

Narratives of Cultural Identity: The Youya Aesthetic in Song Dynasty Attires

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Abstract: Starting from the realistic problem that the Chinese fashion industry has long been lacking in cultural subjectivity, this paper explores the key points of design innovation in the Chinese fashion industry. It is believed that traditional Chinese culture is a treasure for Chinese design innovation, and exploring the essence of Chinese costume culture is a crucial topic for the future development of the Chinese fashion industry. Through research, it has been found that “YOUYA” is the core value of Chinese culture, and the Song Dynasty serves as a pinnacle of this cultural expression, characterized by advancements in art, literature, and craftsmanship that unified spiritual ideals with material forms. This research reveals how the Song Dynasty cultivated and disseminated its “YOUYA” ethos in lifestyle, creating a lasting legacy in Chinese cultural history. The findings underscore the necessity of rediscovering and incorporating traditional cultural values in contemporary Chinese design practices, addressing the disconnect between spirit and materiality in the modern fashion industry. By revitalizing the philosophical concept of “YOUYA”, this study advocates for a culturally confident approach to design innovation that bridges China's rich heritage with global modernity.

Keywords: YOUYA” Style ; The Essence of Culture; Song Dynasty; Lifestyle and Attires.

1. INTRODUCTION

China has been renowned as the "Kingdom of Attires" since ancient times. However, China's industrialization started relatively late, and

Chinese clothing industry had long remained at the stage of handicraft production. Since China's reform and opening up, China's economy has gradually integrated into the global economic system. The Chinese fashion industry has seized the historical opportunity brought by the shift in the global fashion industry structure. With undertaking international orders and completing original equipment manufacturing production as its main development direction, China has become the world's largest clothing manufacturing and exporting country. Having undergone development for over forty years, the Chinese clothing industry has witnessed remarkable achievements(Feng, 1948). However, the development of the Chinese clothing industry was built upon learning from and imitating Western designs. It has completed the accumulation and expansion of industrial capital by localizing the fashion Products of Europe and America. This mode of development was viable in the short term(Shuming, 1987). However, when confronted with issues such as the global financial crisis and the increase in labor and land costs, the industrial economy will face tremendous challenges. In fact, the development of the Chinese clothing industry is closely related to Chinese design. In Chinese fashion brands, designers of frequently take Western culture and the standards of design aesthetics as references when engaging in design practices(Song & Lee, 2010). They keep a close eye on the trends in foreign fashion shows, and their design concepts stem from the fashion information released by the West in every season. This kind of design process and method lacks cultural subjectivity. In the interviews and investigations on Chinese fashion design conducted in this paper, it has been found that the vast majority of designers lack research and understanding of the value, spirit, connotation and essence of local culture. Moreover, in the existing theoretical research on design in China, there is also a lack of systematic analysis of the cultural essence in traditional Chinese creation thoughts. Based on the practical problems faced by the Chinese clothing industry and design practices, this paper holds that it is of great importance to clarify the essential Essence of Culture within the creation thoughts of Chinese culture. This is of significant significance for the construction of the cultural subjectivity of the Chinese design discourse system(Sun & Hua, 2023).

2. THE “YOUYA” ESSENCE OF CHINESE TRADITIONAL CULTURE

This scholarly discourse delves into the absence of cultural subjectivity

within the Chinese fashion design, and assertively posits that the core of cultural development is fundamentally rooted in the Essence of Culture.

2.1 Significance of Essence of Chinese Culture

The term "Essence of Culture" refers to the quintessence within a cultural context, which is refined, the most exquisite, and the most virtuous component, and it necessitates a prolonged historical sedimentation. The Essence of Culture embodies the value proposition of "Taking the essence and discarding the dregs" inherent in the inheritance of excellent culture(Roddy, 1998). It reflects the wisdom of culture and condenses the core of superior cultural heritage. Thus, The Essence of Culture constitutes the most exemplary component of a nation or ethnic group's cultural fabric. The Essence of Culture is necessarily refined and represents the time-honored and venerable traditions that have flowed through the historical stream of Chinese civilization. The refinement of The Essence of Culture is not only a matter of self-awareness but also a requirement and responsibility. It holds significant value for our country, our nation, and even for the whole world and all of mankind(Tian, 2003).

