

# Chinese Folk Art Clothing

中国民俗——服饰



Attached

附

3张 明信片和

1张 画片

three postcards  
and  
a sheet of picture

Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House

上海人民美術出版社

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本社编

主编 / 策划：李 新

撰 文：段 梅

翻 译：赵冬梅

摄 影：卡咔度视觉 管一明

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China is a united multi-national country of 56 nationalities (Photo by Guan Yiming)

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## Chinese Clothing

Since ancient times, China has been hailed as "a big nation noted for clothes and hats" and "the land valuing rituals and ceremonies". "Huaxia" is another name China has been called. According to historical records: the word hua refers to beautiful clothes worn by emperors or officials with the meaning of "illustrious" and "splendid"; the word xia refers to a big nation with the meaning of "great" or "grand". China is known for the "great" importance attached to rituals and ceremonies, so it is called "xia". China is also known for the "illustrious" clothes worn by officials, so it is also called "hua". The origins of all these names have a close relationship with the clothing.

China is a united multi-national country of 56 nationalities. Origins of all nationalities are diversified and patterns of their clothes are colorful. Han Chinese, the main nationality with the largest population mainly distributed in Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, constitute about 91 percent of the country's total population. The style of traditional Han Chinese costumes varies with different places, demonstrating vivid geographic features.

Besides the Han nationality, the other 55 ethnic groups have a very small population, making up about only 9 percent of the country's total population, as such they are customarily referred to as the minorities. These minorities, though fewer in number, are also scattered over a vast area accounting for over 60 percent of China. They mainly includes minorities of Mongols, Korean, Manchu, Daur, Hezhen, Ewenki, Oreoqen distributed in provinces of Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang, and Inner Mongolia; and minorities of Hui, Dongxiang, Bonan, Salar, Tu, Yugur, Uyghurs, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Xibe, Tajik, Uzbeks, Russian, Tatars living in provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Ningxia, and Xinjiang; and minorities of Tibetan, Monba, Lhoba, Qiang, Yi, Bai, Hani, Dai, Lisu, Va, Lahu, Nakhi, Jingpo, Blang, Achang, Pumi, Nu, De'ang, Derung, Jino, Miao, Buyei, Dong, Sui, Gelao living in provinces of Yunnan, Sichuan, and Xizang; and minorities of Zhuang, Yao, Mulao, Maonan, Jing, Tujia, Li, She, Gaoshan living in provinces of Guangdong, Hubei, Hunan, Fujian, Hainan, Taiwan, and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Due to the complexity and diversity of the ecological environment of the wide distribution of these minorities together with different historical and social backgrounds of each ethnic group and the imbalance of socio-economic development, costumes of ethnic minorities demonstrate rich and diversified cultural characteristics.



## Hanfu and Cheongsams

The Han is the main nationality in China and Hanfu refers to traditional costumes of the Han Chinese. With vivid representations of the ritual culture, the origin of Han Chinese costumes can be traced back to an ancient period when it was under the reign of the Yellow Emperor—a legendary Chinese sovereign and cultural hero who is considered to be the ancestor of all Han Chinese in Chinese mythology.

The Han Costume has undergone a long period of evolvement. China began its primitive agriculture and clothing-making about five thousand years ago, when people began to make clothes with linen. Hereafter, the making of clothes was perfected day by day with the feeding of silkworms and the invention of silk-spinning. The Han Chinese attach great importance to the functional significance of clothes from the perspective of rites and ethics, deeming that the upper garment is for fending off the cold and the lower garment is for covering the body. The Han Costume, the combination of both, well exemplifies the very feature of oriental costume culture which places equal emphasis on its practicality and its function for rites and ethics.

