

Visualization of Ar Ros's Chinese Cheongsam Through Fashion Photography as a Cultural Representation of the Bakar Tongkang Ritual

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This creation research aims to visualize Ar Ros's Cheongsam through fashion photography in order to represent its aesthetic characteristics, cultural identity, and visual appeal. **Method:** The creation process involved observation, literature study, interviews, concept development, model selection, studio lighting arrangement, and digital imaging techniques. The visual concept was developed by combining Chinese cultural elements, symbolic color schemes, traditional properties, and controlled studio lighting. **Results:** The results consist of twenty-four fashion photography works that successfully present the beauty of the Cheongsam while communicating the cultural values embedded in the Bakar Tongkang motif. **Novelty:** The novelty of this work lies in the integration of local cultural identity and fashion photography as a medium for cultural promotion, visual documentation, and cultural preservation within the contemporary creative industry.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a nation characterized by its cultural diversity, which emerges from the continuous interaction among various tribes, ethnicities, languages, and traditions. This diversity constitutes a cultural wealth that must be meticulously preserved and safeguarded as an integral component of the national identity. Amid the rapid advancement of globalization and modernization, numerous forms of cultural heritage face significant challenges in maintaining their existence; consequently, comprehensive preservation efforts capable of reaching a broader societal demographic are imperative [1].

One community that has made substantial contributions to the development of Indonesian culture is the Chinese populace. The presence of the Chinese community has profoundly influenced not only the economic sector but also the social, cultural, artistic, and traditional aspects that have flourished across various regions [2]. A notable region with deep-rooted ties to Chinese culture is Bagan Siapiapi, located in the Rokan Hilir Regency of Riau Province. This area is recognized for its extensive history regarding the settlement and development of the Chinese community, and it continues to preserve various cultural traditions inherited across generations [3].

A prominent cultural tradition that serves as a primary identity marker for the Chinese community in Bagan Siapiapi is the Bakar Tongkang ritual. This tradition holds profound historical, social, and spiritual significance for the local inhabitants [4]. The intrinsic cultural values embedded within this ritual have subsequently become a rich

source of inspiration across various artistic disciplines, notably in the fields of fashion and photography.

The Cheongsam attire represents a quintessential symbol of Chinese culture that continues to endure and evolve in contemporary times [5]. Throughout its development, various designers have innovated its form, color, and motifs without eradicating the inherent cultural identity attached to the garment. One such designer who has advanced this innovation is Ar Ros, through the creation of Cheongsam dresses featuring the Bakar Tongkang ritual motif. Ar Ros's creations synthesize elements of Chinese culture with the local identity of Bagan Siapiapi, thereby generating a distinct and unique visual character [6].

Despite possessing robust cultural and aesthetic values, the visual representation of Ar Ros's Cheongsam designs through the medium of fashion photography remains highly limited. The majority of available documentation consists merely of event coverage and personal archives; consequently, the intricate visual details, specific design characteristics, and profound cultural values embedded within the attire have not been optimally communicated to the wider public [7].

Previous research has predominantly examined fashion photography as a promotional medium for fashion products [8]. Conversely, studies utilizing fashion photography as a medium for the representation of local culture remain relatively scarce, particularly those highlighting the Cheongsam dress with the Bakar Tongkang ritual motif as the primary subject of creation. Based on these circumstances, this research aims to produce fashion photography works capable of aesthetically and communicatively representing the visual elegance, cultural identity, and design characteristics of Ar Ros's Cheongsam creations.

The primary issue motivating this research is the lack of professional visual documentation concerning Ar Ros's Cheongsam collection, which incorporates the Bakar Tongkang ritual motif. To date, existing documentation is largely confined to amateur personal records and photographs of ceremonial activities. Consequently, intricate visual elements such as motif complexity, fabric texture, design silhouette, and the inherent symbolic cultural values of the garments have not been optimally captured. This deficiency prevents the aesthetic richness and cultural significance of the collection from being effectively communicated to the wider public.

Furthermore, the Indonesian fashion photography industry remains predominantly oriented toward contemporary global fashion trends, whereas designs rooted in local cultural wisdom are rarely positioned as the primary subjects within professional fashion photography. This issue is compounded by a scarcity of research specifically examining fashion photography as a medium for representing local culture, particularly studies utilizing the Bakar Tongkang-motifed Cheongsam as an object of creative exploration.

