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## FOLK CULTURE INSPIRATION IN CZECH FASHION OF THE 20th CENTURY\*

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### ABSTRACT

Interest in folk culture and costumes emerged in central Europe in the romanticism period, clothes of country people became a hallmark of patriotism and identification with one's country folk. In the 20th century, during the First and Second World War folk culture and its forms such as ornament and embroidery became manifestations of the specific nature of Czech and Slovak nations, as well as a shield against foreign interference and a declaration of patriotism in the time of danger. The communist coup in 1948 brought about the closing of the state borders and the separation of the country from the western world. Folk Art Production Centre continued the tradition where it was still alive and restored it where it had been interrupted, involved domestic materials and manual techniques and preserved specific regional manufacture. Young artists and students create a distinct stylization that employed materials, techniques and decoration from the folk environment, and assemble them into a whole that complied with the modern lifestyle.

**Keywords:** Folk Culture, Folk Costume, Czech Fashion.

### 20. YÜZYIL ÇEK MODASINDA HALK KÜLTÜRÜNDEN ESİNTİLER

#### ÖZET

Romantik Çağ Orta Avrupa'sında ortaya çıkan halk kültürü ve kostümlerine olan ilgi, yöresel halk kıyafetini vatanseverliğin bir işareti ve yöre halkının kimliği haline getirdi. Halk kültürüne ait süsleme, işleme gibi formlar, 20. yüzyılda I. ve II. Dünya savaşları sırasında, Çek ve Slovak uluslarının doğal manifestosuna dönüştü. Bunlar düşmana karşı bir kalkan olmasının yanı sıra tehlike anında vatanseverliğin bir bildirgesi oldu. 1948'de gerçekleşen komünist darbe, devlet sınırlarının kapatılmasını ve ülkenin Batı dünyasından ayrılmasını getirdi. Halk sanatı üretim merkezi, geleneği yaşamış olduğu yerlerde koruma altına aldı, restore etti. Yerel malzemeler ve el işi teknikleri kullandı ve özel bölgesel üretimin korunması devam etti. Genç sanatçılar ve öğrenciler, halk kültürünün dekorasyon teknik ve malzemelerini ayırd edici bir stilizasyonla tasarlayarak, onları modern yaşam tarzıyla uyumlu bir bütün haline getirdiler.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Halk Kültürü, Halk Giysisi ve Çek Modası

Interest in folk culture and costumes emerged in central Europe in the romanticism period. To the upper social strata, anything related to country life appeared exotic and clothes in particular. Austrian burgher women would wear various "foreign" costumes as ball gowns, appraising their originality and attractiveness, including Slav folk costumes that combined elements from the clothing of several ethnic groups. Some gowns only employed characteristic decorative features of folk costumes. When the constituting of European nations culminated, in the 1840s, clothes of country people became a hallmark of patriotism and identification with one's country folk, considered to be the guardians of national traditions. The awareness of differences in folk costumes and the need for the capturing of their variety led to the creation of series of prints that were subsequently assembled into albums. These served for the identification of various types of regional costumes, as well as templates for the making of new ones. Endeavours at equal status of all nations within the Austrian monarchy reached their peak in 1848. The Slav Assembly held in Prague in spring 1848 saw Yugoslav and Polish delegations dressed in folk costumes. This event gave rise to efforts at the creation of a Czech national folk costume that would replace burgher clothes (that obviously had international character). Its wearers would thus differ from the ruling German classes and would publicly demonstrate their Czechness. The first written record of these efforts is a brochure penned by an anonymous author, written in German but calling for the creation of a folk costume that would be based on the clothes of country people (Aufruf an die böhmische Nation zur Bildung einer zweckmässigen Nationaltracht, 1848). These activities also involved women who saw them as part of the emancipation struggle and political engagement, alongside their fathers, brothers and husbands. The Národní noviny newspaper published an appeal by Josipa Kubínová, a Croat married to a Czech, for whom Croatian women wearing blue coats called kaftans and red hats were exemplary in this respect. Kubínová recommended white, red and blue as suitable colours for Slavs (Provolání k mým slovanským sestřám! 1848).

