

NEW MEANING IN TRADITIONAL WEDDING DRESSES
– *XIU HE FU* AND *LONG FENG GUA* – IN
CONTEMPORARY CHINA

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CULTURAL CENTRE
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KUALA LUMPUR

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**NEW MEANING IN TRADITIONAL WEDDING
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LI YULING

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**NEW MEANING OF TRADITIONAL WEDDING DRESSES – XIU HE FU
AND LONG FENG GUA – IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA**

ABSTRACT

Chinese traditional wedding dresses have a long history, they are auspicious symbols for Chinese women. Embroidered decorative and symbolic elements on wedding dresses, represent well wishes for marriage, such as lasting marriage, more sons, more happiness. Although the Western white wedding dress has crossed cultures and many modern Chinese women wear them on their wedding day, the traditional Chinese dresses have re-emerged at the end of the 20th and early 21st century.¹ The Chinese traditional wedding dresses have recently become popular again in wedding ceremonies, especially the type of *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂.² However, this research argue that the traditional wedding dresses have changed in contemporary time, particularly the meaning of them for contemporary Chinese women are different. Because dresses in different situations will represent different identities. When the time, situation or context change, the representation also changes.

This study will investigate the new meaning found on these traditional wedding dresses.

Iconological study of the symbols in history as well as the context of historical and contemporary traditional wedding dresses will be used to investigate the changes in

¹ Matthew Chew, "Re-emergence of the Qipao: Political Nationalism, Cultural Production and Popular Consumption of a Traditional Chinese Dress," *The China Quarterly*, no. 189(Mar., 2007): 147.

² Xibin Chen, "Study of Jiangnan marriage needlework art – take the red dowry of eastern Zhejiang for example" (master's thesis, Zhejiang University of technology, 2014), 108.

Chinese gender and national identity. Much literatures record the images and context of symbolic patterns on Chinese folk dresses; also the symbolic meaning of embroidered patterns in the past have been recorded, for example, lotus/*lian* 莲 means purity.

However, we do not have researches that specifically look at contemporary Chinese women's identities through the symbols on Chinese traditional wedding dresses. This research will study the embroidered decorations on contemporary traditional wedding dresses as more than superficial beautifying decorations, but as new symbolic representations of the contemporary Chinese women.

In a word, this research will relate the Chinese gender and national identity with representation of Chinese traditional wedding dresses in contemporary time. It is in order to analysis that the new meaning of Chinese traditional wedding dresses for women is to express their contemporary Chinese identity, this Chinese identity includes that “the Chinese” national identity and the gender identity of women being part of Chinese nation.

Keywords: *xiu he fu*, *long feng gua*, Chinese traditional wedding dresses, Chinese identity

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ABSTRAK

Gaun pengantin tradisional Cina mempunyai sejarah yang panjang, menggambarkan simbol yang baik untuk wanita Cina. Unsur-unsur hiasan dan simbolik bersulam pada gaun pengantin, mewakili unsur yang baik dalam perkahwinan, seperti perkahwinan yang berkekalan, lebih banyak anak lelaki, lebih banyak kebahagiaan. Pakaian perkahwinan putih Barat telah melintasi ke budaya timur dan banyak wanita Cina moden bersedia untuk memakainya pada hari perkahwinan mereka, namun unsur unsur pakaian tradisional Cina telah muncul semula pada akhir abad ke-20 dan awal abad ke-21. Gaun pengantin tradisional Cina baru-baru ini menjadi terkenal dalam upacara perkawinan, terutama jenis *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 dan *long feng gua* 龙凤褂. Walau bagaimanapun, kajian ini berpendapat bahawa pakaian perkahwinan tradisional telah berubah pada masa semasa, terutama perbezaan makna tentang wanita Cina kontemporari. Oleh sebab itu, perbezaan unsur pakaian dalam situasi akan mewakili identiti yang berbeza. Oleh demikian, perubahan keadaan atau konteks akan menyebabkan perubahan dalam perwakilan juga.

Kajian ini akan menyiasat makna baru yang terdapat pada pakaian perkahwinan tradisional ini. Kajian ikonologi simbol-simbol dalam sejarah serta konteks gaun pengantin tradisional dan kontemporari akan digunakan untuk menyiasat perubahan

jantina Cina dan identiti kebangsaan. Banyak literatur mencatatkan imej dan konteks corak simbol pada gaun kaum Cina; juga makna simbolik bordir pada masa lalu yang telah direkodkan, contohnya, teratai / lian bermaksud kesucian. Walau bagaimanapun, kita tidak mempunyai penyelidikan yang secara khusus untuk melihat identiti wanita Cina kontemporari melalui simbol-simbol pakaian perkahwinan tradisional Cina.

Penyelidikan ini akan mengkaji hiasan bersulam pada pakaian perkahwinan tradisional kontemporari sebagai hiasan penghiasan yang cetek, dan sebagai perwakilan simbol baru dalam wanita Cina kontemporari.

Tambahan pula, kajian ini akan menghubungkan jantina Cina dan identiti kebangsaan dengan perwakilan gaun pengantin tradisional Cina pada zaman masa kini. Ia adalah untuk menganalisis makna baru perkahwinan tradisional Cina untuk wanita mengekspresikan identiti Cina kontemporari mereka, identiti Cina ini menyatakan bahawa identiti negara "China" dan identiti jantina perempuan telah menjadi sebahagian daripada negara China.

Kata kunci: *xiu he fu*, *long feng gua*, gaun pengantin tradisional Cina, identiti Cina

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

A wedding is a special occasion in life to every married woman. Chinese traditional wedding dress is an important symbolic artifact in Chinese history and culture. The dress itself has a long history in China and has been worn by women for centuries. In all its history, the most important element of the traditional Chinese wedding dress is its embroidery. Wedding dresses, as well as their embroidered decorations can be highly symbolic. For example, traditional pattern *xi* 喜 means happiness, the double *xi* 囍 is a symbol for wishing greater happiness.³ It is often used on Chinese traditional wedding dress to hope for matrimonial felicity.⁴ Since Chinese ancient society, the development of wedding dresses has been related to human social and cultural life, wedding dresses not only show the social and cultural values of Chinese societies, but also has a personal meaning for the wife, and the couple.

In China, every ethnicity and every dynasty have its own specific wedding dress.

However, the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) wedding dress was greatly influential to the

dresses of later ages, it is now recognized as ‘the’ Chinese wedding dress style par

excellence, which known as *feng guan xia pei* 凤冠霞帔.⁵ In ancient times, the wedding

³ Alfred Koehn, “Chinese Flower Symbolism,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 8, no. 1/2 (1952): 122, accessed April 04, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2383008>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Zhu Man 朱曼, “Zhong guo gu dai hun li fu se cai yan bian yu xing cheng” 中国古代婚礼服色彩的演变与形成 [The evolution and formation of the color of Chinese traditional wedding dresses], *Journal of Anyang Institute of Technology* 16, no.1 (2017): 95.

dress was a rich woman's garment, used to show her wealth and social position at the moment of her marriage. Until the Ming dynasty, the nobility and commoners both wore *feng guan xia pei* 凤冠霞帔 when marrying.⁶ The other two famous types of *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂 were originated from Qing (1636-1912) dynasty, although this two types dresses disappeared during Mao's period, it began to return to people's life and became popular in the 21st century.⁷

In the past, traditional wedding dresses with symbolic elements were believed to bring good blessings to the couple. These symbols could be very personal, as each pattern is different and organized differently on each dress, bringing different symbolic meaning for the woman wearing it. For example the bamboo (*zhu* 竹) usually means longevity on account of its long evergreen comes, the Osmanthus fragrans (*gui hua* 桂花) means honoring (*gui* 贵), because *gui hua* 桂花 and *gui* 贵 are pronounced the same in Chinese.⁸ After the 21st century, the symbolic meaning of Chinese traditional wedding dresses changed. Although each symbol has its own meaning, when embroidered with other symbols, we need to look at the overall patterns to uncover the meaning of the dress rather than simply looking at individual symbols on their own. Furthermore, these meanings are not inherent to the dresses, and they need to be analyzed in the context they were created, since they represent the woman wearing it. Comparing historical and contemporary traditional wedding dresses, it appears that the dresses and the

⁶ Zhu Man 朱曼, "Zhong guo gu dai hun li fu se cai yan bian yu xing cheng" 中国古代婚礼服色彩的演变与形成 [The evolution and formation of the color of Chinese traditional wedding dresses], *Journal of Anyang Institute of Technology* 16, no.1 (2017): 95.

⁷ Xibin Chen, "Study of Jiangnan marriage needlework art – take the red dowry of eastern Zhejiang for example" (master's thesis, Zhejiang University of technology, 2014), 108.

⁸ Alfred Koehn, "Chinese Flower Symbolism," *Monumenta Nipponica* 8, no. 1/2 (1952): 127-139, accessed April 04, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2383008>

embroidered patterns have changed. I believe the meaning of these symbols have therefore also changed, reflecting a different gender identity of the women that wear them. In this paper, I will do a contextual analysis of the traditional wedding dress and its different symbolic embroidery to expose the transformation of gender identity in China from history to the contemporary/modern era.

1.2 Thesis Statement

Although embroidered patterns were, and still are, important elements of the traditional Chinese wedding dresses, this research contend that the meanings of these symbols with Chinese traditional wedding dresses have changed. In this study I will research these changes through iconography and analyze these changes in relation to gender and national identity in contemporary China.

1.3 Background Research

Along the thousand years of Chinese long history, there are several important turning points of Chinese traditional wedding dresses in the history. The first account of special wedding dress that can be historically identified is from the Zhou dynasty (1046BC-256BC), this type was called *chun yi xun ran* 纯衣纁衲.⁹ Qin and Han dynasties (221BC-220C) follow the formative years of the Zhou dynasty wedding dress

⁹ Zhaomei Wang and Liying Zhou, "Some Thought on The Wedding Dress of China," *Art and Design (Theory)*, no.10 (2007): 175.

and complexity it, for example, the colors used on the dresses different social class (imperial and civilian) of the person wearing it.¹⁰ During the Tang dynasty (618-907) although it was a unifying political and social time, the type of wedding dresses experienced major changes, the bride wore *hua chai li yi* 花钗礼衣 which were layered with stacked.¹¹ During this dynasty, the symbolism became more specific and each ethnic group could be identified through the features of decorative elements such as particular embroidered patterns.¹² Stylistically the wedding dress did not change between the Tang and Song dynasties (960-1379), however, there were a lot of changes with the decorative elements.¹³ Embroidery elements during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1636-1912) dynasties became even more varied and numerous with embroidered symbols such as dragon- phoenix, clouds, flowers-birds and other patterns.¹⁴ Furthermore, during the Ming dynasty, the color with wedding dresses be established as red, namely the *feng guan xia pei* 凤冠霞帔 or called Chinese phoenix coronets and robes of rank, originally made for the Han women.¹⁵ During the Qing dynasty, another traditional dress emerges, the *qi zhuang* 旗装, which was worn by the Manchu woman.¹⁶ At the end of Qing dynasty, *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂 have emerged,

¹⁰ Zhu Man 朱曼, "Zhong guo gu dai hun li se cai yan bian yu xing cheng" 中国古代婚礼服色彩的演变与形成 [The evolution and formation of the color of Chinese traditional wedding dresses], *Journal of Anyang Institute of Technology* 16, no.1 (2017): 96.

¹¹ Ibid., 94.

¹² Zhaomei Wang and Liying Zhou, "Some Thought on The Wedding Dress of China," *Art and Design (Theory)*, no.10 (2007): 175.

¹³ He Xi 和溪, "Zhu Zi JiaLi hun fu kao" 朱子《家礼》婚服考 [An Investigation into the Wedding Dresses in Family Etiquettes by Zhu Xi], *Journal of Jimei University Philosophy and Social Sciences* 20, no.3 (2017): 14.

¹⁴ Zibing Tian, Wu Shusheng and Tian Qing, *A History of Chinese Decorative Design* (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2003), 410.

¹⁵ Zhu Man 朱曼, "Zhong guo gu dai hun li se cai yan bian yu xing cheng" 中国古代婚礼服色彩的演变与形成 [The evolution and formation of the color of Chinese traditional wedding dresses], *Journal of Anyang Institute of Technology* 16, no.1 (2017): 95.

¹⁶ Hua Mei 华梅, *Zhong guo jin dai fu Zhuang shi* 中国近代服装史 [Modern Chinese Clothing History] (Chinese Textile publish,2008), 73.

which were a hybrid nationality that merges Manchu and Han cultures.¹⁷ As Chen (2014) recorded “today, *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂 are still in use and are very popular.”

What distinguishes the wedding dress from the Ming dynasty onward, is its characteristic red color.¹⁸ Before the Ming dynasty wedding dress appeared in black, white, yellow, blue and other colors.¹⁹ For example, Zhou (1984) and Yin (2010) recorded that 3000 years ago, the wedding dress in the Zhou dynasty was black color.

As mentioned earlier, there is currently in China a revival of the traditional wedding dress, either it be the *xiu he fu* 秀禾服, or *long feng gua* 龙凤褂. However, the style they choose to wear is not representative of their ethnic identities, nor are the embroideries exactly the same as the historical examples we have.²⁰ The new style of wedding dresses contributes to a woman’s sense of who she is entering her marriage. Studying the new traditional dresses and its embroidery will help us understand the new sense of identity of the young modern Chinese woman.

¹⁷ Chenxi Bin, “Study of Jiangnan marriage needlework art-take the red dowry of eastern Zhejiang for example,” (master’s thesis, Zhejiang University of Technology, 2014), 112.

¹⁸ Chunyu Han, “Six hundred years’ evolution of wedding dresses in Han nationality from Ming dynasty to today,” (master’s thesis, Beijing Institute of Clothing Technology, 2008), 6.

¹⁹ Ibid., 4.

²⁰ Ibid., 46.

1.4 Statement of Problem

In the 21st century, a number of Chinese women have decided to wear traditional, or traditionally inspired dresses at their weddings.²¹ This study will use iconography and iconology for the embroidery patterns on Chinese traditional wedding dresses. This will be the point of departure and comparison with the embroidery patterns, on wedding dresses in contemporary times. Although people have studied the symbolic meaning of traditional patterns in historical China, this research did not find that any publication explains the contemporary symbolic meanings behind the surface of embroidery patterns with Chinese traditional wedding dresses. This research will compare the symbolic meanings of Chinese traditional wedding dresses in the past and present. Furthermore, the new symbolic meanings found on the contemporary dresses will be studied and analyzed in relation to the Chinese gender and national identity formation. In the representation field, have no research specifically to study representation of symbols on Chinese traditional wedding dresses. Although there are other studies that looked at the changing female identity formation in contemporary China, none of focused on the representation of Chinese wedding dresses.²² This study will add to the current academic body of research by focusing on Chinese wedding dress and how they represent a new and contemporary female identity. In the past, traditional Chinese society had very patriarchal views on women, including that women are inferior to men,

²¹ Yuan Yang, "The design language of modern women's traditional wedding costume," (master's thesis, Southwest University, 2011), 1.

²² Miao Yu, "Between the Tradition and the Modernity-An Investigation on the Unmarried Female Postgraduates' View towards Romance and Marriage in Four Universities in Yunnan Province," (master's thesis, Yunnan Nationalities University, 2009), 17.

and women need to obey men.²³ However, in the 20th century, this traditional conception of gender inequality broken. These social changes were paralleled with the interest in the western white wedding dress. In more recent times, Chinese women have returned to the traditional Chinese wedding dress. Therefore, we need to understand the new gender relations and new gender identities represented with these dresses.

1.5 Purpose and Importance of Research

The purpose of this research is to study the iconography of embroidered patterns on Chinese traditional wedding dresses, to compare the symbolic meanings found on the wedding dresses between the past and the present, to study the reasons of re-emergence of traditional wedding dresses, all this in order to better understand contemporary gender and national identities in China.

1.6 Research Topic (s) /Objective (s)

1. To compare the embroidery on the Chinese traditional wedding dress from the historical and contemporary times to highlight the changes and differences in symbolism.

²³ Miao Yu, "Between the Tradition and the Modernity-An Investigation on the Unmarried Female Postgraduates' View towards Romance and Marriage in Four Universities in Yunnan Province," (master's thesis, Yunnan Nationalities University, 2009), 17.

2. To research the reasons for the re-emergence of the traditional Chinese wedding dress as a representation of modern gender and national identity formations.