Given these circumstances, the urgency of this research lies in the professional documentation of Ar Ros's Cheongsam collection to ensure that its embedded cultural values are preserved and disseminated to a broader audience. High-quality visual documentation is critical for supporting cultural promotion and advancing the local

heritage-based creative industry, while simultaneously providing a foundational reference for future fashion designers and photography practitioners.

Therefore, this study aims to produce fashion photography that aesthetically and communicatively represents the visual elegance, cultural identity, and design characteristics of Ar Ros's Cheongsam. By achieving these objectives, it is anticipated that fashion photography can function as a viable medium for cultural preservation, a form of artistic visual documentation, and an effective instrument for cultural promotion amidst the ongoing currents of modernization and globalization.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a practice-based method for creating fashion photography, encompassing the stages of preparation, design, realization, and presentation. This systematic and sequential approach aligns with standard creation methodologies utilized in the fields of fine arts and design [9]. The preparation phase involved observation, literature reviews, and interviews with key informants knowledgeable about the history of the Cheongsam, Chinese culture, and Ar Ros's creative process in designing garments featuring the Bakar Tongkang ritual motifs. This foundational step was crucial for acquiring comprehensive data and establishing a profound understanding of the subject matter [10].

Observations were conducted on the characteristics of the garments, makeup, accessories, and the visual requirements of the photoshoot to directly capture the visual elements that would serve as the focal point of the photographic work [11]. A literature review was utilized to establish a theoretical framework concerning fashion photography, beauty photography, studio lighting, modeling, and digital imaging. These elements collectively served as technical and conceptual references throughout the creative process [12]. Furthermore, interviews were conducted with Hasan Toyang and Ar Ros to elicit in-depth information regarding the cultural values and design concepts integrated into the Cheongsam garments. Engaging with key subjects facilitates the extraction of qualitative data that cannot be acquired through alternative methodologies [13].

The design phase entailed formulating visual concepts, selecting supporting props and models, developing storyboards, and devising lighting schemes. This comprehensive planning was essential prior to the execution of the photoshoot [14]. The selection of models was meticulously aligned with the visual characteristics of the attire to accurately represent the intended concept, as models play a central role in animating the visual narrative and the character of the garments in fashion photography [8].

The realization phase was executed through studio photoshoots utilizing single-light, two-point, and three-point lighting techniques. These foundational methods are highly effective for establishing dimension, texture, and atmosphere within professional fashion photography [15]. Subsequently, a post-production editing process was conducted using Adobe Photoshop to refine color, contrast, lighting, and visual details while preserving the original character of the subject. Digital manipulation in fashion

photography serves to optimize aesthetic quality without compromising the fundamental essence of the work [16].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The artistic production yielded 24 fashion photography works, prominently featuring Cheongsam garments designed by Ar Ros as the primary subject matter. The complete portfolio was executed through indoor photographic sessions, utilizing a fashion photography framework intended to accentuate the sartorial characteristics, cultural identity, and visual aesthetic values of the attire. From an initial output of approximately 50 photographs, a rigorous process of selection and curation was conducted to determine the final 24 pieces. Within the scope of this article, five specific works have been selected, as they are deemed to most accurately encapsulate the overarching conceptual framework of the project.



Figure 1. Work 1: "Red with Authority"

Photo size: 60 cm x 40 cm

Photo paper

(Source: M. Luthfi, 2026)

Artwork Description:

This fashion photography composition presents a traditional Chinese Cheongsam through the implementation of low-key photography, thereby cultivating a dramatic, elegant, and distinctive aesthetic. The photographic process was conducted in a controlled studio environment utilizing a Godox SK400 strobe integrated with a 120 cm parabolic softbox. To ensure optimal optical resolution and sharpness, the camera parameters were calibrated to ISO 100, an aperture of f/3.5, and a shutter speed of 1/250

