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Exhibiting fashion on the heritage site: the interrelation between body, heritage space, and fashionable clothing

Lan Lan^{1,2,3} & Peng Liu^{1,3}  

The article examines a fashion exhibition at a heritage museum on a historic site in terms of fashion museology. Fashion museology, which has emerged from the growing phenomenon of exhibiting fashion in museums, advocates the visual representation and holistic atmosphere of the curatorial space that determines the on-site audience experience. This article focuses on how the interrelation between fashionable clothing, the bodies of the audience, and the heritage space constructs a hybrid space in which bodily movement articulates the displayed clothing. We consider the heritage space to be a performative event and explore how heritage museums can harness and make practical use of the affective interrelationship within the designed museum space in terms of the quality of the fashion exhibition experience. Museum audiences are situated in and moved around by the curated spatial environment, which is a space with cultural residuals and historical inheritance, where the bodily encounter with the displayed clothing occurs. The investigation of this interaction via case studies sheds light on the overlooked haptic experience and spatial storytelling in fashion exhibitions. The site-specific interaction at the heritage space mediates the body in multiple ways. Such curated bodily movement acts as a narration that imbues the clothing on display with meanings.

¹ Faculty of Humanities and Arts, Macau University of Science and Technology, Macao, China. ² School of Fashion and Engineering, Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology, Beijing, China. ³ These authors contributed equally: Lan Lan, Peng Liu. ✉ email: pliu@must.edu.mo

Introduction

Fashion has been studied by humanities scholars mainly in terms of the complexity of its production and consumption as commercial product, the interaction between personal, national and transnational identities, and its mechanisms as cultural product (Paulicelli and Clark, 2009). Despite the growing popularity of exhibiting fashion in museums (Pinnock, 2019), this practice is dominated by visual sensibility as the primary sense of audience experience—that is to say, the focus is on the way people visually perceive the display artefacts and their attached meanings, which is a cognitive and cultural process (Kaplan, 2002, 37). The exhibiting space, or the culture-inscribed environment, constructs a relation with the displayed clothing to form a certain atmosphere that is captured by the body which contributes to the holistic viewing experience. Apart from facilitating the movement of the visitors, the exhibiting space actively engages with the bodies of visitors in an affective way. As Potvin notes, “environments mitigate, control, inform and enhance how fashion is experienced, performed, consumed, seen, exhibited, purchased, appreciated, desired and, of course, displayed” (2009, 1). The site-specific affective experience reinterprets the historic content of the displayed clothing via bodily experience in contemporary time. Acknowledging studies on how fashion displays are presented in museums in terms of historical analysis (Clark et al. 2014), this article explores fashion in museums in terms of lived experience and bodily encounter, specifically with reference to museums built on historic sites. The space of the heritage site, as differentiated from the institutional museum space, has accumulated cultural residuals and inscribed historical meanings. We consider the heritage space is a performative event and explore how heritage museums can harness and make practical use of the affective interrelationship within the designed museum space in terms of the quality of the fashion exhibition experience. This space is fashioned by and ‘culturalizes’ the displayed fashionable wear, which is in turn perceived by audiences whose bodily experiences reflect the intertwined atmosphere of the space. In other words, bodily movements promoted by and within the space articulate the cultural meaning of displayed clothing. As Paulicelli and Clark note, “clothing is part of material culture and has a double face... [that is] public and private, material and symbolic, always caught within the lived experience” (2009, 3).

Acknowledging the value of traditional methods of studying symbols, patterns, and forms, for example, as a means to interrogate human culture and history, this study nonetheless takes an affective approach to considering fashion in the museum. The increasing popularity of exhibiting fashionable clothing in museums is not just commercially oriented, rather it is an opportunity to reconnect the body of the audience to the displayed clothing that was initially made to be worn, touched, and felt, but which can now only be visually appreciated. Acknowledging concerns regarding knowledge production by museum, which is partial and situated and always politically driven (Vergo, 1989), the concept of the inclusive museum derived from new museology¹ can be critically adapted in fashion museology especially in terms of bodily engagement. The inclusive museum allows audiences to access the cultural heritage regardless of their class, age, gender, ethnicity, and education (Vergo, 1989). This democratic advocacy is coherent with the concept of “museums as contact zone” proposed by Clifford (1997, 192), where different cultures come into contact in a museum environment. The inclusive museum largely focuses on cultural issues despite potential for some critique; for example, possible controversy caused by a culture being misrepresented outside of its original context. Nevertheless, the museum under new museology, as a popular place of culture, entertainment, commercialism and, indeed, education, is inclusive and engages with museum users

interactively. Therefore, the inclusive museum can be thought and achieved through “inclusive” bodily experience at a haptic level.

The study proposes a shift in emphasis from the visual to the haptic dimensions of audience experience in fashion exhibitions with a focus on heritage sites as institutions that foster such engagement. Heritage sites are rich in multisensorial and cultural residuals requiring bodily involvement where the spatial narration of the affective heritage environment is understood via both visual and haptic experience. The heritage museum is built within, and is part of, the on-site story co-making and the affective interrelationship between museum visitors, heritage space, and displayed clothing. Visitors are engaged/disengaged with/in the heritage space before interacting with the displayed garment situated in the curatorial setting (Liu and Lan, 2021). Acknowledging traditional thought on heritage-as-object and object-as-representation, the article instead focuses on bodily encounter as an alternative approach to understanding fashion exhibitions on heritage sites. In other words, the garment can tell a story and can only do so within the curatorial and architectural framework created by the museum display; at the same time, the garment needs to be curated in coherence with the heritage space so that visitors are engaged via vibrant bodily interactions to make the storytelling affective.

The study uses case study analysis to reflect the phenomenon of the fashion exhibition on a heritage site through different perspectives (Thomas, 2015). Following the introduction, the article is divided into the following sections: the literature review on fashion in terms of cultural identity, fashion in museums, and bodily engagement on heritage sites. This is followed by the analysis of two case studies with divergent approaches. The textual approach adopted in the case of the French designer Pierre Cardin² runway show and exhibition in Beijing in 1979 elaborates on the significance of the body of audience. The investigation reflects on the critical presence of the audience in the success of the Cardin exhibition, whereby the exhibition is interpreted as a political and cultural event due to the on-site bodily engagement and the atmosphere co-produced by the presence of the audience. The article then, via an experiential approach, provides an empirical study on the second case study of a temporary fashion exhibition at a heritage site, entitled *Peking Express*, held at the Beijing Temple of Confucius and Imperial College Museum at Guozijian, Beijing, in 2013, which was an exhibition of works created by Chinese fashion design students³ under the guidance of renowned Dutch fashion designer Alexander van Slobbe and Lan Lan. The exhibition is a case study on the creation of a hybrid space with inclusive bodily engagement, using haptic experience as a way to gain understanding rather than by applying authoritarian interpretation on cultural representation. The ensuing discussion on the exhibition aims to conceptualize exhibiting fashion on heritage sites.

