

The Inheritance and Development of Traditional Chinese Clothing Among Overseas Chinese Under the Culture of Etiquette

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Abstract: Chinese clothing encompassed both traditional attire and modern garments that reflected various Chinese cultures and contemporary fashion trends. The clothing of the Chinese not only mirrored the rich historical legacy but also integrated with global fashion trends.. This paper aims to investigate how the overseas Chinese communities preserved or modernized aspects of traditional Chinese clothing within the context of traditional etiquette. The study examines traditional Chinese clothing such as phoenix crown and rosy robe, coat and skirt, long robe, qipao, Tangzhuang , and hanfu, as well as traditional decorative patterns such as peach-shaped decorations, dragons, and phoenix motifs. It also explores the modernization and cultural significance of these elements in the contemporary world, including the traditional costumes used in Chinese festival performances. Furthermore, this research investigates the adaptability and preservation of these cultural items in the multicultural environments of the United States and Singapore. The relevance of these cultural items in rituals and performance is examined in this research to provide insight into how Chinese diaspora populations maintain and adapt their cultural heritage through clothing and accessories. Based on a balance between cultural preservation and adaptation of new societal standards, the findings underscore the continued importance of traditional Chinese wedding decoration and clothes among overseas Chinese. The maintenance of these customs across generational and geographic divides depends heavily on cultural interchange and preservation initiatives.

Keywords: Traditional Chinese Clothing, Culture of Etiquette, Chinese Ornaments, Cultural Heritage

1. INTRODUCTION

The continuous relationship between the retention and innovation of traditional Chinese costume and its dissemination among the overseas Chinese within the context of etiquette culture involved two key processes.

One of the traditional Chinese clothing items worth mentioning in this description of history and cultural significance is clothing articles such as the qipao or cheongsam, hanfu, and Tangzhuang (Xie, 2022). These garments were not merely fashion; they embodied rich cultural connotations and represented various aspects of Chinese ethnic identity, moral character, and social status. Thus, for overseas Chinese, traditional outfits became a tangible representation of the conservation of cultural values and traditions from their homeland (Fu, 2023; Lin, 2021). These communities, residing in the diaspora, frequently faced challenges in preserving their cultural characteristics while assimilating into new societies (Ullah, 2024). Etiquette was therefore, retained through the use of traditional apparel, which assumed significant importance during festivities, weddings, and other critical life events. The use of these garments on such occasions demonstrated adherence to cultural practices and conformity to the beliefs passed down generation, thereby strengthening communal attachment (Kalusa, 2022). The culture of etiquette in traditional Chinese society was characterized by politeness and compliance with established social behavior and interaction standards, all of which were reflected in clothing (Tian et al., 2024). Every outfit conveyed specific messages and followed cultural and ethical standards of dress appropriate according to the occasion. For instance, the color and style of attire could indicate marital status, social class, and even the decency of the wearer. Adherence to such fashion protocols helped overseas Chinese communities preserve the cultural values and traditions of their original country, thus enhancing identity among the individuals. However, the development of traditional Chinese clothing among overseas Chinese was not a static process but rather a dynamic evolution influenced by interaction with other cultures (Chen et al., 2021; Luthar & Pušnik, 2022). The historical past with the modern trends in the fashion industry led to making traditional wear more attractive to the younger generation (Gazzola et al., 2020). Another notable modification included the utilization of simple patterns, fabrics, trends, and comparatively new designs that captured the identity of the overseas Chinese population while integrating traditional motifs into their creations. This development ensured that traditional Chinese clothing remained wearable and seamlessly incorporated into contemporary activities and occasions (Koo & Chae, 2022). Furthermore, the global promotion of fashion trends and the emergence of cultural concerns paved the way for traditional Chinese outfits to be embraced internationally. Fashion designers and cultural representatives from overseas Chinese communities played crucial roles in promoting traditional costumes on the international

stage, such as in showrooms, festivals, or even online (Goretti, 2022). Such attempts not only facilitated the promotion of Chinese culture but also contributed to the value that people placed on its diverse outfit traditions. The continuation and evolution of traditional Chinese clothing among overseas Chinese that integrate with manners were a demonstration of cultural sustainability. In addition to maintaining their ancestral legacy and Chinese culture, overseas Chinese communities also diversified the fashion industry and influenced global fashion trends. This dynamic process helped sustain traditional Chinese clothing, which served as a convenient connection between Chinese heritage and the modern world (Qin & Leung, 2021).

