

Clothing

TO THE TEACHER

OBJECTIVES OF THE UNIT: To examine one aspect of the cultural changes that have occurred in China during the twentieth century. To provide material for thinking about class and gender differences in China and how they have been manifested and reproduced. To offer an alternative approach to issues of western influence.

TEACHING STRATEGIES: Since everyone has to make decisions about what to wear, students should have no difficulty recognizing that a person's choices make statements about personal identity and affiliation. Students could be asked to consider the choices available to people occupying different statuses, and how they have changed over time. Issues of western influence, its meaning and impact, could also be fruitfully discussed by considering the case of clothing.

Besides issues of how clothing looks, students could be asked to discuss issues relating to its creation and how changing technology has affected women's lives.

WHEN TO TEACH: Although some teachers may wish to incorporate the material on traditional clothing when teaching about the Ming or Qing dynasties, this unit was designed above all to highlight the ways ordinary life has changed since the beginning of the twentieth century. It could be introduced near the end of a chronologically arranged course as a review of the magnitude of changes since the end of the Qing.

ii
Clothing may seem like a mundane part of our everyday lives. To many, dress is merely a practical concern that warrants no more than superficial notice. But in every culture clothing is one of the most powerful and ubiquitous forms of visual communication.



Source: *Free China Review* 40.2 February 1990, p. 33.

By using visual clues provided by clothing, people quickly 'place' each other, making guesses about the gender, social status, occupation, ethnic or national identity, and so on of those they encounter. By manipulating the same sets of signals, people can declare their individuality, indicate their beliefs, or signify their membership within various groups through how they dress.

At any given time and place there are conventional ways of expressing meaning through one's clothing, but over time these conventions change in response to changed political circumstances, technology, and fashion. This unit will explore the role clothing played within Chinese culture.

In China, by Ming and Qing times, clothing indicated not only differences in class and gender, but also ethnicity, as the two major ethnic groups, Han Chinese and Manchu, wore distinct clothes. This unit will begin by looking at these traditional patterns, then consider how the great social and political changes of the twentieth century altered this system.

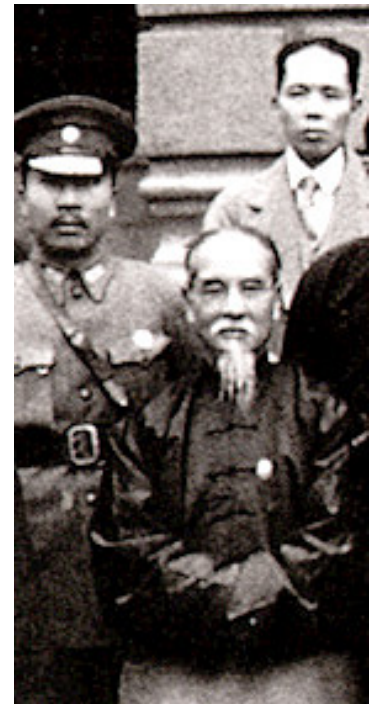
As you view the images in this unit, keep in mind the following questions:

- *How much did the materials used to make clothing influence how they looked? How were clothes adapted to meet the needs of cold and hot temperatures?*
- *What have been the features of Chinese dress that allowed people to place each other according to status, wealth, gender, ethnicity, and political commitments? How have these changed over time?*
- *How did notions of modesty relate to shifts in fashion for women?*
- *Are there any connections between the aesthetic principles found in Chinese clothing and those found in Chinese art?*

Suggested Reading



Traditional Patterns



20th Century Changes

SUGGESTED READING FOR CLOTHING

ii

Cotton and Silk Making in Manchu China. New York: Rizzoli, 1980.

Dress in Hong Kong: A Century of Change and Customs. Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1992.

Chen, Jerome. *China and the West: Society and Culture, 1815-1937*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979.

Garrett, Valery M. *Traditional Chinese Clothing*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press Ltd., 1987.

Garrett, Valery M. *Chinese Clothing: An Illustrated Guide*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press Ltd., 1994.

Hommel, Rudolf P. *China at Work: An Illustrated Record of the Primitive Industries of China's Masses, Whose Life is Toil, and Thus an Account of Chinese Civilization*. New York: John Day, 1937.

Roberts, Claire, ed. *Evolution and Revolution: Chinese Dress 1700's-1990's*. Sydney: Powerhouse Publishing, 1997.

Scott, A. C. *Chinese Costume in Transition*. New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1960.

Steele, Valerie and John S. Major, eds. *China Chic: East Meets West*. New Haven and London, 1999.

Wilson, Verity. *Chinese Dress*. London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1986.

Zhou Xun and Gao Chunming, eds. *5000 Years of Chinese Costumes*. Hong Kong: The Commercial Press Ltd., 1984.

ii

ii

ii

Traditional Patterns

For periods before photography, our evidence of Chinese clothing styles comes primarily from paintings, supplemented by tomb figurines and archaeological discoveries of actual clothing, mostly of the wealthy and high-ranking. We will take a brief look at what is known of clothing from earlier periods through paintings, then a closer look at the Qing dynasty, which allows us to make use of photographs. We have also included an independent unit on textile technology, primarily on women making silk and cotton.



Evidence from Painting



Evidence from Photographs



Making Cloth

Evidence from Paintings

The unit on Painting, especially the section on Painting as a Social Record, included many paintings from the Song and Yuan period that show how people of various statuses dressed. Below are a few of those illustrations, supplemented with some later ones.

What are the main differences in how men and women dress?

What do you interpret as differences based on wealth, status, or occupation?

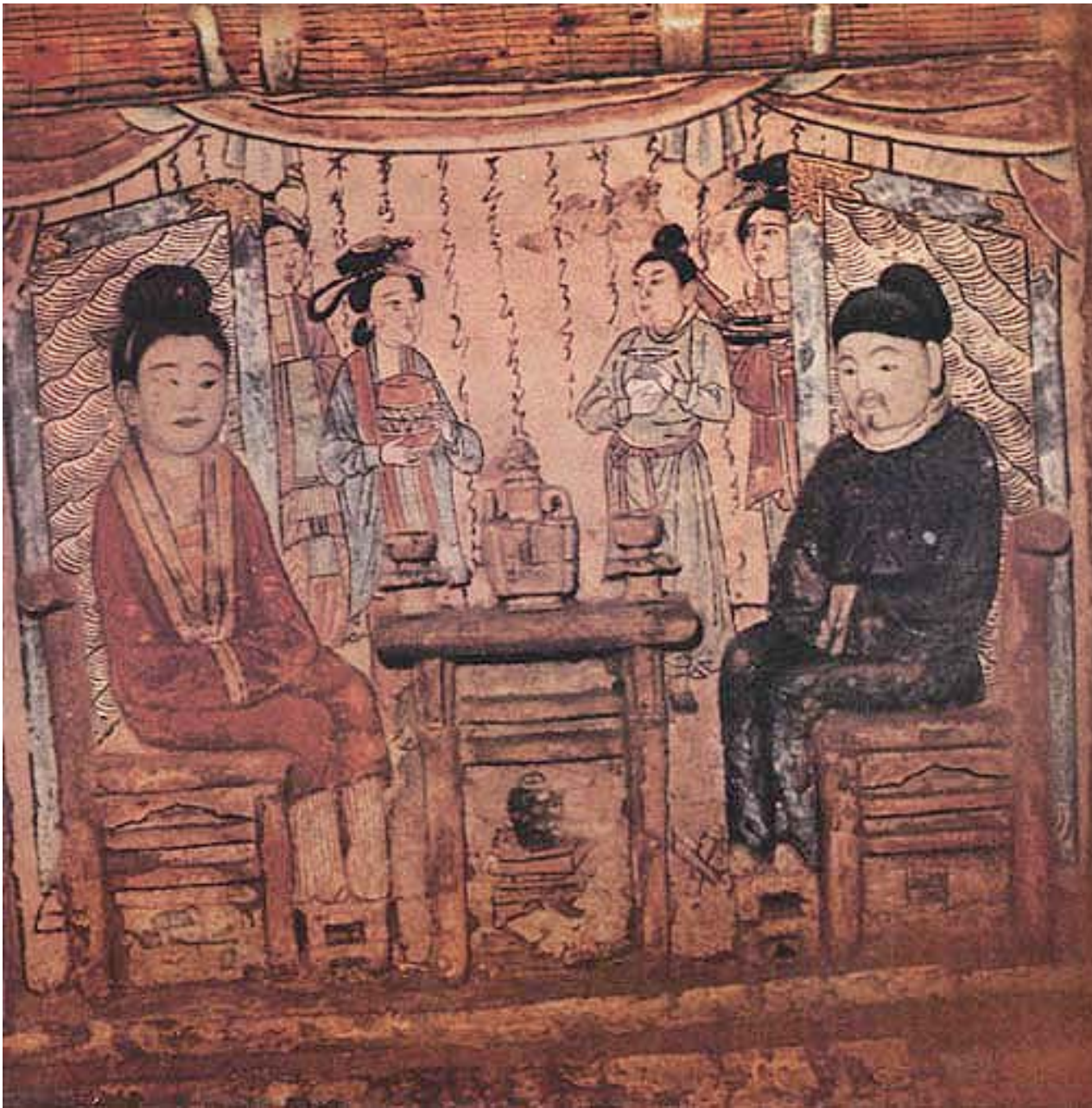
Do you notice any major changes in the style of dress over time?

