Threads of Transformation: The Role of the Qipao in Shaping Women's Modern Cultural Identity

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The Role of the *Qipao* in Shaping Women's Modern Cultural Identity

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Abstract

This study explores the role of the *qipao* in shaping the representation and perception of Chinese women's modern cultural identity during the early twentieth century. In a period of societal instability, Chinese women sought a modern identity that harmonized with their cultural values. Utilizing visual research and literature analysis, the research underscores the *qipao*'s significance as both a tool and a symbol in popular visual culture forming women's identities. Emphasizing the socio-historical context, the study highlights the *qipao*'s role as a bridge between tradition and modernization in Shanghai's cosmopolitan environment. Through magazines, calendar posters, and cinema, the *qipao* emerges as a dynamic cultural dress, influencing representations and perceptions of the modern woman's cultural identity.

Keywords: *Qipao*, Shanghai, Modern Women, Cultural Identity, Visual Culture, Fashion Studies.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The world of fashion is far from an isolated entity; it is deeply interwoven with human history and social narratives. It does not exist in isolation from these broader narratives; rather, it is a tangible embodiment of historical epochs and societal values.

This interconnectedness is exemplified by the *qipao*, a dress that captured significant attention in China, especially in Shanghai, during the early decades of the 20th century.

During this period, China underwent rapid societal transformations driven by the imperative of modernization, external pressures, and shifting attitudes towards the Qing dynasty. The impact of modernization extended beyond technological advancements, influencing societal norms, including sartorial choices. People sought a modern identity, diverging from conventional Qing dynasty vestimentary practices.

This quest for a modern identity was particularly evident in women's sartorial preferences. The evolving societal attitudes brought about a significant shift in perceptions of women's roles and ideals of modern womanhood. The choices of clothing became a many-sided concern with political, social, and moral dimensions.

The socio-historical turbulence, especially in the cosmopolitan city of Shanghai, encapsulate the tension between the old world view linked to the Qing dynasty and the new reality dominated by Western imperialism, characterized by its cultural values and technological advancements. This interplay is reflected in the *qipao*, functioning as a medium for self-representation, or in other words, as a tangible expression of identity.

The *qipao*, while embodying modern sensibilities, retains characteristics of traditional Chinese clothing, thereby reflecting a fusion of the old and the new.

This thesis's primary focus is to demonstrate how the *qipao* as a Chinese national dress serves as a powerful medium for conveying cultural values and how it influences the representation and perceptions of Chinese women's 'modern' identity in a changing, modern looking world during the early 20th century.

This introductory chapter presents an overview of the frameworks and literature that will be used for this research, and delineate the methods and concepts applied to address each research question in subsequent chapters. The methodological framework outlined here aims to address the main research question as follows: *How has the qipao played a role in the representation and perceptions of Chinese women's modern cultural identity?*

To address the research question comprehensively, I will employ a multi-faceted approach encompassing theoretical analysis, literature reviews and archival research. Notably, visual analysis will play a prominent role, as this thesis primarily delves into the *qipao*'s material agency within its socio-historical context.

In each chapter of this thesis, a systematic approach will be employed to pose and answer questions integral to the subject matter. By doing so, every chapter will contribute to a clear understanding of the research findings, ultimately to address the central research question comprehensively.

In chapter two, we will be looking at the characteristics of traditional costume culture in China and the development of these clothes during the Qing dynasty. The question that will be asked in this chapter is: *What are the distinguishing characteristics of traditional costume culture in China, and how did regulations in the political landscape prior and during the Qing dynasty influence these characteristics?*

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the development of the *qipao*, I will explore the antecedents leading to its emergence within the sartorial landscape of the Qing dynasty. The role of ethnicity in China proves crucial in this context, given that the *qipao* originated from the ruling Manchu minority group during the Qing.

However, following the collapse of the Qing dynasty, the *qipao* disassociated itself from its initial ties to Manchu ethnicity. Instead, it assumed a somewhat ambiguous designation as a "Chinese" women's dress within the framework of modern Chinese society.

The concepts that will be put into practice here will primarily be grounded in a social-historical perspective. Moreover, the trends and transition of clothing in China will be explained by referring to visual sources. For this, an art historical approach will be employed such as methods in iconological and iconographical analysis.

In chapter three, the historical context of early 20th century Shanghai will be explored, focusing on the dynamics of modernization and its profound influence on the development of the *qipao*. Simultaneously, the *qipao* will be examined as itself played a crucial role in the broader context of modernization. To guide this chapter, the following question is being posed: *To what extent did the historical context in Shanghai in the early 20th century contribute to the evolution of the qipao?*

The dynamic transformation of the sartorial landscape during the early 20th century was notably pronounced in Shanghai, where the impact of rapid urbanization and modernization was most

conspicuous. It was in this bustling treaty port that the *qipao* gained widespread popularity, serving as a key expression in the shaping of the 'modern' woman and cultural identity of the era.

In chapter four, the profound impact of the city's pervasive visual culture on the evolution of the *qipao* will be explored, intricately shaping both the representation and perception of women's modern cultural identity. The following critical question is being posed: *How were women represented in popular culture (magazines, calendar posters and films) during the early 20th century in Shanghai?*

During this period, a wave of new visual culture swept through Shanghai, reshaping perspectives on Chinese identity. Central to this discourse on modern women in popular media was the *qipao*, playing a significant role in the formation and perception of women's modern and cultural identity.

To fully grasp the fashion scene portrayed in early 20th century popular visual culture, the approach employed involves an analytical examination coupled with archival research on visual media from that era. The investigation into popular visual culture in early 20th century Shanghai aims not only to trace the spread of clothing trends but also to understand its crucial role in influencing modern perspectives. In this chapter the aim is to reveal the close relationship between clothing choices, popular visual culture, and the evolution of women's modern cultural identity.

1.1 Fashion studies in non-western context

Clothing transcends mere fabric draped over the body; it holds a profound place within material culture, carrying both personal and societal significance. Beyond its practical utility, clothing fulfills sexual and social functions, serving as a reflection of social identity and a means of distinguishing "us" from "others." Furthermore, clothing serves as a conspicuous indicator of social classes, social status, authority, and wealth.[1]

As highlighted by Ruth Barnes and Joanne B. Eicher in *Dress and gender* (1992), clothing assumes also a vital and conspicuous role as an ethnicity marker, facilitating the communication of group or individual identities within interacting societies.[2] However, clothing also operates as a non-verbal means of communication, bridging connections between

[1] Cheng (2021), p. 109.
[2] Barnes, Eicher (1992), p. 10.

the self, insiders, and outsiders. The significance of clothing as markers of ethnic identity and the related differentiation between insiders and outsiders are especially relevant in relation to the diverse ethnic groups under the rule of the Qing dynasty (see also chapter two). It is during the transitional period from the fall of the Qing Dynasty to the early Republican era, that the *qipao* gains distinctive significance within Chinese society.

Fashion in non-Western cultures cannot be described in the same manner as it is often discussed in Europe. The field of fashion studies has primarily emerged from a European perspective, closely intertwined with the trajectory of Western modernity. This, however, does not imply the absence of a fashion history in non-Western cultures; rather, it highlights the need for a more nuanced examination of fashion in non-Western societies.[3]

In *Changing clothes in China* (2023), Antonia Finnane examines Chinese fashion history, a topic that has sparked controversy within fashion studies. She claims that Western scholars often relegate clothing from non-Western cultures to the status of costumes rather than fashionable clothing. She refers, among others, to Fernand Braudel, who attributes, what he calls, the relatively static character of Chinese clothing history to the conservative character of Chinese society.[4] The anthropologist Ted Polhemus expresses himself in the same vein. He applies the concept of anti-fashion to the resistance to changes due to the dominance of tradition, religious beliefs or countercultural policies, in contrast to a society shaped by a thriving market economy and by significant social mobility that are fundamental to the concept of fashion.[5]

Finnane, however, argues that the study of fashion in non-Western cultures, as exemplified by Braudel and Polhemus, has predominantly been tethered to the dynamics of Western modernity, and reflects, but does not do justice to, Western attitudes towards Asia in general to the actual situation.[6] Finnane attributes the highly biased Western perspectives on Chinese clothing in the 19th century to the influence of Orientalism as described by Edward Said.[7] This orientalist approach, characterized by the use of binary oppositions in analyzing non-Western cultures, has persisted in scholarly research, shaping the understanding of material culture, including clothing, in non-Western societies with neglect of Chinese fashion history.

Rachel Silberstein also finds it problematic to reduce Chinese clothing culture to the categories of traditional costume or anti-fashion. Silberstein positions herself in *A Fashionable*

[3] Finnane (2023), p. 6.
[4] Braudel (1972), p. 32.
[5] Silberstein (2020), p. 4.
[6] Finnane (2023), p. 6.
[7] Said (1978).

Century (2020) by challenging the conventional classifications applied to non-European cultures in general, and in the context of Chinese clothing culture in particular. Silberstein distances herself from the view that fashion claims in non-Western cultures are invalid applications of a Western framework. Instead of aligning with either folk costume or anti-fashion, she opts for a more nuanced approach that acknowledges the unique characteristics of China's clothing culture.[8] The concept of folk costume, characterized by slow and imperceptible changes, does not accurately reflect the dynamic and evolving nature of Qing China's dress, as evidenced by the widespread and shifting usage of fashion terms to describe dress and adornment. Terms like *shishang* (fashion), *shishi zhuang* (fashions of the times), *shi zhuang* (fashionable dress), and *shi yang* (style of the times) indicate that fashion was of significant concern in Chinese society.[9]

In an effort to move beyond the impasse in scholarship on Chinese fashion, Silberstein focuses on the key issue of methodology. She challenges the prevailing emphasis on written sources about fashion and the methodological divide between object-centered approaches of curators/collectors and document-based socio-economic or cultural history.[10] Silberstein seeks to bridge this methodological gap, allowing for a more comprehensive and inclusive study of Chinese fashion that considers shared themes and factors beyond Western socio-economic phenomena.

Graig Clunas broadly agrees with the criticism of the Eurocentric approach to Chinese history, especially in his work *Superfluous Things* (1991), which examines Chinese material culture during the Ming period.[11]

In this research, I want to focus on internal perspectives within Chinese society rather than external ones. The works of the above-mentioned authors have sharpened my vision regarding China's history of clothing, with the consequence that I want to approach my subject within the broader discourse of fashion studies, with a critical attitude towards the historical Western perspectives in this regard. The aim here is to show the intricate relationship between social and political contexts and changes in clothing, with a particular emphasis on how the *qipao* serves as a signifier of women's positions across the spectrum of modernity.