seconds. The low-key methodology is operationalized through a predominantly dark background juxtaposed with directional lighting focused upon the model, generating a profound contrast that effectively accentuates the primary subject. Compositionally, the image achieves a visual equilibrium between the model and a prominent fan prop. This balance is further contextualized by a red backdrop embellished with Chinese typographical ornaments, a decorative vase, and an additional floral-patterned fan, all of which systematically reinforce the overarching Chinese cultural atmosphere. The crimson Cheongsam integrates a Bakar Tongkang ship motif, functioning as a semiotic representation of the Chinese community's heritage in Bagansiapiapi. Within this cultural framework, the color red denotes auspiciousness, joy, and prosperity, whereas the maritime motif embodies concepts of aspiration, progression, and the veneration of ancestral customs. The synthesis of these visual elements culminates in a modern, feminine work of fashion photography that is intrinsically laden with cultural significance.

This fashion photography project exhibits the traditional Chinese Cheongsam by utilizing low-key photography techniques to evoke a dramatic, elegant, and distinctive atmosphere. The studio photoshoot employed a Godox SK400 strobe light integrated with a 120 cm parabolic softbox. Camera parameters were configured at ISO 100, an aperture of $f/3.5$, and a shutter speed of $1/250$ second to ensure optimal optical resolution and image acuity. The low-key technique is actualized through a dark background that contrasts with directional lighting on the model, thereby generating visual depth that accentuates the primary subject. Compositionally, the image attains a visual equilibrium between the model and the large fan prop. This equilibrium is further reinforced by a red background embellished with Chinese typography, a floral vase, and a floral-patterned fan, which systematically amplify the Chinese cultural ambiance.

The vibrant red Cheongsam worn by the subject integrates the Bakar Tongkang ship motif, serving as a semiotic representation of the cultural heritage of the Chinese community in Bagansiapiapi. Within this cultural framework, the color red symbolizes fortune, happiness, and prosperity [5], whereas the maritime motifs reflect concepts of aspiration, progress, and veneration of ancestral customs [4]. The synthesis of these visual elements yields a modern fashion photography piece imbued with feminine cultural values. This aligns with the premise that an effective fashion photography approach is capable of communicating visual narratives through the amalgamation of aesthetic elements and cultural significance [17].



Figure 2. Work 2: Work 14
"Jiā Rén Yíng Chūn"
Photo size: 60 cm x 40 cm
Photopaper
(Source: M. Luthfi, 2026)

Artwork Description:

This fashion photography piece presents the garment titled "Jiā Rén Yíng Chūn" (Elegant Woman Welcoming Spring), conceptualized by designer Ar Ros from Bagan Siapiapi. The design embodies the cultural ethos of the Bakar Tongkang Ritual, articulated through plum blossom (Mei Hua) embroidery, a predominant white color palette signifying purity, and red accents denoting vitality and transformation. Methodologically, the image was captured utilizing a medium close-up technique at an eye-level angle, an approach selected to establish visual intimacy while meticulously delineating the sartorial details. The studio-based execution employed a soft key light positioned at the front-right utilizing a Godox SK400II flash. This configuration yielded diffused illumination, thereby accentuating the textile's texture while mitigating harsh shadows. Furthermore, supplemental warm illumination was introduced from the rear-left via a Godox SL60 light operating at a color temperature of 5800K, which imbued the subject with structural dimensionality and an aesthetic of elegance. The post-production phase encompassed digital retouching utilizing the Spot Healing, Healing Brush, and Patch tools. This procedure was conducted to eradicate extraneous visual elements and refine the subject's dermal appearance while rigorously preserving its inherent organic texture.

This fashion photography work presents a garment titled "Jiā Rén Yíng Chūn," conceptualized by designer Ar Ros from Bagan Siapiapi. The design embodies the cultural ethos of the Bakar Tongkang Ritual, articulated through plum blossom (Mei

Hua) embroidery, a predominantly white color palette symbolizing purity, and red accents denoting vitality and transformation. Methodologically, the image was captured employing a medium close-up technique at an eye-level angle. This approach was selected to establish visual intimacy while meticulously detailing the structural elements of the garment [8]. The studio execution utilized a soft key light positioned at the front right, employing a Godox SK400II strobe. This configuration generated diffused illumination, thereby accentuating the textile's texture and mitigating undesirable harsh shadows. Additionally, supplementary warm lighting was introduced from the rear left using a Godox SL60 light at a color temperature of 5800K, which imparted structural dimensionality to the subject and cultivated an elegant aesthetic. The post-production phase encompassed digital retouching via the Spot Healing, Healing Brush, and Patch tools. These procedures were executed to eliminate distracting visual elements and refine the subject's skin appearance while strictly preserving its original organic texture. Such an approach aligns with the established principle that digital manipulation within fashion photography serves to optimize aesthetic quality without compromising the fundamental essence of the work [16].



