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BARBARIAN & CHINESE

DRESS AS DIFFERENCE IN CHINESE ART¹

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PROLOGUE

In the early 1970s, the then Department of Oriental Studies at the University of Sydney had a student organisation called SUCSA, a.k.a. Sydney University Chinese Studies Association. A pivotal figure in the association was Kam Louie, later to serve as Professor of Chinese at The Australian National University before taking up an appointment as Dean of Arts in the University of Hong Kong. Born in China, the future Dean was a local source of cultural knowledge about the People's Republic and the inspiration behind SUCSA's musical career. For a period roughly coterminous with the first Whitlam government, SUCSA regularly contributed choral items at Chinese community events in Dixon Street, especially on 1 October, China's National Day.

Our repertoire consisted largely of revolutionary songs, which typically had lines such as 'The People's Liberation Army's production is very great' and 'the American imperialists and their running dogs are increasingly isolated'. Most SUCSA members went on to study in China, where singing revolutionary songs was an established part of life, so learning these songs was a very useful aspect of our early Chinese education. Once in China, however, we also discovered that there were songs in our repertoire which could not be performed in public. Among these was *Su Wu tending sheep* (*Su Wu mu yang*), a song about a Han Dynasty official called Su Wu (140 – 60 BCE), who was detained by the Xiongnu 'barbarians' (*hu*)

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FIG. 1. Ren Bonian, *Su Wu mu yang* (Su Wu tending sheep). Dated 1880. Beijing Palace Museum.

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on the frontier and forced to live among them for nineteen years. Innocents abroad, we took a while to understand why a song about a man living in exile in the first century BCE could be politically sensitive in the 1970s.

Three decades later, in the early years of the twenty-first century, auction houses in China were doing well out of paintings of Su Wu tending sheep (the latter always look more like goats, despite the standard English translation). Ren Bonian (1840-1896), a painter popular in his day and much acclaimed since, produced a number of paintings on this theme (fig.1, previous page)² and the best now

Su Wu's restoration to the position of national cultural icon does not alter the implications of the song, which projects a view of Chinese territory and the Chinese people at odds with the ideal of national unity. This is why, in the politically difficult years of the Cultural Revolution, it could not be sung. The territory once occupied by the Xiongnu now belongs to China, and the minority peoples who live in China's border regions are, like the Han Chinese majority, all regarded as part of a greater social grouping known as 'the Chinese people'. *Su Wu tending sheep* was frowned on in the pre-reform era both because it was an



(above)

FIG. 2. Unidentified artist (active early fifteenth century). *Eighteen Songs of a Nomad Flute: The Story of Lady Wenji, Episode 5: Encampment by a Stream.*

© METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART. ACCESSION NO. 1973.120.3.

command prices of hundreds of thousands of yuan. Since the 1970s, of course, China had passed through a process of reform, and Su Wu had been rehabilitated. A memorial museum incorporating his tomb is now a tourist attraction in his home town, Wugong, in Shaanxi province. A statue in front of the museum shows a bearded figure buffeted by the wind. He carries a tufted staff, the symbol of his office and of Han imperial authority, and is accompanied by two goats. The composition was probably based on impressions derived from the many paintings of Su Wu executed by Ren Bonian, and like those paintings evokes the traditional song of the same name.

'old' song about a non-progressive force in history and because it presented the Han and the Xiongnu as inhabiting different lands and embracing different values. In its emphasis on difference, it is consistent with a long tradition of representations of the frontier in Chinese history. Clothing was one of the details used by graphic artists to depict the difference.

Frederick Turner's partial definition of the frontier as 'the meeting ground between savagery and civilization' is applicable to the frontier in Chinese history, a shifting zone in geographical terms but one where 'this culture

of ours³ always meets its opposite, a way of life and a set of rituals that distinguish barbarians from Chinese. In Su Wu's time, the frontier was the meeting ground between Xiongnu and Han, terms which connoted savagery and civilisation. In contemporary Chinese society, 'Han' denotes the major ethnic group, accounting for more than ninety percent of the population of China, but at that time it was a reference to subjects of the Han dynasty. 'Xiongnu' (literally 'ferocious slave') was its antonym, and referred to the mainly nomadic subjects of a great but unstable empire that abutted the Han empire in the north-west. The final line of the song *Su Wu tending sheep*, 'zhong jiao Xiongnu xinjing dansui gongfu Han de wei' bluntly juxtaposes Xiongnu and Han. The line can be translated roughly as: 'finally [Su Wu] made the Xiongnu tremble in awe at his demonstration of Han virtue'.

