

Centennial Transformation of Pattern Design and Craftsmanship for Cantonese Style Cheongsam as a Form of Cultural Expression in China

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Abstract

Background and Aims: The cheongsam is a representative form of Chinese women's dress. While previous research has focused on the Beijing, Shanghai, and Suzhou schools, the Cantonese style has been less examined. This study investigates the transformation of pattern design and craftsmanship in Cantonese-style cheongsam between 1920 and 2020.

Methodology: A qualitative material study was conducted using archival records, museum collections, and verified private collections. Forty garments were selected based on completeness, representativeness of style, and preservation condition. These were divided into five historical periods for comparative analysis.

Results: The evolution followed a sequence from traditional to simplified to innovative. For instance, in the 1930s, the middle seam cut was removed in favor of side cuts influenced by Western tailoring. During the 1950s–1970s, decorative embroidery was greatly reduced, while the 2000s introduced digital printing and modular construction. Such changes illustrate both functional adjustments and aesthetic innovations.

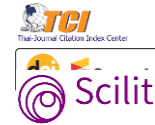
Conclusion: The Cantonese-style cheongsam demonstrates how traditional dress adapts to shifting social contexts through material and structural transformation while retaining its core identity.

Keywords: Cantonese Style Cheongsam; Pattern Design; Craftsmanship; Cultural Expression; Guangfu Culture

Introduction

The splendid cultural heritage of traditional Chinese garments provides contemporary fashion designers with abundant design resources. The cheongsam, a traditional Chinese garment widely recognized as one of the most iconic women's clothing styles, has maintained its timeless appeal through the centuries. Both its pattern design and craftsmanship hold significant research value (Xia, 2018). As a representative of China's traditional clothing, the cheongsam embodies





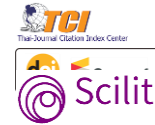
distinctive era-specific characteristics and historical significance within the nation's enduring fashion culture. To this day, it continues to attract widespread attention from domestic and international scholars, cheongsam enthusiasts, and fashion designers (Yan et al., 2017). Possessing unique formal aesthetics and decorative charm, the cheongsam exemplifies the inheritance and development of Chinese traditional culture while facilitating cultural integration among diverse ethnic groups. Despite its centennial history, it remains remarkably vibrant and relevant.

In today's globalized economy and cultural landscape, China's traditional culture has faced intense challenges from foreign influences, sparking a renewed awakening of national consciousness. This cultural shift has led to increased attention toward traditional Chinese garments, with cheongsam (traditional Chinese dress) now embracing fresh contemporary relevance (Chen et al., 2023). While preserving its classical form, modern cheongsam has evolved through cultural collisions between eastern and western traditions, developing innovative designs that embody contemporary sensibilities (Chang et al., 2020). As the ultimate embodiment of feminine grace, the cheongsam is celebrated as both a national treasure and the most splendid form of traditional Chinese dress. Despite historical debates about its transformation, it remains deeply cherished by women. Eileen Chang's poignant remark captures this sentiment: Even heartless women speak of their cheongsam with profound affection. During the Republic of China period, women had a very high liking for cheongsam. Since 2000, cheongsam culture has experienced a revival, with modern women rediscovering its essence while modern adaptations continue to emerge (Zhang et al., 2022). The Cantonese-style cheongsam, a distinctive branch of Chinese cheongsam originating from Guangdong Province, is characterized by its understated elegance and minimalist design. It is necessary, urgent, and systematic to study the centennial transformation of Cantonese-style cheongsam pattern design and techniques in China. The reasons are as follows:

First, conducting a centennial study on the transformation of Cantonese-style cheongsam pattern design and craftsmanship holds significant importance. As a traditional garment for Chinese and overseas Chinese women, the cheongsam is recognized as one of China's national treasures. Its handmade craftsmanship has been listed in the Intangible Cultural Heritage Catalogs of multiple regions across China (Liu, 2009). The Cantonese-style cheongsam not only constitutes an indispensable part of cheongsam art and an integral component of China's outstanding traditional culture but also serves as a vital piece in the global cheongsam art puzzle. The inheritance, development, and international exchange of this cultural heritage hold profound significance for China's current socialist cultural development.

Secondly, conducting a centennial transformation study on the pattern design and craftsmanship of the Cantonese-style cheongsam in China holds significant urgency. Modern



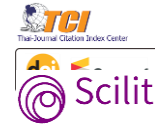


technology and internet connectivity have intensified international exchanges, while rapid global economic development has fueled cultural aspirations. The four major cheongsam schools are primarily categorized as Beijing-style cheongsam, Shanghai-style cheongsam, Suzhou-style cheongsam, and Cantonese-style cheongsam (Chen, 2010). However, literature on the Cantonese-style cheongsam remains relatively scarce. A search through CNKI and Wanfang databases reveals no existing documents specifically titled "Cantonese style cheongsam". Cantonese-style cheongsam constitutes a crucial branch of Chinese cheongsam traditions. Systematic exploration and documentation of this lineage have become imperative. Therefore, studying the centennial transformation of Cantonese-style cheongsam pattern design and craftsmanship carries critical importance for promoting Chinese cheongsam culture and advancing its localization in China (Cheng et al., 2020).

