



Ma wears a flower-like pink dress.

# ELDEST MODEL

## at Shanghai Fashion Week

### living life on own terms

Ke Jiayun

**M**a Yinhong became a model when she was 54 and then an Internet celebrity at 59, which is rare even in the West.

She was the eldest model at this year's Shanghai Fashion Week.

"I feel that people's aesthetic criterion is getting more and more tolerant," she said.

"In the past, there were always young pretty girls being picked for filming a commercial. But now, the models can be different, they can be old and they can have weight. I think they are all beautiful, and the definition of beauty is becoming broader."

Ma posted her first short video on Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok, in March last year. In the video, she walked her Bichon at the Changning Raffles City wearing a brown overcoat, jeans and a colorful hair band. She ran and jumped with joy, and acted just like a young girl.

She knew that her videos would go viral because there's no model of her type on Douyin.

Then her fourth video became a "blockbuster" with nearly 140,000 likes, in which she wore a camisole and long gauzy skirt with boots. A comment under the video said "wishing Chinese women wear whatever they want as soon as possible."

Forty years ago, Ma was an apprentice at the candy workshop of the former Shanghai Huimin Food Factory. However, three years later, before she became a regular worker, she quit the job because she didn't want herself to be like the candy on the production line, which seemed pretty but was arranged by others.

She then worked as a clothes retailer on Huating Road, downtown Shanghai, in the mid-1980s.

"I always had a sense of fashion," she said. "I once sold a 'Paris coat,' which was kind of faddish. At that time, I stocked vintage clothes from Guangzhou. I was infatuated with it at first sight. It had shawl collar, tight upper part and large lower hem. If one wearing it goes round, it's like a blossom."

Some other retailers wanted to copy it but they failed to make such clothes.

Later the Aijian Garment Factory sought her for cooperation but she didn't have enough energy to do so.

When she felt that she would live like that her whole life, one day, she saw a

foreign woman walking across the street near Huaihai Road M. and Changshu Road. The woman was in black, with short hair, long scarf and a cigarette in her mouth.

In those days it was rare to see a foreigner in Shanghai so people stared, but she just ignored them.

"At that moment, I knew what I wanted," Ma said. "No matter what I do in the future, I will always be cool like that."

Before long, there was a trend for the Shanghaiese to go to Japan. To make more money to raise her daughter, Ma followed her elder brother to the foreign land and worked hard to attend the best clothing design school.

At the age of 36, she played a nightclub worker in well-known Japanese director Shunji Iwai's film *Swallowtail Butterfly*.

"I always had a dream to stand in front of the camera," she said.

"After the film, which brought me a gratifying experience, I thought everything would come to an end. But one day, I read the autobiography of Colonel Harland Sanders, founder of Kentucky Fried Chicken. I learned that he started his business at the age of 65. So I think if I dream the dream, it will possibly come true one day."

Ma returned China in 2002 and decided to settle down in Shanghai.

"Many things, they are not coincidences but the inevitable," she said. "After I came back, I took many photos, which were posted on my daughter's WeChat Moments. Then her friends asked me to be the model. It's like that what I love attracted the opportunity."

At the very beginning, she was not used to modelling.

"For professional models, they know the skills like how to move or place their limbs and body naturally," Ma said. "I had no idea about that and my posture was a bit dull. Then I observed and imitated them. The second time, I was able to make the movements."

To be prepared for being a model, she went to the gym.

When she was 54, she participated in the filming of advertisement of a famous domestic clothing brand and started her career.

Sometimes she had to stay up very late for the photographing and almost have no time to sleep.

"Once a work continued through 4:30am and the staff praised me for my hard work and dedication," she said. "I answered that



Ma Yinhong showcases colorful make-up. — All photos/Ti Gong



**Since then, I never fear my wrinkles and can have either a light smile or big smile in front of the camera. I recognized that my smile has its own charm.**