

FROM EASTERN INSPIRATION TO UNISEX FASHION: A CASE STUDY ON TRADITIONAL CHINESE SHENYI¹ ATTIRE

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ABSTRACT

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Unisex fashion is not simply a trend but the new normal under the veneer of people preferring to express self-identity through their garments. However, following the modern standard fashion design process and techniques, prototype or draping, designers define the gender selected in advance, which presents a problem between the traditional design method and the new concept. This study aims to provide a solution and inspire references for the design of unisex fashion. Studies mainly use the past hundred years of Western culture as a basis for unisex fashion. However, people should understand unisex fashion in a global cultural context. This study conducts a review of the history of ancient attire, in particular, unisex clothing in the western and eastern regions. We present different concepts and methods in Western culture, such as the ancient Greeks' Chiton and ancient Romans' Tunic. However, Eastern traditional attire has referred to the unisex concept by other methods, such as Shenyi in China and Jongkraben from Thailand. We take Shenyi as a case study because of its classic 2D technique and influence in Asia. This timeless unisex attire taken from history, modernization, garment structure, and wearable skills enforces the analysis of unisex fashion. However, we not only explore Shenyi but also compare it with other ancient clothing. Through this study, we expect to inspire the development of a new paradigm in the design of unisex fashion.

Keywords: Unisex fashion; ancient clothing; Eastern attire; Shenyi

1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between the garment and the wearer works at two levels of meaning—denotation and connotation. Choosing clothing is not a unidirectional mode of thinking but a balance of a consideration of self-identity and social needs (Barnard, 2002). Every clothing choice is a performance after rehearsal. With modern development, people begin to reconsider some social rules in a fashion that is reasonable or not, such as age and gender. Today, people tend to show self-identity but not rule by the existing labels, such as age and gender. The way people dress is a direct presentation of their identity. Similar to age, gender is not necessarily a factor in choosing one's clothes. Following this concept, the modern fashion trend aims to provide fresh thinking and choices for consumers to balance a good garment performance in different situations.

¹ Shenyi is traditional Chinese attire for males and females.

A survey called “Sex Equality: State of the Nation 2016” conducted by the Fawcett Society found shifting attitudes to gender identity, with people who may not fit neatly into two gender categories or fit stereotypes of “male” and “female.” Moreover, 44% of the survey participants believed that they could express their gender as a range of identities, and 68% of young people argued that gender is non-binary (Olchawski, 2016). An increasing number of people accept the possibility of gender being fluid. Therefore, the boundaries of fashion in binary sex are fading away. People tend to show self-identity but not be ruled by the existing labels, such as age and gender. The way people dress is a direct presentation of their identity. Similar to age, gender is not an essential factor in choosing one’s clothes.

Fawcett also pointed out that people often use the recognition of gender as a social construct to constrain and oppress others. Gender is a concept with widespread purchase (Olchawski, 2016). Thus, recognizing and exploring the changing ways of how the public understands gender is relevant.

Unisex fashion is a progressive terrain looking to explore the future of human society and culture in terms of gender. The discussions have continued to develop over time, in the context of people preferring to show self-identity via fashion, unisex fashion will be the consumers’ choice.

Studies take Western culture as the central entity to study and discuss unisex fashion based on Western history and culture. However, people should understand fashion history as a global cultural phenomenon (Lillethun and Welters, 2018). Thus, scholars should not exclude Eastern culture but, rather, take a global view.

This study aims to focus on Chinese Shenyi as a case study due to its significant effect on Chinese fashion history, given its broad range and long-term influence. As recorded, the Zhou Dynasty shaped the Chinese attire, Shenyi, with a strict system in social levels, gender, age, and situation. However, even with the complicated rules, Shenyi served as a basic clothing worn from noble to plebeian, from old to young, and from men to women. People expressed their identity by the presence of recognized items in their outer clothing; decoration, colors, and materials (Yeh, 2000). Shenyi served in this role for a long time, over a thousand years in the history of Chinese attire beginning around the Shang Dynasty (1600-1100 BC) and fading around the Wei-Chin Southern and Northern Dynasties (220-581 AD) (Sun et al., 2017). Shenyi trend also affected other eastern countries, such as Japan and Korea.

Reviewing the history of Western and Eastern attire, the relationship between gender and fashion was not as evident as today. Some designs were common to males and females, not just Shenyi from ancient China but also the Chiton from ancient Greece, the Tunic from ancient Rome, and the Jongkraben from ancient Thailand.

Ancient unisex attire is worthy of discovery and study, especially the differences in garment structure between Western and Eastern cultures, the 3D draping style, and the 2D pattern. They reached the same objective by using varied design techniques and approaches—fashion for men and women as universal clothing.

This study takes perspectives from Western and Eastern traditional attires to reconsider modern fashion by studying the ancient unisex attire of Shenyi to connect with the current unisex fashion trend while analyzing the history, structure, and conditions with a role in determining the development of unisex fashion in the future. We hope to inspire unisex clothing design by analyzing the structure and technology of this ancient Chinese clothing.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 History of unisex fashion

Over time, people from different backgrounds have discussed the issue of gender neutrality and developed various related concepts through the approach. Unisex fashion is a progressive issue about exploring the future of human society and culture in gender.

Professor Jo Paoletti explained that the terms “sex” and “gender” share similar meanings about sex, but some have defined them differently since the 1950s. “Sex” refers to the biological and physiological nature given at birth, whereas the concept of “gender” is a personal and social construct (Paoletti, 2015). Thus, people begin to think about and accept the possibility of physical and psychological gender inconsistency and the concept of genderless identity. Jo Paoletti also pointed out that perhaps people are acutely sensitive to gender because they are used to seeing the world from a binary viewpoint.

Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell summarized the brief history of unisex fashion to describe how people begin to rethink a divided gender concept and reflect on the gender experiments in design (Chrisman-Campbell, 2015). Therefore, unisex is an issue that continues to evolve. Among these different concepts, designers create varied works based on their understanding of the field. People have made various attempts

to merge, separate, or combine gender characteristics, and through varying interpretations of the concept of unisex, designers have created different works.

