

A Study on the Comparison of Costume at Lower and Middle Class in the Tudor Dynasty

Kim, Kyung-Hee

Full-time Instructor, Dept. of Fashion and Textile Design, Seoil College

Abstract

This study intends to consider the characteristics of Tudorian costume and find out how the thoughts and cultures in those days had influences on the costume trends of low and middle class.

In terms of the Tudorian costume which generated new cultural mainstreams along with blossomed civil culture, this study focuses on the characteristics and trends of costume at low and middle class, which have been little addressed in studies on western costume history or related fields, turning from the costume of upper class based on wealthy noblemen who showed off its dignity and authority along with jewelry and gorgeous ornamental craftsmanship.

This study used related pictures, museum material and other literatures as its reference. It first looked into the general characteristics of western costume and considered the characteristics of costumes popularized in professionals at middle class such as apprentice, yeomen and low-class people.

Professional or other middle class almost typically used to wear tunic, doublet, shirts, coat or long gown. Black was mainly used as clothes color. Similarly to upper class, silk or velvet was very often used as material. People at low class enjoyed wear costumes with simple and easy style for working. They also preferred natural color and cotton or wool as material.

This study intended to find out which type of costumes people at low and middle class enjoyed wearing, rather than compare costume between such two classes.

Key words: apprentice, lower class, middle class, professionals, yeomen

I. Introduction

In the past, we used to have on attractive and fashionable clothes all the time, which became one of criteria to express social and economic position of every individual when selecting clothes.

In the past, fashion leaders included king(or queen), royal family and nobility, who mainly wore a variety of gorgeous clothes according to a flow

of trends.

Likewise, people at low and middle class also wanted to put on trendy clothes, because such taste has been commonly inherent in all human beings. They actually kept making attempts to imitate the clothing trends of upper class.

So far, the studies on costume history, whether western or oriental, has focused on socio-economic and cultural background and mainly addressed the transition courses of costume at

upper class, which evolved in accordance with its political and economic power.

Meanwhile, there has been not anything special or noteworthy in terms of the costume of low and middle class so that corresponding studies or literature are insufficient.

Thus, this study intends to consider the characteristics of Tudorian costume and find out how the thoughts and cultures in those days had influences on the costume trends of low and middle class.

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II. Theoretic Backgrounds

1. Historical Backgrounds

In the British History, the Tudor Dynasty has been well known as a period of absolute monarchy. The administration of central government concentrated on a monarch along with its bureaucratized system, which resulted in

strengthening sovereign power.¹⁾

As noble power was weakened after Wars of the Roses, Henry VII deprived noblemen of control and jurisdiction over their vassal group. He also employed gentry and bourgeoisie into the Privy Council, enacted Maritime Act to regulate merchant activities and enhanced royal finance. In this way, Henry VII built up the foundation of absolutism regime.

In addition, he employed new classes such as gentry, yeomen and merchant, who were newly invented to establish absolutism dynasty over noblemen. Those days, gentry typically referred to the gentlemen who lived in rural town and yeoman was also one of classes in rural town, who ranked between gentry and serf.²⁾ As freemen, they participated in the Hundred Years' War and fulfilled the loyalty to their kingdom without fearing any war, because they would be more affected by social unrest than any other class and could not help but uphold strong sovereign for their stable living.

Henry II also promoted oversea trade and enacted Navigation Act, which contributed to enhancing England up to a maritime power around the world. This act supported English vessel conditions and shipping business in the political ways so that newly-risen middle class upheld their king.³⁾

The death of Henry VII was followed by the enthronement of his second prince, Henry VIII, who was well known as one of the strongest kings in England. Henry VIII played a role in more strengthening absolutism dynasty. Actually, he was well known by his 6 queen consorts. In particular, he issued the Act of Supremacy⁴⁾ in 1534 by taking an opportunity of divorce from his queen Katherine. He dissolved domestic abbey which was incompliant with him and confiscated

its feudal territory. Moreover, he represented even the chief and supreme over English church.

