



## ALLURE OF THE BODY: CHINESE QIPAO<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** The history of modern qipao dress covers only a few decades. The qipao represents a major visual symbol of the Chinese modernity, because it is the dress that was essentially linked to the redefinition of female body during the late Qing and Republican period. The traditional qipao was the female clothing of the Manchu aristocracy. It transformed into a masculine anti-traditionalist female dress at the turn of the 20th century, and later it shifted from a fashionable sexy dress of the 1920s to a decent and conservative garment during the 1930s. Simultaneously, the female body in qipao represented the symbolic change between the traditional, mentally and physically weak lady and the strong and healthy westernised modern Chinese woman.

**KEY WORDS:** China – China-Late Qing Period and Republican Period – Chinese textiles – qipao dress – women in China – Chinese modernity

Three women clad in a tight-fitting qipao dress, sporting permed hair, in Western style high-heels and fine stockings strolling leisurely on a Shanghai street photographed in the 1930s (see Plate 3) might be the wives of government officials, female clerks, or shop assistants in a modern department store. In large Chinese coastal cities at least, *qipao* 旗袍 became a part of the wardrobe of modern urban Chinese women, especially from the middle and upper class. Many of them wore qipao regularly or on occasion. Even low class girls such as factory workers possessed one, even if they did not wear it (Dong: 201). The qipao was a widely-known female dress, even though its history was still short.

The qipao's history lasted no more than two decades, but it showed how substantially the aesthetics of the female dress changed, how deep and ambiguous the shifts in the dress's social and cultural meaning were, and how qipao fashion mirrored the emergence of new social strata. Since the beginning of qipao fashion, various types of women wore it for different reasons. A westernised student in a masculine style qipao

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expressed her hope for equality between men and women. A factory girl who came to a large city from her native village could only afford to wear a cheap cotton qipao. She wanted to make her way up the social ladder by marrying a suitable urban man, and the qipao was a sign of her modernity and her knowledge of the city life. A rising movie starlet owned many exquisite narrow-cut silk qipaos in order to impress her audience with the beauty of her body covered only by one layer of the luxurious fabric. She even might expect some gossip for wearing risqué qipaos. However, for a model housewife of the 1930s the qipao represented a traditional and decent garment. Her morals were not questioned even though she wore a dress that was condemned for its vulgarity a few years earlier.

Despite its dubious character, and perhaps mainly due to it, the qipao became a powerful visual symbol during the early years of the Republican era. On one hand, journals and newspapers published caricatures depicting fashionable woman in qipao as predatory beauties chasing after men, while on the other the advertisement for modern and Western luxury goods employed the contrast of a young energetic, smiling and healthy modern woman in a tight-fitting and body revealing qipao as opposed to a physically unattractive, old fashioned, demure and ailing lady wrapped in the heavy layers of traditional dress.

The visual contrast between a young woman in a qipao and a lady in a traditional gown carried complex cultural and social meanings. Foremost, the qipao represented a radical shift in the clothing habits of Chinese women. The traditional loose, body covering clothes changed to a narrow-cut dress revealing the curves of the female body. Qipao emphasised the female body, symbolised the female body, as if the body and dress eventually became one. However, this concept of body and dress gained rather contradictory meanings during its short history after the turn of the twentieth century. The physical beauty, health and modern lifestyle of westernised urban women prevailed, yet it would be simplistic to assume that it was its only significance. On the contrary, during the thirties the qipao symbolised the homely femininity of a good wife and mother who turned to traditional social values.

The qipao has been worn until today, and even though it has lost much of its previous meaning, it still attracts the fashionistas, designers, and movie makers, not to mention researchers in the history of Chinese clothing. There are only a few garments in Chinese history that have aroused so much interest. It is probably the only “Chinese” female dress that is widely known in the West, where it is considered to express the “real” Chineseness in fashion. Westerners see qipao as a traditional Chinese national dress. However, the Chinese who are aware of the cultural symbolism of clothing point out that the qipao could not assume the socially and culturally elevated role of a national dress. It is a modern hybrid invention based on multicultural influences, and as such it is not suitable to occupy the position.

