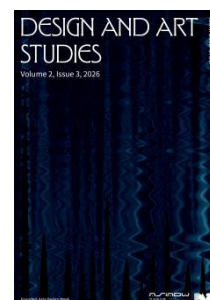




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A Study on the Costume Image Design of Mi Qiongmao, Daughter of an Enfeoffed Lord of Chu in the Warring States Period — The Past-Life Legend of the E Jun Qi Gold Tallies

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Abstract

The story of “The Past-Life Legend of the E Jun Qi Gold Tallies” in Episode 7 of Season 4 of National Treasure is set in the final century of the Warring States period. Across the vast territory of the Chu state, countless merchant convoys travelled by boat and cart along rivers and roads, carrying goods, wealth, information, and talent to different parts of Chu. Mi Qiongmao, daughter of E Jun Qi, refused to become a bargaining chip in a political marriage. She therefore asked to manage her father’s business and led Lord E’s merchant convoy to the northern frontier city of Xiagai. In order to make the costume design better fit the character in the script, this paper first defines Mi Qiongmao’s life setting and historical period, then identifies her character traits. By reviewing historical documents and analysing artefacts excavated from Chu tombs, the study examines her costume from several aspects, including garment form, colour, fabric, patterns, headwear, and footwear. On this basis, it reconstructs the clothing style of noblewomen of the Chu state, using Mi Qiongmao as a representative case.

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1. Introduction

National Treasure has been a highly influential cultural variety programme since its launch in 2017. Taking “bringing cultural relics to life” as its core idea, the programme combines theatrical performance, celebrity narration, and expert interpretation. In doing so, it breaks away from the serious framework of traditional cultural programmes and gives thousand-year-old artefacts a more vivid presence. Through a cross-disciplinary approach, it activates history and allows Chinese civilisation to gain new vitality in a contemporary context. Its distinctive narrative form not only brings young audiences closer to Chinese civilisation, but also uses the dual structure of “past-life legend” and “present-life story” to reveal the humanistic spirit behind cultural relics and the contemporary mission of those who protect them. It proves, through practice, the possibility of communicating traditional culture in a modern way while remaining faithful to its roots.

The “Past-Life Legend” section of Episode 7 in Season 4, centred on the E Jun Qi Gold Tallies, tells a story about Mi Qiongmao (played by Mao Xiaotong), the bold and intelligent daughter of the Chu enfeoffed lord E Jun Qi. In the

story, she captures an internal traitor and recovers the gold tally for the merchant convoy. Based on an analysis of Mi Qionghao's historical period, this paper collects a large amount of relevant textual material, tomb murals, figurines, and excavated objects, and uses these sources to conduct a detailed study of her costume image.

2. Relevant Definitions of Mi Qionghao's Life and Historical Period

2.1 Defining Mi Qionghao's Life

In the programme, Mi Qionghao is presented as a young woman of about eighteen or nineteen. She is the daughter of E Jun Qi. Because she does not wish to become a pawn in a political marriage, she asks to manage her father's business and becomes the leader of Lord E's merchant convoy.

Regarding the identity of Mi Qionghao's father, E Jun Qi, the chapter *Shuo Yuan: Shan Shuo* records that E Jun Zixi and a Yue official were boating on a lake. A Yue boatman sang *the* Song of the Yue Boatman, which includes the line "He was privileged to drift on the water in the same boat as the prince". Zhuang Xin, a minister of King Qingxiang of Chu, stated that "E Jun Zixi was the younger brother of the mother of the King of Chu; he served as Lingyin (prime minister) and held the rank of zhigui (holder of the jade gui)." For this reason, some scholars have argued that "E Jun Qi" was the same person as "E Jun Zixi": Qi was the prince's personal name, while Zixi was his courtesy name. In this view, Qi was probably a son of King Huai of Chu (Yin, 1958).