1.1 The "Fengguan Xiapei"

The "Fengguan Xiapei", which consisted of the "Phoenix Crown" and the "Red Gown", was a well-known ensemble of bridal attire deeply rooted in the history of Chinese clothing. Historically, the *Fengguan* referred to the ornate headpiece worn by upper-class women in ancient China, while the *Xiapei* represented the luxurious ceremonial drape or gown, both of which were formalized as official ceremonial attire during the Song Dynasty. Initially, the Fengguan and Xiapei were not customarily worn together; each had its own distinct historical development. The Fengguan originated from avian-inspired headgear in the pre-Qin period and evolved into a crown featuring a phoenix motif by the Han Dynasty. The Xiapei, which was not originally known by this name, developed from a shoulder drape worn by Buddhist figures during the late Han period. From the Song Dynasty onwards, these garments began to gain symbolic significance, with their styles becoming more standardized, eventually leading to the pairing of the "Fengguan Xiapei" as a representation of status and favor. The Song Dynasty, while inheriting elements of Tang Dynasty wedding attire, did not establish a fixed convention that these two garments must always be worn together in wedding ceremonies. Over time, however, by the Ming Dynasty, the "Fengguan Xiapei" became essential components of wedding attire among the general populace. This evolution was captured in Ming Dynasty literature, such as Feng Menglong's novel *Awakening from the World of Illusions: Zhang Yanxiu Escapes to Save His Father*, which mentioned "Under the wedding candles, wearing a black gauze cap and a red gown, with a Phoenix Crown" (Feng, 1996). In the Ming Dynasty, the "Fengguan Xiapei" were worn together and became significant symbols of bridal attire. By the late Qing Dynasty, these items underwent further changes in form and style. Specifically, the Fengguan remained popular, while the Xiapei, originally an

accessory for the shoulder and neck, transformed into a cloud shoulder. In the late Republic of China period, the Fengguan was often paired with a *Qungua* (skirt jacket) as part of bridal attire. Figure 1-3 from the 1950s illustrated the persistence of these traditions, showing Chinese American brides in the United States wearing the Fengguan and Qungua during their weddings. These items, donated by Mrs. Chen Shiyuan and Guo Fengbo, are now preserved in the Zhongshan Museum. The Fengguan, predominantly red with metal trim, were intricately crafted and inscribed with the title "Lady of the Imperial Mandate". The Qungua, also known as a dragon and phoenix gown, represented traditional Chinese bridal attire, characterized by a high-collared, tailored top and a straight-cut skirt. These garments were richly decorated with gold and silver embroidered dragon and phoenix motifs, enhanced with sequins and rhinestones. Initially, the embroidery on dragon and phoenix gowns featured circular floral designs, which later evolved into more complex floral and dragon-phoenix patterns. The patterns on the Qungua were exquisitely hand-embroidered. This embroidery technique was known as three-dimensional embroidery within Chaozhou Embroidery. It often employed a combination of gold and velvet threads, where gold and silver threads were intertwined with velvet. The key areas were padded to give the embroidery a raised, textured appearance, enhancing both the visual and tactile quality of the finished piece. The Qungua depicted below was a custom-made piece by Liao Fa Embroidery, a well-known clothing brand in the Guangdong-Hong Kong region at the time. It featured intricate phoenix patterns combined with floral motifs, showcasing exquisite craftsmanship. The entire ensemble embodied the traditional style of Chinese wedding attire, serving as strong evidence of the preservation of Chinese cultural traditions and customs among overseas Chinese communities. It also reflected how they maintained Chinese rituals and customs even while integrating into local societies.



Figure 1: Fengguan donated by Mrs. Chen Shiyuan (Collection: Zhongshan Museum, Source: Museum of Chinese Overseas History)



Figure 2: Qungua Upper Garment (Collection: Zhongshan Museum, Source: Museum of Chinese Overseas History)



Figure 3: Qungua donated by Guo Fengbo (Collection: Zhongshan Museum, Source: Museum of Chinese Overseas History)

