

# Cheongsam, China's Cultural & Fashion History Heritage

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## Abstract

*The iconic dress which started with the Qing Dynasty 300+ years before: began with a loose-fitting outfit only worn by the upper-class elites, landowners, nobles and royals. It shot into international stardom when the fashionista of the times began taking this unique silk dress and made it form fitting by the 1920s Shanghai for women. After 100 years, this fashion hasn't gone out of style, but has continued to grow inside China and abroad. First, called the 'changpao' and 'qipao' in Mandarin Chinese, it was later adapted into the word cheongsam (Shanghai word adapted to English, meaning long shirt or dress). It was worn by men and women, but this dress signifies mostly with females for its femininity, softness and beauty. It identifies with China, its character and with Chinese females in the proud way in which they wear it. What this investigative paper intends to do is identify the history, the continuance of the style after a century and through interviews show what this fashion icon means to China/Chinese. Furthermore, the paper tries to learn/explore more about the color coordination and what does it represent.*

**Keywords** — Qing Dynasty, Changpao, Qipao, Cheongsam, Chinese fashion, Shanghai 1920s, Chinese-cultural history and Chinese weddings.

## I. INTRODUCTION

What began by Emperors and Empresses in Mainland China over three centuries before, extended onto the general population of nobles and landowners. With the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, it continued to influence and went on to the general population after the 1911 Revolution. It influenced and influences anywhere in the world where Chinese expats have established roots. The dress in itself is not only worn by Asian females, but it's also worn by females attractively so around the world. This dress took hold in international popularity when in Shanghai it was changed from the long dress to one which hugs beautifully the female body. The style accentuates to woman's anatomy, holds to it in a classical-fad manner and never in an ordinary way.

Sadly, it fell into a negative stereotype during the war years (1937 to 1945). But came back after that terrible conflict to reign supreme by Asian stylist. Whether it was in the Hong Kong cinema of the 1960s or all the way to Hollywood, every time an actress performed the part of a Chinese woman--she wore the beautiful and provocative dress.

The dress made a comeback when and as only one person could do, the politically savvy, *Soong Mei-ling*. She wore and expressed its true sexiness through the photos and reels taken of her at the time.

But it was the actress, *Maggie Cheung* as Mrs. Chan who really highlighted the style in the cinematic-classic, 'In the Mood for Love' (2000 - Romantic/Drama). Delicate, soft, enigmatic and captivating. This dress was to conquer through the whole movie. It wasn't only Ms. Cheung's acting abilities which popped crisply across the celluloid. It was also the dress that made you do a 'double take' in every sequence and scene of the film.[1]

Then entered *Ang Lee's* controversial-film, 'Lust, Caution' (2007 - Wartime/Drama); which highlighted *Tang Wei's* acting ability, as she gloriously wore the qipaos. *Eileen Chang* was spot and befitting in the way she integrated into her novella the elements of history and fashion, like the cheongsam for Shanghai's socialites--upon Japan's invasion of China during World War II.[2]

Classic beauties like the actress, *Gong Li* have worn the fashion for decades and it has shown that she is the quintessential Chinese beauty. Because only she can exalt this outfit and never let her fans down.

People may have their opinions about the dress, whether they like it or not, it is part of Chinese-everyday culture. And as one person expressed once in a written comment of the former *Hangzhou Weekly website*, that it was more a part of the Manchus than Chinese history. But comments do continue, all the same.[3] With the former statement, I had to completely disagree, since without one cannot come the other. Manchus and China's history are completely linked for better or worse.[4]

The qipao is evolving and has evolved in the last three-plus-centuries, since it was worn in the court-palace at Beijing to the streets of Shanghai.

Not enough to remain a part of the upper-classes, but later the commoner would have a literal enjoyment in its wear. It has to be worn and still so, in a symbolic way for China's rise in fashion capitals and sense.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This paper was one which began two years prior. These ideas below began when I was a freelance-journalist for the *Beijing/Shanghai Global Times* (2015 to 2018) and the concepts continued to involve when I wrote for the *Future Handling* (2016 - Present) website in Hong Kong.

