

A Myth of Fashion Media: A Rising Country Makes a Dwindling City?

Abstract

In this paper, participant observation was used to investigate how global fashion and luxury firms and Hong Kong's print media present fashion meanings in the local context. The editorial team of a Hong Kong fashion magazine was observed. That fieldwork created chances for interviews and conversations with thirty-six fashion media insiders in Hong Kong and mainland China from 2011 to 2013, which helped open new windows on the paradoxical yet valid logic of fashion industry.

By revisiting the literature and case studies on various sociohistorical, economic and cultural influences on Asian fashion industry, a fuller picture of the social dynamics of the mainland Chinese and Hong Kong fashion media is first exhibited. The self-perceptions and career aspirations of industry participants are then discussed and analyzed. Hong Kong fashion journalists take a pessimistic view of their career prospects and the industry in Hong Kong. Mainland fashion media personnel, by contrast, take an optimistic view of the industry's potential in mainland China.

The interview data suggest that such contradictory visions may arise from differing political changes and cultural biases. It is argued that the fashion media industry has never reached a cultural renaissance in either Hong Kong or China proper, despite the economic boom both economies have experienced over the past two decades. Behind China's rapidly rising economic splendor in the world, a less-heard story of fashion in China through her ideological transitions is narrated: fashion was a taboo, a sign of bourgeoisie taste, and considered as morally inferior in the Communist ideology. Against this backdrop, the colonial Hong Kong, where the media representation of East-meet-west fashion was much related to the ideas of being a modern Chinese, did

not share this ideological change. With the arrival of 1997, the situation had experienced changes under the fast growing Chinese economy and information flow. The shifting fashion media industries and cultural politics in the two regions also illustrate new relations between the post-socialist country and her post-colonial city.