Further textual research, however, shows that several Song editions of *Shuoyuan* record "E Jun Zixi" in the passage "Xiangcheng Jun was first enfeoffed", whereas Tang and Song encyclopaedias, as well as sources that quoted *Shuoyuan* before the Xianchun period of the Song dynasty, only mention "E Jun" and do not mention "E Jun Zixi". Thus, the expression "E Jun Zixi" may not have existed in the original text. After the E Jun Qi Gold Tallies were unearthed, and after the 1987 excavation of the Baoshan Chu bamboo slips, which record phrases such as "The judicial officer (Sibai) of Lord E arrested Dan and received the appointed term" and "The subordinate of Lord E arrested and delivered (the person)" (The Jingman-Shashi Railway Archaeological Team, 1991), scholars also noticed that the event "Grand Marshal Shao Yang defeated the Jin army" recorded in the slips corresponds to the content of the E Jun Qi Tallies. Based on the surviving evidence, it is highly possible that E Jun was Qi. The original text of *Shuoyuan*, *Shanshuo*, probably referred only to "E Jun"; the two characters "Zixi" were added later, after the Xianchun period of the Song dynasty.

Although historical records do not give a clear account of E Jun Qi's identity, the general situation of Chu enfeoffed lords during the Warring States period helps clarify his social status. Such lords mainly consisted of members of the Chu royal clan, descendants of old Chu aristocratic families from the Spring and Autumn period, and some people who had been enfeoffed because of outstanding military achievements. From this background, the fact that E Jun Qi received a tax-exemption gold tally cast by direct order of the King of Chu implies that he was very likely a prominent noble in the Chu state. At that time, such tallies were certainly not granted casually. Their issuing involved strict considerations of identity and political interests, and only nobles with sufficiently high social rank and influence could receive such a privilege. Therefore, Mi Qionghao, as the daughter of a Chu enfeoffed lord in the programme, should also be understood as belonging to the noble class.

2.2 Defining Mi Qionghao's Historical Period

The "Past-Life Legend" of the E Jun Qi Gold Tallies is set between 328 BCE, when King Huai ordered the casting of the tallies, and 323 BCE, when Qu Yuan became zuotu (a top-ranking official position unique to the State of Chu, responsible for both internal and diplomatic affairs). This period was a crucial transition in which Chu began to move from prosperity toward decline. Internally, after King Huai came to the throne, he attempted to strengthen control over noble economic power by casting the E Jun Qi Gold Tallies. However, the three great aristocratic clans, Zhao, Qu, and Jing, remained very powerful, creating intense tension between royal authority and noble power. Externally, Chu initially maintained friendly relations with Qin, but after Qin occupied Ba and Shu, the western threat increased. At the same time, Chu competed with Qi over the Huai and Si river regions, which continuously drained national strength. During this period, Qu Yuan was appointed zuotu and became responsible for diplomacy and the drafting of laws. This marked King Huai's attempt to employ talented new officials and promote reform. In terms of society and economy, state-run industry and commerce in Chu were developed, and trade along the Yangtze and Han River basins was prosperous. Yet key resources were still monopolised by nobles. Beneath the surface prosperity, the rigid power of the aristocracy, the wavering diplomatic policy, and the accumulation of social conflicts laid hidden foundations for the later decline of Chu and also foreshadowed the enormous resistance that Qu Yuan would face in his reforms.

Passes and "tallies" were required by the feudal ruling class in order to govern the state. *Rites of the Zhou* states that "passes are the strategic corridors of the feudal lords and the gateways for external goods" and that "all who travel through the realm must have tallies to support their passage" (Teng & Rong, 1994). By the Warring States period, commerce had developed greatly. Transportation, trade, and economic activities all had to pass strict inspection before

being allowed to proceed. This not only helped maintain economic stability between regions, but also had considerable importance for protecting trade between the various feudal states (Xu, 2017). In addition, passes and tallies also served the ruling class by providing a source of revenue. Before the Eastern Zhou period, frontier passes already had functions such as inspecting goods and maintaining public order. Ancient merchants had to use a “tally” as a pass when entering or leaving strategic points and checkpoints, and they also had to pay taxes. Only merchants who held a gold tally and followed the land and water routes set by the authorities could qualify for tax exemption.

The inscriptions on the E Jun Qi Gold Tallies show that the Chu state made very detailed regulations about the routes used by merchants. The vehicle tally of the E Jun Qi Tallies records: “passing through Yangqiu, Fangcheng, Youfen, Fanyang, Xiacai, Juchao, and Ying”(Chen, 1986). The story in the programme is set in the Central Plains, in Xiacai, a city near the border between Chu and Han, which was one of the places passed by the merchant convoy of E Jun Qi.