Another group engaged in these activities was a circle of women known as Sestry slovanské (Slav Sisters) led by Johanna Fričová from a prominent Prague burgher family. The association closely collaborated with artists from the Slovanská lípa

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(Slav Lime Tree) group. The Slav Lime Tree set up a committee whose members collected information about folk costumes in the Czech lands and other Slav regions and studied medieval illuminations. On the basis of this groundwork (intended for the National Museum) artists were asked to produce designs for the new national folk costume. At the end of the revolutionary year 1848, the Slav Lime Tree issued several lithographs with designs for men's and women's folk costumes by painter Josef Václav Hellich. The men's costume drew inspiration from folk clothing in the Czech lands and from Polish models, typified by plentiful decorative cords and buttons. The women's costume, rooted in late medieval models, was rejected by the public. Only red or blue jackets with white hems were found acceptable, while the hats in the manner of medieval bonnets met with harsh criticism. Another design, inspired by a Slovak folk costume for men, was drawn by the famous Czech artist Josef Mánes. As complete folk costume sets were far too expensive, the majority of Czechs demonstrated their patriotism in a more simple fashion: with ribbons in national colours, hats and red caps. With the political pressures escalating, such open manifestations were persecuted, as they came too close to Jacobinism that the absolutist Austrian state had feared since the late 18th century (Moravcová, 1986a, 1986d).

After 1860 the political situation calmed down and the establishment of new cultural associations was no longer prohibited. At the same time, efforts at the design of the national costume gained momentum. These were no longer spurred by Czech intellectuals; they were spontaneous activities of Prague tailors and their customers. A new coat for men called čamara was designed after Polish models. It was a black or blue cloak decorated with gold cords and buttons, or with a silk hem. For festive occasions men also wore a red sash around the waist, finished with an embroidered lion, symbol of the Czech nation and state. However, there was no national folk costume for women. Appeals for its creation were published in the first number of the new Lada magazine in April 1861. The submitted designs did not show anything new: fashionable garments were supplemented with decorative cords or with a women's version of the čamara cloak. The only new feature was a bodice, symbolising folk costume. Fashion magazines also recommended a small round hat with an upturned brim, viewed as typically Slavic, despite the fact that in the country it was only worn by men. This costume was recommended for a national pilgrimage fair held in 1863 in Velehrad, Moravia, marking the thousandth anniversary of the arrival of Sts. Cyril and Methodius from the Byzantium to Moravia and the adoption of Christianity. The 1860s saw the mushrooming of communal activities; numerous choirs and readers' societies were established, tourism and sports thrived. One of the most important organisations was Sokol, a physical education association celebrating 150 years of its existence this year. Painter Josef Mánes designed a uniform for the Sokol members into which he incorporated elements from Moravian, Slovak, Polish and Yugoslav folk costumes. Uniforms of craftsmen's associations that accentuated the trademark features of each guild came into existence in parallel. These uniforms were worn, for example, for the celebration marking the laying of the foundation stone of the National Theatre, Prague in 1868. Efforts at the creation of the national folk costume ceased in the 1870s and experts' interests turned to the collecting of parts of folk clothing. In Prague these activities were pursued by a group around Josefa Náprstková who in 1877 established a collection called Our Mothers' Work within the Czech Museum of Applied Arts, and in 1880 organised the first exhibition of folk costumes and embroideries with over 300 exhibits. People were advised not to sell folk costumes and embroideries to junk dealers but to keep them and supply them for exhibitions, or donate them to museums. In Moravia, a museum association in Olomouc and its women's section were the most important in this respect. Their first exhibition held in Olomouc in 1885 was visited by Emilie Bach, director of the Embroidery Department of the School of Applied Arts in Vienna. Inspired by the Moravian example, Bach organised an exhibition in Vienna showcasing embroideries from the Austrian monarchy. Museum collections were to serve as sources of information about one's culture, as well as wellsprings of ideas for new clothes. In reality, there were yet no tendencies to study materials or cuts and to explore the functions of individual parts of folk clothing. Only the elements of form noticeable at first sight such as attractive multicolour embroideries were adopted for everyday clothes (Procházková, 1866). One of the folk costume trademark features was the apron that became part of burgher clothes even on social occasions. The Domáci hospodyně magazine and its supplement Náš kroj published designs with aprons inspired by the folk costume in eastern Moravia, from around Kyjov.