2.2 What is Essence of Chinese culture : YOUYA

Research on The Essence of Culture is mainly conducted from a microscopic perspective, while there are rather few explorations of The Essence of Culture from the perspective of generalized cultural inheritance. Renowned Chinese scholars such as Feng Youlan, Li Zehou, Fei Xiaotong, and Zhang Dainian have put forward numerous viewpoints from the perspectives of Chinese philosophy and aesthetics, making outstanding contributions to clarifying The Essence of Culture. The academic discussions on cultural essence mainly fall into two categories. The first one is to directly equate cultural essence with certain traditional ethical concepts. For example, a viewpoint is sought from the philosophical perspectives of the Hundred Schools of Thought (诸子百家) in ancient China as the cultural essence, such as traditional Chinese philosophies like "harmony" (和合) and "the doctrine of the mean" (中庸). The second one is to select a certain skill in fields like clothing, arts and crafts, etc., conduct discussions on its symbolic signs in terms of form, and finally define it as The Essence of Culture. In other words, cultural symbols serve as the expressions of The Essence of Culture(Hird, 2009). In 1915, Ku Hung-Ming put forward in "The Spirit of The Chinese People" that "The chief characteristic of Chinese civilization is the delicacy". He pointed out

that to evaluate the value of a civilization is to see what kind of people this civilization has produced. And The Essence of Culture is the most prominent character trait of a nation. He regarded the “YOUYA” of the Chinese people as the product of the combination of being empathetic and reasonable. The term “YOUYA” is derived from the combination of the Chinese characters “YOU” (excellent) and “YA” (elegant), and it is predominantly employed as an adjective. According to the “Modern Chinese Dictionary” (7th edition), YOUYA is characterized as “graceful and refined” or “graceful and noble,” manifesting an aesthetic state of tranquility, gentleness, composure, delicacy (Cheung, 2023), refinement, and cultural grace. Ku Hung-Ming attributed the cause of the emergence of the characteristic of “YOUYA” to the enlightenment of Confucianism in Chinese culture. He believed that the essence of the Chinese spirit lies in abiding by “rites and laws” (礼法) and adhering to “justice” (正义), as well as having faith in the power of goodness. Confucianism has played a considerable role in shaping the collective consciousness of the nation and the country. Just as Ku Hung-Ming put it, “The greatest thing Confucius did for the Chinese people was that he gave them the true concept of the state—the true, rational, and eternal absolute foundation of a nation.” This solid foundation consists of the five moral qualities advocated by Confucianism, namely “benevolence” (仁), “righteousness” (义), “propriety” (礼), “wisdom” (智) and “filial piety” (孝). In fact, the moral character and types of human beings represent the essential features of a civilization (Tu & Xie, 2022). Ku Hung-Ming agreed with the French proverb “Le style, c'est l'homme même” (Style is the man). Then, what exactly endows the Chinese people with the characteristic of “YOUYA”? He clearly gave the answer — it is “being understanding” (善解人意) and “being reasonable” (通情达理). “Being understanding” means being able to fully understand and take into account the feelings of others and being good at putting oneself in others' shoes. What is actually embodied therein is the true wisdom of human beings — the power of goodness in human nature. “Being reasonable” means being sensible and doing and saying things in a reasonable and appropriate manner. It emphasizes the core of moral norms in Confucianism—“benevolence” (仁). Mencius put forward that “the heart of compassion; the heart of shame; the heart of courtesy and modesty; the heart of right and wrong” (恻隐之心 ; 羞恶之心 ; 辞让之心 ; 是非之心). “Benevolence” (仁 is the highest criterion

for moral conduct. It is a kind of innate conscience of human beings and refers to compassion. Mr. Liang Shuming elaborated his understanding of the rational spirit of Confucianism in *The Essence of Chinese Culture* (中国文化要义), believing that it is the fundamental feature of Confucian thought. In the field of aesthetics, Li Zehou also mentioned that rationality is the characteristic of Chinese culture(XINCHEN, 2014).

2.3 The Embodiment of “YOUYA” Essence in Chinese Philosophy of Creation

Chinese culture has established an “YOUYA” aesthetic paradigm based on morality as its intrinsic value. In fact, it also represents the rationality in creation. With the qualities of "being understanding"(善解人意) and "being reasonable"(通情达理), “YOUYA” can be generated. The philosopher Wang Guowei mentioned that the state of selflessness in observing objects from the perspective of objects is “YOUYA”. The aesthetician Zhu Guangqian believed that “YOUYA” is a relatively static state, such as the calligraphy and paintings of Zhao Mengfu in the Song Dynasty. This stems from the infiltration of Confucianism. "Being considerate" means putting people first, and "being reasonable" refers to the rationality of creation. It is in the long process of exploration that this paper has discovered the essence of Chinese culture - “YOUYA”. As mentioned above, the essence of culture lies in the thought of creation. If the essence of culture is “YOUYA”, then the material forms guided by it will also be “YOUYA”. “YOUYA” - the essential core, is actually text in nature. It addresses the core issues of both the material and the spiritual, and it is also an attribute of them, which is text. Create things with “YOUYA” to achieve “YOUYA” material forms(Yang, 2016). The essence of culture is, in fact, the core of the thought of creation. We must adhere to this core. When creating things anew, we will use it to create “YOUYA” forms, that is, when recreating things, the thought of creation is materialized once again. It is a continuous intergenerational cycle(Li, 2022). The forms of the recreated things vary to some extent with the changes of the times. Therefore, only by constantly adhering to the core of the cultural spirit can we continuously create “YOUYA” forms. The formation of the “YOUYA” essence occurs throughout the long history. It does not exist only in a certain period but sometimes manifests itself differently. It has been passed down from generation to generation, continuously developing, evolving, and enriching, thus forming the precious material and spiritual cultural wealth of successive dynasties(You

et al.).

