



Thomas Handforth, just home from the Orient, says that Chinese women are better stylists because they have better figures than their Western cousins

CHINESE WOMEN

World's Best Stylists



Noted American Artist,
Home From China,
Declares Oriental Women Outdo
Their Western Cousins and Would
Win All Prizes Offered in Any
"Best-Dressed" List



This is one of the freaks of style, common among Western women, but always taboo in the Orient

By Carol Bird

MODISTES, Elsa Maxwell, chronic "ten-best" compiler, and others who are qualified in one way or another to know whether a woman is a frump or an elegant fashion plate, have been announcing the names of "the ten best-dressed women in America," the "ten best-dressed women in Paris," the "ten best-dressed women in the world" and so on and on endlessly, like a bubbling stream.

Those who have been given enviable status in the smart realm of the fashionably dressed are actresses, women with titles, society women, famous beauties, celebrities. For example, Paris dressmakers recently named the following group as "the best-dressed in the world," after first declaring that half of the "twenty best" are Americans, and naming Lady Mendl, the former Elsie de Wolfe, as "tops," so to speak.

Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt, of New York; Baroness Eugene de Rothschild, the former Kitty Spotswood; Mrs. Ernest Simpson, a friend of the Prince of Wales; Mrs. Cole Porter, wife of the New York song writer; Mrs. John Marriott, daughter of the late Otto Kahn; Mrs. Gilbert Miller, wife of the theatrical producer; Ina Claire, actress; Constance Bennett, actress; Kay Francis, actress; the Duchess of Kent, Greek by birth; the Hon. Mrs. Reginald Fellowes, French; Mme. Maria Jose Sert, Russian; Mme. Martinez de Hoz, Argentine; Princess Jean Louise de Faucigny-Lucinge, French; Countess Charles de Noailles, French; Countess de Beauchamp, French; Marquise de Paris, South American; Countess Gerard de Montiers, French; Diana Wynyard, English.

ALL of the women mentioned so far in domestic, foreign and international lists are Occidentals. What about the Orient? Why has it no representation?

Madame Ling Su Chen and her daughter, specially sketched for this page by Mr. Handforth

The answer comes from Thomas Handforth, artist, who went to China in 1931 on a Guggenheim Fellowship and remained there four years. He returned recently for an exhibition of his drawings, etchings and lithographs at a New York gallery. He is represented in the Metropolitan Museum, New York; Fogg Museum, Cambridge; Chicago Art Institute, Library of Congress, Pennsylvania Museum, Baltimore Museum of Art, Los Angeles Museum and many others.

It is Mr. Handforth who names several Chinese women whom he believes are among the beautifully gowned women of the world and who rightfully have a place in any "best-dressed woman" or "charm" list. They are Madame Chu Kwan Mu, Miss Rosa Fung, Madame Dan and Madame Woo Lien-deh, a writer, all of Peking.

"China is the home of many women who have beauty, distinction, intellectual attainments and style," said the American artist. "Those I had the greatest opportunity to meet and observe were the women of Northern China, for I spent most of my time there in Peking and in Shanghai.

"Chinese styles are radically different, of course, from Western fashions. They are not as variable, for one thing, but that does not make Chinese women any less well dressed. In fact, the very 'rightness' of their apparel makes it unusually beautiful.

"Chinese women do not affect extreme styles, nor do they show a tendency to dress in the latest mode; that is, they do not snatch eagerly at 'last-minute' creations in the fashion world. They do not like eccentricity in dress or freakish novelties, and they do not go in for the odd, the bizarre, the swiftly changing style, which is good for today but which tomorrow will look ridiculous and 'old-fashioned.'

"After all, the Chinese woman's style of dress is much like traditional Chinese art. Chinese culture is the oldest in the world, and it has continued for the greatest length of time without a break. The Chinese, in their art, in pictorial illustration, in architecture have developed ways that, through centuries, are satisfying to them.

"So it is with their art in clothes. The Chinese woman's type of dress is the kind most suitable for her and one which she knows unquestionably is right for her."

The lines of this modern American miss give her an appearance that would not be tolerated in the Orient

The Chinese woman, according to the artist, has one advantage in particular over Western women in the matter of achieving a real effect in dress.

"It is her physique that gives her this advantage," explained Mr. Handforth. "The Chinese woman is slender and graceful. There are very few stout women in China. Just why I do not know, for they like food and eat extremely well. But fat women are not admired. Fat men, yes. A man, in fact, is always respected more for his portliness, because this is a sign of his prosperity.

"But the women are all slender, long-waisted and they have very small hips. They are naturally rather flat-breasted, too. They used to bind their breasts, but I do not think that measure could ever have been necessary. Some of the younger Chinese women are so slender and reed-like that you wonder how they even hold together. The Chinese women have naturally small feet and hands, and you would almost think, seeing some of the women, that their feet were still bound, but they are not.

"This extreme slenderness calls for simplicity in style as far as dress is concerned, and thus the clothes which are so well adapted to the Chinese woman would not be suitable for the foreign woman.

