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DEDICATION

To my grandmother, Charlotte Sim,
for providing me with endless inspiration,
always with impeccable style.

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RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse explore les résultats d'un projet de recherche multi-volets qui étudie le lien entre les vêtements et l'identité ethnique ainsi que les stratégies post-coloniales dans l'art contemporain. Avec un accent sur le cheongsam, un vêtement qui est devenu un symbole internationalement reconnu de l'identité culturelle chinoise pour les femmes, ce projet apporte une contribution originale à la recherche sur les femmes nées au Canada d'origine chinoise entre 1967-1987 tout en proposant une nouvelle réflexion sur les stratégies post-coloniales et l'installation en art contemporain qui comprend la spécificité du site, l'inclusivité transculturelle et les méthodes de recherche ethnographiques et autoethnographiques combinées. Ce projet a été réalisé avec une approche méthodologique interprétative et qualitative, et comprend la création d'une installation de trois œuvres interdépendantes qui combinent la vidéo projection multipiste, l'audio et les objets sculpturaux. Basée sur un cadre théorique féministe et post-colonial, une analyse critique des entretiens avec une vingtaine de participants (qui inclut ma propre expérience en tant que femme canadienne d'origine chinoise et philippine), cette thèse recherche-création jette une lumière nouvelle sur le cheongsam et sa relation complexe avec les femmes nées au Canada d'origine chinoise à travers une installation multidisciplinaire et multifacette.

Mots clés: cheongsam, vêtements ethnique, identité, hybridité, diaspora, patrimoine, multiculturalisme, authenticité, art d'installation, post-colonialisme, art contemporain.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the results of a multi-pronged research project that investigates the link between ethnic clothing and identity as well as post-colonial strategies in contemporary art. With a focus on the cheongsam, a garment which has become a internationally recognized symbol of Chinese cultural identity for women, this project makes an original contribution to research on Canadian born women of Chinese heritage born between 1967-1987 while proposing new thought on post-colonial strategies for installation in contemporary art that includes site specificity, transcultural inclusivity and combined ethnographic and autoethnographic research methods. This project was carried out with an interpretive, qualitative methodological approach and the creation of an installation of three inter-related works that combine multi-channel video projection, sculptural objects, and audio. Based on a feminist and post-colonial theoretical framework, a critical analysis of interviews with twenty participants (which includes my own experience as a Canadian woman of mixed Chinese-Filipino heritage), this research-creation dissertation sheds new light on the cheongsam and its complicated relationship with Canadian born women of Chinese Heritage through an equally multi-faceted art installation.

Key Words: cheongsam, ethnic clothing, identity, hybridity, diaspora, heritage, multiculturalism, authenticity, installation art, post-colonial, contemporary art.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Multiculturalism does not fit all

My mother was born in the small town of Kabankalan in the Philippines. My father was born in Swatow, China, and spent much of his childhood and adolescence in Hong Kong. They met at the University of Houston, Texas, and made their way to Canada in the late 1960s. In my mind, they were model immigrants, as they were ambitious, hard working, knew how to speak English and were happy to adapt to Canadian culture and society. Changes to the Canadian Immigration Act at that time facilitated their application to become Canadian citizens and this was eventually approved. I am their first child, born in Hamilton, Ontario, in 1971. That same year, Canada adopted multiculturalism as a policy, which according to the official website promotes "the value and dignity of all Canadian citizens regardless of their racial or ethnic origins, their language, or their religious affiliation." (http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/multiculturalism/citizenship.asp). My parents embraced this message, as did many newly arrived immigrants to Canada at that time. But as I got older and was made aware that I was different in Canadian society, multiculturalism's rosy statements started to ring hollow. The awareness of my difference started in kindergarten where I attended a public school in the town of Burlington, Ontario. I enjoyed school and thought I was getting along OK, until one day our teacher gave us an exercise on what must have been categorization. She wanted to use eye colour as a way to understand this concept and had created a large chart with the words "blue," "green," "hazel" and "brown" written down the left hand column. As each child was called upon, he or she was asked to come up to the chart and place a sticker next to the word that represented their eye colour. Blue-eyed children received blue stickers, green-eyed children got green stickers and so on. I

waited patiently to be called, along with the brown-eyed children, but never was. When it seemed like the teacher was going to wrap up the exercise, I raised my hand and asked if I could put my sticker on the chart. The teacher sighed, grabbed an orange sticker, attacked it with a black magic marker, and handed it to me. I slowly rose, feeling quite humiliated, and put my improvised sticker on a separate line - the one I supposed was for black-eyed children. From that point on, my difference was clearly articulated and this incident would be the first of other racialized incidents I was to encounter throughout my childhood. These would shape and motivate my wish to not be visibly different and above all to be as 'Canadian' as possible. Gradually I began to disown the signifiers of my difference. I complained about eating Chinese food and used a product called 'Sun-in' to bleach my hair. Over time, I eschewed my ethnic heritages in an attempt to assimilate dominant white Canadian culture. As an adult, I have come to terms with and now celebrate my difference and have been empowered by what I have learned on the margins. But it was a long journey that cost me my connection with my ethnic heritages and I contend that this was aided by the double discourse articulated by the utopian rhetoric of Canadian multiculturalism.

Canada's drive to promote a different form of inclusive immigration started in the 1940s as the country sought to further its economic growth and to establish itself as a nation. As settler nations were not providing enough population growth to satisfy these goals, it became clear that immigration would need to be adopted. However, the cultivation of the idea that immigrants might take part in Western prosperity was relatively new, since Canada already had a long history of using cheap migrant labour to build its infrastructural foundations. Peter S. Li's *The Chinese in Canada* (1988), presents a prime example of how Chinese migrant workforces were instrumentalized in Canada. He describes how the emigration of Chinese people began in the mid-nineteenth century due to the famine, poverty, and economic instability caused by war and natural disasters. In order to better their chances of survival, the Chinese left in droves, landing in parts of Southeast Asia, Latin America and North America. He

explains that in Canada, the arrival of the first wave of Chinese male emigrants came in response to the 1858 gold rush in Fraser Canyon, British Columbia. Settlements emerged and throughout the 1860s the Chinese were useful to the British settlers as they worked twice as hard for less pay than white men, and were tolerated as long as they did not claim citizenship or any other rights. Li writes that, between 1881 and 1885, throughout the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway, as many as 17 000 Chinese men were brought to Canada through a 'coolie trade' which amounted to indentured servitude. The CPR was essential to Canada's union as a country, linking both coasts, and as a way for goods to be distributed across the country from its port in Vancouver. The CPR, therefore, played a paramount role in Canada's commercial and political success. Despite the contribution of their blood and sweat, the Chinese were simply a cheap form of labour and not credited for their contribution to Canada's emergence as a geographically unified nation. By the 1940s, the government's attitude to migrant labour changed significantly, as immigration by that time, was viewed as integral to Canada's establishment as a postwar nation. As a result of the misfortunes that befell countries around the world new waves of immigrants arrived in Canada over the next thirty years. The policy on multiculturalism was eventually brought in to address the many issues that had arisen as a result of the diversification of Canada's population.

At first view the multiculturalism policy promotes Canada as an attractive and level playing field where immigrants from anywhere may come to access this land of opportunity. However, as Eva Mackey contends in, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada* (2002), the policy was put in place:

> ...to respond to the range of complex and potentially dangerous conflicts in the cultural politics of Canadian nationalism, including the threat of Québec separatism, demands for recognition by immigrants and other minorities, and the need for immigrants to fuel prosperity. It also intersected with the need, seen as a natural 'evolution' of nationhood, to construct a unified and distinct national identity to differentiate itself from the USA and Britain. (2002, p.70)

To underscore this point, Mackey describes how a 1985 document published by Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada described multiculturalism as 'a great national bandage' "that helps to heal the 'national fabric'." (2002, p.67)

Finally, while the policy claims that "all citizens can keep their identities", (http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/multiculturalism/citizenship.asp). The fine print reveals that immigrants may do so only with the understanding that a dominant culture informed principally by Anglo-Saxon traditions and values should be accepted as the norm and therefore be practiced in public, everyday life. Despite the policy's aims to project an image of openness and 'tolerance', I share Mackey's contention that it actually contributes to the articulation of difference and the reinforcement of unequal power relations between an immigrant 'other' and a dominant Anglo-Saxon 'national' culture. She argues that:

> The policy has been critiqued for maintaining the idea of British Canadians as the 'norm', in relation to 'multicultural' Canadians. In this construction of culture, we have a core Canadian national culture as a 'whole way of life', and the 'multicultures' exist as fragments of culture, only valued for the ways in which they contribute to this 'whole way of life' of the national culture. (2002, p.67)

She further illustrates this point by citing what C. Mullard calls "a 'three Ss' model of culture, which features "saris, samosas and bands' in order to diffuse the 'three R's': 'resistance, rebellion and rejection.'" (2002, 67) Mackey also cites Kogila Moodley's argument that Canadian multiculturalism "promotes a 'festive aura of imagined consensus'". (2002, 67) In other words, the celebration of ethnic food and dance gives us the impression that people are 'equal regardless', when in reality it has been tacitly agreed that we must conform to a dominant cultural norm. The desire I had as a child to assimilate in order to gain acceptance into Canadian society was not something I had invented, but rather, was greatly encouraged. If I could blend in, I would get along just fine.

What I have tried to do so far is to establish how government discourses, such as the policy on Canadian multiculturalism articulate differences between a preferred dominant culture and an immigrant 'Other' in Canadian society as part of the nation-building project. Through a more in-depth consideration of the work of Peter S. Li (1988), Eva Mackey (2002), Bonnie Mah (2005) and Farha Shariff (2008), I will attempt to outline the importance of undertaking research on second generation, Canadian-born children of immigrants as it sheds light on how hegemonic forces compelled this generation to eschew their ethnic heritages, as I did, in an attempt to find acceptance in mainstream society.

While the immigrant experience in Canada has been well documented by academics such as Gerald Tulchinsky, with his 2008 book *Canada's Jews: A People's Story*, the 2011 book *The African Diaspora in Vancouver* by Gillian Creese and Antona Fanella's 1999 ethnographic study *With Heart and Soul Calgary's Italian Community*, the experience of the children of immigrants, in particular children of visible minority immigrants born in Canada, is still largely unexplored. I argue that a closer look at this particular group reveals a deeper understanding not only of the complexities of being 'in between' but also the tactics and strategies employed by second generation Canadians to survive and thrive. One aspect of Canadian-born children of visibly racialized immigrants that I argue is specific to second generation Canadians, is the very notion of entitlement and the rights accorded by virtue of being born in Canada. As government discourses such as the multiculturalism policy are aimed at building a sense of national identity, while defining an immigrant 'other' from the dominant cultural majority, it would stand to reason that someone born in Canada would feel she/he had the edge over immigrants in terms of 'rights' and privileges. My own childhood survival instincts indicated that it was important to lay claim to my nationality, to say that I was Canadian and to underscore and highlight that I was born in Canada. This would be an irrefutable fact to offer those who would

question my provenance and therefore my 'place' in Canada. From my experience, this sense of a 'national birthright' is a shared phenomenon amongst second generation Canadians and explains why there is great frustration felt towards the continued asking of the question 'Where are you from?'. By way of an example from my own experience, I recall that in 1994 I was sending out a Canada Council grant for my first video *A Few Colourful Phrases*. This art video was about the very experience of being asked where I was from on a regular basis, despite having been born and raised in Canada. As if by some divine comedic intervention, the FEDEX courier, a Francophone man of European heritage, actually asked me where I was from while I filled out the waybill. It was then that I was convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that in mainstream culture, people of colour are not considered 'from here'. My desire, therefore, to assimilate into dominant culture was strongly motivated by the need to prove that despite racialization, I was just as Canadian as the FEDEX person. The 'Where are you from?' question, therefore, reveals the underlying message that a racialized person of colour must justify his or her presence in Canada. How did these entrenched attitudes form? I looked to the experience of the Chinese in Canada, as I got the sense early on that Chinese people were often vilified in Canadian society. Peter S. Li (1988) describes the situation of Chinese immigrants in Canada, from their first arrival in the mid 1800s to their current situation in the late twentieth century, which reveals much about the constraints on immigrants and in particular those marked by 'race'. He explains:

> As long as Chinese-Canadians remain relatively few in number and confined to traditional immigrant enclaves in Canadian cities, they are tolerated as cultural novelties that help to celebrate Canada's multiculturalism and diversity. But as soon as Chinese-Canadians expand in number and excel economically and socially, their legitimate place in Canadian society comes into question, often on the superficial grounds that they represent a foreign culture with values and customs that are presumed to be incompatible with Canada's European traditions and established institutions. (1988, p.143-44)

With this statement Li outlines the Canadian government's political and economic interests in Chinese migrant labour. He further traces the emergence of racialized discourses that shaped public, mainstream attitudes and impacted on the lives of Chinese people and their Canadian-born children:

> Pseudo-scientific ideas about race were widely propagated during the colonial period, and the Chinese who went to British Columbia in the nineteenth century were immediately burdened with negative images and stereotypes. But it was the unequal conditions under which the Chinese were incorporated into the Canadian economy and society that gave new substance to racism. By the time Chinese labour was no longer required for the development of the west, anti-Orientalism had become a rallying principle that white politicians, labour unionists, workers, and employers alike could use to advance their immediate interests. As exclusion and segregation of the Chinese – politically, economically, and socially – became entrenched in Canadian society, the image of the Chinese as inferior was constantly reaffirmed and substantiated. (1988, p. 43)

Eva Mackey (2002) further reveals the opacity of the multiculturalism policy which effectively renders the 'white' Canadian population blind to both the existence of a dominant culture and their privilege within it. She argues that because white Canadians buy into the idea that they are 'tolerant', they become oblivious to the reality of inequalities on the ground and in policy. In order to come to this conclusion, Mackey carried out field work in 1992, a period which saw a revitalization of the national identity question and the re-emergence of 'identity politics' which coincided with the Canadian government's perception that there existed a 'constitutional crisis'. To mitigate the so-called crisis and to promote and reinforce a sense of Canadian identity, the government organized a campaign of festivities across Canada called 'Canada 125'. Mackey attended and studied these celebrations "designed to mobilise local people for patriotism and national unity" (2002, p.7) as they offered a prime ethnographic opportunity to explore the "construction of national and local identities." (2002, p.7) Her work entailed

participant observation and interviews with people who attended these events as well as cultural workers and high-level bureaucrats involved in the 'Canada 125' initiative. The results of her investigation and analysis allowed her to assemble a portrait of the attitudes of 'ordinary' Canadians towards the concept of Canadian identity. Her study exposed some surprising truths for a country that promotes itself to the world as 'open' and 'tolerant'. She explains:

> One striking consistency in the interviews I did at small-town local festivals was the degree of anti-immigrant sentiment expressed in the language of populism, in a discourse of the oppressed and resistant 'ordinary people'. (1999, p.33)

With this observation, a polemic relationship is revealed between so-called 'ordinary people' and immigrants that becomes particularly apparent when it comes to the sharing of resources. Mackey asked white festival-goers to describe Canadian identity by posing a set of questions designed to gauge their reaction to the government's distribution of public money to help ethnic communities mount organizations and special events. In general, the respondents believed that it was unfair to use 'their' (public) money for these purposes. With these findings, Mackey concluded that while multiculturalism is fine for bringing in diversity on a superficial level, the true sharing of resources does come with serious reservations. Mackey's critical analysis further exposes the Canadian government's double message of promoting a multicultural face to the world while discretely cultivating a culturally dominant one that is "unmarked, non-ethnic, and usually (a) white, '*Canadian*-Canadian' identity". (2002, p.20) Rather than defending equality and plurality, the policy reinforces a model of a normative national identity or a culture of '*Canadian*-Canadians', which fails to recognize that everyone in Canada, apart from First Nations and Inuit people, has arrived from somewhere else. Furthermore, the concept of the *Canadian*-Canadian ideal is inherently flawed because of the linguistic fracture line that is a result of English and French settler history that goes back to the founding of Canada. In this way, it is revealed that Canada never was, as in the case

of all nation states, a homogenous and 'purely' united culture and the idea of a nation state is but a utopic one. Government rhetoric such as that surrounding 'multiculturalism' reinforces dominant cultural norms through the hegemonic forces of schools, government programs, such as 'Canada 125', and other cultural institutions, such as the CBC and the NFB to effectively to tell us what 'Canadian' is and looks like. The observations made by Li and Mackey support the hypothesis that a dominant Canadian culture has been formed and is reinforced by a range of hegemonic tools. What I contend is that the concept of an 'ideal' Canadian has greatly impacted on the children of immigrants born in Canada (second generation Canadians) and the connection that they have as adults with their ethnic heritages.

In her thesis, *Ethnic Identity and Heritage Language Ability in Second Generation Canadians in Toronto* (2005), Bonnie Mah examines the link between heritage language, ethnic identity and a sense of belonging to the community associated with one's ethnic identity. The authors in her review of literature find that the loss of heritage language, what they call the "language shift", contributes in a significant way to the "loss of ethnic identity, cultural fragmentation and 'non-authentic' expressions of ethnicity." (2005, p.3) Research carried out for my Master's thesis, inspired by my experience as a Canadian-born daughter of visible minority immigrants, demonstrated that the attempt to assimilate into dominant culture indeed resulted in the loss of heritage language(s) skills and this deficiency in turn compromised my sense of connection to my ethnic origins. The loss of language caused by an attempt at assimilation instilled a true feeling of distance from my Chinese roots, emphasized by my mixed heritage appearance. According to my research, this feeling of distance from one's ethnic heritage is particularly common for people of colour in Canada. Scholar Farha Shariff shares my preoccupation with the importance of studying Canadian-born children of visible minority immigrants, as they are the first generation to be born in Canada as a result of major waves of immigration from countries other than Europe, and can tell us much about the

formation of ethnic and national identities in the context of Canada's social power dynamics. In her article "Straddling the Cultural Divide: Second-Generation South Asian Identity and The Namesake" (2008), she explains:

> The children of the post-1965 wave of immigrants are less visible in the media, and in academic literature. Although this group of second-generation Canadians have moved into adulthood and created their own social, personal, professional and familial spaces, their ethnic and national identity development has not been adequately researched. Exploration of second-generation Canadian identity is timely and significant in light of new research that questions the efficacy of official multiculturalism for the children of visible minority Canadians who exhibit 'a more profound sense of exclusion than their parents' (2008, p.457-458).

According to Shariff's research, second generation Canadians, born around and after the adoption of the Canadian Multiculturalism policy, experienced racism and intolerance, at both small and large scales, throughout their childhood and adolescence. Attempts at assimilation were part of a strategy of survival in an environment where normativity was greatly preferred over diversity. I use 'attempts' at assimilation to underscore the contention made by Homi K.Bhabha and others that for people of colour, appearance inevitably excludes assimilation. Bhabha's famous formulation "almost the same, but not quite" from the paper "Of Mimicry and Man: The ambivalence of colonial discourse" (1994) has also been paraphrased as 'not quite/not white' to drive home how skin colour is an immediately visible and constant factor in this equation. These attempts at assimilation on a large scale have resulted in the loss of heritage language, the disappearance of any meaningful connection with the communities of one's ethnic backgrounds and possibly a sense of betrayal by the 'immigrant dream', where the idea of living in this land of plenty where all people would be equal, quickly dissipated. Happily however, my research also shows that these children, born in Canada, after the first major waves of immigration from countries other than Europe, have now grown into adults who have successfully established their place in Canada, despite the ongoing 'where are your from?'

question. Furthermore, they have come to embrace their ethnic heritage(s). With a sense of Canadian cultural understanding firmly in place, I contend that there is a growing desire among second generation, Canadian-born people of a variety of ethnicities, in particular those who are racialized, to find ways to rediscover and re-connect with their eschewed ethnic heritages.

My research has found that there are myriad ways to find communion with one's long lost ethnic origins. Food, music, dance, language lessons, and the observation of certain customs and holidays are among them. What I have discovered for myself, however, is the significance of wearing ethnic clothing to experiment with the reclaiming of my heritages, in particular, my Chinese heritage. This dissertation project is, therefore, part of a personal quest that puts the focus on the cheongsam or Chinese dress as an object and subject through which to explore, through art, the condition of Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage today. What was it like for us to grow up in Canada? What is our relationship to the cheongsam? How might I convey these observations through an art installation?

1.2 Context: The art of cheongsam

I have been a professional musician working across many genres over the last twenty years. In the mid-2000s I wore a cheongsam for a concert in Montreal. It was a long dress with a pink floral pattern on a black background that I still have and wear today. The material is a good quality silk polyester blend, which was a typical fabric for the mid-1960s when it was made. When my parents got engaged they went to Hong Kong to visit my father's family. His parents took my mother to their bespoke tailor who created a number of garments for her to take home. Included among these was the dress I wore for the concert.

Figure 1. Author (center, background) at opening the exhibition *La Cabine d'Essayage / The Fitting Room* wearing the black cheongsam she also wore for a concert. Photo: Victor Sim

After the concert, I was approached by a Chinese journalist who asked me to be a guest on her television show about Chinese Montrealers. Being of mixed heritage, I was amazed to be recognized as Chinese when all my life I had 'passed' as a foreigner within the Chinese community. When I asked what led her to speculate that I was Chinese, she simply said, "It was the dress". The cheongsam, which means 'long dress' in Cantonese, has become internationally recognized as a symbol of Chinese cultural identity for women. Originating from a combination of Han and Manchu clothing styles, an amalgamation which attests to the legacy of the historical events in China that led to exposure to American fashion and Western values in the 1920's and 30's, the contemporary cheongsam has evolved into a fitted dress, typically made from satin brocade, with a high collar, side slits and intricate fastenings, referred commonly to as 'frogs'.

Figure 2. Woman in red, brocade cheongsam with yellow piping and fastenings

On-line image: Asian Inspirations https://asianinspirations.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/CNY-Outfit-QiPao-Chang-Pao-11.jpg, Retrieved April 11, 2015

While I have always been convinced of the power of clothing to communicate messages, I had not fully understood why I had chosen to wear the cheongsam for the concert, a dress that is charged with intense political and cultural readings. My inability to fully articulate these impulses led me to investigate clothing and its relationship to identity through a Master's project. With a focus on the cheongsam or Chinese dress, the main research question I asked myself was whether a connection to one's ethnic heritage could be meaningfully expressed through the wearing of clothing associated with that heritage. My research culminated in the creation of a 32-minute single-channel video entitled *Ode to the Cheongsam,* which examines attitudes, ideas, impressions and wearing practices of the cheongsam by Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage living in Montreal. Is there a desire to re-claim or appropriate the cheongsam? Does this desire risk perpetuating stereotypes and negative narratives about Asian women? Does wearing the cheongsam undermine the assertion of one's 'Canadian-ness'? Interviews, poetic voiceovers, clips from Wong Kar Wai's film *In the Mood for Love*, family photos, archival images, a pop song and the documentation of the making of a cheongsam, were the principal elements that formed a multi-layered portrait of what this dress means at the beginning of the 21st century, for Montreal-based, Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage. What this research ultimately revealed is a relationship between Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage and the cheongsam, a relationship which is deeply complex and characterized by intense ambivalence. Stimulated by this initial research, I was compelled to undertake this doctoral project that would expand on my original sample to include more Francophone women as well as women born in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario. Through an expanded artistic proposal that would take me out of the familiar terrain of single-channel video in order to explore installation, *La Cabine d'essayage / The Fiting Room* would delve even further into the relationship between the cheongsam and Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage. As research on the cheongsam and its relation to Canadian women of Chinese heritage has not yet been documented or published in academic literature,

nor has it been the focus of any projects in contemporary art, this dissertation project constitutes an original contribution to studies on ethnic clothing, this under-examined generation of women of immigrant parents, and intercultural, trans-cultural and post-colonial strategies and approaches in contemporary art

As mentioned earlier, I do not speak or read any Chinese language, nor do I 'typically' resemble a Chinese person (according to what I am told by Chinese people when they discover I have Chinese heritage). As a result, the great majority of Chinese in Canada and elsewhere most often regard me as a non-Chinese. The expectations associated with a 'typical' Chinese appearance can be linked with the discourse of archetypes cultivated by Western media as well as an essentialized notion of 'Chineseness' perpetuated by China itself. While I will discuss this more in depth later, what I want to emphasize at this point is that the wearing of ethnic clothing underscores ethnicity and, therefore, can fuel a desire to mark one's self as belonging to the community associated with that ethnic clothing. At the same time, the wearing of ethnic clothing may pose a risk to those who do not wish to emphasize their ethnicity. With this idea in mind, the cheongsam or Chinese dress, offers a fascinating and vital site of exploration for its potential to further complicate the concept of identity and representation in the Canadian context.

1.3 Research Questions

The resulting installation was called *La Cabine d'Essayage / The Fitting Room* and was motivated by two inter-related goals and questions. The first was to explore in greater depth, the relationship between the cheongsam and women of Chinese heritage born in Canada between 1967 and 1987. What was the nature of this relationship? What aspects of this relationship might be static, while others are mutable or in flux? Taking this first goal and set of questions as the subject matter for an artwork, the second goal consists of extending my practice from single channel

video to one that included multi-channel media, multiple screens, objects and installation approaches as strategies to explore this rich and complex subject in new and original ways. How might an engagement with space, context and trans-cultural narratives support the exposition of the relationship between the cheongsam and Canadian born women of Chinese heritage and yet resonate with a general audience? How might I employ approaches that will support my dedication to presenting a multiplicity of voices?

The results of my research offered an opportunity for a non-Chinese public, and the variegated Chinese community in Montreal, to become aware of the situation and condition of Canadians of Chinese heritage in the context of an installation that pivoted on a powerful cultural icon and artifact. As the project speaks directly to the experiences of people of Chinese heritage born in Canada, the installation also provided a safe space for discussion and sharing to take place. This latter experience exposed one of the most under-explored consequences of cross-cultural artforms: their potential to serve as community-based media for the open dissemination of advanced historical, socio-cultural research as well as working as forums for the exchange of ideas and opinions.

1.4 Defining language and terms: cheongsam vs. qipao

The meaning of the word for this dress varies according to region and Chinese language. In mainland China and Taiwan, where the main language is Mandarin, this dress is referred to as *qipao – qi* which means 'banner' or 'flag' and *pao* which means 'robe'. *Qipao* is a direct reference to the clothing of the Manchu people. Also called *Qi* people or "Banner people", the Manchu ruled China during the Qing dynasty (1644 – 1911) which would be the country's last. The term "banner" refers to the system of 'Eight Banners' under which Manchu families were administratively organized.

In Hong Kong and Singapore, where the predominant dialect of use was and still is Cantonese, the dress is most often referred to as cheongsam which means "long dress" or robe and refers to the one-piece garment first worn by Han men at the end of the Qing dynasty and later appropriated by women. The Chinese characters for this dress are the same whether it is for a man or a woman (旗袍).

Regarding this brief etymology of terms, it is clear that the term 'qipao', contrary to many historians' explanations, is not merely the Mandarin word for cheongsam. The use of these terms unpacks the historical events and political struggles that shaped relations between Mainland China, Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan, and in turn speaks to the importance of clothing and its use in carving out power relations. While knowledge of this garment and its subsequent influence came to me through my Cantonese-speaking grandmother and extended Chinese family, who lived in Hong Kong for many years, I have come to know this dress as the cheongsam and therefore privilege this term in my usage. In the interests of consistency of terminology throughout this dissertation, I will use 'cheongsam' in all citations and references, even if the term originally used by the cited author is 'qipao', unless it is mentioned in the title of a book or essay. The word cheongsam is the same in both its singular and plural usage. (i.e. One cheongsam, many cheongsam)

Figure 3. My grandmother Charlotte Sim in cheongsam circa 1940s. Photo: unknown

1.5 Laying out the pieces

La Cabine d'Essayage / The Fitting Room revealed an unprecedented portrait of Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage through an exploration of the object and subject of the cheongsam. It brought social, cultural and political questions together with a desire to expand on installation practices in contemporary art that are culturally and critically engaged. As previously discussed, this research-creation project was also preoccupied with a transcultural mandate to examine the meaning of clothing and the act of dressing, as it relates to the construction of identity, the representation of self and the performance of the body.

This dissertation is composed of five chapters of which the central chapters are 2, 3 and 4. In Chapter 2, I will lay out the theoretical framework which, to use textile as a metaphor, is a weave of three thick conceptual threads: identity, ethnic clothing and installation in contemporary art. Each of these threads is made up of multiple fibers, which work together to support my research questions. The concept of identity will be the most discursive, with a starting point on the seminal writings of Stuart Hall, a crucial extension into a discussion of 'hybridity', as posited by Bhabha, and more recent theorizations on identity in the context of identity politics formulated by Rosaura Sanchez and Alison Weir. An elaboration on the concept and uses of 'hybridity' will follow to provide the basis for a discussion of the concept of identity in relation to Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage. The writings of Ien Ang and Peter S. Li provide a stimulating platform from which to consider the discourses of 'Chinese-ness' and Otherness which impact on issues of identity formation for people of Chinese heritage. The consideration of theories of identity is fundamental to my first research question, which in essence wishes to engage with the power of the cheongsam, to challenge notions of authenticity and representation, while examining how this dress shapes power dynamics connected to the expression of ethnicity. It is

through these theoretical writings that I will be able to discuss, for example, how I have come to disengage with the term 'diaspora' in order to articulate with more precision, the constituency or participants under investigation in this project.

For the second thread, I will engage with the study and theorization of ethnic clothing through the writings of Margaret Mayrand, Joanne Eicher and Sandra Niessen, Carla Jones and Ann Marie Leshcowicz. Each of them builds on the contention that ethnic dress is not simply a clear referent for a group with a common language, history and culture. Instead, its meanings are mutable, changing and have varied widely over time, a finding that challenges the notion that ethnic clothing is synonymous with tradition. These ideas, combined with Stuart Hall's foundational concept of the non-fixity of identity, allow us to consider the cheongsam as a tool of agency for Canadian women of Chinese heritage, to express and affirm their Chinese and Canadian heritages simultaneously, while finding empowerment through new modes of representation.

The third thread is art installation where I focus on Claire Bishop, Miwon Kwon and Jennifer Gonzalez' art historical perspectives on the development of practices in installation and site specificity. Claire Bishop lays the groundwork for my understanding of the potential of installation art practices, through the concepts of 'activation' and 'decentralization' which allow the visitor to experience the work from a multitude of perspectives, making the visitor essential to the completion of the work. Miwon Kwon adds to this reflection with an analysis of site-specific installation practices that engage with the real world outside the gallery space. Jennifer Gonzalez explores the work of five artists that employ site-specific strategies to examine the constructs of 'race'. The examples presented by Bishop, Kwon and Gonzalez provided important frames of reference for my reflections on the choice of context for the final installation.

The theoretical framework will be followed by a discussion of my multi-pronged, 'concentric methodology.' This project employs the practical and philosophical posture of research-creation, informed by a post-positivist, qualitative and interpretive methodological approach that combines the research methods of ethnography, autoethnography and historical research. What I mean by a concentric methodology is that within each of these methods are sub-processes that involve accumulation, appropriation and editing. I will describe how this methodology, which privileges a multiplicity of viewpoints, functions in concert with the creation of an artwork that wishes to be engaged both critically and formally.

Chapter 3 is organized into two sections. In Section 1, I will outline the history and evolution of the dress, drawing from the work of Hazel Clark, Wessieling, Juanjuan Wu and Antonia Finnane. Next, I will chronicle the cheongsam's arrival and proliferation in Canada, sourcing the publication *Jin Guo: Voices of Chinese Canadian Women* in addition to the website database, *Chinese Canadian Women, 1923-1967: Inspiration – Innovation – Ingenuity* produced by the Multicultural History Society of Ontario. My analysis of this historical research will serve my argument that the cheongsam is a 'cultural-political complex' that consists of a set of established discourses that inform its status and quality as a 'technology' shaped by historical, cultural and political events in China and further affected by popular culture in both China and Canada. In Section 2 of this chapter, I will undertake a thorough examination of the attitudes, ideas and feelings towards the dress as outlined by the responses from interviews I carried out with tweny Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage. This primary research reveals the wearing practices of the dress; whether women are wearing the dress or not, when and where it is worn, who can wear it and what it means. What my analysis will show is that the dress inspires deep and complex ambivalence. While it is admired for its beauty and its connection with family and Chinese heritage, it is also maligned for how it uncomfortably constricts the body and its association with essentialized

representations of the Chinese female, constructed by the patriarchal gaze. This analysis will also reveal an abiding interest in the concept of 'authenticity' that dictates when, where, how and by whom the cheongsam can be worn. In the final section of this analysis, I will discuss how the wearing of the cheongsam can be a tool of agency that reflects emergent conditions of possibility as a result of changing economic power dynamics between China and the West, a situation supported by the recent writings of Olivia Khoo and Sean Metzger. Taken together, these factors will show how the cheongsam is a technology that contributes to its characterization as a 'cultural-political complex'.

In Chapter 4, I will focus on an unpacking of the reasoning behind choices made for the final installation. I will give a review of key works in contemporary art that inspired my formal and conceptual decisions, with respect to their deployment of strategic approaches that support a feminist, post-colonial perspective that is manifested in what I call "politicized sensuousness". Next, I will explain my considerations around the choice of context for the installation, that contribute to an original reflection on site specificity. Afterwards, I will enter into a discussion of the research that influenced the creation of the three inter-related works that made up the installation.

The subject of ethnic identity for children of immigrants in Canada is complex and often brings forth emotions and memories that have long been suppressed. With this project, I hoped to demonstrate how artistic creation offers a vital and viable method for gathering research in areas that are difficult and inaccessible to reach, and can facilitate an exploration of the interstices and the inexpressible through strategies and methods that engage all of the senses.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

2.1 Determining the 'fabric'

The creation of a garment begins with an understanding of the material from which it will be made. Considerations related to the choice of fabric in turn affect the cut and design of the dress. How will it drape and flow on the body? When does the design dictate what types of fabric and weave will work best? Establishing these decisions is analogous to the construction of the theoretical framework for *La Cabine d'Essayage/The Fitting Room*, which consists of the interlocking of three major conceptual threads: identity, ethnic clothing and installation art. Together they articulate the exploration of the relationship between the cheongsam and women of Chinese heritage born in Canada between 1967 and 1987.

2.1.1 Identity

In the introduction to *Subject to Display* (2008), Jennifer Gonzales underscores the contribution of Stuart Hall as having been the one "who has perhaps done the most to successfully articulate the progressive possibilities and pitfalls of the concept of identity and the complex histories of identification that work through it." (2008, p.11) Indeed Hall's seminal essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1990) has become a theoretical touchstone for my own work. His major contribution to the discussion on identity is that it is a "production", which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation". (1993, p.222) Identity is a flexible and variable concept and, therefore, cannot be predetermined. It is informed by the external variables of place, history, culture and class, as well as personal

experiences that are always changing and evolving. In this way, the idea that identity is non-fixed can be a potent and empowering concept for second-generation Canadians who are looking for ways to reconcile the multiple aspects of their cultural identities in a context that puts people and things into neat categories. As briefly discussed in the Introduction, I am often asked where I am from in my own country of birth. Each of the women interviewed had this same experience growing up and this type of questioning persists today. Their answers to this question vary, depending on the context and the person that is doing the asking. For each of these women, however, the question "where are you from?" continues to give pause, sending them into a frozen moment where they must at once, consider their place of birth, their heritage, and their social and cultural conditioning, when forced to realize that assumptions have been prompted by their external appearance. In her chapter entitled "On a Critical Realist Theory of Identity" from *Identity Politics Reconsidered* (2006), Rosaura Sànchez affirms that "identities are necessarily also multiple" (2006, p.41) and argues for what she calls a "critical realist politics of identity" (2006, p.32) as a way to locate agency and self-determination for people of colour systemically disenfranchised by 'race' and class. What was most helpful to my project was her distinction between the term 'identity' and 'identification', a differentiation which helps to articulate the potential for emancipation, both through a collective and individual sense of identity. Sànchez writes that identification is:

> ...a relational and discursive process that is always linked to a group or collectivity that is contained within a particular social space...it can emerge from outside or from within a social group or space. (2006, p.39-40)

For Canadian-born people of Chinese heritage, experiences with racism and racialization at an early age are part of an externally generated 'identification' formation process, whose visceral effects have mutated over time. For many of the women I interviewed, the effect was initially what Sànchez terms, 'non-identification' with their Chinese heritage. Later on in life, however, this distancing

or rejection would transform into a vital re-identification with their Chinese heritage that would bring solace and empowerment through connection with a larger community of Canadian-born people of Chinese heritage. Sànchez' theory of identity takes individual subjectivity into consideration and connects it to a collective group sensibility that shares a similar experience. Identity is, therefore, defined as:

> ... always agential; it involves an awareness of identification as a containment process and entails a conscious acceptance of a designation, that is, of a discourse, whether it be imposed from the outside or generated within a group. (2006, p.41)

In this way, identification imposed by external forces can be simultaneously limiting and emancipating, while impacting on one's sense of identity, which as Sanchèz contends is above all, "a discourse that serves to mediate between the individual and the world." (2006, p.42) Many things inform this discourse, including the process and effects of identification, which together, according to Sanchèz, can contribute to a sense of identity that is self-affirmed and ultimately liberating. She illustrates the relationship between identity and identification through the situation of Latinos who have grown up in the predominantly white communities of the Midwest. She argues that once they migrate to bigger cities, they begin to experience racialization, which makes them "acutely aware of the identification process and of their designation as members of a particular group. At that point, their positionality, the way they view their positioning, is forced to undergo a major shift". (Sànchez, 2006, p.41) While they come to their own sense of identity through their own process of individual evolution, they are also nurtured by external factors such as family, school and community. According to Sanchèz, once they come into contact with racialization, their sense of identity is forever altered, and choices are made – agency is enacted – that bring about either a process of incorporation (identification) or a process of disavowal (non-identification). What is clear in her argument is that identity and

identification become linked through the realities of racialization and the perpetuation of discourses of ethnic 'difference'.

Alison Weir reinforces this idea in "Identities and Freedoms: Feminist Theory Between Power and Connection" (2013). Troubled by the critique of identity politics within academic circles, Weir attempts to take apart the notion of identity as 'shackle' to show how identities are "sources of resistance" (2013, p.2), that "are better understood as complex, rather than paradoxical", and that can be "recognized as sources of important values: of connections to ourselves, to each other, and to ideals; and that these in turn constitute sources of freedom for individuals and collectives." (2013, p.3) The heart of Weir's argument echoes Sanchèz' distinction between identification and identity and takes it a step further with the contention that:

> ...understanding identities as sources of freedom requires that we differentiate identity as category from identity as connection to and identification with ideals, each other and defining communities. Thus it involves a shift from a metaphysical to an ethical, political conception of identities, and to a focus on practical, ethical, and political identifications as practices of freedom. (2013, p.3)

For Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage within the context of this project, Weir's concept can help to get beyond the limitations of an essentialized notion of what it means to be Chinese or to be of Chinese heritage to allow for the inclusion and assertion of the multitude of complex and heterogeneous aspects of one's ethnic identity. For the women I interviewed, this can allow for the simultaneous embracing of a connection with Canadian-ness, with being of mixed-heritage and with wanting to belong. Taken together, Stuart Hall's seminal writings, and Rosaria Sanchèz' and Alison Weir's more recent theorizations on identity, provide a productive framework that can be used to advance the discussion on identity and in particular, ethnic identity today.

Hall's statement that identity is "constituted within, not outside, representation" (1990, p.222) aptly gets inside of 'race discourse' to unravel the effects of media on people of colour in Canada. Jennifer A. Gonzalez describes 'race discourse' as " the politics of representation...that insists on presenting people as "racialized" subjects". (2008, p.3) The under-representation and misrepresentation of people of colour, including Asian women in Hollywood cinema, television, magazines, advertising and other media, has had a profound impact on the women I interviewed. The dearth of people of colour in mainstream media effectively delineated the center from the margins, contributing to self-esteem issues and in many cases, especially for women of Chinese heritage born in the late 1960s into the early 80s, a rejection of one's ethnic heritage in favour of attempts to conform to dominant norms. What little images there were in mainstream media of women of colour were limited to exoticized voiceless stereotypes, such as the 'Asian dragon lady' or 'tragic prostitute'. By the early 90s, a new wave of cultural workers, artists, and activists took up the work of earlier pioneers to address issues of 'race' and representation in Canadian society which coincided with the upsurge of post-colonial theory and theory on the politics of identity and representation in the U.S., Britain and Australia. Slowly and painfully, more critical awareness emerged in Canadian institutions and resulted in concrete steps forward for the acknowledgement of the contribution and participation in the creation of visual culture by people of colour. Debates around 'political correctness' aside, the growing presence of non-racialized representations of Asian people in mainstream media, in particular film and fashion magazines, had an affirming effect on a number of the women interviewed for this project. Journalists such as Connie Chung in the United States started to appear on network news. Actresses such as Lucy Liu and Sandra Oh appeared in Hollywood films in which they portrayed independent and intelligent women. Slowly, it started to be possible to re-claim one's Chinese heritage with less fear of racialized comments and marginalization. Furthermore, as these women came into their own in Canadian society, confident in their ability to negotiate the terrain, it became increasingly

important to re-connect with their estranged ethnic identities, embracing them with all of their shifting potential. This shift was important to my project as it confirmed my interest in how media images can feed the re-imagining of one's own identity and re-inscribe one's process of identification in external social structures. In other words, it reinforced my fundamental interest in the ability of media images to alter perception and to empower.