Finally, systematic research is urgently needed to explore the centennial transformation of Cantonese-style cheongsam pattern design and craftsmanship. The Cantonese-style cheongsam lacks systematic documentation, particularly regarding its stylistic and technical transformations. Current literature predominantly focuses on Beijing, Shanghai, and Suzhou styles, while Cantonese-style cheongsam studies remain severely underrepresented. Emphasizing exposure, visibility, and uniqueness, the Cantonese style stands as the most unconventional among cheongsam variants. In Hong Kong and Guangdong, cheongsam was often mistaken for men's long gowns and thus called "long gowns" (Yang, 2020). Over time, cheongsam-style long gowns became everyday wear for women. For formal occasions like weddings, elaborately patterned cheongsams called "dining gowns" were custom-made. These distinctive "long gowns" and "dining gowns" have long been overlooked by scholars (Chai, 2019).

Despite the growing body of scholarship on the cheongsam, previous research has predominantly focused on the Shanghai and Beijing schools, emphasizing their interaction with Western tailoring and urban modernity. Studies on craftsmanship have primarily documented embroidery and textile practices without systematic attention to Cantonese techniques. Furthermore, little research has applied material culture or design innovation theories to explain the long-term evolution of the Cantonese-style cheongsam. This gap limits our understanding of how regional dress forms embody cultural identity through both pattern design and craftsmanship. Therefore, this study aims to trace the transformation of Cantonese-style cheongsam between 1920 and 2020, focusing on its pattern structures and craft techniques. The contribution lies in providing a theoretically informed and empirically grounded account of Cantonese cheongsam within Chinese dress history and material culture studies.





Research Objectives

To study the centennial transformation of pattern design and craftsmanship for Cantonese-style cheongsam as a form of cultural expression in China, this current research aims to:

- (1) To analyze the history and development of the Cantonese-style cheongsam in China.
- (2) To synthesize the characteristics of making Cantonese-style cheongsam in China.
- (3) To create a new concept for making Cantonese-style cheongsam in China.

Literature review

As the foremost element in the "four essentials of life" (clothing, food, housing, and transportation), garments have evolved from ancient protective garments for warmth and modesty to cultural symbols of social identity. Beyond their aesthetic functions, clothing documents historical transformations (Yang, 2020). The cheongsam, one of China's most iconic traditional garments, serves as a crucial material for analyzing 20th-century Chinese fashion aesthetics. Guangzhou, the first southern port city to open its doors in modern China, became the country's second-largest economic hub after Shanghai. Following its designation as a treaty port in 1860, nine nations established concessions along its rivers. Guangdong's advanced textile and garment industries, combined with Western fashion influences, fostered cultural diversity (Zhang et al., 2022). Bordering Hong Kong (a cultural powerhouse), Guangdong's garment culture carries historical legacies. The Cantonese-style cheongsam's design evolved through this dynamic, blending innovation with heritage to create distinctive charm. While academic research predominantly focuses on Shanghai-style cheongsam, studies on Cantonese variants remain scarce. This paper aims to uncover the cultural value of the Cantonese-style cheongsam and propose new development strategies.

The cheongsam, a cultural symbol of China's unique charm, has evolved through Republican-era influences, with the Cantonese-style cheongsam standing out as particularly distinctive (Chai, 2019). Originating in the late Qing and early Republican periods, this traditional garment underwent gradual transformations as women's fashion evolved, developing into a diverse and innovative style. In this context, modern women's wear became more refined and contemporary, with Chinese cheongsam gaining global popularity. By the early 20th century, cheongsam designs incorporated Lingnan cultural elements featuring loose waists and wide cuffs. During the mid-20th century, significant changes occurred: narrower waistlines, smaller cuffs, and shorter vertical lengths emerged. In the late 20th century, incorporating Lingnan cultural influences, the Cantonese-style cheongsam adopted elongated versions with high side slits and tighter waistbands, highlighting Eastern women's graceful and slender aesthetic qualities (Huang & Dai, 2021).



For Cantonese-style cheongsam, its research time is relatively short, and although the development history is relatively long, there is very little literature that can be collected, lacking systematicity. The Cantonese style cheongsam, cheongsam has a serious southern characteristic and developed simultaneously with the Beijing and Shanghai styles. However, due to geographical limitations, it gradually took shape in Hong Kong and is known as a long gown. The collection of literature is very limited, with few magazines and documents available.

