

Leslie Cheung — a Fashion Pioneer, a Dandy and an Androgynous Fashion Icon

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Abstract

Leslie Cheung is one of the most well-known queer actors in Asia. He played in lots of LGBTQ+ films and created non-binary images in his music works and performances. Cheung is also a fashion pioneer, who has created many important fashion moments. By studying some academic research (especially those produced by Natalia Chan), reports, and articles in fashion and lifestyle media, as well as some video resources on the Internet, I will first introduce the public images of Cheung's dressing style and some of his classic outfits for stage performance. Through the works of scholars in cultural studies and sociology such as Adam Geczy, Vicki Karaminas and Daniel-Salvatore Schiffer, we can identify a close relationship between Leslie Cheung and the mythological figure of the Dandy. They have a mindset which is ahead of their time and both demonstrate a revolt to the gender binary and traditional masculinity. Finally, we can also find that Cheung's style of dressing has showcased the same approaches to menswear of some contemporary fashion designers. It all goes to show Cheung's vision in fashion and gender fluidity.

Keywords: Fashion; Dandy; Androgyny; Queer Identity; Gender.

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Introduction

Leslie Cheung made a great contribution to the development of queer cinema in Hong Kong, mainland of China, and even in the whole Asia: *All's well, End's well*, 1992; *Farewell My Concubine*, 1992; *He is a woman, She is a man*, 1994; *Happy Together*, 1997. The gay roles that he played in the films have caused lots of discussion on the perception of queer and homosexuality and the gender identity of the artist himself has become a myth. As a polyvalent artist (actor and singer), Cheung's music works can express the indeterminateness of male subjectivity as well. In addition, Cheung is also a pioneer of fashion. The public images of his daily outings, his styles in his music videos, as well as his costumes on the stage, have become the topics of fashion media and the grand public for a long time. Cheung's fashion styles reflect his queer and androgynous identity, which can be seen as a revolt against the gender binary and traditional masculinity. In *Fashion and Masculinities in Popular Culture*, Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas argue that fashion, costume, and the way of styling and dressing can find their association with mythical figures. These mythical figures still have an impact on contemporary fashion and trends. One of the most important figures that they mentioned is dandy, who showcases a quality of ambiguity and a non-binary mindset.¹ Dandy can also help us understand fashion and gender construction in contemporary society. I argue that Cheung's fashion styles and his queer identity are in line with the characteristics of this male and female archetype. In the third section of this chapter, compared with the menswear design of some contemporary fashion designers/brands, it seems that Cheung's fashion styles in the 2000s and his fashion attitude coincide with the current trend in men's fashion, which reflects his vision and avant-gardism.

Leslie Cheung's Queer Identity in the Films and Music Works

As many Hong Kong film stars who have "flexible and multiple cross-media identities,"² Leslie Cheung is not only a Chinese film star, but also has a parallel pop star career. He performed in about sixty films and released more than forty music albums during his lifetime.³ He gained worldwide reputation through his films and brought Chinese cinema to international stage.⁴ Compared with other male stars of the Hong Kong New Wave such as Chow Yun-Fat, Andy Lau, Tony Leung Chiu-wai, and Tony Leung Kai-fai, Cheung is the one who performed/played homosexual/queer roles the most times in the world of Chinese cinema.⁵ Some of his roles are hilarious. For instance, in *He is a woman, She is a man*. Cheung played an effeminate man who fell in love with a masculinized woman. Then, in *All's well, End's well*, Cheung played a dramatic and "sissy" guy who ends up "re-obtaining" his manhood as a result of electrocution. Some of Cheung's thought-provoking queer roles have become the classics. One of the most well-known homosexual roles that Cheung starred in is the persistent, reckless, childlike, and vulnerable Ho Po-wing in Wong Kar-wai's film *Happy Together*. Considered one of the greatest LGBTQ+ films of all time, not only did Cheung showcase the "realism" of the love between two gay men, but also "openly" exhibited his "gayness".⁶ His second representative queer role is Cheng Dieyi in Chen Kaige's film *Farewell My Concubine*. Cheung played a revered opera actor who confused his gender identity between real life and stage and devoted his life to art and love. It was in this film that

1. Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas, *Fashion and Masculinities in Popular Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 160–161.
2. Gary Bettinson, "Commentary: Hong Kong stars and stardom," in *A Companion to Hong Kong Cinema*, eds. Esther M.K. Cheung, Gina Marchetti and Esther C.M.Yau (UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 379–387.
3. Hong-Chi Shiao, "Remembering Hong Kong as a Queer Metaphor: Leslie Cheung's Queer Performativity and Posthumous Networked Fandom," in *Made in Hong Kong, Studies in Popular Music*, eds. Anthony Fung and Alice Chik (London-New York: Routledge, 2020), 115–123.
4. Julian Stringer, "Leslie Cheung: Star as Autosexual," in *Chinese Film Stars*, eds. Mary Farquar and Yingjin Zhang (London-New York: Routledge, 2010), 207–224.
5. Chou Hui-ling Katherine, "The Queer Stardom and Body Enactment of Leslie Cheung," *Journal of Theatre Studies*, Vol. 3 (January 2009): 217–248, <https://theatre.ntu.edu.tw/journal/text/pdf/03/03-7.pdf>.
6. Natalia Chan, *Leslie Cheung, Butterfly of Forbidden Colors* (Guangxi: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2009), 94.

