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From Joint Ventures to Collaborative Projects: Toward an Ethnography of Sino-Italian Fashion Relations in the 2020s

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# **From Joint Ventures to Collaborative Projects: Towards an Ethnography of Sino-Italian Fashion Relations in the 2020s**

**Key Words:** Joint Ventures, Sino-Italian Fashion, Cosmopolitanism, Global Fashion.

## *Abstract*

Each case tells a story in the global production of “national fashions,” a historically Eurocentric field. The first Italian-Chinese collaborations were characterized by joint ventures led by Italians and aimed at the Chinese market. New types of collaboration are vastly more complex. Indeed, they are reshaping Western-Chinese relations in both directions, and present a template for global fashion in the twenty-first century.

## *Introduction*

This article focuses on the evolution of fashion relations between Italy and China.<sup>1</sup> Fashion, as a cultural industry, has become both a global language and a barometer for the quality of international exchanges, as evidenced by travelling fashion exhibitions and global fashion weeks (Mc Neil and Riello 2016; Petrov 2019). However, fashion is also a manufacturing industry: garments are designed and manufactured by people from various cultural and sartorial backgrounds. Each case tells a story within the diverse politics of producing “national fashions” (Skov 2012) in a historically Eurocentric field (Welters and Lillethun 2018). While joint ventures aimed at the Chinese market characterized collaborations between Italian and Chinese companies in the 1990s

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<sup>1</sup> The information in this article is based on personal interviews (some conducted remotely owing to Covid-19 restrictions) with Italian and Chinese designers, creative directors, and intermediaries between 2019 and 2020, as preliminary fieldwork for a global fashion research project. The interviews were translated from Italian to English by me.

and early 2000s (Segre-Reinach 2005, Segre-Reinach 2019), new types of collaboration are now reshaping fashion relations (Ling and Segre-Reinach 2019). This article identifies in them both specific elements of the case study and a broader process defining the global fashion system of the twenty-first century's future decades.

### *Italy and China in fashion*

The Italian fashion system has been and continues to be both a mirror and a model for China. As the Italian Ambassador in China, Ettore Sequi, has pointed out, the rich craftsmanship of fashion practices characterizes both countries.<sup>2</sup> The family business, typical of Italian entrepreneurship, is characteristic of many fashion businesses in China as well, despite government influence (Zhao 2013; Gu 2018; Rofel and Yanagisako 2019; Finnane 2020; Jin 2020). The reputation of beautiful and well-made products attributed to Italian fashion design (Lees Maffei and Fallan 2013) fits well into the vision of what Xi Jinping's describes as a “prosperous, strong, culturally advanced, harmonious and beautiful nation.”<sup>3</sup> Last but not least, both countries share the driving force of “going global.” The concept of Made in Italy,<sup>4</sup> which was created for this purpose in the 1970s and 1980s (Scarpellini 2017; Belfanti 2019), is still on the Italian agenda.<sup>5</sup> The Chinese “‘go out’ policy (*zou chuqu*),” characterized by the 12<sup>th</sup> five-year plan (2011-2014), aimed to encourage Chinese companies to compete globally (Zhiyan, Borgeson, and Schroeder 2013; Andornino 2015; Jin 2020). Italy, like China, is a fashion manufacturing powerhouse. The majority of global luxury brands were and still are manufactured in Italy (D’Annunzio 2019), often with the assistance of Chinese workers (Ceccagno and Sacchetto 2020; Ceccagno and Ding 2020). Since the 1990s,

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<sup>2</sup> On the occasion of the Italian launch of the “Made in China 2025” project: <http://www.cittc.it/2017/07/12/made-china-2025/>. Accessed January 16, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Speech at the Symposium of the 19th National Congress Of the Communist Party of China: [http://gd.china-embassy.org/eng/gywm\\_1/dsjhjwz/t1560438.htm](http://gd.china-embassy.org/eng/gywm_1/dsjhjwz/t1560438.htm), accessed on November 10, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Marino, F. “Furniture, Food e Fashion sono le tre eccellenze italiane, le 3F conosciute in tutto il mondo e che rappresentano l’80% della produzione.” <https://www.digitalic.it/magazine/furniture-food-fashion-digitalic-n-67>. Accessed 10 November 2020.

<sup>5</sup> “Made in Italy gets € 256 m to go global,” <https://www.thelocal.it/20150227/government-invests-256-million-in-italian-exports>. Accessed 10 November 2020.