Where did it all start for me? Everything has a beginning. This need or want to learn more about the Chinese-traditional dress. It could have started when I was a little boy, back in Brooklyn, New York (U.S.A.). Seeing the enigmatic *Bruce Lee* movies, where the lovely-females wore this famous dress, sadly and stereotypical of 'The World of Suzie Wong' character (1961 movie) or possibly on the streets of Chinatown; when my family would take me on the weekends to lower Manhattan to savor the sweet & sour dishes throughout *Canal Street, New York City*.

But to be perfectly honest, it wasn't till 2017, when I started writing about the topic for *Future Handling* in Hong Kong. After, I focused this piece on the *Jin Bo* store, in Chengdu.[5] I was later awestruck when I saw one of my editors (*Stella*) from the *Shanghai Global Times Metro* [beautifully, I might add] wear one. It was then, I was further inspired to write an article for the newspaper and after that, I wrote a couple more opinionated essays on the style which has come to define China and the Chinese female.[6] This accentuation and comparison in the pieces I wrote taught me a lot about this dress. Furthermore, one writing or an interview experience could not teach me everything about this type of clothing line. Since like China, continues with an elongated history and to be a mystery. That is why, I decided to write an investigative paper on the matter.

Now, I will be going back and forth between the usage of the words cheongsam and 'qipao'. Meaning the following: for the majority of times, cheongsam will be applied for the female-Chinese traditional dress and for the word, 'qipao', it will apply in the Pinyin-Chinese written form. The latter word is the putonghua way of saying cheongsam or at least, referring to it.

Another thing for people whom are conservative in China with the use of the word, sexy. Most times, the word sexy will be used in the context of beauty and not necessarily in the term, 'sexually attractive'. Therefore, the meaning intended here is in the way of classical beauty or in the Chinese-putonghua, 'piaoliang' (漂亮).

This is for those who know a lot or too little about the cheongsam. It is my wish that you all can get more value in the learning process from it, and that it is a part of the history of China which should be respected and preserved. I myself learned a lot!

With that said, this is dedicated not only to the qipao edition of the dress; moreover, its an inspiration written for the Chinese culture and to the people who helped me so patiently throughout China with the interviews. Kind regards, a pleasure and it has been an honor!

## III. HISTORY OF THE CHEONGSAM

By the period of the Qing Dynasty (清朝, 1644 - 1911), the Manchu (滿族) females wore a version of the Cheongsam (長衫), called *Changpao* or long gown/dress (长袍).[7] It evolved into a one-piece female outfit from the Manchu period until it reached the streets of Hong Kong. Buttoned on the right side and in a netted styled for elegance. It was unique for the females of the court and it was yet ready to evolve into what it is today; the figure-hugging we see throughout China and the rest of the world where Chinese ex-patriots reside.

When the 20<sup>th</sup> Century came around with all the revolutionary conflict growing in China, for the Cantonese-Chinese it become a long-shirt. The term as we know it today, the cheongsam, calling it the chun-li version (春麗) or to focus on the contour of the female's waistline.[8] For females it become shorter. Who signified the style of the time? The person in the political arena to expose this issue was the beautiful and sexy, *Soong Mei-ling* (宋美齡).[9] A woman whom like her Western counterpart, *Bette Davis* would enter a gala event: hypnotize every man with their jaw dropping stares and be the envy to every woman at the party. By 1911, the dress officially became what we see presently in a longer version or called the 'qipao' (旗 - qi, 袍 - pao)-- flag or banner in a longer robe version.[4]-[10] It began with an adjustment to the body.

With the Shanghai fit, it was a form hugging or a Haipai (海派) cultural fit.[11] This would accentuate the female anatomy and therefore, adapt to the western cultural standards at the time. In other words, it was the mix and match to gracefully make it into a one or two-piece outfit.

Beijing, to not fall behind with the fashionista or times, the city went with an 'A' line. Made in red tapestry and ornamented with decorative flowers, form still popular today.

In Shanghai it became more culturally liberal and open. The shorter, the tighter, the better.