From the graphically depicted differences between the Han and the Xiongnu in narrative paintings of the frontier, it can be surmised that the Chinese sense of self was strongly informed by a consciousness of the alien, horse-riding, warlike peoples who populated the frontier. Mark Edward Lewis has neatly summarised the early Han-dynasty view of material life in the contrasting cultural spheres which constituted the known world: 'the nomads ate meat and drank milk; the Chinese ate grain. The Xiongnu wore skins and furs; the Chinese wore hemp and silk. The Chinese had walled towns, fields, and houses; the Xiongnu [supposedly] [...] had none'.⁴ Virtually all of these paired opposites are graphically represented in one of the most famous treatments of the Han-Xiongnu encounter, the Song Dynasty (960-1279) illustrations to an eighth-century song cycle known as *Eighteen Songs of a Nomad Flute: The Tale of Lady Wenji*.⁵

The Xiongnu are thought by some to be identical with the Huns who appeared in Europe in the fourth century. Although the evidence is not strong, the parallel is analytically suggestive. The idea of Attila the Hun in Europe is comparable to the idea of the Xiongnu in China, and indeed there are similar stories about the Hun and the Xiongnu, barbarians in the West and East respectively. In Europe, the legend of St Ursula tells of the martyrdom of a princess who refused to



marry a Hun chieftain, putatively in the fourth century. In China the legend of Cai Wenji (b. 177 CE), tells of a well-born woman's return to her parents after twelve years of enforced marriage to a Xiongnu prince. In both cases, an encounter with the barbarians provides a way of articulating a value central to the civilised or cultured society: virginity in Christendom, filial piety in Confucianism.

Both legends have inspired numerous paintings, which again are worth comparing. The illustrations to *Eighteen Songs of a Nomad Flute: The Tale of Lady Wenji* exist in various forms, of which the most complete (although by no means the finest) is a late version owned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art (fig. 2). This handscroll, copy of an original tentatively attributed to Li Tang (c. 1050-1130),⁶ is in most respects quite unlike the legend of St Ursula as depicted by Hans Memling (c. 1430-1494) on the shrine in St John's Hospital in Bruges (fig. 3).⁷ Yet each of these works is a series of illustrations of a legend featuring a barbarian prince, the one Hun and the other Xiongnu. The artists came to comparable conclusions as to how to represent this figure. Memling, painting at a time that the Ottoman Empire was rapidly expanding, depicted the Hun as



(above)

FIG. 3. Hans Memling, *The Reliquary of St Ursula*, Panel 6. Dated 1489.

© MEMLING MUSEUM, ST. JOHN'S HOSPITAL, BRUGES.

a Turk, or at least in a turban. The Chinese handscroll shows the Xiongnu prince dressed in the style of the Khitans, founders of the Liao Dynasty (916-1125). This dynasty, presiding over an empire on China's northern frontier in the tenth century, coexisted with the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), which controlled the greater part of the terrain occupied by Han Chinese. The Khitans developed a written language that looked like Chinese (the subject of pioneering research by Macquarie University's Professor Daniel Kane),⁸ and left a rich visual record of themselves, particularly in the form of tomb murals. Like the Ottomans in Europe, they were long visible on the horizon of the known, cultured world, posing both a threat and a puzzle to the Song Chinese.

can be recognised in popular story cycles, but they were normatively suppressed in favour of civil, literary values, especially during the Song Dynasty.¹¹ To the extent that the frontier was a 'meeting ground between savagery and civilization', it was best represented by horse-riding, armed barbarians confronting gown-wearing Chinese.

Variations in this configuration show that the frontier was also a place of cultural negotiation, 'a place of reversal', as Jean Franco writes, '[...] where the civilized may become barbarian and the barbarian civilized.'¹² In the fourth century BCE, King Wu Ling of Zhao attained ascendancy over the Xiongnu by 'changing into barbarian dress, and shooting from horseback'.¹³ In the twelfth century, a

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The capacity of each of these legends to delineate contrasting 'cultural spheres' is also evident from paintings. Two paintings of St Ursula in the Hotel de Clûny impressed Anna Brownwell Jameson for just this reason. 'The artist', she observed, 'has taken great pains to distinguish the heathen and barbarous court of England from the civilized and Christian court of Brittany'.⁹ Correspondingly, the opening and closing scenes of *Eighteen Songs* provide a sharp contrast between the warlike barbarians engaged in sacking the city, and the peaceable Chinese going about their business in the same city after the cessation of conflict. The barbarians wear armour and carry weapons. The Chinese wear long garments or short, according to their social status, and pay their respects to each other with hands folded beneath sleeves, all in accordance with sentiments articulated in the concluding stanza of the poem:

