

On confucianism reflected in the description of clothing in *the Analects of Confucius*

Huiqin Zhang[†]

English Branch, Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology, China

Abstract

The paper focuses on the clothing codes described in *the Analects of Confucius*, and explores the reasons for the rules setting up, including the rules of color, the design, the pattern, and even the material of the clothes whose distinct features reflect the ceremony and etiquette of the time in the classic, which are in correspondence with the requirements of Confucianism, especially for stressing the social rights, obligations and codes of conduct to everyone in the society.

Keywords: clothing, confucianism, the analects of confucius

I. Introduction

Analects of Confucius is a rich text that includes the fundamental philosophical and social ideas of Confucianism. Most studies on this classic focus on its ideas on education thought, political ideas and moral ethics, few has paid attention to its comments on clothing, how it is related to the society at the time, as well as the relationship between human and nature. This paper examines the clothing and its color, design, pattern, style and fabric to discuss how these features reflect the etiquette of his time, and how it was part of the social stratification, social obligation, and codes of conducts. The paper argues that these clothing codes and styles should be seen as part of Confucian thinking.

II. *Analects of Confucius* and Clothing

In addition to being a philosophical text, *Analects of Confucius* also stipulates a series of codes of conduct for the people to follow in their daily life; these codes are consistent with Confucius' social ideas and moral ethics. The codes make sure the people could live harmoniously together and stay in their social positions, and that the ruler would rule benevolently. The codes of clothing, part of general codes of conduct, focus more on maintaining the hierarchical aspect of society and individual behaviors.

Influence over the clothing rules for the traditional Chinese society; lay the principles, stipulated the codes used by the later dynasties. Among the first books that connected the clothing with the society, *Analects of Confucius* indicated that clothing in China did not only evolve over time; it also transformed dramatically with Dynastic changes or the Imperial decree of a new ruler. For thousands of years, generations of clothes

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[†] Corresponding author (zh-huiqin@163.com)

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designers have devoted themselves to building different system of clothing indicating people's social rank and position more distinguishable, especially between the people in different social class through the pattern, color, material and style of their dress. For example, among the upper dominating class in ancient feudal society, only to the Emperor's robe was assigned the yellow color and the dragon emblem which served as an exclusive affirmation of their power, to the others, it was forbidden.

Based on the core spirit of *Analects of Confucius*, the clothing plays an important role in building up the harmonious society at that time. First, ceremony and etiquette concerning clothing may keep the whole society in perfect order, thus achieving stability and harmony, through requiring every one to act up according to their social role, duty and the social norm. Different social classes should be dressed in different ways in terms of color, material, style, pattern, ornament, so on and so forth. Second, ceremony direct social norm of people, which means the dressing must be conformed to the requirements of etiquette under different situations, the proper costume at the proper time could transform and define a monarch's reputation well. And third, clothing functions as etiquette in social situations, helping people to deal with each other and cooperate well with each other.

III. Confucianism Reflected in the Description of Clothing in James Legge's Version of *Analects of Confucius*

This paper studies how clothing reflects Confucius's idea of hierarchical thinking of the society, his idealism of social harmony, the harmony between human and natural worlds via examining and analyzing specific examples from *Analects of Confucius* translated by James Legge.

1. Color scheme in clothing

Colors are important to traditional Chinese philosophical thinking. According to those who believe in the Chinese Taoist philosophy of "Wu Xing", "blue, red, yellow, white and black" are associated with the primary substances of "wood, fire, earth, metal and water" of which the entire universe consist. In ancient China, Confucius advocated the regulations of color in clothing, exemplified as the followings authentic and academic version chosen from James Legge (1815-1897), who was regarded as a noted Scottish sino-logist. During his tenure as holder of the Chair of Chinese language and Literature at Oxford University, he devoted some 20 years to the translation of the Chinese classics, making contributions to the dissemination of Chinese ideas and culture to the rest of the world (Kong Xianglin, 2006: 324). The key colors in traditional Chinese thinking; their significance: the harmony between the nature and human worlds; human world as extension of the natural world.

Let us examine the specific 15 examples of color from James Legge's version of *The Analects of Confucius*:

Example 1: "The superior man did not use a deep purple, or a puce color, in the ornaments of his dress. Even in his undress, he did not wear anything of a red or reddish color." (James Legge: 131-132)

After entering the slavery and the feudal society, colors of clothing not only served for practical purpose, but possessed aesthetic function of attracting others' attention. Colors also helped distinguish social class between the noble and the lower rank. And as a symbol of the class, dark red, yellow, green, black and white were seen as the noble colors, and for the mainstream colors, between the green and white, the dark and red, between the purple and smoke color, and yellow and black color, all these intermediate colors were considered as the low-rank colors. According to the custom of the Western Zhou dynasty, the bright red and bright purple was very noble colors for noble use. In Confucius' opinion, the collar or decoration of gentlemen's clothes should not be in

dark green or was he supposed to use black on the inside of the clothes as a decoration of sleeves; besides, he could not use red or purple cloth for regular household purpose.