What levels of social status are represented in this scene? Which aspects of the garments give you clues to status?



Song period, detail from *The Spring Festival Along the River* by Zhang Zeduan

SOURCE: Zhang Zeduan (Song), *Qingming shanghe tu*, in Fu Xinian, ed. *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Liang Song huihua*, shang (Series Vol. 3), pl. 51. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Beijing.



How are the men and women distinguished in this scene?

Eleventh century tomb wall painting

SOURCE: Su Bai, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji huihua pian 12: Mushi bihua* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1984), pl. 137, p. 135. Mural on west wall of tomb, Baisha Town, Yu County, Henan province. Approx. 90 cm h. x 135 cm w.

Would you have known these men were literati even if they did not hold brushes or documents?



Zhou Wenju (10th c), *A Literary Garden*

SOURCE: Jin Weinuo, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji, huihua bian 2: Sui Tang Wudai de huihua yishu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1984), pl. 63, pp. 124. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Beijing. Handscroll, ink and colors on silk, 30.4 x 58.5 cm.



What do you notice about sleeves in this scene?

How is color used in these people's garments?

Detail from Ma Hezhi, *Classic of Filial Piety* (12th c)

SOURCE: *Songdai shuhua ceye mingpin techan* (Taipei: Guoli Gogong bowu guan, 1995), pl. 44a. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei.

How do the clothing of these two pairs compare to what we have seen above?



The Night Revels of Han Xizai, attributed to Gu Hongzhong, detail (12th c)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo lidai huihua: Gugong bowuyuan canghua ji*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1978), p. 85.



Yuan wall painting

SOURCE: Zhou Xun. *Zhongguo lidai funu zhuangshi*. (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co. Ltd., 1988), pl. 146. The mural is from the Yongle gong Daoist temple.

What seems to be the status of the people in the illustration below?



Wall painting from a Yuan period Daoist temple

SOURCE: *Yongle gong bihua* (Beijing: Waiwen chubanshe, 1997), p. 84.

ANSWER: The man on the left is a literati doctor. He has diagnosed the problem of the seated woman, but an assistant is providing the actual treatment.



During Ming and Qing times, a conspicuous feature of official dress was the use of rank badges. Different birds or animals indicated the rank of the official in the civil or military hierarchy.

Ming portrait of Jiang Shunfu

SOURCE: *Mingqing renwuxiaoxiang huaxuan* (Nanjing: Nanjing Bowuguan, 1979), pl. 16.



Take a closer look at the badge on his garment. Also note the subtle patterning of the black silk.

Does anything else besides the badge add distinction to his costume?

HINT: Notice the belt worn by this official and the one in the portrait below.

Ming portrait of Jiang Shunfu, detail

SOURCE: *Mingqing renwuxiaoxiang huaxuan* (Nanjing: Nanjing Bowuguan, 1979), pl. 16.

Sometimes the badges were made using gold thread for the background.





Qing portrait of Xu Ruke

SOURCE: *Mingqing renwuxiaoxiang huaxuan* (Nanjing: Nanjing Bowuguan, 1979), pl. 51.

Move on to [Evidence from Photographs](#)

Evidence from Photographs

Photographs, available in some abundance beginning in the 1870s, allow us to see many features of Chinese dress not very well revealed from paintings, including the dress of people of lower social levels.

Photographs also allow us to see some of the ethnic distinctions in dress and adornment that resulted from the Manchu conquest in 1644. The most notable change in personal appearance was the requirement that men shave the front of their heads and wear the rest of their hair in a braid, in the Manchu fashion. Although this tended to blur visible distinctions between Chinese and Manchus, in other ways this ethnic distinction was made visible. Manchu women, for instance, were not allowed to bind their feet the way Chinese women did. Although both Manchu men and women were encouraged to wear Manchu dress, rather than adopt Chinese fashions, over time more and more were seen in dress indistinguishable from what Chinese of their class wore.



Men



Women

Men

Although there are undoubtedly some women at the market depicted below from a photograph published in 1899, most of the people seem to be men.

What do you notice about their clothing? What seem to be major differences in how people are dressed?



A rural market in the 1890s

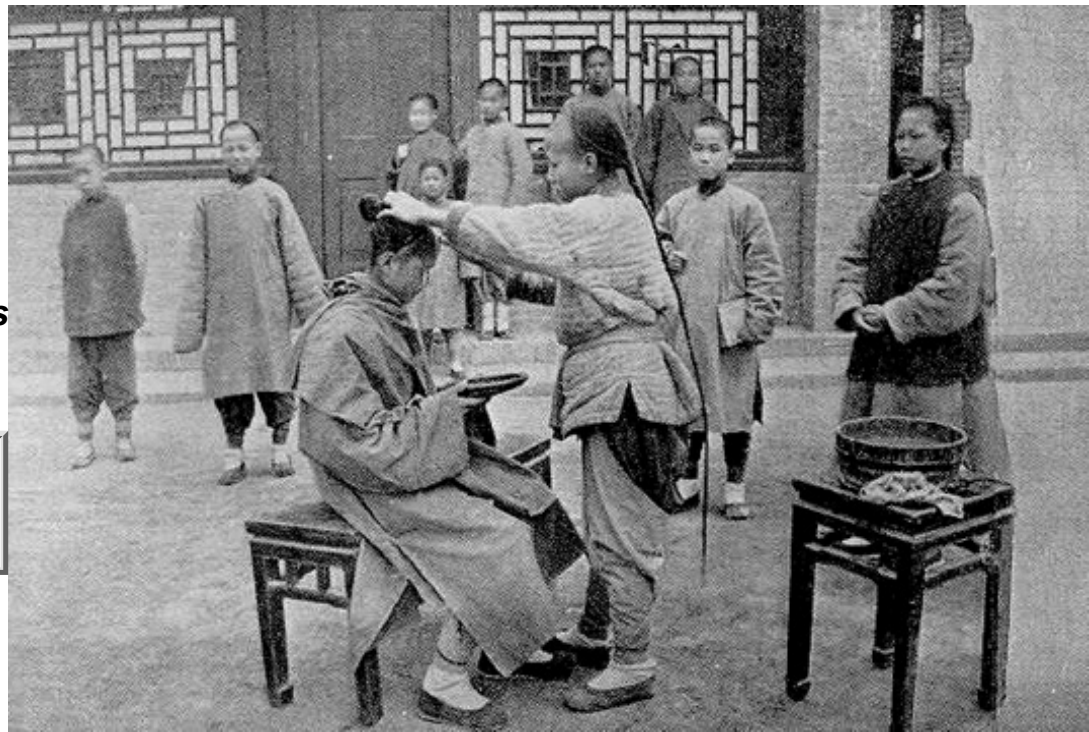
SOURCE: Arthur H. Smith, *Village Life in China* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1899), opposite p. 148.

What do you notice about the shoes, jackets, pants, and other elements of the dress of the people here.

Do you think there are any women present?

What fabric do you think was used for most of the clothes?

ANSWER: All of these men seem to be wearing clothes of cotton, with the thicker jackets padded with cotton wadding.



