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A journey into the development of the Chinese fashion
industry

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论文概要

本文的研究目的不仅在于描述中国现代时尚产业的发展历程，更在于深入分析中国现代时尚产业走向自主、创新、独立的中国时尚体系的路径。我选择这个主题的原因，主要是因为中国作为世界上最大的制造业基地，很多人都了解对于中国的生产与手工的发展，其少人却了解中国的时尚，这是一个非常当代的问题。即使在许多西方人眼里，中国仍然是西方品牌的模仿以及仿冒者，拥有不够专业和跟新的劳动力，但必须弄清楚，在过去几十年里，中国的现实以及整体面貌都发生了深刻的变化。事实上，进入全球化进程后，中国在国际舞台上的角色已经打破了其他国家之间的平衡，成为国际上第二大世界强国。

中国的快速而威望的发展，在1980年改革开放以来，涉及到许多领域，其中就包括时尚领域。即使时尚在国内是一个比较新的现象，我们也可以说中国在时尚产业上已经走过了两个不同的阶段：从世界工厂到世界市场，现在已经准备进入第三个发展阶段。正从“中国制造”走向“中国创造”，成为世界的创新者。这对于一个需要摆脱贫困和落后的国家，是非常重要的一步因为它正在成为一个现代化、创新的新国家。在时尚领域，创新的进程仍在进行中，然而中国正在继续增加这一领域的专门知识。中国的服装设计师，在中国政府的帮助和支持下，正在非常努力的建造属于自己的服装体系，着力于服装创新，打造中国与众不同的风格和能够受到国际尊重与认可的时尚品牌。为了做到这一点，中国正致力于消除那些一直对中国时尚观念产生负面影响的事，列入一些规定型观念，同时也在打击西方品牌的威武。通过这种方式，中国正努力使自己的时尚系统获得国际认可，以便最终成为这一领域的国际强者。

本文第一章的主要内容是深入分析中国服装业的发展，了解中国在这一领域走向自主的过程。本章首先简要介绍了中国纺织服装业的发展，因为纺织服装业是中国现代经济的最初动力，也为创造现代时尚产业铺平了道路。事实上，由于其高度的扩张和随后的专业化，中国有机会诞生一个遍布全国的现代时尚体

系，这要感谢时尚教育体系的建立、时尚媒体的发展、时尚机构与协会的建立以及关于时尚的各种节目。为了证明中国的情况正在发生变化，我们将关注中国与西方品牌之间的关系：西方首先因为中国的低成本以及大量的劳动力而利用中国作为生产基地，然后，当中国成为国际最大消费者，西方又将它视为目标市场。本章最现代的部分是关于中国必须改变和发展一个适当和自主的时尚体系。一方面，由于国家经济的巨大扩张、社会生活条件提升、和购买力迅速提高，使得时尚用品的需求和销售迅速扩大。中国社会在几年内不仅对服装的需求增加，而且随着时尚知识的增加，也开始对更多的奢侈品提出需求。另一方面，政府支持发展中国时尚产业，不既是完成国家现代化进程的需要，也是让中国建立一个创新、独立、现代化的国家新形象。基于这些原因，中国，特别是从2000年起，通过创造属于自己的时尚观念和品牌，通过消除西方规定的时尚观念和时尚威武，中国开始非常努力地创建自己的自主和独立的中国时尚体，并且开始创造能够让国际认可的品牌。近年来，中国在服装领域经历了爱国主义的复兴，以中国辉煌的服装历史为基础：这也鼓励了中国时装设计师从中国自己的历史而不是从国外汲取灵感。在这一点上，我们将以意大利品牌Dolce&Gabbana为例来分析这场极具攻击性和不尊重性的促销活动，它完美地体现了中国想从西方时尚帝国中解放出来的愿望。最后，在本章的最后一部分，我们将重点介绍一些已经获得国际成功的中国时尚品牌，以此证明中国时尚品牌做得很好，并逐渐获得国际认可。

第二章的目的是关注中国时尚中的一些文化方面，至少在一开始，这些文化方面是现代时尚在中国扩散的障碍。中国对外国模特的需要，使世界各国有可能认为它没有创新能力；西方总是把中国的时尚描绘成一文不值；政府对人们生活的方方面面控制过于严格，放慢了中国时尚风格和趋势在全球的发展，最后中国传统文化已经成为在国内采用现代时尚理念和生活方式的障碍。在这一章的最后一部分，我们将注意力转移到最重要的时尚人物身上，即中国服装设计师身上，他们的主要特点以及他们在设计和零售方面的不同背景和方法。之前，

由于快速的经济发展没有任何多余的时间和空间留给设计和创新所以设计师们，为了满足大量客户的需求，在设计方面直接从西方时尚采取元素。如今的他们，在国家的各方面的支持下，有更多的时间、资源去设计以及创新，主要是为了能够不仅仅的做一个裁缝 而是一位真正的艺术家，这样一来他们展现出来的作品也会成为一样艺术品 而不是为了满足服装的基本需求。

综上所述，本论文有助于理解中国是如何从纺织服装业的扩张开始，沿着国家的发展之路，围绕时尚产业的崛起，努力发展一个自主、独立的时尚体系的。这个分析足够表明中国不再是一个正在发展中的国家，它不再只被西方公司用作生产基地，但它正在成为一个有能力发展成一个时尚自主的国家，具备着属于自己的时尚创新和本土品牌，而且，这将使中国的时尚体系获得正当性和国际认可，最终使中国在时尚领域跻身世界强国之列。

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INTRODUCTION

'Let China sleep, for when she wakes, she will shake the world'

-Napoleone Bonaparte-

The aim of my dissertation is not only to describe the development of the modern fashion industry in China, but also to deeply analyze the path toward the rise of an autonomous, innovative and independent Chinese fashion system. The choice of this theme is mainly due to the fact that much can be read about the majestic expansion of China as the world's largest manufacturing site but, little investigation has been made on its fashion industry, which represents a very contemporary issue. Even if at the eyes of many Western people China is still the country of copycats of Western brands, with low-skilled workforce and not able for innovation, it is important to figure out that in the last decades the reality, as well as the overall face of the country, have changed deeply. In fact, after having entered the globalization process, the role of China in the international arena has shaken the traditional balances between countries and it has imposed itself as the second largest world power at an international level.

The very rapid and majestic economic expansion of China, which started right after the period of economic reforms and of the opening up of the country toward the West, has touched many fields, including the one of fashion. Even if fashion is quite a recent phenomenon in the country, we can state that China has already gone through two different steps in the fashion industry: it turned from being the *factory* of the world, toward being the *market* of the world and now it is ready to enter the third stage of development, that is, becoming the *innovator* of the world, moving from the 'Made in China' to the 'Created in China' label. This has been an important step for a country that had the necessity to sort out from its status of poorness and backwardness and to become a new, modern and innovative country. In the field of fashion, the process of innovation is still ongoing, and the country is continuing to increase its expertise in this field. In particular, Chinese fashion designers, with the help and the support of the Chinese government, are working very hard to create an autonomous and independent fashion system in China by focusing on fashion innovation and on the creation of Chinese aesthetics and Chinese fashion brands that should be culturally distinctive, respected and internationally recognized. In order to do that, China is focusing on trying to eliminate the stereotypes that has always negatively influenced the perception of Chinese fashion and also on fighting against the imperialism of Western brands in the field of fashion. In this way, China is

striving to obtain the legitimization and the international recognition of its own fashion system in order to finally become a world power in this field.

In the first chapter of my thesis the main focus is to deeply analyze the rise of the fashion industry in China and to understand the journey of the country toward more autonomy in this field. The chapter begins with a brief introduction on the development of Chinese textile and apparel industries, since they functioned as initial drivers for the economic modernization of the country and they also paved the way for the creation of a modern fashion industry. In fact, due to their high level of expansion and, subsequently, of specialization, China had the opportunity to give birth to a modern fashion system that spread all over the country thanks to the establishment of fashion education system, to the proliferation of fashion mass media and to the foundation of fashion institutions, associations and events. In order to demonstrate that things are changing in China, we will focus on the relationship the country had with Western brands: they first exploited the country as a production base for its low labor costs and high workforce availability and then, when China became the fastest consuming market in the world, they look at it as a target market. The most contemporary part of this chapter focuses on the necessity that China had to change and to develop a proper and autonomous fashion system. On one hand, the society, thanks to the huge economic expansion of the country, saw a rapid increase in living conditions, disposable income and purchasing power, that let the demand and sale of fashionable items rapidly expand. The Chinese society in few years not only demanded for more clothes, but, as fashion knowledge increased, it started also to demand for more value-added products. On the other hand, the government supported the development of a Chinese fashion industry both as a necessity to complete the process of modernization of the country and as a way to give China a new image of an innovative, independent and modern country. For these reasons, China, in particular starting from 2000s, began to work very hard in order to create its own autonomous and independent Chinese fashion system by creating authentic Chinese aesthetics and Chinese brands that should obtain global recognition, mainly by fighting against stereotypes it has for long suffered for and by trying to eliminate the Western imperialism affecting fashion. This is also due to the fact that, in recent years, China experienced the revival of patriotic sentiments in the fashion field that are based on China's glorious sartorial past: this encouraged Chinese fashion designers to take inspiration from China own's past, rather than from abroad. At this point, we will analyze the case study of the profoundly offensive and disrespectful promotional campaign of the Italian brand Dolce & Gabbana, which perfectly embodied this desire of China to liberate itself from Western imperialism. Finally, in the last part of

this chapter, we will focus on the presentation of some Chinese fashion brands that already gained international success, as a proof that Chinese fashion brands are doing well and they are gradually obtaining international recognition.

The purpose of the second chapter is, instead, to focus on some cultural aspects that can be found in Chinese fashion that, at least at the beginning, represented an obstacle for the spread of modern fashion inside the country. China's dependence from foreign models has given the possibility to the rest of the world to judge it as not able of innovation; other stereotypes have always depicted Chinese fashion as worth nothing; the too strict government's control on every aspect of people's life refrained the spread of styles and trends and, finally, the traditional Chinese culture has represented an obstacle for the adoption of modern fashion ideas and lifestyles inside the country. In the very last part of the chapter, the attention shift on the most important fashion's figures, namely the Chinese fashion designers, on their main characteristics and on their different backgrounds and approaches they have in design and retail. Previously, due to the rapid economic development of China, there was no extra time and space left for creativity and innovation, so Chinese fashion designers, in order to satisfy the growing demand from fashion consumers, directly adopted Western fashion in terms of design. Nowadays, thanks to the support of the government, they have more time and resources to focus on design and innovation, which allowed them to be regarded as "artists" more than only as manufacturers, able to create work of art instead of simple functional clothes.

To summarize, I would say that this thesis could help understanding how, following the journey of the country from the expansion of textile and apparel industries first, and then focusing on the rise of fashion industry, China is now striving to develop an autonomous and independent fashion system. That should be an analysis to figure out that China is no more a developing country only used as a production base by Western companies but, it is emerging as a country capable of developing a proper fashion system based on fashion innovation and on the creation of autochthone Chinese brands, that will let the Chinese fashion system obtaining the legitimacy and the international recognition needed to finally include China among the world power in the field of fashion.

CHAPTER 1

FROM PRODUCTION TO FASHION

As probably we all know, in the last decades, China experienced a tremendous economic growth which led the country becoming the second world's economic power, only after USA.

Among the rise and the development of many industries, an important place is occupied by the Chinese textile and apparel ones, which nowadays represent two pillars in the Chinese scenario.

China boasts the leader position for the export of textile and clothing, producing more than 43.1 percent of global demand in 2017¹. This industry had to provide clothing for a population of around 1.3 billion people, it employed about 19 million workers and it contributed for a long period to create the highest trade surplus which serve to support country's modernization efforts². Despite the decline these industries have to face starting from 2015³, due to many reasons that we will analyze in the next paragraph, it is without doubt that China today is the world's leading powerhouse in garment manufacturing.

It is exactly due to the recent incredible growth of China, and in particular of textile and apparel industries, that the country started to create the basic conditions for the birth and the rise of a fashion industry⁴. It is only after 1980s, thanks to the reforms carried out by Deng Xiaoping, that China experienced the rise of a fashion industry, initially highly influenced by the West, but that nowadays is striving to develop independently and to gain global recognition. In the next chapters, after a brief introduction to the Chinese textile and apparel industries, we will



Fig. 1 A factory in Henan run by the Jiantai Garment Company

deeply analyze the rise of Chinese fashion industry, its development in recent years and its path toward gaining more autonomy and innovative roots.

¹ Textiletoday.com, *China is building tech intensive textile industry, leaving low value business*, 2017, <https://www.textiletoday.com.bd/china-building-tech-intensive-textile-industry-leaving-low-value-business/>

² ZHAO, Jianhua, *The Chinese fashion industry: An Ethnographic approach*, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, p.17

³ Textiletoday.com, *China is building tech intensive textile industry, leaving low value business*, 2017, <https://www.textiletoday.com.bd/china-building-tech-intensive-textile-industry-leaving-low-value-business/>

⁴ XIAO, Wenling, 肖文陵, Guoji liuxing tixi yu dangdai Zhongguo shishang chanye fazhan tujing 国际流行体系与当代中国时尚产业发展途径, Qinghua Daxue Meishu Xueyuan 清华大学美术学院, in Zhuangshi 《装饰》, 2010, 第 10 期

1.1 A BRIEF PRESENTATION OF CHINESE TEXTILE AND APPAREL INDUSTRIES

In order to understand how China reached its actual supremacy and gained a leading position, we need to briefly introduce the evolution of modern Chinese textile and apparel industries in the country.

Different scholars agree that textile and apparel industries in China have gone through three different steps⁵:

1. Infancy: the industry before 1949
2. Development: the industry in pre-1978 People's Republic of China
3. Take-off: industry post-1978 in the Reform Era

China has always been considered the cradle of natural fibers, known for its richness in textile, in particular for silk and cotton already traded in ancient times along the silk road, but the history of modern textile and apparel industries in China only started in 1870s.

In that period, China was experiencing the end of the millenary Chinese empire with the fall of the last dynasty. During the last years under the control of the Qing dynasty, China was involved in the fight of Opium wars against British empire finished with the defeat of China, which was forced to sign the Treaty of Nanking through which the country had to open to Britain five ports, namely, the port of Shamian, Xiamen, Fuzhou, Ningbo and Shanghai⁶. This was the first time that the very close, conservative and millenary Chinese empire opened its doors to foreigners and to the capitalist Western world. Thanks to the opening of ports, Britain, together with other European countries, was given the possibility for the first time to establish businesses on the Chinese territory and this resulted in an immediate and huge expansion in the number of factories⁷. The opening up of China continued over time and it was sustained also after the declaration of the Republic of China in 1912. It is in this atmosphere and under these conditions that the modern textile and apparel industries emerged, when the first Chinese nationalist entrepreneurs set up textile mills together with Western capitalists⁸. In ports, there was a rapid and huge growth in the circulation of technologies

⁵ ZHAO, Jianhua, *The Chinese fashion industry: An Ethnographic approach*, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, p.34

⁶ *The treaty of Nanjing*, in Milestone Documents in World History, https://moodle2.units.it/pluginfile.php/174058/mod_resource/content/2/Treaty_of_Nanjing_1842_with_Explanation_s_Opium_War_Primary_Sources.pdf

⁷ ZHAO, Jianhua, *The Chinese fashion industry: An Ethnographic approach*, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, p.20

⁸ Ibid

and innovation⁹ which were imported from the Western world where the industrial revolution was taking place in those precise years. Through the import of technology and machineries from the West, it was possible for China to develop a mechanized textile industry. Nevertheless, the periods of the late Qing dynasty and the early years of the Republic of China were characterized by turmoil, confusion and continuous political problems which created an instable environment for the textile and apparel industries to let them develop at their maximum¹⁰. It is for this reason that, even if during those years we can trace the beginning of the modern textile and apparel industries in China, we can say that the expansion was not without problems and proceeds at a slow pace of growth. With the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 and under the guidance of the communist party, China started to face a lot of changes, in particular for what concerns its politic and its economy.

Starting from the end of 1958, Chinese government decided to impose the planned economy and started to carry out the Five-Years Plan¹¹, an economic-political instrument used in socialist countries where the economic initiative is controlled and planned directly by the state and not by the market, as in capitalist countries. In China, the organ responsible for the issue of the Five-years plan was the State Council which was composed by different ministries which were in turn responsible for the production of the corresponding products; in fact, there were ministries for coal, communications, electronics, textile and so on. Under the planned economy, all the factories, not only those which were part of the textile and apparel industries, became little by little state-owned and state-run. In this system, the state could be considered the sole owner and the sole manager of the overall economy, making the complex networks of industries and factories a sort of single factory with a single owner, the State. At the beginning of the foundation of the PRC, the planned economy showed enthusiastic results since it had the advantage of very rapidly pushing toward the economic development, it helped to achieve the economy of scale and to concentrate the scarce resources of China in the most important fields after years of war. It is for this reason that, despite all the political events happened in China in that historical period, the country lived an impressive economic growth. For example, for what refers to the textile and apparel industries, in 1970, the production of cotton and realization of fabrics in China reached 11.31 million bales and 9.15 billion meters respectively, showing an increase of five times respect to 1949¹².

⁹ FINNANE, Antonia, *Changing clothes in China*, London, Hurst & company, 2007, p.105

¹⁰ ZHAO, Jianhua, *The Chinese fashion industry: An Ethnographic approach*, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, p.20

¹¹ Ibid p.21

¹² Ibid p.22

Of course, this shift toward a planned economy, which was reflected also in the collectivization of the society, brought also a lot of negative aspects in the development of Chinese industries. In fact, after the settlement of the planned economy, low-productivity, inefficiency, impoverishment in the competition between factories and depression in consumption demand were all problems that affected the overall economy of the country.

TEXTILE AND APPAREL INDUSTRIES AFTER-1978 DURING THE REFORM ERA

The take-off of Chinese textile and apparel industries is fixed in the 1978¹³, which can be regarded as a very important year in China, corresponding with the death of Mao and with the end of the radical socialist era. In the previous years, particularly from 1966 to 1976, China experienced ten years of Cultural Revolution, characterized by fear, turmoil and violence that touched every aspect of Chinese people's life. During the Mao era, China was turned inward, and it was completely isolated from the rest of the world. The objective of Mao was to reorganize the society transforming it into a proletarian paradise, and, for that reason, all people have to focus on political and class struggle. This is the reason why, when China open up again to the rest of the world, it was in a social and cultural shock-status, in a stage of profound backwardness and it had one of the highest percentage of people living in a status of poverty.

After Mao's death and the rise of Deng Xiaoping, China had an urgent need to restore itself and to abandon the policies of isolation imposed by Mao.

In 1978, the Chinese government held the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee, a congress which was chaired by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist party in Beijing. At that meeting, the CCP decided to focus on economic development as the prime focus for China which result in a shift from class and political struggle to much more attention on economic development¹⁴. The "Four Modernizations" in industry, science and technology, national defense and agriculture should become the Party's major goal in the next future. In order to carry out economic development rapidly, China decided to adopt market-oriented reform policies and open up the country to the trade with the West through the so-called "Open-Door policy". The shifts from state-owned to market-based economy and from an almost closed economy to an increasing

¹³ ZHAO, Jianhua, *The Chinese fashion industry: An Ethnographic approach*, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, p.23

¹⁴ China Daily, *Third Plenary Session of 11th Central Committee of CPC held in 1978*, 2008
http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/bizchina/2008-10/29/content_7169033.htm

participation in the global economy were of crucial importance both for the opening up of the country to trade with West and for facilitating the entry of China in the WTO in 2001¹⁵.

On the economic side, the most important measure taken was to turn companies into fully market-driven and privately-owned mechanisms¹⁶. This resulted in a change in the management of firms which was transformed into a general manager responsibility system; in the transformation of companies into business units and not merely in administrative ones, which do not only take care of the production process but also of commerce, giving them the possibility to take decisions independently; in the shift toward a contract-based employment system and in the reformation of the salary system based now on performances¹⁷. The privatization of factories reintroduced also competition, incentives and market mechanisms in the country, which were disappeared in the China of Mao, fundamental to regain the efficiency in the overall economy. As for the opening up to the West, it had, instead, the advantage to increase the circulation of foreign capital, technology and know-how coming from developed countries.

This focus on economic development represented the first efforts of China to come out from its status of a rural and agricultural society and to pave the way to become a modern, urban and industrial country.

Together with these efforts, results come in turn.

In the first 25 years of reforms, from 1980 to 2005, China's economic expansion was two hundred times faster than the development of any other country in the world¹⁸, not only in the textile and apparel industries, but also in other fields, first with a focus on the heavy industries and agriculture and then also on light manufacturing and service sectors. Between 1978 and 2008, the size of Chinese economy multiplied nearly 50 times over and the average annual GDP growth was approximately 10%¹⁹. This resulted in a huge improvement in living conditions: in a period in which world's poverty was increasing, following a very fast rate, in China the conditions of poorer people were improving very rapidly. By 2005, the number of people living under \$2 per day had fallen by

¹⁵ ZHAO, Jianhua, *The Chinese fashion industry: An Ethnographic approach*, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, p.24

¹⁶ WESSIE, Ling, SEGRE REINACH, Simona, *Fashion in multiple Chinas*, London, New York, I.B Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2018 p.47

¹⁷ ZHAO, Jianhua, *The Chinese fashion industry: An Ethnographic approach*, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, p.25

¹⁸ WELTERS, Linda, C. MEAD, Arthur, *The Future of Chinese Fashion*, Fashion Practice, 4:1, 13-40, 2012, p.19, <https://doi.org/10.2752/175693812X13239580431225>

¹⁹ ROSS, Sean, *The 3 Industries Driving China's Economy*, in Investopedia, 2015, <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/investing/091515/3-industries-driving-chinas-economy.asp>

nearly 500 million since 1981, while in those years in other developing countries of the world the number of people living in poverty increased by more than 500 million²⁰.

As it happens in almost all developing countries, textile and apparel industries were among the first ones to develop when the country started its path toward urbanization and modernization. This is due to the fact that this type of industries requires low capital investment and low-cost workforce. When Deng Xiaoping in 1980 adopted the export-led growth strategy and the open-door policy to promote foreign trade, a huge number of foreign companies came to China in search for low manufacturing costs, huge workforce and cheap labor. This, together with the emphasis on exportation and the adoption by China of favorable policies for exportation of textile and apparel products, such as tax rebates and tax deductions, caused the incredible growth of textile and apparel industries, leading China to gain the position of world's leader in manufacturing.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS: THE TRENDS OF MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY IN MOST RECENT YEARS

The surprising and magnificent growth of China in the export of textile and apparel products had begun, as we have seen, in the 1980s.

But what did happen to these industries in more recent years?

In general, it can be said that the Chinese textile and apparel industries, key players in the economy of the country and in the international textile market as a whole, were mainly fueled by the export and they steadily increased and developed until 2014²¹. After this year, China's exports started to decline very rapidly: since 2015, exports of Chinese textiles and clothing have declined sharply around 14,79% from about US\$236 billion in 2014 to US\$206 billion in 2016, according to the World Trade Organization²².

²⁰ WELTERS, Linda, C. MEAD, Arthur, *The Future of Chinese Fashion*, Fashion Practice, 4:1, 13-40, 2012, p. 19, <https://doi.org/10.2752/175693812X13239580431225>

²¹ Qian zhan chanye yanjiuyuan 前瞻产业研究院, *Fuzhuang hangye fazhan xianzhuang fenxi weilai fuzhuang qiye fazhan qianli juda* 服装行业发展现状分析 未来服装企业发展潜力巨大, 2018, https://www.sohu.com/a/226673482_473133

²² LENG, Sidney, *China's once-booming textile and clothing industry faces tough times*, in South China Morning Post, 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/30/chinas-once-booming-textile-and-clothing-industry-faces-tough-times.html>

Table 1: Trend of Chinese textiles and clothing export to the world from 2012 to 2016. Value in thousands USD. Source: ITC Trade Map, WTO					
Product: Chapter & Brief Name	Exported value in 2012	Exported value in 2013	Exported value in 2014	Exported value in 2015	Exported value in 2016
56 Wadding, felt and nonwovens; special yarns; twine, cordage, ropes and cables and articles thereof	3540451	4125344	4598172	4861927	4937214
57 Carpets and other textile floor coverings	2403738	2505473	2680242	2629738	2538131
58 Special woven fabrics; tufted textile fabrics; lace; tapestries; trimmings; embroidery	4637697	4874882	5122705	4805720	4590432
59 Impregnated, coated, covered or laminated textile fabrics; textile articles of a kind suitable ...	6848801	7375917	7606787	7131843	6932651
60 Knitted or crocheted fabrics	11219348	12900389	14142116	14629502	14467683
61 Articles of apparel and clothing accessories, knitted or crocheted	87045225	96792727	91991969	83842271	75026960
62 Articles of apparel and clothing accessories, not knitted or crocheted	61224360	68251874	81446011	78506716	72766740
63 Other made-up textile articles; sets; worn clothing and worn textile articles; rags	24015853	26825158	28473917	26954429	25724646
Total: Textiles & Clothing (Chapter 56-63)	200935473	223651764	236061919	223362146	206984457

Fig. 2 Table 1: Trend of Chinese textiles and clothing export to the world from 2012 to 2016

The main reason of this decline, that has started in 2015, is due to the fact that China, as we will see from the last Five-year plan and from the policy of China manufacturing 2025, is undergoing an impressive economic transformation with a commitment to increase high-tech industries through the development of new and advanced technologies, which should replace the labor-intensive industries, such as the textile and apparel ones. "Many labor-intensive Chinese industries had already shifted to Southeast Asian countries," said Zhang Jianping, a senior researcher at the Institute for International Economic Research under the National Development and Reform Commission. He continued that "The labor costs there are four to five times cheaper than in China"²³. Even if textile and apparel industries developed relatively late in China, nowadays Chinese companies are attempting to make progress and they are improving very rapidly through innovation in many fields. Counting also on a great support from the government, many Chinese companies are now seeking to produce high-end and value-added products. Despite the decline in export registered starting from 2015 and the slower pace of growth of textile and apparel industries in recent years²⁴, these sectors still maintain their leading position in the global market.

