

# The Design Theory of Contemporary “Chinese” Fashion

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## Introduction

Through textual analysis of fashion journals and magazines published from 2002 to 2013, and by interviews of popular Chinese fashion designers, this article aims to answer the question of “what exactly is contemporary ‘Chinese’ fashion design?”

## Objective and Rationale

The dramatic upsurge in the past decade of Chinese designers from the People’s Republic of China (PRC) on the international scene is compelling. Frankie Xie’s debut at the 2006 Paris Fashion Week brought the first mainland-China Chinese designer into the big-four fashion weeks (London, Milan, New York, and Paris); Ma Ke’s stunning display at the 2008 Haute Couture Fashion Week in that same city began a steady growth in international influence. Uma Wang, a trainee from both Dong Hua University and Central Saint Martin College of Art & Design, started her parade across London, Shanghai, and Milan Fashion Weeks in 2009. In 2012, five young Chinese designers—all graduates of the elite fashion school, Central Saint Martin College of Art and Design—appeared at the London Fashion Week. Chinese designer Wang Tao debuted at the New York Fashion Week in September 2014, and she later garnered the notice and appreciation of Tiffany Trump, who wore a white, double-breasted long jacket, designed by Wang Tao, at her father’s inauguration into the Office of President in January 2017.

Spectators now can find Chinese designers’ shows at all of the big-four fashion weeks. This stage success of Chinese fashion designers has been accompanied by growing interest from scholars, too. Four book-length publications examining the trajectory of contemporary Chinese fashion have been published since 2008.<sup>1</sup> The interest in current designs stands in marked contrast to earlier scholarship, which focused on historical Chinese costumes as ancient Oriental cultural relics. This recent emergence of Chinese fashion designers and the attention given by fashion scholars suggest that the prospects for Chinese fashion designers on the global scene are bright.<sup>2</sup>

- 1 Antonia Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Juanjuan Wu, *Chinese Fashion: From Mao to Now* (Oxford: Bloomsbury Academic, 2009); Christine Tsui, *China Fashion: Conversations with Designers* (Oxford: Bloomsbury Academic, 2009); and Jianhua Zhao, *The Chinese Fashion Industry: An Ethnographic Approach (Dress, Body, Culture)*, (Oxford: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).
- 2 Recent scholarship includes the following works: Hazel Clark, “Chinese Fashion Designers: Questions of Ethnicity and Place in the Twenty-First Century,” *Fashion Practice* 4, no.1 (May 2012): 41–56; Tiziana Ferrero-Regis and Tim Lindgren, “Branding ‘Created in China’: The Rise of Chinese Fashion Designers,” *Fashion Practice* 4, no. 1 (May 2012): 71–94; Linda Welters and Arthur C. Mead, “The Future of Chinese Fashion,” *Fashion Practice* 4, no. 1 (May 2012): 13–40; and Simona Segre Reinach, “The Identity of Fashion in Contemporary China and the New Relationships with the West,” *Fashion Practice* 4, no.1 (May 2012): 57–70.

In *Chinese Fashion Designers: Questions of Ethnicity and Place in the Twenty-First Century*, Clark discusses the emergence of the second generation of American-Chinese fashion designers and how their ethnicity might affect the future prospects of Chinese fashion designers, including those in mainland China.<sup>3</sup> Welters and Mead reveal the vibrant changes of the “production, consumption, and innovation” system in China<sup>4</sup>; like Clark, they predicted the future importance of Chinese fashion designers in the global fashion system. Tiziana and Tim examine the growing influence of Chinese fashion designers and their labels across the globe; they also note the “desire [of Chinese designers] to create the elements of a distinctly Chinese brand through aesthetic references to Chinese culture and iconography” and argue that Chinese fashion brands make “reference to [Chinese] heritage and tradition,” but they do not clarify the heritage and tradition to which the Chinese fashion designers are referring or how exactly they are doing so.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, Reinach explores Chinese fashion’s identity but does so by offering a brief history of Chinese fashion, starting from the 1980s, and by considering how the West has been affecting and shaping the development of Chinese fashion. The work ultimately does not draw many conclusions about what exactly the identity of Chinese fashion is.<sup>6</sup>

Current researchers thus affirm their faith in the prospect of Chinese fashion designers. They also agree that competing in the fiercely competitive global fashion universe requires that Chinese designers establish their own “identity.” The objective of this paper is to explore the gap these authors have left of what exactly is meant by “Chinese” fashion.