Embroidery was one of the symbols of folk culture. The Committee for the Spreading of National Embroidery was established within the Art Association group in 1886. The committee members, especially artists and handicraft teachers, put together a collection of embroideries that were to make templates for the drawing of ornaments at schools. At first they were only copied, but soon motifs from the embroideries were developed and applied on fabrics, cushions and clothes. Folk ornamentation was combined with neo-renaissance and art nouveau motifs, giving rise to specific Czech forms of these international styles. Similar tendencies can be traced in many European countries, notably Germany, Austria, Poland, Hungary and Scandinavia. In the Czech society, however, views on the use of folk ornamentation soon grew radical, from its eulogizing to total rejection. Demonstrations of patriotism among Czech intellectuals included the wearing of a "Slovak men's shirt" with an embroidered front the popularity of which stretched to the first half of the 1920s. Its women's counterpart was a blouse called Isabella, after a Habsburg countess who promoted embroidery. The Czech-Slavic Ethnographic Exhibition held in 1895 became a patriotic celebration of Czech and Slovak nations that only existed as parts of the Habsburg monarchy. The exhibition objective was to present the wealth of their folk culture, its ancient roots and, in particular, its difference from German culture. This was to support the claims for the autonomy of Czechs and Slovaks and their equal status within Austria-Hungary (Štěpánová, 2000). On the other hand, authentic folk culture in the country was in slow decline in the late 19th and the early 20th century. Country people tended to abandon their traditional agricultural activities and left to work in towns and cities, chiefly in industry. In consequence, they abandoned folk costumes and replaced them with more practical clothes. Collectors and ethnographers strove to preserve knowledge about folk crafts and similar skills. Schools of arts and crafts and girls' schools played a very important part in these endeavours (In the Czech lands there was the highest number of specialist schools within the Austro-Hungarian monarchy in the last quarter of the 19th century. The most important girls' schools with progressive curricula included the Vesna School in Brno. See Kalinová, Nováková, 2007). They taught the drawing of folk ornaments, embroidery, making bobbin lace and small decorative objects for the interior (modelled on those in country houses). Folk fabrics that had

a ceremonial function in their original environment were used in burgher households for interior decoration; sometimes only the embroideries were cut out and sewn onto cushions and blankets. Cooperatives centred upon embroidering were established in Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia; their products were sold in spa towns and shops in Vienna and Berlin (The Isabella cooperative in Bratislava was the first in 1898, renamed Detva in 1919 (after the establishment of Czechoslovakia). Zádruha in Prague was established in 1901, Moravská ústředna pro lidový průmysl umělecký in Brno and Lípa in Turčanský sv. Martin in 1908, Družstvo in Skalica, western Slovakia in 1909).

In the 20th century folk culture and its forms such as ornament became manifestations of the specific nature of Czech and Slovak nations, as well as a shield against foreign interference and a declaration of patriotism in the time of danger (Křížková, 1952). In 1915, during the First World War, an exhibition of "national peculiarity" was held in the Municipal House, Prague. The majority of exhibits were women's and children's clothes. The exhibition was organised by Renata Tyršová whose objective was to create new, stylish versions of clothing rooted in the Czech milieu. The designs were to compete with Austrian and German fashion promoting "Dirndlkostym", or "Dirndlkleid". Elements derived from Czech, Moravian and Slovak folk costumes included plisse, full skirt, sleeves tied at the wrist and a short tight female jacket called kordulka. The clothes were decorated with elaborate embroideries, lace and cords, which, however, increased their cost and was the main reason why they did not become more popular. One of the conditions for the spreading of clothes inspired by folk costumes was their material and production accessibility to the middle classes (Mulačová, 1917). This prerequisite lay behind the success of simple embroidered girls' blouses and children's clothes made by the Zádruha cooperative. Their models were folk costumes from Slovakia and eastern Moravia: linen trousers, shirts and fur coats for boys, and sleeveless dresses and aprons imitating folk costume for girls (Moravcová, 1989. Apart from Marie Fischerová-Kvěčhová, children's fashion was designed by Anna Lukášová and Anna Suchardová-Brichtová). These products were also intended to boost local clothes manufacture and secure jobs for embroiderers and their families when men fought in the war (Tyršová, Kožmínová, 1918). The topical nature of the use of folk ornaments and embroidery in clothing is illustrated by copious articles in magazines such as *Ženský svět*, *Móda a vkus*, *Eva*, *Lada* and *Šťastný domov*.