Therefore, compared to other styles of cheongsam (Beijing style cheongsam, Shanghai style cheongsam, and Suzhou style cheongsam), studying the Cantonese style Cheongsam is more urgent and necessary.

In view of the particularity of Guangfu culture and our deep understanding of Cantonese-style cheongsam, the transformation of cheongsam in the past hundred years can be divided into five stages according to the changes in each period:

(1) 1920-1929 (Classical period). This period is the development period of traditional cheongsam, which is based on the traditional cheongsam of the Guangzhou cheongsam people in the Qing Dynasty.

(2) 1930-1949 (Prosperous period). Influenced by the Beijing school, Shanghai school, and Suzhou school, the Cantonese-style cheongsam developed rapidly during this period.

(3) 1950-1979 (Quiet period). During this period, influenced by cultural restrictions, the Cantonese-style cheongsam, like other cheongsams, was in a dormant period of development.

(4) 1980-1999 (Revival Period). During this period, influenced by the reform wave, many cheongsam styles changed, and the seeds of revival were sown for the further development of cheongsam.

(5) 2000-2020 (Innovative period). During this period, the cheongsam achieved unprecedented development, with many innovative cheongsams emerging, many styles appearing, and a variety of craftsmanship flourishing.

Jiang et al. (2024) pointed out that, as a kind of dress combining traditional and modern design, the pleated cheongsam is becoming increasingly popular among Chinese users. However, the current design of the pleated cheongsam has the problem of mismatch with users' modern aesthetics and demands, which causes serious homogenization of the pleated cheongsam and low sales volume. Therefore, the optimal design of the pleated cheongsam was discussed from three aspects: consumer demands, design features, and comprehensive evaluation.

Fu and Liang (2025) revealed that the subjective evaluation is used to measure emotions and sensory perception for cheongsam styles, and finally, these two output synthesis scores. Additionally, a sensory evaluation model is built between the synthesis score and eye-tracking data, which could effectively predict whether the synthesis score of cheongsam styles is positive

or negative. This scientific sensory evaluation of the cheongsam by eye-tracking indices can be easily achieved.

Nowadays, there are some existing shortcomings and areas for improvement as follows:

(1) The transformation of the cheongsam is seldom studied from the perspective of "structure and technology". Through the above literature review, it is found that most of the research on cheongsam is in the aspects of cultural development, a brief description of the cheongsam craftsmanship structure, artistic design, and application of cheongsam, etc. Most of the research on contemporary cheongsam is based on the direction of cultural inheritance and the modern design application of cheongsam. A few of them start from the research on the structure and technology of contemporary cheongsam and make a comparison to find out how to add modern technology to the basis of inheritance to form a cheongsam style more suitable for Contemporary women.

(2) The classification of the transformation period of the cheongsam is too "simple". At present, the classification of the transformation period of the cheongsam has not been unified in many studies. This study is committed to making the most accurate classification of the transformation of cheongsam through detailed literature, to scientifically define the different periods of the transformation of cheongsam, and lay a foundation for finding the transformation law.

(3) There is a lack of "comparative" research on the transformation of the cheongsam. The structural design and craftsmanship of the cheongsam are constantly changing and developing with the passage of time. It is inseparable from the development of politics, economy, military, and culture at that time. The research on the transformation of cheongsam structure design and technology must be carried out along with the replacement and development of historical periods, and vertical comparison is needed. At the same time, it is necessary to conduct a horizontal study on the change and development of cheongsam structure design and technology and their characteristics in a specific period. However, there is little relevant literature at present.

In summary, current literature indicates that: (1) there is relatively little research on the Cantonese-style cheongsam, and no scholars have systematically studied the Cantonese-style cheongsam; (2) few scholars have systematically studied the pattern designs and craftsmanship of the Cantonese-style cheongsam; (3) the transformation over a hundred years has not been studied by anyone.

Conceptual Framework

The research conceptual framework of this study is shown in Figure 1.