From fashion as identity to fashion in museums

Fashionable clothing as cultural identity. Originating from studies of fashionable dress as material artefacts, fashion studies has extended into interdisciplinary research, where the design aspects of clothing in terms of structure, silhouette, color, form, function, and material/textile are studied by scholars to produce cultural meanings and conduct visual storytelling, which are the main focus of fashion studies in contemporary discourse (Teunissen, 2014). Scholars such as Tarrant (1996) are interested in the social and physical aspects of the history and development of clothing; while others like Taylor (2002, 2004) focus on the material culture of dress history addressing the interrelation of

socio-cultural, theoretical, and object-based contexts. Clothing can be read and decoded in terms of the value of textiles and symbolic power of decoration in the cultural system to reflect ethnicity, social status, age, sexuality, etc. (Wilson [1985] 2020; Entwistle, 2015; Sikarskie et al. 2023). In Silverman's words, "clothing draws the body so that it can be culturally seen, and articulates it in meaningful form" (1986, 145). Before the increasing popularity of fashion in museums in the past two decades, fashion was studied in terms of fashion as system (Kaiser, 1990); and fashion as identity, exemplifying cross-disciplinary approaches across philosophy, anthropology, and sociology (Wilson [1985] 2020; Davis, 1992; Svendsen, 2006). Fashion is conceptualized as a practice and event originating from social relations (Breward, 2004), whereby stylish clothing is a "demonstration of identity" (Ross, 2008, 12) and "personhood in aesthetic form" (Gell, 1998, 157) in order to fulfill the needs of people in relation to social adaptation and self-distinction (Simmel, 1997). Scholars Jones and Leshkovich (2003) elaborate that colonial discourse is reflected in the dress in colonized countries in Asia. In short, fashion is a medium and it is always mediatized in the effort to understand the world. Fashionable dress is more than an object to wear but a human-made artefact understood as a social tool (Barnard, 2014); for example, Miller argues that fashion is social custom, "an imitation of the others" (2007, 32), that can be studied, displayed, and understood as a cultural phenomenon, which is, in turn, prompting the increasing number of fashion exhibitions in various museums to take place.

Borrowing Ribeiro's (1995) words, "fashion acts as a link between life and art" (5), while museums manifest and extend this connection. Along with the emerging phenomenon of fashion in museums in the past decade, discussions are being carried out by many scholars, such as Wallenberg (2020) who argues through analyzing several fashion exhibitions that "fashion's intimate relation to life" is a way to understand past lives whereby fashion and dress are a part of cultural histories (2). In other words, studying fashion is way of better understanding everyday life, as fashion is embodied in every aspect of our cultural life; every piece of clothing worn on the body carries social meanings associated with the person (Dunne, 2010). Moreover, Steele (2008) notes in examining some fashion exhibition practices, such as the exhibition, *Visions of the Body: Fashion or Invisible Corset*, which took place at the Kyoto Costume Institute, that there is an interest in "the role of fashion as a second skin, and the connections between fashion and modern art" (26). Therefore, displaying fashionable dresses in a curatorial setting is more than a special theme on fashion in museums, but rather a means to develop various cultural understandings on fashion, as fashion is now consistently regarded in terms of its cultural, artistic, and historical significance. A typical approach is seen regarding gender; for example, when Petrov (2014) highlights the gender inequality embedded in conventional display methods and museum collections of dress. Moreover, Crewe argues in terms of Geographical Theory of Fashion that "envisions fashion as both product and practice, object and agent. Fashion is valorized in complex ways through design and desire, production and reproduction, representation and transformation and, perhaps most significantly, through relations between creator, wearer, and garment in space and through time" (2017, 6).

Exhibiting fashion in museums—from object showcasing to experience co-making. Fashion in museums has a relatively long history that can be traced back to the late twentieth-century (Palmer, 2008; Steele, 1998, 2008). Fashion began appearing as part of museum exhibitions in major museums as early as the

beginning of the twentieth century at venues such as the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1913, Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1929, Brooklyn Museum in 1925, Royal Ontario in Toronto in 1933, and McCord Museum in Montreal in 1957 (Petrov, 2019). The increasing interactions between fashion and museums have attracted attention among contemporary scholars and practitioners in both fields of fashion studies and museum studies. It is acknowledged that the museum always operates in line with political and social happenings of the moment and that it has its own political and social motivations and cultural ideologies. Nonetheless, exhibiting fashion in museums has mutual impacts, which include framing fashionable dress beyond merely being historic artefacts, while simultaneously influencing traditional museum practices.

Drawing on Melchior's (2014) research, it can be argued that the contemporary popularity of fashion in museums reflects the shifting interest from dress museology to fashion museology. Dress museology, which is exercised in traditional museums, reflects the emphasis of the practice of collections and studies leaning towards the aesthetics, materials, and techniques of historic clothing dressed on realistic forms – in other words, on the history and cultural representations of dresses on display, which is a typical method of understanding the world. These fashion exhibitions, or to be more specific, costume exhibitions, which have taken place in museums since the early twentieth century, concentrate on the showcasing of dress supported by the practices of collection, storage preservation, clothing maintenance, and display conditions. Dress has been handled and displayed like other artefacts to achieve the museum's educational purposes.

By contrast, fashion museology provides a contemporary approach for curating fashion exhibitions in museums where exhibitions are designed and driven by the creation of the atmosphere in the curatorial space via visual experience and bodily engagement of the audience while they are on site. The approach understands that the spatial atmosphere of the exhibiting space together with the material of the actual dresses actively contribute to the visitor's visual experience and co-produces the on-site story (Liu and Lan, 2020, 2021). "Focusing less on the actual piece of clothing and more on the creation of a visual impression, a narrative to engage and evoke the feelings of the visitor" (Melchior, 2014, 9) drives the contemporary approach of fashion in museums.

