

Exploring the Modern Qipao Through the Lens of U.S. Gen Z Consumers

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Introduction and Literature Review. Traditional Chinese Qipao is a figure-fitting dress characterized by elegant stand-up collars, a front piece, and the Chinese panko (Chang, 2008). Originally symbolizing women's liberation, its evolution reflects cultural identity and changing societal attitudes, establishing it as an iconic garment (Tibberts, 2021; Han, 2019). Researchers have broadened their scope by incorporating technological innovation, creativity, and other emerging concepts in apparel and merchandising (Lee et al., 2020). Previous studies have compared Chinese and American perspectives on Chinese-influenced fashion (DeLong et al., 2005) as well as explored style perception and consumption behavior related to the cultural identity of traditional Chinese attire (Wang & Zhou, 2016). Despite the current knowledge of Qipao design and elements, this study focuses on modern Qipao designs to understand how ethnic dress can be integrated into contemporary fashion. Moreover, most existing research has been conducted in Asian countries; this study, however, targets U.S. Generation Z consumers, selected for their growing spending capacity and authentic engagement with culturally influenced design (Shine et al., 2022). The purpose of this study is to create a five-piece modern Qipao collection that aligns with 2023 fashion trends and to assess how various design details influence Qipao preferences. This research provides actionable insights for designers and retailers by facilitating a connection between traditional dress and contemporary fashion.

Methodology. In this study, WGSN's forecasts for the 2023 fashion trends were incorporated. Details were gathered from fashion magazines and website reports, highlighting trends such as slim-fit silhouettes with high necks, Y2K fashion, straight-fit pants, lingerie corsets, and back-focused cutouts (Baidoo, 2022; Trotman, 2022). Figure 1 showcases five redesigned Qipaos, labeled Modern Qipao (A) through (E). Each design integrates traditional Chinese features, such as stand-up collars, specific patterns in traditional Chinese brocade, and the binding technique. Modern Qipao (A) features wavy sleeves and double slits, complemented by a transparent corset to highlight the figure's contours. Modern Qipao (B) combines a water-drop collar with a black sheer floor-length skirt and a laser-cut leather pattern. Modern Qipao (C) presents a crop top and pleated skirt ensemble, inspired by the Y2K fashion trend of 2023. Modern Qipao (D) is characterized by a slim silhouette with detachable long sleeves, enhanced by a traditional front piece and a back cut-out. Lastly, Modern Qipao (E) pairs a crop top with puff sleeves and a transparent corset with straight pants.



Figure 1. Modern Qipao (A) to (E).

An online survey was conducted using Qualtrics, where out of 412 submitted questionnaires, 211 were completed and retained for data analysis. All participants were aged between 18 and 26 years. Participants were invited to view the images of five modern Qipao and were asked to rank the following design components, including silhouette, color, textile/fabric pattern, and other design details, on a 5-point Likert scale. Additionally, the survey collected demographic information from participants, such as ethnicity, academic standing, and annual household income.

Results and Discussion. Regarding familiarity with the Qipao, 84.4% of the participants were aware of the Chinese Qipao, while 15.6% had never heard of it. Among the participants, 97.6% correctly identified an image of the Chinese Qipao. Additionally, participants generally held positive views on culturally inspired apparel, describing such apparel as “a symbol,” “can express nationality and culture with its characteristics,” and “focuses on the global perspective from outside of the U.S. that she may not be familiar with.” Some participants mentioned that culturally inspired apparel “is a great way to honor culture and an essential development for an ethnic group, but only if the design is done respectfully.”

Modern Qipao (A) emerged as the top-rated design, praised for retaining the original appearance of the Chinese Qipao with features like wavy sleeves, double slits, and a dragon pattern symbolizing fortune and luck. Participants appreciated its femininity and attractiveness. Conversely, Modern Qipao (E) received lower ratings due to its lack of traditional elements. In addition, participants favored innovative techniques like laser-cutting, with the water-drop collar design in Modern Qipao (B) and the back cutout detail in Modern Qipao (D) receiving high praise. The integration of classic Qipao elements with modern styles, such as in the crop top and pleated skirt combination of Modern Qipao (C), was also well-received, illustrating consumer interest in traditional yet innovative appearances.

This research also investigated participants’ purchase intentions for each modern Qipao design. Overall, participants exhibited varying degrees of willingness to purchase. Modern Qipao (D) (54.4%) received the highest ratings in the category of likely to purchase, followed by Modern Qipao (E) (46%), and Modern Qipao (A) (41.3%). Additionally, most participants indicated a willingness to pay between \$50-100 for Modern Qipao (A), (B), (C), and (D). Notably, 29.9% of participants were willing to spend \$100-150 on Modern Qipao (E). Consumers may be willing to pay a higher price for Modern Qipao (E) due to its unique feature

as a pants outfit. The unique aspects and potential for adding other items along with Qipao (E) might explain these preferences.

Conclusions and Implications. These findings help Qipao designers and fashion marketers better understand U.S. Generation Z consumers' attitudes and preferences towards modern Qipao and develop effective marketing strategies. Additionally, the incorporation of fashion trends and technology can help modernize traditional Qipao and promote cultural heritage and appreciation in the global fashion market. Overall, this study contributes to the understanding of the role of Qipao in modern fashion and its potential for future growth and prosperity.

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