²³ WENQIAN, Zhu, *China's textile exports decline in 2015*, in China Daily, 2016, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2016-01/14/content_23088319.htm

²⁴ RASHEDUL, Antu, *Is Textile Industry Shifting from China?*, in Textile Focus, 2017, <http://textilefocus.com/textile-industry-shifting-china/>

Top ten exporters of textiles, 2016
(US\$ billion and annual percentage change, %)

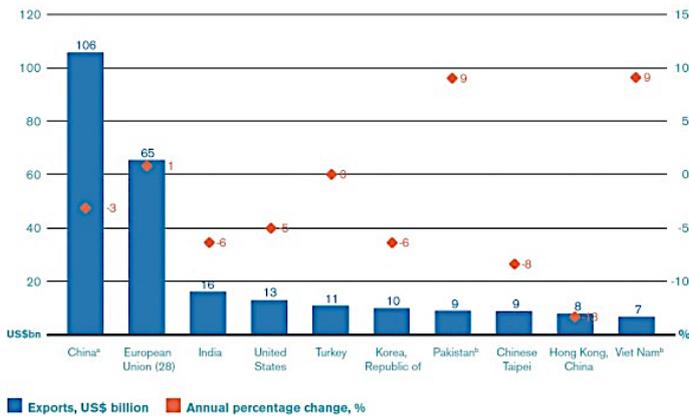


Fig. 3 Top ten exporters of textiles, 2016

(US\$ billion and annual percentage change, %).

Top ten exporters of clothing, 2016
(US\$ billion and annual percentage change, %)

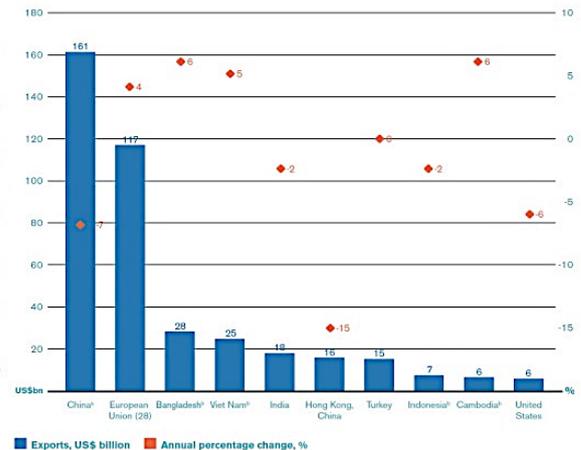


Fig. 4 Top ten exporters of clothing, 2016

(US\$ billion and annual percentage change, %).

From these graphs, taken from the World Trade Statistical Review, released by the WTO in 2017²⁵, it is possible to see that not only China in 2016 was still the first exporter in the world of both textiles and clothing, but also that it existed a very big gap between the total value of exports of textile and clothing products of China and that of the other countries. In 2016, China registered a decrease of 3% in the export of textiles and of 7% in the export of clothing but still it maintains its pole position accounting for a total value of \$106 billions and \$161 billions of exports in the two sectors respectively. These data provide a clear evidence of the fact that China will maintain its leading position in the textile and apparel industries for a long time.

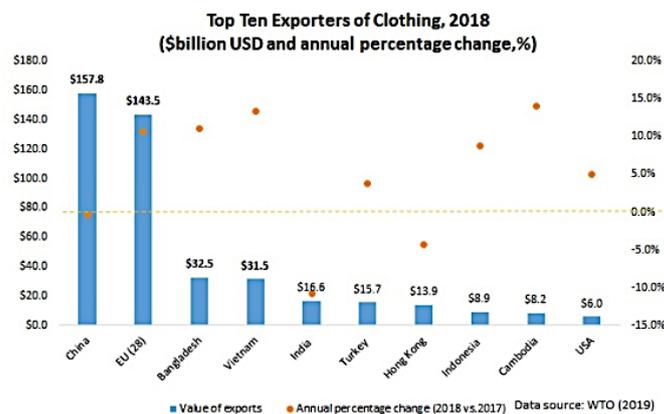


Fig. 5 Top ten exporters of clothing, 2018 (US\$ billion and annual percentage change, %).

In 2018, despite all the challenges that the textile and apparel industries were going through, including moving to high-value products, China was still the first exporter of clothing in the whole world, as it can be seen from the graph. Compared to the previous year, the exports of clothing in

²⁵ WTO, *World Trade Statistical Review, 2017*, https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/statis_e/wts2017_e/wts2017_e.pdf

2018 have only registered a very slight decrease of around 1,5%. This reflects exactly the new focus of the country, that we will analyze in depth in the next chapters: since China understood that the industry will not continue to growth at the same speed as in the previous years of establishment and expansion, the country focuses now on maintaining the same speed of growth in these industries and on shifting toward industrial innovation.

1.2 THE RISE OF MODERN FASHION INDUSTRY IN CHINA

Despite the position of leadership already reached and well-established by China in the textile and apparel industries, a more recent phenomenon is the rise of fashion industry in China.

Generally speaking, fashion industry is considered a modern phenomenon born in the 20th century, which developed first in Europe and in the United States of America when the rise of capitalism, the invention of many new technologies and the development of retail activities first made their appearance. If fashion at the beginning was an exclusive circumstance of Western world, nowadays it is an increasingly board less and globalized industry, which see the contribution of different countries around the world involved at different stages of the value chain. Fashion industry incorporates a lot of activities such as manufacturing, design, distribution, retailing, marketing, advertising and promotion. Thus, it is clear that fashion industry is much more complicated that the textile and apparel industries. The key sectors of fashion industry are numerous. The first one is textile design and production or better the making of textile through machineries giving them a shape, color or pattern. Secondly, we have fashion design and manufacturing which constitute mainly in the effort of designers to establish trends in the world of fashion. Moreover, four of the most important activities in an era with such a high level of competition and consumption are fashion retailing, marketing, merchandising and branding. Retailing includes all the activities made to bring the product from the manufacturer to the consumer; marketing is the ensemble of activities spacing from the initial design of the product to its presentation to the final consumer; merchandising is based on the idea of selling the right product, in the right place, at the right price, to the right consumer; last but not less important is branding, the activity of creating a brand, promote it and made it recognizable and valuable. All these activities are separated but interconnected to satisfy consumer's demand in the world of fashion. The complexity of this type

of industry let us understand why it usually takes long time to rise in developing countries such as China²⁶.

The main question that different scholars ask themselves when they study fashion in China is whether or not fashion existed in the China of pre-1949. Many of them believe that it is impossible for a country with more than five thousand years of history not to have ever developed fashion before. The historian Antonia Finnane, in her book "Changing clothes in China", provides us a clear evidence of the fact that fashion already existed in the China of the pre-1949 People's Republic of China²⁷.

At this point, in order to clarify why did scholars take different positions on this topic, it is fundamental to provide some definitions and to make clear distinction between some different concepts.

First of all, even if the two concepts of clothing and fashion are widely used as synonyms, in this analysis it is important to highlight the distinction existing between them. Clothing can be defined as "the covering we put on ourselves", while, fashion "also includes the additional and alluring values attached to clothing that make clothing enticing to the consumers"²⁸. From the two definitions, we can easily understand that the concept of fashion is much deeper, not merely functional and it is also linked to psychological factors such as the image a person wants to give of itself. Another important difference between clothing and fashion is that the last one, intended as fashion trend, change over time. The characteristic of "change" is proper only of fashion and it is not included in the notion of clothing, a material product of the apparel industry which does not hide any abstract connotation. Moreover, to conclude this reasoning, it is important to deeply understand the differences existing between the fashion process and the fashion industry. The first one, in fact, exists throughout history while the second one is a more recent phenomenon. Even if the fashion industry is powered and fueled by the fashion process, the latter alone is not sufficient for the first one to rise and develop. This is the main reason why different scholars have different opinions on the birth of fashion in China: those who sustain the idea that fashion existed in China before 1949 are considering the fashion process while, those who believe that fashion is a recent phenomenon are considering the rise and growth of a modern fashion industry²⁹.

²⁶ MAJOR, John S., STEELE, Valery, *Fashion industry*, Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/art/fashion-industry>

²⁷ FINNANE, Antonia, *Changing clothes in China*, London, Hurst & company, 2007

²⁸ WESSIE, Ling, SEGRE REINACH, Simona, *Fashion in multiple Chinas*, London, New York, I.B Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2018, p.45

²⁹ Ibid p.46

For the rise of fashion industry in developing countries there are some preconditions that should be satisfied. Some of them include well-established textile and apparel industries which are able to support the demand of clothing; a manufacturing capacity that has already reached a high degree, since the fashion industry requires the production of a large number of products; a sufficient number of experts in the field of fashion design who take care of the creation process of products and design, a key concept in fashion; an overall disposable income that allow people to buy fashionable clothing; channels able to spread the styles to different consumers and let them know and look new fashion trends; last but not least, fashion has an urgent need to develop in a social and economic environment which gave the possibility to people to buy and wear fashionable products. All the preconditions above-mentioned were very difficult to be spotted in the country prior to the establishment of the People's Republic of China. Not even during the Maoist era there was the possibility to give rise to such an industry, since China was going through a period of repression, fear and backwardness. It is particularly in those years, when China lived in an isolated context and closed to the rest of the world, that fashion experienced the worse period ever, rejected as an outcome of bourgeois and capitalistic ideas. Even if the government never established a dress code during the years of Cultural Revolution, people were afraid to be considered antirevolutionaries, so, since staying in the crowd was less dangerous than standing out, almost all Chinese people adopted the same fashion style.

Therefore, in which context did modern fashion industry develop in China?

It is only after the period of economic reforms and of the Open-door policy, established by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, that China little by little started seriously to accumulate the conditions for the rise of the fashion industry.

On the economic side, after the period of Cultural revolution, the need to restore the country and to push economic development were the prime focuses of the government. Textile and apparel industries played a fundamental role at the beginning of this process, since they were already established in China and they required low investment and low skilled workforce; so, they perfectly function as initial drivers for the improvement of the country's economic development. Following this great expansion of textile and apparel industries, companies were not only able to develop an enormous production capacity, but, due to the adoption of market-driven economy and to the privatization of companies by the government, they started also to accumulate know-how, technologies and inputs, mainly coming from the West, which represent the basis from which domestic fashion industry can develop.

On the political side, the economic reforms marked also the relaxation of the control by the State on people's everyday life, including their choices on what to wear. Since the tight grip maintained by the Chinese government on people slightly waned, Chinese people entered in contact with the world of entertainment and they started to get passionate about it. This resulted in a proliferation of styles in sharp contrast to the plain Mao era, living space for more freedom for people to decide their looks, to express their own personalities and to show interest in fashion, considered at the beginning only a vain lifestyle issue³⁰.

These changes in the social, economic and political contexts were crucial for determining the rise of the fashion industry.

In the early years of the reform era, fashion media such as TV shows and magazines, fashion contests, associations, fairs and courses at colleges or universities played a fundamental role in the spread of fashion inside the country.

THE SPREAD OF FASHION THROUGH MASS MEDIA

After a decade of isolation and repression, China reopened to people hungry for information and entertainment, two luxuries that China cannot enjoy for long time. These were the main reasons for the spread of mass media such as journals, magazines and other types of publication, TV shows and films, which were all fundamental channels for the dissemination of fashion inside the country and for the transformation of Chinese fashion from a trivial lifestyle into a legitimate industry.

Fashion print media played a very influential role in the shift from the rigid uniformity and strictness of the Mao era to the adoption of new styles after reforms, in particular among young generations which started to pursue fashion with great enthusiasm.

In order to respond to the growing demand for fashion information, in the 80s and in particular in the early 90s, China experienced the blossom of a great number of newspapers and fashion magazines. To name but a few from the domestic market: *Shizhuang* (Fashion), *Xiandai fuzhuang* (Modern dress), *Luxing se* (Fashion colour), *Zhongguo fuzhuang* (China Garments), *Shanghai fushi* (Shanghai style), *Shanghai shizhuang bao* (Shanghai Fashion Times), all published between 1980 and 1990. These domestic publications enjoyed almost a decade of exclusivity on the Chinese market, before the entry of hybrid domestic-foreign fashion titles, and they blossomed in a period in which,

³⁰ WESSIE, Ling, SEGRE REINACH, Simona, *Fashion in multiple Chinas*, London, New York, I.B Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2018. pp.47 - 48

for the first time, fashion was supported in China instead of being repressed. To mention a success in the domestic print, *Fashion* constituted the first fashion magazine to appear after the Mao era, published in Beijing in 1979 by the Ministry of Foreign Trade. Cheng Tianbao, who became the director of the journal, explained in this way the reason for the founding of a fashion journal after the Mao era: “Although at that time [in 1980] what appeared in the eyes of the people was a world of blue and gray, a glimpse of flicking red and yellow could already be caught from the bottom of people’s heart. Seeking beauty is an irrepressible part of human nature”³¹. Chen believed that, not even the Cultural Revolution could change people’s nature of seeking for beauty. For this reason, *Fashion* was founded to provide people with fashion information they were demanding for³². Beside *Fashion*, *Shanghai style* was another example of magazine which had the aim to provide information about new styles, clothing-care methods, pattern-making techniques, make-up and mix and match tips. Many other domestic publications blossomed with the intention to provide concrete fashion examples for masses to copy. They also helped in the proliferation of popular lifestyles, new aesthetics and sense of taste among the readers. Some of these titles include *Shenghuo zhoukan* (Life), *Zhishi yu shenghuo* (Knowledge and life), *Wenhua yu shenguo* (Culture and life) among many others³³. All these magazines were sold for few renminbi and distributed through subscription via local post offices and bookstores, which allowed them to reach every city in China. In the 90s, many magazines from the West started to enter the country. This forced the majority of domestic magazines to build partnerships with foreign ones in order to create hybrid domestic-foreign titles. It is in this period that there was the foundation of magazines such as *Shishang* (Cosmopolitan), *Shijie shizhuang zhi yuan* (Elle), *Ruili* (Rayli), *Shishang Basha* (Harper’s Bazar), *Jiaren* (Marie Claire) and Chinese *Vogue* which imposed themselves in the market from 1990s to around 2005³⁴. Besides helping the spread of fashion, these magazines were fundamental to mushroom fashionable urban lifestyles and to promote luxury consumption. At this point, it is easy to understand



Fig. 6 Cover of Vogue China's inaugural issue in September 2005, (2005年9月, Vogue杂志中国版创立)

³¹ WU, Juanjuan, *Chinese fashion: from Mao to now*, New York, Oxford, Berg, 2009, p.65

³² STEELE, Valerie, MAJOR, John, *China Chic: East meets West*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1999

³³ WU, Juanjuan, *Chinese fashion: from Mao to now*, New York, Oxford, Berg, 2009, p.63

³⁴ WU, Juanjuan, *Chinese fashion: from Mao to now*, New York, Oxford, Berg, 2009, p.76

the fundamental role played by fashion print in educating on fashion a mass of people who had no knowledge about these issues before and gradually in spreading fashion in all its facets.

If fashion print was a pillar in the growth of the fashion industry, TV dramas and shows had an even greater visual impact on people. As the 80s began, everybody started to desire to possess a television, so the number of people possessing it increased at an incredible speed rate. The television played a very important role in transforming the Chinese lifestyles, revolutionizing also Chinese fashion. Since in China in those years there were not so many entertainment activities, watching TV became one of the favorite hobbies of people, transforming it in a powerful channel for spreading fashion³⁵. At the beginning the number of TV dramas broadcasted in China was very scarce and they were mainly imported from Hong Kong and Japan. They were so much filled with fashion inspirations that they could be regarded as a major way to import models for China to be copied, facilitating the adoption of new styles and trends. The TV dramas imported from Japan focused on themes such as aspiration, family bonds and love and they were set in modern years. This made their adoption easier than embracing those coming from Hong Kong usually set in elder periods. American TV shows and series were also adopted during those years. Although fashion already appeared on screens in the early years of reform era, it was particularly in the 1990s that stations started to broadcast specific fashion shows and programs in a more direct way. TV was used as a sort of classroom to offer dressmaking lessons to those people hungry for fashion information. The first fashion television program was the so-called *Fashion Galaxy*, broadcasted for the first time in 1988 on Guangzhou TV Station³⁶. It was mainly about international trends and events and it was such a success that it was followed by the creation of a lot of other similar shows. Today fashion shows play an indispensable part of every TV stations around the country. Two of the most influential fashion programs are also represented by *Oriental Fashion* and *The Complete Fashion Manual*. The first one is broadcasted by the CCTV and it is a program not only about fashion attitudes and ideas but also on advices about clothes, care, makeup, skincare among others³⁷. The second one was created in 1997 and it covers themes such as fashion trends, runway shows, high-end consumption and so on. Some fashion programs were also imported from the West: *Project Runway* is an American fashion reality which meet with very great success in China in 2008³⁸.

³⁵ SPENCE, Jonathan D., *The search for modern China*, New York, Norton, 1991

³⁶ WU, Juanjuan, *Chinese fashion: from Mao to now*, New York, Oxford, Berg, 2009, p.26

³⁷ BAO, Mingxing, 包铭新, *Shimao Cidian 时髦词典* (Fashion dictionary), Shanghai, Shanghai Wenhua Chubanshe 上海文化出版社, 1999

³⁸ WU, Juanjuan, *Chinese fashion: from Mao to now*, New York, Oxford, Berg, 2009, p.27

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FASHION EDUCATION SYSTEM

The development of fashion industry in China is also strictly linked to the rise of Chinese fashion education system. As we have already seen, a precondition for the rise of a fashion industry is the availability of professionals working in the fashion industry. Knowing that and since the establishment of this type of industry was on government's agenda as a part of the modernization process of the country, the government decided to create and support the fashion education system for preparing China's own design talents.

Starting from the early years of the reform era, clothing design programs were organized in more than thirty universities around the country. To mention some of them included: The Central Academy of Art and Design, the Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology both in Beijing, Suzhou Institute of Silk Textile Technology, China Textile University in Shanghai. The first degree-major in fashion design was offered in 1980 by the Central Academy of Art and Design by Yuan Jieying, a respected Chinese designer. Many other colleges started to build up fashion courses, majors, and programs to satisfy the need for information people felt in that period and in particular to educate those who had the ambition to become designers, a profession that China still lacked in 1980s. The majority of college educators or founders of universities programs during those years were designers who received a training in fine arts and drawing skills. For the shared background of these first educators, fashion design programs in China at the beginning were mainly focused on drawing skills such as sketching, watercolor painting, Chinese painting, fashion illustration, color theory and anatomy³⁹. Chinese first designers were educated to be more fine artists than fashion designers. This is the reason why designers of the early period lamented the restrictive nature of Chinese fashion education system. The latter in fact lacked creative contents and business education. Although the fashion education system of the reform era was highly criticized, it played a basic role in the creation of the fashion industry in China. In order to enrich the education provided in colleges and universities, many educators decided to take part in foreign exchange programs and activities. In this way they opened their vision and ideas and entered in contact with the West where fashion design is considered to be born. It is exactly during these early global connections that clothing design education pioneers had increasing interactions with the West and they could better understand the structure built around Western modern fashion design. Their international experience helped the whole country to shift from its traditional apparel industry to a modern

³⁹ Ibid p. 132

fashion system composed of different fashion professionals which included not only designers but also manufacturers, retailers, models, advertisers, editors and journalists. We will deeply analyze the development of fashion designers in China further in a specific chapter.

THE LIVELY PANORAMA OF FASHION INSTITUTIONS AND EVENTS

The components of fashion industry not only include designers but also a set of institutions and organizations which have the main focus to expand and support this industry over time. This is the main reason why the Chinese government made a lot of efforts to set global fashion centers, associations, state-funded institutions, research and design centers, exhibitions, runway shows and design competitions to further spread fashion industry in China.

In order to build up a functioning fashion system, the State, starting from 1970s, found research institutions and associations. The *Shanghai Clothing Research Institute* was established in 1979 for grouping together some designers whose task was to design mainly for foreign trade shows and exhibitions. In 1981, after a conference held on fashion color, the *National Textiles Fashion Color Research Center* was founded to research and forecast fashion color trends. It is in 1986 that the *Shanghai Garment Trade Association* (SGTA) was established in order to manage the link between Chinese and Western fashion industries and between government and apparel companies. This last association was also very important for its function of regulating professional activities, planning future development, editing apparel books and magazines, providing professional consultancy and evaluating professional designers among many other activities. The institutes and associations listed above are only some of the several ones that were founded in those years by the government.

In 1980s, China experienced also the blossom of countless fashion events and activities usually held in the major cities of China, such as Shanghai and Beijing, organized and financed by state-funded fashion entities, companies and higher institutions. To mention one, the *Garment, Shoes and Hats Design Exhibition* had been very influential in China because it was exactly during this exhibition that the Ministry of Commerce and the municipal government set guidelines for clothing design. According to these general rules, clothing should be *meiguan* (beautiful), *defang* (composed) and *jiankang* (healthy) and these standards had to be respected not only by designers but by all people involved in the fashion supply chain. Even fashion editors must respect these guidelines when they decided on fashion illustrations for their journals and in particular fashion critics should evaluate new design on this basis. Styles that went against these criteria were evaluated as offensive “bizarre

looks” and they were condemned by the State media. Another important event was the *Shanghai Clothing Design Exhibition* held in Shanghai in 1979 at the Shanghai Art Pavilion. It saw the participation of over ten thousand people every day of the exhibition and it displayed over a thousand items of dresses and illustrations.

Since these exhibitions were all held by the State, they also served as an effective way to communicate and educate people on fashion accepted by the government and on what was considered appropriate.

Starting from the 90s, when the country has already been opened to fashion for almost ten years, China registered a proliferation of fashion design contests, modelling contests, festivals, fairs and fashion show in more or less all major cities.

One important contest was organized by the *China Fashion Designers Association*, which in 1995 began to list China’s Top ten fashion designers and created the most prestigious fashion title for a Chinese designer, the so-called Golden Peak Award.

Another contest worth to mention is the *Brother Cup China International Young Fashion Designers Contest*. It was held in Beijing and it lasted for ten years from 1993 to 2002. It used to be one of the major and most covered fashion competitions in China with the ambition to encourage innovation in clothing. It is not difficult to understand that this contest had a controversial nature since it went against the guidelines issued by the government through its guidelines and it mainly provided unconstrained styles, bizarre and odd shaped looks⁴⁰, which made it possible for the event to become the favorite one of both the fashion media and designers⁴¹.

The last event to mention as a pillar for the fashion industry is the China Fashion Week. In 1993, the government decided to found the China Fashion Association (CFA) in Beijing with the objective to organize a major event in which all the parts of the puzzle that composes the fashion industry in China can meet together and in order to promote the fashion industry, designers and brands in China. The results of the efforts of the CFA were visible when the very first China Fashion Week



Fig. 7 Models present the Chinese fashion house Aimer’s spring-summer 2011 lingerie collection at China Fashion Week in Beijing on October 25, 2010.

⁴⁰ PEIDONG, Sun, 孙沛东, *Kujiaoshang de jieji douzheng – wenge shiqi Guangdong de qizhuang yifu yu guojia guixun* 裤脚上的阶级斗争 – 文革时期广东的奇装异服与国家规训 (Class struggle over trousers: bizarre dress and state admonitions in Guangdong in the period of the Cultural Revolution), Kaifang shidai 开放时代, 2010

⁴¹ WU, Juanjuan, *Chinese fashion: from Mao to now*, New York, Oxford, Berg, 2009, pp. 136 - 140

(*Zhongguo guoji shizhuang zhou* 中国国际时装周) was held in Beijing in 1997⁴². This event takes place twice a year at the Beijing Hotel and at the China World Hotel, and it consists of fashion shows, professional contests, exhibitions, fashion forums, professional evaluation, among other activities. It is regarded as the most important fashion event in China which brings together all the major players of the fashion industry such as designers, models, fashionistas, potential buyers, members of fashion media as well as scholars and students of fashion. It is during this event that people can figure out how vivid is the array of factors essential to build up a concrete and operative fashion industry and how many professionals such an industry requires. This is not only a fashion event, but it is also an important social occasion for reunions, celebrations and meeting with people that are part of the sector and, for this reason, it usually obtains such a high success, coverage and participation. China Fashion Week is an almost newly established institution that has apparently been learned from the Western world where such events have already taken place in previous decades: the first New York Fashion week was, in fact, held in 1943 and the first Paris Fashion Week in 1945⁴³. Within more than 20 years of development, China Fashion Week is not only an unrivaled platform for fashion design, display of styles, ready-to-wear clothes and accessories but it is also a stage for showing brands, broadcasting fashion trends and displaying originality. Until nowadays, CFW saw the participation of more than 550 designers from over ten countries, and more than 520 fashion brands and organizations have hold 1152 fashion shows. Around 126 professional contests were organized in which took part more or less 3300 young designers and models. Today China counts more than 30 Fashion weeks around the country with China Fashion Week being the most influential since it attracts hundreds of fashion media from all over the world⁴⁴.

⁴² China fashion week 中国国际时装周,
http://english.chinafashionweek.org/gywm_en/201202/t20120214_893212.html

⁴³ FWO, Fashion Week Online, *History of fashion week*, <https://fashionweekonline.com/history-of-fashion-week>

⁴⁴ China fashion week 中国国际时装周,
http://english.chinafashionweek.org/gywm_en/201202/t20120214_893212.html

SHANGHAI: THE PARIS OF THE EAST

Even if Shanghai is still far from enjoying the same status of New York, Paris or Milan, it is gaining gradually the title of a fashion city. Even if it cannot be considered at the level of its Western competitors, Shanghai has already established itself as the “fashion capital” of China and even of Asia, near Tokyo, Hong Kong and Singapore.

The city nicknamed the “Paris of the East” has a long story of fine fashion and garment production that dates back to the 20s when it first opened its doors to the West during the early years of People’s Republic of China. During the nineteenth century, Shanghai emerged as the major port’s city and it served as country’s site of cultural experiment, economic development and social change⁴⁵. In those years, the city appeared very different from other Chinese cities to the eyes of both Chinese and foreigners. The growing circulation of commodities and innovation in technology caused a growing interest in fashion on Shanghainese. After the years of closeness and turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, during which China and Shanghai experienced a step back in the development of fashion⁴⁶, the decision of Deng Xiaoping to open up again the city to the West was an event of extraordinary importance. The Pudong area of Shanghai was transformed into a free-trade area while some foreign concessions were established in other parts of the city. This resulted



Fig.8 Models in the city of Shanghai.

in the possibility for Shanghai to solidify its position as the national center of fashion and commerce. People living in Shanghai were more enthusiastic and open toward Western fashion as well as very proud of their splendid sartorial tradition. For this reason, the label “Made in Shanghai” was considered for a period symbol of quality and fashion.

