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# PIPELINE

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THE PHOTOGRAPHY ANNUAL

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# DOWN WITH CONTEMPORARY ORIENTALISM

打倒當代東方主義

原文 Ysabelle Cheung

*China Through the Looking Glass*  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

May 7th to August 16th 2015.

P86 Gallery view  
Chinese Galleries, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery,  
Wuxia ensemble, Jean Paul Gaultier (b.1952, France),  
autumn/winter 2001-2; Courtesy of Jean Paul Gaultier.  
Photo: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art

P88-89 Gallery view.  
Chinese Galleries, Douglas Dillon Galleries, Chinoiserie.  
Photo: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art

P90 Gallery view.  
Chinese Galleries, Gallery 207, Guo Pei Evening gown,  
Guo Pei (b.1967, China), spring/summer 2007 haute  
couture; Courtesy of Guo Pei.  
Photo: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Courtesy The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.





More than just a bit of context is left out of the viewfinder in *China Through the Looking Glass*, the Metropolitan Museum of Art's turgid attempt at justifying cultural appropriation. Curated by the museum's Andrew Bolton and Harold Koda, with additional artistic direction by Wong Kar-wai, the exhibition is a collaboration between the Department of Asian Art and the Costume Institute. Last year, the latter put on a gorgeous show of Anglo-American designer Charles James' body of work, but the former failed to excite with its *Ink Art: Past as Present in Contemporary China* show in 2013. So the idea of the current exhibition provoked trepidation – which the reality of it does little to dispel.

The show is not so much ignorant to political sensitivities as it is brazenly aware of its haphazard cobbling together of culture, race, history and socio-politics. Pairing

western designers' creations with replicas or museum artefacts of their Chinese inspirations, the show attempts to narrate a spread of influence from east to west in sprawling chronology. In one room, a Tseng Kwong Chi print featuring the artist in his Mao suit is comically juxtaposed with military-chic Western designs, missing the point of Tseng's scathing inquisition of Western vanities. Ostentatious dresses by Dior and Valentino lifelessly fill up a fake Ming Pavilion, a place meant for quiet reverie and contemplation of the harmony between man and nature. An admittedly gorgeous Guo Pei dress is explained in the accompanying plaque as emulating the "lotus flower, which is one of the eight Buddhist symbols and represents spiritual purity and enlightenment". And so the curators have plonked a gold lotus flower on the mannequin's head, the resulting sculpture rising high above real Buddha

effigies in the room, something seen as disrespectful in stricter Buddhist countries. The obvious ignorance and inaccuracy of much of the information presented can be distinctly awkward.

One wonders what the purpose of the show is at all, if the view through the looking glass is going to be largely a myopic one, without balance. But then this exhibition only exists because it was backed by Chinese sponsors, including Silas Chou and Wendi Deng Murdoch, while Koda is Asian-American and Wong is a Hongkonger. (Imagine, for example, the outcry there would be surrounding an exhibition celebrating appropriation of black culture in the US.) But because this, and the insidious manifestations of contemporary Orientalism, are still trivialised, this show still seems like a western trump card of privilege – and the privileged, more often than not, choose to obfuscate certain uncomfortable realities.

紐約大都會藝術博物館的「中國：鏡花水月」展覽不單只忽視了一些背景，更過度合理化文化挪用。這展覽由亞洲藝術部與服飾典藏館聯合舉辦，策展人為該館的 Andrew Bolton 及 Harold Koda，並且由王家衛擔任藝術總監。Koda 去年策劃了一個燦爛華麗的展覽，展出英裔美國設計師 Charles James 的所有作品，然而 Bolton 於 2013 年策劃的「水墨藝術：借古說今中國當代藝術」展覽並沒有取得成功，這樣的往績不禁讓人對是次展覽感到惴惴不安，而事實上，真實的它亦沒有令人有所改觀。

展覽對政治敏感的事物並非一無所知，從它厚顏無恥地將文化、種族、歷史、社會及政治雜亂無章地拼湊在一起便可得知。它將西方設計師的作品與他們的中國靈感的複製品或博物館人工製品組成一對，試圖在紊亂的時序中講述東方對西方的影響。在其中一間房間裡，有一張曾廣智的攝影作品，相中的藝術家身穿的中山裝與西方的軍裝風設計滑稽地並列在一起，完全搞錯了曾氏在作品中對西方人的自大作出尖刻諷刺的用意。還有，Dior 及 Valen-

tino 的奢華長裙在仿明代宮殿建築中顯得單調乏味，明代宮殿本是一個讓人靜謐沉思人與自然和諧共處的地方。關於郭培的長裙，它的確華麗非凡，其附設的說明牌解釋長裙的設計是效仿蓮花，並補充道：「蓮花是佛門八寶之一，代表純潔和覺悟」。然而，策展人將一朵金蓮重重的放在模特兒模型的頭上，使整個雕塑高於同一房間內的真實佛像，在較嚴謹的佛教國家，這可會被視為一種無禮。一個展覽表現明顯的無知、展示大量不準確的資料，著實非常尷尬。

這不禁令人疑惑：如果從這展覽的透視鏡看到的視野是如此目光短淺、沒有平衡的話，那麼，它的目的究竟是什麼？不過話說回來，這展覽的存在乃是有賴於多個中國贊助人如曹其峰及鄧文迪的支持，同時，Koda 是亞裔美國人，王氏是香港人。（試想想，展覽要是歌頌美國的黑人文化挪用，想必引起公眾強烈抗議。）目前這個問題和當代東方主義的禍害依然被輕視，因此這展覽仍像一張西方特權王牌——擁有特權的人通常都會選擇淡化某些不安的現實。