

Title: China Focuses on Sustainable Fashion with the Help Of Millennials

Written By: Svitlana hrabovsky

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Shanghai Fashion Week A21 premiered this past April, introducing over 100 live shows to its attendees. The focus this year seemed to be on green choices for the fashion market, which included events that spotlighted material interventions, fabric developments, circularity, as well as upstream trade business promotions.

The Pandemic's Effect on Chinese Consumerism

For Chinese brands specifically, the pandemic, with its unexpected disruption of the textile market, has helped sway those within the industry towards seeking more sustainable choices. The government has also upheld this approach. In September of last year, President Xi Jinping announced that China was aiming towards reaching carbon neutrality by 2060. Since the formalization of its 14th Five Year Plan in March, the National People's Congress (NPC) of China has also been strongly encouraging and promoting the development of green consumption. A recent article in Forbes likewise noted that China currently owns the largest green finance market in the world.

The pandemic may have a lot to do with such a transition in aspirations. The shake up and destruction of old ways of doing business no longer make sense in a world where consumers are focused on more modest shopping habits, as well as investment pieces over fast fashion. Brands too realize that by adopting clean technology and other such similar sustainable practices, that they are then appealing to a consumer set that has an increasingly influential voice.

Daniel Langer, CEO of Équité and a professor at Pepperdine University covering luxury strategy, noted in a piece for *Jing Daily* that prior to the pandemic, though consumers would on occasion inquire about sustainability, their questions would rarely lead to any sort of notable action. However, in speaking with the head of the Asia-Pacific region for a top-ten global fashion brand, he has found that consumers today, specifically young and affluent ones, see sustainability as a main indicator of whether or not they will purchase a piece.

Chinese Millennials Desire More from Brands

Why young and affluent consumers in particular? For that, we must look at the US as a comparison. The boom of DTC brands, which seem to have originated within the West - Coast Silicon Valley elite, have since cemented themselves as millennial staples. When transported to and translated within the Chinese market, these types of brands best resonate with China's millennial elite and middle and upper class youths.

Social media definitely has a play in influencing this specific group. "On social media, these brands are also promoted by Chinese KOLs, who live and work in the Silicon Valley area, or by

local influencers who seem to have a successful career in one of China's Fortune 500 companies," said Emma Li, founder of the fashion marketing blog and podcast "Annstand," to *Jing Daily*. As a result, young people are more aware of the perils of textile production and instead desire brands that represent a more laid back approach. Similar to their American counterparts, Chinese millennials have too noted the effects of a "millennial burnout", due to a post-pandemic recession and competitive environment. Instead, they now seek a more minimalist and purposeful life.

Brands That Deliver

Veronica Chou, the daughter of successful Hong Kong textile tycoon Silas Chou, stated in an interview with *Hong Kong Tatler*, "My father was all about making as much money as possible. For me, making some kind of positive impact is also important. I had this epiphany that whatever I do has to have a bit more of a purpose."

With a similar mindset as the driving factor, Wendy Yu, the founder of Yu Holdings, recently launched the inaugural Yu prize at Shanghai Fashion Week to support emerging Chinese designers. "In the space of just a season or two, the momentum has picked up with fashion companies, industry stakeholders, and consumers taking action toward environmental sustainability," Yu wrote in a piece for *Vogue*. "More than ever, I noticed a collective consciousness emerging. Even in China — a country known for its consumption and an insatiable appetite for luxury — the mood is changing. And it all starts with education."

Streetwear brands, which have long been known for their exclusive "drops", are also leading the way in sustainable tactics. Already ahead of the curve due to their production practices, many brands, such as Taiwanese functional streetwear label oqLiq, have found other ways to practice going green (specifically utilizing technology).

According to findings from Metabolic, a Dutch consulting company that tackles sustainability challenges, Taiwan's textile industry is leading in the specialization of performance fabrics made from waste based products such as PET bottles and coffee grounds. At the moment, the nation is leading in efforts towards reaching circularity and sustainability.

In 2015 oqLiq, which is based in the southwestern coastal town of Tainan, won the Red Dot Award *and* the ID design award for their shoes which were made using leather from reservoir sludge ("Bi-birth sludge leather"). After this, the brand exploded in popularity and began participating in other fashion events including Italy's Pitti Uomo and NYFW in 2020. Currently, oqLiq designs are sold in Taiwan and with select retailers online from Guangzhous and Seoul to across the Pacific in Chicago.

Chi "Hay" Hong, one of the designers and co-founders behind oqLiq, mentioned to *Jing Daily* the philosophy of their brand, which includes practicing a zero-waste lifestyle. To them, sustainability is only one aspect, and not its entire identity and marketing strategy. Rather, the brand also focuses on increasing the value of its products through limited capsule collections.

They understand that such a method may encourage young Chinese citizens to discuss the brand, and spread further influence through online forums. In the long term, such steps may embolden others to live a minimalist lifestyle with pieces that will last a lifetime, and not just a season.¹

¹ [Why Sustainability Is Trending With China's Millennials](#)