Beijing took a different approach. Making it more reserved, concise, elegant, but not to showoff.

What I gathered from *Miranda's* collection and later interview was the following: the contemporary 'qipao' embraced a mandarin collar, with pankous (盤扣/盤扣, top knot buttons for the dress) - floral designs, large-showy front, sleeves, edging elegantly trimmed, styled at the length and ending with side slits.[12]

Other forms were and are presently, single sided, with a silhouette along the chest area. Focusing on

the designs with flowers, a phoenix or in elongated lines to the sides which spiral at the end.[13]

There is one qipao form which hits the mark with a single-sided straight slanted front. This goes from the collar into the right portion of the chest, where the 'pankous' are placed in a bow section for closure.

The last form is the edging or called in Chinese, 'juan(卷), xiang(相), dang(当)'. [8]-[13], [14] Focusing on the following elements in their subsequent order: to literally roll into one piece, give a look or appearance to the design and finally, in good taste--the appropriate double-edged strip for closure.

As the contemporary cheongsam is about to celebrate its 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, the fashion hasn't declined or disappeared. On the other hand, it has become more popular with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, expanding into the market for foreigners in China and abroad. Furthermore, achieving a status in the international arena and representing the PRC (People's Republic of China) in the area of politics. When the past G-20 was celebrated in Hangzhou (September 4-5, 2016), the cheongsam were made to fit the presidents' wives of the respective countries participating in this event.

Instead of disappearing after World War II, the qipao as it is known in Mainland China made a valued comeback. It didn't come back not only in silk, but lace and cotton. Sold in shops, handmade, to presently in the Chinese e-commerce platform of Taobao. Used in every single facet of Chinese life. Ranging from 300 to 300-thousand RMB (over \$42 to \$42,000 USD), depending on its quality. It is used during company gatherings, weddings, festivals, holidays, females stewardesses represent their respective airlines with this fashion, cultural activities and last but certainly not least, women doing their dances around plazas throughout China; while wearing the enigmatic dress.[15] The cheongsam is gorgeous, soft in silk and has a feel for it. With that said, the outfit continues to expand in the international-fashion world. It has partaken in daily life, whether its in the long form, styled in a short mini dress or for the winter seasons in Western and Northern China, etc.

This is what makes the cultural dress so provocative. It continues to be sexy, but never cheap. Classy, but never looking old. It is cultural, while becoming distinguished in beauty. Therefore, for millions of females it makes sense to wear the cheongsam.



*The politically savvy and always beautiful in her cheongsam, Soong Mei-ling.*

*Photo obtained through [onthistday.com](http://onthistday.com)*

#### IV. INTERVIEWS ABOUT THE CHEONGSAM

May 15, 2019

Huang Ying Ying, a school teacher gave her take, because she wears the long blouse over trousers version of the qipao: "Oh my pleasure to answer about the cheongsam. Yes, I have..."

1. A Colorful one, resembling peacock's tail. And a white one.
2. It became popular since the Qing Dynasty. In recent times, middle-aged women wear them because it is usually handmade, which makes the price costly.
3. It is believed to represent China, because Westerners saw the debutantes wear them in balls in big cities like Shanghai. So they thought it is the outfit which represents Chinese beauty."

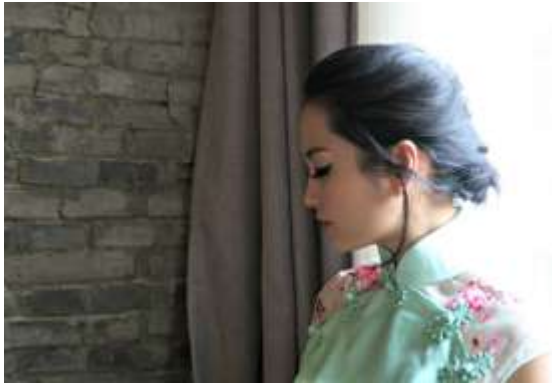
May 17, 2019

Miranda, a young-female fashionista, business woman & entrepreneur:

"Sure - here are my answers:

1. I have many qipaos as you may have discovered on my website, my favorite one is probably the one I wore for my wedding: <http://www.thepankou.com/modern-wedding-qipao-cheongsam/>
2. My favorite colour is green, so I love qipaos in all shades of green.
3. To me, qipaos have an obvious link to China as they descended from the Manchu's Qing dynasty robes, but more importantly, I love them because they represent an intermix of cultures (from the Manchus, adopted by Hans, then the tailoring enhanced through western tailoring) - I wrote about this extensively in my "history of the qipao" blog series.





