

# The Reappearance of Ancient Costumes in Today's China: Hanfu Wearers and Their Community

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## **Abstract**

Wearing Hanfu(汉服) is an emerging phenomenon in urban landscapes in Mainland China. On the other hand, Hanfu is a relatively obscure focus of study in academia. Born in the social context of nostalgia and traditional learning, Hanfu has grown into a clothing culture popular among the younger generations. By asking the question, how young people in the Hanfu cultural community perceive and express their involvement. This study sheds light on experiences and opinions of individuals in the Hanfu community. The empirical findings come from 13 semi-structured interviews. The study finds that young people wear Hanfu because of significant cultural identity and cultural self-awareness. Notwithstanding, diversity is notable in the Hanfu community. Those involved see Hanfu as a unique carrier for social interaction. It also plays the role of a perspective of youth subculture to express personal aesthetics, a symbol for uniting Han ethnicity, an appeal for improving Chinese soft power.

**Key words:** Hanfu; Hanfu Revival Movement; Youth Subculture; Nostalgia; Tradition Learning; Cultural Self-awareness; Han Nationalism

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# 1. Introduction

When people talk about traditional Japanese clothing, they always come up with the image of Kimono. But when people thinking about traditional Chinese clothing, what do they have in their mind? Now, maybe they will find a clue in nowadays Chinese urban landscape. Walking down the streets, one might notice a group of people wearing clothing that are quite different from the usual attire. These clothing often had floor-length robes, wide sleeves, and crossed collars. One may also find women wore their hair decorated with hairpins or headdresses, and men have long black hair. If you are interested in Chinese history, you may think ancient people travel back to modern times. It is, however, a type of clothing called Hanfu (汉服<sup>1</sup>), a cultural image created by modern Chinese. The outfit is based on ancient literatures, paintings and unearthed cultural relics. Some Hanfu wearers also try to recreate an ancient lifestyle.

Some observers (Callahan, 2012; Carrico, 2017; Leibold, 2010) believe this spectacle is due to the anxiety about cultural soft power after China's economic achievement. It also makes both traditional media (e.g. *People's Daily*, 2007) and social media (e.g. discussion on Zhihu and Weibo) to ask whether this is a rise of Han nationalism. Based on these media concerns, this study tries to give a sketchy outline of Hanfu community, and sheds light on the Hanfu wearers' experience and thoughts. This thesis will start from the literature review section, introducing the concept of Hanfu, and the possible angles and the social context to interpret the emerging of Hanfu community and Hanfu involvers, which are nostalgia and traditional learning, youth subculture, and other emerging dress cultures in Mainland China. Followed by the section of theoretical framework, cultural identity and cultural self-awareness. Then, the research design and methodology will be introduced. The following section is analysis and findings. It will draw the picture of individual Hanfu wearer and the outline of Hanfu community as a whole. The discussion section will unfold different Hanfu insiders' opinions about Hanfu revival movement and its relation with Han nationalism. A short conclusion section follows at the end.

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<sup>1</sup> For some specific vocabulary, this study will use Pinyin instead of English.

## 2. Literature Review

Four subsections consist in the following part. It will first introduce what is Hanfu. Then, previous researches on nostalgia and traditional learning in China, subculture and youth culture, and clothing cultures will provide the social context of interpreting Hanfu wearers and the Hanfu community.

### 2.1 The concept of Hanfu

This word, hàn fú, consists of two Chinese characters. Han (汉) and fu (服) in the dictionary, has about 20 different meanings, respectively. Here to simplify, I choose the meaning that is the closest to the word “”. “han” refers to Han dynasty (汉朝, 汉代); Han ethnicity (汉族) (Ciyuan, 1998, p.1012). “fu” refers to clothing (衣服). When searching in English, the English expressions include but are not limited to the following: Hanfu, Han ethnic clothing, Hanfu clothing, Han clothing, Han dress, Chinese Han costume.

Currently, both Chinese and foreign academia have not obtained a recognition for a unified and clear Hanfu definition. Nevertheless, this paragraph tries to access the concept of Hanfu from the perspective of history. According to two dictionaries about Chinese clothing (Zhou & Gao, 1996, p.12; Su & Zhang, 2015, p.697), Hanfu refers to the general costumes in the Han Dynasty (B.C.202 - A.D.220); Hanfu also particularly refers to the Han ethnicity costumes in the Liao (辽) Dynasty (A.D.907-1125). The Khitan (契丹) people defeated the Han ethnicity and established the Liao regime. At that time, the regime called the costumes of the Han ethnicity Hanfu, while the costumes of the Khitan people were called national clothing (国服 guo fu). Other ethnic minority regimes later used this method for distinguishing. Wang (2009, p.1778); Carrico (2017); He and Chalermpon (2020); Wang, Colbert, and Legoux (2020, pp.79-80) all agree with a more general definition that Hanfu is a kind of clothing from ancient China, mainly produced and worn by Han ethnicity. The clothing worn by the Manchus in the Qing (清) Dynasty, therefore are not considered as Hanfu. And Qipao (旗袍), developed from Manchu costumes is not Hanfu. The costumes from China's ethnic minorities are not

Hanfu neither.

Hanfu from different dynasties has different styles with different names. But it usually taken as a whole in today's public narrative, which is also the same in the Hanfu community. The usage of the word "Hanfu", consequently refers to the general, collective defined concept in this study.

In Hanfu lovers, there is a sentence describes three main characteristics of Hanfu: 交领右衽；无扣结纓；褒衣大袖，又以盘领、直领为其有益补充. The first characteristic is the collars cross at the chest. The left front is covered to the right armpit lacing, and the right front is covered inside, showing a "Y" shape in appearance. It makes the whole dress tilting to the right. Along with cross collars, there are straight and coil collars. Straight collars run straight down from the chest, parallelly and vertically. Coil collar is more common in male styles. This collar is round in the shape of a plate. There is a tie on the right shoulder, which is often used in Han and Tang (唐) official uniforms. Secondly, Hanfu does not use buttons or zippers, but with few thin ribbons, to tie in the armpit (one left and one right), to firmly fixed the front of the garment (one inside and one outside). Thirdly, Hanfu usually has a wide robe with large sleeves. There should be room for the arm to bend. It means that the length of the sleeve is not affected when the wearer arm bends. In the Han and Tang dynasties, people think these large sleeves can create a graceful curve in any condition. In the Song (宋) and Ming (明) dynasties, however, the social aesthetic tended towards narrower sleeves. Due to space limitations, it will not elaborate on the historical evolution, tailoring, dress regulations and related etiquette.

## **2.2 Nostalgia and tradition learning**

Based on the definition of Hanfu, it is evident that Hanfu is a concept closely related to history. Meanwhile, the intention of the Hanfu wearer is likely to be related to nostalgia. Therefore, before further discussion of Hanfu, we should first examine the traditional craze that has been popular in China for many years. The following subsection explore the literature on nostalgia, the wave of learning about traditional cultures, and the



underlying political intentions.

Boym (2001, p.853) states that “nostalgia can be both a social disease and a creative emotion, a poison and a cure”. Nostalgia refers to a condition that people imagine an ideal homeland, but they cannot reach it and achieve their dream in reality (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, this unreachable desire and imagination will influence and guide people to change the political and social landscape of real life to a certain extent (*ibid.*). Boym (2001, p.30) argues that there are two kinds of nostalgia: restorative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia. The former one “takes itself deadly seriously” (*ibid.*). While the later one “explores ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones. It loves details, not symbols..... it can present an ethical and creative challenge, not merely a pretext for midnight melancholies” (*ibid.*). Meanwhile, reflective nostalgia reveals that longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another, just as affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgement, or critical reflection (Boym, 2001, p.141). Based on Boym’s statement, Vermeeren and de Kloet (n.d., p.224) further present that “[nostalgia] can certainly express a longing for an imaginary past, but can also articulate a critical reflection on the contemporary and on the passing of time”.

In this study, the concept of nostalgia is closely related to the traditional culture learning trend in contemporary China. After the reform and opening up, the participation of Mao’s ideology in social life continued to weaken. As a result, the thoughts and values have become varied (Wu, 2006, p.361). With the weakening of ideological indoctrination, the people have weakened their legitimacy, dependence, and worship of the ruling party (*ibid.*, p.364). As a result, the people feel lost and find that they lack a trustworthy root (*ibid.*). Meanwhile, the ideology of The Chinese Communist Party has gradually changed to Chinese nationalism (*ibid.*, p.360). Pang (2011, p.3361) also observes a rise of the traditional culture as new nationalism. Withal, Leibold (2014, p.9) finds that “national revival” (民族复兴 *minzu fuxing*) has taken the place of former ideology as a means to unite people. Under this circumstance, nostalgia raise to “maintain the legitimacy of a dominant ideology” (Wu, 2006 p.361).

Later, in the 1980s, the development of the mass media in China has increased the sentiment communication between the professorial people and the public and paved the way for subsequent traditional culture learning trends (*ibid.*, p.362). Additionally, Pang (2011, p.3364) points out that in the process of modernization, traditional interpersonal relations and social ties have been diluted or even broken, while individuals try to find a sense of certainty and the answer of who they are in traditional culture.

From the point of view of Dirlik (2011, p.11), “national learning” (国学 *guo xue*) is an ambiguous concept. On the other hand, Vermeeren and de Kloet (p.220) find that this concept “shares communities” with the “national learning fever” (国学热 *guo xue re*) and “tradition fever”(传统热 *chuan tong re*). Moreover, the role of “national learning” in nowadays Chinese society may be more evident than its definition. Namely, it has a place in politics, culture, spirituality and intellectual (*ibid.*).

The pursuit of traditional Chinese culture is in line with the concept of *The China Dream* put forward by the central government after achieving economic success (Callahan, 2012, p.638). For young people, “national learning” can “express a longing for a more cultured and less mediated lifestyle” (Vermeeren & de Kloet, n.d. p.225). Xie (2011, p.45) states that “tradition fever” is massive collusion born in an alliance of Chinese academics, the market, and the ruling regime. Moreover, the tradition in this collusion is imitating a lost culture (*ibid.*). The authority officials design blueprints, scholars design content, and the market drives production to meet political, educational, and commercial purposes (*ibid.*). Thus, there are different ways to express or embody nostalgia in the Chinese context. However, at this time period, nostalgia in the Chinese society is designed from the top down, in which the ideas of the authorities are placed.

The current followers of “tradition fever” emphasized the identity as a “Chinese” rather than as a “people” (Vermeeren & de Kloet, n.d. p.223). It needs to be noted that the concept of “people” is frequently used in early-stage ideology propaganda of the CCP. Furthermore, it is observed that this phenomenon is more pronounced in certain groups of people. For instance, as a critical component of the “tradition fever”, traditional Chinese art is becoming increasingly popular among the middle class

(Billioud and Thoraval, 2007, p.17). Another example can corroborate the former one to a certain extent. Calligraphy is gaining popularity in the middle classes in the urban areas (Vermeeren & de Kloet, n.d. p.221). Carrico (2017) observes that some people learn calligraphy as a hobby; learn to play the seven-stringed Chinese traditional instrument, called the qin; master the tea-making process; learn traditional Chinese ink painting, or dress up in Hanfu.

