

Global fashion retailers in China

A Western fashions have become very common in Chinese wardrobes in the last few decades. Traditional outfits like the *qipao* have been replaced in everyday life with Western clothes, and jeans and T-shirts have become must-haves all over the country. More recently, China has attracted global fashion retailers because of its rapidly growing economy. In the last few years, a large number of fashion shops have been opened by these companies and there are plans to open many more. For example, the Spanish retailer Zara – which is currently the largest global fashion retailer in the world – has opened 131 shops in China since the first one was set up in 2006.

B Designer clothes with brand names are particularly popular in China, and an increasing number of people want to dress to impress. This trend is linked to the new wealth in the country. With the increase in the amount of money available to them, many Chinese people feel they are capable of becoming very wealthy. This increase in Chinese income and aspiration is reflected in the country's clothing market, which was worth \$243 billion in 2011. This is not far behind the clothing market in the USA, which was worth almost \$331 billion in the same year.

C More recently, China has been affected by the global economic recession and, in 2012, its economy was expected to grow more slowly than in previous years. This has naturally made Chinese shoppers more anxious about spending large amounts of money on designer clothes. As a result, cheaper high-street fashion companies from Europe, such as Zara, H&M and Marks & Spencer, and the American retailer Gap, are using this dip to tap into the market.

D However, some of these companies are having more success than others. While H&M and Zara are doing very well, Chinese customers have not been so impressed by other retailers, due to their less trendy images. These retailers project a middle-class look, whereas many Chinese people prefer to give the impression of wealth through their appearance. They must also compete with local brands such as Metersbonwe and Belle International, which are continuing to grow within China and which are more familiar with the Chinese dress code. However, despite the local competition, global retailers are still choosing to focus their expansion on China, including the Japanese clothing chain Uniqlo, which plans to open 1,000 stores in the country over the next decade. It looks as if Chinese fashion will continue to be influenced by the rest of the world.

Reading

1 Choose the correct answers.

1 In China, jeans and T-shirts:

- have become more popular recently.
- have been replaced by the *qipao*.
- are only worn if they are from designer brands.

2 Chinese people:

- aren't as wealthy as they used to be.
- think that smart clothes are only for wealthy people.
- like wearing smart clothes to reflect their wealth.

3 Global fashion retailers such as H&M and Zara:

- have recently closed shops in China.
- know that Chinese people are looking for cheaper clothes because of the recession.
- are selling fewer clothes in China due to the effects of the recession.

2 Answer the questions using your own words.

1 Why do more Chinese people want to 'dress to impress'?

2 What makes some retailers less popular in China?

Use of English

3 Rewrite sentences 1–2 as active and sentences 3–4 as passive.

1 The *qipao* is worn less often by Chinese women.

2 131 shops have been opened by Zara since 2006.

3 The recession has affected Chinese shopping habits.

4 Designer clothes shops attract Chinese customers.

4 Find synonyms in the text for the following words.

1 quickly (paragraph A) _____

2 growing (paragraph B) _____

3 worried (paragraph C) _____

4 concentrate (paragraph D) _____

Writing

5 Write two short texts on the following topics.

Write about 100 words for each.

1 A current fashion trend in your country.

2 Your favourite clothes shop and why you like it.