

# The Embodiment of the "Heaven and Man are United as One" in the Colours of Qing Imperial Ceremonial Dress

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## Abstract

Through the elaboration of the idea of "Heaven and Man Are United as One" and the study of the colours of Qing dynasty imperial ceremonial dress, the philosophical idea of "Heaven and Man Are United as One" is discussed in the colours of Qing dynasty imperial ceremonial dress.

## Keywords

Heaven and Man are United as One; Colours; Etiquette Dress; Qing Dynasty.

## 1. Introduction

"Heaven and Man Are United as One" is a traditional Chinese philosophical idea. Heaven refers to the sky, the way of heaven, and all things natural. Heaven and Man Are United as One refers to the realm where "heaven and earth are born with me, and all things are one with me". In Taoism, it is believed that the universe and man are interconnected, and that a Taoist of high moral virtue is able to communicate with the heavens through his own cultivation in order to pray for good weather and rain. The idea of the unity of heaven and man has had an important influence in all aspects.

The Qing Dynasty Emperor's court dress is the ceremonial dress worn by the Qing Dynasty emperors during major ceremonies and rituals. There are four colours: bright yellow, blue, red and moon white, blue for praying for rain, red for the sunset and moon for the moon. During the Qing Dynasty, the emperor and the queen were also known as "colourful clothes" and "flower clothes", worn on occasions such as major festivals, banquets and rituals. The dress was worn in the same colour as the corresponding natural elements for different events, reflecting the philosophy of Heaven and Man Are United as One. In today's world where more and more attention is being paid to our traditional culture, it is of great research value and significance for today's times to dig deeper into the connotations and cultural heritage of our traditional costumes for the embodiment of classical philosophical aesthetic ideas in costumes.

## 2. Research Status

### 2.1. The Interpretation of the Idea of "Heaven and Man are United as One"

According to Meng Wei [1]; Wu Firan [2]; and Li Wenxin [3], "Heaven and Man Are United as One" first sprang from the primitive society's simple perception of "heaven" and its fear and awe of nature. It was believed that the "heaven" was mysterious and sacred, and that it ruled the movement of all things.

Wu Firan[2] elaborates on the understanding and theoretical views of Laozi, Zhuangzi, Confucius and Mencius on the idea of "Heaven and Man Are United as One". Zhang Guodong[5] expresses the view of Zhu Xi and Dong Zhongshu that heaven and man are in circulation and united as one. The highest meaning of Heaven and Man Are United as One is the state in which the subject and object are fundamentally unified. Wang Depeng[6] argues that the idea of

Heaven and Man Are United as One is the ideal state of life formed by the ancients in their perception of man and nature.

## **2.2. The Philosophical View of "Heaven and Man are United as One" in Traditional Dress Culture**

Li Wenxin [3], Wang Yu, Wu Wei[4], Liu Mingyu[9], He Yanan[10], Sun Xia[11], Lu Ping[12] and others have focused on traditional clothing forms, clothing fabric manufacturing techniques, traditional clothing items, clothing patterns, accessories, shapes, and colours to explain the idea of "Heaven and Man Are United as One" embodied in them. The study is based on traditional clothing forms, clothing fabric manufacturing techniques, traditional clothing items, clothing patterns, accessories, shapes and colours. Zhang Tianyang[13] elaborated on the idea of "Heaven and Man Are United as One" in the costume culture of the Middle Kingdom. Zhu Hongfeng and Chao Yingna [14] discuss the specific manifestations of the "Heaven and Man Are United as One" in the clothing design activities. Some other literature has also studied and discussed the idea of "Heaven and Man Are United as One" in the costumes of ethnic minorities [18] [19].

## **2.3. A Study of the Colour of Imperial Ceremonial Dress in the Qing Dynasty**

Qi Yini [21] and Wang Ming conducted a study on Manchu costume colours in the Qing Dynasty. Chang Zhuo, Su Lichao, and Ruminant [22] divided Qing costume colours into two aspects: conforming to taboos and breaking taboos. Wang Ming, Zhang Xin [23] showed in his study that the Qing costume colours were both ethnic Manchu and a development of the Chinese feudal official dress system. Zhao Shiyang [24] in his study showed that the Manchu revered white, and later fused with Han Chinese culture, red, yellow and blue also became the main colours of Qing costume colours.

## **3. The Philosophical View of "Heaven and Man are United as One" in the Colours of Qing Imperial Ceremonial Dress**

Colour is one of the basic elements of dress, and in traditional Chinese dress culture, colour is not only a visual aesthetic necessity, but also a reflection of hierarchy and symbolic meaning. Influenced by the 'five elements', the five colours of green, red, yellow, white and black represent the five elements of nature, as well as the directions and seasons [25]. In the YiQing, there is the phrase 'the sky is xuan and the earth is yellow', with the sky being xuan and the earth yellow. In ancient times, heaven and earth were considered to be the greatest, and the emperor was regarded as the chosen son of Heaven, so black and yellow were used as honourable colours in clothing to emphasise his status. As a result of this thinking, these five colours were the proper colours and only the honourable could enjoy them. In ancient times, the colours were naturally influenced by the ceremonial dress of the royal family, which was used for important occasions such as rituals and ceremonies. In the LiJiYueHui, it is recorded that the emperor often linked the seasons and parties to the symbols of colour during ceremonies or ritual occasions in the royal palace, and in accordance with this principle, the "five seasonal garments" were created, meaning that different colours were worn according to the different seasons[26].

