

The Life Of Crepe De Chine

Jordan Ellis

FASH 341W - Textile and Materials

Ms. Shana Hereford

March 22, 2022

Abstract

Crepe fabric comes in all different types such as aerophane, canton crepe, crepe de sante, crepe de chine, french crepe, plisse, and many more. Many people when they think of fabric they immediately think of cotton or polyester not luxury fabrics like crepe de chine. Crepe de chine, is a beautiful elegant fabric that makes anyone feel graceful like they are walking on a cloud while the fabric billows behind them. The journey of how crepe de chine is made depends on it is made from silk, wool, or synthetic fibers. Whichever textile is used can impact the planet in good or bad ways. Silk is the most sustainable because of the silkworms, but it is also more expensive. Wool can be sustainable if they are not killing the animals they are using or drowning the product in chemicals. Synthetic is highly flammable but cheaper, it depends on what kind of customer the company wishes to attract.

The Life of Crepe De Chine

Crepe De Chine is a soft fine, shiny fabric that is commonly made with silk and with highly twisted yarns. Crepe de chine can also be manufactured with cotton and synthetic materials that imitate silk such as polyester, nylon, rayon, or acetate. Crepe de chine is mostly used in eveningwear so many luxury gowns are made from this particular fabric and certain cultures still use crepe in their traditional garments. It is also sold globally with many tips and tricks to make the sewing experience easier.

Crepe has appeared in so many different cultures it is difficult to determine where it originated. However, this particular fabric is believed to be first seen in the Middle Ages worn by the Chinese imperial family. During the nineteenth-century, crepe became a popular mourning fabric. Crepe de chine translated in French means “crepe of China” so believing that this fabric started in China does not seem like a huge stretch. “Crepe de chine did not become popular until the 1960s when Hollywood stars would wear this fabric to red carpet events” (Crepe De Chine Fabric Guide). Crepe de chine is also the fabric that was used in George Lucas’ popular movie *Star Wars: A New Hope* for Princess Leia’s iconic white gown she wears through the majority of the film. “The costume was made from crepe de chine, a thin, lightweight silk that was comfortable for Carrie Fisher” (Alinger, 2014, p.18). The drapery of the costume showed that her character was ready to take action at any time rather than politics like the audience expected given her situation in the opening scene of *A New Hope*. The fabric choice and color make her look angelic and innocent as well since most people picture angels in white, flowy garments.

Crepe is still used by Orthodox Greek women for mourning, and various cultures of the Indian subcontinent incorporate crepe into their traditional garments. At this point in time, this fabric is commonly used for evening gowns, dresses, lining garments, suiting, and home decors such as curtains and pillows. Princess Leia, played by Carrie Fisher, is not the only celebrity that has stunned the audience while wearing crepe de chine. Zendaya wore a gorgeous gown designed by Roberto Cavalli at the 2021 Ballon d'Or Ceremony in Paris. The fabulous gown is a formfitting black dress made out of crepe de chine with an open back that featured a compelling golden spine detailing created with small golden chains. Working with this fabric is as difficult as it would be for any silk-like fabric because its' surface is slippery. Now we have advanced and have come up with ways to make working with this fabric a bit easier. One helpful tool is putting a layer of pattern paper in between the folded crepe this will help prevent the fabric from shifting and will make it easier to use a rotary cutter. Another insightful trick is using a zig-zag, overcast, french, or overlock stitch is the best way to finish a crepe de chine garment.

Originally crepe de chine was made from silk, but now it can be produced by cotton, wool, and synthetic fibers such as polyester. The main properties of crepe de chine are its wrinkle resistance, breathability, lightweight, durability, and appearance. “A crepe de chine texture has a slight crepe character, a feature produced by the use of weft, or filling, yarns spun with the twist running in reverse directions and known as a right-hand and left-hand twist” (crepe de Chine, 1998). It is made by using the process called “hard twisting” which involves the yarns being wound much tighter than usual. Once the fabric is constructed it can be dyed, spun into garments, and treated. Weaving is a common word throughout the textile world. The Britannia

encyclopedia, crepe de Chine (1998), explains weaving beautifully, “it is the production of fabric by interlacing two sets of yarns so that they cross each other, normally at right angles, usually accomplished with a hand- or power-operated loom.” There are multiple different types of weaving processes such as plain, twill, and satin. The plain weave is used for crepe de chine.

Crepe de chine is not completely sustainable but sustainability could be achieved. If it is made from wool that can be biodegraded as long as it is not treated with chemicals. Non-organic cotton can not be biodegraded because of the heavy dyes that are used or the finishing chemicals that are applied. Non-organic cotton also leads to pesticides being used. The chemicals degrade soil, pollute the water, and poison cotton pickers. Wool production is also damaging. “Wool that is not organic is dipped in toxic chemicals to ward off ticks/lice, toxins from animal excrement pollute the air, water, soil, high CO₂e carbon emitted, the strain on natural resources such as land, food, and water, contributes to deforestation, with a large number of animals” (Marie, 2022). Silk is the most sustainable fabric in the world because of the silkworm. Silkworms survive off of the mulberry trees which do not require fertilizers, beyond that the pesticides will kill the worms. Silk production can be one hundred percent sustainable if done correctly. The only possible harm is to the silkworms during the boiling process to open the cocoons.