Meanwhile, young people in contemporary China are trying to trace history to divide and build their interest communities (Frangville & Gaffric, n.d. p.13). Their way is to reread history and learn the so-called “Chinese tradition” (*ibid.*). Wu (2006, p.360) points out that nostalgia has become a key content for the creative industries in China. People’s nostalgia behavior allows commercial interests, for instance, “the televisions series and movies, but also for the construction of tourist sites and museums” (*ibid.*). However, a representation of culture is not only a way to be part of that all-encompassing culture, but also a means to express the self and embody that culture (Vermeeren & de Kloet, n.d. p.230).

Additionally, rather than taking tradition and nostalgia as a relatively personal choice and hobby, some people also use concepts related to traditional culture as a means of expressing their political positions. Leibold is a scholar who has been studied Han nationalism on the Internet for many years. For Leibold (2010, p.542), however, Han is a vague and empty concept, and for many Chinese born after 1976, Han is a meaningless concept. It is, nevertheless a created concept, a “historical formulation”, serving a role as “the boundaries, symbols and sentiment of Han today” (*ibid.*). Irgengioro (2018, pp. 319-321) observes the rise of “the Han Chinese identity”. Carrico (2017, pp.1-2) finds the link between nationalism and Han clothing movement in his fieldwork in China. Further, Leibold (2010, 2014, 2016) points out that there is a group of people “promot[ing] pride and self-identification with the Han race” while excluding other Chinese ethnic minorities and emphasizing the history of bloody conflicts between the Han people and other ethnic groups. It is an informal group being active on BBS with Hanwang (汉网) as the prominent gathering place, and the central

members are urban young people from the non-elite class (2010, pp.551-553; 2014, p.13; 2016, pp.4-5). When I was doing background research on the Internet, the information about Hanwang was also frequently appearing.

From Leibold's (2010, p.546) perspective, the rise of the Han culture movement is the result of the 1898 Tiananmen Square incident, and the government began to show the image of rejecting the Western world and increased its publicity on Chinese history and traditional culture in order to establish a more Chinese image. Some evidence is the movement of "root seeking"(寻根 xun gen) and "national studies" trend (*ibid.*). However, some young people expressed strong dissatisfaction with some of the works and content in these movements. Because they think they are wrongly represented (*ibid.*). Leibold, and Pan, Zhang, Zhu (2020, p.504) give the same example to prove that. The case is someone specially wrote an article stating that at the APEC meeting, the Tang suits that China provided to the leaders of the participating countries were not traditional Chinese costumes. The author of this critical article further attributed this matter to the cultural fault caused by the Manchu rule in the Qing Dynasty (Leibold, 2010, pp. 546-547; 2014, pp. 8-9). There even appears a voice that the Han people should start a "Cultural Xinhai" (文化辛亥 wenhua xinhai) revolution further to promote Han tradition (2014, p.11). Meanwhile, based on my searching experience, this word, Cultural Xinhai, or similar expression is rarely seen in the current simplified Chinese online world. Back to Leibold's studies, however, this idea has won the support of some people and spread quickly on the Internet (2010, p.547). The idea later developed a wave of promoting Han ethnicity clothing. Hanfu is therefore used as a weapon to express the attitude of Han revivalism (*ibid.*, p.548).

### **2.3 Subculture and youth culture**

In the previous subsection, the study of Hanfu, traditional culture learning and the political aspirations behind it were carried out. However, in this study, the Hanfu community also highlights the characteristics that it is subcultural groups formed by young people with their hobbies as the leading role. Hence, in this subsection, it will

introduce the concept of subculture and youth culture in contemporary society, to interpret Hanfu community and the people there from another angle.

In mid-1970s, subculture closely linked with the academic field of “youth, style, music and leisure” (Bennett & Kahn-Harris, n.d. p.1). This concept was first applied as “a means to describe such visually and behaviourally distinctive sensibilities of youth” (Bennett & Kahn-Harris, n.d. p.3). Hebdige (2002, p.18) points out the significance of style in youth subculture, which aims to attract public attention and challenge social consensus. Together with appearance, youth in subcultures also choose their leisure pursuits to complete the domination (*ibid.*).

Within the context of “a break up of mass culture” (Shildrick, 2006, p.63), “contemporary cultures of youth are more fleeting, transitional and organized around individual lifestyle and consumption choices” (*ibid.*, p.62). As a result, the classless youth cultural group has diverse social backgrounds (*ibid.*). Social conditions have cultivated different subcultural communities of young people. Schouten and McAlexander (1995, p.43) make a definition that

*A subculture of consumption is[as] a distinctive subgroup of society that self-selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand, or consumption activity.*

Meanwhile, they bring up other features that can be found in a subculture of consumption that “an identifiable, hierarchical social structure; a unique ethos, or set of shared beliefs and values; and unique jargons, rituals, and modes of symbolic expression” (*ibid.*). In their study of a subculture group, they use the concept of “hardcore”, as well as “inner circle”, to describe whose “style and ideology that is full-time and enduring” (*ibid.*, p.48). In contrast, “softcore” refers to whose “styles and values are incomplete and whose roles are subordinate to and dictated by the hardcore” (*ibid.*). In this study, the Hanfu community is a relatively loose hobby-oriented group. Community members have differences in their understanding and practices of core values. On this account, analysis and findings section will adapt this frame to understand the Hanfu community.

In different academic studies, subcultures are often mentioned side by side with youth culture. As young people are the majority in the Hanfu community. It becomes another reason to bring up youth culture. Wulff (1995, p.15) states that “youth culture is what youth is concerned with”. Similar to all youth cultures in other places, youth culture in Mainland China is also “a product of interaction” (Massey, 1997, p.123) and featured with “active importation, adoption and adaptation” (*ibid.*). Kwong (1994, p.263) indicates that “youth culture mirrors the official and the lived cultures of the larger society and their contradictions”. Meanwhile, she argues that rather than doubt changes or transform as “ideological crisis” existing in the young generation, it is, however, reflecting “a more general set of social tensions” at that time (*ibid.*).

Based on the study of Chinese youth cultures, Frangville and Gaffric (n.d. p.14) claim that “youth cultural practices and production can simultaneously embody, reproduce, and negotiate the structures and spaces they are developing from”. The youth cultures in Mainland China have “embraced the global trends of cultural consumption and production” (*ibid.*, p.2) and “youth is a social construction shaped by particular regional, cultural and socio-economic factors” (*ibid.*). Meanwhile, they (*ibid.*, p.10) acknowledge that “youth are not merely consumers, but also actively contribute to create and share news forms of cultural expression in a hybrid process of ‘prosumption’”. Their self-knowledge includes both an international perspective and their national pride, and they can also “be success-oriented and materialist and criticize particularism and privileges” (*ibid.*, p.14).

Being a generation that grows in a hyper-mediated environment, Chinese young people learn how to use their knowledge to live with and figure out the censorship-related barriers and engage in public conversations on the premise of avoiding unnecessary political troubles (Frangville & Gaffric, n.d. p.11). Furthermore, the cultural activities and ways of expressing opinions of the young Chinese generation can be freely switched online and offline according to their needs and different situations (*ibid.*). They also make a summary from their study (*ibid.*, p.10)

*The ability of young people to negotiate the power dynamics and domination of the*

*spaces in which they evolve, but also their capacity to let new spaces emerge, whether they are temporary, permanent, or incorporated from the beginning into a process of State control.*

Space where young people be active also needs to be noted. Frangville and Gaffric have summarized that (n.d. p.9)

*We consider both spaces as “perceived” (in the sense that they tangibly exist), “lived” (in that they are experienced daily and give rise to social practices), and “moving” (in that they are not fixed and can be modified by individuals acting on them) spaces*

Furthermore, this paragraph will give the context that how cyberspace becomes an extension of youth cultural active venues in contemporary China. When doing research in Mainland China, cyberspace can be defined as part of “public-ness”, namely, the collective space (Frangville & Gaffric, n.d. p.9). Online interaction plays a role of an extension to face-to-face communication. The motivation of socialization can maintain and develop online connections, gain social support, and help group members (Dong, et al., 2011, p.241). These functions can also be found in the Hanfu community. The details about how Hanfu wearers engage in cyberspace will be unfolded in the analysis and findings section.

Additionally, Frangville and Gaffric (n.d. p.10) argue that collective spaces as “shared sites of interaction and performance created through the co-presence with others”. Since the 2000s, youth cultures have increasingly moved from underground and peripheral urban areas to shopping malls and mainstream places of creation and consumption. According to the observation of Hua (n.d. pp.26-27, p.31) and Peng (n.d. p.41), the changes of places of youth culture activities is tangible. That is, young people move and expand from limited site options and underground sites to more diverse options of parks or shopping malls, as well as more aboveground.

For a non-mainstream cultural community in Mainland China, however, barriers still exist. But they have their own ways of coping with the state. In Deklerck’s study about the LGBT+ community in China, he (n.d. pp.156-158) finds that to maintain and

build the community, they have developed many strategies, for instance, culture within this community is empowering themselves and “having fun”; literal communication and everyday behavior are implicitly made so that they do not seem too out of step with the mainstream society; when the authorities blocked their activities, they reduced the scale of the activities, changed the events places, and continued with a low-key form. Although the Hanfu community is not the same situation as the LGBT+ community, the authority keeps an ambiguous attitude as well.

Since there is no official statement and relevant documents, I might use the tone of official media to measure the authority attitudes. In 2007, CCP official newspaper *People's Daily* published an article that call the Hanfu revival movement into question. The next time was in 2014, *People's Daily* put words of “Hanfu” and “tradition” together in the article title, but use a neutral tone. While, in 2019 and 2020, the state news agency *Xinhuanet* has had two articles about Hanfu with a relatively positive tone. In addition to traditional media, social media has also become an essential channel for official propaganda. Being the largest social media platform in China, Weibo (微博) provides space for political discussion (Zhang, Liu & Wen, 2018, p.763). The image of the Hanfu community is more positive in Weibo than it in traditional media. The official institute, Communist Youth League of China (共青团中央 Gongqingtuan Zhongyang), which conducts the CCP propaganda towards young people, has nearly 16 million followers in 2021 May. Just in April, this account hosted a Hanfu live stream (see Figure 1 in the appendix). Here, changes can be observed from the tone in different official media channels.

#### **2.4 (Re-)Emerging clothing cultures in Mainland China**

Back to the concept of clothing itself, it is a way of self-presentation. Hanfu should be understood in the context of other clothing cultures. Visually, Hanfu is different from the clothing that ordinary people can see in modern China society (Carrico, 2017, p.101). Clothing, as a symbolic medium, expresses both personal and cultural meanings from the wearer to the audience (*ibid.*, p.102). Chew (2007, p.157) also indicates that



“dress is a conspicuous identity marker because it is in continuous public display”.

Likewise, for the concept of fancy-dress costume, Wild (2020a, p.1) states that it is “a performative form of dress, imaginative and incongruous, worn for a discrete occasion and limited time that disrupts the place of the individual within the social and political relationships of a specific community”. He further argues that the attitude towards the fancy-dress costume can reflect “the prevalent social attitudes and mores of their community” to certain extent (2020b, p.155). For people who are wearing an item of non-daily clothing, their behavior can hint some “motivation and manner” behind their costuming choice and convey “an undercurrent of feelings”, which are ambiguous for scholars to analysis (*ibid.*).

