

Chinese Designer: Guo Pei

Later summer, I read about Guo Pei's dress in the newspaper and I knew I had to see it. When I finally stood before the masterpiece, in the showroom at the Metropolitan Museum in New York City, I was speechless. I learned that her inspiration came from images of the traditional Chinese Emperor's coat - gold, imperial, regal. The predominantly gold dress brought enormous confidence to the viewing audience.

Guo Pei's masterpiece evoked powerful memories of my first days after moving to the U.S.. I was thirteen years old, alone, and without my parents. The transition was tough and I distracted myself by visiting the museum regularly. Guo's dress had the kind of energy and inner strength that reminded me of the peaceful days I spent in museums sketching. I finally felt at home in the art and designs I came to appreciate.





While my passion in art brought happiness into my life, it also led me in the right direction of academic interest. Then I saw Guo Pei's "Magnificent Gold" dress, an exhibition that gave me vision and identity. Guo Pei is one of the most admired designers in China, best known for her design of Rihanna's gown for the 2015 Met Gala. Inspired by the traditional Chinese Emperor's coat, her design was so imperial and regal. Standing in front of it, it was a reminder of my childhood in Beijing and visiting the magnificent Forbidden City with my dad. I have never seen my culture presented in such a unique and modern pattern. Guo Pei was exactly the type of artists that I dreamed to be, capable of originating methodology to combine traditional culture with contemporary elements.

**T
H
E
L
E
G
E
N
D
O
F
D
R
A
G
O
N**

"Thirty years ago, there was no fashion, no such word in China," explained GuoPei, "And 20 years ago there was no so-called 'fashion design' in China, but during these 30 years, the understanding of beauty has evolved so much for Chinese people and they are now seeking the spirit of their nationality and their individual spirit," she said. In Europe, haute couture designs are actually relative to ones who are wealthy, showing and representing people's social status. However, in China, it is a little bit different. Haute Couture appeared to be expensive and unwearable in Chinese people's mind nearly thirty years ago. GuoPei desired to make expensive and unwearable haute couture costumes, but few understood it in the beginning of her career. It was considered as a risky job.



Using iPad Pro in her design process, GuoPei had a conversation with Cook at her studio in Beijing. Cook pointed to a dress and said, ‘What is that for?’ because that dress is actually not wearable. GuoPei thought about how to answer his question and said, ‘Do you see those dresses over there? Those are the dresses I design to sell for money, and I’ll use that money to make this dress that is not wearable.’” Wearable or not, Guo Pei’s designs successfully have the world’s attention, both with her pursuits of dreams and commercial.



A lot of Chinese people think that if one is acknowledged in the West, then he or she is somebody. However, Guo Pei does not always pay much attention on her own reputation. Rather, she just wants to do something meaningful to people and the nation. Indeed, international acknowledgment of Guo Pei’s haute couture designs have been increased since Rihanna wore her 55 pound gold gown to the Met Gala in 2015. The dress actually took 100 workers, 50,000 hours to create, which surprised and impressed me a lot. Now, we all read GuoPei and her designs as stories.