the artist completed his first-ever cross-dressing performance. Cheung's acting was so good that many audiences thought that it was the natural performance of the actor himself. Natalia Chan (she is also known as Natalia-Siu-hung Chan and her Chinese pseudonym is *Luo Feng*), professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong who has done much academic research on Leslie Cheung, also argues that it was Cheung's identification with his femininity that helped him to perfectly interpret this character.⁷

In the books, *Wong Kar-wai's Happy Together* and *Farewell My Concubine, a queer film classic*, the authors implied that in the 1990s homosexuality was still a sensitive topic in both Hong Kong and mainland of China. However, the two films on the theme of redemption and homosexual love have generated lots of discussions about homosexuality and sexual subjectivity since their release.⁸ According to Helen Kok-Sze Leung, apart from interpreting the gay roles or effeminate men in his stereotype-busting way in the films, "Cheung embraces a queer profile both personally and professionally", as he never responded directly to the media or the public about his gender identity and sexual orientation.⁹ As a pop singer, Cheung's songs and music videos also displayed a mindset of androgyny and queer identity, as well as challenging the gender binary and traditional masculinity. For instance, his song *I am What I am*, released in 2007, expresses his confrontation with gender dimorphism as a gay man and his attitude towards the freedom of love. In addition, in the music video of *Yuan Nan*, he described how the *travestissement* brought pleasure to the transgender and queer guys who have to maintain an image of a traditional man in the daytime. Then, in the video of *Da Re*, Cheung used clothes and makeup to play with gender and to showcase a variety of androgynous images of himself.¹⁰ Not only did the artist convey the concept of gender fluidity, but also his avant-garde vision to the audiences.

A Style Icon and A Fashion Pioneer

In addition to his films and music works, Leslie Cheung can be seen as one of the most important androgynous and gender-fluid icons in the history of fashion and popular culture. Some of Cheung's styles/looks in the films were already imitated and followed by the grand public, such as the leather jacket with a scarf in *Once a Thief* and the yellow DNKY jacket in *Happy Together*.¹¹ Other than that, the public images of Cheung's dressing styles and the styles for his stage performance, as well as his attitude to fashion not only reflect a spirit which is ahead of his time, but also express his queer identity and generate the social reflection on the construction of gender and masculinity.

Cheung's sense of fashion may come from his family background and his personal experiences, as Natalia Chan argues that his dandyism was related to his coming from a family of tailors.¹² Cheung's father, Mr. Wut Hoi Cheung, was a well-known suit tailor in Hong Kong. He opened a shop on D'Aguliar Street in Central, Hong Kong back in the 1930s, and his skills of tailoring were favoured by many Hollywood stars. Director Hitchcock, and actors such as Cary Grant and Marlon Brando were his customers. Leslie Cheung also studied textile management at the University of Leeds, UK. On *Celebrity Talk Show*, Cheung revealed that he once studied and worked in his father's suit shop. However, due to the rise of ready-to-wear, the family's bespoke clothing business also suffered. Therefore, he was not able to follow in his father's footsteps.¹³

7. Natalia-Siu-hung Chan, "Camp Stars of Androgyny: A Study of Leslie Cheung and Anita Mui's Body Images of Desire," in *A Companion to Hong Kong Cinema*, eds. Esther M.K. Cheung, Gina Marchetti and Esther C.M. Yau (UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 341–358.

8. Jeremy Tambling, *Wong Kar-wai's Happy Together* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), 65–76; Helen Hok-Sze Leung, *Farewell My Concubine: a queer film classic* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2010), 83–115.

9. Helen Hok-Sze Leung, *Farewell My Concubine: a queer film classic* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2010), 108–109.

10. Natalia Chan, *Leslie Cheung, Butterfly of Forbidden Colors* (Guangxi: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2009), 53–60.

11. Macy, "Eternal remembrance! Leslie Cheung's fourteen classic looks on stage and in cinema," *Cosmopolitan HK*, March 31, 2018, <https://www.cosmopolitan.com.hk/fashion/leslie-cheung-legendary-style>.

12. Natalia-Siu-hung Chan, "Camp Stars of Androgyny".

13. ATV, "Celebrity Talk Show S2-16," uploaded February 2021 on Youtube, video 48:33 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zM-vYonPZHk&t=23s>.

