Large Print Guide
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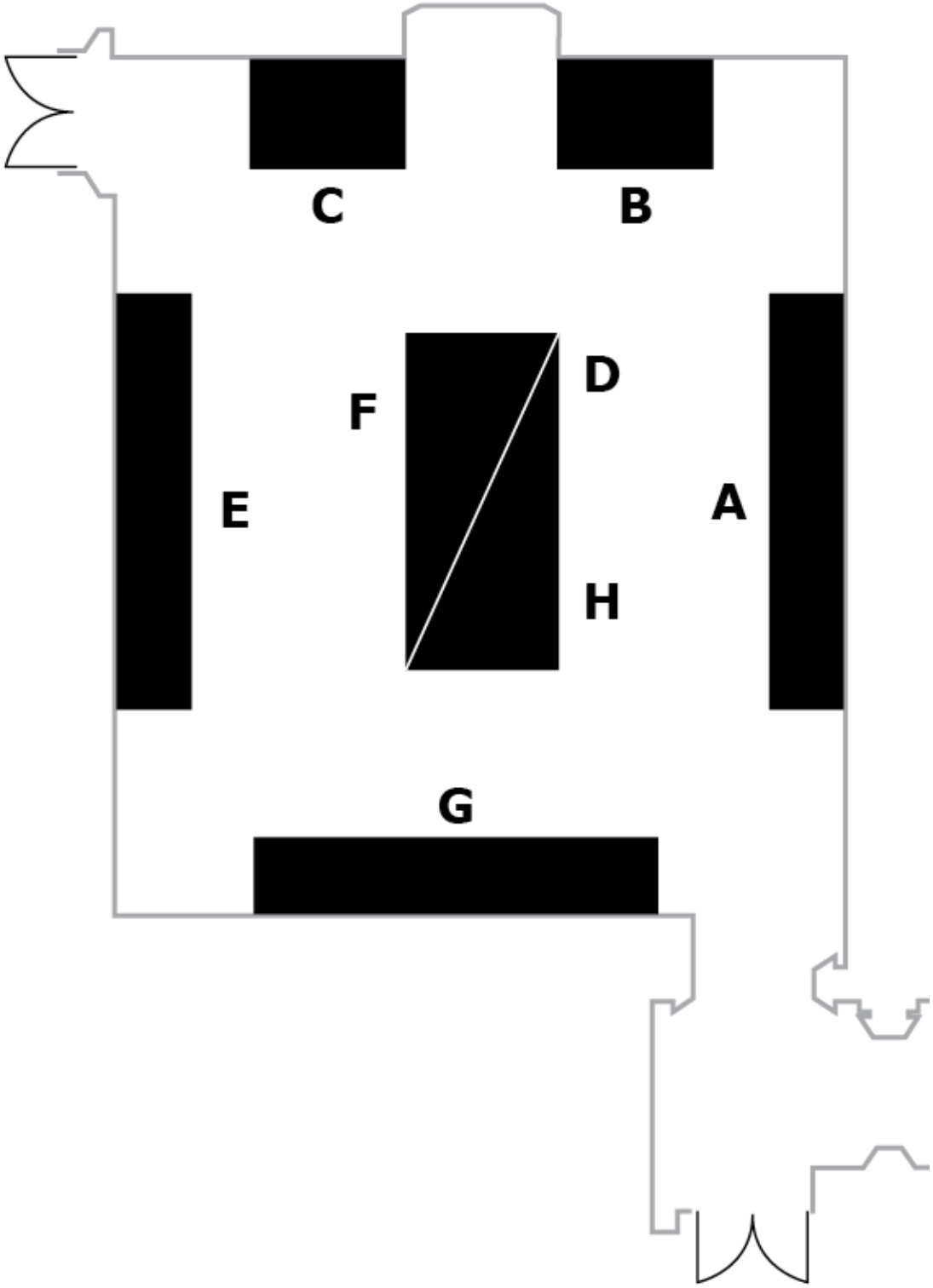
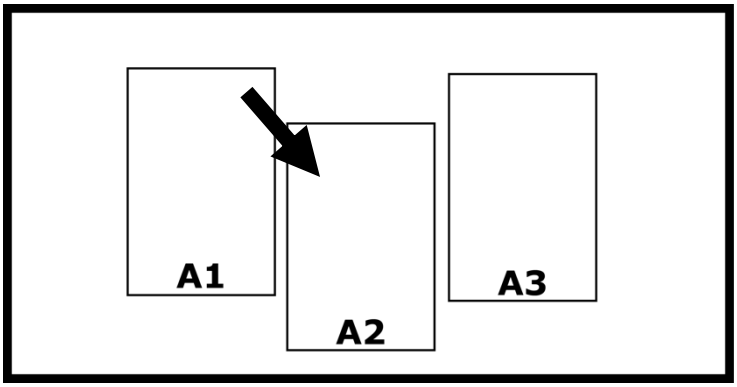
Fashion & Textiles

Level 3
Permanent Galleries
Materials & Design

Floorplan of Gallery and User Guide



How to read display case and floorplans



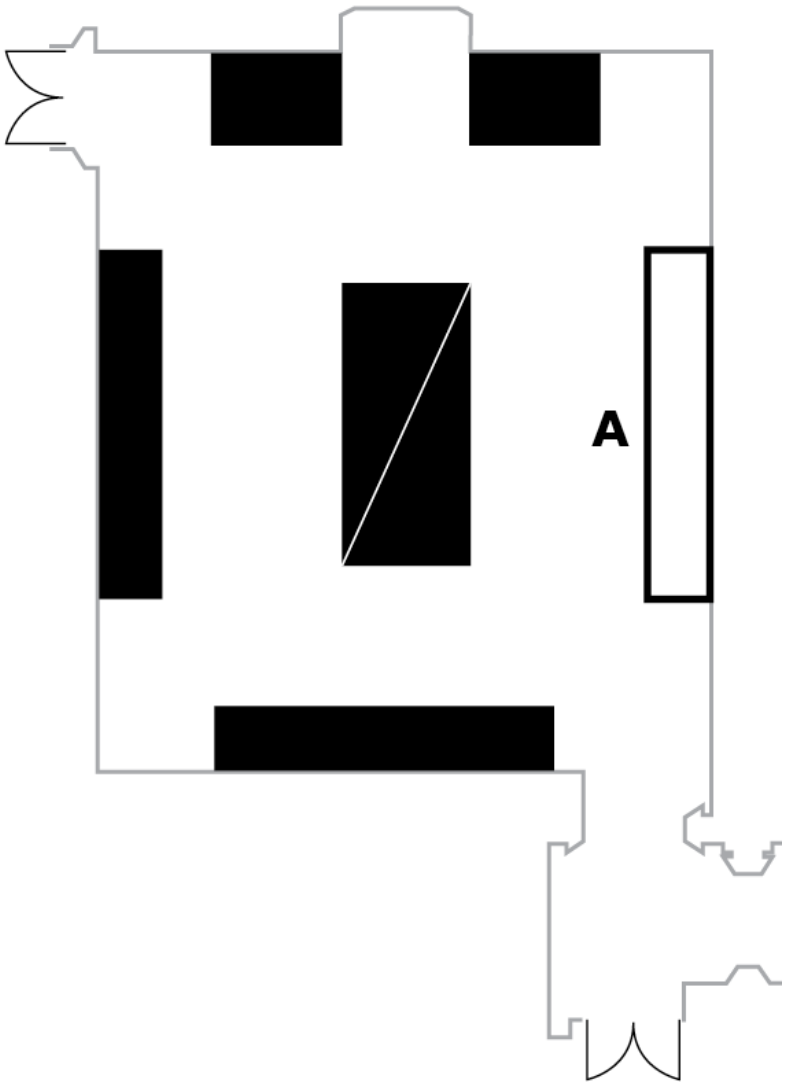
To find object label text, match A2 to A2, then A3 to A3, and so on.