*Photo is a courtesy of Miranda, as she wears an increasingly popular color in China, a light-green version and this is from her website [www.thepankou.com](http://www.thepankou.com)*

4. For me, qipaos are elegant yet seductive; demure but provocative; timeless, ageless, and simply beautiful. I think a fuller description of they mean to me is best explained here: <http://www.thepankou.com/about/>



*A self-described qipao addict, Miranda's qipao collection is one form which elegantly symbolizes Shanghai-style and the whole of China. Photo is a courtesy of Miranda (from [www.thepankou.com](http://www.thepankou.com))*

I've always loved green because it has a tranquility to it - it's a colour that appears a lot in nature. All the different shades also have different personalities: a light yellow-green is spring-like and lively, a dark forest green is mysterious. It's also the colour of jade - a very significant stone in Chinese culture."

May 20, 2019

Angel Liao, one of my 10<sup>th</sup> grade students mentioned the following: "There is love, beautiful and traditional. For me, my favorite colors are in

black and gold. But I myself don't have! It isn't suitable for me, because it hugs my body and I don't have the form for it."

Beatrice Sun, another one of my 10<sup>th</sup> grade students expressed: "I like it. It is a part of our traditional culture. We have to protect it, but it's not for children. I don't know more about it; however, my favorite color is blue. We need it to remain a part of China. We should know about it."

Krystal Li, a teenage high-school student reflected on her answer: "I personally like it. It's from China and reflects on a woman's body. Honestly, thin people wear it better. My favorite colors are: yellow, blue and pink. I haven't worn one yet and this is my interest in the future."

Rony Chen, one of the older teenagers in high school, "Beautiful, indeed. Chinese traditional style... White is my favorite color to see on women. Worn properly, it is great for special occasions and ordinary life. But I don't know anybody who has or wears one."

Gallan (Long Xin Yue), high school student answered simply: "I like the beauty it inspires. Pink is one of my favorites and blue for older women. Yes, my mom has one which she wears."

Jack Lin, teenager, said: "It is a successful accessory of China. Many girls wear these outfits. The clothes are cool and beautiful. The fashion I often seen in red and white. My preference to see isn't really the long dress, but a combination of something easy to wear."

Chad Chen, teenager said with a wide grin: "Ah, why do I like it? Because it is worn by Chinese woman, like a drawing, it is very sexy! Favorite color in blue... It is unique and goes with a woman's beautiful body."

For Ender Guo, a 9<sup>th</sup> grader mentioned: "The 'qipao' is part of our national symbol. Thanks to Chinese females, it has helped it survive."

Another 9<sup>th</sup> grader like Susie Han stated her opinion: "Chinese women always wear this clothing, because it is very ancient."

Henry He, this teenager added: "It is the civilization of China and represents beauty!"

A teenager like Lisa Li stated: "It's ancient. My favorite color is pink in long or short form."

For an adolescent like Nancy Chen, what she said was wise and simple: "What represents China in essence? The 'qipao' dress and dumplings..."

For Jason Chen, a sports star in high school: "It is made in China, first and only in China."

Jeanie Luo a clever and witty-adolescent. She smiled, moving her head: "Made in China, of course. It is a Chinese advantage to share with the world." she then lifts her finger in a funny way mentioning, "But I don't like it!"

Nina Long, a lovely-teenager with a broad smile mentioned: "It's something very Chinese. The style I like is the 'wuhua' (showing the rounded

portion of the shoulder).” Stating, “I wore it once for my birthday and to impress my grandfather. It is something from China since ancient times and my favorite color is red.”