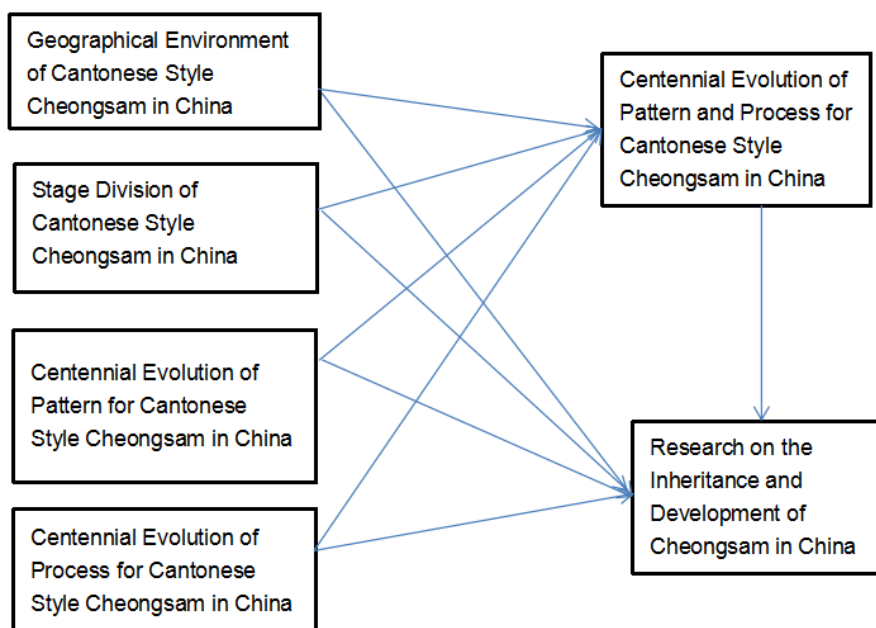


Figure 1 The research conceptual framework diagram

Methodology

This research employed a qualitative material culture approach to examine the historical transformation of Cantonese-style cheongsam between 1920 and 2020. The methodology consisted of four main components: sampling, analytical framework, validation strategies, and ethical considerations.

Sampling

A total of 40 Cantonese-style cheongsam pieces were selected from multiple sources: museum collections (n=18), verified private collections (n=12), and institutional fashion archives (n=10). The selection was based on three criteria: (1) physical integrity and preservation condition, (2) reliable provenance, and (3) representativeness of each historical period in terms of pattern design and craftsmanship. The garments were divided into five chronological phases—1920–1929, 1930–1949, 1950–1979, 1980–1999, and 2000–2020—for comparative analysis.

Analytical Framework

Pattern design was analyzed through a typological framework focusing on seam placement, collar shape, sleeve length, and silhouette. Craftsmanship was examined using a craft taxonomy that categorized decorative and structural techniques, including embroidery, piping, and button knotting. Each garment was systematically documented and coded, enabling comparative mapping of design evolution across periods. For example, the shift from center-seam cutting in the 1920s to side-seam cutting in the 1930s was treated as a structural typological change, while the adoption of digital printing in the 2000s was classified as an innovative craft adaptation.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure research rigor, triangulation was applied by cross-referencing three data sources: archival documents, physical garments, and semi-structured interviews with artisans. Reliability was strengthened through cross-check validation with three experienced Cantonese cheongsam masters, who reviewed the technique classifications and provided feedback on historical accuracy. Additionally, peer consultation with two dress history scholars was conducted to confirm the consistency of typological and taxonomic coding.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained before data collection. All artisans and designers who participated in interviews provided informed consent. Their contributions are acknowledged anonymously unless explicit permission was granted to record their names. Special care was taken to respect cultural heritage ownership, ensuring that the representation of Cantonese-style cheongsam remains faithful to both its historical and contemporary custodians.

Results

1. Transformation of pattern design for Cantonese-style cheongsam in China

Through the comparison of five representative physical sample pattern designs in five periods for the Cantonese-style cheongsam in China, the characteristics are found as follows:

1.1 The front and back seams of the robe changed from "having seams" to "no seams."

The golden age (1930-1949) marked a pivotal turning point. The introduction of Western three-dimensional tailoring techniques, expanded fabric widths, improved sewing efficiency, and the emerging demand for showcasing feminine curves collectively propelled the Cantonese-style cheongsam beyond traditional flat-cut limitations. This transformation eliminated the essential center seam stitching, achieving a leap toward simpler, more fluid, and modern silhouette designs. Subsequent periods continued to build upon and refine these technical innovations.

1.2 The front and back hem from "amplified swing" to "micro-retracted swing."

In the 1930s, Guangfu relied on its commercial advantages to combine Western human aesthetics with local craftsmanship and realized the transformation of cheongsam from "traditional robe" to "fashionable women's clothing" through collection and swing, laying the foundation for later generations (Huang & Dai, 2021).

1.3 The front lapel of the robe changed from "right straight lapel" to "right curved lapel."

In the 1930s, Cantonese craftsmen injected Western streamline aesthetics into Oriental clothing. The curved front softened the rigidity, which not only retained the ethical symbol of right lapel, but also echoed the dynamic curves to reflect the flexible and inclusive

characteristics of Lingnan culture, becoming a landmark breakthrough in the modernization of cheongsam (Xie, 2012).