1.7 Research Question(s)

1. How has the symbolic meaning of embroidery patterns with Chinese traditional wedding dresses changed from past to contemporary?

2. What can the new symbolism of the embroidery on the contemporary traditional wedding dress tell us about the gender and national identity formations of the young contemporary Chinese woman?

1.8 Delimitation(s) and Limitation(s)

As stated earlier, the Chinese wedding dress has changed over time. However, this research will focus on traditional wedding dresses from the Qing dynasties, more specifically the *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂. This is because what is considered 'traditional' today, which is the red color of the wedding dress was established in the Ming and Qing dynasties, and these two styles identified are also predominant today at contemporary weddings.²⁴

²⁴ Yuan Yang, "The design language of modern women's traditional wedding costume," (master's thesis., Southwest University, 2011), 3.

Moreover, the symbols on traditional wedding dresses will focus on only 5 categories (auspicious clouds/*xiang yun* 祥云, moire/*shui bo* 水波, dragons and phoenixes/*long* 龙 and *feng* 凤, flowers and plants, animals), because these symbols are the ones most often found in both historical and contemporary dresses.²⁵ And these symbols were found before Qing dynasty, thus, their meanings in history should go back to before that period.

The main limitation in this research is the geographic limitation. I will do my research in Malaysia, however, most of the primary material – the dresses – are in China. Thus, this research will rely on the digital archive of photographers specializing in wedding photos.

Even though I might, although not probable for financial reasons, go back to China to gather primary material, I cannot investigate all wedding dress shops in China. This is why I am focusing on wedding photos, which show dresses from a variety of shops.

However, this research needs to address the problem of photo data collection. Although this research cannot collect photo data from Chinese offline shops, it can collect data from online wedding dress shops. Furthermore, along with the rapid development of Chinese e-commerce, online transactions also increased, especially more and more female choose to shop online.²⁶ Moreover, data collection from online shops also

²⁵ Ma Ning, Ding Yue and He Rong 马宁, 丁钥 and 何蓉, “Wo guo nv xing hu fu wen hua qian xi” 我国女性婚服文化浅析 [The Cultural Analysis of Chinese Women’s Wedding Dress], *Wide Angle* 广角 36,] Modern Business (2016): 188.

²⁶ Jin-yong GUO, Xing-dong WANG, Rong-qing WANG and Zhao-qing ZHANG, “Factors Influencing Female Consumers’ Online Shopping Intention,” *Journal of Jiangxi Agricultural University* 11, no. 3 (2012): 68.

addresses the problem of regional limitation, as shops will sell dresses to any Chinese city. Therefore, this research will also collect data from Chinese online wedding dress shops instead of collection of offline shops. In order to ensure that collection of wedding dresses is suitable to represent the broad consumer markets of China, this research accessed many shops and studios.

In China, many wedding dress stores focus exclusively on traditional wedding dresses. These stores are very well known. For example, the store Guahuang 褂皇 has many retail locations including Beijing, Shenzhen, Nanning, Xiamen, Fuzhou, Changsha. Similarly, the store Longyu 珑御 can be found in Shanghai, Hangzhou, Guangzhou, Nanchang. Both of these also offer to sell online. Other stores only sell online, such as 月白中式嫁衣 in Shanghai(www.yuebaijiayi.com), and also the Taobao online wedding shops 茧迹 and 华芬中式嫁衣. Furthermore, many studios of photographers of wedding were also visited. As part of this research, the online stores of the above mentioned were visited multiple times. However, only one photographer studio gave permission to reproduce photographs of their dresses in this document. Therefore, although online data was acquired by visiting online stores, only photographs from Andi studio 安迪图文 were reproduced in this dissertation.

Although this is the only one studio that gave permission for the reproduction of images, this research has found that all stores and studios offer very similar dresses. Therefore, although the research could only reproduce dresses represented in Andi studio 安迪图文,

we still believe that these dresses are representative of the dresses found in the wedding shops dedicated to traditional wedding dresses.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

Iconography is the study of images, the practice of iconography at its simplest level means identifying motifs and symbols in works of art. “Iconography as the identification of images explained different themes and allegorical personifications, it works to retrieve the symbolic and allegorical meanings contained in works of art.”²⁷ Iconography enables scholars to retrieve the intrinsic meaning or content in works of art.²⁸ The art historian Erwin Panofsky defined the iconography into three levels: the first level is to explain the natural or primary meaning of the image, that is, identify the representational details such as people, animals and plants in the works; the second level is to discover and explain the conventional meaning of the image or subject-matter, that is the identification of stories and allegories; the third level, is to explain the content of the image taking into account the context of production, including time period, region, social relations and religion.²⁹ Generally, this third level is to interpret the symbolic values of motifs, images, it is called “iconology”.³⁰ Iconology attempts to explain how and why a certain imagery was chosen based on the broader cultural background of the image.³¹ For example, a dress might have a bird embroidered on it. The first phase of

²⁷ Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the visual arts* (Doubleday & Company, 1955), 26.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 27-30.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

iconography is to identify its details. The second phase is to identify it, for example, as a phoenix and give its general meaning. However, the third level will analyze the phoenix in relation to the other symbols on the dress, and also in relation to its time and place of production. Therefore, this research tries to investigate the meaning of motifs, symbols, and allegories with Chinese wedding dresses in their cultural context through iconographic analysis.

Because this research centers on iconography, it also needs to include contextual art history. Chinese society has changed in the recent past. For instance, Chinese nationalism and gender in society is different than in Ming and Qing dynasties.³² For example, “Chinese nationalism in past arose in a poor and backward China to seek wealth and power in the nation, between the end of the 20th century and the early 21st century, the resurgence of nationalism rooted in China’s prosperity.”³³ Gender relations have also changed. In the past, Chinese men were seen as superior to women who were expected to pay more attention to the family and have a stronger dependence on marriage and family.³⁴ Through education, modern women will have more distinct self-consciousness and independent awareness. Modern Chinese society is more inclined towards equality, mutual help and collaboration between the spouses.

³² Guoguan Wu, “From Post-imperial to Late Communist Nationalism: historical change in Chinese nationalism from May Fourth to the 1990s,” *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (2008): 467.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Jamie Burnett, “Women’s Employment Rights in China: Creating Harmony for Women in the Workforce,” *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 17, no.2 (Summer 2010): 292.

Through these dresses, the researcher will look at how modern Chinese women are representing themselves. What do these dresses say about their gender and national identities.

The question about “How Chinese women are representing themselves in contemporary time?” is related to the theory of representation. According to Stuart Hall “representation is one of the practices in culture, culture is about shared meaning, and language is the medium to make sense of things, hence language has been regarded as the repository of cultural values and meanings. We use signs and symbols (sounds, words, images, even objects) to stand for or represent our concepts, ideas and feelings to other people.”³⁵ “Things themselves have meaning not know their own, participants in culture give meaning to people, objects and events.” (Hall 2013).³⁶ Well, every one read things in different ways, refer to different gender, age, class, race and other factors.³⁷ “We give things a meaning by how we represent them, such as the stories we tell about things, the value we place on things.”³⁸ Representation is also an effective analytical tool for gender research.³⁹ This research will investigate the representation of the contemporary Chinese women through their wedding dresses.

In a sense, representation is that people use different way to represent things what meaning they want to express, these ways use by language, signs, images and any

³⁵ Stuart Hall, *Representation*, ed. Stuart Hall, Jessica Evans and Sean Nixon (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 2013), xvii.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, xix.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, xix.

³⁹ Yajun Qu and Meirong Fu, “Gender and Cultural Representation in the Context of Museum: A Case Study on Women Culture Museum,” *Journal of Nankai University*, no.2(2009): 38.

objects. According to the theory of representation, here will go into the semiotics, because semiotics is the theory of signs that is used in one way to represent something. Sign in semiotics approach is the union of the 'signifier' and 'signified', 'signifier' is the form that the sign takes, 'signified' is that the concept it represents.⁴⁰ Briefly, "the 'signified' is something that stand for something else, the 'signified' is the idea of the thing it stands for."⁴¹ In semiotic approach, not only sounds, written words, images but also any objects can be the function as signifier to stand for meanings. The understanding of meanings is not only what works of things mean but how presenter, viewer and culture at large go about creating those meanings.⁴²

1.10 Research Design/Method of Approach

Because this research is based on cultural and historical changes, a large part of the research will be based on secondary sources of data, such as publications on history, art history and cultures in China. Such secondary research will focus mainly on previous recording material both in Chinese and English, and also of visual materials including paintings, publicities, statues, handcraft, etc.

Secondly, I will need to gather primary material – images of traditional wedding dresses.

I will collect the visual data (image photos) from the wedding dress shops and

⁴⁰ Anne D'Alleva, *Methods & Theories of Art History* (Laurence King Publishing, 2005), 30.

⁴¹ Richard Howells and Joaquim Negreiros, *Visual Culture* (Polity Press, 2012), 113.

⁴² Anne D'Alleva, *Methods & Theories of Art History* (Laurence King Publishing, 2005), 29.

photography studios. I will need to secure the copyrights of these images. I will do so by contacting the different shops and photographers.

University of Malaya

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chinese Textile

Textile as a subject of academic studies has been investigated in different ways, mainly in the design elements and the manufacturing techniques of Chinese textile. Firstly, there is extensive studies based on connoisseurship of Chinese textile, often focusing on design features in different historical periods. For example, Lesnitchenko (1963) explored the embroidered techniques, designs, and development of Chinese silk fabrics in Han period. Schuster (1993) analyzed the symbolic elements of cotton embroideries with certain motifs from Western China. Zhang (2009) looked at the different embroidery patterns on Chinese textile during the Qing dynasty. She focused on motif, layout, and colors. Other scholars focused on manufacturing techniques and the materials used. For example, Shim, Gao and Zhou (1995) looked at the origin and development of the ancient Chinese patterns weaving in textile techniques and looms (instruments). Ni (2003) studied the relationships between properties of textile and the shape and production of clothing.

2.2 Chinese Traditional Wedding Dresses

Previous researches of Chinese traditional wedding dresses focused on mainly on two areas. The first group of scholars focused on how dresses, including the wedding dresses changed through time, while the others looked at the differences in wedding dresses between different ethnic groups. For example, Zhou (1984) looked at the history

of Chinese ancient folk customs, focusing mainly on the different types and colors of wedding dresses. Han (2008) looked at the style evolution of Chinese Han ethnic wedding dress from the Ming dynasty to Qing dynasty. Yang (2011) looks at analysis, the design with different type wedding dress for different ethnic group, and investigated the traditional masking technique on a traditional wedding dress at present. Other studies, such as Yin (2010), explored in details, only two ethnic groups. Yin explored the ancient Chinese wedding dress of Man and Han, including representative ethnic elements in different time, including the colors and decorations, as well as fabrics.

2.3 Chinese Embroidery

Embroidery as a decorative element helps us to understand the symbolic meaning of Chinese traditional wedding dress. Embroidery also has been extensively researched in China. Previous researches tended to focus on the artistic features of embroidery patterns (e.g. The preferences of styles and types) and their aesthetic value (e.g. Sophisticated motifs, designs). For example, He (2015) looked at Chinese embroidery in Miao ethnic group focusing on the aesthetic features of Phoenix pattern, the beauty of human nature and ethnic identities reflected in the embroidery. Zhang (2010) looked at the application of embroidery on modern fashion. He compared Chinese and Western embroidery, and analyzed the cultural values of the Chinese embroidery using in modern fashion design. Shi (2015) looked at the changes of Chinese embroidery specially the plant patterns in each period, highlighting the symbolic meanings and

design concepts of plant patterns, and brought an in-depth analysis of artistic characteristics and craftsmanship of plant patterns in fashion design. Additionally, the techniques, methods and materials adopted for making, embroidery (needlework) also have been studied in terms of the different embroidery among different geographical areas or ethnic groups. For example, Li (2013) looked at the characteristics and cultural connotations of different Chinese folk embroidery styles, and explored the differences between handmade and machine based on embroidery design. Qiu (2013) looked at the application of Chinese embroidery on contemporary objects other than textile. She emphasized that embroidery today is no longer limited to gender, as machine are now making embroidery as well.

2.4 Representation

Finally, representation has come to occupy a new and important place in popular culture and fashion studies, putting a particular emphasis on gender representation. For example, Nixon (2013) focused on the representation of 'masculinity' through different fashion codes (e.g. Materials and details of clothes, outline of body, etc.) found in advertising images. His research focused on the representation of "new man" represented in social media images, such as fashion advertising and photography or window displays.

Gledhill and Ball (2013) illustrated the impact of gender in the soap opera, and the cultural representation through the soap opera as media agency to reflect female audience. Fang (2004) explored gender representation in modern media, especially the

male characters. She focused on the representation of masculinity through hero roles in films, television dramas and serials to represent manliness, such as political and control power, success, force and other charms.

In a word, there are many researches on textile, design and styles of embroidery, the development of Chinese wedding dresses, and the gender representation in social media. However, until now, we do not have a research specifically to identify gender identity formation from Chinese traditional wedding dress, and explain what Chinese traditional wedding dress meant for contemporary Chinese women.

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CHAPTER 3 HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF SYMBOLS AND DRESSES

3.1 The Context of Chinese Auspicious Symbols

The Chinese traditional patterns/symbols have a long history, they take up a predominant position in Chinese visual art and folk culture, these patterns/symbols as an art form that Chinese ancestors aspired to pursue a beautiful life.⁴³ In ancient times, people were full of confusion and fear of disease and death, and they were powerless in some natural disasters. Hence, people regarded animals, plants, and natural phenomena in the natural world as gods, these gods as the source of inspiration for people to create traditional patterns/symbols.⁴⁴ Furthermore, people materialized and expressed their life awareness, aesthetic concept, moral feeling, or religious sentiments as visual images, which refers to the use of homophobia or metaphor or other methods to form decorative patterns/symbols with some kind of auspicious meanings (blessing for safety, longevity, happiness, promotion, wealth, etc.), also, we can call them – “auspicious patterns/symbols”.⁴⁵ Chinese auspicious patterns/symbols be applied to ornament clothing, shoes, hats and accessories, etc. And they were created by the subjects of figures, animal, flowers, birds, moons, etc. Mainly three methods inspired people to create these patterns/symbols: 1. Visual imagery representation; 2. Homophonic representation; 3. Characters representation.⁴⁶

⁴³ Ellen Johnston Laing, "Auspicious Motifs in Ninth-to Thirteenth-Century Chinese Tombs," *Arts orientalis* 33, (2003): 45.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 47.

⁴⁵ Yuanqin Peng, "A Brief Introduction to Chinese Mascot," *Canadian Social Science* 8, no. 6 (2012): 54.

⁴⁶ Zhu Lei 朱磊, "Zhong guo chuan tong ji xiang tu an zai fu Zhuang she ji zhong de ying yong" 中国传统吉祥图案在服装设计中的应用 [The Application of Traditional Chinese Auspicious Patterns in Fashion Design], *The Western Leather* 西部皮革, no.20 (October, 2017): 11.

1. The visual imagery represents: to extend the natural properties or characteristics of some animals and plants, which is the most common method to create auspicious motifs. For example, the image of dragon, phoenix and python were used to symbolize the imperial power and wealth in historical Chinese society.⁴⁷
2. The homophonic representation: in the Chinese language, one pronunciation often corresponds to several Chinese characters. The homophonic pun of Chinese provides favorable conditions for traditional motif creation. Thus, some auspicious motifs were created through the same or similar pronunciation in Chinese.⁴⁸ For example, “*fu* 蝠” (bat) are the same pronunciation as “*fu* 福” (happiness/good wishes) in Chinese.⁴⁹
3. The Characters representation: the auspicious motifs can also be directly represented by various typefaces of Chinese characters which are auspicious meanings, these characteristic motifs used to express people’s good wished. For example, *fu* 福 (good fortune/blessing, be used to bless the old man in birthday), *lu* 禄 (prosperity, means success), *shou* 寿 (longevity), *xi* 喜 (happiness, be used to bless newlyweds).⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Zhu Lei 朱磊, "Zhong guo chuan tong ji xiang tu an zai fu Zhuang she ji zhong de ying yong" 中国传统吉祥图案在服装设计中的应用" [The Application of Traditional Chinese Auspicious Patterns in Fashion Design], *The Western Leather* 西部皮革, no.20 (October, 2017): 11.

