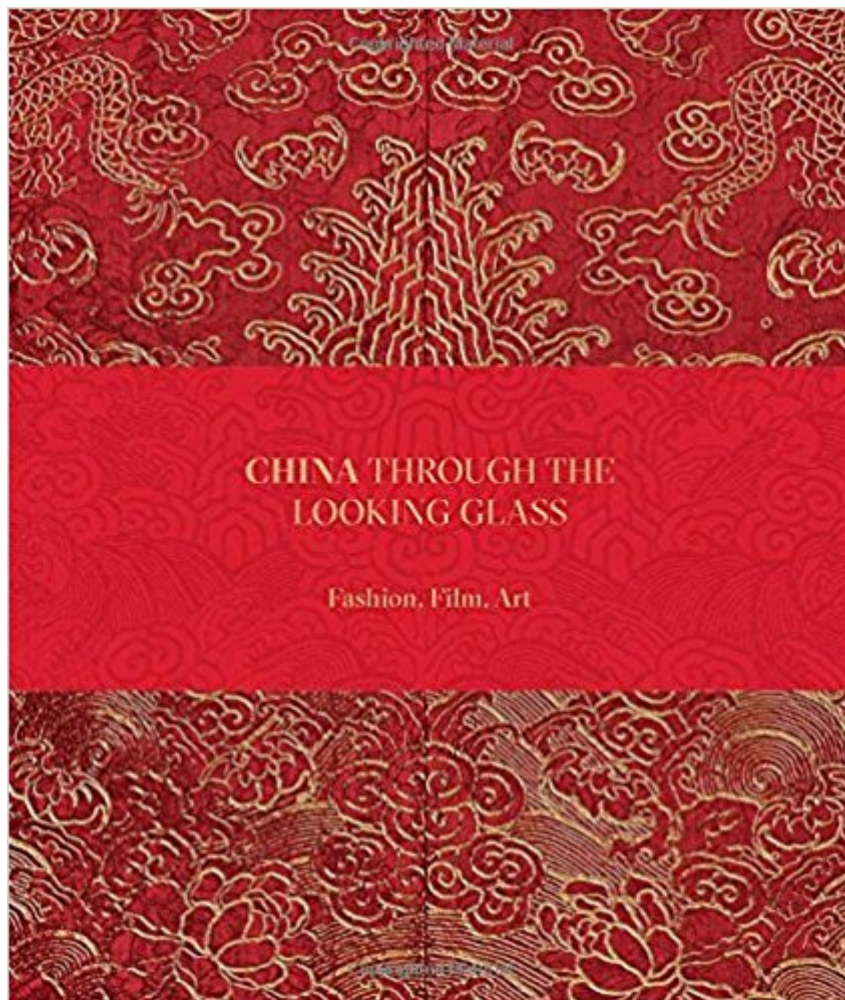


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# China: Through The Looking Glass



## Synopsis

A lavish exploration of the evocative and complex fashions inspired by Chinese culture. 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"In the sensual Costume Institute catalogue. . . Bolton's depoliticized take on the exchange

between East and West in his introduction sets the tone for a volume that is an exuberant triumph of style over substance, complete with a red, silklike cloth cover stamped with gold foil. Inside, elaborate Western couture, art, and films spanning several centuries conjure a fantastic vision of China." — Christopher Lyon, Bookforum

Accompanying one of the most successful exhibitions in the Metropolitan Museum's history, this lavish book explores the evocative and complex fashions inspired by Chinese culture.

With nearly every major exhibition that opens at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York these days, we are being blessed with the simultaneous publication of impressive catalogues. And such is the case with the Costume Institute show titled "China Through the Looking Glass: Fashion, Film, Art" that debuted in early May. The show examines the influence of Chinese aesthetics in general and clothing in particular on western counterparts and, in turn, western notions and re-imagined representations of the Central Kingdom. The 256-page catalogue that accompanies the exhibition is a masterpiece itself, as becomes clear from the outset with covers that replicate both the look and texture of a classic red-and-gold Chinese brocade and pages that are folded in on themselves in the traditional Chinese manner. The recent New York Times review of the exhibition focused on its sponsorship by MMA's Costume Institute and the beauty of the clothes on display. The catalogue, however, offers a broader perspective, as experts were engaged to write chapters on subjects like "Toward an Aesthetic of Surfaces," "Imagery of Chinese Dress," "Cinema's Virtual Chinas," "Emperor to Citizen," and "Empire of Signs." The concluding chapter, meanwhile, presents a conversation between the couturier John Galliano with the Costume Institute curator Andrew Bolton. The Chinese gowns pictured in the catalogue, especially recent couture, will be quite a revelation for the western reader and museum-goer, and the catalogue documents that there is much to celebrate in the dynamic between the West and East. To take but one example, consider the manner in which designers from both have represented the vocabulary of Chinese blue-and-white porcelains. In the early and mid-20th century, the Western designer was likely to have produced a blue-and-white dress of a simplified toile-like fabric. However, some Western designers have now joined their Chinese counterparts in producing innovative gowns that take even their shape from complete ceramics.

I was fortunate enough to have seen this exhibit; however, I did not have ample time to really savor the experience. I am thrilled I can relive my visit via this breathtaking book. The few pictures I was

able to take pale in comparison to those in this book. The book is thoughtfully organized and I was especially impressed with the coverage of Chinese influence on cinema epitomized by the alluring Anna May Wong. It was a treat seeing a dress she actually wore in one of her films and it is gracefully represented in the book. The book itself is a stand-out production with a shimmery red and gold cover, vellum inserts and images which are not printed back-to-back so each image stands alone with no shadow of the image on the opposite page. There is a blank side on each image. Well done! Those who treasure art, fashion, Chinese history and culture, film and graphic design will want to add this book to their library.

Wow! Wish I could have seen the accompanying exhibition --what a treat that would be. This book is the next best thing, however. Gorgeous photos that had me (practically) drooling from page to page. If someone (maybe you, perhaps?) loves costumes and/or all things Chinese, this book makes an amazing gift. Expensive but well worth it!

Not sure I'll make it to the Met for this exhibit so this is the next best thing. Beautiful illustrations & printing. Looks like a more expensive book.

Exquisitely illustrated and beautifully done catalog of the Metropolitan Museum Costume Institute show.

An excellent book to complement the exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, it features interesting articles and a wealth of photos. Highly recommended.

a sumptuous book that is lavishly illustrated with photos that are both evocative and encyclopedic of asian influences in art, culture and fashion. detailed, superbly executed and a must for any fashion junkie, sinophile or beauty addict! worth EVERY penny and then some! bravo!

I bought this exhibit catalog after seeing "The First Monday in May". I am terminally envious of all of you who got to see the actual exhibit. How totally extraordinary it looks! Magic.

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