An outdoor barber and his customer

SOURCE: Arthur H. Smith, *Village Life in China* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1899), opposite p. 118.

Can you think of any reason why this carpenter would wear a padded jacket but not shoes?



A carpenter

SOURCE: Arthur H. Smith, *Village Life in China* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1899), opposite p. 310.



The next three pictures are all of men from the elite class.

Which features of this man's dress tell you something about his status? Compare the way he is dressed to the ordinary people above and the well-to-do men below.

HINT: Think about the sort of fabric used.

A wealthy man in 1870

SOURCE: *A Pictorial History of Modern China.* (Hong Kong: The Seventies Publishing Co., 1976), p. 75.



Men having a meal

SOURCE: *A Pictorial History of Modern China*. (Hong Kong: The Seventies Publishing Co., 1976), p. 6.



What do you notice about collars, sleeves, and fastenings in the clothes of this man and the ones above?

Late Qing man

SOURCE: Tang Zhenchang, ed. *Jindai Shanghai fanhualu*. (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1993), p. 246.

Move on to Women

Women

Chinese women's clothing naturally varied by class, season, and region of the country, much as men's did, but dresses, skirts, jackets, trousers, and leggings were all common types of garments.



What features of the dress of these two women give an indication of their class?

Can you see any similarities between the women's and men's clothing?

A large proportion of Chinese women in the late nineteenth century had their feet bound small while they were children. The woman seen in this late nineteenth century photograph was an entertainer, a sing-song girl, but footbinding was also practiced by the families of scholars and merchants.

The shoes that covered bound feet, as well as the leggings over the top of them, were often elaborately embroidered, as seen in the example below.



Shoes for bound feet

SOURCE: Zhou Shun and Gao Chunming, *Zhongkuo lidai funu zhuangshi* (Hong Kong: Sanlien shuju, 1988), p. 289.



A sing-song girl in the late 19th century

SOURCE: Tcheng-Ki Tong and John Henry Gray, *The Chinese Empire, Past and Present* (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1900), opposite p. 128.

Westerners often commented that, as you can see in the photograph below, Chinese women's clothes did not reveal the shape of their bodies in the way Western women's clothes of the period did.

Can you think of any reasons Chinese may have preferred loose clothing?



Women preparing a meal

SOURCE: Arthur Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, opposite p. 19.

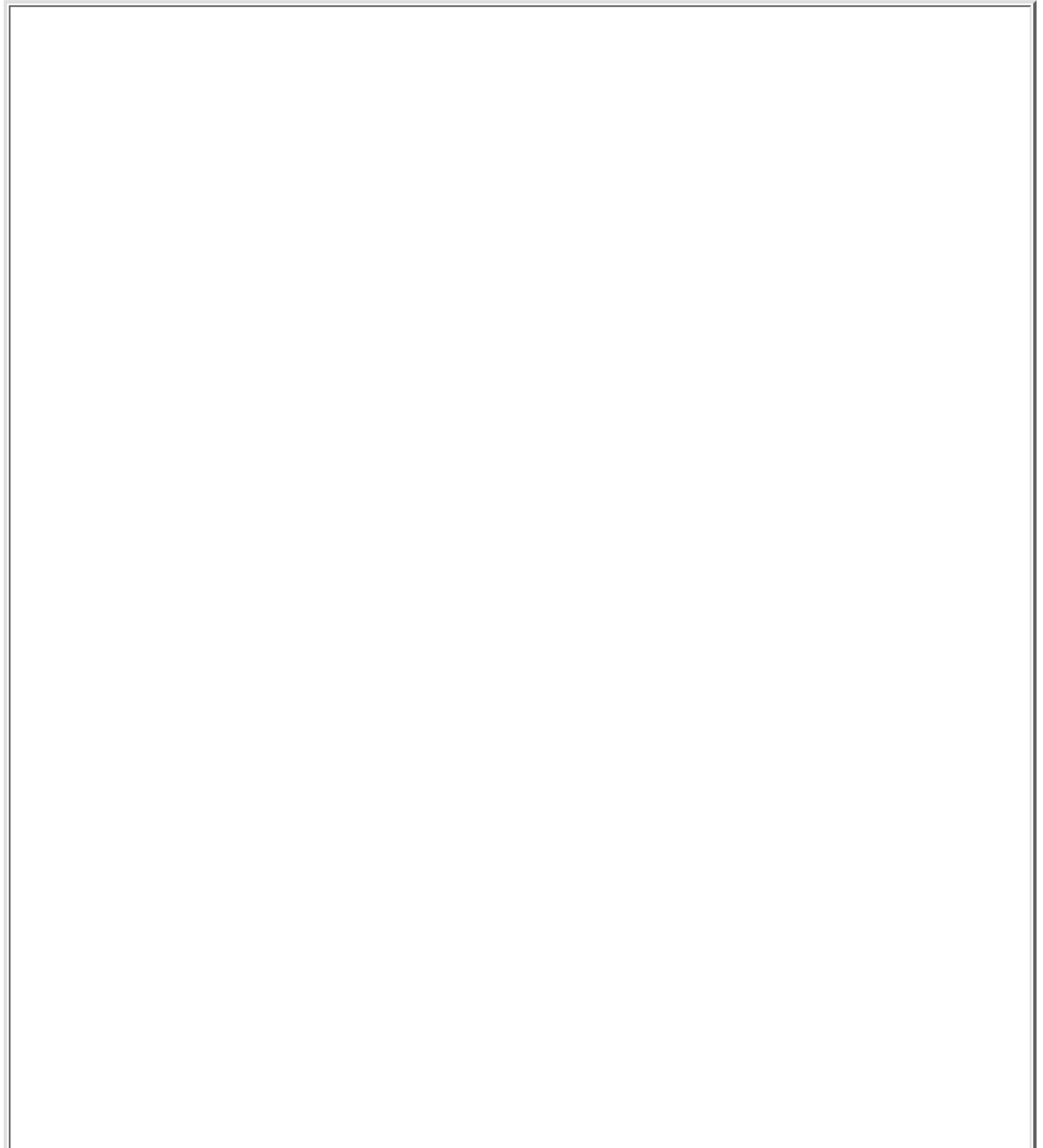
Notice the use of embroidery to decorate these women's clothes.

To see photos of clothing like these women are wearing, [click here](#) [given below in this Teacher's Guide].



Women and girls in an elegant home

SOURCE: Yan Chongnian. *Beijing: The Treasures of an Ancient Capital*. (Beijing: Morning Glory Press 1987).





The silk garments of upper class women were regularly embellished with patterned borders, often embroidered.

A close-up of the embroidery on the front of the skirt panel is given below.

What do you notice about the colors of this garment?



SOURCE (above and below): *Luoyi Baizai* (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1992), p. 43.

This jacket, besides the embroidered sleeve panels found in the garment above, also has an elaborately embroidered collar.



Here is a closer view of the needlework.

Manchu women did not bind their feet, but wore elevated shoes that created some of the visual effects of bound feet.

What features of their appearance would you think might signify the social standing of these women?



Two Manchu women in a courtyard

SOURCE: Tcheng-Ki Tong and John Henry Gray, *The Chinese Empire, Past and Present* (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1900), opposite p. 177.



Manchu women on the street

SOURCE: Yan Chongnian. *Beijing: The Treasures of an Ancient Capital*. (Beijing: Morning Glory Press 1987).

SOME THOUGHTS: The women in the picture on the right are wearing Manchu long gowns. Those on the left are wearing clothes like Chinese women wore, with wider sleeves, visible leggings, embroidered borders, and so on. But note the hairdo of the seated woman, which reflects Manchu customs.



Shoes worn by Manchu women



SOURCE: Zhou Xun. *Zhongguo lidai funu zhuangshi*. (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co. Ltd., 1988), pl. 441, 440.

Move on to [Making Cloth](#)

Making Cloth

Making cloth was women's work in China. In early times, the two main fabrics were silk and hemp, supplemented by other fibers such as ramie. Beginning in Song times, cotton began to supplant hemp for ordinary clothes, and by Ming times cotton spinning and weaving were important cottage industries.

