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Research Paper

Socially and economically, post World War II fashion was a result of a new consumer driven society due to the overall economic gain. Historically though, due to German forces occupying Paris from 1940 to 1944, communication and trade between the three largest fashion centers- Paris, London and New York, were interrupted majorly. This forced all three fashion hubs to create their own independent markets, resulting in hindered development and expansion. Since the production and consumption of clothing were being regulated due to resources being used mainly for war effort, the government in North America and Britain restricted textiles like wool, cotton, linen and silk for everyday fashion wear. Women had to become thrifty and often times, take on a man's role in the world during the war (Cole & Deihl, 2015). Fashion was geared towards practicality and use of minimal fabric opposed to exuberance and indulgence. It was not until post-war, that society was urged to flaunt and embrace fashion again.

With the world exiting a time of great restraint, consumption in all segments of society was encouraged and expanding (Cole & Deihl, 2015, p.232). Leisure time was growing and technologies developed during war time, were finally being offered again for civilian use. One of the major technological developments during this time, that played a major role in the promotion of the influx of consumer goods of the 1950s, was the television. Over one million homes in the United States owned one and the majority of consumer marketing was geared towards women, "As people strove for a conservative simplicity, the housewife became the feminine ideal for the day" (Monet, 2012).

Conservatism, femininity and glamour were some of the expressive themes reflecting 1950's fashion. During this decade, it was important to be dressed correctly with the proper clothes and accessories for the specific time of day or event you were attending. Looking polished, whether at home during the day or at an event or occasion during night, was of major focus during the 1950s. Moreover, with the rise of two new silhouettes, women's fashion was headed towards accentuating a more hour glass figure, highlighting a fitted bodice with a cinched waist and continuing into either a full skirt supported by a large crinoline, or a more narrow shaped pencil skirt, hugging at the hips (Cole & Deihl, 2015, p.235).

At the end of World War II, the government and industries were really encouraging women to return home to take on the role of a housewife again. "The number of women who focused on domestic duties peaked during the 1950s, and doing it in style was a huge part of their culture" (Formichella, 2021). Due to this idea of the housewife, the 1950s functional housewife dress was created and exploded in the market. It was a perfect garment to make homemaking fashionable. A typical housewife dress was usually made with easy to wash fabrics, cozy patterns and breathable materials and normally topped with a cute apron. With that being said though, a more elite society who likely had more money to spend, could purchase a housewife dress designed by a courtier who used more expensive fabrics. This leads me to the primary source I chose for this paper.

The garment I chose as my primary source, is an upscale version of a housewife dress designed by Chicago born, American- French couturier, Main Rousseau Bocher to become known as Mainbocher. Not only was Mainbocher the first American to become a member of the Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture but as a designer in America, he was favored and highly requested by the elite society of Manhattan (Watson, 2015, p. 49) Mainbocher was all about

simplicity and more subtle nuances of luxury. The goal was not to design for obsolescence but to create reassuring clothes. Although Mainbocher aimed for unpretentious elegance, he was a master of the subtle silhouette and chic detail (Watson, 2015). Charming some of America's favorite socialites during this time, Mainbocher was passionate about fabrics and extremely critical of craftsmanship and design. He understood the balance of designing clothes that were trending while incorporating his authentic style of classic and elegant opulence.

Stated on (metmuseum.org), this particular garment is made up of silk medium and was a gift of the American socialite, Mrs. Winston Guest. The garment is two-toned, consisting of a silky pale pink color for the bodice portion of the dress and a very pale blue color for the bottom part, making up the skirt. The bodice is fitted and consists of two short sleeves with a high neckline, while the skirt portion is long and elegant with minimal gathers, flaring subtly. There is a thin pale blue band binding both bodice and skirt which created a very high waistline as well as allowed the skirt to appear quite long, as it flows all the way down to the floor. What truly caught my eye on this particular garment was the Chinoiserie aesthetic embroidered onto the center of the bodice and the satiny apron. The rectangular shaped embroidery on the bodice looks to be of a nature theme but Chinese costume style, consisting of vine like plants and colorful florals. The same theme also appears at the bottom center of the apron while also incorporating the two-toned look of the dress using darker shades of pastel blue and pink. Additionally, placed along the lower brim of the rectangular apron are seven embroidered, cream colored floral motifs.

According to (metmuseum.org) "Mainbocher loved Chinese costume references...His Chinoiserie ranged from graphic, cheongsam reductivisim..."). Cheongsam is also known as the sensational trend of the qipao. The qipao is a tight fitted dress with high collars and asymmetric fastenings. It is a Chinese woman's most sexiest, iconic outfit and is meant to be worn on grand

occasions. The qipao is very sensual and is known for its body hugging silhouettes, intricate embroidered designs and is usually made up of gorgeous silk. In “Whats behind the Global Appeal of China’s Qipao Dress?” Nag Mani (2021) says, “ ... Cheongsam, began in Shanghai in the 1930s...Yet, if we dig deeper, ... the qipao gained popularity a decade earlier in the 1920s”. With that being said though, the qipao trend truly found its way into Western world fashion when Shanghai fashion retailer, Hongxiang, wooed Hollywood film stars at qipao fashion shows. With the overwhelming loving response, Hongxiang designed six qipao dresses to exhibit at the Chicago World Expo in 1933 (Mani, 2021). Hollywood movies are what catapulted the trend of the qipao dress around the world and influenced designers to incorporate some of the beautiful details of the qipao into their own work.

As you can see within the primary source of discussion here, Mainbocher quite deliberately fused qipao and oriental details with the conservative, lady like daintiness of a house wife dress. Additionally, Mainbocher used silk medium which makes up most of this garment, giving it the same luxurious appeal as a qipao would. wrote “...Mainbocher, along with some other well known designers, created silk shantung suits with narrow skirts and a provocative side slip” (Stewart, 2016, p. 152), displaying their fondness for Oriental design within some of their marvelous work. Globally, Cheongsam had stole the hearts of some prestigious couturier’s.

As seen in Vogue, “...Mainbocher was clear about who he wanted to dress and how he wanted his work to be presented” (Borrelli- Persson, 2016). He created exquisite designs for the creme de la creme and had a way of elevating the humble and modest feminine nature, of the 1950s well- dressed woman ideal. The garment of focus here was gifted to Mrs. Winston Guest (C.Z. Guest), as mentioned before. C. Z. Guest was a New York Socialite who not only was a

noted horsewoman, outstanding hostess and was acknowledged as a lifelong member of The Best Dressed List.

(Smith, 2010, para. 5)

The color is...and that was at the back.

“sentence 1...sentence 3”

According to the Met Museum’s costume institute,

Another study of students and research decisions discovered that students succeeded with tutoring ("Tutoring and APA," n.d.).