Linda Yin is a lovely teenage-young lady who her family does business in the industry, said the following: “It’s more a part of our 20<sup>th</sup> Century history. It doesn’t have only Chinese traditions but foreign elements, like the Haipai. Sexy, showy at times, while demonstrating the body line. In my case, my favorites are for the blue and white versions. However, it is modern, because it represents other Chinese elements in its complexity.”

Cinci, a delicate-teenager with a broad smile, thought and said: “These are Chinese traditions since the Ming Dynasty. It can be considered a costume, but it’s not for everybody. Those who wear it, often use it during festivals and in spring. Of course, for most females it’s about body appearance and red is particularly charming. The symbolism is just simply attractive.”

Alex Xu, a thoughtful adolescent tries to comprehend. He was serious at first and then smiled: “This tradition is part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. With the new China, came a new government in 1911 with Sun Yat-Sen. Before things weren’t very good and then, with this style everybody could wear something like this beautifully.”

Becky Chueng, a teenager from Hong Kong expressed: “This depends on many factors. I think it was before, in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Then it became part of Shanghai by the early 1900s. Because Shanghai is after all a fashion capital, whether people accept this fact or not. My favorite color is pink, because it goes perfectly with the skin color.”

Harry Pan, this teenager answered the following: “Not only it is traditional, but I adore to see it in red. My mom has a blue one and my sister has a red qipao.”

May 23, 2019

Alison Li, young lady who works in the Human Resources field stated during this interview: “I prefer light pink and different kinds of the green, depends on the design.

Some famous Chinese actresses are in cheongsam. Let me show you...” she then shows me some actresses in green cheongsam.

“You see, most of them are in green. Different kinds of green, light green looks gorgeous. Green looks elegant! Pink looks young and it’s great for girlhood, girlie like, you know.”



*Traditional cheongsam or changpao in pink used during the Manchu Period/Qing Dynasty*

Kelly Xu said: “When I was young, I believed it was for Chinese traditional weddings, and it was/is beautiful and for that grand day! It can represent Chinese-traditional culture.”



*Actress Gong Li, the quintessential-Chinese beauty who always rocks in a cheongsam (image by: china.org.cn)*

Rainbow Yuan, a young PhD student and teacher stated: “Yes, I have a qipao, light color. It’s lotus. Just looks fresh and clean. The qipao for me only applies at events, like a gala dinner or international conferences with most foreigners gathering around or during Spring Festival.”



*Photo is a courtesy of Rainbow Yuan*

Candy, a young-artistic teacher reflected: “I had one before in pink, because it’s traditional cloth and represents femininity.”

Jenny He (He Juan), former teacher and entrepreneur: “Yes, I have a red one. Qipao has Chinese elements. Actually, I think it has no special meaning today, just a traditional-cultural dress.”

Mickey, former student of mine and teacher stated: “The cheongsam, a kind of classical Chinese costume shows elegance and charms of ladies. I do have one, but that was when I was a child. I remember one which had a white lotus on it.

Now women who go to a party or some formal occasion will choose cheongsam as their dresses. You might see it in the Cannes Film Festival or the international night parties with Chinese. Cause, it’s a representation of Chinese culture. And for me, I dream to have one, only if I can lose weight to my dream figure. Cheongsam really sketches the outline of the figure. As far as I know, ‘a group of cheongsam’, is a group for the women who love these dresses. Most members are 50-year old ladies, they spend a lot money on buying all series of cheongsam.”

Katniss, a young adult-Chinese student and fashionista: “Yes. I have one. It’s pink. Qipao is a traditional cloth in China. It’s a symbol of elegance, at least I think.”

Chloe Ye, former ballerina and high school student, stated: “Yes, I have one. I prefer elegant colour. The cheongsam made of silk and satin has the most textured texture and the picture of classical vintage Chinese style is on it, showing more noble guise and figure. Wearing a cheongsam is a way to pay attention to the sitting position. So, it is not simple to put on a cheongsam with charm and it is not for a simple woman. It has to do with oriental charm and cannot be covered, since it is in bright colors. Qipao is a retro feeling for me.”

