

Yat Pit is the brand reviving lost Chinese culture

Based in Hong Kong, designers Jason Mui and On-Ying Lai are trying to reclaim their heritage during questionable times

Fashion **On the Rise** A month ago Text **Arthur Tam**

f t p 817 shares



Yat Pit
Photography Ren Hang



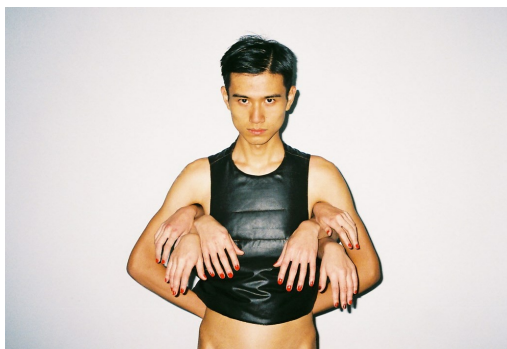
Since the beginning of the Qin Dynasty back in 221BC, China had already developed a distinct direction in fashion, which evolved beautifully over the centuries. Luxury clothing was well-tailored, robe-like, colourfully patterned, loose and flowing, layered and appropriately accessorised. Then all of that wonder and creativity came to an abrupt halt due to the Cultural Revolution, 5,000 years of Chinese fashion just evaporated and was mostly left to the West to romanticise, fetishise (think *The World of Suzie Wong*), appropriate and misunderstand (with exceptions like [John Galliano's](#) Chinese-inspired [couture collection](#) for [Christian Dior](#)).

As a result of this erasure and misinterpretation, independent designers all across China are now being motivated to reclaim their heritage in fresh, modern ways. An example of this is designer duo Jason Mui (a graduate of Nottingham Trent University) and On-Ying Lai (a graduate of [Central Saint Martins](#)) with their newly launched fashion label Yat Pit (meaning 'one stroke' in Chinese), which carries the tagline: 'reviving lost Chinese culture.'

Lai – a Hong Kong native who's current day job is a womenswear designer for Hong Kong fashion company IT – joined forces with Mui – a third culture kid from England, who's current day job is managing the visual merchandising for Prada in Hong Kong – to create a brand that shows their vision of what a group of young, irreverent, Chinese youth would be wearing today had the Cultural Revolution not taken place.

The visuals for the brand were taken by provocative illusionist photographer [Ren Hang](#) and the clothing line can be characterised as having a mixture of an androgynous Bruce Lee-esque aesthetic, filled with wide denim pants, oversized tunics and corduroy jackets with traditional Chinese fastening. As the designers put it, it's a "bad taste can be good taste" type of concept, which has found fans in [Opening Ceremony](#) who picked it up during Shanghai Fashion Week.

We meet up with Mui and Lai at their design studio in Sham Shui Po – a former gritty fashion and electronic district of Hong Kong that is currently going through a youth culture and art revival. The design studio maintains an old Hong Kong allure and the walls are lined with photography from Ren Hang, DVDs of 80s Hong Kong cinema and choice books like *Bruce Lee: Art of Life*. We talk to the pair about their fledgling brand, their reflections on cultural identity and what went wrong with last year's Met Gala.



Yat Pit
Photography Ren Hang

How did you come up with the name Yat Pit?

On-Ying Lai: There is a Chinese idiom: '10 strokes without a slash.' It means that people always say they want to do something, but never even start. The idiom is supposed to be humorous. Something your mother would scold you with. So, we've started our 'Yat Pit', which means the first stroke in Cantonese. We've taken the first step.

Are you both of you trying to make Chinese fashion relevant again?

Jason Mui: We were wondering why people in Asia aren't interested in their heritage as much.

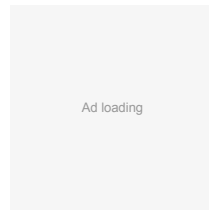
On-Ying Lai: So, we decided to promote Chinese clothing to this generation and not have our outfit choices only being dominated by Western aesthetics of just t-shirts and jeans.

Jason Mui: We all know people have been talking how important China is for while, but there hasn't as much of a spotlight on the growing amount of talent here. Not just in fashion, but music and film. It's still very much about Western talents dictating the conversation, but it's like: 'Hey guys, here we are'. It would be nice for Asia to show what it is about and how it influences the world.

Is there a sense of pride in that for both of you?

On-Ying Lai: It's more like a sense of love and interest. We wanted to mix Chinese aesthetics with a Western uniform, so people could understand our brand easily and they wouldn't feel alienated by it.