Museum practitioners, like administrators and marketing departments, value fashion as rapidly and continuously changing styles (Wilson [1985] 2020) materialized through clothes and bodies who wear them (Entwistle, 2015; Calia, 2020); in this constant pursuit of newness, the styling practices of the fashion industry can consolidate museum exhibition design and improve the audience's aesthetic experience. Apart from attracting more, and specifically new and younger, visitors who are considered non-traditional museum visitors, fashion exhibitions can increase the vitality of museums. As Melchior (2014) notes, "fashion museology describes the focus of museums on fashion and the declaration of new museum ideologies in what can be seen as a reaction to the new museology paradigm" (6). Moreover, scholars focus on the ways that "museums have become ideal platforms for fashion display, on fashion's potential for other areas of museum practice outside the exhibition, and fashion's role in developing and transforming the museum as a twenty-first century cultural institution" (1–2). Museums are regarded as non-commercial spaces, and the entrance of fashion, particularly high-end contemporary fashion, makes museums a part of the fashion system, another channel of display for the fashion industry (Anderson, 2000). For example, according to Webb and Yokobosky (2020), dress-centered fashion exhibitions are mainly

shown in two ways, either as a collection of works by a certain designer and/or brand, or a display with a sense of avant-garde that is not intended to be worn on a daily basis, such as the *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London which had almost half a million visitors from both UK and overseas (Calinao and Lin, 2017).

Focusing on the immanent on-site visiting experience, many museum scholars and practitioners are investigating how fashion is experienced in museum contexts, such as fashion exhibitions held in art museums, design museums, cultural historic museums, and museums of science and technology. In fashion exhibitions at various museum institutions, the space in the building designed to display objects has been the center of the discussion on how fashion has been integrated into the field of museological display. There are many other characteristic places and spaces for displaying dresses, such as in art galleries, community spaces, and shopping centers. As Potvin (2009) notes, the “spaces which influence the display and representation of fashion” (6) are critical in realizing the clothing on display – specifically, the interrelation between the dress on display and the body perceiving it. In this regard, the historic inherited and culturally charged space is always more provocative than a “white cube” in mediating the physical presentation of the dresses and the subsequent cultural representation of the display upon the bodies of visitors. Experiencing a fashion exhibition held at a heritage museum on a heritage site may require one’s visual ability to understand the dress in a cultural and historic context, but it takes one’s bodily experience to understand the dress in relation to the present cultural and physical space. Acknowledging that “visibility and visuality conspicuously give fashion meaningful shape, volume, and form” (Potvin, 2009, 7), this shape, volume, and form are meaningful in so far as they are relational to the cultural setting of the built environment and its impact upon the body of the audience. The given values and cultural meanings of fashionable dress are mediated by the space thereafter re-realized by the bodies of the audience while co-making the spatial storytelling in/with the heritage space.

The study, therefore, aims to investigate how the heritage site with rich cultural residuals actively contributes to the haptic experience of the body gained from the displayed clothing, whereby touching and being touched by the textiles are significant in creating understanding of the fashion exhibition. The displayed garments are not always explained away by, or hidden behind, their visual and cultural representation, but instead can be curated according to—and (re)interpreted via—bodily experience and lived encounter.

Exhibiting fashion in the heritage museum—from visual dominance to haptic understanding under the concept of the inclusive museum. Studies on the visual and textual experience of visitors are dominant in discourse on the fashion exhibition; the tactile experience is generally overlooked in fashion museum experience (Petrov, 2011) because haptic experience gained through touching, smelling, hearing, etc., is discouraged, if not totally prohibited, in the museum setting. The traditional museum display method where objects are covered by transparent glass for protection, for example, is a disconnection and denial to haptic experience in the exhibition space. Museum exhibition is predominantly visual (Bennett, 1998), so communication with the public is through visual presentation (Riello, 2011), whereby the symbolic meaning of the object becomes prominent and is interpreted by audiences.

Comprehending the heritage space and the clothing exhibited within via haptic experience. The term “haptic”, or haptic system

(Gibson, 1966), as an embodied way of knowing, has been discussed extensively in the fields of anthropology, ethnography, architecture, cultural geography, and so forth. Haptic refers to more than immediate skin contact and includes internally felt bodily sensations (Paterson, 2007). With recent scholarship focusing on touch or non-visual senses in the field of psychology (Stoller, 1997; Howes, 2003), it is understood that embodied tactile and spatial experience provides a sense of immediacy for the body when interacting with the surroundings. In particular, multisensory quality is deemed as tactility, where skin is the sensing organ, while the other senses including vision “are extensions of the sense of touch” (Pallasmaa, 2014, 34). Tactile experience as a form of non-optical function is contextualised and becomes a part of the heritage understanding (Liu, 2018, 2020, 2022). The tactile experience reactivates multisensory involvement in the embodied process of transferring meaning. This is, therefore, a tactile space; a form of embodied knowledge that promotes cultural interpretations and bodily expressions within the curated space.

Going beyond the visual spectacle in curatorial display and the understanding of the artefacts through cultural representation allows haptic experience to co-produce stories on site. The fashion exhibition curated in context with the heritage environment offers visual experience as well as bodily engagement that enable clothing to be regarded together with cultural and historic values. In this regard, the heritage narration reinterprets and reconnects the dresses to the lived surroundings via bodily movement and engagement. At the same time, however, there is always a balance between the curator-led authorship and the processual, dialogic nature of the exhibition as experienced by visitors (Loscialpo, 2016). The historical understanding of clothing is, therefore, always realized by the body that is embodied with present-day values.

Exhibiting fashionable dresses on a highly culturally-charged heritage site provides access to an inclusive museum via curatorial practice. The inclusive museum contributes to individual recognition and personal development (Mason, 2004), and thereafter to the regeneration of society (Fleming, 2002, 224). The curatorial practice under the concept of the inclusive museum, therefore, seeks to organize displayed dresses to correlate with the audience’s culture and history, by (re)creating the space of the cultural residuals that allows the heritage site to mediate the exhibited dresses. Fashioning heritage in contemporary time “culturalizes” the everyday wear at the same time, whereby the exhibited dresses are presented via an audience-oriented approach that impacts on the bodies of audiences wandering through the space. According to Message (2006), the inclusive museum “refers to the style of architecture, the approaches towards installation, and the modes of publicity circulating around the museum, rather than to what is exhibited” (604). Site-specific curatorial explorations in the heritage museum, compared to other “white cube” spaces, are magnified, changed and different, as there is always a body involved, specifically the presence of the body and bodily movement interacting with/in the heritage space.