Lucy Liu (Liu Lu), she is a teacher and school psychologist: “I like it, but it feels strange to wear qipao in life. I wore it once in a show, many

years ago. The reason why it is valued, is that I think it can show the beauty of women.”



*Ms. Liu doing a show in 2010 and wearing the traditional-cheongsam dress on stage*



*Ms. Liu is third from the right gorgeously wearing it with a smile. Photos are a courtesy of Lucy Liu*

Jennifer Cai expressed: “I don’t have one and I don’t like it actually.”

May 24, 2019

Sarah Li was subjective about the topic, since by what she demonstrated was her love for the these dresses: “I like to sparkle in an elegant-ivory color. It’s timeless the qipao experience.” Sarah continued telling me, “I like light-colors, the reminders of flowers. For me, it’s the meaning of something sweet, fresh air.” as I looked at the details of her cheongsam, exquisitely fitting and sexy. As she showed-off her shoulders. She resumed our conversation with, “It’s the fit and sexy shoulder wear. For us is the traditional wear of culture. These have been a part of my life for the last 20-years and I have five of these dresses in white,” what was special about Sarah’s interview was her eye for good taste, pose and she really knew how to wear it.





*Photos are a courtesy of Sarah Li*



Yoka, another of my high-school students gave her perspective: “Besides the holidays, people may wear it when they travel. There are many ancient buildings in China. When people see these buildings full of Chinese emotion, they will try their best to be there. So some people would wear clothes from that era. I think it can help people know more about their country's traditional culture. Some businessmen sell or rent qipaos at tourist attractions. This not only makes money, but also gives foreigners who visit China a chance to experience Chinese culture. I think qipao represents the beauty of Chinese women. But nowadays, few people wear it. People only wear it on some holidays. I remember wearing it when I was a child. I thought the dress was really beautiful. It looks like a short-pink cheongsam. I didn't live with my mother before. I lived in my aunt's house for a while. She has a cheongsam with blue and white china painted on it. That cheongsam with her black bright-long hair, this reminded me of the Oriental beauty.”

May 25, 2019

Winnie Chen's mom: “Because it is a traditional dress that only exists in China. \*It represents ‘the charm of being a woman’ (I don't know how to translate ‘女人味’ better. You can ask someone to have a better translation of this word). For me, I really want to fit it. Of course I like it. It is our traditional dress. I have several, but I gave them all to others. I only wear it when there is a special event. Black and red ones are nice.”

\*The characters ‘女人味’ represent feminine or femininity.

June 25, 2019

Li Ming Xing mentioned more about wearing the qipao overseas, as her representation of China and Chinese culture: “What does the qipao mean for China? What does it represent for China and I? The dressing culture in China and part of the traditional culture. Qipao was famous in 1920 - 1940 and it shows the virtuous, elegant, gentle and beautiful Chinese woman. This is the thing I learned when I was in middle school, ha, ha! To be honest, I don't know much about qipao. Ha, ha! What does it represent to me? When talking about traditional costume in China, it will first come to my mind. It is a symbol of maturity. If you are wearing a qipao, you are a woman who is gentle, traditional and elegant. What are my favourite colors? Not really. I need to dress on them and see if they match me or not. I cannot just say which colors are my favourite, etc. Do I have a qipao? I do have a qipao. One was in grade school, the other my mum bought me a pink qipao. Another was in the U.K., all my housemates had one qipao. (It was a present from my housemates.) When do I think it is the most significant time to wear the qipao or do I like to wear the fashion all the time? You could wear qipao anytime if you wish, but people may stare at you when you are walking down the street. As for me, I will wear the qipao for weddings, parties, graduation ceremonies or other special events. Not for daily outfits.”



