

## *Original Paper*

# Hybridity and Marginal Drift of Cultural Identity in Hong Kong Cinematic Qipao: A Study of Colonial Context and Film Narrative

Qihua Yang<sup>1</sup>, Yuxiao Cui<sup>2</sup> & Jianpei Gong<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> School of Innovation and Creation Design, Shenzhen Polytechnic University, Shenzhen 51805S, China

<sup>2</sup> The Hong Kong Polytechnic University School of Design, Hong Kong 999077, China

<sup>3</sup> School of Design, Nanjing University of the Arts, Nanjing 210013, China

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### **Abstract**

*As a distinctive cultural symbol shaped by colonial history and film storytelling, qipaos appearing in Hong Kong films carry two core cultural traits: hybrid cultural attributes and floating marginal identity. Taking the costume exhibition A Record of Changing Clothes: Hong Kong Film Cheongsam Costume Exhibition as the core research sample, this paper adopts Homi K. Bhabha's hybridity theory and Oscar Ho Hing-kay's marginal drift concept as dual analytical frameworks. It analyzes how qipao silhouettes blended Chinese and Western tailoring logic under colonial governance, alongside how film narratives reshaped and shifted Hong Kong people's cultural belonging through this costume carrier. The research draws a clear conclusion: the qipaos popular in Hong Kong cannot be simply categorized as pure inheritance of traditional Chinese costume or blind imitation of Western fashion. Instead, they are brand-new hybrid cultural forms born from constant silhouette revisions, cross-border sewing technology integration and symbolic design innovation within the cultural gaps brought by colonial rule. Film creation endows qipaos with powerful narrative and metaphor value, making them a vital medium for Hong Kong communities to negotiate cultural belonging and spread localized oriental aesthetics to global audiences.*

### **Keywords**

*Hong Kong cinematic qipao; cultural identity; hybridity; marginal drift; A Record of Changing Clothes*

## 1. Introduction

Co-hosted by Hong Kong's Leisure and Cultural Services Department and Hong Kong Film Archive, the costume exhibition *A Record of Changing Clothes: Hong Kong Film Cheongsam Costume Exhibition* centers on 31 classic qipao costumes taken from representative Hong Kong films. Curators divided the exhibits into four thematic zones: "Traditional Variations", "Geometric Intrigue", "Floral Splendor" and "Shaping the Era". Curators supplemented physical costumes with classic film clips, vintage stills and interactive projection devices, mapping out the full evolution of Hong Kong qipao from daily casual wear to iconic screen symbols between the 1950s and 1990s. The exhibition fully reproduces the tangled cultural choices behind Hong Kong qipao's hybrid identity and the complicated historical context embedded in film costume design, offering irreplaceable physical evidence for analyzing the cultural characteristics of Hong Kong movie qipaos.




Existing academic studies mostly focus on three directions: the evolution track of garments worn by local Hong Kong women of Chinese descent<sup>[1]</sup>, the aesthetic presentation of qipaos in Chinese and Western motion pictures<sup>[2]</sup>, and the costume language design in single films such as *In the Mood for Love*<sup>[3]</sup>. Few studies systematically discuss the unique hybrid traits of Hong Kong qipao formed under colonial background, nor explore how film media reconstruct the cultural meaning of qipao as a whole. To fill this research gap, this paper uses *A Record of Changing Clothes* as the entry point, utilizing Bhabha's hybridity theory and Ho Hing-kay's marginal wandering theory as analytical tools. From two dimensions—the hybrid transformation of qipao tailoring under colonial rule and the floating state of cultural identity carried by screen qipaos—the paper analyzes how colonial perspectives deconstruct and reconstruct the cultural connotation of Hong Kong qipao. It further explores the construction logic of its cultural subjectivity, supplying fresh theoretical perspectives for research on Hong Kong costume culture and the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage.

## 2. Hybridity under the Gaze in the Colonial Context

### 2.1 *The Southward Migration and Continuation of Shanghai-Style Qipao*

After Hong Kong became a British treaty port, the city gradually formed a cultural landscape where Western mainstream values coexisted and blended with local Chinese civilization. Homi K. Bhabha, Harvard Professor of English and American Literature and Language, put forward the hybridity theory when interpreting Hong Kong's cultural ecology. He pointed out that cultural hybridity is not a mechanical splicing or compromise between two civilizations, but an intermediate space without fixed hierarchical relations, in which cultural differences become the source of new artistic creation<sup>[4]</sup>. All authentic cultural forms keep updating and restructuring themselves in the collision with external "Other" cultures. This paper holds that Bhabha's theoretical framework can well interpret the dual attributes of Hong Kong's cultural identity, as well as the core characteristics of silhouette and cultural meaning belonging to Hong Kong film qipaos.