In 1913, French designer Paul Poiret created the first trousers for women, called harem pants, which were loose-fitting and wide-legged, and inspired by Eastern culture. This influence was evident in the designers borrowing men's suits and transferring the design into womenswear—the classic dress that Palazzo Style Trousers by Coco Chanel² and Le Smoking by Yves Saint Laurent³. Not only womenswear but also the trend of the Peacock Revolution⁴ returned color and decoration to menswear, such as David Bowie wearing glamorous and beautiful costumes. The gender clothing movement did not just change fashion but also bodies. Fashion is not only about clothing but also the possibility of physical reproduction and desire. The gender boundaries of men's and women's clothing were no longer distinct after this period.

The notion of the 1960s as the “counterculture” drew on the “youth culture,” “pop culture,” “sexual freedom,” and “the women's rights movement” (Yeh, 2000). The young generation began to create their clothing with personal preferred clothing styles with different directions being the core concept. Women strived for their rights and took clothes to be a symbol to defend the gendered rule. The movement also pushed the clothing boundary, blurring from womenswear to neutral to release women's bodies and exercise freedom. In another way, menswear abandoned the rigid simplicity and order and returned to color and display in the Peacock Revolution. The movement also pushed menswear from the other direction to neutral. The gender boundaries of men's and women's clothing were no longer distinct, given that the two genders moved towards neutral.

This fashion upsurge explored an open-ended paradigm and affected subsequent fashion trends. The traditional distinctions between male and female dress became blurred. The flared trousers and jeans were all widespread universal styles for both men and women. One classic example was the blue denim jeans that were a counter-cultural garment but widely worn and subsequently promoted by global brands. Clothing became increasingly unisex and informal. Another unisex style example in this trend was bell-bottoms for men and women.

As the designers begin to escape from the traditional thinking of dividing the target customers into gender groups, a modern perspective of providing a style identity has emerged. Designers expressed their opinions in the report “In Fashion, Gender Lines are Blurring” in *The New York Times*. They took the concept of unisex as new thinking for everyone, be they designers, brands, or the final consumers. The spirit, style, form, and material are more important than gender for fashion designers. Trisha Balster concluded that brands and designers open up their perspectives when they create work without considering the gender of consumers and instead focusing on personal style (Balster, 2017).

2.2 Traditional attire of unisex fashion

2.2.1 Chiton from ancient Greece (750 BC–30 BC)

The Chiton comprises a simple design, a single long rectangular piece of fabric without cutting or sewing but just a large rectangle of material in wool, linen, or silk. The garment lies on the body loosely but not fitted and is just held by a belt, pins, buttons, or simple stitching (Moulton, 1998). The wrapping of the garment on the human body creates its rhythm and dynamics. Each item is unique to present the spirit of freedom. Figure 1(1.1) shows the two different Chiton styles as Ionic and Doric, but with the same wearing concept.

Throughout the entire period of their history, the manufacturing method of the ancient Greeks' clothing remained the same. Only its dimensions, fabric, decoration, and ornaments changed. In some periods, the Greek attire became elaborate with rich patterns and embroidery, but the basic form of the garments did not change.

2.2.2 Tunic from ancient Rome (753 BC–476 AD)

Early Roman attire was similar to that of the Greeks. However, with time, the Roman paradigm developed new features, even specialized to social class, age, and the occasion. The difference emphasized the decoration but not the form. Despite social differences, the Tunic was still popular with men and women and people of all classes (Yeh, 2000).

² Palazzo pants are long women's trousers with a loose, extensive leg that flares out from the knee. Coco Chanel spotted these elegant men's trousers and cleverly adapted the design for women in her collections in 1922 (Cole, 2016).

³ The Autumn–Winter 1966 collection of Yves Saint Laurent introduced the most iconic piece: the tuxedo (Le Smoking). It was an unusual design wherein he adapted the traditionally masculine suit for the female body. The sleeves fitted, and the waist belted, while the wide pants were flattering for the legs (Yves Saint Laurent, 1966).

⁴ The Peacock Revolution was a period of a massive shift in men's fashion during the 1960s and 1970s in which male fashion returned to color and displayed flamboyant elements, such as embroidery. Vividly printed shirts also became acceptable parts of the everyday male dress code. The icon of the Peacock Revolution, David Bowie, was famous for his strong dressing and makeup (Yeh, 2000).

The basis of Roman attire comprised two main garments—a tunic and a cloak—the tunic was worn underneath and considered domestic clothing, as shown in Figure 1(1.2) (Yeh, 2000). The Roman Tunic is more complicated than the simple Greek Chiton; which is a single rectangle with uncut and minimal stitching. The Roman Tunic is a patchwork garment of several pieces sewn together; it comprises rounded and cross-shaped pieces of material but still keeps a rectangular shape. The Tunic has two pieces of material, front and back, stitched together at the sides but with holes or short sleeves for the arms. The wearer slips the garment over the head and fastens it with a belt in the waist (Moulton, 1998).

2.2.3 Shenyi from ancient China (772 BC–8 AD)

A chapter from a Chinese classic, the Book of Rites, explained the meaning of Shenyi in Chinese. It is clothing in which the upper part is connected to the bottom part to cover the body deeply, as shown in Figure 1(1.3) (Shen and Wang, 2018). An aristocrat would wear a decorative coat to cover Shenyi as base clothing, whereas a plebeian would wear it on its own.

Shenyi is an icon of traditional Chinese attire with a strict system of social levels, gender, age, and situation. However, even with the complicated dress rules, Shenyi became the basic clothing worn from noble to plebeian, from old to young, from men to women. People expressed their identity through the presence of recognizable items on their outer clothing, in terms of decoration, colors, and materials (Yeh, 2000).

