

YOUTH

Promoting Chinese styles in Italy

NANJING — As a Chinese businessman living in Italy, Xu Xudong has become a fashionista. But, the 42-year-old dreams bigger. He wants to act as a bridge between China and Italy.

Xu is the president of DinDin Brand Management SRL, headquartered in Changshu, East China's Jiangsu province, and is also the chairman of an Italy-based Chinese entrepreneur association.

His firm is mainly involved in brand marketing and management in the fields of fashion apparel and accessories. It helps Chinese fashion brands go global and facilitates entry of brands from Europe into China.

Xu went to Italy with his parents 25 years ago, when many locals were taking advantage of China's reform and opening-up to go abroad and start businesses. He was deeply amazed by Italy's well-developed clothing market. "I made up my mind to help Chinese clothing brands enter the Italian market," he says.

When Xu returned to China in 2006, looking to start a business, he found that the domestic clothing brands were innovating and new ones were emerging, ready to make their mark on the international stage.

Xu set up his company in Changshu, home to more than 5,000 textile and clothing enterprises. The city boasts a gigantic apparel market and a complete clothing production and supply chain.

In 2013, he collaborated with Changshu's local brand Bosideng for promotion overseas. His company used marketing strategies, like advertising and runway shows, to build a reputation for the Chinese brand's cost-effectiveness in the high-end market of countries such as Italy. Today, Bosideng sells to more than 70 countries and regions.

"China is a huge consumer market, and more European brands want to enter this market," Xu says.

In 2020, Xu's company inked a deal with the Italian brand Butnot, aiming to bring overseas street fashion to the Chinese market despite COVID-19.

"Under the Belt and Road Initiative, I can feel the deepening of cooperation between China and Italy," he says.

"You can see more Chinese elements emerging in the Italian fashion industry."

Xu was invited as a representative to a governmental negotiation in 2019, during which a sister city relationship was established between Changshu and Italy's Taranto.

"It is my mission to take more Chinese styles to Italy and increase the charm of Italian fashion in China," he says.

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Hong Kong is a big draw for expats with its openness and diversity. ZHANG WEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

A city of opportunity

Inclusive labor laws and efforts to ensure social integration of ethnic minorities through various programs have turned Hong Kong into a second home for expats.

A visitor to Hong Kong may be amazed by the variety of food the city has to offer. In addition to traditional Chinese delicacies, one can find Japanese sushi, Thai curry and Spanish paella within a short walk.

An international business and financial center, boasting openness and diversity, Hong Kong is home to some 600,000 non-Chinese residents, many of whom have lived here for decades.

Since its return to China in 1997, Hong Kong has become more inclusive, with a growing number of foreign nationals and a more favorable environment for them to thrive.

A resident for more than 20 years, Abdus Samee from Pakistan sees the city as his second home. The 22-year-old speaks fluent Cantonese and shares a lifestyle with many locals: spending long hours in the workplace during weekdays and going hiking or cycling with friends on weekends.

However, the process of social integration wasn't easy for Samee, who once struggled to communicate with his classmates in school because, like most expats, he faced the language barrier.

Luckily, with the help of a nonprofit that specializes in helping ethnic minorities adapt to the society, Samee quickly picked up Cantonese and English, as well as some Mandarin.

"I was grateful for what they did for me, and was determined to do something similar for kids who face communication issues," he says.

Thanks to his language skills, Samee landed a job at the multicultural ethnic-link teen center, which



Amakiri Jefferson from Nigeria (left) and Abdus Samee from Pakistan are among the expats who regard Hong Kong as their second home. PHOTOS BY XINHUA



organizes various educational and social events to help people from different cultural backgrounds feel included.

"Lending a helping hand always makes me happy," he says.

Samee came here at the age of 1 with his father, who made a living in the logistics industry of Hong Kong before becoming a security guard.

"Before Hong Kong's return to China, foreigners, such as Pakistanis and Indians, came here to work in the disciplinary forces or in the logistics industry. Today, their jobs vary and may span different sectors," he says.