The qipao originated in Shanghai in the early 1920s, also known as the Shanghai-style qipao. It is a representative example of modern Chinese women's clothing and the first true women's fashion in Chinese costume history<sup>[5]</sup>. After the victory of the War of Resistance against Japan in 1945, a large number of immigrants from mainland China moved south to Hong Kong. The Shanghai-style qipao entered Hong Kong along with the Shanghainese, Hongbang tailors, and filmmakers who came from the south. At that time, the style of the qipao basically continued the Shanghai-style characteristics. For example, the qipaos worn by Shi Hui on the cover of *Great Wall Pictorial* and by You Min on the *International Screen*, although modified to suit the aesthetics and trends of the time, still retained the highly culturally identifiable core symbols of the traditional qipao, such as the standing collar, front opening, side slits, and embroidery (Figure 1). In contrast to the development path of the Shanghai-style qipao, which emphasized the display of urban modernity, the Hong Kong qipao had already begun to undergo modifications oriented toward the adaptation of hybrid culture from the 1950s. Therefore, in Hong Kong films set in the 1930s and 1940s, such as the qipaos worn by Ruan Lingyu (played by Maggie Cheung) in the film *Center Stage* (1991) and by Tang Qi (played by Lin Dai) in *The Blue and the Black* (1966), both featured in *A Record of Changing Clothes*, the silhouettes and cutting methods still generally reflect the continuation and inheritance of the Shanghai-style qipao (Figure 2, Figure 3).

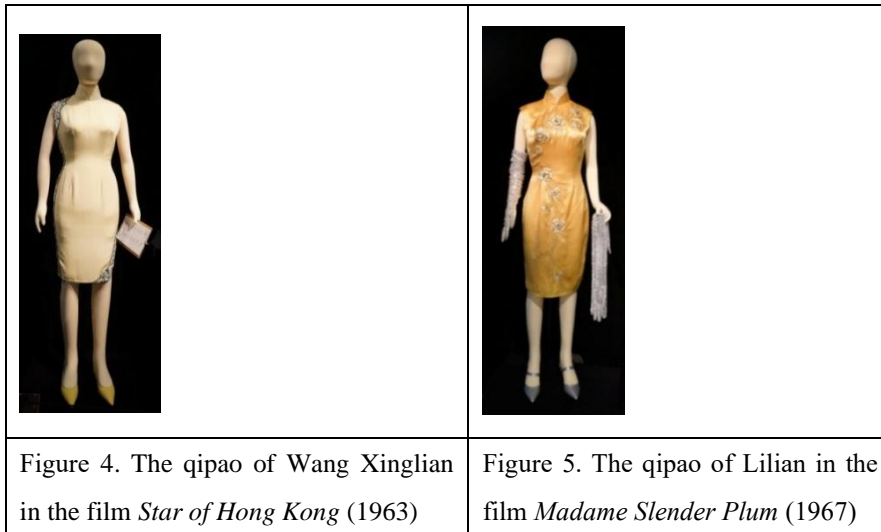
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| a. <i>Great Wall Pictorial</i> ,<br>October 1955                                    | b. <i>International Screen</i> ,<br>December 1958 | Figure 2. The qipao of<br>Tang Qi in the film <i>The<br/>Blue and the Black</i>     | Figure 3. The qipao<br>in the film <i>Center<br/>Stage</i>                            |
| Figure 1. Qipao on the covers of movie magazines<br>in the 1950s                    |   |   |   |

### 2.2 "Chinese Form with Western Tailoring" and Hybrid Nature

In Hong Kong's local dialect, qipao is called cheongsam, a naming convention that carries the inheritance and expansion of Lingnan traditional culture in Hong Kong. Driven by the growth of Hong Kong film industry and cross-border trade, the Cantonese pronunciation "cheongsam" gained global popularity, now becoming one of the internationally recognized terms for qipao. The formation of this universal name and the shaping of its cultural identity took place under dual pressures: colonial

institutional governance and worldwide cultural globalization. Meanwhile, British colonial authorities built hierarchical social norms through etiquette rules and public space access standards, placing Western formal wear at the top of the social garment hierarchy while discriminating against local traditional costumes. As a garment with natural compatibility between Chinese and Western aesthetic systems, qipao became an important tool for Chinese women in Hong Kong to break the implicit class barriers brought by clothing discrimination.

