

# From "Duke Huan of Qi Likes to Wear Purple" to Modern Clothing Freedom: On the Evolution of Clothing Equality and Freedom and the Boundary of Law

Ruiling Gu

*School of Law, Huaqiao University, Shanghai, China*

**Keywords:** Clothing Equality and Freedom, Transformation, Legal Boundary, Public Order.

**Abstract:** This article takes "Duke Huan of Qi's fondness for purple clothing" as a starting point to trace the evolution of clothing equality and freedom throughout history. In ancient times, clothing served as a tool to maintain feudal hierarchical order. In modern society, the progress of clothing equality is significant, characterized by diversity and de-hierarchization, with constitutional laws ensuring clothing freedom. However, modern clothing freedom often conflicts with traditional morals, public order, and safety, necessitating clear legal boundaries. The article explores these issues from aspects such as public order, health and safety, special occupational identities, and intellectual property protection, aiming to balance individual rights with social interests and realize the value of clothing equality and freedom. It emphasizes that the law is crucial for ensuring clothing equality and freedom, and future efforts should focus on enhancing the rationality of legal regulations, strengthening publicity, and improving laws.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Looking back at history, clothing has been closely linked to social order and hierarchical systems. In ancient China's feudal society, the colors, materials, and styles of clothing all carried distinct hierarchical symbols, and this was also true in medieval Western Europe, where the differences between noble and commoner attire were pronounced. The anecdote of "Duke Huan of Qi's fondness for purple" vividly illustrates the influence of the ruling class on social customs and the strict distinction in clothing among different classes. In modern society, clothing has long transcended its basic function, becoming an important means of expressing individuality, status, and cultural identity. In an era that values diversity and individuality, equal clothing is a direct manifestation of social equality. From ancient times to the present, clothing has undergone a process of increasingly equal transformation.

However, in modern times, there is still a certain degree of inequality in the field of fashion. For example, school uniform regulations are overly strict, limiting students' expression of individuality; workplace dress codes are rigid, increasing women's burden and reinforcing gender inequality; some

public places restrict "alternative" attire, infringing on citizens' freedom of dress. At the same time, the excessive promotion of freedom and equality in fashion also conflicts with traditional moral values, public order, and safety. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify the legal boundaries for protecting freedom and equality in fashion, so as to truly achieve freedom and equality in clothing in modern society.

This study focuses on the equality and freedom in clothing, tracing the evolution of clothing freedom and equality throughout history. In ancient times, it primarily analyzes the "Duke Huan of Qi's fondness for purple" and the hierarchical system of clothing. In modern times, it examines the manifestation of clothing equality and legal regulations. At the same time, it explores the legal boundaries of clothing equality and freedom in contemporary society, clarifies the principles guiding these legal boundaries, and promotes the realization of fair and free values in the field of clothing.

In terms of research methods, this paper adopts the literature review method to deeply explore the evolution of clothing concepts from ancient times to modern times and the development thread of relevant legal provisions. It employs interdisciplinary research methods to integrate knowledge from multiple

disciplines such as law, sociology, history, and cultural studies, conducting a comprehensive analysis of the legal boundaries of clothing equality and freedom from different disciplinary perspectives.

From an academic perspective, equality law ensures social fairness and justice, with equality and freedom being its concrete manifestations in social life. Exploring the legal boundaries of dress equality and freedom can enrich the content of equality law research, summarize the application characteristics and development patterns of equality law in different periods, promote the improvement of the theoretical framework of equality law, and provide theoretical support for addressing equality issues in other fields.

From a social perspective, the public's understanding of clothing equality and freedom is vague. Some people excessively pursue freedom at the expense of responsibility and duty; others, influenced by traditional beliefs, have biases against others' clothing choices. This study clarifies the legal boundaries of clothing equality and freedom, helping the public understand their rights and obligations, enhancing legal awareness, reducing social conflicts caused by clothing, and fostering a harmonious and inclusive social environment.