Finnane (1996, p.100) points out the significance of studying the domain of dress in the context of Chinese cultural history. She further concludes that the changes in clothing highly related to changing political climate, the industrialization of clothing production, and the global fashion business orientation (*ibid.*, p.127). In the state ideology implementation process, clothing becomes an essential tool. Under this condition, clothing is embodied nationalism. It can emphasize the difference between China and the rest of the world (*ibid.*, pp.100-101). On the other hand, however, when Western culture strongly influencing the world, China lost an identifiable indigenous Chinese-style clothing culture to a certain extent (*ibid.*, p.103). Nonetheless, Qipao can be regarded as a rare historical legacy (*ibid.*, pp.124-125). She (*ibid.*, p.125) argues that Qipao plays a role of “a certain nostalgia for the 1930s and of a vague sense of the connection that the qipao supplies with a generalized past”.

Nonetheless, in the study of the re-emergence of Qipao in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Chew (2007, pp.158-160) finds that Qipao is a concept repackaged by celebrities and cultural producers. He points out that after repackaging, Qipao offers a choice of practical compromise that urban Chinese women with limited socio-economic resources and fashion-cultural knowledge can adapt it as their fashion ability and socio-moral acceptability (*ibid.*, p.158). In this process, rather than the state, commercial power dominates this re-emergence (*ibid.*).

Besides, when it comes to the youth clothing culture in Mainland China recent years, JK<sup>2</sup> and Lolita<sup>3</sup> are two concepts that should not be ignored. JK and Lolita are imported cultural products from Japan. However, along with the trend of cosplay, it can be observed that JK and Lolita are earning more popularity within the Chinese urban young generation. As remerging clothing cultures, Hanfu, JK, Lolita, these three clothing styles are often called as “Three Sisters of Bankruptcy” (破产三姐妹 pochān sānjiēmei) on Mainland China cyberspace. This nickname means if someone is interested in them and buy all three kinds, this person will be very poor. Meanwhile, from the searching result on Mainland China largest search engine Baidu, and from my interviewees’ description, people who are interested in this kind of clothing culture often call the process of falling in love and devoting their energy and time to do related things as pitting (refers to 入坑 ru kēng, in Chinese). Traditional media also borrows this usage. For example, in 2021, *Xinhuanet* used the title of 三坑少女(sānkēng girl) when reporting this emerging clothing phenomenon.

At present, compared with Hanfu, academic work focuses on the JK and Lolita communities in Mainland China is less developed. At the time of April and May in 2021, when I search 破产三姐妹 or 三坑少女 on Baidu, all the results show high relevance. When searching for 三坑少年(sānkēng boy), the result is much less and the content is less relevant. Hence, based on the way that cyberspace calls girls who are interested in Hanfu, JK, Lolita, and the lack of evidence that the same way is used to call boys. It indicates that at the intersection of these three clothing cultures, the main active members are young female.

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<sup>2</sup> じょしこうこうせい jyoshi koukousei. This refers to Japanese high school girls’ uniforms. Their school uniform usually consists of a shirt, bow tie, short skirt, suit jacket, or sailor suit. What is popular in China is a version that developed from the original Japanese school uniform. Boys’ version can also be found. Considering copyright issues, readers need to find JK pictures on their own.

<sup>3</sup> ロリタ洋服 rorita yofuku. A clothing subculture originated from Japan. According to the styles of different subordinates, such as classic, sweet, gothic, steampunk, the wearer’s clothing, makeup and hairstyle are varied. There is also boys’ version Lolita. As the same issue above, readers need to find Lolita pictures on their own.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

In the literature review section, different concepts and historical context were introduced. Hanfu wearers and this community show a polyhedron. To avoid fall into a certain stereotype, this study applies *inductive approach* to let the empirical finding guides the theory. Namely, “theory is the outcome of research” (Bryman, 2012, p.26). Therefore, after the analysis of the collected data, the concept of *cultural self-awareness* is considered as a proper lens to interpret what are Hanfu wearers thinking and doing in today's China social context. In the later discussion section, cultural self-awareness will be applied to understand Hanfu involvers.

Cultural self-awareness is nuanced and multifaceted. Before introducing this concept, *self-awareness* and *cultural identity* need to be introduced first. The APA (2020) defines self-awareness as “self-focused attention or knowledge”. In traditional social psychological theories, self-concept means the individual's unique identity sense that differentiated from others (Brewer & Gardner, 1996, p.83). *Self* in the cross-cultural context refers to “individuals define themselves in terms of their relationships to others and to social groups” (*ibid.*). Rather than psychological usage, this study roots in the social context. According to human's general cognitive process, individuals first know themselves, and then through identifying a (usually more than one) culture individuals involved, they may raise a cultural self-awareness to further understand themselves, the culture they involved in, and other culture. Identification is a construction, and will be an always ongoing construction. The process of individuals being aware of cultures is not a simple linear relation withal. Self-awareness, cultural identity and cultural self-awareness are often interacted with each other in this process.

#### **3.1 The concept of cultural identity**

Brewer and Gardner (1996, p.83) point out that “different self-construals may also coexist within the same individual, available to be activated at different times or in different contexts”. Polletta and Jasper (2001, p.285) explicate cultural identity as an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community,

category, practice, or institution.

Globalization and human migration are a continuous process along the history, markedly recent decades. The massive amount of information challenges established cultural identity to a certain extent. To understand cultural identity in global systems should be kept in the condition that considering “the phenomena of hegemony, of countervailing identities, of dominant and subaltern discourses” (Friedman, 1994, p.25). Culture in this context, regards to “personhood and experience and the way they are connected to the production of representations of the world and the formation of strategies of practice” (*ibid.*).

Being aware of the exist of similarities and differences in culture. Cultural identity is pertaining to individuals’ beliefs and values, personal relationships, and work (Jensen, Arnett & McKenzie, 2011, p.287). Yet the degree of globalization is deepening, along with the development of the Internet and other media has made. It is easy for teenagers and young people to have interaction with different cultures as they grow up, both be first-hand and indirectly from various media. In consequence, it becomes a complex issue of building a cultural identity. It is “no longer a question of becoming an adult member of one culture but instead of figuring out how to negotiate multiple cultures” (*ibid.*, p.285). Diversity in cultural identity can cause *identity confusion* concomitantly. For instance, young people may feel *unrooted* (Friedman, 2000), they may lose “a sense of home and custom complexes to guide positive involvement in local or global communities” (Jensen, Arnett & McKenzie, 2011, p.292).

Wan and Chew (2013, p.248) state that cultural identity is a two-way process. On the one hand, individuals associate certain aspects with culture through various forms; on the other hand, individuals also choose and shape the cultural identity they need. According to Wan and Chew (*ibid.*), there are three components of cultural identity: cultural knowledge, category label, and social connections. Cultural knowledge is “the alignment between an individual’s characteristics and the culture’s most central and widely shared knowledge” (*ibid.*). Rather than thinking of oneself belong to specific “cultural values and practices” (*ibid.*, p.249), category label refers to

an individual's "self-reported" and "psychological association" of a cultural collective (*ibid.*). For the component of social connections, it is developed from an individual's "specific networks of social relationships" (*ibid.*, p.259). Meanwhile, this relationship plays a role of a bridge between an individual's cultural identity and the culture itself (*ibid.*). However, Wan and Chew (*ibid.*, p.255) point out the potential that when cultural changes happen, individuals' cultural identity will change based on different situations. Namely, if cultural changes have a negative impact on "social others", individuals will be more likely to show negative attitudes to their own cultural identity (*ibid.*). Wan and Chew (2013, p.247) also find that even just a shared cultural interest can be a cultural identity.

Apart from approaching cultural identity from the individual perspective, it can also be found in collective practices. Cultural identity, sometimes adapted to collective identity, which is a concept often mentioned in the context of social movements. When activists are calling for a political reform or a recognition for new identities, collective identity can explain that "how groups see themselves and are seen by others" (Polletta & Jasper, 2001, p.284). In certain conditions, collective identities may appear after social movement mobilization, it can be built in the process of recruiting participants (*ibid.*, p.291). Furthermore, collective identities are expressed in cultural materials. Examples like narratives, symbols, rituals, clothing, can all be the presentation of cultural materials.

### **3.2 From cultural identity to cultural self-awareness**

Lu and Wan (2018, p.823) state that "cultural self-awareness is an individual's metacognitive understanding of culture's influence on the self".

*It involves understanding the connection between the self and cultural experience.*

*Individuals with a high degree of cultural self-awareness become more aware of how their cultural experiences have shaped them. These people will be aware of how culture affects different aspects of themselves, such as their values and behaviours.*

In the article, *In Response to Cultural Threat: Cultural Self-Awareness on Collective Movement Participation*, Lu and her colleagues (2020) apply the concept of culture self-awareness under a circumstance of a cultural threat to explain the 2014 Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong. Namely, their case study indicates that a person with a higher cultural self-awareness level could be more sensitive to cultural threat. As a result, this kind of people will treat the cultural threat as a threat to themselves. In this study, Lu and her colleagues define the core culture as the Hong Kong local culture, which featured “the ideals of democracy and autonomy of governance” and the local dialect Cantonese. While external intrusion, the cultural threat in the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement is defined as the “increasing presence of Mainland Chinese tourists and new immigrants, and an increasing prevalence of Mandarin Chinese”. It is found that “cultural self-awareness was positively related to individuals’ participation in the collective movement, via increased collective pride and exclusive collective identity” (*ibid.*, p.74). Furthermore, people with higher cultural self-awareness will be more aware of their identity in the collective by “psychologically through a greater collective pride and more exclusive collective identity”, and on the other hand, “behaviorally through collective movement participation” (*ibid.*). Meanwhile, Lu and her colleagues argue that the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement is not an isolated case. They “expect a similar role of cultural self-awareness in situations where the cultural circumstance draws individuals to respond as a member of the cultural collective” (*ibid.*).

In this study, the analysis frame of Lu and her colleagues in the case of the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement, will be adapted into interpreting empirical findings of Hanfu wearer and their community. The main point is to exam *why* and *how* young people raise their cultural self-awareness in the process of involving in a certain culture.

### **3.3 Research Questions**

This study aims to shed light on Hanfu community from the insider perspective. Given the fact that the young generation is the most active Hanfu participants at current stage. The main research question is formulated as:

How young people experience their involvement in Hanfu?

To answer the main question, this research puts forward sub-questions as a foreshadowing. Hanfu insider involvement is drawn from two main aspects, which are their social interaction in this youth subculture group; taken account of identity and self-awareness, the meaning and value of Hanfu defined from their behavior and thoughts. Here, two sub-questions are formulated as:

- 1) How social interaction happens among these people in Hanfu community?
- 2) What attitudes do people wearing Hanfu have on issues that the media is worried about?

### **3.4 Significance of the study**

The main contribution of this study will be trying to fill a missing piece in the academic world. Current public discourse about Hanfu shows a general outline. And there is not much research done the experience of Hanfu from the Hanfu wearer perspective. While in this study, the conceptual approach provides a good basis to do this.