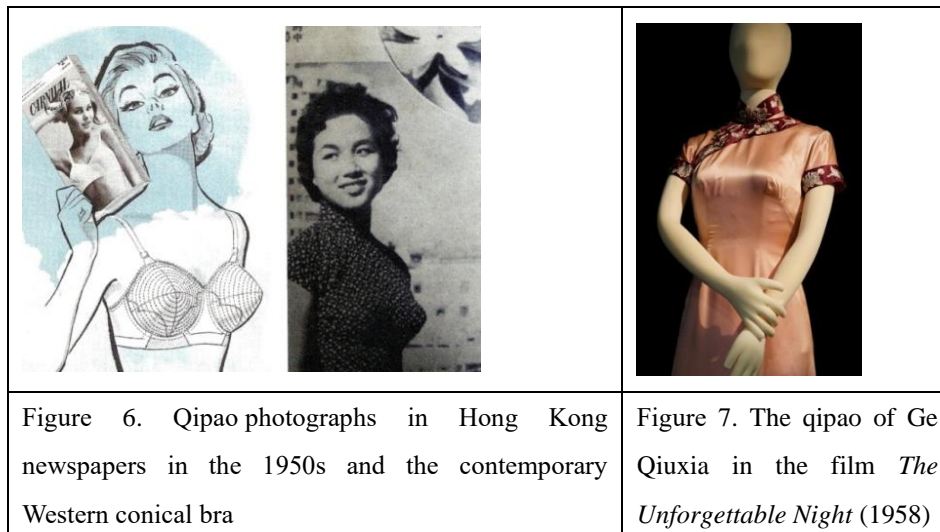
The 1950s to 1970s are recognized as the golden age of Hong Kong cinema and pop culture. During this period, multicultural hybrid historical circumstances stimulated extremely vigorous cultural creation in Hong Kong<sup>[6]</sup>. Local cultural consumers pursued synchronized fashion trends from Europe and America, yet local creators refused to simply copy Western aesthetics as passive followers. Many cultural practitioners at that time aimed to build a unique "high-quality local culture". This cultural pursuit can be defined as an independent local cultural system formed by absorbing foreign design elements while retaining indigenous characteristics, which later evolved into the representative "Hong Kong style, Hong Kong flavor, Hong Kong creation" visible in Hong Kong movies, Cantonese pop music and martial arts TV series. Accordingly, daily and screen qipaos produced in Hong Kong throughout the 1950s and 1960s preserved classic Chinese elements such as stand collars, front opening and side slits, while absorbing three-dimensional cutting techniques from Western dressmaking. Designers exaggerated bust, waist and hip curves to deliver a sense of feminine sensuality and mystery originating from Western fashion logic<sup>[7]</sup>. On the surface, such silhouette changes reflect deep integration between Chinese and Western aesthetics; yet post-colonial and gender studies provide alternative interpretations: this kind of costume transformation also records the visual marks left by colonial power discourse, representing the re-encoding of Western male gaze desire through women's fashion. Revised Hong Kong qipaos featured exaggerated three-dimensional body lines, hemlines lifted 4 to 5 centimeters above the knees, and side slits extending down to the lower hip area. At *A Record of Changing Clothes*, the qipao worn by You Min's Wang Xinglian in *Star of Hong Kong* and Jenny Hu's Lilian in *Madame Slender Plum* (1967) are typical tight-fitting hybrid costumes. These designs elevated qipao from daily casual attire to a mixed cultural symbol on screen, fully embodying the aesthetic logic of "Chinese silhouette framework with Western three-dimensional tailoring" (Figure 4, Figure 5).