3. Textual and Archaeological Analysis of Mi Qiongmao’s Garment Form and Colour

3.1 Garment Form

Chu society had clear class divisions, and clothing served as a visible marker of social identity. Noble and commoner clothing differed noticeably in form, material, and accessories, so class could often be judged from dress. These differences were a direct expression of the Chu hierarchy and continuously reinforced class consciousness. Considering Mi Qiongmao’s status and the background of the story, her costume can be studied from the perspective of the daily dress of Chu nobles. Existing archaeological discoveries and historical documents provide rich material and visual evidence for the everyday clothing of the Chu aristocracy. Silk textiles, painted wooden figurines, and silk paintings unearthed from sites such as Tomb No. 1 at Mashan in Jiangling, Hubei, and Chu tombs in Changsha show that the daily clothing system of Chu nobles was well developed. It mainly included shenyi, pao robes, unlined garments, ru jackets, qiu yi(a type of unlined funerary garment), skirts, and trousers.

The main reference for Mi Qiongmao’s garment form is the formal dress worn by the female noble buried in Tomb No. 1 at Mashan, Jiangling: a purplish-red silk unlined garment embroidered with a coiling pattern of one dragon and one phoenix (Figure 1). Its form is similar to a Chu robe. It has a right-closing front with a large lapel, a broad body and wide hem, and an integrated structure in which the upper garment and lower skirt are joined. Unlike a Chu robe, however, this unlined garment has no inner lining. The Chinese character *dan* in *danyi* can also be written as *chan*. *Shiming*, “*Explanation of Clothing*”, states: “A *chan* garment means one without lining” (Liu, 2008). Depending on the texture of the fabric used, an unlined garment could be worn either as innerwear or as an outer layer. The chapter *Yuzao* in *Rites of the Zhou* records the phrase “*chan* serves as the fundamental principle”, which can be understood as an unlined garment worn over other clothing.

The garment has curved hanging sections under the sleeves known as *chuihu*. This design is both beautiful and practical: the curved sleeve opening allows greater flexibility during movement, while also adding a flowing line to the overall silhouette. Brocade, embroidered silk, and other fabrics are used as decorative elements on the collar, cuffs, hem, and front opening. These decorative fabrics are not only finely made, but their own weight also gives the edges of the garment stronger drape. As a result, the outline becomes clearer and the garment appears more refined and structured. This clever design enhances the decorative beauty of Chu unlined clothing, strengthens the overall shape, and demonstrates the distinctive artistic charm and skilled craftsmanship of Chu dress. In addition, the people of Chu favoured a narrow waist. Shen Congwen noted: “A characteristic of Chu clothing is that both men’s and women’s garments tended to be slender and long” (Shen, 2011). This feature is often seen on clothing worn by wooden figurines excavated from Chu tombs, such as the painted female figurine unearthed from Tomb No. 25 at Yangtianhu, Changsha. She wears a close-fitting long robe that trails to the ground, with a belt tied at the waist, showing the slender-waisted style of Chu dress (Figure 2).

3.2 Garment Colour

The colours of Chu clothing were rich and varied. Textiles unearthed from Tomb No. 1 at Mashan and Tomb No. 1 at Mawangdui show the use of yellow, red, purple, blue, green, brown, dark brown, black, and other colours. Archaeological reports also record a wide range of textile colour names, including deep red, vermilion, orange-red, reddish brown, dark brown, golden yellow, earth yellow, greyish yellow, greenish yellow, cobalt blue, purplish red, grey white, dark brown, and dark purple (Sun, 2021). Such a rich colour range reflects the high level of dyeing technology in Chu. The people of Chu were able to create many hues and degrees of brightness to meet the needs of different garments, and this also shows their pursuit of colourful everyday life.

The people of Chu worshipped Zhurong as an ancestor. Zhurong originally held the position of fire official and, by the Zhou period, had become an important official responsible for matters related to fire. This role carried strong shamanistic associations. In early human understanding, fire was closely connected with the colour red. As an important

part of early belief systems, fire worship subtly shaped the Chu social custom of “believing in shamans and spirits and valuing elaborate sacrifices”. Therefore, red, with its connection to early religious belief, received special attention among the people of Chu. The chapter *Gongmeng* in *Mozi* records: “King Zhuang of Chu wore a bright crown with a braided tassel and a crimson robe with broad sleeves to govern his state, and the state was well governed” (Wu, 2018). The term crimson robe refers to red clothing. However, in order to express differences between high and low status, common people in daily life could only use colours from the same spectrum but with lower brightness and purity, such as brown, dark brown, and yellow.