When China first developed its production of textiles and apparels, a lot of factories were opened in Shanghai, where free trade with the West was allowed. Then, when, during the reform era, the government decided to push the development of fashion industry, production plants moved to other near cities and Shanghai became the stage for a vivid growth in the fashion field. It was in this

⁴⁵ FINNANE, Antonia, *Changing clothes in China*, London, Hurst & company, 2007, p.101

⁴⁶ REN, Shan, 任珊, 1949-1965 nian Shanghai fuzhuangye fazhan yanjiu 1949-1965 年上海服装业发展研究 (The development of Shanghai clothing industry in 1949-1965), Shanghai, Donghua University, 2013

country that main fashion events, fairs, contests and activities took place and where the majority of luxury brands, coming from the West, decided to establish their headquarters. Even if the sense of fashion is still clearly not an important factor in the culture of China, where most of the people still dress with cheap clothes and do not follow trends, a high percentage of the population which is sensitive to and concerned about fashion moved to Shanghai. One of the most important events held in the city, starting from 1995, was the Shanghai international Fashion Culture Festival (SIFCF), an annual event organized by the China Textile Association and the Shanghai municipality⁴⁷. It involved dozens of municipal bureaus, associations, media, departments and corporations and it included runway shows by world-famous fashion designers, an international fashion fair, the China Cup national design contest, an international fashion model contest, among many other activities. Its aim was to expand the international connection of the city and to promote Shanghai's leading position as the capital of the Chinese fashion industry. In the 2008, this festival was transformed into a month-long fashion event that attracted a large amount of media coverage. Nowadays the SIFCF has become part of the Shanghai Fashion Week which is held twice a year and it is recognized among the most influential fashion events in the country.

In conclusion, we can say that despite Shanghai is still not recognized to be so much important in the international fashion scene, it is making its way on the world stage to gain the reputation of a fashion capital.

1.3 CHINA AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH WESTERN BRANDS

The relationship between China and Western brands was quite controversial, and it changed in nature over time. China represented first a production base and then a target market for the West. China is a very big country, with the highest population compared to any other country in the world, still underdeveloped before the reform era but with a very high potential both in terms of manpower and production and in terms of expected economic growth, so it was not difficult for the West to understand the advantages it could gain from China.

At the beginning, starting from the establishment of the Open-door policy, Western companies, included the ones operating in the textile and apparel sectors, were encouraged to enter China. The key policies taken by the government to open the country toward the West were mainly two:

⁴⁷ WU, Juanjuan, *Chinese fashion: from Mao to now*, New York, Oxford, Berg, 2009, p. 138

opening up of Special economic zones (SEZs) giving the possibility to foreign companies to establish FDI in the country and adoption by China of policies which favored foreign companies to outsource part of their activities to China. SEZs represent zones which are specifically created for facilitating the commerce and the growth of the economy by attracting foreign capital and technologies. The main policies carried out in SEZs included tax incentives to attract foreign investments, independence in trade activities, attraction and usage of foreign capital, establishment of Sino-foreign joint ventures, implementation of export-led growth strategies and of market forces. In general, many countries around the world have tried to establish SEZs, but China comes out as the most successful example in using this method to attract foreign investments⁴⁸. These solutions, taken by Deng Xiaoping, were among the first steps toward the reopening to the West after the period of Cultural Revolution with the aim to let the nation changing from being traditional toward embracing modernity and from being feudal toward favoring openness⁴⁹.

From the point of view of Western companies, once that China gave them the chance to enter the country, they immediately understood the benefits they could obtain, and they do not loose time.

Which was the interest Western countries had in China?

Foreign companies could gain advantages in shifting their production there thanks to the existence of global value chain. The internationalization of value chains is the result of globalization and it consists in the phenomenon of displacing different activities of a single company in different countries around the world⁵⁰. There were many reasons that led companies to take the decision to offshore or outsource their activities, including taking advantage of a local market or search for natural resources or cost advantage⁵¹. In the case of China, it was exactly this last point that attracted western companies. As outsourcing became a more common activity in business, many companies decided to shift manufacture and labor-intensive part of their business to developing countries in order to concentrate all the resources on the core one. The offshore factory had to perform limited activities confined to manufacture and it had only to produce low-cost items to be re-exported to foreign companies for sales or to be reworked and assembled with other components⁵². This is precisely what happened in China, once that it opened its doors to the West. Low-labor cost, large workforce, taxation benefits, low-cost production are among the most

⁴⁸ BARONE, Adam, *Special Economic Zone (SEZ)*, Investopedia, 2019, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/sez.asp>

⁴⁹ ZHAO, Jianhua, *The Chinese fashion industry: An Ethnographic approach*, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, p.59

⁵⁰ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Global Value Chains (GVCs)*, <https://www.oecd.org/sti/ind/global-value-chains.htm>

⁵¹ LASSERRE, Philippe, *Global Strategic Management (third edition)*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p.254

⁵² Ibid p.255

important advantages China could offer to Western companies which had benefits in starting their production there, gaining competitiveness.

If previously Western companies considered China only as a production base to exploit for its low labor costs, workforce availability and favorable regulatory conditions, now the same companies are looking at China and Chinese consumers also as a target market for their products. So, if before Western companies were only interested in outsourcing production to China, nowadays they are interested in having a presence in the Chinese market. This happened in many sectors, among which there is also the one we are discussing of. After the rapid growth of Chinese textile and apparel industries and subsequently of China's fashion industry, Western companies with strong brands spent a lot of time, efforts and resources in order to develop the right strategy to enter the complex Chinese market. Nowadays, the Chinese fashion market is attractive for Western brands not only because it became one of the fastest-growing markets in the world for consumption of global well-known brands, but also for the further expected expansion it will have in the next future. Another point that really attracts Western companies is Chinese market size: China is the country with the largest population in the world, composed by around 1.4 billion people⁵³. These represent some of the main reasons why Western brands cannot but enter China and exploit the opportunities of its huge market.

LUXURY BRANDS ENTER CHINA

After the reopening of the country to the West, luxury brands started gradually to enter China.

The first haute couture designer to get into China was Pierre Cardin. He held fashion shows in Beijing



Fig. 9 In 2011 Pierre Cardin showed his new collection in Tianjin, China.

and Shanghai in 1979, in an era in which fashion was still a taboo and a controversial matter in the country. For this reason, his fashion show was attended only by fashion professionals. Despite this, Cardin's fashion show was an incredible success and it is still remembered as

one of the most memorable East-meet-West fashion milestones in the post-Mao China. Cardin was

⁵³ Worldometers, *China population*, <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/china-population/>

the first to bring to China the modern idea of fashion industry: fashion models, fashion shows, fashion designers and fashion brands. Even if it was risky to stage such an idea of fashion in a China still strongly communist and shocked by past events, Pierre Cardin became recognized as China's "father of fashion". His suit became a symbol of prestige and most of his luxury products started to be both produced and sold in China. In the 80s and 90s, Pierre Cardin became synonym of fashion, as the fashion critic Wang Weiming affirmed: "*Pierre Cardin has become a model, a symbol, a signal that could not be any stronger. It signifies all required qualities in a commercial society: dignity, precision, manners, commitment, trust, ambition, and even arrogance*"⁵⁴. He became the most famous fashion Frenchman in China by the end of the 20th century, with a fashion empire that dominated China's luxury market for over a decade.

After Cardin's entry and success in the Chinese market in the 70s, many other brands coming from the Western world tried to enter the country.

An example of luxury brand that started to be sold in China in the early years of the post-Mao era is Nike, which opened the first factory in China in 1981 as a joint venture⁵⁵. In order to conquer the Chinese market, Nike adopted almost the same marketing strategy that make it very successful in USA. In fact, in 1981, the Western brand sponsored the Chinese national Basketball Team and in 1994 it took part in the establishment of China's first professional sport league, in soccer. Nike also sponsored top athletes, in particular during Olympic Games, to make the brand known all over the country. At the beginning, Nike was sold in the state-owned Beijing Friendship Store in 1982 while nowadays it grew into a billion-dollar enterprise⁵⁶.

Along with these above-mentioned fashion brands, many others made their way into the Chinese market very soon. To mention but few: Gucci, Prada, Dior, Chanel, Burberry, YSL, Versace among many others.

FAILURES IN ENTERING THE COUNTRY

Despite the numerous examples of great success in entering and establishing Western brands in the Chinese market, there are many other experiences of failure in imposing a brand in China. In fact, many fashion brands encountered great challenges in the Chinese market.

Why is it so complex?

⁵⁴ WU, Juanjuan, *Chinese fashion: from Mao to now*, New York, Oxford, Berg, 2009, p. 166

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Ibid p.167

The Chinese market is very difficult to operate in for Western companies. Some factors such as the distribution channels, legal requirements, purchasing behavior and culture make the entry into China very difficult for foreign companies⁵⁷.

First of all, the strong role played by the government has always represented a limit for the entry of foreign companies into the country. It imposes tough legal requirements that truly created high entry barriers for western companies in the Chinese market. Moreover, the question of the competition in China is very challenging for a foreign company since the competition inside the country reaches very high levels and, for this reason, domestic companies, usually grown into this market, are much more able to face highly competitive environments than foreign ones. Third, distribution is very different and complex in China not only for languages barriers, but in particular because Chinese distributors can truly ruin the reputation of a brand and can convey the wrong message and idea behind a brand to customers. This had been a huge problem between Western brands and Chinese distributors. Another difference that surprises a lot is the question of time. Due to the fast pace of growth of the Chinese market, in China everything is moving very rapidly, both decisions and execution, society is also changing dramatically, and trends are moving at lightning speed. Western companies are too slow and indecisive for the Chinese environment. Last but not least, the most common error of western companies is the misunderstanding of the local market and of Chinese culture⁵⁸. In China the market is very different and unique compared to any other country in the world. Chinese people and their culture developed under particular cultural, political, social and economic conditions that made them grow into an environment not easy to be understood by others. This is the reason why to succeed in China the most important thing to do is to spend time, efforts and resources to understand not only the local market but also consumers and culture, in order to avoid making mistakes that can determine the failure of a business.

⁵⁷ LASSERRE, Philippe, *Global Strategic Management (third edition)*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p.191

⁵⁸ GROLLEMAN, Jaap, *Western brands in China: hits and misses*, 2018, <https://jaapgrolleman.com/2018/09/10/western-brands-in-china-hits-and-misses/>

To mention some example in the field of western fashion brands, we can address to the case of Giorgio Armani. When he first opened its store in Beijing in 2001, he decided to give a touch of “China” to his shop, so he installed a red lacquer Chinese-style door at the entrance⁵⁹. This has revealed to be a big mistake made by the designer since its customers wanted to enter the Armani shop that they saw in magazines or TV and to have the same experience as his Western customers have in Italy. Another more recent example of cultural misinterpretation is the Burberry’s campaign for the Chinese New Year, a photography campaign created to celebrate the New Year showing the portraits of a family⁶⁰. These images attracted a blitz of



Fig. 10 Burberry’s Chinese Lunar New Year tribute draws online controversy over creepy fashion shots that shows a lack of understanding of CNY culture.

criticism since they seem to be taken from scary Asian horror movies. This has nothing to do with the atmosphere of Chinese New Year, the most esteemed and revered holiday by people in China, considered as a peaceful, lucky and joyful moment to spend with the whole family. In fact, this campaign was considered as the umpteenth time that a Western brand completely missed the point in China, not spending enough time to understand the culture of the country. For this reason, the result of the campaign was a complete failure for Burberry, that, instead of pushing the demand for these garments, it saw its shares fell almost five percent⁶¹.

THE COPY OF WESTERN BRANDS

Despite all the above-mentioned advantages foreign firms gained from entering the Chinese market, disadvantages should also be considered. As for the field of fashion, the most important drawback foreign companies faced when they first entered the Chinese market to produce their branded products, was represented by the beginning of the Chinese trend to copy products of Western luxury brand. When Western brands made their first appearance in China, the concept of fashion,

⁵⁹ ROLL, Martin, *Asian Brand Strategy: building and sustaining strong global brands in Asia*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p.278

⁶⁰ PAN, Yiling, *Burberry’s Weird Chinese New Year Tribute Stirs Controversy*, in Jing Daily, 2019, <https://jingdaily.com/burberrys-chinese-new-year/>

⁶¹ Ibid

branding and luxury culture were almost nonexistent in the country. Chinese people were only able to associate Western brands with wealth and modern Western world and this resulted in the huge growing desire of Chinese people to possess these brands. So, they started to copy Western branded products mastering a great ability: the copied goods were and still are so similar to real ones that the differences are nearly imperceptible to a normal consumer. It is for this reason that China gained the title of copycat. “Shan Zhai”⁶², the Chinese term to refer to this trend of producing fake imitations of Western brands, created a huge problem for Western companies. The market of counterfeit products in China can be considered one of the biggest one in the whole world and a lot of fake markets can be easily found in major cities in China, such as Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou. To mention one, the Qipu market in Shanghai is a very big counterfeiting market in which you can find very cheap clothing, accessories but not only, also tech products, shoes, objects and anything with a brand on it is available there. What it is really stunning is that, despite the availability of visible fake copies of global-known brands, there are also copies that are really well-done from the design to materials and even packaging⁶³.



Fig. 11 Fake Fendi bag. Fig.



Fig. 12 Fake Balenciaga shoes.



Fig. 13 Qipu Road Wholesale Clothing Market.

The impact of copied products on luxury brands is huge and it has created problems in terms of brand integrity, protection of intellectual property rights, loss of sales and exclusivity of trademarks. These problems still exist nowadays but, since China decided to change its own image, the government is making big efforts in enforcing laws and regulations against the practice of counterfeiting.

⁶² ZAKKOUR, Michael, *Copycat China Still A Problem For Brands & China's Future: Just Ask Apple, Hyatt & Starbucks*, in *Forbes*, 2014, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelzakkour/2014/04/30/copycat-china-still-a-problem-for-brands-chinas-future-just-ask-apple-hyatt-starbucks/#bc3c2db21566>

⁶³ Daxue consulting, *The counterfeit good industry in modern China*, 2019, <https://daxueconsulting.com/counterfeit-products-in-china/>

CONCLUSIONS

After having analyzed the major aspects of the relationship between China and Western companies and brands, we can draw some conclusions.

On the Chinese side, the opening up of China toward Western world and the consequent huge growth of textile and apparel industries have created both disadvantages, in terms of high industrial pollution, but they also brought important advantages. In fact, it was possible for China not only to follow a very rapid pace of growth in the textile and apparel industries, but also to start accumulating the know-how coming from the West, new inputs and capacity and more advanced technologies that China still lacked in those years, which were very useful for the nation to start its own path toward the rise of domestic fashion industry.

On the Western side, the entry into the Chinese market brought, first of all, the possibility to produce in the country at lower costs, shifting labor-intensive activities to Eastern countries, then to address to China as a target market in which there was the possibility to expand the business and exploit many opportunities. But, for what refers to Western brands, we have to consider the huge and negative impact that fake products manufactured and sold in China for few renminbi had on Western brands. This problem created great disadvantages for foreign companies and it also contributed to decrease the credibility of Chinese fashion, considering it not able to innovate but only to copy the West, and to nickname China as the copycat of Western fashion, which the country was, indeed, until the last decade when things gradually started to change inside the country.

1.4 TOWARD A CHINESE AUTONOMY: THE RISE OF CHINA'S OWN FASHION SYSTEM

'China is turning from an 'economy based on imitation' to an 'economy based on innovation'

- L. Mandrieux

INTRODUCTION

Despite the strong performance China showed in developing the textile and apparel industries, the Chinese fashion industry was in a status of backwardness until the early years of the twenty-first century. In fact, a very high positioning in the textile and apparel industries does not mean automatically a positive image in terms of fashion creation. China was considered the copycat of Western brand, not able to innovate and to design fashion independently, only focused on low-cost,

low-quality and low-manufacturing fast fashion, with designers absorbed in creating styles for the mass market, lacking creativity and appropriate systems of management, manufacturing, marketing and retailing. As Zhang Wenhe, editor of the Beijing journal *Art and Design*, stated: “We must recognize that there is currently no fashion industry in our country; even the embryo has not been formed, and fashion magazines in China are no more than a clothes horse for the international fashion industry”⁶⁴. This statement is consistent with the general pessimism that the Chinese fashion world was living in the early twenty-first century. In order to better understand some of the factors that give birth to this pessimism, we have to consider where China was at the beginning of the twenty-first century and where it aspires to go in the next future. To do that, we have to make reference to the concept of global value chains (GVCs) and to the smile curve framework.

The rise of global value chains is one of the most important factors which characterized the phenomenon of economic globalization in recent years. GVCs expect to see different stages of the production process of a company located in different countries around the world. The result is that goods are produced “in a number of stages in a number of locations, adding a little bit of value at each stage”⁶⁵, as stated in 1995 by Paul Krugman, a New York Times opinion columnist. The main reason for that depends on the costs of different activities linked to the production of a finished good: the single task is outsourced or offshored in the place in which it has the lower cost. GVCs have both advantages and disadvantages. Main advantages include the fact that being part of the global value chain creates for developing countries opportunities of accumulating know-how and of transferring technology from more developed countries, a process that happened in China for many years. Moreover, not only it opens up the possibility to increase employment opportunities, but it allows also the country to specialize only in some sectors exploiting its comparative advantage, without the necessity to build up the whole value chain. Despite these advantages, GVCs also brings some disadvantages. First of all, because differences exist in the comparative advantage of different countries around the world, it can happen that rich countries continue to go on developing activities such as marketing, sales, R&D while outsourcing labor-intensive activities to developing countries. This often creates problems of poor quality of the product since the production is in the hand of low-technology and cheap manufacture countries. On the other hand, developing countries are exploited for labor-intensive activities and they can feel trapped in the lowest part of the “smile curve”, without the possibility to develop and improve.

⁶⁴ FINNANE, Antonia, *Changing clothes in China*, London, Hurst & company, 2007, p.279

⁶⁵ YE, Ming, MENG, Bo, WEI, Shang-jin, *Measuring Smile Curves in Global Value Chains*, Institute of Developing Economies, IDE DISCUSSION PAPER No. 530, 2015, <http://rigvc.uibe.edu.cn/docs/20160329210052329340.pdf>

The “Smile curve” framework was first conceived by Stan Shih, the Acer’s founder, in 1992⁶⁶. This graph has been used a lot to describe the concept of GVCs and to analyze in depth the stage of different nations.

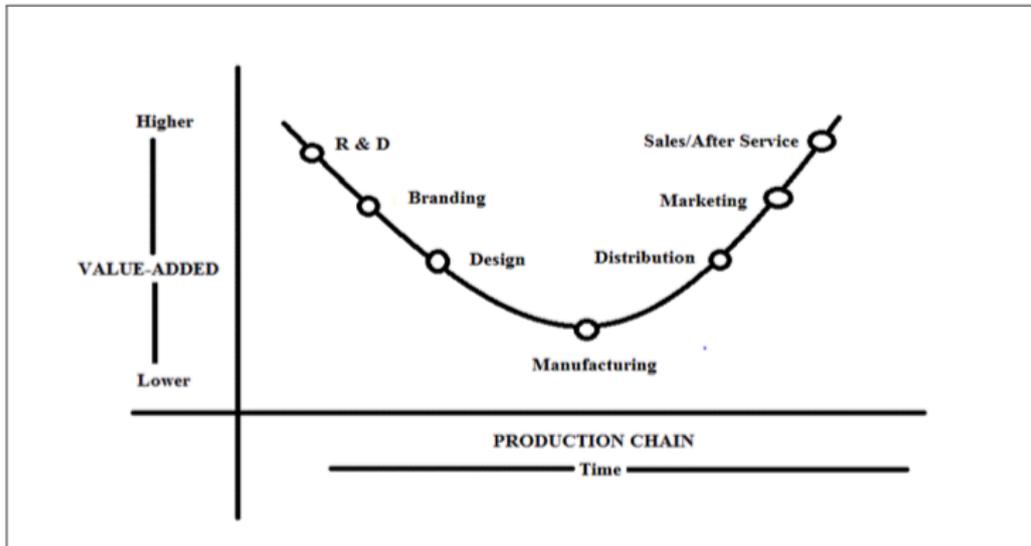


Fig. 14 The smile curve. Source: Mudambi (2008).

Many times, scholars of textile and apparel industries have described the development of these two sectors as a series of steps of industrial upgrade that are unavoidable: this is considered a natural process of developmental stage of different countries. According to this theory, it is obvious for companies in developing countries to start their industrialization development from labor-intensive activities, such as manufacturing. Consequently, it is also natural that developed countries outsource these activities, requiring low-cost manufacture, to poorer countries and to only focus on intangible activities.

It is very clear from the graph⁶⁷, which took the shape of a smile, that R&D, Branding, Marketing, sales and services activities stand at the two upper poles of the curve and they represent value-added and intangible tasks, usually run in developed countries. In the lowest part of the graph stands the manufacturing activity, a very much less profitable stage of the value chain, where China stopped for some time in the past, and where it is still focused today.

As stated in this theory, after that a country developed a strong manufacturing industry, it has a solid base to start climbing up the value chain, toward more sophisticated activities and this is

⁶⁶ AGGARWAL, Sakshi, *Smile Curve and its linkages with Global Value Chains*, in Munich Personal RePEc Archive, 2017, https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/79324/1/MPRA_paper_79324.pdf

⁶⁷ European Union Chamber of Commerce in China 中国欧盟商会, *China Manufacturing 2025: Putting Industrial Policy Ahead of Market Forces*, 2017, p.3, http://www.csc.org.cn/upload/doc/china_manufacturing_2025_putting_industrial_policy_ahead_of_market_force%5BEnglish-version%5D.pdf

exactly what it is happening in China nowadays. As we have already seen, China has been able to create such a strong textile and apparel industries to reach the pole position compared to any country in the world, and now it is ready to move out from the lowest part of the “smile curve”. In recent times, it is clear that the objective of China is no more to be only the biggest producer in the world and to maintain its pole position in the manufacturing sector, but it has also the desire of and it is accumulating the potential to climb out the “smile curve” and to start competing further up in the value chain.

The growth and success of China in the last decades paved the way for the more recent development of what we can call the “Creative economy”, of which fashion industry is an important part.

The concept of *Creative economy* can be found in the literature of post-industrial cities, where traditional manufacturing has been replaced by “creative industries”. The core idea behind this narrative is the opposition between utilitarian, material-driven manufacture typical of the past and the new idea-driven, intangible economy. United States and Europe began to move forward from manufacture starting from the 1980s, entering a new developmental stage. The two countries developed their core business on finance, insurance, real estate, cultural and creative industries and tourism, shifting the production to developing countries along the global supply chain⁶⁸. When China reopened up its doors to the West, the production of fashion on both material and symbolic level represented a real challenge for China. The country was not only eager to catch up the West which was much more advanced and modern but also to excel as a country that can master aesthetic knowledge as a form of soft power to come out from its backwardness⁶⁹. In order to sustain this process, the Chinese government decided to adopt creative industries as part of its attempt to move up the value chain from manufacture to other forms of value-added economic activities, by implementing a new project aiming at shifting “*from Made in China to created in China*”⁷⁰. The “Made in China” label can be found in the wardrobe of any person on the globe, since for long time the country represented the place in which every type of garment was produced, from fast fashion to luxury items. Nowadays things are changing since China is ready to invest money, time and efforts to develop a fashion industry which can be recognized at an international level. So, at this point of development, the country is keen to take clothing to the next stage, that is, fashion created by the

⁶⁸ WESSIE, Ling, SEGRE REINACH, Simona, *Fashion in multiple Chinas*, London, New York, I.B Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2018, p.94

⁶⁹ Ibid p.3

⁷⁰ Ibid p.96

Chinese. Even if this represents a key issue from 2005, the process has not yet been achieved and the country is still working hard to make its fashion recognized at an international level.

WHY DOES CHINA FEEL THE NEED TO CHANGE?

Starting from the beginning of the twenty-first century, China did not accept anymore to be looked at like the country of bad quality, copies of Western brands and not able to innovate. This new trend is the result of the changes that the country experienced after the reform era which completely changed the face of China⁷¹. The new trend the nation is going through in fashion is to move from the “Made in China” to the “Created in China”⁷².

But, at this point, the real question is why does China feel this need to shift from production toward innovation, creative economy and fashion creation?

In order to answer this question, we will illustrate first the changes that lead the society to ask for improvements in the field of fashion and then we will show the reasons why the government has an interest in pushing the development of the fashion industry and how it carried this project out.

THE REASONS WHY THE SOCIETY NEEDS A PROPER CHINESE FASHION SYSTEM

Thanks to the recent process of globalization, the role of China in the international arena has changed and the country has become a leader among main countries in the world. It cannot be considered anymore a developing country since it starts its own path toward modernization and it very rapidly turned its image into the one of a powerful country, also in the fashion sector. Starting from 1980s, China has been the major fashion producer at an international level and since a decade ago it also represented one of the main fashion consumers in the whole world, only after US. The fashion industry is continuing to change and expand very rapidly also due to the process of democratization of fashion for which nowadays fashion items are no more considered an exclusive

⁷¹ XIAO, Wenling, 肖文陵, *Guoji liuxing tixi yu dangdai Zhongguo shishang chanye fazhan tujing* 国际流行体系与当代中国时尚产业发展途径, Qinghua Daxue Meishu Xueyuan 清华大学美术学院, in Zhuangshi 《装饰》, 2010, 第 10 期

⁷² FERRERO-REGIS, Tiziana, LINDGREN, Tim, *Branding “Created in China: The Rise of Chinese Fashion Designers*, in Fashion theory, Volume 4, Issue 1: Contemporary Chinese Fashion, 2012, pp. 71 - 94

for the upper classes, but they are accessible to everybody, letting the number of people that can get access to the market of fashion increase sharply⁷³.