“Chinese” fashion in this paper refers to clothing that is in the contemporary “Chinese” style. Note that not all Chinese designers design “Chinese” style or fashion; therefore, my study focuses on those who claim that their design is in contemporary “Chinese” styles. In this paper, I focus on designers and labels that highlight the importance of design signatures—typically called “designers’ brands” in the industry to differentiate the designs from those of mass-market-driven brands. In designers’ brands, design plays a much more significant role than it does in the segmentation of mass-market brands. Innovation management specialist Yen Tran categorizes fashion firms primarily into two groups: market-driven firms and identity-driven firms. Identity-driven designers *create* design value while market-driven designers normally only *capture* the design value.<sup>7</sup> My concentration on identity-driven fashion designers and their labels leads to fresh understandings about the philosophy behind the creation of design.

3 Hazel Clark, “Chinese Fashion Designers.”

4 Linda Welters and Arthur Mead, “The Future of Chinese Fashion.”

5 Tiziana Ferrero-Regis and Tim Lindgren, “Branding ‘Created in China.’”

6 Simona Segre Reinach, “The Identity of Fashion in Contemporary China.”

7 Tran Yen “Contingencies of Developing Stylistic Innovation: The Case of the Fashion Industry,” *Academy of Management Annual Meeting Proceedings* 8, no. 1 (2010): 1–6.

**Table 1 | Chinese Fashion Designers Interviewed for Research**

Name	Born in	Gender	Location	Occupation	Private Label	Major Achievement
Dooling Jiang	1980s	Female	Beijing	Designer	Yes	Chinese inspired label
<i>Shang Guanzhe</i>	1980s	Male	Xiamen	Designer	Yes	Showed on London Fashion Week / Shanghai Fashion Week
<i>Su Bu</i>	1970s	Male	Beijing	Design Teacher	No	Teacher at Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology
<i>Sun Xuefei</i>	1970s	Female	Beijing	Design Teacher	Yes	Teacher at Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology
<i>Wang Haizhen</i>	1980s	Male	London	Designer	Yes	Fringe Award Winner
<i>Wang Xinyuan</i>	1950s	Male	Shanghai	Designer	Once yes	One of the most well-known designers in 1990–2010 in China
<i>Wu Haiyan</i>	1950s	Female	Hangzhou	Dean/Designer	Yes	Dean of Faculty of Arts & Design/ One of the most well-known designers in China
<i>Yin Jianxia</i>	1970s	Male	Shanghai	Designer	Top manager	Former Vice President of Meter's Bownwe (a large casual brand in China) now founder of brand Uooyaa
<i>Zhang Da</i>	1970s	Male	Shanghai	Designer	Yes	Design consultant of Shangxia (owned by Hermès)

### Methodology

The primary resources of this research are in-depth interviews with nine established and emerging Chinese fashion designers (see Table 1).

I selected the designers with the goal of covering a wide range of factors, including gender, age, region, education, achievements, and design styles. In terms of experience, the interviews focused on established designers operating profitable businesses. Most currently are 35 to 55 years of age, although I also include a small number of emerging designers born in the late 1980s. I identify the age differences of the designers according to Pierre Bourdieu's *habitus* theory, which argues that we are shaped by our social context. Accordingly, designers' philosophy varies according to their generation and context, and this influence is especially clear in China, where dramatic changes have occurred in the past 30 years. Compared with the established designers who grew up in the 1970s and 1980s, when China was still isolated from international interaction, designers born during and after the 1980s live in a globalized and diversified world, with rapid communication that creates an "internet village." This article's prime focus on older and established designers ensures that my findings are based on case studies of individuals with proven success, rather than on those who might be short-term sensations; established designers

have demonstrated their skills and appeal through extended years of toil and have achieved lasting peer respect and marketability.