3.THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE “YOUYA” ESSENCE IN SONG DYNASTY

This article, through an exploration of traditional Chinese clothing culture, reveals that the attire of the Song Dynasty epitomized “YOUYA” to its fullest (Brzobohaty, 2020). The philosophical framework of “YOUYA” began in the early days of Chinese culture. For example, concepts like “Refined Speech (雅言)” and “Refined Music” (雅乐) mentioned in *The Book of Songs* were concrete expressions of this ideal. After the Qin and Han dynasties, the opening of the Silk Road brought a steady influx of foreign cultures, including the introduction of Buddhism. This integration and collision of native and foreign elements spurred the continuous evolution of Chinese material culture. By the Song Dynasty, the flourishing of China's economic foundation and technological advancements had led to the emergence of a rich array of artistic and cultural achievements. During this period, a comprehensive decorative system was developed, embodying “YOUYA” in various aspects. From linguistic expression and etiquette norms to the material aspects of daily life, the Song Dynasty established a sophisticated mechanism for cultural derivation. Later, with the rise of the tributary system in the economic domain, this “YOUYA” culture spread broadly from the upper echelons of society to the general populace, cementing the Song Dynasty as the pinnacle of the development of “YOUYA” culture in Chinese history (Miller, 2021).

3.1 Overview of the Song Dynasty Period

The Song Dynasty discussed in this article refers to the period in Chinese history from 960 to 1279 AD, which is commonly divided into two phases: the Northern Song (960–1127) and the Southern Song (1127–1279). However, since the clothing culture and styles of these two phases are generally consistent, this paper does not distinguish between them and refers to the entire period simply as the Song Dynasty. The Song Dynasty was established in 960 when Zhao Kuangyin, a general of the imperial guards, initiated the Chen Bridge Mutiny. Reflecting on the lessons from founding a dynasty through central military rebellion, Zhao Kuangyin and his allies determined that reclaiming centralized military power was crucial. To prevent similar rebellions in the future, the Song Dynasty implemented

a policy of "promoting literature and suppressing martial pursuits" (崇文抑武). This policy elevated the status of civil officials, fostering a flourishing cultural and intellectual environment. It nurtured numerous scholars and artists, propelling Chinese culture to new heights of development and sophistication (Atkins, 2008).

3.2 Institutional Implementation of the "Promoting Literature" Policy

From an institutional perspective, the "promoting literature" (崇文) policy primarily emphasized traditional culture rooted in Confucian thought and was supported by a series of measures: It goes around in society, "The court is filled with noble officials, all of whom are scholars." (满朝朱紫贵，尽是读书人). In Talent Selection, The Song Dynasty broke down barriers of social class and family background in talent recruitment. Ordinary people were allowed to participate in the imperial examination system, where success depended solely on exam performance. This system selected talents from all levels of society, such as Cai Xiang and Wen Tianxiang. It was widely believed that "All professions are inferior; only studying is noble." (万般皆下品，惟有读书高). Confucianism was vigorously promoted as the guiding ideology for society. The imperial examination focused primarily on Confucian classics and effectively fostering cultural dissemination. The entire society revered education, leading to a thriving literary environment. This period produced an abundance of scholars and elevated Confucian-based culture to new heights. Influential figures such as the "Five Northern Song Masters" (Zhang Zai, Zhou Dunyi, Shao Yong, Cheng Hao, Cheng Yi), Wang Anshi, and the "Three Su" (Su Xun, Su Shi, Su Zhe) emerged during this time, contributing significantly to the era's cultural achievements (Pellecchia, 2011).

