

# *The Research on the Cultural Value and Purchasing Channels of Vintage Clothing*

Qi Wang<sup>1,a,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>High school of dulwich, Suzhou, Jiangsu, 215000, China

a. crystal.wang23@stu.dulwich.org

\*corresponding author

**Abstract:** Vintage clothing is still popular today, and exploring its development history, as well as the fashion elements and buying channels can provide a certain value for those who still love Vintage. In this paper, through the literature reading method, this thesis examines why vintage clothing is still popular in three sections: historical perspective, popular elements, and purchasing channels. The first paragraph provides a short introduction to vintage, a definition of vintage, the market for vintage and a short analysis of consumer psychology. By introducing the social significance of clothing in different periods of time, the paper will show the charm of vintage fashion to the public. The third part will analyze and explain the popular elements of Chinese and Western vintage culture and introduce the purchase channels of today's vintage clothing and a slight analysis of consumer psychology. Through the research results, it is found that the popular elements of vintage clothing include clothing style and decorative style. The purchase channels of vintage clothing include in-store and online shopping such as second-hand deals and more. This study hopes to provide some contributions to scholars who study this field in the future.

**Keywords:** Vintage, Cultural value, Elements, Purchasing channels.

## **1. Introduction**

Fashion is changing dramatically as time goes by, and people are becoming more accepting. They are willing to experience with all kinds of clothes and elements that are popular today, but there are still a few people love the product of the old times-vintage clothes. Vintage clothing is a generic term for garments originating from a previous era (In 1920-1980) [1]. Even though fashion is updating at a rapid pace, however, some of the elements like the mini skirts of the 60s, the plunging tops of the 90s, and the fringes of the 70s are still found in many of today's outfits. Retro elements are still popular among the masses.

Vintage clothing is like old movies. When nostalgic people see the existence of classic, their memories will be instantly brought back to the past. Those long-lost charm repeatedly attracts everyone. Wearing a specific costume from a specific era is like going on a journey. For vintage lovers, the fascination with vintage clothes is because they have their own unique historical stories and souls so that can not be replaced. They are unique treasures in the world.

Moreover, vintage clothing is a way to enhance self-expression. People are able to decide their first impression or character judgment of the person by the clothes they wear. Vintage clothing enthusiasts value the transmission of spirit more than the purchase of many modern fashion garments.

They want to bring an impression of creativity to people when they wear vintage clothing. Over the years, it has been noticed that many current fashion trends are not original, but rather are retro designs that have been revamped to suit modern trends so that they can be blended easily [2]. They also want to convey their love of niche culture to the public. Niche culture is more of a mystery. It requires vintage lovers to present their emotions, creations and collections to each other. That's why it is important to have a cultural identity among them. Spreading positive meaning is the core essence, when vintage is shown to the public again hopefully it will bring them warmth and a sense of heritage of the times, this is something that will help the whole society.

As the author mentioned above: no matter how times change, vintage elements have always been popular in today's fashion. There are still many consumers who rely on the classics and vintage is making a comeback at different times without people even realizing it. The world has shown people that vintage looks can be easily incorporated in today's world [2]. Retro clothing is also eco-friendly which solidifies how truly timeless it is. No matter how modern a world becomes, there shall always remain a demand for the long-lost vintage designs. Retro-themed clothes tend to stay longer in the trending fashion statements because people often like to take a break after everything's fast-paced in today's world [2].

Nowadays, on various social media people can see some bloggers or celebrities sending out their own vintage clothing purchases. Everyone likes vintage clothes for different reasons. Maybe it's because they simply like the designs of the era. Maybe they love the clothes of their elders and want to experience the feeling of that era, or maybe they are influenced by someone who wears vintage clothes as a tribute. In such a culture, all people are full of personal aesthetic tendencies. People with similar interests can come together from all over the world. Similarly, in terms of buying channels, different enthusiasts will choose a variety of ways to buy their favorite vintage items, such as clothing and accessories, based on their own needs and the surrounding environment.

To know why people still love vintage clothing, requires analyzing it from multiple angles. This paper takes the cultural value and clothing elements of vintage clothing, and the buying channels of vintage clothing as the research objects, divides the thesis into three chapters by using the literature research method. The meaning of retro and the psychology of retro lovers will be explored, and it is hoped that this research can provide some contributions to future scholars, who interested in this field in the future.

## **2. The Overview of the Concept and the History about Vintage**

### **2.1. The Concept and the Meaning of Vintage**

The word "vintage" comes from the Japanese word, and can be traced back to the English word "vintage". Fashion is cyclical and on top of that it is innovative and secondary fashion. Vintage is defined as the witness of fashion changes and the inheritor of history, and plays a role in guiding the development of contemporary clothing [2].