Towards the end of the First World War and after the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918 the number of associations and political parties demonstrating through their ideology and clothes - as the most obvious external features - their difference from the rest of the society, increased. Simple uniforms were designed for this purpose. Members of the Catholic youth and the agrarian party drew inspiration from folk costumes and multicolour embroideries. Folk costumes and their imitations were also often worn at national festivals and various celebrations, as well as when welcoming official international visitors, as political symbols and expressions of patriotism. This custom became widespread both in towns and in the country, and folk costumes saw a revival even in areas where they had been previously discarded. The manufacture of new folk costumes was, however, still costly and so those who wanted to wear them would sometimes resort to random elements that did not exactly go together or combined old and new pieces. There were also costume hires that, nonetheless, did not respect any regional particularities and their outfits resembled theatre and carnival costumes. Western Europe was then steeped in the elegant art deco style. In many countries of central Europe it took the shape of national decorativism: ornamentation of sharp perpendicular lines blended with floral motifs derived from folk embroideries, and the colour scheme (dominated by the colours of the national flag, red, blue and white) got expanded. Teachers from the School of Applied Arts, Prague such as František Kysela designed the patterns of fabrics that were subsequently produced by Czech textile companies (Josef Sochor in Dvůr Králové, Ladislav Bartoň in Česká Skalice, Bedřich Kubínský in Prague-Holešovice). Part of the philosophy of the budding Czechoslovak state was the reinforcement of the relationship between the townspeople and the country (the first Czechoslovak president T.G. Masaryk came from a poor working-class background, from the area around the Moravian-Slovak border), and associations of friends of folk art proliferated. Another prominent feature of the new state was the democratization of the society. These were the main prerequisites for the creation of a new type of everyday clothing with the use of folk culture elements. A group of young female artists in collaboration with an ethnographer (A. Suchardová-Brichtová, A. Houžvová-Dostálová, R. Houšková-Tillnerová, A. Lukášová, M. Dokoupilová, B. Kotlářová in collaboration with Vlasta Havelková from the Ethnographic Museum) designed several models of summer dresses made of fabrics with patterns of tiny flowers, hearts and dots, with cuts borrowed from folk costumes. Due to their simple design, these dresses could be made at home. Period photographs show that they became widespread among the middle strata and were later adopted by working-class women (Moravcová, 1986b). Thanks to the promotion in the press these summer dresses were also known abroad, in countries with a Czech minority (Serbia, northern Italy, France and the USA). National decorativism peaked in the year of the tenth anniversary of the Czechoslovak Republic and the St. Wenceslas millennium in 1929. The celebrations of these events turned into mass demonstrations of the independence of Czechs and Slovaks, and folk costumes and their imitations were considered more or less obligatory for the participants. For that matter, it should be pointed out that in towns and cities folk costumes were exclusively worn by girls and women, men only wore them in traditional areas of eastern Moravia.

Another surge of interest in folk clothing and culture emerged with the change in political situation. In the late 1930s, after the establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and during the Second World War Czechs felt the need to openly manifest their nationality (Three most important periods when folk costume inspiration was reflected in urban clothing were described by Vydra, 1952-1953). At the beginning of the 1930s European fashion was swept by influences from Alpine countries bringing back the dirndl that the German Fashion Office viewed as an essential part of the attire of national socialist women. The Czech intelligentsia, fearing the increasing German pressure, especially in border regions, responded with the "outfit of Czech women". A group of artists from the Melantrich fashion studio (V. Michal, H. Vlková, Z. Fuchsová-Mayerová and A. Zenkerová) produced in 1936 designs for a summer dress of printed cotton in white, red and blue called šohajka (country girl). It was a casual dress intended for spending time in the country. Pinafores, skirts, blouses and short waistcoats designed in the same spirit proved particularly popular among burgher classes and became - though briefly - a kind of a uniform of Czech patriotic women. At the same time, voices were heard calling for the return of genuine folk costumes with which the

Czech nation could intellectually counter the German claims for the Czechoslovak territory. One of successful compromises in this respect was a ski jacket modelled on embroidered woollen coats from the Sub-Carpathian Ukraine.