*The above photos are a courtesy of Ms. Li Ming Xing. Ms. Li is the young lady in the pink cheongsam with her former roommates*

May 30, 2019

Oscar Ma, English teacher, counselor and friend: “Highlights a woman's curves in a natural way. It is the traditional-old fashioned style dress brought back in popular fashion. Two aspects I would like to highlight: traditional-old fashion, right and it is a good choice in red! Both ways, Western and Chinese style (what Oscar mentions here is the Haipai; form or Shanghai culture of mixing East and Western elements): it is the dress for presentations, through pick-ups at the airport to flatter Chinese culture and for greeting of guests. Especially at restaurants, while eating a meal, with the style things become more formal. Because it's showing a complete Chinese system of wear--versus Western with the jeans and T-shirt. First memory I have of the qipao, it was 15 or 20 years ago. My aunt wore it to adapt to the climate. The style is quite charming, from conservative to liberal. The qipao came about between the 1920s - 1930s; however, with wars there was a decline in the dress and fell into the sort of people-crowd whom did prostitution. Not very popular for a while, tragically. Then it made a comeback in popularity, with weddings and everyday use. Who wears it as an example to China, Chinese culture and everyday in her shows, is the transgender actress, T.V. hostess and dancer, Jin Xing,” with this said the interview was concluded.





Jin Xing, performing in one of her shows. Photo obtained from xinhuanet.com

June 3, 2019

Max Lin, one of my former students from Hui-dong county mentioned: “Well, it’s the traditional dress of Chinese making. I can appreciate something in turquoise or sea breeze colors. I believe my mom has a purple one, for it represents like yellow, a regal color. I am thankful that it is part of Chinese culture, but I don’t necessarily love or hate it.”

Tony Liu, another sports-adolescent stated thoughtfully: “It is an object that represents China. Many of these clothes are from China. I like the blue and white patterns or something along the lines of: blue, shiny and with light! My mom has one in pink, white and red. She likes it, because it shows her sexiness!”

Anson He, a youngster in High School said: “The traditional dress of China; very, very sexy for women. I like to look at red. Enjoy the black ones too, but my household doesn’t have this color. I love it because it’s ‘Made in China!’”

Leo Zhang, a teenager with smiles, said: “Traditional dress for women... Black is my favorite color, but I’m not certain if it’s also red. Because it looks very, very feminine.”

Zack (Wang Jin Fa), one of my former 9<sup>th</sup> grade students stated: “It was made in China in the 1900s. Chinese people like to wear these clothes because they don’t have so much color. I think, I

Comes to show, for the majority of Chinese, it can be male or female still like the cheongsam. Therefore, showing that this dress is a hit among the crowds.

These numbers were drawn from the interviewed candidates; whether they liked one or more colors on the list. However, the ultimate color which reigned traditionally was red. With pink and blue in-a-tie for the second-top spot. The color white/ivory came in third. Black came in fourth. And surprisingly, green came in fifth, because some people stated it was the ‘it’ or the in vogue color.[17] Furthermore, yellow was surprisingly dead last; since for generations this color represented royalty in China.[18] In the end, only 5

think, they prefer those in white, black and khaki! I’m not sure if my family has one in red. I’m not certain.”

With this concluded the 42-member interview process, most of those interviewed were from teenage to middle-aged Chinese people (male and female alike). The majority residing along Eastern China: Guangdong Province, Beijing, Nanjing and especially Shanghai where it evokes the fashion sense throughout China, etc.[16] The following interviewees gave their opinions on the history and feel for the dress according to their experiences and knowledge they had acquired.

## V. TABLES, PERCENTAGES & COLORS

Out of the 42 interviews gathered, here are two-sample tables and the percentages. Reflecting on the following: for those whom liked or didn’t like the cheongsam and for those whom had a favorite color, etc.