Colour is used as a symbol of orientation and natural elements, and is reflected in the ceremonial dress of the royal family, which embodies the Chinese cosmology of 'Heaven and Man Are United as One'. Through the use of colour in relation to nature and behavioural activities, the desire to communicate with all things in the universe is realised, in order to achieve the 'Heaven and Man Are United as One'.

### 3.1. "Heaven and Man are United as One" in the Colours of the Imperial Court Dress

The court dress was the ceremonial dress worn during major ceremonies and rituals such as the enthronement of the Qing emperor, the great wedding, New Year's Day, the winter solstice, the sacrifice to heaven and earth, etc. The colours of the Qing dynasty dress inherited the ceremonial system of the colours of the Zhou dynasty, of which yellow, red and blue were the colours of the ruling class, and the royal palace dress used bright, strong and gaudy, with yellow and blue as the main colours. Also the use of white, which has the characteristics of meeting the nation, was used [27].

Yellow is the colour of the land, symbolising the earth, and since ancient times it has often been used as a special colour for the emperor. During the Sui and Tang dynasties, Emperor Gaozong of Tang issued a ban on the wearing of yellow clothing by the common people, which can reflect the high rank of yellow. Red is the same colour as the sun and fire. In primitive societies, before people understood the laws of nature, people revered and worshipped the sun and fire, so red became a colour representing good luck and festivity. During the Zhou Dynasty, red was a colour used only by the nobility. Black was also called xuan, the colour of the sky, and because of the worship of heaven and earth, the ancient emperors used xuan as the colour of heaven for the top of their dresses and yellow as the colour of earth for the bottom [28]. The colours of the Qing emperor's court dress did not go as far as black, but instead chose four of the five traditional proper colours, namely yellow, white, red and blue. This coincided with the colours of the eight Manchu banners. The colours of the Manchu Eight Banners were strictly formulated according to the Five Elements theory in relation to their orientation for marching and fighting, and as black was not obvious when marching at night, blue was used instead [29]. While white is the favourite colour of the Manchus, the Manchus still white, unlike the Han Chinese who see white as a symbol of coldness and fear, the Manchus see white as a symbol of nobility and good fortune.

The emperor's court dress was used on the winter solstice at the Huanqiu altar in blue to symbolise the sky, on the summer solstice at the Fangze altar in bright yellow to symbolise the earth, on the spring equinox at the sun altar in red to symbolise the sun, and on the autumn equinox at the moon altar in moon white to symbolise the moon [30]. Praying for rain was a common practice in ancient times, and the emperor was considered to be the chosen son of Heaven, communicating his wishes to the heavens through rain prayers. Moon rituals were also important rituals in ancient times. The Emperor set up an altar to worship the Moon God at the autumnal equinox each year to express his gratitude to heaven and earth for the bountiful harvest. Moon rituals on autumn eve have a long history, originating from the celestial worship and praying for help to fulfil wishes. The sun ritual, one of the most important rituals in ancient times, has a long history and originates from the worship of the sun god by the Chinese ancestors.

These important rituals all reflect the ancient people's reverence and worship for heaven and earth, the universe and nature. In ancient China, people believed that 'everything has a spirit' and regarded the sky, earth, sun and moon as having supernatural powers, but there was also a definite link between heaven and earth, geography and personnel. The Son of Heaven, as a symbol of unity, also wore colours that represented all parties under the heavens [31].

The colours of the emperor's court dress corresponded to the colours of the objects of worship, signifying that the emperor had also obtained the characteristics and instructions of the gods during the rituals, thus achieving the purpose of communication and induction between man and nature and reflecting the philosophical idea of the 'Heaven and Man Are United as One'.

### 3.2. The "Heaven and Man are United as One" in the Colours of the Empress's Auspicious Dress

In the Qing dynasty, the empress's auspicious clothes were also known as 'coloured clothes' and 'flower clothes', worn on occasions such as festivals, feasts and sacrifices [32]. In addition to being used for major auspicious celebrations and seasonal festivals, it could also be used for the Queen's first silkworm altar bowing mulberry and cocoon dedication ceremony. There are more than twenty different colours, such as fragrant, soy, red, beige, lotus, blue, green, snow green, etc. The auspicious clothes not only made the form of court dress richer, but also reflected the individual aesthetic expression of the court women[33]. The Queen's gown also used the colours of different seasons, seasons and natural flowers as dress colours, and was worn on various festive occasions to correspond with them, so as to echo and harmonise with nature. The same reflects the idea of "Heaven and Man Are United as One".

## 4. Conclusion

The Qing dynasty emperor's court dress was ceremonial dress worn for rituals and came in four colours: bright yellow, blue, red and moon white, with blue worn when seeking rain and red worn when facing the sun and moon when setting. The colours corresponding to the natural elements were worn on different occasions to communicate with heaven and earth and nature. In the Qing dynasty, the empress's dress was also known as the 'flower dress' and the 'colour dress', worn mainly on festive occasions, and the colours were changed according to the different flowering seasons to correspond with the natural seasons. The Qing dynasty emperor's court dress and the empress's auspicious dress, as a ceremonial dress, reflect the philosophical view of "Heaven and Man Are United as One" in the choice of colours and the application of occasions.

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