

the background. This technique is sometimes called 'reverse painting' and was paralleled by the delicate technique of inside-painted snuff bottles (fig. 132).

Dress

Dress was used in China, as in many other societies, as an adjunct to social hierarchy (Introduction, p. 34). The Chinese developed clothing in different colours and styles in order to indicate rank, and belts and hats were also important markers of status. The different ranks of the figures in the painting in figure 147 are shown not only by the relative sizes of the figures, but also in the elaboration and colour of their robes. As a complex official style of dress developed, gradations in dress were refined and became increasingly prescriptive. These rules are recorded in the official histories of each dynasty. By regulating what people wore on official occasions, the Chinese rulers advertised the hierarchy of officials both in ceremonies and in daily life. In fact, imperial power depended on a system of favours and rewards by which officials rose through the hierarchy, this rise being indicated outwardly by changes in dress. When officials gathered together at court audiences, rituals and sacrifices, their positions were laid down in minute detail (fig. 145) and could be gauged by their apparel. When they were accompanied by their wives, the costume and accessories of the wife had to accord with the rank of her husband. At the top of the hierarchy, of course, were the emperor and the imperial family.

Evidence for the variety of ancient Chinese dress survives in historical texts, in excavated robes, in ceramic tomb figures buried with the dead, and in paintings. Few early garments have themselves survived, but we can learn something of the role of dress in the official hierarchy from texts of the Han period which purport to describe an earlier time. The texts on ritual, known as the *Liji* and the *Zhou li*, probably reflect Zhou dynasty practices, although they were compiled some time later. The *Liji* draws attention to the importance of the hat in formal dress, saying, 'Rites start with the hat' and describing in detail the sorts of hats, hat ribbons and tassels needed for certain rituals.⁴² The correct dress was absolutely essential, when performing rituals and official sacrifices, to ensure their success.

The *Zhou li* contains precise instructions on the various colours to be worn and their individual meanings. Colours were regarded as symbolic: 'The east is blue, the south is red, the west is white, the north is black, heaven is dark blue and earth is yellow'.⁴³ Throughout Chinese history one of the most important things a new dynasty had to do was to choose a dynastic colour; that of the Ming dynasty, for instance, was red. From the Sui dynasty (AD 589–618) onwards, yellow was not allowed to be used by anyone except the emperor.

Early Chinese styles of dress can be seen on wooden and ceramic figures made for burial from the Eastern Zhou and Han periods. Actual robes, such as those excavated from tomb no. 1 at Mawangdui near Changsha, also survive from these periods.⁴⁴ The principal garment was a simple wrapover jacket with long, wide sleeves (fig. 146). The elegant, flowing robes of the fifth-century AD court can be seen in a famous painting attributed to Gu



145 (above) Copperplate engraving on paper of a court audience, Qing dynasty, c. AD 1830. This celebrates the campaign against eastern Turkestan (see also ch. 6, fig. 212). The officials can be seen lined up in the proper order, wearing their court robes, hats, necklaces and rank badges (see fig. 149). The emperor is seated on the upper floor above the Noon Gate (Wumen) of the Forbidden City (see Introduction, fig. 17). 51 x 88.5 cm.



146 Painted wooden tomb figures showing silk robes decorated with lozenge-shaped patterns and flower scrolls. Early Western Han dynasty, 2nd century BC. Excavated from tomb no. 1 at Mawangdui, near Changsha in Hunan province, in 1972. Painted, printed and embroidered silk fabrics, robes and accessories, as well as damask and brocade, were excavated from this tomb, which belonged to the wife of a high-ranking marquis.

silver. However, due to the Napoleonic wars and the consequent continental blockade in Europe, private British traders in India were cut off from their supply of silver from the New World, which came via Amsterdam. They began to ship large quantities of opium from India to China, for which the Chinese had to pay with their own much-valued silver. The private British traders then sold the Chinese silver to the East India Company, which used it to buy the new tea crop for import to Europe.⁵⁸ It has been estimated that, by the mid 1830s, there were more than 40 million opium addicts in China. This illegal opium trade was not only to cause the First Opium War between Britain and China, in 1839–42, but also led to the British occupation of Hong Kong and the resulting opening of China by force.