I return home and see my kin [...]
As I hold towel and comb, I rediscover the
good rituals and etiquette.
Touching the qin again enables me to live or
die without regret.¹⁰

Here we reach the limits of comparison. The chivalric code and martial values of European societies were not entirely alien to China and

commentary on barbarian people entering into the Chinese orbit described them as 'unfastening the silk cap-strings [on their armor], submitting and paying respects [to the emperor]; putting away their weapons, and receiving the calendar'.¹⁴ Such accommodations illustrate the norm, which was a juxtaposition of barbarian and Chinese as hunter and farmer, warrior and scribe, the one dressed in skins and the other in silks.

* * *

What is the relationship between clothes in works of art and the actual garments worn by people in history? In *Seeing Through Clothes*, Anne Hollander investigated 'how clothes in works of art are connected with clothes in real life', concluding that a systematic relationship exists between painting and fashion in European history. A similar relationship may have pertained in China: that is, fashion burgeoned in Chinese cities synchronously with the proliferation of illustrated books for women and the expansion of the art market in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. But this is to consider the relationship from the perspective of people who wore clothes. How painters decided to depict clothes in the first instance is another matter, particularly if their subject was historical.

One source of information for painters working on frontier themes was descriptions in historical works. In the case of the Xiongnu, educated people in imperial China must have had some impression of what clothing was worn because standard reading matter included works such as the official histories of the Han dynasty, and the *Historical Records (Shi ji)* by Sima Qian (145?-86 BCE). From these it could be ascertained that the barbarians ‘wore their hair down and fastened their clothing on the left’, and ‘dressed in clothes made of skins, and used furs as quilts’.¹⁵ Furs, skins, and a left-hand fastening accordingly feature in barbarian dress as depicted in Chinese painting. Of these features, the left-hand fastening had canonical status. Confucius himself said: ‘But for Guan Zhong, we should now be wearing our hair unbound, and the lappets of our coats buttoning on the left side’.¹⁶

These classical references were echoed in later texts. Liu Shang (fl. 773 CE) drew on them in *Eighteen Songs of a Nomad Flute*, in which he told the story of Lady Wenji. Forced into a barbarian marriage, living in a tent on the steppe far from kith and kin, the disconsolate Wenji laments:

I clean my hair with mutton fat, but it is
seldom combed
The collar of my lambskin robe is buttoned
on the left;
The fox lapels and badger sleeves are
rank-smelling
By day I wear these clothes, by night I sleep
in them.¹⁷ (Rorex, 5)

The Song-dynasty illustrations to the songs accordingly show Xiongnu men in fur-trimmed hats, as well as carrying quivers of leopard skin and wearing gowns fastened on the left-hand side. For some reason the artist chose to depict the women, including Lady Wenji, in right-fastening gowns. This may have been an assertion on his part of Wenji’s cultural influence on barbarian society.

Another resource for the painter of historical events was other paintings. In the Palace Museum’s *Zhuo xie tu* (Respite), a handscroll painting of a Khitan hunting party taking a break, Khitan artist Hu Gui (fl. tenth century) portrays figures which, taken individually,

are almost identical to those who people *Eighteen Songs*, right down to the leopard-skin quivers. The distinctive hairstyles of Khitan men, featuring two pigtailed hanging from the temples and sometimes a shaven head, are well-known from tomb murals and appear in both these paintings. Likewise, every Khitan (or Xiongnu) man is shown wearing boots, in pointed contrast to the Chinese men in *Eighteen Songs*, all of whom wear shoes.¹⁸ The one significant difference in terms of costume is that the women in Hu Gui’s painting wear their gowns fastened on the left. The men in both paintings have the elongated torso and slender hips that Angela Falco Howard finds characteristic of Liao (Khitan) statuary.¹⁹ In brief, there is little to distinguish the Khitan painting of contemporary Khitans from the presumably Han Chinese painting of the ancient Xiongnu.

