Investigating How Qipao and Hanfu Dresses are Representative of China

Jennifer Tibberts

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_____

Yan Xie, Ph.D.
Thesis Chair

_____

Ruth Gomes, M.S.
Committee Member

_____

Christopher Nelson, M.F.A.
Assistant Honors Director

_____

Date

Abstract

This research investigates why *hanfu* and *qipao* represent the nation of China. Previous sources have described the dresses, Chinese history, and Chinese fashion aesthetics, and have questioned why many people wear these dresses today. However, previous studies have not investigated what aspects of *hanfu* and *qipao* make both Chinese people and outsiders associate these dresses so strongly with China. This research looks deeply into the importance of fashion to expression of identity, characteristics and ideals of Chinese clothing, what *hanfu* and *qipao* are, how the dresses connect with Chinese history and traditions, and why the styles have phased in and out of popularity. This work also describes how the researcher constructed her own dresses after the styles of *hanfu* and *qipao*, which has provided greater understanding of the dresses. This research adds to the current understanding of Chinese fashion, history, and culture, and how they are interconnected.

Investigating How Qipao and Hanfu Dresses are Representative of China

There are many different ways to represent a nation's culture. Culture can be reflected through music, holidays, food, etc. One significant method is through fashion. Fashion operates from both cultural and personal perspectives, and has been shown to be deeply important to personal expression and identity. This is especially true of China, a vast and old nation, whose people need a way to represent themselves, their culture, and their history. There are two fashion styles in particular that appear to represent China: *hanfu* and *qipao* dresses.[1] This research seeks to explore the history and significance of these dresses in order to discover why, exactly, they represent China. This will include studying theories regarding identity through clothing, Chinese opinions on fashion, and the construction of these dresses.

Literature Review

Introduction

Chinese history spans centuries, and in that time, many different styles of clothing have gone in and out of fashion. Styles have evolved due to changes in preference, influence from other countries, and innovations in textiles and garments. However, some dresses, such as *hanfu* and *qipao*, stand out in their particular importance to Chinese culture. The history, symbolism, popularity, and other characteristics of these dresses contribute to their cultural importance. In fact, these dresses are so iconic they can even be considered to represent China. Additionally, this discussion is important due to how clothing is tied to identity. Just like everyone else, Chinese people are searching for their own identities, and these historic fashions offer that essential expression to many.

[1] *Hanfu*, or 汉服, is pronounced "HAWN-foo." *Qipao*, or 旗袍, is pronounced "chee-POW."

Identity Through Clothing

Before investigating Chinese fashion, it is first necessary to demonstrate why it even matters whether there are dresses that represent China. Clothing may seem trivial to some, but there are numerous examples that show how important clothing can be to a person's identity. The following examples show how, even in Western countries, fashion matters to the individual's identity.

In the Past

Historically, fashion has been an important way to show class distinction (González & Bovone, 2012). The middle class in Europe, for example, strove to better themselves and gain social privileges by dressing in the style of aristocrats (González & Bovone, 2012). Meanwhile, aristocrats were constantly starting new fashion trends in order to show that they were "above" the middle class (González & Bovone, 2012). The upper class especially seemed to enjoy using sumptuary laws for such purposes. Sumptuary laws required people to dress in the style of their social class (González & Bovone, 2012). This ensured that people could not attempt to claim an identity better than their own (González & Bovone, 2012). "Sumptuary law was important because it operated in societies in which dress was a direct and unambiguous indicator of a social identity…" (González & Bovone, 2012, p. 15). Clearly, fashion was important in the past, since the ruling class created so many rules about it.

In the Present

Although current society lacks the distinct classes of the past and their fashions, this does not mean clothing is any less important. In fact, clothing has likely increased in importance to one's identity, as researchers have noticed a decline in tradition lately. Former sources of

personal identity, such as nationality, gender, community, and religion, have lost their significance (González & Bovone, 2012). People no longer have a firm basis for their sense of who they are, and likely must look within themselves to find their identity (González & Bovone, 2012). Within this crisis of traditional identity, clothing has become ever more important, as it can be used to help people find their place within society and within smaller groups of people, and especially for personal expression.

Clothing in Society. Clothing is an important tool for demonstrating how the wearer fits in within society. According to Wolfendale and Kennet (2011), the adornment of the body is one of the main ways one can navigate relationships with other people, with other beliefs, and with oneself. González and Bovone (2012) describe how fashion is able to do the seemingly opposing tasks of social assimilation and distinction. That is, one can follow fashion in order to fit in within society, but one can also wear different fashions in order to distinguish oneself from others (González & Bovone, 2012).

Clothing Within Groups. It is important to find communal solidarity in joining groups of people similar to oneself, as it is a fulfilling, enjoyable, and satisfying to spend time with like-minded people (Wolfendale & Kennett, 2011). Clothing can be a useful way to show solidarity with a group, as it can display one's associations and values (Wolfendale & Kennett, 2011). For example, Amish people wear clothing to represent humility and simplicity (Wolfendale & Kennett, 2011). This is done through wearing plain, dark fabrics, and wearing specific hairstyles to reflect traditional gender norms (Wolfendale & Kennett, 2011). These details help to set Amish people apart from others, and show their solidarity as a group (Wolfendale & Kennett, 2011). Another example is the dress-code this researcher must follow at her university. Students

are required to maintain a certain level of modesty and formality in dress. This creates solidarity within the student body, as the dress-code is based in religious beliefs, and as the fashions set students apart from other more casual universities. Even students who dislike the dress-code are brought closer together and experience solidarity through a mutual dislike of the rules.

Clothing as Personal Expression. Clothing is especially important to one's identity as it is a great tool for personal expression. Without saying or doing anything, one can send a message to everyone nearby, simply through the garments one wears. According to French philosopher Helene Cixous, clothing is not merely a covering, but is instead an extension of a person's body and presence (Wolfendale & Kennett, 2011). Wolfendale and Kennett (2011) highlight how important personal expression through fashion is to one's dignity. "How we dress is fundamentally an extension of our dignity, because the adornments of our bodies are an expression of our autonomy and uniqueness" (Wolfendale & Kennett, 2011, p. 107) An example of this notion in practice is the clothing line "Fashion Freaks" by Susanne Berg and Meagan Whellans (Wolfendale & Kennett, 2011). Berg and Whellans noticed how people who use wheelchairs experience a limit on their autonomy, as they have limited clothing options (Wolfendale & Kennett, 2011). In order to remedy this, the women created "Fashion Freaks," a line of patterns for garments made for people in wheelchairs (Wolfendale & Kennett, 2011). These designers understood how important it is that everyone—even those with a disability—have the opportunity to express themselves and their identities through fashion.

Youth. Although fashion is important to everyone's identity, there is one unique group in particular to whom it appears to matter the most: youth. According to González & Bovone, "…experimentation with identity is a defining feature of that stage of life called adolescence or

youth," (2012, p. 16). Youth frequently change their fashion styles because they themselves are changing (González & Bovone, 2012). As they grow up and search for their individual identity, they use fashion to reflect this. For example, a teen may begin to dress a certain way to show that she is part of a specific subculture, such as hippies (González & Bovone, 2012). Adults may not fully understand such dramatic style changes, as they have already found their identity (González & Bovone, 2012), but that does not make fashion choices any less important to the youth.