From the academic perspective, the literature gap exists in Hanfu and related topics. When using “traditional Chinese clothing” or “Hanfu” as keywords, it can be found that the relevant literature is not well developed. At the early information collecting stage, I used “Hanfu” as a keyword in English data base, more information is about an apple variety, named hanfu (寒富), developed by Chinese scientists. On the other hand, on Mainland China’s most crucial academic article publishing platform, Zhiwang (知网 cnki.net), academic work focuses on Hanfu is not as significant as people’s enthusiasm for Hanfu in reality.

Nevertheless, the amount of Hanfu relevant literature shows a growth trend. It somehow implies that Hanfu is an emerging social phenomenon and worth to be discussed. In addition, a report from a commercial agency of the new economy industry analysis shows that Hanfu industry has shown a spurt of growth since 2019 (iimedia, 2020). The increasing consumption could also imply the significance of future study

about the Hanfu and this community.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Research Design

The research objects in this study are individual Hanfu wearers and the Hanfu community as a whole. Due to practical consideration, looking at this topic through Hanfu involvers eyes becomes an idea throughout the study. This study aims to shed light on the thoughts and behaviors of Hanfu wearers and their interaction and relation within this community. The research area is limited in Mainland China, namely, those born and raised in Mainland China. Although there are Hanfu wearers showing overseas, Mainland China is highlighted in this research as social and cultural background.

Regards to research strategy, this study conducts *qualitative research* and follows *inductive approach*, which means the theory generates *after* the observation and empirical findings. At the same time, in the process of further analysis and discussion of the data, primarily *iterate* approach is conducted between theory and empirical findings. It “embodies a view of social reality as a constantly shifting emergent property of individuals’ creation” (Bryman, 2012, p.36).

This study uses a small-scale sample. The sample size is sufficient to provide data to understand involvers experiences, but does not aim to be generalizable to the whole fandom. Being a student, considering the limited time and resources, this study adopts a *snowball strategy* to expand the scope of interviewees. First, I use my network to find people related to the research topic and then use these people to establish a more comprehensive sampling range (*ibid.*, p.202).

Meanwhile, a *cross-sectional design* is adopted. It means that in this study data collection contains more than one case and at a single point in time in order to collect a body of quantifiable data in connection with many more than two variables, then exam to detect patterns of association (*ibid.*, p.59). The research methods contain observation on a focus group and qualitative content analysis in a certain time period. Within this



context, an online observation provides preexisted ideas for the interview, while semi-structured interviews are settled as a primary data resource. In other words, the data collection mainly consists of two parts. First, serving as background information, I randomly joined an online Hanfu lovers group chat in early April 2021. This observation helps to develop my sense about the topic of Hanfu. And the experience in turn confirms the content from interviews to a certain extent.

Notwithstanding, the main data is the primary data from the semi-structured interviews with 13 interviewees. The form of semi-structured interview “typically refers to a context in which the interviewer has a series of questions that are in the general form of an interview schedule but is able to vary the sequence of questions” (*ibid.*, p.212). This form is selected because of two advantages. First, it can provide more space for “exploration of the perceptions and opinions of respondents regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues and enable probing for more information and clarification of answers” (Barriball & While, 1994, p.330). Second, the demographic and social background and their involvement levels with Hanfu are varied, which can preclude applying a standardized interview schedule. When conducting semi-structured interviews, validity and reliability issue relies on “conveying equivalence of meaning” (*ibid.*). Regarding the order of questions in the interview (see Table 3 in the appendix), each interview started with some basic information of the interviewee and followed the time sequence of the interviewee from getting in touch with Hanfu to getting more involved in it.

For the process of data collection, almost all interviews were conducted in remote. And almost all remote interviews were taken in audio. The advantage of this form is that “removes this potential source of bias to a significant extent” (Bryman, 2012, p.214). On the other hand, the disadvantage is obvious withal. Interviewer may lose the chance to observe interviewees and mention some sensitive questions (*ibid.*, p.215). And the length of interview may be shorter than personal interview (*ibid.*). As a qualitative researcher, I am also “interested not just in *what* people say but also in the *way* that they say it” (*ibid.*, p.482). Each interview tries to ensure continuity and the

focus of both the interviewee and the interviewer. Meanwhile, since the content of qualitative interviews plays a significant role in this research, for the accuracy of content, and to avoid the ambiguity and deviation of human memory (*ibid.*), I took notes and did the audio recording (if it was an audio or video interview) when I do each interview. And by the end of that day, I playback those audio records and make a more detailed note. After the notes are finished, I use content analysis to draw out analysis and discussion.

To examine Hanfu wearers of different backgrounds and different levels of involvement with Hanfu, I tried to find the interviewees of varying age, living area, time length and the depth of the involvement of Hanfu and relevant activities as much as possible. Thus, the data presented in the following sections will show that the interviewees have different social background and different depth of their love and understanding of Hanfu.

## **4.2 Data Collection**

### **4.2.1 How I reached my interviewees**

Some of the interviewees are people I know, including Interviewee 1, 3, 5, 6, 13. However, Hanfu is still a subculture, which is not a common thing among the overall population in China. Thus, I use snowballing strategy to reach more people who have an interest in Hanfu. In fact, for the majority of the interviewees, I knew them through the people I know. After the interview with Interviewee 1, 3, I asked them whether they know anyone who could be introduced to me for this topic. Then I got in touch with Interviewee 2, 4. Interviewee 9, 10, 11, 12 are my young cousin's network. For Interviewee 7, 8, I got in touch with them through other friends of mine.

### **4.2.2 The forms of interviews**

All the interviews were done in late March and early April in 2021, in the form of semi-structured interviews. All the interviews followed a general framework designed by myself. The way of asking questions and whether raising further questions varied

according to the different answers of each interviewee.

Except for Cai, due to the existing pandemic, I have to make almost all the interviews online, which made me lose some possibilities to get more sense from my interviewees to a certain extent. However, despite the time difference and geographical distance between most of the interviewees and me, they were patient and willing to share their experiences, and we made it.

Table 1 in the appendix will introduce the form of each interview. Table 2 in the appendix will introduce some basic information about the interviewees. The information will be part of clues for analysis in the latter part of this thesis.

### **4.3 Ethical Considerations**

In this study, I, as a researcher, followed the ethical guidelines defined by Swedish Research Council. The voluntariness and privacy of the interviewees were considered. I have taken all possible measures to ensure interviewees anonymity. For all the participants in this research, we did not and do not have any conflict of interest. All interviewees were informed about the purpose of this research. All interviewees volunteered to participate. Before the interview, some interviewees said that they were not willing to communicate with me in the form of video, but they were willing to accept the interview in the form of audio. I respected the preferences of the interviewees. Furthermore, they were also told in advance that they would not appear in the text of the study under their real names. All the interviewees who participated in this study were anonymized in the paper. Before the online video and audio interview, they were informed that our conversation would be recorded. The original content, however, would not be disclosed to third parties after the interview. Additionally, they knew that I as the interviewer, was taking notes when we were talking.

Meanwhile, the language gap is involved in this research. As all the interviews were originally conducted in Chinese, I did all the Chinese-English translation and interpretation myself. In some conditions, the Chinese language is ambiguous. A gap may exist because there may not be a proper way in English can explain the original

meaning of Chinese.

In addition, personal privacy in the Internet age is difficult to guarantee, especially when it comes to social media. For example, the interviews taken on the WeChat platform may be recorded by the platform without our knowledge and authorization. The conversations may leave indelible traces on the Internet. These parts that may leak personal privacy are beyond my control and elimination. Meanwhile, the interviewees may also realize all of the possibilities, and further go into self-censorship before he or she expressing their experiences and thoughts.

#### **4.4 Limitations**

It needs to be acknowledged that this study is limited in many aspects. First, a researcher's values that reflect either the personal beliefs or feelings can be an interference (Bryman, 2012, p.39). As a researcher and as a normal person, I naturally have personal bias and knowledge limitation. Nonetheless, I tried to end each interview by asking my interviewee if there is anything you would like to share with me about any topic or aspect that I have not mentioned before. Being a researcher working within a qualitative research strategy, however, the intensive interview may increase the difficulty to disentangle my stance as social scientists from subjects' perspective (*ibid.*).

Second, reliability and validity in terms of generalization is an important issue. A researcher usually hopes the "findings can be generalized beyond the confines of the particular context in which the research was conducted" (*ibid.*, p.176). In this study, the way I approach to the interviewee is using *non-random sampling method*. It is possible that human judgement impacts the selection process (*ibid.*, p.188). And due to time and cost considerations, the number of participated interviewees is limited. On this account, *Sample bias* exists. It means when some members of the (Hanfu) population stand little or no chance of being selected for inclusion in the sample (*ibid.*, p.187), the result in this study may not be able to put further inference towards a larger population or the whole Hanfu community in China.

The limitation regards to sampling, however, was retrieved to a certain extent.

Considering the demographics of the interviewees, for instance, the proportion of male and female participants and age distribution. The sampling has been involved in the interview to the male Hanfu wearer (this is a community that female members are in the majority), and also a Hanfu wearer in her 30s (the age distribution of the community are mostly in their 10s and early 20s), so the image and voices of the minority in the Hanfu community have also been included in the study.

Third, to minimize the risks that international travel may bring in this period, I chose the online interview format. The process of interviews may be less than ideal. And considering that all the interview content will not be published in their original version, this research lacks transparency for people other than the researcher myself.

## **5. Analysis and Findings**

In this section, first subsection will show the individual Hanfu wearer's experience and thinking. It will mention how my interviewees meet Hanfu, the time and places they wear Hanfu, their families' attitude, whether they own other types of fancy-dress costumes, their different requirements for the correctness of Hanfu form. Second subsection will show the outside social environment, including the general public's attitudes towards Hanfu wearers, and their families' attitudes. In the third subsection, the internal structure of the Hanfu community will be pictured. It shows several independent aspects: the Hanfu age and gender ratio, Hanfu consumption, how Hanfu associations work, how Hanfu community act in the cyberspace.

### **5.1 Hanfu wearers' individual experience**

#### **5.1.1 How they get to know Hanfu**

In the Hanfu community, people who self-identify as fans of Hanfu or members who contribute to the Hanfu revival movement will refer to each other as "tong pao"<sup>4</sup>. All the interviewees come to know the concept of Hanfu after 2010. According to their

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<sup>4</sup> It refers to "同袍" in Chinese, and can be translated to "comrades" in English.

feedback, the interviewees' experiences could be divided into three types. First, they know someone likes Hanfu and get affected. And interestingly, it might be a coincidence that all two male interviewees (2, 3) know Hanfu because of girls. Second, they already have hobbies related to traditional Chinese culture before they know Hanfu. Third, they appreciate the aesthetic of clothing with Chinese elements. While these three reasons have interaction with each other to a certain extent.

Interviewee 1 wears Hanfu for social connection with people having same values:

“I make friends in the Hanfu community. We share a similar attitude on life. There are some topics I can only talk with these Hanfu friends. Hanfu makes us meet each other and hang out together. It is a base, a magnet.”

Interviewee 10 wears Hanfu due to nostalgia and a yearn for the dreamland:

“I feel like I am wearing the five-thousand years history and culture on me [...] and I pay more attention to my manner when I wearing Hanfu. I do not want to break the beauty of clothing because my bad etiquette.”

