



China: Through the Looking Glass

Andrew Bolton

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For centuries, China's export arts—jade, silks, porcelains, and, more recently, cinema—have fueled Western fantasies of an exotic East and served as enduring sources of inspiration for fashion. This stunning publication, which accompanied one of the most successful exhibitions in The Metropolitan Museum of Art's history, explores the influence of Chinese aesthetics on designers, including Giorgio Armani, Christian Dior, Jean Paul Gaultier, Karl Lagerfeld, Ralph Lauren, Alexander McQueen, and Yves Saint Laurent. Drawing upon Chinese decorative arts, cinema, and costume—notably imperial court robes, the close-fitting cheongsam, and the unisex Mao suit—their designs are fantastical pastiches of anachronistic motifs. As in the game of “telephone,” the process of cultural translation transforms the source material into ingeniously original fashions that are products solely of the designers' imaginations.

In a similar way, contemporary Chinese film directors render fanciful, highly stylized evocations of various epochs in China's history—demonstrating that China's imagery is equally seductive to artists in the East and further inspiring today's designers. Juxtaposing modern fashions and film stills with their forebears in fine and decorative arts and historical dress, this book reveals the rich and ongoing creative dialogue between East and West, past and present.

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