1.2 The Aoqun

In October 1911, the Xinhai Revolution, led by Sun Yat-sen, overthrew the Qing Dynasty, ending over 2,000 years of feudal autocracy in China. With the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912, the Beiyang government issued the *Uniform Regulations*, detailing official attire for men and women, with distinct Chinese and Western styles. The Chinese-style formal attire for women included a blue robe paired with a jacket. This marked the first time in modern Chinese history that the government issued official clothing regulations, and the prescribed attire became known as the "national dress." Under official promotion and the growing popularity of Western clothing, Han women began to abandon the straight-waisted, floor-length, exaggerated Manchu qipao (as seen in Figure 4) and adopted the jacket and skirt style. This new ensemble retained elements of traditional women's clothing while incorporating features of Western fashion, making it suitable for Chinese women to wear the *aoqun*. The *aoqun* referred to the combination of a *ao* (jacket) and a *qun* (skirt), typically

featuring a short jacket and a long skirt. It became a popular outfit choice for women during the Republic of China era. Besides, the upper garment typically consisted of either a *ao* (jacket) or a *shan* (shirt), with the *ao* being more common. The *ao* featured various styles, including diagonal fronts and side-fastened designs. Many women from the late Qing Dynasty through the Republic period chose the *aoqun* as their bridal attire (as seen in Figure 4).



Figure 4: Woman's Domestic Semi-Formal Robe (Manchu qipao, Collection: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)



Figure 5: Woman's Wedding Ensemble in Two Parts (Collection: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

1.3 The Changshan and Qipao

The *Changshan*, also known as the long robe, had a long history in Chinese clothing, with different styles evolving through various dynasties. In a narrow sense, it referred to the men's and women's robes popular in the early Republic of China. After the 1911 Xinhai Revolution, the 1912 *Uniform Regulations* by the Beiyang government included the *Changshan* as part of men's formal attire. It featured a high collar, narrow sleeves, a right-side overlap, and ankle-length hem, often paired with a *magua*, formal hat, and trousers (Bao, 2008). On April 16, 1929, the Nationalist government issued *new Uniform Regulations*, designating the *qipao* as formal attire for

women. Regarding the concept of the qipao, Bao Mingxin, in his book *Chinese qipao*, defined it as a garment whose meaning was much richer than that of the traditional robes worn by Manchu men or women. Broadly speaking, the qipao evolved through three major periods: the robes of Manchu women during the Qing Dynasty, the modern qipao of the Republic of China, and the contemporary fashion qipao. Among these, the modern qipao from the Republic era was considered the most typical and significant (Bao, 1998). Foreign scholars noted that this style of clothing was often referred to as Changshan in southern China, while in other parts of the mainland, it was commonly called qipao. Compared to men's Changshan, which saw minimal changes in style, the women's Changshan maintained the basic features of a standing collar and side slits, but underwent numerous innovations in design over different periods and regions. In the early 1920s, influenced by foreign culture, Shanghai's fashion industry first introduced Western tailoring methods, leading to significant modifications in the qipao, such as shortening the garment, tightening the waist, and creating a more pronounced silhouette with a slanted front opening (Seng, 2023). The Changshan and qipao played important roles in social ceremonies. Beyond festive events, both men and women chose Changshan and qipao as their wedding attire on the day of their marriage ceremonies.(as seen in Figure 6).



Figure 6: A Group Wedding Ceremony Hosted by the Tianjin Youth Association at the Beining Park Auditorium on June 15, 1935 (Source: Republican Era Book Resource Library)

1.4 Hanfu and Tangzhuang

The concepts of *Hanfu* and *Tangzhuang* were modern interpretations that carried both traditional and contemporary meanings. Traditionally, they referred to the representative clothing of their respective dynasties, while in modern contexts, they denoted styles that preserved the simplicity of Chinese traditional garments while incorporating the fluidity of modern fashion. Given their undefined forms and ambiguous boundaries, these