### **5.1.2 When and where they wear Hanfu**

The interviewees have different social identity and life conditions. For instance, students in middle school and people who enter the workforce have less leisure time. While students in universities can have more time involve in their own hobbies. In Nanjing, to my knowledge, students are asked to wear school uniforms in most middle schools. And for some jobs, companies have dressing requirements for their employees. Thus, they have relatively fewer chances to wear whatever they want. Moreover, it can be found that, those who not really love Hanfu very deeply only wear Hanfu when they need it for a certain purpose. For this kind of people, they also wear Hanfu with low frequency. They see Hanfu as a special clothing for hanging out with friends, taking pictures for a different sense out of urban daily life, and creating a special atmosphere for traditional Chinese festivals. For example, Interviewee 9,12 only wear Hanfu during

traditional festivals. These special occasions, such as traditional festivals, art exhibitions, or scenic spots, have gained a new source of income for various business due to the rise of Hanfu (Wang, Colbert & Legoux, 2020, p.85).

Additionally, several interviewees mention the same point that cold weather and rainy days could highly impact their willingness to wear Hanfu. But weather and contemporary urban facilities do not affect some deep Hanfu lovers. Interviewee 1, 4, 6 have their solutions, which is choosing different Hanfu's style and clothing materials based on the weather. Hanfu have been integrated with their normal life. Interviewee 4 says:

“I know many Hanfu lovers they have just a few T-shirt and jeans. But they have two closets of Hanfu [...] When it becomes cold, I wear a shawl over the Hanfu. If I need to ride a bike, I will wear Song trousers. Hanfu is what ancient people wear in daily life. So, it is a nature that Hanfu can become part of our daily life. There are different Hanfu styles. They can meet the different needs. Hanfu is convenient as contemporary clothing.”

### **5.1.3 The intersection of other clothing cultures**

As the phenomenon of emerging clothing culture mentioned in the early chapter, the other types here mainly refer to JK and Lolita. Based on the interviewees' response, the intersection of different clothing cultures can be found. In other words, people who own Hanfu also have JK, Lolita, Cosplay custom, or Qipao. Their response provides a basis for the interpretation of young people's self-expression using clothing culture. Within all the response of who have other types of clothing mentioned above, JK is the most common type owned by Hanfuer. The given reason is that JK's shorter skirt and the matching shirts are more convenient and looks less conspicuous in public space. Interviewee 11 says:

“It is a trendy thing in school. I got affected by my friends. They talking about Hanfu, JK, Lolita during the class break, I had interest on this topic and tried them. These clothing are cute.”

Nonetheless, it needs to be noted that, for two male interviewees, Hanfu is the only “unusual” clothing they have. For this point, the observation that it is female be more active in the emerging clothing culture trend is confirmed to a certain extent. Meanwhile, On the other hand, Hanfu represents Chinese tradition and historical culture in their minds, and this meaning provides them with a refuge other than their daily clothes. Interviewee 2 says:

“Today’s Chinese people do not have their dress codes for some important events. But as a Han ethnic, I would say Hanfu is a good choice for me to wear at traditional wedding ceremony and ancestor worship.”

#### **5.1.4 Different views for Hanfu form requirement**

According to the knowledge of the interviewees, there is a division of Hanfu forms requirements. The most stringent and orthodox kind is only following the design of unearthed cultural relics, even the image from ancient painting does not count. The less strict requirement is wearing Hanfu based on unearthed cultural relics design, but decorate with non-Hanfu elements (which means the wearer is free to choose accessories) or use contemporary fabric for clothing (which keeps all the Hanfu appearance but only change the texture). The last is a kind of clothing developed from Hanfu elements (e.g., wide sleeves or crossed collar), but mainly shows contemporary designers’ imagination and creation. This kind of design often labelled as 汉元素<sup>5</sup>(han yuan su). For ordinary people, it may be hard to tell the differences between all these types. For Hanfu wearers, especially for the inner circle, the correctness is a dividing line. The first two can be seen as Hanfu. The third one is not accepted.

Members in a subculture community will develop a set of appearance or behavior to confirm their domain. It usually bases on the consensus within this community. Becker names this kind of informal agreements inside a subculture group as “rules” (1973, p.10). He summarizes from his youth subculture study that, “social

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<sup>5</sup> It refers to clothing designed with stereotyped Hanfu sense, but not follow details from the unearthed cultural relics. For example, a full-length Hanfu dress cut into a mini-skirt length.



groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance and by applying those rules to particular persons and labelling them as outsiders” (1963, p.9). In the Hanfu community, wearing acceptable Hanfu form is the informal agreement. While there are Hanfu wearers enforce the rule, and some break the rule. The following content will show different opinions of several interviewees.

Interview 1 was the manager of a university student Hanfu association. She understands the difficulty of distinguishing Hanfu forms.

“For a newcomer, I will tell them if there is anything inappropriate. But I will not push anyone to accept these rules [...] for people really have interest of learning more about Hanfu and related knowledge, I will happy to share everything I know [...] But I insist that if a garment does not meet the requirement, it should not use the title of Hanfu.”

Interviewee 5 is practicing the orthodox requirement herself for years. She, however, is considering aesthetic:

“Under the premise of understanding the culture and history, I am aware the orthodox Hanfu is the most beautiful one. It can stand the test of time. I cannot bear the modern cloying Hanfu style for catering to some consumers’ taste.”

For Interviewee 2 and 3, Hanfu is a fusion concept. They believe that Hanfu in different historical periods absorbed different styles from other ethnic costumes. And therefore, Hanfu wearers should allow new changes at present times. Interviewee 6, 10, 11, 12 agree that without ruining the overall beauty of the outfit, it is nice to have some changes that are more friendly to contemporary lifestyles. And likewise, Interviewee 4 has a tolerant attitude towards whether the forms of other Hanfu wearers fully comply with history. She says:

“Wearing Hanfu should be a pleasant experience. It can help to promote Hanfu in a flexible way. Hanfu needs to get more opportunities to integrate with modern

lifestyle and be worn by more people.”

Some wearers have the third kind of Hanfu, rather than enforce the general rule in the community, they follow their own rules that the design must be original. Interviewee 9 says:

“I only use Douyin if I want to know anything about Hanfu. I do not like reading ancient books to learn Hanfu. [...] There are a lot of vloggers telling you how to tell differences between Hanfu [...] Whether an outfit of Hanfu is an original design by a Taobao store or it is a copycat. The originality of a design, is the only thing I care about.”

Interviewee 7, 8, 13 show a similar attitude. They do not care about whether a set of Hanfu is strictly following the requirement. They will buy the clothing has good looking without check its form. At the same time, they expressed their confusion and complaint about those Hanfuer who is criticizing others’ styles.

## **5.2 Social environment outside Hanfu community**

### **5.2.1 The general public’s attitude**

The reaction of who saw they wearing Hanfu can reflect the tolerance and acceptance of the general public. Through the experience of interviewees, the outside social environment for the Hanfu community in daily life can be seen. Most of the interviewees who had the experience of walking on the streets in Hanfu expressed they are being stared at by strangers around. In the terms of time span, from some of the interviewees’ experience, the reaction towards Hanfu among ordinary people has a significant change. People on the street are not as curious as they were. It seems that the public has quickly adapted to the situation of people wearing Hanfu on the street within a few years. However, it needs to be noted again, their experience mainly happens in Nanjing.

Interviewee 1 witnesses this change, she says:

“Seven years before, I was too shy to wear Hanfu on the street. Because people seldom saw that kind of clothing. I was asked by strangers many times whether I am a traditional Chinese opera actress or I am on the way for TV series shooting. There were also strangers on the street took pictures of me like watching a circus. But now, hanging out with friends in Hanfu is common and no more strangers ask these questions to me.”

Moreover, observation and experience of Interviewee 2, 8, 11, can indicate the gaps between Hanfu wearers and the general public in terms of different regions. Interviewee 11 implies different Hanfu knowledge between Nanjing local people and people from other areas:

“This years’ Lantern Festival, I wore Hanfu with my friends. We hung out at Confucius Temple, some tourists asked whether we can take pictures with them. You know, it is one of the most popular attractions in Nanjing. And they spoke in a non-local dialect [...] Based on their reaction, it seems like these tourists never saw Hanfu before.”

Compared with Nanjing and other cities, Interviewee 2 says:

“My hometown, Zhoukou, is relatively underdeveloped, and the overall education level is relatively low. People in Zhoukou sees Hanfu as something new and strange. Last Spring Festival, I wore Hanfu there, people all looked at me like they never see such clothing before.”

Under these conditions, he links the popularity of Hanfu with the level of social-economic development of the region and the level of education of the people.

Interviewee 8 has similar experience:

“My hometown, Foshan, a city adjacent to Guangzhou. I seldom see Hanfu on the street in Foshan. I think it is because the high proportion of university students and young people in the entire urban population in Guangzhou, which are factors

Foshan does not have. Young people in the university are the main group wearing Hanfu.”

Besides, Interviewee 5, 13 wore Hanfu in Italy and Myanmar respectively, and people were staring at them with curious attention. The experience of them shows that the awareness of Hanfu abroad is relatively low.

### **5.2.2 Their families' attitude**

Based on all the response of the interviewees, there are two different types of attitudes from their families. One is showing support, and another is to think that Hanfu is something weird, useless, and misfit. Namely, the main reason for the support is that their parents' generation or partner think Hanfu representing traditional Chinese culture and wearing Hanfu has a positive impact. While for those families do not understand. Although they tried to persuade their families that Hanfu is part of traditional culture. The older family members still think buying Hanfu is a waste of money, and wearing it is an odd behavior that not fit in contemporary daily lives.

## **5.3 Hanfu community**

The following sub-sections aims to portray a picture of the Hanfu community from different aspects with Hanfu involvers insights. According to the involvement experience of the interviewees, girls are the majority, and people in their early 20s are the most active age group among all the participants they know in the Hanfu community.

The Hanfu community is inclusive to certain extent. Interviewee 1 says:

“[...] maybe because we have a relaxed atmosphere, I know many gay friends here (the Hanfu community). Some girls prefer to dressing like a boy. And some boys try girls' style too. Here we do not need to be constrained by the daily social identity setting.”

Moreover, Interviewee 2 has a Hanfu friend from Man (满) minority group. It shows that Hanfu can apparel not merely the Han ethnic group but also young people

with other ethnic group backgrounds.

### **5.3.1 Hanfu consumption**

All 13 interviewees do not make Hanfu themselves. They prefer to buy Hanfu on Taobao (淘宝). There are more outfit choices for female than male in the market, just similar to the current male to female ratio of the Hanfu community. Hanfu usually sold as a set. For example, upper clothing with matched skirt or trousers, inner lining with smock. The common price range is 100 to 1000 RMB. Some special style using silk or embroidery can pricing above 2000 RMB per set. All interviewees say that expenses on Hanfu clothing and accessories not effects their normal balance.