3.3 YOUYA Manifestation of the Song Dynasty

The cultural development of the Song Dynasty was prominently reflected in Neo-Confucianism, which integrated Confucian ethics with a broader, transcendent perspective on the universe. This human-centered yet elevated philosophical spirit further guided the aesthetics of the era. Under the dual influence of philosophical thought and aesthetic culture, the Song Dynasty's cultural and artistic accomplishments became paragons of "YOUYA". The concept of ritual (礼) served as the embodiment of "YOUYA", embedding refined cultural values into every aspect of daily

life. Pursuit of being “ritualistic yet festive” (有礼有节) and “refined in manner” (文质彬彬) was evident in the details of everyday life. The growth of the textile industry and the perfection of kesi (a kind of weaving techniques) weaving elevated Chinese silk craftsmanship to its peak in both technique and aesthetics. In the realm of painting and calligraphy, Song Dynasty aesthetics set influential standards, producing masters such as Zhao Mengfu and Ouyang Xiu, whose works embodied the essence of Chinese artistic spirit. Economically, the Song Dynasty was one of the most prosperous periods in traditional Chinese society. Experts estimate that the Song Dynasty's economy accounted for approximately one-quarter to half of the world's total at the time. The Water Margin novel described a society where even commoners, such as merchants and laborers, could afford silk stockings, illustrating the period's economic strength and the widespread accessibility of silk (Wetmore Jr et al., 2014). The manifestation of YOUYA in the basic material needs of human life is as follows:

Table 1(a): Manifestation of YOUYA

Manifestation of YOUYA	
Clothing	<p>1. The clothing styles of various dynasties are diverse and pursue elegance. National attire as a whole is elegant, influenced by Confucian "ritual system" and Daoist philosophy, reflecting a balance between spirit and form, and aligning with behavior and manners. In modern times, this is presented in different circles, and while based on intuitive understanding, there is a need to explore deeper meanings to create YOUYA clothing.</p> <p>2. The evolution of clothing styles reflects the core of elegance. The distinctive features of clothing from different periods all revolve around the theme of elegance.</p> <p>3. Rich in cultural connotations, clothing distinguishes identity and reflects the idea of "correct naming," while also embodying the concept of "benevolence" and being influenced by Daoism.</p> <p>4. Coordinating with behavior, it showcases the qualities of gentleness and benevolence in human nature. The definition of male and female images reflects how clothing and mannerisms together highlight elegance.</p> <p>5. In modern times, different states of elegance are presented in subcultures, formal attire for specific occasions, and in films and television dramas, reflecting the elegant aspects of national clothing culture.</p>

Table 1(b): Manifestation of YOUYA

Manifestation of YOUYA	
Food	1. Confucianism proposes that food and drink are the foundation of ritual, with numerous dining etiquettes governing behavior and creating elegance. Adhering to dining etiquette is itself a manifestation of elegance. 2. Since the pre-Qin period, the YOUYA spirit of food culture has continued to the present day. People show respect internally, and one's character can be judged from their dining behavior. An YOUYA person follows dining norms, respects food and others, and practices civility and politeness.
Shelter	1. The <i>Lanting Pavilion</i> (兰亭) of the Jin Dynasty is a representative of YOUYA architecture, with its architectural space and the " <i>Lanting Gathering</i> " (兰亭雅集) reflecting an elegant atmosphere. 2. Traditional architectural spaces are designed to follow the natural terrain, with gardens embodying " <i>the harmony between nature and humans</i> " (天人合一). Internally, there is a focus on the relationship between void and substance, and the furnishings reflect the scholarly temperament, creating a model that expresses elegance in various aspects.
Transportation	Traditional ways of traveling are related to natural resources. The character "行" implies a slow pace with a pleasant mood. The elegance of traveling lies in comfort, relaxation, and a pleasant state of mind. The descriptions in <i>The Book of Songs</i> reflect the elegance in traveling culture.

Economic development stimulated cultural flourishing, particularly in dissemination. With technological advancements and a thriving textile industry, China engaged in trade with dozens of countries, both overland and maritime. The trade, primarily in high-quality products like silk and ceramics, introduced the "YOUYA" of Chinese culture to the world, gaining admiration from Western nations.

3.4 The Pinnacle of "YOUYA" in the Song Dynasty

The Song Dynasty stands as a paragon of cultural contribution in Chinese history. Renowned historian Chen Yinke praised Song culture, stating, "The culture of the Chinese nation, evolving over thousands of years, reached its pinnacle during the Zhao-Song era." Some foreign

scholars have even likened the Song Dynasty to an Eastern Renaissance.

The essence of “YOUYA” culture achieved a unity of spirit and form during the Song Dynasty. From its early foundations, it evolved into a mature and refined expression, gradually shaping a distinctive style of “YOUYA”. The entire society fostered an atmosphere of refinement, with the scholar-officials and literati establishing aesthetic standards for literature, art, and social life. By consistently visualizing and embodying “YOUYA”, the Song Dynasty cemented its status as the pinnacle of this cultural style, leaving a lasting legacy of sophistication and artistic achievement.

