



**Finnane, Antonia. *Changing Clothes in China. Fashion, History, Nation.*
New York: Columbia University Press, 2008. 359 p.**

Reviewed by Helena Heroldová

The past decade has seen several English-language books on traditional Chinese clothing from the Qing dynasty to the early 20th century. Valery Garrett has presented several books on Qing dress (*A Collector's Guide to Chinese Dress Accessories*. Time Editions, 2001, and *Chinese Dress. From the Qing Dynasty to the Present*. Tuttle Publishing, 2007), Beverly Jackson wrote about fashion in Shanghai in the 1920s and 1930s in her *Shanghai Girl Gets All Dressed Up* (Berkeley/Toronto: Ten Speed Press, 2005), Dorothy Ko published her study of footbinding and women's shoes (*Every Step a Lotus: Shoes for Bound Feet*. University of California Press: 2001), and several articles were published in the journal *Fashion Theory*.

As opposed to the authors who focus mainly on specific topics (for example accessories or court dress) and periods of time (either the Qing dynasty or Republican era), Antonia Finnane (*Dress, Sex and Text in Chinese Culture*. Melbourne: Monash Asia Institute, 1999, and *Speaking of Yangzhou: A Chinese City, 1550 – 1850*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Centre, 2004) turns her attention to a fairly large time span, roughly from the 19th century to the end of the 20th century. These two centuries represent a turbulent and complex period in the history of China, with substantial changes and shifts in the system of government, social structure, culture and lifestyle. Fashion reflected this political, social and cultural development, and new styles of dressing emerged hand in hand with a new aesthetics of dress and the human body as well as with the changing role of men and women in society. Finnane's aim is to present a synthetic view of the role of fashion in a society undergoing such extensive political and social change. She asks whether there was a link between fashion and the political situation during the period under scrutiny, and between the representation of modernity and political ideas by means of fashion. She finds a complex and unsteady relationship between fashion and political climate that includes an intricate interplay of subversive and affirmative elements rather than a simple connection between "modern", "fashionable" and "progressive" as opposed to "backward" and "old-fashioned".

Her book is divided into eleven chapters. In the *Introduction: Fashion, History, Nation* (pp. 1–17) Finnane opposes the "orientalist" (in Edward Said's sense) opinion that traditional China lacked fashion, and she presents numerous examples to support the

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existence of fashion in Qing dynasty and early 20th century China. In *Ways of Seeing* (pp. 19–41) she scrutinizes Western representation of Chinese clothing culture from the 16th to the 19th century. *Fashions in Late Imperial China* (pp. 43–67) demonstrates that fashion was associated with economical and cultural productivity in dynamic commercial centres mainly in coastal China. *Soldiers and Citizens* (pp. 69–100) describes the radical change in clothing taste during the last two decades of the Qing dynasty that emerged simultaneously with the social and political changes of the period. The association between military culture and everyday dressing styles appeared, was maintained during later periods and resulted in a notable combination of fashionable dresser and political persona in the first half of the 20th century and even later.

The Fashion Industry in Shanghai (pp. 101–138) explores the development of the fashion industry in the 1920s, ranging from textile production to dress-making, fashion design, advertising, the role of women's fashion magazines in keeping people informed about fashions, and consumer culture and lifestyle, including shopping in newly-established department stores. *Qipao China* (pp. 139–175) deals with the development of the woman's dress called the *qipao*, as well as changes in public opinion toward this particular clothing style from the 1910s to the 1930s, and modern aesthetics of the female body as opposed to the traditional view. *Her Brother's Clothes* (pp. 177–200) studies men's clothing, starting with the cultural equivalent of the *qipao*, the *changpao*, as well as Western and military-style suits from the Republican era. Finnane also highlights the phenomenon of cross-dressing, i.e. men's clothes worn by women students and intellectuals during the period under scrutiny, in order to express nationalist ideas and military spirit.

The next two chapters are devoted to post-war clothing, when the military style reached its climax. *The New Look in the New China* (pp. 201–226) and *Dressed to Kill in the Cultural Revolution* (pp. 227–255) study the styles during the 1950s to the 1970s and their relation to contemporary political climate.

Breaking with the Past (pp. 257–290) is devoted to the reform era in the late 1970s, the re-establishment of the consumer and producer relationship in the fashion industry, the influence of globalized Western styles on Chinese clothing and the emergence of fashion subcultures at the end of the 20th century. In *Conclusion: Fashion, History, Time* (pp. 291–302) Finnane ponders the opportunities for contemporary Chinese fashion designers to enter the international fashion market.

Antonia Finnane has assembled and investigated a wide range of written and pictorial sources. However, the number of sources and complexity of the topic have resulted in some parts of the book being rather uneven in quality. Some sections have been compiled from revised, already-published articles. This, in my opinion, causes disparity in the text and detracts from the overall high standard of the research. Finnane's book nevertheless represents an authoritative introduction to modern fashion in China for students of related topics, and is a useful supplement for scholars of Chinese nationalism and modern Chinese culture and history.