Due to the massive economic growth of China, in particular after 2000s, Chinese people faced a rise in the quality of life, an improvement in the living conditions and an increase in the income and purchasing power that allow the growth of a middle class and let people become consumers of fashion products⁷⁴. Due to this rise in disposable income⁷⁴, demand and sales for both high-end and low-end clothing started to increase in China at lightning speed, with an interest in people to become more fashionable and differentiated. In fact, in that period the trend of differentiation in clothing styles was massive and it was possible due both to the relaxation of government's control on every aspect of people's life and to the segmentation of the market, which was a direct consequence of the specialization of the manufacturing sector in China: of course, they both helped in the proliferation and development of fashion. With a population of around 1.4 billion people, China represented the largest consumer market for the fashion industry⁷⁵, which was promising both for its huge volume and for the fact that local Chinese consumers were very enthusiastic about new trends, very reactive to absorb new styles and sensitive to quality and brands.

Nowadays, China has already gone through two different steps in the fashion industry: it turned from being the *factory* of the world, to being the *market* of the world and now it is ready to enter the third stage of development, that is, become the *innovator* of the world, moving from the 'Made in China' to the 'Created in China'⁷⁶. This process is still ongoing, and the country is continuing to increase its expertise in many fields. After Chinese population's improvement in wealth conditions, RMB appreciation, rising labor costs and lower demand from exports markets, China can count on its well-established textile and apparel industries to go a step further in the fashion industry, turning its attention to more value-added, high-tech products and services such as marketing, branding and design, climbing up the value chain. As a result of the process of urbanization of China, Chinese people have changed their lifestyles and living conditions in a dramatic way, and this is reflected also in the changes of fashion consumption. In fact, Chinese consumers, both due to their increase in the knowledge of fashion products and their increase in disposable income, started to demand

⁷³ Fashionbi.com, *The Democratization of Fashion: How Fashion Brands Play With The Street Style Trend*, 2017 <https://fashionbi.com/insights/marketing-research/democratization-of-fashion>

⁷⁴ WELTERS, Linda, C. MEAD, Arthur, *The Future of Chinese Fashion*, *Fashion Practice*, 4:1, 13-40, 2012, p.28, <https://doi.org/10.2752/175693812X13239580431225>

⁷⁵ Consulate General Shanghai, *China's Fashion Industry: An Overview of trends, opportunities, and challenges*, Kingdom of the Netherlands, 2014, p.4, <https://www.nederlandenu.nl/documenten/publicaties/2016/12/06/china-fashion-industry-kansenrapport.pdf>

⁷⁶ Ibid p.7

for clothing of greater quality and comfort. Consumers in the new age are more attentive toward the materials used to produce clothing, to their impact on health and they are keener on global fashion trends since the country is more exposed to Western influence and media. If before Chinese consumers were only interested in international brands that they want to show off to underline their economic wealth⁷⁷, nowadays they are going a step further. In fact, Chinese consumers are now looking for innovative design, personalized items, limited editions, convenience and higher quality.

For all the reasons above-mentioned, Chinese society that has now a greater knowledge, understanding and interest in the world of fashion could not accept anymore to be considered the country of imitation, low-production and low-end fashion. Chinese society in fact for all the changes it faced in recent years feels the need to develop a proper Chinese fashion industry. This need for a shift from imitation to innovation is reflected also in the intentions of the Chinese government, that now we will analyze in depth.

GOVERNMENT'S REASONS TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHINA'S OWN FASHION INDUSTRY

In the fashion industry, like in many other sectors, China is trying to demonstrate to all other countries in the world that it can be independent, able to innovate and to create a proper fashion industry. When China opened up its doors to the West during the reform era, the Chinese government decided to sustain and enforce the development of the fashion industry, fundamental for completing the modernization process of the country.

Since at the base of a strong fashion industry there should be well-established and developed textile and apparel industries, and since they were already present in China back in those years, the government decided to increase the knowledge and the efficiency of these industries as a first step toward the rise of a modern fashion industry. So, the government in 1980s started different policies that allowed China to obtain some years later the pole position in the textile and apparel industries becoming in this way known as the 'World's factory'.

Nowadays, despite the slight decrease of the export market in China due mainly to the appreciation of RMB, the rising labor costs and the improvement of workers conditions, the country's textile and apparel industries are still growing at massive rate.

⁷⁷ ZEVELOFF, Julie, *China has entered the "show-off" stage of luxury evolution*, in Business insider, 2011, <https://www.businessinsider.com/china-showing-off-wealth-luxury-2011-9?IR=T>

In recent years, the Chinese government is not only focused on maintaining China's pole position in these sectors, but also on empowering Chinese fashion industry and making it recognizable at an international level. The fashion industry is far much more complicated than the textile and apparel ones since it does not only include trade and production of the final product, but it involves also creativity, arts as well as organization of events and the consumption of the fashion product among other activities. When fashion was still not well spread and known in China, the government decided to push its development by creating fashion courses at main universities to educate fashion designers, by founding associations, fairs, events and by developing fashion centers, which all together created the base from which the Chinese fashion industry started to develop. The strengthening of a proper Chinese fashion industry is also part of a bigger project of the Chinese government, which is considered a priority to complete the economic growth of the country, which consists in giving a new image of China to the outside world. The country has, in fact, an urgent need to be recognized in the fashion industry at an international level, and the government is investing money and efforts to help the country in achieving this goal.

At this point, we will deeply analyze first how nowadays the government is committed to sustain and push the growth of textile and apparel industries by highlighting some parts of the last five-years plan and then, we will focus on how it is trying to convey a new image of China through fashion.

THE LAST FIVE-YEARS PLAN, THE CHINA MANUFACTURING 2025 AND THE CATWALK ECONOMY

In 2016, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) released the 13th Five-years Plan for the economic and social development of People's Republic of China, to be carried out in the period from 2016 to 2020⁷⁸. Throughout this document, the Chinese government will set and ratify the most important objectives that China should reach by the end of its validity period. Chapter 22 of this document describes how the Chinese government intended to carry out the development of the country in order to let it become a manufacturing powerhouse.

The first objective of China is to strengthen the industrial foundations, in particular by increasing innovation technologies and improving policies in terms of technique, efficiency and processes, helping the manufacturing sector move into a medium-high end. In order to do that, the

⁷⁸ Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, *The 13th Five-year plan for Economic and Social Development of The People's Republic of China*, translated by Central Compilation & Translation Press, Beijing, 2016, <http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201612/P020161207645765233498.pdf>

government will settle manufacturing innovation centers and will support the development of industrial design centers.

China's objective in industry is also to promote and cultivate new types of smart manufacturing systems, which can lead toward more flexible, intelligent and innovative models of production. This aspect shows the desire of the Chinese government to move the country from its position of simple producer toward a more advanced stage, in which China can also provide services.

For what concerns the textile and apparel industries, which are part of the manufacturing sector, some goals were fixed in the 2016, and we can see them from the graph (Fig. 15)⁷⁹.

Indicators	Actual Performance 2011-2015	Goals for 2016-2020 (13 th five-year plan)	Comment
Annual growth rate of industry value added	+8.5%	+6%-7%	A notable slower growth expectation
Output of textile fiber	Reached 53 million tons in 2015, +4.5% annually	No mention	China has no intention to simply produce more textiles in the next five years
Fiber end-use ratio	46.6% apparel, 28.1% home textiles and 25.3% by the end of 2015	40% apparel, 27% home textiles and 33% industrial textiles by the end of 2020	China intends to make less apparel and more industrial textiles in the next five years
Annual labor productivity growth	+10%	+8%	A notable slower growth expectation
Exports	Increased by 6.6% annually; value of exports reached \$291.2 billion in 2015; world market share increased by 3.1 percentage points from 2011 to 2015	Maintain a stable market share in the world export market.	China does not plan to intentionally further expand its textile and apparel exports. However, China is not simply giving up its status as a world leading textile and apparel exporter either
R&D spending as a percentage of revenue	0.67%	1%	A notable increase of spending on R&D
Number of patents granted	/	+15% annually	A related initiative to strengthen its R&D
Number of enterprises with RMB10 billion+ (around \$1.5 billion) annual sales revenue	Around 20 enterprises	Around 50 enterprises by 2020	China intends to promote the development of some 'big players' in the industry
Energy consumption per unit of industrial value added	-20% annually	-18% annually	Slightly more conservative goals for the next five years, but the direction of going 'green' and building a more sustainable textile and apparel industry remains unchanged
Water consumption per unit of industrial value added	-30% annually	-20% annually	
Emission of major pollutants	-10% annually	-10% annually	
Newly mentioned buzzwords/areas	/	3D printing, cloud platform, big data, internet plus, impact of newly reached trade agreements such as TPP and AGOA	China intends to build a more tech-intensive T&A industry. China also highly cares about the changing trading environment in the world

Fig. 15 China's 13th Five-Year Plan for Its Textile and Apparel Industry.

The 13th Five-years plan stated that the Chinese textile and apparel industries will make a great effort to maintain an average annual industrial value-added output growth of 6 to 7 percent. The two main goals that these industries have to achieve during the five years of plan's validity are mainly the improvement of quality of textile products and the formation and recognition at an

⁷⁹ LU, Sheng, *Fash455 Global Apparel & Textile Trade and Sourcing*, 2016, <https://shenglufashion.com/2016/10/04/chinas-13th-five-year-plan-for-its-textile-and-apparel-industry-key-numbers/>

international level of Chinese brands. These two main goals stand among some others regarding textile and apparel industries such as improving technologies, developing innovation capabilities, increasing variety in apparel industry, giving much more importance to a “green” type of development and boost the strength of companies which are part of this sector. The five key sectors that gained more importance in the last five-year plan included the one of chemical fiber which should increase innovation, the one of industrial textiles for which it is opportune to expand the application, the one of natural fibers which should improve the utilization, the one of clothing and home textiles that should accelerate innovation and the one of high-end textile machinery.

A very important part of the 13th Five-years plan is represented by the interest and effort of China in implementing the ‘China manufacturing 2025’.

The CM2025 is an initiative that was officially revealed by Chinese State Council in May 2015, with a validity of ten years from 2015 to 2025⁸⁰. As it can be easily understood from its name, this plan was issued to support and promote the Chinese manufacturing industry until 2025. This represents only the first step which has to lead China to become a global manufacturing powerhouse by 2049, corresponding to the year of the 100th anniversary of the foundation of the PRC. The core idea behind this initiative is to restructure the entire manufacturing industry and to make it more competitive using advancement in production technology as just one of the instruments. The need to implement this plan is due to the fact that, as President Xi Jinping expressed in a key speech in June 2014: ‘China’s foundation for science and technology innovation is still not firm. China’s capacity for indigenous innovation, and especially original innovation, is still weak. Fundamentally, the fact that we are [China] controlled by others in critical fields and key technologies has not changed’⁸¹. For these reasons, it was necessary to strengthen China’s domestic capacity for innovation and the government should help the country in doing that. There is no doubt, as we have already said, that China has the largest manufacturing market in the whole world but, being large does not mean that it is at the same time strong and efficient. In fact, this sector is still characterized by a lack of companies and products able to compete with others on the international market, it is still very much dependent from foreign companies and it still uses traditional manufacturing methods which resulted to be inefficient.

⁸⁰European Union Chamber of Commerce in China 中国欧盟商会, *China Manufacturing 2025: Putting Industrial Policy Ahead of Market Forces*, 2017, http://www.cccc.it/upload/doc/china_manufacturing_2025_putting_industrial_policy_ahead_of_market_force%5Benglish-version%5D.pdf

⁸¹ Ibid p.7

While China feels an urgent need to upgrade its industrial base, the government is also trying with all its efforts to make use of the fashion industry to change the image of the country to the eyes of the outside fashion world, a priority to complete the modernization in the fashion industry.

Nowadays, fashion identities are increasingly relational, interdependent and constantly fluctuating between self-perception and external recognition⁸² so, it is fundamental for a country not only to develop a fashion industry but also to obtain the recognition from the outside fashion world, something that resulted to be very difficult in China. In order to better understand this issue, it is possible to address to the '*catwalk economy*', a concept that, with the advent of the new economy in the 90s and the consequent shift from a manufacturing-based economy to a service-based economy, became very popular at an international level. This concept focuses on "*the need to communicate an appetizing image of being fast, innovative, creative and with an important stake in the future*"⁸³. The core idea is that, for a country in order to be successful in the world of fashion, it is no more sufficient to have a strong and powerful manufacturing sector but, what it is really important is to achieve international recognition. As a consequence, each nation started to invest a lot in order to be recognized as a place of creativity and aesthetics and to define its cultural identity within the new globalized context. The occasion to show a country's image is given mainly during the fashion week, an important event that it is no more only considered for its original nature of showing new styles and celebrating fashion designers but, that nowadays it is also considered as an international event in which each country needs to express an immediately recognizable aesthetic, in order to show its own political and economic strength and to demonstrate that the nation is taken part to the culture of globalization.

For what refers to China, the main problem the country faces was that, even if in recent years the country has already made its first appearance on the international stage of fashion, China's fashion brands and designers have been largely ignored⁸⁴. The nation successful place in international trade of apparels and textiles has not been matched with the same recognition of Chinese fashion design and brands on the world stage. This is mainly due to the fact that the success of a country in gaining international reputation depends also on the prejudices linked to that country and on its own capacity to produce something that is aesthetically relevant. Unfortunately for China, it is not so

⁸² SEGRE REINACH, Simona, *National Identities and International Recognition*, in *Fashion Theory*, Volume 15, Issue 2, pp. 267 – 272, DOI: 10.2752/175174111X12954359478889

⁸³ LÖFGREN, Orvar, WILLIM, Robert, *Magic, culture and the New Economy*, Bloomsbury, 2005. p.57-68

⁸⁴ FINNANE, Antonia, *China on the Catwalk: Between Economic Success and Nationalist Anxiety*, in *The China Quarterly*, No. 183, DOI: 10.1017/S0305741005000378, Cambridge University press, 2005, pp. 587-608, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20192510?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

easy to impose itself in the fashion world since it has to fight against many stereotypes the country gained some decades ago which played a fundamental role in ruining its image. Despite this, nowadays the Chinese government and Chinese fashion designers are convinced more than ever to elevate the Chinese fashion industry a step further making Chinese brands known and recognized all over the world.

CHINA AND THE SHIFT TOWARD A CHINESE FASHION INDUSTRY

After having established itself as the world's number one production powerhouse, China has long dreamt of exporting one day its own fashion brands rather than only the fruits coming out from its cheap labor.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, China was pervaded by a great pessimism in the fashion world. In fact, even though the country already experienced the development and the spread of fashion industry, at a global level China's fashion designers and brands have been ignored at first. It was particularly starting from 2000s that policy makers called for fashion innovation in the hope that China would produce its own designers able to compete on the international stage⁸⁵. Since then, Chinese fashion designers started to invest a lot of time, efforts and resources to create Chinese brands which can be culturally distinctive, internationally recognized and respected⁸⁶. A key issue in the creation of recognizable Chinese fashion brands is represented by fashion innovation. In fact, as Suzhou designer Shi Lin affirmed: "without design, there can be no innovation and without innovative undertakings, there is no future"⁸⁷. President Hu Jintao during the Seventeenth National People's Congress in 2007 also stressed the need for strategic structural adjustment in economic development and he also highlight the necessity for "improving the capability of independent innovation and building an innovation-oriented country"⁸⁸. The necessary push toward innovation, quality and brand development is expressed also in the 13th five-year plan on economic development. In this part of the plan, the Chinese government highlight the need to focus on technological innovation, on improvement in the quality of products and on enhancement of Chinese brands, that now still have a weak international pull, in order for the Chinese fashion

⁸⁵ WU, Juanjuan, *Chinese fashion: from Mao to now*, New York, Oxford, Berg, 2009, p. 127

⁸⁶ FINNANE, Antonia, *Changing clothes in China*, London, Hurst & company, 2007, p.280

⁸⁷ Ibid p.279

⁸⁸ WU, Juanjuan, *Chinese fashion: from Mao to now*, New York, Oxford, Berg, 2009, p. 127

industry to move a step further by demonstrating to the fashion world that it can be innovative and independent⁸⁹.

Of course, in order to create recognizable Chinese fashion brands, China should not only rely a lot on fashion innovation, but it has also to focus on the development of proper Chinese aesthetic codes, and in order to do that, it has to distance itself from the influence of Western brands. Western brands have been entering the Chinese market for many years, they have strongly influenced the making of fashion in China and, for their innovative trends and strong brand images, they enjoyed the advantage of being considered more reputable. Nowadays, what can be perceived in China is a shift from the complete admiration of Western brands toward a stronger interest in the production of domestic fashion designers. In this field, the role of the China National Garment Association was fundamental. CNGA is an association established by the Chinese government that is trying to increase the quality of the products, rather than the volumes of sales and to replace manufacture of Western brands with the production of local fashion designers⁹⁰. By doing that, China moves from an economy totally oriented to exportation to an economy more focused to satisfy the domestic demand, which registered a huge increase in the 2000s with the spread of fashion around the country. At this point, what can be really challenging for pushing the recognition of the Chinese fashion industry a step further is to reduce the imperialism of Western brands, that it is actually limiting the development of Chinese fashion. This can lead to a change in the perception of Western brands that probably will be soon replaced by Chinese ones.

In conclusion, in more recent years we can perceive a 'rebellion' of Chinese fashion designers and of the government against the stereotypes that have afflicted China for many years in the field of fashion and, in particular, against the dependence from the influence and the imperialism of Western brands on Chinese fashion, since they both limited the development of proper Chinese fashion brands and their recognition at an international level. Nowadays, the enhancement of proper Chinese fashion brands and designers, a strong sense of patriotism and a vigorous confidence in China's past vestimentary heritage represent the main developing directions of the country in the field of fashion.

⁸⁹ Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, *The 13th Five-year plan for Economic and Social Development of The People's Republic of China*, translated by Central Compilation & Translation Press, Beijing, 2016, <http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201612/P020161207645765233498.pdf>

⁹⁰ 中国服装协会网 China National Garment Association Website, <http://www.cnga.org.cn/#>

PATRIOTISM REFLECTED IN FASHION

Patriotism has always been a key issue for Chinese people, and it has very ancient roots in China. For most of China's history, during more than 2000 years of Celestial Empire, the national belonging was measured on people's attachment to the political and moral structure of the kingdom. This was a primordial form of patriotic expression used in order to give the legitimacy to different dynasties that reigned over a China that was considered the Middle Kingdom, at the center of the world. This changed dramatically between 17th and 19th centuries when the empire opened up to the West and to its ideas of Enlightenment and suffered a century-long occupation of the Chinese territory. In those years, China for the first time entered in contact with external forces able to shake its civilization's foundation. Chinese patriotic sentiment gained strength in particular under the leading role of both the Nationalist and Communist parties. Chinese people perceived a great contrast between the glorious past of China and the modern humiliation by outside forces and this resulted in the increase of nationalist ideals which were translated into an urgent need to strengthen China⁹¹. After the opening up of the country toward the West and the consequent need of China to rethink its position in the world, in 1990s a renewed nationalistic and patriotic sentiment resurged among Chinese people⁹². Thanks to the unprecedented economic growth of China and its rise at global level, besides their millenary history and culture, Chinese people have finally something else to be proud of. Nowadays, they are more aware of all the suffering provoked by the West on China and they see it as an impediment for the country to become stronger. After having suffered for the stereotypes and the nicknames that the West attributed to China, the country, counting on its new strategic and fundamental role in the global arena, is ready to demonstrate that it can be independent, powerful and innovative. A renewed nationalist sentiment, an economic boom and a central role in the geopolitical arena are all factors that render Chinese people proud of their country in recent years. This renewed sentiment of national pride crosses many different areas in China, including fashion. Due to the importance given to history in the Chinese culture, China makes of its special place in world's history a factor favorable to its future success in establishing globally powerful companies. This sense is also palpable among Chinese fashion designers who turn back to China's past vestimentary heritage in order to legitimate the rise of a proper Chinese fashion industry. In fact, the 'glorious history of Chinese clothing culture' is considered a legacy that Chinese fashion

⁹¹ SPENCE, Jonathan D., *The search for modern China*, New York, Norton, 1991

⁹² Stratfor, *The Evolution of Chinese Nationalism*, 2012, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/evolution-chinese-nationalism>

designers have the duty to conserve and enrich. For this reason, many times Chinese fashion designers return back to Chinese history for getting inspired from the richness of traditional handicraft work such as embroidery and brocade work among others⁹³.

China is nowadays following the path toward the creation of its own fashion aesthetic codes, getting rid of the influence of Western brands. Due to this renewed patriotic sentiment and to the search of a proper fashion identity, China is fighting against the imperialism of Western brands in order to leave the stage to autochthone Chinese fashion.

CASE STUDY: DOLCE & GABBANA

The recent case of Dolce & Gabbana embodies the renewed nationalistic sentiment of China and its fierce path toward obtaining the recognition and the legitimacy of the Chinese fashion industry on the international arena.

In the history, there are many cases and examples of failure committed by Western brands in entering and understanding the Chinese market. The same Dolce & Gabbana with the advertising campaign called *#D&GLovesChina* has raised critics among Chinese people, since the images used depicted good-looking models in high-end fashionable clothes together with old Chinese people, in a background showing backward-looking buildings. What really makes Chinese get angry is



Fig. 16 Models in Dolce & Gabbana ad campaign in Beijing.

the way Beijing has been depicted: a poor and underdeveloped country with no traits of the international big city it is gradually becoming⁹⁴.

But the new campaign of the Italian fashion Maison has fueled a different and totally new reaction, not only in Chinese people living in the mainland, but also in those living abroad. The controversy started when D&G, last year, launched a new campaign by publishing three promotional videos showing the famous Chinese model Zuo Ye struggling to eat Italian food using chopsticks. They have

⁹³ FINNANE, Antonia, *Changing clothes in China*, London, Hurst & company, 2007, pp.291 - 292

⁹⁴ Marketinginteractive.com, *Dolce & Gabbana ad campaign upsets Chinese netizens*, 2017, <https://www.marketing-interactive.com/dolce-gabbana-ad-campaign-upsets-chinese-netizens/>

been published on all social network channels of Dolce & Gabbana brand and they should serve to promote “The Great Show”, a fashion show that should be held in Shanghai as a “tribute to China”⁹⁵.



Fig. 17, 18, 19 Chinese Model Zuo Ye eating Spaghetti, Pizza and Sicilian Cannolo in the Dolce & Gabbana ad campaign.

The three different 40-second spots broadcasted the model eating super-sized Italian Spaghetti, Pizza and Sicilian Cannolo. On the background a typical stereotyped Chinese melody is played and a narrator with irony gives instructions to the model on the usage of chopsticks by warning that they cannot be used as knives but only as pliers. After having received these advices, the model understood that it was better to cut the super-sized foods into pieces to eat them easily with chopsticks. These spots immediately create a wave of indignation that started to criticize the advertising campaign as offensive and racist. If this reaction of Chinese people can result not really understandable at the eyes of Western people, we can figure out many reasons why Chinese people feel offended by these videos.

First of all, chopsticks are a representative symbol of Chinese tradition. Among all the eating utensils available, chopsticks are those that best represent the Chinese cultural characteristics. They have a long story and tradition and they represent a symbol Chinese people are proud of⁹⁶. In the D&G spot, the fact that a Western narrator teaches the Asian model how to use them to eat the food of another culture was perceived by Chinese people as extremely offensive.

Moreover, the way in which the woman is portrayed made Chinese people angry. She is almost a parody, a feminine figure that does not exist in modern China, a miserable and vulgar woman that cannot be accepted anymore. To increase the vulgarity, the spot is also full of squalid allusions and of sexist double meanings. What renders the model more vulgar is also the fact that she laughs ear to ear, something considered not smart and exaggerated in the traditional Chinese culture.

⁹⁵ CNN Style, *Chinese model: Dolce & Gabbana ad campaign 'almost ruined my career'*, 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/dolce-and-gabbana-model-zuo-ye/index.html>

⁹⁶ China Culture tour, *Chinese Chopsticks Culture*, 2019, <https://www.chinaculturetour.com/culture/chinese-chopsticks-culture.htm>

The atmosphere is also full of stereotypes that Western people attribute usually to China: the classic sound in the background, the red used both for the setting and for the dress of the model, the comical pronunciation of foreign names in Chinese.

All these elements contributed to create a stereotyped image of China as a country lacking culture, refinement and stuck in its backwardness. The intention of Dolce & Gabbana to target China as a potential market resulted instead in a mock of the country and in a parodied vision of what modern China is not and this highly offended Chinese culture and society.

The model also made declarations about the controversy on her Weibo account after the scandal apologizing for her role in the spot and declaring that she knew very little about the spot before participating in it. She added that when she was on the set, she felt extremely embarrassed and uncomfortable both when she was required to eat that super-sized food with chopsticks and also when the director asked her to laugh ear to ear. She declared: "I never and would never bear anything disrespectful to my home country," and she added: "I'm deeply in love with my country and proud to be a Chinese to send on international runways.". On her Weibo account, the model said that this inconvenient almost ruined her career and for this she received a lot of online attacks and offenses⁹⁷.

After the shower of negative comments fell on all the social networks of the fashion Maison, the videos were canceled from Weibo and other Chinese social network, but not from Instagram. What make things worse was precisely a private online conversation between an Instagram user and Stefano Gabbana that was then made public. In the message, the Italian designer offended China and its population in a contemptuous way and defined the country as “ignorant, dirty and



Fig. 20 The Great Show Event Invitation.

smelling” and this, without doubt, was what made all the vicissitude to explode⁹⁸. Chinese celebrities, models and actresses declared that they do not want to participate anymore in the show; the China Bentley Modeling agency refused to let its models work and

finally the political pressures on the fashion Maison were so strong that D&G had no possibility

⁹⁷ CNN Style, *Chinese model: Dolce & Gabbana ad campaign ‘almost ruined my career’*, 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/dolce-and-gabbana-model-zuo-ye/index.html>

⁹⁸ ZHENG, Ruonan, PAN, Yiling, *Dolce & Gabbana Shanghai Show Canceled by Chinese Government Over “Racist” Campaign*, in *Jing Daily*, 2018, <https://jingdaily.com/dolce-gabbana-cancel-show/>

but cancel the show by suffering a huge economic negative impact⁹⁹. After the scandal, Stefano Gabbana and its business partner Domenico Dolce published on all social networks a video to apologize for the inconvenience and the misunderstanding of the advertising campaign, since their intention was only to make a tribute to China. Despite this effort made by the two fashion designers, Chinese people did not accept these excuses since they found them not sincere at all and they believed the only interest D&G has in China is of economic nature, and it did not concern Chinese culture and people¹⁰⁰. The damage was done: the hashtag #BoycottDolce continued for long to be viral on the web, the company's reputation has been deeply affected, the sales fell enormously, in particular, when D&G products were dropped from major e-commerce platforms and stores in China¹⁰¹.