4. YOUYA AESTHETIC IN SONG DYNASTY LIFESTYLE

4.1 The YOUYA Lifestyle in Song Dynasty

In the process of cultural production, the core concept of “YOUYA”, relying on institutions, permeates all aspects of social life in a comprehensive manner. The aspiration for and practice of an “YOUYA” lifestyle represent the literati's pursuit of life quality and the spirit of refinement, which is manifested in every aspect of social life. The literati and officialdom were enthusiastic about engaging in various refined activities, such as burning incense, tasting tea, cultivating flowers, and hanging paintings. (Figure 1)

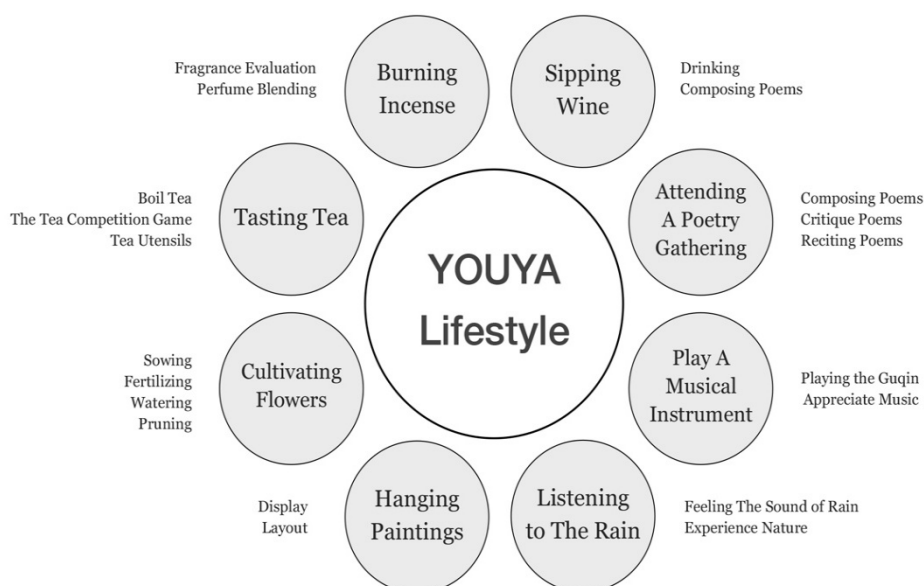


Figure 1: YOUYA Lifestyle

China's incense culture has a long history and is respected as the "Way of Incense" (香道). The cultural tradition of burning incense can be traced back to the Spring and Autumn Period. The art of blending incense,

burning incense, and evaluating incense developed into a high-quality art form during the Tang Dynasty, and the refined activity of burning incense gradually took shape and flourished. By the Song Dynasty, the Way of Incense had already become a lifestyle. Literati often gathered together to comment on the burning incense and discuss scriptures and doctrines in the curling smoke of the fragrant aroma (Buswell Jr, 2022). China's tea culture exerts a broad influence. As early as the Western Han Dynasty, there were documented records regarding the practice of tea drinking. During the Eastern Jin Dynasty, the literati residing in the prosperous regions south of the Yangtze River took pleasure in sipping tea and engaging in leisurely conversations amidst the picturesque landscapes of mountains and waters. The "YOUYA" inherent in tea was then imbued with spiritual significance, thereby integrating it into the refined lives of scholars. In the Song Dynasty, the imperial court established specialized institutions tasked with the management of tea affairs, which led to the standardization of tea-tasting etiquette. Subsequently, the custom of tea drinking became prevalent throughout society. At literati gatherings or tea parties, the activity of whisking tea served as a medium for emotional exchange, enabling participants to relish the experience and savor the aftertaste within an "YOUYA" ambience. In traditional Chinese culture, flowers are frequently bestowed with profound symbolic connotations. For instance, plum blossoms, orchids, bamboo, and chrysanthemums are emblematic of the noble, virtuous, tenacious, and indifferent-to-fame-and-wealth qualities characteristic of gentlemen. Through personally sowing seeds, watering, fertilizing, and pruning flower plants, individuals establish a close bond with nature. In the course of their daily lives, they are able to experience the vitality of nature, which not only aids in relieving stress but also facilitates the enjoyment of the harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. Consequently, this has evolved into a lifestyle adopted by the literati and officialdom for the cultivation of their minds and bodies (Fraunhar, 2018). When literati and refined scholars hold activities like "YOUYA" gatherings or literary meetings, they would display their treasured collections and share as well as exchange their artistic insights. This way of display and exchange is gracefully referred to as "hanging paintings". Hanging paintings poses a great test for literati in terms of their aesthetic taste, layout and matching skills, spatial perception, and the depth of their understanding of paintings. It emphasizes the harmonious unity between the content and the display form, and it must complement the surrounding environment and color schemes. Hanging paintings is a direct manifestation of cultural taste and artistic accomplishment. A properly