Nevertheless, the qipao is a dress of the utmost aesthetic value. The beauty of a woman wearing a qipao, her bearing and gait, were praised by early twentieth century writers as well as modern filmmakers. The aesthetic of the qipao is appealing both to Chinese and Westerners. A woman in a qipao simply attracts attention. Admired or condemned, qipao enthral and fascinate, and no one is left unmoved.

For Western researchers qipao represent a major visual symbol of the Chinese modernity, particularly with regard to the status change of Chinese women. Without numerous photographs of women in qipao, caricatures and drawings in newspapers and magazines,

and depictions in novels and short stories, the female aspect of Chinese modernity would without doubt remain buried under other symbols, namely masculine ones.

## **Before the Emergence of the Modern Qipao: The Androgynous Revolutionary**

During the late period of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) women of the Han ethnicity wore jackets and skirts while women of Manchu ancestry used one-piece gowns (see Plates 4 and 5). The Manchu dressing style reflected their former nomadic lifestyle. The female dress, loosely covering the body, was simple and convenient. The so-called “qipao” (Banner Dress) was worn by Manchu women of the Eight Banners, originally a military style organisation of Manchu society. The Manchu style qipao was cut in an A-shape with a narrow upper part and wide bottom. Sleeves were long and loose. The front was tailored with right-sided buttoning. Qipaos were heavily embroidered, with wide floral embroidery around the standing collar and the opening, the bottom of the sleeves and lower hem. The colours were bright and came in various combinations. The cheerful blend of colours and embroidery might be visually overwhelming for a modern Western observer, but the original Manchu qipao “reflected a perfect image of the Manchu woman – elegant, tall, straight, solemn and conservative”, as described by a contemporary Chinese researcher (Yuan: 42).

The Manchu qipao is usually considered to be the direct ancestor of the modern qipao. However, the modern qipao has various progenitors, and the Manchu style female gown was only one of them (Finnane: 141-142). Modern qipao emerged together with profound social changes leading to, among other demands, the formulation of new roles for women in society (Hershatter: 1030-1031) during the last decades of the Manchu dynasty. Social space for women widened, new possibilities appeared, namely in education and vocation, as well as in sports and leisure time activities (see Plates 6 and 7). The need for new clothing went hand in hand with these social changes. Like their male counterparts, Chinese women sought new clothing, something simple that reflected the lifestyle of a woman who is not only a mother and housewife but an educated and active member of society. The adoption of Western dress was problematic for many reasons, whether political, psychological, or simply practical. However, the spirit of physical and mental power embodied in Western female attire merged with the convenient elements of a traditional Chinese dress. The combination eventually led to creation of a hybrid style, the new qipao.

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries women could choose from different styles of dressing according to their social position and lifestyle. Traditional Han and Manchu women wore traditional clothing. Loose but increasingly more close-fitting knee-length gowns with trousers, westernised skirts and blouse style jackets, and early modern qipaos were worn either by young female students or top-class courtesans who were eager to catch the newest fashions (Hershatter: 1030). The natural feet in Western shoes, easily managed hairstyle and modern accessories such as chain watches accompanied the dress of urban women who stepped out of the secluded sphere of their families into the new public space of schools, streets, parks, shopping stores and restaurants. The model woman of the late 1910s became “politically aware, patriotic, independent, and educated” (Dong: 215). The ideal woman wore the appropriate dress to embody her yearnings as well as her inner qualities.