⁴⁸ Patricia Bjaaland Welch, *Chinese art: A guide to motifs and visual imagery*, (Tuttle Publishing, 2013), 10.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Zhu Lei 朱磊, "Zhong guo chuan tong ji xiang tu an zai fu Zhuang she ji zhong de ying yong" 中国传统吉祥图案在服装设计中的应用" [The Application of Traditional Chinese Auspicious Patterns in Fashion Design], *The Western Leather* 西部皮革, no.20 (October, 2017): 11.

3.2 Embroidery Patterns/Symbols on Traditional Wedding Dresses

Embroidery patterns/symbols as the traditional ornaments, provided a wealth of visual elements for Chinese traditional wedding dresses, these symbolic embroidery patterns on traditional wedding dresses were classified mainly 5 categories: 1. Auspicious clouds/*xiang yun* 祥云 2. Moire/*shui bo* 水波 3. Dragons/*long* 龙 and phoenixes/*feng* 凤 4. Flowers and plants 5. Animals.⁵¹ Following steps will respectively analyze these 5 categories symbols, and these symbols are the ones most often found in both historical and contemporary dresses, they are not giving in order of importance.

1. Auspicious clouds/*xiang yun* 祥云: in ancient Chinese farming, people had expectations and awe of the clouds and rain which impacted and decided harvest, because of these, clouds has been sublimated in people's heart, and giving rise to worship and awe.⁵² Cloud is a typical pattern in Chinese decorative patterns, it symbolizes good luck and happiness or promoting to a higher position.⁵³ Clouds can make rain to nourish all things, people thought this was because clouds bring happiness. In Chinese, "*yun* 云"(cloud) and "*yun* 运"(good luck/destiny) are homophonic, thus cloud symbolizes lucky destiny which means people can promote to a higher position in the work/life. The swarm holds a wide scope of applications and mostly as foil design in architecture, carvings, costumes, appliances and various

⁵¹ Ma Ning, Ding Yue and He Rong 马宁, 丁钥 and 何蓉, "Wo guo nv xing hu fu wen hua qian xi" 我国女性婚服文化浅析 [The Cultural Analysis of Chinese Women's Wedding Dress], *Wide Angle* 广角 36, Modern Business (2016): 188.

⁵² Zibing Tian, Wu Shusheng and Tian Qing, *A History of Chinese Decorative Design* (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2003), 145.

⁵³ Ibid.

handcrafts, but the way of cloud patterns was made differently (abstract or natural) with the same symbolic significance.⁵⁴ On that point showed some different auspicious cloud/*xiang yun* 祥云 forms: *duo yun* 朵云, *tuan yun* 团云, *ru yi yun* 如意云, *die yun* 叠云.



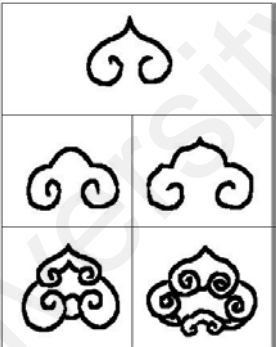
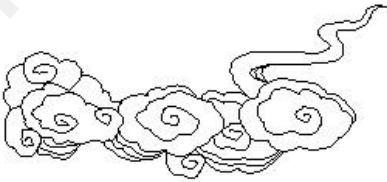
	<i>duo yun</i> 朵云
	<i>tuan yun</i> 团云
	<i>ru yi yun</i> 如意云
	<i>die yun</i> 叠云

Figure 1: auspicious cloud/*xiang yun* 祥云 forms

⁵⁴ Zibing Tian, Wu Shusheng and Tian Qing, *A History of Chinese Decorative Design* (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2003), 145.

2. Moire patterns/*shui bo* 水波纹: in Ming and Qing dynasty, moire patterns were usually employed on a robe to decorate the lower hem.⁵⁵ Broadly speaking, the billowing moire will be set together with other practices, such as stones, clouds, plants and creatures.⁵⁶ Patterns of moire together with rocks are almost common, moire represent rivers and ocean, firm rocks represent stability, when the patterns of moire and rocks together appeared on an imperial robe will symbolize a united and stable nation.⁵⁷ Furthermore, moire and rocks also mean happiness and longevity, on Chinese traditional wedding dresses these patterns imply the wishes of “*fu ru dong hai, shou bi nan shan* 福如东海，寿比南山” (happiness life as the sea, living longer than the mountain), this is a good wish for a long and happy lifetime.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Li Niu, Rongrong Cui and Yiwen Wang, “The Decorative Arts of Women’s Coats in Qing Dynasty – Taking Women’s Coat with Wave-Cliff and Peony Patterns for Example,” *Apparel Engineering* 6, no.30 (2017): 100.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Zibing Tian, Wu Shusheng and Tian Qing, *A History of Chinese Decorative Design* (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2003), 357.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 386-387.

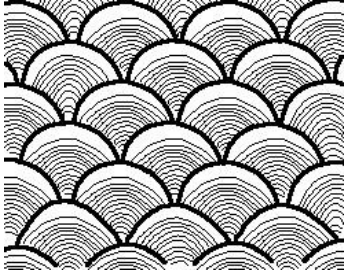
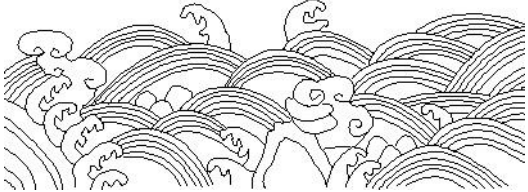
	moire patterns/ <i>shui bo</i> 水 波纹
	moire patterns/ <i>shui bo</i> 水 波纹 together with rocks

Figure 2: Moire patterns/*shui bo* 水波

3. Dragons/*long* 龙 and phoenixes/*feng* 凤 motifs: *long* 龙 (*dragon*) is an imaginary and mysterious animal, it is the most auspicious animal in Chinese history and civilization. As a mythological beast, dragon evolved through people's imagination and creates, which founded on Chinese ancient totem worship, it represents the sky, the imperial power, success and wealth.⁵⁹ The dragon represents the countless well wishes, for instance, people look forward to happiness and prosperity. Dragons - their raised foreheads represent intelligence; two trumpets on the head represent longevity; two ears represent leaders; and tail shows its bright.⁶⁰ Phoenix/*feng* 凤 is also an imaginary bird, it symbolizes goodness, phoenix does not feed on vegetation and insects, when it was flying, there are hundreds of birds accompany.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Carol Dean Krute, "Collecting Qing dynasty textiles," *Magazine Antiques* 159, no.3 (2001): 446.

⁶⁰ Zibing Tian, Wu Shusheng and Tian Qing, *A History of Chinese Decorative Design* (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2003), 411.

⁶¹ Charles Alfred Speed Williams, *Chinese Symbolism and Art Motifs Fourth Revised Edition: A Comprehensive Handbook on Symbolism in Chinese Art Through the Ages*, (Tuttle Publishing, 2012), 314.

The appearance of the phoenix is similar to peacock, its head, wings, back, chest and abdomen respectively correspond to the five qualities of virtue, right, righteousness, benevolence, and faithfulness.⁶²

When the phoenix/*feng* 凤 and the dragon/*long* 龙 accompanied each other, they had the good wishes of “*long feng cheng xiang* 龙凤呈祥” (in extremely good fortune), that is a good wish for contentment, happiness, peace and prosperity.⁶³

Dragons are used to depict men, and phoenixes are used to depict women. In the Chinese feudal period, dragon and phoenix represented the highest emperor and empress respectively, and the motifs of dragon and phoenix can be used only by emperors and empresses.⁶⁴ With the changes of the times and the replacement of the dynasties, the use of dragons/*long* 龙 and phoenixes/*feng* 凤 motif gradually spread from the imperial to civilian, the traditional rule “only the imperial family can use the dragons/*long* 龙 and phoenixes/*feng* 凤” was broken.⁶⁵ To the civilian, the motives of the dragon and phoenix flying together, it means that the husband and wife take care of each other, love each other and accompany each other by a lifetime.⁶⁶

⁶² Xiaocong Wu, “Research on Design and Application of Dragon and Phoenix Patterns in Wedding Home Textiles” (master’s thesis, Zhongyuan University of technology, 2016), 8.

⁶³ Lei Shen, “Dragon and Phoenix,” *Ceramics Technical* 35, (2013): 70.

⁶⁴ Xiaocong Wu, “Research on Design and Application of Dragon and Phoenix Patterns in Wedding Home Textiles” (master’s thesis, Zhongyuan University of technology, 2016), 8.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

4. Flowers and plants: the flower patterns on traditional wedding dresses mostly are peony/*mu dan* 牡丹, lotus/*lian hua* 莲花, pomegranate/*shi liu* 石榴. Chinese saying “peony is king of the flowers”, it means royalty and virtue, the peony petals are very full and bright-colored, it also symbols feminine beauty and prosperity, the other name of the peony is “*fu gui hua* 富贵花”(the flower of wealth and honor), same as the name “*fu gui hua* 富贵花” symbolizes wealth and honor.⁶⁷ Lotus known as the “rising out of the mud to bloom”, in Buddhism it represents purity and nobleness.⁶⁸ “*lian* 莲” (lotus) is the same pronunciation with “*lian* 连” (uninterrupted, continuous), and seeds in lotus bear the meaning of praying for even more kids.⁶⁹ Pomegranates/*shi liu* 石榴 are seeds planted, it can open to view hundreds of germs. In Chinese traditional wedding culture, people hope the newlyweds can reproduce offspring like pomegranates, because symbols of pomegranates blessed that the twosome will bear many sons and grandchildren in the future life.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Charles Alfred Speed Williams, *Chinese Symbolism and Art Motifs Fourth Revised Edition: A Comprehensive Handbook on Symbolism in Chinese Art Through the Ages*, (Tuttle Publishing, 2012), 310.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 254

⁶⁹ Ibid., 253.

⁷⁰ Zibing Tian, Wu Shusheng and Tian Qing, *A History of Chinese Decorative Design* (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2003), 239.


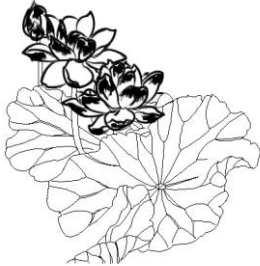

	peony/ <i>mudan</i> 牡丹 together with moire patterns/ <i>shui bo</i> 水波纹
	lotus/ <i>lian hua</i> 莲花
	pomegranate/ <i>shi liu</i> 石榴

Figure 3: Symbols of flowers and plants

5. Animals: motif of fish/*yu* 鱼 always combines with lotus/*lian* 莲 to express the desire for affluence of life and surplus of wealth, it is because of the homophobic characters in Chinese, “*yu* 鱼” (fish) is the homophone for “*yu* 余” (surplus, excess, plenty), and “*lian* 莲” is the similar pronunciation with “*nian* 年” (age/year).⁷¹ Thus, the motif of fish with lotus means that every year have enough use of wealth and enough things to spend, that is a good wish for abundant life.

⁷¹ Ellen Johnston Laing, "Auspicious Motifs in Ninth-to Thirteenth-Century Chinese Tombs," *Ars orientalis* 33, (2003): 47.

The patterns/motifs of goldfish/*jin yu* 金鱼 symbolizes abundant wealthy and happiness or many children in the family, it was called “*jin yu man tang* 金玉满堂”(gold and jade fill the hall).⁷² Because in the Chinese characters “*jin* 金” means gold, “*yu* 鱼”(fish) has the same pronunciation with “*yu* 玉”(jade). Thus the motifs of goldfish/*jin yu* 金鱼 on Chinese traditional wedding dresses imply a serious hope for the young span that they will fill wealthy in the future life.

Mandarin ducks/*yuan yang* 鸳鸯 are faithful animal with the symmetrical and beautiful meanings, they stand for the incomparable love between married man and married woman.⁷³ In China it is told that “The instincts of a pair of mandarin ducks are inseparable, males are left and females are right, flying and flapping their wings in sync, swimming in sync. When they sleep, they will link with wings and intersect the neck. If mandarin duck bereft of one’s mate, the other one will not to copulate at the residue of life.”⁷⁴ People admire mandarin ducks flying and nestling together, so they deliver a full expectation of marriage that lovers should like mandarin ducks always keeping each other’s society.

Butterfly/*hu die* 蝴蝶 is a symbol of the sweet love and happiness, because butterflies are also a faithful beast, and only one companion for a life.⁷⁵ In the Chinese auspicious motifs, butterflies always combine with flowers, and the

⁷² Xiaobing Yang, “Study on the Application of Qing Dynasty Costume Pattern in Modern Clothing Design” (master’s thesis, Northeast Normal University, 2010), 4.

⁷³ Zibing Tian, Wu Shusheng and Tian Qing, *A History of Chinese Decorative Design* (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2003), 241.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Xifan Ding, “Study on butterfly patterns” (master’s thesis, Lanzhou University, 2007), 8.

patterns/motifs of butterflies with flowers imply marital felicity.⁷⁶ It's because the innate disposition of butterfly love flowers, flowers blossom and butterflies fly.

In the West, bats are seen as a terrible and ominous creature, people think that they are dark and ugly animal, also associate them with vampire according to their habits of activities always been at night. But in China, bats/*fu* 蝠 are considered as auspicious symbols, the reason is that in the Chinese homophonic “*fu* 蝠”(bat) sounds identical to the word “*fu* 福”(happiness/good luck/good fortune).⁷⁷ Five bats very often showed in Chinese folk art, because the “five blessings/*wu fu* 五福” separately are old age, wealth, health, virtue and peaceful death, this was recorded in a Chinese history book- *Shang shu* 尚书/*Book of Documents*.⁷⁸ Thus, in history, Chinese traditional wedding dresses embroider five bats together to wish “five blessings/*wu fu* 五福”, the most luck - the collection of many blessings.

⁷⁶ Xiaochen Sheng, “Rapture- Auspicious Patterns Studied in the Traditional Chinese Marriage Customs” (master’s thesis, East China Normal University, 2012), 43.

⁷⁷ Wolfram Eberhard, *Dictionary of Chinese symbols: Hidden symbols in Chinese life and thought*, (Routledge, 2006), 30.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

	<p>fish/<i>yu</i> 鱼 combine with lotus/<i>lian</i> 莲: to express the desire for affluence of life and surplus of wealth.</p>
	<p>goldfish/<i>jin yu</i> 金鱼</p>
	<p>Mandarin ducks/<i>yuanyang</i> 鸳鸯</p>
	<p>butterfly/<i>hu die</i> 蝴蝶</p>
	<p>bats/<i>fu</i> 蝠</p>

Figure 4: Symbols of animals

3.3 Historical Context of Chinese Traditional Wedding Dresses

In the past, women learned the skill of needlework from their childhood, they can master various craftsmanship, such as embroidery, clothes and dressmaking skills. Until the age get married, an important task for women is to make their own wedding dress and other dowries (coats, skirts, embroidered shoes, handkerchiefs, sweatbands, belts, wallets, etc.), while, these dowries cannot be created solely by the bride, many of whom are sisters, mother and aunties, they completed together.⁷⁹ The bride will be admired and seen as a good housewife or homemaker, because of these well-made dowries.⁸⁰ At the end of Qing dynasty, along with the growth of the handicraft industry, a lot of handicraft workshops emerged, which were to fulfill the people's demand for dowries.⁸¹

From the Qing dynasty to the end of the 20th century, there found mainly four types of traditional wedding dresses that were used in history, arranged chronologically as *feng guan xia pei* 凤冠霞帔, *xiu he fu* 秀禾服, *long feng gua* 龙凤褂/dragon phoenix coat and *qi pao* 旗袍/cheongsam. The red color wedding dress - *feng guan xia pei* 凤冠霞帔 was established during the Ming dynasty, this type of wedding dress, especially for Han woman, and the name of *feng guan* 凤冠 born of the decoration of the dragon and phoenix, *xia pei* 霞帔 was a dress wrapping on the shoulders and thorax.⁸² The traditional wedding dresses of *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂/dragon

⁷⁹ Bingqing Duan, "Qing Dynasty's Wedding Cloths Clothing in the Central Plains," (master diss., Beijing Institute of Clothing Technology, 2014), 14.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Yang Lei 杨蕾, "Ming Qing Jiangnan nv hong zhi shen mei feng ge wei tan" 明清江南女红之审美风格微探 [Aesthetic of Jiangnan needlework in Ming and Qing], *Journal of Suzhou University* 26, no.7 (2011): 77.