placed hanging painting can enable people to feel the humanistic spirit in art in their daily lives and add an “YOUYA” charm to the space. There are numerous YOUYA activities, each with its own unique charm. There are also other “YOUYA” affairs like listening to the rain, playing the guqin (a traditional Chinese musical instrument), attending poetry gatherings, and enjoying wine. When listening to the rain, one quietly listens to the symphony of nature. While playing the guqin, emotions get immersed in the notes. At poetry gatherings, people compose and recite poems and make friends through poetry. When enjoying wine, they follow the tradition of floating cups along the winding water and share the joy of drinking. Through these “YOUYA” lifestyles, people's spiritual needs can be better satisfied, and they can experience and enjoy the beauty of life. These “YOUYA” life practices gradually form an “YOUYA” attitude towards life. This includes the art of attire. Literati and refined scholars use it to shape an “YOUYA” image and further interpret the “YOUYA” character. In the social environment of the Song Dynasty where an “YOUYA” lifestyle was highly advocated, literati and refined scholars conducted detailed research on the etiquette norms of various lifestyles. In terms of the attire system, *The History of Song: Chapter on Clothing* (宋史·輿服志) and *The Three Rites Illustrations* (三礼图) were published, providing meticulous regulations for different grades of ceremonial and everyday attire. These regulations covered everything from the design, color, and patterns to accessories, with detailed provisions on aspects such as the wide sleeves of ceremonial robes, which cleverly embodied the function of rituals in concealing inappropriate behavior during meals or drinking occasions. In the realm of food, books like *The Bamboo Shoot Records* (笋谱) and *The Mushroom Records* (菌谱) emerged, offering comprehensive guidance on the cultivation and preparation of food, starting from the sources of ingredients, and meticulously documenting various herbs, plants, fish, and insects. For the leisure activities of scholars, works like *The Tea Record* (茶录) discussed the collection, preparation, brewing, and tasting of fine tea from the perspectives of color, fragrance, and taste, while also offering textual guidance on the “YOUYA” style of tea utensils. Similarly, *The Ink Record* (墨谱) provided detailed accounts of ink formulas, production processes, and uses for scholars and calligraphers to reference and apply. The concept of “YOUYA”, conveyed through textual forms, provided precise guidance

for daily life in the Song Dynasty. By effectively utilizing institutions, it transformed spiritual content into external forms of “YOUYA”, thus constructing the unique cultural ecosystem of “YOUYA” in the Song Dynasty. This pursuit and shaping of an exquisite and refined life appeared in every detail of daily life, achieving the transformation of spirit into “YOUYA” forms through institutional means.

4.2 The Cultural Communication of YOUYA Aesthetic in Song Dynasty

The development of communication activities and the commodity economy helped complete the cultural production loop of “YOUYA”—namely, the continuous cycle from "concept—form—communication—consumption," which perpetuated and accumulated over time. This cycle of cultural reproduction, or the transmission of culture, allowed the culture of “YOUYA” to advance continuously through an intergenerational process of "inheritance—accumulation—inheritance," ensuring its ongoing development. Since the pre-Qin period, a series of “YOUYA” cultural activities, such as literary gatherings and spring outings, have been conducted, with spaces like the Lanting Gathering becoming important bases for both the production and dissemination of this culture. The Song Dynasty saw a vibrant array of intellectual activities, such as the famous Spring Gathering at the West Garden in 1086, where Wang Shen invited notable figures like Su Shi, Su Zhe, Huang Tingjian, Mi Fu, and Li Gonglin to a refined gathering at the Fu Ma Zhai (驸马宅). This location, nestled between mountains and water, provided a serene setting for the literati to compose poems, write essays, paint, inscribe calligraphy, play the zither, sing, and engage in artistic discussions. The event became widely renowned and later served as inspiration for numerous artistic creations. In addition to these gatherings of scholars, daily life for literati also included practices like incense burning, tea preparation, hanging paintings, and flower arranging, all of which contributed to the spread of “YOUYA” culture. When burning incense, a slow, gentle fire would release a long-lasting fragrance, helping the scholars to calm their minds and savor the experience. The preparation of tea, with its meticulous craftsmanship, blended tea leaves with water, transforming simple ingredients into something precious. A cup of tea brought pleasure and reflection to both body and mind. Flower arranging, using plum blossoms to symbolize the gentleman's character, was arranged with an “YOUYA” and balanced composition that highlighted aesthetic sensibility. Hanging paintings, often