Elizabeth I adopted the predestination theory of Calvinism as a doctrine over Anglican Church. She also enacted the Elizabethan Poor Law and Vagrancy Acts⁵⁾ so as to relieve and control people who were expelled to enclosure.

2. General Characteristics of Costume

The costumery of England was first affected by Italian mode. Then, it was much affected German, Spanish and French mode respectively.⁶⁾

Especially, Henry VIII preferred German mode to any other modes, while a great English queen Elizabeth I was considerably affected by French court fashion under the reign of Henry III.

For the costume in the first half of 16th century, it is remarkable that last Gothic costume focused on physical height was changed to the costume which highlighted breadth and volume. Men's long and wrinkled coat and shoes with pointed toe were transformed into shortened coat with broadened shoulder and highlighted volume and square-like shoes with wider toe, respectively.

In this way, a sort of grotesque mode was popularized such as slash, puff and pad, which featured excessive physical distortion. These distortions can be found in detail from the portraits of Henry VIII painted by Holbein, a court painter of Henry VIII.

Basically, Tudorian men wore shirts made of white linen, silk or taffeta, which was originated from medieval undertunic.⁷⁾ To such shirts, doublet or jerken used to be added along with thick gown or short cape. Over doublet or jerken, they would put on a German-mode gown which featured broad and abundant shoulder, otherwise Spanish cape. They also used to put

on coats by opening its front, not adjusting. Long gown with length down to ankle was used in various ceremonies, which clergymen or professionals mainly wore.

For cloke, there were a variety of lengths, colors, accessories and materials depending on occupation, class, economic capability and individual taste. For example, upper class used to have on very short cloke, while middle class used to have on longer cloke.⁸⁾

Until the 16th century, doublet was one of favorite costumes inside men's coat. And padding was mainly used to increase volume, because this padding was then assumed to add more maleness to men's appearance.

III. Costume at Lower and Middle Class

1. Middle Class

1) Professional

In Tudorian dynasty, technical occupations included judge, physician, musician and doctor who used to put on a little simpler costume than nobility.

(1) Judge

The shape of garments worn by judges during fifteenth century was similar to them of the fourteenth century<Figure 1>. But in scarlet, and Occasionally purple, according to their rank: budge was the fur used for lining and edging the garments. A small black silk scarf tied round the waist now appears.

The scarlet robes worn by judges during the late sixteenth century consist of a long gown with sleeves turned back at the wrists with budge, a hood with deep cape edged with the same fur, a



<Figure 1> Serjeant-at-Law
(Medieval Costume
and Fashion, p. 259)



<Figure 2> A Judge(Tudor Costume
And Fashion, p. 691)



<Figure 3> A Physician(Tudor
Costume And
Fashion, p. 74)

mantle lined with budge, and a square black velvet or cloth cap, worn when not on the bench or tucked into the black satin waist sash on State occasions. Underneath is the coif, the 'principal and chief insignment of habit wherewith serjeants-at-law on their creation are decked.'⁹⁾ It should be noticed that the mantle is placed on top of the cape, the hood being turned back over it. The mantle was worn only at coronations, opening of Parliament, cathedral services, and on the first day of term. A broad black silk scarf was sometimes hung round the neck, stole fashion, when the mantle was dispensed with<Figure 2>. These robes remain in use up to the present day.