Italian companies have outsourced parts of their “Made in Italy” production to China.<sup>6</sup> However, over the last few decades, the picture has shifted dramatically. A redefining of the goals and scope of collaborations may imply Chinese entrepreneurs acquiring all or a majority stake in Italian brands. The cultural dimension of these new acquisitions is perhaps as important as the economic one, and it will undoubtedly have long-term consequences (Xiao 2008; Spalletta 2017).

### *The Sino-Italian Joint Ventures: a Background*

A few joint ventures, including some of the legally structured collaborations between the Italians and Chinese in the production of fashion at many levels, local and international, were scrutinized in a previous study on Sino-Italian collaborations. During a decade of fieldwork in China (2001-2010), the research identified three major (Italian) fashion narratives influencing Sino-Italian joint ventures. These culturally constructed fantasies arose from previous collaborations between Italians and Chinese, from the pioneering and legendary stage of *sourcing* described in colorful memories to the down-to-earth business competitions around branding and marketing. When the fieldwork began in early 2000s China,<sup>7</sup> all three models described were present, but the focus on a specific one, whether primarily sourcing for a lower manufacturing price or a more structured collaboration in the production and branding of a fashion collection, defined the mindset of the relationships between Italian and Chinese managers and workers. By 2010, Chinese companies knew how to make excellent high-end fashion products, typically using Italian textiles, but they still needed to learn more about branding and collection design. In other words, Chinese companies still needed to fully master the immaterial side of fashion. Mastering creativity has long been regarded as strategic in order to consolidate the necessary soft power to “go out” as a cultural influencer, which China has sought since the early years of Reform (Keane 2007; Ling and Segre-Reinach 2018; Cabestan

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<sup>6</sup> The troubled laws defining when and how a product can be legally considered made in Italy demonstrate the difficulty in regulating the complexity of fashion production. (see Colombi, “Made in what Italia” ZMJ).

<sup>7</sup> Sylvia Yanagisako invited the author to participate in the research as a fashion scholar and cultural anthropologist. The result is a book authored by Lisa Rofel and Sylvia Yanagisako (2019), to which the author contributed a chapter on fashion relations between the two countries.

2019). The Italian partners were hesitant to share this knowledge with the Chinese because their primary goal in China was to rely on a good factory to either export brands (and reimport them in China) or to sell them in China. *Italianità*, as an essentialized “DNA” strategy, and *cosmopolitanism* were both claimed by the Italians, who successfully disseminated “made in Italy” products globally. This is to say that Italians considered themselves to be cosmopolitan because “made in Italy” was a well-established global concept, whereas the Chinese were not considered as such. The Chinese were resentful of their negative reputation, as well as the Italian assumption of cosmopolitanism which they claimed for themselves (Rofel and Yanagisako 2019), but they had no choice but to make the best of it. The distinction between immaterial and material fashion production, aided by the (out)sourcing mode, quickly proved fictitious (Entwistle 2009; Ling and Segre-Reinach 2019). Trying to prevent China from appropriating the symbolic side of fashion in order to maintain control over the entire fashion-making process was a doomed project. None of the joint ventures investigated at the time were successful. They either ceased operations or became fully Chinese-owned.

#### *Made with Italy. The Giada Case and the new collaborations between Italians and Chinese*

The turn of the century saw a frenzy of consultancy activities for Italian fashion practitioners aimed at both domestic and international brands. Many went to China to work as style consultants, fashion designers, textile suppliers, and designers. Giampiero Arcese, an Italian fashion designer with extensive experience working with Chinese fashion houses, describes that period as follows:

“In the early 2000s, there was a real exploit of requests from Italian designers willing to collaborate with Chinese companies. Initially, the contacts were made directly, as it was in my case, personally going to China for research and to take care of the fitting of the Italian collections that I designed

and that were produced there. As a ‘client designer,’ I was asked to become a ‘consultant designer.’ And so it was.”<sup>8</sup>

It caused a shift in the concept of what a joint venture could be. Giada,<sup>9</sup> a luxury brand created in Italy and *naturalized* in China, is the first to cause a stir. Rosanna Daolio, the Italian designer who founded Giada in 2000, resigned from Max Mara in the late 1980s after worked there for thirteen years. She, too, was caught up in the consultancy fever for a while, but she eventually realized that she wanted to launch her own brand. She did so, naming the brand Giada. “Giada” is the Italian word for “Jade,” which is a traditional Chinese product:

“Chinese silk, porcelain, ceramics, silver, gold and jade, as well as its tea, have been part and parcel of Chinese civilization since ancient times. These items have conquered the world, gone further than their counterparts in western countries in terms of cultural connotation, artistic attainment and craftsmanship.”<sup>10</sup>

In an era of uncritical exoticism, Diana Vreeland wrote on the occasion of the Manchu Dragon exhibition, “In the land of jade, everything seems possible” (Vreeland 1980, 4).