Figure 1. Purplish-red silk unlined garment embroidered with a coiling pattern of one dragon and one phoenix

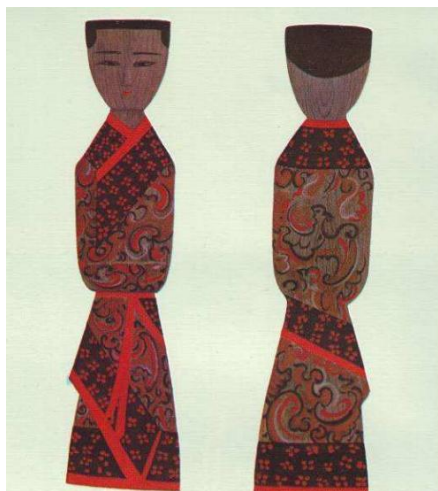


Figure 2. Painted female figurine unearthed from Tomb No. 25 at Yangtianhu, Changsha

4. Textual and Archaeological Analysis of Mi Qiongmao's Fabrics and Patterns

4.1 Fabrics

Chu costume fabrics are highly representative in the history of ancient textiles. Their use was closely connected with the level of social and economic development at the time. The widespread cultivation of mulberry trees and silkworms, together with innovations in textile tools such as looms, greatly improved the efficiency of fabric production in Chu and laid a solid material foundation for the flourishing of its textile industry. A systematic study of Chu silk artefacts and related historical sources shows that the fabrics used for Chu clothing can mainly be divided into two categories. The first category consists of coarse cloth made from hemp and ramie fibres. These fabrics were inexpensive and relatively simple to produce, so they were the main clothing materials for commoners and other lower social groups. The second category consists of silk fabrics. These were soft in texture, bright in colour, and highly refined in craftsmanship. They were reserved for the upper nobility and not only reflected the wearer's social status, but also demonstrated the advanced silk-weaving techniques of Chu.

There were many kinds of fine Chu silk. Ancient texts record that the Jing qi patterned silk and Chu lian fine silk produced in Chu could rival the Qi wan silk of the Central Plains and the Lu gao gauze. According to manufacturing techniques, Chu silk fabrics can be divided into eight types: juan, sha, luo, ti, qi, jin, zu, and tao (Zhang, 2012).

Shiming, compiled at the end of the Eastern Han period, explains: “Juan is silk that is relatively thick and loosely woven” (Liu, 1985). Juan and sha are both plain-weave silk fabrics. They are light, thin, smooth on the surface, and relatively dense. Compared with other materials such as ramie cloth and satin-like silk, sha is lighter and more breathable, and garments made from it appear more elegant. Because unlined garments have no lining and are light and breathable, they are suitable for hot summer weather. They can sit close to the skin, absorb sweat, and remain cool and airy (Qin, 2024). Many silk textiles unearthed from Chu tombs use juan as the embroidery ground. The purplish-red silk unlined garment embroidered with the coiling pattern of one dragon and one phoenix, used as the reference for Mi Qiongmao’s costume design, is one such example.

Luo fabric has an open texture and, like juan and sha, is suitable for summer clothing. Ti fabric is relatively thick, but it has a smooth, flat surface and a bright natural sheen. Because of these qualities, it is very suitable for making robes. Qi fabric is a typical patterned weave. Its relatively firm texture allows it to strengthen the drape when used on hems, collars, and garment edges, giving the clothing greater layering and a stronger three-dimensional quality. Examples include the upper edge of the light-yellow silk quilt embroidered with a coiling dragon and flying phoenix pattern from Tomb No. 1 at Mashan, Jiangling, and the sleeve edge of the purplish-red silk unlined garment embroidered with a coiling pattern of one phoenix and one dragon. Jin brocade uses a “plain-weave compound warp structure in which patterns are formed by warp threads”, and its technique is extremely complex. Through the varied interlacing of colourful warp threads, such textiles display brilliant and refined patterns. The examples from Tomb No. 1 at Mashan include pagoda-pattern brocade, small-rhombus-pattern brocade, and phoenix-bird and geometric-pattern brocade (Figure 3). When used as garment edging, brocade also helped prevent damage to the robe. Zu and tao are both band-shaped textiles and were often used for edge decoration or for making belts.