A2

Court robe (chaopao 朝袍) with dragons, for a man

China, mid-19th century

Silk (satin weave, embroidered with silk floss, gold-wrapped threads)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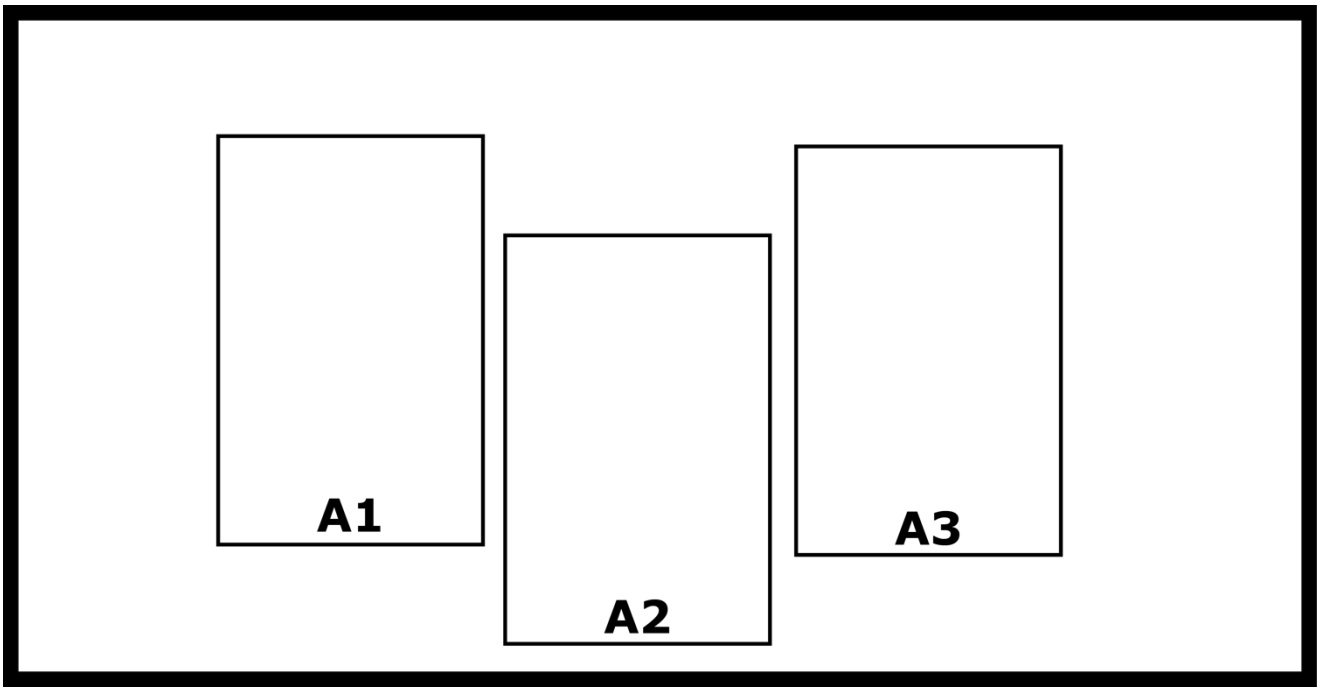

A1
A2
A3

A1

Court robe (chaopao 朝袍) with dragons, for a woman

China, mid- or late 19th century

Silk (tapestry weave), gold-wrapped threads

Women's court robes differ from men's in shape. They have raised shoulder seams, extra sleevebands at elbow level, and a continuous design from neck to hem. Women wore them under a sleeveless vest.

The Regulations stated that the colour and dragon designs on women's robes should be similar to those allowed for their husband's rank. Brown was considered one of five shades of yellow for royals, and assigned to consorts of first and second-rank princes.

A2

Court robe (chaopao 朝袍) with dragons, for a man

China, mid-19th century
Silk (satin weave, embroidered with silk floss, gold-wrapped threads)

Court robes were worn for the most formal occasions — sacrificial ceremonies and court audiences. Manchu innovations include the distinctive narrowing at the waist, making this one-piece gown look like a two-piece bodice and skirt. Also the non-functional square patch near the right hip (perhaps originally to hide fastenings or a scabbard slide).

The Regulations reserved the blue-black colour and four-clawed, front-facing and profile dragons for nobles and higher-ranking officials. Nineteenth-century changes on the robe displayed here include the fully decorated bodice

and inclusion of roundels and five-clawed dragons, which previously would have been reserved for the imperial family and the emperor.

A3

Robe with nine dragons (longpao 龙袍) and Twelve Imperial Symbols, for a man

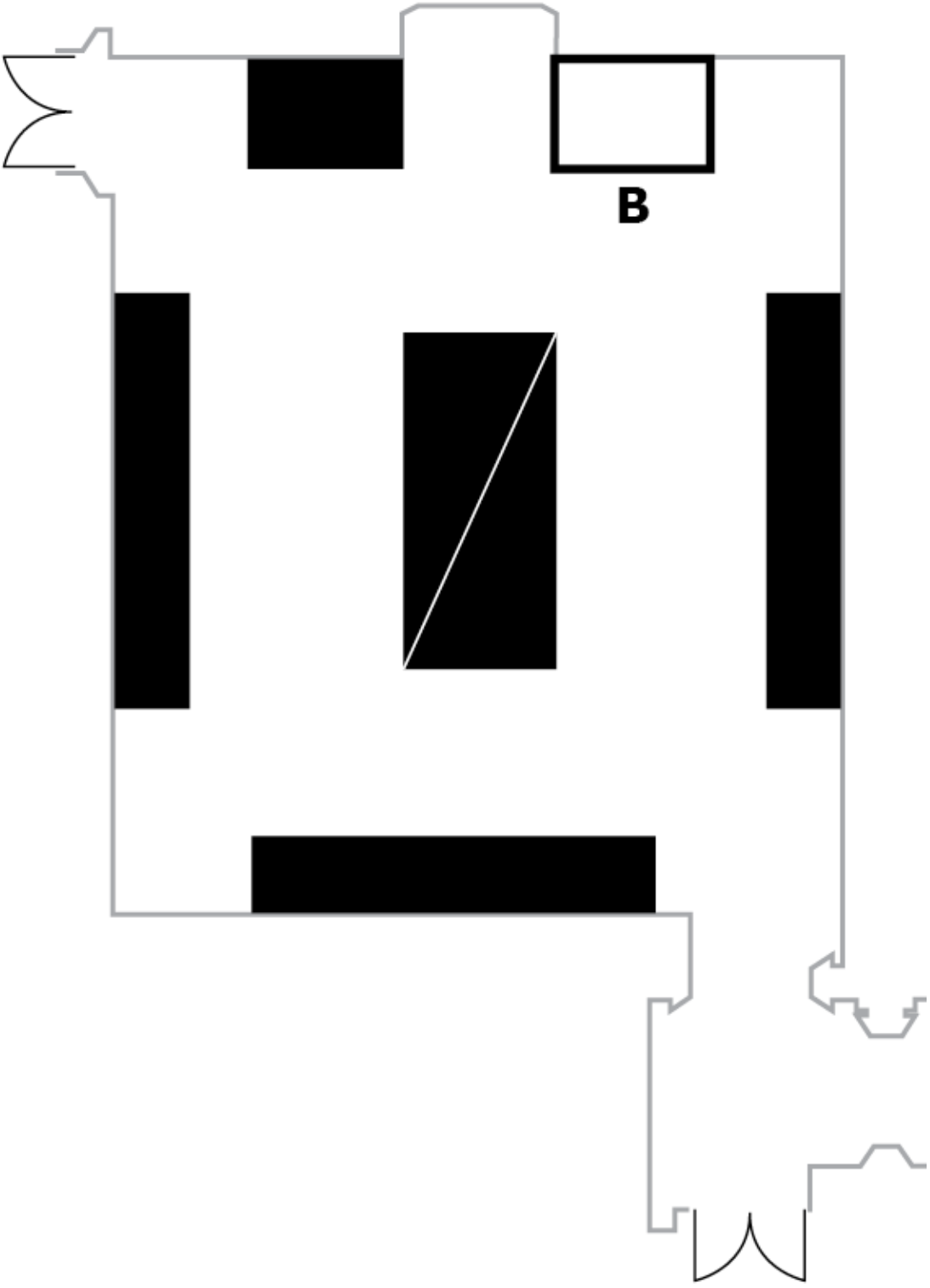
China

Silk (tapestry weave), silk floss, gold-wrapped threads

1760–95

Festive robes like this one show the emperor as the “Son of Heaven”, ruling with Heaven’s mandate. In the Chinese world view, his proper conduct was essential to ensure peace and harmony. This bright yellow shade (minghuang) was reserved for the emperor, empress, and empress dowager.