### 2.3 Colonial Context and the Western Gaze

Qipao acts as a cultural bridge connecting China and Western societies in Hong Kong for two key reasons: it serves as a core identity symbol for ethnic Chinese residents in Hong Kong, and it represents the integrated development of local indigenous culture and colonial imported culture. Nevertheless, even with stable inherent cultural connotations, Hong Kong qipao kept restructuring itself through constant cultural negotiation, transformation and integration within the gaps of colonial governance, and this reconstructive trend grew increasingly obvious over decades. During this long-term reshaping process, colonial cultural context continuously strengthened qipao's hybrid attributes at every developmental stage, making its design evolution closely tracking the mainstream haute couture trends popular in Western countries. In 1947, Christian Dior introduced the "New Look," characterized by fitted bodices, cinched waists, and full skirts---an aesthetic system emphasizing bodily curves, with hourglass silhouettes and ultra-feminine tailoring that not only dominated Western fashion for the next decade but also quickly influenced the direction of Hong Kong qipao modification<sup>[8]</sup>. Furthermore, the pointed bras popular in Western fashion circles during the 1950s also significantly influenced the appearance of Hong Kong qipaos. This type of bra, also known as the cone-shaped bra, employed a rotary continuous stitching method and used padding at the apex of the cups, giving women's busts a conical shape. By the 1960s, the overall appearance of Hong Kong qipaos had become increasingly simple and neat, with the design focus gradually shifting toward the pursuit of an extreme "hourglass" silhouette. This combination of the "bullet bra" and the deliberate emphasis on the bust-to-waist differential made the qipaos of this period highlight a previously unprecedented firmness and fullness in the female bust<sup>[9]</sup>. This silhouette closely aligned with the curvilinear aesthetic championed by Dior's "New Look," becoming a direct manifestation of Western fashion's influence on Hong Kong's costume culture and of Chinese women's expression of modern consciousness and their pursuit of Western trends. For example, a photograph of film studio newcomer Luo Min published in Hong Kong's

*Weekend Post* (1959, Issue 44) shows her wearing a qipao clearly influenced by the popular Western cone-shaped bra, with a distinctly pointed bust (Figure 6). In the Hong Kong film *The Unforgettable Night*, the qipao worn by Ge Qiu Xia (played by Li Xianglan), a maidservant in a certain mansion, exemplifies the adoption of the Western "hourglass" silhouette, emphasizing an extreme bust-to-waist differential and a high, prominent bust, with the Sino-Western hybrid tailoring seamlessly integrated on this garment (Figure 7).



The slim, short-cut qipaos appearing in films like *Star of Hong Kong* and *Madame Slender Plum* inevitably remind audiences of the classic "Suzie Wong qipao", which solidified Western society's stereotypical imagination of Oriental women in the 1960s. British author Richard Mason created the character Suzie Wong in his novel *The World of Suzie Wong*, a Hong Kong woman wearing ultra-short, high-slit silk qipaos. Later, the film adaptation directed by Richard Quine and starring Nancy Kwan turned Suzie Wong into an exclusive cultural icon representing Hong Kong in the 20th century (Figure 8). In Western viewers' eyes, actresses wrapped in tight silk qipaos became the standard image of Hong Kong women and the global representative of Chinese qipao culture. The Suzie Wong-style qipao is a typical hybrid product formed under dual aesthetic pressures: while inheriting traditional Chinese costume customs, its design deliberately catered to Western audiences' exotic gaze toward the East, reflecting local Hong Kong people's complicated psychology—coexisting cultural self-confidence and inferiority complex under colonial rule<sup>[10]</sup>. This qipao prototype not only heavily shaped the costume design of Oriental female roles in later Western films and TV series, but also broke regional and temporal boundaries, spreading the oriental aesthetic carried by qipao to global fashion circles and participating in the construction of worldwide fashion discourse (Figure 9).

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| <p>Figure 8. The tight-fitting qipao image in the movie poster of <i>The World of Suzie Wong</i></p> | <p>Figure 9. The poster of the 1961 Hollywood film <i>Flower Drum Song</i>, adapted from the Broadway musical of the same name</p> |

### 3. Marginal Wandering of Cultural Identity and the Reshaping of Cinematic Narrative

#### 3.1 Marginal Wandering and the Dual Nature of Cultural Identity

If Suzie Wong's qipao represents an Oriental costume symbol constructed by Western gaze within colonial context, numerous other qipaos in Hong Kong film narratives present another transformation path: integrating Western fashion elements while rooted in local Chinese cultural identity. The intervention of film art lifted qipao's functional positioning from daily wear to a carrier recording local historical memory and cultural belonging. In the narrative construction of motion pictures, these screen qipaos clearly reflect people's anxiety toward unstable, transitional and hybrid cultural identity, showing a continuous floating state in cultural recognition. This marginal wandering trait also reveals the core reshaping logic of Hong Kong film qipaos: they are neither pure heritage of native Chinese civilization, nor mechanical copy of colonial Western culture, nor simple superposition of two civilizations. Instead, they are unique hybrid cultural products formed through repeated compromises amid multiple tensions—colonial history vs local residents' cultural resistance, Western aesthetic trends vs Eastern traditional costume logic.