1.4 The transformation of front and back garment lengths from "short style" to "ceremonial style."

In the 1930s, Guangfu relied on commercial capital and open vision to reshape the ceremonial attributes of cheongsam with long sleeves, transforming practical clothing into a carrier of "body etiquette". It not only met the needs of the merchant class for decent social interaction but also demonstrated the local wisdom of Lingnan culture in the "flexible reinterpretation" of the Chinese ritual system.

1.5 The sleeve type changed from "inverted wide sleeve" to "round sleeve", and then to "shoulder sleeve."

The 1930s saw Cantonese fashion adopt Western aristocratic aesthetics through three-dimensional tailoring, transforming the inverted-sleeve design into a rounded silhouette. The 21st-century transformation of the shoulder-attached sleeve exemplifies the global craftsmanship philosophy of "simplicity over complexity": artisans use technical innovation to dismantle traditional garments' class distinctions, allowing cheongsam to reclaim its role as an everyday art form that embodies aesthetic values (Xie, 2012).

1.6 The front and back body panels changed from "no panels" to "panels."

The transformation of provincial highways from their initial development to localized optimization vividly demonstrates how Guangfu culture has maintained its local practical foundation while actively incorporating foreign technologies (Western-style tailoring). Through continuous adaptation and innovation in response to contemporary demands, including social trends, evolving women's roles, and lifestyle changes. It perfectly embodies its core values of "pragmatism, openness, and adaptability" (Yang, 2020).

1.7 The collar type changes from "no change" to "up and down."

The dynamic interplay between formal and informal garments reflects the Cantonese people's evolving balance between social propriety and practical adaptability. While maintaining social prestige through formal garments (e.g., dignified business etiquette), they actively reinvent their fashion choices to embrace climate change and modern lifestyles (e.g., air conditioning adoption and fast-paced urban living). This fluid adaptation embodies the cultural ethos of Cantonese fashion – embracing adaptability, prioritizing human-centric values, and embracing change.

1.8 The shoulder type evolved from "simple and seamless" to "structured with seams."

The transformation of the shoulder-shaped structure from "flat" to "three-dimensional" and ultimately "integrated" demonstrates Guangfu culture's distinctive path: rooted in practicality

(climate adaptation, functional needs), embracing innovation (technology adoption), and ultimately prioritizing human-centric comfort. This transformation transcends mere trend-following, as it involves rationally filtering foreign elements while creatively adapting them to local contexts. It steadfastly upholds the life philosophy of "comfort as essence, appropriateness as application" (Huang & Dai, 2021).

1.9 The slit evolved from "conservative" to "open."

The Cantonese people abandon formal exposure and turn to "openness with moderation". High slit should be supported by practical functions (such as freedom of movement) or artistic expression (such as openwork splicing), reflecting their values of "valuing commerce over righteousness, seeking novelty without abandoning reality" (Xie, 2012).

2. Transformation of craftsmanship for Cantonese-style cheongsam in China

Through the comparison of five representative physical sample craftsmanship in five periods for the Cantonese-style cheongsam in China, the characteristics are found as follows:

2.1 The pattern design and material of cheongsam fabrics

This transformation trajectory epitomizes the Guangfu culture's continuous absorption, transformation, and innovation under its geographical advantage of "being at the forefront of cultural trends". From initially integrating Western influences to pragmatically adapting during the middle phase, then revitalizing through commercial networks in later stages, it ultimately grounded itself in local intangible heritage (Xiangyunsha) while employing cutting-edge technology (digital printing) to reinterpret cultural symbols (Chinese seal characters). This deep dialogue between traditional craftsmanship, regional culture, and modern industrial technologies highlights the Guangfu people's spirit of "daring to pioneer while preserving roots" (Xie, 2012).

2.2 The cloth of the cheongsam has evolved from "color" to "material."

From "manifestation" (early decorative elements) to "subtlety" (mid-period simplification), and finally to "refinement" (late-period emphasis on quality), the transformation of Liubu reflects the Guangfu people's adaptive survival wisdom shaped by climate, economy, and social trends. Whether through abandonment, reuse, or selective refinement, the core principle lies in achieving a delicate balance between practicality and elegance, neither indulging in unnecessary extravagance nor compromising intrinsic sophistication. This perfectly embodies the essence of "low-key" aesthetics (Yang, 2020).