⁸² Cao Lifang 曹丽芳, "Feng guan xia pei zhi wei shui" 凤冠霞帔只为谁 [Who is Feng Guan Xia Pei only for], *TANJIU-ZHUISU* 探究·追溯, no.6 (2011): 46.

phoenix coat both emerged at Qing dynasty, and mainly these two types brides prefer to wear on contemporary China.⁸³ The name of *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂 were called on contemporary, not on history, in history these two characters are both two-piece dresses, but the cutting short of *long feng gua* 龙凤褂/dragon and phoenix coat is much slimmer, it also namely *qun gua* 裙褂/*gua qun* 褂裙.⁸⁴ These traditional two-piece dresses is called *shang yi xia shang* 上衣下裳/upper and lower, it was a usual character of women's dresses in Qing dynasty, the upper position is short gown and the lower side is a long skirt to the ankle.⁸⁵

The name of *long feng gua* 龙凤褂/dragon phoenix coat came from the main decorations to dress, it elaborately adorned with embroidery patterns of the dragon and phoenix, and it was split up into different classes depending on the embroidery density.⁸⁶ According to the history, dragon and phoenix were the symbol of imperial power, they can only be used by the emperor and empress, while the Ming dynasty, a minister's daughter got married, the emperor gave her a wedding dress embroidered with dragon and phoenix, because of emperor in honor of this minister.⁸⁷ This minister took this wedding dress back to his hometown of Guangdong, embroidering the patterns of dragon and phoenix on wedding dress became a folk custom in Guangdong/Canton.⁸⁸

⁸³ Tangyun Gong, "The application and design of Chinese costumer in the new 'six rites' occasion based on the costumer's requirements" (master's thesis, Zhejiang Sci-Tech University, 2016), 19.

⁸⁴ Xibin Chen, "Study of Jiangnan marriage needlework art – take the red dowry of eastern Zhejiang for example" (master's thesis, Zhejiang University of technology, 2014), 108.

⁸⁵ Hua Mei 华梅, *Zhong guo jin dai fu Zhuang shi* 中国近代服装史 [Modern Chinese Clothing History] (Chinese Textile publish, 2008), 7.

⁸⁶ Xibin Chen, "Study of Jiangnan marriage needlework art – take the red dowry of eastern Zhejiang for example" (master's thesis, Zhejiang University of technology, 2014), 108.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 109.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

During the end of Qing dynasty, the bridal attire of *qun gua* 裙褂/*gua qun* 褂裙 emerged, this type of wedding dress can show the women's curvaceous shape, during the Republican period, it became popular, especially in the area of Guangdong province, according to their customs - embroidering patterns of dragon and phoenix on *qun gua* 裙褂/*gua qun* 褂裙, the name of *long feng gua* 龙凤褂/dragon phoenix coat appeared.⁸⁹ And wearing *long feng gua* 龙凤褂/dragon phoenix coat to marry become a bridal custom of Cantonese people, on the wedding, bridal's mother or sisters also can wear this type without red color, generally with black color.⁹⁰

xiu he fu 秀禾服 originated from the Qing dynasty, it's also called *ao qun* 袄裙, this is Han women's dress, which merged the characteristics of Manchu's clothing. The name of "*xiu he fu*" is from a TV series - the "Orange turned red" became popular in 2001, the chief actress *Xiu He* worn this type of costumes.⁹¹ This character of the upper gown and lower skirt refers to slant opening, wide waist, trumpet sleeves. This pattern emerged in the middle and late Qing dynasty to the 1920s and 1930s, the embroideries mostly are flowers and birds, symbolizing love for whole seasons.

Around the 1920s, Shanghai women began to wear *qi pao* 旗袍/cheongsam, the original shape of *qi pao* 旗袍/cheongsam was wide and flat.⁹² Being the influence of Western

⁸⁹ Xibin Chen, "Study of Jiangnan marriage needlework art – take the red dowry of eastern Zhejiang for example" (master's thesis, Zhejiang University of technology, 2014), 109.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 110.

⁹¹ Ibid., 112.

⁹² Chen Rongfu and Chen Weiru 陈荣富 and 陈蔚如, "qi pao de zao xing yan bian yu jie gou she ji bian hua yan jiu" 旗袍的造型演变与结构设计变化研究 [Study on the Evolution of Modeling and Structural Design of Qi Pao] *Journal of Zhejiang Sci-Tech University* 浙江理工大学学报 24, no.2 (2007): 155.

slim apparel, it set out to tighten the waist and shorten the length to the knee.⁹³ In fact, it was evolved from the Manchu woman's *qi zhuang* 旗装 which was influenced by traditional Han dresses and in combination with the Western slim fit dress, it was regarded as a special product of combination of Oriental and Western cultures.⁹⁴ By comparison, this hybrid dress was less restricting cut than traditional Manchu and Han dress, on that time, it signified the emergence of Chinese "modern women".⁹⁵ Later on the popularity in Shanghai, *qi pao* 旗袍/cheongsams became prevailing in some major cities, in 1929, it was established as one of the national dresses by the government of the Republic of China.⁹⁶ Red color *qi pao* 旗袍/ cheongsams with auspicious symbols was also worn as wedding dresses in the 1930s -1940s.⁹⁷ However, after 1950s, there were fewer women to wear *qi pao* 旗袍/cheongsams in wedding, due to the Maoist coming of androgynous style.

3.4 Transformation of Chinese Wedding Dresses (from Qing dynasty-the end of 20th century)

The political party of the Qing dynasty was established by Manchus, in early of this dynasty, the Manchu government implemented the *qi zhuang* 旗装 (the Manchu

⁹³ Chen Rongfu and Chen Weiru 陈荣富 and 陈蔚如, "qi pao de zao xing yan bian yu jie gou she ji bian hua yan jiu" 旗袍的造型演变与结构设计变化研究 [Study on the Evolution of Modeling and Structural Design of Qi Pao] *Journal of Zhejiang Sci-Tech University* 浙江理工大学学报 24, no.2 (2007): 156.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Sally E. Mc Williams, "" People Don't Attack You If You Dress Fancy": Consuming Femininity in Contemporary China." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2013): 169.

⁹⁶ Shaorong Yang, *Traditional Chinese Clothing: Costumes, Adornments & Culture*, (San Francisco: Long River Press, 2004), 8.

⁹⁷ Hua Mei 华梅, *Zhong guo jin dai fu Zhuang shi* 中国近代服装史 [Modern Chinese Clothing History] (Chinese Textile publish,2008), 101.

clothing).⁹⁸ But only the Han men were required to follow this rule, women can continue to wear Han dresses, thus Han women still maintain the habit in wedding of wearing *feng guan xia pei* 凤冠霞帔.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, during the Qing dynasty, Manchu and Han cultures were intermingled and interacting with each other, and dress style of Manchu and Han merge with each other equally well.¹⁰⁰ At the end of the Qing dynasty, the difference between Manchu and Han women's dresses gradually decreased, *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂 were the products of this social context.¹⁰¹ In summation, this period was affected foreign cultures, a great number of outsiders came to China, with the return of overseas students, clothing began to appear in a combination of Chinese and Western styles, and some wedding dresses showed a trend of fit and slight.¹⁰² Comparing with *xiu he fu* 秀禾服, the slim version of *long feng gua* 龙凤褂 was more tempted by Western dress.¹⁰³ These laid the foundation for the subsequent appearance of the *qi pao* 旗袍/cheongsam during the Republic of China.

In the early 20th century, Western-style marriage customs spread to China, some women affected by Western civilization and culture, began to accept and wear Western-style white wedding dresses.¹⁰⁴ In 1927, at the wedding ceremony of Chiang Kai-shek and Song Meiling (they are the leadership of the Republic of China), Miss Song Meiling

⁹⁸ Hua Mei 华梅, *Zhong guo jin dai fu Zhuang shi* 中国近代服装史 [Modern Chinese Clothing History] (Chinese Textile publish,2008), 73.

⁹⁹ Ya Deng, "Exploration into the Evolution and the Innovation of Han Nationality Women's Wedding Dress" (master's thesis, Jiangnan University, 2008), 14.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 23.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Juan Xu, "The Innovation Design Research of Chinese Style Wedding Dress on Modern Women" (master's thesis, Zhongyuan University of Technology, 2014), 10.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Yuqin Zhao and Liang Hui'e, "Analysis on Reasons of Evolvement of Chinese "Traditional Wedding Dress" in Modern Times and Inspirations," *Journal of Silk* 50, no.4 (2013): 68.

wore a white Western-style wedding dress, the pursuit of trendy women followed this type of wedding apparel.¹⁰⁵ At the same time, many magazines or department stores' publicity albums recommended western-style wedding dress for stylish women, so that they can find the most popular wedding dress trends for the foremost time.¹⁰⁶ These social publicities led to some progressive women began to wear Western white wedding dresses. On April 3, 1935, a large-scale collective wedding ceremony was kept back in Shanghai, for this marriage ceremony, hundreds of young couples abandoned Chinese traditional wedding garments and chose to wear Western-style white wedding dresses and suits, this group wedding attracted many people's attention and threw a big influence.¹⁰⁷ Then Beijing, Nanjing, Hangzhou, and other large urban centers began to watch this wedding form and use Western-style dresses and suits.¹⁰⁸ Yet, at this time, rural areas' people still retain the old wedding dress trend and no one chose Western-style clothes, due to the closed social information and less influence by foreign cultures.¹⁰⁹ The introduction of Western wedding dresses represented the transformation of Chinese wedding dresses into a new historical period, and it was a new direction of growth of Chinese wedding dresses.

¹⁰⁵ Yuqin Zhao and Liang Hui'e, "Analysis on Reasons of Evolvement of Chinese "Traditional Wedding Dress" in Modern Times and Inspirations," *Journal of Silk* 50, no.4 (2013): 70.

¹⁰⁶ Hua Mei 华梅, *Zhong guo jin dai fu Zhuang shi* 中国近代服装史 [Modern Chinese Clothing History] (Chinese Textile publish,2008), 69.

¹⁰⁷ Yuqin Zhao and Liang Hui'e, "Analysis on Reasons of Evolvement of Chinese "Traditional Wedding Dress" in Modern Times and Inspirations," *Journal of Silk* 50, no.4 (2013): 68.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Hua Mei 华梅, *Zhong guo jin dai fu Zhuang shi* 中国近代服装史 [Modern Chinese Clothing History] (Chinese Textile publish,2008), 70.

During Maoist period (the heart of the 20th century), the development of wedding dress went into a stagnation point, due to the influence of the Chinese socialism policy.¹¹⁰ Especially under 10 years of the Cultural Revolution of China (1966-1976), social economy and people's lives have been severely impacted, to clothing, China eradicated old styles of dresses and complied with military and peasant uniform, these androgynous uniform based on conformity of revolutionary spirit.¹¹¹ Thus, on that time, regardless of whether women were daily events or weddings, they were all dressed in simple lifestyles, and brides will pride to be able to put on military uniform, and it was almost impossible for a woman to wear ornaments, such as jewelry for weddings.¹¹²

Despite the culture of wedding dresses stagnated during the heart of the 20th century, it reappeared in the marriage ceremony since 1980s Deng Xiaoping's administration of "the reform and opening-up policy".¹¹³ Under the support of this policy, social environment gradually began to be enlightened, democracy and freedom, people's imprisoned ideology began to release, some foreign brands have been reintroduced into China.¹¹⁴ Since the 1990s, along with the market expansion of Western costume brands in China, wedding dresses began to progress quickly in the direction of Westernization.¹¹⁵ For most Chinese people, Western white wedding dresses became nearly indispensable in ceremony, and to represent women who enter into urban

¹¹⁰ Sally E. Mc Williams, "" People Don't Attack You If You Dress Fancy": Consuming Femininity in Contemporary China." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2013): 165.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Lily Dong and Kelly Tian, "The Use of Western Brands in Asserting Chinese National Identity," *Journal of Consumer Research* 36, no.3(October 2009): 508.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Sally E. Mc Williams, "" People Don't Attack You If You Dress Fancy": Consuming Femininity in Contemporary China." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2013): 173.

modernity.¹¹⁶ Around this period, the Western white wedding dress has become the mainstream form, while the incomprehension of the Western wedding culture of Chinese women, there were some studios offering wedding services for people.¹¹⁷ At the end 20th to early 21st century, Chinese traditional wedding dresses became fashionable once more.

¹¹⁶ Sally E. Mc Williams, "'People Don't Attack You If You Dress Fancy': Consuming Femininity in Contemporary China." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2013): 173.

¹¹⁷ Yu Zuojun and Luo Xuying 于佐君 and 罗旭颖, "Tan hun li fu wen hua de bian qian" 谈婚礼服文化的变迁, [The Changes of Wedding Dress Culture], *The Textile herald 纺织导报* no.11 (2008): 93.

CHAPTER 4 SOCIAL CONTEXT OF GENDER AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN HISTORY

4.1 Introduction

Barthes (1990) divided clothing into 3 different levels, “real clothing, image clothing and written clothing which is an essential shift from technology to iconic then verbal”.¹¹⁸ In this construction, clothing transformed into representation by means, the clothing of materials, clipping, decorations or sewing patterns as a code of shifter to transform clothing from manufacture to meaningful.¹¹⁹ Culturally, clothing can be a protection, adornment or modesty, also can interact with social conditions to reflect the person’s cultural background, such as lifestyle, value concept or other context in society.¹²⁰ There is an assumption that Chinese traditional wedding dresses can culturally correlate with certain identity or status in real life, they can serve as a medium for the representation of Chinese gender and national identity. Thus, this Chapter will research that the transformation of Chinese gender and nationalism in different social contexts. And these shifts will be separated to mainly 2 different period, the historical and the Chinese revolution context.

¹¹⁸ Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System*, ed. Matthew Ward and Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1990), 5.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

4.2 Social Gender and National Identity in Historical China

Chinese historical gender context was mainly fall in the filial culture, and the gender concept were being ruled by Confucian ideology.¹²¹ At that time, Chinese peoples' daily lives (such as peoples' national understanding and feelings or experiences) in historical dynasties attached to the royal societies and organizations. This department will explore the details of social gender context and national identities in historical China.

4.2.1 Social Gender Context in Historical China

In Chinese feudal society, gender formation was based on patriarchy, in this male oriented social context, the gender relationship and status between men and women was unequal, that is in order to embody the dominated position of adult males, and the controlled and subordinate position of adult females.¹²² In traditional gender concept of female inferiority, the value of women in society was belittled, women's primary mission was to help the family, such as a continuation of the family line, serving her parents-in-law, assisting husband and growing kids.¹²³ Male-dominant was the principal feature of the gender relationship in traditional Chinese society, in this subordination of female to male, and in order to create women's economic dependence

¹²¹ Shuo Wang, "'New Social History' in China: The Development of Women's History," *The History Teacher* 39, no.3 (May, 2006): 316.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 317.

¹²³ Jamie Burnett, "Women's Employment Rights in China: Creating Harmony for Women in the Workforce," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 17, no.2 (Summer 2010): 292.

on adult males, women were stripped of property rights from economic.¹²⁴ In summation, as Confucian teachings “it is a virtue if a woman has no ability”, this traditional filial ideology advocated that women cannot be knowledgeable in school, and people believed that talented and minded women are good at socializing, easily losing their chastity, that is only harming families without benefiting them.¹²⁵ From this, Chinese traditional education instructed that lacking of talent in a woman is a virtue. According to this Confucianism, the concept of beautiful women for people was that women should to hide themselves indoor.

Moreover, according to traditional principles, there are three rules for women, they need to follow and obey their father when young, married women followed and obeyed husband, the widow will follow and obey her son, women’s lifetime was always dominated by male, her father, husband and son.¹²⁶ Even the marriage institution, women can not to marry freely. They settle in the system of feudal marriages, their family/father generally had the rights to arrange their marriage, and they demand to obey this arranged marriage, sometimes they did not know who is prepared and will go on to dominate their future lifetime.¹²⁷ In this male dominated society, women must obey men will, their experiences and feelings had to reflect men’s expectation, and they also were ignored in the public sphere, such as their political, economic, and social

¹²⁴ Shuo Wang, “‘New Social History’ in China: The Development of Women’s History,” *The History Teacher* 39, no.3 (May, 2006): 316.