2.2.4 Jongkraben from ancient Thailand (600–1300 AD)

Jongkraben is a traditional Thai style bottom for males and females, as shown in Figure 1(1.4). It is a piece of lower-body wraparound clothing worn with unique and complicated draping techniques (Chantararat, 2017). Jongkraben takes a single piece of fabric and requires different tying and rolling steps that result in a pair of voluminous pants. However, Jongkraben evolved into puffed-up pants with intricate details and several aesthetic features (Chantararat, 2017). In Thailand, Jongkraben can trace its usage back in the Dvaravati⁵ period until the later years and is still prevalent in some formal occasions today (Lily, 2019).

Jongkraben has many styles for different uses to satisfy social or working demands. However, regardless of gender and status, people wore Jongkraben as a common option. An aristocrat is adorned with ornaments such as earrings, bracelets, and belts. The female attire is similar, although they drape a light fabric over their breasts (Chantararat, 2017).

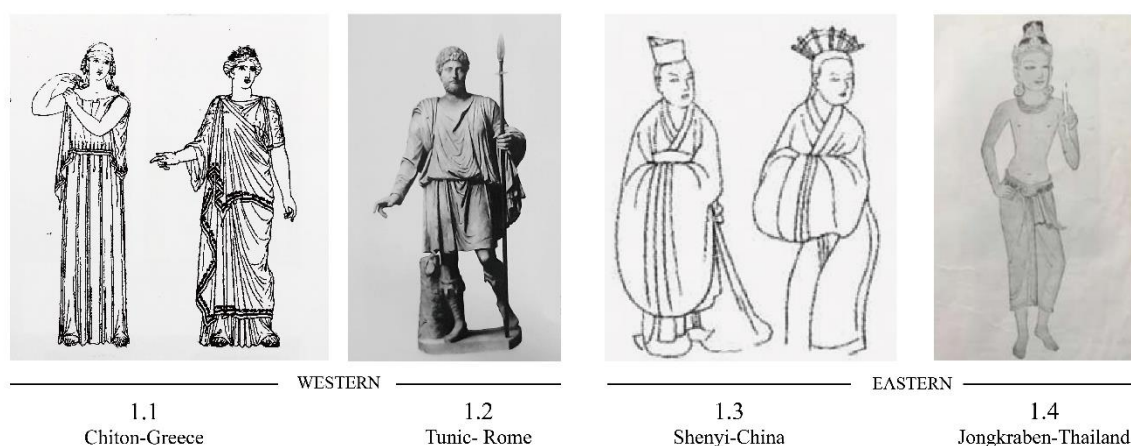


Figure 1: The List of Ancient Unisex Clothing

2.3 Discussion

In the development of fashion history, regardless of its origin, the difference in clothing for gender is a critical issue. From the studies of the four ancient unisex attires, a common point is worthy of discussion: with the simple clothing, the design is a common option for the public, from noble to plebeian and from men to women. Among universal clothing, people present social and gender identities via decoration but not in the clothing itself. Thus, the relationship between gender and clothing is not as strong in ancient periods as in modern fashion. In other words, the connection between clothing and gender was a social construct. The difference between European gendered clothing tended to be active during the 14th century. The connection

⁵ Before it became known as Thailand, Dvaravati was an ancient kingdom of Southeast Asia, which also refers to a culture and an art style that flourished from the 6th to the late 11th century.

between gender and clothing was deployed for social and political purposes. An excellent example of gendered clothing still exists in modern times: pink clothes for girls and blue for boys as a standard and straightforward concept called “kids’ wear.” However, this difference is just what the producers have defined by themselves for commercial purposes (Paoletti, 2012).

This study develops the idea to rethink the issue by separating attire into two elements: decoration and function. The decorative elements are easy to recognize within the groups, indicative of gender, social level by colors, materials, motifs on the fabric to address the social and cultural needs rapidly and efficiently. However, from the four types of ancient unisex attire, the structure and function of attire evolved slowly. The limited skills could bring about this situation in ancient periods. Decoration is more easily and quickly recognized in terms of the social need and cultural symbols compared with function.

In the following paragraphs, the study would like to study Shenyi in terms of history and design features, focusing on the function and structure to inspire the unisex design practice and keep the decoration space for designers to experiment with personal style.

2.4 Features of Chinese traditional Shenyi Attire

2.4.1 History of Shenyi

The traditional Chinese garment structure consists of the upper and bottom halves, connected or not, in two styles. The first one was the upper and bottom halves not connected as a “two-piece garment,” and the other was the upper and bottom halves connected as a “one-piece garment.” Shenyi is an example of the latter in Chinese, which means “the upper half is connected to the bottom half to cover the body fully,” as explained in a Chinese classic text, the Book of Rites. Before Shenyi appeared, the non-connected style was the primary attire in ancient China. However, the connected style, Shenyi, became mainstream and affected subsequent Chinese clothing history for a long time. In this study, we observe three periods of Shenyi development in Chinese clothing history.

The early period was followed by the appearance of Shenyi since the Shang Dynasty and shaped the Zhou Dynasty with a complete attire system (Sun et al., 2017). People obeyed the dress code strictly in social levels, gender, age, and situation. However, even with the complicated attire system, the design of Shenyi served the needs of people in all classes, no matter if they were noble or plebeian, old or young, male or female (Li, 2016).

Throughout the whole Shenyi era, the unisex concept as the dress option was a universal choice in subsequent years. Shenyi led the upper and bottom halves connection style as the mainstream choice during the Qin Dynasty and the Han Dynasty. Figure 2 presents the stone carving of the Zhu-Wei mausoleum, illustrating the fact that males and females of the Han Dynasty dressed in Shenyi (Shen, 1992). This ancient Chinese attire kept its role as the fundamental and universal option for a long time until fading around the Wei-Chin Southern and Northern Dynasties (Sun et al., 2017).