Given this similarity, the question of how the Xiongnu were to be depicted by the painter of *Eighteen Songs* might perhaps be rephrased as a question about how the *Khitan* were to be depicted. In other words, the theme of the painting may well have been secondary to the subject matter, which is for the most part Khitan land, Khitan material culture, Khitan people. In the analysis of Robert Rorex and Wen Fong, ‘to the early Southern Song viewer the [painting] *Eighteen Songs* represented no mere historical romance but a real, all-pervading national trauma’,²⁰ a reference to the constant threat of and actual invasions by peoples who were referred to as *hu* or *fan*, i.e. barbarian. But Irene Leung finds in the painting evidence that the painters were respectfully recognising the culture of their non-Chinese neighbours — or at least of the Khitan — and coming to terms with it in a way consistent with the Song’s status as a lesser empire. Comparing this handscroll and its look-alike predecessors with a sixteenth-century handscroll painting by You Qiu (fl. 1553-1591+), lends weight to Leung’s conclusion. The subject of You Qiu’s painting is not Lady Wenji but a slightly earlier historical figure, Wang Zhaojun (fl. first century BCE), but the two have much in common (fig. 4).

* * *

Wang Zhaojun was a palace lady in the court of Emperor Han Yuandi (r. 48-33 BCE) and



(above)

FIG. 4. You Qiu, **Zhaojun chusai tujian** (Zhaojun’s Departure for the Frontier), detail. Dated 1554. Shanghai Museum.

PUBLISHED SHANGHAI BOWUGUAN AND LIANGNINGSHENG BOWUGUAN, (EDS), SHIMAO FENGQING: **ZHONGGUO GUDAI RENWU HUA JINGPINJI** (ENGLISH TITLE: HIGHLIGHTS OF ANCIENT CHINESE FIGURE PAINTINGS FROM THE LIAONING PROVINCIAL MUSEUM AND THE SHANGHAI MUSEUM), EX.CAT. (SHANGHAI: SHIJI CHUBAN GUFEN YOUXIAN GONGSI AND SHANGHAI GUJI CHUBANSHE, 2008), VOL. 2, p. 411.

was offered in marriage to the Xiongnu Khan (*shanyu*) as part of a peace settlement. Unlike Cai Wenji and Su Wu, she never returned to Han territory, but like them she became a legendary figure, the subject of poems, dramas, and paintings. Painting history shows that to some degree her legend became entwined and confused with Wenji's. 'The Return of Wenji' (*Wenji qui Han*) and 'Zhaozhun's departure for the Frontier' (*Zhaojun chusai*)²¹ are titles that could be indiscriminately applied to a number of frontier paintings, as demonstrated by two almost identical works held by the Jilin Provincial Museum and the Osaka Municipal museum respectively. The former depicts Wenji's return, the latter Zhaojun's departure.²² The major difference between the two is the addition in the latter of a maid carrying a *pipa*, or Chinese lute. The *pipa* is steadily associated with the legend of Wang Zhaojun, who is said

The beginning of the handscroll shows the wintry scene of a river that the party has already crossed. The men depicted riding on the further side appear to be Mongols. With facial hair, hooked noses, heavy faces, wearing trousers and boots, they present a forbidding appearance. Two timid-looking women are riding in their midst. They wear what appear to be barbarian hats (*hu mao*), but their gowns, worn over pleated skirts and tied with knotted girdles, are in the Chinese style familiar from Ming figure paintings, and provide a striking contrast to the clothes of the barbarians.

Rendered in black and white 'outline style' (*baimiao*), this unusually dark painting projects a view of frontier relations consistent with the actual history of Ming-Mongol contact, which was marked by the conspicuous absence of marriage alliances.²⁷ The contrast between the barbarian men and the Chinese women is

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to have played it to 'soothe her longing for home'.²³ Wenji's instrument, as indicated in the verse cited above, is the *qin*, or Chinese zither.

The legend of Wang Zhaojun has taken various forms over time. A ninth-century version associated with Dunhuang presents a sympathetic picture of the Khan and includes detailed descriptions of Zhaojun's life 'among the barbarians'.²⁴ This version brings to mind Irene Leung's reading of the *Eighteen Songs* and is consistent with the marriage alliance policy that characterised frontier relations during the Tang Dynasty (618-907). By contrast, the early seventeenth-century edition of the play *Autumn in the Han Palace* fails even to get Zhaojun across the border. Instead of proceeding to married life among the Xiongnu, she flings herself into the river demarcating Chinese and barbarian territory.²⁵

You Qiu does not portray a suicide, but his is a grim painting. The date of its execution, 1554, suggests a response on his part to contemporary border problems posed by pirates on the coast and Mongols on the northern frontier. You Qiu is known as a painter of 'fair ladies' (*meiren*),²⁶ but in 1554 he produced a painting full of movement and violence.