¹²⁵ Dong Leng, “The evolution of the traditional Chinese gender concept and its influence on women’s basic viewpoints and understanding,” *Women’s Studies: History and Cultural*, no.2 (1999): 34.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹²⁷ Charlotte L. Beahan, “Feminism and Nationalism in the Chinese Women’s Press,” *Modern China* 1, no.4 (Oct., 1975): 409.

position.¹²⁸ Under such ideological influences of patriarchy, women gradually lack their sense of self-representation and self-consciousness, they were used to their weakness and isolated situations as obedience, softness, and dependence.¹²⁹

4.2.2 The Power of Women in Historical China

Women as members in families still have rights and power, but mostly inside the house, because their position was often recognized as mothers, wives, and daughters in the family, and their activities/ practices also mostly were limited in the family.¹³⁰ In this feudal culture, adult females were kept apart from public community, their intense lifelong were always associated with their fathers, husbands and sons, and their lifetime goal of contribution was to work/service for household in the family, such as needlework, laundry, cooking.¹³¹ Moreover, these women still as productivities in preindustrial China, their performance of works simply were indoor practices - the manual toil, they require to possess better skills and diligence in handwork, especially the textile work, as spinning, weaving, making dress, embroidery for home usage.¹³²

The power of their handmade articles was attractive to their husband's families to know that these young women were already accustomed in housework.¹³³ However, their workload often depended on the economic level of their households. For example, Han

¹²⁸ Shuo Wang, "'New Social History' in China: The Development of Women's History," *The History Teacher* 39, no.3 (May, 2006): 316 - 317.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 317 - 320.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 316.

¹³¹ Yang Hu and Jacqueline Scott, "Family and Gender Values in China: Generational, Geographic, and Gender Differences," *Journal of Family Issues* 37, no. 9 (2016): 1270.

¹³² Laurel Bossen, Wang Xurui, Melissa J. Brown, and Hill Gates. "Feet and fabrication: footbinding and early twentieth-century rural women's labor in Shaanxi," *Modern China* 37, no. 4 (2011): 349.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

(nationality) women's foot binding, not every woman had little feet, some women from poor folks did not do foot binding, because they still need to work outside the house, they usually as labor to do the work such as cleaning house, taking care of kids, farming work, the small feet would limit them in sedentary works, but they call for a pair of normal feet to afford heavy workload.¹³⁴ Therefore, women's workload often depended on the economic level of their households, although most women in history seem as indoor productivities and were entitled to rights and power in the house, some poor families' women not only undertake the responsibility indoor but also produce for society.

As the above arguments in part of 4.2.1 and 4.2.2, here gives a table to interpret gender identities of male and female in the Chinese feudal society with traditional gender concept in most cases.

¹³⁴ Shuo Wang, "'New Social History' in China: The Development of Women's History," *The History Teacher* 39, no.3 (May, 2006): 321.

Gender representation	Women	Men
Life purpose	Fertility, serving families	Successful in career
Life space	Family	Society
Activities, work	Housework	Social, public activities
Economic position	Dependent, be offered/provided	Provider
Education	Illiterate/semiliterate	Normal, high level
Gender role	Dependent, compliant	Independence, dominance

From this, it is easy to understand, in the Chinese historical gender context, women were often neglected in the public activities, family became the main living space for women, husband and children have become the center of their spirits, they lost the sensation of self-representation and self-consciousness, they conceived the meaning of spirit is to keep household well and to be a gentle, moral excellence wife.¹³⁵ For previous Chinese women, they mostly cannot take part in the public community, and they did not seem significant for society and nationalism.¹³⁶ However, it does not imply that women lived without any rights and power, they were posed as members at home

¹³⁵ Dong Leng, "The evolution of the traditional Chinese gender concept and its influence on women's basic viewpoints and understanding," *Women's Studies: History and Cultural*, no.2 (1999): 35.

¹³⁶ Maria Jaschok, "Violation and resistance: Women, religion, and Chinese statehood," *Violence Against Women* 9, no. 6 (2003): 658.

and still possess the rights and power within families and household. Meanwhile, they still necessitate to work as productivity, but majority women produce within the house for families, some as social productivities.

4.2.3 Chinese Femininity in Historical Society

The emphasis of femininity in Chinese historical society is women's virtue, women should be kind and behave in a dignified manner- "gentle and quiet", obedient to their husbands, filial to their elders and loving to their children, and diligent women in textile and tailoring were considered attractive.¹³⁷ In terms of women's appearance, Qing dynasty take slim and fragile as beauty, this beauty was highlighted by drooping shoulder and flat chest in dresses.¹³⁸ However, appearance was not an important criterion for a beautiful woman, women would not be regarded as having femininity without virtue.¹³⁹ Thus, although the modification of appearance cannot be neglected from the past to the present, women in historical society paid more attention to establish their virtue, that in order to represent their femininity.

¹³⁷ Chen Xingfen 陈醒芬, "Lun shijing nv xing shen mei yi shi de li shi yan bian" 论《诗经》女性审美意识的历史演变 [On the Historical Evolution of Female Aesthetic Consciousness in The Book of Songs], *Journal of Tongling Vocational & Technical College* 铜陵职业技术学院报, no.4 (2017): 64.

¹³⁸ Yuanyuan Zhang, "On Female Aesthetic of Ming and Qing Painting," *Journal of Tongren University* 12, no.5 (2010): 127.

¹³⁹ Zhu Zhu, "Analysis of ancient "Gentleman" and "Lady" in book of Songs Guanju," *Journal of Jiamusi Vocational Institute* 178, no. 9 (2017): 130.

4.2.4 Chinese Marriage in History

Traditionally, the concept of marriage in China emphasizes matching socioeconomic statuses between the two families, this concept of pairing up led to arranged marriage which was based solely on the command of parents and the good offices of a matchmaker.¹⁴⁰ Mostly, the married couples did not choose their spouses and were not supposed to meet each other before the wedding. Thus, the Chinese traditional marriages were commanded by family without the expectation of the marriage resulting in love and affection between couple, for marriage, it connected the political, social and economic resources between the two families. However, even if young couples were in this context of arranged marriages, they are still full of good expectations for their matrimony. Based on the research and writing done in chapter 3 in the section 3.2, we have seen that symbols have different auspicious meanings for the expectation of newlyweds, such as luck, happiness, longevity, more kids, wealth and honor, etc. From this, we can infer that women, by making their own embroideries on their wedding dresses, are hoping for certain good blessings which can be brought by wedding dresses. Actually, the expectation is more related to family, not to her own, but assumed for her husband and their new family, by embroidering these symbols, they fit within a very idealistic traditional view of women, which is the bride who will bring luck to her new family.

¹⁴⁰ Xuewen Sheng, "Chinese Families," in *Handbook of World Families*, ed. Bert N. Adams, Jan Trost (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGA Publications, 2005), 101.

4.2.5 Chinese National Identity in History

The Qing dynasty (1636-1912) was same as many feudal dynasties in the yesteryear, the political and social systems were constituted in monarchy and based on the Confucian traditions, different from the other dynasties ruled by the Han people, Qing dynasty ruled by Manchu.¹⁴¹ In Chinese before imperial domination of non-Han people were based on cultural assimilation to instead coercion, its concepts promoted other ethnic groups to accepts Han culture and promoted unified nation state.¹⁴² After the fall of the Ming dynasty, Han people still accounted for the majority of the population in the Qing, but under the Manchus' court, the national concept of China has already gone toward removing any Han-centered meaning.¹⁴³ The unified territory and the nationalities promoted to establish the formation of multiethnic empire, Qing dynasty was defined as a multi-nationality state.¹⁴⁴ Until the Manchu rule ended in 1911, the Chinese Han people never yielded to the dictatorial position. A function of reason about the Qing despotism ending can be ascribed to the scattering of anti-despotism with increasing frequency, intellectuals began to place forth the concept of "human rights" during the final years of the Qing dynasty, rights talks spread and developed rapidly in that fourth dimension.¹⁴⁵ These talks of human rights as a powerful tool to critique Qing despotism and promote the construction of a modern nation, meanwhile, anti-despotism fueled people's thinking on human rights, not only among radicals and reformers but also

¹⁴¹ Peter Zarrow, "Anti-Despotism and "Rights Talk" The Intellectual Origins of Modern Human Rights Thinking in the Late Qing," *Modern China* 34, no. 2 (2008): 179.

¹⁴² Peter C Perdue, "Comparing empires: Manchu colonialism," *The International History Review* 20, no. 2 (1998): 255.

¹⁴³ Gang Zhao, "Reinventing China: Imperial Qing Ideology and the Rise of Modern Chinese National Identity in the Early Twentieth Century," *Modern China* 32, no. 1 (2006): 11.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴⁵ Peter Zarrow, "Anti-Despotism and "Rights Talk" The Intellectual Origins of Modern Human Rights Thinking in the Late Qing," *Modern China* 34, no. 2 (2008): 179.

among officials as well.¹⁴⁶ The thinking of anti-despotism used the concept of “human rights” to expose the evils of despotism, radicals started to against despotism and guided people to suffer in the opposition of autocracy, also to social and cultural repression.¹⁴⁷

The Chinese national identity at that time was critical of the ruling Manchu and traditional Chinese political institutions. The spread of these anti-despotism thinking, accelerated the demise of the Qing dynasty.

4.2.6 Conclusion of Gender and Nationalism in Historical China

According to the Chinese gender concept and nationalism in the history, women’s responsibilities at that time were confined in the household, and under the Chinese filial culture, men or male elders dominated the women’s life at home, women had to obey the arrangements for family, without education and advanced thinking. Thus, under long-term operation of ideology, women had habitually to obey arrangements without their self-awareness. To boot, the historical Chinese national identities relied on imperial monarchy, the Chinese empire does not permit women to take part in government. Under such ruling ideology, many people believed that women cannot take part in the public domain, even with the anti-despotism thinking, it was difficult to envision a female in the public activities. Although women in historical imperial society were limited in publication rights, they still own rights to be protected at home. Even they did not produce for society, they were even responsible for the home. Therefore,

¹⁴⁶ Peter Zarrow, "Anti-Despotism and “Rights Talk” The Intellectual Origins of Modern Human Rights Thinking in the Late Qing," *Modern China* 34, no. 2 (2008): 179.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 180.

this social context leads to the isolation of women from the outside, their activities and rights were restricted at the house, they did not concern with the nation and empire, the national identities were also ignored by women in history.

4.3 The Changes of Social Gender Context and Nationalism in China

Even though, Chinese traditional gender concepts are patriarchy, at the start of the 20th century (from where the Qing Dynasty fell to the Xinhai Revolution) women's traditional status and practices in society started out to interchange.

Along with the decline of the Qing dynasty in 1911, the Chinese society and nationalism also change by people's experiences. Particularly since the introduction of New China in 1949, gender concept and nationalism had different definitions for Chinese citizen. This section will study the changes of gender and nationalism from ending of the Qing dynasty to Mao's period.

4.3.1 The Changes of Social Gender Context in China

With the demise of the feudal dynasty in China (the destruction of the Qing dynasty), people gained more rights and powers of democracy and freedom, and along with the development of feminism movement in China, some progressive scholars started to find some feminine publications, such as newspapers or magazines, to promote the

information and arguments about female liberation and gender equality.¹⁴⁸ These women's magazines as an important social media in promoting gender equality, they attempted to urge women to aware their weakness and isolated conditions, support women's fighting for freedom and independence.¹⁴⁹ In addition, some feminist authors wrote journals to advocate "free marriage" institution, they thought Chinese women should obtain a good marriage by individuals and freedom choice.¹⁵⁰ These women's journals mentally encouraged women to run inside the mainstream intellectual area and to fight group identification from society, and also advocated women should be developed, employed, independent, concerned with any public actions.¹⁵¹ For instance, agreeing to an article in 妇女时报 [Women's Times] 7, no. 9 (1921) "In recent years, adult females possess not only sought development and progress in education, they have likewise started to attempt to build an independent institution in the economy, and they have started to recreate their part in society."¹⁵² Thus, women can strive for freedom by the improvement of educations, the independence of the economy, the contributions in society, and other aspects. Furthermore, this article mentioned "Women's freedom apart from efforts in educations, economies, and societies, costumes should also be improved to reflect the beauty of women."¹⁵³ Actually, here is implied that women's aesthetics should not be based on men's favor as in the past, women should represent themselves and have their own independent personality and awareness of beauty.

¹⁴⁸ Jiang Meihua 蒋美华, "Lue lun xin hai ge ming shi qi fu nv qun de jie fang xin tai" 略论辛亥革命时期知识妇女群的解放心态 [The Emancipated Psychology of Intellectual Women in the Revolution of 1911], *Jianghai Journal* 江海学刊 6, (1998): 141.

¹⁴⁹ Binbin Yang, "Guardians of Family Health in Qing China: From the Exemplary Wife to the Reformer," *Modern China* 41, no. 5 (2015): 507.

¹⁵⁰ Charlotte L. Beahan, "Feminism and Nationalism in the Chinese Women's Press," *Modern China* 1, no.4 (Oct., 1975): 409.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 382.

¹⁵² Ren Chen 纫菑, "Nv zi fu Zhuang de gai liang" 女子服装的改良 [Improvement of Women's Clothing], *Women's Times* 妇女杂志 7, no.9 (1921):67.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

During the Republic of China, although women's self-awareness has begun to rise, and they also started trying to participate in public activities, it does not mean that most women have become the integral part of society, still a lot of women were ignorant in their desperate and isolated conditions.¹⁵⁴ For example, many girls' school or women educations were universal provided in major cities, such as Peking and Shanghai.¹⁵⁵ Fortunately, this is a beginning of Chinese women's independence, women started to access formal education and participation in public life, it also lay down a good foundation for women to enter the mainstream of society.

Chinese women's rights and benefits have been protected in laws and regulations since the setup of new China in 1949, they have gained freedom to choose a marriage and have enjoyed legal equality in society. Due to supports of laws and regulations, women were allowed to obtain a divorce, pursue a formal education, and own their property, all of these seemingly basic rights and interests were not possible for historical societies.¹⁵⁶

4.3.2 Women as Social Productivities in China

In 1949, People's Republic of China was established within socialism, due to the establishment of the new government and the needs of social construction, women were expected to participate in social labor in China's development.¹⁵⁷ Mao Zedong as the

¹⁵⁴ Charlotte L. Beahan, "Feminism and Nationalism in the Chinese Women's Press," *Modern China* 1, no.4 (Oct., 1975): 385.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 381.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 294.

¹⁵⁷ Ling Ge and Li Xiaoling 凌革 and 李潇玲, "Qian yi Zhong guo nv xing li shi di wei bian qian" 浅议中国女性历史地位的变迁 [Discussion on the Changes of Chinese Women's Historical Status], *Theory Research 学理论* 25, (2010): 77.

chairman of new China argued that women were a vast reserved of labor to afford the demands of mechanize and production.¹⁵⁸ Mao believed that women out of the household could be met needs of productivities in the blowing up of production scale, and the participation in economic sector was helpful to promote women's status.¹⁵⁹ Especially The Great Leap Forward (1950s-1960s) provided positive new roles for adult females. This revolution took the productivity leap in commerce, farming, and diligence, then women actively engaged in social production, women in cities located in the commercial enterprise or industry, countryside women also were labor force in farming.¹⁶⁰ Then, Chinese national policies promoted factories to provide job opportunities for women, and they can receive equal pay for equal work.¹⁶¹ Although women became participants in socialist construction, they still not considered equal to men because of their household responsibilities and weak in physical strength.¹⁶² Nevertheless, the fortunate things for women was that they acquired economic independence, meanwhile their labor power was regarded as a positive factor in social development. So, they began to be respected and status also raised in society.

In summation, the household responsibility for women were also significant for women, publicity, propaganda advocated women not only should contribute in social production, yet need to occupy in child rearing and family tasks. Accordingly, women also kept

¹⁵⁸ Wenqi Yang and Fei Yan, "The annihilation of femininity in Mao's China: Gender inequality of sent-down youth during the Cultural Revolution," *China Information* 31, no. 1 (2017): 64.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁶⁰ Shelah Gilbert Leader, "The Emancipation of Chinese Women," *World Politics* 26, no.1 (1973): 64.

¹⁶¹ Jamie Burnett, "Women's Employment Rights in China: Creating Harmony for Women in the Workforce," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 17, no.2 (Summer 2010): 293.

¹⁶² Ling Ge and Li Xiaoling 凌革 and 李潇玲, "Qian yi Zhong guo nv xing li shi di wei bian qian" 浅议中国女性历史地位的变迁 [Discussion on the Changes of Chinese Women's Historical Status], *Theory Research 学理论* 25, (2010): 78.

primary loyalties to family, forged and managed traditional chores at home, in parliamentary procedure to build a united, happier and harmonious family.