The cut of the early qipao still resembled the traditional banner dress. However, it became narrower, and its length shortened. The height of the standing collar changed according to the fashion. Once it reached up to the ears and covered the cheeks. The original wide embroidered hems disappeared. Its modesty and a certain androgynous look reflected the seriousness of the new social role of women in a changing society. Early qipao were “angular and puritanical” (Chang: 72). Women from the urban middle-class intelligentsia hoped for equality between men and women, and dressing like men was the initial step. During the final years of the Empire and the early years of the Republic their hopes and ambitions were still fresh and unspoiled. However, the gap between expectations and social reality created a consequent disillusion that led to the emergence of a new type of femininity and a new aesthetics of clothing.

## Emergence of the Qipao: The Modern Girl

When exactly the “real” modern qipao emerged remains a mystery. As noted by Antonia Finnane who wrote extensively about qipao and Chinese dress, it appeared during the early 1920s. Chinese writer Eileen Chang (1920–1995) famous for her depictions of the 1940s urban society and its excess dated its first appearance to 1921 (Chang: 71). Qipao seemed to come into existence in the mid-twenties but spread a bit later; in 1926 it became the high fashion among young urban ladies from well-to-do families (Finnane 1996: 109).

During this period, the qipao was only one of the possible fashions. Conservative ladies still wore traditional dress, and modern urban women sported westernised skirts, blouses and jackets based on the late Qing Han dress (Finnane 1996: 109). However, qipao gradually began dominating the fashion. The women who wore it came from the emerging westernised middle class living in large coastal cities. They received modern education in China or even abroad, and members of their families were involved in the political, social and cultural events of the day (Finnane 1996: 111). Modern ladies entertained themselves in cafés and cinemas, went to parties, shopped in Western style shopping houses, and enjoyed new luxurious products such as cosmetics and medicals (Dongs: 215).

In the West, the “Flapper”, a modern fashionable young woman emerged during the so-called roaring twenties, and China gave birth to her counterpart, a *modeng* 摩登 girl. The *modeng* girl was a young woman sporting a qipao and high-heels, wearing face powder, and lipstick, with a bob or permed hair. However, despite her modern and stylish appearance, her social background could not be easily detected. “There was no sure way to tell the class of a young woman sporting the modern girl look” (Dong: 201). This characteristic expresses the conflict with the traditional society and its dress code. In a traditional China one’s dress openly announced the social position of its wearer. It was essential information for proper social behaviour; however, social status was obscured by modern dress. There were subtle indicators of social position such as the quality of fabric and accessories; however, the very type of the qipao wiped away social differences, at least at first glance.

Qipao represented a break with tradition and the traditional structure of society. A modern girl in a qipao openly announced her willingness to enjoy the freedom provided by a modern urban society, including free love. For young girls who moved from poor rural areas into large cities in order to find a job and to marry to a suitable man, the

qipao represented a possibility to enter a world to which they could not belong in traditional society. The qipao showcased the beauty of the physical body and attracted onlookers. It could not hide physical defects like the traditional layered jackets and gowns that entirely covered the body and obscured poor posture caused by foot-binding and the sedentary life of middle- and upper-class women.

During late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the policy of strengthening the nation was executed, the fragile bodies and melancholic minds of the Chinese were accused of almost causing political and military defeat. The intellectuals of the period were excessively worried about “the effeminate image” of China “to the Western gaze” (Luo, n.pag.) The association of the modern citizen with the nation, and the physical fitness of every man and woman as well as the political and military “fitness” of the nation intensified during the Republic (Hershatter: 1012) when modern qipao emerged. Simultaneously, the change in perception of the female body appeared (Hershatter: 1031). As opposed to the traditional beauty ideal, the new approach preferred the strong and healthy female body (see Plate 8). Traditional Chinese beauties depicted in poetry and fiction were fragile, slim and pale skinned, whereas modern women were praised for their athletic qualities, physical power and health. The qipao, short hair and make-up emphasised the radiant freshness of a healthy and young woman. Caucasian features such as large breasts and buttocks were demanded, because they symbolised better hygiene, fitness and health (Ho: 91). The obsession with fitness and body health as well as the recovery of the nation continued into the thirties.