The Han Costume features open cross-collar, the right side wrapped over before the left, long and loose sleeves, and string-binding. Hundreds of styles evolved from the basic ones through alterations in collars, sleeves, waistbands, and cutting. The four main styles of the Han Costume are Yishang—the upper garment plus the lower skirt, Shenyi—a long full body garment with tunic and skirt sewn as a single unit, Paofu—closed, round collared robe and Yiku—the upper garment with trousers. Mianfu is the two-piece garment Yishang worn by emperors and government officials on ceremonial occasions. Shenyi is the daily dress for officials and the formal dress for common people. Paofu is the daily dress for officials and scholars, while Ruqun—a top garment with a separate lower skirt, is for women. For ordinary men, they usually wear short upper garment and trousers. Distinctions as to the style, color, design and adornment of the dress show people's positions, gender differences as well as some historical and geographical characteristics. From modern times, the Han Costume has been gradually replaced by cheongsam and the Chinese tunic suit as the "national costume".

The cheongsam, or qipao in Chinese, has a close relationship with the history of Manchu. Manchu, an ethnic minority living in the northern part of China, is a nomadic people which is good at fishing and hunting in history. Paofu worn by the Manchu people features a

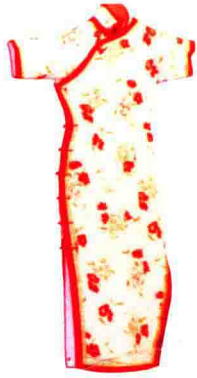




waistband and four slits with one on the left, right, front and back, which is rather warm and suit to their way of living. At the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century AD, a Manchu leader named Nurhaci (1559-1626), also known as Emperor Taizu of the Qing Dynasty, unified the Jurchen tribes in Northeast China and established the banner system—a military structure which consists of eight administrative divisions: plain yellow banner, bordered yellow banner, plain white banner, bordered white banner, plain red banner, bordered red banner, plain blue banner, bordered blue banner. All the Manchus were placed into the above-mentioned eight banners. Accordingly, they were called Banner People and the dresses they worn came to be known as the qipao. In the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Emperor Shunzhi (1638-1661) whose temple name is Qing Shizhu entered the Chinese proper by force through the Shanhai Pass—one of the major passes of the Great Wall of China. He firstly made Beijing the capital and then unified the whole country. Afterward, a compulsory costume reform was initiated with the purpose of assimilating Han Chinese with Manchu costumes. Broadly speaking, paofu, no matter worn by male or female banners, is all called the cheongsam. But, in fact, only the long robes worn by the female eight banners have some connections in origin with cheongsams which gained popularity afterwards. In the late Qing Dynasty, with the cultural communications and integrations, differences in patterns and styles between Manchu and Han Chinese costumes gradually diminished and cheongsams began to be popularized all across China.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Republic of China was founded. People started to cut long queues they are wearing, to alter colors of their costumes, and to lift various strict restrictions on costume making which intend to differentiate one's social standing and classes. The complicated adornments of the old-fashioned long gowns worn by those female banners were discarded and the simple style was in vogue, preferring quiet colors and paying more attention to the natural beauty of a woman. It was since that period that clothing making started its reform towards a civil and international direction. From the mid-twenties, Shanghai led the fashion trend of China when the initial pattern of cheongsams was sleeveless like a long waistcoat. Meanwhile, long skirts then were replaced by long waistcoat matching with a short outer garment. Then with influences of short skirts from the West, cheongsams were shortened to the knees and became more fitted to the waist and narrow-sleeved with piped edge. The side slits became much deeper. This altered pattern—a fusion of Chinese tradition