Figure 3. Phoenix-bird and wild-duck geometric-pattern brocade

4.2 Patterns

Clothing is a material carrier of decorative art. Chu costume patterns are known for their distinctive artistic style and rich cultural meaning, reflecting the aesthetic taste and spiritual beliefs of the Chu region during the Warring States period. Because dyeing and weaving techniques were limited at the time, realistic images from nature could not be directly applied to textiles. Instead, people used transformed and stylised forms. They processed and refined the natural forms of animals, plants, and human figures, turning them into decorative patterns that suited production conditions and reflected the aesthetic taste of the period (Wang, 2004). In general, Chu costume patterns can be divided into three categories: geometric patterns, animal patterns, and other decorative motifs. Common geometric patterns include rhombus patterns, triangles, squares, dots or circles, hexagons, and S-shaped forms. They may be said to have expressed “the beauty of broken lines to the highest degree” (Liu & Zhang, 2005).

Animal patterns mainly include phoenixes, dragons, tigers, snakes, deer, horses, and birds. Among them, dragons, phoenixes, tigers, and snakes appear most often, either alone or in combination, as in “floral flying-phoenix patterns”, “phoenix-bird and snake patterns”, “coiling-dragon and flying-phoenix patterns”, and “dragon-phoenix-tiger floral patterns”. Judging from excavated Chu tombs and artefacts, phoenix patterns account for more than half of the total. This is also connected with Chu cultural customs. The phoenix was the totem of Chu, and the people of Chu regarded it as a symbol of the Chu state, the Chu people, and their own identity (Cai, 2021). Therefore, when phoenix patterns appear together with other animal forms, the other animals are usually subordinated, while the phoenix occupies a dominant position. This expresses the energetic and assertive spirit of Chu culture. Other motifs include plant patterns such as evodia, lotus, willow, fusang trees, and four-petal flowers; natural motifs such as cloud patterns, interlocking thunder patterns, mountain-shaped patterns, water-wave patterns, and fire-like motifs; and hunting scenes that show aspects of real Chu life. These three types of motifs could also be arranged in different ways to create many combined patterns with clear and distinctive features.

Since the pre-Qin period, the principle of “embroidered garment body with brocade edging” had been followed. Thin fabrics were usually assembled through stitching and combined with wide, heavy, and firm brocade borders. Compared with the garment body, these borders created a clear hierarchy and elegant colour relationship. At the same time, the use of edging prevented the cloth from clinging too closely to the body, increased the durability of the garment, and outlined its overall structure, thereby enhancing the wearer’s status and temperament (Ren, 2011). According to technique, Chu costume patterns can be divided into embroidered patterns, brocade patterns, and band patterns. Embroidered patterns were widely used on the main garment surface. Because embroidery is flexible, these patterns are the most vivid and varied. Brocade and band patterns were often used on collars and edges, and only occasionally on the surface of robes. Due to technical restrictions, brocade and band patterns were usually geometric (Xie, 2024).

Based on the above principles, the main body pattern of Mi Qiongmao’s costume refers to the dragon-phoenix-tiger embroidery unearthed from Tomb No. 1 at Mashan (Figure 4). In this pattern, the dragon body is winding and vigorous, while the phoenix spreads its wings in flight. The two forms connect head to tail, forming a dynamic circular or wave-like composition. The tiger is drawn with simple lines. It may be hidden in the spaces between the dragon and phoenix or placed at the edge of the main pattern. Its posture is powerful yet lively, reflecting the romantic and flowing style of Chu culture. Under the influence of bronze and lacquer art, the jacquard patterns of Chu silk textiles often used rhombuses, checkerboard forms, and compound rhombuses as geometric frameworks for dividing space (Sun, 2011). Therefore, the sleeve-edge pattern in this design refers to the small-rhombus pattern unearthed from the mid-Warring States Chu tomb at Xinyang (Figure 5). The rhombus units are uniform in size and extend horizontally like a band. The pattern is orderly yet lively, simple yet meaningful.