In fact, the US government even supports the perspective that fashion is important for personal expression, as is shown through American regards for school uniforms. Supporters of school uniforms say that there is a correlation between uniforms and educational benefits, such as higher test scores and attendance rates (Wolfendale & Kennett, 2011). Meanwhile, opponents of uniforms say that students need to be able to express themselves through clothing (Wolfendale & Kennett, 2011). They claim that this form of expression is necessary to students' dignity and development (Wolfendale & Kennett, 2011). Further, they argue that even if uniforms *do* improve things like test scores, such benefits would still not justify forcing students to wear them (Wolfendale & Kennett, 2011). Finally, in the 1969 case *Tinker v Des Moines School District*, the Supreme Court ruled that public school children have the right to self-expression.

As past research has shown, clothing is an essential part of representing oneself and one's place in society and within groups. Even though these sources were from a Western perspective, this still demonstrates how important fashion can be to all people, including Chinese people, and especially Chinese youth.

Differences Between Western and Chinese Fashion

Since previous sources have come from a Western perspective, it is now important to acknowledge how Chinese fashion differs from that of the West. It should be noted that this information comes from Ling Yang (2019), a Chinese source, which provides a helpful Chinese perspective on this topic. Ling Yang (2019) describes how Chinese and Western clothing differ in three aspects: structural features, dress sense, and functional consciousness.

Western Aspects

Regarding structural features, Western clothing is considered art for the human body (Ling Yang, 2019). Westerners concern themselves with the 3D space effect; that is, clothing is a sort of "soft sculpture" that can be used to reshape the body (Ling Yang, 2019). For example, Western women have used corsets to alter the shape of their waists. Western clothing is tight and close to the body, showing the beauty of the body's curves (Ling Yang, 2019). Ornaments are 3D objects such as knots or ribbons, which were, for example, common in the Rococo period (Ling Yang, 2019). Ling Yang (2019) goes on to discuss dress sense: how Western clothing can exaggerate the size of the body, through means such as men's shoulder pads. Clothing is used to attract the opposite sex, show the wearer's individuality, and show the beauty of the human body (Ling Yang, 2019). Finally, Westerners can wear what they want, instead of having to dress to match their status, as the West idealizes equality, freedom, and harmony (Ling Yang, 2019). This leads to the idea of functional consciousness; Ling Yang believes that, in the West, clothing has never been as important to social status as in Chinese culture (2019). Although both Chinese and Western culture have shown social status through fashion, they used different methods. Westerners used clothing styles in particular (i.e. the construction of garments). An example

would be pre-Revolution era French men wearing breeches or trousers, depending on whether they were upper or working class, respectively.

Chinese Aspects

Meanwhile, Ling Yang (2019) discusses Chinese functional consciousness by describing how Chinese clothing is loose and comfortable, unrestrained, smooth, and graceful. The styles do not pursue clear geometrical forms or exaggerate the body (Ling Yang, 2019). Chinese fashion is more concerned with the 2D space effect; thus, fabric is decorated using traditional processes, such as embroidery (Ling Yang, 2019). Chinese people wear loose and large clothing, as they are less concerned with the human body (Ling Yang, 2019). Ling Yang refers to this as "natural wear" (2019, p. 89). Then Ling Yang (2019) details Chinese dress sense. Due to Confucianism, Chinese fashion is conservative, hiding the skin and covering the wearer; clothing is just meant to cover the body, not as a means for boasting (Ling Yang, 2019). Clothing is also used to show the spirit of human beings, and to show the wearer's social status (Ling Yang, 2019) Finally, showing social status is a large part of the function of Chinese clothing (Ling Yang, 2019). Instead of differing between classes through style or garment construction, the Chinese have focused more on the fabric and patterns of the garments (Ling Yang, 2019). Ling Yang (2019) cites the Qing Dynasty specifically, where the styles among social classes were almost the same, but upper class garments used more expensive fabrics or other details to reflect their station.

Causes for the Differences

Chinese ideas regarding fashion differ from Western ideas due to China's history, culture, and geography. Geographically, China is closed off, as the nation is mostly surrounded by mountains and oceans (Ling Yang, 2019). Further, historically, China was self-sufficient, which

is why Chinese fashion is closed off, too, and hides the body (Ling Yang, 2019). There is much influence from Confucianism and Taoism, which leads to more modesty and themes of nature in fashion (Ling Yang, 2019). Finally, China's history has been simply a vertical development through different dynasties, with little change (Ling Yang, 2019). Han[2] costume and culture have almost always been dominant (Ling Yang, 2019). This contrasts with Western history, which takes influence from Christianity, curiosity about the world, and a desire for expansion (Ling Yang, 2019). Additionally, in the West, the culturally dominant nation would affect the other nations (Ling Yang, 2019). For example, during the Golden Age of Spain, Spanish fashion became popular in other European countries. Solitary China has not changed in such a manner.

Hanfu

Hanfu refers to traditional Han ethnic clothing ("Hanfu Sees Revival," 2019). Some say this means all clothing that Han people have worn for 5000 years, while others say *hanfu* does not include styles from after 1644, when the last ethnic-Han dynasty (Ming Dynasty) was overthrown ("Chaguan: Something Old," 2019). This research will focus specifically on *hanfu* styles from the Sui, Tang, and Ming Dynasties. (see Appendices A and B for pictures of *hanfu*)

Sui and Tang Dynasties

Historical Context. The Sui Dynasty (581-618) unified China after it had been divided for roughly 400 years (Salisbury, 2019c). However, the second Sui ruler wasted most of China's resources attempting to fight northern Korea (Salisbury, 2019c). Eventually, Gaozu, a military commander, revolted and took the throne in 618, beginning the Tang Dynasty (Salisbury, 2019c). From 712-755, during Xuanzong's reign, was the golden age of the Tang Dynasty, a

[2] The Hans are the main ethnic group in China, making up over 90% of the population (Ashbaugh, 2019).

very prosperous time for China (Salisbury, 2019c). This age ended with the rebellion of An Lushan (Salisbury, 2019c). After multiple other rebellions, Huang Chao led an army and overthrew the Tang Dynasty in 881 (Salisbury, 2019c). The nation would go on to be decentralized the Song Dynasty (960-1279) (Salisbury, 2019c).

Culture. The Sui and Tang Dynasties were a very prosperous time for China (Yang, 2004). This was a "Golden Age" of philosophy, art, cultural enlightenment, and economic prosperity (Yang, 2004, p. 2). According to Mei, "In terms of cultural and economic development, the Tang Dynasty in China was undoubtedly a peak in the development of human civilization," (Mei, 2011, p. 24). The Tang Dynasty was an era of material abundance, strong national power, and a relaxed social order and atmosphere (Mei, 2011). Additionally, women did not have to follow tradition as closely; for example, a woman could choose her own spouse and divorce him if she wished (Mei, 2011).

Clothing. When the Sui Dynasty reunited China, the Han dress code was revised (Mei, 2011). They earnestly established a clothing system characteristic of the Han nationality (Yang, 2005). Sui women wore short jackets with short sleeves, and long skirts (Mei, 2011). These elegant skirts were tied at chest height, a style still worn by Korean women, today (Mei, 2011). Due to the prosperity and stability of the Tang Dynasty, the continuity of the Han system of clothing was maintained (Yang, 2004). The Sui Dynasty had seen further development of textiles and progress with silk reel and dye techniques, so by the Tang Dynasty, the variety, quality, and quantity of textiles was better than ever before (Mei, 2011). Therefore, there was a variety of dress styles that could be worn (Mei, 2011). Today, the phrase "Tang costume" is used to refer to any front closure Chinese jacket, actual Tang garments were far more extravagant (Mei, 2011).

