

The History of Fashion in China's Development After the Chinese Reform

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Introduction

When I think of Chinese street fashion, I think of the many Tik-Toks, Instagram posts and YouTube compilations we see online of model like fashionistas and individuals showing off their unique clothing style to the world. There is no doubt that many young Chinese people have a love for fashion and finding their own way of expressing themselves through clothing. As an individual who loves fashion, this topic interests me greatly. I take much of my outfit inspiration from far East Asian street wear and am eager to understand why the fashion industry in China is still new and now booming. I will delve into the history and background to China's emergence to Western trends, and how opening up the country brought freedom through the means of garments. As all trends they develop and change over time, and I hope to see the recent and old trends sparked joy with the Chinese people and how East Asian street fashion also contribute to Western trends. The Great Firewall is quite the restriction to the Chinese youth so I will also touch on how people can access Western media for their own artistic gain and vice versa.

Fashion has meaning to it, more than just for decency, catwalks, red carpets, and magazines. It is something the surrounds us, a way of self-expression and comfort being yourself. This year the People's Republic of China is turning 72, and the country has changed leaps and bounds since 1949, this is obvious when looking at the typical Chinese woman's wardrobe.

The Evolution of Women's Fashion

From 1949, when the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, what was most important was employability and work. As for the clothing worn, the "Blazy" was very trendy and loved by women. A Blazy is a type of Russian dress that has short puffy sleeves, a frilled hem and comes in a range of diverse patterns popular at the time, for example, polka dots. The Blazy was said to have brought out the young women's fashion and beauty, and it was more comfortable and less restraining than the Qipao*, which gave more flexibility whilst working.

**A Qipao is a garment from the Qing dynasty with a rectangular waist-less silhouette, short narrow sleeves, saddle-shaped collars, plate buttons, and embroidered designs, This dress is a Manchurian invention, Manchurians were called Qi people and the garment was named after them.*

During the 1960s there was only one prominent trend, only one fashionable style, that was the military uniform. The military at the time was an icon to all and was the dream of many to own their military uniform, even if they were not recruited. Because of the mass popularity of the uniform, the country looked monotonous with military green.

In the 1970s the reform and opening-up policy began! And soon enough the military green scenery had vanished. It was a time when fashion seemed to have more free will and people could embrace fashion. A popular material used at this time was 'Di Que Liang' called dacron in English, it is a piece of polyester-based upholstery fabric. This material is resistant to creasing

but was not comfortable. At the time it was difficult to get a hold of ready-made items of clothing, so this material was well-loved and useful when wanting to try new styles.

During the 1980's many households purchased their first television sets, here is the emergence of a different type of admiration. Very different from the admiration towards the military, the focus was now on celebrities who set fashion trends who people who took notice. Singers, actors, and news anchors also pioneered this new fashion trend wave for the country. They were especially admired by career-minded women who loved wearing suits with the classic 80's shoulder pads and a tight skirt. Now women's confidence and independence strived.

The 1990s like Britain was a golden age for fashion, people still take inspiration from 90's trends today, especially with suits and jackets, suits have yet again become very popular for women, but a blazer is rarely seen with skirts. Also, light coloured denim coats and jeans, tight and sexy dresses. In the 90's most inspiration came from Hong Kong's pop culture, which was spread by their tv shows, music, and films.

A new century was upon us and the Chinese economy was booming, now fashion had become very mix match and heavily influenced by k-Pop which became viral in China, this included exaggerated hairstyles, dyed hair, and popular Korean fashion at the time.

In 2010 China was flooded with foreign fashion brands. From this Chinese fashion has become greatly diverse and has now become a reflection of one's self-identity.

Fashion in China Today

China's internet control is considered the most advanced than in any other country in the world. The great firewall blocks many foreign websites from crossing to china such as YouTube, Soundcloud, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Google, just to name very few. This has been very frustrating for the younger adults in Shanghai. Shanghai is a city full of young artists, musicians, and designers developing their ideas in a fast pace city.

Like Britain, young people are wanting to push boundaries and put their stamp on their brand, be happy even if they do not make much money from doing what they love. Especially among young people, this has become a current way of thinking as there are so much more opportunities to do what you love, and have more independence through this, so no wonder it intrigues so many and pushes them to create something unique for themselves. Fashion is one way of self-expression and a key concept when discussing how anyone expresses themselves. From what I gathered about the Shanghai youth is that it is beautiful when you have self-identity that does not contribute to the mainstream.

90% of purchases from high-end shops in 1995 were accounted for by men. Women and men are now 50-50, in the global average, women account for roughly two thirds. This shows us just how important clothing and fashion is to both males and females.

"Women are today more independent, richer, and can buy products for themselves."