in keeping with the lines of the play *Autumn in the Han Palace*, where aspects of Han and *hu* culture are constantly juxtaposed.²⁸ The contrary is the case in *Eighteen Songs*, where the painter's treatment of the contrast is gentler than the lines of the poem he purports to illustrate: the fur hats are few, skins are not apparent in actual clothing, and the mien of the barbarians is gentle. In commenting on the clothing depicted in the earlier scroll, Rorex and Fong in fact found it difficult to distinguish between Chinese and Khitan.²⁹

How might these frontier tales have been viewed on the other side of the border? Surprisingly, there does exist a painting that enables us to reflect on a 'barbarian' view of these encounters: Zhang Yu's *Return of Wenji* (fig. 5), executed in the Jin Dynasty (1115-1234). The Jin was founded by the Jurchen people and was effectively a successor to the Liao although eventually extending over a much greater area of China. Unlike the Khitans, the Jurchen left few reminders of how they looked. For this reason, Zhang Yu's painting is frequently published in books of costume history. By comparing textual evidence with the painting, costume historians have

identified the following items of Wenji's dress as characteristic of Jin Dynasty clothing: the marten-fur hat, long-legged boots with pointed toes, and cloud cape, as well as her hairstyle, consisting of long pigtails at the side of the face.³⁰ A Chinese envoy accompanies the party, distinguished by his official hat and fan. The remaining horsemen are all 'barbarian', although it is worth noting that the Jin Dynasty forbade the use of this term (*fan*, not *hu*) in 1191.³¹

The painting is difficult to read in terms of the cultural politics of Jin-Song relations,

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the frontier was tamed and incorporated into a vast empire ruled by the Manchus in association with their increasingly loyal Chinese servants — the scholar-officials of the empire. The Manchus liked to think of themselves as descendants of the Jurchen. They cultivated a strong historical genealogy to legitimate their possession of the throne. They endeavoured to retain a martial ethos, manifest in their dress, with its close fitting gown, narrow sleeves, horse-shoe cuffs, horse-riding jacket — all markedly different from the

extravagant robes of the Ming gentleman. Chinese scholar-officials were forced to adopt both the Manchu gown, and Manchu hairstyle, which they saw as barbarian and by which they were initially appalled.

The Manchus hated talk of 'barbarians' and were watchful of any references to the border peoples. From this perspective, Hua Yan's eighteenth-century portrayal of Zhaojun's departure for the frontier poses a slight conundrum

except insofar as Zhaojun had lost some of her Ming-dynasty intransigence. Hua Yan (1682-1756) was a southern painter, born in Fujian but active in Hangzhou and occasionally Yangzhou, leading to his occasional inclusion among the so-called 'eccentric' (*guai*) artists of Yangzhou. He was widely travelled, including in the north-east, and his oeuvre is marked by an interest in the frontier uncommon in his circle.³³ At least three paintings of Zhaojun are attributed to Hua Yan, along with one of Wenji, all of them showing a rather fragile-looking young woman holding a pipa as she is led away on either a horse or a camel by her captor (fig. 6, following page). She wears a 'sleeping rabbit' (*wotu*) fur



(left)

FIG. 5. Zhang Yu, *Wenji gui Han tu* (The return of Lady Wenji). Jin Dynasty (1115-1234), detail. Jilin Provincial Museum.

PUBLISHED IN WANG RONGQIANG, *RENWUHU BIMO JIFA XIANGJIE* (EXPLAINING THE BRUSH AND INK TECHNIQUE IN FIGURE PAINTING) NANNING: GUANGXI MEISHU CHUBANSHE, 2001), p. 114.

but clearly the artist has made some decisions different from those of the *Eighteen Songs* painter. The painting is of the return rather than the forward journey. Wenji looks steadfast, rather than timid, unhappy, or irresolute. The clothing of all the party but particularly of Wenji is rendered with extraordinary attention to detail, the overall effect being of a rather assertive display of Jurchen culture.³² It can be concluded that if tribute was being paid to the Southern Song, as suggested by the focus on the return among other things, it was being offered by an equal.

我本漢家子將適單于庭辭訣未及終前驅
 已抗旌葆御涕流離轅馬悲且鳴哀鬱傷五內
 涕淚霑珠纒行日已遠遂過句如城送我於穹
 廬加我閩氏名珠纒非所安雖貴非所榮父子見
 陵辱對之慙且驚為我身良不易默以苟止苟止
 亦何聊積思常憤盈願假飛鴻翼乘之遊北飛
 鴻不我顧佇立以屏營昔為匣中玉今為冀上
 英朝華不足歡廿與秋年并傳語後世人遠
 塚難為情 新雁人寫并錄石李倫句



cap of the sort frequently depicted in winter scenes of this period, and a fur-lined jacket, but the folds of her clothing and the delicacy of the figure bring to mind the sing-song girls of places like Suzhou and Yangzhou. Indeed we know that these girls posed for artists. The version held by the Shanghai Museum, along with one established forgery, carries a poem by Shi Chong (249-300), the first of many written about Zhaojun in the course of China's literary history. The opening lines establish the captive's identification with her Han origins, and the trauma of going into exile:

I am a child of the Han, deemed suitable for
 the household of the Khan.
 Before the farewells are over, the advance
 carriage raises the banner.
 High and low, all are weeping; the horse in
 harness whinnies in sorrow.
 My belly is knotted in grief, my tears are
 ribbons of pearls.³⁴

Another of these paintings carries a poem by Du Fu (712-770), which concludes with lines even more challenging: 'For a thousand years the lute speaks a Tartar[hu] tongue / We make out grief and hatred expressed within the tune'.³⁵

While the poems place these paintings unambiguously in the tradition of Han-*hu* confrontations, a number of factors suggest they should be considered as part of a rapidly expanding genre of 'fair lady' or 'beauty' (*meiren*) paintings, which existed in the Ming but experienced a boom in the Qing.³⁶ These factors include Hua Yan's social position as a professional painter, the simple composition and modest dimensions of the paintings (around 125 centimetres long), together with their hanging-scroll format — suitable for middle-range buyers in the art market; and the existence of numerous other decorative hanging scroll paintings of Zhaojun, all of which show her as elegantly dressed, sometimes strikingly so. It should be noted that comparable portrayals

(left)

FIG. 6. Hua Yan, *Ming Fei chu sai* (The Bright Consort departs for the frontier). Eighteenth century. Shanghai Museum.

PUBLISHED IN YANGZHOU HUAPAI SHUHUA QUANJI: HUA YAN. (CALLIGRAPHY AND PAINTING BY THE YANGZHOU PAINTING CIRCLE) (TIANJIN: TIANJIN RENMIN CHUBANSHE, 1998), pp. 183-4.

exist of Wenji, although she did not have quite Zhaojun's status as a 'beauty'.³⁷

Commenting on the somewhat later frontier paintings executed by Ren Bonian, Yu-chih Lai remarked on this artist's attention to sartorial detail: he 'adorns his Su Wu in a fur-trimmed coat and a robe with long, elegant sleeves and an ornamental blue ribbon hanging almost to the ground', presenting a figure of 'unprecedented youthfulness and handsome charm'.³⁸ Lai explains Ren's novel approach to this hallowed subject in terms of the art market in Shanghai. As a Treaty Port and a rapidly expanding centre of international trade, Shanghai was home to an increasingly materialist society with a concern for appearances that was reflected in consumer choices. In brief, people in Shanghai liked pretty pictures. Yet Hua Yan was painting for a market that has been described in comparable terms.³⁹ Considered alongside earlier paintings of Zhaojun and Wenji as 'beauties', Ren Bonian's painting of Su Wu looking resplendent rather than tattered seems consistent with developments in the art market and trends in taste before that time.

The most striking aspect of Ren Bonian's frontier paintings lies not in Su Wu's sartorial splendor, but rather in the barbarians, who are conspicuous by their absence. This leaves the impression that the north-west frontier had ceased to loom large in the Chinese imagination, and indeed Lai analyses Ren's frontier paintings in terms of a 'new frontier': the coast. The barbarians whom Ren Bonian chose not to paint were thus not the Manchus (whom he could not anyway have painted for political reasons), or even the Xiongnu, but rather the Westerners, who like the Khitan, the Jurchen and the Mongols for some earlier painters were very much part of Ren's present.

* * *

In the early twentieth century, Chinese dress styles began to change in response both to the cosmopolitanism of the Treaty Ports and to political change, which finally resulted in the collapse of the Qing empire in 1911 and a corresponding collapse of Manchu dress codes. Curiously, Chinese men were left with a choice of barbarian clothes to wear: on the one side was the Western suit, strongly favoured in the

early years of the Republic; on the other side was the Manchu gown (fig. 7). The gown won out in the short term: it was seen, for want of anything better, as more Chinese than the suit. Just as curiously, Chinese women ended up



wearing a garment that evolved from various elements in Chinese, western and Manchu dress, but that came to be known as the *qipao*, which in effect means the Manchu gown. This has survived as the main form of Han Chinese ethnic dress, replacing the loose jacket and pleated skirt (*aoqun*) that defined Han women's dress under Manchu rule.