Over the course of my research process, I have gone back and forth over the use of 'hybridity'as a theoretical concept and strategic practice in my work. The idea of 'hybridity', as I understood it, independent of scholarly theory, was a positive one, allowing me to 'be' all aspects of my ethnic heritages – Chinese and Filipino – while acknowledging my upbringing in *Canadian*-Canadian culture. Operating as a 'hybrid'of cultures was my strategy for survival, adopted from an early age in order to navigate the Canadian environment. Depending on the context, I was able to exercise these various aspects in an attempt to get by with as little tumult as possible. My first video work, *A Few Colourful Phrases* (1995), dealt specifically with the reconciliation of my identity as 'multiple', which I argued was the situation for all people. My eventual contact with 'hybridity' in post-colonial theory seemed to put a name to what I had been doing instinctively all along. In *The Location of Culture* (1995), Homi Bhabha states that a strategy of hybridity:

> ...unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power. (1995, p.159-60)

Bhabha's definition of hybridity appealed to me, as it affirmed the notion that my knowledge of the dominant culture could be employed for my own empowerment. While my attempts at assimilation had erased my heritage languages, they also informed me on how to excel, or in Bhabha's sense, to use hybridity as a strategy of subversion. There are, however, conditions of possibility that distinguish my

situation, such as my middle-class economic status which provided the means for the gaining of knowledge through travel (mobility) and post-secondary education. The issue of class points to some of the limitations of Bhabha's concept of hybridity which has been criticized for not fully considering the material and historical factors that put restrictions on a person or group's agency. Bhabha's concept has also been attacked for not constituting a truly subversive act that risks the re-inscription of a stereotyped ideal of a properly assimilated, 'colourful' and visible, post-colonial subject or 'model minority'. While these limitations have validity, what becomes crucial is not to throw out the concept of 'hybridity' altogether, but to approach it with unflinching criticality in the spirit described by Ien Ang in *On Not Speaking Chinese*. She writes:

> What we need to question, then, is not so much hybridity as such, which would be a futile enterprise, but the depoliticization involved in the reduction of hybridity to happy fusion and synthesis. I would argue that it is the *ambivalence* which is immanent to hybridity that needs to be highlighted, as we also need to examine the *specific contexts and conditions* in which hybridity operates. (2001, p.197)

Ang contends that for postcolonial and cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Trinh Minh-ha, Homi Bhabha and others, hybridity has "explicitly critical political purchase". (2001, p.198) She describes how hybridity can find its political expression through Hall and Gilroy's enunciation of a "hybrid speaking position they call 'Black British' – a mode of self-representation designed to interrogate hegemonic 'white' definitions of British national identity by interjecting it with blackness." (2001, p.198) Similarly, I can see how I have used my hybridity as insider/outsider as a strategy to negotiate all situations where I am marked as Other. Bolstered by Ang's writings, hybridity, therefore, remains a vital strategy in my work and describes my artistic approach from both conceptual and political standpoints. The type of hybridity that appeals to me is in keeping with Ang's assertion that it "is a sign of challenge and altercation, not of congenial amalgamation or merger" (2001, p.198). It

refers to an artistic approach that reflects a conceptual desire to use forms and genres in various combinations to allow for an ongoing mutability and flexibility in creation. From a political standpoint, hybridity in my work employs tactics of *combining* that can call attention to historically and culturally formed unequal relations of power. It is this *combining* strategy that has brought me to the subject of the cheongsam itself. Writer/historian Hazel Clark and artist/scholar Wessieling contend that the cheongsam is a hybrid dress whose components can vary while maintaining a Chinese identity. According to historians such as Clark (2000) and Finnane (2008), the cheongsam takes formal cues from a combination of Han and Manchu clothing, which was then influenced by Western fashion in the 1920s and 30s. As long as the elements of the dress are maintained (high collar, fastenings, slits), it is possible to play with the fabric and other elements such as sleeve length or the addition of other adornments in order to make an unlimited number of combinations and statements. Even in the 1920s and 30s, women were playing with these variables to express personal taste and style. In the case of *La Cabine d'Essayage / The Fitting Room*, however, the kind of cheongsam that I was interested in making, aimed at using – in Ang's words – the "interrogative effects" of hybridity to explore the experiences of Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage. In addition to making several cheongsam that would speak to the current condition of Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage, *La Cabine d'Essayage / The Fitting Room* examined critical strategies of hybridity that manifest themselves in current wearing practices of the cheongsam. Likewise, these acts seek to question the dominant hegemonic 'white' definitions of Canadian national identity by injecting 'Chinese-ness' into them. But I would argue that they go even further, to question the dominant and essentialist ideas about what constitutes the concept of an ideal Chinese identity.

Taking into consideration Hall's description of identity as always in flux, writers and theorists have struggled with the impossible task of using words to name an identity in a way that considers nationality, ethnicity and culture simultaneously. Chinese-

Canadian, Asian-Canadian, Can-Asian – are all attempts to describe the multiplicity of identity of those of Chinese descent who immigrated to Canada or who were born in Canada. In "Bold Omissions and Minute Depictions" (1991), Trinh Minh-Ha discusses the use of the hyphen as it is applied in 'Asian-American' as a way to acknowledge the "realm in-between, where predetermined rules cannot fully apply". (1991, p.84) Bringing 'Asian' into contact with 'American', through the porous hyphen indicates a transitional condition as well as the tension of living in the interstices that is not limited to two or more cultures but extends into a deeper understanding of living in the interstice and the knowledge that it can produce.

The 'Chinese' in Chinese-Canadian is also fraught with its own set of power dynamics. When my parents would take me to Chinatown, I often heard Chinese people refer to me as 'jook sing', which means 'hollow bamboo' in Cantonese. While I was not sure what it meant at the time, I got the feeling that it set me apart from other 'real' Chinese. As an adult, I remember going into an herb shop in Montreal's Chinatown with two friends who are also Canadian-born of Chinese heritage. They, however, were able to speak a little bit of the Toisanese dialect. I had a very bad cold and they encouraged me to get a specific medicine. The shopkeeper addressed me in Cantonese and when I stared back at her, actually quite ashamed that I could not speak to her in 'our' language, my friends stepped in. While I could not understand exactly what they were saying, I could recognize the conciliatory tone as they explained that I was born in Canada and did not speak Chinese, to which the shopkeeper replied, "Ah, jook sing". I was mortified. Experiences like this contributed to my insecurity about claiming and asserting my Chinese heritage. Not speaking or looking Chinese created a distance from a community and it nurtured a fear of losing connection with my own family. Being called 'jook sing', therefore, created a feeling of alienation for most of my adult life until I came upon, "The Banana Blog: Echoes of the Jook Sing Generation" (http://www.drivel.ca/banana/topic01.html) in the process of researching this project.

The first topic of this new blog, launched on June 30, 2002, was about the term 'banana' which is used mostly among Canadian-born people of Chinese heritage to describe our westernization – or more bluntly – our 'yellowness' on the outside, and 'whiteness' on the inside. The question posed was: "What is your definition of "banana" as it relates to Chinese-Canadians?" As I began to read, my relationship to the term 'jook sing' and the even more dreaded 'banana', started to open and evolve. The first contributor to the blog wrote:

> To me, a banana is someone who is Chinese but "westernized" to the extent such that they cannot even speak or understand Chinese.
>
> A Chinese-Canadian is not automatically a banana. Most are "jook sing", while others are "westernized Chinese"; a "jook sing" being one who has some of both Chinese and Western values but not all of either culture, while a "westernized Chinese" is one who has mainly Chinese values with some Western ones so that they can adapt to this western society better.
>
> Then there are those who consider themselves "Chinese" and not Chinese-Canadians, regardless of the number of years they have lived here. Those are the ones who do not try to or wish to fit in and believe that they are "better" than everyone who is a "Chinese-Canadian". They also seem to be the ones that believe ALL CBC's (Canadian-Born- Chinese) are automatically bananas and make it seem like being a CBC makes one a social outcast. To them, anyone that is not "Chinese" is a banana.
>
> The Banana Blog: Echoes of the Jook Sing Generation. (June 30, 2002) No I'm not but don't call me a jook sing [Blog post]
> Retrieved from http://www.drivel.ca/banana/topic01.html

'Jook sing' was not necessarily the ostracizing label I thought it was, and the term 'banana' was also starting to lose its sting. Another contributor to the Banana blog wrote:

> Other than a delicious fruit and phallic symbol the word banana has been used derogatively by others to describe a Chinese person (yellow on the outside) who thinks, acts, and talks like a white person (white on the inside). So if you can speak, read and write Chinese do you count as a banana?
>
> It is high time we reclaimed this word. We shouldn't be afraid to call

> ourselves Banana. It's not just used derisively by other people - but mostly by our own people.
>
> There is another alternative moniker, the CBC (Canadian Born Chinese). Though it is definitely more politically correct it still leaves a chasm in a description of the modern asian canadian. In theory it's a good label but in practice the CBCs who grew up in very Asian areas such as Vancouver and parts of Toronto are closer to FOBs (fresh off the boat, new rich immigrants) on a scale.
>
> ... Truth is, what if you're neither a complete Banana and not technically a CBC, only you have a dash of FOB stirred in? What category do you belong to?

While offering a comprehensive inventory of the nuanced 'monikers' that have been coined to describe being Chinese in Canada, this writer also expresses how the existence of a fixed and reduced identity is virtually impossible, and in the spirit of Stuart Hall, ends his entry with a call to "stop trying to label ourselves so definitively." The 'Banana blog' offers a first hand account of the complexity of identification and identity and does much to help confront feelings of shame and guilt about the loss of heritage language and culture. Likewise, Ien Ang (2000) casts a critical eye on the discourse formations around what constitutes 'Chinese-ness', which, like the term 'banana', circulates within Chinese communities. Drawing on Tu Wei-ming's collection *The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today*, she explores the source and construction of an essentialized Chinese identity that serves to haunt the Chinese diaspora, effectively limiting its ability to find comfort and stability in its inevitable evolution. She writes:

> The notion of a single centre or cultural core, from which Chinese civilization has emanated – the so-called Central Country complex – has been so deeply entrenched in the Chinese historical imagination that it is difficult to disentangle our understandings of Chineseness from it. (2001, p.41)

In response to this, Tu Wei-ming's contributes the notion of 'cultural China', which

Ang describes as a "symbolic universe" (2001, p.40) in order to de-centre the Central Country complex. With this, Tu attempts to open up the reduced 'ideal' of Chinesness – one that is defined as 'belonging to the Han race, being born in China proper, speaking Mandarin and observing the "patriotic" code of ethics' (Tu, 1994b:vii) by challenging the claims made by Beijing, Taipei, Hong Kong and even Singapore to be, the 'ultimate authority' in defining Chineseness. In issuing this challenge, Tu wishes to open up ideas of Chineseness, and to "explore the fluidity of Chineseness as a layered and contexted discourse, to open new possibilities and avenues of inquiry." (ibid.:viii) Through this exploration, taken up by Ang, the periphery, or Chinese outside of China may gain the agency required to assert their realities, significance and contribution to the opening up of the established and reductive definition of 'Chineseness'. Combining forces, the Banana blog, along with Ang and Tu's writings, helped me to consider how to articulate the situation of second generation Canadian-born people of Chinese heritage and its expression in the creation of works in *La Cabine d'Essayage/The Fitting Room.*

This discussion of the question of 'Chinese-ness' is important because of what it contributes to the concept of diaspora and the limitations of this term for my project. Returning to 'monikers' for a moment, Sean Metzger proposes the term 'Sino/American' in *Chinese Looks: Fashion, Performance, Race* (2014), and takes specific items of clothing as a lens through which to examine the changing relations between the United States and China over the last 150 years. Metzger's use of 'Sino/American' is inspired by David Palumbo-Liu's (1999) 'Asian/American'. Metzger and Palumbo-Liu prefer the slash as a way to better indicate the "sliding over or "transitivity" between two always undecided terms." (2014, p.9) Metzger privileges the term Sino/American as a way to name the interface that facilitates his analysis of the changing power relations between the U.S. and China. In this way, he clarifies his area of study so that it does not become confused with the substantive terms, 'Asian American' or 'Chinese American'. I have also been inspired to re-

examine the terminology I use to describe the participants in *La Cabine d'Essayage/The Fitting Room* in order to articulate the specificities and significance of my particular target group. In earlier iterations of my research proposal, I described the participants in my survey group as 'diasporic Chinese women'. Through further research on theories of diaspora, it became clear that while we are part of the Chinese diaspora in the literal sense, we are most often not in the ideological sense. The etymology of the term diaspora refers to the dispersal of the Jews, but is now applied to people who have left a 'homeland' and are now scattered across the globe in a variety of places and nations. What marks the term diaspora, in an ideological sense, is that it refers to an intense longing for the homeland. For the women in the interviews, myself included, there can be no longing for a place that was never truly known. Again, I refer to Ien Ang who states that "(w)hat connects the diaspora to the 'homeland' is ultimately an emotional and almost visceral attachment." (2001, p.32) While the participants are able to eloquently discuss their connection or lack thereof to their Chinese heritage, they do not speak about China in these ways. It is, therefore, not the diasporic condition that interests me, as this could include women who were not born in Canada. What is most pertinent to my exploration is the situation of women of Chinese heritage who were born in Canada at a particular time in history, a period which served to unsettle the idea of any connection to this heritage.

Seen in this light, the cheongsam is not just a garment. It is a conduit through which to address the ineffable quality of what it means to be of Chinese heritage in Canada today. In concert with my exploration of theories of identity, the research that I carried out reveals how the desire to foster a multiple and evolving expression of identity is of major importance to Canadian-born people of Chinese heritage. A connection with Chinese identity is directly affected by experiences growing up in the Canadian context, which have resulted in a desire to either maintain it, to reject it or to remain ambivalent about it. What I have attempted to convey here is that identity is

a central conceptual thread that serves to unravel the complexity of the relationship between the cheongsam and Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage. Many of these ideas have had a direct influence on the conceptual aspects of *La Cabine d'Essayage/The Fitting Room* and have resulted in decisions that I will describe in depth in Chapter 4. Furthermore, being a Canadian-born female of Chinese heritage brings about issues of sexuality and femininity that further complicate attitudes and ideas towards the cheongsam that will be explored in detail in Chapter 2.

2.1.2 Ethnic Clothing

As the cheongsam is an ethnic garment, it is important to consider the theories circulating about the significance, meaning and wearing practices of ethnic clothing, particularly in the current global context. In *Dress and Globalization* (2004), Margaret Mayrand brings the subject of ethnic clothing into dialogue with the process of globalization, which she describes as having:

> ... commenced with the world crises of 1968-71, and the slowing down of overall world economic growth. The period under discussion covers the collapse of Sovietism; the consumer revolution in China; the speculative booms in equity and property markets in the 1980s; the vast social changes brought about by postcolonial rule and the changing, flexible rhythms of post Fordist production and outsourcing; the rise of multinational corporations; the globalisation of finance systems; and not least the growth of world media networks and the e-revolution ... it must be emphasised that the interconnectedness of the (so-called) First and Third Worlds, implied by the term, has taken place on unequal terms, thus making globalisation seem largely synonymous with westernisation... (2004, p.3)

It can be argued that now, more than ever, ethnic clothing styles are circulating quickly, and are influencing the style of clothing created and produced outside of their places of origin. With that in mind, what role and place does ethnic clothing now have for people in everyday life around the world? Does ethnic clothing retain

relevance for people outside of the countries of their ethnicities? How might an understanding of globalization and its effects on the cheongsam inform my research, and the creation of the works in my installation, in order to better transmit the complexity of the relationship between Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage and this dress? With these questions in mind, I combined the results of my field work with the writings of Joanne B. Eicher, Margaret Mayrand, Carla Jones, Ann Marie Leshkowich and Sandra Niessen to inform my creation process. The results of my research indicate that the cheongsam is not an object of the past that has been cast aside. Rather, it continues to be a conduit through which to express the contemporary condition of complex identities in an advanced, globalized world. Not only can ethnic clothing be worn to demonstrate a connection, or desire for connection with one's ethnic identity, it can be modified, embellished or styled in a way that communicates multiple and even paradoxical messages.

In *Dress and Ethnicity: Change Across Space and Time* (1995), Joane B. Eicher examines the role of dress as a "sensory system of non-verbal communication" (1995, p.5) and its link with and expression of ethnicity. Her research shows that ethnic clothing is more than just a clear referent for a group of people who share the same language, history and culture. Ethnic clothing takes many social and cultural factors into consideration that can be employed as a way for people to distinguish themselves and to 'communicate their actual or desired autonomy". (1995, p.305) Eicher also offers a clarification of terms and definitions for the words 'clothing', 'dress' and 'fashion', which she feels are mistakenly used interchangeably. Not all clothing is fashionable dress, 'fashion' is not limited only to dress, and 'clothing' is only one aspect of dress. Yet, in order to examine these more distinct terms in relation to ethnic clothing, Eicher proposes the concept of 'world fashion'. 'World fashion' means the dressing practices and garments of ordinary everyday people, which is quite distinct from 'high fashion', which she describes as "a dominant or monolithic fashion with exclusive, custom-made creations found in designer salons." (1995, p.300) While

'world fashion', like 'high fashion', changes quickly over time, from year to year and season to season, Eicher contends that 'ethnic dress,' in contrast, implies "non-fashionable dress, dress that reflects the past with slow change and few modernizing influences," (1995, p.301) and is "worn and displayed to signify cultural heritage."(1995, p.299) While Eicher affirms that ethnic clothing is worn as a way to indicate connection with the group associated with that ethnicity, she is careful to qualify that this takes into consideration the understanding that the term 'ethnicity' is also fluid and contingent as individuals move through space and time.

In *Dress and Globalisation*, (2004) Margaret Maynard builds on Eicher's work and employs a political economy perspective to examine the "ways in which cultures interact and engage with each other at the level of appearance." (2004, p.13) What she finds is that the dominant flow of Western clothing around the world has not had a homogenizing effect on dressing, but that rather, "(in) non-western cultures, acceptance, rejection or a combination of western and traditional clothing is highly variable, complex and constantly changing." (2004, p.27) Also of interest to my project are her findings that show that "people use (clothing) tactically, to define, to present, to communicate, to deceive, to play with..." (2004, p.5) Her work examines how people actively choose what they want to wear and how they would like to wear it, exercising agency through clothing. These choices can be influenced by a number of overlapping factors including socio-economic background, political viewpoints, and climate. She cites a number of examples to demonstrate her claims, such as the case of 'les sapeurs' from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. 'Le Sape' is a social movement that emerged in Brazzaville and is based on the acronym that stands for 'Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élégantes'. Those engaged with the movement -- the 'sapeurs' --are mostly men who select and wear clothing that evokes the 'dandyism' of the colonialist past as a form of resistance. The 'dandy' is characterized as a young man who stands outside of high society, yet is able to use

his wit, charm, looks and fine clothing to gain access to the elite. I will discuss the figure of the dandy in more detail in Chapter 4.

Figure 4. Modern day dandies–Gentlemen of Bakongo, Brazzaville. Photo: Daniele Tamagni. On-line image http://www.urbanlife.se/en/life/men/161-fashion/366-gentlemen-of-bakongo-brazzaville
Retrieved Feb.22, 2015

The 'sapeurs' employ Western clothing to express anti-colonial sentiments and because many Congolese men were forced to immigrate to big cities such as London and Paris, 'Le Sape' offered a refuge from the difficulties of the experience of marginalization in Europe. 'Les sapeurs' are a prime example of how clothing, in combination with performance and wearing practices, become a vehicle of expression for the revealing of uneven power dynamics and agency, discoveries which have always been vital to my thoughts about the cheongsam.

Closer to home in North America, the Civil Rights movement greatly inspired an increased sense of expression of affirmation of Black identity in the United States. The 'afro' and the wearing of the West African dashiki are examples cited by Walter Keenan in *Walking on Water: Black American Lives at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century* (1999), of popular hair and clothing styles that were adopted on a large scale as a way to reflect Black pride as well as the rejection of conformity to White American culture. The wearing of the 'afro' was also a symbol of Black self-esteem behind the "Black is beautiful" movement. These gestures are symbolic of resistance

and agency for a large group of people connected through their shared history and struggle for emancipation.

Figure 5. Angela Davis in afro. On-line image.
http://www.autostraddle.com/idol-worship-angela-davis-is-my-ultimate-feminist-icon-22304/
Retrieved March 25, 2015

Figure 6. Example of a dashiki. On-line image. http://shop.fruitionlv.com/category/dashiki/
Retrieved March 25, 2015

Also valuable to my research was Mayrand's finding that ethnic clothing is not stagnant but rather evolves and changes while retaining its association with ethnicity, particularly when it comes to the migration of people. She writes:

> As part of mutation within diasporic migrations and shifts, ethnic identities in new countries have been shown not to mirror precisely practices in the homeland, but rather, use a range of sources to shape new ways of doing things. (2004, p.72)

Again, she cites many studies from around the world to illustrate this claim, such as a study of Arab-speaking youth in South Western areas of Sydney, Australia, who employ a mix of western clothing and ethnic clothing to exercise what Mayrand terms, a "strategic hybridity". (2004, p.72) This strategy brings together the clothing of mainstream culture with clothing that asserts ethnic heritage and allows people a

way to negotiate their subject positions and to show the mainstream that while they understand the norms of society, they will deal with them on their own terms. Examples such as this support Mayrand's main argument that ethnic clothing and its wearing practices are fluid and subject to evolution and change, contingent on the wearer. As she explains:

> The term 'ethnic' clothing becomes impossible to fix with any degree of certainty, however tempting. It is not exclusively hybrid clothing but attire chosen by the wearer for particular reasons and used in particular ways in different situations. Thus ethnic dress must be thought of as relational. It is attire in which the components are never absolutely static or 'frozen', but in continual process. (2004, p.73)

The women in this study aptly demonstrate Mayrand's point. Those who choose to wear the cheongsam do so under a very specific set of circumstances. Many women only wear this dress to family occasions or special events that propose a context where they feel they will not be questioned or receive unwanted or inappropriate attention. Some have worn a semi-Western version or a store-bought version in combination with western clothing to demonstrate a strategy of hybridity, while others are on the lookout for more casual looking cheongsam to assert and affirm their connection with an ethnic identity on an everyday basis. In all of these cases, it is the wearers who determine how they want to wear the Chinese dress with an awareness, however, of the dress' dominant discourses. They may choose to modify it, to combine something with it or to re-invent it in a way that communicates their relationship with their ethnic identity as impacted by social, cultural and political factors.

Figure 7.. Charmaine Leung, fashion designer and teacher, wearing a cheongsam. Photo: Piera Chen, 1997.
On-line image http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/hsc/evrev/cheungsam.htm
Retrieved March 26, 2015

A final example of the tension between tradition and evolution in ethnic clothing was illustrated by my own research in the Canadian magazine 'FASHION'. The article by Mishal Cazmi entitled "Under Cover", focuses on a Canadian-born Muslim woman named Saman Munir. Cazmi describes Munir as "among the newest crop of hijabis using fashion to challenge what the hijab represents for Muslim women". (2012) Keeping Eicher's definition of 'global fashion' in mind, the hijab or headscarf, worn by Muslim women is very generally associated with the Muslim faith and religious piety. However, for Munir, the hijab is also "an extension of her identity" (Cazmi, 2012) and asserts a connection and solidarity with her ethnicity through a visible, sartorial choice. With a deep passion for style, no doubt in part inspired by her North American context, Munir has become well known for her hijab styling tutorials on YouTube, which have attracted over one million viewers. Munir's desire to inject personal flair into the wearing of the hijab further underscores Mayrand's contention that the mobility of ethnicity can bring about an evolution of meanings and wearing practices of ethnic clothing. This point is especially salient for my work.

*Figure 8.*Photo of Saman Munir. On-line image http://www.flare.com/fashion/hijabi-fashion-bloggers/ Retrieved March 26, 2015.

The anthology, *Re-Orienting Fashion: The Globalization of Asian Dress* (2003) edited by Carla Jones, Ann-Marie Leshkowich and Sandra Niessen, examines the tensions and complications that have arisen in dressing practices in Asia as a result of rising globalization. Through the presentation of case studies that focus on the design, production and wearing of ethnic garments, such as the Vietnamese ao dai, the South Asian salwaar-kameez and the Korean han bok, the collected writings reveal how the processes of globalization which have given rise to 'Asian chic' are simultaneously re-Orientalizing Asian countries and Asian people. Asian people are, however, aware of the power dynamics involved in ethnic clothing and are taking control of how they are wearing it. Through a feminist and post-colonial lens, the writers concentrate on what they call, the 'mid-level actors': Asian designers, merchants and consumers whose economic, political and cultural positioning provide a reliable barometer for measuring the agency and limitations that effect the choices they make about dress and appearance. Useful to my own analysis is the concept of 'performance practices', a theoretical tool developed by Jones, Leshkowich and Niessen that synthesizes Judith Butler's 'performance theory' (1990) with Bourdieu (1977) and de Certeau's 'practice theory' (1984). Jones et al (2003) contend that, on its own, practice theory "risks reducing people to the sum total of their socially and culturally defined roles" (2003, p.24), while performance theory "overemphasizes the notion of play in 'role-play'". (2003, p.24) Bringing these two theories together makes it possible to track:

> ...the constraints shaping and limiting identity creation and subversion. Even if we view the performance of self as stemming from conscious choice, we must recognize that our desire to be a certain way is not entirely self-generated, nor can we determine the outcome. (2003, p.24)

While a desire to wear the cheongsam may arise out of an attraction to its formal traits and/or its representational link to a Chinese ethnic identity, the external factors of Othering, exoticization and eroticization that have become entangled with the dress' image may impact on a woman's actual wearing practices. 'Performance practices' can be used to analyze the limits of a desire to assert a Chinese identity that is informed by the internal links of kinship and yet impacted upon by external hegemonic structures such as Western mainstream media. 'Performance practices' can, therefore, be employed as an analytical tool to examine agency for Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage, as they negotiate the wearing of the cheongsam today.

Another valuable contribution is Jones et al's investigation of what they call 'self-Orientalizing' gestures, which entail the 'performance practices' of the wearing of ethnic clothing strategically, at the risk of re-inscribing Orientalist discourses. Rebecca N. Ruhlen's chapter "Korean Alterations: Nationalism, Social consciousness and "Traditional" Clothing", looks at feminist activists in South Korea who wear the hanbok at national and international women's events and fundraising activities. The editors' description of this case study explains how the wearing of Korean ethnic dress in these instances was carefully considered "precisely because it softened the potentially hard edges of feminism and insulated the wearers from accusations that feminism is a form of Western neo-imperialism..." (2004, p.33) In my research involving the cheongsam, I have termed these acts 'auto-exoticization', in keeping with the critical examination of Orientalist and sexist discourses that have equated Asian with exotic as well as the erotic. My use of 'auto' implies a self-generated and determined action that underscores Jones, Leshkowich and Niessen's finding that

women in Asia "...are strikingly aware of the stakes involved in their choices." (2003, p.31) Ethnic clothing can be re-coded and re-appropriated for specific goals that can lead to increased empowerment and agency for the wearers.

The theoretical contributions of Eicher (1995), Mayrand (2004), and Jones et al (2003) support my analysis of the interviews with the women in this study. While a dominant discourse around the cheongsam exists, the meanings of the dress are multiple and have evolved over time, based on factors such place, time, culture, mobility and design innovations. There is evidence that women in Canada are starting to intervene with the cheongsam, altering how it has been worn in order to challenge its past perceptions, meanings and ways of wearing. There is a desire to address the constraints of the garment's cut and form that imposes normative ideals of beauty on the wearer. There is also a need to subvert the sexual stereotypes that have been associated with the dress, and women are looking for ways to wear it on an everyday basis instead of reserving it for formal occasions only. The dresses I made for the installation were, therefore, a reflection of this range of concerns, issues, experiences and wishes.

2.1.3 Installation Art

My work has focused mainly on single channel video as a reflection of my television-saturated childhood, an early interest in documentary film, and my exposure to that genre through my employment at the National Film Board of Canada. My use of the single screen model went almost entirely unquestioned until my graduate studies led me to a deeper engagement with critical theory. Through the work of academics such as Michel Foucault, art historians such as Kate Mondloch and through my exposure to multi-screen approaches in art history, I started to develop a more critical analysis of media art and to consider the conventions or dominant regimes of viewing that have contributed to the questioning of my employment of single channel video. I

have not abandoned single channel work, but instead approach it with a more informed understanding of its extrinsic qualities that can be used in a strategic way, not only to call attention to entrenched norms of production and presentation but to think through the best presentation strategy for the work. Given the object/subject of the cheongsam, however, as well as the focus on Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage, the possibilities offered by installation art seemed more appropriate to my interest in using a variety of forms (video, textile, audio, sculpture), within a specific context, to convey the complexity and multiplicity of perspectives and to engage with a diverse set of viewers. The theoretical work of art historians Claire Bishop (2005), Miwon Kwon (2000), and Jennifer Gonzales (2008) have enriched my understanding of installation art as a fundamentally critical approach that works in concert with the nature of my main research questions.

In *Installation Art: A Critical History* (2005), Claire Bishop explores the emergence and development of installation art through a non-chronological method that acknowledges that the variety of approaches to installation have emerged in an overlapping and continuous way, rather than through a series of developments and ruptures. She explains that installation art emerged from minimalism, conceptual art and institutional critique, as artists were interested in challenging entrenched regimes of viewing, and a capitalist art market that emphasized a need for discrete, exchangeable objects. Installation art also wished to explore the creation of works that established a meaningful relationship with a particular site. She describes installation art, not simply as the type of work one enters, but more specifically, a strategy through which "the space, and the ensemble of elements within it are regarded in their entirety as a singular entity."(2005, p.6) Mindful that approaches to installation are various and continue to proliferate, Bishop distinguishes installation art from "traditional media (sculpture, painting, photography, video)" (2005, p.6) by calling attention to the requirement of the literal presence of the viewer in order for the work to be complete. Unlike modernist discourses that bestow autonomy on a

discrete work of art, installation is dependent on the experience of the embodied visitor. Installation art would exist for the duration of the exhibition alone and then be dismantled, or works removed from its particular site, place or environment, so emphasizing the ephemeral quality of the work, in so far as one would have needed to have physically been there to have adequately experienced it. Bishop further characterizes the importance of experience for installation art by explaining the notions of 'activation' and the 'decentring' of the viewer. 'Activated spectatorship' refers to a direct, multi-sensory experience presented by the work that offers the visitor a way to engage that is more akin to the way she engages with the world - as an active player functioning on a variety of registers, and not limited to visual contemplation alone. The concept of 'decentring' is related to the subjectivity of the visitor and is based largely on post-structuralist theories that emerged in the 1970s and has also had great influence on art critics and historians who have been receptive to feminist and postcolonial theory. The concept of 'decentring' poses a challenge to the "masculinist, racist and conservative...dominant ideology" entrenched in the Renaissance perspective that positions the viewer as "...a rational, centred, coherent humanist subject" and purports that there is only one, ideal and 'right' way of looking at the world (2005, p.13). As Bishop explains, post-structuralist theories served to undo these rigid conventions, contending that the way we "view our condition as human subjects (is) fragmented, multiple and *decentred*" (2005, p.13). Rather than constraining the viewer to one position, the 'decentring' effect, in essence, liberates the viewer and transforms her into a *visitor* as the multi-sensory and spatial aspects of installation offer a multitude of viewing perspectives, which effectively subvert the Renaissance model of 'centring'. In her conclusion, Bishop identifies a fundamental contradiction between 'decentring' and 'activation' which she reconciles by explaining how installation art is a simultaneous experience of both 'centring' and decentring' for the visitor. A tension is created between "the *literal* viewer who steps into the work, and an abstract, philosophical *model* of the subject that is postulated by the way in which the work structures this encounter." (2005, p.130) In other words,

the work requires the viewer's physical presence, which is centred in its subjectivity in order to be subjected to a decentring experience, which may enlighten, engage, or move the viewer. In Bishop's view, the "closer the ideal model to the literal viewer's experience, the more compelling the installation". (2005, p.133) Where this idea is interesting to me is the extent to which the visitors -- through their own subjectivity -- can relate to my installation. What I take away from Bishop's theory is the importance of taking the visitor's subjectivity into consideration, and looking for ways to create a variety of entry points that will compel the visitor to engage with the works and hopefully elicit a meaningful experience. This resonates with my own instinctual approach to making art that is invested with the larger project of bringing people together, through increased understanding and acknowledgement, through the sharing of stories and experiences. I realize that the experience of the Chinese in North American society may seem to speak about a specific group of people. However, I believe that the sharing of these stories can open up a dialogue of transcultural exchange that can have some long-term positive effects on the dismantling of racializing discourses.

In the chapter "One Place After Another: Notes on Site Specificity" from the anthology *Space, Site Intervention: Situating Installation* (2000) edited by Erika Suderburg, Miwon Kwon discusses the emergence of site specificity as a major element of installation art and offers a survey of its practices, which chronicle the changing meanings and uses of 'site' in contemporary art. She concludes, provisionally, that the "definition of the site has been transformed from a physical location – grounded, fixed, actual – to a discursive vector – ungrounded, fluid, and virtual." (Kwon, 2000, p.46) Like Bishop, she is careful to point out that the variety of approaches to site specificity did not emerge and phase out along a linear trajectory, but rather operate "simultaneously in various cultural practices today (or even within an artist's single project)." (Kwon, 2000, p.46) The imperatives behind the interest in site specificity are linked with those that inform installation art in

general (for instance, the emphasis on the embodied visitor, centring/decentring, and the subversion of the capitalist market economy), but also focus on the growing critique among artists to challenge the established notion of the museum or gallery white cube as an "innocent" space. Again, informed by minimalism, conceptual art and various forms of institutional critique, Kwon names Hans Haacke, Daniel Buren and Mierle Laderman Ukeles as examples of artists who began to consider the context of spaces and to question the "*cultural* framework defined by the institutions of art". (2000, p.39-40) As Kwon writes, the white cube perpetuates its own ideology and discourse.

> The seemingly benign architectural features of a gallery/museum, in other words, were deemed to be coded mechanisms that *actively* disassociate the space of art from the outer world, furthering the institution's idealist imperative of rendering itself and its hierarchization of values "objective," "disinterested," and "true." (2000, p.40)

As artists began to question the neutrality of the museum or gallery space, they also began to engage with the "outside world and everyday life – a critique of culture that is inclusive of non-art spaces, non-art institutions, and non-art issues" (Kwon, 2000, p.43). This engagement reflected a desire to make work that would engage with social, political, economic and cultural issues, concerns and topics. Taking art outside of the physical site of the exclusive and even elitist context of the museum or gallery, in favour of sites non-traditionally coded as art spaces, was a critical and political gesture. Kwon offers Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc,* created expressly for the Federal Plaza in Washington, D.C. as an often-cited early work of site-specificity. To remove the object from its site would essentially be to destroy the work of art. She also cites Daniel Buren's "striped canvases marching out the gallery window" (2000, p.44) which, on the other hand, proposes a direct critique of art institutions that are out of step with the people and suggests that art should be taken to the streets.

Kwon contends that in addition to a concern with site, installation art is distinguished by its growing interdisciplinarity that includes anthropology, sociology and cultural histories. She also explains that installation art became "sharply attuned to popular discourses (such as fashion, music, advertising, film and television)." (2000, p.44) Furthermore, artists began to unmoor art from a fixed, physical space and to engage with spaces in a more itinerant way so that "unlike previous models (of installation art) the site is not defined as a *precondition.* Rather it is *generated* by the work (often as "content"), then *verified* by its convergence with an existing discursive formation." (2000, p.44) With this, the idea of 'site' specific art offers a whole new set of practices to be explored. For instance, an area of inquiry or subject such as racism or colonialism could be considered a 'site' as evidenced in the practices of artists such as Renée Green and Fred Wilson. Going further, Kwon shows how artists themselves became the site itself as they began to travel in order to create works in different places around the world. A further example of site-specific art that gets away from the physical site itself is work that considers an *aspect* of site specificity so that:

> ...different cultural debates, a theoretical concept, a social issue, a political problem, an institutional framework (not necessarily an art institution), a community or season event, a historical condition, and even particular formations of desire are deemed to function as sites now. (2000, 45)

Kwon offers Mark Dion's 1991 project *On Tropical Nature* as a prime example of a site-specific project that is not tied to a single site. His project included several phases that occurred across a variety of related sites – an uninhabited part of the rain forest in Caracas, Venezuela, a gallery space, where specimens collected in the rain forest were displayed, the curatorial framework of a 'group' exhibition created by Dion and the last site "concerning cultural representations of nature and the global environmental crisis." (2000, p.44-45) Kwon also cites Renée Green's *World Tour,* another example of a semi-nomadic work, where the conception of how it is deployed over space, place and time is part of a discursive strategy to explore the boundaries

and meanings of site-specificity. This project entailed th e re-creation of four site-specific projects, in four different parts of the world, over a three-year period. Ideally, the visitor would have had to experience, not only each of these recreations, but also the original iterations of Green's projects, to surmise the full weight of her proposal. Part of the question or point may have been the material impossibility of this task for most people. However, for Kwon, Green's project presents an attempt:

> ...to imagine a productive convergence between specificity and mobility, where a project created under one set of circumstances might be redeployed in another without losing its impact – or, better, finding new meaning and gaining critical sharpness through recontextualizations. (2000, p.54)

In a bid to further liberate art practices from a dominant mode shaped by art institutions, and to produce works that engage with the social constructs of space and even transcend the bounded-ness of site specificity itself, the work described by Kwon opened up my project to a great number of discursive possibilities.

Jennifer A. Gonzàlez' *Subject to Display: Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art* (2008), focuses on the contribution of artists Fred Wilson, James Luna, Amalia Mesa-Bains, Pepon Osorio and Renée Green. Gonzàlez selected these artists as vital examples of those working primarily with the variables offered by installation art, in order to engage with a "critical approach to material and visual culture that examines and ultimately attempts to undermine racist, colonialist, and sexist discourses in a long tradition of *abolitionism*." (2008, p.20)

These artists grapple with a range of topics with which to explore issues and concepts such as representation, identity and the politics of space and museum culture, which has been pertinent to and inspiring for my work. Also, significant to my research, was how Gonzàlez situated the study of installation art as coming out of social movements such as student protests, civil rights and feminist movements, all of which sought to challenge entrenched social and political norms and injustices. In terms of

art practice, these inspirations also motivated productive ways of disrupting "the traditional semiotic and somatic boundaries assumed to exist among the audience, the work of art, the site of exhibition and the world beyond." (2008, p.8) What installation art opened up for these artists was the appropriation of spaces and places that provided the terrain for serious play. Installation art offers an opportunity to transgress the social discourses that put limits on people's mobility, whether literal or figurative, due to racialization, class, age or occupation. Fred Wilson's 1992 work *My Life As a Dog* provides a prime example. In this satirical performance offered to docents at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, he began by greeting the group and then asked them to meet with him in one of the upstairs galleries. Wilson then changed into a uniform worn by the museum security guards and placed himself in the gallery that they agreed to meet in. When the docents arrived they searched for the artist they had just met. When he finally revealed himself, they were surprised and embarrassed realizing that he had been there all along. Wilson's piece revealed to the docents and re-confirmed to himself how the museum frames black bodies. They may be visible in works of art or within a predominantly "white" museum going public; however, when dressed as staff members, people of colour simply disappear. This work employed site specific strategies, in this case the museum and its mechanisms -- to create an experience that was immersive, visceral and ultimately consciousness raising.

Miwon Kwon and Jennifer Gonzàlez' writings provided references for my reflections on the use of site-specificity for *La Cabine d'Essayage / The Fitting Room*. While Kwon provided perspective on the use of site in installation art, Jennifer Gonzàlez presented a number of important examples of works that use site-specificity to engage with a particular community. One of her examples that demonstrates this aspect well is *En la Barberia No Se Llora* (1994) by Pepon Osorio. For this work, the artist found an abandoned building on a street accessible to foot traffic and transformed it into a barbershop installation. Pepon created a place that looked legitimate on the outside

and made passers-by think that it was simply a new business in the neighborhood. On the inside, Osorio arranged the furniture according to the layout of a conventional barbershop but then subverted those conventions through the incorporation of art works into this environment. Images of male torsos, scissors and razor blades were silk-screened onto the barber chair upholstery, television monitors were installed in place of the barber chair headrests and a floor to ceiling display of photographic portraits of historic and iconic Latin American and Caribbean men adorned the walls. The ambiguity between a 'real' and a fabricated environment was intentional, and got people inside to experience Pepon's work and the issues he wanted to raise and discuss. His strategy leads to a very key point about installation art and its use of specific sites. The use of selected spaces makes it possible to bring projects into communities, places and neighborhoods for the purpose of engagement with the target audience for the artist – in Pepon's case, men of Latin American heritage. At the same time, this use of site specificity challenges the institution of the gallery as the only legitimate place for art and underscores a critical post-colonial perspective.

*Figure 9.*Left: External view of the installation *Barbaria No se llora* (No crying in the barbershop), 1994. On-line image. http://blog.sharmashari.com/2011/01/art-tuesday-pepon-osorio.html. Retrived Feb. 23, 2015.

Figure 10. Right: Installation view of *En la Barbaria No se llora* (No crying in the barbershop), 1994. http://blog.sharmashari.com/2011/01/art-tuesday-pepon-osorio.html. Retrieved Feb. 23, 2015.

The accounts of artists' work described by Bishop, Kwon and Gonzalez demonstrate a range possibilities for what installation art can 'do'. Also instructive are the critical theories and questions that have developed through the analysis of art installation practices. The concepts of activation, experience, centering/decentring, multiple ways of experiencing the work, the engagement of all the senses, and the interaction with a specific space and site, cohere with the kinds of questions and goals I had for my work. In this way installation art made sense for a discursive and critical examination of the cheongsam and its relationship with Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage.

2.2 Methodological Approach and Research Methods: Realizing the pattern

For *La Cabine d'Essayage / The Fitting Room* I adopted a post-positivist methodological approach for its resonance with my project's aims which were to develop a multi-faceted portrait of the current condition of Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage. How can an exploration of their relationship with the cheongsam shed light on a connection with one's ethnicity, alongside a discourse of multiculturalism, in combination with the effects of advanced globalization that have decentered power relations between the West and China? How is a connection to one's Chinese heritage (or lack thereof) expressed, and how might ethnic clothing be part of that expression? My project builds on Peter S. Li's work on the history of the Chinese in Canada, through its contribution of qualitative research on the situation of women of Chinese heritage born in Canada between 1967 and 1987. Each woman's personal historical narrative gives us information about when and how her family came to Canada, where in Canada she spent her formative years of socialization (which province(s), what type of area - rural/suburban/urban), what her impressions of those formative years are, and how, if at all, her family practiced or still practices

aspects of Chinese culture. The factors of class, language, geography, and key formative experiences add to the richness of this portrait and it is, therefore, the desire to present this diversity and multiplicity of attitudes, ideas and experiences that informed this project's methodological position. A post-positivist approach was the most appropriate as it allowed me to combine a variety of research methods and to carry out an investigation "that shares the objective of giving voice to different people and social groups in order to allow them to take their place in society."[1] (Anadon, 2006) A post-positivist stance is also grounded in a critical position that investigates dominant and hegemonic discourses, the social constructions of 'reality' and systems of meaning. Anne B. Ryan writes in *Post-positivist Approaches to Research* (2006), that this type of qualitative methodological approach is not about seeking one overall 'truth'. Rather, a post-positivist approach values reflexivity, the investigation of one's epistemology, problem setting over problem solving and learning over testing. As described earlier, my primary research question is two-pronged and links sociological questions with an artistic exploration. A need for a variety of research methods, not only helped me to adequately address the variety of stories from the participants, it also recognized how a variety of media such as video, sculpture, and sound were the most viable way to approach the presentation of this wealth of responses. It is for all of these reasons that an overarching post-positivist methodological approach that employs a variety of specific research methods, including ethnography, autoethnography, the use of historical archives and popular culture was the most appropriate for my project.