styles could embody diverse personalities and meanings, resulting in products with varying group identities (Sulaeman et al., 2021). In historical texts, "Hanfu" was not a specific term but was often used in contrast to "*Hufu*," referring to the clothing worn by non-Han ethnic groups. The Han people, being open and inclusive, absorbed aspects of foreign attire to develop their own distinct clothing culture. Hanfu as it is known today was a modern cultural construction, emerging as a new term in the early 21st century. It encompassed not only traditional garments with unique Han cultural features (Wu et al., 2021), but also a clothing system representing the identity of modern Chinese people. Typical features included flat cutting, cross-collar wrapping, right-over-left lapels, tied with ribbons, with upper and lower garments, wide sleeves, and bordered edges. The styles were categorized into five types: *Yi* (upper garments), *Shang* (skirts), integrated clothing, *Ku* (trousers), and accessories (e.g., half-arm garments). And the occasions for wearing Hanfu are generally categorized into two types: everyday wear and ceremonial wear. Traditional Han ceremonial clothing is further divided into four categories: wedding attire, mourning attire, burial attire, and sacrificial attire (Hsu, 2022). The Hanfu movement, driven by the internet, began in the 21st century as Chinese youth sought to revive traditional culture through the revival of Han ethnic clothing. Overseas Chinese communities also participated, such as the Vancouver Hanfu Culture Association, established in 2010 and recognized as a nonprofit organization by the British Columbia government. With nearly a thousand members, primarily overseas Chinese and students, the society reenacted a Ming dynasty wedding in October 2022 at Vancouver's Sun Yat-sen Park (Minhus & Huie, 2021). The bride wore a Fengguan, a red long-sleeved robe, and a Xiapei, while the groom wore a black gauze cap and a *Jiangpo*, promoting Chinese traditional culture abroad.(as seen in Figure 7).



Figure 7: Vancouver Hanfu Society Hosting the "Peach Blossom" Ming Dynasty Wedding Scene Reenactment at Vancouver's Sun Yat-sen Park

Source: Haiwai Net WeChat Official Account, article titled "Exquisite Hanfu Beautifies Vancouver." The historical concept of Tangzhuang from the Tang Dynasty differs significantly from the modern Tangzhuang in both style and wearing methods. During the Tang Dynasty, men typically wore *paoshan* (robes) while women wore *ruqun* outfits. Men's clothing was divided into official and casual attire. Official attire, *gongfu*, during the Tang Dynasty, as the Chinese name suggests, referred to the attire worn by officials during their duties. Most commonly, this consisted of a round-collared robe with long, wide sleeves (Wang et al., 2023). The collar, sleeves, and lapels of these robes were typically plain and undecorated, emphasizing their formal and functional nature. As for women, they typically wore men's casual attire, which was the clothing men wore in their daily lives. Men's casual attire mainly consisted of the *futou* (a type of headwear), the *yuanling queknao pao* (a round-collared robe with slits up to the hips), and *changyan xue* (long boots). The *futou* was a type of male headgear that evolved from the Xianbei hat and was divided into two parts: a *fujin* and a *jinzi*. The *yuanling queknao pao* was the most popular men's garment during the Sui and Tang dynasties (Ma, 2022). It was a type of *hufu* (foreign-style clothing) characterized by side slits that extended up to the hips. To be more specific, the slits of the *queknao pao* extended up to the hip area. It's worth mentioning that there were more types of robes than just the round-collared ones. There were also double-lapel and single-lapel robes, with the lapel style being a distinctive feature of *hufu* (foreign-style clothing). These lapel robes were almost as popular as the round-collared robes during the Tang Dynasty. Black leather boots were the standard footwear paired with round-collared robes, worn by both civil and military officials, and could be worn on important occasions, except during sacrifices.



Figure 8: Tang Dynasty Cavalry Scroll (Tang Dynasty Equestrian Painting, Northern Song Dynasty Copy)

The primary representative clothing for women during the Tang Dynasty

was the *ruqun* ensemble. This outfit typically consisted of a *ru* or *shan* on the upper body and a skirt on the lower body, sometimes paired with a *pibo* (a type of shawl or scarf). The *ru* was a short, narrow-sleeved garment, which initially had a tight fit, but became increasingly loose with wider sleeves as the Tang Dynasty progressed. In the Tang Dynasty, the *shan* was a sleeveless, single-layer garment that absorbed sweat, featuring two styles: symmetrical front-opening and right-side overlap. It could be worn as an outer garment in Spring and Autumn Dynasty. Unlike short-sleeved versions, this type was known as *banbi* (half-sleeve). Also, the collars of *ru* or *shan* during the Tang Dynasty were distinct from previous periods, offering a variety of styles including overlapping, square, round, and lapel collars. The lapel collar, with its symmetrical design, imparted a sense of formality. Next was the *qun* (skirt), which in the Tang Dynasty was typically composed of multiple panels, creating a flowing silhouette. Lastly, the *pibo*, which originated from the shoulder drapes worn by Buddhist figures, evolved into an essential accessory for women of that era. Also referred to as *pei zi*, *ling jin*, or *pei bo*, this garment was widely used and symbolized elegance and status. The *pibo* became an integral part of women's fashion during the Tang period, often adding a graceful layer to their outfits.



