



## Bosideng who?

The UK consumer and the other Europeans might well ask.

Actually, [Bosideng is a huge company in the Chinese market, with 8,000 stores](#). It is the Middle Kingdom's answer to Marks & Spencer, a somewhat unfortunate comparison because, like its British analogue, it is somewhat stretched in terms of image and product categories (womenswear, menswear, childrenswear). Unsurprisingly Bosideng is an unknown quantity in Europe because until now it hasn't had a visible presence in the region.

So I was excited to learn about Bosideng opening up its first London outlet for high-fashion in upmarket South Molton Street.

Excited not because I'm a Bosideng buyer or a fan (just yet), but because it's encouraging to see a Chinese retail clothing brand having the courage and chutzpah to take a bold step into the maw and claw of London's fashion industry, a hard category to crack for a new brand, more so for one from China.

And excited for a personal reason too: they've opened up shop next to Bond Street – home to luxury brands – and my old stomping ground where I worked many years ago (more than I care to remember) and where I enjoyed many after-office hour pub sessions with colleagues .



Old stomping ground, pub in South Molton Street

Bosideng's chutzpah is about timing and boldness: launching themselves in Europe just as the London 2012 Olympics was about to start and choosing a site in the heart of the London's *bon ton* West End that is renowned for luxury and style.

Imagine my disappointment when I visited their [website](#). My first navigated port of call was to view a photo of their premises in South Moulton Street, a kind of old man's homecoming, as it were. The photo showed the carapace of a building draped in the plastic sheets put up by construction companies for health and safety reasons. There were no interior shots of the retail experience either. With an investment of [a reported €7.5 million](#) in a flagship property, this is a poor return on internet eyeball investment indeed.

Moreover, for a company that aims to be upmarket, this was hardly the introduction to an unknown fashion brand (at least, here in Europe) I had expected. High-end fashion retail is all about style and experience (where quality is a given and unsighted – the user experience is subjective). It is not simply about having great products or a desirable location and address. We should be able to see on the website an attractive physical presence and shop interiors that entice us to visit the flagship store. How about an interactive 3D tour of both place and products, or a video, for example?

## The brand experience

A lot more could be achieved on their website using the protean [functionality of digital](#) from catwalk videos to virtual fitting rooms. As it is, the Bosideng website is static and uninspired, which is odd for a luxury brand that's just entered a new market and wants to make an impact with a flagship store. Burberry set a standard in [Beijing](#). It's even odder knowing that China's own ecommerce landscape is blessed with immense [invention and creativity](#).

This got me to thinking about a problem that Chinese brands endemically have in projecting themselves into the West's consumer space: brand communication and positioning. Where better to start illustrating the point than

continue surfing through the Bosideng website?

Not being a style guru myself, I have to skip comments about Bosideng's fashion photos that depict handsome young men sporting the brand's apparel. Both are very nice to look at but somewhat samey as product shots that can be found on similar retail websites. Bosideng has obviously paid a lot in modelling and photographer's fees. My interest is in their brand positioning.

When checking out the Bosideng 'Philosophy' I found this claim about their clothes: *'Inspired by both Chinese and British cultures, the two traditions are fused'*. This is fine: I like East-West fusion. It is usually the best of both worlds, one reason why I find brands such as [Shang Xia](#) so engaging.



### East-West fusion

But I had a hard time detecting the East-West fusion in Bosideng's fashion style. The Chinese DNA was entirely absent. More of it would surely be its brand product differentiation. Actually, Bosideng could incorporate more of its Chinese identity into the website to make the brand stand out.

As it is now, from a creative viewpoint, Bosideng's identity is bland European. Its Chinese heritage has been diluted and probably compromised by a brand consultant's remonstrance to subsume the oriental, or rather the Sino identity, of the brand's provenance, in order to appeal to the eurocentric buyer. This is an own goal. An opportunity lost.

Equally pertinent was the refrain: *"an uncompromising commitment to quality and innovation"* which is no more than what every fashion brand says. Trouble comes when you see the same claim repeated in the 'Heritage' web page: *"unwavering commitment to quality and innovation."* Reading the same thing twice rather grates because brand originality is suspect. Bosideng needs to employ a creative copywriter who digs deep into understanding what the brand is all about and realises that varying content is an art, not a cut-and-paste job.

### Brand heritage

On the plus side, Bosideng's heritage has a story to tell. The text about the brand's founder, Gao Dekeng, during the mid-1970s cycling 80 kilometres to Shanghai and tailoring clothes in super quick-time is wonderful. Yet the story is on the thin side; much more could be made of it. For example, how hard did Gao have to struggle at a time when China was emerging from the turmoil of its Cultural Revolution? How did it affect his business? What was it like to work in Shanghai then? One imagines it must have been a personal struggle. Where are the pictures, providing the visual context and firing the imagination? If none exist (hard to imagine – a quick keyword search produced photos of [the city from the 1980s](#)) invent them as graphic illustrations. As an example, Bosideng need look no further than the web page devoted to [Burberry's brand heritage](#).



Burberry's first store

Of course, heritage doesn't have to extend over centuries. That very English brand, [Mulberry](#), for instance, has heritage – a foundation story – that originates about the same time that Bosideng was established and it is equally compelling, enough to have [produced a book on its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary](#). In any case most British people have an image of rustic Somerset in England – or at least, an image of an arcadian England that is a decent substitute for Somerset. Bosideng's potential British customers will have a far more difficult time forming a brand image of a company from China.



Mulberry brand heritage: 40th anniversary book

### Communicating a difference

If Bosideng seeks to present an upmarket image in Europe it needs to revisit its brand communication and identity. It could start by doing a better job of highlighting its difference as a Chinese brand and a retail experience on its website and making much more of its Chinese-British fusion and undoubtedly interesting brand heritage.

Still, enough of the critique. What Bosideng can now claim to its Chinese customers back home is that it is an 'international' brand, with a classy address in London. Perhaps that's the real value of its South Molton street presence for the time being.