Example 2: “Over lamb’s fur he wore a garment of black; over fawn’s fur one of white; and over fox’s fur one of yellow.” (James Legge: 132)

Normally, gentlemen and nobles wear clothes made of fox fur or other luxury materials. Fox fur has many different kinds, with white fox fur as the most noble kind and only used by emperors; yellow fox-fur is usually used by the feudal princes to make clothes; for senior or junior officials in feudal China, the most common garment materials are green fox fur and lamb skin (the officials wear the latter when going to the palace). During winter, black outer cloth needs to match the black lamb skin, and white outer coat needs to match white fawn fur; and yellow outer cloth needs to match yellow fox fur robe. In ancient times, the fur going inside is called *qin* or a robe whereas outer garment is called *xiyi*. The colors of both the garments inside and outside as well as the accessories must be matching and go harmoniously with one another, Just like today’s dressing etiquette, black tie usually goes with black waistcoat, and different colors and materials are in match with a certain set of norms and regulations. This is not only for the wearer to feel comfortable and look beautiful, but also for the significance and the formality of the occasions or gatherings to be manifested according to conditions of the local custom and official etiquettes of that time. Indeed, a system of matching, coordinating, contrasting colors and shades of light and dark in apparel have had since ancient times, and which still plays an important role in our modern life.

2. Etiquette in clothing

Example 3: “The Master said, “I can find no flaw in the character of Yu. He used himself coarse food and drink, but displayed the utmost filial piety towards

the spirits. His ordinary garments were poor, but he displayed the utmost elegance in his sacrificial cap and apron.” (James Legge: 110)

Confucius advocates proper adornment with glory, although Yu is very economical in his daily life, he displayed the utmost devotion in his offerings to spirits and divinities. Content with the plainest clothes for daily wear, but he saw to it that his sacrificial apron and ceremonial head-dress were of the utmost, and his energy went into draining and ditching. Therefore proper regulations of the costumes must be adopted to show proper respect for the social order and norm. And emphasis is put on the functions of the clothes in social communities to reflect politeness and the class of a person’s position.

Example 4: “In warm weather, he had a single garment either of coarse or fine texture, but he wore it displayed over an inner garment.” (James Legge: 132)

In hot weather, he wore an unlined gown of fine thread loosely woven at home, but puts on an outside garment before going outside. The cloth named “Ge” can be divided into two types according to the textile thickness, whose hide fiber can also be made into the summer cloth. During summer time, you wear something much more coarse, or you call it the thick Ge cloth, or fine Ge cloth. It is more tightly needed or has higher thread counts, so you wear them as a shirt. But when you go outdoors, you will put on another coat on its outside. This is because the fine of Ge cloth is made so thin that helps your skin breathe in a better way. It is often used in summer, because it is thin and the sweat can easily evaporate through the fabric. Besides, it does not cover your whole body and exposes the skin to someone, which is considered not very polite, so it is not for official use, and you must put on something else on the outside so as to cover it.

Example 5: “When he was ill and the prince came to visit him, he had his head to the east, made his court robes be spread over him, and drew his girdle

across them.” (James Legge: 132)

The above sentence indicated that even a junior official was ill and stayed in bed at the period of that time in China, when the emperor condescended to pay a visit, the official must put on his formal outfit, including his court dress and belts and tried to be seated, so as to show his proper respect for the emperor. In one word, his clothing must match his position to the emperor.

Example 6: “When the Master saw a person in a mourning dress, or anyone with the cap and upper and lower garments of full dress, or a blind person, on observing them approaching, though they were younger than himself, he would rise up, and if he had to pass by them, he would do so hastily.” (James Legge: 116)

From this example we know that when Confucius passed by the person who was very young, he might form a judgment based on his dressing, such as the robes of mourning or the ceremonial headdress, with gown and skirt. Just because of it, he was going to walk hurriedly to extend his comity, and his behaviors must fit for the requirements of the ancient society in China.

3. Clothing style

Example 7: “The fur robe of his undress was long, with the right sleeve short.” (James Legge: 132)

Confucius thought that the casual clothes worn at home needed to be made longer to keep warm, with the sleeves on the right side truncated, not only for the convenience at work, and most important was that objects should be made the best use of and waste should always be avoided, which indicated his rule of virtue.

Example 8: “He required his sleeping dress to be half as long again as his body.” (James Legge: 132)

In the above sentence, the bedclothes referred to quilts in ancient times, smaller quilt was called “bei”, and the big one called “qin”. More widely used in bed was “bei”, which was as long as one and a half

length of one’s body so as to cover well and meet the requirements of courtesy. He does not, of course, undress, but simply draws the bedclothes over him.