Cultural identity refers to the self-awareness, sense of belonging and positioning standard of individuals or groups in cultural, historical and social dimensions. The coexistence of marginal wandering and hybridity grants Hong Kong film qipaos distinct dual characteristics: on one hand, they carry stable cultural marks accumulated from local history, forming the basic foundation of identity recognition; on the other hand, they stay in a dynamic state of continuous negotiation and identity reconstruction amid multi-cultural collisions under colonial governance. The concept of "marginal wandering" was proposed by famous Hong Kong curator and art critic Oscar Ho Hing-kay when analyzing Hong Kong's cultural predicament. He argued that Hong Kong culture always exists in an intermediate transitional zone: caught between British colonial governance and traditional Chinese civilization, between Western political systems and indigenous cultural roots, and between modern

globalization and local life customs. It belongs to neither side completely yet absorbs traits from both. This floating marginal trait is the key to maintaining Hong Kong culture's unique charm, allowing it to carve out independent living space between Chinese and Western civilizations<sup>[11]</sup>.

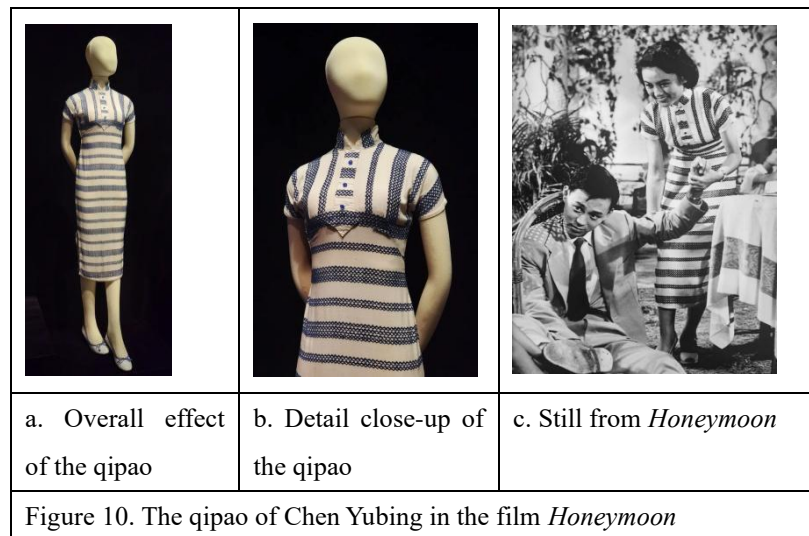
The floating marginal attribute laid material and cultural groundwork for Hong Kong qipao's hybrid characteristics. Based on this foundation, film qipaos actively reconstruct cultural identity rather than passively accepting Western cultural impact. Through silhouette modification, cross-border sewing technology fusion, symbolic pattern innovation and film narrative interpretation, they rebuild the cultural subjectivity of qipao within colonial cultural gaps. Therefore, the "interstices of colonial rule" provide another theoretical entry point for understanding the creative value of Hong Kong film qipaos. When observing the dynamic narrative construction of Hong Kong movies, we can find that the mobility, diversification and fragmentation of cultural identity also cultivate the cross-cultural identity of screen qipaos: these costumes break away from fixed original cultural connotations, adapt to new multicultural environments through design borrowing, simulation and subtle subversion, gaining highly adaptable, creative and negotiable identity attributes.

### *3.2 Reshaping of Form and Style in Cross-Cultural Identity*

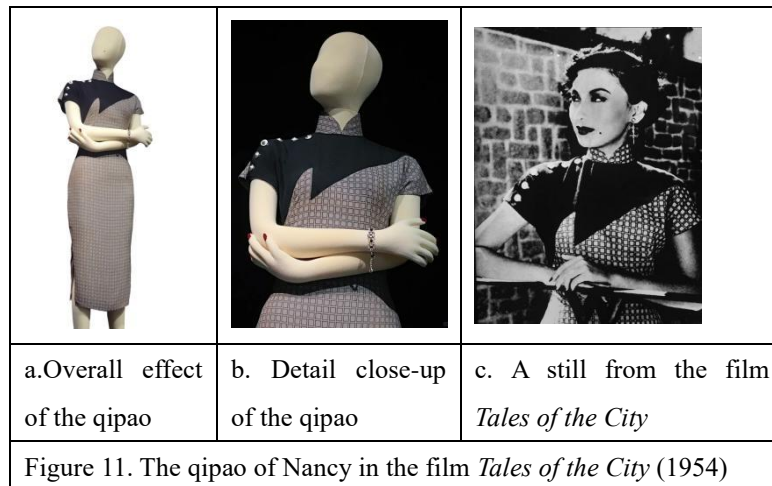
Hong Kong film qipaos serve dual artistic functions: narrating complex stories of colonial immigration, homecoming and nostalgic reminiscence, and delivering abstract cultural imagination through visual language. Besides direct narrative tools including camera angles, lighting, plot conflicts and character relationships, silhouette design, tailoring methods and pattern metaphors also become core means to construct cross-cultural identity narratives. Through these silent costume details, designers embed the floating marginality, hybrid traits, in-between positioning and uncertainty of cultural identity into every stitch of qipaos. In this sense, physical qipao exhibits collected by the *A Record of Changing Clothes* exhibition are not only reproductions of Hong Kong women's daily dressing habits across different decades, but also tangible carriers reflecting movie characters' personalities, social status, inner emotions and cultural belonging.

