

## PAGE TWO



**Above:** Shanghai couturier Chen Yehuai poses with models during a show of her work in Moscow, Russia, in September. **Left below:** Three designs from Chen. **Right below:** Another Chen design (top) and creations from Laurence Xu (center) and Ms Min. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

# Tradition: Culture offers inspiration

From page 1

She has become one of the Chinese couturiers whose works have caught global attention, along with Guo Pei, Ms Min, Bu Kewen, Laurence Xu and Ji Cheng.

Their collective success highlights how Chinese designers have risen to world stardom over the past four decades.

Back in December 1978, a middle-aged Frenchman wearing an oversized drop-shoulder woolen coat strode through the streets of Beijing, causing a stir among local residents. A few days later, he caused an even bigger sensation when he climbed the Great Wall and struck a victory pose.

The visitor, Pierre Cardin, was the first Western fashion designer to visit China, shortly after the country announced its reform and opening-up policy.

Three months later, Cardin organized the country's first fashion show at the Cultural Palace of Nationalities in Beijing, not only flying in 220 of his haute couture outfits from Paris, but also 12 professional models and a team of photographers, curators and stylists.

On the second day of the show, Xinhua News Agency said in an exclusive report to industry insiders, "The variety of colors on the runway contrasted sharply with the uniform blacks and grays of the audience."

Over the next decade, Cardin, dubbed the "Marco Polo of the 20th century" by Chinese media, continued to make headlines in the country.

He organized fashion shows on the Great Wall and in the Forbidden City, opening them to the public for the first time, with one event attracting an audience of 10,000.

Cardin also sent nine Chinese models to attend Paris Fashion Week and take part in a motorcade, in which they wore *qipao* as they were driven under the Arc de Triomphe in convertible cars flying the Chinese national flag.

By the late 1990s, Cardin had persuaded Chinese consumers that any attire bearing the logo of his eponymous brand was the ultimate symbol of status, wealth and refinement. Furthermore, he had proved to the world that China, a textile manufac-

Fashion reflects the tastes of the age and the feelings of the people. Now, Chinese people's tastes are demonstrating a kind of national spirit, so through my designs I try to reflect the place in which the people find themselves. I try to interpret national sentiment."

Guo Pei, contemporary Chinese designer

turing giant, could also become a significant fashion market.

The first Western fashion house to be convinced of this was Italian luxury menswear brand Ermenegildo Zegna, which made its Chinese debut in 1991, opening a boutique in Beijing.

China is now the largest single market for the century-old business, accounting for about one-third of its global sales.

According to Ermenegildo Gildo Zegna, the fourth-generation helmsman of the family company, these achievements would not have been possible if it hadn't taken the Chinese market seriously by entering early, setting up the right stores and continuing to invest in new areas.

However, it was only after the French luxury brand Louis Vuitton, which entered China a year after Ermenegildo Zegna — opening a store in the same building — that interest in fashion was observed among all age groups and both sexes.

Yves Carcelle, the late CEO of Louis Vuitton, who pushed for this goal to be achieved, believed that China was "sophisticated". This was despite often being asked by local reporters why he was visiting the country, as the "people don't understand luxury".

By 2001, when China joined the World Trade Organization and numerous luxury fashion brands had arrived in the country, Louis Vuitton stood out as one of the most coveted by Chinese consumers at home and abroad.

Last year, annual luxury spending by Chinese consumers exceeded 770 billion yuan (\$109 billion), account-

ing for more than one-third of the global total, according to management consultancy McKinsey & Co. At the time, the company forecast that 2019 would be the first year in which China would overtake the US as the world's largest market for fashion and luxury items.

According to the China National Textile and Apparel Council, in 2017, some 45.6 billion items of clothing were bought in the country, up 66 times on the figure for 1978. Spending on clothing has risen by more than a hundredfold in the past four decades, reaching 2.87 trillion yuan in 2017.

China has not only seen sales and consumption rise significantly in recent decades. As a civilization spanning thousands of years, the country's culture and traditions have also provided a rich and constant source of inspiration for fashion designers worldwide.