The effects of trade

China

By the time of the forced opening of China after the Opium Wars, the Chinese had developed a deep suspicion of Western traders. However, there had been previous periods of close co-operation and trust, when foreigners had been employed at the courts of various emperors and had impressed the Chinese with their knowledge of the West. Marco Polo, for instance, who travelled in Asia between 1271 and 1295, served the Mongol emperor Khubilai Khan for about seventeen years. Above all, however, it was the Jesuit missionaries who best bridged Western and Chinese culture. Matteo Ricci, an Italian Jesuit who arrived in Beijing in 1601, was followed by a steady stream of accomplished Jesuits who studied Chinese language, philosophy and literature and introduced the emperors of China to many aspects of Western science. Often skilled painters, they were sometimes employed to paint porcelain or enamel vessels. They supervised the imperial glasshouse under the Emperor Kangxi, while one Jesuit, Giuseppe Castiglione, produced paintings of a very high quality using an eclectic blend of Western and Chinese styles. Another combination of Chinese and Western techniques is shown in the clocks produced in Canton – complete with revolving medallions, movable scenery and miniature fountains. The hundreds of clocks now preserved in the Palace Museum in Beijing were mostly tribute from Canton in the later eighteenth century,⁵⁹ either of European or Cantonese manufacture. Many of those made in Europe were products of the clockmaker James Cox, who specialised in elaborate clocks for the Chinese market. Other items exported to China were sheets of glass used for reverse paintings, which in turn were exported to the West and hung in country houses.

Under the Emperor Qianlong there was a vogue in China for objects painted with Western scenes in the Western manner, using perspective. The Emperor Qianlong also followed Western custom by commissioning a series of celebratory prints showing battle campaigns in which he had subdued peoples on China's borders. The first set of these was actually made in Paris and the rest in China, copying the Parisian technique (fig. 212). The culmination of this vogue for Western design and techniques was the building of the Yuanming Yuan, the imperial summer palace outside Beijing, a glorious rococo-style white stone building with sweeping staircases, foun-



tains and Italian gardens. Designed by Jesuits, it was sadly destroyed and looted by British and French troops in 1860.

The West

China's effect on the West was immeasurable. Although the Greeks and Romans had known China as a source of silk, it was not until Marco Polo's account of his travels was published in Europe in the early fourteenth century that the high level of Chinese civilisation was revealed to the West. Many doubted the veracity of his description of Kanbalu, capital of the great khan. His partial account – for he described only those aspects he chose to record – was the seed of a semi-fictitious idea of China which was to develop into the idealised Cathay. At least Marco Polo's account, however embroidered, was based on the truth; another influential medieval book, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, was complete fiction, but from its fantastic descriptions was developed a general perception of China which persisted until the sixteenth century, when exotic oriental objects began to arrive in Europe.

Europeans seem to have had little idea of the exact origin of the objects imported by the Portuguese, and Chinese objects were often, for instance, described as Indian. It was at this time that the fashion for the *Kunstkammer* or *Wunderkammer* – a private collection of exotic items, both man-made and natural – developed into a mania in many parts of Europe. Particularly famous collections were those of Paludanus in the Netherlands, Archduke Albrecht V of Bavaria and Rudolph II of Prague. Archduke Albrecht's collection comprised 4000 items and was the first to have a published catalogue.⁶⁰ Albrecht Dürer, who was fascinated by orientalia and exotic items, produced fantastic concoctions incorporating real imported Chinese porcelain (fig. 213).⁶¹ Chinese porcelain also appears in Italian Renaissance paintings

212 One of a series of sixteen copperplate engravings made, following Western practice, to celebrate the Emperor Qianlong's victorious campaign against eastern Turkestan. Qing dynasty, c. 1764–72. This set was made in Paris by Nicholas de Launay and others, and the poems were then handwritten by the Emperor Qianlong (1736–95). After this, further series were made in China to show the emperor's victories over other border peoples (see ch. 4, fig. 145).

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*Jessica Rawson, Anne Farrer, Jane Portal,
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