

# Examining the Popularity of Hanfu (汉服) Among the Younger Generation, its Historical background and the Reasons for its Recent Trending

Ceilyn Williams 1801550

In recent years the Hanfu has made a comeback and is growing in popularity in large Chinese city landscapes. I aim to uncover what has triggered this new wave of Chinese popular fashion and how did an ancient garment become such an internet sensation in eastern media and popularised in day-to-day life. Firstly, I gathered sources, as this is a recent phenomenon all sources are current and up to date, therefore, this information I have sourced would have been published within the past three years. As this is a new trend there have been mixed reviews towards the movement, I will include the different perspectives I have gathered from Chinese people and their views, both negative and positive. As the Hanfu has been sourced from history and brought into the modern age, I must also inform of the historical background to have a better understanding of its present use. Also, what encouraged a young generation to become fixated on fashion trends of the past. My research has brought me to many conclusions to these questions yet has given me a better understanding of how pride for a nation has brought acceptance to the Hanfu movement.

“Everyday clothing is more practical. Wearing it, you must face the burden of daily life. But wearing Hanfu is a way to escape the frustrations of life.”

Hanfu is described as a revived fashion trend as it's been reintroduced to the Chinese people through various means, mainly through popular social media. This style was created roughly 2,600 BC but these clothes' development was interrupted by the Yuan dynasty from 1271 to 1368 AD when China at the time was under Mongol rule and the Qing dynasty from 1644 to 1912.

Hanfu's literal translation means traditional Chinese clothing. Like it says in the name it is the traditional clothing of the Han ethnic group which consists of over 90% of the Chinese population. These outfits that have made a return in the last few years do attract attention when out on the streets as it is still not considered as a mainstream trend nor very popular. Young people are seen wearing Hanfu both on special occasions and for some people their daily life.

It has simply been described by many as a “recent fashion trend” but of course there is more behind this phenomenon than pure luck that the traditional clothing has suddenly made a return? The popularisation of wearing Hanfu made strides in the past five years and did not have as much acceptance by the public that they do today. One citizen exclaims “as long as it is the culture left by our ancestors, it is never weird, when I see people promoting it, I'm really glad.” It appears because the Hanfu has historical significance, the older generation seems somewhat prideful to see this clothing on the streets, bringing back ancient culture to the present day, especially in Beijing and Shanghai. By 2018 the number of Hanfu buyers had increased by 92% compared to the previous year.

In the past almost 40 years, China has been exposed to the world of fashion and its trends, this was after the opening up and reform. Before this, the older generations have memories of people wearing almost the same dress, the same suit for many years. But after the reforming, people were allowed and encouraged to accommodate and to adapt their unique style for a sense of

individuality. Because of this, now the younger generation wants to express themselves and have their own identity in society, which also brings independence to the individual.

The popularity of Hanfu is seen mostly in Beijing and Shanghai, they have been said to have coined the Hanfu movement, yet the people who decide to wear Hanfu are still a small minority. Hanfu was worn from before the Qing dynasty and is seen in many historical dramas therefore the Chinese people have access and becoming used to seeing such garments on mainstream media. Through interviewing members of the public of their opinion on Hanfu being worn by the younger generation, they were interviewed by “Asian Boss” a popular YouTube channel that seeks the opinion of people on the streets of countries such as China, South Korea, and Japan.

Their interview regarding Hanfu clothing took place in Shanghai, one of the most popular cities for Hanfu wearers. Many described the fashion choice as pretty, beautiful, some feeling envious of their beauty, also people found the trend great, many praised the Hanfu wearers for bringing back culture in a way, bringing back what once was so important culturally to the Chinese people hundreds of years ago. On the other hand, many people believe that wearing it would not be convenient, comfortable to wear nor practical, especially for those who decide to wear the garment daily. “If this was a smaller city, wearing Hanfu would feel kind of strange. But I think in Shanghai, people can do things like that more often.” As Hanfu gets more exposure in the busier cities, the more acceptance it brings, as time passes, seeing Hanfu on the streets will be a natural occurrence.

The word “Hanfu” is a recent name that was created by internet users that describes the traditional clothing of the Han people during the Han Dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD). But this word refers to the “historical dress of the Han people” for the whole history of traditional Chinese clothing before the Qing Dynasty during the Manchus’ reign.

This brings up the question, why has this trend grown in popularity, why has it reappeared after all this time? When observing the age group of people following this trend, we can see that they are mostly kids of the 90’s who have grown up and revived the traditional attire of the Han Chinese. “I don’t think it will revive the Hanfu culture because it has no practical use”. This brings me on to what kind of future do people see for this movement, like other trends they often appear and disappear, and most likely reappear another time being just as popular as it once was, this is how fashion trends work in the current day, but of course, the Chinese people did not always have this luxury.

The concept of Hanfu was raised in 2001 by President Xi Jinping at APEC, where China pledged to open its ‘super-sized’ economy. At APEC national leaders wear the traditional clothing of their nation. Because of this, the Chinese people raised the question, what traditional clothing represents the country’s culture?

