

THE CULTURE OF CLOTHES

A CELEBRATION OF
WORLD DRESS

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ASIA

As the world's largest continent, Asia stretches over a staggering 45 million square kilometres. It is here that Mount Everest, Earth's highest peak, towers 8,850 metres over the valleys of Tibet. It is also here where Earth's lowest point, the Dead Sea, can be found, dipping more than 400 metres below sea level near the dry hills of Jerusalem.

Due to its wide reach, encompassing every conceivable kind of landscape, the people of Asia have found an astounding array of ways to clothe themselves. From the yak-wool cloaks of the Siberian Tuvan to the cooling wide-sleeves of the Japanese kimono, this vast continent offers a rich variety of traditional dress.



CHINA

Longhorn Miao

In southwest China's Guizhou province live millions of people known as the Miao. One small Miao community that numbers just 5,000 people lives in a sprinkling of villages on the sides of the mountains around a town called Longga. They are called Longhorn Miao and are known for celebrating the annual flower festival of the Lunar New Year in spectacular style.

During the festival, the Longhorn Miao women wear a special costume made up of a vibrantly decorated shirt embroidered with white flowers and a pleated skirt patterned with pink and orange stripes. As the Miao didn't traditionally have a written language, these designs have been used to record their people's history, including tales of war.

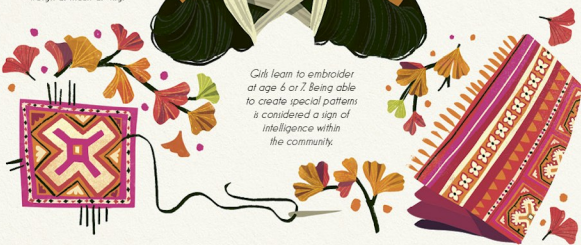
Yet it is what the Miao women wear on their heads that makes this traditional dress particularly notable: a gigantic headdress made mostly of human hair. The Longhorn Miao's ancestors believed that wearing the headdress would frighten off any wild beasts they might encounter in their remote mountain villages. Putting the headdress on is a complex task. First, a horn-shaped frame is attached to the wearer's head, then a collection of yarn, wool and human hair is wrapped around the frame and held in place with a white ribbon. The headdresses are never taken apart – instead, they are passed down from generation to generation. Some of the hair can be hundreds of years old, representing a lasting link between the Miao and their ancestors.

Women collect their hair from hairbrushes and add it to their headdresses. Some can weigh as much as 4kg.



The patterns on the Miao women's shirts and skirts are created using a knife dipped in hot wax.

Girls learn to embroider at age 6 or 7. Being able to create special patterns is considered a sign of intelligence within the community.



BALI

Oleg Dancer

From volcanic mountains shooting skyward to waters that shimmer shades of aquamarine blue, Bali packs so much natural beauty into an island just 150 kilometres wide. The vibrant culture of the Balinese people is just as rich, with an ancient tradition of dance forming an important part of it. Balinese dancers wear clothing to depict themselves as queens, gods, animals and supernatural creatures, and apply makeup to their faces to exaggerate their transformations. Once reserved for religious rituals on this ancient island, today these dances are performed mostly to entertain.

Some of the most elaborate costumes in Bali are worn by female Oleg dancers, whose performance is also known as 'the dance of the bumblebees'. From head to toe, the dancers are adorned with gold. Dressing begins by wrapping a long sash, called a *sabuk*, around the dancer's torso. A cloth covers the bottom half of the dancer's body, covered in gold patterns and edged with pompoms and adornments. Large gold bracelets decorate their wrists and arms.

On the Oleg dancers' heads sparkle exquisite golden crowns. These crowns, called *gelungan*, are decorated with tiny golden sandat flowers, which sway gently as the dancer's arms shimmer in tiny, trembling movements that represent bees collecting nectar.

The sash is wrapped tightly around the dancer and is believed to represent the one the dancer loves, wrapping their arms around her in an embrace.



As running is considered to look ridiculous in Balinese culture, the dancer's skirt is pulled tight to her body to encourage her to take smaller steps.

Heavy gold bracelets represent the fact that the dancer never loses control of their hands, for example to steal things.



PHILIPPINES

Ifugao Man

For the last 2,000 years, the Ifugao people have harvested rice on lush green terraces that inch up the mountains of Luzon, the largest island of the Philippines. It makes sense that the Ifugao are farmers, since their name translates to 'people of the earth'. During ancient ceremonies and rituals, though, it is the skies, not the land, they look towards.

During these ceremonies, male spiritual leaders called shamans wear elaborate headdresses. These impressive pieces are decorated with feathers, wild pig tusks or the beaks of hornbill birds, which the Ifugao believe are able to carry messages to the gods. Traditionally, the top half of the body is either bare or wrapped loosely in a blanket, but the rectangular piece of coloured cloth that covers their lower body is full of symbolism.

Diamond patterns on the lower cloth are said to represent ferns, one of the planet's oldest plants, to commemorate the Ifugao's ancestor. Stars represent a god who is the child of the Sun and the Moon, and helixes (double spirals) the lightning god, who also carries messages to other divinities. Yet it is a lizard that is one of the most distinctive symbols on the traditional dress. This design is thought to bring wealth and good fortune, because it is believed that a monitor lizard was sent by the gods to teach the Ifugao how to grow rice high in the mountains.

The strings that dangle from a bag called a moma are used to count the number of days an Ifugao man has worked. A taci is tied for each day of labour.



The Ifugao use their long spear for a variety of purposes. On some occasions it is used as walking stick, on others it is used for hunting or as a defensive weapon.

The cloth, called an uloh, has several uses. At night it's used as a blanket and by day it's wrapped around the shoulders for protection, or used to carry things.