In addition to the face-to-face interviews, I have drawn data from interviews with designers published in two primary Chinese fashion magazines: *Shizhuang* (Fashion) and *Fuzhuang Shejishi* (Fashion Designers). *Shizhuang* was the first fashion consumers' magazine launched in China in the post-Mao era (in 1980) and is now the Chinese partner of the French high-end fashion magazine, *L'Officiel*. Its longevity and prestige in the fashion domain make this magazine a vital research source. *Fuzhuang Shejishi*, established in 2002, is produced by the Chinese Fashion Designers Association and is the only Chinese industrial journal that focuses on the development of Chinese fashion brands and designers. In this regard, the magazine provides a vital industrial perspective for my research.

Between 2002 and 2013—a period that matches the accelerating international impact of PRC designers—the two magazines ran 37 interviews with 39 designers. Most of the interviewees are established designers; only one interview focused on younger, emerging designers.

In addition to the personal interviews and the interviews in both the consumer-oriented and industry-oriented magazines, the data for this paper also draws on three leading PRC academic journals that relate to fashion studies. The first, *Zhuangshi* [Arts and Design], centers on design theory and practice and was founded in 1958 by the PRC's first tertiary education institute dedicated to fashion, the Central Academy of Arts and Crafts (now the Faculty of Fine Arts at Tsing Hua University). The second academic journal is *Yishu Sheji Yanjiu* (Arts and Design Research) and was initiated by the Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology in 1992. The third journal, *Meishu Guancha* (Art Observation), was first published in 1981 by the China Arts Research Institute. The three journals are the core journals for this field in the PRC and are indexed in the Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index.

#### *Chinese Fashion: "HE" 和*

This study shows the Chinese style, which exhibits features of implied beauty in aesthetic, flat form in shape, and harmony in spirit. I synthesize the three features into one Chinese character, *HE* 和. *HE* literally has many meanings: harmony, peace, implicit but evoking, reserved, pure, and natural, as well as any synonyms of these words. Like many other Chinese characters, it encompasses a richer set of connotations that are difficult to capture in a single English word. In addition, the meaning of the character can vary, depending on the specific discourse in which it is used, and

for this reason, I prefer to retain the term *HE*, rather than finding an inadequate and misleading English partial equivalent. The following explanations of Chinese fashion in aesthetic, form, and spirit elaborate on what exactly *HE* means in this paper.

#### *HE—Implied Beauty in Aesthetics*

My analysis of interview transcripts and print publications conducted for this paper shows that certain words and phrases appear more frequently than others when Chinese designers describe their aesthetic goals. The most frequently used phrase is *Hanxu* (implicit but evoking), followed by *Piaoyi* (flowing grace). Other words include *Hexie* (harmonious), *Pinghe* (peaceful), *Chunjie* (pure), and *Ziran* (natural); synonyms of these words include gentleness, conservative, and reserved. For instance, the prominent Chinese fashion historian and theorist Professor Yuan Ze recommends that Chinese designers design in the Chinese style of clothing, and he defines Chinese style as *Neixing* (introspection), *Jingguan* (contemplation), and *Xiangzheng* (metaphor),<sup>8</sup> which together are considered to express “oriental specificity.”<sup>9</sup> Wang Xinyuan, one of the most prominent Chinese fashion designers in the 1990s, also agrees that the Chinese aesthetic tends to be more *Neilian* (conservative).<sup>9</sup> In an interview in *Fuzhuang Shejishi*, a collective of Chinese fashion designers discussed what the “Chinese concept” is: “Although our modern life has received substantial influence from Westerners, the Chinese still retain the national aesthetic characteristics of being leisured and *Shuhuan* (gentle), *Hanxu* (implicit and evoking), and *Duanzhuang* (demure).”<sup>10</sup>