Silk, the most valued of all fabrics, was made in China from Shang times, if not earlier. Silk makes excellent clothing because it is soft, sheer, lightweight, long-lasting, and can be dyed brilliant colors. It can be made light enough to wear on the hottest of days, but also helps protect against the cold because silk floss makes excellent padding. By the Warring States period, Chinese were making multi-colored brocades and open-work gauzes as well as elaborate silk embroideries.



Wang Juzheng, *The Spinning Wheel*, detail (Song)

SOURCE: Fu Sinian, ed., *Zhongguo meishu quanji, huihua pian 3: Liang Song huihua, shang*. (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), pl. 19, p. 34. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Beijing.



Chinese have long viewed sericulture as a fundamental activity, comparable to men's agricultural work. From Song times on governments issued illustrated guides to the sericulture process, both to promote the spread of up-to-date information and to honor the women who worked at making silk. To the left is a detail from one such set of illustrations, dating from the late seventeenth century. To see more illustrations of the steps in the sericulture process, [click here](#) .

Detail from illustrations of the sericulture process

SOURCE: *Yuzhi gengzhi tu* (Taipei: Guoli Gugong bowuguan, 1979 reprint of 1696 ed.).

From Song times on, cotton became the dominant fiber for ordinary clothes, though hemp and ramie also remained in use. The advantages of cotton were that it was lighter, warmer, and softer than these other fibers.

Growing cotton plants was farm work, done primarily by men in areas where the climate and soil were favorable. However, many families that did not grow their own cotton bought unprocessed cotton that they spun themselves, or bought cotton yarn that they wove themselves. Thus, it was very common for women to spin and weave for their families, and in many parts of the country, they also produced for the market.



Spinning cotton is a demanding task. The spinner has to draw out uniform amounts of the short fibers as she spins so that they can be twisted into a thin, even thread.

What is this woman doing with her feet?

Woman working a spinning wheel

SOURCE: Emile Bard, *The Chinese at Home* (London: George Newnes, n.d.), opposite p. 144.

Cotton was generally woven into simple, flat weaves, using looms like the treadle loom used to weave silk. The loom used by the woman below was much simpler to make and set up.



Woman weaving a band or ribbon on a small loom

SOURCE: Rudolf P. Hommel, *China at Work* (New York, John Day Co., 1937), p. 185.

Women in well-to-do households by late Imperial times rarely spun and wove, but needlework was considered a proper occupation for women, and many women spent long hours making lace or doing embroidery. The women below are making lace, perhaps solely for their own use, perhaps to sell.



Women and children sitting on a *kang*, making lace

SOURCE: Arthur Smith, *Chinese Characteristics* (London, 1894), p. 200.



As seen earlier, many better-off women wore garments embellished with embroidery. (To review, [click here.](#))

How much time do you think it would have taken to do the embroidery on this woman's gown?

Embroidered silk women's dress

SOURCE: Zhou Xun. *Zhongguo lidai funu zhuangshi*. (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co. Ltd., 1988), pl. 286.

Move on to [Twentieth Century Changes](#)

Sericulture

Producing silk was a lengthy, complex process. As show in the illustrations below, men took responsibility for the mulberry trees, growing the only food silkworms eat, but women were responsible for the critical task of feeding the leaves to the silkworms. Silkworms do not spin cocoons on demand; timing and temperature have to be handled carefully, and during the month between hatching and spinning the cocoons have to be fed every few hours, day or night. If properly coddled, the worms eventually spin cocoons for several days, each cocoon made up of a strand of silk several thousand feet long. Over two thousand silkworms are needed to produce one pound of silk.

The illustrations below of the steps in the sericulture process are from a set issued by the government in the late seventeenth century. The tradition of the government sponsoring sets of pictures of the processes involved in both agriculture and silk production dated back to Song times. It was based on the view that the government should encourage basic, productive work, as opposed to less essential enterprises such as trade.



The sericulture process begins with washing the silkworm eggs that had been stored over the winter.

After the eggs have hatched, the larvae are spread out on trays to grow. They are fed chopped mulberry leaves for about a month.

Why do you think a baby and small child are in this picture?



Below, women bring baskets of mulberry leaves during the final few days before the worms spin their cocoons. At this point, the worms may need to eat ten times a day.



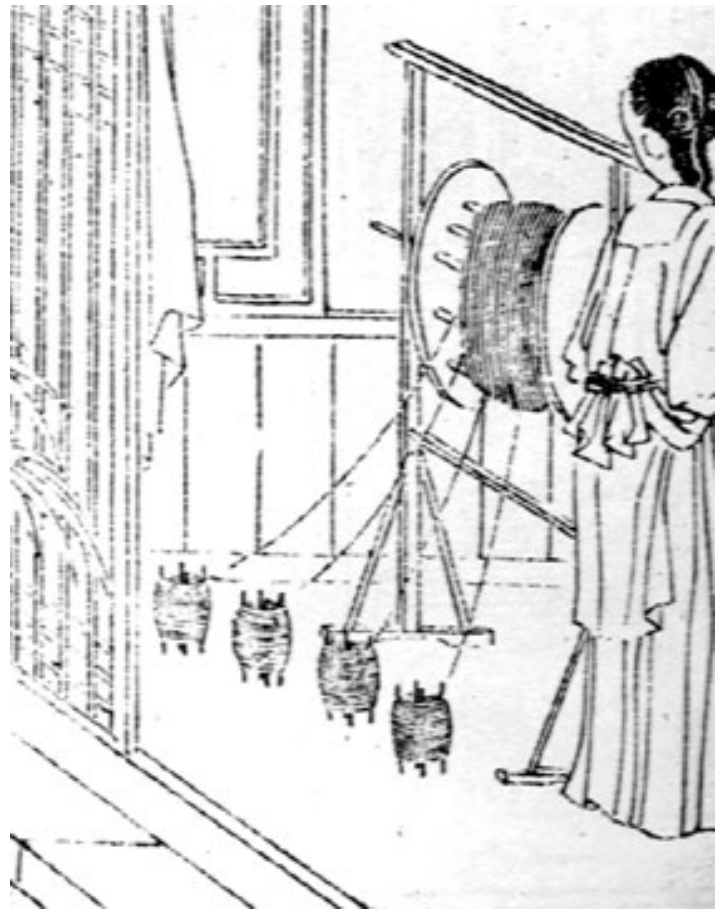
The rushes on the trays have to be cleaned regularly.

Preparing the frames for the silkworm mats, where the worms will be placed for spinning.



Spinning may take about a week, after which the cocoons have to be unraveled. Here the cocoons are in a pot of hot water, which both kills the worms and loosens the filaments and lets the cocoons float freely. The filaments from several cocoons are reeled off together to make a strong thread.

To make stronger warp threads, it is necessary to twist several single threads together on a spooling frame.



Silk threads are wound onto smaller reels for weaving.



In preparation for weaving, the warp threads are laid out and rolled up.



Below, the skeins of silk are being dyed.

Do you think this is done in each household, or by specialists?