The article, therefore, argues that the affective heritage environment provokes bodily experience, promotes the lived encounter while the bodily movement unfolds with/in the space, and situates the displayed clothing in a multisensorial narration, which together continuously co-produces the on-site story. With the heritage space being able to affect upon and be produced by the body, neither the space nor the displayed clothing is a fixed visual and cultural representation. The displayed clothing and anticipated bodily movement manipulated by the curatorial sitting activates the heritage museum as a multisensorial medium.

Method

Our research draws upon ethnographic methods combining participant observation and archival research. The two case studies presented differ in terms of participation. The first case study analysis is the international fashion exhibition by Pierre Cardin in Beijing in 1979. Relevant artefacts and archives examined include photography and texts at the National Library of China and National Digital Library of China in Beijing, undertaken in 2022 and 2023. The second case study is the fashion exhibition, entitled *Peking Express*, curated by Alexander van Slobbe and held at the Beijing Temple of Confucius and Imperial College Museum at Guozijian, Beijing, in 2013. One of the authors was directly involved in the design and co-curation of *Peking Express*; both authors visited the exhibition and the heritage site subsequently, and they have continued to visit the heritage museum an average of three times a year since then. The self-reflection and self-observation during and after the visits foreground our subjectivity towards *Peking Express* and the heritage site in terms of auto-ethnography (Adams et al. 2015; Anderson, 2006; Bochner and Ellis, 2016). Our on-site experiences were documented using photography. The exploration on our personal thoughts, feelings, and observations is used as a qualitative method for understanding the cultural, political, and social meanings of the heritage site that have been manifested as a curatorial space.

Furthermore, the two case studies have been chosen for reasons that are coherent with the advocacy of the bodily inclusive in fashion exhibitions that focus on the socio-culturally embodied and the lived encounter. Firstly, the collaborations in both Cardin's show and *Peking Express* were between a visiting European impresario and local designers/audiences, where the chosen sites, curatorial designs, and selected garments on display were social, cultural, and political statements made by and with all the stakeholders who brought their own values and thoughts into the space. Both Cardin's show and *Peking Express* manifested pioneering attempts to reinterpret traditional characteristics of the heritage space materialized via the curatorial design, while remaining open to further negotiation by the audiences' on-site movement. Secondly, both authors are grounded researchers who use their own bodies in terms of autoethnography for everyday research practice. The selection and comparison of the two cases have many implications for negotiating the bodily inclusive. For example, *Peking Express* involved direct bodily engagement on-site while Cardin's show was indirect requiring involvement in conducting archival research at national libraries. By putting two fashion exhibitions using different approaches side by side, this approach reflects that fashion exhibitions on heritage sites are a vibrant, ongoing cultural negotiation with the constant presence of the body—as designer, curator, audience, and researcher, etc.; from inside and outside of the cultural context; on and off the sites; as well as during and after the exhibition.

In addition, the investigation on fashion exhibitions focuses on the interrelationship between curatorial/heritage space, bodily movement, and displayed clothing in terms of an affective approach. Affect theory has been interrogated and mobilized by the authors in previous studies in terms of heritage/museological/architectural space, and is not repeated here (Liu, 2018, 2020, 2022; Liu and Lan, 2020, 2021, 2021a). In contemporary studies on heritage space, the focus is shifting from the static site and artefact, to questioning engagement, experience, and performance, whereby wandering in the heritage space becomes a process of embodied meaning and sense-making (Waterton, 2014). In other words, heritage space is not only symbolic, but affective (Micieli-Voutsinas, 2017), more-than-representational (Thrift, 2004), and performative and material (Krafft and Adey, 2008). The fashion exhibition taking place within this complex and embodied environment is, therefore,

designed and curated to be more than visual, but rather provocative, haptic, and affectual, which allows the on-site story to be co-produced and constantly emerging through ongoing and dynamic encounters of the body with the heritage-situated clothing.

From visual presentation to bodily engagement in the case of Pierre Cardin's first fashion runway in new China

The international fashion exhibition by Pierre Cardin in Beijing in 1979, following China's opening up policy, was culturally influential in transforming fashion in China into diversity. The exhibition, along with the launch of China's first fashion magazine in 1980 entitled *Shizhuang* (Fashion), reinforced the notion of fashion as visual joy in the Chinese context. This article analyzes the critical presence of the audience in the success of the Cardin exhibition, whereby the exhibition is interpreted as a political and cultural event due to the on-site bodily engagement and the atmosphere co-produced by the presence of the audience. The fashion exhibition is, therefore, more than just a visual feast. The bodies of the Chinese audience both encountered and partially contributed to the curatorial setting and the exhibition space, that is, the social and political context of the late 1970s. The displayed clothing is interpreted and understood by the relationship of the audience to the social and cultural environment. Moreover, the bodies of the audience determine and (re)interpret the exhibition content that the cultural residuals of the historical site mediate.

Fashion exhibition as cultural event. The Cardin show was held at the Cultural Palace of Nationalities.⁴ The venue was the first state-operated and modern-built museum that consisted of a museum, gallery, library, art institute, theater, and other facilities. The architecture was built on the former site of the Court of Justice in the Ming and Qing dynasties. In 1950, Mao proposed at the meeting of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party to build a palace for the ethnic minorities, as China is a multi-ethnic country, to be used as a symbol of the great unity of all ethnic groups and as a center for the activities of compatriots from ethnic minorities. The construction of the palace was completed in 1959 and covered an area of more than 37,000 square meters. The venue was under the administration of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission and chosen because of its cultural representation and political significance for holding the first international fashion exhibition after the nation re-opened to the world.⁵ Only professionals from fashion industries and journalists were permitted to attend,⁶ and about 500 Chinese of all ages viewed this first showing,⁷ as shown in Figs. 1 and 2. It had a significant cultural impact on visitors, enlightening some Chinese artists and designers to realize that fashion reflects cultural embodiment and speaks for the creator.

Prior to the show, Chinese people in the 1970s were used to having blue and gray as the main colours in everyday life, and the Mao suit or Cadre suit was the dominant fashion trend. The monotonous colours and style represented unity, and at the same time diminished gender differences during that period. However, the Pierre Cardin fashion show disrupted the situation by bringing breezy colours and gender-differentiated styles to audiences, which highlighted how fashion is constituted by (im)material elements in expressing ideas that are culturally embedded. At this runway show, Cardin presented a combination of multiple colours and fabrics realized in big silhouettes to express his aesthetic and concept. Called "Superman styles" by *The New York Times*, the displayed garments were visualized with big and wide shoulders inspired by his first trip to China in 1978, as well as his first experience of climbing the Great Wall (Fig. 3),⁸



Fig. 1 First international fashion show at the Cultural Palace of Nationalities, 1979. Source: National Library of China and National Digital Library of China, Beijing.