Liangzi, who created Tangy, one of the most successful fashion brands in China since 1996, said that the beauty that she seeks to deliver through her clothing is “natural” and “harmony.”<sup>11</sup> One of the winners of the Top Ten Best Designers Awards, Luo Zheng, said in one of her interviews that her aesthetic style involves “*Roumei* (gentleness), *Lingdong* (agility), *Qingche* (innocence), and *Juanyong* (literacy).”<sup>12</sup> Designer Zhao Huizhou, whose brand Eachway is also commercially successful, defines her aesthetic of fashion as a “new Oriental spirit of China that is serenity (*Pingjing*) and tranquility (*Tiandan*).”<sup>13</sup>

All the italicized keywords—implicit but evoking, gentle, calming, introspective, introspection—can be condensed into one aesthetic term called *Hanxu Meixue* (implicit aesthetic). Li Zehou, the eminent Chinese aesthetic philosopher, describes “implicit” as an “important aesthetic criterion of the Chinese artistic tradition.”<sup>14</sup> He also says it is “a partial legacy of the Confucian notion of ‘gentleness and sincerity.’”<sup>15</sup> Instead of revealing the meaning of the artistic work in an explicit form, implicit style “hides the emotion in the artistic concept” (*Yijing*) (and provokes “a profound and

- 8 Ze Yuan, “Lun Fuzhuang Sheji Zhong de Zaoxing Xian (Xu)” [The Styling Lines of the Dress Design (II)], *Zhuangshi* (January 1986): 45–47.
- 9 Interview with the author, May 29, 2013.
- 10 Lei Fu and Xiao Wu, “Zhongguo Gainian yu Chengyi Sheji” [Chineseness and Clothing Design], *Fuzhuang Shejishi* (August 2008): 134–39.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 135.
- 12 The “Top Ten Fashion Designers” is an annual event organized by planners of China Fashion Week to reward the ten best fashion designers of the year, based on their catwalk shows presented at fashion week and on their sales scale. See Xiao Hua Peng, “Luo Zheng: Wode Xinyun Juefei Xiangxiang de Name Jiandan” [Luo Zheng: My Luck Was Far Beyond the Imagination], *Fuzhuang Shejishi* (February 2006): 58–9.
- 13 See Dessen Chung and Chao Guo, “Zhongguo Shishang Liliang” [The Fashion Power of China], *Shizhuang* (September 2012): 117–51, 124.
- 14 Zehou Li, *The Chinese Aesthetic Tradition*, trans. Maija Bell Samei (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 142.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 To understand more about “implicit” in Chinese, please refer to the following dictionaries: Daiyun Le, Lang Ye, and Peigeng Ni, eds. *Shijie Shixue Da Cidian* [The Big Dictionary of World Poetics] (Shengyang: Chunfeng Wenyi Press, 1993), 195; Tonghua Lin, ed. *Zhonghua Meixue Da Cidian* [The Big Dictionary of Chinese Aesthetics] (Hefei: Anhui Education Press, 2000), 175; Xianshu Zhu, Jin Lv et al., *Shige Meixue Cidian* [The Dictionary of Poetry Aesthetics] (Cheng Du: Sichuan Cishu Press, 1989), 179; and Mingjun Tao, ed. *Zhongguo Shulun Cidian* [The Dictionaries of Chinese Calligraphy] (Changsha: Hunan Meishu Chubanshe, 2001), 77.
- 17 Mingjun Tao, ed. *Zhongguo Shulun Cidian*, 77.



Figure 1a (left)  
Qipao in Late Qing Dynasty, Courtesy of China Silk Museum.