Many well-known Hanfu merchants have only Taobao stores and no offline physical stores. They will have several different social media accounts. For example, they will interact with consumers on Weibo. The form of interaction includes fan messages and sending gifts. These stores also often have their own designers, and these styles will have invisible patent rights in the hearts of fans. If a well-selling design is copied by other stores and sold at a lower price, it will cause dissatisfaction from some fans of the original store. When people think their Hanfu do not fit or do not need it anymore, second-hand circulation and rental service are their choice.

### **5.3.2 Hanfu associations**

Hanfu association has two main forms in the Hanfu community. One is the student association at school. Another is the registered Hanfu association in society. The Hanfu associations at school is basically hobby-oriented. The application process is relatively easy, as long as students are interested in Hanfu can join. They do not have to pay a membership fee. Everyone shares the cost of each activity.

While for the registered associations in the society, the entry procedure is relatively strict. The application usually open in a few specified time periods in a year. And they have an annual membership fee. If there is an event, participants may have to pay an extra fee. Such registered associations are usually dominated by elder adults

(compared with who in their early 20s). The most active members are whose work is related to traditional Chinese culture. These people not only love Hanfu but also consider it from real interests. Getting to know people with similar hobbies can bring certain benefits to their own work. There are also some people who are photographers or makeup artists, and they join these associations mainly to increase their customers. Only a few interviewees continue to join registered associations in the society to build new network after graduated from school. For other interviewees, they just keeping contact with Hanfu wearers from school times.

Although the two types of Hanfu associations works in different ways, there are many similarities in the content of activities. For example, playing traditional Chinese musical instruments, singing Gufeng(古风) songs, imitating ancient Chinese games, competing to write poems, or staying at B&Bs for one night in scenic places.

### **5.3.3 Social media as an active field**

Investigating Hanfuers' behavior in the online world, this study focuses on social media and other open platforms with information exchange functions. It expounds how Hanfu wearers use social media to make connections within this community. It also helps to understand the means that they obtain knowledge and share information in the community. Although this study did not conduct a more detailed study of the behaviour of Hanfu wearers on social media, it may provide valuable clues for future Hanfu online field research.

First, Hanfuers' preference for public platforms is pronounced. The most frequently used social media are QQ, WeChat, Zhihu (知乎), Weibo. Although WeChat is the most popular social media in nowadays China, Hanfuer prefers to use QQ. Because QQ has a more open community design. Users can find strangers with similar hobbies by using the keyword searching function. In this way, people who do not know each other can join the same group chat and become friends. However, WeChat has a relatively compact community design. If anyone wants to add a new contactor, these two people need to know each other through other ways, at least. If anyone wants to

join a group chat based on a specific topic or interest, this person needs to know someone already in this group chat or have access the group chat invitation code. Following the way of how QQ and WeChat adds new contactors, it can be found that Hanfu community is not based on the personal network in the reality. It more focuses on the hobby itself.

Interviewee 4 is the administrator of a Hanfu lovers online group chat. She describes their daily communication:

“If we have time to meet, then we talk about the details of activities [...] But usually people need to study or work, so most of time, it is just some chitchat.”

The four youngest interviewees, Interviewee 9, 10, 11, 12, have the same response: they only use QQ to get in touch with other Hanfuers. Four of them describe the relaxed and happy atmosphere in the QQ group chat. Interviewee 10 says:

“Last time there was a girl who made a hairpin for me. I was very happy to receive this kind of handcrafted gifts. I think this kind of socialising is common here.”

Bilibili is a video platform, however, the function of bullet comments (弹幕 dan mu) provides a chance for users to exchange their thoughts and make comments under each video (Nakajima, n.d, p.107). The viral short video platform, Douyin (抖音 China domestic version of TikTok) also has countless Hanfu related content. To promote Hanfu and the commercial behind, these platforms are gathering Hanfu vloggers. Interviewee 1 says:

“If I see a Hanfu vlogger shows a good aesthetic, I will follow her account. It is not about her face or body. It is about how she matching colours and textiles. My Hanfu friends and I have one favorite Hanfu vlogger, sometimes we just take her outfits and ask the Taobao store to make the same thing for us.”

Except the commercial promotion, Hanfu vloggers also use Hanfu as a symbol to distinguish Chinese culture from other cultures. For example, on both YouTube and

Bilibili, a video (see Figure 2,3 in the appendix) distinguishing Hanfu from Hanbok (the Korean custom) has received many positive feedback from Chinese netizens. It has brought popularity to this vlogger at the same time. Interviewee 13 checks many similar videos and says:

“I really want to let foreigners to see what kind of traditional clothing we have [...] if anyone says Hanfu is Hanbok, I will be angry and tell them it is from Chinese culture. I like these video that telling people differences between Hanfu and clothing from other cultures.”

Interviewee 5, 6, 7, 8, rarely use social media to strengthen contact with members of the Hanfu community. Four of them unanimously express that they do not want to be classified as people in the Hanfu community, but they do like Hanfu and the culture behind it. Two reasons make them unwilling to be labeled as members of the Hanfu community. First, they are not willing to deal with interpersonal relationships in the community. They even do not want to be bothered by the online group chat messages. Second, they regard Hanfu as a private hobby, and they already have friends who can talk Hanfu related topics or wear Hanfu to hang out together. They feel satisfied with the current situation.

Interviewee 8 complains about the speech environment on Zhihu and Weibo:

“I do not want to post my Hanfu pictures on these open platforms. There always some people like to judge your looking and outfits. Some very ‘hardcore’ people will criticize you wearing a neither fish nor fowl. Why should I care about the ‘correctness’ of my Hanfu?”

Additionally, a part in the literature review briefly introduced the image change of Hanfu in the official media agencies. According to Interviewee 3, the Hanfu related knowledge is also introduced in Xuexi Qiangguo, which is a theoretical learning platform for learning the main content of Xi Jinping’s thoughts. This platform also has functions such as news push, instant messaging, and social networking. It shows the



changing status of the Hanfu trend in official propaganda.

#### **5.3.4 Cyberspace as a place to spare knowledge**

Hanfu, as an emerging clothing phenomenon, is the result of Hanfu lovers' promotion. It is a hobby-oriented group. The Hanfu community itself does not have a real hierarchy. But the information acquisition method in cyberspace can outline varied involvement levels of Hanfu wearers. As it mentioned in the literature review section, in a subculture community, core members have a more comprehensive understanding and put more effects in practicing the core culture. Following this logic in Hanfu community, by presenting the process of information acquisition, it can clarify who is taking the role of inner circle and who is relatively in the outer circle.

Some Hanfuers read materials from ancient books and follow the relevant information from archeology research to understand the clothing history, and organize these pieces of knowledge into systematic documents. It is a voluntary. These documents circulate among the Hanfu community. They are uploaded to Hanfu forums (e.g., aihanfu, hanfuwang), are shared files in QQ and WeChat group chats, link to hashtag in Weibo and Zhihu platforms for larger audience. In this spread process, the content in original documents can be adapted into diverse versions that fit demands of users on different platforms. Hanfu wearers check the clothing patterns and background knowledge of the Hanfu from these documents. For people who have an interest in Hanfu but do not want to spend a lot of time to read, they usually learn relevant knowledge from video and short video platforms (e.g., Bilibili and Douyin). While the video content is mostly snippets plucked from these organized documents. If see the original document as primary information, then the content on different platforms can be seen as secondary information. For the content on video and short video platforms, the text gives place to the image. The information is further translated and the knowledge becomes fragmented.

This process shows the way of knowledge spread in the Hanfu community. It starts from the inner circle to the outer circle, and even reaching the general public. For

people who making the original documents, they mastery the knowledge and have complete picture of the Hanfu culture. It can strength the inner circle's identity and sense of responsibility for the core value. At the same time, the knowledge processed through the inner circle has recreated norm and value of current Hanfu community. Under this condition, the inner circle not only chose Hanfu but also further develop this concept. This is a two-way influence between a cultural collective and the individuals in it.

Begin with learning from the shared documents online, now Interviewee 2 prefers to obtain knowledge directly from ancient literature. As a member who has a more comprehensive mind of the core culture, he puts more effort to understand the Hanfu culture in his way. He says:

“[...] things online are now overlapping the knowledge I already have. And they all from these several original documents. I need to find new things to feed myself [...] the influence of Hanfu on me is advocating a lifestyle and attitude similar to *Zen*. I am also reducing the usage of social media. It is too noisy.”

## **6. Discussion**

Hanfu revival movement starts from some posts on online forums in early 2000, and develops in the Hanfu wearers real life practices thereafter. The online claims are relatively radical. These forums claimed that Han ethnic group has been treated unequally and their traditional culture was under threat since the Qing Dynasty. Similar claim is evident in Leibold studies, which was mentioned in the literature review section. These people appeal to a large-scale reform in Mainland China to “save” Han ethnic group culture. They choose Hanfu as their reform symbolic. This kind of appeal, however, has not received positive feedback.

Nevertheless, since 2010, moderate evidence has been shown in the reality. Some young people wear Hanfu on the street to attract the public attention. During weekends and holidays, especially traditional Chinese festivals, such as Spring Festival, Qingming Festival, Dragon Boat Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival, these people

perform Hanfu shows in the urban public space (e.g., large square, parks). Some also wear Hanfu to commemorate Confucius and other historical figures; encourage students in the folk national learning institutions to wear Hanfu; suggest that universities should take Hanfu as the academic dress for graduation ceremony and taking Hanfu as the clothing for important meetings or sports games opening.

The first Hanfu Cultural Festival was held in November 2013 in Xitang town. Regardless of to what extent it is a local government tourism promotion, it could be considered as a result of the growth of the Hanfu community for years. A rise of a cultural phenomenon is not something new, however, the word “han” represents the largest ethnic group in China. It thus appeals to the public’s attention for its potential nationalism. As the former section draws the picture of the Hanfu community. This section focuses on discussing whether Han nationalism is positive in current Hanfu community through the experiences and opinions from involvers. Through the lens of cultural self-awareness, it further goes to answer why and how Hanfu become a cultural image embodied with political appeal.

**“I bought Han nationalism before, but not anymore.”**

From the early 2000 to 2010, some online forums tried to use Hanfu as a slogan to advocate Han nationalism. Interviewee 3 has such experience:

“I bought it (Han nationalism) even before the first time I wore Hanfu [...] We all know that China has 56 ethnic groups. Han ethnic group has the largest population, but we should respect other 55 ethnic groups. [...] Han nationalism threatens the national unity.”

**“Hanfu promotion is showing our cultural confidence and soft power. We need to be seen by the world.”**

Interviewee 1 want to make the general public know more about Hanfu. She emphasizes it should be the correct and original Hanfu style from the history, not the modern design. She, however, claims that she is not in the alliance with people who promote Han

nationalism. She shares experience that:

“One of my friends is a ‘spy’ in a very hardcore Hanfu group chat. People in this group chat still insist that Han nationalism should be in the first place in Hanfu community. They criticize me and my friends a lot. Because they believe that we downgrade the mission of the Hanfu revival.”

At the same time, Interviewee 1 expresses her disappointment with the government. She gives examples that the Tang suit at the APEC meeting (the same example given in previous studies, see chapter 2.2 Nostalgia and tradition learning):

“It is something Chinese may proud of. But it has become a shared memory of the Hanfu community in a negative way [...] As a Hanfu lover, I think I am misrepresented [...] This kind of Tang suit cannot reflect Chinese culture and history.”