Embroideries based on folk patterns were back in fashion in the late 1930s. A new trend involved their functional use: they were incorporated into the design and were not merely decorative. The Isabella blouse made by Slovak embroiderers remained a steady favourite. It was marketed by the Zádruha cooperative and its price was relatively high. In order to make embroidered clothing more accessible, fashion journals started to publish cuts with embroidery patterns that could be easily copied. As a result, the standard of embroideries varied considerably, from professional craft to amateur efforts. Red skirts and embroidered blouses and ties with embroidered national ornaments were the most popular items of everyday wear. These open demonstrations of patriotism were silently tolerated on the German part, and there were even attempts to merge them with the propaganda of fascism that would thus demonstrate its benevolence towards the subjugated nation.

A new initiative based on genuinely expert views took shape around then. Czech women in the Czech-German city of Brno wanted to distance themselves, through their clothing, from the German dirndls and the like. A group of girls' schools teachers, most of them from the Vesna school, and professors from the School of Arts and Crafts led by Marie Zapletalová, established the Czech Fashion Association that promoted fashionable clothes even with the limited choice of materials available during the war, with folk costume inspiration reflected in cuts and embroideries. The members of the association studied original materials and old handicraft techniques that they employed in the manufacture of accessories such as woven belts. Fashion designs were enriched by folk motifs (with regards to practicality), simple embroideries and further decorative elements. The association published its own magazine, *Práce ženy* (Women's Work), and organised fashion shows for lower-class women. Their activities were hailed in Prague as well as in other towns where they were picked up by professional artists trying to create a national style. Their efforts can be termed folklorism in clothing, meaning the use of folk elements in new contexts, especially urban clothes. The progressive direction of the Czech Fashion Association was confirmed after the Second World War when companies such as *Textilní tvorba* and clothing cooperatives followed in its footsteps (Moravcová, 1986c, 1990). Political situation in Czechoslovakia changed soon after the end of the Second World War. The communist coup in 1948 brought about the closing of the state borders and the separation of the country from the western world. Czechoslovakia was to turn to its rich history and culture. In the spirit of this ideology, folk art as the product of the poor country masses was elevated to the benchmark of social values, with the state promoting activities associated with the presentation of folk music and dancing and material culture. New folk costumes were made for the performances of amateur ensembles, and plentiful books with cuts of folk costumes and embroidery ornaments were published (Šotková, 1940-1941, 1951). Unfortunately, some of these efforts resulted in clothing resembling theatre costumes; folk costumes were cut down to a white blouse, a skirt and an apron. Outfits for mass gymnastic performances known as Spartakiads, which replaced assemblies of the now-banned Sokol association, were designed in the same fashion.

Inspiration derived from folk costumes was repeatedly projected into everyday clothes, in the shape of embroideries as decorative elements of dresses and blouses. The limited supply of fabrics and off-the-peg clothes in shops forced women to alter pre-war models and to make their own clothing. The knowledge of sewing, knitting, crocheting and other handicrafts was common among Czech women, and was also supported by women's magazines containing instructions for making clothes. This enabled women to expand the wardrobes of their families after their own tastes and skills. Homemade clothes frequently featured stylized embroideries with flowers, leaves and hearts. When the wave of ethnic style from the West swept the socialist bloc in the 1970s, it found a suitable breeding ground. It was not necessary to seek inspiration in exotic cultures; one could use domestic sources and simply make the most of grandmother's clothes. Embroidered blouses and nightdresses, linen and cotton jackets were dyed, tie-dyed or supplemented with more embroidery. The Isabella blouse saw a revival, albeit in a modernised version. Blueprint fabric [modrotisk] with patterns and traditional chequered fabrics were back in fashion as well. Novelties included trousers, skirts and waistcoats made of denim that was then produced by some of the Czech textile companies and was thus more available than before.