In recent years there has been a movement in China to revive an indigenous form of dress for Han Chinese. Adherents of this movement, the *Hanfu* movement, are seeking to popularise ancient forms of dress for ceremonial occasions. An occasional eccentric has been known to don this sort of clothing even for daily wear. Avoiding the fusion styles of the Tang dynasty onwards, *Hanfu* adherents have gone back to a time when the difference between Han and Xiongnu, Chinese and barbarian, was arguably unambiguous.



(above)

FIG. 7. Alternative forms of semi-formal wear decreed by the new Republican government in 1912. **Zhonghua minzu fuzhitu** (National Dress of China) (Nanjing: Gohuo weichihui, 1912).

The Chinese government likes the patriotism evinced by this sort of movement, but has to counter the implications of the thinking behind it, particularly in light of troublesome ethnic relations in Tibet and Xinjiang. In the summer of 2009, as the country prepared to celebrate sixty years of rule by the Communist Party, the frontier was the subject of massive propaganda campaigns in which Han and non-Han were pictured shoulder to shoulder, cheek to cheek, in demonstrations of ethnic harmony, national unity, and a spirit of economic development. Myths that used to be about separation, suffering and longing for home had long since been rewritten as myths about intercultural marriage and the merging of cultures to form the Chinese nation.

Su Wu and Wenji have a relatively modest place in this new frontier, but Zhaojun, brought to the stage in 1978 and to the television screen in 2008, has a prominent position. Visitors to Zhaojun's tomb in Inner Mongolia can there contemplate an entirely new set of images of her, most notably a bronze statue showing her riding companionably alongside the Khan, and a large bas-relief sculpture, showing her face alongside his in a style familiar from revolutionary posters of workers, soldiers and peasants. Unlike in earlier centuries, when both Han bride and barbarian groom were usually shown in the dress styles of the time, these figures are presented in the gowns and cloaks of a rather unspecific past. They gesture only in a generic way to a difference that is no longer supposed to matter. ¶



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2. See Yu-chih Lai, 'Remapping Borders: Ren Bonian's Frontier Paintings and Urban Life in 1880s Shanghai', *Art Bulletin*, 86, 3 (Sept 2004), pp. 550-72.
3. A reference to the translation of *si wen* in Peter Bol, *This Culture of Ours: Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).
4. Mark Edward Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires: Qing and Han* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press, 2007), p. 133.
5. Robert A. Rorex and Wen Fong, *Eighteen Songs of a Nomad Flute: The Story of Lady Wen-chi* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1974).
6. Julia K. Murray, *Mirror of Morality: Chinese Narrative Illustration and Confucian Ideology* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), p. 81.
7. This is one of a series of miniatures rendered for the Shrine of St Ursula, held in the Memling Museum, at St John's Hospital in Bruges. According to Mrs. [Anna] Jameson (*Sacred and Legendary Art*, Vol. 2 [London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, & Roberts, 1857], p. 516), 'There is a good set of engravings (coloured after the originals) in the British Museum'.
8. Daniel Kane, *The Kitan Language and Script* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).
9. Jameson, *Sacred and Legendary Art*, p. 516.
10. Rorex and Fong, *Eighteen Songs*, verse 18, n.p.n. Romanisation adapted. On this 'happily-ever-after' conclusion, see Dore J. Levy, 'Transforming Archetypes in Chinese Poetry and Painting: The Case of Ts'ai Yen', *Asia Major*, Third Series, VI, 2 (1993): pp. 147-68. My thanks to Freda Murck for this reference.
11. See John King Fairbank's discussion of 'the symbiosis of wen and wu' in Fairbank and Merle Goldman, *China: A New History* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 108-112.
12. Jean Franco, *Critical Passions: Selected Essays*, ed. by Mary Louise Pratt and Katherine Elizabeth Newman (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 330.
13. Dai Ping, *Zhongguo minzu fushi wenhua yanjiu* (Studies in the clothing culture of the peoples of China), (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2000), p. 182.
14. Adapted from Irene S. Leung, 'The Frontier Imaginary in the Song Dynasty: Revisiting Cai Yan's "Barbarian Captivity" and Return' (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2001), p. 10.
15. Zhang Ruili and Zhao Bin, 'Qin Han Xiongnu fuzhuang xingzhi tanxi' [Exploratory analysis of the design of Xiongnu clothing in the Qin and Han dynasties], *Xiyu yanjiu* [Research on Western China] 2 (2008), pp. 62-7.