Figure 3. Work 3: Work 16
“Alluring Ashes”
Photo size: 60 cm x 40 cm
Photo paper
(Source: M. Luthfi, 2026)

Artwork Description:

The fashion photography artwork entitled "Abu Memikat" exhibits a modern Cheongsam designed by Ar Ros, comprising a form-fitting silhouette augmented by a shoulder cape accent. This structural composition engenders an aesthetic of grace and

elegance while ensuring functional wearability. The model's subtle expression, paired with a relaxed posture and hands positioned on the hips, reinforces a visual temperament that is simultaneously assertive and composed. Constructed from metallic grey satin, the garment projects a luxurious and contemporary quality, distinguished by a prominent red dragon embroidery on the bodice that serves as the visual focal point. This motif transcends mere aesthetic enhancement, functioning as a symbolic representation of strength, valor, and Chinese cultural identity. The juxtaposition of the neutral grey palette with the vibrant red embroidery establishes a harmonious and sophisticated contrast.

The photographic process was executed within a controlled studio environment, utilizing a Godox SK400II as the key light. This lighting configuration was strategically employed to ensure uniform illumination across the subject's face and attire, while concurrently accentuating the inherent luster of the satin textile. A traditional Chinese-themed backdrop, incorporating red lanterns, floral vases, and decorative ornaments, was deliberately selected to consolidate the cultural identity and evoke a quintessential celebratory ambiance. In the post-production phase, the photograph underwent digital processing via Adobe Photoshop 2019. This procedural workflow encompassed cropping, alongside color and exposure calibration utilizing Adobe Camera RAW. Furthermore, blemish eradication was conducted via the Spot Healing Brush Tool, culminating in a retouching process utilizing Portraiture to yield a refined, natural skin texture without compromising the integrity of the original photographic details.

The fashion photography work titled "Captivating Gray" features a modern Cheongsam designed by Ar Ros, characterized by a fitted silhouette augmented by a shoulder cape accent. This structural composition yields a graceful and elegant aesthetic while ensuring functional comfort. The model's subtle expression, combined with a relaxed posture and hands positioned on the hips, reinforces a visual temperament that is simultaneously assertive and serene. Fabricated from metallic gray satin, the garment exudes a luxurious and contemporary impression, featuring prominent red dragon embroidery on the bodice that serves as the central visual focal point. This motif transcends mere aesthetic function, acting as a symbolic representation of strength, courage, and Chinese cultural identity [18]. The integration of a neutral gray palette with vibrant red embroidery generates a harmonious and sophisticated contrast.

The photographic process was conducted in a studio setting, utilizing a Godox SK400II strobe light as the primary illumination source. This lighting configuration was strategically employed to ensure uniform illumination across the model's face and attire, while simultaneously accentuating the natural luster of the satin fabric. A Chinese-themed background, incorporating red lanterns, floral vases, and decorative ornaments, was deliberately selected to reinforce cultural identity and evoke a distinct festive atmosphere. In the realm of fashion photography, backgrounds and supporting props play a pivotal role in constructing the visual narrative and the cultural context surrounding the garment [19].

The post-production phase of the images was digitally processed via Adobe Photoshop 2019, encompassing cropping, color and exposure calibration utilizing Adobe Camera RAW, and blemish removal via the Spot Healing Brush Tool. A retouching procedure employing Portraiture was executed to achieve a smooth and natural skin texture without compromising the integrity of the original photographic details. This post-production approach is imperative for attaining the requisite visual quality standards within professional fashion photography [12].