[8] Silberstein (2020), p. 4.
[9] Idem.
[10] Idem.
[11] Clunas (1991).

Chapter Two: Sartorial Landscape Qing Dynasty

2.1 Historical context: Qing dynasty (1644-1912)

The Qing dynasty, spanning from 1644 to 1912, was established by the Manchu people, descendants of the Jurchens, an agricultural society originally hailing from what is now known as Manchuria, encompassing the Chinese provinces of Jilin and Heilongjiang.

The establishment of the Qing dynasty can be traced back to Nurhaci (1559-1626), the leader of a small Jurchen tribe called the Aisin-Gioro in Jianzhou during the early 17th century. Nurhaci established The Eight Banners, serving a dual foundation in Manchu society, operating both as military forces and as an essential administrative structure. These banners were initially administrative divisions, where every Manchu household found its place, and they were comprised of three distinct ethnic groups: the Manchu, Han Chinese, and Mongols. The Eight Banners successfully brought together and harmonized the previously fragmented Jurchen people and also played a crucial role in the Qing dynasty's ultimate victory over the Ming dynasty.[12]

Following Nurhaci's passing in 1626, his eighth son, Hong Taiji (1592-1643), took the reins of leadership. Hong Taiji's reign marked a crucial moment as he officially embraced the term "Manchu" to represent the united Jurchen people in 1635.[13]

The Manchu rulers were deeply committed to preserving the diverse ethnic and regional identities within their empire, recognizing the crucial role these identities played in their imperial vision. This commitment served a dual purpose: it not only solidified their standing as a conquering elite but also reinforced the territorial expansion they had achieved. The Manchu leadership displayed a keen awareness of the potential influence of Chinese culture, having observed how previous foreign dynasties had gradually assimilated into Chinese cultural norms. To safeguard their distinct identity, they instituted a series of laws aimed at upholding Manchu traditions, with a particular focus on clothing and personal adornment.[14]

In 1636, Emperor Hong Taiji issued a dress code, drawing a direct connection between the decline of non-Han Chinese dynasties and their adoption of *hanfu* attire and a sedentary lifestyle.[15] *Hanfu* referred to the clothing style of the Han people during the preceding Ming dynasty. Hong Taiji emphasized that Manchu conquests relied on horsemanship and archery,

[12] Keliher (2019), p. 41.
[13] Rawski (1998), p. 36.
[14] Keliher (2019), p. 41.
[15] Rawski (1998), p. 40.

rendering the *hanfu,* characterized by the wide-sleeved garments, of the Ming dynasty unsuitable for the Manchu way of life. Consequently, the Manchu vehemently rejected the adoption of Ming dynasty court clothing.[16]

In 1645, the Manchu prince and regent Dorgon (1612-1650), introduced the *Tifayifu* policy, a decree that required members of The Eight Banners to adopt Manchu clothing and refrain from embracing Chinese customs. Notably, Han Chinese men were legally mandated to shave their foreheads and wear their hair in a single plait, known as a queue (*tifa*), symbolizing submission. (Fig. 1). Official and formal occasions demanded both Manchus and Han Chinese officials to don Manchu-style robes, while informal gatherings allowed Chinese men to wear their traditional attire. This policy remained in effect and visible until 1911 with the fall of the Qing dynasty. Most abandoned the *tifa* after the last emperor Puyi (1906-1967) cut his queue in 1922.[17] Among the Manchus and some tribes in the northeastern region of China, this was the customary hairstyle. However, for a vast majority of Chinese men during that period, it represented a significant departure from tradition. Shaving their foreheads was seen as a form of self-mutilation and a departure from the reverence of their ethnic identity.[18]

Additionally, it's important to note that the *Tifayifu* policy mainly applied to adult Chinese men.[19] *Hanfu* continued to be worn in less formal settings, such as theaters and women's quarters, as it received limited attention from the court.

The persistence of *hanfu* was due to the court's relatively lax regulation of women's attire, allowing Manchu and Han Chinese women to intermingle and influence each other's clothing styles. Nevertheless, there were certain rules for Manchu women, prohibiting them from adopting Chinese customs like foot binding, wearing wide-sleeved *hanfu* dresses, or replacing the Manchu practice of wearing three earrings in one ear with a single Chinese earring.[20]

Despite these regulations, some upper-class Manchu women did not adhere to them, as evidenced by an 1839 edict that punished the fathers of girls who appeared for imperial inspection wearing *hanfu* with wide sleeves.[21] This illustrated the emperors' persistent resistance to signs of acculturation among the Manchu people.

Notably, Han women persisted in their vestimentary practices. For instance, the edicts

[16] Rhoads (2000), p. 12.
[17] Godley (2011).
[18] Rawski (1998), p. 41.
[19] Rhoads (2000), p. 60.
[20] Idem.
[21] Idem.

issued in the 17th century to prohibit the practice of foot binding were disregarded by Han women. Foot binding, known as "lotus feet" was part of ancient Han women sartorial customs going back to the 10th century, and was seen as a status symbol and feminine beauty. During the 19th century almost 100 percent of Han women were practicing foot binding.[22]

As the 19th century unfolded, the Qing dynasty confronted various challenges, such as external pressures resulting in the Opium Wars (1839–1842, 1856-1860), the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864) as the first major instance of anti-Manchu sentiment, and the Sino-Japanese war (1894–1895), that gradually diminished their ruling power, and as result the emphasis on clothing regulations. This shift paved the way for the emergence of hybridization of ethnic clothing, a phenomenon we will delve into later on in this chapter.

Fig. 1. Afong, Lai. (ca.1880). *Chinese Meal.* Chinese men with queue (*tifa).*

[22] Idem.

2.2 Clothing characteristics

Hanfu

The significance of clothing as a symbolic marker of social identity became prominently evident during the transitional period of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). This era witnessed a deliberate departure from the attire associated with the "barbarian outsiders" of the preceding Yuan dynasty (1279 -1368). Instead, a conscious effort was made to hark back to the Tang dynasty dressing style, perceived as a representation of the ethnic Han people.[23]

A notable characteristic of women's Ming-era clothing was the high-waisted style short jacket called *ru*, often paired with a flowing skirt, *qun*. Sleeves were intentionally oversized, cascading gracefully over the hands. (Fig. 2). Sometimes, the sleeves of the blouse were in the *pipaxiu* style, meaning narrow and curved sleeves.

During the late Ming period, the *pifeng*, also known as *beizi*, was adopted and gained widespread popularity during the 16th and 17th centuries. The *pifeng* referred to a voluminous, loose outer coat with generously long sleeves, contributing to the overall elegance of the attire. (Fig. 3).

The *aoqun* made an appearance in the late Ming era, meaning a long jacket *ao* over a skirt *qun.* The *ao* closely resembled the gowns worn by Manchu women during the subsequent Qing dynasty, marking a transitional period that saw a distinct Qing influence on the clothing of Han women as one dynasty succeeded the other. (Fig. 4 and 5).

[23] Zujie (2007), p. 181.

Fig. 2. A Ming dynasty painting showcases two women adorned in the traditional clothing style *ruqun,* comprising a short jacket *ru* with a flowing long skirt *qun*.

Fig. 3. A Ming dynasty painting by Tang Yin (1368-1644), showcases four court ladies adorned in long outer coats called *pifeng*.

Fig. 4. Afong, Lai. (ca. 1875-80). *Courtesans in Shanghai.*
Qing dynasty Han women wearing *aoqun.* The *ao* changed in variation influenced by the Manchu clothing style. The skirt *qun,* remained in the *hanfu* style of the Ming dynasty. A subtle detail lies beneath their clothing—the pointed shoes, a telling sign of the enduring practice of foot binding among Han women.

Fig. 5. Afong, Lai (1880). *Upper class Chinese women*.
Han women adorn themselves in the classic two-part Han clothing style known as *aoqun*. The late Qing dynasty witnessed the popularity of ornate decorative borders.

Qizhuang

Manchu clothing, known as *qizhuang*, was very different from the Ming dynasty clothing style in terms of practicality. The *qizhuang* consisted of boots, trousers, and functional riding coats, meticulously designed for horseback riding. These riding coats featured hoods for insulation and close-fitting designs to allow for unhindered freedom of movement. Notably, the *matixiu*, or horse hoof-shaped cuffs, along with trousers, not only provided protection against cold weather but also facilitated the art of mounted archery.[24] (Fig. 6).

The *matixiu* found its place in three out of the four dress categories worn by Manchu court women: ceremonial or formal court dress (*li fu*), auspicious court dress (*ji fu*), and informal court dress (*chang fu*). The exception was leisure clothing (*bian fu*), which did not adopt this distinctive silhouette and was free from Qing court regulations. Leisure clothing was donned for everyday and recreational activities, devoid of strict rules.[25]

Both men and women shared some noteworthy commonalities in their *qizhuang*. long one-piece robes, referred to as *changshan* or *changpao*, were the standard attire. (Fig. 7).

There were two variations of *changpao*: *chenyi* and *changyi*. The key distinction between the two lay in their structure, with the *changyi* featuring two high side slits, allowing for greater ease of movement, while the *chenyi* lacked side slits. (Fig. 8 and 9).

During the Qing dynasty, these long robes were frequently paired with short over-jackets known as *magua* or vests called *pipa*. *Magua*, worn by both men and women, had elbow-length sleeves and could vary in length from the waist to the knee. (Fig. 10).

The *pipa* vest, worn by Manchu women, evolved from the informal *magua*, featuring a shorter front left side designed to facilitate horse mounting. This distinctive vest style endured into the early 20th century when combined with long robes.(Fig. 11 and 12).

The one-piece long robe, the *changshan* or *changpao/chengyi* is considered the precursor of the *qipao*. While *qizhuang* and *qipao* share some similarities, the latter is recognized as a distinct form of Chinese women's clothing that gained prominence during the early Republican period.

[24] Silberstein (2020), p. 21.
[25] Idem.

Fig. 6. (ca.1770). A Manchu emperor's semiformal court coat featuring the *matixiu* cuffs.

Fig.7. (ca.1788- 94). *Liang Chaogui, in changshan.*

Portrait of a Manchu figure donned in a long, one-piece robe referred to as *changshan* or *changpao*, an emblematic representation of Manchu ethnicity. Notably, he wears practical riding boots, underscoring the utilitarian essence in the Manchu clothing style.

