

Fitting tributes

霓裳布衣



An Indian fabric with historical significance is making a comeback as a fashion statement

別具歷史意義的印度布料khadi趕上潮流的腳步，再次在時裝界興起

TEXT/撰文 SHOBA NARAYAN

A SLEW of young Indian fashion designers has made a bold choice in their use of fabric recently – a decision to look backwards. They have pulled from Indian history a hand-spun, hand-woven cotton material popularised in the 1920s by Mahatma Gandhi, the famed leader of Indian nationalism in British-ruled India. The fabric is *khadi*. Gandhi called it “sacred cloth” and the poignant image of him spinning it at a wheel endures as an iconic depiction of the leader. Cricket great Sachin Tendulkar, along with numerous politicians, dons the “freedom fabric”, as it is also popularly known, both as a way of connecting with the masses and to pay reverence to an important part of India’s history.

近期，多位年輕印度時裝設計師在選用布料時，不約而同地從往昔歲月中擷取靈感，大膽地挑選了富歷史色彩、以手紡紗全人手織造的印度棉布。這種名為khadi的布料，在當年印度爭取自由的鬥爭中，獲聖雄甘地大力推廣。甘地稱之為「神聖之布」，而他坐在手紡車前辛勤紡紗的形象，成為了這位領袖深植人心的經典畫面。時至今天，印度板球巨星Sachin Tendulkar和無數政治人物，也喜歡穿著由這種「自由之布」縫製的衣服，一方面是為了爭取群眾認同，亦是向印度這一段重要的歷史致敬。

手搖紡織機專家兼時裝設計師Mayank Mansingh Kaul指出：「khadi在印度人的集體意識裡能產生巨大的共鳴。政治人物穿著khadi服裝，主要基於其歷史背景，希望藉此樹立人民公僕的形象。」



Purists are drawn to the handmade quality of khadi (far left), a beloved traditional Indian fabric that has become a fashion favourite

真正喜愛khadi布的人特別被其手紡品質所吸引（左頁），這種印度布料現時更深受時尚界歡迎



Photos: Weaver: Argusphoto. White outfit: James Ferreira. Black: Reuters. Yellow: EPA/Click Photos. Purple: Deepika Govind



“The resonance that khadi has in India’s collective psyche is huge,” says Mayank Man-singh Kaul, a hand-loom expert and fashion designer. “Politicians wear khadi because of this historical construct, because it is in keeping with the image of a public servant.”

On the Indian fashion scene, the trend of wearing the humble hand-loomed fabric is widespread. College students, who had earlier shunned khadi in favour of more cutting-edge fashion, are now pairing it with jeans. Last year, during India Fashion Week, designer James Ferreira showcased a collection made entirely from the fabric. Deepika Govind includes khadi among the eco-friendly textiles she uses in her designs; Sabyasachi Mukherjee has designed khadi skirts for Bollywood actresses; and design label Abraham & Thakore has sold khadi throws at Britain’s upscale Conran Shop.

Mass-market firms are also experimenting with khadi. Arvind Mills, a large Indian textile export company, plans to produce khadi denim jeans for sale in Paris and global clothing brand Fabindia makes tunics out of khadi sourced from rural NGOs. Investors seem to be taking note: private-equity fund L Capital Asia purchased an eight percent stake in Fabindia, partly because it marries commercial good and social good, said Ravi Thakran, a managing partner of the firm.

Government agency Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) plans to institute a “khadi mark”, similar to



The traditional craft of hand-weaving khadi (above left) has inspired designers such as Sabyasachi Mukherjee (right)

傳統手織khadi布(左上圖)已成為Sabyasachi Mukherjee(右上圖)等設計師的靈感泉源

An outfit from Deepika Govind’s Khadi Kool Summer 2013 Collection

Deepika Govind設計的Khadi Kool 2013夏季系列其中一款服裝

今天，這種樸素的手紡布料已再度興起。曾幾何時，大學生們只愛穿著潮流時裝，對khadi布不屑一顧，但現在卻愛以khadi配搭牛仔褲。

這股風潮席捲印度時裝界，在去年舉行的印度時裝周，設計師James Ferreira展示了一系列全部以khadi布縫製的服裝。Deepika Govind設計的服裝，則以khadi布混合其他環保布料製造。Sabyasachi Mukherjee也為寶萊塢女演員設計了khadi裙子。設計品牌Abraham and Thakore則在英國的高級家居用品店Conran Shop，出售khadi沙發布罩。