Figure 1b (right)  
Qipao in 1940s, Courtesy of China Silk Museum.

lingering flavor.”<sup>16</sup> Appreciating these artistic works is “like chewing the olive, the longer you chew the more taste you feel.”<sup>17</sup> The implicit style provides space for spectators to imagine the condensed and beautiful meaning hidden in the artistic work of poetry, calligraphy, or paintings. The imagination, a term called “imaginary reality” (and contrasted with “sensory reality”) in Chinese aesthetic philosophy, “strives for the subtlety (that) lies between likeness and unlikeness.... Likeness (reality) prevents utter abstraction or the totally free association of the senses.”<sup>18</sup> Instead of manifesting the wearer’s body in an explicit form, like hugging the body, clothing that has applied these concepts of *Si yu bu si* (likeness and unlikeness) reveals the human body in a form of visible and invisible, which is also reflective of a common feature of historical Chinese costume—flat form.

#### *HE—The Flat Form*

In contrast with the traditional Western form, which adopts seam lines and darts to expose the body in a three-dimensional form of clothing, the flat form cuts the fabric straight, without seam lines and darts, thus hiding women’s curved lines under the fabric. This hiddenness allows viewers to imagine the beauty of the wearer rather than to see the body shape of the wearer directly through the eyes. Chinese clothing was in flat form until the import of Western cutting technology in the mid- to late-1800s. The transformation of the Qipao from a long, loose-fitting robe to a body-hugging sheath is a good illustration of the implications of this technical transition (see Figure 1).

18 Zehou Li, *The Chinese Aesthetic Tradition*, trans. Maija Bell Samei (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2009): 157.

19 Ze Yuan, “Lun Fuzhuang Sheji,” 47.

In aesthetic terms, flat form does not reveal the body but conceals it. The popularity of soft fabrics like cotton and silk in historical China further enhanced the flatness of the form of the clothing. The flat form in soft fabric reveals the human body by shifting it between the visible and the invisible as the wearer moves; this flowing of the fabric line manifests a gentle flowing grace. “[The traditional Chinese clothing’s] silhouette is like a line in [traditional] Chinese painting—free flowing and unbounded.”<sup>19</sup>

The traditional Chinese flat form is a consequence not only of implicit aesthetic and restrictions in cutting technology and soft fabrics, but also of traditional Chinese culture and ideology. Until the establishment of the Republic of China in 1911, men and women in China were not allowed to have physical contact with one another in public. Tailors were all men, so they could only use their eyes to “measure” the size of the women. This method gave tailors no opportunity to make precisely sized clothing for the wearers.

Although cutting technology and restrictions on male–female physical interaction no longer are obstacles today, some Chinese designers still choose the flat form as the primary feature for their designs. These designers see flat form as a feature of “Chineseness.” The costume researcher at Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology, Shao Xinyan, elaborates on this feature: “The common feature of Chinese traditional clothing is flat form and straight cutting; this feature may be the best inspiration for us to explore a solution to rejuvenate the traditional (Chinese) clothing for modern lifestyle.”<sup>20</sup> Chinese designers who still practice the flat form today include Ma Ke, who co-established the first contemporary Chinese designers’ label, Exception, in 1996 and is now a designer for the current first lady, Peng Liyuan. Ma Ke’s second line, Wuyong, also adopts flat form. Liangzi, the founder of Tangy and one of the contributing designers for the 2014 APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) leaders’ attires, also applies flat form to most of her collections (see Figure 2). Designer Xiao Yu proclaimed during an interview that “on the surface there are no visible stereotypical Chinese symbols [in my designs]; nevertheless, the flat form [and] the abstract graphics in black and golden colors invoke traditional Chinese landscape painting.”<sup>21</sup> Designer Zhang Da attributes his being appointed chief clothing designer for the Chinese culture-inspired luxury brand, Shangxia, funded by the luxury tycoon Hermès fashion group, to his skill with flat form, “which is connected with Chinese tradition.”<sup>22</sup>

20 Xinyan Shao, “Hua fu shi zhi xing jie gou yu xiandai fu zhuang she ji yan jiu” [The Cross Cutting of Historical Chinese Costumes and Research of Modern Clothing Design], *Yishu Sheji Yanjiu* [Research of Arts] (January 2013): 40–44.