For those whom liked or disliked the cheongsam:

LIKED THE CHEONGSAM	CHEONGSAM NEUTRAL	DISLIKED THE CHEONGSAM
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87.4%	4.2%	8.4%
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Favorite colors according to percentages:

RED GREEN (DARK & LIGHT VARIATIONS)	PINK	BLUE (DARK & LIGHT VARIATIONS)	BLACK	NO ANSWER
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38%	34%	34%	17%	
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YELLOW UNCERTIAN OF WHICH COLOR LIKED	WHITE/IVORY OF WHICH COLOR	NO ANSWER THE PERSON LIKED
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8%	29%	5%
4%		

percent didn’t answer to a particular color, and 4 percent weren’t sure. But it goes to show how the Chinese generation is changing with the market on the purchase of the cheongsam. Although, red was still on top, pink and blue were closely behind. It is something to think about next time when out-and-about to buy a qipao.

Why does any Chinese person want to wear a cheongsam in a certain color? Here is the following explanation and examples of just a few colors: Red - fertility, love, good luck and happiness; Yellow is royalty, regal, nobility and power; White - purity, virginal and innocent; now Black is a very sexy color in the cheongsam, however, traditionally it has always symbolized death, destruction, havoc, temptation,

something bad or cruel is about to happen; Blue means spring, advancement in life, forever or forever young at heart; and Green symbolizes wealth, growth and harmony with the earth.[19]

With that said, this concluded the portion of the tables, percentages and what the colors meant for people whom wear the cheongsam.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The concept of the qipao isn't going anywhere anytime soon. As cities like Shanghai and Beijing become fashion capitals, the dress will get maximum exposure from the local and international crowds.[20] Whether a person likes it or not, the fashion is here to stay and thrive.

One thing is important to understand: as the powwow outfits of the Native Americans, the sari-wrapped Indian dresses or the Japanese kimonos--so is the cheongsam synonymous with China. This hasn't changed and will not, as it goes fashion-forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Hitting by this century 100 years since its evolution in Shanghai and 400 year mark with its conception--thanks to the Qing Dynasty!

The color red is still the most important one for weddings. However, with the new generation coming along to stand their ground, colors are being substituted for: blue, pink and white. Since these are becoming popular colors for engagements, ceremonies and marriages across the world. Wherever there are Chinese elements or Chinese expats, there will be a tailor for the cheongsam to showcase his/her wears and Chinese will be showing these garments off.

Not only has the Chinese dress been popular with females in Asia. It has expanded like Chinese cuisine, Kung-fu and Tai-chi into Western societies. The cheongsam is now becoming as popular as the Chinese language to be fitted upon and learned about.

That is why, so many years before I became attracted to this topic. For all my memories, it began in Manhattan (New York, New York) as a boy, when I saw those sexy ladies wearing the cheongsam or for the old Bruce Lee movies. For this, I have to thank the Chinese culture and its inspiration.[21]

Once I entered China, I began writing more frequently about it, and it has been a true pleasure in knowing more about the cheongsam. I wish to have many more years to learn about it. As I pass down this love for the dress to my wife and child, I hope they can appreciate this never passing fad into their lives and wear it with beauty, love, delicate-care and honor. Since *Xiao qin* is Chinese and our child who is Chinese-American.

I thank all the people whom participated in the interviews and photographic moments; without all of you, I wouldn't been able to know where to start. For the editors whom gave me the chance to publish my works about the cheongsam and fashion, it was a sincere pleasure knowing and working with you all. Thanks and kind regards, Daniel Otero!

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For *Sarah* (Lili), one of the most gracious teachers I have ever met and sadly I had wished we had more time to work together. Alas, I hope in the future it can be that way. Thank you for wearing so beautifully the qipao (cheongsam), you are unequivocally the essence of the Chinese female in every way, shape and form. From your femininity, your smile, to the way your hair cascades over this lovely body-fitting dress. Please continue to wear it with pride, after all, it's the essence of China! Take care and my best wishes!

Another person I would like to thank. The one who reflects the wearing of the cheongsam like in her name, *Mingxing*. Thank you for being so kind in submitting an interview and photographs with the other two-young ladies. Indeed, Mingxing shows off the qipao in the beauty of the Chinese female, when her smiles accentuates the dress and melts every heart in the room. I never thought that for this old man, an interview would lead to friendship and somebody that is always delighted in hearing her gorgeous laughter. Don't change your honesty and purity of heart, in spite of what the world does or says.

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