Figure 4. Dragon-phoenix-tiger embroidery unearthed from Tomb No. 1 at Mashan



Figure 5. Small-rhombus pattern unearthed from a mid-Warring States Chu tomb at Xinyang

5. Textual and Archaeological Analysis of Mi Qiongmao’s Headwear and Footwear

5.1 Headwear and Hairstyle

The people of Chu had many kinds of hairstyles, and these varied according to gender and social status. However, ancient textual records about Chu hair ornaments are relatively limited. Although archaeological excavations have produced a fairly rich body of material evidence, the exact shapes of the hairstyles shown in these objects are still not fully clear. Therefore, the hairstyles of Chu people can only be roughly inferred and reconstructed from the available evidence. Based on existing material, Chu hairstyles included the zhui topknot, the hanging chignon, and the double-loop style.

The zhui topknot involved gathering all the hair into a knot. It could be positioned on the top of the head, above the right ear, or at the back of the head. Both male and female nobles used this style. Men’s zhui topknots were often

upright on the top of the head, while women's usually rose backward from the back of the head. The woman in the dragon-phoenix silk painting unearthed from the Chenjiashan Chu tomb wears this type of hairstyle. Figurines from the Yutaishan Chu tombs show hair gathered into a bun at the back of the head or near the neck. Although the exact shape is not fully clear, it can still be identified as a hanging chignon. Another style involved braiding the hair down the back, tying the middle of the braid into two loops, and letting another lock of hair hang below the loops. This double-loop hairstyle was relatively complex and had a decorative quality. Painted wooden figurines unearthed from the Yangtianhu Chu tomb in Changsha use this hairstyle. Other simpler hairstyles included long wavy hair worn loose down the back, hair tied into a bunch at the nape of the neck and left to hang naturally, and hair tied at the back of the head and then braided down to the waist. The latter two styles may have belonged to commoner women or to men.

In addition, a lacquered wooden figurine unearthed from the Tazhong Chu tomb in Shayang shows a different hairstyle (Figure 6). Its front hair is cut straight, and the topknot rises sharply in a conical form, extending high upward and backward from the crown. The overall outline resembles a layered tower. Judging from the proportions of the figurine, the height of the topknot may reach half the length of the head, with a hanging chignon at the back. A similar hairstyle can also be seen on the Warring States gold-chain dancing-girl jade pendant unearthed at Jincun, Luoyang, Henan Province (Figure 7).



Figure 6. Lacquered figurine from the Tazhong Chu tomb, Shayang



Figure 7. Warring States gold-chain dancing-girl jade pendant

5.2 Footwear

Footwear, also called foot clothing, refers to garments worn on the feet. So far, only three examples of women's footwear from the Eastern Zhou Chu state have been discovered through archaeological excavation, and all come from Tomb No. 1 at Mashan. Two of them are badly damaged and difficult to identify. The only relatively well-preserved pair is a pair of hemp shoes with brocade decoration. Its appearance is somewhat similar to cloth shoes with grass soles. The toe is rounded, the opening is relatively wide, and there are no ties (Figure 8). In terms of production technique, the hemp shoe was first shaped on a frame, and then the sole was woven by winding hemp thread (Chen, 2020). The upper is covered with hemp cloth, the inner layer is lined with fine grass, and the outer surface is decorated with large-rhombus-pattern brocade.

Analysis of the material and structure of these hemp shoes shows that they were not suitable for walking in rain or on muddy roads. This suggests that people who wore such footwear did not often rely on walking for daily travel and

lived in relatively comfortable conditions. Considering Mi Qiongmao's social rank, it can be inferred that her footwear should be brocade-faced hemp shoes.

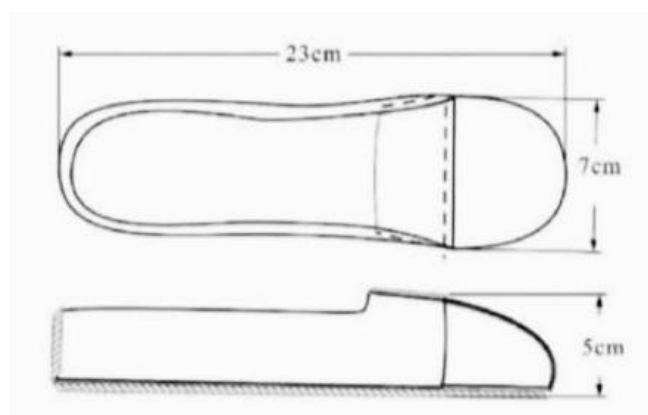


Figure 8. Hemp shoes with large-rhombus-pattern brocade surface

6. Overall Presentation of Mi Qiongmao's Costume Image Design

As a high-ranking Chu noblewoman, Mi Qiongmao's costume image is shaped by several factors, including her social status, her historical period, and the clothing fashions of late Warring States Chu. With reference to ancient texts and the large number of artefacts excavated from Chu tombs, the overall presentation of the costume image is shown in Figure 9.