### **The Height of Fashion: The Decent Housewife**

During the thirties the qipao was a highly fashionable dress (see Plates 9, 10, 11). However, as opposed to the previous decade, it expressed different meanings. The qipao had previously been worn by a westernised girl who had the courage to stand up to convention, but in the thirties the qipao was the dress of a woman who deeply honoured tradition.

The social expectation of women from the late Qing and early Republican period focused on their role in a new, soon-to-be society, where they would be equal with men. Women should be educated, open-minded, physically healthy, hard-working, and modest. However, the memoirs and novels of the period depicting the lives of women witnessed their deep disappointment and frustration after they realised that the traditional male-oriented society was not willing to change as easily as they had expected. The revolutionary men declared the need for a new social position of women, however, when it came to realisation of their ideas, they remained reluctant and hesitant.

The modernised and westernised qipao girl turned into a dollish consumer of fashionable goods, and eventually into a traditionally-minded model mother and wife. During the thirties, stereotyped “family women” appeared as a product of the new official cultural policy during the Nanjing decade after the establishment of the Nationalist government in 1927 (Finnane 1996: 118). The New Life Movement *Xin shenghuo yundong* 新生活運動 set up in 1934 aimed to counter the rise of the Communists, and to build up national morale on the eve of the military conflict with Japan. The ideology of the New Life Movement was based on nationalism, militarism and traditional Confucian teaching (Dong: 216, Liu: 31). The movement was conservative,

and it stressed the revival of “native morality” (Dirlik: 945). In terms of family values, it praised the traditional division of gender roles. The man was responsible for affairs outside the household, whereas the woman was expected to maintain the domestic matters (Finnane 1996: 117). The proper destiny of the family woman was to marry a prosperous man, to properly keep her household, and to give birth to children. A domestic inclination, self-discipline and frugality were preferred. Education was demanded when it came to upbringing the children. Health was a desirable trait because women were responsible for bearing a new generation for the future nation. A woman should use all their assets, such as her decent family origin ensuring her health and social position, her physical fitness and her beauty. Finally, women “were supposed to be women” in terms of appearance, behaviour and clothing (Finnane 1996: 117). The revolutionary girls of the early twentieth century often abandoned their families to pursue their education and vocation, and the摩登 girls of the twenties chased urban men in order to climb the social ladder. However, the New Life Movement morale was rather strict and severe. The spirit of self-discipline prevailed, and the public morality was met with economic restrictions. The consumerism of the twenties was criticised (Dong: 216), and provocative and luxurious clothing was prohibited. The conservative look demanded that clothing should cover the arms and the throat.

Despite the required conservative look the qipao of the thirties displayed an overt sexuality. It was tightly cut with a narrow waist but full bosom. It definitely outlined the female body. The tight cut demanded long slit openings on both sides of the skirt (see Plate 1 and 2). While walking and sitting, the openings showed a woman’s legs clad in stockings and high-heels. The advertisements for modern products of the period as well as photographs often presented women in middle-class westernised apartments. An elegant lady in a qipao sitting on a sofa, holding a cigarette in her hand and listening to a gramophone represented a domesticated and safe femininity of the thirties, as opposed to the revolutionary martyrs from the beginning of the century and the predatory beauties of the twenties. The qipao worn during the previous two decades were a social and personal statement, whereas in the thirties they became a stable part of a woman’s wardrobe, a “must-wear” for an urban fashionable lady.

## Later History: Respectability or Decadence

This essay is primarily focused on the development of qipao during the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, nevertheless its further history should be mentioned. During the fifties, after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, qipao ceased to be worn in Communist mainland China. In Taiwan and Hong Kong it was still popular, even if it was worn more on special occasions than for everyday wear.