2.2.1 Ethnography

The films produced by the now defunct Studio D, the women's studio at the National Film Board of Canada, have greatly influenced my work. "Sisters in the Struggle"

[1] This quote translated from the original French text "La recherche dite <qualitative> : de la dynamique de son évolution aux acquis indéniables et aux questionnements présents. *Recherches Qualitatives. Vol. 26, (10) p.5-31.*

(1991) by Dionne Brand, "Women in the Shadows" (1993) by Christine Welsh and "Return Home" (1992) by Michelle Wong are examples of Studio D films that shaped my approach to the exploration of a subject with, and through people, in my art practice. The major contribution of these films is their ability to give voice to a multitude of different women who are often silenced and essentialized in mainstream media. The filmmakers celebrate difference within communities of women and recognize the mutability of identity while refusing to reaffirm the 'center'. Studio D films also demonstrate how the expression of contrasting ideas and opinions can open up opportunities for dialogue that can dismantle reductionist expectations of 'Others' that are perpetuated by those in positions of power. It is in this spirit that I worked with an interview process that would garner a wide range of attitudes, ideas and wearing practices in regards to the cheongsam. Through a process of 'snowballing', I found a number of women willing to contribute their voices and stories to what would form an accumulative, complex representation of their relationship with the cheongsam.

The interviews were conducted in-person, in a location agreed upon with the participant. As they were audio recorded for the purposes of an art work, my only request was that the interview happen in a relatively quiet place. I worked with the same set of questions for all the participants (see Annex 1) which aided in the organization of material in the editing stage. Selected excerpts were transcribed and then put through a 'paper edit' process. The 'paper edit' produced a script for the final sound editing phase which yielded two audio pieces – one with francophone participants and the other with anglophone participants. These audio works were presented in conjunction with the three sculptural pieces *Les Robes hybrides / Hybrid Dresses*. My approach to ethnography as a research method is informed by an ethos of respect in the handling of the words and voices of the interviewees in my final work, and a desire to present a panoply of responses to complex questions contingent on factors that include context and personal experience.

2.2.2. Autoethnography

Documentary films by Christine Welsh and Michelle Wong and the work of artists such as Richard Fung and Yinka Shonibare MBE have inspired my desire to explore autoethnography as a research method and to situate and exercise agency over the representation of my voice and image.

In "Autoethnography: Journeys of the Self" (1999), Catherine Russell explores the emergence and evolution of the term autoethnography and presents a number of examples of its employment in video and film. She acknowledges Michael Fischer's earlier use of the term 'ethnic autobiography', as a precursor to 'autoethnography', in his essay, "Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory" (1986). Russell quotes from Fischer's article to illustrate how 'ethnic autobiography' in literary form, "partake(s) of a mood of metadiscourse, of drawing attention to their linguistic and fictive nature, of using the narrator as an inscribed figure within the text whose manipulation calls attention to authority structures." (Russell, 1999, para. 4) Russell builds on this by contending that in terms of film and video making, autobiography becomes ethnographic when the maker positions their personal history within the larger context of social, cultural and historical forces to reveal how identities are produced and performed. The insertion of the author into the video or filmic text, either as the first-person narrator, as an on screen representation, or both, brings attention to the maker's (or artist's) deep understanding of what Russell terms a "staging of subjectivity – a representation of the self as a performance." (1999, para. 5) Russell goes on in her article to credit Mary Louise Pratt with introducing the term 'autoethnography' as an "oppositional term". In her book, *Imperial Eyes: travel writing and transculturation* (1992), Pratt explains autoethnography as a term used:

> ... to refer to instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer's own terms. If ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent themselves to their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations. (1992, p.7)

An autoethnographic approach is, therefore, a tool that artists can use to empower their representations in light of essentializing ethnographic practices that perpetuate discourses such as 'Primitivism' and 'Orientalism'. Those on the margins can harness the language and technology of powerful media, such as film and video, to tell their own stories from their own points of view. The timing of Pratt's writing on autoethnography coincides with my discovery of documentary and single channel video art in the early 1990s. This was a time when there was much discussion around identity politics, which had a profound effect on the work of aboriginal and people of colour, filmmakers and artists who were looking to take control over how they were represented in various media. One of the main approaches they took was to integrate themselves directly into the work. Situating themselves within the content structure was a way to take ownership of the questions and objectives they wished to address. Another effect of an autoethnographic strategy was to call attention to how various media are carefully constructed in order to influence and perpetuate a point of view. If the power of the media is wielded by the person behind the camera, then it would be crucial for subjugated 'Others' to take control of the means of production in order to frame themselves. An influential example of this type of autoethnographic strategy is found in the 1994 documentary film, *Keepers of the Fire* by Christine Welsh. As the writer and producer, she chronicles her journey to discover her Métis grandmothers as a way to connect with her lost heritage. It is her first-person voiceover that drives the film forward, as it shares her insights and fears as she engages with her quest. She is also present on screen in a variety of scenarios as well as in discussion with members of her family and others she interviewed, taking an active role in that process and connecting these stories with her own. Archival and

family photos, as well as dramatic passages, are also part of her strategy that places her in the frame in an actively engaged way.

Figure 10. Gallery of images from *Women in the Shadows*, On-line image. http://www2.nfb.ca/boutique/XXNFBibeCCtpItmDspRte.jsp?formatid=26603&lr_ecode=collection&minisite=10002&respid=22372 . Retrieved Feb. 10, 2015.

The work of Richard Fung is an example from video art that engages productively with an autoethnographic approach. His 1990 work *My Mother's Place,* is an experimental documentary that gives voice to the memories of his then 80 year-old mother, Rita Fung, a third generation Chinese-Trinidadian. Through her story and his illustration of it, Fung presented her recollections with the over-arching aim of exploring how discourses of 'race', class and gender are formed under colonialism. He employs a poetic mix of first-person voiceover, interviews, home movies, personal photos and the placing of himself within the framing of the interviews, to convey a story that is personal and yet, connects with a larger community and narrative.

Figure 12. Left: Image of Richard Fung On-line image.

http://news.brynmawr.edu/2014/01/30/film-studies-program-brings-video-artist-richard-fung-to-campus-on-monday-feb-10/
Retrieved Feb. 25, 2015

Figure 13. Right: Still from My Mother's Place. On-line image.
http://blog.lib.umn.edu/puot0002/qd2010/2010/11/queering-intimacy-annotated-bibliography-2.html
Retrieved Feb. 25, 2015

Pratt's definition of autoethnography, in combination with the examples of autoethnographic strategies in documentary film and art video, corresponds with how I wanted to use the videographic form. In *La Cabine d'Essayage / The Fitting Room,* I employed autoethnographic strategies in two ways. First, I recorded an interview with myself so that I might mix my voice and responses with those of the women I interviewed. This is why throughout this dissertation I use the pronoun 'we' rather than 'they', in reference to the women interviewed for this project. Secondly, I incorporated new video content in *L'Ecran (Chinois) / (Chinese) Screen* that shows me wearing the three cheongsam made for the *Robes Hybrides / Hybrid Dresses* installation. I also included clips of myself being fitted for and wearing a cheongsam from my previous video *Ode to the Cheongsam.* These choices were aimed at exploring a critical reflection of the cheongsam that would subvert dominant expectations through the authoring of my own words and representation. In this way, I used autoethnography as a research method to help me better understand my subjectivity within the framework of the Canadian context and its impact on how my figure as a Canadian-born (invisible), woman of colour (visible) is seen and interpreted through the dominant culture, as well as the the culture of Montreal's Chinese community.

2.2.3 Historical Research / Popular culture.

Nina Levitt's installation *Little Breeze* (2002-2004) exemplifies a research method that brings historical data together with research on popular culture for the purposes of an artwork. *Little Breeze* is an interactive installation that tells the story of the often overlooked and misrepresented lives of European women who worked as spies during the Second World War. The work focuses on Violette Szabo, a British officer, who bore the code name "Louise", who by the age of 23 had completed two missions in occupied France before being captured and executed a few months before the end of the war. In this installation, the viewer is confronted with a large format projection of a sequence of spy portraits produced out of ASCII code. About a dozen vintage suitcases are placed in front of the screen. By lifting a suitcase, an audio excerpt of dialogue from the film "Carve Her Name with Pride" (a film about the life of Violette Szabo) is broadcast through a speaker embedded in the suitcase. When one opens the suitcase, an excerpt from the film appears on the screen. The action of moving around the space and opening suitcases enables the viewer to interact with physical elements in the space while learning about these forgotten women.

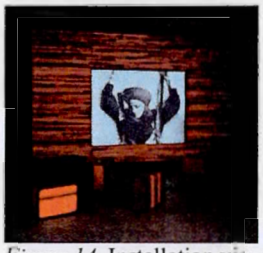


Figure 14. Installation view of the installation *Little Breeze*. On-line image.
http://www.ninalevitt.com/html/artwork/installation/littlebreeze/detail.htm
Retrieved Feb. 25, 2015

In a separate room, a wall features small photo portraits of nine female British officers who worked in the occupied zone of France, along with a coded "teletype" text. A radio transmission of Morse Code is broadcast from speakers installed in the

room. When the movements of the visitors are captured by a webcam, the Morse code sound transforms into the song "Louise" by Maurice Chevalier. Again, the movement of the visitor's body in the space triggers the change in audio and activates the visitor's experience.

Figure 15. Detail of *Little Breeze* 0 audio installation. On-line image
http://www.ninalevitt.com/html/artwork/installation/littlebreeze/detail.htm#
Retrieved Feb. 25, 2015

Levitt worked with Second World War archives as well as a Hollywood film and a popular song as a base on which to build her installation. This combination of historical information and popular media provided a useful reference for the multi-screen work in my installation, which brought in archival images of Han and Manchu dress, photos of the 'modern' cheongsam from my personal collection and original video work into dialogue with clips from a well known film through a recombinant, non-linear narrative that attempted to evoke the complicated story of the dress, as well as a critical exploration of the historicity of the dress. I started by gathering data on the history of cheongsam from a variety of sources. I then plotted out the many theories of its origins, the narratives of its evolution and the historical, socio-cultural, economic and political events that affected the dress, and its arrival in Canada. This charting allowed me to carry out a comparitive analysis which confirmed my suspicion that, rather than a clear, linear historical narrative, the story of the cheongsam's origins and evolution consists of diverse and divergent historical accounts. (See Annex II) This comparative analysis revealed the complicated place the dress has in the minds of the women interviewed, and helped to shape my treatment of the subject of the cheongsam in the final multi-channel work.

This explanation of the theoretical framework, methodological approach and research strategy establishes the foundation that informed the creation of the final installation. In the following chapter I will delve into research related to the object and subject of the cheongsam and the findings that emerged from the interview process.

CHAPTER 3

LITERARY REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

3.1 Part 1: The Cheongsam As 'Cultural-Political Complex'

A variety of political and cultural influences have shaped the evolution of the cheongsam, affecting its design and physical look, as well as how it is perceived today. Like the 'military-industrial complex', which is comprised of a web-like system of relationships between legislators, armed forces and the arms industry, I contend that the cheongsam is a 'cultural-political complex', made up of a tight network of linked relationships that inform its quality as a 'technology' shaped by governments, patriarchal discourses, popular media and the fashion industry, to affect the current perception and wearing practices of this garment by Canadian women of Chinese heritage. In Section 1 of this chapter, I will address the elements that make up the weave of this complex, through a sequential unraveling of its various strands. First, I will map out the historic and cultural events that surround the cheongsam in China as explored by historians Hazel Clark (2000), Wessieling (2007), Juanjuan Wu (2009) and Antonia Finnane (2008). This mapping will expose how the dress was co-opted by the nationalist interests of the Chinese government and later exploited for the needs of a growing economy. With references to the publications *Jin Guo: Voices of Chinese Canadian Women* (1992) and the website database *Chinese Canadian Women, 1923-1967: Inspiration – Innovation – Ingenuity,* produced by the Multicultural History Society of Ontario, I will then discuss its migration to Canada. I will explain how the dress was embraced in Canada, soon after its popularity rose in China, and was worn by Chinese Canadian women everyday, as well as for special occasions. In Section Two, I will delve into and explore the responses gathered in the

interview process, to assess the current attitudes towards the cheongsam. This primary research material will also investigate the contemporary wearing practices of this dress by Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage, to reveal whether women wear the dress or not, when and where it is worn. I will conclude the chapter with an analysis of the interview responses that illustrates how the dress inspires deep ambivalence, a pre-occupation with the notion of authenticity and is coming to be associated with a growing sense of agency. The ambivalence, authenticity and agency of the dress make up the major components of the cheongsam that characterize it as a 'cultural-political complex'.

3.2 The 'technology' of the cheongsam

Ursula Franklin's 1989 Massey lectures entitled "The Real World of Technology" advanced a compelling treatise on how technologies are systems, "that entail far more than (their) individual material components." (1989, p.12) In these lectures, Franklin does not refer to machines, gadgets or the computer chips or gears that are inside them. Rather, she is interested in how technologies are constructed, owned, and controlled through, "organization, procedures, symbols, new words equations, and, most of all, a mindset." (1989, p.12) Through the analysis of a number of concrete examples, she reveals how technologies have permeated our everyday lives, and claims that over time we have become increasingly blind to the hegemonic quality of these systems, which have led to the deterioration of human relationships, quality of life and the natural environment. She acknowledges her affinity to French philosopher Jacques Ellul's concern that technology may have a growing tyrannical hold on humanity. As a key to articulating her arguments, Franklin focuses on technology as practice and how the 'doing' of things in certain ways can carry out the goals of a technology or system. She argues that practices as technologies in themselves, "identify people and give them their own definition" (1989, p.31) as well as "identif(y) and (limit) the content of what is permissible." (1989, p.31) In other

words, within a given technology or system, those who do not follow prescribed practices according to certain established norms, are considered deviant and may be penalized. For Franklin, what is ultimately at stake here is how practices have become ingrained into everyday culture to the point where we no longer see how we are complicit in supporting technologies which could have serious and harmful consequences on our social, political and physical lives. In the case of the cheongsam, my research reveals that the dress is a technology in Franklin's sense, in that it is governed by well-entrenched discourses that control and discipline the body, perpetuate a limited, idealized concept of Chinese femininity, and impose upon women a certain set of 'correct' practices. I will explain how the dress changed over time, from being a loose-fitting garment that began as a symbol of Chinese women's emancipation during China's Republic Era, to become a thoroughly body conscious garment by the 1960s, as it came under the influence of the fashion industry and popular culture. The responses gathered from my interviews, however, reveal that these factors do not detract from the overall high regard and desirability of the dress. This demonstrates clearly on the one hand, how 'technologies' are at work in a transparent sense. On the other hand, my research also shows that women are aware of the issues attached to this dress, and are thinking critically about it and acting on how to use the cheongsam as a tool, in order to affirm links to Chinese ethnicity that may also subvert general sexual and racialized stereotypes perpetuated in the Western context.

3.3 Theories of emergence of the cheongsam in China

A review of literature about clothing in China shows how the Chinese have always been acutely aware of the significance of dress. Specific customs, styles and items have been instrumentalized to enforce political, cultural and social agendas. For example, in *The Art of Oriental Embroidery* (1979), historian Young Yang Chung explains how during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), the favored scholar class of the mandarins who attained high positions in the court and public life, were awarded a

special rank badge. This ranking system consisted of elaborately embroidered badges with carefully designed motifs that were stitched onto the chest area of the wearer's coat. Special attention was paid to colour and symbol. Birds were allocated to the civil system while larger animal designs were given to those in military roles. In this way, rank badges worked to visually and symbolically structure Chinese society. According to Chang, these badges, commonly referred to as the 'mandarin square', were "striking little masterpieces of handsome colour, carefully organized design, and skillful needlework..." (1980, 34) that were either carried out by the wives or daughters of the officials, or by a professional embroidery studio.

Figure 16. Left: Buzi Mandarin square that employs a bird to symbolize the rank of a civil official. On-line image. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandarin_square. Retrieved November 8, 2014.

Figure 17. Middle: A 15th-century portrait of the Ming official Jiang Shunfu. His Mandarin Square indicates that he was a civil official of the first rank. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandarin_square. Retrieved November 8, 2014.

Figure 18. Right: Qing Dynasty photograph of a government official with Mandarin Square on the chest. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandarin_square. Retrieved November 8, 2014.

The imposition of Manchu clothing and hairstyle on the majority Han people is another example of the importance of clothing in China's history. When the invading northeastern Manchu took over rule of China to form the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), one of their first orders of business was to erase the ethnic identity of the majority Han people. Han men were forced to abandon their ethnic clothing, to shave the front

of their heads, and to wear the rest of their hair in a single braid down the back. Those who did not comply were summarily executed. In *Chinese Fashion from Mao to Now* (2009), Juanjuan Wu explains how:

> "(i)n this brutal struggle between conqueror and conquered, clothes were weapons. The Manchu wielded this weapon as a means of imposing their authority while the Han clung to their own clothing styles as a means of resistance..." (2009, p.104)

She goes on to explain that in order to mitigate Han resentment, Manchu rulers eventually relaxed certain sartorial rules, which allowed Han women to continue to wear their own style of dress. This event is a strong indicator of power and gender inequality for women in Chinese society. Given an entrenched patriarchal system, women simply did not matter politically and the Manchu, therefore, saw no value in imposing any changes on their dress. Women's struggle for emancipation and equality began shortly after the fall of the Qing dynasty and imperial rule, which is when the discussion of the birth of the modern cheongsam begins.

A comparative mapping of the 'birth' of the cheongsam reveals a number of inconsistencies that point to disputes that are culturally and historically rooted, as I will explain later in this chapter. This is particularly revealing when applied to the responses from Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage, concerning their perceptions of the cheongsam. In what follows, I will attempt to provide a review of both the historical literature on the dress as well as a summary of the author(s) conclusions about its origins.

My review of literature revealed that English language writings on the history of the cheongsam began to emerge in the late 1980s, as part of larger studies on Chinese clothing. Valerie Garrett has been one of the most prolific Western historians on this subject, starting with the publication of *Traditional Chinese Clothing in Hong Kong*

and South China 1840 – 1980 (1987). Given the scale of her research, she does not go into depth into the history of the cheongsam but she does say that it first appeared in the 1920s and, "developed from the robes worn by Manchu women during the Qing dynasty." (Garrett, 1987, p.15) This assertion is one that is repeated and goes largely uncontested until later writings. It is on these later accounts that I focus my attention, as they provide some meaningful correlation with the divergent attitudes and ideas on the dress that prevail today and in turn provided reference for my installation.

The Cheongsam (2000), by Hazel Clark, was promoted as the "first comprehensive account of the garment to be written in English". (back cover) Through a feminist lens, Clark examines the origins of the dress, the historical and cultural influences on its evolution and perception, its production, its wearers and its influence on the Western fashion industry. In terms of the dress' origins, she is the first to begin to diverge from the prevailing discourse that the cheongsam was a descendant of Manchu dress. Her contention is that during the Qing dynasty (1644 – 1911) the two-piece skirt and tunic traditionally worn by Han women and the one-piece garment of the Manchu started to merge and "(a)s a result the styles between the two groups became somewhat blurred, increasingly so after 1800." (Clark, 2000, p.4) Rather than evolving from the Manchu robe alone, Clark contends that the cheongsam is a hybrid style informed by two forms of dress and further influenced by American fashion and culture. Furthermore, Clark is the first to call attention to how the hybrid nature of the dress extends into its various formal aspects, affecting the fabric, sleeve and other details which make it appealing to the fashion industry, offering women an opportunity to take pleasure in the garment and to communicate their personalities and taste. Clark's statements about the origins and evolution of the dress complicate the history of the cheongsam in a way that underscores the findings in my own research, as expressed in the final installation.

Fusionable Cheongsam, by artist and designer Wessieling, is the catalogue that accompanied her exhibition of the same name at the Hong Kong Arts Centre in 2007. Her texts chronicle the cheongsam's rise and evolution, examine the dress as seen through popular culture and discuss the garment in relation to the hierarchies of the fashion industry. Wessieling's main argument builds on Hazel Clark's assertion that the cheongsam is an inherently hybrid garment and explains that it is informed by the binary relationships of masculine/feminine, East/West, and traditional/modern, which establishes conditions of possibility for the wearer across a variety of symbolic and visual terrains. While Wessieling does mention that the cheongsam has been associated with the Manchu robe, she contests that "its feminine image offers little suggestion of its affiliation with the men's attire of the Manchu". (2007, p.10) Like Clark, Wessieling locates the political rise of the cheongsam in the 1920s, coinciding with the May Fourth Movement (1919-1921) which she explains "was an intellectual revolution and sociopolitical reform movement led by students and directed toward national independence, emancipation of the individual, and rebuilding of society and culture". (2007, p.12) This movement marked the start of a new reform culture, driven by Western ideas in combination with Chinese patriotism and included bids for liberation for women after the fall of the Qing dynasty. It is against this backdrop that Wessieling asserts that the cheongsam was able to become "the official formal dress during the Republican era." (2007, p.12) She further contends that the dress descended, not only from Manchu clothing, but also the *changpao* worn by Han men, as described in Zhang Ailing's famous essay "A Chronicle of Changing Clothes", first published in January 1943. Both Clark and Wessieling point out that until the Republican era, Han women had worn two-piece garments, while a one-piece robe was traditionally reserved for men. The appropriation of the one-piece garment by women was, therefore, an expression of their desire for equality during the Republic Era. The irony, however, as pointed out by Clark, Wessieling and others, is that the eventual influence of popular culture would influence the cut of the dress, while

increasing global trade would covertly transform the dress from a symbol of freedom into an instrument of constraint, both figuratively and literally.

Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, Nation (2008), by Antonia Finnane, examines connections between the modernization of China and its visibility to the rest of the world, from the viewpoint of the changes in the fashion industry and Chinese dress. The chapter "Qipao China" looks at the roots and evolution of the garment in Beijing and Shanghai at the beginning of the twentieth century. Diverging from her colleagues, Finnane points out that there are no clear links to the exact origins or precise dates of emergence for the dress and that the abandonment of the two-piece ensemble for the one-piece garment, "is one of the great enigmas of Chinese fashion history in the twentieth century." (2008, p.141) Like Wessieling, she states that while the dress may have been quoting Qing clothing, it should not be confused with the Manchu one-piece garment. Furthermore, she does not consider Zhang Ailing's account of the emergence of the garment in 1921 to hold much validity, as the writer was only a year old at the time and, therefore, could not be speaking from first hand observation. Instead, Finnane looks to other writers and ethnographers at the time, such as Aoki Masaru who studied Chinese dress. She also researched photos and accounts of prominent women who might have been seen wearing the cheongsam, in order to ascertain when it started to gain popularity. Although Finnane concedes that the cheongsam most likely appeared as student uniforms in the 1920s, at a time when there were a number of dress styles circulating among Chinese women (including Western clothing), she asserts that the modern cheongsam did not become truly fashionable until the 1930s. Furthermore, Finnane's research indicates that the high collar, which has become a major characteristic of the cheongsam, was scarcely seen on clothing in the 1920s. Finnane's analysis has influenced my own understanding of the complex history of the cheongsam, and her work impacted on the historical framing of my final installation.

Juanjuan Wu (2009) presents an account of the rise of the Chinese dress through an examination of the rise of the Chinese fashion industry. Like Finnane, she uses the term *qipao* and focuses on this garment in the chapter "Reinvented Identity: The Qipao and Tang-style Jacket". While Clark explains that the cheongsam came out of the blurring together of Han, Manchu and Western clothing styles, Wu goes a step further towards a more nuanced explanation of how the dress emerged. She writes that:

> "(t)owards the mid-to late Qing, upper-class Han and Manchu women started to imitate each other's styles, and a look that mixed both Han and Manchu dress features became popular along with hybrid styles that mixed Chinese and Western features. By the Republican era, the ethnic demarcation of dress was obscured. As Han Chinese regained power in Republican China, the need to mark ethnic identity was overshadowed by the need for new symbols that would represent the new China as a national state." (2009, p.107)

The modern cheongsam represented a mode of dressing that was more "democratic in nature"(Wu, 2009, p.108) while representing freedom in that "no restrictions were officially placed on its design and usage." (2009, p.108) In this way, the cheongsam was "embedded with modern meanings while still vested in a traditional frame", (2009, p.110) which reflected the government's political interests at the time. In essence, the vocation of the dress evolved to become the symbol of a united country. Wu's contribution to the understanding of the complex nature of the origins of the cheongsam, adds to the idea that decisions around clothing and dress do not happen in a vacuum. Instead, a diverse set of factors that include politics and culture play an important part in shaping how dressing practices evolve.

Chui Chu Yang completed her doctoral thesis, "The Meanings of Qipao as Traditional Dress: Chinese and Taiwanese perspectives" at Iowa State University in 2007. The objective of her study was to explore the understanding and interpretation of the dress by women of Chinese and Taiwanese nationality attending Iowa State

University, and also to question the influence of cultural contexts on current wearing practices. In order to fully underline its historical significance, her review of literature focused on how the cheongsam became the national dress of China. Yang conducted interviews with 14 women between the ages of 24 and 30 who had been living in the United States for less than three years at the time of the interviews. Yang's theoretical framework draws on Pierre Bourdieu's 'practice theory', which "emphasizes a practical research method that can simultaneously investigate structural meanings and the meaning interpreted by social actors within the culture." (Yang, 2007, p.10) Utilizing practice theory as an analytical tool, she concluded that the meanings and traditions associated with the dress are fluid and unstable and that personal experience is important to an understanding of how and when women wear the dress. Furthermore, while the meanings of the dress are similar for both Taiwanese and Chinese women, the political situation between China and Taiwan makes it difficult for Taiwanese women to consider it their 'national' dress. Western dress codes further influence the meanings attributed to this dress, and influence perceptions of the dress by the women interviewed, as the ultimate feminine and sexual object. As I have found myself, the women in this study have become aware of how the dress is associated with Western stereotypes about Asian women and how they might instrumentalize the dress as a tool of agency, at the risk of re-inscribing or perpetuating these stereotypes. While Chui's work focuses on young Chinese and Taiwanese women living for only a short time in Iowa, and is, therefore, limited in scope, what is significant for my study is how external cultural forces can impact on the perception of ethnic clothing and how that perception can be challenged through the use of ethnic clothing itself.

The cumulative findings presented in the work of Clark, Wessieling, Finnane, Wu and Chui encouraged me to adopt a more nuanced and relative point of view concerning the origins of the cheongsam. A more productive approach would be to consider how a category of dress known as the cheongsam is a result of flows and

exchanges, as well as political and cultural factors that influenced its adoption by Chinese women. The story of the cheongsam is one of ethnicities and cultures coming into contact with one another to bring about a new and progressive outcome for the dress and the women who desire to wear it. It is analogous to the complexity of identity formation for Canadian women of Chinese heritage who are trying to find a conciliation between their Canadian cultural upbringing and its effect on an evolving sense of Chinese ethnicity. The cheongsam, therefore, represents possibility, change and becoming, and is an affirming and vital symbol for women in the pursuit of new sensibilities around identity that as Hall states, are always "in a process of becoming." (Hall and Du Gay, 1996, p. 4)

3.4 Historical narrative of the cheongsam in China

While historians do not agree on the exact origins or the date of birth of the cheongsam, the historical narrative of the dress follows the same general contours across all accounts I studied, from the fall of the Qing dynasty, into the late twentieth century. As mentioned above, the conditions of possibility for the rise of the cheongsam were largely born out of the fall of imperial rule and China's desire to modernize during the Republic Era (1911-1949). The value of a woman's role in society grew in importance to the extent that the formal education of girls was encouraged among the middle and upper classes. According to Clark (2000), the female student became a channel for the promoting of the 'new woman of China' and represented, as such, the "potential for fundamental social change and self-liberation." (2000, p.7) At the same time, women reformers began to speak out about women's rights and "respect for women's individuality" (Clark, 2000, p.15). Based again on the 1943 writings of Zhang Ailing, Wessieling (2007), explains that the early 1920s cheongsam, with its loose cut based on the men's changpao, became the right garment to express the desire for gender equality, as it offered freedom from the heavy, restrictive Han and Manchu clothing, reflecting "the desire for women's rights and a respect for women's individuality." (2007, p.14-15) As Wessieling explains

further, the appropriation of the one-piece male garment by female reformers and activists became a meaningful, expression of women's politics as:

> "the 'androgynous' cheongsam created the pleasure for women of being able to dream about being the opposite sex or having the freedom to choose between sexes: one day a man in a cheongsam, the next day a woman in jacket and skirt. They could swap, or role-play, or sample 'in between' gender roles through the significance of gender representation by the cheongsam." (2007, p. 15)

These statements demonstrate how the cheongsam began as a politicized garment, employed as a tool of agency and desire for Chinese women. It is not surprising, therefore, that it should continue to be a source of consternation and wonder for Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage who struggle with the complexities of identity in the shadow of discourses of gender, ethnicity and national identity formation.

Wessieling draws on Finnane's 1996 article, " What Should Chinese Women Wear? A National Problem", to underscore how the popularity of the cheongsam also grew partially out of the May Thirtieth movement of 1925. This labour movement was characterized by anti-West demonstrations and a rise in nationalism which shouted out for the discarding of Western clothing which at this time had entered vigorously into the sartorial vocabulary of Chinese people. As Wessieling writes, "(g)iven that the cheongsam was already worn by some women who were seen as open-minded reformers, advocates of strengthening the nation, the cheongsam seemed to suggest the answer to the Nationalist cry." (2007, p.17) By the late 1920s, the appeal of the dress was firmly in place and showed no signs of abating, and by 1929 the Nationalist government officially declared the cheongsam the national formal dress for women.

Figure 19. Women in cheongsam, in the late 1920s. On-line image.
http://hk.history.museum/en_US/web/mh/whats-on/announcement-05.html. Retrieved March 29, 2015.

Figure 18. Fu Bingchang with two women, 1930s – early 1940s, from the Fu collection featured by Visualising China. On-line image.
https://nttreasurehunt.wordpress.com/2012/07/13/the-lost-world-of-fu-bingchang/. Retrieved March, 29, 2015.

Juanjuan Wu explains that the cheongsam became the "most dominant urban female fashion of the 1930s and into the 1940s" (2009, p. 110) as it is "embedded with modern meanings while still vested in a traditional frame." (2009, p.110) She further writes that China's intense economic boom encouraged women to "act as modern consumers" (2009, p.110) who would partake in the styles coming out of New York and Paris. As a result the cheongsam became more form fitting as fashion influences from the West flooded into China through mass media such as magazines, films and advertising. For those who celebrate the style of the cheongsam today, the 1930s is considered the garment's heyday, as hybrid styles that mixed Western and Chinese elements emerged with great creativity and fervor. Endless combinations and variations on necklines, sleeve shapes, lengths, fabrics, cut and trims abounded while the essence of the Chinese dress remained.

Figure 21. 1930s Calendar advertisement. On-line image. https://germainewidjaja.wordpress.com/2013/02/19/old-shanghai-style-cheongsam-girl/. Retrieved Feb. 20, 2015.

Figure 22. Image still for the film In the Mood for Love, 2000 Directed by Wong Kar Wai Example of 1960s trend of high collar. On-line image http://www.wgsn.com/blogs/beauty/inspiration-in-the-mood-for-love/attachment/in-the-mood-for-love. Retrieved Feb. 10, 2015.

Even the quintessential collar was subject to fashion's whims and rose as high as the cheeks only to narrow down in the following season. Wessieling (2007) argues that the wild fluctuations in the styles of the cheongsam were an indication of the importance of fashion in the lives of women at this time, as it offered them control over something. The 1930s marked a time of great political and economic instability with the growing communist threat and conflicts with Japan that eventually led to the Sino-Japanese war of 1937. Exercising decisions over one's cheongsam provided a way to react to the reigning anxieties and pressures of life, while providing some greatly needed pleasure and enjoyment.

As the cheongsam became a form-fitting garment, the Chinese woman's body was seen like never before. China's push towards modernity as determined by the West also exerted its influence on the cheongsam, as it could be used to increase the desirability of the Chinese female, making the female body China's latest export. Hazel Clark describes how calendar posters contributed to this situation. Calendar

posters were hand painted images that accompanied calendars that emerged in the late nineteenth century and were a popular art form, given as gifts and found in many Chinese households. As Clark explains, the development of lithographic printing made them more accessible and soon posters were "purchased and distributed by locally based companies" in Hong Kong and Shanghai "who added their names and products to mass-produced images." (2000, p.14) While the circulation of these images may have contributed to the popularity of the cheongsam in China, and the association of the dress with Chinese culture, Clark writes that:

> (t)heir often very revealing portrayals of the female body not only drew attention to the product being advertised, but also covertly projected a notion of Chinese women as 'exotic' and desirable commodities. ... The poster depicted women in a variety of roles, ranging from object of desire used to advertise popular brands of cigarettes, fabrics, or cosmetics, to the virtuous wife and devoted mother who appeared in the prints issued at Chinese New Year...both stereotypes were, in their own ways, sexually subordinate to their male counterparts. (2000, p.15-16)

Figure 23. Calendar advertisement. On-line image.
http://www.myelegantdress.com/chinese-cheongsam-in-modern-calendar-advertisements-of-shanghai/
Retrieved February 8, 2015.

Figure 24. Calendar advertisement illustration. On-line image.

http://www.walkinginmay.com/2012/12/qipao-love-part-1-from-qi-pao-to.html
Retrieved March 29, 2015.

The association between the cheongsam and an idealized Chinese feminine beauty, as well as the idea of the Chinese woman as 'exotic and therefore erotic,' is one that continues to haunt perceptions of the cheongsam in the minds of Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage today. Add to this the double discourse of tradition and modernity that promotes a nationalist agenda alongside the need for trade with the West, and a portrait emerges of how the seeds of great ambivalence towards the cheongsam have been sewn.

By the 1940s, women of all classes in China had adopted the cheongsam as everyday wear. While part of the appeal was its connection to the urban fashion elite and leisure class, it had become more widely available as more Shanghai-based tailors began to migrate to Hong Kong at the onset of the Japanese invasion in 1937. The popularity of the cheongsam remained high but the fluctuation of styles settled down. Wu explains that the Sino-Japanese wars and the insurgence of the Communist party during the 1940s greatly affected the fashion mood. Patriotism and frugality were called for in the media, while new tools and techniques from the West such as zippers, snaps, darts, set-in sleeves and detachable linings for easy cleaning had an impact on the design of the cheongsam.

The Republic era ended in 1949 with the establishment of the Communist party and the founding of the People's Republic of China on the mainland. The values of austerity, hardship and egalitarianism marked another shift in the history of China. As Wu writes, "anything bourgeois was looked down upon, and the cheongsam accordingly fell out of fashion." (2009, p.111) The dress that had initially represented freedom and modernity now signified extravagance in the eyes of the new ruling governement. The cheongsam was discarded for a plain jacket and trousers, called the

'people's suit', underscoring China's continued understanding of the power of clothing to shape ideas and attitudes.

Figure 25. Patriotic wool suit. On-line image wool. http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/hsc/evrev/mao_suit.htm Retrieved March 29, 2015.

In the 1950s the cheongsam mostly disappeared from daily life in Mainland China but was occasionally worn by certain elites. In Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan, however, the dress continued to be a staple in women's wardrobes. For a number of the women interviewed for this project, including myself, the introduction to the cheongsam came through photographs of grandmothers and aunts who lived in these places during the 1950s and 60s and later immigrated to Canada. The cheongsam was an everyday dress made from practical fabrics such as cotton, wool, tweed and polyester. Our aunts and grandmas brought their tailor made and store-bought dresses with them to Canada and would have more made during visits back to Asia after immigration.

With Mainland China being largely closed, Hong Kong became the primary exporter of Chinese culture to the West. The cheongsam's popularity in Hong Kong, promoted through mainstream culture in the form of beauty pageants, cinema and fashion, contributed to its image in the West, as a symbol of Chinese cultural identity.

Figure 26. My father's cousin, circa 1950s, Hong Kong.

Figure 27. Family friend in cheongsam, 1976. Photo: V. Sim

While the cheongsam had arrived in North America via Chinese immigration, it became an international sensation through the musical *The World of Suzie Wong,* starring France Nguyen, which was later made into a movie in 1961 with Nancy Kwan in the starring role.

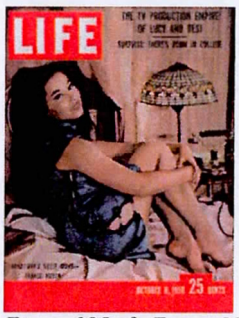


Figure 28 Left: France Nguyen on the cover of Life Magazine. On-line image http://www.oldlifemagazines.com/october-06-1958-life-magazine-3443.html. Retrieved February 8, 2015

Figure 29. Movie poster for *The World of Suzie Wong*. On-line image. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_World_of_Suzie_Wong_(film). Retrieved February 8, 2015.

Women of Chinese heritage born in North America in the 1950s and 60s, often cite the film version of this musical as an example of 'bad publicity' for Asian women and the cheongsam. It tells the story of Hong Kong prostitute Suzie Wong and her romance with white, British lover, Richard Lomax. Lomax is an architect who decides to move to Hong Kong for a year to try his hand at being an artist. He meets a woman named Mee Ling on the ferry to Hong King Island and, given her clothes, he thinks she is a respectable young woman of good social standing. The next time he sees her is in a bar in the company of a sailor, wearing a tight fitting, red cheongsam and discovers that she is a prostitute who goes by the name Suzie Wong. He asks her to model for one of his paintings and they begin to get to know each other. He finds out that she was forced into prostitution when she was ten years old. As they spend more time together, they start to fall in love, but Lomax attenuates their growing affair. Later, when Lomax's friend Ben Marlowe, a white married man offers to make Suzie his mistress, she accepts to make Lomax jealous. But when Marlowe gets back together with his wife and asks Lomax to tell Suzie, the pain of rejection overwhelms her and Lomax finally admits his love for her. Their relationship starts off well and Suzie stops working as a prostitute, but faces difficulties when Lomax discovers that Suzie has been hiding a child. He accepts the child but their relationship is again put to the test when he starts to have financial problems. His pride prevents him from taking money from Suzie. When she pays his rent and offers to resume prostitution to

help him, he casts her away in a fit of anger. After realizing his mistake he goes after Suzie. When he finds her, she has discovered that her baby was killed in the annual flooding. They finally reconcile, committing themselves to each other forever. The 'white knight' saving the tragic Asian woman is a narrative that is re-iterated from other texts, including Puccini's opera Madame Butterfly, and the hit Broadway musical "Miss Saigon". However, what women of Chinese heritage in North America remember best is how the *The World of Suzie Wong* fuelled the exotic/erotic appeal of the cheongsam. Wessieling (2007) writes, " *The World of Suzie Wong* brought the cheongsam to Western audiences alongside the ascription of sexy-exoticism to the dress." (2007, p.31) She goes onto explain that "(r)eflective of the plot, a love story that crosses racial, cultural and social boundaries, Suzie's beauty is contained through her appearance in the cheongsam which has been sexualised and exoticized...feeding the desire of the gaze." (2007, p.31) Wessieling argues that the inter-cultural affiliations of the musical and film that bring the 'Orient' into contact with the West through a hybrid setting (the film was shot in Hong Kong and London), hybrid plot (set in British Hong Kong), and a hybrid actress (France Nguyen, the star of the musical is of French and Vietnamese ancestry, while the star of the film version, Nancy Kwan, is of Chinese and British origins) increased the exotic appeal of the story in the West. Suddenly, white women wanted to wear this dress as way to access a kind of naughty mystique. The excitement over what became known as the 'Suzie Wong dress' reverberated back to Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore and the cheongsam became even more form fitting as evidenced in photographs.

Figure 28. Woman in tight fitting cheongsam. circa 1960s, Hong Kong Photo: V. Sim

Figure 29. Western woman in cheognsam, 1960s Hong Kong. On-line image. http://www.quora.com/What-look-is-famous-in-the-Far-East. Retrieved March 29, 2015.

As the cut came closer to the body and the slits rose higher, American journalists started to take note. The glossy 2009 publication *The Cheongsam,* produced by Pepin, contains a reprinted 1964 Saturday Evening Post article in which Stanley Karnow explains that, "the proper cheongsam is supposed to look as if it were painted on" and that "(t)raffic accidents in Taipei increase sharply at lunch hour, when girls in their slit skirts grace the city's boulevards." (Pepin Press, 85)


THE CHEONGSAM ATTRACTS MALE STARES AND CAUSES CAR ACCIDENTS

Figure 32. Article by Stanley Karnow Featured in *Cheongsam*, Pepin Press, 2009. Scanned image.

The tightness of the cheongsam was a result of fashion trends and media images that in turn influenced how women should look. In interviews, many of the women in this project felt that only slender women can look good in the dress, given its close cut. Even as late as 1996, advertisements for the "Suzie Wong" dress could be found in importer trade magazines in England, and as evidenced in my interviews, the

cheongsam is still popular as a Halloween costume for those who wish to masquerade as a "sexy Chinese" type character.

Figure 33. Image of the costume called "Adult Oriental Princess Costume". On-line image. http://www.costumecraze.com/category/asian-japanese-and-chinese-costumes. Retrieved on March 29, 2015.

Figure 34. Examples of Asian influenced Halloween costumes pictured in the article "Is your Halloween costume racist?". On-line image. http://gawker.com/5672914/is-your-halloween-costume-racist/ Retrieved March 29, 2015.

The issue of cultural appropriation and the flattening of Asian culture, coupled with the association of the cheongsam with overt sexuality, continued to inform mainstream perceptions of the cheongsam today. The dress form that had emerged as a representation of emancipation and equality for women had now become one of constraint. The tightness of the modern cheongsam limited women's movement, forcing them to walk with shorter strides, to sit with a certain restrained posture and prohibited them from bending down with ease. The image of the cheongsam in popular Western culture would also be objectified by the male gaze, effectively

reducing the dress to one of sexual availability and male fantasy. While other pieces of Western clothing, including the mini skirt of the 1960s and 'skinny' jeans of the 2000s, expose the female body, they are not marked ethnically or culturally in the same way as the cheongsam.

The onset of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China (1966-1976) brought about a seek and destroy mission led by the Red Guard to rid society of any decadent, bourgeois clothing or accessories. Clark writes about a Shanghai woman who "related how the Red Guards burned all her cheongsam and ripped up photographs of her wearing them, using anti-imperialism as a justification." (2000, p.23) Finnane describes the story of Wang Guangmei, wife of President Liu Shaoqi, who had been filmed wearing a cheongsam during a tour to Southeast Asia in 1963. Her wearing of the cheongsam was noted by the zealous Jinggangshan Corps who subjected her to a mock trial where she was charged with being "a member of the reactionary bourgeoisie" (2008, p.227) and was "humiliated by being forced to put on a *qipao* too small for her, a necklace of ping-pong balls, and high heeled shoes." (2008, p.228)

Figure 35. Wang Guangmei wearing *qipao* and necklace of ping-pong balls. On-line image. http://www.applet-magic.com/cultrev.htm. Retrieved March 29, 2015.

These coercive acts are reminiscent of those carried out by the Manchu during the Qing dynasty and are a continued testimony to the instrumentalization of clothing and the politicization associated with what to wear and what not to wear. The cheongsam

was out and replaced by the practical, androgynous, monochromatic clothing of the Cultural Revolution, which became the dress-image that China wished to represent to itself and the world. As Wu writes, "(in) the sea of monotonous blue and gray, outsiders divined a deeper meaning: uniformity in dress signified the desire for uniformity in thought and behavior." (2009, p.112)

Hazel Clark (2000), Juanjuan Wu (2009), Wessieling (2007) and others mark the late 1960s as the start of the decline of the cheongsam in the places where it survived after the founding of the People's Republic of China. As the ready-to-wear garment industry took off in Hong Kong, mass-produced Western-style clothing became more available and affordable. The desire for Western garments such as the mini skirt reflected the changing values and desires of a new generation who saw the cheongsam as "old-fashioned and too obviously 'Chinese'. This younger generation wished to be seen as 'modern Chinese'." (Clark, 2000, p.28) Wearing Western clothes at this time, closely resembling the ideas of the Republic era, was linked with "social progress, informed taste and elite style." (Clark, 2000, p.28) At the same time, the cheongsam sparked controversy for being worn too tight, with slits too high, prompting the Catholic Church and other community organizations to intervene. Clark describes how a Kai Fong (local neighborhood) Association held a 'Happy Family Life' campaign, which urged women to wear cheongsam with knee length hemlines and only two-inch slits." (2000, p.30) By the 1970s, the hem of the cheongsam continued to rise in order to compete with the mini skirt. But this iteration of the cheongsam was considered vulgar and without the elegance appropriate for national dress. From this period onward, the cheongsam became outmoded as everyday wear for the new generation.

Figure 36. Woman in office appropriate cheongsam, 1960s. On-line image. http://www.wgsn.com/blogs/vintage/qipao-crush. Retrieved March 20, 2015.

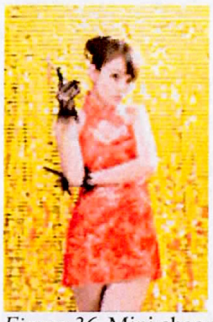


Figure 36. Mini cheongsam. On-line image. http://free-images.gatag.net/en/2013/02/07/020000.html. Retrieved April 18, 2015

By the 1980s, in Mainland China, Wu writes that "the political focus suddenly shifted from class struggle to economic development." (2009, p.112) With this change of mindset yet again, people began to exercise more freedom in their choice of clothing, which brought about a revival of older 'indigenous' garments including the cheongsam. The fashion industry got a major boost from the government to ignite the economic development of China. As a result, the cheongsam started to appear in magazines and stores.

Figure 38. Fashion editorial from Vogue China. On-line image.
http://projectrungay.blogspot.ca/2009/09/vogue-china-60-memorable-fashion.html. Retrieved March 29, 2015

Figure 39. Cheongsamon sale in Beijing market. On-line image.
http://www.chinahighlights.com/beijing/shopping.htm. Retrieved March 29, 2015.

With the Cultural Revolution and Red Guard tactics not so far in the distance, women greatly hesitated to wear the cheongsam. Wu explains that women's ambivalence was centered around the paradoxes now associated with the dress, which was "modish yet a fashion from a bygone era. It was feminine, yet backward looking. It was classic, yet looked out of place." (2009, p.112) Wu cites the publishing of an article in July 1983 in the *Ximmin Evening News* titled "Women Like to Wear the Qipao: There is No Need to Fear" as an attempt by the government to mitigate women's concerns about the dress and stimulate the marketplace. The article tells the story of a woman

who wanted to buy a cheongsam but hesitated because she was afraid of what that the leaders in her work unit would think. Wu further describes how the cheongsam re-appeared in fashion shows, trade exhibitions and advertisements, on mannequins in window displays and advertisements, but did not take off as a garment worn by the masses. There were many factors that worked against the re-adoption of the cheongsam. Younger people saw it as old-fashioned, while the older generation remembered a time when the dress was forbidden. Its use by the service industry as a uniform for workers, such as flight attendants, restaurant servers and hostesses at commercial events also greatly diminished associations with exceptional elegance and grace.

Figure 40. Restaurant worker in cheongsam uniform. On-line image. http://www.eastern-queen.co.uk/specialEvents.html. Retrieved March 29, 2015.

Furthermore, the formality and constraint of the cheongsam was still out of step with the general desire for more casual and comfortable clothes. All of these factors worked against the government's attempt to revive the cheongsam and interest in the dress did not take off on a mass level. However, as Wu points out, "attempts to promote the (cheongsam) in the media did help to re-popularize it as ceremonial attire for traditional holidays and special occasions...." (2009, p.113) and it does still find an enthusiastic, if niche audience in China.

Figure 41. Woman in contemporary Beijing. On-line image. http://chinesecouture.tripod.com/. Retrieved Feb. 12, 2015

Figure 42. Members of a Shanghai qipao club. On-line image. http://china.org.cn/learning_chinese/news/2009-03/20/content_17475567.htm. Retrieved March 29, 2015.

3.5 Migration of the cheongsam to Canada

The cheongsam's arrival in Canada can be traced thanks to two major contributions to the history of Chinese Canadian women in Canada. *Jin Guo: Voices of Chinese Canadian Women* (1992) is an oral history book project produced by the Women's Issues Committee of the Chinese Canadian National Council. This groundbreaking collection of interviews archives a cross section of stories and experiences of women who immigrated to Canada as well as women who were born in Canada. It begins with the an interview with Margaret Chan, one of the oldest pioneers and ends with Sharon Lee, an artist and writer born in British Columbia. The second is the website project *Chinese Canadian Women, 1923-1967: Inspiration – Innovation – Ingenuity,* produced by the Multicultural History Society of Ontario. This veritable goldmine of oral histories, photographs, pedagogical resources and virtual exhibits was created in order to recognize and commemorate "Chinese Canadian women for the important

roles they played during a challenging time in their community's history, the over four decades in which Canadian immigration policy was blatantly discriminatory." (http://mhso.ca/wp/multi-faceted-websites/ Retrieved November 23, 2014)

Jin Guo: Voices of Chinese Canadian Women features a brief overview of the history of Chinese women in Canada and also features a fascinating selection of historically significant photos.

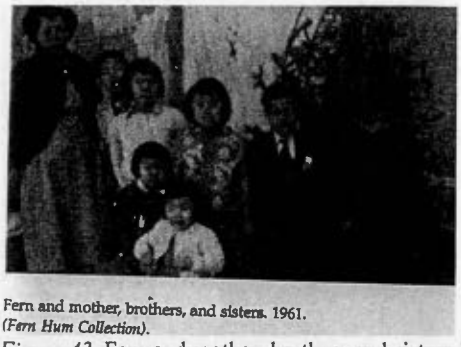


Figure 43. Fern and mother, brothers and sisters 1961. Fern Hum Collection.

Figure 44. Women in a race, Chinese School picnic, Elk Lake, Victoria, B.C., 1935. Susie Nipp Collection.

Figure 45. "The Woman's Part in War" .Valerie Mak Collection.

In the historical overview, the text explains that:

> the majority of pioneer Chinese women came from the Pearl River Delta region of Guangdong province in Southern China. Women from this area have traditionally demonstrated an exceptional independence. The people of the region had been emigrating for centuries, mostly to Southeast Asia. (1992, p.18)

We are also given an account of how Mrs. Kwong Lee, wife of a "prosperous merchant" based in San Francisco, was the first Chinese woman to arrive in Canada when she landed in Victoria, British Columbia on March 1, 1860. Earlier migrant workers did not have the means to bring wives over or were unable to afford marriage. Edgar Wickberg's research for his 1983 book, *From China to Canada*, indicates that fifty-three Chinese women had arrived in Canada by 1885, as recorded in immigration records. From that year onward, more women arrived, predominantly wives of merchants, despite the Head Tax legislated by the Canadian government to limit Chinese immigration. As the *Jin Guo* publication explains,

> (t)his increase reflected not only the growth of the merchant class, but also a response to the new fifty dollar Head Tax on Chinese immigrants. While not explicitly forbidding women to enter, the new tax made any further immigration extremely difficult. (1992, p.18)

While the Head tax tended to restrict Chinese immigration to Canada, it did not stop it entirely. Families and friends continued to find the money to help pay the tax. However, the introduction of the Chinese Immigration Act in 1923 effectively put a stop to any further immigration of the Chinese to Canada until 1947. The Chinese Immigration Act, today referred to, as the Chinese Exclusion Act, was the most comprehensive legislation ever to be enforced in Canadian history. Furthermore, Canada has not applied this type of Act on any other immigrant nation. While Chinese women had already started to arrive prior to the Act, they were subject to long decades of separation from their families back in China. But despite the propaganda and institutionalized racism that was rampant at that time, Chinese

women were active and engaged members of Canadian society, bringing their cultural heritage, together with the customs and clothing of their adopted country.

An analysis of the images found on the *Chinese Canadian Women, 1923-1967* database show that Chinese women who first arrived in the late 19th century often wore Western clothing and were sometimes photographed in Han traditional clothing for formal portraits. The cheongsam, nevertheless, arrived in Canada in the early 1930s, not too long after it became fully adopted in China.

Figure 46. Portrait of Quon Liang and Ng Shee, Victoria, 1914, c. Alice Louie-Byne.

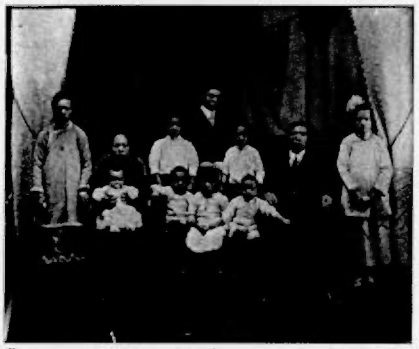


Figure 47. Chew Family Portrait, Collection of Jan Mah.

Figure 48. Volunteer servers for the Women's Missionary Society's Chow mein tea, Calgary, 1934 Collection: Loretta Lee.

It is possible that as the cheongsam took off in China at the end of the 1920s, the latest Chinese fashions from Shanghai and Hong Kong were seen in family photographs, magazines and other advertising, prompting an influx of the cheongsam through regular trade as well as via relatives back in China. The 1934 image above clearly shows how traditional Han, Manchu and Western clothing styles were combining and merging. The woman standing on the far left wears a Han style *ao qun* or two-piece jacket and skirt while the woman standing on the far right wears a Western style dress. A few of the women seated in between them are wearing the one-piece cheongsam or variations that work with all three styles. This mixing and mingling of styles lends visual support to an understanding of how Manchu, Han and Western clothing interacted stylistically to give birth to the modern cheongsam.

Photos in the *Jin Guo* publication and the MHSO website reveal that the cheongsam continued to be worn by women in everyday situations, from the 1940s until the 1960s however, by the 1970s and 1980s it gradually became used only for formal or community oriented occasions, mirroring the decline of the dress' popularity in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore.

Figure 49. Chinese Canadian women fundraising for the Allied War effort c. 1940s, Multicultural Society of Ontario, E.C. Mark Collection, Film 1-30.

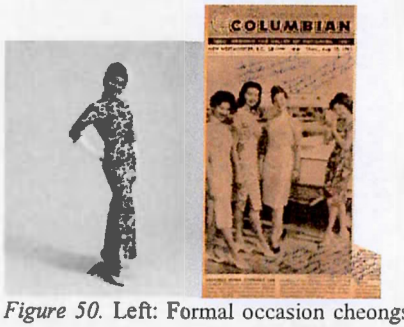


Figure 50. Left: Formal occasion cheongsam, *Figure 51.*Right: Women in daywear cheongsam Courtesy Susan Chew.

In the early 1990s, Clark, Wessieling and Wu describe how the cheongsam made a comeback that inspired a kind of dialogue between designers in China, designers of Chinese heritage based in the West and Western high-fashion houses. New York based designers Anna Sui, Yeohlee and Vivianne Tam, all of Chinese heritage, began to create cheongsam that reflected their particular branded style. Anna Sui's dresses, "were informed by popular culture and retro styles, but they also firmly reflected her Chinese heritage." (2000, p.57) Yeohlee's minimalist aesthetic, "produced deceptively simple shapes", while Vivian Tam's dress cuts and iconography were "influenced by Chinese tradition and popular culture." (2000, p.58)

Figure 52 Left: Cheongsam by Hong Kong designer William Tang, Hong Kong Fashion Designers Assoication show, Hong Kong Fashion Week, 1992. *The Cheongsam*, by Hazel Clark, 2000.

Figure 53 Right: A white silk cheongsam, designed by Blanc de Chine. *The Cheongsam*, by Hazel Clark, 2000.

As Clark notes, Hong Kong designer William Tang updated the cheongsam in his 1992 collection, featuring them in contemporary colours and with eclectic accessories. She claims that at the same time a new crop of designers based in Beijing began to adopt the cheongsam as one of their references. The major retail chain Shanghai Tang launched in 1994, promoted its 'Made by Chinese' branding and featured home furnishings, gifts and clothing, including the cheongsam, inspired by nostalgic images of 1930s Shanghai. Sun Jian and Guo Pei are noted as the first designers to arrive on the scene with their collections, which both featured pieces that evoked the cheongsam.

Figure 54. Shanghai Tang store in the Pedder Building in Hong Kong. On-line image. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pedder_Building Retrieved March 30, 2015.

Clark describes their joint 1996 fashion show called 'Approaching 1997' as a reflection of "the eagerness with which Mainland designers awaited the return of

Hong Kong to China, which would provide greater access to what was seen as a key fashion centre in East Asia." (2000, p.58) The re-emergence of the cheongsam did not go unnoticed by the most powerful fashion houses of the Western fashion industry and by the late 1990s designers such as Karl Lagerfeld, John Galliano and Jean-Paul Gaultier took up the cheongsam as their latest inspiration. Galliano's versions were particularly reminiscent of those of the 1930s, due to the mixing of western fabrics and cuts with the basic elements of the cheongsam, but also because of their emphasis on the sex appeal of the dress. Short, flirty and trimmed with peek-a-boo lace or worn with fur, these iterations stirred the imagination of the Western high-fashion loving public.

Figure 55. & *Figure 56.* Left and right: John Galliano for Dior Autumn/Winter 1997/98 Prêt-à-Porter Collection. *The Cheongsam*, Hazel Clark, 2000.

Clark explains how the cheongsam found its way into every level of the fashion industry, from the 'high street' to the red carpet and cites a member of girl group "The Spice Girls", as wearing a mini cheongsam to meet Nelson Mandela, as a prime example of this phenomenon.

Figure 57. Celine Dion poses on the red carpet with Jennifer Lopez. On-line image http://yan-er-ji.weebly.com/traditional-clothes/chinese-traditional-cheongsam-qipao-dress-in-global-cinema. Retrieved March 30, 2015.

Figure 58. The Spice Girls meet Nelson Mandela in 1997. On-line image. http://www.independent.ie/entertainment/music/spice-girls-in-tribute-to-mandela-29816478.html. Retrieved March 30, 2015.

I recall the many items I bought in trendy, mainstream stores in the mid 1990s that distinctly riffed on the cheongsam. Whether it was a top or a dress, each of these cheongsam type pieces demonstrated the hybrid quality of the garment, which is able to maintain its Chinese roots even when made from high tech fabrics and designed with more relaxed cuts.

Figure 59. The author wearing a white cheongsam made from high-tech fabric (nylon/cotton blend), with zippered side slits and minimalist styling. Photo: Jamie Riddell

While the cheongsam was no longer officially considered the national dress of China by the 2000s, it had re-established a more legitimate, less stigmatized presence in Chinese society in service of the growing fashion and retail industry. In North America, the dress had been seen on actresses like Anna Mae Wong in American films of the 1930s. It had been seen on older women who immigrated from Hong Kong from the 1960s to the 1980s. It became an inexpensive mass produced item found in Chinatown stores and appeared on actresses and pop singers and eventually influenced the style of mass manufactured casual wear by the 1990s. The cheongsam as signifier of Chinese culture became part of the fashion vocabulary in the West, even if the mainstream public did not know its proper name. This message went back to China and as Wu writes, "affected views of the (cheongsam) as serving as a symbol of Chinese identity" (116). To illustrate this point, Wu describes how renowned mainland Chinese actress Gong Li wore this dress for her debut at the Venice International Film Festival in 1992, and further explains how China experienced, "its own China fad, marked by a revival of many traditional styles as street fashions along with a renewed and intensified interest in Chinese traditional culture." (Wu, p.117-118)

Figure 60. Gong Li at 2002 Venice Film Festival. On-line image.
http://www.spokeo.com/Gong+Li+1/Sep+04+2002+London+Gb
Retrieved March 30, 2015

The cheongsam's resurgence in China and North America was further bolstered by film. According to Wessieling, Wu and the findings of the interviews carried out for this project, the 2000 film "In the Mood for Love", by Chinese director Wong Kar Wai featured the cheongsam like no other before, a point I will describe in more depth in Section Two of this chapter.

What I have attempted to demonstrate through this brief mapping of the history and evolution of the cheongsam is that this iconic garment has its roots in a deep and complex set of circumstances and influences that are shaped by political events that in turn affect its place in Chinese and North American culture. Furthermore, the cheongsam is a prime example of what Ursula Franklin describes as a 'technology'. It is surrounded by a tight weave of discourses that shape, limit and enforce ideas about who is permitted to wear it, how it should look, how it should be worn, when it should be worn and what it means. As explained, forces and interests have altered the dress' shape and its representations, transforming it from a symbol of freedom and progress for women to an instrument for the commodification and disciplining of the female body that also perpetuates an idealized image of Chinese femininity. Yet despite all of these contradictory influences and currents, the cheongsam remains, even if perhaps secretly so, a desirable object. Pleasure can be taken in the enjoyment of the garment's fabrics, design elements, details, and cut. The appeal of the cheongsam also lies in its ability to be used as a tool of agency in affirming links to an evolving Chinese identity that is mutable and multiple, especially in contexts outside of China. What I will endeavor to illustrate in Section Two, is how the responses culled from my interviews reveal current wearing practices of the cheongsam by Canadian women of Chinese heritage and how these wearing practices are informed by the garment's history, its representation in Western mass media, and the experiences of the Chinese in Canada. The analysis will also underscore how the cheongsam functions as a 'technology' that inspires great ambivalence amongst

Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage, making the dress a veritable material-symbolic, cultural-political complex.

3.6 Part Two: Wearing Practices In Canada – interviews and analysis

In this section, I will present and offer an analysis of the interview question-based responses from the twenty women who participated in this project. I will begin however with an outline of the limitations that shaped the overall process and provide further evidence of the importance of this research and its potentional for deeper study.

3.6.1 Limitations

As outlined in the Methodological Approach, this project presents qualitative research that aimed to weave together a portrait that might adequately portray the vibrance and complexity of the lives of the women interviewed, in regards to my primary research questions. The sample size is, therefore, relatively small but demonstrates an attempt to address and underscore the diversity and range of experiences within this particular group. Another major aspect that guided the search for interview participants, was the need to include an equal representation of anglophone and francophone women as a way to address the variable links between language and its effect on culture and ethnicity in the Canadian context, to acknowledge Montreal, a bilingual city, as the location of the presentation of the exhibition and to address certain expectations and assumptions about Chinese people in Quebec. As previously described, the Chinese in Canada have been historically affected by the perpetuation of Orientalist discourses, which I believe have cultivated an assumption, particularly in Quebec, that Chinese people or people of Chinese heritage are difficult to assimilate and tend to learn to speak English before French. I,

therefore, wanted to subvert this assumption, in the first place by making sure that francophone women of Chinese heritage were well represented.

Taking all of this into consideration, it is important to point out that the participants were from British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec and Alberta. I would eventually like to expand my investigation to include women from all provinces and territories, so that this study may benefit from an analysis that takes more of Canada's regions into consideration, as there is the possibility that the experiences of women who grew up in the Yukon and Nunavut, as well as the Atlantic areas of Canada may have unique experiences affected by the history and culture of those areas that are not addressed by the women interviewed at this stage. Thus, any future research on this subject will include interview participants from these unrepresented areas. Concerning the installation itself, I think that a future work should adopt a more expansive approach to audio montage and that it should include a visual mapping of the year and place of birth for each participating woman. This demographic information would reveal the extent of Chinese immigration across Canada and would also provide additional contextual background that would enhance an understanding of the variety and richness of the responses in the interviews and perhaps by extension provoke a larger reflection on discourses and their formation.

The methodology of 'snowballing' involves the use of my immediate contacts in order to locate women for the interview process. These contacts may lead to other contacts and so on. I only knew six of the women personally and gradually found the others through other contacts, including family members, a Facebook group for Chinese Montrealers, Alan Wong, an academic and community organizer, and Parker Mah, a jazz musician who also worked on the film "Être chinois au Québec". They each reached out to the women they knew who met with my criteria. Some of the women I interviewed referred me to other women and so on. I found 'snowballing' to be an effective and objective tool for my qualitative research

purposes as it did not entail any major limitations that would lead to a problematic homogeneity in my participants nor undermine my desire to represent a multiplicity of voices. The only inherent limitation of 'snowballing' is that it tends to produce a smaller sample than perhaps a survey or more quantitative research tool. But my concern and aims were focused on a deeper and richer examination of the questions I was engaged with and that could only adequately be answered through extended one-on-one interviews, which were facilitated by pre-existing connections through a mutual contact. With more time to expand on my initial sample group, I will be able to include women from more regions. The final group of participants came from a variety of Canadian locations, socio-economic backgrounds and immigration situations that reflect the movement of Chinese people around the world (the Chinese in Viet Nam, Malaysia and Singapore, for instance).

3.6.2 Interview responses and analysis

The preliminary questions were as follows:

- Briefly tell me about how your family came to Canada.
- Tell me about growing up in Canada (your school, your friends, your experiences).
- What does it mean to you to 'feel' Chinese or to connect with your Chinese-ness? Do you feel connected? Why or why not?

After getting a sense of the woman's background and formative years, I focused on a set of questions about the cheongsam.

- Have you ever worn the cheongsam?

If not:

- Why? What factors might have contributed to not wearing it?
- Under what circumstances might you wear a cheongsam?

If so:

- When was the first time?
- What did it look like?
- How did you get it? (store bought? tailor made? inherited? borrowed?)
- How did you style the cheongsam? (hair, makeup, accessories)
- How did you feel in the cheongsam? (physical comfort, emotional and mental state)

Whether you have worn a cheongsam or not:

- What does the cheongsam mean or symbolize to you?
- Who can wear it?

In the following pages, I will provide a brief summary of the responses to these questions, along with a selection of excerpts from the interviews to illustrate the findings outlined in the summary.

3.6.3 Have you ever worn the cheongsam: No.

Of the twenty women who participated in the interviews, seven women had never worn the one-piece cheongsam. Their reasons were multiple, ranging from not having had the right occasion to wear one, not feeling enough of a connection to it, not having a sufficiently developed knowledge of Chinese culture, not having the right body type and not wanting to wear store-bought versions.

LC, who is of mixed Chinese and Trinidadian-Chinese heritage and grew up in suburban/urban Alberta during the 1980s, has never worn the cheongsam. She attended a middle-class elementary school, and then a middle-to-upper class Catholic high school. She describes the student population at both schools as predominantly white but explains that there were more Chinese students in her high school. What she remembers is that differences were more apparent across class than across 'race'. Her family was the only Chinese family in her neighborhood and they spoke English

at home. LC explains that generally she does not identify herself as Chinese and feels closer to the West Indian culture of her mother. If she does feel an affinity with her Chinese heritage, it is mainly through food. Her mother cooks Chinese and Chinese-Trinidadian meals, and LC chooses the most adventurous dishes on the menu whenever she goes out to Chinese restaurants. In Alberta she never had to provide explanations about her ethnic background and it was only when she moved to Montreal that she truly became aware of her difference and has been asked where she comes from on a regular basis. Furthermore, she has been exposed to racial slurs, and on one occasion during a job interview, was shamed by one of her white interviewers for not having learned to speak Chinese. This combination of experiences has led her to a current crisis of identity and has contributed to a sense of loss in terms of a knowledge of her Chinese heritage. As a result, the cheongsam is a garment that she does not feel she would or should wear:

> I don't ever picture myself wearing one unless my parents bought me one. I think they offered to buy me one in China and I think I turned (my mom) down. She probably thought it would be difficult to get one anyways. I wouldn't know what to do with it. I wouldn't wear it at a white person's wedding because I don't want to be the token person – exotic Chinese friend – at a white person's wedding – but I would wear it to a Chinese friend's wedding. But it's more because I don't know enough about it and would feel like a fraud – even because I don't even know about festivals and holidays. I think they are beautiful. I just don't think I would wear one. (LC)

ACV, who is of mixed heritage, also feels the fear of being an imposter. She was born in Hamilton, Ontario and grew up in the suburban town of Stoney Creek during the 1970s. She attended Catholic elementary and high schools that she describes as 98% white, and became a little more aware of her ethnicity in high school when there was more diversity among the student population. Her parents divorced when she was a child and she lived with her Filipino mother, while staying with her Chinese father only occasionally. As a result, she says that her connection with her Chinese heritage "is lost". She explains that even when her parents were together that her

father did not feel that teaching her Chinese was a priority and that in Canada it was expected that one should speak English. She talked about how she hated Chinese food as a child and that she didn't have any friends of Chinese heritage until she was in university. She also laughed about how her Black, Jamaican born, Canadian-raised husband knows how to use chopsticks better than she does. She now lives in Markham, Ontario which is a suburb of Toronto that has become the new enclave for newly arrived immigrants from Mainland China. There are entire malls and shopping centers that cater to the Chinese community, offering activities and events during holidays such as Chinese New Year and the Harvest Moon festival. She says that she likes to bring her children to these events so that they might know a little bit more about their heritage. But because her appearance is more Chinese than Filipino, she is often worried that she won't be able to respond to people who try to speak to her in Chinese. These concerns are directly linked with why she has never worn the cheongsam:

> I think for me personally – I think it's the expectation of looking Chinese and wearing this dress...they might come up to me and speak Chinese to me and I would feel foolish. And since I don't feel 100% (Chinese) I don't feel comfortable wearing the dress...I feel totally ignorant, through non-exposure – not educating myself. I can't speak to it. (ACV)

While ACV does not have a cheongsam, she does own a cheongsam-style blouse with gold embroidery and a red and black reversible Chinese jacket (*ma gua*), which she wears for special occasions. She styles these pieces with jeans and more casual Western accessories and feels that mixing Western clothing with these Chinese looking garments expresses her own style and also communicates that she is a mix of ethnic heritages, reducing any essentialized expectations from white Canadians and Chinese mainlanders.

This 'strategic hybridity' is also employed by AL who was born and raised in suburban Burnaby and urban Vancouver, British Columbia during the late 1970s and 1980s. Her father arrived from Hong Kong in 1968 and her mother arrived during the 1950s as a teenager. In elementary school, she remembers being bullied for being Chinese and wanted badly to integrate into mainstream society. At home, she only spoke English and says that her refusal to speak Chinese did not meet much resistance as her father had stated that he knew what the values were in Canada when he arrived and was ready to live by them. When AL reached high school, she started to feel more part of the mainstream, as 80% of the student body was of Asian heritage. She now considers herself very Canadian, but "with a twist". Most of her close friends are of Asian heritage and she explains that they have created their own culture, given that they share the experience of being of Asian heritage and growing up in Canada. Despite her interest in style and her studies in fashion, she has never worn the cheongsam. She explains that it was something she did not know how to access or make and that the ones she saw in the stores did not do justice to the beauty of the cheongsam, which she had seen in films such as *Joy Luck Club* and later *In the Mood for Love*. She says she would happily wear the dresses presented in those films, but still expresses a deep ambivalence similar to that of ACV:

> Without even intending I think I would feel very Chinese in it. There is some sort of significance. I do take clothing seriously and it is a way to express myself... I do imagine that if I wore it, it would be a definitive expression of my Chinese-ness...knowing at the same time that if I wore it my family would laugh, like, you look Chinese but you don't speak it! (AL)

ACV, LC and AL's discomfort with wearing the cheongsam can be described as the 'burden of representation' as articulated by Kobena Mercer (1990). With this idea, he raised the concern that Black artists in Britain were expected to 'represent' the Black identities or Black community issues through their work. This expectation, expressed by the art world's institions of museums, critics, curators and art schools, unwittingly

(to various degrees), reduced and essentialized the black experience while limiting the scope of what black artists were expected to explore in their art. This responsibility assumed that one artist could speak on behalf of a widely diverse community, and saddled the artist with a great deal of cultural responsibility. Similarly, Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage who express a disconnection with their Chinese heritage, do not feel they should wear the cheongsam.

In a more pointed way, AL's hesitance to wear the cheongsam is underscored by a kind of internalized racism transmitted to her by her mother. AL would look at fashion magazines and show her mother a hair or makeup style that she wanted to try. Her mother would reply that those styles were only appropriate for white women. This reaction extended into the wearing of the cheongsam, inspiring AL to wear Chinese style clothing differently:

> And I remember a white girl wore the (cheongsam) top and I asked my mom about why it looked different and my mom said, oh they look better on white people. I wore the cheongsam top with baby barrettes, cat eye glasses, jeans and combat boots. That was my interpretation. (AL)

AL's wearing of the cheongsam top in this manner expressed her desire and ability to explore and master the language of hybridity. Her ensemble is a reflection of the influence of grunge music on youth subculture and fashion trends, but also her desire to express some irreverence towards traditional Chinese clothing, perhaps in light of her mother's comment. Grunge music and the style of the early 90s, echoes the punk subculture of the 70s, which was about transgressing social conventions, rebellion and anger towards class inequality. The combination of the heaviness and masculinity of combat boots and jeans with the more delicate and highly codified top creates a dissonance that speaks to her feminist and identity politics. The cat eye glasses evoke images of trendy Hong Kong girls from the 1950s and 1960s, while the baby barrettes worn in the hair were an accessory that emerged in 90s rave subculture, along with other accessories of regression, such as baby t-shirts, backpacks and soothers. With

all of these elements together, AL played with Chinese clothing in order to articulate, not only her personal style, but also what informed her identity at a certain place and time.

As previously stated throughout this section, ethnic clothing can be a signifier that is worn when very little else is left to affirm one's heritage. AJ was born in Mississauga, Ontario in the mid 1980s. Her mother is Singaporean Chinese and her father is originally from the former Czechoslovakia. She has several Chinese style shirts that she has received from family members over the years and would wear them proudly to school as a teenager. Growing up in suburban Ontario, she was made very aware of her mixed heritage and racialization. At the same time, she noticed how her parents did not give her much exposure to their own ethnic heritages. She hypothesizes that this is linked with their embracing of Pierre Trudeau's discourse on multiculturalism. The possibility that this suppression of ethnicity on her parents' part was due to an internalized colonialist mentality prompted AJ to take it upon herself to wear the Chinese blouses to bring her closer to her Chinese family and heritage. But other factors kept her from wearing the one-piece cheongsam:

> They're shiny and overly bright and have hideous patterns that are often not well cut so the seams don't quite match up and the pattern is disjointed at the seams – oh my god they're so not attractive. But the idea of participating fully in my family and fully in my family's activities is what is appealing about it and what keeps bringing me back to these stores despite the garishness of it all. And pretty much every time we pick out a few colours that we think might somehow magically match my skin tone – even though they really don't match anyone's skin tone – and I go and I try them on and they wrinkle in certain places and they have extra material in others and the saleslady will reassure me that they can take it in and make it all fine. But it's not comfortable to be in and I feel self conscious about my body and the excesses of my body in some places, particularly my chest which are not intended to be there in the cheongsam, also my hips, which are not intended to be there and how the dress wrinkles whenever I sit down and...yeah, it's just not a look I can pull off. (AJ)

The cheongsam's form fitting cut does not make it an easy garment to buy off the rack. The choice of colours and fabrics is also mostly limited to bright hues of blue, pink and red made from affordable polyester brocade featuring cherry blossom, dragon and phoenix motifs. The availability of more formal looking cheongsam reflect how the dress is now worn almost exclusively for weddings and other special occasions. Taking all of these factors together, subtlety and comfort are not characteristics of the contemporary, store bought cheongsam.

JY was born in Montreal, Quebec in 1982. Both her parents are Chinese and immigrated from Vietnam. She feels she had a fairly sheltered childhood, raised mostly by her grandmother, while her parents worked. Cantonese was spoken in the home and she did not start to learn French until pre-school. Her parents later enrolled her at a private francophone school with a mostly white student population. While there were very few Asian students, she did not feel marginalized by her ethnicity. Class differences emerged from time to time but she explains that the emphasis was primarily on academic achievement. It was not until she started university that she started to experience racialization, more significantly in everyday life situations. She is close with her family and feels she has adopted a Chinese mentality as well as a number of its values and customs. At the same time, she is aware of how both white and Chinese people have the ability to make racializing comments. When she was younger, she found the cheongsam too Chinese and would not want to wear it in public out of a fear of being seen as a newly arrived immigrant, rather than someone who was born in Canada. Now that she is older, she feels more confident about her place in Montreal and has a deeper appreciation for her Chinese heritage. She has seen photos of her grandmother in the dress and describes her as looking elegant, regal and chic. JY feels the cheongsam is a dress that belongs to the upper classes but that it is not appropriate for everyday. Despite the fact that she has never worn the cheongsam, JY feels the dress is a symbol of respect for Chinese heritage and family:

> C'est un moyen pour s'exprimer et être en contact avec son héritage – c'est le symbolisme qui est ancré dans la tradition – c'est un signe de respect de rassemblement aussi, non seulement le vêtement mais le fait que tu la portes pour d'autres personnes. C'est un bon moyen pour se connecter. (JY)

While she does not feel that the cheongsam is associated with any negative stereotypes, she does feel like AJ, that the cut of the dress is very limiting and that it does not lend itself to women of different shapes and sizes.

> Je ne vois pas les stéréotypes – mais pour moi ça idéalise un certain genre de corps. J'hésite à la porter comme mon corps n'est pas parfait. Je l'assume. Alors pour cette robe il n'y a pas beaucoup de 'loose' pour cacher les imperfections...c'est aussi lié à l'image que nous avons des femmes asiatiques aussi. Oui on a beaucoup de pression pour être belle et mince, toujours placé...la robe est dans la même chaine d'idées...contraignante. Mais si je trouve une qui me va, je vais la porter. (JY)

JY's ambivalence is palpable. She is knowledgeable about how the dress originally took after the men's *changpao* and that its close, form fitting shape is a result of fashion influences and the marketing aspects of the fashion industry. She, therefore, states that, if mainstream designers took it upon themselves to create a quality cheongsam that was more accommodating and wearable for all types of women, she would definitely wear that one.

AH/1 and AH/2 are twin sisters, born in 1984 and raised in the small rural town of Chibougamou, Quebec. Their mother is a Chinese refugee from Vietnam and their father arrived from Hong Kong in the late 1970s. The population of Chibougamou is mostly francophone Québecois with very few visible minorities. The fact that AH/1 and AH/2 are identical twins, as well as being one of the few Chinese people in town, made them very aware of their difference and visibility. They grew up speaking Cantonese at home and observing Chinese holidays, such as the New Year and Harvest Moon festival. While interviewed separately, one in English, the other in French, they both revealed that they feel equally close to their Chinese and Western

cultural identities. While neither of them has yet worn the cheongsam, they each express the desire to wear one for an important life event.

> Il y a des moments dans la vie ou c'est le moment opportun on peut dire. Et pour moi l'occasion opportune serait, par exemple, si je suis reconnue pour des accomplissments c'est là que peut-être dans cette cérémonie je mettrai comme un cheongsam. Parce-que pour moi, qu'est ce que ça représente c'est des valeurs chinoises. Par exemple – de travailler fort, faire des sacrifices, avoir de la discipline, être modeste – alors pour moi avec un seul geste je peux représenter tous ces sentiments. (AH/1)

As explored in the dress designs of the 1930s, the cheongsam lends itself extremely well to hybrid styling that combines Chinese/Western elements. AH/2 explains that she would like to wear a cheongsam as a wedding dress one day, and describes how she might use it to relay both aspects of her cultural identity:

> What I had in mind was to show that a big part of me will maintain and will want to express my Asian roots and to show that part of me is Westernized and North American. Not one or the other but a mesh of both. I want to take the Asian culture from my parent's generation and grandparent's generation and modernize it and make it relevant in modern society. I decided traditionally or culturally, cheongsam are usually for weddings and are red, while in Western culture, most brides wear white. I would go with ivory or cream rather than red. I also found different sites or people that make cheongsams and found one with lace overlay with the Chinese collar and pearl buttons so there are elements of Asian and Western style. (AH/2)

For both AH/1 and AH/2, the dress is considered an elegant gown that must be treated with respect, as a way to honour family and heritage without eclipsing their Western cultural upbringing. They do not consider the cheongsam a dress that can be worn in an every day context, such as the workplace due to its slim cut and fine fabrics.

> Parce-que pour moi s'il s'agit d'un cheongsam plus traditionnel, ça communique l'élégance. Et ce n'est pas dans la vie quotidienne qu'on a besoin de ce niveau d'élégance... Alors pour moi (porter le cheongsam tous

> les jours), ça diminue un peu la valeur de qu'est ce qu'il représente, si on le porte n'importe quand ou n'importe comment. (AH/1)

3.6.4 Have you ever worn the cheongsam? Yes.

Thirteen out of the twenty women interviewed had worn the cheongsam at some time in their lives. In order to get an in depth sense of what wearing this dress currently means to these women, I asked a series of questions that address the contextual, physical and psychological aspects of the dress: when it was worn for the first time, how it was obtained, what the dress looked like, how it was styled, how it felt on the body and what the psychological effects of wearing it were. This section is organized according to the question asked, with theoretical observations based on the writings of Olivia Khoo, Dorinne Kondo, Ien Ang and Sean Metzger.

> • When did you wear the cheongsam for the first time? What did it look like? Where did you get it? How did you style it? How did you feel wearing it (physically, psychologically)?

For AMJ, the cheongsam was first worn for her high school graduation ceremony. Both of her parents arrived from Hong Kong and she was born in Montreal, Quebec, in 1971. She was one of the few visible minority children in her downtown Montreal school and quickly became aware of her racialized difference. She was teased, bullied and even experienced physical aggression, based purely on her Chinese appearance. While she did not fully reject her heritage, she grew up knowing that her visibility made her vulnerable to various types of attack, and that her best form of defense was to fit into the dominant culture. Upon her final year in high school, she was named valedictorian of her class and was required to deliver a speech at her convocation ceremony. Her mother suggested that she wear a black, brocade cheongsam along with a black, beaded cardigan that she had been keeping in her closet for many years. Without any hesitation, AMJ proudly wore this ensemble, and did not feel it did

anything to negatively emphasize her Chinese heritage. Rather, the cheongsam was a beautiful dress that was appropriate for a dignified and significant life event.

> But it is for me, not about reminding me about my Chinese-ness. We don't live in a society that will let us forget that. So when we want to wear ethnically marked clothing, we have to do it out of our own choice.... I'd be happy to wear it whenever I want to wear it. When would I be unhappy to wear it is when I would be expected to wear it. That would be feeding into expectations and they might not be well informed. (AMJ)

AMJ explains that her mother wore the cheongsam as an everyday dress back in Hong Kong, so in many ways, the dress itself was not ethnic clothing, but simply regular clothing. At the same time, she is aware that, in the Canadian context, the cheongsam is a racialized and feminized garment that requires a certain negotiation when deciding when and where it can be worn. Being selected valedictorian was a major, public validation of AMJ's accomplishments and perhaps this occasion provided a safe context in which to wear this dress.

Like AMJ, JW first wore the cheongsam as part of her high school graduation. She was born in Quebec City in 1980 and is third generation Canadian. Her mother is Québecoise and her father, who is of Chinese heritage, was also born in Quebec City. She was raised mostly by her paternal grandmother and spoke Toisanese at home. Even though she was one of only a few visible minority children in her neighborhood and school, her father and grandmother established in her a confidence and pride about being Chinese. While she had worn some Chinese clothing as a child, her dream was to wear a proper cheongsam one day. When her high school graduation party came around, she finally had an occasion to wear it and bought one with her father's help in Montreal. For JW it had to be full length, red and made of satin brocade. She had her hair and make up done and said she felt incredibly elegant and beautiful.

> Pour moi il n'y aura aucune autre robe. Je ne sais pas si c'était pour m'identifier comme Chinoise, mais c'était une occasion. Et jeune dans ma tête, quand tu as des grands occasions, tu peux porter la belle robe chinoise...et puis c'était mon tour. (JW)

Wearing the cheongsam was a rite of passage for JW as well as a long held dream. A high school prom celebrates the transition from childhood to adulthood, marking a major accomplishment and the start of a new phase in life, which includes making one's own decisions. JW and AMJ's choosing to wear the cheongsam for these special events, demonstrates respect and admiration for a dress that is not so much a reminder of their heritage, but more a reflection of the pleasure they take in the dress' formal beauty.

CW wore the cheongsam for the first time when she traveled to China. She was born in Montreal, Quebec, in 1985 and both of her parents issue from the community of ethnic Chinese in Vietnam. They spoke only Cantonese at home and she was raised with very strict Chinese values. She attended a conservative, predominantly white private school for girls. As a child, she considered herself Chinese and all of her friends were of Chinese heritage. But as she got older and some of her friends started to join street gangs, she drifted away from her Chinese friends. As a teenager and young adult, her awareness of racialization and issues of identity grew. This awakening attracted her to political activism in the Québec mainstream. In this homogenous environment, she felt the need to prove her Québecois identity to her peers. At the same time, she felt deeply constrained by her family and the pressure of the values that they strongly enforced. Feeling like a minority in both cultures, compounded by her feeling that Chinese people were just as racist as the Québecois, she began to reject her origins and to disconnect from her family. Now as an adult, she feels fully integrated into Québecois culture but still feels at odds with her Chinese heritage. In order to find more balance between her militant Québecois values and her family's strict Chinese values, she decided to go to China. It is there

that she bought her first cheongsam.

> La première fois c'était en Chine, c'est la chose touristique à faire. Elle était blanche, au genou, subtile – je l'ai porté pour des événements mais ce n'était pas pour m'identifier comme Chinoise mais parce-que je la trouve belle. Je ne cherche pas à mettre cette robe. Elle me va bien simplement. Ce n'est jamais pour affirmer mon identité. J'aimerais même enlever tout le coté identitaire de la robe – je ne la porterais pas pour éviter les questions et commentaires. Je veux la mettre pour me plaire. (CW)

Wearing the cheongsam was not about realizing a dream. It was simply a dress that CW felt looked good on her. Furthermore, the dress' association with Chinese heritage was more of a burden than a symbol of affirmation.

> (J)e trouve que ça me 'folklorize'. Ce n'est pas quelque chose que je recherche. J'ai toujours eu de la misère avec le mexicain qui porte son 'poncho' même si je reconnais la fierté qui vient avec. Ça amène des commentaires. La question identitaire est tellement présente dans ma vie. J'ai tellement besoin de me justifier face à mes politiques. Cette robe ne me tient pas plus à coeur à cause de ça. (CW)

What is most fascinating is that CW has more than one cheongsam and wears the dress despite serious reservations about how it marks her as Chinese and may attract questions and comments that make her uncomfortable. This double discourse reveals a deep ambivalence that reflects her ongoing attempt to reconcile her Chinese heritage with her Québecois values. The attraction and repulsion of the cheongsam, therefore, seems to be analogous to the forced reconciliation of living within an east/west or Chinese/Canadian binary tension, a phenomenon also noted by each of the women interviewed.

FM, born in Edmonton, Alberta in 1978, experienced the turmoil of this ambivalence in a very deep and intense way. Both of her parents arrived from Hong Kong in the late 60s and she was raised in south Edmonton in a mostly white neighborhood. She felt that she stood out from the other children in school where she was teased and

ostracized for being Chinese, wishing instead that she had been born white, blond haired and blue-eyed. These experiences led her to reject her heritage, a rebellion, which included refusing to eat Chinese food. While her parents insisted on speaking Cantonese at home, she spoke only English with her siblings and eventually dropped out of weekend Chinese school. As a young adult, she worked very hard to get through her anger and has now made peace with her Chinese heritage. She says that the Chinese culture that her parents attempted to share is now part of her, and this includes a love of Chinese food. She had worn a few of her grandmother's cheongsam, which she considered rather retro style dresses rather than 'authentic' cheongsam. They were made from everyday fabrics such as wool and cotton and she styled them with belts to enhance their hybrid look. For her wedding, however, she wore a red, brocade cheongsam, which she considers more traditionally Chinese and experienced the power of the dress to heal old wounds.

> Well I found for the wedding it definitely brought me closer to my heritage – and (my family's) expectations and I was happy to do it – I like how it looks and how it feels – connecting with culture and with my family. They identify as Chinese not really as Canadian. So for me it was to please them and also to embrace that side of me that I never really embraced before. It was one of the things I was happy to embrace. If not, my mother would have been upset and I didn't want to rebel anymore. I wanted to embrace my culture and be closer to my family. (FM)

For FM wearing the cheongsam for her wedding was clearly about asserting a Chinese identity that she had worked so hard to suppress as a child and teenager. It was about making amends; showing love and respect for her family and also proving to herself that being of Chinese heritage was something positive.

Of the thirteen women who had worn the cheongsam, four of them wore it for the first and only time at weddings. QY was born in Toronto, Ontario, in 1980 and wore the dress for her own wedding. Both Chinese parents arrived as refugees from Viet Nam and QY and her sisters were raised in the Jane-Finch neighborhood of Toronto,

which was home to many low income and immigrant/refugee families. Being surrounded by people who shared a similar story and background was comforting to her while growing up. As her parents began to prosper, they took QY and her siblings out of their comfort zone and into the middle class neighborhood of Bloor West. With very few visible minority families and children around, she started to become acutely aware of her difference and recalls being teased in school. While she says it was difficult to make friends, she did not reject her heritage and simply disregarded the insulting comments. She describes her parents as "very Chinese" in that they upheld strict and traditional values. Only Cantonese was spoken at home and when she was old enough to date, her parents made it clear that she could only date Chinese boys. As a result, QL considers herself 50% Chinese and 50% "accustomed to the Canadian way", but not Canadian. She knows she is considered 'juxin' because she is not fluent in Cantonese anymore, but remains close to her family and observes all the holidays, rituals and events with them. When she got married she thought she would have to wear the ancient Chinese wedding garment based on Han clothing, consisting of a heavily brocaded jacket and skirt, along with an intricately decorated headpiece with veil of pearls. Raised with this idea in her head, she was incredibly relieved to find out that Chinese wedding garments had evolved into the form fitting, contemporary cheongsam she saw when she went shopping in Toronto's Chinatown. The dress she finally chose was not the 'classic' red brocade cheongsam, but rather hues of pink and red, full-length, and sleeveless. Despite being raised in a very strict Chinese household, she explains how the dress "definitely makes you feel more Chinese..."; oh wow, I thought, I'm very Chinese now." While QL was pleasantly surprised that the dress had become more flattering and was happy to wear it, other women wore it strictly out of obligation. TL for instance, is third generation Canadian, born in Montreal, Quebec in 1968. Her paternal grandparents arrived in Quebec from the Toisan province and her father was born and raised in Montreal, while her mother arrived from southern China as a teenager. Growing up in Montreal in the early 70s,

TL experienced racist taunts and marginalization due to her ethnic minority status. As a result, she worked very hard to integrate and to downplay her Chinese heritage.

> I wore a cheongsam only a handful of times and only for weddings and sort of occasions like that where I was allowing myself to wear a cheongsam...because my mother came when she was 13, she had an idealized idea of what the cheongsam was all about and for her it was a great pride to wear the cheongsam. For me it was a completely different thing. As I got older it got more comfortable but for me as a young child it was like – ugh – why do you want to underline that Chineseness of yourself. But for my mother it was very different because she was born in China. So for her it was a fantasy of being Chinese that she couldn't be because she wasn't raised in China, she didn't stay in China. So for her it gave her the opportunity, in retrospect now, to have that fantasy of being Chinese. (TL)

The desire to wear the dress for TL's mother exemplifies diasporic discourses that emphasize a longing for homeland, a longing that is also affected by a sense of alienation felt in the new country. As a child and teenager, TL wore the cheongsam begrudgingly, and only under specific, negotiated circumstances as a way to minimize the focus on her difference in a society that was still tightly homogenous and ethnocentric. While she has now reconciled her childhood shame about being of Chinese heritage, she is still reluctant to wear the cheongsam. She may wear a Chinese inspired top occasionally, but explains that "they were not traditional clothes, they were sort of Western versions of ... Chinese clothes." The appropriation of elements of Chinese clothing by the Western fashion industry gave her permission to wear clothing that she would otherwise do everything to avoid.

> (There) was sort of a Western 'chinoiserie' phase that was happening that was becoming acceptable in popular culture – so I thought I could do it as well. But only when I got that sort of 'ok' from popular culture was I willing to explore it. But prior to that there was no way...I just wanted to be like everybody else. And only as a young adult when things changed when it became more fashionable, then I was trying tops on and trying clothes but they were not traditional clothes, they were sort of western versions of what they thought Chinese clothes were. I was more willing to explore that part and

> use that sort of pop culture version of being Chinese ... more than my genuine Chinese heritage. (TL)

Like TL, MC wore a cheongsam out of a sense of resigned duty. Her parents arrived from Hong Kong and she was born in the Saguenay region of Quebec in 1977. She attended an English language school that had some diversity, due to the presence of aboriginal and international students, but was predominantly white. She feels she was raised in a Chinese household where Cantonese was mostly spoken and her mother made Chinese food. Like so many of the women interviewed for this project, she initially rejected her Chinese heritage as a way to survive the marginalization and xenophobia experienced as a child. As an adult, her concern about expressing her Chinese heritage dissipated, and she now feels she knows how to negotiate Chinese and Western cultures. MC wore the cheongsam, which she bought in Hong Kong, for the first time at her brother's wedding. It was made from mint green brocade fabric, was mid-calf length and had cap sleeves. As MW feels that the best part of a wedding is the food, she had the dress altered to allow for more eating and breathing room. For her, the cheongsam was a dress worn for a special occasion and nothing more. She had no previous desire to wear this dress but did so out of respect for what she describes as "the rules" and to follow through on what "was expected". While she was happy that her family appreciated the effort, she has no plans to wear the cheongsam again, unless called upon for such an occasion.

Like TL and MW, JL wore the cheongsam out of a sense of duty. But rather than being something to endure, her first experience wearing the dress turned out to be a positive one when she wore it for her brother's wedding. She was born in Toronto in 1978 and raised in Burnaby B.C, as well as Calgary, Alberta. Both her parents arrived from Taiwan to do their Master's studies and she felt she had a sheltered childhood, with a good group of friends and quite a few Asian children in her elementary school. Taiwanese was spoken at home and was gradually replaced by English. By junior high, she started to become conscious of her difference through racialization, as she

became aware that she was a lesbian. JL resisted feminized stereotypes and chose early on not to wear dresses. However, when it came to her brother's wedding, she felt it appropriate to make an exception. She shopped for the dress with her brother and mother in Toronto's Chinatown. The one she eventually bought was a deep blue brocade with a tiny cherry blossom flower motif, sleeveless, mid-calf length and had frog fastenings down the front of the dress. She remembers trying it on and having to come out of the fitting room in order to show it to her family:

> Normally I would feel very self-conscious and I would have an emotional problem with that but with the cheongsam I remember I didn't have such a problem. I'll try this on and I don't mind people looking, and it was in a location where there weren't a lot of people. It was more pleasant than I thought it would be...Because it was a more ceremonial and ritual dress...but I don't wear dresses and I just tend to not wear clothes that are very feminine in general, but wearing the cheongsam...I felt like this is MY dress. So it was ok to do and felt at the same time it didn't define me outside the family. This is for the formal setting of the wedding and for family and for them I perform anyways, so this is something I can do. (JL)

Wearing the dress was a way to be included in this special occasion, to honour her heritage and to please her family all at the same time. The pleasure in wearing the dress was linked with the positive comments that came from people at the wedding and reinforced a connection with her family and her place in it. The wearing of the dress was also part of performing a role – partly her role as a member of the immediate family within the wedding party, and partly as a woman of Chinese heritage. The formal context of a wedding, therefore, provided her with a kind of protective membrane from the daily struggles of affirming herself in conventional society and granted her permission to wear the dress. In *About Face: Performing Race in 'fashion' and Theater,* Dorinne Kondo contends that these performances are not hollow gestures. Kondo applies Judith Butler's 'performance theory' to her focus on theatre and fashion as modes or arenas for the performance of identity. She describes Butler's 'performance theory' as describing the "notion of gender, sex, and sexuality as performatives that are constitutive – not merely attributes – of

identity...Performative citations are therefore never merely the voluntary choices of a humanist subject; rather they are the product of constitutive constraints that create identities...." (1997, p.7) She paraphrases Butler further, by contending that "repeated iterates of identity can both consolidate its force and provide the occasion for its subversion." (1997, p.7) JL explains that she does not usually wear dresses as a way to subvert the tenets of hetero-normativity. The wearing of the cheongsam by JL is, therefore, indicative of the complexity of identity and the contingencies and compromises that it brings about. JL explained that the wearing of the cheongsam did not compromise her identity, and instead articulated how her family and her Chinese heritage are in fact constitutive of that identity. Her understanding of how the wearing of the dress and taking an active role in the wedding (she had a role in the traditional Chinese tea ceremony that was part of the wedding's events) were indeed performative acts that helped to reconcile her decision to wear the cheongsam.

Linked with the performance of identity, KT remembers wearing the cheongsam for the first time as a child. Born in Montreal, Quebec in 1976, she is third generation Canadian. Her grandparents arrived from Toisan and her father was born in Montreal. When it was time for him to marry, he returned to the Toisan region to find a wife. While her parents worked during the day, she was taken care of by her grandmother, spoke Toisanese at home, and feels her experiences growing up were mostly positive. She attended a private elementary and high school in the affluent neighborhood of Westmount where she was one of a small handful of visible minority children. When she was about 8 or 9 years old, she bought a cheongsam while on a family trip to Hong Kong. It was red, knee length and she wore it to school on two occasions, one of which was Halloween. For this event, she wore her cheongsam with white socks, flat, black shoes, pink glasses and with her hair in two 'pigtails'. Her desire to be a 'Chinese girl' for Halloween was fascinating and I asked her what she thinks motivated that choice at such a young age:

> I don't know but, it must have been, like, I've never worn one of these dresses before and I really wanted to and kind of play my ethnicity. Like, this is how I'm different from you guys. I know what you mean about trying to fit in, but then sometimes you want to declare how individual you are, how you're different. (KT)

While CW is uncomfortable with the dress' ability to 'folklorize' and TL, JY and others express the concern that the cheongsam might make them look too Chinese, KT made a very clear decision to underscore her Chinese heritage. One can only hypothesize that growing up in a close knit family that instilled in her a sense of pride about being Chinese, gave her the desire to wear the dress as a way to distinguish herself from her classmates and to declare her Chinese identity in the 'safe' context of a dress-up event. While her rendition of the 'Chinese girl' could be based on images from popular media, and, therefore, perpetuate certain stereotypes, her gestures in the spirit of Kondo's (and Butler's) assertions are sincere and assertive.

SG offers another example of a desire to seek out and wear the cheongsam as a way to perform her Chinese heritage. She was born in Edmonton, Alberta in 1978 and both of her parents are Chinese from Malaysia. As a child, Mandarin was the language spoken at home and she also attended Chinese school on Saturdays. However, by the time she was a teenager, speaking Mandarin and Chinese school had been phased out. She attended a predominantly white Catholic school and is sure she was teased about being Chinese. In high school, she did not have any Chinese friends and was concerned about being seen as F.O.B (fresh-off-the-boat) or a newly arrived immigrant. As a young adult, however, she felt very anchored and confident with her Canadian cultural upbringing. She began to look for ways, as she states, "to stay Chinese." One of those ways was through clothing. She recalls seeing Icelandic musician Björk wearing a modified cheongsam in a music video. The appropriation of the dress by a major European pop star gave it validation but also moved SG to want to reclaim it for herself as a woman of Chinese heritage. In her early 20s, she

found her first cheongsam in a junkshop in London, England. It was made from beige-coloured cotton and had an appliqué pattern throughout the fabric. It was too small for her so she opened the side slits up to the waist and wore it with jeans. The second cheongsam, which she describes as a "grandma style", is black with a big floral pattern that she also found in a vintage store. Her mother altered it for her and she wears it with jeans or leggings. Both of these dresses are styled in trendy and hybrid ways as part of her everyday wardrobe. The third cheongsam was made for her wedding and was bought from a store in Edmonton where the style can be selected from a book. She then selected her fabric and other details and her measurements were taken. Her order was then relayed to a tailor in Hong Kong who sent the finished dress to Edmonton for the final fitting. Her wedding cheongsam was made in a silky red brocade material, emblazoned with a phoenix and dragon motif and also had a wide, gold stripe down each side that connected with the slits. While she would concur with MC, CW and others that the dress can be uncomfortable and unforgiving, she continues to take great pleasure in wearing the cheongsam for its formal characteristics and as a symbol of her Chinese heritage.

Like SG, my sister LS and I have always had a strong attraction to the formal qualities of the cheongsam, as well as the dress' signification as a distinctly Chinese garment. Prior to wearing the cheongsam, we had seen photos of our paternal grandmother wearing the dress on a daily basis. For us, the cheongsam is familiar and associated with female strength. We were both born in Hamilton, Ontario in the early 70s. As I explained at the beginning of this dissertation, our father is Chinese, our mother is Filipino and we spent our early childhood in the suburbs of Ontario and then moved to the small town of Hudson, Quebec in the early 1980s. We both experienced teasing and bullying based on our appearance and worked hard to assimilate. LS, who is almost four years my junior, was very outspoken and willing to subvert norms as a teenager. She looked for ways to assert her ethnic heritages that would fly in the face of societal norms. In high school, she started to play with Asian

"female stereotypes by dyeing her very long hair extra black, wearing red lipstick and emphasizing the almond shape of her eyes. As she says when interviewed, "...the whole stereotypes and the whole mythology behind the Asian thing...you know what? You have to flip it." For her that meant taking ownership of an essentialized Asian look. In high school, I too was looking for ways to re-claim my ethnic heritages through appearance and mostly exercised this through clothing. When I was fourteen, my family attended a huge Sim family reunion in Houston, Texas where much of my Chinese family was based. Being part of this gathering gave me a new appreciation for the reach and variety of the Chinese diaspora. My Texan cousins and mixed heritage second cousins made me feel like less of an anomaly, and gave me a sense of belonging and acceptance as well as permission to claim my Chinese heritage. This affirming experience opened doors to my understanding of identity as a process of becoming, well before I had read Stuart Hall's words. I was given a t-shirt with the Sim name in Chinese on the front and my first name on the back. This association between that character (which loosely translates as "wise men by the water") and my first name, created a link that would solidify my connection to my heritage and inspire one of the works in my final project. Wearing my names on my clothing had such an empowering impact on me that I had my mother create an appliqué of the Sim Chinese character so that it could be sewn onto the back of a jean jacket. I would wear both the t-shirt and the jacket for selected important moments. The desire to wear the Sim name as a gesture of affirmation also fuelled my desire to wear the cheongsam.

Like so many of the women interviewed for this project, LS first wore the cheongsam for a wedding in the early 90s. It was also a rite of passage that entailed pleasure in the obtaining of it as much as the wearing of it:

> It was special because it was being made for me and I was getting fitted for it and getting it made in the style that I really wanted and that's what I loved. I

> felt like a woman, like a whole other person wearing it. And when you put it on, well, your whole posture, the way you carry yourself, the movements that you make have to be more conscious. When you respect the detail, the craftsmanship, the line, how it's supposed to make you feel...it makes you feel good. (LS)

Her cheongsam was long, sleeveless, and made from satiny, black fabric. It had white piping, an intricate white appliqué on the front and instead of side slits she opted for a single, off-center slit at the front of the dress. She wore it with black heels and put up her hair in a classic chignon. These decisions were based on what she feels are an important set of protocols for the cheongsam:

> You have to wear it in appropriate circumstances in the right context. It's not for schlepping about. You have to respect the garment...You don't wear it with flip-flops, you don't wear it with flats, you really have to wear it with heels. You have to carry yourself in a different way. You can't be doing regular activities you would normally do because it's not forgiving in that way. You've got to do your hair, your make-up – everything has to be on point or else it just takes away from it, or belittles it. That's the disrespect. You have to have the right mindset to be in it. Cause it can totally bring you down, it can be very oppressive, it can be really stuffy and like, I don't feel right, I feel very exposed in it, I feel very uncomfortable in it. So you have to have the right mental strength to wear it. (LS)

LS' comments echo those of every women interviewed. That the dress is psychologically demanding, again reveals how it provokes anxiety and ambivalence in the wearer, connected with discomfort around over-exposing one's body, emphasizing one's ethnic heritage in a potentially hostile environment, and contending with the physical constraints of the dress. The next cheongsam LS acquired was one that she chose to wear at her own wedding as a way to acknowledge her Chinese heritage. It was a sleeveless, burgundy red brocade cheongsam that she bought in Chinatown in Montreal. While she was happy with her decision, she gravitates more to the black cheongsam that was made with her own custom touches. She feels the cheongsam can be worn to nightclubs and parties – events that are not

connected with family or Chinese tradition – provided it is worn with respect. In this way she brings her heritage in line with her contemporary life while showcasing the beauty of the dress:

> You know I'd love to have another cheongsam made but all in more modern fabrics and with newer techniques, but always keeping that traditional silhouette. So because I'm Canadian, because I'm half and half, because I'm living in the age I'm living in now, versus old times, it makes me want to have something like, the next level, like 2.0. Cheongsam 2.0! Now when I wear it, it's not about trying to look more Chinese, I find it's a dress that just has such a nice line to it...(LS)

LS' desire to wear a cheongsam, that brings it into a next stage of evolution through a strategy of hybridity, supports Carla Jones, Ann-Marie Leshkowicz and Sandra Niessen's argument that through migration, the feedback loops of the fashion industry and the demands of the people who wear it, ethnic clothing can change over time. LS' statement also affirms Wessieling and Hazel Clark's contention that elements of the dress can be modified without denaturing its association with Chinese culture.

My grandmother Charlotte was highly instrumental in nurturing my relationship with the cheongsam. She was born in southern China in 1906 at the end of the Qing dynasty. Her father had an important position in the China petroleum company and embraced the modernization of the country. As part of the old ways, her mother did not have a formal education and her feet had been bound in the Han tradition. My grandmother's feet were not bound and she was the first female of her family to go to school. She was married to my grandfather, George Sim when they were both sixteen years old. It was an arrangement that allied their two families and protected their financial and societal interests. My grandmother became a savvy business-woman and had five children of her own. She ran small businesses during difficult times when they had to escape the Japanese invasion, and later, the Communists. During times of peace, in particular after the Second World War, she ran larger enterprises

owned by my grandfather and pioneered better working conditions for women, such as providing an on-site daycare service. She also had great style, and was very interested in clothing and accessories. She represents the Republic Era's modern woman described in the historical accounts of Clark, Finnane, Wu and others and would have been an early adopter of the cheongsam as an upper middle class woman. In almost every photo that I have seen of her, she is wearing a cheongsam. She had cheongsam for work and formal occasions and had them made by a tailor in anticipation of every new season. She was very interested in having dresses made from fabrics in cotton, wool, silk and velvet, often with jackets made in matching or complementary patterned or solid colour fabrics. She always wore her long hair in a neat bun, and chose her shoes, stockings and handbags with great care. My grandmother had a room in my parents' home and, and when she died, left a number of her dresses there from as far back as the 1970s. Slowly, I began to appropriate them and the first one I wore was a psychedelic paisley print of greens and yellows on a blue background of stretch polyester. It was the perfect garment to underscore my combined interest in retro and Chinese clothing and meant even more because it belonged to my grandmother. The first cheongsam I had made for myself was for my wedding, to be worn as a second dress after the ceremony. It was made from a dusty rose coloured raw silk. The seamstress was not as familiar with making this type of dress, which was apparent in its ill fit, rough seams and the fact that it was not properly lined. Needless to say, wearing this cheongsam was not a great experience, but it did not deter me from wanting to continue to wear the cheongsam. Later on, I took dresses from my mother's closet that she'd had made on her first visits to Hong Kong with my father in the late 1960s. There was a pink satin, sleeveless dress with red velvet flowers appliquéd on top, along with silvery, transparent beads and the full-length black cheongsam with a pink and purple floral print. I have worn each of these dresses for various parties and events, including the concert described in the Introduction. In recent years, my interest in the cheongsam has been in attempting to subvert its current discourses, which have been outlined in these interviews. These

discourses are characterized by a handful of beliefs, which include the idea that the ulitmate, 'authentic' cheongsam is made from red brocade fabric, can only be worn for formal occasions such as weddings and has to be cut close to the body, cutting a trademark s-curve silhouette. To explore these entrenched ideas, I endeavored to document the process of having one made as part of my M.A. project. I found a tailor in Montreal who was born in Hong Kong but came to Montreal as a teenager. He was trained in fashion design at Lasalle College and upon graduating went back to Hong Kong to learn how to make the cheongsam. His business plan was to make custom cheongsam for weddings by bringing his knowledge of Western techniques together with his understanding of how to make the Chinese dress. His training was also highly informed by the fashion industry, and in the spirit of Wessieling and Hazel Clark, he counted on the hybrid possibilities of the dress to appeal to both non-Chinese and Chinese alike. Inspired by my grandmother who wore the cheongsam on a daily basis, I wanted this dress to be made out of a fabric that would be wearable in all four seasons and for most occasions. I chose a medium gray coloured, light wool with a gray lining. Conceptually, I chose this material in order to draw a parallel between the appropriation of the man's *changpao* and the Western male suit. The dress was sleeveless, fell just below the knee and the collar rose a little higher, as inspired by *In the Mood for Love*. Apart from the choice of fabric, what also made this dress a hybrid style was the employment of western techniques to make the dress faster and easier to put on. The zipper opening was at the back instead of the side and the simple *haniu* or knotted fastenings were 'fake' in that they were sewn shut and simply applied to the top yoke, instead of being able to actually open and close. Despite my conscious efforts to undermine expectations about what this dress should look like, the end result still adhered to the established tenets of cheongsam discourse in that it was very form fitting and body conscious, factors which greatly affected my movements. Watching myself in the video documentation, I was made aware of how the dress had formed me far more than my ideas of the dress had formed it. The interests and ideas of the dressmaker, images in my head of Maggie Cheung in *In the*

Mood for Love and my own deep desire to embody the idealized notions of Chinese femininity, all worked together to thwart my feminist and post-colonial critique. Ultimately, these findings and realizations were part of the impetus for pushing my research on the cheongsam further with this project.

3.6.5 Do you have any negative associations with the cheongsam?

During the interviews, I asked each woman if they thought the dress was associated with any negative narratives, images or stereotypes. For many women, it was difficult to separate the way they view the dress and the way it has been represented. Because it is generally held in high regard, there seemed to be some hesitation around linking the cheongsam with negative images. However, after probing further, women were very forthcoming about how the dress has been co-opted or instrumentalized by popular media to essentialize the Asian female:

> The cheongsam meaning outside of China can be sort of antiquated through media and cinema. You represent this docile, beautiful woman who is going to serve whoever in charge – who is male. And the darker side is that you are typically sexualized and licentious and available. 'Asians look alike' so if you're wearing a cheongsam, you are automatically a geisha, regardless of the ethnic misunderstandings! Total Asian confusion. It's the hypersexualization of the Asian female and that is signaled by the accoutrements. (AMJ)

AH also describes how she is conscious that the cheongsam's image has been sullied by pop culture, which has fed a set of expectations around what the dress means:

> Another negative stereotype that would prohibit wearing the cheongsam on a day-to-day basis would be the 'Asian beauty' – you're from another country, you're exotic and many North American men might exotize you. Movies are a lot to be blamed for that. A lot of these movies are made by Western men and they portray the dress that way and people accept these ideas rather than looking into it themselves. Movies impress people with stereotypical ideas about other cultures too. The cheongsam is just so recognizable. (AH/2)

As mentioned earlier, the form-fitting silhouette makes the cheongsam a garment that imposes a normative, idealized standard of beauty on women. The tight-fitting dress exposes the female body, making it vulnerable to the male gaze while its recognizability as a Chinese dress can further racialize the body, going a long way to explain why Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage carefully consider how and when they wear it:

> So wearing the cheongsam was always fraught with weird sort of conflicting kind of feelings because -- ok this is pretty I want to wear this, but then you got that whole 'do I really want to do this'? Am I ready to face the world wearing this? Is some idiot going to drop a dumb comment? So beyond 'this is a pretty top I want to wear this pretty top' there is this whole other 'how do I deal with my being Chinese' -- all in a top! Or a dress! (TL)

While there is a major concern for the misrepresentation of the cheongsam in popular culture, women were only able to cite examples that were symptomatic rather than causal. They were able to cite examples of what would be described as inappropriate or disrespectful uses of the cheongsam, such as its inspiration as a 'sexy' Halloween costume, or its association with prostitution in Hollywood films, such as in the 1987 film "Good Morning Vietnam". It can, therefore, be surmised that the way this dress has come to be associated with a submissive, sexually available, hyper feminized and racialized female is much more insidiously linked with the history of patriarchy in China and the West, in combination with the racialization of the Chinese in Canada. Juanjuan Wu explains that the subservience of women to men in China was established throughout its imperial history, as dictated through Confucian teachings. As Wu observes:

> "(in) the Confucian system the role of women was defined and governed by the "three submissions" (daughter to father, wife to husband, and widow to son) and the "four virtues" (morality, appearance, speech and domestic skills). The roles, behaviors and appearances of women that these encompassed were defined, interpreted, and judged by men." (2009, p.32)

Patriarchal control in China and the West has manifested itself in the subjugation of women that continues today. Images of women, created by men, in all areas of culture have historically served the heterosexist male gaze, which in turn perpetuates and reinforces patriarchal discourses. Chinese calendar art of the 1930s, is a prime example of how cheongsam-clad women were put forth as sexually available commodities, alongside cigarettes and alcohol in illustrating how the dress went from a loose-fitting gown, based on the man's changpao, to a form-fitting dress. With patriarchy well entrenched in Canadian society, the addition of racialist discourses further subjugates the Chinese female. What proves most fascinating, however, is that despite these serious issues, Chinese women continued to accept the cheongsam, even as it became tighter over the years. The question, as always when dealing with women's clothing in general, whether it is high heels or miniskirts, is the consideration of the insidiousness of patriarchal and market interests that blur the line between the co-opting of women's agency and women's own true desires. How much is the dress' appeal about my tastes, and to what degree have these tastes been influenced by other factors?

The World of Suzie Wong has been cited as a reference from popular culture that is responsible for creating negative associations with the cheongsam. However, for the generation of women I interviewed, this film is considered too far in the past to be of relevance to their contemporary sensibilities. The film that is more often referenced as having a significant impact on their impression of the cheongsam is *In the Mood for Love,* by Chinese director Wong Kar Wai.

> *In the Mood for Love* – Maggie Cheung was definitely objectified but then I thought – I should have a cheongsam. (EYC)
>
> Also the film *In the Mood for Love* gave me permission to wear it – made me think of my grandmother and it also showed me that cheongsam can be worn everyday when it's the right material, like cotton or wool or something more practical. And because Maggie Cheungs' character was not a dragon lady or

> any of those hackneyed Hollywood stereotypes it gave me permission to wear the dress with less fear about being questioned about my own heritage and gave the sense that I could wear it with a sense of affirmation. (CS)
>
> *In the Mood for Love*? Maggie Cheung looked amazing. (AL)
>
> When did *In the Mood for Love* come out? That and Bjork contributed to all of that. I loved that movie and she looked so amazing in that movie so it was also that that gave you permission...I would love to find the ones that Maggie Cheung wore – like in cotton. I would wear them all the time if I could... (SG)

The emergence of the Hong Kong Second Wave (1980s-1990s) of filmmakers, brought a major influx of never before seen images and stories about China and Chinese people to Western audiences. Wong Kar Wai is considered part of this wave with ground-breaking films such as *Chungking Express* (1994) and *Happy Together* (1997). The critical acclaim of these films brought Chinese films to a more mainstream public and has contributed to the changing perception of Asian-ness in the West. Alongside the Hong Kong Second Wave, feature films told from the Chinese-American and Chinese-Canadian perspectives started to emerge in the United States and Canada in the early 1990s. Examples of these are *Joy Luck Club* (1993) by Wayne Wang, based on the novel by Amy Tan, and *Double Happiness* (1994), by Canadian Mina Shum. These films were a source of social empowerment for Canadians and Americans of Chinese heritage.

In contrast to *The World of Suzie Wong*, the cheongsam in *In the Mood for Love* is celebrated and not associated with any negative images. Released in 2000, *In the Mood for Love* tells the story of unrequited love between Su Li-Zhen played by Maggie Cheung and Chow Mo-Wan played by Tony Leung. Both are married and find out that their respective partners are having an affair together. They turn to each other for comfort, and while there is attraction and longing, their relationship never evolves. The film is set in Hong Kong in 1962 and Maggie Cheung's character wears

the cheongsam exclusively as was the custom at that time. She wears the dress effortlessly, with her elegant and graceful movements enhanced by the use of slow motion and recurring musical theme. A critical reading of the dress can easily be made in that it serves as a metaphor for the constraints of her character's situation and her entrenched gendered role as a married woman. But what comes forth more readily for the women interviewed for this project is how the dress incites desire – a desire to wear the cheongsam as well as a desire to embody the fantasy of stylish, Chinese femininity that Cheung so magnificently presents. Furthermore, Cheung's character is a "regular" woman who works in an office. She is not a prostitute or a 'dragon lady'. While her cheongsam-clad image is undeniably beautiful, it is not compromised by exotic/erotic connotations. Furthermore, many of the women in the film wear the cheongsam, reinforcing the notion that this dress was part of everyday life, worn by everyday women of every age, effectively de-fetishizing the cheongsam. Given that many of the women interviewed talked about feeling unattractive and outside of the norms of beauty while growing up, this movie affirmed the beauty of Asian women in a context dominated by blond, blue eyed norms and showcased the cheongsam as a dress that is truly owned by Chinese women. The need for validation on the level of 'beauty' is no doubt problematic from a feminist perspective that is critical of conventional, hetero-sexist norms. The valuing of women based on appearance goes back to the discussion earlier about patriarchy established and enforced in Canada and in China. The question of what constitutes beauty across ethnic backgrounds is a double-edged sword. How do you pull apart standards of beauty that have been put into place by patriarchal interests from one's own desire to be beautiful? While a deep exploration of this discussion is not the primary focus of my dissertation, it is part of the discourses on the cheongsam and its role as a technology. What is important to emphasize is that for the women interviewed for this project, Wong's film presented an image of a Chinese woman, wearing a cheongsam on the big screen that was considered 'beautiful' across all conventional standards.

3.6.6 Who can wear it?

If there was any doubt about whether clothing is contested terrain, the question of who should be allowed to wear the cheongsam makes it clear that it is. The majority of women strongly feel that non-Chinese women should not wear the dress:

> When I was younger there was a certain urgency and reaction when you see white people wearing that. You're appropriating our culture and you think it's just fashion. It means nothing to you. Now it's not the same dogmatic reaction...I just silently judge. (AL)

> It would just be one of those things where I would get angry and I would just desperately want to ask, so why are you wearing this piece of clothing, like where does it come from, wondering if it's some form of cultural appropriation from someone who is in a privileged racial position of appropriating an ethnic symbol to maybe give herself an air of exoticness or buy into certain fetishes…and that would be just an automatic suspicion for me. (AJ)

> C'est un question de contexte – c'est quoi de le but, l'intention, l'occasion de la porter? J'ai dit dans le passé que approprier les autres cultures est insultant. Porter des caractères chinois, c'est une mode donc on voit les gens approprier des symboles ou des aspects d'une culture minoritaire surtout dans les cultures occidentales que pour la mode – et pas seulement chinois. On a toujours du travail à faire pour bien éduquer les gens que le respect mutuel culturel est un échange et pas une appropriation. (MC)

Cultural appropriation is one of the main issues expressed by women to support the belief that the cheongsam should only be worn by women of Chinese heritage. This belief underscores a deeper concern about cultural ownership and power that is channeled into the cheongsam. TL is reluctant to wear the cheongsam herself. Yet, she is genuinely shocked by her insistence that only Chinese women should wear the cheongsam:

> I don't want to uphold Chinese culture. I shouldn't be the one doing that just because I wear a cheongsam. But mind you in the same breath if a white chick was wearing a cheongsam I'd say no, what the hell's she doing in a cheongsam! So I'm stuck between a rock and a hard place. I can't believe that this is how I feel. They don't compute, they don't equal to each other but this is how I feel. (TL)

The double discourse is troubling for TL and raises many questions about how internalized racialization can operate. She does not want to wear the cheongsam as it underscores her Chinese appearance, making her more vulnerable to racist comments. At the same time, she feels she is racializing by prohibiting white women from wearing the cheongsam. How do we buy into these ideas and how do they rob us of our power to transcend racialization? I have given this issue a lot of thought, as I fall into the category of women who intellectually and morally feel that anyone should have the right to wear the cheongsam, and yet instinctively feel that the wearing of this dress is a privilege that comes with many caveats and conditions.

> It took me a long time to feel I could wear the dress and because we have so little as women of Chinese heritage I feel protective of it. It's paradoxical. The more Chinese culture proliferates in the West, the less division we have. On the other hand when you think about unequal power relations that exist – and people of colour in general have had to resist and struggle to retain a sense of their ethnicity in spite of the pressures to assimilate, it feels like a kind of little victory to say 'this is ours' and it is something that cannot be appropriated easily in good conscience. It comes at a price. So maybe everyone can wear it if they acknowledge the power, the history, the understanding that it issues from Chinese culture, that it is worn with a certain amount of dignity and that it means something really important to people. I think then I'm ok with non-Chinese people wearing the dress. (CS)

Responses such as these are evidence, that for Canadian women of Chinese heritage, the cheongsam is a contentious and a jealously guarded object. Linked with power, privilege and one's own questionings, this garment is a site of profound and often hidden insecurities. On the one hand, its beauty is seductive and brings about the desire to lay claim to wearing it, while excluding it from others. On the other hand, it

can underscore one's difference in a society that covertly promotes a homogenous culture. What these statements reveal at this point in time is that wearing the cheongsam is somewhere between a right and a privilege, depending on a variety of factors such as context and intention.

3.6.7 Unfolding the discourses: Ambivalence, Authenticity and Agency

What has emerged from this analysis is a more thorough understanding of the discourses that surround the cheongsam. I was further convinced of their existence when I encountered two high school aged women at my exhibition at the Swatow Plaza. They were both born in Montreal and were of Chinese heritage. One of the women had worn a cheongsam before while the other had not. I asked the woman who had not worn the cheongsam why she had never worn the dress. She explained that the material was too stiff and that the dress was too tight and uncomfortable. I asked her whether she would wear a cheongsam if the cut were altered to make it easier to wear. She wrinkled her nose at this idea and said, "but then it wouldn't be elegant". Clearly the silhouette of the dress is a singular characteristic of an 'authentic' cheongsam that in the minds of many women (and designers) cannot be altered. This discourse further demonstrates the power of established norms of aesthetic beauty, tied to patriarchy and the male gaze mentioned earlier. The authentic cheongsam, according to many of the women interviewed, is also made from embroidered, silk brocade fabric, and is only worn for formal events. These 'rules' contradict my understanding – which corresponds with a few of the other women interviewed – that the cheongsam can be made from cloth other than brocade fabric, that it can be worn informally and that it can have a more relaxed cut. Images of cheongsam from the late 1920s throughout the 1970s show that Chinese women and the tailors who made their dresses embraced all manner of styles and materials for this dress, while maintaining the basic cheongsam elements. As discussed previously, the cheongsam was also worn on a daily basis, for work and play, as seen in

photographic records and also in the film *In the Mood for Love*. Notions of authenticity for the cheongsam are, therefore, various and, in fact, undo or perhaps open up the very definition of the word.

Market forces confound issues of 'authenticity' further. As revealed in the responses by women in this study, cheongsam-inspired garments made for the high fashion market, as well as trendy clothing items that merely borrow cheongsam-style elements, are considered inauthentic and, therefore, perhaps fair game for non-Chinese consumers. Perhaps even more interesting is that the appropriation of cheongsam elements for Western high fashion garments – despite the usual patchwork knowledge of the cheongsam's history – is accepted because it demonstrates a kind of endorsement of Chinese ethnic clothing by the West. TL described earlier how cheongsam-inspired Western clothing had a leveling effect when it came to reconciling her Chinese heritage with her Canadian cultural upbringing as, "things changed (in Canadian society) and it became more fashionable (to be Chinese)". Her experiences with racialization brought about a need for acceptance in mainstream Canadian society. Distancing herself from "traditional" clothes and her "genuine" Chinese heritage in favour of hybrid Western/Chinese clothing designs, reflected her need to display her Canadian cultural upbringing in spite of her Chinese appearance.. As described earlier in this chapter, I have also adopted strategies like this in my choice of how to wear the cheongsam and other pieces of cheongsam-inspired clothing offered by the mainstream market. These practices are ways of negotiating the terrain as a racialized person in Canadian society that are no doubt informed by discourses that have been deeply internalized. In another interview, AL presents a number of examples of how her mother's experience as a teenager growing up in Canada impressed upon her that white, blond and blue-eyed was the beauty ideal upon which all else would be judged. In essence, Chinese was not beautiful. The decision to wear cheongsam-inspired clothing offered by the

Western fashion industry, therefore, offered a way to resist these culturally ingrained ideas. In other words, while the type of appropriation that negatively contributes to Asian stereotypes is always at risk from the mainstream fashion industry, hybrid clothing items that combine Western styles with cheongsam elements can make the cheongsam familiar. As I will explain later in this chapter, the term 'exotic' can take on new meanings that can create agency for Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage.

Access to store-bought cheongsam in Canada is still limited to boutiques in Chinatowns in any city. These dresses are made primarily in China by the mainstream fashion industry, that has embraced many changes to make the dress more economical to make and easier to wear. While prints and bright colours are still the norm for what is available, it is possible to find cheongsam that are made from more casual fabrics, such as cotton and cotton blends which reflects a desire on both sides of the industry for women to be able to wear them for everyday activities. Some women consider an 'authentic' cheongsam to have the zipper on the side, with frog (haniu) fastenings, completing the closure diagonally across the neckline. The dresses that are coming from China now, however, have moved the zipper to the back, making it faster to get in and out of the dress. Designers are also continuing to play with the cut and style in order to offer women more choices. Necklines, while always having the high collar, might have a keyhole cutout below the collar, and the bottom of the skirt area may be cut in an A-line. All of these examples show that the fashion market, consisting of producers and consumers, demands change and the cheongsam is an ideal garment for these changes. This point brings me back to the question of 'who' has the right to wear the cheongsam. The fashion industry is disinterested in a garment's ethnic ownership, history or meaning. Its stakeholders are ultimately interested in business, and everyone's money is good. As Chinatowns around the world have opened up to diverse publics for their own survival, mainly as tourist and leisure attractions, cheongsam boutiques are open to all. For the few remaining

bespoke cheongsam makers today, ethnic background does not matter. If you want one, they will make it for you. For some women I interviewed, the idea that the cheongsam can be worn by anyone would be a great source of discomfort. But perhaps the time has come to take the discussion of the politics of the cheongsam forward, as it may be a crucial step towards real agency for women of Chinese heritage in the West. Part of this agency comes from the changing power dynamics between Asia and North America, which I will explain later. What I will show with the support of recent theories is how these dynamics may offer possibilities for the creation of new modes of representation over which women have more control.

What, therefore, constitutes an authentic cheongsam? And is this pre-occupation with authenticity for many of the women interviewed an indication of a deeper anxiety? Ingrained concepts of authenticity as 'pure and therefore superior' are a reflection of Ang's description of the 'Central Country' complex. When fear of the loss of ethnicity emerges, rules about what constitutes ethnic authenticity become stronger. In this way, the increase of Chinese diaspora around the world corresponds with the emergence of the essentialization of Chinese identity enforced within Chinese diasporic communities and a related rise in anxiety among second generation Canadians about not fitting into either Chinese or Canadian cultures. In short, we are confronted by the old saying that the Chinese are more Chinese here than in China. When the women I interviewed began to contemplate the complexity of their own ethnic identities, they also began to question the meanings of 'authenticity' and by extension to consider how they might like to see the dress evolve in ways that could better reflect their values and ideas with a recognition of the role that the fashion industry plays in that evolution:

> Il y la modèle classique – la robe rouge avec les petites manches, cintrée avec les deux fontes les cotés. Mais il y a beaucoup de dérivés – couleurs, coupes...même en Chine je n'ai pas vu autant comme ça. Avec le temps la mode change. (JW)

An indication that cheongsam designers are interested in serving the desires of their clients over the design conventions of the dress is suggested by the case of Hong Kong born, Toronto-based fashion designer Alice Ko, featured in an article that appeared in FG Magazine called "Alice Ko: The Art of the Cheongsam". This article chronicles Ko's fifteen-year career as the principal cheongsam designer for the Miss Chinese Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal pageants, as well as a designer of gowns for gala events and weddings. She brings together the "cheongsam's traditional eastern aesthetics with western techniques of dressmaking", in order to make the dress " more practical and suitable for the current society of women." Much like the designer I worked with here in Montreal, she uses fabrics that go beyond Chinese brocade but goes a step further to take into a account a woman's need for freedom of movement. Her approach shows how the cheongsam is a versatile fashion object that endures as a piece of ethnic clothing. Echoed here is Margaret Maynard's contention that the evolution of ethnic clothing is relational and in continual process despite its discourse. She states, "There is no habitual way of defining ethnic dress nor can it be expressed in terms of its stasis" (Mayrand, 71). The way that ethnic clothing is made and worn will continue to evolve as a result of the variety of forces, including but not limited to, technical innovation, economics and the fashion market in symbiosis with everyday practices experienced and exercised by diasporic people and shaped by history and culture. In this way, definitions of authenticity and tradition open up to allow for multiple meanings of ethnic clothing to emerge and in this way, any cheongsam is 'authentic'. The question that remains for me is whether there is enough strength and concern among Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage to encourage the further evolution of the cheongsam in ways that reflect their interests and desires.