Here the emperor is represented by nine five-clawed dragons, rising above and controlling the universe, represented by the swirling clouds, and the waves and mountains at the hem. The Twelve Symbols can be seen at the neck — the sun, moon, constellation, mountains; at the waist — fu symbol (亞), axe, pair of dragons, pheasant; and at the knees — water weeds, libation cups, flames, millet.


B

B

Semi-formal robe (jifupao 吉服袍), for a woman

China, mid-19th century

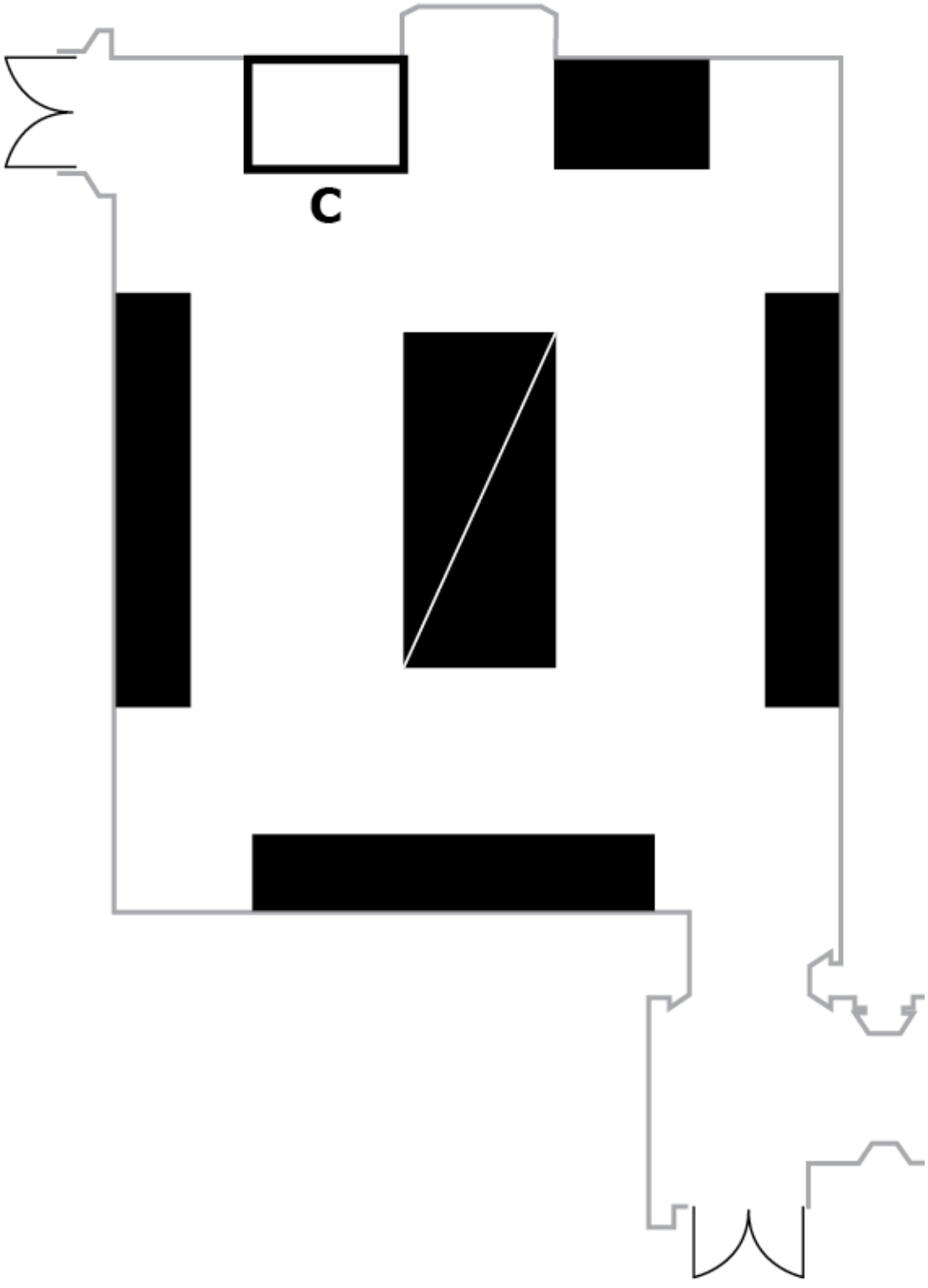
Silk (tapestry weave), gold-wrapped threads, fur, paint

Womens' festive robes feature a variety of Chinese auspicious designs (beyond dragons) with associated meanings. Here, eight roundels contain the Eight Buddhist Emblems (wheel of the law, canopy, fish, jar, lotus, eternity knot, conch shell, umbrella) interspersed with pairs of butterflies. Red was associated with the fire element and happiness, and regarded, since the Ming dynasty, as a lucky colour for major family celebrations, such as weddings.

Even numbers — especially eight — were also considered lucky. Enlarged horsehoof cuffs, like the ones on this robe, were in vogue from the

Daoguang period (1820–50). Paint was used to add shading and detail to this finely executed robe (painting to add details was popular in the 19th century).

The fabric is woven in a sophisticated technique called kesi ("cut silk"). The colour areas are each woven with a separate section of yarn, making them look like they have been cut out of the overall structure of the weave.


C

C

Robe with chrysanthemums and longevity characters

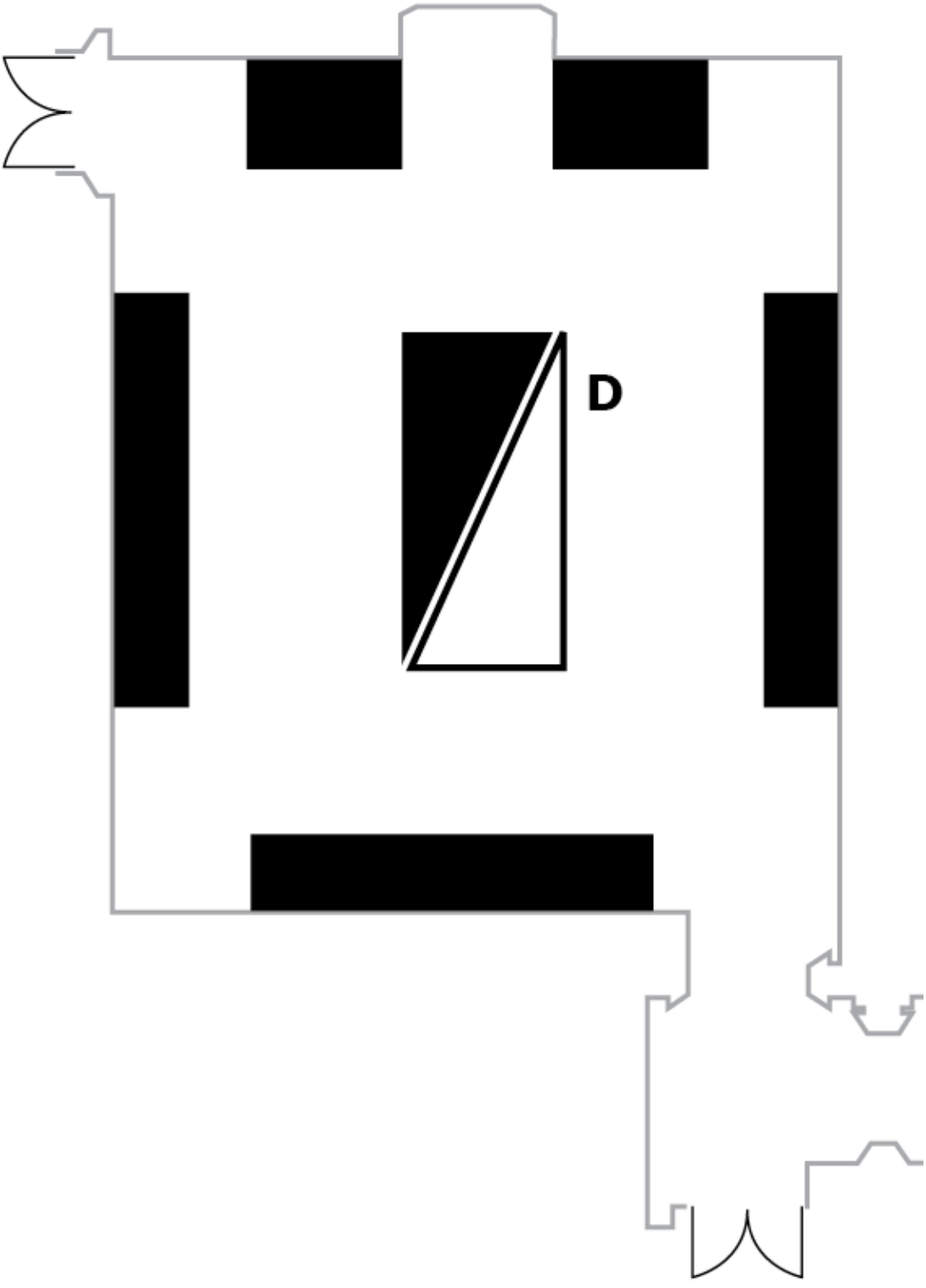
China, 1890–1905

Silk (tapestry weave), silk floss, gold-wrapped threads

The look of this robe reflects new colour trends and Western technological innovations. Bright synthetic dyes like the ones used here were invented in England in 1856, and brought into China by 1871. The decoration includes bats, symbolic of happiness, which is multiplied by the wan characters (卍,”10,000”) on the sceptres. The qipao evolved from casual-wear robes like this.

