



# Gorgeous Gentlemen

by Crystal Chui

It is a weekday evening at a Hong Kong coffee shop. Men in suits and young office ladies turn their heads towards the entrance as a young man strides in. The young man's outfit is not what we usually see men wear: a short camouflage-patterned jumpsuit with a pair of flats. He has shoulder-length wavy hair, a neat goatee and chiselled features. He is also completely unperturbed by the other customers who are blatantly staring at him.

## The Guy Who Dresses Up

Joey Ma Chung-hon says he is used to attracting attention whenever he goes out. "Let it be. It doesn't matter to me," Ma says while chewing a mouthful of apple crumble.

His craze for fashion began seven years ago, when he was a 20-year-old student in Los Angeles. Ma says the people there wear all sorts of clothes, their various styles along with punk and Emo styles inspired him to love fashion.

Ma's closet is anything but conventional. There are heels, skirts, dresses, an extensive collection of colourful socks and all sorts of eccentric garments and accessories. "There are some things, which if you don't do them when you're still young, you will regret it.

You just can't ask me to wear clothes like this when I am 30 or 40," he says.

Right now, he has around 300 items of clothing and 100 pairs of shoes in his wardrobe. He usually buys clothes online and spends an hour surfing fashion websites each day. Ma spends an average of \$10,000 and a maximum of \$50,000 on clothes each month. His parents sometimes complain about the expenditure.

Since March this year, Ma has uploaded photos of his outfits on his blog titled "Individuality". He posts photos of himself in different outfits and from different angles. Each picture is accompanied by information about each item of clothing. The site now has posts on more than 160 outfits. In mid-September, he started posting photos on LOOKBOOK.nu, a fashion website where people from all over the world share their own street-fashion photographs.

This blogging experience took Ma's interest in fashion to a higher level. After developing the habit of taking photos of his outfits, he now pays even more attention to what he wears.

However not everyone appreciates his efforts.

He meets friends of friends who are surprised to see his crazy outfits,

and people post his photos on online forums. The posts criticise his tastes in fashion. But Ma says none of this is going to make him change his style. "Somebody even said, 'I would beat him up if I saw him on the street.' What they are doing is too extreme. I was sad for a while but afterwards I was completely fine," Ma giggles as he explains. He may look proud and unapproachable in his photos, but in real life, Ma is a softly-spoken and shy person.

Ma thinks whether someone is hurt by put-downs depends on whether that person can accept himself and the outfit he is wearing. If the answer is "yes", then he should not care about what others think of him. He adds, "Many people in Hong Kong do not have the guts to be themselves. Perhaps some men want to be well-groomed as well, but they are too shy to do so."

Still, Ma knows there is a time and a place for him to express his individuality. He works for his family's fruit product trading business and adopts a more sober look for his work attire. He dresses in suits for work to project an impression of reliability for his clients. He thinks this is the reason why most Hong Kong working guys stick to wearing suits and most of them rarely spend much time on grooming. Now he is a member of the working population, Ma keeps the stylish clothing and "crazy" outfits for holidays and gatherings.



Joey Ma's blog features photos of himself in different outfits.

Lifestyle

Courtesy of Joey Ma Chung-hon



### The Guy Who Wears Make-up

The quest to look good is not limited to fashion. Hamlet Chan's passion is for skin care and make-up.

Chan is a part-time make-up artist. The 18-year-old estimates that he has tried more than 100 skin care and make-up products. The obsession began when he entered puberty and pimples started breaking out on his face. "Men put on make-up to cover imperfections like blemish marks," he says.

From an initial desire to cover up his spots, Chan's daily skin care routine is now made up of five to six steps including the application of anti-wrinkle and whitening products. He also uses beauty masks twice a week. Apart from that, Chan goes to beauty salons for deep cleansing treatments every month.

To Chan, taking care of his skin is more than just a habit. It is a responsibility. He maintains his complexion every day and has a beauty blog where he posts beauty-related articles.

Most of the posts are product reviews and articles teaching people how to put on make-up. Apart from the text, Chan posts photos of himself to show the effects of beauty products and demonstrate different looks using make-up. Recently, beauty brands started giving him free samples to try. "It's a kind of recognition. It means people have confidence in me. I noticed there aren't many men doing the same thing," he says.

In one of his blog posts, Chan posted photos of himself wearing a pair of dramatic fake eyelashes with sequins.