In Mainland China, some TV shows that go beyond entertainment. The most typical example could be the New Year Gala produced by one of the most important official media agencies, CCTV. Richaud (n.d. p.245) points out that New Year Gala in the Chinese Spring festival, “emotions serve as a premise for a feeling of recognition”. Under this cognition, Interviewee 1 complains about a high-profile Hanfu catwalk show in the 2021 New Year Gala.

“The show may have a board impact among the audience. However, the Hanfu in the show, presents designers creativity, not the traditional image of Hanfu. Such images can mislead a lot of people.”

Hanfu involvers’ disappointment not just towards the domestic side, it also shows on international side. Because Hanfu itself has not become a Chinese cultural icon. It may be hard for a foreigner to tell what is traditional Chinese costume looks like, and some Hanfu involvers feel frustrated about this fact. Interviewee 8 gives an example of Hanfu be recognized as an Indian costume on Twitter, which made Chinese

netizen unhappy (see Figure 4 in the appendix).

“I understand that Hanfu can be mis-recognized as Kimono, Hanbok or Ao dai. Because the costumes of parts of Japan, Korea or Vietnam have historically been influenced by Chinese culture. It makes sense that the ethnic costumes of these places sharing a similar look with Han costumes. It is rare for Hanfu to be considered Indian clothing. I am very surprised. Maybe we should put more efforts on promoting Chinese culture both in China and overseas.”

**“Hanfu is important to me. But I do not take on this heavy task of the Hanfu revival.”**

Interviewee 2 and 4 have involved in the Hanfu community relatively deep for years. They have the motivation to keep learning knowledge about Hanfu forms, and according to their response, I would say that they have richer knowledge compared with normal Hanfu wearers. They devote a lot of time to in-depth learning and mastering more traditional Chinese cultural activities. Interviewee 2 has reconstructed his lifestyle into a more cultured and less mediated way:

“For me, Hanfu is a window to know more about Chinese culture. I choose all my furniture in Ming dynasty style. I have bought a lot of ancient literature books and use my spare time to read [...] Now I am doing Tea business. I am happy with this job because it can build connection with my hobbies.”

Interviewee 4 has engaged in many different fields that related to Hanfu. For example, she did volunteer work in Hanfu Cultural Festival. Now she is learning traditional Chinese musical instruments in a private studio. Moreover, she tries to inherit Hanfu and the culture to the next generation,

“I bought a lot of Hanfu for my son. He is just kindergarten age, but I want to let him aware this tradition. I feel the responsibility to inherit Hanfu and traditional Chinese culture.”

The conditions of these two interviewees can reflect their recognition of the concept of Hanfu itself. However, they not agree with the idea of Han nationalism and they do not think they will contribute to the Hanfu revival movement. They claim that the most crucial issue is the love for Hanfu itself and finding happiness from traditional culture. To a certain extent, it shows that a high degree of self-identification of a particular culture does not necessarily lead to the driving force for the further export and promotion of this culture.

**“For me, Hanfu is just a hobby.”**

Interviewee 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, enjoy themselves in the experience of wearing clothing different from ordinary life and the socializing. They do not embody their styles with any political appeal. The four youngest interviewees show their confusion about why Hanfu is embodied with a political meaning and express their incomprehension.

Interviewee 13 expresses her doubt about the Hanfu revival movement:

“Hanfu is not customs designed for modern life. Even with some reformed details, a person cannot easily cook food and wash dishes in Hanfu. I also heard a voice saying Hanfuers are contemporary petty bourgeoisie.”

Hanfu is not the only option for a cultural icon. But these young people are trying to compose a narrative that define their identity in the present by reproducing Chinese history. By wearing Hanfu, they actively provide the outside world with an entry point to interpret Chinese culture in a general sense. Not only they want people living in mainland China to be aware of this, but they also want to show this image clearly to people from other countries and cultures.

If define the group of people who are promoting Han nationalism on the Internet as hardcore, it can be observed that involvers position towards the hardcore is like concentric circles (see Figure 3 in the appendix). The concept of inner circle can be used to describe Hanfuers who have strong self-identity about Hanfu but disagree with

the idea of Han nationalism. The inner circle has richer cultural knowledge, a clear category label, and relatively strong social connections within the Hanfu community. They access their Hanfu knowledge directly from the original document and they have motivation to further learn about relevant knowledge. This group engage in the culture for longer time period, and has participated in more cultural activities. They therefore have made friends and built stable social and psychological connection with other Hanfu involvers. Meanwhile, the inner circle's behaviors and values are more affected by this culture. And they are more sensitive to outside cultural threat. At the same time, this kind of Hanfu involver is more concerned about the community rules (whether the form of Hanfu is correct, whether the looks of this garment can find the evidence in history). The inner circle advocates the revival of traditional culture and etiquette with Hanfu as a symbolic carrier. But they do not show activism behavior on promoting Hanfu. They mainly internalize the Hanfu revival as a kind of personal practice, such as personal values and lifestyle.

However, on the other hand, the outer circle engages less in this culture. In the frame designed by the inner circle, the market speeds up the expansion though driving production. The outer circle, however, is standing on the consumer side. The consumption object are the items of Hanfu and the related concepts. They have access to the knowledge in an indirect way, and often shows less concerns towards the community rules. They still relate Hanfu to traditional cultures, but the connection between is not detailed and sometimes unnecessary. It is a fashion or an imitation following trendsetters in young people. Hanfu is individual self-presentation towards the society around them. As the culture is not the center of their lives, their social network is not developed around this cultural community. Cultural self-awareness is raised especially when feeling a cultural threat. And culture members with stronger cultural identity are more sensitive to the threat. For this reason, regards to Hanfu involvers, the outer circle is usually not as sensitive as the inner circle.

On that account, the inner circle plays the role that promoting Hanfu to against cultural threat. The cultural threat in this condition may not be urgent, even not a real

threat. But it reflects a certain anxiety of Chinese may lost its values and direction of develop in the globalization process. This kind of uncertainty can also be seen in the discussion of the balance between the Han ethnic and the minority group. Due to the dynasty change in the history, the Han ethnic group is actually fusion of different ethnicity population. And in contemporary China, the image of Han ethnic is not clear as well. People can say that Confucianism can represent this ethnicity. But this answer maybe not concrete enough. On the other hand, Hanfu involvers can usually tell the characteristic of costume or unique custom form the minority group. As Hanfu involvers are the generation grow up in the Internet age, it is easy for them to get various information from different cultures. When a youth trying to figure out what kind of connection is built between him/herself and the culture him/her naturally belongs to, such convenience may result in a confusion about individual's cultural self-identity.

China as a country with economic achievements, has not built a complete cultural image. Namely, besides the ancient culture heritage, today's China has not developed convincing soft power. From a global perspective, China, Japan, Korea are located in Northeast Asia, and later two countries have been influenced by Chinese culture in history. Today, Japan and South Korea have strong soft power and cultural export. Under this condition, letting Hanfu as an icon representing China or just representing the Han people become a cultural image to export overseas becomes a goal in Hanfu involvers.

Hanfu represents an imaginary past. It emerged in the process of rereading history and formulate it to serve todays people. Nostalgia provides its audience an identity and a certain social order from traditional culture. Meanwhile, individuals who lost their direction can use nostalgia to create a shelter in this rapidly changing Chinese society. Hanfu revival movement is grounded from core-value shared community members. They tend to challenge exist social consensus, however, always looking for legitimacy and cooperation from the authority. There is no denying that Hanfu and relevant activities compose nowadays traditional learning among young generation. Examining the role of traditional learning in last decades, it has a place in uniting the



people and maintain stability of the society as a policy tool, but under the shadow of nationalism. As Hanfu has received increasing positive feedback and support from the authority, boundary between a bottom-up civil activity and an up-down regime policy implementation becomes unclear. Facing broad audience, it needs to put a question mark on the initial of Hanfu promotion. At the same time, the concept of nationalism needs to be questioned again.

## **7. Conclusion**

Hanfu is an emerging clothing subculture among young people in contemporary China. In this study, it finds that the majority of Hanfu involver is female. These people usually have an interest in other clothing cultures. People have different motivations for joining Hanfu related activities. But different Hanfu involvers have the same self-identity regards to traditional Chinese culture. It is a two-way self-identity process. They can choose to what extent they acknowledge this identity, and how to shape the detailed content by themselves. Some involvers have witnessed many changes in Hanfu community since its early days. This group of people usually show a higher recognition level with Hanfu culture and build stable social connection with other members in this community. While negative reputation about Hanfu on social media and efforts for dealing with the personal relation are the main reasons why some people do not want to participate in the Hanfu community more deeply.

Some Hanfu involvers put efforts on improving the impression of Hanfu to all audiences in both reality and cyberspace in a moderate way. Natheless, due to the expansion of the community, less Hanfu involvers show response to this initiative. The significance of Han nationalism has decreased, and Hanfu involvement more reflects the needs of socializing of young people.

Additionally, previous research shows that the traditional learning before embodies the color of the authority's propagating nationalism from the top down. But this study finds the Hanfu revival a bottom-up movement led by young people who are

in their twenties. At the current stage, the authority is not dominant power in Hanfu promotion. Social media, however, plays a significant role in building relation between Hanfu involvers and promoting Hanfu to larger audience. This study pictures the Hanfu knowledge transmission channels on the Internet. It goes from the inner circle to outer circle. This process strengthens the informal agreement within this community to a certain extent. And diversity and tolerance can be found within this subculture.

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## Appendices

Table 1. Forms of Interviews

Interviewee	Form of Interview	Time length
1	Audio calls on WeChat	The first time 73:13 mins The second time 39:12 mins
2	Audio call on WeChat	51:38 mins
3	Video call on WeChat (He was wearing Hanfu for this interview.)	59:29 mins
4	Audio call on WeChat	44:21 mins
5	Audio messages on QQ	
6	Audio messages on QQ	
7	Audio call on WeChat	24:34 mins
8	Audio call on WeChat	24:49 mins
9	Audio messages and text on QQ	
10	Audio messages and text on QQ	
11	Audio messages and text on QQ	
12	Audio messages and text on QQ	
13	Face to face interview in a cafe	Around 60 mins

Table 2. Basic information about interviewees

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<b>Interviewee 1</b>
Age: 25
Gender: Female
Born in Nanjing city, Jiangsu province
Education background: M.A. of Landscape Architecture in one of the universities in Nanjing
Current Job: Plant maintenance in one of the Classical Gardens of Suzhou, Jiangsu province

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<b>Interviewee 2</b>
Age: 26
Gender: Male
Born in Zhoukou city, Henan province
Education background: B.A. of Artwork Appreciation and Restoration in one of the universities in Nanjing
Current Job: Tea product marketing in Nanjing

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<b>Interviewee 3</b>
Age: 25
Gender: Male
Born in Nanjing city, Jiangsu province
Now based in Zhenjiang city, Jiangsu province
Education background: M.A. of Fluid Machinery and Engineering in one of the universities in Zhenjiang
Job: Has signed a contract with a company in Nanjing

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<b>Interviewee 4</b>
Age: 32
Gender: Female
Born in Nanjing city, Jiangsu province

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Education background: Graduated with a bachelor degree

