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On English and Chinese Fashions;
with a Comparison betwixt the Dresses of the Inhabitants of each Country.

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ONE may as well be out of the world as out of the fashion, is a common, expression among the English ladies; for who would not wish to appear as other folks do? Where fashions vary so often as they do in this country, some regulation is necessary, that people in high life may know when they make a genteel and fashionable appearance, and when they do not. To effect this point, of so much modern consequence, I could wish two directors-general were appointed to superintend the affair of fashions; one should be a Lady, who should direct her own sex, the other a gentleman, who should have the same authority in his department. The orders of these directors might from time to time be notified in the Gazette, in the same manner as those for general mourning are from the Lord Chamberlain or Earl Marshal's office; this would prevent much confusion, and occasion a decent uniformity of dress, that would do honour to the nation.

The Chinese, who are esteemed a wise people, have a particular standard they constantly follow, and in which they have been invariable for many ages. They look upon their ancestors as wiser than themselves, and have a laudable veneration for old customs. They are apt enough to admire any thing that is convenient or elegant, and the produce of Europe; but if you advise them to imitate it, and improve any thing of their own, they seem surprised, and answer, *It is according to the custom of China; and if it is not so well as it should be, it matters not; it is as good as the rest, and it would be criminal to alter any thing in it.*

The Chinese are steady to one constant fashion; we are variable; yet is there in the article of fashion some resemblance betwixt the customs of the two nations. I shall begin with the Ladies, and where the likeness ceases, they may possibly find something worthy of imitation, to increase the present variety.

The Chinese women rub their faces every morning with a kind of paint that sets off the whiteness of their complexion, and gives them a colour, but soon spoils their skin, and makes it full of wrinkles.

What words could we better make use of to describe the modern custom of painting, in use among our Ladies of taste and fashion? the consequences of present beauty and future deformity are the same in both nations.

Among the charms of the Chinese Ladies, the smallness of their feet is not the least. When a female infant comes into the world, the nurses are careful to bind their feet very close, for fear they should grow too large. They are subject all their lives to this constraint; and such is the force of custom, that they not only undergo this inconvenience readily, but increase it, and endeavour to make their feet as little as possible, thinking it an extraordinary charm, and always affecting to shew them as they walk.

Small feet are reckoned an ornament by English ladies, and they are as fond of shewing them as the Chinese: 'tis true they do not take the same measures to reduce their size, yet the shoemakers and waiting-maids can easily testify what tortures they suffer to have a handsome foot.

Though the Chinese ladies are seldom seen but by their domestics, they spend several hours in dressing and adorning themselves, doing that by custom, which our ladies do to excite admiration.

With regard to their head-dress, it differs not much from the present fashion, as it consists of several curls interspersed with little tufts of gold and silver flowers. Some adorn their heads with the figure of a bird made of copper, or silver gilt, according to the condition of the person. Its wings extended lie pretty close on the side part of their head-dress, and embrace the upper part of their temples; its spreading tail makes a sort of plume on the middle of the head; the body is over the fore-head, and the neck and beak fall down on the nose; but there is an imperceptible hinge in the neck, that it may easily play, and answer to the least motion of the lady's head. The whole bird lies chiefly on the head, and the claws are fixed in the hair. Women of the first quality have generally an ornament of several of these birds united together, which make a sort of a crown. My countrywomen have already their pompons, egrettes, &c. &c. and I own I should think something like the bird worn by the Chinese ladies would mightily become them; I have no doubt but the fashion will soon be introduced; novelty is generally pleasing.

There is in particular one ornament I would recommend to the English ladies, for which the Chinese are remarkable, and that is, an uncommon modesty that is conspicuous in their looks and dress. As to their gowns, they would not, I am sensible, be approved of, as hiding too many charms; for they are very long, and cover them from head to foot in such a manner that nothing appears but their face. This, would be a shocking situation for an English young lady, especially, when it is considered, that their hands are always concealed under wide long sleeves, that

would almost drag on the ground, if they were not careful to lift them up. In the colours of their clothes they are as fickle as the European ladies, being red, blue, or green, according to their fancy: none but ladies advanced in years wearing violet or black. Our British ladies gowns are certainly more becoming, especially when modesty dwells in the breast of the wearer: the long and large Chinese sleeve would too much conceal many fine hands and arms, and an elegantly turned neck may certainly be in part shewn to advantage.

