

## The Spring Bamboo I - Evergreen

Ling Zhang, Central Michigan University, USA

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This design was one ensemble of a wearable art collection that was inspired by the Chinese painting, *The Spring Bamboo*, drawn by the designer's father who lives in China. The purposes of creating this design were to: (a) experiment the Chinese ink as the silk painting material on the wearable art and (b) fuse the aesthetic concepts of *Taoism* and the symbolization of the bamboo in Chinese painting with the Western garment silhouettes.

*Taoism* is one of two main Chinese philosophies that has been the foundation of Chinese aesthetic thought for over two thousand years (Dongchu, 1991), and a part of Chinese people's lives. Aesthetic concepts of *Taoism* emphasize the beauty of nature, which became the foundation for Chinese style *Xie Yi* painting. *Xie Yi* style is also called "large impressionistic" or spontaneous style (Briessen, 1962) in Chinese, and literally means "writing ideas", which represents both the action of painting and writing the idea and mood of the artist. *Taoism* impacted the Chinese traditional drawing styles and the way of Chinese artists and designers' thinking. Most of Chinese apparel designers have created contemporary western styles while simultaneously exploring Chinese traditional culture in the Western world. These designers are also often inspired by *Taoism*. The most important producer of such art is fashion designer Ke Ma of China. Her inaugural invited artistic collection in Paris fashion show, "Wuyong/The Earth," was inspired by *Taoism*. Many western designers such as Louis Vuitton and Gucci utilized Chinese garment attributes such as mandarin collars, piping seams, and frog closures (Yu et. Al., 2001). However, the challenge of this wearable art design was to interpret the spirit of the Chinese painting and Taoist aesthetic concepts with Western garment silhouettes.

In Chinese culture and Chinese painting, specific plants are considered symbols of personalities. Bamboo is one of the most popular themes in Chinese painting. It has a "great wealth of symbolism, including virtue, constancy, and friendship even in adversity longevity" (Briessen, 1962, p.319). Guan (2000) also stated that "bamboo signified the idealized moral integrity of Chinese scholars – *junzi* which refers to those who pursued moral high grounds, who had a strong and uncompromising will, and who, in their pursuits, demonstrated graceful and elegant demeanor" (p. 320). To fully convey the spirit of the inspiration painting, *The Spring Bamboo*, and the meaning of the bamboo in Chinese culture, the designer extracted three fundamental components from the initial inspiration: mood, color, and motif. These components were considered by the designer to be the driving force for creating successful wearable art designs, which determined the artistic expression, designer's mood, and the direction of designing this piece of wearable art. First, the bamboo in the painting was straight and powerful. The bamboo stalk is hollow inside and the outer wall is circular. Thus, the goal of designing this piece was to present the form of the bamboo stalk. To produce the texture and stiffness of the bamboo, heavy weight fabrics, such as silk satin was used. Key words like "straight," "growing," and "hollow inside" were determined as the mood and guide in developing this design. Second, black ink is the only medium used in Chinese style *Xie Yi* painting since typically all colors in this style of painting is represented by five tones of black ink. Other hues, if necessary, is applied exactly how the ink is applied using splash ink or ink-break techniques. Black and white are also the colors of *yin-yang* philosophy in *Taoism*. Achieving the best balancing between black and white on wearable art garment to represent the believes of Taoist was the goal of determining the color story of this design, because the empty space has endless power in *Taoism* philosophy. Third, flat pattern making and draping techniques were combined to create the silhouettes with an abstract representation of bamboo culm and the growth characteristics.

The designer tested the feasibilities of using Chinese ink as a textile painting medium on silk fabrics using protocols from the AATCC. A total of 60 textile samples were tested for direct application. Successful wash fastness, light fastness and spectrophotometer characterization indicated that Chinese ink could be confidently used as a hand silk painting medium to express the spirit of Chinese painting on the wearable arts.

The designer used princess seams on the front panel of the top to create a center panel with different sizes of a triangular shape to present the hollow inside of the stalk using a folding technique. In order to create stiff geometric shapes, the folded triangular pieces were double layered with the same silk fabric. The triangular pieces were pre-wet using white vinegar to allow the painting medium transforming smoothly and increase the color fastness of the Chinese ink. The solution of Chinese ink mixed with white vinegar was hand painted a gradient color from black to light grey on the peak corner to the 1/3 of the triangular pieces using Chinese brush, and air-dried. The top layer was hand beaded using 10/0 black seed beads to emphasize the texture and structure of the center panel. Then the corners of the triangular pieces were attached onto the bodice. The center panel aesthetically represents the ink-breaking technique of drawing bamboo in Chinese *Xie Yi* painting. The bottom hem pieces were draped with pattern paper to achieve the geometric shapes. The hem pieces were stiffly interfaced to create support the fabric and weight the hemline. In order to balance the black and white, the seam around the waist was hand painted using the same technique as the triangular pieces to emphasize the feminine body shape. Size 10/0 black and silver seed beads were attached on the painted areas to add textures on the fabric.

The top of the skirt was draped on the dress form. The front and back curve seams were visually matched to the curve shape of hem of the top. Silk satin was used on top of the curve seams to keep the shape of the hip area. While silk charmeuse bias cut to create a contrast of softness and stiffness, which is also the art philosophy of *Taoism*. The hem of the skirt was dip-dyed and the waist area hand painted to pattern match transition between the top and skirt. Black glass beads were again used to embellish the hem of the skirt.

The final garment successfully integrated the aesthetic concepts of *Taoism* and the spirit of the Chinese painting with the wearable art. The process of creating this design demonstrates the value of examining the feasibilities of using Chinese ink as a silk painting medium for creating wearable art. This wearable art fills a gap of expressing the spirit and techniques of the traditional Chinese *Xie Yi* painting with the Western garment silhouette without the attributes of Chinese style garments.

**References:**

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Image 1 – Front (above) Image 3 – Side (Below)



Image 2 – Back (Above) Image 4 – Detail (Below)

