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WOMENS DRESS OF THE ORIENT \* CHINA, JAPAN, INDIA.

Costumes of the East are in general more interesting than those of the West. Because the changes have been comparatively few the basic lines remain the same. More thought is given to design of material, embroideries, quality, and color. So often there is an inner meaning to certain colors or designs, reasons for certain details that reach back into history. This is clearly understood by the oriental woman, but to us this is seldom appreciated, and slips by without notice. A hidden wealth of interest which is hard for us to bring to light.

When thinking of womens dress in China, most of us have one type of dress come to our minds, and to us that is Chinese. Or having once seen a Chinese woman in native dress, we need not look further to complete our picture. But how far from the truth we soon find this to be. Styles do change in the Orient, though those changes to us may seem slight. Geography is one of the fundamental causes for natural differences. The vastness of China is beyond our comprehension. In the extreme south the climate is practically semi tropical, and to the far north, they can expect severe cold in winter. Houses have little or no heat so their dress must be such as to keep them sufficiently warm.

Another contrast is between the coastal cities and the interior. In a modern city such as Shanghai, foreign influence is strongly felt both in styles and material. Our American films may be seen any day. So what is worn in Paris, London or New York may be seen the next day in Shanghai. But in the interior, China is still China and foreign influences penetrate slowly if at all, and there you will find more truly the style of the Chinese women. But even as I make this statement of the interior of China, I am aware of the trek of the countless thousands of the educated, well-to-do Chinese from the occupied coast cities to free China in the west. For with them will go so many influences common to modern city life that will be new and foreign to those of the interior. Certainly the life of China is in transition, and we cannot foresee how great or extensive those changes will be.

How often when looking at pictures we are led to believe at first glance that the women in China wear the trousers and men the skirts! Yes, women do wear trousers, but so do the men, but the latter often wear over them a long coat which



gives the effect of a skirt. With the women while wearing the trousers, their jacket is apt to be short, to the hips, and in certain sections the trousers will be fuller. The trousers and jacket combination is surely to be seen worn by country women or servants, and ofcourse by young girls. Other women might wear the short jacket in their homes, but on the street would be seen with a long coat which gives the appearance of a skirt.

Most of us are familiar to some degree with the characteristics of this dress. Its stand up collar opening in the front with small buttons and loops, the opening continueing down the right side, under the arm, and all the way to the hem. At the side seam, on both sides of the skirt are slits varieing in hight according to the fashion. In modern Shanghai it may be up to the knee. Sleeves usually full length, may be short in summer.

The student class invariably wears the long dress rather than the trousers and jacket. It is close fitting and long, giving them a slender, willowy appearance.

The simplicity of the cut of the dress makes an ideal opportunity to show the quality and design of the materials used. Beautiful brocaded materials are seen at their best. Satins and silks of all kinds are often glorious in quality, for China has led the world in the discovery and manufacture of silk. Cotton ofcourse is the common material used when silk is out of the question. Colors in unusual shades are often most becoming against their olive complection. In the warmer seasons their love for color is easily seen, and the shades used are as varied as flowers themselves. Among poorer classes, and in the country, blue<sup>is</sup> the predominating color found everywhere.

Embroidery has always been a favorite form of trimming. This was especially true in the old days of the Imperial Court. Designs were dictated by the seasonal flowers - peony in the spring, lotus for summer, chrysanthemum in the fall, and yellow plum blossom in winter - Each must be kept in their period, and the time of changing from one season into another was dictated by the Court. These same principals to a lesser degree were followed throughout the country. And though now there is no Court to dictate, the custom has been well established. Today though embroidery is still used, it is being replaced by the use of bands and braid around the collar and down the sides of the dress. Buttons too are quite important and interesting to notice, and often show the slight variations of style from one year to another. They may be made of twisted cord or the material of the dress, in intricate designs, or to suggest various



flowers etc. They are unusually clever and attractive.

Where warm clothing is needed in winter, quilted dresses are used, and as many layers of such as may be desired. For those who can afford it, fur is used as a lining. Many different kinds may be seen from rabbit to sable, and beautiful in quality. Wool is practically unknown, even for winter clothing.

During the last year or so, war conditions have left their mark on women's dress. Quieter shades in color are more often seen. Black itself has become quite common, being practical for the more strenuous life that many women must now live, and when in the open is less conspicuous from the air. Sturdier materials and less in trimming have naturally followed. War and modern life even in China have to be met in a matter of fact, practical manner.

Undergarments differ in various parts of the country. To the north they may bind their body from the arm pits to the hips with bias, flesh colored silk. Then they put on pajamas, pleated in at the waist in front and back and held in place with a tape. This is followed by the outer garment or dress. In the south the body is not bound except for something in the nature of a brassiere, then loose cotton under pajamas, and last the jacket and trousers or dress.