Apart from Natalia Chan's book and articles, I have not found other scholarly research on Cheung's fashion style. However, the passion for the discussion of his fashion styles has never dwindled on the internet and social media. For instance, in a Chinese social media, Zhihu, there are three group discussions related to this topic. The subject "Why does Cheung's style of dressing from twenty years ago still look fashionable nowadays?" has received over 1,09 million views.¹⁴ In addition, some renowned fashion and lifestyle magazines are keen to analyse Cheung's styles in his films and concerts. For example, in one article published on *Madame Figaro HongKong*, the author expresses an appreciation for Cheung's casual style.¹⁵ One article on *Vogue Club* points out that Cheung is the man "who wore Adidas in the 1960s, who had Louis Vuitton bags in the 1980s and who wore Gap, New Balance, Converse and Burberry scarf in the 90s"¹⁶. Although this statement is a bit tongue-in-cheek, it shows that Cheung already had a keen sense of fashion at a time when there was a relative lack of fashion information in mainland of China and Hong Kong. In fact, according to an article published on *Life Week*, the casual styles of Cheung were originally influenced by one of his idols, James Dean, who represents rebellion, romance, and eternal youth. Therefore, Jeans, T-shirts, and jackets were Cheung's signature dress style in the 1970s. The casual styles were also brought to some of his performances, which distinguished Cheung from other contemporary male artists in Hong Kong. However, his casual styles on stage were considered to be "too ahead of his time". Even the composer, one of the closest friends of Cheung, James Wong, once criticized him for dressing "not formal enough" for his concerts.¹⁷

In addition, Cheung's versatile suit styles are the most impressive. In the 1970s and 1980s, Cheung was one of the first Chinese male stars who wore Giorgio Armani, as the artist favours western designers and menswear brands. His passion for fashion can be seen in Natalia Chan's description of his dressing styles through the decades,

"...From the mid-1980s, Cheung's image shifted decisively to a more casual one, from a stately elegance to a more energized and dynamic style, matching the vibrant design of Gianni Versace and Remeo Giogli. In the early 1990s, Leslie reverted to a more stately and elegant style, like a nobleman with a sense of dignified maturity..."¹⁸

Some of Cheung's favorite brands have revolutionized menswear design and the representation of masculinity in Western countries in the second half of the 20th century. For instance, Giorgio Armani, the Italian designer created a "deconstructed suit look" by promoting a floppier cut and a slack silhouette to the suit.¹⁹ Sometimes Cheung did not like to wear the suit in a conformist way. For instance, he paired the casual suit with the sneakers and the mix-and-match style reminds us of Kim Jones's debut at Dior Homme. The British fashion designer chose to collaborate with Supreme, when the French luxury house met American streetwear. This merging of casual and formal styles has also become the approach of many contemporary designers for menswear.²⁰ As a matter of fact, over the years, Cheung's music album covers have often featured him in a suit. However, from tailoring to colours, then to various details and twists, the suits that Cheung wore were always non-conventional,²¹ (for instance *Qing Dao Nong Shi*, *Wei Ni Zhong Qing*, and *Quan Lai You Ni*). Whether the red suit or the dandy-style suit

14. "Why does Cheung's style of dressing from twenty years ago still look fashionable nowadays," Zhihu, accessed February 21, 2024, <https://www.zhihu.com/question/34551961/answers/updated>.

15. Ray Meiji, "Ten Fashion Moments explain why what Leslie Cheung wore still leads the fashion," *Madame Figaro HK*, April 1, 2021, <https://www.madamefigaro.hk/fashion/%e5%bc%b5%e5%9c%8b%e6%a6%ae%e6%99%82%e8%a3%69d-46038/>.

16. Christina You, "Leslie Cheung, a fashion history, a firework of different colour," *Vogue Mini*, April 01, 2023, https://mini.vogue.com.cn/voguemini/news_182562e78ef84966.html.

17. Yu Zhu, "Leslie Cheung's Costumes and Clothes Genealogy," *Life Week*, March 31, 2013, <http://old.lifeweek.com.cn/2013/0331/40429.shtml>.

18. Natalia-Siu-hung Chan, "Camp Stars of Androgyny".

19. Tim Edwards, *Fashion in Focus: Concepts, Practices and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 62.

20. Fashionista, "Suits with Sneakers was the outfit of choice at Paris Fashion Week Men's," *Fashionista*, June 25, 2018, <https://fashionista.com/2018/06/paris-fashion-week-mens-spring-2019-street-style>.

21. Chan, *Leslie Cheung, Butterfly of Forbidden Colors*, 36.

paired with a Panama hat, Cheung's styles represent playfulness and hedonism²². From the perspective of Tim Edwards's analysis of men's suits, Cheung's flashy suits are considered as the "modern dandy" style,²³ which surpasses the emphasis on the function of modernity.

In addition to his casual wear and his dandyism dressing way of men's suits in his time, Cheung's stage outfits are the best expression of his attitude towards fashion and his defiance of the binary gender dressing code. In terms of his looks in *Leslie Cheung cross the 97 Concert*, Cheung chose to work with the well-known costume designer William Chang.²⁴ The most iconic look is a shimmering black suit with a pair of red sequined high heels. He wore them when he sang the song *Red* written by Albert Leung. The colour red and the flamboyant details were the elements which integrated into most of his looks for this concert. Apart from the red footwear and the red cravat, the glittering metallic jacket paired with the mosaic tight top also made him divine on stage. As Natalia Chan argues, red is one of Cheung's favourite colours. Leslie Cheung loved to wear red and he was one of the few celebrities who were recognized as wearing this colour well. This colour reflects Leslie Cheung's flamboyant personality and conveys his erotic imagery to the grand public.²⁵ The love of red seems to foreshadow Cheung's move towards much bolder performance styles.