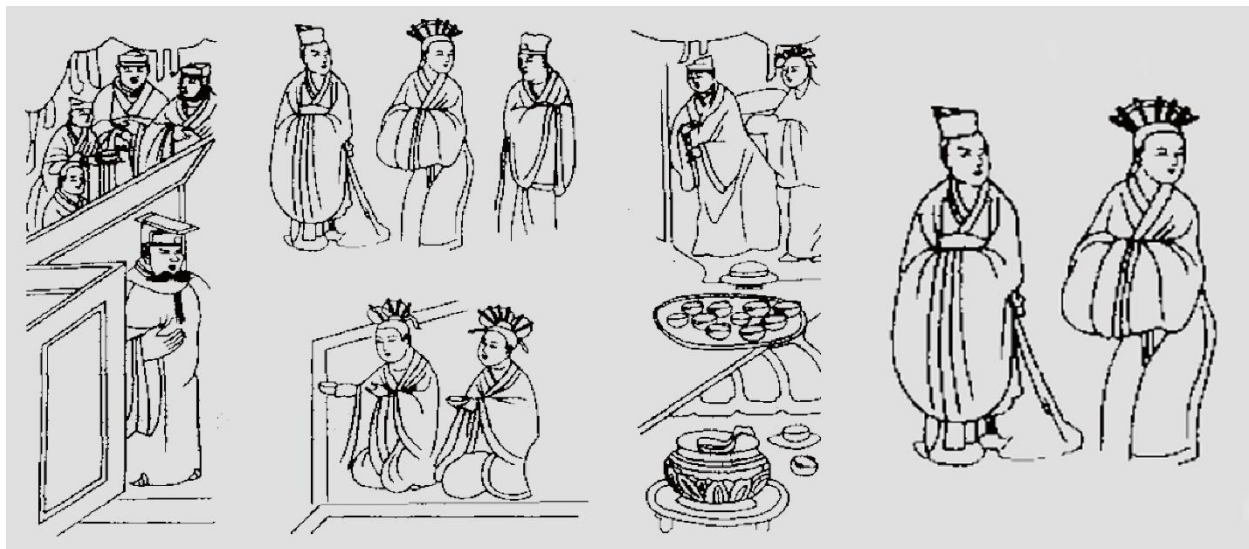


Figure 2: Males and Females Dressed in Shenyi from a Stone Carving of Zhu-Wei Mausoleum During the Han Dynasty

From the record, this study sorts out the archaeological Shenyi in the early and mainstream periods, as shown in Figure 3 (Shen and Wang, 2018). The outline of Shenyi had undergone no visual change but only

minor modification in details, such as sleeves—the more expansive style, the narrow style, the length of sleeves, as shown in Figure 4 (Shen, 1992).

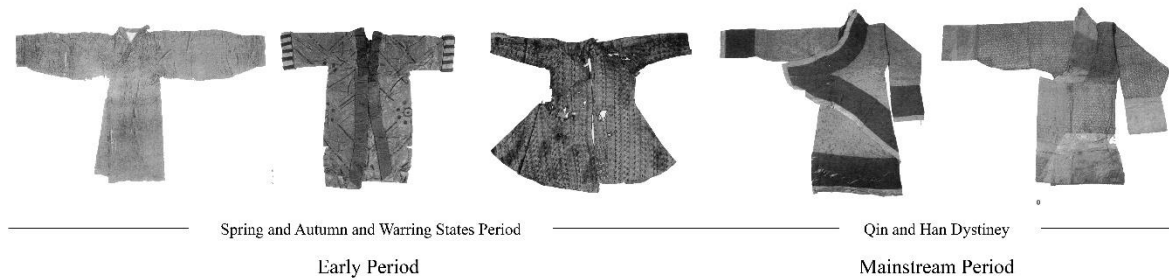


Figure 3: The List of the Archaeological Shenyi in the Early and Mainstream Periods



Figure 4: The Three Shenyi Styles

As an icon of traditional Chinese attire, Shenyi has a significant effect on Chinese fashion history because of its broad range and long-term influence. It had occupied three periods: beginning around the early Qin Dynasty, with the main period in the Qin Han Dynasty, before disappearing in the Wei–Jin North–South Period. However, Shenyi’s influence remained relevant in subsequent years. Chinese scholars recorded and defined Shenyi since the ancient period, such as Zhu Xi of the Song Dynasty, Huang Zongxi of the Ming Dynasty, and Jiang Yong of the Qing Dynasty (Sun et al., 2017).

2.4.2 Design feature of Shenyi

A chapter from a Chinese classic, the Book of Rites, explained the meaning of Shenyi in Chinese. It is an item of deep clothing where the top is connected to the bottom to cover the body deeply (Shen and Wang, 2018). Given its critical role, Chinese scholars recorded and defined Shenyi since the ancient period, such as Zhu Xi of the Song Dynasty, Huang Zongxi of the Ming Dynasty, and Jiang Yong of the Qing Dynasty (Sun et al., 2017).

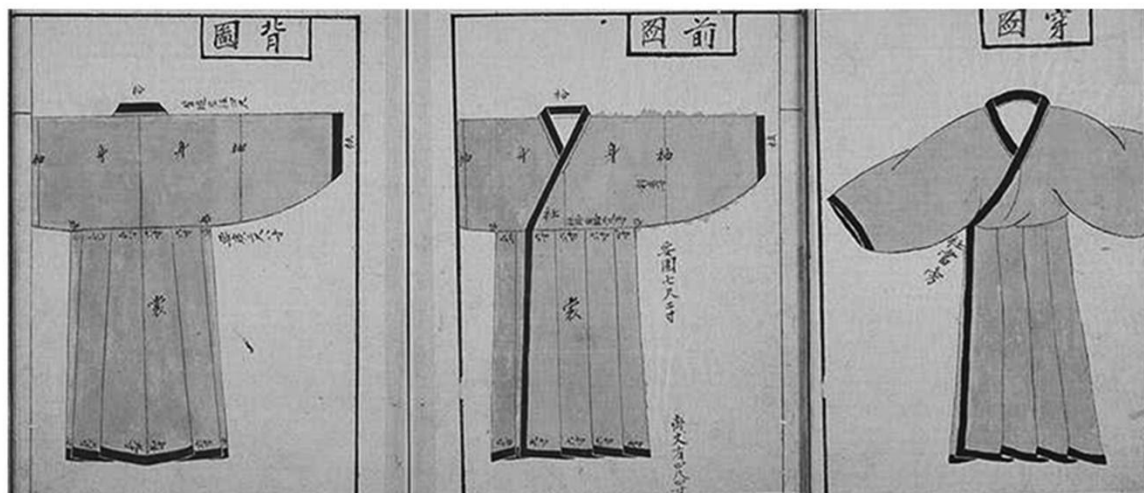


Figure 5: The Template of Shenyi in the Work of the Japanese Scholar Nakai Riken

The Japanese scholar Nakai Riken also studied and drew the template of Shenyi, as shown in Figure 5 (Riken, 1765). The study took the template of Nakai Riken to point to the four design features of Shenyi in common consensus: the upper and bottom connection, the square collar, the length to the ankle, and the extra cover, as shown in Figure 6 (Yeh, 2000).

