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Anna Lingling Perry  
*Colorado State University, anna.perry@colostate.edu*

Eulanda A. Sanders  
*Iowa State University, sanderse@iastate.edu*

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Anna Lingling Perry, Colorado State University, USA
Eulanda A. Sanders, Iowa State University, USA

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Various ways can be used to build partnerships between industry sponsors and apparel design programs in the United States. One desired integrated approach is improving and facilitating the current American competition practice (Lipstadt, 2005) by learning successful examples from other countries. In China, the number of apparel design competitions has increased vastly in recent years. The purpose of this current study is to investigate Chinese apparel design competitions and the forces that inform them, and how other countries may learn to find collaboration and opportunity from them.

Method. Search engines (e.g., Google, Baidu) and professional Chinese fashion websites (e.g., eff.net) were used to collect announcements of apparel design contests from January 1, 2009, to March 23, 2014. To avoid repeated analysis of data, the current study only collected the available latest year’s announcements if the contest was an annual contest, because of their similar contents. A total of 105 samples were collected. Only the frequency of the following each variable was reported because the frequency and percentage have a similar value. Two trained coders analyzed 12 of the announcements with 0.95 inter-coder agreement then primary investigator finished the rest of the coding. Frequency counts were computed by SPSS 20.

Results and discussion. There were 6, 16, 27, 12, 27, and 17 contests in years 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014, respectively. Nearly half of the contests were annual contests (52). 30 of them had been offered 2-5 times, 14 of them had been offered 6-10 times, and 8 of them had been offered 11-22 times. The contests focused on different types of apparel: fashionable dresses (12), pattern design (12), swimwear, underwear, house-wear (10), special fabric clothing (9), Knit design (8), casual and sport wear (7), children wear (6), accessories (6), professionals (5), illustration (5), etc. 89 announcements had requirements: fashionable/trendy (54), creative (46), marketing value (36), match topic (35), functional (34), original (33), Chinese or minority cultural elements (28), sustainability (12), and special fabric or fiber (12). These results indicated the popularity of apparel contests in China. Although there were various categories, the contests have combined artistic values (creativity and originality) with consumer needs (fashion/trend, marketing value, function, and special fabrics/fibers), and also considered culture (Chinese elements) and a current hot topic (sustainability).

Of the 105 contests’ sponsors, 91 included industries, 80 included industry associations, 30 included governments, 25 included mass media, and 16 included schools. The names of the
total 105 fashion contest’s came from the following: company or brand name (42), location of government or industry (25), content of contest (26), company, location, and content mixed together (9), and the expectations of the future (3). These results indicate a way for collaboration and mutual benefit by: industries and governments financially supporting apparel associations and schools for contests, the associations and schools returning the favor by naming the contests after the industries or the locations of the industries/governments, and the mass media publicizing the contests in the news.

Sixty-two out of 105 contests indicated the purpose of the contest as: 38 hoped to cultivate apparel design students or designers, 37 wanted to support fashion industry, 11 -13 wanted to find good designs, improve company image, lead consumption, and collaborate, 4-5 hoped to improve Chinese culture and pursue a dream, and 2 of them wanted to display educational results and make economic benefits. This suggests that the funding supporters actually did not expect to gain economic benefits by holding apparel contests. In contrast, their main purposes were to cultivate fashion designers and support the fashion industries.

To encourage participation, all of the contests required no registration fee except for two. Fifty-seven of 105 contests indicated they open to participants worldwide; however, only four of them had an English version of announcement. In the 86 contests that participants were required to make final products, 24 contests provided money, fabric, materials, or technologies to help participants to make their product, and 7 contests’ industry supporters made the product for participants, because of the difficulty of making the product (e.g., shoes). In these 86 contests, 21 supported domestic travel and lodging, 20 supported lodging, and two supported international travel and lodging. All of the 105 contests were judged by the jurors from industry, media, academia, etc. The award for first prize often included monies (RMB 10,000 – 200,000/USD 1,610 – 32,195) and other types of gifts (e.g., free study aboard, an apartment, a BMW car, profit after mass production of the design, job opportunities, etc.). The above results indicate the need for a connection between the Chinese apparel design contests and the other countries (e.g., English version of announcements) and possible opportunities for apparel students and professionals.

In summary, educators, designers and grant seekers can learn about collaboration between government, industry, schools, and mass media from the model of Chinese apparel contests. There are many opportunities for students, educators and professionals in the U.S. to participate in these apparel design contests plus possibilities for collaborations between the sponsors of Chinese contests and other countries.

References