In 2015, at the annual exhibition held by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, some 130 haute couture dresses and ready-to-wear items showcasing the impact of Chinese design on Western fashion were displayed.

Titled *China: Through the Looking Glass*, the exhibition included works from almost every recognized designer and leading fashion house, including Karl Lagerfeld, Yves Saint Laurent and Tom Ford.

Andrew Bolton, who spent two years organizing the exhibition, told *Vogue* magazine that the main aim of the event was to "recast Orientalism in a more positive light as an exchange of ideas and an honored source of influence".

One surprise at the exhibition was a display of contemporary Chinese

designer Guo Pei's work. Footage of a yellow caped gown, with a train nearly 5 meters long worn by the singer and fashion designer Rihanna on the red carpet at the event's opening ceremony, went viral.

Guo's design was dubbed the "omelet dress" due to its resemblance to the breakfast staple.

The gown, which weighs about 25 kilograms, combines traditional Chinese craftsmanship and the classic A-line silhouette of haute couture. Some 50,000 hours of embroidery work went into creating it.

Guo said, "People used to say there is no such thing as high-end couture — the epitome of aesthetics and skills — in China. But now that view is changing."

In 2016, the Beijing-born designer was the first Chinese national to have her work shown at Paris Couture Week.

"Fashion reflects the tastes of the age and the feelings of the people. Now, Chinese people's tastes are demonstrating a kind of national spirit, so through my designs I try to reflect the place in which the people find themselves. I try to interpret national sentiment," Guo said.

On Nov 1, she staged her first fashion show in the United Kingdom, at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, as part of celebrations marking the 20th anniversary of the institution's Fashion in Motion series.

This free event featured a catwalk show by leading international designers, which over the years have included Alexander McQueen, Vivienne Westwood, Jean Paul Gaultier and Yohji Yamamoto.

Oriole Cullen, the museum's fashion curator, said: "Guo Pei's work demonstrates the height of what can be achieved in the skilled ateliers of a haute couture house. We are delighted to be working with Guo to showcase a selection of garments from her uniquely beautiful *Alternate Universe* collection."

Bo Leung in London contributed to this story.

Contact the writers at [xujunqian@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:xujunqian@chinadaily.com.cn)



## Shanghai designer Grace Chen parades the best of both worlds in Moscow

By REN QI in Moscow  
[renqi@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:renqi@chinadaily.com.cn)

Grace Chen sought to connect Chinese and Russian fashion culture for the show she staged in Moscow in September.

A design team working for the Shanghai couturier traveled to Guizhou province in July to research silverware produced by the Miao

ethnic group. The crew was surprised to find that the designs and craftsmanship used for the Miao items were either exactly the same or similar to elements of some traditional Russian art.

As a result, for the Moscow show, Chen presented designs from both countries, a decision that worked well.

In developing her brand Chen Chen at home and abroad, the

designer has had two goals in mind. "One is to establish an image for Chinese women. I think they're very misunderstood in every way. I want to find true beauty for them to give them the respect they deserve," Chen said.

"The second goal is to use Chinese fashion to express our aesthetic view of beauty and the philosophy behind it to the world."

She said three major series have been launched under Chen's brand — Serenity, Depth and Glamor. For the Moscow show, customized designs from the Depth series were paraded on the catwalk.

"Depth stands for women's inner power, and I think this theme best fits the characteristics of Russian culture and art," Chen said.

Zhao Xiangrong, a counselor at

the Chinese embassy in Moscow, said the presence of Chinese fashion brands in Russia is an important part of Sino-Russian cooperation in people-to-people and cultural exchanges.

"At the Moscow show, Russian audiences saw beautiful dresses with not only Chinese elements, but Russian cultural ones. The Chinese designer combined the elements,

thus enhancing the bilateral friendship," Zhao said.

Chen agreed with Zhao, adding that she was glad to see Chinese fashion accepted on the international stage. This demonstrates the increasing influence of China's "soft power", as fashion is one of the most direct ways in which to showcase the features of a country or society to the world, she added.