Ms. Daolio recalls that when she launched Giada, there were no Chinese in sight. Rosanna Daolio simply thought that Giada was a beautiful name for a luxury brand, something feminine and precious. *Nomen omen*: what else but Giada could best represent the new wave of Sino-Italian collaborations? She soon began yearning for China: “I don’t know why, but I felt that China had to

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with author on 27 November 2019.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.giada.com>.

<sup>10</sup> From: “NE.TIGER Receives Exclusive Invitation From Sino-Italian Fashion Summit to Launch Haute Couture Huafu Show in Milan: From China,” To the World PR Newswire; New York [New York]10 Sep 2012.

be in my future of fashion designer.” She looked hard for a go-between to China. At *Première Vision*, the most prestigious international textile and fashion fair in Paris, she met Mr. Zhao, the owner and general manager of the Chinese conglomerate Redstone. Mr. Zhao wished to launch his own Italian brand in China. At the time, Redstone was in charge of luxury brand distribution in China, including Giorgio Armani, Salvatore Ferragamo, Valentino, and Saint Laurent.

“He explained to me that he would love to invest in an Italian brand for Redstone. He loved my Giada. I said ok, but textiles should be Italian. I hated Chinese textiles at the time. He replied, of course they will, the brand will be Italian, and made in Italy by Redstone” (Rosanna Daolio, my translation).<sup>11</sup>

The new Giada, with its Italian creator Rosanna, was supported by Chinese Redstone and developed in China. Rosanna Daolio and Redstone's agreement was completed by 2005.<sup>12</sup> She travelled to China on a regular basis to assist in the manufacturing of the clothes, to do the styling, and to supervise the collection's production. Her recollections of that period have the flavor of a pioneering stage of Sino-Italian encounters, combining her love for China with a deep sense of its inadequacy in fashion making:

“In 2002, we presented in a hotel the first Giada collection to the shop managers who would buy for their stores: Shenzhen, Shanghai, Hangzhou. I asked for a model girl to wear the clothes—it doesn't matter, they answered, use the hanger in your hand...I freaked, I started screaming like crazy. We are not selling carrots, onions or potatoes!”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with author on 6 May 2020.

<sup>12</sup> A small share of the company was given to Rosanna Daolio as a reward for her faithful collaboration.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with author on 6 May 2020.

After achieving brand awareness and reputation in China, the time had come to disseminate the brand in Italy. What about if Chinese tourists visiting Italy were unable to find their favorite Italian brand? Redstone chose Milan's via Montenapoleone in the "Quadrilatero della moda" as the location for the first Italian store (2013). The appointment of an architect and interior decorator is an important part of the story. When Mr. Zhao approached Mr. Claudio Silvestrin, the latter had just finished a decade of exclusive collaboration with Giorgio Armani to design his stores worldwide. Following the opening in Milan, two more stores opened in Beijing and Boston. The Milan store was renamed *Giada House Global Flagship Store* in 2018. True, Rosanna Daolio and Claudio Silvestrin were not only a brilliant designer and a famous architect, respectively. They also brought valuable knowledge of the best examples of Italian industrial prêt-à-porter, including Max Mara and Armani. Previously described as a "Sino-Italian joint venture," the website now describes Giada as, "Born in Italy, Giada is a luxury brand of modernity and elegance."<sup>14</sup>

### *A New Generation of Designers*

Designers of the twenty-first century differ from previous generations in many ways. They receive a proper education in the fashion schools. They do not usually own their productive premises. They design their own brand or for other brands, often both. They have agents who help them find jobs. They win prizes, allowing them to sustain their work and gain international popularity, and they professionally master social networks. Although they are usually based in major global fashion cities, they are well-versed in international markets and can move freely through the fashion capitals, virtually or in person, and they tend to freely use their national background. Their names are well-known among gatekeepers, fashionistas, and journalists, but less so among the general public. Many of them have visited China at some point in their careers.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.giada.com/explore/about>, accessed on 17 January 2021.