This style was favoured by Empress Cixi. A trendsetter concerned with appearance, Cixi (who effectively controlled China from 1861 as

Empress Dowager) favoured pastel shades, including lilac. Symbols of long life, like chrysanthemums and the shou characters, were used on her casual wear. Floral features changed with the seasons, chrysanthemums being a preferred representation of autumn.


D

D.1

Jacket with figurative scenes (ao 袄)

China, late Qing dynasty
Silk (satin weave) embroidered with silk floss, gold-wrapped threads

D.2

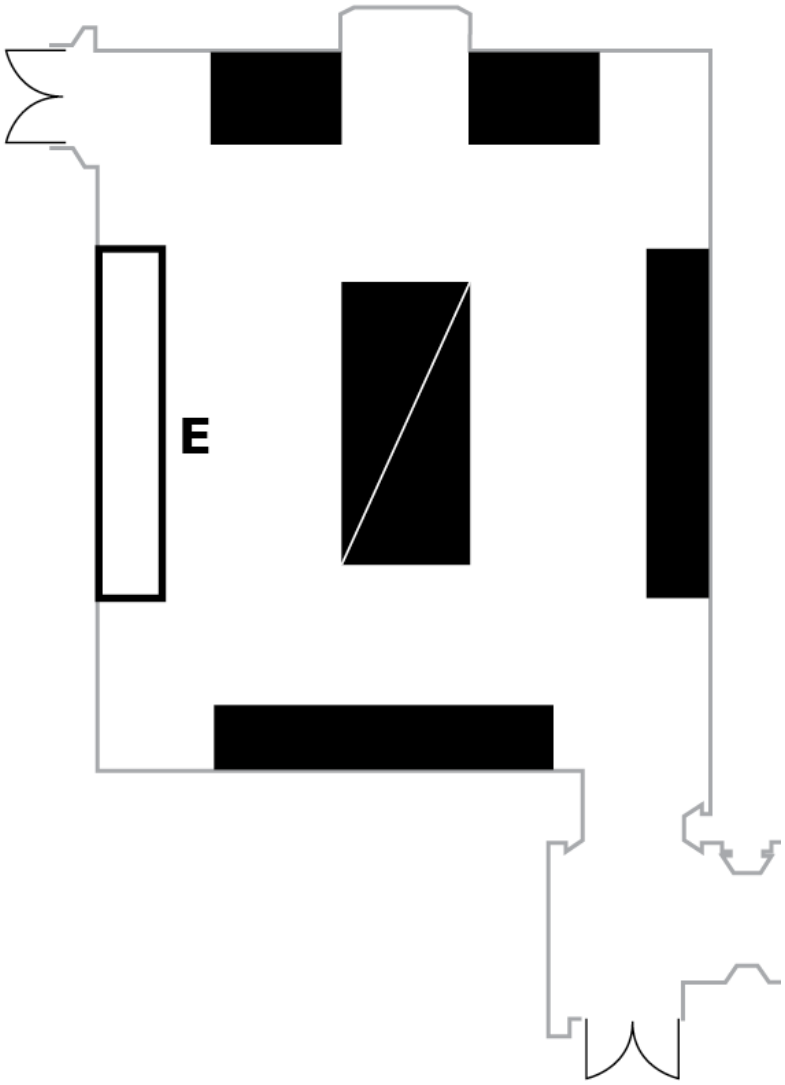
Skirt with figurative scenes (qun 裙)

China, late Qing dynasty
Silk (tapestry weave), silk floss, gold-wrapped threads, cotton, paint

The lively scenes on this ensemble were probably inspired by wood-cut illustrations in Chinese novels. The steamships and foreigners in Western clothes would have been interpreted as exotic and novel.

Semi-formal dress like this for Han women in the 19th century was still based on Ming-dynasty

styles. The skirt is in two parts, with the decoration below where the jacket hangs. This ao is one of two jacket styles (the gua jacket has a centre opening).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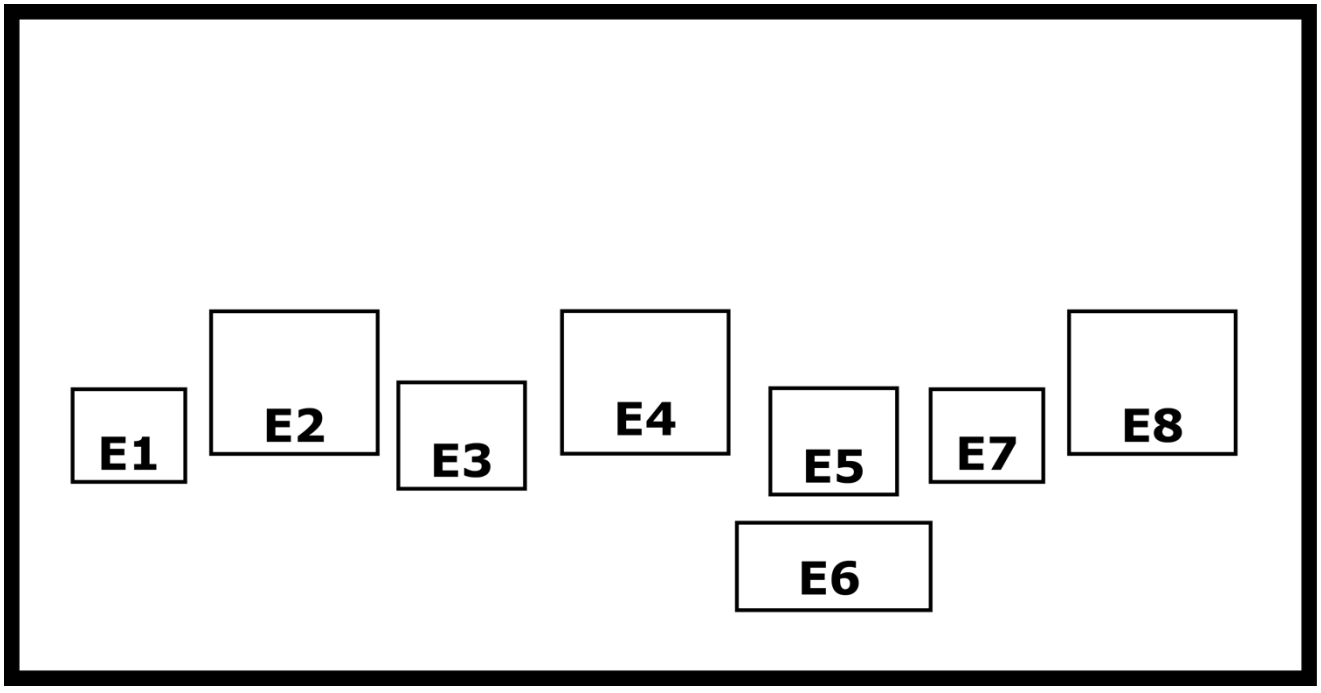
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E8

E1

Vest with grapes

China, late 19th century

Silk (satin weave) embroidered with gold-and-silver-wrapped threads

Grapes — a preferred motif of Empress Cixi — symbolise abundance. Here they are made with gold-and-silver-wrapped threads “couched” to the surface (stitched down with smaller threads). A vest like this would have been worn over a casual robe. The flat, gilded, Western-style buttons are decorated with the Chinese character for double happiness (囍 xi).