The physical costumes displayed in the exhibition—through cutting craftsmanship, fabric selection, printing patterns and decorative accessories—visually present the complete historical process of cross-cultural identity reconstruction and evolution. Most importantly, every qipao on show closely links to the identity, character and even fate of its corresponding role, turning screen qipaos into a unique character narrative medium and external projection of characters' inner psychological world. As early as the 1950s, Hong Kong film designers began this hybrid cross-cultural reconstruction practice for qipaos. The costume worn by Shi Hui's Chen Yubing in the 1952 film *Honeymoon* stands as a typical case of tentative cross-cultural identity expression in this period (Figure 10). This qipao reserves core traditional marks including stand collar and side slits, yet adopts an open chest placket and horizontal striped fabric under the bust, borrowing design elements from sailor uniforms and casual sportswear to break the gentle, restrained temperament of classic qipao<sup>[12]</sup>. This revision was not a simple patchwork of Western decorative elements. Within colonial cultural context, it represented a

balanced design compromise in cultural negotiation: by implanting Western fashion language, the costume avoided being excluded by mainstream colonial aesthetic norms, while retaining identifiable Chinese cultural symbols to safeguard ethnic identity. This design logic reflects local cultural practitioners' survival wisdom in the gaps of colonial governance.



The "Geometric Intrigue" zone of the exhibition displays multiple costumes combining Chinese qipao silhouettes with Western abstract geometric fashion patterns. For instance, Chen Daqing designed a qipao for Xia Meng's Lan Si in the 1954 film *Tales of the City* (also known as *Symphony of the Metropolis*), taking Western abstract geometric prints as the core decorative element while retaining traditional Chinese stand collars. Designers replaced heavy jacquard silk fabrics used in ancient Chinese costumes with lightweight printed silk featuring geometric textures. This design matched Hong Kong's modern fashion trends of the 1960s, and avoided full Westernization by retaining core Chinese structural elements. This type of cross-cultural identity qipao design essentially originates from the struggle and compromise of cultural identity under colonial background. Through hybrid costume symbol design, it conveys the modern stance of Hong Kong Chinese women: neither fully attached to colonial imported culture nor rigidly clinging to outdated traditional aesthetic standards (Figure 11).



Hybrid silhouette design fully displays the floating marginality of cultural identity and cross-cultural identity traits. For example, the qipao worn by Luo Lan’s Wang Xifeng in 1952’s *Modern Red Chamber Dream* moved side slits to the center front hem. It adopted an open front design with Western metal buttons, and decorated collars and hem slits with traditional "sea water river cliff" embroidery extracted from Qing dynasty dragon robes. This design organically integrated Western dress structure and ancient Chinese cultural patterns, placing ethnic identity symbols at the visual center of the costume (Figure 12). The qipao worn by Ouyang Shafei’s Xie Yulan in *A Double-Faced Man* (1952) absorbed more Western fashion details. Although it kept stand collars and diagonal plackets, the opening position shifted slightly to the right of the center, replacing traditional frog buttons with more than a dozen Western round buttons. Designers also matched collars and sleeves with different fabrics to highlight Western decorative aesthetics (Figure 13).







