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## Retail study gets to the bottom of Chinese body shapes

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**Julia Kollewe**The Guardian, Monday 11 August 2008

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Western retailers wanting to expand in China will need a much smaller range of clothes sizes than in the US, according to a body measurement study released today. It shows that Chinese women have much narrower variances in bust, waist and hip than those in the west.

The US market needs more than double the number of clothes sizes to reach the same proportion of the population compared with China, the study claims. It was produced by Alvanon, a New York-based consulting firm, which scanned more than 28,000 people at shopping malls in four key regions of China. Alvanon clients include retailers such as Marks & Spencer, John Lewis, Tesco and Laura Ashley.

The study found that body shapes in China are, on average, much smaller and more homogenous than in the US and Europe. Men have similar average heights in China and the US but have dramatically different average chest and waist sizes as well as weight. Body shapes in the UK are similar to those in the US.

Whereas the US clothing and shoe market is expected to increase gradually to \$323bn (£168bn) by 2011 - up 7.3% from 2006 - the Chinese market is expected to nearly double to \$184bn, according to Euromonitor International.

"There is an unprecedented retail opportunity in China," said Janice Wang, the Hong Kong-born chief executive of Alvanon and a former Chase Manhattan banker. "As China becomes much more wealthy, we are seeing this huge move to luxury products. The Chinese are very fashion conscious."

The survey comes as M&S prepares to open its first store in mainland China. And Topshop is thought to be close to opening a branch in Shanghai, while also looking at locations in Beijing and Hong Kong.

Because of changes in diet and lifestyle, the younger generation in eastern China is growing taller and heavier, bringing it more into line with westerners. More than 30% of Chinese city dwellers are considered overweight, and women aged 35 to 45 have put on the most weight. There are significant differences between the north and the south as northerners tend to be much taller.

Alvanon's database of body measurements now exceeds 250,000 men, women and children of different age groups from more than 14 countries.

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