(2) Doctor

In the fifteenth century the ordinary everyday dress of a physician consisted of a long gown, ungirded, having loose sleeves edged with white

fur, a hooded cape lined with fur, and a high, black, felt, brimless, basinshaped cap. <Figure 3>, shows a physician wearing a long black gown, without fur, and a black cap. A hooded cape, unlined or lined with fur, would be worn when not attending to the business of the sick room. The full academic robes of a Doctor of Medicine, Oxford, late fifteenth century, are shown. Over the ordinary black gown is worn a short cloak of red. Often the cloak was seamed up a short distance from scarf or tippet. A green hood was the distinguishing colour of the faculty of medicine during the reign of Henry VII.¹⁰⁾ The doctor wears an underrobe of black velvet and over it a long gown of black cloth with wide open sleeves lined and edged with brown fur. Physicians sometimes wore the livery colours of the Royal or noble person ages to whose household they were attached.

<Figure 4> we see a physician of the Elizabethan era. His underdress is a suit of the period, and so is his flat black velvet cap. The wrap-over cloth gown of a dark colour or black, lined throughout or turned back only with fur, has sleeves of the fashionable shape, and to the waistbelt is attached a commodious pouch. The professional coif of white lined, the only symbol of his calling, is worn under the cap.

2) Gentry

Gentry led in changing the conventional structure of English rural communities and most pioneers in farming development actually belonged to gentry.¹¹⁾ Young gentry men used to put on same clothes as those in the period of Henry VI, i.e. broad-sleeved tunic.

The young gentleman is therefore garbed in a fashionable gown, as worn by Nobility, in some bright colour. The sleeves are fairly close fitting

and turn back at the wrists to form cuffs. A large rough beaver hat is worn at a rakish angle, over a small cap of the same shape.

In addition, young gentlemen would have on tunic with detached black velvet sleeve. The surcote is of cloth of gold, lined and turned back with brilliant blue silk. It has narrow sleeves turned back with blue at the wrists, but they are worn off the arms and hang behind from the shoulders <Figure 5>.

Until the mid of the 16th century, gentleman class used to wear less gorgeous clothes of which style was a little modified. Former gentleman class would have on long gown and clothes with same fashion as those Henry VII enjoyed wearing.¹²⁾

Wealthy merchants typically used to wear long gown made of common cloth or velvet. Lined and turned-back sections were made of fur. These sections kept open, not girded. The long tubular



<Figure 4> A Physician (Tudor Costume And Fashion, p. 691)



<Figure 5> A Gentleman (Tudor Costume And Fashion, p. 77)



sleeves are now mere panels, long and often flat, the arm passing through an opening cut like an inverted T. Under this gown the merchant wears a skirted doublet with loose sleeves, and a pouch and rosary, through unseen, are suspended from the waistbelt. An undervest, the descendant of the plastron rising beneath the top of the doublet, and under it is the shirt. Hosen of cloth, yarn, or worsted, shoes of leather with round or square toes, and a bonnet of velvet, cloth, or fur complete this typical costume of the opulent commoner.

<Figure 6> is typical of the English gentleman of the latter part of Henry VIII reign. His costume is moderate proportions. It consists of a tunic with skirt the sleeves could be of the same material and colour or different as shown.

This is worn over a shirt with a turned-down collar tied at the throat. The surcote in this instance matches the tunic and forms a 'suit'. This

would be carried out in a dark coloured cloth edged with bands of velvet and braid, or with braid alone. It was not essential, however, that tunic and surcote should be alike, and frequently one sees in illustrations the tunic worn without a surcote. A flat cap of velvet or cloth was the usual head covering, and long top boots with square toes were worn over the hosen when required.¹³⁾

Pages who attended the King and nobility or jockeys employed in the Royal used to wear parti-coloured tunic or doublet made of Bruges satin and white fustian cloth¹⁴⁾ so that undershirt was visible. They also put on belt around their waist. The under-sleeves are close-fitting, with wide cylindrical upper-sleeves to elbow length and pleated into the armholes. The headgear is of black velvet with a gold button. The parti-hosen are counterchanged, and broad-toed black shoes with double straps complete the outfit



<Figure 6> English Gentleman (British Costume from Earliest Times To 1820, p. 213)



<Figure 7> Royal page & Jockey (Tudor Costume And Fashion, p. 299)

<Figure 7>.