4.3.3 Chinese Femininity in Maoist Revolutionary Period

During 1949-1976, China's Mao era came, this proletarian period emphasized that "all were equal", especially the Cultural Revolutionary (1966-1976) period, under the conformity of Maoist revolutionary spirit, Chinese femininity emphasized androgynous style, if young women tried to look different or dressed feminine, they were castigated as bourgeois and being bad girl in sexual mores, social and political nationalist norms.¹⁶³ Also, the old style of traditional dresses were categorized as bizarre and decadent, women cannot dress in old type which were stigmatized as the sign of feudalism.¹⁶⁴ Under this powerful proletariat context, Chinese femininity based on androgynous style, women dressed military or peasant uniform which were male centered in presentation, and working class or proletariat women were the hallmark of "iron girls".¹⁶⁵

4.3.4 The Changes of Chinese National Identities

In the 20th century, a great change had taken position in Chinese society, and the rise of Chinese nationalism in the 1910s has undergone a historical change. The most

¹⁶³ Sally E. Mc Williams, "'People Don't Attack You If You Dress Fancy': Consuming Femininity in Contemporary China." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2013): 165.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

significant event was that May Fourth Movement, it was a watershed in Chinese history. The May Four Movement was caused by the Chinese failure of diplomacy in Paris, on May 4, 1919, a patriotic movement broke away in Beijing, it mainly organized and participated by young students, the masses, citizens, business people and other middle and lower classes also participated, it was a patriotic movement that Chinese people against imperialism and feudalism.¹⁶⁶ The key agenda of Chinese nationalism at that time was saved China, rising China and patriotism, this nationalism laid the basis of Chinese modern national identity, and the followed communist revolutions.¹⁶⁷

Since the formation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Chinese nationalism has led to the Mao's period and changed especially in the Cultural Revolution. From 1966-1976, China had been going to decade-long revolution period, which was called Cultural Revolution, it was also officially called the "Great Chinese Proletarian Cultural Revolution".¹⁶⁸ Mao Zedong as the president of the Chinese Communist Party and his radical supporters attempted to set up people's quite clear minds through the Cultural Revolution, the "quite clear minds" in there was the unflinching loyalty to Mao and his thoughts.¹⁶⁹ In order to promote people's loyalty, Mao and his associates organized the "Red Guards" which was the paramilitary bands constituted by the students, they attacked traditional customs, religious beliefs, teachers, books and other symbols of

¹⁶⁶ Guoguang Wu, "From Post-imperial to Late Communist Nationalism: historical change in Chinese nationalism from May Fourth to the 1990s," *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (2008): 468.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Jonathan Unger, "The Cultural Revolution at the grass roots," *The China Journal* 57 (2007): 113.

¹⁶⁹ Guey-Meei Yang and Tom Suchan, "The cultural revolution and contemporary Chinese art," *Art Education* 62, no. 6 (2009): 25.

authority.¹⁷⁰ In the 1970s, schools and factories were closed under the political repression of Cultural Revolution, it leads to the economic stagnation on that period.¹⁷¹ Therefore, the Chinese national identity at that time fell into the personal worship of Mao, due to the mass indoctrination into Maoist thought.

4.3.5 Conclusion of the Changes of Social Gender Context and Nationalism in China

After the Qing dynasty, Chinese women's self-awareness begins to awaken under the influences of progressive minds from intellectuals and feminists, women's status has been further improved until to the 1949. The new government suggested women's rights on the public sphere, while the needs of social productivities, women started going outside of the house to be labor force, even they pursued the opportunities for higher level of public activities. Furthermore, 1950s-1970s, Chinese society has been going into a Maoist period, at that time, the Cultural Revolution as a tool to boost people's loyalty to Maoist though, this social context impacted Chinese femininity and national identity, which relied on Mao's idea.

¹⁷⁰ Guey-Meei Yang and Tom Suchan, "The cultural revolution and contemporary Chinese art," *Art Education* 62, no. 6 (2009): 25.

¹⁷¹ Jonathan Unger, "The Cultural Revolution at the grass roots," *The China Journal* 57 (2007): 115.

CHAPTER 5 SOCIAL CONTEXT OF GENDER AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA

In order to analyze how Chinese traditional wedding dresses can culturally correlate with Chinese gender and national identity, this Chapter will go to study the Chinese gender and nationalism in contemporary social context.

5.1 Chinese Gender Context and Nationalism in Contemporary Time

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China (after 1949), a Chinese government emphasized that women should enjoy equal rights with men in all areas of political, economical, social, cultural, etc.¹⁷² Thus, since 1949 the gender context has entered an era which women's status is going to better. In contemporary time, Chinese national identity will change from the revolution period, the new nationalism will be different with before. This section will go to research the Chinese gender and national identities in the present.

5.1.1 The Gender Context in Contemporary China

In contemporary time, numerous policies committed to establish an equality system in gender relationship, in order to promote the advancement of women's social status. For most Chinese women, their responsibilities are no longer confined to the family in

¹⁷² Jamie Burnett, "Women's Employment Rights in China: Creating Harmony for Women in the Workforce," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 17, no.2 (Summer 2010): 289.

contemporary time, they employed to be workforce besides household work, they participated in social activities extensively due to the needs of social productivity.¹⁷³

Chinese social developments and supportive policies have had a profound impact on the changes of female status and social roles. Women no longer being provided for men, the independence on the economy was the foundation that women get rid of their subservient status. Their rights and powers not only were limited indoor, they also were protected by both family and society.

In recent years, a large number of Chinese women pursue some professional jobs or higher education, they are not only accustomed to become a part of a social community, at the same time, they still need to perform the household responsibility.¹⁷⁴ Compared to historical women, contemporary women's gender roles have changed from simplex attentive wives and caring mothers to both housewives and labors, employees, teachers or other social communities.

Moreover, many Chinese women take part in some national key fields which were defined as men's networks in the past, such as sports, army, politics, etc. For instance, Chinese women's contributions in the Olympics, they see themselves as a part of the nation and represented China to get achievements in international competitions.¹⁷⁵

Therefore, contemporary Chinese women as a part of the community to make joint

¹⁷³ Jamie Burnett, "Women's Employment Rights in China: Creating Harmony for Women in the Workforce," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 17, no.2 (Summer 2010): 289.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 293.

¹⁷⁵ Andrew Billings, Qingru Xu, and Mingming Xu. "Two Sides of the Chinese Sports Media Story: Contrasting State-Owned and Commercially Sponsored Chinese Websites by Nation and Sex of Athlete." *Communication & Sport* (2018): 5.

effort in a harmonious society, they represented their independence in public spheres, try to enhance and reinforce female strong individual in society. Especially the urban women, they have more higher pursuance of educations, finance, or other achievements, even in marriage, they similarly have high claims for their partner.¹⁷⁶ However, it cannot fully identify here is absolute equal rights in China, Chinese community itself hard to push side of the patriarchy, here still exists patriarchs phenomena (not merely China, this is a global problem).¹⁷⁷ Obviously, the Chinese one-child family policy implemented from 1980-2015, it led to some social problems, the increasing of female infanticide, girl abandonment or abuse, even women were divorced if they bear daughters.¹⁷⁸ The occurrence of these phenomena is based on male offspring which is the strong Chinese cultural preference, but these certainly happened less in urban regions.¹⁷⁹ Moreover, societal perception that “women are less capable physically and mentally than men”, male still far outnumbers female in a managerial position or top level posts.¹⁸⁰

In a sense, women’s equalities are not perfect in everything, patriarchy and gender division still existed in present, but Chinese women’s situations gotten better compared to in history. Contemporary Chinese women go inside of public spheres to represent

¹⁷⁶ Sandy To, “Understanding *Sheng Nu* (‘Leftover Women’): the Phenomenon of Late Marriage among Chinese Professional Women,” *Symbolic Interaction* 36, no.1(February 2013): 4.

¹⁷⁷ Jamie Burnett, “Women’s Employment Rights in China: Creating Harmony for Women in the Workforce,” *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 17, no.2 (Summer 2010): 290.

¹⁷⁸ Karen Korabik, “Managerial Women in the People’s Republic of China: The Long March Continues,” *International Studies of Management & Organization* 23, no.4 (1993): 50.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Jamie Burnett, “Women’s Employment Rights in China: Creating Harmony for Women in the Workforce,” *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 17, no.2 (Summer 2010): 290.

their “self-esteem, self-respect, self-possession and self-strengthening”.¹⁸¹ Culturally, we have good representations of women in contemporary time, they looked themselves as a part social community to present their independence and individual consciousness through different medium.

5.1.2 Contemporary Chinese Femininity

Along with the coming of Deng’s open-door policy(late of 1970s), Chinese market opened for foreign trade, people widened outlook in pop-culture, from the movies, magazines, advertising or other social media, they saw the foreign and Western style.¹⁸² From social media, Chinese women had the understanding of sexy body - the image of blonde women with big breasts and slender waist.¹⁸³ In contemporary time, the standards of Chinese femininity are influenced by Western style, Chinese women identify these new styles as beautiful and fashionable direction, especially urban young Chinese women tend to this direction to look pretty and attractive.¹⁸⁴ Women care more about their images which look in others’ eyes, having colored and curled hair, makeup and the female body looks is a performance of contemporary beautiful women.¹⁸⁵ Contemporary Chinese women pay attention to the modification of body shape, they

¹⁸¹ Maria Jaschok, "Violation and resistance: Women, religion, and Chinese statehood," *Violence Against Women* 9, no. 6 (2003): 666.

¹⁸² Sally E. Mc Williams, "" People Don't Attack You If You Dress Fancy": Consuming Femininity in Contemporary China," *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2013): 166.

¹⁸³ Jiaran Zheng, *New Feminism in China: Young Middle-class Chinese Women in Shanghai* (Singapore: Springer, 2016), 70.

¹⁸⁴ Sally E. Mc Williams, "" People Don't Attack You If You Dress Fancy": Consuming Femininity in Contemporary China," *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2013): 166.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 176.

reveal their female body lines by using the feminine dresses with tailored bust, narrow waist and long side slits.¹⁸⁶

5.1.3 Contemporary Chinese Marriage

Nowadays, the arranged marriage in China has become obsolete, while contemporary Chinese marriage goes to diversity in mate selection and free courtship. In contemporary concept of marriage, mates' personal factors were more considered, including moral standing, occupation, educational level, appearance, temperament and etc.¹⁸⁷ Mates were selected by oneself with parent permission, marriage couples were introduced by parents, relatives and friends, the dating websites and multiple internet chatting tools is a popular way to matchmake marriage partners, and marriage introduction agencies also provide multiple options for young people.¹⁸⁸ Thus, unlike traditional arranged marriages, marriage in contemporary China respects the self-selection of young person. Especially for women, the Chinese rapid economic growth and expansion of education enhances women's employment opportunities and economic independence, they are more open to culture, ideas, values and lifestyles and have more expectation for diversity marriage. Therefore, the free marriage allows women to have more choices in marriage, they are no longer only able to have a good imagination of an unknown marriage, but they can choose what they expect, the expect

¹⁸⁶ Sally E. Mc Williams, "'People Don't Attack You If You Dress Fancy': Consuming Femininity in Contemporary China," *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2013): 169.

¹⁸⁷ Xuewen Sheng, "Chinese Families," in *Handbook of World Families*, ed. Bert N. Adams, Jan Trost (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGA Publications, 2005), 102.

¹⁸⁸ Pan Wang, "Inventing traditions: television dating shows in the People's Republic of China," *Media, Culture & Society* 39, no. 4 (2017): 505.

is about consideration of mate's moral standing, occupation, educational level, appearance, temperament and etc. Similarly, women have a variety of choices in the wedding dress, they don't have to make it, women can buy or choose to rent wedding dresses which style of dresses are they expectation.¹⁸⁹ This is terms of women's consuming power, today women are pursuing more economic income, the higher education and the professional job, that means they have more opportunities in society. When they became a part of Chinese community and choose to wear traditional wedding dresses, it will be related to nationalism.

5.1.4 Chinese National Identity in Contemporary Time

Officially, China is a multiethnic/multi-nationalities country, the formation of ethnicity in the Chinese social community be constructed by 56 nationalities, the Han (race/ethnicity) is the most main percent of the population or populous part in China, the Han occupies almost 90-96 percent, except for the majority Han nationality, the other 55 were identified as minority nationalities, such as “the Man (Manchus), the Meng (Mongolians), the Hui (Muslim Chinese), the Zang (Tibetans), etc.”¹⁹⁰ Although the Chinese ethnic concept in early 20th century propagated that “minority nationalities should be assimilated into the Han civilization which was the representation of Chinese culture,” the present Chinese cultural system has been officially redefined to the

¹⁸⁹ Yu Zuojun and Luo Xuying 于佐君 and 罗旭颖, “Tan hun li fu wen hua de bian qian” 谈婚礼服文化的变迁 [The Changes of Wedding Dress Culture], *The Textile herald* 纺织导报, no.11 (2008): 93.

¹⁹⁰ Xiaowei Zang, "ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN NEIGHBORING BEHAVIOR IN URBAN CHINA," *Sociological Focus* 36, no. 3 (2003): 198.

multi-cultural community – “each nationality has its own language, custom, culture, and history”.¹⁹¹ Even if the Han majority may be predominant civilization, the Chinese community still expects the minority nationalities which as a part of multinational state to construct Chinese multi-cultural representation.¹⁹² For example, in some official celebrations, festivals or occasions, the minorities’ songs and dances were officially approved to represent the distinctive cultural in China.¹⁹³ Especially in the four-hour Spring Festival TV program (the most popular TV program during the Chinese New Year), “China is a multi-national country, 56 different nationalities” by hosts’ stating, 56 performers from different nationality within colorful “native” costume advanced onto the stage, and this program devoted one-half time to minority songs and dances. However, the Han have been habitually considered as the “race of China” by most Chinese people, even the Han is only one of the 56 nationalities, this is an automatic ideology for most people to mistakenly regard the Han identity as Chinese identity.¹⁹⁴ Internationally, China wants to be represented the vision of nationalities unite, “the Chinese/*zhong guo ren*” as the Chinese national identity which consists of 56 nationalities.¹⁹⁵ For example, the Chinese personal identity card stamped the different nationality, but on the passport only marked “the Chinese”, out of China, “the Chinese” is only one national identity without ethnicity. Thus, although China was constructed by

¹⁹¹ Murata Yujiro, “A discourse on the ‘Chinese Nation’ in Modern China,” *China Report* 37, no.3(2001):368.

¹⁹² Li Xi Yuan, “Ethnicity or Nationality?: Minority Policy and Ethnic Conflict in Contemporary China,” In *Ethnicity as a Political Resource: Conceptualizations across Disciplines, Regions, and Periods*, ed. University of Cologne Forum (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2015), 165.

¹⁹³ Michael Hathaway, “The Politics of Making Biocultural Diversity,” *RCC Perspectives*, no. 9 (2012): 39.

¹⁹⁴ AGNIESZKA JONIAK-LÜTHI, “The Han “Minzu”, Fragmented Identities, and Ethnicity,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 72, no. 4 (2013): 860.

¹⁹⁵ Michael Hathaway, “The Politics of Making Biocultural Diversity,” *RCC Perspectives*, no. 9 (2012): 39.

56 nationalities, Chinese people will represent “the Chinese” as their national identity in out of China.

Additionally, in 21th century, China is aware that future development should to rely instead on “Chinesenization”, due to the inflow of Westernization. Especially the inspiring Chinese achievements of 2001 – Beijing was elected to host the 2008 Olympics, Chinese Economy Website called this as “Chinese year”, and during the Olympic torch relay in 2008, young Chinese people express their love for China and their support for the Beijing Olympic games through placing the English word “love China” in a red heart.¹⁹⁶ It can be seen that the national identity of “the Chinese” is more important than the individual nationalities in contemporary China. Because people no longer to emphasize which ethnic group they are, nowadays, people prefer to represent “the Chinese” national identity, especially in front of the world, people emphasize they are “the Chinese”. Thus, according to “the Chinese” national identity, it can be explained there why *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂 are not defined as traditional wedding dress of certain ethnic group in contemporary time, because for contemporary women these traditional dresses are not represent ethnicities anymore, they are representing “the Chinese” culture. However, the name of “the Chinese” in here is formulate in the complex strategies of Chinese cultural identification, as same as the discourse of nationalism from Homi K. Bhabha that function in the name of “the people” or “the nation” provides a perspective of representation that signify a people, a

¹⁹⁶ Ying Jiang. “Cyber-nationalism in China,” in *Challenging Western media portrayals of internet censorship in China*, (University of Adelaide Press, 2012), 52.

nation, or a national culture, this cultural identity has dominated a narrative strategy of the nation as a cultural force.¹⁹⁷ Nations and national identities were described as imagined communities by Benedict Anderson, national identity is constructed in discourse which is narrative of national culture, the discourse as a key instrument in the social construction of imagined communities.¹⁹⁸ The discourse of national cultures is powerful that they can construct national identities, Homi K. Bhabha described national life is a repeating process, the scraps, patches, and rags of daily life be repeatedly turned into the signs of a national culture.¹⁹⁹ Thus, a certain national culture or national identity is created by national narrative, as same as that if a nation brand is supported in social media, it was repeating in our everyday life quite often, we will talk about this nation brand in national community, the narrative of social expectation can change people's perceptions of what construct their national identity. In the same way, the national narrative in China today is base based on tradition, China is revival in traditionalism.