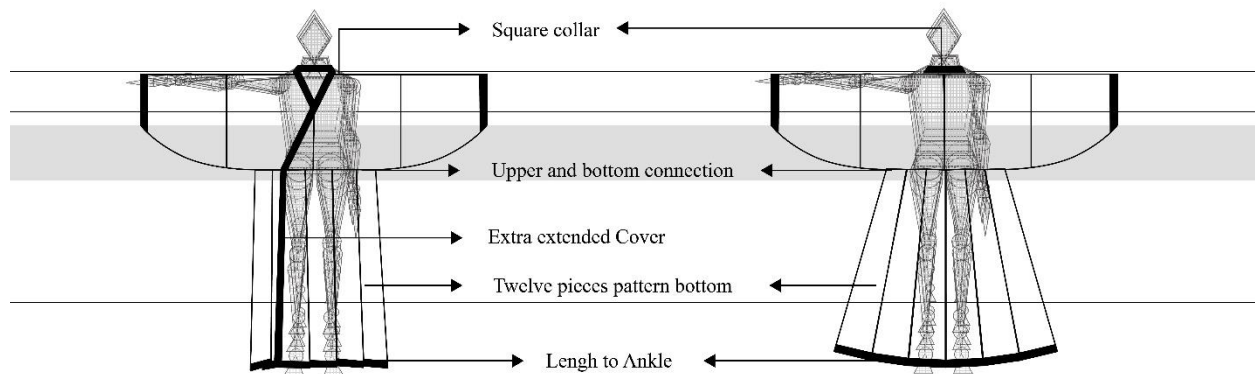


Figure 6: The Design Features of Shenyi

3. METHODOLOGY

This study is practice-based research in applied design via content analysis. This paper is the basis for practice.

Although the content analysis is too narrow to focus on ancient unisex clothing as a whole, we take Shenyi as a case study from fashion history. On this basis, we touch on human ergonomics, clothing structure, and wearing technology to capture the design inspiration for modern unisex fashion as a reference. Moreover, we do not only focus on Shenyi but also compare it with other ancient clothing.

4. ANALYSIS AND PRACTICE

We obtained some inspiration from the reviews of unisex fashion and ancient clothing, especially Shenyi. To determine its connection to fashion design, we consider the analysis and practice an essential part of this study.

The study of unisex fashion refers to bisexual bodies and, therefore, takes both male and female bodies into consideration. Here, taking an ergonomic point of view is necessary to observe the required conditions between body and fabric to satisfy the functional need. Moreover, we analyze the structure of Shenyi and extend our findings to practice in fabric observation to reveal the design idea from the process of the garment's construction.

4.1 Review from ergonomics

This case study aims to define a new prototype taking the universal design of the unisex user as the first step. Following the data of human ergonomics (Tilley and Henry Dreyfuss Associates, 2001), setting up the details of the model and then planning the functional layouts are necessary to build the structure of the basic pattern. Considering the essential clothing structure loading, we transfer the aligned line of human ergonomics from the ground to the shoulder line, as shown in Figure 7.

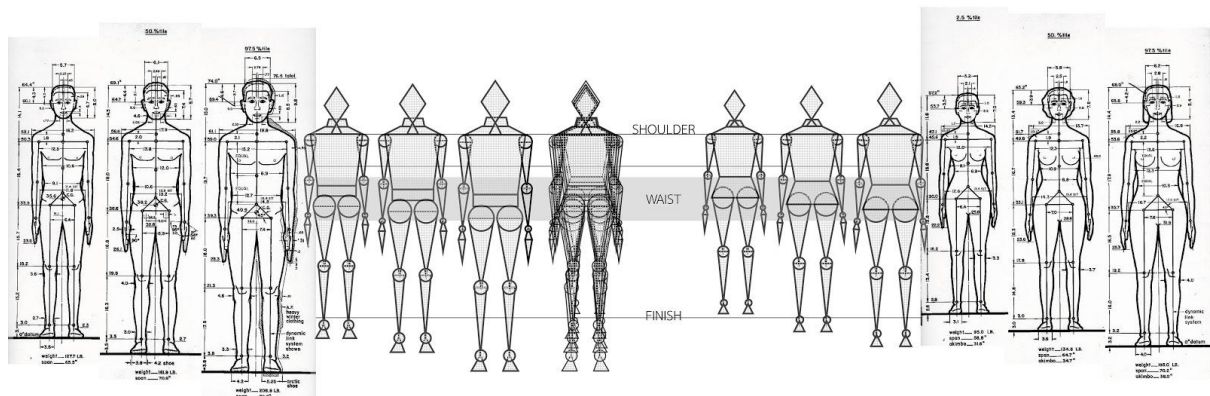


Figure 7: The Illustration of the Application Area in the Table of Ergonomics and the Defined Human Body

After considering the human body in its varied sizes and its genders to define the corresponding area of operation, we select the applied field of fabric functionality, and align the shoulder line for essential structure loading, along with the waistline area and the ending area. We use the aligned shoulder line as the base to settle the waist area by choosing the highest from the shortest women and the lowest from the tallest men to contain the whole waist area. We define the hemline by using the feet of the shortest woman. We present the numerical expression of the application area shown in Figure 8(8.1) in the real fabric, as shown in male and female mannequins in Figure 8(8.2).