Fig. 2 The monotonous colours and style of clothing worn by the audience at the show in 1979. Source: National Library of China and National Digital Library of China, Beijing.

with the sweeping shoulders of the collection evoking the rooves of Chinese traditional temples.⁹ The shape and sense of the Chinese traditional style roof with identical layers of tiles sloping downwards is eye-catching. In particular, the oversized sweeping shoulders of the garments in the designs visually enhanced the various body figures, making them look as dignified and steady as the Chinese traditional style roof.

This exhibition was more than just visually pleasant; it was a form of cultural critique. There was volume-based design in Cardin's collection as well as the representation of the hybrid concept in the form of western cutting and shape that culturally embodied traditional Chinese architecture. It was therefore not just a fashion show to introduce western fashion style, but also a milestone educational event that broadened the perspective on fashion and identity in the Chinese context. Unlike Yves Saint Laurent, who presented his "Les Chinoises" collection in a museum-like exhibition in China in the late 1970s without at all having been to China,¹⁰ there was an element of bodily involvement for Cardin whose collection was based on his personal experiences of visiting and exchanging ideas with the cultural communities (Webb and Yokobosky, 2020). Prior to this, Cardin had begun to explore gender-based dressing by experimenting with garment forms. He then travelled to China in the 1970s, when it was still very much about the Mao uniform, as shown in Fig. 4. Cardin worked with local designers there and came to know the ethos behind the style of the uniform and its physical structure. Cardin did not just "incorporate aesthetic features of Chinese dress as ornament or even blindly copy a



Fig. 3 Pierre Cardin at the Great Wall for the first time in 1978. Source: *Pierre Cardin A Legend in China*, and National Library of China and National Digital Library of China, Beijing.

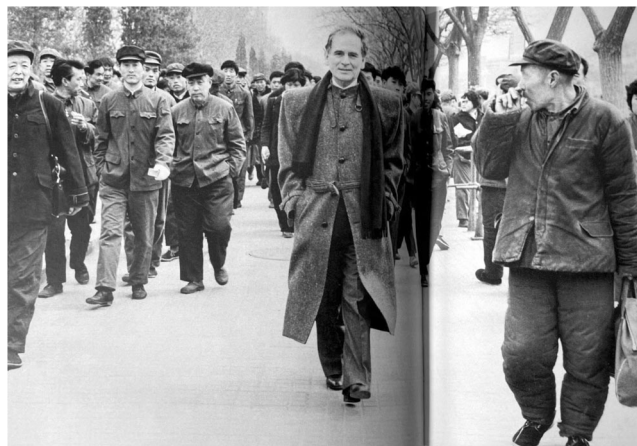


Fig. 4 Pierre Cardin walking in a street on an early visit to China. The picture reflects everyday dress in the 1970s. Source: National Library of China and National Digital Library of China, Beijing.

silhouette; his design work engaged in a dialogue with the whole Chinese modernist cultural aspirations of the time" (Webb and Yokobosky, 2020, 191). Fashion as a term in China became pluralistic from the moment that the 1979 Pierre Cardin runway show was held and, at the same time, became the zeitgeist of the new era. Fashion had transitioned from an object to a culturally embodied event in the Chinese context.

The presence of the lived cultural body. In *The Open Work*, Eco (1962) describes how an artwork can be finished. After the creator provides the artwork and when the audience gets close to it and



Fig. 5 The French model Maryse Gaspard at the Great Wall in 1979.

Source: National Library of China and National Digital Library of China, Beijing.

feels it, the encounter between creator, artwork, and audience produces a chemical reaction; this reaction completes the final work. By extension, the cultural body of the Chinese audience completes the show at the moment of encounter between the body and displayed clothing which characterizes the space and invests the show with cultural significance. In other words, the Pierre Cardin fashion show was obviously successful, in so far as the achievement was constituted by Cardin (as the designer), the collection, and Chinese audiences at that time. As journalist Li Andong stated in 2020 recalls, “the fashion show brought colours to Chinese people’s perception of fashion at that time.”¹¹ The Chinese bodies, who, for a decade, had only seen the majority of clothing in dark green and dark blue, the typical colours of the Cultural Revolution, were overwhelmed by the show. The runway, particularly how the Chinese body emotionally related to the clothing on site, was reviewed by journalists and professionals and later written about by Chinese scholars Yuan and Hu (2011), thus underscoring the historical significance of the show. The photograph in Li’s report depicts the Chinese audience physically showing their realization through their bodies, wrapped in dresses with plain colours while surrounded by the collection in multiple colours, worn by professional models brought in from France and Japan for the catwalk¹², wherein “the monotony of black and grey uniforms that shrouded China back then was forever shattered by the brand” (Xu, 2018). As part of the fashion promotion, models were also taken to the Great Wall to interact with local audiences, as shown in Fig. 5, and the visual contrast was delineated in a *Global Times* report.

Granted that the political momentum of the time had contributed to the success of the fashion runway resulting in its social and cultural impact, the physical space was also significant in mediating the bodily engagement by co-producing the on-site atmosphere with the bodies of audiences who just emerged from the Cultural Revolution. As Potvin notes, “spaces and places have often been overlooked in the writing of the visual and material cultures of fashion” (2009, 1). The space for the runway at the Cultural Palace of Nationalities was already inscribed with cultural and political meanings. The richness of this space enabled and assured the encounter of Chinese body and displayed clothing, thus creating the lived atmosphere impacting upon the bodies of the audience wandering within. In other words, the quality of the cultural space matters.

From runway to museum-like exhibition: bodily interaction in/with the fashion space. Unlike the runway show, where clothing is worn by models, museum-like fashion exhibition is exhibited without human flesh, yet there is still a sense of bodily presence.

Extending the view on thinking body, clothing, and space together to investigate the museum-like fashion exhibition, it can be posited that the audience does not only visually perceive the actual clothing on display, but is also engaged with those bodies that either used to wear or are supposed to be wearing the clothing in society. As Halls points out, “a garment can be regarded as the remaining outer shell of a living person and will reflect that person’s taste, position, way of life, or even a transient mood of gaiety or grief, more faithfully and more directly than other arts” (1968, 303, as quoted in Petrov, 2019, 25). This is because of the affective and sensory capacities of our bodies: “... through our bodies that we can feel the materiality of our clothes, and their touch and fit, and it is only through our bodies that we can see, feel, understand, and comprehend the world and our place within it” (Crewe, 2017, 5).