16. James Legge, *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning and the Doctrine of the Mean* (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), p. 282. Book 14, Hsien Wan, Chapter. XVIII, 2. Guan Zhong (725-645 bce) was a statesman in the state of Qi.
17. Rorex and Fong, *Eighteen Songs*, verse 5, n.p.n.
18. This description applies also to figures in a set of four album leaves in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, which are painted in slightly more detail than figures in the handscroll. A view of one leaf is available on the museum website, under the title 'Wenji and her family' (accession no. 12.898).
19. Angela Falco Howard, 'Buddhist Sculptures of the Liao Dynasty: A Reassessment of Osvald Siren's Study', *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*, 56 (1984), p. 6.
20. Rorex and Fong, *Eighteen Songs*, Introduction, n.p.n. Romanisation adapted.
21. I follow here the translation of the title of You Qiu's painting used by Shanghai Museum. *Shimao fengqing: Zhongguo gudai renwu huajing pinji* (English title: Highlights of Ancient Chinese Figure Painting from the Liaoning Provincial Museum and the Shanghai Museum), (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008), Vol. 2, (Exhibit 60), p. 410. 'Zhaojun passing through the frontier' would seem a more accurate translation, particularly for this painting, which shows her already on the other side of the river that constitutes the border.
22. Susan Bush, 'Five Paintings of Animal Subjects or Narrative Themes and Their Relevance to Chin Culture', in *China Under Jurchen Rule: Essays on Chin Intellectual and Cultural History*, ed. by Hoyt Cleveland Tilleman and Stephen H. West (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), pp. 195-6.
23. John Myers, *The Way of the Pipa* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1992), p. 8.
24. Eugene Eoyang, 'The Wang Chao-chun Legend: Configurations of the Classis', *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*, 4, 1 (Jan. 1982), p. 4.
25. Kimberley Besio, 'Gender, Loyalty, and the Reproduction of the Wang Zhaojun Legend: Some Social Ramifications of Drama in the Late Ming', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 40, 2 (1997), p. 263.
26. Ren Daobin, 'Mingdai Jiangnan shinütu mianxiang moshihua tan wei' [The routinisation of painting of female faces in Ming Jiangnan], *Meishu shilun* [Fine Arts History] (2009), p. 9.
27. Ning Chia, 'Women in China's Frontier Politics: Heqin', in *Presence and Presentation: Women in the Chinese Literati Tradition*, ed. by Sherry J. Mou (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), p. 44.
28. Besio, 'Gender, Loyalty, and the Reproduction of the Wang Zhaojun', p. 263.
29. See Rorex and Fong, *Eighteen Songs*, commentary on verse 13. Wenji's hat is obviously Khitan, but the gown is fastened on the right; her husband wears a gown that is elsewhere clearly depicted as fastened on the left.
30. Hua Mei, *Fushi yu Zhongguo wenhua* [Dress and Chinese culture] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2001), pp. 290-1; Zhou Xidai, *Zhongguo gudai fushi shi* [History of Chinese clothing before modern times] (Taipei: Nantian shuju, 1989), p. 369.
31. Susan Bush, 'Five Paintings of Animal Subjects', p. 195.
32. See detailed discussion in Bush, 'Five Paintings of Animal Subjects'.
33. See Ginger Cheng-chi Hsü, 'Traveling to the Frontier: Hua Yan's *Camel in the Snow*', in *Lifestyle and Entertainment in Yangzhou*, ed. by Lucie Olivová and Vibeke Børdahl (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2009), pp. 347-75.
34. Han Xin, 'Hua Yan zhi Liang fu "Zhaojun chusai tu"' [A study of the two Hua Yan paintings of 'Zhaojun departs for the frontier'], in *Hua Yan yanjiu* [Studies of Hua Yan], (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2003), pp. 256-9.
35. See Paul F. Rouzer, *Articulated Ladies: Gender and the Male Community in Early Chinese Texts* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), p. 194.
36. Shen Yizheng, 'Lidai meiren huaxuan: xu' [Preface to 'selected paintings of fair ladies'], in *Lidai meiren huaxuan* [English title: Selected Paintings of Beauties Through the Ages], ed. by He Gongshang (Taipei: Yishu tushu gongsi, 1999), p. 7.
37. An example is *Cai Yan xiang* [Portrait of Cai Wenji] by Jin Tingbiao (d. 1767). Published in He Gongshang (ed.), *Lidai meiren huaxuan*, plate 110. Provenance not given.
38. Yu-chih Lai, 'Remapping Borders', p. 565.
39. See Ginger Cheng-chi Hsü, *A Bushel of Pearls: Painting for Sale in Eighteenth-Century Yangchow*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).