At Cheung's last concert tour in 2000 and in 2001, the *Passion Tour*, he collaborated with the renowned French designer Jean-Paul Gaultier to make the costumes for his performance. Jean Paul Gaultier, also known as "*Enfant Terrible*", has explored the relationship between fashion/clothing and gender since the 1980s and he is considered as one of the first designers who showcased androgynous and unisex fashion in contemporary western societies. In 1985 Gaultier's spring/summer collection *And God Created Man*, the designer introduced the kilt to menswear, which caused a big media and social sensation. The kilt, sailor-striped top, and bleached blonde hair became one of Gaultier's signature looks as well.²⁶ In this collection, the French stylist also created a cut-out suit vest with a white skirt named "skirt suits" for men.²⁷ Gaultier's promotion of non-binary fashion and queer style, as well as his efforts towards gender and sexuality liberation, coincide with Cheung's mindset. According to an article on *Ming's magazine*, Cheung was the first Asian artist to invite Gaultier to design the costumes for his concert and it was his dream to work with this talented designer.²⁸ Gaultier has created six looks for Cheung to fit the theme of "From Angel to Devil", which includes: a white suit paired with feathery wings on the shoulders, symbolizing the incarnation of an Angel; the Pretty Boy looks — a see-through shirt ornamented with pearls and bead, dressed with a pair of black sailor trousers; the Latin Lover look — a flamboyant metallic suit; finally, the Devil looks — black tights and red opera coat. In addition, some other garments with feminine cuttings or feelings also represent the transformation of Cheung's role on the stage from one to another, such as a black transparent sailor top paired with a silver sequined Egyptian-style white skirt and an undershirt with a skinny 80s style jean.²⁹

22. Ray Meiji, "Ten Fashion Moments explain why what Leslie Cheung wore still leads the fashion," *Madame Figaro HK*, April 1, 2021, <https://www.madamefigaro.hk/fashion/%e5%bc%b5%e5%9c%8b%e6%a6%ae%e6%99%82%e8%a3%9d-46038/>.

23. Tim Edwards, *Fashion in Focus: Concepts, Practices and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 64.

24. Larami Mok, "The Five Creatives behind Leslie Cheung, Hong Kong Legend: Fashion Designer Jean Paul Gaultier, Wing Shya, Photographer to Wong Kar-wai, and More Artists Gave the Cantopop Icon His Unforgettable Style," *South China Morning Post*, April 1, 2023, <https://www.scmp.com/magazines/style/celebrity/article/3215632/5-creatives-behind-leslie-cheung-hong-kong-legend-fashion-designer-jean-paul-gaultier-wing-shya>.

25. Chan, *Leslie Cheung, Butterfly of Forbidden Colors*, 37.

26. "Iconic Creations," *Gaultier Universe: House of Gaultier*, Jean Paul Gaultier, accessed February 21, 2024, <https://www.jeanpaulgaultier.com/ww/en/fragrances/gaultier-universe/iconic-creations>.

27. Matt Fidler, "Jean Paul Gaultier's best catwalk moments — in pictures," *The Guardian*, January 22, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/gallery/2020/jan/22/jean-paul-gaultier-best-catwalk-moments-in-pictures>.

28. Sherry Yeung, "Leslie Cheung and JEAN PAUL GAULTIER: JPG: I miss making shirts for him," *MINGS*, March 29, 2017, <https://www.mings.hk/jean-paul-gaultier-%E5%BC%B5%E5%9C%8B%E6%A6%AE-%E9%AB%98%E8%B7%9F%E9%9E%8B-43498/>.

29. Natalia-Sui-hung Chan, "Queering body and sexuality, Leslie Cheung's Gender Representation in Hong Kong Popular Culture," in *As Normal as Possible: Negotiating Sexuality and Gender in Mainland China and Hong Kong*, ed. Yau Ching, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 133–150; Qi Hu, "Leslie Cheung, Passion Tour Collection," uploaded

These feminine outfits, which were worn on Cheung's masculine body shape, are in line with the androgynous fashion and queer style. According to the definition of Andrew Reilly, professor at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, whose research focuses on fashion and gender studies, androgynous fashion is "the combination of masculinity and femininity, to blend gendered components into one look".³⁰ Cheung's moustache and beard mixed with the long black wig also emphasized the intersexuality of the legendary artist and made the performance as drag as possible. As Natalia Chan comments, this concert is a "cross-cultural drag performance". Not only did these queer styles "visualize Cheung's androgynous body and bisexuality" and symbolize the in-between of Cheung's mindset and his gender identity, but also acted as a field where the artist realized the fluidity of gender, which challenged the notions of heteronormativity and the homophobic society.³¹