E2

Jacket with peonies and butterflies

China, mid-19th century
Silk (satin) embroidered with gold-wrapped threads

Lively pairs of butterflies (symbolising conjugal bliss) fluttering amidst lush peony sprays (wealth and power) carry auspicious meanings for the wearer. The decoration of gold threads on a black background suggests that this was meant for a festive occasion.

E3

Vest, for a woman

China, late 19th or early 20th century
Silk gauze, embroidered with gold- and silver-wrapped threads

Lotus flowers and leaves, made with gold and silver-wrapped threads couched (stitched) on the

surface, are surrounded by a matching band, including the shou character, for longevity. The lotus, one of the four Chinese Flowers of the Seasons, and the light gauze fabric suggest this vest was intended for summer.

E4

Riding jacket with plant design, for a man

China, late 19th century

Silk (damask)

This riding jacket features a side closure; centre closures became the standard later, in the Republican period (post 1912). Large, naturalistic depictions of plants growing from the ground were common in the last decades of the Qing dynasty.

E5

Vest, for a man

China, late 19th century

Silk damask with cotton lining

The L-shaped overlapping closure on this vest is called “pipa-style”, because the shape resembles the pipa stringed instrument. Vests that close like this, with standup collars, were fashionable beginning in the late 19th century. The inspiration was, again, Manchu riding garments.

The wan character (卍, “countless”) repeated in the background signifies good fortune. Chinese vests have deep sleeve openings, and can be grouped by the way they open. Besides pipa-styled, there is centre, right, horizontal, and V-shaped.

E6

Detachable queue

China, late Qing dynasty

Human hair

At the start and end of the Qing dynasty, choice of hairstyle was of critical importance for men. Early on, Qing rulers demanded that Han men demonstrate their loyalty by adopting the Manchu hairstyle of a half-shaved head with a long queue. By the end of the dynasty, Chinese reformers disillusioned with the government and inspired by Western concepts of a democratic republic cut off their queue as an act of resistance. With the fall of the Qing dynasty, queues were banned, and they quickly fell out of fashion. The queue, like foot-binding, had come to be thought of as backward.

This queue is said to have come from the family of Hong Jun, Chinese emissary to several

European countries (1887–90). A detachable queue was used to creatively negotiate the boundaries of patriotism and modernity. It could be worn selectively, depending on the situation and company.

E7

Vest, for a man

China, late 19th or early 20th century

Silk (damask)

Late 19th-century trends evident in this flamboyant vest are the large size of the embroidered floral (peony) motifs, and the multiple edge trimmings, featuring the cloud and thunder pattern (called “key fret” in the West).

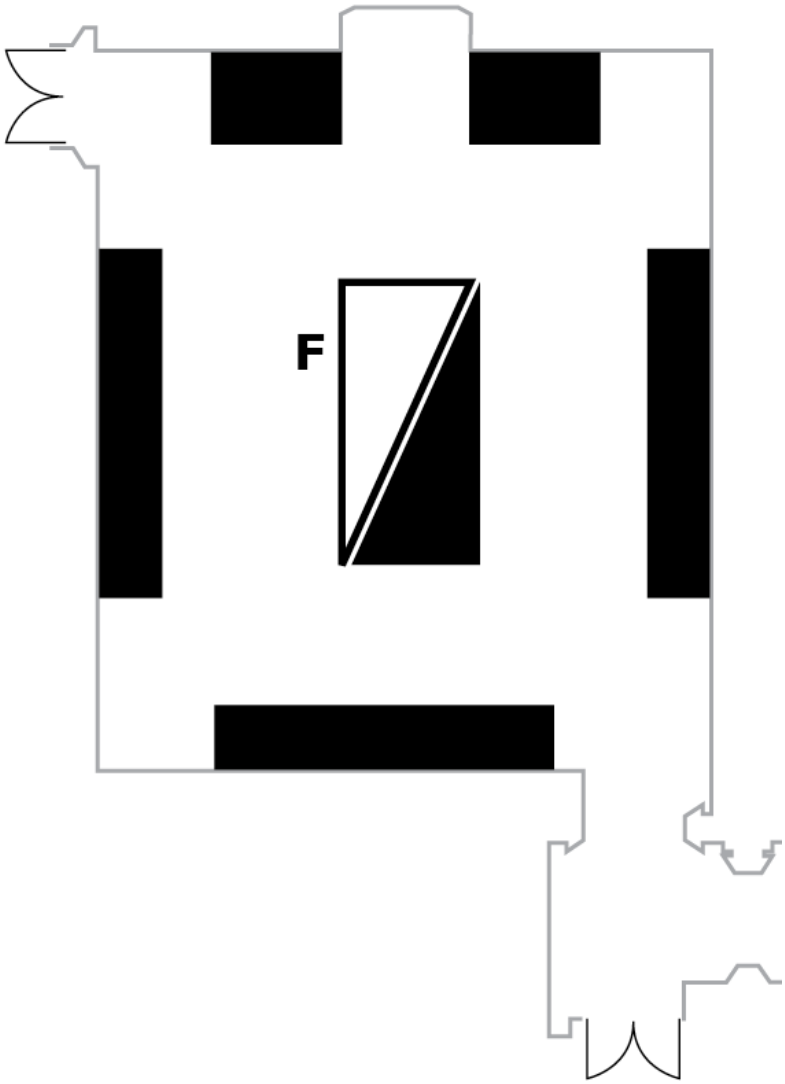
E8

Jacket with roundels, for a man

China, possibly Beijing, mid-19th century

Silk (damask)

Jackets like this, worn over a long robe, were considered appropriate for men for more formal, but non-official occasions. Confronting dragons are delicately woven in the roundels. This design indicates that this was for a member of the court or an official. Typical late Qing designs include floral and longevity patterns.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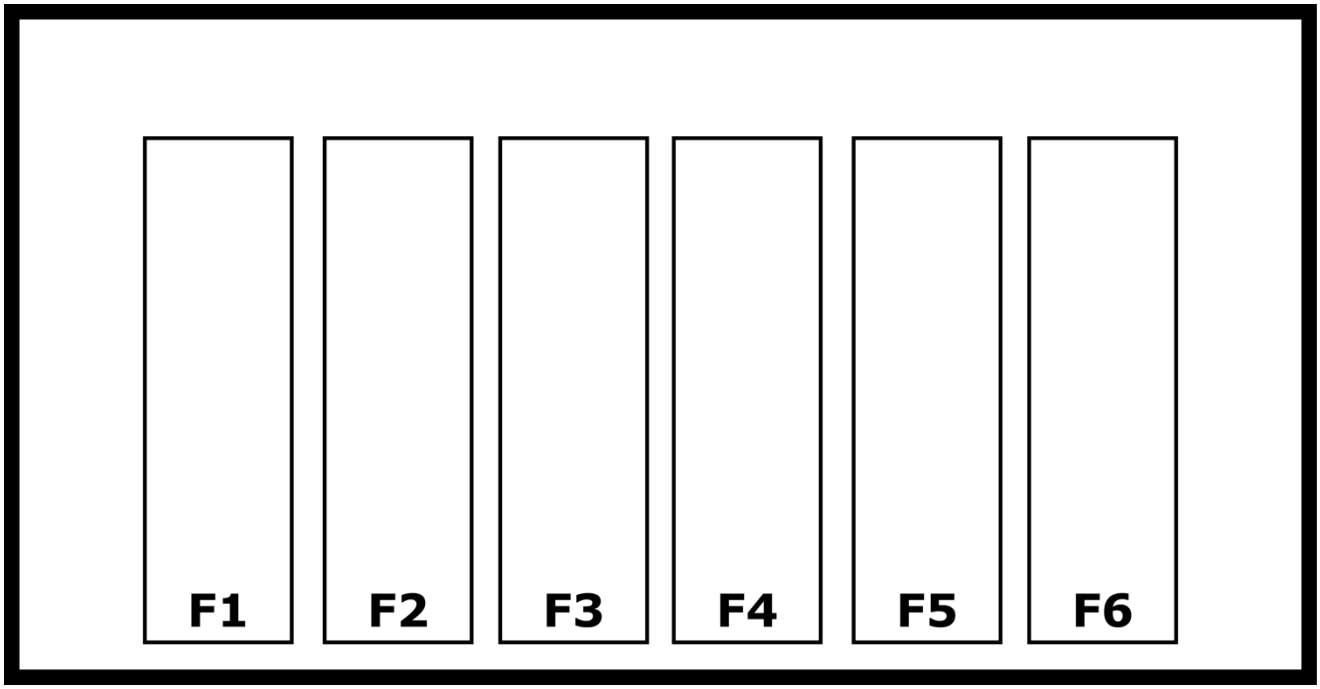
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F6

F1.1

Blouse

China, 1910s

Silk satin embroidered with silk floss

F1.2

Skirt

China, 1910s

Silk satin embroidered with silk floss

This light pink ensemble is an elegant cross between trends and tradition. Like Qing dress, its main decoration is auspicious imagery — a pair of phoenixes perched on rockery with large lotuses rising above. The high collar, with four frog fastenings, is the modern, trendy part, as is the one piece skirt, fastened at the top with buttons.