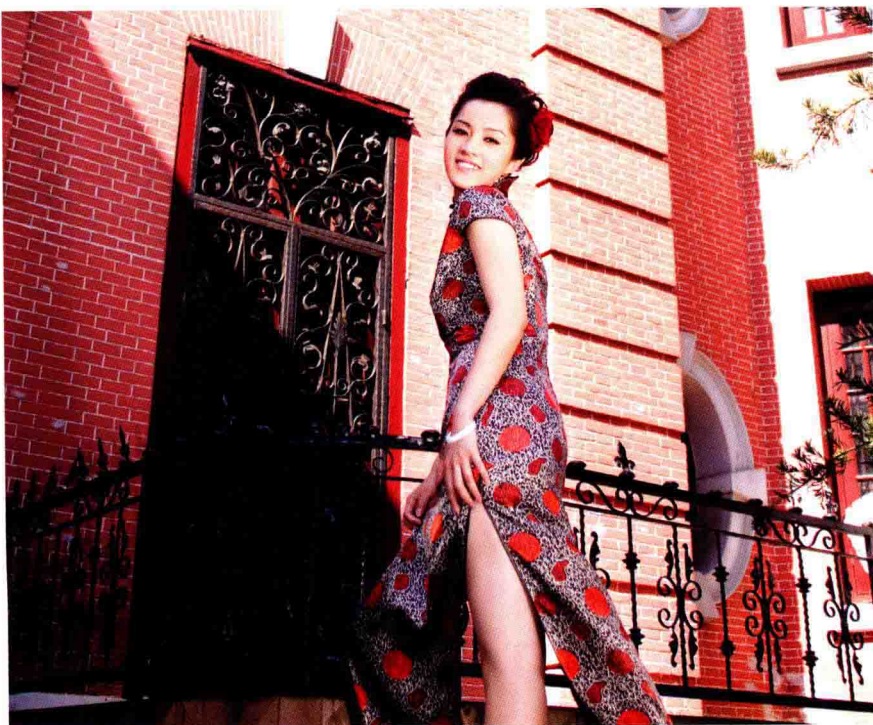




and western styles—was quite the vogue at that time. In the 1930s and the 1940s, the making of cheongsams gradually reached its maturity with constant alterations in form cutting, collars, edges, sleeves, and slits. In order to highlight the curve of the female body, cheongsams were gradually lengthened even to the floor with two deep side slits and a tight fitting waist which went very well with a waistcoat. Then, fashioned after western models, the cutting of cheongsams became more form fitting. After that, cheongsams were shortened again and became sleeveless—a pattern similar like a long waistcoat of 200 years ago and were gradually accepted by the people.

The cheongsam constitutes an important part of Chinese costume culture. With constant reforms and innovations in designs and colors, nowadays cheongsams have a wide variety of styles such as set-in sleeve patterns, shoulder seam patterns, hidden pleat patterns, short grown-on sleeve patterns and those sleeveless ones. But the simple, light, formfitting, and elegant style which sets off the elegant temperament of oriental women is preferred and carried on to this day. Gradually, cheongsams become the standard traditional clothes for Chinese women.

The cheongsam constitutes an important part of Chinese costume culture (Photo by Kakadu Vision)







## Costumes of Ethnic Minorities

Clothing designs and forms of Chinese ethnic minorities are extremely colorful and exquisite. According to different geographical areas each ethnic minority belongs to, their ecological environment and mode of production, costumes of Chinese ethnic minorities can be broadly classified into five types.

The costumes of fishing and hunting ethnic groups living in Northeast China. This region is located in the northernmost part of the country with high mountains, dense forests, crisscross rivers, and a cold climate. Costumes of this type share the cultural characteristics of the cold high-altitude region. In history, ethnic groups living in this region such as Manchu, Xibe, Hezhen, Oreogon, Ewenki, etc., made a living on hunting, fishing, and gathering. Materials of their costumes are mainly animal skin or fish skin. Decorative patterns of their clothes have characteristics of primitive fishing and hunting ethnic groups. Since modern times, these ethnic minorities mainly wear gowns which come in two forms: one is long which is hemmed to the ankles and the other is short which is hemmed to the knees. Materials of these gowns are fur or cotton felt in winter and silk, cotton, or linen in summer.



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1. Secular official dress with dragon design in old Tibet, Tibetan

2. Woman's coat, Daur