## **2 FROM ANCIENT TIMES TO MODERN TIMES: THE EVOLUTION OF EQUAL CLOTHING**

### **2.1 Duke Huan of Qi's Love for Purple Reflects the Inequality of Ancient Chinese Clothing**

#### **2.1.1 "Duke Huan of Qi Liked to Wear Purple" Interpretation of the Anecdote**

Duke Huan of Qi favored wearing purple, and the whole country followed suit. At that time, no one could obtain a single piece of purple among the five colors. This anecdote from "Han Feizi: Left Upper Storage Sayings" vividly portrays the fashion trends in Qi during the Spring and Autumn period. As the ruler of Qi, Duke Huan's fondness for purple clothing sparked a widespread trend across the state, causing the price of purple fabric to soar. Five bolts of white silk could hardly be exchanged for one bolt of purple cloth, profoundly illustrating how fashion influenced market supply and demand. When Duke Huan heeded

Guan Zhong's advice and stopped wearing purple, it soon became impossible for anyone in Qi to wear it. This phenomenon highlights that under the feudal hierarchy, the ruler had absolute control over fashion trends, while ordinary people's clothing choices were dictated by the ruling class, revealing the inequality in attire at the time.

### **2.1.2 Ancient Chinese Clothing and Ranks**

Purple, in the ancient Chinese color system, underwent a transformation from lowly to noble. In early times, purple, as an intermediate color, was seen as a symbol of impurity and lowliness. However, Duke Huan of Qi's fondness for purple broke traditional notions. During the Sui and Tang dynasties, the official dress color system was established, with purple becoming the official color for officials of the third rank and above, who wore golden fish bags, thus solidifying its status as a symbol of nobility.

In fact, "Duke Huan of Qi's fondness for purple robes" is merely a microcosm of ancient Chinese attire and its hierarchical system. In terms of color, in ancient China, clothing colors were closely tied to social hierarchy. Primary colors such as blue, red, yellow, white, and black were seen as symbols of nobility and purity, while secondary colors were considered lower in status. Yellow, starting from the Sui and Tang dynasties, became exclusively for emperors, symbolizing imperial authority; commoners were not allowed to wear it, or they would violate the law. In the official dress code, during the Tang dynasty, officials of the third rank and above wore purple robes, those of the fourth rank wore deep crimson, fifth rank light crimson, sixth rank dark green, seventh rank light green, eighth rank dark blue, and ninth rank light blue, using color to signify their rank and position (Song, 2023).

At the same time, the attire of different social classes in ancient times showed significant differences. Taking the court robes of Ming Dynasty officials as an example, they wore a beam crown on their heads, with the number of beams decreasing according to rank: seven for first class, one for ninth class. They wore red silk robes and skirts, fastened with leather belts, adorned with jade pendants and sashes, made of high-quality silk fabrics, embroidered with exquisite patterns such as cranes, highlighting their status (Kong & Gu, 2016).

In contrast, common people mostly wore coarse cloth made of materials like hemp and ramie, which were rough in texture, monochromatic in color, and simple in style. Their tops were often short garments,

convenient for labor. This attire reflected the economic conditions and low social status of the common people, serving as a tool to maintain the feudal hierarchy (Xu&Xu, 2013).

## **2.2 Modern Society Tends to Be Equal and Free in Clothing**

### **2.2.1 The Embodiment of Equality and Freedom in Modern Social Clothing**

First, clothing choices have become more diverse. Take jeans as an example; they were introduced to China in the 1980s and quickly gained popularity among young people, becoming a symbol of fashion and individuality. In the 1990s, with advancements in domestic production technology, jeans became even more varied in style and color. Today, consumer upgrades have led to market segmentation, with unique styles like frayed and patchwork jeans emerging frequently. The rise of e-commerce has broadened purchasing options, making it easier for consumers to choose, thus achieving the democratization of clothing and highlighting equality.

