



Rebirth

Chanjuan Chen, Kent State University, USA

Sustainability, Couture techniques, Textile innovation

Measurements: Bust 35", Waist 28", Hips 37"

The reuse of existing materials is a sustainable design strategy that provides designers with the opportunity to reassess the real worth and value of a waste material (Gwilt & Rissanen, 2011). Designers Annika Sanders and Kerry Seager have reworked men's suits and shirts, turning them into one of a kind experimental, yet playful, womenswear, under the label "Junky Styling" (Brown, 2013). In addition, scholars have adopted Eastern cultural costumes as inspiration for a variety of creative works, such as Kim Hahn's design, *Magma Shrouds*, which was inspired by the Korean traditional coat, *Durumagi* (Hahn, 2014). Utilizing the strategy of upcycling, combined with the concept of traditional Chinese dress style, *Qipao*, the purpose of this design was to refashion and add new value and significance to secondhand men's suits and neckties by creating a culturally inspired feminine dress with ornamental detail. Both the tailored men's jackets and neckties were made out of quality fabrics despite small damaged areas. By redesigning and making use of these otherwise underused items, they are given prolonged life and increased value.

The silhouette of the dress was motivated by a traditional Chinese dress style, *Qipao*, and the inspiration for the details on the dress was a mythological bird, *Fenghuang*, or Phoenix, symbolizing beauty, grace, high virtue, and renewal as the bird is believed to be cyclically reborn. *Qipao* means "banner gown", referring to a style of robe worn by Manchu women in the Qing dynasty. In the 1920s, it began to develop into a more fitted one-piece dress style with a high neck, side front buttons, and slits on the sides, and was commonly worn by Chinese women (Ng, 2015). The use of tailored men's jackets and ties, items traditionally representing stature and power, distinctively contrasts with the *Qipao* dress style, which characterizes women's modesty, gentleness, and beauty. The elements of the western men's suit jacket, such as the lapel and flap pocket, were subtly manipulated into the dress to form a unique combination of different cultures and identities. The details on the dress were made by cutting used men's ties into thin strips and forming a unique outline of the *Fenghuang*, emblazoned on the body of the dress.

The process began by deconstructing two tailored men's jackets that were made out of wool fabric, one black and one navy blue. Some worn-out areas on the jackets were carefully avoided, and interesting elements, such as the lapel and pocket, were kept as whole components for reuse. To finalize the pattern, the pieces were transferred onto a heavier muslin fabric and draped on a body form to construct a *Qipao* inspired dress. The process required analyzing the amount of available fabric and existing pattern pieces from the two jackets in order to make effective use of the materials and form the desired new look. Some of the original darts from the jackets were utilized on the dress as appropriate. A pair of lapels and the collar from the navy blue jacket were adapted to form a high neck design and side front opening. Two welt pockets, one on the front and one on the back, were placed for functional use. Jacket front pieces created two unique side trains as well as one side slit in between. The black and navy blue wool pieces were arranged to balance the design and enhance the gracefulness of a female form.

The technique and the pattern design for the ornamental detail on the dress were inspired by the Chinese frog button, a traditional closure and decorating element associated with *Qipao*. Using research and visual aids, an abstract sketch of the *Fenghuang*, or Phoenix, was designed. This sketch was then superimposed on the garment to serve as guiding lines. To transfer the abstract *Fenghuang* onto the dress, four neckties were used to create the design. Since most of the neckties were cut on the bias and made of finely patterned silk, they provided an innovative way to obtain quality fabric for bias strips (Copenhaver, 2014). The neckties were deconstructed, cleaned, and ironed in preparation for using. They were cut into several ½ to 1 inch strips and sewn into long bias tubes. A loop turner was used to turn the tubes right side out. The bias strips were then pressed carefully and manipulated and sewn by hand on the dress according to the initial *Fenghuang* sketch. Only one side of each strip was stitched on the dress to give the pattern depth. When put together, the colorful neckties were arranged so as to reinvent the colors and textures representing the *Fenghuang* in Chinese culture. The face of the *Fenghuang* was stitched with gold cotton thread to add detail.

With textile waste growing, it is increasingly important for designers to explore new ways of upcycling. For this dress, the design and form were inspired by Chinese cultural elements. The design demonstrates not only an innovative way of upcycling, but also reassesses the value of waste materials. In addition, the design encourages the consideration of cultural inspiration in upcycling and how the two concepts can be combined.

The tailored men's jackets and neckties were repurposed and transformed into an entirely new aesthetic of a woman's dress. The limitation and repetition of structure and materials of the tailored men's jackets allowed this design to focus on clever use of construction and details, such as plackets, lapels, and pockets. In fact, the uniformity of styling in menswear has increased the potential of production efficiency in upcycled designs (Brown, 2013). Rich colors and fascinating patterns of used neckties are compatible with Chinese traditional colors and patterns. Future research will continue to analyze and combine the concepts of upcycling and cultural inspiration.

Brown, S. (2013). *Refashioned: Cutting-edge clothing from upcycled materials*. London: Laurence King Publishing.

Copenhaver, C. (2014). *Necktie quilts reinvented: 16 beautifully traditional projects - rotary cutting techniques*. Concord, CA: C&T Publishing.

Gwilt, A., & Rissanen, T. (2011). *Shaping sustainable fashion: Changing the way we make and use clothes*. London: Earthscan.

Hahn, K. (2014). Magma shrouds. *ITAA Proceedings 2014 Creative Design Professional: International Textile and Apparel Association*. Retrieved from <http://cdm16001.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p16001coll5/id/18612>

Ng, S. (2015). Gendered by design: *Qipao* and society, 1911-1949. *Costume*, 49 (1), 55-74.