2.3 The sewing of the collar in cheongsam has evolved from "decorated" to "undecorated" and then to "decorated."

The spiral progression of Liling Decoration's "complex-simplified-complex" philosophy fundamentally reflects Cantonese artisans' responsive adaptation to evolving demands. During

prosperous commercial eras, they showcased craftsmanship; in turbulent times, they concealed ingenuity through simplicity. As industries pursued efficiency, cultural revival emphasized reinterpreting classical traditions. Each transformation refined decorative proportions within practical frameworks, maintaining the pragmatic foundation of "clothing embodying moral values" while consistently upholding quality dignity through meticulous craftsmanship (both visible and subtle). This epitomizes Cantonese craftsmanship tradition's essence of "adapting to trends while preserving essence" (Chen, 2010).

2.4 The transformation of cheongsam right-lapel and front-closure stitching has transitioned from "complexity" to "simplicity."

Every design choice in the Cantonese traditional garment reflects the people's precise response to historical challenges. From showcasing craftsmanship during prosperous trade eras to concealing ingenuity in wartime simplicity, from industrial functionalization to cultural revival through "Neo-Decoratism," forms may evolve, but the essence remains unchanged. The principle of "decorative utility" (transforming gold threads into beaded nails) became a flexible declaration of cultural identity and technical prowess. This epitomizes the Cantonese spirit of "breaking conventions without losing authenticity". Through each wave of change, they anchor themselves in pragmatism and sail with craftsmanship (Lu, 2010).

2.5 The transformation of cheongsam button stitching has progressed from "traditional" to "modern", then to "functional", and finally to "decorative."

The transformation of Cantonese-style cheongsam buttons epitomizes Lingnan culture's "emphasis on practicality, integration of innovation, and adaptive subtlety" amidst the tides of time. From luxury items showcasing craftsmanship to functional objects adapting to social movements, and ultimately becoming symbolic cultural commodities, this transformation consistently aligns with regional characteristics and market demands (Fu & Liang, 2025).

2.6 The slit sewing of the cheongsam has evolved from "traditional craftsmanship" to "modern elements."

The transformation of slit heights and decorative techniques reflects the strategic adaptation of Cantonese culture to dramatic social transformations. From the conservative "hiding ingenuity in simplicity" during the preservation phase, to the open-minded "using slits as metaphors for social trends" in the liberal era, and finally to the commercial age's "leveraging slits as cultural bridges", these designs consistently prioritize practicality as their foundation, maintain understated elegance as their exterior, and embed innovation as their essence. Within the limited space of slit openings, they vividly embody the Lingnan philosophy of survival.

2.7 The sewing of cheongsam sleeves has changed from "complex" to "simple", and then back to "decorative."

The sleeve type evolved from complexity to simplicity and then to decoration, which was a quick response of Guangfu culture to the needs of the times. In the early stage, it showed off the class with craftsmanship; in the middle stage, it sought simplicity to respond to the changes of the times; in the last stage, it refined traditional elements into a carrier of commercial premium and interpreted the Lingnan philosophy of "practicality as the body and decoration as the use" in the small sleeve.

2.8 The hem of the cheongsam has evolved from "traditional splendor" to "simple and practical" to "refined innovation."

The transformation of the lower hem from flashy decorative elements to functional simplification, and ultimately to symbolic revival, which reflects the adaptive strategies of Guangfu culture in response to epochal transformations. In its early stages, craftsmanship served as a metaphor for social hierarchy; during the middle phase, it became a strategic tool for cultural preservation in changing tides; and in its final phase, traditional elements were refined into commercial assets. Through the rhythmic sway of garments, this cultural adaptation embodies the Lingnan survival principle: "practicality as foundation, ornamentation as enhancement."

2.9 The fabric of the cheongsam has evolved from "passive wrapping" to "active adaptation."

From "full body wrapping" to "precise zoning," Li Bu exemplifies the pinnacle of practical rationality in Guangfu culture. In its early stages, it compromised for warmth; in the middle phase, it adapted to circumstances by breaking old conventions; and in later stages, it scientifically coordinated climate, resources, and human data to implement the Lingnan survival principle of "functional adaptation surpassing formal dogma" within limited space (Chai, 2019).

Discussion

1. Differences and similarities in the logic of transformation for Cantonese-style cheongsam in China

This study investigates the centennial transformation of Cantonese-style cheongsam pattern design and craftsmanship in China, examining 40 garments spanning five historical periods (Classical Period, Prosperous Period, Declining Period, Revival Period, and innovative period). Through a comprehensive analysis of nine aspects, including pattern design and craftsmanship, the research employs multiple methodologies such as literature review, historical research, interviews, and comparative analysis. By analyzing physical samples from five periods of Cantonese-style cheongsam pattern design and craftsmanship, the study provides conclusive insights into the centennial development of these traditional garments.