以大眾市場為目標的公司也嘗試推出khadi產品，印度大型布匹出口公司Arvind Mills，便計劃生產khadi丹寧牛仔褲，準備出口到巴黎銷售。全球知名的時裝品牌Fabindia則選用農村非政府組織採購的khadi布縫製長襯衫，並得到投資者的青睞；私募基金L Capital Asia的主理合夥人Ravi Thakran表示，他們很欣賞這種兼顧商業利益與社會公益的模式，因此向Fabindia購入了8%股份。

印度官方機構Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) 正計劃制定一個「khadi標誌」，作用就如「真絲標誌」一樣，旨在辨識真偽與確保這種布料的品質。此外，KVIC亦準備開設十多家khadi購物中心，專門售賣khadi產品。

印度khadi布早在18、19世紀已出口到歐洲，當時主要用來縫製長袍。到了20世紀初，印度民族主義者視之為「獨立運動的制服」，khadi布於是在印度大行其道。今日，對織品有研究的人士更因為它人手紡織的質感和柔軟度，以及它對印度人民的象徵意義，而對這種布料推崇備至。更重要的是，khadi很適合在印度的熱帶氣候穿著，能做到冬暖夏涼。

Photos: Sabyasachi Mukherjee: Roberto Schmidt - AFP/Getty Images. Khadi Kool collection: Deepika Govind

the existing “silk mark”, as a means of guaranteeing authenticity and quality. It also plans to open dozens of khadi plazas to sell products made from the material.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Khadi was exported to Europe to make gowns. Its widespread revival in India came courtesy of Indian nationalists in the early 20th century, who considered khadi as the “livery of freedom”. Today, the cloth has found appreciation among textile connoisseurs who value its handmade quality, softness and symbolism to Indians of all ages. It’s also hugely versatile in India’s tropical climate, keeping the wearer cool in the summer and warm in the winter.

“The beauty of khadi is its coarseness,” says designer Ravi Kiran, who uses the fabric for his clothing brand, Metaphor Racha. “You can see the aberrations and unevenness of the khadi yarn. In fact, purists won’t buy fine khadi; they prefer the coarse variety because you can see the weaver’s handprint there.”

Some people wonder if the fabric is still authentic if it has been spun on a mass scale. Various organisations are making efforts to bridge the gap between age-old tradition and the needs of modern design. In June 2012, the National Institute of Design signed an agreement with the KVIC to provide help with product design, branding, labelling and retailing of khadi and related products. Under this partnership, young designers at the school will be paired with craftspeople supported by KVIC.

“There are two great things about khadi: it has an emotional connect with Indians and it is truly indigenous,” says Uzra Bilgrami, founder of Malkha Marketing Trust, a group striving to preserve the traditional, small-scale craft in villages by working with weavers to update designs so as to appeal to younger generations of Indians. “After all, we have been weavers of cotton for 5,000 years.”



設計師Ravi Kiran便採用khadi布製造旗下的服裝品牌Metaphor Racha，他說：「khadi之美在於其粗糙感，你會看到紡線顏色與粗幼的偏差。事實上，喜愛khadi原有特質的人士不會買精紡的khadi布，反而偏愛粗糙質感，因為這樣才可展現每位紡織者手紡的特色。」

也有人擔心，大量生產這種布料的話，能否保持其原有特質。多個組織正努力使這種傳統布料追上現代設計的需要。去年6月，印度頂尖的國家設計學院與KVIC簽定合作協議，答應為khadi及相關產品的設計、品牌推广、商標設計和零售等提供協助。這項夥伴計劃還會將仍在學院就讀的年輕設計師與KVIC資助的紡織匠配對起來，以二人一組的形式合作。

另一個名為Malkha Marketing Trust的機構則與紡織匠一起改良設計與剪裁，一方面保存農村的傳統小型手工藝行業，一方面吸引年輕的印度人重新注視這種布料。該組織的創辦人Uzra Bilgrami指出：「khadi擁有雙重意義，一來印度人對它有特殊的情感，二來它是真正的印度土產；說到底，我們已有5,000年的紡織歷史。」■

Mahatma Gandhi spinning khadi, a fabric he referred to as “sacred cloth”

聖雄甘地稱khadi為「神聖之布」；圖中他正在紡織此布料

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牌照號碼：352024