However, this performance, which was full of bold, dashing, and creative fashion costumes, was questioned and attacked by Hong Kong media. According to the study of Natalia Chan, the coverage of this concert and Cheung's styling was mostly derisive, even derogatory. The media also suspected that Cheung had psychological problems and brought in some conservative experts to "give him a diagnosis". Most of the media considered that the feminine outfits, the androgynous looks, and even Cheung's non-binary performance were immoral and indecent. They also believe that eroticism, sexiness, and femininity are absolute contraries to masculinity. The negative media coverage in Hong Kong even shocked and angered the designer Jean Paul-Gaultier. After the first concert in Hong Kong, the *Passion Tour* went on a world tour. However, Cheung's costumes and performance were well-received and highly acclaimed in other countries. Natalia Chan in particular pointed out that Japanese designer Emi Wada, who won an Academy Award for Best Costume Design in 1985, wrote an article in *Asabi Shimbun* to promote Cheung's *Passion Tour*. Emi Wada felt that the performance and the collaboration between Cheung and Gaultier were sublime. The comments on Western media also had an impact on the attitude of the media in Hong Kong. After the final performance of the *Passion Tour* in 2001, some Hong Kong media changed their stances and started to praise the concert's achievements in art and fashion.³²

Embodiment of the Mythical Figure — Dandy

Leslie Cheng's attitude towards fashion and his dressing styles remind us of the image of metrosexual in the 1990s in Western societies. Based on the research of Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas, metrosexual represents resistance to the images of traditional masculinity. An avowed interest in fashion and appearance allows metrosexual men to touch profoundly their feminine side. Their sensitive, even sometimes emotion-oriented qualities also make them non-conformists of the gender paradigm. In addition to the blurring boundaries with the gay and queer communities, as well as the complex relation with homoeroticism, their behaviours, and mindset are also considered as narcissistic.³³ Natalia Chan mentioned that many of the film characters played by Cheung have a narcissistic complex, such as Cheng Dieyi in *Farewell My Concubine* and Ouyang Feng in *Ashes of Time*. Many film directors also like to shoot the actor by using mirror and water scenes, two symbols that signify narcissism.³⁴ In his analysis of the documentary directed by Stanley Gwan, *Yang ± Yin: Gender in Chinese Cinema*, Julian Stringer argues that Cheung embodies narcissism and ambisexuality in his performances as well as his public media images, that make him the most socially significant Chinese film star in terms of the construction of gender and identity. The ambiguity of Cheung's sexual identity is also similar to metrosexual, which represents the

September 23, 2019 on Youtube, video 01:58:35 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GqSvjGCB3qM&t=326s>.

30. Andrew Reilly, *Introducing Fashion Theory, from Androgynous to Zeitgeist*. (London and New York: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2021), 90.

31. Chan, "Queering body and sexuality".

32. Chan, *Leslie Cheung, Butterfly of Forbidden Colors*, 52–53.

33. Geczy and Karaminas, *Fashion and Masculinities in Popular Culture*, 14–20.

34. Chan, *Leslie Cheung, Butterfly of Forbidden Colors*, 117–136.

change of masculinity at the center of some East Asian fashion capitals.³⁵ However, narcissism does not only symbolize autoeroticism or cult of self. In a broader sociological sense, Cheung, who embodies the characteristics of Narcissus, is also in line with the imaginary of postmodern society. From his acting in the films to his fashion styles, he showcased, as Gilles Lipovetsky described in *Narcisse ou La Stratégie du Vide*, a revelation of the self, of the authentic and intimate self, and of the liberation of the body. Meanwhile, Cheung also makes his body available for various “experimentations”, which breaks the resistance of tradition and erases rigid oppositions and hierarchies, as well as blurring his own identity.³⁶ Cheung’s relation to style and fashion, as well as his narcissism, are associated with a mythical figure in western culture and societies, which is often related to the crisis or the change of masculinity — dandy. In the aforementioned studies of Natalia Chan, she also associates Cheung’s looks on stage and some of his images with dandy and dandyism³⁷. From the perspective of anthropology and cultural studies, I also argue that Cheung’s public images and his attitude towards fashion and style in general showcased a spirit of dandyism. In addition to the passion for style and fashion, dandy can be considered as the precursor of fashion in their time. They use fashion to showcase their rebellion and resistance to the mainstream and conventional styles. In *Queer Style*, Geczy and Karaminas mentioned that the first great dandy, Beau Brummell made a great contribution to the modernization of menswear. Not only did he introduce trousers and pantaloons into the mainstream men’s fashion repertoire, but he also “initiated” their dressing style by tucking them into the boots. This outdoor equestrian look reflects an approach of “mix and match” and it is even argued that this style became an inspiration of the “sports fashion” which started in the 1920s.³⁸ Cheung’s casual styles during the 1970s also exuded this avant-garde spirit. At least in Chinese society, Cheung was one of the pioneers who started this casual revolution. As Geczy and Karaminas notes, the post-regency dandies have more refined and delicate dressing styles. They use different twists and embellishments to break up the boredom of the suits in the 19th century.³⁹ This approach to dressing suit can also remind us of Cheung’s suit styles on his music album covers that we discussed in the second section.