The transformation of Cantonese-style cheongsam pattern design and craftsmanship is both independent and closely related, driven by the characteristics of Guangfu culture: "pragmatism, openness, compatibility, and emphasis on commerce". The following comprehensive comparison is made from three aspects: transformation logic, cultural motivation, and technical interaction. The comprehensive transformation logic of the pattern design and technology of the Cantonese-style cheongsam is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 The similarities and differences in the comprehensive transformation logic of pattern design and craftsmanship for Cantonese-style cheongsam in China

Dimension	Pattern design	Craftsmanship	Similarity
Core trajectory	Structural functionality: From flat cutting (splicing/wide swing) → three-dimensional cutting (no saving/micro swing) → scientific (connected shoulder sleeve modular)	Symbolic value: From manual skill (golden edge/pan buckle) to practical simplification (dark buckle/no lining cloth) to cultural symbolization (bead nail/digital printing)	Both have experienced a spiral upward trend of "tradition → simplification → innovation", but the layout focuses on functional breakthrough, and the craftsmanship focuses on the transformation of symbolic value.
A critical transition period	The heyday of the 1930s: Western three-dimensional cutting is introduced (reduction, removal of the middle seam, curved front)	The 1980s Renaissance: Industrial efficiency dominates (simplified decoration, mechanization)	The period of social openness (1930s/1980s) is the acceleration point of change.
Dormant period strategy	Hidden persistence: The micro-decolletage is retained, and the arc of the hem is preserved to maintain the traditional genes through structural compromise.	Cunning in simplicity: The "green bud" is edged, and the fabric is reversed, with minimalistic craftsmanship implied by cultural metaphors.	Under political pressure, both continue the cultural bloodline with low-key pragmatism.

2. The infiltration mode of cultural motivation for the Cantonese-style cheongsam in China

The infiltration mode of cultural motivation in the comprehensive transformation logic of Cantonese-style cheongsam pattern design and technology in China is shown. The infiltration mode of cultural motivation in the comprehensive transformation logic of Cantonese-style cheongsam pattern design and craftsmanship in China is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 The infiltration mode of cultural motivation in the comprehensive transformation logic of pattern design and craftsmanship for Cantonese-style cheongsam in China

Guangfu cultural characteristics	Pattern design	Craftsmanship	Interactive cases
Pragmatic and business-oriented	No middle seam saving (1930s to present), shoulder sleeve cost reduction (2000s)	Remove the rib (1930s), replace manual rolling with machine rolling (1980s)	The design of the rib section (1980s), the type (under-chest and under-sleeve lining) meets the ergonomic requirements, and the craftsmanship (no sleeve lining) reduces the production cost, which together achieve the dual advantages of "comfort and cost".
Open and compatible	Narrowing the hem to absorb Western curves (1930s), and incorporating digital printing into shoulder sleeves (2000s)	Geometric jacquard fusion of beads and metal buttons (2000s)	Qujiemenjin (1930s), inspired by the Western streamline aesthetics, relies on Western ironing techniques for its craftsmanship (form shaping).
Be flexible	Clothing length compromises to the calf (1950s), with "scene-based" designs of slits (2000s)	"Green sprouts" patchwork, metaphor for vitality (1950s), detachable collar (2000s)	The cutting technique (1950s) and the layout (low height of 20 cm) adapt to the political environment, while the technique (hidden pleats) maintains the function, which jointly shapes "restraint and elegance."

3. The interactive relationship between technology and materials for Cantonese-style cheongsam in China

The interactive relationship between technology and materials for the Cantonese-style cheongsam in China is shown in Table 3.

Table 3 The interactive relationship between technology and materials in the comprehensive transformation logic of pattern design and craftsmanship for Cantonese-style cheongsam in China

Essential factor	Pattern design	Craftsmanship	Synergistic effect
Technical innovation	Sewing machine popularization → Remove the center seam (1930s) elastic fabric → Remove the waist seam (2000s)	Sticker → shoulder sleeve shaping (1980s) Digital printing → Chinese seal stamp (2000s)	No provincial road design (2000s): the layout depends on the elasticity of elastic fabrics, and the craftsmanship uses nail beads to decorate and transfer the visual focus, to weaken the structural requirements.
The material transformation	Fragrant cloud gauze with a drop-like feel → long cheongsam (1930s) lace → wavy sleeves (1980s)	Flannel → padded lining (1920s) Net lace → Hong Kong revival (1980s)	Innovative period (2000s): The pattern design (45 cm slit) needs silk to support the sense of flow, and the craftsmanship (nail beads and barbs) is reinforced with metal beads in the vulnerable parts.

4. The symbiotic logic of layout and technology for Cantonese-style cheongsam in China

First, the dialectical unity of function and symbol. The layout solves the problem of "how to wear" (such as shoulder sleeves to improve mobility), and the craftsmanship determines the problem of "why to wear" (such as beads to highlight cultural identity). Together, they build the underlying logic of "practicality is beauty, and beauty is commercial" for Cantonese-style cheongsam.