Moreover, from the silhouette line of males and females presented together, the gender features are not visible because they almost cover the body. We only observe a slight difference in the width of the body. We associate this silhouette presentation with the ancient Greek Chiton and Roman Tunic as classic examples which appeared in unisex history.

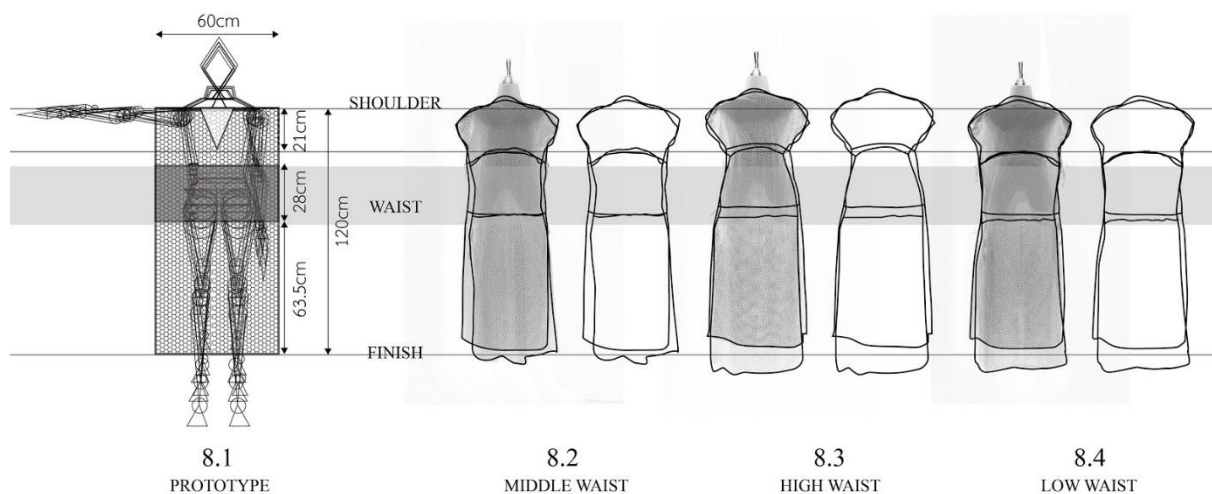


Figure 8: The Prototype and Fabric Prototypes Presentation with Different Waist Positions

After the shoulder test, we tie the waistline in two different positions, high and low on the waist area, as shown in Figures 8(8.3) and 8(8.4). We conduct comparison loading in clothing structure but could change the silhouette significantly. We could also fix the shoulder point in function, but the waistline could be flexible. Designers can use the silhouette changing and flexible waist area to create their personal style.

An excellent example of the silhouette transformed design in unisex history is *Le Smoking* by Yves Saint Laurent, who applied the men's tuxedo form to women's haute couture. The designer not only widened the shoulders but also lowered the waist to elongate the ratio of the upper body. By changing the silhouette to increase its muscular quality, this design changed the temperament of attire in gender and the traditional perspective on women's shorter upper body ratio.

4.2 Practice of Shenyi

We combine the template of the Japanese scholar Nakai Riken and the ergonomics application shown in Figure 7 to analyze the structure of Shenyi: the essential shoulder point, the inner waist connection by tying,

and the extra fabric to cover and fix, as shown in Figure 9(9.1). After the analysis, we define a new Shenyi prototype with the ergonomics application area shown in Figure 9(9.2) and produce a fabric prototype as worn by male and female mannequins shown in Figure 9(9.3).