From a cultural point of view, vintage is a witness to the soul of today's international brands and is the basis of contemporary fashion design. Based on vintage, today's fashion has added many new elements to it, which reflects the important cultural value of vintage to the apparel industry. Secondly, the vintage clothing left behind by various countries is purchased and loved by the public. In China, for example, many consumers choose to buy Japanese vintage clothing. Quite a number of photographers love Showa style and they choose to buy a lot of seafaring in order to achieve the shooting style. This can be seen in the design and culture of different countries collide with each other. Chinese vintage clothing with distinctive ethnicity is also purchased by vintage clothing lovers from other countries and design elements from different countries are passed on to each other and sought after by more and more people. For instance, American vintage, Chinese vintage, Japanese vintage.

They are not only loved in their own countries, but also many people in other countries are trying to learn about and buy vintage clothes by all means. For China, these vintage clothes are the cultural foundation of Chinese clothing design innovation, which is of great significance. People also attach great importance to some design brands' additions and modifications based on vintage clothes and hope that local design brands will be valued and promoted on top of this.

The concept of vintage can be slightly different from a personal point of view. It is a mark of identity that highlights good taste. Taste is not just a private topic, but is full of ideological overtones. If people divide vintage lovers into vintage enthusiasts and regular vintage buyers, enthusiasts will tend to know more about vintage culture so they are filled with faith and sentiment to buy, while ordinary buyers are only controlled by desire and interest. Under such guidance, the individuality of vintage, niche vintage has become a way to boast good taste. Second, vintage is a symbolic love of nostalgia. They want to listen to the experience of going back in time through vintage clothing. Nostalgic sentiments are often seen as an accumulation of emotions about a once wonderful past. Some studies have found that, among other things, purchasers are nostalgic for the past because they can not cope with the present. Vintage has become an anchor to help them navigate the real world. The third point is that vintage dress is more of an aesthetic pursuit and a sense of personality. People can often judge a person's character by the way he or she dresses, in the same way, can understand the spiritual aspirations of these vintage lovers through the style of vintage clothing. Because of the scarcity of vintage clothing, it is very rare to find clothes that fit your style and size. As a result, wearing vintage clothes is one of the ways to promote one's personality.

## 2.2. Historical Overview of Vintage Clothing

The formation of vintage clothing originated in Europe and has been studied and developed since then in Europe and the United States. The cultural formation of vintage clothing is divided into three historical stages:

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, European women's wear was in a historic transition period from classical women's wear to modern women's wear. Designers went from being obscure tailors behind the scenes to being fashion-leading artists on the stage. The formation of modern women's wear has created the foundation for the culture of vintage clothing [3].

The 1960s saw the emergence of the Young Storm, a liberal and turbulent era that saw the emergence of a group of liberal, anti-traditional hippies who sought a non-materialistic way of life and rejected industrial society. The Green Revolution, which grew out of the hippie movement, promoted the idea of developing handicrafts and finding and wearing clothing from the old industrial society. It was a prototype of today's vintage culture [4].

In the 1990s, people began to resist the conspicuous consumption of the 1980s, and fashionistas began to experiment with vintage clothing as a new trend within the established fashion rules [4].

As society has evolved, the definition of vintage clothing has varied from period to period. For example, in the 1920s, both the cultural aspects and the social status of women changed. Because of the Great Depression and the widening gap between the rich and the poor, clothing became more plain and simple on women. Comfort became the main goal and there was a "Jacksonian slave" look. In the 1930s, when the financial crisis emerged, women returned to traditional dress and focused more on highlighting their femininity, such as their bodies, as they aspired to a stable life. In the 1940s, the whole society became depressed after the war. People pay more attention to the function of clothing. As a result of aesthetic support, the waist of the garment tightened. In the 1950s, after the war, people wanted to treat psychological trauma. On top of this, Dior's feminine New Look appeared and has been handed down to this day. In the 1960s, because of political unrest, rock 'n' roll, hippies, pop art, and other sorts of new things made the concept of restless and rebellious aesthetic, and promotes the emergence of anti-establishment women's dresses such as futuristic style and Mondrian style. In the

1970s, because of the oil crisis and the economic crisis, people went back to the style of the 1950s. The 1980s saw a revival of the 1960s style. In the 1990s, economic depression prompted a return to conservative clothing in Europe. Under the impact of various technologies, green environmental protection has become popular and fashionable.

From this, people are able to find that fashion is indeed a cycle. All fashion ideas have traces to follow and the ancient culture will come back every few years because of the cycle of social and economic development [4].