Jason Mui: We've stuck to your cottons, jersey, denim and corduroy and that might make people feel more comfortable to wear it and easier to mix it into their daily wardrobe. Western designers always interpret Chinese design in a Western eye. So for us, I think we can use our Chinese background to really do things from our direction. Have you seen the movie *First Monday of May* (the documentary about this year's Met Gala)?



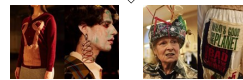
Subscribe

Get updates direct to your inbox with the Dazed bi-weekly newsletter

Follow @Dazed

SUBSCRIBE ON YOUTUBE

More Fashion



How to get your hands on London's most exciting new labels

Vivienne Westwood reveals how you can save the planet

Most Viewed News



Meet Art School, London's gender-queer fashion collective



The son of Oasis frontman Liam Gallagher is now a model



Why Brit sportswear label Cottweiler is one to watch in 2017



Men's fashion week: the must-see moments



J.W. Anderson & Alasdair McLellan debut NSFW photo project



How Factory Records inspired decades of fashion

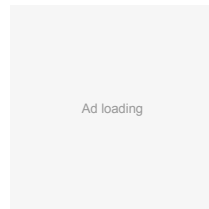
More On the Rise



The label with a fresh take on sustainable fashion



Fresh label Laundry Service shows black women in a new light



“Western designers always interpret Chinese design in a Western eye. So for us, I think we can use our Chinese background to really do things from our direction” – Jason Mui

No, I actually haven't. What did you think about it?

Jason Mui: The film was interesting in terms of the way they researched and curated the exhibition. It was a success. The Met event itself, however, was a bit cheesy with a bunch of people dressing up in non-Chinese clothing to a Chinese event. It was really bad.

On-Ying Lai: It was like Halloween.

Jason Mui: It's interesting when you don't know how to reference or that you're referencing something incorrectly. I think the problem is that a lot of people haven't actually been to China. And on the flip side, China was closed off for so many years and during that time killed off a lot of its culture.

Hence why Yat Pit is the revival of Chinese culture?

Jason Mui: Wouldn't it be cool if you went to China and people were still dressing like this (shows a photo of ladies of the court during the Qing Dynasty). Like India and Japan still incorporate traditional fashion into daily wear. It's sad about what happened to China.

On-Ying Lai: We just want to imagine if the Cultural Revolution didn't happen, what people in China might be dressing like today.

Jason Mui: There is always going to be Chinese aesthetic because that is the backbone of our brand.

On-Ying Lai: If you look at the collection you know it's not very gender specific. We are trying to keep things unisex.

Jason Mui: Looking back at Chinese dressing, you don't really see any type of hourglass silhouettes or an accentuation of the breasts or the waist – there's none of that. The silhouettes are kind of bulky and pretty much the same for men and women throughout the dynasties. The only way they would differentiate by gender would be the hair, makeup, shoes and embroidery. But even the men's clothes were heavily embroidered.



Yat Pit
Photography Ren Hang

Are you going to jump around from dynasty to dynasty with different collections?

Jason Mui: It feels like quite a natural step because there is so much history that we haven't even explored yet. We've only explored a few layers, so we're really excited to go on. This collection is on the subtle side, but for our next collection, we might go full out Qing Dynasty. Every collection is going to have a different inspiration.

Bruce Lee seems like quite the inspiration for your collection

Jason Mui: He's like a god.

On-Ying Lai: He's one person who took Chinese culture to the Western world. And since then, there hasn't been a person with that same type of impact. I love how confident and sure he is whenever he speaks.

What is the overall message you want people to from this brand? Are their social undertones, especially with everything that's happening in Hong Kong at the moment?

Jason Mui: Fashion or anything creative is a tool for commentary and having a voice.

On-Ying Lai: But, this collection isn't about having an aggressive take on politics. For us, it's just more a loud expression that we love Hong Kong.

Jason Mui: We've had people ask us what the link is between our brand and China and how we view China and Hong Kong. For us, we don't really think about it like that. For me, it's a personal time to explore my roots.

@yat_pit



Yat Pit

Get updates direct to your inbox with the Dazed bi-weekly newsletter ✕

✉ [Subscribe](#)

More Fashion



How to get your hands on London's most exciting new labels

[Fashion](#) [News](#) 10 hours ago

Fashion East have landed in Selfridges where, for the next three months, they'll be selling goods by Charles Jeffrey, Craig Green and many more



Vivienne Westwood reveals how you can save the planet

[Fashion](#) [News](#) 10 hours ago

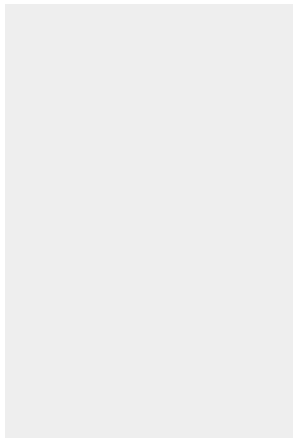
At her AW17 show, the designer encourages the world to switch to eco energy