It is not the English ladies alone that are to be charged with fickleness in following a variety of fashions; the men are to the full as fond of change: one year you see them with a coat reaching down to their ankles, in the next the skirt is not perhaps ten inches long; sometimes with a sword as long as themselves; at others, so short as scarcely to be noticed; and in every other part of their dress are they equally variable. I shall conclude this essay by setting before them a laudable example of decent constancy, in an account of the manner of dressing of the men in China.

Their garments are made agreeable to the gravity they so much affect; it consists in a long vest, which reaches to the ground, having one lappet folded over the other, in such a manner that the upper lappet reaches to the right side, where it is fastened with five or six gold or silver buttons, at a small distance from each other. The sleeves that are large towards the shoulder grow narrower, by degrees towards the hand, and end in the shape of a horse-shoe, which cover their hands, and let nothing be seen but the ends of their fingers. They gird themselves with a large silk sash, the ends of which hang down to the knees, and to which they tie a case that contains a knife and two small sticks, which serve for a fork, a purse, &c. The Chinese heretofore did not carry a knife, and to this day the learned carry one very seldom.

Under the vest, in the summer-time, they wear a pair of linen drawers, which they sometimes cover with another pair of white taffety; and during the winter they wear sattin breeches, with cotton or raw silk quilted in them; but if it be in the northern parts, they are made of skins, which are very warm. Their shirts, that are made of different kinds of cloth, according to the season, are very wide and short; and to keep their garments clean from sweat during the summer, several wear, immediately next to their skin, a kind of silken net, that hinders their shirt from sticking to the skin.

In summer they have their necks quite naked, but in winter they cover them with a neck-band made of sattin or sable, or the skin of a fox, which is fastened to the vest. In winter their vest is lined with sheep-skin, though some wear it only stitched with silk and cotton; people of quality line it quite through with sable, imported from Tartary, or fine fox-skin with a border of sable: if it be in the spring, they have them lined with ermin. Over the vest, they wear a surtout with large short sleeves, that are lined and bordered in the same manner.

All kinds of colours are not equally permitted to be worn by all people; none but the Emperor and the Princes of the blood may wear yellow habits. Sattin, with a red ground, is affected by certain mandarins on days of great solemnity; but they are commonly dressed in black, blue or violet: the vulgar are generally clad in dyed cotton either blue or black.

Heretofore they greased their hair very much, and were so jealous of this ornaments, that when the Tartars, after the conquest of the country, obliged them to shave the head after the Tartarian fashion, several chose rather to die than obey the conquerors in this point, though their new masters did not alter the other customs of the nation. At present they have their heads shaved, except on the hind part, or in the middle, where they let it grow as long as they please.

They cover their heads in summer with a kind of a small hat or cap made in the shape of a funnel; the inside is lined with sattin, and the outside is covered with ratan, or cane very finely worked; at the top of the cap is a large tuft of red hair that covers it and spreads to the very edges. This hair is very fine and light; and grows between the legs of a kind of cow, and is dyed of a very bright red: this is very much in fashion, and allowed to be worn by all sorts of people. There is another that the vulgar dare not wear, it being proper to mandarins and men of letters, of the same fashion as the other, but made of paste-board between the two sattins, the inside of which is generally red or blue; the outside is white sattin, covered with a large tuft of the finest red silk. People of distinction make use of the former when they please, but especially on horseback when the weather is bad, because it keeps out rain, and is a fence from the sun.

In the winter-time they wear a very warm sort of cap, bordered with sable, ermin, or fox-skin, the upper part of which is covered with a tuft of red silk. This border of fur is two or three inches broad, and looks very handsome, especially when it is made of fine black shining sable, and is worth from forty to fifty taels: the Chinese, especially those who are qualified, dare not appear in public without boots. These boots are generally made of sattin or callico, and fit exactly, but have no tops or heels. If they go a long

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journey on horse-back, they wear boots of neats or horses leather, so well dressed, that nothing can be more limber; their boot-stockings are of stuff, stiched and lined with cotton; they come higher than the boots, and are bordered with plush or velvet.

If these boots and stockings are commodious in the winter time, to keep the legs from cold, they are almost intolerable during the summer, for which reason they have another sort which are more cool: these are not very much used among the vulgar, who, to save expence, have something of this kind made of black cloth: people of quality wear such in their houses, but they are made of silk, and are very neat and handsome.

When they go abroad, or make a visit of any consequence, they wear a long silk gown, commonly blue, girded about them, over which they have a black or violet cloak that reaches to their knees, which is very wide, and has very wide and short sleeves, and also a little cap made in the fashion of a short cone, covered with tufts of silk, or red hair, stuff boots on their leg, and a fan in their hand.