

Cheongsam charm 旗袍魅力

by VALERY GARRETT

An alluring classic of the Chinese wardrobe is making a comeback

展現女性迷人曲線的經典中國長衫，於近年再次綻放光芒

VISITORS TO A recent international ceramics expo in Shandong Province took it all in their stride when they saw a bevy of beautiful women, wearing nothing but body paint, gathered at one of the stands. How times have changed. When Shanghai women threw off the voluminous robes of the past in the mid 1920s and donned the cheongsam it caused a scandal. China's fashion capital had produced a figure-hugging dress showing off a woman's curves for the first time.

Better known on the mainland as the *qi pao*, or banner gown, since it resembled robes worn by women of the ruling Manchu banner divisions in the Qing Dynasty, the classic garment is no longer controversial. It inspires designers such as John Galliano, Roberto Cavalli and Dolce & Gabbana, regularly appearing in some form in their collections. Renowned New York designer Vivienne Tam, who was born in Guangzhou and educated in Hong Kong, still looks to her roots for inspiration. "I've been collecting cheongsams since high school," she says. "I love the beautiful embroidery and dragon beading, the lined lace from the '60s, the crotchet work from the '70s."

Back in the 1930s, Shanghai's film industry was big business and stylish women copied the cheongsams that movie stars wore, along with their permed hair and arched eyebrows. When hemlines dropped to the ankle, side slits slid to the thigh, revealing legs clad in sexy silk stockings. Even though the cheongsam's popularity declined in Mainland China in the 1950s, women in Hong Kong continued to wear it. The dress became still more figure revealing, with a rounded hem accentuating the curvaceous look.

Cheongsams worn by Nancy Kwan in the 1960

movie *The World of Suzie Wong* became a hit overseas, even worn in Hong Kong by visiting royalty. And in Wong Kar-wai's movie *2046*, in which much of the action is set in Hong Kong during the '60s, the dress takes centre stage, with Zhang Ziyi as a glamorous call girl in sensual attire.

Leung Ching-wah of Linva Tailors in Hong Kong's Central district made gorgeous cheongsams for Maggie Cheung in a previous movie by Wong, *In the Mood for Love*. Leung and his wife founded Linva in 1966 after a seven-year apprenticeship with a distinguished cheongsam-maker from Shanghai.

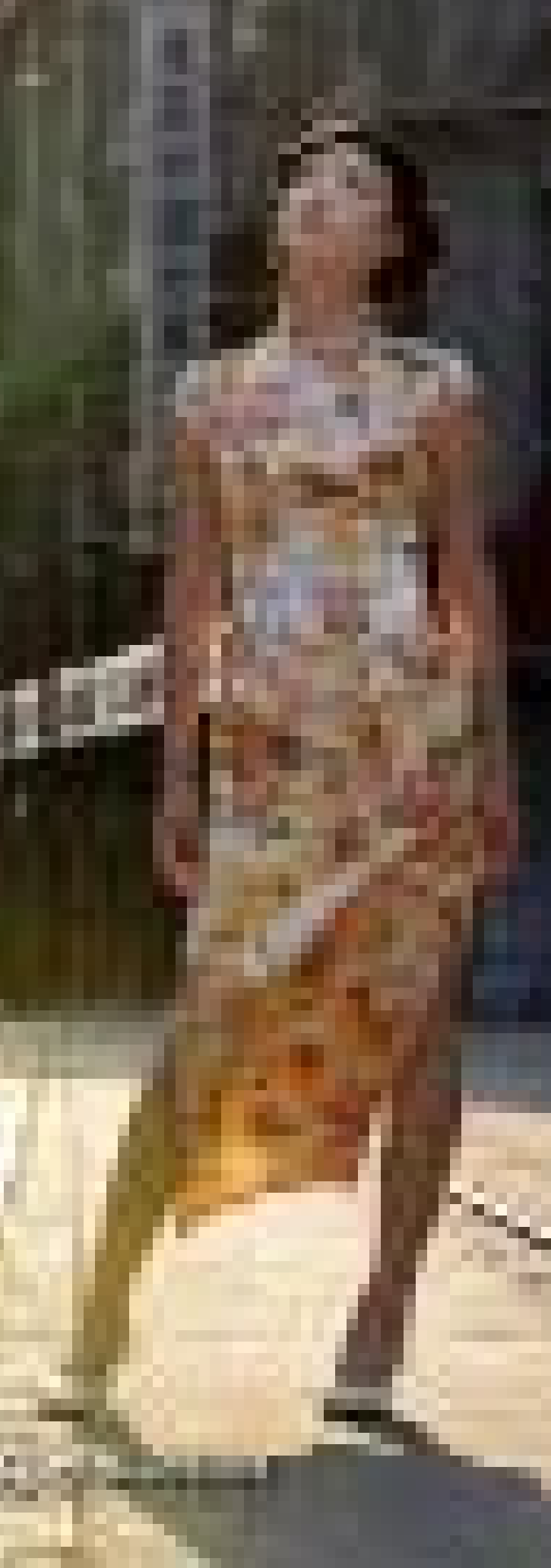
The first step in choosing a cheongsam, especially if it's your first, is a careful discussion with Leung. He will want to know the occasion on which it will be worn – daytime, evening or a wedding, for example. Most tailors offer a large selection of fabrics to choose from including printed and woven silks, brocades, velvet chiffon and cashmere. Since Western customers are sometimes unsure about how they will look in a cheongsam, there are ready-made ones hanging up to try on.