Figure 9. Overall presentation of Mi Qiongmao's costume image design

This study rigorously distinguishes between two distinct design methodologies: strict replication grounded in archaeological evidence, and artistic adaptation necessitated by stage performance and character portrayal, thereby explicitly delineating the translational boundary from archaeological data to costume design for visual media. The foundational garment structure adheres to the right-over-left joined-body form of the purple-red silk unlined robe excavated from the Mashan No. 1 Chu tomb in Jiangling. Its embroidered motifs reproduce the dragon-phoenix-tiger pattern from the same site, while the geometric borders on the sleeve edges and collar reference the diamond-shaped brocade from the Xinyang Chu tomb. The coiffure replicates the high-conical chignon seen on the painted lacquer figurine from the Shayang Tazhong site, and the footwear is a faithful reconstruction of the brocade-faced hemp shoes unearthed from the Mashan No. 1 tomb. The chromatic palette conforms to the color spectrum documented in Chu silk textiles and aligns with the Chu cultural tradition of venerating red in shamanistic rituals. All these core elements have been reconstructed based on archaeological artifacts and transmitted textual sources, ensuring maximum fidelity to the authentic attire of aristocratic women in the Warring States Chu state.

Conversely, the artistic modifications include: substituting the dark, dull brown-black ground of ancient Chu garments with a soft pink silk to minimize the visually aged impression of excavated relics and optimize on-screen visual appeal; moderately enlarging the draping volume and widening the waistband to accommodate modern actors' physiques and mitigate mobility constraints imposed by the trailing length of the original gown on stage; and omitting the elaborate multi-layered accessories in favor of a simplified belt, which accentuates the pragmatic and capable temperament of the character Mi Qiongmiao, thereby achieving a harmonious synthesis with contemporary stage aesthetics and performance requirements.

In summary, judging from the final effect, the overall form and structural design are highly consistent with the intended historical scheme. However, taking into account changes in the modern human body, changing contemporary aesthetic preferences, and the special requirements of performance, some parts were adjusted appropriately. These adjustments avoided problems such as restricted movement and aesthetic discomfort between ancient and modern visual habits, while also ensuring the stage visual effect of the programme (Figure 10).



Figure 10. Final costume image of Mi Qiongmiao in performance (still from National Treasure, Season 4)

7. Summary

Costume is an effective carrier of cultural communication and an important material form through which civilisation is presented. It reflects the social conditions and values of a specific historical period. With the primary goal of restoring historical appearance, the design of Mi Qiongmiao's garment form, colour combination, and decorative patterns all draws on excavated objects, while also taking the logic of the storyline into account when combining and designing fabrics, colours, and motifs.

Through the costume image design of Mi Qiongmiao, this study systematically presents the clothing culture of the Chu state during the Warring States period. It analyses the characteristics of Chu dress in terms of form, colour, fabric, and pattern, as well as the information it carried about social hierarchy and cultural belief. This may provide a new perspective for understanding Chu history and culture, and offer a reference for the reconstruction and innovative design of Chu costume in film and television. In the future, as archaeological excavation continues and research deepens, our understanding of Chu costume culture is expected to be further enriched and corrected.

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Ethics Statement

Ethics approval was not required because this study analyzes published literature and publicly available institutional documents and does not involve human participants, experimental intervention, or identifiable personal data.

Availability of Data and Materials

The core documentary corpus is provided in the accompanying supplementary material. All underlying documents are publicly available through the references and URLs cited in the manuscript.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

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AI-Assisted Tools Disclosure

Generative AI-assisted tools were used during manuscript revision to support language editing, structural refinement, document formatting, and the technical preparation of author-generated schematic figures. The author independently verified all sources, factual claims, analyses, interpretations, and final wording and assumes full responsibility for the manuscript.

Author Contributions

MengQin Han: Methodology, Material collection, Original Draft Writing; HongWen Liu: Writing—Review & Editing. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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