In the museum-like fashion exhibition, the moving bodies of the audience and the interaction with the displayed dresses construct the exhibition scene and, in turn, characterizes the space; the audience visually perceives the materials and technology of the dresses while, at the same time, walking around the dresses in the space to bodily experience the absentee bodies wearing the dresses. The cultural meaning is realized and formed by both visual and bodily experience on site. The museum-like fashion exhibition visually presents the absence of the body to activate self-imaging of the audience’s bodily movement with reference to the displayed dresses. The following case study shows the haptic experience in a fashion exhibition in a heritage space.

Fashioning the heritage and culturing the everyday wear in Peking Express

In 2013, Dutch fashion designer Alexander van Slobbe presented a fashion exhibition as a project to showcase garments created by a group of Chinese students on the heritage site of the Beijing Temple of Confucius and Imperial College Museum. The fashion exhibition is one of seven “Design Goes Dutch” multi-platform events during Beijing Design Week 2013 with Amsterdam as Guest City.¹³ The exhibition is a continuation of a Sino-Dutch exchange project initiated in 2010 for the Shanghai World Expo under the theme of the Dutch Golden Age. Unlike the other design exhibitions that were held at the 798 Art Precinct, the Capital Museum, and the China Museum of Digital Arts during Design Week,¹⁴ Van Slobbe’s fashion exhibition took place on a heritage site. Based on the theme of “Chinese Red”, which is a color embedded with traditional value, the exhibition was visualized and materialized through the presentation of 20 garments made in silk, the material long associated with the nation, created by the students under the guidance of Van Slobbe and Lan LAN.

Beijing Temple of Confucius and Imperial College Museum, as suggested by its title, is a combination of two juxtaposed heritage sites, wherein typical Chinese courtyards with major buildings sitting on the central axis occupy about 22,000 and 27,000 square meters of land respectively. The major buildings on these heritage sites are more than 700 years old and have been turned into a museum with permanent and periodic exhibitions. Apart from the traditional architecture, there are many stone tablets in the space as a part of its heritage layout. In particular, there are 189 stones, each measuring 305 cm by 106 cm by 31.5 cm, lined up in the space, which were carved in 1794 with over 630,000 Chinese characters narrating 13 Confucian classics. This is a traditional heritage museum setting, that is, the museum of the past with a permanent collection, which is object-oriented and defined according to the categories of objects they collect, research, and display, exhibiting cultural objects representing a particular community during a particular period of history.

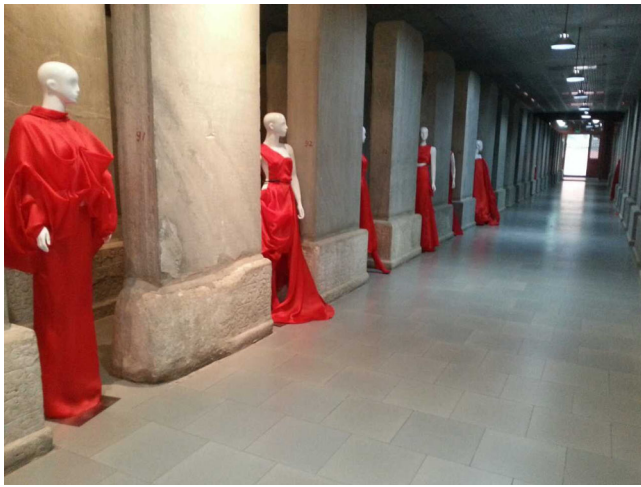


Fig. 6 The displayed dresses are set up alongside the stone tablets, thus creating a sense of textural and visual contrast in-between. Photo: Lan LAN, 2013.

Barnard (2014) notes that clothing is understood as a social tool when it is culturally embodied and worn by people. The interactions between body and dress determine the meanings communicated which are in a constant state of flux (Ryan, 2014). There is a sense of ‘mobility’ in clothing, which is out there ‘circulating’ in everyday society. The ‘mobility’ of clothing is crucial in fulfilling its social functionality. Hence, ‘immobile’ clothing, or unworn clothing exhibited in a museum in static terms for example, is not only “filled with potential” (Mackey et al. 2017, 63), but has constructed a spatial storytelling in its interaction with the space and body of the audience on site. As an analogy, money kept in a savings account, and therefore not spent and circulated in the economy, has lost its physical function, but still has value. The same sense applies to clothing displayed in a museum. Instead of being worn and used to interact with/in the everyday society, this clothing not only still functions to “produce emotions, sensory experiences, and engender memories” (Crewe, 2017, 4) with its embodied, cultural, and historic values, but also forms the interaction between space, body, and clothing via haptic experience contextualized with historic value on the heritage site.

Traditionally, the garments on display at museums are either covered by glass or distanced by stands in order to keep visitors away from the artefacts, thereby the body is restrained and walking merely serves as a transport method. Requiring minimum effort from the body of the audience, the displayed dresses are usually accompanied by explanatory labels featuring essential information displayed alongside. Plinths of various heights are deployed to create visual rhythm in the space. These are all things done for the pleasure of eye. However, the garments in *Peking Express* were not there passively waiting to be visually perceived and appreciated by the audience. The garments were designed to be positioned according to the characteristics of the heritage space to construct a dialogue between displayed garments and the heritage space and inclusive components, such as wooden columns and windows, fallen tiles on the ground, and cracked stone steps and dirt walls, that are themselves rich, sensorial objects and have value in terms of heritage. Rather than being locked away or kept away from touch in a traditional museum setting, the space and the included objects are fully accessible in terms of tactility via touch, smell, etc. while walking and recalling to offer intimate sensibility.

After Van Slobbe and Lan LAN visited the heritage site and saw, in particular, the stone tablets, the theme and possible



Fig. 7 The rear space of the displayed clothing is accessible so that the audience can move back and forth freely to interact with the dresses. Photo: Lan LAN, 2013.

curatorial design were derived in consideration of the singularities of the space. The design brief focused on the exploration of contemporary Chinese fashion designer identity and how their contemporary designs, which are culturally embodied, responds to the historic environment loaded with heritage and cultural residuals. The students were asked to use culturally embodied silk, the color red, and take inspiration from a self-chosen traditional element, such as the Cloth Tiger from popular folk art, to design a contemporary garment. In other words, students were asked to refine and re-organize traditional elements in a contemporary manner and avoid traditional costume-like silhouettes, such as the stand collar, or visual narrations copied directly from tradition. There were no restrictions on the method of making.