China's Trends

A trend in the fashion industry is when fabric, pattern, garment, or colour becomes popular and sells particularly well at a certain time, therefore shops will cater to this to bring up sales. When

mentioning Chinese fashion trends, it falls within this category, a type of clothing that becomes very popular among a certain group of people, these people are what is called your target audience which is who you aim to cater for. Some trends in China have been and gone, most likely to return as trends circle, for example wearing denim jeans and a denim jacket that was popularised in the '90s and has now become a popular look once again. Some trends have stayed for a few years.

British Fashion in China

British fashion or “style from the Briton” originated during Queen Victoria’s reign. The typical British style these days are the use of tartan, elegance, a sense of nobility, and simple fitted designs. British fashion in China has been categorised into three similar styles which are the MOD which is very 90’s, smart, tweed style which also has elegance and simplicity, and preppy chic which consists of wearing a lot of tartan.

Korean Fashion in China

The emergence of Korean dramas and K-Pop groups in the past few years and their immense success across the world has no doubt influenced Chinese fashion, Korean celebrities have also been cast on Chinese adverts. The Korean styles (there are many!) Are very popular with the younger generations, and Korean fashion is fast-changing, and Korean brands are always changing the style of clothes they sell so it's sometimes hard to pinpoint when Chinese people are inspired by Korean fashion. These Korea fashion enthusiasts are very often called "little fresh meat" (小清新) and “stupid but sweet” (傻白甜).

Elegant Chinese Fashion

This style is based on traditional Chinese culture, elements from ancient Chinese garments have been adapted for today's popular styles and lifestyles, this style is called Chinoiserie. It includes elements such as Auspicious Dragon, Embroidery, white and blue porcelain patterns, and Cheongsam. And these patterns have been very prominent in Western clothing shops. Both the East and West influence each other and its designers.

Baroque Style

The Baroque period was between the 16th and 18th centuries during the Dutch-centered period, when people were into the “long look”, “leather” and “lace”. Baroque men and women wore garments covered in lace and ribbon to strengthen female body shapes. There is a hint of luxury to this style that makes people almost unapproachable. This style is a form of art called “movement and life force” which gives these looks soul.

Luxury Brands

In recent years, especially with the older generation, they want luxury and to be seen as high class. They purchase many branded products to show, branded bags are immensely popular with many women in the big cities of China. There are also online websites that sell fake branded luxury items which are also popular. Popular brands that produce products in China are Prada, Armani, Dolce & Gabbana, Miu Miu, and Burberry which are all European couture brands that have become very successful in China.

Going Digital

Of course, this year is not like any other year, and the fashion industry has to keep afloat and bring its word into the digital world. Shanghai had launched the “world’s first all-online fashion week” in the Spring. The designers had pre-recorded their collections, created interactive events

with viewers, and live-streamed shows hosted by TMall, and by the end of the week made a total of 20 million RMB (2,250,010.07GBP) with TMall's "see now, buy now model."

Sustainability

At Shanghai Fashion Week, sustainability was a big theme of the week last Autumn. Great designers had shown and committed to creating through recycling, upcycling, and the use of materials that were sustainably sourced for their collections. A newcomer named Shie Lyu made a great impact by debuting with clothing made from "all recycled materials".

The organisers of the event made sure it was a prominent theme throughout Shanghai fashion week. One of the displays was called the "material utopia exhibition" which shows major suppliers and their new-age sustainable textiles. "We have been talking about sustainability for a long time," The vice secretary Xiaowei Lv said, "The goal of making such an exhibition is to evoke the designers' imagination of materials that can be used in the next season's design." During that same week, the Green Carpet Fashion Awards from Italy made their China debut.

"China generated 26 million tons of clothing waste this year alone "(2020), both buyers and designers are starting to rethink their contributions "on a smaller scale". Therefore, the growing popularity of China's second-hand market is so great.

A designer named Lowe Tong had mentioned in an interview in 2020 that it is still difficult for sustainable labels to be sold in the mass market in China. During a panel discussion with Green Carpet Fashion Awards, Shawey Yeh, the leading sustainability advocate raised a point that they do not have much time left to bring sustainable clothing to the shelves.

Conclusion

To conclude, Chinese fashion has indeed been fast, the amount the country influences its people by the means of style baffles me. For example, military clothing was incredibly popular, which I fully understand as also in the West people wear military and khaki clothing even today. Also, how other outside sources have managed to make a stamp on China. Korean fashion has made mas strides in its popularity and has influenced china with its garments for years, just as China influenced Korea. And how the younger generation in Shanghai has such a different and fresh outlook on their creative and work lives by researching western media via VPN. It is exciting to see what the next big thing in China will be, would the fashion change drastically in the next 10 years? Or change if there was easier access to varied western media. There is no doubt everyone is influenced by their interests; it is what brings joy and confidence to the individual. Fashion is something personal, and it is beautiful to see people expressing themselves as they wish and have the confidence to do so.

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