5.1.5 Chinese Nationalism are Looking Back to Traditions

Along with the development of Chinese society, China as a major economic power has received international recognition after 1990s, then, in order to establish global recognition and improve national confidences, government began to consciously reconstruct some traditional things as national symbols, such as the "Chinese style"

¹⁹⁷ Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and narration*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 292.

¹⁹⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, (Verso books, 2006), 7.

¹⁹⁹ Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and narration*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 297.

dress – *qipao* 旗袍/cheongsam.²⁰⁰ Then, the Chinese traditional elements were widely used in international conferences or occasions to represent “the Chinese” nationalism.²⁰¹ Especially the appearance of Chinese traditional costumes in the international field, it has laid the foundation for women to choose traditional dresses to represent their national identity. For instance, the Chinese well-known actress Gong Li and Zhang Ziyi wear *Qi pao* 旗袍/cheongsam in international film festivals to get an impression of the “Chinese actress”.²⁰² Although *qi pao* 旗袍/cheongsam was daily costume for historical women, in contemporary exposure, it is a symbol to represent “the Chinese” identity. From this, Chinese traditional dresses in different social contexts have the different meaning for people.

On the other hand, at the reports of these political events through the media, the Chinese traditional costumes turned into fashion trend and market, because some fashionistas have found inspiration from these costumes. For example, some Hong Kong and the Western fashion designers started to collect the “Chinese style” elements in their products, these inspired collections got Chinese fashionistas’ endorsements, and they began to be worn in formal parties.²⁰³ These products only borrowed some traditional elements as creative inspiration and did not replicate the historical costumes completely. But in semiotics, these elements are signifier, people got the impression of the “Chinese

²⁰⁰ Matthew Chen, “Re-emergence of the *Qipao*: Political Nationalism, Cultural Production and Popular Consumption of a Traditional Chinese Dress,” *The China Quarterly*, no.189(Mar., 2007): 147.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 149.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 153.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 146.

style” from this signifier. Under the guidance of these fashionistas, people have defined costumes with traditional symbols or elements as a new fashion.

Moreover, along with the development of social media, Chinese traditional things were frequently released in pop-culture by different ways, not only in TV shows, also in magazines, advertisings or other popular products. For example, according to a report about fashion in Chinese trend from the *Jing Daily* in 2013, May 16 “the Chinese local design brand NE•TIGER uses the Chinese traditional elements to provide the label with a sense of local heritage and national pride” and “the rise of Chinese design brands go into international and gain more attention”.²⁰⁴ Not only in Chinese pop-culture, Western media also make interest in the Chinese elements, “the US weekly magazine *TIME* first time use both English and Chinese phrase on the cover in 2017”.²⁰⁵ The exposure of traditional costumes in the media has increased the impression of the “Chinese style” for people, and it also takes people’ interesting in Chinese traditions.

As a Chinese observer, we can experience every day life in this neo-traditional Chinese culture. For example, Hanfu is an ancient Chinese dress which back in fashion after 400 years. A report by *South China Morning Post* in 2017 recorded “ After vanishing from history for about 400 years, the style has gained a substantial number of followers on the mainland in the past 15 years as the country attaches more importance to tradition

²⁰⁴ Jing Daily, “Saudi Royals Take Interest in Chinese Design,” jingdaily.com. <https://jingdaily.com/saudi-royals-take-interest-in-chinese-design/> (accessed May 16, 2013).

²⁰⁵ China Daily, “Chinese Elements in Western Mainstream Media,” chinadaily.com.cn. <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201711/14/WS5a0d281fa31061a7384095b8.html> (accessed November 14, 2017).

and calls on the public to be proud of Chinese culture”, Luo stated as one interviewee in this report “I wear Hanfu once a week and joined the Hanfu Society at my school, members celebrate Chinese festivals, clad in Hanfu”.²⁰⁶ Nowadays, some young people are wearing long dresses, silky robes and black hats, this phenomenon was recorded by the *inkstone* in April this year “ in the southern metropolis of Shenzhen, one thousand Hanfu enthusiasts joined on a day of Han clothing and culture”.²⁰⁷ These young people decided to dress in historical dress, they are bring the Chinese traditional culture back to modern China. In the present, people are also keen on the palace drama, *Yanxi Palace* is most popular TV show in China in 2018, *BBC NEWS* give a striking title in a report in December 2018 “*Yanxi Palace: The most Googled show on Earth*”, although it fictionalized the power struggles among the concubines of Emperor Qianlong in Qing Dynasty, it still was the most watched online drama in China over the summer in 2018.²⁰⁸ Therefore, from the resurgence of Hanfu and palace drama, it can be seen that Chinese traditional culture has not only returned to peoples’ lives, but also has become a new tradition that is popular in China. This “traditional culture” is constructed by narrative, that revival elements and details as the scraps, patches and rags which are repeating in people’s daily life. As the recording by *KK NEWS* “in recent years, many Chinese celebrities wear traditional wedding dresses in their wedding ceremony, such as Liu Shishi, Zhang Xinyi, Yang Ying, Yang Qianhua, Chen Yanxi.”, as the photos in this

²⁰⁶ Alice Yan, “The Hanfu fashion revival: ancient Chinese dress finds a new following,” *South China Morning Post*, October 21, 2017, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/2116289/hanfu-fashion-revival-ancient-chinese-dress-finds-new-following> .

²⁰⁷ Arman Dzidzovic, Viola Zhou and Tom Leung, “Young people in China are reviving old clothing, and maybe nationalism too,” *inkstone*, April 9, 2019, <https://www.inkstonenews.com/society/chinas-han-clothing-movement-cloak-nationalism/article/3005369>.

²⁰⁸ BBC NEWS, “*Yanxi Palace: The most Googled show on Earth*,” *bbc.com*.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-46630781> (accessed December 23, 2018).

news, these celebrities have chosen *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂.²⁰⁹

People look at these celebrities' wedding from social media quite often, some people want to copy these wearing due to the celebrity power and effect. However, even though the "traditional culture" is reviving, it is not the representative of the real historical China, these specific elements is showed by contemporary people, people is choosing these elements differently, it is not the representation of real historical life. But, when these selective elements are repeating in contemporary daily life, people's perceptions will belong to this national narrative.

Furthermore, the re-emergence of traditional Chinese style dresses in public occasions influenced fashion consumption trend. In the 21st century, traditional Chinese style dresses have been taking in Chinese coastal metropolises firstly, then along with the publicities of fashion shows and advertisements, some hinterland cities showed a wide variety demanded of these "Chinese style" dresses.²¹⁰ In metropolis and megacities, Chinese modern women saw and reflected from shopping advertisements and shop windows, they want to participate in this urban modernity.²¹¹ Thus, the popularity of Chinese traditional dresses was influenced by the responsibilities of political, cultural and nationalism on global recognition, and the showing of these traditional dresses on pop-culture is also an important factor to promote fashion consumption trend to traditional style.

²⁰⁹ KK NEWS, "The competition of Chinese wedding dresses," knews.cc. <https://knews.cc/entertainment/3lop528.html>(accessed April 15, 2018).

²¹⁰ Matthew Chen, "Re-emergence of the *Qipao*: Political Nationalism, Cultural Production and Popular Consumption of a Traditional Chinese Dress," *The China Quarterly*, no.189(Mar., 2007): 153.

²¹¹ Sally E. Mc Williams, "" People Don't Attack You If You Dress Fancy": Consuming Femininity in Contemporary China." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2013): 171.

But, these styles of traditional wearing still are not the everyday dresses on street of contemporary China, nonetheless they might prepare one for weddings or other necessary occasions.²¹² Contemporary young Chinese women are free to choose their wedding gown, under the influence of traditional “Chinese style” in pop-culture, choosing a Chinese traditional wedding dress has also become a popular trend in China.

5.2 Conclusion of Gender Context and Nationalism in Present China

With the improvement of women's status, Chinese women have participated in various public fields, and even some women have higher requirements for the realization of self-worth and contribution to society. Although they seem to have the same rights as men in public sphere, in fact, the full equality of gender rights does not exist in society. Because unlike men who are fully engaged in their work, women must also take care of their family responsibilities while participating in social activities. Along with the gender changes in women's status, education, concept, etc. they have more opportunities in society, they are more open to culture, ideas, values and lifestyles. Thus, they have more expectation for diversity marriage, as their consuming power, they also have more choices for their wedding dress.

²¹² Matthew Chen, “Re-emergence of the *Qipao*: Political Nationalism, Cultural Production and Popular Consumption of a Traditional Chinese Dress,” *The China Quarterly*, no.189(Mar., 2007): 146.

On the other hand, nationalism in contemporary China was a multi-cultural nation, after people accepted the media and the government's spread of different cultures from Chinese different nationality, people also realized that they were in a multi-cultural country. They learned each other's culture and no longer define themselves as a certain nationality, but regard "the Chinese" as their national identity. Base on the representation of "the Chinese" national identity, Chinese in today prefer to trace back to traditional culture, such as designing with traditional elements, showing palace dramas, wearing historical dresses, etc.

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CHAPTER 6 ANALYSIS OF CHINESE TRADITIONAL WEDDING DRESSES IN CONTEMPORARY TIME

6.1 Context of Traditional Wedding Dresses in Contemporary China

Chinese historical women made wedding dresses by themselves, not the same as before, in contemporary time, Chinese people preferred to rent a wedding dress, due to the popularity of wedding photography studios, the rental price is less one-tenth than purchase, also the choice is rich.²¹³ As well as the trend of the fashionable and diversified pursuing for a Western white wedding gown, Chinese traditional wedding dresses are popular in contemporary time.²¹⁴ Especially along with the economic development and the rising demands for “Chinese style” wedding dresses, the number of people who buy or customize a traditional wedding dress has gradually increased in recent years.²¹⁵ But, for most people, the income generated to afford a customized wedding dress still extravagant, rental way can still meet the needs for the majority. From the changes of social context, the meaning of traditional wedding dresses with symbols in the present might be different for people.

This chapter will focus Chinese traditional wedding dresses in contemporary time, firstly it will discuss about the different categories of symbols on Chinese traditional wedding dresses, a specific comparison will base on their visual studies in historical and

²¹³ Yu Zuojun and Luo Xuying 于佐君 and 罗旭颖, “Tan hun li fu wen hua de bian qian” 谈婚礼服文化的变迁 [The Changes of Wedding Dress Culture], *The Textile herald* 纺织导报, no.11 (2008): 93.

²¹⁴ Sally E. Mc Williams, ““ People Don't Attack You If You Dress Fancy”: Consuming Femininity in Contemporary China.” *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2013): 163.

²¹⁵ Qiao Nan, and Yan-rong Tan, “Talk About the Chinese Wedding Dress of Modern Women,” *DEStech Transactions on Social Science, Education and Human Science* seme, (2017): 229.

contemporary time. Same as the symbols, the comparative studies of dresses' types and shapes will also be divided in historical and contemporary China. According to the differences and similarities on symbols, types and shapes of dresses, the further investigation will focus on the transformation of these Chinese traditions. Finally, the Chinese social context of gender and national identities in chapter 4 and 5 will help this research to explain how Chinese women use traditional symbols to represent new meanings in contemporary time.

6.2 Visual Comparison of Symbols on Chinese Traditional Wedding Dresses

This section will focus on the comparative studies of symbols on Chinese traditional wedding dresses. It will trace back the images of embroidery patterns in history and present respectively, and compare the differences and similarities of these symbols in different time period. And the images of symbols will only focus on auspicious clouds/*Xiang yun* 祥云 (Figure 5,5), moire/*shui bo* 水波 (Figure 5, 6), dragons/*long* 龙 (figure 5, 6) and phoenixes/*feng* 凤 (Figure 7, 8), flowers and plants and animals (figure 5, 8), because 3.2 mentioned that these categories of embroidery patterns were repeated more often in both historical and contemporary wedding ceremony.

6.2.1 Symbols on Traditional Wedding Dresses in History

In the historic time, embroidery patterns on dresses with various forms were handwork by women, and women's skillful handcraft gave their wedding dresses in abundant adornment, complicated structures and enriched colors.²¹⁶ Here found some images of symbols in historical dresses, these symbols were not entirely on wedding dresses, they also be applied to decorate the daily costume. According to studies in chapter 3, auspicious clouds/*xiang yun* 祥云 are different figures with same symbolic significance. For exemplar, the figure 5 and 9, these two auspicious clouds/*xiang yun* 祥云 can be visually identified as *tuan yun* 团云 and *die yun* 叠云 to symbolize good fortune or fortune. Moreover, symbols of moire/*shui bo* 水波 appeared in a similar appearance on dresses, such as the figure 5 and 6. Phoenix/*feng* 凤 as one of the important symbols represented by same form with different designs, colors or materials. For instance, figure 7 and 8, the details of phoenix/*feng* 凤 in figure 8 was embroidered more carefully on feather with different materials and colors. Therefore, optical analysis in figure 5, 8, 9 and 10, symbols of dragon, flowers and plants as well as phoenix/*feng* 凤 in similar or like forms were represented by different patterns.

²¹⁶ Surui Yang, "Application of traditional Chinese auspicious patterns in the design of modern silk garment," *Advanced Materials Research* 796, (2013):534.



Figure 5: peony/*mudan* 牡丹 with auspicious clouds/*xiang yun* 祥云 and moire/*shui bo* 水波

Image source:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Clothing,_Qing_dynasty,_1644-1911_AD_-_Sichuan_University_Museum_-_Chengdu,_China_-_DSC06263.jpg



Figure 6: moire/*shui bo* 水波 patterns

Image source:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chinese_embroidered_silk_lady%27s_jacket_and_pleated_skirt,_c._1900,_East-West_Center.JPG

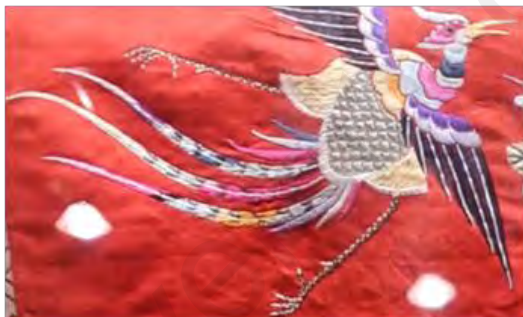


Figure 7: phoenix/*feng* 凤

Image source:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Clothing,_Qing_dynasty,_1644-1911_AD_-_Sichuan_University_Museum_-_Chengdu,_China_-_DSC06263.jpg



Figure 8: flowers with phoenix/*feng* 凤

Image source:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chinese_wedding_jacket,_early_20th_century,_East-West_Center.JPG



Figure 9: auspicious clouds/*xiang yun* 祥云 with dargon/*long* 龙
Image source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chinese_wedding_jacket,_early_20th_century,_East-West_Center.JPG



Figure 10: dargon/*long* 龙
Image source:
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wedding_costume_in_midi_\(dense_embroidery\)_style,_view_1,_with_dragon-and-phoenix_patterns_-_Hong_Kong_Museum_of_History_-_DSC00951.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wedding_costume_in_midi_(dense_embroidery)_style,_view_1,_with_dragon-and-phoenix_patterns_-_Hong_Kong_Museum_of_History_-_DSC00951.JPG)

6.2.2 Symbols of Traditional Wedding Dresses in Contemporary Time

The above historical categories of embroidery patterns also appear in contemporary weddings, here gives some images of symbols. Figure 11 to 14 visually show the symbols of auspicious clouds/*xiang yun* 祥云, moire/*shui bo* 水波, dragon/*long* 龙 with phoenix/*feng* 凤, flowers, plants and animals in the present. Although these symbols are applied in contemporary weddings, the pattern of these symbols has not converted from their show.