Apart from his chic, elegant, and various suiting styles, the artist approaches fashion in a more audacious way, especially his looks on the stage in *Leslie Cheung Cross the 97 Concert* and *Passion Tour*, which reflects a Camp aesthetic. In *Notes on Camps*, Susan Sontag notes that Camp is “a way of artifice and stylization” which emphasizes “the-things-being-which-they-are-not”. It dilutes the seriousness while spotlights style rather than content, and aesthetic rather than morality. The androgynous and shinning looks in Cheung’s two concerts reflect “a relish for exaggeration of sexual characteristics” and the convertibility of men and women, of masculinity and femininity. As the first Asian artist who collaborated with Jean Paul Gaultier, Leslie Cheung also embodies a Camp vision and a Camp way of looking at things. In general, the Camp quality integrates into the artist’s practices and this quality made him extraordinary, special, and glamorous. Sontag also mentions that Camp is the dandyism in the age of mass culture and it is often related to the creative mindset of homosexuality as well.⁴⁰ The sensibility and sophistication of Cheung’s costumes and his attitude towards fashion also represent a kind of artistry. Daniel S. Schiffer notes the fact that dandies, as with Oscar Wilde’s words, whether wear an artwork or become an artwork. They are the artistic creation of themselves. Dandy, in general, is an aesthetic and ethical model.⁴¹

35. Julian Stringer, “Leslie Cheung: Star as Autosexual,” in *Chinese Film Stars*, eds. Mary Farquar and Yingjin Zhang (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 207–224.

36. Gilles Lipovetsky, “Narcisse ou la Stratégie du vide,” *Réseaux*, Vol. 4 (n°16, 1986): 7–41. <http://doi.org/10.3406/reso.1986.1202>.

37. Chan, “Queering body and sexuality, Leslie Cheung’s Gender Representation in Hong Kong Popular Culture,” in *As Normal as Possible: Negotiating Sexuality and Gender in Mainland China and Hong Kong*, ed. Yau Ching (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 133–150.

38. Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas, *Queer Style* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 57.

39. Geczy and Karaminas, *Queer Style*, 6.

40. Susan Sontag, “‘Notes on ‘Camp’”,” in *Camp, Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 53–65.

41. Daniel-Salvatore Schiffer, *Métaphysique du Dandysme* (Brussels: Académie royale de Belgique, 2013).

In terms of the construction of gender and sexuality, dandy's behaviours and mindset embody an ambiguous quality, a combination of masculinity and femininity and queer identity. After the French Revolution, men of the bourgeois class believed that menswear should be functional, which fit the identity of "producer", while fashion, especially frivolous fashion, should only belong to women. This is also in line with one of the most influential fashion ideas of the twentieth century produced by the British psychologist John Carl Flugel — the Great Masculine Renunciation. This Renunciation, which represents an emerging political value and social change, also conforms to the construction of modern masculinity.⁴² However, dandy changed this gender stratification and hierarchy with their behaviours and mindset, and their passion for fashion and styling reflects a spirit of in-between. As Frédéric Monneyron described, for dandy, they start their revolt by challenging the system of dress. They can also be seen as the precursor of the protestant of sexual dimorphism. This protest did not involve imitating the glitz and glamour of womenswear, though some of them adopted women's corsets to align themselves with feminine manner. "It was in their relationship to the fashion and clothing, but not in the clothes themselves that they identified with women".⁴³

As I have discussed in the last section, Cheung's androgynous looks for his performances suffered lots of attacks from the local media and society. Cheung himself felt very frustrated about the prejudice and judgment. However, he stayed true to himself and insisted on his aesthetics. For example, in a press conference in mainland of China for *Passion Tour*, not only did the artist express the honor and luck of working with Jean Paul Gaultier, but also defended his androgynous and drag costumes.⁴⁴ In other interviews even at his concerts, Cheung revealed more than once that a good actor should own an androgynous quality and he embraced the feminine facet in himself.⁴⁵ This might be one reason, that he showcased male transgenders of various professions and different social classes as well as the connotation of transvestism in the music video of his song *Yuan Nan in 2003*. As with dandy, Cheung's practices and attitude can be marked as rebellion, who questioned the heteronormativity and the notion of modern masculinity.

Cheung's way of expressing himself via fashion, his attitude towards fashion, and his revolt against "mainstream" aesthetics and values are associated with a legendary figure in western societies — David Bowie, who is considered as the embodiment of dandy as well. It is one of Bowie's looks, which is composed of a three-coloured jumpsuit, a costume, and a pair of red vinyl boots, created by the Japanese designer Kansai Yamamoto for his character — Ziggy Stardust, has inspired Leslie Cheung's red high heel look for his concert in 1997.⁴⁶ In the 1970s, Bowie used his performance costumes, wedge haircuts, and makeup to break the gender binary and reject the heteronormative constraints. He also revived the androgynous fashion and the style of transvestism. Not only did Bowie create "a space" for freely breath for people who had gender identity/identification crisis, but also made a great contribution to the social movement in western societies.⁴⁷ The rebellious attitude of Cheung and Bowie towards fashion and gender construction also reflects the heroism of dandy. Daniel Schiffer identified dandy as Nietzsche's Zarathustra, a superman, a *sur-soi*, who owns a quality of heroism. He argues that in terms of morals and politics, dandy can confront social norms and conventions.⁴⁸ This argument coincides

42. Christopher Breward, "Fashionable Masculinities in England and Beyond: Renunciation and Dandyism, 1800-1939," in *The Cambridge Global History of Fashion, from the Nineteenth Century to the Present, Volume 2*, eds. Christopher Breward, Beverly Lemire and Giorgio Riello (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 737-765.

