

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Celebrities put their might behind China's sustainability agenda

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A sustainability-focused exhibition in Shanghai is showcasing donated pieces from Chinese stars, including model Liu Wen and Chanel ambassador Zhou Xun. Image courtesy of CanU

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As awareness of the current climate emergency grows, attitudes towards sustainable fashion are changing in major Chinese cities a trend which is expected to trickle down to lower-tier areas.

According to [Daxue Consulting Green Guilt Report 2022](#), 77 percent of surveyed consumers 75 percent of whom are based in first-tier cities are willing to pay 5-20 percent extra for sustainable fashion products, with up to 20 percent of upper-class Chinese consumers open to paying double for such lines.

A leading fashion capital, Shanghai is not a city to miss out on such movements.

From July 22 to Aug. 2, the historic building at 52 Yongfu Road, Xuhui District will host "ULIO: The Sustainable Fashion Exhibition." More than 30 artists, designers and industry leaders have been invited to showcase 52 art pieces across 4,300 square meters, each examining the fashion industry's relationship with nature and looking at new and alternative answers to sustainability.

A special project unveiled at the exhibition, "Can You Recall," will feature items such as Liu Wen's first evening dress from Alexander Wang, Chanel ambassador Zhou Xun's first Chanel haute couture suit and Lanvin's archival pieces designed by Alber Elbaz.

With the aim of extending the lifecycle of a garment, celebrities, designers and other prominent figures have donated treasured pieces to the cause.

The show was initiated by Cui Dan and is co-curated with CanU's creative director, Monica Mong, and independent sustainable content planner Yidi Chen.

CanU is a sustainable fashion platform and a strategic partner of Shanghai Fashion Week's sustainable development program Ulio as well as a partner of the China National Textile and Apparel Council. It works closely with the industry supply chain manufacturers, brands and core creatives to drive a more ethical approach to production.

"Since around two years ago, CanU has been doing work to increase and promote sustainability by having public awareness events and also industry events to connect people within the different spectra of sustainability to collaborate," said Vincent Djen, cofounder of Remakehub, which provides a circular solution for waste pollution in the fashion industry.

According to Beijing's [14th Five-Year Plan](#), sustainable development and green consumption are two top priorities of the state's agenda. Domestic names have been committed to it: Djen mentioned [Li-Ning](#), [JNBY](#) and [Bosideng](#), which are working on lowering their scope 1 and 2 carbon emissions, while many native labels have been using sustainable renewable materials like [Tencel](#) and Naia.

"China's fashion industry is involved in sustainability just as much as the West," Mr.Djen said. "All the listed companies in China have to file ESG reports."

Mr. Djen indicated that the industry is doing many things to make the sector more sustainable without the buzz of PR communications. Exhibitions such as this therefore become an important tool for spreading public awareness.

The use of celebrity influence will further boost citizens' excitement and help drive traffic to the topic too, especially younger consumers. Events, panels and initiatives should follow up to keep interest high and ultimately influence young shoppers' purchase choices.

However, Christina Dean, founder of charity Redress, noted that there will always be the question as to whether customers have the attention span to access the deeper concepts in these works some of which can be fairly complex. This means makers, too, need a forum to experiment.

Ms. Dean said how "it takes some vulnerability for creatives to try new practices and statements. And so this exhibition seemingly welcomes a much-needed space to raise awareness of the connection of the fashion industry to nature and our environment. There is the global need to keep on drip-feeding, influencing and educating consumers."

As the world's factory for fashion, renowned for being its most polluting country, the mainland's advance towards emission reduction and sustainable practice will play a crucial role in the future of the industry.

Not surprisingly, developments such as this exhibition show that welcome change is afoot. It cannot come soon enough.

"China is absolutely integral both from a consumer and production perspective," Ms. Dean said.

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