Among these twenty-first century designers is Gabriele Colangelo, Italian creative director of Giada since 2015, and he was already quite successful when Mr. Zhao and Ms. Daolio approached him to inject novelty into Giada collections.<sup>15</sup> Before the pandemic, Colangelo used to travel to China four times a year to present the new collection to the company, including textiles, colors, and mood-boards, as well as for other special events, such as the Giada show in Chongqing on March 23, 2019. According to Mr. Colangelo, this show was a memorable event: “One of the most incredible experiences in my life,” adding that he finally understood “how a rockstar might feel on stage[.]”<sup>16</sup> The show took place during the celebrations of Italy and China’s “New Silk Road Agreement.”<sup>17</sup> Thousands of people gathered at the People’s Liberation Monument (Jiefangbei), with millions more watching on social media. Colangelo’s career can be divided into two parts: BG (Before Giada) and AG (After Giada). Since 2021, his own brand, Gabriele Colangelo, has been produced in collaboration with Redstone and widely distributed in China. Needless to say, this would not be possible without the financial support of China.

### *Roads (and stumbles) towards Cosmopolitanism*

Gabriele Colangelo’s case is far from unique. Other professionals I interviewed admitted that working with a Chinese company implied having a relatively stable job, which is becoming increasingly difficult to find in Italy (and Europe). It also makes it easier to expand one’s own business in Asia if one already has one. The Italian designer A.A.,<sup>18</sup> a renowned designer who has shown in Milan and Paris and is the owner of a high-end brand bearing his name, has been under contract with a major Shenzhen-based<sup>19</sup> group since 2011, “a record indeed!” in his words. This company owns eight major brands targeted, the majority of which are aimed at the Chinese market,

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<sup>15</sup> Before launching his own brand, Mr. Colangelo worked as a designer for Versace Jeans and Roberto Cavalli.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with author on 3 June 2020.

<sup>17</sup> “Italy Joins China’s New Silk Road Project.” <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-47679760> accessed on 2 August 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with author on 24 April 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Camera della moda Milano and Fashion Shenzhen signed an agreement in 2016. Selected Shenzhen brands were shown in Milan.

but some of “the most advanced” are also aimed at Korea and Japan. A.A. creates mood boards, collections, and styles for some brands while working as a merchandiser and advertising consultant for others. The Chinese team then completely manufactures the brands. Although the Chinese brands for which he consults are domestic, A.A. believes that collaborations with European designers have the potential to outline their future internationalization. In addition, he is becoming acquainted with the Chinese market, where his own brand is distributed.

F.P., an independent designer from Italy with no personal brand, was hired by the Chinese brand Jessie through an intermediary.<sup>20</sup> The collaboration came to an end after two collections. When a collaboration ends, the intermediary usually assists the designer in finding a new one. At the time of the interview (July 2020), F.P. was collaborating with a Chinese brand, L. Agnese, using the same formula: Italian textiles, mood board, and *campionario* made in Italy, with full production in China. Surprisingly, his “partner” is the young daughter of Ms. Daolio’s interpreter during Giada’s early days. This young designer, who studied fashion design in Milan and was born in Italy and educated in both China and Italy, embodies the new collaborative formula between the two countries.

Complaints and conflicts may arise if a Chinese company wishes to express the cultural capital of a global brand, namely its prestige, but is unwilling or unable to go through the entire process. On the one hand, Western designers should understand why they are being co-opted; on the other hand, Chinese companies must be able to “use” the designers rather than simply adding a foreign name to the company chart.<sup>21</sup> If there are misunderstandings, the “loser” is most likely to be the western designer. I recall V-Grass and their brand V-Grass Studio, which was created for the Italian market. This is an interesting case because the company’s owners, according to the Italians practitioners

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with author on 25 July 2020.

<sup>21</sup> I am unable to demonstrate that this is a government requirement. I received several confirmations from my interviewees that the Chinese fashion system’s hierarchy requires a Chinese first level brand to be able to place an international designer in the company’s organizational chart, at least on a symbolic level.

who collaborated with the brand, wanted to replicate Giada but had no idea what a global brand entailed in terms of investments and time. Following a flamboyant catwalk show in the beautiful historical Milanese *Palazzo Serbelloni* (February 2019), the company was abruptly shut down, and all employees in Italy were fired.

“Things need to be clearly stated from the beginning,”<sup>22</sup> says S.B., an Italian designer with no personal brand based in China, recalling Jean Paul Gaultier’s collaboration with Chinese Bosideng. Mr. Gaultier, who needed to fund his last show in Europe, accepted Bosideng’s invitation to launch a “joint series”<sup>23</sup> with a show. This was a mutual agreement in which economic support was exchanged for prestige. However, in order to become an international brand, Bosideng has developed a solid two-year business plan for which they hired S.B, who previously worked for Chinese Icicle, a Shanghai-based company.

