

Jewellery: About archives and traditional industry

In conversation with Lionel Lee (Individual Jewellery Designer & Editor in Chief of COMFORT Magazine, China)

1. In China, is there any cultural significance associated with rubies?

China is not an original country that produces rubies and thus their value is generally much more higher than other red gemstones in this country. However, going through the history, the royalties regarded Red as the royal color so people are always fond of red as the representative color of luck and richness. When you appreciate ancient jewellery from the Palace Museum, Beijing, you will find rubellites maybe more popular for daily wearing, but rubies are still thought to be the most precious ones.

2. For Chinese marketing, How's the discussion about rubies?

Rubies or other precious stones, collectors' preference usually influences jewellery industry and marketing because of their commercial contributions. As the jewellery industry becomes more transparent for them, their purposes has transformed to purchase the uniqueness. The better colors, clarities and carats, etc.

With the increase of younger consumers, they are more interested in the practicality whether the ruby jewellery can be daily wore or not. So they prefer to purchase stylish or wearable ones.

As a result, some luxury brand companies will collect good-quality gemstones from mining areas and sell them to different targets. The interesting thing is in recent years, some jewellery brands not only set preview for those targets, but also set a gem room just for target customers.

3. Have you encountered any fashion jewellery pieces that insert with rubies? What is your perspective to criticize them?

Yes, of course. Those fashion jewellery with rubies are not as expensive as the traditional ones but their creations are normally more stylish. I think that's because they don't have too many limitations from brand DNA, materials or craftsmanship. They are more like created for showing up different attitudes and concepts.

But, from my perspectives, the craftsmanship should be considered carefully as well, it's like the basis of any jewellery. There is so long history of jewellery production and many generations make efforts to improve handmade skills. As a jewellery maker you should respect it, not just the conceptualization.

4. How do you think some designers we mentioned before turn to do some creations with new materials and technology?

In China, Firstly it's also about the collaboration to test something out about jewellery. Their shifting is diverse which means they maybe always open to the possibilities and innovation. It is significant for this realm to keep passion. Secondly, for the marketing, it will be more realistic and thus they have to think about balancing the commercial and artistic purpose.

I think the jewellery industry is an permanent up-and-down process, not just for designers but also for the viewers. For example, when they graduated from schools, they might prefer to design some pieces that are from their feelings, perspectives and interactions. Their first period would be very experimental, avant-garde or stylish. Then, when they continuously went close to commercials, such as branding, selling and collaborating, they have to consider the balance. Many years later, they may get the better balance and then the loop could be completed. For us, the audience, it's a process to explore new knowledge of this area as well. Sometimes you will feel excited about their invention, but sometimes you will be confused about their changes. Not just for you, but also for me.

5. What do you think about the importance of the jewellery archive?

Jewellery is not a necessity. However they are usually the embodied products of history and the spirit of the times. Through the jewellery archive, you could review your works, reflect yourself and sometimes could get new inspiration from that. Also, for some luxury jewellery brands, such as Cartier, Bulgari and Tiffany, they also provide different archives for different targets to achieve their commercial purpose. For High jewellery team, they could provide draft, initial designer and other history info. (Anyways, my suggestion for you guys is based on your info, try your best to be inclusive and keep communicative to more people.)