Double 11, also known as singles day on the eleventh of November, this date was chosen because the number 1 is a stand-alone number representing unmarried men that do not add to the branch of the family tree. These men are known as guānggùn (光棍) which means bachelors. It was a day created for singles to online shop, and whilst its popularity has grown, sales skyrocket on this day. On singles day, November 2019, these young people contributed 180 RMB of sales. The search volume for Hanfu clothing on an online shopping website called Taobao had surpassed the search for T-Shirts.

Every year in Xitang Town, Zhejiang province just outside of Shanghai, the largest national Hanfu Cultural Week is held. All participants enter for free when wearing Hanfu. This festival started in 2012 when it first started gaining some popularity. Tens of thousands of Hanfu lovers flock from all over the country to this unique event, most of the Students. Hanfu fans have been dubbed

'Tongpao' (同袍) which in turn gives the people a sense of community and cohesion. Since 2013 and 2014, from the constant development of social media in the past few years, and the emergence of Hanfu clubs in varied colleges and universities in China, the number of people who love Hanfu increased drastically. At the Xitang Hanfu Culture Festival, the water fashion show is the highlight of the carnival. The water fashion show consists of KOL's (key opinion leader) of the club, stand on ancient style boats and sail down a scenic river, the KOL's are "the four beauties" (四大美人), and celebrities of TIKTOK as they publicise sponsors' logos that they were asked to publicise as they influence other Hanfu enthusiasts.

"People wearing Hanfu would be somewhat strange in daily life, but under the backdrop of small bridges and a river in Xitang, those clothes seemed perfect for the scenery."

There is not much reference to why the movement started apart from it was a niche market with a few enthusiasts, it is hard to say that the progress made is credited to a person, group, or an institution. It is also difficult to give the absolute correct definition to Hanfu clothing as there are different variations of the garment from different periods in Chinese history. Different styles of Hanfu increase or decrease in popularity, there are different trends within the Tongpao community.

Taobao is the most popular online shop to buy Hanfu, and you don't have to be rich to enjoy wearing this elegant clothing, they come in a range of affordable to pricey wears. Good quality Hanfu can cost from 50 to 300 GBP online. But Hanfu is not usually sold in retail shops as it is still not a popular type of clothing people shop for, also as it is only usually popular with students, shops do not feel there is a need to only cater to a small minority's needs.

From nationalists caring about reviving enterprises, to restorative scholars who loves the traditional culture and carefully research ancient texts, these people were mostly born between 1995 and 2000. These are some of the reasons that Han Chinese clothing has popularity.

The festival lasts 4 days and it is a chance for people with similar interests to make friends and exchange their niche interests within Hanfu history. There is also a military show at the festival to show your ancient combat skills, also a Han Chinese clothing show. Also, there are Hanfu weddings held and archery competitions. Therefore, also the historical importance of these clothes interests the Hanfu fans. Of course, the most important activity at the festival is taking pictures together and sending them to your moments on WeChat.

Of course, as it is a niche interest, the National Hanfu Cultural Week attracts other peers in the media, and they interview Hanfu enthusiasts on their love for Hanfu and their participation in the festival. The popularity of Hanfu consists of interclass public participation, E-commerce meaning online means of advertisement, also beautifying filters on different social media platforms which include ancient Chinese makeup styles, ancient hairstyles, and Hanfu filters. But the participation of wearing Hanfu and doing your hair and makeup to match the era is of course not as popular as people using these filters, but these popularised filters have made wearing Hanfu more common and have made people more aware of these Tongpao.

Of course, as wearing Hanfu still is not popular or mainstream, it is not seen as day to day wear, not even as suits or wedding dresses. There is a gap in the development of Hanfu culture, and it is in the backdrop of the Chinese cultural renaissance, at present, the Hanfu is brand new. The first step would be in recovering it back to the past original pattern. After this should it be adjusted to fit the modern rushing society? Or should the act of wearing Hanfu be a representation of bringing the past back to life, or should it be developed to fit the new age of busy streets and fast-paced life. What will be the future development for these garments?

Many believe the long flowing wizard sleeves are inconvenient, could they possibly be improved or adjusted to fit modern standards and needs, after this change would Hanfu gain popularity, or would the Tongpao only want the garments true to history?

To conclude, the more exposure this clothing gets, both on the streets and online, the more acceptance these people will gain. It seems that, after researching, no one has any strong opinion against the wearing of Hanfu in public nor on social media. As I see it it works as another fashion trend, we see in the west many trends circling back from the 60's, 70's, 80's 90's, of course, the Hanfu has more historical significance as it is an ancient garment brought back to the modern age. Like all trends, some partake, and some do not, for convenience or not to their taste or liking. Not wearing Hanfu is not seen as not having pride for your nation as it still is not seen as the Traditional dress of China, at least not yet. Who knows what the future may hold for the Hanfu, but for now it is beautiful to see the younger generation represent the past and enjoying the beauty of its history.

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