### 3.3 Cinematic Narrative, Metaphor, and the Mirror of the Times

Hong Kong film qipaos transcend the single function of marking cultural identity, evolving into an important visual tool to display character growth and psychological transformation. In Stanley Kwan's 1987 classic *Rouge*, Anita Mui's character Fleur's qipao changes synchronously with her life trajectory: luxurious, heavily embroidered bright designs for her peak time as the top courtesan of Yihong Building; plain, unadorned styles during her passionate love with Twelfth Young Master; dull, faded grey fabrics in her despair before the double suicide, and worn, aged silhouettes fifty years later when she wanders Hong Kong searching for her lost lover. The gradual shift of qipao styles visually records her decline from glory to despair, becoming an indispensable part of the film's tragic narrative logic<sup>[13]</sup>. In Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love* (2000), the color, pattern and silhouette of Maggie Cheung's Su Lizhen's qipaos subtly change alongside plot development. Early scenes adopt plain, conservative designs with dark color palettes to embody her restrained, repressed inner world; later segments add bright hues, complex floral prints and tighter body lines to externalize her fluctuating emotional struggles. Here, qipao is not merely a reproduction of 1960s fashion, but a real-time projection of the heroine's psychological state. Wong Kar-wai and art director William Cheung used narrow high-collared qipaos as a metaphor for the moral restrictions binding Su Lizhen, with the suffocating tight cutting visualizing her trapped living condition<sup>[14]</sup>. This method of shaping character arcs through costume design integrates qipao organically into film narrative, rather than treating it as a meaningless decorative prop. Beyond screen storytelling, *In the Mood for Love's* qipaos form dual metaphors for Hong Kong's cultural identity: they simultaneously represent the elegance of traditional Chinese aesthetics and the repression of individual life within a colonial international metropolis, with these two symbolic meanings converging in 1960s Hong Kong. From this perspective, qipao evolves from a simple garment into a tangible metaphor for the cultural gaps formed by colonial governance.

As core decorative elements of qipaos, printed patterns carry rich metaphorical connotations in Hong Kong films, serving as another medium to convey cultural identity and character emotion. The "Floral Splendor" exhibition zone in *A Record of Changing Clothes* presents diversified metaphorical expressions of costume patterns. Traditional Chinese flower patterns gain brand-new cultural meanings on screen qipaos, acting as symbols of Chinese ethnic identity and spiritual markers for preserving indigenous culture amid colonial influence. For example, the peony patterns on Li Lihua's Kong Ku-lan in *Song of Romance* (1952) symbolize wealth and grace in traditional Chinese culture. Large peony prints deliver a direct visual presentation of Oriental female charm, as well as implicit tribute to outstanding Chinese traditional culture under colonial context<sup>[15]</sup> (Figure 14). In addition, the qipao worn by Lin Cui as Chiang Yu-min in the 1957 film *He Has Taken Him for Another* features hand-painted floral patterns instead of industrial printed designs. This craft choice itself forms a unique metaphor: hand painting endows flower motifs with unrepeatable vitality and the warm texture of manual brushstrokes, breaking the mechanical repetition of mass-produced printed fabrics. Visually, it

echoes the creative transformation theme implied by the film’s title, allowing traditional flower patterns to release unique artistic vitality under the new carrier of film narration (Figure 15).

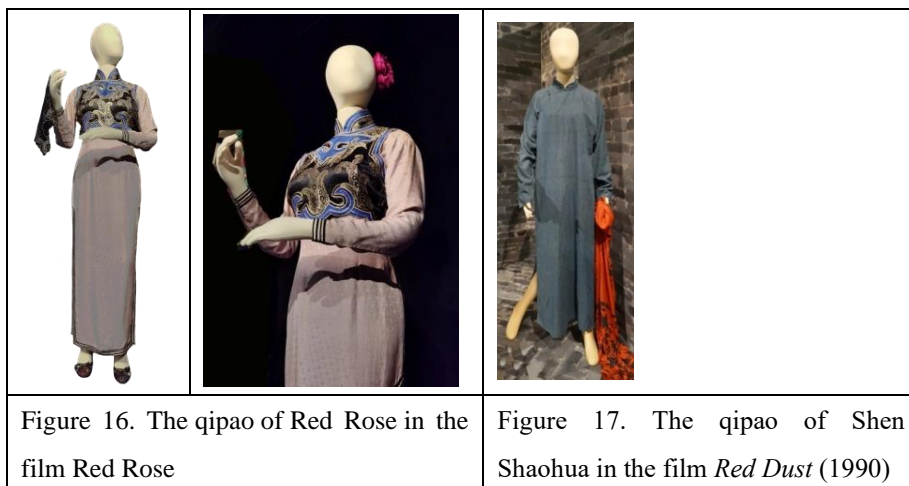
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| <p>a. Overall view of the qipao in <i>Song of Romance</i></p>                        | <p>b. A still from the film <i>Song of Romance</i></p>                            | <p>a. Overall view of the qipao in <i>He Has Taken Him for Another</i></p>                          | <p>b. Hand-painted floral details of the qipao</p>                                  |
| <p>Figure 14. The qipao of Kong Ku-lan in the film <i>Song of Romance</i> (1952)</p> |   | <p>Figure 15. The qipao of Chiang Yu-min in the film <i>He Has Taken Him for Another</i> (1957)</p> |   |