Figure 9: Tang Dynasty Painting by Zhou Fang



Figure 10: Hairpin Flower Lady Picture

Reproduction by Duan Wenjie, based on a mural from Cave 130 in the Mogao Caves, Dunhuang, during the High Tang period. In the modern

context, the term *Tangzhuang* symbolized China's long history and prosperity, reflecting a nostalgic reverence for a golden era in Chinese history. Initially popularized in Chinese communities in American Chinatowns and later reported by overseas Chinese media. Then, the Tangzhuang spread to China, particularly in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and southern coastal cities, though it lacked formal definition. It wasn't until the 2001 Shanghai APEC meeting that the concept of the "New Tangzhuang" gained widespread recognition. During the event, the leaders of participating economies wore modified Tangzhuang for a group photo in front of the Shanghai Science and Technology Museum (as seen in figure 11). This outfit, which blended traditional Chinese features with modern Western styling, was subsequently given the specific name "New Tangzhuang." The fabric patterns and design prototypes of the "*New Tangzhuang*" (men's attire) could be traced back to Qing Dynasty garments such as the "Longgua," "Jifugua," "Xinggua," as well as the "Magua" worn as men's casual attire during the Republic of China. Additionally, it drew inspiration from the "duijin zhongzhuang" (Chinese-style jacket with a front opening) that was popular in the 1950s and 1960s. Besides, the women's version of "New Tangzhuang" were inspired by the modified qipao of the Republic of China era, as well as the Chinese-style front-opening women's jackets that were popular in the 1960s and the mixed-style garments with attached sleeves that gained popularity in the 1970s. The "New Tangzhuang" placed great emphasis on traditional clothing elements, such as the stand-up collar, front opening, and handcrafted knotted buttons, while also integrating modern fashion aesthetics. Although there was no direct connection between the "New Tangzhuang" and Tang Dynasty attire in terms of appearance or design, the opulent and vibrant nature of Tang Dynasty clothing influenced the fabric choices and color schemes of the "New Tangzhuang."



Figure 11: Leaders of Participating Economies at the 2001 Shanghai APEC Meeting, Wearing "New Tangzhuang" for a Group Photo in Front of the Shanghai Science and Technology Museum (Source: China News)



Figure 12: A Modern Portrait of Gldria Chen, Daughter of Panamanian Chinese Zheng Rongkai, Wearing Tangzhuang (Source: Zhongshan Museum)

2. TRADITIONAL CHINESE DECORATIVE PATTERNS

Ornaments as Peach-shaped: In many contexts, it held deep cultural significance and symbolism, particularly in Chinese culture. Figure 13 displays ornaments in the shape of peaches. As a symbol of longevity, immaturity, and riches, peaches had positive connotations associated with these charms. Peaches were associated with springtime and rebirth in Chinese mythology, and their petals were considered to provide immortality. This symbolism was also associated with peach-shaped ornaments, which were expertly crafted and used in various contexts throughout Chinese civilizations (Deng, 2020). Peach-shaped decorations, found in anything from jewellery to household objects, were often featured in traditional Chinese art and artistic themes.



Figure 13: Peach-shaped Ornaments (Source: China Overseas Chinese History Museum)

Peach-shaped ornaments had several symbolic meanings in both daily

and spiritual contexts. They were seen during celebrations, rituals, and even in people's houses. For example, peach-shaped decorations adorned clothing and dwellings during festivals such as the Double Ninth Festival or the Chinese New Year. These ornaments represented the desire for an extended and prosperous life. Their importance in spiritual traditions was demonstrated by their frequent use in ceremonies honoring deities or relatives. However, peach-shaped ornaments were more than simply trinkets. Peach-shaped decorations also played a significant role in literature and culture. There were several myths and stories that referenced them (Tao, 2021). Some of these stories described heavenly beings offering peaches that granted immortality. These legends showed how the decorations had a mythical origin and strengthened the connection between them and heavenly favors, as well as eternal life. Such stories helped explain why peach-shaped decorations were so popular and resonated deeply in Chinese culture. The significance and use of peach-shaped jewellery continually evolved in contemporary contexts. They commonly appeared in modern designs and fashion, blending traditional motifs with cutting-edge flair. This update ensured their continued importance in customs and festivities while catering to contemporary tastes and lifestyles.

