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Finalist Mariam Ahmed's dress. Photograph: Jess Hund/reportdigital.co.uk

## When Silk Route meets rag trade

By Joseph Lee

WHEN STUDENTS competed with their Beijing counterparts in a fashion contest last week, they took their inspiration from the history of Britain and China.

The catwalk showdown was the culmination of a series of fashion, workshops attended by 130 students from across London since the beginning of the year.

The contest was organised by Fashion Awareness Direct, a charity that gives underprivileged teenagers the chance to pursue a career or higher education in design.

The theme this year, the third time the contest has been held, was Britain and China – from the Silk Routes to the modern-day handover of the Olympic torch from Beijing to London.

Mariam Ahmed from Newham Sixth-Form College (whose gold dragon dress is pictured) was one of four college students who made it to the final, competing against rivals at schools and colleges across London and from China's vocational education system.

"The biggest thing I learnt was to be patient and the work will turn out well. Everyone here is quite calm," said Mariam, 17. "I will speak to anyone here now, but I was quite shy before. Since I started, I've become interested in making my own clothes. Even my mum's surprised: I've never designed clothing before."

In the best traditions of international co-operation, the prize was split in the end, between 19-year-old Nosipho Ndaba from Burntwood School in Wandsworth and 17-year-old Zhou Xiao Tian from Beijing Polytechnic of the Second Light Industry.

The Chinese student's blue-and-white dress will be made and sold by the supermarket chain Tesco. Andreas Stavrou, design manager at Tesco, said: "I was extremely impressed with the simplicity of the design combined with its beauty. It is a creative and commercially successful design that will appeal to our customers."

Meanwhile, Nosipho will take advantage of a work placement with Tesco's clothing design team.