### **3. The Fashion Elements and Purchase Channels of Vintage Clothing**

#### **3.1. The Popular Elements of Vintage Clothing**

While vintage styles are diverse, there are some specific vintage styles that are particularly popular and appear on the shelves with great frequency, such as retro wedding dresses, floral dresses, country-style clothing, little black dresses, and lace elements, polka dots, and Chinese retro styles in dress styles.

##### **3.1.1. The Elements of Clothing Style**

From a Western perspective: vintage wedding dresses are one of the most popular styles with most of the fabrics being silk and satin. Mostly decorated with orange flower headdress and tulle veil. This not only adds a sense of mystery is also rich in vintage romantic atmosphere. Wedding dresses represent romance, and vintage wedding dresses have timeless designs from different eras, which have also witnessed countless former loves. Today there are still modern wedding studios that purchase vintage wedding dresses and offer them to modern brides to wear.

Floral dresses are one of the most widely used decorative patterns in China and abroad. They are mostly through embroidery, printing and compilation. Although in different ways but people can still find it a popular element in spring and summer fashion. In vintage fashion, floral dresses and blouses are a popular choice for many buyers. Wearing such patterns on the body can reflect elegance as well as opulence. It is easy to see that floral prints are a constant fashion topic in every era, a sign of femininity, interpreting different periods and providing a nostalgic mood. Whether worn for the design and creativity of vintage clothing or studied as an inspiration for design, floral prints have always been one of the most popular vintage garments [4].

Country style clothing fabrics mostly rely on fabric with wool, velvet, corduroy and leather combinations. Examples include corduroy jackets and breeches, tweed four-piece suits, white knits and shiny leather boots. Although this type of combination is not as glamorous and extravagant, the use of traditional fabrics adds a nostalgic beauty. If the tweed and brightly colored chiffon dresses are paired, sporting lace for detailing can achieve a mixed but uncluttered sense of beauty. This beauty is often spontaneous and free yet full of beauty.

The little black dress is a garment that was and still is very popular with the masses. The little black dress is simple and elegant and can be worn anywhere, anytime. In 1926, Chanel designed a travel-friendly dress for the American Vogue magazine. Black was common during this period, but mostly not considered to be fashionable but a maturity and loss (often used for mourning clothes). However, as women's social status increased, they wore more practical clothing and the public became more accepting of this type of clothing. The little black dress, synonymous with "female liberation", raised the status of this fashion in the minds of women, and the lack of fussy design increased the practicality of the dress. It was in line with the demands of the feminist movement.

### 3.1.2. The Element of Decorative Style

Soft lace is one of the popular elements no matter what time of year it is. Lace is a representation of femininity and sensuality. Because of the high cost of handmade lace, it was a symbol of the wearer's social status and could even be given away as property in a will or dowry. In the 1930s, full lace dresses appeared, but at this stage lace was not the whole fabric, they could be disassembled and made into embellishments at will. In the fifties, lace cardigans were widely used in evening dresses. The handmade lace dresses and printed lace patterned cardigans worn by the cast of the movie "Roman Holiday" for the Oscars really became the bargain of handmade lace. In the sixties, the Lolita style was prevalent. Heavy and large pieces of lace made up the Lolita style. Lace became more widely used. Lace lingerie, tights, printed pants and coats were frequently seen to enhance the fashion and sophistication of the public.

The polka dot pattern is the most noteworthy among the vintage elements. In the early days, polka dots were small and simple and looked very playful. By the thirties, polka dots were usually in bright colors such as brown, green or navy. After the fifties, the polka dot pattern became larger in size and richer in color. Black and white were elegant, while pink and blue were more muted to represent beauty. Bright red and green were more spirited to symbolize joy, and gray and beige are more understated and gentle symbolizing solemnity. With the return of the retro trend in the eighties, the revival of stripes made polka dots appear in the public eye once again. Polka dot pattern almost covers the suit, shoes and even hats on such accessories. Although polka dots are a simple design, they can withstand the test of time for a long time, and the flexibility to change the color and size of polka dots can cater to people's tastes at different times.

Chinese clothing has been influenced by Western culture. Flared pants, denim, super short skirts, and leather-like styles appeared in major cities in China. Western dress culture entered the mainland. Flared pants wrap around the waist, hips and thighs and then flare out to the knees, this boldly showed the line of women's legs and reflected the change of Chinese people's consciousness towards boldness and high tolerance for clothing. 90's light and transparent sexy styles became popular in China, and internationally popular navel-less dresses, halter dresses and mini-skirts gradually became popular. The European and American national dressing style replaced the traditional subtlety of the East. The popularity of this fashion made Chinese clothing, such as belly-bibs and chambray jackets, appear once again in the public eye. The popularity of Chinese films and TV dramas also led to a resurgence of the stand-up collar and pleated skirt [4].