43. Frédéric Monneyron, "Du Vêtements comme Anticipation Sociale," in *Le Vêtement, Colloque de Cerisy*, ed. Frédéric Monneyron (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001), 206-221.

44. Ming Xing Kao Gu Dui, "Interview clip of Leslie Cheung twenty years ago — The press conference for *Passion Tour*," uploaded April 2020 on Youtube, video 12:42, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9FMW2xt05SI&list=PLS5_cWbgw9ew-pl5x2I-1f-PxKgQw08ln.

45. Chan, *Leslie Cheung, Butterfly of Forbidden Colors*, 52-61.

46. Guilan He, "The Gender Heritage of Leslie Cheung, still ahead of his time after fifteen years," *BBC News*, March 30, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/simp/chinese-news-43593167>.

47. Hawkins Stan, *The British Pop Dandy: Masculinity, Popular Music and Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

48. Daniel-Salvatore Schiffer, *Métaphysique du Dandysme* (Brussels: Académie royale de Belgique, 2013).

with the perspective of Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas. The authors think that dandy can cause a profound revolution in society, including the social imaginary and ideology, as dandy represents the root of the postmodern and posthuman body.⁴⁹ In fact, the postmodern fashion, even the prototype of post-postmodern fashion can also be found in Leslie Cheung's fashion styles in his music videos and concerts.

Leslie Cheung's Styles and the Connection with the Contemporary Fashion Industry — Towards a "Gender More" Fashion Tomorrow

Dandy deeply influenced, or even revolutionized, the aesthetics of his time and that of the future. For instance, in the 19th century, the progenitor of fashion and style in the 19th century, George Brummell had an impact on many artists and celebrities such as Leigh Bowery and Andy Warhol.⁵⁰ Monneyron also argues that not only does dandy's fashion and sense of aesthetics transcend his contemporaries, but also anticipate the development of society and the social trends.⁵¹ In this aesthetics-centred and hyper-postmodern society, the boundary between body and mindset has become more and more vague. Fashion, especially menswear design, has completely revolutionized. However, we can also find the prototypes of these dramatic changes in the archive of Cheung's fashionable looks.

In 2023, *Vogue HongKong* published an article on Cheung's styles and their influences on contemporary fashion icons and designers. The author displayed Cheung's various costumes and styles, in particular those for his *Passion Tour* in 2000 and 2001, and compared them to some international fashion icons today such as Harry Styles and Ezra Miller, as both of them are known for their genderless styles and androgynous mindset. Meanwhile, the author mentioned that some garments in the collections of Ludovic Saint Sernin, Bianca Saunders, Haider Ackermann, Paco Rabanne also have a direct association with Leslie Cheung's fashion looks. For instance, in Ludovic de Saint Sernin Spring/Summer 2020 collection, the French designer showed lots of minimal yet chic looks to celebrate the in-between aesthetic. The approach to these garments is very similar to one of Cheung's looks — a tight white t-shirt/white tank top paired with jeans. Some parts of his body were also exposed.⁵² The sensuality of Cheung's look and de Saint Sernin's design reveals an erotic imagination which is established on Freud's concept of "concealment and revelation".⁵³ In the history of fashion, womenswear constantly played this "concealment and revelation" game. With regards to menswear, especially in the 20th century, it is men's undergarments which began to showcase more libido quality. For instance, brightly coloured bikini-style men's briefs were born during the Peacock Revolution in the 1970s. By the end of the 20th century, some designers even created G-strings for men. It is also since this time that some men's underwear advertisements have become more sensual and homoerotic. Shaun Cole argues that all these body-conscious trends and the homoerotic connotations of men's undergarments are linked to the liberation of men's bodies and the revolt against the rigidity of modern masculinity. Sometimes they even signified the sexual ambiguity and a camp aesthetic.⁵⁴

Since the 2010s, this erotic approach is no longer limited to the design or the advertisements of men's undergarments. An increasing number of fashion designers/brands have started to create menswear with a hyper-sexual approach. In addition to Ludovic de Saint Sernin, many designers have introduced see-through and sheer fabrics into menswear. Naked dressing has become the trend since the end of

49. Geczy and Karaminas, *Fashion and Masculinities in Popular Culture*, 8.

50. Geczy and Karaminas, *Fashion and Masculinities in Popular Culture*, 11.

51. Frédéric Monneyron, "Du Vêtements comme Anticipation Sociale," in *Le Vêtement, Colloque de Cerisy*, ed. Frédéric Monneyron (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001), 206–221.

52. Daniel Cheung, "Fashion Icon: 20 Years After His Depart, Leslie Cheung's Stylish Styles Are Still Scattered Around," *Vogue HK*, March 31, 2023, <https://www.voguehk.com/zh/article/celebrity/leslie-cheung-fashion-style-2020-runways/>.

53. Lesley Millar and Alice Kettle, "Introduction," in *The Erotic Clothes, Seduction and Fetishism in Textiles*, eds. Lesley Millar and Alice Kettle (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 1–22.