In the West, qipao gained popularity due to a 1960 romantic drama “The World of Suzie Wong” set in Hong Kong<sup>3</sup>. The movie depicted a love story between an American artist and a native prostitute. The young and pretty woman pretends to belong to high society, but her profession is revealed by her behaviour and especially by her markedly sexy qipao. Although in the sixties qipao appeared in Western fashion, its popularity was rather questionable, as it primarily represented a “sleazy Suzie Wong dress” (Chew: 159). As a respectable garment the qipao appeared as an official dress worn by the

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<sup>3</sup> Directed by Richard Quine, starring William Holden and Nancy Kwan, based on a novel by Richard Mason.

wives of Chinese and Taiwanese representatives, however, as such it hardly served as a fashion inspiration for Western women. Since the eighties qipao have been occasionally worn by Chinese and overseas Chinese women. Some see it as a link with tradition and ethnicity, for others it represents luxurious and fashionable goods, and some wear it for its sexiness. The luxury and sensuality of silk qipao are regularly employed in fashion campaigns, such as by the famous fashion house Shanghai Tang, which revives nostalgia for the decadence of old Shanghai. However, its status remains ambiguous and the qipao is still not regarded as a respectable dress (Finnane 1996: 105, Chew: 159).

## **Qipao and the Female Body**

Since ancient times philosophical, literary, and religious texts depicted the harmful effects of women, namely the concubines of the emperor upon the success or failure of the state (Goldin: 109). The connection between the sexual life of the ruler, his morality and its impact on the state lay in the focus of many political treatises for centuries. Immoral women especially, and women in general, caused fear in the minds of traditional scholars whose education since childhood was based upon classical texts. This mental framework helped to create a setting where women should be subdued to patriarchal rules and their supposedly harmful powers bound. During the last decades of the Qing dynasty in the 19<sup>th</sup> century China suffered a series of political defeats, and the state was in economic and social turmoil. Late Qing reformers mused about the causes of the national humiliation in front of Western powers and came to a conclusion that reflected the traditional philosophical worldview. They linked the political failure of China and its weakness and isolation with the physical weakness of Chinese women and their social isolation and dependency upon the male authorities. On one hand, women became a powerful symbol on the weakened nation, on the other hand, according to the traditional view; women were treated as if they were responsible for the unfortunate development of the state (Edwards: 126, Finnane 1996: 102). The anti-Qing reformers imagined that women should study, work, and participate in politics in order to strengthen the nation (Hershatter: 1029). This opinion opened new possibilities for urban middle-class women who were eager to study and find a vocation in order to improve their lives. The physical fitness of women was visible evidence of their changing mental framework. Girls and women were encouraged in their pursuit of sport and care for their bodies (Hershatter: 1012). Heavy and layered attire was exchanged for a simple skirt and blouse and an early qipao.

The association of a modern nation with the physical fitness and health of its members intensified during the Republican period (Hershatter: 1012). The traditional beauty with a fragile body, oval face and fair skin was replaced by an energetic body, smiling face, and big eyes. The robust, strong body with large breasts and buttocks was considered healthy as well as modern. The well-built body was emphasised by close fitting clothing, and the narrow cut dress exposed the female body in previously impossible ways. However, the Chinese are traditionally very sensitive to bodily exposure. Revealing one's body or its parts to others was considered unacceptable (Chew: 158). The traditional dress covered the body entirely. The body under its layers ceased to exist, as if there were only multiple covers of underdresses, trousers, skirts and voluptuous jackets and vests, all of them heavily embroidered and embellished. Either a well formed or an ill body was concealed under the affluent silk. However,

qipao represented only a simple “sheath” that lay between the female body and her surroundings, “nothing more than a foil faithfully setting off the contours of the figure (Chang: 72). Qipao showed off a body that had to be well shaped and beautiful. Unlike the traditional dress that concealed any type of female figure, the qipao was only appropriate for women with suitable proportions, because its cut did not hide any shortcomings. Qipao also required a movement of the body that differed from that of a woman in traditional dress. Sitting in a qipao, walking, and standing required a poise and deportment that was not required from a woman in traditional dress (Tam: 2-3).