accompanying tea drinking and gatherings, created a certain atmosphere while also telling a story. These activities engaged multiple senses, shaping a multi-dimensional image of “YOUYA” and closely linking it to daily life. Over time, they have become deeply embedded in the cultural fabric. Even today, practices like tea drinking, incense burning, and “YOUYA” home decor continue, demonstrating that our need for and habit of embracing “YOUYA” have never ceased, and the cultural tradition continues to be passed down through the ages. The prosperity of the commodity economy and the flourishing of trade during the Song Dynasty endowed the material forms of “YOUYA” with distinct commercial characteristics, enabling them to spread spontaneously through consumer behavior. This “YOUYA”, carried by commodities, not only took root deeply within China but also spread widely to Southeast Asia and the Western world through routes like the Maritime Silk Road. The commercialization of the material forms of “YOUYA” displayed two prominent trends: On one hand, literary and artistic works increasingly entered the market as commodities. For example, the commercialization of painting led to the rise of a painting market. On the other hand, commodity production began to move toward large-scale, standardized, and mass production, with ceramics and silk standing out as particularly notable examples. This shift was largely driven by strong demand from overseas markets. During this period, a significant quantity of high-quality products continuously flowed to foreign markets, and the luxurious lifestyle they represented introduced the Western world to the unique charm of Chinese “YOUYA”. This exposure fostered admiration for Chinese civilization, with Chinese “YOUYA” being seen as a distant yet highly desirable ideal—a "white moonlight" that was both unattainable and alluring. This deeply influenced the Western perception of Chinese culture and sparked a longing for its refined ideals.

5. THE EXPRESSION OF YOUYA STYLE IN ATTIRE CULTURE

In human society, attires, housing, and transportation, along with food, constitute the four basic necessities of material life. Among them, "attires", which tops the list, specifically refers to various garments that cover the human body. Throughout the development of human civilization, attires have played an important role and can be considered as one of the earliest materialized manifestations of human culture since ancient times. Moreover, the Chinese “YOUYA” Essence is vividly reflected in the attire

culture of the Song Dynasty.

5.1 The Expression of "propriety" (禮) and "benevolence" (仁) in Chinese Attire Culture

The traditional Chinese attire culture is closely associated with the "ritual system" and serves as an externalized form of culture. It distinguishes social statuses through the materials, colors, styles, and accessories of attires. The "YOUYA" aesthetic concepts are externalized in an "YOUYA" manner through the norms of "propriety" (禮), and the forms of attires are completed in accordance with relevant requirements. "The Book of Rites" (禮記), one of the Four Books and Five Classics (四书五经), "Chapter of Clothing" (輿服志), a historical document on the history of attires, as well as physical objects and painting works can prove that the attire culture has been in the same line of inheritance with Chinese culture. The reason why attires have become a tool for distinguishing social identities and roles is that this external form serves as a reminder for everyone to abide by their proper status. The essence of the thought of "rectifying names" is actually the adherence to ethical norms. Under the influence of the thought of "propriety" (禮), Chinese social civilization has achieved an orderly state. In the philosophical thought system of China, human virtues and social order are unified. With "propriety" (禮) as the moral norm, which encompasses the external forms of attires, its essence remains "benevolence" (仁), that is, goodness. People with good natures are able to possess the characteristics of being reasonable and "YOUYA". Therefore, on the whole, Chinese attire culture is "YOUYA". It is not only the manifestation of the cultural essence but also the result created under the thought of taking "YOUYA" as a principle of creation. This is because, during the thousands of years of the development of Chinese culture, "YOUYA" has long permeated into individuals' personalities. As this topic has discussed at the very beginning that the essence of Chinese culture is "YOUYA", it naturally follows attires, as a form of culture, are also "YOUYA".

5.2 The Unity of the "YOUYA" Cultural Essence and Material Forms

The unity between spirit and form has always been emphasized in Chinese culture. Confucius held that personal cultivation and external appearance are unified. In "The Analects of Confucius" (论语), it was

emphasized that, "Where the substance prevails over refinement, the result is rusticity; where refinement prevails over substance, the result is pedantry. Only when refinement and substance are equally present does one become a gentleman." (质胜文则野，文胜质则史。文质彬彬，然后君子). This implies that if one focuses solely on the inner self, one would be like an ordinary person, and if one pays attention only to the external aspect, one would inevitably become superficial. Hence, the external form and the spiritual connotation are two equally important aspects of a thing, and only in this way can the courteous and gentlemanly character be manifested. This also demonstrates the significance that Confucianism places on external image. Confucius' ideal regarding the aesthetics of attires was the gentleman who embodies a perfect blend of refinement and substance, which, in fact, represents "YOUYA". The backbone of Chinese culture is Confucianism, yet it has also assimilated certain ideas from other schools of thought in ancient China. The same holds true for attire culture. Laozi, a key figure in Taoism, proposed "adorning one's clothing", regarding the existing attires as beautiful. Meanwhile, Zhuangzi advocated following nature and refraining from deliberate pursuit. This reverence for nature has been incorporated into China's aesthetic culture and manifested as the simple and natural aspect within attire styles, which serves as an embodiment of the concept of the unity of man and nature (天人合一).