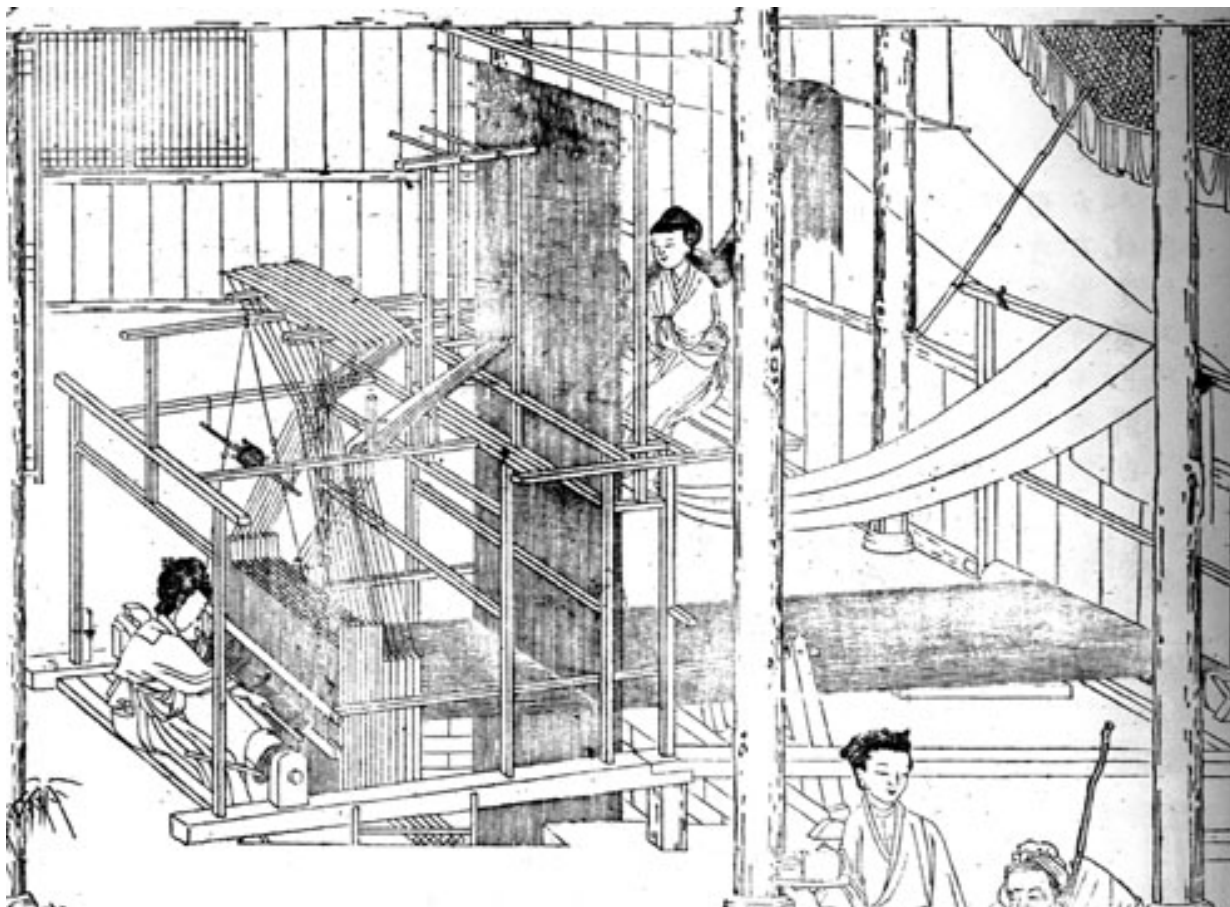


SOURCE: Dyeing was commonly done by specialists for a fee. Dyeing was a messy business, and not of high status.



For simpler weaves, one woman could operate a treadle loom, using her foot to raise the heddles.

How would you compare the work involved in weaving to all of the earlier steps in making silk yarn? Which took longer, was more tedious, more creative?



More complex weaves required a two-person draw loom. The person perched above moves the heddles that allow the weaving of complex multi-colored patterns.

SOURCE: *Yuzhi gengzhi tu* (Taipei: Guoli Gugong bowuguan, 1979 reprint of 1696 ed.), passim.

20th Century Changes

As China struggled to define its place within the modern world during the twentieth century, issues of cultural identity were often worked out through clothes. Here we look at these processes through three lenses: the accommodation of features of western dress early in the century in a politicized context, the great diversity of styles of the 1980s and 1990s, and the transformation of clothing worn for weddings.



Adaptations to Western Styles



80s and 90s



Weddings

Adaptations to Western Styles

In the first decades of the twentieth century, many of the elite families of China sent their children abroad for study. Western ideas of modernization and industrialization became familiar to a whole generation of young educated elite in China, and many of them came to associate western styles of dress with modernity. While some people fully adopted western style dress, others took to wearing clothes that retained symbolically important elements of traditional dress.

To the right is a cartoon from a magazine in the 1920s showing a "modern" day couple.

What do you notice about the clothing styles?

Take a close look at the first frame.

Can you guess what is happening in this frame? What do you think the figures in the background represent?



SOME THOUGHTS: The first frame illustrates the tensions between traditional Chinese culture and the influence of western culture during the 1920s in China. The trousers and blazer worn by the 'westernized' man shocks the sensibilities of the men in the background. Although the two men in the background also adopt subtle hints of westernization in the hats they wear, overall they maintain a more conservative form of Chinese dress.

— 新時期的婦女 —



(1) 她自命為新文化中的人物，不願與舊習為伴，出門時必帶和風（她的夫）攜手同行，使她為國恥。走到街上，他見了友人，驚問這婦人，你作不見，然而她每氣為昂昂的。



(2) 每週星期六晚上，她總是學習跳舞，無人能阻，這把留聲機帶來，她，嗚呼！上流社會，她也是驚人的。



(3) 新文化生活去過的時候，各自獨立，她則每月讓款中賺了許多生財，半年中已無錢買糖糖，其得意時，則其勇氣，借此過關。

新時期的主婦

中秋生

SOURCE: *Funu zazhi* Vol. 13 no

MORE 1920s magazine pictures

Many of the social, political, and artistic leaders in the early decades of the twentieth century had studied abroad. Song Qingling, the intellectual and political activist of the revolutionary period and the wife of revolutionary leader Sun Yat-sen, studied in the U.S.

Below are two photos of her. The photo on the left was taken while she was a student at Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia. In the photo on the right, Song Qingling sits to the left of her two sisters Song Ailing (the future wife of Chiang Kai-shek) and Song Mei-ling (who married Shanghai financier T.V. Song) after her return to China.

In looking at these two photos, what differences do you notice in how clothing carried markers of gender, wealth, and fashion-consciousness? Why do you think Song Qingling would change back to a Chinese clothing style when she returned to China from her studies in America?



Notice anything about these women's shoes?

SOURCE: *China Reconstructs* 31. 9 (Sept 1982): 33.

During the political upheaval of the early twentieth century, Chinese men frequently expressed their political allegiances through the clothes they wore.

Below is an old photo of a meeting of Nationalist Party (Guomindang) political leaders in 1930.

How many different styles of dress are illustrated in this photo? What different political allegiances do you think their clothing reflects?



SOURCE: *Jiang Jieshi yu guomin zhengfu.* (Hong Kong: The Commercial Press Ltd., 1994), p. 133.

ANSWER: The 1920's and 30's were tumultuous years in Chinese history. Chiang Kai-shek and his Nationalist part contended with local warlords for control while communist rebels and Japanese troops continued to threaten Chiang's tenuous hold on power. The different styles worn by these men can be viewed as a reflection of the disunity and instability common during this period in Chinese history.

**To the right is a photo from
1985 of two doctors, one**

specializing in traditional medicine, the other in modern, Western medicine.

Is it surprising that a practitioner of traditional Chinese medicine would also choose to dress in a traditional way?



SOURCE: *Across China*. China Pictorial, ed. (Beijing: China Pictorial, 1985), p. 54.

During the twentieth century new modes of dress were created in an attempt to integrate both traditional Chinese and western cultural influences. The most influential were the *qipao* for women and the Mao suit. Today, however, many men wear western-style suits, just as women wear western-style clothing.



Qipao

Mao suits

Western-style suit

Eighties and Nineties

By the 1980s and 1990s, dress in China had become extremely diverse, with fashion-consciousness especially pronounced in the large cities.

Is there anything about the people in the three scenes below from 1990s Beijing that could not have been seen in a large US city of the same date?



People on the streets of Beijing in the mid 1990s

SOURCE: *Zhongguo 619* (1998), pp. 8, 10.



Do the people at these two market scenes seem more distinctively Chinese than the ones above? What is different about their appearance?

Buying and selling watermelons on the street

SOURCE: *China Today* 39.8 (Aug 1990): 1.



Market scene, Beijing, 1996

SOURCE: Courtesy of Joyce Chow, 1996.



How would you describe the clothing choices of the people seen on this street in Hong Kong in the late 1980s?

Hong Kong street, late 1980s

SOURCE: *Free China Review*, vol. 40 no. 3 (March 1990): 29.

In what ways does this scene of Shanghai in 2001 resemble Hong Kong as seen above? What is different?



Shanghai shopping street, 2001

Photograph courtesy of Joseph Gotchy

Move on to [Weddings](#)

Weddings

Weddings had long been an occasion when ordinary people dressed in much more elaborate clothes than they would otherwise wear, and wedding dress has continued to carry symbolic importance, making it a good case for viewing how dress has changed.