Despite the early qipao emergence during the politically and socially turbulent end of the Qing dynasty as a garment for a strong modern woman, it gradually became a symbol of womanliness, beauty and sexuality, and it has been viewed as such until now both by Chinese and Western audiences. However, there is another view that sees the qipao in an altered way. It comes from a Chinese author, a witty observer of the excess of the period, the writer Eileen Chang 張愛玲, who in her still currently influential essay *Gengyi ji* 更衣記 (A Chronicle of changing clothes)<sup>4</sup> presented a different perspective. Eileen Chang pointed out that dress usually became increasingly narrow and tight during times of political, social and economic unrest. She remarked on how different the attitudes of a self-possessed lady in a traditional wide robe and a pitiful “damsel in distress” were to a young girl in a narrow cut qipao worn during the years around the fall of the Empire (Chang: 69).

Eileen Chang provided us with a perspective different from that of writers dealing with the history of feminist ideology in China, who often praise the late Qing period as a difficult but victorious time of liberation for women from under patriarchal rule. She noticed how stressful and uncertain this transitional period might be for middle-class women, and how their fear materialised in the simplicity and puritanism of their new dress as well as in their hopes for equality with men and desires to obtain the same symbolic value as men: to be educated as men, to possess similar body strength and to dress like men.

During its short history the qipao travelled a long way from an ornate dress of the Manchu aristocracy to a masculine anti-traditionalist dress, and later from a fashionable and sexy “flapper” to the conservative and decent garment of a middle-class lady. Simultaneously, the female body experienced the journey from an ailing weakling of a traditional woman to the strong, healthy and sexy westernised modern Chinese woman, so much praised by her male and female contemporaries. The evolution of the qipao covered only thirty years. However, the qipao became the dress that was most fundamentally linked to the redefinition of female body during the crucial period of the development of Chinese modernity.

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<sup>4</sup> The essay was originally written in English and published under the title “Chinese Life and Fashions” in January 1943 in the journal *XX<sup>th</sup> Century* (Vol. 4, No. 1). Eileen Chang provided a translation into Chinese for the December issue of the journal *Gujin* 古今 (Past and Present) (No. 43). It appeared in a collection of essays *Liuyan* 流言 (Shanghai: Zhongguo kexue gongsi, 1945), translated into English by Andrew F. Jones under the title *Written on Water*.



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Plate 1

The qipao (Inv. N. 46674) was donated to the museum by a private owner in the 1980s. The elegant 1930s style qipao is made of light blue *kesi* weave fabric with white and yellow-green hydrangea flowers, *prunus* flowers and butterflies with painted shading. It is underlined with dark blue silk covered with a tie-dye technique design of tiny white squares.



#### Plate 2

The qipao (Inv. N. 18195) was donated in 1957 by the representatives of the People's Republic of China. The large gift contained modern copies of traditional porcelain, cloisonné, and jade carving objects, including also examples of arts and craft such as textiles and embroidery. The qipao is made of black satin. It has a very narrow cut with a metal zipper at the waist. High slits are located on both sides. The embroidery adorns the body as well as the sleeves. The buds and blooming *prunus* flowers in shades of white and pink sit on beige and brown twigs with hints of blue representing the traditional embroidery motif. The choice of colours and composition are traditional, whereas the realistic flowers resting on slightly stylised twigs represent a modern style.



Plate 3

The Czechoslovak journalist Viktor Mussik<sup>5</sup> visited China in 1932–1933. Among the pictures from his archive kept in the Náprstek Museum are several photographs of women wearing qipao. The picture of three girls was taken in Shanghai in 1933. B/w, 3 x 4 cm. (Mussik Collection, Inv. N. As I 3037).



Plates 4 and 5

A Manchu woman in a "Banner Dress" and a Chinese lady wearing a skirt and a jacket. Watercolour on paper, 25.9 x 21.6 cm, late Qing period. Two sheets from an album of fifteen paintings depicting various female hairstyles. (Inv. Nos. A/19179a, A/19179ch).