Once the fabric has been chosen, it is time to select the two or three plain silk accent colours used for the piped edging, and the distinctive flower-button fastenings. These are placed at the neck and down the right side opening, and are made to resemble the peony or chrysanthemum to complement the style.

The next step is to measure the client. There is a strict order in which Leung does this, keeping all 12 measurements in his head until the last one is taken. He's always done it this way, he says.

Like the cheongsam itself, there is a tradition to making the garment that has never varied. Small

Photos: Modern-day cheongsam: TPGimages. 1880s: Private Collection/The Stapleton Collection/The Bridgeman Art Library. 1920s: Hulton Archive/Getty Images



The cheongsam has evolved into a provocative fashion statement (left)

旗袍已演變成為性感時尚的代名詞 (左圖)

Voluminous robes of the 19th century (above) would give way to a more seductive look

19世紀的寬鬆長袍 (上圖) 最終被更具風情的旗袍所取代

By the early 20th-century, the cheongsam as we now know it was beginning to take shape (right)

直到20世紀初，今日的旗袍款式已逐漸成型 (右圖)





Shanghai's film industry boosted the cheongsam's popularity in the 1930s (left). Maggie Cheung (co-starring with Tony Leung Chiu-wai, right) recalled the style of the '60s in *In The Mood for Love*. The garment's transformation has continued on the catwalk, with designs by Vivienne Tam (centre right) and Shanghai Tang (far right)

於1930年代，上海電影業曾帶動旗袍風靡一時（左圖）；張曼玉（與合作演出的梁朝偉，右圖）在電影《花樣年華》中引領觀眾回味1960年代的時尚；而在時裝天橋上，旗袍的轉變更是日新月異，譚燕玉的設計（右中圖）與上海灘（最右圖）這兩款時裝均令人眼前一亮



The essence is in a few basic details 旗袍的精粹在於數個基本元素

changes may be made to collar and length, but the look is always the same. As fashion designer Tam explains: "The essence of the cheongsam is in a few basic details: the cross opening, the high neck, the close fit to the body, and the side slits. Nothing else really matters."

After taking the measurements, Leung writes them down on a form and hands it to a tailor in the cramped room at the back of the shop. Experienced tailors can work by simply marking measurements onto the cloth, while those in training first make a paper pattern. The garment is then cut out and basted together for a fitting. Tailors still use the traditional paste, made of rice flour mixed with water, to stick the fabric edges together before sewing with a large stitch. After about three days the client returns for a fitting and the garment is checked carefully for proportion and comfort. All adjustments are made prior to completing the decorative edging. The cheongsam is machine-sewn together and the flower buttons added. The garment is then ironed and given a final check before being sent to the customer.

Once the cheongsam was the mainstay of many

Hong Kong women's wardrobe, but it became less popular in the '70s due to the growing influence of Western styles. But many tailors say it is enjoying a resurgence. Celebrities and businesswomen, such as Prada-clad Amanda Cheuk, love wearing the cheongsam. "You can wear them for business functions in the evening," she says. "My overseas clients like to see me in them." Many Chinese brides also wear the cheongsam as part of their wedding ensemble during the ceremony, so tailors are kept busy.

Others are also preserving the craft. In a studio in Hong Kong's Sheung Wan district, Jody Kan runs classes about cheongsam-making and gives workshops at schools in the New Territories to educate girls about their heritage.