Phoenixes and Dragons Motifs: It captured a deep story that was interwoven with symbolism and traditional Chinese art. Dragons and phoenixes were two of the most iconic symbols in the world of Chinese cultural history, each bearing a wealth of symbolic meaning (KON, 2024). The dragon was highly revered in Chinese mythology and art, symbolizing imperial power, strength, and auspiciousness. They represented tenacity, wealth, and the pursuit of heavenly peace and abundance. Known for their vibrant feathers, phoenixes were frequently connected to dragons. They stood for longevity, love in marriage, and rebirth. Additionally, in Chinese society, they represented peace and harmony. Chinese design and art incorporated harmonious duality through the interwoven designs of phoenixes and dragons. According to Chinese philosophy, the unification of *yang* and *yin* energy represented the perfect balance of each energy type. Centuries of cultural shifts did not diminish the importance of the dragon and phoenix motifs, which took on many inventive interpretations and localized bureaucracy. Whether depicted in traditional fabrics, artwork, or sculptures, their existence in Chinese art illustrated a visual illustration of the patience of ethnicity and the efficiency of symbolic significance across time. These styles preserved to bridge history and innovation in current contexts via inspiring sparkling interpretations in popular tradition, fashion, and layout. Therefore, the phoenix crown (Fengguan), mentioned

earlier, held historical significance and evolved over time. The phoenix crown was a full-size headpiece dating back to ancient China. Initially, it was worn exclusively by women of high rank, such as empresses and noblewomen, during important ceremonies and events. The crown was characterized via its complex format, regularly embellished with phoenix motifs, which symbolized splendour, grace, and prosperity. Over time, the usage of the phoenix crown prolonged beyond the aristocracy, becoming a famous bridal accessory among commonplace human beings throughout weddings. This evolution signified the crown's transition from an image of royal repute to a cherished element of traditional wedding apparel, embodying both ancient legacy and cultural continuity.

3. TRADITIONAL CHINESE FESTIVAL PERFORMANCE COSTUMES

The Spring Festival was the most solemn traditional festival of the Chinese nation. From the beginning of the New Year's Eve to the end of the Yuanxiao (filled round balls made of glutinous rice-flour for Lantern Festival) on the 15th day of the first lunar month, the Spring Festival, for overseas Chinese scattered around the world, was like a cultural root from their home country, embodying the essence of the traditional Chinese culture. Chinese people around the world still retained traditional festival customs, of which the lion dance was one with a long history. During this festival period, Chinese people performed the lion dance to pray and enhance the joyous and auspicious festival atmosphere. The lion dance, which combined difficult choreography with complex costumes signifying deep meanings and rituals, originated in Chinese subculture. Often constructed with vibrant colours and complicated embroidery, these costumes served as both apparel and mighty symbols during performances (Chen, 2024). In Chinese way of life, lions were considered symbols of braveness, energy, and exact fortune. Through their layout, the garments themselves conveyed this symbolism (Xingchen & Karin, 2022). Stylized lion heads, frequently embellished with detailed and emotive features highlighting the animal's dual essence of fierceness and benevolence, were hallmarks of conventional costume in lions. Following the pinnacle, a frame match was normally product of bright substances like gold and pink, which were taken into consideration fortunate charms in Chinese lifestyle. But every a part of a lion dance dress had a fixed of rituals attached to it. The performance was attached with top fortune and success because the

colors were deliberately chosen to convey specific traits and energies. For example, gold symbolized money and prosperity, while red represented vitality and happiness. The costumes exhibited authenticity and reverence for customs, crafted by expert craftspeople who passed on their knowledge to future generations to preserve it. During performances, lion dancers conveyed the essence of the lion with movements timed to rhythmic drumming and cymbal crashes. The way the costume was created allowed dancers to bring the lion's persona to life, complete with jovial antics, powerful jumps, and auspicious gestures that signified driving away evil spirits and bringing blessings to the community (Lacey, 2023). China has long been recognized as a nation steeped in the traditions of etiquette, profoundly shaped by Confucianism's emphasis on the culture of "Li" (culture of etiquette) from ancient times to the present. This cultural framework places great importance on moral education and the inculcation of proper etiquette. Historically, successive Chinese dynasties have imbued clothing with the significant roles of establishing personal and social identity, nurturing moral character, and ensuring the stability of the state. Ancient China was thus often referred to as the "Kingdom of Clothing and Hats." Within the influence of culture of etiquette, clothing, regarded as a person's second skin, serves as a non-verbal medium through which individuals express respect for one another and, more profoundly, convey the rich cultural connotations of the Chinese nation's traditions of etiquette. This cultural continuity is notably strong among the Chinese people, including those overseas, who continue to resonate with the concept of "Li." Even when living abroad, Chinese communities often retain traditional values and customs, particularly in the context of significant life ceremonies, where they frequently opt for traditional Chinese attire.