Fig. 8. (ca.1800). Qing dynasty court painting of the princesses Kurun Shou'an and Kurun Shou'en wearing *changyi,* characterized by its two-sided slits.

Fig. 9. (ca. 1890). *Manchu ladies at the Qing Imperial Court in Beijing.*
Manchu women in *chengyi,* without any side slits.

Fig. 10. (ca. 1800). A *magua* vest, worn by men and women.

Fig. 11. (early 20th century). A woman's sleeveless jacket, *pipa.*

Fig. 12. Thomson, John. (1898). *Through China with a camera.*

Late Qing dynasty Manchu woman in a one-piece long robe *changpao* with a *pipa* vest.

2.3 Assimilating fashion

Despite the regulatory framework aimed at preserving distinct ethnic clothing, it failed to entirely curtail the assimilation of clothing styles between the Han and Manchu people, particularly within the domain of women's attire. Due to the gradual assimilation of Manchu and Han Chinese ways of life, especially among women, by the 18th century, distinguishing a Manchu from a Han Chinese based on their sartorial practices had become increasingly challenging.[26]

The persistence of *hanfu* during the Qing era is depicted in some paintings originating from affluent Manchu and imperial households. In the family portrait "Four Generations of Manchu Family in Late Qing 1853", a wealthy family is portrayed. (Fig. 13).

The style of this genre of painting is referred to as *gong bi zhong cai*. This style is particularly valuable as a source for documenting material culture because it focuses on realistically depicting the environment and providing detailed representations of clothing and home decorations.

Within the painting, a clear representation of a Manchu family is presented, all dressed in *qizhuang*, however, the individual who conspicuously disrupts this balanced arrangement is the lone Han woman positioned on the far right. She is adorned in a long jacket *ao* and skirt *qun*, deviating from the conventional full-length robe, *changpao*. This contrast in ethnic clothing becomes apparent to the observer since, in contrast to the men, none of the women are adorned in official clothing. Instead, they don an informal style of dress referred to as *bianfu*.

The primary distinguishing feature between Manchu and Han women's clothing was that the former wore long robes, while the latter wore divided outfits consisting of upper jackets and lower skirts. As explained by the Manchu writer Zhenjun (1857–1920), "In Manchu custom, women's jackets are joined to the skirt, and do not separate the upper and lower; this is the ancient system."[27]

The visual representation of Han ethnicity in the portrait underscores the inherent tension between preserving Manchu identity and accommodating cultural diversity. This tension was intrinsically tied to the central role of women's attire, which served not only to reflect political stability and moral well-being but also to navigate the complex landscape of cultural interactions.[28]

[26] Schlesinger (2017), p. 18.
[27] Silbestein (2020), p. 19-21.
[28] Idem.

Fig. 13. (1853). A family portrait depicting four generations of an elite northern family in the late Qing dynasty.

In another notable painting titled "Enjoying Pleasures", Prince Yinzhen is wearing a blue *changpao* and is accompanied by four women, positioned apart by study walls and divided into pairs by a balustrade.[29] (Fig. 14).

The women in the background wear Manchu-style plain robes, with one of them featuring a decorative collar and border. They sport the *ruan chi tou* hairstyle (soft wings hairstyle). However, the attention is drawn to the younger pair in the front, as they are dressed in Han clothing styles featuring small cloud collars, *yun jian*, long sleeveless jackets, *bijia*, pleated skirts, and tasseled belts. These elements are all characteristic of the southern Han fashion of that period.[30]

What sets the "Yinzhen Enjoying Pleasures" painting apart is that it not only portrays contemporary clothing styles, as opposed to historical fantasy, but also prominently features the Manchu prince himself alongside these women of different ethnic backgrounds. This has led to the possibility that this painting might indeed be genuine records, suggesting that the consorts in question were, in fact, Han women dressed in traditional Han clothing.[31]

[29] Silberstein (2020), p. 27.
[30] Idem.
[31] Idem.

Fig. 14. (ca. 1708). Yinzhen Enjoying Pleasures (Yinzhen xingle tuzhou).

As previously discussed, *hanfu* continued to persist during the Qing period, despite the presence of clothing regulations aimed at governing the attire of various ethnic groups. Notably, Manchu women faced more stringent restrictions on their clothing choices. However, a relative lack of oversight regarding interactions in women's quarters and spaces within the court allowed for a gradual and persistent exchange of fashion styles. This exchange notably resulted in hybrid styles, predominantly evident in the design of bordered garments and the shapes of robes.

Manchu clothing typically consisted of a single long robe, *changpao*, often

characterized by its relative simplicity in terms of decorations. In contrast, Han women adorned their two-piece clothing with more intricate decorations. A discernible influence of the Manchu style on Han clothing is evident in the lengthening of the upper jacket, called *ao,* which gradually resembled a one-piece robe. Conversely, the influence of Han clothing on Manchu clothing is observed in the increased detailing of the garments especially during the late 19th century, particularly notable in the use of bordered embellishments.

These bordered garments provided a means for Manchu women to participate in the same fashion sphere as Han women, as exemplified in a photograph by John Thompson (Fig. 15).

In this image, a Manchu woman is attired in a long robe, featuring the distinct *liang ba tou* hairstyle. In contrast, her Han maid is dressed in a jacket *ao* and skirt *qun*, complemented by the hanging bun *Suzhou ji* hairstyle. While both ethnic groups maintained their unique clothing style, with the Manchu woman in *changpao* and the Han woman in *aoqun,* the fashionable use of bordered embellishments effectively transcended the sartorial boundaries established by regulations.

The emergence of hybrid clothing styles coincided with the complex socio-political tensions of the late 19th century and the diminishing power of the Qing dynasty. Nonetheless, Manchu clothing styles remained prominent in the sartorial landscape of China until the turn of the 20th century. With the advent of a Western capitalist market and the rise of a new intellectual class advocating for the removal of dynastic rule, the sartorial landscape began to undergo significant transformations. The early 20th century witnessed the adaptation of the one-piece long robe to suit the evolving socio-political spheres.

In the upcoming chapter, we will delve into the socio-historical context of Shanghai, where a new sartorial landscape emerged, ultimately paving the way for the development of the *qipao*.

Fig. 15. Thomsen, John. (ca. 1898). *Through China with a camera*.

Two women showcase their distinct Manchu and Han clothing styles and hairstyles. On the right, a Manchu woman in *changpao.* On the left, a Han woman in the two-piece clothing style, *ao* and *qun.*

2.4 Conclusion

What are the distinguishing characteristics of traditional costume culture in China, and how did regulations in the political landscape prior and during the Qing dynasty influence these characteristics?

The *hanfu* style is notably characterized by its loose-fitting garments, consisting of two parts. In contrast, the Manchu people prioritized practicality in their attire, favoring clothing that allowed ease of movement. The characteristics of *qizhuang* are the one-piece long robes, worn by both men and women, and often combined with vest such as the *magua* and the *pipa.* It becomes evident that Manchu clothing played a crucial role in establishing ethnic distinctions from the Han Chinese. To maintain order, stringent clothing regulations were imposed, particularly at the imperial court, where wearing Manchu-style clothing signified allegiance to the Qing dynasty. This symbolism was chiefly upheld in official spheres, but exemptions were granted in unofficial spheres; Han men and women were allowed to wear *hanfu*. The persistence of *hanfu* led to a fusion of *hanfu* and *qizhuang*, particularly evident in the decoration of the borders. Despite the rigorous regulations on Manchu clothing characteristics, the emperors eventually found it challenging to control the evolving styles.

The emphasis on expressing ethnic identity through clothing becomes particularly interesting when we look at the surge of nationalistic sentiments and the development of ideological national imagery in the early 20th century. A noteworthy instance is observed during the revolution against the Qing dynastic rule, where the Han Chinese voiced their discontent against the Manchu rulers, viewing them as “external” authorities distinct from the Han Chinese. The Han populace sought to distance themselves from Manchu rule, aspiring to modernize their society akin to Western advancements. This period of social upheaval prompted a quest for a renewed modern and cultural identity, particularly evident in shifts in clothing practices.

In the subsequent chapter, we will examine the historical backdrop of Shanghai in the late 19th and early 20th century, examining how historical events played a role in the emergence of the *qipao*.

Chapter Three: Historical Context of Shanghai and the *Qipao*

In the mid-19th century, the growing influence of Western powers began to reshape China's socio-political landscape, particularly noticeable in treaty port cities.

On August 29, 1842, the Treaty of Nanjing was signed, marking the end of the First Opium War (1839-1842) between Great Britain and the Qing dynasty. This treaty is now recognized as the starting point for a series of agreements later referred to as the "Unequal Treaties." These treaties forced the opening of five ports in China (Canton, Amoy, Foochow, Ningpo, and Shanghai), imposed fixed trade tariffs, introduced extraterritoriality clauses, granted most favored nation status to Western powers, and legalized the importation of British opium, all of which had significant social and economic implications for the Chinese population.[32]

Western nations established themselves in Shanghai, with the British, French, and Americans claiming specific areas within the city where they enjoyed special rights and privileges. In 1895, after the first Sino-Japanese war, Japan was granted a concession based on the Treaty of Shimonoseki.[33]

The pressure exerted by external powers on China gave rise to nationalist sentiments, particularly after the Boxer Rebellion of 1899-1901. This revolt led by a Chinese nationalist movement was directed against foreign influence, colonization, and the spread of Christianity and was ultimately suppressed by Western powers.

Following the suppression of the Boxer Rebellion, China did not experience a return to tranquility. Instead, the aftermath of the rebellion witnessed escalating tensions within the nation, characterized by a growing surge of nationalist and anti-Western sentiments. Additionally, there was a heightened response to the actions and authority of the emperor, blaming corrupt, weak and ineffective rule, both domestically and in dealing with external pressures. An increasing number of revolutionaries, people from various social and political backgrounds, advocated for modernization and the abandonment of imperial rule. This culmination ultimately led to the Xinhai Rebellion in 1911.

The Xinhai Revolution, named after the Chinese year Xinhai (approximately 1911), signified the conclusion of the Qing dynasty under Puyi, its last Manchu emperor. Initiated by the Tongmenghui group, established in 1905 by Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) and Song Jiaoren

[32] Nield (2017), p. 197.
[33] Nield (2017), p. 204.

