



EDWIN KOO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Fashion Week guests at Marina Bay Sands in Singapore, where the new Asian Couture Federation was inaugurated during the style event in mid-October. The federation, modeled on French and American organizations, is intended to promote Asian designers worldwide.

A new day for Asia

SINGAPORE

BY ALEXANDRA KOHUT-COLE

Its organizers called the inauguration of the Asian Couture Federation a milestone moment for Asian fashion.

"A lot of talented designers are at couture level," explained Frank Cintamani, the new organization's founder and president. But until the federation was organized, there was "no single body to represent their interests."

The nonprofit body is modeled on the *Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture*

in Paris and the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) in New York — both organizations that nurture, promote and support local design talent to a global market.

The foundation's debut took place in mid-October during the third annual Fashion Week, presented by the Shoppes at Marina Bay Sands and organized by FIDÉ Fashion Weeks, headed by Mr. Cintamani.

The announcement was followed by a gala evening that included a four-course menu designed and prepared by the Japanese chef Hide Yamamoto.

Stéphane Rolland, the Parisian couturier who participated in the fashion week, presented a haute couture showcase that featured the well-known flamenco dancer Rafael Amargo.

The new organization, which includes a committee of 11 governors from Asia and 10 Asian designer members, appointed Kenzo Takada, founder of the fashion house Kenzo, as its honorary president. Mr. Takada was in Singapore for the event.

"He understands the need for Asia to now stake a claim in this industry because he was definitely one of the earlier pioneers of Asian fashion," Mr. Cintamani said.

Among the governors are Kim Sung-Joo, chairman of Sungjoo Group and owner of the MCM fashion label; Satoshi Onuma, the former president of Bunka Fashion College, Japan's leading fashion school; Zio Song of the South Korean men's wear brand Songzio; and Kullawit Laosuksri, editor-in-chief of *Vogue Thailand*.

One of the requirements for designers who wish to become foundation members is that they live in Asia — an effort, Mr. Cintamani said, to debunk the thinking that to be credible a designer has to

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reside in London, Milan, New York or Paris rather than Bangkok, Beijing, Seoul, South Korea, or Tokyo.

"I think that perception has to change," he continued. "You can create a viable business being an Asian designer while still being domiciled in Asia."

Many prominent designers in the United States, including Alexander Wang, Derek Lam and Jason Wu, are Asian. "When are we going to stop exporting all of these designers because we don't have a platform that is deemed credible enough for them to participate in?" Mr. Cintamani said.

The new federation, which has been endorsed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan and by Queen Sirikit of Thailand, intends to work closely with Asian schools to create workshops, competitions and mentorship programs between emerging designers and senior designers. It already has teamed with the Atelier Chardon Savard in Paris, Parsons School of Design in New York and the CFDA.

Guo Pei, one of Beijing's best-known designers and a foundation member, said she believes it will be "a gateway to the world" for Chinese designers.

And Michael Cinco, a Filipino designer, says he is confident that the foundation will help designers in the Philippines, who are not now aided by the government. "It's now for me to make a platform for the Filipino designers to be recognized — not just in Asia, but all over the world," he said.

The Paris-based designer Julien Fournié, who showed his work during the FIDÉ Fashion Week, said it is important to think ahead to a new generation of couture.

"It's research and development. And if you lose that, you lose a way of thinking for ready-to-wear, craftsmanship, a lot of things," Mr. Fournié said.

During the foundation ceremonies Mr. Cintamani was made a chevalier of *L'ordre des Arts et des Lettres* by Benjamin Dubertret, the French ambassador to Singapore.

As he accepted the honor, Mr. Cintamani said it felt wrong to be rewarded for "something that I enjoy doing so much."



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