Figure 4. Work 4: Work 19
“Youyuzi Yun”
Photo size: 60 cm x 40 cm
Photo paper
(Source: M. Luthfi, 2026)

Artwork Description:

The fashion photography piece entitled “Yōuyǎ Zǐ Yùn” presents a garment designed by Ar Ros, comprising a modern modified gown inspired by the Cheongsam silhouette. The form-fitting tailoring accentuates an elegant, graceful, and resolute character. The model’s composed expression and deliberate pose upon a circular podium, alongside the incorporation of a floral-patterned hand fan and red lanterns, establish a harmonious visual atmosphere replete with cultural significance. The lustrous purple hue of the attire amplifies a sophisticated and contemporary aesthetic, whereas the intricate gold embroidery on the anterior serves as the primary decorative element, thereby elevating the artwork's aesthetic value and exclusivity. The photographic execution was conducted within a studio environment, employing two Godox SK400II units as the key light and fill light to simultaneously illuminate the subject's face and emphasize the satin texture in a balanced manner. Supplementary illumination from a

Godox SL60II, integrated with a snoot modifier, was applied to project a circular spotlight effect behind the subject, engendering a dramatic visual dimensionality. The studio backdrop was further augmented with oriental-style ornamental branches and red lanterns, solidifying the Chinese cultural identity. During the post-production phase, the image was processed utilizing Adobe Photoshop 2019. This procedural workflow encompassed cropping, color and exposure calibration via Adobe Camera RAW, meticulous detail refinement employing the Spot Healing Brush Tool, and retouching via the Portraiture plugin to achieve a smooth and natural skin complexion while strictly preserving its inherent texture.

The fashion photography project titled "Yōuyǎ Zǐ Yùn" exhibits a garment designed by Ar Ros, conceptualized as a modern modification inspired by the traditional Cheongsam silhouette. The precisely tailored, form-fitting cut accentuates an elegant, graceful, and assertive character. The model's composed expression and poised stance upon a circular podium, combined with the incorporation of a floral hand fan and a red lantern, cultivate a harmonious visual atmosphere imbued with profound cultural significance. The iridescent purple hue of the garment reinforces a sophisticated and contemporary aesthetic, while the intricate gold embroidery situated on the anterior serves as the primary decorative element, thereby elevating the aesthetic value and exclusivity of the piece.

The photographic execution was conducted within a studio environment, utilizing two Godox SK400II units as the key and fill lights. This configuration was designed to illuminate the model's face while simultaneously emphasizing the satin texture with optimal equilibrium. Supplementary illumination from a Godox SL60II, paired with a snoot modifier, was applied to project a circular spotlight effect behind the subject, thereby generating a dramatic visual dimension. The studio backdrop was augmented with oriental-style ornamental branches and red lanterns to further solidify the Chinese cultural identity. The implementation of a three-point lighting technique in this composition facilitates the optimal rendering of dimension, texture, and atmosphere, which are essential elements in professional fashion photography [20].

The post-production phase was executed utilizing Adobe Photoshop 2019, encompassing image cropping, alongside color and exposure calibration via Adobe Camera RAW. Detail refinement was achieved through the Spot Healing Brush Tool, followed by retouching with the Portraiture plugin to attain a smooth, natural skin appearance while meticulously preserving the original dermal texture. This methodological approach ensures that each fashion photography piece effectively presents an optimal visualization of the garment while simultaneously communicating its intrinsic cultural values [21].



Figure 5. Work 5: Work 24
"Shining with Tradition"
Photo size: 60 cm x 40 cm
Photo paper
(Source: M. Luthfi, 2026)

Artwork Description:

The fashion photography piece titled "Qī Měi Yíng Xiáng" translating to "Seven Beauties Welcoming the Arrival of Fortune" features seven models adorned in contemporary Cheongsam garments designed by Ar Ros, which draw direct inspiration from classical Cheongsam silhouettes. This title encapsulates the harmony of modern women united in the spirit of the Lunar New Year, articulated through an elegant, tiered spatial arrangement and a meticulously balanced composition. Each subject is styled in a gown exhibiting distinct colors and characteristics encompassing dark green, red, purple, silver-gray, golden yellow, dark blue, and various muted tones all of which are accentuated by traditional Chinese oriental embroidery. Furthermore, the integration of diverse hand fans as supporting props amplifies the cultural resonance and augments the visual complexity of the composition.