In fact, the Tang Dynasty has been called, "the kingdom of clothes," due to the grandeur of the styles (Mei, 2011, p. 36). Overall, there were three categories of clothing that a woman could wear: *hufu, ruqun*, or men's garments (Mei, 2011). The *hufu* was a dress style from the Silk Road (Mei, 2011). The *ruqun* consisted of a top jacket and long gown and skirt on the bottom (Mei, 2011). The jacket was short and could be double layered or padded (Mei, 2011). This is a traditional style, typical of central China, but Tang women altered this tradition by deepening the "V" of the collar as far as to show cleavage (Mei, 2011). This style would have been unacceptable in previous dynasties due to Confucianism (Mei, 2011). Women also went against Confucian rules by wearing full sets of men's riding attire, which consisted of boots, gowns, horsewhips, and hats (Mei, 2011). Women of all social classes[3] wore this style, both in and outside of the home (Mei, 2011).

Upper Class. During the Tang Dynasty, ladies in the palace wore riding habits (Benn, 2019). These were a sort of burnoose from the Tu-yü-hun pastoral people of the northwest of China (Benn, 2019). The riding habit was a large sheet of cloth that was draped over a woman's head (Benn, 2019). It fell over her shoulders to her feet, covering most of her body (Benn, 2019). The garment left only a small gap for the woman to see through (Benn, 2019).

Commoners. Tang women's clothing resembled the modern Japanese kimono and was similar also to Tang men's formal wear (Salisbury, 2019a). Men's formal wear included two robes of silk, with the right lapel folded over the left (Salisbury, 2019a). This resembled modern bathrobes (Salisbury, 2019a). The outer robe was smaller, so that the sleeves and lapels of the

[3] The earlier Wei and Jin Dynasties (AD 220-420) had established a system of nine social classes, due to property or rank in court. These classes were clearly separates, and people could not inter-marry. This system stayed in place through many dynasties (Mei, 2011).

inner robe would be visible (Salisbury, 2019a). This was all secured by a sash or belt at the waist (Salisbury, 2019a). The sleeves were very large, sometimes hanging as low as the wearer's knees (Salisbury, 2019a). Sleeves were used to cover the hands when meeting people, although they would be folded back if the wearer needed to use their hands (Salisbury, 2019a). Men and women both wore skirts; while men tied their skirts at the waist, women tied theirs above or across the chest (Salisbury, 2019a). Women's skirts flared out from where they were tied (Salisbury, 2019a).

Fabric. During the Tang Dynasty, the three main types of fabric were wool, linen, and silk (Salisbury, 2019b). Wool, made from animal fur, was worn by commoners, as it was the easiest to make (Salisbury, 2019b). Bast fabrics (i.e. linen) were made from hemp, ramie, and kudzu (Salisbury, 2019b). Hemp came from the north (Salisbury, 2019b). Since it was course, it was used by the lower classes, for mourning clothes as sackcloth, and as bandages, sheets and shrouds (Salisbury, 2019b). Meanwhile, ramie and kudzu came from the south (Salisbury, 2019b). Ramie fabrics were shiny like silk, dried easily, and were comfortable to wear in the summer (Salisbury, 2019b). It was also easier to grow a lot of ramie than hemp (Salisbury, 2019b). Finally, silk was the most difficult and expensive fabric to make, since it is made from silkworm cocoons (Salisbury, 2019b). The Bureau of Weaving and Dyeing recognized eight different fabrics made from silk, such as chiffon, damask, and satin; each was created using a different weave (Salisbury, 2019b).

There were also many fabrics from other areas that were gifted to the Tang court (Salisbury, 2019b). Examples include camel hair, wool from otter fur, bombycine from wild tussah mouths, and fabric made from banana fibers. Although the Chinese did know about

cotton, which came from Pakistan and India, it was too expensive to be used for clothing until the 1200s (Salisbury, 2019b).

Colors. Different sources claim different rules about the colors of garments. Perhaps there has been uncertainty from archaeological evidence, or perhaps different sources refer to rules under different emperors. It is unclear. According to Mei (2011), there were no requirements for color of dress during the Tang Dynasty, and people wore yellow, violet, and green, with pomegranate red the most popular. However, Mei (2011) also writes that, during the Tang Dynasty, the court ruled that only the emperor was allowed to wear yellow. This law would be maintained through the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) (Mei, 2011). Meanwhile, Yang (2004) describes red as the most popular color, with purple, yellow, and green also popular, during both the Sui and Tang Dynasties. However, according to Salisbury (2019b), color was used to show the wearer's status during the Tang Dynasty, and the Bureau of Weaving and Dyeing recognized only six colors: purple, blue, red, yellow, black, and white. Salisbury (2019b) also writes that, in AD 630, the emperor specified what colors different statuses of people were allowed to wear. For example, purple was worn by exceptional men, such as Buddhist monks or Daoist priests, and men of the third grade/class or higher (Salisbury, 2019b). Red was for fourth and fifth grade, green for sixth and seventh grade, and blue was for eighth and ninth (Salisbury, 2019b). Women wore the same color as their husbands. Additionally, commoners were required to wear white, which was not well-received, as white was the color of mourning (Salisbury, 2019b). During the Sui Dynasty, butchers and merchants had to wear black, but historians are uncertain whether this rule still stood during the Tang Dynasty.

As previously stated, red dye came from pomegranate blossoms (Mei, 2011). Vegetable dyes were used to make most other colors (Salisbury, 2019b), which also gave the garment a pleasant scent (Mei, 2011). Lastly, bleach was used for white (Salisbury, 2019b).

Ming Dynasty

Historical Context. The Mongols ruled China from 1206-1368 during the Yuan Dynasty (Mei, 2011), but eventually Zhu Yuanzhang took power back for the Hans, establishing the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) (Yang, 2004). Finally free of Mongol rule, non-Han clothing, languages, and surnames were banned (Yang, 2004). In 1449, the emperor was captured, but after the court recovered, there was peace for the rest of the 1400s (Rossabi, 2013). However, from the beginning of the 1500s, there were many issues in Ming China (Rossabi, 2013). There was a lot of turbulence both domestically and with other nations, including tax issues, bureaucrats' struggling for power, attacks by the Mongols, and attempted invasions from Japan into Korea[4] (Rossabi, 2013). There were attempts by an official named Zhang Juzheng (1525-1582) to reform Ming China, but they ultimately failed (Rossabi, 2013). Eventually, China was taken over by the Manchus, ending the final imperial Han dynasty in China (Mei, 2011).

Religion. There were changes taking place in China's religions during the Ming Dynasty. Although Buddhism had flourished under the first Ming emperor, eventually other religions, such as neo-Confucianism started to overtake it in terms of influence (Rossabi, 2013). Buddhists began borrowing Daoist ideas, in an effort to remain influential, however this was not particularly affective (Rossabi, 2013).

[4] The Chinese wanted to keep Japan out of the mainland, so they helped Korea fight against the Japanese in 1592 and 1597. However, this assistance cost China a lot of money (Rossabi, 2013).

Culture. Han culture fully developed during the Ming Dynasty, absorbing the culture of the earlier Tang and Song Dynasties (Mei, 2011). Clothing was very well documented at this time (Mei, 2011). Literature was rife with illustration, and, although the literary stories were not always set during the Ming Dynasty, the illustrations would still depict Ming fashion (Mei, 2011). Clothing was further documented through portraits, which were popular, especially in realistic styles (Mei, 2011). This is very fortunate for modern historians.

Clothing. The Ming government was very controlling regarding fashion. Due to the previous Mongol rule, the Ming court worked hard to re-establish Han culture, especially through clothing. Non-Han clothing was banned, and everyone was required to follow the clothing system established in the Tang Dynasty (Yang, 2004). One royal decree stated, "Those who are dressed in a non-Han way shall be seriously punished," (Yang, 2004, p. 6). Further, there was a detailed and elaborate protocol regarding the styles of the emperor, court officials, royal servants, and other members of the imperial household (Yang, 2004).