The case of Dolce & Gabbana represents once again an example of cultural misunderstanding committed by a Western brand. The main reason why these accidents are so frequent is that when foreign companies enter China, they only focus on gaining economic success, lacking a complete understanding of Chinese people and culture, which in reality is fundamental to have success in the country, since the traditional culture has still strong roots in Chinese people's mind. But, as we have said, this controversy can be considered something more than a simple cultural misunderstanding. In fact, despite many fashion Maison committed such errors, the D&G case produced an overreaction of Chinese society and it gained a wider media coverage. Why this happen? This is mainly due to the fact that nowadays China, as we have previously said, is living an historical period in which it has the desire to fight against the stereotypes of being considered a cheap and underdeveloped country and to demonstrate that it has the potential to become an innovative and independent powerful giant in many sectors, included fashion. For this reason, China did not agree anymore to accept any type of offense from Western brands, that are, instead, losing their reputation of being superior and more reputable and they are leaving the stage to autochthone Chinese fashion brands that are rising and trying to impose themselves in the international fashion arena.

⁹⁹ TALON, Kettj, *Dolce & Gabbana vs China: here is what happened*, in NSS Magazine 2018, <https://www.nssmag.com/en/fashion/16855/dolce-gabbana-vs-china-here-is-what-happened>

¹⁰⁰ CHUNG, Stephy, HOLLAND, Oscar, *Dolce & Gabbana cancels China show amid 'racist' ad controversy*, in CNN Style, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/dolce-gabbana-shanghai-controversy/index.html>

¹⁰¹ TALON, Kettj, *Dolce & Gabbana vs China: here is what happened*, in NSS Magazine 2018, <https://www.nssmag.com/en/fashion/16855/dolce-gabbana-vs-china-here-is-what-happened>

CHINESE BRANDS THAT GAINED INTERNATIONAL SUCCESS

Despite China has been considered for years the country of cheap items and copies, the above-mentioned need of the country to create new proper Chinese brands represents a new challenge both for Chinese fashion designers and for fashion companies. In recent years, we have already experienced the entry of autochthone Chinese brands in the international arena, not only in the fashion sector but also in many others. To demonstrate that China had some movements toward the creation of Chinese brands, mainly due to technological innovation, independence from other countries and enforcement of IP, we can make some examples. In the field of services, China has created a lot of different apps among which *WeChat* and *Weibo* represent the most important ones. They are not only widely used by Chinese users, but they also boast millions of users outside China and they demonstrate the originality and technological ability of Chinese for these new social platforms. *Lenovo* is another excellent example of technological advancement: it is now one of the major global competitors in the sale of computers in the world and it vaunts a very high reputation at a worldwide level¹⁰². We can add to this list also *Huawei*. The latter is the most famous Chinese brand in the world, and it has been the first Chinese company ever to enter the “Top 100 Best Global brands”, compiled by Interbrand, occupying the 70th place in 2017¹⁰³. Huawei is a Chinese company that can be took as an example of innovation and technology that have not been stolen from the West but that have been completely studied and invented in China thanks to the importance the company has given to research and development in the technological field. In fact, the company has created many R&D centers, joint innovation centers and training centers all over the world in which are employed the 44% of Huawei’s workers¹⁰⁴.

All these examples are provided to understand that Chinese companies also has the potentialities and capabilities to create huge brands that can help the country fighting against stereotypes and making China have competitive and recognizable brands at an international level.

In the field of fashion, we can make some examples of creation of Chinese brands that not only conquered the domestic market but that have also already gained international success.

¹⁰² ZAKKOUR, Michael, *Copycat China Still A Problem For Brands & China's Future: Just Ask Apple, Hyatt & Starbucks*, in Forbes, 2014, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelzakkour/2014/04/30/copycat-china-still-a-problem-for-brands-chinas-future-just-ask-apple-hyatt-starbucks/#bc3c2db21566>

¹⁰³ The Innovation Group, *Huawei*, <https://www.theinnovationgroup.it/sponsors/huawei/?lang=it>

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

PEACEBIRD is a leading young, modern and trendy Chinese fashion brand founded in 1995 by Zhang Jiangping and his associates¹⁰⁵. The target market for PEACEBIRD is composed by young generation customers, and for this reason the average age of fashion designers' team is 28 years old. This allows to create a sort of alignment between the design team production and the needs of the youthful target market. After some years in which the brand strived for gaining national recognition, in 2009 PEACEBIRD was elected as one of "Best Employers in Chinese Clothing Industry" and recognized as a "National Well-known Trademark" by the General Administration for Industry and Commerce¹⁰⁶. In 2015, the brand started a partnership with Alexis Mabille, a French Haute Couture Brand, which gave the possibility to PEACEBIRD to enter in contact with international operations' experience and to improve product design capabilities¹⁰⁷. That was also an opportunity to acquire international fashion resources and to promote a Chinese fashion brand globally giving it the chance to become an international fashion brand.

It was since 2014 that PEACEBIRD put a lot of effort in developing cross-over products as a strategy to let the brand gain global visibility¹⁰⁸ and, after many attempts, in the AW2017 fashion show, PEACEBIRD presented its first cross-over collection together with Pepsi¹⁰⁹. Among many



Fig. 21 Peacebird collection in collaboration with Pepsi.

examples of partnership like this, we can also find the Emoji collection, "Cars" cartoon kids wear collection and many others. The two years of 2017 and 2018 were fundamental for PEACEBIRD: the first year it got listed, representing the first fashion enterprise in China to be listed on a share market and the second year it made its debut at the New York Fashion Week as a Chinese fashion brand, showing the creativity of a new Chinese youth generation without borders¹¹⁰. Of course, PEACEBIRD

¹⁰⁵ Peacebird.com, <http://www.peacebird.com/en/pages/aboutus/milestones.php>

¹⁰⁶ ibid

¹⁰⁷ Li, Aviva, *LUXE.CO SERIES REPORT | REINVENTING ESTABLISHED FASHION COMPANY OF CHINA: PEACEBIRD REJUVENATED*, 2017, <http://en.luxe.co/post/633>

¹⁰⁸ ibid

¹⁰⁹ Pop Fashion, *Peacebird Fashion Brands Depth Analysis*, 2019, https://www.popfashioninfo.com/blog/detail/peacebird-fashion-brands-depth-analysis-id_296-label_177/

¹¹⁰ Peacebird.com, <http://www.peacebird.com/en/pages/aboutus/milestones.php>

is not the only brand to be present as such event, but here it is taken as an example to demonstrate that also Chinese fashion designers are able to create proper fashion brands which have the possibility to gain international success.

LI NING is another example of Chinese brand that has gone global and that is gaining success very rapidly. The company was founded in 1990 by Li Ning, known as the prince of gymnasts in China¹¹¹. After more than 20 years of market exploration and many management errors, Li Ning has become a leading sport brand company in China with around 8,000 shops in the country¹¹². The brand's opportunity to appear at the New York Fashion Week marked an important step for Li-Ning that started to be considered a global fashion brand. This can come as a surprise since usually it was possible to find this label at discount malls and it was produced for the mass-market, but the repositioning of Li-Ning in the last years gave it the possibility to be seen as Nike or Adidas and to become a worshipped label both inside China and in other foreign countries¹¹³.



Fig. 22, 23 Li-Ning store

¹¹¹ Li-Ning.com, <https://www.shopnings.com/about-us>

¹¹²ZHANG, Danwei, *Li-Ning sportswear looks to win overseas*, in BBC, 2011, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-12665597>

¹¹³ CHEN, Rilly, *Made in China 2.0: How Li-Ning Sneakers Went from Beijing Outlets to New York Fashion Week*, in Radii, 2018, <https://radiichina.com/made-in-china-2-0-how-li-ning-sneakers-went-from-beijing-outlets-to-new-york-fashion-week/>

The last example I want to bring as an example of Chinese fashion company that already reached the global market is Metersbonwe, China's leading casualwear apparel company founded in 1995 by Zhou Chengjian. The company had the possibility to grow 30% every year thanks to the franchisee and the team of French and local designers that Zhou created¹¹⁴. The company gained increasing popularity by targeting young and gradually more fashion-conscious consumers and by focusing on good quality and reasonable prices. A strategy that resulted to be a great success for Metersbonwe was to invite stars to become the brand's ambassadors, such as Aaron Kwok, a Hong Kong's famous pop star, Jay Chou, a Taiwanese pop star, Angela Chang and Wilber Pan, two Taiwanese singers and actors¹¹⁵. In 2009, Metersbonwe cooperated with Transformers 2 becoming the first Chinese brand to form a strategic partnership with a major Hollywood blockbuster. The company's business model based on Film advertising, merchandising and promotion made it a pioneer within the industry and become an example of cross-border marketing, paving the way for Metersbonwe to become known inside and outside China. The strategy used by this company differs from the one used by the two other examples of PEACEBIRD and Li-Ning: Metersbonwe in fact count more on a localization strategy in order to go global in a second moment. "If you are looking to influence consumers, the so-called big four fashion shows might be a good choice," said Zhou Chengjian. "But what we are after is connecting with our consumers, which means allowing them to see and touch our attire. In this sense, Shanghai is definitely an ideal start." ¹¹⁶ .



Fig. 24 Shanghai Metersbonwe Fashion&Accessories Ltd.

Thanks to the implementation of this strategy, Metersbonwe became a global brand established in Asia and Europe since 2015. The Shanghai Metersbonwe Fashion & Accessories Co., Ltd. is now listed among the top 200 largest fashion companies in the world by market value, accounting for \$805 million and occupying only the 146th place in the list¹¹⁷.

¹¹⁴ GU, Jing, *Facts & Figures of the biggest Chinese fashion Companies: Metersbonwe*, in Fashion United, 2018, <https://fashionunited.uk/news/business/facts-figures-of-the-biggest-chinese-fashion-companies-metersbonwe/2018082438472>

¹¹⁵ Metersbonwe.com, <https://www.metersbonwe.com/index.php/showlist-aboutUs-21.html>

¹¹⁶ JUNQIAN, Xu, *Chinese fashion company Metersbonwe eyes big comeback*, in China Daily, Shanghai, 2018, <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201810/27/WS5bd364c3a310eff303284e02.html>

¹¹⁷ Fashion United, *Combined Top 200 Fashion Companies*, <https://fashionunited.com/i/top200>

CHINESE FASHION INDUSTRY IN NUMBERS

As we have deeply analyzed, even if the rise of the fashion industry in China is quite a recent phenomenon, it developed enormously and very rapidly in the last decades. If China was completely out from the fashion industry before 1980s, it was able in few years not only to gain the same level of development of the fashion industry of the Western world but also to occupy the first place for revenues in the fashion sector. In order to understand the stage of development of Chinese fashion industry and the influence this sector has on the overall economy of the country nowadays, we will analyze some graphs, taken from the Statista website, showing the most recent trends¹¹⁸.

In 2019, China occupies the first place in the Global Revenue Ranking, with revenues in fashion segment that, as we can see from the graph below, amounts to US\$281,979 millions. The market's largest segment is the one of the apparels with a market volume of US\$184,056 million this year.

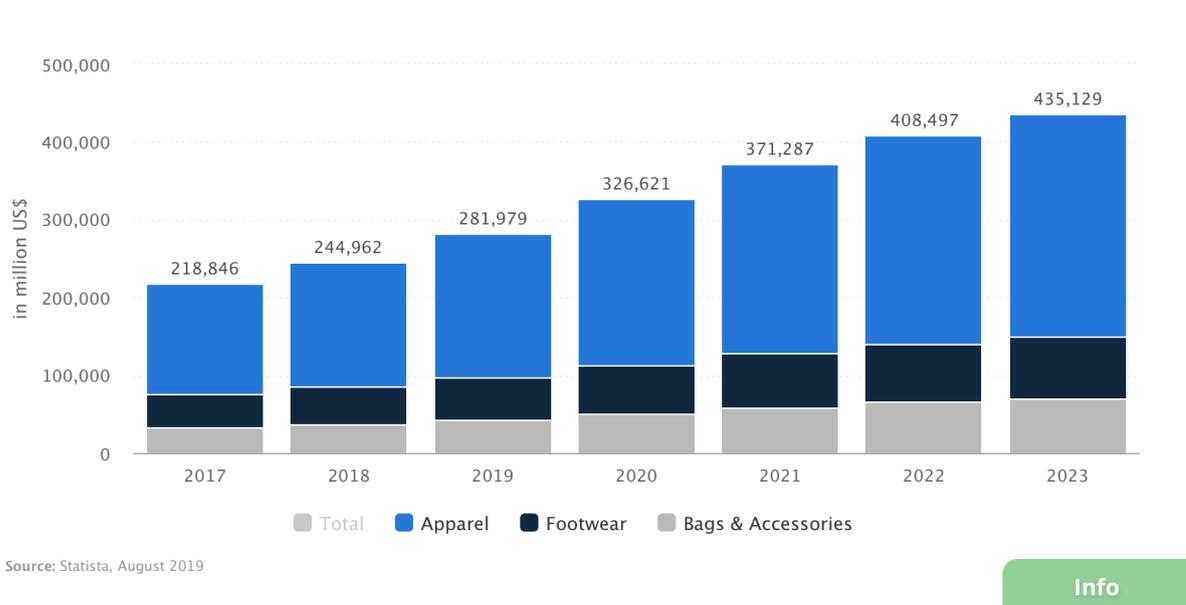


Fig. 25 Revenue in the Fashion segment in US\$, China.

The trend that can be spotted from the graph is that the revenues in the fashion sector are expected to show an annual growth rate of around 11.5%, with the greatest expansion in the apparel sector, that would probably reach a market value of US\$435,129 million in 2023 and so, it should almost double respect to nowadays.

¹¹⁸ Statista, *Fashion: China, 2019*, <https://www.statista.com/outlook/244/117/fashion/china#market-globalRevenue>

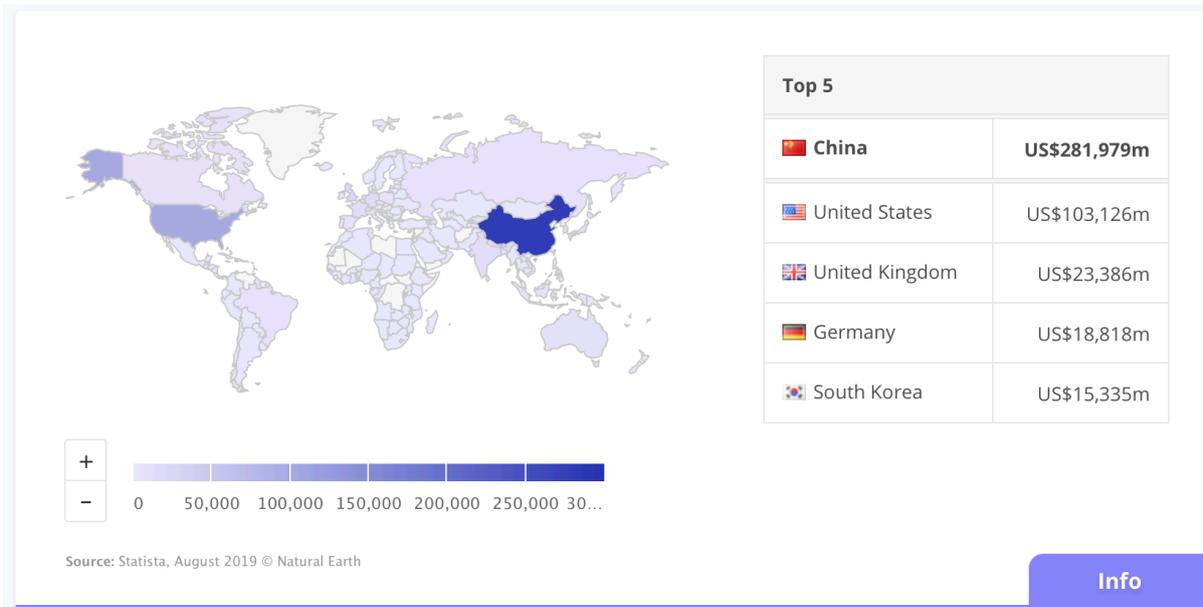


Fig. 26 Global comparison – Revenue in million US\$.

This second map let us understand which are the top 5 countries which have the highest revenues in the world of fashion in 2019: China results to be the first country in which the majority of revenues related to the fashion sector are generated, followed by USA.

The fact that China has been able to overtake the USA becoming the world’s largest fashion market let us understand the importance that China has in rebalancing the economic power at an international level¹¹⁹. With its population of nearly 1.4 billion people that is continuing to increase, China disposes of a lot of consumers with increasing disposable income that have the desire to spend their money in fashion items¹²⁰. For this reason, China occupies nowadays the first place in the world’s fashion industry, and it focuses now more on gaining international fashion recognition.

CONCLUSIONS

Through this chapter we have made a deep analysis of the modern Chinese fashion industry since its birth. The enormous development and growth of the textile and apparel industries that China experienced, starting from the reform era, represented the base from which the fashion industry started to develop.

¹¹⁹ BAIN, Marc, *China is set to overtake the US as the world’s largest fashion market in 2019*, in Quartz, 2018, <https://qz.com/1482850/china-is-set-to-overtake-the-us-as-the-worlds-largest-fashion-market/>

¹²⁰ *ibid*

At the beginning, China was only focused on the production of fashion garments in order to expand its textile and apparel industries and, as a result, they grew so much that China rapidly became known as the 'Factory of the world'. In the early years of the reform era, the fashion produced in China was only the fruit of cheap and low-skilled labor, lacking completely of innovative design and realized by copying the products of Western brands. For this reason, China for many years, and still nowadays, has been considered the copycat of Western brands.

After having suffered for long time for the stereotypes the West attributed to the country, in recent years China started to have the desire to create a proper Chinese fashion system, to demonstrate at a global level that the country is able to innovate, to be independent and to become a powerful country, even in the fashion industry. This desire born in China mainly due to the economic and social changes the country experienced in recent years: the unprecedented economic growth, not only in the textile and apparel industries but also in many other fields, let Chinese people improving the living conditions, increasing disposable income and gradually feeding a larger knowledge and interest in fashion. For these reasons, Chinese society not only become the largest consumer market in the world but also started to ask for value-added products, higher levels of quality, design and sophistication. In this way, China from being the 'producer of fashion', turned into being the 'consumer of fashion' and now it is increasingly going toward being the 'Creator of fashion'.

If China experienced such a rapid and huge development of fashion industry is also thanks to the support of the Chinese government: first, through the incentives given to push the growth of textile and apparel industries; secondly, through the creation and education of Chinese fashion designers; thirdly, through the establishment of fashion design centers, institutions, associations and events; moreover, through the spread of fashion media around the country and, finally, through the support of consumption of fashion products and the support in the creation of proper Chinese labels. The government had two main interests in fashion industry: first, it was seen as a necessary step to complete the modernization process of the country and secondly, it was also considered as a way to change the image of China from a 'cheap country' into a 'modern and powerful' one.

Both the government and the society have reasons to support the building of an autonomous Chinese fashion industry by fighting against the stereotypes of being 'cheap' and 'copycat' and by creating new Chinese brands, shifting in this way from the 'Made in China' label into the 'Created in China' one. Despite the country put a lot of efforts in creating an autochthone fashion system, Chinese fashion designers have not yet received international recognition, and Chinese brands still have a weak international pull.

Nowadays things are changing very rapidly in China since fashion companies are investing a lot in fashion education, innovation and autonomy from Western influence in order to create Chinese brands that can be culturally distinctive, respected and recognized. To do that, as we have seen, China is now going through a process of emancipation from Western influence, that has been considered an obstacle in the development of Chinese fashion industry. To demonstrate that China is moving toward realizing its desire of exporting China's own brands all over the world, we provided some examples of successful Chinese brands that have already gone global and gained success at an international level, such as PEACEBIRD, Li-Ning and Metersbonwe.

To conclude, we can say that despite China is still constructing and consolidating the recognition of its own fashion culture and it is still trying to shake the image of the country as the 'World's factory', the Chinese fashion industry is expanding and gaining success in a very rapid way and it is trying to overcome the stereotypes that damaged its image for many years by gaining the global market and by obtaining international recognition through the creation and promotion of its autochthone and innovative Chinese fashion brands.

CHAPTER 2

CULTURAL ASPECTS IN CHINESE FASHION

China is a country that is still very embedded with its own culture since the latter had always played a fundamental role inside the country, affecting not only people's ideas and behaviors, but influencing also country's economy and politics. Very much like elsewhere, the entry into the globalization process and the journey toward modernization have been among the most important causes of abandonment of traditional culture, which instead tend to force a country to freeze into its own past. In China, all these phenomena are quite recent and still ongoing, so the country is now starting to gradually relax the very rigid values and habits of its own culture in order to follow the pursuit of modernization. For what refers to the fashion field, we can say that, at least at the beginning, fashion had to clash with different cultural aspects that represented some obstacles for its spread inside the country.

In the following chapter, we will analyze the factors that helped to create a negative and erroneous perception of what Chinese fashion really is, from where these incorrect ideas come from and why we can nowadays consider them to be outdated. In the very last part of the chapter, we will shift our attention to the most important fashion figures, namely Chinese fashion designers. These professionals, after having faced a huge evolution in the last decades, are now more than ever focused on implementing Chinese fashion design and innovation and they always struggle to balance modernity and Chinese traditional culture elements in their fashion creations.

2.1 CHINA'S DEPENDENCE FROM FOREIGN MODELS

Before the second half of the 19th century, it was not possible to talk about a "Made in China" style, because back in those years clothing was only used to keep pace with tradition, religion, customs and social differences, as colors, textiles and embroideries contributed to communicate the rank of each person¹²¹.

It is only starting from the opening of Chinese ports, after the Opium wars, that for the first time Chinese entered in contact with both advanced sewing machines and techniques, developed in the West, and with Western fashion styles. The exotically adorned foreigners who arrived in China

¹²¹ WU, Juanjuan, *Chinese fashion: from Mao to now*, New York, Oxford, Berg, 2009, p. 104

through ports appeared as fashion examples to observe and to copy to the eyes of Chinese people. It is from these years that the influence from the West started to affect China. Zhao Chunlan is considered the 'Father of fashion' in the country: having seamstress parents, he was among the first Chinese to go to USA in 1848 to study sewing techniques and ,during his stay, he had the opportunity to learn how to do a Western-style jacket, that he, then, taught to his pupils when he came back to China¹²². These facts do not only represents the very first steps toward the creation of a fashion system in China but, they also let us understand that modern fashion is a concept that entered in the country through the West and for this reason we cannot but justify the initial dependence of China from foreign models, both in the economic field and of course in the cultural one, since the country not only absorbed business models but also Western ideas.

After the fall of the last Imperial dynasty and with the subsequent creation of the Republic of China, Chinese people were busy in finding ways to modernize the image of the country and to transform it into a new, independent and modern nation. The strengthening of the relationship with the West was necessary in order to let more advanced technologies gradually entering the country, since they were very useful for the building of modern factories in which to produce textile and apparel products, even if at that time the majority of garments were still hand-made and affordable for few people. From a cultural perspective, reformists and revolutionaries believed that to change China's image it all had to start from the adoption of Western fashions, which in those years were much more developed and advanced. As an article published in the journal *Shenbao* in August 1934 declared, "Everything in China is too ancient. In today's world it won't work to remain ancient. But how shall China change? Undoubtedly, it needs a new life to replace the old one. This so-called new life, I dare to say, is to Westernize as much as possible"¹²³. In a country that lived in a status of complete backwardness and poverty, people wanted to modernize rapidly and to do that they should look at more advanced countries such as those in the West. The Western attire during the Republican period signified desire for change, progress and modernization. The westernization became apparent in many aspects of Chinese people's life¹²⁴, including fashion, with the adoption of Western styles in major cities. In Shanghai, it was possible to see three different types of Western fashion: the military uniform inspired to British, American, Russian and Japanese styles; Western

¹²² OU, Na, *East meet West in Chinese Fashion Culture: A Historical Insight into Its Aesthetic Revolution and Evolution*, in Academia, 2016, https://www.academia.edu/37415404/EAST_MEETS_WEST_IN_CHINESE_FASHION_CULTURE_A_Historical_Insight_in_to_Its_Aesthetic_Revolution_and_Evolution

¹²³ WU, Juanjuan, *Chinese fashion: from Mao to now*, New York, Oxford, Berg, 2009, p. 105

¹²⁴ SPENCE, Jonathan D., *The search for modern China*, New York, Norton, 1991

suits and other traditional Western daily wear, which were worn mainly by Chinese officials, employees of foreign firms and students who returned from their overseas experiences; and finally, Japanese-style attire and school uniforms¹²⁵. Women also felt the desire to modernize their images by bobbing or perming their hair, abandoning breast and foot binding and adopting Western undergarments and accessories, eliminating the traits of their ethnic identity. In the Republican era, in fact, China assisted to an ethnic demarcation in dress: clothing should no more mark a person's rank or ethnicity, but they have to display the image of the new China as a national state. Fashionable Chinese women had the possibility to enter in contact with Western styles both through Chinese travelers returning back to China from Europe or America and also through fashion magazines and photographs published in journals. To understand how much the West had influenced China, we can also underline that even Sun Yatsen, the founder of the Republic of China, used to wear the *Zhongshan Zhuang* or *Sun Yatsen suit*, inspired to Western-style suits.

Despite the progress of fashion in China in 1920s and 1930s and the development it experienced thanks to the opening up toward the West that have served China with more advanced technologies and more modern fashion styles adopted to modernize its image, the country could not still count on a modern Chinese fashion industry.

Any influence the West exercised on China was blocked during the Maoist era, when all business activities became state-owned and fashion assumed a political value.

