NTDTV's Third Global Han Couture Design Competition concludes

By ANGELA WANG

Young men smiling with a modest demeanor, elegant ladies walking with light footsteps—a unique runway show featuring diverse aspects of exquisitely handcrafted Chinese costumes was put on the catwalk at the Metropolitan Pavilion in the fashion capital of New York on Saturday, Oct. 15.

The costumes, called Hanfu, are traditional clothes of the Chinese and were designed by professionals from around the world who competed in New Tang Dynasty TV's Third Global Han Couture Design Competition.

Some of the costumes supported the local streams along the southern banks of the Yangtze River, some were reminders of the glorious royal court of the capital's Forbidden City, and some resembled the lightness and elegance of lustrous stones in the mural art of Buddhist temples.

The handcrafted pieces, each telling an ancient story, brought Chinese history alive on the runaway stage.

Taking a closer look, even the inner garments featured hand-embroidered patterns that were previously drawn repeatedly as sketches by the contestants. When it comes to Hanfu, not even one inch from head to toe is left plain.

An audience member Christian Bernard recalled, the show was a “visual symphony of design, colors, fabrics, and jewels.”

Each of the costumes showcased clothing from the Tang (618–907), the Song (960–1279), the Ming (1368–1644) dynasty—three important periods when the Han ruled China over neighboring minority groups and their culture flourished.

While the main styles remain similar, each dynasty incorporated its own variations. The Tang Dynasty was the most prosperous time in terms of culture and economy, so its people dressed in bright colors and prestigious styles. Women of the court liked long, wide and loose sleeves, sometimes long enough to trail on the ground when they walked.

Clothing of the following Song Dynasty inherited most of the Tang styles. Yet the people prized preservation and added a more scholarly aspect to the clothing as Confucian values flourished during the dynasty. Thus light and elegant styles were favored.

The Ming Dynasty's first emperor personally directed the nation in reviving Hanfu after China was previously ruled by the Mongolians, who influenced the way the Chinese dressed. Clothes makers in the Ming Dynasty added more details to the designs. Handcrafting was well-devised, and more jewelry was attached to the garments and worn as accessories.

Usually people consider Qipao the ethnic costume of the Manchus. To be Chinese because the Manchurians ruled throughout the last dynasty, named the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912). Actually, Qipao is Manchurian and not Chinese.

Thus the authenticity of the style was one of the most important judging criteria in the competition, along with color combination and fabric selection. In order to learn about how people dressed in ancient times, the contestants had to research historical books and artifacts.

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Harmony and completeness are key elements of Hanfu design. The combination of main and secondary fabrics and colors of different garments all played their roles in making the whole design look harmonious. I used clothes of natural color tones in all of my three entries to the competition,” said Winna Lam, a contestant from New York.

The designers themselves talked about the case they put into making the clothing and the feelings they have about the importance of the opportunity to share Han design with a wide public.

“I had to do it very carefully, since it’s not possible to fix if I made a mistake,” said Lam.

“I think the public will be aston-ished by the beauty of Chinese clothing—the grace, richness, and colors of it. I saw a most fantastic revival such a precious form of art by left by our ancestors,” said Outstanding Award-winner Ying Chen from New York.

“I always wanted to present the beauty of Chinese clothing as to inspire other designers to put more efforts in restoring our ethnic fashions. One day, people will be walking on the streets wearing traditional clothes on certain occasions,” said Silver Award winner Tou-Ying Kao from Taiwan.

“The traditional Chinese clothing reflects both the beauty of the design and the elegance and decorum of the ancient people,” said Kang.