A painterly effect is achieved through delicate shades of black and white embroidery, accented by splashes of pink and light green.

F2.1

Blouse with “sycee” collar

Possibly Beijing, China, 1910s

Silk

F2.2

Cropped pants

Possibly Beijing, China, 1910s

Silk

Popular in the 1910s, this ensemble has cropped trousers and a tight-fitting jacket with cropped sleeves and an extremely high collar. Called a “sycee” or “yuanbao” collar 元宝领, the shape resembles Chinese gold and silver ingots.

Especially high ones could extend over the cheeks.

Exposed skin and the subtle, exuberant peonies executed in openwork would make a woman wearing this seem quite sensual. The smoky grey colour was fashionable at the time.

This ensemble is said to have belonged to a courtesan named Sun Shi (1890–1928), who married a wealthy Manchu man.

F3.1

Blouse

China, 1920s

European silk (brocade)

F3.2

Skirt

China, 1920s

European cotton (machine lace)

The blouse was tailored in China using an imported silk fabric with a bright art nouveau design of flowers and vines. The skirt fabric was probably made in Europe on a lace-making machine. Bobbed hair with bangs would have completed this light and innocent look.

F4.1

Blouse

China, 1920s.

European silk (brocade), lambswool lining

F4.2

Skirt

China, 1900s or 1910s

Silk (satin), cotton

The hybrid style of this “New Civilised Dress” ensemble reflects Qing traditions and Western influences. Roses, embroidered at the border, were popular in women’s fashion at this time, symbolising romance, free love, and modernity. Tradition echoes in the tightly pleated, two-piece skirt, decorated with peonies. Strong, red floral details contrast dramatically against the background of fine, cracked ice design on the blouse.

F5.1

Blouse

Europe, 1920s

Silk (jacquard weave)

F5.2

Skirt

China, 1920s

Silk gauze, cotton

Popular from the 1920s, the “New Civilised Dress”, as this ensemble would have been called, reflects cross-cultural influences and modern inventions. The blouse, tailored in China, was made from an imported, translucent Western fabric with large, raised (brocaded) floral designs.

Flared “trumpet sleeves” echo Western bishop sleeves of the same period. The shortened skirt — to mid-calf — allowed for more freedom of

movement. Compared to the colourful skirts in Han ensembles of the Qing period, this black skirt with elastic bands displays simple elegance.

F6.1

Blouse

China, 1920s

Cotton (voile, with machine embroidery)

F6.2

Skirt

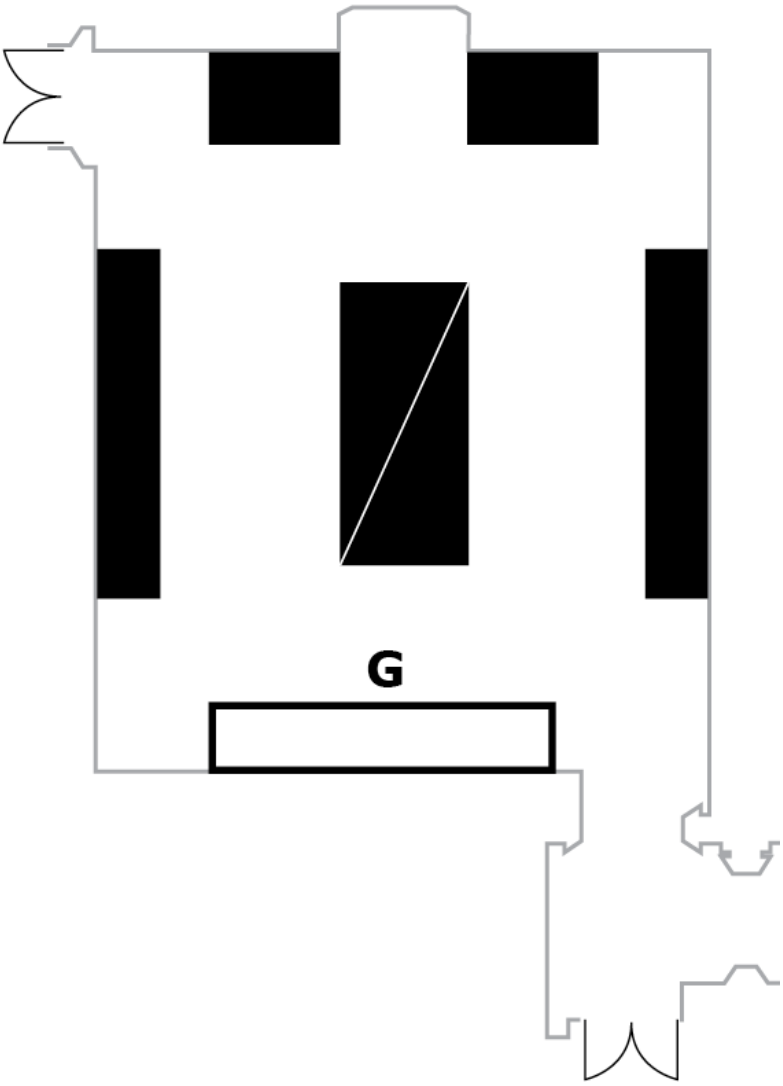
China, 1920s

Silk (satin embroidery), silk floss,
gold-wrapped threads

Translucent fabrics, like the one used for this blouse, were first used in China in the mid-1920s. A white slip would be worn underneath. The Western, art nouveau decoration is an example of early machine embroidery. Like Han

skirts of the Qing period, the skirt panels display embroidered, auspicious floral imagery.

A woman wearing this outfit would have been admired by some people for being alluring and liberated, while traditionalists would have seen her as controversial.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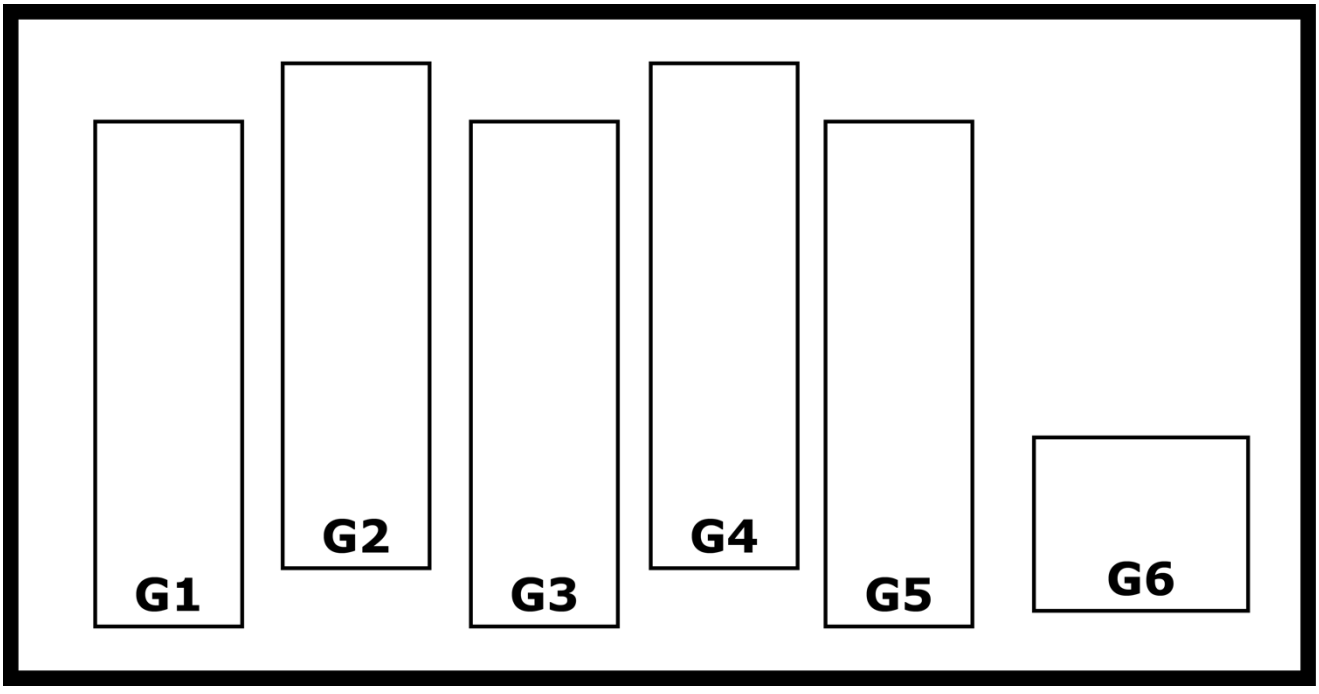
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G6