This late nineteenth century photograph depicts a young couple in north China at their wedding.

What do you notice about how they are dressed?

What would you guess about the colors of their garments?

HINT: In most areas of the country, the bride would wear red, an auspicious color. The groom would wear brighter colors than men normally wore, but not red.

Young couple at their wedding

SOURCE: Arthur H. Smith, *Village Life in China* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1899), opposite p. 188.

This newly married couple went to a studio to have a photograph made to commemorate their marriage.

What differences do you detect between this couple and the one above? What might account for them?

HINT: Notice the rank badge the man is wearing.



Studio portrait of bride and groom, 1890s

SOURCE: W. A. P. Martin, *A Cycle of Cathay* (New York: Felming H. Revell, 1896), opposite p. 368.

Below are three photographs of marriages among Hakka in Taiwan in the early twentieth century, between 1923 and 1940.

With regard to clothing, what seems to have changed first? How could this be explained?



1923 photo of bride and groom and family members

SOURCE: Lin Chengzi. *Liudui keji chuantong yishi de shentao* (Taipei 1981), pl. no. 139, p. 61.



How do the family members, other than the bride and groom, dress?

1930 photo of bride, groom, and family.

SOURCE: Lin Chengzi. *Liudui keji chuantong yishi de shentao* (Taipei 1981), pl. 143, p. 62.



Why might a couple in Taiwan in 1940 have worn western dress?

1940 photo of bride and groom

SOURCE: Lin Chengzi, *Liudui kejiia chuantong yishi de shentao* (Taipei, 1981), pl. 145, p. 62.

These young people are getting married in a rural area in Yunnan province.

What features of how they are dressed reflect traditional customs?

HINT: Think about color.



Newly married couple in Yunnan in the early 1990s

SOURCE: *Visual Voices 100 photographs of Village China by the Women of Yunnan Province* (Yunnan: Yunnan People's Publishing house, 1995), p. 96.



This picture of the bridal party is from an advertisement for a wedding ceremony company that appeared in a 1990 issue of *Women's Magazine*.

Why would Chinese want to wear tuxedos and white wedding gowns?

Magazine advertisement for wedding company

SOURCE: *Funu zazhi* no. 12 (1990): 77.

Magazine Advertisements

All three of the images below come from the popular journal, *Women's Magazine*, from 1927.

What do you notice about how the people are dressed?

What might account for differences among them?



SOURCE: *Funu zazhi*. v.13 n.2.



SOURCE: *Funu zazhi*, v. 13 no. 2.

歐美各國。對於婦女之服裝。非常注意。近年我國。女體日強。文飾日富。婦女之服裝。却是一件重要的問題。所以本公司為特誠實的指導。務望女同胞採用國貨。

道此緯成呢。美但是目下時行的新裝。且更輕。更個體。美。麗。堅。結。細。軟。分外。經。穿。我。請。各。界。一。試。矣。

分八角九洋大尺每呢成緯牌門前
角 九洋大尺每呢成緯牌後樓

總發行所
上海英租界北平路一號三樓
緯成公司謹啓
各大公司各埠洋貨商店均有出售

The two girls above on the couch seems to be as young or younger than the young woman in the advertisement to the left from a clothing company.

What distinguishes how they dress and how their clothes are represented?

SOURCE: *Funu zazhi*, vol. XIII no. 11 nov. 1 1927.

Qipao

The modernized Chinese dress commonly worn by women in the early decades of the twentieth century is called the *qipao*. It is a one-piece dress characterized by an upright ("mandarin") collar, an opening from the neck to under the right arm, and a fairly narrow cut, often with a slit, especially if the skirt reaches below mid-calf.

In what sense can the qipao be seen as



developing from women's clothing styles of the Qing period?

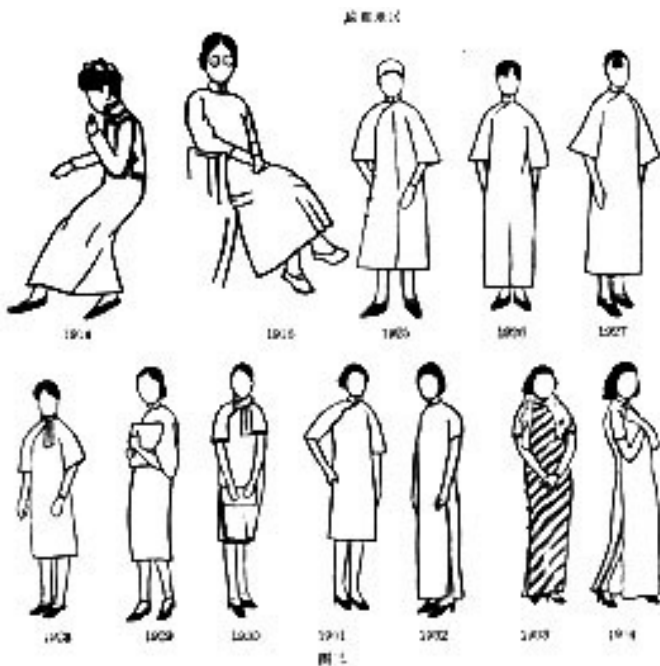
SOURCE: Lexis Books Calendar (Taipei: Lexis Books, 1999).



The Communist party leader Deng Yingchao (the wife of Zhou Enlai) was wearing this dress when she met with an American writer in 1938.

Did this choice of clothing carry any political messages?

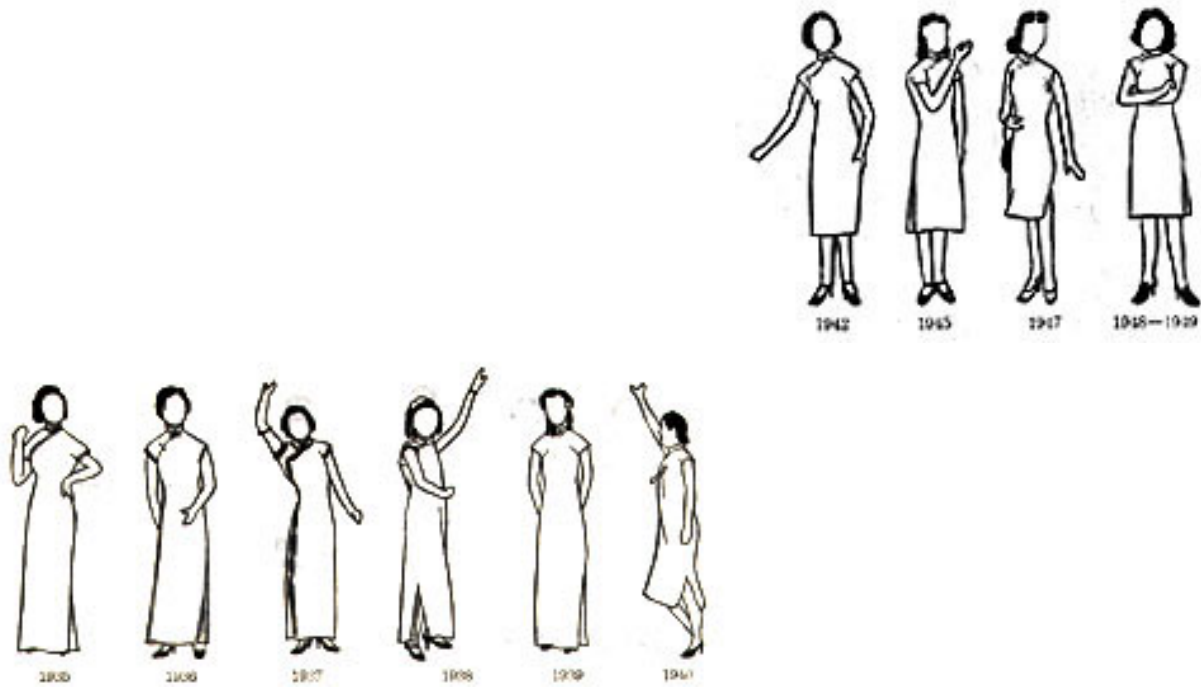
SOURCE: *Zhou Enlai tongzhi.* (Beijing: Zhongguo sheying chubanshe, 1977), p. 8.



The cut of the *qipao* changed constantly, as Chinese women's dress became much more subject to fashion than it ever had been before.