In Elizabethan period, gentry who could afford to live comfortably without labor was generally called as a gentleman. If he could afford to buy a coat of arms and register himself and his family at the College of Arms, he was, without doubt, a gentleman and an armiger, and would be addressed as 'esquire' or 'master'.¹⁵⁾

Such gentlemen included high-class servants in noble house, wealthy merchants or high skilled professionals. They used to wear shirts made of high quality cotton or linen cloth. Over shirts, they put on doublet followed by skirt. The length of skirt ranged from upper thigh to knee, depending upon age and social position. They also used to put on doublet and coat over slops, rather than cape.

Pouch and dagger hung from his belt and he might have a fine gold chain around his neck to denote wealth, rank or position. His clothes were trimmed, embroidered, and jeweled as much as he could afford, and silk the sumptuary laws would allow, and his appearance was sometimes little different from that of noble gentleman.

Fabrics were still the practical wool and lined, but they were much finer quality than before. Added to this were cottons for undergarments, and silk satins and velvets in modest quantities. Those who could afford to dress especially well were always skirting the edges of the sumptuary laws, trying to get away with just a little bit more than their neighbors.¹⁶⁾

Colors were brighter jewel tone, but not in shocking shades and black was the color for the most formal of occasions. Trim was more ornate, but still mostly restricted to geometric forms or bands of plain colored embroidery or ribbon. The richest paid their sumptuary taxes and wore gold and silver trim, and were richly decorated,

beaded, pearled, or bejeweled, just like the nobles.

3) Apprentices

Important members of the community at this time, especially in London, were the apprentices. Their recognized dress, which was more or less regulated by custom, consisted of a tunic of blue cloth reaching to about the thigh, with moderately close sleeves worn over the ordinary shirts. Hosen attached to short slops were 'sewed up close thereto, as they were all in one piece'. This was their usual summer attire, but in winter their shirts, hosen, and tunics were supplemented by a blue cloth cloak<Figure 8>. A blue coat was the distinctive garb of a menial, and was the habit of serving-men and boys during the whole of the sixteenth and the early part of the seventeenth century. A servant was frequently referred to as a 'blue-coat', or 'blue-bottled' was a term of scorn. Even the official coat of a beadle was blue.¹⁷⁾

London apprentices in the time of Henry VIII wore round black caps with flat brims, like those in general use at the time.

Because they were worn by this class of unfledged tradesmen, flat cap became a snobbish appellation for an apprentice. 'Goodman' was a term of contemptuous familiarity and to greet any one with 'goodman flat cap' was to ensure for oneself a sound box on the ear or something worse.

<Figure 9> shows the style of apprentices in the beginning of Elizabethan period. Compared to former costumery, they had on similar costumes. As such costumes got increasingly gorgeous, however, Mayor and Common Council finally enacted even "Regulations Recommended for the Apparel of London Apprentices"(1582).¹⁸⁾

(1) To wear any apparel but what he receives



<Figure 8> Apprentices(Tudor Costume And Fashion, p. 302)



<Figure9> Apprentices (Tudor Costume And Fashion, p. 701)

from his Master.

- (2) To wear no hat within the City and Liberty thereof, nor anything instead thereof, but a woollen cap, without any silk in or about the same.
- (3) To wear no ruffles, cuffs, loose collar, nor other thing than a ruff at the collar, and that only of a yard and a half long.
- (4) To wear no doublets, but what were made of canvas, fustian, sackcloth, English leather, or woollen cloth, and without being enriched with any manner of gold, silver, or silk.
- (5) To wear no other coloured cloth or kersey, in hose or stockings, than white, blue, or russet.
- (6) To wear little breeches, of the same stuffs as the doublets, and without being stitched, laced, or bordered.
- (7) To wear a plain upper coat of cloth or

leather, without pinking, stitching, edging, or silk about it.

- (8) To wear no other surcote than a cloth gown or cloak, lined or faced with cloth, cotton, or bays, with a fixed round collar, without stitching, garding, lace, or silk.¹⁹⁾

In this way, gorgeous look dominated even the clothes of apprentices as well as those of people at other classes.

4) Yeomen

This country esquire, Justice of the Peace and of the Quorum and Custos Rotulorum, who writes himself armigero in any bill, warrant, quittance, or obligation, is soberly and substantially clad in a gown with tubular sleeves of cloth decorated with bands of velvet. It is a comfortable garment worn over a suit of sombre hue, and gired with a leathern belt to which a pouch is attached. A set of small goffered cuffs and ruff, a hat perhaps of

velvet, and a medallion or mounted jewel hung round the neck, add to the old gentleman's dignity.²⁰⁾

In Elizabethan period, yeomen were called as 'legales hommes' who were born in England. They earned total revenue of 40 sterlings every year from their own land.

This sort of people have a certain pre-eminence and more estimation than labourers, and of artificers, and these commonly live wealthily keep good houses, and travel to get riches. They are also for the most part farmers to gentlemen, and with grazing, frequenting of markets, and keeping servants do come to great wealth, insomuch that many of them are able, and do buy the lands of unthrifty gentlemen, and often setting their sons to the schools, to the universities, and to the Inns of Court, or otherwise leaving them sufficient lands whereupon they may live without labour, do make them by those

means to become gentlemen.²¹⁾ A yeoman in his best attire would pass for any well-to-do burgher.

5) Citizens and burgher

Citizens and burgesses have next place to gentleman, who be those that are free within the cities and are of some likely substance to bear office in the same. In this place also are our merchants to be installed as amongst the citizens, although they often change estate with gentlemen, as gentlemen do with them. Burghers used to wear gowns made of red, brown and vermillion velvet.

The gown in <Figure 10> is of the usual shape, which as a rule had long tubular sleeves with a slit at elbow level, but in this drawing, taken from a contemporary one, the top part forms a small shoulder cape with a long pendent end.²²⁾

This opulent burgher<Figure 11>, clutching his money bag, comes from a painting of Abingdon



<Figure 10> Lawrence sheriff
(Mourning dress, p. 95)



<Figure 11> A Merchant(The
Chronicle Of Western
Costume, p. 83)



<Figure 12> Gentleman (The
Chronicle Of Western
Costume, p. 91)

Bridge dated about 1590, and now in the hall at Christ's Hospital. It is supposed to represent Geoffrey Barbour, who took a leading part in the building of the bridge during the reign of Henry V. He is dressed, however, as a rich burgher of the sixteenth century, and tom, arising from sheer ignorance, of painting people of past ages arrayed in costume of the artist's time.²³⁾

<Figure 12> shows humble clothes which wealthy burghers enjoyed wearing in the 1580's and 1590's. The suit made of cloth belonged to typical cutting.

They wore upperstocks over upperstocks, and ample cloak reached the height of knee. This is a good example showing typical costumes which merchants enjoyed wearing.

2. Lower class

Inferior to the yeoman was the 'farmer', who cultivated land not his own but for which he paid rent. A peasant man would wear at least a shift or shirt and breeches of some kind. He might wear a laced-up or buttoned jerkin with or without sleeves over this, and some kind of hat with a coif underneath to keep his shaggy hair out of his



<Figure 13> A Looby (British costume From Earliest Times To 1820, p. 229)

eyes.²⁴⁾ All but the poorest would have cloth hosen and shoes, or if he wore no hosen, he might have bare legs or long breeches similar to Pajama pants, cross gartered from ankle to knee. Cross gartered breeches were commonly worn by the lower classes since before the Conquest 500 years before. He would have a cape in cold weather.²⁵⁾

The lower classes mostly spun their own yarn and woven their own cloth, and just because they had to do it does not mean that they were good at it. They wore wool, linen and combinations of the two fibers, such as linsey-woolsey. They also wore leather when they could get it from hunting, and they lined their winter clothes and capes with the skins of rabbits and squirrels.

Young rural men in the period of Henry VII and VIII wore simple cut tunic with open at the throat over a shirt unseen. The hosen of coarse material are ill-fitting, and are kept close to the knee by a



<Figure 14> A Peasant (Tudor Costume And Fashion, p. 813)

strap bound round the leg. Servants of noblemen were supposed to wear uniform with same color and the colors of their clothes were specified for each activity. For instance, light brown clothes were mainly used for farming works.

The Last sort of People of England are day labourers, poor husbandmen, and some retailers copyholders, and all artificers, as tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, brickmakers, masons, etc. As for slaves and bondmen we have none, which is not quite true about bondmen(Figure 13).

As regards the real poor, their style of clothing was much the same as that of the early Tudor period, its chief characteristics being a long-sleeved tunic reaching to the knees, cloth hosen, and a felt or straw hat. They were usually content with the cast-off clothing of their betters.

There is a trace of the medieval lingering in this(Figure 14) costume of a peasant. The tunic is loose, made of a coarse material fastened up the front by two straps and bound at the waist with a strap to which a pouch is attached. Sometimes

<Table 1> Comparison of Costume at Lower and Middle Class

	Middle Class					Lower Class
	Professional	gentry	apprentices	yeomen	citizen and burgher	
cloth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tunic • gown • mantle • girded gown • a hooded cape 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tunic • long gown • doublet • coat • shirt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tunic • doublet • gown • cloak • shirt • hosen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tunic • doublet • gown • shirt • hosen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tunic • doublet • gown • cloak • shirt • hosen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tunic • doublet • shift • jerkin • cloak • shirt • hosen
hat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • square cap • clothcap • felt cap 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • beaver hat • bonnet • flat cap 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • flat cap • hood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cap 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • coif • fur cap • hood • felt cap
color	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • scarlet • purple • black • red 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • blue • white • black 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • blue • white • russet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dark color 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • blue • red • black • brown 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • russet
fabric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • velvet • silk • budge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • velvet • silk • lenen • wool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cloth • leather • silk • canvas • fustian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • velvet • leather 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • velvet • silk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cotton • wool • leather
ornaments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • silk scarf • lined with fur 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fur • belt • embroidery • jewel • ribbon 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • jewel • medal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pendent • silk scarf 	

full slops are seen worn under the tunic, the legs are covered with ill-fitting hosen, often tied below the knee, and feet thrust into cockers. A hood sometimes took the place of a hat, but often both were worn, as of old. If necessary a cloak would be thrown over the shoulders.²⁶⁾

A poor man is described at this time as having an old ragged doublet, and a torn pair of breeches with his hose out at heels, and a pair of old broken slip shoon on his feet, a rope about his middle instead of a girdle, on his head an old greasie cap, which had so many holes in it that his haire started through it. In this way, farmer's clothes had simple decoration and typically had no decoration around the edge.

IV. Conclusion

This study focused on comparing each costumery at low and middle class in Tudorian dynasty. As a result, it can be concluded as follows:

Middle class included professional such as judge or judicial officer and musician, gentry, apprentices and yeoman. Lower class mostly consisted of farmers below yeoman class, who did not have their own land and cultivated leased land. The results of comparing their respective costumes are as shown in <Table 1>.

As shown in <Table 1>, professional or other middle class almost typically used to wear tunic, doublet, shirts, coat or long gown. Black was mainly used as clothes color. Similarly to upper class, silk or velvet was very often used as material. People at low class enjoyed wear costumes with simple and easy style for working. They also preferred natural color and cotton or wool as material.

This study intended to find out which type of costumes people at low and middle class enjoyed wearing, rather than compare costumery between such two classes.

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Received 3 October, Accepted 1 December.