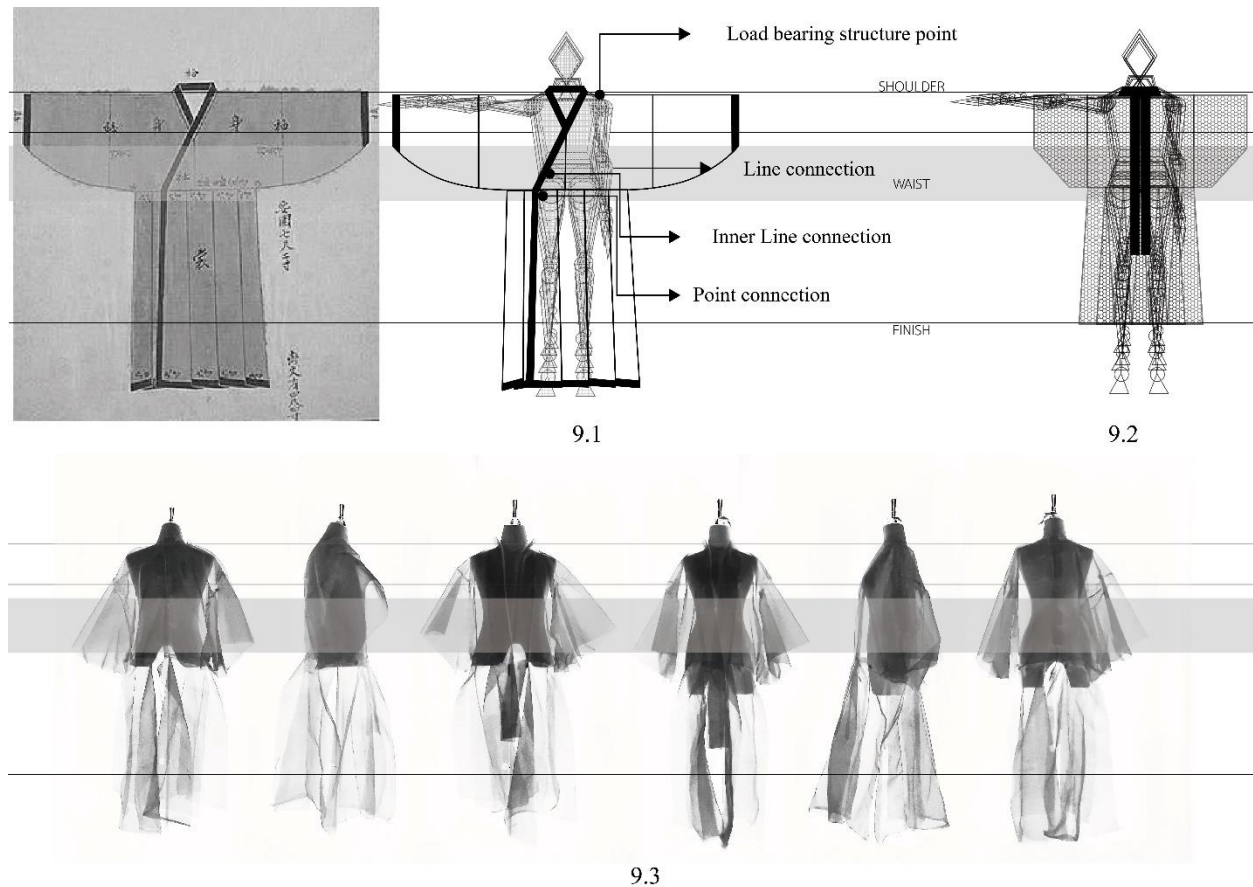


Figure 9: The Analysis of Structure from Traditional Shenyi and the Experimental Prototype of Shenyi Presented on the Male and Female Mannequins

4.3 Findings from practice

From the actual process following the analysis of ergonomics and defining a prototype of Shenyi, we obtain some novel findings as follows:

4.3.1 2D prototype

Two technological systems exist in garment design: flat pattern making and fashion draping. Draping refers to positioning fabric on a purpose object form to develop the structure of a garment design in 3D using intuitive thinking. Shenyi belongs to flat-pattern-making thinking in the 2D concept where designers must imagine the presentation on the human body. Our analysis of the template of Shenyi indicates that the straight line composes rectangles to complete the pattern, as shown in Figure 9(9.1). With the straight line, the producer could easily cut and sew because of the technology of the time. Likewise, the defined prototype follows this concept.

4.3.2 Rectangle prototype and multi-piece

The rectangle pattern is not only easy to cut but also fully utilizes the material. Unlike curved designs, this pattern does not waste fabric. Moreover, combined with the concept of multi-pieces and the rectangle prototype, designers can arrange the whole pattern in a cloth. The literature review also mentioned that the dimension concept of Shenyi considered the completed pattern and matched the dimension of the fabric. These two findings indicate that the measurement of the prototype was not fixed but flexible. Designers can adjust the garment's dimensions, such as the fabric width, to reflect the trend of saving material. This concept reveals that ancient people respected the object and its frugality in design and construction.

4.3.3 Large fabric

The classic book "Shenyi Kao Wu" explained the measurement of Shenyi and various fabrics used. Another chapter of the Book of Rites also mentioned that to fit different requirements, the measurement of the material must be large enough (Bi, 2013). The design also needs a large piece of fabric to cover the human body

for different sexes and sizes and reach the achieve wearable for men and women in a universal way. However, the large size of the fabric also causes some problems, making it difficult for the user and wasting the producer's materials.

This study also compares the fabric acreage of the traditional Shenyi and defines a prototype, as shown in Figures 10(10.1) and (10.2). By the calculation, the defined prototype uses 64.8% of the fabric used in the traditional Shenyi. The result shares some ideas for further studies: people consider the fabric and pattern rule traditionally, yet they could apply a modern sizing concept to adjust the design, such as defining the suitable application area with ergonomics, which could save on the usage of fabric.

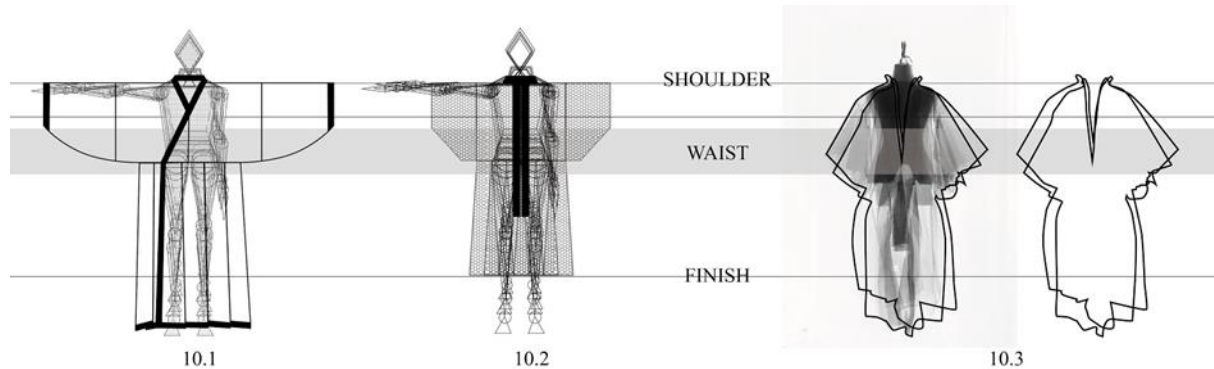


Figure 10: Shenyi Dimension and Silhouette Comparison

4.3.4 Closed silhouette

We place the defined Shenyi prototype work on different body types but a similar silhouette, regardless of gender. The design has encircled the human body within the silhouette of the work. We place the same Shenyi prototype on male and female mannequins to outline the outfit. Following the illustration given in Figure 10(10.3), deciding which shape is feminine or masculine is difficult. We only observe a slight difference in silhouette with the same fabric prototype because of the different positions on the respective shoulders. An excellent example for designers taking a similar concept within the closed silhouette as an interesting phenomenon is the famous “oversize” design in modern fashion periods.

4.3.5 Fixed sewing and unfixed waist belt

In some ancient pattern cases, users had to follow only one pattern making, which meant that all bodies must fit in the outfit. Therefore, the fabric dimension has to be large enough. However, even with multi-piece pattern designs, designers used one large piece of fabric to fit different bodies. Except for the basic pattern, an additional design is to use a belt to tie on the waist and thereby fit various bodies. Belt-tying is the only design to suit individual shapes inflexibly.