The dresses were placed in juxtaposition with the stone tablets that shared the space, as shown in Fig. 6. The audience had to walk alongside and across corridors formed by the lines of stone tablets to see the whole shape of the displayed dresses, as shown in Fig. 7. Certain efforts were required from the visitors as actions demanded by the setting in order to fully explore the spatial storytelling. These bodily actions, which included walking alongside or bending over to sneak through the gap between dresses and stone tablets, touching the silky clothing and hard stone surface, etc., were haptic experiences to realize the fashionable color of royal scarlet against the achromatic color between the extremes of black and white in the heritage space.

The curatorial decision to exhibit the dresses is an experimentation in interpreting and, at the same time, being interpreted by the heritage space. The fashionable dresses are used as a tool to interrogate the space that has two-way effects. The exhibition allows the dresses to be experienced and understood alongside the stone tablets as a spatial scenario; at the same time, the audience can (re)image the historic residuals in the culturally charged space that has been fashioned on site. Hence, the fashionable clothing is a proactive intervention to (re)explore the cultural heritage through the lens of contemporary fashion. Fashion and its constant changing in styles and pursuit of newness activates the ‘fixed’ heritage value of the space. In turn, the fashionable dresses are re-framed within the space of cultural heritage.

The displayed dresses are set up alongside the stone tablets, thus creating a sense of textural and visual contrast in-between. Apart from the color red and the use of silk, which are culturally embodied and historically inherited and connect the exhibits to the heritage space, the in/direct presence of the body is multiply manifest in the space. The interaction between the clothing, the stone tablets, and the bodies of audience creates a sense of bodily



Fig. 8 The stone tablets are fixed on the ground and would not fall on the audience. The fashionable dresses are placed as the absolute protagonists in the space. Apart from exhibition design, Van Slobbe also designed and made three garments for the exhibition. Photo: Lan LAN, 2013.

making in the space. Specifically, this sense borrows from Bryson's view on Chinese landscape painting as an example of how the subject matter is both the depicted landscape and, equally, "the work of the 'brush' in real time and as extension of the painter's own body" (1983, 89). The Chinese calligraphy carved on the stone tablets shows the process of each stroke of every Chinese character made, one after another and/or one (partially) overlapping another, in a sequential order, that is different from everyday writing rules on rice paper. The traces of each vigorous and forceful hammering and chiseling on the stones, their depth and width, are the records of bodily force of lettering and movement in front of the stones. The artist's personal "trace," or imprint is important in the Chinese tradition (Fong, 1992, 5). Human marks made in the past and surviving the passage of time are captured in this historic space. The content of the Confucian classics on the stone tablets might affect the audience, despite the difficulty in reading them due to the partial loss in their legibility due to weathering over past centuries. Nevertheless, the contextualized brush/chisel traces revealing the prior (semi)vanished sequence of marks preserve the cultural residuals in bits and pieces that provoke bodily experience on site. The cannot-be-fully-recognized text is perceived as part of the spatial pattern in the contextualization which characterizes the space.

Hence, the impact of the stone tablets upon the audience and the way the audience interacts with the stone tablets inform the audience's approach to the dresses displayed next to them. The fashionable clothing is encountered and perceived in the heritage space; they do "not simply function as backdrops but are pivotal to the meaning and vitality that the experiences of fashion trace" (Potvin, 2009, 1). The fashionable dresses can then to be understood as traces of bodily actions of the makers, the group of Chinese fashion students, involving the process of making and revising, capturing every action of the single needle that has resulted in pieces of thread in the hand-sewn garments over a period of time and re-imaged according to the marks left on the material. More importantly, the re-imagination of possible bodily gesture and movement in cutting and sewing silk cloth bring bodily presence to the fashion exhibition that is understood when contextualized by the spatial characteristic of the site.

Haptic experience through bodily interaction in the space is encouraged through the curatorial setting. The rear space of the displayed clothing is accessible so that audience can move back and forth freely to interact with the dresses. There are no



Fig. 9 Van Slobbe with student designers and a heritage museum staff member explain the concept of the exhibition to audiences, and encourage them to touch and walk around within the curated heritage site. Photo: Lan LAN, 2013.

Do-Not-Touch signs or any equipment to keep the audience away in the exhibiting space, as shown in Fig. 8. It was observed that the audience occasionally touched the clothing and the stone tablets to feel the textures, and to experience the spaces formed by and in-between the pleats of the clothing, as shown in Fig. 9. The gap between each clothing and the stone tablet is neither a proper pathway nor a complete blockage. We observed that most audience members walked all the way down the corridor and then turned into the next path to see the back of the dresses, however some managed to get through these gaps as a shortcut; they moved back and forth between the corridors to see the dresses from multiple angles while conducting 'not-so-comfortable' bodily actions and gestures. The dresses were not 'still' in the eyes of audience and not viewed through the 'standard viewpoint', but rather as they 'moved' along with the body when bending over, leaning to one side, stooping down, etc. It is almost impossible to move through the gaps without touching the clothing or stone tablets, so the bodies of the audience had to bend or squeeze in order to achieve the passing through while keeping in balance. The display promotes complex bodily actions in the curatorial space where haptic experience is implicitly encouraged. The exhibition is perceived and driven by individual bodily experience.

Fashion spaces are constituted through hybrid relations and connections to other places (Gilbert, 2006). Fashioning the heritage museum space is a proactive action to articulate the experience of clothing out there in the society by creating an inclusive space of heritage and fashion to consolidate the experience of "being-in-the-world" (Pallasmaa, 2005, 11), thereby strengthening our sense of self and space.

