

The Aesthetic Evolution of Women's Clothing of Tang Dynasty Terracotta Figurines from the Perspective of the Silk Road

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ABSTRACT

The Tang Dynasty had frequent cultural exchanges with Central Asia, India, West Asia, Europe and other regions through the Silk Road, which promoted the diversified development of Chinese civilization. Among them, the art of Tang terracotta figurines, as the peak of sculpture during this period, not only reflects the lifestyle and cultural exchanges of that time, but also its clothing has become an important basis for studying the social customs and aesthetic consciousness of the Tang Dynasty. This article takes the Silk Road as a perspective, and through comparative analysis of the styling characteristics of Tang Dynasty women's clothing in different periods, explores the influence of foreign culture on the aesthetic evolution of Tang Dynasty women's clothing, and reveals the cultural integration and trends reflected behind it.

Keywords: Silk Road, Sino-foreign exchanges, Tang Dynasty terracotta figurines, Women's clothing.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Tang Dynasty was the most active period of international exchange in Chinese history, and the prosperity of the Silk Road promoted the deep integration of Chinese and Western cultures, forming a diverse and coexisting cultural pattern. In this context, a large number of clothing crafts and aesthetic concepts from Central Asia, Persia, India and other places were introduced into the Central Plains (the cultural heartland of China), which had a profound impact on women's clothing. Whether in terms of garment structure, pattern themes, color coordination, or fabric craftsmanship, Tang Dynasty women's clothing exhibits a strong exotic style and unprecedented aesthetic diversity. At the same time, the ideological atmosphere of the coexistence of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism has injected rich cultural symbols into clothing, making it not only daily wear, but also carrying identity, faith, and aesthetic values. As an artistic epitome of actual society and idealized aesthetics of the Tang Dynasty, the female figurines vividly record the evolution of aesthetics in clothing during this period. The clothing features presented by Tang terracotta figurines not only

reflect the aesthetic pursuits and social roles of women at that time, but also reveal the aesthetic evolution against the background of multicultural integration on the Silk Road. Especially in Chang'an, the core area where Chinese and foreign cultures converge, the clothing of female figurines showcases the characteristics of the times and the achievements of cross-cultural communication. Conducting a systematic study on it not only helps to deepen our understanding of Tang Dynasty costume art, but also provides a new perspective for exploring cultural interactions on the Silk Road.

2. HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF TANG DYNASTY TERRACOTTA FIGURINES

2.1 The Origin and Development of Tang Dynasty Terracotta Figurines

The prosperity of the Silk Road during the Tang Dynasty not only promoted cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries, but also had a profound impact on neighboring countries through the dissemination of Tang culture. Supported by a

comprehensive ritual system, Chang'an became a hub connecting Central Asia and West Asia, attracting a large number of foreigners to trade and settle, and the two capital regions experienced an unprecedented prosperity. As an outstanding representative of Tang Dynasty tomb art, Tang terracotta figurines vividly record the social landscape and cultural integration of this period.

The history of figurines as burial objects can be traced back to the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, and their emergence is closely related to the ancient funeral concepts of "belief in the immortality of the soul" and "reverence for spirits and deities". During the Shang and Zhou Dynasties, live human sacrifices were commonly practiced in burial rites. For example, 152 human bones found in the tomb of Wuguan Village in Yin Xu in Anyang were the warriors and slaves of the tomb owner [1]. With the collapse of slavery, human sacrifice was gradually replaced by symbolic figures made of straw, known as "straw spirits". "The Correct Meaning of the Book of Rites Tangong Xia" records: "Confucius said, 'Those who make offerings are good,' and those who make figurines are unkind," indicating that simulated human burial objects had already appeared at that time. During the Warring States period, terracotta figurines made of materials such as pottery and wood gradually became popular. Wang Chong's "Lun Heng: Simple Burial Chapter" referred to them as "elephant like living beings" [2]. However, the realism of the terracotta warriors has also sparked controversy, as quoted by Confucius in "Mencius King Hui of Liang": "The initiator has no successors." [3] This reflects the ethical criticism of his "human sacrifice".