This series shows how women's dress changed from 1914 to 1949.

What seem to be the more significant changes?



SOURCE: Zhou Xibao, *Zhongguo gudai fushishi* (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1984), pp. 539-540.

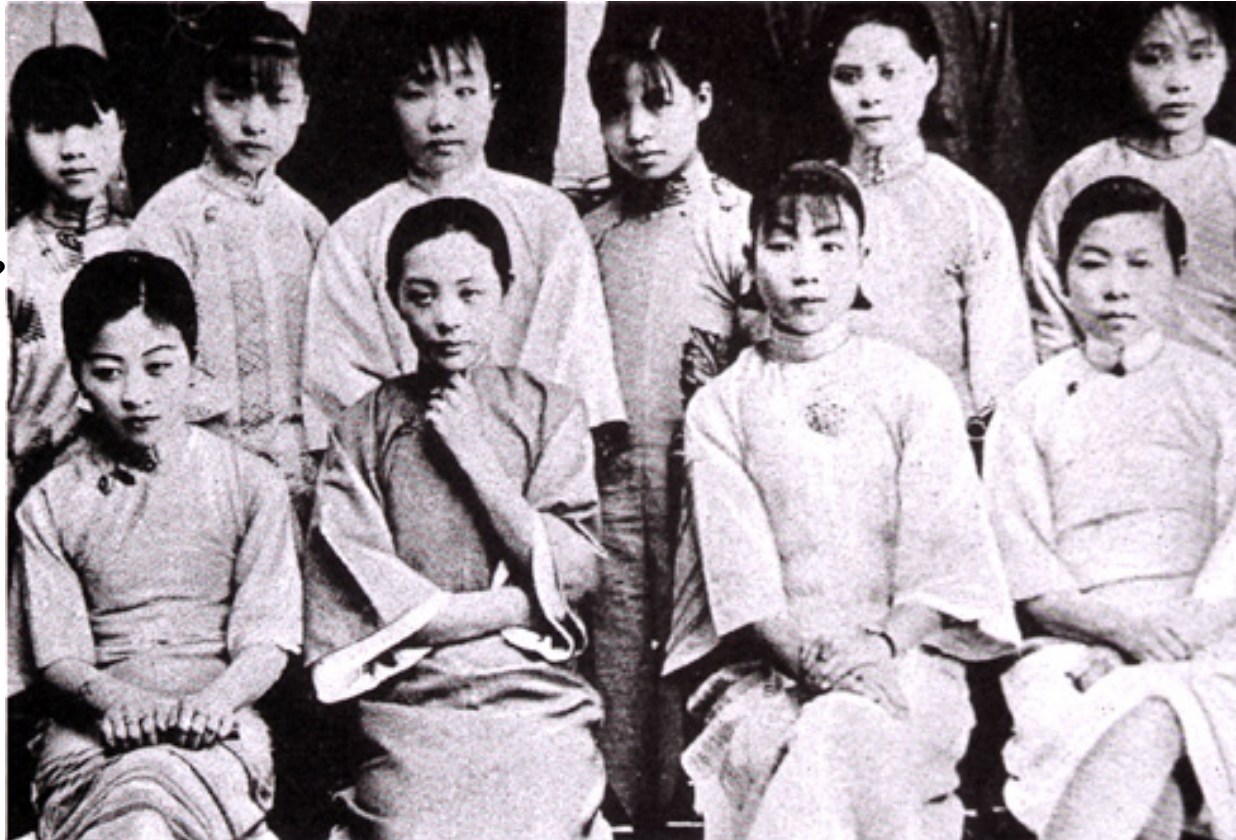
To see a parallel diagram of the changes in men's Chinese style clothing from the same source, [click here](#) [given below in this Teacher's Guide].



图一 辛亥革命后 1911 年至 1940 年间男子长衫与短衫的演变形式。
 图中 1914 年是以短衫中式的。1914—1916 年有这种马褂式样的款式，以前就罕见了。1919 年的对襟背心，并不是说这年只有此式，而是说，它与其他的长衫与短衫同时并存的。图中的瓜皮小帽也不是只有这几年流行的。同时期中有上层官员、知识分子、青年学生及普通百姓等。这里只是把在各个年代里比较流行的款式及其演变、风格，由于年代上的变化作一简单的介绍。

The women shown here were singsong girls in 1920s Shanghai.

What do you notice about their clothes?



SOURCE: Tang Zhenchang, ed. *Jindai Shanghai fanhualu*. (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1993), p. 234.

How would you compare the girls' clothing above to that of the movie star, Yuan Zhenyu, shown below left, or the war protestors, below right?



SOURCE: *Jiang Jieshi yu guomin zhengfu*. (Hong Kong: The Commercial Press Ltd, 1994), p. 123.

SOURCE: Tang Zhenchang, ed., *Jindai Shanghai fanhualu* (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1993), p. 224.



The mandarin collar, one of the essential features of the *qipao*, sometimes came to be exaggerated for stylistic effect. Here we see three women from 1930s Shanghai who have adopted a high collar style. Prior to the twentieth century, collars had never been so exaggerated.

SOURCE: Shanghai 1930-1940. Courtesy of Joyce Chow.

Even into the 1990s, the mandarin collar carried messages about "Chineseness." Here we see a stewardess for China Airlines in 1990.



**SOURCE: *Funu zazhi*
Dec. 1990: 144.**

Move on to the Mao Suit

Mao Suits

Despite its modern-day name, the roots of the Mao suit can be traced back to Sun Yat-sen and the Nationalist government. In an attempt to find a style of clothing that suited modern sensibilities without completely adopting western styles, Sun Yat-sen developed a suit that combined aspects of military uniforms, student uniforms, and western-style suits. In the late 1920s civil servants of the Nationalist government were required by regulation to wear the Sun Yat-sen suit which would later be called the Mao suit.



Sun Yat-sen 1924

SOURCE: Wang Gengxiong, *Sun Zhongshan yu shanghai* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1991).



Mao Zedong 1939

SOURCE: *Weida lingxiu Mao zhuxi yongyuan huo zai women xinzhong* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1977), p. 25

MORE:

This is a photo you saw previously on the 20th century developments page. Take a closer look at the figure wearing a Sun Yat-sen/Mao suit.



He is Chiang Kai-shek. Since Chiang Kai-shek was embroiled in a struggle for political power, he may have adopted a Sun Yat-sen suit in order to visually reinforce his claim as the legitimate successor to Sun Yat-sen.



What are the differences and similarities between the clothes of Sun Yat-sen and his second wife Song Qingling, shown in the photo below?



Sun Yat-sen and Song Qingling in 1917

SOURCE: *China Reconstructs* 31. 9 (Sept. 1982): 33.

After the Communist Revolution, the Mao suit became a symbol of proletarian unity, and was regularly worn by party cadres.



Communist Party leaders in the 1950s

The collars, pockets, and seams of the Mao suits these men are wearing are all the same, but the suits are still not identical.

Can you spot Mao Zedong within this group of men? How is he distinguished from the others?

SOURCE: *Deng Xiaoping*. Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi (Beijing: Zhongyangwenxian chubanshe, 1988), p. 156.

ANSWER: Mao Zedong is the person sitting in the bottom row second from the right. Notice how his suit is the lightest in shade. Also, a young Deng Xiaoping can be seen fifth from right in the same row.

Political leaders were not the only ones to wear Mao suits. People of both genders, in all areas, and in all different kinds of professions began wearing variations of the Mao suit on a daily basis.

How do these outfits seem different from those worn by the political leaders above? Do you think these differences or the uniformity of the clothes of this period reflected the social structure of China?



Factory cadres at a meeting

SOURCE: *China Reconstructs* 33.5 (May 1984): 42. Their caption: "The Shanghai Jinghua Chemical Company guards against environmental pollution and is beautifying its grounds, thanks in part to trade union leadership." Photo Zhang Heling.



Commuters in Beijing

SOURCE: *China Reconstructs* Vol 35, No. 1 (January 1986): 1.

Why do you think some of the men in these two scenes from the 1980s wear Mao jackets and others do not?



Discussing building plans

SOURCE: *China Reconstructs* 33.11 (Nov. 1984): 10. Their caption: Jinling graduates assisting on the design for a hostel to be built by the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum administration. Photo by Zhou Youma.



