

# China Girls

As standards soar and necklines plunge, Chinese fashion is gripping the globe like a tightly laced corset. **Diana Hubbell** rounds up the bold and innovative ladies behind the looks.

**"MADE IN CHINA"** ONCE stood for shoddy or mass-produced, uninspired garments. But today some of the industry's biggest tastemakers are coming from the People's Republic. The Metropolitan Museum of Art's "China Through the Looking Glass" exhibition of more than 140 ready-to-wear and haute couture pieces drew some 670,000 visitors, smashing the previous record set by Alexander McQueen and extending its run through September 2015. Meanwhile, waifs clad in Chinese creations strutted down fashion week catwalks in New York, Paris, London and Berlin, eliciting all sorts of *oohs* and *aahs*. From breakout stars to local icons finally receiving recognition, here are the names to know.

**RAN FAN, *RanFan***  
Last year might have been her New York Fashion Week debut, but Ran Fan sashayed onto the stage like a pro. Her statement pieces in jewel and cream tones earned her the Mercedes-Benz China Emerging Designer Award, as well as the adoration of critics at home and

abroad. Figure-flattering shapes and natural fabrics such as wool, silk and lambskin make these garments imminently wearable. It doesn't hurt that Fan earned her credentials both in London and at Beijing's Tsinghua University, a dual set of degrees that bolster her cross-cultural aesthetic sensibilities. [ranfanstyle.com](http://ranfanstyle.com).

**MASHA MA, *Mashama***  
It comes as no surprise that Masha Ma interned with Alexander McQueen during her time at London's prestigious Central Saint Martins; her designs have a dark humor and otherworldly feel that would make the late, great pioneer proud. Given her flair for the



Safari-chic aesthetic from Wang Tao.

COURTESY OF TAORAY WANG. OPPOSITE: COURTESY OF MASHAMA (2)

dramatic, it seems fitting that both Lady Gaga and Naomi Campbell are fans. Slick, iridescent fabrics, see-through mesh and sculptural forms characterize Ma's 2016 collection, her eighth to appear in Paris Fashion Week. Though she just celebrated her 30th birthday, her brand is already soaring high—around 10,000 meters, to be exact. Last year, British Airways commissioned Ma to design an East-meets-West livery, complete with her signature, to be emblazoned across the side of one of the airline's Boeing 777s. [fb.com/mashama.paris](http://fb.com/mashama.paris).

**VEGA ZAISHI WANG, *Vega Zaishi Wang***  
This rebel designer lit up the runways with her 2012 Alpha Lyrae collection, a series of structured, luminous garments that would look right at home in a Stanley Kubrick film. Although her subsequent works lean less towards the space-age, she still errs on the side of the avant-garde, perhaps a souvenir of time spent interning with Vivienne Westwood while at university. A strong advocate of "smart" fabrics, Wang constantly blurs the boundaries between art and technology. [vegazaishiwang.com](http://vegazaishiwang.com).

**GUO PEI, *Rose Studio***  
Remember Rihanna's saffron-hued gown at the 2015 Met Gala, also known as "the dress that spawned a thousand memes"? The 25-kilo fox fur- and gold thread-extravaganza that all but enveloped the petite pop star, splashed across the pages of *Vogue*, and catapulted Beijing-based Guo Pei, who already had two dresses in "China Through the Looking Glass," into the international spotlight. Although she receives plenty of requests, the couturier caters to a rather select clientele—namely, A-listers such as Zhang Ziyi who can afford bespoke creations like Rihanna's, which took her team of 300 embroiderers a total of more than 15,000 hours to make. For those not in the 0.01 percent, she

opened a shop under the name Guo Pei Xi along Shanghai's Bund a couple of years ago, where demi-couture wedding dresses fetch around US\$4,000 as opposed to US\$800,000. [guopei.fr](http://guopei.fr).

**WANG TAO, *Taoray Wang***  
During her time as creative director at Broadcast:bo, a popular women's-wear label, Wang Tao established herself as one of the country's canniest female entrepreneurs. With

an eye for expansion, she debuted her eponymous clothing line at the 2014 New York Fashion Week and set the international community atwitter with her clean, feminine silhouettes and classic cuts. For her most recent collection, she opted for a safari-chic aesthetic—picture *Out of Africa* meets the big city, possibly made with the hope of generating a little extra buzz before the opening of her first U.S. showroom later this year. [taoraywang.com](http://taoraywang.com). ☎



Two of Masha Ma's dark-humored designs.

## OTHERS TO WATCH

**Moti Bai, *Black Spoon***  
Gothic Lolita grows up with Black Spoon's ruffled, frilled and layered confections. Moti Bai's baroque ensembles and doll-like models were just the right amount of over-the-top for Shanghai's 2015 Fashion Week.

**Zhou Xiaowen, *Hiuman***  
After studying in Paris, Guangzhou-born Zhou Xiaowen set out to conquer Shanghai with spare, crafted menswear. Understated pan-Asian touches add a Zen note to these urbane looks.

**Zhang Na, *Fake Natoo***  
One of the more influential labels in Shanghai, Fake Natoo draws inspiration from some of the most unexpected sources. Zhang Na's autumn-winter collection back in 2014 incorporated yak-wool shirts woven by Tibetan nomads, while her latest collection, *Microscope*, is a feminine, boho affair in silk and lightweight cotton.

**Dido Liu, *Deepmoss***  
Hats worthy of a special day at the races and other flamboyant touches add a

dash of romance to this Central Saint Martins-trained, dreamy designer's latest collection.

**Zhang Da, *Boundless***  
This trendsetter, who has collaborated with Hermès, launched his first women's-wear collection in 2005 and currently sports shops in China's big cities: Shanghai, Beijing and Chengdu. Slightly enigmatic and famously publicity-shy, Zhang Da showcases his experimental creations on ordinary people rather than models.