

## COVER STORY



Han cultural activities have frequently been organized by *hanfu* aficionados in recent years to promote the traditional culture and clothes of Han people. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

# CLOTHING FIT FOR A PEOPLE

They feel more comfortable in voluminous robes than in a taut pair of jeans, and these advocates of a clothing style that goes back thousands of years are determined to ensure it remains with us for a long time yet

By XING WEN

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One Sunday afternoon a little more than 16 years ago, 17 men and three women who stood in a row at the Shanghai Science and Technology Museum were given a worldwide fanfare – and it was as much what they were wearing as what they had been talking about that grabbed the world's attention.

People's Daily reported that the main element was “a satin jacket featuring Chinese-style cotton buttons and round flower patterns with peonies surrounding the four letters of APEC, and a white silk shirt”. They came in six colors, scarlet, blue, olive green, brown, burgundy and black.

Those who wore these jackets on Oct 21, 2001 were the leaders of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum economies, holding their annual meeting in China for the first time since its founding 12 years earlier.

It had become the custom for the leaders to don traditional clothes of the

host country on the final day of the forum, and speculation about what form this would take had become a popular guessing game. However, in China that guessing took a serious turn, with earnest debate about what, in this context, the term “traditional Chinese” could possibly mean.

The result was the *tangzhuang*, a hybrid based on Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) clothing and other, more modern, elements. A little more than 20 years after China began to open up to the world, and just three weeks before it became a member of the World Trade Organization, the aim of the forum organizers was apparently to highlight not only the country's traditions but its modernity as well.

Zhao Jianhua, in his book *The Chinese Fashion Industry: An Ethnographic Approach*, says that the *tangzhuang* became extremely popular after the APEC meeting, but that in essence it was a fad that lasted for little more than a couple of years, even if the garment has become a set piece in the Chinese wardrobe.



Wang Tianjiao, *hanfu* aficionado.

However, the creation of the *tangzhuang* and the debate surrounding it appear to have been the genesis of a movement whose members show no sign of being content for their preferred garb to be mere space fillers in a wardrobe. These are the aficionados of traditional clothing based on that worn by the country's ethnic majority, the Han, 5,000 years ago.

Though the term *tangzhuang* was deployed to describe the APEC jacket, there was no Chinese word in the early 2000s to denote clothing from the Han Dynasty, and the term eventually coined was *hanfu* (Han clothing). The irony is that what has led to a revival in this centuries-old style of clothing and that keeps the flame flickering is 21st-century technology – the internet and social networking.

One aficionado of *hanfu* is Wang Tianjiao, 26, of Shandong province.

“Tieba is where I first learned about hanfu 11 years ago,” Wang says, referring to the community online forum Baidu Tieba.

“I was absolutely spellbound by this

time-honored clothing.”

She realized that few of her acquaintances had heard of *hanfu*, and all the information she got about it came from Baidu Tieba and the website hanchc.com, where a movement to rejuvenate *hanfu* germinated.

The dress on which contemporary *hanfu* clothing is based appeared as long as 5,000 years ago and prevailed through different dynasties in Chinese history until the Manchu established the Qing Dynasty in 1644. The Qing regime banned the wearing of Han clothes, and for the masses the custom of dressing in such clothing gradually disappeared.

Four years after Wang came across the Baidu Tieba group, she attended a hair-pinning ceremony, a traditional rite that marks Han girls' passage into adulthood, at the Jinan Fuxue Confucius Temple, built during the Song Dynasty (960-1279) and restored as a tribute to Confucius in 2005.

Such activities have frequently been

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**Main illustration** for the third Hanfu Cultural Festival in Xitang in 2015: 16 men in *feiyufu*, clothes worn by the imperial guards of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).



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**Trend:** For 2018, the color of the year is ultra violet, a blue-based purple that's referred to as mysterious, spiritual and intuitive.