Second, technology is the bone, and culture is the soul. Western-style cutting (saving path/returning to the pull) injects modernity into the pattern design, but the technology is

transformed into a carrier of Lingnan culture through local wisdom such as "green bud edging" and "reverse use of fabric".

Third, the business-driven adaptive system. The layout (such as a micro-reception swing) adapts to the changes of consumption scenarios, and the craftsmanship (such as a symbolic plate buckle) improves the premium of products. The two continue to be reconstructed in the "business pulse" of Guangfu, making the cheongsam transform from a traditional costume into a cultural commodity.

Through the comparative analysis of the pattern design and craftsmanship of the five periods (classical period, prosperous period, dormant period, revival period, and innovative period) of Chinese Cantonese style cheongsam, it can be found that:

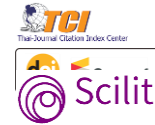
(1) The transformation of Cantonese fabric from pattern design to materials: This reflects the core characteristics of Guangfu culture: "openness, pragmatism, inclusiveness, innovation, and commercial emphasis". From initially integrating Western trends, to mid-period pragmatic adaptation, then later revitalization through trade networks, it ultimately uses local intangible heritage (Xiangyunsha) as its foundation. By employing cutting-edge technology (digital printing), it reinterprets cultural symbols (Chinese seal characters), achieving profound dialogue between traditional craftsmanship, regional culture, and modern industrial technology.

(2) The transformation from "color" to "material" in Libu reflects the survival wisdom of the Cantonese people, who flexibly adjust according to the times. Whether it is discarded, reused, or selected, the core lies in the delicate balance between practicality and dignity, neither unnecessary waste nor loss of inner style, which perfectly explains the low-key.

(3) The cyclical transformation of collar decoration: It reflects the dual genes of pragmatism, change, and commercial expertise in Guangfu culture. The changes from complex decoration to simple decoration and then to exquisite decoration show the social outlook and aesthetic trend of different periods.

(4) The transformation logic of slit design: This demonstrates the transformation of women's social roles and their relationship with public spaces in Guangfu culture. From the functional concealment of body parts through slits, to the economic empowerment-driven bodily expression through slit exposure, and finally to the autonomous control of slit usage through open dimensions, all these stages consistently embody the fundamental principle of Guangfu culture: "function-oriented and adaptable to the times."

(5) Transformation of holistic cultural characteristics: This reveals the continuous development of Cantonese culture through absorption, transformation, and innovation. From early integration with Western trends, to pragmatic adaptation in the middle period, and later revival through commercial networks, it ultimately showcases the unique charm and



developmental potential of Cantonese culture by combining traditional elements with high-tech means.

The centennial transformation of Cantonese-style cheongsam embodies a dual trajectory of "functional iteration and symbolic rebirth" within the cultural framework of Guangfu. While pattern design innovations were primarily driven by external technological forces (such as Western-style tailoring in the 1930s), craftsmanship adaptations often stemmed from internal cultural motivations (like the "Green bud metaphor"). Ultimately, this dynamic equilibrium was achieved through the pragmatic wisdom of "emphasizing practicality while preserving tradition," serving as tangible evidence of Lingnan culture's adaptability without losing its essence. These conclusions not only summarize the developmental journey of Cantonese-style cheongsam pattern design and craftsmanship but also profoundly reflect the core values of Guangfu culture and the impact of social transformations.

Conclusion And Recommendation

This study traced the century-long transformation of Cantonese-style cheongsam from 1920 to 2020 through an analysis of pattern design and craftsmanship. The results show a trajectory from center-seam cutting with ornate handcrafts to modular design with digital techniques. The findings highlight how Cantonese cheongsam demonstrates both cultural continuity and adaptive innovation, providing a regional case for material culture analysis and intangible heritage studies. By situating Cantonese cheongsam alongside Beijing, Shanghai, and Suzhou schools, the research clarifies its unique contribution to Chinese dress history and offers comparative insights for global fashion studies.

In summary, the centennial transformation of the Cantonese-style cheongsam stands as an epic chapter in Guangfu culture's garment development. Guided by the philosophy of "shaping forms with trends while preserving Lingnan essence," it has reinvented itself through each era's transformations. From the classical golden-trimmed sleeves and flowing wide hem of its golden age to the avant-garde digital-printed Xiangyunsha fabric of its innovative phase, this tradition demonstrates that enduring vitality lies not in rigid forms but in cultural courage and awareness that continuously engages with contemporary technologies. This Guangfu paradigm of "maintaining essence in change" offers a profoundly enlightening Eastern solution for global intangible cultural heritage preservation and innovation.

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