I interviewed three European designers involved with Icicle. Icicle, founded in 1997 by a Chinese couple,<sup>24</sup> began its business by acquiring a Max Mara factory in China, a quick way to learn the know-how for high-end productions. According to M.B. (a former Burberry and Versace employee), the company began aspiring to be a global brand around the year 2000. Collaborations with European designers were established. Icicle’s strategy for pursuing “collaborations” differed from that of typical joint ventures. Icicle sought practitioners who were willing to work in China, such as art directors, designers, textile technicians, and communication experts. They did not seek famous designers or celebrities, but candidates needed to demonstrate a high profile in Anglo-European<sup>25</sup> luxury groups. Only six of the company’s four hundred employees were foreigners, but

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with author on 28 February 2020.

<sup>23</sup> [https://www.popfashioninfo.com/blog/detail/chinese-brand-of-bosideng-jean-paul-gaultier-id\\_1433/](https://www.popfashioninfo.com/blog/detail/chinese-brand-of-bosideng-jean-paul-gaultier-id_1433/) accessed on 16 August 2020.

<sup>24</sup> Shouzeng Ye, a former professor at Donghua University Shanghai, and Shawna Tao, a former student who is now his wife.

<sup>25</sup> Jin’s (2020) expression is preferable to the culturally-charged “Western.”

they all held key positions. Icycle sources finished textiles in Italy and raw materials from China for its collections.<sup>26</sup> To complete the global “turn,” Icycle opened a branch in Paris, which is run by a French designer. Carven, a heritage French brand, was purchased by Icycle in 2018. According to the European practitioners who worked in the project, the atmosphere was friendly, the company provided fringe benefits such as apartments for employees, and it is environmentally conscious. The owners are interested in and knowledgeable about Italian and European culture. The three designers were about to leave the company, or had just left, at the time of the interview (February 2020), for higher salaries offered by large Chinese groups such as K Boxing, Bosideng, and Anta. M.B. commented, “I sold my soul to the devil!”<sup>27</sup> He was able to recover it quickly. In 2021, he was back at Icycle as a men's designer consultant, according to another interview. S.B. also left Bosideng to open a consulting agency with a Chinese partner who also happens to be his wife, and A.C. returned to Italy permanently.

Other encounters with large Chinese groups were completely negative. After twenty-nine years with a major Italian menswear company, G.T. relocated to China in 2011 to work for a Sino-Italian joint venture, Marzo Azzali in Ningbo, which lasted six years before being bought out by the Chinese partner. He then relocated to Chenzhou to style a Chinese brand called Lampo, which aspired to be the same as Marzo Azzali's. G.T. was finally hired at Chinese Evergreen, but was fired during the pandemic. He was unemployed at the time of the interview<sup>28</sup> and contemplating establishing a consulting agency in China.

### *Global Fashion Collaborations in the 2020s*

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<sup>26</sup> For example, the Chinese-Italian finished silk comes from the historic company Ratti in Como, and the Mongolian cashmere comes from the Italian Loro Piana.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with author on 20 January 2020.

<sup>28</sup> 22 January 2020.

There are numerous difficulties in the Chinese fashion system, which is still attempting to strike a balance between creativity and the role of the state (Finnane 2020). The Chinese fashion industry is developing in a different direction than the established fashion system of Euro-America, owing to its heavy reliance on government support and retail activity (Jin 2020). This may explain some of western designers' misunderstandings and failures.<sup>29</sup> There are dozens of cases that fall somewhere between total success and total failure. The Chinese fashion system is no longer the same as it was twenty years ago. Mr. Arcese provided a hint by categorizing the Chinese companies he worked with into "companies close to Europe and *true* China companies":

"In the latter, the imprinting by 'contractors' is still very evident. This second supply chain, that is 'true China' companies, do not experiment, do not risk but perform: they have simply replaced the 'foreign customer' with local merchandisers." (Giampiero Arcese.)<sup>30</sup>

Despite the complexities of the outputs, it is worth noting the emergence of a new class of global fashion practitioners whose experience with Italian (European) fashion is already mediated by the Chinese. In the long run, this will further reshape the recruitment and careers of designers. Some "True China" companies appear to seek them out, believing that they are better suited to operate in a Sino-global environment, whereas others seek only "newcomers" to ensure the integrity of the (European) creative and professional input.<sup>31</sup>

These patterns of co-creation (Ling and Segre-Reinach 2019) delineate the various expressions of global fashion within a diverse range of Chinese interventions.<sup>32</sup> In many ways, it is now the

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<sup>29</sup> What is a failure in terms of global reach, and for the Italian designers involved, may be a success in China: the Italian brand Krizia was purchased by Zhu Chongyun (Marisfrolg), and the haute couture brand Curiel was purchased by Redstone; V-Grass Studio is still operating as V-Grass in China.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with author 15 December 2019.

