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NEEMIC inspires organic fashion movement in China

Contributor **Alina Rätsep**



SOURCE contributor Alina Ratsep meets with Hans Martin Galliker, the founder of Chinese fashion label, NEEMIC to discuss the market for sustainable fashion and the advent of organic textile production in China.

NEEMIC is a project and fashion label created by Amihan Zemp and Hans Martin Galliker with 3 visions at heart:

1. Creating outstanding fashion
2. Making the industry more environmentally sustainable
3. Building bridges between Europe and Asia.

Based in Hong Kong, NEEMIC collaborates with young designers from London to Tokyo to create a particular metropolitan aesthetic, using the finest natural fabrics and quality organic fabrics where possible.

NEEMIC is member of **Agrachina**, a network aimed at promoting organic agriculture in China and is working towards only sourcing and growing demand for organic materials from China.

SOURCE contributor Alina Ratsep speaks with Hans Martin Galliker, the founder of NEEMIC, to discuss the market for sustainable fashion and the advent of organic textile production in China as well as NEEMIC's plans for the future.

Please tell us a little bit more about yourself and NEEMIC. How did it all start for you?

I grew up on a typical family farm in Lucerne, Switzerland. We produced our own cheese, and all kinds of crops and fruit to sell at the local market. At the age of 15 I left school and pursued an agricultural apprenticeship. When I was 20, I desired a new environment and moved to Zurich to manifest my computer passion by selling computers as well as studying part-time IT engineering and business.

Over the years I became an IT solution architect, studying business communications on the side, and eventually going to study abroad. During my exchange experience in China, I met many young entrepreneurs working in sustainable agriculture, which initiated my passion for improving the agricultural industry.

We established the NPO Agrachina (Agrachina.com), which promotes organic agriculture in China and supports young entrepreneur's projects in sustainable agriculture,. The support includes networking, IT solutions and links to local art & culture events.

NEEMIC is one of our primary projects, with the vision to foster the market for organic textiles and up-cycling in China. NEEMIC is our way to reach into the fashion world, and do our small bit for changing the fashion industry for the better.

Together with Amihan Zemp, we established NEEMIC in 2011 with three visions at heart: creating outstanding fashion, making the industry more environmentally sustainable, and building bridges between Europe and Asia. Our project is based in Beijing, China, and our aim is to collaborate with young designers throughout Asia and Europe. Though sourcing organic textiles in China has proved difficult, we are committed to using organic materials.

What kind of materials do you use in the collection?

I'd like to say that we use 100% organic fabrics in our collection, but it's not true. Unfortunately, our dream hasn't worked out yet. We are currently using around 15% organic textiles, which we have to source from outside China from countries such as Germany and India, who supply high-quality organic fabrics.

We currently use silk, cotton, linen, bamboo, up-cycled blends, and are planning on using hemp in future collections. For us, design comes first. If a fabric is organic but it doesn't look or feel right, we won't use it.

Where do you source fabrics?

Most of our fabrics come from China. Unfortunately, they are not organic fabrics because we are struggling to find organic textile suppliers who meet our quality criteria. We have travelled across China and Europe attending fabric and textile fairs, and we are yet to come across the supplier whose product would suit us.

Most of our suppliers come from a third person's contacts, as well as through the people who we've met at fairs. All of the organic fabrics currently used in our collection come from Europe or India, but it's not ideal, because shipping fabrics from long distances is hardly sustainable. In China, we buy some of our fabrics from wholesale fabric markets in the south of Beijing.

What is your fabric of choice?

Silk. It's a great material to work with. But it's not usually organic nor is it sustainable!

What are your plans for fabric sourcing in the next 5 years?

Together with other enthusiasts from the industry we have established the Organic Textiles Association in Hong Kong. We are now planning to set up new chapters here in China. We currently only have a few members but I am certain we will grow. I think in 5 years there will be a substantial choice of organic textiles in China's textile retail markets.

In some European countries organic is now mainstream. For example, it is sometimes hard to avoid organic food when you walk into a grocery store! Although when it comes to organic textiles, even in Europe it is hard to come across fashionable organic garments.

On the other hand, it is indeed easier to source organic textiles of great quality that come in a wider range of choices and are available in affordable quantities compared to China.

“It's early days here in China, and I feel that we are amongst the pioneers in this field

– Hans Martin Galliker

It's early days here in China, and I feel that we are amongst the pioneers in this field, so it's very hard for us at the moment. We produce everything in small amounts, and suppliers can have minimum order quantities that we can't afford.

The thing is, no one cares about organic that much in China yet. Perhaps, only young parents – they are starting to get into organic baby clothes. But it's not mainstream, and most designers here typically care about their designs, not whether the material is organic or not!

So, the big question – why organic?

I look at organic from the agricultural point of view, and its relation with the closed-loop circle. Sustainable and organic farming helps preserve the soil, and keep it fertile. In contrast, pesticides and chemical fertilizers degrade the soil quality.

More holistic approaches, like organic farming, tend to have an overall positive impact on biodiversity and the environment in a more general sense. So for NEEMIC using organic textiles came naturally. It is more than an attitude, but a lifestyle choice

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