After the period of closure and isolation from the West, Deng Xiaoping carried out political, social and economic reforms to lead the country toward a process of modernization that, in some ways, can be considered as a form of Westernization, for the important role the West had in this process. In fact, the reopening of the country toward the West had a huge impact on China, including in the fashion field, and made the country completely change its face. For what refers to fashion industry, in the period of the reform era, China experienced the inflow of Western business models, fashion shows, styles and ideas and, at the same time, the outflow of Chinese-made garments to the West¹²⁶. This was the period during which Western countries started to outsource their production to cheaper countries such as China, giving the latter the possibility to start developing and expanding its own industries. This process of outsourcing from the West to the East represents an important factor to analyze in order to understand the influence Western world had on China. In fact, this process made it possible the transfer of technologies, business models and corporate culture to

¹²⁵ WU, Juanjuan, *Chinese fashion: from Mao to now*, New York, Oxford, Berg, 2009, p. 105

¹²⁶ ZHAO, Jianhua, *The Chinese fashion industry: An Ethnographic approach*, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, p.156

China that had not yet developed a fashion industry at that time. The transfer of Western knowledge represents a very controversial issue, since it created huge disadvantages for the West, but for China it was an unevaluable source for starting to accumulate the knowledge and the expertise for creating, subsequently, an independent Chinese fashion industry. At the beginning, China had not a sufficient knowledge to create a fashion industry but, then, it felt the necessity to develop it in a fast way: first, the government wanted to push its expansion in order to carry on the path toward the modernization of the country; secondly, the government and fashion designers understood that through fashion it was possible to change the image of China from being backward and feudal into being modern, independent and innovative; moreover, as Antonia Finnane states, “people in reform-era China wanted to be citizens of the world. Charged with clothing the population not only of China but of many other parts of the world as well, designer’s skills were absorbed mostly producing international styles for the mass market”¹²⁷ so, the number of products that the industry was required to produce was huge. These were some of the main reasons why China had the necessity to rapidly develop a fashion industry so, at the beginning, in order to do that, and lacking a deep knowledge of this industry, China had no possibilities but copying both fashion systems and fashion styles from the West, where this industry was already widely developed and proved to be successful.

The influence of the West on Chinese fashion industry can be seen also in the adoption of the same design techniques, marketing activities, knitting and sewing techniques and sometimes also same business models.

For what refers to design techniques, the influence from the West was very visible at the beginning since the majority of Chinese fashion designers went abroad to study in fashion schools and they returned to China with the knowledge they accumulated in the West, based on Western ideas of fashion and Western techniques.

Another point of influence can be seen in the fact that the fashion market of China shows the same market segmentation and the same business models of the Western one, divided mainly into three parts: haute-couture, prêt-à-porter and fast fashion¹²⁸. Despite China is known for the huge role it has in the fast-fashion market, the country has also started to develop the other two market segments by copying styles and business models from the West.

¹²⁷ FINNANE, Antonia, *Changing clothes in China*, London, Hurst & company, 2007, p.280

¹²⁸ WESSIE, Ling, SEGRE REINACH, Simona, *Fashion in multiple Chinas*, London, New York, I.B Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2018, p.49

For what refers to marketing strategies, China takes inspirations from Western companies. The most recent phenomenon that is going on in fashion marketing, both in the West and in China too, is to implement the KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders) marketing or influencer marketing. It consists in a soft-selling strategy using influencers as channels to promote new products or services, usually on social networks platforms¹²⁹. Thanks to their personality and ability to make their opinion important, they are able to influence people in a way that no other method is capable to do.

Another aspect that China took from the West is related to brands and specifically to luxury brands. As Chinese people have the main goal to become rich, the consumption of brands and luxury items has been a way both to enjoy spending money but also to show off the social and economic advancement. In a country where people have no other ways to demonstrate wealth and communicate their identity, brands and luxury items represent the most important ways to do that. In Chinese mind, a well-dressed person communicates his wealth and career success. For this reason, an individual dressed in high-quality brands is usual to receive better treatment and to have greater opportunities for social advancement¹³⁰. Even if this happens in every society, when it gets richer, in China this phenomenon has been exaggerated. At the beginning China was totally at odd with luxury brands and what branding strategies are, concepts that Western countries already knew very well in those years. For the fact that, on one hand when Chinese first entered in contact with Western brands, they immediately got crazy for them and started desire them more than everything, but, on the other hand they did not immediately understand their real value, they started to copy brands directly from the West by creating a huge market of counterfeit products. It is only in recent years that China focused more on creating proper Chinese luxury brands giving much more importance to the brand identity, brand awareness, brand image and brand positioning, following the Western philosophy. Despite the effort of China in imposing its luxury brands, till nowadays, the market of these items in China is still entirely dominated by global brands. It has taken decades for Western luxury brands to establish at global level, and Chinese one all lack history, an essential element to create a luxury brand.

The influence from the West can be found also in fashion shows, particularly in fashion weeks. Fashion weeks born in the West first, as very important events in which new styles and trends, created by fashion designers, coming from all over the world, were displayed. China completely

¹²⁹ LUI, Natalie, *KOL Marketing: The Key to Success on Chinese Social Media*, in Dragon Social, 2019, <https://www.dragonsocial.net/blog/kol-marketing-success-china/>

¹³⁰ WU, Juanjuan, *Chinese fashion: from Mao to now*, New York, Oxford, Berg, 2009, p. 175

adopted them in major cities like Beijing and Shanghai in the same way they were organized in the West.

Finally, also modelling profession started in China in the same way it was regulated in the West. The first Chinese modelling team was created by the Shanghai Garment Company, one of the largest and most competitive Chinese garment industries at the time, composed by more than ten models who came from textile and apparel factories¹³¹. At the beginning, this profession was judged as immoral and it was perceived as pure entertainment but, then, Chinese learnt from the West that modelling profession was a necessary part in order to be successful during fashion shows and it completes the work of fashion designers. For this reason, this profession in China started to be conformed to that in the West.

Beside these many aspects that influenced the fashion industry of the country, also Western styles were directly adopted in China, in particular after the reform era. Since, after the period of Cultural Revolution, China experienced a relaxation in the rigid political control on every aspect of people's life, the country started again to have the desire to modernize its image and people began to express their new ideas through changes in clothing. In that era, dress mirrored the changes of China and its dream to look modern and glamorous. Something that really helped the spread of Western styles was represented not only by fashion media, which were still under a strict control from the government, but also, and in particular, by fashion icons imported from the West. In fact, in 1970s, China started to look at the West for fashion inspirations and models to copy¹³². At that time, Chinese fashion iconography completely lacked individual fashion icons able to influence people through their own personality or sense of style. Till the years of the reform era, fashion icons in China were all people coming from the world of politics rather than from entertainment. Consequently, the style worn by Sun Yatsen or Mao Zedong had more influence on people than pop stars have nowadays. But everything changed when the government relaxed its politics against the influence from the outside world: personal and political spheres were separated and the influence of politics on people's life started to wane. This marked exactly the beginning of the import of fashion icons from the West, in particular of pop stars, through fashion magazines and some foreign TV shows and movies. These represented for China a model to copy and to follow and they were used in order to give an idea of what a new, modern and liberated "New China" should look like. For the numerous sources of fashion inspiration China had in those years, different bizarre looks

¹³¹ WU, Juanjuan, *Chinese fashion: from Mao to now*, New York, Oxford, Berg, 2009, p. 157

¹³² Ibid p.85

started to spread in the country. The first trend to enter China in the post-Mao era is represented by bell-bottom pants, which were accepted with a total shock effect by Chinese people. Besides bell-bottom pants, also jeans made their appearance in the China of those years. Men experimented bell-bottom pants, plaid shirts, they usually wore sunglasses and they had moustache, sideburns and long hair; these characteristics together created the image of a modern male in 1970s. For what refers to women, they wore bell-bottoms, high heels, jewelry, make up and they had sunglasses and permed hair. These represented the main Western styles that entered China in those years.

To conclude, we can easily understand that China, starting from the years of the reform era, had been deeply influenced by the West, both in the economic sector but also culturally, due to the import of Western and capitalistic ideas. The country not only adopted business models from the Western fashion industry, but it also copied and introduced in the country Western styles and for this reason China had been for many years dependent from Western models. Recently things have changed, and, by fighting against the imperialism of Western fashion brands, China is more than ever determined to demonstrate to the world that it can be an independent and innovative country.

2.2 STEREOTYPES ABOUT CHINA'S FASHION

In a global market in which goods and images circulated almost freely, the relationship between East and West is clearly changing. Asia today is already competing with Western countries, not only from an industrial point of view but also from a cultural perspective. Asia more and more represents the place where to look for new inspirations, in particular in the field of fashion.

The controversial relationship existing between the East and the West in this field starts from the idea of *Orientalism*, a theory that defines the East and the West as fundamentally opposite, with the first seen as perpetually inferior and exotic and the latter characterized by progress and innovation¹³³. This idea derives from a strong *Eurocentric vision*, which had started in the 17th and 18th centuries, in a period during which Europe was expanding its colonies and felt superior to any other country in the world. In this vision, European history and values are considered as "normal" and superior to others, thereby helping to produce and justify Europe's dominant position within the global capitalist world system and, consequently, also in the world of fashion¹³⁴. At the basis of

¹³³ LESHKOWICH, Ann Marie, JONES, Carla, *What Happens When Asian Chic Becomes Chic In Asia?*, Fashion Theory, 7:3-4, 2015, pp. 281-299, DOI: 10.2752/136270403778051970

¹³⁴ FRANZKI, Hannah, *Eurocentrism*, InterAmerican Wiki: Terms-Concepts-Critical perspectives, in Universitat Bielefeld, 2012, [https://www.uni-bielefeld.de/\(en\)/cias/wiki/e_Eurocentrism.html](https://www.uni-bielefeld.de/(en)/cias/wiki/e_Eurocentrism.html)

the Eurocentric idea there is the conviction that fashion is purely a Western product, with the West that takes inspiration from the East, while the East merely copies the West. From the idea of Eurocentrism comes the notion of *Orientalism*, which is seen, as Edward Said explains, as the way in which imperialist Western cultures have inaccurately and patronizingly interpreted the “East”¹³⁵. This idea of Orientalism allowed the creation of a hierarchy of fashion capitals with the West in the leading position and China always in a position of inferiority and backwardness. The erroneous images the Orientalism has created about what Chinese fashion is, constrained the country to face huge obstacles in imposing its own fashion system at an international level. Orientalism is reflected in collections created by Western fashion designers that appeared to Chinese eyes just as exotic as they did to Western ones, giving in this way a distorted idea of Chinese fashion and helping creating stereotypes that, from that moment on, have been attributed to Chinese fashion. In fact, this passion and interest for the East and for the exotic let fashion designers in the West using recognizable Chinese elements but in a westernized way, that even Chinese people perceived as distorted. An example of how Orientalism has almost become a synonym of Western supremacy and segregation is represented by the very famous exhibition taken on 4th of May 2015 at Metropolitan Museum of Art’s in New York City, called “China: Through the Looking Glass”¹³⁶.

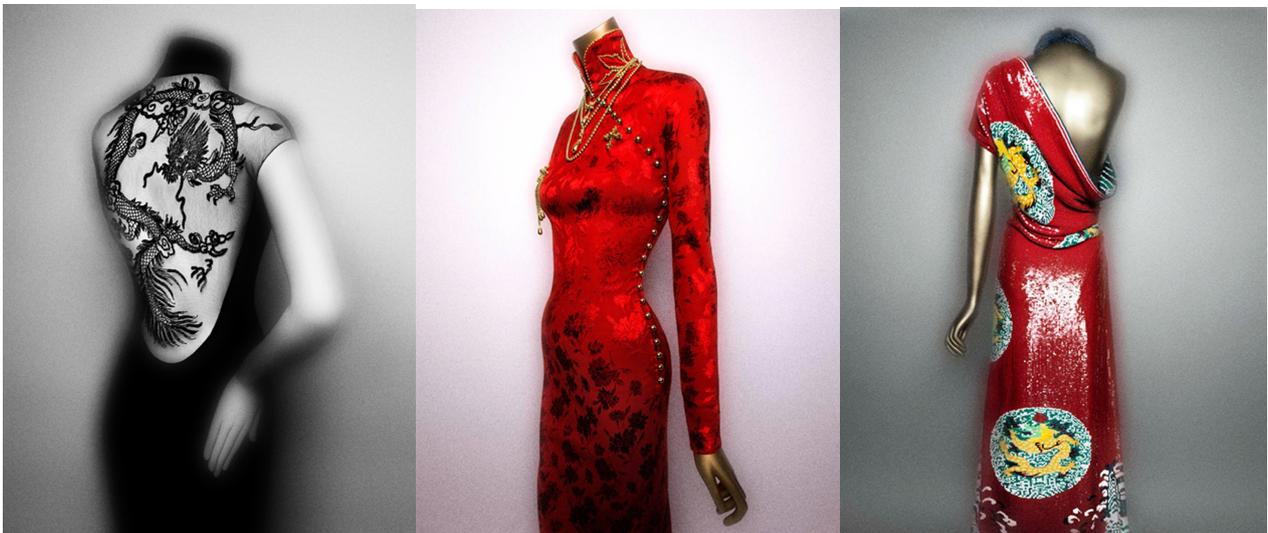


Fig. 27 Ralph Lauren (American, born 1939) Evening dress, fall/winter 2011–12.

Fig. 28 John Galliano (British, born Gibraltar, 1960) for House of Dior (French, founded 1947)

Fig. 29 Tom Ford (American, born 1961) for Yves Saint Laurent, Paris (French, founded 1961)

¹³⁵ WANG, Connie, *The Met’s New Exhibit Is About Orientalism, Not China*, in Refinery 29, 2015, <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2015/05/86838/met-china-orientalism>

¹³⁶ Metmuseum.org, *China: Through the looking glass, Exhibition Overview*, <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2015/china-through-the-looking-glass>



Fig. 30 A gown designed by Guo Pei at the Costume's Institute's new exhibition, 'China: Through the Looking Glass.'
 Fig. 31 A wider view of the exhibit 'China: Through the Looking Glass.'

The Costume Institute and the Department of Asian Art collaborated to create a juxtaposition with Chinese costumes, paintings, porcelains and other arts such as films, in order to recreate an enchanting reflection of the Chinese imaginary. From the earliest period of contact between Europe and China in the 16th century, the West has fed an incredible interest in the East, finding an important source of inspiration for many fashion designers. For example, Paul Poiret made use of Orientalism in order to create a sort of forbidden sensuality that rendered his works more intellectually daring. Yves Saint Laurent took inspiration from China making full use of color, texture and every type of embellishment, creating an absolute extravagant style that mesmerized. Vivienne Westwood and John Galliano also have been inspired by China but in a different way: they both have been attracted by the profound plainness of the Mao jacket. Vivienne experienced a real obsession for the image of Mao itself that she reproduced over and over again in her spring 1995 collection¹³⁷. In the Met exhibition, many designers represented their inspirations from China creating an erroneous and confused ensemble of Chinese aesthetic and cultural traditions. But, as stated by Costume Institute Director Andrew Bolton and Wong Kar Wai, acclaimed filmmaker and the exhibition's artistic director "China: Through the Looking-Glass" is not about China, Chinese fashion or Chinese fashion designers, and the Met makes that point very clear. Rather, it is about how the West has borrowed from China throughout history: "The China mirrored in the fashions in this exhibition is wrapped in invention and imagination. Stylistically, they belong to the practice of Orientalism."¹³⁸. Through this exhibition, West had once again the chance to highlight its superiority

¹³⁷ Metmuseum.org, *China: Through the looking glass, Exhibition Overview*, <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2015/china-through-the-looking-glass>

¹³⁸ WANG, Connie, *The Met's New Exhibit Is About Orientalism, Not China*, in *Refinery 29*, 2015, <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2015/05/86838/met-china-orientalism>

at the expenses of the Chinese fashion system, without recognizing that, even if the West still considers Chinese fashion as backward and lacking a proper identity, it provided for very long time inspiration to the West. Although Chinese fashion has not yet gained international recognition, the fact that nowadays all are looking at the East for inspirations is already an alarm to recognize the importance that Chinese fashion is gradually acquiring.

Another element that contributed to see China as a country not able to express itself in the field of fashion is the fact that it was completely out of the international arena after the Second World War, the most important period during which fashion expanded in Western countries. Its absence helped the spread of the idea that China developed fashion only after the contacts it had with Westerners and this is still an obstacle that did not allow the country to impose itself in the fashion world and contributes to make it difficult the recognition of Chinese fashion at a global level.

Beside Orientalism, seen as an East created by the West, we can also witness the creation of a Self-Orientalism, an East created by the East. Its birth is due mainly to the desire of China to express its own national identity, that the country still does not have elaborated. In many cases, this different form of Orientalism has been used by Chinese fashion designers and brands as a strategic design decision: it is, in fact, an example of how the country has made use of the stereotypes the West has attributed to China in a positive and strategic way. As a matter of fact, by using chinoiserie in their design, fashion designers have created styles that had encountered a great enthusiasm in Western people since they appeared exotic and modern to their eyes and, at the same time, they figured out to be traditional but also cosmopolitan to the eyes of Chinese people. This is one of the main reasons why the brands that followed this kind of strategy gained success on the international market and with Westerners. Shanghai Tang is a very successful Chinese brand, founded in Hong Kong in 1994 by sir David Tang, that perfectly embodied the idea of Self-exoticism and evoked the romantic nostalgia of the Chinese glorious past. As its founder stated: “Shanghai Tang is the best of 5000 years of Chinese tradition exploding into the 21st century”¹³⁹. Shanghai Tang made of Chinese tradition the most important source from which taking



Fig. 32 Shanghai Tang ad campaign.

¹³⁹ LU, Xiao Pierre, *Elite China: Luxury Consumer Behavior in China*, John Wiley and Sons (Asia) Pte. Ltd., Singapore, 2008

inspiration from for the creation of new styles. The brand tried to present itself as the “ambassador of the modern Chinese style”¹⁴⁰, since it has reinvented Modern Chinese chic by drawing back to the stylish decadence of Shanghai in the 1930s. The main goal of the brand is that it directly took inspirations from its beloved country and it was able, through its advertising campaigns created by evocative and powerful images, to tell emotional stories, improving in this way its storytelling. From the very beginning, the brand presented itself “as the first to introduce authentic Chinese luxury to global customers and showcase a vision of holistic, Chinese inspired, lifestyle”¹⁴¹. Shanghai Tang aspired to enjoy the same prestige that all luxury brands, associated to a particular national aesthetic, have gained by becoming the “Chanel of China”¹⁴². Nevertheless, besides the great effort of David Tang to let the company become a great success also in the West, it did not gained the expected positive outcome, since “Western luxury brands were generally perceived as being more luxurious and prestigious”¹⁴³, so it was very difficult for customers to understand the high price of the items, in a period in which Chinese fashion was still seen as poor in design, linked to cheap labor and almost inexistent.

Another stereotype that Chinese fashion suffered for, for very long time, is exactly the one to be attributed to low-cost manufacturing and cheap labor. This stereotype of course finds its foundations back in the period in which China focused on the massive production of textiles and apparels, after the push toward economic development that the government sustained in this field. With the huge expansion of textile and apparel industries, China in few years found itself forced to produce clothing not only for its own population but also for the majority of people out there, due to the outsourcing process of large Western companies, so, designers spent almost all their time and efforts in designing and creating clothes for the mass market, without spending energies in good and qualitative design¹⁴⁴. This is one of the main reasons why China, at the beginning, completely lacked design in the production of clothing and apparel. But, following the expansion of the textile and apparel industries, China experienced also the rise of the fashion industry that, although it developed in late respect to Western countries, made massive progresses very rapidly. Despite its favorable position, China still struggles to fight against those stereotypes that has been attributed

¹⁴⁰ HEINE, Klaus, PHAN, Michel, *A Case Study of Shanghai Tang: How to Build a Chinese Luxury Brand*, ASIA MARKETING JOURNAL Vol. 15 No. 01 April 2013 (1~22)

¹⁴¹ Shanghaitang.com, *Our Story*, <https://www.shanghaitang.com/en-eu/our-story>

¹⁴² HEINE, Klaus, PHAN, Michel, *A Case Study of Shanghai Tang: How to Build a Chinese Luxury Brand*, ASIA MARKETING JOURNAL Vol. 15 No. 01 April 2013 (1~22)

¹⁴³ Ibid

¹⁴⁴ FINNANE, Antonia, *Changing clothes in China*, London, Hurst & company, 2007, p.280

to the fashion of the country back in 1980s. The characterization of China as a fast fashion country essentially creates the image of a country matched with poor, unoriginal, cheap design and counterfeits Western fashion. Consequently, also Chinese fashion designers are seen as copycat of fashion coming from the West. Many Western scholars argued that China will never be able to catch up with the West in the field of creative economy, since it completely lacks the ideas of the Enlightenment, thus remaining only able to copy the ideas from the West instead of developing an advanced knowledge in this field. The Chinese scholar, Jing Wang, argued that for China adopting the creative economy is very difficult, in fact he stated: “how far creative industries can travel in a country lacking a real social and cultural democratic transformation”¹⁴⁵. In order to understand how much this idea of China as an imitator of Western brands was deep-rooted in the mind of Westerners, we will disclose an example of a fashion designer that expressed it through an advertising campaign. *Coco Chanel: From Paris to Shanghai, a Fantasy* is a film directed and created by Karl Lagerfeld, the Chanel designer, where the history of China is transformed into a sort of soap opera¹⁴⁶. The short film is based on a fictitious Coco Chanel that time travel in different epochs of Chinese history, passing through the Cultural revolution, the China of 1930s and ending with the last emperor of the Qing dynasty. In all these passages China is described and depicted through a series of old stereotypes: first, it conveys the idea that Coco Chanel arrived in China to liberate the country from its ignorance in the field of fashion and to educate the masses; secondly, it stereotypies the clothes of all the major Chinese characters, based on the ideas that Westerners have of the fashion styles of different epochs in China and finally, it shows China as a country only able to imitate the West. In recent years, in particular starting from 2000s, the difference existing between the reality and the stereotypes regarding the Chinese fashion is becoming gradually more and more evident: China is fighting off the perception of the country as cheap, low-skilled and copycat of the West by trying to focus its attention on design innovation, fashion technologies, advancement and modern looks and, in particular, trying to create Chinese fashion brands that can be recognized at an international level. Chinese fashion designers, also, are seeking to impose themselves as “authors” or “creators” of fashion instead of still accepting to be stereotyped as copycats.

¹⁴⁵ WESSIE, Ling, SEGRE REINACH, Simona, *Fashion in multiple Chinas*, London, New York, I.B Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2018, p.96

¹⁴⁶ SEGRE REINACH, Simona, *The identity of Fashion in Contemporary China and the New Relationship with the West*, *Fashion Practice*, 2015, 4:1, 57-70, pp. 62-63, DOI: 10.2752/175693812X13239580431306

The other stereotype that is profoundly erroneous about Chinese fashion industry is linked to the image of China uniquely as a fast fashion country, with a single market¹⁴⁷. In reality, the opening up of the country toward the West in the reform era and the consequent huge outsourcing of production by foreign companies to China opened up the opportunity to develop this sector in a very rapid way and on a large-scale. Consequently, this led to a continuing process of market segmentation which resulted in the creation of numerous niche markets in China. This is the reason why the Chinese fashion market nowadays is characterized by multiple fashion systems and by a high degree of segmentation. Fashion scholars usually recognized three models or systems of fashion: fast fashion, prêt-à-porter and haute couture¹⁴⁸. These fashion systems are categorized in a hierarchical order considering different aspects: first, in terms of originality, fast fashion represents the least original and high fashion the most original one; secondly, in terms of price, fast fashion is the cheapest and haute couture the most expensive and, finally, also in terms of quality, fast fashion uses low-quality materials while haute couture uses the finest ones. Of course, by describing these three market segments, we cannot entirely represent the complex and lively panorama of fashion systems existing in China nor all the niche markets but, we will give evidence of these macro fashion systems to prove that Chinese fashion is not only composed by a single-facet market, but, on the contrary, it is very complex, articulated and developed, more than what Westerners still believe.

In the field of fast fashion, China has developed its own Chinese brands such as the already mentioned Metersbonwe. The latter can be considered part of the fast fashion segment since its strategy is based on selling very cheap clothes, relying more on marketing activities to sell garments quickly and on large volumes of sales, rather than on complex design. Even if a company can count on a team of fashion designers, designs for fast fashion generally are not innovative and original but based on what designers thought it will be popular among Chinese consumers. They basically copy popular trends from other brands, and, through small changes, they make these styles their own. In line with the concept of fast fashion, the clothes sold by Metersbonwe have low price, low quality and lack in originality.

China has also developed many fashion brands that can be included in the category of the prêt-à-porter. This fashion segment is characterized by branded ready-to-wear garments realized with a better and more original design, with higher quality materials and they are sold at a higher price

¹⁴⁷ ZHAO, Jianhua, *The Chinese fashion industry: An Ethnographic approach*, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, p.106

¹⁴⁸ WESSIE, Ling, SEGRE REINACH, Simona, *Fashion in multiple Chinas*, London, New York, I.B Tauris & Co. Ltd, p.49

respect to fast fashion. We can say that the majority of middle-ranged fashion designers fall in the category of the prêt-à-porter. One of the most important brands in this fashion segment is Zuczug, founded in 2002 by Wang Yifang¹⁴⁹. The fashion designer defines its own brand as an “original designer brand”, since the design of Zuczug products was originally created by him and his fashion designers’ team, without external influences. The brand nowadays has a high reputation among Chinese consumers, and it has developed five regular lines or series, each with a team of fashion designers responsible for their creation. Each series take inspiration from different aspects of urban life, and for this reason they are all different, original and unique. Beside the classical series, Zuczug developed a line of outdoor wear, an environmentally sustainable line, a jeans line and an accessories line¹⁵⁰.

The last fashion segment is the one of high fashion, also known as haute couture, that has been developed in China too. High fashion is a luxurious type of custom-made clothing utilizing premium fabrics and sophisticated handwork¹⁵¹. In haute couture, fashion designers have a great freedom in pursuing creativity and originality in their design, in order to make of every piece a unique garment that usually is limited in quantity. A Chinese high fashion brand is Ne Tiger, founded in 2003, when the homonym fashion designer launched his luxury, tailor-made evening wear collection in its flagship store in Beijing¹⁵². The brand tries to take inspirations from Chinese history, looking back at the glorious imperial past of the country and trying to reinvent the ancient examples of luxury. The outcome is that Ne Tiger produces one-off made-to-measure dresses with exceptional and sophisticated design.