<sup>5</sup> About Viktor Mussik, see the forthcoming article by Jiřina Todorovová „The Photographs of Journalist Viktor Mussik in the Collection of the Náprstek Museum,“ in *Annals of the Náprstek Museum*, 35/2, 2014



Plate 6

Girls studying in the "New professional school for women".

The picture depicts shows girls carrying out various activities suitable for the modern educated woman. One girl is sewing while another sweeps the floor. One girl plays a lute while two are engaged in a lively conversation about the book they are reading. The teacher on the left instructs three girls. On the right two girls exercise with dumbbells.

The girls wear early qipao and trousers with a sash. Some have a simple headdress adorned with flowers whereas others wear westernised straw hats. Some girls have cotton shoes for naturally grown feet, however some wear tiny red slippers for bound "golden lilies".

Print and colour on paper, 60 x 110 cm, late Qing period. (Inv. N. A/19222).



Plate 7

A boy and a girl riding a bicycle.

A couple in traditional dress ride a modern western invention – a bicycle for two. The girl wears trousers and a jacket. She has bound feet and traditional slippers.

Print and colour on paper, 17 x 25 cm, late Qing period. (Inv. N. A/19222).

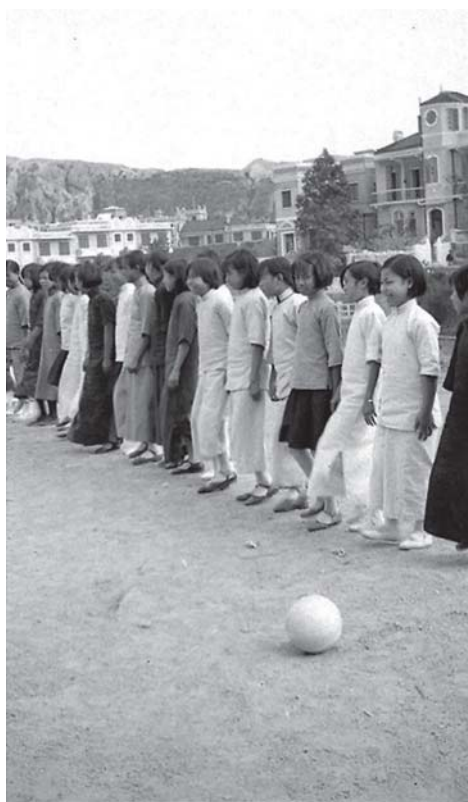


Plate 8  
Student girls during a physical exercise class. The picture shows various clothing worn during the period by young girls. There are several qipaos, long skirts and jackets (there might be also long trousers and jackets), and one example of a very short skirt with a jacket. B/w, 4.5 x 3.5 cm (Mussik Collection, Inv. N. As I 1476).



Plate 9  
An elegant lady in a qipao goes window shopping. The picture belongs to a series depicting the Bata shoes shop in Shanghai. The lady wears a tight fitting qipao and high-heels. She has an elaborate headdress made of permed hair. B/w, 6 x 9 cm (Mussik Collection, Inv. N. As I 1192).



Plate 10

A young lady in a qipao.

B/w, 4.5 x 3.5 cm (Mussik Collection,  
Inv. N. As I 1465).



Plate 11

A young lady in a qipao sitting in a modern  
westernised room smokes a cigarette.

B/w, 4.5 x 3.5 cm (Mussik Collection,  
Inv. N.As I 1472).

The photographs taken by Viktor Mussik is one of a set of five pictures of young women in qipaos. The pictures represent the Western male gaze of a traveller and journalist who takes arranged pictures of modern Chinese beauties. The women were probably known to him, as the pictures were taken in a privacy of a flat and on the balcony of a modern building. The women wear qipaos with petticoats, high heels, and jewellery.