(1882-1913), the revolution gained momentum through a series of uprisings, protests, and military actions. A crucial event occurred during the Wuchang Uprising on October 10, 1911, when Qing military units in Wuchang (present-day Wuhan) rebelled against the dynasty. This event prompted similar uprisings throughout China as other provinces and regions joined the call for change. Ultimately, the revolution culminated in the establishment of the Republic of China on February 12, 1912.

From 1915 until 1921, a broad movement emerged in China known as the New Culture Movement. This movement marked a progressive shift that scrutinized traditional Chinese principles such as Confucianism, advocating for the establishment of a new Chinese culture rooted in modern ideals.

The May Fourth demonstrations in 1919, represented a significant moment within this broader movement, led by students called "new youths", aimed at replacing traditional Confucian values and can be seen as a continuation of the Xinhai revolution. Their stance involved a rejection of traditional culture while seeking inspiration from international sources in the name of nationalism.[34]

In Shanghai, the sentiments of discontent found resonance among students and laborers who were challenging feudalism, capitalism, and government involvement in foreign imperialistic ventures. This discontent culminated in the "May Thirtieth" uprising of 1925. The uprising met brutal suppression, initiated by the Shanghai Municipal Police who opened fire on Chinese protesters within Shanghai's International Settlement. The resulting incidents of gunfire not only garnered global condemnation but also triggered extensive domestic protests and uprisings against foreign influences.

3.1 Shanghai: *Modeng* City

During this turbulent period, the forced opening of Shanghai to foreign trade led to the establishment of major European banks and various types of Western trading houses. Shanghai quickly became China's primary port city. Around 1860, this port accounted for approximately 25 percent of the total shipping tonnage entering and leaving the country.[35]

The significant impact of foreign trade also had cultural and lifestyle repercussions, including changes in clothing styles. In the early 20th century, there was a search for a style of dress that adequately expressed one's own identity. After the fall of the Qing dynasty, the

[34] Schwarcz (1990), p. 9.
[35] Finnane (2023), p. 103.

traditional way of dressing as dictated by the imperial court's fashion fell out of favor. It was associated with an outdated way of life that had no place in the new social order. Traditional Chinese clothing represented the attire of a society that had ultimately been defeated.[36] If clothing is a reflection of status and ambition, then traditional clothing was far from a guarantee of successful social life. Western influence in fashion was, therefore, inevitable. After the fall of the Qing dynasty, Shanghai evolved into the fashion capital of China, and Western companies introduced technological innovations in the fashion industry. New terms like *modeng* emerged, referring to what was modern in fashion and what was fashionable. *Modeng* is a Chinese transliteration of the English word "modern." The term first appeared in Shanghai, and became a popular buzzword among Shanghai's urban residents, used to describe just about anything new.[37] In this context, it applied not only to new urban infrastructures and new technologies, but also to a particular lifestyle encompassing various intellectual and artistic aspects of life. As a result, the concept of *modeng* was highly relevant in the sartorial context.

The emergence of Chinese modern culture was not the result of autonomous development within China's social evolution, but rather a somewhat passive choice made in response to strong Western cultural influences. It followed a trajectory from shock to fascination, envy, and eventually imitation in China's initial encounters with the West. The logic was that if the West had brought China to its knees, it meant that China's centuries-old traditions were outdated and needed to urgently adopt Western ways. To many, the West represented an ideal of a prosperous lifestyle and progressive ideas. People enthusiastically pursued Western merchandise, while stores capitalized on this demand by selling various imported foreign products.

At the same time, there was a strong psychological barrier to unconditionally embrace Western fashion due to the prevailing anti-Western sentiments. According to scholar Leo Ou-fan Lee (1999), China faced victimization but was never fully occupied by a Western power. Despite the absence of complete colonization, clear instances of racism and segregation continued to exist between Western and Chinese communities in Shanghai.[38]

Homi Bhabha's concept of "mimicry" explores the desire for a reformed Other that is both recognizable and different, challenging colonial authority. The "mimicry" is in this case to seek similarity with the Western imperialists without accepting as white, disrupting the colonial narrative with a gaze of 'otherness'. This phenomenon is observed among the Chinese elite in

[37] Edwards (2000), p. 130.
[38] Lee (1999), p. 309.

Shanghai who, despite holding Chinese citizenship, willingly embrace colonial subjecthood for the sake of complete Westernization. [39]

Thus, on one hand, the downfall of the Qing dynasty led to the rejection of traditional clothing styles. On the other hand, strong anti-Western sentiments that had developed hindered full acceptance of Western fashion. This deeply ambivalent attitude towards Western fashion prompted a quest for a clothing style that was both modern and true to one's own cultural identity. The complete rejection of the past, driven by recent humiliating historical events, gradually gave way to a more tolerant, exploratory attitude toward one's own culture. Perhaps there were elements within it that, detached from their historical context, still held value and could be updated with some adjustments to begin a new life in modern society. The embodiment of this modern adjustment in the sartorial landscape is the *qipao*.

3.2 Qipao

The *qipao* that emerged during the early 20th century, a traditional yet cosmopolitan garment, assumed a complex role as both an expression of anti-imperialism and a reflection of modernity. Since the Han dynasty (25-220 AC), Han-Chinese women's clothing followed a distinct pattern known as *liang jie chuan yi*, characterized by a two-part top-bottom structure, as detailed in chapter two. This sartorial tradition has endured for centuries, extending into the early 1920s. The top and bottom components underwent significant transformations, but the enduring division between them became a defining element of Han Chinese female identity.[40]

In contrast, Manchu women wore a one-piece robe. The *qipao*'s origin is attributed to the inspiration drawn from Manchu women's informal dress, *changpao* or *chenyi.* The *qipao*'s structure bears resemblance to this one-piece robe, with the notable distinction of a slit on the wearer's left side, absent in *chenyi*. Another theory posits that the *qipao* may have originated from the Manchu male gown, as *qipao* directly translates to "banner gown". *Qi* represents "banner" and alludes to the Manchu people. In Cantonese, the *qipao* is known as *cheongsam*, signifying a "long robe." In Mandarin, the equivalent term is *changsan*, denoting the "Manchu male robe." This suggests that the *qipao* may have evolved from male attire.[41]

However, from the 1910s to the early 1920s, Han women's clothing predominantly consisted of the essential *ao* (flared top/jacket) and *qun* (flared skirt). During the early Republic

[39] Bhabha (1984), p. 86–90.
[40] Han (2017), p. 9.
[41] Idem., p. 15.

years, the prevailing silhouette adopted an "A" shape, created by this two-piece clothing style. (Fig.16). In the 1920s, variations of this two-piece style began to emerge, characterized by a shift toward a one-piece robe. For instance, while earlier tops (*ao*) could be paired with a vest (*majia*) of the same length, the 1920s saw the emergence of exceptionally long vests that replaced the skirt, *qun.* These early variations maintained the A-shaped silhouette of the *ao* and *qun*. Over time, an array of diverse *qipao* styles emerged, defying easy categorization: some had slit sides, while others did not; some featured accordion pleats along the slit; and collar styles ranged from traditional mandarin collars enclosed by buttons to simpler "tube collars" known as *tongzi ling*. Decorative elements varied widely, with Western Art Deco motifs such as radial and geometrical patterns finding incorporation.[42] The *qipao*'s silhouette transitioned into a more rectangular H shape in the mid-1920s. (Fig. 17). By the 1930s, it had evolved into a closer-fitting form, with each *qipao* custom-tailored to fit its wearer's measurements. Despite its increasing popularity and standardization during the 1930s, the *qipao* was not a mandated uniform for all. Diversity in style and design remained pronounced. (Fig. 18, 19 and 20).

A typical 1930s *qipao* featured a main body of fabric cut as a single entity, eschewing the intricate stitching seen in more complex garments. It featured a stiff mandarin collar that accentuated a gracefully elongated neck and was adorned with sets of detailed crafted silk buttons. These buttons secured the front opening, known as *jin*, which extended across the side opening until reaching the slit.[43]

[42] Idem., p. 14.
[43] Idem.

Fig. 16. women wearing two- piece A- shaped clothing style popular during the 1910-1920s.

Fig. 17. H- shape *qipao* 1920s.

Soong Ching-ling, the wife of Sun Yat-sen, adorned in a *qipao* reflective of the 1920s fashion, exhibits the characteristic H-shaped silhouette of the era.

Fig. 18. Close-fitted *qipao* Shanghai, 1930s.

Fig. 19. Actress Ruan Lingyu wearing a close-fitted *qipao*, 1930s.

Fig. 20. An overview of style evolution of the *qipao*.

3.3 Qipao and the modern identity

While societal expectations influence women's clothing choices, the wearer is not entirely oppressed; rather, they weave their aspirations into their clothing, communicating with the world through their dress. Thus, we will see how the *qipao* is taking part of the modern Chinese women's discourse, and how this is perceived within China's socio-political landscape.

Qingxuan Han, in "Qipao and Female Fashion", contends that the *qipao* represents an early manifestation of modern individuality through fashion in China. [44] Within the context of national politics during the early 20th century, clothing, particularly the *qipao*, becomes a prominent stage for societal debates and reflections on the sexual order. Han underscores how the role of the *qipao* symbolizes the negotiation of personal space in the evolving landscape of modern feminine transformations in the Republican era.[45]

The *qipao* was first worn by young middleclass women and members of the Yongjia Natural Feet and Natural Breast society. [46] (Fig. 21). Since the *qipao* in the early 1920s was very similar to male *changpao,* it was not surprising that these dresses were worn by political invested women. (Fig. 22). Women started adopting unconventional roles, some choosing to dress as men in their quest for equal rights, challenging traditional gender norms and Confucian societal standards.

With the Xinhai uprising, women were encouraged to actively engage in the political and revolutionary spheres. One remarkable development during this period was the establishment of a "Women's Army," led by the visionary Wu Shuqing (1892 – unknown). Inspired by the heroic tales of literary and historical female warriors like Hua Mulan, this move underscored the profound importance of women within the political arena. Wu Shuqing was driven by a deep-seated belief in gender equality, firmly holding that every citizen, regardless of their gender, bore the responsibility to defend their nation.[47] In her case, this translated into a fierce commitment to fight for the "Great Han nation" against foreign powers and the ruling Qing dynasty. Wu Shuqing's unwavering conviction exemplified the prevailing spirit of the time, a time when women's clothing choices symbolized a profound yearning for equal rights.