54. Shaun Cole, *The story of Men's Underwear* (New York: Parkstone International, 2009)

the 2010s. For instance, in Burberry Spring/Summer 2016 collection, Christopher Bailey has already showcased men's garments made with crafted cotton lace and gauzy tops with different prints, as well as the dandified tailoring with various details and sensitivity.⁵⁵ In Saint Laurent 2024 Spring/Summer menswear collection, Anthony Vaccarello also exhibited some sleeveless shirts made of gossamer silk and chiffon. The airy and soft looks made men's bodied more sensual and libido.⁵⁶ In fact, in the *Leslie Cheung Cross 97 concert* and the music video of *Da Re*, Cheung has already shown lots of garments with different styles made of sheer fabric.

The eroticization of menswear heralds the advent of a new era — the approach to menswear is more and more similar to that of women's. As with Cheung's costumes created by Jean Paul Gaultier, in recent years, lots of fashion houses and designers have started to dress male models in various styles of skirts. Louis Vuitton 2022 Spring/Summer collection displayed men's skirts in different silhouettes made of different materials in a multi-coloured palette.⁵⁷ In Simone Rocha 2023 womenswear and menswear collection, the designer also mixed the military uniforms with bridal gowns and deconstructed all the elements to create many genderless looks.⁵⁸ In addition, some designers and brands have claimed as non-binary and have blurred the dressing code of menswear and womenswear since the foundation of the house such as Charles Jeffrey Loverboy and Harris Reed. For instance, Harris Reed's collections are enriched in extravagant silhouettes, and colours, which mix the masculine elements with that of feminine. In an interview with Harris Reed, the American designer has claimed that for him, fluid fashion is about expressing yourself authentically, whose mindset is in line with Cheung's.⁵⁹ In fact, the dressing taboo in the age of Cheung has become the lighthouse of the contemporary fashion industry. More and more designers in the fashion industry are striving to break gender dimorphism and create a new symbolic order. In addition, as inclusivity has become the *Zeitgeist* of the fashion industry since the 2010s, a new design approach is emerging — inclusive design. When it comes to inclusive design, it is always concerned with people of different ages and people with disabilities. However, the inclusive design also covers people of different gender identities. The philosophy of inclusive design is also in line with two concepts that have been discussed in the world of fashion studies today — Gender More and Antigender. Ben Barry notes that Gender More represents a post-postmodern androgyny. The signification of this post-postmodern androgyny is far away from the simple combination of masculinity and femininity, but expresses “the complexity of gender identities and the diversity of masculinity and femininity facets.”⁶⁰ In terms of Antigender, this concept relies on antifashion constantly confronting, opposing and challenging the system of gender-binary, which showcased the performativity of gender and its unstable nature.⁶¹ In any case, both the concepts signify a break with the social norm, which is in line with Leslie Cheung's fashion practices at the beginning of the 21st century.

55. Tim Blanks, “Burberry Prorsum Spring 2016 Menswear,” *Vogue* (Online), June 15, 2015, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2016-menswear/burberry-prorsum>.

56. Mark Holgate, “Saint Laurent Spring 2024 Menswear,” *Vogue* (Online), June 12, 2023, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2024-menswear/saint-laurent>.

57. Sarah Mower, “Louis Vuitton Spring 2022 Menswear,” *Vogue* (Online), November 30, 2021, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2022-menswear/louis-vuitton>.

58. Sarah Mower, “Simone Rocha Spring 2023 Ready-to-Wear,” *Vogue* (Online), September 19, 2022, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2023-ready-to-wear/simone-rocha>.

59. Rebecca Mead, “Height of Glamour, How the designer Harris Reed helps Harry Styles and Solange play with masculinity and femininity,” *The New Yorker*, September 20, 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/09/27/harris-reeds-gender-fluid-fashion>.

60. Ben Barry and Andrew Reilly, “Gender More: An Intersectional Perspective on Men's Transgression of the Gender Dress Binary,” in *Crossing gender boundaries: Fashion to create, disrupt and transcend*, eds. Andrew Reilly and Ben Barry (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect Books, 2020), 122–136.

61. Judith Beyer, “Antigender Fashion: JW Anderson and Gender-Fluid Fashion,” *ZoneModa Journal*, Vol. 13 (July 2023): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2611-0563/17079>.

Conclusion

In general, no matter his various fashion styles, the way of dressing ahead of his contemporaries, and the avant-garde non-binary costumes for performances, Leslie Cheung is ultimately the embodiment of the mystical figure — dandy. Cheung himself has also become a legend, a myth, who is admired by people of different generations. His fashion practices and his attitude to fashion reflect an androgynous mindset, which not only expresses his queer identity and his gender fluidity, his revolt against the rigid social norm in terms of gender and traditional masculinity, but also breaks the binary of male/determination and female/indetermination. As with the archetype of dandy, Cheung has also created his aesthetic symbolic order. His insight and narratives on fashion allude to the change in contemporary men's fashion. Compared with the design of some contemporary menswear designers and fashion trends, especially the eroticization of menswear, such as the exposition of body, the use of see-through or transparent fabrics, the androgynous style such as the incorporation of womenswear into men's, as well as the emergence of the new concept such as gender more fashion, we can see that Leslie Cheung is a real pioneer ahead of his time. He is also a conduit between yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

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