

Classification of Mongol and Yuan Robes

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Textiles and costumes from the Mongol and Yuan period (13–early 14th centuries) were documented by not only the Chinese historians but also western travelers, such as the former Yuan Shi (Yuan History), Meng Da Bei Lu (Records about Barbarian Mongols), Hei Da Shi Lue (Stories of Black Mongols), and the latter The Travels of Marco Polo and The Journey of William of Rubruk to the Eastern Parts. In the recent decade, besides of excavated finds, some complete Mongol and Yuan robes come out and are collected in some private collections, such as those in Mongol and Yuan Culture Museum in Huhhot, Rossi & Rossi Ltd in London and one private collection in San Francisco, which make it possible for us to know the basic classification of Mongol and Yuan robes.

I. Textiles for robes

In Yuan Shi, a series of common textiles were mentioned as the materials for jishen robe, the formal robe for both emperor and officials in the banquet.

Emperor, winter	Emperor, summer	Official, winter	Official, summer	Textiles for jishen robe
Nasij	Nasij	Nasij	Nasij	Gilt Lampus
Qiemianli		Qiemianli		Velvet
Baoli	Baoli		Baoli	Brocade
Fengpi				Leather
Yinshu				Fur
	Maozi		Maozi	Wool textile
	Luo	Luo	Luo	Gauze
	Dazi		Dazi	Gilt brocade
	Qin Shufu			Fine wool textile

Combined with excavated textiles, the common textiles for Mongol and Yuan robes could be listed in below:

1. Nasji, basically in lampus weave and woven with gilt threads, including gold strips and wrapped gold threads;
2. Twill damask and satin damask woven with supplementary gold threads, or brocaded, including complete gold woven damask, brocaded gold damask, etc;
3. Embroidery with gold threads on either twill or satin damasks;

4. Gauze printed with gold foils;
5. Silk tapestry;
6. Polychrome woven silk, possibly in lampus weave, but possibly in samite weave, which could be the historical textile, so called Zandaniji in central Asia. (see figures 1–1,2,3,4,5,6 Various weave structures)



Fig.1-1 Nasij

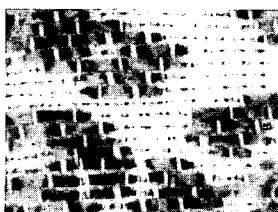


Fig.1-2 Twill damask with gold threads



Fig.1-3 Embroidery with gold threads

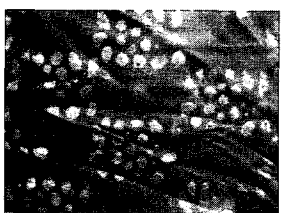


Fig.1-4 Gauze printed with gold foils



Fig.1-5 Silk tapestry



Fig.1-6 Polychrome woven silk, lampus

Among above, 1, 2, 3 and 4 can all be the material for jishen robes. However qiemiaoli was the one without archaeological evidences.

II. Classification of robes

There are mainly two groups of robes in Mongol and Yuan periods, one in fitting shape and the other with wide sleeves, the former for both male and female, but the latter only for female.

1. Fitting robe: narrow sleeves, narrow waist, three or more buttons or tapes to make ties on the right side, wide skirt joined with two panels overlapped in front and back, right opening. It consists of two types:

2.1. Robe with braids

Yuan Shi explains this type all same as narrow sleeves robe in shape except braids for the waist. While Hei Da Shi Lue mentions more details: the so called waist braids, made of red or purple silk fabric, were for decoration to show the color and brightness. In fact, based on the archaeological finds, the waist braids were made in three methods, silk threads, silk tabby, and threads made of silk tabby. (see fig.2)

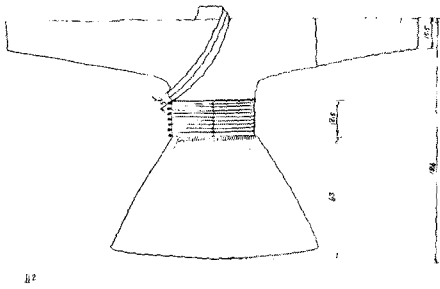


fig.2 braid

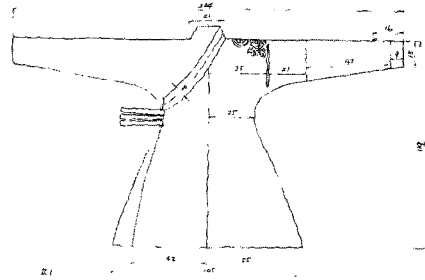


fig.3 movable sleeves

2.2. Hai Qing robe, Robe with all weather sleeves

One opening was made in front of each shoulder, so that the arm is allowed to come out when the weather is hot. This is what so called robe with all weather sleeves, and hai qing robe in Chinese, which is still used in the central Asia. (see fig.3)

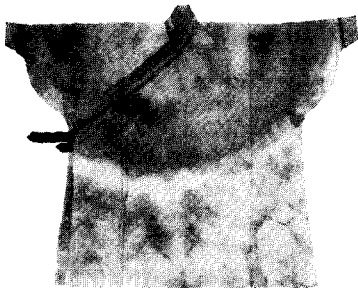


fig.4 wide

2. Robe with wide sleeves

According to Meng Da Bei Lu, this robe, similar to Chinese Taoist robes, has long skirt which should be kept by two waitresses during walk. More detailed document could be found in Xi Jing Zhi: its style is extremely wide, but with very narrow cuff, about 5 Chinese inches. Under both arms, there are purple gauze tapes to tie. During walk, the skirt of robe should be lift by other females. So this robe is called li fu. (see fig.4)

3. Pattern layout on the robes

Many Mongol and Yuan robes show the application of such a design idea "woven into weave", which means pattern design layout follows the robe style design. Most of the nasij robe has a pattern bank on the shoulders, and silk brocade and tapestry have usually cloud collar shape, as well as those with front and back badges and shoulder designs. All these styles of robe created a great influence to the eastern and western costume at that time, and the costume in the following dynasties. The styles of dragon robe and rank badge robe.