No matter how flat pattern making and fashion draping are trending to fit the body for a 3D garment. For this purpose, the folding skill appears in the different positions necessary for menswear and womenswear. Figure 11 shows the classic culture-style prototype defined by Japanese Bunka Fashion College⁶: the folding dimension and position reflect the fitting intention to emphasize the human body.

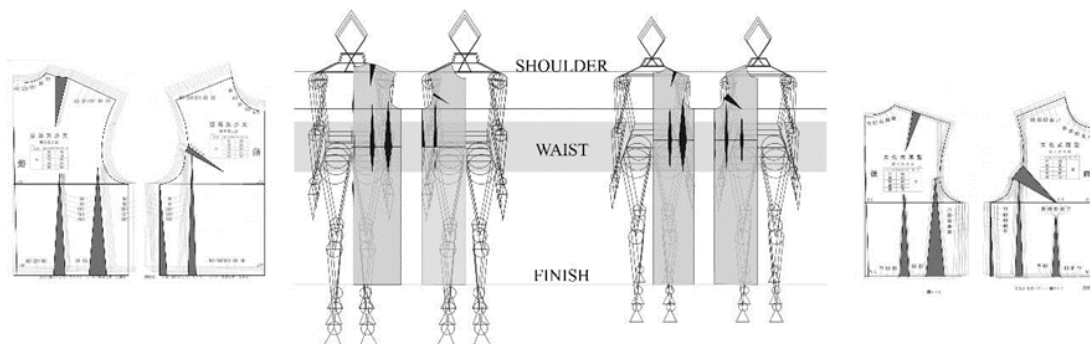


Figure 11: The Pattern-Making Template

⁶ Japanese Bunka Fashion College defined the “cultural prototype” since the 1930s as the prototype designed by Asian ergonomics and applied widely in the region. The study’s prototype took the “new cultural prototype” published around 2000 with adjustment.

Combining the analysis from the structure of Shenyi and other ancient attire, we find another way of thinking: no fixed folding by shifting to flexible folding.

In comparison, in modern society, ready-to-wear fits and emphasizes the shape of the body. People opt for close-fitting clothes in the design available. If unisex fashion designers can keep the covered condition in design with the modern concept, then they view gender as non-restricting. They will also look for a balance between the traditional 2D style and ready-to-wear, breaking down the boundary between menswear and womenswear because of the flexible design.

5. CONCLUSION

During the vital period of unisex fashion, the genderless concept has flourished not only in this area but in many fields. However, a tricky problem exists in traditional design methods limited by gender, while modern concepts would like to blur the boundaries of gender in fashion.

To address this problem, we analyzed the ancient unisex clothing of Shenyi in terms of fashion history, the modernization of clothing, human ergonomics, clothing structure, and wearing technology. We also examined other ancient unisex clothing for comparison. Through this research, we provided some solutions as a reference for the design of unisex fashion inspired by Shenyi and other ancient unisex clothing as follows:

5.1 Relationship between gender and clothes is not necessary

The review of the history of clothes, regardless of their origin, revealed that ancient clothing did not refer to gender seriously. People recognized gender in other ways, such as through hairstyles or decoration. Therefore, the relationship between attire and gender was not essential and could be reduced in genderless fashion today for people that is not suitable in rigid bisexual outfits.

5.2 Silhouette removed or blurred

With the closed silhouette that covers the feature of gender shape, people pay attention to design itself and reduce the personal biological shape, focusing on personal identity and preference. The user can choose their favorite motif or design to express their preference freely without being limited to their biological features. Considering gender but not sex in developing the modern genderless concept, new generations pay attention to personal identity and present it in a variety of ways, including fashion.

5.3 Balance between traditional clothing and modern ready-to-wear style

From the study of Shenyi, ancient people considered a fabric and pattern rule that fits different body needs. Consequently, they used large measurements of fabrics and wasted materials. For this reason and from the actual process, this study suggests that designers could add the modern size concept to adjust their design. Ready-to-wear is a standard option in modern society, given that the Industrial Revolution provided few size options for people to fit in. The balance of conventional and modern design methods could be a solution, such as separating consumers into size groups instead of gender groups.

5.4 Style is more important than sex

From the study of ancient unisex clothing from Shenyi and other ancient garments, we conclude that the vital concept for the modern genderless fashion designer is style and not sex. No matter who is going to wear this design, the body placed into the outfit is fine. This conclusion aligns with the report "In Fashion, Gender Lines are Blurring," which argued that the designer should focus on personal style to attract consumers who care about the design itself but are not limited in the gender department when they go shopping (La Ferla, 2015).

5.5 New choice for consumers besides the neat gender group

The inspiration provided by the Chinese unisex attire to modern unisex fashion is not just in function but also in critical concept. In Asian culture, the sexual shape is not the point of the outfit, hence, Shenyi was a common option for ancient peoples' garments. The co-option concept is, thus, excellent for unisex fashion to take a proper role in commercial fashion. In the marketing field, Trisha Balster pointed out a similar opinion in rethinking unisex without being limited to the traditional sexual system (Balster, 2017). Personal alternatives provide a new path for design, marketing, and consumerism in the future.

For consumers, unisex fashion provides fresh thinking and more choices to express personal style without the restrictions of gendered expectations. For the fashion industry, marketing promotes everyone who enjoys the design directly. An experimental example is the London department store, Selfridges, which created a new shopping area and a website to display gender-neutral clothing in 2015 (Chrisman-Campbell, 2015). Keeping an eye on the consumers' behavior for gendered fashion is relevant to the fashion industry.

As designers begin to break away, they shift from the traditional thinking of the target group divided into gender groups to a modern perspective of providing an identity style. Likewise, mutual recognition of conceptual styles is critical in fashion design.

Unisex fashion is not just a flash trend but the new normal in commercial apparel, located as a new option besides standard menswear and womenswear for consumers. In the new normal commercial industry, the role of the designer is now to develop new thinking about design and escape from the traditional design process.

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