Some female bloggers mistook him for a girl. That post attracted a total of 205 comments including Chan's replies. Most of the bloggers were impressed by his courage and make-up techniques.

Chan is now a skin care and make-up guru among his friends and fellow bloggers. Both men and women seek his advice by posting questions regarding their skin care routine on his blog. Some male bloggers have even asked him to go out with them to choose skin care products. Chan declined.

When asked whether his love for make-up and skin care was influenced by his mother or elder sister, Chan laughs, "On the contrary, I am the one influencing my family." At first, his parents did not support this hobby, but when his mother started to try

out his products, skin care became a common interest among the family members. Chan's mother now follows a more complicated skin care routine than before and even uses Chan's skin care products.

Still, make-up and skin care alone are not enough to satisfy Chan's hunger for beauty. He is planning to have Botox injections for face-slimming. "When it comes to cosmetic surgery, I think I am open to it," he says, "I want to have a nose job. My nose isn't straight at all."

fashion. Pursuits that were once seen as being effeminate are now being embraced by straight men, according to Wu Keping, an associate professor from the Anthropology Department of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. "Looks and sexuality are not related," she says.

Wu says that beauty in men is usually associated with traditional notions of masculinity. But, in fact, when we look into history, there have always been men in China who paid attention to how they look. In old Chinese novels like

have a wider selection of cultures to consume and more platforms to share their beauty tips.

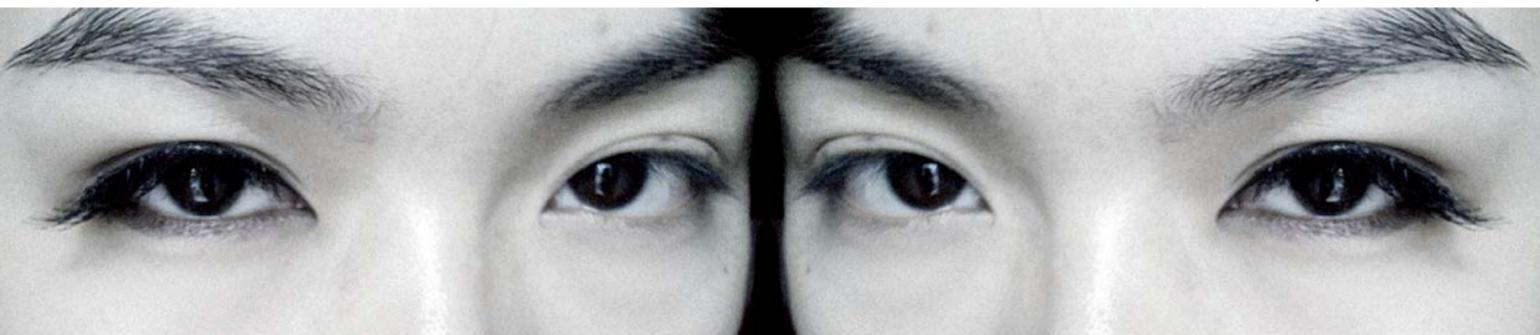
The media has been instrumental in changing perceptions of men's beauty. In recent years, feminine-looking male models, with slender frames and pale skin started to appear in the media.

In the contemporary context, Wu thinks one of the reasons men take such pains with their looks is to appeal to the opposite sex. "In the past, we would look to see whether the man was



Lifestyle

Courtesy of Hamlet Chan



Hamlet Chan loves make-up and skin care products as his blog shows.

### The Scholars Say...

The lifestyles of Ma, the fashionista, and Chan, the beauty guru, may seem unconventional and eccentric to many people, but they are among a growing number of men who are redefining traditional ideas of masculinity.

Since the mid-1990s, the term "metrosexual" has been used to describe often heterosexual urban men who spend money on grooming and

*Dream of the Red Chamber*, there are passages describing men's accessories and jewellery.

In the past, the yearning for beauty was more than just a leisure activity, it was also a symbol of social status. "Class is a very important issue. Being pretty rarely applies to working-class men, they simply do not have the time or money to take care of their looks," says Wu. But, with advances in technology and the media, men now

successful, protective and had money. Now we may also look to see whether they are good-looking," Wu says.

Outré fashions and make-up may indeed draw people's attention to Joey Ma and Hamlet Chan but their dedication to their looks may be driven by a desire to please themselves rather than anyone else. "Being pretty is a way to show you love yourself. Dressing up is a happy thing to do, really happy," says Ma. ▾