the market competitiveness for men's costume design, but also can provide guidance and inspiration for modern menswear design practice.

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