The presence of all these different fashion segments in China, let us understand that the Chinese fashion market cannot be considered only as fast fashion, but it is constituted by multiple and different fashion systems that render it very large and complex.

From this explanation, it is very easy to dispel another myth that has for long characterized Chinese fashion: the plainness and uniformity in Chinese fashion styles¹⁵³. China, of course, gained this image of rigidity and uniformity in the years of the Cultural revolution when people all dress the same, since expressing one’s personality through clothing was something wrong and dangerous, in line

¹⁴⁹ Zuczug.com, <https://www.zuczug.com>

¹⁵⁰ WESSIE, Ling, SEGRE REINACH, Simona, *Fashion in multiple Chinas*, London, New York, I.B Tauris & Co. Ltd, pp. 49-61

¹⁵¹ ZHAO, Jianhua, *The Chinese fashion industry: An Ethnographic approach*, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, p.24

¹⁵² Jing Daily, *Chinese Luxury Brand Ne-Tiger Bursts Onto Shanghai Scene*, 2010, <https://jingdaily.com/chinese-luxury-brand-ne-tiger-bursts-onto-shanghai-scene/>

¹⁵³ SEGRE REINACH, Simona, *Stereotipi e cultura della moda*, in Ocula.it, 2007, <https://www.ocula.it/files/OCULA-8-SEGREINACH-Stereotipi-e-cultura-della-moda.pdf>

with Western and bourgeois ideas. Back in those years people were a mass of “blue ants”, dressing all the same in their military uniforms. The representation of this stereotype can be found in an advertising campaign made by Dior in 2010, titled *Shanghai Dreamers* and directed by the Chinese photographer Quentin Shih¹⁵⁴. The campaign entails all the old stereotypes about the indistinct and amorphous Chinese masses, wearing all the same uniforms or the same qipaos, as it can be spotted from the picture (Fig. 33). Nowadays, the reality

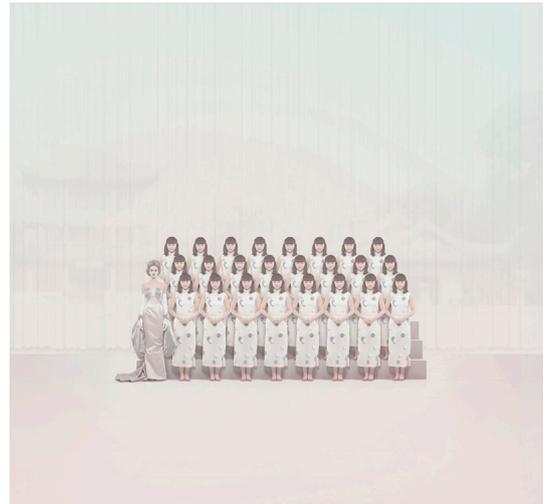


Fig. 33 Christian Dior – *Shanghai Dreamers*: Quentin Shih.

of fashion is very different from these old image and idea: the Chinese fashion market, in fact, is expanding very rapidly, is highly segmented and sophisticated, always asking for more and more variety in clothing.

In conclusion, after having made this analysis about stereotypes, we can say that China is still consolidating the recognition of its proper fashion system, of its own brands and of its native fashion designers, trying to shake the image of the country only as the “factory of the world”. Nowadays that China is demonstrating to the rest of the world that it is able to compete with other giants at an international level, it is also more than ever determined in imposing itself as a creator of fashion, free of all the stereotypes that have been attributed to its fashion system and that are an obstacle for the development of this sector. Gone are also the years in which China was considered as subordinate to the West since also the latter is obsessed with China and look at this country for fashion inspirations. Even if China still has to fight for very long time to liberate its own fashion system from all these old stereotypes, it is already on its way for imposing itself as the world’s first fashion industry, and for gaining, in the next future, the so much desired global recognition that will elevate its proper fashion at an international level.

2.3 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CREATIVITY AND CONTROL

As we all know, the government in China has always played a fundamental role, maintaining a tight grip on all aspects of people’s life and trying to make the society follow the ideological ideas that it

¹⁵⁴ SEGRE REINACH, Simona, *The identity of Fashion in Contemporary China and the New Relationship with the West*, *Fashion Practice*, 2015, 4:1, 57-70, p. 62, DOI: 10.2752/175693812X13239580431306

wanted to spread, controlling in this way the population. Fashion is a field that had suffered for the influence of the government that initially discouraged its free development and the use of creativity in this field.

As we have already said, the fashion industry started to develop in China from 1980s, after the period of cultural revolution, during which people were discouraged to express both their thoughts and their own's personality, trapped in a period of fear, turmoil and self-isolation. In that period, fashion was perceived as something "dangerous", linked to the capitalistic and bourgeois world that Chinese people should stay very far from. For these reasons, even right after economic reforms implemented by Deng Xiaoping, people still felt uncertain about anything new and they were still afraid about how to react to new ideas, trends and lifestyles¹⁵⁵. Of course, they were shocked by the past events, when the government controlled not only their lives but also their ideas. Even if in the reform era the government relaxed a bit its influence on people, anyway, it tried to maintain a certain control on ideological aspects, protecting China from the huge influence coming from Western ideas that flew into the country after the Open-door policy. The balance between external influences and the respect of the Chinese traditions has always been a controversial issue: the government wanted Chinese people to still maintain and carry on Chinese traditions in the ideological field, while looking at the West for economic reasons, in order to pursue modernization. This trend was visible also in the field of fashion: China looked at the West to learn how to run the fashion industry but, from an ideological perspective, at the beginning, the government did not accepted too much self-expression from fashion designers when they created new designs and styles, so it decided to control how fashion styles were produced in the country. In 1980s, Chinese fashion designers were mainly at the service of the state that had the necessity to spread fashion industry, producing styles conformed to its ideas, not letting them completely free of creating fashion as they wanted. The majority of Chinese fashion designers in the early years of fashion creation in China were occupied working for large manufacturing companies, investing all their time and efforts in the production of clothes for the mass market, not having the time to operate by themselves to create their own artistic designs. In this way, the creativity of Chinese fashion designers was discouraged, forcing them to act as puppets at the service of the state. In order to control fashion creation, the government decided to impose some guidelines that all the figures involved in the fashion industry should follow, including fashion designers. These set guidelines declared that fashion designs should be *meiguan* (beautiful), *defang* (composed), *jiankang* (healthy)

¹⁵⁵ WU, Juanjuan, *Chinese fashion: from Mao to now*, New York, Oxford, Berg, 2009, p.10

and *shiyong* (practical)¹⁵⁶. Those styles that did not respect these general rules would be criticized as “bizarre looks” and they would be condemned by the fashion media between the end of 1970s and the beginning of 1980s. Of course, these guidelines were adopted in order to educate both fashion designers and the Chinese society about what the government considered as “appropriate” in dress. As we can easily understand, at least in the early years of the fashion industry, Chinese fashion designers were not able at all to express their own artistic ideas by freely creating whatever they wanted.

In this discussion about creativity, we should also spend some words in order to describe the education system in China, regulated by the government, that in some ways represents also the background that first Chinese fashion designers had during their years at school. Their education is mainly based on hard study of books and theories instead of made by practice and experiences. People during their years at school are required to spend the majority of their time studying very hard, not leaving space for passions, hobbies or for making experiences. For this reason, they pursue a type of education that discourages creativity and kills initiative¹⁵⁷. This is also another obstacle for fashion designers: since their education didn’t leave space to creativity, they had to get used to change their minds and their educational background to give space to their imagination.

What ruined and obstacle the most the expression of creativity in Chinese fashion, at least at the beginning of 1980s, was the control and the support by the government of large-scale manufacturing companies¹⁵⁸. Back in those years, from 1950s to 1980s, the overall economy and, consequently, all the companies were in the hand of the government. This is typical of all socialist nations, which are usually based on a planned economy system that needs the control and the support of the state in order to reach the fixed goals. Of course, back in those years, when all factories were state-owned, the competition between companies of the same sector was almost absent. After the period of economic reforms, when China finally adopted market-driven economy and partially abandon the system of having fully state-owned companies, the country started to increase in the number of private companies and it allowed the rise of small and medium enterprises, which before almost non-existed in China. Despite this great change, many Chinese companies still remained state-owned under the government’s control and were of large size, in particular in those

¹⁵⁶ WU, Juanjuan, *Chinese fashion: from Mao to now*, New York, Oxford, Berg, 2009, p.137

¹⁵⁷ CHEN, Celia, *China’s education system kills initiative and creativity, says co-founder of Angry Birds mobile game*, in South China Morning Post, 2017, <https://www.scmp.com/tech/start-ups/article/2125049/chinas-education-system-kills-initiative-and-creativity-says-co>

¹⁵⁸ WESSIE, Ling, SEGRE REINACH, Simona, *Fashion in multiple Chinas*, London, New York, I.B Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2018, pp. 96

fields in which the government had a particular interest. In the field of fashion, the fact that China always advantaged large businesses ignoring small entrepreneurs is something that created an obstacle for creativity and creative economy. It is agreed, at least in Western literature, that big businesses are the least innovative sectors in the economy. Large sized companies, in fact, are usually much more focused on business, on earning more and more money from the sales of clothing, thus inducing fashion designers only to produce fashion that follow most popular trends to satisfy the majority of consumers. By doing that, China has disadvantaged small size enterprises that usually are the most innovative ones, suppressing in this way free expression and autonomy of fashion designers in creating their own designs, following their own aesthetics.

The control of the Chinese government in the field of fashion is still very evident, both for its support of large fashion business and for its interest in boosting the development of this sector. Despite the fact that its influence and control have created barriers and obstacles for the development of creativity in fashion, we can see that nowadays China is rapidly developing and actively sustaining the rise of creative economy that has mainly been adopted to create an image of China as a globalized modern country but, also in order to climb up the value chain. Nowadays, China is developing fashion products that are not only the fruit of cheap manufacturing labor but a creation that encases many other values such as taste, culture, aspirations, aesthetic and art. Fashion designers are also aspiring to improve their own reputation by presenting themselves as “geniuses” instead of manufacturers and by demonstrating that they are able to create brands and designs worthy of receiving recognition at an international level.

2.4 CHINESE CULTURAL TRADITIONS VERSUS MODERN CHINESE FASHION

Confucianism is the pillar of Chinese culture. It cannot be considered as a religion but more as a way of life, a system of social and ethical philosophies that has influenced for very long time every aspect of people’s life and has deep roots in the Chinese culture. It is based on a series of concepts that have always indirectly ruled the country and it has been taken as the “guide” to understand what should be considered ideologically right or wrong in the society, leading people acting morally and in accordance to these principles. The opening up of the country toward the Western and the capitalistic world has for the first time shaken the very strong foundations of Confucianism in the Chinese society. Starting from those years, Chinese people began to ask if they still recognized themselves in the principles of Confucianism or if it dates back to too ancient times, restraining the

possibility for the country to advance and become modern. China in fact started to live the collapse of some of the ancient ideals and values proper of the traditional culture that left space to more modern and westernized capitalistic ideas. This did not only happen in the way people dressed or in the fashion field, but it regarded different aspects of people's life.

As we have already said, even if during the reform era the government relaxed a bit its influence and control on every aspect of people's life, in the early years of post-Mao era, the government was still concerned in "repudiate capitalist liberalization" and "cleanse out spiritual pollution"¹⁵⁹. The notion of spiritual pollution comes from the Confucian idea that China should stay far away from the influence of other countries and cultures and it should preserve its own cultural authenticity and pureness. For what refers to the field of fashion, this means that conservatives wanted to expel from the country the new styles that had appeared after the arrival of Westerners in the country, in particular jeans and bell-bottom pants, since they were considered as negative influences on Chinese culture. Despite the fact that these fashion items never left the country after their entry, in this period new fashion trends and fashion activities were still considered risky. In 1983, the government launched the first national campaign against crime of the post-Mao era, an event that made Chinese people even more afraid of adopting new fashion styles and ideas¹⁶⁰. During these campaigns, disco dancers were mainly accused of sexual promiscuity and pop singers were banned or attacked by the state fashion media. There were numerous fashion styles and trends that were discouraged in order to cleanse the "spiritual pollution" that had invaded China: among them we could find long hair for men, that were considered disturbing, since they created mistakes in the recognition of men and women; moustaches, that entered as a trend imported from the West and, finally, also pop music, which was a great source of fashion inspiration that incentivized the spread of rebel looks. Since in the Chinese society one's appearance was pretty much linked to one's morality and ideology, revolutionaries and people who adopted new fashion styles were considered immoral and lacking values. The image of the fashionable man, with long hair, sideburns, moustache, bell-bottoms and sunglasses was banned and largely criticized. On the contrary, the image of the perfect Chinese man was with short hair, without shave, dressed in a white shirt and loose pants, who dedicated his life to study hard and to avoid "bizarre looks" and "unhealthy thoughts" of fashion rebels. Women should avoid wearing uncomfortable high-heeled shoes, sunglasses, too heavy make-up, short dresses and earrings or any other type of "unhealthy

¹⁵⁹ WU, Juanjuan, *Chinese fashion: from Mao to now*, New York, Oxford, Berg, 2009, p.12

¹⁶⁰ Ibid

ornament". People were encouraged to pursue the ideals of simplicity and frugality typical of Confucian spirit and to abandon the enthusiasm for such lively fashion styles and trends. Despite the government's efforts to contain the influx and rise of so many new fashion ideas and trends, this field continued to develop very rapidly, it gradually interested more and more people and it started to gain high media coverage¹⁶¹.

Another great change that China experienced with the rise of fashion, that once again challenge the solid foundations of Confucianism in China, is the relationship with the body and body exposure in fashion. Nudity has always been appreciated in the West in its artistic sense as a way to express the natural forms of everyone's body. Westerners are quite used to see nude figures both in sculptures and in paintings, but this is not the case of China¹⁶². In the Chinese culture the body is seen as something intimate, private, sexual and sacred, not to be shared in public. Chinese culture has always put a greater emphasis on morality and spirituality and it never looked at the body as an object of beauty, as it happened in the West, in particular in the Greek culture. For this reason, it has never appeared in visual representations, not in art nor in the way people dressed. If some sort of visual representation of the body existed in China, it was considered as pornographic material. In terms of clothing, in the history of China until 1980s, it is very hard to find out some styles that left space for the vision of the body, usually almost fully covered. In Qing dynasty, the body, in particular for women, was completely covered, except for head and hands, while, during the Tang dynasty, women were considered to wear revealing dresses that only let see neck and upper chest. The only dress that in some ways, for its materials and its shape, highlighted the female body curves was the qipao but, it represented the only exception among a large variety of clothes that for very long time make the body disappear. New forms of dresses, mainly imported from the West, gradually helped in changing the perception of the body and the notion of revealing it, both in people and in government's minds.

Another fundamental factor which, starting from the foundation of the People's Republic of China, contributed to the rise of modern fashion is the birth of the modern women. This factor profoundly influenced the vision of feminine body and revealing fashion in the country. After the fall of the last imperial dynasty, women in China started to ask for more rights and they began to approach to new roles, new freedom and, subsequently, also to new fashions. During the millenary Chinese empire, the role of women was based on some Confucian ideas: woman was always subordinated to man

¹⁶¹ WU, Juanjuan, *Chinese fashion: from Mao to now*, New York, Oxford, Berg, 2009, pp. 10-15

¹⁶² Ibid p.15

and its role was defined by some Confucian principles. They should be daughters for their fathers, wife for their husbands and widow for their children; they should also have four virtues: morality, appearance, speech and domestic skills. Back in 1920s, with the influence coming from the West, women started to embrace the idea of women's freedom and they began to feel the need to define their role into the society. They started to study very hard in order to sort out from their status of ignorance, as education was seen as the first step to reach the goal of women's liberation. Of course, not all women could get access to education both for economic reasons and also because some of their families were still very conservative and do not see any advantage in let their daughters studying: this was something that made it possible to distinguish the "new woman" from the traditional one, not always closed at home, just conducting the life of a wife or of a mother, but a literate woman, determined to change her position in the world. For the linkage they had with the image of the "new girl", these modern educated feminine students were usually taken as models to be copied and they became trendsetters in fashion. They not only started to attend school, but they also entered in public areas that they had never ventured into before. They also began to practice outdoor activities such as horseback riding, swimming, cycling, and other sports which were also advantaged by the abolition of foot binding. This shift women experienced has changed not only the role they played in the society but it also heavily influenced fashion. Of course, this new woman should wear appropriately to her new role in the society and depending on the activities she started to practice. For this reason, in 1920s China experienced a great shift in womenswear: from the very heavy, accessorized and embroidered style of dresses for women, there was a change toward more simple clothes and less accessorized and heavy garments that the "modern girl" asked for. In those years, the "pure and neat style" was very popular among Chinese fashion students¹⁶³. Starting from the liberation of Chinese women, fashion has followed not a stable trajectory: first, during the Mao era in 1950s, women experienced an asexual uniformity in dress that do not allow differences between man and woman, since the society become increasingly militarized; then, women, after the reform era, mainly influenced by Western styles, rediscovered their interest in feminine looks that were increasingly and freely adopted only in 1990s. In the early years after the end of the cultural revolution, women gained new positions into the society and they started to express their interest in beauty and fashion. In that still very conservative period, women were encouraged to dress not in a "too slim, revealing, transparent or short"¹⁶⁴ style and to conform to the standards

¹⁶³ WU, Juanjuan, *Chinese fashion: from Mao to now*, New York, Oxford, Berg, 2009, pp. 32-33

¹⁶⁴ WU, Juanjuan, *Chinese fashion: from Mao to now*, New York, Oxford, Berg, 2009, p.40

imposed by the government. Many women, even if they had an increasing desire for change, were still afraid to stand out of the crowd after such a hard period for Chinese people. In the early years of 1980s, Chinese women, while reclaiming their feminine side in fashion, wanted also to gain the same status and rights of man inside the society and to express their new roles in the workforce. For this reason, in 1980s, China experienced a spread of unisex trends in fashion, through which women reclaimed their role as workers. In those years, while the liberation of women was still in place, both feminine and unisex trends were mushrooming in the country. The acceptance of new more feminine fashions was possible not only thanks to the new role of the women but also due to the sexual revolution that the country experienced in 1990s. With the beginning of 90s, the attitude of people toward sexual relationship changed incredibly, also because of the influence from the West, where people were sexually free since many years before. In 1990s, bars, pubs, one-night stands and discos started to spread all over major cities; internet chat rooms facilitated the communication between people who organized extraordinary affairs with strangers; people, in particular young, could be seen kissing and hugging in public¹⁶⁵. These things were all banned till few years before, since Confucianism and the Chinese traditional culture had always asked people to be very conservative, modest and reserved in public, since other behaviors were considered immoral and disrespectful. This sexual revolution, of course, not only influenced fashion but, in particular, how revealing fashion was. Popular trends, in fact, included revealing styles such as one-shoulder tops, strapless dresses, see-through materials, underwear as outwear and so on. Jeans, T-shirts, jackets, athletic wear and sweater, which characterized the unisex trend of 1980s, were all designed with more gender characteristics and trims in 90s. Even if the Chinese government tried to ban these new styles and to prohibit their adoption, Chinese people find them even more interesting and the desire for freedom was so strong that the efforts of the government were almost useless¹⁶⁶. Thus, new fashions helped to change the ideas of femininity, decency and modesty, letting new modern and more revealing fashion styles enter the country.

A fourth characteristic of the modern Chinese society is the new trend toward individualism. China has always been a collectivistic country that gave more importance to the group than to the single individual and that promoted uniformity instead of individuality. These values came from Marxist

¹⁶⁵ BAO, Mingxing, 包铭新, *Jindai zhongguo nuzhuang shilu* 近代中国女装实录 (A Record of Chinese Women's Wear in Modern Times), Shanghai, Donghua Daxue Chubanshe 东华大学出版社, 2004

¹⁶⁶ PEIDONG, Sun, 孙沛 东, *Kujiaoshang de jieji douzheng – wenge shiqi Guangdong de qizhuang yifu yu guojia guixun* 裤脚上的阶级斗争 – 文革时期广东的奇装异服与国家规训 (Class struggle over trousers: bizarre dress and state admonitions in Guangdong in the period of the Cultural Revolution), Kaifang shidai 开放时代, 2010

ideas which saw the display of individuality as dangerous for a socialist society. As the economic expansion of China increased, and as it partially abandoned pure Marxist philosophy and opened up to the capitalistic Western ideas, the question of individualism became quite a controversial issue. On one hand the government, by pushing the economy and by supporting small enterprises, allowed the formation of few very rich people, feeding in this way individualistic sentiments; on the other hand, the government tried to set some limitations to the display of individualism in the country. Of course, with the privatization of companies and with the adoption of market-driven economy in the reform era, the Chinese society could no more be considered as collectivistic but it started to develop following the models of the West, where people give more importance to themselves as individuals than to the group or to the society as a whole. In the field of economy, when companies are private, each of them has the prime objective to do their best, not considering what it is good or wrong for others or for the society. This of course let the country to become more individualistic and gradually abandoning collectivism.

To conclude, we can say that the profound changes that China had experienced, in particular starting from the reform era, let the country gradually abandoning some basic notions of Confucianism and of Marxism, becoming in this way a more modern country, partially adopting capitalistic ideas and becoming a more materialistic than spiritual country where individualism is enormously increasing. Even other traditional Confucian ideas changed: the body became less sacred and more revealed through fashion, mainly due to the change in the role of women inside the Chinese society, with females that figured out to be more fierce, independent and freer to express their ideas, thoughts and femininity. All these changes have been reflected in dress and in fashion styles which were used as a display of new and modern ideas, less compliant with Chinese traditional culture and gradually accompanying the country in its own path toward the creation of the image of a “new China”.

2.5 CHINESE FASHION DESIGNERS

INTRODUCTION

Fashion designers represent a fundamental piece to complete the puzzle of fashion figures that contribute to the creation of a fashion system. For this reason, also Chinese fashion designers are a source that cannot be ignored by the fashion world. In China, they are more than ever eager to display their capabilities to their own nation but, in particular, to the rest of the world and to introduce themselves as creative people, like artists or “geniuses”, instead of being only considered as manufacturers. Since fashion is quite a recent phenomenon in China, the notion of fashion designers appeared for the first time in the country during the Republic of China, a period during which China was starting to enter in contact with the West, Western ideas and also with fashion. Back in those years, China was experiencing the first influx of Western styles and trends inside the country which, to the eyes of Chinese people, appeared as a symbol of modernity, wealth and urban lifestyles.

With the following foundation of the People’s Republic of China, the country seemed to throw it away any trace of fashion, in particular during the period of the Cultural Revolution.

It is only after the reform period and with the reopening of the country toward the outside world that people, having more freedom in the choices of what they could wear, started to feel the need for fashion information and to demand for more fashionable dresses. This last period represents the moment in which fashion designers started to develop as professional figures, which at the beginning were more linked to the world of manufacturing production but that gradually tried to focus more on fashion creativity, design and innovation. Chinese fashion designers, according to the fashion scholar Christine Tsui, can be divided in three generations according to the period of their activity: the first generation of Chinese fashion designers (1980s) can be described as more focused on the artistic side of fashion and less commercially successful, concerned about their Chinese identity; the second generation (1990s) was more “pragmatic and professional” and tended to focus on business success; the third and last generation (2000s) is more “contemporary, diversified and creative” but with the trend to copy Western styles¹⁶⁷. These three groups, even if not so distant in terms of time, show very big differences since they lived in a country that was under profound

¹⁶⁷ ZHAO, Jianhua, *The Chinese fashion industry: An Ethnographic approach*, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, p.87

changes in all the fields of economy, politics, culture and society, so they all have very different backgrounds.

A crucial phenomenon for the formation of fashion designers in China had been the development of fashion education in the country starting from the end of 1970s. As we have already seen, after the reform era, the Chinese government had the desire to push the development of the manufacturing industry as part of the modernization project and in order to give China a new image of modern country. For this reason, it started from the development of some fashion courses which were fundamental for educating fashion designers and for the creation of professionals that worked in that field. Following the foundation of fashion education system, the country also experienced the rise of many fashion events which were organized in the country to which Chinese fashion designers took part in as an opportunity to enter in contact with other fashion designers, sometimes also coming from all over the world, and for keeping up with new trends and styles. These events gave also the chance to Chinese fashion designers to become known, at least at a national level, and they represented a stage in which they could show their talent and attract the attention of fashion media.

It was only at the end of 1980s that finally, for the first time, a generation of Chinese fashion designers started to gain much more attention, becoming the above-mentioned first generation of fashion designers. Besides all the specific characteristics of this group, that we will deeply analyze in the next chapter, we can say that they played a fundamental role by creating the basic conditions for the rise of fashion in the country but, of course, being the first in doing this job, they do not gained too much success, they are almost unknown and they cannot be considered successful from a commercial point of view. In any case, the following generations of fashion designers positively exploit the foundation created by this first group to further develop the fashion sector.

Nowadays, Chinese fashion designers, even if they made enormous progresses in the last decades, still struggle to fight against stereotypes that for long have been attributed to them, such as being copycat of Western fashion, lacking innovative design and being only manufacturers instead of creators of fashion. Consequently, they are now trying to launch new Chinese fashion brands that can be recognizable, culturally distinctive and valuable by improving in fashion design, techniques, product development, brand image, among other things. In this way they could sort out from the “Made in China” era and enter the “Created in China” one. They are also working very hard to gain international recognition, useful to finally legitimize Chinese fashion at a global level.

THE THREE GENERATIONS OF CHINESE FASHION DESIGNERS

Many scholars agree that Chinese fashion designers can be divided into three main groups, a postulation that was first theorized by the fashion scholar Christine Tsui. She believed that in China existed in the history three generations of fashion designers, each one presenting its own peculiar characteristics: the first was composed by fashion designers that gave more importance to the artistic side than to the business one in fashion creation and which evidently showed their Chinese identity; the second generation was more “pragmatic and professional” in the sense that they were much more focused on business and on commercial success; the third is the contemporary generation composed by fashion designers that tends to diversify their styles from those of the others but that committed the mistake to copy Western design techniques for long. Of course, they operated in different decades very different one from the other: China in the last decades faced a lot of changes both in politics and in economy but also from a cultural point of view. For this reason, even though these generations are not too separate each other in terms of time, but they have very different background and they faced very different realities.