So although the fortunes of the cheongsam rise and fall, along with its hemline, its aura extends into the 21st century. ■

A tighter fit for the '50s
於1950年代流行的貼身剪裁





旗袍魅力

早前於山東省舉行的國際陶瓷博覽會，訪客可說是大開眼界：一個展覽攤位聚集了一群身體塗上彩繪的裸體美女。這令人感歎時代變了；回想1920年代，當上海女士捨棄累贅長袍，穿上了貼身長衫時，隨即引來流言蜚語。

上海是中國時裝之都，開創女士穿著貼身剪裁長衫的潮流，而長衫確實能令女性的曲線美表露無遺。

在中國內地，更多人稱長衫為旗袍，因為它原是滿清旗人婦女的服裝。今天，富民族色彩的旗袍已不再招人詬病，更成為John Galliano、Roberto Cavalli和Dolce & Gabbana等知名設計師的靈感泉源，他們不時把旗袍設計融入時裝系列。生於廣州、在香港受教育的紐約著名設計師譚燕玉（Vivienne Tam），亦從這種中國傳統服裝擷取靈感，她說：「我在中學時便開始收集旗袍。我喜歡旗袍上的刺繡、龍紋珠飾，1960年代的喱士襪裡和1970年代的鉤織。」

回顧1930年代，上海電影業如日中天，時尚女性愛參照電影明星的打扮；她們將頭髮燙鬚、畫上彎彎眼眉，旗袍的裙擺長至足踝、開衩高及大腿，穿上絲襪的美腿在旗袍下若隱若現。在1950年代，即使旗袍在內地幾近

絕跡，香港的女士仍然酷愛穿著。在1960年代經典電影《蘇絲黃的世界》裡，關南施穿上旗袍，更在海外掀起熱潮，就連一些英國皇室成員到訪香港時亦身穿旗袍亮相。

在王家衛執導的《花樣年華》一片中，穿旗袍的張曼玉婀娜多姿；縫製這些精美戲服的裁縫師傅梁清華，曾跟隨著名的上海旗袍裁縫師學師七年。他與妻子在1966年創立了年華時裝公司，店舖設於中環。

對於首次訂造旗袍的客人來說，首要步驟是先與梁師傅詳細討論。他會先了解客人打算穿著旗袍出席什麼場合，例如是日間、晚上或是婚嫁時穿著，都必須考慮。大部分裁縫店都備有多款布料可供選擇，包括印花絲綢、織錦、絨絨雪紡和茄士咩。選好布料後，再挑選兩至三種淨色絲線，用作鑲邊和盤扣，綴飾衣領和右邊衣襟。而盤扣會製成牡丹或菊花形態，為旗袍錦上添花。

接下來便要為客人度身。梁師傅自有一套嚴謹方法；他一邊度身，一邊把12個尺碼默記，直到完成度身才寫下尺寸。他說他向來都這樣做。旗袍歷久長青，其縫製傳統亦恆久不變；衣領和長度或許會稍微改變，但仍保留旗袍的特質。譚燕玉說：「旗袍的精粹在於數個基本元素——交疊的襟領、高領、貼

身剪裁和開衩——其他細節都是次要。」

完成度身後，梁師傅會把尺寸寫在表格上，交給位於店後狹室內的師傅處理。經驗豐富的裁縫師會直接在布料上記下尺寸，裁剪衣料後，再在衣料邊塗上漿糊黏合，然後以粗針縫上，讓客人試穿。

大約三天後，客人便可回來試身，裁縫師會仔細檢查旗袍的比例，以及客人是否穿得舒適，完成所有修改後，才會縫上飾邊。接著，裁縫師用衣車縫合旗袍，並縫上盤扣。在把旗袍燙平後，會作最後一次檢查，然後才送交客人。

隨著西方時裝自1970年代以來愈受歡迎，旗袍一度備受冷落。然而，近年旗袍再次綻放光芒。不少名人和專業女性均愛穿旗袍，平日一身Prada服飾的卓雅茵說：「你可以穿旗袍出席商務晚宴。海外的客戶都喜歡我穿旗袍。」此外，不少新娘子都喜歡在婚宴上穿著旗袍。

出色的旗袍裁縫師已愈來愈少，梁師傅也擔心子女不肯承繼家業。不過，也有人努力保存這門手藝。斬青青在上環附近的工作室開班教授縫製旗袍的技巧。她與職員甚至會到新界的學校舉辦工作坊，教導女孩們縫製旗袍，希望把這門手藝承傳下去。