<sup>31</sup> Personal discussion with the founding partner of an Italian recruitment agency operating in China on 26 March 2021.

<sup>32</sup> China Focus: From imitation to innovation: China's fashion industry gets tech boost Xinhua News Agency - CEIS; Woodside [Woodside] 11 June 2017. Accessed 10 February 2021.

Chinese who are sourcing in Italy (a role reversal from times bygone). Pursuing both textiles and designs, as well as consultants and fashion designers, Chinese groups are looking for suitable partners and collaborators on Italian soil. It is the Chinese who allow the Italian young designers to fully express their (potential) cosmopolitanism. Independent Chinese designers are sought after by luxury brands for reasons other than to support the mainland market.<sup>33</sup> China's reworking of the fashion landscape may give new life to heritage western brands or consolidate new ones. Chinese firms may open branches in Europe.

Fashion collaborations in the twenty-first century are reshaping the concept of authorship, which is still rooted in a twentieth-century Eurocentric notion of fashion creation, and the concept of "made in." Modernization is an uneven pattern with many solutions, rather than a unilinear "progression from manufacturing through design and on toward symbolic fashion cities" (Gilbert and Casadei 2020, 398). Examples from my field work are used to contextualize, as in Wubs, Lavanga, Janssens (2020), fashion's more symbolic activities with textile and clothing manufacturing in relation to broader national and international regulatory frameworks, policies, and institutions. Decentering one's understanding of fashion (Slade and Jansen 2020) necessitates a thorough understanding of the evolution of post-colonial entanglements. Although modernity cannot be understood outside of a colonial context (Jansen 2020), the case of China is more than just emancipation and positionality (Ling and Segre-Reinach 2018). China is both embedded in the coloniality of fashion and expressing an outside position from it, having been, and in most cases still being, the "factory of the world." Its ambivalence is visible in the contradictory (?) status of Chinese independent designers adored by an elite global fashion,<sup>34</sup> in emerging international companies reworking fashion capitals, and in the massive "true Chinese companies". However, the conflicts appear to be a Western

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<sup>33</sup> Canali, an Italian menswear company since 1934, which derives 20% of its revenue from China, has recently (27 January 2021) appointed Chinese designer Li Gong, who graduated from Central St Martins, London, and who owns the brand 8ON8, to design an international "collaborative capsule collection."

<sup>34</sup> Williams, Gemma A. "Are Chinese Designers The Future of Luxury Collabs?" Jing Daily 26 November, accessed 23 March 2021. <https://jingdaily.com/china-chinese-designers-future-luxury-brands-collaborations-burberry/>.

problem rather than a Chinese one. According to Zhao, learning from the West is “merely a means to achieve a Chinese modernity, not the Westernization of China” (Zhao 2013, 11). In its own way, modern Chinese fashion has both “mirrored and shaped social and cultural change” (Wu 2009, xii). The parties maintain their “originality,” but the final product transcends them, falling outside of any “made in” category. As Louise Crewe argued, it is critical to consider fashion value and its supply chain geographically (Crewe 2017). In the new global fashion order, the fashion supply chain reveals itself to be a cultural chain as well. Sino-Italian collaborations, an example of transnational fashion within the co-creation template, can be categorized as collaborative, multifaceted, cultural, and productive global fashion projects.

### *Coda*

According to Mario Boselli, president of the Italy-China Foundation, China “is one of the few areas where we can say things are actually going pretty well for fashion companies. Italian companies are among the major players in the market, and they are taking the steps necessary to keep things that way.”<sup>35</sup> The Chinese proverb on marriage—“same bed, different dreams”—was once often invoked to explain disparities in expectations for the first Sino-Italian joint ventures in early 2000. Although the beds have changed, the dream remains the same: to go global.

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<sup>35</sup> Xinhua “Italy’s fashion companies building on Made in Italy in China”, 12 January 2020 <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1208595.shtml> accessed 20 February 2021.

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