Second, the development of modern professional attire embodies the concept of equal clothing, breaking down the hierarchical differences in traditional professional wear. Traditional professional attire distinguished between senior executives and regular employees through style, material, and accessories, reinforcing a hierarchical order. However, many companies, such as large multinational corporations, have abandoned this distinction, with all employees wearing the same uniform. This not only highlights team spirit but also allows employees to feel equality. In the service industry, professional attire also emphasizes uniformity in professionalism, using logos to differentiate positions, enhancing the industry's image, and promoting equality and harmony among employees (Li, 2022).

Third, school uniform culture also highlights clothing equality. British school uniforms are classic and simple, eliminating students' competitive mentality. Japanese school uniforms have distinct characteristics, with uniform styles for urban and rural areas, fostering a sense of community while providing space for individual expression. American public school uniforms are loose, allowing students to choose clothing with or without the school emblem according to their preferences, balancing individuality and equality. Chinese sporty school uniforms incorporate fashion elements, reducing material competition and helping students focus on their growth.

### **2.2.2 The Guarantee of Freedom of Dress in the Constitutions and Laws of Various Countries**

Different countries guarantee freedom of dress through their own constitution and laws.

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, while not directly mentioning freedom of dress, protects citizens' right to wear religious attire from the perspective of religious freedom, such as Muslim women wearing headscarves, Sikhs wearing turbans, and preserving long beards. Courts often rule on cases related to religious clothing based on this amendment, ensuring citizens' freedom to wear religious attire without compromising public interests.

Article 10 of the French Constitution ensures citizens' rights while emphasizing that the exercise of these rights must not violate public order and safety. Regarding freedom of dress, France recognizes citizens' right to choose their attire, but stipulates that this choice must not harm public order or the rights of others. For example, France has been involved in controversies over Muslim women wearing headscarves in schools, which touch on the balance between religious freedom and public order.

The Basic Law of Germany guarantees citizens' dignity and the right to free development, including the freedom to choose their attire. German law stipulates that employers cannot unjustifiably restrict employees' clothing choices unless it significantly impacts work safety or corporate image. At the same time, some companies allow employees to wear casual clothing in non-critical business settings, demonstrating respect for individuality.

Japan's constitution guarantees citizens' freedom of thought, belief, and expression, and clothing as a way to express themselves is also protected. People can wear traditional kimonos to carry on the culture, or pursue fashion trends, reflecting the full implementation of clothing freedom in Japan.

The laws of different countries vary. In the United States, emphasis is placed on protecting freedom of dress from the perspective of religious freedom, highlighting individual rights; France values maintaining public order and morals, imposing relatively more restrictions on freedom of dress; Germany focuses on balancing personal freedom with workplace needs; Japan ensures the freedom to choose clothing while respecting traditional culture. These differences are influenced by cultural factors in each country.

### 2.3 Controversy Caused by Modern Clothing Freedom

Currently, while progress has been made in the area of clothing equality and freedom, gender, racial, and age discrimination still exist in the realm of fashion freedom. Women face more restrictions when choosing their attire, with some workplaces imposing strict dress codes for women; regarding race, wearing specific clothing across races can spark cultural appropriation controversies; age discrimination manifests as rigid requirements for dressing according to different age groups. To eliminate these discriminations, it is necessary to strengthen legal protection, promote education and awareness, and foster an inclusive cultural environment.

At the same time, equality and freedom of clothing in modern society is still suffering from some negative voices, which are highlighted as follows:

#### 2.3.1 Conflict with Traditional Moral Concepts

As society develops, people's clothing choices have become increasingly diverse, often clashing with traditional moral values, particularly in the areas of revealing attire and special occasion wear. Exposed styles such as crop tops are frequently questioned in conservative regions, deemed to violate traditional morals and influence social norms. In special occasions like funerals and weddings, some individuals pursue individuality at the expense of traditional dress codes, wearing bright or revealing outfits that cause dissatisfaction and are seen as disrespectful to traditional morals. This conflict stems from the difference between traditional moral values and modern liberal ideas. The former emphasizes order and etiquette, while the latter stresses personal rights and freedom. This divergence leads to controversies over clothing freedom. Such conflicts can spark public debate, putting pressure on those who seek freedom in their attire, but they also spur social change and promote societal diversity (Ndwandwe, 2018).

#### 2.3.2 Consideration of Public Order and Safety

Clothing has an impact on public order and safety. Excessively revealing attire can easily attract unwanted attention in places like shopping malls and schools, disrupting normal operations. Specific venues have clear regulations regarding clothing to ensure smooth operation and safety; for example,

workplaces require employees to dress appropriately, while special locations such as airports restrict the wearing of potentially hazardous clothing. Balancing freedom of dress with public interests requires setting clear boundaries, establishing norms, and fostering correct attitudes through education and guidance (Bibi, 2016).

## 3 LEGAL BOUNDARIES OF EQUALITY AND FREEDOM IN DRESS

On the path to ensuring equality and freedom in personal attire, how to maintain social public interests and good order through reasonable legal regulations is a critical issue that requires deep reflection. As the guardian of social order, the law should fully leverage its guiding and regulatory role when balancing equality in attire with legal regulations. In areas such as public order and good morals, safety and health, special professions and identities, as well as intellectual property and trademark protection, the law regulates clothing choices to ensure that personal attire does not harm others' rights or the overall social interest. This legal regulation is not a restriction on freedom of attire but aims to achieve true equality and freedom in clothing, seeking a balance between individual rights and social public interests (Engi, 2016).

### 3.1 Public Order and Good Customs

Public order and good morals serve as important legal grounds for restricting freedom of dress. Public order is crucial for the normal functioning of society, while good morals represent societal ethical standards. In public places such as shopping malls, stations, and schools, wearing bizarre or overly revealing clothing can cause discomfort to others, distract attention, and disrupt normal order. Relevant management departments can establish dress codes to impose restrictions. Good morals also constrain freedom of dress; clothing that promotes violence, pornography, or terror can damage social ethics. In social settings, inappropriate attire violates public decency. To clarify the scope of freedom of dress, future legislation will grant citizens the right to choose their clothing according to personal preference and cultural background, covering aspects such as style and color. At the same time, clear restrictions will be defined, prohibiting the wearing of clothing that promotes harmful content like terrorism or pornography, and



requiring adherence to dress codes in specific venues to prevent abuse of rights (Dong-il, 2013).

### 3.2 Safety and Health

Safety and health are crucial considerations in the legal boundaries of clothing equality and freedom. In the workplace, strict regulations are in place to ensure employee safety. Construction workers must wear hard hats, safety shoes, and reflective vests, while chemical industry employees need to wear anti-static suits and other protective gear. In public places, to maintain public safety, clothing restrictions are also enforced. At transportation hubs such as airports and train stations, wearing clothing that may contain hazardous materials or be mistaken for hazardous items is prohibited. Firefighters must wear fire-resistant suits when on duty to protect themselves and ensure the smooth execution of firefighting tasks (Margit, 2011).

### 3.3 Special Occupations and Identities

Special professions and identities have specific requirements for attire. Military personnel must wear uniform military uniforms, wear their rank insignia, to uphold military discipline and order. Police officers wear police uniforms and relevant badges when on duty, enhancing the authority of law enforcement. In religious venues, believers must dress according to religious regulations, expressing their devotion to their faith. Judges must wear judicial robes in court, symbolizing the solemnity and impartiality of the judiciary (Ayelet, 2010).

### 3.4 Intellectual Property Rights and Trademark Protection

In the field of fashion, intellectual property and trademark protection safeguard innovation in clothing and market order. Fashion design is protected by intellectual property rights, and designers' unique designs are protected under copyright law; copying works by renowned designers constitutes infringement. Trademarks serve as identifiers for the source of goods; trademark law protects the exclusive rights of trademark owners and prohibits others from using similar trademarks, such as the strict protection of Nike and Adidas trademarks. Classic styles of some brands, like Burberry's check patterns, are protected under both copyright and trademark laws. Relevant authorities will investigate counterfeit products to protect brand intellectual property and consumer rights. In

scenarios such as online live streaming and virtual social interactions, the freedom of citizens to wear virtual clothing is protected, and platforms are regulated against unreasonable restrictions and discriminatory practices. In emerging fashion industries, the intellectual property and labor rights of professionals like online fashion designers are clarified to promote healthy industry development (Galan, 2010).

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

This study focuses on the equality and freedom in clothing, tracing the development of clothing freedom and equality from ancient times to modern times. In ancient times, "Duke Huan of Qi's fondness for purple" reflects that clothing was a tool for maintaining feudal hierarchical order. In modern society, significant progress has been made in clothing equality. It is evident that from "Duke Huan of Qi's fondness for purple" to modern clothing freedom, there has been a positive transformation process in clothing equality and freedom. However, it should be noted that clothing equality and freedom are not without boundaries. On one hand, there are still disparities in modern clothing equality and freedom; on the other hand, they face challenges from traditional moral values and concerns about social order. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the legal boundaries of clothing equality and freedom. This paper discusses the legal boundaries of clothing freedom and equality from aspects such as public order and good morals, safety and health, identification of special professions and identities, and intellectual property protection, ensuring a balance between individual rights and social interests to realize the value of clothing freedom and equality in modern society.

It should be recognized that the law plays a crucial role in ensuring equality and freedom of attire. The law not only safeguards citizens' freedom to dress but also imposes reasonable regulations on fashion freedom to protect public interests and social order. This regulation is not about restriction but seeks a balance between individual rights and social benefits. In the future, efforts should continue to promote equality and freedom in fashion, enhancing the rationality of legal regulations. Society should strengthen education and publicity on relevant concepts, encouraging personalized expression; at the legal level, it is necessary to continuously improve laws, precisely define legal boundaries, and create a harmonious and orderly social environment.

## REFERENCES

- Kim D.(2013).Right, Equality, and the Fairness Obligation.*Philosophia*,41(3),795-807.
- Lorenz E.(2016).Recht und Rechtfertigung Zur rechtstheoretischen Dimension des moralischen Rechts auf Rechtfertigung.*ARSP: Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie / Archives for Philosophy of Law and Social Philosophy*,102(3),353-362.
- Mercedes G.(2010).Forms of this state of Law and Demarcation of the right to a good governance.*Arbor-Ciencia Pensamiento Y Cultura*,186(745),901-915.
- Russell B.(2016).Models of freedom: Bangladeshi women are now vital to the economy but they are still restricted in their dress.*Index on Censorship*,45(4),21-23.
- Sabelo N.(2018).The Common Good and a Teleological Conception of Rights.*Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*,65(4 (157)),100-122.
- Shachar A.(2010).Freedom of the Dress: Religion and Womens Rights in Secular States.*Harvard International Review*,32(2),53-59.
- Sutrop M.(2011).Changing Ethical Frameworks: From Individual Rights to the Common Good?.*Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics*,20(4),533-545.
- Xiangnong Li(2022). Reflections on "freedom of dressing". *Shanghai Peoples Congress Monthly*, (09),49-51.
- Xuhang Song(2023). Analysis of the hierarchical nature of official costumes in the early Tang Dynasty from materials, patterns and accessories. *Journal of Shandong University*, (05),57-59.
- Yifei Xu & Weizhong Xu (2013). A Discussion on the Influence of Traditional Hierarchical System on Ancient Chinese Clothing. *Science and Technology Horizon*, (24),153-156.
- Zheng Kong & Changsheng Gu(2016). Hierarchical system and costume culture. *Mass Literature and Art*, (18),120-121.