Children's clothing, while not generally called Mao suits, could also indicate political allegiance. The red scarves seen around the necks of the children in these two pictures indicate that they are young pioneers. The scarves became important symbolic objects to many of the children in this period.

The label on the poster to the left reads "Set your mind on becoming a strong revolutionary successor."

Poster from 1965

SOURCE: Courtesy of the University of Westminster collection of Chinese posters.



Children on a field trip to a temple, circa 1980

SOURCE: Cover of *Fu Tao Yuan* (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, March 1981).

Move on to the [Western-Style Suit](#)

Western-Style Suits

After the Communist Revolution, western-style suits fell out of favor in China because of their association with western imperialism. Thus, in October 21, 1984, when Hu Yaobang, the General Secretary of the Communist Party, appeared on television at a meeting of the Central Committee wearing a dark-blue western style suit, he was making a bold sartorial statement. To many Chinese watching the televised meeting, his appearance was extraordinary. Prior to this event, Communist Party leaders had always appeared at formal functions inside the PRC in Mao suits. Hu's move was possible because of the more relaxed atmosphere following the ascendancy to power of Deng Xiaoping in 1978 and his introduction of political and economic reforms. From this point on, as China entered into the international political stage and global economy, government and business leaders had a wider range of choices of how to present themselves.

Before 1984 communist officials would occasionally don a western-style suit when traveling outside China. Below is a photo of Hu Yaobang visiting Japan.

Do you see any differences between the suits worn here that would reveal which person was Chinese and which was Japanese?



Photo of 1983 visit by Hu Yaobang to Japan

SOURCE: China Pictorial, ed., *Across China* (Beijing: China Pictorial, 1985), p. 46

The photo to the left below is of Deng Xiaoping, the powerful Chinese leader. Below right is a photo of Jiang Zemin (left), President of China since 1993, posing with a guest.

Do the clothes worn by these two men seem to reflect anything about their politics?



Deng Xiaoping 1987

SOURCE: *Deng Xiaoping*. (Beijing: Zhongyangwenxian chubanshe, 1988), p. 125



Jiang Zemin (left)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo* no. 624 vol. 6, (2000): 11.

By the end of the twentieth century the western-style suit had been fully adopted by Chinese men as the preferred choice of clothing for all formal, official, and business affairs. Below is a photo of members of the private Technical Advisory Committee giving a plaque to the Premier of the Republic of China, Yu Kuo-hwa, in Taipei, Taiwan.

Although these men are dressed in western-style suits, do you notice anything in their surroundings which suggests traditional Chinese culture? What do you make of this juxtaposition of Chinese and western culture?



Taiwan businessmen and government officials, 1989

SOURCE: *Free China Review* Vol. 39 no. 2 (Feb. 1989): 14.

Move on to [Eighties and Nineties](#)

Western-Style Suits

[Up](#)[Contents](#)[Timeline and Maps](#)

After the Communist Revolution, western-style suits fell out of favor in China because of their association with western imperialism. Thus, in October 21, 1984, when Hu Yaobang, the General Secretary of the Communist Party, appeared on television at a meeting of the Central Committee wearing a dark-blue western style suit, he was making a bold sartorial statement. To many Chinese watching the televised meeting, his appearance was extraordinary. Prior to this event, Communist Party leaders had always appeared at formal functions inside the PRC in Mao suits. Hu's move was possible because of the more relaxed atmosphere following the ascendancy to power of Deng Xiaoping in 1978 and his introduction of political and economic reforms. From this point on, as China entered into the international political stage and global economy, government and business leaders had a wider range of choices of how to present themselves.

Before 1984 communist officials would occasionally don a western-style suit when traveling outside China. Below is a photo of Hu Yaobang visiting Japan.

Do you see any differences between the suits worn here that would reveal which person was Chinese and which was Japanese?



The photo to the left below is of Deng Xiaoping, the powerful Chinese leader. Below right is a photo of Jiang Zemin (left), President of China since 1993, posing with a guest.

Do the clothes worn by these two men seem to reflect anything about their politics?



Deng Xiaoping 1987 [source](#)



Jiang Zemin (left)

[source](#)

By the end of the twentieth century the western-style suit had been fully adopted by Chinese men as the preferred choice of clothing for all formal, official, and business affairs. Below is a photo of members of the private Technical Advisory Committee giving a plaque to the Premier of the Republic of China, Yu Kuo-hwa, in Taipei, Taiwan.

Although these men are dressed in western-style suits, do you notice anything in their surroundings which suggests traditional Chinese culture? What do you make of this juxtaposition of Chinese and western culture?



Taiwan businessmen and government officials, 1989

[source](#)

Move on to [Eighties and Nineties](#)



Home

Adaptations to Western Styles

Up

Contents

Timeline and Maps

In the first decades of the twentieth century, many of the elite families of China sent their children abroad for study. Western ideas of modernization and industrialization became familiar to a whole generation of young educated elite in China, and many of them came to associate western styles of dress with modernity. While some people fully adopted western style dress, others took to wearing clothes that retained symbolically important elements of traditional dress.

To the right is a cartoon from a magazine in the 1920s showing a "modern" day couple.

What do you notice about the clothing styles?

Take a close look at the first frame.

*Can you guess what is happening in this frame?
What do you think the figures in the background represent?*



[source](#)

[MORE 1920s magazine pictures](#)

[SOME THOUGHTS](#)

Many of the social, political, and artistic leaders in the early decades of the twentieth century had studied abroad. Song Qingling, the intellectual and political activist of the revolutionary period and the wife of revolutionary leader Sun Yat-sen, studied in the U.S.

Below are two photos of her. The photo on the left was taken while she was a student at Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia. In the photo on the right Song Qingling sits to the left of her two sisters Song Ailing (the future wife of Chiang Kai-shek and Song Mei-ling (who married Shanghai financier T.V. Song) after her return to China.

In looking at these two photos, what differences do you notice in how clothing carried markers of gender, wealth, and fashion-consciousness? Why do you think Song Qingling would change back to a Chinese clothing style when she returned to China from her studies in America?

Notice anything about these women's shoes?



sourcesource

During the political upheaval of the early twentieth century, Chinese men frequently expressed their political allegiances through the clothes they wore.

Below is an old photo of a meeting of Nationalist Party (Guomindang) political leaders.

How many different styles of dress are illustrated in this photo? What different political allegiances do you think their clothing reflects?



Guomindang political leaders in 1930

sourceANSWER

To the right is a photo of two doctors, one specializing in traditional medicine, the other in modern, Western medicine.

Is it surprising that a practitioner of traditional Chinese medicine would also choose to dress in a traditional way?



Two doctors in 1985

[source](#)

During the twentieth century certain modes of dress were adopted in an attempt to integrate both traditional Chinese and western cultural influences. The most influential were the *qipao* for women and the Mao suit. Today, however, many men wear western-style suits, just as women wear western-style clothing.



Qipao



Mao suit



Western-style suit



Home

Across China China Pictorial, ed. (Beijing: China Pictorial, 1985), p. 46

[Back](#)

Deng Xiaoping

Deng Xiaoping (Beijing: Zhongyangwenxian chubanshe, 1988), p. 125

[Back](#)

Zhongguo

Zhongguo Vol. 6, no. 624 (2000): 11.

[Back](#)

[Back](#)

Eighties and Nineties

Up

Contents

Timeline and Maps

By the 1980s and 1990s, dress in China had become extremely diverse, with fashion-consciousness especially pronounced in the large cities.

Is there anything about the people in the three scenes below from 1990s Beijing that could not have been seen in a large US city of the same date?



People on the streets of Beijing in the mid 1990s

[source](#)



Do the people at these two market scenes seem more distinctively Chinese than the ones above? What is different about their appearance?

Buying and selling watermelons on the street

[source](#)



1996 market scene

[source](#)



How would you describe the clothing choices of the people seen on this street in Hong Kong in the late 1980s?

Hong Kong street, late 1980s

[source](#)

In what ways does this scene of Shanghai in 2001 resemble Hong Kong as seen above? What is different?



Shanghai shopping street, 2001

[source](#)

Move on to [Weddings](#)

 [Home](#)