21 Lei Fu and Xiao Wu, “Zhongguo Gainian yu Chengyi Sheji,” 137.

22 Zhang Da, interview with the author, April 29, 2013.



Figure 2  
Brand: TANGY, 2010SS Collection, Designer:  
Liang Zi, Photographer: Juan Zi.

### *HE—The Spirit of Harmony*

My research also shows that Chinese designers and commentators regard harmony as an important spiritual value to be reflected through their clothing. When the interviewed Chinese designers were asked what “good” design and “aesthetic” design are, the answers were consistent: Both depend on whether the “relationship” between the clothing and the wearer is in harmony. The most frequently used word to narrate such harmony is *Gongming* (resonance). Wang Haizhen defines aesthetic design as “what degree of resonance the clothing can provoke the wearer to sense.”<sup>23</sup> Zou You envisions a perfect design as “when the clothing and the heart of [the wearer] reach resonance.”<sup>24</sup> Dooling Jiang claims good design means to “‘have dialogue’ with the body.... [A] person selects a peculiar piece of clothing [because] you feel the resonance from the clothing.”<sup>25</sup> Zhang Da explains that the reason why designers like Vivienne Westwood, Yohji Yamamoto, Ray Kawamura, and Coco Chanel became great designers in their time is simply because their work “evoked resonance [between the wearers and dresses].”<sup>26</sup>

23 Haizhen Wang, interview with the author, November 18, 2013.

24 Designer You Zou, interview with Yue Lu, “Shejishi Xin Shili: Wang Yuwei, Zou You, Su Hang + Qin Zheng” [The New Force of Designers: Wang Yuwei, Zou You, Su Yu + Qin Zheng], *Shizhuang* (April 2006): 239.

25 Dooling Jiang, interview with author, July 22, 2013.

26 Zhang Da, interview with author, April 19, 2013.

What exactly does “resonance” mean here? Resonance describes a relationship between the dress and the wearer—and indirectly, between the designer and the wearer, too. In this sense, dress becomes a mediator between the designer and the wearer. The designer sews his or her thoughts into the dress; the wearer might not necessarily understand the technical language of the dress, but he or she certainly senses the thoughts of the designer through certain types of emotional connections. How are such emotional connections made? The clothing might “contain the similar life experience of yours, or your views toward aesthetic, the world, the value system,” says Dooling Jiang.<sup>27</sup> Designer Zhang Da illustrates an example of how “good” clothing works on a human’s body:

A friend of mine bought a piece of clothing of Yohji Yamamoto. He said although this is a piece of new-bought clothing, he felt like he has worn this clothing for a long period of time. Very few [brands] can make this type of clothing. They really made it fit exactly [for the wearers].... [My friend] he feels very comfortable, very confident, very relaxed [with this clothing]. He felt confident because the clothing helps him, but it does not mean you need to give any special caring to the clothing [to sustain the confidence], the result turns out naturally.<sup>28</sup>

When wearers don a new dress and they already feel like they have worn it for a long period of time, the experience offers the best appraisal for the clothing and its designer—and maybe achieves the highest level of resonance. The key word of resonance indicates that Chinese designers use fashion not only to express themselves but also to seek understanding and recognition from the wearers. Designers express values through their clothing. The values can be life experiences (stories) or value systems, like peace, harmony, or happiness. The clothing provokes the emotional resonance of the wearers or consumers first by allowing the viewers to understand the values behind the design and then by allowing them to recognize or appreciate the values that they share with the designers. Through the designer’s expression and the wearer’s understanding and recognition, both designer and wearer achieve resonance. The definition of resonance coincides with part of the definition of aesthetic, as discussed in the previous section, which means that a “good” design is also an aesthetic design, and vice versa, and it creates “harmony” between the wearer and the clothing.