Job: Unemployed, now learning Guzheng (a traditional Chinese musical instrument)  
and tea ceremony in private studios in Nanjing

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**Interviewee 5**

Age: 25

Gender: Female

Born in Nanjing city, Jiangsu province

Education background: B.A. of Fashion Design in Italia, now is a postgraduate  
student

Job: Doing an internship in Nanjing

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**Interviewee 6**

Age: 25

Gender: Female

Born in Nanjing city, Jiangsu province

Education background: B.A. of Industrial Design

Current Job: Graphic designer in Nanjing

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**Interviewee 7**

Age: 25

Gender: Female

Born in Guangzhou city, Guangdong province

Education background: M.A. of Global Media Communication in one of the  
universities in Melbourne, Australia

Current Job: In a multinational internet technology company in Guangzhou

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**Interviewee 8**

Age: 25

Gender: Female

Born in Foshan city, Guangdong province

Education background: Postgraduate student of Museum Curation in one of the  
universities in Guangzhou

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**Interviewee 9**

Age: 14

Gender: Female

Born in Nanjing city, Jiangsu province

Education background: Second-year student in junior high school in Nanjing

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**Interviewee 10**

Age: 14

Gender: Female

Born in Yancheng city, Jiangsu province

Education background: Second-year student in junior high school in Nanjing

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**Interviewee 11**

Age: 15

Gender: Female

Born in Nanjing city, Jiangsu province

Education background: Third-year student in junior high school in Nanjing

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**Interviewee 12**

Age: 15

Gender: Female

Born in Nanjing city, Jiangsu province

Education background: Third-year student in junior high school in Nanjing

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**Interviewee 13**

Age: 24

Gender: Female

Born in Leshan city, Sichuan province

Education background: Postgraduate student in one of the universities in Sweden

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Table 3 Key questions in interview

- 1) Please introduce yourself, including your real name and nickname in Hanfu community, your age, gender, where you grew up and where you now live, your education background.
- 2) How do you know the concept of Hanfu, and when was the first time you wore Hanfu?
- 3) How do you get your Hanfu?
- 4) When and where do you wear Hanfu?
- 5) Do you know the different Hanfu styles or forms? Do you have any requirements for that, or any preferred styles?
- 6) What kind of attitudes do your families and friends have towards your Hanfu hobby?
- 7) When you are in Hanfu, do people around interact with you in a different way? Regarding people's response, is there any change that happens during these years?
- 8) Have you joined any Hanfu-related association? If so, can you share some experience?
- 9) According to your observation, what is the gender ratio and age distribution among Hanfu wearers or lovers in your network?
- 10) Have you participated in Hanfu-related discussions or networking on the Internet?
- 11) Have you heard of the Hanfu revival movement? If so, do you want to share any opinion or experience about this topic?
- 12) Do you have Cosplay costumes, JK, Lolita, Qipao or other kinds of "different" clothing? If so, can you share some experiences?



Figure 1. Hanfu live stream hold by Gongqingtuan Zhongyang Weibo account



Figure 2. A video distinguishes Hanfu and Hanbok on Bilibili<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Available at: < <https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV18K4y1S7Vx/> >

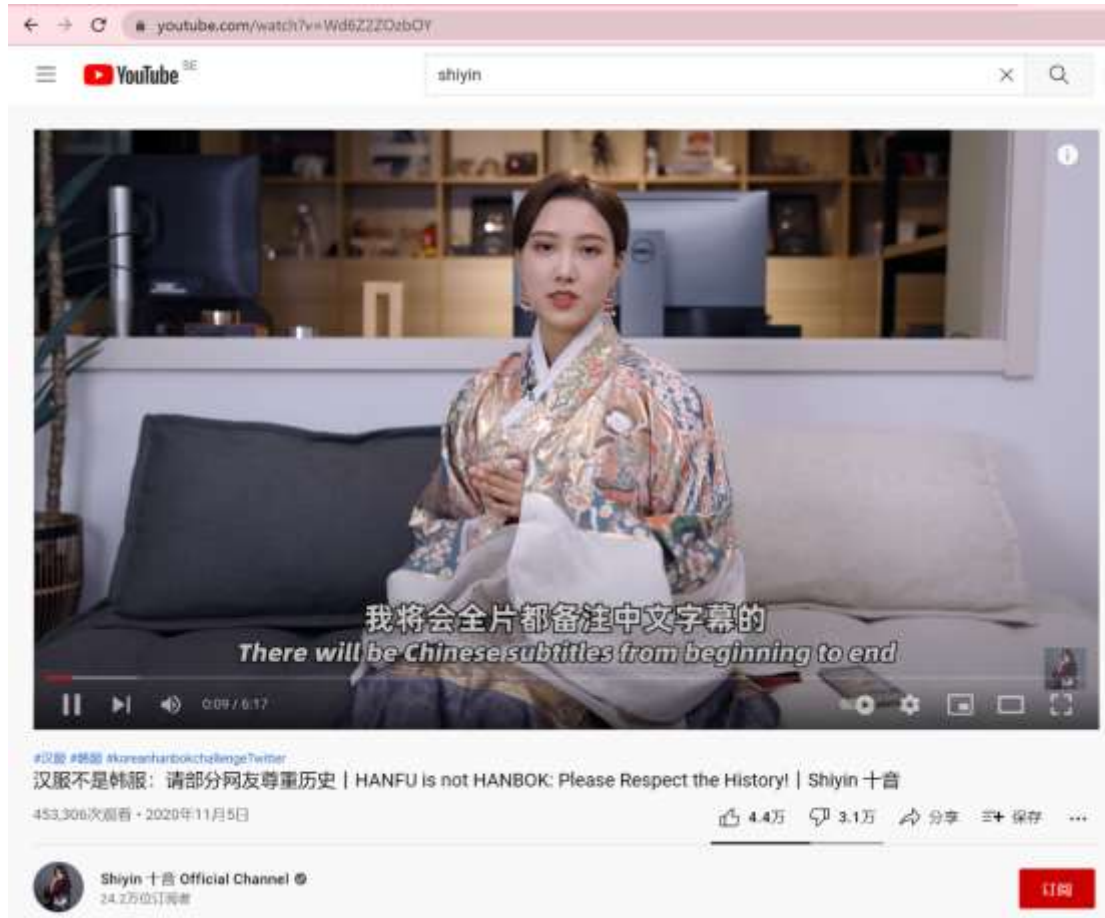


Figure 3. A video (uploaded by the same vlogger) distinguishes Hanfu and Hanbok on YouTube<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wd6Z2ZOzbOY>>



盗发视频还说我们是印度演员? 我们是中国人

107.8万播放 · 1679弹幕 2020-07-17 10:03:08



Figure 4<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> A video shows an online debate about foreigner's misunderstanding of Hanfu. Available at: <<https://www.bilibili.com/s/video/BV1YK411J7oc>>.

The case was a Hanfu promotion video was thought to be from Indian culture on Twitter, which made Chinese netizen dissatisfied. The screenshot picture is from the video on Bilibili. My translation for the title of this video: They stolen the video also said that we are Indian actors? We are Chinese. When I access it on 2021 April 5th, the play times is 1.078 million and 93,000 people like the attitude of claiming it is a Chinese custom culture promotion video.

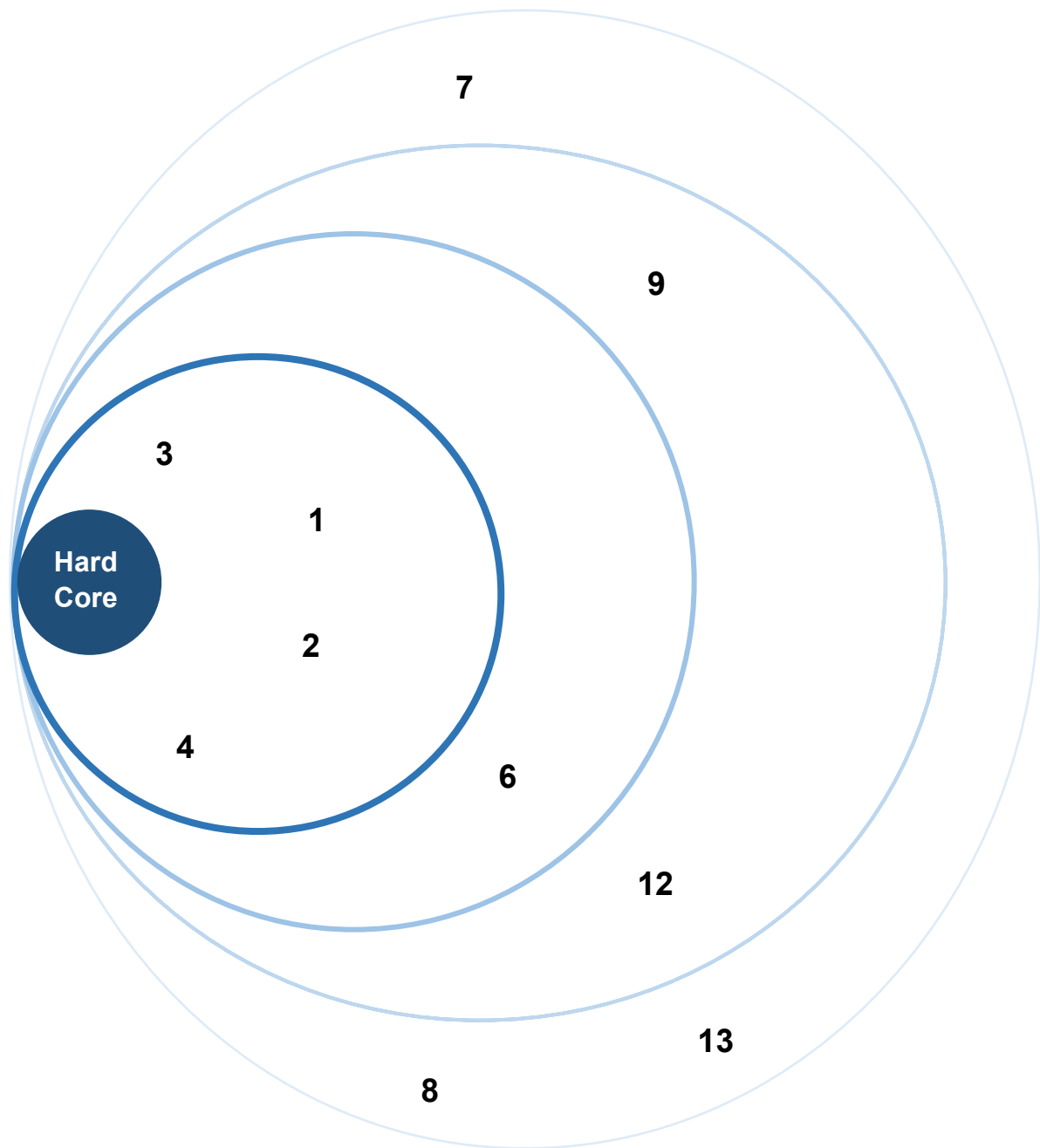


Figure 5. The depth of Interviewees' involvement with Hanfu<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Note: I made this figure myself and tried to visualize that, within these circles, the more distant the name is from the "hardcore", the less connected the person is to the core Hanfu culture and community.