Upper Class Styles. The Ming official uniform was dignified and splendorous, and there were complex styles and dressing rituals for the emperor and all officials (Mei, 2011). According to the emperor, the crown prince and other imperial family members had to wear: blue cloth coats, purple printed cloth waistcoats, while cloth trousers, indigo cloth skirts, shite cloth socks, blue cloth shoes, and black coifs (Yang, 2004). Scholars and the ruling class wore the *changpao*, which was a long, loose, straight gown (Mei, 2011). *Xiapei* were considered daily clothing for queens and protocol clothing for the wives of senior officials (Yang, 2004). *Xiapei* literally means "rosy cloud scarf" (Yang, 2004, p. 32). During the Hongwu Period (1368-1398) of the Ming Dynasty, there were specific regulations for what style a woman wore based on her rank

(Yang, 2004). For example, women given Rank one or two by the emperor wore *xiapei* embroidered with a gold pattern of clouds and pheasants (Yang, 2004).

Regular Styles. A large variety of styles of clothing was available to women during the Ming Dynasty. In general, Ming women's clothing was much more gentle and elegant than the lavish styles of the earlier Tang (Mei, 2011). It seems that Ming women were perhaps less carefree than Tang women, as their clothing was more reserved and subdued (Mei, 2011). However, it was also not as stiff and rigid as other styles, such as during the Song Dynasty (Mei, 2011).

During the Ming Dynasty, the robe was considered the basic stylistic element for clothing (Yang, 2004). This was a long, flowing garment with a cotton lining (Yang, 2004). Jackets were another common item (Yang, 2004). Jackets were essentially the same as robes, but were shorter (Yang, 2004). Woman had many different styles of jackets to choose from. Jackets could be single or double layered; be made of cotton, fur, brocade, or silk; be greenish-blue, light blue, pinkish-white, or red in color; and may have patterns of flowers, birds, bats, peaches, or Chinese characters for longevity (Yang, 2004). Another typical Ming garment was the *bijia*, a long, sleeveless jacket that draped to below the knee (Mei, 2011). The *bijia* made the wearer look thinner, a useful style during this era, when the ideal woman had a slender figure (Mei, 2011). Women could also wear long, fitted gowns with a woven pattern, and a bow tied at the waist (Mei, 2011). Other styles included *shuitian* dresses and the *ruqun* (Mei, 2011).

Women's coats were also common (Yang, 2004). They had buttons down the front (a popular feature at this time for many garments), and long sleeves that could reach to the knees (Yang, 2004). Waistcoats, which were popular before even the Song Dynasty, had become even

more popular by the Ming (Yuan, 2004). Typically, they were only long enough to reach the waist, but some went as far as the knees (Yuan, 2004). Waistcoats were useful as they had no sleeves, so they offered warmth to the wearer without impairing their arms (Yuan, 2004). They were used both as regular clothes or during ceremonies (Yuan, 2004). During the Qing Dynasty, women preferred wearing long waistcoats over their jackets and skirts (Yang, 2004); it is unclear, but likely waistcoats were worn similarly during the Ming. Women's court jackets developed from the long waist coat (Yuan, 2004). Women's court coats were decorated with azurite and gold hems and usually had beautiful patterns with details such as dragons, treasures coming out of water, and Chinese characters for longevity (Yuan, 2004). It should be noted that, historically, there have been rules about wearing symbols of dragons in China; as the dragon is the ultimate symbol of power, only the emperor can wear it (Yuan, 2004). However, if given permission from the emperor, other people could wear garments with dragon-like creatures (Yuan, 2004). These creatures were essentially dragons, but had one less claw on their feet (Yuan, 2004). Yang (2004) is unclear whether these rules were only for men, or included women as well.

Colors and Fabrics. During the Ming Dynasty, there were strict rules on the colors and fabrics used in garments (Yang, 2004). For example, the Tang rule that only the emperor could wear yellow was still in place (Mei, 2011). Ranks one through four wore crimson, five through seven wore blue, and eight, nine, and below wore green (Yang, 2004). In the winter, these ranks wore cloud damask that was not dyed, while in the summer, they wore ramie fibers, gauze and silk (Yang, 2004). Yang (2004) is unclear as to whether these descriptions were only regarding male officials, but it is likely their wives were required to follow them, too.

Yang (2004) goes into further detail regarding the clothing regular women wore. For daily clothing, women were limited to wearing plain, unadorned fabrics of soft, light colors, such as purple or peach (Yang, 2004). They also wore broad belts made of indigo silk cloth (Yang, 2004). Both Yang (2004) and Mei (2011) make a point to state that Ming women did not use gold embroidery. Mei (2011) also writes that Ming women wore robes made of rough homespun cloth, only in the colors of purple, green, and fuchsia. Working class women were not allowed to wear deep blue or bright red, as these were colors used in royal clothing (Mei, 2011).

Skirts

Skirts have been an important part of historical Chinese fashion for centuries. Traditionally, red skirts have been especially popular among Chinese women (Yang, 2004). They are called pomegranate skirts because the skirts are dyed red using pomegranate extract (Yang, 2004). After the Eastern Han Dynasty (ca. AD 25-220), more women started wearing skirts (Yang, 2004). The original design was two pieces: one in the front, one in the back (Yang, 2004). However, this was inconvenient for sitting and walking, so it eventually became one piece (Yang, 2004). Then the skirt changed to include pleats, and pleated skirts began to be considered quite elegant (Yang, 2004). After the Sui and Tang Dynasties, skirts became more voluminous, and the breadth and pleats of the skirt were increased (Yang, 2004). The Five Dynasties Period (907-960) saw the skirt gain even more volume (Yang, 2004). By the end of the Ming Dynasty, women were wearing phoenix-tail skirts (Yang, 2004). These garments were made of damask and embroidered with golden thread (Yang, 2004).

Embroidery

Embroidery is an essential detail of historical Chinese clothing, thus an overview of all of Chinese embroidery will be given here (see Appendix C for photos of embroidery). Chinese embroidery has been around for centuries, and was fairly developed by the Spring and Autumn periods (770-476 BC). During this time, popular designs included dragons, phoenixes, tigers, flowers, plants, and geometric shapes (Mei, 2011). During the Warring States (475-221 BC), and Qin (221-206 BC) periods, animal patterns, especially mythical creatures, were the most common textile designs. Arabesques and mountains were also common patterns. In ancient China, people used embroidery of fantastical animals, such as dragons, phoenixes, and kylins to symbolize the emperor's prayers. In fact, the dragon is the most powerful creature in Chinese culture (Torimaru, 2011). Chinese embroidery was especially great during the Qin and Han Dynasties. In the Qi Kingdom, the upper class used embroidery so much that the entire house of the royal family dressed in brocade[5], and even the dogs and horses wore woolen dress. Wealthy people wore *five colored brocade*, and even used silk and embroidery for their furniture (Mei, 2011). During the Eastern and Western Han period (206 BC-AD 220) and the Six Dynasties period, art reflected a belief in Qi, which is said to be the vital life force or energy flow. Qi was represented with swirling and fluid lines that depicted mystical creatures. The chain stitch was used with this style of embroidery (Torimaru, 2011). Embroidery of Buddha's portrait was popular from the late Han Dynasty through the Tang Dynasty. During the Tang Dynasty, the satin stitch was invented. It is still popular today (Mei, 2011). Meanwhile, unfortunately, during

[5] Although both brocade and embroidery create beautifully decorated fabrics, the difference between them should be noted. Brocade is a fabric woven to create a design, while embroidery is a design added onto a fabric that already exists.

the Sui and Tang Dynasties, the chain stitch disappeared. This was because the popular styles changed from fluid Qi designs to more grounded subjects, such as the peony Tang grass pattern, blossoms, and lions. Dragon designs were still used, but looked more earthly (Torimaru, 2011). The peak of Chinese embroidery was during the Song Dynasty. During the Tang and Song Dynasties, gender roles dictated that women had to learn needlepoint. Embroidery was not only a necessity, but was also viewed as an elegant and artistic hobby for a woman. During the Ming Dynasty, the demand for embroidery increased, and some people and households became famous for their fine embroidery. During the Qing Dynasty, many schools of embroidery began to appear, including the Suzhou, Guangdong, Sichuan, Hunan, Beijing, and Shandong schools. Additionally, many ethnic minorities have their own styles of embroidery (Mei, 2011).