The activities of pre-war cooperatives including their fashion clothes design were followed, after 1945, by the Folk Art Production Centre (ÚLUV). In its first phase (1945-1954) the company continued the tradition where it was still alive and restored it where it had been interrupted. The production involved domestic materials and manual techniques and preserved specific regional manufacture. The ÚLUV output changed significantly with the arrival of art theoreticians and artists who, on the basis of deep research and knowledge of the regions and museum collections, started to design new items and standardize the production of individual workshops. The new "ecru style" that took shape in the late 1950s dictated the use of different kinds of natural materials. A small group of artists created a distinct stylization that employed materials, techniques and decoration from the folk environment, and assembled them into a whole that complied with the modern lifestyle (Ludmila Kaprasová designed lace screens and curtains, Jaroslava Černíková, Jaroslava Bloudková, Alfréd Hynek, Stanislav Kučera, Josef Zdražil and Eva Jandíková designed fabrics, Arnoštka Eberhardová designed blueprint fabric. Modern and yet timeless garments were created by Zdenka Gottwaldová, Helena Wahnerová and Milada Jochcová, Eva Vítová designed textile ornaments). One of the leading figures who understood the nature of folk art and were able to capture its essence and employ it in modern clothing was Milada Jochcová (b. 1928), a designer who worked in the Brno branch of the Folk Art Production Centre. The key to her successful approach was a detail knowledge of folk fabrics, their properties and the possibilities of their use in contemporary clothing, rooted in research into material evidence both in the field and in museums. Thanks to Jochcová's approach, old techniques existing since the Middle Ages were revived. Designers working in the Folk Art Production Centre had the advantage that they could commission the manufacture of fabrics after their own design and could also set the colour scheme and pattern for each part of clothing. In collaboration with further artists, Jochcová designed embroideries and lace after models from Moravian and Slovak regions. Her compositions of quality materials with refined decoration, both elaborate and austere, never succumbed to a primitive, kitschy use of folk ornamentation. The results were attractive collections of fashion clothes typified by their timeless character. Although the quality materials and a large proportion of handwork classified Milada

Jochcová's models with the high price category, their durability and exclusivity compared to the standard supply of socialist shops brought her a number of intellectual customers who demonstrated their progressive views by wearing these garments (Holešovský, 1974).

Fashion designer Liběna Rochová (b. 1951) followed in Milada Jochcová's footsteps. Rochová collaborated with studios and workshops of the Folk Art Production Centre in Brno, designed stylized parts of folk costumes and studied traditional techniques. Her models employed classic materials such as wool, and the designer coined an elegant minimalist style. She presented her inspiration with Czech and Moravian folk culture at the CPD fashion shown in Düsseldorf where she introduced blueprint fabric in modern clothing and 2010 project Memory at EXPO Shanghai. She now lectures at the College of Applied Arts, Prague, passing her knowledge to further generations. Young designers draw inspiration from folk art even today, as illustrated by a recent project of art-school students and artists under 35 from the Visegrád Group countries. These young people share a Central European background, as well as historical experience of the Austrian monarchy (The Visegrád Group comprising four Central European states, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary was established in 1991). The "Folklore is Alive!" exhibition has manifested that young artists nowadays adopt folk-art impetuses freely. What they find important is the use of natural materials and traditional techniques as they are in accord with the designers' views on ecology. These artists are economical with such typical external features as embroidery and ornament, and centre on traditional handicrafts. In clothes designs, inspiration with folk costumes is more or less latent and not obvious at first sight, yet the artists' awareness of their roots is apparent. Return to national traditions is a natural response to the contemporary globalized world. This need is felt not only by artists and designers but also by art lovers and the followers of fashion. It is not an outdated or obsolete approach – as inclinations to folk art were once seen and criticised – but a rediscovery of qualities with lasting value.

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Figure 1, 2, 3: Women's evening dress. Beginning of 20th Century Women's dress, 1915. Children's coat, 1915-1918



Figure 4, 5, 6: Men's sports jackets, 1940-1945. Milada Jochcová: Women's coat, 1972. Milada Jochcová: Women's tunic, 1973