One of the strangest customs found anywhere, and certainly one of the most unfortunate, was the binding of women's feet. A most distorted sense of beauty, and one wonders that it could have held the people for so many generations. Having once bound her feet in childhood, a girl was ever after limited in her ability to get about. Life was for her to be primarily within the courts of her own home. If she must go any distance outside, what we would call walking distance, she must be carried in a chair or some form of conveyance. Naturally those who were servants or country women, who must go about more freely to do their work, have normal unbound feet. So the contrast between one class or group of women is strongly marked. Within the last decade or so it has become unlawful to bind the little girls' feet. Still a law cannot change feet that have already become deformed in this way, and many older women are seen in any city hobbling along on what seem to be stumps. It looks painful and is certainly a most ungainly walk. In the interior, where changes come slowly, binding the feet may still continue to a small degree. But we are thankful for the countless thousands of little girls who are being given a chance to grow up in a more normal and healthy way.



The shoe seen commonly is a flat soled slipper with cloth top. This may be a simple dark cotton material, or a gaysatin embroidered. The better soles are of leather, though among poorer people, layers of old cotton material, glued together is often used. Modern girls in the coast cities wear fancy high heeled slippers, or any shoes such as found in our American stores. What changes a few generations can bring!

Ornaments are very popular with those who can afford them, and ofcourse among the wealthy may be of great value. There may be ear rings, bracelets, finger rings, or hair ornaments. They may be only of glass or stone, or jewels of real value. It is but the responce of women the world over to their love of beauty and a desire for ornamentation.

And so when we ask " What is the well dressed woman of China wearing today?" we are met by other questions "In what part of China does she live? Is she holding to what is purely Chinese, or has she come in touch with the western world and is responding to its leadings?" As she answers these questions may she judge true values, to adopt new ideas that may add to her physical comfort and meet some of the practical needs of modern living. At the same time may she hold to the beauty and charm of their own materials, designs and colors, hold to their incomparable art of embroidery, and I hope they will not throw away the simplicity, attractiveness and individuality of their straight, full length Chinese dress. Then will east and west meet, each giving the other something of their best.

In Japan we have come to expect the usual Kimono with its long straight lines, wrapped close about the figure. To us it is so thoroughly Japanese, I was surprised to learn that it is a style of dress borrowed from the Chinese back in the 14th Century. Now it is more at home in its adopted country than in the land where it originated . This but follows the leading of so many of the arts and industries now carried on in Japan, which we have come to learn were first established in China.

In Japan the age of the wearer is plainly reflected in the Kinono that she wears, in both color and design. Little girls wear extremely bright colors and large patterns, red and pink are always popular for them. As she grows into her teens, kimonos are still bright and gay, but designs a bit more conservitive. Married women wear subdued blue, grey, or brown, with the design quite simple such as a pin stripe or small all over conventional designs. Older women will be seen only in dark simple



type kimonos. As some one has put it " she becomes a little grey moth or plain colored sparrow ", quite in contrast to the Butterfly type of her youth.

The seasons have a direct influence on the design of the kimonos. If it should be of flowers, they must follow the calendar month by month. Cherry Blossoms succeeds the plum, and then the Wisteria, and so through the year. In summer materials of lighter weight are used, while in winter a heavier, quilted, shorter Kimono or Hoari coat is added. Hoari Coats are also of silk, often with artistic designs, which also must follow the season or occasion.

The Obi has not been mentioned but in reality it is one of the most important parts of a woman's wardrobe. To keep her kimono snug and in place, a child wears about her waist a sash of cotton or silk material, tied simply in back. This is later replaced by a finer, more interesting material, perhaps brocade or embroidered, and always richer and gayer than the Kimono. This is the Obi and is 12 or 15 inches wide, and may be 4 to 6 yards long. It is wound snugly twice around the waist and tied in back in a complicated flat knot. The Obi is all important in material and design, and frequently costs much more than the Kimono. Fitting snugly, it becomes a handy place to tuck a fan or change purse in its folds. The Butterfly Bow which we once thought this Obi to be, is in reality only used by young girls or brides or by the geisha. These latter, who are the commercial entertainers and dancers of Japan, are truly the Butterflies in their extremely long, gay Kimonos and streaming Obis of finest materials.