5.3 The Features of Form of "YOUYA" Attire Culture: Shapes, Colors, Patterns, and Materials

In terms of shapes, "YOUYA" attires attach great importance to the smoothness of lines, as well as the harmonious combination of form and rhythm. There is never a presence of sharp silhouettes. In the Song Dynasty, the shapes of attires worn by noblewomen witnessed a transformation. They changed from wide robes with broad sleeves to a preference for narrow sleeves. Wide sleeves were mainly featured in formal dresses. As for everyday clothing, common styles included beizi (褙子, a kind of outerwear), waistcoats, ru (襦, a short jacket), shirts, ao (袄, a kind of padded jacket), skirts, and trousers. Generally speaking, the silhouettes of these attires took on an "YOUYA" straight style. In terms of colors, highly harmonious intermediate colors have always been advocated. Even for some bright and vivid colors, there are usually corresponding complementary colors to match them. However, attires in such colors often appear in specific occasions like weddings, funerals, and other similar

events. Generally speaking, neutral colors have always been the dominant tone, reflecting the characteristics of grace and “YOUYA”. The female attires in the Song Dynasty ingeniously integrated the colors found in nature, frequently using colors like lotus root powder, light yellow, pale blue, and light green. As described in verses such as "The rouge and powder are not thickly applied, like the light spring of idle flowers"(朱粉不深匀, 闲花淡淡春) and "The snow-white gauze is dyed in the color of sky-blue water" (天水碧染雪藕纱), the colors were gentle, restrained, with moderate brightness, soft contrast, and a natural transition. In terms of patterns, the patterns on attires with an “YOUYA” style in the Song Dynasty neither overshadowed other elements nor were overly complicated. Instead, they were in harmonious and unified coordination with other attire elements such as materials, colors, and style structures. The aesthetic pursuit of "valuing simplicity" made the expression of patterns rather implicit. The pattern designs emphasized a balanced relationship between firmness and softness. The production techniques were rich and diverse, covering a wide range of crafts including embroidery, kesi (缂丝 a kind of silk tapestry), jacquard weaving, and color painting. The expression of patterns was meticulous and vivid, ensuring high quality. These exquisite pattern-making techniques and the characteristics of silk fabrics like being lightweight and breathable complemented each other, presenting an “YOUYA” appearance. In terms of materials, the focus is on their being lightweight and breathable. It is precisely these qualities of materials that enable the creation of shapes with soft lines. Silk fabrics are so light that they seem almost weightless and are as transparent as a delicate mist. They possess a simplicity yet “YOUYA”, giving off a beauty that is unadorned yet not plain in a crude way. Instead, this plainness is the result of meticulous weaving and elaborate craftsmanship, which endows them with a fine and delicate texture. Consequently, silk fabrics are highly favored by the literati and officialdom and have become the top choice for the attires of noblewomen. Particularly under the influence of the climate and environment in the capital area of the Southern Song Dynasty, the characteristics of silk match people's dressing habits quite well.

6. CONCLUSION

“YOUYA” represents the essence of Chinese traditional culture. Rooted in ancient Chinese philosophical thought, it was inherited and enriched

during the Song Dynasty, leaving a profound legacy of material and spiritual culture. This concept of “YOUYA” permeated every aspect of daily life in ancient China and found its fullest expression in Chinese aesthetic creations, continuing to influence contemporary society. For instance, ancient Chinese clothing culture placed great emphasis on the harmony between spirit and form. The enduring legacy of this “YOUYA” style still captivates the world and inspires modern designers. In fact, the philosophical principle of unity between spirit and form in Chinese thought resonates with the modern design concept that "ideas represent another form of existence." The essence of design lies in the process of "concept-structure-form": the concept embodies the essence and spirit of a creation, while the form represents its tangible manifestation. However, the current Chinese fashion industry often imitates and replicates Western styles, neglecting its own design philosophy and cultural roots. This disconnection between spirit and materiality disrupts the cultural continuum, leaving the industry overly reliant on the global fashion system and hindering the sustainable development of Chinese clothing culture. To secure a meaningful future for Chinese fashion design, it is imperative to center on “YOUYA” as its essence of culture, striving for an intrinsic harmony between spirit and form. Design innovation should delve deeply into the spiritual connotations of Chinese culture, integrating tradition with modernity. This approach will pave the way for a path of cultural confidence, uniquely rooted in China's rich heritage.

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