The photographic execution was conducted within a studio environment, employing two Godox SK400II units functioning as a key light and fill light. This lighting configuration was strategically designed to provide uniform illumination across all subjects while deliberately accentuating the satin texture of the textiles. Supplementary illumination from a Godox SL60II was applied as a side light to establish visual dimensionality and intensify the dramatic ambiance against a maroon backdrop. This background was further embellished with lanterns, Mei Hua (plum blossom) ornaments, oriental botanical branches, and the Double Happiness motif. Collectively, these visual components construct a profound representation of Chinese culture that denotes

solidarity, prosperity, and auspiciousness. During the post-production phase, the image was digitally processed utilizing Adobe Photoshop 2019. The workflow encompassed cropping, alongside color and exposure calibration via Adobe Camera RAW. Detail refinement and localized corrections were executed using the Spot Healing Brush Tool, followed by skin retouching via the Portraiture plugin. This methodological approach ensured the rendering of a refined and natural epidermal texture while strictly preserving the intrinsic physiological characteristics of each respective model.

The fashion photography artwork titled "Qī Měi Yíng Xiáng" translating to "Seven Beauties Welcoming the Arrival of Fortune" features seven models donning contemporary Cheongsam garments designed by Ar Ros, which draw direct inspiration from classical Cheongsam silhouettes. This title encapsulates the harmony of modern women united in the spirit of the Lunar New Year, articulated through an elegant, tiered spatial arrangement and a balanced visual composition.

Each model is attired in a gown exhibiting distinct colors and characteristics namely dark green, red, purple, silver-gray, golden yellow, navy blue, and a spectrum of soft hues all of which are embellished with traditional Chinese oriental embroidery. Furthermore, the integration of various hand fans as supporting props fortifies the cultural resonance and augments the visual complexity of the composition. The photographic execution was conducted in a studio setting utilizing two Godox SK400II units as the primary and fill lights. This setup was engineered to provide uniform illumination across all subjects while simultaneously accentuating the fabric's satin texture. Supplementary lighting from a Godox SL60II was implemented as a side light to generate visual dimensionality and intensify the dramatic atmosphere against a maroon background. This backdrop is enriched with lanterns, Mei Hua (plum blossom) ornaments, oriental botanical branches, and the Double Happiness motif, which collectively construct a profound representation of Chinese culture symbolizing solidarity, prosperity, and auspiciousness.

All visual elements within this artwork align with research findings indicating that the Bakar Tongkang tradition in Bagansiapiapi embodies cultural values that are continuously transmitted across generations, serving as a prominent source of inspiration in various artistic domains, including fashion design [22]. This ritual functions not only as an expression of gratitude and veneration to the sea deity Ki Ong Ya but also acts as a tourism icon that reinforces the cultural identity of the Chinese community in Rokan Hilir [23], [24].

The image post-production phase was digitally processed utilizing Adobe Photoshop 2019, encompassing cropping, color and exposure calibration via Adobe Camera RAW, detail refinement using the Spot Healing Brush Tool, and skin retouching through the Portraiture plugin. This method was applied to yield a smooth and natural epidermal texture while meticulously preserving the physiological characteristics of each model. Such rigorous procedures ensure that each artwork not only presents the visual aesthetics of the attire but also serves as a communicative and aesthetic medium for cultural documentation [25], [26].

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : The execution of Ar Ros's Cheongsam fashion photography successfully generates a visual representation that encapsulates the design characteristics, aesthetic values, and cultural identity inherent in the Bakar Tongkang ritual motifs. **Implication :** Through the methodological approach of fashion photography, the Chinese cultural elements prevalent in Bagan Siapiapi are visually articulated in a highly communicative and compelling manner. Furthermore, fashion photography transcends its conventional utility as a promotional instrument for apparel, emerging as a vital mechanism for cultural documentation, representation, and preservation. **Limitation :** The resultant body of work underscores the substantial potential of the photographic medium to disseminate local cultural heritage to a broader demographic, employing a visual paradigm that aligns with the trajectory of the contemporary creative industry. **Future Research :** Future studies may explore the application of fashion photography in documenting and promoting other forms of local cultural heritage, as well as investigate the effectiveness of visual media in enhancing public awareness, cultural preservation, and audience engagement across diverse cultural contexts.

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