The Japanese have contrived a foot gear quite their own. Though it seems to cultivate an awkward walk, it has its practical features as well. The white cotton tabi which serves as a stocking is shaped to fit the foot, and allows for the separation between the big toe and the smaller toes. It covers little above the ankle, and opens in back of the heel. In their homes this is all that is worn on their feet as the floors are covered with soft matting. At the door when entering the house, are left their Geta. This is sort of a wooden sandle, with two wooden cross pieces underneath which raises it from the ground. V shaped straps on the upper side make a place for the Tabi to slip under, and the toes to hold the Geta on. The height of the wooden cross pieces under the Geta varies, being for wet weather or in snow about two inches high, giving a suggestion of being on stilts. It does help to keep them above the mud and slush. There are also more elaborate types of geta, There is a built up sole in place of the wood with cross pieces. This may be of cork or felt with woven straw on



top. Perhaps the ultra modern "Wedgies" were suggested by old Japan. Because of the stiffness of the Geta, the stilt effect, the tightly wrapped around Kimono, the women of Japan have a most awkward walk, a short step, and toes slightly turned in.

Womens dress in Japan has also felt the influence of the western world. There can be no compromise or change in the Kimono itself, but rather it is the giving up of the old, and replacing it with the new. The first suggestion of this change came about 1890, when the Imperial Court made a gesture to copy the dress of the German women. It was not a success. Dresses were illfitting, to them most unbecoming and uncomfortable. Still while it was popular at Court it was copied by many in lower social classes. This had its day and fortunately passed. The charm of their own dress is unquestionable, and nothing is more becoming to them. But again today to be sure, many women have been in touch with America or Europe and have adopted our dress, but most have lost much of their charm in doing this. Too often their awkward walk still persists, they do not always know how to put together our type of clothes, and women who have not been used to wearing hats just don't know how to put them on.

But with foreign ways of living, foreign types of homes, education and travel abroad, there are many influences working on the everyday life of all classes in Japan. Perhaps it is inevitable that the womens mode of dress will also pass. When that day comes Japan will have lost one of its special charms and interests. For its bright colors, interesting designs, and exquisite materials can only be shown to best advantage in their right setting of the dainty Japanese women in their native dress.

In India the outstanding characteristic that first catches ones attention in noticing the dress of the women, is their love of gay color. Bright rich colors and soft pastel shades, endless variety, and all standing out clearly in the strong tropical sun.

There is one type of dress to be found in all parts of India, which is the Sari. It is surely a most clever and attractive dress. It is one piece of material, requiring no sewing, not a pin, hook or button. The Sari is from 6 to 9 yards long, and  $1\frac{1}{4}$  yards wide. One end is wrapped around the waist and tied, then folds are pleated



in front and tucked in at the waist line. The loose end is brought up across the breast and over the left shoulder. The end may either be tucked in at the waist when at home, or drawn over the head and across the face as a veil when on the street. The full skirt and flowing end of the Sari are most graceful and becoming, and the wealth of color always to be found add much to their charm. With the Sari is worn a short, tight fitting jacket. It has short sleeves, V neck, and does not quite reach to the waist. This with the Sari is the complete dress of the Indian woman.

The feet are almost universally bare, but among the higher castes the sari must be long enough to hide them.

The materials used vary from sheer soft silk to heavy cottons, but the colors are always gay. The quality of the Sari is shown in the design of the border. Metal threads are very popular and beautifully used. This may be only in the border, or woven in an all over pattern. The value of the Sari may run into hundreds of rupees.

Though the same type of dress is worn in all parts of India, the way the Sari is worn may vary in different provinces and with different castes. These differences naturally would be quickly noticed by Indians, and their meaning better understood than by foreigners.

No Indian woman is completely dressed without a lavish amount of jewelry. This will be in the form of ear rings, nose rings, beads, bracelets, anklets, finger and toe rings. In fact all her spare cash, her Savings Account, is translated into jewelry. It may be silver or gold, jewels or glass beads, but it is all important to the Indian woman. Altogether it may weigh from 2 to 3 pounds, and truly must be a burden to wear, but unquestionably adds to the gaily and picturesqueness of her costume. The workmanship on this jewelry is not fine, but interesting in design and effective. Costume Jewelry, comparatively new in America, is centuries old in India.

We must not leave India without mention of the Mohammedan women who are to be found in all parts of the country. Their dress is quite in contrast to the Hindus. They in public must be extremely veiled, though to be sure, this custom is slowly breaking. These women wear close fitting trousers, a straight simple dress over it, then a sheer dainty veil ~~through~~ over the head and reaching to the bottom of the hem. In public all this must be covered by a veil of heavy material reaching from head to foot, leaving but peek holes for the eyes, and even these are covered with sheer net. It is a most extreme custom and costume, and in a climate such as India's, it must be almost unbearable. What a release for them that this requirement of their religion is



begining to pass. What will be their form of dress in the near future, we cannot tell. Perhaps like the women of China and Japan they too may adopt some customs of the occident.

So even in our hurried glance at women of the Orient, we still find much that is new and strange to us, at the same time, much that suggests customs that are old and familiar. They are borrowing from us, perhaps, we are learning from them more than we fully realize. The world is getting smaller, and more and more of a neighborhood, even in womens dress.