Conclusion

The article investigates fashion in heritage museums under the concept of fashion museology. Heritage museums in the Chinese context emphasize the collection, protection, and display of the objects of human activities and natural environments for the purpose of research, education, and aesthetics; these museums "act as repositories of cultural memory, gathering up material objects and information to guard against its anticipated loss" (Morgan and Macdonald, 2020, 56). Traditional curatorial practices at Chinese heritage museums can be expanded and magnified by bringing fashionable clothing displays on site. The culturally inscribed space complexifies the interaction between body and clothing whereby the heritage space mediates the

clothing that is perceived by the bodies of the audience. Fashion in heritage museums is not only a visual fascination but a haptic experience where the bodily movement of the audience on, and promoted by, the heritage space during the interaction (re) articulates the cultural meanings of the displayed clothing. The article argues that the fashion in heritage museums presents inclusive museum via haptic experience, that the exhibition is understood through skin and the involvement of whole bodily movement, resulting in a body inclusive space. Therefore, audience access to the cultural heritage on site is inclusive in so far that, regardless of their class, age, gender, ethnicity, and education, the audience's understanding of the exhibition is realized via individual bodily movement, as shown in Fig. 9.

The characteristic of heritage architecture (Liu and Lan, 2021; Liu, 2022) enables the museum on heritage sites to become the center of the case study in the discussion. The heritage space is a performative site where the museum within can harness and make practical use of the affective interrelationship ensuring the quality of the fashion exhibition experience. Acknowledging other kinds of museums can set the stage for a tactile, haptic, and interactive fashion exhibition, the museum as a part of the heritage space itself that is culturally embodied and historically inherent offers an affective and immersive spatial experience. The heritage architectural space is characterized by the bodily co-produced atmosphere (Böhme, 2014), which is multisensorial as the "quality of environmental immersion that registers in and through sensing bodies..." (McCormack, 2008, 413). The curatorial practice on heritage sites is an active recharacterization of the ambiance of the historic space by for example not only displaying artefacts from outside of the cultural and historic site but promoting multisensorial interaction through the bodily movement of visitors in the space. Therefore, exhibiting fashion on heritage sites shall emphasize emotional sensibility and material-haptic experience which are an immediate appreciation towards and a construction of lived encounters on displayed clothing. Exhibiting fashion on heritage sites is being-in-the-world by prioritizing the spatial sense of vagueness and indeterminacy in the study of fashion museology, rather than focusing on the formal quality and visual features of garments. The haptic experience becomes an alternative means to (re)interpret displayed clothing.

Although runway shows held at heritage sites are commonplace, the static display of fashionable clothing in heritage sites is rarely seen in China; however, the latter is gradually generating curatorial and academic interest in the Chinese context. For example, the *The Silk Road and Celestial Clothes* exhibition was held in 2017 in Beijing at The Imperial Ancestral Temple built in 1420 A.D. Exhibiting fashion on the heritage site enables a dynamic interaction that leads to the formation of the body inclusive space. In particular, fashionable clothing, as made artefacts, suggests a pursuit of newness while presenting human actions conducted in the past via the marks of the making, for example. The bodily engagement with/in the space articulates the body's presence in relation to fashionable clothing; it is a way of understanding clothing besides wearing or merely looking at it. Apart from clothing made to be worn and for expression, clothing is created and displayed to be "surrounded" by moving bodies, whose eyes, hands, skins, etc., can be in direct contact to (re) explore and (re)imagine human traces in time and space, where the space of body inclusivity emerges in terms of the lived experience of individuals. The inclusive space and the dynamic interaction taking place within can neither be simply thought of as a traditional historic site nor a facilitator to allow fashion to be displayed, rather the inclusiveness of bodily movement challenges the audience's understanding of the traditional, static fashion exhibition in the museum institute as "fixed" heritage from the

past. The bodily movement of the audience when encountering fashion in heritage museums is being curated to shed light on culture as haptic experience.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this research as no data were generated or analysed.

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Notes

- 1 Alternatively called 21st century museology or postmodern museology.
- 2 Pierre Cardin whose geometric shapes became popular in fashion movement of the early 1970s and was a renowned fashion designer by the late 1970s when this exhibition was held (Länge, 2005).
- 3 The participating students majored in fashion studies and were from Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology (BIFT) and China Central Academy of Fine Art (CAFA).
- 4 The First China International Clothing and Accessories Fair (CHIC) was held in Beijing in 1993. Pierre Cardin, along with the other two well-known fashion designers, Gianfranco Ferré and Valentino, exhibited their collections at the Temple of Heaven, which is a UNESCO world heritage-listed site, but not a museum.
- 5 http://www.news.cn/english/2020-12/31/c_139633078.htm.
- 6 http://pierrecardin.com.cn/wordpress/?page_id=31&lang=en.
- 7 <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/03/20/archives/cardin-shows-haute-couture-designs-in-china.html>.
- 8 http://pierrecardin.com.cn/wordpress/?page_id=31&lang=en.
- 9 <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/03/20/archives/cardin-shows-haute-couture-designs-in-china.html>.
- 10 According to "YSL 25-Year Retrospective "Astonishes" Peking Viewers" published in *Los Angeles Times* on May 10, 1985, although Saint Laurent's works were inspired by Chinese art and culture, these references all originated from books or photographs about China. Regarding the "Les Chinoises" collection and the Retrospective, Saint Laurent admitted, "Perhaps some of these clothes are not appropriate for the Chinese, but the materials and technology are appropriate." The YSL 25-Year Retrospective was launched at the National Art Museum of China on May 6, 1985. The exhibition was successful and admired by Chinese audiences. However, it came from the western dream of China, and its purpose was described by Saint Laurent in the following terms: "I love China, so I chose China as my second retrospective. I hope Chinese people could understand the fashion history of development in Europe in the past 20 years and the world fashion trends through my design works. This retrospective fashion exhibition is a culture and art communication and a bunch of flowers I send to my beloved China."
- 11 http://www.news.cn/english/2020-12/31/c_139633078.htm.
- 12 Professional modelling was unknown in China before the 1980s (Finnane, 2008, 264).
- 13 "Design Goes Dutch" is an interactive communication where designers from Amsterdam, Beijing, and around the world meet on equal footing and contribute jointly in formulating design solutions to the pressing issues of today and of tomorrow.
- 14 Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam presented Marcel Wanders and Benthem Crouwel at the Capital Museum, Beijing. The works included Marcel Wanders' Knotted Chair, Gerrit Rietveld's Red and Blue Chair, and Hella Jongerius' vases. Works by Dutch new media artist Sander Veenhof and the game studio Monobanda were presented at the China Museum of Digital Arts.

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Author contributions

L.L. conceived the study, conducted the research, and wrote the manuscript. P.L. conceived the study, conducted the research, and wrote the manuscript.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical approval

Ethical approval was not required as the study did not involve human participants.

Informed consent

This was not relevant, as the article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

Additional information

Correspondence and requests for materials should be addressed to Peng Liu.

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