An issue that I have had about wearing the cheongsam, which is implicitly stated in many of the interviews, is the concern that doing so might 'auto-exoticize' the wearer

and re-inscribe exotic/erotic stereotypes and discourses about Asian women in the Canadian context:

> I think people would think that I'm very feminine and heterosexual and typical even though it was a dress for a specific situation...And that's not at all who I am. I have a problem with being objectified in this dress as feminine or Asian. People think of the dress as visually beautiful so I assume that it's a compliment but then there is also the yellow fever people might crawl out of the woodwork. So it is about this thing of assumptions and expectations of what a person who wears this dress is like. (JL)

AH/2 describes the concern with wearing the cheongsam within a workday, office setting:

> ... many North American men might exoticize you if you're wearing a cheongsam instead of suit. It's harder to be taken seriously. I would wear it for Asian events because we understand the context. (AH/2)

In short, auto-exoticization means wearing the dress with full awareness of the risk of being objectified and racialized and wearing it despite this, to please oneself. This negotiation is perhaps one of the trickiest aspects of wearing the dress for the women interviewed. This fear in turn reinforces discourses about the cheongsam for Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage, that dictate that the dress is only appropriate for certain, cultural and most often, family related events that provide a safe environment in which to wear the dress. In my explorations with cheongsam wearing, I have attempted to subvert concerns with 'auto-exoticization' by wearing the cheongsam in certain ways, in everyday life, as my grandmother did, in an attempt to render it 'familiar' rather than keeping it strange. As mentioned earlier, I wore the cheongsam to school, and later on, to the office. I mixed them with Western-identified pieces of clothing, such as wool cardigans and leather belts much like the way they were worn in the 1930s. What these experiments have shown me, is that the wearing of a dress that has come to symbolize the 'exotic', can, in this current global context, embody power and agency. As I will explain further, images of Asian women in Western media and popular culture have shown positive signs of

progression and evolution, not coincidentally, linked with the changing economic landscape, as China and other countries such as South Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong have gained economic power. TL expressed this sentiment in her interview:

> They'd (men) would make those stupid comments whether I was wearing a cheongsam or not. It's about being an Asian woman -- period. But I get that less and less today... It's really a different world we live in and the world powers are very different. So this was before China was a super power. This was before, "oh my god we all have to do business in China.

In tandem with my hypothesis that the dress can be used as a tool of empowerment are theories put forth by Olivia Khoo in her book *The Chinese Exotic: Modern Diasporic Femininity* (2007). Khoo argues that women of the Chinese diaspora can locate agency through new representations, such as that of the 'Chinese exotic' who is cosmopolitan, mobile, and modern:

> The Chinese exotic is also differentiated from colonialist or imperialist exoticism in that it conceives of women and femininity, not as the oppressed, but as forming part of the new visibility of Asia, connected with the region's economic rise and emergent modernities. What is exotic now is no longer the old (primitive) China within Asia, but the idea of a new Asia (Asia the cosmopolitan, the rich, the modern, and the technological)... the Chinese exotic consists of both subject and object positions, whereas the old exoticism consisted only of object positions. (2007, p. 12).

As more people of Asian heritage rose to prominence in areas such as entertainment, journalism, medicine and politics, and especially Chinese cinema, being of Asian heritage in North America became less negatively stigmatized. The upsurge in consumption of film from Hong Kong and 'Fifth Generation' filmmakers – the first cohort of filmmakers to graduate from the Beijing Film School post Cultural Revolution – transformed the perception of China and Asia in general in the West. All of the sudden, as expressed by interview participant LS, "it was cool to be Asian". I echo Ien Ang's assertion that in a world where globalization and rapidly growing

transnational regional economies are the new reality, being an Asian 'other' still exists. However, "the status of that otherness has changed" (Ang, p. 140). As a result, I see Khoo's 'Chinese exotic' as a concept that combines the baggage of imperialist exoticization (used as source of knowledge) with newer, empowered representations to be capitalized upon by women of Chinese heritage in order to more fully realize themselves on their own terms. Within the theory of the 'Chinese exotic' is my contention that the cheongsam has re-emerged as a tool of agency. I would also include cheongsam-inspired clothing produced by the mainstream fashion industries as tools of agency. The way Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage have been wearing these garments and mixing western and Chinese garments, demonstrates that they have been exercising elements of Khoo's 'Chinese exotic' all along. Identifying the cheongsam as a tool of empowerment is a view that is shared by Sean Metzger (2014). He underscores the validity of clothing and fashion in the area of political power and echoes the hypothesis that the cheongsam is coming back into favour as women are learning how to take ownership of this dress in order to use it in ways that contribute to their agency. He writes:

> I return to the silhouette to recognize, as Fanon did, fashion's ideological valences and to insist that its meanings remain contingent and in flux, allowing for appropriation and recycling. Given this temporal quality, iterations of femininity as expressed through the (cheongsam) eventually waned in predictable fashion as the political possibilities for women increased. The dress fell out of favor from the late 1960s through the 1980s, but it has recently experienced resurgence in popularity. The cut of the qipao has returned, and with it a new splicing of spatial and temporal configurations that re-imagine and refigure the Sino/American interface. (2014, p.104)

My wearing of the cheongsam has been informed in a major part by the desire to transcend the discourses around the cheongsam that limit when, where and how it can be worn. I argue that it is important to take the dress out of the confines of protected environments and contexts by bringing the fabric and cut into the realm of the everyday, in order to evacuate notions inside and outside the Chinese community that

the dress is a strange and rarified object. The conservatism of these views are no doubt shaped by a long history of the racialization of the Chinese in Canada which have in turn been internalized by the Chinese in Canada. I argue that the time to redress the effects of these historic experiences is now, and that making the cheongsam part of the vocabulary of modern dressing is an act that can be both political and pleasurable. Dorinne Kondo (1997) contributes the useful term 'politics of pleasure', which focuses on how the enjoyment of fashion is both a life-giving force and a political act that has the serious power to challenge and celebrate. Applying the 'politics of pleasure' to cheongsam wearing practices, underscores how this act mixes pleasure and assertion and is ultimately a gesture of empowerment, resistance and experimentation. Kondo writes that:

> ...the world of representation and of aesthetics is a site of struggle, where identities are created, where subjects interpellated, where hegemonies can be challenged. And taking seriously that pleasure, that life-giving capacity of aesthetics, performance, bodies, and the sensuous is, within our regime of power and truth, an indisputably political act. (1997, p.4)

Presently, the cheongsam may be able to transcend its perception by Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage as being old-fashioned and 'too Chinese'. While signs of a backlash against China and the increased presence of Chinese people in North America continues, Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage need to acknowledge that they have developed a polyvalence that allows them to deftly move between Canadian culture and their own sense of a Chinese identity, making more space to experiment with the wearing of the cheongsam that is strategic and opens up agency towards further empowerment and freedom. AMJ, who wore the cheongsam to give her high school valedictory address, underscores this idea:

> If you elect to accentuate your visible difference with very obvious ethnically charged items of clothing you are making a statement. What kind of statement are you making...what do you want to make? What is the context? How are people receiving you? Are you speaking to an informed crowd or are you

> catering to their expectations? In spite of it all, you will do that anyways. I think there's a kind of empowerment in that. (AMJ)

For the cheongsam to be a truly progressive dress that can represent new modes of representation for women of Chinese heritage that are ultimately empowering, it is important to address the patriarchal discourses that have gradually made the dress more and more form fitting, and objectifying of the female body. The government of the Republic of China (1911-1949) strategically co-opted the popularity of the one-piece cheongsam as women were using it to express their desire for reform between the sexes in society. It was decreed that the cheongsam should be the 'national' dress. However, unlike other government sanctioned dress, no guidelines were imposed on its shape, length or colour. I would therefore contend that if the government were truly interested in women's equality, a loose-fitting cut dress may have existed alongside the more body hugging version. What I have noted in my research is that while films like *In the Mood for Love* are exciting for the way that they bring the cheongsam into the realm of Khoo's "Chinese Exotic", these representations still operate within the parameters of conventional aesthetic ideals. In order to take cheongsam-wearing practices in Canada to the next level, it would therefore be important to find ways to break away from these entrenched models.

There is much to investigate in the contemporary wearing practices of ethnic clothing in Canada, some of which have been explored in depth here. What these interviews show us is that a connection to one's heritage is being expressed through the wearing of ethnic clothing, a practice that is contingent and negotiated on an ongoing basis, a strategy of contestation, as well as a tool for experimentation with one's identity. These days, despite the reigning discourses about the cheongsam, there is an increasing desire to see this dress in different types of fabric and cuts. As Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage continue to discover and claim this dress for themselves, they are finding ways to access a heritage that exists beyond a singular,

essentialized concept of Chinese-ness. The respondents in this study describe a relationship with the cheongsam that is informed by experiences with racism, racialization and popular culture. While this dress can be desirable for its formal qualities, its link with tradition and family make it a way to assert a connection with Chinese heritage. At the same time it can produce anxiety in a situation when its display on the body may further underscore Otherness and concerns about auto-exoticization that reinforce stereotypes catering to the male gaze. The cheongsam can, therefore, be defined as a site of ambivalence governed by discourses of authenticity. At the same time, I have outlined how cheongsam-wearing practices that transcend these discourses may provide agency for women of Chinese heritage. It is this set of paradoxes that make the cheongsam a technology that is part of a larger 'cultural-political complex' constituted by historical, political, economic and cultural forces.

CHAPTER 4

LA CHAMBRE D'ESSAYAGE / THE FITTING ROOM MEDIA INSTALLATION

4.1 Situating *La Cabine d'Essayage / The Fitting Room* in recent contemporary art

What I have attempted to do so far in this dissertation is to clarify my prime motives and research questions, to lay down the foundation of my theoretical framework and methodological approach and finally to map out the history of the cheongsam. I then followed with an in-depth sampling of responses from my primary research, to show how the relationship between the garment and Canadian women of Chinese heritage, made up of ambivalence, authenticity and agency is a rich and multifaceted 'cultural-political complex'. My aim in this final chapter is to discuss the media installation that emerged from my research and reflection. First, I will present a review of recent works in contemporary art that situate my installation, then I will explain the context selected for its presentation, its layout, and the choices involved in the creation of each work within the installation. Finally, I will discuss the exhibition's reception and how I might present this exhibition in future iterations.

To list all of the artists that have provided inspiration for my works would surpass the limits of this dissertation. Generally, I feel a connection to the conceptual art of Yoko Ono, the intermedia practice of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, the critical projects of Michael Snow, the institutional critique of artists such as Fred Wilson and the exploration of identity politics by artists such as Pepon Osorio. In the review that follows, however, I will focus on artists whose work shares similar concerns to *La*

Cabine d'Essayage / The Fitting Room. In this way, I hope to show how this installation contributes to a growing body of work that explores sociological issues, together with art questions that include context, aesthetics, medium and technique.

4.1.1 Sara Rahbar

Born in Iran in 1976, Sara Rahbar's family left for the U.S. during the Islamic revolution and Iran/Iraq war when she was five years old. Raised in the United States, Rahbar's artistic practice is informed by the emotional tug-of-war between her adopted country and her country of birth. Rahbar works at the intersection of textile art, photography, sculpture and installation. Her multi-pronged approach includes autoethnography, history and the semiotics of cultural and national signifiers. Her first series of works entitled *Flags* (2008) consists of textile pieces that bring the American flag together with the symbols and materials of Iranian culture. She worked with the American flag as a base, either horizontally or vertically, and sewed on a range of textiles but only on top of the stripes. These assemblages consist of finely embroidered fabrics, bits of carpet, ornamental fringes, fragments of writing as well as entire texts, and occasionally, objects and images, including Western symbols such as John F. Kennedy, the crucifix and military stripes. All of these elements produce a lush aesthetic portrait of diaspora, hybridity, memory, femininity, community and identity. *Love Arrived and How Red* (2009) is a series of photos that chronicles the marriage between a young woman and an Iranian soldier. Using herself as one of the subjects in the work, the artist is pictured in one image wearing Iranian ethnic clothing. In another series she wears a Western wedding dress with an American flag as a veil while the soldier wears his military uniform. In another image they wear black balaclavas in addition to the wedding attire. In this way, she brings photography into contact with performance and creates an interplay between autobiography, symbolism, politics and history. The work that speaks most directly to my work, is her series of photographs entitled *You are Here, Safe with Me* (2008) which depicts the

artist wearing a variety of textiles, including the flags of Iran and the United States as a hijab or burka. Here we are confronted with a variety of personal and political statements engaged with conflicting concepts of nationalism, national identity formation, religious and ethnic clothing, textiles, and portraiture. The wearing of these flags as clothing marks the body as gendered and contested by national allegiances. The autoethnographic strategy of inserting herself into the image is a powerful gesture that is reinforced by a challenging gaze directed into the camera's lens. Rahbar's artistic and personal pre-occupations are very close to my own pre-occupations with identity and the meaning of ethnic clothing. I take great inspiration from the conceptually layered and formally captivating nature of her work.

Figure 61. Images from You are Here, Safe with Me (2008) by Sara Rahbar. On-line images. http://iranian.com/Arts/2006/October/Rahbar/index.html. Retrieved September 2012.

4.1.2 Yinka Shonibare MBE

Born in London of Nigerian heritage, Yinka Shonibare MBE moved to Lagos, Nigeria, with his family at the age of three. He returned to London to attend art school in the late 1980s with an interest in global political issues. When he created a work about Russian *perestroika* one of his tutors remarked, "Well you're African, aren't you? Why aren't you producing authentic African art?" Bemused by the assumption that his ethnic origins should dictate and limit the scope of his artistic terrain, he countered by engaging fully with the concept of 'authenticity' in his work. What constitutes 'authenticity'? What are the signifiers of Africanness and what do

they look like? A reply to some of these questions came to Shonibare in the form and style of Dutch wax fabric, which would become the main conceptual and formal device in almost all of his work. While this fabric has become an established marker of pan-African culture, it is actually Indonesian in origin, based on batik techniques, which were appropriated and industrialized by Dutch colonizers. With its mixed and mistaken provenances, Dutch wax fabric provides a sumptuous yet probing vehicle to evoke and explore how 'authenticity' is constructed in relation to culture and identity.

A strong undercurrent of ambivalence flows throughout Shonibare's body of work, as he leaves questions open, stirring complicity with confrontation. To illustrate this point, Shonibare was awarded and accepted the decoration of Member of the "Most Excellent Order of the British Empire" (MBE) in 2005. While other Black British artists have refused this distinction, this acronym has been officially added to his professional name as it underscores the tensions that emerge through his work in regards to the experience of being at once inside and outside, African and British, and of belonging and being marginalized. Mixing references from Western art history, cinema and literature with a conceptually informed employment of painting, sculpture, photography and film, Yinka Shonibare MBE examines the effects of colonization and globalization on the Western contemporary context through a post-colonial lens. In *Subject to Display* (2008), Jennifer Gonzàlez discusses artists' use of a post-colonial strategy as, "historical references in their contemporary works with specific, critical narratives in mind." (19) The work of Yinka Shonibare MBE provides an excellent example of this type of strategy. His 2011 series *Fake Death Pictures,* for instance, takes the historic figure of Lord Nelson, dresses him in a uniform made from Dutch-wax fabric and places him within a selection of five classic death scenes in painting. An officer in the British Royal Navy, Nelson became famous for his military acumen, which led to victories during the Napoleonic Wars and his eventual death in the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. Shonibare employs Nelson's glorified image as a metaphor for the establishment of the British Empire, where his

death, re-envisioned over and over, is not only analogous to the current decline of Western empires and the de-centering of world economic powers, but also of history's tendency to be repeated.

Figure 62. Fake Death Pictures The Death Of Leonardo Da Vinci In The Arms of Francis I, 2011. On-line image. http://www.yinkashonibarembe.com/artwork/photography/?image_id=118. Retrieved April 18, 2015.

Figure 63. Fake Death Pictures (The Death of Chatterton – Henry Wallis), 2011. On-line image. http://www.yinkashonibarembe.com/artwork/photography/?image_id=118. Retrieved April 10, 2015.

Shonibare also employs a strategy of hybridity and autoethnography in a number of works, including *Dorian Gray* (2001) based on the 1945 screen adaptation of Oscar Wilde's 1890 book *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*. Shonibare created a series of 'film stills' casting himself as the main character, thus employing an auto-ethnographic strategy to subvert expectations, a strategy compounded by his exploration of the role of the 'dandy', an 18th century figure who was able to infiltrate the upper classes with his impeccable style. The website 'dandy.org', which is dedicated to the history of dandyism and its current practices in San Francisco, California, situates its emergence in England in the early 1800s. At that time, England took over the role of central

cultural influence from France (reeling from its revolution), and a real figure by the name of George Bryan Brummel caused a sensation when he became friends with the Prince Regent and later became, "one of the most influential, and even powerful men in the nation, not by his birthright, or education, or military prowess, or scholastic accomplishment...but by being well dressed." (dandy.org/whatisdandyism%3F) Brummel, who became known as 'Beau' Brummel, had a major influence on English society and is credited with being the first dandy. Brummel launched a kind of new male representation that would be employed in literary texts such as Oscar Wilde's *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*. Another important aspect of the figure of the dandy is his ability to move within the world of his 'betters', through the knowledge generated by being from the lower classes. His insider/outsider status becomes a vehicle that allows him greater mobility. By inserting his racialized self into this historic text, Yinka Shonibare MBE challenges the established British social order on cultural and political levels via one of its 'own' celebrated literary achievements. At the same time, he comments on his own dualities (that plays on the duality of Wilde's character Dorian Gray) and how it has informed him to strategically transcend Britain's social hierarchies and limitations.

In addition to Shonibare's use of clothing and fabric, I find much in common with his investigation of authenticity, class, 'race' and identity. His strategic uses of auto-ethnography, hybridity, and historical references are all touchstones for my work. Perhaps overall, it is his simultaneous use of seduction and subversion that has been the most inspiring for *La Cabine d'Essayage / The Fitting Room*. His work is visually sensuous, while engaging the mind's critical faculties to produce tensions that productively unsettle simple binaries to reveal the complexities and questions related to his subject matter.

Figure 65. Left: Scramble for Africa, 2003. On-line image.
http://www.yinkashonibarembe.com/artwork/photography/?image_id=118. Retrieved March 10, 2015.

Figure 66. Right: *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews Without their Heads*, 1998. On-line image.
http://www.yinkashonibarembe.com/artwork/photography/?image_id=118. Retrieved March 10, 2015.

4.1.3 Mary Sui Yee Wong

Mary Sui Yee Wong is a Montreal-based multidisciplinary artist who immigrated to Canada as a child from Hong Kong in 1963. Her work refers to the issues of identity and cultural diversity that are implicated in her various roles as a Chinese-Canadian artist, mother, teacher and community activist. Wong's practice is inspired by personal memories, histories, and legacies as it attempts to examine the mutability of personal and national identity formation, especially in light of advanced globalization. Her multidisciplinary installations operate at the intersection of Western theory and Chinese philosophy. The works of most relevance to my project are *Yellow Apparel* (2004-2008) and *Mei Ren* (2008).

Yellow Apparel features a "collection" of outfits of different styles made from the same fabric the artist found in a local shop. The fabric is printed with a graphic design of what seems to be stereotypical images of 'ethnic' children who all have the same peachy-brown skin colour. Wong used this material to make a series of outfits inspired by a wide range of clothing styles. In the gallery space, these outfits hung on a rack, swathed in plastic, as if they were soon going to be shipped off to a fashion

show or boutique. The installation also featured large scale photographs of people of colour wearing these garments, thus employing the language of fashion photography, ethnography, advertising and contemporary art. More of Wong's 'designs' were presented in the gallery's street level vitrine and she staged a fashion show for the opening. In her artist statement, Wong explains that *Yellow Apparel* engages with her concern for the current Western fascination with all things Asian, from fashion to home decor. She links these trends with her own passion for textiles and patterns and uses them to explore questions of representation, cultural consumption and racialization. In this way, the installation engages with the workings of the fashion industry, in order, as Wong states in the October 29, 2008 edition of the online blog fibreQuarterly, "to re-appropriate the appropriated and play with notions of acculturation as part of the everyday."
(http://fibrequarterly.blogspot.ca/2008_10_01_archive.html, Retrieved February, 2012)

Wong's other work, *Mei Ren* which means 'beautiful person' in Cantonese, is a participatory sculptural work that consists of a life size paper doll and various paper doll outfits. The paper doll is a cutout from a black and white photo of the artist as a toddler in which she is wearing Western clothing. She then created a wardrobe of doll outfits that quote both Western and Asian period dress. Wong invites the viewer to choose outfits and to 'dress' the doll as a gesture to explore how post-colonial Orientalism is marketed, disseminated, consumed and perpetuated.

My interest in Mary Wong's work is fed by similar questions about the cultural and counter-cultural functions of identity, post-colonial discourse and representation, as well as material issues raised by labour, production and consumption in the case of textile based works. I am also interested in how her conceptual use of fabric and clothing offers a critique of the dominant Western fashion industry, a stance that is also cultivated in my dissertation project.

Figure 67. Left: Install view, Yellow Apparel by Mary Wong, 2004-2008. On-line image. http://www.google.ca/search?q=Mary+Sui+Yee+Wong+Yellow+Apparel&client=safari&rls=en&prmd=ivns&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ei=hyo0VeyVDMbdsASNu4GABg&ved=0CAUQ_AU. Retrieved Sept.10, 2012.

Figure 68. Right: Detail from *Mei Ren*, 2008. On-line image. http://www.google.ca/search?q=Mary+Sui+Yee+Wong+Yellow+Apparel&client=safari&rls=en&prmd=ivns&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ei=hyo0VeyVDMbdsASNu4GABg&ved=0CAUQ_AU. Retrieved Sept.10, 2012.

4.1.4 Wessieling

Of all the artists I researched only one had engaged directly with the formal, conceptual and political aspects of the cheongsam. With her exhibition *Fusionable Cheongsam*, Hong-Kong born artist and fashion designer Wessieling investigates the cheongsam's hybrid nature that blends east/west, modern/ancient and male/female positions. In a series of installations, Wessieling presents the constantly evolving and multiple identities of the cheongsam that have emerged through popular culture, history, fashion production, global circulation and consumption. *Authentic Dress* (2007) consists of a red-brocade cheongsam, which according to my own research is the most commonly produced cheongsam. In the installation, it looks as if it is being

lifted out of a Chinese wok by a pair of floating chopsticks, a reference to cultural assumptions and consumption. *One Dollar Dress* (2007) is a cheongsam made out of fabric printed with the American one-dollar bill. Hanging on a wire hanger, as if being packed or unpacked from a well-traveled suitcase, this work provokes a reading on the current state of Chinese migration in pursuit of the American dream, while simultaneously commenting on Western capitalism. *Red Guard Dress* (2007) is a cheongsam fashioned from a Red Guard uniform that strikes an ironic chord given the fact that the dress was banned during the Cultural Revolution. *National Dress* (2007) is made from a Chinese flag, playing on ideas of a national identity. Wessieling's one media piece is entitled *Nam Kok Staircase* (2007) and consists of a torso from a female mannequin onto which clips from a variety of Hollywood films that feature the cheongsam are projected. This piece offers the viewer insight into the cultural construction of the dress' identity and its link with popular culture. As I will explain further in this chapter, this exploration of the representation of the cheongsam through cinematic images is a strategy that I also employed in the component of my installation entitled *L'Écran (chinois) / The (Chinese) Screen.*

Left. *Figure 69.* Authentic cheongsam, Middle: *Figure 70.* One Dollar Dress, Right: *Figure 71.* Nam Kok Staircase, All 2007, Wessieling. On-line images. http://wessieling.com/projects/fusionable-cheongasm/. Retrieved Sept.15, 2012.

With rigor, beauty and a high level of expertise in their execution, each of these works contributes to a cohesive matrix of ideas that are embedded in the semiotics of

the dress. Wessieling's work adopts a Hong Kong perspective that goes beyond the fashion industry to engage with the influences of migration, globalization and capitalism. Her work also articulates the cheongsam's hybrid evolutive nature in a direct, almost literal way.

The work of the artists I have described above resonates perhaps most deeply with my own desire to explore complex notions, such as historically formed inequalities of power, through an experience with art that is simultaneously seductive on all sensory levels while critically engaged. I call this strategy one of 'politicized sensuousness'. When I look back on how I dealt with racialization as a child, I see that clothing and style were a big part of my strategy of survival and continue to be today. The spirit of the dandy and perhaps the newer representational mode of Khoo's 'Chinese exotic', present ways to gain agency despite the obvious difficulties and barriers of entry for women of Chinese heritage in Canada. In this way, 'politicized sensuousness' may raise consciousness without alienating the viewer. While sharp commentary may be made and serious questions raised, it is done so either through sumptuous formal qualities, playfulness or humour.

La Cabine d'Essayage / The Fitting Room provides a complementary viewpoint to those developed by the artists I discussed, most specifically in relation to Wessieling's *Fusionable Cheongsam* exhibition, in that it is the product of a second-generation Canadian perspective that builds on the history and evolution of the cheongsam and provides insight into the experience of Canadian born women of Chinese heritage while promoting further explorations of post-colonial strategies in contemporary art.

4.2 The exhibition context and layout

4.2.1 Chinatown

When I began to think about the exhibition, I imagined that it would take place, as if by default, in a typical gallery setting. However, as the project began to take shape, and as I started to imagine the works in a space, I became absorbed with how the use of place would contribute deeper meaning to the installation itself. Given the level of engagement with social, cultural and political issues within the theoretical foundations of the work, it became appropriate to carefully consider the question of where the work would be presented. Over time, the use of a non-art space provided the appropriate frame of reference for the work's engagement with ideas of belonging, representation, meeting and dialogue. Since the exhibition was conceived as an investigation of the cheongsam and its relationship with Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage it seemed clear that it should directly involve the Chinese and non-Chinese communities. It was, therefore, crucial to take that investigation and its multi-faceted conversation to a place where communities were likely to intersect. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Kwon asserts that the art historical movements of Minimalism and institutional critique of the 1970s helped to challenge the "innocence" of the gallery or museum space, working to reveal its hidden agenda, which in her words, worked towards "furthering the institution's idealist imperative of rendering itself and its hierarchization of values "objective," "disinterested" and "true". (2000, 40) Taking the art experience out of a space marked and coded as 'gallery', into a space outside allows one to address a different set of power relations and to bring communities together in order to consider the dynamics of culture, history and migration that inform and shape identity in a context where these dynamics might already exist on a day-to-day basis. My choice of a particular site was informed by three inter-related considerations: the actuality of the location, the social conditions of the framework of the site as well as what the site offered discursively, in terms of "a field of knowledge, intellectual exchange, or cultural debate." (Kwon, 2000, p.44) Chinatown is a site of comfort and discomfort as well as security and insecurity for me and other Canadians of Chinese origin who feel a certain connection to the place, while at the same time feeling a sense of alienation

and non-acceptance. This tension provides another important reason for the exhibition to take place in Chinatown, rather than the more familiar and branded space of the gallery. The presentation of *La Cabine d'Essayage / The Fitting Room* in Chinatown represents a gesture of affirmation as well as a risk – it is based on the desire to affirm my Chinese-ness at the risk of rejection – a concern that is fundamental to this investigation. Montreal's Chinatown also offers an opportunity to address the notions of 'ghetto' and 'ghettoization' that are still relevant issues in Quebec society. The choice of the historic site of Chinatown was, therefore, rooted in a transcultural strategy that aimed to engage with an active and vibrant neighborhood frequented by a wide variety of people.

4.2.2 Swatow Plaza

Given the subject matter of my exhibition, the use of a storefront or boutique space was the most obvious choice. During my location search, the Swatow Plaza quickly came to mind. It is Chinatown's newest building that spans Clark and St-Laurent streets (entrances on both sides) between De la Gauchetière and Viger.

Left: *Figure 72.* Exterior view of Swatow Plaza from Saint-Laurent Boulevard Right: *Figure 73.* Inside Swatow Plaza, view of the ground floor. Photos: C.Sim

In an amazing coincidence, Swatow is also the city of my father's birth and the place I have heard the most about from my grandmother as significant to her life. This six-

storey, multi-purpose building has a large supermarket in the basement, retail kiosks and services on the ground and first floors, a travel agency and administrative offices on the fifth floor and a luxury Chinese restaurant on the 6th floor. During the time of the exhibition, the third and fourth floors were being converted into retail furniture showrooms. I visited the building a few times and upon noting the existence of a number of empty retail kiosks I contacted their leasing department. To my delight, they were willing to rent some of them for the one month I required, even though they did not exactly understand the project or why I was not selling anything.

For *La Cabine d'Essayage / The Fitting Room* I ended up renting three commercial kiosk or stall spaces on the first floor with the idea of placing each of the inter-related works in its own space. By chance they were situated remarkably well in relation to one another, and thematically well in relation to the other stalls.

My closest neighbor happened to sell clothing and accessories of both Western and Chinese styles all imported from China.

Views of adjacent kiosks

Left: *Figure 74*. Behind wall is the clothing stall. Right: *Figure 75*. Furniture stall. Photos: C. Sim

Another stall featured knick-knacks such as clocks, vases, fake flowers and figurines, and a few of the other adjacent kiosks spaces showcased Chinese furniture. In order to access my installation you had to find your way up the main escalators or elevator

and then wind through the initial labyrinth of stalls offering all kinds of goods from teaware, to watches, men's suits, women's undergarments and other household goods.

Views of retail stalls in the Swatow Plaza

Left: *Figure 75.* Image of toy stall. Middle: *Figure 76.* Watches display, Right: *Figure 77.* Undergarments display. On-line images. http://www.swatowgroup.com/en/floors-2nd.html Retrieved April 18, 2015

Some visitors who came specifically to see the exhibition said they had some difficulty finding it, as it seemed to blend into the mix of the other kiosks. For me, this was an excellent indication that the chosen context would deepen the questions and significations raised by the exhibition. The immersive retail environment evokes additional layers of consideration around commerce, labour and exchange. Furthermore, the infiltration of a non-commercial art exhibition within the context of a mall becomes analogous to my insider/outsider status within Chinatown.

4.3 L'Écran (chinois) / The Chinese Screen

Figure 78. Installation view of *L'Écran (Chinois) / (Chinese)Screen.* Image: V. Sim

My research on media installation brought me to Kate Mondloch's book *Screens: Viewing Media Installation* Art (2010), which analyzes a number of works created in the 1970s by artists such as Michael Snow, Bruce Naumann and Dan Graham. Mondloch explains how certain key works were aimed at a critique of 'new' technologies and their impact on the human perception of time and space. Their projects, which all engage with the screen, and explore the system of production and the appropriation of space, propose a critical analysis of the viewing regimes and language of cinema and television imposed by their respective industries. *The Language of New Media* (2002) by Lev Manovich also offers a very useful archeology of the screen that was invaluable for providing information on the history of media. The 15th century development of perspective, for example, provides a historical frame of reference for the cinema screen, an equally flat surface that becomes in Manovich's words, a 'dynamic screen' that presents a deep space with the arrival of moving image and projection. Mondloch summarizes the multiple tensions inherent in the ontology of the screen with the observation that:

> (t)he screen then, is a curiously ambivalent object – simultaneously a material entity and a virtual window; it is altogether an object which, when deployed in spatialized sculptural configurations, resists facile categorization. (2010, p.19)

Mondloch explores two prime examples of ambivalence that also served as a historical frame of reference for *L'Écran (chinois) / The Chinese Screen.* Michael Snow's *Two Sides to Every Story* and Dan Graham's *Present Continuous Past(s)* both produced in 1974, promote an awareness of the presentation and production of moving images, of the perception of space and time, of normative viewing regimes and of the effect of media technologies on the body.

Two Sides to Every Story by Michael Snow presents two analogous 16mm films projected synchronously on each side of a rectangular, aluminum screen, which hangs

in the center of a room. At opposite ends of the otherwise empty space are two 16 mm film projectors placed on black plinths about forty feet from each other. The on-screen content shows a woman taking directions from the director (Snow) who asks her to do a variety of tasks such as to walk towards and away from the camera. What the viewer eventually discovers is that there are two cameras set up in the on-screen shots, exactly the same way the projectors are set up in the installation. In order to piece together the content of both films, or both sides of the screen, the viewer must also walk back and forth between the two projections, never fully seeing both perspectives at the same time, but rather, piecing the mundane action together over time and through a negotiation of the space. As a result, the viewer is affected in a number of ways. First of all, the viewer becomes acutely aware of her movements in the gallery space, as they begin to mimic those of the actor. Secondly, the time it takes to walk the forty-foot length of the room also impacts on what is seen or not seen while moving around. Walking back and forth between the two sides of the screen offers the viewer a heightened appreciation and knowledge of the editing process, where multiple points of view are spliced together to create the illusion of one seamless action that carries a narrative from point A to point B. The physical effort that the viewer must exert to discover the artist's strategy comes with the reward of a comprehension of the tenets of single screen filmmaking established by the dominant language of Hollywood filmmaking. Snow's installation reminds us that in the world of commercial cinema, the relationship between space and time has become collapsed into 'film time'. Snow suggests that this construct has come to dominate our viewing sensibilities and in turn, may have an implication on our current perception of space, time and reality.

Another strategy that Snow employs is one of self-reflexivity, as he draws a parallel between the production mode (cameras) and presentation mode (projectors) inside the installation space. The cameras are shown in the filmic content and the director is seen in the shot. The lighting is plain, evoking no particular mood and the location of

the shoot could be the artists' studio, a place of experimentation, as opposed to a soundstage or spectacular location. This unremarkable setting breaks down the process and illusion of filmmaking to its component parts, as a way to de-mystify the world of cinema and to demonstrate how artifice is indeed fabricated.

A third highly critical and analytical aspect of this work is the use of the ambivalent nature of the screen as a material object and illusory deep space. Snow's screen hangs in the center of the room, taking on a central, sculptural role, rather than being relegated to its usual and classic placement on the wall. What the viewer becomes more acutely aware of in this instance is a simultaneous understanding of the thinness of the screen as well as its objectness. On the wall, the screen disappears to become as Regina Cornwell wrote in *Projected Images* (1974), "a 'window to the world' in order that we may lose ourselves." (1974, p.26) With this installation, Snow confronts the projection-based sensation of deep space by putting the screen in the center of the room. When looking directly at the surface of the screen, we experience the credible illusion of depth produced by the projected image. But when we look at the screen from the side or edge, the screen almost disappears. The two-sided screen, therefore, offers the viewer a way to deconstruct the viewing experience, depending on one's physical placement in the room and point of view. In *Screens: Viewing Media Installation Art* (2010), Kate Mondloch points out that Snow's work makes us aware of how in daily life we have become conditioned to looking into screens rather than at them. By bringing our attention to the screen itself, installations like this one compel us to consider our relationship to screens. Furthermore, she contends that works like Snow's, "also put forth a rather unsettling proposition: that we are, quite literally, screen subjects – largely defined by our daily interactions mediated through a range of screen-based technological devices" (2010, p.19). By making us aware of space and time, revealing the process of the shooting/production and presentation/installation processes, as well as taking the screen off the wall, Snow's work brings the viewer's awareness to technologies and practices of viewing.

The 1974 work *Present, Continuous, Past(s)* by Dan Graham is another room-based installation that explores the video medium. The viewer enters a small, rectangular room where two of the adjacent walls are fully mirrored. On the third white wall are a camera and a 28" video screen. The partial wall that accommodates the entrance is also painted white. Upon entering, the viewer sees her familiar image in the two mirrors, noticing also the two different angles or points of view that she has of her body in present and real time. As the viewer begins to contemplate the image on the video screen, she begins to understand that the camera is not playing back her image in real time, but rather playing it back with a delay. In fact, Graham had the camera rigged to record in intervals using an 8-second delay. As a result, the viewer is made acutely aware of time and space. She sees her many images in the present and the recent past, taking note of how she was standing or moving and trying to piece these recently past actions with current actions. In her explanation of the curious phenomenon experienced, Kate Mondloch (2010) explains that, while "mirrors can be employed to produce curious *spatial* displacements in their viewers, video screens have the potential to generate novel spatial *and* temporal experiences" (2010, p.36). The resulting effect brings about a strange sensation of being in the here and now as reflected in the mirrors, while simultaneously disembodied, when faced with one's own mediated screen image which has been recorded and played back with a delay.

In a similar way to Snow's installation, the proximity of the viewer to the camera and playback apparatus in Graham's installation also serves to demystify the fabrication of televised images. Once the viewer begins to understand the logic of the captured and broadcast image, she can also begin to enact agency over what she does in front of the camera and what gets recorded. In opposition to the passive way that we have been taught to consume television, this installation makes us a more active participant, inviting reflection and perhaps even play into the equation. Art historian David Joselit suggests that artists such as Graham expose the hidden system of

television as a way to critique the dominant modes and disciplining practices of everyday television viewing. In reference to *Present Continuous Past(s)*, he writes that Graham, "brilliantly maps commercial television in reverse by acknowledging the political atomization and impotence it masks." (Joselit in Mondloch, 2010, p.37) The transparency of the act of capture and playback, rendered by the time-delayed display of recently recorded images, allows the viewer to actively deconstruct the apparatus of television, encouraging an understanding of how in its dominant form, television works to render viewers passive and submissive. Furthermore, it calls into question what Mondloch refers to as "the viewer's conventional relationship to, and identification with, television's idealized personality types" (2010, p.38). By presenting the viewer with her own image in discontinuous pre-recorded moments, Graham's installation slowly destabilizes the unquestioned notion of the person and the image of that person. While normative television viewing has conditioned us to accept television personalities as true and real people, *Present Continuous Past(s)* suggests that these images, as Joselit notes, "represent identity as a *process*, not a televisual *presence*" (Joselit in Mondloch, 2010, p.38). Things and people on television are, in fact, not as they seem in reality. Through an engaged interaction with the play of time and space, in combination with the exposure of the television apparatus, the viewer comes away with a more critical and informed view of how perceptions of reality are connected to and influenced by media technologies.

The use of screens by artists in the 1970s demonstrates the ambivalent quality of the screen, a quality that I have also highlighted in my own installation. In the spirit of the works outlined above, one of my aims in creating *L'Écran (chinois) / The Chinese Screen* was to address the materiality of the screen as well as theoretical questions about regimes of viewing and to explore conceptual ways to rethink the screen in the context of a new set of questions related to contemporary identity construction. I also wanted to construct a screen device that would be informed by the subject of the

cheongsam. After a very long period of reflection, I decided to use the model of the Chinese screen as the basis for a design of a new form of projection screen.

The Chinese screen is a folding structure that is considered to function as a piece of furniture. As a cultural form, it emerged during the 2nd century, Common Era. Used to decorate palaces and grand manors in China, the Chinese screen was a luxury item, often decorated with lavish carvings or fabrics and inlaid with precious materials, such as jade or mother-of-pearl. The concept of the Chinese screen, therefore, embodied decorative and practical characteristics. They were used to delineate and articulate space, as well as provide privacy while dressing or undressing. In this way, the Chinese screen creates spaces that are hidden or revealed. I chose to make my screens out of simple, 2 x 2" pine frames, with rear-projection screen material stretched on one side, which gives the screens a sense of front (to be seen) and back (not to be seen). I sanded the frames and sprayed them with a clear, matte lacquer in order to give them a protected and finished look. Wood was used as a way to link the traditional use of this material for these screens, to a Canadian context, by using easy-to-find pine that can be equally beautiful even when unadorned. The hardware joining the panels was simple nickel-coloured metal hinges and screws found at Home Depot. The overall clean and simple aesthetic of the screen object itself, in contrast to a traditional Chinese screen, created a framework that would heighten the appreciation of the rich and colourful video content. I decided to go with a 4:3 aspect ratio with screens that each measured 4 feet by 3 feet. The relative low height undermines the idea and function of privacy yet the object is still able to delineate space. As a projection surface the screen opens up a new space, inviting the viewer into another realm. In this way, the human scale of the screens allowed me to work with the ambivalence of the screen's ability to conceal and reveal.

In addition to the screen's cultural references, I chose rear projection over monitors for the multiple references that the concept of projection offers in relation to identity,

representation and the influence of cinema. We project ideas and images onto ourselves. At the same time, ideas and images are projected onto us by others. Where do these ideas and images come from and how are they perpetuated? Projecting images onto screens, rather than having them emanate from inside monitors allowed me to evoke and explore these questions in a polysemic socio-cultural space-time.

The fact that the Chinese screen consists of multiple panels also allowed me to explore the possibilities of multiple images and interrelationships between time, narrativity and historicity. For example, I used archival images of the Chinese dress, personal photos, documentation photos of cheongsam tailors in Hong Kong and calendar illustrations from the 1920s to illustrate the early history of the dress, to suggest its origins and to show how it was represented. These images are part of the dress' past as well as China's history. I brought these older images into conversation with contemporary references, specifically excerpts from the film *In the Mood for Love*, which is a significant filmic text for Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage, as previously discussed in Chapter 3. I also incorporated clips of myself getting fitted for a cheongsam from my previous work *Ode to the Cheongsam*, and added new video footage of myself clothed in the dresses fabricated for the installation. I worked with a cameraperson who set up the shots according to my direction and was recorded in long shot, walking through different locations and landscapes in Montreal. Each dress was worn in a specific, corresponding location. I wore the *Robe banane / Banana dress* in an urban downtown street, with reference to the attempt to assimilate into dominant Canadian culture. In Chinatown, I wore my DNA dress that speaks to my invisibility as a person of Chinese heritage. In Angrignon park, I walked amongst the trees and falling leaves wearing the 'Sim Dynasty' dress which is made from red brocade fabric, richly infused with Chinese symbols, and my Chinese name, hand embroidered into any available spaces within the motif. To add to the fantasy and performance aspect of these images, I reduced the playback speed of the images

to slow motion in the editing process, mimicking the rhythm of Maggie Cheung's walk as she moves through scenes in *In the Mood for Love*. My aim was to bring the past and the present together, where Chinese origins echoed through my presence in Canada. I also aimed to explore an auto-ethnographic approach to my subject matter as my presence on screen allowed me to reference the performance of my identity in everyday life in terms of the 'transgression' of specific places and environments in Montreal as a Canadian born person of Chinese heritage. Moreover, the empowerment of my own image was also a way to exercise agency and to bring attention to the precarious power dynamics of image-making and representation. On the one hand, I took control of the mechanisms through which images of women of colour are continuously misrepresented and underrepresented in mainstream media by directing all aspects of the shooting, editing and presentation. On the other hand, I worked with some of the language and techniques of conventional film (slow motion, shot composition), to engage with a more romantic feel, in order to convey an ambivalence that exists between an attraction to the cheongsam and the fear of how it renders the wearer vulnerable. Putting myself on the screen in this way pointed to a limitation of autoethnography. For example, in the autoethnographic strategies employed by Christine Welsh and Richard Fung, it is made clear to the viewer that they are the artists/makers of the work. The works in which Yinka Shonibare inserts himself (*Diary of a Victorian Dandy*, *Dorian Gray*, *Self-Portrait (After Andy Warhol)*, are works that reference a historic figure or existing text which he then transgresses through the representation of his own black body. I do not give any obvious prompts to the viewer that I am the artist in order to work with the ambiguity of my appearance and how the general public reads it. What happens to the viewer's reception if they know or do not know that the woman in the work is the artist? While a limitation of an auto-ethnographic strategy may be defined by the strategy of making it clear to the viewer that it is the artist who is putting him or herself in the work in order to ensure a preferred reading, I maintain that the cultivation of an

authorial ambiguity could be more evocative of my questions around identities and their relationships with the construction of appearances.

The multi-screen strategy also gave me the opportunity to play with narrativity and historicity. My research into the birth and evolution of the cheongsam revealed divergent narratives confirming that cultural items, such as clothing, are in ongoing flux in terms of design, symbolism and use. I thought I might be able to relay this cultural fluidity by employing a strategy of recombinant film techniques for the four-channel work. Instead of synchronizing each channel so that the same images would come up together each time the loop repeated, I started each player manually. At times a single player would start from the beginning of the loop, while others would continue to play back from where they stopped the day before. This meant that the images would come together across the four screens in different combinations continuously, never offering the same combination twice during the run of the exhibition. This constant reshuffling of the combination of images echoes the complexity of historical events that gave rise to a garment such as the cheongsam, as well as the complexity of identity and its formation. Stan Douglas' 2005 work *Inconsolable Memories*, brings together documentary and fictional material to address time, memory, historical events in Cuba and a main character's sense of alienation within a country undergoing major change and upheaval. This artist's technique of producing a recombinant film that shuffled scenes, taking them out of the repeating, linear narrative served as a frame of reference for the development of this project.

The throw distance of the projectors obliged me to bring the screen further out from the back wall of its designated kiosk space. This meant that viewers could easily see the whole technical apparatus of projectors, media players, cables and wires behind. Thinking back to the works of Snow and Graham, this revealing of the playback system was a way to dispel the illusion of the generation of screen images and

worked appropriately for me from a critical and theoretical point of view. Rather than concealing the apparatus that might give the impression of a more magical or theatrical mode of presentation, I exposed the installation's mechanics. The off-wall placement of the screen also created enough space for people to circulate around the installation, thereby creating situations where attendees' shadows were periodically cast on the screens. This shadow play extended the discourse on the construction of identities through the direct interaction of the spectator in the construction and reception of meaning. It was also the inspiration for a performance presented at the opening of the exhibition. Canadian-born actor and theatre director of Chinese heritage Sophie Gee, who happened to be visibly pregnant, wore a black cheongsam and engaged in a play of postures behind the screen, casting her shadow onto them in a way that directly interacted with their unfolding content. For example, she sat reading a book, occasionally rubbed her feet and slowly paced back and forth. Watching her shadow move across the screen and seeing her actual body at the same time, conflated reality and illusion

4.4 *Les robes hybrides / Hybrid Dresses*

Figure 79. Install view of *Les Robes hybrides / Hybrid Dresses* Photo: V. Sim

This set of works evolved dialogically through a reflection on the constitutive elements of the cheongsam that would also reflect the complex and multi-faceted meanings of the garment for the women interviewed. It entailed an in-depth investigation of personal and cultural symbols and images, of the symbolic use of colour in Chinese history and cosmology, of the history of embroidery and its significance to China, and of discourses that influence the design, fabric choice and cut of the garment.

As previously discussed, colour is of major symbolic significance in Chinese culture and offered another conceptual layer to play with in the creation of the three cheongsam. In *Chinese Clothing* (2011) Hua Mei explains that Chinese colour symbolism is based on the Five Elements Theory of Taoism and Yin and Yang, which was drawn on for sumptuary laws from the Qin dynasty (221 BCE) onwards. Certain colours were favoured in different dynasties. Red was regarded as the most important colour during the Zhou Dynasty (1046 – 256 BCE), symbolizing happiness and good fortune. During the Qin Dynasty (221 to 206 BCE), it became black symbolizing stability, knowledge and power, influencing all officials to wear black as often as possible. When the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 AD) took over from the Qin, yellow, which symbolizes earth, the dragon and the center, became the colour of the highest status. As a result, yellow was attributed to the Emperor alone, a rule that remained in place until the end of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). Colours were assigned to other members of the courts and its subjects as well. Blue and red (also primary colours) were reserved for the royal family and high-ranking officials, while members of general society were permitted to wear complimentary colours as a way to be represented figuratively as children of the royal family. It is in reference to this colour code that is also the basic colour code for Western art, that I chose yellow, red and blue as the basis for my works.

When thinking about how to apply motifs to these works, I carried out a study of the various techniques used to apply image to textile in Chinese history to determine that embroidery would be the most useful technique, conceptually and formally. Young Yang Chung's three books, *The Art of Oriental Embroidery* (1979), *Painting with the Needle* (2003), and *Silken Threads: A History of Embroidery in China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam* (2005) provide a comprehensive overview and analysis of the history, techniques and cultural history of Asian embroidery. Above all, her writings underscore and examine the significance of embroidery as a major, traditional art form in East Asia (China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam), influenced and nourished by cultural, political, philosophical, religious and commercial factors. In addition to being a world-renowned textile historian, Dr. Chung is an accomplished embroiderer and teacher. Many institutions have collected her embroidery work, and in 2004 she founded the Chung Young Yang Embroidery Museum (C.E.M.), an exhibition, educational, and research facility at Sookmyung Women's University in Seoul, South Korea. Her detailed and practical explanation of techniques and stitchery enlivens her historical and theoretical discussion of the form. Chung's research supports the claim that embroidery is the oldest method of applying image to cloth and is linked directly to the discovery of silk in China. While printing and forms of tie-dyeing also occurred in China, they arrived later and did not have the same global impact. In *The Art of Oriental Embroidery,* Chung cites proto-embroidery as dating back to the Paleolithic era:

> The north Asian prehistoric tradition of self-adornment, shamanistic symbolism, and magical rituals connected with the hunt expressed in the proto-embroidery and embroidery decoration of costume was carried over many millennia by the nomadic Mesolithic steppe and taiga peoples into China, where it became incorporated into the Neolithic development that resulted in their settlement there. (1979, p.41)

As early hunter/gatherers settled down around 6000 BCE, silk production emerged and the practice of embroidery flourished. Chinese tradition attributes the discovery

of silk to Empress Xiling, in approximately 2640 BCE. According to written accounts, a cocoon fell into her cup of tea and began to unravel, revealing a silk thread. However, Chung contends that recent evidence shows that silk weaving was actually introduced much earlier, probably by the beginning of the fourth millennium BCE, as knife-cut cocoons have been found among artifacts dated to that time. More significant than the exact date of silk's discovery is how this material became the most important resource for China, creating the conditions of possibility for the founding of an empire. Silk was prized all over Europe and middle Asia and became a form of currency as early as the 2nd century BCE. China's ability to control the market on silk production for centuries was due to its ability and desire to keep the cultivation of silk worms a jealously guarded secret. The silk industry began to take hold and created enormous prosperity for China during the Shang dynasty (1600-1000 BCE) at which time the weaving of silk grew from a domestic cottage industry into a vast, centralized and efficient enterprise administered under state control. Fine silks came to symbolize leadership and as Chung writes, "gifts of silk bolts, garments, and even mosquito nets were presented by Shang kings as tokens of royal favor." (2005, p.76) Excavated textiles found dating from the Zhou or Warring states era (475-221 BCE) have been found in a good state of preservation. From these artifacts, as well as from writings such as the *Chuchi*, a second-century compilation of earlier poems and shamanistic songs from the Chu kingdom of this period, a great deal was discovered about the style and sources of embroidered images, which mostly featured "twining foliage, fantastical birds and other mythical creatures that blend into each other in sinuous curves." (2005, p.89) The Qin dynasty (221-206 BCE) that followed was the first to unite the Chinese people into one, vast empire, with a central industry of farming and weaving. By this time, the tasks of farming and weaving had been divided among gender lines with men responsible for farming and women in charge of weaving and embroidery. In this way, having good embroidery skills became a female virtue in Chinese culture.

Chung (2005) points out that China's cultural heritage survived through its successful transference from one dynasty to the next. This continuity accounts for, "the empire's long survival and the steady endurance of its craft traditions." (2005, p.97) The Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE) further solidified the Chinese empire, making it into a highly influential regional power. Within its high functioning administration, the silk industry, which included embroidery, grew and prospered.

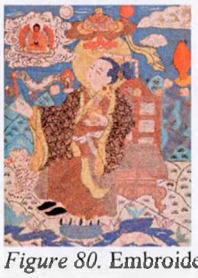


Figure 80. Embroidered Buddhist tapestry. On-line image.
http://www.artofsilk.com/blogs/news/8404057-kings-silk-art-embroidery-from-imperial-china#.VSK-o47e
Retrieved April 6, 2015.

The arrival of Buddhism in East Asia at the end of the Han period had a major impact on Chinese culture and heavily influenced imagery in artistic practice. In the textile arts, needle-workers began to produce technically accomplished compositions representing Buddhist themes, such as depictions of Buddha's life, his attributes and the sacred number '8'. During the Tang Dynasty (618-906 CE), the economic and military expansion of the Empire developed alongside silk production and consumption. Textile designs became highly complex, "with floral wreaths replacing pearl roundels, geometric rosettes opening up into realistic flower medallions, and butterflies and birds, often holding auspicious branches or ribbons in their beaks, flying amid elaborate floral compositions." (2005, p.105) Han records also show that a bolt of embroidered silk was worth twenty-five times the price of a bolt of non-embroidered silk, demonstrating the intrinsic value of this material and medium. Throughout the Song Dynasty (960-1276), embroidery practice began to take on a pictorial realism that Chung suggests is similar to Renaissance painting. For example,

Song embroiderers began to employ shading techniques that allowed them to heighten the changes of light through subtle gradations of color. The embroidery techniques developed were considered to be so refined that they were often mistaken for painting. The Ming dynasty (1368-1644) saw the emergence of the Gu school, which adopted Song dynasty embroidery styles and techniques and became regarded as the most prominent style for Chinese embroidery. As the Qing dynasty unfolded (1644-1911), the value of Gu School embroidery began to decline as embroidered pieces of dubious quality began to appear on the market bearing forged Gu School marks or brandings. Despite the counterfeit activity, four main regional embroidery styles or schools emerged during the Republic Era (1911-1949) and became established in the areas of Suzhou, Hunan, Sichian and Guangdong. Suzhou embroidery became known for its refined patterns, subtle colors, variety of stitches, and accomplished level of craftsmanship. Hunan embroidery is distinct for its starkly elegant black, white and gray coloration, which puts an emphasis on contrasts of light and shade to suggest a three-dimensional effect. This type of embroidery utilizes negative space in a similar way to approaches in Chinese ink painting. Guangdong embroidery, crafted in Chaozhou, is composed of intricate, symmetrical patterns and makes use of primary colors, light and shade, varied stitches and a defined weave, reminiscent of techniques and style of Western painting. Sichuan embroidery (Gu School) is the oldest known style in Chinese embroidery history, and is recognized for its even stitching technique, delicate coloration, and landscape inspired imagery.

This very brief synopsis of the history of embroidery offers some insight into the magnitude of this art form and its contribution to Chinese culture. Embroidery's deep roots as a practice and a medium provided an unusual opportunity to explore my questions. The various examples of Chinese embroidery I have seen in person and in books convinced me of the exciting possibilities that the medium could offer, both conceptually and formally, keeping the central focus of 'Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage' in mind. In order to investigate ideas for possible embroidery

designs, I examined symbols used in embroidery patterns, as well as their function throughout China's history. Chung (2005) explains that embroidery patterns were informed by symbols that emerged through totemic and tribal customs, mythology, and religion, which were then adopted by imperial sumptuary codes. The symbolism and codes established for 'rank badges', the 'dragon robe' and the roots of embroidery design in tattooing, provided essential information for how I might employ embroidery in the project I was developing.

As discussed earlier in-depth, Clark argues that the cheongsam is recognized as a Chinese dress from its distinct collar, handmade fastenings and side slits. Fabrics and other details can be changed without denaturing the Chinese 'soul' of the dress. I worked with various fabrics, motifs, linings, fastenings, colours, cuts and the central element of embroidery across all three dresses to explore some of the perspectives and questions raised in the interviews, which were also presented as a sound montage available for the visitor to hear in the final exhibition.

4.4.1 *Robe Sim dynastie / Sim Dynasty Dress*

Left: *Figure 81.* Top of dress. Right: *Figure 82.* Detail Photos: V. Sim

In addition to working with embroidery, this work plays with the notion of Marcel Duchamp's *readymade,* in combination with the disparaging attitudes expressed by some of the women interviewed towards a store-bought dress. While some women

found their dresses in Chinatown stores, there was an equal number of women who felt that the dresses available in stores in Canada were 'loud' and of poor quality and, therefore, unsuitable to wear. For this work, I used a cheongsam that my mother received from a white American friend. She had purchased it during a trip to Beijing and when it no longer fit her, she gave it to my mother. When I mentioned to my mother that I had a formal event to attend (this was in 1992), she passed this dress onto me. A bright, red silk satin brocade fabric, very heavily adorned with large flowers, bats, longevity and happiness symbols and scrolls, in purple, blue, green and most strikingly, heavy gauge metallic, gold thread, it is a sleeveless, full-length dress that would be appropriate for a bride. My initial thoughts towards this cheongsam are echoed by the comments about the 'gaudiness' of store-bought cheongsam made by the women in this study. To me this was the quintessential, stereotypical example of the cheongsam, where the red colour, the over-the-top brocade motif, length and S-cut silhouette all came together. To me this dress is representative of the essentialized concept of Chineseness as typically expressed in a North American context. As a person who is not recognized as Chinese, wearing a dress such as this would be demonstrative of my desire for an 'authentic' Chinese appearance, no matter how illusory. Displaying this dress on its own may have been sufficient. However, my interest in using embroidery led me to investigate how I might intervene with the 'readymade' dress with needle and thread. The very busy motif encouraged me to think about the pervasiveness of Chinese symbols that I have encountered throughout my life, either in the furnishings at home, the decor of Chinese restaurants or the gifts I received for Chinese new year. I thought about my desire to be acknowledged by the Chinese community and to situate myself within this culture. Remembering my teenage pride in displaying the Chinese character of my surname on various pieces of clothing, it became clear that I might hand embroider this symbol in gold thread onto the dress, in any available space within the charged motif. I asked my father to write our name on paper at a specific size, which I made into a stencil. I traced the stencil onto the dress everywhere I could, with respect to the motif in order to find balance in

the composition. Over the course of 6 months I undertook this embroidery, taking cues from Chung's books. Starting from the bottom of the dress, I grew more confident as I worked my way up. While the overall look of my embroidery work is very much that of an amateur, I find this a fitting analogy to my experience as a Canadian-born person of Chinese heritage trying to find her confidence and footing in a community that is at once familiar and estranged. To acknowledge my Canadian cultural upbringing, I complemented the 'Sim' characters on the front of the dress with an embroidered outline of my given name across the top back of the dress.

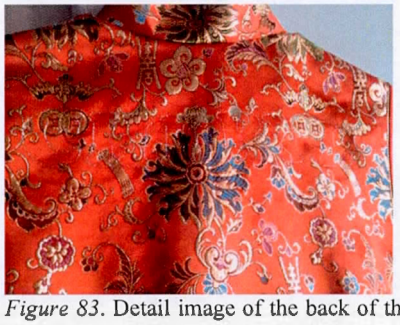


Figure 83. Detail image of the back of the *Robe dynastie Sim / Sim Dynasty Dress*, showing 'Cheryl' outlined in gold thread Photo: C. Sim

Growing up in the 70s and 80s, iron-on t-shirts that could be customized with a name were a big part of popular culture. The desire to wear one's name on a t-shirt was incredibly empowering for kids and teenagers. I ordered iron-on letters in the desired size and mandatory Cooper font, (the most typical lettering for iron-on letters when I was a kid) and used them as a stencil for the embroidered outline. The t-shirt I received at the Sim family reunion, which had the Sim character on the front and my first name on the back, also inspired this component.

Both the 'Sim' characters of which there are 18 in all, as well as the embroidered outline of my given name on the back of the dress, simultaneously blend in and hide in the busy motif, as if Chinese culture and symbolism are too heavy to accommodate any other ideas, where there does not seem to be space for anything else. My

intention and hope was that my names would be found, upon closer inspection, when taking the time to see past the motif, and into the details.

My first attempt at hand embroidery was quite a moving experience. This came as a surprise, as I do not consider myself particularly gifted with the needle. I remember my mother trying to get me into needlepoint when I was eight years old. I lacked patience and precision, and eventually abandoned my first project. My eighth-grade sewing project (sweatpants) in Home Economics class did not fare any better. These experiences left me leery about my ability to take this on with success. But as I began to embroider, I enjoyed the sensation and sound of the thread as it was pulled through the fabric. I thought about the Chinese women who had practiced this ancient art form and about my grandmother, a pillar of society, an excellent businessperson, and a loving mother, who was also very talented in all manner of sewing. I recalled that her last business was an Irish linen manufacturing company that created beautifully machine embroidered napkins and tablecloths. My grandparents bought that business from a Jewish, New York based family with whom my grandmother kept ties well into the 1980s. It dawned on me that my interest in textiles and embroidery was not superficial but rather, part of my family history.

4.4.2 *La Robe ADN / DNA Dress*

Above: *Figure 84. La Robe ADN / DNA Dress* Photo: V. Sim
Below: *Figure 85.* Detail of embroidery Photo: V.Sim

La Robe ADN / DNA Dress works principally with the idea of not being recognized as a person of Chinese heritage, despite my DNA. I wanted to work with a visualization of my DNA as a decorative motif for the dress which would underscore how the un-readability of the pattern, despite being displayed on the outside, would be analogous to my experience as a person whose ethnicity is difficult and at times impossible to ascertain. Through my concept of primary colours, I determined that this dress would be blue – in particular a darker, royal blue, which is the shade that makes direct reference to the male *changpao*, appropriated by female students in the early 1920s. I wanted to combine this aspect of the cheongsam's history with the DNA concept, as a way to link my feminist reading of the dress with my search for recognition in the Chinese community. Embroidery was the perfect technique to incorporate the DNA pattern, not only for its historic and cultural significance, but also for how the stitches physically mesh with the fabric, adding to its weave and making it stronger. In this way, embroidery interlocks with the fabric the way that my DNA is integral to my make-up. To add to the reality of the illegibility of my ethnicities, I decided to embroider the DNA pattern in a thread colour that was exactly the same as the fabric of the dress.

In order to generate the stencil for the embroidery I had my DNA visualized by a now defunct company called DNA2ART. This company was one of several that would visualize a sample of your DNA, which could then be printed onto different objects, including canvas for wall display, mugs and mousepads. Far from the image presented in 'Photo 51', the first x-ray image of DNA credited to Rosalind Franklin, DNA2ART proposed two 'styles' of visualized DNA to choose from– Genestripes™ and DNA Dots™ which could be ordered in a variety of colours schemes.

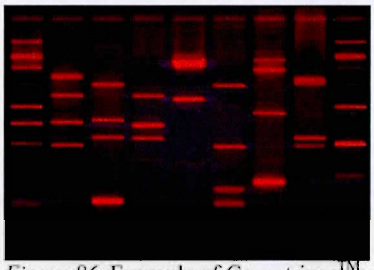


Figure 86. Example of Genestripes™. On-line image. http://mocosubmit.com/dna-art/. Retrieved April 6, 2015.

I selected Genestripes™ for two reasons. The first is formal, as I was drawn to its graphic simplicity in addition to its organic, bioscience aesthetic. The second reason was that it resembles a kind of Morse code, which lends itself well to the concept of language and symbol.

DNA2ART's process of visualization was comprised of two steps. First, the DNA sample was visualized through a process of electrophoresis, which caused the pieces of DNA to become visible on a laboratory gel. DNA2ART then used their custom software and presumably a camera to capture the pattern so it could become a digital picture file. The DNA2Art website which is now off-line explained the process in more technical terms:

> Most of the single nucleotide polymorphism (SNPs) can be detected using a method called restriction fragment length polymorphism (RFLP). RFLP makes use of the many different biological enzymes called restriction endonucleases and their ability to cut the DNA at predetermined sites for detecting specific genetic variants. DNA will be amplified to get millions of copies followed by the actual digestion by the selected biological enzymes and actual output will be visible after visualizing the pieces of DNA on a laboratory gel. One can actually see different stripes on an image and when you compare two persons you might see the differences in the pattern that correspond to the genetic composition of a particular individual. (https://www.dna2art.com/have-your-dna-data/about-reverse-engineering)

The result is what looks like a grid pattern of horizontal stripes that are a visual representation of my unique, genetic code that provides information about my ancestry as well as my physical and biological traits.

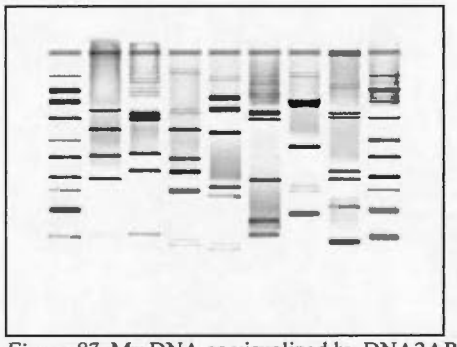


Figure 87. My DNA as visualized by DNA2ART.

In the context of art history, George Gessert (2010) writes in his chapter "Recent Art involving DNA" that DNA was used as a medium by Edward Steichen as early as 1936 in a work called *Delphineums,* while Salvador Dali was one of the first artists to employ the image of the double-helix in his 1958 painting *Butterfly Landscape: The Great Masturbator in Surrealist Landscape with DNA*. My interest in DNA is first and foremost in what it offers conceptually and formally, in the spirit of works by artists such as Kevin Clarke, Gary Schneider, Duo Seid, and Marc Quinn. *Genetic Self-Portrait* by Gary Schnieder (1997-8) is a series of photographs of the artist's body that range from an x-ray of his skull to microscopic views of his cells and DNA. As the title indicates, Schnieder proposes that a true likeness can only be revealed through the presentation of images of what is inside his body – what he is literally made of, rather than the surface of his body. Marc Quinn's work *Sir John Sulston: A Genomic Portrait* (2001) features visualized DNA taken from a sample of Sulston's semen displayed in agar jelly. Like Schneider, Quinn contends that the depiction of Sulston would be more true to life than a patent depiction of his outward appearance. Dui Seid, an American artist of Chinese heritage, believes that a person's DNA is a

portrait of his ancestry and possibly his descendants. In *Bloodlines*, he displayed frosted test tubes of blood with the digital images of his DNA, along with images of his parents. In an accompanying video, his family portrait dissolves into his own image then into a multitude of ethnically diverse people before finally dissolving into an image of his own DNA. In the late 1980s, Kevin Clarke used DNA sequences to create what art historian Ingeborg Reichle (2009) calls "conceptual genetic portraits". In these photographic works, he combined the linear arrangement of genetic sequences in code (ACGT – Adenine, Cytosine, Guanine and Thymine, the four nitrogenous DNA bases) based on DNA samples from his subjects, with an object carefully selected to symbolize his sitter. Through these portraits, attention is brought to a reflection and meditation on the individual, and his or her hereditary physicality.

The ideas and concepts expressed through these artists' works resonated with my desire to use DNA as an embroidery design. To literally wear my visualized DNA is to display my ancestry, and would be, as Reichle notes in the *Art in the Age of Technoscience, Genetic Engineering, Robotics and Artificial Life in Contemporary Art*, "to bring the innermost essence of an individual to the surface and make it visible for all to see". (2009, p.74) The difficulty of deciphering this message, however, makes it analogous to my experience growing up in Canada. As revealed by the interviews I conducted in connection with this research project, this double-edged feeling of marginalization is a commonly shared experience among Canadian-born people of Chinese heritage. An embroidered design of my DNA would, therefore, convey my attempt to assert and connect to my Chinese heritage, while making a statement about the illegibility of my ethnic heritage to others. Furthermore, the centuries old medium of embroidery, combined with the non-prescriptive look of the visualized DNA, make for a supplementary 'strategy of hybridity' that combines Chinese (ancient/culturally specific) and bio-scientific (modern/universal) signifiers.

Once I had my visualized DNA pattern in TIFF format, I brought it into a software utilized by the Embird embroidery machine in the Hexagram Textile Lab at Concordia University.

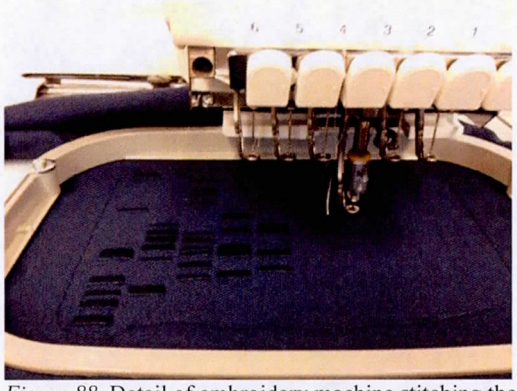


Figure 88. Detail of embroidery machine stitching the DNA pattern Photo: C. Sim

The original image of the DNA I received was in grayscale and made up of short, horizontal lines of various thicknesses and shades. Through a very slow, manual process of tracing these lines through the software, a pattern was made for the embroidery machine to follow. Given my tone on tone concept, I decided not to replicate the variations in shade.

The use of machine over hand embroidering was also strategic. On the one hand, I wanted this pattern to be produced with a very clean, graphic aesthetic, which my amateur hand would never be able to achieve. On the other hand, the use of a machine also makes reference to my presence in the West, which was looked to by China as the model of modernization during the Republic Era.

Given the opportunities to explore visibility and invisibility in this dress, it made sense to play with the lining, which is a practical element of the cheongsam, as well as a more subtle aesthetic field in which to intervene. Normally, the lining of a garment is hidden from view. But because of the cheongsam's side slits, it is possible

to catch quick glimpses of it as the wearer moves. As my DNA, and, therefore, the proof of my Chinese heritage, passes imperceptibly on the outside of the dress, I decided to bring some actual proof to the inside of the dress. Using passport photos from the 1950s of my Chinese grandparents, George and Charlotte Sim, I scanned and cropped their images into circles into order to create a fabric motif that referenced the round medallions of an Emperor's robe. I then printed this on silk using Hexagram's large-scale fabric printer and gave it to the dressmaker for incorporation into the final dress.

Left: *Figure 89.* Detail of printed lining Photo: V. Sim

Middle: *Figure 90..* Showing the lining. Photo: V. Sim

Right: *Figure 91.* Large format fabric printer. Photo: C.Sim.

A final feature of o *La Robe ADN/ DNA Dress* is its cut and shape. As mentioned above, I wanted this dress to make reference to the man's changsam and also address the feminist critique that the typical cut of the cheongsam imposes an idealized and unrealistic body type on women. With this in mind, I asked my dressmaker to make the dress with a straight cut, somewhat like a shift, where there may only be darts at the bust. I even provided him with a photo of a dress designed by William Tang, which had influenced my vision of the dress. When I came for the fitting, the dress was not a loose shift at all, and instead, a form-fitted garment from the bustline to my waist. The skirt area was not tapered to the leg, and opened into an A-line. But I was still disappointed that the dress was not made according to my instructions. When I asked the dressmaker why this had happened, he explained, "If I had done what you

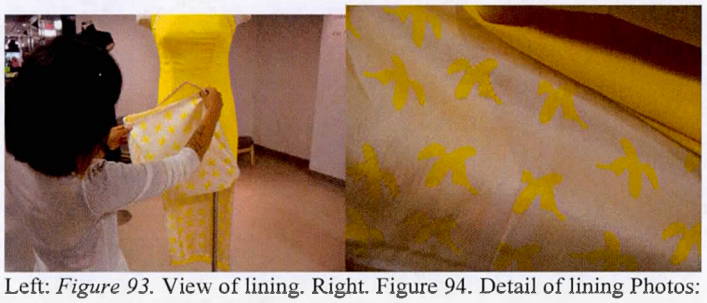
said, the dress would have looked like a sack". This statement was yet another confirmation of the existence of entrenched, patriarchal discourses on the cheongsam, which impose a form-fitted dress shape onto the body, establishing it as a cultural form with strict conventions. My disappointment was quickly mitigated, however, by the realization that the dressmaker was actively contributing to my research.

4.4.3 *La Robe Banane / Banana Dress*

Figure 92. View of *La Robe Banane / Banana Dress* Photo: V. Toi

In the case of *La Robe Banane / Banana Dress*, I wanted to examine what I call "the banana syndrome", which was described in the "Banana blog" in Chapter 1. 'Banana' is often pejorative and used amongst Canadian-born or raised people of Chinese heritage, to describe the ambivalence of having 'lost' one's ethnicity due to attempts at assimilation into dominant culture. Rather than express the guilt and shame for not being Chinese 'enough', which can be associated with the 'banana syndrome', I chose to make this dress in the spirit of reclaiming and celebrating 'banananess'. In order to acknowledge my hybridity, I chose to have this cheongsam made from a cotton fabric with a polka dot motif. Cotton is practical and can be worn everyday, while the polka dots make me think of dresses I wore for Sunday school picnics when I was a kid growing up in Ontario. Yellow is not only the most obvious choice for the

colour of this dress, it completes the primary colour concept and is also, as mentioned above, the colour reserved for the Emperor, as it was the colour most revered and worshipped in Chinese culture between the establishment of the Han dynasty in 206 BCE until the end of the Qing dynasty in 1911. What better colour to use for a dress that aims to affirm and assert one's Chinese heritage, in spite of the marginalizing barriers that are up on either side of the Chinese-Canadian hyphen? The concept for this dress also brought about an irresistible opportunity to use the lining. In the interviews, many women shared their fear of being exposed as imposters in the Chinese community. Their shame in being labeled 'banana' is, therefore, something that is concealed as much as possible. With this in mind, I found a graphic image on the internet of a banana shedding its peel. I manipulated this image in Photoshop and then used it as the basis for the pattern motif. The end result is a field of bananas that resemble birds flying up somewhat defiantly in a bid for freedom. I printed my customized pattern onto silk, and as a finishing touch, hand embroidered the outline of a few of the bananas in gold thread, as way to symbolize how Canadian-born people of Chinese heritage are transcending this syndrome and transforming this experience into wisdom.



Left: *Figure 93.* View of lining. Right. Figure 94. Detail of lining Photos: V. Sim

4.4.4 Audio Montages

As a complementary element in this part of the installation, I took selected excerpts from the interviews and created an audio montage, one with the English interviews

and another with the French interviews. I set up a listening station in close proximity to the dresses so that they might be contemplated by the visitor while listening to the women who influenced the choices and elements that made up these dresses. This approach articulated my strategy of presenting a multiplicity of viewpoints about the cheongsam, while giving voice to the women who participated in this research. Choosing to record interviews in audio only, is a strategy I began to use in *Ode to the Chambermaid* (1998). Separating the video from the audio is a way to privilege the voice.

Figure 95. Install view, visitors listening to the audio montages. Photo. V. Sim

4.5 *La Cabine d'essayage / The Fitting Room*

Figure 96. Install view of *La Cabine d'essayage* Photo: V. Sim

Elizabeth Wilson's 1985 book, *Adorned in Dreams* looks candidly at the impact of clothing and fashion from a feminist perspective. Wilson celebrates how clothing provides 'possibility' and reassures us that taking clothing seriously is not contrary to feminist concerns. Wilson also explains that clothing, like art, is itself a terrain of

self-expression constitutive of social, cultural, historical, geographical and climatic factors. Choosing what to wear becomes a public cultural statement, where what is disclosed and what is concealed can say a great deal about a person's age, socio-economic background or psychological state. The question of 'choice', negotiation and experimentation, when it comes to what we wear, brings me directly to the site of the fitting room. When trying on clothes, we are inhabited by questions, fears, hopes and desires. This room, therefore, serves as a liminal space for the ongoing construction and creation of identity. I collaborated with a fabricator to create a transparent stand-alone fitting room. Transparency is a strategy meant to underscore the feeling of vulnerability and ambivalence we may experience when trying on clothes. It also elicits the idea that, while the fitting room is a private space, we are actually testing and dressing for the public, outside world. My aim was, therefore, to link the more commonly held experience of trying on clothes, with that of Canadian women of Chinese heritage who might think about wearing the cheongsam. To further explore how we use clothing to represent who we are and what we want to say to the world, I further activated the fitting room with a video montage that was projected onto the body of the visitor when she/he stepped inside. The mirror that faces them allows the viewer to see the projection cast directly onto the body. The transparency of the fitting room also allowed onlookers to see the person inside, contributing to the tension between public and private.

The 'super cut' is a technique employed by artists such as Christian Marclay in his works *Video Quartet* (2002), and more recently *The Clock* (2009). The montage I created is made up of excerpts from Hollywood films of people choosing clothes, dressing and looking at themselves in a mirror. Echoing my use of clips from the film *In the Mood for Love*, the use of excerpts here reinforces the impact of cinema on our imaginary in terms of another universal experience, that of trying on clothing. The clips selected are all from films I saw when I was growing up during the 1970s, 80s and 90s. They therefore speak to the past, and may bring about other memories and

newer associations for viewers. The 10-minute video explored in a different way, how the concept of identity construction can take place through the almost ritual process of the selection of clothes and dressing.

Over the course of the exhibition, I discovered that there were two states of reading and activation involved in this work. People approached the 'fitting room' with a lot of curiosity and found the projection emitting from the 'fitting room' onto the floor very beautiful, which was a happy accident for me. Observing the 'fitting room' from the outside could, therefore, first be read as a place to hide and reveal – a structure in which projections occur based on a person's own fantasies, ideas, or fears, which are equally fuelled by social, psychological, environmental and media-influenced images. Once inside, there was a second stage of the reading process. Initially, there was the moment that the eye observed the body in the mirror which then scrutinized the body. Then there was the moment when the eye focused on the projection itself to discern the video content. This action took the viewer's focus off of their own body and into the mind where they might be absorbed in another set of associated reflections.

As the act of choosing clothes is an almost a universal experience, the fitting room becomes a familiar site that transcends sex, age and ethnicity. In this way, my aim with this work was ultimately to make use of this space/object as a transcultural device that would connect with all visitors.

4.6 Reception: A Multitude of Patterns

In concert with the critical ideas that emerged as artists started to break down modernist approaches to how art was to be viewed, the three works that make up the whole of *La Cabine d'Essayage / The Fitting Room* could be approached in any order. At the same time, I did have a proposed path for the visitor that I felt best activated the relationship between the works and that could have enhanced the

experience for the visitor. *L'écran (chinois)/ (Chinese) Screen* presents the history of the cheongsam as it evolved in China and eventually made it over to Canada. In this way, it speaks to Chinese ancestors including those of my family. *Les Robes hybrides / Hybrid Dresses* component played with the concepts of hybridity and the constructs of identity, while presenting the stories of Canadian women of Chinese heritage. This component pays homage to the present, and for the visitor, explains the issues inherent in this dress. *La Cabine d'Essayage / The Fitting Room* speaks to all visitors regardless of ethnicity, gender or age and becomes a vehicle to connect people together.

There were two types of viewers who were drawn to the installation: those who knew about the exhibition and those who did not. For the sake of this analysis, I will identify those who knew about the exhibition as 'intentional visitors' and and those who did not as 'accidental visitors'. As described earlier, some people who came specifically to see the exhibition expressed having a difficult time finding the exhibition, as they found it "blended in" or was "camouflaged" within the context of the mall. One viewer described the work as "infiltrating" the space, and another who knew me personally, felt my strategy was analagous to my desire to "fit into" the context of Chinatown. Overall, the reaction by 'intentional visitors' to the insertion of art into, 'non-art spaces' was positive. Feedback on the use of the Swatow Plaza as a site for this exhibition confirmed the utility of non-art spaces for adding depth to the subjects investigated in my proposal. Placing works that spoke directly to the real world context in which they were placed proved, in this case, to greatly enhance the reception of the work on both formal and conceptual levels.

The situation was quite different for 'accidental' viewers. I would describe the great majority of reactions to the exhibition as a combination of confusion and curiousity, which I hypothesize was based on the mall and the expectations of that context. During the run of the exhibition, I noted that the Swatow Plaza was frequented by a

surprisingly wide demographic base of consumers, transient consumers, and tourists. Based on my observation, there seemed to be a slight majority of Asian shoppers issuing from a variety of communities (Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean, to name a few). The balance of non-Asian visitors seemed to also be made up of a great variety of ethnicities. Among the 'accidental viewers' I engaged with were a trio of teenagers of Moroccan heritage, two different sets of white, Francophone Québecois young adult males and, interestingly, three mixed heritage couples (Asian/Caucasian). There also seemed to be an equal ratio of female to male shoppers, as well as a broad representation of ages, from babies to senior citizens. Very generally, 'accidental viewers' mostly disregarded the exhibition, or gave it a very cursory look. I looked after the exhibition on weekends and evenings, and I would conclude that approximately one out of twenty people who came by spent some amount of time trying to understand the works and their presence in the mall. Different works would catch people's attention. Children seemed to gravitate towards the *La Cabine d'Essayage / The Fiting Room* work most often, first mesmerized by the projection on the floor and then playing a type of 'peek-a-boo' game, ducking inside and outside the booth. The *Cabine* also attracted the teenage son of a Québecois family of four. I observed them from a distance as they examined the object. The son finally went inside, and when the projection hit his body, he exclaimed, "Cool!". At that moment, I approached the family and talked a little bit about the work. They listened politely, thanked me for the explanation and then continued quickly on.

Senior citizens of Asian heritage, both men and women, seemed to spend the most time with the four screen work. There were stools to sit on, and on a few occasions, all three would be occupied. Women would watch and then comment to each other, while men mostly stayed silent. Perhaps the mix of archival footage, the nostalgic air of the clips from *In the Mood for Love*, and the familiar look of family photographs kept them watching. My instinct was to not intervene and simply to let them view.

However, if I had the ability to speak Cantonese, I may have had the courage to ask them questions about what they were looking at.

The set-up of equipment behind the screens also attracted the interest of people, most often men in their 30s, 40s and 50s. Upon seeing the screens with their images projected from behind, they would approach and look behind to check out the apparatus. They wanted to figure out how it all worked, and once they saw the projectors, they seemed satistfied.

As there was approximately twelve feet between screen and the back wall of the kiosk space, people often passed inbetween, oblivious to the work or the projections which cast their shadows into the screens as they walked by. As I watched people do this, I thought through how this unconscious intervention added a layer to my experience of the work, somehow bringing people almost impossibly into contact with a past and a heritage – never physically touching but converging all the same.

A final comment about the reception of the four-screen video installation came from a young, anglophone white male in his 20s, who thought that the work was advertising for the goods on sale in the mall. This reading never occurred to me, but it made a lot of sense when I considered the presence of screens in malls in general. Indeed, most of the content on typical mall screens is geared towards advertising for certain stores, brand name items, and also to announce events and sales inside the mall.

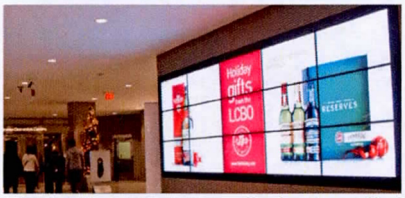


Figure 97. Video screen display in mall. On-line image.
http://articles.multi-monitors.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/digital-signage-11.jpg
Retrieved April 5, 2015.

I thanked the man for his observation as it greatly informed an aspect of my understanding of the language of mall construction and experience that I had not fully grasped until then. The calendar girl images were actually advertisements in their original framework. The clips from *In the Mood for Love*, family photos, archives and my own new content were all there to serve or sell an idea. While I am not offering art in exchange for money, the colliding of my 'art' intentions with the commercial environment provided another layer of consideration and exploration (the political economy of art for instance) that will serve future projects.

Les Robes Hybrides / Hybrid Dresses presented an interesting challenge, specifically to accidental viewers. The placement of the three dresses on mannequins, prominently displayed in the space as they might be in a storefront window, attracted passers by, who examined the works as if they were simply dresses for sale. A few women asked for information about them, asking how much they cost, why there were only three and if I had any more. If they were Chinese speaking, I would give them the Chinese handout, and there would be a nod of acknowledgment, a smile and they would be off. One set of accidental viewers was a mixed heritage couple (the woman was of Chinese heritage, the man of anglo-Saxon heritage) who stopped to look at the dresses, again thinking they were for sale, and asked for information. I started off with a general explanation and as they grew more curious, I explained further. They seemed very moved by the work, as the woman felt her experience as a North American-born woman of Chinese heritage was acknowledged, and the man gained more insight into his partner. During the run of the exhibition, only 'intentional visitors' spent time with the audio component. Once, however, I noticed two boys, who might have been brothers listening to the work, but I am not sure whether they had any idea what they were listening to. I approached them with the handout but they ran away before I could give it to them.

Activating a public site with art is a wonderful and tricky experience. I remember engaging with this problem in a covered market at the Gwangju Biennial in South Korea. Artists installed their works in a few empty stalls, or directly within an active one. The importance of the Biennial in this small city, which has its own dedicated and massive central exhibition space, as well as sprawling off-site exhibitions, makes it a complicitous project for everyone who lives there. The Biennial logo is peppered throughout the city, and one only has to glance at it to have a clue that they are about to experience art. My virtually anonymous insertion into the context of the Swatow Plaza required concerted cultural mediation and gave me an opportunity to interact with people and to casually gauge their response. At times I felt like a hidden camera, sitting off to the side, in a spot where I could monitor all three works at once. I would pop off the perch whenever people looked puzzled as if to say, "What is this?". I also hired a woman to look after the installation on weekday afternoons, while I was at work. She had recently been hired for gallery attendance and cultural mediation at the Phi Centre for a show I had organized. I was very impressed with her gentle and highly competent demeanor. She happened to be of mixed Asian heritage (Chinese and Cambodian), born and raised in Montreal. I felt that it was important to work with someone who had first-hand experience with the questions evoked in the show and I received excellent feedback about her from reliable peers. The language barrier was another major challenge to address. With Chinese speaking people (mostly senior citizens), I used the handout to bridge the gap, but I was not able to decant their reactions or questions further. As evoked earlier, with French or English speaking 'accidental viewers' there was an opportunity to engage and mediate the installation further, with respect to their level of interest. I realized that my intervention could be interpreted as solicitation (like the SPCA or Red Cross campaigners who approach you in the Métro), and exercised caution when approaching people.

To conclude, the exhibition generated substantial positive feedback from 'intentional visitors'. One visitor came to me in tears, telling me she had truly been moved.

'Accidental viewers' seemed to have a mixed bag of reactions that ranged from indifference or obliviousness to amusement and even discovery.

4.7 Alterations/Iterations

I approached the use of the mall context for this project as a test and found that there are indeed possibilities offered when art and the 'real world' come together. I will, therefore, endeavor to bring this project to a mall in Chinatown elsewhere in Canada, such as Vancouver and Toronto. However, to extend my research on post-colonial approaches in contemporary art, I would also like to understand what happens to *La Cabine d'Essayage / The Fitting Room* when placed in a gallery space. I would lay out the works in a similar way, having them configured within their own spaces, but in a way that would clearly highlight their inter-relationship. How might the experience of reception change? What if the same people who came to see the installation at the Swatow Plaza came to this iteration? My aim in bringing this project into Chinatown was to initiate contact with the Chinese community. While there was varying success on this score, would the work get the same exposure in a gallery context? Would I be able to reach out to the Chinese community and to what end is my proposal infused with a socially engaged agenda? How might I need to activate outreach strategies and programs in a different way? What might this exploration contribute to theories on the white cube and its ever-dominant viewing regimes and discourses? These questions have motivated me to pursue a second iteration in a gallery space as well as a presentation in a Chinatown mall elsewhere. This touring show takes on a broader exploration, perhaps in reference to Renée Green's *World Tour* as described earlier by Miwon Kwon. Bringing this installation to different cities and in sites that are both 'non-art' and art spaces would offer an opportunity to investigate recontextualization in a different, comparative manner. Cities would be selected according to their pertinence to the Chinese diaspora in

Canada. However, a future exhibition could also dialogue with Chinese communities in other places around the world, given the remarkable mobility of the Chinese over the last one and a half centuries.

Another change I would like to address in a future iteration would be to further integrate the audio montage within the installation. Friends and colleagues often remarked that they did not know about the audio montages. As the equipment was tucked discreetly into the shelf of a low table, it would have been easy for people to miss this component. One possible remedy could be to have the montages play out on speakers placed within the arrangement of dresses. Visitors would take note of this aural aspect of the installation and could sit in the chairs to listen, or casually absorb a few excerpts while looking at the dresses. Another solution to explore would be to embed the audio playback devices directly into the dress forms, with headphones sitting on a low shelf just beneath the hem of the dresses. This possibility might also help visitors to also engage with the linings of the dresses that I will discuss next.

Should I have the chance to present this installation again, I would like to encourage the public to engage more consistently with the linings of the dresses. My original intention was to allow visitors to discover this element themselves, as I worked with the underlying concept that linings are seen and unseen much like partially revealed secrets. Those who did not realize that the dresses were 'art', freely touched the dresses and discovered the linings. However, since they did not know these dresses were an art project, the meanings in the printed linings may not have registered. Those who knew that they were looking at art were conditioned by museum and gallery conventions not to touch the works and would have missed the linings, had they not been guided to them by myself or my colleague. While the linings are a kind of secret that only the bold or curious may discover, I realize that I would like to give viewers more clues about how to access the linings that takes into consideration the conventions that train people not to touch. One solution might be to add a counter to

the installation. The handout could be placed there and also provide a spot for the gallery attendant/cultural mediator to sit. When people decided to approach the dresses, the 'mediator' could come out from behind the counter, and in the custom of retail sales people, point out the basic aspects of the dresses, invite visitors to touch them and let them know they are available for any further questions they might have. This action would conflate the role of the cultural mediator, gallery attendant and performer in a way that could be productive. How is cultural mediation a type of performance? How would such a performance be nuanced differently depending on the context (mall vs. gallery)? What kinds of questions are raised about the conventional role of the 'security guard' or invigilator? How does this type of task give voice to that role? Furthermore, for future presentation in a Chinatown, it would be important to work with a cultural mediator/gallery attendant/performer who is able to converse in Mandarin and/or Cantonese. My loss of language is an important factor in my quest for a re-connection with my Chinese heritage, and still corresponds with my interest in placing myself directly in contact with the issues I face. At this point in time, I cannot change this fact, without a considerable investment of time and energy. However, in the interest of information gathering on the reception of the work, by people who are more comfortable speaking in Chinese, having someone to communicate with them in a direct way would greatly add to the power and range of a work of this kind.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

La Cabine d'Essayage / The Fitting Room was invested with multiple aims: to deepen knowledge about the cheongsam, to present new information about the condition of second generation, Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage, and to explore and add to post-colonial strategies in contemporary art. This research-creation project has brought forth an original contribution to knowledge about the object and subject of the cheongsam after it traveled from China to Canada. It explores the multi-faceted perception of this garment from the unique perspective of Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage, a topic which has never been explored before. Another aspect of this contribution is my theorization of the cheongsam as a 'cultural-political' complex, characterized by deep ambivalence and a preoccupation with the concept of 'authenticity'. What my research has also shown is that the cheongsam is being used as a tool of agency that has the potential for the cultivation of new modes of representation. In terms of contemporary art, this installation has brought forth some new thought for post-colonial strategies with respect to site-specificity, transcultural inclusivity, the dissemination of social and cultural research and the creation of a forum for discussion within a specific Canadian-Chinese context.

The cheongsam's popularity ended in China with the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 but lived on, in Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan up until the late 1960s. Photographs show that the cheongsam came to Canada through the immigration of Chinese women who wore both Western and Chinese clothing. Following trends in Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan, and with the arrival of the miniskirt, the desire for more casual, everyday dressing amongst the younger generation, the scarcity of cheongsam tailors in Canada, and, more insidiously, the

need for Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage to distance themselves from wearing markers of Chinese culture as part of an attempt to assimilate into dominant, Canadian culture, the cheongsam fell out of favour as an everyday dress in Canada. The cheongsam would eventually be worn for formal occasions only, which is reflected in the marketplace. While cheongsam made from cotton and more everyday cuts and styles are being made in China, they are still difficult to find in Canada. As such, the most commonly held perception of the cheongsam for Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage -- a form-fitting dress, usually red, made from shiny, polyester-satin brocade, with high collar, side slits and intricate 'frog' fastenings -- persists today.

As Asian countries have moved into important positions as global, economic players, the dress is starting to have a renaissance as a tool of agency for a new generation of Chinese women and women of Chinese heritage. Its characteristic hybridity can allow women the power to shape and fashion new representations of Chinese femininity that are modern, mobile and cosmopolitan. My research also shows that the cheongsam continues to inspire Chinese and Western fashion designers alike, keeping the dress on the fashion world's global stage. Films such as *In the Mood for Love* have also had an impact on the perception of the dress, increasing its desirability for an entirely new generation of the Chinese diaspora and non-Chinese people. But the progressive quality of these new representations must consider the patriarchal forces that have imposed an increasingly form-fitting shape onto the dress in order for these new representations to be truly liberating. For example, I have imagined a cheongsam with a straight cut, resembling a 'shift' dress, that could rise just above the knee with a short slit to accomodate more freedom of movement and overall comfort. With the right fabric, such as crisp cotton or wool, this revised cheongsam could spark renewed interest for a whole new generation of Canadian born women of Chinese heritage who want to explore their heritage but not compromise feminist, critical values.

Another aim of this project, which is tightly linked with the investigation of the cheongsam as ethnic clothing, was to collect primary information on the ideas, attitudes and wearing practices of the cheongsam in Canada, by Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage born between 1967 and 1987. Interviews with twenty women born in four provinces across Canada revealed important information about the experiences of this focus group and the variables that make up their current condition in relation to identity, racialization and the effects of assimilation. As Li has argued, the growing hostility of the Canadian government towards Chinese immigration sewed the seeds of racism and xenophobia in Canadian society, starting in the late 1800s. Every woman I interviewed experienced racism and marginalization while growing up and some still encounter them today. While this may be a common experience for visible minority children in general, the case for people of Chinese heritage in Canada is exceptional, due specifically to the early systemic racism towards the Chinese that eventually manifested itself in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1923. As a result of their experiences, almost all of the women I interviewed eschewed their Chinese heritage in favour of assimilation as a strategy of survival and have now come to terms with and even celebrate their heritage. Their attitudes, ideas and wearing practices of the cheongsam revealed a great deal about their acknowledgement of identity as a constantly evolving concept where the baseline understanding of how their ethnicity factors into that identity, is always shifting over time. Accessing this research through the valence of the Chinese dress offered me an invaluable opportunity to examine how clothing, and in particular, how ethnic clothing can be an integral part of an exploration of identity and its formation, and it has allowed me to conclude with several observations that I will enumerate and describe in more detail later in this conclusion.

This project was also aimed at opening up my practice to multi-channel video, object making and installation. After creating the single channel work *Ode to the*

Cheongsam in 2010, I realized that there was still more work to do with the subject/object of the dress, in regards to the post-colonial condition of Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage. I wanted to dig deeper into the cheongsam's history and perception and bring those findings into contact with the contemporary Canadian context, in order to bring more clarity to the present understanding of the cheongsam, while adding new information and perspectives to scholarship on ethnic clothing. My reading of Ursula Franklin's critical essays, in addition to art historical accounts of the critical approach to media art and the emergence of installation by Kate Mondloch and Miwon Kwon confirmed that an intermedia approach might be most fruitful to my investigation. I combined objects, video, audio, installation and a strategy of site-specificity to bring my area of investigation into a multi-sensual experience that offered more possibilities for this subject and these questions. These readings also enhanced my deliberations over the context of the presentation, leading me to choose the Swatow Plaza as the site for the exhibition. While the site-specific use of the environment of a mall is not new, the use of the Swatow Plaza in Chinatown was singular to my investigation of the cheongsam, as a person born in Canada, of Chinese heritage yet estranged from my Chinese heritage and yet often seen as non-Canadian. This duality, shared by the women I interviewed, is important to reveal through the choice of context. A gallery space may have evacuated the tensions of these experiences, so it was important to bring the installation into a space and place that would bring the Chinese and non-Chinese communities together, in order to underscore the myriad questions that the cheongsam can bring up in peoples' minds.

My first experience with multi-channel video was highly rewarding. It was a challenging puzzle for editing and composition but one that allowed me to discover appropriate solutions. Choosing a non-synchronous approach liberated the editing process to more experimentation, as different images would combine and create new associations and meanings, while held together with the strong thread of the subject matter. My experience watching other multi-channel video works has shown me that

there can be a phenomenological moment when the body relaxes and the eyes stop jumping from screen to screen, but rather, absorb the changing images. My hope is that given the slow motion and transitions in *L'Ecran (chinois) / Chinese Screen,* I was able to bring about that moment for viewers, where they began to sense the contours and shape of the history of the dress, its seductive capabilities and as a result, perhaps afterwards, to have a sense of the many issues that this key cultural artifact and piece of clothing can raise. I am also happy with the results of the screen device, which I think is a versatile piece that will be able to serve future projects. Its lightweight, uncomplicated and relatively robust construction makes it easy to transport and set up which are crucial factors as I look for new opportunities to present this work.

As a media artist, making sculptural objects and textile works was an entirely new and exciting proposition. What helped was fully understanding the conceptual underpinnings for each work before starting so that once I began moving ahead with fabricators and the use of machines I would not be wasting materials, money or other people's time. What I discovered in the making of the fitting room, the screen device and the three dresses was that no matter how precise I might have been with my instructions and directions, this process is ultimately collaborative. Certain issues came up that required problem solving and at times, as in the case of *La Robe ADN / DNA dress*, some license was taken, as described in Chapter 3, for which I was not consulted. In that situation, rather than re-do the dress, it made sense to see what issues and ideas lurked beneath the decisions taken on the part of the dressmaker. What did his intervention mean and how could it productively support the research? Ultimately, the decision to incorporate objects into this installation was extremely beneficial, as they operated on a physical and tactile level appropriate to the subject of clothing. With this in mind, the future incorporation of objects into my work will be based on how to best relay the questions and ideas I explore.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Mark Dion's 1991 project *On Tropical Nature* is an example of a project that operated across a number of sites that each defined the idea and the term 'site' in different ways. The last site into which he wished to establish his work was 'discourse' itself. Dion hoped that his work would contribute to and become part of the 'site' of research and I realize that this is also part of my endeavor. Research-creation makes space for work that is invested with social, political and cultural inquiry that may yield useful, qualitative findings. The interviews have brought forth a wealth of material that contributes new knowledge about the experiences of second generation, Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage. For example, I noted that those who grew up speaking a Chinese dialect for the most part, felt more in touch with their Chinese heritage as adults. Those who do not speak Chinese were either never taught to speak the language or rejected it along the way, as an awareness of racialization settled in. This ethnographic work can also tell us a great deal about the variables of class, language, education and location of the women and the various ways these factors have impacted on their sense of ethnic and national identity. This information may also critically extend the usefulness of the concept of diaspora, which is currently more often linked with a sense of loss and exile. With globalization, however, it is moving towards a more nuanced definition that takes into consideration that, while these women are part of the Chinese diaspora, they do not long for an imagined 'cultural' China, but rather, are linked to an evolved, open-ended sense of Chinese heritage. These interviews, therefore, provide additional information on the complex cultural dynamics, which define the complexity of the post-colonial condition of this generation of women, which until now has not been adequately documented. This work also contributes to the scholarship on the experience of children of immigrants, and may prove valuable to research as Canada will continue to rely on immigration for growth in the coming years. How might second generation children, their parents, schools and communities be better equipped to deal with racialization and alienation? Finally, this research may be of use to the study of Chinese, female adoptees in Canada. How might the experience of

Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage shed light on their relationship with ethnic heritage? It is for all these reasons that the sociological aspects of this art installation have contributed in a new way to the scholarship on the study of the cheongsam and the experiences of Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage.

In a parallel undertaking, this project wished to contribute to post-colonial strategies in contemporary art. In bringing the subject of the cheongsam into the public sphere of an art exhibition, I hoped to bring a second-generation Canadian perspective, with all of its complications, into the realm of mainstream consciousness. As I have discovered during discussions about this project, most people of my generation, regardless of ethnic background, do not know about the Head Tax or Exclusion Act imposed on Chinese immigrants. There is an awareness of racism, racialized treatment and stereotyping, but there is no sense of how these are the lasting results of events in history that were motivated by specific interests. At the same time, this exhibition was about being Canadian and the sense of power and even entitlement that comes with being born here, as opposed to arriving via immigration. As described in the introduction, this 'birth right' becomes the basis for the sense of alienation that comes with the question 'where are you from?' The ambivalence represented by the cheongsam is, therefore, analogous to this duality, which reveals to some degree one's own susceptibility to discourses of power. My exhibition aimed at evoking the tensions involved with being at once inside and outside – where there is complicity as well as castigation of both Canada's culture and institutions and the narrow definitions of Chinese identity. As discussed a few times in this dissertation, there is a third site of encounter, which is represented by Montreal's Chinatown. This exhibition hoped to reach out to people in what has been a place of familiarity and estrangement for Canadian-born people of Chinese heritage. Given Canada's historically poor treatment of Chinese immigrants, combined with the effects of the 'Central Country complex', it is understandable how this generation has come to disparage the younger generation's loss of language and customs and traditions. This

exhibition aimed to redress these concerns by raising the notion that being a Canadian-born person of Chinese heritage can be empowering and positive not despite, but indeed *because* of the difficulties faced. It is through the convergence of these three sites of encounter that *La Cabine d'Essayage / The Fitting Room* contributes to post-colonial strategies in contemporary art. In essence, it attempted to open up the gray areas that are part of identity politics whose time has come to be discussed, as people of colour are very slowly starting to make their way into seats of power. My personal concern is how to not re-produce the same set of unequal power dynamics, but rather to effectively use power to put the concerns of identity politics into practice in meaningful ways. *La Cabine d'Essayage / The Fitting Room* tried to do this in several ways, in an attempt to take practices pioneered by contemporary art and documentary film of the 1990s a step further. I combined my voice with the voices of the women I interviewed, as a way to present as many divergent opinions about the cheongsam as possible. By revealing that there are micro-discourses within an established and constructed discourse about the dress, it can be surmised that there is possibility to affect shifts in this discourse. The creation of the *Robes Hybrides / Hybrid Dresses* that presents the three dresses and the audio montages, attempted to attest to that contention, where fabrics, cut, print and embroidery all contributed to the sensibility and evolution of the concept of identity in a broad sense, and the experience and desires of Canadian-born women of Chinese heritage, more specifically. The fitting room component, *La Cabine d'Essayage/ The Fitting Room,* was an important transcultural strategy, as it attempted to underscore for the visitor, the universal ritual of dressing as a way to reflect on one's identity and presentation to the world. In this way, the culturally specific subject and object of the cheongsam became a jumping off point for a discussion of the significance of clothing to an individual's expression of identification, identity, place, time and psychological states that can be pleasurable and fraught with fear at the same time. With this component of the installation, I wanted to invite all visitors, regardless of ethnic background, national affiliation, gender or age, to share in my explorations of what clothing

means, and how ethnic clothing is part of a transcultural, cultural experience. Placing the installation within the Chinatown mall also contributes further to previous site-specific strategies in post-colonial contemporary art. As explained in Chapter 3, while Chinatown was originally a safe haven for Chinese immigrants, it has since evolved into a tourist attraction for the city, reflecting the evolution of economic and cultural flows. This explains why the Swatow Plaza brings in such a diversity of people and becomes a provocative place in which to be confronted with the growing universality of issues of ethnicity, identity, authenticity and national identity. My interest in coming to a mall in Chinatown is fuelled by the curiosity of tourists, as much as the need for communion with my heritage. For these reasons, *La Cabine d'Essayage/ The Fitting Room* has contributed to post-colonial strategies through its ability to function as a knowledge-generating site that aims to be inclusive and open-ended. It is critical not only of the problematic historic treatment of the Chinese in Canada and the veiling of this through multicultural discourse but also of the 'Central country complex' that is perpetuated by the Chinese in Canada and has been a burden for those of the second generation. An encounter with the work is, therefore, an invitation to reflect and exchange. It acknowledges that there is a multi-faceted way of approaching a discussion of identity and privileges a range of entry points and trajectories. Ultimately, its aim is to bring dominant culture in line with marginalized and exoticized culture in an accessible site of commercial and cultural exchange for the purposes of contributing to and advancing the discussions in identity politics. In her 1990 book *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues,* Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak coined the term "strategic essentialism" as way to describe the temporary formation of specific groups to organize against racism and sexism in mainstream society. For example, as it was felt that the concerns of women of colour feminist groups were not being addressed by white feminist groups, women of colour formed their own organizations for the purposes of activism at a crucial moment in time. An example of this is the 'Shakti Women of Colour Collective', a group for feminist women of colour that was founded in the mid-1990s at McGill University

and the Live Out Loud Film and Video collective, also established in Montreal in the mid-1990s, which offered support for women of colour and aboriginal video and filmmakers through workshops and screening events. The key for me in the conceptualization of Spivak's term is the word 'temporary', which recognizes how this type of division/exclusion was necessary for the articulation of identity politics in North America in the 1990s and for some continues to be necessary today. My installation, however, proposes that an inclusive strategy in post-colonial contemporary art practice can also be productive for the advancement of these discussions.

Closing Remarks:

As I began researching for this project in 2011, I found out about a newly published book entitled *The Measure of a Man* by JJ Lee. I worked with the author's sister, who I had interviewed for *Ode to the Cheongsam*. She told me that JJ's book would be about his relationship with their late father via the social history of the men's suit. As a way of dealing with and engaging with a healing process in connection with the difficulties and issues he had with his father while growing up, he decided to alter a suit that had belonged to his father in order to make it his own. JJ Lee's book highlighted the importance of clothing, its ability to preserve memory, to live out fantasy, to protect, to express and even to evoke and perhaps exercise demons, as in JJ's case:

> ...There's more work to be done. The lapel stitches are uneven. I could shave another inch off the shoulders. The waist could be tighter. I can see in the suit all its shortcomings, its deficiencies. It is incomplete, but he's still there and now so am I. At this moment, I am occupying the same space as my father. We remain entangled. (2011, p.283)

Lee's moving account articulates perhaps the strongest undercurrent in my project. In short, clothes matter. As a universal subject that transcends nationality, gender, and age, wearing some kind of clothing is an act that unites us. With this research project, I hoped to bring out that sentiment. I also hoped to contribute to the growing wave of questioning, as new generations of Canadian-born people of Chinese heritage are finding their own voices, and are adding to 'Other' voices that have been raised for quite some time now. At the same time, I hoped to contribute to the range of art practices concerned with the exploration of conceptually-driven media art, where my various strategies of hybridity can engage visitors formally and critically through 'politicized sensuousness'.

As a Canadian-born woman of Chinese ancestry, raised in Quebec, this doctoral research has been of deep personal significance. It has allowed me to further develop and define my creative process, to carve out an understanding of my artistic goals, to contribute to strategies and practices in contemporary art, to gain a deeper understanding of the current condition of second generation Canadians of Chinese heritage and to spend a great deal of time with a subject and object that is literally and figuratively a second skin.

ANNEXE I

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE 20 WOMEN INTERVIEWED

Questions

-Briefly tell me about how your family came to Canada.
-Tell me about growing up in Canada (your school, your friends, your experiences).
-What does it mean to you to 'feel' Chinese or to connect with your Chinese-ness? Do you feel connected? Why or why not?

-Have you ever worn a cheongsam?

If so :

-when was the first time? What did it look like? How did you get it? (store bought? tailor made? inherited? borrowed?)
-How did you style the cheongsam? (hair, make-up, accessories)
-How did you feel in the cheongsam? (physical comfort, emotional and mental state)

If not:

Why? What factors might have contributed to not wearing it?
Under what circumstances might you wear a cheongsam?

-Whether you have worn a cheongsam or not:

-What does the cheongsam mean or symbolize to you?
-Who can wear it?
-Are there negative ideas associated with the cheongsam?

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Questions pour l'entretien

- Décrivez l'histoire votre famille au Canada (Quand et comment votre famille est arrivée au Canada)
- Parlez-moi de ton enfance au Canada (votre école, vos amis, vos expériences).
- Qu'est ce que ça veut dire 'sentir chinois' pour vous? Vous sentez-vous connecté à votre héritage chinois? Pourquoi ou pourquoi pas?

Avez-vous déjà porté un cheongsam?

Si oui :

-Comment est-ce que vous avec procuré votre robe ? (membre de la famille, magasin, sur mesure)?
-Dans quelles circonstances avez-vous porté cette robe? Quel genre de réponse avez-vous reçue gens autour de vous?
-Comment sentez-vous lorsque vous portez un cheongsam? (Comment est-ce que le cheongsam affecte votre corps et de vos mouvements?

Si non :

-Pourquoi pas? Quel facteurs ont influencé cette décision?
-Dans quel circonstances porteriez-vous un cheongsam?

Peu importe si vous avez porté un cheongsam:

-Qu'est ce que le cheongsam signifie pour vous?
-À votre avis, qui a le droit de porter le cheongsam?
-Y at-il des idées négatifs associés au cheongsam? D'où viennent-ils?

ANNEXE II

Mapping of cheongsam history – via recent sources (1987-2011)

title	author	year	han or manchu	first appearance	language	who wore it
Chinese Clothing	Hua Mei	2011	manchu +american	students in Shanghai in 1921, desire for equality	yes *in Chinese called qipao	students middle class upper class
Chinese Fashion from Mao to Now	Juanjuan Wu	2009	manchu+american (but also Han men)	students in Shanghai from 1921, fashionable women, symbol of equality	contrast Qing qipao from modern qipao	middle class upper class
Cheongsam Fashion Textiles and Patterns re-published Naomi Yin-yin Szeto's essay and does not contribute to the epistomology of the cheongsam, but provides lots of nice images (archival as well as newer images of a great variety of cheongsam, dress patterns and embroidery and fabric patterns.	Pepin	2009				
Changing Clothes in China	Antonia Finnane	2008	Confusion. the dress may have been quoting Qing clothing, but should not be confused with the Qing dress. Association closer in Beijing than in Shanghai. (no mention of Han changsam though)	Disputes the Zhang Ailing claim that the dress emerged in 1921. She was only 1 year old at the time. Also, no influential women were wearing it (wives of politicians) to be a barometer of fashion. However, Song Qingling wore one in 1925 (loose fitting). Qipao in fashion magazines as of 1924.	no	society people actresses wealthy middle class
Fusionable Cheongsam	Wessieling	2007	Origin in men's changpao in 1910s (Han clothing). Does mention that it has been associated with the Manchu robe but contests that "its feminine image offers little suggestion of its affiliation with the men's attire of the Manchu". 10 She continues to create distance between the cheongsam and Manchu clothing. "Despite their analogous style and character and the association of their names, the cheongsam cannot merely be reduced to its	Rise in 1920s, coinciding with May Fourth Movement (1917-1921), cultural resistance to the West and the divided nation's search for reintegration and *wenming* (civilisation). "It became the official formal dress during the Republican era (1911-1949). 12 (this is not really referenced)	yes – very important to her argument. she uses 'cheongsam' is more familiar than qipao, and many Cantonese speaking Chinese prefer changpao (men's long robe) to men's cheongsam. The Chinese characters for 'cheongsam' for men and women are the same. The only distinction is to add 'men's' before the word. the term	women of emerging middle class, *shimao* term used (1920s-40s) to describe 'style of the times', fashionistas, those at vanguard, wanting to shock. She also mentions the masses.

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Mapping of cheongsam history – via recent sources (1987-2011)

			inheritance from the one-piece robe worn by Manchu ladies during Qing dynasty. The assured survival and popularity of Manchu wear in the social and political turmoil of the early Republican-era (1911-1949) was slim against the anti-Manchu tenor of the times. Instead, Chinese women were seen in a jacket and skirt (ao, qun). 1925 saw women in cheongsams and their style bore little resemblance to the indigenous Manchurian costume." 14		'cheongsam' is therefore more appropriate for her project as it indicates the hybridity (men's and women's dress) of the garment.	
Chinese Dress from the Qing Dynasty to the Present	Valery Garrett	2007	"By the middle 1920s, the top and skirt had combined to form a one-piece garment, also called a qi pao, literally "banner gown", as it resembled the style worn by Manchu women in the past.	1927, when Nanjing became the capital of the Republic of China, two styles of clothing were designated (by who?) as formal wear for women – the black jacket and blue skirt and the cheongsam.	Doesn't make any distinctions as per the use of the word 'cheongsam' over qipao. Uses cheongsam, but refers to qipao, simply as a kind of alternate term.	(lost some of the text during photocopying)
China Chic	Vivienne Tam with Martha Huang	2000	Makes more clear links to the Manchurian qipao "The dragon robe was slimmed down to the sleek lines of an Art Deco abstract, but richly decorated with the elaborate designs and colours of the Qing. The robe's shape was the basis for the uniform worn by the emporor's imperial Manch troops and was known as the qipao or banner gown in Mandarin. This became the long gown worn by civilian men too – the cheongsam, or long gown in Cantonese." 8 (students wore it for equality)		She uses "cheongsam" . Explains the term "long shirt", and that it is "qipao" in Mandarin "banner gown" qi being the term for the Manchu military division. But not more. (She doesn't outline how the terms are politically and historically informed)	Students, wealthy women, socialites, actresses
The Cheongsam	Hazel Clark	2000	Combination of Han and Manchu clothing. "Manchu women even adopted the skirts worn by the Han. As result, the styles between the two groups became somewhat blurred, increasingly so after 1800.	Refers to Eileen Chang (Ailing Zhang) talking about its first appearance in 1921, but things she is probably referring to students and teachers. She says it did not really appear on a larger scale later in the decade.	Outlines her preference for cheongsam in Preface. Cheongsam more familiar term than qipao outside of mainland China.	By end of 1920s, was main dress worn by middle class, urban women. By everyday women in 1950s.

ANNEXE II

Mapping of cheongsam history – via recent sources (1987-2011)

			Around the beginning of the twentieth century, both Han and Manchu women wore gowns with lavish decorations on the main garment and on the borders. Western styles influence the dress, furthering the idea of the hybrid origins of the modern cheongsam.		Also book focuses mainly on HK where the dress had been worn for the longest time. Romanization based on pronunciation. Any reference to the qipao "refers specifically to the robe worn in mainland China. viii	
China Chic: East Meets West	Valerie Steele & John S. Major "The Cheung Sam: Isues of Fashion and Cultural Identity" Hazel Clark	1999	Doesn't make any committment to a theory bu refers to the qipao of Manchus, but infers the connection. "The female version of the roe was known as *qipao* or "banner gown" after thewomen associated with the Manchu banner regiments which were stationed in major cities to control the population. The cheung sam (alternate spelling) entered China, paradoxically, therefore as a foreign garment representative of an invading culture. p.155	Cites the importance of Shanghai to the emergence of the dress and that the "modern verson began to be fashionable in the early 1920s". 157	Does not go into the use of one term or another, but uses alternate spelling. Her perspective is mostly from HK, which is probably why she goes with cheung sam (the technically closer translation in Cantonese "long shirt".	Wealthy women and students, teachers in southern China
Evolution & Revolution: Chinese Dress 1700s – 1990s	Ed. Claire Roberts "Cheungsam: Fashion, culture and gender" Naomi Yin-yin Szeto	1997	Quotes that it came out of northern China in early 20th century. "It is believed the *cheungsam* first emerged as a modification of the long robe worn by Manchu women." 59	No claim, but that it gained widespread popularity in 20s and 30s.	Distinguished only in terms of language (dialect) or translation. Authors coming from HK perspective.	same
Chinese Clothing: An Illustrated Guide	Valery M. Garrett	1994	Women wearing ao gun in 1912-1915. By 1925, the top, blouse and skirt fused to be one garment called qi pao "literally 'banner gown', as it resembled the style worn by Manchy women in the past.	Cites qi pao as having a life span (1925-1950) !	in a footnote she explains that it is *cheung sam* in Cantonese which means long gown.	Women with style in urban environments.
5000 Years of Chinese Costumes	Zhou Xun, Gao Chunming	1987	States the qi pao was originally the dress of the Manchus, "it was adopted by the Han women in	No strong claim.	No mention of term 'cheongsam' or 'cheung sam'. Concentrated on the	same

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			1920s." 215 Attributes the preference to its economical nature and convenience and also that it is more flattering.		mainland perspective.	
Traditional Chinese Clothing in Hong Kong and South China 1840-1980	Valerie Garrett	1987	Women's cheung sam "developed from the robes worn by Manchu women during the Qing dynasty.	Early Republican period, the jacket and skirt outfit was introduced as a 'modern outift' to replace the heavy robes. By mid 1920s the jacket blouse and skir combined to create the cheung sam, considered 'daring'. Folllowing the establishment of Nanjing as capital of RC in 1927, two styles were stipulated as formal wear for women. p.17 (strict outline of what it had to look like).	no reference to qipao. Deals with HK, so seems normal to use cheung sam.	students, regular women (but no direct reference)

APPENDIX I

La Cabine d'essayage (The Fitting Room)
CHERYL SIM
Du 8 au 22 juin 2014

La *cheongsam* est une robe qui est devenue un symbole mondialement reconnu de l'identité culturelle chinoise. Selon les historiens, cette robe est née d'une association des styles vestimentaires Han et Mandchoue. Ils ont ensuite été influencés par des événements historiques en Chine, qui ont amené celle-ci à être exposée à la mode américaine et aux valeurs occidentales dans les années 1920 et 1930. La *cheongsam* contemporaine est devenue une robe cintrée, traditionnellement faite de brocart satin, avec un grand col, des fentes latérales et des fermetures complexes. Pour les femmes canadiennes d'origine chinoise, porter cette robe implique un mélange entrelacé et complexe d'attirance et de répulsion rempli d'interrogations; la dynamique du pouvoir établi dans un contexte postcolonial tel que le Canada détient une forte incidence sur la manière dont les femmes souhaiteraient se représenter. *La Cabine d'essayage* tente d'explorer un certain nombre de ces questions. Que pensent les femmes canadiennes d'origine chinoise de la *cheongsam*? Souhaitent-elles porter cette robe? Ce souhait risque-t-il de perpétuer des récits négatifs sur les femmes asiatiques? La *cheongsam* ébranle-t-elle la revendication de « canadianité » (identité canadienne) de la personne qui la porte? Cette exposition est une recherche approfondie sur le sens de la *cheongsam*, les pratiques traditionnelles d'habillement des femmes de la diaspora chinoise résidant au Canada, ainsi qu'une méditation sur le rituel quotidien d'habillement et les choix que nous faisons pour exprimer notre identité, nos souhaits et notre capacité d'agir.

Cette exposition est composée de trois œuvres : ***L'Écran (chinois)*/(Chinese) Screen**, ***Les Robes hybrides*/Hybrid Dresses** et ***La Cabine d'essayage*/The Fitting Room.** Elle est présentée au sein du centre commercial Swatow Plaza, situé au centre du Quartier Chinois de Montréal. Évoquant la forme d'un écran chinois classique, ***L'Écran (chinois)*/(Chinese) Screen** est une sculpture vidéo qui présente l'évolution de la *cheongsam* à travers ses couches historiques et conceptuelles. ***Les Robes hybrides*/Hybrid Dresses** est une représentation de trois *cheongsam* accompagnée d'un montage sonore. La bande sonore est composée d'extraits d'interviews de femmes qui partagent leurs histoires et opinions personnelles sur la *cheongsam*. Chacune des *Robes hybrides* est une association de tissus, de doublures personnalisées, de broderies et d'autres éléments qui reflètent les idées, les attitudes et les impressions exprimées par les femmes (l'artiste incluse) dans le montage sonore. ***La Cabine d'essayage*/The Fitting Room** est une cabine d'essayage en plexiglas transparent pour une personne. À l'intérieur, des séquences télévisées de films hollywoodiens sont projetées sur le corps du visiteur. La transparence de la cabine d'essayage ainsi que la projection d'images sur le corps du visiteur servent à analyser l'impact des images médiatiques et le regard de la société sur le processus de formation identitaire ainsi que le rôle joué par l'habillement dans ce processus.

Cheryl Sim est artiste en art médiatique, commissaire et musicienne. Née à Hamilton, en Ontario, de parents d'origines chinoise et philippine, elle vit à Montréal depuis plus de 20 ans. Elle est candidate au doctorat à l'UQÀM. Cette exposition fait partie intégrante de sa thèse de doctorat, intitulée "La Cabine d'essayage: la Cheongsam et des femmes d'origine chinoise au Canada en installation".

Horaires d'ouverture : Mercredi – dimanche / 14 h-19 h
Swatow Plaza 998 Boulevard Saint-Laurent/2ème étage/ Montréal, QC H2Z 9Y9
Contact : cherylannesim@gmail.com

APPENDIX II

La Cabine d'essayage (The Fitting Room)
CHERYL SIM
Du 8 au 22 juin 2014

La *cheongsam* est une robe qui est devenue un symbole mondialement reconnu de l'identité culturelle chinoise. Selon les historiens, cette robe est née d'une association des styles vestimentaires Han et Mandchoue. Ils ont ensuite été influencés par des événements historiques en Chine, qui ont amené celle-ci à être exposée à la mode américaine et aux valeurs occidentales dans les années 1920 et 1930. La *cheongsam* contemporaine est devenue une robe cintrée, traditionnellement faite de brocart satin, avec un grand col, des fentes latérales et des fermetures complexes. Pour les femmes canadiennes d'origine chinoise, porter cette robe implique un mélange entrelacé et complexe d'attirance et de répulsion rempli d'interrogations; la dynamique du pouvoir établi dans un contexte postcolonial tel que le Canada détient une forte incidence sur la manière dont les femmes souhaiteraient se représenter. *La Cabine d'essayage* tente d'explorer un certain nombre de ces questions. Que pensent les femmes canadiennes d'origine chinoise de la *cheongsam*? Souhaitent-elles porter cette robe? Ce souhait risque-t-il de perpétuer des récits négatifs sur les femmes asiatiques? La *cheongsam* ébranle-t-elle la revendication de « canadianité » (identité canadienne) de la personne qui la porte? Cette exposition est une recherche approfondie sur le sens de la *cheongsam*, les pratiques traditionnelles d'habillement des femmes de la diaspora chinoise résidant au Canada, ainsi qu'une méditation sur le rituel quotidien d'habillement et les choix que nous faisons pour exprimer notre identité, nos souhaits et notre capacité d'agir.

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Horaires d'ouverture : Mercredi – dimanche / 14 h-19 h
Swatow Plaza 998 Boulevard Saint-Laurent/2ème étage/ Montréal, QC H2Z 9Y9
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試衣間

CHERYL SIM
2014 年 6 月 8 日至 22 日

Cheongsam（長衫）已經成為國際公認的中國文化身份的象徵服飾。歷史學家認為，這種服飾最早起源於漢族和滿族服飾風格的結合，在 1920 與 30 年代，在中國歷史事件的影響下，又進一步受到了美國時尚潮流和西方價值觀的影響。當代 Cheongsam（長衫）逐漸演變成了緊身禮服，通常由綢緞製成，主要特點為高領、側開衩和盤扣。對於出生於加拿大的華裔女性來說，穿著這種服飾意謂著一種吸引力和排斥力的複雜結合，她們在增添自己魅力的同時，也遭到了種種質疑。因為，在後殖民時代背景下（如加拿大）建立的文化霸權，對於女性希望如何來展示她們自己有著重大影響。「試衣間」試圖與妳一起探索以下這些問題。加拿大華裔女性對於 Cheongsam（長衫）有何感受？她們想要穿著這種服飾嗎？這種想法會否讓一些關於亞洲女性的負面說法一直持續下去？穿著 Cheongsam（長衫）是否會削弱一個人的加拿大氣質？此次展覽是對 Cheongsam（長衫）的意義以及加拿大華裔女性穿著習慣的一次深刻探討，也是對日常穿著習慣的意義以及我們選擇如何表達自己的身份、要求和代表的反省。

展覽包括三組相關作品：**「中式屏風」**、**「混搭連身裙」和「試衣間」**，均在滿地可唐人街的長盛廣場商業中心展出。**「中式屏風」**是以中國的傳統屏風為載體，透過諸多概念性的歷史資料來展示 Cheongsam（長衫）演變歷程的影像作品。**「混搭連身裙」**展出了三件 Cheongsam（長衫），並配有剪輯的聲音片段。配音源自於一些女性受訪者，她們與我們一起分享了她們與 Cheongsam（長衫）之間的故事，以及她們對 Cheongsam（長衫）的個人看法。每一件「混搭連身裙」都是織物、訂製襯裡、刺繡及其他材料的結合，都蘊含著女性們（包括藝術家）在聲音剪輯中所傳達出來的觀念、態度和感想。**「試衣間」**是一個透明的有機玻璃單人試衣間。在裏面，一些好萊塢影片的剪輯鏡頭被投射在參觀者身上。試衣間的透明性以及投射在參觀者身上的影像，便於我們探討媒體印象以及社會眼光對於身份歸屬感形成過程的影響，以及服裝在這個過程當中所扮演的角色。

Cheryl Sim是一位媒體藝術家、策展人和音樂家。她出生於安大略省的漢密爾頓，擁有華裔和菲裔血統。她已在蒙特利爾安家20餘年。她是魁北克大學滿地可分校（UQAM）的博士候選人，這次展覽是她的博士論文的一部分，其論文題為「試衣間：裝置藝術中的Cheongsam（長衫）與加拿大華裔女性」。

時間：
星期三至星期五/下午 5：30—9 點
星期六至星期日/下午 1—5 點

地點：
長盛廣場
998 Boulevard Saint-Laurent / 2nd Floor / Montreal, QC H2Z 9Y9
聯絡方式： cherylannesim@gmail.com

APPENDIX VI

试衣间
CHERYL SIM
2014 年 6 月 8 日至 22 日

旗袍（cheongsam）已经成为国际公认的象征中国文化身份的服饰。历史学家认为，这种服饰最早起源是结合了满汉两族风格的衣装。 20 世纪二三十年代，在中国历史事件的影响下，又进一步受到了美国时尚潮流和西方价值观的影响。当代旗袍（cheongsam）逐渐演变成了贴身礼服，面料以绸缎为主，主要特点为立领、侧开衩和盘扣。对于出生在加拿大的华裔女性来说，穿着这种服饰意味着成为一种层次分明的复杂结合，她们在增添自己诱人魅力的同时，也遭到了种种质疑。因为，在后殖民时代背景下（如加拿大）建立的文化霸权，对于女性希望如何展现自我有着重大影响。“试衣间”试图与你一起探讨以下这些问题。加拿大华裔女性对于旗袍（cheongsam）有何感受？她们有穿着这种服饰的愿望吗？这种愿望会否让一些关于亚洲女性的负面评价一直持续下去？穿着旗袍（cheongsam）是否会削弱她是一名“加拿大人”的身份认同？此次展览是对旗袍（cheongsam）的意义以及加拿大华裔女性旗袍（cheongsam）穿着习惯的一次深刻探讨，也是对日常穿着习惯的意义以及我们选择如何表达自己的身份、愿望和行动力的反思。

展览包括三组相关作品：**“中式屏风”（(Chinese) Screen）**、**“修身长裙”（Hybrid Dresses）**和**“试衣间”（The Fitting Room）**，均在蒙特利尔中国城的长盛广场商业中心展出。**“中式屏风”**是以中国的传统屏风为载体，借助诸多史料和设计来展示旗袍演变历程的影像作品。**“修身长裙”**展出了三件旗袍（*cheongsam*），并配有剪辑的声音片段。配音来源于一些女性受访者，她们与我们一起分享了她们与旗袍（*cheongsam*）之间的故事，以及她们对旗袍（*cheongsam*）的个人看法。每一件“修身长裙”都完美结合了面料、定制衬里、刺绣以及其它元素，在音频剪辑中折射出女性们（包括艺术家）所传达的观念、态度和感想。**“试衣间”**是一个透明的有机玻璃单人试衣间。在里面，一些好莱坞影片的剪辑镜头被投射在参观者身上。试衣间通透明亮，通过投射在参观者身上的影像，我们将探讨媒体印象以及社会眼光对于身份归属感形成过程的影响，以及服装在这个进程中所扮演的角色。

Cheryl Sim是一位媒体艺术家、策展人和音乐家。她出生于安大略省的汉密尔顿，拥有华裔和菲裔血统。她已在蒙特利尔安家20余年。她是魁北克大学蒙特利尔分校（UQAM）的博士候选人，这次展览是她的博士论文的一部分，其论文题为“试衣间：装置艺术中的旗袍（Cheongsam）与加拿大华裔女性”。

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星期三至星期五/下午 5:30–9 点
星期六至星期日/下午 1–5 点

地点：
□盛广□ / 998 Boulevard Saint-Laurent / 2nd Floor/Montreal, QC H2Z 9Y9
□系方式： cherylannesim@gmail.co

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