[44] Idem.
[45] Idem.
[46] Finnane (2023), p.161. The Yongjia (Wenzhou) campaign for natural feet and breast run under the Yongjia Women's Association. These campaigns were associated with progressive ideologies for women's liberation, yet they faced diverse receptions in Chinese society. While the acceptance of natural feet occurred relatively quickly, the matter of breasts was met with different considerations. The primary concern voiced against breast binding was health-related. Critics argued that this practice hindered proper breast development and was evidently associated with breast-related health issues.
[47] Finnane (2023), p. 89.

Another influential woman figure Qiu Jin (1875-1907) was at the forefront of the Xinhai revolution, and traveled to Tokyo in pursuit of their cause. During the years 1904 and 1905, there was a surge in political activism among Chinese overseas students. Qiu Jin, in her quest for a new identity, used clothing as her canvas, challenging conventional gender roles. She also became an outspoken advocate against the practice of foot binding. Qiu Jin stated: "My aim is to dress like a man. If I first take on the appearance of a man, then I believe my mind too will eventually become like that of a man."[48]

Both of these women exemplify the early stages of shaping and seeking the identity of the modern woman, highlighting the evolving and blurred gender roles in Chinese society during this period.

Gender in Chinese society revealed itself to be highly performative, deeply entrenched in social roles that could be inhabited by individuals of any gender. Daughters were prepared to step into the roles of sons, and by dressing themselves in men's clothing, they could contribute to the nation's salvation, a connection to the nation's self-strengthening endeavors.[49] However, the image of the modern woman and their ambiguous gender roles within the emerging society, did not sit comfortably for male conservative intellectuals. The political instability during the early stage of the Republic, led to cultural preoccupation of the sexual order. Women were exploited as signifier of modernity and progressiveness in China, yet they were not genuinely empowered to embody these ideals.

During the initial phase of women adopting the *qipao*, it received approval from conservatives due to its alignment with traditional Chinese moral values, emphasizing modesty and body coverage rather than the Western fashion trend of baring the body. This idea was articulated by magazines that were just emerging in Shanghai. The characteristics of Chinese clothing outlined in women's magazines echoed those proposed by Chinese scholar Lin Yutang (1895–1976).[50] Lin Yutang encouraged Chinese people to wear Chinese clothes, and stressed the dichotomous aesthetic of Chinese and Western clothing; the former served to conceal, the latter to reveal the body. Accordingly, "Western clothes suited only the young and beautiful; it would be cruel to those old and fat."[51] In contrast, Chinese clothes offered equality to wearers: "beauty could be revealed and ugliness could be concealed."[52]

[48] Idem.
[49] Idem.
[50] Ling (2011), p. 360.
[51] Yutang (1938), p. 257-62.
[52] Idem.

The intellectual discourse surrounding women's clothing during this period mirrors the political turmoil that characterized the era. The concept of the modern woman served as a window into the concerns of the male conservative intellectual class regarding power dynamics and governance in a rapidly modernizing China.

In the early Republican era, women were encouraged by the state to embark on a path of "modernization." This entailed acquiring education and participating in intellectual spheres to contribute to the nation's progress. This modernization extended to their clothing as exemplified by the emergence of the *qipao*. However, this transition was often more symbolic than substantive.

Conversely, conservatives were deeply troubled by the blurring of traditional gender roles and the perceived erosion of their own power and authority. In response, they sought solace in Confucian ideals, rallied against Western influences, and as a result, encouraged women to revert to traditional Chinese clothing.

This struggle among the Chinese male intellectuals, driven by their fear of losing influence, reflects the broader global context of Western dominance in non-Western societies. Edward Said, in his 1978 work *Orientalism*, delves into the concept of the feminization of non-European nations and individuals within the context of colonialism and imperialism. He highlights how imperialist expansion was steeped in metaphors of sexual dominance. Said argues that orientalism is essentially a male-dominated realm and a manifestation of male power fantasies. It revolves around the idea of penetrating, subduing, and possessing the virgin lands of Asia.[53] In this framework, China was often portrayed as the woman subjected to the dominance of European and American manhood.

Between the mid-1920s and mid-1930s, the notion of "modern" attributes in clothing became a focal point of discussions. The association between clothing choices and political importance was so profound that individuals, regardless of gender, endured physical abuse and imprisonment based solely on their clothing choices and hairstyles. Lu Xun (1881-1936), the head of the League of Left-Wing Writers in Shanghai, wrote in 1927, "The newspaper described a district where short hair was encouraged; but another army came in, and wherever they found a bobbed-haired woman they would slowly tear out her hair and cut off her breasts".[54]

At the same time, different groups began using external symbols of modernity to convey a range of social messages, placing greater importance on commercial aspects rather than

[53] Said (1978), p. 207.
[54] Xun [1927] 1980: 354.

political ones. This shift broadened the meanings attributed to clothing and hairstyles. Commercial enterprises promoted the concept of the modern woman, transforming modern clothing into an aesthetic statement linked to commercial influence. What were once seen as symbols of modernity, used by reformist intellectuals as a means of advocating change, now became instruments within the commercial sector's arsenal.

The *qipao* evolved as a subtle yet powerful tool for Chinese women to resist state control over their bodies. Through creative adaptations of style and responses to Western fashion influences, Chinese women strategically harnessed the *qipao* as a means of rebellion against the authority of the nation.

The dissemination of new fashion trends was greatly facilitated by the rise of the advertising industry in Shanghai. As mass media platforms emerged, advertising itself became a prominent feature of Chinese commercial life. This development played a crucial role in shaping evolving styles, including the *qipao*, and will be explored further in the upcoming chapter. It will delve into how the controversial *qipao* was portrayed and manifested in popular visual culture during the early 20th century, shedding light on its cultural significance and evolution.

Fig. 21. (1928). Members of the Yongjia Short Hair and Natural Breast Movement. All women wearing H- shaped *qipao*.

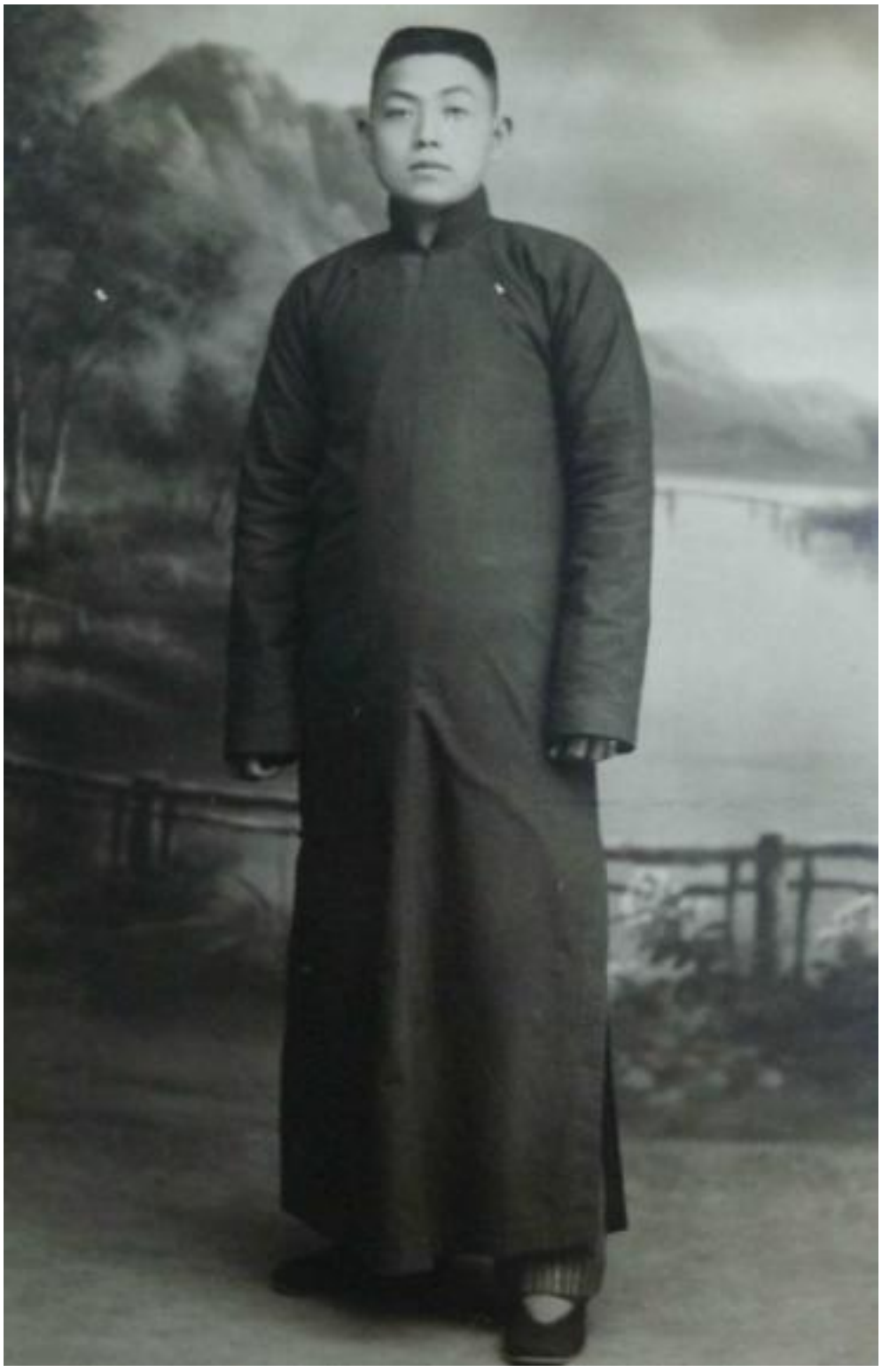

Fig. 22. Chinese man wearing a *Changshan,* similar to the *qipao.*

3.4 Conclusion

To what extent did the historical context in Shanghai in the early 20th century contribute to the evolution of the qipao?

In this chapter we looked at how the historical context in the early 20th century played a role in the evolution of the sartorial landscape in Shanghai, and resulting in the development of the *qipao*, a symbol of sartorial modernity in China. Shanghai's socio-historical landscape accentuated the tension between preserving tradition and embracing modernization to a significant extent.

Shanghai stood at the crossroads of social and political changes. It was a melting pot of influences, boasting a diverse population and serving as a hub for international trade. This cosmopolitan environment exposed the city to Western styles and ideas, influencing the sartorial landscape.