Wales Bonner brings Senegalese street style to fashion week

[Fashion](#) [Show](#) 13 hours ago

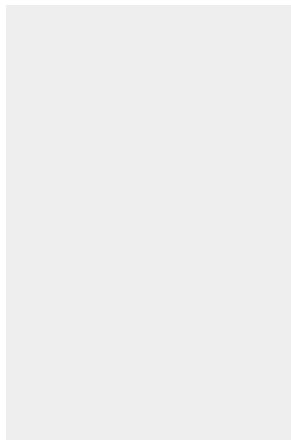
Soundtracked by Sampha, the designer looks at the street in an 'elevated way', combining crystals, Masai beading and Stephen Jones-created Rasta caps



Watch the Vivienne Westwood show live from fashion week

[Fashion](#) [First Look](#) 14 hours ago

Tune in here at 2pm GMT to see what the godmother of punk has in store for AW17




Martine Rose brings subverted bankers to Seven Sisters

[Fashion](#) [Feature](#) 14 hours ago


At her first runway show in nearly four years, Rose explored different masculine roles – and proved why she's one of London menswear's best talents

the da-zed guide

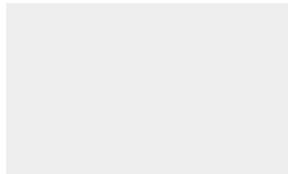


to british sub-culture

finn wolfhard



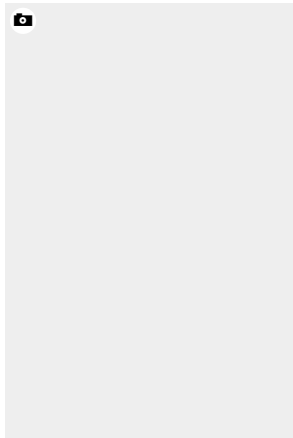
sci-fi 'it-boy'



Watch Hari Nef star in L'Oreal's new advert

[Fashion](#) [News](#) 17 hours ago

Because she's worth it



Kiko Kostadinov explores the idea of a modern uniform

[Fashion](#) [Gallery](#) 19 hours ago

Characterised by his off-kilter pattern cutting, the designer's workwear-inspired AW17 collection featured jewellery inspired by pocket tools




Die Antwoord's Ninja models in Alexander Wang's new campaign

[Fashion](#) [News](#) 18 hours ago

The South African rapper joins Adwoa Aboah and Lil Yachty in the designer's new visuals

david bowie interviews



tarantino confirms





alexander
mcqueen



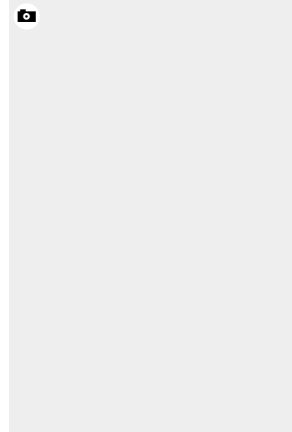
all his films
are
connected

twitter — facebook — tumblr — youtube
newsletter — contact — about — dazed media
legal — distribution — digital editions
subscriptions — rss

Meet Art School, London's gender-queer fashion collective

Fashion [Q+A](#) Yesterday

In the wake of their fashion week debut, we talk to Edén Loweth and Tom Barratt – the design duo celebrating their own gender-fluid reality



Cottweiler designs for a dystopian camping trip

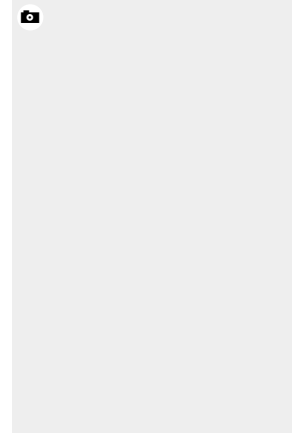
Fashion [Gallery](#) Yesterday

Matthew Dainty and Ben Cottrell debut a collection based on outdoor survival, featuring technical outerwear, headlamps and light-up belly button piercings

J.W.Anderson proves there's a lot worth coming to London for

Fashion [Show](#) Yesterday

Amidst a thinner-than-usual menswear schedule, the modernist designer stages a standout show



Radical design duo Rottingdean Bazaar return to fashion week

Fashion [Gallery](#) Yesterday

For their second presentation, James Theseus Buck and Luke Brooks showcase garments decorated with tights, sports socks, iron filings and Ancient Roman coins