G1

Qipao

China, Tianjin, 1950s

Synthetic machine-made lace (Schiffli), synthetic lining

This qipao was made with Schiffli lace, a machine-made lace invented in Switzerland. The patterns are first embroidered onto a prepared cloth. Then the unembroidered portions are dissolved away in a chemical bath. The remaining embroidered patterns are then attached as decoration to a new fabric.

Qipaos of the 1950s used darts (folds) to give shape, especially at the bust. The sleeves were cut separately from the shoulders and sewn to the armholes.

G2

Qipao

China, 1930s

Silk velvet (devoré velvet), silk lining

This elegant qipao was made with devoré velvet. A chemical was applied to areas of the blended fabric to burn out patterns. The technique was invented in France (devoré, "to devour") at the turn of the 20th century, and came into vogue in the 1920s in China.

G3

Qipao

China, 1930s

Silk velvet (devoré velvet), silk lining

Large floral designs like on this black qipao were popular in the 1930s. Sleeves were shortened to "cap sleeves", and the cut was close to the

natural curves of the body, including unbound breasts.

Compare the upper body of this qipao to the one on the left. In the 1920s, women wore chest corsets under qipaos to create the impression of a flat top.

G4

Qipao

China, Shanghai, late 1920s

Silk (brocade)

The sleek geometric designs and the bold colours here show the influence of art deco style. The wide sleeves and straight cut are characteristic of 1920s qipaos. But the button closures stop at the waist, which is unusual — the woman would step inside, as if putting on a Western evening dress.

G5

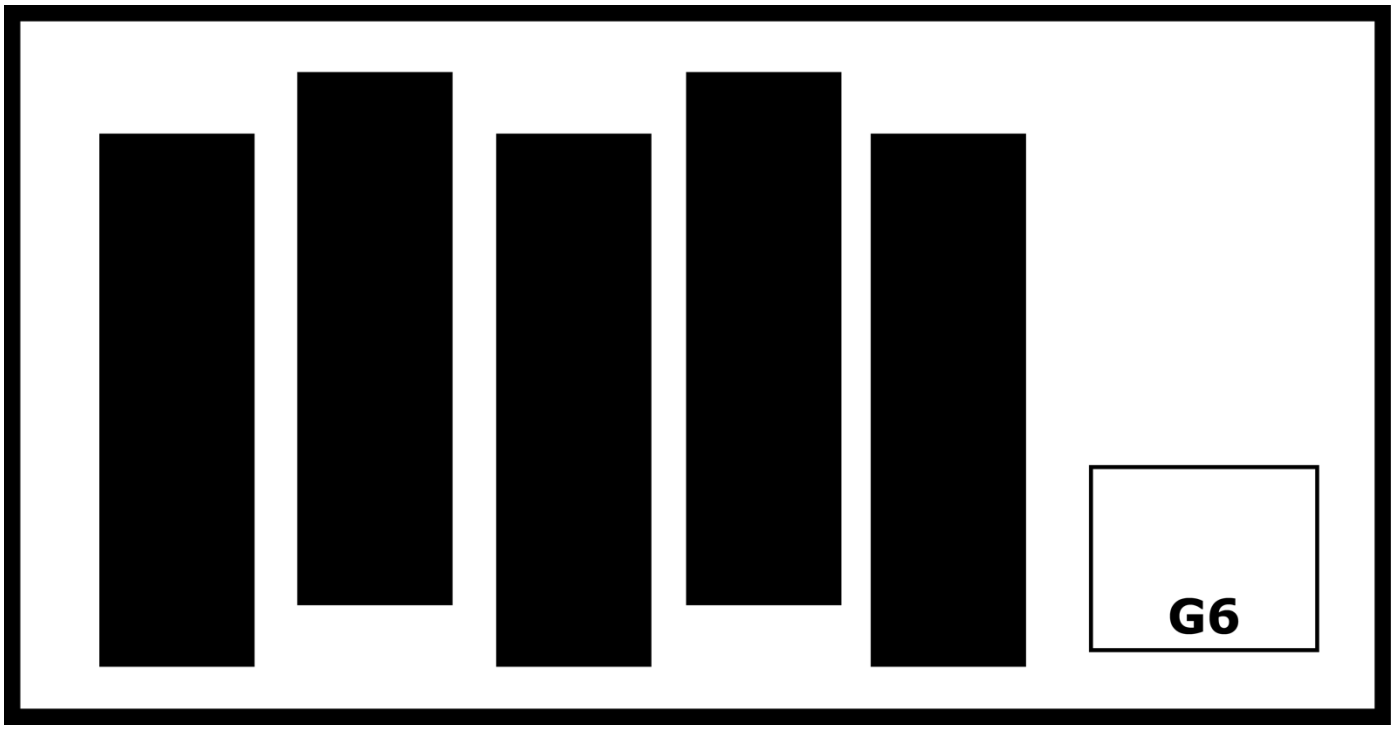
Qipao

China, 1910s or 1920s

Silk

This qipao reflects foreign influences and represents a departure from Qing fashion. The surface is plain, with limited decoration.

The Cyrillic characters here do not form actual words — perhaps indicating the wearer's appreciation of them as an exotic novelty. Cyrillic is used in Slavic languages like Russian, and many Russians lived in Shanghai by the 1930s.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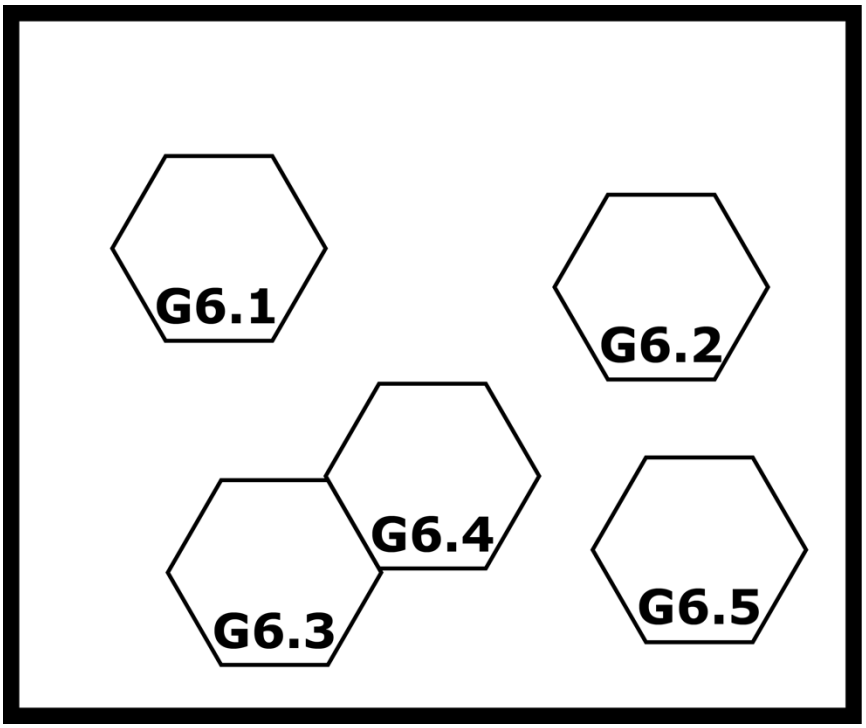

G6.1
G6.2
G6.4
G6.3
G6.5

G6.1

Two pairs of high-heeled shoes, for bound feet

China, probably Shanxi province, late Qing dynasty

Silk embroidery, cotton lining, metallic studs

G6.2

Platform shoes, for a Manchu woman

China, late Qing dynasty

Wood, silk, leather, cotton, paint

These shoes have what are called “flower pot” soles.