### 3.2. The Purchase Channels of Vintage Clothing

In China, vintage fashion is mainly developed in Hong Kong, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and other cities. Hong Kong, as the most international city in China, is also rapidly catching up with the international fashion scene. The vintage culture entered Hong Kong earlier, reached its peak in 2003-2008. The local street culture in Hong Kong has made "Hong Kong style" vintage fashion prevalent. For example, in Hong Kong, there are vintage stores like Mei Wah's that have been open for 30 years. It deals with American vintage style vintage clothing.

The owner of Wah Wah's vintage store said, "Most of the people who buy vintage clothes and use them are those who have knowledge of fashion and trends and know what vintage culture is. The second type is those who like Japanese culture and buy from magazines and media [4].

Beijing is a city where vintage culture was popular earlier in China. Beijing's vintage culture is a bit more rock 'n' roll in nature. Beijing's vintage stores, such as Mega Vintage, have been in operation since 2008, sourcing mainly from fairs, exhibitions and suppliers in Europe and America, and finishing in China. It is also a rare area in the development of fashion where the classics are used to

counteract the ever-changing trends of the day". Beijing is rich in vintage resources and the industry system is relatively standardized, but there is still more Western-style vintage [4].

Shanghai's vintage culture is more of a petite affair. The first vintage store in Shanghai was Lolo Love Vintage, which opened in '09 and has been selling mostly 60s clothing since then. There is a wide variety of vintage stores in Shanghai, from vintage clothing to vintage furniture, from domestic vintage buyers to foreign shopkeepers. A search on social media platforms shows 8,200 results for Shanghai vintage and 3,100 for Beijing vintage, which shows that Shanghai is indeed the fastest growing city for vintage clothing culture in China [4].

According to the study, although China basically relies on imports for vintage clothing, most Chinese consumers tend to shop at physical vintage locations. This is followed by Taobao stores and various websites such as Xiangyu. Vintage bazaars account for the least but still exist. This indicates that consumers have the financial strength to travel abroad and are willing to spend for vintage. Among those people who buy the clothes, they think the existence of vintage clothing is unique. The number of people who buy vintage clothing because they think it is "special" is high, followed by simple enjoyment and collection. This shows that the cultural and historical heritage of vintage clothing has been recognized, and the value of collecting it has also been confirmed.

#### 4. Conclusions

This thesis examines why vintage clothing is still so popular today, in terms of its historical significance, popular elements and its purchasing channels. Based on the cultural and historical significance, the existence of vintage still receives attention. Culture is the root of design, and vintage provides many inspirations and ideas for contemporary design. Classic vintage clothes have left different historical meanings in different periods as society keeps changing. In this change, vintage clothes keep changing to fit the aesthetics of the times. The popular elements mentioned in the article are all iconic to each period of style. Whether modern, hippie or sexy, the textiles or cuts of these styles are extracted and modified again by designers decades later. Fashion is always reincarnating, and by taking inspiration from vintage, people are still fascinated by it and creating more culturally valuable clothing designs. Today, vintage clothing is still being sold through a variety of buying channels, whether on foreign vintage websites or on major domestic platforms and offline stores. They are often simple to buy, so while people like them, their desire to buy them is heightened by the convenience. This research case provides a good answer for vintage lovers and those who are preliminary to design this field. Some groups who have concerns or prejudices about buying second-hand clothes can also be more open-minded when they understand the history and the right way to buy clothes.

However, due to the lack of questionnaire design or interview and question answering, this paper lacks interaction. In future research, the authors suggest that future scholars should pay more attention to quantitative and qualitative research, and focus the questionnaire on "the number of people who know the history of vintage clothing", "the number of people who know the number of elements of vintage clothing" and "which way they prefer to buy." vintage clothing" etc, raise questions that make the findings more convincing.

#### References

- [1] Xiaoyan Tang, *La Révolution et les Vêtements: La culture et politique dans les vêtements féminins pendant la Révolution*, Zhejiang University Press, Hangzhou, P2, 2016.
- [2] Why Are Vintage Clothing Designs So Popular. Retrieved from <https://confessionsoftheprofessions.com/why-are-vintage-clothing-designs-so-popular/>
- [3] Zhu M.H. Discussion on the cultural issues behind the current "vintage clothing" craze in China. *Culture monthly*, 1994-2020, 105-106.

[4] Hu Q.B.(2021) *The development and innovative of vintage clothing*.13-22.