4. ADAPTATION AND PRESERVATION IN MULTICULTURAL CONTEXTS

4.1 Cultural Significance in Overseas Chinese Communities

It encompassed a wide variety of traditions, convictions, and ways of being that persisted throughout continents and grown in diasporic situations. These cultural aspects adapted to new settings while maintaining their essential qualities. For Chinese populations living abroad, they represented their identity and legacy (Tian et al., 2020). The cultural aspects were present in routine activities such as wearing, cooking, and even

conducting. Not only did traditional Chinese cooking fulfill the body's physiological need for sustenance, but it also conveyed a cultural message that introduced a diverse range of new preparations to people worldwide, in line with Chinese philosophical notions of balance and duality. Language also played an important role in maintaining culture, serving as a bridge between generations of a culture. Nevertheless, regional languages and idioms still existed as Mandarin and Cantonese dominate, maintaining aspects of interpersonal interaction and ethnicity. Language preservation was achieved through attempts at maintaining schools and cultural organizations that helped future generations keep abreast with the languages of their passed-down heritage. Existing artwork in the form of calligraphy, paintings, martial arts, and opera provided an outlet for cultural expression. These forms not only reflected the artist's creativity but also relayed instructions in ethics and history, instilling pride and knowledge among the members of the community. Specialized institutions were devoted to these arts and acted as cultural centers, discovering and fostering artists as well as facilitating cultural exchange. Religious practices and beliefs further enriched the cultural life of overseas Chinese, rooted in Daoist, Confucian, Buddhist, and ancestor veneration. Sacred spaces were important as they offered people a "home away from home", and give a sense of identity and comfort in a difficult existence. Examples include the Mid-Autumn and Ghost festivals, which emphasized relationships, particularly in honoring the dead, viewed as a familial bond extending to the spiritual realm. Education played a crucial role in transmitting cultural knowledge and values to younger generations. Chinese language schools, cultural programs, and community initiatives imparted not only linguistic skills but also cultural literacy, equipping youth with tools to navigate their dual identities and contribute meaningfully to multicultural societies. These efforts ensured continuity in cultural practices and traditions, fostering a sense of pride and belonging among future custodians of heritage.

Singapore and the United States Case Examples: As it focused on the intricate interplay of traditional Chinese costume incorporation and transformation in various cultures, The preservation of Chinese ensembles in Singapore, a culturally diverse country with strong Chinese cultural undertones, reflected a complex identity blending traditional and contemporary values (Cui, 2023). In Singapore, the cheongsam and other traditional garments continued to serve as ethical identification, particularly during important ethical ceremonies and festivities. The adaptation process was quite complex since the core was to introduce modernity in design without losing the traditions to cater to the larger market. Figure 14

depicted the traditional wedding attire of a Chinese couple in Singapore.



Figure 14: Singaporean Chinese wearing traditional wedding dresses (Source:China Overseas Chinese History Museum)

Nevertheless, Chinese clothing in the United States had a different purpose,,especially as a symbol of cultural pride and social identity within the Chinese community (Zhu, 2021). People in different parts of the country wore traditional clothes not just for ceremonial occasions but also to maintain the identity and unity of a given culture. The development of these garments in the hemisphere tended to include innovative practical applications, combining pre-Columbian workmanship with modern American styling. It also maintained the purity of Chinese traditional costumes while at the same time assimilating them to the diverse American culture. Figure 15 showed the traditional Chinese bride wedding costume in the United States.