The two countries that are the main exporters for crepe de chine are China and Australia. China is the biggest producer of silk-like fabrics which includes crepe and Australia is the largest producer of wood-based products. Since China is the largest producer of textiles essentially, it is not a surprise that they are leading the race for silk-like products. The Indian culture uses silk more than the people of East Asia. Many Indian silk producers still carry their traditions and

make the silk as their ancestors did. China, of course, would love to also be the leader in wool exports but Australia has more sheep than people living in their country so it is only natural for them to take the lead on this one. New Zealand however has even more sheep than Australia so it is possible that they could take the top spot in wool exports.

Crepe is known for its' delicate nature which is why it is good for evening wear and other lightweight garments. Wool crepe is, of course, is more durable than silk so wool can achieve more heavy-duty garments like sweaters. Silk and wool crepe are more comfortable than a synthetic crepe and natural fibers, like wool, is flame resistant while synthetic is highly flammable. It is also possible to make crepe from alpacas and other ultra-soft wools. Synthetic crepe, however, is cheaper than those made from wool or silk. Commonly, crepe is used in high-end fashion for dresses during a photoshoot, runway show, or galas. According to the article Crepe De Chine Fabric Guide, there are a few simple rules in how to treat crepe de chine such as "hand wash or delicate mode in the washing machine, soft gels are better than soap powders because they are less aggressive and will not lead to bleaching, hang it to dry and keep away from direct sunlight, and, before hanging, soak up your wet crepe de chine garment with a cotton towel." Many people who have sewn before know the importance of having care labels and following them correctly otherwise it could completely ruin the garment.

In conclusion, crepe de chine is a beautiful lightweight fabric that is effortless to drape. Every celebrity that has been caught wearing this type of fabric such as Carrie Fisher and Zendaya, looked absolutely stunning and almost heavenly. This fabric is so free-flowing the wearer must feel at peace rather than wearing a heavyweight garment that weighs them down so

much so they are tired before the red carpet end is in sight. While crepe de chine is not the most sustainable fabric, it is achievable. The fashion industry still has the largest carbon footprint in the world, but the new upcoming designers who understand that this planet is in trouble will continue to find new ways to become greener. Fashion companies will become as green as they can when the customers express how they feel about what the fashion world is doing to the planet they live on. In the 2021 Met Gala Billie Eilish wore a stunning blush ballgown designed by Oscar De la Renta, but she only agreed to wear this brand if they stopped using authentic fur in their future clothing lines. So clearly the designers are willing to be more sustainable they just need the push.

References

- Alinger, B. (2014). *Star Wars Costumes: The Original Trilogy*. Chronicle Books.
- Augustyn, A. (n.d.). *Crepe de Chine*. Encyclopædia Britannica. Retrieved March 20, 2022, from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/crepe-de-Chine>
- Crepe De Chine F*. Tissura luxury and exclusive fabrics. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://tissura.com/articles/crepe-de-chine-fabric>
- Encyclopædia Britannica, inc. (1998, July 20). *Crepe de Chine*. Encyclopædia Britannica. Retrieved March 21, 2022, from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/crepe-de-Chine>
- Ilchi, L. (2021, November 30). *Zendaya wears vintage Roberto Cavalli at 2021 ballon d'or ceremony*. WWD. Retrieved March 21, 2022, from <https://wwd.com/fashion-news/fashion-scoops/zendaya-roberto-cavalli-gold-spine-ballon-d-or-ceremony-photos-1235005614/>
- Marie, A. (2022, January 27). *Is crepe vegan? is crepe sustainable?: 2022 ethical consumer guide: Fabrics, materials*. HEALabel. Retrieved March 21, 2022, from <https://healabel.com/c-fabrics-materials-textiles/crepe>
- Raihurkar, P., Ramachandran, M., & Subramanium, V. (2018). The Structural and Mechanical Properties of the Crepe De Chine Fabrics Material. *International Journal of Mechanical and Production Engineering Research and Development (IJMPERD)* , 104–108.

Sewport Support Team. (2019, October 31). *What is crepe fabric: Properties, how its made and where*. Sewport. Retrieved March 17, 2022, from
<https://sewport.com/fabrics-directory/crepe-fabric>

Triplett, S., Neorr, C., Norris, C., Ahmad, F., & Lauren. (2020, July 1). *Everything you need to know about crepe fabric*. Mood Sewciety. Retrieved March 21, 2022, from
<https://www.moodfabrics.com/blog/everything-you-need-to-know-about-crepe-fabric/>