The *qipao*, emerging during this era, was a reflection of Shanghai's cosmopolitanism. It blended traditional Chinese elements with modern aesthetics. This fusion was a testament to the city's position as a bridge between the old and the new.

We have seen in this chapter, that the political turmoil during this period led to concerns about the societal order, particularly in terms of gender. The modern woman in the *qipao* posed a threat by conservative intellectuals who found themselves uncertain about their own position in the newly established modern society.

The proliferation of the evolving *qipao* was facilitated by the rise of popular visual culture, a significant transformation in the historical context of Shanghai. In the following chapter, we will explore the impact of popular culture and how it portrayed the concept of the modern woman, showcasing the evolution of the *qipao*.

Chapter Four: Popular Visual Culture and the Modern Woman

At the end of the 19th century and early 20th century, Shanghai experienced a profound transformation driven by the influx of Western capitalism and modernization. This period marked a significant shift in the city's cultural and societal landscape, as Shanghai evolved from a traditional society to a burgeoning urban center seeking a modern identity. At the heart of this transformation was the rise of print culture, a medium that played an important role in disseminating new ideas, shaping identities, and guiding individuals through the complexities of modernity.

The inception of the first Shanghai newspaper, the *Shenbao*, in 1872 by British businessman Ernest Major, marked a unique attempt to cater to a Chinese audience. Alongside the newspaper, the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, a pictorial magazine, was created, further aimed at a Chinese readership. This shift toward local relevance was evident in the choice of Chinese artists to illustrate the content, which often focused on Shanghai and Chinese themes.

The proliferation of newspapers in Shanghai also paved the way for the development of magazines, including publications like the *Young Companion* (1926), *Shanghai Manhua* (1928) and *Ling Long* (1931). These magazines were particularly influential in shaping modern society in Shanghai, especially among women and students. They featured depictions of young, beautiful women, frequently film actresses, who became iconic representations of modern femininity. These magazines provided guidance on how women should dress and behave, both defining and challenging the concept of the modern woman.

Calendar posters, which began to feature prominently in magazines, was another medium that played a significant role in shaping perceptions of the modern woman. Their value often extended beyond the goods they advertised. These advertisement calendar posters often portrayed women in alluring poses and attire, and the women themselves became commodities; calendar posters were acquired not so much for the products they promoted but for the fashionable and seductive women they showcased.

Early magazines and calendar posters often featured women in *qipao*. The transformation of the *qipao* and the portrayal of the female body in popular media was influenced by a confluence of factors. Western capitalism, the development of print culture and the emergence of cinema all played a role in shaping public discourse on modernity and fashion.

Benedict Anderson's work *Imagined Communities* (1983) laid the foundation for understanding the impact of print media on forming communities in modern societies, referring especially to novels and newspapers.[55] Leo Ou-fan Lee's "Shanghai Modern" further expanded this concept to encompass the role of magazines and print advertisements such as calendar posters in shaping a modern community in Shanghai.[56]

The interconnectedness of newspapers, magazines, calendar posters, and films played a significant role in defining modernity in early 20th century Shanghai, highlighting the influence of these mediums in guiding individuals through a rapidly changing and complex era. The fashion landscape in Shanghai, particularly the representation of the *qipao*, was central to the evolving modern identity.

Of particular interest was the role of women and the attire they wore in popular culture, which held a distinct fascination, especially for middle-class and high-society women. These women sought guidance from popular culture on how to navigate the evolving standards of the era.

Given the vast landscape of popular culture in Shanghai during this period, the focus for this research will be on three key categories that exerted a profound influence on the fashion landscape for Shanghainese women and significantly shaped the presentation and perceptions associated with the *qipao*: magazines, calendar posters and films.

4.1 Magazines

The emergence of modern magazines in China marked a significant cultural and social shift in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Among the earliest examples was the *Dianshizhai* Pictorial (1884–1898), a Chinese-language magazine published in Shanghai, which gained immense popularity among readers. This magazine was a lithographed supplement to *Shenbao*, one of the first Chinese newspapers founded by Ernest Major in 1872.

Dianshizhai represented a unique blend of traditional Chinese painting techniques and influences from foreign magazines. The magazine was a testament to Shanghai's hybrid culture. The publications were primarily dedicated to political and social critique, along with a discerning examination of foreign imperialism, an issue acutely felt in the cosmopolitan city of Shanghai.

Dianshizhai's appeal lay in its combination of text and striking visuals, making it

[55]Anderson (1983).
[56] Lee (1999).

accessible to a broad audience, including those from the lower classes and children. Notably, within the pages of *Dianshizai* pictorials, a range of topics gained popularity. These included fantastical tales, drama, religious narratives, and aspects of city culture. At times, real-life events from newspapers were adapted into fantastical stories.

One of the most notable illustrators of the *Dianshizai* was Wu Youru (unknown -1894). His illustrations captured the nuances of daily life and societal customs in a quasi-journalistic manner. The illustration titled "Westerners Sight a Dragon", is such an example. (Fig. 23). This illustration invites viewers to explore the collision of new and traditional knowledge. The narrative is set up as a juxtaposition between the enduring Chinese fascination with dragons, a familiar topic throughout history, and the newfound Western fascination with scientific methodologies as a measure of existence and truth.[57]

European newspapers had recently recounted a story of a steamship off the southern coast of Africa encountering a massive whirlpool during a storm. The crew speculated that only an enormous fish could create such a phenomenon. However, due to the lack of physical evidence, their account was dismissed. The *Dianshizhai* writer contended that Chinese people would readily recognize this as a powerful dragon, a creature inherently shape-shifting and imperceptible in the midst of a storm.[58] The writer's message is clear: it is unwise to label something as strange merely because it is unfamiliar. This encounter transcends a clash of knowledge systems.[59]

Intriguingly, with this example from the *Dianshizhai*, it becomes apparent that during the emergence of new print culture and the influx of newspaper stories, there existed an interplay between fantasy and reality. Notably, *Dianshizhai* effectively challenged the conventions of its time by incorporating both the extraordinary and the commonplace, often drawing inspiration from actual events.

An example of the *Dianshizhai* that underscores the challenges of forming a modern identity for Chinese women in an era where modernity itself was a nebulous concept, is the depiction of the "One hundred Shanghai beauties".

In another illustration by Wu Youru "Even I feel Affection for You as I See You", the "hundred beauties" theme was updated by depicting Chinese women in modern settings, including two women posing for their portrait in a photographer's studio. (Fig. 24). One can argue that Youru was the first illustrator to tackle the topic of "modern woman'', setting the

[57] Nedostup (2015).
[58] Idem.
[59] Idem.

trend in which many other illustrators and photographers were to follow depicting the "modern woman" theme. The modern aspect of the woman in the center posing in the lithograph doesn't pertain to the clothing she is wearing in this case, rather, it lies more in her self-awareness surrounded by a modern setting. The woman actively engages in self-objectification, symbolizing a conscious interaction with her own representation. The lithograph itself embodies modernity by incorporating meta-criticism of visual reprographics. It merges elements of both a photograph and a lithograph, representing a modernist response to the evolving societal changes in China.[60]

Fig. 23. Youru, Wu (1886). Westerners Sight a Dragon in *Dianshizhai.*

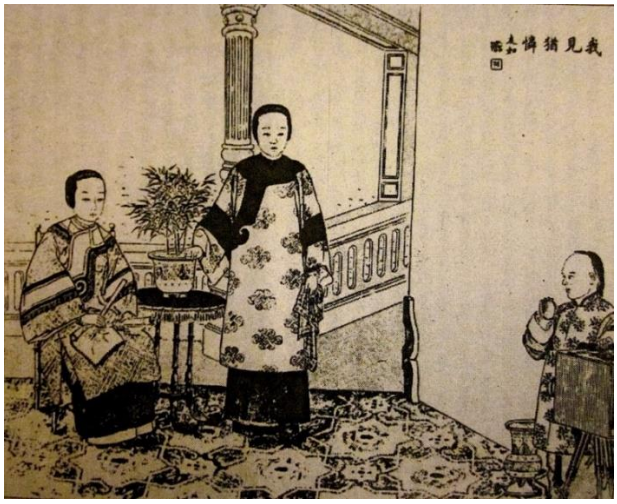

Fig. 24. Youru, Wu (1893). Even I Feel Affection for You as I See You in *Dianshizhai.*

[60] Pang (2007), p.73.

The curation of magazines during early 20th century Shanghai, can be seen as similar to these early pictorials; blending socio-political critique and actual events, with the imagination of idealized modern women, fashion and cinema, creating a kind of fantastical representation of the emerging reality in modern society, where individuals were adapting to a changing world.

The rise of magazines during this era significantly elevated the importance of visual culture and played an important role in reshaping the social fabric of Shanghai, particularly in redefining the roles of women in society. In this context, we will explore three influential magazines that were instrumental in the cultural and visual transformation of early 20th century Shanghai.

The Young Companion (1926-1945)

The Young Companion, established in 1926, was a pictorial magazine that predominantly targeted the urban youth, women from middle to upper-class backgrounds, and students. Despite its Chinese name, *Liangyou*, it prominently featured the English name "The Young Companion" on its cover.

The magazine covered a wide array of topics, from depictions of intellectuals and politicians to explorations of *qipao* fashion's evolution.

The magazine consistently showcased Chinese film actresses and beautiful debutants of Shanghai society as models for the latest fashion trends, but the magazine gained mostly a reputation for its cover girls depicted as "modern girls in motion". These cover girls projected an image of modernity and activity, which was often reflected in the content as women engaged in sports.

The Young Companion magazine had a strong focus on advocating for the well-being and energy of young individuals, particularly women. This aligns with the "New Life Movement," a cultural initiative driven by concerns about corruption and moral decline in China, often attributed to foreign influences. The movement aimed to rejuvenate and uplift Chinese society by instilling core values of health, ethics, and virtue.[61] The Young Companion shared this mission, seeking to inspire young people to lead more active and virtuous lives.

Cunningham in *Modern girls in motion* (2013), explores the transformation of women's representation in athletics in The Young Companion. Initially, there was an expectation that women's participation in athletics could lead to their emancipation. However, The Young

[61] Cunningham (2013), p. 101.