Hanfu Movement

Today, historical Chinese *hanfu* are usually only worn at festivals, religious ceremonies, or in TV and movies (Liqiang & Zhiwei, 2014). However, many Chinese people have been working to revive the *hanfu* in recent years and bring back its popularity (Liqiang & Zhiwei, 2014) or even have it declared the national costume of China ("Should China Adopt Hanfu," 2007). This Hanfu Movement began in the early 2000s, and is mainly supported by Chinese youth ("Chaguan: Something Old," 2019). In fact, it has been estimated that a million people today wear *hanfu* regularly ("Chaguan: Something Old," 2019). The *hanfu* enthusiasts wear these ancient fashions at cultural festivals ("Chaguan: Something Old," 2019), in college *hanfu* appreciation clubs, and even just on the street ("Hanfu Sees Revival," 2019). Even some Chinese people living overseas participate in the Hanfu Movement, as they feel the *hanfu* is such a strong symbol of their Han identity ("Should China Adopt Hanfu," 2007). Unfortunately, many *hanfu*

wearers receive negative responses from their family and friends, or people think they are just wearing a cosplay/costume (Liqiang & Zhiwei, 2014).

Modern Styles

Not every supporter of *hanfu* today wears completely historically accurate garments. In fact, many find *hanfu*, especially upper-class styles, to be quite impractical (Lanlan, 2018). *Hanfu* are oversized and often have big sleeves and long dress trains (Lanlan, 2018). Since the ancient Chinese thought showing one's feet in public was rude, *hanfu* are inconveniently long (Lanlan, 2018). Therefore, many modern designers have worked to create *hanfu* that keep the main characteristics of the original styles, but are still practical for the modern wearer (Wen, 2018). One example is a modern adaptation called *hanyuansu* (Wen, 2018). In 2008, there was even a *hanfu* fashion show with the theme "a new look of tradition" (Lanlan, 2018, p. 1). The designs had shorter sleeves and hemlines than traditional *hanfu*, and also included new elements such as geometric patterns, polka dots, lace zippers, and buttons (Lanlan, 2018). However, the dresses still maintained the iconic traditional details, such as the overlapping collar crossed on the wearer's right side (Lanlan, 2018).

The updated styles lead to an interesting question of the importance of authenticity in symbolic fashion. Some have critiqued the *hanfu* movement, for fear of a lack of authenticity of the styles ("Hanfu Sees Revival," 2019). Meanwhile, modern, practical styles make *hanfu* far more accessible for many Chinese people. This ties back to the question of what makes a style "Chinese." While authentically historical fashion is quite beautiful, perhaps all that is required for a garment to represent China is if a Chinese person enjoys wearing it.

Possible Controversies

There are a number of concerns regarding the Hanfu Movement. As previously noted, one concern is doubts regarding the authenticity of the modern *hanfu* ("Hanfu Sees Revival," 2019). A more intense fear is "Han chauvinism" ("Chaguan: Something Old," 2019). Since the movement is tied so specifically to the Han identity, some worry that the movement is nationalist and will harm relations with the 55 ethnic minorities also living in China ("Chaguan: Something Old," 2019). However, *hanfu* supporters have defended the movement with the reminder that they have not suggested minorities give up their own traditional clothes and begin wearing *hanfu* ("Should China Adopt Hanfu," 2007).

Motivation Behind the Movement

There are a number of suggested reasons for the recent rise in popularity of *hanfu*. Some say that *hanfu* enthusiasts just want to have fun and celebrate their history by wearing ancient styles ("Chaguan: Something Old," 2019). While this may be true for some, it is likely there are some deeper influences, too. Many youths feel that Han customs were unfairly lost during the Qing Dynasty ("Chaguan: Something Old," 2019), after the Manchu people conquered China (Mei, 2011). The Manchu rulers tried to erase the Han national identity through means such as requiring people to wear Manchu style clothing and hairstyles (Mei, 2011). Some Han people were even killed for wearing Ming style square scarfs, or failing to shave their heads in a particular style (Mei, 2011). Thus, many Hans felt discontent and rebellious regarding the Qing rules (Mei, 2011) Although the Qing dynasty began in 1644, it lasted until 1911 ("Chaguan: Something Old," 2019), so perhaps these injustices do not feel very far in the past for many Chinese people.

Another suggested reason for the Hanfu Movement is that Chinese people are searching for a cultural identity and visible cultural symbol (Wen, 2018). This is evidenced by just prior to the 2008 Beijing Olympics, when many people campaigned for *hanfu* to become the national costume of China ("Should China Adopt Hanfu," 2007). They wanted to see Han athletes representing their culture by wearing *hanfu* ("Should China Adopt Hanfu," 2007). Other people claim *hanfu* should be declared the national costume of China because it will not only give the people a cultural symbol, but will help unify the nation and be a nice tradition to pass down to future generations ("Should China Adopt Hanfu," 2007). Further, many *hanfu* supporters feel it is unfair for Chinese people to only be able to get dressed-up in Western-style suits, when many other nations have specific national costumes; for example, Japan has the kimono, Korea the hanbok, India the saree, and Scotland has the kilt ("Should China Adopt Hanfu," 2007). Chinese people, especially youths, need their own symbol to help them find and display their identities.

Qipao

Historical Context

As has been previously discussed, the Manchu people brought their clothing to China when they conquered the nation in the 1600s (Mei, 2011). This included the original style of *qipao* (Yang, 2004). However, a lot of history passed between then and the *qipao* of today, so it is important to first discuss this history, in order to better understand the many changes the *qipao* has gone through. According to Mei (2011), "…China entered modern society" after the Opium War, which began in 1840 (p. 113). The war brought Western lifestyles and values to China, including clothing and hairstyles. (Mei, 2011). In 1911, Imperial China fell, ending the Qing Dynasty, and the Republican period started soon after (Lau, 2010). As the western feminist

movement grew during World War I, the New Civilization Movement was spread throughout China (Mei, 2011). Women gained education and reforms and began wearing "civilized attire"[6] (Lau, 2010). Many women went into higher education, instead of starting a family, as they wanted financial independence and freedom in love and marriage (Mei, 2011). The Republican period lasted until 1949 (Lau, 2020), when the Communist Party won the Chinese Civil War, beginning the People's Republic of China (Wang, 2017).

Description of Qipao

Both Chinese people and Westerners think the *qipao* is a "typical symbol" of Chinese fashion (Tsui, 2013, p. 582). Tsui (2013) writes, "The qipao is widely regarded as the archetypal, traditional costume of the Chinese nation" (p. 582). When people think of "Chinese fashion," they usually imagine the *qipao* first (Tsui, 2013). Western movies often use *qipao* to show a character is Chinese, and many Western fashion designers have used *qipao* in their collections to show inspiration from China (Tsui, 2013). This is quite interesting considered the *qipao* did not even originate with the Hans. In fact, it has been described as a hybrid garment, as it is a Manchu gown combined with Western style clothing (Paulicelli & Clark, 2008).