The first generation of Chinese fashion designers dates back to 1980s. They were not able to gain commercial success or to create their own fashion collection because they mainly worked in state-owned companies¹⁶⁸. These fashion pioneers were more fashion technicians than fashion designers with limited education in modern design and more focused on tailoring and pattern making. They were busy in the creation of fashion for the mass-market that generally required conservative designs which were very far from international popular styles. Big names in the field of fashion in China, in the 1980s, were all linked to very big state-owned garment factories which developed very rapidly after the huge economic growth of China and which needed more and more designers to create mass-market fashion styles, not only to dress the Chinese population but also for the export to foreign countries. This first generation of fashion designers had the advantage not to be illiterate, since they attended from elementary to high school, but they lacked a complete education on modern fashion design¹⁶⁹. They only had the possibility to learn tailoring and design in garment factories during or even before the Mao’s era. Their failure in succeeding it is not only linked to all these factors, but we can detect many other reasons. First of all, the creativity of fashion designers was limited by the rationing system, established in China in 1954 and implemented until 1983, due

¹⁶⁸ WU, Juanjuan, *Chinese fashion: from Mao to now*, New York, Oxford, Berg, 2009, p. 129

¹⁶⁹ Ibid

to the scarcity of resources that were not sufficient to satisfy the needs of the huge Chinese population; for this reason, also in the field of fashion, until the elimination of the rationing system there was a shortage in fabrics that do not allow a wide spread of clothing in the country. Moreover, immediately after the period of Cultural Revolution, China was in a complete state of backwardness and poverty which incredibly diminish the number of people that could afford fashionable clothes. Back in those years, due to these conditions of both poverty and scarcity, clothes were seen more for their function than for their aesthetic values¹⁷⁰. Thirdly, we can say that in 1980s, China still lacked a profound knowledge and experience in the field of fashion both in its aesthetic sense but also in the fashion industry, since fashion in its modern sense was a concept that entered the country only after the opening up toward the West. Another important factor which do not help this first generation of fashion designers to gain economic success was the fact that they were too much focused on the artistic side and they completely lacked business education. Even fashion events were considered more a stage for cultural exchange than an opportunity for making business. It is also important to note that these designers lacked practical skills: the teaching methods used, at least at the beginning, in fashion courses in China were not appropriate, since they focused more on drawing or painting skills than on practical clothing design. Since their first objective in dress making was to highlight their Chinese identity, they spent a lot of time to study Chinese sartorial past tradition and art craft to apply them to their designs. For this reason, they do not know how they could create a collection or build up a proper brand. From a stylistic point of view, this first generation of Chinese fashion designers believed that highlighting Chinese traditional characteristics in fashion design could be a winning move for gaining international recognition, since Chinese elements were considered as objects of fascination in Western countries. But, since Chinese design elements had little connection to international fashion, this strategy generally resulted to be negative for the fashion industry. In the fashion styles created by the first generation of Chinese fashion designers, it is possible to trace the classical elegance of Europe of 1920s and 1950s. This is mainly due to the fact that starting from this very first generation of fashion designers, China tried to copy brands such as Chanel, Dior or Cardin, because this was an easy way for Chinese fashion designers to start their work and they also believed that by imitating them they could reach the same status of their counterparts in Europe¹⁷¹. Finally, we can also add that the lack of efficient sales agencies where to sell their clothes and the scarce media exposure of fashion contributed to make

¹⁷⁰ TSUI, Christine, *China Fashion: Conversation with designers*, New York, Oxford, Berg, 2010, p. 132

¹⁷¹ TSUI, Christine, *China Fashion: Conversation with designers*, New York, Oxford, Berg, 2010, p. 134

the work of this first generation even harder. Of course, despite the difficulties they had to face for all the reasons above-mentioned, they were fundamental to pave the way for the second generation of Chinese fashion designers, which could gain more success thanks to the efforts made by the pioneers. Even if they did not gain success and most of them still remains unknown, some of the most important designers of this first generations are: Qian Shilin of the Shanghai Qianjin Garment Factory, Jiang Hialiang and Jiang Yinmei of the Shanghai First Garment Factory, Jin Taijun and Ye Deqian of the Shanghai Clothing Research Institute, and Chang Genfa of the Shanghai Clothing Factory. It is part of this group of pioneers also Wu Haiyan, successful designer and President of the Chinese Academy of fine arts, who is considered one of the initiators of the contemporary Chinese fashion. She differentiates herself for her clothing realized with the use of Chinese traditional textiles such as silk and linen. Back in 2000s, she created her proper brand WHY which is very popular in China and it is characterized by highly feminine style thanks to the transparencies, floral decorations and differences in patterns. Despite the rise of this first generation of Chinese fashion designers, China, back in those years, still lacked “star” designers.

The second generation of Chinese fashion designers is the one that mainly operated in 1990s, years during which the spread of fashion all around the country was already flourished. In 1990s, China was experiencing its ascent and it was developing very rapidly in many economic fields, included the one of fashion. In fact, it was exactly in that period that a real fashion system definitely developed in China, as the one intended by the fashion scholar Kawamura, precisely characterized by “the combination of organizations, institutions and individuals interacting with one another to legitimate fashion designers and their creativity”¹⁷². In those years, China witnessed the proliferation of fashion mass media, institutions, research centers and fashion events, at least in the major cities of the country. These elements were, of course, a great help given to fashion designers to obtain the support they needed to gain more success and recognition. China, in those years, also enjoyed a period of relaxation of the control by the government on every aspect of people’s life, that helped in the proliferation of different fashion styles, letting people freer to decide what to wear and allowing fashion designers in enhancing their creativity, even if they still have some limitations in the creative sector. This group of fashion designers was beginning to understand the real value of brands and branding activities, so they tried to create their own labels that should gain not only national but also international recognition. Till nowadays, fashion designers and their labels have not yet reached the status they would like to have, so they are still working very hard to be

¹⁷² WU, Juanjuan, *Chinese fashion: from Mao to now*, New York, Oxford, Berg, 2009, p. 136

recognized at a global level. With the opening up of the country to the rest of the world and the reform era, the government abandoned also its full control on companies and let them to be privatized. The rise of private companies advantaged a lot the work of this generation of fashion designers that were no more only required to work for state-owned companies, following the standards imposed by the government, but, for private ones that wanted Chinese fashion designers to improve their designs in order to face the increasing competition in the field of fashion in order to be more successful on the market. For this reason, compared to the previous generation, the second one was much more concerned about the importance of business success. Unfortunately, the pursuit of commercial success was quite a controversial issue in China where art and business have always been considered as conflicting and not able to collaborate or work together¹⁷³. But, in that decade, Chinese fashion designers gradually acquired more business knowledge and they understood that in order to survive on the market the commercial success was fundamental. They should learn to “balance the pursuit of artistic and commercial success to give the product extra value”¹⁷⁴. Moreover, we can say that the improvements in fashion education in China played a very important role in increasing the knowledge, not only in fashion industry and design, but also in the fields of fashion promotion, distribution, marketing, merchandising, promotion and management. In order to improve the fashion education system, many different foreign exchange programs and activities were promoted: Chinese fashion teachers or professional were sent abroad in Western universities to learn Western educational system, while foreigners usually came to China for seminars. This exchange of ideas and connections with foreign countries¹⁷⁵, mainly with those that already had high levels of fashion education, benefited the increase of fashion knowledge in China and they resulted to be fundamental for the shift of the country from its traditional fashion industry to a modern fashion system. From a stylistic perspective, compared to the Chinese design and elements adopted by the first generation of fashion designers, this second group decided to still continue to represent Chinese traditional elements but in a more subtle and almost imperceptible way, without incurring in Chinese design clichés. They focused more on simplicity and frugality, typical of Chinese Confucian tradition as a sort of call back to the “peasant life” and to the years during which Chinese lived an environmentally friendly and frugal life. Despite Chinese fashion had not yet reached international recognition, in those years we can see the rise of the firsts Chinese

¹⁷³ Ibid p.133

¹⁷⁴ WU, Juanjuan, *Chinese fashion: from Mao to now*, New York, Oxford, Berg, 2009, p. 133

¹⁷⁵ BAO, Mingxing, 包铭新, *Jiedu shizhuang 解读时装* (Decoding fashion), Shanghai, Xuelin chubanshe 学林出版社, 1999

“star” designers. Among them we can mention: Ma Ke, Wang Yi-Yang and Liang Zi, among many others. Ma Ke is one of the most important star designers that succeeded in those years. She graduated in 1992 at the Suzhou Institute of Silk Textile Technology and, some years later, in 1996, she created a mid-range brand named “*Exception de Mixmind*” that targeted middle class consumers¹⁷⁶. A decade later, she created a couture line, which represented one of her best creations, named “*Wuyong*” or “*Useless*”, a collection which was presented at 2007 Paris Fashion Week¹⁷⁷. The exhibition was very innovative: models were inside some lit boxes as they were sculptures; their clothes were all made of natural fibers and shoes were created with recyclable materials; models were very simple and wore soil-like makeup created with earthy colors in order to show the main theme of the exhibition, which was in fact “the soil”¹⁷⁸. With this show, Ma Ke wanted to focus her attention to nature, something that for long had been forgotten in flamboyant Paris high fashion, which was instead characterized by excess and extravagance. On the contrary, Ma Ke researched frugality and simplicity in her designs, concepts that had always been of primary importance in the Chinese traditional culture. The recognition she gained through this show had been of primary importance for her to obtain international recognition. What makes Ma Ke an innovative fashion designer is also the fact that she used Chinese tradition but without falling in the representation of Chinese design clichés. In 2007, she was also named “Best Asian fashion Designer” by the *Elle style awards*¹⁷⁹.

The third and most contemporary generation of Chinese fashion designers is the third one, which developed in the 21st century and it is characterized by fashion designers that grew up in a totally different background. China in the last decades had an enormous growth in many sectors to the point of becoming the second most powerful country in the whole world. The imposition of China in the global context had shaken the balances existing between countries at an international level and had given to the country the opportunity to show its own power. For what refers to the field of fashion, the country had experienced the flourishing of a lively fashion system that is in continuous expansion and that it is struggling to finally gain the international recognition that will legitimize the Chinese fashion system. Chinese fashion designers, together with a huge support by the government, are committed to create their own fashion brands, that differ from the ones created

¹⁷⁶ WELTERS, Linda, C. MEAD, Arthur, *The Future of Chinese Fashion*, Fashion Practice, 4:1, 13-40, 2012, p. 33, <https://doi.org/10.2752/175693812X13239580431225>

¹⁷⁷ WU, Juanjuan, *Chinese fashion: from Mao to now*, New York, Oxford, Berg, 2009, p. 154

¹⁷⁸ Ibid pp. 156-157

¹⁷⁹ WELTERS, Linda, C. MEAD, Arthur, *The Future of Chinese Fashion*, Fashion Practice, 4:1, 13-40, 2012, p. 34, <https://doi.org/10.2752/175693812X13239580431225>

by the previous generations, since they wanted these brands to be culturally distinctive, internationally known and recognizable. In these last decades, branding has become a very important issue for fashion designers that would like to see their labels competing with Western big names and not only considered as fruits of the cheap labor and low skilled manufacturing. The government is helping Chinese fashion designers in order to reach this goal and finally liberate China from the stereotypes of being backward, turning, in this way, its image into the one of a new, modern and innovative country, also in the field of fashion. Even if Chinese fashion designers still have some difficulties in imposing their brands at a global level, in any case, we can perceive that, in the last years, many Chinese fashion brands are entering the global arena and they could be seen on important fashion events or at international fashion weeks. This is possible mainly due to some factors: first of all, thanks to the new position that China occupies in the world; then, for the fact that the country represents nowadays the fastest growing consumer market in the whole world, with a middle class of people that it is becoming increasingly rich and it is expanding in its size in a very rapid way; and, finally, also for the huge development that the Chinese fashion industry witnessed in the last decades. Compared to the previous century, China now represents the market every fashion brand wanted to enter in, to gain and to exploit. In few years, in fact, China has passed from being backward to be modern and from being a production base to be a fashion creator. In this context, Chinese fashion designers have great advantages: they have grown up in this country, so they have always been used to face the very high levels of competition that exist inside the country; they are Chinese natives, so they are able to better understand the market and to meet the needs of local consumers; and, finally, they enjoy greater relationship with distributors. For what refers to fashion styles, this third generation of fashion designers gradually abandon the trend of copying designs from Western fashion and it makes efforts in order to find China's own national fashion identity by creating its own autochthone fashion aesthetics and by abandoning the Chinese traditional fashion clichés that do not represent anymore the reality of Chinese tastes. In this sense, Chinese fashion designers are moving toward more autonomy and independency in fashion, by fighting against the imperialism of Western brands, ideas, aesthetic codes and trends. One of the most important fashion designers that is considered to be part of this generation is Lu Kun. After some years of activity, he gained in 2004 the title of "Best Young designer" and this represented a new start for his career that, from that moment on, really boomed. The objective of Lu Kun is mainly to correct, through his own fashion design, the narrow and distort vision that Western people have of Chinese fashion. He tried to make the world understand that "simply adding an embroidered

dragon to a garment is not Chinese style". He perceived that many times Western people have an erroneous idea of what pertains to the Chinese culture and, in particular, of what really is "Chinese style". In reality this is a very controversial issue: understanding China is pretty much difficult, since it is a very big country, composed by 55 ethnic groups, which all have their own characteristics, dressing styles and their own traditional culture. The qipao, for example, is considered something properly "Chinese", but, in reality, it is only part of the tradition of one single Chinese ethnic group. For this reason, it is almost impossible to define a single Chinese style. Lu Kun, in his work, decided to take inspiration from Shanghai, and, in particular, from Shanghainese women that appeared sophisticated, modern, sexy and clever at his eyes. The designs of the Chinese fashion designer can be defined as very skimpy, daring, figure-hugging and provocative, and for this reason they were mainly used by people who wanted to feel like divas; Paris Hilton can be accounted among the fans of Lu Kun. Chinese traditional elements are still present in his fashion creations, such as, the red color, which conveys the idea of happiness and luck, and also the gold color, always linked to the idea of luxury in China. The innovative designs of Lu Kun, at the beginning, resembled to the work of John Galliano, so the Chinese fashion designer soon gained the title of "China's own Galliano". At first, being associated to Galliano was a way for Lu Kun to make his own fashion designs having more visibility but, as time passed, Lu Kun tried to shake off this nickname because he understood that he was living in Galliano's shadow. The Chinese fashion designer wanted fashion consumers to appreciate his fashion designs realized in his own way, not in Galliano's one. This artist generally incorporates the struggles of the majority of Chinese fashion designers considered part of this last generation: first, they wanted to be considered as artists and geniuses instead of manufacturers and, secondly, they would like to demonstrate their ability in fashion design without been criticized as only copycats of Western fashion¹⁸⁰.

To summarize, we can say that the categorization of Christine Tsui helped us in better understanding the general characteristics of each generation of Chinese fashion designers starting from 1980s, when in China, for the first time, fashion designers had been recognized as professional figures. With the growth of the fashion industry and, subsequently, of the fashion system, Chinese fashion designers faced a lot of improvements in terms of fashion design, innovation and independency from Western fashion so, they are now more and more focused on imposing themselves in the global arena. They are increasingly gaining more success inside the country, since new Chinese

¹⁸⁰ BJORKELL, Stina, *Lu Kun – Designer for the Divas*, in *gbtimes*, 2008, <https://gbtimes.com/lu-kun-designer-for-the-divas>

fashion consumers are no more only focused on luxury Western brands and fast fashion, but they are gradually approaching to local designers' creations that convey to them an original and authentic Chinese identity. The latter is nowadays inseparable from global influence and integration, since China is by now internationalized in any aspect of fashion creation, communication and consumption. But what Chinese fashion designers are trying to do with their brands is to convey them a local identity, authentic Chinese one, in order to please Chinese fashion consumers. Despite this categorization of Chinese fashion designers, it is very difficult to make generalizations about their work, since they all have different backgrounds and views and, in particular, they used very different approaches.

CHINESE FASHION DESIGNERS' BACKGROUNDS AND APPROACHES

In this paragraph, we will analyze the different approaches that Chinese fashion designers took toward design and retail, mainly through a presentation of merchandising, retailing, service and promotion activities.

First of all, merchandising strategy is used to support a designer's brand concept which guides all the decisions regarding product development, pricing and, in particular, development of a brand image to support the promotion of a brand. The creation of brand image has gradually gained more importance from the moment in which Chinese fashion designers, and also the government, had decided to focus on the creation of internationally well-known Chinese fashion brands. When a fashion designer decides to give value to his brand, first he has to learn how to balance art and business, two ingredients both fundamental for the success of the brand. The first, namely "art", is used in order to make a brand different from another one, thus recognizable, while the second factor, namely "business", is fundamental to have the finances to run the activity. In the past years, many Chinese fashion designers have used themed series in order to tell their brands' history. They start merchandising their brands by attributing them to meaningful and memorable theme that increased the abstract value of the brand itself. These visual creations together with a narrated brand philosophy represented two of the main elements used in order to convey a fashion designer's label identity. Since China is nowadays part of the globalization process and it takes part to the relatively free flow of information, materials and people, Chinese fashion designers could no more rely on Chineseness or Chinese elements to shock the West. For this reason, in most recent years, Chinese fashion designers have almost abandoned Chinese design clichés and they use

different approaches to design. Some of them, for their designs, take inspirations from non-fashion fields both inside and outside China, while many others decided to still convey Chinese traditional aesthetics but, in a more imperceptible way, without using directly recognizable Chinese symbols. The second element of our analysis is retailing. Retail has become a very important issue only in recent decades for Chinese designers, since retail opportunities had been extremely limited for independent Chinese fashion designers until recently. The only traditional possibility to sell Chinese fashion designers' products was through department store system, a sort of shop in a shop. They do not really embody a great opportunity for designers since their brands lose their identity and could be easily confused with other designers' brands. Only in the last decade, Chinese fashion designers' boutiques appeared in the streets of major cities, in particular in Shanghai. They were a good space in which each fashion designer could highlight his own brand's image and identity. Usually those designer's boutiques were realized by graphic artists that tried to create a space consistent with the image and the identity of the brand sold there. Of course, the result of having a proper boutique was extremely successful to complete the image that the fashion designer wanted to give to his own fashion brand. More recently, it is also possible to find in big cities the so-called collective designer shops, a new retail option that demonstrated to be very successful for independent Chinese fashion designers. Two examples of this new type of retail store that we can provide include BNC (Brand New China) and Dong Liang. The first one is located in the Sanlintun village, the most modern and avant-garde space in the city of Beijing, where art galleries and luxury fashion brands are located. The shop houses the largest collection of Chinese fashion designers' labels under the same roof and it has gained very large domestic media exposure, since it represents the first store in which Chinese fashion designers' labels are sold separately but all host in the same building. The second one, the Dong Liang store, is a shop in which each fashion designer occupies a room or a space which is designed according to his style. Of course, this kind of organization of the space allows the differentiation among each fashion designer's brand and it is also less confusing for customer's mind that have a clearer image and positioning of each brand. Another retail channel, that in the last years literally boomed inside China, is composed by different e-commerce platforms. Of course, these platforms represent one of the best ways to promote Chinese fashion designers' works.

Chinese fashion designers have different approaches also for what refers to service. Of course, the issue of service is much more important in small fashion designers' boutiques, since it can change the overall impression and experience of a customer. Although it is recognized as a critical factor,

Chinese designer boutiques and collective designers' shops still lacked a system of satisfactory service both before and after the purchase. Another critical question is the one of the policies of return and exchange of purchased products: it has been quite complicated to regulate these issues, at least at the beginning. It has been thanks to the efforts of Tmall that in China such policies about return and exchange had been implemented, since this platform, for the first time, allowed consumer to return or exchange products for any reason within seven days receiving a full refund. Nowadays, in China small merchants are much more focused on obtaining positive feedbacks on online platforms and on maintaining their level of customer care at high levels.

The last activity that we will analyze is the promotion of Chinese fashion designers' work. Even if promotional activities are still in an embryonal stage in China, the country offers different ways to promote Chinese fashion designers and their brands. The self-promotion has demonstrated to be the less effective way, while the most popular methods used include fashion shows, interviews with fashion media and overseas academics, cultural exchanges and exhibitions. Chinese fashion designers sometimes use online and offline sales promotions, or they organize some activities to attract their fans in their stores. In China, it is very rare to see Chinese fashion designers to invest in offline promotional campaigns, which is among the less used method for promoting designers' activities or brands. We can even notice that some fashion designers do not really like to attract media exposure and they avoid too much promotional activities, since what they considered the most effective way to promote their work is to stay in their store and focus on both the customer and the product. Some of them avoid also to participate in fashion shows or events: they believe that these occasions do not serve anymore as a moment for selling their fashion items but just as a way to show off designers' own talent. In any case, fashion shows represent nowadays the most important platform for Chinese fashion designers to launch their new collections and to communicate their aesthetic values, ideas and design capabilities. As we have already said, the government makes efforts in order to support and promote fashion designers, but we need to clarify that usually the Chinese government is more focused in supporting platforms that encourage the development of Chinese design on a large or global scale, such as in the case of fashion shows, while it does not concentrate on the promotion of any individual Chinese fashion designer. Despite the fact that fashion shows do not serve as a channel to make direct profits, as it is nowadays for all the fashion shows organized all over the world, they represent a very good way in order to merge the artistic side of a designer's work with the more materialistic side, since they are not only a way to show the pieces created by the designer but it is also a stage on which the designer could recreate

an atmosphere, conveying in this way a multisensory experience and a memorable brand image. Another important way to connect fashion designer with the final consumer in China is through the designer showroom. They mushroomed in China during the last decades, in particular in Shanghai, but they have been mainly occasional, organized during the period and for the duration of the fashion week. Starting from 2014, showrooms have become more important platforms to attract both Chinese fashion designers and international ones. For example, the Showroom Shanghai is one of the China's leading designer consortium which attracts dozens of fashion designers both from inside and outside China. Finally, the extremely popular social platforms used in China are one of the most effective channels for the promotion of Chinese fashion designers and their brands. Chinese people of any age spend a lot of time on these social platforms so, it has become almost compulsory for Chinese fashion designers to find ways in order to promote their brands on social networks, not only by showing their fashion items but also by conveying, through visual contents, their brands' image and aesthetic philosophy¹⁸¹.

After having analyzed the different backgrounds and approaches to retail and design that Chinese fashion designers adopt, it is easier to understand why some scholars do not agree with the categorization made by Christine Tsui. The stereotype that describe China as being formed by a flat fashion market nowadays seems to be outdated. The Chinese fashion market, after its huge development, is become nowadays more and more segmented, and it offers great opportunity both to Chinese and to foreign fashion designers, that have to find the right strategy to be successful in such a complicated market. For these reasons, it is quite complicated to give to these groups of Chinese fashion designers a collective identity, since they are increasingly specialized in satisfying the needs of niche-market consumers. Even China as a country cannot be described as a single unit, having the same tastes or following the same trends, since it is very big, it has different levels of development and it is formed by different ethnic groups. Therefore, even if some similar characteristics could be drawn among Chinese fashion designers, it is also true that in such a highly segmented fashion market they all adopt different approaches.

¹⁸¹ WESSIE, Ling, SEGRE REINACH, Simona, *Fashion in multiple Chinas*, London, New York, I.B Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2018, pp. 71 - 91

CONCLUSION

The decision to talk about Chinese fashion in this dissertation has been dictated by the need to let people realize the importance that China is gradually gaining in the field of fashion. Despite the powerful role the country has acquired in recent years on the international arena, the recognition of Chinese fashion is still underway. China has suffered for long for the stereotypes of being a cheap, low skilled and copycat country, just able to produce in mass due to its availability of a huge workforce and to copy fashion styles from the West.

Things have begun to change starting from the Reform era, when the strengthening of the fashion industry has become part of a bigger project, fundamental to achieve the goal of the modernization of the country, such as the creation of the image of a new, modern and independent China. If in the West the construction of the fashion world took very long time, China instead has been able to create, in a very short time, a fashion world which is multifaceted and multi sourced, characterized by intricate aesthetic identity and that will soon compete with the Western one.

Nowadays, the country is trying to move away from being considered the factory of the world toward being recognized as the innovator of the world. To reach this goal, China is promoting the production of value-added products that are not only the fruits of cheap labor but the result of a creative process, it is focusing more on brand awareness, it is implementing fashion innovation by investing a lot in improving its expertise in this field and it is also promoting the creation of authentic Chinese fashion brands. Despite nowadays they represent just few cases, more and more Chinese fashion brands are now participating at most important global fashion events and they already enjoy global recognition. This is the main reason why today in China, beside Western brands, we can notice many other Chinese fashion designers' brands that are gradually gaining higher reputation and conquering a lot of consumers. Moreover, China is still pushing the development of textile and apparel industries that seems to growth at a steady rate. Today, in fact, China dominates the apparel sector being the most important producer and consumer of fashion in the world.

Despite Chinese fashion is quite a recent phenomenon that it is still at an initial stage of development and it still needs a lot of expertise, at the same time it is growing at a lightning speed and, in few years, it will probably dominate the global fashion arena. Westerners should change their mind about the reputation of Chinese fashion, and they have to get used to see China among the world's leaders in the field of fashion.

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IMAGES

Fig. 1 A factory in Henan run by the Jiantai Garment Company, from <https://www.ft.com/content/fe86f76c-1215-11e8-8cb6-b9ccc4c4dbbb>

Fig. 2 Table 1: Trend of Chinese textiles and clothing export to the world from 2012 to 2016. Value in thousands of USD. Source: ITC Trade Map, WTO. From <https://www.textiletoday.com.bd/china-building-tech-intensive-textile-industry-leaving-low-value-business/>

Fig. 3 Top ten exporters of textiles, 2016 (US\$ billion and annual percentage change, %). Source: WTO Secretariat. From https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/statis_e/wts2017_e/wts2017_e.pdf

Fig. 4 Top ten exporters of clothing, 2016 (US\$ billion and annual percentage change, %). Source: WTO Secretariat. From https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/statis_e/wts2017_e/wts2017_e.pdf

Fig. 5 Top ten exporters of clothing, 2018 (US\$ billion and annual percentage change, %). From <https://shenglufashion.com/2019/08/16/wto-reports-world-textile-and-apparel-trade-in-2018/>

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