Companion shifted their focus from athletic aspects to sexuality, using women's sports to cater to the male gaze and present a model of femininity for female viewers. The magazine initially portrayed women as athletes promoting health but later transitioned to eroticizing them in activewear, emphasizing the visual appeal rather than the actual sports participation.[62] The imagery included full-body shots of women, showcasing their bodies without necessarily engaging in sports. (Fig. 25 and 26).

Cunningham underscores the parallel between the modern woman in a *qipao* and the modern woman in sportswear, both representing societal perceptions on the modern woman identity. (Fig. 27). Consequently, the identity of the modern woman was shaped through these visual representations, showcasing them in *qipao* or otherwise suggesting their engagement in sustaining a healthy physique, the emphasis not on women in motion, but rather on presenting the modern women's bodies. This deliberate presentation aimed to capture the male gaze while simultaneously encouraging women to compare themselves with the depicted ideals showcased in the magazines.

Fig. 25. Cover of The Young Companion. Swimmer Yang Xiuqiong on issue #77, 1933.

[62] Idem.

Fig. 26. Cover of The Young Companion. Tennis player on issue #69, 1932.

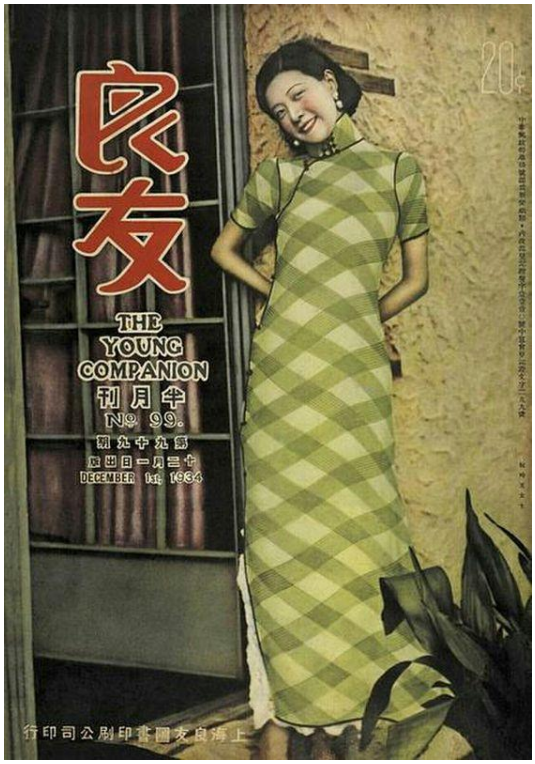

Fig. 27. Cover of The Young Companion. Actress Ruan Lingyu on issue #99, 1934.

Shanghai Manhua (1928-1930)

The contemplation on the ideals of modern womanhood, their actions and their appearances, was a recurrent theme in the pictorial *Shanghai Manhua*. Initially titled "Shanghai Sketch", was a weekly pictorial magazine from Shanghai, from 1928 to 1930. Regarded as the first successful *manhua* magazine in China and one of the most influential, it left an indelible mark on Chinese popular culture, inspiring numerous imitators in Shanghai and across the country.[63] The magazine was distinguished by its provocative cover art, often portraying the modern woman in Shanghai society.

During the mid-1920s, a significant transformation took place as the "new woman" emerged as a more active figure in the public sphere. The term "new woman" and "modern woman" were often used interchangeably during the period spanning the 1910s to the 1930s. These terms represented a new, dynamic, and at times disruptive force in modern Chinese society.[64] This transformation extended to the portrayal of the modern woman as a seductive figure pursuing her desires. She embodied a blend of eroticism, commerce, and the exotic elements of urban culture.[65]

These ideas found vivid visual expression in the various covers of *Shanghai Manhua*. Notably, Ye Qianyu's illustration "Serpent and Woman", featured on the fourth issue of the magazine, portrayed a nude woman provocatively embracing a smirking, coiled serpent. (Fig. 28). In Chinese culture, the serpent carried historical associations with the concept of a seductive woman or femme fatale, epitomized by expressions like "a beauty as vicious as a snake and a viper".[66]

Moreover, the magazine showcased the fascination of men with attractive women and the humorous incidents that often ensued. For instance, in a Ding Song sketch called "Front and Back", two men, one dressed in traditional Chinese attire and the other in Western clothing, appeared stern while passing a beautiful woman, but their faces lit up after they passed her. (Fig. 29).

[63] Laing (2010).
[64] Idem.
[65] Idem.
[66] Idem.

Fig. 28. Qianyu, Ye. “Serpent and Woman.” Shanghai manhua 4 (May 12, 1928), front cover.

Fig. 29. Song, Ding. “Front and Back.” Shanghai manhua 45 (March 9, 1929): 5.

The depiction of women in *Shanghai Manhua* consistently revolved around the theme of modernity and was often presented in a provocative and satirical manner. A notable example of this is found in the humorous "Recent Empresses" cartoons created by Lu Shaofei and Ye Qianyu. (Fig. 30 and 31). These cartoons playfully categorized women from a diverse range of 'feminine professions' as empresses, wives of physiognomists, street prostitutes, dance hall performers and movie stars.[67]

In examining these sketches, we gain valuable insights into the fashion landscape of Shanghai during that era. We see women donning *qipao*, with lengths ranging from long to above the knee, and also women wearing traditional two-piece Chinese clothing. Moreover, these illustrations provide a window into how society viewed women. While some modern women were seen as progressive, the magazine often portrayed them as mindless consumers.

Shanghai Manhua used striking covers and sketches to offer a distinctive perspective on urban life, with a particular focus on the lives of urban women. This thematic departure contributed significantly to the magazine's popularity among Shanghai's elite, as it encapsulated the city's allure and reflected the evolving attitudes and perspectives of the time.

[67] Idem.

Fig. 30. Shaofei, Lu. “Recent Empresses.” Shanghai manhua 15 (July 29, 1928): 5.

Fig. 31. Qianyu, Ye. “Recent Empresses.” Shanghai manhua 18 (Aug. 18, 1928): 4.

Ling long Magazine (1931-1937)

The final magazine that will be investigated is *Ling long*, a compact weekly publication. This magazine occupied a unique and influential position in the early 20th century magazine landscape. Published by the San Ho Publishing Company on Nanjing Road, Shanghai, *Ling long* began in 1931, and continued until 1937, completing a total of 298 issues.

Ling long was divided into two primary sections, one dedicated to women's issues and the other centered on entertainment and cinema. The former section featured a wide range of topics related to women's daily lives, encompassing discussions on cosmetics, household management, Chinese and Hollywood films, as well as childcare. Notably, the magazine did not shy away from addressing subjects related to human intimacy, with contributions even coming from secondary school students.

Ling long was, in essence, a guide for the aspirations of the ideal "new woman". It transformed the question of "How to be a perfect woman?" into a more assertive, "How to be a perfect woman and, naturally, be superior to men?".[68] This redefined portrayal was characterized by self-confidence and an unapologetic stance regarding the male gaze.

Ling long's readership comprised the "new woman" of China and cosmopolitan residents of Shanghai who had emerged from the schools and factories of urban China during the 1920s. The magazine's evolution was shaped more by political factors than economic ones, particularly the influence of the New Life Movement.[69] Consequently, from 1934 onward the magazine adopted a more conservative stance. The escalating Japanese aggression marked the end of *Ling long*, with its final issue published just two days before the invasion of Shanghai.

An intriguing observation regarding *Ling long* is the stark contrast between the front and back covers of the magazine. The front cover consistently featured a beautiful Chinese woman, often wearing a *qipao* with Western accessories, portrayed in a modest posture. In contrast, the back cover predominantly featured American actresses or scenes from Hollywood movies, often in a more provocative manner. This juxtaposition between Chinese and Western representations of women was likely deliberate, presenting two distinct archetypes of modern women in the evolving society. This approach prompted readers to contemplate what constituted modesty and where the line between propriety and excessiveness was drawn. (Fig. 32 and 33).

[68] Edwards (2012), p. 3.
[69] Idem., p. 4.

Fig. 32. Cover of Ling long. Ms. Chen Meier graduated from Guanghua University, issue # 8 May, 1931.

Fig. 33. Backside cover of Ling long: Movie star Marguerite Churchill with a seductive gaze. Issue # 8 May, 1931.

In conclusion, these early 20th century magazines, through their visual and written content, defined and reflected the evolving identities of women in early 20th century Shanghai. They were not just fashion guides but cultural mirrors, showcasing the changing values, aspirations, and sensibilities of the era, and the evolving significance of the *qipao* as a symbol of modernity and empowerment.

Moreover, within these magazines, calendar posters held a significant presence. The visual impact of these commercial calendar posters was remarkably influential, and it is worth exploring some examples to gain deeper insights into their cultural significance and the visual language they employed.

4.2 Calendar posters

At the turn of the 20th century, the Chinese market experienced a dynamic interplay between Western and Chinese companies, resulting in a competitive frenzy to promote products and services. The primary medium for this promotion was printed advertising, with calendar posters taking a central stage in China's visual landscape. These posters, known as *yuefenpai*, borrowed the art of colorful lithography from the West and were predominantly directed towards Chinese consumers. Specialized Chinese artists designed them, and an estimated 700,000 of these calendar posters were produced for both domestic and overseas Chinese markets over three decades.[70]

Traditional Chinese woodblock print calendars had a long history, deeply rooted in culture and tradition. However, with the increasing influence of Western commercial firms in China by 1898, there was a shift towards the adoption of the Western calendar for business and banking, emphasizing practical information like correspondence between the Chinese and Western calendars and tide tables to cater to merchants.[71]

Despite their traditional origins, traditional Chinese calendars did not effectively incorporate the advertising of goods or services, especially when compared to the dynamic persuasion techniques seen in modern urban advertising from the West. This new form of advertising featured pages adorned with pictorial advertisements for various products.

Zhou Muqiao, a prominent artist, played an important role in shaping advertisement

[70] Liang (2004), p. 3.
[71] Idem., p. 27.

calendar posters, particularly through his portrayal of women. In 1914, he introduced the concept of "modern Westernized" women as central figures in calendar posters.[72] These women, depicted in full-scale format, signaled a departure from traditional themes and set the stage for the emergence of the popular theme of beautiful women in advertisement calendars.

Various artists, including Zheng Mentuo, also explored modern themes in their artwork, showcasing contemporary portrayals of women. In contrast to earlier depictions of delicate women with bound feet, these images featured women with natural-sized feet and Western accessories, challenging traditional norms.