Qipao are known as figure-fitting dresses with elegant collars ("Master Dressmaker," 2019) (see Appendix D for images of *qipao*). It usually has buttons on the right side (Mei, 2011). The dress can be long with embroidered silk, or shorter and more casual ("Master Dressmaker," 2019). Two popular styles of *qipao* are Shanghai-style and Tianjin-style: Tianjin style is very colorful and uses more wearable materials than Shanghai-style ("Master Dressmaker," 2019). A

[6] This "civilized new dress" was first worn by female students who studied abroad, and by students from local mission schools (Mei, 2011). This simple and plain style included an upper garment with a tight waistline and bell-shaped, elbow-length sleeves (Mei, 2011). This was paired with an ankle-length, black skirt that eventually grew shorter over time (Mei, 2011). The style was considered fashionable through the 1920s and '30s (Mei, 2011).

tailor-made *qipao* can be quite difficult to make, as it requires more than 200 steps to complete ("Master Dressmaker," 2019). The initial measurement of the client is especially important ("Master Dressmaker," 2019). In fact, the fit of the dress is so important that some seamstresses even sew the half-finished *qipao* on a mannequin, so that it will fit perfectly ("Master Dressmaker," 2019). It can take a seamstress over a month to finish every detail of one of these elaborate, silk *qipao* ("Master Dressmaker," 2019).

History of Qipao

The *qipao* means "flag robe" as it originated with the Manchu people, whom the Hans called "Flag people" (Mei, 2011). The style has changed greatly over the past few centuries, influenced by both Han and Western clothing (Mei, 2011). However, the modern *qipao* really started in 1921, when female high school students in Shanghai started wearing *qipao* (Mei, 2011). These loose-fitting, long robes were made of blue cotton, and looked serious and formal (Mei, 2011). The dresses were ankle length, with a straight, flat outline and bell sleeves (Mei, 2011) There were no edgings or lacework on the collar, front, or hem at this time (Mei, 2011). However, women from the city of Shanghai soon became interested in the dress, and it started to gain popularity (Mei, 2011). Through the 1920s, the *qipao* and its sleeves grew shorter, the waistline tighter, and the vents on the sides of the thigh rose higher (Mei, 2011). By the 1930s, the dress was considered standard clothing for Chinese women (Yang, 2004). Everyone from movie stars, to students, to workers, to the wives of senior officials wore *qipao* (Yang, 2004). It was the standard outfit for social events and diplomatic functions (Yang, 2004). After the 1930s, the *qipao* changed constantly (Mei, 2011). The stand-up collar grew taller, then shorter, then taller again, and the hem and sleeve lengths changed frequently too (Mei, 2011). Sometimes the

dress had no sleeves at all (Mei, 2011). Many *qipao* were made of traditional jacquard woven brocade, but there were many others made of light and thin fabrics, such as cotton, linen, and silk (Mei, 2011). The dresses were made in simple, but elegant colors, and decorated with patterns, embroidery, and eventually edgings (Mei, 2011).

The *qipao* broke with tradition in multiple ways. For example, traditional Chinese clothing does not highlight the waistline, but the *qipao* showed the female form (Mei, 2011). This iconic dress also reflected the increasing level of freedom urban Chinese women were experiencing during the Republican period (Yang, 2004). Traditionally, women had worn two-piece clothing, while men's clothing was only one piece (Mei, 2011). Therefore, women who longed for gender equality enjoyed wearing the *qipao*, as it was only one-piece, just like men's traditional fashion (Mei, 2011).

It is interesting to see how this dress, which originated with the Manchu people, and broke with multiple Chinese traditions, still somehow managed to become one of the garments most heavily associated with China. Its origins hardly seem Chinese at all, and yet, Chinese women took this dress and made it their own, pouring their identity into it, and adapting the style to fit their visions of "Chineseness"[7] and the future of their nation.

Qipao Fades, then Reemerges

However, the popularity the *qipao* enjoyed for years could not last forever. After the People's Republic of China was formed, the "bourgeois lifestyle" was criticized, including clothing (Mei, 2011). Due to the efforts of political propaganda, garments such as *qipao*,

[7] The invented term "Chineseness" comes from Tsui (2013). The term will be used throughout this essay.

Western suits, long robes, and mandarin jackets became symbols of the old society (Mei, 2011). Eventually, the styles were abandoned by farmers and workers (Mei, 2011).

Decades later, in the 1990s, attitudes around *qipao* started to change for the better (Mei, 2011). Other countries grew interested in "oriental style" (Mei, 2011). As China's position in the world rose, Chinese people both inside China and overseas felt pride in their nation, and started wearing more Chinese clothing (Mei, 2011). Both Western and Chinese fashion designers included *qipao* designs in their collections (Chew, 2007). The style gained even more attention when fashion leaders wore *qipao*-inspired dresses to events in 1997 (Chew, 2007). Then, in 2001, the Hong Kong movie *In the Mood for Love* further contributed to the popularity of the dress; the female lead wore over 20 different *qipao* throughout the film (Mei, 2011). Describing the influence of the movie, Mei (2011) writes, "For the first time, people discovered the special charm of Chinese traditional dresses" (p. 162). While the dress was popular among consumers in 2001 and 2002, it was unfortunately unable to return to its 1930s status of being an everyday garment (Chew, 2007).

Current Status of Qipao

Today, the *qipao* is worn at weddings and festive occasions (Yang, 2004). In fact, it is considered very important as a wedding dress for brides (Tsui, 2013). The Chinese government also uses the *qipao* as official clothing when hosting international events (Tsui, 2013).

Modern *qipao* generally fall into one of two categories: custom tailored, expensive *qipao* worn by rich women to social events; or cheaper, mass produced *qipao* worn by regular, trendy, young women (Chew, 2007). The dress is seen as classic, timeless style that balances fashion and beauty with tradition and modesty (Chew, 2007). As the dress is seen as a cultural symbol, many

customers who have bought *qipao* recently are descendants of Chinese immigrants who live abroad and are curious about their cultural heritage (Chew, 2007). Unfortunately, many *qipao*-makers worry about the future of the dress, and that the skills required to create it will be lost ("Master Dressmaker," 2019). These dressmakers are working to keep the dress alive by taking on apprentices and teaching sewing skills in order to maintain this tradition ("Master Dressmaker," 2019). This just shows how important of a symbol the *qipao* is to many people.

Literature Review Conclusion

As has been shown, *hanfu* and *qipao* dresses are both representative of China, each in their own ways. Further, this is important to study due to how clothing is intrinsically tied to one's identity. *Hanfu* allow Chinese people to feel connected to their heritage by maintaining fashions their distant ancestors once wore. China has faced struggles in the past, and reclaiming the traditions once denied to the Chinese helps them to overcome and move on from these difficulties. Meanwhile, *qipao* reflects the seemingly indescribable idea of "Chineseness." *Qipao* may not have originated with the Hans, but through their perseverance and creativity, they have made the dress their own. A garment is not Chinese because it has stereotypical Chinese symbols, such as dragons or peonies; it is Chinese because it has been created and cherished by a Chinese person. Chineseness comes from the spirit of China and its people.

Methodology

Using the information gathered in the literature review, the researcher sought to design and sew two dresses inspired by these traditional Chinese styles, a *qipao* and a *hanfu*. This work was important because it allowed the researcher to gain much more understanding of the beauty and significance of these dresses, instead of if she had merely seen pictures of them, or touched

the fabric in a shop. Sewing the dresses allowed the researcher to fully understand their construction and how much time and effort each dress requires.

Constructing the Qipao

After having read sources detailing the great difficulty in sewing a *qipao*, the researcher chose to use a store-bought sewing pattern to aid her in the design and construction process. This actually proved strangely difficult on its own, as there were not many *qipao* patterns available where the researcher lives. In all of Amazon's website, she could only find two. Although the one she chose definitely had Western influence, the researcher was far more familiar with that pattern company, and knew any glaring inaccuracies could be altered during the sewing process.

The next step was to choose the fabric for the dress. The researcher chose blue cotton, after the blue cloth cotton *qipao* originally worn by Shanghai high schoolers. The fabric is a light blue with simple white and blue patterns of vines and flowers. This design was chosen to reflect the elegant simplicity and natural themes found in Chinese clothing. The researcher avoided stereotypical details, such as using all red and dragon patterns, since she wanted to try to show deeper ideals of "Chineseness," rather than a shallow impression of Orientalism.

Then the researcher created an illustration (see Fig. 1) of how the completed dress would look, using the chosen fabric. The illustration was made using pencil and watercolor paints.

Figure 1. Qipao illustration

Next the researcher had to make many adjustments to the pattern so that the *qipao* would be the proper size for the intended wearer. This was important, as *qipao* are often so well-fitting. Finally, the researcher began actual construction of the dress (see Fig. 2). The finished garment has a mandarin collar, short kimono-style sleeves, small side slits, many darts, and folds over on the wearer's right, secured by two white frog-buttons. More subtle features include a snap fastener at the collar and an invisible zipper under the left arm.

Figure 2. Qipao front, side, and back

Constructing the Hanfu

The *hanfu* dress is intended to be from around AD 620; this allowed the researcher to take inspiration from both the Sui and Tang Dynasties, without being anachronistic. The chosen year was just after the Tang Dynasty began, so it stands to reason that both Sui and Tang elements could exist. The researcher first created a mood-board (see Fig. 3) of authentic

illustrations and photos of *hanfu* representing different eras from different sources. This served as a reference for the initial design process.

Figure 3. Mood-board of hanfu inspiration (see Appendix E for individual image citations)

Then the researcher chose the fabric to be used for the dress. Purple was the original choice, but only green fabric was available to be used for the majority of the dress. Gold fabric was also available, but had to be avoided since yellow has been reserved for the emperor exclusively for much of Chinese history. Although red was the most popular color during the Tang Dynasty, purple and green were also popular colors, so either one would be acceptable to depict this era. The chosen fabric was silk, since silk has long been tied to China's history and

identity. This *hanfu* was also intended to be a more elegant, upper-class type dress, so silk would be appropriate.

Figure 4. Watercolor illustration of hanfu

The researcher used the fabric color to inspire the illustration of the design for the dress (see Fig. 4). The illustration was created using pencil and watercolor paint. The design includes a jacket and a pleated skirt, tied at the bust. Purple and blue accents were chosen for details such as the collar; however, only blue fabric could be attained, so the final dress has no purple. The

illustration also depicts the wearer in Tang Dynasty makeup, hair, and shoes to provide better context for how the completed garment would look when worn.

Figure 5. Front, back, and sides of the draped jacket

With the design planned, the researcher then began draping the jacket for the *hanfu* (see Fig. 5). The jacket was draped to the dimensions of a dress form, using cotton fabric. Gingham fabric was used, since the pattern makes it easier for a seamstress to visualize any straight lines. The researcher only needed to drape half of the jacket, since the final design was be symmetrical.

As the dress form lacked arms, the researcher found it difficult to create the sleeve. The jacket was made to be boxy and loose to match the appearance of real, historical jackets.

Figure 6. Front, back, and side of the draped skirt

The next task was draping the pleated skirt (see Fig. 6). The skirt was created in the same manner as the jacket. Only pieces covering half of the front and back were made, due to the symmetrical and repetitive nature of the design.

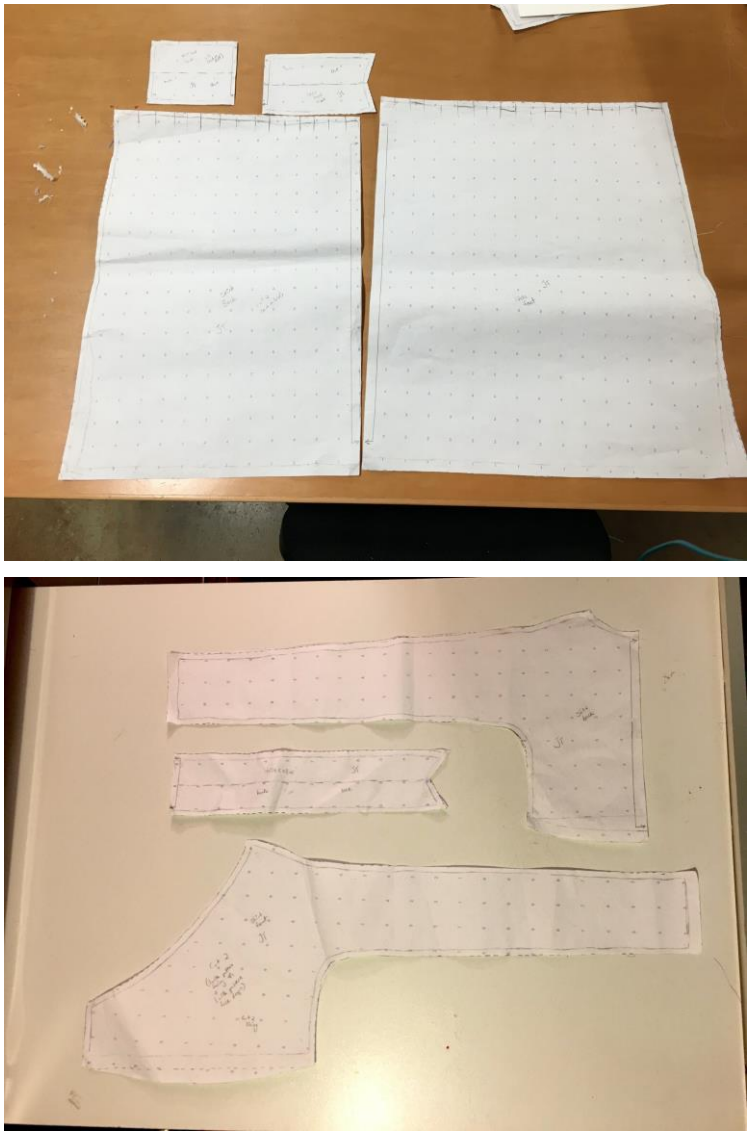

Figure 7. Hanfu pattern pieces

Then the researcher used the draped designs to create patterns for the dress (see Fig. 7). This meant removing the gingham fabric from the dress form, taking the designs apart, and cutting the fabric along markings that had previously been drawn onto the fabric. The researcher the put the fabric pieces onto paper and traced around them. Seam allowance was added, and then the finished patterns were cut out. The researcher also included markings on the patterns

designating the location of pleats, whether the pattern should be placed on a fold, etc. The patterns were used for cutting out the fabric that would eventually become the skirt and jacket.

Figure 8. Front, back, and side of the pleated skirt

The researcher sewed the pleated skirt first (see Fig. 8). The skirt wraps around the body and includes numerous pleats, so a lot of fabric was required. One panel was made for the front and two for the back. The pieces had to be carefully ironed to make the pleats. Light blue fabric was attached at the ends of the waistband, to be used for fastening the skirt at the bust. As the

skirt is intended to wrap around the wearer, it can be flattened out into one long rectangular piece. That is, the sides of the skirt are not connected to each other.

Lastly, the researcher sewed the jacket (see Fig. 9). The jacket is not straight, but curved at the bottom. The two front pieces are the exact same, except that the left one is worn on top. The jacket features small pieces of light blue fabric on the outside right and on the inside left, which can be tied to fasten the jacket together. The jacket also includes a lining, constructed of the same light blue fabric.

Figure 9. Front, back, and side of the jacket

Figure 10. Front, back, and side of the hanfu

Findings

A lot of knowledge was gained through construction of the *qipao* and *hanfu* dresses. There are many details in a garment that a person may not consider until they have to try and recreate it, especially if they only know about the garment through photos or written descriptions. Without seeing it in person, one cannot feel the fabric, see inside the garment, or try it on. Until she started the sewing process, the researcher had not fully considered how the garments would be wrapped around the body, fastened, fitted, or finished. The *qipao* contains

extra fabric on the inside right, to go under the folded-over fabric. The dress is fitted using many different darts on both the front and back. The *qipao* also fastens with a snap at the neck, frog buttons, and a zipper under the left arm. The dress has facings at the arms and neck. Meanwhile, the jacket for the *hanfu* has much extra fabric that overlaps, fastens with small strips of fabric, is loose-fitting, and has a lining. The skirt starts at the front of the body, wraps around the back with one side over the other, then the pieces end under the arms. The skirt is fastened with long strips of fabric, wrapped around the body, then tied at the front over the waistband. The skirt is very loose and big, hiding the shape of the body.

Additionally, when creating a garment and being able to hold it in one's hands, the researcher is better able to understand the effort such garments require, and their importance, beauty, and value. The researcher is no longer seeing a mere photo or item in a store, but a garment representing weeks of hard work. When one designs and constructs garments, the garment will contain a little bit of the one's identity. This is not the same as the cultural identity a Chinese person may associate with their nation's traditional clothing, but is likely the closest approximation a foreigner can have.

Conclusion

Qipao and *hanfu* are wildly different dresses that have come to represent the same nation. These dresses each have a long history, containing numerous stylistic changes. However, they do not represent China for any shallow ideas about their appearance alone. *Hanfu* is a Chinese dress because it dates back centuries and allows today's youth to feel connected to their culture and ancestors. *Qipao* is a Chinese dress because it represents how the Hans were able to withstand difficult and troublesome times. Further, the *qipao* reflects how Han women were able to change

a foreign garment to match their own ideals and aesthetics, and use it to promote feminine strength and equality. Much can be learned about these styles should the researcher take the time to fully understand and appreciate them, through means such as sewing garments inspired by the dresses. Chinese aesthetics can mean clothing that is loose, comfortable, modest, and natural. However, the spirit of China truly lies within the Chinese themselves; a dress represents China because Chinese people feel a connection to it. That connection could come from history, cultural values, or simply stylistic preferences. Fashions will always be Chinese, if their designer is Chinese themselves. Since fashion reflects personal expression and identity, the clothes worn by members of a culture are intrinsically tied to that culture's identity. Today, Chinese people choose to express themselves through *qipao* and *hanfu*, but any kind of garment could represent China, as long as it is valued by the Chinese.

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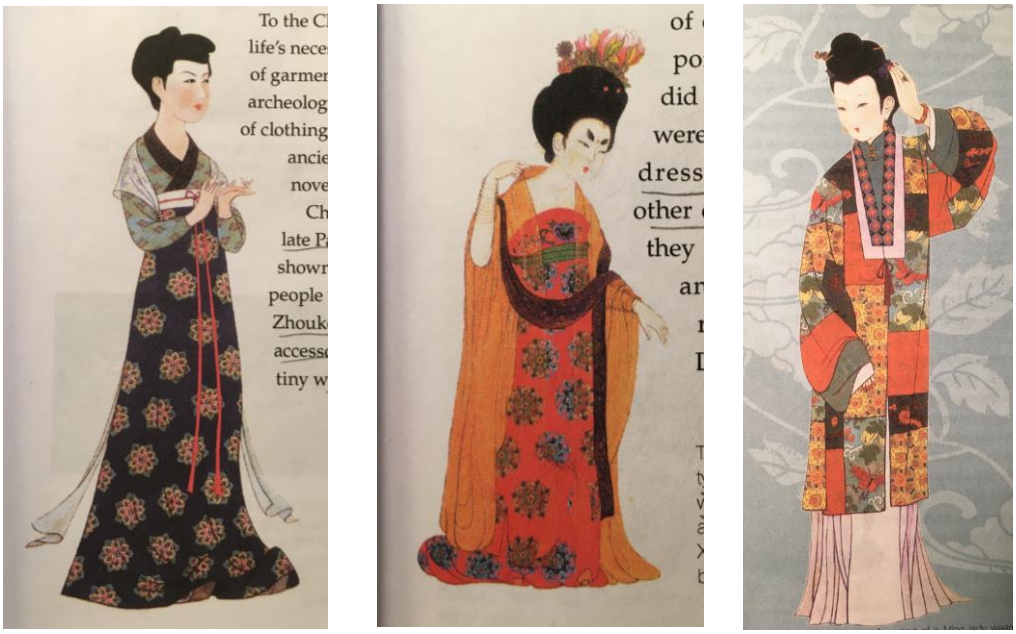
Appendix A



From left to right: Sui Dynasty, Tang Dynasty, and Ming Dynasty dresses (Mei, 2011).

This section of a Tang Dynasty painting offers a helpful depiction of the era's fashion (Zhou, c. 750).

Appendix B

Chinese jackets have been made in a variety of styles (Yang, 2004).

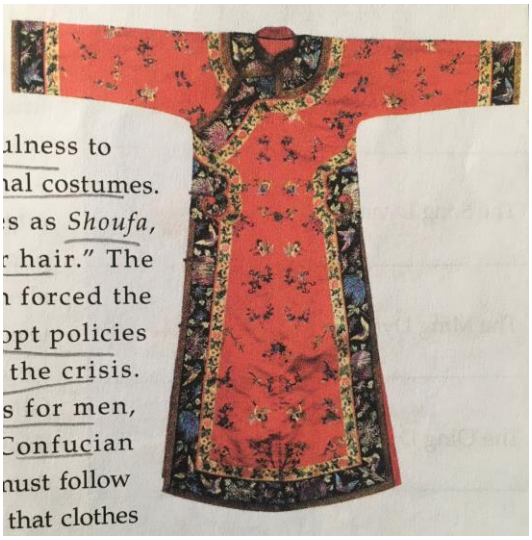
From left to right: waistcoat, xiapei, and pleated skirt (Yang, 2004).

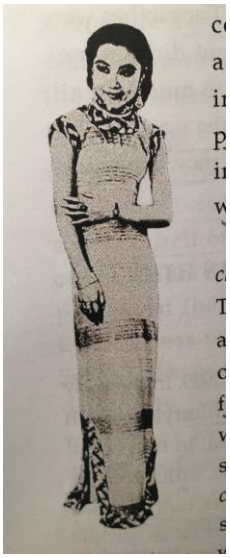
Appendix C




Embroidery can be used to decorate a variety of things, including undergarments (top left), purses (top right), jinlian shoes (bottom left), and jackets (bottom right) (Yang, 2004).

Appendix D





Left: late Qing Dynasty qipao (Mei, 2011).

Right: 1930s qipao (Mei, 2011).

Left: modern qipao from Hong Kong brand Shanghai Tang ("Dresses and Qipaos," 2021).

Right: many Western designers, such as John Galliano, have made their own versions of qipao ("China," 2015).

Appendix E

Photos A, E, F, I, and K are from Yang (2004).

Photos B and J are from Zhou (c. 750).

Photos C, D, G, and H are from Mei (2011).