(A)



(B)

Figure 15: Traditional Chinese Bride wedding costume in the United States
Source:China Overseas Chinese History Museum

Singapore and the United States were two prime examples of how traditional Chinese attire changed to fit new settings while holding onto cultural importance. The cheongsam's growth in Singapore was a story of cultural adaptability and tenacity, appealing to a multicultural populace proud of its rich history. Conversely, Chinese clothing evolved to satisfy

the requirements of a diasporic population trying to preserve its cultural origins in the face of a shifting cultural landscape and came to represent identity and sense of culture in the United States. Role of Cultural Exchange: The process of cultural exchange was invaluable in the processes of preserving intangible heritage and traditions all around the world, being both the key driving force of preservation and the defense mechanism against cultural degradation. Fundamentally, cultural exchange constituted the reciprocity of the flow of ideas, practices, and beliefs among different cultures, as well as shaping the development of culture ministries and conservation of culturally important assets around the world (Mullis, 2022). To begin with, cultural exchange served as a means of bringing people together to share the information and experience necessary to pass down traditional culture within communities. Through global connections and fast travel, different communities gained insights into various ways of preservation, introducing new ideas and methods to revive their heritage practices. Furthermore, cultural exchange increased cultural sensitivity and understanding of other people's cultures hence improving individuals' responsibility toward cultural sites. When people interacted with the ideas and products of others, they became enriched by the diverse cultures shared globally (Ray, 2020). This appreciation was often reflected in support, generally through funding, volunteer work, or policies designed to protect endangered traditions. In the case of the Intangible Cultural Heritage list, which includes practices such as oral traditions and performing arts, cultural exchange was vital in ensuring international recognition and protection for nearly extinct cultural practices. In addition, cross-cultural preservation fostered research and the development of new techniques for preservation, as people shared their innovations (Wu, 2020). Academic professionals and practitioners involved in cross-cultural learning and working, brought into practice multicultural backgrounds and specializations to come up with unique preservation strategies, which encompassed innovative ideas that were borrowed from Indigenous and modern applications of technology and principles of sustainability (Orlando et al., 2020). Moreover, cultural exchange enhanced the resilience of cultural practices by nurturing networks of support and solidarity among communities facing similar preservation challenges. Through transnational partnerships and knowledge-sharing platforms, communities accessed resources, expertise, and advocacy networks essential for sustaining their cultural heritage in the face of globalization's homogenizing forces. This collaborative approach not only strengthened the capacity of local communities to preserve their traditions but also fostered a sense of

cultural pride and identity rooted in shared heritage conservation goals (Córdoba et al., 2021). Besides the physical plans of conservation, multicultural interactions enhanced the continuance of small things like language, values, traditional knowledge, and beliefs. For example, Indigenous communities of Australia, as part of cultural exchange programs, maintained endangered languages by using them in practice as well as participating in cross-cultural narration, thus strengthening the linguistic basis of culture vital for Indigenous people. Therefore, multicultural relations promoted understanding based on cultural differences and ways to reduce prejudices that could hinder cultural heritage preservation. Thus, cultural exchange programs broke down prejudices and integrated diverse perspectives into heritage conservation strategies, fostering openness and respect for cultural and social values. This understanding was evidenced by intertwined inter-ethnic projects in Asia, where several ethnic groups collaborated to strengthen cultural bonds and take responsibility for conserving cultures for future generations (Mishra & Bakry, 2021). Culture played a significant part in preservation efforts, crossing borders and spanning ages to influence global heritage preservation through innovation and diplomacy (Tan & Fernandez, 2023). Since dialogue encouraged respect for cultural diversity, and fostered positive partnership, cultural exchange enabled communities to preserve their cultures from the dynamic social and ecological factors. In the spirit of globalization, people continued to face the challenging task of losing cultural identity as a result of globalization; cultural exchange remained the key to the continuity of the restoration of humanity's cultural heritage.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper aims to discuss the continuity and change of Chinese dress among overseas Chinese, which was mainly on etiquette and Clothing. This research analyzes their relevance in modern practice and explores changes in the multicultural environment of Singapore and the United States. Through discovering the cultural importance and use of those artifacts in ceremonies and performances, it was evident that even though those artifacts are still used in today's society they remain symbols of cultural preservation. They acted as markers of the identity of the Chinese immigrants and as a connection to the past for the Chinese diaspora in other countries and generations. Stressing the cultural aspects that define this discovery, this work explores the continued significance of traditional

Chinese apparel and its contribution to change and appreciation of various cultures around the world. Some of the limitations include; there may be differences in the interpretation of cultures from one region to another; and there is often a problem of acquiring real raw materials. The study could be extended to investigate issues that relate to the digital preservation of garments and the impact of diaspora on emerging fashion trends in China and other countries.

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