Furthermore, qipaos in Hong Kong cinema break through the boundary of character costume, developing into a visual mirror recording social changes, fully documenting Hong Kong’s historical transformation from a colonial trading port to a world-famous international metropolis. The "Shaping the Era" section of the *A Record of Changing Clothes* exhibition systematically examines the evolution of Hong Kong film qipaos through their silhouettes, patterns and craft techniques from the 1950s to the 1990s, intuitively verifying the academic viewpoint that garment evolution is a miniature reflection of social transformation.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Hong Kong qipaos retained relatively traditional silhouettes and decorations, reflecting post-war Chinese communities’ desire to rebuild a complete cultural order. Qipaos of this era mainly adopted local silk and cotton fabrics, decorated with classic flower patterns and fitted body lines. While preserving traditional costume aesthetic value, designers introduced Western three-dimensional cutting to express urban women’s longing for modern life. For example, the qipao worn by Li Lihua in *Red Rose* (1952) combined traditional jacquard brocade and satin fabrics, concentrating vest-like decorative patterns on collars and front plackets following ancient Chinese decorative logic that "chest and back are the most respected positions of garments". It abandoned cumbersome wide traditional sleeves and adopted Western waist dart cutting, balancing the ceremonial solemnity of Chinese formal wear with the neat, crisp aesthetic favored by Hong Kong urban women after World War II. This costume reflects the awakening of Hong Kong women’s subjective

consciousness after the war, standing as a typical representative of the "Chinese form with Western tailoring" craft aesthetic of this period (Figure 16).

From the 1970s to the 1990s, Hong Kong experienced rapid economic take-off and increasingly frequent Sino-Western cultural exchanges, leading to diversified silhouette and pattern trends of qipaos. Film qipaos of this period alternately returned to traditional elements and absorbed Western fashion, embodying Hong Kong's inclusive cultural trait as the "Pearl of the Orient". For instance, the customized black qipao worn by Tang Bik-wan in 1988's *The Mother vs. Mother* became a versatile classic design; matched with different printed outer jackets, it created diverse visual effects, fitting the character's maternal identity while reflecting the aesthetic upgrading of Hong Kong's middle class in the 1980s. Films *Red Dust* and *Center Stage* launched a qipao retro trend in the 1990s. In *Red Dust*, Brigitte Lin's literary female character Shen Shaohua wore loose, dark-toned qipaos inspired by Republican-era men's garments, with raglan sleeves shaping an intellectual, desolate artistic temperament. Maggie Cheung's Yue Feng deliberately wore unironed qipaos to restore authentic daily life texture. This "anti-exquisite" design thinking lifts qipao beyond decorative functions, turning it into a tangible carrier of historical trauma and ordinary life experience (Figure 17). Meanwhile, *Center Stage* reconstructs the elegant fashionable female images of 1930s Shanghai, realizing modern cultural imagination of Republican Shanghai civilization. Hong Kong film qipaos produced in the 1980s and 1990s bear dual symbolic functions: they serve as nostalgic symbols recalling fading traditional Chinese cultural charm, and as tools for reconstructing ethnic cultural identity. Facing the historical turning point of Hong Kong's sovereignty handover, qipao became a vital medium for local residents to imagine the connotation of Chinese identity.



#### 4. Conclusion

Through close analysis of all physical exhibits and film materials from *A Record of Changing Clothes*, we can chart the developmental trajectory of the Hong Kong film qipao and uncover its core cultural

dynamics. First, the marginal wandering within the colonial context, the inherent hybridity, and the driving force of identity anxiety collectively supplied the cultural conditions for the qipao's generation and reconstruction. In accomplishing its innovative subjectivity-building, the qipao emerged both as a key carrier of Hong Kong Chinese identity and as an Oriental cultural product imagined and narrated by Others. Second, through stylistic modification, technological integration, and symbolic innovation, the film qipao achieved a symbolic ascent – from everyday garment to narrative tool, from material object to cultural fantasy, and from individual wear to collective memory – thereby acquiring a rich array of narrative and metaphorical functions. The screen reconstruction of the Hong Kong film qipao is essentially an ongoing experiment in seeking identity breakthroughs and projecting local aesthetics globally, amidst the multiple interstices of China and the West, tradition and modernity, reality and fiction. The history and practice of the Hong Kong film qipao clearly remind us that, in a globalising world, a clear cultural identity is the fundamental bedrock for forming cultural subjectivity and strengthening cultural confidence. If cultural identity remains ambiguous, one easily falls into an identity crisis under the impact of “Other” cultures and loses one's own cultural grounding.

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