Example 9: “On the first day of the month he put on his court robes, and presented himself at court.” (James Legge: 132)

Based on mentioned above, on the first day of every month, everyone was supposed to put on “weishang” to meet the emperor on the court. “Weishang” was also for the occasions of benedictions or other ceremonies. It was made of a whole piece of cloth, without cutting, just being folded and sewn up. The style of “Weishang” resulted in using much more cloth than the normal clothes, but it was necessary for the sake of etiquette, because if it were not for the official robe, the extra cloth would have to be cut off, at the Announcement of the New Moon, he put on his court robes and go to Court in full Court dress.

Example 10: “His under-garment, except when it was required to be of the curtain shape, was made of silk cut narrow above and wide below. He did not wear lamb’s fur or a black cap on a visit of condolence.” (James Legge: 132)

Confucius considered some details which are necessary for a gentleman to observe in matters of dress: His under-garment, except when it was worn as an apron (like the Free Masons now) on State occasions, he should always have cut pointed on the upper part. On a visit of condolence he should never wear a suit of lamb’s fur or a dark blue hat. Because in ancient society of China, the lambskin and dark black cap were only for the court to some extent, they were the symbols of politeness, the color of dark also regarded as noble; for the funeral, it couldn’t be economical used.

4. Clothing fabric

Example 11: “When fasting, he thought it necessary to have his clothes brightly clean and made of linen cloth.” (James Legge: 132)

When preparing himself for sacrifice ceremony, the master must wear a good robe made of linen, which indicated that someone must be dressed properly in different situations. And darker colors were much more favored than lighter ones in traditional Chinese clothing, so the main color of ceremonial clothing used to be dark while bright, with elaborate tapestry designs accented. Lighter colored clothes were worn more frequently by people for their everyday use.

Example 12: “The Master said, “The linen cap is that prescribed by the rules of ceremony, but now a silk one is worn. It is economical, and I follow the common practice.” (James Legge: 113)

The linen cap in the above sentence was mainly made of linen in ancient times through a lot of careful work and high level of craftsmanship, so it was very expensive. Pure black silk was the source of the black cap. Compared with it, the linen ones were much cheaper. So Confucius agreed to accept some changes in customs and followed the common practice to meet the masses needs, it also reflected the spirit of Confucianism.

5. Clothing ornaments

Example 13: “When staying at home, he used thick furs of the fox or the badger. When put off mourning, he wore all the appendages of the girdle.” (James Legge: 131)

When staying at home, we may feel relaxed and use thick furs of the fox or the badger without paying attention to personal ornaments, as their decoration not only adds to the attraction of personal beauty, but also tell the social status they were in. At that time, people often chose jade, jewelry, knife and swords as the personal ornaments, but typically jade (HE Qiliang, ZHANG YE, 2006: 033). But when the mourning is over, the appendages of the girdle, which are lucky talismans; or (in a more sophisticated vein of explanations) the symbolic ornaments indicating his rank. A talisman is an object you believed

has magic powers to protect you or bring you good luck.

6. The rules for clothing

Example 14: “The Master said, “Dressed himself in a tattered robe quilted with hemp, yet standing by the side of men dressed in furs, and not ashamed-ah! It is You who is equal to this!” (James Legge: 123)

Confucius believed that clothing may not only distinguish the social positions, it must also be in correspondence with the basic norms of etiquette. Here Confucius praised Zilu, exclaiming that Zilu was the only one among the students who wore shabby cotton gown while standing together with those wearing a mink coat and does not feel shy at all. In actual fact, Confucius also praised him by using a quoted sentence from “Book of Poems”, which could be the highest appreciation of Zilu. Usually, when the rich and the poor are staying together, the rich tend to be arrogant and can not help bullying the poor, while the poor always hope to gain some benefit from the rich. But Zilu treated the rich and the poor equally, showing his respect to everyone surrounding him.

Example 15: “The master said, “where the solid qualities are in excess of accomplishments, we have rusticity; where the accomplishments are in excess of the solid qualities, we have the manners of a clerk; When the accomplishments and solid qualities are equally blended, we then have the man of virtue.” (James Legge: 74)

Confucius not only advocated the beauty of clothing form, but also formulated the relationship between form and content in cultivating a true gentleman. He thought that, despite the perfect match among the outside form (clothing), the behavior and the situation, and despite the high aesthetic value of the clothes, if a man fell short of kindness, then his ornament would only revealed his coxcombical deeds. The accomplishments and solid qualities should be equally

blended, and in different situation, a true gentleman should be dressed in different ways to be consistent with social norms and to reflect the level of civilization of the social system, In accordance with the provisions of the ritual system, people must be dressed to fit for their social status.

IV. Conclusion

Analects of Confucius is a rich source for studying Confucius's thoughts and ideas on all aspects of society. As an early book that mentions the dressing codes, Confucius' sayings on clothing then reinforce his hierarchical sense of society and idealism of social harmony. Here the clothing has reached beyond their daily functions to include social and political significance and symbolism. The clothing codes of the later Chinese dynasties, though different from one another, all continued the dual functions of clothing. Thus the clothing is always physical and social/political.

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