*He Xie* (harmony) is the core component of Chinese philosophy.<sup>29</sup> According to Li, it means “moderation”; “order”; “stability”; “sameness”; “integration”; “sequence”; a balance of superior and

27 Dooling Jiang, interview with author, July 22, 2013.

28 Da Zhang, interview with author, April 19, 2013.

29 Zehou Li, *The Chinese Aesthetic Tradition*; Shiyong Zhang, *Xin Zhexue Yanjiang Lu* [The Record of New Philosophy Speech] (2nd edition), (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2008).

Figure 3

Brand: Fei by Sophie Sun, 2014SS Collection,  
Designer: Sophie Sun, Photographer: Su Bu.



inferior, older and younger, and noble and base; “the unification of plurality”; mutual regulation; cooperation; intercommunication; “balance”; and “regularity.”<sup>30</sup> Harmony eventually engenders a peaceful emotion. All these words conform to the principle of implied beauty already explored (see Figure 3).

Harmony encompasses the relationship not only between people but also between human beings and nature. Costume researcher Shao says that Chinese respect for nature can be traced from the historical. After her meticulous study of the pattern structures of late-Qing costumes, Shao discovered that historical Chinese costumes reveal respect for nature through their design by reducing fabric waste and by trying to prolong the life of the clothing:

The design of the clothing was motivated by frugality...  
[T]he Chinese costumes made in the late Qing dynasty...  
used joined pieces for underwear in order to take full  
advantage of the salvage and wasted part of the fabric.

30 Zehou Li (2009): 15, 18–21, 80.

Figure 4

Brand: Boundless, Designer: Zhang Da,  
Photographer: Ka Xiaoxi.



The costumes also adopted the added patch for outerwear to reduce the abrasion from the external forces to the susceptible part so that the life of the clothing is prolonged.<sup>31</sup>

Both implied beauty and a spirit of harmony suggest an invisible boundary that infiltrates the minds of Chinese designers. This boundary might explain why we rarely see in the established Chinese designers' brands designs that are as shocking as what we see from some of the Western designers—for example, Alexander McQueen, who once painted obscenities on his collections, or Tom

31 Xinyan Shao, "Huafu Shizi Xing Jiegou yu Xiandai Fuzhuang Sheji Yanjiu," 42.

Ford, who shaved a “G” (for Gucci) on the model’s pubic hair. To the Chinese designers, these two features are against the traditional ideologies of harmony and beauty.

### Summary

This study shows that the Chinese style exhibits features of “implied beauty” in its aesthetic, flat form in its shape, and harmony in its spirit. I synthesize the three features into one Chinese character, *HE*. *HE* mirrors the primary style of contemporary Chinese fashion. It encompasses rich meanings, including harmony, peace, implicit but evoking, reserved, pure, natural, and any of their synonyms. *HE* indicates an implied beauty system for China, presenting beauty in an implicit and subtle form. Implied beauty evokes in viewers an imagining of the beauty behind the clothing—a sense of the beauty that blends the visible and invisible—rather than forcing them to sense the beauty through their eyes. The primary form in clothing as a reflection of implied beauty is the flat form, meaning that the clothing is cut without darts or seam lines to reduce the definition of the bust line, the waist line, and the hip line. The spiritual reflection of *HE* is harmony, which means the clothing evokes resonance from the wearer and creates a harmonious relationship between the clothing and the wearer. In spirit, Chinese fashion thus reflects the core Chinese philosophy of harmony, which means being in tune with both the social and the natural environments (see Figure 4).

### Acknowledgments

I thank my supervisor Professor Louise Edwards for her input on this article and Rita Dibello for her copyediting.