During the Han and Tang dynasties, the art of terracotta figurines reached its peak. The Tang Dynasty terracotta figurines surpass their predecessors in terms of quantity, subject matter, and craftsmanship, with a particular emphasis on realistic style. They not only showcase the diverse lifestyles of the Tang people, but also reflect the multicultural integration brought about by the Silk Road. The line in Yuan Chen's "Faqu" that reads, "Women learn Hu makeup for Hu women and perform Hu music with Hu music" is a vivid portrayal of this phenomenon.

As mentioned earlier, figurines are burial objects that replace living people, with the purpose of allowing the tomb owner to receive the same respect after death as before. Therefore, the identity composition of Tang Dynasty terracotta figurines

presents a significant diversity of social classes. Their character images not only include lower level attendants such as guards, servants, and chefs before the tomb owner's death, but also include professional artists such as singers and dancers, as well as upper level figures such as wealthy and influential concubines. The image of terracotta figurines does not aim to express the personality traits of the characters, but rather focuses on depicting the clothing features that represent the different identities of various characters. Some of the terracotta figurines have mortise and tenon joints on their limbs, which can be disassembled and even moved up and down. For easier identification, some even use a brush to write their identity on their body. Due to the emphasis on the production of terracotta figurines that resemble living beings, the social system, aesthetic trends, and cultural integration of the Tang terracotta figurines can be truly restored and deduced through their imagery.

2.2 The Women's Clothing Image of Tang Dynasty Figurines Under the Influence of Sino-Foreign Exchanges

Tang Dynasty figurines are usually divided into four categories in archaeology based on their depicted forms: human figurines, animal figurines, models, and tomb figurines. With the deepening of research, a classification system for terracotta figurines based on their location and purpose has gradually emerged. It mainly includes categories such as town guardians, travel etiquette, home life, and animal and daily utensil models [4]. This study focuses on female figures within the human figurine category from the Tang Dynasty, particularly those unearthed in the two capital regions.. Combined with clothing characteristics, they are classified into the following three categories: women figurines with skirts, women figurines with half arms, and women figurines with men's clothing.

2.2.1 Ruqun Female Figurines

Ru was a common upper garment worn by women of all social classes in the Tang Dynasty. In the Tang Dynasty, Yan Shigu's annotation of the "Urgent Works"(Volume 2) states, "A long garment is called a 'pao', which reaches down to the ankle bone. A short garment is called a 'ru', which extends above the knees." [5] Another viewpoint holds that a short and waist shaped garment is called a ru. Ru, as a form of clothing corresponding

to a robe, specifically refers to a short top that is knee length or above. The combination of "short robe long skirt" formed by pairing it with a long skirt began in the Han Dynasty, but by the Tang Dynasty, it had undergone significant morphological evolution. There are significant differences in the structural features such as collar and sleeve styles between Tang Dynasty and Han Dynasty in the design of *ruqun*. In terms of clothing contour, the Han Dynasty's Ru skirt was closer to the body contour, and this shape was also continued in the early Tang Dynasty. However, in the prosperous Tang Dynasty and later period, it tended to be loose and elegant, reflecting an open social atmosphere. In terms of clothing details, compared to the dignified and rigorous style reflected in the clothing of the previous dynasties, the Tang Dynasty women's jackets and skirts exhibited significant openness. This aesthetic orientation is particularly prominent in Tang Dynasty terracotta costumes, where the neckline is noticeably lowered, forming a low neckline design that showcases a more liberated dressing style. And it can also be confirmed through unearthed cultural relics such as paintings and murals of noble women in the Tang Dynasty, where the collar of the upper garment is almost always very low, exposing the cleavage. The female figurine in the Tang tomb of Guo Village, Changwu, Shaanxi Province, also wears a robe with a single blade shaped semi bun. She wears a red-cross collar robe on top and a long red striped skirt on the bottom, with a red belt around her waist and silk draped around her right shoulder ("Figure 1").



Figure 1 The female figurine in the Ruqun.

a Source: taken by the author at the Shaanxi History Museum.

At the same time, the evolution of sleeve styles in Tang Dynasty women's jackets showed obvious characteristics of the times ("Figure 2"). In the early Tang Dynasty, the style of tight fitting and narrow sleeves was popular, but after the prosperous Tang

Dynasty, it gradually developed into loose and oversized sleeve styles. This transformation from narrow to wide not only showcases the natural beauty of women's body shape, but also echoes the aesthetic trend of advocating voluptuous figures during the prosperous Tang Dynasty. It is worth noting that although "Ru" has always referred to short clothes in terms of form, its specific style varied significantly at different stages of development in the Tang Dynasty.



Figure 2 Standing figurine of a woman with a fallen horse bun and robe skirt. Source: Li Yan, Xi'an Museum.

a Edited by Li Yan, "She Chang'an", Shandong People's Publishing House, 2019 edition, page 17.

2.2.2 Half-arm Female Figurines

As one of the important types of Tang Dynasty clothing, the development and evolution of the half-arm reflects the integration of Central Plains clothing and Hu-style dress. Half-arm, also known as "half-sleeve", is a short outer garment developed on the basis of the Wei and Jin dynasties' upper garment, which has no collar (or lapel) and a front facing (or pullover) design. [6] Feng Jian's "Continuation of Matters" quotes from the "Record of Two Rites": "In the great cause of the Sui Dynasty, the inner palace often wore half skirts. That is today's long sleeves. Emperor Gaozu of Tang cut the sleeves and called them half-arms." [7] Its characteristics are that the sleeves are elbow length, the clothes are waist length, and men often wear them. It was initially worn as an attire for palace maids, and gradually became a common attire for female officials in the imperial court. The "Yu Fu Zhi" in the Old Book of Tang clearly records that "female historians wear half sleeved skirts and robes" [8], indicating their important position in the palace costume system. Due to the widespread popularity of Hu culture among various social classes in the Tang Dynasty, rulers

implemented relatively lenient foreign policies towards foreigners, making it a trend for women in the Tang Dynasty to wear small sleeved clothes with half arms on top, which became a common practice among the people.

Archaeological discoveries indicate that during the Tang Dynasty, women's half-arm clothing was mainly designed with a double-breasted design, with a length reaching the waist. The collar styles were mostly round and crossed, and the collar position was generally lower, showing an exposed style; In terms of sleeve length, there is a significant difference, with longer sleeves and elbows, while shorter sleeves are only about 10 centimeters wider than shoulders; In terms of clothing edge decoration, cuffs and hem are often decorated with edges wider than 5 centimeters; In terms of wearing style, the half arm can be fixed by the buckle in the middle of the placket or the knot at the hem, presenting a diverse dressing style. From the perspective of cultural origins, half-arm not only absorbs the characteristics of short-sleeved Hu clothing, but also retains the narrow and short features of traditional Ru clothing, which is a typical example of the integration of Chinese and foreign clothing cultures.

It is worth noting that the half-arm in the Tang Dynasty terracotta women's clothing system exhibits a dual use of both internal and external clothing. As shown in "Figure 3", the three colored female standing figurine is adorned with a spiral bun and a small sleeved jacket. The outer cover is at the elbow and half arm level, and the shoulders are draped with silk fabric that hangs down from the back to the front, showing the dignified and elegant state of the female figurine. At the same time, in addition to wearing the outer half of the arm, there are also many ways of wearing the inner half of the arm among Tang Dynasty figurines wearing Hu costumes. Among the painted figurines unearthed from the main tomb of Jinxiang County in the eastern suburbs of Xi'an, there are also many female figurines with half arms worn inside their outer garments. As shown in "Figure 4", a female figurine was unearthed from the main tomb of Jinxiang County. She had a double bun hairstyle, half an arm inside, and wore a light green base with a white floral pattern on the outside. She wears a round-necked Hu suit with a wide embroidered flower edge on the collar and a waistband. As shown in "Figure 5", the female standing figurine is wearing a flip eaved Hu hat on her head, and is also paired with half an arm on the inside and a large collared Hu suit on the outside. This suggests that

wearing the half-arm garment as an underlayer was also a fashionable trend during the height of the Tang Dynasty.



Figure 3 Tri-colored female standing figurines.

a Source: Palace Museum: "Carving Like Life - Sui and Tang Dynasty Terracotta Figurines in the Palace Museum Collection", Forbidden City Press, 2006 edition, page 104.



Figure 4 Standing figurines of women in Hu robes.

a Source: Li Yan, Xi'an Museum, Compilation: "She Chang'an", Shandong People's Publishing House, 2019 edition, page 51.



Figure 5 Hu hat and Hu clothing female standing figurines.

a Source: Li Yan, Xi'an Museum, Compilation: "She Chang'an", Shandong People's Publishing House, 2019 edition, page 48.

2.2.3 Women Figurine in Men's Clothing

Under the influence of Confucian culture, the saying "men and women do not wear the same clothing" has been a traditional norm for centuries. In the Tang Dynasty, with the influence of religious dissemination, ethnic cultural integration, and cultural inclusiveness, women wearing men's clothing became a remarkable historical phenomenon. The female figurine in men's clothing is a unique phenomenon in Tang Dynasty figurine art, reflecting the openness of Tang society and the changes in the status of women. In the "Annotations on Ancient and Modern China", it is recorded that "during the period of Tianbao, the wife of a sergeant wore zhang boots, a shirt, boots, and a hat, which were integrated inside and outside." [9] The "Yu Fu Zhi" in the Old Book of Tang also records that "one may have had a husband's clothes, boots, and shirts, and the hierarchy of the inside and outside was consistent." [10] Regardless of social status, women wearing men's clothing became a social trend. The emergence of female figurines in men's clothing is closely related to the prevalence of the "Hu style" in the Tang Dynasty. The opening of the Silk Road allowed Tang society to absorb a large number of foreign cultural elements, and Hu clothing (such as collars, narrow sleeves, and boots) became a fashion trend. In addition, during the Tang Dynasty, with the expansion of women's living space, the Tang Dynasty equestrian fashion, which originated from northern ethnic groups during the Northern Dynasties period, and the polo sport, which was introduced from Persia through the Western Regions and became popular in the Tang Dynasty [11], were also popular among women in the Tang Dynasty. As a result, men's clothing became more practical and appealing to women. As shown in "Figure 6", the female figurine has a double hanging bun on her head, wearing a round necked robe and shirt, a waist belt, high boots on her feet, and horseback hunting - fully reflecting the Tang Dynasty female style of Wang Jian's poem "Shooting palace maids in red makeup, each with a new bow stretched".



Figure 6 Camel hunting female figurines.

a Source: Li Yan, Xi'an Museum, Compilation: "She Chang'an", Shandong People's Publishing House, 2019 edition, page 137.

The female figurine in men's clothing combines the heroic style of male clothing with the soft and graceful image of women in its design. As shown in "Figure 7", the female standing figurine is wearing a tassel head ornament, a floral patterned round neck robe, and a waistband, which is a typical male attire of the Tang Dynasty. The terracotta figures have a confident and composed expression, which also reflects the confidence and vitality of women in the Tang Dynasty. A large number of male and female figurines have been unearthed from tombs dating to the early and high Tang periods.. The trend of women wearing men's clothing during the Tang Dynasty coincided with the budding of female consciousness in ancient China, a time when women's cultural, social, and recreational activities were particularly vibrant. After the An Lushan Rebellion, female figurines in men's clothing were never excavated again.



Figure 7 Colored painting female standing figurine in men's clothing.

a Source: Shaanxi Tang Sancai Art Museum, compiled: "Long Song of the Royal Imperial Garden in the Prosperous Era - Xingqing Palace Tang Sancai Art Exhibition", 2022 edition, page 53.

3. THE AESTHETIC EVOLUTION OF FEMALE COSTUME STYLES IN TANG DYNASTY TERRACOTTA FIGURINES

3.1 *The Shape of "Lean to Plump"*

In the early Tang Dynasty, the silhouette and shape of female figurines were similar to those of the previous dynasty. At this time, the female figurines fully conform to the traditional aesthetic concept of shaping the "delicate beauty" of women: having a thin and slender figure, with slim shoulders and necks; The hairstyle is mostly a concise high bun, and the expression is mostly a nod and low brow posture; They typically wore the half arm, straight clothes, and pleated skirts favored by Tang Dynasty women, while also pairing them with tassels on the shoulders; The silhouette of the clothing conforms to the curves of the body, presenting the natural beauty of the female body. As shown in "Figure 8", the female dance figurine has a semi-bun hairstyle that was popular from the Sui Dynasty to the early Tang Dynasty, with well-defined facial features and eyes cast downward; it wears a low necked, narrow sleeved long shirt on the upper body, with a half-arm outer cover, draped diagonally, hanging down, and a floor length pleated skirt underneath.



Figure 8 Yellow glazed female figurines of music and dance (pottery).

a Source: Taken by the author at the Xi'an Museum.

During the prosperous Tang Dynasty, society was stable and the economy was prosperous. Through frequent exchanges with neighboring ethnic groups along the Silk Road, a large number of foreign cultures were introduced and absorbed. The culture was open-minded and diverse, and the status of women was elevated, gradually giving birth to an aesthetic trend of women's health and openness. [12] During the reign of Emperor Xuanzong, as Li Bai praised, "Clouds desire clothes and flowers, flowers desire beauty, spring breeze brushes the threshold and reveals the richness of flowers." The voluptuous beauty exemplified by Yang Yuhuan was emulated throughout society, giving rise to a feminine aesthetic that associated fullness with beauty. Most of the female figurines of this period were presented as "graceful and wealthy": full and healthy figures, with plump faces; The hairstyles are diverse and varied, with a relaxed and composed expression; The clothing matching became more diversified, with gradually wider clothing contours, wider cuffs, and longer skirts dragging down the floor, showcasing the full-figured beauty of women. As shown in "Figure 9", the female figurine wears a double bun and a smile on her face, exuding a calm and composed demeanor. The outfit features a draped shawl and flowing wide sleeves, with a floor-length skirt that starts at the chest and flares gradually with light, airy fabric. The same trend of changes in stylistic features is also fully reflected in the artistic characteristics of the maid image in Tang tomb murals. [13] After the You'an Lushan Rebellion in the mid to late Tang Dynasty, the country's strength weakened and artistic achievements were not as good as those of the prosperous Tang Dynasty. The female images of Tang terracotta warriors became increasingly obese, even showing characteristics of being fat, strong, and bloated. Therefore, this article mainly focuses on the discussion of the characteristics of the aesthetic evolution of Tang Dynasty female figurine costume design before the An Lushan Rebellion.



Figure 9 Half-arm female figurine draped in silk.

a Source: Li Yan, Xi'an Museum. Edited by Li Yan: "She Chang'an", Shandong People's Publishing House, 2019 edition, page 44.

3.2 Colors Changing from "Simple but Elegant to Bright and Gorgeous"

The female figurines in the early Tang Dynasty had relatively simple hairstyles, minimal or modest head accessories, and elegant makeup. The clothing colors were relatively rich, with red, green, yellow short jackets and intermediate colored skirts or yellow glazed female figurines being more common. The Tang Dynasty tri-colored female figurines unearthed from Li Hui's tomb in "Figure 10" present the basic characteristics of female clothing in the early Tang Dynasty. The overall color scheme is relatively simple, and the character design and clothing expression reflect a more realistic style. Her face is round, with pink and red lips, and a slender mustache above her upper lips. She wears a small crown and looks diagonally downwards, with a slightly dull expression. In the early Tang Dynasty, the colors used for female clothing in Tang figurines were generally single, usually using single color glazes such as red, yellow, green, white, and black; The face makeup is elegant, as described in You Weizhuang's "Lament for Women": "The crying makeup does not dry in the morning, and the plain face condenses into fragrant snow." In the early Tang Dynasty, women's makeup was characterized by elegance and simplicity, with a powder white plain face and no rouge.



Figure 10 Tang tri-colored pottery unearthed from Li Hui's tomb.

a Source: Shi Ning: "The earliest Tang Sancai figurines unearthed from Li Hui's tomb, Tang Qiuqian Shangshu", published in Collection, Issue 17, 2016, page 32.

During the prosperous Tang Dynasty, there were hundreds of officials vying for lavish funerals, with figurines resembling horses and carvings resembling life. Under the influence of thick burial customs and social culture, Tang Dynasty figurines, especially female figurines and tri-colored figurines, were more vivid, subtle, and colorful. At this time, the female figurines had the most diverse hairstyles, with gorgeous and varied makeup. The rosy rouge reflected the bold and confident spirit of women in the prosperous Tang Dynasty. Clothing colors are no longer composed of single colors, but are instead characterized by more intricate details, either exquisite and elegant, or bright and elegant. As shown in "Figure 11", the female standing figurine has thick black hair, her temples cover her ears, and her head is tied in a black bun; The face is rich and plump, with two bright and lively faces, and a smile on the face; It has heavy makeup and vibrant colors, with crimson rouge and wine blending on both cheeks, red mother of pearl on the eyebrows, emerald green plum blossom mother of pearl on both cheeks, black face on the corners of the mouth, and red lips and white teeth. Wearing a wide-sleeved black and red shirt with a V-neck and half an arm; Wearing a chest length skirt with orange red background and floral patterns, the skirt has a slightly exposed upturned head and pointed toes. The overall design is rich and full, with a moderate degree of color variation.



Figure 11 Wuman bun half-arm female standing figurine.

a Source: Li Yan, Xi'an Museum. Edited by Li Yan: "She Chang'an", Shandong People's Publishing House, 2019 edition, page 45.

4. CONCLUSION

The prosperous exchange between China and foreign countries brought about by the Silk Road had a profound and diverse impact on Tang society, impacting multiple fields such as economy, politics, culture, technology, art, and social life. Especially in terms of art and clothing, foreign patterns, accessories, and craftsmanship were integrated into the Tang culture.. Hu clothing, Hu hats, and other clothing elements influenced the dressing style of women in the Tang Dynasty, making it more diverse and cosmopolitan. By examining the influence of Sino-foreign exchanges on the clothing of Tang terracotta women along the Silk Road, it can be seen that the aesthetic evolution of Tang terracotta women's clothing at each stage was influenced by the cultural background of the Silk Road. From the perspective of clothing silhouette, the clothing silhouette of female figurines in the early Tang Dynasty was influenced by Hu clothing and the previous dynasty, retaining aesthetic features that were closer to the body curve. The overall shape was slim and streamlined, pursuing the traditional feminine "softness and beauty"; The prosperous Tang Dynasty had strong national strength, and with the development of more diverse cultures, women's aesthetics were dominated by "voluptuous beauty" from top to bottom, resulting in a more diverse and plump overall appearance, and a greater pursuit of women's "healthy beauty"; During the mid to late Tang Dynasty, female figurines faced dual pressures from technology and society, leading to a trend of obesity and bloating. From the perspective of clothing color, the early Tang Dynasty female figurines had relatively single colors and a slightly stiff clothing design, mostly

composed of single color blocks, with a fresh and elegant makeup; During the prosperous Tang Dynasty, the clothing of female figurines gradually became more colorful, with diverse patterns and bright makeup colors in various forms. This fully reflects the aesthetic evolution of Tang terracotta women's clothing from thin to plump, from simple elegance to gorgeous, which emerged in the context of Sino-foreign exchanges on the Silk Road.

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