"Their clothes are designed for the more classical face and form. As a race, the Chinese are much more classical in type than Westerners. Their features are always very regular. You do not see so many eccentric faces in China—faces with large, bulbous noses, for instance, or big mouths, odd chins and bulging foreheads, as you see elsewhere. The women have very placid faces, and this keeps them in a perennial Springtime of youth. So they can wear youthful-looking clothes longer than can the Western woman.

"The women, before modern times, used to use sugar paste on their faces before they applied cosmetics. Naturally, they had to wear a mask-like expression to keep the sugar-coating from cracking, but while they no longer follow this practice, they do keep themselves very reserved in expression

Madame Chu Kwan Mu, of Peking, is one of the reigning fashionables of China. This drawing was also done for this page by Mr. Handforth

and gesture, and their emotions do not work havoc with their faces."

Mr. Handforth added that, racially, Chinese women do not begin to show their age as early as Westerners do, and that it is difficult to tell the age of a Chinese woman until she is very old indeed. He said:

"There is a very remarkable woman in Peking. She is Madame Dan, wife of General Dan, and sister of Princess der Ling, now Mrs. White. She and her sister were educated in Europe, but were brought up in the Court of the Empress Dowager. Madame Dan is now well in her sixties, but remarkable for her beauty and distinction, and her artistry in style of dress. Madame Dan does not show her age. She still dances, and occasionally gives a public performance of old classical dances, some which she composed herself. She is not a professional dancer, however, but a society woman.

"Now that I'm mentioning names, I may as well give that of another very charming and beautiful Chinese woman, Madame Woo Lien-deh, a writer, who also deserves a place on a world's 'best-dressed woman' list.

"A CHINESE woman's style of dress does not change much with her age, and perhaps that is why it is often difficult to know a dowager from a debutante. A young girl does not dress much differently than an older woman, except that she may affect more jewels, more ornaments in her hair, brighter colors, but usually the line of the dress and the coiffure worn by older women and young girls are virtually the same."

Asked to describe the style of dress which has appealed to the Chinese woman through so many centuries, with but slight modifications or variations, Mr. Handforth said:

"Well, first of all, it is not a sensational kind of dress. Chinese women do not wear things that are 'the rage' for the moment, and they do not strive to attract attention. While their modern dress has changed somewhat from the dress of the past, it has changed only slightly. They wear only the things that they know from experience are suitable and becoming to them.

"Here, in America, clothes change from season to season. Take hats, for example. Extraordinary shapes are sold: little pancakes perched on one ear; trim sailors, dashing, upturned hats. Hats that go up in the back and down in front and vice versa. Hats with towering crowns, or none at all. They may look all right at the moment, but next year they will be unbecoming and ridiculous. This is because they have been put on the market so quickly that no time has been taken to study the effect. Consequently no one knows whether or not they are beautiful, or even really becoming to the women who must wear them. There is too much impermanence in Western styles.

"Just to show you how conservative the Chinese woman is, I might mention her collar. It seems to me one of the

peculiar conventions of Chinese style, and one which illustrates the fundamental Chinese conservatism, that Chinese women at all times and for all occasions wear the high collar. They may make a few concessions to Western style in their dress, such as adding the new little capes or scarfs, but they always adapt them to the high collar. Wearing the high collar, however, does not mean that they are less décolleté at formal social affairs, for they usually wear sheer fabrics, chiffons, laces and other thin, revealing, cobweb fabrics. But the high collar is always in evidence and, somehow, it makes the women more seductive in appearance; more trim, more formal."

PERHAPS this high collar is worn for a very good practical reason, it was suggested. But Mr. Handforth said: "Oh no, they have nothing to conceal. Chinese women have beautiful, long, slender necks. And neither does the wearing of the high collar signify extreme modesty, for Chinese women sometimes affect the alti skirt, which displays much of the leg."

"Chinese women seldom wear trains, but skirts which are ankle length and always buttoned on the right side, sometimes with the effect of being buttoned all the way down on both sides. They go in for patterned textiles more than do Western women. Variety for them depends so much more on pattern than on cut. They use satins and chiffons, velvet for semiformal and formal occasions. They employ pastel colors in their Summer dresses, which are all light, flowery creations. Otherwise, for other seasons, Chinese women wear darker colors, warmer, richer ones, particularly for formal wear, than Western women do.

"Sports clothes? No, they do not fancy them. Their dresses are always cut the same way. They wear sports jackets, however, over their long skirts, but always with the typical Chinese flare to the jackets. Occasionally Chinese women have Western dresses in their wardrobes, but they more often wear the Chinese style of clothing. The Chinese women, in general, do not wear hats, although they do sometimes go in for Summer headwear, usually the sailor type of hat, but hats are, of course, of Western origin.

"Certainly American women could learn a great deal by studying the Chinese woman's subtlety in dress, her distinction, her appreciation for details, accessories, her type of make-up and style of coiffure, her use of colors, her art of being placid, restful and quiet, and above all by observing her splendid carriage, her graceful walk and slender upright body."

"The Chinese women do go a bit extreme in one article of apparel and that is their fur coats. They show variety in their jackets, their short capes and in their coats. The latter are quite likely to be lavish, dashing, very rich. They particularly like squirrel, fox and sable."

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