Couture, Prêt à porter, and Fast Fashion since 1945

CHAPTER 39

Couture, Prêt à Porter, and Fast Fashion Since 1945

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Introduction

This chapter considers the major cultural and productive changes that occurred in the global fashion system after the Second World War, beginning with an emphasis on the West after 1945 and moving to the analysis of East Asian nations from the 1980s. In the thirty years after the end of the war, new players in Europe (especially of the new Italian *prêt à porter*), and North America (casualwear from the United States) came to challenge a system still dominated by Parisian fashion. A generation later, in the 1980s, the rise of Japanese fashion signalled the decline of a prevailing Western-centred system and the rise of a radical and experimental fashion centre. In the twenty-first century, the transformation of the Chinese economy and the development of digital technologies has led to new collaborations around what are called national made ins . A fluctuating global geography of fashion is based not just on one country succeeding another, but on the emergence of new cultural and production models.[1]

When considering the fashion industry, one has to acknowledge the many different elements that interact within a supply chain stretching from production to consumption. Production and consumption are in no sense separable as they are involved in a circularity that also includes post-consumption. Since the invention of *haute couture*, three formal fashion production and consumption models have alternated over time. The first model revolves around

[1] Louise Crewe, *The Geographies of Fashion* (London & New York: Bloomsbury, 2017).

the concept of luxury, understood as a manifestation of social status. This was the fashion that made its mark in the mid-nineteenth century, and continued until the early 1960s, the period that Lipovetsky defined as the century of fashion .[2] Prestige and class membership were its founding concepts, and the *couturier* its interpreter. France played the lead role. The second model was *prêt à porter*. This deconstructed the culture of the exclusive atelier and focused on the concept of lifestyle, covering a vast middle class, as the consumer society expanded. Its interpreter was the fashion designer. Men and women came to be equally involved in fashion consumption practices, and the nineteenth-century Great Male Renunciation retracted.[3] Italian fashion played a key role in the dissemination of this model. The third production and cultural model is that of fast fashion, defined by the globalisation of processes and the rapidity of proposal and reception. It is a way of dressing intended to immediately satisfy desire, in which everyone can create their own style. Fast fashion does not belong to any specific place, but to the new global fashion culture. *Haute couture, prêt à porter*, and fast fashion are therefore not only production systems but create imaginations and cultures within which consumption and communication practices are defined.

With these systems all present together, *haute couture* exists today both in its traditional version - with the whole dress made by hand in the Parisian *ateliers* - and its technological versions, such as for example the 3D creations of Dutch virtual brand The Fabricant , and with the inclusion of non-European couturiers such as China s Guo Pei. Prêt à porter includes the

[2] Lipovetsky, *L'Empire de l'éphémère*.

[3] John Carl Flügel, 'The Great Masculine Renunciation and its Causes', in Daniel Leonhard Purdy (ed.), *The Rise of Fashion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 102-108. See also the chapter by Christopher Breward in this volume.

collections of corporate luxury brands as well as young independent designers. The fast fashion of the large chains co-exists with small, local productions intended for market stalls.

Zeitgeist in the Post-World War Period

After the end of the Second World War, the return of Paris as the capital of fashion was as significant as was its long-term decline. Nazi Germany s failed attempt to shift the French fashion system to Berlin and Austria confirmed the importance of location and of the local skills which had characterized French *haute couture*. In occupied Paris, the couturier and businessman Jacques Lelong, at the time Chairman of the Chambre Syndicale de la Couture, stated that *haute couture* was made above all from local craft skills and competences, making it a non-transferable system.[4] Yet, Lelong and other couturiers had to contend with changing times. After the war, the United States came to influence the politics, culture and economy of many world countries by introducing more informal lifestyle elements, including in clothing. A new generation of designers - the so-called *American Ingenuity* current - created attractive, functional garments.[5] Among them was Claire McCardell (1905-58), known as the inventor of the American Look , a

[4] In doing so, he anticipated the theories of the fashion space and of *genius loci*. On the former see John Potvin, Introduction. Inserting Fashion into Space , in John Potvin (ed.), *The Places and Spaces of Fashion 1800-2007* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), 1-18; Crewe, *The Geographies of Fashion*. On the latter Christian Norberg–Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1979).

[5] Richard Martin, *American Ingenuity: Sportswear 1930s-1970s* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998).

fresh and dynamic interpretation of fashion quite in opposition to Christian Dior s formal and conservative New Look . The 1950s were dominated by struggles and confrontations between different national paradigms and especially between new fashion designers and producers in the United Sates, Italy and England, and the established names of Parisian fashion. The need to deconstruct aristocratic-bourgeois fashion - of which the French *haute couture* had been an expression - was felt across the Western world.[6]

In this fight against French hegemony, Italian designers stood out.[7] Often mentioned is the well-known fashion show organized by Giovanbattista Giorgini in Florence in the winter of 1951.[8] The event was a triumph, with an article in the influential *Women s Wear Daily* declaring

[6] All used to take inspiration from the Paris ateliers. European tailors and *couturiers* begun to develop their own aesthetics, some due to their forced distancing from Paris during the French occupation and, in the case of Italy, due to the autarkic policies of the Fascist regime. Eugenia Paulicelli, *Fashion Under Fascism* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004).

[7] They were supported by the United States through the Marshall Plan that aimed to relaunch the Italian textiles industry. Nicola White, *Reconstructing Italian Fashion* (Oxford: Berg, 2000); Sonnet Stanfill, *The Glamour of Italian Fashion* (London: Victoria & Albert Publications, 2014); Gianluigi Di Giangirolamo, *Istituzioni per la moda. Interventi tra pubblico e privato in Italia e in Francia 1945-1965* (Milan*:* Mondadori-Pearson, 2020).

[8] The shows organized by Giovanni Battista Giorgini (1898-1971) marked the end of the monopoly of the French fashion designers and the start of Italian style. Valeria Pinchera and Diego Rinallo, 'The Emergence of Italy as a Fashion Country Nation Branding and Collective Meaning Creation at Florence's Fashion Shows (1951–1965)', *Business History* 62/1 (2017),

that the new-born Italian fashion was every bit as good as the French.[9] This endorsement of Italian fashion was a little veiled declaration of the United States support for Italy, whose economy was bankrolled in the postwar period by the US Marshall Plan. In the following years, the Florentine catwalks held in the magnificent Sala Bianca at the Pitti Palace in Florence proposed an alternative to high fashion: similar to the French *prêt-à-porter de-luxe*, Italians designed easier-to-make stylish clothes.[10] Theirs were not simplified copies of *haute-couture* creations, and yet they were not completely industrially made: what came to be known as *moda-boutique* was an international success, sold on the dream of holidays in Capri, the Amalfi Coast and Cortina, sea and mountain locations frequented by a cosmopolitan elite in love with the Italian lifestyle.[11]

Youth revolutions and style subcultures in England also rendered many of the bourgeois fashion rituals obsolete and placed London - and the Anglo-Saxon world more generally - at the

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151-178; Neri Fadigati, Giovanni Battista Giorgini, la Famiglia, il Contributo alla Nascita del Made in Italy, le Fonti Archivistiche , *Zonemoda Journal* 8/1 (2018), 1-15.

[9] 'Italy's Golden Moment': https://wwd.com/fashion-news/fashion-features/article-1177973/ Accessed 12 January 2021.

[10] Péretz Henri, 'Le Vendeur, la Vendeuse et leur Cliente. Ethnographie du Prêt-à-Porter de Luxe', *Revue Française de Sociologie*, 33/1 (1992), 49-72.

[11] Valerie Steele, *Fashion Italian Style* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2003); Vittoria Caterina Caratozzolo, 'Reorienting Fashion: Italy's Wayfinding after the Second World War', in Sonnett Stanfill (ed.), *The Glamour of Italian Fashion* (London: Victoria & Albert Publications, 2014), 46-57; Grazia D'Annunzio, 'Paris and the Tale of Italian Cities', in Valerie Steele (ed.), *Paris Capital of Fashion* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2019); Carlo Marco Belfanti, *Storia Culturale del Made in Italy* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2019).

centre of this change. The title *London The Swinging City* on the cover page of *Time* magazine in April 1966 alluded to the swinging pendulum of fashion from the exclusive Parisian ateliers to the London streets and districts such as Soho and Chelsea, frequented by young people determined to change social rules. With their subversive attitude towards the British class system and the miniskirts of Mary Quant - that harbinger of sexual liberation and greater attention to feminism - youth subcultures placed the look at the centre of social change. Florence did not fit this new paradigm: it was perfect for its mix of aristocratic and casual look which pleased the American press and American buyers, but within twenty years it was superseded. The new Italian *prêt à porter* which marked a freer and youthful fashion did not flourish in Florence, the city of Renaissance, elitist and aristocratic as from the names of its best-known designers such as Emilio Pucci and Simonetta di Cesarò. It was Milan, in the heartland of industrial Italy, that emerged as the capital of modern design and fashion.[12]

From a production point of view, the Italian fashion system was able to expand thanks to the application of a sizing system that was first developed to easily dress the American army during the First World War and was extended to cheap civilian clothing in the late 1940s. After the Second World War, this system was perfected by Italian clothing manufacturers among which Max Mara and Gruppo Finanziario Tessile GFT.[13]

[12] Business was already carried out in Milan through textile fairs such as Mipel (1962) and Ideacomo (1968).

[13] Marina Cassa 'The GFT invents mass ready-to-wear based on a brilliant intuition: measuring Italians. And so with an authentic measurement campaign the sizes are defined. It is a revolution that leads to 120 types' (my translation). 'Quando a Torino c'era persino la moda', *La Stampa* 21 November 2014, Modified 24 June 2019, accessed 7 January 2021. https://www.lastampa.it/torino/2014/11/21/news/quando-a-torino-c-era-persino-la-moda-

Milan and the Industrial Prêt à Porter

In the mid-1970s a new fashion model originated in Milan, that of the *prêt à porter* by the so-called *stilisti*.[14] A term slightly obsolete today, *stilisti* comprises fashion designers or creative directors, and the expression is key to understand the emergence of a fashion identity in Italy. The work of the *stilista* was a unique creative project that became a template for fashion for a generation. Milanese *prêt à porter* was not a simplification of the *haute couture* – as the French

1.35593665. See Susan P. Ashdown (ed.), *Sizing in Clothing. Developing effective sizing systems for ready to wear clothing* (Cambridge: The Textile Institute CRC Press, 2007); White Nicola, 'Max Mara and the Origin of Ready to Wear', *Modern Italy* 1/2 (1996), 63-80; Elisabetta Merlo, 'The Ascendance of The Italian Fashion Brands (1970-2000)', in Luciano Segreto, Hubert Bonin, Andrzej K. Kozminski and Carles Manera (eds.), *European Business and Brand Building* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2012), 137-154; Ivan Paris, *Oggetti Cuciti* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2006). Until then there was an alternation between women's hand-made *haute couture* and manufactured clothing, one intended as the original and the other as the copy, in a clear class-based hierarchy. Well-made off-the-peg clothes put an end to this dual fashion culture. Gilles Lipovetsky, *L'Empire de l'éphémère: La Mode et Son Destin dans les Sociétés Modernes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987).

[14] The word *stilista* cannot be translated in English into 'stylist' as it would mean something different. It is reported that, in early 1970s, when industrialist Nino Cerruti introduced to friends Giorgio Armani, who worked for Cerruti s company before starting his own business, as Ecco il mio stilista (Here s my stilista)– People would reply, But what it is a stilista? . Minnie Gastel, *50 Anni di Moda Italiana* (Milano: Vallardi, 1995).

prêt à porter de luxe, or a semi-artisanal product as Florentine *moda-boutique*, but an innovation in post-war fashion culture and production.[15] The forerunner of the movement was Walter Albini (1941-83), the first to leave the shows in Florence for Milan. His aim was to create a perfect style, and not simply produce a perfect outfit as a *couturier* would: Putting It Together was actually how *Women s Wear Daily* defined Albini s experiments. He shaped collections selecting garment from different companies he collaborated with, using the label Walter Albini .[16] Albini can be considered as a transitional figure between the *moda-boutique* and a brand system that did not yet exist.[17]

Eventually the *stilisti* founded their own companies, usually family businesses in a very Italian entrepreneurial tradition. As Giorgio Armani declared – being an entrepreneur was a

[15] Marco Ricchetti and Enrico Cietta, *Il Valore della Moda* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2006).

[16] Such as Callaghan, Misterfox, Escargots, Diamanti.

[17] There was not a specific place to show at the time, nor a precise calendar. Each *stilista* made up her/his own. Missoni held one at the recently opened and modern-designed Solari swimming pool in 1967. Deemed to be a controversial event, the journalist Maria Pezzi described it this way: 'The last fashion show of the year was not only one of the funniest, but represented the entire spirit of current fashion. A cocktail with all the ingredients: the search for a strange place, the well-balanced representation of allusions and morbidity to Marat-Sade, but played by healthy actors and actresses who had a lot of fun, the presentation of models, materials, new processes. The protagonist, the Missoni knitwear collection, from the success of Paris'.
http://missoni.museomaga.it accessed on 7 January 2021.

consequence of being a designer.[18] Made in Italy combined innovation in style with industrial organization, production, logistics and distribution. Giorgio Armani, Mariuccia Mandelli aka Krizia, Gianfranco Ferrè, Enrico Coveri, Franco Moschino, Gianni Versace to name only a few were among the different expressions of the Milanese *prêt à porter*.[19] The formula included the control of the production and (often) distribution; the segmentation of the production lines according to price (as for instance in Giorgio Armani, Emporio Armani, Armani Jeans); the close collaboration with a photographer for the fine tuning of the brand image (for instance Giorgio Armani and Aldo Fallai); and the licensing system to sign products other than garments. Fashion historian Emanuela Scarpellini describes the role of Italian *stilisti* in this way:

> They do not deal with a single production process or a garment, but create a style that marks a whole collection, or indeed characterizes a lifestyle and gives the brand an imprint; they mark the rhythm of modern fashion, accelerating the production processes with the alternating seasons, and make traditional models culturally obsolete; they become directors of the whole supply chain, managing the creation of the fabric, the design and the manufacturing process, and on to communication and direct relations with the consumers. After them, fashion would never be the same again.[20]

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[18] Minnie Gastel, *50 Anni di Moda iItaliana* (Milano: Vallardi, 1995).

[19] Elisabetta Merlo and Francesca Polese, 'Turning Fashion into Business: The Emergence of Milan as an International Fashion Hub', *Business History Review*, 80/3 (2006), 415-447; Simona Segre Reinach, 'Milan, the City of Prêt à Porter'' in Christopher Breward and David Gilbert (eds.), *Fashion's World Cities* (Oxford: Berg, 2006) 123-134; Paolo Volonté, 'Social and Cultural Features of Fashion Design in Milan', *Fashion Theory* 16/4 (2012), 399-432.

[20] Emanuela Scarpellini, *La Stoffa dell'Italia. Storia e Cultura della Moda dal 1945 a Oggi* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2017), 156.

In 1980s Italy, and internationally, many customers who could not afford a costly outfit from the designer s first line could instead own a piece of fashion by buying a small accessory, thus contributing to make fashion popular.[21] From the 1960s to 1980s, at all price levels and across the entire fashion pyramid, ranging from Benetton to Versace, a greater connection between production and distribution helped the construction of brand value, deemed to be the foundation of quality and, above all, a guide for consumers. The model of the Milanese fashion production was not new – but it was new to fashion: it developed from the combination of design and industry and expanded on a large scale. Industrial design had begun in Milan soon after the Second World War with the work of architects such as Marco Zanuso, Vico Magistretti and Achille Castiglioni.[22] Fashion now applied these tenets in a new field.

Post-war Milan was already the scene of several experiments in modern fashion: in the 1960s, the department store La Rinascente sold clothes by Pierre Cardin at a price lower than in the boutiques.[23] Elvira Leonardi Bouyeure aka Biki - the *couturière* of Milanese high society and the storied soprano Maria Callas - designed the industrial GFT ready-to-wear label Cori from

[21] *Prêt à porter* in Milan acted as a unifying agent against the traditional rivalries among Italian fashion cities. After Turin in the first half of twentieth century, in the 1950s the two main Italian cities of fashion were Florence for *moda-boutiqe* and Rome for *haute couture*. Cinzia Capalbo, *Storia della Moda a Roma* (Rome: Donzelli, 2012).

[22] Grace Lees-Maffei and Kjetil Fallan, *Made in Italy. Rethinking a Century of Italian Design* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013). Experiments with design continued to be a characteristic of the Milan fashion, as the case of the fashion designer Nanni Strada (Strada 2013) winner of the Compasso d'Oro prize in 1978, and later on Monica Bolzoni. Davide Fornari and Régis Tosetti (eds.), *Bianca e Blu. Monica Bolzoni* (Milano: Écal – Rizzoli, 2019).

[23] Elena Papadia, *La Rinascente* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005).

1960 to 1966.[24] Husband and wife Tai and Rosita Missoni, started to design their colourful knitted garments of an easy but elegant make in 1953 in Varese, near Milan. Press, public relation agencies, and photography agencies had their headquarters in Milan. Small coffee shops as Bar Giamaica in the Brera district were the meeting place for writers, photographers, journalists and artists such as Alfa Castaldi and Anna Piaggi. They promoted a strong relationship between culture and fashion, a concept at the time not to be taken for granted, especially as Italian intellectuals considered fashion both superficial and bourgeois. New shopping habits were fostered by modern stores targeting young people such as Elio Fiorucci s Bazaar (opened in 1967), Gulp!, Drogheria Solferino and Carnaby Street, inspired by the Swinging London.[25]

Milan could also benefit from a consolidated heritage. By the time of the advent of prêt-à-porter in the late 1970s , write historians Pinchera and Rinallo:

> the idea that Italy was a country of fashion creators had already been circulating in international markets for more than two decades. This was, as a matter of fact, an intangible asset that the new generation of fashion designers could easily exploit. As a case in point, a special issue of *Women s Wear Daily* dedicated to the 25th year of Italian ready to wear in 1976, found similarities between the style of the new prêt-à-

[24] Simona Segre Reinach, *Biki*. *French Visions for an Italian Fashion* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2019). The GFT (Gruppo Finanziario Tessile) based in Turin produced '*griffes*' such as Armani and Ungaro and also promoted industrial labels such as Cori and Facis.

[25] Luisa Valeriani, *Fiorucci. Quarant'anni di Arte, Design, Moda e Spettacolo* (Rome: Meltemi, 2007).

porter brands being shown in Milan (such as Basile, Callaghan and Genny) and some of their haute couture predecessors from Pitti s Sala Bianca (Capucci, Mirsa and Pucci).[26]

This explains why Milan became a fashion capital in a very a short time. The process started in 1972 when would-be *stilisti* left Florence for Milan – fascinated as they were by the dynamism of the city. By 1978 when Beppe Modenese (1929-2020) founded Modit, the agency regulating the *prêt à porter* fashion shows in Milano, the process was complete.[27] Milan has easy access to the industrial textile districts, located in central and most especially in northern Italy.[28] This enabled Milan to become the geographic and cultural centre of the new integrated industrial system of fashion that spanned from design to production.[29] (Figure 39.1).

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[26] Valeria Pinchera and Diego Rinallo, 'The Emergence of Italy as a Fashion Country', 18.

[27] 1978 is also the year of the agreement between GFT (Gruppo Finanziario Tessile) and Giorgio Armani a milestone in regulating the formula of industrial design.

[28] Industrial districts are small specialized areas scattered throughout the country that constitute the base of Italian manufacturing industry. These include Como for silk, Biella for wool, Carpi for knitwear, Castelgoffredo for hosiery, and the Italian Marches for footwear. Leopoldina Fortunati and Elda Danese, *Il Made in Italy* (Rome: Meltemi, 2005).

[29] Ampelio Bucci, *L'Impresa Guidata dalle Idee* (Milan: Domus, 1992).

Fashion in Italy was also a political phenomenon linked to the rise of Milanese Bettino Craxi s renewed Socialist Party.[30] Craxi was the first politician to understand the relevance of fashion for the concept of Made in Italy. He is attributed the phrase We fly in your planes, but you walk in our shoes to mean that fashion had to have a role in promoting Italy internationally, in the construction of a visual of great impact.[31] Fashion and socialism worked in perfect harmony, dominating the Milanese and Italian cultural life, and continued after Craxi s dramatic political fall.[32]

In the 1980s fashion was the absolute protagonist of the city s life: extravagant shows were at their height; and Versace top models were common guests at sensational parties held in their honour. The concept of Made in Italy took full meaning in combining style, fashion, furniture and food. Giorgio Armani featured on the cover of *Time* in 1982 – after Richard Gere starred in the film American Gigolo (1980) in a total Armani look. Armani s sobriety and Versace glamour were the two sides of what Italy offered: Giorgio Armani presented new gender

[30] Bettino Craxi (1934-2000) was a Member of Parliament from 1969 for the PSI (Italian Socialist Party). He was elected PSI National Secretary in 1976 and was the Prime Minister of Italy from 1983 to 1986.

[31] 'Un Bettino 2.0', *Dagospia* 2 August 2014: http://www.dagospia.com/rubrica-3/politica/bettino-luca-josi-ex-delfino-craxi-rivede-leader-psi-82183.htm, consulted on 16 August 2017.

[32] In 1992 the Socialist politics came to be investigated by a group of anti-corruption magistrates (*Mani Pulite* – literally 'Clean Hands') and Bettino Craxi had to flee Italy to escape conviction. He died in exile in Tunisia.

roles for new jobs; Versace instead explored sexuality and excess. In between, a cluster of designers offered customers all sort of lifestyles a concept that replaced the idea of the *dernier cri*. Among them, Dolce & Gabbana combined Milan and Sicily giving Italian regionalism new power through the work of photographer Ferdinando Scianna. But it was Helmut Newton the photographer who better interpreted the spirit of 1980s fashion – inserting Gianni Versace and Dolce & Gabbana in a wider aesthetic conceptual framework. Over two decades Milan consolidated its position in global fashion and in Italian fashion gained a new aura when *Vogue Italia* became the most influential of the Condé Nast fashion publications.[33] (Figure 39.2).

INSERT HERE FIGURE 39.2

Milan Beyond the Prêt à Porter

The economic crisis of the 1990s, along with the excesses in brand extensions and the emergence of fast fashion, led to profound changes in the prêt à porter system.[34] In the late 1990s, it gradually ceased to be the diffusionist and democratic model it once was. Among the emerging designers in Milan, Miuccia Prada became the promoter of 1990s minimalism and of a subtler, intellectual take on fashion which proved to be extremely successful. She modified the prêt à porter template – less brand segmentation, less licensing - and brought contemporary art closer to fashion. A new

[33] *Vogue Italia* was directed by Franca Sozzani from 1988 to 2006.

[34] Simona Segre Reinach, 'Milan, the City of Prêt à Porter'; Ricchetti and Cietta, *Il valore della moda*; and Simona Segre Reinach, 'Italian Fashion. The Metamorphosis of a Cultural Industry', in Grace Lee Maffei and Kjetil Fallan (eds.), *Made in Italy. Rethinking a Century of Italian Design* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 239-254.

elitist vision of fashion was at hand. It was soon put forward by the newly formed big luxury corporations, such as LVMH and Kering. Luxury became a necessity to promote fashion and availability faded in favour of limited edition and exclusivity. Heritage became a marketing tool to promote European brands in Asia and especially in China. China s new interest in Western fashion brands contributed to accelerate the process. The fresh, ground-breaking spirit of the early years gave place to a more structured and thoughtful system: low cost fast fashion on the one hand and (mass) luxury on the other.[35] Meanwhile fast fashion – a new organisational form in the fashion industry - hyper-popularized fashion through a low-cost strategy, often achieved through extreme outsourcing policies.[36]

Today Italian designers are less popular but not less inventive than their *stilisti* predecessors. They bring to the large corporate groups they work for skills as textile and collection experts and their insightful views on fashion. They are both entrepreneur and creative managers as they are employed as creative directors or creative consultants, and at the same time develop their own brands. In the second decade of twenty-first century - differently from France and the United Kingdom - Italy has managed to maintain a manufacturing sector for the production of high-quality textile products led by small companies that work creatively. The Made in Italy symbol has transformed accordingly and has managed to keep up with the times – mostly changing with the needs of the new financial corporations which own and manage the

[35] Peter McNeil and Giorgio Riello, *Luxury. A Rich History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[36] The expiration of the Multi Fiber Arrangement (MFA) completed the picture. The MFA governed the world trade in textiles and garments from 1974 to 1994, imposing quotas on the amount developing countries could export to developed countries. Its successor, the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC), expired on the 1 January 2005.

majority of the fashion and luxury brands. The Kering group has long been supporting the Tuscan region and fashion pipeline, including opening laboratories that will allow the group to achieve its goals on sustainability.[37]

Italy is increasingly appreciated for specialized craft; while the industrial + design formula of early days prêt à porter has been replaced by an emphasis on high craftmanship and artisans.[38] Among emerging trends, sustainability connected to artisan skills is certainly here to stay. The Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana (CNMI), the organizer of Milan fashion shows, is promoting itself as the European hub for the sustainability of the fashion industry s supply chain. In 2021, Giorgio Armani, Miuccia Prada and Dolce & Gabbana are still privately owned companies based in Milan – although their business is completely globalized. (FIGURE 39.3).

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The Japanese Revolution and Radical Fashion

From a global point of view, the history of fashion since World War II was about provincializing Europe , seemingly replacing one continent with another, firstly Europe with North America and

[37] Luisa Zargani, 'Kering to Support Restoration Works in Florence', WWD https://wwd.com/fashion-news/designer-luxury/kering-restoration-florence-palazzo-1234693272/ Accessed 12 January 2020.

[38] Alberto Cavalli, *Il valore del mestiere* (Venice: Marsilio, 2014). Fendi invited 20 ateliers from 20 regions to reinterpret the iconic Baguette bag – which was originally designed in 1997 by Silvia Venturini Fendi.

later the West with Asia.[39] Yet this provincialization of Europe and globalisation of fashion is a more complex phenomenon characterised by polycentrism and a deconstruction of the very notion of fashion. These changes were brought about by the so-called Japanese revolution (in Paris) in the 1980s and the Belgian Radical Fashion of the early 1990s, both promoters of a more abstract and conceptual fashion.[40] The Japanese fashion shows held in Paris in 1981 when Issey Miyake, Joshi Yamamoto and Rei Kawakubo presented their innovative collections, were the first to break down a monolithic notion of Western fashion. Such a break with the prevailing aesthetics of the time was expressed through asymmetries, irregularities and imperfections. The predominance of dark colours, wide shapes, bias cuts produced a sense of pauperism of the inspiration behind these clothing collections. It was a contrast with both the managerial woman of Giorgio Armani, the most emblematic designer of the Italian school, and with the typical hourglass shape of the most traditional Parisian creations. The three Japanese fashion designers - who had already achieved success in Japan – promoted a new style that refuted the diktats of gender and occasion and took Paris by storm. It was an aesthetic vision related to punk but produced within haute couture; it flirted with subcultures but it did not bubble up from the street as cultural historian Dick Hebdige described just a couple of years earlier.[41] Japanese fashion was proof that an overlap between the marginal and ritual subcultures of bourgeois society had lost their *raison d'être*. The Japanese contribution to modern fashion also renewed the term avant-

[39] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[40] Yuniya Kawamura, *The Japanese Revolution in Paris Fashion* (Oxford New York: Berg, 2004); Anneke Smelik, *Delft Blue to Denim Blue: Contemporary Dutch Fashion* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2017).

[41] Dick Hebdige, *Subcultures. The Meaning of Style* (London and New York: Routledge, 1979).

garde in a system that since the 1930s work of creators such as Elsa Schiaparelli, had partially lost a sense of innovation. As the Japanese revolution took place in Paris rather than Japan, it also paved the way for French fashion to return to the stage as an innovating force.

The Japanese revolution was also the recognition of a modern Asia, pushing a break with old stereotypes, at least those in force from the imperial time of the great divide between East and West . It was above all a break with the very idea that designers had to be western, or westernized, and consequently, with the stereotyped representation of Asia expressed in the various Orientalist moments and, in the specific case, in Japanism. The comments of the period show how strong the Eurocentrism of fashion was, crystallizing the Japanese aesthetic sensitivity and tradition in positive and negative stereotypes. In the 1980s, following Japan's successful expansion into Western economic markets, the French media circulated both positive and negative images of Japan to explain the secret to Japanese success and openly criticized the country s economic invasion of Western markets.[42]

The practice of deconstruction exercised by Japanese designers - which resounded Jacques Derrida's philosophy - involved both western and Japanese sartorial traditions. By doing so, the very mechanics of the dress structure was unveiled. This approach was developed as well by Belgian designer Martin Margiela (1957-) and by the so-called Antwerp 6 – the group of six designers including Dries van Noten, Ann Demeulemeester, Dirk Van Saene, Walter Van Beirendonck, Dirk Bikkembergs and Marina Yee.[43] They are associated with the practice of deconstruction, to be known as Radical Fashion, to differentiate the approach from more

[42] Kyoko Koma, *Mode et stéréotypes interculturels. Le cas des articles consacrés aux couturiers japonais dans Le Figaro et Libération (1981-1992)* (Sarrebruck, Germany: Éditions Universitaires européennes, 2012).

[43] Geet Bruloot and Kaat Debo, *6+ Antwerp Fashion* (Gent: Ludion Editions 2007).

institutional fashion systems such as the French and Italian. (FIGURE 39.4). According to Flavia Loscialpo:

> The disruptive force of their [Antwerp 6 designers] works resided not only in their undoing the structure of a specific garment, in renouncing to finish, in working through subtractions or displacements, but also, and above all, in rethinking the function and the meaning of the garment itself. With this, they inaugurated a fertile reflection questioning the relationship between the body and the garment, as well as the concept of 'body' itself.[44]

INSERT HERE FIGURE 39.4

This new wave of conceiving fashion also brought about discussions on gender roles and binary definitions at large.[45] The innovative formula of Antwerp fashion, an Academy and a Museum entirely devoted to fashion as expressions of both art and industry, attracted students and designers interested in exploring the forefront of fashion[46]. Although the city of Antwerp does not strictly belong to the network of the fashion capitals (London, Milan, Paris, New York) and does not host a fashion week, it has become a crucial place to appreciate fashion as a cultural

[44] Flavia Loscialpo, 'Fashion and Philosophical Deconstruction: A Fashion In-Deconstruction', in Alissa de Witt Paul and Mira Crouch (eds.), *Fashion Forward* (Interdisciplinary Press, 2011), 13-27.

[45] Nicola Brajato and Dhoest, 'Practices of Resistance: The Antwerp Fashion Scene and Walter Van Beirendonck's Subversion of Masculinity', *Critical Studies in Men's Fashion,* 7/1-2 (2020), 51-72

[46] Bruloot and Debo, *6+ Antwerp Fashion*.

industry.[47] The legacy of the Belgian School can be seen today in designers such as Raf Simons, Demna Gvasalia[48], Haider Ackermann, Kris Van Assche and many others at Flemish academies.

By the end of the twentieth century, the geography of fashion was largely polycentric and its productive models multiple. Another huge change in the production and dissemination of fashion occurred with the rise of China.

The Twenty-first Century: Global China

China is a main driver of change in the twenty-first century s system of global fashion. Its economic and cultural power marks a turning point in the history of fashion, achieved in just forty years with a strong acceleration in the last decade.[49] The first Chinese Fashion Week was held in Shanghai in 2001: Shanghai Fashion Week 2020 was the first in the world to be held entirely digitally, setting a new mode of communication that was followed by many Fashion Weeks worldwide. Once considered a country that produced fashion designed elsewhere, China in the twenty-first century has become the main purchaser of the very products it manufactures. Whilst for many Chinese designers the ambition is still to be successful in the West, China decides the success of Western designers by opening its vast domestic market where most of

[47] Javier Gimeno Martinez, 'Selling Avant-garde: How Antwerp Became a Fashion Capital (1990-2002)', *Urban Studies* 44/12 (2007), 2449-2464.

[48] Adam Geczy and Vicky Karaminas, "Time, Cruelty and Deconstruction in Deconstructivist Fashion, Margiela and Vetments", in *Zonemoda Journal* 10, 1, 2020)

[49] See Antonia Finnane's chapter in this volume.

fashion brands revenues are today made.[50] As well, China can ban specific firms from its market, if brands do not fit with its nationalistic policy. Today, the global luxury brands support Chinese designers who take inspiration from historical Chinese cultural references, as it is the case of Yueqi Qi, promoted by Alessandro Michele, the Italian creative director of Gucci.

As I have written elsewhere, the process of Asian engagement with western fashion has in fact demanded a complete rethinking and repositioning of the luxury brands, thus demonstrating that what has come to be known as global fashion is not merely the mechanical expansion of the realm of brands, but required a profound re-interpretation.[51] It was not an easy start: what had been granted to Japan,[52] that because of its history was considered a western outpost in Asia, was not similarly granted to China. This nation was largely closed to the most significant experiences of modern fashion in the period between the Second World War and the 1980s. A small reminder might be useful here: in the Western world, the anti-bourgeois social movement of the 1960s and 1970s helped to create youth fashion that was to pave the way for what we might call a new post-bourgeois fashion. But in China the Cultural Revolution (1966-

[50] Cristopher Breward and Juliette MacDonald (eds.), *Styling Shanghai* (London-New York: Bloomsbury, 2020); Simona Segre Reinach , 'The Identity of Fashion in Contemporary China and the New Relationships with the West', *Critical Studies in Fashion and Beauty*, 4/1 (2012) 57-70; Simona Segre Reinach, 'The Sino-Italian Collaboration Projects in the 20th and 21st Century', *Fashion Theory* (*Global China Special Issue)*, 25/7 (forthcoming 2021).

[51] Simona Segre Reinach, 'One Fashion, Two Nations: Italian-Chinese Collaborations', in Lisa Rofel and Sylvia Yanagisako (eds.), *Fabricating Transnational Capitalism: A Collaborative Ethnography of Italian-Chinese Global Fashion* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

[52] Toby Slade, *Japanese Fashion. A Cultural History* (Oxford: Berg, 2009).

76) led to the utopic abolition of fashion as a bourgeois value, in favour instead of uniformity.[53] A clear divide between bourgeois dress and revolutionary attire replaced the more sartorially nuanced decade of the 1950s characterised by influences from the Soviet Union and the West.[54] During the Cultural Revolution everything belonging to the past, or conceived as intellectual or decadent, was banned. Frugality, simplicity and sobriety were the key features of a new Chinese lifestyle that included dress.[55]

The *qipao*, or *cheongsam*, was abolished, an important sartorial statement of modern Chinese dress for women; permed hair was forbidden and floral dresses too.[56] Examples of sartorial dictatorship are many and frightening: young women were seized by the Red Guards and forced to remove their fashionable garments and shoes in front of the crowd in order to be shamed in public. During one of the most notorious public interrogations, a woman was forced to wear a *qipao* and high heels shoes – the pre-Mao Chinese attire – with a necklace of ping pong

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[53] Antonia Finnane, *Changing Clothing in China. Fashion, History, Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Id., 'Lost in Socialist Transformation? Shanghai Style under Mao', in Christopher Breward and Juliette MacDonald (eds.), *Styling Shanghai* (London-New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 181-210.

[54] Juanjuan Wu, *Chinese Fashion: From Mao to Now* (Oxford: Berg, 2009).

[55] Valerie Steele and John Major, *China Chic. East Meets West* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1999); Wu, *Chinese Fashion.*

[56] On the *qipao* see: Hazel Clark, *The Cheongsam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Wessie Ling, Nationalism, Women and their China: What More the Chinese Talk about When They Talk about the Qipao? , TECHSTYLE Series 1.0 (2017), 92-101; Bian Xiangyang and Yan Lanlan, 'Shanghai Qipao, 1925-49', in Breward and MacDonald (eds), *Styling Shanghai*, 67-86; and Finnane, 'Lost in Socialist Transformation?'.

balls to be mocked, while being denounced as a bourgeois.[57] The Jiang Qing dress case is indicative of fashion at the time: the dress was designed by Mao s second wife, Jiang Qing, in 1974 with the intent to create a national dress for women to break the monotony of the asexual look of the Revolution.[58] Designed with the help of Beijing Opera costume designers, its production in 80,000 pieces was assigned to a Tianjin state-owned firm. The design quoted classic elements from the Song, Han and Tang dynasties mixed with elements of 1950s Western dress. The dress was a complete failure both aesthetically and economically, as it turned out to be too expensive to produce. It was the ultimate proof of China's estranged relationship with modern fashion.[59]

When the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, a series of economic reforms started with Deng Xiaoping s Open Door Policy (1978) to promote social and economic change in China. Modern fashion started to penetrate China, though officially the resistance to bourgeois culture remained a focus of the Communist Party.[60] Controversy and unease characterized the period, as historian Juanjuan Wu clearly explains.[61] The return of fashion in China after 1978 was a slow

[57] Valerie Steele and John Major, 'China chic: East meets West', in Valerie Steele and John Major (eds.), *China Chic: East Meets West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 69-99.

[58] Finnane, 'Lost in Socialist Transformation?'in Christopehr Breward and Juliette Mc Donald (eds) Styling Shangahi (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 181-210.

[59] Antonia Finnane, *Changing Clothing in China*. *Fashion, History, Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

[60] John Vollmer, Chinese Dress , Bibliographical Guides (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015). Bloomsbury Fashion Central. Accessed 3 January 2021.

[61] Juanjuan Wu, *Chinese Fashion from Mao to Now* (Oxford: Berg, 2009).

process, almost imperceptible and affecting only people in the large cities, and especially young women.[62] After more than a decade of isolation, people simply did not know what to wear: the idea of going back to the 1930s *qipao* for women – an attire which evoked colonial Shanghai - and for men a mix of Western suit, Confucius attire and Mao jacket was untenable. It was mainly through exposure to media, like television and radio music around Asia, that the Chinese familiarised themselves once again with the world outside China and with bell-bottoms trousers, blue jeans, sunglasses, floral dresses. These were perceived in China as symbols of individuality and freedom.[63] The Western men s suit - made in China to promote the local garment industry - was also endorsed by the government.[64]

Most inspirational icons came from Hong Kong, Korea, Taiwan and Japan. The Taiwanese singer Theresa Teng (Deng) (1953-95) was much admired in China for her love songs and beautiful dresses.[65] Fashion magazines, abolished during the Revolution, appeared again in the 1980s. Meanwhile more Chinese came in contact with Western fashion. This happened first because Western designers were quick to move into China. The first among them was the French-Italian designer Pierre Cardin (1922-2020) in 1979, followed over the next twenty years by most western brand.[66] On Pierre Cardin s shows in Beijing and Shanghai Juanjuan Wu reports: 'Due to their

[62] Valerie Steele, *Paris Fashion. A Cultural History* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1999).

[63] Mei Hua, *Chinese Clothing* (China Intercontinental Press, 2004).

[64] Yuan Ze and Yue Hu, *A Century of Chinese Fashion 1900-2000* (San Francisco: Sinomedia International Group China Books, 2016).

[65] Sijia Yao, 'Teresa Teng in Diaspora: Affective Replacement in Chinese World-Making', *Comparative Literature Studies* (Special issue on 'The Eighth Sino-American Symposium in Comparative and World Literature'), 57/3 (2020), 520-529.

[66] Vogue China opened in 2005.

sensitive nature , only professionals were permitted to attend Cardin s shows. Nevertheless, the shows were a sensation. Paris fashion, a perfect manifestation of the capitalist lifestyle, had been a taboo subject for decades in China, and its vivid display in front of the Chinese audience left them speechless'.[67] Second, the relocation of western fashion production to China - starting from the 1980s - was perhaps even more important in the promotion of a Chinese fashion industry. Thanks to Western outsourcing to Asia, Chinese managers rapidly learned production techniques, collections assembling, and marketing, gaining knowledge of fashion trends. They acquired both material and immaterial notions on fashion.[68] Production did not change the image of the nation, however: Made in China had a long way to go to shrug off a reputation for low-cost, poor-quality garments in favour of China as a key player in the global fashion system.

Sino-Italian joint ventures represented an important phase in this transition. Specific Chinese brands were the outcomes of joint ventures for the Chinese market. These collaborations faced many challenges and proved unsuccessful in the long run. Italian companies considered their Chinese partners to be facilitators in their strategy of penetration of the Chinese market or ways to produce at lower cost part of the garments destined for the Western market. In both cases they were willing to give away as little know-how as possible. For them, China was the factory of the world : creativity and design were to remain firmly in the West where there was a long tradition of innovation. Chinese companies, on the other hand, were keen to learn marketing and

[67] Juanjuan Wu, *Chinese Fashion from Mao to Now* (Oxford: Berg, 2009), 166.

[68] Simona Segre Reinach, 'Italian and Chinese Agendas in the Global Fashion Industry', in Giorgio Riello and Peter McNeil (eds.), *The Fashion History Reader* (London: Routledge, 2010) 217-234; and Id., 'One Fashion, Two Nations'.

branding in order to enter international markets with their own local brands.[69] These partnerships revived colonial stereotypes such as that of the Chinese tailor who copies even the faults of the commissioned dress; they reinforced a division between author countries and manufacturing countries . Yet at the same time they ignited a process of cross fertilization between Asia and the West, especially in the production of high-end *prêt-à-porter* garments.

Chinese designers rapidly transformed their way of conceiving design, production and distribution, by attending prestigious international fashion schools such as Parsons New York, Central St. Martin London and Marangoni Milan (some of which have also opened branches in China), and by renewing Chinese fashion school such as Shanghai Donghua University, Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology, Tsinghua University and Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Graduate designers acquired the ability to interpret consumer needs. Today mainland Chinese designers are an important part of the Chinese fashion system and are fast becoming part of international fashion together with Chinese-American and Chinese diaspora designers.[70] This has been achieved with difficulty. But Chinese fashion designer today play a significant role in the

[69] Ibid.

[70] Christina Moon, 'Ethnographic Entanglements: Memory and Narrative in the Global Fashion Industry', in Heike Jenss and Chris Breward, (eds.), *Fashion Studies. Research, Method, Sites and Practices* (London, New York: Bloomsbury, 2016); Anja Cronberg, '"There Will Never be a Chinese Fashion" – Staking a Claim for Shanghai as a Fashion City', in Breward and MacDonald (eds.), *Styling Shanghai*, 287-308.

global arena, especially with growing relevance of the digital world in the post-pandemic fashion industry.[71]

Mainland Chinese designers have a complex history. For several decades, the development of fashion design in China also suffered from the conceptual separation between fashion seen as art and clothing seen as commerce, in a context of minimal consumer culture, lack of marketing, and interference by the State in private enterprises. According to Christine Tsui, early fashion designers (pioneers) started their activities when fashion – at least as defined in the West – did not exist in China.[72] The first designers in the post reform era were costume designers. They had little idea of the Western fashion system and could deal with the artistic but not the commercial side of fashion. The genesis of fashion in China, thus, comes from art and theatrical costume.[73] It also meant that the production of low-cost apparel for export was considered to part of commerce, but not of fashion. Tsui defines the second generation of fashion designers as practitioners , thereby indicating their ability to cover all aspects of design. This allowed them to consolidate the idea of a Chinese fashion industry, opening the way to Chinese

[71] Michael Keane and Guanhua Su, 'When Push Comes to Nudge: A Chinese Digital Civilisation In-The-Making', *Media International Australia* 173/1 (2019), 3-16; Jin Yating, 'A Mechanism of the Chinese Fashion System', *Fashion Theory* published online 16 March 2020; Christine Chou, 'What Shanghai's First Digital Fashion Week Meant for Brands and Designers': https://www.alizila.com/what-shanghais-first-digital-fashion-week-meant-for-brands-and-designers/ accessed 3 January 2021.

[72] Christine Tsui, *China Fashion: Conversations with Designers* (Oxford: Berg, 2009).

[73] Bao Mingxin and Juanjuan Wu, *Shimao Cidian* [A Fashion Dictionary] (Shanghai: Shanghai Wenhua Chubansha, 1999).

brands.[74] The third generation of designers, which Tsui calls prospects , consciously relate to global fashion and contribute to outlining the profile and value of Chinese fashion.[75]

Nowadays designers in China (working for giant brands such as Metersbonwe, Bosideng), and Chinese designers working outside China are too many to list. A unique system of digital marketing based on social networks, celebrities and e-commerce is now defining fashion made in China.[76] One designer that, however, stands out is Guo Pei (b.1967), as she contributed to the popularization of Chinese craftmanship and high fashion, against ever-present prejudice. Guo Pei graduated at Beijing Light Industry School in 1986. After working in a state-owned textile company, she founded her own brand Rose Studio in 1997. She was at the centre of the exhibition China Through the Looking Glass at the MET Museum in New York in 2015.[77] The exhibition paid homage to Chinese culture and soft power by historicizing the

[74] Ma Ke and Wang Yi-Yang belong to the 'practitioners' generation. Ma Ke was the designer who introduced the concept of 'slow fashion' in China, and produces two lines: Exception, founded in 1996; and Useless/Wuyong, launched in 2006, a *haute couture* line of collectors' items based on the principle of ecology and the re-use of existing garments. Wang Yi-Yang also markets two lines, Cha Gang and ZucZug. Cha Gang line is inspired by the mugs of the Cultural Revolution, white with a blue edge – the only household item always available in those years of poverty.

[75] Among them Tsui includes Lu Kun and Ji Ji. Tsui, *China Fashion*.

[76]Sindy Liu, Patsy Perry and Gregory Gadzinski, 'The Implications of Digital Marketing on WeChat for Luxury Fashion Brands in China', *Journal of Brand Management* 26 (2019), 395–409; Yingjiao Xu, Ting Chi, Jin Su (eds.), *Chinese Consumers and the Fashion Market* (Singapore: Springler, 2020).

[77] On the exhibition, see Antonia Finnane's chapter in this volume.

influence of China - past and present - on Western art and fashion.[78] Western dresses, films, craft, and artefacts inspired by China were presented. The only Chinese dress was Guo Pei s: a luxury handmade piece that showed the capacity of Chinese designers to produce *haute couture*. Fashion icon and pop singer Ryhanna sported Guo Pei s dress on the red carpet of the MET Gala Event: a canary yellow silk long-tale dress, 25 Kg in weight, that required 50,000 hours of the work to complete. The dress was the talk of the town.[79] Media coverage confirmed the relevance of China s aesthetics in contemporary art and fashion. In the same year, Guo Pei held her first solo exhibition at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris and was honoured as an invited member of the Parisian Chambre Syndicale de la *Haute couture.* (Figure39.5).

INSERT HERE FIGURE 39.5

China and the New Geography of Fashion

The rise of Chinese fashion has led to a rethinking of fashion cities within wider geographies .[80] As Andrew Zhao observes: The Chinese fashion systems do not exist in isolation from the rest

[78] Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York, N.Y.: Public Affairs, 2004).

[79] https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2017/oct/18/guo-pei-chinese-designer-who-made-rihanna-omelette-dress. Accessed on 12 January 2021.

[80] David Gilbert and Patrizia Casadei, 'The Hunting of the Fashion City: Rethinking the Relationship Between Fashion and the Urban in the Twenty-First Century', *Fashion Theory* 24/3 (2020), 393-408.

of the world, even though different fashion systems are connected to the global fashion industry in different ways. most manufacturing by luxury fashion global shaping in participates China [81] of the garments in the world, by purchasing Western brands in need of financial support,[82] and by creating new international networks and new collaborations.[83] Today, these collaborations are no longer one-way agreements – the west designs; China makes – as was the case of early joint ventures. They also no longer promote an opposition between Europe and Asia, nor a East Meets West attitude.[84] At first glance, the formation of contemporary Chinese fashion offers a compelling example of cultural, economic and political entanglement across the globe.[85] At a closer look, Chinese modernity in the twenty-first century cannot merely be underscored by Chinese hybridity: Rather it entails a power dynamic between China and the rest of the world,

[81] Michael Zhao, *The Chinese Fashion Industry: An Ethnographic Approach* (New York London: I.B. Tauris/Bloomsbury, 2018), 66.

[82] Among which the Italian Krizia, Roberta di Camerino, Sergio Tacchini, and Miss Sixty.

[83] Jin Yating, 'A Mechanism of the Chinese Fashion System', *Fashion Theory* published online 16 March 2020.

[84] Wessie Ling and Simona Segre Reinach, 'Fashion-Making and the Co-Creation in the Transglobal Landscape: Sino-Italian Joint ventures as a Method', *Modern Italy*, 24/4 (2019), 401-415; Simona Segre Reinach, '

From Joint Ventures to Collaborative Projects. Towards an Ethnography of Sino-Italian fashion relations in the 2020s.' (Fashion Theory 25,7, 2021).

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[85] Wu Zhiyan, Janet Borgeson, and Jonathan Schroeder, *From Chinese Brands Culture to Global Brands* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

whereby constant negotiation is expected .[86] The result is a multi-faceted Chinese aesthetic identity yet strongly oriented to representing Chinese modernity.[87] Global Chinese fashion impacts local fashions, just as Chinese influencers are gaining global coolness:

> There s something strangely thrilling about lying in bed watching Chinese streetwear fashion TikToks, but lately, that seems to be all I ve been doing…. Watching these videos taught me that I didn t actually understand contemporary fashion in mainland China, which is fresh and new and, yes, primarily defined by the context of China s consumer culture but has evolved to become its own style. It s especially refreshing to see Chinese streetwear fashion incorporating traditional Chinese clothing, such as reinterpretations of hanfu and other forms of reinventing outfits historically significant in Chinese culture.[88]

In 2005 Antonia Finnane claimed that fashion was one of the many areas in which the opening of a dialogue between China and the rest of the world occurred in the late

[86] Wessie Ling and Simona Segre Reinach (eds.), *Fashion in Multiple Chinas. Chinese Styles in the Transglobal Landscape* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2018), 1-2.

[87] Juanjuan Wu, Yue Hu, Lei Xu, and Marylin DeLong, 'Designed in China: Multiple Approaches to Fashion and Retail', in Ling and Segre Reinach (eds.), *Fashion in Multiple Chinas*, *Chinese Styles in the Transglobal Landscape* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2018).

[88] Valerie Wu 'Soft Power: Chinese streetwear fashion affirms coolness', *Daily Troyan* 2 November 2020, accessed 26 January 2021: https://dailytrojan.com/2020/11/02/soft-power-chinese-streetwear-fashion-affirms-coolness/

1970s .[89] In 2021 we can add that China is now leading this dialogue by shaping the global fashion industry 'While scholars across the globe have enriched the geography of fashion by studying locations beyond the big four , there remains a need for better understanding of fashion centers from global and evolutionary perspective'.[90]

In twenty-first century society, fashion is a fundamental pillar of soft power for many nations.[91] Increasingly intertwined with the media, and with other forms of art and culture, as a fully-fledged member of the digital world, fashion represents a kind of imagined community, in the meaning coined by Anderson.[92] Fashion also transcends individual cultures, nations, cities, as it is understood by all, as it re-proposes its original characteristics in a continuous evolution.

Conclusion

From Paris, the first recognized city of fashion, a progressive movement that began in the second half of the twentieth century led to the current polycentric configuration of fashion. Milan challenged Paris in the late 1970s as it promoted a new productive and cultural system - that of the industrial *prêt a porter* - to replace the elitist model of the *haute couture*. Thanks to its

[89] Antonia Finnane, 'Looking for the Jiang Qing Dress: Some Preliminary Findings', *Fashion Theory* 9/1 (2005), 257.

[90] Ben Wubs, Mariangela Lavanga and Alice G. Janssens, 'Letter from the Editors: The Past and Present of Fashion Cities', *Fashion Theory*, 24/3 (2020), 320.

[91] Peter McNeil and Giorgio Riello, *Luxury*; Victoria L. Rovine, *African Fashion. Global Style* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).

[92] Agnes Rocamora, 'Mediatization and Digital Media in the Field of Fashion', *Fashion Theory*, 21/5 (2017), 505-522; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983).

potential to reach different targets, the industrial *prêt a porter* became the most widespread and practiced fashion system in the world. The economic growth of China and the fact that it is both the strongest producer and the largest consumer of clothing, has impressed a further change on the fashion system. The twenty-first century opened with the decline of a Eurocentric perspective on fashion and with the intensification of global exchanges. On the one hand, today people are more connected and exposed to the same fashion information. On the other, the 'democratic' model of 1970s *prêt à porter* has been replaced by extreme luxury on one side and low prices – fast fashion on the other.

For some time now the three systems described above - *haute couture*, *prêt à porter*, and fast fashion - have been marked by a far-reaching trend, that of sustainable fashion.[93] The Who Made My Clothes movement, founded in 2003, has led to the annual Fashion Revolution days, and the Copenhagen Summits linked environmental and cultural aspects, demonstrating how sustainability profoundly affects the very foundations of fashion.[94] Sustainability is not only a new production style but also a new cultural model for fashion that crosses and changes the previous models at all latitudes. It also aims to protect customers and workers and reduce the industry's environmental impact on our planet. Sustainability shapes the working methods of the designers themselves, who are under pressure to produce several collections a year – rather than the traditional two per year - to satisfy a crowded and competitive market. Following the COVID-

[93] Margaret Maynard, 'Fast Fashion and Sustainability', in Sandy Black, Amy de la Haye, Joanne Entwistle, Regina Root, Agnès Rocamora, and Helen Thomas (eds.), *The Handbook of Fashion Studies* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 542-556; Sandy Black, *The Sustainable Fashion Handbook* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2012); Kate Fletcher, *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles*: *Design Journeys* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).

[94] The first Summit was held in 2008.

19 pandemic, many aspects of sustainability have been discussed with a view to redesigning the whole fashion system. The concept of fashion has moved away from the expression of lifestyles as it was in the twentieth century, and involves today a sense of community, of multiple connections and cross fertilizations across nations.

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