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You still feel that there's a long way to go for Beijing to become the vibrant, cosmopolitan city it aspires to be, but it's nice to be at the forefront of an emerging market for independent design

THE EMPIRE'S NEW CLOTHES

FOR MOST OF US, CHINA MAY SEEM LIKE AN UNLIKELY SPOT TO BASE A HUB FOR SUSTAINABLE FASHION. However Swiss born and raised Amihan Zemp and Hans Martin Galliker were beckoned by the mysterious East and its stark contrasts of tradition and new beginnings. With a desire to bridge the gap between Europe and Asia and increase awareness and demand for more natural, ethically-produced fashion, the ambitious pair left their homeland to found NEEMIC in 2011.

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The largest producer of clothing worldwide, there's no doubt that China has a strong foothold in the global fashion industry. According to the last official count by the China National Garment Association, 43.6 billion garments are made in the country every year. With a firm monopoly on production, China has been able to slowly raise its wages, and is on the long path to improving workers' rights. It also has the upper hand on most countries in that its workforce and industries are still largely on home turf. This could, arguably, be the perfect recipe for a revolution to take place - the kind of revolution NEEMIC is hoping for.

Although there's still a long way to go, China's diverse culture and fast-paced development has enticed many international creatives and entrepreneurs - Hans and Amihan among them. Hans even touts his current hometown as the 'Berlin of the East'. "We live in Beijing's Hutong old town," he says, "which is very different from other areas [of the city] that are either gloomy or too commercial. The mood here is very relaxed and fashion is not taken too seriously either. You still feel that there's a long way to go for Beijing to become the vibrant, cosmopolitan city it aspires to be, [but] it's nice to be at the forefront of an emerging market for independent design."

Having launched just two years ago, NEEMIC's strong vision has already helped them achieve some notoriety within the Beijing creative community. "More than just another fashion brand, we see NEEMIC as a cre-



We absorb the atmosphere of this environment, the life of ordinary people in the streets, and translate its essence into a new form

people who want to be uniquely themselves. Amihan names comfort as another key factor, emphasising the importance of “freeing” a person. Whether it be easy-to-wear garment cuts or subtle androgynous tones, the pair want the NEEMIC wearer to feel completely themselves.

Though their aesthetic references are derived from a variety of locations, NEEMIC’s approach to sustainability is distinctly home grown. “Ethics are formed early in life,” Amihan says. “Environmental and social justice concerns were part of our childhood education in Switzerland. However, our aesthetic approach is very much influenced by our exposure to the East, including Japan. Being in Beijing adds another component: we absorb the atmosphere of this environment, the life of ordinary people in the streets, and translate its essence into a new form. The references are felt, not based on clichés.”

Indeed, cliché is the last thing that comes to mind when one thinks of NEEMIC. At the forefront of sustainable fashion in China, they are more akin to pioneers. However, Hans says, they are starting to see a shift in mentality in their new country. “We see many things here developing in the right direction - many young people are developing a curiosity and consciousness about environmental and social responsibility [that] hasn’t been possible in former generations.”

But being pioneers can have its pitfalls, too. With little demand, their efforts to source sustainable materials can often prove difficult. However, NEEMIC’s work with Agrachina developing links between local permaculture and creative industries is building a path toward more easily accessible eco materials in the near future.

For the moment, the brand works with organic and reclaimed fabrics and is currently focusing on a project with Redress China, highlighting creative options to the country’s clothing excess. Hans believes “it is inevitable that China is becoming a driving force in the service and creative industries, with a strong domestic consumption which allows them to escape the vicious circle of a cheap commodity producer.”

NEEMIC is a brand with high expectations of China and the world’s attitude towards fashion production and consumption, however their strategic approach to blending farming, creativity and community together will hopefully bring about change in what is potentially the most powerful fashion production hub in the world. After all, if you are going to make a transformation, why not do so in the belly of the beast?

neemic.asia

ative platform,” Hans reflects. “We bring together sustainably-minded people from various disciplines - design, video, performance, music, photography, farming - in a collaborative creative process revolving around fashion.”

Creative collaboration is certainly not a new concept, however the brand’s carefully orchestrated projects cross boundaries in a highly unique way. Having also played a part in founding sustainable agriculture organisation Agrachina, NEEMIC works to connect farming, creativity and community together.

Most recently the label partnered with Agrachina to host *No More Mono*, an event and exhibition examining ways to live sustainably, incorporating the wisdom of a diverse group of Beijing’s creative and scientific communities. This unusual integration of different disciplines is only the starting point for Hans and Amihan’s long-term goal to build a solid connection between design entrepreneurs and China’s agricultural industry. With Hans’ background in farming, IT and sales and Amihan’s work in cultural studies throughout Europe and Japan, it’s clear to see how such a unique foundation was laid.

NEEMIC is not limited only to its Chinese base, however - it embraces creative circles worldwide. “Our core team is based in Beijing,” says Hans, “but we still work with freelancers all over the world. Some of the collaborations are virtual, but we also invite international artists for specific projects. It’s easy to incorporate fashion into various art forms. That’s what we love to do. By doing so, we create an ecosystem of artists and professionals with an autonomous life of its own.”

With designers spread from London to Tokyo, collaboration has enabled the brand to develop a quintessentially modern aesthetic that can easily be inserted into any wardrobe across the globe. A particular fabric or silhouette can direct their approach to each collection. Thinking of an attitude rather than a specific muse, NEEMIC aims to dress

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