This shift was not without its share of provocative poses and clothing, with some women being depicted in form-fitting dresses. The calendar posters captured the changing dynamics of Chinese society, which simultaneously upheld traditional ideals while embracing modernity.

This period also saw an increased focus on targeting female consumers, especially in the advertising of products like cigarettes. (Fig. 34). The calendar poster from Nanyang Brothers Tobacco Company, is a striking example in which the Chinese calendar is presented next to the Western calendar, showing the influences from western commercialization. The women depicted has a porcelain white skin, wearing traditional Chinese clothing with unbound feet. The backdrop is an idyllic setting of a Chinese landscape. This depiction of a woman as center figure for the commodity, sets the tone for many calendar posters featuring women. The portrayal of women's sensuality in advertisements became more prominent, reminiscent of Western advertising trends (Fig. 35 and 36)..

[72] Idem., p. 102.

Fig. 34. Nanyang Brothers Tobacco Company Calendar Poster, 1921.

Fig. 35. Nanyang Brothers Tobacco Company Calendar Poster, 1930s.

Fig. 36. A Coca-Cola poster depicting Chinese silent film actress Ruan Lingyu 阮玲玉, 1927.

These posters represented a fusion of foreign and Chinese influences and played with the semiotics of bodily gestures and clothing, revealing the interplay between local and global elements and constructing the modern world in the visual sphere. Modern Chinese women were stereotypically depicted and commoditized, often portrayed either as political progressives or decadent modern girls. Calendar posters often depicted women as empty signifiers. The primary focus was on the dominant discourse of consumerism rather than the association with the advertised products themselves. In essence, these posters capture the evolving visual culture of a nation undergoing radical transformation, reflecting the complexities and contradictions of a society in flux.

4.3 Films

One of the most influential mediums for disseminating fashion trends in early 20th century Shanghai was the cinema. The epicenter of the film industry was Shanghai, particularly during the 1930s, which is renowned as the golden era of Chinese cinema, marked by the emergence of leftist cinematic movements.

This cinematic wave in the 1930s gave rise to notable films like “The Goddess” and “The Big Road,” which depicted themes of class struggle, external threats posed by Japanese invasion, and the influence of Western imperial powers. These films often portrayed the hardships faced by the lower class in society. However, the Japanese occupation in 1937 resulted in the closure of all production companies in Shanghai, except for the Xinhua Film Company.

In this context, movies served as a dynamic medium to showcase the social changes unfolding in Shanghai. In tandem with the leftist movement and the Communist Party of China’s ideology, cinema reflected the evolving roles and identities of women in Chinese society.

In the earlier stage of cinema, women were predominantly cast in decorative roles, defined as *huaping*. In this paradigm, women’s significance rested on their physical attractiveness rather than their acting skills. The *qipao*, functioning as an alluring dress, was used to seduce the male gaze, portraying women as objects of desire. Laura Mulvey’s assertion about women standing as signifiers for the male other resonates in this context, depicting women as bearers of meaning rather than creators of meaning:

"Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out this phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning."[73]

The film *The Peach Girl* (1931) serves as an illustrative example of the *huaping* role. The main character's transition from a voiceless and pure rural girl to a city girl is marked by a symbolic shift. The peach flower, representing her virtue as a country girl, is left behind when she goes to the city, and starts dressing in a close-fitting *qipao*. This transformation signifies not only a change in clothing but also a shift in demeanor, replacing modesty with sensuality.[74]

Following the Shanghai bombardment in 1932 by the Japanese army, the cinematic landscape underwent a transformation. The women's *huaping* roles of the 1920s gave way to social roles, particularly those aligned with the national cause. Leftist film productions presented women roles symbolizing China, leveraging the female image to address the country's perceived weakness and passive state under Japanese invasion. These films aimed to create awareness among the masses, advocating the necessity to resist passivity and fight the Japanese enemy.[75] Actresses like Ruan Lingyu personified heroines who actively fought for the popular cause, marking a shift in cinematic representation towards more socially engaged and politically charged roles for women.

A significant reflection of the transformative period of women in Chinese society can be found in the 1935 film titled the "New Women." The movie draws inspiration from the life of Ai Xia, a Chinese actress and writer who tragically ended her own life in 1934. Ai Xia's experiences, particularly her role in "A Modern Woman" in 1933, acted as a catalyst for the creation of the film, shedding light on the struggles and challenges that women faced during this era.

As we have analyzed, the early 20th century saw a shift in the portrayal of women in China, as they began to feature more prominently in magazines and advertisements, exemplifying a modern lifestyle. Women's education was actively encouraged, providing them with pathways into the workforce. However, this modernization of women's roles was not without its critics, who argued that educated women were neglecting their traditional family duties, sparking debates about the evolving roles and expectations of women in Chinese society.

[73] Mulvey (1975), p. 7.
[74] Colet (2014).
[75] Idem.

The film the "New Women" is often considered a reflection of the changing societal norms, marking a departure from traditional constraints on women as depicted in mass media and urban society. The film delves into the "woman question," addressing topics such as love, marriage, education, and employment for women.

The film features three central female characters, Zhang Xiuzhen, Li Aying, and Wei Ming, each representing different social strata and backgrounds. Their stories intricately illustrate the complexities of women's lives, their quest for independence, and their journey to define their identities.

The release of the "New Women" was met with backlash, particularly from the press. Critics objected to its portrayal of journalists and the unflattering depiction of the media. Furthermore, the lead character, Wei Ming, faced criticism for her life choices, particularly her use of suicide as a form of protest against discrimination and gossip. This controversy intensified when Ruan Lingyu, the star of the film, tragically took her own life, echoing the themes of the protagonist's "crisis in subjectivity."[76]

These events drew attention to feminist issues of modernity and drew parallels between Ai Xia, Ruan Lingyu, and Wei Ming. All three became subjects of scrutiny in the "woman question" of 1930s urban China, sparking debates about the film's focus on women's traditional family duties versus the need for a more independent "new woman."

In the concluding scenes of the film, a musical piece is featured wherein a chorus of schoolgirls within a classroom performs a song. It goes as follows:

"No matter that the burden is heavy, we must stiffen our backs against its weight. Don't fall for dreams of romance, we must carry ourselves with self-respect. The new woman is born from hardship, the new women is born through awakening. Who want to stay trapped in a cage? The new woman is at the vanguard of constructing a new society. The new women pushes back against the stormwinds of the age together with men. The stormwinds, we will use them to forge the glory of women."[77]

This serves as an illustration to exemplify the leftist objective of inspiring women to actively contribute to national strength, particularly in anticipation of the impending conflict with the Japanese army. The portrayal of the new woman undergoes a transformative shift from the

[76] Colet (2014).
[77] New Women 1935, clip 1:40:33. https://chinesefilmclassics.org/course/module-5-new-women-1935/ .

enticing figure in a *qipao*, captivating the male gaze, to a woman actively engaged in socially accepted roles aimed at fortifying the nation.

4.4 Conclusion

How were women represented in popular culture (magazines, calendar posters and films) during the early 20th century in Shanghai?

In this chapter we have seen the perceptions and representations of Chinese women's identity in modern society through the evolution of popular visual culture in Shanghai. The emergence of magazines, calendar posters and films were influential for dictating and forming the sartorial landscape in Shanghai, which went hand in hand with societal transformations.

The magazines delve into the expectations and guidelines for women to embody the modern woman in Chinese society. In this discourse, an intriguing dichotomy emerges, wherein women are encouraged to maintain their Chinese identity wearing the *qipao*, distinct from Western women who are often juxtaposed in the magazines, as we have seen in *Ling Long,* to delineate appropriate behavior and physical appearances. In contrast, poster calendars present a different portrayal of women in *qipao*. These Chinese women are represented in an alluring manner, revealing skin and assuming daring poses to captivate the male gaze and embody the idealized female body. Interestingly, these calendar posters showcase full and round curves, a departure from the reality in which Chinese women were still engaging in breast binding while wearing the *qipao*.

Examining the representation and formation of the modern women's identity in cinema reveals an interesting dynamic where the *qipao* shapes the character's persona. This serves as a unique example illustrating that clothing is not merely worn; rather, the *qipao* becoming an integral part of the character's representation, symbolizing the modern woman.

Through these instances of popular visual culture in the early 20th century, it becomes evident how the *qipao* significantly contributed to the representation and perception of the modern and cultural identity of women during this period.

Conclusion

How has the qipao played a role in the representation and perceptions of Chinese women's modern cultural identity?

In this thesis, we have seen the many ways in which the *qipao* played a role in shaping the representation and perception of Chinese women's modern cultural identity. Initially rooted in historical contexts where Manchu clothing delineated ethnic distinctions, the *qipao* emerged as a symbol of sartorial modernity in response to the nationalistic sentiments and ideological shifts of the early 20th century.

Shanghai, standing at the crossroads of tradition and modernization, became a fertile ground for the *qipao*'s development, blending traditional Chinese elements with modern Western aesthetics. This fusion reflected the city's cosmopolitan character and its role as a bridge between old and new. The tension between tradition and modernization was palpable in the adoption of the *qipao*, challenging established norms while emphasizing cultural continuity.

The *qipao*'s significance extended beyond its aesthetic evolution; it became a central element in the representation of the modern woman identity. In the face of political turmoil, the modern woman in the *qipao* emerged as a complex figure, perceived both as a representative of cultural identity and as a threat by conservative intellectuals grappling with uncertainties in the newly established modern society.

The influence of popular visual culture further amplified the impact of the *qipao* on women's modern cultural identity. Magazines, calendar posters, and films dictated and shaped the sartorial landscape in Shanghai, showcasing a dichotomy where women were encouraged to maintain their Chinese identity in contrast to Western ideals. However, the popular visual culture also presented an alluring portrayal of women in *qipao*, challenging Chinese societal norms and presenting an idealized female body, highly influenced by western aesthetics, distinct from the reality of Chinese society. Cinema during this period illustrated that clothing was not just worn but became an integral part of the character's representation. The *qipao*, in this context, symbolized the modern woman and contributed significantly to the overall perception of women's modern and cultural identity during this transformative period.

In essence, the *qipao* emerged as a dynamic cultural dress, embodying the complexities of societal shifts, political changes, and evolving notions of femininity. Through the lens of popular visual culture and the socio-historical context of Shanghai, it becomes evident that the

qipao significantly contributed to shaping and reflecting the modern and cultural identity of Chinese women in the early 20th century.

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