G6.3

Shoes with stripes, for bound feet

China, early 20th century

Leather (calfskin),

sheepskin lining, metal

G6.4

Shoes with bows, for bound feet

China, early 20th century

Leather (calfskin), metal, cotton, bamboo

G6.5

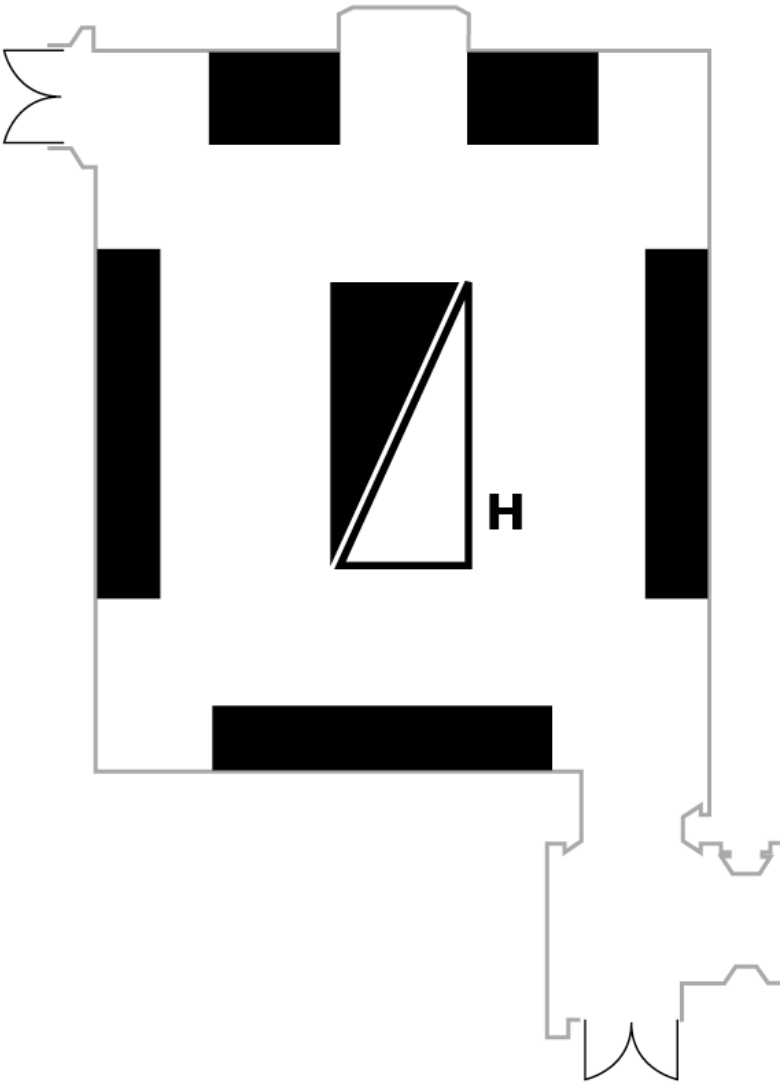
Platform shoes, for a Manchu woman

China, late Qing dynasty

Wood, silk, leather,

cotton, paint

The soles of these shoes resemble Chinese "sycee" gold and silver ingots.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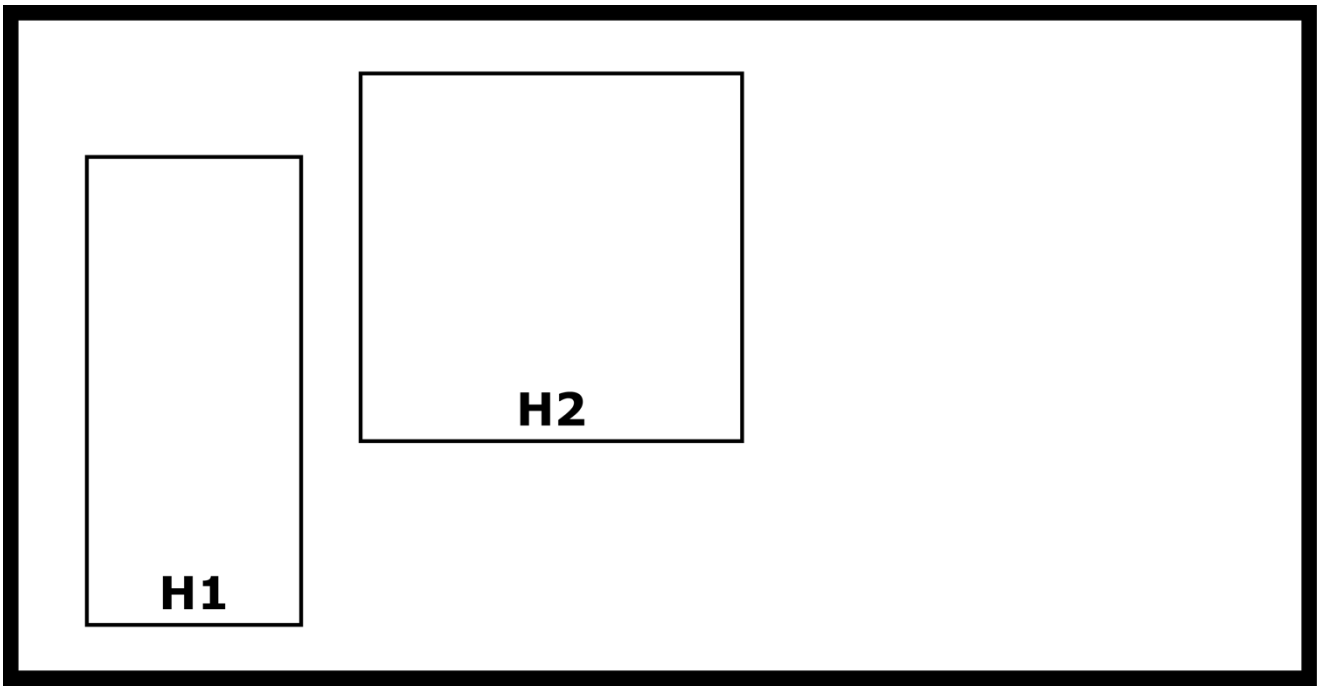
H2
H1

H1

Zhongshan zhuang (中山装 Mao suit)

Hongdu Company
China, Beijing, 1975
Wool with synthetic lining

The personality cult around the supreme political leader Mao Zedong led to him being regarded as a fashion icon. Artworks and songs celebrated the “Great Leader”, and the grey suit he wore at Tiananmen Square on 1 October 1949 to announce the victory of the Communist Party became instantly popular.

Called a “Mao suit” in the West, in Mandarin it is zhongshan zhuang, acknowledging the first man to wear it — Dr Sun Yat Sen (popularly known as Sun Zhongshan in China). Mao copied the style to claim the political legitimacy of Sun, the widely respected “Father of the Republic of modern China”. Mao’s interpretation, like this

suit, was modified by master tailors at the Hongdu Company, Beijing. It features a larger collar, sharpened collar tips, and a looser fit.

This national dress symbolising Chinese modernity relates to suits worn in Japan and by the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, with incorporations of Western military dress, such as a turned-down collar and the four pockets. The five buttons supposedly signified government branches, the four pockets representing virtues of propriety, justice, honesty, and humility.

H2

Panel depicting revolutionary workers

Suzhou Embroidery Research Institute

China, Suzhou, early 1970s

Cotton, silk floss (counted thread embroidery)

Idealised images communicating Communist ideology and ideas of Mao Zedong were spread throughout China. Common depictions included workers, peasants, and soldiers gathered in solidarity, and a beaming Mao surrounded by landscapes of abundance. The panels were a specialty of the Suzhou Embroidery Research Institute, established in 1954 to promote cultural and national pride. They were displayed in official buildings and given to foreign dignitaries.

They also show the uniformity of fashions of the day. Here workers unite under the slogan “Seize the Revolution — Promote Production”. The main figure in blue wears a red armband with the

words “Rebel Group”, while the advancing workers proudly wave “Little Red Books” — Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong.