

Conventional Female Donor Costume of Cave 79 of Kumtura

Shenyan[†]

School of Fashion Design & Engineering, ZheJiang Sci-Tech University, ZheJiang, China

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Abstract

Cave 79 of Kumtura grottoes, is the best preserved cave, which has an important meaning for research on Uighur costume. This paper is intended to analyze the costume characteristics of female donors in Cave 79 by comparing image materials between Dunhuang murals and other murals in Xinjiang province. In Cave 79, female donor wears red robe with tight sleeve, whose collar is crescent-shaped decorated. Two different opinions are upheld for this decoration. One regards this as the turn-down collar, while the other believes this as decoration on V-neckline. Red robe is quite common in female donors of Xinjiang and Dunhuang murals and a female in fresco is wearing a crown in a triangle red headwear style, regarded as red silk and drooping at head. Female donors wear an extra coat, kame hair clasp, red jacket, light-colored high-waist skirt with a long-tail waistband, and tangerine Pibo (silk ribbon) with scattered small flowers. All these costume styles are commonly-used by Han females. The kame headwear is also the common ornament for Han females and the female's hairstyle is in cone shape on head by a white kame. Current costumes are similar but not completely same.

Key words : costume, Uighur, Dunhuang, fresco, headgear, Pibo.

I . Introduction

Cave 79 of Kumtura grottoes, is the best preserved cave for images of Uighur donors in Kucha grottoes, which has an important meaning for research on Uighur costume. This paper is intended to analyze the costume characteristics of female donors in Cave 79 by comparing image materials between Dunhuang murals and other murals in Xinjiang province¹⁾.

II . Method

There are two places that conventional female donors are frescoed in Cave 79. Two females

respectively are frescoed in kneeling posture on the left side of front wall entrance. One female in standing posture are frescoed on the front wall of central platform base. Thanks to the relatively complete inscription on fresco, the identities of donors can be almost confirmed as Uighur donor. As the best preserved cave of images of Uighur donor in Kucha grottoes, it has an important meaning for research on Uighur costume. So far, there has been a clear description of donor's image, but scholars haven't performed further studies on costume. This paper probes into analyzing the differences and similarities of female donor costume in Cave 79 and that in Dunhuang grottoes and Xinjiangn province by comparing their image materials.

[†] Corresponding author E-mail : sy1505@163.com

1) H. Chao, *Explore on Kumtura Grottoes Cave* (Chinese Grotto Arts, 1992), p.36.

III. Results

Female donor's costume, in third image of left side of front wall entrance (Fig. 1). This female donor wears red robe with tight sleeve, whose collar is crescent-shaped decorated. Two different opinions are upheld for this decoration. One regards this as the turn-down collar, while the other believes this as decoration on V-neckline. As a matter of fact, the two opinions will form different ideas on costume style. If it is a turn-down collar, this robe should be a Mandarin style in all probabilities, and if it is decorated as V-neckline, it would much likely to be a jumper without front opening. Opinion on V-neckline is mainly educed from modern Uighur costume, whose female collar seldom has turn-down collar and is always decorated by embroidery or collaging materials of different colors. However, both opinions need more documentations and material data before being confirmed.

This kind of red robe is quite common in female donors of Xinjiang and Dunhuang murals. For instance, the three female donors' costumes

in inner wall of south side of main hall entrance, Cave 20 of Bezeklik Grottos (Fig. 2)²⁾, Xinjiang, were totally same. One inscription is still identifiable, inlaid 'Image of Queen'. Another example of Xinjiang mural is the face-to-face frescos of a male and a female on face of Buddha's seat in Cave 24, Bezeklik Grottos. It can be inferred that the female donor is a princess because inscription inlaying 'Image of Princess Yi'er Kai' ermishi'. Same examples are also discovered in Dunhuang grottoes, such as two Uighur female donor frescos in north side of east wall in Cave 409³⁾ of Mogao grottoes and the one on east wall of corridor of Cave 16 of West Thousands Buddha Grottoes (Fig. 3). They all wear the same costume, i.e. tight-sleeve robe with collar decorated. It is obvious that such red robe was popular in Uighur female donors.

The crown style of this female fresco is what really special, because the complete same fresco with such a triangle red headwear style, regarded as red silk and drooping at head, still cannot be found in the currently published materials. However, the similar style of triangular crown does



〈Fig. 1〉 Female Donor in Cave 79 of Kuntura Grottos.



〈Fig. 2〉 Female Donor in Cave 20 of Bezeklik Grottos.



〈Fig. 3〉 Female Donor in Cave 409 of Mogao Grottos.

2) S. Ma, *Han Style Cave of Kuntura Grottoes Cave* (Chinese Grotto Arts, 1992), pp.44-45.

3) Z. Liang and M. Ding, *Caves Newly Discovered in Chinese Grottoe-Kuntura Grottoes Cave* (Chinese Grotto Arts, 1992), p.26.

exist in certain female donor frescos, such as the one behind two male frescos in the south side of east wall entrance of main hall, Cave 148 of Mogao grottoes; those female frescos on east and west walls of main hall, Cave 16 of West Thousands Buddha Grottoes; and the princess fresco in Cave 20 of Bezeklik Grottos. It is generally agreed that their headwear echoes with the sentence 'Gold accouterments on crown reaching out', (cited from 'Taking off the previous clothes to put on queen's big crimson train skirt, with gold accouterments on crown reaching out' - *Biography in the 'Huihe' Section of Old Book of Tang Dynasty*). Compared with headwear of these females, the female's headwear in Cave 79, Kumtura Grottoes is quite similar in style but totally different in materials, for this one uses the red silk while the former three use metal materials. What on earth is this crown made of? In light of Section 74 'Uighur Section' of *History of Five Dynasties*-'Female hair up to bun as high as 5 to 6 *cun*⁴⁾ (according to measurement in Five Dynasties by research, 1 *chi* equals to 23.562cm, and thus 5.5 *cun* is about 13cm), and wrap it by red silk'. This headwear is half height of the head on an average general estimation of a female's head length as 25cm. Through careful observation, it can be concluded that the proportion of headwear and head is consistent with that recorded in documentations. Therefore, it is believed by author what triangle red headwear wraps in fresco of Cave 79 of Kumtura Grottos is her bun, whose style is referenced from 'Gold accouterments on crown reaching out' to some extent.

Another similar example of headwear is that of Uighur female group excavated from place near Hasar city of Turpan. Whether it is 'wrapped by crimson silk' cannot be confirmed due to the black & white picture, but the figure and height is pretty similar, which makes to believe that the two crown styles have certain relationships. One thing still unclear in this fresco is a petal ornamental article on the back of headwear.

Costume of female donors on front wall of platform and on fifth place of left side of entrance is almost same (Fig. 4, 5). The only difference is the former has an extra coat. The latter have kame hair clasp and wears red jacket, light-colored high-waist skirt with a long-tail waistband, and tangerine *Pibo* (silk ribbon) with scattered small flowers. All these costume styles are commonly-used by Han females. Here, taking silk ribbon and kame as examples.

Pibo (silk ribbon), which is also known as *pizi*, *peibo* and *peijin*, is always written in books. In *History Studies of China*-by Ma Gao in Late Tang dynasty, there is a sentence 'During the Kaiyuan period (a period in Tang dynasty), the emperor issued imperial decree that his concubines shall all wear silk ribbon, and this fashion lasts till now'. In *Story of Huo Xiaoyu*-by Tang Jaingfang in Tang dynasty, there is 'Xiaoyu is



◁Fig. 4) Female Donor in Cave 79 of Kumtura Grottos.



◁Fig. 5) Female Donor in Cave 79 of Kumtura Grottos.

4) H. Wu, *Concise General History of Chinese Metrology* (Beijings: China Metrology Publishing House, 2007), p.50.

beautiful. She always wears pomegranate skirt, purple jacket with big sleeves and red & green silk ribbon'. Besides, in poem *For Shi Niang Again (A lady's name)*-by Zhang Wencheng in Five Dynasties, there is 'Tulip silk ribbon dancing in wind, and pomegranate skirt shining under sunlight'.

Wrapping silk ribbon is quite multiple. It can be from back to forth, leaving the ends in front of chest, e.g. the female donor holding a fan under niche, in west wall of Cave 468 of Mogao grottoes and the female in Weaving Picture. It can also be wrapped as one end slipped into belt and the other end left freely for purpose of convenience. In picture of *Watching Birds & Catching Cicadas* in west wall of front hall of Tomb of Crown Prince Zhanghuai, a lady is looking up the bird with one hand holding a hair clasp and the other on the scattered ribbon. The ribbon's right face is red, and the overturned end shows its green inverse side. This is what exactly expressed in *Romantic Story of Huo Xiaoyu*. The third method is to wrap it from back to front, but leaving two ends behind, such as the lady with red & green ribbon in *Staying in Cage, Looking at mirror*-by Wang Shen, maids of honor in *Fan-waving beauty and Palace Ladies Playing Chess*-by Zhou Fang and the beauty in concert of *Han Xizai Gives a Night Party*-by Gu Hongzhong. The ribbon of two Uighur female donors discussed in this section is also in the third method.

The kame headwear is also the common ornament for Han females, cited in many poem and essays in ancient Chinese culture. In Tang dynasty, there are 'Kames on head, smile happily'-by Yuan Zhen; "Oblige a kame after coming back", *Palace Prose*-by Wang Jian; and "Silver kame ornamented hair", *Palace Prose*-by Flower Madam. Kame ornament is also popular in women of Song dynasty. According to *Entry into Sichuan*-by Lu You (a famous poet), 'The unmarried lady wears Tongxin style bun, which is two Chi, with six kames and an ivory comb large as hand behind'. The porcelain female, evacuated from a Song tomb in suburb of Jingdezhen city of Jiangxi province,

is wearing a Tongxin style bun with a wide hair strap and a big comb under strap. Such ornament style is also recorded in *The Dream of Hua in the Eastern Capital*-by Meng Yuanlao and *Record of Song Dynasty*-by Wang Yong. From the above documentations, it can be concluded that kame is always loved by Han females.

There are altogether 4 Uighur donor murals with kames on hair in Xinjiang. The other three murals other than the fifth female fresco on left side of front wall entrance of Cave 79, Kumtura Grottoes, are all found in the relic pieces in Seven-star site of Karashahr. The first piece has 4 donors, 2 males and 2 females respectively. The female's hairstyle is in cone shape on head by a white kame, a little wider than that on the female donor in Cave 79. The others 2 pieces are founded in Qilin Cave 7 of Seven-star site (Le Cap Code). In one piece there are 10 male and female donors standing one by one, and female's hairstyle is ornamented by kame headwear. So it is with the ornaments on other 4 females in the other piece (Fig. 6). Most females in above 4 murals are wearing the round large earring, which was seldom used by Han female in related dynasty. Therefore, earring must be the specific jewelry ornament of Uighur.

The female donor in front wall of platform wears a long train dress outside the skirt and silk ribbon with turn-out collars, this kind of costume is also found in Dunhuang mural, such as female donor in Cave 390 of Mogao grottoes⁵⁾. Jiang



〈Fig. 6〉 Female Donor of Karashahr.

5) B. Jiang, *Researches on Hu Costume of Donors in Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes* (Hao Chunwen, Liaoning People's Publishing House, 2001), p.5.

Boqin believes that the turn-out collar clothing of Hu minority used by donors of Cave 309 in late Sui dynasty and early Tang dynasty is fashionable in Hu minority of central Asia such as Sugda area. Therefore, it can be known that costume of these 2 female donors mixes Han costume and minority costume.

IV. Conclusion

The third female donor in left side of front wall entrance is of typical headwear, corresponding with section 74 of *Uighur Section* of *History of Five Dynasties*-'Female hair up to bun high as 5 or 6 cun, and warp it by red silk'. However, current images found are only similar but not completely same.

Two female donors in front wall of platform and in fifth place of left side of entrance wear the short jacket, long dress and silk ribbon, while the other one in front wall is coated by a long train dress, identifying such style as mix of Han

and minority costumes.

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