Figure 11: Symbols of dragon/*long* 龙 with phoenix/*feng* 凤, peony/*mudan* 牡丹, auspicious clouds/*xiang yun* 祥云.
Image source: Andi studio 安迪图文



Figure12: Symbols of bats/*fu* 蝠, pomegranate/*shi liu* 石榴, peony/*mudan* 牡丹.
Image source: Andi studio 安迪图文



Figure 13: Symbols of dragon/*long* 龙 with phoenix/*feng* 凤, peony/*mudan* 牡丹, auspicious clouds/*xiang yun* 祥云 and moire/*shui bo* 水波.
Image source: Andi studio 安迪图文



Figure 14: Symbols of phoenix/*feng* 凤, peony/*mudan* 牡丹 and moire/*shui bo* 水波.
Image source: Andi studio 安迪图文

6.3 Visual Comparison of Chinese Traditional Wedding Dresses in Historical and Contemporary Time

Chapter 3 mentioned that Chinese traditional wedding dresses became popular again during a wedding ceremony at the early 21st century. Unfortunately, one of the famous type - *feng guan xia pei* 凤冠霞帔 is no longer used by people, because its big hat is inconvenient to wear.²¹⁷ In addition, although *qi pao* 旗袍/cheongsams as wedding dresses were worn in the last century, in contemporary wedding ceremony it only as an extra dress for brides when couple need to drink a toast to the guests.²¹⁸ From the early 21st century to the present, *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂 are the main two types of traditional wedding dresses that people prefer to use. Thus, this chapter will visually analysis the types of *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂 in history and present, the shapes as a part of types also should be analyzed. From the images of traditional wedding dresses, this research will compare the differences and similarities of *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂 in different time period.

6.3.1 Chinese Traditional Wedding Dresses in History

Here are pictures to indicate the former character of Chinese traditional wedding dresses in history. Figure 15 is an old type of *xiu he fu* 秀禾服, the shape of this type was loose cutting, especially the waist part was wide and almost covered the body curve. Figure

²¹⁷ Xibin Chen, "Study of Jiangnan marriage needlework art – take the red dowry of eastern Zhejiang for example" (master's thesis, Zhejiang University of technology, 2014), 108.

²¹⁸ Matthew Chen, "Re-emergence of the *Qipao*: Political Nationalism, Cultural Production and Popular Consumption of a Traditional Chinese Dress," *The China Quarterly*, no.189(Mar., 2007):148.

16 showed an image of the historical *long feng gua* 龙凤褂, even though the shape of this type looks slimmer than *xiu he fu* 秀禾服, it was still wide waist and hid women's curvaceous beauty. Hence, from the surface of these two old types, *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂 in history were loose shape with wide sleeves and waistline.



Figure 15: Bridal Clothing in Qing Dynasty around 1644-1911, Collected in Sichuan University Museum – Chengdu, Sichuan, China.

Image source:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Clothing,_Qing_dynasty,_1644-1911_AD_-_Sichuan_University_Museum_-_Chengdu,_China_-_DSC06263.jpg



Figure 16: Old Wedding Costume of China, With Dense Embroidery Collected in Hong Kong Museum of History.

Image source:

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wedding_costume_in_midi_\(dense_embroidery\)_style,_view_1,_with_dragon-and-phoenix_patterns_-_Hong_Kong_Museum_of_History_-_DSC00951.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wedding_costume_in_midi_(dense_embroidery)_style,_view_1,_with_dragon-and-phoenix_patterns_-_Hong_Kong_Museum_of_History_-_DSC00951.JPG)

6.3.2 Chinese Traditional Wedding Dresses in Contemporary Time

At present, *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂 were frequently used in young people's wedding ceremony. Here give images show these two types of dresses in contemporary time and to analysis shapes of them. For example, figure 17 and 18 are a contemporary type of *xiu he fu* 秀禾服, from these images, shape of *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 has changed visibly. Although the shape of sleeves and skirt are loose and similar to the historical one, the waist is tight and particularly to reflect the curve of the body. In figure 19, contemporary type of *long feng gua* 龙凤褂 showed a slim shape. Even though the contemporary shape of this type is very similar to historical one, the cutest of waist is tight as special as the contemporary shape of *xiu he fu* 秀禾服, and sleeves narrowed to wrap arms. Furthermore, figure 20 showed the type of Chinese traditional wedding dress, it was also the slim shape, but it looks like the mix type which combine with the shape of *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂. Because the upper side of this type is the same shape with *long feng gua* 龙凤褂, and shape of the skirt is similar to *xiu he fu* 秀禾服. From section 5.2.2 the femininity in Contemporary China, women would like the modification of body shape through dress, the current type of Chinese traditional wedding dresses is going to a slender shape to manually wrap women's waist curve, this shape is suitable for contemporary aesthetics of femininity, that women want to reveal their female body lines by using the traditional wedding dress with narrow waist.



Figure 17: *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 on contemporary China

Image source: Andi studio 安迪图文



Figure 18: *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 on contemporary China

Image source: Andi studio 安迪图文



Figure 19: *long feng gua* 龙凤褂 on contemporary China

Image source: Andi studio 安迪图文



Figure 20: The type of Chinese traditional dress combine the *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂

Image Source: Andi studio 安迪图文

6.4 Conclusion of Visual Comparison

As the visual comparison on symbols and Chinese traditional wedding dresses, the surface of embroidery patterns in present is similar to historical symbols, the type of *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂 are same between history and present, only the shape of these two types has both changed to curve body in contemporary time.

From the historical meaning of symbols which founded in this research, symbols stand for auspicious meaning that was the expectation of newlywed. Especially when historical women made their own wedding dress, their idealistic expectation of matrimony was represented by wedding dress with symbols. Base on this visual comparison and historical context of Chinese femininity, obviously dress being heavy for Chinese historical women, the dress hiding her, her individuality, her body and etc. the symbols and the dress itself is more important than her body, she brings the symbols, in other words, she brings the kids, the wealth, the happiness, etc. But for cotemporary Chinese women, they don't have to make their own dress, as the research of contemporary Chinese femininity in chapter 5, contemporary women have more opportunities in society, their position, education level, cultural and marriage concept are different with traditional women, nowadays, they prefer to pursuit curvaceous beauty. Thus, although surface of symbols didn't change to a new look, contemporary women is choosing the dress differently, they focus on the individual beauty to instead

of the symbols and the dresses itself, obviously, they are showing body curve through the tight dresses.

6.5 The Neo-tradition of Chinese Wedding Dresses

Neo-tradition is that traditional thing in contemporary time, although visual comparison showed the similar appearance of Chinese traditional wedding dresses with their embroidery symbols between historical and contemporary time, this research contend that the meaning of these dresses had shifted in contemporary time. Especially after the research of Chinese gender and nationalism both in history and present, here found that women in contemporary time to wear these dresses differently for different purpose. From the visual comparison in last section, it is obvious that although the wedding dress is similar with original appearance, the shape of dress becomes tighter, it is actually a hybrid of tradition and modern. In other words, women choose these traditional wedding dresses by different way, because they have different expectation in contemporary time. This section will explain why Chinese women choose these traditional dresses in contemporary time, and the new meaning of these dresses.

6.5.1 Representation of Contemporary Chinese Identity in *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂

In contemporary time, Chinese women decided to wear traditional wedding dresses - *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂, this research contends that wearing these traditional wedding dresses help women to express their contemporary Chinese identity.

From iconography study of symbols, historical dresses emphasized individual symbol's auspicious meaning, for example, lotus or pomegranates pray for even more kids, five bats mean the most luck. People desired that these symbols' auspicious meanings can bring good blessings for newlyweds. In the past, when women made their own dresses, they were focusing on the symbols and the dress itself, she brings the symbols and dresses as same as she brings the kids, the wealth, the happiness, etc. this is women' expectation for marriage. In contemporary time, although the appearance of Chinese traditional wedding dresses and embroidery symbols are similar with historical one, contemporary emphasis was focusing on entire dresses which are expression of contemporary Chinese identity. Gender and nationalism as part of contemporary Chinese identity are different with historical context, Chinese women are different and have more opportunities in society, their power and expectation are diversity in today, their place have changed to be part of nation, and the focus of Chinese nationalism changed from the ethnicity to "the Chinese". They towards go back to traditional culture, while keeping their modernity, *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂 as

traditional dresses help women to express their traditions, and the tight shape help to express that they are modern women. Women are no longer focus on the meaning of symbols and dresses, their expectation is to show their curve body and they prefer towards traditional things.

Firstly, according to the changes of Chinese gender context, this research found that contemporary China expect women to participate in social activities because of the requirement of productivities, then, Chinese women need to perform social responsibility while caring household. These women find a place in society, their gender identity is according to their everyday experiences to see themselves as a part of the Chinese community, this is also a part of Chinese nationalism.

In terms of the Chinese nationalism in previous chapter, Chinese identified “the Chinese” as contemporary national identity which represents the union of ethnicity. Especially out of China, in order to improve national confidences and establish global recognition, China use traditional elements to create the impression of “the Chinese”. This national identity is taking back to traditions, under this promotion, Chinese traditions frequently showed in pop-culture, it leads the Chinese traditional costumes turned into fashion trend.

From these points, Chinese national policies made the re-emergence of traditional dresses, and the national identity to Chinese is represented by a certain way of using

traditions. For contemporary Chinese women, their gender identity is that they are part of nation, when Chinese nationalism are looking back to traditions and interesting in traditional dresses, wearing traditional wedding dress among help Chinese women to express that they being part of nation and construct contemporary Chinese society. Therefore, wearing traditional wedding dresses is a way to express Chinese women' gender identity and national identity.

6.5.2 Han Traditions as Basis of Chinese National Identity

Although there is a desire for Chinese to see a one Chinese identity, this national identity is created and only base on few ethnicities. As previous chapter, China is a multi-ethnic/multi-nationalities country, a total of 56 nationalities, the Han people reached 90-96 percent, another 55 minority nationalities account for only 4-10 percent.

From this, even if minority nationalities construct Chinese multi-ethnicity and multi-culture, when the Han population clearly over others, this Han ethnicity and its culture now go to represent China and not others. On the other hand, "the Chinese" culture in today is created and pushed by Chinese modern life, although there are 56 nationalities in China, the social expectation of "the Chinese" is repeating by national narrative, that influence people's sense of belonging and create Chinese nationalism.

The *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂 are only two types of traditional wedding dresses, but there still are other traditional dresses from different ethnic group, this two types were selected to represent China for people now, this is because of that

Han as majority and choose to wear *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂, under this repeating of national narrative, Chinese national culture were constructed in this context. Han ethnic group and their type of dresses were supported to represent all of China. Obviously, some ethnic groups have lost in this hegemonic taking on multi-ethnicity, they are not allowed to represent contemporary China. Nonetheless, it does not mean that minority nationalities have to follow the Han cultures, these minority nationalities still have the right to choose their local dress and cultures. But, some minority women also choose to wear *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂, because in contemporary time, Han identity is still seen as the main pillar for contemporary Chinese national identity.

6.5.3 New Meaning of *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂

From the above points, this research found that the re-emergence of traditional wedding dresses bases on women's desires of the traditions, the meaning of traditions for women has changed from the good blessings of individual symbols to expression of women's gender identity and national identity. In history, when women get married, they need to made their own wedding dresses, they choose to embroider symbols which carry their longings of future life. By comparison, contemporary Chinese women rent or purchase wedding dresses, they do not choose symbols as long as these dresses looks traditional style. Therefore, in contemporary time, women trace back to traditional look dresses to express themselves rather than real traditional symbols with traditional meaning, they

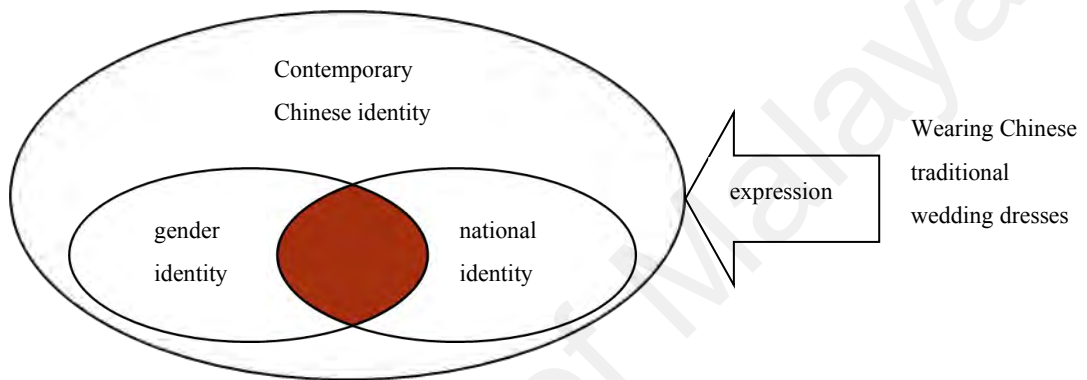
no longer focus on symbolism of each symbol's meaning, but to look at entire dress as representation of traditions.

Likewise, *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂 are not exactly same with historical one, their historical shape are loose and wide, but they have become fitting in present, these two types of *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂 look traditional, but they are not real traditional dresses. From the Chinese femininity in Qing dynasty, although women show their skinny beauty by flat chest and loosening shoulder, they paid more attention on showing their virtue of obedient, filial and loving in family, *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂 did not to show body line on that time. However, in contemporary time, women prefer to express their beauty by showing sexy body lines, *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂 use tailored bust, narrow waist to show contemporary Chinese femininity, while, these two types keep the traditional look and traditional symbols. Thus, in contemporary time, *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂 have loosed their real traditional meaning, they are regarded as the representation of traditions to help women to express contemporary Chinese identity formation.

6.5.4 Conclusion of Neo-tradition of Chinese Wedding Dresses

In conclusion, this research found that the meanings of *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂 have changed. In history, dresses' symbolic meaning was on embroidery symbols, individual symbols with their auspicious meaning can bring good blessings. In

contemporary time, the meaning has changed to looking at entire dresses, because contemporary women choose to wear traditional wedding dresses to express their Chinese identity, and this identity includes that “the Chinese” national identity and Chinese women’s gender identity of women being part of Chinese nation. According to these ideas, here gives a chart to illustrate contemporary Chinese identity.



CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

From the previous literatures, no research specifically to identify contemporary Chinese gender and national identity formation from *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂, and also no one to explain what these Chinese traditional wedding dresses meant in contemporary time. In order to fix this gap, this research attempts to compare *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂 and their embroidery patterns from the historical and contemporary time and to highlight the changes in symbolism, also to research the reasons for the re-emergence of the traditional Chinese wedding dress as a representation of contemporary national identity formation and gender identity formation. From this, there are 2 research questions want to answer:

1. How has the symbolic meaning of embroidery patterns with Chinese traditional wedding dresses changed from past to contemporary?
2. What can the new symbolism of the embroidery on the contemporary traditional wedding dress tell us about the gender and national identity formations of the young contemporary Chinese woman?

In order to answer these questions, this research studied on symbols and Chinese traditional wedding dresses in the history and present, also studied Chinese gender identities and national identities in both historical and contemporary China. Until to now, this research founded, the re-emergence reasons of Chinese traditional wedding dresses in contemporary ceremony is because of Chinese national policies, China use

traditional symbols to create the impression of “the Chinese”. Under these promotion, traditional elements frequently showed in pop-culture, it leads the Chinese traditional costumes turned into fashion trend.

Furthermore, this research also founded, in contemporary time, embroidery patterns’ appearance is similar with historical one, the traditional wedding dresses *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂 are also similar between history and present, only the shape of these dresses changed to curve body line. However, the symbolic meaning of symbols and dresses have changed, unlike the historical meaning focusing on individual symbol, the meaning in today is looking at the entire dress as representation of tradition, that people recognize symbols with dresses as a whole, and the whole help women to express their contemporary Chinese identity which includes gender identity and national identity.

In contemporary time, Chinese women’ place have changed, women participate in social activities and identify themselves as part of China, this gender identity is part of Chinese national identity, and women want to express that they being part of nation and construct contemporary Chinese society, while, this Chinese national identity are “the Chinese” which based on the Han- majority ethnic group.

In a word, what is meaningful about contemporary *xiu he fu* 秀禾服 and *long feng gua* 龙凤褂, in today context, it is not found in the individual symbol’s auspicious meaning, although in history the emphasis was on each symbol’s auspicious meaning, today

people look at the entire dress as symbolizing Chinese tradition to express Chinese contemporary gender identity and national identity.

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