Regardless of their occupation and cultural background, people in Hong Kong share the same qualities when it comes to work and daily life, Samee adds.

According to the latest census data, the number of non-Chinese people in Hong Kong accounted for 8.4 percent of the total population last year. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government

has been stepping up efforts to boost social integration, partnering with nonprofit institutions to offer ethnic minorities support in education and employment.

For Marites Mata, a job opportunity brought her to this city 25 years ago.

After graduating from college, she followed a path that many Filipinos choose: to work in Hong Kong as a domestic help. The reason was realistic and compelling. Here, she could earn more and support her family back home.

The sole breadwinner of her family, Mata managed to purchase a house in the Philippines with her savings and also paid for her son's education.

Mata is grateful to her employer, who respects her and treats her like a family member.

The modern city infrastructure and its scenic surroundings are a big draw for her. She has visited the Ocean Park, has gone hiking with friends, and enjoys singing and

dancing in the parks on Sundays.

In Hong Kong, there are more than 300,000 expat domestic helps, most of whom are Filipinos and Indonesians.

To protect the rights and interests of these foreign domestic workers, the local government has improved labor legislation, adjusted the minimum wage standard and made sure that they enjoy free accommodation, food and medical care from their employers.

Dressed in a light gray suit, paired with rimless glasses, Amakiri Jefferson from Nigeria sits in an office in Tsim Sha Tsui, negotiating orders with African customers. "Africans love Chinese goods, which are cheap and nice," he says.

Jefferson started a logistics firm 19 years ago to ship garments from China to Africa. As trade ties improved over the years, his logistics business expanded to the export of a variety of goods, including shoes and mobile phones.

Asked about the "most attractive thing" in Hong Kong, Jefferson does not hesitate to say "safety".

Since the implementation of the national security law in Hong Kong, social stability has been restored. For Jefferson and many of his business partners, this means a safer and more predictable business environment.

In his spare time, Jefferson likes to go to Lan Kwai Fong for a drink with his friends or to play soccer. He hopes that after the pandemic, he will be able to organize a soccer match with the local community.

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Designer pencils in a shop of creativity

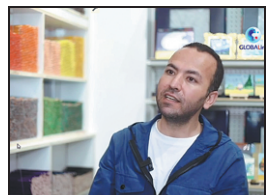
TIANJIN — What can a pencil become? Iranian designer Ali Jalali has found the answer in China.

A freelance designer, Jalali owns a studio of creative products made out of pencils in the northern city of Tianjin. Decorated with 200,000 pencils, the store is called "Kolofo", which he says phonetically resembles "colorful".

Jalali has always loved pencils. He's often seen with one, scribbling down inspirations sparked by his daily life. "There is a saying in China — 'The palest ink is better than the best memory,'" the 43-year-old says.

In addition to being a writing tool, the pencils at Jalali's store act as decorations on shelves, pegs to hang things on and even door stoppers. "I think pencils can be turned into all kinds of things. What I'm hoping for is to create something new every time," he says.

The studio is also a place for him to meet people, sometimes other designers, and to know more about Chinese culture and modern design concepts.



Iranian designer Ali Jalali paints his life with pencil. XINHUA

Jalali has been obsessed with the local traditions for a long time. After graduating from the College of Fine Arts at the University of Teheran in 2008, he came to China, yearning for inspiration from another culture.

He believes China's culture echoes that of Iran in many ways. "We, like the Chinese, have a spring festival called 'Nowruz'. There is also the concept of 'lucky money', a token of blessing the young receive from their elders during the festival."

Jalali supports frugality, which is a traditional virtue followed by Chinese people. The idea offers him inspiration.

One of his creations built on this less-is-more concept is a coffee mug made from coffee grounds.

"I think it is an amazing idea to upcycle coffee grounds into a cup," he says.

Despite the impact of COVID-19, Jalali's store has been seeing a steady flow of customers and growing sales revenue. While preparing to roll out his second store in Tianjin, he also plans to open a shop in his hometown in Iran.

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International Education Column

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