Abstract

Qipao is arguably the most well-known Chinese costume of all time, with a rich history dating as far back as the Qing Dynasty, when it was the common apparel of the Manchus. This thesis aims to present the significance and meaning of Qipao as a costume in movies from various aspects. The three Hollywood films featuring the Qipao are involved in this discussion, namely The World of Suzie Wong, Love is a Many-Splendoured Thing and Flower Drum Song.

Chapter One traces the origins and the development of Qipao. A brief description of the function of movie costumes in a movie and a synopsis of the three films are included. Chapter Two illustrates how the Qipao serves as a signifier of the characters' social, national and racial identities in each of the three films. In Chapter Three, the focus lies on the role played by the Qipao in contributing to the theme of "Orientalism", which is apparent in films like The World of Suzie Wong and Love is a Many-Splendoured Thing.
One of the main functions of a movie costume is to assist in the portrayal of characters in the films, as well as to create images, especially those that are easily identifiable with the audience. The relationship established between the Qipao and the image of the character created by the former is the main concern of Chapter Four.

The above chapters deal with the significance of Qipao as a movie costume within the context of the three films. Qipao has proven itself to be an important element from the narrative to the portrayal of the characters. However in Chapter Five, it is shown that the extent of the Qipao's influence and significance also goes beyond the context of the film itself. After the appearance of the Qipao in the above-mentioned Hollywood films, fashion trends tilting towards Oriental dress were born in the West. The craze for Qipao reflects the level of its immense popularity amongst Western women. Finally, a conclusion will be presented in the last chapter.